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March 4, 2015: The Foreign Leader Speaks

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Title: The Foreign Leader Speaks

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3/4/2015—Yesterday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said to a joint meeting of Congress that the deal that President Obama is trying to make with Iran is a bad deal and should be rejected. I did not watch. Of course there are good and bad deals and I have no idea what the Administration will be able to do with Iran. From the perspective of a deal, Netanyahu's speech might be helpful, since it will show Iran how difficult it is for the President to go forward. This might encourage Iran to reduce its own demands. I am interested in what the speech will mean for the future of American Jewry and American politics. It seems obvious that Israel is now a politically partisan issue in a way it was not before. Before, Israel enjoyed almost automatic political support. But now any position Israel presses in America will be evaluated more like any other issue. If the Administration does make a "one-year" deal with Iran—freezing activity so that it would take one year to make a bomb, Americans will support it. Such support would be overwhelming if Americans paid attention to foreign affairs. But it will be pretty high if the Administration mounts a "the alternative is war with Iran and more terrorism as a result" campaign. The Republicans are riding a bad horse here. If that happens, American Jews will for the first time line up on the opposite side of a position that Israel is pressing. You might say that has already been happening in regard to building settlements in the occupied territories, but the matter has never been presented that dramatically. The fundamental question is not an Iranian bomb, as important as that obviously is. The fundamental question is the nature of Judaism in America. If Judaism is not support for Israel, what exactly is it? The answer to that question will determine if Netanyahu's speech will be seen in retrospect as a marker on the path to the end of Judaism in America or as the first step in a religious rebirth.