

OUR BACKBONE AND THEIR U.N.

The back-room antics before last week's UN resolution on Jerusalem dramatically revealed two things: the kind of political animal the UN has become -- and the special role of the PLO as a Soviet agent.

The PLO first proposed a UN resolution calling for economic sanctions against Israel. The U.S. would have vetoed such a resolution, and everyone knew it. However, the Soviet Union wanted to see a U.S. veto, for political reasons, and that is why the PLO proposed it. In short, the main consideration was not Jerusalem but the U.S./Soviet Union contest for Arab favor. And the PLO was acting for the Soviet Union.

European and Moslem delegates were more interested in the issue itself, and therefore tried to come up with a different formula which would bring an American abstention rather than a veto. Their resolution would have simply censured Israel and called for all embassies to move from Jerusalem.

The PLO then demanded additional language excoriating Israel, and declaring its actions a threat to international peace and security. This new language did not make any substantive difference, as the PLO representative admitted, but it was language that the U.S. would have had to veto. That veto was still what the Soviet Union and, therefore, the PLO were most interested in getting.

This new initiative by the PLO torpedoed the compromise resolution that had been worked out between the Europeans and the Moslems. According to the *New York Times*, many of those Moslem diplomats were furious and complained in private that "the PLO is serving the Soviet Union as much as its nominal Arab constituents."

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The language was finally moderated again to draw an American abstention instead of a veto. But the point had become clear: the PLO was the agent of the Soviet Union in the UN; and the Soviet Union (along with its agent) was interested in the Israelis and Palestinians only as pawns in a larger anti-American game.

And that led to a dilemma for the United States, which apparently understood the nature of the game. At least, Secretary of State Muskie condemned the resolution strongly -- and then condemned the UN for continuing to engage in efforts to disrupt the peace. But if the U.S. were to veto the resolution, it would be doing exactly what the PLO and the Soviet Union wanted most of all. On the other hand, if the U.S. were to abstain, it would be projecting a weak and indecisive will-- and is that any way to combat extremists?

In the short-range, the U.S. perhaps had most to lose by using the veto. In the long-range fight against the extremist anti-American offensive, the U.S. had the most to lose by abstaining. The government made the short-range choice, thus at once disappointing Israel, the PLO and the Soviet Union.

The whole episode is just another example of how the UN has become nothing more than an arena for the cheap political games that nations are playing. A recent incident in West Germany illustrates the point. Two Iraqis were arrested in West Berlin, carrying a suitcase full of explosives with which they planned to kill 34 Kurdish students. A clear case of homicide for the local police, you say. But the West German government called on the authorities to return the two Iraqis, unpunished, to their homeland, for "foreign policy considerations" (spelled o-i-l). The UN has become nothing but a clearinghouse for such shoddy transactions.

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The U.S. probably has no way of winning in this UN game by playing house rules. It is not oily enough. But instead of trying to cut our losses each time with abstentions and similar hedges, we might do better by an extension of the Moynihan technique. He took the offensive, screamed our outraged principles at the world. He offended some of the striped-suiters, but he didn't lose any more than we are losing now -- and he certainly made us feel better about ourselves. Maybe that's the only way we'll win in the long run.

(Syndicated by the San Francisco Jewish Bulletin)