

Bibi, Thank You for Your Service

by Daniel Pipes

[The Washington Times](#)

June 10, 2021

<https://www.meforum.org/62434/bibi-thank-you-for-your-service>

Originally published under the title "Benjamin 'Bibi' Netanyahu, Thank You for Your Service."

Following the example of Prime Minister Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu, many of his supporters vilify the three conservative Israeli party heads who rejected his leadership in favor of what is called the Change government. Despite being a long-time (he and I first met in 1983) admirer of the prime minister, I commend Naftali Bennett, Avigdor



Benjamin Netanyahu looms over Israeli politics. [Illustration: Greg Groesch/The Washington Times]

Liberman, and Gideon Sa'ar for their principled actions. They deserve acclaim, not insults.

Those insults form part of a campaign to get the trio and the members of their parties to change their minds. [Netanyahu](#) rails against what he inaccurately calls a "dangerous left-wing government." His ally [Itamar Ben Gvir](#) denounced the "emerging left-wing extremist government." Another Netanyahu ally, [Aryeh Deri](#), predicted that Bennett will "destroy and ruin everything we have maintained for years." Yet another, [May Golan](#), went further, likening Bennett and Sa'ar to "suicide bombers." Public [demonstrators](#) burned Bennett's picture and called him a "traitor." In a highly unusual warning, the head of Israel's internal security service, the [Shin Bet](#), warned that increasing incitement could spark political violence.



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That pressure campaign might work because the Change camp has just 61 members of parliament versus 59 in Netanyahu's camp; a single parliamentarian moving over from it would abort the formation of a government and require holding the country's [dreaded](#) fifth election in just over two years.

So far, however, the campaign has failed, thanks to principled politicians. Sa'ar, a long-time member of Netanyahu's party, exemplifies their course of action. [Netanyahu](#) recently offered him to become prime minister, if only he'd go back on his electoral promise not to form a coalition with him. But Sa'ar immediately declined the temptation and instead is scheduled for the decidedly more modest post of justice minister in the Change government. If that's not principle, I don't know what is.

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I therefore hope the pressure campaign fails. Yes, Netanyahu has been an excellent leader; but fifteen-plus years as prime minister leave him barnacled with legal cases that distort his priorities and former allies who

mistrust and reject his leadership. Further, the pressure campaign is unethical and [dangerous](#). For these (and a [host of other](#)) reasons, Netanyahu himself has become the focus of national dispute. Israel's current drama has almost no policy content

- not Iran, West Bank annexation, the Palestinians, the economy, or the pandemic
- but rather, it centers on his character.

Only when Netanyahu departs the prime ministry can conservative and centrist parties come together and govern as a unit. Were Netanyahu gone, today's misbegotten, even freakish, coalition of 61 members from

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across the political spectrum (right, center, left, and Islamist) could be replaced by a sensible right-center bloc of up to 81 members, or more than two-thirds of the parliament's 120 seats. That would allow Israel finally to gain the government this [increasingly conservative country](#) deserves, and one that specifically can address its two long-term and most fundamental internal issues: integrating the country's growing Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) and Muslim populations.

The Haredi community has succeeded in making itself a ward of the government, dependent on hand-outs while shirking military duty and in many cases not recognizing the state. This combination, not surprisingly, generates considerable resentment among its tax-paying and military-serving compatriots. [Lieberman](#) – who is slated to oversee state finances – has made Haredi integration his top priority, promising to use his position to "do everything to provide them an education and enable them to learn a profession and stand on their own two feet." He is ideally situated to perform this task.



Israel's Haredi and Muslim populations each pose a challenge.

Israel's Muslims are even more problematic, as the riots last month served vividly to recall. As [I noted](#) nearly a decade ago, the ultimate issue remains that most of them "emphatically wish to remain disloyal citizens of the Jewish state (as opposed to loyal citizens of a Palestinian state)." While appreciating the many benefits of living in Israel, from the standard of living to the rule of law to insurance coverage, they nonetheless retain a widespread and deep hostility to inclusion in the Zionist enterprise. This contradiction has been sloughed aside for too long and needs an honest, sustained look with an eye to finding creative solutions; Middle Eastern-style communal autonomy offers one possible approach.

So long as Benjamin Netanyahu remains prime minister, Israel's politics remain stalemated, static, and stuck. Therefore, it's time to thank Netanyahu for his remarkable service and, as his era closes, look forward to Israel moving on to new heights.

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