

United Nations Security Council

Resolution 2334

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Obama's groundbreaking abstention on a resolution refusing to accept any change to the 1949 armistice lines, and Kerry's one sided rant against Israel have revealed the fault lines, in the USA and amongst Jews, in Israel and the diaspora, on what Israel means and whether Israel deserves to be supported. Is it an awkward impediment or a a moral, existential necessity? I am worried.

Everywhere, appeasement, the favored policy of Obama, has manifestly failed. It will prolong the conflict and cause more casualties. On paper, motion 2334 says nothing new. Even on settlements it still concedes that the issue must be settled by negotiations. But it is the context that betrays a troubling intent, as does America's abstention instead of veto and even more so Kerry's position that Israel alone is to blame.

I will concede that Netanyahu and more so his allies have repeatedly snubbed the US. They have been obstructive. They have their lines in the sand; security, land swaps and Jerusalem. But equally the Palestinians have their lines in the sand; return of refugees to pre-48 land, no Jews allowed to live in their State and Jerusalem. How Kerry can say that only Israel is causing difficulties beggars logic and integrity.

I hate referring to the Holocaust. It ought to have no bearing on the right of Jews to secure autonomy, despite Obama implying just that in his Cairo speech. The desire to return to the Jews' ancestral homeland predates the Holocaust by thousands of years. When, as the Book of Psalms says, "We sat by the waters of Babylon and wept as we remembered Zion," the world was a very different place. There was no Christianity then, no Islam to claim that they had displaced us and made us a redundant fossil. There was no United Nations to deny us any historical connection with the land. No United Nations dominated by ideological closed shops, competing power blocks, and vested interests to focus almost entirely on Israel as the only, the sole issue that unites them all.

What the Holocaust means to me is that the world does not care what happens to Jews, that we are "selected" for special ignominy. This is what the UN means to me, too. There is no other country about which so many states can publicly declare their aim and desire to see it destroyed as Israel. And the UN is a forum that encourages those hatemongers.

What this does to a person's psychology is to reinforce alienation and the refusal to even consider negotiating with those who want to see a Jewish state wiped off the map, regardless of how they phrase or disguise their real motives and aims.

When I first saw pictures of the Holocaust, as a child, I wondered why people hated us so much. Why was I hated just for being a Jew? And why did almost all the rest of the world neither act to help us nor care what happened to us? I know what that did to me. It encouraged and fertilized an arrogance that said, "I just do not care what you think. I am going to survive." But to link Obama to the Nazis is as childish and offensive as it is plain wrong. Pray tell me, which Jews he has murdered? Sadly, we Jews do not lack idiots any more than any other group does.

The UN probably thinks it is being fair—calling on Palestinians to cease provocation and encouragement of violence and hatred, and calling on Israel to withdraw. But they are not fair, because they (as well as Kerry) are not insisting that both parties sit down together and talk face to face. I do not agree with most of the settlement policies. But by focusing on settlements, they are simply aiding Palestinian reluctance to negotiate. Had the Palestinians negotiated thirty, twenty, or ten years ago, most settlements would never have been built. The sad fact is that the longer there are no talks, the more settlements will be built, because this has now become a bargaining tool on both sides. Meanwhile Europe, the UN, and now Obama refuse to insist on both sides sitting down together. The UN, in other words, is encouraging war. The argument that Israel, being stronger, should make more concessions would only be legitimate if the other side showed some willingness too.

I feel so sorry for individual Palestinians whom I know and admire who have suffered—even if much of the suffering inflicted on them has been largely by their own corrupt leadership, gorged on millions in aid while others suffer in poverty. The rest of the Arab and Muslim world told them not to accept UN Partition, not to negotiate, and not to make peace, while at the same time refusing to offer Palestinian refugees a new life, consigning most of them to camps. Their leadership has played a double game and encouraged them to believe they would be able to turn all the clocks back.

