

Ya'alon: 'No Chance' for Peace With Palestinians

"Some people fear Tehran more than Washington now," Defense Minister Moshe (Bogie) Ya'alon said on Tuesday, in apparent criticism of U.S. policy in the Middle East.

Speaking at an annual conference held by the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv, Ya'alon spoke about what he believes to be the waning U.S. influence in the region. "The U.S. has decided to lower its profile, to be less active and less involved in the region, and now some fear Tehran more than Washington," he said.

Ya'alon said Russia had taken advantage of the U.S. absence to "buy itself a better footing and show everyone they do not abandon their allies, and in doing so they have been allowed to lead [diplomatic] negotiations."

"The U.S. has decided to be less involved, to stop being the world's policeman and distance itself from areas of conflict. Look at what is happening in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria," he said.

Ya'alon said there was no chance of a real peace accord with the Palestinians and suggested going for "an arrangement, but not a permanent agreement."

The defense minister cited the Palestinians' refusal to give up the right of return, their inability to function as an independent entity and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' lack of interest in the negotiations.

"Only two weeks ago Abbas said no to recognizing Israel as the Jewish nation, so what are we even talking about? Abbas did not want negotiations then and does not want them now. He has come to the table to release [Palestinian] prisoners. We want

to negotiate with the Palestinian Authority because we live side by side, and there are things we need to do together. But it looks like my generation will not see peace and quiet with the Palestinians," he said.

According to Ya'alon, the importance of the negotiations with the Palestinians pales in comparison to that of Iran's nuclear program.

"The Palestinian subject is a non-issue. Behind closed doors, the Palestinian issue does not even come up. In public one has to pay lip service," Ya'alon said.

Ya'alon poured scorn on the commitment of the PA, which exercises limited self-rule in the West Bank under interim peace deals, to bring Palestinian terrorists to justice.

"We counted 1,040 cases that were handled by the Palestinian security services in 2013. How many of them went to trial? Zero," Ya'alon said.

In the same period, Ya'alon said, Israel had arrested some 3,000 Palestinians, many of whom were later imprisoned.

A U.S. official briefed on the West Bank situation was hard put to explain the discrepancy highlighted by Ya'alon.

"It's true that we haven't seen trials [of Palestinian suspects held by Abbas' administration]," the official told Reuters on condition of anonymity. But, the official said, that did not mean there was no Palestinian security enforcement.

Asked if that meant Abbas' forces might be dealing with suspects out of public view, the U.S. official said yes.

Meanwhile, two surveys released on Tuesday, by the INSS and the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR), found that 67 percent of Israelis and 70 percent of Palestinians do not believe a permanent peace accord can be

reached.

The INSS poll surveyed 1,200 Jewish Israelis, while the PSR interviewed 1,270 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Both polls have a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

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