

Netanyahu delivers anti-Iran tirade to US Congress

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The speech delivered Tuesday by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to an extraordinary joint session of the US Congress consisted of a hysterical anti-Iran tirade and an implicit denunciation of the Obama administration for what was portrayed as an outright betrayal of the security interests of both Israel and the US.

Netanyahu's appearance, organized behind the back of the White House, marked an unprecedented—and constitutionally dubious—bid by an American political party to bring a foreign head of state before Congress in order to condemn and undermine the policies of a sitting president.

For Netanyahu, who described his trip to Washington as a "historic, even fateful mission," the political motives were transparent. With Israeli elections just two weeks away and polls showing his support fading, the speech provided Netanyahu with a means of shifting attention from deteriorating economic and social conditions in Israel to the supposed "existential threat" posed by Iran's nuclear program.

It also gave him the opportunity to be televised accepting multiple standing ovations from the US Congress. Democrats and Republicans proved equally obsequious to the Zionist lobby, rising to their feet at least 15 times during the 39-minute diatribe.

While roughly 55 of the 232 Democrats in both houses of Congress stayed away from the address—not out of disagreement with Israeli policy, but out of loyalty to Obama—the party's congressional leadership showed up.

The speech was delivered simultaneously with a third session of talks between US Secretary of State John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in the Swiss town of Montreux. The negotiations between Iran and the P5+1—the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany—are proceeding under the pressure of a March 31 deadline to reach a tentative agreement on Iran's nuclear program.

Netanyahu's clear aim was to derail any deal with Tehran. US officials had feared he would use the speech to disclose classified information on the negotiations in order to achieve this aim. Instead, the Israeli prime minister relied on crude scaremongering and Islamophobia in what was clearly an attempt to convince Congress to intervene and disrupt the talks.

He portrayed Iran as both a terrorist state and an expanding empire that would resort to nuclear war to achieve its aims.

"We must all stand together to stop Iran's march of conquest, subjugation and terror," he said, adding that "the greatest danger facing our world is the marriage of militant Islam with nuclear weapons."

The deal being negotiated by the Obama administration, he charged, would "inexorably lead to a nuclear-armed Iran whose unbridled aggression will inevitably lead to war."

No one in either major party or in the corporate media pointed out the hypocrisy that saturated Netanyahu's speech. The head of the Israeli government, which possesses hundreds of nuclear weapons and refuses to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, charges Iran, a signatory to the pact, with nuclear malfeasance. The Israeli government, which has waged repeated wars of aggression against the Palestinian people and all of its Arab neighbors, while recognizing no restrictions on its borders, accuses Iran, which has invaded no one, of "aggression."

To promote these lies, Netanyahu equated Iran not only to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), but even to Nazi Germany.

At one point, he turned the attention of Congress to the presence in the gallery of Elie Wiesel, who has made a lucrative career as Washington's semi-official Holocaust spokesman, and repeated the refrain "Never again." Wiesel was seated with Netanyahu's wife, Sara, who

finds herself at the center of multiple corruption scandals within Israel itself.

This cheap invocation of the Holocaust to justify a policy of aggressive war against an oppressed country is as fraudulent as it is morally obscene.

President Barack Obama responded to the speech by stating that there was “nothing new” in Netanyahu’s remarks and that he had failed to “offer any viable alternative.”

An unnamed “senior US official” who spoke to the *Washington Post* was more blunt, declaring, “The logic of the prime minister’s speech is regime-change, not a nuclear speech.” The official added, “Simply demanding that Iran capitulate is not a plan.”

This is the essence of Netanyahu’s policy. His demand that Iran accept the complete dismantling of all of its nuclear facilities—to which it is entitled under international law—cannot be achieved by negotiations, but only through a war to subjugate the country.

Washington has itself repeatedly engaged in saber rattling against Iran, with US representatives insisting even this week that should Tehran fail to accept or subsequently violate a nuclear agreement, the military option remained “on the table.”

Since the end of 2013, however, after it was compelled to back down from its threat to launch an air war against the Iranian-backed regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, the Obama administration has shifted its policy toward reaching an accommodation with Iran.

It is this policy, not the danger of nuclear attack, that Tel Aviv sees as an existential threat. The Zionist regime requires a continuous state of war and confrontation to sustain its rule. A deal with Iran would undermine its central claim to legitimacy.

Before the 1979 Iranian revolution, US imperialism relied on the dictatorial regime of the Shah as a pillar of stability and counterrevolution in the Middle East. Elements within the US ruling establishment no doubt harbor the hope that such a relation can be revived. As Netanyahu’s appearance demonstrated, there are sharp divisions within the US ruling elite over how to pursue such a strategy.

In its latest military intervention in Iraq and Syria, Washington has coordinated its actions with those of Iran, which has supplied the Shia-dominated Iraqi regime with substantial military aid. The *Wall Street Journal* reported Tuesday that in a newly launched operation to retake the Iraqi city of Tikrit, Iran was “throwing drones, heavy weaponry and ground forces into the battle, while the US

remained on the sidelines.”

Israel, which has provided logistical support to the Islamist “rebels” in Syria and has tried to forge a de facto anti-Iranian alliance with the reactionary Sunni monarchies of the Gulf, perceives any thaw in US-Iranian relations as a threat to its hegemonic aims in the region, as well as to Washington’s unconditional support for the aggressive policies with which it pursues these aims.

Tel Aviv opposes Iran in large measure because its aid to the Syrian government, to Hezbollah in Lebanon and to Hamas in Gaza, while posing no existential threat to Israel, limits Israel’s ability to militarily impose its dictates on the peoples of the region.

Washington, on the other hand, is pursuing far broader objectives. Its negotiations with Tehran are directed not merely at curbing its nuclear program, but at creating conditions in the region that will facilitate US imperialism’s “pivot” toward escalating military confrontation with both Russia and China.

Speaking in Geneva, Kerry pointed toward this shift, declaring, “Israel’s security is absolutely at the forefront of our minds, but frankly, so is the security of all the other countries in the region, so is our security in the United States.”

Netanyahu’s provocation in the US Capitol has been accompanied by statements from both Democrats and Republicans reaffirming support for Israel, which translates into over \$3 billion a year in mostly military aid. In an interview with Reuters Monday, Obama said Netanyahu’s actions would not prove “permanently destructive.”

Such reassurances notwithstanding, Netanyahu’s speech is not the cause of the tensions between Washington and Tel Aviv, but rather a symptom of an increasing divergence of strategic interests between US imperialism and its Israeli client state.



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