

The Shimon Post



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Article 1.

The National Interest

The Palestinians' Next Move

Rashid Khalidi

September 30, 2011 -- As the dust settles after last week's "showdown" at the United Nations over the Palestinian application for membership, several initial conclusions can be drawn.

First, the United States now is thoroughly out of touch with most of the international community when it comes to Palestine and Israel. It has positioned itself to the right of the most right-wing, pro-settler government in Israeli history. This was reflected in the joyful reception of President Obama's speech by Israeli prime minister Netanyahu and his right-wing foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, as well as in the Israel lobby's satisfied response to Obama's caving in to Israeli demands all along the line.

In an almost surreal display of pandering, Republican presidential candidates—notably Texas governor Rick Perry—disparaged the president for "appeasing" the Palestinians and thereby betraying Israel. This rhetoric came despite the fact that Obama single-handedly sabotaged the Palestinians' UN bid while publicly lecturing them and the entire General Assembly on the suffering of Israelis without so much as a word acknowledging Israeli occupation, violence and settlements—not to mention the Palestinian suffering caused by these American-supported policies. Obama's domestic electioneering in the face of a historic demand by the long-suffering Palestinians was not lost on the world. Taken in the context of the Arab Spring and its wave of popular demands for human and political rights, it means that the United States has lost all credibility as an honest broker in this conflict.

The second conclusion to be drawn is that after two decades of the U.S. behaving as “Israel’s lawyer,” the two-state solution is now dead. It has been buried by forty-four years of unceasing Israeli colonization of the West Bank and East Jerusalem under the benevolent gaze of nine successive U.S. administrations. The most recent in a long line of boastful Israeli announcements of further settlement construction in occupied Arab East Jerusalem last week is a perfect illustration of this truth. Despite the usual expression of “disappointment” from the White House and the State Department, the United States has, in fact, again acquiesced to the illegal colonization of more occupied Palestinian territory. This served as a ceremonial last nail in the coffin of the disastrous American-led process that since the beginning of peace negotiations in Madrid in 1991 oversaw and facilitated the near tripling of the illegal Israeli settler population to well over half a million and the imposition of severe restrictions on the movement of over 4 million Palestinians. For those of us who have watched this “peace” process unfold since then, the status quo should perhaps be seen not so much as signifying the failure of the process but rather as underlining its sole purpose. As Mouin Rabbani put it [3] in the London Review of Books, “the so-called peace process is working precisely as designed, to give political cover to Israeli colonization and maintain America’s diplomatic monopoly.” Though the time of the two-state solution has passed, it is undoubtedly time for the U.S. government to be pushed aside as sole mediator.

The final conclusion to be drawn is that the Palestinian leadership is at a crossroads: It has taken a long-overdue first step to re-internationalize Palestine’s struggle for liberty and self-determination and to take matters out of the hands of American diplomats who for decades have systematically advanced Israel’s interests at the expense of the Palestinians. The attempt to produce more objective

stewardship of negotiations by taking the Palestinian case to the UN will clearly fail in the short term due to U.S. opposition.

Nevertheless, it was relatively successful in galvanizing international support for the Palestinians almost everywhere outside of the fact-free bubble that is the DC beltway and much of the mainstream media.

The question now is what will the Palestinians' next step be? It is clear where the United States stands and will continue to stand, certainly until November 2012 if not long afterwards. For all the significant changes in perceptions of the conflict at the grassroots level in the United States, the continued power of the Israel lobby in Congress shows that on the political level nothing has changed. As far as Israel is concerned, even a leftward shift is unlikely to bring about meaningful change to decades of Labor, Likud and Kadima-supported occupation and settlement policies, at least not in the near term.

Abbas' speech at the UN, therefore, was only the beginning of what many Palestinians agree needs to be a new long-term strategy for national liberation. The focus of this new strategy will have to return from a two-decade hiatus at a rigged negotiating table to its original and most representative form: popular, grassroots, nonviolent struggle on the ground and among Palestinians in exile. The good news for the Palestinians is that the infrastructure for such a struggle is already in place after years of nonviolent protest in the villages of the West Bank and could grow with the recently minted model of the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions to consider. A highly coordinated and truly massive campaign of active nonviolence could shock the conscience of the world and energize Palestinians everywhere. The bad news for the Israelis—who have brutally repressed nonviolent protest in villages such as Bilin, Nilin, Nebi Saleh, Walaja and many other places over the past six years—is that, according to Ministry of

Defense political-military chief Amos Gilad, “we [the Israelis] don’t do Gandhi very well.”

In the coming months we will see what the Palestinian leadership will do (both those in Gaza and those in Ramallah) and whether they can succeed in reunifying the divided Palestinian national movement; how brazenly the Israeli government will provoke the Palestinians; and whether the Palestinians, the Arabs and especially the international community will be up to the challenge of wresting from the American grip the keys to a negotiating process in need of almost complete remodeling on the basis of international law and UN resolutions, after decades of American mishandling.

In the meantime, should President Obama find the time to reflect upon his decision to forsake Palestinian freedom in favor of pandering to the Israel lobby, he would do well to remember the following thought from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr: "There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic...but one must take it because it is right."

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Article 2.

The Daily Star

The new Abbas takes his distance from the old Netanyahu

Hani al-Masri

September 30, 2011 -- Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas appears to be a new man. What led to this change? Since taking office, he has always said that only negotiations can lead to the establishment of the state. When the talks faltered or faced an obstacle, he often said: "The alternative to negotiations is the negotiations." When Abbas set conditions for the resumption of negotiations, these quickly became mere demands. Even in recent days, he repeated that negotiations were his first, second and third choice.

When Abbas announced his intention to go to the United Nations, the strong U.S. opposition meant that even some supporters did not believe he would follow through. His speech at the U.N. resolved their doubts, however, and raised the ceiling of the Palestinian position.

