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The UN Security Council's October Session on "The Middle East Situation"

The Real Theme of the Session: Israel-Bashing

On October 24, 2011 the Security Council convened its monthly discussion session on the subject "The Middle East Situation Including the Palestinian Question." As in other such Security Council discussion sessions, non-members of the Council were given the opportunity to present their views.

If one were to read the proceedings from the sessions in previous months on the same topic, one would find, not surprisingly, reports quite similar to that for October 24. In each, as Ambassador Ron Prozor of Israel reminded participants when he took the floor, the day's meeting, which was supposed to INCLUDE the Palestinian question, was dominated almost entirely by that question. Despite the fact that events of major concern were unfolding daily in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and elsewhere in the Middle East, most of the 50 speakers at the October session used the forum as another opportunity to focus on Israel and engage in Israel-bashing.

This Security Council meeting thus served, just as did its predecessors, as an excellent example of the preoccupation of the United Nations system with an issue that involves the lives of less than two-tenths of 1% of the world population. It also serves as an example of the unfair treatment of Israel by a significant number of UN member states.

Opening the session, Lynn Pascoe, the United Nation's Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs, made a fairly balanced presentation, but setting the tone for the meeting focused almost all of his observations on the Israeli/Palestinian dispute, making one brief reference to Lebanon and Syria, and totally ignoring the turmoil in Libya and elsewhere in the region.

Ryad Mansour, Permanent Observer for Palestine, was the first non-UN official to take the floor. He noted that the session coincided with the Security Council's consideration of the application by Palestine to become a member state of the United Nations, a move, he said, that was supported by 130 countries. He made it clear that the Palestinian leadership would enter into peace negotiations with Israel only if the Quartet were to secure a commitment from Israel to begin such negotiations "on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders" and to stop all settlement activities. As he put it: "Clearly, no credible peace process can proceed in the absence of such a basic understanding." Israel, he said, must be "**speedily compelled to commit to negotiations along the clear parameters the Palestinian leadership had already committed to.**" These parameters, according to Mansour included "the Arab Peace Initiative." That term, it should be noted, is used to assert the claim of a "right of return" for 4.7 million people, including a relatively small number of surviving refugees of 1948 and the millions of descendants of the refugees who fled in 1948 from a war zone created by the Arab attack on the newly-established state of Israel.

In response to Mansour's insistence on a peace based on Israel's acceptance of the terms on which the Palestinians insist, Prozor emphasized the importance of Israel and the Palestinians resolving their longstanding conflict so that all could live peaceful, secure, and prosperous lives. He added that the road to peace could be built only on a foundation of mutual recognition and dialogue and noted that, in a recent address to the UN, President Mahmoud Abbas had referred to the "Holy Land, the land of Palestine the land of...ascension of the Prophet Muhammad...and the birthplace of Jesus Christ."

This denial of 4000 years of Jewish history had not been an oversight, Prozor pointed out, but a deliberate attempt by the Palestinian leadership to erase the connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel: "Those who seek peace do not negate the narrative of the other side. On the contrary, they recognize its existence and choose to sit down and negotiate peace in good faith...the ancient Jewish bond with the land of Israel is unbreakable. This is our homeland." The United Nations had recognized Israel as a Jewish state 64 years ago. It was time for the Palestinians and the more than 20 Muslim countries around the globe to do the same. Israel wanted peace with a future Palestinian state. "In word and deed, my Government has demonstrated time and again that we seek two States for two peoples, living side-by-side in peace."

In conclusion, Ambassador Prozor noted that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had said, in response to the Palestinian suggestion that settlements were the core cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that the primary obstacle to peace was the Arab world's refusal to acknowledge the Jewish people's ancient connection to the land of Israel...and the Palestinian insistence on the "so-called right of return." The idea that Israel would be flooded with millions of Palestinians, Prozor said, was a non-starter.

The Positions of the Security Council Members

The Council then heard the statements of the fifteen members of the Security Council. Each of these statements has certainly been most carefully analyzed by the interested parties for the hints that were dropped as to the position the speaker's country was taking on the Palestinian application for UN membership. It is, of course, clearly understood that if need be the United States would cast a veto to prevent approval of the application. What is not entirely clear is whether the proponents of the application have the nine affirmative votes needed to make it necessary for the United States to exercise its veto power. If they do not have the nine votes, the application would not be approved, without the need for a veto.

Ambassador Susan Rice of the United States was the first Council member to speak. She made it clear where the United States stood: Only the two parties could make the kind of agreement that could bring about a lasting peace. Unilateral initiatives, such as "status bids at the United Nations," would be counterproductive in that context.

Next came the ambassador of India, who noted that his country had been the first non-Arab country to recognize the State of Palestine in 1988. He contended that Palestine now fulfilled all criteria mentioned in Article 4 of the United Nations Charter for full membership. India, therefore, supported the application for membership.

Germany said that it supported the establishment of a Palestinian state which then would become a member of the United Nations, *but there was no alternative to the resumption of negotiations.*

China observed that it had been among the first to recognize the State of Palestine and had always supported the establishment of such a State, based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. It supported Palestine's application for UN membership.

