

Israel in the Fall of 2021

DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY CHALLENGES

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Israel is facing a series of difficult domestic and foreign policy challenges. The response to these challenges has to be formulated and implemented by a fragile government formed in June 2021 after two years of a protracted political crisis. During those two years and through four election campaigns it was impossible to form a stable, durable Israeli government. At the center of this crisis stood the figure of Benjamin Netanyahu, who had been Israel's prime minister since 2009. This was his second term, preceded by a short first term between 1996 and 1999. Netanyahu is a polarizing figure, still leading the country's largest party and a large right-wing bloc. He was indicted by Israel's attorney general in June 2020, but according to Israeli law, a prime minister (unlike cabinet members) does not have to resign when indicted and can serve until the conclusion of the legal process. Netanyahu's indictment came in the aftermath of a lengthy investigation, and the issue of his culpability has been a focal point of Israeli politics since the country's police began to investigate his alleged illegal transgressions in December 2016. The Israeli public and political system have since been divided between a pro-Netanyahu camp arguing that Netanyahu is the victim of an "attempted coup" and a camp depicting him as a corrupt politician who has been in power too long and should resign from office even if allowed by law to remain.

Netanyahu's remarkable ability to retain power through nearly five years of a criminal investigation, an indictment, a court case, and four elections can be explained by his unusual political skills and his ability to attract and retain the support of a significant portion of the Israeli electorate. Netanyahu appeals to a coalition of right-wingers, Mizrahi Jews, and ultraorthodox voters. Four election campaigns between April 2019 and March 2021 failed to produce a clear decision. Netanyahu failed to obtain the necessary majority of 61 out of the 120 members in the Israeli parliament required in order to form a governing coalition, but at the same time his opponents failed to obtain the same magic number of parliamentary seats. Netanyahu was able to retain the prime ministership through a rotation agreement with his principal opponent at the time, former chief of staff Benny Gantz, and through other arrangements, but ultimately, in June 2021, his other major opponent, Yair Lapid, leader of a centrist party, was able to put together a coalition and form a rotation government headed first by Naftali Bennett and to be headed by himself as of March 2023.

Lapid's ability to form the new coalition was primarily a product of his own evolution and new political stature. He wisely agreed that Bennett, with only six members of



parliament, would be the first prime minister and patiently cobbled together an unlikely coalition stretching all the way from the left-wing Meretz party to the right-wing parties headed by Gideon Saar and Avigdor Lieberman. Lapid's achievement was impressive. Bennett began his political career as the leader of a right-wing party representing the West Bank settlers, while the left-wing Meretz and the moderate left-wing Labor Party are staunch supporters of the two-state solution. It took both Lapid's skills and a sense of responsibility shared by the partners in the new coalition to construct this hybrid entity. The glue that facilitated the formation of the government and that keeps it together is the enmity toward Netanyahu and a genuine concern about the destructive consequences of a potential resumption of the political crisis. The new government relies on a very small majority, and its survival is far from certain. The coalition underlying the new government for the first time includes an Arab party, the moderate Islamist United Arab List (not to be confused with the Joint Arab List, a coalition of several Arab parties and factions). The formation of the Bennett-Lapid government should also be understood against the backdrop of what was, and was seen as, a collapse of Netanyahu's main policies: the unsuccessful round of fighting with Hamas in Gaza (Operation Guardian of the Walls), the gamble on Donald Trump and the obvious tension in Netanyahu's relationship with President Biden and the Democrats, the resurgence of the Palestinian issue in May 2021, and Netanyahu's willingness to support radical racist elements in order to obtain a parliamentary majority. There was also a sense of fatigue with Netanyahu's endless political machinations that affected some of the voters who had supported him in earlier elections.

The formation and survival of the new government is predicated on an understanding that it would seek to evade the major issues confronting Israel, especially the Palestinian question. It is understood by all components of the new coalition that should it try to take a major step to resolve or come to terms with the Palestinian issue, either its left wing or its right wing would withdraw from the coalition and throw the country back into the turmoil of the years 2019–2021. Whether this posture is viable for a significant period of time is an open question. The new government is under permanent assault by the opposition and its leader Netanyahu, who tries to persuade the country and his own supporters that the formation of the current government is a mere episode and that in short order he will reassume the reins of power.

