

RELEASE IN PART
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Sent: Wednesday, November 28, 2012 6:47 AM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Low Key Israeli Response to UNGA

Fyi

From: Shapiro, Daniel B (Tel Aviv)
Sent: Wednesday, November 28, 2012 05:49 AM
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Subject: Low Key Israeli Response to UNGA

B6

[redacted] here are clips from this morning's Israeli press off of FM Lieberman's background briefing yesterday in which he indicated Israel will, at least initially, have a low-key response to the Palestinian UNGA bid, in hopes of building some pressure on the Palestinians, preventing actions that exacerbate the damage to Israeli interests, and avoiding making Israeli reactions the target of international criticism. Three clips from Haaretz, Jerusalem Post, and Maariv, followed by the full articles.

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Haaretz: After long weeks of Israel viewing the Palestinian bid in the United Nations as a grave threat, the Prime Minister's Office and Foreign Ministry now have to back down. Sources associated with Netanyahu and Lieberman are trying to belittle the event in the United Nations and describe it as merely a technical and procedural vote or as a symbolic Palestinian victory devoid of diplomatic significance.

The new Israeli policy involves lowering its media profile. The haughty assertion that Israel will punish the Palestinians the day after the UN vote has disappeared. Lieberman's impassioned threats to bring down the Palestinian Authority have also been put in storage.

A senior diplomatic source pointed out that with regard to the Israeli reaction, "lowering the profile" will be key. He said that, despite the previous threats, Israel does not intend to cancel the Oslo Accords, either in whole or in part. The idea raised in the forum of nine ministers to announce the construction of 3,000 new housing units in the settlements was dropped because Netanyahu and the other ministers realized this would scuttle Israel's public diplomacy efforts.

"We examined different ways to react, but eventually the ministers realized that almost whatever we do will hurt Israel at least as much as it will hurt the Palestinians," the senior diplomatic source said. "If the [Palestinian] Authority collapses, it will fall on our heads. We don't have to draw fire immediately after the vote - it's preferable for the Palestinians to be under pressure to renew the negotiations, as they promised."

Jerusalem Post: Israel will take a “low-profile” approach to the Palestinians’ expected bid to upgrade their status at the UN on Thursday, so as not to divert attention from the Palestinian Authority’s violation of international agreements, a senior diplomatic source said Tuesday.

The source said that if Jerusalem, as some in the international community feared, greeted the Palestinian move with a decision to build thousands of new housing units in the settlements, then that would become the center of attention, not the Palestinian step.

Maariv: A senior government official who is taking part in the relevant discussions at the highest levels said, “we will not cancel any agreements. We will act according to them, but we will strictly keep to the letter of the law. We also respect agreements with governments with which we do not agree. We will respond in a measured way at the right time”.

The senior official tried to downplay the significance of the Palestinians course of action, despite the great efforts Israel made to try and stop it, and said “,there is no significance to this step. It was intended to save the person who initiated it, meaning Abu Mazen. The initiative and escalation of the PA chairman in the international arena is an attempt to cover for his domestic failures and strengthen his position”.

J'lem to take 'low profile' approach to PA UN move

By HERB KEINON
27/11/2012

Senior diplomatic source says Israel doesn't want to make moves that divert attention from PA's violation of int'l agreements.

Israel will take a “low-profile” approach to the Palestinians’ expected bid to upgrade their status Thursday, so as not to divert attention from the Palestinian Authority’s violation of international senior diplomatic source said Tuesday.

The source said that if Jerusalem, as some in the international community feared, greeted the move with a decision to build thousands of new housing units in the settlements, then that would be the center of attention, not the Palestinian step.

“We will react at the right time,” he said.

Israel’s position is that the Palestinian resolution seeking observer state status is a clear violation of the underlying principle of the peace process, which requires all outstanding issues to be resolved through negotiations.

The source’s comments came even as senior Israeli officials were meeting in Washington with administration officials to try and water down the ramifications of the resolution.

One idea being raised is that the legal consequences of the UN General Assembly accepting it as a non-member observer state would not be retroactive.

This means that if, as a result of this decision, the PA is able to take Israel to the International Court of Justice, it will not be able to make claims against it for anything that happened before the GA resolution.

The senior diplomatic official said that as a result of the Palestinian move, Israel would stick to the letter of the agreements it has signed, including the 1994 Paris Protocol mandating economic cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Under that protocol, Israel can withhold tax money from the PA to pay for goods and services Israel provides it.

The PA owes more than NIS 800 million to the Israel Electric Corporation, a debt that Jerusalem is most likely to withhold in the two upcoming monthly tax payments scheduled to the PA.

According to the source, PA President Mahmoud Abbas is making this move now to cover up his failures and his inability to "deliver" a better life to the Palestinians.

The recent events in Gaza have shown him to be irrelevant, the source said, and he is looking to demonstrate his significance.

"This move is not about the Palestinian people or a Palestinian state, but only his survival," the source said.

