

MEMMO

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New Israeli Government Vows to Confront Strategic Threats, Pursue Peace

New Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has formed a broad governing coalition to confront the strategic threats and economic challenges facing Israel. At the same time, the government is committed to pursuing peace talks with the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Arab states. In the months ahead, close coordination between the United States and Israel will be critical to preventing a nuclear-armed Iran and pursuing successful Israeli-Arab peace.

Netanyahu worked hard to form a broad government to deal with the strategic threats facing Israel and to pursue peace.

- Benjamin Netanyahu was sworn in as Israel's prime minister this week, succeeding Ehud Olmert and becoming the head of the Jewish state's 32nd government since its establishment in 1948.
- Netanyahu, who served an earlier term as prime minister between 1996 and 1999, reached across the political spectrum to form a diverse coalition of six parties, including his Likud Party and the Labor Party headed by former prime minister Ehud Barak, who will continue serving as defense minister.
- Netanyahu formed his governing coalition with 74 out of 120 members of the Knesset—a broad government that will deal with the major security threats facing Israel, including a potential nuclear-armed Iran and major military buildups by Hamas and Hizballah. The government will also focus on dealing with the impact of the worldwide economic downturn.
- The new government also has vowed to pursue negotiations with the Palestinian Authority and other Arab neighbors.
- As Israel and the Arabs pursue peace, Netanyahu said it is critical for both sides to work to counter the influence of Iran and radical Islam. "Israel ... strives to reach full peace with the entire Arab and Muslim world, and today that yearning is supported by a joint interest of Israel and the Arab states against the fanatical obstacle that threatens us all," he said in his address to the Knesset before being sworn in as prime minister.
- On talks with the Palestinians, Netanyahu is calling for "three parallel tracks—economic, security and diplomatic" and has emphasized the need to help the Palestinians develop their economy and civil and security institutions as a way build a true foundation for lasting peace.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Barack Obama have pledged to work closely together on Iran and Israeli-Arab peace efforts.

The leaders of the government have a history of pursuing peace with Israel's neighbors and have vocally supported continuing such efforts.

- During Netanyahu's first term as prime minister, Israel was hit with a wave of Hamas suicide terrorism. The PA, led by Yasser Arafat, failed to crack down on Hamas and educate for peace among the Palestinian people. Nonetheless, Netanyahu pledged to uphold agreements made by previous Israeli governments and continued to negotiate and reach agreements with Arafat.
- In 1997, Netanyahu signed an accord that gave the PA control over most of the city of Hebron, historically a major Jewish religious center. A year later, Netanyahu and Arafat signed the Wye River Memorandum, under which Israel gave the PA control of large portions of the West Bank.
- Barak is well known for his effort to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians. In 2000, when Barak was prime minister, he offered Arafat the most generous peace deal that had ever been offered by an Israeli government. Barak offered Arafat all of Gaza, more than 90 percent of the West Bank and parts of Jerusalem. Arafat rejected Barak's offer and turned to violence.
- While known for making controversial statements, Avigdor Lieberman, head of the Yisrael Beiteinu Party and new Israeli foreign minister, advocates a two-state solution, including territorial land swaps between Israel and the PA. Lieberman has said repeatedly that he is prepared to leave his own home in the West Bank to help accomplish the creation of a "viable Palestinian state."

The United States and Israel should work closely together to prevent a nuclear Iran and advance Israeli-Arab peace efforts.

- The U.S.-Israel relationship transcends politics and is based on a long-standing friendship between Americans and Israelis, who share a common bond and face common threats.
- U.S.-Israel cooperation should be maintained as the new administrations in both countries begin working together to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran and pursue Israeli-Arab peace.
- Israel historically has been more forward-leaning in talks with the Palestinians and Arabs when the two countries coordinate their approaches to peacemaking and avoid surprises. Direct, bilateral negotiations—which can be facilitated by the United States—have also proved to be the best path to peace.
- After President Obama was elected in November, Netanyahu wrote Obama, saying he was "confident that we will be able to cooperate in order to promote peace, security and prosperity in our region. ... It is clear to me that an Israeli government under my leadership will be able to work with you with the same warmth and warm relations that you showed in our meetings."
- On April 1, Obama called Netanyahu to congratulate him and reaffirmed the United States' steadfast commitment to Israel and its security. "The president said he looked forward to working closely with Prime Minister Netanyahu and his government to address issues of mutual concern, including Iran and Arab-Israeli peace," the White House said in a statement.