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Israel and Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

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Arutz Sheva

Likud Releases Coalition Demands

The Likud party released a partial list of its demands in the ongoing coalition negotiations. The demands include the legalization of the yeshivas in Homesh and Evyatar in Samaria (West Bank), stopping the illegal Palestinian Authority (PA) takeover of Judea and Samaria, the regulation of and connecting to the electrical grid of the 'young settlements,' and strengthening Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria (West Bank) and throughout the country. The Likud seeks to increase the salary of enlisted IDF soldiers by 20% and to ensure that soldiers in the last six months of their service receive salaries that match the minimum wage. The Likud also seeks to pass the Basic Law: the legislation to strengthen the Knesset and establish a balance of power between the branches of government. [Dig Deeper "Israel's Coalition Talks Hit Stumbling Block as Parties Squabble" \(Ynet News\)](#)

Times of Israel

Amit: Expanding Ben Gvir's Powers as Imperils Democracy

Former Jerusalem police chief Arie Amit warned that anticipated changes to the relationship between the police force and the public security minister, demanded by far-right lawmaker Itamar Ben Gvir, could spell the end of Israeli democracy. Amit was responding to reports that Ben Gvir's expected appointment to head the Public Security Ministry will come with an understanding that the ministry will have expanded power over the Israel Police, with changes to be made to a police order that governs the relationship. The proposal was raised during negotiations between Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud and Ben Gvir's Otzma Yehudit. They said it will not be specifically mentioned in coalition agreements but rather covered by a more general clause granting powers to the public security minister. [Dig Deeper "NGO to A-G: Nix Ben-Gvir Absorbing Police Chief's Powers" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Reuters

Palestinian Teen Shot Dead in Clashes with Israeli Forces

A 16-year-old Palestinian was shot dead by Israeli forces during clashes in the Israeli-occupied West Bank city of Nablus, Palestinian officials said. The Israeli military said it was operating in Nablus, came under fire, and responded with live fire but did not confirm the death. Scores of Palestinians, among them gunmen and civilians, have been killed since a surge in bloodshed that has deepened rancor at their long-frustrated hopes of achieving statehood. In recent months, Palestinian gunmen have repeatedly targeted troops operating in the West Bank, as well as military posts, soldiers operating along the West Bank security barrier, Israeli settlements, and civilians on the roads. The IDF said troops came under fire in Nablus and arrested 16 wanted Palestinians in arrest raids across the West Bank. [Dig Deeper "UN: Israeli Controls in Area C Costing West Bank Palestinians \\$2.5 Billion per Year" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Palestinian Gunmen Holding Body of Israeli Citizen

A Palestinian official has confirmed that gunmen are holding the body of an Israeli citizen from the Druze city of Daliat al-Carmel who died in a car accident in a refugee camp near Jenin. The man died yesterday afternoon; his body was taken by the gunmen from Ibn Sina Hospital in Jenin, the official said. He added that Israeli and Palestinian officials are in talks to secure the release of the body. He also said that the fact that the victim is a young Druze Israeli raises question marks that he may have been a soldier or possibly working on an undercover mission for the defense establishment in the area. According to sources in the Israeli defense establishment, the armed Palestinians are demanding the release of prisoners from Israeli jails or the release of the bodies of terrorists killed by the IDF. [Dig Deeper "Israeli Teen Arrested for Assaulting IDF Soldier During Hebron Clashes" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

US Creates Special Representative for Palestinian Affairs

The Biden administration notified Congress that it has appointed Hady Amr as a new special representative for Palestinian affairs, a senior State Department official said. The move is an upgrade in United States-Palestinian relations. It is the first time the US has created a Washington-based position at the State Department that is solely responsible for Palestinian Affairs. It's also a promotion for Amr, who served in the last two years as deputy assistant secretary of state for Israeli-Palestinian affairs. The senior State Department official said Amr will work under the authority of the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. The US diplomats at the Jerusalem-based Office of Palestinian Affairs will work closely with the special representative. The creation of the new post is also meant to upgrade the US-Palestinian relationship and diplomatic representation as much as possible, given that the US consulate in Jerusalem, which served as the US diplomatic mission to the Palestinians, has yet to reopen, according to a US official. [Dig Deeper "Sweden's New FM: 2014 Palestine Recognition Was 'Premature and Unfortunate'" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

1 Killed as Terror Bombings Target 2 Bus Stops

Two explosions at two bus stops near entrances to Jerusalem killed one person and left another 22 people injured, police and medics said. Police described the explosions as a terror bombing attack. The first explosion occurred close to the main entrance of Jerusalem in Givat Shaul, shortly after the morning peak commuter hour. Eighteen people at the bus stop were injured in the blast, including two critically and two seriously, medical officials said. The victims were taken to two hospitals in Jerusalem. One of the victims later died at Shaare Zedek Medical Center, hospital officials said. He was later named as 16-year-old Aryeh Shtsupak, a yeshiva student from Jerusalem's Har Nof neighborhood. A second blast occurred at Ramot junction, another entrance to Jerusalem. [Dig Deeper "Attack Not Seen in Years: 16-Year-Old Killed, 17 Israelis Wounded in Double Jerusalem Terror Attack" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Israel, US to Simulate Attacks Against Iran and Its Proxies

