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Palestinian UN Vote and Triple-faced EU Policies

The question of recognising the Palestinian state has once again revealed deep divisions within the EU, its weakness and marginality of the problem in light of the euro crisis. In the following study Patrycja Sasnal examines the Palestinian options at the United Nations and claims that the EU can still save face and make a difference in the Peace Process by unanimously abstaining or voting in favour of the Palestinian state, depending on the wording of the resolution. Daniel Levy then gives reasons for why a “yes” vote at the UN can advance the Peace Process. In a chaotic and changing Middle East the immediate goal is to avoid another round of violence between the conflicted parties.

Twenty years of negotiations did not facilitate Palestinian-Israeli agreement

Since October 1991 and the Madrid Peace Conference the only universally positive outcome of the Peace Process has been the Israeli-Jordanian peace agreement. Other than that progress on the Israeli-Palestinian deal has been slow, if any. The negotiations showed U.S. inability to efficiently mediate between the conflicted parties, and once the international mediating body formally expanded into the Quartet—the U.S., EU, UN and Russia—its fictionality became evident, as again only the U.S. had enough political clout to serve as the mediator, albeit an inefficient one. Throughout the years the EU’s policy in the Middle East has suffered from two illnesses: an absence of a unified position of EU member states and irresolute mimicking of the American strategy.

In September 2010 Israeli-Palestinian talks restarted in Washington with a view to concluding them by September 2011 with at least an interim agreement. The negotiations stalled a few weeks later and have not been relaunched since despite U.S. and the Quartet’s efforts. Since September 2010 the likelihood of a UN vote on Palestinian statehood has been

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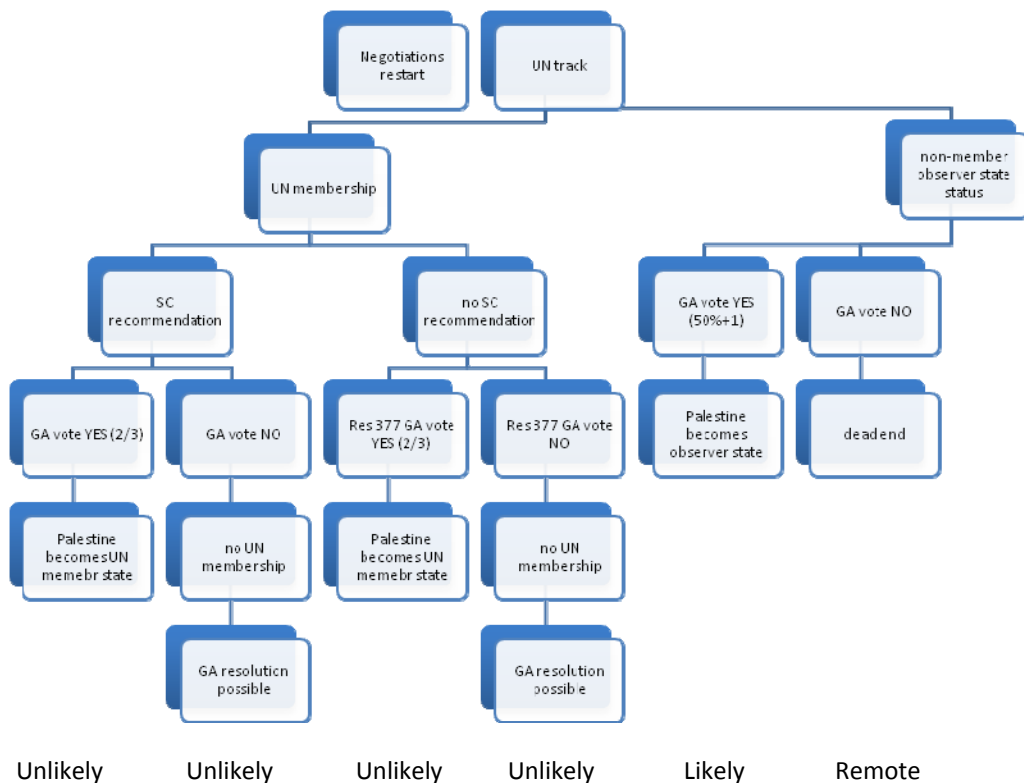
on the rise as it became evident that the up-to-date terms of reference could only lead to a stalemate. The U.S. and the EU have nevertheless been doing their utmost to get the parties back to the negotiating table so as to avoid at least the controversies involved, especially that the Arab spring and internal U.S. and EU crises have altered the regional and international ambience. Despite the Quartet’s unanimous rhetoric, however, the U.S. and the EU remain deeply divided and are sending different signals to Tel Aviv and Ramallah.

