



# MUSLIM PUBLIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL

September 26, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
The President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

I am writing to express the urgent need to impose sanctions on Betzalel Smotrich, Israel's Minister of Finance, and Itamar Ben Gvir, Israel's Minister of National Security, under [Executive Order 14155](#) and the [Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act](#). Both individuals have promoted extremist ideologies, and supported and celebrated violence against innocent Palestinian men, women, and children.

On February 1st of this year, you [signed Executive Order 14155](#) (EO 14155), "Imposing Certain Sanctions on Persons Undermining Peace, Security, and Stability in the West Bank" in response to persistent acts of terror being committed by Israeli extremists against Palestinian civilians. This Executive Order, while long overdue, was a welcome first step in the right direction. It enabled sanctions to be imposed on individuals responsible for or complicit in any of the following actions in the West Bank:

1. An act of violence or threat of violence targeting civilians;
2. Efforts to place civilians in reasonable fear of violence with the purpose or effect of necessitating a change of residence to avoid such violence;
3. Property destruction; or
4. Seizure or dispossession of property by private actors.

Many believed EO 14155 had the potential to have a positive impact because it explicitly stated that government officials involved in any of the aforementioned abuses could face sanctions.

Given this context, we were dismayed and deeply disappointed to learn that, according to [reports](#), you rejected the recommendation from White House officials to impose sanctions against Smotrich and Ben Gvir. What makes this even more troubling is that the decision was not rooted in their conduct or complicity in the very type of terror that EO 14155 aims to address, but rather in the principle that "the U.S. should not sanction elected officials in democratic countries."

If this sentiment-turned-policy — which appears to allow war criminals to enjoy a relationship with the United States under their home country's system of government — would apply universally, it would make clear to the international community that our support for human rights is a political statement and



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not a policy position. Moreover, it would undermine the effectiveness of laws like the Global Magnitsky Act, which allows sanctions on government officials responsible for human rights violations.

Additionally, this position is not in line with the precedent set by past administrations, most notably in 2005 with the [decision](#) to deny Narendra Modi, then Chief Minister of Gujarat, India, entry into the United States. Modi, the democratically elected head of the state of Gujarat, was found to be complicit in the [Gujarat riots](#), which resulted in the death of over a thousand people. As a result, the Bush administration revoked his visa and denied his application for a diplomatic visa. It's worth noting that India was an ally and major trade partner, and Modi was the head of one of the largest states in the country. Yet, the [determination](#) was made that Modi "was responsible for or directly carried out, at any time, particularly severe violations of religious freedom" and thus would not be permitted entry into the United States.

The White House officials who recommended imposing sanctions were not the only ones who recognized the need for action against Smotrich and Ben Gvir. [Josep Borrel](#), the European Union's foreign policy chief, is pursuing sanctions against the two ministers, whom he describes as "sinister." Irish Foreign Minister Micheál Martin and Belgium's Deputy Prime Minister Petra De Sutter also support his efforts.

Sanctioning Betzalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act and EO 14155 would send a clear message that the United States does not tolerate human rights abuses, terrorism, or the promotion of hate crimes. Moreover, it would be an important step in the right direction as your administration ends. One that would show your commitment to curbing violent extremism in the region and your belief that our laws must be applied universally and accountability must not pass through a political filter.

Sincerely,

Salam Al-Marayati  
President

Haris Tarin  
Vice President, Policy and Programming