**Israel, Palestinians Battle for Votes over Jerusalem Resolution at UNESCO**

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Israel is battling to prevent a public-relations victory for the Palestinians at the UNESCO Executive Board in Paris, which is expected to disavow Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem on Independence Day.  
  
Such a vote would provide Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas a boost when he meets with US President Donald Trump at the White House just one day later.

Among the points of contention between the two leaders is Trump’s pre-election promise to relocate the US Embassy to Jerusalem and the presumption that Trump is not opposed to Jewish building in Jerusalem over the pre- 1967 lines.  
  
The United States, one of the 58 UNESCO Executive Board members, is expected to oppose the resolution. The Palestinians have an automatic majority on the board, but the PA and Israel are battling for the support of the 11 EU member states. Their votes have come to represent a “moral” political victory.

Israel’s struggle for European support has been made more difficult because the text – submitted by Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar and Sudan – is less egregious by Israeli standards than past documents.  
  
A March draft asked the board to deny Israel sovereignty over all of Jerusalem, including the western part of the city.  
  
The resolution’s text stated: “Any action taken by Israel, the occupying power, to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the city of Jerusalem are illegal and therefore null and void and have no validity whatsoever.”  
  
This week in Paris, according to diplomatic sources, European diplomats, led by Germany, met with Arab state representatives to amend the text even further so that EU states could either abstain or support the document.  
  
A new draft circulated on Friday seemed to also water down the sovereignty issue, possibly limiting it to east Jerusalem, including the Old City.  
  
It stated: “All legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying power, which have altered or purport to alter the character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and in particular the ‘basic law’ on Jerusalem, are null and must be rescinded forthwith.”  
  
An EU official said the latest draft is not inconsistent with the body’s position on Jerusalem.  
  
A representative for the EU Embassy in Tel Aviv said, “The EU will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties.  
  
“As for Jerusalem, the EU will continue to respect the international consensus embodied in UN Security Council Resolution 478 of 1980,” the representative continued, in reference to the text that was passed after Israel applied sovereignty to areas of the city over the pre- 1967 lines.  
  
“A way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both states,” he added.  
  
Former Foreign Ministry legal adviser Alan Baker said that what is significant is not the legal interpretation of the language but the Palestinian intent, which is to deny Israeli sovereignty over all of Jerusalem.  
  
“The Palestinians are playing a game with the Europeans and others by trying to use UN language” that refers to east Jerusalem and, “in their own political determinations, they mean the whole of Jerusalem,” Baker said.  
  
Former Foreign Ministry director-general and former UN ambassador Dore Gold said, “It is the height of nerve for the Palestinians to be involved in a resolution on UNESCO just prior to a meeting between Abbas and Trump.”  
  
PA Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki accused Israel of inciting against the Palestinians at UNESCO, adding that it had swayed the Trump administration to stand behind such efforts.  
  
He warned Israel that it would fail to halt Palestinian resolutions at UNESCO unless it “ended the occupation.”  
  
Israel’s struggle for votes at UNESCO has put it at odds with Germany, which last year opposed a resolution on Jerusalem but this year is expected to either abstain or support the text.  
  
Israel’s Ambassador to UNESCO in Paris Carmel Shama Hacohen chastised Germany for working to amend the text and for its possible support for the resolution.  
  
“If I were the foreign minister of Germany, I would not participate in drafting a proposal, among whose initiators were Sudan and Qatar. I certainly would not vote against the Jewish state on its Independence Day,” Shama Hacohen said.  
  
“This is an immoral vote” connected to “dubious” leaders accused of war crimes, such as in Sudan, said Shama Hacohen. He added, however, that Germany will remain a good friend of Israel, even if it votes against it on Tuesday.  
  
The behind-the-scenes conflict preceded the public argument between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel over his meeting with the left-wing group Breaking the Silence during his visit to Israel last week.  
  
Netanyahu canceled his meeting with Gabriel and attacked the foreign minister in an interview with German newspaper Bild.