Liberman blasts Netanyahu for not razing Bedouin village in light of ICC probe

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MK Avigdor Liberman on Monday lambasted the prime minister for the government’s decision not to raze the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar in the southern West Bank out of concerns that such an action would prompt an investigation by the International Criminal Court.

In a Facebook post, Liberman mocked Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in light of ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda’s announcement last week that she may open a probe into alleged Israeli war crimes.

The former defense minister and head of the right-wing Yisrael Beytenu party compared Netanyahu’s decision to postpone the court-approved demolition to the United Kingdom’s doomed 1938 Munich Agreement with Nazi Germany, ahead of the Second World War.

“It was Winston Churchill who said of the Munich Agreement that Britain could choose between dishonor and war. It chose dishonor — and got war, in Churchill’s words. The International Criminal Court in the Hague’s announcement that there is a basis to say Israel committed war crimes brings me back… to Netanyahu’s decision not to evict Khan al-Ahmar, in complete opposition to my opinion,” Liberman said.

“So we didn’t evict Khan al-Ahmar and we’ve anyway been accused of war crimes,” he added.

Liberman was the [latest politician](https://www.timesofisrael.com/fm-razing-of-bedouin-hamlet-delayed-over-fears-it-would-be-last-straw-for-icc/)to criticize the Netanyahu government for not evicting the residents of Khan al-Ahmar, following Foreign Minister Israel Katz’s confirmation that the state had not done so out of concerns of an ICC investigation.

“A few days ago I said at Khan al-Ahmar that no reason was given for why the clearance was being delayed. Today we learned the reason: The government of Israel is scared of The Hague [ICC],” tweeted MK Gideon Saar, Netanyahu’s rival in the race for the leadership of the Likud party.

Last Friday, Bensouda said there was a “reasonable basis” to open an investigation into alleged war crimes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Before opening the probe, she said she would ask the court to determine the territory over which it has jurisdiction, as Israel is not a member of the court. The Palestinian Authority is a member of the court, though it is a topic of ongoing legal debate if it qualifies as a state, a question that could prevent the ICC from launching its probe.

Bensouda’s announcement was met with widespread condemnation from Israeli leaders and a legal opinion published by Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit, arguing that the court has no jurisdiction to launch the probe.

Bensouda said she was considering investigating Israel’s West Bank settlement policy, the 2014 war in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli response to violent protests on the Gaza border, and the targeting of civilians and torture of individuals by Hamas and other Palestinian terror groups.

Liberman, Netanyahu’s one-time chief of staff, listed a number of cases in which he said the prime minister caved to external pressure and considerations, rather than voting based on his beliefs, which later backfired.

He recalled a 1995 vote of no confidence in a Labor-led government over a decision to appropriate land in East Jerusalem, despite Netanyahu and the Likud supporting the measure.

“In the end, the appropriation was canceled and the no-confidence proposal was withdrawn, but the scar remains,” Liberman wrote.

“I call on Prime Minister Netanyahu to get it together, to stop with the political spin and to stop looking for excuses not to do something, and to make an immediate decision to evict Khan al-Ahmar and the structures next to Susiya,” he said, referring to another Bedouin village.

Last May, the state said it could not demolish the hamlet until a new government is formed. There is a general tendency among interim Israeli governments not to make unnecessary, dramatic policy decisions, as this could make things more difficult for their successors. Israel has been experiencing a political deadlock since the April elections and repeat September elections, both of which failed to yield a government.

Bensouda said last year that she was keeping tabs on the planned demolition of Khan al-Ahmar and that its razing could be a war crime, drawing a rebuke from Israel.

There has been strong international pressure on Israel to reverse its plans to raze the village, which Israeli authorities say was built illegally. The village is located near several major Israeli settlements and close to a highway leading to the Dead Sea.

The state says the structures, mostly makeshift shacks and tents, were built without permits and pose a threat to the village residents because of their proximity to a highway.

But the villagers — who have lived at the site, then controlled by Jordan, since the 1950s, after the state evicted them from their Negev homes — argue that they had little alternative but to build without Israeli construction permits, as such permits are almost never issued to Palestinians for building in parts of the West Bank, such as Khan Al-Ahmar, where Israel has full control over civilian affairs.

The razing of Khan al-Ahmar has been a key concern for many settlers as well as others in the broader Israeli right, who have criticized the government for carrying out demolitions at the Netiv Ha’avot and Amona outposts, while allowing the Palestinian hamlet to remain standing.