

Children as political props

Children, by virtue of their age, inexperience and vulnerabilities, are protected by law and custom from exploitation. Except in extraordinary circumstances, parents have the right to have the last word on how the world interacts with their children. That includes children being used for political ends — or it should.

The Frisch School, a Jewish high school in New Jersey, provided a test case. News surfaced last week that Rabbi David Sher, the school's director of Israel education and advocacy, sent an email to students urging those believing "that the president made the right decision" on recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and ordering the eventual relocation there of the U.S. Embassy to send letters to President Donald Trump expressing their thanks. He even provided a template for the students to cut and paste. "Just remember to sign your name on the bottom," students were told.

The email noted the letter writing was a project of NORPAC, a rightward leaning, pro-Israel political action committee.

Frisch is the alma mater of Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, an adviser to the president on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Jason Greenblatt, Trump's Middle East envoy, had children who graduated from the school last year. But, as is the case more broadly, Trump is not universally popular at the school.

There is something disturbing about the orchestrated letter-writing campaign. Apparently some parents thought so too, and complained to the school's principal, Rabbi Eli Ciner. He issued a clarification, saying the letter writing was purely voluntary. But he opened another can of worms by adding, "We often write to our political leaders if we agree, or disagree, with their decisions." According to Haaretz, some parents disagreed, pointing out that "students had not been encouraged to write letters protesting recent racist remarks allegedly made by the president," as just one example.

The Haaretz article has drawn criticism over how reporter Judy Maltz obtained information. Critics complained that Maltz drew some of her information from a private Facebook group.

Jason Shames, chief executive officer of the Paramus-based Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey, said the school was "unfairly targeted."

We're not so sure. The fact is that Frisch encouraged its students to take a position on a sensitive political issue without notice to their parents, and certainly without their express consent. That's not the right way to do things — even if the school's intentions were honorable. But Frisch is not the only guilty party. Jewish schools across the country are increasingly using kids for political advocacy and sometimes only notifying parents after the fact.

Whether it's hosting a state legislator to offer thanks for tuition-funding legislation, busing kids to a state capitol to express their gratitude, taking them to a rally for a photo-op holding signs, or encouraging a politically motivated letter-writing campaign, administrators need to be careful — even if their hearts are in the right place. Children should never be used as political props without their parents' consent. ■

You call that a peace plan?

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has never fully accepted the reality of a Jewish state. So his harangue last week at the Palestinian Central Council was not a big surprise. But the vitriolic character of his statements was striking. Now we may know why. According to reports, Abbas was reacting to

Valley. There would be land swaps, but not based on the 1967 lines, and no Israeli settlements would be evacuated. On Jerusalem, Israel would have a veto on the city's final status, which would be negotiated later. The Palestinian refugee issue would not be addressed.

Hardly the deal of the century. A

compound things, the administration announced it was withholding \$65 million out of a \$125 million for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees. While each of these moves can be justified individually, taken together the administration seems to be moving away from creating an environment conducive to peacemaking.

Accurate or not, the plan's details are being taken seriously. Many Israel supporters recoiled when President Obama called for borders based on the 1967 lines, but he was just restating longtime U.S. and U.N. positions. But blessing settlement growth, not only along the Green Line in the settlement blocs, but also in the heart of the West Bank, is not a continuation of current U.S. policy. Indeed, that free-wheeling approach threatens to render Israel as a binational state with a large, restive minority that has its own ideas about self-determination — ideas that are not even acknowledged in the leaked plan details.

We hope this is not the outline of a Trump peace plan. If it is, we are all in for a very rough ride. ■

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details of the not-yet-released U.S. peace plan, which unceremoniously cements the status quo. Abbas called it "the slap in the face of the century," but you don't have to be a rabid Palestinian supporter to react with alarm at what seems to be under consideration.

If there is new thinking in the reported plan, being written by Trump's son-in-law and Mideast adviser Jared Kushner, it is that Palestinian demands for a state and for dignity should be brushed aside. They would be offered, instead, something akin to a "state lite." Israel would retain control over security and maintain a permanent presence in the Jordan

senior White House official countered the reports, telling reporters that Abbas had not seen the plan. "It is unfortunate that the Palestinian leadership is seeking to prejudice people against our unfinished plan, which they have not seen," the senior official said. "We will present proposals directly to the Israelis and the Palestinians at the appropriate time and under the right conditions."

It's hard to know what the Trump administration believes to be the right conditions. With its recent announcement regarding Jerusalem, the United States has lost some of its claim to be functioning as an honest broker. To

Letters

Here's what's missing from evangelical survey

What about support for U.S. Jews ("Support for Israel among young evangelicals is solid but slipping, says new survey," Jan. 18)?

I understand the obvious interest among many regular readers of Washington Jewish Week about how key non-Jewish groups regard the state of Israel and Jews there. I too am a regular reader, and what concerns me are various stories that document increasing signs of anti-Semitism and lesser forms of antipathy toward the free practice of religion and identity by the young adults in our community.

I am disturbed that this issue was seemingly ignored in the description of the survey undertaken by the Chosen People Ministries. How are we to make sense of the finding that 58 percent of millennials view the Jewish state positively in the 2,000 respondent survey when, for all we know, their interest in Jews is only for conversion's sake?

How informed were these respondents about salient issues in the Middle East?

Why give Christians United for Israel a platform for disseminating thoughts about how to promote pro-Israel sentiment among evangelicals without evidence of how they regard Jewish millennials and institutions? Am I missing something?

NORM HALL
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Other Holocaust survivors authored works in Polish

In the obituary tribute to Aharon Appelfeld, Thane Rosenbaum emphasized this: "Along with Elie Wiesel and Imre Kertesz, Appelfeld was among the few writers who survived the Holocaust, wrote about the experience and didn't end his life by suicide [while] each of the others — [Paul] Celan, Primo Levi, Jerzy Kosinski, Piotr Rawicz, Jean Amery, Tadeusz Borowski and even Bruno Bettelheim — did." He added: "The only one to live and write in Israel, however, was Appelfeld" ("Novelist Appelfeld's feverish reimagination," Jan. 11).

I find it necessary to include among the outstanding writers who survived the Holocaust but not the post-traumatic stress syndrome Bogdan Wojdowski, the author of a masterpiece-novel on the

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