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Can the U.S.—Can the World— Afford a Palestinian State?

The Middle East is in chaos: Islamists are waging bloody jihad—and winning—and Palestinian society is collapsing. Is now the time for a Palestinian state?

While the Middle East is being overrun by Islamic terror groups, and Palestinian political factions are verging on civil war, some world leaders now propose forced peace talks with Israel, guaranteeing the Palestinians a state. Can we really afford a Palestinian state ripe for takeover by terrorists?

What are the facts?

Bloodthirsty violence wreaked by Islamic terror groups in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Tunisia has created epic instability in the Middle East. This regional jihad is being waged by the Islamic State, al Qaeda affiliates, al Nusra Front, Hizbollah, Hamas, Houthi rebels and, most prominently, Iran.

Indeed, the jihadis are capturing more Middle East territory daily. The Islamic State continues to seize ground in Syria and Iraq and threatens next to attack Israel's neighbor Jordan. The Houthis today control three major cities in Yemen, and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is making gains in other parts of the country. The greatest threat, however, comes from Iran, which through its terrorist proxies now exerts effective control over four Arab capitals: Baghdad, Iraq; Damascus, Syria; Beirut, Lebanon; and Sana'a, Yemen.

This leaves Israel, the Middle East's only democracy and bastion of Western freedoms, almost encircled by forces of radical Islam—Hizbollah and Iran on its doorstep to the north in Lebanon and Syria; the Islamic State in Syria and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula; and Hamas to the south in Gaza. Iran, of course, threatens weekly to annihilate the Jewish state—and it is steadily, secretly building the nuclear capability to back its bluster.

Adding to this regional volatility, the Palestinians' two main political parties, Fatah in the West Bank and the Islamic terror group Hamas in Gaza, are locked in internecine strife. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's government has no control over Gaza's 1.9 million Arabs. The internal Palestinian conflict has become so bitter that President Abbas recently called on Arab nations to launch military attacks against Hamas.

But Palestinians' problems run far deeper. Their economy is in shambles: Without nearly \$1 billion annually in

international aid, including \$400 million from the U.S., it would collapse. Palestinian civil society in the West Bank is notoriously rife with corruption. Political order is also crumbling: No Palestinian elections have been held since 2006. The 80-year-old Abbas is serving his tenth year of a five-year term, and his Fatah party has no provisions for a successor. What's more, security in the West Bank is critically dependent on support from Israeli Defense Forces. Without it, experts predict a takeover by Hamas, which did the same in Gaza in 2006. A Hamas coup would leave Israel a tiny island engulfed in a sea of Islamist terror.

A Palestinian state forced upon the world today
would most certainly turn into a nightmare.

Why don't the Palestinians already have a state? The Arabs were offered a state next to Israel by the United Nations in 1948, but

turned it down. After Israel's defeat of three invading Arab armies in 1967, the Jewish state offered to negotiate land for peace, but again the Arabs refused. As recently as 2001 and 2008, under the auspices of the United States, Israel offered the Palestinians up to 95 percent of the West Bank and Gaza, plus a capital in East Jerusalem, but again the Arabs walked away from statehood and have for more than 60 years stubbornly refused to recognize the Jewish state.

Today the situation in the Middle East has changed dramatically in two ways. First, Israel and moderate Arab nations are threatened as never before by radical Islamists obsessed with conquest. Second, Palestinian institutions have reached new lows of dependence and disorganization, nearing total collapse. Iran-supported Hamas is well armed and could seize control of the West Bank at any time.

While some world leaders have proposed a deadline for completion of peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, leading to a Palestinian state within a few years, this idea does not account for today's horrific new reality in the Middle East. Indeed, a Palestinian state that is forced upon Israel and the rest of the world would most certainly turn into a nightmare.

While Israel, the United States and other nations have worked in good faith to create a Palestinian state, the Palestinians themselves have consistently rejected requirements that would ensure Israel's security and survival. Today, explosive threats from radical Islamist terror groups in the Middle East, especially Iran, as well as the disintegration of social, economic and political order among the Palestinians, make a Palestinian state unrealistic. Rather, world leaders need to focus on stabilizing the region—especially Palestinian society—and put Palestinian statehood temporarily on hold.

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