Israel Waits for Obama's UN Shoe to Drop

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Israelis and Palestinians anxiously awaiting President Barack Obama’s decision whether or not to take up their conflict at the UN Security Council were given few clues of his plans on Tuesday.

In his final speech as president to the General Assembly, Obama mentioned the stifled Middle East peace process only in passing.

“Surely, Israelis and Palestinians will be better off if Palestinians reject incitement and recognize the legitimacy of Israel, and Israel recognizes that it cannot permanently occupy and settle Palestinian land,” he said. “We all have to do better as leaders in tamping down, rather than encouraging, a notion of identity that leads us to diminish others.”

That was one more remark on the conflict than last year, when Obama made no mention whatsoever of the stalled peace process.

In 2014, the president stated that Israeli-Palestinian peace was one of his top two foreign policy priorities before leaving office, next to solving the international crisis over Iran’s nuclear program.

Now, Palestinians hope and Israelis fear that Obama will take up their issue in a resolution at the Security Council. A resolution floated by France would set out parameters for a two-state solution and restate the council’s position on the conflict.

The Obama administration has vetoed similar language before the council in the past, but has yet to rule out supporting it this year, between the November election and the president’s departure from office in January.

His preferred candidate for president, Democratic nominee Hillary Rodham Clinton, opposes such a move – as does her running mate, Tim Kaine of Virginia, who joined 87 other senators this week in calling on the White House to refrain from any UN actions.

The president’s decision to mention the conflict at all on Tuesday was a simple recognition of unfinished business. But it offered no clear indication of how he will proceed – at the UN, with a speech, or perhaps quietly into the January night.