

"AN EXPERT VIEW FROM ISRAEL"
REPORT # 62
SUMMARY OF A
'MIDDLE EAST FORUM'
WEBINAR
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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

- ♦ Perry began his comments by saying that already a year had gone by since the last general election in Israel (the last of 4 inconclusive elections). Since then, the Coalition government headed by Naftali Bennet had managed against most expectations to remain in office - as he had himself predicted.
- ♦ The stability in government with the budget having been passed has given the new government the confidence to start planning for the next budget despite the many obstacles that have continued to remain.
- ♦ According to Perry, a main obstacle at this time facing the government was disagreement over agricultural policy where some of the coalition members from the left had refused to participate in the voting process. This could become a problem once the Knesset break is over and parliament is once again reopened for normal business.
- ♦ Perry said that the latest polls indicated that in the event of another general election there would be no outright winners, although the Likud Party of Benjamin Netanyahu would be expected to increase its membership to 59 leaving it only 2 short of a majority. Although Netanyahu's upcoming trial has once again received new press coverage, the latest polls still have him as by far the most preferred candidate for the post of PM, way ahead of Naftali Bennet whose preference rating is in the mid-teens.
- ♦ There has been some shock in Israel in the course of the past week following the stabbing death of 4 Israelis at the hand of an Arab terrorist belonging to ISIS who was himself shot down by some armed Israelis. There has been a great deal of acrimony over the police handling of the terrorist in question.
- ♦ By far the most important foreign policy matter over the past week were the official protests launched against the US by both the Israeli PM and Foreign Minister over the issue of removing the IRGC from the list of FTOs (foreign terrorist organizations), emphasizing the wrong message that would be sent as a result of such action.

- ◆ In the Q&A session that followed his presentation, Perry focused again on the Iran issue and said that many members of the US team today were the same people who negotiated the original JCPOA deal and their main objective now – like in 2015 – was to “kick the can down the road”. This was a time when the Russians were trying to use the JCPOA for their own purposes.
- ◆ The same issue along with other Iran related matters was perhaps the most important matter that was discussed in the summit meeting that took place last week in Cairo between the leaders of Israel, Egypt and the UAE.
- ◆ Perry said that it was stated that Israeli forces had taken out some 200 Iranian drones in recent weeks.
- ◆ Perry said that the address made to the Israeli Knesset by the Ukrainian President in which he had compared the Russian attack to the Holocaust and the ‘Final Solution’ had backfired and resulted in certain push-backs from a number of MKs (members of Knesset). This was due to the fact during World War II, the majority of Ukrainians had fought along side the Nazis. Perry noted that communist members of the Knesset had boycotted the meeting in protest.
- ◆ Nonetheless, the Israeli PM had continued with his mediation efforts, and while Jerusalem was still being considered as a potential meeting place for peace talks, Naftali Bennet had conducted another phone conversation with President Putin.
- ◆ At the same time, Israel had accepted some 14,000 Ukrainian refugees – a sizable amount for Israel to absorb.
- ◆ Finally, Perry spoke of the new US Ambassador to Israel – Thomas Niles, saying that some of his recent comments (without too much specification) had resulted in push backs from certain Israeli right-wing political circles.

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