

“AN EXPERT VIEW FROM ISRAEL”

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Special election report

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



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Alex. Selsky served as an advisor to Prime Minister Netanyahu from 2010-2013. He is a member of the Board of Directors of Middle East Forum-Israel.

SUMMARY OF ALEX SELSKY’S COMMENTS

- Selsky (filling in for Ashley Perry for a second week) began by saying that this had been an interesting week as well as an interesting day.
- He elaborated by saying that while the coalition talks were still going on, some progress was being made in this difficult negotiation process.
- Nonetheless, Selsky was of the view that despite having the overall support of some 64 MKs (Members of the Knesset), serious unresolved challenges continued to remain in the talks between Netanyahu and the Leader of the Religious Zionist Party, Bezalel Smotrich. Over the latter’s insistence at being given the Defence Ministry – something that neither Netanyahu, his Party Likud nor the USA wanted.
- Selsky felt that Netanyahu was holding out because if he could persuade Smotrich to have the Finance Ministry and was then able to offer the Defence Ministry to Benny Gantz (thus bringing in his party along irrespective of all previous problems) , then his overall majority in the Knesset could rise by 6 or 7 votes thus bringing his support in the Knesset to well over 70 members.
- Selsky said that Netanyahu is however under pressure within his own party, Likud to give the Defence portfolio to former Major-General Yoav Gallant, a distinguished military officer who had previously been tipped to become the IDF Chief of Staff.
- Selsky said that it had been an interesting day because of the publication of an interview conducted by a former New York Times journalist (Bari Weiss) and Netanyahu in which the PM-Designate has spoken about his security vision for the future while addressing a number of key other controversial issues such as his condemnation of Trump for having met with certain anti-semitic elements.

- Most importantly, in his interview, Netanyahu had said that his most important mission would be to try and prevent Iran from destroying Israel.
- Netanyahu's next goal would be to expand Israel's ties with other Arab states, and more specifically, Saudi Arabia. Netanyahu had said that he was hopeful that Israel would be able to make peace with the majority of the Arab states, though this would not eliminate conflict with the Palestinians.
- Such a process would mean that Israel would carry any further talks with the Palestinians - who constitute no more than 1-2% of all Arabs - from a position of strength thus no longer allowing 'the Palestinian tail to wag the Arab body'.
- Selsky ended his presentation by highlighting another key question being debated in Israel, namely the proposed changes to the 'Law of Return' regarding people of Jewish parentage outside Israel (different from Palestinian right of return).
- According to Selsky, religious parties want to advance bills to amend the Law of Return fearing that under the guise of being Jewish, allow many non-Jews or even anti-Jews have to enter Israel and obtain Israeli citizenship (albeit that in a recent poll, 37% of Israelis polled have said that deeper background checks on new immigrants would amount to racism against Jews from Russian-speaking countries).
- On the other end of the political spectrum, the current Deputy-Speaker of the Knesset, Ahmad Tibi has criticized the system's double standard, stating that "people immigrated to Israel and received automatic citizenship under the Law of Return, while citizens of Nazareth and Tayibe are not allowed to visit their own relatives merely due to the fact that they are Arabs."
- Selsky said that any alteration to the Law of Return in the direction suggested by the religious/Zionist parties would have a huge adverse impact on relations between Israel and American Jewry and especially the US Democratic Party.
- Selsky concluded his talk on this matter by saying that Likud had today said that they would not alter anything at this time. He ended by saying that if other religious/right wing coalition partners go along with Likud's decision on this important topic, then they would probably ask for something in return from Netanyahu.

