Palestinian state recognition and ICJ proceedings are a prize for Hamas

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 24.05.2024

While Ireland, Norway, and Spain announced unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state, the IDF conducted large-scale counterterror operations in the Jenin area – part of the never-ending effort to thwart terrorism's strongholds in the West Bank.

Since Oct. 7, the security forces have conducted over 4,000 arrests in Judea and Samaria, averaging a staggering 18 per day. This fundamental component allows Israel to maintain security stability and curb terrorism in areas under Palestinian Authority control – the same authority now being recognized as a state by some. Without such uncompromising measures, Israel would likely be unable to independently confront the threats it faces.

Hamas swiftly claimed credit, explaining to Norway's prime minister and other naive leaders that far from bolstering moderates, such recognition following the October massacre is considered an achievement for the terror group.

"Recognition of the Palestinian state came after the 'Al-Aqsa Flood' war and the steadfastness of the 'resistance,'" boasted senior Hamas official Husam Badran. His words were published while footage of the abduction of the observers from Nahal Oz filled television screens in Israel.

While the hypocrisy of this move is obvious, it lacks an understanding of the potential implications it may have on the balance of power within the Palestinian camp itself: Crowning Hamas as the factor by virtue of which the Palestinians will receive this achievement, together with their high levels of public Palestinian support, and with the background of an already raging struggle over the succession of Mahmoud Abbas' seat, could pave the way for the terror organization to take over the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank as well.

And not only that. This step, which will be credited to Hamas, is necessarily a tailwind for the entire "axis of resistance" and a strengthening of the path of the

Islamic extremists wherever they are. Instead of uniting around the position that the way of terror is flawed and will not yield achievements, the message of this step is the opposite: Terror pays off.

In practical terms, the impact of unilateral recognition is quite limited. The recognition does not address the issue of borders, and in this way, most countries of the world have already recognized a Palestinian state when it was admitted as an observer to the UN.

The impact of these declarations is mainly on the level of awareness and the momentum they could create, especially when they occur in parallel with proceedings at the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice in The Hague and at a time when the US administration is pressuring Israel to agree to a deal, one component of which is a commitment to a process that will eventually lead to a Palestinian state.

In this sense, the US' reservations about the unilateral recognition move are very important, both to prevent a momentum of more countries recognizing a Palestinian state and to prevent this idea from gaining a foothold in Washington itself. After the heavy price Israel has paid and is still paying, the political leadership not only has the right but is obligated to take a sober, cautious, and suspicious stance. Israel needs to rely only on itself and avoid entering processes that would be difficult, if not impossible, to exit.

In the security arena, whatever the definition of the Palestinians may be, Israel will need to continue its presence and do everything it is currently doing for its security, without any compromises.

It will have to continue to maintain absolute and effective control over the borders and the seamline, ensure security and freedom of operation within the territory, and prevent processes such as those that took place in Gaza.

The IDF and the Shin Bet will be required to continue their activity against terrorist infrastructures, thwart smuggling or production of combat means, take a suspicious approach also towards Palestinian mechanisms, and prevent by all means the possibility of Hamas taking over the governing institutions, whether directly, through a partnership with another political factor or through proxy actors. This is the meaning of the statement – we must defend ourselves by ourselves.

Published in Israel Hayom, May 26, 2024.