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Israel and Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

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Israel Hayom

Poll: Post-Bennett Era Sees Yamina Secure 5 Knesset Seats

The right-wing Yamina party is not expected to suffer a massive political blow following the departure of its founder, outgoing Prime Minister [Naftali Bennett](#), a Channel 12 poll has found. Bennett's No. 2 in the party Interior Minister [Ayelet Shaked](#) will serve as Yamina leader, but the party faces an uncertain future, as three of its current six members have already departed its ranks. The poll found that were elections held at this time, Likud would win 34 seats, followed by Yesh Atid (20), Blue & White (9), Religious Zionist Party (9), Sephardi ultra-Orthodox party Shas (8), Ashkenazi Haredi party United Torah Judaism (7), the Joint Arab List (6), Labor (5), Yisrael Beytenu (5), Yamina (5), the Islamist Ra'am party (4), Meretz (4), and New Hope (4). Unlike [Bennett](#), Shaked is unlikely to refuse an offer to join a Netanyahu-led coalition. This would give the right-wing bloc 63 seats and allow the former prime minister to form a government.

Times of Israel

Low Voter Turnout Projected Among Arab Israelis

As the public stares down its fifth elections in three and half years, widespread voter apathy is likely to again keep many Arab Israelis at home in November, pollsters and analysts said. Two years ago, the four Arab parties rode a wave of high turnout — 65% of eligible Arab voters — to a record 15 seats in the Knesset. But the last two tempestuous years in Israeli politics have left both the Joint List bloc and the Islamist Ra'am party deeply battered. Just 40% of Arab Israelis plan to vote in the coming election, a 4.6-point drop from last year's elections and a 25-point drop compared to 2020, said veteran pollster Yousef Makladeh. Many Arabs hoped that Ra'am, the first independent Arab party to join a coalition government, would be able to positively shape policy. Party leader Mansour Abbas pledged to increase investment in Arab communities and fight a crime wave sweeping through Arab cities.

Jerusalem Post

Yair Lapid Officially Becomes Prime Minister of Israel

[Yair Lapid](#) officially became Israel's prime minister, after the Knesset dispersed itself and scheduled a November 1 election. Lapid will lead the interim government until a new coalition is formed. In accordance with the coalition agreement, Naftali Bennett stepped down from the premiership, becoming alternate prime minister, a title Lapid held for the past year. Lapid will remain foreign minister, as well. Lapid's first stop after becoming prime minister was the Hall of Remembrance at Yad Vashem, which he said he visited "to promise my father that I will always keep Israel strong and capable of defending itself and protecting its children." His father, former justice minister Tommy Lapid, was a Holocaust survivor.

Trump Says Would Consider Backing Netanyahu in Elections

Former United States President Donald Trump said he would consider supporting Benjamin Netanyahu, as his once-close-ally seeks reelection in the upcoming Israeli elections, despite being "disappointed" in some ways by the former Israeli leader. "If he ran, I would certainly give it some thought. We'll see what happens. I don't know that that's going to happen. He disappointed me in certain ways, but he also did a very good job in other ways." In two interviews he gave to the journalist Barak Ravid last year, Trump spoke about his loss to Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential elections — a loss which he disputes and his relationship with Netanyahu. Trump expressed his discontent with Netanyahu congratulating Biden on his victory. "The first person who congratulated Biden was Bibi, the man that I did more for than any other person I dealt with... Bibi could have stayed quiet. He has made a terrible mistake," he said. [Dig Deeper "Netanyahu Leads United Opposition Into Israeli Elections" \(Al-Monitor\)](#)

Biden: Goal to 'Deepen Israeli Integration in Region'

President [Joe Biden](#) previewed his upcoming trip to the Middle East, saying that the aim of visiting Israel and Saudi Arabia is to "deepen Israel's integration in the region." The president made the remarks during a press conference in Madrid at the end of the NATO summit. He is scheduled to visit Israel, the West Bank, and Saudi Arabia on his first Mideast swing since taking office from July 13 to 16. "I'm going to Israel to meet with Israeli leaders to affirm the unbreakable bond Israel and the United States have. And part of the purpose is - the trip to the Middle East - is to deepen Israel's integration in the region, which I think we're going to be able to do and which is good - good for peace and good for Israeli security. And that's why Israel leaders have come out so strongly for my going to Saudi," Biden said. He also said that one of the aims of the trip is to "try to reduce the deaths" in the Yemen civil war. [Dig Deeper "Biden Says Will See Saudi Crown Prince, Won't Push Directly on Oil" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Blinken and Abbas Discuss Ties, Upcoming Biden Visit

Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas received a phone call from US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. According to a statement from Abbas' office, the two discussed bilateral ties and preparations for President Joe Biden's visit next month. While Palestinian officials have little hope of any progress on a list of demands the PA presented to the Biden administration, the statement said the presidential visit to the region may be a starting point to promote long-term diplomatic processes. Though not expecting major breakthroughs before a permanent government is sworn in after Israel's November election, Palestinian officials hope to secure trust-building measures that don't require policy change on Israel's behalf. Meanwhile, ordinary Palestinians are increasingly critical of their leaders, who many view as not trying to pressure either Israel or the US.

Reuters

Rise of Arab-Israel Axis Pushes Iran to Push for Talks

The specter of an emerging Arab-Israeli bloc that could tilt the Middle East balance of power further away from Iran is driving the Islamic Republic to pursue nuclear talks with world powers with renewed determination, officials and analysts said. Indirect talks in Qatar between Tehran and Washington on salvaging a 2015 nuclear pact ended without progress. Iran questioned the United States' resolve, and Washington called on Tehran to drop extra demands. But the talks' difficulty has not discouraged Iran, two officials and a politician, all Iranian, said that adding Iran's hardline establishment was set on pursuing diplomacy. A deal would see a lifting of sanctions that have shackled Iran's economy, eventually reviving oil exports towards the estimated 2.8 million barrels per day shipped before the reimposition of sanctions, from under one million currently. For Iran, the unfavorable alternative could be a war in a region where geopolitical shifts may evolve into a U.S.-led alliance hostile to Tehran, the officials and politician said. Growing worries about warming relations between Israel and its former Arab foes, including normalization agreements between Israel and some Arab nations known as the Abraham Accords, have pushed Tehran to keep the diplomatic ball rolling. [Dig Deeper "Iran Says It's Ready for New Talks with US on Nuclear Deal" \(Associated Press\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Egypt's FM: 'NATO Middle East' Not Currently on the Table

Despite reports circulating in the media of the imminent formation of a military alliance in the Middle East similar to NATO, this is not likely to happen anytime soon, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said during a press conference in Bahrain. The proposal will not be raised during any upcoming events, he added, "in reference to the upcoming summit with the US president in Saudi Arabia next month." Dr. Abdullatif al-Zayani, the Bahraini foreign minister, said during the same press conference in Manama that "there was no final agreement on the agenda for the upcoming summit with President Biden from the nine countries [Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates] meeting with the United States of America." Bahrain and Egypt agreed to support Arab efforts to urge Iran to abide by the international principles of non-interference in the affairs of Arab countries, to preserve the principles of good-neighborliness, and to spare the region all destabilizing activities, including supporting armed militias and threatening maritime navigation and international trade lines, the statement added. [Dig Deeper "RSF: Egypt Government Sponsoring 'Campaign Against Journalism" \(I24 News\)](#)

