Netanyahu, Haley Discuss UNIFIL Mandate vs Hezbollah

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Anticipating the possibility of another war in Lebanon, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke on Wednesday with Nikki Haley, Washington’s ambassador to the UN, about a possible Security Council resolution calling for the removal of Hezbollah forces from southern Lebanon, The Jerusalem Post has learned.

According to senior government officials, Netanyahu and Haley – who arrived early on Wednesday for a three-day visit – spoke about strengthening the mandate of UNIFIL, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, to make it more effective in enforcing Security Council Resolution 1701, which put an end to the 2006 Second Lebanon War.

Under terms of that resolution, the area from the Israel-Lebanon border to the Litani River is to be an “area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon.”

In actuality, however, Hezbollah is ensconced there with tens of thousands of missiles pointed toward Israel.

One senior government official said that even if it was not realistic that UNIFIL would be able to clear Hezbollah – now a powerful political and military force in Lebanon – out of southern Lebanon, it is important for the issue to be placed before the Security Council.

“If there is another conflict and we will have to hit missile launchers that are placed in private homes, it will be difficult for the Security Council to condemn us if the matter is brought to the Security Council now,” the official said. “We want to bring to the world’s attention, now, that Hezbollah is arming and using schools and hospitals to place launchers so that if there are victims in the future the world does not come to us with complaints.”

Netanyahu also talked with Haley about the likelihood that the humanitarian crisis in Gaza will come before the Security Council in the near future and the need to prepare for that eventuality.

Haley will travel to the Kerem Shalom crossing point on Thursday to see firsthand what Israel allows into the Gaza Strip.

She will also visit a terrorist attack tunnel that was uncovered in the region and meet residents from Kibbutz Nahal Oz.

Netanyahu gave Haley, who is on her first-ever visit to Israel, a briefing on where things stand with the Palestinians, including a detailed account of Israel’s construction in the territories. This was important, one senior official said, because Haley is constantly at meetings where Israel is blamed for the diplomatic standstill.

Netanyahu and Haley also discussed anti-settlement UN Security Council Resolution 2334, which was passed in December with what the government maintains was the active participation of the Obama administration. According to Jerusalem, not only did Washington not veto the measure – thereby assuring that it would pass – but it pressed some countries that wanted to abstain on the measure to vote in favor.

Jerusalem has little expectation that the measure can be reversed at this time.

Before the meeting with Netanyahu, Haley said the UN now understands that it cannot go on “bullying” Israel as it has in the past. At a brief photo opportunity for official government photographers, Haley told Netanyahu she was “overwhelmed” by the reactions she has received since taking over her position for coming out squarely against the anti-Israel bias at the UN.

“All I’ve done is tell the truth,” she said, adding that it had become habit in the UN to bully Israel – simply because it was possible – but that she has “no patience” for bullying.

“I think they know they can’t keep responding in the way they’ve been responding. They sense that the tone has changed,” she said.

Netanyahu welcomed her by thanking her for standing up for Israel and for the “truth,” which he said “is standing up for America.”

“People appreciate truth,” he said. “We have an ancient Hebrew saying that when somebody tells a truth, you can feel it. So people feel it, they not only understand it, they feel it. And we feel it. We’re glad to see the fruits of your efforts, uncommon common sense.”

Netanyahu said US President Donald Trump and Haley have “changed the discourse, have drawn new standards and everybody’s taking [them] up, and that’s great. I think it makes a world of difference, both for Israel and the US.”

Haley also met with President Reuven Rivlin who said that as a result of her efforts, “Israel is no longer alone in the UN, Israel is no longer the UN’s punching bag.”

Although Rivlin said Israel’s standing in the UN has improved since January, when he addressed the body on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, he said there is still a long way to go both in terms of official declarations issued by UN bodies and in reducing the “absurd” number of discussions and resolutions about Israel.

Haley assumed her position at the end of January.

Haley replied that she appreciates the support she has received from the people of Israel, but “I feel somewhat guilty because all I did at the United Nations was tell the truth.” She repeated what she said standing alongside Netanyahu, that the UN has been bullying Israel for a long time and that “we are not going to let that happen anymore.”

“It is a new day for Israel in the United Nations,” she said.

Haley arrived in Israel from Geneva where she told the UN Human Rights Council housed in that city that the US may leave that body unless it stops its Israel bashing. She hopes, she said alongside Rivlin, “it will be a new day at the Human Rights Council when it comes to Israel.”

Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely, who met Haley with Netanyahu, presented her with a necklace and gold pendant of a menorah dating back 1,400 years that was found during an archeological dig in the City of David.

Hotovely said the pendant was a token of Israel’s appreciation for the stands she has taken at the UN.

“On behalf of the Israeli public I thank you for your many actions to correct the bias against Israel in the UN and to fight for the truth,” Hotovely said. “The disgraceful efforts in the UN to surrender to Palestinian propaganda and sever the ties between the Jewish people and Jerusalem can end when the US leads to a change in direction in the UN.”

Following meetings in Jerusalem, Haley went to Ramallah where she met with Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah. According to Haley’s office, they spoke about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the work of the UN Relief and Works Agency, an organization to which the US is the largest contributor.

Haley is slated to visit an UNRWA school near Bethlehem when she visits that city on Thursday morning.

The ambassador also paid a “private” visit to the Old City on Wednesday, where – like Trump last month – she visited the Western Wall.

On Thursday, she is slated to tour the country by helicopter accompanied by UN Ambassador Danny Danon. In addition to visiting the Gaza border, she will go to the northern borders with Syria and Lebanon.

Danon said Haley has been warmly welcomed here both by public officials and private citizens, and that the public is well aware of her defense of Israel in the UN.

“But the struggle is not over,” he said.

“We are very glad to have strong [US] support, but the negative forces in the UN are still there and are still working. This visit is important because it gives her a better acquaintance with the situation here.”