

Netanyahu blasts Abbas over 'anti-Semitic' speech blaming Jews for Holocaust



Photo-montage de portraits du Premier ministre israélien Benjamin Netanyahu (d) et du président palestinien Mahmoud Abbas

AFP

Friedman, Greenblatt join slew of Israeli officials condemning Abbas' remarks

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu led a chorus of Israeli and American condemnations of Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas on Wednesday, accusing him of propagating "contemptible" anti-Semitic rhetoric after he suggested Jews' role in the banking sector had led to their massacre in the Holocaust.

“Abu Mazen gave another anti-Semitic speech,” Netanyahu said in a statement, referring to the Palestinian leader by a nickname.

“At the height of ignorance and insolence,” Netanyahu continued, “he claimed that the Jews of Europe were persecuted and murdered not because they were Jews, but because they engaged in interest-bearing loans.”

Abbas, who has faced accusations of anti-Semitism before, suggested in a rambling address to a rare meeting of the Palestinian National Council on Monday night that the Holocaust was a result of Jews’ “social behavior, [charging interest], and financial matters.”

“From the 11th century until the Holocaust that took place in Germany, those Jews — who moved to Western and Eastern Europe — were subjected to a massacre every 10 to 15 years. But why did this happen? They say ‘it is because we are Jews’,” he told the hundreds of delegates.



Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas gestures as he chairs a Palestinian National Council meeting in Ramallah on April 30, 2018

ABBAS MOMANI (AFP)

He then cited “three books” written by Jews as evidence that “hostility against Jews is not because of their religion, but rather their social function,” adding he meant “their social function related to banks and interest.”

He contrasted this with Jews in Arab countries, who he argued had not faced similar persecution.

“Abu Mazen again recites the most despicable anti-Semitic slogans,” Netanyahu’s statement said, adding: “Apparently a Holocaust-denier remains a Holocaust-denier.”

Netanyahu was referring to Abbas’ 1982 doctoral thesis entitled “The Other Side: the Secret Relationship Between Nazism and Zionism,” which questions the validity of the number of Jewish deaths in the Holocaust as 6 million and reportedly describes the cooperation between Zionist and Nazi leaders.

A slew of other Israeli ministers and lawmakers echoed Netanyahu’s condemnations, along with American officials.

David Friedman, the US ambassador to Israel, said Abbas had reached a “new low” while Jason Greenblatt, President Donald Trump’s special envoy to the Middle East peace process, said that “peace cannot be built on this kind of foundation.”



US ambassador David Friedman visits the Western Wall in the old city of Jerusalem on May 15, 2017

Menahem KAHANA (AFP/File)

Friedman, whom Abbas cursed as “a settler and a son of a dog” in another rambling speech in March, blamed the Palestinian leader’s rhetoric for the inability to make peace.

“To all those who think Israel is the reason that we don’t have peace, think again,” Friedman wrote on Twitter.

Greenblatt said the comments were “very unfortunate, very distressing & terribly disheartening,” calling for them to be “unconditionally condemned by all.”

Israel’s foreign ministry accused Abbas of fueling “religious and nationalist hatred against the Jewish people and Israel.”

“On live TV, [Abbas] made remarks that can’t be described as other than anti-Semitic and Holocaust-denying, blaming the Jews for their Holocaust and extermination, while using stereotypes and blames taken from the lexicon of classic anti-Semitism,” it said in a statement. “A national leadership with that

spirit is intolerable, and it is a pity that the PA chairman again and again repeats his grave and unacceptable anti-Semitic comments.”

Israeli foreign ministry spokesman Emmanuel Nahshon said that Abbas’s “anti-Semitism” was “all the more shocking considering that he presents himself as wanting to make peace with Israel.”



Education Minister Naftali Bennett, a key member of Israel’s coalition government, has criticised Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s behaviour after police recommended his indictment for corruption but said he would remain in the government

- (POOL/AFP/File)

Firebrand Education Minister Naftali Bennett, a member of the religious-nationalist Jewish Home party, said that Abbas is “drenched in anti-Semitism and racism from head to toe.”

“He continues the tradition of his predecessors, the grand mufti [of Jerusalem] who was friends with Hitler, and [former PA President Yasser] Arafat, a mass-murderer of Jews,” Bennett continued.

“He infuses the poison of anti-Semitism into the minds of the next generation. Peace will come from the grassroots, not from a corrupt and anti-Semitic Palestinian Authority,” he said.

Israel’s Knesset speaker Yuli Edelstein branded Abbas an “anti-Semite” and “small and irrelevant person” who “in his final days as head of the PA is revealing what he really thinks about the State of Israel and the Jews.”

“The man, who funds families of terrorists who slaughtered and are slaughtering us, will be remembered in history books as a Holocaust denier, a racist and an inciter, if at all,” Edelstein wrote on Twitter.

The row comes as relations between the US and the Palestinian leadership have broken down over the controversial American plan to move its Israeli embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

The move, which is due to be completed on May 14, sparked major protests by Palestinians, who consider east Jerusalem their capital, and led Abbas to cut off ties with Trump’s administration.

AFP contributed to this report.

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