

AP Photo/Andrew H

Secretary of State John Kerry speaks about Israeli-Palestinian policy Wednesday at the State Department in Washington.

Kerry tears into Israel over settlements

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of State John Kerry tore into Israel on Wednesday for settlement-building, accusing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of dragging Israel away from democracy and forcefully rejecting the notion that America had abandoned Israel with a controversial U.N. vote. Netanyahu accused the Obama administration of a biased bid to blame Israel for failure to reach a peace deal.

In a farewell speech, Kerry laid out a two-state vision for peace that he won't be in office to implement, but that the U.S. hoped might be heeded even after President Barack Obama's term ends. He defended Obama's move last week to allow the U.N. Security Council to declare Israeli settlements illegal, the spark that set off an extraordinary and deepening diplomatic spat between the U.S. and its closest Mideast ally.

"If the choice is one state, Israel can either be Jewish or democratic, it cannot be both, and it won't ever really be at peace," Kerry said in a speech that ran more than an hour, a comprehensive airing of grievances that have built up in the Obama administration over eight years but were rarely, until this month, discussed publicly.

Netanyahu pushed back in a hastily arranged televised statement in which he suggested he was done with the Obama administration and ready to deal with President-elect Donald Trump, who has sided squarely with Israel. The Israeli leader faulted Kerry for obsessing over settlements while paying mere "lip service" to Palestinian attacks and incitement of violence.

"Israelis do not need to be lectured about the importance of peace by foreign leaders," Netanyahu said from Jerusalem. The dueling recriminations marked a low point for U.S.-Israel relations, and a bitter end to eight years of frustrated ties between Obama and Netanyahu, who quarreled repeatedly over settlements, the peace process and Obama's nuclear deal with Iran.

Trump, who has assured Israel it merely needs to "hang on" until he takes over, told reporters that Kerry's speech spoke for itself. It was unclear whether Israel came up in a phone call Obama, while vacationing in Hawaii, placed to Trump on Wednesday morning.

Nor was it clear what impact Kerry's speech, coming in the final days of the administration, might have.

Netanyahu expressed concern that a French-hosted summit next month could lead to an international framework that the U.N. Security Council might then codify with Obama's assent, boxing Israel in. Yet Kerry seemed to rule out the possibility Obama would take more parting shots, such as promoting that type of U.N. resolution or recognizing Palestinian statehood.

Kerry, unveiling a six-part outline of what a future peace deal could look like, deviated from the traditional U.S. message that foreign powers shouldn't impose a solution. His outline tracked closely with principles long assumed to be part of an eventual deal, and Kerry insisted he was merely describing what's emerged as points of general agreement.

Though Kerry faulted Palestinian leaders for insufficiently condemning violence and terrorism against Israelis, most of his speech focused on Israel. He said the two-state solution, the basis for all serious peace talks for years, was "now in serious jeopardy," and called Netanyahu's' government "the most rightwing in Israel's history."

Man suspected of ties to Berlin attacker detained in Germany

BERLIN (AP) — German prosecutors said Wednesday that they have detained a Tunisian man they think may have been involved in last week's truck attack on a Christmas market in Berlin.

The 40-year-old, who wasn't identified, was detained in Berlin during a search of his home and business, federal prosecutors said.

The man's telephone number was saved in the cellphone of Anis Amri, a fellow Tunisian believed to have driven a truck into the market on Dec. 19. Amri, 24, was killed in a shootout with Italian police in a suburb of Milan early Friday.

Of the new suspect, prosecutors said in a statement that "further investigations indicate that he may have been involved in the attack."

Twelve people died and dozens more were injured in the truck attack. The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility.

Prosecutors have until Thursday evening to determine whether the case against the 40-year-old is strong enough for them to seek a formal arrest warrant. That would allow them to keep him in custody pending possible charges.

Investigators are trying to determine whether Amri had a support network in planning and carrying out the attack, and in fleeing Berlin. They're also trying to piece together the route he took from Berlin to Milan.

Milan. Italian police have said Amri traveled through France, and French authorities said on Tuesday that he made a stop in the eastern French city of Lyon.

On Wednesday, Dutch authorities said it appeared Amri first had fled through the Netherlands, Germany's western neighbor.

Jirko Patist, a spokesman for the Dutch national prosecutor's office, said "highly likely" that Amri had been in Nijmegen, in the eastern Netherlands, during his journey from Berlin to Milan.

Camera images recovered in Nijmagen "found someone we think, rather of whom we say it is highly likely," is the same person appearing in photos from Lyon in France, Patist told Netherlands public broadcaster NOS.

Patist added that there was no reason to think the suspect was accompanied by anyone while in the Netherlands.

A SIM card found on the fugitive after he was shot led authorities to the Netherlands.

"We can see that the SIM cards like this have been distributed in several locations in the Netherlands," he

Amri had no phone with him in Milan, only the loose SIM card.

According to Italian police, Amri also had a pocket knife and a few hundred euros in cash in a backpack that he was carrying when officers on a routine patrol stopped him to ask for identification in the Milan suburb of Sesto San Giovanni on Friday.

Detroit demolishes thousands of structures

DETROIT (AP) — Remnants of the roof and walls creaked, groaned and then crumpled to the ground Wednesday from what once was an industrial building that covered an entire city block, likely the last structure demolished this year under Detroit's massive blight elimination program.

Blows from an excavator methodically destroyed a portion of what had been a 60,000-square-foot building on Cloverdale Avenue in a west side neighborhood of homes, auto repair shops and other light industrial buildings.

When leveled, the structure that a local resident said had once housed an industrial laundry or dry cleaners, will mark about 3,130 structures cleared in 2016 and about 10,700 — mostly houses — razed since 2014. The vast majority are owned by the city's Land Bank Authority.



AP Photo/Corey Willia

An excavation crew begins demolition of a vacant building on Detroit's west side Wednesday.

But the city has a long way to go. A blight task force in 2014 said 40,000 needed to be torn down and 38,000 others were falling apart in one of the nation's poorest major cities that emerged in December 2014 from the largest municipal

bankruptcy in U.S. history.

Many blocks have more abandoned houses and empty lots than lived-in homes, a result of the exodus of whites and much of the black middle class from the city. About 1.8 million people lived in Detroit in the

1950s. Fewer than 700,000 currently call Detroit home, according to the U.S. Census.

Census.

Mayor Mike Duggan has said the mass demolitions are necessary for Detroit to attract families to city neighborhoods and stop decades

of population loss.

"I'm so excited about this," said an almost gleeful Sandra Pickens as the excavator clawed at brick and wood.

Pickens is president of the Littlefield Community Association. The neighborhood group met over the summer with Duggan about the empty building and other concerns.

"This was an eyesore for us," she told The Associated Press Wednesday. "I've seen people come and dump things here; come in at night and steal the beams. We shouldn't have anything looking like this."

Thursday Morning December 29, 2016

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