

Middle East Notes

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

November 29, 2012



[Read previous weeks' Middle East Notes here.](#)

Please note: Opinions expressed in the following articles do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

This week's Middle East Notes focus on the violence in Gaza past and present, the viability of the two state solution, the role of Hamas, the upcoming UN resolution raising their status of Palestine at the United Nations from an observer to a nonmember observer state, a reflection on the now ended silence of many Christian groups, and other issues.

- Drama in New York: Churches for Middle East Peace executive director Warren Clark writes about the UN vote on Palestinian representation
- Kairos Palestine provides a statement from Palestinian Christian and church leaders noting that the current situation in the Gaza Strip is the result of the impasse in the political process and the absence of peace.
- HCEF News provides statements from church leaders of Palestine concerning the UN recognition of Palestine, continuing violence especially in Gaza and other issues of justice and peace.
- British Foreign Minister William Hague warns that it is the "final chance" for a two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- Mark Braverman, program director of Kairos USA, distinctly disagrees with Tom Friedman's article in the New York Times, "My president is busy," and clearly states his reasons for doing so.
- Barak Ravid states in Ha'aretz that Israel's goal was to lull Hamas and other terror organizations in Gaza into a false sense of security, in the hope that they would lower their level of preparedness.
- Rabbi Michael Lerner in Tikkun enumerates clear steps to ending the struggle between Israel and Palestine being fought out at the expense of some Israeli and more Palestinian civilian lives
- James Wall explains the name of the latest Israeli offensive against the people of Gaza and gives a timeline of events leading up to the assassination of Hamas leader Ahmed Al-Jaabara in Gaza City.
- Phyllis Bennis writes in the Nation that like its predecessor four years ago, Israel's most recent assault on Gaza began shortly after the U.S. elections and before the inauguration of President Obama. This time, as then, the attack began shortly before scheduled Israeli elections.
- Amy Goodman writes in Nation of Change that the latest Israeli military assault on the people of Gaza is not an isolated event, but part of a 45-year occupation of the sliver of land wedged between Israel and the Mediterranean Sea, where 1.6 million people live under a brutal Israeli blockade that denies them most of the basic necessities of life.
- Elior Levy notes in Ynet News that Hamas Politburo Chief Khaled Mashaal said his Islamist movement Hamas is willing to accept a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders or 22 percent of "historical Palestine" conditioning such a deal on an end of the occupation and the dismantling of the security wall.
- Marc Ellis in Mondoweiss writes that the letter from church groups on military aid to Israel has broken the interfaith ecumenical deal.
- Barak Ravid of Ha'aretz notes that Clinton has warned Netanyahu not to punish Palestinian Authority for UN bid. The U.S. message to Israel was not to take any irreversible actions and to act wisely the day after the UN vote; Clinton emphasized that steps such as annulling the Oslo Accords could bring about dangerous consequences.

1) Drama in New York

Warren Clark, Churches for Middle East Peace

November 27, 2012

A drama is unfolding this week in New York over plans for a resolution in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) this Thursday, November 29, that would recognize Palestine as a non-UN member state. That is the anniversary of the UNGA vote on resolution 181 in 1948 for partition and creation of a Jewish state and an Arab state in Palestine. It was declared an "International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People" by the UN in 1977.

UN recognition of Palestine as a state could have far-reaching political and legal implications. Even without being a UN member, for example, it might give Palestine the legal standing to bring cases against Israel in the International Criminal Court.

The U.S. and Israel have firmly opposed recognition of Palestine as a state by the UNGA, saying Palestine's status can only be determined as the result of direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israel. The U.S. has sought to dissuade the Palestinian Authority (PA) from proceeding with recognition now, saying that the U.S. needs more time to work something out. What that "something" might be and how long it would take was not made clear.

Recently PA President Mahmoud Abbas called President Obama to say that he plans to go ahead with the UN vote on November 29, notwithstanding U.S. objections.

The reasons for the defiance by Abbas are not hard to find. Since leading the PA in 2005 he has sought self-determination for the Palestinian people, but despite years of close PA security cooperation with Israel and the U.S., he faces a Palestinian public disappointed by his inability to stop settlement growth and make progress towards ending the Israeli occupation. ... In the past Abbas paid a high political price for bowing to U.S. wishes, for example by withdrawing a resolution from the UN Human Rights Commission at U.S. request that raised questions about Israel's conduct in the Gaza war of 2008-09.

