

Briefing on UN Security Council Resolution 2334

A factsheet from We Believe In Israel

[Briefing on UN Security Council vote](#)

On Friday 23 December 2016 the UN Security Council passed a vote condemning all Israeli settlement activity and calling for its cessation. This email is a briefing to update you with the full story so far, what happened, what happens next, why the resolution is so problematic and the mood in Israel.

[What actually happened?](#)

The USA abstained in the vote and the UK voted for the resolution. The speed of the process in New York took Israel by surprise because Egypt had already proposed the resolution but withdrew it after a combination of pressure from Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Elect Trump. Indeed the mood in Israel on Thursday was triumphant as it appeared that a major diplomatic defeat had been averted and that the new US President was already flexing his muscles in Israel's favour. The diplomatic process moved very fast on Friday as 4 non-permanent members of the Security Council arranged a vote on the resolution. Israel hoped the US would veto, but they didn't. Israel's Government has been very vocal in its reaction, openly criticising the US, accusing Obama of a betrayal and suggesting that this was a behind the scenes stitch up. On December 25th Israel called in all the Ambassadors of the states voting with the resolution and the US envoy for clarifications and a reprimand. Reports in the Israeli media also say that Israel is considering retaliatory measures such as cancelling bilateral visits, meetings and even aid projects and UN contributions.

[What happens next?](#)

There is a rumour that US Secretary of State John Kerry could give a speech about suggested parameters for an Israeli-Palestinian deal, get that approved at the Paris Peace conference on January 15th and put it to a vote at the Security Council before Trump takes office on January 20th. The Palestinian Authority are emboldened and believe this is a major victory in their campaign to internationalise the conflict and condemn Israel at International organisations. There are some views that the resolution could affect the International Criminal Court examination of Israel. However, the resolution is non-binding and not in the same legal category of Security Council resolutions that punish states and call for sanctions. The UN Secretary General is now required to report to the Council every 3 months on the situation. The movement in favour of boycotting Israel believes also this is a big win but countries like the UK were clear in their speeches that they were still firmly opposed to boycotts and sanctions.

Why is the resolution so problematic?

The last resolution that condemned Israeli settlements and was passed at the Security Council was as long ago as 1980. Obama vetoed a resolution about settlements in 2011. It is unclear why the USA abstained now. Perhaps it was frustration that there has been no progress towards resuming negotiations or the perceived need to make a clear statement against initiatives like the Israeli legislation to retrospectively legalise illegal settlements built on private Palestinian land and the continuing reluctance to dismantle settlement outposts like Amona despite Israeli court judgements stating Amona is illegal and ordering its evacuation.

The text of the resolution (see the final part of this UN statement for the full text: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12657.doc.htm>) is unhelpful for three main reasons -

1. It reinforces the idea that settlements are the core issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and if they were just removed then the conflict could easily be resolved.
2. It is a one sided resolution that condemns only Israel. It condemns violence and incitement in only general terms and places no obligations on the Palestinians, nor does it criticise them.
3. It uses the June 4th 1967 lines as its reference point and condemns all Israeli housing over those lines as illegal. This includes parts of Jerusalem such as the Western Wall and the Jewish Quarter of the Old City that are hugely important to Israel. Although this is established policy in many countries it means the resolution does not in any way recognise progress made between Israel and the Palestinians in negotiations that has moved far from this baseline. For instance the Arab Peace Initiative suggests Israel could keep the major settlement blocks near the 1967 line in return for land swaps. Thus the resolution doesn't build on previous talks or do anything constructive to get negotiations restarted.

The mood in Israel

Responding to the vote, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said it was absurd of the resolution to determine that the Jewish Quarter of the Old City in Jerusalem was occupied territory. At the weekly cabinet meeting on Sunday morning, Netanyahu expressed his anger and frustration at what he termed "the unbalanced resolution" which "the Security Council passed in an unworthy manner" and also criticised the Obama Administration for not vetoing it. Israel has cancelled Ukrainian President Groyzman's scheduled visit, due to Kiev's support for the resolution, and has recalled its ambassadors from New Zealand and Senegal for consultations. The government also announced it will cancel all aid programs to Senegal and is considering stopping its funding to five UN agencies to the tune of £6.3m.

Israeli politicians from the opposition were also critical of the resolution, although many simultaneously blamed Prime Minister Netanyahu's policies for isolating Israel. Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid called the resolution dangerous and unfair, but also stated that "What became clear yesterday was that no country in the world agrees with the Israeli government. We had zero supporters at the vote." Former Prime Minister and Defence Minister Ehud Barak, a long-time critic of Netanyahu, commented that "A government that does not act and does not lead a [peace] process brings resolutions like this upon itself."

We will provide further updates in due course.