

Israel's influence at the UN

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It is evident that the international community, through the United Nations, has supported and consolidated Israel's colonial project in Palestine. Israel has consistently manipulated terms and concepts of international law to render them acceptable or worthy only of the slightest tinge of condemnation, and its power to do so is heavily dependent upon the international community.

Without its backing, the colonial enterprise would have collapsed long ago. However, since recognising Israel and even before, by allowing Zionism a platform at an international level, the UN has differentiated between the political violence of colonialism as an ideology and what Israel is implementing on the ground. The mere fact that the UN treats Israel like any state, regardless of its ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Palestinian population has enabled Israel to define its action as emanating from a state rather than a colonial imposition on Palestinian territory.

There are precedents which contributed to the current disregard for human rights violations inflicted upon the Palestinian population. The Balfour Declaration, which called for the establishment of a national home in Palestine for the Jewish people,

can be considered the prequel upon which the UN emulated its policies. Without consulting the indigenous population, a portion over Palestine was bequeathed to the Zionists. With the Declaration incorporated into the British Mandate, the recommendation was elevated to the status of an international treaty after which, through planned immigration quotas, the Zionist movement proceeded with its plans to continue its initial colonisation of Palestine.

The 1947 Partition Plan, now hypocritically recognised by the UN as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, rewarded Zionist colonisation with 57% of historic Palestine upon recommendations from the Peel Commission which were rejected by Palestinians. The UN decision facilitated the next step of ethnically cleansing the Palestinian population from the remaining territory. Between British and later UN promotion of colonising Palestine, Zionism availed itself of diplomatic opportunities, particularly in the aftermath of the second World War, to justify, in the eyes of the international community, the destruction of an indigenous population residing in their own land. Furthermore, Zionism was able to influence the UN due to one particular omission – there was never any consultation with Palestinians from the international organisation, hence all action was taken upon Zionist fabrications.

Such was the UN's refusal to involve the indigenous Palestinian population, that in 1948, when Zionist paramilitary gangs implemented the infamous Plan Dalet which systematically required the ethnic cleansing and forced displacement of Palestinians to establish the state of Israel, there was no objection by the UN to the bombing of Palestinian villages. The lack of interest exhibited by the UN in protecting Palestinian rights is echoed in Israel's refusal to recognise its accountability for Palestinian displacement and implementation of the Palestinian right of return, upon the grounds that the state of Israel had not yet been established when the Nakba occurred.

Eliminating the early influence, therefore, even before international acceptance and recognition were bestowed upon Israel, would impair understanding of the narrative that is unfolding at an alarming rate. It might seem that at a diplomatic level, Palestine is swiftly disappearing. To make such an observation in the present; and dissociated from history, implies novelty. This is not the case, however. What we are observing today is a continuation of the earlier process which has been catapulted into further prominence by former US President Barack Obama's last gesture prior to the end of his tenure when refusing to wield the veto power during the passing of Resolution 2334, as well as the belligerence of current US President Donald Trump.

Besides thwarting the narrative of Palestinians since the 1947 Partition Plan, Israel refused accountability and responsibility for the Nakba by claiming the absence of the colonial state at the time the Zionist paramilitaries embarked upon widespread

torture, displacement, murder and disappearance of Palestinians. The philosophy of exclusivity and impunity, directly derived from European examples of colonialism, was embraced by the international community, given the process incorporated the elimination of Palestinians from the equation.

Inventing a state required the historical imaginary to be disseminated at the expense of the indigenous population. The Nakba, therefore, does not form part of the Israeli narrative and neither do the associated atrocities. Consolidating the absence of Palestinians in Zionist narratives aided in shaping the diplomatic process in which Palestinian rights are discussed through a colonial lens. With Israeli demands prioritised over Palestinian legitimate rights, the UN resorted to resolutions and declarations which, if analysed thoroughly, become clearly enshrined loopholes enabling Israel to impose their interpretations and, as a result, exclusion of Palestinians from their own rights.

The Palestinian right of return is one such example. While it imposes conditions upon Palestinians for return “the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the latest practical date,” there is no impediment to settler colonial expansion. In recent years, the elimination of the latter has resulted in Israel making diplomatic gains at the UN, due to the international community’s acceptance of Israel’s fabricated exclusion.

International accommodation of Israel continued with the settler colonial state making inroads at the UN. In 2014, Israel was nominated to chair the UN Special Committee on Decolonisation and joined the Western European and Others Group (WEOG). In 2016, the settler-colonial state was nominated by WEOG to assume chairmanship of the UN General Assembly’s Sixth Committee, which is “the primary forum for the consideration of legal questions in the General Assembly.” This year, Israeli Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon was also elected as vice president of the UN General Assembly.

With Trump’s presidency, and also in light of Obama’s departing and belated gesture over Resolution 2334 regarding settlement expansion, Israel has increased its lobbying at the institution, emboldened by an ally which, unlike the previous, refuses to conceal the US pro-Israel bias. The influence is exerted through two main tactics: incessant tirades against the UN for its alleged anti-Israel bias as well as joint efforts between the US and Israel to eliminate Palestine from international visibility.

There seems to be no end to the cycle of UN bashing by Israel, for which it continues to reap additional rewards in the form of diplomatic recognition. More importantly for the Israeli narrative, the current UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has also ruled out the possibility of decolonisation while disseminating at an international level

the dangerous myth of anti-Zionism being equated to anti-Semitism.

Last June, US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley also declared she would block any senior Palestinian role at the UN based upon the premise that the US does not recognise Palestinian statehood. She also threatened to pull out of the UN Human Rights Council over alleged “anti-Israel bias.” The incessant efforts to elevate Israeli influence have not gone unnoticed. In a recent speech last week, Haley declared that the UN has become “action-oriented”: “It is a new day at the UN. What you are now seeing is the Israel-bashing has become more balanced.”

The phrase used by Haley should be interpreted for what it is – UN acquiescence to Israeli narratives has contributed to disappearing Palestine from the international arena. With every concession granted to Israel, Palestine recedes even further, so that the diplomatic waiting game to which the Palestinian Authority agreed to becomes a permanent fixture and one that will ultimately be clearly included in rhetoric with an equivalence to that of the two-state paradigm. Regardless of what statements and resolutions are passed and in which Palestine is disguised as the protagonist, the reality is that each statement is crafted to represent Israel’s demands of completing its colonial expansion.

Compounding this declaration of UN appeasement with Guterres’s statement that there is no solution other than the two-state compromise and the result is evident: the UN is completely immersed in protecting Israel’s colonial project at the expense of even ridiculing its professed agenda of human rights. Here lies Israel’s strength. For a colonial entity with a fabricated history, its best allies are an imperialist country and an international organisation which retains its humanitarian façade while incessantly promoting human rights violations and rewarding the aggressors with prominence and impunity.