According to press reports the U.S. informed Israel that it was not successful in getting Abbas to back down and that it sees no way to block a vote in the UNGA. Prime Minister Netanyahu then changed his stance, sending his chief negotiator to the U.S. this week to discuss the wording of a resolution in an effort to limit the damage. Israel is thought to be seeking assurances that Palestinians will not ask to be a member of the International Criminal Court; that recognition grants no Palestinian sovereignty over the West Bank, the Gaza Strip or East Jerusalem; and that Palestinians will commit to enter into direct negotiations without preconditions.

Indeed President Abbas has said that once Palestine is recognized, he would be willing to enter into direct negotiation with Israel, as he will be able to do so on a state-to-state basis. This pre-positioning is important to both sides. As a recognized non-UN member state the PA may believe it will be in a stronger position to negotiate on the basis on the 1967 lines with agreed territorial swaps as suggested by President Obama. This also was the negotiating position of the last Israeli government under Ehud Olmert in 2008, but it was rejected by Prime Minister Netanyahu in his meeting with President Obama in May 2011.

The prime minister reportedly has also prepared some sticks in case the UNGA resolution goes forward. These include a freeze on tax revenues that Israel collects for the PA; the announcement of hundreds of new housing units in West Bank settlements; and approval of sections of the Levy report that recommended legalizing and easing restrictions on construction of outposts in the West Bank.

[Read the entire piece on CMEP's website.](#)

2) Kairos Palestine: Statement by Christian and church leaders on the situation in Gaza

November 19, 2012

In the spirit that infuses this land with sanctity and holiness and in keeping with our faith and its teachings, we appeal to all peace loving people across the world to work with their governments and fellow citizens to stop the destruction and the carnage that is going on in Gaza.

The current distressing situation in the Gaza Strip is the result of the impasse in the political process and the absence of peace. We strongly believe that the cause of all this is the continuing Israeli occupation and the blockade and restrictions imposed by the Israel authorities on the Gaza Strip and its 1.6 population.

The Israeli policy of target killings, which started the current episode of fighting, is morally wrong. It also provokes strong emotions that fuel determination for revenge and furthering the endless cycle of confrontation. The scenes of innocent Palestinian children killed by bombings of family homes that are spread on the internet further promote uncontrollable emotions that are directed not simply against those responsible in Israel but also against Western and other powers and governments that support Israel in its actions in the Gaza Strip. This further increases the polarization across religious and national lines and promises spiraling violence that is the loss for each and every one of us all created in God's image.

We firmly believe that the military option can be stopped if there is a genuine and serious effort not simply at a temporary truce but at a just and lasting solution that would respond to our people's aspirations for a Palestinian state living in peace and good neighborliness in this region.

Israel as the occupying power with its overwhelming armaments and military might should take on the responsibility to see to it that negotiations with the Palestinians are started immediately without its creating the conditions on the ground, through expanding the illegal settlements and other measures that spell annexation of more territory in the West Bank and the strangling of Palestinian East Jerusalem, that would make such negotiations inconclusive, even before they start.

The intensive efforts of the government of Israel to derail the legitimate demand of the Palestinians to become a Non-Member State in the UN General Assembly also point to short-sightedness. We need to remind all that when Israel was admitted as a Nation-State in the UN back in 1948 there was no request of it to get the approval of Arab States through negotiations: the UN just decided. It comes to our people that we are treated likewise.

We pray for the memory of all those killed and we remember in particular the innocent children killed or injured. We hope for quick recovery for those injured and solace and comfort for those families whose homes were leveled and damaged. We remember especially the Dalou family in Gaza that was completely annihilated with 11 of its members killed, including five of its children, due to a "mistake in identification of the right home" according to the Israeli army. We continue with our prayers that peace will come to Gaza and that some wisdom will prevail and that war will stop. Please join us, through writing letters and addressing your own governments and public figures and other means you deem appropriate to raise awareness of the ugliness of this war, to help stop this madness that is further and further dimming all hope for peace, justice and eventual reconciliation.

