

Protestors disrupt Netanyahu's GA speech in New Orleans

PM tells some 4,000 US Jews Iranian nuclear program, delegitimization of Israel greatest threats. Hecklers protesting loyalty oath, West Bank occupation escorted out of event hall, crowd chants 'Am Yisrael Chai'

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"We are ready to recognize a Palestinian state as the state of the Palestinian people, but we expect them to recognize the Jewish State as the state of the Jewish people," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the General Assembly of the Jewish Federations of North America in New Orleans on Tuesday.

Netanyahu's speech before some 4,000 American Jews was disrupted no less than four times by protestors demonstrating against the occupation of the West Bank and the loyalty oath. They were eventually escorted out of the event hall.

The crowd chanted "Am Yisrael Chai" in response to the heckling.

During his speech, Netanyahu stressed that peace can only be achieved through negotiations, adding that peace between Israel, the Palestinian Authority and countries in the Arab world would promote economic possibilities in the region.

The prime minister condemned Palestinian preconditions, insisting that "Israel will not be dictated to." He said Israel's allies, most prominent of which being the US, would not allow anyone to dictate terms to Israel.

"We want a secure peace but we don't want to see the same thing we saw when we left Gaza and Lebanon and have missiles streaming into Israel" he said. "And I will not let that happen."

Netanyahu continued to say that "a nuclear Iran is the greatest threat to Israel and to the world."

"It sponsors terror in Lebanon and Gaza, confronts the US in Iraq and Afghanistan, establishes beachheads in Saudi Arabia. Its influence has spread even to this hemisphere in South America. It has done all this without nuclear weapons. Imagine what it will do with them," said the PM.

The second greatest threat, he said, was the delegitimization of Israel.

The prime minister lauded the US for promoting economic sanctions against Tehran, but said there was no indication Iran was slowing down its nuclear program as a result. Netanyahu said the Islamic Republic must be convinced that the international community is prepared to launch a military strike unless it halts its nuclear program.

"The only time Iran suspended its program in 2003 when it believed it faced a military action," Netanyahu said. "If the world wants to stop Iran without military action, it has to convince them that they are willing to take such action."

Netanyahu went on to praise the efforts of American Jews in helping to rehabilitate and rebuild New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. "Just as the Jewish people have always rallied to help Israel, you rallied to help New Orleans get back on its feet," he said.

Yitzhak Benhorin and Attila Somfalvi contributed to the report