


period, many campaigns of Jewish protection would show that the 19th-century model remained in force. When it came time to “save” Soviet Jews suffering repression, it was not to the U.N. that Jews turned, but rather to the United States in an effort to help their co-religionists abroad.

The failure to create a vertical alliance with the U.N. does not imply that the U.N. is useless for Jews, either historically or today in broader human affairs. We should also recognize that the vertical alliance Jews have long sought in politics still largely culminates in their nation-states, like the State of Israel the U.N. helped recognize in the same year it proclaimed “human rights.”

Of course, it is critical to remember that many Jews have emotionally cherished and defended those ideals the U.N. helped introduce to the world — including the human rights of non-Jews living under Jewish sovereignty or occupation. But perhaps the best proof of where the vertical alliance stands today is how Palestinians have sought to make use of the U.N. in concert with their international supporters. Like the Jews in 1948, they have sought the U.N.’s help in forging their state, which shows that for most peoples, the vertical alliance still goes only so high. 

Discussion Guide

Bringing together a myriad of voices and experiences provides *Sh'ma* readers with an opportunity in a few very full pages to explore a topic of Jewish interest from a variety of perspectives. To facilitate a fuller discussion of these ideas, we offer the following questions:

1. Is it legitimate to draw parallels between the U.N. recognizing the State of Israel and a state of Palestine?
2. Should Israel care about what happens at the United Nations?
3. Do you think the Arab states will ever accept a Jewish state in the Middle East?
4. How might the Israeli leadership move forward toward a two state solution with Palestine? If so, how?
5. Why is attention — good or bad — disproportionately focused on Israel? Is Israel held accountable to a different, higher standard?
6. How has the U.N. vote influenced the position, or status of the United States in the Middle East and as a global leader?

The United Nations’ War against the Jews: Destructive and Self-Destructive

GIL TROY

Tragically, the United Nations has gone from being the Jews’ best friend to the Jews’ worst enemy. This descent not only hurts Israel and the Jewish people; it damages the U.N. itself. Like so many times before in Jewish history, the noxious, obsessive, attack on the collective Jew — in this case, Israel — has revealed deep flaws in the organization’s character and structure.

Back on November 29, 1947, the U.N. appeared to be the Jews’ savior. It was not just that the U.N. had recognized Jews’ rights to a Jewish state in Palestine. More important, the U.N. embodied the Allied ideals mobilized to defeat Nazism. Jews, particularly American Jews, believed in the U.N.’s promise — that this world body could solve conflicts with words, not weapons, advancing justice and peace in a world that had just devoured six million Jews.

By 1975, the U.N. had established itself as a brand name for doing good worldwide. The General Assembly’s Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, both adopted in December 1948, established a language and a legal structure for advancing human rights. U.N. peacekeepers, with their distinctive blue helmets, calmed the world’s most volatile flashpoints, patrolling in Cyprus, the Congo, and the Sinai. The U.N. also was — and remains — the most effective international social service agency in history, pushing economic reform, championing education in developing countries, fighting parasitic diseases, pressing for universal immunization, and, ultimately halving child mortality rates.

In 1975, however, the U.N. passed Resolution 3379 on November 10, declaring

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¹ See Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *A Dangerous Place*, with Suzanne Weaver, (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1978).

² Noam Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel & the Palestinians*, updated edition, (Cambridge, South End Press, 1983, 1999).

³ Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979, 1992), p. 111.

“Zionism is racism.” A year earlier, the General Assembly had invited the chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Yassir Arafat, to its podium. Arafat’s welcome to the world forum for peace traumatized Jews. But passing Resolution 3379 became a larger event because of Israel’s U.N. Ambassador Chaim Herzog and his American colleague, Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Moynihan made the American public aware that the Soviet Union had conspired with dozens of newly formed Third World countries to hijack the U.N. What had been a democratic forum celebrating democratic values now had Third World and Communist dictators using democratic norms they violated at home to pursue their totalitarian agenda in New York.¹


The resolution hurt Israel but devastated the U.N. Even leading anti-Zionist academics like Noam Chomsky and Edward Said scoffed. Chomsky noted the “profound hypocrisy, given the nature of the states that backed it (including the Arab states),”² as well as the sweeping denunciation of Israel’s very right to exist by “referring to Zionism as such rather than the policies of the State of Israel.”³ This twist made the resolution so potent, helping to elevate many attacks on Israeli actions to a broader repudiation of Israel’s legitimacy. Sir Brian Urquhart, the U.N. Under-Secretary-General for 14 years, would call the resolution “the stupidest thing anybody ever did at the U.N.... an absolutely mindless piece of provocation” that “did nothing for the Palestinians,” either.

Eventually, in 1991, the U.N. repealed the resolution — only the second repeal in U.N. history. The repeal came about because of biparti-

san leadership from Americans, persistent pushing from Israel, effective Jewish community lobbying, and the Soviet Union’s collapse. Many former Soviet satellite states voted for the repeal to exorcise the nightmare of Soviet domination, given that the “Zionism is racism” resolution was, in Moynihan’s words, “the big Red lie.”

“Zionism is racism” became the most famous, and notorious, slogan ever associated with the U.N. It entered into international discourse, perpetuated by Arab diplomats, European intellectuals, American academics, and anti-Israel citizens of the world.

At the World Conference against Racism, held in Durban in 2001 — and its review conferences in 2009 and 2011 — the U.N. resurrected the charge. More broadly, since the 1970s — even during the Oslo decade of peace processing — Israel has repeatedly attracted more negative attention and more opprobrium than any other country. While the disproportionate and obsessive nature of the attacks against Israel appear almost medieval in their antisemitism, they also reflect the U.N.’s political dynamics. The United States is among the few countries willing to pay the high price in Third World support for siding with Israel over the Palestinians.

As a mark of the U.N.’s failure, one could easily write a history of recent attempts at Middle East peace without mentioning the U.N., but one could not write about the worldwide campaign to delegitimize Israel without focusing on the U.N. Rather than advancing universal justice and pursuing peace, the U.N. has demeaned itself by remaining the world headquarters for antisemitism and anti-Zionism. 

Working with the United Nations

HARRIET MANDEL

While the United Nations is the central address for world powers to convene, it is not a “world government” or even a world power. It has no jurisdiction over any country and no independent financial resources. It is a parliamentary forum where member states arrange and prioritize regional and international agendas that focus on issues of socioeconomics, human rights, humanitarian efforts, security, and war and peace. U.N. debates serve as a valve to diffuse frustrations of states, and often act as an alternative to war. The U.N. is a venue for horse trading involving

national interests, mutual back-scratching and deal-making, and Machiavellian diplomacy.

What is Israel’s current situation at the U.N.? In 2000, Israel was elected to the Western European and Others group in New York. This catapulted Israel to a new and active role at the U.N. On June 14, 2005, Israel’s U.N. Ambassador, Dan Gillerman, was elected vice-president of the 60th U.N. General Assembly. In 2007, Rony Adam, head of the Israeli Foreign Ministry’s U.N. Department, was unanimously elected to head the U.N. Committee for Program and Coordination. Israel, which has chaired a number

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