

Why Is Nikki Haley Still Trump's UN Ambassador?

It's unclear whether she is speaking for herself or the White House.

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Featured image: U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley. (Source: Flickr/Creative Commons/U.S. Mission Photo/Eric Bridiers)

*I went to a meeting the other night with some **Donald Trump** supporters who, like me, had voted for him based on expectations of a more rational foreign policy. They were suggesting that the president's attempts to move in that direction had been sabotaged by officials inside the administration who want to maintain the current warfare state. Remove those officials and Trump might just keep his pledge to leave **Bashar al-Assad** alone while improving relations with Russia.*

I was somewhat skeptical, noting that the White House had unilaterally initiated the April 7 cruise missile attack on a Syrian airbase as well as the more recent warning against an alleged "planned" chemical attack, hardly moves that might lead to better relations with Damascus and Moscow. But there are indeed some administration figures who clearly are fomenting endless conflict in the Middle East and elsewhere.

One might reasonably start with **Generals James Mattis and H.R. McMaster**, both of whom are hardliners on Afghanistan and Iran, but with a significant caveat. Generals are trained and indoctrinated to fight and win wars, not to figure out what comes next. General officers like **George Marshall** or even **Dwight Eisenhower** who had a broader vision are extremely rare, so much so that expecting a Mattis or McMaster to do what falls outside their purview is perhaps a bit too much. They might be bad choices for the jobs they hold, but at least they employ some kind of rational process, based on how they perceive national interests, to make judgments. If properly reined in by a thoughtful civilian leadership, which does not exist at the moment, they have the potential to be effective contributors to the national-security discussion.

But several other notable figures in the administration deserve to be fired if there is to be any hope of turning Trump's foreign policy around. In **Arthur Sullivan's** and W. S. Gilbert's *The Mikado*, the Lord High Executioner [sings](#) about the "little list" he is preparing of people who "never will be missed" when he finally gets around to fulfilling the requirements of his office. He includes "apologetic statesmen of a compromising kind," indicating that the American frustration with the incompetence of its government is not unique, nor is it a recent phenomenon.

My own little list of “society’s offenders” consists largely of the self-described gaggle of neoconservative foreign-policy “experts.” Unfortunately, the neocons have proven to be particularly resilient in spite of repeated claims that their end was nigh, most recently after the election of Donald Trump last November. Yet as most of the policies the neocons have historically espoused are indistinguishable from what the White House is currently trying to sell, one might well wake up one morning and imagine that it is 2003 and **George W. Bush** is still president. Still, hope springs eternal, and now that the United States has celebrated its 241st birthday, it would be nice to think that in the new year our nation might be purged of some of the malignancies that have prevailed since 9/11.

Number one on my little list is Ambassador to the United Nations **Nikki Haley**, who is particularly dangerous as she is holding a position where she can do bad things. Haley has been shooting from the lip since she assumed office and, it has become clear, much of what she says goes without any vetting by the Trump administration. It is never clear whether she is speaking for herself or for the White House. That issue has reportedly [been dealt with](#) by having the State Department clear in advance her comments on hot button issues, but, if that is indeed the case, the change has been difficult to discern in practice.

Haley is firmly in the neocon camp, receiving praise from Senators like South Carolina’s **Lindsey Graham** and from the Murdoch media as well as [in the opinion pages](#) of *National Review* and *The Weekly Standard*. Her speechwriter is **Jessica Gavora**, who is the wife of the leading neoconservative journalist **Jonah Goldberg**. Haley sees the United Nations as corrupt and bloated, in itself not an unreasonable conclusion, but she has tied herself closely to a number of other, more debatable issues.

As governor of South Carolina, Haley became identified as an unquestioning [supporter of Israel](#). She signed into law a bill to restrict the activities of the nonviolent pro-Palestinian [Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions](#) (BDS) movement, the first legislation of its kind on a state level. Haley has also stated that

“nowhere has the UN’s failure been more consistent and more outrageous than in its bias against our close ally Israel.”

On a recent visit to Israel, she was applauded by Israeli **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu**, [stating](#)

“You know, all I’ve done is to tell the truth, and it’s kind of overwhelming at the reaction...if there’s anything I have no patience for, it’s bullies, and the UN was being such a bully to Israel, because they could.”

But Haley sometimes goes far beyond trying to “tell the truth.” In February, she blocked the appointment of former Palestinian **Prime Minister Salam Fayyad** to a diplomatic position at the United Nations because he is a Palestinian. In a [congressional hearing](#) this past week, she was asked about the decision:

“Is it this administration’s position that support for Israel and support for the appointment of a well-qualified individual of Palestinian nationality to an appointment at the UN are mutually exclusive?”

