

Will Ben Gvir Consent to Jewish Activists' Request to Perform Animal Sacrifices on the Temple Mount?

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Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir's visit to the Temple Mount on Tuesday caused a flurry of reactions, including widespread **international condemnation** by world leaders.

The Temple Mount is the holiest site in Judaism—the location of both the First and Second Temples. It is also the third holiest site in Islam and, currently, the plaza houses Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock.

Israel allows Muslims to visit and pray on the Temple Mount, whereas Jews—according to the “the status quo” policy—are only allowed to visit during specific time windows, but not to pray or to perform religious rituals.

In 2006, Ben Gvir joined other activists who were attempting to perform the Passover sacrifice—the ritual slaughter of a one year old male lamb—on the Temple Mount, before they were stopped by the police. The “Returning to the Mount” activist group every year requests permission to perform the ritual sacrifice on the Mount. Every year, their application is rejected.

“This year, in light of the political situation and the formation of a ‘fully right-wing’ government for the first time in a long time, there is real potential that the Passover sacrifice could be performed in a respectful way, with approval from and coordination with all of the different

authorities, principally the Israel Police, which are under your power as the new national security minister of the State of Israel,” the group wrote to Ben Gvir recently.

It will be difficult for Ben Gvir to deny the request without losing face, as he was deeply involved in seeking to restore ritual sacrifices to the Temple Mount.

However, such permission would be perceived as a significant change in the Temple Mount “status quo,” which most likely would prompt massive protests and violence from Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, as well as widespread international condemnation.

In 2017, Ben Gvir served as defense attorney for members of the activist group, who were arrested for planning to perform the sacrifice.

“The police must allow Temple Mount activists the freedom of worship. Israel is losing its democratic character. It is unimaginable that people are being arrested in the middle of the night because they want to perform a Jewish religious commandment,” Ben Gvir said in a statement at the time.

The issue constitutes a serious dilemma for Ben Gvir. When asked by Israel’s Channel 12 Tuesday night whether he would allow the Passover sacrifice, Ben Gvir ducked the question.

Leading up to Ben Gvir’s visit on the Temple Mount, Hamas—the terror organization that controls the Gaza Strip—threatened that such a visit to the holy site by Ben Gvir would unleash missile attacks and general violence. On Tuesday night, a rocket was fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip, but according to the Israel Defense Forces, it landed inside Gaza, causing no injuries or damage.

“Our government will not surrender to threats from Hamas,” Ben Gvir said, after his controversial visit early Tuesday morning. “The Temple Mount is the most important place for the

people of Israel. We maintain the freedom of movement for Muslims and Christians, but Jews also go up to the site, and those who make threats must be dealt with, with an iron fist.”

The Palestinian Authority– Hamas’ rival–claimed Ben Gvir’s visit to the plaza constituted an “attack” on the Al-Aqsa Mosque, with its Foreign Ministry calling his visit an “unprecedented provocation and a dangerous escalation of the conflict.”

“Netanyahu bears responsibility for this attack,” the P.A. said in its statement.

The P.A. also accused Israel of seeking to build a new Temple for God on the Temple Mount, and its Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh alleged that Ben Gvir’s “incursions” were attempts “to turn the Al-Aqsa Mosque into a Jewish temple.”

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