

FULL COMMENT

Avi Benlolo: What John Kerry should have said about the U.S. failure to veto UN resolution against Israel

AVI BENLOLO, SPECIAL TO NATIONAL POST | December 30, 2016 7:39 PM ET

Human nature has a tendency to pile on the weakest. In this, we failed in our duty to defend and protect Israel. I am sorry

In a speech on Dec. 28, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry defended President Barack Obama's move to allow the U.N. Security Council to target Israeli settlements and declare them illegal. This is what he should have said instead:

On behalf of my administration and president, I apologize for not vetoing resolution 2334. In retrospect, it is incoherent to exclusively attach a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians to the issue of settlements.

Over the years, Israel has taken every opportunity in search of peace and to further Resolution 242, land for peace. Its interest in furthering peace with all its neighbours is exemplified by its peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan. In the case of the former, Israel tearfully vacated the town of Yamit to trade the Sinai for peace.



Zach Gibson/Getty Images U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry delivers a speech on Middle East peace at The U.S. Department of State on December 28, 2016 in Washington, DC. Kerry spoke on the need for a two-state solution and defended the Obama administration's approach to Israel.

Israel's struggle for peace even included negotiation with Syria and Lebanon at various times and places. But its greatest maturation was to invite Yasser Arafat to Oslo to build a new framework for peace between the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Israel. The Oslo Accords were signed in blood, sweat and tears on the lawn of the White House in 1993.

Now, it must be recalled that the PLO was a hostile international terror organization. By our standards of today, we would liken it to the al Qaida of its time. This is the organization responsible for terrorist and murderous attacks, too numerous to recount. It would take me hours to recite the numerous hijackings of El Al planes and PanAm, Swissair, TWA and Lufthansa flights, in which numerous Israelis were murdered. Who could forget the Munich Massacre of 1972 in which 11 Israeli Olympic team members were murdered by the Palestinian Black September terrorist group; or the 1985 murder of American Leon Klinghoffer by four Palestinian terrorists who hijacked the Achillo Lauro cruise ship.

Even after the Oslo accords were signed and Israel allowed its arch nemesis who had blood on his hands into Ramallah in 1994 - Arafat contained himself for several years, but returned to his terror method by 2000. He launched gruesome suicide bombings against Israelis, killing over 1,000 Jews, Christians and Muslims by inciting his compatriots to strap on suicide belts and blow themselves up. Who could forget the 2001 suicide bombing on a Tel Aviv Disco-tech (Dolphinarium), which killed 20 youngsters who were lined up at the entrance to the club.

Arafat made every attempt to destabilize this beautiful island of peace through terrorism. If it was not for the strong will and tenacity of Israel, he might have succeeded. Any nation would be shaken to its core by such horrific incidents of terrorism. Imagine a violent terror attack almost each week on our cities - in New York, in Washington, in Cleveland and in Miami - how would we react? In Israel, successive governments reacted by extending the hand of peace to the Palestinians even further.

In 2000, Bill Clinton hosted the Camp David Summit alongside Ehud Barak and Arafat in which extensive concessions were offered to the Palestinian people. That summit was followed by the Sharm Al Shaich Summit in which parameters were laid out more concisely. This was perhaps the closest the Palestinians would come to immediately establishing their state. But it was not to be. Clinton blamed Arafat after the failure of the talks, stating, "I regret that in 2000 Arafat missed the opportunity to bring that nation into being." This was followed by the Roadmap for Peace in 2002 and 2003 between the newly established trio, George W. Bush, Ariel Sharon and Mahmoud Abbas, the new Palestinian prime minister.



STEPHEN JAFFE/AFP/Getty Images Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak (L), US President Bill Clinton (C), and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat (R) pose for a photograph at Laurel Cabin the site where former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, and former US President Jimmy Carter conducted peace talks in 1978, during the Middle East Peace Summit 11 July 2000 at Camp David, Maryland, the US presidential mountain top retreat. Palestinian and Israeli leaders will meet in the US for direct peace negotiations, ten years after Camp David, on September 2, 2010.

Israel's struggle in search of peace brought forward a unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, a symbolic move meant to demonstrate its embrace of a two-state solution. Under the leadership of supposed hardliner prime minister Ariel Sharon, Israel handed Gaza to the Palestinian Authority - who could forget the images of Israeli soldiers forcing their own brothers and sisters from their homes in tears? The Palestinian Authority was violently ousted from Gaza by Hamas soon after - and Hamas created a mini terror state - using the strip to launch rockets against Israel. This did not seem to bother the Palestinian Authority one bit.

In the meantime, Israel attempted to advance peace with the Palestinians. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is believed to have offered Abbas far-reaching concessions in 2008, including placing Jerusalem under international control. In an interview, "Olmert said he had offered a near-total withdrawal from the West Bank - proposing that Israel retain 6.3 per cent of the territory in order to keep control of major Jewish settlements. He said he offered to compensate the Palestinians with Israeli land equivalent to 5.8 per cent of the West Bank, along with a link to the Gaza Strip - another territory meant to be part of Palestine."



JAAFAR ASHTIYEH/AFP/Getty Images

Instead of furthering peace with Israel and coming to terms, the Palestinians campaign today to slander and defame Israel at every opportunity. No other country is so viciously attacked by campaigns to boycott and sanction it - even while extending an olive branch. No other country must deal with a neighbour that names its squares after terrorists; that incites its youth to hate; that motivates its citizens to suicide bombing and knifing attacks; that campaigns and lobbies the United Nations to pass resolutions against it; and that turns down every peace overture possible - no matter the rhyme or reason.

We made a terrible mistake at the United Nations last week. Perhaps this was because we have been unable to end the conflict in Syria; or stop ISIL in its tracks or impede Russia from moving on our ally, Ukraine. Perhaps this was a way for us to shift attention from the bad deal we made with Iran or our inability to stop North Korea from its nuclear aspirations. Human nature has a tendency to pile on the weakest. In this, we failed in our duty to defend and protect Israel.

I am sorry.

Avi Benlolo is a Canadian human rights activist and president and chief executive officer of Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies.