**The U.N.’s Grotesque Gaza Inquiry**

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Bias against Israel is the most glaring problem with the new Gaza inquiry that the United Nations Human Rights Council launched last month. The council has appointed as its chief investigator a Canadian  lawyer, William Schabas,  who has said in recent years that he’d like to see Israel’s prime minister and president hauled before the International Criminal Court. The resolution authorizing his inquiry is crammed with vilifications of Israel, but it makes not a single mention of Hamas, the terrorist group that rules Gaza and that is dedicated in its charter to obliterating Israel and killing Jews. And in the current Gaza conflict that the U.N. purports to investigate, Hamas plays no minor role: It is against the thousands of rockets fired by Hamas and the many miles of attack tunnels — conduits for Hamas death squads — that Israel, in Operation Protective Edge, has been defending itself.

This U.N. inquiry is not a problem just for Israel, however. With its unabashed prejudice, it is an assault on all those who stand up for genuine human rights, anywhere, around the globe. Ultimately, it is an attack on the foundations of a civilized world order.

If that sounds extreme, please consider. The outfit behind this inquiry is not some private club of freelance bigots. It is the Human Rights Council, officially the top human-rights body of the world’s leading international institution, the United Nations.

For its erstwhile role as a guardian of international peace, freedom, and human dignity, the U.N. is entrusted with special powers, privileges, and immunities, as well as billions every year in U.S. tax dollars. As part of the U.N. franchise, its officials enjoy access to a world stage, on which they appear as voices of authority, under the U.N. flag. It is of no small consequence when the U.N. system is exploited and abused in service of a diplomatic lynch mob.

This new Gaza inquiry, which is to provide a written report to the council next March, comes as a sequel to the U.N.’s 2009 “independent international fact-finding mission,” better known as the Goldstone Report, named for its lead investigator, South African jurist Richard Goldstone. That report savaged Israel over its 2008–09 conflict with Hamas. Two years later, Goldstone published an op-ed in the Washington Post, partially recanting — too little, too late — his committee’s findings against Israel. In his semi-apologia, Goldstone described the U.N. Human Rights Council as a body “whose history of bias against Israel cannot be doubted.”

If the Human Rights Council learned anything from the Goldstone experience, it was only to choose a chief investigator less likely to recant. Enter Schabas, who is notable for not just his outspoken animus against Israel but also his tolerance of Hamas. Asked in a recent interview with Israel’s Channel 2 TV whether he recognizes Hamas as a terrorist group and whether he plans to investigate Hamas as part of his U.N. inquiry, Schabas declined to say.

The Human Rights Council, which spawned this latest “independent international commission of inquiry,” touts itself on its website as “the principal United Nations office mandated to promote and protect human rights for all.” That’s the theory. In practice, many of the world’s worst rights abusers gravitate to the council for the chance to redefine human rights in ways that target free societies, such as Israel and the U.S., and deflect attention from their own violations. Among the council’s 47 members today are such notorious violators as Russia, China, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Congo, Ethiopia, Venezuela, and Vietnam.

Schabas’s appointment as head of the new Gaza inquiry was announced earlier this month by the president of the Human Rights Council, Baudelaire Ndong Ella, a career diplomat of the West African country of Gabon. Ndong Ella’s presence at the helm of the council is no favor to the cause of human rights in Africa, or anywhere else. Gabon is an oil-rich despotism, ranked by Washington-based Freedom House as “Not Free,” with harsh prison conditions, no independent judiciary, and a population beggared by decades of misrule. Gabon is under the sway of President Ali Bongo Ondimba, who acquired power in 2009 upon the death of his father, who had ruled Gabon for the previous 41 years. In a 2014 report, Freedom House writes this of Gabon: “The government is still mired in corruption, and the country’s oil wealth still ends up disproportionately benefiting a wealthy elite.”

