

The Resumption of the Palestinian UN Campaign?

A Q&A with Grant Rumley

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Palestinians see the delay in prisoners release by Israel as a negation of their commitments to halt the international campaign; Abbas is looking to increase his leverage, but the US should be able to pull the Palestinians back to the table



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1. Why did Abbas decide on April 1st to resume the Palestinian UN campaign?

Last week, high-ranking Palestinian Authority officials submitted the paperwork to Mahmoud Abbas on 15 new international organizations to join, and last night on live television, he signed them. This list of 15, which is mostly conventions and international agreements, has been whittled down from the total list, which some officials have said exceeds 60 organizations.

This whole situation has shades of 2008 all over it. When talks between Ehud Olmert and Abbas began to falter in 2008, both sides started playing the blame game; yet here, instead of laying the blame the Palestinians reverted to their '[Plan B](#)' -- international organizations. Abbas knew he would be in a political bind come the end of April, and decided to pre-empt that pressure with an opening foray into the UN.

2. What is the general profile of the 15 agencies that the Palestinians asked to join? How significant are they?

The PLO's Negotiation Affairs Department has released on the morning of April 2nd [the full 15 organization list](#), and they are mostly conventions/minor agreements.

Rights of the child, women's rights, Vienna convention on treaties, 4th Geneva convention, etc. They all look primed to pressure Israel on the settlement construction front, but they are certainly not 'silver bullets' for the peace process, like the ICC. With some well-placed diplomatic pressure, I should expect Kerry and the US to be able to pull the Palestinians back to the table.

3. What are the Palestinian reactions, including that of Hamas, to this move? How do they see the contradiction with their previous commitment to Kerry to freeze the international campaign until later this month?

The latest [polls](#) among Palestinians in the West Bank had the international campaign polling in the vicinity of 86% popularity. In Gaza, Hamas leaders praised Abbas' speech and move to sign on to 15 international organizations, much like they praised his UN campaign in 2011 and 2012. It is one of the rare political movements that garners a majority support among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. In terms of a possible contradiction, Palestinian officials pointed to the delay in the fourth Israeli release of Palestinian prisoners as a negation of their commitments to halt the international campaign. When Israel delayed the release, Abbas was put into a bind.

It is important to remember that the Palestinian leadership has consistently stressed that they do not view pursuing international organizations counter to negotiations, but rather as complementary. They agreed to halt this campaign in lieu of negotiations, but when Israel refused to release the 4th batch of prisoners it was viewed in Ramallah as a negation of this agreement, and the international campaign was back on the table.

4. Is this a reversible move to improve conditions for extending negotiations or do the Palestinians intend to genuinely walk-away from the negotiation table?

Abbas has made his name in negotiations. He is the one leader who was talking with the Israelis back in the 70s. He is not going to shut down the bilateral track. But, he is also president well into his tenure, and a president who is very concerned with his legacy. He does not want to sacrifice Palestinian negotiating stances for nothing. I think this move was calculated to show that he is not bluffing, but that he is not against resuming talks. These organizations are mostly innocuous, and if anything they can be used to challenge Israel's policies in the West Bank, like settlements, which are already outside the scope of international law. At this point, Abbas is looking to increase his leverage.

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