

Netanyahu Accuses European Union of 'Deafening Silence'

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday accused the international community of "deafening silence" in response to recent vows by the head of the Hamas terrorist group to fight on until the Jewish state is destroyed, and appeared unmoved by the gathering storm of global condemnation of his government's plans to continue settlement construction.

These accusations came after the European Union warned **Israel** of unspecified consequences Monday if it goes through with plans to build thousands of new settler homes in Jerusalem and E1.

Netanyahu's tough words were likely to deepen the rift between Israel and some of its closest allies, particularly in Europe, which has emerged since the **U.N. General Assembly** overwhelmingly voted in favor of Palestinian statehood last month.

The bloc's 27 foreign ministers said they were "deeply dismayed" by Israeli plans to expand settlements in east Jerusalem and particularly the E1 project, which, it was claimed, would separate the West Bank from east Jerusalem, the Palestinians' hoped-for capital, and drive a large wedge between the northern and southern flanks of the West Bank.

"The E1 plan, if implemented, would seriously undermine the prospects of a negotiated resolution of the conflict by jeopardizing the possibility of a contiguous and viable Palestinian state and of Jerusalem as the capital of two states," the ministers said in a joint statement. "It could also entail forced transfer of civilian populations."

After the E.U. issued its condemnation, Netanyahu spoke to foreign reporters and accused the international community of

having double standards, condemning not-yet-built settlements in Judea and Samaria while standing quiet during a historic visit to the Gaza Strip by Hamas' exiled leader, Khaled Mashaal.

Making his first trip to the Hamas-ruled territory over the weekend, Mashaal delivered a series of speeches to throngs of supporters vowing to wipe Israel off the map. The visit underscored Hamas' rising clout and regional acceptance since its eight-day conflict with Israel last month.

Netanyahu also directed his ire at Hamas' rival, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, for not speaking out.

"This weekend the leader of Hamas, sitting next to the Hamas leader of Gaza, a man who praised Osama bin Laden, openly called for the destruction of Israel. Where was the outrage? Where were the U.N. resolutions? Where was (Palestinian Authority) President Abbas?" Netanyahu said.

"Why weren't Palestinian diplomats summoned to European and other capitals to explain why the PA president not only refused to condemn this but actually declared his intention to unite with Hamas. There was nothing, there was silence and it was deafening silence."

Netanyahu has long complained that the world unfairly singles out Israel for criticism. In Monday's address, he accused the United Nations of passing an unbalanced resolution that supported Palestinian independence but did not address Israeli security concerns.

On Tuesday Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman also addressed the recent EU condemnation of Israeli settlement construction, telling Israel Radio that Europe was "once again, ignoring calls to destroy Israel" and recalling the United States' lack of action in the 1940s despite the knowledge of the goings on in Nazi concentration camps.

" Hamas leaders are openly declaring that their objective is to destroy Israel, and that they refuse to recognize Israel," Lieberman said. " Abbas supports this view, and Europe is silent."

Accusing the EU of "slapping Israel in the face" in condemning its settlement policy, Lieberman added that "those who sacrifice the Jews and Israel today need to realize that they will be next."

Also Monday, Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt said Europe's political view of the Mideast had changed profoundly since Israel announced plans to build 3,000 new settler homes.

Bildt, speaking as ministers gathered for Monday's E.U. meeting in Brussels, said the Israeli plans had caused "extreme concern" in Europe.

"What the Israelis did on E1 has shifted opinions in Europe," Bildt said. "I don't think the Israelis are aware of this."

Some advocacy groups want the E.U. to prohibit the sale of goods made by Israeli settlers from being labeled as made in Israel. The labeling issue may come up but was not officially on the agenda.

The E.U. foreign ministers' conclusions from the meeting that were published on Monday had in fact condemned Hamas.

"The European Union will never stop opposing those who embrace and promote violence as a way to achieve political goals. The E.U. finds inflammatory statements by Hamas leaders that deny Israel's right to exist unacceptable," the E.U. statement read.

However, the condemnation of Hamas appears at clause No. 9 of 10 points published by the E.U. and comes after a succession of condemnations of Israel for E1 construction, which itself was the reason the foreign ministers had convened. The E.U.'s

Hamas mention also stops short of calling on the organization to take any action or change its ways.

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