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Prior to Operation Pillar of Defence, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's party Likud had been declining in popularity.

Netanyahu was also threatened by an opposition alliance of the former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, former foreign minister Shaul Mofaz, leader of Kadima Shaul Mofaz and Yair Labed.

In light of these developments, in order to secure his re-election, Netanyahu will therefore become the biggest bloc in the Knesset by forming an alliance with rightwing foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman and his ultranationalist Yisrael Beitnu party.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced an electoral pact with Lieberman in October 2012, in preparation for the January 22 2013 Israeli election.

Currently, Likud holds 27 of the 120 seats in the Knesset and Yisrael Beitenu holds 15.

It appears Netanyahu's strategy to pre-empt being overtaken by the centre has worked. Recent polls suggest that the alliance will maintain the lead – with estimates of the total number of seats ranging from 35 to 43 – with the Labour opposition party picking up estimates of between 20 and 23 seats.

Although there was some internal opposition within the Likud party, many were afraid to publicly defy Netanyahu. Many party members have expressed approval at the alliance.

In addition to their right wing extremist policies, which are detailed below, a consideration of events that have passed under their names is a warning that the status quo cannot be perpetuated.

The Policies of Avigdor Liberman's Yisrael Beitenu Party

Avigdor Lieberman is currently Israeli minister of foreign affairs in Benjamin Netanyahu's government and has headed the Yisrael Beiteinu party since 1999.

In 2011 Israel's attorney general indicted Lieberman of corruption charges for money laundering and fraud, although the foreign minister has been granted a hearing before the charges are made formal.

A pact with Lieberman, who lives on Nokdim, an illegal Israeli settlement in the West Bank, could destroy any remaining hope for a diplomatic solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict; he has publicly stated that peace with the Palestinians is not necessarily possible:

- Lieberman is strongly opposed to any form of concessions for the Palestinians
- He has dismissed land for peace, and stated instead "we are completely opposed to what has been and still is the guiding principle of Israel's foreign policy: 'land for peace'" preferring to exchange "territory and populations"
- This refers to his proposal to transfer Arabs out of Israel and into a Palestinian state, whilst annexing illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank
- Lieberman has backed legislation in the past that is biased towards Arabs. He advocated that potential citizens pledge allegiance to a Jewish and democratic state, including committing to military or alternative service. He has threatened them with loss of citizenship including the right to vote if they didn't, hence the slogan, "no loyalty, no citizenship"
- Has supported the death penalty for Israeli Arab members of the Knesset who have met with Hamas. In 2006 he said, "The fate of the collaborators in the Knesset will be identical to that of those who collaborated with the Nazis. Collaborators, as well as war criminals, were executed after the Nuremburg trials at the end of the World War Two. I hope that will be the fate of collaborators in this house"
- Lieberman has supported killing leaders of Hamas and wants to remove the President of the Palestinian Authority
- Lieberman has called for economic, political and security sanctions on the Palestinian Authority as a punishment for their requests at the United Nations General Assembly for recognition of a Palestinian state

- Lieberman has stated in the past that he is opposed to efforts for quiet along the Israel's southern border with Gaza; the events of the past week prove this
- In January 2009 during Operation Cast Lead, Lieberman said that Israel " must continue to fight Hamas just like the United States did with the Japanese in World War II.
- A report in the Guardian in 2009 claimed that Lieberman threatened to use nuclear weapons against Gaza

The Policies of Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud Party

Benjamin Netanyahu has been the Prime Minister of Israel since 2009, having previously served in the post from 1996 to 1999.

It is notable that during his first term the government was detrimentally divided over agreements he made with Yasser Arafat for land transfers in the West Bank. He agreed that Israel would pull out, in stages, from 13% of the land that they had occupied there. Whilst one section accused him of being disloyal to the right wing, he felt pressured enough to anger the left when he did not follow through with the agreement.

In 2005, Netanyahu resigned as finance minister as he adamantly opposed the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

In 2012 Netanyahu formed a coalition with Shaul Mofaz's centrist Kadima party, where together they formed 94 of the Knesset's 120 members. The coalition ended in July when the two parties disagreed over a universal draft law for the Israeli army.

After Obama was elected in November, Netanyahu had to try and repair a relationship with him, having previously, very openly, backed his opponent Mitt Romney.

