

[Business as Usual at the U.N. Human Rights Council](#)

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It has been business as usual at the U.N. Human Rights Council, meeting in Geneva this month.

Here's why it matters.

Notwithstanding the need for urgent attention to such serial abusers as Syria's Assad regime, which continues to barrel-bomb its own citizens in the midst of a destructive civil war, and Iran, which most certainly vies for the lead in any number of human rights abuses, including the execution of juvenile offenders, Israel is still singled out for special opprobrium.

If this sounds like a broken record, it is. Each year, all countries up for discussion are lumped together into one agenda item, while Israel is always separated out from the rest for individual scrutiny under Item "7" which applies solely to the Jewish state, the only democracy in the Middle East. Subsumed under that item this year are a basket of separate resolutions, as well as six reports. The resolutions, which make no pretence at being objective, hammer Israel for "the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory," settlements, human rights abuses in the Golan Heights and a call for Palestinian self-determination.

The special reports include updates on the infamous Goldstone Commission Report, which was written in the wake of the 2009 Gaza war, and which suggested Israel might be guilty of war crimes. Judge Richard Goldstone, who chaired the group which wrote the report, ultimately backed away from its one-sided findings. In the U.N. system, however, vituperation against Israel has a life of its own, so the report lives on.

What does all of this have to do with the real world in 2016? The Middle East is not only in chaos, it is in meltdown mode in Iraq and Syria. Libya has now become the new ISIS target of opportunity. Iran, soon to be flush with cash from the nuclear deal with the P5+1, sends its Revolutionary Guards to Syria, along with its wholly-owned subsidiary Hezbollah, the terrorist organization that has taken over control of Lebanon, to back the Assad regime. Hundreds of thousands of lives have been lost in this conflict, Christians and Yazidis have been massacred and subject to humiliation, eviction and dispersal, with millions becoming part of the biggest refugee migration in decades.

This situation has received scant attention from a U.N. body "re-formed and reformed" 10 years ago to address real human rights crises. Its 47 members have really done no such thing. It is dominated by countries from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Non-Aligned Movement, and something called the Like-Minded Group of Developing Countries, said to represent 50 percent of the world's population, whose worldview includes protecting many of those countries who are in the first line of human rights abusers.

This session, as a result of membership rotation, the United States is not on the Council. Nevertheless, it has spoken out strongly against the double standard Israel receives at the hands of the members of the body. Neither is Canada, which has been a staunch defender of Israel over the past decade. The EU countries choose not to participate in the debate on Item 7, though several of its member states, critical of Israel, find a way to do so. The EU could act more forcefully against this on-going diplomatic charade, but it refrains from doing that—another example of how its actions often don't measure up to the values it claims to uphold.

As for the Palestinians it once again proves that, though largely crowded out of the news because of events in the region, their ability to manipulate the U.N. system continues. Whether it was attaining full membership at UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), non-member state status at the General Assembly, or getting its flag flown in front of the U.N. in New York and other U.N. venues (including Geneva), they continue to plug away, not feeling any pressure to return to the negotiating table with Israel. And why should they? The Palestinians feel they have the international community's blindly supportive wind at their back—even at a time when the Middle East neighborhood in which the Palestinians are based, is imploding.

One European diplomat I met in Geneva, after a spirited discussion about how annual denunciations of Israel only embolden the Palestinians and discourage the Israelis, told me point blank that if they were to say "no" to Item 7, "the Palestinian door would be closed to us." My rejoinder was that if the EU—which has often been the Palestinians' friend in court and which has for years funded the salaries of Palestinian Authority (PA) civil servants—really sought to help resolve the Israeli-Palestinian issue, they would spend their time urging the PA to move to the negotiating table, rather than allow this yearly lacerating of Israel to continue.

So as the Middle East burns, Nero—in this case—the Human Rights Council, fiddles. An aversion to doubling down on real abusers of human rights, and a propensity to let the anti-Israel rhetoric flow in Item 7 and its accompanying reports, speaks to the hypocrisy and emptiness of the Council and the system that has produced it.

Living in a time where, from our smart phone screens we can learn, real time, about the abuses of human rights everywhere, a global conscience is AWOL. Each day it stays that way, real opportunities to help those who suffer, pass. Instead, at the Human Rights Council and elsewhere, there is always time to unfairly castigate Israel.

What a terrible waste.

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