

“ISRAEL INSIDER”

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SUMMARY OF A ‘MIDDLE EAST FORUM’ WEBINAR

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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 COMMENTS BY ASHLEY PERRY

- Perry began his weekly comment by delving immediately into the case of Shireen Abu Aqla who was killed last week by a stray bullet in Jenin, believed by many to have fired by an Israeli soldier. Perry said that so far the exact results of ongoing investigations regarding this incident has not come to light, given the lack of cooperation by the Palestinians who have refused to provide the bullet that had been retrieved from the victim's body for forensic analysis.
- Nonetheless, Israel has tried to continue with its investigations in order to get to the bottom of this matter, though even that has now been made more complicated as a result of the violent and unseemly events that evolved during Shireen Abu Aqla's funeral procession.
- Perry admitted that the terrible scenes that were shown on world media (especially on 'France 14') with Israeli police attacking the funeral procession had been most provocative and damaging for the image of the State of Israel. He noted that what was shown, however, had been selective scenes and chants of slogans on the part of the Palestinian mourners calling for "death to all Jews' and alike were omitted.
- Perry ended this segment of his presentation by saying that it was unclear when the ongoing investigation to this terrible tragedy would come to a conclusion. He was adamant to say that no matter how embarrassing any outcome might be for the Israeli Defence Forces, the public in Israel wanted the true facts to come out – especially if as previously speculated, the bullet that had killed Shireen Abu Aqla might have been fired by an M-16 in the hands of some Palestinian.
- Perry went on to say that what had happened to Shireen Abu Aqla had made life for the governing coalition that was no longer in possession of a majority even more difficult given that the Raam Party of Mansour Abbas simply could not remain in the government if it was seen that the government was somehow implicated in what had happened or wanted to cover it up (no matter how anxious Mansour Abbas was in trying to remain in the government).¹

¹ Ironically on 19 May – i.e., less than 24 hours after Perry's presentation, the future of Israel's government was plunged into uncertainty after Ghaida Rinawie Zoabi of the left-wing Meretz party a member quit, leaving it as a minority in parliament for the first time. Zoabi resigned, saying she could not tolerate its leaders' "right-wing stances" towards her section of society. The unexpected move means the coalition commands only 59 seats out of 120.

- Turning to other issues, Perry focused once again on Israeli concerns about Iran and its possible acquisition of nuclear capabilities in the event of failure to reach a nuclear agreement. He said that while the Defence Minister, Benny Gantz had been in Washington to discuss this issue with his counterpart, the new US Central Command Chief (General Michael 'Erik' Kurilla) had been in Israel where he had been shown Israel's ultimate defence capabilities that could potentially be employed against Iran in multiple ways.
- On the results of the Lebanese parliamentary elections, while Perry was happy about the fact that Hezbollah had not done as well as before, he was nonetheless concerned that the other parliamentary blocks needed to work together much more closely if they wanted to keep Hezbollah and its military capabilities in some form of a check – something he was not very optimistic about.
- Perry concluded his comments by saying while many were hopeful that the Coalition might survive the Knesset's summer session before the start of the upcoming Jewish holidays, he himself had his doubt about such a prospect.

