

Israel After Netanyahu: What Next?

Editor's Note: This is part two of a two-part article. Check out part one [here](#).

The End of Netanyahu's Tenure

Netanyahu has ended his tenure in a less than respectable way on many levels. I've written about that a lot as one who voted Likud/Netanyahu every election the past 20 years except for two, most notably the last one. He's got so many truly great achievements for which he deservingly can take credit. But he made it way too clear that his politics was about him, not the country. The last number of days leading up to the vote this week, he tried every trick in the book, and then made up some more to do anything to stay in power. It was really unbecoming. Now, we look at a man who has truly done so much, ending his term by casting a spotlight on his tricks and unreliability rather than on all the good he's done.

It's come to a point that ultimately, as one pundit noted, "He is not prime minister because no one believes a word he says anymore." Sadly, he may have tainted his career so badly, this may be how people will remember him, not as a statesman competing with better ideas and more success than anyone, as he well could have. He may be back; who knows? Part of it depends on how long the new government is able to last. Part is based on how/if/when he's "deposed" within the Likud party for another leader. Part depends on the outcome of his trial.

Netanyahu's tenure is over, but his political career is not necessarily over. Depending on the success of the new government, he could return. Or the Likud could tap new leaders to bring it back to power and push Netanyahu into retirement. If that happens, it will be up to him how he wants

to be viewed: as a once-in-a-generation political leader with many achievements that are indeed his to take credit for, or as a prime minister in exile. But his embarrassing behavior in the past two years and several weeks in particular remind many Israelis why it was time for a change.

Some have observed that not only was his defeat his own undoing, but among the great paradoxes that exist here, he is also in part to blame/credit for the formation of the new government. By pushing out other prospective right-wing leaders and successors who went to establish their own parties and actively campaigning against them, he became the glue that helped the eight divergent parties stick together. This is a similar paradox to the response of Israel, the Gulf Arab states and Saudi Arabia to Obama's empowering Iran. Obama can receive indirect credit for bringing Israel and these Arab countries together. The normalization of relations was something for which Netanyahu and Trump rightly deserve credit. But the big catalyst was Obama.

The question remains as to whether the new government or the Abraham Accords has more staying power, and if the new government will in any way strengthen or weaken that.

Stability of the New Government

I have lots of thoughts about Israel's new government and new prime minister, about how we got here, and about the end of the tenure of Prime Minister Netanyahu.

The bottom line is that it could be very good or very bad. The new government could rise to the occasion and work together as adults leading the country, seeking unity through compromise. With a coalition ranging the political gamut as this one does, and with each party able to agree or disagree with policies of almost every other member of the coalition, this is a tall order. Or they could start fighting and working against one another, bringing us to a fifth election anyway. One of the

first tests of this will be the ability of the government to pass a budget. By law, that needs to be done within the first hundred days. No grace period here. If that doesn't happen, the government will automatically fail in the fall, and new elections will be called for the winter.

That's a consequence of the government being unable to do something for which it is mandated. But there are many other things that can see the end of this government, proactively. Any one major, divisive partisan issue could do that. The leaders need to balance their agendas and future careers with being selfless and recognize that much more hangs in the balance.

The flip side to this is having clarity as to what brought them together. If it has not been about "change" as they branded the government, but solely about unseating Netanyahu, they did that. But it might not last. The longer the government does stay together, the greater the chance that Netanyahu will be sidelined permanently. If that's the case, and a new Likud leader rises up, the adage "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" may have no legs. A well-known commentator observed, "This government's contradictions are the source of its hope." Or demise. Underscoring the hope, Israel's new Arab minister for regional cooperation (yes, let it sink in that an Israeli Arab will be representing Israel to its Arab neighbors) said, "I thought this [swearing-in ceremony] would be no big deal, but actually it's very emotional. Now, though, I'm solely focused on what we can achieve."

Restoring Respect and Hope for Our Democracy

The swearing-in of Israel's new government reaffirmed the truism that Israel's is indeed the only democracy in the Middle East. The system is not perfect, nor are many of the players. But there was a peaceful (albeit sometimes ugly) transfer of power. Even for a relatively new country, the transfer was steeped in laws and tradition.

I saw this reaffirmed all day Sunday. The nail-biting was nerve-wracking as to whether the government would pass the narrow majority that was projected, or whether Netanyahu would come up with a new trick, knocking out the government before it could start. But the need for change was reaffirmed over dinner. As the Knesset vote took place, I was out to dinner with my nearly 16-year-old son. At one point he commented that he doesn't know any prime minister other than Netanyahu. As he said this, my thought was: *All the more reason it's time for a change.* Democracies are not and cannot be about one person. There needs to be an exchange of ideas and a change of leaders. It's not healthy to define our democracy around one person.

Throughout the day I got choked up a few times. I got choked up watching the local media jockeying for interviews with the new government ministers, listening to our language revived, Hebrew accented with Russian, Arabic, that of Moroccan and Ethiopian Israelis, a short 73 years since our sovereignty was restored.

Having a prime minister who wears his Judaism outwardly, opening his first official meeting by thanking God for enabling us to reach this occasion, sets a new tone for the country within and how people look at Israel from outside. I'm overcome by gratitude for this occasion.

Time will tell whether this government is able to be the hope that many Israelis wish for it to be. I join the voices that express concern, but I pray for the new government's success and restoration of a sense of stability that we've lacked. Based on the shameful behavior by the opposition in announcing the new government, it's clear we've got more than our share of divisiveness, something that is probably not going to just go away with a government of such a slim majority. I pray that rather than nastiness, we'll see an exchange and competition of ideas, not insults, and that Israel continues to lead from within as a light unto the nations. {eo}

Jonathan Feldstein was born and educated in the U.S. and immigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six. Throughout his life and career, he has become a respected bridge between Jews and Christians and serves as president of the Genesis 123 Foundation. He writes regularly on major Christian websites about Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He can be reached at firstpersonisrael@.

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.