

You Can't Report What an Israeli Ambassador Says at a Public Meeting

I'm about to leave on a sketching tour abroad, but [this video](#) recently posted on YouTube deserves attention. An earlier version apparently 'went viral', but that doesn't mean everyone saw it and certainly, those who did haven't heard Part II.

Briefly, the (unnamed) videographer, who describes himself as an Austrian citizen, was invited to a meeting at a Jewish community centre in Austria to hear the Israeli ambassador to Austria, David Roet, speak—at a meeting with a number of people and with the press, who were taking photographs.

First, notice Roet advocates for the execution of under 16-year-olds if they hold guns 'in war'. Since 16-year-olds are civilians, whatever they hold cannot be grounds for executing them, since they are not combatants. Executions also are not shoot-from-the-hip murders; they are supposed to follow legal proceedings. So Roet has advocated summarily dispensing with the provisions of the Geneva Conventions as well as with a heap of human rights laws

Second, notice this *diplomat's* uncertainty about key UN documents: 'even if you are 16-years-old and under a UN, whatever it is called, charter'. Granted he is not a native speaker of English and he is the ambassador to Austria, not to an Anglophone country or to the UN. Who knows why he is giving his address in English when the location is Austria, but he either chose to do so or agreed to do so and given the issues he's addressing, you might think he would know the relevant term to describe one of the UN's foundational documents. Call me cynical, but his remarks give no reassurance that he actually cares about the UN Charter, any more than he seems to care about the Geneva Conventions.

It doesn't get better. The videographer quotes Roet as saying 'If Europe were crazy enough to invest in Gaza, we would have to destroy it the next time'. Note that these words are not recorded coming from the ambassador himself on this video, but perhaps that part of his address was included on the previous, 'viral', video. Assuming the quotation is accurate, the threat Roet is making, in his capacity as an official high-ranking representative of the Israeli government, has nothing to do with the events of October 7. He is essentially saying that Gaza now belongs to Israel and Israel will ensure it is uninhabited and uninhabitable by Palestinians, no matter what the international community does. It is the threat of a land grab, pure and simple: or, as Nazi propaganda put it, the quest for *Lebensraum*.

Then notice that the videographer says that not a single media outlet in Austria or Germany reported these remarks. That's his claim and I have no way of verifying it, but if someone knows of a respected publication or broadcasting service that did report them, please leave a comment with a link. The videographer claims that journalists who were present told him that none of them 'dared to'.

The sequel is that one month later, 'anti-terror units' turned up at the videographer's home and finding him out, forced their way in and seized devices and documents. The police later demanded he come to the police station 'if' he wanted to see these items again. Under Austrian law, it seems publishing video material of another person is subject to up to a year in jail. The videographer does not say whether he was aware of this when he put his video on the internet. He notes only that the Austrian authorities decided, belatedly, to threaten him with prosecution for a recording offence, rather than challenging the person expressing genocidal wishes.

Because Roet is a diplomat, he is probably protected by diplomatic immunity. That, however, does not excuse the Austrian authorities. Because of its history, Austria has strong laws that limit freedom of expression about matters pertaining to the Holocaust. It's not clear those laws would be relevant in this case: Roet's remarks had to do with *advocacy* for genocide *in the future* and the videographer himself does not seem to have said anything about the Holocaust. It seems extreme of the Austrian police to enforce a law about making a video that records what Roet said when the press were there taking photographs. If there is nothing wrong with Roet's remarks, why would the police break into someone's home seizing, among other things, *notebooks*? Is there a law against citizens writing things down?

It's hard not to agree with the videographer's speculation about motive: the Israeli government doesn't want his video to be out in public because the ambassador's remarks were intended solely for a sympathetic audience—an audience sympathetic to Zionism, but not to international law, human rights, the Geneva Conventions or the UN Charter. It's also hard not to agree that this incident indicates how far European governments are willing to go to give the Israeli government a free pass for the advocacy of genocide in our time.

Post Scriptum: Roet is by no means the only incompetent in the Israeli diplomatic corps. Listen to Danny Danon, the Israeli ambassador to the UN, on the floor of the UN, calling the UN Special Rapporteur, Francesca Albanese, a 'witch' and continuing with this metaphor (though it's not clear it is a metaphor for him) with an unhinged rant about 'spells'. Or search 'Israeli ambassador to the UK' or 'Tzipi Hotovely' to watch numerous equally angry, nonsensical ravings on behalf of a state which can apparently not be defended by civil, rational argument—much less facts. In the diplomatic world, appointments to the UN or the Court of St James's count as among the most prestigious. You have to wonder: if these are the Israeli diplomatic corps' best, what on earth must the others like?