

# ISRAEL REPORT

To provide greater exposure to primary Israeli news sources and opinions in order to become better informed on the issues, and to gain a better understanding of the wide range of perspectives that exist in Israeli society and politics.

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## **MOST ISRAELIS CONSIDER NETANYAHU CORRUPT, BUT HE IS STILL CLIMBING IN THE POLLS** (JPost 2/14/18)

Following the Israeli Police's recommendation Tuesday night to indict Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for bribery and breach of trust in two cases, the premier said he would run in the next election and win. A Channel 2 News poll released Wednesday shows that he might.

The poll, conducted by Mina Tzemach and Mano Geva, found that if the election were held today, Netanyahu's Likud would gain one Knesset seat, from 25 to 26, and Yesh Atid would fall by two, from 24 to 22, since the last such poll released on January 13. Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon's party would gain two seats, from seven to nine.

Forty-eight percent of the public said Netanyahu should quit and 40% said he should not. A separate poll conducted by pollster Camille Fuchs for Channel 10 found that 50% believe Netanyahu should quit or suspend himself, while 42% believe he should continue as normal.

After a 14-month-long investigation, police announced on Tuesday that it found enough evidence to recommend the state's prosecution to indict Netanyahu for bribery and breach of trust in Case 1000, the "gifts affair" and Case 2000, the "Yediot Aharanot Affair."

In Case 1000, the "gifts affair," it is alleged that Netanyahu improperly accepted expensive gifts from different businessmen.

In Case 2000, the "Yediot Aharanot affair," Netanyahu allegedly negotiated with publisher Arnon "Noni" Mozes for favorable coverage of himself in Yediot Aharanot in exchange for support of a bill to weaken Israel Hayom, the largest circulation Hebrew-language paper and Yediot's biggest competitor.

## **NETANYAHU DOESN'T HAVE TO RESIGN** (Arutz-7 INN.com 2/15/18)

Professor Aviad Hacohen, dean of the Sha'arei Mishpat Academic College, on Wednesday discussed in an interview with Arutz Sheva the police recommendations in the cases against Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

"Everyone is speaking as though everything has already been decided and it's absolutely not the case. We have to remember that we are at the end of an investigation. After the investigation there must be a decision by the attorney general, and he and he alone, not the recommendations of the police and not senior lawyers, will determine the fate of this case, whether there will be an indictment, and if so – then which offenses it will include," Hacohen pointed out.

"Afterward, and hopefully we don't get there, even if an indictment is filed, we have to go through a lengthy process in court, and this can take several years," he explained.

"On the factual level," said Hacohen, "the role of the police is to collect as much evidence as possible and, insofar as the legal aspect is concerned, the State Prosecutor's Office must start from the beginning, impartially and without prejudices, to examine the facts presented by the police."

Regarding the issue of Netanyahu stepping down, amid calls from the opposition on him to do so, Professor Hacohen stated, "One must distinguish between the legal obligation and the ethical or public obligation. On the legal level, the law goes so far as to stipulate that even if an indictment is filed, as long as the trial does not end with a conviction that the prime minister has committed an offense involving moral turpitude, he does not have to resign and this can take many years."

"On the moral and public levels, there is another question entirely. On the one hand, a prime minister who claims to be innocent, and also the fact that his resignation would mean the resignation of the entire government. On the

other hand there is an inappropriate situation in which a prime minister is concerned with state matters while a heavy cloud of bribery charges that also distracts him from the affairs of the state hangs over his head," he continued.

## **DAMASCUS WARNS ISRAEL: 'MORE SURPRISES'** (YNet 2/13/18)

The Syrian government said on Tuesday that Israel would face "more surprises" in future attacks on Syria's territory, after Syria shot down an Israeli F-16 jet during the fiercest flare-up between the old foes in 36 years.

Syrian anti-aircraft fire downed the F-16 as it returned from a retaliatory bombing raid on Iran-backed positions in Syria after the incursion of an Iranian drone into Israeli airspace early on Saturday. Both Iran and Russia are supporting President Bashar Assad in Syria's near seven-year civil war.

"Have full confidence the aggressor will be greatly surprised because it thought this war—this war of attrition Syria has been exposed to for years—had made it incapable of confronting attacks," assistant foreign minister Ayman Sussan said.

"God willing they will see more surprises whenever they try to attack Syria," Sussan said during a Damascus news conference.

