

Obama, Netanyahu stress war against Iran “still on the table”

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At a White House meeting Monday that was largely overshadowed by the threat of a government shutdown, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pressed US President Barack Obama to maintain and even escalate military threats and economic sanctions against Iran.

Obama obliged by repeating the mantra employed by both his administration and that of his predecessor to threaten Iran. “We take no options off the table, including the military,” the US president said during a brief session with the media following his hour-long meeting with Netanyahu.

Netanyahu’s visit came just three days after Obama conducted a 15-minute telephone conversation with Iran’s recently elected President Hassan Rouhani—the first such contact between heads of state of the two countries since the Iranian Revolution of 1979. According to both sides, the two presidents expressed a desire to move forward rapidly in negotiating a settlement that could bring an end to the longstanding confrontation between the two countries over Iran’s nuclear program.

Formal talks between the so-called P5+1 group (the US, Britain, France, China, Russia and Germany) and Iran are set to resume in Geneva on October 15. Washington is hoping to extract far-reaching concessions from Tehran, while the Iranian government is anxious to secure an easing of economic sanctions that have cut deeply into the living standards of Iranian working people, threatening to provoke social unrest.

This significant tactical shift in US foreign policy arose out of the crisis created in the Obama administration by the overwhelming popular hostility to its attempt last month to drag the American people into a war against Syria. Faced first with the rejection of a pro-war resolution by the Parliament in Britain,

Washington’s closest ally, and then the prospect of an unprecedented defeat of an authorization of the use of a military force resolution in the US Congress, the administration was forced to back away from its planned attack. It embraced a bid by Russia to secure Syria’s agreement to destroy its chemical weapons.

From there, the Obama administration pivoted toward promoting a negotiated deal over Iran’s nuclear program. The US has imposed decades of punishing sanctions and repeatedly threatened war based on allegations that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons. Tehran has consistently denied these charges, insisting that its nuclear program is dedicated to peaceful purposes only.

The reaction of the Israeli regime headed by Netanyahu is approaching hysteria in its hostility to any move toward rapprochement between Tehran and Washington.

Before boarding his flight for the US, Netanyahu told the Israeli media, “I will be representing Israel’s citizens, our national interests, our rights as a people, our determination to defend ourselves and our hope for peace.”

He said his mission in Washington Monday and in a speech he is to deliver to the United Nations General Assembly on Tuesday was to “speak the truth. Facts must be stated in the face of the sweet talk and the blitz of smiles.”

Following his meeting with Obama, the Israeli prime minister stated, “Iran is committed to Israel’s destruction” and insisted that “the sanctions should be strengthened” if Iran continued to develop its nuclear program during negotiations with the US and the other major powers. He stressed that a “good credible military threat and strong sanctions” were the only feasible policy toward Iran.

After his talks at the White House, Netanyahu made a stop on Capitol Hill for a meeting with US lawmakers at a ceremony for the outgoing US ambassador, American-born Michael Oren. Israel counts on the disproportionate influence of the Israeli lobby among both Republicans and Democrats to create obstacles to any deal between Washington and Tehran.

The bluntest statement of the position of Israel's right-wing Zionist government came from its former foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, who was forced to step down at the end of last year after being indicted in a bribery scandal.

Dismissing Iranian offers of a negotiated settlement as an "assault of reconciliation," he wrote in a post on his Facebook page that "the Iranians have long employed a pattern of deceit: various promise tactics, stalling and feeding the international community with false information time and time again, all the while pursuing their goal of obtaining a nuclear weapon, meant to threaten world peace."

Lieberman pointedly referred to Israel's unilateral attack on Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981, declaring, "We should also bear in mind that in the case of the Iraqi reactor, Israel was the only one who made a warning and in retrospect we were right, as in other cases."

The comment can only be read as a threat that Israel is prepared to stage a similar unilateral attack on Iran, with the aim of drawing the US into a war.

The threat that Israel will stage provocations aimed at derailing any successful negotiations between Washington and Iran was also driven home by the conveniently timed announcement Sunday by the Israeli security service Shin Bet that it had captured an alleged Iranian spy, supposedly with photographs of the US embassy in Israel. According to Israeli news services, the arrest took place three weeks ago.

The fears in Tel Aviv were hinted at by an article published over the weekend in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, entitled "Reconciliation with US could bolster Iran's regional power, global standing." If over the past period, the article states, "the nuclear program was a national symbol and unshakable foundation of Iran's strength, it seems now that the dialogue to constrict that program could be used by Iran to achieve more regional influence and power."

Israel's ruling political establishment is determined

to prevent the emergence of any regional power capable of challenging not only its monopoly on nuclear weapons, but also its role as a regional hegemon in the Middle East, in alliance with US imperialism. To that end—and to justify the \$3.1 billion in aid, most of it military, provided by Washington every year—it needs a continuous state of conflict.

During their brief appearance on Monday, Obama and Netanyahu also addressed the so-called "peace process" between Israel and the Palestinians, which the US administration has recently sought to revive.

Obama praised Netanyahu for his "good faith negotiations with the Palestinian Authority" and expressed his appreciation for the Israeli prime minister's "courage in being willing to step forward on behalf of that goal."

The only "courage" Netanyahu has exhibited is in the ruthless theft of Palestinian lands through the expansion of Zionist settlements in the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem, whose population has grown from 160,000 to 650,000 since the so-called peace process began.

As it seeks to placate Tel Aviv over the turn toward negotiations with Iran, Washington will in all likelihood provide even greater support to Israel's assault on the Palestinian people.



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