

Beyond anger: How to respond to the UN Security Council vote

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Israel's angry response to the UN Security Resolution on Israeli settlements, and the abstention (de facto support) of the Obama administration is understandable, but it is unlikely to be very helpful and is probably counterproductive.

Such attacks in the UN have been commonplace for decades, reflecting both the power of the Arab and Islamic bloc, and the hypocrisy of many of the western democracies.

Once President Obama had signaled his readiness to join in this ritual, there was no reason to expect the other 14 members of the UNSC to break with the traditional Israel-bashing.

In lashing out through the cancellation of a scheduled visit by the Ukrainian prime minister (for voting yes), the threat to stop agricultural aid to Senegal (a co-sponsor of the resolution, along with Malaysia, Venezuela, and New Zealand), and summoning the other ambassadors for a dressing-down, the Israeli government is unlikely to accomplish very much. By the same logic, Netanyahu could have angrily sought to sanction the other Security Council members, such as Russia, China and the UK, but in those cases, it was obvious that discretion (or caution) is indeed the better part of valor.

In formulating realistic and rational responses, in this case as in others, Israeli leaders should first assess the potential damage and then find ways to reduce this impact. The main dangers are from further demonization and delegitimization, via boycotts (BDS)

and lawfare. Indeed, the leaders of BDS campaigns are celebrating what they correctly see as a major, if temporary, victory.

The network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, B'tselem, Breaking the Silence and many more – largely financed by European governments and radical foundations such as the Soros group and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund – has promoted anti-Israel Security Council resolutions for at least 16 years – since the infamous UN Durban Conference of 2001. The NGO Forum at Durban marked the launch of BDS and the political war to demonize Israel, and the widely publicized propaganda presentation of Hagai Elad, the head of B'tselem, in what was supposed to be a closed Security Council consultation on October 14, marked the latest “victory.” For the self-proclaimed human rights community, Israel is “low hanging fruit” ripe for the picking, in comparison to the impotence of efforts to prevent real and monstrous war crimes in Syria, among other venues.

Aggressively marketed by the NGO network, this Security Council resolution will be cited at dozens if not hundreds of university BDS events in the coming months and perhaps years, as well as in the anti-Israel (and often antisemitic) programs involving the World Council of Churches and similar groups. The language calling on the Palestinians to end violence and incitement will, as always, be erased, making a mockery of the Obama administration’s façade of “balance.”

In the legal battleground, and particularly the International Court of Justice, the resolution is likely to give the long-running efforts to open investigations and perhaps prosecutions against Israelis. While there are more than 20 active conflicts around the world involving “occupied territories,” including Cyprus and the Ukraine, Israel will be singled out to an even greater degree.

For many years, the Israeli leadership ignored this delegitimization.

But seven years ago, with the publication of the infamous “Goldstone Report” on supposed Israeli war crimes during the Gaza conflict that began at end of December 2008, the political and military officials woke up to the dangers of “lawfare.”

In his report to the UN Human Rights Council, based largely on NGO claims, Judge Richard Goldstone called for a Security Council resolution leading to ICC prosecution.

After being repeatedly confronted with the refutations of the claims made, Goldstone then disavowed his own report, acknowledging that the evidence on which it was based was inaccurate. As a result, the report lost all credibility, Goldstone’s career came to an abrupt end, and the campaign stalled.

Another effort following the 2014 Gaza war, led this time by William Schabas, essentially ended with the resignation of Schabas.

The current situation is quite different, and in shifting the focus of allegations from “war crimes” to settlements, going directly to the Security Council, and enlisting the Obama administration from the beginning, the human rights network has acted strategically. The excuse is settlements, but the target is Israel, regardless of borders or policy.

To be effective, and go beyond expressions of anger and frustration, Israeli leaders are going to have to counter the sources of the demonization systematically and competently.

Barring foreign BDS leaders from conducting tours in Israel that contribute to incitement and antisemitism, and negotiating guidelines with European governments for funding NGOs claiming to promote human rights are important strategies.

And beginning on January 20, coordinating with the new administration in Washington

on this issue is important. And many of the countries that voted for the Security Council resolution might reverse course, if they are not alienated by Israeli overreaction. The resolution will probably remain on the books, but its impacts in terms of demonization can be mitigated or neutralized.