

Netanyahu rejects one-state solution, says settlements are a 'side issue'

In comprehensive interview with the BBC, PM stops short of endorsing Palestinian statehood; also praises Trump's 'leadership qualities' and Iran policies



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu discusses Israel's foreign policy at Chatham House, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, in London, on November 3, 2017. (AFP Photo/Adrian Dennis)

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday resolutely rejected a one-state solution but stopped short, however, of explicitly endorsing Palestinian statehood.

In a comprehensive interview with the BBC as he wound down a trip to London, Netanyahu also praised US President Donald Trump for understanding the nature of Iran's threat to the region, and said he hoped for "continuity" in UK-Israel relations if the Labour Party's Jeremy Corbyn were to become prime minister.

"No, I don't want a one-state solution, I'll be clear about that. And I'm unabashed about saying that," he replied to interviewer Andrew Marr's question about the death of the two-state solution. "But I want to make sure that what we have next

to us is something that will not threaten our lives. It really makes a difference what the other state is. Is it Costa Rica or is it North Korea? Is it another mini-Iran or is it Luxembourg?"

Advocates of a two-state solution do not specify what exactly they mean by that term, Netanyahu lamented.

"The other state, if it's not demilitarized, if it doesn't recognize the State of Israel, which the Palestinians still refuse to do, then it merely becomes a platform for continuing the war against the one Jewish state. And, therefore, I think you have to be more specific and say no, what we want is the recognition, finally, after a hundred years, after the Balfour Declaration, finally recognize the Jewish state."

The settlements are a "side issue" in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with the core issue being the Palestinians' refusal to accept a Jewish state in any borders, Netanyahu asserted. He added: "I think the idea that Jews cannot live in Judea is crazy."

Asked whether he endorses a Palestinian state or whether the Palestinians will have to suffice with "a kind of self-governing territory inside a greater Israel," Netanyahu replied: "I think they should have all the powers to govern themselves and none of the powers to threaten us."

Today's Middle East "is peppered with failed states and pre-failed states and collapsing states," the prime minister continued, arguing that any territory evacuated by Israel would be conquered immediately by the forces of militant Islam.



US President Donald Trump, left, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu clasp hands after giving final remarks at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem before Trump's departure, May 23, 2017. (Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

Asked for his opinion of Trump, Netanyahu focused on the president's view on Iran.

"I think he has leadership qualities and I think sees in the Middle East something different," the prime minister said. While former US president Barack Obama saw the Islamic Republic "as a solution in many ways," his successor "sees Iran as the problem," Netanyahu said.

He added: "I think he definitely understands that Iran is the primary problem. It probably accounts for 95% of the problems we experience now in the Middle East and I think he gets it and it's a good thing that he gets it."

The interviewer also asked Netanyahu how he would react if Corbyn, the current leader of Britain's Labour party and a staunch critic of Israeli policies vis-a-vis the Palestinians, were to be elected the UK's next prime minister.

Netanyahu responded: "Well, first of all the British people decide who they want to govern them, but I hope that there will be a continuity of British policy with Israel because here's something people don't know — that cooperation has saved many lives." Intense security and intelligence cooperation has saved many Israeli and British lives, he went on. "And it's something I hope will continue in the

future.”

Later on Sunday, Netanyahu met with UK Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis and senior leaders of Britain’s Jewish community.

“I think that our histories are intertwined, the history of Britain and Israel, and the Jewish community, from [Israel’s first president] Chaim Weizmann [who spent several decades in the UK] and others, has been intertwined in the history of Zionism,” the prime minister told the Jewish leaders, including representatives of non-Orthodox streams. “I thank you for that continuous bridge between Britain and Israel, between Zionism and Britain.”



PM Netanyahu meets UK Jewish leaders in London, , November 5, 2017 (Kobi Gideon/GPO)

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