

GUEST ESSAY

We Are Israelis Calling on Congress to Disinvite Netanyahu

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The leaders of the U.S. Congress have invited Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel to address a joint meeting of the Senate and the House of Representatives on July 24. Normally, we Israelis would consider the invitation recognition of our two nations' shared values and a welcome gesture from our closest friend and ally, to whom we are deeply and morally indebted.

But Congress has made a terrible mistake. Mr. Netanyahu's appearance in Washington will not represent the State of Israel and its citizens, and it will reward his scandalous and destructive conduct toward our country.

We come from a variety of areas of Israeli society: science, technology, politics, defense, law and culture. We are thus in a good position to assess the overall effect of Mr. Netanyahu's government, and like many, we believe that he is

driving Israel downhill at an alarming speed, to the extent that we may eventually lose the country we love.

To date, Mr. Netanyahu has failed to come up with a plan to end the war in Gaza and has been unable to gain the freedom of scores of hostages. At the very least, an invitation to address Congress should have been contingent upon resolving these two issues and, in addition, calling for new elections in Israel.

Inviting Mr. Netanyahu will reward his contempt for U.S. efforts to establish a peace plan, allow more aid to the beleaguered people of Gaza and do a better job of sparing civilians. Time and again, he has rejected President Biden's plan to remove Hamas from power in Gaza through the establishment of a peacekeeping force. Such a move would very likely bring in its wake a far broader regional alliance, including a vision to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is not only in Israel's interest but also in the interest of both political parties in the United States. Mr. Netanyahu constitutes the main obstacle to these outcomes.

The man who will address Congress next month has failed to assume responsibility for the blunders that allowed the Hamas assault, initially blaming security chiefs (then quickly backtracking), and has yet to announce the establishment of a direly needed state commission of inquiry headed by a Supreme Court judge to look into the fiasco.

Despite the fierce fighting in Gaza and daily casualties on both sides, following Hamas's terrible attacks on Oct. 7, Mr. Netanyahu continues to push forward with the authoritarian remaking of Israel as if nothing has changed. The Israeli police force, under the command of the far-right-wing security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, has cracked down violently on demonstrators. The appointments of court judges and a Supreme Court president remain on hold. Central scientific and cultural institutions continue to endure governmental attempts at political control. Large sums of money have been channeled recklessly to the ultra-Orthodox, who by and large do not share the economic and security burden of Israel's citizens, especially by remaining exempt from serving in the military.

Tuesday's Supreme Court ruling overturning the exemption is a step forward, although the practical impact is unclear, given that Mr. Netanyahu has proposed enshrining the exemption in a law.

Above all, many Israelis are convinced that Mr. Netanyahu has obstructed proposed deals with Hamas that would have led to the release of the hostages in order to keep the war going and thus avoid the inevitable political reckoning he will face when it ends.

Mr. Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, the finance minister, whose support Mr. Netanyahu needs to maintain his government, are strongly opposed to stopping the war in Gaza, even for a temporary truce. They demand that the Gaza Strip be conquered and filled with new settlements.

For months now, many of us have participated in nationwide demonstrations demanding an immediate release of the hostages, an end to the war and immediate elections. Polls of Israelis show that a majority want immediate elections, or elections right at the end of the war.

A large portion of Israelis have lost faith in Mr. Netanyahu's government. He is clinging to power thanks to a tenuous parliamentary majority. That majority ignores the plight of tens of thousands of Israelis displaced in the south after the Hamas attack and in the north because of attacks by Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the families of the hostages, a powerful force now in Israel.

That's where Mr. Netanyahu's speech to Congress fits in with his political needs. No doubt it will be carefully stage-managed to prop up his shaky hold on power and allow him to boast to his constituents about America's so-called support for his failed policies.

His supporters in Israel will be emboldened by his appearance in Congress to insist that the war continue, which will further distance any deal to secure the release of the hostages, including several U.S. citizens.

Giving Mr. Netanyahu the stage in Washington will all but dismiss the rage and pain of his people, as expressed in the demonstrations throughout the country. American lawmakers should not let that happen. They should ask Mr. Netanyahu to stay home.

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