

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*

have already been placed on high alert, but Israel must make it very clear to Hamas that any such attack will be met with a harsh response.

Similar messages must also be delivered to the Palestinian Authority. Although the P.A.

cannot openly go against the Palestinian street on the prisoner matter, which garners complete consensus in Palestinian society, its interest is to maintain quiet due to the fear that any possible violence could be turned in its direction, certainly in Jenin, which in any case has shown more than a few signs of anarchy.

(Israel Hayom Sep 9)

Commentary...

Time for Israel to Take Back Control of its Prisons

By Yoav Limor

The escape from Gilboa Prison is becoming, as expected, an event with strategic implications. What began as a terrible and unfathomable mistake on the part of the Israel Prisons Service now threatens to ignite every security prison in the country, and even undermine stability in Judea and Samaria, Gaza and perhaps mixed Arab-Jewish cities in Israel, as well. The IPS bears full responsibility for the failure.

The list of blunders under its watch is embarrassingly long: The fact that no one was aware of the prison's problematic structural design; the approval given to high-risk prisoners to live together in the same cell, despite their shared history of trying to dig out of the same prison years ago; the lack of intelligence about their plan and its actual execution; the prison guard falling asleep; the hesitant response after the police initially reported suspicious movement outside the prison on the night of the escape; and then the inability to quickly and properly account for all the prisoners; the approval given to Zakaria Zubeidi to move cells; putting prisoners in jails located in the general vicinity of their home towns; the elementary lack of professional experience of intelligence officers; and above all else, the shirking of responsibility.

The last issue points to a defective organizational culture and a skewed understanding of the situation. Former IPS Commissioner Orit Adato erred during a television interview over the Rosh Hashanah holiday, when she said that current IPS Commissioner Katy Perry doesn't need to resign, because senior commanders shouldn't pay the price for operational events.

This is not an operational event, however. It is, rather, a resounding failure of utter negligence that illuminates the deep decay within the prisons service. It is a decay that requires a complete systematic overhaul.

To be fair to the IPS, it must be noted that it suffers from a lack of manpower and resources (although this still doesn't explain or justify the chain of errors). The prisons are outdated and overcrowded, and the available personnel don't come close to suiting the mission. Even worse, the inmates, not the state, appear to be running these security prisons. This defect requires amendment, and now is the time.

If an outburst of violence indeed occurs—and all indications certainly point to this being the case—Israel must act to immediately segregate the various sectors and maintain quiet in the mixed cities. This is the primary lesson from Operation Guardian of the Walls, and an Israeli national interest of utmost importance, also to dissuade other prisoners from toying with similar ideas in the future.

Despite the concerns over riots (which have already erupted) in the prisons, and despite the concerns over the general security ramifications, the time has come to overhaul the prisons—which are more like resorts and which more than a few public security ministers have sought to change, only to concede—and restore control to Israeli hands.

A move in this direction must be made by the government in tandem with the hunt for the escaped terrorists. Six people need help, food and hideouts to survive, and all of this generates quite a bit of intelligence information. The high degree of control on the ground by Israeli security forces, along with advanced technological capabilities, should gradually decrease the escapees' chances of evading capture.

The defense establishment must also prevent them from reaching Jordan, where they will be protected. Fleeing to Judea and Samaria would actually expedite their capture, and also mitigate the threat (which currently appears minor) that they will try harming Israeli civilians. It must also be taken into account that their capture will spark a degree of violence in Judea and Samaria, certainly if any of them are killed in the process.

In such a scenario, the Islamic Jihad terrorist organization, which counts five of the six escapees as members, could launch rockets from Gaza in a display of solidarity. Iron Dome missile-defense systems

גמר חתימה טובה

The Urgency of Preventing a Nuclear Islamic Republic

By Farley Weiss

During their meetings at the White House on Aug. 27, U.S. President Joe Biden told Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett that the U.S. is committed "to ensur[ing] Iran never develops a nuclear weapon ... We're putting diplomacy first and seeing where that takes us. But if diplomacy fails, we're ready to turn to other options."

The Biden administration made it clear from the get-go that it intended to return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—the 2015 nuclear deal, negotiated by former President Barack Obama, from which former President Donald Trump withdrew in 2018.

