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ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

to the foreign-policy gurus' predictions, the reaction was mild. The Supreme Court decision in Menachem's case doomed any legal challenge to the president's recognition of Jerusalem as being in Israel. Other Trump decisions were taken to court by his opponents; this was a rare

unilateral executive action that no one contested.

The proclamation that opened the Jerusalem embassy declared that the relocation was "grounded in principled realism" and "acknowledgment of plain facts." These "plain facts" compelled the State Department's Passport Office, pressed by then-secretary of state Pompeo, to revise the department's Foreign Affairs Manual finally to authorize recognition that Jerusalem is in Israel by permitting Menachem and all US citizens born in Jerusalem to carry passports listing "Israel" as their country of birth.

Since 1844, when the area was under Ottoman rule, the US maintained a consulate in Jerusalem. The relocation of the embassy made this consulate superfluous. Under then-US ambassador David Friedman, the building on David Flusser Street in the Talpiot neighborhood of Jerusalem that had housed the US consulate was converted into the US embassy. Consular services continued at that location and are available there today. The embassy's annex on Agron Street, where the American diplomats who conduct the Palestinian Affairs Unit have their offices, was brought under direct control of the embassy, thereby achieving compliance with the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995.

There is no practical reason for the US to open a new consulate-general anywhere in Jerusalem. If Secretary of State Blinken wants to "deepen ties with Palestinians" by providing more accessible consular services, he can do so by opening a US consulate in Ramallah, near the government headquarters of the Palestinian Authority.

Many oppose a US consulate in Jerusalem because, they say, it "divides Jerusalem." It does more damage than mere division. If the Biden administration converts the Agron Street property or any location in Jerusalem into a new consulate-general that serves as a de facto "Embassy to Palestine," complete with a consul-general who reports not to the US ambassador, but directly to the State Department, America will be resurrecting an unprincipled dangerous fabrication that it finally buried three years ago. And if Prime Minister Bennett allows America to take this step, he will go down in history as the Israeli leader who gave away Jerusalem. (Times of Israel Oct 15)

Commentary...

A US Consulate in Jerusalem States that Jerusalem is Not in Israel By Nathan Lewin

At a Washington news conference attended by Yair Lapid, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that the Biden administration intends to "press ahead" with a plan to open a consulate in Jerusalem designed to "deepen ties with Palestinians." Mr. Lapid apparently voiced no protest, and the State Department's spokesperson resolved any doubt in a later briefing. When asked whether the US plan was to open a consulate somewhere "other than Jerusalem," the spokesperson replied, "The secretary made this clear in May when he spoke to it in Jerusalem; he made it very clear when he spoke to it and Ramallah — we will be moving forward with the process to reopen our consulate in Jerusalem."

Blinken's plan sounds relatively innocuous to those who want a two-state solution. But it really is a giant step backward in America's policy on Jerusalem. If Israel accepts a consulate for Palestinians in Jerusalem, Israel's foes in the State Department will be empowered to again treat Jerusalem as a city that is not in Israel.

Harry Truman may have recognized the State of Israel 11 minutes after its creation, but America's diplomats refused for 70 years to recognize that the city of Jerusalem was in Israel. We encountered that stonewall for the 18 years that we litigated pro bono to reverse the Passport Office's practice that treated American citizens born in Jerusalem as if they were stateless — as if they came into the world outside the borders of any recognized country.

Our baby client was Menachem Binyomin Zivotofsky, born in Jerusalem's Shaare Zedek Medical Center to American-born parents. The birth certificate authorized by the State Department for Menachem left blank the space for his country of birth. US passports routinely designate the country of birth for American citizens born abroad, but the State Department's Foreign Affairs Manual forbade designating "Israel" for anyone born in Jerusalem. When Menachem's parents asked that their newborn be issued a passport, they were told that his US passport could identify no country of birth, but could only say "Jerusalem," as if it were a city outside the border of any country. We sued for Menachem, enforcing a law that Congress had enacted directing that Jerusalem-born US citizens could opt to designate "Israel" as their place of birth.

The State Department was not applying an even-handed policy. Anyone born in Israel before 1948 could choose to list "Palestine" as their place of birth, as if the Jewish state had never come into being. Those born in Tel Aviv or Haifa after 1948 did not have to carry passports identifying them as born in Israel. If they were unhappy to see "Israel" as their place of birth — as some Arabs might be — they could choose to substitute the city in which they were born. The only American citizens denied a wide choice were those born in Jerusalem.