The Third Man

By Nahum Barnea

- **The Bennett government failed the first task that any government must take on: self-preservation. Bennett deserves full praise for the gentlemanly way he released himself from his obligations in both the government and in Yamina, but a good eulogy does not resurrect the dead. In its one year in office, the government did much more than anyone expected. It did not cure the chronic illness of the political establishment. The disease may have even worsened. The Knesset building in Jerusalem was like a black hole this week: Everything was swallowed up in it and nothing escaped, aside from petty, in-your-face, never-ending discussions about matters that have no bearing on anything, not even on the elections. The fight over the date is a good example. The Haredim insisted on October 25, and nothing else. Any other date would entail the commission of a terrible sin—the sin of not learning Torah. The first to suggest the date was Smotrich, the chairman of a party that threatens the Haredi parties.**
- **On October 25, the 30th of the Jewish month of Tishrei, the yeshiva students will be on vacation. They will be physically close to the polling stations where they are registered, and that's good; they will be far from the yeshivas that influence them, and that's bad. Besides, the 30th of Tishrei falls exactly on the day of the festival of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef. Ostensibly, this will act as a stimulant on Shas voters. Once, many years ago, on election eve, I happened to be at Ponevezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak, the most important of the non-Hasidic yeshivas. There was not a living soul there. Where is everyone, I asked a passerby. "They are working for the elections," she said. My colleague and I found only two people in the yeshiva compound: the elderly Rabbi Shach and his assistant. It will be the same this time, in the fifth round of elections. The yeshiva boys will happily commit the sin of not studying Torah, on the eve of elections and on the day of elections. They will vote in droves. The intriguing question is how many of them will vote for Smotrich and Ben Gvir. For the first time, the Haredi establishment is up against a tangible threat from the outside, a political threat (in seats), and an ideological threat (Kahanism).**
- **The ideological threat is worse; there is no coming back from it. Mansour Abbas of the United Arab List sat down in the MKs' cafeteria in the Knesset. He shared a pizza with Iman Khatib-Yassin, a fellow faction member. The Haredi Farkash family approached their table. The father of the family, a bearded redhead, asked: Could we take a selfie? Sure, Abbas said. Three boys of various ages stood to Abbas's left and right. He has a bar mitzvah, the father pointed to the middle son. Can you congratulate him? Abbas agreed easily and the father put his phone on video. The speech was lengthy, and the boy nodded energetically, like a kid sitting on Santa Claus's lap in an American mall. The cafeteria was filled with guests with connections to the Likud MKs. Every five minutes someone approached, apologized for interrupting our conversation, and stood by Abbas's shoulder for a selfie. He smiled generously. They smiled happily. Miki Zohar, at a nearby table, traded jokes with Abbas. "That's how it is in the Knesset," Zohar taught me.**

- From Abbas, the selfie-seekers moved on to Ahmad Tibi on the other side of the cafeteria. Tibi and Abbas are selfie stars, objects of their colleagues' envy. The next day in the Knesset, Netanyahu called Abbas and Tibi "terrorist-supporters," and the Likud faction MKs recited from their page of talking points when they were given the microphone. The Jews love Tibi and Abbas: they're celebrities. Abbas interprets this affection as a sign of change, as evidence that the experiment succeeded. I hope that he's right. His coalition partners read different data. The partnership with an Arab party is a major reason for their failure to recruit significant support from the right-wing. Netanyahu's horrific propaganda triumphed. The Jews love Abbas but are scared of Arabs. Benny Gantz, at the moment, appears to be the alternative to the elections. Not an alternative to Netanyahu, and not an alternative to Lapid—rather an alternative to Ben Gvir and Smotrich.
- The Haredim were not able to persuade him to cross the lines along with his party and join a government headed by Netanyahu in the current Knesset, but they planted the seed for initiatives that will be raised after the elections. There are two scenarios on the table, both of them realistic: one, the Netanyahu bloc plus Yamina headed by Shaked will receive 61 seats. Yamina will have the status of the linchpin. Shaked will tie her joining the government to Gantz's Blue and White also joining. This will give us a broad government, Shaked will argue. She also told me this yesterday morning. The offer to Gantz will include an alternating premiership arrangement. That scenario is also possible without Yamina. Netanyahu knows that a 61-member government is a recipe for failure. Ben Gvir will extort him or topple him; he can't do otherwise. The obvious solution is Gantz, without or without Ben Gvir. The second scenario is that the Netanyahu bloc doesn't cross the 61-seat mark. Neither he nor Lapid will be able to form a government. A sixth election clouds the horizon.
- The Haredim pose Netanyahu with an ultimatum: either you quit, or you offer Gantz an alternating premiership arrangement with Gantz going first. The Haredim were only marginally affected by the Bennett government: rhetoric is one thing, and reality another. Liberman wanted to end the daycare subsidies for families in which the husband attends a kollel and doesn't work; he was forced to backtrack. Matan Kahana's kashrut reform was depicted in the Haredi media as an evil decree, but in fact, it was good for the Haredi kashrut companies. Communications Minister Yoaz Hendel took steps to open the kosher cellphone market. Many in the Haredi public were pleased, but the Haredi establishment went to war. Moshe Arbel (Shas) introduced a counter bill, which passed a preliminary vote in the Knesset (with the support of Meretz).
- The Meretz MKs voted in favor by accident). In the framework of the last-minute understandings between Lapid and the Haredim, the bill also passed the first reading. Hendel was forced to cave. Hendel did succeed in issuing a tender on laying a network for internet connectivity in Haredi towns. Within a year, 93% of Haredim will have access to the web. Every family will be able to decide whether it wants to connect. The Haredim can live with that. They can also live with the changes that Kahana made in the religious councils and in the municipal rabbinate. Their politicians could have told their constituents: we've been through worse; we'll get through this.

