

# “AN EXPERT VIEW FROM ISRAEL”

Series Report #107



## SUMMARY OF A ‘MIDDLE EAST FORUM’ WEBINAR 22 FEBRUARY 2023



*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.*

### **A SUMMARY OF COMMENTS MADE BY ASHLEY PERRY**

#### ***THE ONGOING DOMESTIC TURMOIL***

- Ashley Perry began his weekly briefing by stressing that much had happened in the previous in Israel. He described the intensity of events to have been on par with that which Israel had witnessed at any time during any election or war. Perry noted that even the Leader of Hezbollah had made references to this extraordinary situation.
- The main cause of anxiety for people during this intense period has been the contentious and divisive issues surrounding the governments’ promotion of ‘judicial reforms’.
- In this regard according to Perry, the government for its part, has decided to proceed on a ‘piecemeal base’- i.e., a step-by-step approach, so that it is difficult for the Supreme Court to obstruct its plan of action.
- The first step for the promotion of its plan for the government has been to change the make-up of the ‘judicial appointment committee’ – the body that decides who should occupy the seats on the Israeli Supreme Court, where at present government sympathizers are in the minority.
- The new bill being passed by the Knesset will allow for members associated with the ruling coalition to have a majority on the ‘Judicial Appointments Committee’.
- Another law being passed by the Coalition aims to limit the Supreme Court from having the option of striking down laws passed by the Knesset.
- Perry said that with the exception of 6 members of the Knesset associated with the political party of Avigdor Lieberman, every other member of the opposition had voted against that bill (though the government was able to secure a comfortable majority).

- Nonetheless, major demonstrations – unwitnessed before in Israel, have been taking place, though demonstrations this week had not been as massive as those witnessed in the previous week.
- At the same time, some members of the Knesset are being harassed and prevented from reaching parliament – something that was also without precedent (Perry added that there had also been unseemly behaviour exhibited by some members inside the Knesset as well).
- Perry added that these troubles were having an adverse effect on the state of the Israeli economy, with the Israeli Shekel having weakened significantly against various major currencies.
- Perry noted that in a very short space of time interest rates had also risen from 0.25% to 4.25% thus aggravating inflation as well.

### ***THE SECURITY FRONT***

- Perry said that in a most violent week, 100 IDF soldiers had entered Nablus to arrest 3 Palestinian gunmen from the so-called ‘Lion’s Den’ group.
- Fighting had then ensued and at the end of the day, some 10 Palestinians had been killed (with no Israeli losses) - something which has now received promises of revenge from those Palestinian quarters.
- Perry said that the number of people killed so far in 2023 have not been witnessed since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Intifada going back to 2001.
- Turning to another security related issue, Perry said that this week, permission had also been given to guild 10,000 new settlements in questioned territories, which had received a condemnation of sorts from the international community and more specifically the UN Security Council.
- While the condemnation form the UN had not been in the shape of a Security Council Resolution, Israeli officials were, nonetheless, quite concerned and dismayed as the Security Council action had also had the backing of the US government.
- Perry finally turned his attention to Iran and said that the recent IAEA report noting that Iranian enrichment activities had now reached 84% (very near the 90% threshold needed for weapons grade uranium), had become a source of serious concern for the Netanyahu government.
- Perry said that given the fact that this presented a very serious and credible threat to Israel, Netanyahu had been in close consultations with his military advisers looking at various possible unilateral Israeli options.

