Obama’s Final, Most Shameful, Legacy Moment

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*“When the chips are down, I have Israel’s back.”*

— [Barack Obama](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/post/obama-israel-and-aipac-two-dueling-videos/2012/03/04/gIQAqn1irR_blog.html?utm_term=.a4919b678cd0), AIPAC
conference, March 4, 2012

The audience — overwhelmingly Jewish, passionately pro-Israel and supremely gullible — [applauded wildly](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-urges-israel-to-give-diplomacy-a-chance/2012/03/04/gIQAqEqrqR_story.html?utm_term=.8fced7873b1c). Four years later — his last election behind him, with a month to go in office and with no need to fool Jew or gentile again — Obama took the measure of Israel’s back and [slid a knife into it](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-declines-to-veto-un-security-council-resolution-for-israel-to-stop-jewish-settlement-activity/2016/12/23/cd4efe72-c939-11e6-bf4b-2c064d32a4bf_story.html?utm_term=.47ccef266582).

People don’t quite understand the damage done to Israel by the U.S. abstention that permitted passage of a U.N. Security Council [resolution](https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12657.doc.htm) condemning Israel over settlements. [The administration pretends](https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/12/23/record-press-call-un-security-council-resolution-israeli-settlement) this is nothing but a restatement of long-standing U.S. opposition to settlements.

Nonsense. For the past 35 years, every administration, including a reelection-seeking [Obama himself](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/18/AR2011021805442.html) in 2011, has protected Israel with the U.S. veto because such a Security Council resolution gives immense legal ammunition to every boycotter, anti-Semite and zealous European prosecutor to penalize and punish Israelis.

An ordinary Israeli who lives or works in the Old City of Jerusalem becomes an international pariah, a potential outlaw. To say nothing of the soldiers of Israel’s citizen army. “Every pilot and every officer and every soldier,” [said a confidant](http://www.timesofisrael.com/abbas-confidant-we-will-take-hundreds-of-idf-soldiers-to-icc-this-year/) of Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, “we are waiting for him at The Hague,” i.e. the [International Criminal Court](https://www.icc-cpi.int/).

Moreover, the resolution undermines the very foundation of a half-century of American Middle East policy. What becomes of “land for peace” if the territories that Israel was to have traded for peace are, in advance, declared to be Palestinian land to which Israel has no claim?

The [peace parameters](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/kerry-address-middle-east-peace-process-amid-deep-us-israel-strains/2016/12/28/d656e5fa-cd0a-11e6-b8a2-8c2a61b0436f_story.html?utm_term=.be04f1f69d1e) enunciated so ostentatiously by Secretary of State John Kerry on Wednesday are nearly identical to the Clinton parameters that Yasser Arafat was offered and rejected in [2000](http://www.nytimes.com/2000/07/26/world/impasse-at-camp-david-the-overview-clinton-ends-deadlocked-peace-talks.html) and that Abbas was offered by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in 2008. [Abbas, too, walked away](http://www.timesofisrael.com/abbas-admits-he-rejected-2008-peace-offer-from-olmert/).

Kerry mentioned none of this because it undermines his blame-Israel narrative. Yet Palestinian rejectionism works. The Security Council just declared the territories legally Palestinian — without the Palestinians having to concede anything, let alone peace. What incentive do the Palestinians have to negotiate when they can get the terms — and territory — they seek handed to them for free if they hold out long enough?

[The administration claims](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/how-the-us-came-to-abstain-on-a-un-resolution-condemning-israeli-settlements/2016/12/28/fed102ee-cd38-11e6-b8a2-8c2a61b0436f_story.html?tid=pm_world_pop&utm_term=.e12d5c3348f3) a kind of passive innocence on the text of the resolution, as if it had come upon it at the last moment. We are to believe that the ostensible sponsors — New Zealand, [Senegal](http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Jerusalem-orders-to-cancel-all-aid-programs-to-resolution-co-sponsor-Senegal-476421), Malaysia and a Venezuela that cannot provide its own people with toilet paper, [let alone food](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/in-a-hungry-venezuela-buying-too-much-food-can-get-you-arrested/2016/09/14/b20276d6-755f-11e6-9781-49e591781754_story.html?utm_term=.43d22cdec7c4) — had for months been sweating the details of Jewish housing in East Jerusalem.

Nothing new here, protests deputy national security adviser [Ben Rhodes](http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1612/26/sitroom.01.html): “When we see the facts on the ground, again, deep into the West Bank beyond the separation barrier, we feel compelled to speak up against those actions.”

This is a deception. Everyone knows that remote outposts are not the issue. Under any peace, they will be swept away. Even right-wing Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who lives in one of these West Bank settlements, [has stated publicly](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/02/26/AR2009022602806_3.html?sid=ST2009042003307) that “I even agree to vacate my settlement if there really will be a two-state solution.” Where’s the obstacle to peace?

A second category of settlement is the close-in blocs that border 1967 Israel. Here, too, we know in advance how these will be disposed of: They’ll become Israeli territory and, in exchange, Israel will swap over some of its land to a Palestinian state. Where’s the obstacle to peace here?

It’s the third category of “settlement” that is the most contentious and that Security Council Resolution 2334 [explicitly condemns](http://www.un.org/webcast/pdfs/SRES2334-2016.pdf): East Jerusalem. This is not just scandalous; it’s absurd. America acquiesces to a declaration that, as a matter of international law, the Jewish state has no claim on the Western Wall, the Temple Mount, indeed the entire Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem. They belong to Palestine.

The Temple Mount is the most sacred site in all of Judaism. That it should be declared foreign to the Jewish people is as if the Security Council declared Mecca and Medina to be territory to which Islam has no claim. Such is the Orwellian universe Israel inhabits.

At the very least, Obama should have insisted that any reference to East Jerusalem be dropped from the resolution or face a U.S. veto. Why did he not? It’s incomprehensible — except as a parting shot of personal revenge on Benjamin Netanyahu. Or perhaps as a revelation of a deep-seated antipathy to Israel that simply awaited a safe political interval for public expression.

Another legacy moment for Barack Obama. And his most shameful.