What, where and when will be voted?

The Palestinians have not decided yet whether or not they will unilaterally declare their statehood and, if so, when; neither have they ultimately resolved to bring the issue to the UN forum, but should they choose to do so, it is unclear what they will ask for. If they do pursue the UN track, they basically have two options: to ask for UN membership or seek non-member observer state status, similar to that enjoyed by the Vatican or Switzerland prior to its accession.

The options chart shows that all tracks might eventually lead to some UN resolution save one, which remains the least likely option, with the likelihood assessed depending on the resolution’s wording.

Palestinian Options Chart



The UN membership option is risky for the Palestinians. The first step that they will have to make is to submit an application to the Secretary-General.¹ The wording of such an application can determine whether the application goes beyond the Security Council, which is the first to recommend a state to the General Assembly. The most likely outcome here is that the U.S. would veto the application. The Palestinians would most likely come up with such a phrasing of the application—e.g. stating that the Palestinian state would have its final borders determined in negotiations with Israel based on the 4 June 1967 borders²—that it would be hard for the U.S. to vote against. If it does, however, the GA still gets to debate the issue, but will not vote on membership unless the 1950 Resolution 377 “Uniting for Peace” is evoked.³ This would enable the GA to call an Emergency Special Session and vote regardless of U.S. veto, provided Palestinian UN membership is deemed a matter of “international peace and security.” This would be an unprecedented effort with regard to a state membership in the UN and one with dubious legal results, for the UN Charter explicitly states in chapter 2, article 4, point 2, that “the admission of any such state to membership in the United Nations will be effected by a decision of the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council.”

The Palestinians can take their matter straight to the GA if they choose to seek an upgrade in their current observer status from that of a unique “entity” to that of a non-member “state,” rather than seek full UN membership. This sub-track would allow them to gain that status through an informal communication to the Secretary General. Historically “if there were doubts about the statehood of a non-member state (...), the SG let himself be guided by the degree of diplomatic recognition of the state concerned or the fact that the member state was already a member of at least one specialised agency of the UN.”⁴ If in doubt, the issue would be voted straight at the GA and would only require a majority of favourable votes. The current status grants the Palestinians identical prerogatives as in the case of the Vatican and 16 other states that had earlier been non-member state observers. The difference, however, could be the word “state” in the resolution itself. It might provide an argument for other international bodies, such as UN agencies or international courts, to accept and treat Palestine as a state. It is also an option safest for the Palestinians and probably most welcome by countries uneasy with the Palestinian statehood plan. Another such option is a non-binding GA resolution recognising or supporting the statehood, which needs to be sponsored by at least one UN member state.

¹ For the Rules of Procedure see chapter XIV. Admission of new members to the United Nations: <http://www.un.org/en/ga/about/ropga/adms.shtml>.

² A. Eldar, “New Palestinian strategy document will make it difficult for U.S. to oppose UN vote,” *Ha’aretz*, 30 August 2011, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/new-palestinian-strategy-document-will-make-it-difficult-for-u-s-to-oppose-un-vote-1.381426>.

³ The resolution can theoretically be evoked when the Security Council cannot decide on a matter that is important for international peace. But whether the Palestinian statehood is such a matter remains dubious and given the complexity and controversiality of the ambience surrounding the Palestinian vote, the SC, SG nor the GA will want to make it more divisive than it is at the moment.