Lest one think that the current attempt to reverse Trump's move indicates the success of the previous policy forged by Obama, Iran consistently violated the JCPOA. Furthermore, the Biden administration's efforts have not only failed abysmally but have emboldened the terror-supporting Iranian regime in its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Before the JCPOA was finalized, the Obama administration had repeatedly approved the increase of sanctions on Tehran, making it desperate for a negotiated deal as its economy was crumbling. A major criticism of the JCPOA was the elimination of these sanctions, enabling Iran to receive more than \$100 billion dollars.

Moreover, the JCPOA lacked stringent nuclear-oversight provisions and clauses deterring Iran's ballistic-missile program and global terrorist activities. With the influx of cash, Iran increased its defense budget by 40 percent, and enhanced funding to its proxies, such as the Lebanon-based terrorist organization Hezbollah and Hamas, which rules Gaza. It was also able to expand its ballistic-missile program, while still pursuing nuclear weapons—as Israel's 2018 seizure of a trove of documents from a warehouse in Tehran illustrated.

As a result of the above, Trump exited the JCPOA and reinstated massive sanctions on Iran, with much success. Iran's economy suffered greatly, and the regime was unable to provide the same level of support to Hezbollah and Hamas.

In addition, the Trump administration carried out the Jan. 3, 2020 assassination of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force commander, Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani. Subsequently, on Nov. 27 that year, Israel assassinated the head of Iran's nuclear program, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

It is thus that Iran did not want Trump to remain in office for a second term. This was borne out by U.S. intelligence that Iran was attempting to interfere in the Nov. 2020 American presidential elections in favor of Biden.

Seeing diplomacy as a way to prevent a nuclearized Iran, the Biden administration wants a better, stronger agreement than the JCPOA. In order to achieve this, however, Washington should have continued increasing sanctions, as the Obama administration had done.

Instead, it appointed Robert Malley, an architect of the JCPOA, as U.S. special representative to Iran and lifted additional sanctions. This has served only to embolden and further radicalize the regime in Tehran.

Indeed, Iran responded to the above U.S. actions by "electing" mass murderer in Ibrahim Raisi, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's

candidate, as president. Once instated in the role, Raisi appointed such figures as former IRGC chief Mohsen Rezaee—wanted by Interpol for the 1994 mass murder of 85 Argentinians at the Jewish community center (AMIA) in Buenos Aires—as vice president for economic affairs, and Gen. Ahmad Vahidi Ahmad Vahidi, also involved in the attack, as interior minister.

Meanwhile, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) confirmed that Iran, for the first time, has produced uranium metal-enriched up to 20 percent and has significantly increased its production capacity of enriched uranium to 60 percent, both of which are prohibited as part of the JCPOA.

Germany, France and Britain—parties to the JCPOA—called the above moves “serious violations” of Iran’s commitment under the deal. They said that “both are key steps in the development of a nuclear weapon, and Iran has no credible civilian need for either measure.”

The “concerns are deepened by the fact that Iran has significantly limited IAEA access through withdrawing from JCPOA-agreed monitoring arrangements,” they added in a joint statement. What they did not do, however, is reinstate sanctions.

Describing the current situation to the foreign press last week, Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said, “Right now it seems like the agreement is not going anywhere and the talks are not going anywhere. The world needs a plan B, and Iran needs to know there is a credible threat on it if they will keep on advancing their nuclear program as they do now.”

In an interview with Bloomberg TV on Sept. 3, Malley said that the United States is prepared to be patient with Iran about a return to the JCPOA, but “can’t wait forever.” Isn’t it already obvious, as Lapid pointed out, that that “the agreement is not going anywhere and a plan B is needed”?

Former Israeli Ambassador to the United States Ron Dermer has been more direct, stating that Iran will obtain nuclear weapons “if Israel doesn’t stop it.”

At this point, it may be too late for sanctions to be effective, and that the only remaining option is a military one—for which Israel has been preparing. But not imposing sanctions immediately will guarantee that the military option is the only one left.

