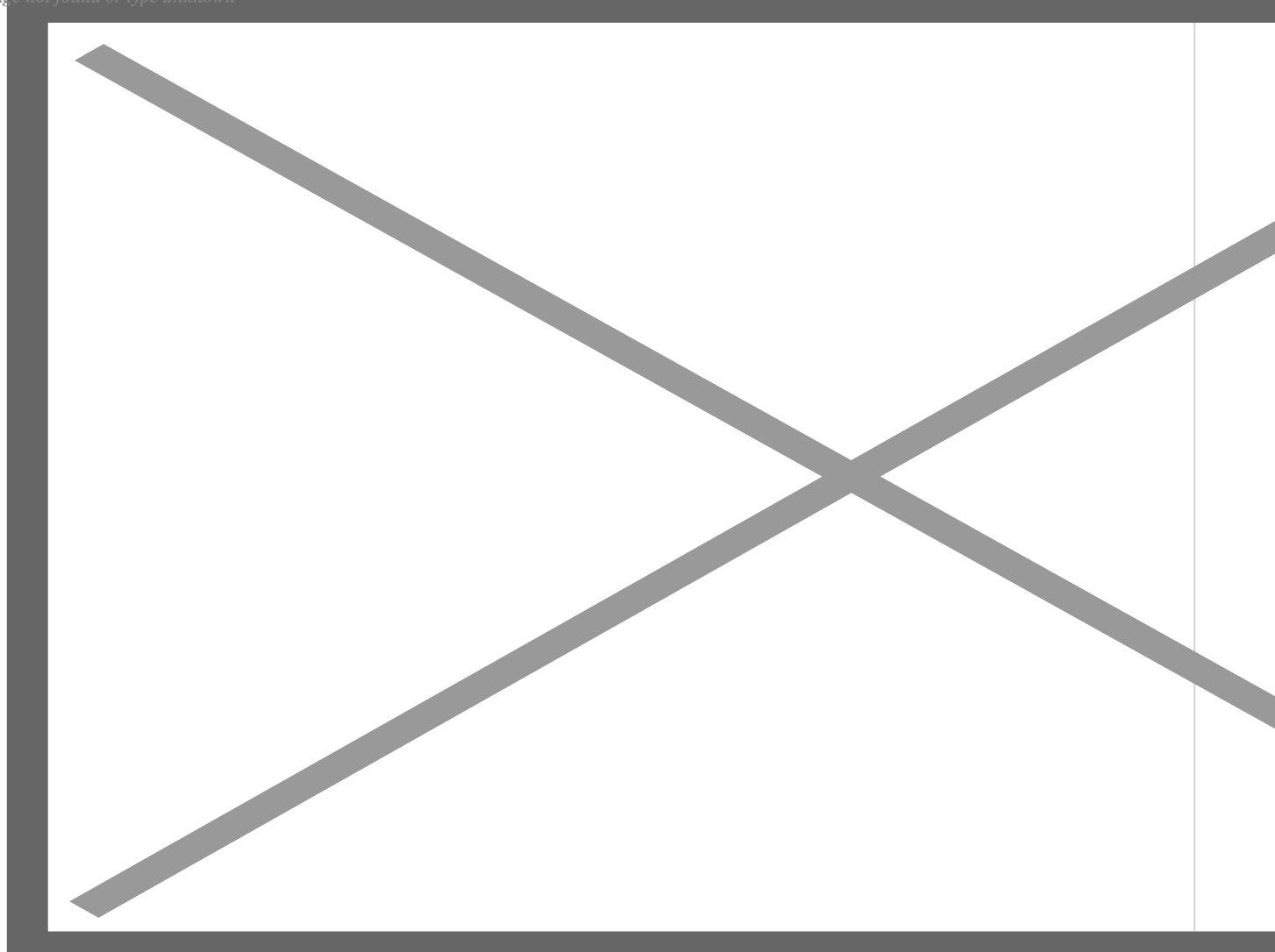


Protests in reaction to war criminal Netanyahu's upcoming special address to U.S. Congress

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A protester holds a poster of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a rally

commemorating Nakba, or Palestinians' expulsion from their homeland at the hands of the Israeli regime in 1948, outside the US Embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia, May 17, 2024. (Photo by AP)

Washington, June 8 (RHC)-- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is set to address a joint meeting of Congress next month, a move that is sparking calls for protests across the United States.

Congressional leaders announced July 24th as the date of the address late Thursday, almost one week after they invited the Israeli prime minister to speak before American lawmakers.

In their letter to Netanyahu, House Speaker Mike Johnson and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell -- both Republicans -- said the invitation was extended to "build on our enduring relationship and to highlight America's solidarity with Israel."

The invitation, however, was not met with unanimous approval among the Democrats.

In a statement, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said that despite "clear and profound disagreements" with Netanyahu, he had joined in the request for him to speak. Back in March, Schumer, the highest-ranking Jewish official in the U.S., had called Netanyahu an obstacle to peace and advocated early elections in the occupied territories.

The invitation comes at a time when Tel Aviv's ties with Washington have strained over the U.S.-backed genocidal war that Israel has been waging on the Gaza Strip since October 7th. The aggression by the occupying regime has so far killed at least 36,654 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured 83,309 others in the Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, the International Criminal Court (ICC) is seeking arrest warrants for Netanyahu and other Israeli officials, on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the besieged Gaza.

Earlier, Independent Senator Bernie Sanders said he intended to boycott Netanyahu's speech in protest at Israel's conduct in the Gaza onslaught. "Benjamin Netanyahu is a war criminal," he said in a statement. "He should not be invited to address a joint meeting of Congress. I certainly will not attend."

Sanders said Benjamin Netanyahu is a "war criminal" who should not be given an invitation to address lawmakers from both main parties at the U.S. Congress. Similarly, Democratic Congressman Greg Casar said he did not plan to attend the event. "Instead of coming here, we need Netanyahu to stop bombing indiscriminately in Gaza," he said. "I don't think it's a good time for him to be coming."

Democratic Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley said: "We should not be creating a platform and welcoming an accused war criminal." "He's an indicted felon in Israel with an indictment as a war criminal at the ICC and they've invited him to speak here! Shame," James Zogby, founder of the Arab American Institute, said of Netanyahu.

In an X post, Medea Benjamin, an activist and co-founder of the women-led peace group CODEPINK, said: "Members of Congress will boycott his visit and protesters will flood DC. War criminal BIBI is NOT welcome in DC. Send him to the Hague instead!!!"

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