

The Sabra Report

Raising Awareness and Encouraging Discussion About Israel

Sanders Gets Personal in a Conversation About Israel Policy

Sean Sullivan and David Weigel, *The Washington Post*, October 28th 2019

Recap:

J Street hosted five Democratic presidential hopefuls at its meeting on Israel and the future of American foreign policy. Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren and South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg all said they are willing to make foreign aid to Israel contingent on the country forging more peaceful relations with Palestinians.

The Context:

- J Street was founded in 2007 and rose to prominence during the Obama administration, supporting policies such as the Iran nuclear deal. The group now seeks to make annual aid the US provides to Israel contingent on the country finding a solution to the Palestinian conflict.
- Sanders, the only prominent Jewish candidate and a vocal critic of the current Israeli government, drew a clear line saying, “some of that \$3.8 billion should go to humanitarian aid in Gaza [1].”
- House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer both argued for a return to traditional US policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, endorsing the two-state solution [2].
- A younger generation of Democrats has shown a willingness to break from the unconditional and bipartisan support Israel has enjoyed in the past. J Street has pressed the Democratic Party to add explicit language opposing Israel’s occupation in the West Bank and a “commitment to Palestinian rights [3]” to its official platform.

Conversation Points:

- Should Israel be the only party held accountable for finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
- Does Sanders’ Jewish identity lend credence to his Israeli policy?

Gantz, Lapid Accuse Netanyahu Of Stalling Coalition Talks

Jacob Magid, *Times of Israel*, October 28th 2019

Recap:

Blue and White chairman Benny Gantz lamented the lack of progress toward a unity government following his first meeting with Likud leader and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. “The ruling party does not want to hold a practical discussion about policy guidelines,” Gantz said in a statement.

The Context:

- In the past year, Israel has seen 2 elections with no clear victor. Blue and White has 28 days to establish a coalition or the country will go to a 3rd round of elections [4]. It is the first time in more than 10 years that a candidate other than Netanyahu has been given the opportunity to form a government [5]. Neither Likud nor Blue and White control a 61-seat majority in parliament though the two parties together have enough seats to form a government.
- While both men support the idea of a unity government, they disagree over who should lead it. Additionally, Netanyahu wants his religious and nationalist allies to sit with Likud and Blue and White whereas Gantz does not. He also refuses to serve under a Netanyahu-led government while he faces possible indictment for corruption charges.
- Gantz will meet with Ayman Odeh, head of the Joint List alliance of Arab majority parties, to explore a potential partnership [6].

Conversation Points:

- Do Likud and Blue and White have any other option but to work together?
- Will tapping Joint List for a coalition full integrate the Arab community into Israeli public discourse? How might that affect Israeli politics?
- Would Netanyahu fight as hard for his right-wing coalition if he were not facing indictment?

Israel's Embassies Around the World Closed Over Pay Dispute

Oren Liebermann, CNN, October 30th 2019

Recap:

Israeli diplomatic missions around the world closed as foreign ministry workers went on strike over a dispute about paying taxes on overseas stipends. No one is allowed into the closed missions and services for Israelis abroad are unavailable.

The Context:

- An agreement on compensation between the finance and foreign ministries was reached in July, but the finance ministry has since backtracked on the deal. Stipends are meant to cover a wide array of expenses from hosting events at an ambassador’s residence to transport costs. A tax on stipends will significantly affect diplomat and attaché’ salaries [7].

- Israel has 69 embassies, 23 consulates and five special missions around the world, including a representative at the United Nations. In September it announced a freeze on most diplomatic activities worldwide [8] and the department currently operates on an annual budget of \$367 million [9]. Approximately 250 properties and staff residences under the Foreign Ministry's charge are in a "dilapidated state [10]"

Conversation Points:

- What is the value of Israel's foreign presence?
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Notes:

1. [Sanders runs to left of J Street and 2020 opponents on aid to Israel](#), Bryant Harris, AI Monitor, October 28th 2019.
2. [In First J Street Appearance, Schumer Pushes for Two-state Solution](#), Amir Tibon, Haaretz, Oct 29th 2019
3. [2020 Democrats at J Street Conference Reflect New Tone on U.S.-Israel Relations](#), Jennifer Medina, New York Times, October 28th 2019
4. [Gantz to meet leader of Arab-majority Joint List for coalition talks](#), Times of Israel, October 28th 2019
5. [Israel: Gantz meets Netanyahu for coalition government talks](#), Al Jazeera, October 27th 2019
6. [Gantz Says No Progress Achieved in Talks on Unity Government with Netanyahu's Likud](#), Jonathan Lis, Haaretz October 28th 2019
7. [Israeli embassies around the world shut as diplomats, military attachés strike](#), Times of Israel, October 30th 2019
8. [Israeli embassies around the world shut as diplomats, military attachés strike](#), Times of Israel, October 30th 2019
9. [ISRAELI EMBASSIES AND CONSULATES CLOSE AS DIPLOMATS STRIKE FOR HIGHER WAGES](#), JEFFERY MARTIN, NEWSWEEK, October 30th 2019
10. [Israeli embassies around the world shut as diplomats, military attachés strike](#), Times of Israel, October 30th 2019

The Sabra Report is a newsletter intended to stimulate conversation about Israel by recapping major events & providing context. Our conversation points are meant to encourage discussion amongst friends and family.

The Sabra Report is written by Irving Safdieh.

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