

Analysis of Statements by UN Secretary-General Guterres



THE JEWISH PEOPLE POLICY INSTITUTE

המכון למדיניות העם היהודי

Shlomi Bereznik, Eli Kannai, and Yaakov Katz.

May 2026

The office of the UN Secretary-General carries considerable symbolic significance and is expected to reflect a neutral and fair approach toward all the countries of the world. The Secretary-General's statements influence how states are perceived in the international arena, including Israel's image.

This study presents findings that indicate bias in the statements of the current UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, toward Israel, alongside a moderate or favorable attitude toward other countries, including China and Qatar. To examine this claim, Israel was compared with a selection of countries perceived as violating human rights and as failing to meet the standards of a democratic state.

Iran	A state that exports terrorism in the Middle East and is responsible for the brutal suppression of domestic protests.
China	A state ruled by the Communist Party and known for human rights violations. A prominent example is the enactment of the Hong Kong National Security Law. ¹
Russia	A state in which extensive political repression exists, and was involved in the Syrian civil war and invaded Ukraine.
North Korea	A totalitarian regime in which labor camps for political opponents still exist. ²
Qatar	A state that exports terrorism and that has previously been subject to a boycott by Arab states on allegations of supporting terrorism. ³

The study examined two central dimensions:

- The number of the UN Secretary-General's statements in which each country was mentioned, as they appear on the UN website since January 2017, the year António Guterres assumed office.
- The tone (sentiment) of the references to those countries, based on the UN Secretary-General's statements.

The publications included in the analysis were divided into three types:

- **Official Statements**
- Remarks by the UN Secretary-General at official press conferences
- Official readouts

All of the publications appeared on the official UN website. The analysis did not distinguish between publication types, on the assumption that they all reflect, to a similar degree, the position of the UN Secretary-General.

¹ Hong Kong National Security Law – The law subjected Hong Kong to Chinese law and is considered to have severely impaired freedom and human rights. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_Hong_Kong_national_security_law

² Labor camps in North Korea. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kwalliso>

³ Diplomatic boycott of Qatar. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qatar_diplomatic_crisis

Data Collection:

The data was downloaded from the official UN website, from the Latest Statements category:
<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/ossj/latest-statements>

Because the volume of statements is very large, the search box was used to locate the relevant statements and generate links referring to the countries selected for the study. The keywords selected were the names of the countries: **China, Israel, Iran, North Korea, Qatar, and Russia.**

It should be noted that statements containing different variations of the keywords were also included in the data collection.

The period examined extends from 2017, the year António Guterres assumed office, through April 14, 2026.

Data-cleaning stage:

- **De-duplication by country** – When a statement appeared more than once in relation to the same country, only one iteration was retained. However, some statements appeared more than once if they referred to more than just one of the countries examined. In such cases, the same statement was analyzed separately for each relevant country.
- **Keyword-based filtering using Regex⁴** – Because of the limitations of the UN website's search box, filtering was performed using Regex, to identify relevant occurrences of the country name. The filtering was based on word boundaries, so that occurrences such as "Iran" and "Iranian" were included, while irrelevant words containing a similar sequence of letters (for example, "piranha") were excluded. At a later stage, an additional noise-reducing filtering process was conducted.
- **Removal of unnecessary languages** – Some statements appeared in several languages. To reduce noise, only the English version of each statement was retained. For this purpose, the Fast Text library, which includes compact language-identification models, was used. The text was split into sentences, and any sentence that was not in English was removed.
- **Advanced filtering** – Because some of the statements are from press conferences, it was necessary to filter out cases when the reference to a particular country was not made by the UN Secretary-General himself, but by another speaker or by a head of state who appeared alongside him. This filtering was performed with ChatGPT5.2.

