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Al-Malki, PA Officials Paint US Loser in Palestinian UN Gambit

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Questions of procedure and outcome of the Palestinian UN gambit remain rife with only a week before Mahmoud ?Abbas stands before the U.N. General Assembly on September 23 and, according to Minister Dr. Riad Al-Malki, ?presents the official request for the state of Palestine to be granted full membership? to Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. Al-Malki said it had been decided to bring the issue of statehood to the Security Council, seemingly daring the US to cast its promised veto and face international isolation. Not certain is whether the U.S. Congress will cut off aid to the cash-poor state-in-waiting. What is certain is that the Palestinian UN enterprise is all but monopolizing international foreign policy officials, many of whom are preoccupied with intense last minute lobbying as envoys from Washington and other Western capitals seek to deflect the clash well into the eleventh hour.

On Thursday, Al-Malki, the Palestinian foreign minister, addressed members of the foreign media in Ramallah, rebutting Israeli and American suggestions that pursuing statehood at Turtle Bay is a unilateral act that will be detrimental to the peace process that exists under the direction of the Quartet ? comprised of the United States, United Nations, European Union and Russia. Repeating a theme that has become familiar from Palestinian officials in recent weeks, Al-Malki said United Nations membership will complement the peace talks, providing greater impetus by virtue of the fact that the participants will be sovereign states speaking as equals.

According to Al-Malki, it didn?t have to come to this at all. In recent days, he said, EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton; Quartet envoy Tony Blair; and Obama representatives David Hale and Dennis Ross came to ?Abbas, but ?came empty handed. They had nothing new to offer? nothing to allow the Palestinians to climb down from the tree. We decided to go and

we're going [to the UN].?

The House Foreign Affairs Committee on Wednesday began debating cutting off US aid to the Palestinian Authority for breaking ranks with the American-brokered peace process. In her opening statement, Committee Chairwoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), credited former President George H.W. Bush in 1989 with "stop[ping] dead in its tracks" attempts by former Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat to seek recognition from various UN agencies after statehood was declared a year before. Ros-Lehtinen called upon President Obama to do the same in 2011 "to stop Abu Mazen's [PA President Abbas] dangerous unilateral scheme" by suspending funds to any UN agency "that granted membership or any upgraded status to the PA."

But Palestinian leaders in recent days showed little hesitation at the decision to push forward even at the risk of confronting the US administration. Asked by The Media Line about the potential loss of critical funding by the cash-poor Palestinian Authority, Al-Malki said he urged the Congress to "ask experts to prepare studies" on the outcome and effect of such decisions -- to see what it really entails not just on the Palestinian Authority but on all parties and the region as a whole "and then they might really change their minds."

Al-Malki was also critical of the United States for announcing its decision to veto any Security Council resolution regarding Palestinian status before the events played out. He told reporters that, "such an advanced decision has put [the Americans] in an adversarial kind of position not vis-à-vis us, but vis-à-vis an overwhelming majority of countries. We are already enjoying a two-thirds majority in the United Nations." Al-Malki suggested the U.S. would work to deny a majority of votes in the Security Council in order to avoid the necessity of casting its veto and avoiding what the Palestinians and others see as negative fallout for the Obama administration.

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