National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine NCCOP and other signatories including:

His Beatitude Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah

His Grace Bishop Atallah Hanna

Her Excellency Ex- Minister Khoulould Deibes

Her Excellency Ambassador and ex-Minister Hind Houry

His Excellency Ambassador Afif Safieh

3) Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF) News

November 29, 2012

- [UN recognition of Palestine, a peace factor](#): Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah: In front of the massacres in Gaza, the UN recognizes the Palestinian State as a permanent observer. “Behind the missiles fired from Gaza and triggered retaliation from time to time by Israel, the underlying issue always resurfaces. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is the problem that must be addressed and resolved, if one wants both peace in Gaza and for Israel to live in peace and security.”
- [Patriarch Fouad Twal: “We live in an uncertain future”](#): After a weekend of tension and violence, His Beatitude Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, talks about the recent events in the Middle East and the implications for the Holy Land.
- [Jerusalem bishop laments new Israeli-Palestinian violence](#): Amid renewed military action between Israel and the Gaza Strip, a bishop from the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem is lamenting the “vicious circle of violence.” Bishop William Shomali, Vicar of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, told Vatican Radio Nov. 15 that it is presently hard to know who started the violence “because everyone condemns the other.”
- [Christian development and peace groups call on Europe to act urgently against new escalation of Gaza violence](#): Three international Christian development and peace groups call on the EU and its Member States to use their influence for a ceasefire in Gaza and Southern Israel, where escalating violence is once again putting civilians at risk.
- [Christians support UN Status for PLO](#): Two years after peace talks between Israel and Palestine broke down, Arab Christians are pushing for UN recognition of the PLO. One hundred Christian leaders in the Holy Land issued an open letter Nov. 14 asking western governments to support the Palestinian people in their struggle for independence and freedom.

4) UK to U.S.: Take more active role on Mideast peace

Reuters, November 25, 2012

British Foreign Secretary William Hague on Sunday urged the U.S. to take a more active role in seeking a lasting settlement between Israelis and Palestinians, warning of a “final chance” for a two-state solution.

Eight days of fighting between Israel and Palestinians in the Hamas-ruled enclave of Gaza diverted U.S. President Barack Obama’s attention to the Middle East as he toured Asia on his first trip abroad after this month’s election.

Hague told the BBC it was “time for a huge effort on the Middle East peace process.”

“This is what I have been calling for, particularly calling for the United States now after their election to show the necessary leadership on this over the coming months, because they have crucial leverage with Israel and no other country has,” Hague said. ...

Recent U.S. efforts to coax the Palestinians and Israelis back into negotiations to agree on a long-term peace have failed, and talks are set to become even more fraught if the Palestinians succeed in securing recognition as an “observer state.”

A vote on the diplomatic upgrade could take place later this month at the UN General Assembly, and if successful would implicitly recognize Palestinian statehood. Israel and the United States oppose the move and call for a return to talks.

[Read the entire piece here on Ha’aretz’s website.](#)

5) It's time to get our president busy **Mark Braverman, Kairos USA, November 2012**

In his New York Times column of Nov 11, "My president is busy," Tom Friedman tells Israelis not to count on the U.S. government to rescue them from their own leaders' catastrophic policies. ...

Even though his column was written before the horror of Israel's latest carnage perpetrated on Gaza, an action sanctioned and made possible by our government, the smugness and hypocrisy of Friedman's statement took my breath away. Friedman ignores the fact it is our policies that have saddled the Israelis with this rogue government. America's massive financial and unconditional diplomatic support of Israel has allowed the most right wing and pernicious elements in Israeli society to take control of the state.

But Friedman would have us abdicate our responsibility. Instead, he blames the Israeli public, themselves victims of successive Israeli leaders who have taught them only hate and fear. "You are home alone," intones Friedman, abandoning the Israelis to the fate to which we have effectively consigned them. And, not neglecting the Palestinians, Friedman faults them for failing to accomplish the "radical change"—what this is to be is not at all clear that will help them out of the situation and will be the condition for earning our help, "to get us to fully re-engage."

Tom, you've got it backwards. The problem is not that we are not engaged, the problem is that we are very engaged, and it is the nature of that engagement that must change. ...

