Bibi Beats Benny but is Three Seats Short of Finish Line

Update: Thursday morning brought bad news for Bibi. Avigdor Lieberman announced that he was adding his party’s votes to the Blue and White coalition to support a bill in the new Knesset to ban any MK who is under indictment from forming a government.

While the Likud coalition remains three votes short needed to get first shot at forming a government, Lieberman’s move could be his final revenge on Netanyahu by closing the door on his long running and controversial premiership. Benny Gantz will have the 63 votes in his pocket to pass the bill when the Knesset session opens on March 16th.

Expect to see lots of fireworks from Mr. Netanyahu, who will resist with every tool that he can. That has already had him firing off that the Gantz plan is an attack on Israeli democracy.

This was a strange move, as Bibi had already floated the idea in the last few weeks of the election that if he led the new Knesset, he would move to pass a bill to retroactively give him immunity on his three felony cases. I would consider that putting the fix in from the top down and completely nullifying the judicial system’s authority would be...
considered by many to be an attack on democracy. Additionally, law enforcement sources were quoted saying an investigation would be opened soon on the Likud party hiring a private intel firm led by a former Shin Bet chief to track and dig up dirt on Gantz. The business daily, The Marker, reported that attorney Yossi Cohen, described as "extremely close to the Netanyahu family", contacted the CGI group looking for compromising information on Gantz.

Netanyahu’s Likud won the Knesset elections, but with a twist

Welcome to Israeli politics. I must add that using intelligence operatives in political campaigns is something that needs a serious looking into for stiff regulations. VeteransToday finds them involved in elections all over the world as part of their normal information gathering, destabilization, and election rigging work.

Israel woke up to a surprise result Monday morning after the Likuds and Blue and White had been polling within a few percent of each other. Despite the legal baggage that Netanyahu has in his political wagon in the last two weeks he focused the voters on sticking with the man they knew, versus the new guy with no experience on the world stage.

With 99% of the vote counted, Likud was ahead with 36 Knesset seats to Blue and White’s 33 seats. With Bibi’s coalition parties, he had 58 of the needed 61 seats to form a government without enticing some of the moderate MPs to abandon ship to help Bibi cross over the finish line.

On round three, a fractured Israel political system gave the prize to a candidate who awaits a trial date on March 17th for three felonies. Where else in the world could this happen other than in Israel? You just can’t make this stuff up. None of Bibi’s backers care if he is guilty, as long as they get to stay in power.

Gantz stumbles under Bibi’s attacks during the final week

IDF General Gantz was up against a seasoned campaigner, whose detractors admit that he is a master politician on the podium. Bibi’s strategy was to parley his known statesmanship talents against the good general who had to admit that yes he stuttered, but that should not be a disqualification for public office.

That was a mistake that only a political rookie would make. No old timer in politics ever admits to a fault. Its not in their DNA. You talk about the other guy’s faults. Bibi had plenty, and they had one hell of an airing out in the first two elections. The best counter is to attack your opponent always, to put him or her on the defensive.

It was more than just stuttering that tripped up Gantz in the run up to the vote. He tried to imitate being the smooth master like Bibi, winging it at the podium where he appears to be talking extemporaneously, but every word in the last week or two of a campaign has to be carefully crafted for maximum impact on the voters.

Gantz got caught by seeming to get lost within his own message, ending a sentence without a point fully being made, like he forgot what he was going to say. Bibi jumped all over this, charging that Gantz was not ready for the office and voters would sell themselves and Israel short by voting for him.

Leaked audio tape via his own team a huge blow

The Lukids ambushed Gantz with a devastating leaked audio tape. As I wrote in last week’s NEO article, his campaign strategist allowed himself to be recorded in a private conversation with a Rabbi where the tape was magically leaked where Benny’s strategist, Israel Bachar, put a bullet into his campaign by saying that Benny would never have the courage to attack Iran and thus constituted a threat to the people of Israel.

