



US MUST ACT NOW TO COUNTER EXTREMIST ISRAELI OFFICIALS & POLICY MOVES

Dylan Williams, J Street Senior VP for Policy and Strategy

Dr. Debra Shushan, J Street Director of Policy

Issue Brief #4 | December 2022

As the most right-wing government in Israel's history takes shape, **it is becoming increasingly clear that some of the most radical figures in Israeli politics today are set to be rewarded with key roles and the enactment of extremist policies that are in direct conflict with US interests and values, and with the founding principles of Israeli democracy.**

What's at Stake: Israel's Radical Right-Wing Government and Its Agenda

This week, presumptive incoming Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu agreed to appoint convicted terror supporter Itamar Ben-Gvir of the Jewish Power Party as head of a renamed and expanded "National Security Ministry" which will oversee not only Israel's internal police, but will take over control of the border police force in the West Bank from Israel's army. Just last month, Ben-Gvir brandished a gun in an occupied East Jerusalem neighborhood, shouting for police to open fire on Palestinian protestors who live there — now he will be in charge of those police forces. Extremists are being positioned to undermine Israel's much-cherished pluralism, with Avi Maoz, known for his anti-LGBT activism and denial of the legitimacy of non-Orthodox Judaism, set to be a deputy minister in charge of a new authority responsible for Jewish identity.

Netanyahu is also negotiating with various coalition factions to undertake a set of policy changes that amount to de facto Israeli annexation of the Palestinian territory. The legalization of many settlement outposts, transferring authority for the Civil Administration of the occupied territories to a new far-right settlement movement minister operating within the Ministry of Defense and the aforementioned transfer of border police operating in the West Bank to an internal-facing ministry constitute late-stage steps in the process of actually governing the territories as part of Israel. It would solidify an undemocratic governance system in which West Bank Palestinians, physically separated from Israelis and each other in grossly underserved communities, have virtually no rights, no vote for the overriding authority that controls their lives and face pervasive discriminatory treatment.

In the weeks since the election, Israel's right wing has been emboldened, with vicious attacks by settlers, including a wave of violence against Palestinians in Hebron that have been widely described in Israel as a "pogrom." Some of these attacks have been aided and abetted by Israeli military units, with Israeli soldiers in one instance being held on suspicion of throwing an explosive device at a Palestinian family's home. Demolitions of Palestinian homes and community property are ramping up, as Israel's military declares further swaths of the occupied West Bank off limits to Palestinians and their supporters protesting such forced displacement.

Make no mistake: we are at the precipice of a crisis in Israel's relationship with not just the United States, but with democratic norms, international law and Diaspora Jews. With the incoming Israeli government negotiating these commitments with its constituent parts right now, the United States government must not delay in making clear its views on the threats posed by these moves — and take steps to counter them.

It's Time to Take Action: Policy Recommendations for the Biden Administration

The Biden Administration should reiterate the long-held, traditionally bipartisan US positions that will be directly challenged by the incoming Israeli government. These include:

- Supporting the eventual creation of a Palestinian state in the territory occupied in 1967, with mutually agreed land swaps;
- Opposing unilateral annexation of territory, whether de jure or de facto;
- Opposing expansion of settlements and residential construction in the occupied territory, especially forward movement on E-1, E-2 and other projects that risk foreclosing the possibility of territorial partition;
- Opposing demolitions and evictions in Palestinian communities in the occupied West Bank, and to forced transfer within or expulsion from the West Bank;
- Opposing “regularization” of what have been illegal outposts under Israeli law; and
- Opposing alteration of the “status quo” on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif.

The Biden Administration should also take a number of concrete steps to give meaningful weight to these positions. These include:

- Clearly stating that there is a legal distinction under international law between the State of Israel inside the Green Line and the territory it controls in the West Bank, and that the United States does not regard West Bank settlements as legal or part of Israel;
- Reinforcing US differentiation between Israel and the West Bank by restoring the longstanding bipartisan customs guidance on accurate labeling of West Bank goods;
- Stating expressly and publicly that the Trump plan, which encouraged unilateral annexation, is no longer on the table;
- Stating that while Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, parts of the city will also one day be the capital of a Palestinian state and that the contours of the city remain a matter for negotiation and are not “off the table,” as former President Donald Trump claimed;
- Making clear that the US government will ensure accountability for the military equipment and other security assistance it provides Israel, in the same manner as it oversees such assistance to other countries; and



US MUST ACT NOW TO COUNTER EXTREMIST ISRAELI OFFICIALS & POLICY MOVES

Issue Brief #4 | December 2022

- Not engaging with Ben-Gvir or others in the next Israeli government who have a proven track record of criminal support for terror, or whose rhetoric and actions cross a red line in opposition to the shared values that form the basis of the US-Israel relationship.



US MUST ACT NOW TO COUNTER EXTREMIST ISRAELI OFFICIALS & POLICY MOVES

Issue Brief #4 | December 2022