[Read the entire piece on Kairos USA's website.](#)

6) [Ahead of Gaza offensive, Netanyahu's Israel did its best to lull Hamas to sleep](#) **Barak Ravid, Ha'aretz, November 15, 2012**

Israel's goal was to lull Hamas and other terror organizations in Gaza into a false sense of security, in the hope that they would lower their level of preparedness.

The decision to launch Operation Pillar of Defense was reached Tuesday morning by an inner ministerial group, known as the "forum of nine." The political-security cabinet did not convene prior to the operation; it convened a few hours after its inception, in order to authorize retroactively the operation's goals.

The operation launched on Wednesday afternoon, following a disinformation maneuver that involved not only the IDF and security officials, but also senior cabinet ministers. The goal was to lull Hamas and other terror organizations in Gaza into a false sense of security, in the hope that they would lower their level of preparedness for an Israeli attack and return to their normal routines in a fashion which would help the IDF identify the head of Hamas' military wing Ahmed Jabari, and assassinate him.

On Monday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu conducted a briefing for overseas ambassadors in Ashkelon, in order to emphasize that Israel would take action to stop the rocket fire from Gaza. Yet the briefing created the impression among the diplomats that Israel would not undertake a military operation in the immediate future. On Tuesday, Netanyahu visited Be'er Sheva, and met there with regional council heads from the south; this meeting also led the local politicians to believe that Israel would not launch an operation in Gaza in the near future. Also that day, Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak clarified that Israel would choose "the right time" for a response to the missile and rocket attacks from Gaza. ...

[Read the entire article on Ha'aretz's website.](#)

7) Israel and Gaza: Enough is enough

Rabbi Michael Lerner, Tikkun, November 2012

All the usual suspects are cheering on their respective sides in the latest struggle between Israel and Palestine being fought out at the expense of some Israeli and more Palestinian civilian lives. I've been overwhelmed with sadness at the tragic loss of lives and harm to the bodies of Israelis and Palestinians, and outraged at all those who continue to justify their side and demean the other, implicitly cheering on the violence even as they officially deplore it! Enough is enough. Stop the violence immediately!

First step: the international community, led by the U.S., should impose an immediate cease-fire on all sides of the struggle, and should introduce an international peace force to restrain and if necessary arrest anyone involved in any side of this struggle who is acting to continue the violence. That force should be equally charged with arresting any military figures on the Israeli side or guerrilla forces on the Palestinian side that are attempting to engage in hostilities. Second step: hold an international conference to create a politically and economically viable Palestinian state living in peace with Israel ... Third step: begin a truth and reconciliation process to coincide with implementing the creation of a politically and economically viable Palestinian state.

So how do we get there, given the apparent willingness of everyone from Obama to the most liberal Dems in the Congress to want to be seen as giving Israel carte blanche to do what it will to punish Hamas, and even the normally predictable peace voices are keeping a very low profile? ...

[Read the entire piece on Tikkun's website.](#)

8) Israel looks to Exodus in Gaza invasion

James M. Wall, November 16, 2012

The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) selected two names for Israel's current military assault against an imprisoned Gaza population. This is a military that thinks seriously about naming its military assaults.

The first name given the second Gaza invasion in four years is "Pillar of Cloud" (Amud Anan in Hebrew). It was intended for use in Israeli media and was for Hebrew-speakers. The second name, "Pillar of Defense," was designed for the rest of us, those who are, presumably, less biblically informed.

The Tablet magazine, a U.S.-based, openly Jewish, Israeli-friendly, publication, explains that "Pillar of Cloud" comes from "a direct biblical allusion to the divine cloud which guided the Israelites through the desert and shielded them from those who might do them harm."

Exodus 14:19-20 is the biblical source: "Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel."

From its pro-Israel perspective, the Tablet justified the use of the two terms with this rather supercilious explanation: "For a campaign intended to halt the barrage of rockets currently raining down on southern Israel, 'Pillar of Cloud' is thus a particularly apt title. Just as the cloud protected the Israelites from Egyptian projectiles, so too does the IDF hope to protect Israel's citizens. However, a literal translation of a 'Pillar of Cloud' fails to convey the meaning of the biblical allusion to a lay audience. As such, the IDF chose 'Pillar of Defense' as the campaign's English designation, a conceptual translation which makes clear the intended meaning of the Hebrew." ...