The Israeli public seemed to not care that Rabbi Guy Habura was a close friend of Bibi’s lawyer, where the tape ending up at Channel 12 would be viewed as an incredible coincidence. Welcome to dog eat dog politics in Israel. It was a huge blow to Gantz, who now had blood in the water and the sharks were circling. Bibi was no longer defending his record. It was now Benny’s turn to defend his.

Likuds’ professional hi-tech get out the vote campaigning

The Likud team had quietly been deploying a secret weapon, using the voter database that all candidates have equal access to, but where the data cannot be passed to a third party. Netanyahy praised his campaign chief Yair Revivo, the mayor of Lod, for winning the extra seats to put Likud on top, despite the initial 36 seats at the 90% count having been trimmed to 35 at the 99% vote count.
Revivo had used the Elector App where the names of 6.5 million eligible voters was uploaded, including all previously registered Likud voters or good prospects were marked down by location to be followed up with 20,000 Likud “fishers of votes”. People were called, calls logged into the system and a follow up call would be made to assure they had transportation or whatever they needed to get them to the polling station. This good old-fashioned ABC precinct work was effective.

This is the magic of organizing the human touch in a campaign, to move heaven and earth to get your supporters to the polls. While living in Atlanta during Obama’s first run, I watched the Democratic black Americans in the churches make sure all elderly people that could not travel to a polling station had a campaigner make sure they got their absentee voting form mailed. This included even going to nursing homes to help people. This attention wins close elections, if the vote flipping of the electronic machines does not steal the vote away from you.

In the end, Likud is still short of the magic 61 number by three votes so the pre-election knives have been put away, and now the tools of enticement are being leveraged to find defectors from the other parties to cross over to Bibi. Why would they do that, you ask? How about being offered a ministerial position, something that has worked in the past. Likud wheeler dealers were making contacts, widely reported in the media, but with news that they were being rejected, so far.

Bibi three seats short of grabbing the prize

The Times of Israel reported that:

“Without 61 seats, Netanyahu will likely seek to woo members of opposition parties to break off and join his coalition, possibly from the right-wing branch of Blue and White, which includes MKs Yoaz Hendel, Zvi Hauser and Omer Yankelevich.

Hendel and Hauser both denied they had been asked to jump ship, saying in identical tweets: “They haven’t approached us. They won’t approach us. And they know why.” Hendel is a former aide to Netanyahu, and Hauser is a former cabinet secretary who also served under the Likud leader. Yankelevich also denied “rumors” that she could defect. She tweeted: “Won’t happen!”

Haaretz reported that Likud had been threatening Yankelevitch with the release of embarrassing tapes about her if she does not join them.

Gantz delays conceding until final official vote count

General Gantz was not all doom and gloom on election night. He knew the polls were showing Bibi winning the most seats, but he had his plan B in the waiting, to cut Bibi off at the pass.

On Wednesday Netanyahu accused Gantz of trying to steal Monday’s election with his beginning efforts to pass a law that would prevent an indicted MK from forming a government.

Bibi charged during a press conference that such an effort would undermine democracy. “This is an effort to divide the nation when we are facing serious challenges like the corona crisis...There are also opportunities like US President Donald Trump’s plan [to steal the Palestinians’ land] that require us to be united and respect the will of the people.”

After the press left the room, Bibi let loose even more, upgrading his attack on Gantz, saying that he was worse than Iran’s Ayatollah Sayyd Ali Hosseini Khamenei. “In Iran they disqualify candidates before elections, but here Gantz is doing it after an election despite the results.”

Bibi forgot to mention that it was he who posed that, if he won the election, he would submit a bill to be passed to give him retroactive immunity.

Another threat to Bibi is on center stage

The Movement for Quality Government in Israel has moved forward with its earlier plans to file a petition in the High Court of Justice that Netanyahu should not have the right to form the next government due to his facing criminal charges.

The same group had an earlier petition dismissed by Attorney General Mandelblit when he ruled that because Bibi had failed to form a government after the second election, the issue was moot until he was in a position to so do.
As generals have historically said when they could not foresee the result of a battle engagement, “The issue is still in doubt.”

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