

“ISRAEL INSIDER”

REPORT # **71**

SUMMARY OF A ‘MIDDLE EAST FORUM’ WEBINAR

1ST JUNE 2022



In a brief ‘Webinar’ session organized by the Washington based MEF, Ashley Perry, an adviser to Israel's minister of foreign affairs and deputy prime minister in 2009-15, provides weekly updates on Israeli politics.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS BY ASHLEY PERRY

- Perry began his weekly briefing by starting with the march on Sunday, 29 May to celebrate ‘Jerusalem Day’ (in reference to Jerusalem having been unified in the aftermath of the Six Day War in 1967 when Jews and Israelis gained access for the first time to previously not allowed areas in East Jerusalem).
- While these celebrations have in recent years taken a more ‘right wing/religious’ identity, last year the government of PM Netanyahu decided to cancel the event in face of Hamas threats to disturb the celebrations by firing rockets etc.
- Although the same threats were repeated once again this year, Naftali Bennet refused to blink and allowed for the march to proceed. While there were some minor trouble, as a whole, the march went on peacefully and became a moral victory for Bennet who was praised for his courage even by ultra-religious leaders who have in the past been most critical of him and his government.
- The fact that the march did not go ahead was a major blow and a loss of face for Hamas – something that Fatah was quick to jump upon and exploit.
- Hamas was persuaded not to do anything following Israeli consultations with Qatar, some Europeans and the US (Qatar threatening to cut off funding). These threats were also complemented by Israeli threats to assassinate Hamas leaders – something Israel had not engaged in for some time. Israel had also threatened to cancel work passes for Palestinians coming for work into Israel from Gaza.
- Hence, all in all, events of the past week had been a major boost for Naftali Bennet and his ailing coalition.

- However, on the Israeli domestic front, matters remained quite dicey for the Coalition with the threat from Michael Biton of the Blue and White Party to leave the coalition unless his criticisms of the reforms in the public transport and agricultural sectors were taken into account.
- In face of serious opposition from powerful people such as the Finance Minister Lieberman, Bennet has appointed a committee to study the matter thus buying a few additional weeks.
- Nonetheless, he is at a crossroad for if he gives in to Biton he will alienate some of his key partners and if he does not, then he is back to just 59 votes in the Knesset!
- Bennet's troubles were further aggravated by a renewed threat from Meretz Party's Idit Silman to once again leave the coalition and by rumours that Minister of Justice, Gidon Sa'ar might once again give his party's support to Netanyahu (although such an occurrence by itself will not be sufficient for bringing the government down).
- There have been a few other key pieces of legislation before the Knesset in the past week which have not boded well for the coalition, and despite the brief respite that was provided by the 'Jerusalem Day' celebrations, the future is looking increasingly bleaker for both Naftali Bennet and his coalition.

