Israel, U.S. Trying to Persuade Western Countries to Oppose Five Anti-Israel UN Resolutions

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Israel and the United States are cooperating to persuade as many Western countries as possible to oppose, or to at least abstain from voting on, five anti-Israeli resolutions scheduled for voting at the United Nations Human Rights Council on Friday, a Foreign Ministry official said on Monday.

The U.S. boycotted UNHRC discussions on the five resolutions on Monday, adding that it would be voting against them.

The five resolutions coming up for discussion and voting are pursuant to Agenda Item 7 of the UNHRC. The section is unusual in being devoted entirely to human rights abuses by Israel. As no other country has been treated similarly, Israel claims that the item is an example of the council’s bias against it.

The discussion on the resolutions took place on Sunday, and the votes will be held toward the end of the week, apparently on Friday.

The five resolutions touch on the state of human rights in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, construction in the territories, and the need for accountability in respect to human rights violations by Israel.

The five decisions come up for voting yearly and are passed by a majority. In discussions held between Palestinians and European and Arab nations, a large part of the most problematic parts for Israel were softened, but the resolutions still level biting criticism at Israel.

As far as Israel is concerned, the most problematic part lies in the resolution touching on settlements in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, which will include a call on the nations of the world and private enterprises to stop all commercial activity – direct or indirect – with the settlements. The resolution will also call for a special discussion on the topic of the settlements in the next meeting of the UNHRC later this year.

The resolution on the settlements will also accuse Israel of deliberate, institutionalized discriminatory policy against the Palestinians, de-jure and de-facto annexation of territories on the backdrop of expropriation, and creating a one-state reality with unequal rights for Palestinian citizens. The resolution engaging in accountability will criticize Israel for harming human rights organizations and constraining their activity.

A top official at the Foreign Ministry assessed that the resolutions are likely to pass, since the Palestinians have an automatic majority in the UNHRC.

However, he stressed, Israel’s purpose is to ensure that the nations of Europe and other Western countries vote against the resolutions, or at least abstain from them. The senior Israeli official said the Palestinians are trying to reach a consensus with the European nations about the formulation of the resolutions, to enable their vote of support. He emphasized that Israel, with the help of the U.S., is trying to break the European consensus.

Israeli circles assess that if Germany and Britain decide to oppose the resolutions, or abstain, it would enable other countries in Europe, Latin America and Asia to oppose them too.

The official added that some weeks ago, Israel contacted the Trump administration and asked to coordinate activity in Geneva and other capitals around the world against the resolutions. A request to this effect was also transferred to U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley, who undertook to help. Israel’s permanent envoy to the UN and other international institutions in Geneva, Aviva Raz Shechter, has been working in recent days with American representatives to influence Germany, Britain and other countries, hoping to persuade them to oppose the resolutions or abstain. The Foreign Ministry has instructed Israel’s ambassadors in the capitals of the countries that sit on the UNHRC to work with top political echelons in these places and ask them to vote against or abstain.

As part of the coordination between Israel and the U.S., the Trump administration decided to boycott the discussion on the anti-Israeli resolutions held in Geneva on Monday. Mark Toner, spokesman for the U.S. State Department, stated that the U.S. believes the UNHRC is biased against Israel, which is why they decided not to participate in the Monday discussion on Agenda Item 7.

“It does not serve the interests of the Council to single out one country in an unbalanced matter,” Toner said. He added that later this week the U.S. will vote against all the anti-Israeli resolutions and would encourage other countries to do the same.

Under former U.S. President George W. Bush, Washington withdrew from the UNHRC and only returned when Barack Obama came to the Oval Office. In recent weeks, the Trump administration has been examining the continuing activity of the UNHRC and possibly withdrawing from it again.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu raised the topic with U.S. President Donald Trump and U.S. Vice President Mike Pence during his visit to Washington in mid-February. A top Israeli official said it was agreed that Israel and the U.S. would hold talks on the matter to shape joint policy toward the UNHRC.

“Our position is that the U.S. shouldn’t be on the [UN]HRC, and Netanyahu made that clear,” the official said.

Deputy Minister Michael Oren said much the same in a phone call last week with the U.S. secretary of state’s aide for international organizations. Oren clarified that the U.S. cannot really influence the council from the inside, so it would be better if it left it altogether.