- Relations between Netanyahu and the Palestinians have become stagnant; in January 2012 negotiators from both sides met after one year, yet both sides reported the meetings were not fruitful
- Israel is adamantly against Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority's bid for full recognition at the United Nations Security Council
- In November, in reaction to this bid for statehood, Israel warned that they would not hand over millions of dollars of tax payments to the PA. Israel buckled under international pressure and American influence to transfer the money

- Netanyahu perpetuates, and strengthens a policy of settler colonialism
- Netanyahu's crisis in Gaza creates a distraction for civilians so that they don't confront his other policies; these include a possible war with Iran, settlement expansion, the siege on Gaza
- Netanyahu has pushed for war with Iran. A particularly memorable moment was his speech at the United Nations where he produced his much ridiculed bomb chart
- In March 2012 Obama pushed for diplomatic and economic sanctions on Iran as a more favourable route to embark on, but Netanyahu believed that such rhetoric would display weakness to Iranian leaders
- He also likes to create the illusion that he needs to protect the Israeli population from Hamas 'terrorists,' a party who were voted in by elections widely deemed as free and fair
- In order to be re-elected, he relies heavily on a national security and foreign policy strategy which involves Iran and Palestine
- The 2010 Turkish flotilla confrontation in which Israeli soldiers killed nine activists, eight of them Turkish, to prevent them from breaking the siege on Gaza turned international public opinion largely away from Israel
- Lieberman strongly opposed apologizing to and appeasing Turkey, which left Netanyahu not wanting to appear politically weak in his eyes
- The incident isolated Turkey and Israel

Implications of the 'Likud-Beytenu' Party

Likud and Beitnu combined constitute 42 seats.

Many believe that the only true opposition to the Netanyahu Lieberman pact is Ehud Olmert (the former prime minister), if he could move past the allegations of corruption and return to politics.

If he did, he would do so on the basis that Netanyahu ruined Israel's relationship with the United States, destroyed efforts of peace with the Palestinians by expanding settlements and made hard line speeches about Iran.

Due to the fragmented nature of Israel's political scene, unstable coalitions are nothing new. This particular alliance is guaranteed to make an already extreme Israel, even more extreme.

- Netanyahu and Lieberman are patently trying to increase support for their parties through their governing coalition
- Contrary to Netanyahu's proclamation at a recent press conference that the alliance is "for a better Israel" it will pull the Likud party further to the right. A worrying prospect as Israel is already extreme in many of its policies
- Lieberman's hard line agenda will become more credible, promising power for Yisrael Beitenu
- The pact will accelerate Lieberman's ultimate goal, which is to lead the right wing in Israel, to become Netanyahu's successor
- Lieberman will be able to choose his preferred ministry to be in charge of, which could be the ministry of defence
- The alliance will create a stronger front with which to pursue shared and dangerous agendas, such as defending Israel "against foreign security threats" such as Iran and its nuclear program
- Lieberman will acquire a marked role in peace talks, despite the fact that he has publicly declared that peace with the Palestinians is not necessarily possible
- Buckling under American pressure, Netanyahyu begun to increase talks of a peaceful resolution with the Palestinians. Lieberman declared that this was "unrealistic," and ridiculed the idea, suggesting instead a time frame of decades
- That both parties endorse illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank makes it unlikely that an independent Palestinian state will materialise from negotiations
- Instead, the government are adopting the vision of a Greater Israel which swallows up Jerusalem and much of the West Bank

The 'Likud-Beytenu' Party and the West

- Despite his extremist tendencies and racist comments, when Lieberman became the foreign minister Europe did not protest
- With how the offense on Gaza has unfolded in the past week, exposing again the vulnerability of its captive citizens, the international community cannot continue to turn its back on what is happening there
- Under Netanyahu, Gaza has continued to be under siege and occupation, something that does not look set to change (but to become worse) under the new alliance
- That Western leaders continue to push for peace through negotiations exposes an act of complete misunderstanding, or at worse desire not to witness complete change
- One of many obstacles to the peace process are the 600,000 illegal settlers who have established themselves in the occupied West Bank and whose positioning and behaviour is defended by the Israeli army
- A number of settlements in the occupied West Bank are being legalised, despite the fact that they were initially deemed illegal under Israeli law
- Hamas have, in the past, stated that they are willing to establish lasting peace with Israel if they retreat to the 1967 borders
- Israel will presumably continue their position, along with Washington and Europe, that Hamas is a 'terrorist organisation' and should be eliminated from diplomacy, despite the fact that they were voted in with free elections in 2006
- At this very moment, under Netanyahu, air and sea strikes against the Gazans are intensifying
- A UN report has deemed Gaza unliveable by 2020; water, electricity, education and health infrastructure and supplies are in desperate need of restoration and with an increasing population (it is currently 1.6 million), in eight years it will not have enough to provide for its citizens. European governments have failed to end this blockade, Netanyahu has sought to perpetuate it
- That Israeli leaders continue to tell us that Hamas is terrorist organisation strikes a chord with Western political rhetoric, where there is currently a security war with Islamic figures who pose a threat; to these people, Ahmed Jabari is indistinguishable from this list

- The recent crisis in Gaza has proved that the Obama will make very little difference to Netanyahu's actions; he has offered indisputable support, despite people believing that he would be harsher in his second term as President as he was not looking to be re-elected
- Despite saying that settlements and the illegal occupation are not acceptable, the United States continues to give Israel $3 billion dollars of military aid per year
- Obama has also been criticised for not pushing to find a solution to the conflict
- The escalating violence of the past week in Gaza has solidified the support of William Hague, Britain's foreign secretary, Cathy Ashton, the EU high representative for foreign affairs for Israel. They have all asserted that Hamas rockets were the start of the predicament
- An article in Guardian by Musa Abumarzuq on Monday draws attention to the killing of a Palestinian child in Gaza by Israeli military on 8 November which in fact escalated the violence
- Why have European and US governments encouraged and supported Israel, despite majorities in their populations opposing the brutality there?