[Read the entire piece on James Wall's website.](#)

9) Israel's war on Gaza

Phyllis Bennis, The Nation, November 20, 2012

Like its predecessor four years ago, Israel's most recent assault on Gaza began shortly after the U.S. elections, and before the inauguration of President Obama. This time, as then, the attack began shortly before scheduled Israeli elections.

In this new crisis, as then, the U.S. role is primary. Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak had it right four days after this escalation began. "This effort could not have been concluded without the generous and consistent support of the American administration led by President Obama," he said. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu certainly calculated that a new Israeli war would compel Obama to publicly reassert Washington's uncritical backing of every Israeli move, regardless of post-Arab Spring changes in the region, and regardless of Tel Aviv's violations of international humanitarian law, UN resolutions, the Geneva Conventions or anything else. Even so, it's unlikely that Netanyahu believes that pushing Washington to defend Israel's so-called "right to self-defense" will somehow recalibrate his tense relationship with the U.S. president. That tension will no doubt rise if the Israeli leader orders a ground invasion of Gaza.

As before, the Israeli military is using U.S.-made and U.S. taxpayer-funded F-16s and Apache helicopters; as before, the United States is directly complicit in Israel's actions. And this time Israel can argue that it's merely channeling Washington's latest mode of warfighting. In the past the U.S., however hypocritically, often criticized Israel's "targeted assassinations." But Obama's drone warfare, which has killed thousands in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and perhaps beyond, has made disapproval of Israel's assassination policy impossible. It would take a level of chutzpah beyond even Susan Rice's to condemn Israeli assassinations when the tactic has become such a hallmark of Obama's wars. ...

[Read the entire piece on the Nation's website.](#)

10) In Gaza, it's the Occupation, stupid

Amy Goodman, Nation of Change, November 2012

"The Palestinian people want to be free of the occupation," award-winning Israeli journalist Gideon Levy summed up this week. It is that simple. This latest Israeli military assault on the people of Gaza is not an isolated event, but part of a 45-year occupation of the sliver of land wedged between Israel and the Mediterranean Sea, where 1.6 million people live under a brutal Israeli blockade that denies them most of the basic necessities of life. Without the unwavering bipartisan support of the United States for the Israeli military, the occupation of Palestine could not exist.

At the time of this writing, the overall Palestinian death toll of the seven-day assault ... is more than 116, more than half of them civilians, including 27 children and 11 women. Hamas has fired hundreds of rockets from Gaza into Israel, which, to date, have killed three Israeli civilians.

President Barack Obama said on Sunday, "There is no country on earth that would tolerate missiles raining down on its citizens from outside its borders. So, we are fully supportive of Israel's right to defend itself from missiles landing on people's homes and workplaces and potentially killing civilians."

"No one questions that right," responds Richard Falk, the United Nations special rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories, professor emeritus of international law at Princeton University and the author of more than 50 books on war, human rights and international law. "The question is: When and how is it appropriate?"

[Read this article in its entirety at Nation of Change.](#)

11) Mashaal: Prepared for peace without blood, weapons
Elior Levy, Ynet News, November 2012

Hamas Politburo Chief Khaled Mashaal said his Islamist movement Hamas is willing to accept a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders or 22 percent of “historical Palestine.”

According to Mashaal, this has been Hamas’ mission and what it has been fighting for since its inception. In an interview aired this weekend on CNN, Mashaal said: “I accept a Palestinian state according to the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as the capital, with the right to return.”

Mashaal also addressed the issue of recognizing Israel, saying, “I want my state. After this state is established, it (can decide) its position toward Israel. Don’t ask me when I’m in prison under Israeli pressure. You cannot ask me, as a victim, what is my stand toward Israel.”

Mashaal blamed the Fatah movement and Yasser Arafat for neglecting the Palestinian issue since Arafat declared independence in Algeria in 1988.

“I am the leader of Hamas. I tell you and the whole world, we are ready to resort to a peaceful way, without blood and weapons,” Mashaal said, “as long as we attain our Palestinian demands. A Palestinian state and the ending of the occupation and the (West Bank security) wall.” ...

