

Palestine's Bid for Recognition

With Israeli-Palestinian peace talks going nowhere and Israel still counting on the unqualified support of the United States a diplomatic clash is shaping up at the United Nations in September as Palestinians push for UN recognition of their own state. But Lawrence Davidson questions whether that is the right option.

By Lawrence Davidson

On July 26, Robert Serry, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East peace process, appeared before the UN Security Council. Mr. Serry, a career Dutch diplomat, had led the Middle Eastern Affairs Division of the Dutch Foreign Ministry. There is every reason to believe that he knows what he is talking about.

He told the Security Council that the "peace process," that is the political process allegedly seeking a negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, had reached a stage of "profound and persistent deadlock." Attempts to resume negotiations are "extremely difficult," he said.

And, "in the absence of a framework for meaningful talks, and with Israeli settlement activity continuing, the Palestinians are actively exploring approaching the UN." That is, actively considering asking for UN recognition of Palestine as a sovereign state within pre-1967 borders.

Mr. Serry's description of the negotiations seems pretty straightforward. The two sides are stalemated.

And, as the Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat noted, this stalemate follows negotiations that have stretched out over at least 20 years. Indeed, we know that in the most recent phase of these marathon negotiations the Palestinian team had dropped just about all of their original demands.

Erekat told U.S. Middle East envoy George Mitchell that the Palestinian negotiators had done everything but "convert to Zionism." And yet, the Israelis scorned the Palestinian's offered compromises.

As Mr. Serry indicated, Israel's settlement of Palestinian land continues. In fact throughout this entire 20 year process, colonization has gone on unabated. And, of course, all of it is illegal under the Geneva Conventions.

One of the reasons that restarting any negotiations is so "extremely difficult" is that the Palestinian side has insisted that, as a prerequisite for any new talks, Israel must begin to abide by international law. Israel has refused.

So it might come as something of a surprise to the uninitiated observer that Israel and the United States are pointing fingers at the Palestinians in this affair.

For instance, Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Ron Prosor stated in the Security Council on July 26 that “now is the time for the international community to tell the Palestinian leadership what it refuses to tell its own people there are no shortcuts to statehood. You cannot bypass the only path to peace.”

For the initiated this statement makes no sense at all. If 20 years of negotiating gets you nothing but more violence and more theft, to describe that process as the “only path to peace” is to contradict yourself.

Something that has proven incapable of achieving X, cannot be the “only path” to X. Just so, to say that there can be no shortcuts to X and therefore one must persist along a road that has historically proven not lead to X is, well, a non-sequitur.

Israel’s staunch ally, the United States, also opposes, with equal illogic, the Palestinian move toward UN recognition.

Rosemary DiCarlo, the US deputy ambassador to the UN, announced that the U.S. will oppose any “unilateral action” on the part of the Palestinians at the UN. She interpreted the Palestinian move as an effort to “isolate Israel at the United Nations.” She insisted that the Palestinians resume negotiations.

In response to DiCarlo, Riyad Mansour, Palestine’s UN observer, pointed out that “120 countries already recognize an independent Palestinian state” and so coming to the UN is hardly a “unilateral” action on the part of the Palestinians. He went on to explain that UN recognition of a Palestinian state at this time would be “the consecration of the the two-state solution” and help make that solution more inevitable.

Unfortunately for Mansour, his words belie the fact that Israel has no intention of allowing a meaningful two-state solution. In fact, all this Palestinian National Authority (PNA) talk and maneuvering goes on against the backdrop of a stark reality: Israel is inexorably eating up Palestine.

The reason decades of negotiation have settled nothing is because they were meant to settle nothing. The Israelis from the word go used the “peace process” as a cover to steal Palestinian property. They are close now to being able to present the world with a fait accompli, those ugly “facts on the ground” and

they don't want any complications.

What sort of complications? Actually, these are more psychological than concrete.

As Ali Abunimah has pointed out the United Nations has never done anything to stop Israeli theft and this "symbolic" gesture of UN recognition will not impact it either. So why should the Israelis care?

Well, here are a couple of possibilities: a) such a move toward recognition on the part of the UN General Assembly would actually replicate the process by which Israel itself became recognized as a state and b) this move would also echo the original intention of the UN to have Palestine divided between Jews and Arabs.

Psychologically, the entire process must resonate deeply within Israeli/Zionist consciousness. It is giving them a sort of national anxiety attack.

Alternatives

Leaving aside Israel's psychological angst and the Palestine National Authority's [PNA] fantasy that their maneuvers will make a viable solution "inevitable," we come back to the question of what is really most likely to work in the long term? I think that we have to confront some hard truths at this point.

–Israel will continue to illegally swallow Palestine. For the Zionists this is a zero-sum, one-state game.

–The United States will continue to be an accomplice to the crime by protecting the criminal.

–The PNA is helpless to stop this.

–Sadly, the peace process is a fraud. A cover for the on-going crime.

So what is the path of resistance that has the greatest chance of changing the facts on the ground?

Well there is Hamas, which is, in fact, the real government in Palestine if we are to take seriously the notion of democracy. That was confirmed by its victory in free-and-fair elections in January 2006. That makes Hamas a lot more legitimate than the present PNA and as legitimate as the Israeli government.

True, Hamas refuses to recognize Israel and would destroy the Zionist state if

it could. But then Israel refuses to recognize Hamas and is, in fact, trying to destroy it. Both governments have used terrorist methods, though Israel has used them more consistently.

In the end, the real issue is, once more, one of power. Hamas cannot destroy Israel. Ultimately Israel can destroy Hamas. As an option for long-term success, for changing the facts on the ground, Hamas does not look like the answer.

That brings us back to BDS: boycott, divestment and sanctions. The Israeli historian and advocate of Palestinian rights, Ilan Pappé, has pointed out that BDS as part and parcel of an overall “civil society struggle in support of Palestinian rights has been successful in key European countries.”

There can be little doubt that public opinion is shifting away from Israel even in the heartland of Zionist influence, the United States. The aim of this movement is to replicate with Israel the process that brought apartheid South Africa to its knees.

And, through this process, to actually realize a one-state solution for Palestine. Not, of course, the one state solution the Israelis seek, but rather a new state of Palestine/Israel that offers “equality and prosperity for all the people who live there now or were expelled from it by force in the last 63 years.”

In my opinion there is actually a good chance that a worldwide BDS movement, growing steadily for say the next quarter century, can actually achieve the de-Zionization of Israel. On the other hand, creating “equality” and “prosperity” in the new state that results will have its own problems, but that is a different struggle for a different time.

Right now, Ali Abunimah is right, UN recognition of Palestine as a pseudo-state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip will solve nothing and may well cause more problems for the Palestinians on the ground.

Alternatively, Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions within the context of increasing worldwide awareness of Israel’s essential racist nature shows real promise of results in the long term.

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