Already operating within limits imposed by its diversity and by its fragile hold on power, the Bennett-Lapid government faces a long list of domestic and external challenges. Internally, attempting to deal with the deep divisions and the fault lines in Israeli society would not be a realistic agenda for the new government. This would be a long-term project to be carried out by a stable government headed by a well-established prime minister. But the current government must and can deal with a number of immediate issues. First among them is the pandemic. Earlier in 2021, Israel was seen as a success story, having inoculated a large part of the population early on, but during the summer of 2021 a fresh outbreak of

the Delta variant of the virus turned Israel again into a “red country.” Trying to contain the pandemic is the government’s foremost challenge.

Another immediate issue is Israel’s relationship with its own Arab minority of some 20 percent. This issue has been shaped by contradictory trends. During the past few years, several positive developments have taken place: A growing number of Israeli Arabs have shifted their attention from the larger Palestinian issue to a quest for integration in Israel’s society and economy. There has been a movement of young Israeli Arabs from Arab towns and villages into the country’s large cities. The number of Arab students in Israeli universities has grown dramatically. Politically, a parallel shift in attitudes on the Arab and Jewish sides has made the precedent of the participation of an Islamist party in the new coalition possible. But in May 2021, during Israel’s military conflict with Hamas in Gaza, serious riots broke out in several Arab towns and among the Bedouin population in the south of the country. To some extent, this was an outcome of the violence and criminality that have beleaguered Arab society in Israel for several years now, but it was also an expression of bitterness and aggravation. The government is fully aware of the need to deal with the criminality among the Arab minority but also to make massive investments to improve the quality of life in the Arab sector and in particular to offer educational and occupational prospects to the young Arab population.

Beyond these domestic issues lie four major external challenges: those of Iran and Turkey, Israel’s relationship with the United States, the Palestinian issue, and Israel’s relationship with the larger Arab world.

The Iranian Challenge

Iran represents the most serious external threat to Israel’s national security. Since 1979 Israel has faced in Tehran a hostile, inimical regime. The Iranian American scholar Karim Sadjadpour wrote in 2018:

Distilled to its essence, Tehran’s steadfast support for Assad is not driven by the geopolitical or financial interests of the Iranian nation, nor the religious convictions of the Islamic Republic, but by a visceral and seemingly inextinguishable hatred for the state of Israel. As senior Iranian officials like Ali Akbar Velayati, a close adviser to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, have commonly said, “The chain of Resistance against Israel by Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, the new Iraqi government and Hamas passes through the Syrian highway. . . . Syria is the golden ring of the chain of resistance against Israel.” So long as the 78-year-old Khamenei remains in power, this hatred will justify Tehran’s continued commitment of blood and treasure to support Assad’s use of all means necessary—including chemical weapons—to preserve his rule.

Though Israel has virtually no direct impact on the daily lives of Iranians, opposition to the Jewish state has been the most enduring pillar of Iranian revolutionary ideology.



Whether Khamenei is giving a speech about agriculture or education, he invariably returns to the evils of Zionism.

Iran's actual policy vis-à-vis Israel has been shaped by a desire to contain Israel, build strategic assets around it, and develop a credible deterrence against a perceived Israeli threat to attack Iran's nuclear installations. It has also been part of a larger drive by an ambitious regime seeking to restore Iran's glorious imperial past, turn it into a hegemonic regional power, and project its power from the region's eastern periphery to the Mediterranean. Iran is thus established now in Lebanon and parts of Syria and is also invested in supporting Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip. It has deployed a huge number of rockets and missiles in Lebanon, managed by its proxy Hezbollah, and is trying to build its own military infrastructure in Syria. It is also engaged in a specific effort to build and provide its proxies in Syria and Lebanon with precision-guided missiles that in the event of a future military conflict would inflict massive damage on Israeli infrastructure. These are all ominous threats, but Israel is first and foremost concerned about Iran's quest for a nuclear weapon. A nuclear Iran would confront Israel with a much graver national security challenge and would probably also lead two or three other Middle Eastern countries to develop a nuclear option.

