

Quick Facts on Israel's New Prime Minister Naftali Bennett

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Born to American parents who immigrated from San Francisco to Israel in 1967, Bennett is a far-right ultranationalist who staunchly opposes Palestinian statehood or self-determination of any kind in Palestine/Israel.

Although not a settler himself, from 2010 to 2012 he was head of the main political body (Yesha Council) that represents Israeli settlers living on occupied Palestinian land in violation of international law and is a staunch supporter of Israel's settlement enterprise.

A former member of the Likud party, he was Netanyahu's chief of staff from 2006-2008. As the leader of the Jewish Home party (2012-2018), he was a key partner in Netanyahu's coalition government, serving as minister of education and minister of diaspora affairs. During the previous government, he was minister of economy and minister of religious services. He was also minister of education (2015-2019) and minister of defense (2019-2020) under Netanyahu. In 2018, he left Jewish Home to form the New Right party.

Bennett has repeatedly stated his [categorical opposition](#) to a Palestinian state being created in the occupied territories. Instead, he [proposes](#) Israel unilaterally annex the approximately 60% of the Palestinian West Bank that fell under full Israeli control under the supposedly temporary [Oslo Accords](#), where most Israeli settlements are located. In 2014, Bennett [told journalists](#) Israel “will be gradually attempting to apply Israeli law [annexing] on Israeli controlled areas of Judea and Samaria [the occupied West Bank].” In 2013, he [declared](#): “I favor implementation of Israeli sovereignty over the zone where 400,000 (settlers) live and only 70,000 Arabs.” Bennett also ridiculed then-ongoing US-led negotiations under the Obama administration, declaring it's “all a joke.”

In 2014, Bennett wrote an op-ed for The New York Times, “[For Israel, Two-State Is No Solution](#),” repeating once again his opposition to Palestinian self-determination and his plan to annex 60% of the West Bank. In 2013, he [told](#) the New Yorker magazine: “I will do everything in my power, forever, to fight against a Palestinian state being founded in the Land of Israel.” A few months later, in June, he [declared](#): “The most important thing in the Land of Israel is to build, build, build [settlements]. It's important that there will be an Israeli

presence everywhere. Our principal problem is still Israel's leaders' unwillingness to say in a simple manner that the Land of Israel belongs to the People of Israel."

In 2014, then-Minister of the Economy and Religious Services Bennett [released a letter](#) addressed to Palestinian citizens of Israel, who make up about 20% of the population, warning them against becoming a "fifth column." According to press [reports](#), the letter, written in Arabic, was riddled with errors.

Bennett also advocates increased Jewish control over the revered Noble Sanctuary mosque complex in occupied East Jerusalem, known as the Temple Mount to Jews, which is the third holiest site in Islam. Extremist messianic Jews [want to build](#) a temple in the Noble Sanctuary, which would spark a major religious conflagration in the region and beyond. In February 2014, Bennett told a meeting of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations that Israel was attempting to exercise greater control over the Noble Sanctuary, [stating](#) that he had already taken measures that would "ultimately influence the eastern side of Jerusalem, and that will include the Temple Mount."

In October 2018, Bennett said that if he were defense minister he would order [a shoot to kill policy](#) against Palestinians attempting to walk across the boundary between Israel and Gaza, where nearly 2 million people have been trapped under an [illegal](#) Israeli [siege and naval blockade](#) for 15 years. When asked if he would instruct soldiers to kill Palestinian children, Bennett [said](#), "They are not children — they are terrorists. We are fooling ourselves. I see the photos." At that point, at least 140 demonstrators had been killed by Israeli soldiers, including [at least 29 children](#) according to the UN, as well as [medical workers](#) and [journalists](#), and more than 29,000 others injured, as part of the [Great March of Return](#).

In 2013, Bennett sparked controversy when it was reported that during a cabinet meeting on releasing Palestinian prisoners he [declared](#): "If we capture terrorists, we need to just kill them... I've already killed a lot of Arabs in my life - and there is no problem with that." Asked for clarification by journalists, a spokesperson said Bennett meant Israeli soldiers should be ordered to kill Palestinians instead of capturing and imprisoning them.

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