



A Refreshing Change At The U.N.

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Trump administration deliberations about whether the United States should quit the United Nations' Human Rights Council over its anti-Israel obsession reflect a welcome new U.S. approach to Turtle Bay.

Nikki Haley, America's ambassador to the United Nations, announced this new U.S. approach the other day when she emerged from her first monthly Security Council meeting on Middle East issues. She called it "a bit strange," marveled that it focused on Israel, and noted that it ignored all of the following true threats to regional peace: Hezbollah's illegal rocket build-up in Lebanon, Iran's money and weapons for terrorists, Bashar Assad's slaughter of Syrian innocents, and the challenge of the Islamic State group.

Of the U.N.'s longstanding and pervasive anti-Israel bias, Haley told reporters that Washington is staking out a firm new position: "I'm here to say the United States will not turn a blind eye to this anymore. I'm here to underscore the iron-clad support of the United States for Israel," which she called the "one true democracy" in the turbulent region. "I'm here to emphasize the United States is determined to stand up to the U.N.'s anti-Israel bias."

The administration's pro-Israel stance has prompted deep soul-searching among American Jews about how to judge the administration vis-a-vis Jews and Israel, as Samuel G. Freedman noted in a recent Washington Post op-ed that has received lots of attention in Jewish circles. That's because this new approach comes from an administration that has largely ignored a marked national uptick in anti-Semitic violence and includes officials with troubling ties to Jew-hating constituencies.

In light of Haley's comments, in which she also denounced the endless stream of "outrageously biased resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly" in connection with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, no one should be surprised that the administration is taking a hard look at the Human Rights Council.

The United Nations established the council in 2006 to replace its Human Rights Commission, which lost its legitimacy after descending into a cesspool of hypocrisy on human rights by focusing enormous attention on Israel and ignoring the world's truly horrific human rights abusers, some of whom were commission members.

The council, however, is no better. President George W. Bush refused to join it because its 47 members included some of the world's worst human rights abusers, but President Barack Obama successfully sought U.S. membership in 2009 in hopes of reforming it from the inside. Members include 11 nations that Freedom House, an NGO that conducts research on political freedom, has classified as "not free" and another 15 that are "partly free," leaving only 21 "free" nations.

Over the last decade, the Human Rights Council, too, has singled out Israel relentlessly, making the Jewish state its only permanent agenda item for its annual meeting while issuing an endless series of resolutions that target Israel. For the March 20 opening of its 2017 session, it will debate six commissioned reports on Israel.

Marking the Human Rights Council's 10th anniversary last spring, United Nations Watch's Executive Director Hillel Neuer told a House hearing that the council had by then adopted 67 resolutions condemning Israel but not a single one to condemn China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Congo, Cuba, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela or Vietnam - all human rights abusers, and some of them council members as well.

Speaking in Geneva last week, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Erin Barclay relayed administration concerns to the Human Rights Council in blunt language. Washington, she said, is "deeply troubled" by its "consistent unfair and unbalanced focus on one democratic country, Israel," an "obsession" that she said represents "the largest threat to the council's credibility" and makes a "mockery" of it.

Whether Washington should abandon the council is a debatable question. Proponents say it would send a strong message around the world that the United States will no longer associate itself with rampant bias and hypocrisy. Opponents, who include such fierce Human Rights Council critics as Neuer, say that things will only grow worse if U.S. officials aren't in the room to influence the council's proceedings as much as possible.

Either way, Washington's candor about the deep rot of anti-Israel bias at Turtle Bay marks a sharp change from decades of go-along, get-along U.S. attitudes toward the global body. More especially, it marks a sharp change from eight years of an Obama administration that grew increasingly hostile to Israel, culminating in an outrageous Security Council resolution that Washington let pass late last year.

For all the very legitimate concerns about the attitudes of some Trump-ites toward Jews, this new U.N. approach is undeniably refreshing.

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