

The Sabra Report

Raising Awareness and Encouraging Discussion About Israel

Israel Passes Budget After 3.5 Years, Preventing Elections

Gil Hoffman, Jerusalem Post, November 4th 2021

Recap:

The Knesset passed the 2021 state budget into law by a 2-vote margin, giving Israel a new budget for the first time since 2018.

The Context:

- ✧ The budget needed to pass into law by November 14th to prevent the Knesset from dissolving and thus initiating new elections [1]. Department funding has been largely frozen and long-term planning at a standstill even as the country faced a pandemic, an economic downturn and shifting military challenges in the region [2].
- ✧ The \$195 billion budget will raise the retirement age for women, introduce a congestion tax in Tel Aviv and advance kosher certification reform. It also contains nearly \$10 billion in funding to improve conditions for Israel's Arab minority, which the Arab Ra'am party demanded as one of the conditions for their support. The budget raises taxes for Israel's ultra-Orthodox community, a move the Haredi parties decried as trying to "destroy Judaism [3]." The ultra-Orthodox parties currently sit in the opposition with Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud.
- ✧ Netanyahu is believed to have torpedoed the last budget to avoid sharing power with his coalition, leading to the most recent election in June that led to his ouster [4].

Conversation Points:

- ✧ With a passed budget, did Bennett's once-brittle coalition prove it can take on Netanyahu?
- ✧ Should the opposition play politics when the functioning of Israeli society is handicapped without a budget?
- ✧ Will a passed 2021 budget make a 2022 budget easier to come by?

Israel Advances Plan for New Settlement Homes, in First for Bennett Era

Patrick Kingsley, New York Times, November 4th 2021

Recap:

Israel advanced plans to build 1,300 homes for Palestinians in the West Bank days after endorsing more than 3,000 Jewish homes in settlement areas.

The Context:

- ✧ Israel took control of the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan in 1967. Nearly 700,000 Jews now live in the area alongside 2.5 million Palestinians [5]. Jews view the West Bank and East Jerusalem as their biblical heartland while Palestinians view the area as home to their future state.
- ✧ Since 1967, Israel has permitted the construction of more than 130 Jewish settlements, a process most countries consider a breach of international law. The United States strongly opposed the new settlements, the first to be advanced since President Joe Biden took office. The position stands in stark contrast to that of Donald Trump, whose administration endorsed Israel's settlement activity. Twelve European countries urged Israel to reverse its plans [6].
- ✧ Much of the planned building will occur in areas likely to remain in Israeli control in the event of a two-state solution [7]. In 2019, the security cabinet approved a record 700 building permits for Palestinians however, an investigation later found that almost none of those building permits were actually issued [8].

Conversation Points:

- ✧ Was Israel's decision to approve Palestinian housing an attempt to whitewash its settlement activity?
- ✧ Why do settlements have to hinder a two-state solution if built on land that will ultimately remain under Israeli control?
- ✧ Should Israel be more cognizant of international pressure before making these types of decisions?

Senate Confirms New US Ambassador to Israel

Ynetnews, November 4th 2021

Recap:

The Senate confirmed Thomas Nides of Minnesota to serve as the next US ambassador to Israel.

The Context

- ✧ The Biden administration pressed for the Nides confirmation, noting a number of sensitive issues in play in the Middle East including the Iran nuclear deal negotiations, efforts by the United States and Israel to expand the Abraham Accords, and US objections to Israeli settlement expansion.
 - ✧ Nides, currently the vice chairman of investment bank Morgan Stanley, has experience on Wall Street and Capitol Hill and is lauded for his ability to navigate complex diplomatic and bureaucratic situations [9]. Israeli Ambassador to the US Gilad Erdan, Nides' counterpart, congratulated him on Twitter. "I'm sure that you will further strengthen the special bond between Israel & the US".
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Conversation Points:

- ✧ What is the importance of having a supporter in the role of ambassador?
- ✧ Does Israel get away with more when an ambassador is not present?

Notes:

1. [Israel staves off new elections by approving first budget in three years](#), Steve Hendrix, Washington Post, November 4th 2021
2. Ibid
3. [Knesset approves key funding bill, begins debating 2022 state budget](#), MICHAEL BACHNER, Times of Israel, November 4th 2021
4. Ibid
5. [Israel approves Palestinian homes after advancing settlements](#), Al Jazeera, November 4, 2021
6. Ibid.
7. [After green-lighting settlements, Israel advances 1,303 Palestinian units](#), AARON BOXERMAN, Times of Israel, November 1st 2021c
8. Ibid.
9. [Senate Confirms Tom Nides as U.S. Ambassador to Israel](#), Haaretz, November 4, 2021

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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