

“AN EXPERT VIEW FROM ISRAEL”

Series Report #89

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



18 OCTOBER 2022

[there was no briefing from 28 September due to Jewish holidays]

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

- After more than a 2-week break in his weekly presentations due to Jewish holidays and technical issues, Perry began his comments by first addressing the issue surrounding an agreement between Israel and Lebanon on the subject of the exploitation of gas reserves in areas adjacent to Israeli territorial waters in the Mediterranean Sea.
- The Karish gas field is a natural gas reservoir located in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is located near the much larger Leviathan and Tamar gas fields near Haifa, estimated to hold 2–3 trillion cubic feet of gas. Following a deal struck between Israel and Lebanon, the Karish gas field is expected to come online in the third quarter of 2022 and eventually become a source of gas exports to Europe.
- Perry said that prior to reaching an agreement, there had been a large measure of sabre rattling by Hezbollah and to a lesser extent by the Lebanese government. He noted that at the peak of tensions, Hezbollah had dispatched a few drones to offshore sights as a sign of strength for purposes of intimidation.
- However, in the end, as a result of US mediation, letters of intent for the exploitation of the gas fields have now been signed
- These developments, in wake of the upcoming Israeli elections, have been hailed as a major victory by the interim PM, Yair Lapid – something that according to him, also lessens the chances of military confrontation with Hezbollah.
- Perry said that because of the upcoming election, Lapid’s claims for victory have nonetheless been challenged by right wing parties and politicians who say that in the agreement that has been reached “Israel got nothing and Lebanon got everything”!

- According to Perry, another key point of contention raised by the opposition over this issue is that the interim government of Yair Lapid does not have the legitimacy that is required for entering into any kind of a long-standing agreement such as the one reached over the gas fields.
- Perry next turned his attention to matters pertaining to the upcoming election that had in the aftermath of the recent holiday season come to full swing and was now being increasingly dominated by issues over the increased cost of living.
- With 2 weeks to go, the position of both Lapid and Netanyahu had somewhat declined slightly according to latest polls, though these polls fluctuated and were not a clear indicator of what to expect.
- However, what seemed realistic was that Netanyahu and his allies were hovering around 59 or 60 seats. This left them below the magical 61 seats which they needed to form a government.
- Perry ended his talk by saying that according to recent polling, 2 factors could possibly ensure a Netanyahu victory - i.e., a coalition of 61 seats or more:
 - 1. If the 'Joint Arab List' failed to produce the kind of representation from the Arab vote that they had enjoyed in the last election - something that was being forecast at this time because of the breakup of the coalition that had existed between the 'Balad, Ta'al and Ra'am parties', especially if any combination of them failed to secure the 3.25% threshold that was needed.
 - 2. If the Yamina party of former PM, Naftali Bennet that was currently being led by Ayelet Shaked - now polling around 2%, also failed to reach the 3.25% threshold that was required.

