US Undecided On Veto of UNSC Resolution Against West Bank Settlements

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The United States has yet to decide whether or not to support a Palestinian drive to push forward a UN Security Council resolution later this month condemning West Bank settlements.  
  
“We understand there is an early draft that the Palestinians have shared informally in New York,” US State Department Deputy spokesman Mark Toner told reporters in Washington on Friday.  
  
The US is one of five nations that have veto rights on all resolutions that come before the 15-member Security Council.   
  
The US vetoed an anti-settlement resolution at the UN in 2011, which was the only veto cast by the US during President Barack Obama’s tenure.  
  
The US also has worked against similar initiatives at the council out of a belief that the best step forward is the resumption of direct talks between Israelis and Palestinians.  
  
The peace process, however, has been frozen since April 2014 with little hope that it will be resumed during Obama’s presidency, which ends in January. There is a growing fear among Israelis that Obama could change his tune with respect to a Security Council resolution.  
  
“I’m not going to comment on what is really an informal draft resolution,” Toner told reporters on Friday. “Nothing has been formally introduced or circulated at the Security Council, and nothing has been introduced by a Security Council member.”  
  
He clarified that the issue was not the US policy on Israeli settlement activity. The Obama administration has been vocal with regard to its opposition to such activity, he said.  
  
“We’ve spoken from here and elsewhere about our concerns about ongoing settlement activity, and that we believe they’re illegitimate and counterproductive to the cause of peace in the Middle East. And that hasn’t changed,” he said.  
  
But, Toner added, “I just want to set that apart and say that’s just a draft resolution. It’s not ready – as we say, not ready for prime time yet. So we’ve seen it, but we’re not going to comment on it at this current form.”  
  
Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued a sharp response late Thursday night to reports that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas planned to bring an anti-Israel resolution to the council.  
  
“Abu Mazen [Abbas] is taking a step that will push negotiations further away,” Netanyahu said in a statement.  
  
“The only way to advance peace is by direct negotiations and Abu Mazen is avoiding this. The Palestinians educate their children on a daily basis that the settlements are Tel Aviv, Haifa and Acre.”  
  
The move seemed to catch Jerusalem by surprise, as the focus of concern about activities at the UN has been centered on whether the French would bring a resolution on the Middle East peace process to the Security Council, and whether the US would veto it.  
  
There also has been concern that Obama, in the waning days of his tenure, might bring a proposal to the Security Council setting down his own parameters for a resolution.  
  
According to Haaretz, the PA circulated a draft resolution last week to a number of Security Council members condemning settlement construction, and Abbas would like to bring the resolution to a vote when he visits the UN on April 22 to take part in a conference on climate.  
  
Haaretz reported that the Arab League is to hold a special meeting on the matter on April 20, and that – according to a Western diplomat – some Arab countries have expressed concern about the resolution and have warned the Palestinians not to go ahead.  
  
Ambassador to the United Nations Danny Danon also issued a statement on the matter. “The Palestinians must understand that there are no shortcuts” when it comes to resolving the conflict, Danon said.  
  
“The only way to promote negotiations starts by them condemning terrorism and stopping the incitement, and ends with direct negotiations between the two sides.  
  
“[The Palestinians] are continuing to deceive the international community by putting forward initiatives that do nothing to better the lives of either side of this conflict,” he said.  
  
Last month the US spoke against a United Nations Human Rights Council resolution condemning West Bank settlement activity and creating a data base of companies that do business in and with the settlements. It could not vote against the resolution, because it is no longer a member of the 47-nation UNHRC.  
  
The US has since stated that it does not plan to comply with that resolution.  
  
The EU, which opposes settlement activity, also took a stand against the resolution; the seven EU UNHRC members all abstained on the resolution.