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Kerry: No one should interfere in Israeli election

AP By **BRADLEY KLAPPER**
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LONDON (AP) — Secretary of State John Kerry on Tuesday outlined America's opposition to any effort undermining Israel's election process, while at the same time holding out hope the U.S. and its partners could find a way to advance Mideast peace and respond to the frustrations of Palestinians.

Kerry wouldn't categorize America's position on suggestions for the U.N. Security Council to set a framework for negotiations, which Israel fiercely opposes. But he emphasized the importance of nations avoiding anything that interferes or "might be perceived as interfering" in Israeli elections planned for March. The priorities, he said, should be halting growing Israeli-Palestinian violence and creating conditions for an eventual resumption in peace talks.

"Right now we're trying to have a constructive conversation with everybody to find the best way to go forward in order to create the climate, the atmosphere, the political space if you will, to be able to go back to negotiations," Kerry told reporters in London, the last stop on a three-nation European trip devoted to Mideast diplomacy.

"In the end, though, this isn't up to the international community or others," Kerry said. "This has to be decided by the parties."

Kerry's meetings Monday included chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat and Arab League chief Nabil Elaraby. He met Mon-

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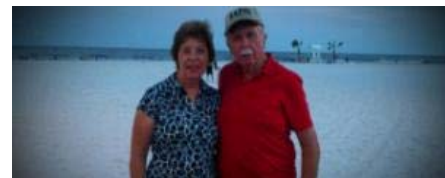
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and then in Paris with the foreign ministers of Britain, France and Germany.

For the U.S., the issue is tricky. As Kerry stated, the Obama administration is reluctant to join any effort that could get in the way of Israel's democratic process, but it is being pressed by close allies to endorse a framework that largely adheres to U.S. policy.

France still hasn't formally introduced its proposal. It speaks of the 1967 Mideast borders as the basis for dividing the land, which President Barack



U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry delivers remarks during a news conference at the U.S. Embassy, on ...

Obama has publicly backed, but it

doesn't include key Israeli — and U.S. — conditions such as Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. France's diplomatic push was prompted by a more far-reaching Jordanian resolution, on behalf of the Palestinians, that demands a full Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank within two years and full recognition of Palestine as a state, with no talk of land swaps or security measures.

Palestinian officials had said their resolution would be submitted for a possible vote Wednesday. Foreign Minister Riad Malki backtracked Tuesday, telling Voice of Palestine radio that the Palestinians were waiting on the outcome of this week's diplomacy in Europe before deciding when to go to the U.N. He suggested a possible postponement.

In Paris on Tuesday, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius made his case to Elaraby, Egyptian and Palestinian ministers, and former Israeli President Shimon Peres.

Fabius said "it's high time" to resume peace talks. But Peres said a Palestinian state would be better reached "through an agreement than through an imposition."

Support for France even within Europe is uncertain, despite mounting pressure for legislators across the continent to hold votes recognizing a Palestinian state. Countries are divided over the idea of setting a 2016 deadline, with Germany particularly reluctant, diplomats said.

Kerry cited several examples of the downward security trend in Israel and the West Bank: Israelis stabbed



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ing or subjected to acid attack, as well as the recent loss of a senior Palestinian official during protests, the burning of a mosque near Ramallah and so-called "price tag" attacks by Jewish extremists.

"We want to find the most constructive way of doing something that therefore will not have unintended consequences, that also stems the violence," Kerry said.

"It's a particular sensitive moment because we understand the frustrations of Palestinians," he added. "They don't see another course at this moment."

The key, Kerry said, is to "try to find whether or not there are other options, other ways, other courses ... to respect the process that Israelis are about to undergo."

Associated Press writer Angela Charlton in Paris and Mohammed Daraghmeh in Ramallah contributed to this report.

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