

Obama to Mark Iraq War Anniversary with War Summit in Israel

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A decade after the American-led invasion of Iraq, the U.S. is once again preparing to set the Middle East ablaze. In fact, President Obama will touch down in Tel Aviv ten years to the day “shock and awe” was first unleashed for what appears to be little more than a war summit with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

According to the [Guardian](#), Netanyahu plans on using the president’s trip “to try to persuade the US to carry out air strikes on Syria if there is evidence that Syrian missiles are to be handed over to Hezbollah in Lebanon, or at least to give full support to Israeli military action to prevent the transfer.” Tel Aviv, the paper adds, wants U.S. support for more preemptive Israeli strikes “even if they risk provoking a cross-border conflict with Hezbollah.”

Back in the U.S., meanwhile, similar domestic pressure continues to build for an escalated level of U.S. intervention into the Syrian conflict.

On Monday, New York Representative Eliot Engel, a fierce Israel supporter, [introduced a bill](#) calling on the Obama administration to directly arm and train the Syrian opposition. Of course, the U.S. is already [training Syrian rebels in Jordan](#), and is providing at least [tacit approval](#) of arms shipments.

Additional reports, however, have also revealed that the U.S. has begun collecting intelligence for [future drone strikes](#) against Islamic extremists fighting inside Syria. Moreover, the CIA is reportedly [stepping up its aid to Iraqi counter-terrorism forces](#) fighting the spillover of Islamic extremists from Syria. As Robert Dreyfuss commented, this dual policy of both aiding and targeting the Syrian opposition appears rather bizarre.

“[A]s the United States ramps up its aid to Syria’s rag-tag rebels, whose backbone is comprised of radical Islamists and Sunni fundamentalists, some with ties to Al Qaeda,” Dreyfuss [writes](#), “the CIA is busily engaged in combat inside Iraq with the very same radical Islamists and Sunni fundamentalists, some with ties to Al Qaeda.”

Such a strategy is only truly bizarre, though, if one assumes the Obama administration is actually seeking a resolution to the Syrian conflict. It is only bizarre if one ignores the possibility that working to stoke the war may just in fact be Washington’s strategy. After all, short of installing a client regime in Damascus, the destruction of Syria as a sovereign state and significant player in regional politics is the next best hope for the U.S. And this goes for Israel, as well. In fact, the weakening of the Syrian army by the prolonged conflict has already come to be [cheered](#) in Tel Aviv.

But the U.S.-Israel war summit won’t be limited to Syria; for in the end, what’s a war summit

without Iran?

Indeed, as the *Guardian* reports, “Obama will also come under Israeli pressure to lower the US threshold for military action against Iran.” A process the U.S. Senate, with the help of the pro-Israel lobby, has [already begun](#).

Undoubtedly anticipating such pressure, Obama sought last week to appease the war hawks by effectively providing a deadline for attacking Iran.

Speaking to Israeli media on Thursday, Obama [stated](#) that, “Right now, we think that it would take over a year or so for Iran to actually develop a nuclear weapon.” A rather dubious claim, given that a mere week prior saw the U.S. National Intelligence Director James Clapper [reaffirm](#) that “we do not know if Iran will eventually decide to build nuclear weapons.”

The president’s suspect time frame, as Kaveh Afrasiabi notes, is also “a potentially dangerous gambit,” seemingly aimed at furthering the current stalemate between the U.S. and Iran at the very time nuclear negotiations appear to be [progressing](#). Of course, such a gambit also serves to make war all the more likely. As Afrasiabi [writes](#), “That is a distinct possibility that Obama, who is at present playing brinksmanship with Iran, should be wary of. All he needs to do is to remind himself of the precious lessons of the US\$2 trillion Iraq war.”

But the limits of American power evidenced in the wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan are lost on a president who has overseen the expansion the U.S. drone war from the Swat Valley of Pakistan to the Gulf of Aden and the African Sahel. The man who rode his measured opposition to the Iraq war to the Democratic nomination in 2008 has simply never shown any real aversion to war while serving in the Oval Office. As the president prefers to incessantly intone, “all options are on the table.”

It’s thus little wonder to learn that according to “senior American and Israel officials” cited by the Israeli daily [Haaretz](#), “Obama is undergoing a maturation process regarding the possibility that diplomatic efforts aimed at Iran could fail, and he might have to order a strike against Iranian nuclear facilities.” The “U.S. military brass is undergoing a similar process,” the paper adds.

Of course, the Western measure on which diplomacy with Iran is ultimately judged to be a success or not is limited to whether Tehran is brought to its knees. Such a warped view of diplomacy, needless to say, invariably leads to war.

It’s clear, then, that the American defeat in Iraq has done little to deter U.S. imperial dreams in the Middle East. For on a grim anniversary which should have sent the U.S. president on a conciliatory visit to Baghdad with reparations for the Iraqi people, instead sees the president off to Israel to confer with Tel Aviv on the next American war in the Middle East. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

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