

Netanyahu visits White House seeking massive arms aid

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Monday's White House meeting between President Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu combined cynical posturing about peace with closed-door discussions about how to reinforce and strengthen the Israeli war machine against both the Palestinian population and neighboring Arab states.

Both Obama and Netanyahu were at pains to pretend that the bitter disputes of the past year over US policy toward Iran were behind them. In a brief joint appearance before the press Monday morning, Obama called the conflict over Iran "a strong disagreement on this narrow issue"—a remarkable description of the all-out Israeli campaign to defeat the Iran deal—while Netanyahu made no reference to the issue at all.

The Israeli leader's silence only demonstrates the fraudulent basis of his campaign for the Republican-controlled Congress to reject the Iran pact. This involved nearly a year of increasingly strident claims that the Iran deal threatened the nuclear destruction of the state of Israel.

Netanyahu took the unprecedented step of traveling to Washington without the invitation of the US government to address a joint session of Congress and denounce the policy of the White House. Now he returns to Washington, eight months later, with no mention of the supposedly impending nuclear apocalypse, instead seeking compensation for the Iran deal in the form of tens of billions in new economic and military aid.

The two hours of closed-door talks, in which Obama and Netanyahu were joined by Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of State John Kerry, included initial discussions on a new US-Israeli aid deal to replace the one that expires in 2017. The current memorandum of understanding provides \$3 billion a year, an enormous subsidy for a country of only 8

million people, but Netanyahu is seeking an increase to \$5 billion a year for the ten-year period 2018-2027.

At the top of the shopping list are high-performance F-35 fighter jets as well as components to build up the Israeli anti-missile defense system known as Iron Dome.

Netanyahu appears to be calculating that rather than waiting to negotiate the pact with the next administration, he can extract more by sparking a bidding war between the Democrats and Republicans during the 2016 presidential election campaign. Both big business parties are fully committed to backing the Israeli state and arming it to the teeth as an instrument of US foreign policy in the Middle East.

In his brief remarks before the talks, Netanyahu paid lip service to reaching a peace deal with the Palestinians that would include the establishment of a Palestinian state. This posture is belied by the actual conduct of the government he heads, which is furiously building settlements on Palestinian land on the West Bank.

The past month has seen an increasingly bloody crackdown following a series of futile and desperate knife attacks, mainly by school-age Palestinian youth, against Israeli settlers on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. Nearly 80 Palestinians have been killed, most of them shot to death while protesting, while 11 Israelis have been killed, mostly in the knife incidents.

Monday's meeting, moreover, came just three weeks after Netanyahu gave a speech in which he blamed the Palestinians for the Holocaust.

Obama used his brief public statement to denounce Palestinian violence against Israelis while saying nothing about the much greater toll of bloodshed by Israeli occupation forces. This is in keeping with his posture last year during Netanyahu's war in Gaza,

when nearly 2,000 Palestinians died, including nearly 500 children, from Israeli shells, bombs and missiles, compared to six Israeli civilians and 65 soldiers.

The White House talks reportedly covered actions that the US and Israel could take in response to Iran violating the nuclear agreement with the five Security Council powers (China, Russia, Britain, France and the US) plus Germany. This would likely involve some form of air strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities.

There were discussions about Syria, with Netanyahu adopting a posture at odds with that of Washington, focusing on alleged Iranian backing to the Assad regime in Damascus while saying little or nothing about the role of Russia. The Obama administration has taken a nearly opposite stand.

It is such policy disputes over Syria, Iran and the Palestinians that underlie the widely reported “personal” animus between Netanyahu and Obama. There was breathless media coverage of their body language and Obama’s visible irritation. Press reports noted Netanyahu’s decision to appoint as his public relations adviser Ron Baratz, who has publicly called Obama an anti-Semite and Kerry a child.

At the root of the conflict is the determination by the US military-intelligence apparatus, at least the section represented by Obama, that US interests in the Middle East can best be served by seeking at least a limited rapprochement with the Iranian ruling elite, which inevitably comes at the expense of the traditional US client states in the region, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Netanyahu’s trip also marked his first overtures to the administration that will succeed Obama’s, whether Republican or Democratic. He addressed a dinner meeting Monday night of the right-wing American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and then made an appearance Tuesday at the Center for American Progress, a Democratic Party think tank that is virtually a Hillary Clinton administration in waiting. He also met with Senator Charles Schumer of New York, expected to become the Democratic leader in the Senate after the next election.

In his address to the AEI, Netanyahu attacked the Iran deal and predicted that Iran would not adhere to restrictions on its nuclear programs. The right-wing think tank gave him its 2015 Irving Kristol Award, named after one of the founders of the neo-conservatives who spearheaded the US war in Iraq.

The AEI’s top award has gone over the years to a whole series of American war criminals and reactionaries, including Dick Cheney, Gerald Ford, Alan Greenspan, Henry Kissinger, Ronald Reagan, Paul Ryan, Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas and David Petraeus. Netanyahu certainly belongs in that company.



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