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Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. (Photo by: MARC ISRAEL SELLEM)

Netanyahu not keeping promise to allocate portfolios

By GIL HOFFMAN
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Likudniks speculate Sa'ar bill is reason

Friday, December 14, will mark the one-month anniversary of former [defense minister Avigdor Liberman's resignation](#), which led to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu holding five portfolios.

Hours after Liberman's resignation took effect on Sunday morning, November 18, Netanyahu's spokesman Yonatan Urich sent a message saying: "The prime minister will appoint additional ministers in the coming days."

It was made clear on that day that Netanyahu would keep the defense and health portfolios, in addition to his premiership, but he would appoint new foreign and immigrant absorption ministers from Likud.

Since then, not only have those vacancies not been filled, but Netanyahu has instead cut the size of the security cabinet, which could not be larger than half his regular cabinet.

Likud officials said Sunday that they believe the reason Netanyahu has not appointed the ministers is that he wants to first pass [the controversial Gideon Sa'ar bill](#), which would prevent the president from asking an MK who was not first on his party's list to form a government. The officials said that keeping open the possibility of promotions is Netanyahu's way of keeping his faction loyal for long enough to pass the bill.

Respected figures in Likud called upon Netanyahu on Sunday to appoint a foreign minister as soon as possible, despite what they said was his success in the role.

Former Likud MK and ambassador to the US Zalman Shoval said he wrote Netanyahu during last month's coalition crisis that he should keep the defense portfolio. But he now is in favor of Netanyahu letting there be a new foreign minister.

"Historically, when a prime minister has been defense minister, it has strengthened both posts," Shoval said. "Having said that, I don't think it would be a negative event if Netanyahu would transfer the foreign minister portfolio to someone else."

Shoval, who is a member of the Likud central committee, said the real important events in Israel's foreign policy have anyway always been handled by the prime minister, and the foreign minister has been secondary, no matter who has been in power.

“As long as Netanyahu is going to continue dealing with the key issues, and in my view doing a very good job, having someone else deal with the other issues – and there are many – would be beneficial.”

Shoval’s view was shared by Emmanuel Navon, a Likud member who is an expert on Israel’s foreign policy, lectures at Tel Aviv University and is a fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies and at the Kohelet Policy Forum.

“Objectively, Netanyahu has done a fantastic job as foreign minister,” Navon said. “But this concentration of powers is abnormal. Netanyahu has become a sort of Bismarck who dominates the political system and will leave a dangerous void in his stead.”

Navon said he believed the prime minister was delaying the appointments for political reasons.

“Netanyahu has promised the Foreign Ministry to both [current Transportation Minister] Israel Katz and [current Public Security Minister] Gilad Erdan, and he understandably wants to spare himself their revengeful ire a few months before the elections,” said Navon, who added: “But then again, Netanyahu has a long history of breaking promises and getting away with it.”



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