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Israel-Hamas war in Gaza: Backlash against Irish President Michael D Higgins for his claims against Israel

Israel has accused the Irish President of "spewing lies" by claiming that Israel has breached the sovereignty of three countries and would like a settlement in Egypt. Philip Bradfield writes in the Belfast Telegraph

Irish President Michael D Higgins made the comments after Israel said it was closing its embassy in Dublin.

Israel took the step on Sunday after the Republic asked the International Court of Justice to relax its definition of genocide so that Israel could be convicted of the crime for its war against Hamas in Gaza.

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar said the embassy closure was due to the "actions, double standards, and anti-semitic rhetoric of the Irish government against Israel", which he added "are rooted in efforts to delegitimise and demonise the Jewish state".

But Mr Higgins hit back at a ceremony at his residence in Dublin on Tuesday, where the Palestinian ambassador was appointed – a formality that is part of Ireland recognising Palestinian statehood.

He said: "I think it's very important to express, as president of Ireland, to say that the Irish people are anti-semitic is a deep slander."

Mr Higgins went on to say that “it is a very serious business to actually brand a people because in fact they disagree with Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu, who is in breach of so many bits of international law, and who has breached the sovereignty of three of his neighbours, in relation to Lebanon, Syria, and would like in fact actually to have a settlement into Egypt”.

Irish citizen Daniel O’Dowd, spokesman for Ireland Israel Alliance, described the comments by Mr Higgins as “a just outrageous act by the president of this country”.

He added: “It feels like the forsaking of the Jewish community here by the nominal leader of this country. We look back to a few months ago when he called claims of anti-semitism by the Israeli government a PR exercise. And we think back to when he publicly accused the Israeli embassy in Dublin of leaking a letter to damage him, but it had actually been released by Iran.

“And now this latest farcical rant where he says Israel would like to settle Egypt. It is just baseless conspiracy theories which ultimately are debasing the office of the presidency.”

Mr O’Dowd, who is Jewish, said it was almost expected from Mr Higgins.

“But what I think is so deafening now is the silence from everybody else across the political spectrum.”

Mr Sa’ar also hit back on X.

“Once an anti-semitic liar – always an anti-semitic liar,” he said.

“Ireland’s president reached a new low, spewing lies that Israel ‘has breached the sovereignty of three of his neighbours, in relation to Lebanon, Syria and would like in fact to have a settlement in Egypt’.

“Let’s get the facts straight. From Lebanese territory, Israel’s sovereignty was breached for over a year. For no reason and unprovoked, Hezbollah joined Hamas on October 8th and since then fired tens of thousands of missiles, rockets and drones at Israeli citizens and communities. Israel did what any country would – it defended itself against a brutal aggressor.”

On Syria, he said: “While Assad’s regime disintegrated, armed groups entered the buffer zone and attacked UNDOF forces, in violation of the Disengagement Agreement from 1974. Israel temporarily entered a few limited points to prevent the threat of radical Islamists against its citizens and communities.

“Israel will not wait for another October 7th on any of its borders.”

With regards to Egypt, Mr Sa’ar added: “Higgins invented the claim that Israel seeks to form settlements there. The facts: in the context of our peace agreement with Egypt – Israel withdrew from a huge area – all of the Sinai desert, and uprooted all of its communities there. This peace agreement has been maintained since 1979.

“And if we are discussing historical truths, let us not forget that Ireland was at best neutral during World War II.

“At that time, the free world was fighting Hitler’s axis while Ireland sat on the side and did nothing.”

Mr Higgins was invited to respond.

Ireland’s anti-Israel stance is embarrassingly hypocritical

The Taoiseach seems only to be in favour of international law and human rights when it suits him. Michael Murphy writes in the Daily Telegraph.

Ireland and Israel are now locked in a zero-sum war of reputation destruction. On Sunday, Israel announced it was closing its Dublin embassy because of the “extreme anti-Israel policies of the Irish government”. It then doubled down, branding the Taoiseach, Simon Harris, an anti-Semite. An irate Harris shot back that Israel was merely attempting to distract from its “killing” of children.

These accusations are so grave it’s difficult to see how either side can walk them back. Who, after all, would make such claims frivolously?

Let’s consider for a moment what led both countries to go nuclear. Since the start of the war in Gaza, the Irish government has been one of Israel’s most strident critics. It backed South Africa’s genocide case against Israel in the International Court of Justice (ICJ), claiming there was sufficient evidence to answer the charge. But just last week, it went further, calling to “broaden” the definition of genocide

to vaguely include civilian harm, effectively turning Israel into a perpetrator of a crime yet to exist.

