



The UN vs. Israel: Strengthening U.S.-Israeli Relations in the Age of Trump

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TRANSCRIPT

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REBECCA L. HEINRICH: [The first several minutes of audio have been lost due to technical difficulties] Mr. Lerner was born and raised in Minneapolis. He's attended George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs, where his thesis examined Soviet dissent policy. the London School of Economics, where he studied international relations, and the University of Chicago Law School, where he was an editor of the united - of the University of Chicago Law Review. Mr. Lerner served as a legislative assistant to members of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the U.S. Foreign Affairs Committee, where he worked on national security policies. And he has several other distinguished accomplishments. But then I will turn down to Ms. Kristen Silverberg. She is executive vice president for policy, good to have you with us this afternoon. Ambassador Kristen Silverberg is executive vice president, policy, at Business Roundtable, where she leads the policy team. She previously served as a managing director at the Institute of International Finance. She served in the George W. Bush administration as U.S. ambassador to the European Union from 2008 to 2009 and as assistant secretary of state for International Organization Affairs from 2005 to 2008. Prior to her time at the State Department, she held a number of senior positions at the White House, including deputy domestic policy adviser. So we're happy to have you here with us. And with that, if I may turn it over to Ambassador Moley to give a few remarks for us.

KEVIN MOLEY: Rebecca, thank you very much. I'm an ambassador - was an ambassador to the U.N. who you never heard of because, quite frankly, the tip of the lance of multilateral diplomacy is our permanent representative in New York, most especially, of course, in the era and time of Ambassador Haley, who brought that function. And her personality is a force of nature, if you will. But let me just say how pleased I am to be here with Jon and Kristen. I actually worked for Kristen Silverberg when I was the ambassador in Geneva, and she was the assistant secretary for international organizations, a job I now hold. And Kristen was actually the first woman to ever hold that job. And before that, she served as deputy assistant to President George Walker Bush. And there was an old saying at the time at the White House that if you wanted something done as opposed to just talked about, you made sure that you had Kristen Silverberg in the meeting because things actually happened. And I can say that as well about my colleague to my immediate left. And if anybody is to the right of Jon, it's me.

JON LERNER: (Laughter) On some days.

MOLEY: But having - but having said that, Jon likewise served in that role with Ambassador Haley. I can tell you, I don't think I ever went to the White House when I didn't see Jon either coming in or out and recognizing that he was spending a lot more time there and getting things done, working with Ambassador Haley. Talking about the commentary article and relations between the United Nations, the United States and Israel is a target-rich environment. And being from Arizona as I am, where there are still billboards on the interstates that say, get the U.S. out of the U.N., I can assure you that I've heard often from friends and colleagues in my home state about why are we even in the U.N.? But the fact of the matter is, we're in the U.N. because if we weren't, it would be even worse. And quite frankly, we need a place - we need a place to meet. And if we didn't have the U.N., we'd have to create some other vehicle to do much of the work we do. But the bias in the U.N. system towards Israel is palpable and has been, quite frankly, since the existence of Israel. And if I might just say a few things about our administration's policy and then turn it over to Jon and Kristen. When your adversaries refuse to come to the table and talk with you, you do not move the goalpost closer to them. You move it further away. And I think this administration, for the first time, has had the courage of our

convictions in respect to moving our embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which prompted many within the Department of State to say all hell's going to break loose. And of course, it didn't. And then, when we defunded UNRWA, which became simply a welfare program for Palestinians and non-Palestinians over the course of decades - when we defunded it, people said, many of my colleagues in the State Department, all hell's going to break loose. And of course, it didn't. And then if your opposition is also saying - when the Syrian ambassador the U.N. was once asked, how small an Israel would you accept, and he could not answer that question, then you just say, the Golan Heights are no longer a matter of discussion. They are part of Israel. And once again, colleagues in the State Department were prompt to say, you know, all hell's going to break loose. And of course, it didn't. So on that happy note, I'll defer to my colleague to my figurative left.

