

# *U.S. Backtracks on Israeli Criticism Over Recent Violence*

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Washington, October 16 (RHC)-- The U.S. administration has backtracked on its criticism of the Israeli government over the recent escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territories.

On Wednesday, U.S. State Department spokesman John Kirby said credible reports indicate that Tel Aviv used excessive force against Palestinian protesters in East Jerusalem.

But speaking at Indiana University on Thursday, Secretary of State John Kerry said the United States backs Israel's "right to defend its existence." Kerry said that he was working with the Israelis and the Palestinians "to stabilize the situation."

"We strongly condemn the terrorist attacks against innocent civilians," he said. "There is absolutely no justification for these reprehensible attacks." This is while a day earlier, Kerry blamed Israel's settlement expansion projects for the current escalation of tensions between Palestinians and Israelis.

"There's been a massive increase in [Israeli] settlements over the course of the last years, and now you have this violence because there's a frustration that is growing," Kerry said.

More than half a million Israelis live in over 120 settlements built since Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem in 1967.

The United Nations and most countries -- with the notable exception of the United States -- regard the Israeli settlements as illegal because the territories were occupied by Israel in a war in 1967 and are hence subject to the Geneva Conventions, which forbid construction on occupied lands.

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