



[Valid Criticism of Netanyahu's Upcoming Address to Congress](#)

Almost exactly 200 years after the first guest address to U.S. Congress by General Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette of France in December of 1824, Congress is now seeking to bestow the honor on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu next month in July despite significant disapproval of the Gaza War. Signed and backed by Speaker of the House Mike Johnson (R-LA), Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), the invitation came as a shock to many Congressmembers, especially due to the substantial evidence of Israeli war crimes and human rights violations being committed in Gaza. Additionally, while previously the House and Senate received guests individually, the practice has fallen out of popularity. This means that when a member of Congress invites a foreign leader (or other non-member of Congress) to address the body, it is typically agreed upon by both the Speaker of the House and the Senate Majority Leader. Furthermore, the privilege of addressing both chambers is typically only gifted to an ally or distinguished guest that Congress would like to honor.

This is where the problems start to arise with the most recent invitation. Back in March, Senate Majority Leader Schumer referred to Netanyahu as a “major obstacle to peace” during an almost hour-long speech that largely criticized Netanyahu’s actions since October. Thus, many view Schumer’s signing off on the invitation as backtracking on his previous comments, and are unhappy with the seemingly sudden change of heart in the midst of continued Israeli human rights abuses in Gaza and the dire nature of the humanitarian crisis. There is also the belief that allowing Netanyahu to speak before both chambers is only going to give him the platform to criticize recent diplomatic efforts to halt the conflict and allow him to again interfere in U.S. politics, as he has done before in the past. A staunch critic of the idea of inviting Netanyahu entirely, Democratic Representative Delia Ramirez (D-IL) said that “A war criminal addressing a joint session of Congress on Thursday the 13th sounds like the twisted plotline of a bad horror movie” in response to initial reports back at the beginning of June that Netanyahu could address Congress on Thursday, June 13th. Since then, the date that has been set for the speech to take place is July 24th. Democratic Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) was also critical of the scheduled Congressional address, expressing that “It’s not going to help move us forward — it’s a detriment” and adding that “Should he (Netanyahu) come for any reason, in any venue, I am not going to be there.”

It appears that there are some principled members of Congress who understand that their attendance to the address will be viewed as support or disregard of Netanyahu’s war crimes, and have thus decided to boycott the speech. Recently, U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) expressed that she would not be attending Netanyahu’s address saying that “Netanyahu has created a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and has also made clear that he does not support U.S. policy for a two-state solution that will let the people of Israel and Palestinians develop their own nation self-determination (and) live with dignity.” U.S. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) shared similar sentiments on the social media platform X, remarking that “This man should not be addressing Congress. He is a war criminal. And he certainly has no regard for U.S. law, which is explicitly designed to prevent U.S. weapons from facilitating human rights abuses. His invitation should be revoked. It should’ve never been sent in the first place.” U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) added further context to why the invitation has caused such a stir, pointing out that Netanyahu has consistently not complied with U.S. demands to protect civilian life in Gaza and stated that the invitation to Netanyahu is a mistake because it risks signaling that the U.S. is endorsing his

widely-criticized war efforts in Gaza. To the media outlet Bloomberg, Van Hollen commented that “I’m not sure why the United States would want to reward a prime minister who has repeatedly flaunted the requests of the President of the United States.” These voices are just a few of the many Congressmembers that have at the very least voiced their concern over the decision and at the most have even vowed not to show up to the planned joint address. U.S. Representative Ro Khanna (D-CA), U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), and U.S. Representative Jim Clyburn (D-SC) are among some of the others that have stated in recent days that they will not be attending Netanyahu’s address to Congress. The Congressmembers that have been critical of the move have rightly highlighted how it rewards the actions of someone who has blatantly violated international law standards and disregarded American warnings and concerns regarding the manner in which the Gaza War has been carried out.

This whole debacle and controversy regarding the impending Netanyahu address to Congress comes as the U.S. gears up for its 47th presidential election in November, a predicted face-off between Incumbent President Joe Biden and Former President Donald Trump. During the preceding months, President Biden has elicited criticism for his handling of the Gaza War. Widespread anti-war demonstrations have emerged on college campuses across the country as a result of the overwhelming evidence of Israeli war crimes and human rights violations in Gaza, and Biden’s actions have been called out, leading to an overall unsteadiness in his popularity – particularly among younger voters. In recent months, these protests have sought to draw attention to Israeli human rights abuses and increasingly-criticized U.S. funding and arms support, with the aim of spurring divestment from entities that take part in these violations and war crimes. Schools such as Columbia University, Harvard University, the University of Southern California (USC), and the University of Texas at Austin (UT) have seen large-scale pro-human rights demonstrations and solidarity movements centered around Israeli war crimes and abuses under the Netanyahu government.

The invitation extended to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to address a joint session of Congress has sparked significant controversy and debate among lawmakers and the public alike. While some see the invitation as a reaffirmation of U.S.-Israeli ties, others view it as a politically-charged maneuver that could deepen divisions both domestically and internationally. The timing of the invitation also adds a layer of complexity to the situation. Netanyahu’s recent dissolution of his war cabinet and the news of the International Criminal Court’s (ICC) seeking of arrest warrants against him certainly further intensify the scrutiny surrounding his visit. This leaves lawmakers to evaluate the potential consequences of their attendance or absence, both for their political careers and for the broader state of the U.S.-Israel relationship. As the scheduled date of July 24th approaches, the decision of whether or not to attend Netanyahu’s speech weighs heavily on members of Congress, having the potential to reshape the landscape of U.S. foreign policy and domestic political dynamics.