

Failing Palestinian Self-determination

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The UN is marking its 75th birthday with a virtual opening of the 75th session of the General Assembly. While UN agencies have carried out successful humanitarian assistance and research programmes, peacekeeping missions and efforts to protect the rights of peoples subjected to repression and abuse, the UN's political organs, the General Assembly and Security Council, have failed to keep the peace and deal with flagrant injustice. Palestine continues to be its most infamous catastrophe as the UN has colluded in the dispossession of that country's indigenous population.

Among the 49 original signatories of the UN Charter, which came into effect in October 1945, were Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Syria. Today the UN has 193 full members. Palestine, a non-member observer state, languishes while waiting to be admitted as the 194th full member.

Palestine is not recognised as a state by the US, Israel, Britain, Germany, Italy, France, Switzerland, Spain, Greece, Canada and the usual supporters of Western positions. Both Russia and China recognised the state of Palestine in 1988 following the declaration of Palestinian independence during a meeting of the Palestinian-parliament-in-exile in Algiers. Of the 193 UN members, 138 have recognised Palestine as compared with 162 which have recognised Israel, although it occupies the whole of Palestine illegally.

Founded to ensure peace and security for all peoples, the UN enabled the Israeli conquest of Palestine, beginning with the adoption in November 1947 of resolution 181 to partition this Arab country, allocating 55 per cent to European Jewish colonists and 45 per cent to indigenous Palestinians. The partition resolution was adopted by the General Assembly only after the US exerted pressure on countries which had intended to vote against or abstain. It is interesting to note that the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries voted in favour while Britain, which promoted Zionist colonisation of Palestine, abstained. Naturally, Arab UN members and the US voted against along with India, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, Greece and Cuba.

A "recommendation" rather than a mandatory measure, the partition resolution provided dubious legitimacy for the Zionist take-over of 55 per cent of Palestine but not the seizure of 78 per cent of the country and the ethnic cleansing of 750,000 Palestinians in the months that followed 181's adoption. This can only be seen as a monumental failure of the international body founded to maintain global peace and security and preserve human rights. There was a feeble effort to make partial amends to the Palestinians in December 1948 with the adoption of resolution 194 which, in paragraph 11, called for the repatriation of Palestinian refugees and compensation for their losses.

This resolution has fallen by the wayside. Although Israeli UN membership was conditioned on its implementation of resolutions 181 and 194, this requirement was ignored by Israel and its mainly Western supporters.

In late 1949 the General Assembly created an independent humanitarian organisation, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) to provide shelter, food, medical care, education and welfare for homeless Palestinians. The intention was that they would ultimately be absorbed by countries where they had taken refuge or elsewhere outside Palestine. This did not happen because Palestinians remained, and insist on remaining, Palestinians and demand the right of self determination in Palestine and the “right of return” laid down in resolution 194 and under international law.

In June 1967, when Israel conquered East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, the remaining 22 per cent of Palestine, another 250,000 Palestinians fled their homeland. Today five million Palestinians live under Israeli occupation, 1.6 million Palestinians are second or third class citizens of Israel, 5.6 million Palestinian refugees in this region depend on UNRWA, and millions more are scattered across the world.

In November 1967, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 242 affirming the principle of the “inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” and calling on Israel to withdraw from territory it occupied during the June war. This resolution became the basis for Egyptian, Jordanian and Palestinian peace deals with Israel under the land-for-peace formula and, the expectation that Palestinians would establish their state in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza in accordance with the “two state solution”.

However, no pressure was ever exerted on Israel, as occupying power, to withdraw its forces and end its colonisation of Palestinian territory. The UN, which has the authority to impose sanctions on countries which reject its directives, has done nothing but generate piles of paper by passing resolutions which Israel and its supporters have ignored.

Over seven decades, the international community abided by a consensus that UNRWA should be preserved as a means of ensuring a modicum of stability in countries hosting Palestinian refugees. Israel’s main financier and most powerful backer, the US, paid about one third of the UNRWA budget of \$1.2 billion. Donald Trump not only violated the consensus by cutting funding for the agency but also halting aid to all Palestinian institutions.

He recognised Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, severed contacts with the Palestinian Authority, and put forward a so-called “peace plan” which would give Israel another 30 per cent of the West Bank and provide for limited Palestinian governance in disconnected enclaves in the West Bank which would remain under Israeli control. The UN has done nothing to reaffirm the consensus, leaving the Palestinians poor and adrift.

The UN’s failure to deal decisively with Israel’s conquest of Palestine has emboldened other aggressors. It served as a model for Turkey’s invasion, occupation and colonisation of northern Cyprus between 1974 and today.

All too clearly, the UN, the servant of powerful Western countries led by the US, operates on the basis of horrendous double standards. For example, the UN has imposed punitive sanctions on Iran for embarking on nuclear research without producing weaponry while Israel, which has scores of nuclear weapons, is not sanctioned for its flagrant expropriation

and dispossession of the Palestinian people. This is a far greater offense against humanity than enriching uranium for power plants and medical isotopes under the watchful eyes of the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency.

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