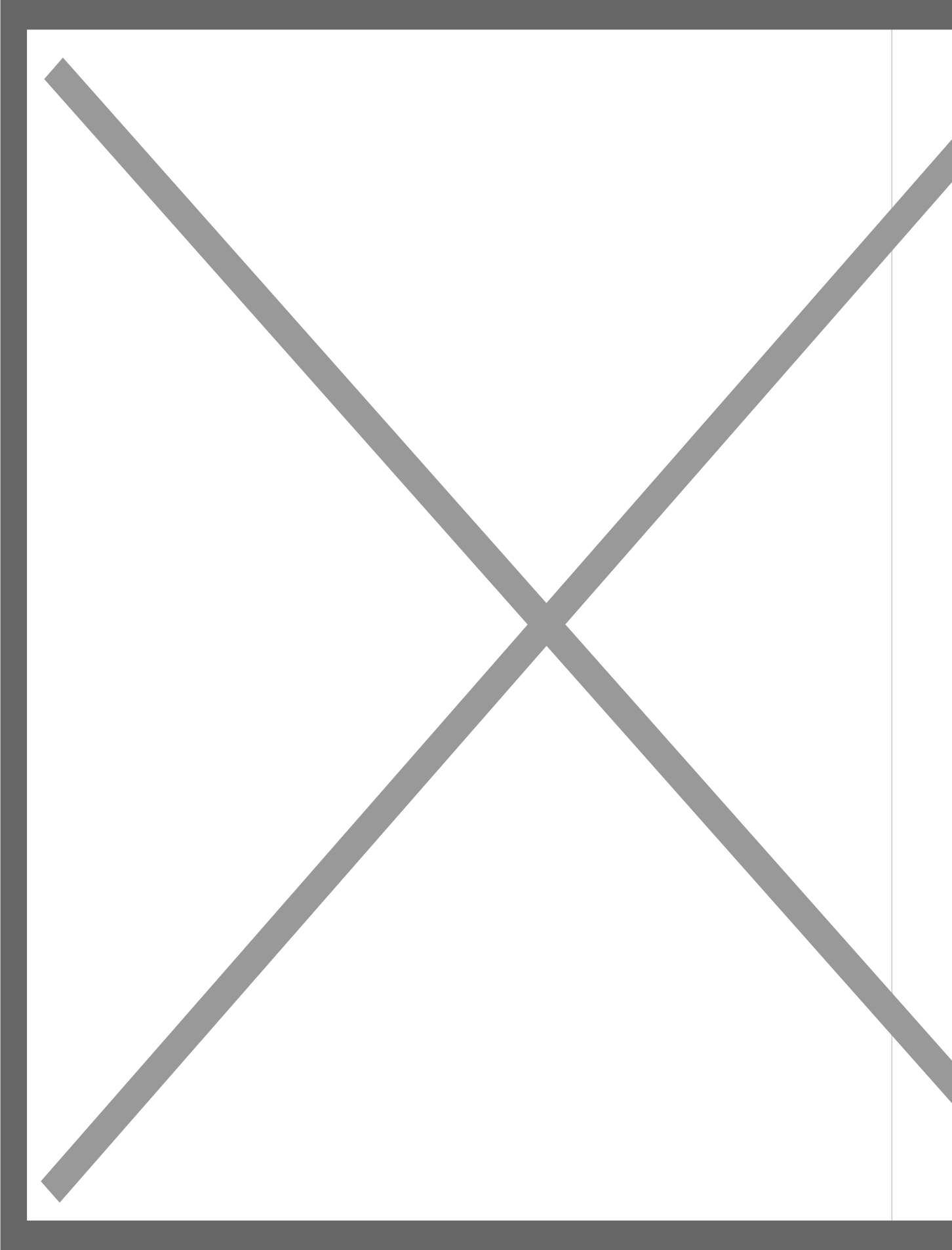


*Israeli prime minister and war
criminal Benjamin Netanyahu set
to address UN General Assembly
on Thursday*

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United Nations, September 25 (RHC)-- At the UN General Assembly just a year ago, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu triumphantly hailed a new peace he said would sweep through the Middle East. A year later, as he travels back to that same world stage, that vision is in tatters.

The devastating war in Gaza is about to hit the one-year mark. Israel is on the cusp of a wider regional war with the Lebanese resistance group Hezbollah.

And the country finds itself increasingly isolated internationally and led by a polarizing leader whose handling of the conflict has sparked protests both in global capitals and on the streets of his own country.

And it's not just the mushrooming regional conflicts weighing Israel down. Netanyahu will head to New York burdened also by what could be an imminent warrant for his arrest by the International Criminal Court over Israel's illegal and genocidal war of aggression against Gaza.

"He arrives almost at a point of being 'persona non grata,'" said Alon Liel, a former director-general of Israel's Foreign Ministry and outspoken critic of Netanyahu.

Netanyahu was set to address the General Assembly on Friday, but that date has now been moved up to Thursday. A renowned orator and showman, he has long viewed speeches from such venerated perches as the optimal way to deliver a message and score political points with Israelis enthralled by his flawless English and fiery delivery.

In July, he championed Israel's case for the war in Gaza in front of a joint session of the U.S. Congress, where he received multiple standing ovations from his co-conspirators.

"In his view, any such trips to New York, to the grand stage of world affairs, he considers an advantage," said Yossi Shain, a professor of international relations at Georgetown and Tel Aviv University. He said Netanyahu's speeches abroad were often meant to impress audiences at home, and this one was no different.

Netanyahu is known for his showmanship at the United Nations and has repeatedly used the pulpit to try make a case for his ideology and policies.

At a speech in 2012, Netanyahu famously brandished a placard with a cartoon bomb to illustrate what he said was Iran's race toward a nuclear weapon. In 2009, he showed up with a copy of the plans for the Nazi death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, using it to highlight what he said was the former Iranian leader's "antisemitic rants."

Last year, his focus was on what appeared to be a burgeoning normalization with Saudi Arabia that he said showed how a broader Middle East peace was not contingent on resolving the conflict with the Palestinians.

He held up his prop, a map of the region, and used the word "peace" 42 times. The map appeared to show Gaza and the West Bank — territories claimed by the Palestinians for a future state — as being encompassed by Israel.

But Netanyahu arrives at the United Nations this week at a time when his own diplomatic capital and legitimacy, as well as that of the country he represents, are at an all time low. Critics say that aside from a moment in the spotlight, it's not clear what Netanyahu will achieve with the visit.

"He is a great believer in speechmaking," said Tal Schneider, a Times of Israel political commentator. "He thinks that if he delivers a speech in English, he can convince people in the justness of his ways," she said, adding that that demonstrated he was "disconnected from reality."

Netanyahu's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Culture and Sports Minister Miki Zohar, who is close to Netanyahu, said the UN was a "very important stage" to lay out Israel's position and he hoped the speech would bolster international support.

At the UN, Netanyahu will seek to persuade a world growing increasingly exasperated by Israel's war in Gaza that its aims are righteous. He may try to galvanize the world behind an Israeli war against Hezbollah.

And he is likely to lay blame for the region's chaos on Iran, a repeated focus of his speeches at home and abroad. That he is making the trip at all, at a time of escalating violence with Hezbollah, points to how much significance he places on the speech.

But Netanyahu's words may fall on deaf ears. The Israeli leader "actually believes that his UN speeches have transformative effects on history. They do not," said Alon Pinkas, a former Israeli consul general in New York. Netanyahu's visit, Pinkas added, comes as Israel is now globally perceived as being "on the precipice of a condemned pariah state" with its leader seen as a "rogue warmonger."

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