Abbas' speech derived strength from the justice of the Palestinian cause and determination to proceed with the application for full membership of the state of Palestine to the Security Council, despite Israeli and U.S. pressure and threats as well as "suggestions" from Palestinian, Arab and international friends. The president refused to compromise by making a request for non-member status at the U.N. General Assembly – either within the package presented by French President Nicholas Sarkozy or as a first step followed by the submission of the application to the Security Council.

The “old” Abbas would have agreed to resume negotiations on the basis of the European initiative, but he preferred the challenge, despite the risks. What lion has grown in the heart of Abbas? What made him stick to his terms for the resumption of negotiations? A number of factors and causes transformed the president into a new national leader, militant in his demands and willing to risk losing the patronage of the U.S. Negotiations have reached an impasse because of the intransigence of the Israeli government led by Benjamin Netanyahu. Most surveys in Israel suggest that the Israeli government will live out its term and that even new elections will produce a government at least as radical as the current one. To make matters worse, the U.S. administration reneged on its promises and U.S. President Barack Obama now seems more favorable to Israel than any previous president. Estimates are that amid the increasingly feverish competition for the presidency, the U.S. – where candidates are competing over who offers more support for Israel – cannot be expected to exercise any serious pressure on Israel until after the U.S. presidential elections. Without this pressure, there will be no resumption of talks and no peace agreement. Abbas has concluded that the next two years, at least, will see no progress in the peace process. This period will be sufficient for the Israelis to create a *fait accompli*, destroy the Palestinian dream of statehood and undermine the Palestinian Authority until its collapse. But the “Arab spring” is the most determinant factor in Abbas’ change. It has removed the weight of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak’s regime from his chest and opened up the possibility for Palestinians to think of new options. Affirming the Arab quest for democracy and considering regional and international changes (especially the deterioration in Egyptian-Israeli and Turkish-Israeli relationships), Abbas sensed it was time for a Palestinian spring.

Still, the solution is not at the door. We must work hard and make one last attempt to end the stalemate in the peace process by changing the rules of negotiations, which requires real change in the balance of power on the ground. It is no longer possible to address the blockage in talks with the means tried and failed over the years.

Abbas dreams of achieving statehood. When he began to see that dream slip away, he sought to leave the scene as a hero and a stubborn defender of Palestinian rights. He wanted to refute the charges of weakness that have dogged him, particularly after his decision to postpone the U.N. Goldstone report that accused Israel of war crimes in Gaza. One cannot explain Abbas' position without this personal dimension. He does not want to carry a gun and die a martyr, like his predecessor Yasser Arafat. But he has chosen to stand fast and use popular resistance to try to achieve a settlement on the basis of clear inalienable benchmarks. Either that, or he will develop a new strategy inspired by the spirit of spring in the region, one that unites Palestinians and opens the window of hope that they will achieve their goals of freedom, return and independence.

As such, Abbas' speech expressed the historical suffering, hope and aspirations of Palestinians, and was answered with warm applause and standing ovations.

In comparison, Netanyahu's speech was weak and worn-out, arguing in a lawyerly way about unfairness. He then moved from attack to defense, wearing the clothes of an innocent. He said, on the one hand, that he was keen on peace and called for the resumption of negotiations. Then he said that Palestine was "the land of Israel" and that Palestinians have foiled all peace initiatives because they refuse to recognize Israel as a Jewish state and the owners of this land. Netanyahu repeated a broken record about Israel's willingness for permanent peace and the generous gestures it has extended, only to be met by terrorism and Palestinian inertia. Israel was a small state

surrounded by enemies who wanted to destroy it, he said, insisting on the primacy of security. He claimed that Israel sought a Palestinian state, as if it has not eliminated all chances for that through its settlement expansion, apartheid wall, the separation and isolation of Jerusalem, and the siege and aggression against Gaza.

Netanyahu said that the concept of security means that a demilitarized Palestinian state should include long-term security arrangements, including the continued presence of Israeli forces and control of borders, air and water so that the area cannot be used as a base for launching rockets at targets in Israel.

Has Netanyahu forgotten that the achievement of peace is the best, fastest and cheapest way to achieve security? Israel can continue its occupation, relying on force and military security and the lack of Arab and international development as deterrence. But for how long? Israel often says that it cannot afford to lose a single war, but its ability to win wars is decreasing. It is no longer able to achieve lightning-quick victory far from the home front. Given the new variables in the Arab and international sphere, will Israel not regret making peace once adverse conditions are forced upon it?

The new Abbas has become even more removed from the old Netanyahu, so that the gap between the Palestinian and Israeli attitudes has become wider. We cannot now turn back the clock and return to sterile negotiations.

What is needed is to allow the new factors and rules to change the balance of power, then for a framework to be set for the peace process. Statements are not enough. There can be no achievement at the negotiating table until action is imposed on the land of the conflict.

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Article 3.

Foreign Policy

Where Do We Go from Here?

Hussein Ibish

September 30, 2011 -- In a perfunctory meeting on Wednesday morning, Sept. 28, as expected, and per its usual procedure for dealing with would-be new United Nations members since the late 1960s, the Security Council referred the Palestinian application to one of its standing committees. The committee -- which meets and votes in secret and requires unanimity to refer the matter back to the Security Council -- is scheduled to begin considering the application on Friday morning. The membership process usually takes weeks, but can take only days (as with the most recent U.N. member, South Sudan) or years (as in the case of Kuwait). Neither the committee nor the Security Council is under any specific obligation to act on the request in a limited time frame, so the process theoretically could drag on indefinitely.

Because the required nine-vote Security Council majority is by no means yet ensured, and because the United States is publicly committed to vetoing a Security Council vote if one ever takes place anyway, full U.N. membership is effectively barred for the Palestinians under the present circumstances. Therefore, the application will have to serve as leverage to achieve something else if it is to produce anything meaningful. So what options does this leave the Palestinians? Let's take a look at five, moving from the least to the most confrontational:

1) Declare moral and political victory and move on.