The downed F-16 was the first warplane Israel has lost to enemy fire since its 1982 Lebanon war. Its two-man crew survived, with injuries, after bailing out of the stricken jet.

Israel retaliated by destroying around half of Syria's anti-aircraft batteries, according to an initial assessment shared with Reuters by an Israeli official who requested anonymity.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday that Israeli forces would press ahead with Syria operations in Syria, where it has launched scores of sorties against suspected arms transfers to Iranian-sponsored Lebanese Hezbollah terrorists.

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In Kiryat Shmona on Tuesday, Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman told reporters, "There are no limitations (on military operations), and nor do we accept any limitations ... We will respond to every provocation."

"We will continue to defend our vital security and other interests. And I would like to paraphrase the well-known saying: 'This is not the time to bark, this is the time to bite.'"

Tehran's involvement in Syria, including the deployment of Iran-backed forces near the Golan Heights, has alarmed Israel. It has also has accused Iran of building precision-guided missile factories for Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Syria and Hezbollah celebrated the F-16 shoot-down as a blow to Israeli military superiority. Israel's Army Radio said on Tuesday that investigators believed pilot error—rather than Syrian capabilities—were mainly at fault for the F-16's failure to evade what was probably an aged SA-5 missile.

Saturday's incident stirred up further questions in Israel about the effectiveness of a coordination mechanism set up with Russia, which has also been reinforcing and arming Assad's army.

Russian President Vladimir Putin responded to the flare-up by urging Prime Minister Netanyahu to avoid escalation in Syria. Moscow said on Monday it did not have information to support Israel's allegation about an Iranian military presence in the site bombed for launching the drone.

Ze'ev Elkin, a Russian-speaking Israeli cabinet minister who serves as Netanyahu's interpreter in the talks with Putin, defended the coordination mechanism on Tuesday as granting Israel "freedom of action in the skies above Lebanon and Syria."

"I don't think the Russians ever pledged that they would take military action against the Iranians and the Syrians for us," Elkin told Israel Radio.

"We are going one-on-one against the Syrians. We don't need assistance from the Russians. We know how to deal with Syrian anti-aircraft fire, as everyone ultimately saw."

#### **"IRAN DECLARED WAR ON US LONG AGO" (JPost, 2/14/18)**

Israel will do everything necessary to prevent Iran from consolidating itself in Syria, Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman said on Wednesday.

"Iran declared war on us. The highest echelons in Tehran want to erase the Zionist entity; they do not hide the fact that they want to wipe the State of Israel off the face of the earth," he said at the annual conference organized by the Federation of Local Authorities and Keren Kayemeth LelIsrael, held at the Tel Aviv Fairgrounds.

"Iran is also fighting us through its proxies – Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad and now Hamas, and of course the Syrian regime. Therefore, it is a daily war not only in the military aspect but also in the realm of international terrorism, and we do everything in order to preserve Israel's security," Liberman said, adding that Israel maintains absolute freedom of action. "Everything we need to do has been done."

"The Iranian activity should, of course, bother us," Liberman said. "It is not only theoretical threats. They are investing billions of dollars in weapons of mass destruction and are trying to establish themselves in Syria."

While Israel is not planning any military action on the northern front, "there are things that are disturbing, and there are things that are an existential threat to our very existence here in the Middle East," Liberman said, adding that "if we reach a situation where we have no choice, we will act."

According to Liberman, while Israel wants to live quietly, the turbulent reality of the Middle East makes the word "peace" irrelevant; the only way to live here quietly is to prepare for war.

#### **ISRAEL BLAMED - 'CATASTROPHE' IN GAZA (Arutz-7 INN.com 2/15/18)**

Bolivia's UN Ambassador, Sacha Llorentty Soliz, on Wednesday accused Israel of bearing the primary responsibility for what he called "the catastrophic situation in Gaza", The Associated Press reports.

Llorentty Soliz's comment came after the UN's Mideast envoy, Nickolay Mladenov, briefed the Security Council behind closed doors at the request of

Kuwait and Bolivia on the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Llorentty Soliz said following the meeting that Mladenov had told the Council that drinking water is short, hospitals have been closed and "doctors stopped doing surgeries." Mladenov also cited Gaza's 47 per cent unemployment rate, rising to 60 per cent for young people, he said.

