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This absolute car crash of an interview by [@AgnesCallamard](#) & [@philipluther](#) makes for an instructive read. Remember, they weren't ambushed on some obscure topic, but asked a few simple questions on the very thing they flew out here to present.



**Amnesty to Tol: No double standard in accusing Israel, but not China, ...**

Our diplomatic correspondent conducted a lengthy, mutually frustrating conversation with the Amnesty officials behind the 'apartheid' report. We're publishing it in full

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/amnesty-to-toi-no-double-standard-in-accusing-israel-bu...>

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And yet their responses to simple questions are a mix of exasperation, ignorance, self-contradiction, and conspiratorial magical thinking. Let's look at a few examples.

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It's almost comical how unprepared [@philipluther](#) is for the most obvious questions. The most obvious would be, why the obsessive focus on Israel in the human rights community?

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Throughout Luther goes back and forth, either denying that there is an outsized focus on Israel to petulantly insisting that it is entirely justified.

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**you'll get to others. At the same time, you look across human rights organizations, they also are putting particular emphasis, it just happens to be on Israel. You go the UN, it happens to be that there are permanent....**

**Luther:** I have to push back. You're now trying to construct an, I don't know, a web of conspiracy — that there's some form of, I don't know what.

**Can you explain it, as someone from inside the human rights community?**

**Luther:** Again, I'm not sure what the problem is.

**You don't see a problem that Israel is focused on ahead of other countries, consistently...?**

**Luther:** I don't think there's evidence for that. I can only speak for Amnesty. You're presenting this view that we're ahead of others. But a lot

On the apartheid accusation, he insists that there's nothing special about accusing Israel because Amnesty has also leveled this charge at Myanmar. This is a red herring. There is nothing comparable in the two Amnesty reports and nothing comparable in the two situations.

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**So Amnesty International, for whatever internal reasons, comes and investigates Israel first with this very harsh...**

**Luther:** Not first, Myanmar was first.

The Myanmar report deals with specific policies of institutionalized discrimination and forcible population transfers in Rakhine State (one of 21 regions in the country) affecting a minority that comprises roughly 1% of Myanmar's total population.



**"Caged without a roof": Apartheid in Myanmar's Rakhine State**

"Caged without a roof": Apartheid in Myanmar's Rakhine State Since August, Myanmar's security forces have waged a devastating campaign of violence against the Rohingya minority in Rakhine State. Myan...

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/11/myanmar-apartheid-in-rakhine-state/>

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The Israel report casts the entire existence of Israel as a tainted enterprise, a national touched by evil. The very basis of Israeli society is a putative crime.

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The Burmese government could conceivably implement each of Amnesty's policy recommendations tomorrow and Myanmar would continue to exist.

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The recommendations proposed for Israel would end the existence of a Jewish state and leave its six million Jews vulnerable to mass murder and expulsion.

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Another big difference: The claims against Myanmar will not be used to mobilize violence against ethnic Burmese around the world.

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And another: The Myanmar report is a response to an actual event happening. A massive campaign of state-sponsored violence got underway in 2016 and took a particularly violent turn in 2017. No surprise that a major human rights org issues a damning report in 2017.

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On Israel, no one is able to point out an event that would suddenly bring three major human rights organizations to all come to the determination in the same year that some dramatic threshold had been crossed.

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Israel conquered the West Bank and Gaza in 1967 and ruled over both directly until the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994. The complicated patchwork of self-rule and shared control in the West Bank is the result of the OSLO II agreement in 1995.

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The only major change since then was the 2005 withdrawal of Israeli soldiers and settlers from the 20% of the Gaza Strip that had not been handed over in 1994. There has been no legal change since then. What changed exactly in 2021?

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The fact that so many self-styled human rights organizations all arrived at the conclusion at the same time despite there being no legal change and no landmark event on the ground is proof that anti-Israel activism is a social activity more than a political one.

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The Israel report is sparked by no such event, but rather by a spiritual ferment within the human rights community. On this [@philipluther](#) is honest, even if his choice of phrasing is a bit obscurantist.

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**Luther:** I cannot tell you the strategic reasons in terms of the focus [on Israeli apartheid]. I can just give you in generic terms.

The “debate” he’s referring to is, of course, the release by other flagship human rights organizations of large reports accusing Israel of apartheid, which is a convoluted bit of reasoning.

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**Which are the countries that you went into attempting to determine whether there is apartheid or not?**

**Luther:** So far, we have applied the framework for Israel/Palestine on the one hand, and Myanmar. Now part of the reason for that on Israel/Palestine is because there is a growing debate on the subject. We thought it was absolutely right and proper that we brought up....

**A growing debate where?**

**Luther:** On Israel/Palestine. That’s one of the considerations. When you’re looking at the question of whether you’re going to be looking at any particular place, well, is there a debate on it? There are external factors, that’s part of the strategic landscape. It’s, Do we have something to say on it, is it something that we might have a contribution.

In other words, what the organization needed was a renewed public avowal...

