

# Palestinians Certain to Win Recognition as a State

The **Palestinians** are certain to win U.N. recognition as a state Thursday in a General Assembly vote that Israel and the United States warn could delay hopes of achieving an independent Palestinian homeland through peace talks with Israel.

The United States, Israel's closest ally, mounted an aggressive campaign to head off the General Assembly vote, which the Palestinians view as a historic step in their quest for global recognition.

In a last-ditch move Wednesday, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State William Burns made a personal appeal to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas promising that President **Barack Obama** would re-engage as a mediator in 2013 if Abbas abandoned the effort to seek statehood. The Palestinian leader refused, said Abbas aide Saeb Erekat.

With most of the 193 **General Assembly** member states sympathetic to the Palestinians, the vote is certain to succeed. Several key countries, including France, have recently announced they would support the move to elevate the Palestinians from the status of U.N. observer to nonmember observer state. However, a country's vote in favor of the status change does not automatically imply its individual recognition of a **Palestine state**, something that must be done bilaterally.

The Palestinians say they need U.N. recognition of a Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem, the lands Israel captured in 1967, to be able to resume negotiations with Israel. They say global recognition of the 1967 lines as the borders of Palestine is meant to salvage a

peace deal, not sabotage it, as Israel claims.

The non-member observer state status could also open the way for possible war crimes charges against the Jewish state at the International Criminal Court.

Israeli Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu** said Thursday the recognition of an independent state of Palestine in the U.N. General Assembly will not advance the Palestinians' quest for a homeland. He said the Palestinians will not win a state until they recognize Israel as the Jewish homeland, declare an end to their conflict with the Jewish state and agree to security arrangements that protect Israel.

While **Israel** argues that Abbas is trying to dictate the outcome of border talks by going to the U.N., the recognition request presented to the world body in fact calls for a quick resumption of negotiations on all core issues of the conflict, including borders.

Netanyahu's predecessors accepted the 1967 lines as a basis for border talks. Netanyahu has rejected the idea, while pressing ahead with Jewish settlement building on war-won land, giving Abbas little incentive to negotiate.

For Abbas, the U.N. bid is crucial if he wants to maintain his leadership and relevance, especially following the recent conflict between his Hamas rivals in **Gaza** and Israel. The conflict saw the Islamic militant group claim victory and raise its standing in the Arab world, while Abbas' Fatah movement was sidelined and marginalized.

The Palestinians chose the "International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People" for the vote. Before it takes place, there will be a morning of speeches by supporters focusing on the rights of the Palestinians. Abbas is scheduled to speak at that meeting, and again in the afternoon when he will present the case for Palestinian statehood in the General Assembly.

U.S. Secretary of State **Hillary Clinton** warned Wednesday that the U.N. vote will not fulfill the goal of independent Palestinian and Israeli states living side by side in peace, which the U.S. strongly supports because that requires direct negotiations.

"We need an environment conducive to that," she told reporters in Washington. "And we've urged both parties to refrain from actions that might in any way make a return to meaningful negotiations that focus on getting to a resolution more difficult."

The U.S. Congress has threatened financial sanctions if the Palestinians improve their status at the United Nations.

Ahead of the vote, Republican Sen. Orrin Hatch filed an amendment to a defense bill Wednesday that would eliminate funding for the United Nations if the General Assembly changes Palestine's status.

"Increasing the Palestinians' role in the United Nations is absolutely the wrong approach, especially in light of recent military developments in the Middle East," he said in a statement. "Israel is one of America's closest allies, and any movement to strengthen one of its fiercest enemies must not be tolerated."

Israeli government spokesman Mark Regev said that by going to the U.N., the Palestinians violate "both the spirit and the word of signed agreements to solve issues through negotiations," which broke down four years ago.

But Israeli officials appeared to back away from threats of drastic measures if the Palestinians get U.N. approval, with officials suggesting the government would take steps only if the Palestinians use their new status to act against Israel.

Regev, meanwhile, affirmed that Israel is willing to resume talks without preconditions.

U.N. diplomats said they will be listening closely to Abbas' speech to the General Assembly on Thursday afternoon before the vote to see if he makes an offer of fresh negotiations with no strings, which could lead to new talks. The Palestinians have been demanding a freeze on Israeli settlements as a precondition.

As a sign of the importance Israel attaches to the vote, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman flew to New York and was scheduled to meet Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon before the vote. Israel's U.N. Ambassador Ron Prosor had been scheduled to speak in the General Assembly after Abbas, but it appears Lieberman may now make Israel's case opposing the resolution.

Unlike the Security Council, there are no vetoes in the General Assembly. The world body is dominated by countries sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and the resolution to raise its status from an observer to a nonmember observer state only requires a majority vote for approval. To date, 132 countries—over two-thirds of the U.N. member states—have recognized the state of Palestine.

The Palestinians have been courting Western nations, especially the Europeans, seen as critical to enhancing their international standing. A number have announced they will vote "yes" including France, Spain, Norway, Denmark and Switzerland. Those opposed or abstaining include the U.S., Israel, Germany, Canada, the Netherlands and Australia.

The Palestinians turned to the General Assembly after the United States announced it would veto their bid last fall for full U.N. membership until there is a peace deal with Israel.

Following last year's move by the Palestinians to join the U.N. cultural agency UNESCO, the United States withheld funds from the organization, which amount to 22 percent of its budget. The U.S. also withheld money from the Palestinians.

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