

“AN EXPERT VIEW FROM ISRAEL”

PERSPECTIVE **58**

SUMMARY OF A **‘MIDDLE EAST FORUM’** WEBINAR

16 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

- Focusing first on the Russia-Ukraine crisis, Perry said that unlike the US and many other European or Latin American states (Brazil being the latest) who have tried to involve by involving themselves in conflict resolution activities, the government of Israel that enjoys good ties with both Russia and Ukraine has deliberately tried to stay out despite much urging from Ukraine.
- This is in a situation where Israel’s primary ally is the US and while Israel also enjoys very close relations with NATO.
- While the crisis today (16 February) has appeared to be less imminent, there has been criticisms inside the country that Israel has not moved fast enough to get its 50,000 or more citizens who are in Ukraine (including also many Ukrainian Jews) out of that country.
- At present, there are many Israeli conscripts who are spending the second year of their national service (as permitted by law) working with Jewish entities (schools and charities) in Ukraine.
- Perry said that for Israel it was also important to maintain its good ties with Russia as well. He said that ongoing Russian naval exercises in Eastern Mediterranean (including Russian elements stationed in Syria) was of some concern to Israel, especially at a time when the Russian Defence Minister overseeing these exercises was in Syria meeting also with President Assad.
- Turning to Iran, Perry was asked to respond to the following question (posed by me): ‘There have been press reports of an Israeli delegation in Vienna meeting with parties involved in the JCPOA negotiations. What is the main objective of such a mission?’
- Perry responded by saying that Israel was unhappy about the desperation that the Biden administration was showing in wanting to reach a deal and repeated his assertion of last week that some ‘hawkish’ members of the US team who had been dissatisfied by the level of concessions being made to Iran had already resigned.
- Perry noted that this was the first time that an Israeli delegation had tried to communicate with the 5+1 in Vienna and the main reason for

this was to alleviate some of their serious concerns by providing a briefing of their own to the various parties negotiating with Iran.

- The fact that as opposed to an estimated one-year nuclear breakout point in 2015, now that period has been reduced to weeks or at best months, is matter of supreme concern for Israel (just as much as a number of other non-nuclear issues pertaining to the Iranian threat).
- Continuing on Iran, Perry spoke of the visit to Tehran on 11 February (43rd anniversary of the Islamic Revolution) of Hezbollah Leader Sheikh Nasrallah. He said that while Tehran was anxious to reiterate that Hezbollah remained under its thumb, the Hezbollah Leader for his part had been adamant in his statements to state (mainly for public consumption inside Lebanon) that for Hezbollah, Lebanon was the first priority (i.e., that Iran should not count on their unquestioned support in the event of any conflict with Israel).
- Perry next turned to the impending state visit to Turkey of Israeli President Herzog who had been invited by President Erdogan.
- Perry attributed this turn of events to the chaotic state of Turkish economy and the need for Erdogan to end the cold war he had started with Israel. He noted that a Turkish team, close to Erdogan was in Israel working out with the Israeli authorities, the agenda for the upcoming meetings in Ankara.
- Perry ended his comments by saying that Turkey has at the same time been naturally most concerned by the close ties that have emerged between Israel, Greece and Cyprus and the various talks concerning a possible gas line linking off-shore Israeli gas to these countries.
- Perry ended his comments by saying that there had been a flare up once again over the eviction of Palestinians from Sheikh Jarrah which had seen some members of Mansur Abbas' Raam Party become quite vocal with their condemnation of government policy over this issue.
- According to Perry, this development had given rise to some speculation - though not considered serious for the time being - of the threat the Raam Party dissatisfaction over this issue (in conjunction with the Arab List) may mean for the security of the current ruling coalition.

GGG