

“AN EXPERT VIEW FROM ISRAEL”

Series Report #84

SUMMARY OF A ‘MIDDLE EAST FORUM’ WEBINAR



31 AUGUST 2022



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

TOPIC OF THE WEEK

- Perry began his weekly account of developments in Israeli politics by pointing to a series of accusing letters that had been sent to prominent quarters following an investigation into the ‘Mount Meron’ tragedy in 2021 – Israel’s largest civilian disaster - when some 45 people had been killed in a stampede and more than 115 people injured during a religious gathering. One such letter had also been sent to the Prime Minister of the day, Benjamin Netanyahu, whose Likud Party had then turned it into a political opportunity for boosting his election campaign on the basis that the current government had wanted to use the investigation as a political tool against Netanyahu.
- According to Perry, Netanyahu (often referred to as a ‘Teflon’ politician) based on recent polling, had apparently succeeded in making use of this opportunity to boost his election campaign.

ON THE JCPOA

- Turning to the subject of Iran and JCPOA, Perry said that according to European leaders, a new agreement was expected to be signed in the next few days. Hence, at this stage, Israel was unable to either stop the deal or change any of its provisions, though Israel was likely to play a role in ensuring that any omission in compliance terms on the part of Iran was highlighted.
- According to Perry, despite a conversation that had taken place between Yair Lapid and Joe Biden, the deal had become somewhat of a ‘hot-potato’ in Israel with Netanyahu having criticised Lapid for his lack of action in preventing its consummation.
- Perry said that Netanyahu had attended a meeting with Lapid - a security briefing (something that he was entitled to) that had discussed the JCPOA deal.
- In that meeting, Netanyahu had caused a raucous for both blaming Lapid for his inaction on the matter as well as not wanting to have his picture taken in a room where he was not himself sitting in the big chair allocated for the Prime Minister.
- However, according to Perry a photo had nonetheless come out leading to an opportunity for Netanyahu to compare Lapid’s lack of action in this case to

that of his own when he had himself gone to Washington and addressed the US Congress back in 2015.

- Lapid for his turn had retorted and said that Netanyahu's actions at the time had damaged Israeli ties with the US - a damage from which Israel had up to now not fully recovered from.

ON PALESTINIAN MATTERS

- Perry said that there were concerns in Israel once again about new efforts on the part of the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, to seek international recognition for a Palestinian state with UN General Assembly in September.
- Such a move could not happen in the absence of a ratification from the UN Security Council where the US is expected to veto such a proposal.
- However, Perry was of the view that the US - wanting at all cost to avoid using its veto power - was trying to prevent such a scenario through diplomacy and discussions with other relevant parties.

ON OTHER ISSUES

- Perry said that finally an agreement between the Treasury, Education Ministry and Teacher's Union had been reached in time for schools to restart on time on September 1.
- He said this agreement had served to enhance Avigdor Lieberman's status as some of his key demands had been accepted by the Teacher's Union.
- As a result, according to the latest polls, Lieberman's Party ('Yisrael Beiteinu' meaning 'Israel Our Home') was expected to gain an extra seat in the upcoming November election.
- Finally, according to recent polls (something that Israelis have become addicted to with one coming out every few days), for some weeks now, the Netanyahu coalition seems to have remained stagnant with just 59 expected seats in the next Knesset - 2 short of the 61 for forming the next government.
- Perry said that the fact that the Netanyahu coalition number had not gone up was due to the fact that some of his allies and their parties were not expected to pass the election threshold. He noted that this was a major concern with which Netanyahu was trying to deal with.
- Finally, on a point of interest, Jonathan Pollard, an American who had been convicted of spying for Israel while working at the Pentagon in the 1980s, having been released and now living in Israel had given his high profile endorsement to Ayelet Shaked, the leader of the 'Zionist Spirit party' (that she formed with Communications Minister Yoaz Hendel) only to later withdraw it under pressure .
- In the last government, Shaked was part of the Yamina Party. Yamina has now become the Zionist Spirit Party.
- Since Zionist Spirit (which has failed to pass the electoral threshold in 18 of 23 polls) was formed, former members of Yamina have been dropping out of the party, including Deputy Religious Services Minister Matan Kahana, Shirley Pinto and Abir Kara.

