

# “AN EXPERT VIEW FROM ISRAEL”

Series Report #92

Special election report

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



9 NOVEMBER 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 COMMENTS

- Perry began his comments by saying that the final certified results of the election results were announced today ( 9 November).
- On Sunday 13 November, leaders of all the parties with representation at the Knesset will be invited by President Herzog (an event that is likely to be broadcast live on Facebook and YouTube) so that they can make their nominations for the next Prime Minister to be.
- Obviously, given the election result, Netanyahu will be given 28 days to forms a government with a possible extension of another 14 days should that be necessary.
- Perry said that at present Netanyahu has been holding court, trying to work out the composition of his government as well as the number of Ministries that will need to exist (estimated at 30, a figure he is trying hard to reduce) in order to permit for his coalition to work.
- Perry noted that contrary to what is said, Netanyahu is a status quo leader and a control freak who is not a risk taker. So, while he will not do anything dramatic, he is expected to reverse some of the policies enacted by the outgoing s-called change government.
- A critical issue that will face Netanyahu will be dealing with the demand by Itamar Ben Gvir, the ultra-right wing head of now the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest party in the Knesset, to be given the Security Ministry with full control over the national police force.
- This is a highly controversial issue given Ben-Gvir’s past record (he was convicted by an Israeli court in 2007 of incitement to riot) especially in light of the existing emergency situation of the past several weeks in Negev.

- Another contentious issue lurking in the side-lines has to do with future nominations for the Supreme Court – a debate that will be quite taxing in the months ahead.

### **CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS ON THE ISRAELI ELECTION**

The November 1 election presumably puts an end to Israel's embarrassing string of five general elections in three and a half years, all in search of a stable majority government. Unusually, the stalemate was not based on ideology, because right-wing and religious sentiments now unquestionably have a solid majority in the population as a whole. Rather, the elections were all fought on the single question of whether Netanyahu should be returned to the office he held from 1996-99 and 2009-21.

Following the collapse in June of a year-long anti-Netanyahu "Government of Change," stretching politically from the left to an Islamist party and even elements of the far right, most of whose major figures were former political partners or even ideological soulmates of Netanyahu, the PM elect has again triumphed, with a likely majority of 65 in the 120-member Knesset for his presumed four-party coalition between Likud, Religious Zionism, and the ultra-Orthodox parties Shas and United Torah Judaism.

For Netanyahu, first and foremost on his mind will be to end the criminal case against him for bribery, fraud, and breach of trust, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/01/world/middleeast/israel-netanyahu-corruption-trial.html> the trial of which has been going on since May 2020. It is expected that the Knesset will soon pass a law preventing the prosecution of a sitting prime minister, or some similar sleight of hand, to make the case go away. That will likely be only the beginning, however. Netanyahu's supporters have cultivated a deep hatred for the country's judiciary, seeing it as part of an out-of-touch cultural elite run amok.

Other such measures proposed have included the right of the Knesset to overturn a judicial decision with a simple majority vote, politicization of Israel's formerly admirable, non-political process for choosing judges, as well as weakening the powers of the attorney general to act in cases such as Netanyahu's therapy law, to satisfy one of Religious Zionism's factions, whose chief issue is opposition to Israel's generally liberal LGBTQ+ policies.

A major casualty of the election is the left-wing, social-democratic-oriented Meretz party, which won 12 Knesset seats in the 1990s but which now seems to have just missed the electoral threshold of 3.25%, below which a party gets no seats and its votes are wasted. Meretz apparently missed the threshold by about 0.1%, while Balad, an Arab nationalist party, missed by slightly more. Between them, they received over 6% of the vote, so with a few thousand more votes for each, the familiar stalemate would likely have occurred, as the pro- and anti-Netanyahu parties received virtually the same number of total votes. Disorganization among the “antis” is being blamed for not having avoided an outcome that has paved the way for Benjamin Netanyahu’s triumphant return at the helm of the Israeli government.

