

Undisguised Fascists Hold Balance of Power in New Israeli Annexationist Regime

By [Richard Becker](#)

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Agreement on a new Israeli government — a coalition of extreme rightwingers, religious bigots and outright fascists – was announced on Dec. 21. Binyamin Netanyahu will return once again as prime minister. Two open fascists, Itamar Ben-Gvir and Belazel Smotrich, will hold key posts dealing with the West Bank and the occupied Palestinian population, and indeed, hold the balance of power in the new ruling cabinet.

A document issued by Netanyahu on Dec. 28 states that the new government's first priority is to "advance and develop settlement in all parts of Israel — in the Galilee, the Negev Desert, the Golan Heights and Judea and Samaria [West Bank]." The Galilee and Negev are heavily Palestinian areas inside the 1948 borders of the Israeli state. The illegally annexed Golan Heights are Syrian territory conquered in the 1967 war that also brought the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza under Israeli control.

Without a doubt, a key aim of the new government's policy is to increase pressure on the Palestinian population everywhere inside historic Palestine to abandon their homeland. Netanyahu announced his intention to annex the West Bank "while choosing the timing and considering the national and international interests of the state of Israel." The "international interests" here refers to Israel's indispensable armer, funder and protector, the United States, which fears that outright annexation could lead to new upheavals and instability in the region. In recognition of this factor, the Israeli government is clearly going forward with an accelerated program of de facto annexation while holding back on an official announcement.

The formation of an openly annexationist government represents a logical next step in the ongoing right-wing shift of the Israeli political landscape over the past several decades. But from its very start as a movement in the late 19th century, Zionism was another variant of racist European colonialism. It was in the name of achieving the Zionist objective of an exclusivist Jewish state that 750,000 Palestinians were driven by means of terror from their homeland in 1948, and hundreds of thousands more in the 1967 war when Israel conquered the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

Today, in violation of international law, more than 700,000 settlers live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. They are protected by the Israeli “Defense” Forces in a thorough apartheid system that has a separate legal system and separate access to resources for Israelis and Palestinians.

Fascists in the new Israeli cabinet

The latest Israeli election, the fifth in the last four years, took place on Nov. 1. A coalition of five extreme right-wing and racist parties narrowly won a majority, 64 seats in the 120-seat Knesset (parliament). Over the next seven weeks, Netanyahu succeeded in dividing up cabinet ministries among his Likud party and its four partners. Becoming a cabinet minister comes not just with an honorific title, but also with a budget. The more important ones have considerable power over sectors of the state, society and the occupied Palestinian population.

Netanyahu’s Likud party won 32 seats and was supported in forming a government by two rightist religious parties, Shas with 11 seats and United Torah Judaism with seven.

Two parties, Religious Zionism, led by Belazel Smotrich and Oztma Yehudit (Jewish Power), headed by Itamar Ben-Gvir, formed a bloc which won 14 seats, without which the new government could not have come into being. Both have demanded and received key positions.

A new “National Security Ministry” was created by the passage of the “Ben-Gvir bill” on Dec. 27. As minister, Ben-Gvir will have control over the infamous Border Police in the West Bank, one of the key instruments of the repressive colonial apparatus.

As a youth, Ben-Gvir was a follower of the notorious racist Meir Kahane, a Brooklynite who moved to Israel and created the Kach party. Kach was outlawed as a terrorist organization by the Israeli government in the early 1990s based on its virulent racism. So extremely racist were Ben-Gvir’s views and actions that he was refused induction into the Israeli military when he reached the age of induction.

Like Smotrich, Ben-Gvir is a leader of the violent racist settler movement in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, a movement which now feels freer than ever to carry out murderous attacks on Palestinians.

Nothing could be more revealing about Ben-Gvir than his hero-worship of Baruch Goldstein. In 1994, Goldstein, a dual U.S.-Israeli citizen from New York, murdered 29 Palestinian worshippers and wounded 125, including many children, inside the Mosque of Ibrahim in the West Bank city of Hebron. Ben-Gvir kept a photo of Goldstein on his living room wall until grudgingly taking it down in order to run for the Knesset in 2020, saying, “for the sake of unity and a right-wing victory in the elections, I’m removing the photograph in my living room.” (Times of Israel, Jan. 15, 2020)

Like Ben-Gvir, Smotrich stands for the expulsion of Palestinians from the West Bank and inside 1948 Israel. In October 2021, he told Palestinians members of the parliament: “You’re here by mistake, it’s a mistake that Ben-Gurion didn’t finish the job and throw you out in 1948.” Ben-Gurion was Israel’s first prime minister who presided over the mass expulsion of Palestinians.

Joint List MK Aida Touma-Sliman, a Palestinian member of the Knesset, tweeted in response: “We are putting up with this filthy fascism every day at the Knesset.” (Haaretz, Oct. 13, 2021).

Also like Ben-Gvir and several other members of the new government, Smotrich is deeply racist, misogynistic and homophobic. In 2016, he tweeted that he supported the segregation of Palestinian and Jewish women in maternity wards. (Jerusalem Post, April 6, 2016). And in 2015, he said that developers should not have to sell houses to Palestinians (J.Post, July 16, 2015.) In a mockery of a Gay Pride parade in 2006, Smotrich organized a “Beast Parade,” made up of animals. Ten years later he tweeted, “I am a proud homophobe.”

For many years, Smotrich has advocated a “shoot-to-kill” policy for the occupation forces in the West Bank. Asked in 2017 what he would do about a Palestinian child throwing stones at a demonstration, he answered: “Either I will shoot him, or I will jail him, or I will expel him.” (Guardian, Mar. 12, 2017)

Smotrich will be the new finance minister and, more importantly, was made a second minister inside the defense ministry with control over Civil Administration in the West Bank. The position of Ben-Gvir and Smotrich guarantee an escalation of fascist attacks on Palestinians, which are already taking place on more than a daily basis. For example, between just Oct. 10 and 21, 100 such attacks took place in the West Bank. These attacks are generally “observed” and often joined in by the occupation military forces. (Haaretz, Oct. 21)



Liberation photo collage. Binyamin Netanyahu, Belazel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir.

The make-up of the latest and most openly racist government in Israeli history is an embarrassment to supporters of the Zionist state inside and outside Israel. So, too, is the government’s intolerance for any version of Judaism that is not Orthodox. Smotrich said in 2016 that he was “not willing to recognize Reform (Jewish) conversions and their fake religion.”

While the clear aim of the new Israeli regime is to continue the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, the Palestinian people have made it equally clear that they are steadfast in their resistance

and have no intention of surrendering their homeland.

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