For Jerusalem, this attempt to shift legal goalposts, redefining established terms to engineer guilt, was the final straw. After years of diplomatic snubs, boycotts, and genocide accusations – not to mention Ireland’s recognition of a Palestinian state soon after October 7 – Israel decided to cut its losses. “We will now channel and transfer resources to a place that is interested in cooperating with us,” its ambassador explained.

The Taoiseach, for his part, called the decision regrettable but dismissed accusations of Irish hostility toward Israel. “We’re just pro-peace, pro-human rights, and pro-international law,” he protested. But Ireland’s record speaks louder than platitudes.

Ireland is for international law when it suits. That’s why it now seeks to rewrite the Genocide Convention – an international cornerstone ratified by 153 states, including Ireland – to retroactively lower the bar for convicting Israel. This more closely resembles authoritarian justice, where the accused is condemned first and the crime tailored to fit. As Stalin’s secret police chief Lavrentiy Beria put it: “Show me the man, and I’ll show you the crime.”

Ireland may claim to be “pro-peace”, but when Irish peacekeepers stationed in southern Lebanon turned a blind eye to Hezbollah amassing rockets on Israel’s border – in blatant violation of international law – Dublin remained silent. Yet it was quick to cry foul when Israel acted to address the violation, warning Unifil’s Potemkin

peacekeepers – 380 of whom are Irish – to clear out. Had the peacekeepers done their job, Hezbollah's emboldening of Hamas, and this war, might have been avoided.

And what of Ireland's commitment to human rights? It has long cosied up to the world's worst abusers. In 2019, Saudi Arabia supported Ireland's bid for a UN Security Council seat precisely because Dublin "doesn't lecture" them on human rights. When the Chinese premier visited Ireland in January, then-Taoiseach Leo Varadkar assured him that Taiwan – a democratic, self-governing state – was part of China, whose Uyghur concentration camps hold one million souls.

And most striking of all: earlier this year, Ireland's president, Michael D Higgins, sent warm congratulations to Iran's incoming president – leader of a regime that hangs political prisoners from cranes and has openly genocidal intentions towards Israel. There's no public record that such a letter was sent to Israel's president upon his inauguration in 2021.

The Taoiseach declared that Israel was not "entitled to have an alternative set of facts." But this cuts both ways. The facts reveal that Ireland's government is determined to accuse the Jewish state of genocide – a term born from the Holocaust – at any cost. Ireland abandons its principles when the violators aren't Jews but weaponises them when they supposedly are. If this doesn't strike Mr Harris as antisemitic, perhaps he ought to broaden his definition of that, too.

Donald Trump will notice that anti-semitic Ireland prefers tyrannical Iran to the Israel he loves

As befits someone so often called a “Jew-lover”, I’ve been thinking a lot about Jews in Ireland since Israel announced the closure of its embassy in Dublin. Ruth Dudley Edwards writes in the News Letter

Ireland’s antisemitic actions and rhetoric against Israel are rooted in delegitimization and demonisation of the Jewish state and reflect clear double standards,” said Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar.

And how!

Once more, I’m thanking fate for giving me parents of a sceptical disposition who were instinctively suspicious of the kind of group-think that has nationalist Ireland succumbing to Jew-hatred.

My parents loathed sectarianism and instinctively sympathised with underdogs: neither had any time for the view that only nationalists were Irish and that Catholicism was the one true faith.

My father, a University College Dublin professor, spent his professional life combating narrow nationalist propaganda by spreading the message that the history of Ireland was that of all the Irish.

They both were utterly horrified by the Holocaust, but though they would have loved to be free of my father's widowed mother, they believed in free speech and endured having her upstairs spouting extreme republican propaganda.

I shared a room with grandmother, who had a photograph of Hitler at the bottom of her bed. I was removed from her when I was four when I proudly showed off to my parents the Hitler salute she had just taught me.

My mother, a school teacher, discreetly challenged prejudices. It was she, who during the war as a mature student at UCD, persuaded a friend to volunteer with her to study Sanscrit so its teacher — an impoverished Jewish refugee — would be paid a fee.

That friend was my godmother, Máirín Ó Dálaigh, whose husband, Cearbhall, a lawyer and a principled republican, became President of Ireland in 1974, and resigned less than two years later after a row with the Fine Gael government with whom he was at loggerheads over emergency legislation, “to protect the dignity and independence of the presidency as an institution”.

