

# *Washington slams far-right Israeli lawmaker for attending Kahane memorial*

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**Itamar Ben-Gvir speaks during consultations on Israel's next government with Israeli President Isaac Herzog, in Jerusalem, November 10, 2022 [Ronen Zvulun/Reuters]**

Washington, November 12 (RHC)-- The United States has condemned far-right Israeli politician Itamar Ben-Gvir for attending an event honouring an ultranationalist rabbi who inspired violent attacks against

Palestinians and Arab Americans.

U.S. State Department spokesperson Ned Price on Thursday slammed Ben-Gvir, who will likely become a minister in Israel's next coalition government, for praising Meir Kahane at a memorial earlier in the day. In May, Washington removed Kahane's ultranationalist movement, Kahane Chai, from its list of "foreign terrorist organizations" (FTO), drawing outrage from Palestinian rights advocates.

"Celebrating the legacy of a terrorist organisation is abhorrent," Price told reporters. "There is no other word for it – it is abhorrent. And we remain concerned, as we said before, by the legacy of Kahane Chai and the continued use of rhetoric among violent right-wing extremists."

Kahane, who was elected to the Israeli Knesset in 1984 on a platform that openly advocated for Palestinians to be expelled from their homeland, was killed in New York in 1990. But his followers continued to carry out violent attacks.

When the State Department delisted Kahane Chai as a "terrorist" group, it described the move as strictly bureaucratic, saying the organisation had gone dormant. But rights activists say the Kahanist movement remains active despite splintering and the FTO listing should have been updated, not removed.

During Thursday's news briefing, Price noted Kahane Chai remains on the Treasury Department's list of "specially designated global terrorists." Israeli media outlets reported that Ben-Gvir lauded Kahane on Thursday, saying the late rabbi was about "love for Israel without compromise." But the far-right Israeli politician also drew jeers from the crowd when he said he does not "support the deportation of all Arabs," according to the Times of Israel.

Before establishing Kach – which later became Kahane Chai – in Israel, Kahane founded the Jewish Defense League (JDL) in the United States. The hardline pro-Israel organisation was linked to several violent attacks on US soil, including the assassination of Palestinian-American organiser Alex Odeh in California in 1985.

In 1994, a U.S.-born member of both the JDL and Kach gunned down dozens of worshippers at the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron in the occupied West Bank. And in 2001, JDL leaders plotted to blow up a mosque in California, as well as the office of Lebanese-American Congressman Darrell Issa.

Israel's Ben-Gvir had a picture of the Hebron mosque attacker in his living room as recently as 2020, according to a number of Israeli and international media reports.

This month, rights advocates called on U.S. President Joe Biden's administration to review its ties with Israel after former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu emerged as the biggest winner in the country's fifth election in four years.

The longtime Israeli politician is set to return to power in a coalition that includes Ben-Gvir and other far-right legislators. But Biden has signalled he will maintain unconditional US support for Israel after the new government is formed.

Earlier this week, Biden called Netanyahu and congratulated him. "The president reaffirmed the strength of the bilateral partnership and underscored his unwavering support for Israeli security," White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters after the call.



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