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Blinken in Israel: Planning for war with an ally in crisis

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other top officials Monday, for talks on the mounting political crisis in Israel, and on joint US-Israeli military operations against Iran.

Netanyahu clearly wanted the main focus to be on the second of these topics, but in his public remarks as they met, Blinken made it clear that there is mounting anxiety in Washington over the explosive political conditions building up both in the occupied territories and within the Jewish state itself.

The Biden administration is clearly concerned that the events of the past month are destabilizing the Israeli regime and calling into question its ability to serve as the principal bastion of American imperialism in the Middle East.

Its level of concern is reflected in the extraordinary relay of top US officials through Jerusalem in the month of January: first National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, then CIA Director William Burns, and now Secretary of State Blinken.



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, left, meets with Israeli President Isaac Herzog on Monday, Jan. 30, 2023 in Jerusalem. [AP Photo/Ronaldo Schemidt/Pool]

Netanyahu has assembled a radical right-wing government, headed by his Likud Party, the traditional party of the Israeli right, but with the participation of fascistic parties based in settlers on the West Bank and ultra-religious parties which seek to suppress not only the Palestinians but the more secular sections of the Jewish population.

Partly in order to block his own continued prosecution on corruption charges—as well as similar charges against several key political allies—Netanyahu is pursuing a series of changes in the Israeli political structure that would remove the attorney general and abolish the independence of the judiciary.

Israel has no written constitution or guarantees of basic democratic rights, and the previous Netanyahu government formally declared Israel the “nation-state of the Jewish people,” reducing Palestinians to a second-class, apartheid-like status.

The latest proposal to effectively neuter the judiciary, popularly considered the last independent line of defense for democratic rights, aroused mass opposition, with several huge demonstrations in Tel Aviv, with as many as 100,000 people, in a country of only 7 million.

Blinken made an explicit reference to these protests in his public remarks, an unusual breach of the traditional diplomatic posture that a country’s internal affairs are its own business. This was clearly not out of concern for democratic rights in general. The US envoy had just spent a day in Egypt schmoozing with the bloodstained military dictator Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

A further destabilizing factor, to which Blinken devoted most of his public comments, is the wave of violence on the West Bank and in Jerusalem, provoked by an Israeli raid Thursday in the West Bank city of Jenin, which left ten Palestinians dead.

This was followed by a suicide attack by a lone Palestinian on a Jerusalem synagogue Friday night, in which seven were killed. On Saturday, a 13-year-old Palestinian opened fire on an Israeli father and son, wounding both. On Sunday there were numerous settler attacks on Palestinians across the West Bank—some reports said as many as 150 violent incidents were recorded over the weekend.

On Monday, Israeli military forces in the occupied city of Hebron opened fire on a car which was supposedly driving suspiciously, killing the driver, 26-year-old Nassim Abu Fouda, who was shot in the head.

In his opening statement to Netanyahu and in subsequent public remarks, Blinken called for an end to the violence, by which he meant actions by Palestinians, and settlers, and other Jewish vigilantes. He made no reference to the Israeli massacre that touched off the current round of attacks, let alone voicing any criticism.

After his meetings with Netanyahu and other cabinet officials, Blinken is to travel Tuesday to the West Bank city of Ramallah, where the Palestinian Authority is headquartered, for talks with the 87-year-old president Mahmoud Abbas. He is expected to bully the PA into restoring official cooperation with the Israeli security forces in actions to suppress the Palestinian population of the West Bank. This cooperation was suspended after the bloody assault in Jenin.



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The closed-door talks between Blinken and Netanyahu are likely to have dispensed briefly with the internal crisis, and given much greater attention to the mounting military aggressiveness of both Israel and the United States against Iran.

There is no doubt active planning under way for further actions after Saturday's attack on the Iranian city of Isfahan, where military targets were hit by small drone aircraft apparently launched within Iran by Israeli agents. There are conflicting reports on the nature of the targets and the extent of the damage, but the city is a center of Iranian air and space operations.

The Pentagon declared Sunday that the American military had no role in the strike, but as the conservative *Jerusalem Post* pointed out, "There are all sorts of ways to parse the Pentagon statement that the US had no military involvement in the drone strike. Might it have had intelligence or cyber involvement?"

Netanyahu has made war threats to forestall the supposed threat of a nuclear-armed Iran his political calling card. He adamantly opposed the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and six major powers, including the United States, and hailed the Trump administration for pulling out of the agreement and effectively wrecking it.

The Biden administration has moved closer to the Israeli position in the wake of the outbreak of the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. Russia has reportedly relied on Iranian-made drones as an effective weapon against Ukrainian targets, although Iran claims the drones were supplied before the war broke out last February.

An aide to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky openly linked the Israeli drone attack on Isfahan and the use of Iranian drones in Ukraine. There has been considerable speculation in the US corporate media that the Biden administration is seeking means to disrupt Iranian drone production or otherwise retaliate against Tehran for its de facto alliance with Russia.

Earlier this month, the US and Israel carried out their largest-ever joint military exercises, involving 7,500 troops and encompassing air, sea and ground forces. In an interview with CNN Monday night, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby declared that these exercises were directed primarily against Iran, which he called the principal security threat to US interests in the Middle East and to the state of Israel.

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