**Israel weighs responses to 'barrage' of international criticism**

Officials say particularly concerned over UN probe of country's court system in the wake of the Goldstone report on the Gaza war.

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Israel's diplomatic and defense establishments will hold several meetings this week on how to contend with what some officials described as a "barrage" of international investigations into Israel's conduct.

The most disconcerting among them, officials said, is the United Nations committee charged with examining the credibility of Israel's court system in the wake of the Goldstone report on last winter's conflict in Gaza.

Two other international probes are soon set to begin over Israel's May raid on a Gaza-bound flotilla - one appointed by the UN's secretary general and the other by the organization's Human Rights Council.

The inquiry into the Israeli court system was decided on at a March meeting of the UNHRC in Geneva as part of its continuing effort to monitor Israel's response to the Goldstone report. The panel is charged with examining the efficiency, independence and professionalism of Israel's court system and its adherence to internationally accepted standards. Some Israeli officials have already begun describing it as "a second Goldstone committee."

Over the next few days, Israel is expected to decide whether or not to cooperate with the probe. The foreign and justice ministries are pushing for a policy change that would lead to Israeli recognition of the probe and full cooperation with it. But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has yet to decide what Israel's official response should be.

The committee is headed by the German jurist Christian Tomuschat; its other members are Mary McGowan Davis, a former justice of the New York State Supreme Court, and Malaysia's Param Cumaraswamy. The three are tasked with monitoring any legal steps taken by the Israeli or Palestinian authorities to implement the Goldstone report's recommendations.

The committee is set to begin its work in the next few weeks and submit a final report in October.

Israeli officials are concerned because this is the first time UN bodies have investigated Israel's military and civilian legal systems, and a harsh report by the committee could stain the reputation of Israel's legal system all the way to the Supreme Court. A negative report could also lead to various countries around the world ignoring Israeli court rulings or filing indictments against Israeli soldiers and officers.

High-ranking officials said that Netanyahu would meet with key ministers this week on whether to cooperate with the UNHRC investigation. The decision could ultimately be made in the diplomatic-security cabinet.

A decision to cooperate with the committee would represent an about-face in Israel's policy toward the Goldstone report: Until now, Jerusalem has resisted recognizing the legitimacy of either the report or the UNHRC. But officials in the foreign and justice ministries believe Israel must cooperate with the new probe in order to influence its findings.

Moreover, they argue, the new panel's mandate is not one-sidedly anti-Israel, as that of the Goldstone Committee was, nor are its members seen as holding particularly anti-Israel views.

Meanwhile, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said last week that he hopes to create a "review panel" to monitor investigations conducted in both Israel and Turkey over the May flotilla raid. Ban said he hopes the committee will include one representative from each of the two countries. Eight Turkish citizens and one Turkish-American were killed in the incident.

Ban reportedly told Netanyahu the panel could help prevent other international attempts to take legal steps against Israel over the raid and obviate the need for an emergency session of the UN General Assembly or Security Council on the incident. Ban also reportedly described the initiative as "a clear Israeli interest."

Netanyahu is expected to accede to the UN chief's request, but also to insist that the panel not begin its work before the Turkel Committee - the Israeli panel investigating the raid - finishes its report.

The third international committee of inquiry into Israel's conduct was set up by the UNHRC in Geneva to probe the flotilla incident. That panel is charged with determining whether Israel violated international law and committed war crimes in taking over the Gaza-bound vessel. However, finalization of its membership has been delayed by the ouster of its designated chairman, former foreign minister of Iceland Ingibjorg Solrun Gisladottir, after it emerged that she had signed a petition in support of the flotilla.