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## Despite UN vote, Palestine remains far from free

James Zogby  
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There was considerable drama leading up to the passage of United Nations Security Council resolution 2334 reaffirming the illegality of Israeli settlements.

It began with all hell breaking loose on Thursday morning when it was clear that the Egyptians would submit their resolution on Israeli settlements for a vote at the Security Council and that American president Barack Obama would support the effort, either by voting in favour or by refusing to veto it.

On Wednesday, there had been a hint that something was up. The White House spokesperson appeared on a cable TV news programme and referred to Israeli settlements as illegal. While he later attempted to clarify his remarks, the point had been made. This was followed by an announcement that secretary of state John Kerry would make a policy address Thursday in advance of the UN meeting that was to consider the resolution.

President-elect Donald Trump sprang into action by tweeting: "The resolution being considered at the United Nations regarding Israel should be vetoed." This was echoed, minutes later, by a nearly identical tweet from Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It has been reported that both leaders made direct calls to Egypt's president Abdul Fattah El Sisi pressuring him to withdraw the resolution. Egypt pulled the resolution from consideration. Mr Kerry's speech was abruptly cancelled.

Late on Thursday, New Zealand, working together with Malaysia, Senegal and Venezuela, with the support of the Palestinians, issued an ultimatum to Egypt to either immediately introduce the resolution or they would do it themselves.

When Egypt did not, the New Zealand-led group followed through and a vote was scheduled for Friday afternoon. In response to this development, the threats from the Israelis, Mr Trump and members of the United States senate increased in intensity.

At 2pm, the Security Council convened. Members spoke and then voted – 14 in favour, none opposed, with the US abstaining, thereby guaranteeing the resolution's passage. Adding to the day's drama, following the passage of the settlement resolution, the usually staid security council chamber broke into sustained applause.

Mr Trump, ever the bully, responded with an ominous threat: "As to the UN, things will be different after January 20th." Senator Lindsey Graham, chair of the committee that oversees foreign operations' funding called the resolution a "provocative action" that "must be dealt with sternly and forcefully" and threatened to cut US support for the UN. For his part, Mr Netanyahu reacted hysterically terming the vote "shamelessly anti-Israel", accusing the Obama administration of "ganging up against Israel" and declaring that Israel would not be bound by any of the terms of the resolution.

Looking at the text of the resolution, one might wonder why all the drama and overreaction. It is, in fact, largely a restatement of decades of US policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The resolution reaffirms well-established principles of international law regarding the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied territories. Seen in this light, the resolution declares that Israel's confiscation of land, construction of settlements and the transfer of their population into the occupied territories are violations of international law.

The resolution goes on to remind both the Israelis and Palestinians of commitments they have made to the international community citing the Madrid peace conference and the Quartet's road map – specifically noting how the settlement enterprise endangers the possibility of a two-state solution and a peaceful negotiated resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while reminding the Palestinians of their responsibility to condemn all acts of violence against civilians and incitement to violence.

There are those who may dismiss the resolution as just another resolution without teeth that will be ignored. But last month's 156-3 vote in the UN General Assembly in support of a similarly worded statement and now this security council vote establish a growing worldwide united front against Israel's aggressive annexationist policies, threatening to further isolate Israel and a Trump-led United States in the international community.

What the reactions of Mr Trump and Mr Netanyahu make clear is that, despite their hollow words to the contrary, they have no intention of supporting a just resolution to the conflict and apparently don't give a damn about what the rest of the world may think. This is what we may have expected – but we now see it playing out in real time a month before the new administration takes office.

Bullying and threats of temper tantrums might have intimidated Egypt, but they did not dissuade the nations of the world from speaking with one voice. This is something that both the future Trump administration and Mr Netanyahu must consider. As Israel continues to advance legislation "legalising" illegal outposts; as Mr Trump considers flouting law and world opinion by moving the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem; and as the senate decides whether to make good on threats to cut or reduce US dues to the UN – they run the risk of international outrage, fraying ties with allies, and even sanctions. These are consequences to consider.

This drama will continue to play out in the New Year and it all began on December 23, a big day at the United Nations.