Israeli Envoy: Obama Gave Palestinians Ammunition for Diplomatic War on Israel

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The Israeli ambassador to the United States, Ron Dermer, said Monday that US President Barack Obama has given the Palestinians ammunition for waging a multi-pronged war on Israel by refusing to wield the US’s veto power at the United Nations Security Council where [a resolution condemning Israeli settlements was passed last week](http://www.timesofisrael.com/choosing-not-to-veto-obama-lets-anti-settlement-resolution-pass-at-un-security-council/), sparking a diplomatic war of words between Jerusalem and Washington.

Fourteen nations voted in favor of UN Security Council Resolution 2334 on Friday, which called on Israel to halt settlement building and expansion in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and in a departure from stated US policy to veto resolutions seen as anti-Israel, the US abstained.

Infuriated, Israel launched a scathing attack on the Obama administration, accusing the US government of pushing for the resolution after it was withdrawn Thursday by Egypt (which drafted it), of abandoning and ambushing its closest Mideast ally, and of cooperating with the United Nations against Israel.

Israel also [summoned the ambassadors](http://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-summons-envoys-of-un-resolution-backers-upbraids-obama/) and deputy ambassadors of 12 of the 14 states that voted in favor of the resolution, and limited working ties with these nations in the wake of their votes, while Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu summoned US Ambassador Dan Shapiro and personally met with him for “clarifications” on the US decision to abstain.

The ambassadors of China, Russia, France, Angola, Egypt, Japan, Ukraine and Uruguay and the deputy ambassadors of Great Britain and Spain were called in on Christmas morning on Sunday for scoldings from directors of the Foreign Ministry’s respective regional departments. Israel also recalled its ambassadors to New Zealand and Senegal, who along with Malaysia and Venezuela, with whom Israel has no diplomatic ties, initiated the vote. Aid programs to Senegal were suspended.

Netanyahu also disinvited Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman, the country’s first Jewish leader who was set to arrive in Israel this week, as a consequence of the vote and reportedly canceled a meeting with British PM Theresa May.

On Monday, Dermer defended the Israeli government’s response to the resolution, rejecting the charge that Israel was isolating itself from countries it considers allies.

“Israel is not going to be kicked in the teeth and just not respond to this,” Dermer told CNN’s Jake Tapper on Monday.

“We can’t just meet with visiting dignitaries as if nothing has happened, this a serious effort against Israel, it’s an anti-Israel resolution,” he charged, pointed to Hamas’s praising of the resolution as proof. “Israel’s enemies are celebrating this resolution, that tells you all you need to know.”

By advocating an Israeli return to the 1967 lines and seeking Palestinian approval for any change in status, including with regard to Jerusalem, he said, “the resolution changes the terms of reference for peace.”

“Obama gave the Palestinians exactly what they wanted, he gave them the ammunition for a political, diplomatic and legal war against Israel, by not vetoing,” Dermer said, adding that the decision “basically encourages boycotts and sanctions against Israel, and will make peace harder to achieve.”

By declaring the West Bank and East Jerusalem occupied Palestinian territory, the resolution, Dermer indicated, weakened Israel’s negotiating position because “the one negotiating chip Israel has” is the territory captured in the 1967 war waged by Arab states against Israel.

The Palestinians, he charged, don’t want to negotiate peace with Israel, preferring to “wage a diplomatic and legal war” against the Jewish state.

“When you’re negotiating a peace, there’s give and take, what they want is take and take, and the way that you do that is to try to internationalize the conflict, to put more and more pressure on Israel, to call for boycotts, sanctions, to take our soldiers to the International Criminal Court,” Dermer said in reference to a probe by the ICC into allegations of war crimes during Operation Protective Edge in the summer of 2014.

When pressed on why Israel seems intent on supporting settlements deep inside the West Bank, on territory the Palestinians would claim as part of a future state, Dermer said that the settlements “make no difference to the peace process,” and that they were not an obstacle to peace and never have been.

Dermer further accused the Obama administration of “bringing the disagreement between our two governments [over settlements].. to the Security Council, something that has not happened in 36 years, since the days of Jimmy Carter,” echoing a sentiment expressed on Saturday by Netanyahu who [compared Obama’s behavior to that of Carter](http://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-says-obama-breached-commitment-with-unsc-vote-likens-him-to-carter/), “a president who was hostile to Israel.”

The Israeli envoy said that the US decision to abstain went against principles issued by Obama himself in 2011 — after a similar resolution was then vetoed by the US — who said that peace will not be achieved with UN resolutions but through direct negotiations between the two sides.

Washington has denied Israeli accusations that it pushed the resolution “behind Israel’s back,” citing recent policies pursued by the Israeli government and pro-settlement claims made by Israeli officials as reasons the US decided to abstain and arguing that Israel should not have been surprised.

“By definition it’s not an ambush when President Obama and Secretary Kerry have been saying in hundreds of conversations and in public comments that Israeli settlement activity was pushing into the West Bank in a way that was making the two-state solution unachievable over time,” Obama adviser Ben Rhodes said Monday. The US had made it clear that “if that activity continued, we could see further international steps against further Israeli settlement activity,” he said.

Rhodes said the administration could not stand by, “when we see laws that aim to legalize outposts,” a reference to the so-called Regulation Bill, a government-backed initiative to authorize West Bank outposts, and “when we see rhetoric that suggests that this is the most pro settlement Israeli government in history.”

Dermer, in an interview with MSNBC earlier Monday, called Rhodes a “master of fiction” — a harsh barb that seemed to evoke Rhodes’ past literary aspirations — after Rhodes denied the US was behind the UN resolution.

In his interview with CNN, Dermer further rejected Washington’s claim that it was not behind Friday’s resolution, saying that Israel will “present evidence of US involvement in bringing the resolution to a vote to the new [Trump] administration [through] the appropriate channels and then they can decide whether they want to release it to the public.”