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Israeli PM Speaks to Putin About Ukraine Conflict

By AFP

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Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Russian President Vladimir Putin **Kremlin.ru**

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett held a phone call Sunday with Russian President Vladimir Putin about the conflict in Ukraine, the premier's office said, following reports Kyiv has asked Israel to mediate.

"Prime Minister Naftali Bennett spoke with Russian President Vladimir Putin this afternoon. The two discussed the situation between Russia and Ukraine," Bennett's office said in a brief statement.

Bennett spoke to Ukranian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy on Friday. According to Israeli public broadcaster Kan and other outlets, Zelenskiy in that call asked Israel to play a mediation role following Russia's invasion.

A senior Israeli official said that in Bennett's call with Putin, the prime minister "said that

Israel is ready to assist as much as required and at any time in order to help resolve the crisis and bringing the parties closer.

"This is due to Israel's special status and good relations with all parties," the official said, adding that "the two leaders agreed to maintain continuous contact between Russia and Israel."

In an earlier announcement regarding a humanitarian aid shipment to civilians in Ukraine caught up in the fighting, Bennett described Israel's response to the crisis as "measured and responsible."

Israel has sought to preserve its delicate security cooperation with Moscow, given the large Russian military presence in Syria, where Israel conducts regular air strikes on what it calls Iran-linked targets.

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid has condemned the Russian invasion as "a violation of the international order," in the strongest language used by an Israeli official since the Russian offensive was launched on Thursday.

But Lapid also said that the welfare of the hundreds of thousands of Jews in both Russia and Ukraine was a top "consideration" for the government, stressing Israel's close ties with both Moscow and Kyiv.

Bennett said he would hold a dedicated security cabinet meeting on the Ukraine conflict later Sunday looking at the "diplomatic and economic aspects" of the crisis, including "the absorbtion of immigrants."

The Jewish Agency, which processes Israeli citizenship applications for Jews living abroad, has said it was setting up processing centers at several Ukrainian border crossings, in anticipation of Jews fleeing and requesting moves to Israel.

The foreign ministry also said 2,000 Israeli citizens had left Ukraine since Thursday.

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