Operation Pillar of Defence

The escalating violence in Gaza over the past week is in part an election tactic by Netanyahu who is trying to convince the Israeli public that he will resolve the 'problem' of Hamas.

This is not a new trick for Israel. Shimon Peres' attack on Lebanon in 1996 intended to do the same, as did Operation Cast Lead in Gaza in 2008. Nobody can afford the possibility of this happening again, at the next elections under Likud-Beytenu.

Both wars (now and 2008) had a political aim, and that was to secure more votes in upcoming Knesset elections.

A poll published in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz on Monday revealed that 84% of the Israeli public are in favour of Operation Pillar of Defence, but only 30% support a ground attack. Netanyahu and Defence Minister Ehud Barak have improved by 20% in popularity ratings.

- Whilst Egypt and Turkey push for a ceasefire, Binyamin Netanyahu, Avigdor Lieberman and Defence Minister Ehud Barak are intent on intensifying the crisis

- The war in the past week will aid public amnesia for illegal settlement building, the occupation and the siege on Gaza
- Avigdor Lieberman said on Sunday that he would not agree to a truce with Hamas until they ceased all rocket fire
- Israeli officials have said that if Hamas do not agree to their conditions to a ceasefire, a ground invasion will commence until Hamas are ousted
- At a recent conference in Thailand, Obama said, “if we’re serious about wanting to resolve this situation and create a genuine peace process, it starts with no more missiles being fired into Israeli territory and that then gives us the space to try and deal with these long-standing conflicts that exist.”
- Whilst attacks from Gaza on Israel are alarming – three this morning hit the Israeli townm Ashkelon - rather than being the beginning of this week’s events, it is imperative to consider the constant occupation, the siege on Gaza, the daily atrocities which make life unbearable for Palestinians in order to understand the source of frustration that Palestinians feel every day
- There were a number of moments of notable unrest in the past year, why did Israel respond with restraint then, but not now
- Since 2009, 271 Palestinians have been killed.
- Military offensives never have and will not solve the problem between Israel and Palestine; the root of this problem is the Israeli occupation of Palestine
- Netanyahu and Lieberman ignore, or whitewash the idea that the Palestinian right of return has a significant part to play in the peace process
- The targeting and killing of Ahmed Jabari aimed to destroy any form of peace initiative. He enforced cease-fire understandings that were brokered by Egypt and was interested in a long-term cease-fire if Israel ceased attacks on Gaza. The morning of his death he received a draft proposal for such a cease-fire with Israel
- What Israel has not attempted is to find mutual ground for a long-term cease-fire
- All Hamas leaders have been forced underground so as not to become the next targets of the Israeli army; Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh has left Gaza

- The government and majority of Israelis continue to hold that they are living in ever more perilous conditions, their neighbours becoming more dangerous by the day
- By attempting to create the illusion that Israel is fighting a war of defence, they are seeking to mobilize public opinion for, rather than against Israel
- America backs them by saying, “Israel has the full right to defend itself and protect its citizens”
- The actions are designed to make the Israeli population feel scared of an imminent threat (whether it’s Palestine or Iran) and vote for Netanyahu and Lieberman’s party on the basis that they will protect them
- Palestinian and Israeli casualties are mounting, as are Israeli war crimes against the Palestinians. At least ninety six Palestinians and three Israelis have been killed in six days and the number is rising
- America failed to mention the completely disproportionate use of force by a far more sophisticated and stronger army; F-16s, the economic siege and the political boycott to name a few
- The government in Jordan and Egypt will be under tremendous pressure from their citizens to break off their respective peace treaties
- The strength and sophistication of the Israeli army in comparison to Palestine makes for a highly disproportionate conflict
- The Israeli army have targeted civilians, people’s homes, institutions, political leaders, government headquarters, the military, police headquarters and journalists
- They have struck with air strikes, strikes from the sea and drones overhead
- Israel is prepared to go to any extent not to back down. As Gideon Sharon (son of Ariel Sharon, former Prime Minister) put it in an article in Jpost on Sunday, “there should be no electricity in Gaza, no gasoline or moving vehicles, nothing. Then they’d really call for a ceasefire. Were this to happen, the images from Gaza might be unpleasant – but victory would be swift, and the lives of our soldiers and civilians spared.”

Despite the failure of many Western leaders to condemn the escalation of violence in Gaza this week, public opinion against Israel is mounting. With the international community and a global effort behind ending the illegal occupation of Palestine, there is only so far leaders can stand detached from what their people want.