The U.S. and Israel Are Preemptively Discrediting The UN's Report On The Gaza War

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The Israeli and U.S. governments have launched a campaign to preemptively discredit a forthcoming United Nations Human Rights Council report on possible war crimes committed during last summer’s Gaza war.

The report, scheduled to be released by the end of June, is based on a nearly yearlong investigation into the six-week conflict between Israel and Hamas, the Palestinian political party that controls the Gaza Strip. According to the UN, Israel’s military incursion into Gaza, dubbed "Operation Protective Edge," [left 2,256 Palestinians, including 1,563 civilians](http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.646065), dead. Sixty-six Israeli soldiers and seven civilians in Israel were also killed in the fighting.

Anticipating that the report would be highly critical of Israel, U.S. State Department spokesman Jeff Rathke reminded reporters Monday that the U.S. opposed the creation of the Gaza investigation. “There is, unfortunately, a long history of anti-Israeli bias in UN resolutions and mechanisms, including at the Human Rights Council,” [he said](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2015/06/243815.htm). The U.S. was the only member of the UN Human Rights Council to vote against establishing the commission inquiry last year.

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During a House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing last week with U.S. Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power, [lawmakers blasted the UN body](https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearing/advancing-united-states-interests-united-nations) as hypocritical and biased against Israel. “The Human Rights Council has really been a joke, as far as I’m concerned,” said Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.), the chairman of the committee. Rep. Ted Deutch (D-Fla.) echoed the remark. “I would suggest that the Human Rights Council cannot be taken seriously,” he said, citing the presence on the council of “some of the absolute worst abusers are human rights,” including Cuba and Venezuela. “I find it absurd that the Council only has one standing agenda item -- item 7 -- that relates to a specific country: Israel,” continued Deutch, referring to the permanent agenda item regarding the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Former president George W. Bush rejected U.S. membership on the Council when it was established in 2006, partly for the same reasons laid out by Deutch. President Barack Obama subsequently moved to join the group as one of his first moves in office. “By the United States being on the Council, we’re in the room,” Power told lawmakers on Tuesday, justifying Obama’s decision. “Since we joined the Council, the number of Human Rights Council resolutions on Israel have gone from a half of the UN Council’s products to a quarter,” she added.

In an effort to dilute the findings of the UN's forthcoming report, the Israeli foreign ministry published its [own 277-page narrative](http://mfa.gov.il/ProtectiveEdge/Documents/2014GazaConflictFullReport.pdf) of the events of last July and August. Released last week, that report found that Israel's military acted lawfully and pushed back on accusations of alarmingly high civilian casualties among Palestinians. “Many allegedly ‘civilian’ casualties were in fact militants,” the report read. The Israelis cited Hamas' use of human shields, Gaza's dense population and imperfect Israeli intelligence as the causes of “unfortunate — yet lawful” harm to Palestinian civilians.

Israel’s foreign ministry simultaneously posted an animated YouTube [video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2MdayBMhb4) mocking the foreign journalists who covered the Gaza war as willfully ignorant of Hamas' terrorist activity.

“We’re here in the center of Gaza, and as you can see the people here are trying to live quiet lives,” the blonde, suit-clad reporter says on camera as a black-shrouded man sets up a rocket launcher behind him. "There are no terrorists here, just ordinary people,” he continues, just before getting blasted by the rocket’s explosion.

The video closes with the camerawoman offering the reporter a pair of glasses. “Here, maybe now you’ll see the reality of life under Hamas rule,” she says. “Open your eyes: terror rules Gaza.”

The Israeli report on the Gaza war came out just days after the Israeli military cleared itself of any wrongdoing in connection with a [missile attack](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/07/16/dispatch-israeli-strike-kills-four-children-at-a-gaza-beach/) last July that killed four children who were playing on a Gaza beach. The strike, which was witnessed by several reporters, became one of the most iconic scenes from war. “The tragic outcome of the incident does not affect the legality of the attack,” concluded the Israeli military in its [written decision](http://www.law.idf.il/163-7353-en/Patzar.aspx).

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [dismissed](http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.661066) the incoming UN Human Rights Council report as a “waste of time,” during a recent cabinet meeting in Jerusalem, noting that the UN organization has issued more resolutions against Israel than Syria, Iran and North Korea combined.

Israel has twice blocked Makarim Wibisono, the UN’s special rapporteur on human rights, from visiting the occupied Palestinian territories as part of the Gaza war inquiry. “We didn’t allow the visit,” Emmanuel Nahshon of Israel’s foreign ministry [told AFP after denying Wibisono access the second time](http://news.yahoo.com/israel-blocks-visit-un-human-rights-envoy-102527029.html). “Israel cooperates with all the international commissions and all [UN] rapporteurs, except when the mandate handed to them is anti-Israel and Israel has no chance to make itself heard,” he said.