

## “ISRAEL INSIDER”

REPORT # **63**

### SUMMARY OF A ‘MIDDLE EAST FORUM’ WEBINAR

30 MARCH 2022



*In a brief ‘Webinar’ session organized by the Washington based MEF, Alex Selsky, a former Advisor to PM Benjamin Netanyahu in 2010-13 and who is currently a member of the Board of Directors of Middle East Forum-Israel provided the weekly update on Israel in place of Ashley Perry.*

#### SUMMARY OF COMMENTS BY ALEX SELSKY

- Alex Selsky, charged with providing the latest Israel update in place of Ashley Perry, began his presentation by saying that ‘the Negev region symbolized the government’s paradox: strength in international affairs on the one hand, as evidenced by the historic Negev Summit with the US and four Arab foreign ministers; and weakness in domestic affairs on the other, symbolized by the ISIS-inspired jihadi attacks that had resulted in a number of Israeli citizens losing their lives.
- Selsky noted that the attacks in the Jerusalem market had been particularly gruesome and most unsettling for the Coalition government.
- However, in the course of the past week and in face of all the domestic difficulties, Naftali Bennet had been able to successfully cement his role as the only neutral representative of the ‘West’ to have open channels of communication with both the Ukrainian and Russian presidents.
- Even if Naftali Bennet is unable to claim full credit for mediating some kind of a cease-fire or peace between the two warring states, it is clear that he has played a key and central role in trying to bring this conflict to some kind of a conclusion. It was also noted that in the process, Israel has absorbed more than its fair share of Ukrainian refugees.
- Bennet’s success in foreign affairs which has clearly elevated his standing before the general public has however been overshadowed by domestic matters exacerbated by the violent attacks of the past several weeks perpetrated by the Jihadis and ISIS supporters.
- The recent attacks have above all highlighted the fragility of the existing coalition which could possibly fall quickly if the Arab members of the Raam Party were to withdraw their support in face of harsh government reaction against Arabs in various areas.
- The current situation is also a huge test for the Raam Party as it adopts the path on which it will need to travel if it were to continue its cooperation with the ruling coalition.

- According to Alex Selsky, Naftali Bennet's problems have also been compounded in the past week by the campaign that has been perpetrated against his government by the 'Yesha Council' also known as the 'Council of Jewish Settlers in Judea and Samaria' – a right wing, die-hard organizations whose CEO in previous times was ironically none other than himself. Their dissatisfaction with Bennet is because of the government freeze that has been invoked on the construction of new Jewish settlements in this region.
- According to Selsky while the Israeli PM has vowed to hit hard against the terrorists, Netanyahu has ignited a new campaign with Likud leaders to force the fall of the coalition.
- Ironically, the greatest emerging hero from the attacks is a Christian Arab who has been serving with the Police Force. It was him who killed one of the attackers.
- According to Selsky, this showed that only significant segments of the Israeli Arabs such as Druze or Christians did not share or condone the actions of hard-line Jihadis bent on killing Jews at any cost and in any way.
- Selsky said that all the Arab foreign Ministers as well Abu Mazen had condemned the ISIS inspired killings. He said that these attacks were only supported by organizations such as Hamas, though he was of the view that the PLO was also responsible to an extent for such acts of terrorism because of their teachings and propaganda.
- Selsky ended by saying that Covid has once again made a large reapetence in Israel which has forced some of the previous restrictions to be reimposed.