Although the official said the move would elicit "fireworks in Ramallah," it will not change anything on the ground. He added that Israel had no intention of issuing declarations or taking dramatic steps to punish the Palestinians for the move.

Rather, he said, "everything we can do according to Israeli law and international agreements, we will do."

This "low-profile" policy is in stark opposition to comments by Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman that Israel should cancel the Oslo Accords and end all contact with the PA if Abbas went through with the measure at the UN.

US and European diplomats have urged Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu in recent weeks to avoid overly dramatic steps in response to the PA move, which is largely viewed as symbolic, but rather to see what Abbas does with the resolution before deciding how to react. Israeli officials said Netanyahu and Liberman were closely coordinated on this matter.

Israeli diplomatic officials, meanwhile, said that the Palestinians had turned down a British proposal for them to commit to not taking Israel to the ICC, and to restart negotiations immediately, in exchange for support for the resolution.

France, meanwhile, has said it will back the resolution.

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said as much on Tuesday in the French National Assembly.

It was former French president Nicolas Sarkozy who first suggested that the PA go to the UNC compensation for his not favoring its move last year to seek full statehood recognition from the Council. It would now be difficult for the French not to support the proposal, an Israeli Foreign Minister said Tuesday.

While many in the EU had hoped that the 27-member union would be able to muster a consensus on the issue, it is looking less and less likely, with some EU countries expected to support the move, some to oppose, and still others to abstain.

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Israel won't punish Palestinians for UN statehood bid

After long weeks of Israel viewing the Palestinian bid in the United Nations as a grave threat, the Prime Minister's Office and Foreign Ministry now have to back down.

By [Barak Ravid](#) | 07:19 28.11.12 | 38

Avigdor Lieberman was asked on Tuesday during a closed meeting what will happen tomorrow night. The questioner hoped to hear the foreign minister's assessment of the vote due to be held in the UN General Assembly on recognizing Palestine as a non-member observer state, but Lieberman replied with typical cynicism: "It will be a good soccer game."

Actually, at the time of the vote in New York, Lieberman will be participating in the Saban Forum in Washington. He preferred not to attend the decisive debate and in his stead Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, Ron Prosor, will conduct the rearguard fight and address the General Assembly.

Lieberman's reply represents what he and his colleagues in the nine-man ministerial forum have realized in the past two days - that the Palestinian move in the United Nations is unavoidable, as is the humiliating and painful diplomatic defeat that Israel is about to suffer. Now Lieberman, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and their cabinet colleagues have to find their way home - both diplomatically and politically.

After long weeks of Israel viewing the Palestinian bid in the United Nations as a grave threat, the Prime Minister's Office and Foreign Ministry now have to back down. Sources associated with Netanyahu and Lieberman are trying to belittle the event in the United Nations and describe it as merely a technical and procedural vote or as a symbolic Palestinian victory devoid of diplomatic significance.

The new Israeli policy involves lowering its media profile. The haughty assertion that Israel will punish the Palestinians the day after the UN vote has disappeared. Lieberman's impassioned threats to bring down the Palestinian Authority have also been put in storage.

A senior diplomatic source pointed out that with regard to the Israeli reaction, "lowering the profile" will be key. He said that, despite the previous threats, Israel does not intend to cancel the Oslo Accords, either in whole or in part. The idea raised in the forum of nine ministers to announce the construction of 3,000 new housing units in the settlements was dropped because Netanyahu and the other ministers realized this would scuttle Israel's public diplomacy efforts.

"We examined different ways to react, but eventually the ministers realized that almost whatever we do will hurt Israel at least as much as it will hurt the Palestinians," the senior diplomatic source said. "If the [Palestinian] Authority collapses, it will fall on our heads. We don't have to draw fire immediately after the vote - it's preferable for the Palestinians to be under pressure to renew the negotiations, as they promised."

Israel's initial steps will be measured and careful. Israel will stop ignoring the Palestinians' infringement of agreements between the sides and will irritate PA President Mahmoud Abbas by insisting on enacting every clause of every one of the agreements. For example, in the coming months Israel will deduct a debt of NIS 700 million to the Israel Electric Corporation and other debts amounting to several hundred million shekels from tax revenues that it collects for the Palestinians. The significance of such a move, which Israel is allowed to make under the Oslo Accords, would be that for two or three months Israel will withhold the tax monies it normally transfers to the Palestinians every month.

Further reactionary steps will be finalized in the future. If the day after the vote the Palestinians will make do with celebrations in Ramallah and a renewal of negotiations with Israel, as they have declared, then no more punitive steps will be taken. But if Abbas opts to prosecute Israelis in the International Criminal Court in the Hague, the reaction will be harsh. "We will wait for a Palestinian move against Israel and then we will have legitimacy to react forcefully," the senior diplomatic source said.

