Netanyahu: Blinken making a 'big mistake' on Iran nuclear deal

Opposition leader, who as PM staunchly opposed initial agreement aimed at curbing Iran's ability to obtain atomic weapons, says revived pact is danger to entire world.

Opposition leader MK Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday that US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken was mistaken for supporting the revival of a 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, warning that the terms of the refreshed pact will enable Tehran to menace the world with atomic weapons.

While noting his respect for the US top diplomat, Netanyahu said in a video he tweeted Sunday that "I strongly disagree with US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken."

"I think he is making a big mistake," he said.

"Iran without the nuclear agreement is a poor country, an isolated country, a country that has no international legitimacy, and no immunity from a military option," Netanyahu said.

By contrast, he continued, with the nuclear agreement, Iran "becomes a rich country with hundreds of billions of dollars which they'll use for terror and aggression, a country that breaks through the international isolation and receives immunity from military action."

Netanyahu said the agreement would not prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons or the means to deliver them to the US and Europe, claiming that the terms of the deal will allow Iran to continue to develop ballistic missile systems.

He urged the government to oppose the pact.

Blinken met earlier in the day with Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, who also expressed his concerns over the deal, which diplomats have said is close to being finalized.

At a joint press conference after their meeting, Blinken said that "there is no

daylight" between the US and Israel on the efforts to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, as well as countering its threats to the region.

He added that the US will maintain that stance regardless of whether a new Iran nuclear deal is reached.

"Deal or no deal, we will continue to work together and with other partners to counter Iran's destabilizing behavior in the region," he said.

Meeting earlier with Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, Blinken said the US and Israel "see eye to eye" on Iran despite disagreements on the nuclear deal.

The so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action gave Iran relief from heavy sanctions in return for curbs on its nuclear program to prevent it from obtaining atomic weapons, a goal Tehran denies it seeks. In 2018, the Trump administration pulled the US out of the deal and reimposed sanctions. Iran has responded by dropping many of its commitments and ramping up its nuclear program.

European-sponsored talks in Vienna are aiming to bring the US back into the deal and see Iran recommit to its terms in return for lifted sanctions.

Ahead of the 2015 JCPOA, signed under then-US president Barack Obama, then-prime minister Netanyahu waged a very public campaign against the agreement, going so far as giving an address to the US Congress opposing the deal, despite Obama's support for it. The deal was ultimately signed, and Netanyahu's speech was seen as further fracturing the relationship between Israel and that administration, as well as with the Democratic party.

Last week, Bennett said he has no intention of creating a public rift with the United States over the renewed nuclear deal with Iran, which he said he believes Washington will sign no matter what.

According to Army Radio, Bennett told cabinet ministers privately that Israel had to choose its battles with the US carefully, and was currently focusing on dissuading Washington from delisting Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terror group as part of the negotiations.

Later Sunday, Blinken was set to participate in the Negev Summit, a gathering of four foreign ministers from Arab sates in southern Israel that was hosted by Lapid. The ministers were to discuss regional security issues, with Iran expected

to be top of the agenda.