The Human Rights Council resolution authorizing the Schabas inquiry into Gaza was introduced at a special session on July 23 by Pakistan, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). According to Freedom House, Pakistan is a “Partly Free” country in which “violence involving terrorist, insurgent, and sectarian groups killed more than 3,000 people in 2013, with civilians accounting for most of the fatalities.”

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation, for its part, is a 56-member outfit based in Saudi Arabia and — with a lot of oil money sloshing around — one of the most influential voting blocs at the U.N. The OIC is rich in tyrannies, including such terror-sponsoring states as Syria, Iran, and Sudan — which also brings to the table a record of genocide.

The Gaza-inquiry resolution this crew authorized brings to mind a scene in Alice in Wonderland in which the Queen of Hearts — shouting “Off with her head!” — tries to rig a trial to her own satisfaction: “Sentence first — verdict afterwards.” It is packed with condemnations of Israel’s activities, and it describes Israel as the “occupying power” responsible for the welfare of all Palestinians in the Gaza strip. There is no recognition that Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005 and that the real authority there, turning its weapons on Israel, is Hamas — which in 2007 seized power in a bloody coup against other Palestinians.

The U.N. notes on the debate that accompanied this resolution include avid endorsements from such states as Syria, Sudan, and Iran, which are not members of the council but are welcomed as observers to weigh in. Syria — home to an uncivil war in which more than 170,000 have died, the ruthless terrorist group ISIS has taken shape, and the government has murdered its own people with chemical weapons — accused Israel of “utter disregard for international law.” Sudan — author of genocide in Darfur — accused Israel of “racial and ethnic cleansing.” Iran — which is in violation of four binding U.N. Security Council sanctions resolutions on its nuclear and missile programs — accused Israel of “systematic and flagrant breach of international law.”

The resolution passed by a vote of 29 to 1, with 17 abstaining. The lone holdout was the United States, which joined the Human Rights Council under President Obama in 2009 in hopes that the best way to improve the council would be to work from within. In this case, it appears the U.S. has not even succeeded in leading from behind. Among the members too craven, clueless, or anti-Semitic to vote nay alongside the U.S. were a slew of European and Asian democracies. Among them: Austria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, South Korea, and the United Kingdom. These are countries in which people enjoy human rights today because over the past 75 years America has either stood up for their rights, fought for them, or defeated their tyrants and handed them back a democratic system. Now they whistle past the lynch mob.

For the worst rights abusers on the Human Rights Council, this entire show is pretty much a free ride, courtesy of the United States and other developed democracies, which provide the great bulk of the council’s money. Last year the council’s funding topped $200 million. For 2014 the council has budgeted $240.6 million, with $90.7 million coming from the U.N. General Assembly’s regular budget (22 percent of which comes from the U.S.). The remainder of the council’s funding depends on voluntary contributions, which flow chiefly from Europe.

Human rights are not a trivial matter. There are real heroes around the world who have suffered and fought and died in the cause of advancing freedom and human dignity. Israel’s Natan Sharansky spent years imprisoned in the Soviet Union before he was expelled and emigrated to Israel, where he champions the cause of liberty for the despot-ridden Arab world — something that cannot be said of U.N. investigators who give a pass to Hamas. China’s Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Liu Xiaobo, endures imprisonment in his own country today for his belief that China’s government should honor the basic rights of 1.3 billion Chinese people. There are billions whose names we will never know who did not weave the webs of tyranny in which they are caught. They deserve better.

When the U.N. employs the label of human rights as a cover for prejudice, propaganda, and dictatorial agendas, it betrays the real interests of humanity. It devalues any good work that might emerge from its conclaves. The world has entered an era in which freedom is on the wane, as the U.S. retreats, the despotisms of Russia and China rise, Iran and North Korea flaunt their rogue nuclear programs, and Christians and other minorities in Iraq are expelled from their homes and slaughtered by jihadis who just this week beheaded an American journalist on video. The Schabas inquiry, a mockery of human rights and justice, can only fuel these furies. Is there really nothing the U.S. can do to stop it?