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Abstract

An annotation of:

"Statehood versus "Facts on the Ground"". By Richard Falk. Aljazeera, September 20, 2011.

Keywords

Human rights, Palestine, United Nations, Membership, Statehood

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The Palestine Bid for Statehood at the UN

Article under review: "[Statehood versus "Facts on the Ground"](#)". By Richard Falk. *Aljazeera*, September 20, 2011.

Following the winds of change spreading through the Arab world, the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, decided in September 2011 that it was time to pursue a formal request for full United Nations membership as a path towards gaining recognition as a sovereign state. President Abbas sees this action as a necessary step for the Palestinians to assert their claim to territory under pressure from Israeli settlements. Israel has vehemently opposed the idea, indicating that that this approach to statehood is unilateral and precludes any negotiations for peace. Aligning itself with Israel, Washington has promised to veto any resolution on Palestinian statehood if it comes to the UN Security Council, claiming that the measure is premature and damaging to the negotiating process.

A month later, the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) voted to recognize Palestine as a full member. The Palestinian bid received overwhelming support, with 107 member states voting in favor of membership, 52 abstentions, and only 14 votes against the motion. In reaction to this measure, the US, Canada, and Israel decided to cut off financial support for UNESCO, stripping it of about one quarter of its total funding. Meanwhile, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon warns of negative consequences stemming from Palestinian efforts to join other UN agencies. "I believe this is not beneficial for Palestine and not beneficial for anybody," Ban Ki-moon^[1] said, noting that the lack of resources for UN agencies jeopardizes millions of people assisted by these organizations.

This month's roundtable discusses the Palestinian bid for statehood at the United Nations and takes as its point of departure for debate an op-ed written in Al Jazeera by Richard Falk, the UN Special Rapporteur on Palestinian Human Rights. Falk's incisive piece not only deals with the particularities of the Palestine-Israeli conflict and the UN bid for Palestinian statehood, it also frames the discussion within a broader debate about the character of contemporary world order: "Need we be reminded once again that the inspiring opening words of the UN Charter, 'we the peoples', has always given way to 'we the governments'? More starkly since the end of the Cold War, as this controversy sadly highlights, it has been replaced by 'we the hegemon.'"

Responding to some of the issues highlighted by Falk, our panelists focus on three topics to explain the reasons and the effects of Abbas's decision to apply for full UN membership. First, the contributors look at some of the motives behind Palestine's bid for statehood, identifying reasons that seem to go well beyond the more obvious symbolic achievement. As a UN member, for example, Palestine would have official recourse to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which resolves disputes between UN member states, as well as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the various UN human rights tribunals. Second, they consider the responses from the international community. In particular, they examine the role of the United States and the consequences for its credibility as an international player, especially within the Middle East. Finally, the panelists highlight some of the potential consequences of the bid for the peace prospects between Israel and Palestine.

[1] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/03/ban-ki-moon-palestine-un-agencies_n_1073285.html

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