The Palestinians have made their moral and legal case for statehood in President Mahmoud Abbas's speech and their formal application. And if the established international peace process should decisively

fail, they do have other options, no matter how risky. The Security Council referral to the committee buys everyone time to look for compromises, particularly given that the Palestinian membership bid cannot succeed. If they choose not to press the issue in the Security Council, the Palestinians could seek advantages in other venues, as follows.

2) Work with the Quartet on more advantageous language for renewed negotiations. It is highly significant that the Middle East Quartet -- the United States, the European Union, Russia, and the U.N. Secretariat -- issued a statement in conjunction with Abbas's address and the Palestinian application. The statement showed that the Quartet has not resolved the differences that emerged in its ranks this year, particularly over whether Palestinians should be required to recognize Israel as a "Jewish state." But it reasserted the importance and viability of the established processes.

Working with the Palestinians and the Israelis separately, the Quartet could issue a statement laying out the framework for new negotiations, timetables, and even clearer terms of reference that might provide the Palestinians with a significant diplomatic achievement -- even if the renewal of direct talks with a reasonable prospect of success has to wait until political circumstances in the United States, in Israel, and among the Palestinians become more favorable.

3) Pursue a General Assembly resolution in cooperation with the EU. The Palestinians are well positioned to win almost any of a number of possible resolutions they could bring before the General Assembly, but they can do this in either a cooperative or a confrontational manner with Western states. They could work with the European Union, which is badly and uncomfortably divided on the issue, to craft language that Europeans could unite behind and that would protect them from the most serious American and Israeli retaliation,

as well as provide them significant diplomatic advances. Many important EU member states, particularly France and Spain, are supportive of Palestinian nonmember U.N. observer status, but others are concerned that this would provide Palestinians' with access to the International Criminal Court and other law enforcement mechanisms to pursue charges against Israel. Some Europeans have been working on a new legal status for Palestine that would be an upgrade from the PLO observer mission but would protect Israel from potentially facing such charges.

4) Pursue a General Assembly resolution independently.

Palestinians could independently pursue nonmember observer-state status, and they would no doubt have a majority to secure that. But this could precipitate a crisis not only with the United States -- which has threatened to cut funding to the Palestinian Authority (PA) -- but probably with some important European countries as well, the two main reliable external donors to the PA's annual budget. A crisis in relations with the Americans would also greatly complicate the resumption of negotiations, which Abbas and other Palestinian leaders acknowledge will be essential for the actual realization of an independent Palestine.

The least aggressive independent action the Palestinians could pursue in the General Assembly would be a resolution acknowledging their right to statehood, but not securing nonmember state status. The most aggressive would be a resolution under the "Uniting for Peace" formula laid down in General Assembly Resolution 377A (1950), which was designed to overcome differences among Security Council permanent members on urgent matters. This would have to be tabled following a U.S. veto in the Security Council and would authorize member states to take coercive measures "to maintain or restore international peace and security." This might be interpreted as authorizing sanctions and other coercive measures against Israel.

However, numerous countries have had sanctions and boycotts against Israel and, indeed, the Palestinians for decades without the authorization of Resolution 377. More importantly, a 377 resolution would not address or enhance the question of Palestinian statehood or U.N. membership, and in that sense is completely off topic.

5) Try to force a vote in the Security Council.

The Palestinians are trying to secure commitments for a nine-vote majority and could try to force a vote on their application in the Security Council, even though they know this will ultimately be vetoed by the United States. Palestinians believe they have recently won over Gabon and Nigeria, meaning that, in addition to Brazil, China, India, Lebanon, Russia, and South Africa, they have eight commitments to vote yes. The rest of the members are likely to vote no or abstain. The Palestinians are focusing their efforts on Colombia and Bosnia, both of which will be difficult to convince. Alone among South American countries, Columbia does not recognize Palestine, and it has an important security relationship with Israel. Bosnia, which is a confederation of three ethnic communities, is divided on the matter, with Muslim Bosniaks and Croats supporting Palestinian membership but Serbs opposing it because of a potential similar application by Kosovo.

If Palestinians cannot secure a nine-vote majority, then there is virtually no rationale for pressing their case in the Security Council. But if they can, some Palestinians and their allies argue that they could achieve a "moral victory" by forcing the United States to use its veto to block Palestinian membership. Such a moral victory, however, could come at a tremendous cost -- loss of U.S. and other Western aid, a souring of relations with the United States, and unspecified harsh retaliation threatened by numerous Israeli leaders, including potentially withholding Palestinian tax revenues that make up the bulk of the PA's annual budget.

For the moment, the Security Council has bought everyone time by referring the matter to the committee and has averted but not foreclosed a universally damaging confrontation. The various compromise tracks are very much in the Palestinians' interests, and there are promising signs they understand this. In defiance of all expectations, while the Israeli cabinet was unable to agree on any unified response to the Quartet's statement, by contrast, following a meeting of its executive committee, PLO Secretary-General Yasser Abed Rabbo welcomed the statement, though he also reiterated the Palestinian demand for a settlement freeze.

If they play their cards right, Palestinian leaders will have made the moral case for their statehood, demonstrated that they do have options outside the established peace process, and secured new diplomatic leverage and political capital at home. But if they mishandle diplomacy in the coming weeks and months, they could face a very dangerous crisis in relations with the West, and especially with the United States, which they can ill afford.

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Article 4.

New York Review of Books

Obama's Palestinian Veto: Let's Be Honest

Henry Siegman

September 30, 2011 -- Over the past few days, much has been written about the Palestinian bid for UN recognition of its statehood and Washington's opposition to it. But the real importance of last week's events at the UN does not lie with the US response itself, but with the effect that response has had on the international community. For now, the Palestinian bid must be reviewed by a special UN committee, a process that will take weeks or months, thus postponing any immediate reckoning with the veto threatened by the Obama Administration. But for the first time, there is a broad recognition of the emptiness of the American claim that the US is uniquely qualified to bring the Israel-Palestine conflict to an end, and awareness that it may instead be the main obstacle to peace.