Israel's army announced that it will soon conduct a joint aerial exercise with the US that will simulate scenarios of attacks against Iran and its proxies in the Middle East. Israel's Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General [Aviv Kochavi](#) held a series of meetings with American officials in Washington at the Pentagon and the White House, including the Israeli ambassador to the US Michael Herzog, with whom he discussed "the focal points of the situation in the region," the Israeli army said in a statement. While this will not be the first joint aerial exercise between Israel and the US, it will be the first with such an overt - and quite frankly blatant - message toward Tehran. It comes as indirect talks between [Iran](#) and the world powers to revive the 2015 nuclear deal have come to a standstill since September. Since then, officials in Israel and Washington have begun to change the tone, showing a willingness to mull over a military option with diplomacy failing. During its 18 months in power, re-establishing Israel's military capability to conduct airstrikes in Iran was one of the main objectives of the outgoing Israeli government. [Dig Deeper "Killer Drone That Hit Israeli-Owned Tanker Was Iranian Shahed-136, US Navy Confirms" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Reuters

US-Saudi Ties Under Review Despite Immunity Ruling

The US relationship with Saudi Arabia is still under review despite a Biden administration ruling that the Saudi crown prince has immunity from a lawsuit over the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said. Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist, then living in the US, was killed and dismembered in 2018 by Saudi agents in the kingdom's consulate in [Istanbul](#), in an operation US intelligence believes was ordered by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The prince has denied ordering the killing, which has cast a pall over relations between the two countries. The Biden administration's ruling last week came at a time of increased strains between Washington and Riyadh over energy supplies after the OPEC+ oil group decided at its last meeting to cut output targets over US objections. [Dig Deeper "At World Cup, Saudi Crown Prince Moves Back on to Global Stage" \(Reuters\)](#)

Headed for a Binational State

By Ben-Dror Yemini

- Quietly, without any noise, without resistance, consent is being reached by all the components of the coalition on one issue: legalizing the “young settlement enterprise.” In other words, turning the outposts, mainly those established after 2001, into legal settlements. Each one of them will have its own local authority; perhaps a rabbi will also be appointed; they will be hooked up to the infrastructure, and they will pay salaries. All in order to promote the project of one large state. A public debate is being held on important matters, such as the override clause, on segregating men from women, and the legal means that will make it possible to appoint Aryeh Deri as a minister. But among all these things, the very important matter that is liable to end the Zionist enterprise with a binational state has been forgotten.
- This did not happen under previous governments, not even in the years in which Binyamin Netanyahu was prime minister with a right-wing coalition. It did not happen because even Netanyahu knows that this is an own- goal. He is no fan of a Palestinian state; even if, here or there, he says that he supports that solution. But he is worried about a binational state. He knows that this is bad for Israel. He knows that this means breaking a pledge that was given in 2003 to remove illegal outposts. And he knows that there is one thing worse than a Palestinian state: a binational state. Just a moment, we can already hear people saying. This is what the majority of the people decided. The right-wing-Haredi bloc received the mandate. In fact, in all matters relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the majority of the people who voted for the bloc did not vote for Bezalel Smotrich’s policies but for Binyamin Netanyahu’s.
- Yes, the same Netanyahu who refrained from annexing [the West Bank]. The same Netanyahu who preferred to sign the Abraham Accords instead. The same Netanyahu who was a partner to Trump’s plan, which called for a Palestinian state and which Smotrich opposed. The same Netanyahu, whose first right-wing government demolished buildings in the Homesh outpost in 2021. And what now? Smotrich wants the defense portfolio. He won’t really decide when the Air Force will bomb Syria. After all, those kinds of things are mainly decided by top defense establishment officials. They recommend, and the prime minister approves. As does the defense minister. But there is one sphere in which the Defense Ministry has dramatic influence. Settlements.
- The Defense Ministry, by means of the Civil Administration and other agencies, is the sovereign in the West Bank. And Smotrich wants to be the prime minister of Judea and Samaria (West Bank). He will be the one to decide what happens with Homesh, Evyatar, and the other outposts, as well as Khan al-Ahmar. There is no better gift for BDS. If this were a decision that a majority of the Israeli public supports, that would be one thing. The majority is entitled to decide in favor of creeping suicide. But the argument as if this is what the public decided is fraudulent. For now, based on reports, Smotrich is willing to walk back his demands and to “suffice” with the Finance Ministry.

