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Diplomat: FM's letter aimed to block Abbas's UN bid

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Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman's letter to the Quartet last week calling for Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's ouster is part of a campaign to get leading democracies to oppose the PA's UN bid, a senior diplomatic official said Monday.

The idea behind the letter, the official said, was primarily to preempt Abbas's move at the UN by putting on the public agenda his record of rejecting Israeli gestures and refusing to negotiate, while trying to diplomatically isolate Israel.

The official said that, like last year, Abbas is expected to deliver a blistering attack on Israel at the UN General Assembly in September, and indicate his intention to seek non-member state status in the organization. He is only expected to make that move, however, after the November 6 American elections so as not to complicate matters for US President Barack Obama.

Abbas knows that Obama needs "peace and quiet until November," so he will raise the issue, but not act on it, until after the elections, the official said.

Liberman's letter, he added, was an attempt to be proactive and cast Abbas in the role of the intransigent party.

One of Abbas's arguments is expected to be that he is making his gambit now because all attempts at negotiation with the current Israeli government have failed.

Preempting, Liberman stated in his letter that Abbas is either "uninterested or unable – due to his standing in the domestic Palestinian scene vis-a-vis Hamas, and in light of the regional geopolitical situation – to reach an agreement which would bring an end to the conflict,

including addressing all the core issues.

Instead, Abbas is creating a culture of blaming Israel for delaying the process, while attempting to achieve advantages without negotiation, via blackmail and ongoing attempts to internationalize the conflict.”

While the official said it was clear that with their automatic majority in the UN General Assembly the Palestinians could easily get the motion passed, Israel was aiming to get some of the world’s key democracies – the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea and European countries – to oppose the move.

According to the source, the assessment in Jerusalem is that without most of those countries, the PA might not go through with the step.

While Washington has come out against such a move, Brussels has not yet weighed in on the matter, and it is likely that while some EU countries will want to oppose, others will support it.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian- Israeli Peace NGO Forum – comprised of 50 left-wing NGOs such as Peace Now, Yesh Din, Machsom Watch and Ir Amim – sent a letter to the Quartet Monday expressing their “outrage” at Liberman’s letter.

The letter encouraged the Quartet to “welcome a Palestinian initiative to secure a vote of confidence in the coming UN General Assembly, by which the State of Palestine will be declared a ‘non-member state’ of the UN.”

According to the NGO forum, “This achievement could constitute a major shift in the current stalemate and generate new political and diplomatic energies serving the peace process.”

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