'UN's Budget Will Suffer Unless It Stops Attacking Israel'

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Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Danny Danon recently marked his second year in the world body. This week he was in Jerusalem to accompany U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley on her three-day visit to Israel.

Asked what he thinks is the most profound change the U.N. has undergone since U.S. President Donald Trump took office in January, Danon said the U.N. has become a different place since the new American administration came to power.

"I remember Dec. 23, 2016, when [Resolution 2334](http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_article.php?id=39019&preview_var=1) [condemning the Judea and Samaria settlement enterprise as an obstacle to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process] was up for a Security Council vote," he recalled. "Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had spoken with [then-]Secretary of State John Kerry and he couldn't get an answer to a simple question: Will the United States vote for or against the resolution. I called [then-]U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Samantha Power dozens of times -- there was no answer. Ambassadors from countries sympathetic to Israel told me, 'Danny, we want to abstain in the vote, but the U.S. won't let us. At the last minute we got word that the U.S. plans to abstain and that it won't veto the resolution.

"Today, on the other hand, it's a different world. There's an open channel of dialogue [with the U.S. mission], we meet and we discuss everything. We don't agree on things 100%, which is natural because our interests don't always completely align, but there is a genuine dialogue.

"Nikki Haley expresses support for Israel, but she's unique in the sense that she expresses this sympathy publicly and emphatically. In a place like the U.N. that has a tremendous impact. The U.S. has been sympathetic of Israel in the past, but the overall approach was always 'Let's work quietly to get the message across.' This directness is the type of conduct that affects how other nations relate to us," he said.

Danon accompanied Haley this week as she was given an aerial tour of Israel's borders, and when she visited several startup companies in Tel Aviv. Haley also visited the Western Wall in Jerusalem, but as the visit was a private one -- as was Trump's visit to the holy site last month -- she was not accompanied by any senior Israeli official.

Haley, Danon said, "chaired the U.N. Security Council and learned that there was a permanent session titled 'Discussion on the Middle East and the Palestinian Question.' She made it clear to the U.N.'s Middle East envoy, Nickolay Mladenov, that from now on, the session will focus solely on the Middle East. We've been talking about this for years. She came in and got it done."

Haley arrived in Israel Wednesday after a visit to the United Nations Human Rights Council headquarters in Geneva, an agency the Foreign Ministry says has suffered a "hostile takeover" by anti-Israel Palestinian elements. The UNHRC seems oblivious to the atrocities taking place in countries like North Korea and Syria, but Israel is a fixed item on the agenda of the 47-member body and since its inception in 2006, it has passed over 70 resolutions against the Jewish state.

On Tuesday, the Trump administration gave formal notice that it was reviewing its participation in the Human Rights Council and Haley urged reforms that would eliminate the agency's "chronic anti-Israel bias."

"The United States is looking carefully at this council and our participation in it. We see some areas for significant strengthening," Haley told the Geneva forum. "This relentless, pathological campaign against a country that actually has a strong human rights record makes a mockery not of Israel, but of the council itself."

Israel is currently spearheading a move that could see multiple members exit the UNHRC unless it relinquishes its anti-Israel bias. Both Israel and the U.S. left the agency in the past but eventually resumed their membership, hoping things would change.

Israel has now presented two key demands: The cancellation of the annual UNHRC session that focuses solely on alleged human rights violations committed by Israel against the Palestinians; and disbanding the committee tasked with maintaining a database of companies doing business beyond the Green Line, in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and the Golan Heights.

"There are hundreds of thousands of refugees in Syria and human rights are being violated in Iran, Libya, Yemen and North Korea, but the Human Rights Council is obsessed with Israel. That's outrageous," Danon said.

"The decision to create a database of companies doing business beyond the Green Line is very dangerous to Israel, because it's not a group like the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement boycotting Israel -- it's an official U.N. body that wants to publish a blacklist calling for a boycott of Israel," he explained.

"This list will include both Israel Hayom and Haaretz, as both newspapers are distributed in Jerusalem's Gilo neighborhood. All Israeli banks and every company, big or small, would face worldwide restrictions, and there will be a call not to do business with them. The committee's deliberations are scheduled to conclude at the end of the year, which is when they're supposed to publish the list. It reminds me of dark periods [in history]."

**Q: What can be done against this decision?**

"The United States can change the situation now. Our presence and that of the U.S. and other enlightened countries on the council lends it legitimacy. We're taking initiative because if things don't change, the UNHRC's budget won't go through and a group of countries will walk out. We will be advising our friends not to legitimize this body and, moreover, render it irrelevant over its blatant bias.

"The U.S. contributes 25% of the U.N.'s budget," he continued. "The General Assembly and Security Council aside, the U.N. has a host of agencies, such as the Human Rights Council, UNESCO, the World Health Organization and UNICEF. These agencies are obsessed with Israel. I'm currently pursuing a move by which the chairpersons of these organizations will be disqualified if it is found that in the past they were biased toward certain populations or countries."