- **But he has a condition: transferring authorities relating to Judea and Samaria from the Defense Ministry to the Finance Ministry. He will decide on legalizing outposts, perhaps also decide on [establishing] many more outposts, and will also be the person who will allocate budgets to them. We won't have a "Muslim Brotherhood government," but we are liable to have a "hilltop youth government." At least when it comes to settlement activity. Smotrich is not about to climb down out of that tree. Quite the opposite is true. He wants to put all of us up a tree. And we will fall.**
- **Decisions on settlement activity in Judea and Samaria (West Bank) are perhaps the most important, in the long-term, in all that pertains to ensuring Israel's continued existence as a Jewish and democratic state. Such decisions cannot be made because one party was somewhat successful in enforcing its policy. Formally, that is possible. That is the way democracy works, and that is the kind of distortion that can happen in a democracy. But such decisions require a broad public debate. Decisions on these matters must be made with the broadest possible consent. Just like decisions on basic laws. And this subject, in fact, received pitiful attention in the election campaigns. The trap of "anyone-but-Bibi" blinded the eyes of the camp that wants a Jewish and democratic state.**
- **Instead of making it clear to many in the Netanyahu bloc that they are liable to place the fate of the Zionist endeavor in the hands of disciples of the binational state, they pumped the slogans against "a prime minister under indictment." Indictments are definitely an important and moral issue. But if Israel stops being Jewish, that is an existential matter. Did they not realize that it was more important? The irony of fate is that there is the only man who can stand up to Smotrich and save us from the disaster of a binational state. His name is Binyamin Netanyahu. He can do this by means of a unity government, on condition that Lapid and Gantz come down off their high horse. And he can do this the same way he did it throughout most of his years as the prime minister of a right-wing government. He will simply prevent excessive expansion of the settlements. He will not grant outposts a seal of approval. He removed Homesh. He did other things. Will he have the power and the will to avert disaster? We will have to wait and see.**

Jerusalem Bombings

By Moshe Neussbaum

- **One person was killed and 19 others were injured in terror attacks that were committed in two separate locations in Jerusalem this morning. Eleven people were injured—one of whom is in critical condition—as a result of what appears to have been a bomb that was detonated at a bus stop near the western exit from Jerusalem in Givat Shaul. A short time later an explosion was reported near a bus stop at the Ramot junction. Several people sustained light injuries. Police Commissioner Insp. Gen. Yaakov Shabtai said: “We haven’t seen a terror attack of this kind in many years.” Defense Minister Benny Gantz held a situation assessment meeting with top security officials. Outgoing Prime Minister Yair Lapid will convene a situation assessment meeting at noon. Residents of Jerusalem have been urged to remain vigilant.**
- **The first explosion occurred near a Magen David Adom station in Jerusalem, which allowed the teams to arrive on the scene swiftly. Four people were taken to Shaare Zedek Hospital in serious condition: a 65-year-old man, a 45-year-old man and two 16-year-old boys. One of the wounded was pronounced dead at the hospital; a second person is now listed as being in critical condition. Magen David Adom personnel took another seven people who sustained light injuries and one who sustained moderate injuries to Shaare Zedek Hospital. Police Commissioner Insp. Gen. Yaakov Shabtai went to the scene of the explosion in Givat Shaul, accompanied by a large number of police officers. “We haven’t seen a terror attack of this kind in many years,” said Shabtai. “We can’t say if this is a lone terrorist or a split cell. We will do everything we can, and we will get to the cell. I’m asking the citizens to remain alert. If there’s a suspicious object, don’t touch,” said Commissioner Shabtai.**
- **Police officials said that the bombs were detonated either by means of a timer or by remote control. They said that the fact that in both cases, the bombs were planted in a similar way behind bus stops has led them to conclude that both were planted by the same group. MK Itamar Ben Gvir went to the scene of the attack, where he said that he wanted to be public security minister “in order to exact a price from [the] terror[ists].” “The body snatching, the terror attack in Ariel. It’s only [thanks to] miracles that we aren’t counting dozens of casualties. Naturally, I share in the families’ grief and wish full recovery to all the wounded. And I’ll say—this chain needs to be broken,” said MK Ben Gvir. “Things are clear and simple from my perspective. We need to resume targeted killings, end the partying in the security prisons, end the payments to the PA, which sponsors terrorism. I heard the police commissioner’s briefing. We have to form a government as quickly as possible.” Defense Minister Benny Gantz held a situation assessment meeting that was attended by the GSS director, the deputy IDF chief of staff, the director of the IDF Operations Directorate, the director of the IDF Military Intelligence Directorate, the director of the Political-Security Staff in the Defense Ministry, the coordinator of government activities in the territories and the commander of the Israel Police’s Operations Division.**

- **The decision made upon the conclusion of the meeting was to close the Jalame and Salem border crossings in the Jenin area. The first explosion occurred at 7:05 this morning at a bus stop in Jerusalem's Givat Shaul neighborhood, near the western exit from the city. The explosion is believed to have been caused by a bomb that was planted on the spot. A second explosion occurred near a bus stop at Ramot junction in the city at 7:35. That explosion appears to have been caused by a bomb that was planted on a fence. A 67 bus that was passing by at the time of the second explosion was damaged by the blast, which occurred outside the bus. The bus driver said: "I took on passengers at the station, and the moment I started to drive off, we heard an explosion from outside. People were hysterical and screamed. The bus stop was really packed. One of the passengers asked me which bus line it was. I saw the smoke."**