

Naftali Bennett Strengthened Hamas and Paved the Way for Smotrich and Ben Gvir — He Is Not the “Savior”

Dr. Shaul Arieli, Head of the Tamarur–Politography Research Group for the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict

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In recent months, Naftali Bennett seems to be enjoying a public revival. He appears on screens, lectures at conferences, and rolls his eyes with false statesmanship, as if he were the last “enlightened” prime minister — the one who “saved” Israel from the abyss. But hypocrisy has its limits. The 20 seats he’s receiving in polls — while Bezalel Smotrich barely passes the threshold and Itamar Ben Gvir maintains his power — show that among centrists and leftists there are many “strategic” or simply naïve voters.

Bennett has found fertile ground for rewriting history. Behind the artificial halo stands a politician who grew from the nationalist-messianic right, promoted settlement expansion, pushed for annexing most of the West Bank, and ignored the Palestinians — directly contributing to the conditions that empowered Hamas and led to the collapse of October 7.

Bennett was never moderate. Quite the opposite: he legitimized political messianism and prepared the ground for the rise of ultra-nationalist forces — the same forces that opened the door to Smotrich and Ben Gvir. Anyone who now praises Bennett’s “achievements” must re-examine his record and its long-term consequences.

Bennett entered politics with a clear agenda: blocking the creation of a Palestinian state. In 2012 he launched his “Stabilization Plan,” whose first principle was the unilateral annexation of Area C. “Israel will act independently and fortify its vital interests,” he said. When asked about Gaza, he replied — blind to regional reality — that it was “already practically part of Egypt.” Fully aware of the sensitivities, he still wrote with arrogance: “The world won’t recognize our sovereignty there... it’ll get used to it over time” (*Ynet*, 23 Feb 2012).

At a time when Likud still sometimes pretended to moderation abroad, Bennett made his aim explicit: annexation. “We must move from defense to decision; our dream is for Judea and Samaria to be part of sovereign Israel,” he declared in Jerusalem in 2016. His “Stabilization Plan” envisioned permanent Israeli military control and Palestinian enclaves without territorial continuity — essentially identical to Smotrich’s later proposal.

In government, Bennett repeatedly advanced policies that deepened Israel’s control over the West Bank. As education minister, he infused the system with messianic ideology, saying: “We must restore pride in Zionism, without apology.” The result: politicization of education and exclusion of critical voices. As defense minister, he strengthened the army as a tool of settlement policy.

Israelis tend to forget Bennett’s words and deeds. He made clear time and again his opposition to a Palestinian state — “Our ancestors and descendants will not forgive a leader who divides our land” (*Maariv*, 11 Aug 2014) — and never changed his stance. His anti-liberal worldview, shared with Shaked, Ben Gvir, and Smotrich, glorified militarism: “We will live forever by the sword.” In a 2015 Facebook post to soldiers he wrote, “One day you’ll be home with your wife and kids under a warm blanket — then new soldiers will guard you.”

He even urged soldiers before elections to persuade their comrades to vote for his party.

In August 2024, *Globes*’ fact-checking project *Mishrokit* exposed false statistics he spread about Muslims in Europe — some unverifiable, others nonexistent.

He didn’t invent attacks on the judiciary either. In 2015 he warned against “judicial tyranny” and backed a Basic Law amendment enabling disqualification of Knesset candidates based on their statements, shifting the burden of proof to them. In 2023 he told NBC that “broad consensus” existed for judicial reform because the Supreme Court “does not fairly represent all opinions.”

When Bennett became prime minister in 2021, many claimed he had changed. He sat with Lapid, Michaeli, and Horowitz, and for the first time included an Arab Islamist party,

Ra'am, in the coalition — a rare moment that seemed to challenge the messianic narrative. But his policy toward Palestinians remained the same. In a Yesha Council speech he compared peace efforts to an unnecessary operation removing a “shard from the backside,” insisting Israel must simply “live with it.” His government advanced over 7,000 new housing units in settlements — a record even compared with previous right-wing governments. Internationally too, he accelerated settlement expansion while posing as a “pragmatist.”

