

Remarks of Rep. Jerry Nadler (NY-12)
“Say No to Ben-Gvir” Rally
New York, NY
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As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, and before I begin, I want to recognize all of my fellow New York elected officials, Rabbis, Jewish organizational leaders, and other speakers here with us. Thank you for being here.

Allow me to start by recognizing that today is *Yom HaShoah Ve’HaGevurah*— the day Jews in Israel and many around the world remember the over 6 million Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust, and the heroic acts of the survivors and righteous gentiles who saved countless lives. *Yehi Zichram Baruch* — may their memory be for a blessing.

As we remember the unspeakable tragedy of the Holocaust, we are also reminded of all too recent tragedies. October 7th was the bloodiest day in Jewish history since the Holocaust, and, for many in the Jewish community time stopped on October 7th, 2023 and has not yet resumed. It will resume when all the hostages are home. It will resume when the war is over and the reservists can return to their families. It will resume when there is enough food, water, and medicine in Gaza to alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe. It will resume when families on both sides of the border can sleep peacefully without the constant fear of rockets and bombs falling from the sky.

And that day need not be far away. Just this past weekend, Prime Minister Netanyahu said in a televised address that he refused to end the war in Gaza in order to bring the hostages home. This proclamation followed intense pressures from within his own government to prioritize the continuation of the war at all costs, including the lives of the hostages. The chief architect and most ardent supporter of this war-at-all-costs position is the head of the far-right, ultra-nationalist, and Kahanist Jewish Power party, Itamar Ben-Gvir.

I just want to reflect on how far Israel and the Jewish people have traveled away from ourselves since the days of Meir Kahane. When Kahane was first narrowly elected to the Knesset in 1984, he was seen as a stain on Israeli society— an outcast, an extremist so far outside the mainstream that no one would ever dream of bringing him into an Israeli government. When Kahane stood at the podium to speak in front of the Knesset, the C-SPAN of Israel refused to broadcast his remarks. When he began speaking, all of his fellow members of the Knesset stood and left the hall in protest against his abhorrent ideology— including those from the Likud, Prime Minister Netanyahu’s own party. The Jewish Defense League, the political organization founded by Kahane, is designated as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center, and, according to the FBI, has been involved in plotting and executing acts of terrorism within the United States. The JDL was long affiliated with Kahane’s political party Kach, which was later banned as a racist party. Today it boasts one of its alumni as a Minister in the Israeli government: Itamar Ben-Gvir. This is the same Ben-Gvir who publicly visited Meir Kahane’s grave as recently as 5 months ago, the same Ben-Gvir who today serves as Israel’s Minister of Internal Security, wreaking terror on both Jews and Arabs.

Let's be crystal clear about who Itamar Ben-Gvir is: he is a racist, terrorist, Jewish supremacist, bent on enacting Meir Kahane's vision.

A major American Jewish organization wrote that Kahane "preached a radical form of Jewish nationalism which reflected racism, violence and political extremism." Yet, today we are gathered here to protest a group of American Jews welcoming Ben-Gvir to New York City. To them, we have one thing to say: Ben-Gvir isn't welcome here!

Itamar Ben-Gvir supports too many outrageous positions to address them all: from his support of West Bank annexation and Gaza population transfer — to his highly inflammatory and repeated violations of the status quo on the Temple Mount. From having been deemed unfit for mandatory military service due to his extremist views — to his many convictions in Israeli court for supporting Jewish terrorism. From inciting violence against Yitzhak Rabin on television shortly before his assassination — to now weaponizing the Israeli police against hostage families, pro-democracy protesters, and Palestinians in the West Bank. Ben-Gvir is the antithesis of everything that American Jewry stands for.

But there is one issue that we must remain especially focused on: Ben-Gvir's role as chief inciter of settler violence in the West Bank. Violence in the West Bank has reached fever pitch levels: destroying property, displacing Palestinians, and turning the West Bank into what one think tank called "a tinderbox." According to the Israeli NGO Peace Now, settlers have seized an equivalent of 14% of the West Bank's total area, through violent tactics such as harassing, intimidating, and targeting Palestinian communities. These settlers have taken control of large areas

of land from over 60 displaced Palestinian communities and have set up new Israeli outposts.

The current Israeli government, championed by Itamar Ben-Gvir, Finance Minister Betzalel Smotrich, and others, have made a “special budgetary allocation” of 75 million shekels for a group called Hilltop Youth. Previously sanctioned by the United States, Hilltop Youth have committed some of the most violent settler attacks, and have done so with the strong support of Ben-Gvir, who called them “sweet kids.” Ben-Gvir has repeatedly used his power as the Minister overseeing the police to shield violent settlers from accountability and has ordered the police not to investigate any such attacks.

In stark contrast, President Biden viewed the epidemic of settler violence in the West Bank as such a serious threat, that he issued an executive order declaring a national emergency. This landmark executive order sought to leverage all the resources at the US government’s disposal to address the destabilizing violence in the West Bank committed both by settlers supported by Ben-Gvir, and by new emerging Palestinian terror groups like the Lions’ Den. And it was beginning to work: material support for both sets of groups and individuals had become extremely difficult.

But Donald Trump, on his first day back in office, repealed this executive order. That’s why when I return to Washington on Monday, I will be introducing the West Bank Violence Prevention Act, which would codify and enshrine President Biden’s executive order into law. I hope all of my colleagues who supported President Biden’s executive order, will join me in supporting this legislation.

This bill makes it clear: we have a choice between the politics of fear, intimidation, and settler violence from Ben-Gvir and Trump — or the politics of hope for a better tomorrow in the Middle East and our communities here at home. We must choose whether to surrender to the authoritarian backsliding on both sides of the ocean — or forge a path ahead that strengthens democratic institutions and the rule of law.

I pray that our country, our people, and our society make the right choice; so that one day, as taught by our American and Jewish traditions, drawn from the Liberty Bell inscription from the Book of Leviticus, וְקִרְאתֶם דְּרוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ לְכָל־יֹשְׁבֶיהָ,
“Thou shalt proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all its inhabitants.”

Thank you.