No to a UN-Imposed Settlement

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The United Nations is hardly a neutral arbiter when it comes to Israel. In fact, the UN’s anti-Israel views routinely border on hysteria.

In agency after agency at the United Nations, Israel is a pariah, held to an impossible standard; it is judged as no other nation is judged.

At the United Nations, the US has for many years prevented one-sided measures from being imposed on Israel.

In the last few days, the White House has publicly stated it is reevaluating its long-held policy positions on the Israeli-Palestinian issue and might consider having the UN Security Council take center stage in seeking an outcome to the situation.

That would be a significant policy change and a cause for concern.

Internationalizing the conflict through the UN is an inherently misguided idea that seems to be gaining traction.

An editorial on March 24 in The New York Times argues, “A clear Security Council statement in favor of a two-state solution would be an important benchmark.

If the United States and other major powers quickly show commitment to that approach, they might be able to keep Palestinians from pressing a complaint against Israel in the International Criminal Court. The Palestinians, who will join the court on April 1, have long argued for an investigation of Israeli ‘war crimes.’ Israel vehemently opposes action by the court, which would poison relations even more and alienate many Americans.”

You can’t point to very much that’s positive the UN has done – over decades – to advance the cause of peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Indeed, it has often exacerbated the Arab-Israeli conflict, rather than promoting reconciliation by the parties.

From the infamous Zionism equals racism resolution adopted in 1975 (and only repealed 17 years later), to the creation of the special UN in-house committees promoting the Palestinian narrative, to the constant browbeating by the UN Human Rights Council – which also perpetuates the Palestinian narrative – and to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which has also perpetuated the narrative of Palestinian victimization, the list is long.

The UN is inhospitable territory for Israel, and attempts to impose any kind of arrangement will find few willing partners in Israel – even beyond the new government.

Knowing a UN Security Council resolution might not require it to make real concessions, would the Palestinian Authority demand a “right of return” of Palestinians to Israel? Attempt to wriggle out of end of- conflict assurances? Agree to be demilitarized? Stop incitement and terrorism? If a framework is imposed through the UN, it will send a message to the European Union and the rest of the world that Israel can be coerced through third parties, and the EU, as well as Israel’s enemies in the Islamic and Arab world will see this as an opportunity to pile on.

Ultimately, a UN-imposed settlement would place Israel in a three-sided vise, facing the prospects of rockets and other terrorist attacks from north (Hezbollah), south (Hamas) and east (Iran and its proxies).

Ben-Gurion Airport was shut down for a day during Operation Protective Edge last year because of Hamas rocket fire; extremists in a West Bank Palestinian state could strike inbound and outbound flights with not much more than a slingshot, given its proximity to the airport.

We justifiably worry about foreign fighters going to Syria, now in its fifth year of a destructive civil war. An arrangement imposed by the UN could be an invitation to the same people to enter territory within shouting distance of Tel Aviv.

Based on some of the recent comments coming out of the White House, the administration appears to be considering what would be a dramatic departure from the hard work done by the US’s UN ambassador Arthur Goldberg and the US delegation when they negotiated the language of Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. The two-state solution was never supposed to be predicated on the pre-June 5, 1967 armistice lines. The language of Resolution 242 clearly calls for Arab states to make peace with Israel, which all but Egypt and Jordan have yet to do, while Israeli withdrawal from territories was supposed to mean some, but not all, territories in dispute.

The administration now risks edging closer to more maximalist positions, which suggests an Israeli return to the 1967 frontier. To do so would be to reward Palestinian unilateralism; it could revise decades of US policy toward an ally and two painstakingly negotiated security council resolutions that have been on the books that entire time.

Late last year, the Security Council came close to adopting a draft resolution that would have fully imposed Palestinian demands on Israel. The US and Australia led the effort to actively oppose the measure. Would the policy “reevaluation” by the White House mean a similar measure could now pass with US support? Or even be adopted with a US abstention? During a vigorous defense of Israel at the Human Rights Council earlier this month in Geneva, US Secretary of State John Kerry said, “The United States will oppose arbitrary efforts to delegitimize Israel… Not just in the UN Human Rights Council, but wherever it occurs.” National Security Adviser Susan Rice told the AIPAC conference in early March of the Israel-US relationship: “The bottom line is simple: We have Israel’s back, come hell or high water…” Samantha Power, the US Permanent Representative to the UN, told that same gathering: “At the Security Council, we have also guarded vigilantly against any resolution that threatens Israel’s security or undermines the pursuit of peace. That is why in December we opposed efforts to pass a deeply imbalanced Security Council resolution on Palestinian statehood and successfully rallied other countries to do the same.”

How does the Kerry, Rice, Power defense of Israel square with the newly stated intention to reevaluate policy on the peace process? An imposed solution would not result in genuine, lasting peace. In fact, it would undermine the cause of peace, because, absent Israeli inclusion in developing them, key issues would remain unaddressed; Israel’s security, and thus regional security, could be compromised.

Negotiations – tough ones involving give and take – are the only path to effectuate an end to the conflict. That can only happen if there is a sincere will on the part of the PA to enter negotiations, if it recognizes Israel as a Jewish state (language the UN has itself used) and if it disconnects itself from the Hamas terrorists in Gaza. These are absolute necessities, especially given the chaotic state of the conflicts raging beyond Israel’s borders.