My Word: The United Nations and the Fall

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By Liat Collins

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It’s probably a mix of my age and the fact that not everyone in the media world has free access to social media – that’s “free” as in unmonitored – but alongside Facebook friends and LinkedIn connections I also have emails and phone numbers written down in a notebook and stuffed into a folder of business cards that has grown fatter over the years.

It was here I looked for some names and contact details last week, and as I did so I realized how much the world has changed – and not for the better.

I was trying to find the addresses of Egyptian journalists I used to be in touch with, along with a couple of Libyan journalists, a Tunisian writer and some Fatah-affiliated Palestinians based in Gaza.

One of the Egyptians barely escaped with his life after the fall of Hosni Mubarak and now lives in the US; the other – the one who a few years ago told me: “The Sunni-Shi’a divide doesn’t exist. It’s being created by America to split the Muslim world” – is also no longer reachable; my heart goes out to the Libyans, as their country disintegrates around them; ditto the Tunisian, who must now realize that the Jasmine Revolution was not as romantic as its named implied.

I was looking for them in the wake of a Black Friday followed by a bloody weekend and even worse week. On June 26 the world was shocked when a terrorist gunned down 39 beachgoers, many of them British tourists, at Tunisia’s Sousse resort; the general public also did a double take when it learned that the attack on an American-owned gas company near Lyon in France included the decapitation of the terrorist’s former boss, whose head was impaled on the factory fence.

It is a mark of Western arrogance that it paid less attention on the same day to the Sunni attack on a Shi’ite mosque in Kuwait during Friday Ramadan prayers. The Sunni- Shi’ite divide is not a figment of our imaginations; it is rocking the world as we know it. And giving the Shi’ite side of it easy access to nuclear arms as well as an economic boost is not going to solve the problem, whatever President Barack Obama and those negotiating with Iran on his behalf believe.

I searched, in vain, for the Cairo-based journalist, not only to get her updated take on the post-Arab Spring world but also for information on the wave of terror that has swept Egypt again, from the assassination of the attorney-general to the attacks by Islamic State that left some 70 Egyptian soldiers and policemen dead in Sinai on Wednesday.

Closer to home, terrorists claimed the life of 27-year-old Malachi Rosenfeld, who was gunned down in a car as he traveled home with three friends near Shvut Rahel, close to Shiloh in the Binyamin region, on Monday.

Israeli officials are wary of calling it a new intifada, but from President Reuven Rivlin down it is being acknowledged that there is a wave of attacks that is not the isolated efforts of “lone wolves.” These deadly assaults seem to be well planned and they are being carried out against the backdrop of sickening incitement.

How is the world dealing with all this? Well, the United Nations Humans Rights Council, as usual, has been busy bashing Israel for “possible war crimes.”

The UNHRC on Monday held a meeting on its report into last summer’s war in Gaza, the war that was triggered by a chain of events starting with the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teens, whose deaths did not apparently warrant a UN investigation, and culminating in 51 days of fighting. I wrote about the UNHRC probe last week: Suffice it to say my conclusions are very different from those of the panel originally led by William Schabas and later by Mary McGowan Davis.

Like most Israelis, I believe the casualties, on both sides, were the result of Hamas aggression and could have been prevented had Hamas not launched some 5,000 rockets on Israel or had abided by cease-fire agreements.

Dropping all pretense of impartiality, a joint delegation of the International Federation of Journalists and the Palestinian Journalists’ Syndicate, composed of IFJ President Jim Boumelha, PJS President Abdalnasser Najjar and Vice President Naser Abubaker, took part in the debate on the report in Geneva.

The IFJ and PJS joint statement claimed that Palestinian journalists and media premises were deliberately targeted by the IDF during Operation Protective Edge, resulting, according to their figures, in the deaths of 19 journalists and “over 350 injured.”

The accusations were the last straw for Haim Shibi, a board member (as am I) of the Jerusalem Association of Journalists, who wrote an op-ed asking, rhetorically, whether Boumelha had contacted Israeli journalists or officials before taking the side of Hamas and accepting its casualty figures.

