

Resolution 1397: Public endorsement of a future Palestinian state as an incentive to Palestinians to stop the violence – boomerangs

Resolution 1397 was adopted after 18 months of failed American shuttle diplomacy designed to get Palestinians to honor their repeated promises to cease the violence (for step-by-step details, see the chapter on “Rejectionism”). The United States, which authored the resolution, sought to mobilize the Security Council to achieve the same goal by providing Palestinians with a positive incentive: public endorsement of a future Palestinian state. Resolution 1397 declared that the goal of the peace process was a Palestinian state side-by-side with Israel. Penned with the utmost diplomacy, the resolution avoided ‘finger pointing’ speaking solely in general of “tragic and violent events...since September 2000” and “demand[ing] immediate cessation of all acts of violence, including all acts of terror, provocation, incitement and destruction.”

The resolution has been criticizedⁱ for what appears to be ‘moral equivalency’ in its efforts to be ‘balanced’, resulting in vague wording (“all concerned to ensure the safety of civilians”); for its fawning lip service to an unconstructive Saudi Arabia ‘initiative’; and for ‘rewarding’ Palestinians for their violence by making a Palestinian state the subject of a Security Council. Yet Arabs attempt to reap further rewards by reading into 1397 meanings that definitely are not there.

First of all, “two States, Israel and Palestine” was a vision, not a directive, as some Arabs would have us believe. And it certainly did not ‘recognize’ rights to a Palestinian state under all conditions, despite its veiled wording. Moreover, the vision was ‘linked’ to “livi[ng] side-by-side within secure and recognized borders.” While 1397 applauds the Saudi’s ‘peace plan’ⁱⁱ as a “contribution,” the Security Council in no way ‘adopts’ or ‘endorses’ this plan, as some Arabs claim. While 1397 welcomed “diplomatic efforts of special envoys” to “bring about a comprehensive just and lasting peace in the Middle East,” these measures do not substitute or replace the principle of ‘direct negotiation’ enshrined in 242 and 338. Such diplomatic efforts are viewed merely as a constructive step toward restarting the peace process. This did not happen. Resolution 1397 was basically a ‘free lunch’ for Palestinians that required no concessions on their side.

ⁱ See for instance, “1397 Constructive Contribution or More Mischief Making,” Canada-Israel Committee, March 2002, at (http://www.cicweb.ca/publications/backgrounder/bgrounder_031402.cfm)

ⁱⁱ The plan actually undermines the spirit and intent of 242 by demanding a return to the 1967 borders as well as the Right of Return (a sure ‘non-starter’) – in exchange for “normalization,” not peace.

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