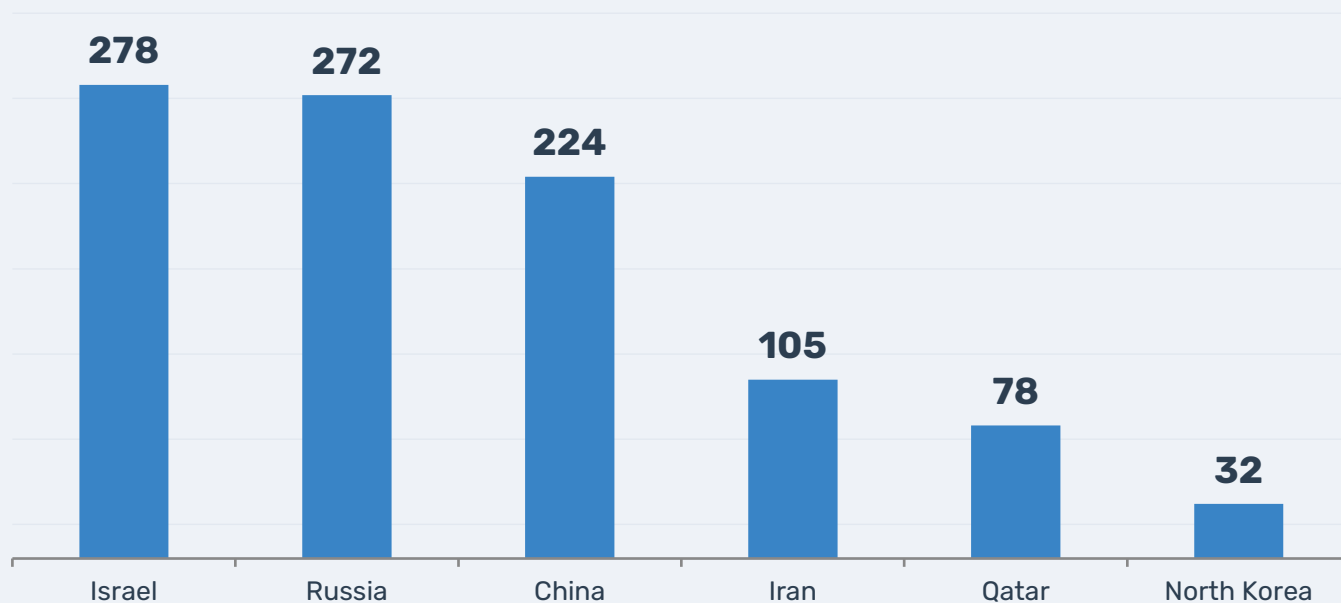
After completion of all cleaning stages, 1,146 statements remained.

Tone-analysis stage:

At this stage, ChatGPT5.2 was used to analyze the tone in which the UN Secretary-General referred to the countries under examination. The analysis was based on the data after filtering, and in particular on the English-language statements. The following pages present the graphs and findings obtained.

⁴ **Regex** An abbreviation for regular expression: a way of defining a pattern that can be used to filter texts (for example, when one wants to filter for a word beginning with a particular prefix). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regular_expression

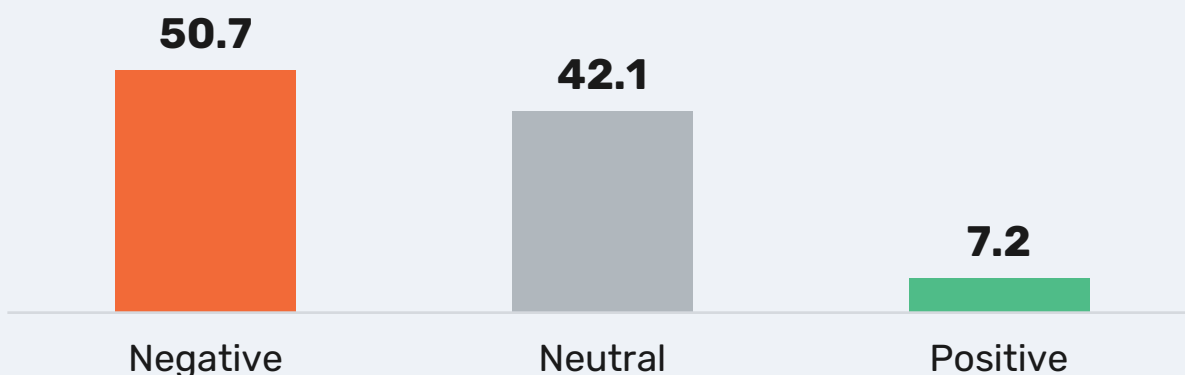
Number of Country Mentions



The data shows that, among the countries examined, Israel was most frequently mentioned in the UN Secretary-General's statements. The number of references to Israel is higher than for Russia, a superpower in the international arena.