Boumelha, who has refused the JAJ’s offers to set up a hotline and other moves to professionally assist the Palestinian media, is also behind the effort to oust Israel from the IFJ (using the pretext of an argument over owed membership fees). “Now, alongside the Palestinians, the Mediterranean branch of the IFJ includes such luminaries of human rights – and press freedom in particular – as Iran, Iraq and Yemen. Israel’s out,” wrote Shibi, adding that as long as Boumelha heads the organization, that’s not a bad thing. (On a positive note, Shibi points out that at a recent meeting of the European Federation of Journalists that he attended a motion condemning Israel was rejected.) I DON’T want to give too much credit to the “flotilla” that set sail from Sweden to save Gaza. Among the passengers was former Tunisian president Moncef Marzouki, who obviously has a lot of spare time and very strange priorities if his primary concern today is what’s going on in Gaza.

As the Israeli Navy towed the intercepted Marianne av Göteborg into Ashdod Port, the Prime Minister’s Office issued a sarcastic statement welcoming them to Israel and saying that they apparently got lost. “Perhaps you meant to set sail for a place not far from here – Syria. There the Assad regime is slaughtering its own people every day with the support of the murderous regime in Iran.”

The letter also noted that some 800 trucks a day pass from Israel to Gaza and that since last summer’s operation Israel has transferred more than 1.5 million tons of humanitarian aid into the Strip. The bloodbath in Sinai reflected the reason that Egypt prefers to keep its Gazan crossing closed (without being internationally vilified). Apart from Salafist attacks, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi’s government is particularly prone to attack by Hamas, an offshoot of Egypt’s outlawed Muslim Brotherhood.

The flotilla participants hadn’t so much lost their way as lost their moral compass.

This was a deliberate attempt not to deliver aid but to provoke another international incident like the Mavi Marmara affair five years ago which could be used to portray Israel, and Israel alone, as responsible for all the evil in the world.

In my search for former contacts, I realized that there’s a party going on that I haven’t been invited to. It is strangely a relief. Under the auspices of the United Nations’ Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People – whose name says it all – a conference has been taking place in Moscow this week, billed as a “meeting in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace.”

In the past, I attended similar conferences in Moscow and in Vienna before turning down an invitation to a meeting in Brazil. I couldn’t face the hateful anti-Israel rhetoric again, even in a pleasant venue on a trip paid for by the UN.

I think peace would have a much better chance of growing were the Arab World and the Palestinians to permit normalization, drop the incitement, and fight terrorism – even when it’s aimed at Israeli and Jewish targets.

To a large extent, the Palestinians have already set up two independent states. The one in the West Bank – like neighboring Israel, Jordan and Egypt – is wary of the precedent of the one in Gaza.

Ten years ago, Israel unilaterally pulled out, only to be followed by Kassam and Grad rockets in an ever-growing radius of terror.

My former contacts there, being affiliated with Fatah, apparently ran from Hamas when it took over shortly after the Israelis left.

All the “peace flotillas” in the world will not turn the beautiful Gazan beaches into a tourist resort with a thriving economy as long as jihadist terrorism is allowed to thrive.

Look at Tunisia.

And instead of being part of the solution, sadly the United Nations is part of the problem.

According to the press release issued on the July 1 gathering in Moscow, MK Ahmad Tibi predictably accused Israel of ever-increasing apartheid policies and “commended all states, businesses and organizations that supported the movement to boycott Israel.” I note his own boycott doesn’t stretch to giving up his well-paid Israeli parliamentary position and perks.

Vitaly Naumkin, director of the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow, told the UN gathering that “Israel’s continued occupation of Palestine” was exploited by extremist terrorist groups – notably ISIL/ISIS – to recruit more youth.

The UN needs to recognize the true nature of jihadist terrorism in order to deal with it.

The last thing the world needs is to divert more attention and funds on obsessively fault-finding Israel, blaming it even for the rise of the Islamic State. The UN should make sure human rights everywhere are inalienable.