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...of central tenets of faith in its larger ecclesiastical community as to who is evil, who is outside the community of the good, who it is that stands in the way of the message of light, whose powerful networks seek to divert the righteous from the path of truth.

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Repeatedly [@Lazar Berman](#) tries to understand if Amnesty will apply this framework in its investigation of other countries and never gets a straight answer.

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**And I’m trying to understand why the range of factors comes together and puts you in a situation where you say Israel is going to be examined in this apartheid lens, but 193 other countries are not.**

**Luther:** But you’re assuming that we will not be looking at this question through this lens.

**In the next year, are you going to look at another country through this lens?**

**Luther:** We are, but we are not going to say what.

**How many countries?**

**Luther:** I don’t know, and that’s not my remit. But we are exploring it on several other countries at the moment. Whether we will end up with that conclusion, I don’t know.

[@philipluther](#) resents being asked about China because he's "not a China expert."

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**That strengthens the case for Chinese apartheid.**

**Luther:** Yes, and maybe we'll get there. I don't know. I'm not a China expert. The question is, as I've said, whether you're doing work on institutionalized discrimination more broadly, and then whether you are

He's just the MENA guy, so [@Lazar Berman](#) asks him about some MENA countries, including Turkey and Syria. The question of "systematic domination" yields no more than an impatient "alright" and an indignant charge that the person asking the question is being unfair.

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**Do you talk about a regime intentionally trying to oppress and dominate another race?**

**Luther:** No we don't.

**Why? It seems quite clear in all these countries that there is that element.**

**Luther:** Alright.

Remember, the conversation is taking place because of an allegation of racist practices, yet Luther treats the question of eagerness to pursue one group and not another as impertinent. [@Lazar Berman](#) is "hung up on the idea" that is "somehow so important,"...

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...but [@philipluther](#) disagrees. He does not spot the irony.

Over and over [@Lazar Berman](#) tries to get him to say something about the Israel obsession of the human rights world, especially of the UNHCR.

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**Do you think that's not true? In Turkey – Turkey and the Kurds. It seems so obvious that there is a systematic attempt to dominate and oppress another racial group. Is that the language Amnesty would use in that situation – without using the word apartheid for some reason – with Turkey and the Kurds?**

**Luther:** Maybe we'll get there. I don't know. Again, I don't know enough about Turkey to be able to comment on the details of the differences.

**Isn't it curious that you haven't gotten there yet?**

**Luther:** With respect, you're hung up on this idea that, somehow, when one's doing one thing in one place and one thing in another, that is somehow so important. I just disagree with you...

Each time he gets to asking about the permanent item dedicated to Israel (nothing of the sort exists for any other country), [@philipluther](#) interrupts him and says he is unaware of any evidence.

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One gets the impression from the flippant response that [@philipluther](#) has genuinely never stopped to think about this. He's annoyed that [@Lazar Berman](#) has asked him a straightforward question about the field he works in.

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Let's imagine a village with 193 families in it, and the local police assigns one of its only cops to follow only one family's car and constantly measure its speed, and the tax department goes over every receipt of this same family looking for irregularities,  
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...and a grand jury sits permanently to investigate any possible crimes of this same family, and the local paper has a reporter permanently assigned to sniff out any infidelities or disputes inside the family...

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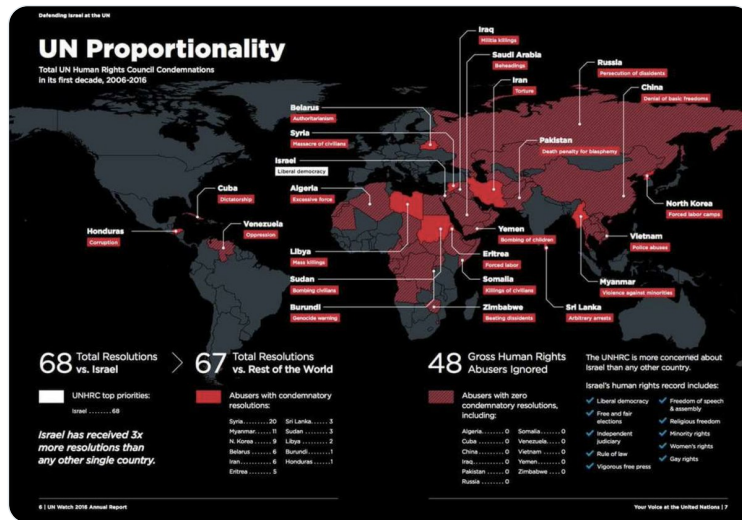
You don't need to be an expert with 20 years experience in the field of human rights to understand what is wrong with this situation.

Mate, your remit is human rights and the Middle East. You're not being asked a question about crop yields in Aragon.

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In nearly every year of its existence, the UN Human Rights Council has devoted more energy to Israel than to all other nations combined. Surely you have an opinion about this. Seems like a notable fact for, um, the topic you get paid to work on and think about.

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Then @philipluther shifts from denying this to embracing it and excusing it dark conspiratorial tones.

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**Ok, let's talk about the fact that there is a debate on it. Israel is under greater scrutiny than other countries...**

**Luther:** I disagree but OK. I mean, arguably, it's managed to shut down scrutiny using the power of its relationships.