Biden announced that he would not withdraw troops from Afghanistan until all Americans were evacuated. He didn’t keep his promise. His assurances to Israel about Iran, then, cannot be counted on. Judging by the Afghanistan debacle, there are two possibilities: a nuclear Iran or a major Israeli strike on the Islamic Republic’s facilities. (JNS Sep 6)

The Taliban’s Palestinian Partners: Implications for the Middle East Peace Process By Dan Diker and Khaled Abu Toameh

The Taliban’s reconquest of Afghanistan, followed by the ISIS-K bombing that killed 13 U.S. military personnel and scores of civilians, underscores the far-reaching implications of the U.S. withdrawal from the country. The mujahideen’s takeover of Kabul, following a 20-year U.S. counter-terror campaign against Al-Qaeda and other jihadi groups in Afghanistan, has reenergized the global jihad’s slow and determined war against the West.

In the Middle East, where symbolism and imagery define reality, the American evacuation represents one of the most significant defeats of what Osama bin Laden referred to as “the Zionist-Crusader alliance” since Al-Qaeda’s mass terror attack on Sept. 11, 2001, that killed 2,996 people (including 19 Al-Qaeda terrorists).

The implementation of the American withdrawal reflects an ongoing Western cultural misunderstanding of its fundamentalist foes. In the eyes of Islamists, the Taliban’s seizure of Afghanistan mirrors the collapse of the world’s leading superpower to the forces of the Koran’s “true believers”—the jihadis. In this way, the pullout has emboldened extremists across Asia, the Middle East and beyond.

The Taliban moment has deep historical roots: The fall of the shah of Iran—the shahanshah, the “king of kings”—in 1979 to Iran’s Islamic revolution inspired Islamist revolutions and militancy elsewhere, including the emergence of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in the late 1980s and early 1990s, respectively. In turn, the Taliban’s past and current successes have inspired other regional Islamist and extremist movements, including those of the Palestinians. The Biden administration has stated that it wishes to bring “peace, security and prosperity” to Israelis and Palestinians. To do so in the

post-Afghanistan context, it is critical to understand the implications of recent PLO and Hamas statements of sympathy for the Taliban, as well as the historical context of Palestinian partnership with Islamist movements.

Hamas has taken credit for inspiring the Taliban, just as it did for Israel’s unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005. In early 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian parliamentary elections in the West Bank and Gaza, running on a ticket of “change and reform.”

While the U.S. pullout from Afghanistan was good news for extremists, it was bad news for moderate Arabs amenable to the West. Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and their supporters have been vindicated in their longstanding ideological claims that negotiations with Israel are futile. Their conclusion is that patience pays off and that only mukawama, or “resistance,” can defeat the American-led Western alliance and dismantle the State of Israel.

It therefore comes as little surprise that Hamas was the first Islamist group to congratulate the Taliban publicly on its takeover of Afghanistan, saying: “We congratulate the Muslim Afghan people for the defeat of the American occupation ... and ... the Taliban movement and its brave leadership in this victory, which culminated its long struggle over the past 20 years. ... [T]he demise of the American occupation and its allies prove that the resistance of the peoples, foremost of which is our struggling Palestinian people, will achieve victory.”

On Aug. 17, 2021, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh told the Taliban’s leader, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, that “the demise of the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan is a prelude to the demise of the Israeli occupation of the land of Palestine.”

Musa Abu Marzouk, a member of Hamas’s political bureau, tweeted: “Today, Taliban has ... faced America and its agents, refusing half-solutions with them. The Taliban was not deceived by the slogans of democracy and elections and fake promises. This is a lesson for all oppressed people.”

Abu Marzouk and Haniyeh emphasize the contradiction between democracy and the vision of an Islamic state shared by both Hamas and the Taliban. Palestinian support for the Islamist rejection of the West in general and Israel in particular extends beyond Hamas. Palestinian public support for bin Laden and Al-Qaeda was on display in the Palestinian street celebrations in Gaza and the West Bank immediately following the 9/11 terror attacks. Professor Martin Kramer has noted that by the 1990s, Islamism came to play a leading role in the Iranian regime-led influence on the Palestinian “resistance.”

Following the August 2021 Taliban takeover, the Palestinian Authority also issued a statement that compared the U.S. withdrawal to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: “Israel must absorb the lesson—external protection does not bring security and peace to any country. The Israeli occupation of the Palestinian land will not last and will end.”