Congress had overwhelmingly approved Israel's jurisdiction over Jerusalem in a 1995 law directing that the US embassy be moved to Jerusalem. Yet Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama — pressed by the State Department's Arabists — overrode Congress' directive by issuing baseless "findings" that invoked overriding foreign-policy justifications to delay the move. Fear that moving the embassy would spark violence in the Middle East was the specious justification.

No matter how unrealistic it was to deny that Jerusalem was in Israel, the policy persisted. When President Obama spoke at Shimon Peres' funeral on Mt. Herzl — located in an area of Jerusalem that Israel had controlled ever since the state was established — the White House unashamedly corrected the tagline issued with his address to read only "Jerusalem," rather than the initially issued "Jerusalem, Israel."

Six justices of the Supreme Court ended our marathon courtroom battle by deciding that Congress had no constitutional authority to recognize foreign governments. The president, they said, had sole and exclusive power to accord legal recognition to foreign sovereigns and determine their boundaries, including the location of cities. The Court's opinion exhibited the justices' fear that recognizing Jerusalem as being in Israel would set off bloody warfare.

Then-president Donald Trump announced in May 2018 that the US embassy would be relocated from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and this turned what had appeared to be a legal defeat into a triumph. Contrary

On Anniversary of Rabin Assassination, Grandson Deepens Divisions in Country By Atara Beck

Opposition Leader and former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu was notably absent from a state ceremony Monday that marked 26 years since the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. But who can blame him?

Ever since the assassination, carried out by right-wing extremist Yigal Amir on November 4, 1995, the Rabin family has been blaming Netanyahu for allegedly inciting hatred that culminated in the murder. Netanyahu, who attended the annual ceremony each year when serving as prime minister, has repeatedly denied the allegations.

In fact, addressing the Knesset ceremony later in the day, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, who leads the right-wing Yamina party, called for an end to the divisiveness, saying, "It wasn't the right or the religious who murdered Rabin. Yigal Amir murdered him."

Yet Yonatan Ben Artzi, Rabin's grandson, reaped division again this year and offended at least a quarter of the Israeli population at a graveside memorial by celebrating the end of the Netanyahu era and claiming it marked the end of "the hatred once again filled the streets [and] the division which tore Israeli society apart."

Despite his inability to form a coalition in the 120-seat Knesset, the Likud leader had more votes by far than any other candidate, winning 30 seats. Next in line was Yesh Atid party leader Yair Lapid, who garnered 17 seats and now serves as foreign minister and alternate prime minister. Bennett won a mere seven seats.

Nonetheless, Ben Artzi used his platform to slam Netanyahu and show contempt for his voters, claiming the former Israeli leader's ouster ended "the hatred once again filled the streets [and] the division which tore Israeli society apart."

Referring to the end of Netanyahu's premiership, Ben Artzi said that "2021 was a turning point. After dark years of fear and silence,

the people of Israel stood up.”

Each Netanyahu victory over the course of his 15 years of leadership was gained through democratic elections and the will of the voters. Yet, according to Ben Artzi “After a long war for its freedom and democratic character, the people of Israel were victorious. Against open violence both verbal and physical, facing a culture of dictatorship and lies, the Israeli spirit triumphed, and government of the people defeated the government of the individual.”

Furthermore, he said, “For the last quarter century, Israel has been suffering from post-trauma which is being fueled by those people who take delight in the pain. But I can say that this morning, 26 years after that terrible night...I can tell you that now that terrible period is over.”

Lapid, too, took the opportunity — at an event that should have been a solemn occasion and a call for unity — to attack his political opponents, saying, “The last election was a referendum on democracy, on the question of whether we still want to live in a democratic regime with the rule of law, or whether we want to move to a populist, authoritarian, extremist and nationalist regime.” Ironically, Lapid trailed behind Netanyahu.

Netanyahu, who attended the Knesset event, responded “Over the years I have heard at these events abusive and false claims about the camp I represent and about me personally, but I gritted my teeth, I restrained myself. I fulfilled my duty to be there as Prime Minister in accordance with the State Protocol...We treat the late Yitzhak Rabin with deep respect for his many virtues, for his great contribution to Israel’s security, and yet we do not hide for a moment the disagreements between us. This is statesmanship,” he declared.

