Vatican



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The Vatican appeared to make a rare public rebuke of a U.S. foreign policy decision Nov. 20, issuing a statement to reiterate its support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict just days after the U.S. gave its blessing to Israeli annexation of Palestinian territory.

While the unsigned "communication from the Holy See" does not refer specifically to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's Nov. 18 decision to no longer consider Israeli settlements in the West Bank a violation of international law, it references "recent decisions that risk undermining further the Israeli-Palestinian peace process."

"The Holy See reiterates its position of a two-state solution for two peoples, as the only way to reach a complete solution to this age-old conflict," the statement continues, before pointedly adding: "The Holy See supports the right of the State of Israel to live in peace and security within the borders recognized by the international community."

It is highly unusual for the Vatican to respond to individual decisions of world governments. Holy See diplomats tend to prefer to work quietly, advancing issues of international peace and diplomacy behind the scenes and with little fanfare.

The Nov. 20 statement is even more unusual in that it comes as Pope Francis is not at the Vatican, but making a seven-day trip to Thailand and Japan.

Pompeo's decision reversed four decades of U.S. policy to treat the Israeli settlements as a breach of international law. Palestinians have long demanded the territory for part of a future state, with the backing of the United Nations, many Europeans countries, and other U.S. allies.

The Vatican recognized Palestine as an independent state in 2013, under Pope Benedict XVI's leadership. Francis later established formal diplomatic relations with Palestine in 2017.

Israel and the Vatican have had formal ties since 1993.

The Vatican's Nov. 20 statement was released officially in Italian and English, alongside a working Spanish translation. It ends by saying the Holy See hopes that Israelis and Palestinians "may find a fair compromise, which takes into account the legitimate aspirations of the two peoples."

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