

# “AN EXPERT VIEW FROM ISRAEL”

Series Report #82



## SUMMARY OF A ‘MIDDLE EAST FORUM’ WEBINAR



17 AUGUST 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

- Perry began his weekly comments by first focusing on the comments made by the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas when he had accused Israel of committing “50 Holocausts”, at a joint press conference with Germany’s chancellor, Olaf Scholz, in Berlin – comments that had drawn subsequent condemnation from both Germany and Israel.
- At the end of his state visit to German on 16 August, Abbas was asked by a German journalist whether he planned to apologise for the deadly attack by Palestinian militants on Israeli citizens at the 1972 Munich Olympics, the 50th anniversary of which is on 5 September. In response, Abbas had said, “If we want to dig further into the past, I have 50 massacres that were committed by Israel...Fifty massacres, 50 Holocausts, and to this day, every day, we have dead people killed by the Israeli army.”
- For his part, Chancellor Scholz, who had criticised Abbas for describing Israel as perpetuating an “apartheid system” earlier in the press conference., did not immediately respond verbally to the Holocaust comparison but did send a tweet the following day condemning the comment.
- Perry who described Abbas’s comments as an ‘own goal’, stated that the event had further pushed back any possibility of a rapprochement between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority for any kind of peace talks on the basis that apart from the hard left in Israel, there was no longer any support for resumption of peace talks so long as Mahmoud Abbas was in charge.

- According to Perry, there was some history behind those comments given that in his earlier days while finishing some kind of a 'doctorate' on the subject of the Holocaust at a Moscow university, Abbas had professed a 'denial/revisionist' stance claiming that at most 850,000 Jews (and not 6 million) had been eliminated by the Nazi regime in Germany.
- Perry said that as a result, the entire episode had been a setback for peace and any engagements apart from security coordination's that were needed.
- Turning to the internal situation in Israel, Perry said that after weeks of anticipation, former military chief 'Gadi Eisenkot' had finally taken the plunge into politics, declaring that he will run for the Knesset together with the 'Blue and White' (led by Benny Gantz) and 'New Hope' (led by Gidon Saar) parties under a unified centre-right list. Matan Kahana, a member of Naftali Bennet's Party (Yamina) who was religious affairs minister in the collapsed, now-outgoing government, will also run on the same new slate.
- According to Perry, the new set up greatly enhances the chances of Benny Gantz for becoming Prime Minister in a new rotational set up with Netanyahu, if Netanyahu and his allies fail to secure the 61 seats they need to form a majority in the new Knesset.
- Perry said there has been a great deal of other side activities by all forces especially Avigdor Lieberman who despite having ruled out any sitting together with Netanyahu is promoting an agenda for 'stability' which has unclear meaning for a majority of the people.
- Perry said that Netanyahu was also having problems of his own trying to keep the forces on the right in line given the infighting and the divisions that exist within the ultra-religious parties upon whose support he is dependent for forming the next government.
- Perry also noted that some divisions had also surfaced in 'Arab Joint List' with the announcement that one of their key members was pulling out of the coalition.
- Finally, Perry turned his attention to another key development of the week - namely the re-establishment of full diplomatic ties between Israel and Turkey after more than 12 years of estrangement in the relationship between the two countries.

- This according to Perry, in the aftermath of close Turkish cooperation with Israeli security forces to bloc terrorist action by Iran against Israeli tourists in Turkey, was a calculated risk taken by President Erdogan at a time of serious economic crisis in his country.

