

# “AN EXPERT VIEW FROM ISRAEL”

Series Report #103



## SUMMARY OF A ‘MIDDLE EAST FORUM’ WEBINAR



25 JANUARY 2023



*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 WEEKLY COMMENTS

- Ashley Perry began his weekly briefing by reiterating the fact that the past week had been a difficult one for PM Benjamin Netanyahu and his new coalition government.
- Perry said that Netanyahu had been rushed into a quick press conference as a result of much talk that the judicial reforms planned by his government might have serious negative implications for the Israeli economy, which is already in a fragile state.
- Netanyahu’s reaction had also been spurred by talk from the Head of the Bank of Israel that the current debates might result in Israel’s credit rating being lowered – something that was also supported by some 270 leading economic and political figures (including Eugene Candle, a previous member of Netanyahu’s inner circle).
- However, concerned that his image might be damaged, all these assertions were strongly discredited and rejected by Netanyahu who referred to them as a mere ‘leftist plot’ and nothing more.
- Netanyahu’s woes in this regard had been aggravated in the aftermath of a second week of public demonstrations that numbered anywhere between 100-150,000 against his proposed judicial reforms – demonstrations in which both Lapid and Gantz had taken part in.
- Another important development in the past week was the fact in the aftermath of the Supreme Court ruling concerning Aryeh Deri, Netanyahu was left with no alternative but to firing him from his positions in the Cabinet.
- The loss of Deri, a loyal supporter and ally in the cabinet means, that while he will remain as the leader of the Shas Party, most key decisions are now likely to be taken in various informal meetings outside the cabinet (meaning that the cabinet is likely to be downgraded by the coalition).

- Netanyahu was also beset by another serious internal quarrel this time between the Defense and Finance Ministers (Galant and Smotrich) over the right of their jurisdiction and decision making over illegal building in West Bank. This had resulted in Smotrich boycotting cabinet meetings. But given that Gallant is a member of Likud and that Netanyahu needs Smotrich much more for the survival of his coalition, Netanyahu is expected to resolve this dispute in a manner that ultimately satisfies Smotrich whom he needs more.
- The issue of granting Israeli citizenship to 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Jews – something that Ultra-religious groups are concerned about mainly because of people coming from the former Soviet Union rose up again, though Netanyahu is working on a kind of solution that will lead to an interim compromise, kicking the can down the road.
- Another setback for Netanyahu was his leaked secret visit to Jordan for a meeting with King Abdullah in which issues around Mount Temple and Ben Gvir's provocative visit had once again surfaced and given prominence in the Israel press much to the PM's chagrin.
- However, despite all these problematic issues facing the government, no one in the coalition is ready for the coalition to collapse at this juncture as no one wants another general election.
- Perry ended his comments by responding to a question that asked if Israel was likely to supply air defence systems to Ukraine. He said, Israel did not want to upset the Russians and did not want Russia supplying Iran with game changing weapons. Additionally, Israel did not have enough missiles to be in a position of exporting anything to anyone at this time.

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