

Netanyahu in Congress

Crime boss fulminates, while his accomplices cheer



By Richard Rubenstein
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OPINION

I returned home from Wednesday's anti-Netanyahu demonstration on Capitol Hill in time to watch the Israeli prime minister address a joint session of the US Congress. The vilest thing about the event was not the speech itself, which was predictably bloodthirsty and mendacious, but the reactions of the assembled Congresspeople. Almost all of them stood and cheered lengthily while their invited guest smeared those protesting his appearance in the streets outside the Capitol as pro-Hamas "idiots" who "stand with rapists and murderers," and whose protests are "paid for by Iran".

Understand that almost all those protesting, including me, were Americans — a group that the members of Congress claim to represent. But never mind that. Benjamin Netanyahu is an experienced con artist who knows very well when he has an audience of suckers who will buy any Brooklyn Bridge that he feels like selling.

I arrived home in time to watch him bedazzle the Congressional rubes by introducing wounded Israeli war veterans — who just happened to be people of color — in the visitors' gallery. No one laughed or objected when he defamed the protestors, when he called the Israel Defense Forces the most scrupulously pro-civilian army in world history, or when he accused the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court of disseminating an antisemitic "blood libel". But his best trick of all was using the Book of Genesis to justify Israeli claims to all of 21st-century Palestine.

About half of the Democrats in Congress had the decency to absent themselves from this bellicose farce. Kamala Harris refused to attend and preside; Rashida Tlaib attended but held up a small sign that read "War Criminal". Other Democrats like Jerry Nadler of New York and Jamie Raskin of Maryland were in the hall but behaving weirdly — sitting on their hands for some of Bibi's more obnoxious pronouncements but rising to cheer at other moments of jingoistic bombast. No point in offending AIPAC and its supporters in an election year! Most Republicans, of course, were



US lawmakers stand and applaud as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (C) addresses a joint meeting of Congress in the chamber of the House of Representatives at the US Capitol on July 24, 2024.

AP

"They call Israel a colonialist state," he ranted, pounding the lectern. "Don't they know that the Land of Israel is where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob prayed, where Isaiah and Jeremiah preached and where David and Solomon ruled?" That grotesque non-sequitur evoked the loudest cheers of all! Netanyahu understands perfectly well that what sustains the remaining American support for Israel is a combination of Zionist political and financial pressure, evangelical Christian hopes for a Middle East Armageddon, and US imperialism. He baldly presented Israel as a US agent in the region, obviating the need for American "boots on the ground". His peroration, cheered on passionately by the yokels, called for an Abrahamic Alliance to make war on Iran and Hezbollah.

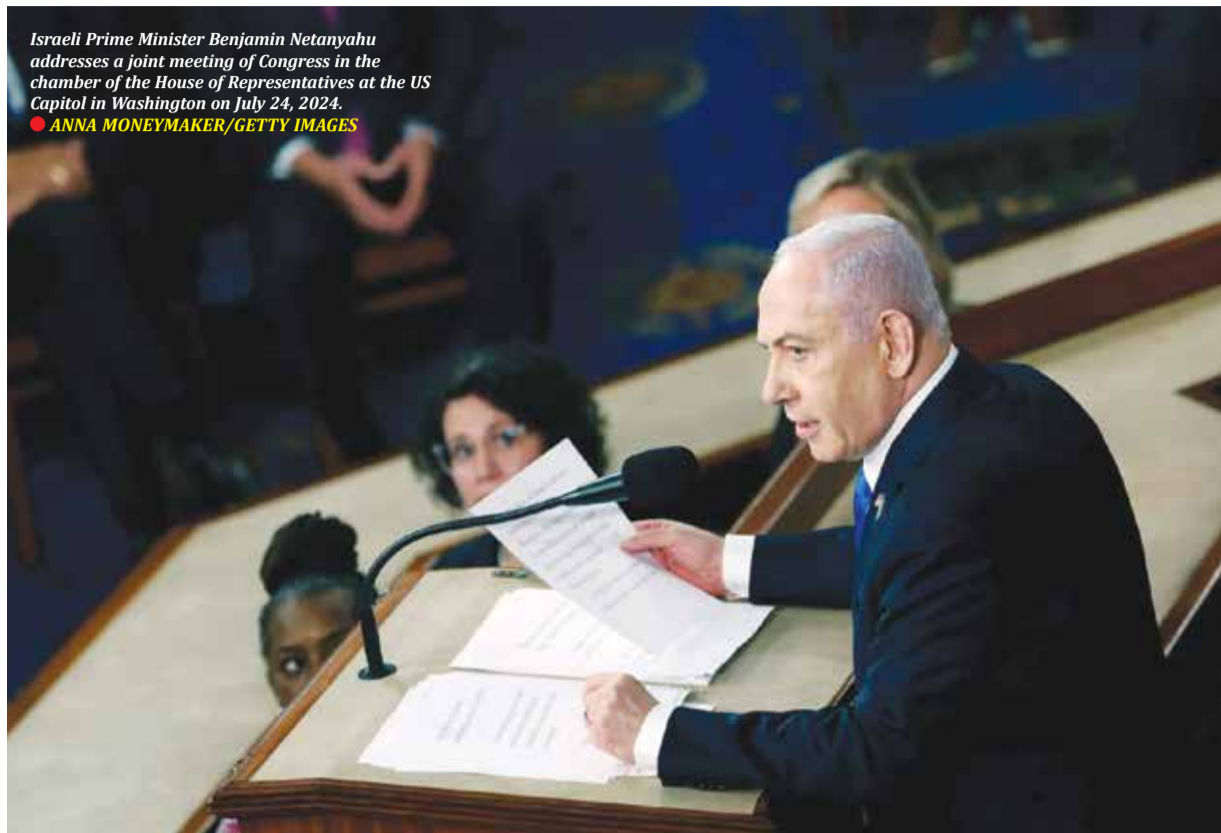
in ecstasy throughout, especially when Netanyahu praised their Dear Leader. As I write this, he is on the way to Mar-a-Lago to pay him homage. So much for Donald Trump the "peace candidate". The one useful result of this globally embarrassing event was the revelation — if one were needed — that the MAGA Republicans are united in support of a US-financed "forever war" in the Middle East. Meanwhile, the world watches in disbelief as the clueless American Empire further isolates itself morally and politically from virtually all the world's peoples. With friends like Netanyahu, as the old Jewish joke goes, who needs enemies?