LERNER: Yes, thank you. Thank you, Kevin. Let me just return the compliments a little bit. I've been told, as a matter of historical fact, that there have been, over the years, tensions - sometimes substantial tensions - between the U.S. Mission to the U.N. and various other parts of the State Department, including the International Organizations Bureau, which Kevin Moley runs. That was not our experience at all. We got along very splendidly. In fact, we were - we were good allies against other portions of the building. But we'll leave that for another panel discussion. And Kristen, to my left, was very helpful when, after Nikki Haley, then-governor of South Carolina, was first nominated to be U.N. ambassador, we had a series of meetings with people during the transition period to sort of get up to school on U.N. matters. And Kristen was enormously helpful during that process. It's good to be here with both of them. As I wrote in the commentary piece, a big sort of thesis of what the administration was attempting to do in its first two years and continues to do over the course of Ambassador Haley's time at the U.N. as it relates to Israel and the Middle East was to challenge sort of conventional thinking that had existed for decades, in some cases. And there were a number of aspects to that. As Kevin mentioned, the Jerusalem Embassy issue was one of them. Funding for UNRWA is another one. And we can get into those details, happily, during the course of the next hour. The one thing I would just sort of open with is the proposition that the - the big animating theory of what we were trying to do really was crystallized by the U.N.'s passage of Resolution 2334 in December of 2016, during the transition period. The Obama administration was on its way out. The Trump administration was on its way in. And that - that U.S. abstention in the Security Council on a resolution that condemned Israeli activities - not merely settlements in the West Bank, but activities in all territories that were captured in the 1967 war - was something that was highly objectionable to the incoming Trump administration, on policy grounds, certainly. But also, as a - there was a sense of injustice about it, particularly coming during the transition. And so we were very determined to undo what we saw as the damage from a symbolic standpoint, but also to pursue policies that challenged the beliefs, not only widely held throughout the diplomatic community, but very much championed by the outgoing Obama administration. I will tell you that the - on the first day that I entered my office in the State Department, my predecessor - most of the people in that office, the U.S. U.N. office in Washington, are political appointees, not career people. And the - our predecessors, who I had met before - I'd had several very nice, constructive discussions with them. But I hadn't been in their actual office. When I walked into the office, I was a bit surprised. Given that the United Nations covers the entire world, I was a bit surprised to find several of the offices within our suite had posters on the walls showing, in great detail, the Israeli settlements in the West Bank. And I thought to myself, well, it's curious that with all of the, you know, hotspots and difficulties around the world,

that this office, this U.N. office, was almost singularly focused on the question of Israeli settlements. And that was between the Iran nuclear deal and the fixation on Israeli settlements. The outgoing administration had seemingly the view that those were the issues that really animated Middle East policy. That was not our position. And so we were able to move things in a different direction. So I'll leave it at that for now. And we can explore other topics as we go.

KRISTEN SILVERBERG: Well, I'll just be very brief, first to say what an admirer of Jon's I am and all of Ambassador Haley's team in New York and Washington. And we'll talk some more about that, I know. But also, to return the compliment to Kevin, who was such a great colleague and friend when we worked together in the Bush administration. Now, Kevin said that New York was - is tip of the spear for U.N. diplomacy. But in our administration, actually, Geneva was a serious hotspot because of the Human Rights Council and other things. And one of the ways Kevin was so effective in that role is because he really understands the difference between allies and adversaries. He worked very hard to develop this kind of gang of roving perm reps, including the U.K. perm rep and others. Kevin has some - has a joke about his U.K. perm rep, but I'll let - I'll let him tell it - and others. And it really helped to stop some of the worst - to block some of the worst things happening in Geneva. And this general theme of the difference between allies and adversaries is one of the things that I think Ambassador Haley did most effectively in New York. And I want to talk about this in more detail. But when I was at the State Department, one thing that would always drive me crazy is when some terrible thing was happening in New York and everybody would complain about the U.N. And I would say, that wasn't the U.N. That was the Egyptians or the Pakistanis or, you know, for the worst stuff, there was inevitably a member state behind it. And by the way, look at their foreign aid package. You know, there was the same - the exact same countries that the U.S. was supporting in lots of other ways felt perfectly comfortable going to U.N. capital and voting against us, making our lives difficult on a kind of broad range of issues. And one of the things I really loved about Ambassador Haley's tenure is that from the first day she got there, she said, we're going to hold member states accountable for their behavior in U.N. capitals. And I think it was incredibly important and effective.