Since 2018, Israel and Iran have been fighting each other directly and indirectly in Syria, where Israel is trying to prevent Iran from building a second military infrastructure on Israel's borders and embed itself in the country. This campaign is called in Israel "the war between the wars." Israel is also trying to contain Iran's quest for a nuclear option by conducting unacknowledged cyber and other attacks on Iran's nuclear installations and personnel. These attacks, likely conducted in coordination with the United States, have slowed down Iran's military nuclear program but have not been able to stop it. Israel has prepared and flaunted plans to launch a military raid against Iran's nuclear installations. It was never clear whether during Netanyahu's tenure Israel was actually ready to take the risks and pay the price involved in such an attack or whether the preparations and massive investment it made were primarily intended to prompt the US and its European allies to take their own action. The net result of this effort was the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) signed by the Obama administration and its partners with Iran in 2015. Netanyahu was a staunch critic of the JCPOA, and he broke several unwritten rules of the US-Israeli relationship when he joined the Republicans in assailing it. Subsequently, he probably had some role in President Trump's decision to withdraw from the JCPOA and to try to bring Iran to its knees through economic sanctions. Trump's policy proved to be a total failure. It did not bring Iran to its knees, and it did provide the ayatollahs with a pretext to enrich uranium well over the level and quantity allowed by the JCPOA. Trump's policy was abandoned by the Biden administration, whose own quest to restore the JCPOA (and improve it) and put an end to Iran's enrichment drive has so far failed.

The Biden administration's initial policy toward Iran confronted Israel's new government with a dilemma. It was and is determined to improve the relationship with the Democratic Party

that was strained by Netanyahu and to develop a harmonious working relationship with the Biden administration. But it is worried by Washington's apparent mild approach toward Iran and by the prospect of a return to the original JCPOA or the signing of an equally disappointing agreement. Prime Minister Bennett visited Washington on August 27, and the Iranian issue was at the top of his agenda. No details of the discussion between Biden and Bennett regarding this issue have leaked.

Turkey

Turkey, like Iran, is the successor state to a former Muslim empire seeking major influence if not hegemony in the Middle East or parts of it. Iran's quest for such a role goes back to 1979. Turkey is a newer player, with its quest beginning several years into the tenure of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the early years of this century. Turkey's initial effort to become a non-Arab champion of Arab nationalism failed. It is now conducting a more sophisticated effort to exert its influence in different parts of the Middle East: Syria (where it annexed part of its neighbors' territory), Yemen, Qatar, Libya, Gaza, and further east, in Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkey also flexes its muscles in the eastern Mediterranean.

Unlike some of his secular predecessors, Erdoğan, the leader of an Islamist party affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, is hostile to Israel and supportive of the Palestinians, particularly of Hamas in Gaza. In 2010, Turkey and Israel came close to a military confrontation when Turkey dispatched a small flotilla to Gaza. The clash was barely averted. Israel responded to Turkey's hostility by building a close relationship with Greece and the Greek part of Cyprus and by participating in the eastern Mediterranean grouping that also included Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, whose purpose is to secure the transfer of gas to Europe in the face of Turkish hostility to any such effort.

In 2021 there were signs that Erdoğan was trying to improve his relationship with Israel, probably as a result of a series of failures he encountered, the difficult economic situation in Turkey, and his quest to improve relations with Washington.

The US-Israeli Relationship

During his recent visit to the United States, Prime Minister Bennett was preoccupied by several issues that have shaped Israel's relationship with the United States in recent years, the Iranian challenge being just one. First and foremost is the need to repair Israel's relationship with the Democratic Party and with the liberal wing of the American Jewish community and the larger American society. Anger with Israel's handling of the Palestinian question has poisoned its relationship with these important groups during the last few decades, and this anger has been exacerbated by Netanyahu's close relationship with Donald Trump and his abandonment of the traditional policy of working with both sides of the aisle in US politics. His close collaboration with the conservative Republicans and his apparent abandonment of a traditional reliance on the American Jewish community came in favor of a new alignment



with the fundamentalist community. This anger was brought to a head by the fighting in Gaza in May 2021, which, more than earlier clashes with Hamas, the Palestinian Authority, or Hezbollah, offended public opinion in the United States as well as in Western Europe. The Biden administration made no secret of its happiness with Netanyahu's ouster from power and has welcomed the Bennett-Lapid government. This auspicious beginning needs to be followed by the adoption of mutually accepted policies on such major issues as the Iran nuclear deal, the Palestinian issue, and Israel's economic relationship with China. In the aftermath of the visit, a problem was created by a small left-wing group among the Congressional Democrats who delayed the granting of \$1 billion (USD) for the replenishment of Israel's defensive Iron Dome system. The issue was sorted out by the White House and the Democratic leadership, but it was a powerful indication of Israel's problem with the party's progressive wing.