⁴ B. Simma, (ed.), *The charter of the United Nations: A commentary*, vol. 1, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 188.

Observer status is purely a matter of practice at the UN; it is not a UN Charter-based status. Hence only practice can determine what is granted to Palestine and how it is interpreted by all other nations in the world. An upgrade in observer status (as well as full UN membership) and a GA resolution will, however, give the Palestinians a document that refers to the entity as a “state,” thus allowing them to recall the resolution every now and then when their statehood is called into question; this would add a new element to the rhetoric about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The issue then is not really whether Palestine meets the formal requirements of statehood under international law, such as defined territory, population or independent government. On the one hand, a smart wording of the resolution can satisfy these requirements: borders to be defined in negotiations, permanent population, independent and effective government in place as decided by the *Ad Hoc* Liaison Committee of donors to the Palestinians who stated in April 2011: “According to the reports to this meeting from the World Bank, the IMF and the UN, the PA is above the threshold for a functioning state in the key sectors they studied.”⁵ On the other hand, however, the inadequacies of Palestinian statehood can be indicated by analogy to earlier controversies over the memberships of the Republic of Korea (foreign occupation), Angola (lack of independence), Israel (lack of sufficiently defined borders).

The issue is political, as it transfers the Palestinian-Israeli conflict upwards to the international arena in a complex manner. For some, for Israel and the Palestinians as well as for their staunch allies, it is a zero sum vote: if you vote for Palestinian statehood, you are against Israel, and vice versa. But beyond that it is clear that the majority of the international community has made up its mind as to whether or not a Palestinian state should exist, and so have Israel, the U.S. and EU.

Israel fears isolation

Israel has valid concerns over UN recognition of a Palestinian state and even over the vote itself. Rhetorically, it emphasises that the UN vote would be a follow-up to a unilateral step on the part of the Palestinians, while Oslo agreements rule out unilateral steps by the parties. The obvious counterargument here is that the illegal Israeli settlements are in themselves a unilateral step on the part of Israel, but then illegal acts by one party do not justify illegal acts by others. By perceiving this as a unilateral step Israel further claims that it would kill the peace process. While the argument may be valid with regard to the previous terms of reference in negotiations between the parties, the gist of the vote is to change these terms and revive the peace process. Israel is also bringing up the argument of divisions among the Palestinians, the Hamas-Fatah divide. While indeed the sudden reconciliation

⁵ *Meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee*, Brussels, 13 April 2011, Chair’s summary, http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/UD/Vedlegg/fredsarbeid/2011_April_AHLC_Chairs_Summary.pdf.

between Hamas and Fatah may have been temporary, it is not out of the question in the longer run allowing both the West Bank and Gaza to function politically in a regular manner.

Regardless of the rhetoric, Israel is in a difficult position on the international arena. Following the Gaza war in 2008/2009, the country has been facing louder condemnation of its actions in international bodies. The BDS (Boycott Divestment Sanctions) campaign, initially organised by the Palestinians, has caught on in many countries, galvanising anti-occupation campaigns. While European governments understand Israeli concerns, European societies do not seem to be so understanding. Furthermore, the Arab spring has invigorated the Arab street, which is in large measure anti-Israeli. Israeli-Turkish and Israeli-Egyptian relations are strained, adding to Israel's concerns. While the UN vote may strengthen Israel's isolation in the short term, especially given the country's staunch opposition thereto, in the long run it can be conducive to Israel's interests.

Israel has thought the *status quo* of continued albeit controlled conflict with the Palestinians was sustainable, but this is now being disproven by the changes in the Middle East. If the UN vote were to strengthen the Palestinian negotiating position, thus facilitating an agreement with Israel, it could ultimately turn to Israel's advantage.

The immediate concern for Israel is the possibility of large-scale Palestinian protests following a negative outcome for the PA at the UN. Given the many options the Palestinians have, this is rather unlikely, as is Israel's annexation of settlement blocks following the UN vote. Withholding funds for the PA is a possible option, but this would spark international condemnation, which Israel would try to avoid.

