

The Delegitimization Campaign Against Israel at the United Nations

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Introduction

Delegitimization is an assault on the integrity and viability of a government or a state. It is an attempt to destroy by political means what cannot readily be accomplished militarily.

The delegitimization of a state or government within the global village can occur in different ways – by casting it as (1) a human rights pariah or an entity whose behavior shocks the conscience of humankind, (2) a chronic international law offender or recidivist, or (3) a grave danger to international peace and security.

The path to delegitimization can be top down if the offender becomes the focal point of attention of world leaders or authorities. Or it can be bottom up and driven primarily from the grass roots and civil society organizations.

Israel has been under such a life-threatening assault since its creation. The attack has been highly successful, both inside and outside of Israel. Outside of Israel this assault has infected multilateral and bilateral institutions across the globe. Inside of Israel it has taken a serious toll on self-image, self-confidence and endurance.

I am going to focus on the delegitimization campaign which has its home base in the United Nations. What is especially important about this launching pad, is the fact that the campaign is diametrically opposed to the foundational premises of the Organization, the Organization having been built on the “sovereign equality of all its members” and

non-discrimination. The environment is especially dangerous because of the appearance of legality and civility which diplomacy and its tradesmeddn easily assume.

The Human Rights Pariah Campaign

According to the United Nations, Israel is the number one human rights violator in the world today.

At www.EYEontheUN.org we have examined every UN report or resolution from the multitude of UN bodies that deal with human rights. Although a few 2005 UN reports are not yet available so the specific numbers will shift slightly, there are more condemnations of the human rights record of Israel than any other state. Criticisms of Israel are 35% higher than its closest competitor – Sudan. While Israel is number 1, Iran is 16th and Syria is 20th on the list of states subjects to UN human rights criticism.

At this past fall's General Assembly – considering only resolutions specifically critical of human rights circumstances – there were 19 resolutions criticizing Israel, and 12 critical of the other 190 UN states combined. A draft resolution focusing on the egregious human rights violations in Sudan, with approximately 300,000 dead over the past three years and 2 million displaced, was defeated.

A cumulative record of the UN Human Rights Commission activity indicates that 30% of all resolutions critical of specific states, since the Commission began adopting them in the mid-1960's, have been directed at Israel alone. But there has never been a single resolution condemning human rights violations in China – with 1.5 billion people without basic civil and political rights, or Saudi Arabia – with a million female migrant

workers in conditions of virtual slavery, or Zimbabwe - with tens of thousands of people on the brink of man-made starvation.

The UN-driven campaign to cast Israel as human rights pariah is completely at odds with comparative facts from the world over, but there is no doubt that it has a tremendous impact on the agendas of the voluminous human rights organizations with which the UN is associated and which fuel a UN-NGO cycle of enmity and incitement.

It should be pointed out, that this cycle does not exclude Israeli-based human rights organizations or even the policies and decisions of public officials. Disheartening is the sense of inevitability or defeat that appears from, where I sit, to sometimes grip Israeli foreign policy decisions at the UN itself. One example, is the recent treatment of the rights of children. From 2002 to 2004 there were three UN GA resolutions on the rights of children – one on the rights of the child, one on the rights of the girl child, and one on Palestinian children. In 2003 Israel decided to put forward a resolution on Israeli children. Egypt moved an amendment to delete the word “Israeli” before every mention of the word “child” and its proposal was guaranteed to pass, thereby forcing Israel to withdraw the resolution. Although the resolution was not adopted it did provide Israel with a clear example of the forces of discrimination operating at the UN against the Jewish state – a point which Israel used to effect in the court of public opinion. Israeli officials, however, interpreted the failure to adopt the resolution as a defeat and were not prepared to repeat the travesty in subsequent years. In 2005 the Palestinians agreed to withdraw the Palestinian children resolution in exchange for inserting language on Palestinian children in another context -- provided Israel joined consensus on this other resolution. So in 2005, Israel actually agreed to a resolution “gravely concerned at the

deterioration in the living conditions of the Palestinian people, in particular children” and “the dire humanitarian crisis being faced by Palestinian children and their families.” No mention whatsoever, here or elsewhere, was made of the plight of Israeli children (and their families,) murdered, maimed and traumatized by war, and uniformly obliged to look forward to mandatory service in the armed forces for years of their young lives. The omission was a disgrace.

International Legal Offender

More generally, the delegitimization effort takes the form that Israel is a chronic violator of international law period. Most insidious are the constant barrage of claims that Israel’s attempts to defend itself – whether it be targeted killings, the security fence, roadblocks, checkpoints, fly-overs, curfews, house demolitions, and so on – are all violations of international law.

