

The Sabra Report

Raising Awareness and Encouraging Discussion About Israel

Netanyahu Tells President He Cannot Form A Government; Rivlin May Now Task Lapid

Times of Israel, May 5th 2021

Recap:

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu failed to form a government leaving him close to losing power after 12 consecutive years in office. His rivals could also fail to build a Knesset majority which would automatically trigger Israel's fifth election since April 2019.

The Context:

- ★ No single party has a majority in the Knesset, leaving a coalition as the only path forward. Political gridlock has paralyzed the country for years, leaving Israel without a state budget during a pandemic and several key administrative and judicial appointments [1].
- ★ Netanyahu almost lost the third election, in March 2020, when his rival Benny Gantz of the Blue and White party was charged by President Reuven Rivlin with building a government. The resulting Netanyahu-Gantz coalition ultimately collapsed in December.
- ★ In a last-ditch effort to cobble together a new government, Netanyahu offered Yamina's Naftali Bennett a one-year rotation as Prime Minister, [2]. Yamina MK Ayelet Shaked called Netanyahu and his wife, Sara, "dictators who are unwilling to leave [3]."
- ★ Rivlin is expected to give Yair Lapid of Yesh Atid a stab at forming a government. Lapid, who like Bennet is a former Netanyahu protégé, has agreed to a power sharing agreement with Bennet in the form of a one-year Prime Minister rotation.
- ★ Netanyahu remains on trial for bribery, fraud, and breach of trust charges. He has sought to pass legislation that would make sitting prime ministers immune from prosecution and was blocked by Israel's high court for trying to illegally ram through the appointment of a political ally as justice minister [4].

Conversation Points:

- ★ Is Netanyahu seeking to extend his rule to influence the judicial process?
- ★ Can Israel progress politically with Netanyahu still in office?
- ★ Are there benefits of a Prime Minister rotation agreement?

Israel Accused of Apartheid by Human Rights Watch

Andrew Carey, CNN, April 27th 2021

Recap:

Human Rights Watch (HRW) accused the Israeli government of apartheid against Palestinians.

The Context:

- ☆ HRW, an organization that monitors human rights across the globe, accused the Jewish state of demonstrating “an intent to maintain the domination of Jewish Israelis over Palestinians across Israel.” The report follows similar allegations by Israeli left-wing NGO’s Yesh Din and B’Tselem [5] and comes just weeks after the International Criminal Court announced it was pursuing a war crimes investigation against Israel with a focus on Israel's presence in the West Bank. The HRW report advocated sanctions, travel bans and asset freezes against "officials and entities credibly implicated [6]."
- ☆ The apartheid term originated in South Africa, where it defined a system of racial segregation and "separate development" operating between 1948 and 1994, which was designed strip non-whites of their citizenship and placing them under the administration of white regimes.
- ☆ Israel's Foreign Ministry called the report a "propaganda pamphlet," accusing HRW of a long-standing anti-Israel agenda. The Palestinian leadership heralded the report as "a powerful testament to the struggle of the people of Palestine [7]."
- ☆ The Biden administration, in a departure from previous US administrations, has ranked the Israeli-Palestinian issue low on its foreign policy priority list [8].

Conversation Points:

- ☆ Is apartheid an accurate description of the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians?
- ☆ Should Israel be held responsible for the decisions made by the Palestinians leadership?
- ☆ Will the Biden administration’s posture towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict affect Israel’s reaction to these accusations?

Recriminations Intensify After Deadly Israel Stampede

Patrick Kingsley, New York Times, May 1, 2021

Recap:

Demands for accountability mounted following a disaster that left 45 people dead in northern Israel [8].

The Context:

- ☆ Hundreds of thousands of ultra-Orthodox Jews visit Mount Meron each spring for the festival of Lag b’Omer. The site consists of narrow, sloping passageways and cramped plazas that visitors have often warned were unsuitable for crowds. 100,000 people attended this year’s event after a successful vaccination drive that has allowed much of Israeli life to return to normal.

- ☆ Successive Israeli governments were blamed for turning a blind eye to safety issues on the mountain for more than a decade to avoid alienating the ultra-Orthodox Jews who attend the annual celebration.
- ☆ The tragedy drew sympathy from across the religious-secular divide in Israel as well as abroad, with President Joe Biden extending his condolences as well as Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. 2,200 Israelis donated blood to help those injured on Mount Meron and flags were flown at half-staff as the country observed a day of national mourning.
- ☆ The Israeli Police, fire department, Justice Ministry, and state comptroller have opened their own probes into the disaster [10].

Conversation Points:

- ☆ Did the lack of a coherent leadership structure at the site make it harder to enforce a proper safety system?
 - ☆ Who holds ultimate culpability for the Meron disaster? The government, religious leaders, or the police?
 - ☆ Does the government turn a blind eye to certain Haredi practices to secure the group's political support?
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Notes:

1. [Netanyahu Offers Rival A Year In Office, In Last-Minute Bid For Government](#), Isabel Kershner, New York Times, May 3, 2021
 2. Ibid.
 3. [Netanyahu's Mandate To Form Gov't Set To Expire](#), GIL HOFFMAN, Jerusalem Post, MAY 4, 2021
 4. [Israel's Netanyahu Has Hours To Form A New Government And No Clear Path To Do It](#), Steve Hendrix, Washington Post, May 4th 2021
 5. [UN Committee To Examine Palestinian Apartheid Charges Against Israel](#), TOVAH LAZAROFF, Jerusalem Post, MAY 3, 2021
 6. [Israel Accused Of 'Apartheid' Crimes By Human Rights Watch](#), NPR, April 27, 2021
 7. Ibid.
 8. Ibid.
 9. [Israeli Public Security Minister Says He's Taking Responsibility After Mount Meron Stampede](#), NICOLE FALLERT, Newsweek, May 1st
 10. [At Knesset Memorial, Leaders Urge Comprehensive Probe Of Meron Tragedy](#), Times Of Israel, 3 May 2021
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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.

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