

The dis-United Nations

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Air Commodore (R) Khalid Iqbal

Theme for debate in the 67th session of the UN General Assembly was fascinating as well as elusive: There were no solid proposals for "Adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means".

General Assembly is the main deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations, comprising 193 members. It is a unique forum for multilateral discussion on full spectrum of international issues. More than 120 presidents, prime ministers and monarchs are attending the meeting. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon predicted that the ministerial session will be among the busiest ever, reflecting "the tumultuous time in which we live – a time of turmoil and transition". It is also taking place "against a backdrop of widespread violence linked to intolerance," he said.

Overwhelming mood at the gathering is of despair, disappointment and frustration. So far, the recent anti-Islam hate movie, Syrian civil war, and Iranian nuclear programme have dominated the show. Lingering conflicts of Kashmir and Palestine have also come under discussion. Interestingly, all these issues have a Muslim dimension. Though the UN carries a huge baggage of unresolved conflicts, it would be worthwhile to evaluate current session's performance in the context of these issues.

At the outset of his address, President Zardari said: "Before I take up my speech, I want to express the strongest condemnation for the acts of incitement of hate against the faith of billions of Muslims of the world and our beloved prophet, Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)...The International community must not become silent observers and should criminalize such acts that destroy the peace of the world and

endanger world security by misusing freedom of expression.”

President Morsi said Insults to the Islamic prophet Muhammad are part of an organized assault on Muslim religious and cultural values and cannot be brushed aside. “The obscenities that I have referred to that were recently released as part of an organized campaign against Islamic sanctities are unacceptable...We reject this. We cannot accept it,” Morsi said, his voice thin with anger. “We will not allow anyone to do this by word or deed... Egypt respects freedom of expression,” but “not a freedom of expression that targets a specific religion or a specific culture.” he added

Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, secretary general of the OIC, said on the sidelines of the UNGA session, that international community needs to unite behind action to implement international law which warns against any advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, aggression or violence.

US President Barack Obama in his address condemned “mindless violence” over the anti-Islam movie. He said that the US could not ban the controversial video under the First Amendment law of the Constitution. President Obama said: “There are no words that excuse the killing of innocents. There is no video that justifies an attack on an embassy. There is no slander that provides an excuse for people to burn a restaurant in Lebanon, or destroy a school in Tunis, or cause death and destruction in Pakistan.”

As regards Syrian conflict, there is no likelihood of a breakthrough on the deadlock; though UNSG said, “it will be foremost in our minds.” Mr Ban further said, the world must “stop the violence and flows of arms to both sides, and set in motion a Syrian-led transition as soon as possible...international community should not look the other way as violence spirals out of control,”...brutal human rights abuses continue to be committed, mainly by the government, but also by opposition.” Russia and China have vetoed three

Western-backed resolutions. "To increase pressure and to increase the isolation of the regime of Assad is one of the goals," Germany's Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle told reporters.

Mr Ban sounded an alarm in the context of Palestinian conflict: "door may be closing, for good" on a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, "the continued growth of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory seriously undermines efforts towards peace. We must break this dangerous impasse." Mellowed down by failure of last year's effort to make headway on acquiring statehood, President Mahmud Abbas has come up with a modest offer seeking an upgrade of Palestine status. The Palestinians expect overwhelming support from the assembly for the enhanced UN status, which would enhance their international legitimacy and grant them access to UN agencies and possibly the International Criminal Court.

Iran's nuclear programme is another sticking point. Secretary-General Ban "urged Iran to take the measures necessary to build international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear programme." Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appears convinced that the Iranians are close to developing a nuclear weapon. Iran's President has shrugged off talk of an Israeli attack on his country's nuclear facilities.

Iranian President Ahmadinejad said, "arms race and intimidation by nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction by the hegemonic powers have become prevalent, and Iran finds itself under threat from world powers seeking to impose their views... A state of mistrust has cast its shadow on the international relations, whilst there is no trusted or just authority to help resolve world conflicts." He urged that United Nations should be restructured, noting that many pressing global issues are the result of mismanagement.