**You can look at UN resolutions.**

**Luther:** You can look at UN resolutions, but you can look at UN inaction. Because [Israel] has influence over powerful allies who then manage to stop it, stop the scrutiny. I just totally disagree with you on that.



And that of course is the appeal of anti-Israel activism in the West: the sincerely held belief that by engaging in it you are somehow standing up to dark powerful forces at home. There's a word for this pathology.

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Elsewhere the conspiratorial nonsense is even denser, eg. in the assertion that Israel's democratic procedures, robust legal protections, and culture of self-criticism are really just a trick to make it harder for humans rights activists to see the truth of its apartheid.

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Now that takes less time to disentangle. You still need to get the evidence, but it explains partly why. It's because the Israeli state has made it so difficult to penetrate. They have tried to create a smokescreen around, and of course there is a democratic system, and there are judicial institutions that of course then call the state to account, or at least challenge their decisions. But that's what makes it so challenging in some ways then to disentangle them when you put it all together.

So I would put it back on the Israeli state. In some ways, it ends up being a driver of complexity and a driver of resources unnecessarily spent on investigations by anybody, because it's made so damn complicated.

We can mock [@philipluther](#) for the inanity (it's fun!), but let's not lose sight of what's going on here. A well crafted bit of rhetoric might serve a purpose. But when someone says something so obviously stupid, it usually means they are speaking some deeper truth.

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The "truth" in this case is that those Israelis are so evil that if they appear to be doing something not evil, that must be a deliberate feint that only proves how evil they really are.

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This too is a statement of a widely held belief in activist circles, usually alluded to as some form of "washing."

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Given one last chance to explain the singularity of the Israel obsession, [@philipluther](#) gives the answer that is supposed to settle the question but only reveals even more how unserious his grasp on the conflict is.

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**I still can't understand why Israel gets the apartheid investigation, and you haven't found any other country besides Myanmar within four years that deserves it. It seems not to bother you – maybe it does bother you – that the UN, which is not your organization, that every year there are permanent and recurring condemnations automatically, and not [against] other countries in the same way, not even close. That would seem to me to be...**

**Luther:** How many other countries have a fifty-year occupation?

An occupation is not the cause of a conflict; it is usually the outcome of one, and it lasts as long as the conflict is unresolved. To discuss the occupation without mentioning (1) how it came about and (2) why it persists is manifestly unserious.

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In this case, it came about (1) because a coalition of Arab armies was defeated in a war whose openly stated and broadly celebrated goal was to destroy the Jewish state and murder and expel its people.

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It lasted because (2) following defeat there was a near total refusal to reach any peace agreement which would end the occupation.

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Wherever there has been a willingness to come to terms with Israel, occupied territories have been recovered. But to acknowledge any of this is verboten for Amnesty and the broader human rights community, where there is no conflict only a racist and irredeemably evil Israel.

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“Occupation” as Amnesty uses isn't a legal or territorial description, but an assignment of moral culpability to the Jewish state. This is why it was so important...

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...to Amnesty to redefine occupation in 2005 in a way that the term had never been used before so that it could still be applied to the Gaza Strip.

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The point is that Israel can leave a piece of territory, but the mark of Cain stays with it. This is true regardless of which of three methods Israel might use to try to end the occupation.

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If it endeavors to reach a final status peace deal with the Palestinians, but the Palestinians reject this three times in the same decade and pursue suicidal terror instead, that is Israel's fault.

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If it just leaves a piece of territory entirely without even getting a peace deal, that is an "open-air prison" and Amnesty and other humanitarians will invent whole-cloth a new definition of occupation suited just for that.

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If it carries partial withdrawals in accordance with an international agreement establishing an interim phase which is then frozen because the Palestinian side refuses to reach a final status deal, then...

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...the complicated overlapping power-sharing arrangements get reconciled as "fragmentation" and "parallel legal systems" which form the basis of the apartheid calumny.

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And that's the point of redefining apartheid especially for Israel too (something all three reports, which claim to be based on "international law" but none of which use the actual legal definition of apartheid, and each of which invents another unique one): ...

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...even if Israel were to effect a full and unconditional withdrawal from every bit of disputed territory, it will still be tainted.

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There is one effective way to end the occupation and that is to make peace. Nothing in the Amnesty report and nothing in this interview suggests that [@AgnesCallamard](#) & [@philipluther](#) assign any importance to that.

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They are welcome in Ramallah to sit with the Palestinian president and present their report precisely because no one imagines for a second that they might criticize the PA's human rights violations, its delayed and canceled elections,...

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...its pay-for-slay sponsorship of terrorist families, its antisemitic incitement, or the Holocaust denial of the president himself.

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Their recommendations include no criticism for the refusal to make peace with Israel and no call for any affirmative action that might lead in that direction.

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On the contrary, they insist the Palestinians waste one more generation on demonization of an enemy they can't defeat rather than pursue a reconciliation for the benefit of all. They will fly home. The people they presume to help will stay right where they are.

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