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**From:** Anne-Marie Slaughter [redacted]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 22, 2011 10:03 PM  
**To:** H  
**Cc:** Abedin, Huma; Cheryl Mills; Sullivan, Jacob J  
**Subject:** my piece in the Financial Times tomorrow

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I want to make sure I give you a heads-up (albeit short notice; I only finished the editing process on this piece late today) on a piece I have coming out in the Financial Times tomorrow. I hope you like the first part, though I suspect you will not like the end. I honestly do think that war could break out – it's certainly happened before and the conditions are ripe. That would be catastrophic. It's no longer just a matter of U.S. interests and Israeli security. And frankly, Israel has given us nothing in return for an enormous amount of time and support from us, while dragging us ever deeper into situations that are increasingly against our interests. I understand the domestic politics, but that's not what people are going to vote on in this election. At any rate, at least I'm defending the strategy to date. You and Cathy Ashton are doing great work. Best, AM

The showdown at the UN corral has been averted, for now. Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas will deliver a letter seeking statehood to the UN Security Council, but has made clear that he does not expect an immediate vote, thereby at least delaying the need for a US veto. But no one should be breathing a sigh of relief because, without swift action, the Middle East is now teetering on the edge of a new period of armed conflict.

In recent months, the existing order in the Middle East and north Africa has been upended; new powers are jockeying for position and old ones (including Israel) have many reasons to deflect attention from internal unrest by magnifying external threats. Avoiding a vote on the current proposal for Palestinian statehood is the right short-term expedient for all concerned, but a new international strategy to move the peace process forward is now a regional and global imperative.

The US and Israel have recently pushed abstention strategy, getting enough Security Council members to abstain to avoid a veto. Diplomatic observers and the media have framed this process as a case of America and Israel versus the world. But in fact *all* Security Council members have an overriding responsibility to avoid a vote. The Security Council is meant to act promptly to stop any "threat to the peace". A vote on the Palestinian request for statehood, or any US veto of such a request, would be just such a threat.

The potential paths to a future war in the region are increasingly easy to trace. In recent weeks Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's prime minister, has called Israel a "spoiled child" and stated that the Turkish navy would challenge Israel in the eastern Mediterranean. Recent Israeli behaviour, most notably a refusal to apologise for a disproportionate use of force in the exercise of rightful self-defence, also shows a state that is becoming dangerously defensive and defiant.

In theory, any UN Security Council resolution in favour of Palestinian statehood ought to increase international leverage to bring Israel to the peace table. In practice, it will probably deepen Israeli intransigence and trigger a frightening round of brinkmanship. Just imagine the domestic Israeli impact of statements that statehood is a "step to wiping out Israel", as Iran's ambassador to Egypt noted last week.

The disappearance of Hosni Mubarak, Israel's staunchest peace partner in the region, followed by widespread protests against Israel and a violent attack on the Israeli embassy in Cairo, intensify the sense among many Israelis that the Arab spring means nothing but bad news. Many, myself included, would disagree; many others would argue that Israel has backed itself into its present corner. But however we got here, this is where we are.

So, fine, let the US issue its veto. Then what? The move is likely to trigger violence in Gaza and possibly the West Bank; Israeli countermeasures risk igniting more demonstrations, particularly in Egypt and possibly in Syria. A direct clash between Israel and Egyptian or Syrian soldiers in the Sinai or the Golan Heights is all too possible, with potentially catastrophic consequences.

Elswhere the situation is just as bad. Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal has already said that a US veto would trigger a Saudi re-evaluation of the extent to which it will work with the US, particularly with respect to Iraq and possibly Yemen. Saudi opposition to the Shia government in Baghdad would destabilise Iraq, and heighten tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The beleaguered Yemeni president is currently in Riyadh; Saudi refusal to co-ordinate its diplomacy in Yemen with the US would make it nearly impossible to resolve the current impasse.

These are threats growing daily on the horizon. The move from threat to confrontation may seem unlikely, but remember the inexorable sequence of mobilisation that turned the assassination of an Austrian archduke into the first world war.

An abstention strategy is at best a holding pattern, creating a moment of respite. The Security Council should now move to adopt – and the US should allow – a resolution endorsing the Palestinian aspiration to UN membership, while also condemning the steady Israeli encroachment on Palestinian land. It should set forth the parameters for negotiating that President Barack Obama set out in May. Oversight should be delegated to the Quartet.

The US can and should stop the Palestinian request going forward in the Security Council as a request divorced from a larger process of negotiations. But it cannot put the genie back into the bottle and insist that resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict be a purely or even primarily US preserve. A threat to international peace and security is just that. The world must respond.

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