

# ??????? Netanyahu launches into another tirade against Iran

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Washington, March 7 (RHC)-- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claims that Iran is responsible for "darkness descending" on the Middle East, hailing the US administration's threat to withdraw from the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1 group of countries.

"Iran is building an aggressive empire. Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, Yemen, more to come," Netanyahu claimed in a hawkish address in Washington on Tuesday to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), a day after a meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump.

He alleged that Iran is increasing its influence in the Middle East and seeks to dominate regional countries such as war-ravaged Syria and Yemen, Lebanon and Iraq. The Israeli prime minister presented an ominous map of the Middle East with the countries he claims Iran seeks to dominate colored in black.

Netanyahu, who faces an intensifying corruption probe at home, claimed that the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), had made Tehran's atomic program more dangerous.

Iran and the P5+1 countries -- the United States, Russia, China, France and Britain plus Germany -- finalized the nuclear accord in July 2015 and started implementing it in January 2016. Under the deal, Iran undertook to apply certain limits to its nuclear program in exchange for the termination of all nuclear-related sanctions against Tehran.

Netanyahu described the agreement as a great threat to peace in the region and claimed that Tehran is seeking to develop nuclear missiles. He said Israel and its Arab allies would support a possible move by

U.S. President Donald Trump to tear up the JCPOA if it is not strengthened in a way to prevent Tehran from resuming its alleged quest for atomic weapons.

The Israeli premier threw his weight behind a "right policy" adopted by the US president to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. "We will never let Iran develop nuclear weapons - not now, not in 10 years, not ever," Netanyahu told the pro-Israel lobby group. Iran has in the past repeatedly denied similar allegations by Netanyahu and his allies as baseless.

President Trump has repeatedly described the JCPOA, which was negotiated under his predecessor, Barack Obama, as "the worst and most one-sided transaction Washington has ever entered into," a characterization he often used during his presidential campaign, and threatened to tear it up.

Trump has threatened to pull out of the JCPOA unless Congress and America's European allies help "fix" it with a follow-up agreement within a 120-day deadline.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Monday everyone will regret the possible collapse of the landmark nuclear agreement as the US continues its efforts to sabotage the deal and issues threats to pull out of it. In a meeting with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian in Tehran, the Iranian president added that it is imperative to save the nuclear agreement.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also in February rejected as "improper" the conditions set by the United States for upholding the multilateral nuclear agreement, urging Washington to immediately fulfill its commitments under the deal.

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