- **Instead, they chose to depict the Bennett government as a Holocaust government. Once in a decade, a government is formed in Israel that does not include a Haredi party. If there had been any chance to make a change in the workforce, in the schools, or in military service, it was missed.**

Back to Insanity

By Ben Caspit

- In a parallel universe, today's headlines would be about the Iranian issue: Israel and the Mossad's stunning victory over the Revolutionary Guards and the Iranian intelligence services; the blows that the ayatollahs have taken in recent months, as described at length in the New York Times; the riveting Hollywood drama where our close cooperation with the Turks prevented three Iranian death squads from assassinating Israelis on Turkish soil. In at least one case, the Israeli tourists were whisked out of Istanbul's famous market just minutes before the Iranian agents (with local accomplices) could put bullets in them. In a sane country, today we would be discussing the unfathomable quotes by Iran's former vice president, who said that Israel's Mossad is simply breaking the Revolutionary Guards apart and is making this murderous regime's senior officials sweat in their beds at night (my description).
- And the fact that the Israeli Mossad officially announced that the head of the Revolutionary Guards Intelligence Services Hossein Taeb, the scariest man in Iran, who is behind every attempted terror attack against us, was in the crosshairs. The message was clear and simple: either you halt the attempts to commit terror attacks against Israelis immediately, or you step down, or you're history. Yes, just like that. Taeb is history. Ultimately, after Iran's complete and embarrassing failure, he was dismissed. The two people who were primarily responsible for ruining his career met this week on Tuesday in what retrospectively became then-Prime Minister Bennett's farewell meeting with the Mossad's top brass. Ostensibly, this was a "situation assessment." Bennett told Mossad Director Dadi Barnea and his team that he was debating his future. I cannot imagine Barnea's thoughts, but it seems to me that his wealth of experience in intelligence work over the years helped him to realize that the prime minister had come to say goodbye. He has been on the job for barely a year, and there have already been three prime ministers.
- Two days later, the Likud conditioned [its support for] passing the metro bill on canceling MK Amichai Chikli's renegade status. No, the Likud did not demand to make gasoline cheaper or give more money to the hospitals, or finance shelters for battered women. It demanded that Amichai Chikli's renegade status be rescinded. Astonishingly, some members of the coalition agreed. Justice Minister Gideon Saar, who had just landed in London, rushed to tweet, "Capitulating to extortion on Chikli is a corrupt deal that is against the law and against the House Committee decision. 'Whitewashing' Chikli will encourage defection a day after the elections. The opposition ran a campaign to buy defectors; now, sadly, the coalition is giving this a seal of approval. New Hope is firmly opposed!" Saar didn't settle for tweeting, and he also made a few phone calls. The Likud's offer was declined. The metro bill fell. Israeli citizens will suffer.
- Amichai Chikli, who preached extending a hand to the moderate Arab Israelis, who recommended appointing Mansour Abbas regional cooperation minister, who announced five minutes before flip-flopping that he was behind Bennett "with all his might," will

have to find a new party for himself and cross the electoral threshold. They tried to save him, at all of our expense. And they failed. There were two opposition MKs in the Knesset plenum on Thursday afternoon. They had difficulty mustering even that many. Having boycotted the Knesset committees throughout the entire last year, the Likud lost interest. It kept the metro bill from passing; it prevented the US visa waiver bills from passing; it tortured and harassed dozens of bereaved siblings, led by Eli Ben Shem, who tried to persuade Yoav Kisch that the bereaved siblings bill should be above politics, and then it just disappeared. Left on the agenda were uninteresting bills like the bill for equality for people with disabilities, bills concerning sexual assault against children, and the bill to compensate businesses that had suffered losses because of the Omicron variant (the bill was Abir Kara's pet project), and the bereaved siblings bill. Two Likud MKs were in the plenum. They had already done their part by trolling an entire country.

