The ‘Apartheid’ Libel of Israel

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Perhaps you thought Israel had long ago established its right to exist as a Jewish state. Guess again. Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran want to eliminate Israel as we know it, but who would have thought they’d find allies in Amnesty International?

Perhaps we should have known this given some of Amnesty’s sympathies with the global left. But the nonprofit advocate for political prisoners is going far beyond that with its 211-page report labeling Israel an “apartheid” state that deserves the world’s opprobrium and sanction. The report is embargoed until Tuesday, but we’ve obtained the draft from a source other than Amnesty. It deserves condemnation for its bias and lack of understanding about why Israel survives amid hostile neighbors.

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Few words are more politically charged than “apartheid,” the system of racial separation that elevated whites over blacks in South Africa until the early 1990s. The world ostracized and boycotted the country until the Pretoria government under president F.W. de Klerk released Nelson Mandela from prison and negotiated a process to end apartheid.

The Amnesty report is a long indictment of Israel that attempts to show it is an apartheid state in how it treats Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza. “Israel has established and maintained an institutionalized regime of oppression and domination of the Palestinian population for the benefit of Jewish Israelis—wherever it has exercised control over Palestinians’ lives since 1948,” says the report summary.

Note that mention of 1948, which is the year Israel was founded. The Amnesty report isn’t one more denunciation of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank, or its housing policies in Jerusalem, though all of that is included. It also isn’t an attack on one Israeli government or another. The report is a denunciation of the very existence of Israel as a refuge for the Jewish people.

The report treats Israel’s founding as the original sin from which all other offenses flow. In the 27-page executive summary alone, we counted at least 26 references to 1948 or 1947-1949. Amnesty’s message is that Israel was created as an apartheid state and continues as such today.

This is a libel that distorts history. Israel was founded in the wake of the Holocaust with broad international support. The Jews who settled in historic Palestine had to fight to survive against Arab militias and national armies that wanted to push them into the sea.

Amnesty makes no attempt to explain Israel’s laws and practices in the context of the many wars Israel has had to fight since 1948. It mentions in passing that Hamas sends missiles into Israel from Gaza with no regard to its targets. But then it quickly moves on to denounce how Israel defends itself against these indiscriminate attacks.

The report glides over the Oslo accords of the 1990s as if they were merely one more opening to subjugate Palestinians. The accords were an historic concession by Israel to recognize a Palestinian state if peace could be negotiated. The report ignores that Hamas, which controls Gaza, is sworn to destroy Israel and that Israel has no choice but to impose security measures to protect against terror attacks.

Above all, the report all but ignores that Israel is a democracy that accords more rights to Arabs and Palestinians than does any other state in the region. Arabs participate in elections, hold seats in the Knesset, and one Arab is now a cabinet minister. The Palestinians in the West Bank could have their own state with comparable rights if they had accepted the concessions that Israel offered, under U.S. auspices, in the 1990s and again in 2000. Their leaders refused and the ugly stalemate continues.

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The Amnesty report is especially ill-timed in an era when Israel and Arab states are negotiating new deals for commerce and travel since the Abraham Accords. A fair assumption is that Amnesty’s drafters hope to block such progress by inflaming world opinion with the “apartheid” slander. Amnesty also calls on the United Nations to sanction Israel, and the International Criminal Court to investigate and hold Israelis criminally responsible.

We assume the Biden Administration will denounce this calumny and oppose all efforts to use it as a cudgel against America’s best friend in the Middle East.