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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and Middle East News Update

*Tuesday, August 9*

### Headlines:

- **Pro-Netanyahu Bloc Loses Projected Majority in Polls**
- **PM: Gaza Operation Gave Israel Initiative & Deterrence Back**
- **Lapid Thanks Sisi for Efforts to Broker Gaza Cease-Fire**
- **UN Security Council Holds Meeting on Gaza-Israel Tensions**
- **Misfired Rockets May Have Killed Over a Dozen in Gaza**
- **Unilever Freezes July Wages for Ben & Jerry's Directors**
- **EU: 'Political Decisions' Required to Close Iran Nuclear Deal**
- **The First Ukraine Grain Cargo Refused by Lebanese Buyer**

### Commentary:

- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "The Joint List Dilemma"**  
- By Amit Segal
- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "Without Too Much Talk"**  
- By Sima Kadmon

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# News Excerpts

August 9, 2022

## Ha'aretz

### **Pro-Netanyahu Bloc Loses Projected Majority in Polls**

The bloc of parties backing opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu would not have a Knesset majority after Israel's November 1 election, according to three polls released by Kan, Channel 12, and Channel 13. According to the polls conducted after a cease-fire was announced between Israel and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) to end the latest round of fighting in the [Gaza Strip](#) – the pro-Netanyahu bloc would have 59 out of 120 Knesset seats. The polls gave Netanyahu's [Likud](#) 33-34 seats, keeping its position as Israel's biggest party. Prime Minister [Yair Lapid's](#) Yesh Atid is projected to win 22-24 seats. If neither bloc secures a majority after November, forming a coalition will be nearly impossible and may require forming a minority government that receives support from parties external to the coalition. [Dig Deeper “Public Thinks Lapid Handled Gaza Battle Well, but No Electoral Boost” \(Times of Israel\)](#)

## Ynet News

### **PM: Gaza Operation Gave Israel Initiative & Deterrence Back**

Prime Minister Lapid said that the latest round of fighting returned the initiative to Israel in the ongoing situation in the Gaza Strip. "Operation Breaking Dawn brought back the initiative and deterrence. Whoever tries to harm us will pay with their life," Lapid said in a televised statement alongside Defense Minister [Benny Gantz](#). This latest flare-up was sparked over the weekend after Israeli airstrikes hit a senior PIJ commander following days of simmering cross-border tension. Israel said its action was a pre-emptive strike against an attack planned by the Iranian-backed group. In the [56 hours](#) of violence that ensued, Palestinian militants fired more than 1,000 rockets at Israel, sending residents of southern areas and major cities fleeing to shelters. [Dig Deeper “Israel Didn't Agree to Free PIJ Prisoners, Sees Chance of Wider Gaza Deal with Hamas” \(Times of Israel\)](#)

## Jerusalem Post

### **Lapid Thanks Sisi for Efforts to Broker Gaza Cease-Fire**

Prime Minister Lapid thanked Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi for his role in brokering the cease-fire ending the violent flare-up between Israel and the PIJ. "Egypt has a very significant role in maintaining regional stability and security," Lapid told Sisi during a phone call, according to the Prime Minister's Office. The two men also discussed Israel's relationship with its Arab neighbors and Palestinians. Both leaders agreed that it was essential to strengthen and develop "normalization between Israel and the countries of the region" to continue dialogue on regional stability. "Lapid emphasized his view that there is a need to improve the economic situation of the Palestinians," the PMO stated. [Dig Deeper “Lapid to Palestinians in Gaza: Take Your Future in Your Own Hands” \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

## **UN Security Council Holds Meeting on Gaza-Israel Tensions**

The United Nations Security Council held an emergency meeting to discuss the situation in Gaza, with several members raising concerns despite the tenuous truce between the PIJ militants and [Israel](#) after three days of deadly conflict. The United States UN ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield supported "Israel's right to defend its people against terrorist threats." "This Council should be able to come together and unconditionally repudiate the terrorism of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, whose reckless actions have put the lives of civilians, on both sides, at risk," she said. "Are you ready to say enough is enough? As the highest authority responsible for maintaining international peace and security?" he demanded. "How many more children do we have to bury until someone says enough is enough?" [Dig Deeper "After Mediating Gaza Ceasefire, Egypt Sees Envoy Berate Israel at Security Council" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

### Associated Press

## **Misfired Rockets May Have Killed Over a Dozen in Gaza**

Close to one-third of the Palestinians who died in the latest outbreak of violence between Israel and Gaza militants may have been killed by errant rockets fired by the PIJ, according to an Israeli military assessment that appears consistent with independent reporting. The Israeli military said 47 Palestinians were killed, at least 14 by PIJ-fired rockets that fell short. No one in Gaza with direct knowledge of the explosions in question was willing to speak publicly. But live TV footage showed rockets falling short in densely packed residential neighborhoods. Israel is claiming victory, partly because it killed two senior PIJ commanders and with no Israelis killed or seriously wounded. If it turns out that PIJ harmed some of those it claims to protect, it would make for an even more humiliating outcome for the militant group and its sponsor, Iran. Gaza-based human rights groups investigating the strikes declined to address the claims. [Dig Deeper "Islamic Jihad Mulls Compensating Gaza Victims of Misfires" \(Israel Hayom\)](#)

