The NATIONAL INTEREST FOUNDATION

Netanyahu Rushes to Washington to Ensure Military Action Against Iran

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was in Washington D.C. to meet with U.S. President Donald Trump yet again this week, marking his 7th visit in the past 12 months since Trump returned to the White House. Analysts were quick to highlight how the trip represented a clear attempt by Netanyahu to continue efforts to pressure Trump to adopt a harmful maximalist approach towards Iran – one that would sabotage the chances of diplomatic engagement with Tehran and instead likely result in dangerous military escalations. In fact, observers contend that the accelerated date for the Netanyahu-Trump meeting – which was originally due to take place next week – was pushed for by Netanyahu himself in response to the recent attempts at diplomatic progress via the U.S.-Iran negotiations last Friday in Oman. Rather than support the talks aimed at achieving a peaceful diplomatic solution to Iran's nuclear program, it has become obvious to many that the Israeli efforts to push the American president to take a hardline approach that goes beyond merely Iran's nuclear capabilities to also include the state of its ballistic missile program is designed to undermine the prospects of diplomacy. This is why those seeking to avoid the outbreak of a potentially protracted and destructive new conflict are urging U.S. officials to focus on considerations related to Iran's nuclear program that are achievable through diplomatic engagement as opposed to adopting Israel's maximalist approach which is viewed as a nonstarter.

For many, the main concern surrounding Israeli officials' repeated attempts to sway the United States' approach to Iran is that it risks dragging the U.S. into another harmful conflict in the Middle East. As such, impartial experts have argued that the United States should engage in tangible diplomatic efforts with Iran and not allow Israel to – as some have called it – "play spoiler" when it comes to the prospects of peaceful solutions. The attempts to impede diplomacy are troubling and jeopardize entangling the United States in endless "forever wars," – something that Trump campaigned and vowed not to do. The separate non-nuclear related issues such as Iran's ballistic missile program are blatantly being used by those who desire a direct conflict with Tehran to provoke this into taking place. Analysts have argued that in light of the recent negotiations in Oman, Netanyahu and other Israeli officials suspect that the U.S. may be less inclined to use military force against Iran – hence the clear-cut motivations behind the pushed-up meeting between Netanyahu and Trump. Moving this up serves as an effort to influence the U.S. approach to Iran before negotiations can progress any further. These talks

are particularly important at a sensitive time like now when there is real concern over the possibility of a direct U.S. or Israeli attack against Iran.

While Trump has mobilized forces across the Middle East, the direction that the United States is headed remains uncertain. The recent talks in Oman highlighted how Iran continues to view non-nuclear issues like its ballistic missile program as a diplomatic nonstarter and a matter of national sovereignty. Therefore, the prospect of potential future talks will likely hinge on whether Trump prioritizes nuclear-related issues that can be achieved through diplomacy or adopts Israel's maximalist and hardline approach that risks the outbreak of armed conflict. A direct U.S. attack on Iran or participation in Israeli attacks against Tehran would be counterproductive to the United States' best interests. There are a multitude of destabilizing and harmful risks associated with launching or supporting an attack which could prompt a destructive widescale war in the Middle East – endangering American troops, resulting in the massive loss of life, damaging infrastructure, and entangling the U.S. in a protracted conflict. In the past, in places like Iraq and Syria, there is ample evidence of the U.S. being dragged into conflicts at the behest of others which ultimately proved to be not only unwarranted, but also counterproductive to the prospects of long-term peace and stability. Now, there is the same risk of this manifesting again regarding Iran and observers can only hope that the United States does not succumb to the pressures of warmongering forces. Despite the challenges, diplomacy with Iran remains the best path forward for the United States.

The uptick in international criticism of Israel's actions and policies in recent years should prompt serious hesitation on the part of the United States regarding the damaging prospects of continued alignment with its foreign policy approaches. Observers have grown increasingly critical of the destabilizing role that the Israeli government has played throughout the Middle East and elsewhere, with concern that it is now hell-bent on provoking conflict with Iran. The United States should make policy decisions that prioritize its own best interests, especially given that alignment with Israel in the past has so often had harmful consequences.