President Barack Obama opined that Iran and Syria were on the

losing end of a sweeping tide of democracy in the region. The United States "will do what we must to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon... nuclear-armed Iran is not a challenge that can be contained." Obama said. Iran has denied western accusations that it seeks a nuclear bomb.

UNSG condemned "shrill" talk of war between Israel and Iran. Mr Ban said, he rejects "threats of potential military action by one state against another. Any such attacks would be devastating". The OIC Contact Group on Kashmir met on the sidelines of the UNGA. The meeting was co-chaired by the OIC Secretary General and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan. AJK President and Mirwaiz Umar Farooq also attended the meeting.

The OIC Secretary General reaffirmed the continued support of the OIC for the people of Kashmir and assured that the Organization would spare no efforts in supporting their legitimate endeavours and struggle.

In her address to the Contact Group, Minister for Foreign Affairs apprised the meeting of the commitment of the Government of Pakistan to constructively remain engaged with India for the early resolution of the Kashmir dispute. She highlighted the human rights situation in Indian occupied Kashmir and called upon the Government of India to take necessary steps in accordance with international humanitarian law to ensure respect for human rights of the Kashmiri people. The Foreign Minister also called upon the Government of India for the early settlement of the Kashmir issue in keeping with relevant resolution of the UN Security Council. In his statement, Mirwaiz updated the meeting on the latest situation in Indian Occupied Kashmir.

Peace and security is a prerequisite for the stability needed for global economic growth, sustainable development and social progress. Unfortunately we see that contribution of the UN towards global peace has diminished over the previous decades. The current session of the UNGA may not achieve much beyond

reiteration of already states positions. It is indeed a divided house. And, it is alarming that polarization within the UN is snowballing on Muslim Vs non-Muslim basis. Restructuring of the UN is long overdue. Though the UN may credit itself for not letting the World War III occur, multitude of conflicts sprinkled all over the world necessitate a bold course correction, lest it meets the fate of its predecessor, the 'League of Nations'.

The farce of United Nations reforms

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Ramzy Baroud

US campaign against UN bodies does not represent a genuine democratic endeavor. The country that has long been known to abuse its powers and privileges in the United Nations is now leading a campaign to reform the same organization. While UN reforms are welcomed, if not demanded, by many of its member states, there is little reason to believe the recent US crusade is actually genuine. Rather, it seems a clear attempt to stifle any semblance of democracy in the world's leading international institution.

Most American politicians actually despise the UN. While the Security Council is directed or tamed by the US veto (often to shield the US and its close ally Israel from any criticism), other UN bodies are not as easily intimidated. When the UN education and science agency, UNESCO, accepted Palestine's bid for full membership last October, following a democratic vote by its members, the US could do little to stall the process.

Still, it immediately cut funding to the agency (about 20 percent of its total budget). The move was devoid of any humanitarian considerations. The UNESCO provides vital services to underprivileged communities all over the world, including the United States.

Yet, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland insisted on sugarcoating on what was an entirely injudicious political act. "Today's vote by the member states of UNESCO to admit Palestine as member is regrettable, premature and undermines our shared goal of a comprehensive just and lasting peace in the Middle East," said Nuland. The fact is, there has been much saber-rattling in the US Congress targeting the UN. The campaign, led by Republican congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, chairwoman of the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, is threatening the UN with all sorts of punishment if the organization does not cease its criticism of Israel and tighten the noose around Iran. Naturally, the UN is not meeting the expectations of Ros-Lehtinen and her peers. It happens to be a body that represents the interests of all its member states. Some US politicians, however, see the world through the distorted logic of former president George W. Bush: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."

