

## Resolution 3379: “Zionism is Racism,” Fifty Years Later

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Recent accusations that Israel is committing genocide, enforcing apartheid, and practicing settler-colonialism did not arise in a vacuum. Their intellectual lineage traces back to UN General Assembly Resolution 3379, adopted fifty years ago, which declared that “Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination.” Although repealed in 1991, the resolution’s underlying logic endures. This paper traces how the *Zionism = racism* formula—conceived in Soviet Cold War propaganda—was institutionalized through UN bodies, NGO networks, and academic activism, and how it evolved into the moral vocabulary of contemporary discourse. It argues that these charges reflect a framework shaped by identity politics, dividing the world into “oppressors” and “oppressed” and casting Jewish self-determination as racial domination. Understanding this genealogy is essential not only for historical clarity but for reclaiming Zionism’s true meaning: the national liberation movement of a people seeking dignity in its ancient homeland after centuries of exile and antisemitism.

### The Afterlife of “Zionism is Racism”

During the course of the war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip, accusations that Israel has committed genocide and is enforcing apartheid have flooded the mainstream discourse in the West. From [professors at Ivy League universities](#) to New York City’s [new mayor](#) to leading [cultural figures](#), these charges have become de rigueur—a new marker of virtue.

Those who make such claims cite the war’s heavy toll on Gazans, the rhetoric of some Israeli ministers, and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) case against Israel under the Genocide Convention. These factors, tied to the present context and developments in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, have largely intensified a narrative that has been developing for decades and long pre-dates the recent war. While internal Israeli debates over the future of the conflict are genuine and ongoing, the purveyors of the most egregious claims are typically animated not by constructive and legitimate criticism over Israel’s policies and actions but rather by agendas that often oppose Israel’s very legitimacy and right to exist. One need only look at the post-ceasefire landscape from October 2025 onward where [groups openly call for Israel’s “dismantlement”](#) to understand that peace is not what these actors seek and that what is at issue for them is not the borders of the post 1967 war, but those of pre-1948; that is, before the establishment of the State of Israel.

The accusatory terminology was already ubiquitous before October 7, 2023, circulating for years in NGO reports, campus campaigns, and UN statements depicting Israel through precisely these frames. The conceptual foundations for these accusations reach back half a century to UN General Assembly Resolution 3379, adopted on November 10, 1975—fifty years ago—which declared that “Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination.” Although the resolution was formally repealed in 1991, its language and logic have survived, quietly

migrating into the institutions, networks, and ethical idioms that now dominate global civil society. The charge that Zionism equals racism was never extinguished; it was simply reformulated.

Resolution 3379's conceptual DNA still animates the allegations leveled against Israel today. Understanding that genealogy is not merely a matter of historical accuracy; it is essential to formulating an effective response—one that moves beyond defensive rebuttal and reclaims Zionism as the legitimate expression of Jewish self-determination and liberation, rather than as an ideology of exclusion.

### **From the Cold War to Durban**

The roots of Resolution 3379 lie in the ideological battles of the Cold War. In 1965, during negotiations over the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Soviet Union sought to equate Zionism with racism and Nazism—a tactic meant to deflect US criticism of Soviet antisemitism. After Israel's victory in the 1967 Six-Day War, Moscow intensified its campaign, casting the Jewish state as the moral heir to its historic persecutor.

By 1975, this rhetoric had matured into Resolution 3379, championed by the Soviet bloc, the Arab League, and the Non-Aligned Movement. The measure stigmatized Zionism as inherently racist and re-cast Israel as a pariah state. After over a decade of lobbying for its reversal by Jewish groups, Israeli diplomats and international parliamentarians, Resolution 3379 was repealed in 1991, in the context of the Gulf War and Madrid Peace Conference. However, the narrative survived through a dense network of UN committees—most notably the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) and the Division for Palestinian Rights (DPR)—that continued to describe Israel in the language of colonial domination and racial discrimination. Each annual report, conference, and exhibit helped preserve the conceptual architecture that 3379 had built.

The 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban marked the resolution's re-emergence in civil-society form. There, NGOs branded Israel "a racist, apartheid state" and called for global boycotts. Taking place in post-apartheid South Africa, the setting lent the accusation renewed symbolic weight. Four years later, the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement institutionalized that framing, situating itself within the global discourse of racial justice and decolonization. By the time of October 7, 2023, these ideas were already embedded in university curricula, NGO reports, and activist vocabularies. The old equation—Zionism = racism—had simply evolved into new rhetorical forms.

### **The New Lexicon: Genocide, Apartheid, and Identity Politics**

The current charges of genocide and apartheid represent the latest mutation of this moral genealogy. Within hours of Hamas's assault, protests across Western capitals accused Israel of genocide, often invoking imagery of Nazis and concentration camps. The analogy—once a calculated Soviet inversion—has been normalized, circulating freely on placards, in petitions, and across social media.

This narrative operates within the grammar of identity politics, in which virtue and culpability are assigned through categories of "oppressed" and "oppressor." In that schema, Israel—militarily strong, Western-aligned, and depicted as majority "Jewish-white" (despite only a

minority being of European descent)—can only appear as the oppressor. The Jewish story of dispersion, persecution, and statelessness is erased; Jewish power is misread as proof of privilege. The asymmetry of military strength substitutes for a history of existential vulnerability.

The persistence of this framing illustrates how effectively the binaries of the late-twentieth century have merged with the rhetoric of contemporary activism. For many, “decolonization” now functions as a shorthand for justice, making it almost impossible to imagine Jews as anything other than agents of oppression. The result is a cognitive reversal: Israel’s founding as a movement of national liberation is reinterpreted as an act of racial domination.

### **Why the Idea Endured**

The durability of the “Zionism is racism” narrative reveals how ideas, once institutionalized, can outlive their creators. The UN imprimatur gave the formula normative authority; its diffusion through NGOs and academic networks gave it endurance. As the global left shifted from class to identity as the main axis of concern, the old Soviet charge adapted easily, translating into the universal idiom of race, power, and privilege.

This endurance is not the result of ignorance, nor was it inevitable. The narrative offers a simplistic map of the world—victims and villains, powerless and powerful—and within that map Israel’s complexity disappears. Each revival, from Durban to BDS to today’s “genocide” discourse, reactivates the same structure of meaning that Resolution 3379 first codified. The vocabulary changes; the logic remains.

For Israel and its partners, confronting this rhetoric requires more than refuting it point by point. It demands reclaiming the terrain on which the argument is fought. The task is not only to expose the Soviet origins of the accusation but to show how profoundly the charge distorts the moral and historical meaning of Jewish national revival.

Zionism must be rearticulated as it was and remains: the national liberation movement of a people reclaiming dignity in its ancient homeland, after centuries of exile and persecution. Recognizing it as such disrupts the simplistic oppressor–oppressed binary that dominates Western discourse and restores clarity to the conversation.

### **Conclusion**

The formula “Zionism is racism” was born of Soviet cynicism, nurtured by UN institutions, and reborn in our century through the languages of apartheid, colonialism, and genocide. Its persistence reflects its adaptability: a political invention recast as matter of conviction.

Fifty years later, the task is not only to rebut its claims but to restore historical clarity. By situating Zionism where it belongs—as the national liberation of an ancient people—Israel can reclaim the vocabulary of justice and self-determination that others have appropriated.

In that sense, overcoming the legacy of Resolution 3379 is not simply a matter of history. It is an act of intellectual and moral reclamation—the effort to return the language of human rights to its universal purpose and to remind the world that the story of Jewish liberation is, at its core, a story of emancipation, not oppression.

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