

A Few Observations About Secretary of State John Kerry's Speech

This blog was written to assist the community relations field respond to United Nations Resolution 2334 which condemned Israeli settlements, and Secretary of State, John Kerry's, subsequent "Remarks on Middle East Peace" which were delivered on December 28, 2016



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Prior to Secretary of State Kerry's [remarks](#) today, rumors were swirling that the Secretary would formally recognize a Palestinian State. That did not come to pass. Instead, Kerry delivered an impassioned, 70 minute exhortation that the two parties must reach a two state solution. Here are some of my thoughts on the address.

- While Secretary Kerry laid some of the blame on the Palestinian side for ongoing incitement and terrorism, he spent much more time criticizing settlement construction, leaving some in the pro-Israel community feeling that it was not a balanced take on the impasse and that the US Administration has let the Palestinian Authority off the hook for its refusal to participate in direct negotiations.
- Secretary Kerry did shed light on the US Administration's perspective on the various types of settlements. One of the major criticisms of UN Security Council resolution 2334 was that it lumped all settlement activity together, including building in Eastern Jerusalem and the Old city, making no distinction between settlement building in areas that are widely understood to remain under Israeli sovereignty and those that would likely become part of a future Palestinian state. Kerry acknowledged that Israel would, indeed, hold on to territory as part of mutually agreed upon land swaps, but that Israel cannot make such a determination unilaterally prior to negotiations. Thus the current US stance represents a clear departure from that of the Bush Administration, which was willing to [make a distinction](#) between settlement blocs and outlying settlements. Neither

Administration, it should be pointed out, held that the settlement blocs were off the table in negotiations.

- While Kerry said much about settlements, obstacles to peace, UN resolution and principles, he did not offer much in the way of practical next steps for the parties to take. He offered no new ideas about how to create the conditions for peace, only a clear statement about what he sees as the current obstacles to peace.
- The Prime Minister of Israel and others have been publicly critical of Secretary Kerry's remarks, which, in their view, purported to know what is in Israel's best interest better than democratically elected government of Israel. Some Israelis are calling the remarks paternalistic.
- This may not be the last we hear from the Obama Administration on Middle East peace. Israel fears the US and France might advance another move on the Israeli-Palestinian issue before the Obama administration finishes its term. Reports suggest that a January 15 meeting of foreign ministers might yield a series of decisions on the peace process that would immediately be brought before the UN Security Council for a vote and adopted before January 20.
- We want to make clear that we strongly support a two state solution and do not begrudge — in fact, we applaud — the US Administration for its desire to play a constructive role in resolving the conflict. The six principles that Kerry articulated at the end of his remarks detailing how the conflict should be resolved are in accord with parameters offered by previous Administrations. However, we do believe that abstention at the UN Security Council was counter-productive to reaching such a peace deal.