Haley responded yes, that the administration is “supporting Israel” by blocking any Palestinian from any senior UN position because Palestine is not recognized by Washington as an independent state.

At various UN meetings Haley has repeatedly and uncritically complained of institutional bias towards Israel, asserting that the “days of Israel bashing are over,” without ever addressing the issue that Israeli treatment of the Palestinians might in part be responsible for the criticism leveled against it. Her description of Israel as an “ally” is hyperbolic and she tends to be oblivious to actual American interests in the region when Israel is involved. She has never challenged the Israeli occupation of the West Bank as well as the recent large expansion of settlements, which are at least nominally opposed by the State Department and White House.

Haley is inevitably a hardliner on Syria, reflecting the Israeli bias, and consistently hostile to Russia. She has said that [regime change in Damascus](#) is a Trump administration priority. Her most recent foray involves the White House [warning that](#) it had “identified potential preparations for another chemical weapons attack by the Assad regime.” [Haley elaborated](#) in a tweet,

“...further attacks will be blamed on Assad but also on Russia and Iran who support him killing his own people.”

Earlier, on April 12, after Russia blocked a draft UN resolution intended to condemn the Khan Shaykhun chemical attack, [Haley said](#),

“We need to see Russia choose to side with the civilized world over an Assad government that brutally terrorizes its own people.”

Haley’s analysis of who is doing what to whom in Syria is certainly questionable at a minimum. And her language is hardly supportive of possible administration diplomatic attempts to mend fences with the Russians and can also be seen as quite dangerous as they increase the likelihood of an “accidental encounter” over the skies of Syria as both sides harden their positions and seek to expand the areas they control. She [has also said that](#),

“We’re calling [Russia] out [and] I don’t think anything is off the table at this point. I think what you’re going to see is strong leadership. You’re going to continue to see the United States act when we need to act.”

Regarding Moscow’s role on the UN Security Council, [she complained](#) that,

“All they’ve done is seven times veto against Syria every time they do something to hurt their own people. And so Russia absolutely has not done what they’re supposed to do.”

Regarding Ukraine, Haley has taken an extreme position that guarantees Russian hostility. In February, she addressed the UN Security Council regarding the Crimean conflict, which she appears not to understand very well. She warned that sanctions against Russia [would not be lifted](#) until Moscow returned control over the peninsula to Kiev. On June 4, she

doubled down, insisting that the United States [would retain](#) “sanctions strong and tough when it comes to the issue in Ukraine.”

Haley is also increasingly highly critical of Iran, which she sees as the instigator of much of the unrest in the Middle East, again reflecting the Israeli viewpoint. She claimed on April 20, during her first session as president of the UN Security Council, that Iran and Hezbollah had “conducted terrorist acts” for decades within the Middle East, ignoring the more serious terrorism support engaged in by U.S. regional allies Saudi Arabia and Qatar. She [stated last week](#) that the Security Council’s praise of the Iran Nuclear Agreement honored a state that has engaged in “illicit missile launches,” “support for terrorist groups,” and “arms smuggling,” while “stok[ing] regional conflicts and mak[ing] them harder to solve.” All are perspectives that might easily be challenged.

Haley is also much given to rhetoric reminiscent of George W. Bush during his first term. Regarding North Korea, on May 16 [she told reporters](#) that,

“We have to turn around and tell the entire international community: You either support North Korea or you support us,” echoing George W. Bush’s sentiment that, “There’s a new sheriff in town and you’re either with us or against us.”

So Haley very much comes across as the neoconservatives’ dream ambassador to the United Nations—full of aggression, a staunch supporter of Israel, and assertive of Washington’s preemptive right to set standards for the rest of the world. That does not necessarily make her very good for the rest of us, who will have to bear the burdens of imperial hubris. Nor is her tendency to overstate her case a plus for the Trump administration itself, which is clearly seeking to work its way through Russiagate—and just might be considering how to establish some kind of *modus vivendi* with **Vladimir Putin**.

If Donald Trump really wants to drain the Washington swamp and reduce interference in other nations, he might well continue that program by firing Nikki Haley. He could then appoint someone as UN ambassador who actually believes that the United States has to deal with other countries respectfully, not by constant bullying and threats. In the lyrics of Gilbert and Sullivan, she’s on my list and “she will never be missed.”

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