There’s no good reason for anti-US, anti-Israel UN voting patterns

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The Trump administration’s decision to withdraw from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) late in 2018 is one shot across the U.N.’s bow. Notoriously hospitable to dictatorships, hostile to Israel and mismanaged as well, UNESCO deserves the warning.

But what does the U.S. do about U.N. member countries consistently voting against it and against Israel without even a national policy excuse for doing so? Not enough, yet.

The countries in question are not adversaries like Russia or Iran, which pursue policies inimical to American interests. Rather, they are either beneficiaries of U.S. aid or states whose own concerns would seem to parallel those of this country, or at least not oppose them.

For example, according to the American Jewish International Relations Institute (AJIRI), in 2016 a half-dozen countries ranking as major beneficiaries of U.S. tourism and assistance, and lacking a policy pretext to do so, nevertheless voted overwhelmingly in opposition to the U.S. on 67 roll call resolutions in the U.N. General Assembly. They were the Caribbean states of St. Lucia, siding against the U.S. 70.3 percent of the time; Belize, 69.8 percent; Dominican Republic, 68.7; Bahamas, 68.2; Jamaica, 67.7; and Barbados, 67.2 percent in opposition.

On 18 anti-Israel U.N. resolutions last year opposed by the U.S.—Israel being America’s major Middle East ally and only democratic government among regional pro-U.S. states—all the above tourist destinations nevertheless voted unanimously in favor except Jamaica. It backed 17 of the anti-Israel measures, abstaining on one.

Five African countries that receive major U.S. foreign assistance compiled a similar record. AJIRI noted that Kenya, which in fiscal 2017 gladly accepted $649 million of Uncle Sam’s aid money, voted against Washington on 2016’s 67 U.N. General Assembly roll call resolutions 76.3 percent of the time. Zambia, which received $436 million, opposed the U.S. 75.9 percent of the time.

Not far behind were Mozambique, a recipient of $420 million in American foreign aid, voting against the U.S. position at a rate of 75.4 percent; Tanzania, $611 million, 75 percent; and Ethiopia, $385 million, 71.7 percent.

On those 18 specifically anti-Israel resolutions, all but Ethiopia were unanimously in favor—that is, consistently opposing American Middle East policy. Ethiopia voted yes 16 times but abstained twice. Like the six Caribbean countries, none of the five African states displayed the courage to vote “no” even once.

There have been hints of a break in the U.N.’s anti-Israel lockstep policy. The world body’s new secretary-general, former Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Guterres, sounds like a believer in George Orwell’s observation that “sometimes the first duty of intelligent men is the restatement of the obvious.”

In April, Guterres vowed to fight anti-Semitism and called the denial of Israel’s right to exist a modern form of anti-Jewish hatred. “As secretary-general of the United Nations, I can say that the state of Israel needs to be treated as any other state, with exactly the same rules,” he said.

If so, then the U.N. has a long way to go. Last year’s 18 General Assembly condemnations of Israel, despite the opposition of the U.S., compared with six measures criticizing any of the organization’s 192 other members.

In February, Guterres contradicted a noxious piece of anti-Jewish, anti-Israel revisionism adopted late last year by UNESCO. The organization had declared Jerusalem’s Temple Mount an Islamic-only shrine. The secretary-general said it was “completely clear that the Temple the Romans destroyed in Jerusalem was a Jewish temple.” Further, he said “no one can deny the fact that Jerusalem is sacred to the three monotheistic religions”—Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The Palestinian Authority (PA), led by President Mahmoud Abbas’s Fatah movement and in charge of the West Bank, demanded an apology. Persisting in its denial of Jewish history in Jerusalem and the rest of the Holy Land, the PA claimed Guterres’S statement “violated all legal, diplomatic and humanitarian customs.”

Reforming the U.N. secretariat’s sclerotic, chronically anti-U.S. bureaucracy will be hard enough for Guterres. Getting a fairer shake in the General Assembly for the U.S. and Israel must begin in Washington.

A good start would be spotlighting countries—like those highlighted above—that benefit from the U.S. and Israel but routinely vote against them. This is work for the White House, State Department and members of Congress. Countries at fault should get friendly reminders: If you enjoy profitable relationships with the U.S. and with Israel, benefiting from bilateral economic, technological, military and cultural ties, you ought to align U.N. voting patterns with your own national interests. Failure to do so should warrant a cost, like that facing UNESCO.