

# Netanyahu raps Lapid's peace plan as 'reckless'

• By TOVAH LAZAROFF

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu attacked his largest coalition partner, Finance Minister Yair Lapid, at his Likud Knesset faction on Monday, describing him as an inexperienced politician with a reckless peace plan.

At the same time, he touted his own skills as the most responsible veteran diplomat to successfully navigate Israel through its current impasse with the Palestinians.

"Someone who is inexperienced in diplomatic negotiations and security matters should not initiate a reckless plan whose results would be akin to those of [the 2005 Gaza] disengagement," Netanyahu said.

He spoke one day after four party leaders, including three from his coalition, challenged his ability to properly manage the Israeli Palestinian conflict by presenting their own plans to resolve it, while chastising Netanyahu for failing to show leadership at this critical moment.

The four politicians - Justice Minister Tzipi Livni (Hatnua), Economic Affairs Minister Naftali Bennett (Bayit Yehudi), Labor Party leader MK Isaac Herzog, and Interior Minister Gideon Sa'ar (Likud) - spoke at the 2014 Herzliya Conference sponsored by the IDC Herzliya.

But Lapid's warning that he would topple the government if it annexed even a single settlement and his detailed three-part plan drew the most media attention.

The finance minister's plan calls on Israel unilaterally to create a map of its final borders, as well as to freeze construction at and to with-

draw from isolated settlements. This would be done in coordination with the Palestinians, but in advance of a final-status agreement.

In the Knesset, Netanyahu did not name Lapid as he spoke to his faction, but it was assumed that his comments targeted the Yesh Atid party head. Netanyahu read from a sheet of paper, quoting from the pre-election speech Lapid gave at Ariel University in the West Bank when he launched his political career.

"At the outset I would like to quote from things that were said at Ariel University, not so far away from the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya," Netanyahu said.

"We must not repeat the historic mistake of the Israeli Left, which always announces its concessions up front, which only causes the Palestinians to want more and more. This isn't how you negotiate, certainly not in our region," Netanyahu said as he quoted from Lapid's old speech.

He then added his own comments. "I'm not busying myself with political commentary. I'm preoccupied with protecting the security of Israel's citizens. I will continue to lead the country in a careful and responsible manner," Netanyahu said.

But in spite of his strong words, Netanyahu has yet to put forward his own plan for how Israel should proceed, since the nine-month, US-led negotiating period ended in April with no tangible results. Israel has insisted that it will not talk with the newly unified Fatah-Hamas government and as a result

it seems unlikely that negotiations would resume in the near future.

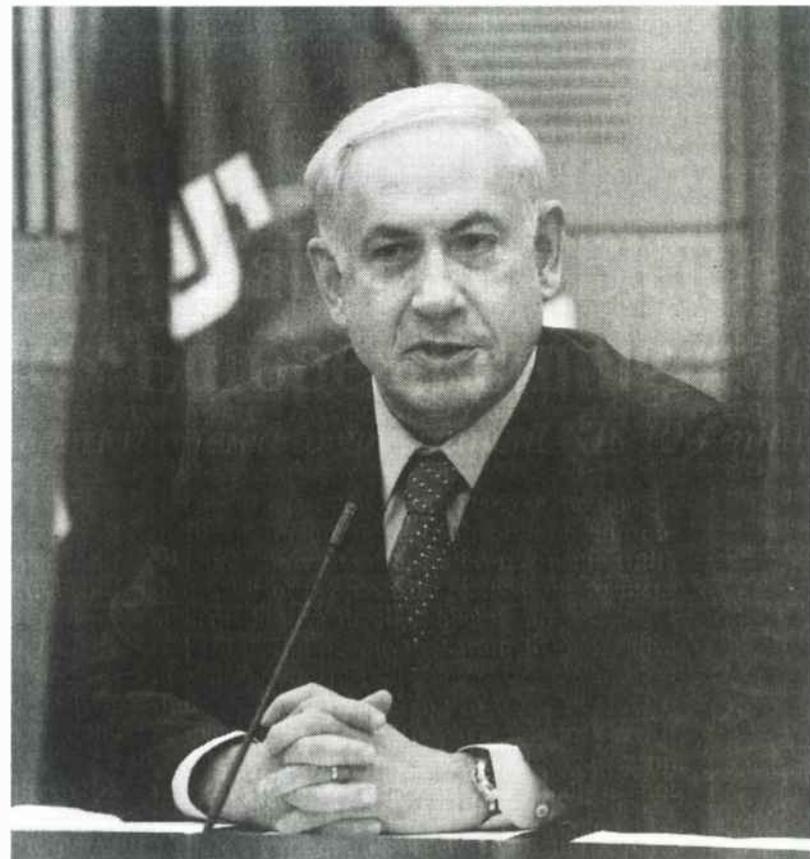
The security cabinet last week created a team to study options, including the possibilities of limited, unilateral territorial withdrawal or annexation. Sunday night's debate, however, revealed how deeply divided Netanyahu's ministers are on Israel's next step.

