

Israel Threatens Palestinian Authority: Defer UN Vote on Goldstone or Face ‘Second Gaza’

Diskin to Abbas

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The request by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to the United Nations Human Rights Council last year to postpone the vote on the Goldstone report followed a particularly tense meeting with the head of the Shin Bet security service, Haaretz has learned. At the October meeting in Ramallah, Shin Bet chief Yuval Diskin told Abbas that if he did not ask for a deferral of the vote on the critical report on last year’s military operation, Israel would turn the West Bank into a “second Gaza.”

Diskin, who reports directly to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, threatened to revoke the easing of restrictions on movement within the West Bank that had been implemented earlier last year. He also said Israel would withdraw permission for mobile phone company Wataniya to operate in the Palestinian Authority. That would have cost the PA tens of millions of dollars in compensation payments to the company.

A PA official close to Abbas told Haaretz that Diskin came to the Muqata compound in Ramallah in October with a foreign diplomatic delegation, and that a senior Israel Defense Forces officer made similar threats to other PA leaders at around the same time.

The Shin Bet said in response that it does not comment on Diskin’s schedule or meetings.

Abbas told a Palestinian commission of inquiry investigating the vote’s deferral that he accepted responsibility for the decision, and denied that his choice was a result of outside pressure.

Commission chairman and PA legislator Azmi Shuaibi told Al-Watan TV at the time that in a three-hour session Abbas admitted to the panel that he had made a mistake in asking the UN body to defer the vote and said he was sorry that the affair had been exploited for political ends.

Thirty-three of the UN council’s 47 members supported the PA’s initial endorsement of the Goldstone report. The matter was slated to be transferred from the UN General Assembly to the Security Council, when to the surprise of diplomats on all sides the PA delegation agreed at the last moment to defer the vote until March 2010.

The Goldstone commission recommended that Israel be given until March to complete an independent inquiry into its conduct during the offensive and to try any figures suspected of war crimes. Failure by either Israel or Hamas to conduct an open inquiry into their conduct would result in the case being referred to the International Criminal Court.

The United States is now seeking to persuade Israel to conduct such an investigation, and to release its findings on a number of incidents in which civilians were killed during the fighting.

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