As for the possible legal consequences of the UN vote, Israel fears that Palestine will be able to file suits in international courts, such as the International Criminal Court, unleashing a wave of suits for all past wars, victims and damages. Without full UN membership this will not be possible. Even the current PA status at the ICC is questionable in legal terms, but it is probable that with the GA resolution the Palestinians might be able to find more state sponsors of their causes.

Palestinians have the majority

So far some 122 countries have already recognised Palestine if recognition for the 1988 Palestinian Declaration of Independence is taken into account. The number is by no means accurate: many Central European countries, for instance, recognised Palestinian independence at the time, but have somewhat altered their policies since and it is doubtful if they will back Palestine at the UN General Assembly. It is expected that some 120 countries would vote in favour of a Palestinian bid put forward to the UN in the second half of September, regardless of its wording. The highest rate of recognition is in Asia, Africa and Latin America, with the exception of Australia, Colombia, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand and

South Korea, while European Union member states remain by far the most important and numerous group among the undecided.

The EU is divided into three camps on the Palestinian statehood issue

The EU agenda is now dominated by one single topic, the eurozone crisis, with most resources in Brussels diverted to the issue. As an institution, the EU is unlikely to devote substantial energy to this problem, highlighting instead the efforts of individual states.

Some countries are said to be strongly in favour of a Palestinian state: Belgium, Cyprus (recognised Palestine in January 2011), Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovenia and Spain. The hesitant ones include France, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Norway (not a member of the EU) will also vote in favour. Some are openly against all unilateral moves, with their position closer to the Israeli and American approach: these embrace Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Romania and Slovakia. The Polish approach, in general closer to the third group, stands out due to Poland's presidency of the EU Council until the end of December 2011.

Franco-German divide. France's decision may in fact be a personal decision of the president, especially that policy coordination between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Sarkozy remains inadequate. France's policy *vis-à-vis* the Middle East has been so devised recently as to safeguard leadership over the 27-nation-strong EU in the region, regardless of the particular interests of the member states. France pursued this policy during the Gaza war of 2008/2009, marginalising the Czech EU presidency's efforts to keep the bloc united, and it managed to do so again in Libya. With Nicolas Sarkozy's statement on the need for a unified voice, France is once again trying to speak on behalf of the 27. Last May Sarkozy declared that France would be ready to recognise a Palestinian state if Israeli-Palestinian negotiations were to be dead in September 2011.⁶ This would put France in the position of an EU leader in lobbying for the recognition of the UN Palestinian bid as long as the Palestinians did not ask for full UN membership. On the other end of the spectrum is Germany, although the country has not been as vocal on the Middle East as France. Last April Chancellor Angela Merkel said that Germany would never recognise a Palestinian state without Israel's acceptance.⁷ This declaration confirms that the EU vote would almost certainly be split if the UN were to vote on Palestinian membership. Further divisions surfaced in June, when Luxembourg hosted a dinner to discuss the recognition issue with Catherine Ashton and

⁶ "Sarkozy prêt à reconnaître le cas échéant un Etat palestinien," *L'Express*, 3 May 2011, http://www.lexpress.fr/actualites/2/actualite/sarkozy-pret-a-reconnaitre-le-cas-echeant-un-etat-palestinien_988892.html.

⁷ *Merkel will not recognize unilaterally-declared Palestinian state*, Deutsche Welle, 7 April 2011, <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,14974756,00.html>.

selected countries, which did not include Hungary or Poland, the two countries presiding over the EU Council in 2011.⁸

Poland's EU presidency. Even though Poland has traditionally been close with Israel and considered one of the more Israeli-friendly nations in Europe, the main factor that currently drives Polish policies towards Israel and the Palestinians is the Polish presidency of the EU.

