

New Legislation in US Congress Seeks to Punish South Africa

The Bill's language omits any mention of the Palestinian death toll at the hands of Israel, but accuses the ANC of supporting 'malign actors,' writes LINDA PENTZ GUNTER

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New Bill has been introduced into the US Congress that effectively seeks to punish South Africa after it sought a ruling from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) last month that Israel is committing genocide in its war against Palestinians in Gaza.

The bi-partisan legislation — the US-South Africa Bilateral Relations Review Act — was brought by two members of Congress, Republican John James of Michigan and Democrat Jared Moskowitz of Florida. It asks the Biden administration to determine within 30 days of the Act's passage, "whether South Africa has engaged in activities that undermine United States national security or foreign policy interests." It is unclear whether the Bill will have wide support.

A change in US relations with South Africa brought on by passage of the James-Moskowitz Bill could hurt South Africa economically, as it currently receives trade benefits through the African Growth and Opportunity Act.

The Bill makes more than two dozen accusations against South Africa, some of which border on the "totally trivial and embarrassingly dubious," said University of Johannesburg sociology professor, Patrick Bond, in an interview with SABC News.

The Bill's language is replete with the customary rhetoric that conflates criticism of the Netanyahu government with anti-semitism. It accuses South Africa of "siding with malign actors" such as Hamas, Iran, Russia and China, and the ruling ANC of having a "hardline

stance of consistently accusing Israel of practicing apartheid.”

Black South Africans endured decades of bitter cruelty under the white apartheid regime. Countless people were illegally detained, tortured and murdered. A peaceful transition of power occurred in 1994 when ANC leader, Nelson Mandela, assumed the presidency, having been imprisoned for 27 years during which time he was labelled a “terrorist” by the US government.

The new US Bill mentions only the October 7 2023 “unprovoked and unprecedented horrendous attack” by Hamas, while avoiding any reference to Israel’s subsequent massacre of what is now more than 26,000 Palestinians, or the history that preceded the Hamas assault. Instead, it condemns what are now widely held opinions around the world that Israel escalated the violence after the Hamas massacre, has for decades occupied Palestinian land illegally, is committing a genocide and is guilty of war crimes.

Some of the more petty accusations in the Bill question the ANC’s competency to govern, accusing it of failing to provide adequate public services such as regular power supplies, efficient rail and mining operations and effective management of health epidemics, none of which have any bearing on the war in Gaza.

The Bill also cites ANC meetings with political leaders in China and Iran, diplomatic ventures that are hardly exclusive to South Africa. Indeed, President Joe Biden personally met Chinese leader Xi Jinping last November at a California summit.

But the Bill also overtly attacks South Africa for filing what it calls “a politically motivated suit in the International Court of Justice wrongfully accusing Israel of committing genocide.”

While the ICJ did not categorically rule that Israel was committing a genocide, it did call on Israel to prevent acts of genocide in Gaza and to punish those who may have already committed or incited such acts. It also ordered Israel to take immediate steps to improve the humanitarian situation for civilians in Gaza.

Instead, Israel has announced it will next attack the city of Rafah in south Gaza, the last refuge for around one million fleeing Palestinians, crowded into an area that Israel once promised would be a safe haven. “No-one will stop us, not The Hague, not the axis of evil and not anyone else,” Benjamin Netanyahu had said in a defiant speech after the court’s January ruling.

Last week, President Biden finally blanched at Israel’s latest acts of brutality, saying “the conduct of the response in Gaza, in the Gaza Strip, has been over the top.” But the US has done little material to alter its continued support and still refuses to describe Israel’s actions as a genocide or call for a cease-fire.

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Featured image: SOLIDARITY: Activists wave a giant Palestinian flag and South Africa flags during a

protest demanding countries to resume funding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinians Refugees (UNRWA), near the European Union headquarters in Beirut, Lebanon

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