

# US comes to the defence of Zionism at UN conference on racism

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President Bush's refusal to allow Secretary of State Colin Powell to attend the United Nations world conference on racism in South Africa, because of a resolution criticising the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza as racist, is a further indication of the US's unswerving support for Israel's brutal suppression of the Palestinians.

He said that the tone of the resolution, even after amendments to appease the US and Israel, was still "pretty discriminatory", and that the US was not prepared to allow the occasion to be used "to isolate our friend and strong ally".

"We have made it very clear through Colin Powell's office that we will have no representative there so long as they pick on Israel", Bush said. "We will not participate in a conference that tries to isolate Israel and denigrate Israel." Instead, the US may send a junior delegation to try and water down the resolution still further.

Arab and Muslim countries had tried to resurrect the 1975 UN resolution that equated Zionism with racism. That resolution had been introduced in the aftermath of Israel's defeat of its neighbours in the 1973 Six-day war and the end of the Arab regimes' embargo on oil shipments to Israel's imperialist backers which had been imposed as a means of isolating Israel. The 1975 resolution had no practical implications and in reality marked the end of the Arab regime's practical support for the Palestinians. The resolution was finally withdrawn in 1991, when all the countries in the region supported the US and Britain in their war against Iraq and agreed to attend the Madrid Conference to end the long standing Arab-Israeli conflict.

When the second *intifada* broke out at the end of last September, there were renewed calls for the passing of a similar resolution. But the resolution drafted for the Durban conference is much milder, as its sponsors were leaned-on to water it down to make it more acceptable to

the US and Israel. In its current form, the draft resolution does not directly equate Zionism with racism, as did the 1975 resolution, but says, "Foreign occupation founded on settlements ... (is) a new kind of apartheid, a crime against humanity." It refers to "ethnic cleansing of the Arab population in historic Palestine". The resolution also expresses "deep concern about practices of racial discrimination against the Palestinians as well as other inhabitants of the Arab occupied territories".

The refusal of the Bush Administration to attend the conference reflects its acute sensitivity that its support for and complicity in Israel's military and economic blockade of the Palestinians and its policy of assassinating its opponents flies in the face of world wide public opinion and is fostering angry opposition within the Arab countries. It fears that the conference will criticise the US for its support of Israel, demand that it reins in its client state, and expose its pretence to act on the side of human rights—a claim that it routinely invokes to justify its thuggery and wars against small nations.

In a parallel meeting organised by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Durban before the official start of the UN conference, 7,000 delegates urged the UN to accept that Israel was a "discriminatory state" and Palestinians could resist "occupation by any means". The resolution also demands that Israel pay "full compensation" to Palestinians, whom it describes as people living under a foreign military occupying power. "The Palestinians are one such people currently enduring a colonialist, discriminatory military occupation that violates their fundamental human right of self-determination", the draft said.

Canadian foreign Minister John Manley echoed US concerns over the criticisms of Israel and told reporters in Ottawa that he would not be attending. US opposition to the resolution has also undermined EU backing for the conference. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has done

everything he could to mollify the US and persuade it to attend. The host government of the African National Congress (ANC) has been at pains to minimise the controversy. Thabo Mbeki, the South African President, refused to comment on Bush's refusal to send Powell. Mary Robinson, the UN high commissioner for Human Rights, has taken a similar conciliatory position. As well as the resolution on Israel, there are a number of other resolutions that upset the US and Western powers. These originally included demands from African nations for an admission that the trans-Atlantic slave trade was a crime against humanity and calls for reparations—both of which have now been dropped.

The nervous reaction of the US and other imperialist powers to the resolution does not lend credibility to the clam of the Arab regimes to be the defenders of the Palestinian people. In the context of their actions since the start of the *intifada*, the tabling of the resolution has the character of a cynical manoeuvre. They are once again seeking to use demagogy at the UN as a cover for their refusal to come to the aid of the Palestinians.

Only a few days ago, at what was no less than the fifth emergency meeting in Cairo of Arab foreign ministers since last September, Syrian foreign minister Farouq al-Shara'a bluntly admitted that they had no plan of action against Israeli aggression. "It's become an embarrassment", said one Arab diplomat. "I don't know why they bother to meet at all."

Faced with fierce hostility to Israel and its imperialist backers amongst their own citizens, the Arab governments are forced to stage manage some show of opposition. When the *intifada* first broke, the first Arab summit since the Gulf War to include Iraq promised financial and political support. But this was nothing more than grandstanding. Both Egypt and Jordan are entirely beholden to the US and dare not revoke their peace treaties with Israel for fear of losing the loans that keep their tottering regimes afloat. Saudi Arabia seeks to enter the World Trade Organisation and has refused to stop its oil exports as a means of putting pressure on the West to force Israel to withdraw.

With the violence escalating every week, the Arab regimes fear the radicalisation of the masses as unemployment, poverty and repression grows. The Saudi regime fears that public anger will trigger terrorist attacks against US targets, while in Jordan the government has banned anti-Israel demonstrations and is likely to postpone the elections due in the autumn for fear that the pro-Palestinian and Islamic parties will win.

As one Egyptian commentator, Mohammad Sid-Ahmad, said, "They are afraid that if they take steps that are too strong, the situation could get out of hand. Everyone is afraid that the *intifada* will go beyond the borders of Palestine and no-one is ready to assume a military responsibility."

Under these circumstances, the Arab regimes have turned once again to manoeuvres at the UN, safe in the knowledge that, even if the resolution is carried, just like the 1975 resolution that was passed when the Soviet Union still posed a significant military threat to the US, it will commit the delegates to nothing.

Their other response is to whip up anti-Semitism in order to play to the lowest common denominator amongst those opposed to the crimes of the Israeli state. Syria and Iran in particular have come out with virulent anti-Jewish statements. A pamphlet containing a cartoon that made a crude equation between the Star of David and the Swastika led Mary Robinson to protest and make the somewhat theatrical proclamation, "I am a Jew".

The reactionary character of much of the propaganda produced by the Arab bourgeoisie is epitomised by its direct equation of the Jewish people with the Israeli state, in a way that plays into the hands of the Zionists and fosters the very divisions between the Arab and Jewish working class that provide the foundation of imperialist domination of the region. Their ultimate aim is to block the development of a political movement to unite Arab and Israeli workers in a common struggle against the ruling elite throughout the Middle East, and for the building of a socialist society.

*See Also:*

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