

# Israeli PM's former protege could now bring his downfall

Author:

By ARON HELLER | AP

ID:

1568023033193925300

Mon, 2019-09-09 09:32

JERUSALEM: Avigdor Lieberman entered Israeli politics as a loyal protégé of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Now, the maverick politician could be the one to topple his former mentor.

Lieberman, a burly, tough-talking immigrant from the former Soviet Union, forced Israel's unprecedented second election of the year and is poised to be the kingmaker again.

Polls suggest Netanyahu won't be able to form a coalition government without Lieberman's support.

Lieberman has played hard to get.

"I don't have to join at any cost," he told Channel 12 news over the weekend.

"The prime minister's policy is simply submission to terrorism."

For years, Netanyahu and Lieberman have had a roller-coaster relationship.

Lieberman, once Netanyahu's chief of staff, has held a series of senior Cabinet posts and was often a staunch partner. But he's also been a rival, critic and thorn in Netanyahu's side.

In a high-stakes gamble, he passed up the post of defense minister in Netanyahu's government following April's election, leaving the prime minister without a parliamentary majority and forcing the Sept. 17 do-over vote.

Their dispute, over what Lieberman says is excessive influence of ultra-Orthodox religious parties, has become a central issue in the current campaign.

Lieberman says he will insist on a secular unity government between Netanyahu and his main challenger, Benny Gantz, in order to push out ultra-Orthodox parties. But Netanyahu says his former ally's real goal is to oust him from office, and Lieberman is suddenly discovering newfound support from those who hope he does just that.

"He is the only one who actually stood up to Netanyahu and didn't bend over," said Eli Avidar, a lawmaker from Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu party.

"Lieberman has known Netanyahu for 31 years. He knows the good and the bad and every angle you can imagine."

The crisis that led to this month's election ostensibly revolved around Lieberman's insistence that young ultra-Orthodox men be drafted into the military, like most other Jewish males. But beneath the surface is a decades-long strained relationship between the two men.

The Moldovan-born Lieberman started as a top Netanyahu aide in the 1990s before embarking on a political career of his own. But he resigned last year because Netanyahu kept blocking his plans to strike hard against Gaza militants.

"When I look at the Gaza Strip it's unbelievable. The Hamas chiefs know they have immunity from Netanyahu," Lieberman said Saturday.

Lieberman is often accused of racism for branding Arab lawmakers as enemies of the state and advocating for population swaps that would place many Arab citizens outside Israel's borders. But he's also shown signs of pragmatism, such as suggesting he'd be willing to dismantle his own West Bank settlement if Israel's final borders were redrawn.

Lieberman's secular agenda has made him a favorite of Israel's business sector, and his iconoclastic persona and straight talk – delivered in a slow, Russian-accented monotone – made him an unlikely savior for people tired of Netanyahu's corruption-tainted, decade-long grip on power. That's despite the fact that Lieberman survived a lengthy corruption scandal himself that exposed his links to shady characters and that allegedly earned his daughter mysterious millions.

"Oddly, the man who was a symbol for the secretive and conspiratorial politician, who runs his party undemocratically, is the hope of Israeli democracy and society," communications expert Baruch Leshem wrote in a column in the Ynet website.

An irate Netanyahu has made it his mission to destroy Lieberman politically, taking aim in ads and campaigning furiously among his core base of Russian-speaking supporters. He's branded him a "leftist" and a "serial toppler" of right-wing governments.

"Whoever wants a leftist government should vote for Lieberman," he said during a recent visit to Ukraine, which critics say he used to target Lieberman's traditional backers.

But the all-out assault has yet to make a dent. Polls show support for Lieberman's party has doubled since it came precariously close to elimination in April's vote.

An emboldened Lieberman recently met with top members of Netanyahu's Likud party, reportedly discussing the chances of replacing the prime minister if he fails to muster a parliamentary majority. That fear seems to have propelled Netanyahu to demand a "loyalty oath" from party members, which Lieberman compared to practices of a North Korean leader.

Unlike Gantz, Lieberman hasn't officially ruled out forming a government with Netanyahu again, saying a broad coalition is needed to tackle urgent security challenges and lessen a deficit – which he blames on extortion by smaller religious parties. But he's done nothing to dispel suggestions that he too wants Netanyahu gone.

"He's a strategist, he knows how to play politics better than anyone," said Ashley Perry, a former adviser.

Former officials affiliated with the center-left have been showing up at his campaign events. Lieberman has been warmly welcomed in bastions of liberal Tel Aviv – until recently an unimaginable scene.

