

U.S. ambassador to Israel pictured with controversial image of Jerusalem Third Temple replacing Muslim mosque - U.S. News

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U.S. Ambassador to Israel [David Friedman](#) was photographed Tuesday receiving an aerial image of Jerusalem bearing a simulation of the Third Temple instead of the [Al-Aqsa mosque](#) and the Dome of the Rock.

First reported on the ultra-Orthodox news site Kikar Hashabat, the photo of Friedman receiving the poster was taken during a tour of Bnei Brak held by the Achiya organization, which aids children who suffer from learning disabilities.

It was unclear at the time whether Friedman noticed that the image was doctored and whether he was endorsing it or not. A U.S. Embassy official told Haaretz they have demanded an apology from the organization "for allowing one of their staff to present this controversial image to the ambassador during the visit."

A statement issued by the embassy later said that Friedman "was not aware of the image thrust in front of him when the photo was taken. He was deeply disappointed that anyone would take advantage of his visit to Bnei Brak to create controversy."

"The U.S. policy is absolutely clear: we support the status quo on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount," the statement concluded.

Achiya has issued an apology to Friedman and the embassy, saying a staff member on its behalf presented the picture to the ambassador, who was unaware of its content.

"We wish to thank the ambassador Mr. David Friedman and the staff members for their professionalism and courtesy... regretfully the entire event was marred by a cheap political act, the responsible staff member was identified and apologizes and we will deal with the matter internally in the organization," said the statement.

Lawmaker Ahmad Tibi (Joint List) responded to the photo by saying: "And this madman wants to bring peace. Good thing you didn't put the embassy there!"

The [U.S. officially opened its embassy in Jerusalem](#) on May 14 amid clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians at the Gaza border that [killed dozens of protesters](#) and wounded hundreds more.

David Friedman has been a controversial figure in the U.S.-Israel-Palestinian Authority axis. Known for his support of the settlements, [Friedman headed a group](#) that has raised tens of millions of dollars for Beit El, one of the most radical settlements in the West Bank.

The U.S. State Department has in the past [publicly distanced itself](#) from comments made by Friedman, clarifying that his words do not signal a shift in U.S. policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In January, the State Department reiterated that it has "[not changed](#)" its position regarding the status of the West Bank as occupied territory, following a report published saying that Friedman pressured the department to stop using that term.

In early September, Friedman said in an [interview to the Jerusalem Post](#) that the Israeli left-wing is opposing the "alleged occupation" of the West Bank. Later that month [he caused similar controversy](#) when he told an Israeli news outlet that Israel is "only occupying 2 percent of the West Bank," and that it was "always the expectation" that Israel would expand into the area it conquered after the Six Day War in 1967.