HEINRICH: Wonderful. And with that, I would - I do - I think I'll start there because it kind of prompted this idea in my mind. When we think of the U.N., we do think of all the things that it does - that not the U.N. does, but that the member states do and how they vote. But I really like this quote from Ambassador Bolton - he's quoting Jeane Kirkpatrick - when he's - when he was asked, shouldn't we just pull out of the U.N.? And he says, it's not worth the trouble. So can you talk a little bit about how it's useful? How has being - how has - especially Ambassador Haley's tenure there, how she really had a much clearer understanding of allies and adversaries, and she said, we're taking names for these votes - how has that helped the United States internationally and in terms of security alliances? How - what is the fruit from that kind of approach?

LERNER: Well, I think there's a few places you can look to. There are some concrete areas that - where you did advance the ball in 2017, '18, at the U.N. The North Korea sanctions were a significant advance, you know, South Sudan, arms embargo, significant financial reforms. But bigger picture, to answer that - to address that question, I'd say that what's important to keep in mind at the U.N. is the United States has to make a decision about how seriously we take the U.N. and how important U.N. outcomes are to us. Often, we, for a variety of reasons - some of which I think are the right reasons - undervalue or purposefully devalue U.N. actions. It doesn't

matter to us that much. So - and so countries see that, and they know that there is little price for them to pay to go against the United States. Sometimes that's OK. We have a great many interests that exist outside of the U.N. and supersede that. However, I do think that we underplay it more than we should. If we were stronger in our demands or in our expectations about voting behavior at the U.N., we would get better outcomes from it. As Kristen mentioned, the linkage between American foreign assistance and U.N. voting from countries is one that we have very - we've historically very little drawn that linkage. Ambassador Haley very strenuously encouraged the drawing of that linkage. President Trump is fully on board with that idea. There - but - (laughter) we'll just say that there are others in our system that resist that, I think sometimes for good reasons and sometimes for maybe parochial reasons.

HEINRICH: Did you have something of - to add?

MOLEY: Well, one has to bear in mind that although we - when generally all of us think of the U.N., we think of that iconic building in New York. The - and I use the analogy, that would be the equivalent of course of the White House and the Congress. It's referred to as the 38th floor in New York, is where the secretary general resides and of course the general assembly. But all the agencies of the U.S. government that line Constitution and Independence Avenues here and across town are for the principal, in part, in Geneva. There are far more employees of the U.N. in Geneva, as an example, than there are in New York. And unlike in New York, where, in the Security Council, 15 members, five of which are permanent - the United States, of course, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, China - where we have a veto, in all those other institutional bodies of the U.N., we are Gulliver fighting off the Lilliputians. We're one of 193 votes. And oftentimes it comes very close to being one versus 192. I say that only somewhat facetiously. We do have a handful of allies that we can generally count on - the Marshall Islands, as an example...

(LAUGHTER)

MOLEY: ...And generally speaking, the United Kingdom, of course, who I always regard as our older brother in the U.N. system. After all, they've been there, done that. And they'll always ask you when we're about to say or do something, have you really thought through the consequences? And then, of course, the Australians, who are your younger brother, who says - who, when you say, let's go do something, they say, let's go kick their a** right now.

(LAUGHTER)

MOLEY: But across the board, of course, we have to work very hard to put coalitions together on various issues. And sometimes we find ourselves with very strange bedfellows. On one particular social issue, I remember thinking, we have Muhammad. We have the Vatican. And we have the United States, the one remaining superpower, our Lord Jesus Christ and Allah. We can't be beaten. Unfortunately, those situations don't often occur. But when they do, once again, in the U.N. system, when we don't have the opportunity to exercise the veto, we need to make our case with a variety of sometimes unseemly characters on certain issues. But on that happy note, I'll defer to my former boss, Kristen.

SILVERBERG: I should say, I was also Ambassador Bolton's former boss, but he doesn't describe me that way.

