

# Israel's Far Right, Shunned by AIPAC, Is Embraced by Mike Pence - Israel News - Haaretz.com

[Allison Kaplan Sommer](#) Mar 10, 2022

Former Vice President Mike Pence visited Israel this week, and while his visit made little headlines, on Wednesday he did manage to draw public attention after touring the West Bank city of Hebron with two of Israel's most notorious right-wing extremists, MK Itamar Ben-Gvir and far-right activist Baruch Marzel.

Pence, whose visit appeared to be laying the groundwork to shore up evangelical support in the 2024 presidential race, said it was a "great honor" to meet Ben-Gvir, the ideological successor of the late Rabbi Meir Kahane, whose Kach movement was banned from running for the Knesset and is considered a terror organization by the U.S. government. Ben-Gvir shook Pence's hand and told the former vice president about how he was "battling against our enemies."

"That's what I heard," Pence replied. "Stay strong. We'll stand with you."

Both Ben-Gvir and Marzel made their names as leaders in the far-right, anti-Arab Kach movement. Today, Ben-Gvir leads the Otzma Yehudit party and was elected to the Knesset in 2021. As an attorney, he has represented suspects in Jewish terror cases and hate crimes.

'This is Putin's show, he has several ways to take it nuclear'. LISTEN

He first became famous when, a few weeks before the November 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, he appeared on television brandishing a Cadillac emblem [stolen from Rabin's car and issuing a threat](#):

"We got to his car, and we'll get to him, too."

Lawmaker Itamar Ben-Gvir speaks to reporters. Credit: Hadas Parush

Ben-Gvir is also famous in Israel for lionizing Baruch Goldstein, the far-right Jewish terrorist who massacred 29 Muslims at the Cave of the Patriarchs in 1994. In 2019, when Otzma Yehudit was negotiating to unite with other right-wing parties with the encouragement of then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ahead of an Israeli election, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) tweeted that it "has a longstanding policy not to meet with members of this racist and reprehensible party."

In addition, Israel's current prime minister, Naftali Bennett, [refused pressure by Netanyahu in 2020](#) to add Ben-Gvir to his party in order to consolidate right-wing votes in that year's national election. Bennett said he would not partner with someone who glorifies a murderer like Goldstein, noting that Ben-Gvir had hung a large photo of the Jewish terrorist in his living room.

- [Kahanist Lawmaker Pulls Gun on Palestinians in the West Bank](#)

- ['Truly Horrifying': AIPAC Criticized for Endorsing GOP 'Election Deniers'](#)
- [Thanks to Netanyahu's Party, Meir Kahane Has Been Resurrected in Sheikh Jarrah](#)

Ben-Gvir's provocations have continued throughout his stint as a Knesset opposition member over the past 10 months. In one instance, a video surfaced of him [pulling a handgun on Arab security guards](#) during a parking dispute in the underground garage of the Expo Tel Aviv conference center.

In recent months, he has maintained a [makeshift parliamentary office](#) in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, declaring that "we are the landlords," prompting protests by Palestinian residents and violent clashes. In their aftermath, Bennett described Ben-Gvir as "a provocateur who tries to ignite tensions."

Ben-Gvir was introduced to Pence in front of press cameras on Wednesday by Marzel, the Boston-born former leader of Kahane's Kach movement, who lives in Hebron and was one of the settler leaders giving Pence a tour of the city. Marzel has been banned from both Facebook and Twitter for hate speech and was blocked by Israel's Supreme Court from running for political office in a decision that cited Marzel's racist statements, calling them "a new low point in the racial discourse that we have not known before."

During his visit to Israel, which began Monday, Pence dined with Republican megadonor Miriam Adelson, met with both Bennett and Netanyahu, and saw President Isaac Herzog and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid. In addition, he visited the Western Wall and received an honorary degree from Ariel University, to which Adelson is a major donor.

Pence has been raising his political profile in recent weeks, through the organization he chairs, Advancing American Freedom. The group recently spent over \$10 million on television ads criticizing President Joe Biden and congressional Democrats ahead of the 2022 midterm elections.

Pence's friendly exchanges with Ben-Gvir and Marzel were attacked by Meretz MK Mossi Raz, who wrote that Pence chose to meet with men "who have worked for years to cleanse the old center of Hebron of its Palestinian population" and called the meeting an "alliance of hate."

Matt Duss, foreign policy advisor to Senator Bernie Sanders, compared the exchange to "a foreign leader coming to the U.S. and hanging out with [the Proud Boys](#)."