The P.A. statement rests on historical precedent. PLO founder Yasser Arafat launched the “al-Aqsa intifada” in summer 2000, following Israel’s overnight withdrawal from southern Lebanon two months earlier under pressure from Iran-backed Hezbollah. Hezbollah’s reaction, voiced by its secretary-general, Hassan Nasrallah, that “Israel ... is feeble than a spider’s web,” inspired the “secular” Sunni Arafat to ignite a jihad using the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem as a pretext, making it indistinguishable from other Islamist campaigns.

Similarly, PLO and P.A. leader Ahmed Qurei (Abu Ala) took note of the Hezbollah response in 2000: “Every Palestinian viewed the withdrawal as a strategic defeat of Israel,” which would be interpreted, in his words, as “kill Israelis, get territory.” Qurei emphasized that “if that is how Hezbollah got Israel to quit Lebanon, sooner or later it would result in Palestinian violence against Israel.”

The recent statements by Hamas and the P.A. in support of the Taliban should be understood in the context of the fundamentalist groups’ ideological rejection of America and Israel as infidels seeking to control the lands of Islam. Just as the Taliban routed America from Afghanistan, the PLO, the P.A. and Hamas aspire to expel Israel from all of “Arab Muslim Palestine.” In short, Palestinian-Taliban affinity is anchored in ideological rejection, not territorial conflict.

The Taliban, after a 20-year absence of control, has reemerged as the government of the pre-9/11 Islamic Emirate. Hamas, as the ruling government and military power in “Hamastan,” sees itself similarly.

In 2007, after Hamas's violent overthrow of the Western-backed P.A., Khaled Mashaal, head of the Hamas politburo, declared: "We shall never give up an inch of the fatherland, nor any of our rights, nor any part of our land.... We shall go the way of resistance, which is not a straight line, but means blows, clashes, one round after another, attacks and withdrawals. The course is to Palestine, to cleanse Jerusalem and al-Aqsa. This is our way against the occupation. Hamas was and always will be strong in jihad [holy war] and istish-had [suicide bombings]."

The Palestinian–Taliban–Al-Qaeda connection extends back decades. Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian scholar and cleric from a village near Jenin, is widely considered the "father of the global jihad," having served as a mentor to Osama bin Laden. Azzam laid the groundwork for the establishment of Al-Qaeda and the Pakistani jihadist group Lashkar-e-Taiba, which carried out the deadly attack in Mumbai, India, in 2008, killing 175 people. Azzam influenced some of the world's most prominent terrorist leaders, including Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and Anwar al-Awlaki, the U.S.-born operations commander of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

Azzam had traveled to Pakistan, Afghanistan and even the United States in the 1980s to recruit and train Arabs and other Muslims from around the world, including many Palestinians, to fight the "global jihad"—first against the Soviet Union and subsequently, the United States. These global jihad fighters would come to be known as the "Afghan alumni."

Sheikh Azzam is also considered to be an ideological father to Hamas. CIA and Middle East analyst Bruce Reidel has noted that Azzam helped draft Hamas's 1987 founding charter.

However, over the years, Hamas and Al-Qaeda have maintained an uneasy relationship, reflecting various ideological, strategic and operational differences.

In the years following the Sept. 11 attacks and parallel to the PLO-Hamas Al-Aqsa terror war, bin Laden continued to identify Israel as part of what he called the "Zionist-Crusader alliance." While Palestinian leaders expressed a certain dissatisfaction that Azzam had dedicated himself to global jihad at the expense of the Palestinian armed struggle, Israel remained the third objective of Al-Qaeda's global jihad, the other two being the American presence in Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Bin Laden said, "We will continue, God permitting, the fight against the Israelis and their allies ... and will not give up a single inch of Palestine as long as there is one true Muslim on Earth."

Palestinian support for bin Laden continued until his death in 2011. Hamas president Ismail Haniyeh condemned his killing by U.S. forces, declaring the operation "the continuation of the American oppression and shedding of blood of Muslims and Arabs," referring to bin Laden as "an Arab holy warrior."

American and Israeli flags being burned after the relocation of the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was announced. Credit: Tasnim News Agency.

The Palestinian legal assault on U.S. operations in Afghanistan

While Hamas's ideological affinity with the Taliban reflects Islamic teachings, international, PLO-affiliated "human rights" organizations have used other means over the years to undermine the American mission in Afghanistan.

