Obama Backtracks on Israel Defense Package to Counter Iran Nuclear Deal

February 8, 2016

DEBKAFile

<http://www.debka.com/article/25217/Obama-backtracks-on-Israel-defense-package-to-counter-Iran-nuclear-deal->

US President Barack Obama has retracted on his pledge of an extra defense package to compensate Israel for the damage caused its security by the nuclear deal concluded with Iran last year. This flat refusal, reported here by debkafile’s Washington sources, confronted Israeli officials when they met last week with heads of the National Security Council at the White House.

Asked to define its new requirements, Israel asked the administration for an additional $1.9 billion, which would have upped the total to $5 billion per annum for the next five years. The officials explained that Israel’s defense bill had been inflated substantially by the new perils looming from the current Middle East wars, and the windfall Iran had gained from the lifting of sanctions for its advanced ballistic missiles programs and for enhancing its allies' aggressive capacity, especially that of Hizballah.

Israel is now beset additionally by adverse Russian military operations in southern Syria and looming ISIS threats on multiple fronts, at a time that the Arab states are stuffing their armories with advanced weapons from Russia and China.

The US officials explained that, because of cutbacks in US defense spending, it would not be possible to add a single dollar to Israel’s regular $3.1 billion appropriation. After notifying Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Moshe Ya’alon of this refusal, the Israeli delegation was advised to reduce its application to $900 million. This too was refused.

The standing $3.1 billion annual US assistance program for Israel expires at the end of 2016. The negotiations taking place currently were to have covered its extension for ten years. That too is in doubt.

In his report to the cabinet meeting Sunday, Jan. 7, the prime minister said that if Israel’s security needs were not met, he would not sign a deal and would prefer to wait for the next US president to take office in January 2017.

Although Netanyahu did not say so explicitly, this issue will no doubt play into the election campaign for the next American president. The prime minister hopes that the leading candidates, whether Democrats or Republicans, will be more forthcoming about Israel’s defense needs.
US officials reacted angrily to Netanyahu’s comment, warning that the US budgetary situation would not improve and that Israel would not find a president more committed to its security than Barack Obama.

This is the line customarily taken by the president and Secretary of State John Kerry when issues come up with the Netanyahu government.

Moshe Ya’alon is due to visit Washington in March for talks with Defense Secretary Ashton Carter and will no doubt try to soften the US refusal.  Our sources report that the Secretary has been advised by the White House not to make any concessions. Towards the end of March, Netanyahu had arranged to attend the conference of the pro-Israeli lobby AIPAC. That is no longer certain. And even if he does go to Washington, there is no telling if he will ask to see the president for a last-ditch bid for the extra military assistance.

Obama is in no mood to change his mind. Administration officials have laid the ground for his position by underestimating the amounts released to Iran by the lifting of sanctions as no more than around $50 billion, whereas Israel, whose concern strongly reflects that of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Emirates, says the real sum on tap for Tehran is double or even triple that amount.

They all confirm that the lion’s share is going directly into developing Iran’s cutting-edge weaponry.

That Obama administration policies have substantially promoted Iran’s political and military interests and exacerbated its menace to the region is an argument that finds no listeners in the Washington of today, whether it comes from Israel or the Persian Gulf.