

After Slamming Kerry, Ya'alon Apologizes

The publication of Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon's criticism of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on Tuesday in the *Yedioth Ahronoth* daily newspaper "Violated all the journalistic rules of ethics, including the most basic rule of protecting a source and ensuring his anonymity," a source close to Ya'alon said on Tuesday.

Yedioth Ahronoth quoted the defense minister as deriding Kerry's Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts as naive and foolhardy, and calling Kerry "obsessive" and "messianic." The comments triggered an angry response from the U.S. government.

Late Tuesday night, Ya'alon's office issued a statement expressing appreciation for Kerry's peace-seeking efforts.

"The defense minister had no intention to cause any offense to the secretary, and he apologizes if the secretary was offended by words attributed to the minister," the statement read.

Earlier, Ya'alon said that Israel's relations with the U.S. were "intimate and meaningful."

"The United States is our greatest friend and our strongest ally, and when there are differences they are resolved behind closed doors, including with Secretary Kerry, with whom I have many conversations about the future of Israel," Ya'alon said. "I will continue to determinedly, responsibly and thoughtfully protect the security of the people of Israel."

However, speaking to students in Ofakim on Tuesday, Ya'alon said, "There are officials who think that it is possible to solve this conflict easily."

Before Ya'alon's late-night apology, the U.S. government

responded to the criticism of Kerry with an uncharacteristically strong rebuke, with State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki saying that, if accurately reported, Ya'alon's remarks were "offensive and inappropriate, especially given all that the United States is doing to support Israel's security needs."

"Secretary Kerry and his team ... have been working day and night to try to promote a secure peace for Israel because of the secretary's deep concern for Israel's future," Psaki said. "To question his motives and distort his proposals is not something we would expect from the defense minister of a close ally."

White House spokesman Jay Carney echoed Psaki's statements.

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U.S. Embassy in Israel Complains

The U.S. Embassy in Israel filed a complaint about the reported comments with the Israeli government, said a senior State Department official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because she was not authorized to discuss the matter on the record.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made an effort on Tuesday to calm tensions with the U.S., addressing the issue in a speech to mark the 65th anniversary of the establishment of the Knesset.

"Our difference of opinion with the United States is about the merits of an issue, not the merits of a person," he said.

President Shimon Peres also devoted his comments at the ceremony to the strong bonds Israel has with the U.S. "The unusual determination of Secretary of State Kerry to reach

peace reflects and serves Israel's deep desire for peace," he said.

Finance Minister and Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid criticized Ya'alon's comments, saying, "These are things that should not have been said, and certainly not [said] aloud."

Justice Minister and Hatnuah leader Tzipi Livni wrote on her Facebook page: "It is possible to oppose the negotiations in a relevant and responsible way, and not to lash out and destroy relations with our closest friend."

Opposition Leader MK Isaac Herzog (Labor) attacked the government, saying, "The true positions of Likud and the government were revealed."

Economy and Trade Minister and Habayit Hayehudi leader Naftali Bennett appeared to back Ya'alon's sentiments, saying, "Israel cannot rely on sensors and drones, but only on itself and on the Israel Defense Forces."

Meanwhile, after Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's "three noes" speech in Ramallah on Saturday—in which he stressed that the Palestinians will never recognize Israel as a Jewish state, will never give up the right of return and will not sign a deal that does not make eastern Jerusalem the capital of a future Palestinian state—Palestinian officials have begun to work on a strategy to join organizations as a nonmember state.

Palestinian Media Watch, a website that monitors Palestinian incitement against Israel, reported that at the PLO meeting in Ramallah on Monday attended by Abbas, Religious Endowments Minister Mahmoud Habbash called on Muslims who have joined the fight in Syria to also begin a jihad against Israel. The incitement against Israel was met with strong applause, including from Abbas, according to the report.

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