(LAUGHTER)

SILVERBERG: The - I think...

MOLEY: No. And I was allegedly Ambassador Haley's boss, and she never describes me that way.

(LAUGHTER)

SILVERBERG: Yeah. I think Kevin made a really important point at the beginning, that we tend to think of the U.N. as this monolithic entity. And actually, it's this whole assortment of agencies and organizations, some of which have highly technical, relatively apolitical mandates. You know, they negotiate standards that U.S. companies rely on to do, you know, business globally. And - you know, and we do fine at most of those places. One of the big differences between different parts of the U.N. is that some of them are funded through an annual assessment that's just based on a country's percentage, based on the size of the country's economy. Others are voluntarily funded. And no surprise, we do much better in the places that are voluntarily funded because we hold them accountable. We say, you're not going to get paid no matter what. You're going to get paid if you meet the objectives that the board has set out for you. And so one of the big themes during the Bush administration is that we wanted to move organizations from the assessed side of the line to the other side of the line. And to Jon's point about how seriously the U.S. takes the U.N., one of the constant themes when I was assistant secretary is how many governments were prepared to let kind of stuff go just because, even though they were supposedly more multilateralist in the Bush administration, they really just weren't that invested in the outcome. They just really weren't taking it seriously. So for example, every time an - you know, we - the U.S. would frequently stand up and make an objection to particular resolutions to say - you know, basically to make the point that the U.S. doesn't accept an international right to abortion. And we would do that whenever these come - particular language came up. And they would always complain, why are you doing that? You know, it's annoying. We've heard you say this a million times. You're wasting time. But we did that because the previous administration had toyed with this idea that there was an international right. And we wanted to say, we're taking these documents seriously legally. And so if you're going to assert that - you know, if you're going to use this language, then we're going to - you know, going to make our legal objection. And it's that kind of thing that actually I think the U.S. usually engages in U.N. capitals with a lot of kind of seriousness.

HEINRICHS: I think, from somebody who's been outside looking in, just from a foreign policy, international relations perspective, clarity is helpful. And so this idea that - you know, that we want to sort of lead by committee and kind of want to, you know, try to figure out what the Europeans want and then do that, you know, that is not a very helpful way to lead. And so just having the clarity of positions where the United States is just has its own benefits just inherently. And then just thought it was interesting - so you - can you talk a little bit, though, about - that was different from just the Bush administration to Obama and now the Trump administration and, in particular, Nikki Haley. What is unique, though, about the Trump administration, even as opposed to the Bush administration - how they view the U.N. and even the U.S.-Israel relationship? Can you contrast that a little bit?

MOLEY: Well, I like to - well, first let me set a predicate. Altogether too often, our allies believe in what they would call a compromise, which inevitably, to me, always led to concession and not real compromise. Having said that, I think the three issues I mentioned in respect to this administration - I mean, it's been since 1995, when the Congress said our embassy should

move from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. And we finally, meaning the Trump administration, did it. Likewise, as I indicated earlier in respect to Syria and the Golan Heights, it's - you know, no concession or - that we ever put on the table ever gained us anything other than repudiation. And so - ha ha (ph) - Golan Heights is no longer a topic of discussion or negotiation. It is part of Israel and always will be. And thirdly, on UNRRA, large controversy about how many actual descendants there were of the, quote, "refugees," Palestinians. And the only figure that was ever made, a classified document of a number of refugees in a country. The only time it was ever classified was in the Obama administration. We were never able to get it declassified, so we just eliminated funding to UNRRA. And once again, as I said, there were those within the department, many of whom are career experts, who predicted catastrophe when we did that. And yet, nothing has happened. If the Saudis and others regard that agency as so important, well, they can fund it, as they oftentimes claim they will. And then the money doesn't ever seem to show up. But why should we, the American taxpayer, be on the hook for something that is not serving America's interests? So I just use those as three examples of things that, even in the Bush administration, in which case many of us, including Kristen and I, certainly, and others felt very strongly about, but we never could get to the finish line. But this administration has decided against much internal opposition on those three specific issues to do what we probably should have done some time ago.

