

Palestinians Will Submit UN Membership Letter

September 20, 2011

The  **Moscow Times**

UNITED NATIONS — Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas pressed ahead on Tuesday with his diplomatic campaign to gain full UN membership, brushing aside heated Israeli objections and a promised U.S. veto as the issue of Palestinian statehood takes center stage with world leaders gathering for the UN General Assembly.

Abbas had meetings scheduled Tuesday with French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Lebanese President Michel Suleiman, among leaders, as he sought to line up support ahead of his speech Friday to the General Assembly when the Palestinians vow to submit a letter formally requesting UN membership.

Envoys of the Quartet of Mideast mediators — the United States, the UN, the European Union and Russia — planned to meet again Tuesday in an effort to avert a divisive showdown over Palestinian statehood by crafting a way forward that would be enough to persuade the Palestinians to drop their bid and have enough caveats for Israel to get its support.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon "reiterated his support for the two-state solution

and stressed his desire to ensure that the international community and the two parties can find a way forward for resuming negotiations within a legitimate and balanced framework," UN spokesman Martin Nesirky said after the secretary-general met with Abbas on Monday.

The comment underscored the desires of some members of the Quartet of Mideast mediators that Palestinian statehood should not be granted before a resumption of peace talks. While the four international mediators have repeatedly called for renewed negotiations, Russia supports UN membership for Palestine.

The long-stalled negotiations have been unable to solve key issues including Israeli settlement building in the West Bank and the status of east Jerusalem, which the Palestinians want as their capital.

"Abbas says to every one: It's enough, 20 years of negotiations are more than enough, the world should intervene and end the Israeli occupation as long as the U.S.A. can't," said Mohammed Ishtayeh, an Abbas aide.

A U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive diplomatic work, said progress was being made on a joint Quartet statement that would include a modest upgrade to Palestinian status at the UN, address Israel's demand that it be recognized as a Jewish state, and set a broad timeline for renewed negotiations.

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