

New gov't in Berlin marks end of Merkel era, maintains her Israel policy - analysis

Olaf Scholz was in Angela Merkel's coalition, and the new chancellor has said that he plans to mostly stay with her foreign policy.

By LAHAV HARKOV Published: DECEMBER 8, 2021 17:30

Updated: DECEMBER 8, 2021 18:00



Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and outgoing German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Jerusalem, October 10, 2021.
(photo credit: YOAV DAVIDKOVITZ / POOL)

Advertisement



Listen to this article now

07:39



Powered by **Trinity Audio**

With [Olaf Scholz elected Germany's chancellor](#) on Wednesday, the new government in Berlin is expected to stay the course set by his predecessor [Angela Merkel](#) when it comes to Israel.

Scholz and his Social Democrats (SPD) were in Merkel's coalition, and the new chancellor has said that he plans to mostly stay with her foreign policy.

Echoing a prior declaration by Merkel, the new coalition's agreement states, "Israel's security is a national security interest," as do the platforms of its parties, the Greens, the SPD and Free Democrats (FDP). In addition, the

coalition supports a two-state solution and is for continued normalization between Israel and Arab states.

Top Articles By JPost

“They’re against occupation, annexations, settlements, etc., but they also oppose BDS [the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement].... The new foreign minister has a typical German consensus approach to Israel,” Emmanuel Navon, a senior fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, said.

“If the three parties making up the coalition weren’t German, they would be unfriendly to Israel,” Navon said. “The Greens and Social Democrats in France, Belgium and Scandinavia are hostile to Israel. Germany is a separate case, because of their special relationship to Israel.”



Designated German Chancellor Olaf Scholz attends a session of the Bundestag, the German lower house of Parliament, in Berlin. (credit: REUTERS)

For example, the new German-Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said during the escalation between Israel and Hamas in May that Israel has the “right to self-defense guaranteed by international law.” That remark was criticized by other Green Parties in Europe, but is typical for Germany, Navon said.

Baerbock also told Bild in May that the Greens “will discuss and continue security cooperation with the State of Israel, in partnership” if it is part of the next government, and called for a “resilient peace solution” between Israel and the Palestinians.

Volker Beck, CEO of the Tikvah Institut in Berlin and the former chairman of the Bundestag’s Germany-Israel Parliamentary Friendship Group, said the coalition agreement is not very explicit on every aspect of its plans for the Germany-Israel relationship.

“It has not yet been decided where this coalition will have its main projects in the Near East, but I hope the influence of the [FDP], who were very supportive of Israel while in the opposition, will have an impact on the subject,” he said, adding that the statement that Israel’s security is Germany’s *raison d’état* is very important.

In addition, Beck stated, the part of the coalition agreement about normalization is a “big step for this coalition to say the Abraham Accords are a success and should be continued.”

One area of concern may be where it comes to weapon exports. Israel has bought nuclear submarines, among other arms, from Germany, and Baerbock has said in the past that she opposes exporting submarines to “crisis regions.” The new coalition plans to increase regulations on arms deals to such areas, and it is unclear whether Israel would fall under that definition.

Beck said that Baerbock’s selection of Tobias Lindner as Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office – a position similar to a deputy minister in Israel – is a good sign on that front.

Lindner “was responsible in the [Bundestag] budget committee for defense issues, and he was always very clear about support for Israel’s defense, and that we would deliver and subsidize” arms necessary for Israel’s security, Beck said.

“The biggest damage done on this issue was the [former prime minister Benjamin] Netanyahu’s corruption cases,” Beck said, referring to charges against officials involved in the purchase of submarines from Israel, in which Netanyahu ultimately was not named a person of interest. “This made it difficult for those of us who said that Israel should decide what it needs for its defense, and not us. [Arms exports] need to be in the interest of Israel and not the financial interest of the members of the government. That was a big burden for supporters of Israel.”

Navon suggested that Israel presents its need for the submarines to defend its natural gas fields, and to point to its cooperation on energy with Egypt.

The parties in the new German coalition all oppose a nuclear Iran, but are in favor of using diplomacy to bring the matter to a resolution.

Beck said that a “rush to the JCPOA,” as the 2015 Iran nuclear deal is known, “is a little bit naïve” and he hopes new actors will take a different approach.

“You can’t trust the Iranian regime,” he said. “It’s not sufficient to only speak about uranium enrichment. You also have to talk about rocket programs, which was never part of the JCPOA. That was one of the big mistakes in my view.”

That being said, Navon pointed out that Germany “doesn’t really decide for the West. It’s really the US deciding whether or not a new deal can be signed, though it looks unlikely.”

There are concerns that the left flanks of the SPD and the Greens could pressure the government to be less supportive of Israel. The Greens, in particular is divided between the “realos,” like Baerbock, who are viewed as more pragmatic, and the radicals, like new Minister of State for Culture and Media Claudia Roth, who voted against banning the anti-Israel BDS movement.

Beck, a former lawmaker from the Greens, said he is optimistic.

“Israel and the Near East was always a subject of internal strife in the Green Party,” Beck said, “but what gives me more hope is that the younger generation in the Green Party, even if they are leftists, they are more pro-Israel, because they were raised to be critical of antisemitism.”

Beck argued that the tendency of his generation of left-wing politicians to put blame on Israel “often has nothing to do with foreign policy and is more about German identity and an incapacity to handle its responsibility for the past.”

“My generation is really the problematic generation, even if I’m not part of this subset. There is a huge amount of new, young MPs in the new faction and the older generation... will lose influence,” he added.

The new German government presents an opportunity for Jerusalem to upgrade cooperation with Berlin based on issues important to the latter, Navon posited.

“Part of the new government’s plan is to speed up [clean] energy transition and to improve Germany’s Internet infrastructure,” Navon said. “Israel has added value in those areas and should really focus on working with Germany. Israeli technology can help in those areas.”

The new government has also said that it is committed to the safety of German Jews.

“We will protect Jews and their institutions together with the federal states,” the coalition agreement states. “It is a shameful and painful state of affairs in Germany that they must be permanently guarded.”

In addition, the coalition says it “will strengthen initiatives that promote Jewish life and promote its diversity, and combat all forms of antisemitism.”

Beck said that it is the first time he can remember a coalition agreement include the promotion of Jewish life in Germany, but said that there should be more on that topic, instead of mostly talking only about fighting antisemitism.

Advertisement



עדכון גרסה: בית פרטי שעבר שיפוץ מדויק
sponsored by: בניין ודירור

זה