

The Sabra Report

Raising Awareness and Encouraging Discussion About Israel

Gantz Gives Up on Forming Government, Mandate Goes to Knesset

Gil Hoffman & Lahav Harkov, Jerusalem Post, November 20th 2019

Recap:

Israel entered uncharted territory after Blue and White leader Benny Gantz failed to form a coalition. The Knesset now has three weeks to form a government or Israel will head to the polls for a third time in under a year.

The Context:

- No party or coalition secured the 61 seats needed to control Israel's Parliament in either the April or September elections [1].
- After Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu failed to establish a coalition, Gantz "turned over every stone" to form a national unity government but said he encountered "a bloc in the way that cared about the good of one person," referring to the Netanyahu-led 55-seat religious bloc. Questions over the balance of religion and state were prominent in Israel's elections [2].
- Israel will for the first time enter a three-week period where the 120 members of the Knesset will attempt to find a majority to support Gantz, Netanyahu or a third candidate. If unsuccessful, Israelis will head to the polls once again, likely in early March [3].
- To cap off the tumultuous week, Netanyahu was indicted on charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust in a set of long-running corruption cases. Netanyahu defiantly insisted the case against him were built on lies and political hostility [4].

Conversation Points:

- Who is responsible for Israel's political deadlock?
- Is Netanyahu better positioned to face indictment charges as Prime Minister?
- Will US President Donald Trump's deal of the century ever be unveiled as long as Israeli politics remain in limbo?

In Pivot, US Says It No Longer Regards Israel's West Bank Settlements as Illegal

Times of Israel, November 18th 2019

Recap:

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo renounced a 1978 State Department legal opinion that held civilian settlements in the occupied territories are “inconsistent with international law.” The move - welcomed by Israelis and criticized by Palestinians - is at odds with other nations seeking to end the conflict.

The Context:

- The 1978 legal opinion on settlements is known as the Hansell Memorandum and has been the basis of more than 40 years of carefully worded US opposition to settlement construction that has varied in strength depending on the current administration’s position. United Nations Security Council resolutions, most recently in 2016, say Israeli settlements are a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits an occupying power from transferring its population to the area it occupies [5].
- Netanyahu welcomed Pompeo’s statement saying it reflects a “historical truth that the Jewish people are not foreign colonialists in Judea and Samaria [6].” Democratic Presidential candidates reprimanded the Trump administration with Joe Biden calling the move “an obstacle to peace” and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders saying, “Israeli settlements are illegal [7].”
- Last week the European Court of Justice ruled products made in Israeli settlements must be labeled as such while this week 165 nations voted yes on a resolution titled *The Right of The Palestinian People to Self-Determination* at the United Nations General Assembly. Only Israel, the US, Nauru, Micronesia and the Marshall Islands voted against the resolution.

Conversation Points:

- Was the State Department’s announcement timed to send a lifeline to Netanyahu as he fights for his political future?
- If Israelis unilaterally abandoned the West Bank, similar to 2005’s Gaza withdrawal, would peace between Israelis and Palestinians be realized?
- What are the pros and cons of the renouncement?

Lionel Messi Arrives in Israel Despite Rockets and BDS Threats

Haaretz, November 17th 2019

Recap:

Soccer legend Lionel Messi and his Argentine teammates played a friendly match against the Uruguay national team in Israel.

Context:

- Last Year, Argentina abruptly canceled a World Cup warmup match in Jerusalem following demonstrations in the West Bank that included images of bloodstained Messi jerseys. As a result, FIFA banned Palestinian soccer federation president Jibril Rajoub for “inciting hatred and violence” against Messi.

- Following high-profile negotiations with Canadian-Israeli billionaire Sylvan Adams, 30,000 Israelis, including President Reuven Rivlin, Sports Minister Miri Regev and super model Bar Refaeli [8], turned out to see the match.
- Sylvan has sponsored previous sporting and cultural events in the country including the opening stages of the Giro d'Italia cycling race and a \$1 million Madonna performance at Eurovision.

Conversation Points:

- Why are Sylvan's projects, and others like it, important for Israel?
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Notes:

1. [Netanyahu Rival Unable to Form Government in Israel](#), Felicia Schwartz and Dov Lieber, Wall Street Journal, November 20th 2019
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. [Israel's Netanyahu Indicted on Charges of Fraud, Bribery and Breach of Trust](#), David M. Halbfinger New York Times, November 22nd 2019
5. [Palestinians slam US policy reversal on Israeli settlements](#), Al Jazeera, November 19th 2019
6. [In Shift, U.S. Says Israeli Settlements in West Bank Do Not Violate International Law](#), Lara Jakes and David M. Halbfinger, New York Times, November 18th 2019
7. [Leading Democratic presidential candidates denounce US settlement decision](#), Times of Israel, November 19th 2019
8. [The Messi-ah finally arrives: Israel fetes Argentine soccer superstar](#), RAPHAEL AHREN, Times of Israel, November 19th 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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