A historic turning point for Israel and the ICC

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David Ben-Gurion is famous for referring to the UN with the dismissive Hebrew phrase “Oom shmoom,” meaning essentially that the UN does not matter and Israel cannot trust it.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been at least as dismissive of the UN as his illustrious predecessor and has refused to cooperate with it on almost any issue involving war crimes allegations.

But that may all be about to change.

If Netanyahu grants a request by the International Criminal Court prosecutor to send representatives to meet with Israel and the Palestinian Authority in the coming weeks – which The Jerusalem Post confirmed on Friday that he is considering – it could be a game-changer.

Israel has not cooperated with numerous UN and other international investigations of alleged war crimes in the past, refusing UN officials entry when they requested to come to collect evidence.

Neither officials from the UN Human Rights Council’s Goldstone Report on the 2008-9 Gaza war or from its McGowan-Davis Report on the 2014 Gaza war were permitted to enter the country.

Netanyahu also attacked the ICC prosecutor’s legitimacy in January 2015 when it recognized Palestine as a state for its purposes.

So allowing the ICC prosecutor’s representatives to visit would be nearly unprecedented (Israel has had some limited cooperation with UN secretary- general inquiries in the past).

The trip would likely be limited to public relations and for educating the Israeli public about the ICC and not to gather evidence regarding alleged war crimes connected to the 2014 Gaza war or the settlement enterprise.

But for Netanyahu to give the ICC any kind of public podium in Israel would be a major change, although there has been quiet cooperation between Israeli legal and ICC officials since July 2015 on limited jurisdictional issues.

The visit would put both the ICC prosecutor’s office and Israel in virtually uncharted waters, where both sides are trying to signal good-faith and compete for public opinion on a range of domestic and international issues.

But for the first time since the 2014 Gaza war, and in some ways the first time in decades, a major international body and Israel seem about to take cooperation on war crimes issues to a new level.