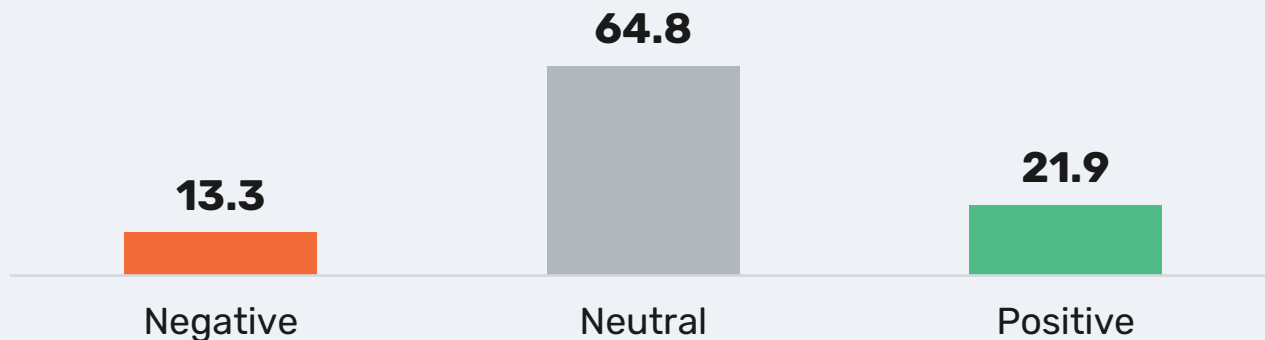
Tone Analysis

Sentiment Distribution – Israel (%)



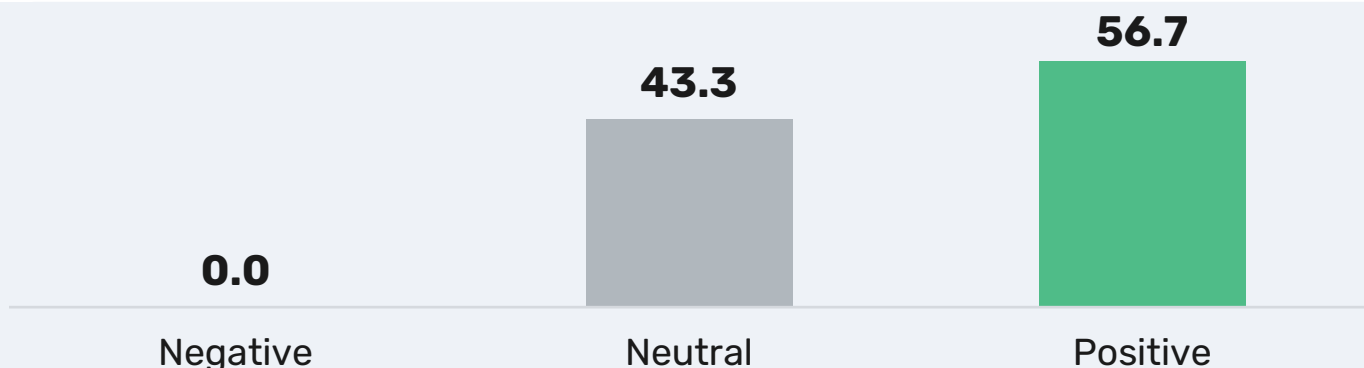
The data shows that more than half of the UN Secretary-General's statements regarding Israel were negative in tone. This share is higher than that found for most of the countries examined.