### Israel Hayom

## **Unilever Freezes July Wages for Ben & Jerry's Directors**

Ben & Jerry's independent board said parent company Unilever with which it is locked in a dispute over the sale of its Israeli business – had frozen its directors' salaries in July as a pressure tactic ahead of a mediation on the matter. The ice cream giant surpassed \$1 billion in sales last year for the first time, becoming one of 13 Unilever brands to achieve such a scale, the board also said. Ben & Jerry's sued Unilever, which has owned the Burlington, Vermont-based company since 2000, on July 5 to try to stop the sale of its business in Israel to local licensee [Avi Zinger](#). Ben & Jerry's last year said it no longer wanted to sell its products beyond the Green Line because it was "inconsistent" with its values, which prompted Unilever to make the sale. The deal with Zinger made the ice cream available to all consumers in Israel and Judea and Samaria ([West Bank](#)). [Dig Deeper "US Judge Weighs Ben & Jerry's Claims Against Owner Over Israeli Business" \(Reuters\)](#)

## **EU: 'Political Decisions' Required to Close Iran Nuclear Deal**

Negotiators from [Iran](#), the [United States](#) and the European Union have concluded indirect talks over what the EU described as the “[final text](#)” of an agreement to place limits on Tehran’s nuclear activity. Marathon negotiations over the tattered nuclear deal resumed Thursday at the Palais Coburg, the luxury Vienna hotel where the original agreement was signed. The deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, imposed curbs on Iran’s enrichment activities in exchange for sanctions relief. A major obstacle to a renewed agreement has been Iran’s demand that its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps be removed from Washington’s list of foreign terrorist organizations. The Biden administration rejected that demand, and Iran’s official news agency IRNA is now reporting that the IRGC’s delisting is no longer on the table. The primary sticking point now appears to be Tehran’s insistence that the United Nations’ atomic watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, end its years-long investigation into suspicious nuclear activity at three of Iran’s undeclared sites.

## **The First Ukraine Grain Cargo Refused by Lebanese Buyer**

The Razoni, the first ship to depart Ukraine under an UN-brokered deal, is looking for another port to unload its grain cargo as the initial Lebanese buyer refused the delivery, citing a more than five-month delay, the Embassy of Ukraine in Lebanon said. The Razoni left Odesa last week carrying 26,527 tons of corn. The ship was scheduled to arrive in Lebanon on Sunday, but it changed its destination to Turkey's Mersin port and is currently at anchor off Turkey's southern coast, according to Refinitiv ship tracker data. The UN and Turkey brokered the agreement last month after warnings that the halt in Ukrainian grain shipments caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine could lead to severe food shortages and even outbreaks of famine in parts of the world. So far, around 243,000 tons of corn has been exported from Ukraine on seven ships since the first departure on Aug. 1, according to a Reuters tally of data from Turkey's defense ministry. [Dig Deeper “‘Apply Israeli Land Concession Ban to Water with Lebanon’ - Policy Group” \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

## **The Joint List Dilemma**

By Amit Segal

- The entire world is a very narrow bridge [a famous Jewish song that is popularly attributed to Rabbi Nahman of Breslau], and the bridge that Israel's new prime minister has been walking is especially narrow and rickety. The issue at hand is the strategic question of the upcoming election: What stance should he take on partnering with **the Joint List**? When the last election was called, Yair Lapid went to the television studios at his own initiative and announced: "I have no problem relying on the Joint List in the [initial] vote [of confidence] to form the government." He hasn't repeated that sentiment this time around. The polls indicate that if he were to say once again that he considers the Joint List to be a partner for forming a government—though not as a potential coalition partner—his bloc will lose two seats to the right, and Netanyahu will be sworn in as prime minister. But if he says that he won't cooperate with Ayman Odeh and Ahmed Tibi (leaders of the Joint List), he is looking at electoral problems that stem from a different reason.
- Voter turnout among the Arab citizens of Israel plunged to 46% in the last election. Some 200,000 Arabs who had voted in the previous election opted not to vote this time, mostly because of the feeling that, in any event, their representatives were destined to sit in the opposition, and they felt there was no point in making the effort. Disavowal by the incumbent prime minister (Lapid), coupled with the sense that the experiment with the United Arab List ended in failure, could send Arab voter turnout plummeting even further. The numbers are astonishing and indicate that the only game in town, with all due respect to the Jews, is in Arab society. If Arab voter turnout remains around the same level as it in the last election, Netanyahu will be within touching distance of a 61-seat majority.
- If voter turnout rises to its robust level from 2020, when the Joint List won 15 seats, Netanyahu will end the election with 56 seats. However, if Arab voter turnout drops any further, even by the slightest bit, Netanyahu will have an easy path to an absolute majority. A rise in voter turnout in Bat Yam and Beer Sheva coupled with a drop in voter turnout in Umm el-Fahm and Nazareth will mean one thing only: at least one Arab party won't cross the electoral threshold—and there is no reason to assume that that party is going to be the United Arab List. That is why Lapid is inching his way across that narrow bridge very slowly. He has said he won't agree to a "government with extremists" but hasn't cited the Joint List explicitly. That is something that his spokespersons have done in background briefings, and some of his faction (Yesh Atid) members have done in measured media interviews in which their one goal has been to withstand a downpour of questions and to remain dry. MK Ram Ben Barak, for example, recently said on several occasions that the Joint List would not be part of the coalition, even though that wasn't what he was asked. When his interviewers insisted that he answer questions about forming a government based on a vote of confidence by the Joint List, Ben Barak replied: "Why is that so important to you?" Because that is the only thing that is important.