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Rashida Tlaib (C), congresswoman for Michigan's 12th Congressional District, holds a sign that reads "War Criminal" as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addresses a joint meeting of Congress in Washington, DC, on July 24, 2024.

GETTY IMAGES



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addresses a joint meeting of Congress in the chamber of the House of Representatives at the US Capitol in Washington on July 24, 2024.

ANNA MONEYMAKER/GETTY IMAGES

Netanyahu's speech to Congress was uninspiring, directionless



By Yossi Mekelberg
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OPINION

Only those who still harbor any expectations of Israel's embattled Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu were disappointed by his speech to a joint meeting of the US Congress on Wednesday. For the rest of us, it was the same old Netanyahu: all hype and no substance; clichés over content. He was cynical in exploiting the captives, whether still in captivity or released, parading them along with soldiers and officers who risked their lives in the war. As always, he was economical with the truth, and all for the sake of his own vanity and political survival.

It was argued that this Netanyahu speech, although delivered in Washington, was mainly intended for Israel's domestic audience. In fact, its messages were chiefly for American consumption, mainly because most Israelis are not falling for his empty rhetoric about "total victory" and his pretense that releasing the captives is his priority. But the optics of the event were directed at the audience back home, in an attempt to redeem his credibility and reputation as a statesman who can still play on the biggest international stages.

Those present at the Capitol willingly swallowed his rhetoric, but it was worth paying more attention to the relatives of the captives. Either those in the gallery in Congress who wore T-shirts reading "Seal The Deal NOW" and consequently were removed from the hall and arrested, or those watching in Israeli TV studios who were holding back the tears as they had hoped that Netanyahu, because he had taken the trouble to be away from the country in these tough days, would deliver a message that a deal had actually been reached. Their disappointment was understandably visible. Instead, it became apparent that Netanyahu's speech had three aims. First, to receive US support for continuing the war. Second, to maintain the flow of American weapons and ammunition. And, lastly, to attack the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice in order to find a partner to help derail any legal proceedings against Israel and against himself personally.

Netanyahu received repeated rounds of applause from those present at his tedious, nearly hour-long speech, but about half of the congressional Democrats skipped it, including former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and former House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn. This was more than twice the number

of Democrats who could not bear to attend a similar previous occasion when Netanyahu's aim was to upset Barack Obama's Iran nuclear deal.

Pelosi later posted on X that the speech was "by far the worst presentation of any foreign dignitary invited and honored with the privilege of addressing the Congress of the United States," and she should know, considering her long service in that Congress.

One of Netanyahu's routine acts when in the US, or his "schtick," as they call it there, is to present the alliance between the US and Israel as one between equal partners. And he takes this even further, portraying Israel as protecting American interests in the Middle East. But on this occasion, he went as far as claiming that "Israel fights on the front line of civilization," that American cities are safer because of that, and, by doing it, "we help keep Americans' boots off the ground." He added: "We're not only protecting ourselves; we're protecting you."

This is what American legislators and those they represent love to hear, whether true or not, and unsurprisingly so, considering the nation's traumatic experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq. But the reality is very different when we consider that, in the immediate aftermath of October 7, Biden sent two aircraft carriers to the Eastern Med-

iterranean, including the USS Gerald R. Ford, the world's largest warship, to deter Iran or Hezbollah from joining the Israel-Hamas conflict. Moreover, since the beginning of the war, it is estimated that the US has enacted legislation providing at least \$12.5 billion in military aid to Israel.

But for all the expressions of gratitude to President Joe Biden in Netanyahu's speech, there was a barely veiled criticism of the former's holding back of an increased supply of weaponry, with the implication that the onus is on the current American administration to achieve "total victory". "Give us the tools faster, and we'll finish the job faster," he said.

This might ring true with Israel's supporters, but instead of repeatedly giving Netanyahu a standing ovation, they should have asked him: How is it possible that those weapons — which according to local authorities in Gaza have already killed 39,000 Palestinians, many of them civilians and among them thousands of children, possibly implicating both Israel and potentially the US in war crimes — are yet to achieve this victory? Instead, Israel's prime minister repeated his mantra that victory was within sight, something that he has been constantly repeating during the course of this war, with no evidence to support it.