Sentiment Distribution – Iran (%)



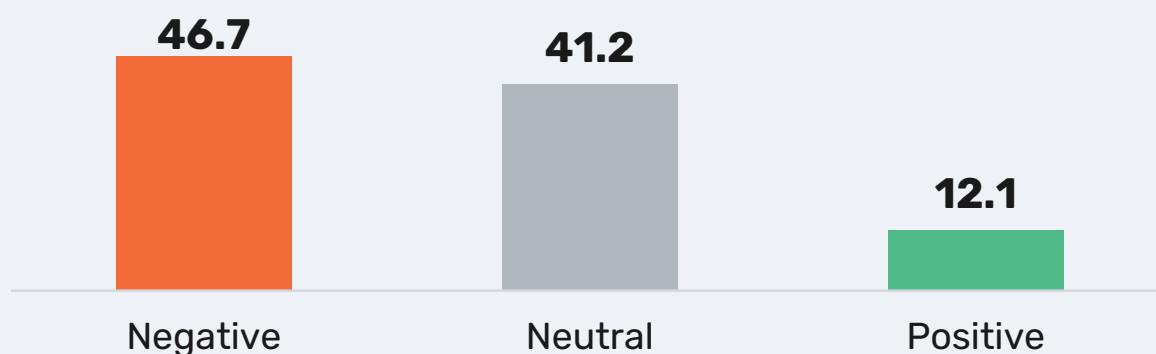
The data shows that more than half of the references to Iran were neutral in tone. In fact, according to the classification performed using ChatGPT, the share of statements in which Iran appeared in a positive context exceeded the share in which it appeared in a negative context.

Sentiment Distribution – China (%)



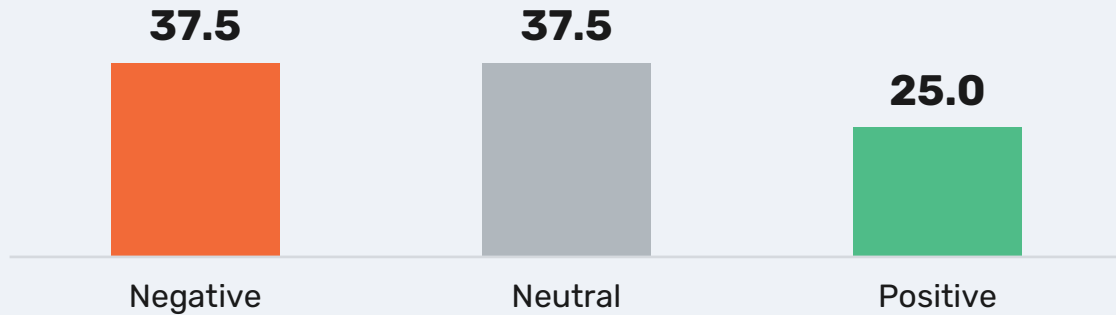
The analysis did not identify any statements with a negative tone toward China. This finding is addressed below, in the conclusions section.

Sentiment Distribution – Russia (%)



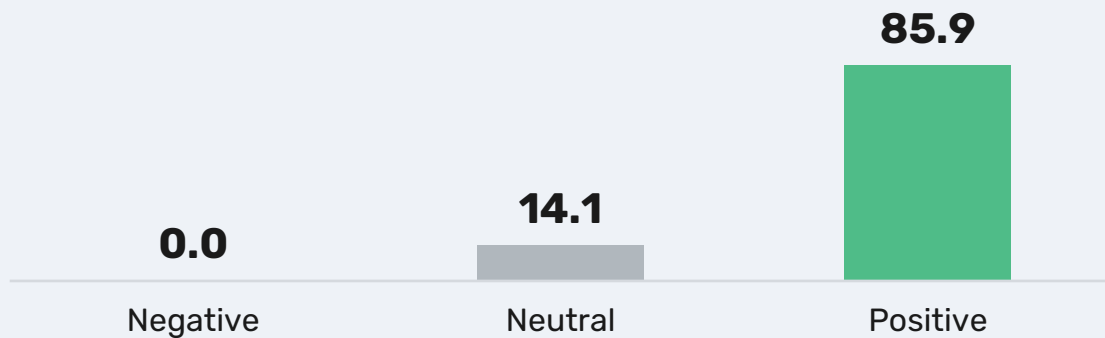
In the case of Russia, a considerable share of the statements are negative in tone.

