

Israeli leader presses Obama to set trigger for war against Iran

Peter Symonds
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In another provocative move, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appeared on two prominent American TV talk shows on Sunday to press the Obama administration to set a “red line” for military action against Iran over its nuclear program.

While denying that he was intervening in US politics, Netanyahu’s inflammatory language was obviously aimed at generating a nuclear scare over Iran and pressuring Obama to set a trigger for war in the midst of the American presidential campaign. Republican challenger Mitt Romney has already branded Iran’s nuclear program as Obama’s “greatest failure” in foreign policy and accused him of abandoning Israel.

Netanyahu told CNN’s “State of the Union” that: “*They [Iran] are moving very rapidly to completing the enrichment of the uranium that they need to produce a nuclear bomb. In six months or so they’ll be 90 percent of the way there.*” Speaking to NBC’s “Meet the Press”, he declared: “They’re in the last 20 yards, and you can’t let them cross the goal line,” adding that would have “grievous consequences for the peace and security of us all.”

Netanyahu’s remarks are a deliberate falsification, designed to create the impression that the country is on the brink of building a nuclear device. Tehran has signed the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and its uranium enrichment facilities are all monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Regular IAEA reports detail Iran’s stockpile of uranium, which has been enriched at no more than 20 percent, well short of the 90 percent required for a nuclear bomb.

Tehran has repeatedly denied any plans to build a

nuclear weapon. Moreover, US intelligence agencies have assessed that Iranian leaders have not made a decision to construct a nuclear bomb. Netanyahu provided no evidence to the contrary. His comments are completely cynical given that Israel has a substantial stockpile of nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them anywhere in the Middle East.

In his remarks, Netanyahu seized on the wave of anti-US protests in the Middle East to whip up anti-Muslim sentiment. Referring to the Iranian regime, he declared: “It’s the same fanaticism that you see storming your embassies today. You want these fanatics to have nuclear weapons?”

The crude anti-Islamic video produced by elements of the American Christian right may have triggered the protests, but the underlying resentment and hostility throughout the region has been fuelled by decades of oppression and wars by US imperialism and its allies, including Israel. Netanyahu raises the spectre of a nuclear-armed Iran, but it is Israel that has waged brutal wars of aggression in the Middle East.

Netanyahu made similarly provocative remarks last week, implying that Israel would take unilateral military action against Iran if the US did not. “Those in the international community who refuse to put red lines before Iran don’t have a moral right to place a red light before Israel,” he told a press conference in Jerusalem.

To date, the Obama administration has rejected Netanyahu’s demands. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has bluntly stated that the US was “not setting deadlines” for military action. Appearing on the same talk shows as Netanyahu last Sunday, US ambassador

to the UN Susan Rice reiterated that all options, “including a military one,” were on the table. But she insisted that there was still “time and space” to force Iran to bow to international diplomatic pressure and sanctions.

These differences between the US and Israel are purely tactical. Obama is just as willing as Netanyahu to resort to military force against Iran. Since the beginning of the year, the Pentagon has been systematically building up US military presence in the Persian Gulf—doubling the number of aircraft carrier battle groups to two and stationing sophisticated F-22 fighters in the region.

Under the guise of “defence”, Washington has bolstered the anti-missile systems of its regional allies, including Israel, to block possible Iranian retaliation against an American attack. This week, the US navy commenced the largest ever anti-mine exercise in the Persian Gulf, involving warships from 30 countries, including Britain, France and Japan. While the US navy claimed these war games were purely defensive, the clear aim is to be able to neutralise Iran’s capacity to mine the Gulf and thus enhance Washington’s ability to attack with impunity.

The Obama administration has also collaborated closely with the Israeli government in waging a covert campaign of sabotage and assassination against Iran. It is widely acknowledged that the US and Israel were responsible for the Stuxnet computer virus that damaged or destroyed gas centrifuges in Iran’s uranium enrichment plants. In the past two years, four top Iranian nuclear scientists have been killed, almost certainly by the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad operating with direct or indirect US support.

On Monday, Iran’s nuclear chief Fereydoun Abbasi-Davani claimed that “terrorists and saboteurs” operating under the cover of the IAEA were responsible for explosions earlier this year that cut power to Iran’s uranium enrichment plants at Fordow and Natanz. While there is no independent evidence for such an attack, it cannot be automatically ruled out, given the close association of IAEA inspectors with foreign intelligence agencies, including the US and Israel.

The Obama administration might have rejected Netanyahu’s demand for a “red line”, for the present at least. But its highly provocative actions, including the imposition of crippling economic sanctions, the military build-up in the Gulf, and its involvement in covert operations inside Iran, have raised tensions throughout the region and greatly heightened the danger of war. The chief target of any American attack will not be Iran’s nuclear program, but the Iranian regime itself, which Washington regards as an obstacle to its ambitions to consolidate its dominance of the energy-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia.



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