Nikki Haley Confronts the U.N.'s 'Jackals'

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When U.N. member states vote Thursday on a resolution condemning America's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, Ambassador Nikki Haley will be watching. As she [tweeted](https://twitter.com/nikkihaley/status/943241599953309696) Tuesday, "The U.S. will be taking names."

President Donald Trump endorsed the threat Wednesday at the opening of a cabinet meeting, [suggesting](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/20/world/middleeast/trump-threatens-to-end-american-aid-were-watching-those-votes-at-the-un.html) that countries that vote against the U.S. in the U.N. General Assembly will potentially lose foreign assistance.

It's easy to shrug off this bravado. The U.N. provides members with an accounting of all votes in the General Assembly, so there's no need to "take names." What's more, it's only a symbolic resolution. Haley vetoed a potentially substantive one on Monday at the U.N. Security Council.

But dismissing Haley's threat misses the significance of Trump's course correction at the United Nations. Trump's predecessor used the U.N. to validate American foreign policy. Barack Obama sought a Security Council resolution to intervene in Libya -- without bothering to get Congress to authorize that military action. And while he didn't end up going to the U.N. when a rampage of the Islamic State in 2014 led him to re-intervene in Iraq and Syria, Obama generally placed great weight on the U.N.'s approval of U.S. foreign policy. He loathed using America's veto to protect Israel from the inevitable one-sided pro-Palestinian resolutions that burble out of Turtle Bay.

When Obama's envoys did exercise that veto, the administration made sure to signal that it agreed with the principal of condemning Israeli settlements, but opposed the venue. Haley's predecessor, Samantha Power, finally did abstain from a resolution that declared East Jerusalem occupied territory a year ago. She did so -- to a standing ovation at the U.N. Security Council -- when Obama had less than a month left in office.

Make no mistake, Power was "joining the jackals," to borrow the title of a famous Commentary Magazine [essay](https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/joining-the-jackals/) by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a former U.S. ambassador to the U.N. and former Democratic senator from New York. In that essay, Moynihan documented how the anti-Israel resolutions to which former president Jimmy Carter acquiesced were designed to single out Israel as a rogue state at a time when the Security Council was silent on the predations of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and other regional aggression.

That's not how Carter saw it though. Like Obama, he pursued a policy of avoiding open confrontation with states at the U.N. with whom the U.S. disagreed. Better to press the case in private and appear to be with the majority of member states than to stand in contrast to alleged world opinion. Moynihan summed up the folly of this approach neatly: "In our flight from 'confrontation' did we end not by understanding the perspectives of others, but by adopting them."

This is the ideological context of Haley's recent actions at the U.N. She has made it clear that the U.N. needs America more than America needs the U.N. This is not just because the U.S. hosts the body's headquarters. It's because the U.S. remains the indispensable member of the organization. It contributes 23 percent of the U.N. annual budget. The U.S. provides nearly 30 percent of the budget to the U.N. Relief and Works Agency, or UNRWA. That's the agency that runs Palestinian schools and medical facilities and has often turned a blind eye to the participation of outlaws like Hamas. The U.S. provides the logistics for moving troops and material for peace-keeping missions and disaster relief. There is no U.N. without the U.S.

Haley made this point well in her speech announcing the U.S. veto Monday of the U.N. Security Council resolution condemning recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. "When the American people see a group of countries whose total contributions to the Palestinian people is less than 1 percent of UNRWA's bud get -- when they see these countries accuse the United States of being insufficiently committed to peace -- the American people lose their patience."

Haley has delivered this message in public and private a lot in her first year on the job. She pulled the plug on U.S. participation in U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization after it declared Hebron to be a Palestinian world historic site with no mention of the deep Jewish historical connection to that city. She has sought ways to cut the fat from the U.N. peace-keeping budget, and has used the monthly U.N. Security Council meeting to deal with the Middle East to call attention to Iranian aggression.

Under the Obama-Carter theory, Haley's approach would lead to America's isolation at the U.N. But so far this has not been the case. In one week, Haley was able to help shepherd a U.N. Security Council resolution this year imposing sanctions on North Korea. One U.S. official told me several member states have reached out to the ambassador for assurances on their bilateral relationship given the upcoming General Assembly vote.

I doubt that Haley's tweets and speeches will have much of an effect on the vote Thursday. U.N. watchers predict an overwhelming majority of member states will approve a symbolic resolution expressing displeasure at America's decision to relocate its embassy in Israel. For Obama, that would be a policy failure. For Haley and Trump, it's a moment of clarity. The jackals will do what they will, but they still need America more than America needs them.