In 2019, responding to that year’s attack by Ben Artzi on the former premier, Netanyahu responded “The memorial has become a disgraceful political outburst. They take advantage of the official memorial ceremony for false political propaganda. We see a direct link between this disrespectful behavior and the difficulty of uniting the people, healing the wound.”

Indeed. (World Israel News Oct 18)

Rabin, Peres, #MeToo and the Battle Among Sacred Cows

By Ruthie Blum

Every year at this time, Israel stops to mourn and memorialize Yitzhak Rabin, the prime minister who was assassinated on Nov. 4, 1995 at a rally celebrating the signing of the Oslo Accords.

Whatever one thought of the late premier prior to after his murder at the hands of “right-wing extremist,” Yigal Amir instantly turned him into the country’s most hallowed figure—one with a legacy named after him. National trauma will do that, especially under the circumstances at the time.

The so-called “polarization” that Prime Minister Naftali Bennett bemoans and vows to rectify was on full display all those decades ago, just as it has been since the establishment of the state. Then, as now, opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu was called the culprit by the self-anointed peace camp.

It was allegedly his and his supporters’ ostensible incitement against Rabin and Oslo that led Amir to gun him down. That the accords would prove to be the disaster of which Netanyahu had warned—mass Israeli casualties at hands of Israel’s Palestinian “peace partners,” ruled by PLO chief Yasser Arafat—is absent from the discussion.

To everyone’s great surprise, Netanyahu’s Likud Party emerged victorious in the Knesset elections that took place a mere seven months after the assassination. Though the entire nation was still reeling from the tragedy and the left demanded that the right engage in “soul-searching,” more voters opposed the Oslo Accords than supported them.

Netanyahu defeated Shimon Peres, who had assumed the role of prime minister upon Rabin’s death. Ironically, Peres and Rabin had been personal and political archrivals for the bulk of their lives. They had managed, somehow, to bury the hatchet in plenty of time to jointly sign the first Oslo agreement with Arafat in 1993 on the White House lawn. The three subsequently shared the Nobel Peace Prize for the charade.

Israeli quipped that it wasn’t clear which hand was harder for Rabin to shake during that period: Arafat’s or Peres’s. Nobody doubted, however, that Peres found it easier to make nice with the terror-master than with his nemesis-turned-frenemy.

But then, unlike Rabin, Peres was a devout land-for-peacenik who kept insisting that the New Middle East was busting out all over. No amount of spilled Jewish blood put a dent in his fantasy.

Nor did Peres’s loyalists ever forget that Rabin, while defense minister in 1988, reportedly ordered Israeli soldiers to “break the arms and legs” of Palestinian inciters. Rabin denied the allegation, but it stuck nevertheless.

Though Peres would not see the prime minister’s seat again, he assumed other roles, ultimately becoming president. His land-for-peace visions—some would say delusions—were his calling card at home and abroad.

Just as Rabin gained posthumous saint-like status, Peres, while alive, cultivated his own until his death in 2016 at the age of 93. It was an easy feat since laying claim to peace is a safe bet where global honor and fundraising are concerned.

It thus came as a huge shock when former Labor Knesset member and former consul general to New York Colette Avital revealed that Peres had sexually assaulted her in the 1980s. In a “tell-all” interview with the left-wing Israeli daily Haaretz, Avital recounted two incidents that left her with “difficult memories”: one during her three-year diplomatic stint in Paris and the second upon her return to Israel a few years later.

According to Avital, the first time that her mentor harassed her was at the hotel in France where he was staying during a visit. She said that when she arrived for their breakfast meeting, she was told by his aides that, “due to security reasons,” the tête-à-tête would have to take place in his room.

She claimed that he greeted her in his pajamas and proceeded to shove her towards the bed—whereupon she fended him off and fled.

The other instance, she said, took place in 1984, when Peres was prime minister and she was finishing up in Paris. According to her account, Peres summoned her to his office to discuss her future in his administration.

When they were done talking and she was preparing to leave, “He pressed me against the door suddenly and tried to kiss me,” at which point she pushed him away and ran, “legs shaking.”

“It repulsed me,” she said.

This didn’t prevent her from spending many years working for and with Peres, of course. But, she explained, in the aftermath of the above incident, she avoided encountering him for a very long while.

It took the #MeToo girls a few days to catch their breath. On the one hand, a sister in their camp had come forward with a story that normally would elicit a communal outcry. On the other, Peres is a sacred cow, and his baby, the Jaffa-based Peres Center for Peace and Innovation, is a cash one.

