

UN Secretary General's "Preventive Diplomacy"

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The 66th session of the UN General Assembly which opened on September 13 promises to become a milestone in the UN history. Its agenda seems to reflect a whole spectrum of key themes in contemporary international affairs, from the current situation in North Africa and the Middle East to the legal dimension of the problem of self-proclaimed states. The Palestinian bid for statehood is expected to ignite particularly heated debates, with both supporters and opponents of Palestine invoking various existing precedents like [Kosovo](#). To avoid the prospect of a US veto, Palestinian National Authority president Mahmoud Abbas a priori rejected the option of having the issue handled by the UN Security Council. Instead, it will be discussed by the UN General Assembly, which several country and government leaders have already announced planning to attend. Mahmoud Abbas will pass a draft of the corresponding resolution directly to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

The dilemma amounts to a full UN membership for Palestine with a capital in East Jerusalem or a the UN recognition of Palestine as a non-member state. Both outcomes are acceptable to Palestine which, if given the non-member state status, will still be able to apply for membership in a number of international organizations and to endorse the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Apart from the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and potentially some other EU countries pledging support to the vehemently resisting Israel, the majority of the EU will likely back the resolution proposed by Palestine, as will most Arab and other Muslim countries. Consequently, Palestine's score in the UN General Assembly can realistically be projected to reach 120-130 out of 193, though a lot will depend on the steps to be taken by the US. Up to date, Washington remains somewhat secretive about its plans. Last year, B. Obama actually alluded to the prospects that Palestine would win a UN membership by the time the world leaders convene in the framework of the current UN General Assembly session, but later the US Department of State explained that the US President's remark should be read as an expression of hope and by no means as a call for voting in favor of admitting Palestine to the UN.

On top of being able to influence how many UN member-countries vote at the General Assembly, Washington has the right of veto in the UN Security Council. The UN Charter states that "The admission of any such state to membership in the United Nations will be effected by a decision of the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council". Were it not for the imminent US veto, Palestine could probably win a UN seat via the Security Council.

It is already clear that the camp counting the US, West Europe, the Organisation of Islamic

Conference, and the Arab League, which used to act in concert over the Balkans, Libya, etc., is headed for serious divisions. The discord may translate into visible geopolitical shifts and come as a prologue to a new game affecting the post-Soviet space along with the Greater Middle East.

On the eve of the UN General Assembly session, Ban Ki-moon delivered a programmatic speech on international peacekeeping and conflict prevention, which in today's world are the subjects of major controversy. Upon reiterating the well-known – “Preventive diplomacy has been an enduring idea at the United Nations for many decades” – the UN Secretary General went on to assert that “preventive diplomacy today is delivering concrete results, with relatively modest resources, in many regions of the world, helping to save lives and to protect development gains”. Kenya, Guinea, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were cited as the examples. “With increasing knowledge, stronger partnerships and better instruments, I am convinced that it is possible to further strengthen the international community's capacity for preventive diplomacy in the interest of peace, security and development”, said Ban Ki-moon, adding that the resolutions of the 2005 World Summit where member-countries reaffirmed commitment to building “a culture of prevention”, reinforcing the UN, and making collective efforts should serve as the legal basis for the above.

What looms behind the current UN General Assembly session's agenda, however, are multiplying problems in addressing international conflicts rather than any developments warranting such optimism. The UN will be confronted with the problems of the Middle East, the post-Soviet space, Palestine, and Cyprus. A particular line on the list is occupied by the prevention of armed conflicts.

Leaders of a number of countries intend to revisit the Balkan theme in the process of general political debates. Over the past several weeks, Kosovo has been sliding towards a new round of massive armed hostilities, and the situation evidently invited Ban Ki-moon's “preventive diplomacy” which the international community has kept failing to put to work for years. Since the 1990ies, the UN made urgent attempts to defuse the Balkan conflicts but created no solid foundations for stability in the region. The application of the international law in the process was highly selective, and, moreover, in the recent years the interpretation of the so-called humanitarian interventions widened to the point of authorizing architects of the new world order to launch full-scale military offensives launched against defiant countries and regimes.

Today's UN practically gave up its role in dealing with key regional problems and delegated the corresponding responsibilities to NATO, the EU, and other players. Washington and West European centers of power, especially Paris and London, egoistically stick to their own far-reaching plan for a political overhaul across the Balkans, North Africa, and the Middle East, while the UN only talks politics without even trying to have the international law reinstated...

Moreover, the release of formerly secret documents made it clear that Ban Ki-moon was among the early backers of Kosovo's self-proclaimed independence. According to *Koha Ditore*, an Albanian-language newspaper published in Pristina, Ban Ki-moon met with US permanent representative to the UN Zalmay Khalilzad when Belgrade and Pristina held talks under the auspices of the Russia-US-EU trio to stress that he personally supported the idea of Kosovo's statehood but was worried about the resulting confrontation with Russia.

Qatar's UN envoy Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser who chairs the current session of the UN

General Assembly said after the first day of the forum that the debates should focus on mediation. The truth is that, with the UN blessing, over the past years NATO, the EU, and some of the international institutes have routinely been brushing off mediation and whatever compromise-oriented diplomacy. If the UN Secretary General could, in a clear breach of the 1999 UN Security Council Resolution 1244, express support for Kosovo's self-proclaimed independence and even indicate that it was among his own goals, it is completely natural that the UN as a whole started to suffice with a background role in international affairs. The Palestinian initiative may top the UN General Assembly's agenda, but no doubt the real decision on the Palestinian problem will be made elsewhere. Similarly, the UN with all of its diplomacy and mediation simply has no say in the situations around [Libya](#), [Syria](#), and Iran.

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