

“AN EXPERT VIEW FROM ISRAEL”

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Special election report

SUMMARY OF A ‘MIDDLE EAST FORUM’ WEBINAR ENTITLED ‘ISRAEL UPDATE’



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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 ASHLEY PERRY’S COMMENTS

- After a two weeks absence, Ashley Perry began his weekly briefing from Israel by saying that in the wake of the creation of new right-wing government with a number of controversial figures tapped to assume key cabinet positions, there has been a great deal of talk regarding the kind of international pressures likely to be manifested.
- However, Ashley pointed to the fact that this was not the first time for such speculations, given that when Menachem Begin first formed a right-wing Likud government after some four decades of continuous rule by the Left-wing Labour Party, similar talk of isolation and boycott were sounded. The same was also voiced when Ariel Sharon came to power in 2005.
- Ashley said that in both previous cases, both Begin and Sharon despite all the bad press had gone on to achieve major breakthroughs and shine on the world stage (Camp David and the Israeli disengagement in Gaza).
- Nonetheless, the assignment of people like Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich to key cabinet posts has once again raised similar concerns, especially in the US where according to Perry there are 2 schools of thoughts regarding this issue:
 - 1. Those in the US who are upfront about saying that this arrangement cannot work with such controversial figures;
 - 2. Those who like Secretary of State Blinken say that any US concerns are limited to policies and not personalities.
- Perry noted that already, the UAE had invited Ben-Gvir to their national day celebrations with events having moved on without any fuss or problems.

- Much to Netanyahu's relief, the UAE action has now made it much more difficult for others in trying to boycott people like Ben-Gvir or Smotrich (who has already served in previous governments as Housing Minister).
- Perry was of the view that there had been a great deal of behind the scene lobbying on the part of Likud officials for Netanyahu not to give the Defence and Foreign Ministry portfolios to non-Likud people – something that seems to have yielded result with the almost certain appointment of General Gallant as the next Israeli Defence Minister (though the appointment of the foreign minister is still uncertain despite previous speculations).
- Perry said that Netanyahu's first deadline for announcing his government is midnight of 11 December, though he is able to extend it for another 14 days if needed.
- In Perry's view, Netanyahu had already concluded all the key agreements he needed, though problem still remained with the Shas Party and less crucially at this juncture, with the likes of Benny Gantz (along with his allies who hold 11 seats in the new Knesset) in the near term.
- Perry concluded his remarks by saying that while the international community was adopting a wait and see attitude, having kept the Defence Ministry portfolio in the hands of Likud, Netanyahu is in a good position for giving that job to Gantz at some point in the future, if his participation was deemed necessary.