Sa'ar, who represented Netanyahu's Likud Party, argued that the best option is to maintain the status quo, while Economic Affairs Minister Naftali Bennett (Bayit Yehudi) argued that Israel should gradually annex all of Area C, starting with the Gush Etzion bloc. Justice Minister Tzipi Livni (Hatnua) spoke in support of the settlement blocs and against building in isolated settlements. But she said that she, too, opposes annexation.

Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman told a conference in Eilat on Monday that Netanyahu should unite his ministers around a single plan. He attacked as a "grotesque spectacle" the speeches given by the four politicians at the Herzliya Conference.

"The economic affairs minister spoke about annexing the settlement blocs and the finance minister threatened to topple the government if even one settlement is annexed," Liberman said. "They both know that there is no chance that either of these things will happen."

"Annexation is a good idea, but it is inapplicable," Liberman said. "Minister Bennett knows this, but he thinks he can pick up a few more mandates by speaking about it. The



BINYAMIN NETANYAHU (Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)

justice minister is talking about the continuation of the Oslo Accords, 21 years after it started and then failed.

"This reminds me of a quote from Hegel that 'governments never learn anything from history.' 'The interior minister talked about the continuation of the status quo, something that simply will not work,' he said.

The government must initiate a clear plan that has united ministerial support, Liberman asserted.

"The prime minister must do this as soon as possible, because if we do not initiate [a plan] one will be forced on us that we do not want and is not in our interests," Liberman said.

His Yisrael Beytenu party, Liberman said, is the only one that has a realistic platform for a future agreement with the Palestinians, but he did not elaborate.

The Yisrael Beytenu Party supports a peace deal as part of an overall package that allows Israel to have a good relationship with the Arab world and resolve the issue of Israeli Arab citizens, Liberman said. Thus all issues that will be dealt with in the agreement must be worked on simultaneously.

Lapid, however, spoke in support of his plan on Monday when he addressed his faction in the Knesset. He said that Israel must set its final borders, because it needs to secure the country and to separate from the Palestinians.

"We need to put a concrete map on the table that will define the boundaries of the settlement blocs," he said. "To do nothing is not an act of leadership," he said.

Bennett told his faction that Israel needs to look out first and foremost for its interests. It needs a plan that is born of strength and not fear, he said, defying critics who have called his plan "unrealistic" or "anti-Zionist."

"I say, that no matter how hard you attack, we will continue to do exactly what we believe is good for the nation of Israel and what is needed to stay true to our voters," he said, noting the plan was proposed before the last elections and his party has worked to advance it since then.

Bennett said that Israel should first extend its sovereignty to Gush Etzion, because even former US president Jimmy Carter believes it should be within Israel's final borders.

"It could be a good start," Bennett said.