

Netanyahu, Trump discuss war preparations against Iran

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7 March 2018

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's five-day trip to the US has been dominated by a growing drumbeat for war against Iran, a regional struggle that would eclipse the immense carnage wrought by the past 15 years of uninterrupted US military intervention in the Middle East.

Netanyahu's meeting with US President Donald Trump Monday was followed Tuesday by his appearance before the annual conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the principal US Zionist lobby, in Washington. There, he proclaimed before a cheering audience that "Iran, Iran and Iran was the main topic of the meeting."

The Israeli prime minister spoke in apocalyptic terms of Iran's growing influence in the Middle East, declaring "darkness is descending on our region" and pointing to a map in which countries that he alleged Iran was dominating were painted black.

"Iran is building an aggressive empire: Iran, Iraq, Syria, Gaza, Yemen, more to come," he continued.

He went on to praise Trump for adopting a policy of provocation and aggression against Iran, declaring that "his administration will not accept Iran's aggression in the region" and "will never accept a nuclear-armed Iran."

Netanyahu said that Trump "has also made it clear that if the fatal flaws of the nuclear deal are not fixed he will walk away from the deal and restore sanctions."

Trump must sign a waiver in May to prevent the reimposition of US sanctions that were lifted as part of the nuclear agreement reached between Tehran and the major world powers in 2015, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The administration has issued an ultimatum to its erstwhile European allies—Britain, Germany and France—that unless they join with Washington in imposing a rewritten nuclear accord on Tehran, including provisions that the Iranian government cannot and will not accept, the US will proceed unilaterally in carrying out punitive economic measures that pave the way to war.

The sharp divisions between the US and Europe over the

nuclear accord were made clear during a trip to Tehran Monday by French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, who stressed to the Iranian leadership that he was no "emissary of Donald Trump." A spokesman for the French Foreign Ministry told the media, "We want to preserve the nuclear deal because it is working, it's robust and because the Iranians are respecting it."

The European powers view the drive by US imperialism and Israel to forge an anti-Iranian bloc with the reactionary Sunni Persian Gulf oil monarchies with increasing concern. Major European corporations, including the French oil conglomerate Total, have signed billions of dollars worth of deals with Tehran, while Europe stands to face the brunt of the blowback from a major new Middle East war.

Speaking at the AIPAC conference on Monday night, Vice President Mike Pence reiterated Trump's ultimatum, stating that "unless the Iran nuclear deal is fixed in the coming months, the United States of America will withdraw from the Iran deal immediately."

Pence adopted an even more hysterical tone over Iran's alleged regional ambitions, declaring that with the collapse of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, "we must be vigilant to prevent others from taking its place."

"Iran hopes to recreate the Persian Empire under the modern dictatorship of the ayatollahs," he charged. "As we speak, that regime seeks to carve out a corridor of influence running through Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, creating an unbroken passage for its armies and ideology."

As Trump and Netanyahu were meeting, the *Washington Post* revealed that the Trump White House, the National Security Council and the Pentagon have begun drawing up plans for a major new US military assault on the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad.

The talks last week reportedly included Trump, his Chief of Staff Gen. John F. Kelly, national security adviser Gen. H.R. McMaster and Defense Secretary Gen. Jim Mattis.

While the attack would be launched on the pretext of responding to completely unsubstantiated allegations of Syrian government use of chlorine gas bombs in its military

campaign against Al Qaeda-linked militias in the Damascus suburb of eastern Ghouta, the main purpose of a fresh US military intervention would be to counter Iranian and Russian influence in the country, raising the risk of a far wider and potentially world catastrophic armed confrontation.

According to the *Post* account, there were sharp divisions among the generals who form the core of the Trump administration, with McMaster strongly in favor of an attack, and Mattis “adamantly” against it.

The US has at least 2,000 US troops on the ground in Syria. Their supposed campaign against ISIS has turned into a drive to militarily carve out a US-controlled sphere of control in the country’s northeast on the borders of Turkey and Iraq in order to provide a base of operations for continuing the war for regime change against Assad and preparing for confrontation with Iran.

Even as Netanyahu flew to Washington, his former spokesman and senior aide Nir Hefetz reached a deal with prosecutors to testify against him and provide tapes of both Netanyahu and his wife Sara implicating them in the bribery and corruption charges brought by prosecutors.

For his part Trump has suffered a series of resignations of top aides as he faces an unrelenting campaign by the Democrats, the media and the intelligence agencies over alleged Russian “meddling” in the 2016 presidential election, which is increasingly aimed at crippling his administration and, if possible, forcing him from office.

The domestic political crises faced by both US and Israeli leaders only serves to accelerate their drive to war.

In his remarks to APEC, Netanyahu made it clear that the Trump White House, having announced last year its recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and its decision to transfer the US embassy to the disputed city, gave an unequivocal green light to the ever-expanding Zionist settlements in the West Bank and to Israel’s move toward outright annexation of the occupied Palestinian territory.

Stressing that he and Trump spent more than half of their meeting discussing Iran, Netanyahu allowed that the rest of the time was devoted to Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, with the Palestinians as an afterthought.

“The evacuation of the settlements didn’t come up at all” in the talks, he boasted.

US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley drove home this point in her speech to the AIPAC conference in which she condemned the Obama administration for having abstained on a UN General Assembly vote in 2016 that stated the obvious fact that the Zionist settlements in the occupied territories were illegal. Describing it as “a shameful day for the United States,” she added that “on my

watch, that would never happen again.”

In his remarks to the conference Pence stated that “if both sides agree, the United States of America will support a two-state solution.” The clear implication being if Israel rejects such a solution, as the right-wing government of Netanyahu surely does, the US will as well.

The actions of the Trump administration have driven the last nail into the coffin of the decades-long fraud of a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict mediated by Washington and the other major imperialist powers. Washington has driven this message home with a series of punitive measures, including sharp cuts in humanitarian aid, that have pulled the rug out from under the corrupt Palestinian Authority of President Mahmoud Abbas, while inflicting new suffering on the Palestinian masses.

Not to be outdone in genuflecting to the Zionist lobby and braying for war, leading Democrats, including Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Minority leader Nancy Pelosi delivered speeches to the AIPAC convention unequivocally supporting Israeli aggression and suppression of the Palestinians as well as confrontation with Iran.

Schumer’s statement was perhaps the most reactionary. He insisted that the only reason that there was no peace in the Middle East was that the Palestinians “don’t believe in the Torah” when it says that “it’s our land.” He praised Trump for moving the US embassy “to where it should belong” in Jerusalem.

He was joined by Democratic Senator Robert Menendez of New Jersey who criticized the Trump administration from the right for not immediately reimposing the full range of sanctions against Iran and for failing to pursue a sufficiently belligerent policy in Syria and against Russia.

“Hand in hand, criminal and terrorist, Putin and Assad have cleared a path for the Iranian regime to expand its military footprint,” Menendez said. “We risk willfully disregarding this reality if we cling to a repeatedly failing policy of ‘negotiating’ with Russia.”



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