

David Cameron opposes boycotts in pro-Israel speech

By John Reed in Jerusalem

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David Cameron said Britain opposed boycotts and would fight the “delegitimisation” of the Jewish state in a resoundingly pro-Israel speech in Jerusalem on Wednesday.

The UK prime minister was addressing a special session of the Knesset after arriving for an overnight visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories that comes as Middle East peace talks are reaching a critical point.

“Britain opposes boycotts, whether it’s trade unions campaigning for the exclusion of Israelis or universities trying to stifle academic exchange,” he said in a speech that also made reference to his Jewish great-great-grandfather and efforts to promote Holocaust education in the UK.

He said that “delegitimising” the Israeli state was “abhorrent and, together, we will defeat it”.

He spoke of “the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran” – the central policy focus of Israel’s prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu – and also mentioned the Klos-C, a ship Israel intercepted in the Red Sea last week with what it said were [Syrian and Iranian weapons](#) intended for Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip.

Mr Cameron made the speech on his first visit to Israel since becoming prime minister, before crossing Israel’s separation wall to meet Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, on Thursday.

Mr Abbas goes to Washington next week for talks with President Barack Obama amid signs that the peace negotiations, launched last July, are reaching an impasse.

Israel has continued expanding Jewish settlements on Palestinian lands throughout the talks, causing Palestinians to threaten repeatedly to abandon the discussions and push for unilateral recognition through the UN.

The Palestinians and the Arab League have rejected a demand by Mr Netanyahu’s government that they recognise Israel as an explicitly “Jewish state”. John Kerry, the US secretary of state, is prodding both sides to agree on a framework of principles by the end of April that might allow them to continue the talks.

Mr Cameron's speech made one brief reference to the settlements issue, saying that Britain backed the compromises needed for a peace deal, "including the halt to settlement activity and an end to Palestinian incitement, too" – Israel's term for public statements and educational material it says delegitimises its state.

But his overall tone was positive, at most cajoling, as he urged Israelis to imagine a peace deal that would lead to "a nation state of the Palestinian people and the nation state of the Jewish people", and open up new business opportunities in the region.

"Think of the capitals in the Arab world where Israelis could travel, do business, and build a future," he said.

Israel's relations with the EU are at a low point because of recent moves by Brussels to cut off scientific and research funding for Israeli entities that do business in the settlements.

A widespread expectation in Israel that the talks will end in failure have led to fears in the Jewish state that the international "Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions" movement that favours isolating Israel economically until it ends the occupation will gain momentum.

UK Trade & Investment, the business promotion body, recently published guidelines [warning companies](#) of the reputational and legal risk of doing business in the settlements, which caused friction with the Israeli authorities.

However, Mr Cameron emphasised the robustness of Britain's commercial ties with Israel. The two countries' trade in goods is worth £5bn a year. Mr Cameron was accompanied on his visit by business executives including representatives of Asos, GlaxoSmithKline and the London Stock Exchange.

"It was a very pro-Israel speech," **Azriel Bermant**, a research fellow at the **Institute for National Security Studies** in Tel Aviv, said of Mr Cameron's remarks to the Knesset.

"It was also a very good way to go about things: instead of talking about the danger of what would happen if no agreement were reached, he focused on the positives of the two-state solution."

<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/901cdbbc-a9f9-11e3-adab-00144feab7de.html#axzz2vpQmbu5T>