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FOR POLICIES AND FUTURE STUDIES

# **The new Israeli government** **is caught between the hammer of** **internal contradictions & the oaks** **of external challenges.**

**By Ida Bary**

University of Birmingham, UK

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## **Middle East Forum** For Policies and Future Studies

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[www.policiesforum.me](http://www.policiesforum.me)

[info@policiesforum.me](mailto:info@policiesforum.me)

+90 850 840 3 999

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## Ida Bary

A Norwegian researcher of Palestinian origin who specializes in conflict resolution and international mediation, Islamic movements, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Yemeni issue, and Arab Gulf studies.

She studied at the Islamic University of Gaza & obtained a BA in Economics & Political Science with an excellent degree.

She earned a master's degree in international relations from the University of Kansas in the United States of America, as well as a master's degree in international development from the Norwegian University of Science for Life.

She also has a PhD in International Mediation from the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom.

She has many research papers & lectures on conflicts and crises in the Middle East that have been published at Harvard University & many other international research centers and universities.



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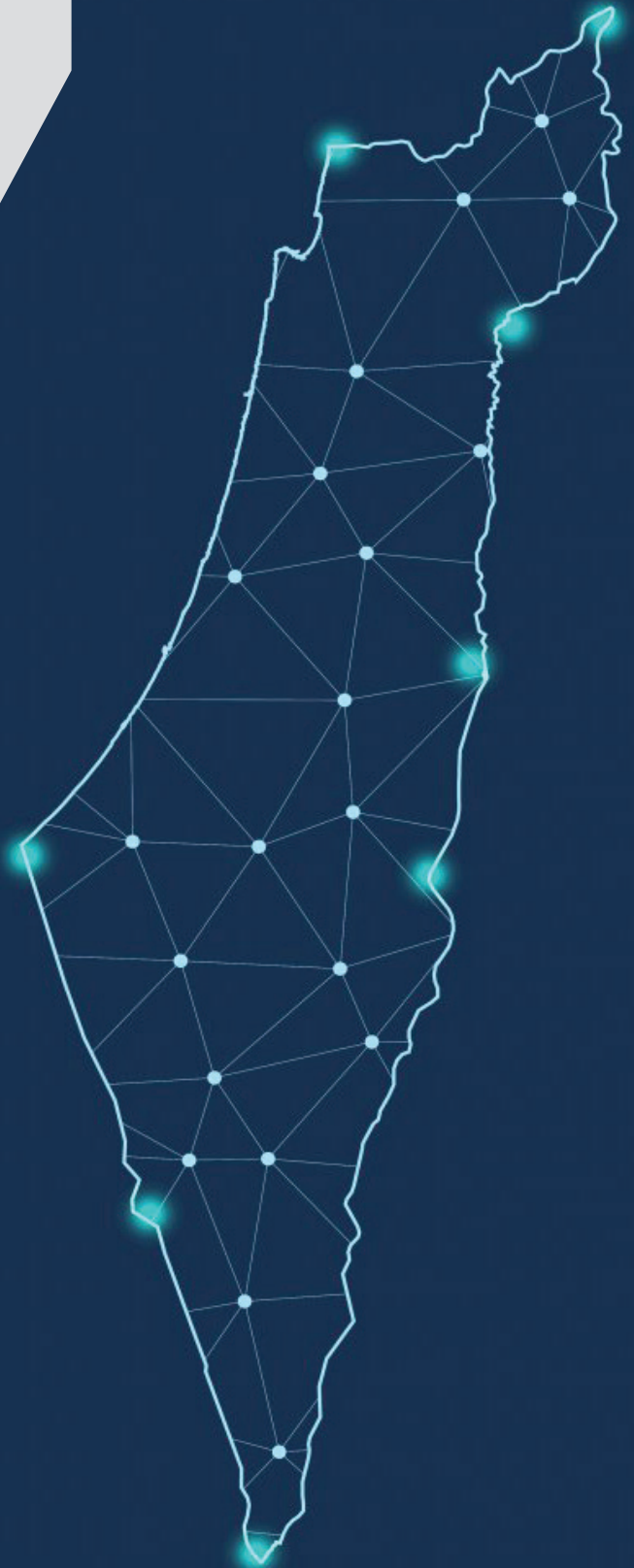


On 13 June, the new Israeli coalition government was voted into the Knesset. This new coalition government has been united on one goal; to depose Netanyahu, who has been Prime Minister for the past 12 years. The coalition consists of different parties in Israel.

This coalition includes a Palestinian Arab party, the Arab Islamist party in Israel, for the first time in Israeli history. The odd thing about this government is that it is a coalition of parties of diverse agendas: it's a coalition of Hawks vs doves and religious vs secular. It is characterized by a stark ideological difference among its components with its internal contradictions.

