Politician who called herself 'mother of the politically incorrect' offered Israel's top diplomatic post in NYC

By Ben Sales April 20, 2023

May Golan, left, pictured last year with far-right lawmaker Itamar Ben-Gvir. (Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

(JTA) — She once said that she was "proud to be racist" and has called herself the "mother of the politically incorrect." She once had a video removed from TikTok for inappropriate speech. And she may be Israel's next top diplomat in New York City.

May Golan, an Israeli government minister and ally of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has been offered Israel's consul general job in New York, a coveted position that is the country's highest post in the largest city in the United States, according to Israeli press reports. Golan would replace Asaf Zamir, a centrist politician who resigned last month in protest of Netanyahu's proposed judicial overhaul, which would sap much of the power of the Israeli Supreme Court.

Golan, 36, has long been a vociferous advocate for curbing the court's power and is one of the most outspoken right-wing voices in Israel's parliament, the Knesset. Speculation that Netanyahu sought to ship Golan to New York to remove a firebrand supporter of the judicial overhaul from the Knesset prompted a denial from his Likud Party.

"The offer was made to Golan because of her excellent public diplomacy skills in English," the Likud statement said, according to Haaretz. "Contrary to some claims, the offer has nothing to do with Justice Minister Levin," the architect of the overhaul. Golan does not appear to have commented publicly on the offer as of Wednesday night.

This week, according to her social media, Golan was in New York, where she posted a video criticizing a Holocaust exhibit at the United Nations. She also visited the grave of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the late leader of the Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic movement, and posted a photo of herself posing next to his headstone.

Golan first made her name as an activist in her home neighborhood of south Tel Aviv, where she was a leader of a movement against the city's population of African asylum seekers, whom she has repeatedly accused of crimes including rape. She has said the neighborhood is "occupied" by asylum seekers and has sought to pass a law allowing Israel to expel them from the country. (She says her "racist" comment, made about a decade ago, was taken out of context and was meant to demonstrate how her opponents misuse the term. She has also identified as a target of racism because she is Mizrahi, or a Jew of Middle Eastern descent.)

In 2016, she went on Fox News to advocate against the African asylum seekers she termed "Muslim infiltrators" in Israel and to support the immigration policy of then-U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump.

"The word 'racist' has just lost all meaning to me," Golan said on Sean Hannity's talk show. "I can see here what's going on with Donald Trump. They're calling him racist just for wanting to protect the borders of his country. Well, this is the same thing in Israel. I think I, and the rest of the people of Israel, have the right to protect their homes, and its borders."

Golan first ran for Knesset in 2013 with the defunct far-right Otzma L'Yisrael, or Power for Israel, party. She entered Knesset in 2019 as a member of Netanyahu's Likud Party and became a minister without a

specific portfolio in the current right-wing coalition. Last year, when she was a member of the parliamentary opposition, the video platform TikTok removed a video of a speech of hers in which she blamed the Israeli Supreme Court's decisions for the rape of a 22-year-old woman in Tel Aviv.

In that speech, she called the Supreme Court "the most dangerous dictatorship that there is in this fake democracy that we live in" and added, "Because of you, there won't be a Jewish state here."