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Israel's Olmert: Rice embarrassed over UN vote

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Israel's Olmert: Rice embarrassed over UN vote

By JASON KEYSER

The Associated Press

Monday, January 12, 2009; 6:12 PM

JERUSALEM — Israel's prime minister said Monday that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was embarrassed by orders to abstain from voting last week on a U.N. truce resolution for Gaza that she helped arrange.

Israel had argued that the Security Council measure calling for a halt to the Gaza fighting _ which passed Thursday in a 14-0 vote with the U.S. abstaining _ was unworkable because it did not guarantee Israel's security.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said he called President George W. Bush to seek an abstention from the U.S., a key Israeli ally at the United Nations.

"I said: 'Get me President Bush on the phone,'" Olmert said in a speech in the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon. "They said he was in the middle of giving a speech in Philadelphia. I said I didn't care: 'I need to talk to him now.' He got off the podium and spoke to me."

Olmert said he argued that the United States should not vote in favor, and the president then called Rice and told her not to do so.

"She was left pretty embarrassed," Olmert said.

A senior U.S. official in Washington disputed the account.

"The plan had been all along, as agreed by the secretary and the president, that if all of the pieces fell into place, we would abstain," the official said on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the issue.

"The government of Israel does not make policy for the United States," the official added.

The approved resolution called for "an immediate, durable and fully respected cease-fire, leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza."

Rice said later that the United States "fully supports" the resolution but abstained because it "thought it important to see the outcomes of the Egyptian mediation," referring to an Egyptian-French initiative aimed at achieving a cease-fire.

Still, Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki said he was surprised by the U.S. abstention.

"We were told that the Americans were going to vote in favor," he said Friday, a day after the vote.

But when Rice came in to the Security Council chamber, she informed the Saudi foreign minister with an apology that she would abstain and would clarify later that the U.S. supported the resolution nonetheless, according to Malki.

"What happened in the last 10 or 15 minutes, what kind of pressure she received, from whom, this is really something that maybe we will know about later," he said.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/12/AR2009011202469.html>

