

Five minutes with Noam Chomsky – “Europe is pretty much following behind US policy, no matter what that policy is”

by Blog Admin

Last week the General Assembly of the United Nations voted in favour of recognising Palestine as a non-member observer state. The EU was unable to reach a common position on the issue, with some states voting in favour and others, including Germany and the United Kingdom, abstaining. EUROPP editors Stuart A Brown and Chris Gilson asked [Noam Chomsky](#) for his views on the vote and Europe’s wider response to the Israel-Palestine crisis.



Europe should have agreed to Palestine’s observer status at the United Nations being upgraded, but they were, as you know, split on this. The US, of course, was strongly opposed. The reasons are very explicit and it’s worth looking at them. They were discussed again in the New York Times last week where, of course, the newspaper took the same position as Washington almost reflexively. There are two problems, they say. One is that if Palestine gains observer status it might try to bring to the International Criminal Court charges against Israel’s actions in the occupied territories, which of course are totally illegal: even the Israeli government agreed to this back in 1967, it’s not a question. We have to block that because we can’t allow the International Criminal Court to judge actions of an ally of the United States, or of course the United States itself. That’s not what the court is set up to do, so we’ve got to block that. The second argument is that Palestine might try to gain entry into other UN organisations, just as it has into UNESCO, and that will probably cause the United States to defund those organisations, which would be a serious blow to them. So those were the two arguments against allowing Palestine to upgrade its status. I won’t comment on those two arguments, I don’t think there’s any need to.

What Europe ought to have done is disregard those arguments – in fact with contempt – and vote with the rest of the world. I recently visited Gaza and there’s an ironic slogan there, which is that: “Israel destroys; Gazans rebuild; Europe pays”. That’s roughly true, in the West Bank, too, and I don’t think that’s a role that Europe should adopt. Europe is pretty much following behind US policy – the UK overwhelmingly and Continental Europe to a large extent – no matter what that policy is. Now, in fact, US policy for 35 years has been to block a political settlement, a settlement which is supported by virtually the entire world: namely a two state settlement on the international border, with minor and mutual border modifications. This settlement was in fact official US policy from 1967 up until the early 1970s, when it shifted.

This proposal for a two state settlement, with full guarantees for the rights of each state – including Israel’s right to exist in peace and security within secure and recognised borders – was brought to the UN Security Council in 1976 by the three major Arab states: Egypt, Syria and Jordan. The United States vetoed it; the Europeans I believe abstained at that time. There was a similar vote in 1980 and although I won’t go through the record, it essentially continues until the present. The most recent US veto was in February 2011. Now that one actually got a little bit of publicity because it was so outlandish. Obama vetoed a resolution calling for implementation of official US policy, namely against expanding Israeli settlements. There was another case just a couple of weeks ago when the Security Council was debating a proposal to call for a cease fire during the latest Israeli attack on Gaza, and the US blocked it: because we’ve got to allow it to continue.

Now Europe can go along with that if it wants, or it can take an independent course. This is quite significant in the case of Gaza. The torture of Gaza goes way back, but the contemporary phase began in January 2006, when there was a free election in Palestine. This was carefully monitored and recognised to be free and fair, but the ‘wrong’ people won. Not what the US wanted. And when the wrong

people won, the United States at once, along with Israel, initiated a harsh punishment of the population: harsh sanctions, increasing violence, all sorts of things. And Europe timidly went along, the way it usually does. Well, I don't approve of that either.

The United States also, at once, returned to standard operating procedure when you don't like an elected government: namely initiate a military coup. So it began to organise a military coup based on a Fatah 'strong man', Mohammed Dahlan. The coup was supposed to take place in 2007, but it was blocked by the elected government, which then took over completely. The way that's described in the West is that Hamas took over by force, ignoring the fact that they were blocking a US run military coup. And Europe went along. Now maybe they'll pay when Israel destroys and Gazans rebuild, but I think Europe can go way beyond that.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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