

# **Amid Iran nuke talks, Lapid says Israel has capabilities many 'cannot even imagine'**

In TV interview, foreign minister vows Jewish state 'will protect itself against the Iranian threat'; promises anyone who misused NSO Group spyware 'will be brought to justice'

Foreign Minister Yair Lapid talked up Israel's military capabilities amid talks between world powers and Iran on restoring the 2015 accord curbing Tehran's nuclear program.

In an interview aired Friday to mark 10 years since he entered politics, Lapid was asked if Israel has the ability to strike uranium enrichment facilities and/or weapons sites in Iran.

"Israel has capabilities, some of which the world, and even some experts in the field, cannot even imagine. And Israel will protect itself against the Iranian threat," he told Channel 12 news.

He also indicated Israel could attack Iran if necessary without informing the Biden administration, which is looking to rejoin the nuclear deal. Israel vocally opposed the accord, which is formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

"Israel will do whatever it needs to do to protect its security. And we don't need anybody's permission for that. That's been the case since the first day we established this state," he said.

Lapid also commented on the negotiations being held in Vienna to revive the nuclear deal, from which former president Donald Trump withdrew in 2018. Iran has since ramped up its nuclear activities in violation of the pact.

The foreign minister said there had not yet been a "capitulation" to Iran during the talks, and stressed: "Israel is not against a good deal, it is only against the wrong deal."

He added that Israel has shown information to world powers “that proves the Iranians are lying” about their nuclear activities.

Separately, Lapid was asked about Israeli spyware firm NSO Group, which has faced increasing scrutiny in the wake of allegations that its wares have been used by countries to hack opposition politicians, dissidents, journalists and others.

“The [Israeli] license requirements for NSO and all other such cyberattack firms are simple: You can only use it to prevent terror and to prevent serious crime,” he said.

“If anybody used Pegasus, the core program of NSO, for other purposes, they will be brought to justice, and we won’t hide or cover up anybody,” Lapid added.

During the interview, Lapid also defended the government’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, amid accusations of zigzagging in its response to the emergence of the Omicron variant.

“When I compare us to what is happening in France, Germany, the United States, the developed nations, Israel is handling COVID significantly better than the world average,” he said.

Lapid praised Prime Minister Naftali Bennett’s role, saying the premier was managing the pandemic “wisely and carefully.”

“Sometimes you have to respond quickly to changing conditions,” he said of the various policy shifts and restriction changes.

“We’ve not had a single lockdown, we’ve kept the economy open,” he said, referring to the coalition government that took office in June.

Israel’s top diplomat also noted there are currently fewer than 100 serious cases.

Lapid was also asked if he believed Bennett would hand over the premiership to him in September 2023, as the two agreed as part of their power-sharing agreement.

“Yes... I have faith in Naftali, yes,” he said.

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