

Il Congresso ha applaudito il genocidio di Gaza, ma il discorso di Netanyahu ha mostrato che il consenso politico su Israele è finito

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Mercoledì, in una delle manifestazioni più vergognose della storia del Congresso, il Primo Ministro israeliano ha pronunciato un discorso in una sessione congiunta del Congresso.

Il discorso era pieno di militarismo, razzismo e bugie così sfacciate che persino i principali media americani ne hanno colto alcune. Netanyahu ha fatto sfilare un soldato musulmano e uno etiopico dell'IDF, vantandosi di quanti palestinesi hanno ucciso nel superficiale tentativo di confutare l'idea che Israele sia uno stato razzista e di apartheid.

Ha mentito sul fatto che Israele abbia preso di mira i civili palestinesi, cosa che ha fatto a un livello senza precedenti; sul rapporto tra civili e combattenti uccisi a Gaza; e il bilancio delle vittime a Rafah. Erano tutte oscenità, una dimostrazione di negazione del genocidio nelle aule del Congresso alla pari dei peggiori negazionisti dell'Olocausto. Ancora peggio, questa negazione è stata fatta dallo stesso assassino, mentre continuava a commettere crimini atroci, e le bugie sono state accolte con standing ovation e applausi da parte dei membri del Congresso presenti a testimoniare.

Netanyahu ha persino portato alla luce bugie da tempo sfatate sul 7 ottobre, storie di bambini bruciati vivi e bambini uccisi mentre si nascondevano in una soffitta. Queste sono state smentite da fonti israeliane, ma ciò non ha impedito a Netanyahu di ripeterle davanti a una folla accogliente di islamofobi e razzisti anti-palestinesi a Washington.

Come previsto, ha anche affermato che il gran numero di manifestanti fuori dal suo discorso sono stati finanziati dall'Iran, rafforzato dalla recente testimonianza falsa e del tutto infondata del direttore dell'intelligence nazionale statunitense Avril Haines.

Il discorso di Netanyahu aveva lo scopo di rafforzare il sostegno del Congresso al genocidio di Gaza e di rafforzare lo sciovinismo e il militarismo all'idea che Israele sta combattendo in prima linea nella battaglia americana contro la barbarie musulmana. Il razzismo trasudava da ogni sua parola ed è stato accolto con travolgente calore e apprezzamento dai repubblicani e dai falchi democratici presenti.

But beyond the bombast, there was little substance to the speech, which held nothing new, just the same old talking points, falsehoods, and basic racism. It was, in the end, a reflection of the event itself: an attempt at grandstanding by the Christian Nationalist Speaker of the

House Mike Johnson, which Democratic leaders, in their typical cowardice, refused to stand up to.

Netanyahu's goals

The substance of the speech, though, was not really the point for Netanyahu. He had two main goals with this appearance. One was to shore up American support, mostly from Republicans, but as much as possible from both sides of the aisle. The second was for Israelis to see the way he was feted in Congress.

On the first score, he was reasonably successful, with some of the most loathsome Democrats like John Fetterman, Kyrsten Sinema, and Steny Hoyer front and center with their Republican colleagues in their zealous support of a war criminal. While half the congressional Democratic caucus boycotted the speech (Rashida Tlaib attended holding a sign that said “war criminal” on one side and “guilty of genocide” on the other), Netanyahu expected this, and couldn’t have asked for more than the support he largely got from those Democrats who were in attendance.

That’s enough congressional support for Netanyahu to ensure that Congress will continue to open the checkbook for Israel’s military and its genocidal actions.

But on the second goal, he didn’t score as well.

Israelis will notice that not only did the president of the Senate, Kamala Harris, skip the event, but Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, while he did attend, also declined to preside over the affair, which would have meant sitting right behind Netanyahu, with the camera on him every second. That was an image he didn’t want. Schumer was replaced by Senator Ben Cardin, the outgoing Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee who is not seeking reelection.

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Netanyahu tried to speak of bipartisanship, but what he demonstrated to his constituents in Israel was that he has severely damaged the bipartisan support that his predecessors, not to mention the American pro-Israel lobbying groups, worked tirelessly for decades to maintain.

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Moreover, while Netanyahu spoke in grandiose terms about Israel's military might and how he intends to bring the Israeli hostages home, Israelis will surely notice that he didn't mention diplomacy or a hostage release deal even once. Since that is what has freed almost all of the hostages that have been returned, he was telling the Israeli public that he is still refusing to back down from his insistence that they be freed by military means, which has killed more Israeli hostages than it has rescued. That is now an overwhelmingly unpopular stance in Israel, so much so that even Netanyahu's own hostage negotiating team is denouncing him for blocking a deal.

What next for Democrats?