SILVERBERG: You know, I see Doug (ph) here. So he would have views on this as well. But my own view is, you know, both the Bush and the Trump administration are really invested in the relationship between the U.S. and Israel. And so, you know, I don't see a lot of daylight on the kind of overall strategic objectives. But I will say that it's a very different context. For most of the Bush administration, we were in the response to 9/11. We were waging war in Iraq. And a lot of our priorities, including in New York, were built around those kind of fundamental efforts. So I'll just give you one example. We had - for a Bush administration which normally, I think, would have been really aggressively opposing excessive U.N. budgets, we actually proposed increases in the U.N. peacekeeping budget. And we did that in part because our troops were busy. You know, and so our view at the time was we want the U.N. taking care of as many low-level conflicts as possible. We're going to stay focused on these things. And in fact, the Pentagon actually sent somebody over to my - when I had to defend my budget request that included this big increase, they sent somebody over to make the case with me. So there were some times when sort of we were doing things that - yeah, that were a little bit unusual for that reason. The other big thing is we were trying to keep up a - sort of really closely tied to the Europeans on Iran. We were trying to build this kind of multilateral coalition that could get Security Council resolutions that had European support and also Russian and Chinese. And that shaped a lot of our decision making. So - you know, so I think all those things kind of affected our broader strategic outlook.

HEINRICHS: That raises a great point that I think is often lost in the conversation when people talk about the JCPOA in Iran now, is all of the sanctions that led us to the point where the Obama administration even had the luxury of talking to the Iranians about negotiations was really the lead-up and the ramp-up during the Bush years.

SILVERBERG: Thank you. Yes, thank you (laughter).

HEINRICHS: Because it really - it took an enormous amount of work and developing that international consensus to get to that point where they were biting to the point where the Iranians were willing to have these conversations. And in my view, it was squandered on the

JCPOA. But that took so much work. And now we're - now that is the context in which we find ourselves now in dealing with interacting with and working with the Israelis as we try to now go back and take care of the problems that we continue to have with the Iranians.

LERNER: Rebecca, I would just add to that. The - I think clearly the Bush administration was very supportive of Israel, as is the Trump administration. The difference, in some degree, sort of befits the personalities of the two presidents, in the sense that I think President Bush - George W. Bush - worked very collaboratively with the Israelis on the various policies. In many cases, President Trump and the - and the Trump administration does - takes actions that are pro-Israel without even consulting the Israelis. For example, when we got out of UNESCO, we didn't - we didn't talk to the Israelis particularly about that. We just went and did it. And then, you know, the next day, the Israelis came out and said, oh, well, if you're getting out, we'll get out too. So there is - there is some difference on that. And I think the Israelis appreciate it because the policies are so much in their interest. But I do think they - like much of the rest of the world, at times they scratch their head wondering what's going to come next.

HEINRICHS: And I would just say that, too, you can - one of the key features of this administration's foreign policy is its focus and reclaiming the principle of sovereignty, U.S. sovereignty. And you can see it expressed, possibly in the best, most clearest way at the U.N. And especially with Ambassador Haley there, you could - you could see all these elements. And that gets to your point, too. You know, the United States' relationship with Israel is because they overlap. It's not because the United States is just doing what Israel wants. It's because it's in our interests. And it overlaps with Israel's interests. And I think that that dovetails nicely with the point you just made.

SILVERBERG: Can I hop on on this...

HEINRICHS: Yeah.

SILVERBERG: Because one funny experience I had is sometimes the Israelis had sort of views that I - you know, that I would not have intuited, which made the consultation particularly important. And the one I remember most was the Human Rights Council debate. So you'll recall that the Human Rights Council, the U.S. had voted against the formation of the Human Rights Council. We thought - basically, we did the math and said this is going to come out badly, called for a vote, voted against it, said we're not running to be members for the first term. And so a question was coming up at the end of the Bush administration, whether we should run or not. And it was quite clear to us internally that the thing was as bad as we expected. And we weren't going to run. And the Israelis asked us not to say that publicly because their view was basically that the Europeans desperately want you there. And the only way they're going to behave is if they think that you're - you know, that you're actually potentially on the hook. And so we basically kept it quiet. And there was this whole debate in the press about whether we were going to run or not, which was not remotely under consideration. But it was basically in response to the Israeli request.

