

commentary

Replacing the U.N.



Edwin Black

For years, foreign policy critics, politicians and outraged members of the public have been militating to defund and quit the United Nations. The empty sheet of bitter discontent with the U.N. has now been filled in with a new name and a new movement calling to “defund and replace” that troubled organization with a new world body: the Covenant of Democratic Nations (CDN).

Ignition switches have been clicking since last December when the highly controversial U.N. Resolution 2334 declared, among other libels, that Israel’s Jewish connection to the Western Wall was effectively illegal. With a new U.S. administration and the installation of Nikki Haley as U.N. ambassador, the anti-Semitic, anti-Israel, undemocratic and diplomatically dysfunctional ligatures of this international body have finally been spotlighted.

We have recently seen Haley excoriate the U.N. for its anti-Semitic obsession with battering Israel — essentially putting the U.N. on notice as a credible entity. Her influence elicited a similar response from the UK. She set in motion the debunking of a fallacious U.N. Human Rights Council document that declared Israel an “apartheid” state; this engineered by the very nations that have institutionalized religious apartheid.

That report was formally rejected; and, in consequence, the agency’s Jordanian director abruptly resigned.

Then, the world witnessed how the U.N. Security Council stood palsied and aphasic as Syria’s Assad inflicted yet another poison gas attack against his own civilian population, murdering women and children. This resulted in the unilateral launching of 59 Tomahawk missiles by President Donald Trump during a state dinner given for Chinese President Xi Jinping.

A conversation of ideas has been unleashed proposing an official international conference that would produce a carefully propped diplomatic convention to be ratified by countries as a binding treaty to forge the Covenant of Democratic Nations into operational reality. The entire process would be limited to nations governed by democratic principles with equal respect for all people regardless of religion, gender, race, identity or national origin, as well as formulating a mechanism to resolve disputes.

A prime mission of the new world body would be to re-ratify, amend or nullify all acts and resolutions of the United Nations and its agencies. Thus, the Covenant would create a new body of long-overdue, reformed, clarified and updated international law. Just

as American laws perpetrating slavery, Jim Crow, segregation and institutional inequality were overturned, updated and reformed during the Civil Rights Era and right through our present decade, so, too, would the inequity and misuse of international law and process be overturned by the CDN. Most CDN nations would remain as vestigial members of the U.N., overseeing its collapse from decaying economic and bureaucratic processes, as was done when the League of Nations was dissolved after World War II and replaced with the present U.N.

Understandably, some suggest that once born, the Covenant may eventually sunset its own existence after its reform work is done.

The Covenant conversation launched in earnest on Jan. 23, 2017, when a panel of like-minded voices assembled in the Rayburn House Office Building. Rep. Trent Franks (R-Ariz.), who currently supports a bill to defund the U.N., opened the launch proceedings by declaring, “This is a critically important issue. The United Nations started out with a noble charter ... But it has become an anti-American, anti-Semitic, anti-democratic, anti-freedom mob ... We need some type of alternative — a Covenant of Democratic Nations ... We need to repeal and replace.”

The launch in Washington, D.C.,

was only the beginning. Additional panels and town hall meetings convened Jan. 31 in Manhattan, Feb. 6 at Palm Beach Synagogue, then in San Francisco, then in the Australian Parliament in Canberra on Feb. 13, and then on to Los Angeles after that.

The latest chapter will be written in Detroit at 5 p.m. on Sunday, April 24, at the Corners, 2075 Walnut Lake Road, West Bloomfield, when a panel, chaired by this writer, lays out the case. Panelists include former U.S. House Intelligence Committee chairman Pete Hoekstra, ZOA-MI president Sheldon L. Freilich, George Washington University law professor Martin Adelman and MSU civil rights icon Dr. William Anderson, who fought alongside Martin Luther King for equal treatment for all. The free event is sponsored by ZOA-MI, Spill the Honey, StandWithUs, EMET and others.

In many ways, the League of Nations began with a speech, Woodrow Wilson’s 14 Points. The United Nations began with a short, written declaration. For the Covenant of Democratic Nations, the conversation has now begun. ➔

Human rights advocate Edwin Black is the author of IBM and the Holocaust and the initiator of the Covenant of the Democratic Nations effort.

During a swing through Michigan, Edwin Black will also participate at 12:30 p.m. Sunday, April 23, at Congregation Beth Shalom at the unveiling of a bust of Raoul Wallenberg by sculptor Daniel Biber.

guest column

Bittersweet Shabbat

All day, I debated whether to go to the Re//Turning program through The Well. The planned event was a Shabbat service and dinner at Temple Beth El. No, not the one on Telegraph and 14 Mile. The one on Woodward Avenue and now known as Bethel Community Transformation Center (see last week’s cover story).

Rabbi Dan Horwitz’ promise of a “truly breathtaking” sanctuary won over my photographer side and muted my sense of walking through a trigger wire to set off uncontrollable emotion. Yes, I snapped some photos. And, yes, I snapped crying through the entire service.

I am writing to share my experience of the deeply moving evening. I will preface and say if the things I say offend you, I am sorry. I did feel joy. We all love to read about beautiful Jewish gatherings and new beginnings. I also felt anger and pain. And I am sure some readers will think I am not entitled to such judgment as I did not live during the Jewish migration out of Detroit and even today am an irregular contributor to the Jewish community.



Jane Gazman

Yes, the sanctuary is breathtaking. Breathtaking like a full-force punch in the gut. But it is obvious, once, when she was loved and maintained, she was breathtaking like today’s Fox Theater. The details, though

crumbling, are exquisite. There are paintings on the ceiling. One looks like a young man arriving at Ellis Island. I would love to know the story of the art.

There is no question Temple Beth El was built with no expense spared. I walked to the second floor, having confirmed which stairs are safe. I saw a pillow pushed through broken glass to keep the cold out. I saw familiar long bookshelves without a single text. I saw the home next door. Falling to pieces.

The thing most unsettling to me is our abandonment of our synagogue. We moved a half-hour away, and we completely forgot about her for decades. Let me rephrase. We acted like she left with us and never returned. And she is still right there on Woodward. She is reminiscing about our weddings and bar/bat

mitzvahs and sermons and gatherings. She never forgot about us. And I am a stranger to her congregation, and yet my heart engaged deeply and I felt her and I was so grateful I made the decision to come.

We must start again somewhere, and The Well event was a meaningful return (see page 32). The synagogue needs investment as does her community. Writing a check is easy for some. But it’s not for me and it’s not for many. Let’s organize. Let’s be a part of the community we once called home. Let’s return Temple Beth El and her surrounding Detroit community to a place of joy. ➔

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