

Begin-Sadat Center Research Fellows Analysis of
PM Netanyahu's BIU Speech, October 6, 2013

Calling a Spade a Spade

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It is time that politicians start relating to the reality of the Middle East as it is, without whitewashing the facts. This is exactly what Prime Minister Netanyahu did in his speech on Sunday, October 6, at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University. This was an implicit answer to the speech of the American president, Barack Obama, who hopes that there is a way to come to terms with the Ayatollahs regarding their nuclear military program. Netanyahu is much more realistic about Iran and its real and dangerous intentions vis-à-vis Israel, the Middle East and the rest of the world. Nobody can ignore the facts which lead to the only conclusion: Iran is developing nuclear weapons, and therefore the world should strengthen sanctions against them, not soften them.

Netanyahu dedicated a significant part of his speech to describing some historical facts which people try to ignore: the role of the Mufti Haj Amin al-Huseini, the Palestinian leader during the 1930s and 1940s, who took an active part in the extermination of European Jewry. This is the reason – according to Netanyahu – why we, Jews, should demand that the Palestinians recognize Israel as the state of the Jewish people, the people whom their leader tried to exterminate. Israelis and others, who dream about a peaceful Palestinian state alongside Israel, should never ignore current and historical facts, of which Netanyahu reminded us all, by calling a spade a spade.

A Strident Netanyahu Places the Onus on the Palestinians

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Israel's timeline for Iran to reach a military nuclear capability is considerably shorter than US estimates. This is because Israel is focused on preventing Iran from becoming a threshold nuclear power, reaching the point where it can choose to break out and build a nuclear bomb within a matter of weeks at the time of its choosing. In contrast, the US is focused on preventing Iran from building a nuclear bomb per se. Israel is concerned that this is cutting it too fine and that the Iranians will follow the North Korean precedent and find a way to breakout when the US is distracted. Israeli concerns have only increased in the wake of the Obama administration's handling of the crisis over Syrian use of chemical weapons.

Specifically, with American-Iranian negotiations looking likely to commence soon, Israel is concerned that Iran will string out talks while continuing to advance towards its objective or that the US and Iran will reach an agreement that in effect would allow Iran to become a nuclear threshold state. Against this background, Netanyahu again laid out Israel's position on the issue. Going beyond the US position, he emphasized that the Iranians must not only freeze their nuclear program, they must dismantle it. Their program must be pushed back, not merely frozen in place and he advocated keeping the pressure on Iran. Netanyahu, in essence, is playing the role of the 'bad cop' and there is no doubt that if there is even a slim chance of reaching a good agreement with Iran, keeping up the pressure on the regime is vital.

Keeping up the pressure on Iran requires that world opinion recognize the true nature of the Iranian regime. Recently, President Rouhani has won plaudits by apparently accepting that the Holocaust occurred, in contrast to his predecessor. However, Rouhani also trotted out the canard that Israel manipulates the Holocaust to justify the oppression of the Palesti

Implicitly then, the Prime Minister's message was the same as ever: 'If they give, they will receive; if they do not give, they will not receive'.