

A Critique of Netanyahu's Speech

Netanyahu's Speech.

A number of friends have asked me what I thought of Netanyahu's speech. I listened to it on you-tube, then had to run off to work. With a moment after, here are some reactions. First, this was a barn burner of a campaign speech. He is campaigning for another term as prime minister of Israel, of course; but he is also campaigning against any agreement with Iran that would bring the United States and Iran closer together and deprive Netanyahu of his favorite enemy.

In any campaign speech, or political theater, it is of course important what you say. But it is even more important what you do not say. Presumably, the difficulty of finding that balance was why Ron Dermer, the former aide to Newt Gingrich and Republican operative who is now the Israeli ambassador to Washington, left his post and spent days closeted with Netanyahu in Israel as they prepared the text. You don't want to include anything that will detract from your central purpose. So, what did Netanyahu leave out of his speech?

1. Iran has dramatically reduced its stockpile of enriched uranium. Remember Bibi's cartoon bomb that was going to go off last summer? Well, it has been drained of fuel, and that will probably continue to be true indefinitely. No mention.
2. Inspections will continue long after the nominal 10-year point, contrary to his claim that everything expires in ten years. No mention.
3. The heavy water reactor at Arak will be permanently modified, so it produces near zero plutonium. Not only did he not mention it, but he listed the reactor and plutonium as one of his threats.
4. His repeated assertion that Iran is actively seeking nuclear weapons ignores the judgment "with high confidence" of both American and Israeli intelligence that Iran has taken no decision to build nuclear weapons. It also contradicts the repeated findings of the IAEA that no materials have been diverted for military purposes.
5. All the major countries of the world are co-negotiators with the United States, so a U.S. congressional intervention that killed the deal will not only affect us but all of our major

allies. If we stiff them, there is no reason to believe the international sanctions will hold for long. No mention.

Are these simply oversights in the interests of time? Why did he leave out only the facts that cast doubt on his central thesis? Netanyahu claims that Iran is this powerful aggressive state that has recently taken over four countries: Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. I'm sorry, but as someone who follows the region somewhat closely, this is simply silly. Iraq is especially peculiar.

The reason there is a Shia government in Baghdad is because George W. Bush invaded (with the very strong recommendation of Netanyahu) and installed a pro-Iranian Shia government. If this is a case of conquest, he has the wrong culprit. But then he also claims that this all-conquering regional power is also such a vulnerable state that it will quickly concede if we impose more sanctions.

He carefully avoids mentioning that we refused a deal with Iran in 2003 that would have capped its centrifuges at about 3000 and started imposing more and more sanctions. Ten years later Iran had 20,000 centrifuges and a highly developed nuclear power program. Don't mention that, and don't mention that Netanyahu predicted in 1992 — more than 20 years ago — that Iran would have a nuclear weapon in 3-5 years. He emphasized that Iran cannot be trusted. Agreed. But when you make an agreement with an enemy (think SALT agreements with the USSR) you do not trust, you verify. And that's what the current negotiations are intended to produce.

His only alternative is the unicorn option: walk away from the table and Iran will cave in and agree to eliminate its entire nuclear capability. Our 36 years of dealing with Iran suggest that this is truly fantasy land. It may appeal to politicians trying to look tough, but there is no way that it will actually get Iran to modify or reduce its nuclear program. Reality: We walk, Iran resumes all of its previous enrichment policies, we have to intervene militarily, Iran builds a bomb. But don't say that. It detracts from the message. This was great political theater. But it insulted the intelligence of anyone who has been paying attention to the issues. How will it play in Israel? Or in the Congress as it considers its role in an agreement that seems to be getting closer to completion? In the next few weeks we will find out.

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