



POLITICS

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In Jenin, as Elsewhere, Netanyahu Knows He Can Count on Washington's Complicity

As America's nonresponse to the attack on Jenin demonstrates, support for Israeli apartheid is fully bipartisan.

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Happy days: Biden as vice president meeting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem, March 2010. (Ariel Schalit/AP)



With his helmet of chalk-white hair neatly brushed, an American flag pin poking from his lapel, and a pious choirboy expression on his face, former vice president Mike Pence seems to be among friends. The photo shows him standing on an outdoor stairway next to Itamar Ben-Gvir and Baruch Marzel in March 2022. The two Israelis were giving Pence a tour of Israel's occupied West Bank when they stopped for a Twitter picture in front of the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron, also known as the Tomb (or Cave) of the Patriarchs.

It was a place Ben-Gvir knew well. In 1994, a close friend of his, the American-Israeli Baruch Goldstein, entered the mosque during Ramadan and opened fire with an AK47-style assault weapon on over 800 unarmed Palestinian worshipers, killing 29 and leaving 125 wounded. He was eventually beaten to death by survivors.

It was a “great honor,” Pence said, to meet Ben-Gvir, who in 2007 had been convicted in Israel of inciting racism and supporting a terrorist group. “Stay strong. We’ll stand with you,” he added. Ben-Gvir was widely recognized to be the ideological successor to the late Rabbi Meir Kahane, a violent racist whose Kach movement (later known as Kahane Chai) was classified as a terrorist organization in the United States. The Brooklyn-born Kahane was murdered by a gunman at a rally in New York in 1990.

Pence's other escort, the Boston-born Marzel, is a settler now living in Hebron who spent decades as Kahane's “right-hand man.” Marzel has been banned from both Twitter and Facebook for hate speech, and in 2019 he was banned from running for the Knesset for inciting racism against Palestinians. Benzion Sanders of the Israeli human rights organization Breaking the Silence tweeted that Pence was “empowering Jewish Supremacy the same way he empowers White Supremacy.”

A few months after meeting with Pence, Ben-Gvir, head of the “Jewish Power” party, which espouses KKK-style Jewish supremacy and

Kahanism, led his party to significant gains in the Israeli election. He was then appointed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to one of the country's highest positions—national security minister. Nevertheless, Ben-Gvir continued to publicly hero-worship Goldstein—a position supported by the 10 percent of Israeli Jews who also consider the mass murderer of Palestinians a “national hero,” according to a recent poll by *The Jerusalem Post*.

Last April, Ben-Gvir gave a speech at a yeshiva founded by Kahane while standing in front of a wall-hanging that referred to Kahane and Goldstein as “martyrs.” It read, “Their blood will rise,” and quoted Joel 3:21: “For I will avenge their blood, which I have not yet avenged.” This week Ben-Gvir apparently carried out that promise, playing a key role in launching Israel's largest assault on the West Bank in more than a decade: an attack on the densely populated Palestinian refugee camp in Jenin that has so far left a dozen Palestinians dead. Jenin, argues Ben-Gvir, was “a military operation, to take down buildings, exterminate terrorists—not one or two but tens and hundreds, if necessary, thousands.”

But the assault on Jenin is only a preview of what lies ahead as the 2024 American presidential campaign unfolds. As Israeli tanks and jets pummel Palestinians from the air and ground, and fanatical Israeli settlers terrorize and attack them from the fields and the streets, Republicans like Pence cheer them on and Democrats like Biden meekly mutter their approval or say nothing. “We have seen the reports and are monitoring the situation closely,” a White House spokesperson said. “We support Israel's security and right to defend its people.” Neither dares risk the millions expected from pro-Israel lobbies and donors as the campaigns heat up. It was a lesson Biden certainly learned while in the Senate.

Biden had long ago learned to turn a blind eye to Israel's blatant racism, extreme brutality, and espionage in the United States in order to keep the millions in donations flowing. While vice president in 2011, he gave an

address to a group of fundraisers and supporters of Yeshiva Beth Yehuda, a Jewish day school in Detroit. “I was speaking to the Zionist Organization of Baltimore. And I said, I am a Zionist, for I learned you do not have to be a Jew to be a Zionist.” He then added, to great applause, “I’ve raised more money from AIPAC than some of you have.”

It was an odd comment, since at the time AIPAC did not donate to candidates. But now it does. In 2021 the group announced that for the first time it would launch a super PAC, the United Democracy Project (UDP), and begin endorsing candidates. But there would be no overt mention of Israel in either its name or its ads. Soon it was running numerous television spots supporting or opposing Democratic primary candidates for the 2022 midterms; by the end of the year, the UDP had raised nearly \$36 million.

Rather than AIPAC, what Biden was likely referring to was pro-Israel money in general, and there he was certainly a winner. According to the campaign watchdog site Open Secrets, while he was in the Senate Biden was the largest recipient of pro-Israel PAC money: \$4,226,604—almost twice as much as the second-highest recipient, Hillary Clinton.