Avidar, the lawmaker from Lieberman's party, said a firm stance against Netanyahu on religious affairs has boosted the party's wider appeal among secular voters who tend to vote more liberal, but said it remains firmly on the right when it comes to security and negotiations with the Palestinians. "We are getting a lot of sympathy because people see that we are the only party stopping a Halachic state," he said, referring to one governed by Jewish law.

Still, the prospect of Lieberman's newfound crossover appeal is unnerving to those who have tangled with him before.

"Lieberman may have decided that the Netanyahu era is over and that he will

be the one to give the final twist of the knife. That would be a fitting end to a Shakespeare play, but what we've got here is an Israeli tragedy," wrote Zahava Galon, a former leader of the dovish Meretz party.

"Lieberman was and remains one of the shadiest and contemptible individuals in Israeli politics, and his belated legitimization only goes to show just how low we have sunk."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Israel](#)

[Benjamin Mendy](#)

[Avigdor Lieberman](#)

[politics](#)

Rockets fired toward Israel from Syria, but fall short  
Israeli PM's office airbrushes Netanyahu's 'Yeltsin' gaffe

---

## [Assistance to victims of Sri Lanka terrorist attacks](#)

The Australian Government has declared the 21 April 2019 bombings in Sri Lanka as a 'terrorist act' for the purpose of the Australian Victim of Terrorism Overseas Payment (AVTOP) scheme.

---

## Jordan teachers launch strike, demand pay raise

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

1567970998428217100

Sun, 2019-09-08 18:56

AMMAN: Teachers in Jordan are launching an open-ended strike after negotiations with the government failed to yield a raise.

A Jordanian teacher's union announced the strike Sunday, saying the government hasn't implemented a 50% salary increase agreed upon in 2014.

Jordan is a staunch military and political ally of the West in a turbulent region. In June, 2018, a proposed tax hike triggered strikes and the largest anti-government protests in recent years, eventually leading King Abdullah II to replace his prime minister.

On Thursday, thousands of Jordanian teachers protested in the capital, Amman, demanding higher wages. Some scuffled with security forces during the demonstration.

The Education Ministry says it is committed to dialogue with teachers but said pay raises must be tied to better performance.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Jordan](#)

[teachers](#)

[Strike](#)

[payment](#)

Amman comes to a standstill as teachers demand 50% pay rise  
Jordan Tourism Board to attract visitors with Wego

---

## [Charity boat rescues 50 African migrants in sea off Libya](#)

Author:

By RENATA BRITO | AP

ID:

1567968376587920500

Sun, 2019-09-08 17:45

ABOARD THE OCEAN VIKING: Humanitarian groups SOS Mediterranee and Doctors Without Borders rescued 50 migrants on Sunday from a rubber dinghy off Libya's coast and brought them aboard their charity ship, Ocean Viking. An AP journalist aboard the Norwegian-flagged Ocean Viking witnessed the rescue of a pregnant woman, 12 minors and 37 men, all from sub-Saharan Africa. It happened about 14 nautical miles (16 statute miles) from Libya. Libyan authorities, responsible for search and rescue in that area of the Mediterranean, didn't answer multiple contact attempts by Ocean Viking. Authorities in Rome and Malta, when contacted, referred Ocean Viking to their Libyan counterparts. A fishing vessel, seen near the rubber boat, didn't respond to contact.

A European Union plane from Operation Sophia overflew Ocean Viking, the dinghy and the fishing boat multiple times shortly before the people were rescued.

In Greece, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has criticized Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan for a statement he made last week about opening the gates for Syrian refugees to massively migrate into Europe. Mitsotakis said at a news conference in the northern Greek city of Thessaloniki that Erdogan can't "threaten" Greece and the European Union by trying to wrest more money to deal with mass migration, adding that the bloc has already provided Turkey with 6 billion euros in aid.

Mitsotakis also criticized EU countries for not doing their part to accept refugees, especially unaccompanied children, saying that if they couldn't show solidarity with fellow EU members, they should leave the Schengen area of free peoples' movement.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Libya](#)

[migrants](#)

[rescue](#)

[Africa](#)

Four wounded in rocket fire on Libyan capital's airport UN envoy on Libya warns conflict could trigger chaos

---

## [Kuwaiti Emir postpones Trump meeting after being admitted to hospital in US](#)

Sun, 2019-09-08 20:37

DUBAI: Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has postponed a meeting with Donald Trump after he was admitted to hospital in the US for medical tests.

Sheikh Sabah, 90, had been due to meet Trump on Thursday, the state news agency KUNA reported.

A date for the meeting would be set later, Minister of Amiri Diwan Sheikh Jarrah Al-Sabah said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah](#)

[Kuwait](#)

[Donald Trump](#)

Kuwaiti Emir: We must resist all those bent on spreading confessional discord in our society  
Trump praises relations with Kuwait during meeting with the Emir Sheikh Sabah