Elliott Abrams: Obama Feeds Israel to the Jackals

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By Elliot Abrams

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The Security Council resolution on Israel rewards the PLO for refusing to negotiate and adopts its tactic of replacing serious, face-to-face negotiations with useless dramas in New York. It is a danger to Israel.

And by refusing to veto, the Obama administration abandoned the usual American practice of defending Israel from what Jeane Kirkpatrick called “the jackals” at the United Nations.

Last weekend, administration spokesmen have tried to defend this abandonment of Israel in truly Orwellian terms, inverting the meaning of their action. This was done to help Israel, you see, and to defend it; we know better where its interests lie than does its elected government (and main opposition parties); we abandoned Israel because we are its friend.

These were main themes of the president’s aide [Ben Rhodes](https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/12/23/record-press-call-un-security-council-resolution-israeli-settlement) when he spoke to reporters Friday, and among other things said the following, describing:

a resolution that expresses the consensus international view on Israeli settlement activity….this is consistent with longstanding bipartisan U.S. policy as it relates to settlements….one of our grave concerns is that the continued pace of settlement activity — which has accelerated in recent years, which has accelerated significantly since 2011….

let’s be clear here: We exhausted every effort to pursue a two-state solution through negotiations, through direct discussions, through proximity discussions, through confidence-building measures, through a lengthy and exhaustive effort undertaken by Secretary Kerry earlier in the President’s second term. We gave every effort that we could to supporting the parties coming to the table.

So within the absence of any meaningful peace process, as well as in the face of accelerated settlement activity that put at risk the viability of a two-state solution, that we took the decision that we did today to abstain on this resolution….

Where is the evidence that not doing this is slowing the settlement construction?

If you enjoyed the children’s exercise where the child is asked to find all the things wrong in a picture–signs upside down, dogs with horns, etc–you will enjoy pondering Mr. Rhodes’s misleading narrative.

Yes, the resolution “expresses the consensus international view on Israeli settlement activity,” which calls them illegal, and that is the point: until the Obama administration, the United States’s position was that they were unhelpful but not illegal. Therefore the resolution is not “consistent with longstanding bipartisan U.S. policy.”

As to the pace of settlement activity, Mr. Rhodes is simply wrong. I’ve reviewed the statistics [here, in Foreign Policy](http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/12/04/president-trump-and-the-art-of-the-ultimate-israel-palestine-peace-deal/). There, Uri Sadot and I concluded that:

A careful look into the numbers shows that neither the population balance between Jews and Palestinians, nor the options for partition in the West Bank have materially changed….Israeli population in the settlements is growing, but at a rate that reflects mostly births in families already there, and not in-migration of new settlers.

In fact settlement growth has not “accelerated significantly” since 2011, whatever Mr. Rhodes says.

His most disingenuous remark is about the failure of negotiations. Indeed the Obama-Kerry efforts failed, because the Palestinians refused to come to the table even when Israel undertook a 10-month construction freeze. One of Mr. Obama’s officials, [Martin Indyk](http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.602946), said this in 2014 about those negotiations:

“Netanyahu moved to the zone of possible agreement. I saw him sweating bullets to find a way to reach an agreement,” said Indyk. Abbas, for his part, did not show flexibility, Indyk added. “We tried to get Abu Mazen to the zone of possible agreement but we were surprised to learn he had shut down.”

So what is to be done when the Palestinians refuse to negotiate? Punish Israel. Join the jackals in Turtle Bay. Adopt the PLO view that action in the United Nations will replace face-to-face talks. That was Mr. Obama’s decision.

Mr. Rhodes’s twisted formulation, “Where is the evidence that not doing this is slowing the settlement construction?” is a kind of epitaph for Obama policy. He explained:

We have a body of evidence to assess how this Israeli government has responded to us not taking this kind of action, and that suggests that they will continue to accelerate the type of settlement construction that puts a two-state solution at risk.

Settlements expand if we veto resolutions, he is saying, so we have decided not to veto resolutions.

This is precisely wrong, a true inversion of the truth. The Obama account of settlement expansion is invented and avoids the facts to build a case against Israel.

Netanyahu is not popular among settlers exactly because he has restrained settlement growth and as noted adopted a 10-month freeze. In 2009 [Hillary Clinton](http://www.deseretnews.com/article/705341196/Clinton-calls-Israeli-concessions-unprecedented.html?pg=all) said, “What the prime minister has offered in specifics on restraints on a policy of settlements…is unprecedented.” What has been the Obama reaction to his restraint, to his freeze, to the PLO refusal to negotiate?

The reaction has been to blame Israel and assault Netanyahu year after year, including with childish [epithets](http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/senior-obama-official-israeli-pm-netanyahu-is-chickenshit/article/2555390). And this attitude culminated finally in the abandonment of Israel at the United Nations.

Supporters of strong Israel-American relations can only be glad that the 22nd Amendment limits presidents to two terms in the White House.