

Ripping Up the Evidence: How Israel Maintains Global Impunity

From Chaim Herzog in 1975 to Gilad Erdan last year, Israeli officials have taken dramatic steps to avoid accountability for the state's crimes

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Global Research, June 21, 2022

[Middle East Eye](#) 20 June 2022

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [United Nations](#)

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On 10 November 1975, the late Chaim Herzog, then [Israel](#)’s ambassador to the United Nations and the father of President Isaac Herzog, stood on the podium at the UN General Assembly and [dramatically tore up the text](#) of Resolution 3379, adopted that same day.

[Resolution 3379](#) declared that “Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination”. Israel was shocked. A major boulevard in Haifa named in honour of the UN was swiftly renamed “Zionism Boulevard” by the Haifa City Council. What a joke of fate: the street once named in gratitude to the UN for [declaring in 1947 its support](#) for Israel’s establishment as a state was renamed three decades later due to a different decision of the same organisation.

Chaim Herzog was an immediate superhero in Israel. It was the peak moment of his career. Israelis deemed his theatrical gesture a fitting response to what the country perceived as an act of global [antisemitism](#). Nearly all Israelis, the younger me included, held that opinion at the time. Comparing [Zionism to racism](#)? It could only be antisemitism.

Years passed. The UN [rescinded that decision](#) in December 1991, but another few decades later, everything looks different again. Zionism, which today is essentially about the preservation of Jewish supremacy in a country inhabited by two peoples, no longer seems too far off from how it was presented in the original UN decision.

Likewise, the gesture made by Herzog senior at the UN podium – shredding the pages of a decision that the majority of the world’s nations had accepted as lawful – seems much less appropriate today than it did at the time.

Human rights violations

What has shifted not an inch since the adoption of Resolution 3379 in 1975 is Israel’s

attitude towards international organisations and [international law](#). Nearly half a century later, we find the current Israeli ambassador to the UN, Gilad Erdan, doing something similar. On 29 October 2021, he stood on the same stage and [tore up the latest annual report](#) of the UN Human Rights Council.

This time, the performance was perceived as repulsive and violent, and earned much less respect. But Erdan also suggested [consigning the report](#) to its rightful place in “the dustbin of antisemitism”.

That Israel is not alone in its human rights violations – that other countries behave likewise, but earn far less international censure – is considered adequate to justify Israel’s complete failure to respond to the accusations levelled against it.

It’s like a driver caught speeding recklessly, who tries to avoid legal consequences by saying that everyone drives that way. This is a useless ploy when used on traffic cops, and it should be similarly useless when directed at the institutions of the international community.

So, here is the story in a nutshell: a country established thanks to the power of the UN and the international community acts to undermine the same international bodies the moment they become critical of its behaviour. Just note how compliant Israeli media reports on members of the various international commissions of inquiry into Israeli actions.

Consider the most recent portrayals of Navi Pillay, who [spent six years](#) as the UN high commissioner for human rights and now chairs the UN [commission of inquiry](#) into Israel’s bombing of high-rise towers in Gaza in May 2021: Pillay “is mistaken”, “hates Israel” or “is an antisemite”.

Shooting the messenger

Not everything was made public on Israel’s efforts to destroy the reputation of Richard Goldstein, who [headed the UN team of inquiry](#) into the 2008-09 Gaza war. Still less is known about its attempts to target Fatou Bensouda, the former chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, after she finally summoned the courage to [open an inquiry](#) into suspected war crimes by Israel.

Israel repeatedly employs an old but effective strategy: if you cannot handle the message, shoot the messenger. Following the decision to open that inquiry, [Bensouda resigned](#), and nothing has been done since. UN commission members probing the latest Gaza war have been refused entry to Israel, as the [government declines to cooperate](#) with their work.

Israel has much to hide. Yet, even that has not provided incentive enough to scale up the investigations.

This is working for Israel. Erdan has just been [elected as a vice president](#) of the UN General Assembly. Investigations of Israel are conducted at a suspiciously leisurely pace. Let’s not even mention the word sanctions; what was fine for dealing with [Russia](#) just a few weeks after its [invasion of Ukraine](#) has never been on the agenda with regards to an amazingly similar [occupation](#), more than half a century old and counting, by Israel.

The result: nobody accused, no accountability, no price exacted and no punishment.

This whole progression has led to an inconceivable situation. It features an occupying

power, whose continued occupation is internationally recognised as illegal; whose “temporary” occupation has long since become permanent; and whose security forces commit war crimes in the occupied territories on a regular basis, since that is the only way to overcome the legitimate resistance to the occupation. No one is investigated, charged, tried or punished – not the country itself, nor its citizens who carry out these actions.

Automatic impunity

Since the judicial system in Israel also systematically absolves those who [carry out such crimes](#), a situation is created whereby Israel, its government, its military and other organisations operate with an impunity that is automatic, blind, continuous and almost total.

Soldiers serving in the occupied territories know very well that nearly anything they do is treated as permissible: shooting, killing, abusing, humiliating. They will never be punished, not by Israel nor by anyone else. Every day there are more killings, politically motivated arrests without trial, collective punishment, [home demolitions](#), land confiscation, torture and humiliation, [settlement expansion](#), and exploitation of natural resources.

No one is ever held responsible, beyond those who try to change this distorted situation. If a report is written, Israel will not even read it, and its ambassador will shred the text on the world’s most respected international stage. If anyone dares to launch an inquiry, Israel will quickly make it disappear.

The rest of the world might take a hard line about Israel rhetorically, yet it instantly comes to Israel’s defence in the face of any potentially damaging action. No other country has anything like [Israel’s spectrum of impunity](#). No other army is treated as guiltlessly, despite perpetuating an occupation and committing all the avoidable and unavoidable crimes that are part and parcel of this illegal situation.

Has Israel ever acknowledged even one indefensible action before the international community? Has the international community ever dared to take a genuine step towards bringing the guilty parties to justice?

There has been no accountability whatsoever for the long list of crimes committed in the territories under Israel’s occupation. Just ask Erdan how this works; to keep this system going, you need only to stand at the most respected podium on earth and tear up the evidence of your transgressions.

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Featured image: Gilad Erdan, Israel’s ambassador to the UN, tears up a report from the UN Human Rights Council on 29 October 2021 (Twitter/@giladerdan1)

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