Working out an understanding on the Palestinian issue need not be as difficult as it may at first seem. The Biden administration has modest expectations with regard to the Palestinian issue. It does not seek to bring about a final status agreement or even less ambitious goals. It is interested in improving the quality of life in the West Bank and Gaza and in limiting settlement activity by Israel so as not to eliminate the prospect of a negotiated solution in the future when conditions change. The right-wing elements in the Bennett-Lapid coalition, including Bennett himself, can live with this policy, but it is easy to envisage irritants and problems down the road. With regard to the Jewish community and to liberal opinion, it would be very much up to the two principal leaders of the new government to project a new approach and to replace Netanyahu's negative image with the images of younger, more liberal and pragmatic leaders.

The Biden administration, like its predecessors, is concerned with China's strategic investments in Israel and by the defense relationship and the sale of advanced weapons systems by Israel to China. It is a complex issue, but a mutually acceptable compromise can be worked out.

Beyond these issues lies the question of America's position in the Middle East. Israel, like other US allies in the region, is concerned with Washington's "pivot away" from the region. It views the United States as an indispensable ally with regard to Iran but also as an indispensable partner in dealing with the ambitions of China, Russia, Iran, and Turkey, all seeking to fill the vacuum left by Washington's disengagement. A dialogue on the international and regional politics of the Middle East should be an important dimension of the current US-Israeli relationship.

Prime Minister Bennett's first visit to Washington and meeting with President Biden were overshadowed by the ISIS terrorist attack in Kabul, but Biden was and is determined to help Bennett consolidate his government, and a cordial relationship seems to have been established between the two leaders.

The Palestinian Issue

The Palestinian issue has been the dominant issue in Israeli life and politics since 1967. In light of peace with Egypt and Jordan and with the temporary removal of the Golan issue from the agenda, this remains the one outstanding consequence of the Six-Day War. There is almost an equal number of Jews and Arabs west of the Jordan River, and it is clear that should the occupation of the West Bank continue, Israel would cease to be either Jewish or democratic in less than two decades. The numbers are not disputed, but Israeli public and political opinions are divided over their significance. The center and left of the Israeli political spectrum are persuaded that in order to avoid this Hobbesian choice, Israel needs to come to a final status agreement with the Palestinians and separate from them. The Israeli right wing argues that the two-state solution is not acceptable on either security or ideological grounds, and that somehow the issue will take care of itself as it has in the past. As we saw earlier, the Bennett-Lapid government, due to its composition and fragility, cannot seek a fundamental solution to the problem and must limit itself to managing the issue. In practical terms, this means helping the Palestinian Authority to survive its present crisis, to deal with the Hamas challenge in Gaza, and to ensure that Israel's Arab minority continues to integrate into Israeli society and politics and does not become part of a new Palestinian insurgency or Intifada.

The Palestinian Authority, the self-governing entity produced by the Oslo Accords, is on the verge of collapse. It is led by an aging leader and is held in contempt by a large part of the population of West Bankers, who view it as corrupt and inefficient. It is also facing a major economic crisis that threatens to lead it to bankruptcy and chaos resembling that of Lebanon. The Palestinian Authority lives in the shadow of a challenge by Hamas, which is now seen by many in the West Bank as less corrupt and more effective, and as a worthy opponent of Israel. The Biden administration has made it clear to Israel that it is not about to salvage the Palestinian Authority and its economy, and that it would be up to Israel to act if it does not wish to deal with the consequences of a total collapse of authority in the West Bank.

