

Israel's scathing attack on the UN is not appropriate

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Israel's Permanent Representative/Ambassador to the United Nations Gilad Menashe Erdan termed as "shameful" the statement made by Secretary-General Antonio Guterres at the meeting of Foreign Ministers held by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on Tuesday, October 24. He demanded his immediate resignation. Targeting the United Nations and its Secretary-General Erdan wrote: "The UN is failing, and you, Mr. Secretary General, have lost all morality and impartiality. Because when you say those terrible words that these heinous attacks did not happen in a vacuum, you are tolerating terrorism, and I think that the Secretary General must resign." Asking for his resignation as "must" he further writes: "Because from now on, every day that he is here in this building, unless he apologizes, today, we called him to apologize, there is no justification to the existence of this building."

On the other hand, Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen, who was present at the meeting, reacted sharply to the statement of the UN Secretary General: "I will not meet with the UN Secretary General. After October 7, there is no room for a balanced approach. Hamas must be erased from the world." He had a scheduled meeting with the Secretary General on the same day. Further, Israel has threatened to teach the UN a lesson by canceling the travel visas of its officials, including UN Humanitarian Coordinator Martin Griffiths, and not allowing any officials to come to Israel. There are reports in the press that Israel has branded the Secretary General as a "blood libel" (a medieval superstition against Jews).

What is Israel's tactic behind cornering the UN and the Secretary-General through such a scathing attack; what are the implications of this episode in the context of a possible solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict in the future – this is a separate but important topic not considered here. This article is written out of concern for the significance and dignity of the UN and its chief.

This is truly a shocking incident of Israeli attack on the reputation of the more than 75 years old joint organization of 193 countries of the world, and its current Secretary General. It seems that Israel has forgotten the fact that it owes its birth in 1947 to the UN. The Secretary-General clarified his statement the following day: "I am shocked by the misrepresentations by some of my statements ... as if I was

justifying acts of terror by Hamas. This is false. It was the opposite.” He further stated: “The grievances of the Palestinian people cannot justify the appalling attacks by Hamas. And those appalling attacks cannot justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people.”

But Israel rejected his explanation and intensified the attack. Erdan said: “The secretary-general once again distorts and twists reality. He clearly said yesterday that the massacre and murder spree by Hamas ‘did not happen in a vacuum.’ Every person understands and understood very well that the meaning of his words is: That Israel is guilty for the actions of Hamas or, at the very least, a demonstration of understanding and justification by the secretary-general for the massacre.” This time trying to make the case the UN versus the Secretary-General, Erdan stated: “It is a disgrace to the UN that the Secretary-General does not retract his words and is not even able to apologize for what he said yesterday. He must resign.”

America and Russia have not spoken on this unpleasant UN-Israel squabble, whose resolutions for “humanitarian-pause” and immediate “complete ceasefire” respectively on the ongoing Israeli attacks on Gaza have not been passed in the Security Council. Most of the countries, except England, Portugal and Germany, have also not presented their side on this one-sided squabble. England's Deputy Prime Minister Oliver Dowden has criticized the Secretary-General's statement, even calling the explanation inadequate. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has supported his deputy's opinion. The Foreign Minister of Antonio Guterres' home-country Portugal has expressed full confidence in the Secretary-General. A representative of the German government has said that Germany continues to have confidence in the Secretary-General.

No one from scholars and writers around the world have come forward with their comments/observations on this serious issue. The civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations, active at the international level, have also not come forward in support of the UN and the General Secretary. The way Israel is directly attacking the United Nations and its Secretary-General, there is a possibility that this squabble could take an uglier turn. Therefore, leaders and diplomats from all sides need to handle the squabble with great understanding and sensitivity. So that it does not have an adverse impact on the Palestine-Israel conflict, and innocent citizens of both the countries do not become victims of terrorist and military attacks.

Israel's language and stance reflect its open contempt to the United Nations as an institution and the Secretary-General as a position. Israel wants the United Nations to directly condemn the October 7 attack without going into any causality – the cause-and-effect theory. It also wants unequivocal support for its ongoing air and ground strikes. Whereas the Secretary-General's statement is made in line with the purposes/objectives of the United Nations – peace, security, international cooperation, human rights and humanitarian assistance. In his statement, the Secretary-General condemns Hamas' October 7 terrorist attack on Israel and mentioned some of the facts/reasons behind the attack. He expressed concern over the thousands of innocent civilians being killed in Israeli air strikes over the past three weeks, and called for adherence to the international rules of war. The concern that other countries/groups should not get involved in this conflict is also included in his statement. It is also the Secretary-General's concern that this longest conflict in the modern world finds a permanent solution to the peace and security of the citizens of both sides. This would, in fact, be the correct perspective on the Palestine-Israel conflict which is being represented by the Secretary-General in his address.

The purpose here is not to praise the merits of the United Nations. Rather a chain of complaints and criticism of the UN had started since its inception. Israel's complaints to the UN, particularly regarding its "biases" on human rights questions, are well known. There is a separate chapter on the shortcomings, weaknesses and failures of the United Nations. But, at the same time, it is also true that the UN is the only platform of international affairs the world has. Therefore every country should have accountability towards it until a better alternative comes into existence. Furthermore, apart from being a stage for diplomatic maneuverings, the UN is the only body which provides emergency aid to the people facing devastation due to wars, civil wars, terrorist attacks, and natural disasters of various natures.

Some points may be considered for contemplation in the wake of the present UN-Israel tussle: Is it not a serious thing to publicly threaten and belittle the UN and its Secretary-General - despite any limitations, perceived or otherwise? Has the United Nations become merely a decorative organization? Is the world really running on the logic of 'might is right'? Are the rules of the game no longer necessary even for show in matters of international relations and cooperation in the corporate capitalist system? Has the United Nations really lived its life? Will the future world

run on the basis of various types of overlapping economic and strategic alliances in the neo-liberal era? Will there be a permanent or working solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict in near future keeping the UN at bay?

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