

Netanyahu Shape-Shifts Iran Reality

When Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu visits Washington, he behaves like the master of all he surveys, his arrogance extending to his shape-shifting reality about Iran, with expectations of hearty applause for his claims and robust guffawing at his jokes, ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar notes.

By Paul R. Pillar

Benjamin Netanyahu's tiresome vilification of Iran has taken on the characteristics of a rote obsession that diverges farther and farther from truth, reality and his own ostensible objective. It is as if, in pursuing his real objective of keeping Iran ostracized, preventing any U.S. agreements with it, and keeping the specter of an Iranian threat permanently overshadowing everything else he'd rather not talk about, he has been reduced to a ritual, repetitive chant of "Iran bad, very bad" and does not care whether or not reflection on what he is saying shows it to make any sense.

Outside of the anti-Americanism that is heard so widely and often, it is hard to think of any other leader or government so dedicated to heaping calumnies unceasingly on another nation, at least one not currently waging war on the heaper's country. Maybe some American Cold Warriors fixated on the Evil Empire came close.



Attacks on Iran occupied most of the first half of Netanyahu's speech Tuesday to AIPAC. *Haaretz* accompanied a [transcript of the speech](#) with one of those graphics depicting the frequency with which particular words have been used. For the entire speech *Iran* was mentioned far more than any word other than *Israel*.

Maybe the relentlessness of this latest iteration of the chant reflects Netanyahu's frustration over his recent failure to get the U.S. Congress to sabotage the nuclear negotiations with Iran by slapping on new, deal-breaking

sanctions. Perhaps he also felt a need to amp up the attacks to bring attention back to the Iranian specter from the crisis in Ukraine.

Falsehoods continue to flow out of Netanyahu's mouth on this subject. Maybe the technique of getting people to believe something if it is repeated often enough is working, as reflected by some of the same falsehoods coming out of the mouths of members of Congress.

He referred, for example, to the need for pressure to get Iranians to "abandon their nuclear weapons program." No: according to the U.S. intelligence community, Iran has not decided to build a nuclear weapon, and Israeli intelligence does not disagree.

Netanyahu said that "Iran openly calls for our [i.e., Israel's] destruction." No: the former Iranian president who once made a metaphorical statement that got mis-translated into something along that line isn't even around any more. Actually, the current Iranian government says if the Palestinian problem is resolved then it would be possible for Iran to extend formal recognition to the state of Israel.

Netanyahu asserted that Iran "continues to build ICBMs." No: there is no evidence that Iran is building ICBMs or even intermediate-range ballistic missiles. Iran does have medium range ballistic missiles, but testing and development even of those has been quiescent lately.

In an opening sequence in the speech in which Netanyahu referred to medical and other humanitarian aid that Israel furnishes overseas, he said that Iran doesn't do any such thing because "the only thing that Iran sends abroad are rockets, terrorists and missiles to murder, maim and menace the innocent." No: actually Iran does provide medical and similar humanitarian aid.

The prime minister's analytical assertions are similarly divorced from reality. In arguing for the deal-breaking, impossible-to-achieve objective of no Iranian enrichment of uranium, he said that "letting Iran enrich uranium would open up the floodgates" of "nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and around the world."

But Iran already has been enriching uranium for some time, and no floodgates have opened. Even if Iran, contrary to its current policy, were to build a nuclear weapon, they still would be unlikely to open.

Netanyahu seemed to dare us not to take him seriously when, in a jarringly discordant note alongside all of the alarmism about a supposedly deadly and dire threat, he tried to crack a joke to accompany his falsehood about ICBMs: "You remember that beer commercial, 'this Bud's for you'? Well, when you see Iran

building ICBMs, just remember, America, that Scud's for you." Hardy har har.

Glaringly absent from the tirade was any of the perspective of a person living in a glass house who should be careful about not throwing stones. For example, along with self-congratulation for medical aid Netanyahu said Israel has provided Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, there was no mention of the misery that Israel has inflicted on people living in the same territory through a suffocating blockade and military-inflicted destruction.

And alongside all of the alarums about a possible Iranian nuclear weapon there was of course no mention of Israel having the only nuclear weapons in the Middle East, totally outside any international control regime and with their existence not even admitted.