However, the liberal in the world are optimistic and they describe the formation of the new government as progress.

## The new Israeli government



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The head of the new government is Naftali Bennet who is considered the first religious prime minister of Israel. He is described as being more right-wing than Benjamin Netanyahu. Additionally, he is usually called an extremist and an opportunist. He is thought to be more pragmatic and less ideological than he appears.



He claims that teaming up such ideological polar opposites will end the Israeli impasse. The main issue with this government is that it could collapse at any time if one of the parties leaves.

The parties that have formed this coalition seek to restore Israel's stability, or so they believe when they formed it. This government, however, is confronted with enormous challenges.

**These challenges can be classified into three levels:**

local or national,

regional,

and international.

On a local level, the main challenge is represented by Israel's suffering economy as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, the problem of Israeli Arabs that appeared this May and the violence between them and Jews, and the settlement issue and how government members are divided on it.



On a regional level, the new government faces two major challenges: the Palestinian issue, including Hamas in Gaza, and Iran's nuclear weapon. Finally, on an international scale. The main challenge that the new government faces is the relationship with the United States. Since Joe Biden became President of the United States, relations between the United States and Israel have been strained.

Bennet should make an effort to resolve this issue. His support for the settlements, on the other hand, may stymie his efforts. It is worth mentioning that the new government is headed by a settler advocate, Naftali Bennet. He usually champions the settlers and led the council of settlers. He is a religious prime minister wearing a kipa.

However, some religious right accused him of abandoning his ideology in order to join the leftists and the Arabs. This would increase the local challenges that the new government would face.





In terms of local challenges, it appears that the new government will prioritize economic issues, focusing on recovering and improving the Israeli economy, which has suffered greatly as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. In addition, the new administration would focus on the state budget and the construction of new hospitals. The new government would also care about the social issues in Israeli society. The inclusion of an Israeli Arab party in the new coalition suggests that the new government will pay more attention to the relationship between Israeli Arabs and Jews. Especially after the violence that erupted in May 2021 as a result of Al-Aqsa unrest and events in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. This violence was the result of Benjamin Netanyahu's divide-and-rule policy, which he had implemented during his 12 years as Prime Minister of Israel. That violence was a forewarning of the existence of a large crack in Israeli society as a result of discrimination against Israeli Arab citizens.

Bennet describes this violence by saying "Israel was thrown into a maelstrom of hatred and infighting".







It appears that the new government will be pre-occupied with local issues rather than regional issues such as the Palestinian crisis.

The new government decided to focus on domestic matters to overcome its differences on regional issues such as the Palestinian- Israeli relations or conflict.

One of the regional challenges is the Palestinian question. Naftali Bennet began his first meeting with the cabinet by assuring them that Israel will maintain control over all of the lands it occupies. He's referring to the West Bank and East Jerusalem settlements. By assuring this, Bennet fades any hope in a two- states solution.

This was clear from the first moment Bennet was announced as the head of the new government. A government led by a settler advocate, Bennet, would not recognize an independent state for the Palestinians. In addition, he called for more forceful attacks on Hamas and the Gaza Strip. Because of these facts, there is no space for any peace negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis. It is known that Israel only engages in negotiations when it is pressure.





Under Bennet's administration, Israel can participate in negotiations if the US administration puts pressure on it. In this case, Bennet would resume negotiations in order to satisfy the US administration rather than to find a solution. He will, however, continue to expand the settlements.

That's why the announcement of Bennet as the head of the new government is not considered good news for the Palestinian government. The Palestinian prime minister, Mohammad Shtayyeh, assures that there will be no future for this new government unless Palestinian legitimate rights are taken into account. The new prime minister explicitly announced that the Israeli occupation will not be ended and that no lands will be given to Palestinians.

However, in their congratulatory messages to the new government, some international leaders, including Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and US President Joe Biden, have mentioned the importance of peace.



Some may think that the existence of the Arab party as a part of the centrist-left bloc in the government, is an indication of constraining any right steps against the Palestinians in the West Bank. This could happen; however, it will not make a significant difference in a case as important as the Palestinian cause.


As Naftali Bennet was very firm when he announced that Israel should annex much of the occupied the West Bank. The question is, how will this Arab party react if the new government takes a major step in the West Bank, for example? Should it resign from the government? Will Bennet agree to this?



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The background of the entire page is a photograph of a large, ornate domed building, likely a mosque or a government building, with intricate architectural details. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. A network of white dots connected by thin white lines is superimposed on the sky and the building's dome, suggesting a digital or technological theme.

The withdrawal of any party from the government means the collapse of the government. Should Bennet be in a position where he has to change his ideology and gives away being a religious one? Bennet's government appears to have ignored the Palestinian issue in its political programs in order to avoid a conflict within its fragile coalition. The Palestinian issue, on the other hand, is the most challenging test for the new coalition government.

