**Obama and Israel: Showdown at the UN?**

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The Obama administration is reportedly signaling another major shift in policy towards one of its staunchest allies, Israel, and this shift could change the way it votes at the Security Council. The change would mean an end to the US' use of its veto power in the United Nations Security Council when certain anti-Israel resolutions are introduced for a vote.

Reports surfaced a couple of weeks ago, that a senior US diplomat met with Qatar's foreign minister in Paris. They discussed the possibility that the US was giving serious consideration to not using its veto if a vote on Israeli settlements was to come up. It has been the policy of successive administrations to veto virtually all anti-Israel resolutions at the Security Council.

While the Israeli spokesperson at the United Nations would not comment on the reports, US officials at the UN told Fox News that there is no such initiative before the Security Council and they are not "pursuing or encouraging such action", but some critics believe they are playing a game of smoke and mirrors.

Anne Bayefsky is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and Touro College and says the administration, like none other before them, appears prepared to blackmail Israel at the UN. She says "The administration may imagine that the threat of withholding the veto at the Security Council, or the failure to oppose vigorously any one of a constant stream of anti-Israel UN concoctions, will be good for the United States. They will be dead wrong." She believes "Israel's enemies are America's enemies, and an effort by the Obama administration to use the UN as a tool to blackmail Israel or undermine Israel's independence and security is a double-edged sword. "

Daniel Levy the Director of the Middle East Task Force at the New America Foundation in Washington disagrees. He tells Fox News that he doubts the US would vote for a UN Security Council resolution against Israel and expects that they will continue to veto them but he says the veto has not always been used by the administration on votes concerning Israel.

It was last month when tensions between the Obama administration and Jerusalem surfaced. While on an official visit to Israel, Vice President Joe Biden and the administration were infuriated when the Israeli Housing Ministry announced it was building 1600 new units in a hitherto undisputed part of Jerusalem. Ever since then, relations between the two erstwhile allies have been tense.

Levy who also advised former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak tells Fox News that "if Israel were to continue to flout its own commitments, undermine the possibility of a two-state solution, or if in the context of a peace process impasse, the US and its Quartet allies were to advance their own plan, then under those circumstances it is conceivable that the US would support or abstain on a UN Security Council vote". He believes that such an outcome would be "presented as being part of, rather than in contravention of, America's support for Israel."

John Bolton the former US ambassador to the UN, and now a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy in Washington says that successive US administrations have played a vital role in stopping the delegitimizing and marginalization of Israel at the UN, and that foes "knowing that the United States was not prepared to countenance mischief making in the Security Council alone deterred considerable unhelpful activity, and at least mitigated much of what remained." He says "If President Obama materially changes this long-standing, bipartisan American policy, peace in the Middle East will be set back. America's friends and allies alike will conclude that the Obama Administration is indeed a feckless ally."

Levy is not so sure and says that relations between the two countries continue to be "strong and supportive." He questions the choices that the Netanyahu government has made, which he says "seem to place loyalty to settlements and a far-right wing coalition of choice above peace and the needs of the strategic relationship with the US."

Bayefsky, who is also editor of EYEontheUN.org, says "If the Obama administration believes that it can bring about more peace and harmony and respect for America by sitting on its hands and refusing to exercise the veto, while the likes of Russia and China and Lebanon (which is currently a member) revel in a hate-filled denunciation of Israel, then the administration is delusional. The refusal to exercise the veto will be read as weakness, as will any attempt by the Obama administration to deflect criticism by claiming "the UN made me do it."