In Sydney, Netanyahu Lauds ‘Clear-Eyed Australia’ for Blasting UN

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Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday praised Australia for being “courageously willing to puncture UN hypocrisy” on resolutions singling out Israel for condemnation.

His counterpart Malcolm Turnbull had marked the first visit to Australia by a serving Israeli leader with an opinion piece in Wednesday’s [The Australian newspaper](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/foreign-affairs/malcolm-turnbull-blasts-un-over-vote-on-israel/news-story/10af365ffbb27d88928a2646a0615e37) that backed Netanyahu’s criticism of the United Nations.

“My government will not support one-sided resolutions criticizing Israel of the kind recently adopted by the UN Security Council and we deplore the boycott campaigns designed to delegitimize the Jewish state,” Turnbull wrote in an op-ed in The Australian newspaper, referring to a December 23 [resolution condemning Israeli settlements](http://www.timesofisrael.com/choosing-not-to-veto-obama-lets-anti-settlement-resolution-pass-at-un-security-council/) in the West Bank and East Jerusalem as a “flagrant violation” of international law.

The United States abstained from that vote and Australia, while not a member of the security council, was one of the few countries to publicly support Israel’s position.

During a press conference with Turnbull, Netanyahu said he was delighted to read the article at the start of his four-day Australian visit.

“Australia has been courageously willing to puncture UN hypocrisy more than once, including this absurd resolution that said the Western wall, the most sacred site for the Jewish people for thousands of years — thousands of years even before the rise of Islam — that this is occupied Palestinian territory,” he told reporters.

“So the UN is capable of many absurdities and I think it’s important that you have straightforward and clear-eyed countries like Australia that often bring it back to Earth,” Netanyahu said.

Turnbull described Australia as a committed and consistent friend of Israel and praised the two countries’ “shared values, democracy, freedom, rule of law,” describing Israel as “truly miraculous nation.”

He also reiterated his support for a two-state solution to resolve the Palestinian conflict. “I agree with you in that the circumstances of the times in your area… do appear to create the opportunity where perhaps the moons are aligning such that this could be a good time to come back to the table and reach an agreement,” he said, “but, of course, as with any agreement, it needs two to tango,” Turnbull told Netanyahu.

The two-state solution has come up for debate in the last week, after US President Donald Trump appeared to walk back America’s long-held commitment to the formula. His remarks were cited by many of Netanyahu’s coalition partners as an opportunity to do away with the notion of Palestinian statehood, and while the prime minister has not disavowed his own commitment to two states, he has stated he sees no possibility for a bilateral peace deal in the foreseeable future.

Australia’s foreign minister had indicated last week that Canberra could be open to a [one-state agreement](http://www.timesofisrael.com/australia-hints-at-openness-to-two-state-solution-alternatives/) as well if that was what the sides desired, echoing [Trump’s statement](http://www.timesofisrael.com/trump-walks-back-us-support-for-two-states-but-vows-to-pursue-a-great-peace-deal/) earlier this month that he would accept whatever Israelis and Palestinians agreed on.

“Israel and the Palestinians need to come to a settlement and we support a directly negotiated two-state solution so that Palestinians will have their own state and the people of Israel can be secure within agreed borders,” Turnbull wrote in his op-ed, amid suggestions that the Israeli leader no longer backed the two-state formula.

During the press conference, Netanyahu dismissed calls from critics of Israeli West bank settlements, including former Australian prime ministers Kevin Rudd and Bob Hawke, for Australia to formally recognize Palestine as a state.

“I ask both former prime ministers to ask a simple question: What kind of state will it be that they are advocating? A state that calls for Israel’s destruction? A state whose territory will be used immediately for radical Islam?” Netanyahu said.

He also reiterated his opposition to a single-state solution, saying of West Bank Palestinians, “I want them to have all the freedoms to govern themselves but none of the powers to threaten us. Let them govern themselves, but not have the the military and physical power to threaten the State of Israel.”

He and Turnbull resigned agreements on technology and air services as well as discussing an expansion of cooperation in areas including cybersecurity, innovation and science.

Netanyahu will stay in Sydney until Sunday to meet with top government officials and senior leaders of the Jewish community.

On Wednesday he was scheduled to take part in an economics conference with leading Israeli and Australian businessmen, and to go onto an event at Sydney’s Great Synagogue.

Opposition leader Bill Shorten, head of the Australian Labor Party, has made clear that he will raise the issue of West Bank settlements when he meets with the Israeli premier.

“We support the right of both Palestinians and Israelis to live within secure borders,” Shorten said Tuesday. “I will make it clear to Mr. Netanyahu that where settlement-building is an obstacle to two-state solution, it should be stopped.”

Netanyahu is also expected to face a series of protests during the visit. Over 60 prominent Australians signed an open letter opposing his visit, citing the Israeli government’s policies toward the Palestinians, and demonstrations are planned for Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra.

“It is time for the suffering of the Palestinian people to stop and for Australia to take a more balanced role in supporting the application of international law and not supporting Mr Netanyahu and his policies,” the signatories — including former politicians, legal professionals and clergy — wrote.

“Mr Netanyahu’s policies consistently aim to provoke, intimidate and oppress the Palestinian population which increase that imbalance [of power], thus taking Israel irretrievably further from peace. These policies are inconsistent with Australian values and beliefs and we should not welcome him here,” they added.

During his press conference with Turnbull, Netanyahu brushed aside questions about his relationship with Australian billionaire James Packer, whose name has come up in a number of current criminal investigations involving him. “I think nothing will come of it because there is nothing there except friendship,” he asserted.