

Netanyahu's Speech to the US Congress Really Helps Obama against Iran

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A lot of focus has been made about the tensions between US President Barack Obama's administration and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The tensions pivot on Iranian-US nuclear negotiations and Netanyahu's speech to a joint session of the US Congress on Capitol Hill in Washington on March 3, 2015. Although there are several angles to look at the situation and frank differences do exist, the key point that should not be lost is that through his tough stance Prime Minister Netanyahu is actually providing leverage to President Obama and the US negotiating team against Iran. This is why talk about a war with Iran is beginning again in Washington, DC.

The disagreements between the Obama Administration and Netanyahu do not signal a divide between Israel and the US. The strategic relationship between Israel and the United States is still intact. Nor does the gap between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party over Netanyahu's March 3 speech reflect divisions between Israel and the US as much as it represents divisions among the US political establishment, specifically between the realists and the neo-conservatives.

Speaking in London to the British think-tank Chatham House, European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini confirmed that internal divisions and «political dynamics» are creating friction on February 24, 2015. In this context, it should not be forgotten that Israel's parliamentary elections will be held on March 17, 2015. Netanyahu is using both fear and the US Congress as a stage to give a performance for Israeli voters to make sure that his Likud Party and its political allies secure enough seats in the Knesset to form the next government with him as its prime minister.

The Argument for Sanctions: Is it About a Hidden Prize?

Although he indirectly took a slap at Benjamin Netanyahu and the Republicans, US Secretary John Kerry even brought up the option of «whacking» Iran—meaning going to war with Tehran—at the US Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs hearing to review the US Department of State's budget request on February 24, 2015. He did this while answering US Senator Roy Blunt's question about Iran.

Kerry mentioned «whacking» Iran to calm and mitigate the criticisms against the Obama Administration's negotiations with the Iranian government. This was clear when Kerry spoke to the warmonger Senator Lindsey Graham at the end of the session when he deliberately reversed the Republican rhetoric about a nuclear-armed Iran telling Senator Graham if negotiations did not continue that what Graham and Israel wanted to prevent would come into fruition.

Partisan politics was visible throughout the hearing. Using a ridiculous cartoon drawing of multiple cartoon bombs to claim that the US government was allowing Iran to fund Hezbollah, the Republican Senator Mark Kirk clearly was using similar rhetoric as Netanyahu by claiming that the interim agreement with Iran was a form of defeatist appeasement. Senator Kirk also tried to undermine the lead US negotiator, US Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman, too.

Pausing and choosing his words carefully, Secretary Kerry also made the following statement about Washington's negotiations with Tehran: «Anybody running around right now jumping in to say, 'Well we don't like the deal,' or this or that, doesn't know what the deal [with Iran] is and there is no deal yet. And I caution people to wait and see what these negotiations produce.»

The continuation of the anti-Iran sanctions regime is a key feature of the foreign policy divisions in the Washington Beltway about negotiations with Iran. It was during the course of the exchange between Kirk and Kerry on maintaining the sanctions regime on Iran that John Kerry would mention Prime Minister Netanyahu directly. Secretary Kerry would point out to Senator Kirk that Netanyahu was against the Obama Administration's sanctions approach, but hitherto has been arguing for the sanctions to be kept in place against the Iranian economy.

In part, the temptation to somehow seize the immense amount of Iranian financial assets and funds that have been frozen due to the anti-Iran sanctions might be driving a faction of the opponents of the nuclear negotiations. Kerry told the US Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs that Iran has well over one hundred billion US dollars that have been frozen that Tehran cannot touch and that since 2012 the US has denied Iran access to two hundred billion in lost exports and funds «held abroad in restricted accounts.»

To some extent, Netanyahu could be serving US financial interests more than Israeli interests. He and much of the Republican Party share the same election donors. «More than half the people who gave money to Netanyahu's re-election campaign are Americans who've also donated to the Romney campaign or the Republican Party in the United States,» according to an article published by *McClatchey* on November 1, 2012. [1] *McClatchey* also reveals the following important points:

- According to records published by Israel's State Comptroller office, Netanyahu has received donations from 47 individuals. Only one of them was Israeli, and 42 were American. By cross-checking public records in the United States with Netanyahu's list, *McClatchey* found that 28 of the American donors to Netanyahu also gave to Romney, the Republican Party or both. Only two gave to Democrats, one of whom donated to President Barack Obama.
- In interviews, Netanyahu's representatives have stressed that he isn't interested in playing partisan politics in the United States. However, his list of donors shows only two families who gave to both the Democratic Party and Netanyahu. [2]

Aside from ideological posturing and a strategy to gain maximum concessions from Tehran, the financial interests that both Netanyahu and the Republicans represent may want to use the anti-Iran sanctions regime to annually siphon about twenty to forty billion dollars (US)

from Iran.

Obama's Authorization for the Use of Military Force Request: For DAESH or Iran?

Although the anti-Iran sanctions may now be viewed as a means of plundering Iranian wealth for Wall Street, they are also a form of pressure or coercion that is being used alongside the military threat of a US and Israeli war against the Iranians.

Netanyahu's warmongering is psychologically and politically assisting this push to maximize the possible concessions that Tehran makes to Washington. His hawkish posturing gives the Obama Administration leverage to make more demands from the Iranian side. In one way or another, Netanyahu and the Republicans are playing the role of the bad cops while the Obama Administration is paying the role of the good cops with Iran.

At the end of the day, the US and Israel are aligned and threatening Iran. Both the US and Israel are on a war footing and uneasy as they realize that the strategic equation in the Middle East is about to see major changes to the benefit of Iran and its regional allies in the Resistance Bloc or Axis of Resistance. [3] It is in this context that Israel's Channel 2 has quoted an unnamed European official as saying that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will allow Israel to use its airspace to launch a military attack on Iran—ridiculously in exchange for «progress» in the bogus Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. [4] It is also in this context that Turkey intervened in Syria, using the pretext of relocating the tomb of Suleiman Shah on February 21, 2015, as a means to normalize and reserve a possible military role for Turkey inside Syria should a regional war be ignited. [5]

Obama is silently holding a big stick over Iran. Under the pretext of fighting DAESH, first in Iraq and then in Syria, the Obama Administration has asked the US Congress to give it the authorization for the use of military force in the Middle East. The Pentagon has already marshaled a large military contingent and used the cover of fighting DAESH in Iraq to begin illegal military operations inside Syria. [6] The authorization to use military force from the US Congress will give the Obama Administration flexibility to redirect the Pentagon forces that the US government has amassed in the Middle East and use them to threaten Iran and Syria with war.

NOTES

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[1] Sheera Frenkel, «Mitt Romney, Benjamin Netanyahu share donors as well as friendship,» *McClatchy*, November 1, 2012.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya, «Iran's Golan 'Third Front' and the Border Clashes between Israel and Hezbollah,» *Strategic Culture Foundation*, February 25, 2015.

[4] «Report: Saudis might help Israel attack Iran in exchange for progress in peace process,» *Jerusalem Post*, February 24, 2015.

[5] Leo Benedictus, «Why did Turkey invade Syria to dig up the grave of Suleyman Shah?» *Guardian*, February 23, 2015.

[6] Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya, «Fighting ISIL is a Smokescreen for US Mobilization against Syria and Iran,» *Strategic Culture Foundation*, September 26, 2014.

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