

Obama hardens threat of war against Iran

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In his most explicit threat against Iran to date, US President Obama declared yesterday that he would “not hesitate to use force” to prevent Iran from building nuclear weapons. The speech was pitched not just to his immediate audience—the pro-Israeli American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC)—but to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whom he meets today.

Obama spelled out the meaning of his oft-repeated phrase that “all options are on the table” in relation to Iran. “That includes all elements of American power,” he said, “a political effort aimed at isolating Iran, a diplomatic effort to sustain our coalition and ensure that the Iranian program is monitored, an economic effort that imposes crippling sanctions and, yes, a military effort to be prepared for any contingency.”

Obama’s only note of caution was against “too much loose talk of war”, as he urged Israel to allow time for punitive sanctions to force Tehran into negotiations. However, he also left no doubt that the US was prepared to attack Iran. Citing US President Theodore Roosevelt’s maxim “speak softly and carry a big stick,” Obama added menacingly: “Rest assured that the Iranian government will know of our resolve.”

Obama’s comments come after months of intensifying pressure on Iran, which includes the imposition of an embargo on Iranian oil by the European Union and US sanctions on the Iranian banking system aimed at blocking its oil exports. These measures, which are on top of a broad range of existing penalties, come into full force in July.

The US military has also been building up its forces in the Persian Gulf, including the stationing of two aircraft carrier battle groups in the area.

In comments to the media last week, the US Air Force Chief of Staff, General Norton Schwartz confirmed that plans for attacking Iran had not only been prepared, but had now been sent to the president and the defence secretary. “What we can do, you wouldn’t want to be in the area,” he declared. Unnamed Pentagon officials told the press that the options included wide-ranging attacks on every aspect of Iran’s military, security and intelligence apparatus.

Israel is also making barely disguised threats to attack Iran’s nuclear facilities. In his meeting with Obama today, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will press for the US to spell out “red lines” that would trigger American military strikes against Iran.

Speaking in Canada on Friday, Netanyahu insisted that “the international community” should lay down requirements for any negotiations with Iran. “I think the demands on Iran should be clear: dismantle the [Fordow] underground nuclear facility in Qom, stop [uranium] enrichment inside Iran and get all the enriched uranium out of Iran.” Such preconditions virtually assure that Tehran would not agree to talks.

Sections of the Israeli military and political establishment have been pressing for an attack on Iran in the coming months. An article in the British-based *Telegraph* on Saturday reported that Israeli “military planners have concluded that never before has the timing for a unilateral strike against Iran’s nuclear facilities been so auspicious.”

The *Telegraph* pointed to the “near civil war” in Iran’s ally Syria as a key factor in Israeli military calculations about Tehran’s ability to retaliate against an Israeli attack. “Iran’s deterrent has been significantly defanged. As a result some of those

opposed to military action have changed their minds,” a source close to Israel’s defence chiefs told the newspaper.

In discussions with Obama, Netanyahu will exploit the threat of an Israeli strike to extract US guarantees and “red lines” for an American attack on Iran. Iran has denied that it is building a nuclear weapon, and there is no evidence that it is doing so. Israel, however, is intent on destroying any Iranian potential to construct a nuclear bomb, thus preserving its own military supremacy as the only country in the Middle East with nuclear weapons.

A pre-emptive attack by Israel or the US would be in complete breach of international law. Unlike Israel, Iran is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and its nuclear programs meet its obligations on the treaty. Waging an unprovoked war of aggression was the chief crime for which Nazi leaders were convicted at the Nuremberg Trials following World War II.

The AIPAC lobby group has been pressing the Obama administration to accede to Israeli demands. Much of Obama’s speech yesterday was devoted to the record of his administration’s unequivocal support for Israel, including the staunch US defence in the UN of Israeli crimes such as the 2008 invasion of Gaza and its supply of advanced weaponry, which includes bunker buster bombs that would be used in any attack on Iran.

In a lengthy interview with the *Atlantic* last week, Obama reiterated his determination to halt Iran’s nuclear program, by military means if need be. “I don’t bluff,” he declared. Obama did, however, warn against any immediate Israeli strike, declaring: “At a time when there is not a lot of sympathy for Iran and its only real ally [Syria] is on the ropes, do we want a distraction in which suddenly Iran can portray itself as a victim?”

Obama’s comments also underscored the fraudulent character of US/Israeli allegations about Iran’s nuclear programs. “Our assessment, which is shared by the Israelis, is that Iran does not yet have a nuclear weapon and is not yet in a position to obtain a nuclear weapon

without us having a pretty long lead time in which we will know if they are making that attempt,” he admitted.

A *New York Times* article yesterday went further, noting: “Recent assessments by American spy agencies have reaffirmed intelligence findings in 2007 and 2010 that concluded that Iran had abandoned its nuclear weapons program.”

Commenting on previous tensions with Netanyahu, Obama told the *Atlantic* that any differences that had emerged were “tactical and not strategic.” While Israel has been hinting at an attack on Iran within months, the Obama administration has urged that the US and EU sanctions due to come into full force in July be given time to take effect.

Obama is clearly calculating that a war on Iran before the November presidential election would send oil prices skyrocketing, creating further social distress and impacting on his chances for re-election.

Whatever the exact outcome of today’s haggling between Obama and Netanyahu, it has the character of two gangsters plotting the details of their next crime. Any attack on Iran would be an utterly reckless enterprise that would inevitably inflame tensions throughout the Middle East with the potential to trigger a broader regional and international conflict.



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