Avital gave a few reasons for her having spilled these particular beans now, after all these decades. One was that she felt that she should serve as an example to all the young women who no longer tolerate the kind of sexual harassment that females of her generation had taken for granted.

Another was to dispel, once and for all, the rumor that has swirled around her career since the beginning: that she was Peres’s mistress and slept her way to the top. The gossip wasn’t even whispered; it was something that every Israeli of a certain age had heard and assumed to be true.

Meanwhile, she also insisted that she had informed certain advisers of Peres’s when the harassment took place. One of these, peace activist and former minister Yossi Beilin, protested this week having no memory of the conversation.

Another, radical Haaretz columnist Gideon Levy, at least acknowledged having been aware that many women made sure not to be with Peres behind closed doors. But he also stated that he hadn’t actually witnessed any of the behavior, quipping that “Peres never sexually harassed me personally.”

Then there’s former Meretz MK Anat Maor, who wrote to Avital that she “and many others are hugely disappointed by your revelation,” which was disrespectful to Peres, especially when juxtaposed with “victims of severe harassment ... Isn’t it obvious to you [that it] will be used to damage the peace process and the Oslo Accords?”

Never mind that only peace actually taking root right now is based on the Abraham Accords, not Oslo. More importantly, one shudders to imagine the fate of any right-winger would dare, like Levy, to make light of a so-called “predator,” or like Maor, to put a man’s policies ahead of his appetites and sense of macho entitlement.

Most of the left knows this and has been scrambling to do a bit of damage control.

As a result, after a second woman revealed that she’d been sexually assaulted by Peres—and members of the elite grudgingly admitted that his actions on this score were common knowledge all along—the #MeToo ladies have had no choice but to make their voices heard, even if in sotto voce.

Transportation Minister Merav Michaeli, for instance, told a gathering of her Labor faction, “I always believe the complainants and I believe Colette Avital, too.”

Not exactly what you’d call “fightin’ words” from one of the country’s leading loud feminists. But then, even Avital insisted that Peres’s “greatness” shouldn’t be canceled out, all because of this

other matter. You know, the one that she herself unleashed.

Luckily for her and the rest of Israel's best and brightest, the Peres Pandora's Box was upstaged by the Rabin-assassination anniversary, enabling them to speak in platitudes about peace vs. polarization, and focus on Netanyahu as the main villain in their false narrative.

If anyone was still wondering about the outcome of a sparring match between two sides of "woke"—whether sexual assault trumps Palestinian statehood or the other way around—this week provided a pretty clear answer. (JNS Oct 19)

The Systemic Failure of Israel's Civil Administration in Judea and Samaria By Lt. Col. (Res) Maurice Hirsch

Each day, it becomes clearer that the Israeli Civil Administration is one of the greatest dangers to the Jewish people's realization of the goal to resettle the Jewish heartland of Judea and Samaria. Since the signing of the 1993-1995 Oslo Accords, the Civil Administration has lost its way.

Despite being a branch of the Israeli Defense Ministry/Israel Defense Forces, the Civil Administration is more concerned with facilitating the creation of the "State of Palestine" than it is with ensuring the rights of the Jewish people in its ancestral homeland.

A recent report from Israeli NGO Ad Kan exposed that a Palestinian in a senior position in the Israeli Civil Administration was arrested by the Palestinian Authority. Before his arrest, he had been given permission by his boss in the Civil Administration to take sensitive, secret information to his home in Nablus. This was the second such incident reported in just a few months.

The Palestinian in question holds a position that gives him direct access to land transactions carried out in Judea and Samaria. This means that he had direct access to the names of both the buyers and the sellers.

In a normal reality, who would care?

The problem is that Israel does not live in a normal reality. It's a reality in which Palestinians own land that they cannot use and are looking to sell, and in which Jews are willing to pay exorbitant prices for land in Judea and Samaria. According to P.A. law, a Palestinian who sells land to a Jew is committing a severe crime. P.A. leader Mahmoud Abbas considers this such a serious crime that he amended the legislation in 2014, raising the maximum sentence to life imprisonment with hard labor.

Under these circumstances, a Palestinian with access to sensitive land transactions is courting danger. I am not suggesting that a Palestinian, inherently, cannot be trusted. There are literally thousands of Palestinians who risk their lives daily for the security of the Jewish people. However, when a Palestinian who lives with his family in an area controlled by the P.A. has direct access to information desperately desired by the P.A. and its unscrupulous security forces, then the path to disaster is clear.

