[White House to U.N.: First Iran, Then Mideast Peace](http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/28/whunited-nations-un-iran-mideast-peace-israel-palestine-kerry-france-fabius-netanyahu/)

April 28, 2015

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Foreign Policy

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The United States has been privately leaning on France and other allies to hold off on pushing a measure at the U.N. Security Council that is designed to force movement on the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process at least until negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program have concluded, diplomats told Foreign Policy.

The American pitch for a delay, which has not previously been reported, comes just weeks after French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius announced that he would push in a matter of “weeks” for a new U.N. “parameters” resolution that would set a fixed timetable for negotiating a political settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

But U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has appealed to his French counterpart to put the decision off until at least after the deadline for Iran talks wraps up at the end of June, or possibly even later, after the administration has secured congressional support for the deal, according to diplomatic sources.

So far, the Americans have not provided France or other allies with a precise time for when they would be prepared to consider a move at the United Nations. “It’s been very blurry,” said one diplomat familiar with the talks.

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.

U.S. President Barack Obama’s administration had hinted recently that it might be willing to drop its long-standing resistance to Security Council action after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that a Palestinian state would not be established under his watch, raising questions about his commitment to a two-state solution.

“It seems pretty clear to me there is no interest in the United States in pushing this right now,” Ilan Goldenberg, a former member of the Obama administration’s Middle East team, told FP. He noted that the White House has to balance its interest in mounting a new Middle East peace push at the U.N. with locking down support for the Iran deal in Congress. “The administration is not going to do anything to jeopardize that,” he said.

State Department spokesman Edgar Vasquez told FP that “no decisions have been made” on whether to back any measure at the United Nations and that the United States would “carefully consider our future engagement at the U.N. if and when we reach that point.”

“We will continue to work with our partners, including the French, to advance the prospect for a two-state solution and provide a horizon of hope for Israelis and Palestinians, while opposing all efforts that would undermine that goal,” he said.

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.”

The United States has long resisted efforts to involve the U.N. Security Council in coaxing Israelis and Palestinians to pursue a peace deal, favoring direct talks between Palestinians and Israelis. Jerusalem, which thinks the world body is hopelessly biased, has also fiercely opposed any talk of more directly involving the U.N. in the peace talks.

But the United States has expressed a willingness to consider some form of U.N. action following Israel’s incursion last summer into Gaza as part of Operation Protective Edge, which resulted in the deaths of more than 2,100 Palestinians and 66 Israeli soldiers and seven civilians, according to U.N. Security Council diplomats.

The violence underscored the futility of U.S. efforts to broker a peace deal between Israelis and Palestinians. It fueled pressure from France, which is keen to play a broader role in the Middle East peace process, and other European powers to promote a far more active role for the U.N. Security Council in the effort. France has also proposed convening an international conference to reinvigorate those peace efforts.

Tensions between the United States and Israel have risen following Netanyahu’s claim during his election campaign that a Palestinian state would never be established under his watch. Netanyahu subsequently backtracked on his remarks, which appeared to reverse the commitment the prime minister had made to a two-state solution in a 2009 speech at Bar-Ilan University. The United States has reacted coolly to such assurances.

Obama informed Netanyahu in March, just days after the Israeli leader won re-election, that the United States would have to reassess its policy toward the peace process because of Netanyahu’s remarks. The State Department’s Vasquez said the United States is still “reviewing our policies with respect to how to best achieve a two-state solution.”

At the same time, the administration has held off efforts by the Palestinians, France, and other countries to address the crisis at the U.N. Security Council.

In December, Kerry told the 28 ambassadors of the EU countries at a closed-door luncheon that Washington might ultimately support a resolution that didn’t impose a peace plan on Israel or place specific deadlines for the conclusion of peace talks. But Kerry warned that the United States would veto any resolution on the Middle East before Israel’s March 17 election.

In the days preceding the election, U.S. officials told British, French, and German officials that Washington was open to considering the adoption of a resolution promoting a two-state solution to the Middle East crisis, but only in the event that the election victor formed a conservative Israeli government that was opposed to a peace deal. Netanyahu is expected to complete the formation of just such a government by next week.

America’s top negotiator in the high-stakes Iran nuclear talks, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman, on Monday reiterated Washington’s concern that Netanyahu has “raised questions about his government’s commitment to a two-state solution” and said that the United States “will be watching very closely to see what happens after a new government is formed on this issue of working towards two states living side by side in peace and security.”

“If the new Israeli government is seen as stepping back from its commitment to a two-state solution … that makes our job in the international arena a lot tougher,” Sherman told a gathering of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism in Washington. “Because our ability to push back on efforts to internationalize efforts to address Israeli-Palestinian issues has depended on our insistence that the best course in achieving a two-state solution is through direct negotiation between the parties.”

In the meantime, frustration has been mounting at Turtle Bay and in an array of world capitals.

On April 21, a Palestinian diplomat, Feda Abdelhady Nasser, issued an appeal to the Security Council to adopt a “meaningful” resolution that could “assist the parties to overcome this dangerous impasse.”

New Zealand’s U.N. envoy, Jim McLay, complained during an April 21 Security Council meeting that it is “always not the right time” for firm action at the United Nations.

“There will never be a perfect time. We cannot continue to kick the can down an endless road,” he told the council.

French officials, meanwhile, have expressed sympathy with the U.S. argument that U.N. action on the peace process could complicate Iran negotiations. But they fear the United States will indefinitely delay any plans for Security Council action.

Fabius [told the *Financial Times*](http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/eec0b612-e4cb-11e4-8b61-00144feab7de.html?siteedition=intl#axzz3YebD6xsj) in an April 19 interview that Paris is still eager to introduce a resolution soon. But he said France still needs to agree on timing with the United States.

“There are other issues to deal with,” he said. “One negotiation should not hurt another, but at the same time, there’s always a lot going on, so the risk is we never find the time.”

“The French are keen to press ahead,” said a senior Western diplomat. The Americans, he said, “have told them to wait” because “you can’t have the Israelis criticizing two major American policy initiatives at the same time.”

“The bottom line is that any resolution that has to provide for parameters for a Palestinian state has to have consensus of all council members, whether it’s based on the French text or some other text,” added a Security Council diplomat. “It all depends on what the Americans want and when they want to move forward.”