HEINRICHS: Jon, can you talk about the merits of possibly moving this position to a Cabinet-level position, which is one of the arguments that you made in your...

LERNER: Yeah, so...

MOLEY: Then I'll demand time for rebuttal.

(LAUGHTER)

LERNER: As some might or might not know, the position has gone back and forth in Republican administrations. And Democrats have long had the U.N. ambassador as part of a Cabinet and the NSC. Republicans have shifted over the years back and forth. You know, either model can be successful. I think as I pointed out in another article, it sort of goes to the question of what you want your ambassador's role to be in New York. I think Ambassador Haley benefited significantly from having that more elevated status within the administration, benefited in terms of her interactions with her colleagues in New York, benefited in terms of working through some of the bureaucracy in Washington. So it was very helpful to her. And I think it would be to any ambassador. The counterargument is the question of, you know, to what degree you want to sort of downplay the significance of the U.N. in our foreign policy and to what extent you want to sort of streamline the operations through the secretary of state's office, which - I just teed it up for Kevin here. So he can...

MOLEY: Well, this audience is obviously - has an interest in all things U.N. So it comes as no surprise to say that the relationship between Ambassador Haley and Secretary of State Tillerson was not the best. But having said that, one has to remember that there's always been, inherently, tension between Washington and New York, the secretary of state and our ambassador. And I always point out that this goes back as far as Adlai Stevenson and the Kennedy administration. And even when people bring up the Tillerson-Haley back-and-forth, I always remind them that in the Reagan administration, Ambassador Kirkpatrick and Secretary of State Alexander Haig were on the opposite sides of the Falklands War. And that obviously took it to a whole different dimension. So one has to keep these things in perspective. And I would agree with Jon. Either can work. It certainly worked to Jon and I's benefit to have Ambassador Haley in the Cabinet because on issues - all three of the issues I've mentioned - moving the embassy to Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and defunding UNRWA, there was substantial institutional opposition in the Washington foreign policy establishment, to say the least, to making those moves. And Ambassador Haley had, quite frankly, the force of nature to just say this is what we want to do. And President Trump was in his yes, Nikki...

LERNER: Well, I was going to say, on all of those issues - and I would add the Iran - the JCPOA as well, Ambassador - where Ambassador Haley and Secretary Tillerson differed, in all of those cases, Ambassador Haley was on President Trump's side. So that does make a difference.

HEINRICHS: Sounds like it would help. And...

SILVERBERG: Sorry, can I hop in on this?

HEINRICHS: Please.

SILVERBERG: My view is that Republican administrations ought to think about foreign policy tools as kind of a cafeteria plan, that sometimes we're going to work through international organizations. Sometimes we're going to work multilaterally, just through some ad hoc coalitions. Sometimes we're going to work unilaterally - but that the idea is you're supposed to think about kind of what are our objectives, and what's the best tool for meeting them? And I worry that putting the perm rep on the Cabinet sort of sends a signal that the U.S. - that U.N. has primacy in terms of our foreign policy tools. And I just - you know, functionally, I just don't think that's where we ought to put it on our kind of range of options.

