

Netanyahu threatens war with Iran

by David M. Herszenhorn via sal - Politico *Wednesday, Feb 13 2019, 11:07pm*

international / prose / post

Bibi tweets that countries are 'sitting down together with Israel in order to advance the common interest of war with Iran.'



nutter

WARSAW — A barrage of Twitter-fire quickly torched any notion of a Middle East [peace conference](#) — along with any illusions the meeting in Warsaw was not designed to focus on Iran.

As officials from dozens of nations gathered for the U.S.-sponsored event in the Polish capital Wednesday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu posted a tweet threatening war with Iran.

Proclaiming the historic importance of the event, the Israeli prime minister's official account tweeted: "This is an open meeting with representatives of leading Arab countries, that are sitting down together with Israel in order to advance the common interest of war with Iran."

Oops.

The tweet was quickly deleted and replaced with a new one that used slightly softer language about "the common interest of combating Iran."

But it was not deleted and replaced fast enough to stop the Iranian foreign minister from grabbing a screenshot and slamming Netanyahu. Mohammad Javad Zarif also repeated his criticism of the U.S.-organized event using the hashtag: #WarsawCircus.

As controversy swirled around the gathering in Poland, Russia moved to capitalize on the opportunity to highlight how the U.S. appears to be losing clout on the world stage. The Kremlin announced that President Vladimir Putin would host his own summit on Thursday, in the seaside resort town of Sochi, with the leaders of Turkey and Iran.

Russia, after asserting heavy military force in Syria and successfully protecting President Bashar al-Assad from being ousted, is now viewed by many regional players and even some international powers as the dominant external actor in the Middle East.

The event in Warsaw was initially conceived by Brian Hook, U.S. President Donald Trump's special representative for Iran at the State Department, as an effort to reinsert the U.S. into the global

diplomatic discussions about Iran. Washington has largely been excluded from those conversations since Trump unilaterally pulled out of the Iran nuclear accord.

But American officials quickly realized a conference focused on Iran was far too divisive a topic, and working with the Polish hosts, they sought to broaden the event to a discussion about Middle East peace.

Still, the prospect the event was intended to further criticize and isolate Iran and to potentially further undermine the nuclear deal, which other guarantors have continued to support, led several nations to say they would not attend the Warsaw meeting. Critics of the Trump administration proclaimed the event a debacle before it even started.

For sure, it wasn't going well on Wednesday.

Even before the controversial tweet about "war," Netanyahu made clear in a separate post on Facebook that the conference U.S. officials said was not about Iran, was, in fact, entirely about Iran.

"This is a very important international conference in Warsaw," Netanyahu [wrote](#) in the post. "The focus is Iran. This brings together Israel, the U.S., and countries in and beyond the region. There will be interesting meetings there."

In the Facebook post, Netanyahu also answered some of the bellicose rhetoric voiced in Tehran during recent celebrations of the 40th anniversary of Iran's Islamic revolution.

"Iran threatens us on the 40th anniversary of the revolution," Netanyahu wrote. "They threatened to destroy Tel Aviv and Haifa, and I said that they would not succeed but if they try then I repeat that this will be the last anniversary of the revolution that they celebrate, this regime."

Adding to the sour tone around the event, Trump's lawyer, the former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, participated in a rally in Warsaw with an Iranian opposition group, the People's Mujahedin of Iran, or Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), which advocates for the violent ouster of Iran's government.

Separately, in an [interview](#) with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Giuliani also called for overthrowing the government in Tehran. "I believe there has to be an overthrow of this regime," Giuliani said, stressing he was speaking as a private citizen and not on behalf of the U.S. government.

Putting the Israeli prime minister at the same table as leaders from Arab nations, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, might have given the Trump administration at least one achievement to boast about from the Warsaw event.

The administration has invested serious political capital with a high-level delegation that includes Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner.

A number of senior European officials, including the EU's foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, opted to steer clear of the Warsaw event. Mogherini cited a scheduling conflict but others simply did not want to get caught up in Trump's Iran-bashing.

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