Obama’s Fitting Finish

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Barack Obama’s decision to abstain from, and therefore allow, last week’s vote to censure Israel at the U.N. Security Council is a fitting capstone for what’s left of his foreign policy. Strategic half-measures, underhanded tactics and moralizing gestures have been the president’s style from the beginning. Israelis aren’t the only people to feel betrayed by the results.

Also betrayed: Iranians, whose 2009 Green Revolution in heroic protest of a stolen election Mr. Obama conspicuously failed to endorse for fear of offending the ruling theocracy.

Iraqis, who were assured of a diplomatic surge to consolidate the gains of the military surge, but who ceased to be of any interest to Mr. Obama the moment U.S. troops were withdrawn, and only concerned him again when ISIS neared the gates of Baghdad.

Syrians, whose initially peaceful uprising against anti-American dictator Bashar Assad Mr. Obama refused to embrace, and whose initially moderate-led uprising Mr. Obama failed to support, and whose sarin- and chlorine-gassed children Mr. Obama refused to rescue, his own red lines notwithstanding.

Ukrainians, who gave up their nuclear weapons in 1994 with formal U.S. assurances that their “existing borders” would be guaranteed, only to see Mr. Obama refuse to supply them with defensive weapons when Vladimir Putin invaded their territory 20 years later.

Pro-American Arab leaders, who expected better than to be given ultimatums from Washington to step down, and who didn’t anticipate the administration’s tilt toward the Muslim Brotherhood as a legitimate political opposition, and toward Tehran as a responsible negotiating partner.

Most betrayed: Americans.

Mr. Obama promised a responsible end to the war in Iraq. We are again fighting in Iraq. He promised victory in Afghanistan. The Taliban are winning. He promised a reset with Russia. We are enemies again. He promised the containment of Iran. We are witnessing its ascendancy in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. He promised a world free of nuclear weapons. We are stumbling into another age of nuclear proliferation. He promised al Qaeda on a path to defeat. Jihad has never been so rampant and deadly.

These are the results. They would be easier to forgive if they hadn’t so often been reached by disingenuous and dishonorable means.

The administration was deceptive about the motives for the 2012 Benghazi attack. It was deceptive about Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl’s service record, and the considerations that led it to exchange five Taliban leaders for his freedom. It was deceptive about when it began nuclear negotiations with Iran. It was deceptive about the terms of the deal. It continues to be deceptive about the fundamental aim of the agreement, which has less to do with curbing Iran’s nuclear ambitions than with [aligning](http://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2015/02/obamas-secret-iran-strategy/) Washington’s interests with Tehran’s.

Now the administration is likely being deceptive about last week’s U.N. vote, claiming it did not promote, craft or orchestrate a resolution that treats the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem’s Old City as a settlement in illegally occupied territory. Yet in November, John Kerry had a long talk on the subject with the foreign minister of New Zealand, one of the resolution’s sponsors.

“One of the closed-door discussions between United States Secretary of State John Kerry and the New Zealand government today was a potential resolution by the United Nations Security Council on a two-state solution for the Israel-Palestine conflict,” the New Zealand Herald [reported last month](http://m.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11747382). “‘It is a conversation we are engaged in deeply and we’ve spent some time talking to Secretary Kerry about where the U.S. might go on this,’” the paper added, quoting Foreign Minister Murray McCully.

The Israelis claim to have more evidence along these lines. If so, it means the administration no longer bothers to lie convincingly.

Even this might be excusable, if Mr. Obama at least had the courage of his mistaken convictions, or if his deception were in the service of a worthier end. Instead, we have the spectacle of the U.S. government hiding behind the skirts of the foreign minister of New Zealand—along with eminent co-sponsors, Venezuela, Malaysia and Senegal—in order to embarrass and endanger a democratic ally in a forum where that ally is already isolated and bullied. In the catalog of low points in American diplomacy, this one ranks high.

After the Carter administration pulled a similar stunt against Israel at the Security Council in December 1980, the Washington Post published an editorial that does the paper honor today.

“It cannot be denied,” the editors wrote, “that there is a pack and that it hounds Israel shamelessly and that this makes it very serious when the United States joins it.” The editorial was titled “Joining the Jackals.”

Unlike Mr. Carter, Mr. Obama hasn’t joined the jackals. He has merely opened the door wide to them, whether at the U.N. or in the skies over Syria or in the killing fields in Ukraine. The United States abstains: What a fitting finish to this ruinous presidency.