Netanyahu on war crimes probe: ICC has become a ‘weapon’ against Israel

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Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday tore into the International Criminal Court for saying there were grounds to investigate alleged Israeli and Palestinian war crimes, calling it an “absurd” decision that showed the court was being weaponized against Israel.

“As we’re moving forward to new places of hope and peace with our Arab neighbors, the International Criminal Court in The Hague is going backwards. On Friday it finally became a weapon in the political war against Israel,” Netanyahu said at the start of the weekly cabinet meeting in Jerusalem.

The ICC’s top prosecutor announced over the weekend that there was a “basis” to probe Israel’s settlement policy in the West Bank, the 2014 Gaza war, the Israeli response to violent protests on the Gaza border, and the targeting of civilians by Hamas and other Palestinian terror groups.

The prosecutor referred the matter of the probe to the Hague-based tribunal to rule on the specific territory over which it has jurisdiction, as Israel is not a member of the court.

Netanyahu said the prosecutor’s decision contained three “absurdities,” the first of which was going against the court’s founding principles.

“The ICC was established after the horrors of World War II, in particular the terrible horrors done to our people, and it is meant to deal with problems that states bring up against war criminals, such as genocide or mass deportation,” he said.

Second, taking aim at the court’s scrutiny of West Bank settlements, Netanyahu argued that the decision went against “historical truth” of Jewish rights in the historic land of Israel.

“It is acting against the right of Jews to settle in the homeland of the Jews. To turn the fact that Jews are living in their land into a war crime — it is hard for there to be a greater absurdity than this,” he said.

Finally, Netanyahu said the ICC was ignoring the “present truth,” lashing it for not instead pursuing probes of Iran or Syria.

“This is terrible hypocrisy,” he said. “We’ll fight for our rights and our historical truths with all tools at our disposal.”

He also said the US was “fighting these distortions, this lack of justice and this lie,” without elaborating.

The Trump administration has previously threatened the court with sanctions and visa denial if it investigates Americans or Israelis. In April, it revoked ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda’s visa over a possible investigation of American troops’ actions in Afghanistan.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday condemned the court’s announcement, saying it “unfairly targets” Israel, but did not say whether the US would act against the ICC over the move.

Netanyahu also commented on Israeli-Arab relations after the foreign minister of the United Arab Emirates shared an article Saturday about warming ties between Israel and Arab states.

“Yesterday we saw a further expression of the warming ties between Israel and Arab states. The foreign minister of the United Arab Emirates, Abdullah bin Zayed, talked about the new alliance in the Middle East — an Israel-Arab alliance,” he said.

He added: “This remark is result of the fruition of contacts and considerable efforts.”

Jerusalem is said to have developed clandestine ties with numerous Arab countries in recent years over the countries’ shared antipathy toward Iran and the need to counter jihadism.

Arab leaders, however, have also indicated that true normalization cannot take place so long as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not resolved.