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Congress considers limiting UN aid if statehood granted

By HILARY LEILA KRIEGER, JPOST CORRESPONDENT, 7 June 2011

If int'l body recognizes a Palestinian state in September, the US should cancel funding of the UNGA, resolution by top congressman proposes.

WASHINGTON - A top congressman has drafted a resolution that calls on the US to withhold contributions to the UN if the international body recognizes a Palestinian state.

The measure declares that the US secretary of state should cancel American funding for the UN General Assembly if the GA "adopts a resolution in favor of recognizing a state of Palestine outside of or prior to a final status agreement negotiated between, and acceptable to, the State of Israel and the Palestinians."

Rep. Steve Chabot (R-Ohio), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Middle East subcommittee, introduced the nonbinding measure on Friday and so far has no co-sponsors.

But other members are discussing whether Congress should use its control of the government's purse strings to take a more concrete stand against any UN recognition of Palestinian statehood.

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Florida), chairwoman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, has publicly voiced support for leveraging UN funds to further US policy interests, including preventing a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood.

At a hearing in March on reforming the UN, she cited the threat during the George H. W. Bush administration to cut off funding to the any UN entity that recognized a Palestinian state after PLO chairman Yasser Arafat made such a declaration in 1988.

"The PLO's effort was stopped in its tracks. While Arafat is gone, his successors are up to the same tricks today. The US response must be just as strong," she said.

“I think there would be broad support for something limiting funding [to the UN] based on what happens at the UN,” said one aide to a representative on the House Appropriations Committee of the possibility of Ros-Lehtinen or others bringing forth such a measure.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has said that he will seek the backing of the UN, most likely in the General Assembly, for a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood when it begins its next session in September.

The US has indicated it opposes the move, but some pro-Israel figures are calling for a more emphatic repudiation of the idea in the hopes that it will dissuade the Palestinians from going to the UN.

Members of Congress have warned Abbas that PA aid is at risk of being reduced should the Palestinians pursue a declaration of statehood this September.

The chairwoman of the US House appropriation subcommittee for foreign operations, Rep. Kay Granger (RTexas), and the subcommittee’s ranking member, Nita Lowey (D-New York), wrote Abbas about their “serious concerns” on that score in April.

Former US ambassador to the UN John Bolton argued in *The Wall Street Journal*, however, that a further threat to reduce aid to the UN itself would be most effective.

“Congress should legislate broadly that any UN action that purports to acknowledge or authorize Palestinian statehood will result in a cutoff of all US contributions to the offending agency,” wrote Bolton, who served in the George W. Bush administration. He suggested that the reductions could be tailored so that agencies such as the World Health Organization or the International Atomic Energy Agency are unaffected.

“Our current federal budget deficits provide another attractive reason to reduce UN contributions.

If political realities make it impossible to cut off funding completely, perhaps a partial reduction, say 50 percent, might be a suitable compromise,” he said.

Pointing to the George H.W. Bush administration’s precedent, he concluded that “although defeating the PLO campaign required further maneuvering, Mr. Baker’s statement was the death knell of the ‘statehood’ push (in 1988).”