

Israel: Iranian President's Charm Offensive a 'Charade'

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is scheduled to address the U.N. General Assembly in New York on Tuesday, will arrive at the U.N. at an awkward time, as he will have to try and curb the international community's enthusiasm for the new Iranian leadership.

"A bad agreement is worse than no agreement at all," an Israeli source was quoted by the *New York Times* as saying on Sunday. According the source, Netanyahu's address will draw parallel lines between the Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs.

"Iran must not be allowed to repeat North Korea's ploy to get nuclear weapons," the Israeli official told the *Times*. "Just like North Korea before it, Iran professes to seemingly peaceful intentions; it talks the talk of nonproliferation while seeking to ease sanctions and buy more time for its nuclear program."

The White House, meanwhile, does not fully subscribe to the comparison between Tehran and Pyongyang.

"The comparison is simply that they are two nations that have not abided by international nonproliferation norms," Deputy National Security Adviser Benjamin Rhodes says. "But the fact of the matter is North Korea already has a nuclear weapon. They acquired one, tested one in the beginning of 2006. And Iran does not yet have a nuclear weapon."

"That's all the more reason why we need to take steps to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon so that we're not presented with the type of situation that we have in North Korea, where you're seeking to denuclearize a country that has already crossed that threshold."

"It seems the world is willing to fall for [Iranian President Hasan] Rouhani's charade," said Yuval Steinitz, minister for international, intelligence and strategic affairs, in an interview with Army Radio on Tuesday. "We are aware of the fact that some of the world is willing to be fooled."

Steinitz, who is currently in New York, added, "Rouhani is trying to deceive the world, and some of the world is willing to be deceived. Israel's role is to fight for the truth, and we are doing our best. What we are seeing from the Iranian president is a charm offensive and smile diplomacy, but there is no change in the substance [of Iran's rhetoric]."

Asked about the chances of a potential handshake between Rouhani and U.S. President Barack Obama, Steinitz said, "I hope not. I don't know."

He stressed, "The important thing is not just words and appearances. The important thing is the actions. The important thing is the resolutions ... and I really hope that the whole world, and chiefly among them the United States, will say, 'OK, it's nice to see the smiles, to hear the new rhetoric, but as long as you don't change the conduct, and as long as you don't make a real concession in the nuclear project, the economic sanctions will continue and, if there is need, will be joined by a military threat as well.'"

Rouhani and Obama delivered speeches to the General Assembly on Tuesday.

Washington says it remains determined to deny the Iranians the means to make nuclear arms, but its willingness to engage them directly complicates the strategy for Netanyahu, who will address the world forum on October 1.

The day before, Netanyahu is scheduled to meet Obama at the White House for discussions on Iran that Israeli officials say will affect the content and tone of his U.N. speech.

During last year's speech, Netanyahu set a "red line" that he said would trigger Israeli military strikes on Iranian nuclear sites, drawing it across a cartoonish bomb representing the pace and scale of the Islamic Republic's uranium enrichment.

This time around, some Israeli officials predict, he will opt for a more sober message, with facts trumping rhetoric. As Iran has kept its uranium enrichment below the Israeli threshold, they say, he will note it has also made progress on another track that could yield bomb-grade plutonium.

Steinitz said last week that Iran, on its current course, could make a nuclear weapon in six months. "There is no more time for nuclear negotiations," he told *Israel Hayom*.

But with a new round of such talks in the works, Steinitz reaffirmed Israel's position that it would support a diplomatic solution that truly halted Iran's nuclear program. He described this as unlikely, saying Rouhani brought a deceptive change of style but not substance to Iranian policy making.

"We are certainly warning the entire international community that Iran may want an agreement, but it is liable to be the Munich agreement," Steinitz said, referring to the 1938 appeasement of Nazi Germany.

"Rouhani wants to hoodwink, and some in the world want to be hoodwinked, and the role of little Israel is to explain the truth and to stand in the breach," he said. "And that is what we are doing to the best of our abilities. It is a long struggle."

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