Palestinians delay vote at UNSC against Trump’s peace deal

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<https://www.jpost.com/International/US-suggests-amendments-for-UNSC-resolution-on-Trump-peace-plan-617115>

In a surprise move, the Palestinian Authority has delayed a scheduled UN Security Council vote on a resolution against the Trump administration’s peace plan. But the meeting will otherwise continue as scheduled.

This includes a special address by PA President Mahmoud Abbas.

The vote on the resolution was delayed, but was expected to be moved forward a later time, a diplomatic source told The Jerusalem Post.

There was immediate speculation that the delay was a backhanded way of pulling the resolution because it lacked the requisite support of nine members for passage. Otherwise, it would have been considered that the resolution had failed.

The delay comes amid US pressure to soften the language of the resolution towards the US and Israel. A US source with direct knowledge of the negotiations between the members of the Security Council told the Post earlier on Monday that if the resolution would get a vote, a number of countries are expected to abstain.

Even if it had passed, the US had been expected to veto the original text put forward last week by UNSC members Tunisia and Indonesia.

PLO Secretary-General Saeb Erekat tweeted: “Reports that the resolution promoted by the Arab Group and the non-aligned movement has been withdrawn are unfounded.

“The draft resolution has been distributed. We are continuing the process of consultation with various countries in a way that doesn’t contradict the principles of the resolution,” he said, adding that the draft resolution was not yet ready to be voted on. Erekat made similar comments to the Palestinian media.

Over the weekend, a number of changes already had been made to water down the text, to ensure its passage by at least nine members and with an eye toward receiving the support of the five European countries on the council.

The US and Israel had worked hard to ensure that the resolution would not pass.

“In recent days, great pressure has been brought to bear on council members. Those efforts bore fruit,” an Israeli source told the Post.

The “Palestinians had realized they would not have much support, and they took it off the table,” the source added.

It is still unclear if the matter will be brought back to the Security Council or to the General Assembly.

“But there is no doubt that the rules of the game have changed,” the source said. The Palestinians’ removal of the resolution from Tuesday’s UNSC meeting is reflective of Abbas’s standing and the message the international community is conveying to him,” the Israeli source said.

Israel’s mission to the UN confirmed that Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon and US Ambassador to the UN Kelly Craft would attend the meeting. It said that UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will open the meeting. UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Nickolay Mladenov is also expected to speak.

On Sunday night, the Post learned that America had put forward its own amendments to the text in hopes of re-crafting a resolution that could ensure the return of Israelis and Palestinians to the negotiating table, a person familiar with the discussions told the Post. In the event that Tunisia and Indonesia do not adopt the American comments, the US Mission to the UN is expected to veto it.

According to a source familiar with the discussions between the US, Tunisia and other members of the Security Council, criticism against the US has softened, and “there is a desire to avoid promoting a resolution that will vetoed.”

The softening of the language comes after US special envoy Jared Kushner’s briefing with UNSC members last Thursday. Kushner was accompanied by Trump's assistant and special envoy for international negotiations Avi Berkowitz, and US envoy Brian Hook. The source added that “there are numerous countries who are considering abstaining” if the wording is not changed.

A US administration official told the Post: “The international community has shown a desire to see the two parties negotiate, and realizes that now is not the time for resolutions that won’t advance the cause of peace. The US would like to have a resolution that encourages the sides to negotiate instead of one that simply criticizes one side.”

Danon said the original text was “offensive both to Israel and the US... Mahmoud Abbas continues with his diplomatic terror.”

“In my speech, I intend to focus on the Palestinian refusal to negotiate,” he said, adding that he intended to also mention former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert’s plan to hold a joint press conference with Abbas after the Security Council meeting.

“I will remind Abbas that even if former prime minister Ehud Olmert is coming to support him, when Olmert was in office, [he] gave him the most generous offer ever, and Abbas did not respond – meaning, it doesn’t even matter who is standing behind the proposal or its content,” Danon told the Post.

In response to international pressure, Tunisia and Indonesia had by Monday softened the wording so that it does not say the UNSC “strongly regrets that the plan presented… by the United States and Israel breaches international law.”

The new draft left out the US and “notes that the initiative… in relation with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, departs from the internationally endorsed terms of reference and parameters for the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to this conflict as enshrined in the relevant United Nations resolutions.”

It still stated, however, that “annexation of any part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem constitutes a breach of international law.”

In addition, the new version of the draft resolution says it is “condemning all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation, incitement and destruction.”

The draft also calls for “the intensification and acceleration of international and regional efforts to launch credible negotiations” between Israel and the Palestinians on final-status issues.

For the US, this is a step in the right direction but not nearly enough to prevent a veto vote.

The EU had leaned toward an abstention because it wanted to avoid antagonizing the US, and it could only vote in favor of a resolution that is closer to past texts and is an opening for future negotiations, encouraging the Palestinians to return to the table.

The EU tends to vote as a bloc in the UN; its member states in the Security Council are France, Belgium, Germany and Estonia. Belgium has recently come under criticism from Jerusalem for inviting NGOs with ties to Palestinian terrorists to the UNSC, which could be a challenge for the EU policy of unanimity.

Sources have said that at least two non-EU states were considering abstentions. Together with the US, that would cancel the vote.

Ahead of Tuesday, Danon said he had held a briefing for relevant UN ambassadors to “expand the circle of states that will abstain or oppose the Palestinian resolution if it goes to a vote in the General Assembly.”

Danon told his colleagues that Abbas is responsible for the current escalation because he “continues to incite and encourage violence against innocent Israelis along with his continued refusal to negotiate.”