I have very little in common with right-wing Israeli political stances or with the left. I stand in the liberal middle, which means I will please nobody. Yet I do not believe there is anyone to negotiate a deal with at this moment. In the Middle East as is, Israel would be mad to concede any of its security. Exiting Gaza gained nothing. Both Hamas and Hezbollah are committed to exterminating Jews and intentionally fire rockets at civilian targets. Israel froze settlement expansion for a long time at the US's request, in the hopes that this would lead to negotiation. It did not, any more than withdrawal from Gaza. Both Gaza and Hezbollah continue to assert that they will continue to threaten Israel. The evidence shows that negotiation is going nowhere.

I don't see how exiting the West Bank entirely would be in Israel's best interests. But to provoke one's allies in the most blatant way, as members of Netanyahu's government have, making provocative announcements and bellicose statements, cannot do anyone any good. Attacking Obama on his own territory cannot make sense. If he and Kerry were wary of Israel before, what does one expect? Don't provoke bears unless you want to be bitten.

I have always favored the idea of land swaps in the interest of a settlement. I have always believed in the right of Arabs to live equally in Israeli territory. And I cannot see why Jews should not be allowed to stay and live under a Palestinian authority or state. Many ultra-Orthodox Jews claim they would prefer to live under a Muslim regime than a secular Jewish one. Yes, I think they are crazy. But they represent one other body of opinion in the complexity of the Middle East, where secular divisions and religious divisions often conflict with each other on both sides.

You cannot have genuine peace if there is no attempt at convivencia, genuine practical coexistence, rather than creating an apartheid division between where Jews may live and where Jews may not. If Arabs can live amongst Jews as they do, why not Jews amongst Arabs?

I deplore occupation. I agree with the late Professor Yeshaya Liebowitz, that it degrades Israel's soul. Any army, however ethical, makes mistakes; rogue commanders, scared or immature soldiers can do inhuman things. No war, however justified, is pretty. I want to see occupation end. But how, without lying down and rolling over and committing suicide?

The threat from without has empowered an internal coalition in Israeli politics, with harsh, bullying voices. Yet between a third and a half of the Israeli electorate want peace and reject the rejectionists. They surely have the right to choose the government and the representatives democratically. Or is Obama extending his disdain for American democratic choices he does not agree with, to Israel too? The longer the legitimate concerns are ignored, the stronger the extremes will get. And the more extreme Islam gets, the less those who suffered its oppression firsthand (a majority of Israel's Jewish and Christian population) are prepared to risk trying it again.

This is disturbing. I do not see a solution until the world tells the Palestinians as well as the Israelis that they MUST negotiate. Then, when there are agreed boundaries, we can talk about legalities and compensation and rectification. But until such a time, trying to bully only one side will only have the effect of pushing peace further away and handing the messianists the justification for praying for the apocalypse.

We can argue forever about the Mandate, about what constitutes legality, who rejected the UN partition plan, or who consistently—after 1948, after 1967—refused to negotiate. I believe the conflict is between two rights, two valid claims to the same house. But no one wants to hear the other's point of view. The anti-Israel protestors across the universities of the Western World refuse to listen to arguments anyway. That has been their way since Leninism and Maoism. Do not engage. They only want to shout, disrupt, and boycott. No thought of peaceful dialogue.

No doubt Kerry and Obama will push even more. Regardless of what the UN decides, no solution can be imposed. Practically, it is totally unrealistic. It just allows a sore to fester. Even if Trump restores American support for Israel's right to safe, negotiated borders, he will not be President for ever. The tide will turn again. Perhaps by then, as Netanyahu believes, Israel will have made new alliances; perhaps not.

In the meantime, if the world really wants a solution, it can only come around the negotiating table, and facilitators have to be seen as objective. Both sides have their pathologies and neuroses. They must be dealt with. In the end, both sides must be pressured equally to end this festering sore. But it must be both sides. Equally. Peace will only come when there's no alternative.

Churchill supposedly said of the UN, "Better jaw-jaw than war-war." But Obama, Kerry, and the UN are currently encouraging war-war, because they refuse to insist that the parties to the conflict engage in jaw-jaw. Yes, I am worried. Not about whether there is a Palestinian state or what the whole world thinks, but about the violence that is bound to continue with both sides suffering.

PS – I am delighted that Theresa May, the British Prime Minister, has decided to stand up and say publicly pretty much the same thing. There are benefits to Brexit.