How unlike his successor, President Higgins, who disgraces his office with his personal prejudices and would have to be removed from office with a wrench.

Ó Dálaigh died a couple of years after resigning in Sneem, County Kerry, which he loved.

So good a friend he had been for years to the Irish Jewish community, that the Israeli President, Chaim Herzog — the son of the Irish-speaking Chief Rabbi, who had been born in

Belfast and raised in Dublin and fought in the Haganah Jewish paramilitary group during the Arab revolt of 1936-9 — came to Sneem in 1985 to unveil a statue he had donated in Ó Dálaigh's honour, depicting a steel tree to symbolise links between Israel and Ireland.

It was vandalised last July by pro-Hamas supporters.

My parents didn't share the republican politics of their old friends, but they didn't fall out. I have no doubt that they would have been in complete accord in revulsion at the atrocities of October 7th.

And they would have been disgusted at how the anti-semitism of Irish republicanism had infected almost the entire Irish establishment, symbolised by the failure to emulate most European countries by flying Israeli flags on public buildings in solidarity with the October victims.

When I look at maps of the Middle East, I see one tiny little democratic nation in the midst of its often-barbaric enemies battling heroically for survival.

And I abhor quite as much as 'Ooo ah, up the 'Ra', Christy Moore's 'Palestine', a grotesque travesty that ignores the centuries of persecution of Jews — as republicans ignore their own massacres of Protestant neighbours — in favour of a preposterous rewriting of history with Jews in jackboots.

We are usually adept at ignoring what might be unintended consequences of thoughtless actions, but now, with President Trump, whom the Irish establishment wrote off, they are facing consequences with a vengeance.

December 20, 2024

Anti-semitism is out in the open. And Ireland is rightly shamed.

Trump is very pro-Israel, and will note that Ireland prefers the tyrannical Iranian regime to that of Israel.

'Tis the season to be reckoning.
Happy Christmas, all people of good will.

Report a 'wake-up call' on gender-based violence

MLA calls for action as 10% of NI women experience sexual harm over five years.

A new Stormont report on violence against women and girls in Northern Ireland must serve as a “wake-up call” to the Executive after it found that one in 10 female respondents had experienced sexual violence in the last five years.

'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: Experiences and attitudes of adults in Northern Ireland in 2023' was published yesterday by The Executive Office.

The report by the NI Statistics and Research Agency highlights the widespread prevalence of gender-based violence and concerning societal attitudes. It found that psychological violence was the type of gender-based violence most experienced by respondents in the last five years (13%).

This includes being insulted, stalked, harassed, threatened, humiliated, denigrated or controlled against your will.

Second place was shared by online, physical and sexual violence, all experienced by 7% of respondents.

The report also revealed that a significantly higher proportion of females (10%) reported experiencing sexual violence in the last five years than males (4%).

Young women appear most at risk, with 18-29-year-olds experiencing more sexual, psychological and online violence than other age groups.

SDLP Foyle MLA Sinéad McLaughlin said “the findings in this report must serve as a wake-up call for all of us”.

“This report lays bare the scale of gender-based violence in NI and the shocking experiences endured by women and girls in our communities,” she said.

“The findings that 10% of women have experienced sexual violence in the past five years and that 18-29-year-olds are disproportionately affected by sexual, psychological and online abuse are utterly appalling.

“These attitudes perpetuate a culture where violence and harassment are normalised, and this must change.”

She urged the Executive to “accelerate the delivery of and properly resource the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework to ensure we continue to tackle violence, address harmful attitudes and provide support for victims and survivors”.

DUP MP Carla Lockhart said yesterday she had met with Home Office Minister, Jess Phillips to stress the urgent need for Government to adopt a UK wide approach to combatting violence against women and girls.

“This strategy must address the root causes of this violence, improve conviction rates, introduce tougher sentencing for perpetrators, and provide better support for victims and their families,” she said. “Violence against women is not inevitable. It is preventable.”

Alliance MLA Paula Bradshaw, Chair of the Committee for the Executive Office, said: “Tragically we have seen again this week just why ending violence against women and girls must be an absolute priority of the Executive Office and of the Executive as a whole.

“The headline figures for female victims of violent crime are already deeply shocking. These newly-released figures show the underlying attitudes, and we can see immediately the number of people, and perhaps even more particularly young women, still experiencing sexual abuse is beyond unacceptable.

“There remains also, even beyond these figures, a tendency to tolerate and even enable misogyny, including in the political sphere, which goes well beyond what we should be allowing.”

Church News Ireland

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