For example, Palestinian operatives, disguising their affiliations via various non-governmental organizations, appealed to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in a strategic effort to undermine the U.S. military's fight against the Taliban and their Al-Qaeda affiliates.

Beginning in April 2017, Palestinian activists—executive members of two international NGOs: the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR)—submitted complaints to the ICC charging U.S. military forces in Afghanistan and the CIA with "war crimes" and "crimes against humanity."

This was part of a strategic, political and legal warfare initiative by FIDH and CCR. These "human rights activists" were also found to be members of several PLO terror-affiliated NGOs—al-Haq, al-Dameer, al-Mazan and the Palestinian Center for Human Rights—that launched simultaneous legal assaults against the United States and Israel. By November 2017, the ICC prosecutor had requested the opening of an investigation against U.S. military forces.

The Palestinian submissions were made by several front organizations, whose executives included Shawan Jabarin, director of

the PFLP terror group affiliate al-Haq. Jabarin was referred to as "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" by Israel's Supreme Court, in line with his past terror and political warfare activities. Jabarin also serves as secretary-general of the anti-American FIDH, which submitted the complaint against the United States to the ICC.

Palestinian sympathy and support for the Taliban have far-reaching implications for the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. The Islamists, according to their own understanding, have humiliated the Americans, making it impossible for the P.A. to agree to any U.S. peace proposal that would require any Palestinian concessions.

If the PLO's ruling Fatah faction were to align with moderate Arab regimes that oppose Hamas- and Taliban-style Islamism and that have signed peace agreements with Israel, they would be perceived by the Palestinian public as weak, pro-Zionist and pro-American. In contrast, Hamas takes credit and garners Palestinian public support for emulating the Taliban in fighting to shake off its Western occupier.

Hamas's support for the Taliban also renders the P.A.'s relative silence on the issue noteworthy. The P.A. cannot publicly oppose the Taliban Islamists, since Hamas has become a more popular competitor for Palestinian public support in Gaza and the West Bank and has proven to be a more successful alternative as a "liberation movement." The PLO-P.A. has also branded itself as an organization that supports mukawama—"resistance," which precludes it from negotiating with Israel.

Inadvertently, the U.S. administration has tied the hands of the P.A., since the Taliban's takeover and the U.S. withdrawal have legitimized and empowered Hamas as the new standard for "resistance" against Israel's existence as a democratic, Jewish-majority state in any borders.

There are important lessons from the U.S. experience in Afghanistan that can be applied to the Palestinian issue. As analyst Lee Smith notes, in 2013, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry invited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on a secret visit to Afghanistan to show him that the "model the United States employed for Afghanistan would work for the Palestinians, too." Smith writes that "Netanyahu declined the invitation and correctly surmised that as soon as the United States withdrew forces, Afghanistan would come under the control of the Taliban. And the West Bank would also fall to an Islamist regime if Washington imposed the Afghanistan model there, too."

Netanyahu's prognosis notwithstanding, Kerry's assessment provides a teachable moment. But it is one that proves the opposite of what he had intended. Afghanistan under the Taliban serves as an excellent model for the Palestinian cause. Hamas's model of armed "resistance," now reenergized by the Taliban's reemergence and success, has placed a concrete barrier across the path of local legitimacy and international negotiations of the Fatah-ruled Palestinian Authority.

(JNS/Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs Sep 6)

Bennett's Voters Face Bennett's Diplomacy By Caroline Glick

The four farmers of Arugot Farm, located on the eastern side of the Gush Etzion settlement bloc, were tense last Monday morning. They had just gotten word that the next day, 100 soldiers were set to storm their farm and uproot their vineyard, planted six years ago in memory of Ezra Schwartz.

Ezra, 18, of Sharon, Massachusetts, was one of three people killed when a Palestinian terrorist opened fire at vehicles stuck in a traffic jam at Gush Etzion junction in 2015. Five of Ezra's friends from yeshiva were wounded in the attack, which occurred just a few dozen meters from where Naftali Frankel, Gil-Ad Shaer and Eyal Yifrach were kidnapped and murdered the previous summer. Their abduction and execution set off a chain of events that led to the 2014 summer war with the Hamas regime in Gaza.