Brazil declared that it was time for Palestine to be fully represented at the United Nations and hoped that the Council would take a decision "very soon."

Russia viewed the Palestinian bid for membership in the United Nations logical and declared that Palestinians already met all criteria involved. Membership in the UN would not harm prospects for a negotiated settlement.

The United Kingdom reaffirmed the 23 September statement of the Quartet and declared that it was *time for both parties to commit to negotiations in that framework*, and make the bold compromises needed.

France said as the path of admission of Palestine to the United Nations was facing obstacles, it had proposed an intermediate state, namely to elevate the status of Palestine at the United Nations to that of an Observer State.

Gabon said that the implementation of the two-State solution within the framework of the Quartet was the backdrop for the consideration of Palestine's membership bid for membership in the United Nations.

South Africa called on the Council to recommend full membership for Palestine.

Bosnia and Herzegovina said the *only way to bring about a just and lasting resolution to the Middle East conflict was through direct negotiations based on previous agreements, taking note of the Quartet statement.*

Lebanon said that the question of Palestinian statehood should not be subjected to the outcome of negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis, but should be dealt with on the basis of objective merits, namely the inalienable right of self-determination.

Portugal said that statehood was an inalienable right of the Palestinian people, but *an independent state can be achieved only through direct negotiations.*

Colombia supported *the two-state solution through a negotiated agreement, which was the only possible and durable path to lasting peace.*

Nigeria noted that it had long recognized Palestinian statehood, that Palestinians met the criteria for statehood and that both parties must commit to progress through negotiations without preconditions.

While some of the foregoing statements are quite forthright and clear, others use terminology that requires interpretation.

Reviewing these statements it is quite evident that **six** members of the Council are prepared to recommend the admission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations: Brazil, China, India, Lebanon, Russia, and South Africa.

The United States position of opposition to the Palestinian application was most clearly supported by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Germany, and Portugal, for a total of **five** members in opposition.

The statements of France and the United Kingdom suggest non-support for the application, without saying so directly. Nigeria's statement is not clear. Gabon suggests non-support, but that position is not certain.

It follows that as of October 24, it did not appear that the Palestinian application had the required support of nine members of the Council, thus causing it to fall short of adoption without the need of a U.S. veto.

The Observations of Other States

After the Security Council members had been heard from, the floor was opened for statements by UN member states that do not serve on the Council. Almost all of those who took the trouble to attend the meeting and offer their comments used the opportunity to support the Palestinian application and to denounce Israel.

Participating in this exercise were, to start with, members of the Arab Group, with Egypt leading off. It purported to speak for the Non-Aligned Movement. The other members of the Arab group that felt motivated to participate in this Israel-bashing exercise were:

Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sudan, Syria, and Tunisia.

These Arab Group members were joined by the following other members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation:

Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Maldives, Pakistan, Senegal, Uganda and Turkey.

Non-Islamic countries joining the exercise were

from Latin America: Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela (all parts of Latin America's anti-U.S. bloc),

from Asia: North Korea, Sri Lanka, and Viet Nam

from Europe: Austria, Iceland, Norway,

As distinct from these 30 states that were eager to use the Security Council meeting to denounce Israel, there was one that attended the meeting to speak for peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. It was Japan.

Almost all the supporters of the Palestinian resolutions but also most of its opponents took exception to Israeli "settlements," particularly the recent approval of plans for housing

developments in East Jerusalem. The geographically untenable claim was advanced that these housing developments, if actually built, would divide the proposed Palestinian state into two non-contiguous areas.

Concluding Observations

Under Article 14 of the United Nations Charter, the members of the United Nations conferred “on the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.” As a number of members of the Council are not committed to the basic principles on which the UN was founded, but seek to manipulate the organization to attain their own goals, this clear mandate is largely ignored. As this memorandum demonstrates, a significant amount of time and resources are allocated to exercises designed to delegitimize one member state of the United Nations, Israel, and to embarrass another, the United States. They are exercises that are most certainly not in keeping with the principles of the UN Charter and have the effect of placing obstacles in the path to attainment of the Charter’s objectives.

The truly extremist positions of the Latin American anti-U.S. states illustrate how the UN system is used by some states to advance their political goals. Nicaragua accused Israel of denying Palestinian citizens their “status as human beings” and engaging in “illegal killings and destruction of Palestinian homes,” because of the immunity it enjoyed “through the imposition of a veto by a member of the Security Council.” Cuba accused Israel of “the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of military force against the civilian population” and “inhuman treatment of [Palestinian] prisoners.” Venezuela accused Israel of detaining “thousands of [Palestinian] prisoners, some of them under the age of 12” and added that the “United States was seeking to delay or block the historic demand for a Palestinian state.”

Venezuela did touch on another Middle Eastern issue as well: it praised the Syrian Government of Bashar Al-Assad.

As we shall discuss in future memoranda, the states that engage in this theatric exercise do not represent the outlook of the leadership of a majority of the UN member states. The challenge is to organize that majority.

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Sharon Wilkes, Executive Director, swilkes@ajiri.us 301-915-0132 P 917-826-4811 C