As I See It: The Deadly Tragicomedy at the UNHRC

July 9, 2015

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The Jerusalem Post

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/As-I-See-It-The-deadly-tragicomedy-at-the-UNHRC-408523>

When the UN Human Rights Council voted last week to back the report by Mary McGowan Davis on the 2014 Gaza war, the behavior of two council members in particular provoked protests in their home countries.

The report, which used skewed and selective reports falsely to condemn Israel for war crimes along with the true war criminal, Hamas, was a travesty. The resolution, which failed to blame Hamas for war crimes but accused Israel of such behavior not just last year but also in the 2008/2009 war, piled malice upon malice.

Only the US voted against the UNHRC resolution. Five countries abstained: Kenya, Ethiopia, Macedonia, India and Paraguay. But what caused a stir was that two countries, the UK and Germany, voted for it.

In Germany, this was denounced by the Christian Democratic Union party. In Britain, Prime Minister David Cameron was accused of hypocrisy. Only last April he had robustly supported Israel’s actions in Gaza, declaring there was “such a difference” between indiscriminate attacks upon Israel and its attempt to defend itself against them.

What’s more, the UK had also voted against Israel last May when, by 104 votes to 4, Israel was singled out by the World Health Organization as the only nation on earth to be condemned for violating health rights. Voting twice in support of motions designed to demonize, delegitimize and destroy Israel was behavior scarcely fitting one of its allies.

But then the story took off in a very odd direction. Stephen Pollard, the editor of Britain’s Jewish Chronicle, had a scoop which was as strange as it was sensational.

On the morning of the UNHCR vote, he wrote, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had personally called David Cameron and Angela Merkel and asked them to vote for the Israel-bashing resolution.

The reason, said Pollard’s sources, was that this resolution – which was bad enough – had been watered down from the far more savage original version. Israel feared that if the watered-down version was overturned, the original would be revived.

Cameron, who had been planning to vote with the US against the resolution, initially described this bizarre request as “pure madness” before agreeing to vote as Israel was asking.

The story made little sense.

Given that most of the UNHRC was hostile to Israel, there was surely scant chance the resolution would be overturned. More strikingly still, Netanyahu had asked India, Kenya and Ethiopia to abstain. Why would he have done that if he was desperate for this resolution to be passed as the lesser of two evils? Why was his plea to the UK and Germany diametrically different? The answer to this puzzle becomes obvious if one understands just what the Palestinian Authority was doing behind the scenes, and the nightmarish diplomatic stranglehold in which Israel is trapped.

The PA was using blackmail to get the Europeans, in particular, on side. The US, to the PA, is a lost cause on the UNHRC while India and African states are of little account. The people the PA has identified as the key to bringing Israel down through both economic isolation and diplomatic delegitimization are the Europeans.

The PA’s goal at the UNHRC was therefore a full hand of European support. So it used blackmail to achieve it. If the Europeans wouldn’t vote en bloc for the watered-down resolution, the PA would bring forward instead the original that Israel feared more.

That was why Netanyahu rang Cameron and Merkel. That was why even abstention wasn’t enough. The UK and Germany had to vote for the resolution to see off the PA threat.

Of course Israel hasn’t acknowledged this. Asked about the Jewish Chronicle story, it replied enigmatically that it had “asked members of the council to ensure that the proposed draft would not be made even worse.” Given the PA’s threat, there was only one way of ensuring that.

But Britain can’t shrug off its responsibility here quite so easily.

Netanyahu’s gambit was born of desperation because he was backed into a corner – not just by the PA’s behavior but by the pusillanimous attitude of Britain and the Europeans.

For in the face of the PA’s blackmail – indeed, presented with this appalling report and even the watered-down resolution – the UK and Europeans should have said they would have no more to do with this travesty and walked out of the UNHRC altogether.

The council should be ostracized for embodying an obscene perversion of human rights. In the words of Col. (ret.) Richard Kemp, the former commander of UK forces in Afghanistan: “This council has for too long allowed itself to become a tool of Hamas’s murderous strategy.”

By remaining members, the UK, US and Europeans legitimize the UNHRC and thus tacitly connive at its diplomatic pogrom against Israel. Even the US can hardly preen itself over its no vote since, as a council member, it will still be helping pay to implement this resolution.

Nevertheless, people should not be too quick to write Britain off altogether. Although at first glance it may seem the opposite is the case, David Cameron is now moving in the right direction.

Sure, he still has some way to go. After the jihadist massacre of British tourists in Tunisia, he said idiotically that Islamic State was “neither Islamic nor a state.” But he also said something of great significance: that the British government should not engage with people who say “It’s all right to be a suicide bomber in Israel but not all right to commit terrorist attacks elsewhere.”

In any sane universe, this is a statement of the obvious. In Israel- phobic Britain, however, for the prime minister to enunciate such elementary moral decency is a startling shift.

And it is echoed in another fascinating insight in Stephen Pollard’s story. When last May’s WHO vote was reported, he writes, the Prime Minister’s Office “went ballistic.” They had no idea the vote was happening, let alone that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office intended the UK to support such a poisonous resolution.

So furious was Cameron that he decided the far more sensitive UNHRC vote should bypass the FCO altogether and be handled directly by his own office. This is all so astonishing it is likely to be true.

The good news from this vignette is that Cameron seems now to realize Britain has a big problem with the FCO’s reflexive impulse to appease the Arabs at Israel’s expense.

Yet consider: A British prime minister intent on outflanking his endemically pro-Arab foreign ministry in order to support Israel was forced publicly to adopt an anti-Israel position by Israel’s prime minister – and all because Britain and the West refuse to do what is needed to support Israel properly at the UN. Truly, one doesn’t know whether to laugh or cry.