Graham Threatens to Pull Funding for U.N. over Israeli Settlement Vote

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Sen. Lindsey Graham warned Saturday that he will propose a bill in Congress to pull U.S. funding for the United Nations unless the U.N. Security Council repeals its just-passed resolution condemning Israeli settlements as illegal.

The resolution, a major rebuke to Israel, passed Friday in a 14-0 vote. The U.S., which has vetoed similar resolutions in the past, abstained, allowing it to be adopted.

The measure demands Israel "immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem." It declares that the establishment of settlements by Israel has "no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law."

The Republican senator from South Carolina [told CNN](http://www.cnn.com/2016/12/24/politics/lindsey-graham-united-nations/index.html) on Saturday that he had been planning to work with the U.N. to create a Marshall Plan to support countries emerging from conflict but won't do it unless the council overturns the resolution.

"I am a huge supporter of foreign aid and the U.N.," he said. "I want to do more, not less. But I can't support funding a body that singles out the only democracy in the Middle East who shares our values."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected the measure as "shameful" and said Israel will not abide by its terms.

Graham told CNN that trying to defund the U.N. is a new approach.

"This is a road we haven't gone down before," said Graham, a member of the powerful Appropriations Committee. "If you can't show the American people that international organizations can be more responsible, there is going to be a break. And I am going to lead that break."

In [a statement](http://www.lgraham.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/press-releases?ID=5BD4E916-0077-43B7-AAB9-44B21FFD41CD) Friday following the vote, Graham said President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry went from "naïve and foolish to flat-out reckless" in allowing the resolution to be adopted.

White House officials said the administration's decision not to veto was consistent with long-standing U.S. opposition to Israeli settlements, calling them an incitement to violence and an impediment to peace.

The resolution "makes clear that both Israel and the Palestinians have to take steps to preserve the two-state solution," said Ben Rhodes, deputy national security adviser for strategic communications. Rhodes said the U.S. had nothing to do with the U.N. resolution, and that the Obama administration has been warning Israel for years that settlements were increasing its international "isolation."

U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Samantha Power, in remarks to the council after the vote, said the U.S. position on the settlements has remained unchanged for five decades. She quoted a 1982 statement by then-president Ronald Reagan, which declared Washington “will not support the use of any additional land for the purpose of settlements.”

"The U.S. has been sending the message that the settlements must stop, privately and publicly, for five decades," Power said.

She said settlement activity "harms the viability of a negotiated two-state outcome and erodes prospects for peace and stability in the region.”

Under international law, Israeli settlements — built on Palestinian land occupied by Israel — are considered illegal. Some 600,000 Israelis live in East Jerusalem and on the West Bank, which the Palestinians seek as part of a future independent state. Israel captured both areas in the 1967 Mideast war.

Israel argues that the final status of the territories should be determined in any future talks on Palestinian statehood.

Graham, in his statement, said the U.S. diplomatic move amounted to abandoning Israel and that he expects it will "create a backlash" against the U.N. in Congress.

"The organization is increasingly viewed as anti-Semitic and seems to have lost all sense of proportionality," he said.

The senator told CNN he discussed the resolution before the vote with António Guterres, the incoming U.N. secretary-general, and also lobbied members of the Security Council not to support it.

In addition, he raised the issue with South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, President-elect Donald Trump's nominee for ambassador to the United Nations.

Trump, in an unprecedented move for a president-in-waiting, tried to block the vote by persuading Egypt, the initial sponsor of the measure, to withdraw it Thursday. The following day, however, other co-sponsors of the measure brought it up for a vote.

Afterward, Trump — who takes office in four weeks — tweeted: "Things will be different after Jan. 20th."