

Israel : What's Going On

2021/2022 - The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly
And a Look at What Might Come in 2022

Israel: What's Going On

The Good

- Coalition government is a functioning government and may be the first government in Israeli history to last four years (Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid). Took office on 13 June 2021.
- Government has passed first budget in over two years, allowing expenditures on social programs
- First ever Arab party in the government. Mansour Abbas of Ra'am speaking in favor of a Jewish Israel provided the rights of all minorities is upheld. He has given these talks in Hebrew, Arabic, and English
- Highest immigration to Israel from North America since 1973
- Diplomatic and trade relations with four Muslim countries - the Abraham Accords document was signed by UAE, Bahrain, and Israel on 15 Sept 2020, Morocco agreed on 10 Dec 2020, Sudan on 23 Oct 2020 agreed. A side note - it is now 48 years since the last major war (Yom Kippur). The country most vociferous in calling for Israel's destruction is Iran, not an Arab country.

Israel: What's Going On

The Good

- On Nov 22, the UAE, Jordan and Israel signed an agreement by which the UAE will build a 600 mw solar power plant in Jordan. Jordan will sell the power to Israel, Israel will sell 200 million cubic meters of desalinated water to Jordan. This gives Israel a clean energy source, and Jordan critical access to fresh water.
- Warming relations with Egypt. Naftali Bennett paid the first visit to Egypt since 2010. Both countries have shared enemies, among them the Islamic Brotherhood in Egypt and Hamas in Gaza (IB cousin). Egypt is home to the Natural Gas Forum that includes Israel, Cyprus and Greece. The uptick in the relationship is directly related to the Abraham Accords, as Egypt sees the economic benefits that the signatory states have already reaped.
- First ever meeting in Erbil, Iraq with 300 Iraqi notables calling for normalization of ties with Israel and outreach to the country's dispossessed Jewish diaspora. To understand how significant this is, normalization remains a crime in Iraq, and contact with Israel's can be met with a death penalty. Guests included former UAE official Ali al-Na'imi and Chemi Peres, son of Shimon Peres. As another side note., 100,000 Iraqi Jews left for Israel between 1950-1952.

Israel: What's Going On

The Good

- The government has instituted a policy of investment in Israeli Arab communities and a willingness to deal with the rampant violence and crime prevalent in Israeli Arab communities. This is a dramatic change to previous governments and clearly reflects the increased importance of Israeli Arabs to the country and the presence of Ra'am in the government
- Rebuilding relations with Democrats in the White House and Congress. The previous government had curried favor with the Republican Party, long before Donald Trump appeared. It had slighted Democrats and Barack Obama in particular. The new government has worked very hard to not embarrass the Biden administration in areas where there are different opinions (Iran) and to not surprise them. There have been regular meetings between the two governments in Washinton and Jerusalem on many levels of government
- Completion of barrier between Israel and Gaza. This is an above ground/below ground barrier complete with seismometers and motion sensors, and is aimed at stopping the terror tunnels.

Israel: What's Going On

The Bad

- Growing threats from Iran. Iran has added Dimona (home of Israel's nuclear program) to its list of top military targets. Increasing talk of war and destruction.
- Continuing problems with Covid/Omicron. Government has implemented a fourth vaccination regimen for those over 60 or immuno compromised. Confusion and disagreement on opening/closing the country, and on shutdowns.
- No non traditional prayer at Wall. Government has ceded to the religious right and has tabled the plan for egalitarian prayer space at the wall. For those unfamiliar with the plaza, this area was south of the walk up to the Temple Mount and on a platform over the archaeological park.

Israel: What's Going On

The Bad

- Continued conflict over Sheikh Jarrah. This is a neighborhood in East Jerusalem, not far north of the Damascus Gate. Land was originally granted to Jews under the Ottoman Empire. After 1948 it was given by the Jordanian government to Palestinians who fled Israel. Agents of the original owners want it back by Israeli law. Hamas has used this as a red flag leading to the recent war with Israel. It is not helpful that the Israeli courts do not allow Palestinians to file commensurate claims on property lost to Israeli's. This will continue to be a source of grief.
- Agreements between terrorist groups to work together against Israel (Hamas and Islamic Jihad). 12 organizations in total performed in this month's large scale drill in Gaza.
- Continued weakness and decline of the PA. The Palestinian Agency continues to be hobbled by old age and corruption. They have canceled elections, curtailed who can run in local elections, jailed journalists and shutdown news media. Mahmoud Abbas is now in the 15th year of his 4 year term as president. Hamas is now popular among the West Bankers.

Israel: What's Going On

The Bad

- New strain of H5N1 avian flu has struck cranes in the Hula Valley over the last month. More than 5,000 birds have died. (20% of the annual migration of crane). It has spread to chickens. Thousands will need to be killed. H5N1 can mutate and spread to people. Typically spreading is not common, however, it is frequently lethal. The virus can spread to other birds, as well. As a note of reference, over 500,000,000 (yes, that's right) migrating birds pass over Israel every year. This virus could decimate much of the European migratory bird population.
- UNGA resolutions against Israel. No surprise here. The United Nations General Assembly has passed 14 resolutions against Israel in 2021. More than all other countries combined. No matching resolutions against Hamas or other Palestinian organizations. Again, no surprise. Good thing these resolutions have no power.

Israel: What's Going On

The Ugly

- Threats from the religious right and extremists against members of the Government cabinet. Most recently against Omer bar Lev, Public Security Minister, forcing the government to give him a security detail. Similar threats have been made against other ministers, including Religious Affairs, Matan Kahana. These groups were shut out of the current government and do not recognize the validity of this years elections.
- Lone wolf attacks. These attacks have increased in recent months, urged on by Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other terror groups. Attacks have taken place in both Jerusalem and the West Bank and are expected to continue,
- 397 violent incidents in the West Bank this year, up nearly 40%)
- Settler violence against Arab neighbors (Homesh) up almost 50% this year and against security forces 60 events vs 50. An item of concern as attacks against Arabs are typically not prosecuted (only 2 last year).

Israel: What's Going On

What 2022 May Bring

- Open war with Iran. An increasingly likely event, especially if there is an agreement between the Joint Powers and Iran. Many senior Israeli military advisors feel that raids can be undertaken without a significant response from Iran. Others feel there will be significant fighting but will be worth the cost.
- War with Hamas. Always a possibility
- Increasing conflict between IDF and Palestinians in the West Bank. Logical as there has been increasing conflict this past year and both Hamas and the PA feel they can benefit politically from it.
- War with Hizbollah. Not likely unless it is part of a three front war.

Israel: What's Happening

What 2022 May Bring

- Three front war. High cost in casualties and economy. If Israel and Iran go to war, it would be highly likely that Hamas and Hezbollah will join in.
- May bring out alliances with more Arabic countries. There is a possibility that in the event of a war that the Gulf Countries, including Saudi Arabia will join with Israel.
- Relationships with more Muslim countries: Oman, Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Qatar, Iraq?, Saudi Arabia? Tunisia, Algeria
- Development of infrastructure in the Golan with a doubling of the population to 100,000 (currently over 50,000). Government has approved a \$300,000,000 shekel budget to allocate to the growth of population and industry in the far north
- Nice news. The second Israeli in space - private astronaut and billionaire Eytan Stibbe has paid the cost for his trip and 50 experiments to the ISS in late February (Ilan Ramon was first, on the ill-fated space shuttle Columbia)
- Maybe - Peace?