Nor was there any real application of logic to implications for policy, given that the most important policy fixture at the moment is the nuclear negotiation. If Netanyahu's objective really were to assure prevention of an Iranian nuke, rather than assuring persistence of the *issue* of a possible Iranian nuke, the conclusion would be to support the negotiations rather than to try to sabotage them. Even if one believed all the calumnies, they are either irrelevant to the nuclear talks or all the more reason to hope they succeed.

Listening to a speech such as this, it is a wonder that many Israelis condone a leader who is offering his country unending conflict and confrontation. And it is a wonder that many Americans, including ones with admiration and fondness for Israel, are influenced by him. He is not acting in the best interests of the state they admire and love, let alone in the interests of the United States.

The reciter of the primitive chants of hate against Iran has a narrower objective. As Henry Siegman observes, "To say that Netanyahu is not a visionary leader is an understatement. To be sure, he is a clever tactician who knows how to stay in office. That goal, which he believes is unbreakably linked to retaining his leadership of Israel's political right wing, trumps every other domestic and international challenge that faces Israel."

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Putin or Kerry: Who's Delusional?

Exclusive: Official Washington and its compliant mainstream news media operate with a convenient situational ethics when it comes to the principles of international law and non-intervention in sovereign states. The rules apply only when they're convenient, explains Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

When Secretary of State John Kerry denounces Russia's intervention in Crimea by declaring "It is not appropriate to invade a country and at the end of a barrel of gun dictate what you are trying to achieve. That is not Twenty-first Century, G-8, major-nation behavior," you might expect that the next line in a serious newspaper would note Kerry's breathtaking hypocrisy.

But not if you were reading the New York Times on Wednesday, or for that matter the Washington Post or virtually any mainstream U.S. newspaper or watching a broadcast outlet.

Yet, look what happens when Russia's President Vladimir Putin does what the U.S. news media should do, i.e. point out that "It's necessary to recall the actions of the United States in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in Libya, where they acted either without any sanction from the U.N. Security Council or distorted the content of these resolutions, as it happened in Libya. There, as you know, only the right to create a no-fly zone for government aircraft was authorized, and it all ended in the bombing and participation of special forces in group operations."

Despite the undeniable accuracy of Putin's observation, he was promptly deemed to have "lost touch with reality," according to a Washington Post's editorial, which called his press conference "rambling" and a "bizarre performance" in which his words have "become indistinguishable from the propaganda of his state television network."

You get the point. If someone notes the disturbing U.S. history of military interventions or describes the troubling narrative behind the "democratic" coup in Ukraine spearheaded by neo-Nazi militias who overthrew a duly elected president you are dismissed as crazy.

Revised Narrative

Yet, it has been the Post, Times and other U.S. news outlets which have led the way in developing a propaganda narrative at odds with the known reality. For instance, the violent February clashes in Kiev are now typically described as the Ukrainian police having killed some 80 protesters, though the original

reporting had that death toll including 13 policemen and the fact that neo-Nazi militias were responsible for much of the violence, from hurling firebombs to shooting firearms.

That history is already fast disappearing as we saw in a typical New York Times report on Wednesday, which reported: "More than 80 protesters were shot to death by the police as an uprising spiraled out of control in mid-February."

Those revised "facts" better fit the preferred narrative of innocent and peaceful demonstrators being set upon by thuggish police without provocation. But that isn't what the original reporting revealed. Either the New York Times should explain how the earlier reporting was wrong or it should respect the more nuanced reality.

To do so, however, would undercut the desired narrative. So, it's better to simply accuse anyone with a functioning memory of being "delusional." The same with anyone who mentions the stunning hypocrisy of the U.S. government suddenly finding international law inviolable.

The history of the United States crossing borders to overthrow governments or to seize resources is a long and sordid one. Even after World War II and the establishment of the Nuremberg principles against "aggressive war," the U.S. government has routinely violated those rules, sometimes unilaterally and sometimes by distorting the clear meaning of U.N. resolutions, as Putin noted.

No Accountability

Those violations of international law have done nothing to diminish the official reputations of presidents who broke the rules. Despite the slaughters of millions of people from these U.S. military adventures, no U.S. president has ever been punished either by U.S. judicial authorities or by international tribunals.

In 1983, President Ronald Reagan, one of the most honored political figures in modern American history, ordered the invasion of the tiny Caribbean island of Grenada to overthrow its leftist government amid a political crisis that U.S. hostility had helped stir up. Reagan's pretext was to protect American students at the St. George's Medical School, though the students were not in any physical danger.

