افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مبـــــــاد   بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مـــــباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم   از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com   *afgazad@gmail.com*

European Languages	زبانهای اروپائی

BY DANIEL WARNER
24.03.2024

The Rift Between the United States and Israel Remains a Simple Family Feud When a Significant Separation is Urgently Needed

Photograph Source: The White House – Public Domain

U.S. President Joseph Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have been personally and politically close for decades. The United States and Israel have been more than just political allies since Israel's founding in 1948. A recent speech critical of Netanyahu and Israel's policies by a U.S. senator is part of an evolving tension between Biden and Netanyahu and the United States and Israel concerning Israel's policies in Gaza and the West Bank. If relations between individuals are like relations between states, we are witnessing a simple family feud between Biden and Netanyahu and Israel and the U.S. when a significant personal and political separation between the two individuals and countries is needed.

President Joe Biden has known Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for 50 years. Their bro-hug during Biden's tenth official visit to Israel in October 2023 symbolized their close relationship. Biden even admitted once signing a photo for <u>Netanyahu</u> writing, "Bibi, I love you." In times of crisis, they used to telephone each other several times a day. Soon after October 7, their familial-like relationship has turned frosty. A rift has emerged between them personally and diplomatically over Netanyahu's overly aggressively reaction to the Hamas attack. Their March 18 phone call was their first since February 15.

Hope that the call would produce radical change was quickly squashed. U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan described the latest call as "businesslike;" it "did not end abruptly." No doors were slammed. No one said, "I'll never speak to you again." Nor did anyone say, "Let's agree on a new strategy."

Within the status quo, the evolving rift was heightened between the two phone calls when Charles Schumer, the Democrat Senate Majority Leader, called for regime change in Israel on March 14 on the Senate floor. For the first time publicly, a U.S. official challenged unwavering U.S. support for Netanyahu's leadership. "It's impossible to understate the seismic event this was," observed the chief executive of the Republican Jewish Coalition.

Schumer's speech was the most public demonstration of the Biden/Netanyahu, U.S./Israel rift. "The Netanyahu coalition no longer fits the needs of Israel after Oct. 7," Schumer said. "The world has changed — radically — since then, and the Israeli people are being stifled right now by a governing vision that is stuck in the past." Schumer proposed that the U.S. would play "a more active role in shaping Israeli policy by using our leverage to change the present course."

End of bro-hug and "I love you"? A significant distancing from an uncritical family relationship between Biden and Netanyahu and the United States and Israel? A move away from just a family feud to a real separation? The New York senator's speech was noteworthy in its criticism as it came from the highest elected Jewish official in American history. It certainly raised the level of tension. But, despite repeated warnings to Israel from Biden and U.S. officials about Israel's disregard for Arab civilians as well as its outright violations of humanitarian law, Israel's policies have not changed.

Did Schumer's speech reflect a U.S. policy move beyond a simple family argument between Biden/Netanyahu, U.S./Israel, to a potential separation? First, did President Biden know about the speech in advance and did his entourage agree? *New York Times* insiders David Sanger and Peter Baker reported: "There is no indication that the White House was involved in any way in planning the speech."

If Schumer was not officially delivering Administration policy, what was President Biden's reaction? "I'm not going to elaborate on the speech," Biden replied in response to a journalist's question. "He made a good speech, and I think he expressed a serious concern shared not only by him but by many Americans."

Mere familial "serious concern" about a close relative's bad behavior or enough "serious concern" to warrant punishment and taking distance? The reason the speech received so much commentary is that it is the strongest public criticism to date of Netanyahu government's policies by a U.S. official. But what does that mean? There have been plenty of Biden officials' warnings to Netanyahu. The president himself was even overheard to have said that he and the Israeli leader will need to have a "come to Jesus" meeting. But that meeting has not yet taken place.

Beyond threats, what kind of punishment would Biden carry out in a "come to Jesus" meeting? What kind of separation? Is the misbehaving Netanyahu to have reduced pocket money ($3.8 billion a year) or denied access to military material? ("The United States has quietly approved and delivered more than 100 separate foreign military sales to Israel since the Gaza war began Oct. 7," *The Washington Post* reported.)

In an asymmetrical situation of power, the strongest is supposed to dominate. In the relationship between Israel and the United States, Israel now dominates. The United States has become Israel's proxy instead of the other way around, an eminent international relations specialist suggested to me. "We should not be forced into a position of unequivocally supporting the actions of an Israeli government that includes bigots who reject the idea of a Palestinian state," Schumer said. The United States forced by Israel?

Will Schumer's call for the U.S. to play "a more active role in shaping Israeli policy by using our leverage to change the present course," be followed? If not, what do financial and military leverage mean? As the former Israeli defense minister Moshe Dayan is reported to have said: "We take the money, we take the arms, and we decline the advice."

Here is a recent example of the inverted power relationship: "Benjamin Netanyahu Rebuffs U.S. and Readies Rafah Invasion Plan," *The New York Times* put on its March 20 front page. "The Israeli leader brushed aside President Biden's opposition to a planned ground invasion of the city in Gaza, saying that his government would press ahead," the story continued.

While Gazans suffer inhumane conditions and West Bank settlers continue to terrorize Arabs, Israel and the United States are locked in a simple family feud. Even with Schumer's speech, no radical separation between the United States and Israel has taken place. As Aaron David Miller wrote in the *New York Times*: "Make no mistake about it. 'I'm unhappy with Israel but

won't do much about it' policy is Mr. Biden's policy – driven by the president's pro-Israel sensibilities, politics and policy choices he faces in dealing with the current war."

Schumer's speech was a rebuke to Netanyahu in a catastrophic situation. Despite the urgency of Gazans suffering, Netanyahu continues to "rebuff" U.S. rebukes. As Israel continues killing civilians, destroying buildings and hospitals, cutting off food, water, and shelter for Gazans, much more than rebukes are needed. Reducing money and weapons could be the first U.S. step in distancing itself from Netanyahu and Israel.

The rift between Biden and Netanyahu and the U.S. and Israel has had no effect on the ground. The horrendous conditions in Gaza and the West Bank are only getting worse. Because of a lack of separation between Biden/Netanyahu and the U.S./Israel, the U.S. is more and more complicit in Israel's outrageous behavior. Furthermore, if there is no significant separation, Biden and the United States will lose without moral authority they have left. And Biden may lose his political leadership position as well.

Daniel Warner is the author of An Ethic of Responsibility in International Relations*. (Lynne Rienner). He lives in Geneva.*

MARCH 22, 2024