

# The fraud of Israel's new “government of change”

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Israel's new coalition government was sworn in on Sunday, with far-right leader and settler advocate Naftali Bennett replacing Benjamin Netanyahu, the country's longest serving prime minister.

It required a razor-thin confidence vote of 60 to 59 in the 120-seat Knesset, with one legislator from the United Arab List abstaining, to install the “government of change”—a motley crew assembled by opposition leader, Yair Lapid, a former TV news anchor, who heads the second largest party Yesh Atid.

Under a power-sharing agreement, Lapid will take over as premier in two years' time, in the event the highly unstable eight-party coalition lasts that long. In the meantime, he will serve as foreign minister.

Lapid was tasked with forming a government after Netanyahu, who despite heading the largest party—Likud—in the March 23 elections, the fourth in two years, failed to do so. Two key small parties, Bennett's Yamina Party and Mansour Abbas' conservative Islamic Movement-affiliated United Arab List, or Ra'am, with seven and four seats, agreed to join forces with Lapid. While Bennett had indicated his willingness to join a coalition with Netanyahu, this was not enough to secure a majority in the Knesset, leading Bennett to switch sides to prevent a fifth election that was expected to cost him votes.

The two-year long deadlock has left Israel without a budget, amid a soaring social and economic crisis exacerbated by the pandemic, and ethnic strife in the country's mixed population cities, whipped up by far-right vigilantes from the settlements in the occupied West Bank with the backing of Netanyahu and the security establishment.

Several thousand Israelis, many of whom have demonstrated for months against Netanyahu under the vacuous anti-corruption slogan of “Anyone but Bibi”

(Netanyahu's nickname), took to the streets of Tel Aviv to celebrate the end of his 12 years as head of government. This ignores the reality that Bennett, a 49-year-old millionaire businessman, is an ideologue further to the right than Netanyahu—a fervent annexationist and implacable opponent of Palestinian statehood, who has admitted he has no problem killing lots of Arabs.

All of his senior colleagues have for years sat in government with Netanyahu and/or acted as aides to him. They include Avigdor Lieberman of the Israel is our Home Party, who served as finance and later defence minister; Yair Lapid of Yesh Atid as finance minister; Benny Gantz as Defence Minister and before that as chief of staff of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF); and Ayelet Shaked of Bennett's Yamina Party as interior minister. Gideon Sa'ar of the New Hope Party, a more recent deserter from Likud, has held numerous portfolios, while Bennett has served as defence minister.

The only thing these political criminals agree on is the need to accelerate the assault on the living conditions of the Israeli working class, more than 20 percent of whom live in poverty, with Bennett saying his priorities would be reforms in education, health and cutting “red tape,” a euphemism for more privatisation and free market reforms.

While the new government will focus on economic and social issues, the coalition agreements grant Bennett executive powers as prime minister to further consolidate the occupation, thereby bolstering the settlers at the expense of the Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as targeting Israel's own Palestinian citizens.

Lapid, as incoming foreign minister, indicated some of the broader forces at work in engineering

Netanyahu's exit from power—for the time being at least. Speaking at the swearing in ceremony, he vowed to repair ties between Israel and the Democratic Party in the US, which had become strained under Netanyahu as he bickered publicly with President Barack Obama and aligned ever more closely with the Republican Party and later, President Donald Trump. Netanyahu's relations with President Joe Biden have been described as "chilly" at best.

Lapid said, "The management of the relationship with the Democratic Party in the United States was careless and dangerous. The Republicans are important to us, their friendship is important to us, but not only the friendship of the Republican Party. We find ourselves with a Democratic White House, Senate and House and they are angry... We need to change the way we work with them."

Biden called to congratulate Bennett just two hours after the confidence vote in the Knesset, saying he looked forward to strengthening the "close and enduring" bilateral relationship. This contrasts starkly with the two-month long, frosty silence before Biden called Netanyahu after assuming the presidency in January.

Other world leaders followed suit, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, European leaders and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Lapid stressed the importance of restoring relations with the European powers, saying, "We both believe that it is possible, and imperative, to build relations based on mutual respect and better dialogue." He emphasised the importance of Israel's relationship with the Jewish Diaspora, especially in the US, which has become increasingly alienated by Israel's criminal oppression of the Palestinians. While Netanyahu had stressed the importance of Christian evangelicals and other groups, Lapid insisted, "Jews from all streams, Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox, are our family. And family is always the most important relationship, and the one that needs to be worked on more than any other."

Lapid also appeared to step back from Netanyahu's increasingly hostile attitude towards Jordan's King Abdullah, amid suggestions that Israel and Saudi Arabia had sought to engineer a coup, replacing him with his half-brother Prince Hamzah. He called

Abdullah "an important strategic ally," promising to work with him.

Palestinian leaders had little to say to Israel's Palestinian citizens, who will face the full force of a far-right, pro-settler and openly anti-Palestinian leadership, dismissing the new government as "an internal Israeli affair."

The assortment of parties that include ostensibly ideologically opposed politicians from hardline Jewish religious nationalists and the Labour Party and Meretz—both of which are committed formally to opposition to annexation and settlements—and the Islamist United Arab List, ensures that this government will be no less fractious, unstable and short-lived than its predecessors.

The new government faces its first challenge on Tuesday when several right-wing Israeli groups plan a flag-waving march through Jerusalem's Old City. The Netanyahu government gave the go-ahead for the march, a day after police banned the proposed route fearing it would incite violence and rekindle the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

Netanyahu has refused to go quietly, declaring, "If we have to be in opposition, we will do this standing tall—until we bring down this dangerous government and return to lead the state." He said, "The right will not forget Bennett's deception."

He told his allies in the Knesset, "I will lead you in a daily battle against this bad and dangerous left-wing government and bring it down. And with the help of God, this will happen faster than you think."



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