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AFL Leadership Mission: NOVEMBER 17-20, 2019

Once again, the AFL Mission promises to be exciting and insightful. As usual, we are scheduled to meet with MKs and Ministers including two of the top MKs in the Likud - Speaker of the Knesset Yuli Edelstein and MK Gideon Saar. Also, as suggested to us by MK Avi Dichter (fmr Head of the "Shabak" and Chair of the Knesset's prestigious Foreign Affairs & Defense Committee), we will visit Israel's strategic CyberCenter in Be'er Sheva and will travel into the heart of Judea & Samaria to see Israeli agric-innovation and get an on site security briefing. All combined with our unique historical perspective and, of course, a stop at one of Israel's award-winning boutique wineries.

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Gantz rejects Netanyahu's latest unity offer

Benjamin Netanyahu made a last-ditch proposal yesterday to the Blue and White party to form a national unity government but it was quickly rejected by Benny Gantz who said it was "a proposal that I cannot accept." Netanyahu's window – or "mandate" – to form a government closes next Wednesday, after which it will be Gantz's turn.

- Netanyahu's offer included vague clauses on security, economics, social welfare, religion and state, and foreign policy. On the most sensitive issue of religion and state the offer said the status quo would be preserved for one year and that coalition parties would have a free vote on a law regarding military conscription of ultra-Orthodox men.
- More consequentially, Netanyahu said he would not break up his 55-seat right-wing/ultra-Orthodox bloc, a move Blue and White and Yisrael Beiteinu leader Avigdor Lieberman have long demanded. Netanyahu's offer also did not address who would serve first in any premiership rotation arrangement between him and Gantz.
- In rejecting the offer, Blue and White said in a statement that Netanyahu ("the

outgoing Prime Minister”) failed to “acknowledge that the majority of Israeli citizens elected a liberal unity government, without extremists.” The statement also added that “the establishment of committees and the postponement of decision making to later stages raises concerns” about the sincerity of Netanyahu’s intentions.

One month after the last election, Israel is still in political deadlock. Netanyahu was never likely to obtain a 61 seat majority needed to form a government. Yesterday’s offer, like those that came before, are meant to show the public that he attempted to compromise – and that if there is a repeat (third) election Gantz should be blamed.

- Netanyahu has also solidified his right-wing allies, including inside the Likud, who all have declared that he is their sole candidate for prime minister. For this reason Gantz will also find it difficult to form a government once the “mandate” passes to him next week for 28 days with no possibility of an extension.
- Gantz does in theory have the option of forming a minority government, with Blue and White, Labour and Democratic Union inside the government (44 seats) and possibly supported from the outside by Yisrael Beiteinu (8 seats) and the Joint (Arab) List (13 seats). But a minority government has never been formed in Israel after an election but they have resulted after parties have left existing coalitions. Most recently, when Shas left Yitzhak Rabin’s coalition in 1993 it became a minority Government supported by Arab parties.
- The obstacle to such a move is political, with Lieberman previously stating he would not serve in a government with the Arab-Israeli parties or the left-wing Democratic Union. It also remains to be seen whether all the Arab-Israeli parties would be willing to actively support the creation of an Israeli government.

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PM and DM Netanyahu Meets with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo

Prime Minister and Defense Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met this morning, at the Prime Minister's Residence in Jerusalem, with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

PM and DM Netanyahu at the start of the meeting: "Secretary Pompeo, welcome once again to Jerusalem.

Mike, we've had important discussions about strengthening our alliance, the region, the various challenges that we face together.

I want to thank you and the president for your consistent support of Israel. The Middle East is a sea of troubles and turbulence, but if there is one thing that stands out, it's your ability, stability and strength of the American-Israeli alliance. We talked about making it even stronger, and I want to thank you for consistent support.

Thank you and welcome once again to Jerusalem."

Prime Minister Netanyahu invited Secretary of State Pompeo to visit the sukkah at the Prime Minister's Residence and said:

"Mike, since you're visiting here on the holiday of Sukkot, we sit in a sukkah and we always remember what it was like when we didn't have a permanent home. So let me show you a sukkah and then we'll let you continue on your way."

Also attending the meeting were US envoy to the Middle East Jim Jeffrey, US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman, Mossad Director Yossi Cohen, National Security Council Director Meir Ben-Shabbat and the Prime Minister's Military Secretary, Brig.-Gen. Avi Bluth.

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AFL Leadership Mission to Israel
November 17-20, 2019

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