

“AN EXPERT VIEW FROM ISRAEL”

Perspective **57**

SUMMARY OF A ‘**MIDDLE EAST FORUM**’ WEBINAR 9 FEBRUARY 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 ASHLEY PERRY’S WEEKLY COMMENTS

1. THE CITIZENSHIP BILL

- Perry began his weekly brief by first focussing on the subject of ‘re-introducing of the Citizenship Law’, which in his view could potentially expose the sharp divisions in the government coalition and thus pose a threat to its survival.
- The law in question has to do an extension to a controversial law barring Palestinians from the occupied West Bank or Gaza who marry Israelis from being granted citizenship rights – something that has general public support and has been consistently ratified by the Right since 2003.
- Despite opposition from the Arab parties (Raam Party and the Joint Arab List) and the left-wing Meretz Party, the law comfortably passed its first hurdle in the Israeli Knesset with the help of the opposition by 44-5 votes. The opposition justified its action on the basis of not wanting to undermine the security fabric of the nation.
- The support provided in this instance by the opposition was unprecedented and was achieved following close consultation between all the right-wing parties - both in the Coalition as well as the opposition.
- According to Perry, the bill would renew a ban on permits for Palestinians who marry Israelis to live with their spouses in Israel. The ban was first passed in 2003 and then renewed every year since, until last July when the law expired after the coalition failed to win a vote on extending it.
- Meretz and Ra’am say they oppose the legislation because of its discrimination against the Israeli Arab population, and both parties have warned of consequences for the coalition if the government moves forward on such a contentious issue while ignoring their position.

2. Other Issues

- Perry next turned his attention to a terrible scandal that has broken out in Israel in which the Police has been accused of abusing its rights by hacking the mobile phones of a number of people without legal authorization.
- This process that involved using the Pegasus Programme has been going for some time despite the fact that one of its victims has been the son of former PM, Benjamin Netanyahu.

- The process of investigating this matter which has just started is expected to lead to major embarrassments for both Netanyahu and Bennet.
- Finally, Perry brought attention to the unconfirmed reports that the US has agreed to release some \$29 billions of Iran's assets in an attempt to secure an agreement for reviving the JCPOA – something that has not gone down well in Israel.
- Whether related or not, Naftali Bennet and Joe Biden did have a telephone conversation together concerning the ongoing negotiations with Iran. There has been increased fear in recent weeks in Israel about the progress of these talks, especially since most of the hawkish elements who had constituted a part of the US negotiating team have resigned and left.
- Perry emphasized that Naftali Bennet remained strongly against the JCPOA deal that was now being discussed in Vienna.
- Perry was adamant that in the event that a deal should eventually be signed, it would be very difficult for Israel to then try and carry out any kind of a military strike against Iran.
- Finally, on the subject of Ukraine-Russia standoff, Perry said that while Israel is trying to remain neutral (despite having close ties to both countries), Foreign Minister Lapid has offered to mediate in the ongoing dispute, though in light of the presence of other larger countries vying to do the same, it is unlikely that Israel will have any role in helping to defuse this crisis.

