

Israel's democracy fight: Why Biden is getting off the sidelines

By [Howard LaFranchi](#) Staff writer / March 23, 2023 | WASHINGTON

For weeks at the outset of the year, White House officials hinted that President Joe Biden would soon welcome Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – newly returned to power – to the Oval Office for the traditional reaffirmation of “unbreakable” U.S.-Israel ties.

Then ... nothing.

As recently as Monday, following Mr. Biden's Sunday phone call with Mr. Netanyahu, the White House spokesperson for strategic communications, John Kirby, told Israeli TV Channel 13 there was no invitation and no “timetable” for the Israeli leader's visit.

What shifted the White House from “invite” to “no invite” was an unprecedented and unflagging explosion of public opposition in Israel to the Netanyahu government's proposed judicial reforms – an overhaul critics say would gut any semblance of separation of powers, place Israel on a slippery path to authoritarian rule, and ultimately threaten its cohesion and national security.

[...]

“There are more and more indications that normalization between Israel and the Arab countries is facing immense challenges, [while] Israel is gradually losing the support of its good friends in the U.S. and Europe,” says **Shira Efron**, director of policy research at Washington's Israel Policy Forum and a senior fellow at the **Institute for National Security Studies** in Tel Aviv. Indeed, Gulf Arab leaders who have recently established diplomatic ties to Israel have warned that including the far right in the government will harm relations.

Israel's security concerns and relations with key partners deserve “the full attention of a savvy and experienced national security cabinet,” Ms. **Efron** says. Instead, “the cabinet includes ministers with zero national security experience,” she adds, with their attention focused domestically “on undermining the court and building the infrastructure for exonerating corrupt politicians.”

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