

Netanyahu Fear Mongering Over Iran to Mask Israel's Lack of Legitimacy

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The Israeli Prime Minister may have left his cartoon bomb at home, but his latest appearance at the UN contained no shortage of dubious claims aimed at strangling the nascent US-Iran rapprochement in its cradle.

Just three days after the historic phone call between US President Obama and Iranian President Rouhani, hopes for a thaw in relations between the two countries were dashed when Obama confirmed that military options were still on the table during a press conference with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu in the Oval Office. In his eloquent address to the General assembly, Rouhani explicitly cited the “*military options on the table*” position as being an illegal and ineffective contention, prior to explicitly declaring, “*peace is within reach.*” Obama’s unwillingness to deviate from his dominant line comes as no surprise looking back to his excessively uni-polar and exceptionalist address to the general assembly. Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Zarif immediately decried Obama’s flip-flop, and urged Washington to show consistency in dealing with Iran to promote trust – a unexceptional plea that will most likely prove to be too much for Washington to adhere to.

Whatever glimmers of pragmatism employed by the Obama administration in its dealings with the incumbent administration in Tehran at the start of the general assembly were overshadowed by Washington’s unshakeable bond with Israel as Netanyahu visited the White House and took to the podium as the final speaker. Obama is not quite transparently about to turn his back on the “*warmongering pressure groups*” Rouhani warned that would enact measures to maintain the status quo in his address. For those radicals who dominate the political establishment in Tel Aviv, the coherent and temperate Rouhani is incomparably more troublesome than Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose bellicosity allowed Israel to more plausibly sell its anti-Iran narrative. As many journalists and always analysts point out, following Israel’s tirades, Tel Aviv has Iran accused of being “*months away from the bomb*” for over two decades.

Netanyahu’s latest performance has been in keeping with Israel’s proclivity for relying exclusively on dubious or highly debatable claims to delegitimize Iran. Bibi may have convinced some who are unfamiliar with the issue, but for others, he has again shown his promising potential as a fiction writer, perhaps an apt career path for the man to embark upon once he leaves office. Though the Israeli leader invoked an ancient Persian edict of King Cyrus that allowed Jews to return to the land of Israel as a mark of historic friendship between the Jewish and Persian people, Netanyahu has only ever viewed Iran as a modern-day Amalek, the Biblical state and people whose total extermination by the Israelites was called for in the Old Testament. At the forefront of Bibi’s hysterical diatribe was the issue of Iran’s nuclear program, and the wholly groundless claims that Iranian nuclear warheads

could strike New York City in 3 to 4 years.

The last time Netanyahu addressed the UN with his doodled explosive, he claimed that Iran would soon have the capability to enrich uranium to 90 percent, allowing them to construct a nuclear weapon by early-to-mid 2013. Bibi may be a compelling storyteller, but he has sorry credentials as a fortune teller. Washington and Tel Aviv have taken the conscious decision to ignore evidence entirely brought forward by the US Intelligence Community, as well as appeals from nuclear scientists, policy-advisers. IAEA and WHO personnel claim that the "*Iranian threat*" is exaggerated and politicized. Netanyahu has not corrected his statements insinuating that Iran was nearing his red line of 90 percent enrichment, the amount needed to weaponize uranium. There is no evidence to suggest that Iran has pursued enrichment over the 20 percent needed for medical research, which is allowed within the stipulations of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), of which Iran is a signatory.

At no point has the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported conclusive evidence of a military dimension to Iran's nuclear program. Tehran has in fact done more than most other countries to address concerns that its enrichment program may be diverted to non-peaceful uses, including placing additional restrictions on its enrichment process by ratifying additional protocols to allow for rigorous inspection by the IAEA. Enrichment facilities, such as in Natanz, operate with the participation of foreign representatives, and while Netanyahu accuses Iran of exploiting its heavy water reactor in Arak to gain "*a plutonium path*" to the bomb, Iran has no reprocessing capability to extract plutonium and it has specifically renounced plutonium reprocessing. The IAEA's latest report published in February 2013 confirmed an expansion in Iranian uranium enrichment capabilities, and that Iran was reconverting its 280 kg of near-20% enriched uranium to fuel the Tehran Research Reactor.

The IAEA February 2013 report acknowledges, along with numerous experts, how the product of Iran's gas-based centrifuges – uranium hexafluoride gas – would be entirely impractical to weaponize, especially after it is reconverted into a fuel product. The religious prohibitions issued by Iran's Supreme Leader regarding the proliferation of both chemical and nuclear weapons is often downplayed in the West, but consider that Iran failed to pursue development of chemical weapons even when it came under attack from Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Iran's military strategy reflects a defensive logic based on missile-based deterrence which aims to prevent pre-emptive strikes and Gulf Arab participation in a US offensive against Iran. Tehran's ballistic missiles rely on conventional explosives, while it is developing unmanned drones based on American technology, and maritime capabilities that would allow it to close the Strait of Hormuz if threatened or attacked. There is no evidence that Iran has developed or tested chemical or nuclear warheads for its ballistic missiles, and its military program has only served a defensive function.

Netanyahu uses his opportunities to address the international community to scapegoat Iran because it allows the Jewish state to portray itself as a victim while it defies dozens of UN resolutions and international law. Tehran has called for a nuclear-free region encompassing West Asia and North Africa on multiple occasions, and Rouhani took the initiative to do so again in his UN address. Israel, being the only country in the region to have nuclear weapons, is not a signatory to the NPT, nor has it ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention. Israel's apartheid status is horrifying enough – its failure to adhere to international conventions on its nuclear and chemical stockpiles should warrant a sustained and internationally endorsed regime of boycott, divestment, and international sanctions on

Tel Aviv. As a serial violator of international law, Israel should not be allowed to maintain its status as a “good” rouge state.

If peace in the Middle East is the goal, it is within reach, but the thawing of relations between the US and Iran is a vital prerequisite. A historic compromise between Washington and Tehran based on equal footing would be remembered as a crucial foreign policy victory for the Obama administration. The fulfillment of Rouhani’s vision for a nuclear-free Middle East would be a momentous achievement – Obama should be bold and consider the historical parallels. In the late 80s, Mikhail Gorbachev called for the US and USSR to incrementally eliminate their massive stockpiles of nuclear weapons and proposed a disarmament framework to Ronald Reagan, who turned down the deal in favor of an outlandish pursuit of a space weaponization program that never came to fruition. Obama would be a fool to repeat Reagan’s mistake in the modern context by not strong-arming Israel into signing the NPT. Peace is within reach, but Obama appears to lack the political will to reach out and make it a tangible reality.

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