This recognition marks a dramatic shift from only two years ago. In his speech in Cairo in June 2009, Obama seemed to announce a new American commitment to fairness, international law, and a two-state solution when he proclaimed that:

the Palestinian people—Muslims and Christians—have suffered in pursuit of a homeland. For more than 60 years they've endured the pain of dislocation. Many wait in refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza, and neighboring lands for a life of peace and security that they have never been able to lead. They endure the daily humiliations—large and small—that come with occupation. So let there be no doubt: The situation for the Palestinian people is intolerable. And America

will not turn our backs on the legitimate Palestinian aspiration for dignity, opportunity, and a state of their own.

In his speech at the UN General Assembly last week, however, Obama reserved his compassion for those responsible for the Palestinians' misery. "Let's be honest," he said. "Israel is surrounded by neighbors that have waged repeated wars against it," and Israeli citizens have been killed by suicide bombers on their buses. "These are facts, they can not be denied," he said. As noted by The New York Times's Ethan Bronner, the speech could have been written by an Israeli government official: "It said nothing about Israeli settlements, the 1967 lines, occupation, or Palestinian suffering, focusing instead on Israeli defense needs."

Moreover, Obama's depiction of today's Israel was neither honest nor factual. Far from waging repeated wars on Israel, a decade ago its neighbors offered to establish full normal relations, including diplomatic recognition, trade and security—an offer Israel has to this day spurned and rejected. The earlier Arab hostility to Israel which Obama invoked is as relevant to Netanyahu's policies as the Soviet Union's hostility to America is to Obama's policies.

There is little point in engaging Obama's apologia for Israel's rejectionism because from everything known about this man and his intelligence, no one in the UN audience thought he himself believes a word of it. Avigdor Lieberman, Israel's Foreign Minister, was ecstatic, declaring "I am ready to sign onto this speech with both hands." Obama should ponder what he has wrought when his speech is acclaimed by a man whose racist views about Palestinians, and Arabs in general—having described Arab-Israeli members of the Knesset as a "fifth column," proposed forced population transfers to rid Israel of its non-Jewish population, and called for the execution of any Arab Member of Knesset who meets with Hamas officials—

would have disqualified him from any governmental position in any other democratic country.

But Obama's inconsistencies are only part of the problem. More troubling is his affirmation of a principle which, if taken seriously, would nail down the coffin into which US policy has placed the peace process. Obama has now declared repeatedly—before, during and following his speech—that the UN cannot give Palestinians their state. A Palestinian state can only result from an agreement reached in direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

The former editor of *The Harvard Law Review* surely knows that national self-determination is a “peremptory norm” in international law that obliges the UN to implement that right. Obama's principle would subject Palestinian self-determination to the approval of an Israeli government, a majority of whose ministers are charter members of the Israel's Knesset caucus that is committed to incorporating the entire West Bank into the Greater Land of Israel, notwithstanding Netanyahu's recent acceptance of a two state solution, a declaration that few Israelis take seriously.

And yet, paradoxically, Obama's surrender to domestic political expediency in a presidential election campaign year has offered new hope for a change in direction away from the American-sponsored peace process. That peace process has been one of the great frauds of recent diplomatic history, having served as a cover for Israel's settlement policies in the West Bank. It has by now succeeded in establishing some 600,000 Israelis in former Palestinian areas of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The international community has until now abided the US-led peace process out of the belief that precisely because of America's one-sided support for Israel, it has unique leverage to persuade the Israeli government to accept a fair resolution of its conflict with the Palestinians. Obama's speech at the UN has finally shattered that

expectation. No one who was in that audience any longer believes that America is the indispensable party for an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. Indeed, it has become painfully clear that America is “uniquely” obstructing the process, using its influence in Western Europe and elsewhere to shield Israel from international pressures that might change its rejectionist stance.

The conventional wisdom on this subject has maintained that Israelis must be reassured of their security to accept the compromises necessary for a peace accord. If threatened by sanctions or criticism seen by them as intended to challenge Israel’s legitimacy, they will only harden their position and adopt a bunker mentality. It is useless wisdom, not because it is a false description of the Israeli reaction to outside pressure, but rather because the Israeli government acts no differently when no one is threatening it and when its interlocutors are moderates who unequivocally oppose violence and seek to come to an accommodation with Israel.

As noted above, that is how Israeli governments have acted since 2002 when the Arab countries offered to normalize relations with Israel, and that is how they continue to act even as terrorist threats have been largely eliminated in the West Bank—in great part because of the Palestinians’ own efforts led by Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad.

As a result of this US-supported intransigence, there is now a growing openness by other members of the international community to bypass the US and pursue new avenues that offer greater hope for ending Israel’s occupation and creating a Palestinian state. President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, for example, openly rejected America’s position in his address to the UN immediately following Obama’s speech. Russia was never fully aboard, and neither Egypt, nor Jordan, nor Saudi Arabia will again defer to America on this issue, as they have in the past. What hope there is now for rescuing a two-state

solution rests with this emerging disillusionment with America's leadership of the peace process and with the new openness to measures—by governments and civil society—that are far more likely to change Israel's cost/benefit calculations for its colonial ambitions.

This new international backing for the Palestinians could easily be compromised, however, if Abbas is not more careful with his rhetoric. Having recognized the State of Israel within its internationally recognized 1967 lines, it is one thing for him to refuse to pronounce further on the Jewish character of the State of Israel, as Israeli leaders have asked him to do. However, his omission, in his UN speech, of any mention of a Jewish historical connection to the Holy Land while citing the Christian and Muslim connections prompts mistrust in the Palestinian leadership and risks the loss of international support.

It must also be stressed that the international support for the Palestinian cause manifested at the UN will not bring about significant change if it does not continue to be inspired by Palestinians themselves. It was Abbas' speech, daring to say "no" to the US (and to the hapless Quartet) that brought his audience at the UN repeatedly to its feet. In turn, it transformed Abbas' own image from that of a passive politician trying to live up to Israel's standards for an acceptable "peace partner" into a courageous leader of a national liberation movement.

