

Netanyahu Says He is Heading to UN to “Speak the Truth”

Prime minister decides to address the U.N. next Friday, says "I know that the General Assembly is not a place where Israel gets a fair hearing" • Netanyahu: Any peace that is built on a foundation of lies ultimately collapses on the rocks of truth • Government official: Abbas wants to rewrite his place in history.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided on Thursday to address the U.N. General Assembly next Friday to “speak the truth.” Netanyahu is scheduled to deliver his message to the U.N. on the same day that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is set to deliver his message asking the U.N. to recognize Palestine as a member state.

“I know that the General Assembly is not a place where Israel gets a fair hearing. I know that the automatic majorities there always rush to condemn Israel and twist truth beyond recognition. But I’ve decided to go there anyway, not to win applause, but to speak the truth to every nation that wants to hear the truth,” Netanyahu said at a press conference with Czech Prime Minister Petr Necas in Jerusalem on Thursday.

“I have decided to convey the twin messages of direct negotiations for peace and the quest for peace,” Netanyahu told reporters. “You cannot build peace on a foundation of lies. Any peace that is built on a foundation of lies ultimately collapses on the rocks of truth. That was true in Europe and it is true today. We have to speak the truth. The first truth is that to have peace, we must have mutual respect for other peoples.”

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In Jerusalem, a Netanyahu aide told Reuters that the Israeli leader did not rule out talks with Abbas even if the Palestinian leader presented the U.N. membership request as planned on Sept. 23.

The aide noted the General Assembly probably would not vote on such a membership upgrade resolution until early October, keeping the door open for a resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks and a meeting between Netanyahu and Abbas.

On a visit to Latrun on Thursday, Defense Minister Ehud Barak said, “Only direct negotiations on all the core issues will solve the crisis and lower the level of tension among the countries in our region. The Israel Defense Forces, Israel Police, and the Defense Ministry are prepared for any scenario, and I hope that this period of time will pass without any escalation and violence.”

Continuous attempts to dissuade Abbas

Meanwhile, American and European officials continued their attempts on Thursday to thwart the upcoming Palestinian statehood bid in the U.N. and bring the two sides back to the negotiating table. Palestinian officials characterized their meetings with U.S. envoys David Hale and Dennis Ross in harsh terms, saying the Americans “threatened” them.

At a press conference in Ramallah on Thursday, Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister Riyad Al-Maliki said that, barring any diplomatic breakthrough, Abbas would address the U.N. Security Council on Sept. 21, two days before his address in the General Assembly. “If Abbas will accept an offer to return to direct negotiations,

backed up by appropriate guarantees, we will consider a compromise concerning our request for statehood in the U.N.," Al-Maliki said.

Al-Maliki indicated that based on recent visits he was not optimistic that American diplomacy would bring about a breakthrough, CNN reported. "I thought the Americans would be more forthcoming in presenting something that will satisfy the expectations of the Palestinians. Unfortunately, what we have heard from the last visit of Dennis Ross and David Hale were threats," he said.

The diplomatic flurry by the U.S. and EU centers around a compromise which would upgrade the Palestinian status at the U.N.

"Our idea is to push for an upgrade of the Palestinian status without excluding full status in the future but with a reference to negotiations," one senior EU diplomat told Reuters.

It was not immediately clear whether this would be an upgrading to the status of "non-member observer state," as held by the Vatican, or some other formulation.

The Palestinian Authority now has the status of "observer entity."

Speaking of the diplomatic initiative, CNN quoted Al-Maliki as saying, "We will see if any of them are carrying any credible offers that will allow us to look into it seriously -- otherwise, at 12:30 p.m. on the 23rd, the president will submit the application."

According to the offer taking shape, the Palestinians will not have access to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, where they could pursue lawsuits against Israel's presence in the West Bank, as well as legal action against Israeli defense officials. European officials who met with Palestinian leaders said that Abbas did not accept the offer, his plan being to address the U.N. first, and then try to revive negotiations with Israel from a position of strength.

Middle East Quartet envoy and former British prime minister Tony Blair suggested that Abbas submit his request to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and, in parallel, begin direct talks with Israel on the core issues. That would give both sides more time to decide their next move, while kick-starting negotiations at the same time.

As for how European countries intend to vote should the Palestinians submit their request at the General Assembly, Reuters reported on Friday that the European Union's 27 member states could split into three camps, with some opposing the bid, others backing it and several abstaining. France seems to be more open to Palestinian arguments, with Germany opposing a unilateral declaration, and supporting a negotiated settlement.

In San Francisco, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said there was a "growing recognition" on the part of Israel and the Palestinians that the issues had to be settled in peace talks, and that they "will not be resolved if some other route is taken at the U.N.," Reuters reported. The U.S. has threatened to veto any Palestinian statehood bid if it is brought to the Security Council.

Meanwhile, a Chinese state-run newspaper on Friday warned of a spike in tensions in the Middle East if the U.S. vetoed the Palestinian bid for membership of the U.N.

"If the U.S. chooses to fly in the face of world opinion and block the Palestine U.N. bid next week, not only will Israel become more isolated but tensions in the region will be heightened even more," said the China Daily.

"The majority of the international community deems an independent state as the inalienable right of the Palestinians," the English-language daily said in an editorial, echoing Beijing's official position on the issue, AFP reported.

Hamans deems statehood bid 'worthless'

Despite reports citing lack of progress and straightforward messages by the Palestinian Authority foreign minister to that affect, a senior official in the Palestinian president's office claimed that there was, in fact, progress in the negotiations with Israel that might lead to a compromise concerning the statehood bid, or even its cancellation.

On the other end of the Palestinian political spectrum, Hamas spokesman Sami Abu-Zuhri said on Thursday that the position of Hamas on the Palestinian statehood issue was not taken into account. "The move is worthless and only symbolic. Palestinians will not gain anything in the U.N. except for a flag on the U.N. building," Zuhri said.

Representatives of Fatah and Hamas met on Thursday, despite their differences, to discuss the upcoming Palestinian statehood bid.

Reactions ahead of Palestinian statehood bid

In reaction to Abbas' determination to go ahead with his unilateral move, a senior Israeli government official said, "Abbas wants to rewrite his heritage, from a leader who was ousted from Gaza by Hamas and brought about a split in the Palestinian leadership, to the leader responsible for a Palestinian declaration of statehood in the U.N. It is likely that Abbas will step down as Palestinian Authority president after the vote in the U.N."

Opposition leader Tzipi Livni (Kadima), commenting on Netanyahu's decision to address the U.N., said, "Unfortunately, Israel is at a point now at which it doesn't matter what Netanyahu says in his address to the U.N. The question is whether or not they believe he will act on his words as well. No one should try to sell us the theory that this terrible isolation is an act of nature."

New York Times editorial blasts Netanyahu

A New York Times editorial on Thursday had harsh words for Netanyahu, saying he "has been the most intractable, building settlements and blaming his inability to be more forthcoming on his conservative coalition. Egged on by congressional Republicans, he has sought to embarrass Mr. Obama -- astonishing behavior for so close an ally that does not serve his own country's interest."

The article continued, "Mr. Obama has repeatedly affirmed support for Israel and backed it up with action. He has had far more success than President George W. Bush in rallying tough sanctions on Iran ... Now, Mr.

Obama is risking American ties with a fast-changing Arab world by vowing to veto the Palestinians' statehood bid at the United Nations."

The piece concluded, "Mr. Netanyahu should be worried that his country is more isolated now than when he took office. That isolation will deepen so long as negotiations remain stalemated."

Lieberman submits official protest over 'Judenrein' remark

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman filed an official complaint with EU countries and the U.S. over remarks made by a Palestinian official in the U.S. regarding a future Palestinian state being "Judenrein," an official statement said Thursday.

On Wednesday, the Palestine Liberation Organization's Ambassador to the U.S., Maen Areikat, was quoted in a USA Today report as saying that the future Palestinian state should be "free of Jews." "After the experience of the last 44 years of military occupation and all the conflict and friction, I think it would be in the best interests of the two people to be separated," USA Today quoted Areikat as saying during a meeting with reporters in Washington.

Lieberman said Areikat's comments are similar to those made previously by Abbas, and prove that the Palestinian leadership has adopted the "Judenrein" ideology used by Nazi Germany in its extermination of the Jews.