The U.S. invasion killed some 70 people on the island, including 25 Cuban construction workers. Nineteen U.S. soldiers also died. Though Reagan's clear violation of international law was noted around the globe, he was hailed as a hero by the U.S. media at home and faced no accountability from the United Nations or anyone else.

When I went to Grenada to report on the invasion for the Associated Press, an article that I co-wrote about abuses committed by American troops, including the ransacking of the personal libraries of prominent Grenadians (in search of books such as Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*), was spiked by my AP editors, presumably because it clashed with the feel-good U.S. public reaction to the invasion.

Last week, as I was reviewing documents at the Reagan Presidential Library at Simi Valley, California, I found a number of papers about how the Reagan administration used propaganda techniques to manipulate the American people regarding Grenada.

The files belonged to Walter Raymond Jr., a top CIA expert in propaganda and psychological operations who had been reassigned to Reagan's National Security Council staff to oversee the creation of a global psy-op structure including one aimed at the U.S. public.

On Nov. 1, 1983, just a week after the invasion, White House public-relations specialist David Gergen advised Reagan's image-molder Michael Deaver on steps to orchestrate the "follow-up on Grenada" to impress the American people, including making sure that the phased U.S. withdrawals were "well publicized, the bigger the groups the better. When units of the fleet leave, that also ought to be done with fanfare."

The P.R. choreography called, too, for using the "rescued" students as props. Gergen wrote: "Students Meet with Liberating Forces: Everyone sees this as a key event, and it needs to be done before RR [Reagan] leaves for the Far East. Students Visit the Wounded: Many of the wounded would probably welcome a thank you visit from a student delegation."

In a handwritten comment on the last suggestion, Raymond praised the idea: "Happy Grenada theme."

More Recent Violations

Secretary Kerry might argue that Grenada was so Twentieth Century, along with such events as the Vietnam War, the invasion of Panama in 1989 and the Persian Gulf conflict of 1990-91, which involved the slaughter of Iraqi soldiers and civilians even after the Iraqi government agreed to withdraw from Kuwait in a deal negotiated by then-Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. [For details, see Robert Parry's *Secrecy & Privilege*.]

However, if one were to take up Secretary Kerry's challenge and just look at the Twenty-first Century and "G-8, major-nation behavior," which would include the United States and its major European allies, you'd still have a substantial list of U.S. violations: Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Libya and others. France

and Great Britain, two other G-8 countries, have engaged in military interventions as well, including France in Mali and other African conflicts.

On Aug. 30, 2013, Secretary Kerry himself gave a belligerent speech justifying U.S. military action against Syria over murky accounts of a chemical weapons attack outside Damascus, a war that was only averted by Putin's diplomatic efforts in convincing President Bashar al-Assad to agree to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons.

Plus, throughout his presidency, Barack Obama has declared, over and over, that "all options are on the table" regarding Iran's nuclear program, a clear threat of another U.S. bombing campaign, another crisis that Putin has helped tamp down by assisting in getting Iran to the bargaining table.

Indeed, it appears that one reason why Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, a neocon holdover, has been so aggressive in trying to exacerbate the Ukraine crisis was as a form of neocon payback for Putin's defusing the confrontations with Syria and Iran, when Official Washington's still-influential neocons were eager for more violence and "regime change." [See Consortiumnews.com's "[What Neocons Want from Ukraine Crisis.](#)"]

In virtually all these threatened or actual U.S. military assaults on sovereign nations, the major U.S. news media has been enthusiastically onboard. Indeed, the Washington Post and the New York Times played key roles in manufacturing public consent for George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq in 2003 under the false pretext of eliminating its non-existent weapons of mass destruction.

By promoting dubious and false allegations, the Post and Times also have helped lay the groundwork for potential U.S. wars against Iran and Syria, including the Times making the bogus claim that the Aug. 21 chemical weapons attack east of Damascus was launched by Syrian government forces northwest of the city. Months later, the Times grudgingly admitted that its reporting, which helped bring the U.S. to the brink of another war, was contradicted by the fact that the Sarin-laden missile had a much more limited range. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Mistaken Guns of Last August.](#)"]

However, when Russia has a much more understandable case for intervention in an incipient civil war on its border that involves clear U.S. interference, the overthrow of an elected president and the participation of neo-Nazi militias, the U.S. government and its compliant mainstream media lock arms in outrage.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#)

and [barnesandnoble.com](https://www.barnesandnoble.com)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).