As demonstrated by Operation Guardian of the Walls, the fourth round of fighting between Israel and Hamas since 2009, there is no neat solution to the problem of Gaza. Hamas as a fundamentalist, Islamist organization rejects the notion of a political solution with Israel. It is allied with and supported by Iran and has built a large number of medium- and long-range missiles that enabled it to launch rockets against Israel throughout the fighting last May. Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005, but it keeps a partial siege of the Strip, arguing that free access by land, sea, and air to Gaza would enable Iran to supply Hamas and the more radical Islamic Jihad with an arsenal resembling that of Hezbollah. This precarious situation has led to repeated cycles of fighting. Israel cannot use its overwhelming military advantage without actually conquering the Gaza Strip. This it refuses to do, realizing that it would be a costly



operation at the end of which Israel would be back in control of the Strip and its two million residents. The only way to overcome this vicious cycle would be for Israel to come to a comprehensive agreement with the Palestinian Authority and help it regain control of the Gaza Strip. At this point in time, this is not a realistic option.

Syria and Lebanon

Israel's northern neighbors, Syria and Lebanon, represent additional powder kegs threatening to explode both separately and as a potential united northern front. Between 1992 and 2011, Israel and Syria conducted intermittent negotiations for a peace settlement and continued to fight each other directly and, more frequently, through Lebanon. This period ended with the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011. Israel decided early on not to be dragged into the civil war despite the temptation of helping a more moderate opposition to topple the regime of Bashar al-Assad and inflict a major blow on Iran and Hezbollah. This policy was modified by a series of red lines established by Israel, primarily the interdiction of the transfer to Hezbollah of sophisticated weapons systems and the prevention of the establishment of a hostile presence in the Syrian Golan. Israel also extended humanitarian and a limited degree of military aid to opposition groups in southern Syria.

The situation changed after the victory achieved by the regime in December 2016 with the massive help of Russia and Iran. Israel acted to prevent or at least limit the extension of Hezbollah's presence as well as that of other pro-Iranian militias in the Syrian Golan, and it later began to take military action against Iran's efforts to establish a military infrastructure in Syria, not just in the country's southern part but also deep in its territory. This was done primarily by the Israeli air force, and throughout the period there were almost no incidents or tensions with the regime's patron and Iran's partner, Russia, which had established a significant aerial presence in Syria. Occasionally, clashes took place between Israel, Iran, and Bashar al-Assad's army.

The civil war and its course and outcome have removed from the table the prospect of a Syrian-Israeli peace agreement. For one thing, the Israeli political system and public would not tolerate a return of the Golan to a Syria ruled by a dictator who had slaughtered a large number of his own citizens. The Trump administration's decision to recognize Israeli sovereignty in the Golan served yet another deadly blow to the prospect of a political settlement (ironically, Israel itself had not annexed the Golan in 1981 but only extended Israeli law to the territory).

As with Syria, Iran's hold in Lebanon defines Israel's relationship with that country. The outcome of the 2006 war was pivotal. In fact, it is difficult to speak about Israel's relationship with Lebanon since in Israeli eyes, the effective power in Lebanon is Hezbollah, and the Lebanese state is practically an empty shell. Israel takes a skeptical view of

the policies of the United States and France, which focus on trying to strengthen the Lebanese state and armed forces in order to enable them to stand up to Hezbollah.

The 2006 war in Lebanon is not considered a success by most Israelis. Like most hybrid wars, it did not end with a clear victory, and it exacted a very high price from Israel. Since 2006 Hezbollah's arsenal of rockets and missiles has been dramatically increased, and, most significantly, it now includes a small number of precision-guided missiles. Iran is making a major effort to increase that number while a major target of Israel's operations in Syria is precisely the prevention of such an outcome. And yet, Hezbollah has been deterred by the devastation inflicted on itself and on its civilian constituency during the 2006 war and is very careful not to cross the red lines that would ignite another round of fighting. This policy is reinforced by Tehran's concern that such a war could be exploited by Israel to launch an attack on its nuclear arsenal.

Thus, a deterrence equation exists between Israel and Hezbollah. Israel believes that should another war erupt, it could destroy Hezbollah and its arsenal but knows that the cost of such a war would be very high. There would be serious harm done to Israel's civilian population as well as significant damage to its infrastructure before Hezbollah's arsenal could be destroyed. Hezbollah and Iran are also both fully aware of the consequences of another Lebanese-Israeli war. And so, a delicate and fragile balance exists along the Israel-Lebanon border. Israelis and the West are concerned by the near collapse of the Lebanese state, politically, economically, and administratively. Israel is also concerned that such a collapse could prove to be the spark that would ignite the powder keg.