If Palestinians are to retain their painfully acquired support, Abbas must develop and implement effective strategies for non-violent Palestinian resistance that will hold the world's attention and turn the "Palestinian Spring" he promised in his speech from slogan to reality.

Article 5.

The Christian Science Monitor

An Interview with Mahmoud Abbas

Raghida Dergham

Raghida Dergham: Mr. President, how did you feel at the moment you stood before the General Assembly? At that historic moment as you stood there, how did you feel personally?

Mahmoud Abbas: I felt that we are really witnessing an historic event, that we are before a just and right demand, namely that we want to obtain a state that is a full member of the United Nations, just like other people. I, as I gazed upon the people, felt that if we held a vote we would have had unanimous support. But unfortunately, there are those who want to prevent the Palestinian people from reaching that, and those who want to reject this, and all we can do is to be patient.

Dergham: Are you afraid of the reactions? Is this an adventure that you fear may bring you undesirable consequences?

Abbas: It is not an adventure. On the contrary, it is a well-calculated endeavor. For more than a year, we have discussed this issue and considered it down to the tedious details: Where do we go and how do we go there? We discussed it with Arab countries, which have been fully up to speed, especially the Arab follow-up committee, on every step we have taken. For this reason, we were not maneuvering or playing games, but were instead absolutely clear to everyone. This is our stance, and this is what we want to do. This is not only recorded in the minutes of meetings, but also in our statements.

Dergham: Will a US veto lead you to alternatives that you know of? What will you do? What are your alternatives if the US veto is used?

Abbas: I said that we will now return home and study all possibilities. This means that anything that will be proposed to us, we shall not reject readily, but instead consider in accordance to the ground rules that we hold. In other words, we want to return to the negotiations. But without recognition of the 1967 borders and without a halt to settlement activity, we will not do so. We await the Security Council to resolve the matter in due course through its formal and technical procedures. However, we reject any political games aimed at obstructionism and stalling.

Dergham: Is there a scenario whereby upon the arrival of the application to the Security Council, a decision on it is deferred, only deferred, until the European efforts along with those of the Arabs at the General Assembly are concluded, so that Palestine would be given the membership of an observing state but not full membership?

Abbas: We are not currently looking into this issue. Certainly, we reject any kind of delay or obstruction.

Dergham: If the issue comes to an end with the US veto, Palestine would not have the status or position of a state, and would not be able to head to the ICC [International Criminal Court]. What would you have gained then?

Abbas: The United States, the bastion of democracy, would do wrong to the Palestinian people if it denies them the right to liberty and self-determination. It will have to bear responsibility for its own actions.

Dergham: But there are those who say, Why risk losing an American president who sympathizes with you and your cause?

Abbas: It is the US president who spoke of the necessity to halt settlement, and it is he who spoke of the '67 borders. He has to fulfill his words, at the very least.

Dergham: Has [French] President Nicolas Sarkozy become the alternative when he put forward detailed proposals?

Abbas: We say that we appreciate what he proposed, but our official answer will be given after we consult the Palestinian leadership. We present everything before the latter in detail, and it is this leadership that decides upon the appropriate position.

Dergham: Is the Quartet over? Are you disappointed with the stances of the Quartet?

Abbas: Unfortunately, the Quartet has failed throughout the past year in issuing a statement, despite the fact that in the past it indeed issued good ones. But this year, since September and to date, it has failed. Twice it has failed to meet, and in the third time, it was the Quartet that rejected American proposals, not us. Russia, Europe, and the United Nations rejected what the Americans proposed. This means that what the Americans offered was unacceptable to anyone. Such proposals talk about a Jewish state, about the settlement blocs, as though they were a fait accompli, and about security that would remain in Israel's control. After that, the Quartet envoy, Tony Blair, carried to us the ideas that the Quartet itself had rejected. For this reason, I told President Obama that we reject totally such ideas.

Dergham: The Quartet statement the [UN] secretary general told you about includes new ideas, correct?

Abbas: They presented some ideas and views. We said we would listen to them, discuss them, and then give them our feedback.

Dergham: President Sarkozy has proposed a timetable for negotiations. Are you ready to move forward on that?

Abbas: The negotiations are the first matter, before the timeframe. This is important. But the core issue is the substance. If the substance is appropriate, then yes, a timeframe. We would put a timeframe in place and within which we would conclude the negotiations.

Dergham: Hamas has criticized your speech. While the world was applauding you and giving you a standing ovation, positions were taken and statements were issued against you?

Abbas: From the outset, Hamas said that this move is unilateral and one-sided. True, we perhaps did not consult with them. But the matter should not be, "If you do not consult me then I am against you." At least I understand the essence of their position. But they have taken pride in erroneousness. They continued to reject and started looking for pretexts, saying that the statement contained contradictions and whatnot. The whole world understood the speech, and yet they say it is full of contradictions. This is regrettable.

Dergham: Why is there talk of dissolving the Palestinian Authority?

Abbas: We are not talking about dissolving the Palestinian Authority.

Dergham: You proposed what is now close to being a civil intifada against the occupation.

Abbas: I did not say intifada. This has existed for some time. The popular and peaceful resistance is present in Bil'in and Ni'lin and elsewhere in Palestinian cities adjacent to the Wall, and it is carried out every week by Palestinians, Israelis, and foreign volunteers. We encourage these popular and peaceful protests, which are not against international law, or anyone for that matter, but only against the occupation, while using peaceful methods. What is required of us? Now, our Arab brethren have taught us with their uprisings and their Spring. They talk about the peacefulness of their protests. And indeed, this has proven to be the most effective way for people to attain their rights.

Dergham: Are you afraid [Israeli Prime Minister] Benjamin Netanyahu may carry out his threats of taking measures, as it seems he is making threats that may even amount to military action?

