

Netanyahu: Israel Does Not Want a Bi-National State

While not coming out directly against his Deputy Defense Minister Danny Danon—who said last week in an interview that the government does not support the two-state solution and will not allow a Palestinian state to be established inside the pre-1967 borders—Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Monday that he would seek, together with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, “to find an opening to negotiations in which a demilitarized Palestinian state emerges which recognizes the Jewish state. And for this to occur, the government needs to act as one.”

Without mentioning Danon by name, Netanyahu said, “Building in Judea and Samaria will continue. It is continuing even today, but we have to understand what is happening around us. We have to be smart, not only right. Settlement in the main blocs do not fundamentally change our ability to reach an agreement, and the real question is whether or not there is a willingness on the other side to accept the Jewish state.”

Netanyahu spoke behind closed doors at the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, and officials released some of his remarks in a statement issued later to reporters. In those remarks, Netanyahu said that if negotiations with the Palestinians were entered into, they were expected to “be long and tough, but that the alternative Israel faces is a binational state, which Israel does not want.”

During a separate Likud faction meeting on Monday, Netanyahu said, “The construction in Jerusalem will continue regardless of the negotiations with the Palestinians.”

The prime minister was commenting on an Army Radio report quoting Housing Ministry sources as saying there was a de

facto building moratorium in east Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria. Netanyahu told the Knesset members that "construction in Judea and Samaria has no bearing on the peace deal."

However, Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee Chairman Avigdor Lieberman (Yisrael Beytenu) told the committee there was a "delay" in approving construction projects in east Jerusalem as part of Israel's efforts not to hamper Kerry's attempt to reignite the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

"This is a temporary measure. We want to see (Kerry) succeed," he said.

Netanyahu also reassured the Likud faction that the U.S. had made no demand to freeze construction beyond the Green Line.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has repeatedly stated that a complete settlement freeze, including all construction projects in east Jerusalem, is a prerequisite for resuming the stalled peace talks.

Kerry was scheduled to arrive in Israel on Tuesday, but has decided to postpone the trip by one week to give Abbas more time to decide whether to drop his preconditions.

"Setting preconditions is an insurmountable obstacle," Netanyahu said at the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee meeting.

Meanwhile, Deputy Defense Minister MK Danny Danon (Likud-Beytenu), who stirred controversy over the weekend with his remarks to The Times of Israel, has been receiving support from members of the coalition and the opposition alike.

The Land of Israel Lobby, which aims to prevent the government from ceding land in Judea and Samaria and to increase the settlement movement's budget, is expected to hold its first meeting since the induction of the 19th Knesset on Tuesday.

The lobby is headed by Coalition Chairman MK Yariv Levin (Likud) and MK Orit Strook (Habayit Hayehudi) and, according to its own data, its work has the support of over 40 MKs. Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein, as well as MKs from various Knesset factions, are expected to attend the meeting as well. According to Levin, the lobby's meeting was called "in coordination with Prime Minister Netanyahu."

Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, who heads the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations alongside Netanyahu's special envoy Yitzhak Molcho, reacted on Monday to Danon's comments, saying, "Netanyahu will have to decide whether he wants 'Danonism'—a group of extremists who do not want a peace deal—to take over the government, or to support a group that believes a peace deal is in Israel's vital interest. It is important that there is a clear [government] line on this matter."

Meanwhile, the Bemuna company, which heads housing projects for the religious public and has submitted bids for various Housing Ministry tenders, issued a press release Tuesday saying that the ministry and the Israel Land Authority were holding up several bids for the construction of 294 housing units in east Jerusalem on the government's orders.

The company, which cited "American pressure" as the cause of the delay, urged the government "not to cave in to the American pressure and make the results of the tenders public immediately."

"Since the new government was sworn in no new tenders have been issued for projects beyond the Green Line and the [Jerusalem] zoning committee has been dragging its feet on the plans before it," Bemuna CEO Yisrael Zair said.

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