The Israeli national security establishment believes that in the event of another war in the north it would be limited to either the Lebanese or the Syrian front, but that Iran and Hezbollah would try to create one front from the Mediterranean to the eastern parts of southern Syria. Nor can it be ruled out that in the event of such a war missiles could be launched at Israel from more remote areas under Iranian control or influence, be that in Iraq or Yemen.

Egypt and Jordan

Egypt and Jordan are states that signed peace agreements with Israel in 1979 and in 1994. These peace agreements have survived several challenges but remain "cold." The term *cold peace* means that these two countries have kept their major obligations of the peace treaties with Israel but have not allowed their full normalization of relations to proceed. This policy reflects the residual impact of the traditional conflict with Israel, the pressure of public opinion nourished by satellite television and social media, and Cairo's and Amman's unhappiness with several aspects of Israeli policy, particularly its Palestinian policy. This state of affairs was exacerbated by President Sisi's and King Abdullah's criticism of Netanyahu. The Bennett-Lapid government has reached out to both countries in an effort



to improve relationships. These efforts are facilitated by the new impetus recently given by the Abraham Accords. It is much easier for Cairo and Amman to pursue a better relationship with Israel and to collaborate on such issues as gas and water when they are not the only Arab states to have made peace with Israel.

The Abraham Accords

The Abraham Accords is the term used to designate a series of agreements concluded by Israel between September and December 2020 with four Arab countries—the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. The term was originally applied to the agreements signed between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain at the White House on September 15 and witnessed by US president Donald Trump. The agreements the two countries made with Israel differ: The three parties first signed the “Abraham Accords Declaration,” which called for the promotion of peace and cooperation in the Middle East. Israel and the UAE then signed a peace treaty called “Abraham Accords Peace Agreements: Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization.” With Bahrain Israel signed a more modest short declaration in which the two parties announced their intention to establish peaceful relations and enter into a series of normalization agreements. This was actually implemented three days later in Manama, the capital of Bahrain. A month later, on October 23, Israel and Sudan also agreed to normalize their relations; on December 22, Israel, Morocco, and the United States signed a joint declaration announcing the establishment of full diplomatic relations.

The Abraham Accords clearly represented a dramatic achievement for the Trump administration’s and the Netanyahu government’s foreign policies. Four Arab countries thus broke a consensus established by the Saudi Peace Plan, which had been adopted by the Arab League in 2002, according to which peace and normalization with Israel would be established only after an acceptable resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This departure from the Arab peace plan was met with a mixed response in the Arab world. Significantly, the original author of the plan, Saudi Arabia, without joining the Abraham Accords gave them an indirect endorsement, first by permitting its protégé, Bahrain, to join the accords, and then by opening its airspace to flights from Israel. Others, first and foremost the Palestinian Authority, blasted the Arab signatories to the Abraham Accords. Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), through his spokesman, argued that “the Palestinian leadership rejects the actions of the Emirati government, considering it to be a betrayal of the Palestinian people and Jerusalem and al-Aqsa.” This primary response was eventually moderated when the Palestinian Authority realized that it could not stem the tide and settled on the hope that the normalization agreements with four Arab countries would end up softening the Israeli attitude on the Palestinian issue. During the following months the agreements made with the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco were gradually implemented albeit slowly and without the enthusiasm that had been originally created by the dramatic breakthrough.

The momentum created by the Abraham Accords was temporarily checked by the May 21 crisis. None of the agreements was abrogated or suspended, but implementation was slowed down. The change of administrations in the United States had a similar though more limited effect. The Abraham Accords were the handiwork of the Trump White House and were his most prominent foreign policy success. It took the Biden team some time to express support for the Abraham Accords, and there was not the enthusiasm displayed by its predecessor nor the accompanying intimacy, for better or worse, that existed between Trump and the Saudi and Emirati royal families.

Netanyahu's shadow continues to loom over Israeli politics, though with the passage of time and the consolidation of the new government, it is diminishing. The vote on the budget in November 2021 will be a crucial test for the Bennett-Lapid government. By crossing this hurdle it would consolidate its existence for a significant period. But survival will not mean that Israel will have a government capable of dealing with the country's fundamental issues and fault lines. For this to happen a stable government and a leader with statesmanlike qualities will have to appear on the scene.



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