

A Clubbable Admission: Palestine's Case for UN Membership. Binoy Kampmark

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"I find it rather difficult to make it clear to my children why we are not eligible, for from one point of view it isn't quite clear to me." —X, "The Jew and the Club," [The Atlantic](#), October 1924.

It must surely make certain ethnic and religious groups reflect, notably those languishing in minority status for decades, if not centuries.

There was a time when the rental advertisements in London had such caustic couplings as "Irish and Blacks need not apply." Oxbridge bursaries and scholarships, in all their variety, reveal a tapestry of personal prejudice and lively bigotry. In terms of recreational clubs, the east coast, moneyed establishment in the United States prided itself from keeping Jews out of the membership circle, notably in such mind destroying facilities as golfing establishments. The wall was impervious, idiotic, resistant.

The United Nations, yet another, albeit larger club, functions on similar principles.

Do you have the right credentials to natter, moan and partake in the body's constituent parts? Do you satisfy the seemingly elementary criteria proposed in the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States? (These are: a permanent population, a defined territory, an identifiable government and a capacity to enter into relations with other states.) Meeting that threshold, the assumption of recognised statehood and, it follows membership, should be a matter of minor controversy.

What is not mentioned in the United Nations Charter is the political dimension that boils beneath the text: states who are refused admission, let alone recognition, on grounds petty or substantial. All clubs, it follows, are institutions oiled by the tenacity of small minds and

rarely troubled by actual principle.

For Palestinians, the still incomplete road to recognition, let alone UN membership, has been particularly potholed.

In November 1988, the Palestine National Council, the legislative wing of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, [declared](#) the existence of the State of Palestine.

In 2011, an application was made for admission to the United Nations. All the way, their claims have been challenged.

Israel, having pinched Palestinian land, guards the door to admission with zeal, and confident, for the most part, that a viable Palestinian state will never come into being.

On May 10, the UN General Assembly resolved (143 votes in favour, nine against, including the drearily predictable US and Israel, iced with 25 abstentions) to sanitise the Palestinian application to become a member of the club. The significantly diluted resolution throbs with enormous condescension, more a nod and wink than anything significant.

The [summary](#) from the UN does little to dispel this assumption, suggesting an “upgrade” to “the rights of the State of Palestine within the world body, but not the right to vote or put forward its candidature to such organs as the Security Council or the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).” The Assembly merely found Palestine a suitable candidate for full membership, recommending the Security Council “reconsider the matter favourably”.

What, then, can the Palestinian delegation actually do with its revised status? From September, delegates [will be able](#) to make, for instance, statements on behalf of a group, submitting proposals and amendments and their introduction. They will qualify for election as officers in the plenary and Main Committees of the General Assembly. They will also be able to fully participate “in UN conferences and international conferences and meetings convened under the auspices of the General Assembly or, as appropriate, of other UN organs.” Hardly breathtaking, though an improvement on the current “observer status” which should be designated “spectator status”.

Like an applicant to the Garrick Club in London or the Savage Club in Melbourne, private institutions long in tooth and vanity, their membership heavy with colostomy bags and short of females, the Palestinians were found to be partially deserving. In other words, they had, in circumstances absurd and crude, been found by the UN’s largest forum to be *potentially* clubbable. Exercising all rights of membership will ultimately depend on what the big boys and gals on the Security Council, notably the permanent five, say.

Some clue of what will happen when the matter comes up for discussion in the Security Council can already be gathered by the sinking of a previous resolution for Palestinian admission last month. The Algerian sponsored resolution [was quashed](#) by the United States as a matter of course, despite receiving 12 approvals. The [grounds](#) for doing so were familiar: recognised statehood could only spring from “a comprehensive peace agreement.” Sustainable peace was only possible “via a two-State solution with Israel’s security guaranteed.” All other matters, including the debate on admission, were “premature”.

All of this makes the reaction from Israel’s UN ambassador, Gilad Erdan, all the more absurd.

Before fellow delegates, the intemperate representative sported a miniature shredder in which he placed a copy of the UN Charter, [declaring](#) that granting Palestinians greater rights of representation entailed the following message: “you are telling the child-murdering Hamas rapists that terror pays off.” In that statement can be detected the echoes of such founding representatives of Israel as Ben Gurion and Menachim Begin, all of whom were well-versed in the calculus of violence and its ill-gotten rewards.

The unhinged Erdan, perhaps unwittingly, revealed a perspective many had suspected: that Israeli policy towards the Palestinians is one of conflation, denigration and the eradication of distinctions. All are terrorists of the animal variety, as Israel’s Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, [would have it](#), and all are, at best, only suitable for playing a subservient role on the international stage.

“We always knew that Hamas hides in schools,” moaned Erdan. “We just didn’t realise that it’s not only in schools in Gaza. It’s also Harvard, Colombia and many elite universities.”

If all that was, indeed, true, then any improvement in the Palestinian situation, culminating in the UN General Assembly vote, must surely be regarded as pitifully modest. Palestine remains, at the end of the day, ineligible for full club membership.

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