Malcolm Turnbull Blasts UN Over Vote on Israel

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Malcolm Turnbull has strongly condemned the UN, accusing it of a prejudiced attack against Israel over a Security Council resolution that accused the Israeli ­government of violating inter­national law with its settlement activity.

On the eve of a historic visit by Benjamin Netanyahu, who ­arrives in Sydney today as the first sitting Israeli leader to visit Australia, the Prime Minister also charged those who promoted or supported a boycott campaign with a deplorable attempt to ­­­de-legitimise the Jewish state.

In an exclusive commentary article published in *The Australian* today, Mr Turnbull denounces the UN for what he claims is bias, citing 20 resolutions ­between 2014 and 2015 that are critical of Israel when only a ­single resolution had been issued on the Syrian war.

While Mr Turnbull has been critical in the past of anti-Israeli resolutions, rarely has he been so forceful in his language. “My government will not support one-sided resolutions criticising Israel of the kind recently adopted by the Security Council and we ­deplore the boycott campaigns designed to delegitimise the Jewish state,” Mr Turnbull writes.

“At the same time, we recognise that Israel and the Palestinians need to come to a settlement and we support a directly negotiated two-state-solution so that Palestinians will have their own state and the people of Israel can be secure within agreed borders.

“We believe that with so many other larger, more destructive and intractable disputes in the Middle East, this is a time when Israeli and Palestinian leaders, supported by the global community, should return to the negotiating table and work towards a solution that upholds the rights of both peoples to live side-by-side in peace and security.”

The Israeli Prime Minister’s visit follows a White House meeting with President Donald Trump and has reignited a feud within the Labor Party, which is becoming increasingly divided between those who adhere to its long-held position of explicit support for ­Israel and a new guard actively promoting the Palestinian cause.

Bill Shorten said yesterday he would be raising the controversial issue of settlements directly with Mr Netanyahu in a scheduled meeting. “Labor has long supported a two-state solution,” the Opposition Leader said.

“We support the right of both Palestinians and Israelis to live within secure borders. I will make it clear to Mr Netanyahu that where settlement-building is an obstacle to two-state solution, it should be stopped.”

Labor senator Sam Dastyari has chided ALP figures for a deliberate provocation in calling for recognition of a Palestinian state ahead of Mr Netanyahu’s visit. Taking a similar position to Mr Turnbull, Senator Dastyari suggested there were more pressing human rights issues in the Middle East that needed to be addressed.

“In recent years, there have been atrocities in Syria, Libya, Iraq and throughout the Middle East,” Senator Dastyari said ­earlier in the week. “Palestine ­remains an important­ foreign policy issue. I have always been a strong supporter of a two-state solution and of Australia playing a role to help facilitate that (but) the Labor Party can’t afford to focus on the Palestinian question at the expense of the other ­humanitarian challenges.”

Victorian Labor MP and member for Melbourne Ports ­Michael Danby yesterday ­accused former prime minister Bob Hawke and former foreign minister Bob Carr of trying to damage Labor’s relationship with Israel with their public calls for a change in foreign policy to recognise a state of Palestine. “I might say to all of the heroes who are beating up on a country, a democratic country where there are gay pride parades — there aren’t any in the surrounding countries — or Christmas celebrations — there aren’t any in the surrounding countries — why don’t they beat up on China when the Chinese President comes to Australia?” the Jewish MP told Sky News.

“Where is Bob Carr, Gareth Evans and Bob Hawke when the terrible things that are happening in Tibet are discussed? They never raise their heads, they never raise their heads to power. They want to try and provoke the Israeli Prime Minister and upset relations ­between him and the Labor Party prior to Netanyahu’s visit.”

Mr Netanyahu’s visit follows a meeting with Mr Trump who has sought to repair the damaged relationship following the Obama ­administration’s decision to break with its long-time ­position of not supporting such resolutions by ­abstaining from the UN vote.

In *The Australian* today, Mr Turnbull refers to Australia’s historical ties with Israel and it being the first country to vote for the 1947 UN partition resolution leading to Israel’s establishment in 1948. “This week our friendship will take a historic step forward,” Mr Turnbull writes. “For the first time, a serving Israeli prime minister will visit Australia. The government is honoured to host Prime Minister Benjamin ‘Bibi’ Netan­yahu. Our peoples are bound ­together first and foremost by the values we share — a mutual commitment to freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

“And as a majority Christian nation, we share the rich cultural inheritance of the Bible, its stories and values a foundation and a context for our history, our literature, our imagination. And we could not imagine modern Australia, the most successful multicultural ­society in the world, without the brilliance and the enterprise of our almost 120,000-strong Jewish-Australian community.”

The 2015 ALP conference ­resolved to join “like-minded ­nations who have already recognised Palestine” if Israel and the Palestinians fail to agree on a two-state ­solution. The UN Security Council voted 14-0 in December in favour of censuring Israel for its settlement ­activity, saying it violated international law. It ­demanded Israel stop settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Australia/Israel & Jewish ­Affairs Council executive director Colin Rubenstein said Mr Netanyahu’s visit was recognition and a show of gratitude to Australia for being one of the few countries to denounce the resolution. “The trip here represents great appreciation and admiration for the stance Australia has taken over the years,” Dr Rubenstein told *The Australian*.