In Gaza, the same pattern persisted: strengthening Hamas as an alternative to the Palestinian Authority. The cynical logic was that as long as Hamas ruled Gaza, there was “no one to talk to.” Economic concessions to Hamas continued — Qatari salary payments, more work permits — all under the “conflict-management” doctrine that sowed the winds which brought the storm of October 7.

Bennett believed Israel could expand settlements without paying a price, weaken the PA without losing stability, and tolerate Hamas as long as it was “quiet.” That pessimism laid the groundwork for the despair fueling Palestinian terror. Hamas became richer, stronger, deadlier. As defense minister, Bennett’s greatest failure was embracing “conflict management.” He weakened the PA further, offering token economic gestures while proudly refusing to meet Abu Mazen or discuss diplomacy (*Srugim*, 17 Aug 2022).

Meanwhile, he helped legitimize the messianic right. As leader of *HaBayit HaYehudi*, he collaborated with those who saw settlements as a redemptive mission. He avoided confronting Ben Gvir, thus paving the way for *Religious Zionism* and *Jewish Power* — parties that later captured the finance and national security ministries. “Whoever lets tigers into the political cage shouldn’t be surprised when they devour the keeper.”

Bennett’s clean image, fluent English, and calm tone granted him an aura of responsibility that deceived both Israeli centrists and the foreign press. Yet the gap between image and reality is vast.

Historically, Bennett appears as both the prime minister who formed a coalition with an Arab party — an unprecedented step — and a politician who deepened the occupation

and empowered extremists. These two faces complement each other: Ra'am served as his fig leaf while he quietly advanced the messianic agenda.

Right-wing leaders had long used the same tactic — moderate façade, annexation in practice — but Bennett perfected it and sold it to the center-left. That is his greatest political success and his most destructive legacy.

Israelis love myths, and Bennett exploited that. Draped in the image of “the responsible savior,” he now calls himself a pragmatic unifier. When asked if he might return to politics, he replied: “I don’t rule anything out. If I see the country in danger, I’ll consider returning” (*Globes*, 12 June 2024). The irony is sharp: the man who helped create the danger portrays himself as the one to rescue us from it.

He has already founded a new party — *Bennett 2026* — and appears frequently in international media as Israel’s self-appointed advocate.

Let it be stated clearly: Naftali Bennett is not the “responsible alternative.” He is part of the failure.

Anyone who weakened the Palestinian Authority, strengthened Hamas, and legitimized Smotrich and Ben Gvir cannot be the savior. He shares full responsibility for the chaos.

The lesson for the future is clear: if Israel wishes to recover from the trauma of October 7, it must stop clinging to false myths and stop treating those who created the problem as part of the solution. Bennett, like Netanyahu and the rest of the messianic right, belongs to a past we must leave behind.

Those who vote for him will also bear responsibility for the policies that already led us to disaster.

What Israel needs is leadership that understands: the conflict cannot be managed forever; settlements cannot keep expanding without destroying stability; and extremists cannot be legitimized without dismantling democracy.

As long as the public remains captive to fake narratives of “responsible leaders” like Bennett, the future will mirror the present — another cycle of delusion and ruin.

Voters must resist “strategic voting” and choose those who truly represent their values.

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In recent months Naftali Bennett seems to be enjoying a public comeback. He appears on screens, lectures at conferences, and projects a false air of statesmanship, as though he were Israel’s last “enlightened” prime minister who rescued the country from the abyss. But hypocrisy has limits. The twenty seats he now polls—while Bezalel Smotrich barely passes the electoral threshold and Itamar Ben Gvir keeps his strength—show that many centrist and left-leaning voters are either “strategic” or naïve.

Behind Bennett’s artificial halo stands a politician who grew out of the nationalist-messianic right, encouraged settlement expansion, sought to annex most of the West Bank, and ignored the Palestinians—directly helping create the conditions that strengthened Hamas and led to the collapse of October 7. Far from moderate, he legitimized the new political messianism and prepared the ground for the rise of ultra-nationalist forces, the same ones that opened the door to Smotrich and Ben Gvir.

