

Wellington, Sep 8 (AP) - A diplomatic row flared Monday between Israel and New Zealand after officials from the South Pacific nation said their new ambassador was rejected by Israel because he's also an envoy to the Palestinian Authority.

New Zealand officials said that since 2008, their ambassadors in Turkey have been responsible for covering a large swath of territory. But they said Israel has refused to accept their latest appointment to the post, Jonathan Curr, who was due to travel to Jerusalem in the coming days to present his papers.

"A few days ago, Israel advised New Zealand that it would not accept as ambassador a person who was also a representative to the Palestinian Authority," Foreign Minister Murray McCully said in a statement.

The Israeli Embassy in Wellington said the matter is a "protocol principle" applicable to all ambassadors to Israel.

"The issue in question is totally unconnected to the good relations between the two countries," the embassy said in a statement.

New Zealand Prime Minister John Key said he was trying to gather more information on the issue. Asked whether Israel was trying to send New Zealand a message, Key said: "I don't know. Maybe. I wouldn't want to read too much into it. Let's see."

Key said his government was likely viewed internationally as being pro-Israel before 2012, when it became one of 138 countries that voted in favor of giving Palestine nonmember observer status at the U.N. Since that vote, Key said, New Zealand has been viewed as being more neutral.

"Our long-standing view has been that there has to be peace in the Middle East, and in the end we want a two-state solution," he said.

New Zealand's ambassador in Turkey is also charged with taking care of diplomatic relationships with Jordan, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

Key said it would "obviously be pretty inconvenient" if it couldn't continue such an arrangement and that McCully would be investigating what next steps needed to be taken.

"We don't have massive representation in that part of the world," Key said.