This obvious danger apparently did not bother the Civil Administration.

The Civil Administration was established in 1981 by then-Defense Minister Ariel Sharon to be the civilian arm of the Israeli government in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. Originally, the Civil Administration was a large body with extensive powers and responsibilities. That changed dramatically in 1995, when, pursuant to the Oslo Accords, almost all the functions of the Civil Administration were transferred to the newly established P.A.

In the new reality, the powers and responsibilities of the Civil Administration were limited to being the intermediary between Israel and the P.A. and Area C, which, under the Accords, remained under full Israeli authority.

Over time, however, the Civil Administration lost its way.

According to the Israeli NGO Regavim, since the implementation of the Oslo Accords, the Palestinians have built tens of thousands of illegal structures in Area C. Some of these structures were built in cooperation with, or even entirely funded by, the European Union. While the move was part of official P.A. policy, the Civil Administration failed completely in its task to prevent the open land theft. The failure is so catastrophic that it has caused genuine strategic damage to the State of Israel and the Jewish people.

Since its establishment, the P.A. has paid huge rewards to Palestinian terrorists. In 2004, it even entrenched the policy in law. The Civil Administration completely missed this or decided to look the other way.

Had Palestinian Media Watch not exposed these P.A. terror rewards in 2011, and presented what it uncovered to the U.S. Congress, European governments and the Knesset, the world would still not know about it, due to the silence of the Civil Administration. Indeed, when MK's Avi Dichter and Elazar Stern proposed legislation to punish the P.A. for its "pay for slay" policy, the Civil

Administration was the first to come to the P.A.'s defense.

As part of the Oslo Accords, Israel agreed to waive, in favor of the P.A., billions of shekels of tax income. The P.A. then used the money it received from Israel to bankroll its terror-funding policy. The Dichter-Stern law stipulates that every year, Israel will punish the P.A. by deducting the sum it spent the previous year on its terror payments from the tax incomes of the following year.

Despite the clear logic and morality of the law, the Civil Administration did its best to torpedo it. Defending the P.A., the Civil Administration repeatedly falsely claimed that implementation of the law would cause the financial collapse of the P.A. Thankfully, the MKs ignored the empty warnings of the Civil Administration and enacted the law. So far, pursuant to the law, the P.A. has been penalized with the deduction of more than 1.25 billion shekels (\$390 million). And the P.A. has not collapsed.

Having failed to prevent the passage of the law, and while its financial predictions had proven to be false, the Civil Administration, through persistent moaning, in April 2020, persuaded then-Defense Minister Naftali Bennett to promote the idea of circumventing the law by Israel's providing the P.A. with a "loan" equivalent of the sums deducted. While the 2020 "loan" never came to fruition, two months ago, the Civil Administration repeated the same failed recommendation.

Employing Palestinians in strategically sensitive positions, allowing the Palestinians to steal land and trying to prevent the passage of a law to punish the P.A. for paying rewards to terrorists who murder Jews are just three of the countless systematic failures of the Civil Administration.

While I would like to believe that those who serve in the Civil Administration are good people, the entire mechanism is rotten to its core. It has failed entirely to fulfil its functions. As long as it continues to exist in its current capacity, these systemic failures, and others, will continue to cause irreparable damage to the State of Israel. (Palestinian Media Watch / JNS Oct 17)

Iran is Cozying up to Moderate States, and Israel is Worried

By Yoav Limor

The increasingly warm relations between Iran and a number of moderate states in the region are causing worry in Israel. Frustration is rising in Jerusalem over what is being termed the "passive" U.S. policy on Iran's nuclear program.

Since Ebrahim Raisi was elected president of Iran, the country has been investing considerable effort in rebuilding its ties with other Middle East nations, including ones considered moderate. The most notable of these is Saudi Arabia, after years of a break between Iran and the Saudis, it is becoming increasingly likely that they might renew diplomatic relations, and even open consulates. Meanwhile, Iranian-Qatari relations are also strengthening, and Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has held a surprising first conversation with his Jordanian counterpart.

Israel is following these developments with concern. They signify not only growing Iranian confidence in the regional and international arenas, but also the Iranians' realization that the U.S. exit from the region has left a vacuum which they can fill. Among other things, the Iranians can work to counterbalance the Abraham Accords, which Iran sees as a huge threat to its own interests in the region.

