

Do-or-die moment for Netanyahu

Israel's prime minister addresses Congress tomorrow to insist his country and the world are endangered by a pending deal with Iran on its nuclear programme, writes **William Booth**

PRIME Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's upcoming address to a joint session of Congress will probably be the most important speech of his career – and one that has jeopardised relations between Israel and the US.

Tomorrow, Netanyahu will confront an American president and insist that the future of the state of Israel and the world is imperilled by a pending "bad deal" with Iran on its nuclear programme.

Also hanging in the balance is Netanyahu's political future. Just two weeks after the speech, Netanyahu will either be re-elected to a historic fourth term as prime minister or be out of a job.

Netanyahu has spent three terms as Israeli prime minister, focused on the dangers posed by Iran. In his first address to Congress in 1996, he warned that an atomic Iran would "presage catastrophic consequences, not only for my country and not only for the Middle East but for all mankind".

His supporters call him prescient; his detractors say Netanyahu has been warning for 20 years that "time is running out" on the Iran threat. His critics say he is a broken record, willing to damage US-Israeli relations in a futile confrontation with the US that does not win Israel anything.

His opponents in Israel and the US say the speech is mostly a cynical ploy to get re-elected in a tight March 17 vote, by fear-mongering on Iran and by opposing a US president who is not popular in Israel.

Tomorrow, as Secretary of State John Kerry meets his counterparts in Switzerland to try to complete a framework accord with Iran by the end of the month, Netanyahu will stand at the lectern in Congress to tell Americans, essentially, that President Barack Obama is either foolhardy or weak and about to sign a deal with the devil.

Netanyahu will warn, as in the past, that the Americans are gambling on a radical Iranian regime run by Muslim clerics who deny the Holocaust, sponsor terrorist groups, support a murderous regime in Syria and pledge to destroy Israel.

He will write the speech himself because he considers himself an authority on the minutiae of the Iranian nuclear programme – the number, type and productivity of the centrifuges and the estimates of low-enriched uranium to the kilogram – and an expert on US politics and the American people.

Netanyahu studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and served as Israeli ambassador to the UN in New York. He has been called the "most American" of Israeli prime ministers.

This is his moment. Netanyahu's English is fluid, conversational, persuasive and often blunt. He has a flair for stagecraft.

His guiding light, says his inner circle, is Britain's wartime premier and great orator, Winston Churchill, who is the only other foreign leader to have addressed a joint session of Congress three times.

During Netanyahu's second speech to Congress in May 2009, he received 29 standing ovations.

Netanyahu's critics in Israel and in the Obama administration warn that the Israeli leader is no Churchill and that he has miscalculated this time. Israeli relations with Democrats and the Obama administration are at a historic low.

A top Israeli diplomat said Netanyahu, if re-elected, has written off his relations with Obama in his past two years in office, a potentially perilous gambit for a Middle East leader surrounded by enemies.

National security adviser Susan Rice last week denounced the address as destructive to the relationship between the US and Israel.

A senior US official said on Friday that the strategy was to stand aside and let Netanyahu give his speech, which will neither derail Iran talks nor sway Congress to block a possible agreement.

The senior official, who agreed to present administration views in exchange for anonymity, said the speech was more about Netanyahu's re-election bid and his pre-occupation with Iran.

"The Netanyahu myth is that he alone understands the Americans," said Alon Pinkas, a former Israeli consul-general in New York and former Netanyahu adviser.

Pinkas said the speech would be applauded by Republicans but would do little to shape the Iran deal.

"He is a grumpy old man. He's like a Republican senator from West Jerusalem. He talks like them, he dresses like them. He is always saying 'They're against me! They don't like me!' He's dealing with an America he doesn't know," Pinkas predicted the speech would fall flat.

The Israeli journalist and author of the best-selling history *My Promised Land*, Ari Shavit, said he expected Netanyahu to give "a brilliant and desperate speech".

Shavit is sympathetic. He sees the Iranian threat as more "bloodcurdling" than ever. Yet he says the prime minister has made a mistake by working against the US administration rather than beside it.

"Israel rather than Iran has been isolated," he wrote in a recent column.

Netanyahu has opposed any deal with Iran that does not dismantle its uranium-enrichment programme and insisted that economic sanctions be stiffened, not lifted. Kerry and his negotiators have said such a deal is impossible.

Senior administration officials say an imperfect agreement that freezes Iran's nuclear ambitions and allows for monitoring leaves the world in a safer place than a

rogue Iran with the potential to rush towards a bomb in clandestine bunkers packed with centrifuges. Iran has long maintained that it seeks only a peaceful atom, and it is within its rights to research and exploit nuclear energy.

Netanyahu does not believe this. The Israeli leader has brushed aside appeals by Jewish leaders in the US, congressional Democrats and some of his allies at home to pull back and find a face-saving way to cancel the speech.

In Israel, Netanyahu faces a tight race for re-election against a strong challenger, Isaac Herzog, leader of the Labour Party, who has pummeled Netanyahu for endangering US-Israeli relations with his speech.

Two hundred former generals and commanders of the Israeli Defence Forces, Mossad intelligence agency, Shin Bet domestic security and National Police were scheduled to appear at a joint news conference yesterday to urge Netanyahu to avoid any further deterioration of the US-Israeli strategic relationship.

