

Netanyahu: 'I Am Committed to the Security of My People'

"As we have warned, and I say this with regret, the sanctions regime has started to weaken and very quickly," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said about Iran on Sunday night at a Hanukkah candlelighting ceremony at the Great Synagogue in Rome. "If tangible steps are not taken soon, it is liable to collapse, and the efforts of years will vanish without anything in exchange. But at the same time, I tell you and promise in the spirit of the Maccabees, we will not allow Iran to receive a military nuclear capability."

Earlier on Sunday, former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert criticized Netanyahu's conduct vis-à-vis the U.S. regarding the Iranian nuclear issue.

"We've declared war on the U.S.," Olmert said indignantly in a speech at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv. "Will [Russian President Vladimir] Putin come to the rescue, or will it be [U.S. President Barack] Obama? Do we really need to go against the president of the U.S.?"

"During my time as prime minister," he continued, "there were also disagreements with the American government, but in no case did we want the contacts and discussions to turn into public wrangling between us and our ally. It certainly did not occur to us to wage war against Israel's number one ally and incite Congress against the president, something which is unprecedented. The danger and damage from it are incomparably larger than any potential gains.

"Can you imagine another president receiving warnings from Jerusalem that if he does not act tomorrow morning in accordance with these warnings, something bad will happen? Is this serious? If the warnings were sent the proper way,

quietly, via confidential channels we have established over decades with the American government, we would make it much easier for [the Obama administration] to make the decisions we want.”

Later in the day in Rome, Netanyahu did not refer to Olmert by name but said, “The U.S. was, is and will be the greatest friend of Israel. As prime minister of Israel, I have warned time and time again about the dangers connected with the Iranian nuclear program. In contrast to others, when I see that interests vital to the security of Israel’s citizens are in danger, I will not be silent.”

“It is very easy to be silent,” Netanyahu said. “It is very easy to receive a pat on the shoulder from the international community, to bow one’s head, but I am committed to the security of my people. I am committed to the future of my state, and in contrast to periods in the past, we have a loud and clear voice among the nations, and we will sound it in time in order to warn of the danger.”

Likud MK Tzachi Hanegbi also addressed the Institute for National Security Studies on Sunday, saying that while his approach was different from Olmert’s, there were certain things on which there was no dispute.

“There is no dispute that if Iran obtains nuclear weapons, this would represent a grave threat to Israel’s security,” Hanegbi said. “There is also no dispute that Iran is at a critical juncture, on the verge of completing its transformation into a threshold state. The amount of time it would take for it to obtain nuclear weapons is no more than a few months.”

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