The late British author and humanitarian doctor Theodore MacDonald showed that the US actually has a love-hate relationship with the UN. In his final book, *Preserving the United Nations; Our Best Hope for Mediating Human Rights*, MacDonald reveals a strange reality that the US and its allies labor to undermine the UN, while also using it to further their own military, political and economic objectives. Expectedly, successive US governments had mastered the art of political manipulation at the UN. When successfully co-opted to accommodate US military designs, the UN suddenly becomes true to its mission – per Washington's account, of course. However, when US pressures failed to yield a unified front

against Iraq in late 2002, President Bush asked in his first address to the United Nations, on Sept. 12, 2002: "Will the United Nations serve the purpose of its founding, or will it be irrelevant?" The Bush years were rife with such ultimatums – to the UN and the whole world. However, a similar attitude continues to define the administration of Barack Obama. The US latest assault on the UN is now happening under the guise of reforms, but no 'reforms' are possible without first creating the needed polarization aimed at pushing for an American agenda. Joe Torsella, the US Deputy Ambassador for Management and Reform of the United Nation, spoke of the latest US efforts at reining in the 47-nation Geneva-based Human Rights Council. "The US will work to forge a new coalition at the UN in New York, a kind of 'credibility caucus' to promote truly competitive elections, rigorous application of membership criteria, and other reforms aimed at keeping the worst offenders on the sidelines," he said.

UNHRC is an outspoken critic of human rights violations. As of late, the organization has been particularly vocal regarding the rights violations under way in Syria. It is also very critical of Israel and its one-sided wars and human rights violations in Gaza and the rest of the occupied territories. For years, the US has conspired to undercut, intimidate and silence this criticism.

The Reuters report on the US latest push for the supposed reforms states: "Council members include China, Russia and other countries where rights groups say abuses are commonplace." To offset the seeming inconsistency – between UNHRC mission and its members' records – the US, according to Torsella, wants to "hold Human Rights Council members to the same standard of truly free and fair elections that the UN promotes around the world, and insist on the highest standards of integrity for the Council and all its members." Viewed without context, it is a noble endeavor indeed. However, it becomes a tainted statement when one considers that the US

status at the UN has been achieved through the least democratic of all means: a disproportionate political power (the veto) and money (used for arm-twisting).

Attempting to curb and contain the UN, as opposed to punishing and boycotting the international body, is basically what sets Democrats apart from Republicans. Unlike Republicans, “the other side of the debate (mostly Democrats) believes that achieving these reforms requires strong American leadership – and strong leadership is demonstrated by paying dues on time and in full. You can call this side ‘constructive engagement,’” wrote Mark Leon Goldberg in the UN Dispatch (Jan. 20). Practically, both approaches are aimed at achieving similar outcomes: Realizing US policies, rewarding allies and punishing foes – even at the expense of the noble mission once championed by the UN over 65 years ago.

While the latest push for “reforms” is being hailed by Washington’s media cheerleaders, no honest commentator could possibly believe the US campaign against UNESCO, UNHRC and the UN as a whole represents a genuine democratic endeavor. In fact, the truly urgent reforms required right now are ones that aim at correcting what MacDonald described in his book as the UN’s “foundational defects.” MacDonald counseled for immediate addressing of the “issue of permanent membership and the use of the veto.” He also recommended the granting of greater power to the General Assembly and eliminating the “imposed use of the US dollar” in mediating UN transitional affairs. MacDonald’s guidelines for reforms are comprehensive, and rely on the concept of equality, guided by humanitarian and moral urgencies. The same can hardly be said of Washington’s latest UN intrigues and shady politics.—Arab News

United Nations

Since its membership on September 30, 1947, Pakistan has been an active participant in the United Nations and its specialized agencies and other bodies, as well as in various UN conferences.

Pakistan maintains a permanent mission to the UN, which is currently headed by Ambassador Abdullah Hussain Haroon in New York. There is a second mission based at the UNO office in Geneva, Switzerland.

The Pakistani military has played a key role in the UN's peacekeeping programme in different parts of the world, most prominently in Somalia, Sierra Leone, Bosnia, Congo and Liberia. Currently, Pakistan stands as the largest[dubious – discuss] contributor of troops to United Nations peacekeeping missions in the world, and is followed by Bangladesh and India