

United Nations attempts to stall Palestine statehood bid

By Jean Shaoul
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On Friday, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas formally submitted an application to United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon requesting the General Assembly recognise a Palestinian state.

In his speech, Abbas drew attention to the death, destruction and humiliation carried out by Israel during what he described as “63 years of suffering”

“Enough. It is time for the Palestinian people to gain their freedom and independence,” Abbas said, calling for Palestinian statehood to be based upon land occupied by Israel since 1967 and with East Jerusalem as its capital. “At a time when the Arab peoples affirm their quest for democracy—the Arab Spring—the time is now for the Palestinian Spring, the time for independence,” he said.

While his speech won enthusiastic applause at the UN session, those in the audience are well aware of this suffering, having stood by and allowed Israel to blatantly flout one UN resolution after another.

They were equally aware, however, of the dangers of Washington’s stated intention to veto the application on the Security Council, and the campaign of threats and intimidation it has conducted to get other countries to fall into line.

Washington’s position in the Middle East has been gravely weakened by the mass uprisings in the Middle East that have led to the ouster of its long-term allies, Hosni Mubarak and Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali.

The use of its veto against the Palestinians would further compromise the position of the major powers and their beleaguered allies in Egypt and Jordan, whose support for Israel has already led to mass demonstrations calling for the expulsion of Israel’s ambassadors, the repudiation of their treaties with Israel, and the evacuation of Israel’s embassy staff for their own safety.

Abbas’ statement, therefore, was also intended as a warning that continued blatant UN complicity in the on-going oppression of the Palestinians would expose imperialist pretensions to be the ally of the “Arab Spring” and would fan the flames of revolution.

“It is no longer possible to redress the issue of the blockage of the horizon of the peace talks with the same means and methods that have been repeatedly tried and proven

unsuccessful over the past years,” he said. “The crisis is far too deep to be neglected, and what is more dangerous are attempts to simply circumvent it or postpone its explosion.”

His remarks are a tacit admission to the bankruptcy of the US-brokered “peace process,” which for more than two decades has been used a cover for Israel to strengthen its occupation of Palestinian land and suppress its people, with the aid of Washington.

They also made clear that Abbas’s efforts to accommodate Israel—revealed so graphically in the “Palestine Papers” published by Al Jazeera earlier this year—had gravely undermined his own credibility and that of his Fatah-led Palestinian Authority.

The application for statehood was the result of Israel’s repeated failure to negotiate in accordance with the 1993 Oslo Accords that had set out plans for a future Palestinian state, Abbas said.

Nor had anything changed under US President Barack Obama. Talks begun last September in Washington—involving the Quartet (the US, UN, European Union and Russia) along with Egypt and Jordan—had set out plans for a peace agreement within one year. These had broken down within days, however, after Israel refused to extend even a temporary freeze on settlement construction on land that would be part of the future Palestinian state.

The occupation was now “racing against time to redraw the borders on our land ... that is undermining the realistic potential for the existence of the State of Palestine,” Abbas said. This was part of a “multi-pronged policy of ethnic cleansing.”

At the same time, Israel “continues to impose its blockade on the Gaza Strip and to target Palestinian civilians by assassinations, air strikes and artillery shelling, persisting with its war of aggression of three years ago on Gaza, which resulted in massive destruction of homes, schools, hospitals, and mosques, and the thousands of martyrs and wounded.”

Abbas also pointed to what he described as “the criminal actions of armed settler militias, who enjoy the special protection of the occupation army.” These are perpetrating “frequent attacks against our people, targeting their homes, schools, universities, mosques, fields, crops and trees. Despite our repeated warnings, the occupying Power has not acted to

curb these attacks and we hold them fully responsible for the crimes of the settlers.”

Israel was also trying to introduce new condition for negotiations, through its demand for recognition as a Jewish state. This would lead to the transfer of Palestinian Israelis out of Israel, Abbas said, warning that this will “transform the raging conflict in our inflamed region into a religious conflict and a threat to the future of a million and a half Christian and Muslim Palestinians, citizens of Israel, a matter which we reject and which is impossible for us to accept being dragged into”

Abbas has no alternative to the machinations of Israel, the US and the imperialist powers. His apocalyptic warnings are intended at pushing ahead with the very negotiations he criticised, and he made clear he would resume talks as soon as Israel halted settlement construction.

In contrast, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu struck an arrogant and belligerent tone, dismissing the UN as “the theatre of the absurd.”

“Hezbollah-controlled Lebanon chairs the UN Security Council. A terrorist organisation presides over the body entrusted with world security. You can’t make this stuff up,” he said.

Netanyahu rejected the bid for statehood, saying, “The Palestinians want a state without peace, and the truth is you should not let that happen.”

The only way to statehood was through acceptance of Israel’s terms—some limited form of local government on less than 40 percent of the West Bank whose essential remit was to assure Israel’s security. This was the plan that Obama endorsed at the UN last week.

Netanyahu claimed he sought a “just and lasting peace” with the Palestinians and called on Abbas to return to the negotiating table, but offered absolutely nothing in return.

He rejected any return to Israel’s 1967 borders, despite earlier UN resolutions, and justified his expansionary policies with the claim that Israel needed more land to enable it to defend itself, particularly against the threat of militant Islam and Iran.

The Israeli government has made extensive preparations for any Palestinian unrest following the UN bid for statehood, in effect putting the armed forces on a war footing. It has reservists on standby in case of a Palestinian uprising and the army has provided Israeli settlers with tear gas and stun grenades and trained them in their use.

On Friday, troops shot and killed a Palestinian demonstrator outside the village of Qusra in the West Bank after settlers marched on the village and began provoking its residents.

In addition to the surety of Washington’s support, the other element involved in Israel’s defiance is that the occupation of Palestine has long served as a mechanism to divert social and economic tensions within Israel itself.

But the statehood application has highlighted both

Washington and Israel’s increased political isolation, and the destabilising influence their actions are having in the region.

Netanyahu faces mass protests at home that threaten his government, and ultra-right forces that are hostile to any form of accommodation with the Palestinians.

As for the US, , Saudi Arabia’s Prince Turki al-Faisal, a former ambassador to the US, writing in the *New York Times* in the run-up to the UN meeting, warned that an American veto would risk losing it whatever credibility it still had in the Arab world, undermining Israeli security, strengthening Iran, and increasing the chances of another war in the region.

It would, he said, force Riyadh to adopt a far more independent and assertive foreign policy. In essence, he was calling for some visible progress in the negotiations towards Palestinian statehood as price for his country’s continued support for Washington’s imperialist intrigues in region.

At the same time, Israel’s assassination of nine Turkish citizens on board the Turkish- flagged vessel Mavi Marmora, part of an aid flotilla to Gaza in May 2010, has cost it the support of its long-time ally Turkey, a NATO member. Ankara has sent gunships into the eastern Mediterranean and threatened to intervene if Israel cooperates with Cyprus in oil and gas exploration before some deal is worked out with Turkish controlled northern Cyprus.

The Security Council is to begin consideration of the Palestinian application immediately, but negotiations could go on for months, while Israel and the western powers use all means possible to get the issue off the agenda.

Israel has threatened to withhold the taxes collected on its behalf from the Palestinian Authority, while the US has threatened to cut off aid. The quartet is involved in intense manoeuvrings to breathe life back into the charade of “peace” negotiations with calls for the resumption of talks between Israel and Palestine.

It has been widely reported that Abbas has accepted a deal whereby the vote at the Security Council is delayed pending the outcome of resumed talks with Israel.

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