The extent of the UN machinery disseminating this year-round inaccurate and inflammatory information about Israel cannot be underestimated. It includes:

- an entire UN Division on Palestinian Rights – there being no other UN division on any other group of people anywhere. It has a full-time UN secretariat staff of 16, while the UN staff for the entire Asia and Pacific Division is 20.
- a standing UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People
- Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories – composed of state representatives with no pretense of being independent experts

- a Special Rapporteur or investigator on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 – which has a mandate deliberately excluding the human rights of Israelis violated by Palestinians
- a special section of the UN Department of Public Information with the only specific budget dedicated to a single cause – entitled “Information Activities on the Question of Palestine”
- an enormous electronic database – UNISPAL – which spews out a daily barrage of reports, resolutions, conferences, and press releases
- a total of six subsidiary bodies of the UN General Assembly focus on Palestinians, while no other subsidiary UNGA body is addressed to any other specific people in any UN member state.
- a special UN day entitled “Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People” is held every November 29th – the day the UN GA voted to adopt the partition of the British Palestine Mandate.

All of this apparatus usually seeks to masquerade as neutral critique, with the end game of the delegitimization of a Jewish state well hidden from public view. This façade was lifted recently at the November 29th festivities in 2005. In one of the UN’s largest public meeting rooms at NY Headquarters, the Inalienable Rights Committee’s annual Solidarity Meeting sported the following display at the front of the room – a UN flag to one side, a Palestinian flag to the other, and in between them a regional map without the state of Israel. The meeting was attended by all major UN figures – the Secretary General, and the Presidents of the Security Council and General Assembly. The display had been the same for many years, but this time I managed to take a photo of the map.

The map was called Palestine 1948. Ambassador John Bolton wrote to Secretary-General Kofi Annan asking some pointed questions about responsibility for the map.

In an obvious slight, Annan got an Under-Secretary-General to reply to the American Ambassador. Among other things, the response claimed the map was merely historical and represented the British Palestine Mandate. The answer was outrageous for many reasons, including the fact that (a) the UNGA had taken a decision to divide the Mandate in 1947 and even the UN's own resolution was ignored, (b) the map, which was entirely in Arabic, said on it "Palestine's Political Map, The Palestinian Labour Organization, Center for Research, Beirut," indicating it was obviously not merely historical but produced as part of a campaign claiming all of the territory as Palestine and seeking the destruction of the Jewish state, and (c) displays wiping off the large proportion of UN member states which did not exist in 1948 don't grace other UN meetings.

A careful examination of UN output provides further evidence of the delegitimization agenda. UN historical revisionism takes the form, for example, of a publication, dated 1990 but currently online and available to students, teachers and laypeople the world over, which purports to be "The Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem." Here is a sampling:

The "concept of a "Jewish national home" created strong conflicts of loyalties...Sir Edwin Montagu...the only Jewish member of the British Cabinet...questioned the credentials of the Zionist Organization to speak for all Jews.... [Lord] Curzon [British Foreign Secretary] commented: "...I don't want a Hebrew State." ...[T]he House of Lords was strongly opposed to the Balfour policy...A strict policy of what in today's terms would be described as racial discrimination was maintained by the Zionist Organization in this rapid advance towards the "national home". ... The drive of political zionism to establish a settler State in Palestine was met by violent resistance from the Palestinians...The Palestinians had sensed that only through violence could they force recognition of their inherent rights...Ironically, the Palestinian Arabs were to suffer an experience similar to the Jews - a diaspora. [Quoting] Arnold J. Toynbee "... The

reason why the State of Israel exists today and why today 1,500,000 Palestinian Arabs are refugees is that, for 30 years, Jewish immigration was imposed on the Palestinian Arabs...”

Threat to Peace and Security

The story, as told from the UN perspective, is that Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land is the root cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This would appear to date the problem from 1967. But a closer examination of UN activities makes it clear that the underlying sentiment is that the existence of a Jewish state is the root cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Over and over again, one finds references to 1948 as the starting point for the mortal threat to world peace. In the publication just read, the tract concludes with a quote from Toynbee that carries on from his starting point of Jews imposed on hapless Arabs – or in the words of the UN publication itself “the drive of political zionism to establish a settler State in Palestine.” Says Toynbee: “The tragedy in Palestine...is an injustice that is a menace to the world's peace.”

The claim is repeated in many guises from European opinion polls to British Ministers, that terrorism everywhere is somehow a consequence of the Israeli “occupation.” The UN plays a seminal role in fueling this belief. In the history of the General Assembly there have been ten emergency sessions. The *raison d’etre* of such sessions, according to UN rules, is to deal with matters of international peace and security not handled satisfactorily by the Security Council. Six of these sessions have been about Israel. The tenth session is now a permanent forum – on Israel – and has been “reconvened” 13 times since 1997.

There are numerous other examples which can be drawn from the activities of the Security Council itself.

The bias involved in elevating Palestinian and other Arab claims against Israel to this level of threat to international peace and security, becomes obvious when compared to the inability of the Security Council to address the threat posed by Iranian nuclear ambitions even once.

Conclusion

This UN-based campaign to delegitimize the state of Israel is clearly inconsistent with the UN Charter's sovereign equality of member states, as well as governing UN policy such as the Middle East Roadmap. But there is no avoiding the fact that it is UN-driven nonetheless. Responses, therefore lie in

- a) drawing attention to the contradictions between these actions and UN obligations,
and
- b) encouraging democracies to develop an alternative multilateral venue for addressing human rights violations and threats to peace and security, which is genuinely compatible with democratic interests.