

Israel's UN Ambassador Speaks Truth to Power

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Gilad Erdan

Yes, I agree. It's a generally hideous formulation – “speak truth to power.” I've never used it before, except once as a joke, something about “speaking truth to (Samantha) Power,” and I promise I won't do it again. But just this once, I think it might be excused...

When it comes to anything to do with Israel, the U.N. is a kangaroo court in continuous session, with the Jewish state perennially in the dock. At the Security Council, more resolutions are passed about Israel than about any other country. Things are even worse at the U.N. Human Rights Council, with Agenda Item #7 – Israel's human rights record – being discussed at every session. At the UNHRC, Israel has been condemned more than all the other 192 nations combined.

This past year at the General Assembly, there were 18 resolutions concerning Israel, and only seven for the rest of the world combined. Not China, or Russia, or North Korea, or Iran – it was the mighty empire of Israel that drew the most condemnation from the world body, as it does year after year. Israel's U.N. Ambassador, Gilad Erdan, answered back. The story is here: "Erdan: UN Resolutions Only Perpetuate Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," [Israel Hayom / JNS.org](https://www.jns.org/article/2020/11/05/erdan-un-resolutions-only-perpetuate-israeli-palestinian-conflict), November 5, 2020:

Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Gilad Erdan on Wednesday [November 4], criticized UN bodies for consistently supporting anti-Israel resolutions that he said perpetuated the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Erdan made his remarks at the UN General Assembly Fourth Committee, where 139 countries adopted a resolution referring to Jerusalem's Temple Mount solely by its Muslim name of Haram al-Sharif...

The Temple Mount is the holiest site in Judaism. Jews were praying there since about 1000 B.C., that is, more than sixteen hundred years before there was a single Muslim in the area, before there was even the religion of Islam. The Jews' attachment to the Temple Mount is a matter of history. The Muslim attachment to the Haram al-Sharif is based on a story, believed only by Muslims, about Muhammad going on his winged steed Al-Buraq, from Mecca to Jerusalem and the "farthest mosque" (al-masjid al-aqsa), that is, the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which when Muhammad arrived was filled with the 124,000 prophets who preceded him. Still on his winged steed, Muhammad ascended into Heaven and the "Divine Presence," then returned, all within twenty-four hours, to Al-Aqsa and from there back to Mecca; this was the Night Journey, or miraj. Jewish history deserves at least as much respect from the U.N. as the improbable tale of the miraj.

When the U.N. General Assembly passed a resolution in early November about the Temple Mount, that resolution did not refer to it by its two names – Temple Mount (as Jews call it) and Haram al-Sharif (as the Muslims call it), but only by its Muslim name, as if to erase the fact that the Temple Mount is anything other than a Muslim site, when it is, in fact, the holiest site in Judaism. Thus does the U.N., even in the toponyms it chooses to use or to ignore in its resolutions, place itself squarely on the side of the Muslim Arabs.

These endless anti-Israel resolutions in the General Assembly are ineffectual; they are non-binding, unlike resolutions in the Security Council, where the American veto keeps similar anti-Israel resolutions from being adopted (save for one shameful exception in the Obama era). The Israelis brush them aside. But with each General Assembly or Human Rights Council vote that malevolently bashes Israel, the Palestinians feel they have won another propaganda victory, which heartens them and makes them even less interested in negotiating with Israel.

“Instead of functioning like the UN’s refugee agency to integrate refugees in their countries of residency, UNRWA exaggerates the number of ‘refugees’ and automatically recognizes every Palestinian descendant as a refugee, even those who have already become permanent residents of other countries,” Erdan added.

UNRWA does nothing to solve, and everything to perpetuate, the Palestinian refugee problem; it allows Arab states to keep their own “Palestinian refugees” from being integrated into the larger community; among the Arab states, only Jordan allows them to be citizens. The care and feeding of these soi-disant “refugees” is left largely to UNRWA, and UNRWA, in turn, keeps adding names to its rolls, because among the many refugee groups all over the world, the Palestinians are uniquely allowed to inherit their status. The children,

grandchildren, great-grandchildren (and so on) of the Arabs who left Mandatory Palestine or Israel during the 1947-1949 conflict are all considered to be "refugees." Thus, more than 70 years since the first Arab-Israeli war, there are now said to be not 30,000 refugees (the actual number of Arabs still living who left "Palestine" in 1947-1949), but five million of them, and their numbers increase with every year that passes. That is what Erdan has pointed out, and will no doubt continue to point out, as he should – the absurdity of recognizing "every Palestinian descendant as a refugee," a practice that applies only to the Palestinians – though no one has ever offered a justification for this exceptional treatment that the U.N. seems dead set on preserving.