After his speech, Netanyahu met separately on Thursday with both Joe Biden and the presumptive Democratic nominee Kamala Harris. Biden had little to say, leaving the spotlight to Harris, and the White House readout of his meeting with Netanyahu matched the substance of Harris' public statement about their meeting.

However, the tone Harris struck was slightly different from Biden's. She spoke at more length and with more conviction about the "suffering in Gaza" than Biden ever has. She also said she told Netanyahu that the ceasefire deal must be completed, but made no claim, as both Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken have both repeatedly and falsely done, that it is Hamas that is holding up the deal.

Still, Harris spoke about the suffering in Gaza as if the United States had nothing to do with causing it. She recycled the tired and disingenuous line of "how Israel defends itself matters," but spoke of conditions in Gaza as if they had come about with no outside agency, without Israel committing massive war crimes, and taking no responsibility for the fact that the United States provided most of the weaponry and all of the political protection for those crimes.

Israeli officials blasted Harris for even the mild rebuke she offered, accusing her in Orwellian fashion of somehow making it harder to close a deal to release Israeli hostages with her words. This is a standard Israeli step, and Harris responded to it by asking, "What are they talking about?" just as Biden did when Netanyahu accused him, even more absurdly, of failing to arm them sufficiently.

Harris gave no indication that she is prepared to take steps, once in office, to pressure Israel to stop its behavior, which the International Court of Justice just confirmed is criminal. Netanyahu certainly noted that, and the jab at Harris from his team over her minor rebuke was simply him testing her, seeing how she would respond.

Chuck Schumer refusing to preside over Netanyahu's speech, but still attending and sitting in the front row sent its own message. Schumer, who is as passionate a supporter of Israel as any in Congress, is well aware that Netanyahu has done unprecedented damage to Israel's standing in the world, and even in the United States.

For Schumer, Netanyahu and his association with the Israeli far-right, embodied in figures like Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, is the problem. He supports figures like Benny Gantz and Yair Lapid, despite the fact that Gantz recently voted for a Knesset statement opposing an end to Israel's occupation and apartheid. Lapid and his party refused to vote against that bill, abstaining instead by leaving the room.

Schumer is not ignorant of these realities. He is one of the main catalysts behind the Democratic strategy to isolate Netanyahu as the problem while refusing to acknowledge the structural issues in Israel and Israeli society that give rise and strength to the far right and which, themselves, sustain and strengthen the apartheid system and the occupation.

At this point, it seems that this is the wing of the party that Harris will draw her policy from, while paying lip service to the more progressive wing.

GOP balancing act

On the Republican side, there is less nuance, but it would be a mistake to think there is complete unity.

Donald Trump's meeting with Netanyahu was more private, but Trump's statements show some of what he is balancing. He criticized Harris for what he called an "insulting" meeting with Netanyahu. This was likely a reference to her remarks after that meeting, as Israeli officials said the meeting itself went smoothly.

Trump has repeatedly spoken about the need for Israel to finish the job quickly. This reflects several of Trump's views.

The most important is the cheapness of Palestinian life, as he is clearly expressing a desire for a massive Israeli wave of strikes that flattens and destroys Gaza once and for all. That also reflects the desires and views of his Evangelical base, which sees Israel as entitled to claim all of the Holy Land and that any counter claims are claims against the will of God and must be forcefully and uncompromisingly confronted.

But Trump also wants this over because of the strands within the Republican party that insist on ending large-scale financial support to foreign allies, even Israel. They may not oppose annual aid to Israel, but the much larger amounts that have gone to Israel are less popular. This wing of the party focuses mainly on aid to Ukraine, but the isolationists in the Republican party make up a significant minority of Trump's base, and they oppose foreign aid completely.

Trump non vuole che gli aiuti a Israele diventino un problema all'interno del suo partito, come potrebbe accadere se il massiccio sostegno americano continuasse fino al 2025, e lui fosse alla Casa Bianca a gennaio.

Ma al di fuori di questo punto, Trump è desideroso di ritrarre i repubblicani come filo-israeliani e i democratici come anti-israeliani. Netanyahu, che certamente vuole vedere Trump vincere a novembre, sembra disposto a collaborare in questo sforzo, anche se meno apertamente.

I più sensati sostenitori di Israele non sono d'accordo con questo approccio, ma molti dei sionisti ebrei più conservatori e praticamente tutti i sionisti cristiani non sono disposti a scendere a compromessi sul diritto di Israele di fare guerra, uccidere e distruggere in massa a Gaza, in Cisgiordania, Libano e oltre. Ciò ha già paralizzato il tradizionale appello bipartisan di Israele e, se continua, ci saranno sempre più opportunità per difendere i diritti dei palestinesi nel Partito Democratico.

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