Haley: Vote With U.S. at U.N. or We’ll Cut Your Aid

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By [Colum Lynch](https://foreignpolicy.com/author/colum-lynch/)

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U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley is proposing a sweeping reassessment of U.S. foreign assistance with a view to punishing dozens of poor countries that vote against U.S. policies at the U.N., according to a confidential internal memo drafted by her staff.

The move to make foreign aid conditional on political support follows a U.S. decision to cut tens of millions of dollars in assistance to Palestinian refugees, a cut made in retaliation for Palestine’s sponsorship of U.N. resolutions denouncing U.S. President Donald Trump’s controversial recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. Haley now wants to apply a similar principle to decisions about aid to other needy countries.

“It is the opinion of the U.S. mission to the U.N. that all U.S. foreign assistance should be reevaluated to ensure that taxpayers dollars are spent to advance U.S. interests, not to fund foreign legacy programs that provide little or no return on investment,” according to the 53-page memo, which was reviewed by Foreign Policy. The Palestinian aid cuts “should serve as a fulcrum from which we use our foreign assistance leverage and measure its impact.”

The memo, titled “America First Foreign Assistance Policy” and marked sensitive, echoes Trump’s oft-repeated claim that the world takes advantage of U.S. largesse while opposing American goals. The proposal also underscores the dramatic shift in Haley’s own stance on foreign assistance; she began her term pledging to preserve humanitarian aid for Palestinian and Syrian civilians and to oppose “slash and burn” cuts at the United Nations.

The document is part of a broader interagency review of U.S. foreign assistance initiated by Trump, who [appealed](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-state-union-address/) to Congress during his State of the Union address to “pass legislation to help ensure American foreign-assistance dollars always serve American interests and only go to America’s friends.”

The memo recognizes that support for U.S. positions at the U.N. is not the only condition for aid, and that in many cases it must be “disregarded in favor of US security or economic needs.” Some of the largest recipients of U.S. aid, including Iraq, which votes against the U.S. 60 percent of the time, and Egypt, which “often has a more antagonistic approach to the United States in the U.N. than Russia, China and Venezuela,” would likely be spared, according to the memo.

But “the autopilot nature of many U.S. foreign assistance efforts is leaving far too much ‘low-hanging fruit’ that should be either eliminated or leveraged into greater support at the U.N. and elsewhere.”

The paper proposes subjecting to review nearly 40 countries that received a total of $100 million in U.S. assistance in 2016, but that vote against the United States 54 percent of the time. It notes that South Sudan, one of the top 10 recipients of U.S. aid in 2016, “votes for U.S. interests at the United Nations a paltry 47.9% of the time.”

The document primarily targets development programs, including infrastructure, education, and energy projects, even though those kinds of overseas assistance programs are often explicitly designed to advance U.S. foreign-policy interests. Development and education investments help curb radicalism, while energy and development assistance boosts economic growth and stability, lowering the chance for conflict.

Haley’s staff cite three U.S.-funded projects worth reconsidering in view of the recipient countries’ frequent lack of support for U.S. positions: A $3.1 million job training program in Zimbabwe, a $6.6 million climate change program in Vietnam, and a $4.9 million school construction program in Ghana. The memo tallied $580 million in total U.S. support for those three countries in fiscal year 2016, but saw support for U.S. positions in the U.N. only 54 percent of the time from Ghana, 38 percent of the time from Vietnam, and 19 percent of the time from Zimbabwe.

“None voted with us on Jerusalem, even though none have a strong domestic constituency compelling the vote,” the memo adds.

Haley’s office suggested that congressional support for such a policy would strengthen its impact, but said U.S. diplomats could get better voting outcomes if they underscored the threat of losing aid money.

“If our warnings fail, then, as the president said, ‘we would save a lot of money,’” the memo reads.

Some conservatives have long bridled at the fact that countries that receive U.S. aid routinely vote against the United States in the U.N. General Assembly. “I’ve been of the view that votes in the United Nations should cost people, cost countries that vote against us,” John Bolton, a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and rumored next national security advisor, recently [told](https://grabien.com/story.php?id=145631) Fox News.

Bolton recalled that former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker said that Yemen’s 1990 vote against the authorization of force against the then-Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein would be the most expensive vote they ever cast. “And we did cut their foreign aid,” Bolton said. “And there needs to be more of that.”

Haley, who has frequently sought Bolton’s counsel on U.N. matters, agrees. “For decades, the U.S. has been by far the world’s single-largest provider of foreign assistance,” her staff writes in the memo. “Numerous countries have taken advantage of this assistance while routinely opposing us in the U.N.”

The memo says there is a “historic reflex” among American administrations to continue providing assistance year after year to legacy aid programs. “It should stop,” it states.

Humanitarian aid advocates have voiced alarm. “To walk away in a casual and cavalier manner from decades of U.S. policy on humanitarian assistance is profoundly depressing,” says Eric Schwartz, the president of Refugees International. “It’s wrong morally and it’s wrong geostrategically.”

He says that such a posture could undermine U.S. soft power around the world.

“The goodwill that the U.S. has in the world has largely been the result of the perception of international good citizenship,” Schwartz says. “To walk away from that is shameful.”