All of this might help Netanyahu at home. "The question here is who will be able to replace him?" said Dan Avnon, a lecturer in political theory at Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

"Can anyone else stand up in Congress and talk so forcefully against the leader of the US? This has an effect on voters in Israel. People sit at home and say this man really steps up to the pressure."

Netanyahu's speech is going to be especially challenging, as it must reach multiple audiences with multiple messages.

"He is speaking to the people of Israel, his political system, to the administration, to Congress and to the American people, as well," said Dore Gold, president of the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs and a former foreign policy adviser to the prime minister who is part of his inner circle.

"The notion that this speech is for political purposes is baseless," said Gold, a former Israeli ambassador to the UN.

Netanyahu has revelled in past performances at the UN and before Congress. In a September 2012 address before the UN General Assembly, Netanyahu employed a drawing of a bomb with a fuse and took out a marker to draw a literal red line.

Netanyahu's intelligence minister, Yuval Steinitz, said that although he has not seen a draft of the speech, the prime minister would stress that leaving Iran with thousands of centrifuges and a stockpile of uranium – materials that Israelis say would allow Iran to break through to a nuclear bomb in months, not years – was too dangerous.

"Our position is simple," Steinitz said. "Iran built a nuclear programme in secret, illegally. They want normal relations with the world? Okay, dismantle it." – Washington Post-Bloomberg



ORATOR: Benjamin Netanyahu speaks during the UN General Assembly in New York last year. **The Israeli prime minister has a flair for stagecraft, says the writer.**
PICTURE: JUSTIN LANE / EPA



'PROPAGANDA': The writer says we ought to disregard the 'myths' that anti-GMO groups spread. PICTURE: EDUARDO MUNOZ / REUTERS

OWEN PATERSON

WE LIVE in a time of opportunity. Progress in plant sciences is opening up the promise of a new agricultural revolution, one that can not only feed the 10 billion people who will inhabit our planet in 2050, but feed them well. No place on Earth is better placed to take advantage of this than Africa.

With its vast resources of land, soil, water and sun, Africa is well situated to match or exceed the success of Brazil – a nation agricultural development helped catapult to the front ranks of world trade. This revolution will only occur, however, if African countries embrace systems that include the use of modern biotechnology.

Genetically modified (GMO) plants and seeds are increasing yields, boosting farmer incomes and reducing the need for pesticides.

Last year, 18 million farmers, 90 percent of them resource poor, planted 181 million hectares of biotech crops in 28 countries. During the 19 years GMO crops have been commercialised, we have seen a more than 100-fold increase in the area planted.

South Africa is the leader on this continent, with 2.7 million biotech hectares

planted. But other nations are catching up.

In Burkina Faso, 70 percent of all cotton is insect-resistant Bt cotton, a GMO. Farmers who plant Bt cotton have seen a 20 percent increase in yield, at least \$87 (R1 000) per hectare increase in their profits and used 66 percent less pesticide. Field trials are under way in Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria and Uganda on a range of new crops from biotech bananas to maize and cowpeas.

This time of opportunity, however, is also one of mischief, with environmentalists and bureaucrats waging an ideological propaganda war against biotechnology.

Not since the Luddites smashed cotton mill machinery in early 19th century England have we seen such an organised antagonism to progress.

These enemies of the Green Revolution call themselves "progressive", but their agenda could hardly be more regressive.

They call themselves humanitarians, but their policies would condemn billions to hunger. And their insistence on mandating inefficient farming techniques would decimate remaining wild spaces.

There are many impediments standing between the vision of agricultural progress and Africa, of course, but none is more pernicious than these groups. They are supported by massive funding from the EU, as well as misguided church and humanitarian agencies. They have undue influence in the media and government.

They have put forward many myths, the

most glaring of which is insistence that biotech crops are unsafe. It's a claim they continue to make in the face of hundreds of studies testifying to GMO safety and the universal opinion of every independent scientific institution that GMOs are as safe as any other food. Americans have been consuming GMOs for over 15 years, without a documented adverse health effect.

Another myth is the implication that farmers, especially smallholders in the developing world, are easily fooled by biotech into paying more for GMO seeds when they'd be far better off without them.

But since their introduction almost two decades ago, biotech crops have, on average, increased crop yield by 22 percent and farmer profits by 68 percent and reduced

chemical pesticide use by 37 percent. Groups like Greenpeace not only conduct scaremongering. Greenpeace attacks research it opposes. Anti-biotech groups in 2013 destroyed a field trial of Golden Rice, a GMO crop that could save millions of children with a vitamin A deficiency.

The question that must be asked is: When did so many of our "humanitarian" organisations become so disdainful about the lives of the poor, whom they are supposed to be helping? The greatest offender is the EU, which in a twisted version of neo-colonialism has imposed its affluent organic affectations and anti-scientific policies on Africa.

When I was secretary of state for environment, food and rural affairs with the UK government, I saw this first hand.

Europe's retreat from science is one reason the technologically advanced EU can't feed itself. European livestock farmers now import millions of tons of GMO feed crops annually.

We stand at the beginning of a second agricultural revolution. We need every tool available to meet this challenge.

We can't afford to take the most promising plant technologies off the table while children go hungry.

TAX TIP #12 Eliminate uncertainty and avoid any risk of late payments!



- Submit all outstanding submissions
- Make outstanding payments on or before 31 March 2015
- Taxpayers, who are making payments on 31 March 2015, are urged to do so by 12:00 midday

Remember, payments and submissions received after the deadline will be marked as late and you will be liable for penalties and interest



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