

Trump threat to cut aid faces credibility test after UN vote
American president vowed to deny foreign aid to nations that challenge U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as Israeli capital • Threat did not dissuade majority of U.N. members • Washington seems to gingerly back away from its pledge mere hours after vote.

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U.S. President Donald Trump | Photo: AP

After threatening to cut U.S. aid to nations that rebuked him over Jerusalem, President Donald Trump faces a key question about his global credibility: Will he follow through?

Most of the world defied the United States on Thursday at the U.N., voting for a resolution that declares Trump's Dec. 6 recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital to be "null and void." Only a day earlier, Trump had linked the vote to future U.S. foreign assistance, telling reporters: "Let them vote against us. We'll save a lot. We don't care."

Trump's U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley upped the ante further in a speech just before the vote. Not only was foreign aid in the crosshairs, but U.S. funding for the United Nations, too, she said. Haley said the United States would "remember this day" when it was singled out for exercising its sovereignty.

"We will remember it when we are called upon to once again make the world's largest contribution to the United Nations," Haley said in the General Assembly.

Yet the ultimatums from Haley and Trump did not dissuade almost all the top recipients of the billions of dollars Washington gives each year to help with security, development and other needs.

And within hours of the U.N. vote, the Trump administration started gingerly backing away from its funding threats.

In Washington, State Department Spokeswoman Heather Nauert said cuts to countries that opposed the U.S. were not a foregone conclusion.

"The president's foreign policy team has been empowered to explore various options going forward with other nations," Nauert said. "However, no decisions have been made."

On U.N. funding, Haley's office suggested the Jerusalem vote alone would not lead the Trump administration to cut off the global organization. Under Trump, the U.S. has been conducting a broader review of United Nations funding and has already cut money to some specific U.N. agencies over abortion-related concerns.

"We will use U.N. votes as one factor in our foreign relations," the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, said in a statement. "It's not going to be the only factor, or even necessarily the number one factor, but it will no longer be ignored."

It was a rare moment of soft-pedaling by the Trump administration, considering the president's aversion to backing down from a fight or falling short on a promise. Trump has often credited himself with restoring America's credibility when it issues threats by following through when U.S. adversaries cross "red lines" that he has set.

In this case, though, there were signs that Trump intended his threat, delivered in a Cabinet meeting Wednesday, more as rhetoric than policy. The warning had appeared to catch the State Department and other agencies off-guard, leading them to seek more details from the White House's National Security Council on how to proceed.