Abbas: He can, without making any threats, he can do anything on the military level because we cannot confront him on that level, nor do we want to. If he likes, the doors will be open to him.

Dergham: Do you fear that US financial aid to you may be suspended?

Abbas: There is talk of suspending aid, but at least the Americans should tell us why, if they want to suspend aid, then why. But we shall cross that bridge when we get to it.

Dergham: Are you currently on good terms with Syria? And why do you not conduct a visit to Iran? The first to congratulate you on your speech were the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the emir of Qatar. What is the nature of your relations at present, while bearing in mind that there is an Iranian-Turkish competition

over the region, and what is the nature of your relations with Iran and Syria currently?

Abbas: I think, when we went to the conference, there was the Iranian delegation who welcomed us. The same can be said of the Syrian delegation with whom we've met.

Dergham: Here?

Abbas: Yes, we met yesterday, we more than once met with the Syrian delegation, both in the General Assembly or at the home of the emir of Qatar. Then today, [Syrian Vice Foreign Minister] Faisal Mekdad came and congratulated me. We are not on bad terms at all with any side, and we maintain good relations with everyone. With regard to Erdogan, our relationship is excellent, and our relationship with the emir of Qatar is excellent as well. We have no problems with anyone. For this reason, everyone came to congratulate us and greet us. If a certain side did not want to do so, then no one is putting pressure on anyone to congratulate, greet, or say good words about the speech.

Dergham: Is there anything that makes you afraid?

Abbas: Of whom should I be afraid? If Netanyahu wants to attack us, then welcome. If he wants to annul agreements, then welcome. He is free to do whatever he wishes because he is the occupier, not us. He occupies our land, and he is able to do what he wants. But we will not submit to what he wants. We shall oppose him by all peaceful means.

Article 6.

Project Syndicate

Has Palestine Won?

Shlomo Ben-Ami

2011-09-30 -- The somber spectacle of Israel's isolation during the United Nations debate on Palestinian statehood marks the political tsunami that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's critics warned would arrive if Israel did not propose a bold peace initiative. But, more importantly, the speeches at the UN General Assembly by the two rivals, Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, showed that any initiative to bring the parties back to the negotiating table might turn out to be futile. Speeches do not make peace, but they can mar its prospects. Netanyahu and Abbas both showed once again how the politics surrounding "the peace process" has defeated the cause of peace. Both leaders exhibited utter indifference to the other's core concerns, and catered to their constituencies, Hamas and Israeli settlers included, making it clear, urbi et orbi, that the gaps separating their positions are as unbridgeable as ever. Netanyahu could not bring himself to admit the sins of occupation, or even to utter a minimal expression of empathy with the Palestinian tragedy of dispossession and dispersion. Israel's march of folly in expanding its West Bank settlements did not deserve a hint of soul searching on his part. Indeed, Netanyahu's call for peace will remain hollow so long as he continues to view the solution to Israel's legitimate security concerns as requiring continuous occupation of sizable portions of the future Palestinian state. The Jordan Valley and the hills of Judea and Samaria are, undoubtedly, strategic assets for a country whose width is that of the length of a Manhattan avenue. But demilitarization, the deployment of international forces, and rigid security arrangements could offer an answer. Security concerns can

no longer be treated as a license for territorial expansion. Eager to deliver his elementary history lessons, Netanyahu refuses to admit the validity of one key perspective. Rather than interpreting Israel's victory in the 1967 Six-Day War as permission for annexation of territory, that triumph should be viewed as a watershed that made possible peace with the entire Arab world should Israel relinquish occupied Arab lands. This principle was stipulated by the 2002 Arab peace initiative, and was previously realized in Israel's peace with Egypt and Jordan. So, whoever aspires to help the parties reach a settlement needs to be attentive to the fact that territorial borders are only one aspect of this conflict – and not necessarily the most contentious one. Unlike Israel's peace with Egypt (and, one hopes, its peace with Syria), the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is rooted in more than a real-estate dispute. As the UN debate showed, what is at stake is a clash of irreconcilable national narratives. Egypt had to grant Israel only political recognition, but the Palestinians are being asked to recognize Israel's moral legitimacy by accepting Jewish links to the Holy Land and hence admitting the Jews' millenarian claim for a state in a land that the Palestinians believe is historically theirs. Not a word, nor an omission, in Abbas's UN speech was accidental. What was most striking was how flagrantly dismissive he was of Israel's most fundamental national narrative. He spoke of the Holy Land as the source of Christianity and the home of sacred shrines of Islam, but intentionally ignored the Biblical roots of Judaism and Jerusalem as the home of Hebrew kings and prophets. For Israelis, that omission reveals even the most moderate Palestinians' unwillingness to embrace the existence of a Jewish state. Abbas's refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state – on the ground that to do so would betray Israel's 1.5 million Palestinian citizens – vindicated a key Israeli concern, and fueled skeptics' fears of a hidden long-term Palestinian agenda to do away with the Jewish state

altogether. This is likely to dishearten Israeli doves – and embolden hawks in their insistence that no progress toward peace is possible without the Palestinians’ unequivocal acceptance of Israel as the Jewish national homeland. Thus, Abbas’s implicit message that Israel will never offer a fair deal to its Arab minority will reinforce Netanyahu’s leadership as the staunch defender of the national interest against the naïve dreamers of the left. Netanyahu has only to present Abbas’ arguments as proof that, for the Palestinians, peace with Israel is just the first stage in a grand strategy leading to one Palestine, embracing all of Israel, with an Arab majority. Even if, as expected, the Security Council rejects the Palestinians’ request for full UN membership and Palestine ends up with observer status in the General Assembly, Abbas can already claim victory. He managed to redress the balance of power with Israel and the United States by mobilizing the vast support that the Palestinian cause elicits in the international community. If not for his bold initiative at the UN, the Quartet (the UN, the US, the European Union, and Russia) would not have become so suddenly hyperactive in searching for a formula to bring the parties back to the negotiating table. But don’t hold your breath. Nothing will come out of the Quartet’s move unless the parties change their attitudes. Peacemaking is about courageously addressing the other side’s genuinely vital concerns. And would-be mediators, for their part, can no longer just be “facilitators”; they need to regard themselves as stakeholders – and be prepared to exert pressure and twist arms. Left to their own devices, Israelis and Palestinians will never reach a comprehensive peace settlement.

