

Palestine and the UN: The dead-end of the “peace process”

Bill Van Auken
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Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas received standing ovations from the United Nations General Assembly Friday for a speech announcing his submission of a request for UN recognition of a Palestinian state.

While the speech included passages detailing the death, destruction and humiliation wrought by Israeli occupation, Abbas' audience of foreign ministers, heads of state and UN delegates was hardly unaware of the six-decade-old plight of the Palestinian people. Not a few of their governments, particularly in the Arab world, have been complicit in it.

The enthusiastic response may have been driven more by hostility to Washington, which announced in advance that it would use its veto on the Security Council to kill recognition of a Palestinian state.

US officials have carried out a shameful campaign of threats and intimidation to force countries sitting on the Security Council to abstain or vote no. Portugal, for example, was reportedly told that the US would pull the plug on aid to the country's crisis-ridden economy if it voted in favor of the application.

The display of US hypocrisy and bullying served to undercut the message that Washington had wanted to deliver at the UN. Its aim was to hail the US-NATO war for regime-change in Libya as both a victory for UN-sponsored multilateralism and an extension of the popular upheavals of the “Arab Spring.”

While Obama included these claims in his speech to the General Assembly, he was forced to acknowledge with bitter resignation that they were overshadowed by the controversy over Palestine.

In reality, Washington's unconditional support for Israeli oppression of the Palestinian people is entirely of a piece with its predatory imperialist policy throughout the region, which has found its most naked

expression in the war for regime-change in oil-rich Libya. As for the “Arab Spring,” the Obama administration fought, together with Israel, until the last possible moment to keep their close allies, Mubarak in Egypt and Ben Ali in Tunisia, in power. Now they are working to consolidate regimes in the two countries that will defend the interests of imperialism and stifle the revolutionary strivings of the workers and youth.

Why does the Obama administration feel compelled to block the Palestinian Authority's bid for UN recognition? The official story is that this “unilateral” action will undermine the “peace process,” disrupting the “bilateral” talks that are supposedly the only road to a settlement.

The so-called “peace process” is a charade that has gone on for two decades, producing neither peace nor any realization of the aspirations of the Palestinian people. Rather, it has served as a cover for the unilateral actions of the Israeli state, which has consolidated its control over ever-larger parts of the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, with the number of Zionist settlers doubling in the last 10 years alone. This has gone together with the proliferation of military checkpoints and “Jewish-only” security roads that render not merely a national existence, but life itself, impossible for the Palestinians under occupation.

While the turn to the UN is a tacit admission of the bankruptcy of the US-brokered “peace process,” Abbas and the bourgeois leadership of the Palestinian Authority are not posing any alternative. Rather, they have voiced the insubstantial hope that the UN gambit will somehow reanimate the talks.

If the UN were to recognize Palestine as a member state, it would do no more to change the conditions of the Palestinian masses than the scores of other resolutions passed by the UN on the Israeli-Palestinian

question over the past 50 years. It would not spell an end to Israeli occupation and military attacks. It would not secure for the millions of Palestinians in exile the right of return. And it would not win equal rights for the 1.5 million Palestinian Arabs living inside Israel.

Abbas and the PA leadership have turned to the UN in a desperate bid to win some credibility among the Palestinian population that they claim to represent. In some respects, the Palestinian Authority is not so dissimilar from regimes toppled by the masses in Egypt and Tunisia. Unelected, it rules by decree, while maintaining a massive police apparatus that is funded by the US and works in collaboration with the Israeli occupation. It represents the interests not of Palestinian workers and oppressed, but a thin layer of government officials and businessmen who have enriched themselves off of foreign subsidies and corruption.

As demonstrated by the “Palestine Papers,” the secret minutes documenting a decade of Israeli-Palestinian talks released by Al-Jazeera earlier this year, the PA leadership has capitulated all down the line, effectively renouncing the right of return for the Palestinian diaspora, giving up virtually all of East Jerusalem, and agreeing to collude in ethnic cleansing aimed at securing Israel’s status as a “Jewish state.”

Washington’s intransigence is generally explained with references to the 2012 elections and the so-called “Jewish vote,” a euphemism for a powerful and lavishly financed Zionist lobby that represents not the majority of American Jews—nor for that matter those in Israel—but rather the most right-wing elements in the Israeli political establishment. No doubt, organizations like the American Israeli Political Action Committee (AIPAC) exert a monstrously disproportionate influence on the policies of America’s two capitalist parties.

There are, however, more fundamental underlying interests. Israel has served for half a century as a bulwark of US imperialist intervention in the Middle East. Moreover, going all the way back to the Camp David accords signed by Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat in 1978, the pretense that Washington serves as some sort of “honest broker” in negotiations for “peace” has provided US imperialism with an instrument for furthering its interests in the region.

US hostility to a UN vote on statehood is driven in large part by its determination to maintain its monopoly

over the so-called “peace process.” Significantly, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, fresh from using warplanes and mercenaries to advance the interests of French imperialism and Total Oil in Libya, seized on the debate over the Palestinian statehood bid to argue that the peace talks directed by US had failed and to advance his own French solution.

Driven by the interests of the ruling clique in the Palestinian Authority on the one hand, and imperialist machinations on the other, the UN debate on Palestinian statehood will do nothing to secure the democratic and social demands of the Palestinian masses. In the end, they can be achieved only by means of revolutionary struggle.

The insoluble crisis of world capitalism that produced the mass uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt is also fueling growing upheavals in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories as well, manifested recently in the massive nationwide demonstrations over social conditions within Israel itself. The decisive question is that of uniting Arab and Jewish workers on the basis of a common socialist and internationalist program in the fight for a Socialist Federation of the Middle East as part of the struggle to put an end to capitalism on an international scale.

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