- Sitting in the visitors' gallery was Yad Labanim Chairman Eli Ben Shem. MK Michal Shir told him that the agonizing journey was nearly over, and the bill would pass. But Ben Shem didn't believe her. After what he went through over the past few weeks in the face of the Likud's cynicism, he doesn't believe anyone anymore. He stayed until he saw with his own eyes that the bill had passed. Then he wept. The days before the Knesset was dissolved were filled with frantic, not to mention hysteric, running around in Netanyahu's byzantine court. The drama came to a transient high on Tuesday night. Wild-eyed proposals came pouring in towards Benny Gantz and Gideon Saar like wildfire. They were offered everything. Gantz was offered the premiership in six months, as long as he gave Netanyahu the first six months. And then he would get another year! Ditto Saar. And there was a proposal to form an "emergency government" for a year (led by Netanyahu) and offers for all kinds of shameful backroom deals and unrealistic offers, just to cancel the election.
- Why is Netanyahu so afraid of holding an election? Maybe he knows something we don't. Maybe he's realized that this is the last round. When it comes to being a doormat, one day even the Haredim will reach their limit. One way or another, the event came to nothing. No one believes Netanyahu's offers. Gantz and Saar know that he wants to settle back into Balfour to evade justice again. They know it's a trick. They know it's an act of deception. Gantz's side enjoys wearing out Netanyahu's side in these pointless negotiations, using contacts who are effectively straw men, and employing psychological warfare. Gantz's revenge on the Bibi-ist grinder was served cold. Netanyahu is a politically insolvent figure. Even the United Arab List got offers from the Likud. You'll be surprised to know that a detailed and surprising report in this context was publicized on Channel 14 (!!!). I've been told that all's well with Kobi Bornshtein, the political affairs correspondent who reported it, at least for now. Mansour Abbas is still being courted by the Likud. Dudi Amsalem wasn't saying what he felt in his heart. He knows the truth. In response, Likud sources figures officials said that the proposals to the UAL were related solely to the initiative to change the electoral system and switch to directly electing the prime minister. This must be understood: the Likud dreams of changing the electoral system now, a minute before the election.

- For whoever doesn't understand, that is a constitutional change that is also a retroactive ad hominem bill intended to satisfy the needs of one man alone. Which is totally fine, of course. But the defendants bill is a retroactive ad hominem that is fundamentally illegitimate. It's a judicial revolution! A putsch!!! These people are incapable of seeing their own toxicity. Remember Bezalel Smotrich, who contended just before the government was established that there was an alternative? He said that a "fully" right-wing government was just waiting for Naftali Bennett and Ayelet Shaked. He refused to divulge details, but his associates talked about two defectors from New Hope who had agreed to join such a government if Lapid's mandate [to form a government] expired. Shaked checked out these defectors personally, heard their denials, and gave Bennett a green light to form the government. We've now reached the second screening of the same movie. Now too, Smotrich is claiming that there is a possibility of forming a narrow, fully right-wing government. Where are New Hope's defectors? The same place they were a year ago: in Smotrich's feverish imagination. It's not just Smotrich.
- The Haredim pumped and spread reports in the last few days, over and over, that there were defectors and that a government headed by Netanyahu would immediately be formed. They lied deliberately. So did Netanyahu's people. This is the chosen method of the "toxic machine." These are MKs and elected representatives who stop at nothing, who wallow in spins, in fake news, in lies, just to please their master and mistress. The fact that over and over it turns out there are no defectors proves retroactively that Bennett and Shaked had no choice a year ago. Any Israeli who loves their country would have formed the government of change were they in their place because the alternative was awful: a fifth election. How sad it is that we've reached that point now.