

The Sabra Report

Raising Awareness and Encouraging Discussion About Israel

Netanyahu Seethes as Knesset Moves to Debate His Immunity Request

Times of Israel, January 13th 2020

Recap:

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu lashed out at his rivals after lawmakers voted to form a committee that will debate, and likely reject, his request for parliamentary immunity. The move still requires approval by the Knesset plenum [1].

The Context:

- Netanyahu announced on January 1st that he would seek Knesset immunity from prosecution in the three criminal cases in which he has been charged. Netanyahu is accused of offering favors to media moguls in exchange for gifts and positive press [2].
- The committee will have 30 members “to ensure representation for all factions.” Netanyahu’s bloc will not have a majority on the panel and will try to delay the process until after the March election. Two earlier elections, in April and September 2019, ended inconclusively, with no one able to form a viable government [3]. If approved, immunity could keep Netanyahu out of court for as long as he remains a member of Parliament [4].
- Netanyahu supporters say “immunity is intended to protect elected officials from manufactured cases [5],” while his opponents criticize Netanyahu and his allies for “deal[ing] only with Bibi’s personal issues and not a single one of [the issues facing] the country’s citizens.” Most Israelis oppose immunity [6].
- No lawmaker has been granted immunity since the law was amended in 2005. As Foreign Minister, Avigdor Liberman was charged with fraud and breach of trust and resigned as a result. He returned to his post after being acquitted in court. Former Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, resigned under pressure, even before he was indicted on corruption charges. He was ultimately convicted and sent to prison [7].

Conversation Points:

- Why did Netanyahu wait so long to request immunity?
- Why don’t Israeli’s support immunity?
- Will immunity become a major sticking point in the next election?

Israel Begins Gas Exports to Egypt From Giant Leviathan Field

Stuart Elliott, S&P Global, January 15th 2020

Recap:

Israel's landmark offshore gas field carried its first exports to Egypt this week.

The Context:

- Discovered in the Mediterranean Sea, 77 miles west of Haifa, in 2010, the Leviathan field is one of the largest deep-water natural gas finds in the world, estimated to hold 22 trillion cubic feet of recoverable natural gas. There is a potential for half a million barrels of oil [8] and additional reservoirs of natural gas in Israel's exclusive economic zone [9].
- Leviathan is the second major gas field in Israel. Tamar field was discovered in 2013 and serves the Israeli domestic market. Natural gas will help phase out expensive and polluting imported coal [10] as well as make Israel a gas exporter for the first time in its history.

Conversation Points:

- Would Israel have been as technologically innovative today if it had found the natural gas fields 50 years ago?
 - Will Leviathan and Tamar play a factor in Israel's diplomacy with Arab nations?
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Iron Dome Missile Defense System Passes New Interception Tests

JTA, January 13th 2020

Recap:

The upgraded Iron Dome missile defense system passed 100% of its new interception tests, up from a previous interception rate of 85%.

The Context:

- The Iron Dome air defense system is made up of advanced radars, interceptor missiles, and a command-and-control center. The system represents the shortest-range system in the Israeli military's multi-tiered air defense array and was originally funded in part by the US government under the Obama administration [11].
 - Since its deployment in 2011, Iron Dome has intercepted over 2,400 projectiles, the majority fired from Gaza. Its first interception was over the southern city of Ashkelon in April 2011 [12].
 - Moshe Patel, head of the Defense Ministry's Israeli Missile Defense Organization, said the new Iron Dome "will allow the Air Force to deal much better with the projected threats in the field [13]."
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Conversation Points:

- How many wars were likely averted due to the Iron Dome and why?

Notes:

1. [Netanyahu, Right bloc asks Edelstein to stymie immunity rejection](#), GIL HOFFMAN, Jerusalem Post, JANUARY 14th 2020
2. [Israel's Netanyahu Asks Parliament for Immunity from Corruption Charges](#), CHRISTOPHER DEAN HOPKINS, NPR, January 1, 2020
3. [Netanyahu Seeks Immunity from Israeli Corruption Charges](#), Isabel Kershner, Times of Israel, January 1st 2020
4. Ibid.
5. [Israel's Netanyahu Asks Parliament for Immunity from Corruption Charges](#), CHRISTOPHER DEAN HOPKINS, NPR, January 1, 2020
6. Ibid.
7. [Netanyahu Seeks Immunity from Israeli Corruption Charges](#), Isabel Kershner, Times of Israel, January 1st 2020
8. [Israel to start pumping gas from Leviathan, making country an energy powerhouse](#). SHOSHANNA SOLOMON, Times of Israel, December 16th 2019
9. [Israel gets first gas from Leviathan with exports to follow](#), Ari Rabinovitch & Tova Cohen, Reuters, December 2019
10. [Israel to start pumping gas from Leviathan, making country an energy powerhouse](#). SHOSHANNA SOLOMON, Times of Israel, December 16th 2019
11. [Decade after 1st interception, new Iron Dome boasts 100% success rate in trials](#), JUDAH ARI GROSS, Times of Israel, January 12th 2020
12. [Israel reveals major upgrade to Iron Dome Defense](#), Yoav Zitun, Ynetnews, January 12th 2020
13. [Next Generation Version of Iron Dome Missile Defense System Successfully Completes Series of Tests](#), Benjamin Kerstein, Algemeiner, January 15th 2020

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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