



[U.S. Secretary of State Blinken Warns the Returning Netanyahu Over Potential Annexation in the Illegally-Occupied West Bank](#)

In remarks made this past weekend, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned soon-to-be returning former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu against settlements and potential annexation in the illegally-occupied West Bank. Peace and social justice activists are understandably concerned that the return to power of criminally-indicted Netanyahu and his new extreme far-right coalition government could escalate tensions and incite further illegal Israeli settler violence in the West Bank. This is especially true considering the alarming make-up of the anticipated incoming coalition government and its array of troubling figures and officials. Despite this legitimate unease, Blinken expressed that the Biden administration would ultimately engage with the new government based on “its policies rather than individual personalities.” This comes amid reports, however, that the White House has held recent high-level meetings to discuss its approach toward the new Israeli government and the prospect of not engaging with some of its most bigoted and extremist ministers.

In the weeks since the November 1st Israeli election, peace advocacy groups have urged the Biden administration to not deal with controversial figures in the new Israeli coalition government such as Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich – both bigoted Jewish supremacists and extremists. It has been pointed out how the U.S. State Department has a strong case to consider potential ministers like Ben-Gvir and Smotrich as persona non grata for diplomatic interaction and engagement. Ben-Gvir has a long history of deplorable behavior, including being an active proponent for the violent eviction of Palestinian residents from their generational homes and as a supporter of Baruch Goldstein, who massacred 29 Palestinian worshippers back in 1994. Ben-Gvir has even been convicted in Israeli courts for inciting racism and supporting terrorist supremacist groups. Smotrich heads the Noam Party, an aggressively bigoted group, and both his and Ben-Gvir’s expected roles as ministers in the new Israeli coalition government has elicited concern regarding the extent to which this will incite further violence and discriminatory policies against Palestinians.

Blinken’s recent remarks are a clear indication that the Biden administration acknowledges, and is highly aware of, the concerns that the new Israeli coalition government could push for the initiation of further destructive behavior like new unlawful settlements and potential annexation in the illegally-occupied West Bank. Additionally, the recent news of sensitive meetings on how to approach the new government further crystalize this as well. In fact, there are indications that the rise of extremist far-right groups as key coalition members has “triggered debate about the implications for Israel’s democracy, its ability to manage tensions with Arabs and Palestinians, and its relations with the United States and other countries.” Senior U.S. officials from an array of government agencies are believed to have been involved in these recent meetings, highlighting the scope of concern surrounding the figures that are anticipated to hold notable ministerial positions in the new Israeli coalition government. So far, there are suggestions that the Biden administration may not engage directly with controversial individuals like Ben-Gvir and Smotrich.

The manner in which U.S. officials deal with all aspects of the new Israeli coalition government and the nature of the policies that the latter enacts remain to be seen, but one thing that is for sure is that many will be keeping an eye on and eagerly awaiting to see what transpires with this in the coming weeks and months ahead.