

Netanyahu Aides Chastise Obama for 'Election Meddling'

The White House is not denying a report that President Barack Obama repeatedly said that "Israel doesn't know what its own best interests are," POLITICO reported Tuesday.

White House spokesman Tommy Vietor, in a statement to POLITICO on Tuesday, did not confirm or deny that Obama made the comment "or what was allegedly discussed in private meetings."

"The president has been clear in stating what he believes is a realistic basis for successful negotiations, and we will continue to base our efforts on that approach," Vietor said. "He has also consistently stated that the U.S. commitment to Israel's security is unwavering, and he has backed up this commitment with tangible action."

Sources close to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday brushed off Obama's critical remarks, as published in an article by Jeffrey Goldberg on Bloomberg News.

"The prime minister will continue to protect the national interests of the State of Israel, and will not make any compromises that will undermine the security of Israeli citizens," one Netanyahu associate said.

According to Atlantic Monthly columnist Goldberg, Obama said privately and repeatedly, "Israel doesn't know what its own best interests are."

"With each new settlement announcement, in Obama's view, Netanyahu is moving his country down a path toward near-total isolation," wrote Goldberg, who is believed to have steady access to the White House.

"When informed about the Israeli decision (to announce

construction plans in the E1 zone as a punishment for Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' U.N. move), Obama, who has a famously contentious relationship with the prime minister, didn't even bother getting angry," Goldberg wrote. "He told several people that this sort of behavior on Netanyahu's part is what he has come to expect, and he suggested that he has become inured to what he sees as self-defeating policies of his Israeli counterpart.

"The dysfunctional relationship between Netanyahu and Obama is poised to enter a new phase. On matters related to the Palestinians, the president seems to view the prime minister as a political coward; an essentially unchallenged leader who nevertheless is unwilling to lead or spend political capital to advance the cause of compromise.

"Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, Obama's nominee to replace Hillary Clinton as secretary of state, is said to be eager to re-energize the Middle East peace process, but Obama – who already has a Nobel Peace Prize – is thought to be considerably more wary. He views the government of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas as weak, but he has become convinced that Netanyahu is so captive to the settler lobby, and so uninterested in making anything more than the slightest conciliatory gesture toward Palestinian moderates, that an investment of presidential interest in the peace process wouldn't be a wise use of his time.

"Obama, since his time in the Senate, has been consistent in his analysis of Israel's underlying challenge: If it doesn't disentangle itself from the lives of West Bank Palestinians, the world will one day decide it is behaving as an apartheid state," Goldberg wrote.

Diplomatic sources close to Netanyahu responded to the article: "In the last four years Netanyahu stood strong in the face of all the international pressure. As President Obama said, security cooperation between the two countries is as

deep as it ever has been. We saw this recently during Operation Pillar of Defense, when the U.S. equipped us with Iron Dome batteries.

“Netanyahu won’t let Iran go nuclear, he won’t retreat to 1967 lines, and he won’t allow Jerusalem to be divided,” the diplomatic source said.

Meanwhile, a senior Likud official disparaged the president’s remarks. “This is blatant meddling by the U.S. president in Israeli elections. The fingerprints of the Israeli Left are all over it.”

Hatnuah Chairwoman Tzipi Livni also jumped on the bandwagon. “One can love or not love the U.S. president, but we are speaking about our greatest friend and about Israel’s security. Therefore these remarks need to wake up every Israeli citizen.”

One foreign columnist who did take Netanyahu’s side is conservative British journalist Nile Gardiner. In a forcefully worded blog post for The Daily Telegraph, Gardiner wrote:

“President Obama’s contempt for Netanyahu is already well known, as he amply displayed in a private meeting with then French president Nicolas Sarkozy at the G-20 in November 2011, where he reportedly told his French counterpart in reference to the Israeli PM: “you’re fed up with him, but I have to deal with him every day!” Obama refused to meet with Netanyahu when he visited the United States in September last year, while finding the time to appear on the David Letterman show, and has a long track record of snubbing the Israeli PM.

According to Gardiner, “Obama’s latest comments, conveyed by Jeffrey Goldberg, take the U.S. president’s hostility against Netanyahu to new heights, and are a major diplomatic faux pas ahead of next week’s Israeli election, which Netanyahu is widely expected to win ... They also reveal a remarkable degree of antipathy towards America’s closest friend and ally in the

Middle East, and an unhealthy willingness to intervene in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation state.

“Barack Obama’s sneering reference to Israel as ‘a small state’ that is already ‘a pariah,’ and one that may not even survive unless it changes its ‘behavior,’ smacks of staggering condescension, and will be music to the ears of every enemy of Israel on the face of the earth ... President Obama claims to be a friend of Israel, but his words and actions strongly suggest otherwise. And as for Israel’s best interests, they are far better defended by Benjamin Netanyahu than the current occupant of the White House.”

In related news, the White House responded with a week’s delay to remarks by Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi, who last week was discovered to have said in Sept. 2010 that Israelis are “the descendants of apes and pigs.”

“The language that we have seen is deeply offensive,” said White House spokesman Jay Carney. “We completely reject these statements, as we do any language that espouses religious hatred.”

The Obama administration called for Morsi to respect people from every religion and said that such remarks are not acceptable in a democratic Egypt. “This kind of discourse has been acceptable in the region for far too long, and is counter to the goal of peace,” Carney said.

Morsi clarified that he respects people from every religion and that such remarks are not acceptable in a democratic Egypt.

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