**Danon: US Likely to Support Israel’s Seat on UN Security Council**

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In a move that could significantly bolster Israel’s historic bid to join the United Nations Security Council, the US is likely to “actively support” Israel’s candidacy against Germany and Belgium, UN Ambassador Danny Danon said.

Danon, back on a work-visit to Israel, told The Jerusalem Post on Sunday that while there is still a year to go before the General Assembly will vote on the five members who will join the council in 2019, he is already raising the issue with different leaders and has discussed it with US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley.

“I think that it is clear that we will get the support of the US,” Danon said. “And I think that we can even expect active support for this important bid.”

Haley has repeatedly spoken of the need to change the UN’s relationship toward Israel. And Danon said a natural outgrowth of Washington’s call for a fundamental change in that relationship would support Israel’s efforts to win a Security Council seat.

The Security Council is composed of five permanent members – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States – and 10 non-permanent members elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly.

Candidates for a non-permanent seat are allocated according to regional blocs.

Since 2000, Israel has been a member of the 28-strong Western European and Others Group. Three members have declared their intention to vie for the two spots that will be open in 2019: Israel, Belgium and Germany.

Israel is the only country in the Middle East – and one of 67 countries in the UN, many of them small islandstates – that has never sat on the Security Council, a body that historically has had tremendous impact on the Jewish state and the region.

Last year, Danon was elected chairman of the UN Legal Committee, the first time an Israeli was elected to chair a UN permanent committee.

He said that just as this was accomplished – even though few thought that the UN “glass ceiling” could be broken – so too a seat on the Security Council is not inconceivable, especially if the US puts its weight behind the bid. The support of at least two-thirds (128 states) in the General Assembly is needed to gain a seat.

Danon also said that Israel has good bilateral relations with many countries in the UN – such as African and Asian states – that could be leveraged for their support.

He noted the increasing number of smaller states at the UN that have turned to him to assist in their relations with the US, knowing the closeness of Israel’s ties with the White House under President Donald Trump.

Speaking of Trump’s likely visit to Israel later this month during his first trip abroad, Danon said the message of such a trip is that “the US is close to Israel, and Israel is close to the US. That is an important consideration [for many countries]. You can’t ignore this.”

He said the closeness of those ties has led to some change in relations with some European countries inside the UN, Britain foremost among them.

Under the Obama administration, he said, some friends of Israel were influenced by the US to support the anti-settlement Security Council Resolution 2334. Now, however, some of those same countries are being influenced by the Trump administration to go in the opposite direction.

Danon acknowledged that it will be very difficult with Russia, China and France holding a veto on the Security Council to repeal UNSC 2334.

Nevertheless, he said there are efforts to “water it down” by minimizing reference to it in other resolutions or documents.

But this, too, is an uphill battle. For instance, Haley tried to get the Security Council to put out a statement condemning February’s terrorist attack in Petah Tikva.

The French, however, insisted on inserting language referencing 2334, to which Haley objected. As a result, the statement was not issued.

Haley said France and Sweden are two European countries that pose difficulties for Israel on the council, along with nations such as Bolivia, which is known to be hostile toward the Jewish state.

When Haley urged the Security Council countries to discuss Iran and Hezbollah at the monthly session devoted to the Middle East, instead of placing all the focus on the Palestinians, Sweden diplomatically objected. Nevertheless, Danon said, many countries did stay focused on Iran and Hezbollah instead of on Israel and the Palestinians.

Danon said that Haley – with words and actions – has changed the atmosphere toward Israel in the UN, and that its new Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, recognizes “there is a new reality.”

Danon said he invited Guterres to visit Israel and expects him to come in “the coming months,” perhaps even by the beginning of the summer.