

Netanyahu reportedly worried ICC is preparing to issue arrest warrant



Tel Aviv, April 30 (RHC)-- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is reportedly growing increasingly concerned that the International Criminal Court is preparing to issue arrest warrants for him and other top government officials for committing war crimes in the Gaza Strip.

The Times of Israel reports that the Israeli government, in partnership with the U.S., is “making a concerted effort to head off” possible arrest warrants from the ICC, which first launched its war crimes investigation in the occupied Palestinian territories in 2021.

Israel does not recognize the ICC's jurisdiction and has refused to cooperate with the probe. The ICC says it has jurisdiction over Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem.

Citing an unnamed Israeli government source, The Times of Israel reported that "a major focus of the ICC allegations will be that Israel 'deliberately starved Palestinians in Gaza.'" Other officials who could face arrest warrants are Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi.

The Times of Israel's reporting came shortly after Israeli journalist Ben Caspit wrote that Netanyahu is "under unusual stress" over the possibility of arrest warrants and is leading a "nonstop push over the telephone" to forestall ICC action.

Like Israel, the U.S. is not a party to the Rome Statute, which established the ICC in 2002. The legal body is tasked with investigating individuals, not governments.

The U.S., Israel's leading arms supplier, has opposed the ICC's Palestine investigation from the start, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken saying in a 2021 statement that the court "has no jurisdiction over this matter" because "Israel is not a party to the ICC."

But the Biden administration vocally supported the ICC's decision to issue an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin over war crimes committed in Ukraine, even though neither Russia nor Ukraine are parties to the Rome Statute.

Seeing commentary that ICC arrest warrants against Israeli officials would create a dangerous precedent because Israel isn't a party to the Rome Statute.

The Israeli government has been accused of committing numerous war crimes in Gaza since the October 7 Hamas-led attack, including genocide, ethnic cleansing, and using starvation as a weapon of war. Late last year, the human rights group Democracy for the Arab World Now submitted to the ICC the names of dozens of Israeli military commanders who are believed to have been directly involved in violations of international law.

Reports of potentially imminent ICC action have sparked alarm among conservatives in the United States.

U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) wrote on social media Friday that the court should "should stand down on this immediately."

In an editorial published that same day, The Wall Street Journal suggested the U.S. and United Kingdom could "risk finding Americans and Britons under the gun" next if they don't warn ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan against issuing arrest warrants for Israeli officials. Human rights organizations and legal experts have said Biden and other U.S. officials could be held liable under international law if they continue supporting Israel's war on Gaza.

"Mr. Khan's candidacy was championed by his native Britain and supported by the U.S.," continues the Journal editorial, "so both countries may have influence if they warn Mr. Khan of what will happen if he proceeds."

The Times of Israel noted Sunday that according to reports in several Israeli media outlets, the U.S. is "part of a last-ditch diplomatic effort to prevent the International Criminal Court from issuing arrest warrants against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other Israeli officials."

Trita Parsi, executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, argued Sunday that "there is absolutely no reason for Biden to be involved in this."

"But once again," Parsi added, "Biden steps in to protect Netanyahu from the consequences of the war crimes he commits, which Biden claims he privately is frustrated about."

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