

Naftali Bennett to head Israeli “government of change” to oust Netanyahu

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Far-right leader and settler advocate Naftali Bennett of the Yamina Party is set to become prime minister, replacing Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving prime minister, who has led the country since 2009.

It follows March's inconclusive election, the fourth in two years, that gave Netanyahu's Likud Party the largest number of seats but left him unable to form a majority government. Netanyahu needed a majority to ensure his ability to evade his trial for bribery and corruption, now entering evidence sessions.

Bennett will head a deeply unstable, unprincipled coalition with a majority of one in the 120-seat Knesset. Made up of eight parties spanning almost the entire spectrum of Israeli politics, these political reactionaries have united to try and rescue the Israeli bourgeoisie from a widening social and political crisis and the threat they face from an increasingly disaffected working class—all under the vacuous “anti-corruption” slogan of “Anyone but Bibi” (Netanyahu's nickname).

The fractured and febrile state of Israeli politics, along with its proportional representation system, means that no one party can win a large enough majority to rule alone, ensuring small parties wield disproportionate power. After the March elections, two parties emerged as “king-makers”: Bennett's Yamina Party and Mansour Abbas' conservative Islamic Movement-affiliated United Arab List, or Ra'am, with seven and four seats respectively.

The announcement by opposition leader Yair Lapid, who heads the second-largest party Yesh Atid and has long sought to depose Netanyahu, that he had cobbled together a “government of change” came just minutes before his mandate to do so expired on Wednesday night.

Lapid told President Reuven Rivlin, “I commit to you Mr President, that this government will work to serve all the citizens of Israel—including those who aren't members of it—will respect those who oppose it and do everything in its power to unite all parts of Israeli society.”

Under the proposed arrangements, Lapid will not immediately assume the premiership. Instead, king-maker Bennett will become prime minister for the first two years. Only if the coalition survives that long will Lapid take over. In the meantime, he will serve as foreign minister.

This so-called centrist, a former journalist, TV presenter and news anchor who served as finance minister in a previous Netanyahu-led government, has handed the reins of power to far-right, pro-settler champions of the free market. This will inevitably result in a stepped-up assault on the living conditions of the Israeli working class, more than 20 percent of whom live in poverty, and a ramping up of support for settlers at the expense of the Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as Israel's own citizens.

Bennett, a millionaire who once served as chief of staff to Netanyahu, is opposed to a Palestinian statelet. He has called for Israel's annexation of Area C in the West Bank which is under Israeli military control and is home to most of the settlements, Palestinian Authority control over Areas A and B only under the supervision of Israel's military and security apparatus, and the transfer of Gaza to Egypt.

The key posts are to go to vicious right-wing nationalists. Ayelet Shaked, Bennett's Number 2 in Yamina, is to serve as interior minister responsible for “law and order” under conditions where the authorities have encouraged settlers and far-right Jewish vigilante groups to run amok in Israel's mixed towns and cities. She once served as Netanyahu's office director, later becoming Justice Minister 2015-19, helping to draft a version of the infamous Nation-State Law, institutionalizing Jewish supremacy. She is bitterly hostile to the Palestinians, virulently opposed to African asylum seekers and determined to limit the role of the judiciary.

Avigdor Lieberman, leader of the secular nationalist

Yisrael Beiteinu (Israel Our Home) party, whose initial support base was immigrants from the former Soviet Union, is to become finance minister. He left Likud in 1997 after Netanyahu granted minor concessions to the Palestinians in the Wye River Memorandum, later proposing the separation of Palestinian and Jewish Israelis via a population “transfer.” In 1998, Lieberman proposed bombing Egypt’s Aswan High Dam because of Cairo’s support for Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. Lieberman has served under several Likud governments, including as deputy prime minister, foreign affairs minister, when he broadened the campaign against Iran, and minister of defence, resigning in 2018 because of a ceasefire in Gaza he characterized as “surrendering to terror.”

Gideon Sa’ar, who last year formed New Hope as his own political vehicle after failing to unseat Netanyahu in a Likud leadership contest, is to take the justice portfolio. Opposed to a two-state solution, he supports the annexation of the West Bank and Palestinian autonomy in a federation with Jordan.

Benny Gantz, former chief of staff of Israel’s military and leader of the Blue and White Party who fought three elections on an anti-Netanyahu ticket only to join his coalition last year, serving as defense minister, will continue in this post. He was responsible to Israel’s criminal assault on Gaza in 2014, now under investigation by the International Criminal Court, and last month’s 11-day bombardment on the besieged enclave that killed at least 253 Palestinians, injured 2,000 more and damaged or destroyed at least 17,000 homes, six hospitals, nine healthcare centres, a water desalination plant and other vital infrastructure.

These political criminals are joined by the Labour Party that signed the Oslo Accords that was supposed to bring about a mini-Palestinian state. Its legislators, Merav Michaeli and Omer Bar-Lev, will serve as transportation and public security ministers respectively, while another will head the Diaspora affairs ministry.

Meretz, which opposes Jewish settlement in the occupied territories and supports the two-state solution, has also agreed to serve under Bennett, with Nitzan Horowitz set to become health minister and Tamar Zandberg environmental protection minister. Its Arab member Esawi Freige will serve as regional development minister.

The cabinet will include for the first time the leader of the United Arab List or Ra’am, Mansour Abbas, who has agreed to support the coalition in return for an increase in economic support and a temporary freeze on home

demolitions in Israel’s Arab community.

It will be the first cabinet without the ultra-religious parties that have participated in most of the coalitions since 2001.

The new government has yet to get the approval of the Knesset, which is not set to vote on the issue for at least another week. Lapid is seeking to replace the current Knesset speaker, a Likud Member, with Yesh Atid lawmaker Mickey Levy to expedite the process.

Netanyahu has insisted that he is not going away and is seeking to secure defectors from the Lapid-Bennett coalition, in addition to Amichai Chikli, one of Yamina’s legislators, who refused to join the “left-wing” government. He excoriated his former colleagues, calling the proposed coalition “illegitimate.”

Netanyahu’s fascistic ally, Religious Zionism party leader Bezalel Smotrich, accused Yamina leaders Bennett and Shaked of working to “establish a left-wing government with the Arab supporters of terrorism.” Hundreds of his supporters have rallied repeatedly outside the homes of Bennett and Shaked. Such is the concern that they might become the targets of political violence, both politicians have been assigned police protection.

There have been questions raised in the media as to whether Netanyahu would mount new provocations against the Palestinians in East Jerusalem, promote acts of terrorism by Jewish fanatics against Israeli Palestinians, seek to mount a coup similar to that of former US President Donald Trump, or launch a provocative move against Iran to maintain his grip on power.



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