Netanyahu: ICC makes Jewish rights to biblical Israel a war crime

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Israel plans to push back against the “absurd” decision by the International Criminal Court: to turn the right of Jews to live in biblical Israel into a war crime, while ignoring the human rights abuses of countries like Iran, Syria and Turkey, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the cabinet at the start of its weekly meeting on Sunday.

On Friday, the ICC “finally became a weapon in the political war against the State of Israel,” Netanyahu said.

He spoke just two days after ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda said that she believed war crimes had occurred in Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem.

She plans to open an investigation into human rights abuses by Israelis and Palestinians in those territories.

But first, she has asked the pre-trial chamber to rule on the question of whether the ICC can consider Palestine a state for the purposes of adjudicating this issue – and if so, whether the court has jurisdiction over all the territory in question.

Netanyahu told his ministers that there were “three absurd things” with her decision.

“The ICC was established after the horrors of World War II, mainly the horrors that were inflicted on our people, and it was designed to deal with problems that states would raise regarding war crimes, such as genocide or large-scale deportations,” Netanyahu said.

“It was designed to do so for states that did not have true judicial systems of law, which of course do exist in the Western world,” he added.

Instead, what has happened here is that the ICC has accepted a claim by the Palestinians, “who do not have a state, and have accused the only democracy in the Middle East, which operates in accordance with the highest legal standards of Western democracies, which the court has no jurisdiction over,” Netanyahu said.

Secondly, he said that the “prosecutor’s decision contradicts historical truth. It opposes the right of the Jews to settle in the Jews’ homeland. To turn the fact that Jews are living in their land into a war crime is an absurdity of unimaginable proportions.”

Lastly, he asked, “Who are they bringing here? Who are they accusing here? Iran? Turkey? Syria? No – Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East. This is terrible hypocrisy,” he said.

Israel will fight for its right and its historical truth with all the tools it has, the prime minister said.

Netanyahu thanked US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for the strong statement he issued Friday against the ICC and in support of Israel.

While Israel’s situation at the ICC has gotten worse, he said, its regional ties with Arab nations are strengthening.

He pointed to UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed, who on Saturday, “spoke about a new alliance in the Middle East: an Israeli-Arab alliance. This is the direct result of our policy, which has turned Israel into a rising power in the region and the world.”

He credited warming ties on the work that he and his government have done. “This remake is the result of the ripening of many contacts and efforts, which at the moment – and I emphasize at the moment – would be best served by my silence,” Netanyahu said.

The prime minister also spoke of the need to approve more money for the residents of southern Israel, who have been living under the threat of Gaza rockets and incendiary balloons.