The Bolivian envoy further said that Mladenov highlighted that the situation in Gaza has been worsened by the U.S. suspension of millions of dollars in funding for the UN agency for "Palestinian refugees", UNRWA.

Llorentty Soliz added he told the council the primary responsibility for "the catastrophic situation in Gaza" rests with Israel, according to AP.

Despite the accusations, Israel continues to regularly allow humanitarian aid and construction materials into Gaza, even though its terrorist rulers continue to attack southern Israel with rockets and openly threaten to destroy the Jewish state.

Gaza's Hamas rulers use the money and materials they receive to build terrorist tunnels that infiltrate into Israel – a fact which was pointed out two weeks ago by Jason Greenblatt, U.S. President Donald Trump's Special Representative for International Negotiations.

#### **ISRAEL SAID TO FEAR ASSAD CHEMICAL WEAPONS SPILLOVER INTO GOLAN HEIGHTS (Times of Israel, 2/15/18)**

The Foreign Ministry fears poison gas may leak into Israel if the Assad regime uses chemical weapons against rebels near the Golan Heights, and has reported warned of a punishing response should such a situation unfold.

The ministry sent a classified cable to 15 Israeli ambassadors around the world, providing the envoys with guidelines for sending strong messages against Iran, Syria and Hezbollah to their host countries, following last week's infiltration of an Iranian drone and subsequent downing of an Israeli F-16, Channel 10 news reported Wednesday.

In acknowledging Jerusalem's fear of chemical spillover into the Golan Heights, the cable directed the envoys to convey that "it must be made clear that such an incident would require Israel to respond in the strongest possible terms."

The Foreign Ministry asked its ambassadors to emphasize to the senior political leaders in the countries where they are stationed that Iran's entrenchment in Syria could increase the Islamic Republic's desire to carry out additional attacks on Israel, which would lead to an escalation of hostilities in the entire region.

"We must convey the message that Israel will not allow this and will defend itself, its citizens, and its sovereignty," the cable said, according to the report.

In July 2012, a similar concern reverberated across Israel that terror groups could gain control of Syria's large stockpile of chemical weapons. Officials at the time said Assad could transfer the weapons to the Hezbollah terrorist group. The number of gas masks distributed to civilians subsequently saw an immediate and significant rise.

The Syrian government on Wednesday denied it possessed chemical weapons and branded the use of such arms "immoral and unacceptable."

A joint investigation team comprising experts from the UN and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons concluded that the Syrian government used chlorine gas in at least two attacks in 2014 and 2015 and used the nerve agent sarin in an aerial attack on Khan Sheikhoun last April 4 that killed about 100 people and affected about 200 others.

On February 1, Washington said Assad's regime could be making new chemical weapons and warned it was considering fresh strikes against the regime.

Other messages that the Israeli envoys were asked to convey included calls on the international community to pressure Iran to halt its support of the Hezbollah terror group and to prevent the organization from purchasing and manufacturing precision missiles which could be used to target Israel, Channel 10 reported.

A senior Israeli official told Channel 10 that the ambassadors were asked to

pass along the warnings in light of Jerusalem's "sense" that the international community has not been taking Israel's willingness to act against Iran's entrenchment in Syria seriously.

A senior Syrian official on Tuesday warned Israel that it would face "surprises" if it launches any attacks on his country, claiming the Jewish state mistakenly thinks Syrian forces are incapable of defending the country.

#### **ISRAELI JUDGE BLOCKS SEX SEGREGATED TRAINING PROGRAM FOR ULTRA-ORTHODOX TOUR GUIDES** (Ha'aretz, 2/15/18)

The Jerusalem District Court ruled Wednesday that a requirement for sex segregation in a state-funded course to train ultra-Orthodox tour guides constitutes "a priori discrimination." The court ordered the state to put the course out to bid again, minus the demand for separate classes for men and women.

The court, ruling on a petition from the Israel Women's Network, also said that the Tourism Ministry failed to prove the need for sex segregation.

The vocational program is part of a growing trend of sex segregation to satisfy the demands of Haredim.

Judge Oded Shaham not only rejected the state's position that "access to Haredim" requires sex segregation, but also suggested that other segregated frameworks, such as academia or the Civil Service Cadet Program, are discriminatory.

The Tourism Ministry issued a call for bids for operating a tour-guide course for Haredim in August 2016.

