

Skipping Netanyahu's Speech to the U.S. Congress for All the Wrong Reasons

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Don't get me wrong, I'm glad to hear that Congress members will [skip Netanyahu's speech](#) no matter what reason they offer. Here are some of them:

It's too close to Netanyahu's election. (That doesn't persuade me. If we had fair, open, publicly funded, un-gerrymandered, verifiably counted elections, then "politics" wouldn't be a dirty word and we would want politicians to show themselves doing things to try to please us before, during, and after elections. I want them acting that way now, even with our broken system. I don't want the U.S. interfering in Israeli elections, but allowing a speech is hardly the same as backing coups in Ukraine and Venezuela or giving Israel billions of dollars worth of weapons every year.)

The Speaker didn't ask the President. (This is likely the big reason that Democrats are promising to skip the speech. I'm actually amazed more of them haven't made that promise. Netanyahu seemed to me to miss the extent to which the United States has become a term-limited monarchy. Congress typically wants to pass the buck on wars to the President. The President typically controls one of the two parties quite tightly. But do I actually care that Congress didn't consult the President? Hell no! Imagine if, during the run-up to the 2003 attack on Iraq, Congress had offered a joint-session microphone to El Baradei or Sarkozy or Putin or, indeed, Hussein to denounce all the bogus claims about WMDs in Iraq? Would you have been outraged by the impoliteness toward President Bush or delighted that a million people might not get killed for no damn reason?)

These kinds of reasons do have a practical weakness: they lead to calls for postponing the speech, rather than canceling it. Some other reasons have more serious flaws.

The speech damages bipartisan U.S. support for Israel. (Really? A slim minority of the President's party skips the speech for a laundry list of lame excuses and suddenly the United States is going to stop providing all the free weapons and vetoing every attempt at legal accountability for the crimes of the Israeli government? And that would be a *bad* thing if it actually happened?)

The speech hurts the critical effort of negotiations to keep Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. (This is the worst of the bad reasons. It pushes the false idea that Iran is trying to build a nuclear weapon and threatening to use it. It plays right into Netanyahu's fantasies of poor helpless nuclear Israel the victim of Iranian aggression. In reality, Iran has not attacked another nation in modern history. If only Israel or the United States could say as much!)

As I said, I'm glad anyone's [skipping the speech](#) for any reason. But I find it deeply

disturbing that an enormously important and deeply moral reason to skip the speech is obvious and known to every member of Congress, and while most are acting against it, those acting in accordance with it refuse to articulate it. The reason is this: Netanyahu is coming to spread war propaganda. He told Congress lies about Iraq in 2002 and pushed for a U.S. war. He has been lying, according to leaks this week of his own spies' information and according to the understanding of the U.S. "intelligence" services, about Iran. It is illegal to spread war propaganda under the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, to which Israel is a party. Congress is struggling to keep up with the wars President Obama is continuing, launching, and risking. Here's one war Obama seems not to want, and Congress is bringing in a foreign leader with a record of war lies to give them their marching orders. Meanwhile, an agency of that same foreign government, AIPAC, is holding its big lobby meeting in Washington.

Now, it is true that nuclear energy facilities create dangerous targets. Those drones flying around French nuclear plants scare the hell out of me. And it is true that nuclear energy places its possessor a short step away from nuclear weaponry. Which is why the U.S. should stop spreading nuclear energy to countries that have no need of it, and why the U.S. should never have given nuclear bomb plans to Iran or sentenced Jeffrey Sterling to prison for allegedly revealing that act. But you can't accomplish good by using horrific mass murder to avoid horrific mass murder — and that's what Israeli-U.S. aggression toward Iran means. Stirring up a new cold war with Russia in Syria and Ukraine is dangerous enough without throwing Iran into the mix. But even a war that confined itself to Iran would be horrifying.

Imagine if we had one Congress member who would say, "I'm skipping the speech because I'm opposed to killing Iranians." I know we have lots of constituents who like to think that their progressive Congress member secretly thinks that. But I'll believe it when I hear it said.

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