The Foreign Ministry now estimates that at least 150 UN member states will support the Palestinians receiving observer status, including most of the EU member countries. A senior source in the Foreign Ministry said that recent days, when it became apparent that Abbas had no intention of backing down, have seen diplomatic erosion in favor of the Palestinians among the European countries on which Israel focused its diplomatic efforts.

First came France, which informed Israel last week that it intends to vote in favor of the Palestinians. But the most significant blow came from Britain. The government in London put significant pressure on the Palestinians to postpone the vote and even announced that it will not support the move, but on Tuesday Israel realized that this policy is no longer relevant. The British are now inclined to support the Palestinian move, especially in the wake of Operation Pillar of Defense in Gaza, which in British eyes strengthened Hamas, meaning that the moderate Abbas should be bolstered by his move in the United Nations.

The United Kingdom has made it clear to the Palestinians that it will support their measure in the United Nations if they guarantee that they will not seek to file criminal charges against Israeli officials with the ICC. The British did not state whether they were requesting oral or written guarantees from the Palestinians.

But the diplomatic erosion does not stop there. In light of the French and British position, the Foreign Ministry expects Spain to follow suit. Also the Netherlands and Italy, which were expected to vote against the move, will now probably abstain. The Foreign Ministry now expects at least 15 of the 27 EU member states to vote in favor of the Palestinians. Only Germany and the Czech Republic are expected to vote against.

The Foreign Ministry is now concentrating on damage limitation. Israeli ambassadors worldwide have been instructed to pressure every country to publish an announcement, regardless of how they will vote, emphasizing that the borders of the Palestinian state and the other core issues will be decided only by

direct negotiations with Israel. The ambassadors have been asked to demand that the announcements will acknowledge that this symbolic decision does not change facts on the ground and does not recognize Palestinian sovereignty over the West Bank, Gaza Strip or East Jerusalem.

EUROPE SUPPORTS THE PALESTINIAN BID

Ma'ariv (p. 6) by Eli Bardenstein and Assaf Gabor -- France has officially announced that it will support the Palestinian bid for recognition as a non-member state, and Ireland, Denmark, Portugal, Spain and Luxemburg will do so as well. Additional European countries are also expected to support the bid, which will be made tomorrow .

The Foreign Ministry recently led an effort to persuade European countries to object, or at least abstain in the vote in the UN tomorrow on upgrading the Palestinians 'status, but without success. In the past few days there was a tremendous increase in the number of European countries expected to support the bid. According to the Foreign Ministry's updated estimates, between 12 and 15 European countries, including France, are expected to support the Palestinians. Many countries, however, have decided to abstain instead of objecting. Britain, which until recently was one of the most vehement opponents to the Palestinian application to the UN, might change its position and abstain. It is possible that Germany may choose to do the same .

The Palestinians are also currently refusing to amend the phrasing of the resolution whereby they would agree to not bring any cases against Israel before the International Criminal Court in The Hague“ .If we decide not to do this, it will not be because of threats from Israel or the Americans, but only because it will not serve our interests ”,said Palestinian officials.

Attorney Yitzhak Molcho, the prime minister's special envoy, flew to Washington a few days ago in order to insert a series of amendments in the wording of the resolution, but it seems that he did not succeed in his mission, and he is expected to return to Israel today. The American State Department's spokesperson confirmed that Molcho met with American Special Envoy for Middle East Peace David Hale in Washington, but did not give details of the meeting .

In the meantime it seems that Prime Minister Netanyahu has decided not to decide, and for now has determined that Israel will not impose sanctions on the Palestinians. Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman's recommendations to act aggressively and topple PA Chairman Abu Mazen were rejected by Netanyahu. It is believed that Netanyahu's decision is mainly due to the American request to not weaken Abu Mazen and not take actions that would weaken the financial state of the Palestinian Authority .

The document put together in Minister Lieberman's office by his staff, says that“ if the deterrence efforts are not successful, then Israel must exact a heavy price from Abu Mazen, including the possibility of toppling his regime and dismantling the Palestinian Authority ”.Despite that, as of now, Israel will not try to dismantle the Palestinian Authority or cancel the Oslo Accords. Israel most likely will not freeze the PA tax money or hurt its cash flow either. However, Israel will consider imposing severe sanctions on the Palestinian Authority if it takes advantage of the resolution upgrading their status to become a member of the International Criminal Court in The Hague and sue Israel, or if it tries to join other UN agencies .

A senior government official who is taking part in the relevant discussions at the highest levels said“ ,we will not cancel any agreements. We will act according to them, but we will strictly keep to the letter of the law. We also respect agreements with governments with which we do not agree. We will respond in a measured way at the right time ”.

The senior official tried to downplay the significance of the Palestinians course of action, despite the great efforts Israel made to try and stop it, and said“ ,there is no significance to this step. It was intended to save the person who initiated it, meaning Abu Mazen. The initiative and escalation of the PA chairman in the international arena is an attempt to cover for his domestic failures and strengthen his position”.