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OCTOBER  
2011

## PALESTINE-ISRAEL: The Farther We Go, the Worse It Gets

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Summer drew to an end with the introduction into the yearly agenda of the United Nations General Assembly of a topic as hot as it was anticipated: the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) had decided to submit an official petition to be accepted as a full member State of the Organization. In point of fact, ever since the General Assembly itself, in Resolution 181 of 1947, proposed the partition of historic Palestine into two States, one Jewish and the other Palestinian Arab, the topic has been on the table. To be precise, there are two points that must be made. The first is that the overwhelmingly favorable vote was possible (at the very outset of the Cold War!) thanks to the explicit accord of the representatives of the USSR and the United States, who proceeded to communicate it to their respective allies. The second point has to do with the fact that the Jewish community (Israel did not yet exist) quickly saw the advantages of the offer, and accepted the plan. The Palestinian side (Palestine also did not exist as a State) was not consulted, and the Arab states of the UN rejected it, and thus began the first of the several Arab-Israeli wars. Apparently, and fortunately, different parameters seem to frame the current debate, as all the parties, including Netanyahu and his government, claim to want a Palestinian state, and hence the discussion shifts toward “but not this way”, “not yet”, “only by means of bilateral negotiation”, and the ineffable and unforgivable phrase with which Obama buried his precarious credit in the Arab world (and not only there): “There are no shortcuts to peace.”

Reactions have varied, and the most lucid come from the very ranks of the Israelis. Yossi Alpher, the prestigious Israeli analyst, former director of the significant Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel-Aviv University, and, previously, director of the Mossad, advocates explicitly in favor of recognition of the Palestinian State. This is nothing new; many Israeli leaders have been doing so for years. But in this case, the additional factor is that Alpher proposes that Spain and other European countries vote in favor of the Palestinian proposal to create such a State, which appears to have the backing of 130 member states. Alpher adds that this vote is decisive, precisely because the United States is not prepared for it nor disposed to accept it. Everyone knows, of course, that the General Assembly vote is not judicially binding, and in any case the initiative will be overturned by U.S. veto when it reaches the Security Council. For the time being, the topic is stalled in the complex rules of procedure of the Admissions Committee. But when the day comes, all parties will show their true colors.

It is not enough to have the juridical key to veto over and over again the existence of a Palestinian State, because this is going to create a politically unsustainable situation for the Obama administration. And, as Alpher points out, Obama has little room for maneuver on the threshold of the (long) North American electoral process of 2012. For this very reason, in August and September, in yet another additional provocation, the Netanyahu government approved the construction of almost 3,000 additional dwellings in illegal settlements located both in Jerusalem and on the West Bank. It is easy to observe that the situation is complex: the resonance of a massive favorable vote in the General Assembly will be considerable and it will have consequences.

At the heart of the question is how to emerge from the stagnation of the conflict over the past ten years. In 2011, a decade has transpired since the flare-up of the Second Intifada (though in fact it began in September 2000), which buried the Oslo-Washington peace process, the only effective and real negotiation between Israel and the PLO in all their years of shared history. In effect, in this decade, in addition to the dramatic wake of death and destruction left behind, many other things have occurred, almost all of them bad. But, above all, what must not be forgotten is the string of failures of the so-called international community with regard to the conflict. In November 2007, the pompous Annapolis Conference, at which George W. Bush convened Mahmoud Abbas, Ehud Olmert, Russia, China, the European Union, the Arab League, and the United Nations. A lot of cooks in the kitchen to remind everyone that the final goal was the two-state solution, but with few concrete commitments. Meanwhile, Olmert went on building settlements and finishing off his wall of unilateral separation-segregation. Annapolis had zero effectivity. And before that? Well, we will always have the unforgettable Middle East quartet, created in 2002, supposedly an initiative of José María Aznar (but the man in question has little to say about it), and whose high representative for the past five years has been Tony Blair. What has Blair been doing all these years? The experts disagree. Some say "nothing", others affirm he has carried on "personal business" and still others add, "He has defended Israel's interests". Let us not forget that the 2004 "Road Map", drawn up by the U.S. Department of State, proposed that there should be a Palestinian State in December 2005. Indeed, with three international congresses to be held that have never taken place, while the total number of Israeli settlers in the occupied territories increased by almost 27,000 in two years, going from 5558,988 in 2005 to 585,800 in 2007. To complete the list, the 2003-2004 peace plan known as the Geneva Accords, as full of good will and political audacity as they were of disconnection from the real political process; the peace plan of the Arab League, under the auspices of Saudi Arabia (with no objections on the part of Washington, which was aware that the plan would not work out in any case), which proposed in 2002 (in the midst of the initial, most violent, phase of the second Intifada) the classic formula of the two states, Israel's return to the 1967 frontier, Jerusalem as the capital of both states, etc. And we might add the Palestinian elections of 2005 and 2006, required by the very same international community that later rejected the 2006 elections because Hamas won them, and the time is yet to come for the European Union to say something in this regard (its current high representative, or perhaps her predecessor in this position).

The wall built by Israel to surround and close off the Palestinian territories is finished, and the highway network (called by-passes) restricted exclusively for the use of the military and the settlers, crisscrosses them from top to bottom, and side to side. In the face of this situation, Europe has two options: to vote its conscience or to play the fool once more, shielding itself behind "the search for a position of EU consensus". There is no EU consensus in this matter, no one is expecting it and, even though it has a high symbolic value, the success of the Palestinian candidacy for full membership at UNESCO is not likely to change any of it.