Netanyahu planned on visiting and personally lobbying Poland twice in the past three months; the first time he chose Poland's national holiday as the date for his visit (declined by the prime minister), and then he had to cancel his trip due to social unrest in Israel. There have been no more plans for his visit afterwards. This is yet another argument suggesting that the Israelis probably understand that Poland will not necessarily vote according to the logic of friendship with Israel. Instead, the fact of holding the presidency, i.e. the need to stay neutral and uncontroversial, is likely to take precedence in the Polish authorities' position.

Poland recognised independent Palestine in 1988, when its institutions were non-existent, so it would be inconsequential for Poland not to recognise Palestine now, when the state institutions are basically in place. This could also be too costly politically, making Poland vulnerable to criticism of unprofessional handling of the EU presidency by adopting a radical decision rather than promoting a common EU position. On the other hand, Poland has exceptionally good relations with Israel, and these not only run deep in history, but also bear tangible fruit, such as military or hi-tech cooperation.

Lessons from earlier UN vote. Voting on the so-called Goldstone report⁹ in the GA in November 2009, the EU member countries were divided into three groups: 15 countries abstained (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Romania, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom), five were in favour (Cyprus, Ireland, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia), and seven were against (the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia).¹⁰ This took place despite the Swedish presidency's initiative for all EU countries to abstain amid the controversies over the report. The Goldstone report vote begs a question about whether the same split will be observed during a potential September vote. In the run-up to the GA Goldstone vote, intense diplomatic lobbying by the Americans and Israelis had been noted to divide the EU vote, and it was eventually successful. Similar lobbying steps have been undertaken in the

⁸ "Ashton's secret diplomacy upsets EU states," *EUobserver*, 23 June 2011, <http://euobserver.com/24/32535>.

⁹ It was a UN study particularly critical of Israel Defense Forces conduct during the Gaza war in 2008/2009, although it did list the Palestinian side's (Hamas) violations. The debated disproportionality of the report added to the difficulties in restarting the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations then and Israeli fears of isolation on the international arena.

¹⁰ *General Assembly, GA/10883*, 5 November 2009, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/ga10883.doc.htm>.

run-up to the September 2011 vote, although this time not only an anti-statehood campaign has been devised, but also the Palestinians have been much more energetic in galvanising support for their cause. Another analogy with the November 2009 Goldstone vote is that President Abbas was then presumably persuaded by the U.S. to abandon the GA vote on the report. If the Palestinians were to be persuaded to relinquish their UN bid, they would have to get new terms of reference *vis-à-vis* Israel in the negotiations; otherwise Mahmoud Abbas will be faced with yet another—and possibly more forceful—outcry at home than the one sparked by the Goldstone report.

The current UN SC has five permanent member states and ten non-permanent members (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Colombia, Gabon, Germany, India, Lebanon, Nigeria, Portugal, South Africa). Of the 15 countries, four are EU members and they all voted in favour of the February 2011 SC resolution condemning Israeli settlements on occupied territories, as did all other SC members except the U.S., which vetoed the resolution,¹¹ using its veto power for the first time under the Obama administration. The resolution was sponsored by at least 120 countries; an earlier (December 2010) GA resolution on Israeli settlements called for a cessation of all Israeli settlement activities by a majority of 169 votes to six against and two abstentions,¹² with all 27 EU countries in favour .

The conclusion then is that while the potential for a united EU vote is there (as shown by the settlements vote), when it comes to controversial decisions, especially those setting a precedent or potentially but realistically detrimental to Israel's interests (Goldstone vote), the EU does not vote unanimously, given its member states' differing and often conflicting interests with the parties to the conflict.

EU interests. The ultimate interest of all EU countries, the EU presidency and the High Representative Catherine Ashton should be European unity with regard to the Palestinian UN bid. Given the controversies, the easiest way to achieve this would be to abstain unanimously if the Palestinians ask for UN membership.

