[The Iran Deal and the Looming Showdown with Israel at the UN](https://www.commentarymagazine.com/2015/04/29/the-iran-deal-and-the-looming-showdown-with-israel-at-the-un/)

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Those waiting for the Obama administration’s much-hyped decision on whether to abandon Israel at the United Nations will have to keep waiting. Foreign Policy’s Colum Lynch is [reporting](http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/28/whunited-nations-un-iran-mideast-peace-israel-palestine-kerry-france-fabius-netanyahu/) that the Obama administration has been pushing its European allies to postpone a vote at the UN, designed to pressure Israel over the contours of a two-state solution, until after President Obama concludes a nuclear deal with Iran. There are competing explanations for how this is to be interpreted, but it is, at the very least, an unambiguous case for more congressional oversight.

As Lynch writes, Obama doesn’t want to pick an additional fight with Congress while he still needs them to rubber-stamp his nuclear diplomacy with Iran. In that sense, Congress’s attempts to reclaim some of its turf back from a power-hungry president are bearing fruit on more than just the Iran deal. It also limits what Obama can do in areas where he doesn’t need Congress, because he wants to avoid burning more legislative bridges for the time being.

But that’s not wholly positive news. After all, if Obama wants to postpone UN action on Israel because he doesn’t want to fight with the pro-Israel U.S. Congress, that suggests that the action he wants to take at the UN would anger the pro-Israel Congress. Here the prediction takes a distinctly negative turn. Were Obama planning to unequivocally support Israel at the UN, he surely needn’t worry about congressional opposition.

You could argue further that if Obama intended to bolster Israel at the UN, it might make sense for him to do so before the Iran deal is finalized because it could earn him some goodwill from Congress. Part of the concern about Obama’s foreign policy, and specifically his pending deal with Iran, is that the president seeks a full reordering of American strategy in the Middle East, by leaving a security vacuum and then encouraging and enabling Iran to step into that role.

Allowing Iran a much freer hand in the region–which, it must be conceded, Obama is already doing–would harm America’s traditional allies, especially Israel. So Obama might consider protecting Israel at the UN before the Iran deal is finalized as a way to reassure the Israelis that there are limits to how far Obama will go in elevating Iran in the Middle East. It would also be a good-faith gesture to Congress, by signaling that although Congress might disagree on the path Obama’s taking with Iran, some Middle East issues will remain bipartisan. (This would be especially appreciated by congressional Democrats, whose party is increasingly becoming identified with its growing hostility to Israel.)

So it’s a bad sign, from the perspective of the free world, that Obama wants to wait. Yet it should be noted that there is a way to interpret the scheduling as indicative of Obama protecting Israel at the UN when the vote eventually takes place. Obama could, for example, want to postpone anything that might upset Iran before he gets a deal signed. Also, he might want to use American UN action as a way to blunt criticism of the Iran deal after it’s signed (if it’s signed).

Regarding the latter, Obama could pitch supporting Israel at the UN to send the message that the Iran deal changes nothing about America’s special relationship to Israel. Additionally, the president knows that if he signs a deal legitimizing Iran as a nuclear power he will yet again be criticized for the various ways such a move would harm Israel’s security. He might want to hold off on the UN so that he can let defending Israel at the UN provide him with a positive news cycle in the aftermath of the deal.

There is another possibility, however, this one raised by Lynch: that the president who always loved voting “present” doesn’t want to have to make a decision at the UN either way–and doesn’t plan to. Lynch writes:

The U.S. outreach reflects concern over the potential political perils of pursuing dual initiatives that are deeply unpopular with Israel and its supporters in the U.S. Congress. But it has also raised suspicions among key observers and diplomats that the United States may be backing away from its plans to pursue action on the Middle East at the United Nations. …

Goldenberg said he believes the Obama administration is genuinely committed to pursuing some form of action at the council to promote a two-state solution. But he doubts the United States will ever find the right time to push ahead. When the administration “weighs the costs and benefits” of U.N. action, he said, it tends to either “hesitate” or “back off.”

I find the wording there quite revealing. It suggests that the cost-benefit analysis performed by the administration shows it to be a net-negative to abandon Israel at the UN. Hence, the president would “back off.” But the “hesitate” part is interesting too. The president seems to want to side against Israel on this issue, but believes he just doesn’t have the political capital to take such a drastic step.

Yet he also doesn’t want to side with Israel on the issue because he doesn’t want to go on record against a peace plan that he really supports. So he doesn’t want the vote to ever actually take place.

Perhaps he just wants the vote to be a looming threat to quiet Israel’s opposition to the Iran deal. Whatever the case, he won’t be able to put off the UN vote forever. And that’s when we’ll see if the president who took the extraordinary step of downgrading the U.S.-Israel military alliance while Israel was at war is also ready to downgrade the U.S.-Israel diplomatic alliance and unleash the full prejudice of the United Nations on the Jewish state.