Sentiment Distribution – North Korea (%)



The sentiment toward North Korea was mixed, but less negative than the sentiment toward Israel. In addition, the volume of references to North Korea was relatively low, with only 32 mentions.

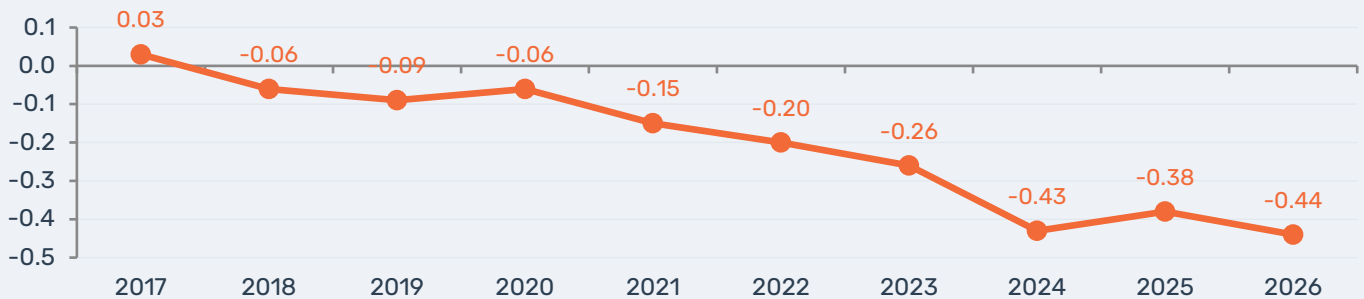
Sentiment Distribution – Qatar (%)



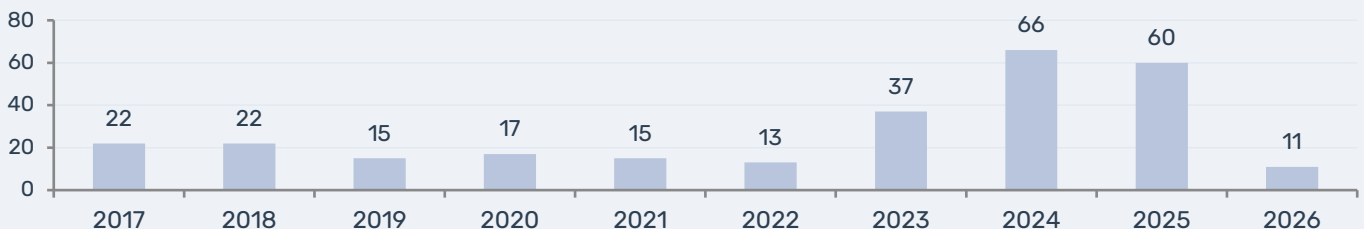
Among all the countries examined, Qatar received the most favorable treatment.

Tone toward Israel over time:

Annual average sentiment toward Israel (-1 most negative, 1 most positive)



Number of statements about Israel per year



The graph indicates a sustained negative trend in the tone of references to Israel throughout the UN Secretary-General's tenure. The data for 2026 includes only the period through April.

Summary of Key Findings:

1

The State of Israel leads in the number of mentions (278) in the UN Secretary-General's statements compared with all other countries examined. This is nearly three times the number Iran mentions (105). In addition, the tone toward Israel was more negative than for the other countries examined.

2

The tone toward Israel has deteriorated sharply over the years.

3

The treatment of China is characterized by a lenient approach.

4

Qatar receives especially favorable treatment; no statements were found in which the UN Secretary-General criticized its support for terrorism.

Several examples of particular note include:

Israel:

One of the notable examples is the statement of October 13, 2023 (less than a week after the Hamas onslaught on Israel), entitled:

Secretary-General's press encounter on the situation in the Middle East

<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-events/2023-10-13/secretary-generals-press-encounter-the-situation-the-middle-east>

The statement opens with the sentence:

"The situation in Gaza has reached a dangerous new low."

