

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
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Subject: Abbas likely to reject Obama request on settlements (Reuters)

RAMALLAH (Reuters) - Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is likely to turn down Washington's request to withdraw a U.N. Security Council resolution demanding Israel halt settlement expansion on occupied land.

Several officials close to Abbas on Friday predicted this would be the consensus of a meeting of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's executive later in the day to discuss President Barack Obama's telephone call with Abbas on Thursday. The U.N. Security Council is scheduled to start discussions later on Friday on a draft resolution that Arab states submitted in January, demanding that Israel halt settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The Palestinians say continued building flouts the internationally-backed peace plan that will permit them to create a viable, contiguous state on the land after a treaty with Israel to end its occupation and 62 years of conflict.

Israel says this is an excuse for avoiding peace talks and a precondition never demanded before during 17 years of negotiation, which has so far produced no agreement. Obama, who has said Israeli settlements in territories it captured in a 1967 war are illegal and unhelpful to the peace process, is opposed to a U.N. move that in Washington's view could shatter hopes of reviving the stalled talks.

In a 50-minute phone call, he asked Abbas to drop the resolution and settle for a non-binding statement condemning settlement expansion, Palestinian officials said. Abbas on Friday received a follow-up call from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on the issue, the Palestinian news agency Wafa said.

"Caving in to American pressure and withdrawing the resolution will constitute Goldstone 2," said a Palestinian official, speaking on terms of anonymity.

He was referring to the wave of protest in October 2009 accusing Abbas of caving in to U.S. pressure by agreeing not to submit for adoption a U.N. report that accused Israel and Hamas Islamists of war crimes during the brief Gaza war two years ago.

Abbas was hanged and burnt in effigy by pro-Hamas supporters furious over the move. Abbas maintains he insisted on submitting the report.

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