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OTTAWA – Canada will dismiss any United Nations recognition of Palestinian statehood this fall as a meaningless public relations move, Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird said Monday.

The Palestinian Authority has been waging a long campaign to win over a majority of support in the UN General Assembly during a vote in September- a vote that could put considerable pressure on Israel and its staunchest allies such as Canada and the United States.

“We think it’s distinctly unhelpful to seek a public-relations declaration within the UN General Assembly,” Baird said during a conference call with reporters. “Obviously, it would be without any meaning.”

The foreign affairs minister said only a vote of the Security Council would finalize the matter, and that “statehood should be the product of a negotiated permanent peace with security for both the Palestinian and Israeli people.”

Baird said he would be thrilled to welcome a new Palestinian state, but only after peaceful negotiations with Israel.

A former Canadian ambassador to the United Nations suggested the Palestinians have been left with little choice.

“I’d like to know what Mr. Baird thinks the alternative for the Palestinians is. Their land has been occupied longer than Eastern Europe was occupied by the Soviet Union,” said Paul Heinbecker, the ex-career diplomat, who served as Canada’s UN ambassador and foreign policy adviser to ex-prime minister Brian Mulroney.

“The Palestinians are doing what you would expect them to do, which is round up as much international support for their position as they can. The idea that this is somehow interrupting a peace process or negotiation – there is no peace process, there is no negotiation.”

If the Palestinian gambit succeeds, it could force the U.S. into the uncomfortable position of wielding its veto at the Security Council to stop it on Israel’s behalf, said Fen Hampson, director of Carleton University’s Norman Paterson School of International Affairs.

“It’s certainly not meaningless, but it won’t be terribly helpful in the current context.”

Heinbecker said the fact that Israel is launched its own diplomatic counteroffensive against the Palestinian campaign shows it is not a “preposterous” idea.

“There must be something they’re afraid of in this process.”

Baird affirmed the Harper government’s unwavering support for the Jewish state, which has sparked criticism in the past.

“Canada has taken strong, principled stands with respect to supporting liberal democracies, and with respect to this issue,” he said.

“There has been certainly a change under the leadership of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, and I certainly wouldn’t see us changing on that regard.”

Heinbecker said he is surprised the current Conservative government is so unsympathetic of the plight of the Palestinians, citing the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

“The Israelis contrary to international law have built very large settlements, over the objections, more or less, of the entire international community, including the government of Canada” he said.

“There is such a thing as international law and the Israelis are in violation of it, in fact. A fair-minded government would factor those kinds of considerations into its policy.”

Baird’s remarks were part of another announcement signalling a tougher stand with the United Nations by the new majority Conservative government.

He also confirmed Canada is boycotting the UN Conference on Disarmament because North Korea has assumed the rotating chairmanship.

“It’s absurd, and it’s a blow to meaningful efforts at worldwide disarmament and, frankly, it’s a blow to the credibility of the UN,” said Baird.

“If countries like Canada who are supportive of multilateralism don’t speak up to these types of things we would allow a continued erosion in this regard,” he added. “We don’t want to see the UN take another hit like this in the future.”

Canada will rejoin the Geneva-based body later in August after North Korea’s rotating chairmanship has ended, and will table a plan to reform how the committee functions, said Baird.

Canada’s boycott will simply entail ignoring the work of the committee, he said.

The U.S. State Department said it was not making a big deal Monday about the matter. Spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said the U.S. can’t see any possible damage North Korea could inflict in the consensus-based organization of 65 countries.

The conference has been stalemated since it wrote the nuclear test ban treaty in 1996.

The U.S. has focused its disarmament efforts on the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany, Nuland said.

Heinbecker said he supports the government’s reasoning for boycotting the conference.

“If the government has the best interest of the UN at heart, it doesn’t bother me,” he said.

“I’m wondering what kind of agenda they’re bringing back to the table.”