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Zionism vs Zionism – Ben-Gvir and the Acceleration of the Collapse of Israel



Unsplash+ and Getty Images.

Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir vowed, on August 26, to build a synagogue inside the Muslim holy site Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

Ben-Gvir, as a representation of Israel's powerful religious Zionist class in the government and society at large, has been candid regarding his designs in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of Palestine.

He has advocated a religious war, calling for the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, the starvation or killing of prisoners and the annexation of the West Bank.

In his capacity as a minister in the equally extremist government of Benjamin Netanyahu, Ben-Gvir has worked hard to translate his language into action. He has raided the Palestinian Al-Aqsa Mosque repeatedly, and implemented his starvation policies against Palestinian detainees, going as far as defending rape inside Israeli military detention camps and calling the accused soldiers "our best heroes".

His supporters have carried out hundreds of assaults and dozens of pogroms targeting Palestinian communities in the West Bank.

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, at least 670 Palestinians have been [killed](#) in the occupied West Bank since the start of the Gaza war. A large number among those killed and injured were [victims](#) of illegal Jewish settlers.

But not all Israelis in the political or security establishments agree with Ben-Gvir's behavior or tactics. For example, on August 22, Israel's Shin Bet chief, Ronen Bar, [warned](#) against the "indescribable damage" to Israel caused by Ben-Gvir's actions in East Jerusalem.

"The damage to the State of Israel, especially now ... is indescribable: global delegitimization, even among our greatest allies," Bar wrote in a letter sent to several Israeli ministers.

Bar's letter may seem odd. The Shin Bet has been instrumental in the killing of numerous Palestinians, in the name of Israeli security. Bar himself is a strong supporter of the settlements, and as hawkish as is required for the person who leads such a notorious organization.

Bar's conflict with Ben-Gvir, however, is not that of substance, but style. This conflict is only an expression of a much greater ideological and political war among Israel's top institutions. This war, however, began before the October 7 attack and the ongoing Israeli war and genocide in Gaza.

Seven months before the start of the war, Israeli President Isaac Herzog [said](#) in a televised speech that "those who think that a real civil war ... is a border we won't cross, have no idea."

The context of his comments was the "real, deep hate" among Israelis resulting from the attempts by Netanyahu and his extremist government coalition partners to undermine the power of the judiciary.

The fight over the Supreme Court, however, was merely the tip of the iceberg. The fact that it [took](#) Israel five elections in four years to settle on a stable government in December 2022 was itself indicative of Israel's unprecedented political conflict.

The new government may have been 'stable' in terms of the parliamentary balances, but it destabilized the country on all fronts, leading to mass protests, involving the powerful, but increasingly marginalized military class.

The October 7 attack took place at a time of social and political vulnerability, arguably unprecedented since the founding of Israel atop the ruins of historic Palestine in May 1948.

The war, but particularly the failure to achieve any of its objectives, deepened that existing conflict. This led to warnings from politicians and military men that the country was collapsing.

The clearest of these warnings came from Yitzhak Brik, a former top Israeli military commander. He [wrote](#) in Haaretz on August 22 that the “country ... is galloping towards the edge of an abyss,” and that it “will collapse within no more than a year.”

Though Brik was, among various factors, blaming Netanyahu’s losing war in Gaza, the anti-Netanyahu political class believes that the crisis mainly lies in the government itself.

This solution, according to recent [comments](#) made by Herzog himself, is that “Kahanism needs to be removed from the government.”

Kahanism here is a reference to the Kach Party of Rabbi Meir Kahane. Though now banned, Kach has resurfaced in numerous forms, including in Ben-Gvir’s Otzma Yehudit party. As a disciple of Kahane, Ben-Gvir is set to achieve the vision of the extremist rabbi, that of the complete ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people.

Ben-Gvir and his ilk are fully aware of the historic opportunity that is now available to them as they hope to ignite the much-coveted religious war. They also know that if the war in Gaza ends without advancing their main plan of colonizing the rest of the occupied territories, the opportunity may not present itself ever again.

Ben-Gvir’s rush to achieve the religious Zionist agenda contradicts the traditional form of Israeli colonialism, predicated on the ‘incremental genocide’ of Palestinians and the slow ethnic cleansing of Palestinian communities from East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Though the Israeli military believes that illegal settlements are essential, they perceive these colonies in strategic language as a ‘security’ buffer for Israel.

The winners and losers of Israel’s ideological and political war are most likely to emerge following the end of the Gaza war, the outcomes of which will determine other factors, including the very future of the state of Israel, per the estimation of General Yitzhak Brik himself.

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