

US Vice President reinforces military threat against Iran

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7 March 2013

US Vice President Joe Biden has again menaced Iran with the threat of unprovoked American military attack, declaring that “the window is closing” for a negotiated solution to the current confrontation over the country’s nuclear programs.

Biden was speaking on Monday to the pro-Israeli lobby group American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), in the lead up to President Obama’s visit to Israel later this month. He went out of his way to emphasise the Obama administration’s unalloyed support for the Zionist state across all issues, including US assistance to ensure Israel’s military superiority, American diplomatic support for Israel in the UN and their “shared interests” in ensuring pro-Western regimes in Syria and Egypt.

However, on the issue of Iran, Biden was particularly emphatic. To the cheers of 13,000 AIPAC supporters, he declared that Obama was committed “to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. Period. (Applause) End of discussion. Prevent—not contain—prevent. (More applause).”

The vice president then added: “The president has flatly stated that... big nations can’t bluff. And presidents of the United States cannot and do not bluff. And President Obama is not bluffing. He is not bluffing. (Applause)”

This naked and unabashed display of support for another war of aggression in the Middle East has more than a whiff of fascism about it. The US and its regional ally Israel are recklessly threatening an attack on Iran that could trigger a far broader regional conflict along sectarian lines: Shiite Iran versus Israel, the US and its Sunni allies such as Saudi Arabia.

The pretext for a war against Iran is no more plausible than the justifications for the criminal invasion of Iraq or the current operation to oust Iran’s

ally in Syria, the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. Against the unsubstantiated claims of the US and Israel, Iran has repeatedly denied any plans to build a nuclear weapon, has signed the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and its nuclear installations are subject to international inspection

Public differences between the US and Israel over the efficacy of international sanctions and talks, as well as the timing of any military assault, are purely tactical. Biden restated the Obama administration’s preference for “a diplomatic solution”, saying that “there is still time and space to achieve the outcome.”

However, what Washington means by “a diplomatic solution” is the capitulation of the Iranian regime to its demands. Renewed international talks took place in Kazakhstan where the US and its allies made a new “offer” to Iran that would impose tight restrictions on uranium enrichment in return for minor alterations to the economically crippling sanctions imposed on Iran. Further talks are scheduled this month and next. But even if a deal were struck on this basis, it only lead to an endless series of US demands for Iran to effectively shut down key aspects of its nuclear program.

Biden spelt out the real purpose of the talks to his AIPAC audience, saying: “If, God forbid, the need to act occurs, it is critically important for the whole world to know we did everything in our power... to avoid any confrontation.” In other words, as the US prepares for another war, it is “critically important” that it postures as a peace-maker to blunt the anti-war opposition it will inevitably arouse.

At every stage, Biden explained, the Obama administration is maintaining the closest collaboration with Israel. “We are in constant dialogue, sharing information with the Israeli military, the Israeli intelligence services, the Israeli political establishment

at every level,” he said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who also addressed the AIPAC gathering via satellite link, was far blunter about the need for “a clear and credible military threat if diplomacy and sanctions fail.” He was dismissive of any prospect of a peaceful outcome, declaring: “From the bottom of my heart and from the clarity of my brain, words alone will not stop Iran. Sanctions alone will not stop Iran.”

Netanyahu inflated the “threat” posed by Iran, declaring: “Iran enriches more and more uranium, it installs faster and faster centrifuges... We have to stop its nuclear enrichment program before it’s too late.”

These remarks are utterly hypocritical given that Israel remains the only country in the Middle East known to have a substantial arsenal of nuclear weapons. In addition, it has a long record of military aggression against neighbouring Arab states. Israel, in league with the US, is determined to prevent any rival having even the potential to build a nuclear device, as part of the broader joint strategy of maintaining American-Israeli dominance over the strategic region.

Netanyahu pointedly noted that Iran had “still not crossed the red line I drew at the United Nations last September.” In that speech, the Israeli prime minister made the utterly bogus claim that by the middle of this year Iran would have completed “90 percent” of the work necessary to build a nuclear weapon. On Monday, he declared that Iran was “getting closer to that red line”—that is, to the trigger for a US or Israeli military attack.

During Obama’s visit to Israel this month, the issue of war against Iran and its timing will undoubtedly be at the top of the agenda. Obama did not visit Israel during his first term of office, but focussed instead on patching up relations with the “Muslim world”—in particular with the Arab bourgeois regimes of the Middle East—in the wake of the Iraq war. He has now completely dropped this window-dressing, including his limited criticisms of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory.

It is of course impossible to predict the exact outcome of Obama’s trip, but the preparations for war are being put in place. In testimony before the US Senate yesterday, General James Mattis, head of the US Central Command, noted that Obama had “taken no option off the table, and my role is to provide him

military options.”

Defending the current international talks, Mattis said: “I don’t believe that we should stop negotiations because they do not prevent us from doing other things at the same time. For example, while negotiating, I’ve requested and received additional forces in the Gulf by the decision of the secretary of defence to ensure that we are ready to reassure our friends that we mean business and temper the Iranians’ designs.”



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