HEINRICH: I would just say, too, to underscore this point, that the enormous pressure - not just in - here at home, among the professional international advisory class, for lack of a better term - for the United States actually moving our embassy to Jerusalem, I was in a European country. I won't even mention it, which one. But I was in a European country fairly recently discussing this particular issue. And the government official was upset with me - even though I didn't do it - but was upset with me for the United States actually following through with that and moving our embassy there. And one of the arguments that he said was, you know, that this affects - this affects everybody. And you didn't - you, your country, didn't ask what we thought before you did it, and it came as a surprise. So there is enormous pressure just coming from Europe in general. And that goes kind of across Europe, you know, from the Western to, you know, Central, Eastern Europe. And I said, well, I'm sorry that you were surprised because we passed it as American law over and over and over again. And the only reason it should be - it's a surprise is because our American presidents didn't do what the American people wanted to do. So we have, now, an administration that cares more about, in my view, what the people are voting for than what the Europeans prefer that we do. So - so I said, if - you know, if one of the things that - if you'd like to know what's going to happen better, perhaps look and see what the American people have been saying and the laws we've been passing. And with that, I'm going to turn it to some questions for you. Oh, my goodness, so many. OK, we'll start here in the second row. And then we'll kind of pop back over here. If you could, please say your name and keep your question very brief so we can get to a few different people.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: With respect to all the opposition that you found to various decisions the Trump administration - you know, the moving an embassy, the Golan Heights, the JCPOA, what's the reaction now? When they all predicted, you know, these catastrophes from our own, you know, foreign policy establishment with - and the media pundits and - and European leaders, I mean, what do they say now, when these catastrophes haven't happened? And also related, current administration's done a lot to sort of perhaps change, at least now, sort of the attitude toward Israel. It seems Israel, they're recognizing sort of the hatred of Jews and the Jewish state. And they're sort of acknowledging that bias that exists. Do you think that's temporary because of the current administration? Or is that a real adjustment?

MOLEY: I think any administration following the Trump administration will find it very, very difficult, virtually impossible to reverse the decisions we've just spoken about, meaning the Golan, the embassy and the funding of UNRA because fundamentally in, all three cases, it has broad public support, A. And B, the in quote "catastrophe" just didn't happen. Voices have been quieted. Although having said that, those underlying - reality of that opposition remains. There is institutional - I mean, let's face it, the foreign policy professionals, many of whom, even on the Republican side never Trump, are not going to be ameliorated. But they remain.

LERNER: Well, I mean, one of the propositions or myths that we sort of set out to challenge was the idea that, you know, the United States could - the proposition was that if the United States was, you know, very overtly and strongly pro-Israel, that that would cause rifts within our relationships with the Arab world. In fact, the - you know, I think it's not particularly controversial observation to say that the bilateral relations that the U.S. has today as compared to during the Obama years are better with Egypt than they were in those days, better with the Gulf countries than there were in those days. You know, other parts of the region not as much, but that's by design as well. So it is hard to point to, I think, anything that's going on in the Middle East that has been harmed by the U.S. efforts in this regard. One could make the case about, you know,

the so-called peace process, but that is - remains a work in progress. And the, you know, the Trump administration's predecessors were a bit challenged in that regard as well.

HEINRICHS: And I would just say too just that the administration is calling out the number of anti-Israel votes compared to the other condemnatory votes that had been at the U.N. I don't remember that happening - that certainly didn't happen during the Obama administration of putting that on notice and showing that because you do - you - this sense that there is a bias against Israel as the state and its right to exist. And so as you continue to call that out and raise that profile, it makes it much more difficult for people to, I think, to continue behaving in that way.

LERNER: Well, just on that point, a funny little story. On the vote that we had in the General Assembly about the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and the embassy move, there were 68 countries that did not vote against us on that. They either voted no or they were abstained or absent - 68 countries. You know, that's still, you know, around a third of the U.N. But a previous ambassador after that vote sent a note to Nikki Haley saying that, you know, when I was ambassador, our secretary of state gave me the mission of doubling the vote totals that we would get on any issue that pertained to Israel. And I was very pleased at the time that I accomplished the doubling from four votes to eight votes in our favor. And so congratulations on getting 68 votes on our side.

SILVERBERG: It was an accomplishment. But the outrageous just thing about - to me about that vote wasn't just the number of countries that had to condemn the U.S. move, but that they thought it was an appropriate issue for a General Assembly vote to begin with, something that's entirely trusted to the sovereign decisions of Israel and its partner, the United States.

HEINRICHS: Again, back to the sovereignty issue. I took - absolutely totally agree. And that was it. Let's go - let's go over here, sir. Sorry. Trying to be...

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you. When we recognize the Golan Heights as part of Israel, the - Prime Minister Netanyahu raised the concept of a defensive war. And that jibed in my thinking that, over the course of years and centuries, human beings, societies and countries evolve and change their sense of identity and affiliation and even boundaries. How do we build in a greater sense of flexibility within the international order so that it's a living, breathing organic fabric and not frozen in time? Thank you.

