

Britain is coming under growing American pressure to oppose a Palestinian bid for statehood at the United Nations next week amid claims that its silence on the subject is undermining prospects for peace in the Middle East.

With a major international confrontation looming as the UN General Assembly convenes in New York, Britain has found itself torn between its natural allegiance to the United States and the inclination of some of its European allies to recognise Palestinian advances towards creating a viable state.

Although the United States has threatened to wield its Security Council veto to prevent the Palestinians gaining full UN membership, Britain has yet to make an explicit declaration of its voting intentions.

Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority, is expected to seek Security Council endorsement of a bid for full Palestinian statehood within the United Nations after he addresses the General Assembly next week.

An attempt by Catherine Ashton, the EU foreign policy chief, to forge a common European response to the Palestinian application has collapsed, Israeli officials said yesterday, leaving individual European states to decide their own positions.

Germany and a number of its allies on the Continent have already signalled they will side with Israel in opposing the Palestinians. But France, like Britain a permanent member of the Security Council, is reportedly considering giving their support to the Palestinians in the belief that international recognition of their aspirations could prompt them to renew stalled negotiations with Israel.

Some in the Foreign Office are thought to share French views, while Jack Straw, the former Foreign Secretary, has also urged British support for the Palestinian bid. So far, the Prime Minister, who will also address the General Assembly this week, has held his counsel.

Several members of Congress, which is unquestioning in its support of Israel, have warned Mr. Cameron that his apparent willingness to make concessions to the Palestinians will not be looked on kindly in Washington.

"There are no circumstances where Britain should be voting 'yes' unless you want to give support to the continuation of terrorist activities," said Allen West, A Florida Republican.

"I strongly urge Britain to stand with the US and respect the emerging peace process," said Doug Lamborn, a Republican from Colorado. "Recognition may unravel the bilateral negotiations. Many of us in Congress want to send a strong message that this is a big mistake."

Palestinian leaders argue that they have been left with no alternative but to seek a fresh approach to the peace process in the virtual absence of negotiations in the past three years, something they blame on Israel's refusal to halt Jewish settlement construction on occupied Palestinian land.

Although the prevailing mood is one of pessimism, some in the International Community are hoping that the Palestinian bid could get bogged down in technical committees, postponing a crisis by several months.

For the moment, Palestinian officials say they will not seek to bypass the Security Council and seek a resolution from the General Assembly, which is much more sympathetic to the Palestinian cause but which only has the power to confer a more symbolic form of statehood.

But there is still concern that Israel and the United States could carry out their threats to punish the Palestinians for going ahead with their initiative.

Some officials in the right-wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, have threatened to withhold Palestinian customs revenues, which are collected by Israel. Congress has also warned that it could suspend aid to the Palestinian Authority.

Moderate voices within the Israeli establishment have warned that such sanctions could be highly counterproductive, causing a funding crisis that could trigger the collapse of the Palestinian Authority.

Such an eventuality could lead to the dissolution of the Palestinian security forces, who are considered to have played a vital role in keeping the peace in the West Bank.

"This money is also used to pay salaries of Palestinian security forces on the ground," said a senior Israeli official. "Without security, we will go back to (Yasser) Arafat's time and we will find ourselves without any hope."

Many Palestinian state employees, including some in the security forces, have already been on half-pay over the past two months after Arab donors delayed making payments to the PA.

If the Palestinian security forces were to collapse, a number of former militants in their ranks could resume their fight against Israel.

Some have told the Daily Telegraph that they would join protests against the Israeli occupation and even embark on armed resistance if Palestinian hopes for statehood were dashed or if the Palestinian Authority were to collapse.

To read the entire story, click [here](#).

By Jon Swaine, New York and Adrian Blomfield in Jerusalem

