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# Israel, US issue veiled warnings to Iran

• By TOVAH LAZAROFF

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and the US issued veiled threats against Iran on Wednesday from Jerusalem and New York.

“The State of Israel will always defend itself, by itself, against any external threat,” Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said at a special memorial ceremony for the founder of political Zionism Theodor Herzl, at the military cemetery in Jerusalem named in his honor.

“Israel won’t let its hands be tied when it comes to ensuring our security. We will act firmly, creatively and continuously, in the face of emerging threats, both from near and far,” Bennett added.

It was a line that hinted at potential Israeli reaction to Iran, which threatens Israel from its own territory and from its proxy forces on Israel’s borders, particularly in Syria and Lebanon. It was similar in tone and style to statements issued against Iran by former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Bennett spoke as the United Nations Security Council in New York debated Iranian compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal, signed between Tehran and six powers; the US, Russia, China, France, Great Britain and Germany. The deal was designed to curb Tehran’s nuclear program in exchange for the suspension of international

sanctions against Iran.

Former US President Donald Trump abandoned the pact in 2018 and reimposed harsh sanctions, prompting Tehran to start violating some of the nuclear limits in 2019. US President Joe Biden has sought to revitalize the deal. The European Union has brokered talks to bring both the US and Tehran back into compliance with the deal.

Netanyahu has opposed the deal and Bennett has expressed similar opposition.

Earlier in the day on Wednesday, Bennett met at his Jerusalem office with US Chargé d’Affaires at the US Embassy Michael Ratney. On Monday President Reuven Rivlin met with US President Joe Biden in Washington and the two men discussed Iran.

“Iran will never get a nuclear weapon on my watch,” Biden said.

He also discussed with Rivlin Sunday’s US air strikes against Iran-backed militia in Iraq and Syria.

Israel has also operated against Iranian entrenchment in Syria and has been accused of carrying out airstrikes against Iranian militias in Iraq.

At the UNSC, US Senior Advisor for Special Political Affairs Jeffrey DeLaurentis spoke of Iran’s conventional threat. “Iran’s support for terrorism threatens US forces, diplomatic personnel, and our partners in the region and elsewhere. It drives instability and negatively impacts millions of civil-



PRIME MINISTER Naftali Bennett addresses a memorial ceremony for Theodor Herzl in Jerusalem yesterday. (Olivier Fitoussi/Flash90)

ians,” DeLaurentis said. “We will continue to use all tools at our disposal to counter Iran’s destabilizing activities in the region.

A date for the next round of talks in Vienna has yet to be agreed upon, but Russia’s UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said: “We’re already seeing the profile of a future agreement, there’s a general understanding of how to move forward to the goals set before us.”

Iran’s UN Ambassador Majid Takht Ravanchi said “those who broke their promises” must make hard decisions, calling for “assurances that all sanctions are removed verifiably and the US will not once again withdraw.”

China’s deputy UN Ambassador Geng Shuang called on the United States to respond to Iran’s request for a guarantee that it would not again quit the deal.

Prior to the meeting UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appealed to the Biden’s administration to lift or waive all sanctions on Iran imposed by the Trump administration.

In a report to the UNSC, Guterres also urged the US to “extend the waivers with regard to the trade in oil with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and fully renew waivers for nuclear non-proliferation projects.”

Reuters contributed to this report.