UK's Key Role in Brokering UN Resolution on Israeli Settlements Confirmed

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Britain played a key behind-the-scenes role in brokering the [UN resolution condemning Israel for violating international law](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/23/us-abstention-allows-un-to-demand-end-to-israeli-settlements) with its policy of building settlements on occupied Palestinian territory, it has been confirmed. The UK helped draft some of the key wording to ensure it met US concerns.

The UK role, first highlighted by Israeli diplomatic sources, leaves the UK on a collision course not just with Israel, but at odds with Donald Trump, the US president-elect and a strong opponent of the UN resolution, the first to be passed that is critical of [Israel](https://www.theguardian.com/world/israel) for seven years.

The UK has never hidden its support for the UN resolution, voting for its terms, and subsequently both UK ministers and diplomats have publicly justified its wording. It is also usual for the UK to play a key brokering role on UN resolutions, especially on the Middle East.

It has been confirmed the UK helped with drafts of the resolution with Egypt and the Palestinians in a bid to ensure that it met with the concerns of the US president, Barack Obama. The US said it did not veto the resolution because it was balanced, condemning violence and incitement, as well as illegal settlements. The US has insisted it did not draft the text, and did not even tell other delegations how it intended to vote in the key consultations process.

Formally the Foreign Office did not deny it had been involved in the drafting process. It stressed “the resolution was proposed and drafted by the Egyptian delegation”, adding that the UK, as one of the five permanent members of the security council, “engaged with” the text “as we do with all security council texts”.

Israel claims the UK’s diplomatic activity in New York, conducted in liaison with the French and the US, took place behind its back. It is dubious that the US played a hands-off role.

Israel’s ambassador to the US, Ron Dermer, speaking to the US media this week, said: “This is not a text that was formulated by the Palestinians or Egypt, but by a western power.” It was not clear if this was a reference to the US or the UK.

In particular the UK is thought to have played a major role in mediating between the Palestinians and the Americans to ensure the text eventually put forward by New Zealand, and not Egypt, met the concerns of both sides.

The UK in conjunction with Gulf states said the resolution should go ahead even when Egypt decided not to sponsor it.

A last-minute glitch came up when Russia’s ambassador to the [United Nations](https://www.theguardian.com/world/unitednations), Vitaly Churkin, proposed postponing the vote until after Christmas, according to an interview the deputy Russian ambassador to Israel gave on Israel Army Radio. This reportedly followed a phone call between the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and the Russian president, Vladi­mir Putin. The other security council ambassadors refused to wait, however.

The UK Foreign Office minister Tobias Ellwood welcomed the UN resolution on Twitter, and the UK ambassador to the UN, Matthew Rycroft, also highlighted the UK support for the resolution.

The British foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, has not so far issued any public statement either way, but it is not claimed this is significant.

The UK support for the UN resolution has already led to reports that a tentatively planned meeting between Theresa May, and Netanyahu scheduled for Davos international summit this month [has been cancelled](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/26/netanyahu-snubs-may-over-un-settlements-vote-israeli-media-says).

The UK role has divided opinion inside the Conservative party. Conservative Friends of Israel’s parliamentary chairman, Sir Eric Pickles, said: “CFI is disappointed by the UK’s decision to support the controversial UN security council resolution, which legitimises the Palestinian Authority’s attempts to internationalise the issue and avoid the necessary direct peace talks.

“In addition, the resolution will embolden the hardline BDS movement and the ramifications for Jerusalem and Judaism’s holiest site – the Western Wall – are seriously troubling.”

By contrast the Conservative Middle East council said the resolution affirmed the “establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including east Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-state solution”.

The UK is also backing the French-hosted Middle East conference on 15 January, where more than 70 countries may endorse an international framework, including a two-state solution for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Israel has long vowed not to attend, with the Israeli defence minister, Avigdor Lieberman, comparing the summit to “a modern version of the Dreyfus trial” at a meeting of his party’s deputies.

Israel says it will only hold bilateral talks with the Palestinians.