The UN Secretary-General then clearly condemns Hamas's terrorist attack. However, immediately afterward, he turns to criticism of Israeli policy:

"Moving more than one million people across a densely populated warzone to a place with no food, water, or accommodation, when the entire territory is under siege, is extremely dangerous – and in some cases, simply not possible."

Already at this stage, he describes Gaza's health system as being on the verge of collapse and expresses concern over exchanges of fire in southern Lebanon along the Blue Line. The statement was classified as negative in tone, though not highly negative, because on the one hand it acknowledges the severity of Hamas's terrorist attack against Israel; on the other hand, the reference to the massacre itself is relatively limited—only three lines, alongside one additional line calling for the release of the hostages—while most of the statement focuses on the situation in the Gaza Strip.

China:

Negative statements about China were de minimis, despite criticism by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and other human rights organizations of his relative silence on China's alleged persecution of its Uyghur minority.

An example of a neutral reference to China appears in the press conference of May 28, 2020, entitled:

Secretary-General's press conference with the Prime Ministers of Canada and Jamaica on Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond

<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-events/2020-05-28/secretary-generals-press-conference-the-prime-ministers-of-canada-and-jamaica-financing-for-development-the-era-of-covid-19-and-beyond>

The statement addressed the COVID-19 crisis. During the press conference, Guterres was asked about the national security law in Hong Kong, but he avoided answering and referred to remarks made by his spokesperson the previous day. Even after the journalist pressed the issue, no direct reference to the matter was provided. Instead, the UN Secretary-General referred to China in the context of international cooperation in combating COVID-19:

"So, there is a commitment both from the United States and China to be involved in this process, which we very much welcome."

Despite the positive tone regarding cooperation with China, the above statement was classified as neutral because the positive reference was not strong enough to be considered definitively positive.

Qatar:

Another notable example is a statement of March 4, 2023:

Secretary-General's remarks at opening of UN House in Doha, Qatar [as delivered]

[Secretary-General's remarks at opening of UN House in Doha, Qatar \[as delivered\]](#) | [Secretary-General](#)

The UN Secretary-General explicitly praises Qatar, stating, among other things:

- *"This spirit of collaboration and solidarity has defined the United Nations' partnership with Qatar from the very start."*
- *"From Qatar's generosity to assist the most vulnerable..."*
- *"To your steadfast support of the Sustainable Development Goals..."*
- *"To your extremely valuable contribution to the work of the UN fighting terrorism and violent extremism..."*

In these remarks, Qatar is presented as a generous state that assists vulnerable populations and contributes to the UN's efforts to combat terrorism and extremism.

Summary and Conclusions:

The findings of this study point to a substantial gap between how the UN Secretary-General refers to Israel and how he refers to the other countries we examined. While Israel received an exceptional volume of references and a particularly high share of negative references, other countries that systematically violate human rights are sometimes treated more moderately. At the same time, it is important to note that Secretary Guterres does recognize Israel's legitimacy and its right to security. He condemned the October 7 Hamas attack, met with families of hostages and called for their unconditional and immediate release. However, the examples presented indicate that shortly thereafter, the primary emphasis of his remarks shifted to the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, and references to the scale of the Hamas massacre became more limited. In addition, considerable caution, and at times even leniency, is evident in his references to China, including when he avoided answering questions directly about the harm to Hong Kong. Taken together, the findings reinforce the impression that the UN Secretary-General applies inconsistent standards to different countries.

President of JPPI (the Jewish People Policy Institute), Prof. Yedidia Stern:

"The findings emerging from the study are not based on feelings or political perceptions, but on a systematic analysis of hundreds of official statements. The picture that emerges shows a clear gap between the way the UN Secretary-General refers to Israel and how he refers to other countries.

The role of the UN Secretary-General, as the person representing the entire international community, requires balance, caution, and a consistency of standards. When a democratic state such as Israel receives an exceptional volume of negative criticism, while countries with a documented record of human rights violations receive more moderate treatment, a substantive question arises regarding Guterres's performance.

Our study does not seek to rule out criticism of Israel, but rather to point to a persistent lack of proportion. The gap revealed by the study requires a serious discussion of whether the UN is indeed upholding the principles of balance and fairness when it comes to Israel."