

Netanyahu gets good marks on speech, except from Arabs

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By: ICEJ News

Jerusalem says government standing on rise in Europe



Reaction to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's landmark policy speech on Sunday continues to reverberate across the globe, with officials in Jerusalem claiming it has raised the government's standing in many world capitals.

After Netanyahu complied with his demand to accept the goal of a Palestinian state, US President Barak Obama praised his speech as "a step in the right direction." He also played down Arab rejection of the speech as a knee jerk reaction that was to be expected and added that he would also like to see Israel's Arab neighbors making an effort to reassure

Israel on security issues.

"I think any time an Israeli prime minister makes a statement, the immediate reaction tends to be negative," Obama said. "There were a lot of conditions, and... that's exactly what negotiations are supposed to be about."

The speech was given an approval rating of 71% of the Israeli public in a poll published by the leftist *Ha'aretz* newspaper. His combination of calling for an undivided Jerusalem, opposition to the return of Palestinian refugees, a demand for defensible borders, and a demilitarized Palestinian state appear to have struck a chord with Israelis from across the political and social spectrum.

Netanyahu also appears to have shored up support among his own Likud party. "We have to unite behind the prime minister," nationalist cabinet minister Bennie Begin told a meeting of the Likud faction in the Knesset on Monday. Minister of Strategic Affairs Moshe Ya'alon agreed, telling *Army Radio* that "What was presented in the speech accurately reflects the Israeli consensus. All their [Palestinians'] reactions have been refusal and war. Now we no longer look like we are the ones who are refusing the [peace process]."

The reactions to the speech from the Palestinian and Arab world continued to be very harsh. "The Israelis see themselves as victims rather than the aggressors," said an editorial in the official Syrian newspaper *Tishrin*, while Saudi Arabia's state-run *Al-Nadwa* daily said "every paragraph of Netanyahu's speech makes us more pessimistic." In Jordan, the pro-government *Al-Rai* daily ran an editorial titled, "Netanyahu offered rotten merchandise. Nobody will buy it."

Elsewhere, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and German Chancellor Angela Merkel voiced tepid support for the speech in phone conversations with Netanyahu yesterday, with Merkel inviting him to visit Germany in the near future. Many in Israel have been worried at a growing trend in official Europe against Israel and in favor of closer ties with the Hamas terror militia in the Gaza Strip, but diplomatic sources in the EU say the speech might have changed things.

"Before the speech Netanyahu had no credit with the Europeans, and in fact was in deficit," a senior diplomatic official said. "Now he has some credit. Not a lot, but some credit."

Ending weeks of limited media appearances, Netanyahu told *NBC's* Today Show today that, "Just as they expect us to recognize a Palestinian state, they have to recognize a Jewish state." In a *CBS* interview, he added that he was "disappointed" with the chilly Arab response to his parameters for a Palestinian state, but nonetheless claimed he has opened the door to peace.