Obama endorses Netanyahu as “man of peace”

Chris Marsden
8 July 2010

President Barack Obama on Tuesday praised Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a man who “wants peace” and is “willing to take risks for peace.”

He did so following a White House meeting five weeks after the May 31 raid on the Mavi Marmara Gaza aid convoy, in which Israeli forces murdered eight Turkish activists and a dual Turkish-US national. The White House meeting was also on the eve of another round of Israeli settlement expansion on the West Bank.

On the day of the meeting, a report by the human rights group B’Tselem said that Jewish settlements with 300,000 people now control more than 42 percent of all land in the West Bank, including 21 percent of all privately owned Palestinian land.

In March, Obama had made a point of refusing to hold a press conference with Netanyahu after Israel announced the building of 1,600 more Jewish homes while Vice President Joseph Biden was visiting Jerusalem. A “partial freeze” on further building runs out in September, and Israel has made clear it intends further construction.

Netanyahu has also refused to extend an apology to Turkey for the Mavi Marmara raid, and has rejected any international inquiry. With Washington’s support, Israel is holding its own inquiry, headed by a retired Israeli Supreme Court justice. The Israeli investigative committee does not even rise to the level of a state commission of inquiry.

Despite tensions that led to a temporary souring of US-Israel relations, Obama has again made clear the essential continuity of Middle East policy with the Republican Bush administration and underscored the bi-partisan character of US support for Israel. Obama described the relationship between the US and Israel as “unbreakable” and enduring. “It encompasses our national security interests, our strategic interests,” he said, and has “grown closer and closer as time goes on.”

Obama went to extraordinary lengths in his efforts to rehabilitate Netanyahu and Israel in the face of popular anger internationally over its blockade of the Gaza Strip and the suffering this inflicts on the Palestinians. He said nothing about the continued construction of Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem and did not urge an extension to the partial freeze.

Instead, he hailed the partial lifting of the Gaza blockade to allow in a limited number of consumer goods in the aftermath of Mavi Marmara as an example of how Israel has “shown restraint over the last several months that I think has been conducive to the prospects of us getting into direct talks.”

He rebutted press questions over his previous snub of Netanyahu. “The premise to your question was wrong, and I entirely disagree with it,” *Haaretz* reported Obama as saying. “If you look at every public statement that I’ve made over the last year-and-a-half, it has been a constant reaffirmation of the special relationship between the United States and Israel; that our commitment to Israel’s security has been unwavering. In fact, there aren’t any concrete policies that you could point to that would contradict that.”

He added, “I trusted Prime Minister Netanyahu since I met him before I was elected president. He is dealing with a very complex situation in a very tough neighborhood.”

The Israeli press noted in particular the significance of Obama’s defense of Israel’s nuclear deterrent. Obama rejected any singling out of Israel over its undeclared nuclear program as a threat to the 2012 Middle East regional nuclear conference.

A White House statement explained, “The president emphasized that the conference will only take place if all countries feel confident that they can attend, and that any efforts to single out Israel will make the prospects of convening such a conference unlikely.”

In an extraordinary Freudian slip, Obama also told reporters, “We strongly believe that, given its size, its history, the region that it’s in, and *the threats that are leveled against us—against it* , that Israel has unique security requirements. It’s got to be able to respond to threats or any combination of threats in the region. And that’s why we remain unwavering in our commitment to Israel’s security.” [Emphasis added]

YNet reported, “Israeli officials said no other American president has ever made such a clear statement regarding Israel’s nuclear ambiguity,” while *Haaretz* correspondent Natasha Mozgovaya called his statement, “The real treat” for Israel.

Obama’s glowing tribute to Netanyahu and fence-mending with Israel are motivated in the first instance by his desire to ensure Israeli collaboration against Iran, with both leaders stating they had discussed efforts to negotiate with Iran over its nuclear intentions following the imposition of additional

© World Socialist Web Site

sanctions by the United Nations Security Council.