From the outset Bennett’s goal was to block any chance of a Palestinian state. In 2012 he launched his “Stabilization Plan,” calling for unilateral Israeli sovereignty in Area C: “Israel will act independently and fortify its vital interests.” Asked about Gaza, he replied—blind to regional realities—that it was “already practically part of Egypt.” He admitted the world would not recognize such sovereignty but added: “It’ll get used to it over time.”

At a Jerusalem conference in 2016 he declared: “We must move from defense to decision; our dream is that Judea and Samaria will be part of sovereign Israel.” The plan would leave the IDF in control everywhere while Palestinians lived in disconnected enclaves—essentially identical to Smotrich’s later proposal. As education minister,

Bennett infused the school system with nationalist-religious ideology and suppressed critical voices; as defense minister, he treated the IDF as a tool of settlement policy.

Bennett never changed his opposition to a Palestinian state—“Our ancestors and descendants will not forgive a leader who divides our land”—and his anti-liberal worldview, shared with Shaked, Smotrich, and Ben Gvir, glorified militarism: “We will live forever by the sword.” He politicized the IDF, urged soldiers before the 2015 election to vote for his party, and spread false statistics later debunked by *Globes*. As early as 2015 he warned against “judicial tyranny” and backed legislation enabling the disqualification of Knesset candidates for their opinions. In 2023 he told NBC there was “broad consensus” for judicial reform because the Supreme Court “does not fairly represent all opinions.”

When Bennett became prime minister in 2021 in the “government of change,” some claimed he had evolved: he sat with Lapid, Michaeli, Horowitz, and even brought in the Islamist Ra’am party. But his policy toward Palestinians stayed intact. He continued the “creeping annexation” strategy, authorizing more than 7,000 new settlement housing units—more than under previous right-wing governments—and in international forums promoted the settlement project while posing as a pragmatist.

In Gaza he pursued the same cynical “conflict-management” doctrine: strengthening Hamas as an alternative to the Palestinian Authority. Economic concessions and Qatari funds kept Hamas afloat, while the PA grew weaker. Bennett believed Israel could expand settlements, undermine the PA, and tolerate Hamas so long as it stayed “quiet.” That illusion bred despair and empowered terror. As defense minister he praised token economic “improvements” yet refused any political engagement with Abu Mazen. Meanwhile he helped normalize the messianic right and avoided confronting Ben Gvir, paving the way for Jewish Power and Religious Zionism to capture key ministries. Those who let tigers into the political cage should not be surprised when they maul the keeper.

Bennett's polished image and fluent English fooled both Israelis and foreign media. History, however, will record him as a prime minister who, while forming an unprecedented coalition with an Arab party, deepened the occupation, legitimized extremists, and perpetuated Palestinian division. The Ra'am partnership served as a fig leaf for advancing the messianic agenda. Right-wing leaders had long played this double game—moderate façade, annexation in practice—but Bennett perfected it and sold it to the center-left. That is his greatest political success and his most destructive legacy.

Israelis love myths, and Bennett exploited that, marketing himself as “the responsible savior.” Asked if he would run again, he answered: “If I see the country in danger, I'll consider returning.” The irony: the man who helped create the danger now casts himself as the rescuer. He has already founded a new party—*Bennett 2026*—and presents himself abroad as Israel's self-appointed defender.

Let it be said plainly: Naftali Bennett is not a responsible alternative but part of the failure. Anyone who weakened the Palestinian Authority, strengthened Hamas, and legitimized Smotrich and Ben Gvir cannot be the savior. He shares full responsibility for the chaos.

If Israel wants to recover from the trauma of October 7, it must stop clinging to false myths and treating those who caused the problem as its solution. Bennett, like Netanyahu and the other messianic leaders of the right, belongs to a past Israel must leave behind. Voters who support him will bear responsibility for repeating the policies that already led to disaster.

Israel needs leadership that grasps simple truths: the conflict cannot be managed forever; settlement expansion destroys stability; legitimizing extremists destroys democracy. So long as the public remains captive to the fake narrative of “responsible leaders” like Bennett, the future will echo the present—more illusions, more ruin. Choose those who truly represent your values.