In the past few weeks, the issue has been raised a few times in contacts between high-ranking Israeli and American officials. The Israelis made it clear that American influence and support were needed to balance the Iranians' efforts. However, the prevailing belief in Jerusalem is that while Washington will try to help Israel and its other regional allies, it may in turn demand progress on the Palestinian issue.

Iran's regional activity is taking place as it maneuvers to postpone rejoining the negotiations for a new nuclear deal. In recent weeks, Iran has increased its uranium enrichment, although the assessment in Israel and the west is that the enrichment activity is not designated to achieve nuclear "breakout," but rather to secure additional assets to use as bargaining chips to reach an improved deal with the Americans.

In talks with the United States, Israeli officials received the impression that the two sides were closer than in the past when it came to Iran's nuclear project and its various components. However, considerable distance remains between Jerusalem and Washington when it comes to what conclusions should be drawn and what steps should be taken in future.

Israel would like to see the United States set a deadline, one that would carry a clear threat of heavy sanctions and possibly a military operation, to force the Iranians to stop playing for time. The

Americans, however, have made it clear that the second option is not currently on the table, and until a few days ago it appeared that Washington would only resort to sanctions as a last possible measure.

This led to considerable frustration in Israel. Off the record, senior government officials called the Americans “naïve,” and expressed worry that Washington’s “passive policy,” as they called it, is being exploited to the hilt by Iran so it can make progress on its nuclear plans. Still, recent days have seen new messages conveyed to Israel, indicating that Washington’s patience with Iran’s delaying tactics is about to run out, and that if no progress toward a deal is made soon, the Americans will adopt a series of new diplomatic and economic steps against Iran, the Iranian regime and its interests.

On Monday, a senior Israeli official said he thought that the Iranians would try to “drag it out for a few more weeks” before returning to the negotiating table. The working assumption is that Iran will not sign an agreement different from the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action nuclear agreement, despite the Israeli demand for significant changes to the deal, most of which have to do with its end date and other matters pertaining to oversight. Still, it’s doubtful the U.S. administration will insist on changes to the deal, as they have already said they will try to improve it “on the way.”

The Israeli effort to reach maximal cooperation with the United States is due to, among other factors, the fact that Israel has very few options left. The Netanyahu government’s pressure—which led to the United States withdrawing from the 2015 deal—was based on the assumption that, facing collapse due to heavy economic sanctions, Iran would sign a better deal, or if not, that the United States would attack it, or at least threaten to do so.

These assumptions (along with the hope that former President Trump would be reelected) turned out to be incorrect, and thus Israel now realizes that a return to the original deal is the only way to buy time Israel can use to make a diplomatic effort and step up military preparations to keep Iran away from a nuclear bomb, now and in the future. (Israel Hayom Oct 19)

Biden Palestinian Consulate Move will be Bennett’s Toughest Test By Jonathan S. Tobin

Over the course of its first nine months in office, the Biden administration has had a lot of trouble getting out of its own way on just about every conceivable issue, be it domestic or foreign. Yet one of the few areas in which President Joe Biden hasn’t so far either screwed things up and/or appreciably worsened the situation is the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

That was a result of a combination of factors, including the administration’s being distracted by other crises. It was also a function of recognition on the part of even Biden’s advisers, who believe in a two-state solution with an almost religious faith, that the prospects for restarting the dead-in-the-water peace process were negligible.

But it looks like that will be changing in what may be only a matter of weeks.

The Biden administration signaled earlier this year that it intended to reopen a U.S. consulate in Jerusalem that will be, for all intents and purposes, an embassy to a putative Palestinian state. It agreed to delay implementation of the decision until later in the year. While perhaps Israel’s coalition government and some American supporters of Israel may have hoped that the delay would continue indefinitely, Secretary of State Antony Blinken has made it clear to Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid that the moment will soon arrive when the consulate will be back in business.

The administration is trying to portray this decision as not a big deal. After all, Jerusalem was home to an American consulate whose main purpose was to be the diplomatic focal point for Washington’s relations with the Palestinians until it was closed in 2018 by the Trump administration when it moved the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Despite their opposition to Trump’s recognition of reality, Biden and Blinken have not moved the embassy out of Jerusalem. Still, they believe that reopening the consulate is a gesture that will help reboot relations with the Palestinian Authority and perhaps even encourage an eventual revival of the peace process.

