

## The UN Vote on Palestine

Michael Sean Winters | Nov. 30, 2012 Distinctly Catholic

The United Nations yesterday voted, by a lopsided margin, to grant the Palestinian Authority the status of Non-Member Observer State. The United States was joined by only eight other nations in opposing the measure. 138 nations voted for it. The Holy See, which now shares the same status as the Palestinian Authority, said that it welcomed the change. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas clapped in the audience when the vote was announced. After watching Hamas dominate the Palestinian political landscape for most of the past few weeks, Abbas saw the vote as a much-needed confirmation of his authority within the Palestinian community.

The news channels last night all covered the story with diligence, and I do not have TiVo, so perhaps I missed it, but so far as I could tell, no one asked the most obvious question: So what?

Diplomatic recognition by the U.S. government brings along many helpful benefits. You can apply for most-favored nation trade status. You can negotiate for the purchase of military supplies from the U.S. You can pledge your troth to the most powerful nation on earth and hope the U.S. will come to your aid in time of need. Similarly, diplomatic recognition by Russia or China can bring benefits to a regime, although those benefits to the regime usually come at the expense of benefits to the populace.

But, what does recognition by the United Nations bring? It is strange to read about the political negotiations at the end of World War II, the enormous emphasis placed by the U.S. government on erecting the United Nations and getting it to become a working mechanism for peace. There were great hopes for the organization, hopes that now appear as silly as the hopes of most of the little girls of that time that they could grow up to be the next Shirley Temple, or of the little boys that they could grow up to be the next Humphrey Bogart. All the care and concern lavished on making sure the new world organization would be more effective than the world organization it replaced, the League of Nations, came to naught. Indeed, the League of Nations at least had the decency to admit it was useless and go to an early death. The monstrosity that is the United Nations seems, instead, to match its impotence with a bizarre sense of its self-importance.

It is long past time to ask some tough questions of the United Nations. Did the organization help to end the violence in Bosnia? Did the people of Srebrenica benefit from their association with the organization? What did the United Nations do to help the people in Darfur? Or the people in Rwanda? Certainly, in the Mideast the United Nations has been a nearly constant impediment to peace, from its failed refugee policy to its failed political strategy. Now, they decide to recognize the Palestinian Authority as a non-member state, which may have at least a little benefit for Abbas, who has been both less hostile to Israel than his brothers in Hamas, and is the first Palestinian leader to focus on improving the lot of his people and not just his cronies. Abbas is better by comparison to other Palestinian leaders, present and past, but that is a terribly low bar. Still, his organization distributes educational materials to the schools where the next generation is formed that are filled with hate and lies.

Why does anyone take seriously an organization which has among the members of its Human Rights Council such great champions of human rights Russia, China, Cuba and Saudi Arabia. Libya recently held the presidency of the Human Rights Council, and not the current Libyan regime, but the regime of Qaddafi. Indeed,

just before Qaddafi decided to start killing his own people en masse as opposed to his habitual targeted killing, the Human Rights Council was set to vote on a report that could scarcely contain its praise for the Libyan dictator's human rights record. Read [this report from the New York Times](#) [1] and you will get some of the flavor of the unreality of the United Nations, the emphasis on documentary pledges, the complete lack of facticity, the unwillingness to speak with candor about what is so obvious. There is always a bit of decorum bending towards deceit in the conduct of diplomacy, but the United Nations has taken that particular danger of the diplomatic corps and elevated it into a nefarious art form. It has become a forum where dictators congratulate themselves on their commitment to human rights, where regimes that rob the foreign aid sent to their countries complain about the need for more aid, and where the Palestinian Authority, unwilling to make peace for these many years, turns for recognition and approbation.

Those of us who happily consider ourselves Zionists should not make too much of the vote in New York yesterday. It changed nothing of significance. Sen. Lindsay Graham has suggested the U.S. should cut off aid to the Palestinian Authority because of the vote, but we should not give the pooh-bahs of Turtle Bay the impression we give a damn what they do. If we want to continue aid to the Palestinian Authority, or we want to suspend such aid, the decision should be based on facts, not fantasy, and the United Nations is increasingly a fantasy world.

Our nation's Declaration of Independence speaks of "a decent respect to the opinions of mankind" as the reason the founders saw fit to issue the Declaration. I am not arguing for a return to American isolationism, ideological or otherwise. But, what you get at the United Nations is not the opinions of mankind but the opinions of countless tyrannical, often bloodthirsty, usually repressive, regimes, not the opinions of the people they oppress. If it is still a part of the American vocation to show respect for the opinion of mankind, we should find a better venue than the United Nations for gauging such opinion. And, when I am feeling snarky and sometimes when I am not feeling snarky, whenever I hear someone say something about the danger of inflaming "world opinion," I tend to cringe, knowing that something stupid is about to follow. Unfortunately, most of the U.S. political leaders who share my suspicions of the U.N. are also committed to the kind of neo-con foreign policy we associate with John Bolton and Donald Rumsfeld, and their view of the U.S. role in the world is more dangerous than being a bit delusional about the possibilities of the United Nations becoming something better than what it is.

Some of the United Nations' ancillary offices, such as UNESCO, do great work, preserving cultural heritage sites from neglect or worse. Other UN agencies have done much to improve the lot of the poorest of the poor by funding projects for safe drinking water and fighting the spread of HIV. I do not think for a moment that the U.S. should abandon the United Nations or cease funding the organization. But, we should recognize that in its principal goal, the maintenance of world peace, the organization is not only a failure but an impediment. We did not need yesterday's vote to prove the point. The graves of the dead in Srebrenica, and Kigali, and Nyala, and Jerusalem call out to all who seek peace to find a better instrument than the United Nations to achieve the goals for which the organization was created.

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