

Disputing Schneidereit

Columnist Paul Schneidereit is at it again. He says: "Canada should oppose Palestinian UN statehood bid" (Aug. 30). He calls upon Canada to stand with Israel, the U.S. and a few opposing countries, while over 130 countries are supporting this Palestinian call, which is in conformity with international law.

He states that Israel is being told "what talks should conclude on contentious issues like borders or the future capital of a Palestinian state."

Pray, what is contentious about these issues? The West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, are under illegal occupation for over 44 years, in defiance of international law and repeated UN Security Council resolutions. Withdrawal from these illegally-occupied territories should require no negotiation.

Mr. Schneidereit describes the insistence of Israel on building settlements in "disputed territories." The West Bank, where Israel is building settlements, is an illegally-occupied territory and nothing is "disputed" about that. These settlements are illegal and in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and are defined, by international law, as war crimes.

It is time that the readers of The Chronicle Herald are allowed a modicum of fair reporting based on facts, instead of blatant bias.

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Canada should oppose Palestinian UN statehood bid

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Paul Schneidereit



Canada will no doubt be among a decided minority of nations if Ottawa opposes, as is likely, next month's expected Palestinian Authority bid for UN recognition as a member state.

The final text of the PA's submission could change, depending on the outcome of talks with European nations seeking to water down the bid to make it more palatable for them to

support. But it currently appears the Palestinians are going to ask for recognition of statehood based on the pre-1967 lines — in other words, the 1949 armistice lines — with its capital in East Jerusalem.

The reality is that the proposal has just about zero chance of approval in the chamber with the power to grant statehood — the Security Council — because the United States will, quite rightly, surely veto what is seen by many as an attempted end-around of direct negotiations with Israel.

The PA appears to instead be aiming for winning what would be a largely symbolic vote supporting Palestinian statehood — while also gaining non-member observer status — in the full General Assembly.

A strong majority of the world's nations have already indicated they will support such a declaration. But the U.S., Italy, Germany and, no doubt, Canada, are expected to vote against any such resolution.

Despite the belief among many that such a vote, even a symbolic one, would raise international pressure on Israel to make more concessions, it's hard to see that happening.

In fact, what's much more likely is that Israel — being told, in effect, beforehand what talks should conclude on contentious issues like borders or the future capital of a Palestinian state — will be even less inclined to hold discussions with the PA.

And, as many analysts have pointed out, going ahead with the UN statehood bid appears to harbour many downsides for the Palestinians.

Certainly, there appears to be strong support within the U.S. Congress to end, if the UN statehood proposal goes forward, more than \$500 million US in aid now going to the PA.

Meanwhile, noted international legal expert Guy Goodwin-Gill, who has argued past cases for the Palestinians, has warned the move may disenfranchise Palestinian refugees who don't live in the West Bank or Gaza.

Most distressingly, for all who live in the region, are fears, and in some cases predictions, that the post-UN vote period — when it becomes clear nothing on the ground is likely to change after the symbolic UN vote — could lead to a third intifada.

So why is Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas pushing ahead with going to the UN?

Negotiations with Israel are stalled due to the Jewish state's insistence on building settlements in disputed territory. This, as much as the PA's inability to meet its past commitments, remains a major roadblock to peace. Perhaps the PA hoped Israel might actually back down to avoid any symbolic debacle at the UN. Not going to happen.

Abbas, of course, is in a no-win position. Although he's nominally the president, if open elections were held, it's highly doubtful his party, Fatah, would not be demolished by the more popular Hamas, which openly calls for Israel's destruction.

So, as many observers has noted, Abbas couldn't survive politically if he were to make any concessions to Israel.

By forcing the UN vote, goes the argument made by some, Abbas knows nothing will change, but he'll look good in attempting to win statehood.

Whatever the truth is, the reality remains that, sadly, the interminable, bloody conflict will, in all likelihood, continue much as it has, despite whatever happens or doesn't happen at the UN, for years to come.

And those on the extremes of the debate will continue to insist — of this, I am most certain — to frame conditions for the end of this impasse in unachievable terms, to the detriment of all.

It's certainly an admission of cynicism on my part, but frankly the lead-up to next month's UN vote reminds me most of watching a slow-motion train wreck.

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