

What Was Missing From the US Mainstream Coverage of Netanyahu's Speech

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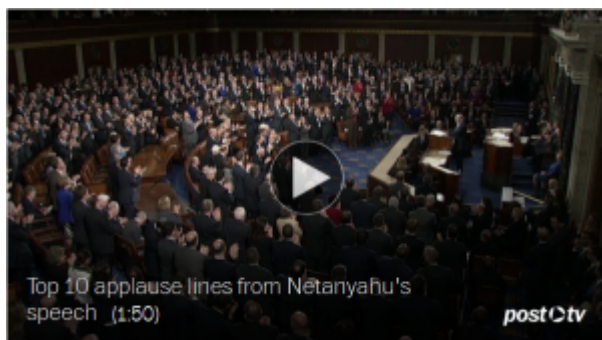
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Reading the lead stories on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to Congress about Iran in five prominent US papers—the [New York Times](#), [Washington Post](#), [LA Times](#), [Wall Street Journal](#) and [USA Today](#) (all 3/3/15)—what was most striking was what was left out of these articles.

None of them mentioned, for example, that Israel [possesses nuclear weapons](#). Surely this is relevant when a foreign leader says that it needs the United States' help to stop a rival state from obtaining nuclear weapons: The omission of the obvious phrase "of its own" changes the story entirely.



The Washington Post's coverage of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to Congress included "Top 10 Applause Lines From Netanyahu's Speech."

Another thing largely left out of the story is the fact that Iran has [consistently maintained](#) that it has no interest in building a nuclear weapon. There was one direct statement of this in the five stories—the New York Times' reference to "Iran's nuclear program, which [Iranian] officials have insisted is only for civilian uses." The Washington Post alluded to the fact that Iran denies that it has a nuclear weapons program, referring to "a program the West has long suspected is aimed at building weapons," Iran's "stated nuclear energy goals" and "the suspect Iranian program." Elsewhere the military nature of Iran's nuclear research was taken for granted, as when the LA Times said that the issue under discussion was "how to deal with the threat of Iran's nuclear program."

Entirely absent from these articles was the fact that not only does Iran deny wanting to

make a nuclear bomb, the intelligence agencies of the United States (New York Times, [2/24/12](#)) and Israel (Guardian, [2/23/15](#)) also doubt that Iran has an active nuclear weapons program. Surely this is relevant to a report on the Israeli prime minister engaging in a public debate with the US president on how best to stop this quite possibly nonexistent program.



Instead, these articles generally seemed content to cover the subject as a debate between Netanyahu and US President Barack Obama, perhaps with some congressmembers thrown in-as if these were the “both sides” that needed to be covered in order to give a complete picture of the controversy. When Iranian officials were quoted for a few lines in these pieces—which some neglected to do altogether—it seemed an afterthought, despite the fact that Netanyahu’s speech was mainly a long litany of allegations and threats against their country.

(Though I’m confining my analysis to what seemed to be the most prominent and comprehensive article on the speech on each paper’s website, it’s worth mentioning that the New York Times’ website featured a [piece](#) by Iran’s ambassador to the UN, Gholamali Khoshroo, rebutting Netanyahu’s speech. Reading it one is struck by how different the news pieces would read if Iran’s perspective on Iran’s nuclear program were given equal weight with Israel’s and the US’s views.)

None of these news articles mentioned the [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty](#), signed by both the United States and Iran but not by Israel, which [guarantees](#) “the inalienable right of all the Parties to the Treaty to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.”



One article—the New York Times’—had a reference to Netanyahu’s decades-long record of making [false nuclear predictions](#) about Israel’s enemies. And even that was framed in partisan terms: Netanyahu “did not succeed in mollifying all Democrats, who recalled a history of what they deemed doomsday messages by him.” A reporter, of course, could look up Netanyahu’s [previous projections](#) to see if they came true or not—as Murtaza Hussain of the Intercept ([3/2/15](#)) did—but holding officials accountable for what they have said in the past is not something an “[objective](#)” journalist is likely to do.

Another striking omission from these articles, about a speech in which Netanyahu talked about Iran's "aggression in the region and in the world," were words like "Palestine," "Palestinian," "occupation" or "Gaza"; none of these came up in any of the five articles. USA Today headlined its piece "Netanyahu: Stop Iran's 'March of Conquest'"—as though it were Iran, not Israel, that has [conquered, occupied and in some cases annexed](#) its neighbors' territory.

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