Just hours ahead of Obama's meeting with Netanyahu, during a visit to Finland, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman warned that "if Iranians gain nuclear capability, we will see a crazy nuclear arms race in the whole Middle East with consequences I don't even want to think about." This, he said, "is the biggest threat to the Gulf countries, it's the biggest threat to the Middle East."

Obama can accommodate so openly to Israel only because of the backing of the Arab regimes, as well as Turkey. The US has been concerned that Israel's provocative actions and brutal treatment of the Palestinians might make it impossible for the Arab states to collaborate with its plans to secure Middle East domination. But the Arab bourgeois governments have shown a remarkable willingness to do so.

The Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is offering unprecedented concessions to Tel Aviv in order to secure the continued sponsorship by Washington of his stooge regime. The London-based Arab-language newspaper *Al Ahram* reported that Abbas submitted written proposals to US Special Envoy George Mitchell on core issues, including the borders of a Palestinian state and Jerusalem. The report states that Abbas's Fatah will consider a land swap that would allow Israel to retain the major Jewish settlements in return for Palestinian control of East Jerusalem, with the exception of the Jewish quarter of the Old City and the Wailing Wall.

Should this be rejected, as it will be, his sole alternative is to ask the Arab League countries to re-endorse the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, and to plead with the UN Security Council to recognize a Palestinian state based on the pre-1967 War borders.

Behind their usual empty words of support for the Palestinians, the Arab League states are working ever more closely with Washington and Tel Aviv. On the eve of Obama's meeting with Netanyahu, his administration approved £500 million in military sales to three Arab League states—Egypt, Oman and Tunisia—including an air defense upgrade, aircraft and naval ship support and helicopters. Washington is also considering a request from Saudi Arabia for the sale of 75 F-15 fighter jets and the modernization of other aircraft worth $10 billion. The request was reportedly approved during the visit to Washington by Saudi King Abdullah last month.

Last year, the US approved almost $13 billion in arms requests from the Arab states. Such military and commercial arrangements, coupled with a shared desire to curb Iranian power, are what really determine the Arab League's attitude towards Israel and the Palestinians.

The US deputy national security advisor, Ben Rhodes, stressed that such deals do not cut across enhanced military and security cooperation with Israel and the maintenance of its "qualitative military edge…through programs such as the Iron Dome [missile defense program] and through a very close contact through our national security teams."

"We believe that there are many cases in which the Iranian threat commits us to strengthen the ability of states in the region to defend themselves," he added.

The US has also agreed nearly $10 billion in arms deals with Turkey.

Syria's President Bashar al-Assad has called upon Turkey to exercise restraint regarding its posturing over Mavi Marmara. He warned on an official visit to Spain Monday, "If the relationship between Turkey and Israel is not renewed it will be very difficult for Turkey to play a role in negotiations" over the Middle East peace process, which would "affect the stability in the region."

Ankara has been forced by domestic anger to make protests against its traditional ally, Israel, in the aftermath of the killing of its citizens, including freezing at least 16 arms deals worth $56 billion, recalling its ambassador, and closing its airspace to Israeli military aircraft.

Last weekend, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu was reported to have told a small group of journalists traveling with him to Kyrgyzstan that Turkey would cut off ties with Israel if it did not receive an apology over Mavi Marmara. But Turkish officials quickly claimed the minister had been misrepresented, telling Reuters that he had said only that relations would not improve unless Ankara's demand was met.

Trade between Turkey and Israel reached a high of $3.3 billion in 2008, up from $1.4 billion in 2002 when the Justice and Development Party first came to power in Turkey. Last year, Israel and Turkey, despite the recession, did over $2.5 billion in trade.

Senior Israeli officials told the *Jerusalem Post* they believed it was unlikely Ankara would sever ties with Israel because, "This is not something the US feels is in the interest of Middle East stability."

"If they went ahead with this, they would feel US anger," the officials said. In addition, the European Union would oppose such a move, which would "bury" Turkey's chances of EU membership.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site