Israel Deserves a Seat on the Security Council

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December 23, 2016 marked a new nadir for the United Nations Security Council as it adopted a shameful resolution questioning the very legitimacy of Israel’s presence at the holy Western Wall in Jerusalem. Lost in the rancor of this resolution, however, was a statement Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had made 10 days earlier declaring Israel’s intent to compete for a nonpermanent seat on this very same Security Council.

Now, more than ever, it is time for Israel to take its place as a leader in the world’s premiere international organization. Our country is qualified, well equipped and well prepared for this important role.

We know this will not be easy. Resolutions and motions that are routinely passed by consensus at the U.N. when proposed by other countries are often subject to intense debate and wrangling when they are brought forward by the Jewish state. The enmityalsoextends to matters of leadership. The U.N. comprises five regional groups: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and WEOG (Western Europe and Others). If a country is not a member of a regional group, it cannot be considered for leadership roles at the U.N. Though Israel has been a full member of the U.N. since 1949, for many years we were banned from joining our regional group of Asia-Pacific. It was not until 2000 that we were allowed to join WEOG on a temporary basis and then as full members in 2004.

Despite this official recognition, progress has been slow. It was only last year that I was elected to chair the Sixth (Legal) Committee, becoming the first Israeli to chair a U.N. permanent committee. What is usually a position confirmed by consensus became a protracted and complicated campaign in which we had to cajole and persuade 109 countries to cast their ballot for an Israeli.

With this victory as a model, Israel has set the ambitious goal of obtaining one of the three nonpermanent WEOG seats on the Security Council in 2019. To do so we must convince two-thirds of the General Assembly members of the worthiness of this cause.

Make no mistake about it, we are as deserving as any nation of this leadership role: Israel funds a higher percentage of the U.N. budget than the other 65 countries yet to serve on the Security Council combined. Moreover, few countries have Israel’s firsthand experience in the failures of the U.N.—and acute awareness of the possibilities were this organization to be set on the right path.

On our northern borders the peacekeeping forces of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon play a vital role in keeping volatile situations relatively stable. Still, this force has not lived up to its potential and must do much more to fulfill its mandates. Despite UNIFIL’s presence on the ground for decades, Hezbollah has been allowed to grow largely unchecked. The Iran-backed terrorist group’s aggressive posture led to war in 2006. And more recently, it has increased its arsenal from 7,000 rockets in 2006 at the end of the Second Lebanon War to almost 150,000 rockets today, aimed at our cities and towns.

This is why Israel fights tirelessly for the enforcement of Security Council resolution 1701, which stated that no foreign forces or arms are to enter Lebanon. UNIFIL troops must work with the Lebanese army to deploy throughout the south of the country up to the border with Israel.It is high time for Lebanon’s government to distance itself from the terrorists of Hezbollah and reclaim full sovereignty in its country. We know that this promises not only peace for us, but safety and stability for the people of Lebanon.

Our firsthand knowledge of the importance of the U.N. does not end with matters of war and peace. Israel’s willingness, and unique expertise, in humanitarian missions around the world is unparalleled.

Our sought-after technology has been used for everything from securing the pope’s visit to Africa, to helping to relieve terrible droughts. Whether it’s extracting survivors from a devastating earthquake in Turkey or treating the wounded from the typhoon in the Philippines, Israel is always first on site to help our fellow nations.

We believe that by playing a key leadership in the U.N.’s most important body, Israel can make real change in the international community—not just supplementing the efforts of other nations, but integrating our knowledge and know-how into the system itself.

The past few months have raised serious questions about the credibility of the U.N. as a whole and the Security Council in particular as it continues its unending obsession with Israel while paying way too little attention to the other ills of the world.By electing Israel to serve on the Security Council, the members of the U.N. will make a strong statement finally accepting the Jewish state as a full and equal member.

More important, the international community will gain a leader committed to tirelessly furthering the noble goals upon which the parliament of nations was founded almost 72 years ago.