**A Stinging Defeat For Abbas, But No Great Victory For Israel**

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Many months and innumerable headlines in the making, the Palestinians’ bid to impose terms for statehood upon Israel via the United Nations [ended in embarrassing failure on Tuesday night](http://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinian-statehood-resolution-defeated-at-un-security-council/), when the Security Council rejected Resolution S/2014/916. The US didn’t even have to wield its veto.

Their defeat was unexpected and stinging. Shortly before the vote, the Palestinians claimed — and Israeli officials confirmed — that nine countries intended to support the resolution, which would have constituted the necessary majority and forced the US veto. But come the moment of truth, Nigeria surprisingly abstained. Pushing a bid for a solution to the conflict within a year and a full Israeli withdrawal within three, PA President Mahmoud Abbas’s Palestinians found themselves one vote short.

Expect politicians and pundits in Israel to spend the next few days debating whether the 8-2 vote, with 5 abstentions, was a disaster, underlining the country’s increasing international isolation, or a case of brilliant Israeli diplomacy, in that Nigeria could be persuaded to change its position at the last minute. (Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke to the leaders of Rwanda and Nigeria before the vote; Rwanda, less surprisingly, also abstained, as did Britain, South Korea and Lithuania.)

The Palestinians plainly suffered a dramatic reverse. But Israel cannot claim an equally dramatic victory. Mustering the opposition only of the US and Australia — to a motion that was designed to impose terms that Israel has made plain it cannot accept, submitted by a Palestinian leadership that is currently part of a Hamas-backed unity government — hardly suggests widespread international empathy for Israel’s concerns.

Even the abstaining countries made clear that they back many provisions of the Palestinian resolution. The UK, for instance, “supports much of the content of the draft resolution. It is therefore with deep regret that we abstained on it,” London’s ambassador to the UN Mark Lyall Grant said.

Perhaps the smartest way to view the vote is that it underlined ebbing support for Israel’s positions, even as reluctance to endorse an imposed solution narrowly held sway. The message was that the international community is fed up with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, believes a negotiated accord is the best way to solve it, but one way or another wants to see Israel speedily withdraw from the West Bank to enable the creation of a Palestinian state. Israel got some breathing space, nothing more. Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat has already spoken about going back to the Security Council when its membership is more advantageous.

There had been some speculation that the Palestinians rushed to call the vote before January 1, when the council’s constellation becomes even more sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, because they wanted their resolution to fail. Wary of possible American sanctions, the Palestinians sought defeat in order to spare the US the need to veto.

But the way events played out suggests nothing of the kind. Rather, the Palestinians were apparently confident that they had the nine yes votes locked in, miscalculating Nigeria’s position. Had they waited just two more days, by when Malaysia will have replaced South Korea, they would not have been defeated.

Most of the eight yes votes had long been utterly predictable. No one was shocked that Jordan, Chad and Chile voted in favor of the resolution, which read like a Palestinian wish list while ignoring Israeli caveats. No one was hugely surprised, either, that China, Russia, Argentina and even Luxembourg, though supposed to be allies, also supported a resolution Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had warned put Israel’s “future in peril.”

“There’s a natural affinity and friendship between the ancient people of China and the ancient people of Israel. We are both rooted in great traditions, but we also are absolutely determined to seize the future,” Netanyahu told Chinese Vice Premier Liu Yandong in May. For Beijing, the future evidently includes the creation of a Palestinian state within 12 months, accompanied by “a full and phased withdrawal of the Israeli occupying forces which will end the occupation” by December 2017.

But France’s yes vote was a jaw-dropper. The Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem was caught entirely off-guard when it emerged, just hours before the vote, that Paris had changed its position and intended to vote in favor. French diplomats had spent weeks working on their own, “softer” statehood resolution, which gave Israel more time for a withdrawal and included several provisions more to Israel’s taste, including more acceptable phrasing on the refugee issue.

The Palestinians refused to adopt the French version, and submitted their own, making a few changes en route that rendered the text still less acceptable to Jerusalem. The final draft added the release of Palestinian prisoners to the list of outstanding issues that require a “just settlement” and demanded the cessation of all Israeli settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem. While an earlier draft spoke of Jerusalem “as the shared capital of the two States,” the version defeated on Monday states explicitly that East Jerusalem shall be the capital of the State of Palestine and envisages “a just resolution of the status of Jerusalem as the capital of the two States.”

And yet Paris said yes. “France wanted to offer a constructive, reasonable and consensual alternative to the initial Palestinian draft,” explained Francois Delattre, the country’s ambassador to the UN. The Palestinian text, submitted for the vote by Jordan, was “not ideal,” he admitted. But despite “reservations about some of its formulations,” he had voted in favor because the peace process needs to advance and the international community “must share the weight of these negotiations.”

About a year ago, on November 18, 2013, Netanyahu welcomed French President Francois Hollande to the Knesset. Hollande is a “true friend of Israel,” the prime minister declared at the time. “We thank you for your strong support of our efforts to fortify Israel’s security and to establish a true peace with our neighbors.”

One wonders if he would say the same today.