[Read the entire piece on the Ynet News website.](#)

12) [The interfaith ecumenical deal is dead](#)
Marc Ellis, Mondoweiss, November 12, 2012

With the election over and the fiscal cliff looming it’s easy to lose sight of a politics beneath the radar, one that keeps moving on the ground. Game-changers don’t always make the loudest noise. Sometimes they’re incremental. They arrive when you least expect them. It seems late in the Israel/Palestine political game – and it is late indeed – but the mainstream churches are breaking what I have called the interfaith ecumenical deal.

That deal is usually referred to as the interfaith ecumenical dialogue, the post-Holocaust place where Jews and Christians have mended their relationship. Israel was huge in this dialogue. Christians supported Israel as repentance for anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Then as Israel became more controversial with their abuse of Palestinians, Christians remained silent. Non-support and, worse, criticism of Israeli policies, was seen by the Jewish dialoguers as backtracking to anti-Semitism. That’s where the dialogue became a deal: Silence on the Christian side brings no criticism of anti-Semitism from the Jewish side.

Of course, the interfaith ecumenical deal was also part of a larger political deal on the American political scene. Any criticism of Israel from political figures was their death knell. The accusation of anti-Semitism was the bullet.

Can the political pro-Israel deal survive if its component parts wither? Certainly, the Jewish establishment has given up on parts of its most natural component parts. I’m thinking here of broad swaths of the Jewish community. Jews of conscience have left the Israel fold. Many mainstream Jews are either silent or apathetic toward Israel today. ...

[Read the entire piece on Mondoweiss’s website.](#)

13) Clinton warns Netanyahu not to punish Palestinian Authority for UN bid

Barak Ravid, Ha'aretz, November 23, 2012

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during her talks in Israel this week not to take any extreme actions in response to the Palestinian move in the United Nations for recognition as a non-member state. Clinton said such steps against the Palestinian Authority could bring about its collapse. The Palestinians are planning to ask the United Nations General Assembly to vote on upgrading its status from non-member entity on the symbolic date of November 29.

The day after the cease-fire with Hamas took effect, Israel is preparing for the next crisis with the Palestinians, which is scheduled for six days from now. November 29th is the anniversary of the United Nations vote on accepting the Partition Plan in 1947, which led to the founding of the Jewish State. It is also the United Nations' International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The Palestinians are expected to have the support of at least 150 of the 193 UN members for their bid. Israel is particularly worried about the upgraded status, since it would allow the Palestinians to also ask for membership in the International Criminal Court in The Hague, and then bring cases against Israel, such as for construction in the settlements. In an attempt to deter Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Israel threatened to respond with various punishments against the PA.

Clinton met with Netanyahu Tuesday night in Jerusalem. Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman also were present. The focus of the meeting was on the attempts to achieve a cease-fire in Gaza, but the issue of the Palestinian UN proposal was also discussed.

On Wednesday morning Clinton visited Ramallah and met with Abbas. Clinton asked him to reconsider the UN bid, or at least postpone it until after the Israeli elections. But Abbas sounded determined not to put off the UN vote, both in his meeting with Clinton and in a meeting with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon a short time later. Abbas told Clinton "the train has already left the station." Abbas told Ban that if Israel punishes the Palestinians the day after the UN vote, "I will invite Netanyahu to the Muqata in Ramallah and I will give him the keys and go home," said a Western diplomat.

Clinton returned to Jerusalem from Ramallah and met again with Netanyahu, Barak and Lieberman. The Palestinian UN bid also came up at this meeting. Clinton told Netanyahu he should examine how to strengthen Abbas now, especially after the operation in Gaza, which brought about the strengthening of Hamas among the Palestinian public.

Two senior Israeli officials and an American official, who asked to remain anonymous due to the sensitivity of the subject, said the American message to Israel was not to take any irreversible actions and to act wisely the day after the UN vote.

The Obama administration thinks it is necessary to try and minimize the potential damage of the Palestinian move in the UN, said the U.S. official. Extreme acts by Israel the day after will not help, they will only make the situation worse, he added.

Clinton told Netanyahu that such punitive steps against the PA would only weaken it, which would not serve Israeli interests, said a senior Israeli official. Clinton emphasized that steps such as annulling the Oslo Accords or freezing Palestinian tax funds could bring about dangerous consequences, including the collapse of the PA, said the official.