PALESTINIAN UN BID PROVES MORE THAN SYMBOLIC

Posted on October 1, 2011 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

Haroon Siddiqui, The Toronto Star, 1 October 2011

If the Palestinian bid for United Nations recognition as a state is as meaningless as it is made out to be — "merely symbolic," "won't change a thing," etc. — why is it that Israel, the United States, Canada and others are attacking it so ferociously and are desperate to defeat it or consign it to procedural oblivion? Because the request is not meaningless; it is full of meaning.

Haroon Siddiqui, The Toronto Star, 1 October 2011

If the Palestinian bid for United Nations recognition as a state is as meaningless as it is made out to be — "merely symbolic," "won't change a thing," etc. — why is it that Israel, the United States, Canada and others are attacking it so ferociously and are desperate to defeat it or consign it to procedural oblivion? Because the request is not meaningless; it is full of meaning.

It has already raised the profile of an issue they would rather bury. It is dominating the 66th session of the General Assembly.
It highlights Barack Obama's failure to deliver on his promise of a Palestinian state by this fall, outmanoeuvred as he was by Benjamin Netanyahu and pro-Israeli forces in Congress and the American political system. The president has never looked as hapless as when he delivered his mea culpa at the UN. His speech was "a blatant lie; the speaker knew it was a lie, and so did the audience," writes Uri Avnery, the renowned Israeli peace activist.

The Palestinian bid exposes the peace process for the sham it has been. Netanyahu, in particular, has systematically scuttled it, as Bill Clinton noted recently. Since the 1993 Oslo peace process, Israel has doubled the population of its illegal settlements. The Palestinians won't negotiate until such construction stops, something Obama himself called for but was told to buzz off, which he has, as he heads into his re-election bid next year. As if to rub salt in his wounds, Israel announced Tuesday another 1,100 new units in disputed East Jerusalem.

The absurdity of the American position has been laid bare:

• Obama is threatening to veto a state he supports.

• He is siding with the occupier in a protracted conflict that his military says endangers American security.

• He wants good relations with the Muslim/Arab world, yet will cast the veto that would sink American credibility even further.

• He applauds the Arab Spring for upending domestic oppressors but consigns the Palestinians to

the oppression of a 44-year-old foreign occupation.

No wonder Netanyahu thinks the president deserves a “badge of honour.”

Not that Obama is unaware of the contradictions. Thus his arm-twisting of Security Council members to line up the needed nine votes to spare the U.S. the embarrassment of casting its veto. Thus also the specious arguments:

• The Palestinian bid is “unilateral.” Going to the world’s most multilateral body is the exact opposite.

• It undermines the peace process. What peace process?

• This isn’t a good time for Palestinian statehood. When would it ever be?

• Palestinians must negotiate with Israel. Sure, but it’s not in their interest to let the stronger party dictate all the terms, while they have little or no recourse to international forums.

If stymied by the Security Council, they can go to the 193-member General Assembly, which does not have the authority to grant state status but can — and will, by an easy majority — upgrade their current “observer entity” to “observer state,” akin to the Vatican.

That could give them access to the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court. They could also seek the rights accorded member nations, including protection from having their territorial integrity and sovereignty violated.

It’s clear that most UN member states stand with the Palestinians, as does world public opinion, including American public opinion, according to two recent polls by the Pew Research Center and the BBC. The latter polled 20,466 people in 19 countries, including Canada, where 46 per cent favour Palestinian statehood and only 25 per cent oppose.

Yet the Harperites keep promoting the right-wing Likudnik vision of Greater Israel. At the UN, John Baird likened critics of Israeli policies to appeasers of fascism and communism before World War II. And Jason Kenney opined that Israel is being targeted by a “new anti-Semitism” that’s “disguised as anti-American, anti-Western and anti-Israel.”

By this measure, a great many Israelis must be pro-communist, pro-fascist, anti-Western, anti-American, anti-Semites and even anti-Israel.

All this is self-defeating. Netanyahu has isolated Israel more than ever. Derailing the Palestinian UN bid will also weaken Mahmoud Abbas, the most moderate Palestinian leader ever, and strengthen Hamas and those who oppose dealing with Israel.