Ezra and his friends had been on their way to help build the Oz V'Gaon nature preserve on the eastern side of the junction. Oz V'Gaon is located not far from where the three teens' bodies were found, and was built in their memory.

Local officials had asked the farmers to build Arugot Farm. It is located on state lands the Jewish National Fund had been unable to maintain. Around 20 years ago, the JNF planted 10,000 trees on the site to protect it from Palestinian land grabs. But in the space of a few hours, Palestinian villagers uprooted all of the trees. The four farmers

and their families moved in seven years ago. Together they cultivate and protect some 40 acres of state land.

In 2008, then-Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad unveiled a strategy to seize the lands of Area C, with the goal of choking Israeli communities, blocking their development and transferring control over strategic lands to the P.A. Since then, with lavish funding from the European Union, thousands of acres of state land have been seized by the Palestinians. Illegal settlements have sprung up by the dozens, and major traffic arteries and access roads to Israeli communities have turned into gauntlets. In an interview with Maariv last week, Kobi Eliraz, who served as an adviser on Area C to three defense ministers, estimated that as a result of the land grabs, Israel today controls at best 40 percent of Judea and Samaria.

At the farm on Monday, Ari Abramowitz explained the significance of Arugot Farm and the vineyard in the context of the Palestinian land-grab war.

“Our location is the last line of state lands in eastern Gush Etzion. A kilometer to our east is already P.A.-controlled territory. There are thousands of areas where Palestinians have seized control over state lands. Nature preserves are being destroyed and are disappearing. The Civil Administration isn’t doing anything to stop this. But our little vineyard, where we’ve invested hundreds of thousands of shekels of our savings and spent hundreds of hours cultivating, this is what they insist on uprooting.”

Palestinian land seizures are impossible to miss. On the road to the farm, the Palestinians have set up a half-dozen illegal quarries, destroying the biblical landscape and enveloping the three Israeli communities in the vicinity—Ma’ale Amos, Ivey Nahal and Arugot Farm.

“We built the vineyard on survey land,” explained Jeremy Gimpel.

“Survey land” is land the ownership status of which is unknown. When land is delineated “survey,” the Civil Administration is supposed to survey ownership claims. If it can find no credible claims, survey lands are redesignated state lands.

“We chose this spot because of its strategic importance for continued Israeli control of the area. It connects the Arugot Farm, Ivey Nahal and Ma’aleh Amos. The Palestinians want to isolate us from one another by cutting off the contiguity of Israeli control,” said Gimpel.

“The military order to destroy this vineyard is particularly grating because just around the time we planted the vineyard, Palestinians planted an olive grove on survey land on the other side of this mountain. No one is giving them a destruction order,” he added.

A local government official explained that the destruction order for the vineyard is part of a new policy being enacted by the Bennett-Lapid government.

“Since this government came into office, land policies in Judea and Samaria have changed. Until now, although the Civil Administration didn’t fight Palestinian land grabs, it tried to expedite the surveys of survey lands and redesignate them as state lands. That has stopped. Now the policy is to not survey ownership of survey lands and instead treat them as if they belong to Palestinians, even when no one has claimed ownership,” the official said.

The way things are going, the farmers say, the IDF will uproot their vines and the next day, the E.U. will buy vines for Palestinians who will come in and plant them. The Civil Administration will sit on its hands and the land will be lost.

Destruction orders like the one for Arugot Farm’s vineyard is just one way the Bennett-Lapid government is engaging in a diplomatic process towards establishing a hostile Palestinian state in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem.

Although Prime Minister Naftali Bennett entered politics eight years ago brandishing a plan to apply Israeli law to all of Area C, today he is conceding Area C to the Palestinians without a fight.

Bennett’s policies are even more radical than those advanced by leftist leaders like Ehud Barak, Ehud Olmert and Tzipi Livni. Their peace plans all envisioned Israel retaining control over the so-called “settlement blocs” in a final peace deal with the Palestinians. But the Bennett government is making moves on the ground that will break up Gush Etzion—the settlement bloc most deeply rooted in Israel’s political consensus, even on the left.

