Israel Doing Little to Promote Own Bid for Security Council Seat

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Israel’s long-shot bid to gain a coveted slot on the 15-state UN Security Council in 2019-2020 is getting longer due to a failure by Jerusalem to launch any serious campaign, The Jerusalem Post has learned.

In addition, the decision by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu this year to withhold $8 million of Israel’s $11m. annual membership fee to the world body – because of its Security Council anti-settlement resolution in December and the UNESCO vote in May denying Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem – is not the type of action that enhances the chance of being elected to the UN’s premier body. Israel pays another $36m. each year to support UN peacekeeping forces.

In September 2005, soon after Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip and thenprime minister Ariel Sharon was warmly received in the UN, then-foreign minister Silvan Shalom announced that Israel would vie for a spot in 2019, the next date in which both WEOG slots had not already been claimed.

Since that time, both Belgium and Germany declared they also would vie for the spot. The support in a secret ballot of at least two-thirds – 128 states – in the General Assembly is needed to gain a seat. Both Belgium and Germany have come out with slogans and logos for their campaign and have actively lobbied other countries to support Israel – beyond making clear that it is interested in a seat – has done little else.

Netanyahu, during a state visit to Kazakhstan last December, asked President Nursultan Nazarbayev for assistance in getting Israel accepted on the council.

“We helped you get accepted as a member of the Security Council and now we are asking you to help us be a member of the council, as well,” Netanyahu said at a joint press conference.

Kazakhstan became a member of the council on January 1.

One western official closely following the issue said it was hard to believe that in the current situation Israel stood much of a chance.

The elections are scheduled for June 2018, the official said, noting that last week the UN voted in the five new countries who will become members of the Council in 2018-2019: Poland, Peru, Equatorial Guinea, Cote d’Ivoire and Kuwait.

Equatorial Guinea, for instance, pushed its own candidacy hard, setting up a web site under the headline “Equatorial Guinea, a worthy candidate for the UN Security Council 2018-2019.” It also produced a brochure and video hailing the country’s progress and its achievements.

“It is a little late for Israel to start now,” the western official said, adding that countries often wage a campaign two to three years in advance and make sure that it is on the agenda of every meeting their presidents or prime ministers holds with their counterparts.

The official said states that are interested invest millions in the campaign; send delegations around the world; invite dozens of delegations to their own countries; and appoint an ambassador whose job it is to push this issue.

What you don’t do, the official said, is withhold money from the UN the year you want to be elected.

The Canadian Broadcast Company reported in May that Canada, which is vying for a seat on the council in 2021-2022, is “on track to spend millions over the next three years” in its bid to beat out Ireland or Norway for the two available spots.

This sum, according to the report, “includes everything from postage stamps to travel to hospitality. It does not include the salaries of the 10 government employees appointed to work fulltime on Canada’s bid.” Salaries could add another million dollars to the overall price tag.

According to the report, Sweden spent $4m. on salaries, envoys and receptions in the last two years of its campaign to win a seat in 2017. CBC also quoted media reports suggesting that Turkey spent $85m. on its campaign to win a seat on the council in 2008, and that Australia reportedly spent just under $25m. when it won a rotating seat in 2012.

In Israel, by contrast, nobody has been charged with leading the campaign and no significant budget has been allocated.

UN Ambassador Danny Danon has been pushing the Foreign Ministry on the issue for more than a year, but to little avail.

Part of Israel’s reluctance to invest large sums has to do with a lack of confidence that it could actually win a race for the influential seat in a body that is traditionally stacked against it. At the same time, without investing the money, it will never happen.

Danon said in April that Israel could likely count on active US support for the bid, but Washington has not yet publicly lobbied for the move. The issue is believed to have been raised when Netanyahu met last week in Jerusalem with US ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley.