
Benjamin Netanyahu Defiant in Face of Isolation After Iran Deal

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While the world's major powers welcomed the deal finalised with Iran on Tuesday as a historic moment capable of setting relations with the Islamic republic on a new path, Netanyahu harshly condemned it.

For the 65-year-old savvy right wing prime minister, the agreement was a 'stunning, historic mistake.'

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He stressed Israel would not be bound by the deal and again signalling that military force was not off the table and said the country would 'always defend ourselves.'

Today, he declared that the agreement was 'not the end of the story.'

'We are going to continue to denounce the danger in reaching an agreement with a dictatorial regime,' he said.

Netanyahu argues that the deal will not block Iran's path to nuclear weapons that could be used to target the Jewish state and says the lifting of sanctions will allow it to further support proxy militants in the Middle East.

While he has angered US President Barack Obama by appearing before Congress in Washington to argue against the agreement, there is wide support for Netanyahu's stand among his political allies in Israel.

The Israeli opposition has also denounced the deal, while at the same time criticising Netanyahu for deteriorating relations with the United States, the country's most important ally.

'Netanyahu wants to go down in history as practically the only person to warn to the very end against the dangers of a nuclear Iran,' a senior Israeli official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

'He knows in advance that it is a losing battle in the short-term, but he cannot stand idly by.'

His focus now is likely to turn to the US Congress, which has 60 days to review the deal. Netanyahu has allies there, particularly among Republicans, but their chances of sinking the agreement appear unlikely for now.

Even if the deal is voted down in Congress, Obama can veto their move. Congress can only override the veto with a two-thirds vote.

Obama has sought to reassure Netanyahu, telling him in a telephone conversation on Tuesday night that the agreement was in Israel's 'national security interest.'

He also announced that US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter would visit Israel next week.

'American Umbrella'?

Israel is believed to be the only country in the Middle East with atomic bombs, although it has never confirmed it.

The United States currently grants Israel some \$3 billion (2.7 billion euros) in military aid yearly outside of spending on other projects, such as assistance in developing the country's Iron Dome missile defence system.

There has been talk of further assistance to compensate for Israel's concerns related to the deal, such as additional F-35 stealth fighters capable of evading Iranian detection. Israel has already ordered 33 F-35s.

Yuval Steinitz, the Israeli minister who has overseen the Iran dossier, however sought to keep the focus on the danger his country says the deal poses.

'We are very grateful for the assistance we get from the US,' Steinitz told journalists on Wednesday.

'But I think it's wrong to use the word compensation because there is no real compensation for

nuclear threat.'

Akiva Eldar, a political analyst and columnist for the Al-Monitor website which covers the Middle East, said one strategy Israel may be seeking to pursue involves protection under an 'American umbrella.'

That would mean reaching an agreement specifying that any Iranian attack against Israel would be considered an attack against the United States, he said.

The Israeli official who spoke on condition of anonymity said discussions would also likely include further cooperation between US and Israeli intelligence to detect any potential violation of the nuclear agreement by Iran.

It is unclear whether Netanyahu, long known as a shrewd political operator, will continue to strongly criticise the deal in public but work more diplomatically behind the scenes.

Some in Israel have however begun to suggest that it is time to move on.

'The nuclear deal in the making is far from perfect, but the skies are not going to fall on our head tomorrow,' Yossi Melman, who focuses on security issues, wrote in The Jerusalem Post.