It is obvious that Bennet will find himself in an unenviable situation. He should be aware that there are numerous other critical files awaiting him, some of which threaten the very existence of his government. The Iranian nuclear weapon is one of those files.

### **Iran's nuclear weapon and the US -Israeli relationship**



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# Iran's nuclear weapon and the US -Israeli relationship

Discussing the US- Israeli relationship is closely connected to the nuclear deal with Iran.

First of all, it is important to be aware that Israel serves as the United States' eyes and ears in the Middle East. Americans believe that Israel is the only country that can protect them from radical Islam.



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Traditionally, Israel used to have a cultivation bipartisan support in the United States. However, Benjamin Netanyahu has developed more aligned with the Republicans. When Biden became the president of the United States and suggested restoring the nuclear deal with Iran, Netanyahu accused him of being a threat to Israel. Since that time the relationship between Israel and the US administration is a fusty one.

Restoring relations between the United States and Israel is a significant international challenge for Israel's new government. Not opposing the nuclear deal is a way for Bennet's administration to re-establish strong bipartisan support for Israel.

Another regional challenge that the new coalition government should consider is Iran's nuclear weapon. In terms of Iran's nuclear weapons, there is no significant different between Bennet and Netanyahu. Both are opposed to the agreement and the US initiative to re-establish the international nuclear agreement with Iran. Bennet considers resuming the nuclear deal with Iran as a mistake that would provide legitimization to the Iranian regime, which is considered a violent regime, according to Bennet. However, Bennet called Biden two hours after his inauguration. He agreed to hold close consultations on Middle East security issues, including Iran.





Bennet, on the other hand, can soften his stance toward Iran if the US assures him that Iran will never use its nuclear weapons against Israel. Bennet would do this to fix the relationship between the United States and Israel. Bennet is expected to take a less confrontational approach and align with Washington's approach regarding restoring the nuclear deal with Iran. He would be in the same line with Biden's policy regarding restoring the nuclear deal with Iran. Bennet must use a less disharmonious policy with Biden regarding the question of Iran.

Some members of the new coalition, such as Gantz, the Blue and White party leader, do not strongly oppose Biden's plan to re-establish the nuclear deal with Iran. In any case, if the US decides to lift the sanctions against Iran, it should meet Israel's security needs and maintain military support for Israel, particularly by replacing the Iron Dome.

While Netanyahu compares the Biden administration to Iran and Hamas, both of which he considers to be threats to Israel, Bennet would prefer to align with the Biden administration. Bennet has a chance to reduce political tensions between Israel and the current US administration. The new administration may provide an opportunity for Biden to re-establish the nuclear deal with Iran. If Bennet does not oppose the nuclear deal, Israel will be assured that the US will prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. If Bennet is forced to oppose the resumption of the nuclear deal with Iran, he will do so quietly.





Bennet would not risk his political capital or his relationship with Biden's administration to challenge Iran's nuclear deal. The new government's rhetoric toward Iran will be less bellicose. In general, it is unlikely that Bennet's government will change its policy toward Iran significantly.

The new administration should be aware of the link between Iran and the Palestinian issue. In order to make progress on the Iranian issue, Israel should make progress on the Palestinian issue. To find common ground with Iran, Israel should reach a diplomatic agreement with the Palestinians.





In conclusion, Israel's new coalition government poses a challenge in its own right. It is made up of various ideological components. It is a coalition of Hawks vs doves and religious vs secular. It contains many contradictions, and its constituents are divided on many issues but united on one, the removal of Netanyahu. This government could fall apart at any time if one of the parties leaves.

Additionally, the new government is facing many challengeable files. Those challenges exist at the local, regional, and international levels. The bad economy caused by the Coronavirus pandemic, as well as the violence perpetrated by Israeli Arabs this May, are seen as top priorities for the new government. The Palestinian question, Hamas, and Iran are challenges facing the new government on the regional level. While the tense relationship between the United States and Israel is an international issue, the new administration should address





It appears that the new government will put aside the most difficult issues, such as the Palestinian issue, in order to focus on rebuilding the Israeli economy. To avoid a conflict within its fragile coalition, Bennet's government ignored the Palestinian issue in its political programs. However, the Palestinian issue is the most challenging test for the new coalition government. Bennet's administration should pay close attention to the Palestinian issue.

The current tense relationship between Israel and the US is linked to Biden's suggestion to re-establish the nuclear deal with Iran. Supporting Biden's decision to restoring the nuclear deal would provide an opportunity for Bennet's coalition government to repair ties with Democrats while also restoring bipartisan support for Israel.

**In the end, it is unclear whether the new government will be able to avoid the gridlocks or will collapse under the weight of its internal contradictions.**

