



Should the U.N. Admit Palestine as a Full Member State?

Watch—and participate in—the Slate/Intelligence Squared live debate on Jan. 10.

By Katy Waldman | Posted Tuesday, Jan. 3, 2012, at 3:31 PM ET

Israel's occupation of land in the West Bank and Gaza, the status of Jerusalem, and the rights of Arab refugees have roiled the Middle East for almost half a century. Since direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority broke down in 2010, peace seems ever more elusive, with President Mahmoud Abbas of Palestine abjuring the bargaining table so long as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refuses to freeze settlement growth in the West Bank.

On Sept. 23, 2011, President Abbas sought full membership for a Palestinian state at the United Nations. This approach, a radical departure from the bilateral tactics of years past, stirred up fresh hopes, fears, and headaches for the international community. Though the U.N. Security Council declined to act on Mr. Abbas' request in November, a two-thirds majority vote from the General Assembly could still upgrade Palestine's official U.N. status from "nonmember observer organization" to "nonmember observer state," giving the Palestinians more leverage to achieve their diplomatic goals—including eventual admission to the U.N. as a state. Would United Nations membership for Palestine reenergize the faltering peace process and point the way toward a two-state solution? Or would it apply a unilateral sledgehammer to 60 years of direct Arab-Israeli diplomacy?

Four longtime engineers of the peacemaking efforts in the Middle East will tackle these questions at the next Slate/Intelligence Squared U.S. live debate on Jan. 10. We'd like to invite you to attend—we're offering Slate readers a 30 percent discount on tickets (see below)—and we hope you will use the comments section of this article to submit questions for the debaters. We'll pick the most interesting one, and moderator John Donvan will ask it at the event. Be sure to include your full name and hometown with your question.

The motion for the debate is "The U.N. Should Admit Palestine as a Full Member State." Supporters claim that the Palestinians are economically and morally deserving of statehood, and that their plea to the United Nations represents a last-ditch attempt to resolve the situation without violence. Opponents foresee more violence issuing from Israeli retaliation to the U.N. bid, as well as from the gaps in the Palestinian Authority's leadership; they argue that only direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians can yield a lasting peace.

Join us at NYU's Skirball Center in New York City for an Oxford-style live debate. Former Palestinian Authority presidential candidate and political activist Dr. Mustafa Barghouti will

team up with former Israeli government negotiator and J Street co-founder Daniel Levy to defend the motion that a Palestinian state should be admitted to the United Nations. Dore Gold, former Israeli U.N. ambassador and adviser to Prime Minister Netanyahu, and Aaron Miller, former U.S. Mideast negotiator, will dispute the motion.

The details about the debate:

When/Where: Jan. 10, 2012, at Skirball Center for the Performing Arts, New York University, located at 566 LaGuardia Place (at Washington Square South). The evening begins at 5:45 p.m. with a cash-bar reception for panelists and audience members; the live debate starts at 6:45 p.m. and ends at 8:30 p.m. For venue information, [click here](#).

Tickets: \$40 (\$12 for students with ID). Purchase tickets [here](#), and be sure to enter the special Slate promotional discount code, Slate30, to receive 30 percent off your ticket.

About the debaters

For the motion:

Palestinian democracy activist Mustafa Barghouthi was a candidate for the presidency of the Palestinian National Authority in 2005, finishing second to Mahmoud Abbas with 19 percent of the vote. A medical doctor trained in the former Soviet Union and Jerusalem, he also received a degree in management from Stanford University in the United States as a Sloan Fellow. Nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 2010, Barghouthi is Secretary-General of the Palestinian National Initiative, a movement that campaigns for political reforms.

Daniel Levy is co-director of the New America Foundation's Middle East Task Force and an editor for the Middle East Channel at ForeignPolicy.com. He is a senior fellow at both the Century Foundation and the European Council on Foreign Relations. Levy was previously an official negotiator for the Israeli government in peace talks with the Palestinians under Prime Ministers Rabin and Barak. Levy served as the lead Israeli drafter of the Geneva Initiative. He is a board member of the New Israel Fund and a founder of J Street.

Against the motion:

Dore Gold is a world-renowned expert on Middle Eastern affairs, a best-selling author, and an accomplished diplomat. During his career as foreign policy adviser to Israel's prime minister and later as Ambassador to the United Nations, Gold distinguished himself in negotiations with world leaders which included the president of the United States, the U.S. Secretary of State, and the British Foreign Secretary. He also served as a special envoy to the leaders of Arab states.

Aaron David Miller became a Public Policy Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in January 2006. He is the author of *The Much Too Promised Land: America's Elusive Search for Arab-Israeli Peace* and a forthcoming book, *Can America Have Another Great President?* For the prior two decades, he served at the Department of State as an adviser to Republican and Democratic secretaries of state, where he helped formulate U.S. policy on the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli peace process, most recently as the senior adviser for Arab-Israeli Negotiations. He also served as the deputy special Middle East coordinator for Arab-Israeli Negotiations, senior member of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, and in the Office of the Historian.

The moderator:

John Donovan is a correspondent for ABC News' Nightline. He has served as ABC White House correspondent, along with postings in Moscow, London, Jerusalem, and Amman.