

“AN EXPERT VIEW FROM ISRAEL”

Series Report #83



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 ASHLEY PERRY’S WEEKLY COMMENTS

- Perry devoted the majority of his weekly talk to addressing Israeli concerns on the subject of a revived JCPOA agreement that is now increasingly expected to come to some kind of a fruition in the coming weeks.
- He acknowledged that the US had now provided its comments to Iranian demands that were made after the European’s so-called ‘take it or leave it’ offer, as made by EU High Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell.
- Perry said that the two contentious outstanding items having to do with the IRGC’s designation as a terrorist organization and Iran’s outstanding disputes with the IAEA over some of their previously unaddressed investigations seems to have been brushed under the carpet for the time being.
- According to Perry, the Israeli response to these developments has been strong and condemnatory. Indeed, both Yair Lapid and Naftali Bennet as well as former PM, Benjamin Netanyahu have held press conferences in which they have all said that the second JCPOA agreement is in fact worse than the first one.
- According to Lapid, if sanctions against Iran are removed, the Islamic Republic would be able to have access to some \$100 billion a year from the sale of their oil (according to Naftali Bennet, this figure is more likely to be closer to a quarter of a trillion dollars).
- Israeli concerns have become seriously aggravated given that there are no signs of returning Iran to the limits of uranium enrichment that were set in the 2015 agreement and the fact that it is as yet unclear what is to

happen to the amounts of enriched uranium already in possession of the Islamic Republic.

- According to Perry, these concerns have promoted the Head of the Israel's National Security Council, Eyal Hulata to meet with his US counterpart, Jake Sullivan while Benny Gantz is also expected to travel to Washington for similar consultations with Pentagon and CENTCOM officials.
- Perry said that consultations on this subject with both China and Russia were meaningless as they were unlikely to want to influence this matter.
- On the domestic front with the approach of the upcoming elections, Perry said that the most important "Bombshell" this week were the polls that for the first time suggested that the 'Religious Zionism Party' of Bezalal Smotrich might not pass the electoral threshold.
- Because of this important concern, there have been increasing suggestions that the Religious Zionism party chair Bezalel Smotrich and 'Otzma Yehudit' party chair, Itamar Ben-Gvir will begin "accelerated negotiations" to merge into one list and finalize an agreement between them in the "coming days".
- Perry said that for Netanyahu and his prospects of forming the next government, such a merger was a key factor and as such he was most active behind the scene to see that this objective was achieved.
- Finally, Perry turned his attention to the raucous that had been caused by an ongoing 'Teacher's Union' strike demanding for more pay that had resulted into an open dispute between Finance Minister, Avigdor Lieberman and PM Lapid and his Education Minister.
- Lieberman has said that any salary increase will have to be awarded on a 'meritocracy' basis and has refused to budge on this point, threatening to resign if forced to comply at a time when no one with the elections only months away - for reasons of expediency 0 wants to see a situation whereby an unresolved teacher's strike might lead to schools not restarting after the summer break.

