

ISRAEL, AMERICA AND THE UNITED NATIONS: A LETTER FROM RABBI STEVEN KUSHNER

Over the last several days several of you have sought my opinion regarding the import and meaning of the decision by the United States to abstain from exercising its veto power regarding UN Resolution 2334. That resolution condemns Israel for its policy of allowing Jewish settlements in the disputed territories seized following the 1967 Six-Day War.

As many of you know, I have always been troubled by the settlements. While I do not believe that their existence is a moral one, nor do I feel that the predicament that has led to Jews living on lands that were previously occupied by Palestinian Arabs to be a "black and white" issue (meaning that like any geopolitical conflict there are issues of history and politics that are deeply nuanced), I have always held that any hope for a resolution of conflict between the State of Israel and the Palestinian people must involve a "trading of land for peace." The presence of the settlements complicates and potentially obstructs such a hope. That the current Israeli government continues to encourage settlement in the disputed territories is profoundly frustrating for me. I can understand the United States' decision not to oppose UN Resolution 2334.

By the same token, well we know there are forces within the Arab world and particularly within the Palestinian nationalist movements who have consistently rejected the right of Israel to exist at all. For them the words "settlements" and "occupied territories" apply to the entirety of Israel. Moreover, support for these rejectionist attitudes have invariably found sympathy among many of the members of the United Nations. Indeed, condemnation of Israel at that international body has been so frequent and predictable that it leads one to question the motivations and the integrity of the institution itself. Even the departing UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon admitted as much when he said, "Decades of political maneuvering have created a disproportionate number of resolutions, reports and committees against Israel..." The institutionalization of anti-Semitism (in the cloak of anti-Zionism) at the United Nations is hard to deny.

As much as I understand the US "abstention" at the UN, I must say that I fear for its consequences. With so much uncertainty in both American and world politics, this is a time for calmness and discretion. I believe that this resolution will serve to do nothing but embolden the forces that oppose Israel. America's refusal to exercise its veto at the United Nations may prove to do more damage than good.

I have no doubt of the inviolability of the unique relationship between Israel and the United States. Of this I am certain. And notwithstanding my frustrations that Israel cannot seem to get out of its own way on the question of settlements (the truth be told, Israel has many greater domestic issues to face), I am equally certain that the omnipresence of anti-Semitism and its institutionalization in international attitudes against Israel is, in my mind, a much greater threat to peace in the Middle East. As such, I am disappointed and saddened that the United States

played into this charade of allowing a matter of bias and hate to be guised in the clothing of politics.

The settlements are a serious problem. As Jews who love Israel, we must face this. But as Jews and as Americans we should also be demanding universal and unequivocal recognition of Israel's sovereignty. Indeed, this was something that was decided by the same United Nations 70 years ago. Let us not forget that it was the Arab world who rejected that decision and thereby created the refugee problem. If anything should be condemned, it is their persistently violent and obsessive rejection of the State of Israel.

Recognize Israel and renounce terrorism and then we can talk about the settlements.