In doing so, they are not merely flouting diplomatic practice since consulates only operate outside of capital cities, as the presence of an embassy renders any other facility superfluous. By re-establishing a consulate to the Palestinians in the Western part of Jerusalem, which is indisputably Israeli territory, Biden is doing more than declaring his belief in two states and the repartition of Jerusalem, which would, in theory, serve as the capital for both Israel and the putative state of Palestine.

Trump’s policies were a signal to Arab and Muslim nations that their support for the century-old Palestinian war against Zionism was getting them nowhere. That paved the way for the first real peace

breakthrough in decades in the form of the Abraham Accords. That, in turn, was a message to the Palestinians that the Sunni Arab world was done being held hostage by their intransigence and refusal to make peace with Israel, no matter where its borders might be drawn. Though neither the P.A. nor its Hamas rivals seemed willing to listen, their isolation created a situation where sooner or later, they, too, would realize that normal national life was a better option than clinging to the fantasy of a world without Israel.

However, the consulate reopening will tell Palestinians that they can forget about having to draw the difficult but necessary conclusions that Trump’s policies were pushing them towards. The consulate, situated as it will be in a Jerusalem neighborhood that not even left-wing Israeli governments would ever consider surrendering, will like virtually every similar gesture made by both Democratic and Republican administrations in the last 30 years not encourage Palestinians to think about peace. On the contrary, it will merely serve to convince them that they will pay no price for continuing to refuse to give up a conflict that is utterly futile but which has become an integral feature of their identity.

The only question now is whether anything can be done to stop Biden from this folly.

Were pro-Israel Democrats a powerful voice within Biden’s party, they might act, as Christian evangelicals did with both the George W. Bush and Trump administrations, as a check on any weakening of U.S. support for the Jewish state. But with the anti-Israel progressive left a loud and influential constituency that Biden regards as necessary to the achievement of his domestic agenda and pro-Israel Democratic moderates as deluded about the peace process as the foreign-policy establishment, there’s little chance of them speaking up.

The only force that can do something about it is the Israeli government.

The often incoherent coalition of centrist, left- and right-wing parties headed by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Foreign Minister (and prime minister in waiting) Yair Lapid has set as one of its chief goals achieving warm relations with Biden. In principle, that is a laudable goal since it is every Israeli government’s obligation to stay as close as possible to its one superpower ally.

They are aided in this quest by Biden’s and Blinken’s knowledge that this coalition is the only possible alternative to a return to power of former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a prospect that they regard with more horror than perhaps the onset of global warming.

They know that the consulate reopening will severely test the durability of the coalition. That’s because its right-wing elements will insist that Bennett do everything in his power to prevent it from happening, up to and including what would otherwise be a routine approval from the host government. If Bennett responds with nothing more than a few futile complaints, then it is entirely possible that his government will lose enough support to fall.

That’s why Blinken agreed to put off the reopening until after the Israeli government passes a budget next month that would, under normal circumstances, guarantee its longevity for at least the next several months.

Lapid, who pays lip service to his own opposition to the consulate but is clearly prepared to live with it, has been trying to persuade Blinken to continue delaying the move. But Blinken, who said this week that the most he will do is create a joint American-Israeli committee on the issue, isn’t budging.

The foreign minister is counting on the threat of a return of Netanyahu to power to keep his partners in line. All the parties and personalities have a lot to lose if the government falls. But Bennett’s own Yamina Party, as well as others on the right inside the coalition tent, is unlikely to tolerate staying in a government that is being pushed around by Washington on a matter of Israeli national consensus.

In his first few months of office, Bennett has faced some challenges, but none as difficult or as crucial to Israel’s vital interests or his own political future as this one. Yet if he learned anything during his years serving with Netanyahu, it ought to have been that Israel can say “no” to the Americans when necessary. The consulate controversy will be one more such moment.

Dragging Lapid and his left-wing partners along with him in resisting the consulate reopening will be difficult. But what we will now learn about Bennett is whether he is the sort of leader who can make other people do things they don’t want to, or if he is the type who lets others make him act against his principles. A determined stand might just force Biden and Blinken to back down, yet if that’s not possible, Bennett’s ability to shape events—rather than be shaped by them—is about to be put to the test on an issue that will have serious implications for his nation’s hopes to maintain the momentum for peace that the Trump administration established. (JNS Oct 20)