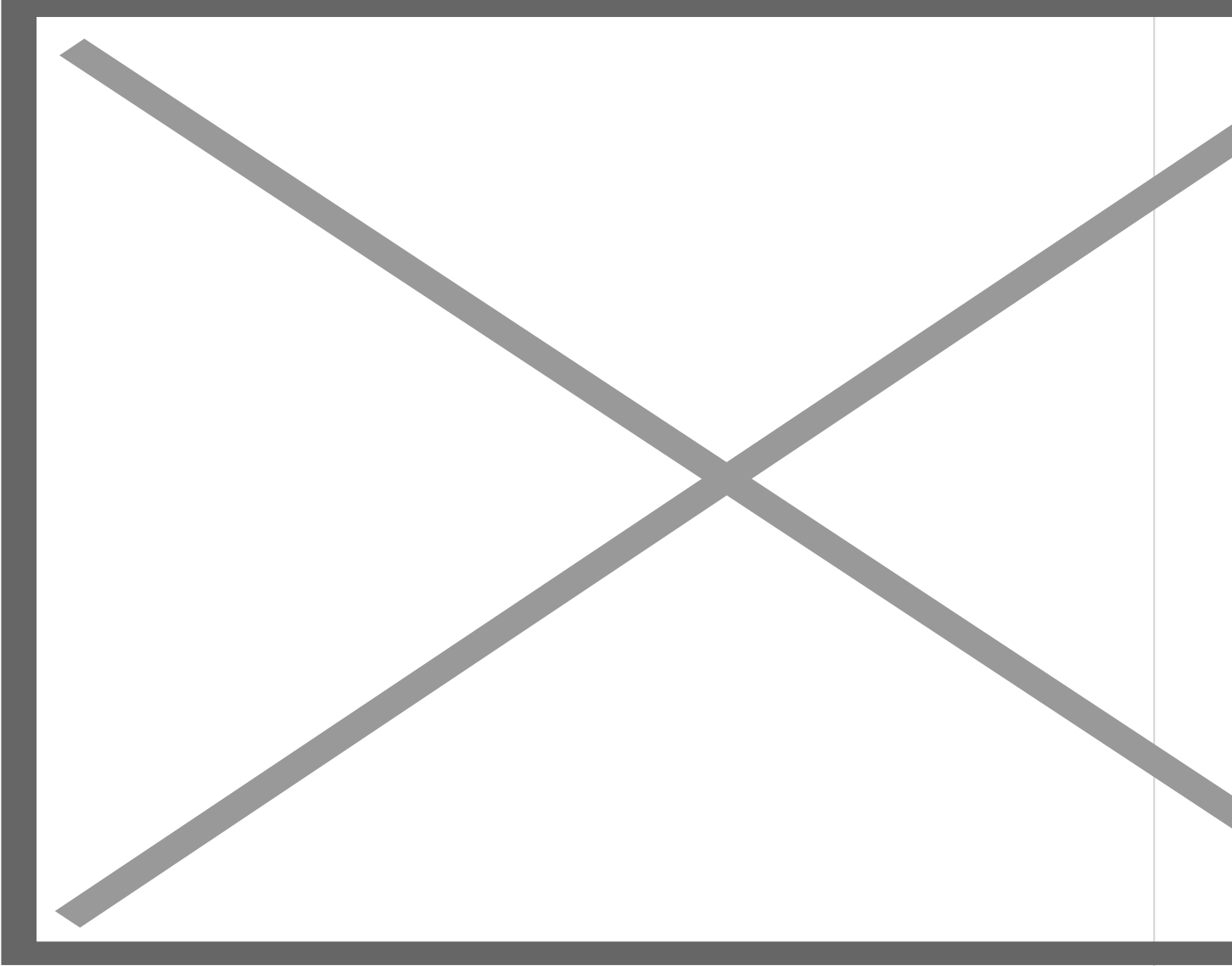


Palestinians slam Israeli comments on U.S. consulate in Jerusalem

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The US consulate, which served Palestinians from the occupied territories of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, was closed by the Trump administration in 2018 [File: Ahmad Gharabli/AFP]

Ramallah, November 8 (RHC)-- The Palestinian Authority has slammed Israel for rejecting the promised reopening of the U.S. consulate in occupied East Jerusalem, a move that would restore Washington's main diplomatic mission for the Palestinians in the contested city.

The Trump administration shuttered the U.S. Jerusalem consulate, an office that for years served as the de facto embassy to the Palestinians. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has pledged to reopen it, a move that Israel says would challenge its sovereignty over the city. The reopening could help mend U.S. ties with the Palestinian leadership, which ruptured under Trump.

In a statement on Sunday, the Palestinian Foreign Ministry said it views the reopening of the consulate as part of the international community's commitments to ending Israel's decades-long occupation of territories the Palestinians seek for their future state.

"East Jerusalem is an inseparable part of the occupied Palestinian territory and is the capital of the state of Palestine. Israel, as the occupying power, does not have the right to veto the US administration's decision," the statement said.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said on Saturday there was "no room" in Jerusalem for the mission. "There's no room for another American consulate in Jerusalem," he said. "Jerusalem is the capital of one state and that's the state of Israel."

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid suggested the consulate could instead be opened in the Palestinian administrative centre in Ramallah, the occupied West Bank.

On Saturday, the spokesman of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas rejected Lapid's comments. "We will only accept a U.S. consulate in Jerusalem, the capital of the Palestinian state. That was what the US administration had announced and had committed itself to doing," Nabil Abu Rudeineh told Reuters news agency.

The Palestinian Authority wants East Jerusalem as the capital of a future state. Israel, which captured East Jerusalem in 1967 and later annexed it in a move that the majority of the international community did not recognise, calls Jerusalem its indivisible capital.

Seeking to repair ties with Palestinians, the Biden administration has said it would reopen the consulate. The consulate is emerging as another test between Bennett's government and the Biden administration, which has moved to restore traditional U.S. foreign policy towards Israel and the Palestinians after the Trump White House largely sided with Israel on issues related to the conflict.

Trump had downgraded the consulate's operations and placed them under his ambassador to Israel when he moved the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 2018. The embassy move infuriated the Palestinians and led them to sever most ties with the Trump administration.

Blinken has not provided a firm date for the reopening of the consulate and US officials have implied that Israeli resistance to the move could act as a hindrance.



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