The Israel Women's Network asked the court to withdraw the demand for sex segregation, saying it constituted separation in "state-provided and -funded services, which shape the labor market and the social and professional networks of participants."

The petitioners said the segregation clause infringes on the constitutional right to dignity and equality and violates anti-discrimination laws.

Shaham said that whenever the state wants an exemption from equality requirements, it must prove need. He said the Tourism Ministry did not examine the possibility of holding the course without sex segregation and that exclusive courses for ultra-Orthodox people could raise questions regarding equality.

Hagai Kalai, Liad Vertzhaizer and Miriam Zelkind, lawyers for the Israel Women's Network, said after the ruling that "the separation of men from women and using sex as a criterion for allocating public resources are real discrimination. We hope that today's ruling marks the beginning of a change in the state's position in similar cases. The clear message that the court conveyed is that segregation is always discrimination."

Israel Women's Network's CEO Michal Gera Margalot said "the verdict makes it unequivocally clear that there is no place for state-sponsored gender segregation."

Dr. Yofi Tirosh, head of the Sapir Academic College School of Law, said "the court cast doubt for the first time in the legality and wisdom of gender segregation. ... It is to be hoped this marks a change in the mistaken approach that one group can be discriminated against in favor of another."

#### **IRAN'S EX-MILITARY CHIEF: ISRAEL SENT LIZARDS TO SPY ON NUCLEAR PROGRAM** (Israel Hayom, 2/14/18)

Iran's former military chief, Hassan Firuzabadi, on Tuesday accused the Mossad and the CIA of using lizards to "attract atomic waves" as part of their efforts to spy on the Iranian nuclear program.

Firuzabadi, who headed the Iranian armed forces from 1989 to 2016 and is now a top military adviser to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, also said Western nations had often used tourists, scientists and environmentalists to spy on Iran.

"Several years ago, some individuals came to Iran to collect aid for Palestine. ... We were suspicious of the route they chose," he told the Iranian Labour News Agency.

They were carrying "a variety of reptile desert species like lizards, chameleons. ... We found out that their skin attracts atomic waves and that they were nuclear spies who wanted to find out where inside the Islamic Republic of Iran we have uranium mines and where we are engaged in atomic activities," he said.

#### **NFL PLAYERS LAND IN ISRAEL FOR TOUR A YEAR AFTER TRIP MARRED BY CONTROVERSY** (Times of Israel, 2/14/18)

Seven current and former American football players arrived in Israel late Tuesday night for a week-long tour of the Jewish state, complete with meetings with the prime minister and president, the trip's organizer said.

The visit was organized by a group called American Voices in Israel, which has been bringing influential opinion makers — including actors, clerics, journalists — to the Jewish state since the early 2000s with the belief that by seeing the country up close "they will understand the complexities of the situation," the head of the organization, Irwin Katsof, told The Times of Israel on Tuesday.

It is the second year in a row that the organization is bringing athletes to Israel, though the 2017 trip did not go as planned, with several sportsmen dropping out at the last minute for political reasons.

The withdrawals from the trip, which garnered international headlines at the time, were led by Seahawks defensive end Michael Bennett, who pulled out saying he felt he was being "used" by the Israeli government after reading comments about the trip made by Strategic Affairs Minister Gilad Erdan and Tourism Minister Yariv Levin in the days prior.

This time around, American Voices in Israel apparently attempted to avoid a repeat of last year's events, keeping news of the trip quiet until the players touched down at Ben Gurion International Airport.

Katsof said the main mission of his organization is to "help the American population get a deeper understanding of what's happening in Israel that goes beyond headlines and CNN soundbites."

It pursues that goal by courting figures with the ability to shape public opinion. Tellingly, the group's list of descriptions of the players participating in this year's trip includes the number of followers they have on social media.

The cost of the trip is covered by American Voices in Israel, but Katsof stressed that it is "no strings attached" and the participants are free to speak their minds during and after the visit.

The players paid to bring along family members — wives, fiancées, brothers, sisters and mothers — for the week in the Holy Land, Katsof said.

Avery Williamson, for instance, arrived in Israel with his sister ahead of the rest of the group on Tuesday and spent the day traveling around Jaffa and Tel Aviv's Neve Tzedek neighborhood.