Bilateral relations of EU member states with Israel and the Palestinians are after all of different scope, intensity and warmth. This does not in the least imply isolating Israel. On the contrary, Israel, as an important partner in the Middle East, finds itself in a difficult position of strained relations with Turkey and Egypt, which only proves that the current security paradigm of great comparative advantage over the neighbours is now backfiring. It is possible that Israel should have taken the reconciliation road simultaneously. Once the UN

¹¹ *Israeli settlements: U.S. vetoes UNSC resolution*, BBC, 19 February 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12512732>.

¹² Against: Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, Palau, United States. Abstain: Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Panama. Absent: Antigua and Barbuda, Burundi, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, Kiribati, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Suriname, Vanuatu. All other states were in favour, including all 27 EU member countries; <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2010/ga11035.doc.htm>.

vote is there, the EU and the U.S. should, even from their position of strength, do their utmost to get the conflicted parties to agree on a peace treaty and ultimately help bring in Israel to the international community as a welcome partner.

In the EU it would be the first time that the 27 countries speak with one voice on such a disputed issue. A walk-out is possibly the worst option of all, as it shows complete disregard for the UN forum. If, however, the Palestinians ask for anything less, the EU should vote favourably in accordance with previous statements and decisions, having a dead peace process in mind along with the need to revive a meaningful contact between Israel and the Palestinians. The EU is now committed to the Arab struggle against authoritarianism and is looking for ways of strengthening democratic processes in the Middle East. This could add to the EU's positive influence and legitimacy in the Arab eyes only if it is consistent with what the EU declares on other issues related to the Middle East. Support for a two-state solution and Palestinian state-building has been one of those declarations and efforts.

The UN vote as a positive development

The traditional peace process is dead, and there is little value in resurrecting it. It is probably now a rather widely-shared consensus that the prospects for serious Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, with meaningful terms of reference, are rather bleak. Eighteen years after the Oslo process began and 12 years after the expiration of the deadline for concluding Oslo (May 1999), a frank acknowledgment of the deep structural flaws of the existing peace process is long overdue. Those flaws are many, but the current core equation is this: as long as the Israeli government experiences no real downside to maintaining its current posture, there can be no progress. Such a downside will not be domestically-driven; at best it will emerge as a consequence of non-violent external developments—in the territories, regionally, and crucially in the international diplomatic arena (UN), leading eventually to Israel reconsidering its positions.

A UN Palestine vote in September can be a constructive step, especially given the alternatives. There is an understandable temptation to get something, in fact anything, going in advance of the September vote in order to avoid a situation at the United Nations where some form of a Palestine resolution is put to the vote. That vote will not be an easy call for many states, notably EU members, given the well-reasoned lack of appetite for a split EU vote or for key European states to be on a different side of the divide than the U.S.

This is leading to a number of alternative options being considered. None are particularly promising in terms of advancing peace or even in succeeding to prevent or delay a deteriorating situation on the ground. All of the alternatives are essentially predicated on another round of capitulation by an already compromised and emaciated Palestinian leadership. While it is true that the Palestinian leadership is pursuing the UN track with a degree of reluctance (their comfort zone remains the donor-sustained PA and suspension-of-

disbelief sustained negotiations), and they might yet fold on the UN approach, it is highly doubtful that this should be registered as even a short-term achievement.

Anyone invested in the current Palestinian leadership (and unenthusiastic about the alternatives, including Hamas) might consider the impact that another diplomatic setback could have, perhaps being the straw that breaks the camel's back. The alternatives, such as a compromised fudge for resuming the structurally flawed negotiations or a Quartet statement on the endgame that is lacking any coercive muscle, are sufficiently transparent to be quickly and easily exposed as another manifestation of Palestinian co-optation and another victory for Israeli intransigence. Hardly a recipe for hope or for relieving pressure on the ground.

