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<http://nypost.com/2014/08/06/netanyahu-asks-us-to-help-israel-avoid-war-crime-charges/>

Netanyahu asks US to help Israel avoid war crime charges

By Geoff Earle

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asked US lawmakers Wednesday to help fend off Palestinian claims that his country engaged in “war crimes” while defending itself against attacks from Gaza, one top lawmaker told The Post.

The Israeli leader later told international reporters that his country employed “extraordinary measures” to avoid civilian deaths in the nearly month-long conflict.

As a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas held for a third day, Netanyahu met with a group of US legislators, including Rep. Steve Israel (D-LI,) to discuss the country's tense security situation and some fissures in US-Israel relations.

Netanyahu asked the delegation to help Israel stay out of the International Criminal Court, where its attacks on Gaza could come under scrutiny — even while responding to Hamas rockets fired at Israeli urban centers.

Palestinian leaders are getting ready to join the ICC, and met with officials in The Hague recently to discuss the implications of joining.

“The prime minister asked us to work together to ensure that this strategy of going to the ICC does not succeed,” Rep. Israel told The Post by phone from Tel Aviv.

Netanyahu “wants the US to use all the tools that we have at our disposal to, number one, make sure the world knows that war crimes were not committed by Israel, they were committed by Hamas. And that Israel should not be held to a double standard,” the congressman said.



Palestinians sit amid the ruins of destroyed homes in the Shejaia neighborhood of Gaza City, which witnesses said was heavily hit by Israeli shelling and airstrikes. Photo: Reuters

“It’s Hamas that embedded its rockets in hospitals and in homes,” he added. “And now there are some in the international community who want to investigate the Israelis for the war crime of simply defending themselves.”

Netanyahu blamed Hamas for the civilian deaths, saying the group intentionally used innocent people as human shields — and showed a video to international journalists to prove the point.

“Let’s imagine your country attacked by 3,500 rockets,” Netanyahu said at a news conference.

“Your territories infiltrated by death squads. What would you do? What would you demand your government do to protect you and your family? What if the rockets are fired from civilian areas? Should you then not take action?”

Netanyahu also criticized Hamas for not agreeing sooner to the ceasefire now in effect.

“Ninety percent of the fatalities could have been avoided had Hamas not rejected the ceasefire it accepts now,” he said.

“We have taken extraordinary measures to avoid civilian casualties.”

His assessment came as news surfaced that the West Bank kidnapping and killing of three Israeli teens in June was funded by Hamas.

According to the Times of Israel, the alleged ringleader of the terror cell behind the deaths told authorities that Hamas operatives in Gaza funded the operation.

The discovery of the bodies, and an apparent revenge attack, sparked days of unrest, which prompted Israel to launch its operations to destroy a network of cross-border attack tunnels.

President Obama said he had “no sympathy” for Hamas and that Israel needs assurances there will be no repeat of the rocket attacks, but indicated Israel should make long-term concessions.

The two sides agreed to a 72-hour truce Monday — and Israel said it was prepared to extend it. Hamas officials said they’d agree to an extension only if progress is made in negotiations being held in Cairo.

Nearly 1,900 Palestinians have been killed in the fighting, with Gaza officials saying three-quarters of the dead were civilians.

Israel says some 900 Hamas militants were among the dead. Sixty-four Israeli soldiers and three civilians inside Israel have also been killed.