A Palestinian attempt to oust Israel from the UN would be quixotic — and fail

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After their failed efforts last year to[get Israel booted from FIFA](https://www.timesofisrael.com/fifa-wont-take-up-palestinian-complaint-against-israeli-clubs/), the world soccer body, the Palestinians have now reportedly set their sights on an even bigger prize: kicking Israel out of the United Nations.

According to a brief report Sunday in the Israeli daily Yedioth Ahronoth, Palestinian leaders are planning to argue that Israel is in violation of several UN Security Council resolutions and the UN charter. Ramallah will further argue, the report stated, that Israel’s recently passed [nation-state law](https://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinian-flags-fly-at-arab-led-rally-in-tel-aviv-against-nation-state-law/), which declares national rights to be exclusive to Jews, proved Israel is an apartheid state and must therefore be sanctioned.

Palestinian officials did not respond to several requests for comment by The Times of Israel.

Israeli officials were quick to denounce the ostensible plan, even though the chances that Israel would actually be expelled or suspended from the UN are close to zero.

The apartheid accusation, long leveled at Israel by its critics, is particularly noteworthy, because in 1974 South Africa — one of the UN’s 51 founding members in 1945 — was suspended from the UN General Assembly over its racist governing system.

After attempts to kick out South Africa failed due to vetoes by France, Britain and the US, the General Assembly voted to suspend the country, 91-22 with 19 abstentions. South Africa did not lose its seat at the GA but could not make speeches or participate in votes.

The US, the UK, Israel and other Western countries opposed the move, not defending apartheid but saying depriving the country of its seat at the General Assembly was illegal “and could set a dangerous precedent for the future,” The New York Times [reported at the time](https://www.nytimes.com/1974/11/13/archives/south-africa-is-suspended-by-un-assembly-9122-un-session-barssouth.html).

The motion passed nevertheless, mainly because “black Africans had threatened to dilute their support for the Arab countries in the Palestine debate if they were not backed on the South African issue,” the Times cited a Western diplomat as saying.

In 1994, after Nelson Mandela stared down the apartheid regime and South Africa became a democracy, the country was readmitted as a full member of the General Assembly.

Next year, South Africa — now one of Israel’s harshest critics in the international arena — will begin a two-year term as a non-permanent member of the Security Council.

### How the Palestinians may attempt an expulsion

According to [chapter six of the UN Charter](http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-ii/index.html), a member state “which has persistently violated the Principles contained in the present Charter may be expelled from the Organization by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council.”

The same process — a vote in the Security Council followed by one in the General Assembly — is also required to suspend a country from “the exercise of the rights and privileges of [UN] membership.”

In the General Assembly, the Palestinians have an automatic majority, and any vote to punish Israel would likely pass.

But at the Security Council, any one of its five permanent members — the US, France, the UK, China and Russia — could veto an effort to get Israel suspended. There is no question that Nikki Haley, the US ambassador to the UN and one of the administration’s most outspoken defenders of Israel, would never let such an effort get very far.

The other permanent Security Council members, which usually vote for pro-Palestinians resolutions, could also reasonably be expected to oppose expelling or suspending Israel. Not even France or China could argue that such a move would advance the cause of peace.

That is not to say that the Palestinians are not going to try it, if only for the PR value. It wouldn’t be the first time that Ramallah has proposed resolutions that are either merely declaratory or that it knows will be vetoed.

When the US in December vetoed a Security Council resolution condemning its recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, the 14 other countries voted in favor — a great result, from a Palestinian perspective.

The subsequent vote on the same matter in the General Assembly had no practical implication, but, again, the 128-9 vote looked good for the Palestinians.

The Foreign Ministry and the Prime Minister’s Office declined to comment on the Palestinians’ ostensible new gambit. In private conversations, Israeli officials completely dismissed it, saying the initiative is dead on arrival and therefore should not be given much attention.

Still, the coverage in Yedioth prompted some Israeli officials to forcefully denounce it.

“It is a cynical and empty initiative by the Palestinians that will go nowhere,” Israel’s Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon told The Times of Israel this week. “It is nothing more than a stunt to spread lies on the UN stage, delegitimize Israel and silence the truth. We will continue to act in every way to expose the culture of hate and incitement.”

Deputy Minister for Diplomacy Michael Oren went further. “Even without the nation-state law, the Palestinians’ goal was and remains the same goal: to eradicate Israel from the map,” he said in a statement.

The 137 countries that recognized a Palestinian state did so thinking the Palestinian Authority only wanted peace, but they are mistaken, Oren went on.

“In reality, these states are supporting the Palestinians’ malicious plot to expel Israel from the UN, and thereby destroy the State of Israel, all of this without any relation to the nation-state law. This is not what peace looks like, this is what perpetuating the conflict looks like.”

Whether the Palestinians will end up actually proposing getting Israel booted or suspended from the UN will likely depend on how they assess the PR value of such a move. But everyone in Ramallah and in Jerusalem knows it has virtually no chance of succeeding.