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Article 7.

The Independent

Will Israel still exist in 2048?

Mary Dejevsky

30 September 2011 -- This time last week the diplomatic world was on tenterhooks, as President Mahmoud Abbas prepared to make Palestine's claim to recognition at the UN General Assembly. Seven days on, his historic demand languishes in a vague limbo, as Americans and Europeans try to pre-empt an ill-tempered stand-off in the Security Council and the US veto that would surely follow. The idea seems to be to try to deflect the Palestinians with a promise of revamped peace talks with Israel.

Whether or not this tactic works, however, there can be little doubt that one day, sooner rather than later, a fully fledged Palestinian state will come into being. There have been many mis-starts, including the 2006 elections that much of the West rejected retrospectively when Hamas emerged as the biggest party. But the momentum is inexorable. The Arab Spring, better described as the Arab awakening, can only speed the process along.

The bigger and longer-term question relates not to the existence, or even the viability of a Palestinian state – which should be a given. The demographics, economics and politics all point the same way. It relates to the future, and long-term survival, of Israel. In short, will Israel, as the Jewish state, still be around to celebrate its centenary in 2048?

Let me make it absolutely clear: the question is not whether Israel should continue to exist. That is beyond doubt. It is a legally constituted state with full UN recognition. It is a stable, albeit fractious, democracy and has survived more than 60 years in a distinctly hostile neighbourhood. It has created a thriving economy,

with intensive agriculture and advanced industry, from almost nothing. It has a rich cultural life. It is not alone in having borders that are not finally demarcated and are regarded by some as illegal. The fact that it has enemies who withhold recognition does not negate its legitimacy.

No, the question is not whether Israel should survive, but whether it can and will survive. And here there must be room at the very least for doubt. A string of recent developments contains hints that the state of Israel, as currently constituted, may not be a permanent feature of the international scene.

One is the new porousness of its borders. Despite massive spending on security and recent, controversial, efforts to erect physical barriers along what Israel defines as its border with the Palestinian Authority, its other frontiers have become, or threaten to become, porous. On several weekends in May and June, Palestinians in Syria breached the border with Israel. They did not use overwhelming force. Numbers were enough, against Israeli troops – rightly – reluctant to mow down dozens of young people.

The incursions appeared to be encouraged, if not actually incited, by the Syrian authorities seeking a diversion from their own difficulties. They have since ceased; but the threat remains, and could soon escalate were the situation in Syria to deteriorate. If, in the worst case, Syria descended into civil war, chaos could present an even greater danger to Israel because there would be no one in Damascus with the authority to call the crowds of frustrated young Palestinians back.

Something similar, perhaps even less tractable, applies in the south, on Israel's border with Egypt. Sinai is a vast territory and hard to patrol. Security on the Egyptian side has already deteriorated as a by-product of the fall of the Mubarak regime, and there have been attacks on Israeli convoys in the Negev. If unrest in Syria and Egypt

were to extend to Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, the consequences for Israel's security could be even worse.

Add to these growing security problems the demographics – very young and fast-increasing populations in the countries all around – and it is clear that present trends will not easily be reversed. It is just about possible to imagine Israel resorting to the sort of impenetrable fortifications that extend along stretches of the US frontier with Mexico, but the investment would be huge, the message one of isolation, and the effect on daily life in Israel almost entirely negative. A second reason why Israelis might be justified in having qualms about their future relates to the political aftermath of the Arab Spring. For a long time the fear was that any change in Arab countries would bring Islamist regimes to power, with fiercely anti-Israel agendas. That still cannot be ruled out. But what has happened so far could have more insidious consequences for Israel. Not only is the Jewish state losing its kudos as the sole democracy in the region, but those Arab leaders who actively supported peace have lost, or are losing, power, and the US is giving up on intervention.

One hope was that the emergence of more democratic regimes around Israel might foster a climate of normalisation and mutual respect. That may yet happen. But another effect is that leaders will have to be more responsive to the wishes of their people. As can already be discerned with Egypt, this may not bode well for stability in Arab-Israel relations. With the Arab Spring also bolstering the self-confidence of the Palestinians – a factor in Mr Abbas's decision to take his case to the UN last week – the political balance in the region is shifting. A third reason for doubt about Israel's future lies within the Jewish state itself. With the early pioneering spirit fading, and even the Holocaust – dare one hazard – less of a unifying force, Israel is not the same country it was 60, 30, even 10 years ago. And demography means that it will continue to change, with the Arab,

Orthodox Jewish and second-generation Russian populations increasing much faster than other groups. The Israel of the next 30 years is likely to be more divided, less productive, more inward-looking and more hawkish than it is today – but without the financial means and unquestioning sense of duty that inspired young people to defend their homeland by force of arms. Recent mass protests against inequality and the cost of middle-class living also suggest that the social solidarity that has prevailed hitherto could break down. In such circumstances, it must be asked how much longer Israel can maintain the unity it has always presented against what it terms the "existential threat". An Israel whose borders are leaky, which is surrounded by states that are at once chaotic and assertive, and whose citizens are less able or willing than they were to fight, could face real serious questions about its viability. The choice then might be between a fortress state, explicitly protected by nuclear weapons, and a state so weak that association, or federation, with the burgeoning independent Palestine would become plausible: the so-called one-state solution by other means. In either event, those with other options – the younger, more educated, more cosmopolitan sections of the population – might well seek their future elsewhere, leaving the homeland of their ancestors' dreams a husk of its former self. The emotive call, "Next year in Jerusalem" would be the wistful vestige of a noble ambition overtaken by cruel demographic and geopolitical reality.

