PM warns of retaliation for Abbas's diplomatic warfare

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Jerusalem will not let continuous Palestinian diplomatic steps against Israel go without a response, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Wednesday evening in reaction to Interpol’s decision earlier in the day to admit the Palestinians as a member state.

Netanyahu’s comment came at a meeting in his office with US envoy Jason Greenblatt, US Ambassador David Friedman and Israel’s Ambassador to the US Ron Dermer. The Prime Minister’s Office did not indicate what that response would be.

But Jerusalem Affairs Minister Ze’ev Elkin did give an indication of what measures might be considered. He said following the Interpol decision that Israel should immediately cancel all cabinet decisions regarding gestures toward the Palestinians made over the last two years, and that it should revoke the VIP passes given to the heads of the Palestinian Authority enabling easier passage into Israel.

In addition to raising the Interpol issue, Netanyahu also discussed Palestinian calls – as a member of the International Criminal Court since 2015 – to bring Israelis to trial for “war crimes,” and the Palestinian Authority’s refusal to condemn Tuesday’s terrorist attack in Har Adar.

According to the Prime Minister’s Office, Netanyahu said at the meeting that the actions of the Palestinian leadership are violations of previous agreements with Israel and severely damages the chances of achieving peace.

Netanyahu directed Dermer to see whether the Palestinian moves at the ICC are a violation of US law, which could conceivably lead to a closure of the PLO offices in Washington.

The Interpol vote came just a week after Netanyahu told the UN General Assembly how Israel’s stature on the world stage was steadily improving.

The move passed in a secret ballot by a vote of 75 to 24, with 34 abstentions. The Palestinians needed more than two-thirds of the yes-or-no votes counted, and passed that threshold handily.

After the UN, Interpol – with 190 member states – is the largest international organization in the world. The Solomon Islands also gained membership on Wednesday. A Palestinian bid to join the organization fell short last year.

Secret ballots in international organizations generally work against Israel, as it prevents Jerusalem from being able hold countries that vote against it accountable. Following the anti-settlement UN Security Council resolution in December, which was a public vote, Israel took punitive measures against a number of states – such as Senegal, New Zealand, Angola and Ukraine – that voted against it.

The Palestinian initiative to join Interpol is part of an overall strategy to join as a state as many organizations as possible. They withdrew their bid earlier this month to join the UN’s World Tourism Organization following intense US pressure.

The US, however, has a degree of leverage on international organizations under the UN umbrella – such as the WTO – that it doesn’t have with international organizations that are independent of the UN. According to US law, Washington must cut funding to UN organizations that accept Palestine as a state. That law does not extend, however, to international groups outside the UN system.

Greenblatt, who arrived in the country on Monday, tried to get the Palestinians to back away from this bid as well, to no avail. It was not immediately clear whether the US did not push as hard this time as it did concerning the WTO, or whether the Palestinians simply decided to buck the American pressure.

Israel is adamantly opposed to Palestinian admission to all international organizations, arguing that a state of Palestine does not exist and, therefore, it cannot be accepted as a state in international organizations.

The Palestinian admission to Interpol follows by two years its last success in joining a major international institution, when it gained membership into the International Criminal Court.

In 2011, the Palestinians won full state membership into [UNESCO](http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Five-reasons-the-UNESCO-Hebron-decision-matters-to-Israel-and-the-world-499084). The UNESCO precedent is troubling for Jerusalem, since that organization has annually passed anti-Israel resolutions since the Palestinians have joined, including declaring the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron a Palestinian World Heritage Site, and removing any Jewish connection to the Temple Mount.

Likewise, the concern is that the Palestinians will use Interpol as a platform to continuously needle Israel, perhaps by asking the organization to issue arrest warrants against Israeli citizens. Though such requests in no way bind the organization, and even though Interpol does not have enforcement capabilities in any event, this could be a significant nuisance causing Israel headaches.

Wednesday’s developments in Beijing began poorly for Israel, when the plenum rejected a move to postpone consideration of the Palestinian application for another year. The Palestinians mustered the support of 61% of the nations to defeat that measure.

Israel – and some of its supporters in the UN General Assembly – then tried to block the vote through a procedural maneuver, claiming there were irregularities on an earlier vote regarding the criteria needed to accept new members into the organization. That, too, failed.

While the Foreign Ministry did not issue an immediate response, opposition politicians quickly reacted.

Former foreign minister Tzipi Livni (Zionist Union) said the move was “bad for Israel and bad for the war on terrorism.” She placed the onus of responsibility on the government for not leading a diplomatic process with the Palestinians.

“When Israel abandons the diplomatic field, the Palestinians take it and unfortunately have successes, from their standpoint, that harm Israel,” she said.

Former prime minister Ehud Barak tweeted that the decision is “another failure for Netanyahu.” In reference to the prime minister’s speech last week at the UN, Barak said the decision shows that the “gap between impressive but hollow speeches and reality is growing larger.”