RAMALLAH, West Bank — President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority said Monday that he was going to the United Nations this month to seek membership for a state of Palestine, not instead of negotiations with Israel, but in addition to them. His goal, he said, was for a Palestinian state and Israel to live in peace and security next to one another.

Even after any recognition by the United Nations, Mr. Abbas said, his hope is to negotiate with Israel.

“Our first, second and third priority is negotiations,” he said. “There is no other way to solve this. No matter what happens at the United Nations, we have to return to negotiations.”

But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel said at a separate event that a Palestinian bid for recognition by the United Nations would “set back peace, and might set it back for years.” Israeli officials argue that a resolution recognizing a Palestinian state could complicate the prospect of talks beyond salvation.

Each side says that it wants direct talks and peace but that the other side does not.

Mr. Abbas was speaking in his office to 20 left-wing Israeli intellectuals and artists who had come to urge him to go to the United Nations despite their government’s opposition. Journalists were invited to cover the meeting.

He told the group that he had met abroad secretly three times in recent months with President Shimon Peres of Israel — in London and Rome, and in Amman, Jordan. A fourth meeting was called off by Mr. Peres. Mr. Abbas said he also held a previously undisclosed meeting with Israel’s defense minister, Ehud Barak, 10 days ago.

“We have exhausted all opportunities so we have to go to the U.N.,” Mr. Abbas said.

For his part, Mr. Netanyahu said direct negotiations were the only option. Speaking after a meeting in Jerusalem with Prime Minister Yves Leterme of Belgium, Mr. Netanyahu said, “Unfortunately, for over two and a half years, the Palestinians have done pretty much everything in their power to avoid such direct negotiations.”

The United States is opposed to a Palestinian bid for membership in United Nations. Senior American officials are due here this week to try to persuade the Palestinians to drop their effort.

Mr. Abbas says for direct talks to begin, Israel should carry out a short-term freeze in settlement building in the West Bank and East Jerusalem as well as agree that the basis of the talks would be the lines drawn in 1967. Mr. Netanyahu rejects the freeze and calls on the Palestinians to recognize Israel as a Jewish state, which the Palestinians reject.

Mr. Abbas said the Palestinians planned to start their membership drive with the Security Council despite a vow by the Obama administration to exercise its veto there. It is expected that the Palestinians’s next step would be in the General Assembly, where there is no veto but which can grant only observer status, not full membership.

He offered an impassioned defense of his approach.

“Some Israelis complain that this is a unilateral move, but when you address 193 countries, that is not unilateral,” he said. “We are going to complain that as Palestinians we have been under occupation for 63 years.”

“We don’t want to isolate Israel but to live with it in peace and security,” he also said. “We don’t want to delegitimize Israel. We want to legitimize ourselves.”

Mr. Abbas, 76, said that as long as he remains president, Palestinian security in the West Bank would continue to be coordinated with the Israeli military.
“We have good coordination to prevent terror and keep the situation calm and quiet,” he said. “We will continue to do our job. Security will prevail as long as I am in office.”

But he also said that if he came to the conclusion that he had failed his people, he would resign.

Saeb Erekat, the chief Palestinian negotiator, said in a separate interview that going to the United Nations was a way to push the solution forward.

“We’re trying to preserve the two-state solution,” Mr. Erekat said. “History will judge us.”

Earlier in the day, Israeli settlers in the West Bank tried to set a fire inside a disused mosque to protest the Israeli military’s destruction of three settler houses at an illegal outpost.

The police and witnesses said the settlers threw burning tires into the mosque and spray-painted the names of two settlement outposts on the walls, including that of Migron, where the army destroyed three buildings constructed on private Palestinian land. The Israeli Supreme Court determined that the entire outpost was built on such private land, but the three chosen for destruction had been built after that decision was handed down.