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The UN Aftermath of President Trump's Announcement on Jerusalem
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On December 6, 2017 President Trump announced that the United States recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's capital. What followed this controversial announcement in the UN realm was a flurry of initiatives, including a draft resolution submitted to the Security Council by Egypt; a resolution submitted to the General Assembly by Yemen and Turkey; Israel's withdrawal from UNESCO (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), and President Trump's threat to cut funding from UNRWA (UN Relief and Work Agency responsible for Palestinian refugees).

In the Security Council, the United States was forced to use its veto power to prevent a unanimous decision to support the draft resolution. This was the precise intention of the Palestinian delegation, which reportedly held a series of bilateral meetings with Council members to discuss the contours of a resolution that would be broadly acceptable to all members besides the United States. Indeed, widely consensual parameters in the draft – affirming that decisions vis-à-vis Jerusalem must comply with relevant resolutions of the Security Council, and calling for a reversal of trends imperiling the two-state solution – were skillfully balanced with references to "deep regret at recent decisions concerning the status of Jerusalem"; assertions that actions that alter the status of Jerusalem are "null and void," and that all states should refrain from the establishment of diplomatic missions in Jerusalem. The art of compromise and dialogue with Security Council players thus enabled the Palestinians to achieve their objective and demonstrate poignantly the lack of international support for the American unilateral decision on Jerusalem.

In post-vote Council dynamics, the other four permanent members differentiated their policies from that of the United States. France led the rebuttal by assertively claiming that the 14-member approval of the resolution is no less than a testament to the Council's collective commitment to international law, and Russia leveraged the momentum to position itself as a worthy alternative to America's hegemonic leadership in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. As anticipated, the American veto in the Security Council led the Palestinians to pursue a vote on the same issue in the General Assembly, whereby US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley issued a warning letter noting that the United States will be "taking names" of states that vote to reject President Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Despite the warning, the resolution was widely supported, with 128 states voting in favor. Nine states voted against, and 35 abstained, including

Hungary, Croatia, Latvia, Romania, and the Czech Republic which broke European Union consensus on the vote.

Abstention justifications can be summed-up according to three categories. One is technical reasons, including the belief that the Security Council was the rightful body to deal with such issues; that convening an emergency session was a disproportionate response, and that there was insufficient time to prepare for the vote. A second category centers on the resolution's substance and refers to its inability to advance peace and bring the sides to the negotiating table, as well as to the need for both sides to arrive at such decisions through direct negotiations. A third, perhaps subtler category behind the abstentions is undoubtedly reluctance to support a move perceived by the United States as a challenge to its sovereignty. In this vein, the Ambassador of Mexico declared his country's feeling that "the United States must become part of the solution, not a stumbling block that would hamper progress."

In a third development in the UN, and weeks after the United States declared that it would withdraw from UNESCO, Israel too announced its resignation from the organization. Israel linked this decision to gratitude to the United States in general and to its outspoken Israel-supportive Ambassador Haley in particular. Yet while UNESCO's systematic efforts to deny the Jewish connection to holy sites in Israel are unacceptable, three other factors to be considered are the organization's educational work in fields that are very much in line with Israel's interests, such as fighting extremism, promoting Holocaust studies, and defending media freedoms; the recent appointment of former French Minister of Culture Audrey Azoulay, known for her positive stances on Israel, to head the organization; and the fact that America's decision to leave the organization was likely guided by its own interests. This includes the United States' accumulated debt to UNESCO following cuts to its funding since 2011 over the admission of Palestine into the organization.

In an additional development, President Trump threatened to cut UNRWA's budget. Concrete and tangible criticism of UNRWA centers on contracting Hamas-affiliated employees and enabling Hamas terror-linked activities to take place from within UNRWA facilities. Principled criticism centers on the Agency's activity to distinguish and perpetuate the problem of Palestinian refugees: although refugees from the entire world are dealt with by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Palestinian refugees are dealt with separately through UNRWA, which operates according to different criteria. As such, while citizenship in foreign states and socio-economic status serve as criteria for annulling refugee status, Palestinian refugees retain their refugee status regardless of both criteria. Furthermore, Palestinians are the only refugees whose status is automatically transferred from generation to generation, thus multiplying their

number. It therefore becomes evident that UNRWA's work, which fuels the problem of Palestinian refugees, a core issue of the conflict (much like Jerusalem is), is not in line with American foreign policy. As US funding to UNRWA comprises a significant part of the Agency's budget, fulfilling President Trump's threat would have a substantial impact on the ground.

In reviewing this sequence of events, two conclusions emerge. First, the UN arena – composed of the sum of its member states – has largely demonstrated the limitations of equating monetary power with support for policy directives. The overwhelmingly consensual votes against United States policy in two different bodies of the UN, supported – and even brought to vote – by some of the superpower's very allies and beneficiaries, demonstrate that under certain circumstances, issues of identity, values, and social rewards command more weight than material rewards. As such, President Trump's threat to cut UNRWA funding cannot be expected to transform Palestinian policy and conduct, despite anticipated repercussions on the ground. Second, unilaterally relinquishing power in some UN bodies (such as UNESCO) may temporarily soothe the withdrawn state's frustrations but cannot be expected to yield fruitful results in the long run: not in the deserted organization, where the void left by Israel and the United States will soon be filled by players with opposing policies, and certainly not in other UN forums where some of the exact same states exercise their ability to vote – and can thereby unite to make a powerful statement even in the face of vetoed decisions.

The momentum created by President Trump's threat to cut UNRWA funding should be utilized to mobilize international discourse regarding this agency's contribution to perpetuation of the situation of the Palestinian refugees, including avenues to resolve this core issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Palestinians can be expected to intensify their efforts to negate and delegitimize Israel in the diplomatic arena. Israel, therefore, should engage in international forums, present a balanced narrative, cultivate diplomatic relations with traditionally unsupportive states, and initiate more substantive concrete steps to end the current Israeli-Palestinian deadlock, which does not serve Israel's interest.