## **Without Too Much Talk**

By Sima Kadmon

- **Can we say something now about the flawed preconception? Can we, despite the opposition's efforts to chip away at the [success of the] operation in Gaza that has just ended—"it was merely a small terror organization," "their rockets aren't great," "we should have gone to war against Hamas"—talk about the twisted preconception that the prime minister of Israel needs to be at the very least a [former] Sayeret Matkal squad commander? It seems to me that the time has come for us to contemplate other options. The way in which Operation Breaking Dawn was managed while the man serving as prime minister was a [former] reporter for Bamahane, the man whom everyone loves to mock for his lack of credentials and his inability to oversee a security crisis—we need to change our conversation.**
- **True, sitting by his side were the seasoned defense minister, Benny Gantz, the seasoned chief of staff, Aviv Kochavi, and other top-notch professionals. And it is also true that Israel's intelligence, operational and defensive capabilities keep improving from one operation to the next. But that is precisely what proves that the narrative as if Mr. Security, the man who facilitated Israel's transition from being a country that grew oranges into being a high-tech superpower, the man without whom this country would collapse the moment the first rocket landed here—is ridiculous. A prime minister needs to have much more than just military experience. Or, to put it in more accurate terms: the prime minister needs to possess a range of other qualities that might obviate the need for him to be a general.**
- **Even this government's staunchest rivals stammered when they were asked to talk about this operation. Their only way out was to praise the security forces and not to say a single word about Prime Minister Lapid. Just imagine if Netanyahu were prime minister. What wouldn't we have heard in the past number of days about the man who oversaw a short and effective operation with zero [Israeli] casualties and with very little property damage? The accolades would not have gone to the security forces but to the first to identify [Netanyahu]. Some people view this successful operation as a healing experience. "The government of change had a firm security policy," said one of its leaders this past week. "Syria, Gaza, Iran—the policy on each of them has been ten degrees to the right of the previous government. But it didn't get credit for that.**
- **This operation was a healing experience. That manifested itself in the initiative that we took: something bold and decisive, without too much talk, without squabbling, without fighting over credit. That reversed things entirely." But military operations tend to fade from memory. Who is going to remember this operation in another three months? It will either be forgotten, or another operation will have come to overshadow it. In the meantime, the only significant change in the public's position—as indicated by Channel 12 News poll—is on the question of suitability to serve as prime minister. Lapid has begun to close the gap. Just 11% separate the former prime minister and the current one.**

- A second positive result was that 68% of the public praised the prime minister's performance. All of which is to say that we shouldn't underestimate Lapid's contribution to the way this operation is viewed. From its inception, it was already clear that he and the defense minister were working in exceptionally close cooperation, [which was exceptional] given the history between them and the upcoming elections. The photo that was snapped of them standing on the side of the conference room whispering to one another, while Gantz's hand was on Lapid's shoulder and Lapid's arm was around Gantz's waist, wasn't leaked to the press coincidentally. Both of them wanted to signal that they were working in full cooperation.
- One of Lapid's adversaries, who sits in on security cabinet meetings, admitted that the impression received is one of total cooperation. That wasn't only the case at the security cabinet meeting on Saturday night, where their cooperation was patently visible, but also in the meeting that was held two days earlier. It was also discernible in the press conference that they held yesterday evening. Both of them delivered speeches that were devoid of pathos and were without all of the usual "I, I, and I." Lapid gave credit to Gantz, Naftali Bennett, the security establishment, and even to Opposition Chairman Netanyahu. He may not be an officer, but he is a gentleman. The key to overseeing this operation was unflappability. Quite a few people, mainly professional [security and political] officials, praised the unflappability that was shown by Lapid, who ran the meetings professionally and didn't raise his voice even a single time.
- Lapid, Bennett, and Gantz are all veterans of Operation Protective Edge—Lapid and Bennett were security cabinet ministers, and Gantz was IDF chief of staff. All three of them have hair-raising stories about how Netanyahu lost his nerve in the early stages of the operation. He sat with a pile of tissues and yelled at everyone. One of the unforgettable moments was when he yelled at Yehuda Weinstein, who was the attorney general at the time. "Nu, Bibi, yell, yell," Weinstein said to him calmly. "I'll talk to you once you've calmed down." That didn't happen this time. Neither the tissues nor the yelling. The critical discussion about the mechanism for ending the operation, which traditionally is held by the army, was held this time at Lapid's request by National Security Council Director Eyal Hulata, who is directly subordinate to him. It's a political discussion, he explained. The political echelon will hold it.