**The U.N. Prepares for Durban III**

June 23, 2011

By: Anne Bayefsky

Weekly Standard

http://www.weeklystandard.com/un-prepares-durban-iii/article/575485?nopager=1

On Wednesday, the U.N. General Assembly elected Iran one of its vice presidents and Qatar as president, each for a year-long term starting in September. At one and the same time the Obama State Department has been blanketing the airwaves with speeches on this administration’s love affair with the UN under the title “principled engagement.” But with Wednesday’s U.N. elections, what kind of principles might the Obama administration be talking about?

In theory, the mission of the General Assembly includes making “recommendations for the purpose of…assisting in the realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms.” But that’s only in theory

In practice, though, the Qatari president of the General Assembly, and his new right-hand, Iran, have something else in mind. In their first couple of weeks on the job, they will have two contentious orders of business – the U.N.’s Durban III racist “anti-racism” conference scheduled for September 22, 2011 and the Palestinian effort to seek statehood without having to accept a Jewish state. There are now some very clear indications of their strategy.

Last week, the General Assembly adopted a resolution planning the Durban III conference, an event intended to “commemorate” the anti-Semitic event held in Durban, South Africa in September 2001. Durban II took place in Geneva in 2009, and it was headlined by the most famous advocate of genocide today, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The Durban III plans entail an opening session with a select group of speakers – including none other than the president of the General Assembly.

It is instructive to recall what Qatari General Assembly president Nassir Abdulaziz al-Nasser will have to commemorate. At the first Durban conference on “combating intolerance and xenophobia” the head of Qatar’s delegation, Abdul-Rahman H. Al-Attiyah, declared: “all the Israeli heinous violations are justified as a means to bring back every Jew to a land that they raped from its legitimate owners and denied them their right to claim it back.”

Al-Nasser will, undoubtedly, also reflect his emir’s current agenda. During the opening days of the General Assembly in September 2010, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, said: “the war on terror…has plunged us into a kind of war with no limits, nor end, nor logic, nor legal or moral conditions. ..[W]e believe that even as the phenomenon of terrorism exists, it should not be treated by waging wars…To the contrary, it has…undermined the efforts made in dialogue among cultures.”

As for his Iranian sidekick, he’ll have plenty to keep him busy. According to U.N. rules, vice presidents of the General Assembly fill in for the president with “the same powers and duties” on the many occasions when “the President finds it necessary to be absent during a meeting or any part thereof.” They also serve on the governing body of the Assembly, the so-called General Committee, which draws up proposed agenda items and the priority of items – like how to handle a Palestinian statehood resolution, for example.

Iran’s U.N. ambassador, Mohammad Khazaei, lost no time to make it clear what his country plans to do with its new status as a U.N. role model. “Membership in the General Committee is a good opportunity to assert fair positions in the world order…[and] be instrumental in planning the meetings of the Assembly and the arrangement of internationally significant issues for inclusion in the agenda of the Assembly,” Khazaei told Iranian PressTV. He then specifically cited the “important issue” of the “Durban Conference focusing on racial discrimination.”

No subtle diplomatic skills are required here. At Durban II, Ahmadinejad, again denied the Holocaust and the “pretext of Jewish sufferings.” At last year’s General Assembly he declared that 9/11 was an inside job and Jews control the world: “the U.S. government orchestrated the attack…All values, even the freedom of expression, in Europe and in the United States are being sacrificed at the altar of Zionism.”

The Durban III resolution also has a few other wake-up calls for the Australians, New Zealanders, and European Union states still sitting on the sidelines about whether to participate. (The Canadians, Israelis and Americans having already pulled out.) For the first time in its history, the General Assembly will suspend part of its opening session to corral world leaders – who refused to attend Durban I and II – into attending Durban III, thus turning it into a summit. The move is so unusual that the resolution was careful to declare “that arrangement does not constitute a precedent.”

Furthermore, the U.N. will crown the day-long meeting with a new declaration “by heads of state and government” that will celebrate the original Durban Declaration. That’s the declaration that charges Israel with racism and names not one of the U.N.’s other 191 state members. To ensure that the views of Ahmadinejad and company get full billing, the General Assembly will also be treated to “summaries of the discussions” (conducted during the day at roundtables), while the whole event will be webcast around the globe. A few non-governmental organizations will be allowed to speak – provided that they are included on a list drawn up by the president of the General Assembly and approved by U.N. member states “on a no-objection basis.”

In case you’re wondering, the resolution that hands Iran and its friends a veto over the selection of anti-racism advocates who will be permitted to speak at Durban III was adopted by the General Assembly without a peep from Obama administration delegates.

Principled engagement, U.N. style.