

# EU research funds wasted on Amnesty's Hollywood-style CSI adventure

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Gerald Steinberg

In July 2015, amid great fanfare, including a media blitz and later a press-conference in Jerusalem, Amnesty International and the UK-based Forensic Architecture project launched their “Gaza Platform.” The stated objective was to shed “new light on violations of international law committed” in last summer’s bitter war.

This pseudo-scientific exercise repeated Amnesty’s standard political bias and was immediately exposed as factually inaccurate – terrorists were identified as civilian health care workers; a “journalist” doubled as a Hamas operative, etc.. The major investment in graphics and public relations notwithstanding, the impact of the “Gaza forensics architecture project” was largely and justifiably non-existent. The claim that computerized maps and “eyewitness testimony” gathered by NGOs in Gaza could somehow determine whether war crimes were committed is clearly untenable. (Under international law, this would require examination of the intentions of Israeli military officials, and determining the presence or absence of Hamas terrorists and their weapons at the time and location of each attack. “Forensic architecture” can do neither.)

However, on one issue, the implications are significant – the amount of European taxpayer money that was wasted on this Hollywood-style exercise in pseudo-science. Apparently persuaded by buzz-words and the promise of hi-tech graphics, the EU framework known as the European Research Council (ERC) paid the bills. An initial grant of €1.2 million was provided for the 2011-2015 period to Eyal Weizman, the “principle investigator”. An additional €150,000 came from the ERC in 2014 for a “Media Aggregation and Plotting Platform” (MAPP), ostensibly to give human rights organizations “a highly efficient research and advocacy tool.”

To qualify for this grant, Forensic Architecture is listed as a research project at the University of London (Goldsmiths), explained vaguely as “a field of practice and as an analytical method for probing the political and social histories inscribed in spatial artefacts and in built environments.” The Forensic Architecture website, however, is not hosted by the University, suggesting a very limited connection.

The ERC is a European Union funding framework established in 2007 ostensibly for scientific research based on “open competition to projects ... The sole criterion for selection is scientific excellence. The aim here is to recognise the best ideas...”

But in this project, these criteria appear to have been ignored, and subjective political objectives, wrapped in the façade of science and technology, were substituted instead. The failed decision-making process will remain hidden until the European Parliament or some other independent body undertakes an investigation.

What is known is that officials in the ERC were somehow persuaded to fund Weizman's forensic architecture. Perhaps these officials did not undertake the due diligence generally required in processes by which governments dispense taxpayer funds. If they had checked, they would have seen that Weizman is a long-time Israeli fringe activist who, prior to this project (and in its results), showed no expertise in the complex methodologies required for discerning details of modern asymmetric warfare against terrorists and of international law. His main claims to fame were his involvement in various anti-Israel boycott campaigns, as well as the research and writing of two tendentious publications "Land Grab: Israel's Settlement Policy in the West Bank" (2002) and Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation.

In an article in the Guardian (September 2014), Weizman made the weirdly conspiratorial assertion that settlements houses are built with red roofs so that the Israeli Air Force would "know not to target them." Weizman also expressed his desire to help prosecute Israelis in the International Criminal Court with his "expertise." The money provided by the ERC for the Forensic Architecture project enabled him to advance this objective, and to hire a number of fellow long-standing and obsessive anti-Israel activists.

It appears that Weizman convinced the ERC to buy his claim "to provide new kinds of evidence for international prosecution teams, political organizations, NGOs, or international institutions such as the UN." (Tellingly, the Forensic Architecture website features a picture of Judge Richard Goldstone visiting in Gaza in 2009, before Goldstone denounced the discredited UN report on Gaza that bears his name.) Reflecting the shoddy work of NGOs and the UN, in his glitzy Gaza war-crimes presentation, marketed in cooperation with Amnesty, Weizman forgot to include the 4,563 rockets fired from Gaza at Israeli civilians.