**It’s Time for the U.S. to Reassess Its Role in the U.N.’s Farcical ‘Human Rights Council’**

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​An Evangelical Filipino man who lived several years in Saudi Arabia recently told me about life for a Christian there. It’s a familiar story: hiding from the henchmen of an oppressive regime to worship in house churches, fearing arrest, torture, and worse.

There are approximately 1.5 million Christians in Saudi Arabia, most of them Asian and African migrant servants of the country’s opulent and often brutal ruling class. Abuse and exploitation are commonplace, rape and even murder go unpunished, and some servants disappear without a trace. Raids on house churches include the arrest of women and children. The governments of migrants’ home countries, such as the Philippines, are too weak to be effective advocates for their citizens. Western governments, compromised by a dependence on the Saudi regime’s oil and its sometimes-overstated ability to keep the Middle East stable, tacitly excuse the regime’s appalling human-rights record. Even most Christian leaders in the West are silent.

The mistreated Christian servants of the Gulf states came to mind amid reports that the U.S. is threatening to abstain from membership in the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) following the publication of a U.N. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) report claiming that Israel is guilty of “apartheid.” Under pressure from U.S. ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley, U.N. secretary general António Guterres came out against the report, leading the Jordanian diplomat who originally published it to remove it from the U.N.’s website and subsequently resign her post in protest. A story at the time of the original report’s removal suggested that the ESCWA planned to publish another report likening post-1967 Israel to the antebellum American South.

The whole affair is rather absurd. Living conditions in the “apartheid” state of Israel would seem like heaven to the Christians of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, where actual apartheid might constitute human-rights progress. Saudi Arabia is a member state of the UNHRC, as are Cuba, Iraq, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela — all repressive regimes that refuse to recognize Israel’s right to exist. China and Egypt are also members. Russia lost its seat last year. Only the presence of Iran and North Korea would provide further moral clarity.

It should go without saying that in addition to their abysmal human-rights records, many of these countries have for decades actively or tacitly pursued campaigns of hostility and even violent extremism against America and Israel. The PLO, al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, Hamas, and hosts of other terrorist and extremist organizations could never have sustained operations without active and tacit support for decades from oil-rich states across the Middle East. Most terrorist organizations receive funding through a highly intricate global support network, a mix of shell charities and black-market enterprises that can often be traced back to individuals or organizations in countries that sit on the UNHCR.

Palestinians have always been a political prop for oppressive Middle East regimes, a means by which to direct the hatred of citizens at enemies abroad, thereby consolidating power at home. Westerners have been among the last to catch on to the con. A Palestinian-American, discussing Saudi Arabia, told me last year, “I hope they choke on that oil.” His grievance is legitimate: If but a fraction of the resources committed to the destruction of Israel — almost all from the Persian Gulf — over the decades had been used instead to build a Palestinian state, there would have been peace long ago. In the moments when it cried out for a Gandhi, a Solzhenitsyn, or a John Hume, the Middle East instead got Arafat, Abbas, and Hassan Nasrallah.

Dalia Hatuqa and Gregg Carlstrom, writing in Foreign Affairs, recently captured Palestinian frustration with Hamas’s inability to govern Gaza. “I swear, I don’t care anymore if the Jews control Gaza. I just want to live,” one Palestinian man told them. And yet states such as Qatar and Turkey, putative U.S. allies, continue to support Hamas.

The Obama administration had a policy of engagement with the oppressive members of the UNHRC. It is difficult to see how American interests and values, or those of authentic U.S. allies, were advanced by such an approach. The Trump administration appears to be contemplating the reversal of this policy, and larger changes to the way America engages with the U.N. as a whole.

At a minimum, the U.S.’s continued involvement with the UNHRC should be conditioned on a demand that all member states comply fully with the U.N.’s Universal Declaration on Human Rights, including Article 18, which holds that “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.” Member states should also make a commitment to end support for violent extremism, to bring the sponsors and supporters of extremism within their borders to justice under the law, and to cooperate with the U.S. and its allies in the global fight against violent extremism. Lastly, to ensure that this terrible history is not repeated, member states should prohibit state-funded textbooks that deny recognized genocides and related crimes, or countenance terrorism as a means of pursuing justice.

That the UNHRC is filled with so many despicable actors is no accident. It is part of a campaign to undermine the advancement of human rights by dragging the institutions of the international system into disrepute. If this farce were neatly confined to Manhattan — where U.N. diplomats live in comfort, partly on the American taxpayer’s dime — and if there were nothing real at stake, it would be merely another example of extravagant U.N. waste and corruption. But there is something of paramount importance at stake, as the Filipino, Indian, and African Christians who gather secretly in house churches across the Arab Gulf states each Sunday know.

The days of oppressive regimes playing moral jujitsu at the U.N., and of barbaric actors using the moral weight of the broader array of global institutions against the civilized, should be brought to an end.