

The passage of a General Assembly Resolution granting Palestine UN status as a non-member observer state has just occurred. We know that there have been a range of feelings in our communities about the advisability of such a move. But it is now imperative to think about how best to react to a reality that can no longer be changed, and, most important, to consider what opportunities it might present, if we can allow ourselves sober but serious visioning of Israel's future.

It is pointless to pretend that any change of the status quo in the Middle East is free of risk and anxiety. This one certainly falls into that category. But certain facts are also clear. The Palestinian Authority is not the faction that has been launching rockets at Israel; the appeal to the United Nations for the status embodied in this resolution is a diplomatic, not a violent, act; and there is so much more to lose if Hamas' violence becomes, perversely, the only "self-respect" offered to the Palestinian people. So with all the risk and anxiety that this turn of events brings, it seems to us to be vital that it be greeted with cautious optimism, and not simply with recriminations, finger-pointing, and expressions of despair. It should certainly not lead to painting friendly nations who voted for the resolution, or abstained, as somehow having turned against Israel. It is, after all, the oft-stated policy of the Israeli government to be working towards a two-state solution, and there are surely opportunities for nearing that goal that creative and willing minds will be able to extract from this new landscape. The passage of this resolution will not lessen Israel's crucial military superiority. But it can, if the will is there on all sides, open more possible paths to a diminution of human misery than the events we have just lived through on Israel's border with Gaza.

Exactly 65 years ago, just such a resolution was passed by the United Nations. In November of 1947, Resolution 181 did indeed call for the creation of an Arab State and a Jewish State in Palestine. The Arab world at the time, including the people of Palestine, rejected that resolution. Events have since proven how much suffering that rejection has caused, to both Israelis and Palestinians. Now that the Palestinian Authority is implicitly acknowledging – as belatedly as it is – that their 1947 rejection was a historic blunder, we owe it to everyone, and Israel most of all, to challenge the Palestinians, the Israelis, and the United States to take these new raw materials and work ceaselessly and creatively to make them instruments of peace. In particular, the Palestinians must know that the United States will not tolerate this resolution's being used as a path to vindictive filings in the International Criminal Court. And Israel and the world Jewish community must recognize that they stand to gain nothing, and to lose much, from being seen by the world as thwarting a non-violent move towards a people's self-determination.

Both sides have now indicated that they are prepared for negotiations without preconditions. They should begin as soon as possible. Rather than bemoaning and condemning this resolution, we should urge the Palestinians to prove that their intention is indeed to rectify their mistake of 65 years ago, and also urge the nation we love, even as it remains vigilant about its security, to proceed with the work of compromise and resolution as if that intention is in fact there.

Psalm 34 exhorts us to "seek peace and pursue it", and we should never forget what our Sages said in commentary: "Seek peace where you are, and pursue it to other places as well". We are surely in a different place today, but we – both Israel and the United States -- must not lose faith in the pursuit of peace.