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Article 8.

Real-Clear-World

Erdogan Should Mind His Own Glass House

Hillel Fradkin & Lewis Libby

September 30, 2011 -- Two weeks ago, Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan visited Egypt, Tunisia and Libya on what was dubbed his “Arab Spring Tour.” With a growing economy, a strong regional military and three successive electoral pluralities (the most recent this past June), Erdogan enjoys greater legitimacy than any other Middle Eastern Muslim ruler. He designed his Arab Tour to bolster his claim to lead the Middle East. But Erdogan also needed his tour to obscure his recent record of regional failures, failures from which he badly needs to recover.

Outwardly, the tour appeared to succeed. Erdogan’s airport arrivals won him “rock star” treatment, and he even addressed the Arab League – the first non-Arab afforded that distinction. Arab Spring activists, worried that hold-over militaries might yet derail their revolutions, marveled at Erdogan’s ability to reassert Islamism and, most recently, his success in bringing Turkey’s generals to heel. But his greatest appeal sprang from his vociferous attacks on Israel, which he threatened with naval war, and the West, whom he accused of seeking to exploit Libya’s wealth. By contrast, he cited Turkey as a long and selfless friend. Here was a man, he would have people say, willing to confront Israel like a Nasser, willing to lead like an Ottoman.

Heady stuff, but in fact Erdogan’s foreign policy is in shambles. The Arab Spring, which often cites approvingly Turkey’s domestic

model, has also presented the Turkish prime minister with his first serious tests. And Erdogan has stumbled badly.

It began in Libya, where Erdogan had warned sternly against NATO intervention, even though NATO sought to protect Muslim civilians. NATO ignored him, and Erdogan soon crept back into line, even trying to claim credit.

But it is in Syria that Erdogan has suffered his most serious setbacks. He had once loudly advertised a regional foreign policy of “zero problems with neighbors”; helped create an EU-like free trade and travel zone with Syria, Iraq and Iran; and backed Syria’s President Assad and Iran’s rulers in their quarrels with the West, even seeking to shield Iran’s nuclear program. But today, Turkey staggers under problems with Syria, Iraq and Iran. Worse yet, Erdogan has appeared ineffective. The Syrian crisis is the proximate cause, but Erdogan’s problems run deeper still.

Erdogan raised the stakes in Syria by declaring it to be not merely a regional issue, but a crucial “domestic” one for Turkey. After all, violence in Syria risks flooding Turkey with Syrian Kurds; and Turkey’s long-running problems with its Kurdish population includes terror attacks by the Kurdish group, PKK. So Erdogan demanded that Assad halt assaults on Syrians and reform, even as Erdogan was bombing PKK camps in Northern Iraq, killing Iraqi civilians, violating Iraqi sovereignty and causing Iraq to complain about Turkey.

Nonplussed, Assad has repeatedly rejected Turkish demands, despite Turkish sputtering that its “patience” was running out. Once, Turkey’s foreign minister proudly announced he had persuaded Syria to withdraw tanks from a siege, only to see the tanks return hours later. Turkey looked the fool.

Turkey failed because Assad knows both the dreadful price of looking weak and that Iran will support him. Herein lies the deeper

cause of Erdogan's failures in Syria: Iran also seeks to lead the region. For that, it needs its proxy Syria. Erdogan is in Syria's and Iran's way. So Iran charges that Turkey's suppression of its Kurdish opposition is no different than Assad's suppression of his opposition. Iran - which is itself shelling Iraqi territory - refers sometimes to the PKK not as "terrorists" but as "insurgents," who are an authentic voice of legitimate Kurdish aspirations. As Erdogan squirms, Iran chortles.

For the moment, and for so long as Assad stands, the region will see Iran as winning. As long as Iran continues work on its nuclear program, time works against Erdogan. This is what lay behind Turkey's recent decision to accept installation of a U.S. radar needed to protect against Iran.

Against this background, Erdogan launched his Arab Spring tour, expelled the Israeli Ambassador and threatened naval war with Israel. He sought to shift the focus to those Arab and largely Sunni lands where his strengths lay; but his liabilities lurk still. Arab League dignitaries in the audience were enraptured by Erdogan's denunciations of Israel, but others - the Egyptian military included - do not relish where this may lead. And the League's serious business that day was Syria, about which Erdogan sat silent. As he left the hall, Syrian exiles called him "coward."

Indeed, some in the Turkish opposition have begun to denounce Erdogan's morally hypocritical "glass house." They ridicule his government's travels as motion without results. They deride his vanity, a man given to delivering moral sermons whose tests he fails - ironic commentary on the man who still holds with pride the Gaddafi prize for human rights.

All this, then, marks Erdogan's reverting to trump: the anti-Israel card. Erdogan's hostility to Israel undoubtedly runs deep. In 2006, he

embraced Hamas, devoted to Israel's destruction. But now he slaps trump down with ever greater ferocity, threatening military conflict. Erdogan's broader international standing slides, too. The UN Palmer Report criticized his support for Turkish ships attempting last spring to run Israel's legitimate effort to keep weapons from terrorists in Gaza. Erdogan's efforts to block Cyprus from enjoying the rights of EU membership, and his military threats against Cyprus lawfully developing resources useful to the EU, win few friends. For a would-be leader of the new Middle East, his anti-Israeli, anti-Western tactics look awfully similar to the old. So far, at least, Erdogan's foreign policy has mostly just entangled Turkey more in the unproductive Middle East politics his predecessors avoided. Erdogan's foreign minister has essentially admitted as much. While calling the "zero problems" policy a success, he now defines it narrowly as Turkish-Egyptian alliance, one implicitly directed against Israel.

It would be nice to suppose that Turkey's inherent strengths, its past moderation and the apparent political and moral limits to Erdogan's regional influence might soon turn him to a more sober course. After all, a would-be "leader" must eventually show results more substantial than applause.

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