

## Biden's Meeting With Israeli Leader Delayed After Kabul Attack

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's meeting with President Biden, originally scheduled for Thursday morning, was postponed after attacks that killed American service members in Afghanistan.



By Annie Karni

Published Aug. 26, 2021 Updated Oct. 27, 2021

WASHINGTON — When Prime Minister Naftali Bennett of Israel was scheduled to meet President Biden at the White House on Thursday, the two new leaders had aimed to reset relations between their countries and reinforce a bond that has showed signs of strain.

But their first meeting was postponed Thursday after two deadly blasts outside the airport in Kabul, Afghanistan, where officials said there were dozens injured or dead, including at least 12 U.S. service members who were killed.

The meeting, originally scheduled for Thursday morning, was delayed and then rescheduled for Friday as Mr. Biden remained in the Situation Room meeting all morning with his top national security advisers and the Pentagon held a briefing with Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., commander of U.S. Central Command.

“On behalf of the people of Israel, I share our deep sadness over the loss of American lives in Kabul,” Mr. Bennett said in a statement Thursday. “Israel stands with the United States in these difficult times, just as America has always stood with us. Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of the United States.”

The schedule change means that Mr. Bennett, an Orthodox Jew who does not travel on the Sabbath for religious reasons, will extend his trip to Washington until after the Sabbath on Saturday night.

Mr. Bennett, who arrived in Washington Tuesday night, earlier in the week met with Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III and Jake Sullivan, the national security adviser.

Mr. Biden, who called Mr. Bennett to congratulate him less than two hours after his swearing-in two months ago, has tried to send a clear signal that the United States supports his new, diverse, coalition government.

Mr. Bennett has said that he wants his administration to be known as the “good-will government,” and that he wants to take a softer tone toward the United States than did his longtime predecessor, Benjamin Netanyahu, who often clashed with Democratic leaders.

But for all the conciliatory style, the challenge may be the substance. Mr. Biden and Mr. Bennett, who have never met before, have vastly different views of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and of efforts to restore the Iran nuclear deal.

Mr. Bennett has made clear that there will not be an independent Palestinian state while he is the head of his government. The Biden administration, in contrast, has expressed a deep commitment to a two-state solution that, by definition, includes an independent Palestinian state.

**Sign Up for On Politics** A guide to the political news cycle, cutting through the spin and delivering clarity from the chaos. [Get it sent to your inbox.](#)

Mr. Bennett also opposes the United States' re-entry into the Iran agreement, which the Biden administration is exploring.

“These are two very central issues in the U.S.-Israel relationship on which there are radically different points of view,” said Jeremy Ben-Ami, the president of J Street, a liberal pro-Israel advocacy group. “The tone and the atmosphere cannot substitute for the fact that there is a fundamental difference in view on the core issues at stake in the U.S.-Israel relationship.”

In a recent interview with The New York Times, Mr. Bennett said he would expand West Bank settlements, a move Mr. Biden opposes. And he declined to back American plans to reopen a consulate for Palestinians in Jerusalem.

Still, he made clear that he wanted the meeting to show that the relationship with the United States was on more solid ground, even if some of his policies are similar to those of Mr. Netanyahu.

“There’s a new dimension here — coming up with new ways to address problems, being very realistic, very pragmatic, and being reasonable with friends,” Mr. Bennett said.

His visit comes as Mr. Biden is navigating the biggest foreign policy crisis of his young presidency, trying to evacuate all Americans and Afghan allies from Afghanistan before his Aug. 31 deadline for a withdrawal of U.S. troops from the country after 20 years of war.

At home, Mr. Biden is dealing with crosscurrents over Israel in his own party, as an energized progressive wing and a quiet shift among more mainstream Democrats have led many lawmakers to take a more skeptical approach toward the longtime ally.

Mr. Bennett is also the rare international leader that Mr. Biden, a former chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, shares no history with, a distinction that sets Mr. Bennett apart even from some of his neighbors. Last month, when King Abdullah II of Jordan became the first Arab head of state to visit the White House since Mr. Biden took office, the president called him a “loyal and decent friend” and noted, “We’ve been hanging out together for a long time.”