Cognitive Bias and UNSC Resolution 2334

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Israeli Amos Tversky and his colleague Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman are famous for their research regarding systematic human cognitive bias. Cognitive bias often leads people to decisions that, when fully understood, are irrational by their own standards.

In essence, one creates a reality not based upon objectivity, but influenced by emotions, leading to irrational judgments.

US President Barack Obama, his adviser Ben Rhodes, National Security Adviser Susan Rice and Secretary of State John Kerry suffer from a postcolonial cognitive bias. Their reality is that Israeli settlements are the primary cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nothing can disabuse them of this distorted reality, and every event in the region is seen through this biased filter.

Ignoring the facts of Israeli offers for two states over the past 69 years, or a Netanyahu settlement freeze in 2009, allows them to blame Israel for their own repeated diplomatic failures, while ignoring a PLO Charter that still calls for the end of Israel. “The partitioning of Palestine... the establishment of Israel are illegal and null and void, regardless of the loss of time,” it says.

The administration is locked in a paradigm where it is axiomatic that Palestinians are helpless victims, not to be held accountable for their words, their actions and what they preach to their children.

Make no mistake about it: UNSC Resolution 2334 is not tough love to move the peace process forward. It is a diplomatic war to delegitimize all of Israel through boycotts, sanctions and the International Criminal Court.

According to the Israel Group, “By the end of 2016, the United Nations... will have adopted 20 resolutions against the State of Israel and four resolutions against all other countries combined.” It is an antisemitic double standard plain and simple, and it is not going away.

Four years ago during the Chuck Hagel nomination, I told an audience that I was not worried about his alleged lack of sympathy for Israel as defense secretary, but was more concerned about the damage Senator John Kerry could do as secretary of state. I was booed by a pro-Israel audience. Years later I learned firsthand that the relationship between Hagel and the Israeli Defense Ministry had been excellent, and today you know what damage Kerry’s cognitive bias has done to Israel.

UNSC Resolution 2334 is non-binding, but can still cause terrible damage to Israel’s reputation and its ability to negotiate on an even footing with the Palestinians.

The best way to respond is for a bipartisan Congress to work with the new administration and go on the offensive. We must return to the days when Israel was a less partisan issue. This will not be easy, as a growing segment of the Democratic Party shares the president’s animus toward Israel, and wants the world to think of Israel as it used to think of South Africa.

What does going on the offensive mean? It is a strategy to legislate unappetizing consequences for those who join in the lynching of America’s ally.

Here are some suggestions: 1. The Lawfare Project recommends “adopt[ing] legislation that would impose sanctions on European government[ s] and private entities that engage in BDS...

[and] reaffirm the letter from President George W. Bush to Israeli Prime Minister Sharon that recognized that major settlement blocs will remain part of Israel under any peace treaty.”

2. Congress should reaffirm UNSC Resolution 242, that says Israel was never supposed to return to the indefensible 1949 armistice line.

3. Since the first consequence of 2334 might be Israel being brought before the International Criminal Court, ICC donors must be quietly convinced to threaten to withdraw funding if Israel is brought before this court.

NATO allies and Japan, who don’t want to get off on the wrong foot with the new administration, need to be pressured by the Trump administration, as they know he can ask them to start paying their fair share of defense costs.

4. Cut the US funding to the UN in half. America should work with the UN only on humanitarian issues.

New legislation must be written, as existing laws and treaty requirements enshrine much of American financial support for the UN.

5. Withdraw participation and funding for the Human Rights Council and UNESCO. UNESCO perpetuates the falsehood that there is no Jewish association to the Temple Mount, and the Human Rights Council is simply an anti-Israel advocacy organization, ignoring the world’s human rights abuses.

6. Create a coalition of willing democracies in place of the UN on security issues. Today’s United Nations is overwhelmingly non-democratic and anti-American.

7. End funding of UNWRA unless the definition of Palestinian refugees is changed to the UN High Commission of Refugees definition. This would immediately decrease the number of Palestinian refugees from five million to 30,000, and end a major impediment to resolution of the conflict.

8. Demand that the 750,000 Jewish refugees and their descendants ethnically cleansed from Arab lands receive the same compensation as Palestinian descendants.

The real problem may be that Congress and the new administration may be so overwhelmed with domestic legislation and getting their cabinet nominees approved that responding to 2334 may be put on the back burner.

Pro-Israel organizations must keep this issue on the radar of Congress and President Donald Trump, because Palestinian advocate J Street will be fighting with everything it has to encourage legislators like Keith Ellison to support 2334.