Palestinians Mull Freezing UN Resolution on Settlements in Wake of French Pressure

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The Palestinian Authority is leaning toward freezing its effort to secure a United Nations Security Council draft resolution condemning Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, following pressure from France and other countries, a senior Palestinian figure told Haaretz.

The French government was pressing the authority to suspend the effort on the grounds that it will undermine French attempts to convene an international peace conference this summer, according to senior Israeli and Palestinian officials.

“The opportunity to go to the Security Council will always be there and we want to give a chance to the French initiative because, in the end, this is an initiative that serves us and not one that hurts us,” the Palestinian figure said.

A senior official in Jerusalem, who asked to remain anonymous due to diplomatic sensitivity, said that information reaching Israel had indicated that France’s ambassador to the United Nations, Francois Delattre, informed his Palestinian counterpart, Riyad Mansour, of the problems involved in promoting a Security Council resolution against the settlements at this time.

The issue also came up in a meeting at the Elysee Palace in Paris on Friday between French President Francois Hollande and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. The latter wholly supports the French initiative and wants to take advantage of the United States’ distancing itself from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to increase the involvement of other countries and convene an international peace conference.

The senior Palestinian official, who asked to remain anonymous, said that the French had made clear in closed conversations that there was no point in investing efforts in a Security Council draft resolution that was unlikely to succeed, either due to the lack of a majority or a U.S. veto. According to the official, the French said it would be preferable to present a united front in support of an international conference.

In light of the French pressure, Abbas has changed his statements regarding promotion of the draft resolution over the past few days. In a press conference after his meeting with Hollande, as well as in a press conference Tuesday with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Abbas intimated that the Palestinian Authority might not push for a vote in the Security Council.

He said the Palestinian leadership was continuing its consultations with Arab countries to set the most a suitable time to move ahead with a draft resolution on the settlements.

Abbas, who was to fly to New York , will meet with the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan Saudi Arabia and perhaps other Arab countries Wednesday to discuss its move in the Security Council.

Senior Israeli and Palestinian officials said that the Egyptians, the Jordanians and the Saudis are not keen to move the draft resolution ahead at this time.

Israel is gratified by the French pressure on the Palestinians, but there is anger in Jerusalem at the French vote in favor of a resolution promoted by the Palestinians in UNESCO last week condemning Israel for its actions in Jerusalem and on the Temple Mount.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is very suspicious of the French initiative for an international peace conference. In a briefing for political correspondents on Monday, he remarked cynically: “Can somebody explain to me what is included in the French initiative? So far I don’t understand and I’m not sure the French understand.”

Netanyahu’s skepticism is shared by the United States. Senior American officials said that so far they have received no clear details of the content of the French initiative and they have heard only general and vague descriptions from the French ambassador to the United States, Pierre Vimont, who is in charge of organizing the conference.

French diplomats said that Vimont has devoted the past month to consultations with several countries on the French initiative and he is expected to submit a report in a few days to French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault with recommendations on how to move the initiative ahead.

France’s next move is to convene a meeting of senior diplomats in Paris in May in preparation for the international conference.