The meaningful alternative that some are pursuing to the UN track, namely an Israeli U-turn, including a willingness to accept reasonable terms of reference for a deal that pursues genuine de-occupation and a freezing of settlement construction, is simply not on the cards. It is, therefore, worth considering the case for why a UN vote and support for a certain type of Palestinian statehood resolution could be a constructive move that can advance, rather than retard, efforts to achieve a breakthrough towards Israeli-Palestinian peace. Here are five points to consider:

Sending the wrong signal on Israeli intransigence. The sad reality today is that Israeli complacency has become a central factor in understanding why there is no forward movement. The current government claims a win for its obstructionist positions and gets a bounce in public support every time it snubs its nose at the world and at international law, and proves that this entails no consequence or price to pay. The main argument used by the pragmatist camp in Israel is that the world will not put up with it, yet the ongoing impunity in the face of Israeli misbehaviour proves the opposite, strengthens rejectionists, and undermines pragmatists.

A UN vote represents one relatively low-cost way to make the opposite point and has the added advantage of making that point in an environment where there is safety in numbers—no one stands out as having gone it alone in wagging a finger at Israel (admittedly, one vote at the UN will not be enough to drive this message home, but it at least starts to lay down a marker).

The costs are higher in a democratising Arab world, where public opinion matters more. Developments in the region around the Arab Spring, the democratising trends, and new weight accorded to Arab public opinion make it “more urgent than ever” (to quote President Obama) that serious progress is made in resolving Israel-Palestine. But it also makes it more urgent than ever for Europe and others to take a credible position on this issue and to in some way create distance not from Israel itself, but from the indulgence of unreasonable and unlawful Israeli policies. Producing a fix that avoids a UN vote but transparently acts to protect Netanyahu's intransigence will further undermine the credibility of the West in Arab eyes. Better to have the vote happen and to be on the right side of history.

Paradoxically, a strong UN vote creates more space for the U.S. to act constructively *vis-à-vis* Israel. For the U.S., it is obviously not convenient to be very isolated in a vote of this nature at the UN, yet that outcome might also open up a certain new space in which the U.S. can act in the future. It is hardly news that America is so boxed in by its domestic politics on this issue that it is almost neutralised in its ability to bring any leverage to bear on Israel to advance peace. The president may not say so directly, but to have any chance of being effective, he probably needs others, less politically straight-jacketed than himself, to create a bit of leverage with Israel.

A UN vote is likely to improve, rather than scupper, the prospect of more productive future negotiations. There is a core weakness to the argument that Palestinians would be entrenching maximalist positions in a UN resolution, thereby derailing the chances of compromise in future talks and also setting off on an irreversible path toward legal, rather than negotiated, redress.

First, a key Achilles' heel of the negotiations is the asymmetry, so creating a little more Palestinian leverage enhances, rather than decreases, prospects for future negotiations.

Second, the Palestinians have made clear that they are not abandoning the negotiations option and pursuing a sanctions-centric approach. Nor is a UN GA resolution likely to equip them with powerful new tools for pursuing such an approach. In fact, all key arguments against the UN track are weak—there are texts for a statehood vote that would not contravene previous agreements (previous agreements do not actually address statehood). To the extent to which this would “pre-judge final status talks” or be acting unilaterally, these are hard arguments to sustain in the face of a settler population that has tripled during the Oslo years. Finally, the UN cannot be considered an inappropriate venue for advancing a two-state solution; it is after all the birthplace of the principle of partition as applied to Israel-Palestine as well as the source of Israel's own legitimacy.

The most pressing question is probably how best to avoid a new round of bloody violence on the ground. Palestinian frustration is more, not less, likely to be fuelled if the UN option is dropped and replaced by a transparently non-credible alternative path, or if the vote at the UN itself becomes a stinging disappointment. It is true that even a spectacularly successful endorsement at the UN will not change the situation on the ground and will still lead to disappointment. In fact it is probably fair to say that events at the UN are not going to be the key variable in determining whether there is an escalation on the ground or not. Preventing violence will have more to do with Palestinian adherence to non-violent tactics, Israeli responses, and approaches to the new Palestinian national reconciliation arrangement. It is reasonable to argue that hope for the Palestinians is an important variable and a good outcome at the UN may at least buy some time by providing an injection of hope.