Israel's Electoral Stalemate

a discussion with

Peter J. Haas
Abba Hillel Silver Professor Emeritus

November 22, 2019 12:30 – 1:30 p.m.
Kelvin Smith Library Dampeer Room 11201 Euclid Ave.

Longtime participants in the "Friday Lunch" will know that, every few years, Professor Peter Haas has been kind enough to join us to discuss what is going on in Israeli politics. It has never been easy, but he really has his work cut out for him this time.

On the other hand, he only has to describe it, rather than solve it.

As this announcement was being written on November 17, Israel did not have a government. The election of September 17 created a situation in which Avigdor Liberman's "secular, ultranationalist" Yisrael Beiteenu, although it only has 8 of 120 seats in the Knesset, holds the balance of power between the two largest parties: Likud, with which Benjamin Netanyahu has become Israel's longest-serving Prime Minister, and the Blue and White party of Benny Gantz, who served as Chief of Staff of the Israeli Defense Forces from 2011 to 2015 and whose new party fills a vacuum on the not-quite-left created by the collapse of the Labor Party over the past two decades. But Liberman cannot form a government with Netanyahu except by also allying with the ultraorthodox parties that he believes are grave threats to the state; and cannot ally with Gantz and form a majority without also allying with the Arab List parties that he believes are even graver threats. And an alliance of the two main parties hasn't happened because Netanyahu's serious legal problems make him unlikely to share power and Gantz refuses to share power with someone with such legal problems (whom he also seems not to trust very much).

Under Israeli law, Netanyahu had 28 days to form a government. He failed. Gantz was asked next, and his 28 days expire on November 20. So we will gather either to discuss the miracle that occurred after this statement was written, or whatever might happen next.