



Ukrainian official: Bennett told Zelensky he should take Putin’s proposal to end war

Description

UKRAINE: A senior Ukrainian official said that Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Tuesday that he should take Russian President Vladimir Putin’s proposal for ending the war. An official in the Israeli Prime Minister’s Office denies the claim.

Why it matters: Bennett has emerged as a [key mediator between Putin and Zelensky](#) in the last two weeks. Israel has said it needs to remain neutral in the mediation, but the Ukrainian official told Axios that Bennett must present proposals and do more than act as a “mailbox” between the two sides.

Driving the news: The senior Ukrainian official claimed Bennett initiated the [call on Tuesday](#) and recommended Zelensky take the offer.

- Zelensky and his advisers didn’t like Bennett’s recommendation, according to the Ukrainian official.
- “Bennett is basically telling us to surrender and we have no intention of doing that,” the senior Ukrainian official said.

A senior official in the Israeli Prime Minister’s Office said that the details of the call as described the Ukrainian official were not true.

- “We doubt that the official is a senior person that is in Ukraine now and who was on the call, because it was conducted on a private line. Our contacts are directly with President Zelensky and his close advisers,” the official in the Prime Minister’s Office said.
- The Israeli official said Bennett didn’t recommend that Zelensky take Putin’s offer because Israel hasn’t received such an offer. “The prime minister doesn’t intend to give Zelensky any recommendations or advice at any stage,” the official said.
- The Israeli official stressed the call between Zelensky and Bennett was good and long and included a discussion about the possibility of holding a mediation meeting in Jerusalem.
- The Israeli official declined to comment on whether Israel is going to propose a more detailed plan for ending the war. “The prime minister’s efforts are focused on one thing — stopping the

bloodshed in Ukraine,” the official said.

Behind the scenes: In the last two weeks — and especially after Bennett’s trip to Moscow last Saturday — the Israeli government has claimed that it needs to maintain a careful and balanced approach to the war in Ukraine.

- The Israelis asked Ukraine in private to stop requesting military assistance or political backing from Israel because it will harm the mediation efforts that demand neutrality, the senior Ukrainian official said.

Details: The senior Ukrainian official said Zelensky and his aides didn’t get the impression over the last week that Bennett’s mediation efforts are bearing any fruit.

- The government in Kyiv thinks Bennett has not been acting as a mediator, the senior Ukrainian official said. He added that a mediator needs to push for compromises, put proposals on the table and not simply pass messages.
- “We don’t need another mailbox, we have enough of those,” the Ukrainian official said.
- The official added that Zelensky and his advisers believe that if Bennett wants to stay neutral and mediate, he needs to appoint an envoy that will work on this full time.

Between the lines: The Ukrainian president and his aides think that Bennett’s diplomatic involvement is largely motivated by his goal of not taking a clear position on the Russian invasion in order to maintain good relations with Russia, according to the Ukrainian official.

- “His initiative looks like an excuse for why he is not speaking out against Russia, not providing weapons to Ukraine and not sanctioning Russia,” the Ukrainian official said.
- The official noted that France and Germany are also passing messages between Kyiv and Moscow and don’t claim they have to stay neutral.

by Barak Ravid, author of Axios from Tel Aviv

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