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US vetoes UN resolution condemning Israel on Gaza

11 Nov 2006 18:52:15 GMT
Source: Reuters

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BACKGROUND (Adds background, council comment, paragraphs 4, 5, 14-18)

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UNITED NATIONS, Nov 11 (Reuters) - The United States on Saturday vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution urging an immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and condemning an Israeli attack there that killed 18 Palestinian civilians.

Nine of the council's 15 members voted for the measure, while four abstained: Britain, Denmark, Japan and Slovakia.

But the "no" vote cast by U.S. Ambassador John Bolton -- his second since he arrived at U.N. headquarters in August 2005 -- was enough to kill the resolution.

Bolton's first veto, on July 13, 2006, killed a resolution reacting to an earlier Israeli incursion in Gaza.

The United States has cast 82 vetoes in the United Nations' 61 years, and nine of the last 10 council vetoes, seven of which dealt with the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

The measure defeated on Saturday was backed by Arab, Islamic and nonaligned nations and formally proposed by Qatar.

It would have called on the Palestinian Authority to "take immediate and sustained action to bring an end to violence, including the firing of rockets on Israeli territory."

It would have urged the international community to take steps to stabilize the situation, revive the Middle East peace process and consider "the possible establishment of an international mechanism" for the protection of civilians.

It also would have condemned Israeli military operations in Gaza and called on the Jewish state to withdraw all troops from Gaza and end its operations in all Palestinian lands.

ACCIDENTAL 'TECHNICAL FAILURE'

Seven children and four women were among the dead in Wednesday's shelling of Beit Hanoun, for which Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has apologized, calling it an accidental "technical failure" by the Israeli military.

But Palestinian leaders have called it a massacre.

Bolton said Washington regretted the loss of life but was "disturbed at language in the resolution that is in many places biased against Israel and politically motivated."

He said the suggestion of a mechanism to protect civilians would raise false hopes, and he was disturbed the measure made no mention of the word "terrorism" or the Palestinians' elected Hamas government, which refuses to acknowledge Israel's right to exist or renounce violence.

Palestinian U.N. Observer Riyad Mansour said Arab foreign ministers meeting in Cairo on Sunday would decide on the next steps following the measure's defeat. One option was to bring the measure to a vote in the 192-nation General Assembly, where Washington did not have veto power.

The U.S. veto sent the wrong message to both Israeli and Palestinian militants, Mansour told reporters. "Will that help extremist elements to take issues into their own hands on both sides? You bet!"

Governments that abstained said they were unable to support the text because it was unbalanced.

"It is absolutely right that the Security Council should meet on this important issue," said British Deputy Ambassador Karen Pierce. But "any statement from this council must be balanced and must serve the interests of both parties, and that interest is peace."

Congo Republic Ambassador Basile Ikouebe, who voted for the measure, expressed "deep disappointment" that the veto had prevented council members from being "able to express ourselves clearly on such a serious situation."

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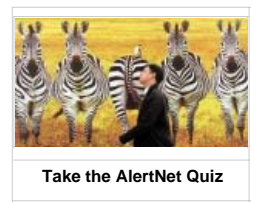
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