As for the resolution referring to the Temple Mount by its Muslim name only, Erdan denounced it as an "audacious attempt to rewrite history" and erase the centuries-old Jewish connection to Jerusalem...

By failing to use both place names – the Jewish and the Muslim – for the Temple Mount, the U.N. is trying to efface, by sleight of word, the 3000-year-old Jewish connection to the area, and to privilege the Muslim place name that only appeared after the Jews had been praying on the Temple Mount for more than sixteen hundred years.

"During my term, the number of Jews visiting the Temple Mount each year more than tripled. No resolution passed here will stop that process. No resolution passed here will change the eternal connection between the Jewish people and the holiest site of our faith—the Temple Mount. They will also not change the fact that today, our connection to Jerusalem is stronger than ever. A growing number of countries are moving their embassies to Jerusalem, our united and undivided capital," the UN ambassador said...

Ambassador Erdan might add, on the next suitable occasion (the

U.N. provides so many), a bit more to his indictment of the U.N., and his spirited defense of Israel. He might note that Israel is deeply solicitous of the feelings of Muslims and does not allow Jewish visitors on the Temple Mount either to pray or even to mouth silent prayers, nor are they allowed to bring Jewish prayer books up to the Temple Mount with them. Muslims have full access to what they call Haram al-Sharif, except in times of heightened tension and violence, when that access may be limited for security reasons, to prevent riots or stone-throwing by Muslims on Jews worshiping below at the Western Wall. Israel's record of scrupulously protecting the access to religious sites by believers in all three monotheistic faiths may be compared with what happened when Jordan possessed the Old City from 1949 to 1967. In that period the Jordanians completely destroyed, often with dynamite, 36 of the 38 synagogues in the Old City. Jews were forbidden to visit or pray at the Western Wall. And the Jordanians pulled up tens of thousands of the tombstones in the ancient Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives, breaking them apart to use the pieces at building sites, for roads, and to line the floors of Jordanian army latrines.

He might mention how the Palestinians have treated Jewish holy sites in territory that they now control, thanks to the disastrous Oslo Accords. In 2003, Palestinians destroyed the carved stone covering the grave at Joseph's Tomb, and later filled the tomb with garbage that was then set on fire. In 2007 they vandalized the tomb yet again; in 2008 they set burning tires inside. In 2015 the Palestinians again set fire to the tomb. Finally, Mahmoud Abbas declared this site holy to Jews to be a "Muslim holy site." The U.N. did not protest any of those attacks, nor the appropriation of the site as exclusively Muslim. As for the Tomb of Rebecca, it has been firebombed on several occasions by Palestinians; to date little damage has been done – though not for want of trying. As with Joseph's Tomb and Rebecca's Tomb, the Cave of the Patriarchs (holy to both Jews and Muslims) in Hebron was

completely off-limits to Jews when Jordan, from 1949 to 1967, possessed the West Bank.

Ambassador Erdan should remind the U.N. of this history of Muslim Arabs keeping Jews from visiting their holy sites, including the Western Wall and the Cave of the Patriarchs, destroying 36 of 38 synagogues in the Old City, and attempting to destroy both Joseph's Tomb and Rebecca's Tomb. And he should ask that august body, the General Assembly, why the U.N. has not once protested any of those Palestinian attacks on Jewish holy sites, nor objected to the appropriation of such sites as exclusively Muslim. And let's hope he is bold enough to flummox Israel's enemies in the chamber, baying for blood, with this question: "Well, what can any of us expect of the U.N., which counted a Nazi war criminal, Kurt Waldheim, as one of its Secretaries-General?"

Gilad Erdan has been on the job as Israel's ambassador to the U.N. for scarcely three months. He knew, of course, about the grotesque mistreatment of Israel by that supremely hypocritical world body, but now he's seen it up close and personal. And clearly, he's not going to take it lying down.

First published in