

Netanyahu Makes His Last Stand Against Lapid-Bennett Coalition

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As corruption charges mount and political instability intensifies, can 'King Bibi' continue now that opposition parties have united against him?



Embattled Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. Photo: Sebastian Scheiner/AFP/Getty Images

Following last month's 11-day clash between Israeli and Palestinian forces, Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, is currently forced to fend off his enemies yet again, except this time they are coming from within the Knesset itself.

His 12-year tenure as premier seems to be all but over now that eight opposition parties have agreed to form a coalition government.

Negotiations to form this new government have been led by Yair Lapid, head of the centrist Yesh Atid party. However, it is Naftali Bennett, leader of the right-wing Yamina party, who is expected to serve as prime minister until September 2023, with Lapid then taking over until November 2025 when the Knesset term concludes.

As well as five other Knesset parties, Lapid's coalition government is also set to include the United Arab List, led by Mansour Abbas, potentially becoming the first Arab party to serve in an Israeli government.

There is still a long way to go, however. On Wednesday night Lapid submitted their coalition proposal to President Reuven Rivlin which will be voted on in the Knesset by June 14. These 12 days could still spell trouble for Lapid's coalition as it gives Netanyahu and his supporters ample time to wear away at their majority.

Avigdor Lieberman, a far-right member of the new coalition, has acknowledged their vulnerability during this interim period, telling Channel 13 TV, "We launched the move, but we haven't completed it."

If Netanyahu does emerge victorious it certainly would not be the first time the man Israelis call "The Magician" has fought off his opponents through his political acrobatics.

"We have seen in the past that he has pulled magic out of his sleeve whenever anyone has tried to [jeopardise] his career" Danny Dannon, the former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, told Sky News.

So far, this trend seems to have continued. On Thursday morning he denounced the coalition on twitter as a "dangerous leftwing government" that has "sold out" to the political minority of the Arabs.

Demonstrations have also been held outside Bennett's house by former supporters, now calling him a traitor for siding with their self-proclaimed political and religious adversaries. These protests have grown to such intensity that on Thursday Israel's domestic intelligence agency, the Shin Bet, provided Bennett with a full security detail.

This pressure has already been too much to bear for one member of the coalition from Bennett's Yamina party, who defected earlier this week. The loss of this seat brings the coalition perilously close to collapse, now holding a majority of just one.

The fact that they've been able to speak to one another, never-mind unite together, is remarkable given how conflicting the parties and their leaders are. This range of major disparities is at its starkest regarding the question of Palestinian statehood.

Throughout his political career Bennett has made his disdain for the Palestinians abundantly clear, saying in 2013, "I have already killed lots of Arabs in my life, and there is absolutely no problem with that" after arguing that "if you catch terrorists, you have to simply kill them."

Whilst such comments are bound cause offense to the Israeli-Arab Abbas, the two have been able to unite following Bennett's promise to not annex any more territory from the West Bank and to not build any new settlements whilst he is prime minister.

What unites the coalition overall, however, is their determination to oust Netanyahu.

After suffering through four inconclusive elections in just two years, numerous criminal investigations and indictments, several of which ongoing, and now this new threat of a coalition, it only seems likely that the Lapid-Bennett union will succeed in forcing 'King Bibi' to surrender his crown.