

German Chancellor: A Two-State Solution 'Not Imminent'

Standing alongside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a joint press conference in Berlin on Tuesday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel acknowledged that a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not imminent.

"Now is certainly not the time to make really comprehensive progress, but you can achieve improvements in certain places," Merkel said. "The European Union, and Germany as a member state, is very concerned about seeing things realistically. We know the threat of terrorism that Israel has to endure. We believe, on the other hand, that we have to advance a process of peaceful coexistence, and this, according to our opinion, is ultimately built on a two-state solution."

Merkel said Germany was ready to assist Israel and the Palestinians with any steps toward peace, particularly in the realm of economic development.

Netanyahu praised Merkel's words, saying: "This is a realistic approach to the situation in our region. I hear the same things from top world leaders. I heard this from [U.S. President Barack] Obama and now Merkel. We also heard this from Opposition Leader Isaac Herzog. Therefore, what is needed is to stabilize the situation on the ground, alongside a stable economy."

The prime minister also said the French initiative to hold an international peace conference was "baffling."

France has for months been preparing to hold a conference that would bring together Israel and the Palestinians and their American, European and Arab partners in order to revive the peace process. France has warned that if its peace efforts fail, it will recognize a Palestinian state.

Criticizing the French initiative, Netanyahu said, “[The initiative] says: We will hold an international conference but if you do not succeed we are already predetermining the result—we will recognize a Palestinian state. It does not matter if this state could become another Islamic dictatorship, one of many in the Middle East. It does not matter if it will not genuinely commit to ending the conflict and recognizing the state of the Jews. It does not matter if there will not be security arrangements that will prevent the capturing of territory that Israel would be due to evacuate by Daesh [the Islamic State group] or Hamas or both of them. It does not matter. We will determine that there is a state, without any conditions regarding recognition, security or anything.

“Of course this ensures that this conference will fail because if the Palestinians know that their demand will be met a priori, and they do not need to do anything, then there is certainly an internal contradiction here, because they will not do anything. There is one way to advance peace: direct negotiations without preconditions between the sides. This is the true way and I think that anyone who tries to deviate from it will not advance successful negotiations.”

At the joint press conference, Merkel said that Germany’s relations with Iran could only be fully normalized if Iran recognizes Israel’s right to exist.

Merkel said she had “made very clear” that “there cannot be a normal, friendly relationship with Iran so long as the existence of Israel is not recognized.”

During their meeting, Netanyahu asked Merkel for German assistance in mediating the return of the bodies of Israeli soldiers Oron Shaul and Hadar Goldin, who were killed in battle in the Gaza Strip during Operation Protective Edge in the summer of 2014 and whose bodies have been held by Hamas since.

Later on Tuesday, Merkel unexpectedly joined Netanyahu and his wife, Sara, during their visit to the German Historical Museum in Berlin, where there is currently a Yad Vashem art exhibition on display. The exhibition features 100 works of art created by Jews during the Holocaust.

“I told Chancellor Merkel that we will never forget,” Netanyahu said. “And my responsibility and that of the State of Israel is to ensure that it will never happen again. I very much appreciate the assistance Merkel and her government have given us to ensure that it will never happen again.”

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