

The Obsession With Israel That Is Not Magnificent

If possession is nine-tenths of the law, obsession is at least that amount in the discourse on the Middle East in the halls of the United Nations. That obsession with the State of Israel was fully illustrated on January 26, 2016 at the quarterly meeting of the 15-member UN Security Council on Middle East affairs.

It was particularly troubling that the meeting coincided in the same week as the occasion on January 27 of Holocaust Remembrance Day, the commemoration of the six million Jews killed by Nazi Germany and its allies. The analogy is obvious. The obsession with Jews and consequent antisemitism and attacks on them has existed for centuries; now the obsession at the UN, rhetorical in nature, and the attacks, physical and deadly, by Palestinian individuals and groups are being directed against the Jewish State of Israel.

In the UN debate there was occasional perfunctory mention of some problems in the Middle East. But little attention was given to the insecurity in the Gaza Strip, the friction with and between with Palestinian factions, the conflict in Syria, the chaos in Libya and Yemen, the nuclear ambitions of Iran, or the menace of ISIS. The focus of attention was, as usual, the actions and policies of Israel.

It was acknowledged by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that 2016 had begun, as had 2015, with violence and polarization. But the source of the violence was not stated. Indeed, on January 1, 2016 a Palestinian attack on a bar in Dizengoff Street in central Tel Aviv killed three Israelis and wounded 8 others. Two weeks later, on January 17, a 38 year-old nurse and mother of six was stabbed to death in her home in front of her children. Nothing was heard in the UN debate

about the extent of the violence instigated by Palestinians by stabbings, vehicle attack, and shootings against Israeli civilians. Since October 2015, 28 Israeli civilians have been killed.

In his remarks in the UN debate, Ban Ki-Moon did urge the two parties to agree to a two state solution, and he did condemn rocket fire from terrorist groups in Gaza into Israel and called for an end to incitement. But more important are his remarks, in connection with Palestinian terrorism, that it was "human nature to react to occupation which often serves as a potent incubator of hate and extremism."

He explained security measures (presumably Israeli) alone did not address the profound sense of alienation and despair driving some Palestinians, especially young people. Moreover, he said, Palestinian frustration is growing under the weight of half a century of occupation and the paralysis of the peace process.

On the very day before the UN debate, two Israeli women were attacked by two Palestinians in a West Bank settlement in Beit Horon community, between Jerusalem and Modi'in. One of them, a 23 year old woman, was stabbed and died on the day of the debate. Later, three pipe bombs were found near the area of the attack.

During the last four months the UN Security Council has been concerned about the terrorism in 12 countries; the continuing terrorism against Israel was not one of them. Even the most fervent believers in the usefulness of the UN to help bring peace in the area can recognize the double standard towards Israel and the lack of neutrality regarding the Israel-Palestinian issue. They can also distinguish between "frustration" and "terror." Ban Ki-moon, by his remarks, may not have given "a tailwind to terror," as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, but did not exercise moral force or political judgment in his comments on human nature.

Much of the specific criticism of Israel was focused on Israeli plans in two areas. One is to build 150 new homes. The other was, as always, settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, now containing 555,000 Israelis compared to a Palestinian population of 350,000 in East Jerusalem and 2.7 million in the West Bank. In particular, many UN delegates complained of the Israeli decision on January 21, 2016 to appropriate and term "state land" a tract of land , 380 acres, in the Jordan Valley close to Jericho. Left unsaid is the fact that Israeli farmers have been farming the land for many years. Even the building of a new town for Bedouins, instead of being praised, was termed a forcible transfer of Bedouin communities living in the Jerusalem area.

A not so funny thing happened on the way to and during the UN Forum where something familiar was voiced by the assembled ambassadors. A few examples are sufficient. Kuwait told us that Israel's actions were racist and they sought to challenge the Islamic character of Jesus. Syria, forgetting the brutal civil war in its country spoke of Israeli war crimes. Turkey, which has assisted ISIS in a number of ways, condemned Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights. The UK thought the "underlying causes of conflict" must be addressed, but then concluded that Israeli settlement construction and demolition of Palestinian homes harmed the peace process.

Lebanon, in which Hezbollah has at least 100,000 rockets, one of which was launched at Israel the previous week and some of which are stored in private homes, and also has advanced strategic weapons systems, contributed a remarkable, precise, statistical analysis that no international military or political expert had previously found or counted: Israel had committed exactly 1,168 violations of Lebanese sovereignty by land, air, and sea.

Riyad Mansour, the so-called Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine, perhaps auditioning for a role in a Broadway comedy, said he was disturbed that the UN had failed to hold

Israel, the occupying Power, accountable for not implementing the countless UNSC and UNGA resolutions. He failed to explain what had happened to the countless UN Resolutions since 242 of November 22, 1967, and the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995, calling on the Palestinians to come to the bargaining table.

The answer to the failure is that Palestinian leaders want to destroy a state, rather than concentrating on building one. This was made clear by the voluble Tawfiq Al-Tirawi, member of the Palestinian Central Committee and head of the Palestinian committee still investigating the death of Yasser Arafat, though as he said the investigation was “searching for a needle in the ocean.” Perhaps to coincide with the republication of Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, he also said that Hitler wasn’t morally corrupt, he was daring.

Tirawi is one of the many Palestinian leaders calling for “armed resistance.” Nevertheless, on January 18, 2016 he revealed the truth. The creation of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders (sic) with Jerusalem as its capital was “just a phase,” in the struggle with Israel. The map of Palestine, in a remark he made that may dismay well-meaning supporters of J Street and Amnesty International, is not limited to the West Bank and Gaza. He revealed that the cities of Haifa, Jaffa, and Acre are “Palestine,” and the entire land belongs to the Palestinians. He outlined the contours: Palestine stretches from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.

US policy towards Israel has been defined in varying ways. U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, outlined it in the debate. While strongly opposing settlement activity and the construction of new settlements, she believed that activity can never in itself be an excuse for terrorism, and that Palestinian attacks on civilians were reprehensible and inexcusable.

Her argument appeared moderate, but the ill advised words of Dan Shapiro, US Ambassador to Israel, supposedly a “vigorous”

supporter of Israel were not. Speaking in Tel Aviv on January 25, 2016 Shapiro was critical of Israeli settlements and its West Bank policy. But remarkably, he also spoke of “double standards,” not referring to the hostile UN resolutions on Israel, but regarding Israel which he said had two standards of adherence to the rule of law, one for Israel and one for Palestinians.

Though Shapiro was not rebuked, the statement on January 27, 2016 by President Barack Obama has appeared to mollify the situation. It was fitting he made it at a ceremony held at the Israeli Embassy in Washington honoring four people, two of whom were brave Americans, who had been named Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

One of the Americans, Sergeant Roddie Edmonds, had protected his fellow prisoners in a German prison camp in 1945, and refused the German demand to identify who was Jewish. He said, “We are all Jews here.” Obama repeated those words, adding that antisemitism was an expression of an evil. One looks forward to U.S. Administration that is based on his words that “America’s commitment to Israel’s security remains now and forever unshakable.” If only the UN would regard this as a fundamental moral principle.