

# Netanyahu tells U.S. Jews he won't allow nukes for Iran

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NEW ORLEANS (RNS) Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told thousands of American Jewish leaders that Israel will not allow Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon, and stands ready to negotiate a meaningful peace with Palestinians, but only if they guarantee Israeli security.

Appearing before most of the 4,000 delegates at a meeting of the Jewish Federations of North America, Netanyahu launched a broad defense of his administration's policies in the Middle East, with Iran at the center of Israel's threat radar.

He did not touch on Israel's continued settlement building in disputed East Jerusalem, despite U.S. pleas for a halt because the U.S. believes it complicates the peace process.

Netanyahu called a nuclear-armed Iran "the greatest threat to Israel and the world." And while United Nations and U.S. sanctions have exerted pressure on Iran, there is no sign Iran is ending its nuclear program, he said.

"The simple paradox is this: If the international community, led by the United States, hopes to stop Iran's nuclear program without resort to military action, it will have to convince Iran it is prepared to take such action," Netanyahu said.

Netanyahu also expressed a willingness to negotiate with Palestinian authorities, but would not yield territory in return for a mere promise of peace.

He said Israel would not vacate occupied ground, as it left Lebanon in 2006, only to be subjected to rocket attacks from the vacated area.

"If Israel does not maintain a credible military and security presence in the Jordan Valley for the foreseeable future, this is exactly what will happen again," Netanyahu said. "And I will not let that happen."

Netanyahu told the largely sympathetic crowd that Israel depends on the American Jewish community to back its policies. Attendees responded with repeated applause.

His address was interrupted five times by shouts from individuals protesting the Israeli occupation and Israel's domestic security policies. The protesters, from an organization called Jewish Voice for Peace, were shouted down and quickly hustled out of the room by security guards.