MOLEY: It's a work in progress. I really don't know that I have much to say about that particular subject.

HEINRICHS: And if I may, I mean, I would just say, you know, again to beat on this drum. But one of the features of this administration is emphasizing this back to national sovereignty. And so national interests are going to change over time. And they might change. And so I think sort of getting into this group think, it can be problematic. And so, like, we're going to see. There should be this now - this freeing that countries can vote based on their own interests and what their own people want, which is what the United States is doing much more robustly at the U.N. Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The United Nations is a venue whereby any nation can be held accountable for its conduct. Is Israel an exception? Is it potentially only accountable to itself? I'd raise a recent book - Joan Mellen, author of the book "Blood In The Water" just this year

recounting the events of the attack on the USS Liberty in 1967 and revealing evidence that, in fact, there was U.S. complicity at the highest levels before that attack in order to be staged as a false flag event to bring the U.S. into the Six-Day War and blame the attack on the liberty upon Egypt. So is Israel ultimately accountable just as any other nation would be for its actions?

LERNER: Let me try to address that hopefully thoughtfully. The question of accountability is it is an interesting one when you look at the United Nations and its organs with regard to Israel. A sense of scale is in order here. So, for example, the Human Rights Council - in the preceding 10 years, the Human Rights Council passed exactly zero resolutions condemning human rights in China. They passed six condemning human rights in Iran. They passed nine condemning human rights in North Korea. And they passed 68 condemning human rights in Israel. So, you know, we can't even get to a question of, you know, which countries are being held accountable. If that's the question, Israel is far and away the country held most accountable in the world, so much so that it's distorted all sort of - all sense of kind of balance in the U.N. system.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I used to work with Kevin Moley a long time ago - when we both had darker hair, anyway. My question - I want to look to the future a bit. If Mr. Netanyahu goes through with his pledge to annex at least the settlements, if not all of the various - I'm curious what you think will happen in the United Nations, what U.S. positions should be and maybe in the context also of feeding in an editorial in New York Times by Friedman which was asking if the United States can love Israel too much.

LERNER: What are we going to do?

MOLEY: Well, I'll leave what Prime Minister Netanyahu does to Prime Minister Netanyahu. I would say on a broader issue that the December speech of Secretary Pompeo laying out America's interest in multilateral institutions, stressing the primacy of both sovereignty and our interests. And when those interests conflict with Israel's interests, I'm sure that we will make that known. We have our interests, and some - they don't always. They don't always coincide with Israel's. But they coincide with Israel's and conflate with Israel's interests far more than other nations certainly in that region, certainly in particular their neighbors to the north, Syria. And so I think I'll leave it at that.

LERNER: If the Israelis were to annex significant portions of the West Bank, of course the United Nations would go bananas about that. The U.S. reaction - I think the U.S. - the pending U.S. peace proposal speaks to some degree to the questions of territories and future disposition of them. And I think the degree to which any Israeli action in regard to them meaningfully diverges from the U.S. - from the Trump administration's plan. it would be - it would make sense that the Trump administration, you know, might, you know, react accordingly to that. I suspect that the Israelis will make no such moves, at least prior to the rollout of the administration's plan. So once that plan is out there and we see what the reactions are, I think that will significantly impact what future U.S. reaction would be to such an Israeli move.

SILVERBERG: When I was assistant secretary, we took the position that the U.N. Security Council wasn't an appropriate forum for resolving issues about Israel even when we disagreed with the Israelis. You know, at any particular point of time, there are some significant percentage of the Security Council members who don't even have diplomatic relations with Israel. So our view was it could never be deemed - the Security Council could never be deemed, you know, in those conditions to be a kind of honest broker for resolving issues. So I would hope that even if

Israel takes action and the U.S. has concerns about what that could mean to a future peace plan, that the administration would put out the message that regardless we're not going to - we will not permit a Security Council resolution on that topic.

HEINRICH: I'm sorry. We're going to have to end it there. I think that was a great place to end. Please join me in thanking our wonderful panelists for this.