

Diving into Durban II

From the August 1, 2008 *National Review Online*

August 6, 2008
by [Anne Bayefsky](#)

Just before the summer recess, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs produced an enlightening, tangible example of multilateralism Barack Obama-style. The Committee recommended House Resolution 1361 concerning the forthcoming United Nations anti-racism conference known as Durban II. In one and the same breath, it acknowledged the anti-semitism embedded in the 2001 Durban Declaration, and then refused to support a boycott of the follow-up conference intended to implement it. For the overwhelmingly Democratic sponsors, denying legitimacy to the United Nations isn't on the radar screen — no matter what.

Durban II — known formally as the Durban Review Conference — is scheduled for April 2009 in Geneva. HR 1361 admits the problem: "Whereas . . . the "Durban Declaration . . . wrongly branded Israel's treatment of Palestinians as racist." In other words, it included a form of that old U.N. canard, Zionism is racism.

What do Obama-style multilateralists then do when faced with such ugly realities? You guessed it: meet the racists on their playing field and speechify. Or as HR 1361 expresses it: "adhere to the agreed framework of the 2009 Durban Review Conference and its previously agreed upon goals and parameters and . . . urge Member States of the preparatory committee to return to decisionmaking by consensus."

Seemingly unbeknownst to the Foreign Affairs members, the preparatory committee of Durban II has always operated by consensus. The perfect storm of a Libyan chair, the African regional group led around by the nose by spokesperson Egypt, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, say "jump." The European Union says "how high?" And life on the Committee has been going smoothly ever since.

The "agreed framework of the 2009 Durban Review Conference" was adopted at the first preparatory committee session last August by consensus. It includes this purpose: "foster the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action." That's the same Declaration that "wrongly branded" Israel as racist. How exactly does the Foreign Affairs Committee propose to adhere to this "agreed upon goal and parameter"?

The title of the resolution provides a clue: "Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that the United States should lead a high-level diplomatic effort to . . . ensure that the Durban Review Conference serves as a forum to review commitments to combat all forms of racism." Sounds benign enough. It's just that the 98 percent of U.N. member states that didn't walk out of Durban I (like the United States and Israel) or make

oral reservations (like Canada), committed themselves to combating the form of racism said to be perpetrated by Israel against Palestinians.

The nub of the Obama-Democratic foreign policy, therefore, amounts to this. Wish the unpleasant facts away. Or when anti-semitism is shouted in your face, ask your interlocutor to repeat it as if you must have heard it wrong the first time.

HR 1361 reminds us why Secretary Colin Powell pulled the U.S. delegation out of Durban I. It quotes his words: "you do not combat racism by conferences that produce declarations containing hateful language, some of which is a throwback to the days of "Zionism equals racism;" or supports the idea that we have made too much of the Holocaust; or suggests that apartheid exists in Israel; or that singles out only one country in the world — Israel — for censure and abuse." In other words, Powell held that an anti-racism platform built on the inequality of Jews was wrong, period — a poisoned well.

Obama-Democrats appear to believe just the opposite, and are prepared to claim that the detriment to Jews from Durban I can be isolated and weighed against the benefits to other minorities. Among other things, H.Res. 1361 applauds the Durban Declaration for "mark[ing] an important recognition of the historic wounds caused by slavery, colonialism, and related ongoing racism and racial discrimination . . . [faced by] people of African descent, people of Asian descent, and indigenous peoples. . . ." For Obama Democrats, the U.N. glass is always half-full, whether you're drinking human refuse or champagne.

The upshot of the resolution is to "call on the President to urge other heads of state to condition participation in the 2009 Durban Review Conference process on concrete action by the United Nations and United Nations Member States to ensure that it and they will reject any effort to inject anti-Semitism, hatred, and discrimination in all its forms onto the agenda of the Conference." Since the agenda of the conference is already to implement the Durban Declaration mantra of Israeli racism — assuredly part of anti-semitism in all its forms — there is only one message that HR 1361 really sends to a President Obama. Go man, go!

The Canadians have taken a different approach, declaring last January they will not go. They want no part of such a U.N. platform and have been prepared to take the heat from minority groups which forget that for racists, Jews are just the appetizer.

Astonishingly, however, HR 1361 deliberately covers up the Canadian boycott. Fudging their marked differences in approach, it "commends the Governments of the United States, France, Canada, Israel, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands that have declared their intentions not to participate in any United Nations Durban Review Conference that . . . promotes hate. . . ."

Here is what Canada's minister of foreign affairs and secretary of state actually said in a joint statement: "[We] had hoped that the preparatory process for the 2009 Durban Review Conference would remedy the mistakes of the past...We have concluded that, despite our efforts, it will not. Canada will therefore not participate in the 2009 conference. Canada will continue to focus its efforts on genuine anti-racism initiatives that make a difference."

In effect, HR 1361 represents an effort to design the wetsuit for an Obama dive into the swamps of U.N.-led multilateralism. In the meantime, the muck just got thicker. In the last month Iran became a member of the "Group of Friends of the Chair," an informal group of states charged with taking the first steps towards producing a Durban II manifesto. The "friends" — who also include Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and Egypt — met twice in July and will report to the "Intersessional Open-Ended Intergovernmental Working Group" in early September in Geneva. Working Group Chairman Zohrab Mnatsakanian describes the role of his friends as "engaging in brainstorming and consolidating inputs."

Can you imagine the benefits to humankind of the defenders of Holocaust-denial, torture, amputation, stoning, and female genital mutilation, brainstorming about human rights? Apparently, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs can. Otherwise, their 2,000-word bill could have been much simpler. "Hell no, we won't go" would have sufficed.

Anne Bayefsky is a senior fellow at Hudson Institute.

©Copyright 2007 Hudson Institute. All Rights Reserved

Presented with permission of author.