Alon Shvut and Rosh Tzurim are sister communities located in central Gush Etzion, about 15 minutes from Arugot Farm. Central Gush Etzion is Bennett country. Whereas Bennett’s Yamina Party received only 5 percent of the vote nationwide, it dominates in Gush Etzion. Yamina won 54 percent of the vote in Rosh Tzurim and 40

percent in Alon Shvut.

Along the boundary between Alon Shvut and Rosh Tzurim is a small cluster of 40 Arab houses that goes by the name Hirbat Zechariya. At its upcoming meeting, the Civil Administration’s planning committee is scheduled to approve a building plan that will add 50 new homes to the cluster. The new buildings would be constructed in the vineyards adjacent to Hirbat Zechariya.

A local official relayed that the expansion of Hirbat Zechariya is being financed by the French government, which spent 1.25 million euros on the building scheme.

The goal of expanding Hirbat Zechariya is straightforward. The vineyards where the new housing units are to be constructed are the walking paths that connect Alon Shvut and Rosh Tzurim with all the villages in central Gush Etzion—Kfar Etzion, Elazar, Bat Ayin, Neve Daniel and Efrat. If the paths become a Palestinian settlement, the communities of central Gush Etzion will be cut off from one another.

Local residents attest that they have spoken with Bennett’s partner, Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked, about the issue and asked for her help. Her reply, they say, is “Talk to Benny.”

That is, she referred them to Defense Minister Benny Gantz, claiming she had no influence on the issue. Notably, the same story has been repeated by concerned residents all over Judea and Samaria. They have called Shaked, formerly one of the champions of the communities in Judea and Samaria, asking for help. She has pleaded powerlessness and told them, “Speak to Benny,” as if he was the politician they voted for.

After Bennett broke with the right to form his government with the left and the Muslim Brotherhood’s Ra’am Party, he soothed the fears of his voters in Judea and Samaria by telling them that there would be no “diplomatic process” with the Palestinians and that his government’s policies in Judea and Samaria would be limited to the “here and now,” and would not impact the long-term political or territorial end-state. Unfortunately, both of his claims were untrue.

The diplomatic process is taking place on three levels. On the ground, Bennett’s government is informally, but in most cases irrevocably transferring control over Area C to the Palestinians, while transforming Israeli communities—including the ones everyone wants to maintain in perpetuity—into islands surrounded by Palestinian-controlled areas.

In the international arena Bennett, Gantz and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid are meeting with foreign leaders—U.S. President Joe Biden, E.U. foreign ministers as well as Arab leaders—and agreeing to multiple demands for Israeli concessions on everything from sovereignty over Jerusalem, to the release of terrorists from prisons, to renewed funding and equipping of the Hamas regime in Gaza and the P.A. regime in Judea and Samaria.

In his meeting last week with P.A. leader Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah, Gantz agreed to sidestep Israel’s law requiring the government to withhold funding from the P.A. so long as it continues to pay salaries to terrorists. More than 6 percent of the P.A.’s operating budget is spent on payments to terrorists and their families. By calling the NIS 500 million (\$156 million) Israel is set to transfer a loan, Gantz avoided the legal restrictions. He also effectively killed Israel’s long-standing demand that the Palestinians stop waging war against Israel. His move—which Bennett approved—constituted an abandonment of Israel’s core demand that the P.A. and any future Palestinian entity abjure terror and live at peace with Israel.

To date, the government has refused to reject the Biden administration’s request to open a consulate in Jerusalem to serve the P.A. If it permits the consulate to open, dozens of other states will follow—opening consulates to a hostile, terror-funding P.A. in Israel’s capital. So by failing to reject Biden’s request, the Bennett-Lapid government is effectively agreeing to divide Israel’s capital behind the public’s back.

On Thursday, Abbas attended a summit in Cairo with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Jordan’s King Abdullah. The meeting’s declared purpose was for the leaders to agree on a unified negotiating position with Israel. El-Sisi will communicate that position to Bennett when Bennett meets him in Cairo this week.

On Monday afternoon, the Civil Administration delayed the order to uproot Arugot Farm’s vineyard until next month. While relieved by the news, the four farmers had little reason to rejoice. Unless something radical changes, Bennett’s diplomatic process is coming for Gush Etzion. (JNS Sep 5)