

Netanyahu forms far-right Israeli coalition government

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26 December 2022

Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is set to return to power after 18 months in opposition, after announcing a series of deals with the fascistic Religious Zionism Party and the ultra-orthodox religious parties, Shas and United Torah Judaism (UTJ).

Having pushed Israeli politics to the right during his 15 years of premiership, he will now head the most right-wing government in Israel's 75-year history. It will empower the violent, racist and fascist forces seeking to incite political violence against the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and within Israel, cement Israel's Jewish Supremacy policy enshrined in its 2018 Nation-State law and clamp down on Jewish workers opposing its policies.

It puts paid to the claim that Israel is "the only democracy" in the Middle East. The inclusion of Religious Zionism makes explicit what was always implicit: Israel's government will be committed to Jewish Supremacy and apartheid rule, the annexation of large swaths of the occupied West Bank illegally occupied since the Arab Israeli war of 1967, the expansion of settlements illegal even under current Israeli law and Jewish prayer at al-Aqsa Mosque.

Netanyahu tweeted triumphantly, "I got it," on Wednesday night, just minutes before the deadline for forming a new government following the fifth elections in less than four years on November 1. It is expected that the new government, which will have a majority of four, will be sworn in early in the new year.

The election, the fifth in four years, was precipitated by the collapse last June of the fragile coalition headed by Yair Lapid and Naftali Bennett of eight parties united only by opposition to the scandal-ridden Netanyahu. Their "government of change" that included Labour and Meretz—both ostensibly committed to a Palestinian statelet alongside Israel—paved the way for the rise of the far-right Religious Zionism. It presided over more killings of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories than at any time since 2005, escalated Israel's covert wars against Iran and its allies, lifted all measures aimed at restricting the spread of the pandemic and did nothing to alleviate social

inequality—one of the highest in the OECD group of advanced countries.

Netanyahu, currently in court on charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust in three separate cases, brokered an electoral alliance of the three far-right parties—Religious Zionism, Jewish Power and Noam—to bolster its vote in the November 1 election because of its willingness to introduce a law preventing a sitting prime minister from being indicted while in office. Religious Zionism won 10 percent of the vote and 14 seats, making it the third largest party in the Knesset, enabling Netanyahu to form a 64-seat coalition, the largest majority for any government since 2018.

With Religious Zionism in a position to call the shots, Bezalel Smotrich, leader of the Religious Zionism alliance, has secured the finance portfolio for himself and a newly created ministerial position within the defence ministry with powers over the civil administration of the West Bank for his party. This Jewish Supremacist, homophobe and proponent of annexation of Palestinian territories has control over building permits in the settlements, demolitions of Palestinian homes, land issues, access to water. It has oversight of two military units that run civilian and security issues in the West Bank's Area C, including the movement of people and goods between Gaza, Israel and the West Bank.

This is nothing less than the de facto annexation of Area C, designated under the Oslo Accords as being under Israeli military control, where Israel's West Bank settlements, home to more than 450,000 Israelis, are located. While Netanyahu had sought to annex parts of the West Bank during his earlier premiership, he was forced to drop the plan after "normalizing" relations with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco. These states had earlier signaled their unease over the new government that has—according to the *New York Times*—'quickly morphed into a more pragmatic approach: Business as usual, at least for now.'

Itamar Ben-Gvir, leader of the fascistic Jewish Power, has secured the post of national security. This convicted racist,

supporter of the virulent anti-Arab Kahanist organization, once designated as a terrorist organization in both Israel and the US, who threatened to expel Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, will have oversight of the police within Israel and the force that controls access to and security at al-Aqsa Mosque. Ben-Gvir demanded and won an extension of his remit to include the Border Police, a paramilitary force that chiefly operates in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, a change that requires parliamentary approval. The security forces that have long allowed the settlers to attack the property and lives of Palestinians living in the West Bank with impunity—often under the protection if not active assistance of the military—will now actively encourage it in order to drive them from their homes and their land.

Netanyahu has appointed Avi Maoz, head of the Noam party and notorious for his racist, homophobic and misogynist views, is deputy minister in charge of “Jewish identity,” with control over parts of Israel’s national education system and authority to approve or expunge external content programmes from the list currently offered to Israeli schools.

Netanyahu has promised the interior and health portfolios to Aryeh Deri, leader of the ultra-Orthodox Shas party, who served time in jail for corruption and left office as part of a plea deal for a new indictment of tax evasion. Since Israel’s attorney general has stated that his conviction for tax offences disqualifies him from serving in the cabinet, this will require the Knesset to fast-track legislation to overturning the ban on convicted legislators serving as ministers.

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The new government’s agenda includes an overhaul of the judicial system, subjecting the decisions of the Supreme Court to an override by the Knesset that will also be given the power to appoint judges, ending any independence of the judiciary. It is following the path taken by far-right governments in Poland and Hungary. Also expected is legislation aimed at securing the dismissal of Netanyahu’s ongoing corruption trial.

His agreement with Religious Zionism includes steps to promote Orthodox and nationalist interpretations of Judaism, including narrowing the definition of who is a Jew—and thus eligible for automatic citizenship under Israel’s law of return. It also includes a pledge to introduce legislation revoking the ban under Israel’s Basic Law on a party that incites racism that was introduced to block the return of the outlawed Kach party, led by ultra-nationalist Meir Kahane who advocated for the mass expulsion of Palestinians, to the Knesset. In 2019, this law was used to prevent Jewish Power members Baruch Marzel—who has called for the ethnic

cleansing of Palestinians—and Bentzi Gopstein—who has called for the dismantling of the Dome of the Rock Mosque—from running for the Knesset.

Netanyahu has already agreed to legalise Jewish settler outposts in the West Bank and transferring jurisdiction over settlers from military administrators to civilian ministries. This would legally place settlers and Palestinians under entirely different systems and confirm charges that Israel is running an apartheid regime.

There are plans to enforce the “Judaisation” of the Galilee and Negev in the north and south of Israel respectively, that are home to significant numbers of Israel’s Palestinian citizens, via the offer of economic benefits and discounts to Israeli Jews who move there.

According to *Arab 48*, Ben-Gvir has won agreement from Netanyahu to sack and refuse to hire teachers who criticise the Israeli occupation or take part in anti-Israeli occupation protest, claiming “this is terrorism.” Smotrich has declared that human rights groups—both Palestinian and Israeli—pose an “existential threat” to Israel and called for their funds to be seized and their activities banned. Amichai Chikli, a Likud legislator, said “under the guise of human rights organisations and humanitarian activity hides a radical antisemitic and anti-Zionist ideology, whose purpose is to undermine the legitimacy of the State of Israel and spill the blood of its soldiers and citizens.”

At a recent clash between Israeli activists opposed to the settlements in Hebron in the West Bank, one soldier was filmed hurling an activist to the ground and then punching him in the head, while a second warned, “Ben-Gvir is going to put things in order here. You’re done making a mess... I decide what’s legal here.” While the first soldier was suspended and the second jailed for six days, Ben-Gvir is pushing an immunity bill for soldiers against trials and investigations for acts carried out during their service.



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