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**U.S. recognition of Palestine would heighten tensions, spur violence**  
**By Lawrence J. Haas**

WASHINGTON -- U.S. recognition of a Palestinian state is one of those tempting silver bullets that upon close examination would produce the opposite of its promised result. Rather than promoting peace, it would likely ignite conflict both within Palestinian society and between Israel and the Palestinians.

Never mind that such recognition would undermine the very process of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority to which the two parties agreed, which United States and the global community have endorsed, and which is supposed to produce a Palestine that lives in peace with its Jewish neighbor.

Never mind, too, that we have been here before with a unilateral Palestinian declaration of statehood followed by strong international recognition, followed not by peace but, instead, by more conflict.

In late 1988, the Palestine Liberation Organization adopted a resolution that declared an independent state of Palestine. PLO chairman Yasser Arafat declared himself the president of Palestine, and more than 100 nations have since recognized an independent Palestine over the years.

No state arose and no peace ensued because Israel and the Palestinians had not ironed out the details of mutual recognition, borders and other basic matters that are the *sin qua non* of real peace. Why anyone would expect a different result this time with the parties wrangling over the same issues defies explanation.

If anything, the situation is more complicated now, making the stakes of U.S. recognition of statehood even riskier.

Arafat was the undisputed Palestinian leader a generation ago, the singular figure who could have made peace had he wanted to. Now, Palestinians are split between Fatah, which runs the Palestinian Authority and controls the West Bank, and the terrorist group Hamas, which has run Gaza since 2007 when it replaced Fatah after a bloody coup.

The Palestinian factions remain at war, one that could reignite in the aftermath of a U.S. recognition of statehood by making control of the Palestinian government that much more important to each faction.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad are making commendable progress in building such essential features of a future state as courts, schools, and infrastructure. But, Abbas refuses to recognize Israel as a Jewish state and appears disinterested in serious negotiations.

Meanwhile, Hamas remains committed to Israel's destruction, continuing to fire rockets from Gaza into southern Israel. It would hardly step back if a U.S.-recognized Palestinian state had to decide its relations with its neighbors.

Nor, even if Fatah somehow managed to assume control over all Palestinian territory, will the issues that divide the Palestinians from Israel magically disappear.

At its most basic level, a nation needs internationally recognized borders. Presumably a new Palestine would assume the so-called 1967 borders - the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem - that is, the territory Israel won in that year's Six-Day War with its Arab foes.

But no serious scholar or diplomat involved in the Middle East peace process believes that a Palestine that is created through negotiations would occupy that precise territory. Instead, Israel would maintain its largest West Bank settlements and the Palestinians would receive other compensating land from Israel.

If the Palestinians tried to set up shop within the 1967 borders, both the Israeli state and average Israelis who have built thriving communities on the West Bank surely would dig in, which would generate conflict if not open war. That, in turn, would lead the parties back to negotiations, but this time to stop the bloodshed.

Thus, U.S. recognition of a new Palestine would prompt new fighting within Palestinian society and with Israel, and it would set back negotiations - to which the main parties to the conflict as well as the global community have long committed - that are designed to create that very state.

#### ABOUT THE WRITER

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