

Zelensky Tells Israel: “You can mediate — but not between good and evil”

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President Volodymyr Zelensky on Sunday criticized the Israeli government for not standing unequivocally on the side of Ukraine and against the Russia invasion during a virtual address to Israeli lawmakers.

Why it matters: Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett is one of the few leaders who is in contact with Russian President Vladimir Putin and has been passing messages between Putin and Zelensky in an attempt to reach a ceasefire.

- Around 110 of the 120 members of the Knesset logged in to watch the speech. It was also broadcasted live on all Israeli TV networks and aired during a big pro-Ukraine rally in Tel Aviv.

What they are saying: “Why are you busy with calculations [regarding Russia]? Mediating without taking sides? You can mediate — but not between good and evil,” Zelensky said.

- The Ukrainian president compared the Russian invasion to the Holocaust and said Russia unleashed all-out war aimed at destroying the Ukrainian people like Nazi Germany wanted to destroy the Jewish people.
- Zelensky criticized the Israeli government’s policy regarding the entry of Ukrainian refugees, and complained that Israel refuses to supply Ukraine with the Iron Dome anti-missile system and other defensive weapons and equipment.
- The Ukrainian president also criticized the Israeli government for failing to impose sanctions on Russia like other countries in the west.

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said after the speech that he condemns the attack on Ukraine and thanks Zelensky for sharing the emotions and the distress of his people with the members of the Knesset.

- “We will continue to help the Ukrainian people as much as we can and never turn our back to people who suffer from war,” Lapid said.

The other side: The Israeli prime minister’s office and foreign ministry have declined to comment on Zelensky’s speech. A senior Israeli official told Axios: “We can understand what he is going through. He is under huge distress and his people are dying.”

- On the other hand, several ministers and lawmakers criticized the comparison Zelensky made between the war in Ukraine and the Holocaust.

Flashback: Zelensky’s speech echoed the harsh criticism that was voiced by a senior Ukrainian official earlier in the month during an [interview with Axios](#). “Bennett is basically telling us to surrender and we have no intention of doing that,” the senior Ukrainian official said.

Behind the scenes: Zelensky wanted to give the speech in front of the Knesset plenary but was declined. The speaker of the Knesset said it was impossible because lawmakers are on recess and the plenary is under renovations.

- Israeli officials said that while this was all true, it wasn’t the only reason. The Israeli government was concerned that if Zelensky gave a speech in the Knesset, Putin would ask to do the same — something nobody in Jerusalem wanted to happen.
- After facing criticism on social media, the speaker of the Knesset offered a compromise under which Zelensky would speak to members via Zoom.

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