Scoop: Israel's "top priority" mission to discredit UN probe

January 26, 2022

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Axios

<https://www.axios.com/israel-discredit-un-human-rights-probe-gaza-palestinians-951e3799-2f2b-4c1f-ad3c-5a8a15aa7ac9.html>

Israel is planning a campaign to discredit a UN commission formed to investigate the violence in Gaza last May and the root causes of the protracted conflict in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, according to an Israeli Foreign Ministry cable seen by Axios.

**Why it matters:** Israeli officials say they are highly concerned that the commission’s report will refer to Israel as an "Apartheid state" and that its findings could damage Israel's reputation, particularly among progressives in the West**.** The report is expected in June.

**The backstory:** The UN Human Rights Council in Geneva voted narrowly last May to form the [Commission of Inquiry](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/S-30/1). The Western democracies on the committee objected to the fact that the commission's mandate was unusually broad when it came to investigating Israel, and didn't specifically mention investigating Hamas.

* Rights groups accused both Israel and Hamas of international law violations during two weeks of fighting last May, in which over 250 people were killed in the Gaza Strip and 13 in Israel.
* The commission is designed to be ongoing, with reports due every June to the council in Geneva and every September to the UN General Assembly in New York.
* In addition to probing conflicts in the West Bank and Gaza, the commission was also tasked with investigating human rights violations in Israel.

**Details:** The commission is headed by former UN commissioner for human rights Navi Pillay, former UN special rapporteur Miloon Kothari and human rights law expert Chris Sidoti.

* Israel has declined to cooperate with the inquiry and claimed the commission's mandate and membership are biased against Israel. The Biden administration [doesn’t support the inquiry](https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-will-oppose-un-human-rights-councils-disproportionate-attention-israel-state-2021-10-14/) and played a central role in cutting its funding by 25% in UN budget negotiations.

**Behind the scenes:** Last week, the international organizations department of Israel's Foreign Ministry sent a classified cable to all Israeli diplomatic missions around the world. It designated the commission of inquiry as its “top priority” at the UN in 2022.

* The cable said the Foreign Ministry was about to start a diplomatic campaign on the issue that will be increased ahead of the UN Human Rights Council meeting in March.
* Israel has had some partial successes in the past when seeking to discredit UN commissions. In some cases, UN investigators have resigned, and the judge behind a probe of the 2008 Gaza war later [backtracked on some of his conclusions](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/apr/03/goldstone-regrets-report-into-gaza-war).

**The other side:** A spokesperson for the commission of inquiry declined to comment directly on Israel’s criticism but said the commission was comprised of three independent and impartial experts who are not paid for their work and will investigate allegations of international law violations by all parties — state or non-state — without distinction.

* “As an independent body, the Commission conducts its own investigations independently and separately from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and other United Nations offices and agencies," the spokesperson said.