**Duels instead of dialogue**

According to Danon, one of the main issues is the reports produced by the U.N.'s agencies.

"The U.N.'s agencies prepare reports that are then used by the U.N. headquarters and all over the world. We spare no effort to review these reports and see what they write about Israel and unfortunately, we never regret it. Take for example an allegedly innocent report titled 'Annual Report on Children in Armed Conflict Areas.' The Palestinians tried to put Israel on a blacklist, alongside organizations such as Islamic State and Boko Haram.

"The report included an incident titled 'The murder of a Palestinian minor in Kiryat Arba' that said a Palestinian youth was killed while stabbing a young Israeli woman. I called the agency's chairman and I said, 'Have you lost your mind? This is a 17-year-old Palestinian terrorist who entered a home in a Jewish community and [murdered](http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_article.php?id=34683) a child sleeping in her bedroom. Is this how you present a murder in the U.N.?' This is the type of thing we deal with on a daily basis."

Underscoring the American influence, Danon said Israel "is trying to effect change through the U.S. and through the threat that if these unfair attacks continue, the U.N.'s budget will suffer."

"Israel has cut about half of the membership fees it pays the U.N., but this mostly has symbolic significance, especially on the American legislators. One hundred senators recently signed a [letter](http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_article.php?id=42079) informing the U.N. that unless it ends its negative attitude toward Israel, the payments [by the U.S.] to the U.N. will be in danger."

**Q: The U.N. has 193 member states. The Vatican and the Palestinian Authority have nonmember observer state status. Do you ever have the chance to speak with Palestinian envoy Riyad Mansour?**

"I maintain ties and dialogue with many U.N. representatives, including with the envoys of Muslim nations with which we have no ties, but not with the Palestinian envoy. Riyad Mansour is using the U.N. to ram Israel. This is the Palestinian objective in the U.N. -- to use it as a platform to attack and spread lies so as to encourage the delegitimization of Israel.

"Even on issues that he's supposed to spearhead, such as humanitarian aid to the people in the Gaza Strip -- Israel is leading that and the Palestinian envoy is absent. You can find him organizing conferences that malign us, spreading lies like the [allegation](http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_article.php?id=29459) that we engage in organ-harvesting, and making outrageous comparisons between the situation in Judea and Samaria and the Holocaust.

"A year ago, during one of the Security Council's meetings, a terrorist attack took place in Jerusalem. I turned to Mansour and said, 'Let's condemn terrorism -- all terrorism -- together.' He refused and a commotion ensued. As far as he's concerned, the U.N. is a battlefield, not a place where you foster dialogue."

**Q: Anti-Israeli resolutions are also promoted by Egypt and Jordan, neighboring countries with which we have peace treaties. How do you explain that?**

"I find it unacceptable. When I see ambassadors who talk out of both sides of their mouth, saying one thing in private conversations and another thing in public, I tell them that's inappropriate. The explanations I get are always two: The first is that 'we are part of a group and sometimes we have to do something for the group'; and the second is that 'our actions for Israel are frowned upon at home.'

"This was the case, for example, when we passed the resolution to [recognize](http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_article.php?id=31409)the ZAKA rescue and recovery service as an official U.N. body. Certain committees can only pass unanimous decisions. I worked with envoys from Arab countries, they eventually agreed to remain outside the room, and their absence from the vote led to the approval of the Israeli motion on ZAKA. Afterward they showed me the hate-filled stories about them at home."

**Q: Arab states** [**cut ties**](http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_article.php?id=42881) **with Qatar this week over its support of terrorism. Can this change be felt in the U.N.?**

"This is a very significant step. I was in one of the Gulf states a few months ago and during a conversation with one official, he told me about their concerns about Iran. I told him, 'The first missile will fall on us,' and he said, 'No, they'll fire their first missile here, on us.' The Iranian threat is familiar in Israel, but in the Gulf it's perceived as an existential threat. This is why Qatar's conduct is perplexing."

Like Netanyahu and many others in the Right, Danon claims that "Israel is not isolated internationally."

He believes the fact that Israel loses important votes in the U.N. and struggles to operate within its agencies is the result of animosity, not Israel's prolonged control of Palestinian territories, as well as the result of "actions taken by a handful of nations" and traditional voting patterns that are difficult to change.

"One can count on one hand the number of countries whose envoys get up in the morning and come to work against us, namely Iran, Venezuela, Syria and the Palestinians. The problem is that they generate peer pressure. On top of that, there's an obscene practice in the U.N., called 'voting history,' meaning that if we voted on something a certain way in the past, we won't change the way we vote. For this reason, even countries that are not hostile toward Israel vote against us.

"Our job is to take every resolution's draft and present its problematic nature to Israel's friends," Danon explained. "Many times, illustrating these things leads at least to a situation where a country that isn't anti-Israeli abstained in the vote."