Attending an AIPAC conference as vice president, Biden boasted of his support for the settler movement. “As recently as last year, the only country on the United Nations Human Rights Council to vote against—I think it’s 36 countries, don’t hold me to the exact number—but the only country on the Human Rights Council of the United Nations to vote against the establishment of a fact-finding mission on settlements was the United States of America.” He added, “I did more fundraisers for AIPAC in the ’70s and early ’80s than—just about as many as anybody.” With a self-declared Zionist in the White House, proud of his support for the brutal and illegal settler movement and eager for more pro-Israel PAC money for his reelection campaign, it is likely that Prime Minister Netanyahu felt free to launch his attack on Jenin.

In May of last year, Israel launched another attack on the Jenin refugee camp; that one resulted in the fatal shooting of the unarmed Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. According to a number of investigations, including the United Nations, the reporter was repeatedly targeted, along with her colleagues, despite being clearly identified as a member of the press. Nevertheless, the murder of an American citizen was brushed under the rug by the Biden administration.

Afterward, United Nations special rapporteur Michael Lynk issued an 18-page report on Israel's institutionalized racism and human rights abuses, officially charging the Jewish state with "committing the crime of apartheid." "The political system of entrenched rule in the occupied Palestinian territory," Lynk wrote, "which endows one racial-national-ethnic group with substantial rights, benefits and privileges while intentionally subjecting another group to live behind walls, checkpoints and under a permanent military rule '*sans droits, sans égalité, sans dignité et sans liberté*' [without laws, without equality, without dignity, and without liberty] satisfies the prevailing evidentiary standard for the existence of apartheid." Both the US-based Human Rights Watch and Britain's Amnesty International have also documented Israel's apartheid system. As has Israel's own human rights organization, B'Tselem

One source of millions in pro-Israel campaign dollars is Miriam Adelson, the widow of Republican mega-donor Sheldon Adelson, who made no secret of his own pro-Israeli/anti-Palestinian views. Adelson—once the eighth-richest human on the planet, with \$40 billion—and his Israeli-born wife pumped a record \$172.7 million into Republican coffers during the 2020 election cycle, mostly to Donald Trump. And it was Miriam Adelson who flew Mike Pence to Israel aboard one of her jumbo jets for his meetings with Ben-Gvir, Marzel, and Netanyahu.

Miriam Adelson also dined with Florida Governor Ron DeSantis during his visit to Israel this April—which also included a meeting with Netanyahu. In 2018, the Adelsons backed the extreme-right-wing Florida politician during his successful gubernatorial campaign,

donating \$500,000 to the Friends of Ron DeSantis PAC. During that campaign, DeSantis proclaimed with pride that he would be the “most pro-Israel governor in America.” As the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* noted, “His close relationships with, and vociferous support for, Israel’s violent settler movement and its government are a testament to that commitment.”

In 2019, the Adelsons also donated \$500,000 to a nonprofit for Nikki Haley. According to *The Times of Israel*, Haley “won plaudits in Israel and among the pro-Israel community in the US while in office [as the Trump administration ambassador to the UN] for her staunch backing of the Jewish state.” And at an Israeli event, Miriam Adelson introduced Haley as Israel’s “Wonder Woman on the world stage” and the “potential first female president of the United States.”

At the same time, AIPAC’s powerful new super PAC, the UDP, was pouring millions into the primary campaign for one incumbent Democrat battling another incumbent Democrat in a newly redistricted area of Michigan. In 2022, AIPAC spent over \$4 million for ads and mailers on behalf of Representative Haley Stevens, considered a pro-Israel hard-liner, to beat progressive Representative Andy Levin. Levin was viewed as insufficiently pro-Israel, even though he is Jewish and a former synagogue president. In the end, Stevens won, with AIPAC claiming it as a victory for the “pro-Israel” cause.

Such support for both Democratic and Republican candidates from the White House, Congress, and governors’ mansions guarantees that the United States will continue to close its eyes to Israel’s brutal occupation, endless settler attacks, and deadly military assaults. It also makes it extremely unlikely that any occupant of the White House will question the need to continue providing Israel with its yearly allowance of \$4 billion from hard-strapped US taxpayers—more foreign aid than goes to any other country in the world, despite Israel’s being a nation of great industrial wealth and military power, as the only nuclear-armed country in the Middle East.

Without comparable power, wealth, or influence, all Palestinians have to give for American support are oceans of tears and rivers of blood. **N**

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James Bamford is a best-selling author, Emmy-nominated filmmaker, and winner of the National Magazine Award for Reporting. His most recent book is *Spyfail: Foreign Spies, Moles, Saboteurs, and the Collapse of America's Counterintelligence*, published by Twelve Books.’’

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