The full itinerary includes a mix of lighter tourist attractions — a dip in the Dead Sea, a jeep ride in northern Israel — and more meaningful historical and religious sites, like Jerusalem's Western Wall Tunnels, City of David and Christian holy sites in the Old City.

It also includes stops in Jewish settlements, including a winery in the central West Bank, Katsof said.

In addition, players are scheduled to meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu next week.

One night, they will also dine with President Reuven Rivlin and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, including its executive vice chairman, Malcolm Hoenlein, under whose direction American Voices in Israel was created during the Second Intifada.

The players and their families will also visit Safed's Ziv Hospital to see some of the injured and sick Syrians who are receiving treatment in Israel under the army's Operation Good Neighbor program.

#### **REVEALED: ISRAELI ORDER TO SHOOT DOWN ARAFAT'S PLANE OVER THE SAUDI DESERT** (Ha'aretz, 2/14/18)

When Ariel Sharon was Israel's defense minister he ordered the Israeli army

to shoot down a passenger plane if it was confirmed that Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was on board. Now, the Israeli author of the report has revealed the handwritten notes greenlighting the Israel Defense Force to shoot down a civilian airplane carrying the Palestinian leader.

The handwritten note was supplied by Rafael Eitan, then the IDF chief of the staff, to the head of the Israeli air force at the time, David Ivry, and were presented Monday by Ronen Bergman in a follow up to his New York Times report from last week. The notes were relayed to Bergman by Ivry after former Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak told him about how Sharon put Arafat back on Israel's kill list after assuming the defense ministry in 1981.

"David, It is possible that Arafat will be flying from Damascus to Saudi Arabia in a Saudi plane. If this is the case — it is to be shot down. A good site must be chosen above the Saudi/Jordanian desert," the note reads.

Bergman says Ivry gave him the note after the New York Times published a long excerpt from his new book "Rise and Kill First: The Secret History of Israel's Targeted Assassinations."

Among the stories revealed by Bergman was that when Uri Avnery, a famous Israeli journalist and pro-peace activist, traveled to Lebanon to interview Arafat, a team trailed him with the aim of taking Arafat out, even at the cost of the Israelis' lives. But Arafat's maneuvering paid off and the journalists lost their tail and lived.

Avnery recalled the incident in a piece published by Haaretz last week, writing that: "The meeting did not take place at an official PLO site, but in the private home of the Shakour family, in an ordinary apartment building.

"It lasted about two hours and dealt entirely with the possibility of peace between Israel and the Palestinian people. It was the first time Arafat had met with an Israeli, and from this perspective, it could be called a 'historic meeting.' The date was July 3, 1982. I recorded every word, and the German crew was invited to film the last 10 minutes.

"Reading Bergman's revelations, I'm very glad now about all the precautions that Arafat took."

#### **WHEN YOU ARE A KING** (Nahum Barnea, YNet 2/14/18)

Let me start from the end: After the police had their say in Case 1000 and in Case 2000, there's no escape from drawing conclusions. The prime minister must suspend himself until the attorney general makes his decisions on the indictment. At the same time, Yedioth Ahronoth publisher Arnon Mozes must give up his authorities as managing editor.

That's my personal opinion, of course. At Yedioth Ahronoth, there is no collective opinion dictated from the top. I have a lot of respect for Mozes, as well as for his achievements, skills and contribution to the power of free press in Israel. I feel for him on the personal level. I hope the cloud hanging over his head is quickly removed. But a newspaper, any newspaper, is more important than its journalists and is more important than its owners.

And the state is more important than its prime minister. This is what David Ben-Gurion, the greatest of all, was told at the end of his term, and this is what Benjamin Netanyahu should be told too. The speech he gave Tuesday following the publication of the police recommendations was a rhetoric work of art. Occasionally, he failed to tell the truth, but even US President Donald Trump knows that, and there's nothing new about it.

The conflict between the police's version and Netanyahu's version is somewhere else. During his third and fourth term, Netanyahu touched the sky. He felt luck was on his side and that the sky was the limit: He's allowed to, he deserves to. He initiated a series of aggressive moves which had nothing to do with the best interest of the state or Likud or the Right.

He admitted in Tuesday's speech that he had dissolved the Knesset and forced expensive elections on Israel because of a free newspaper that flattered his ego. He created havoc, to the point of threatening new elections, over a television channel which few people watch and which hardly has any influence. No one understood, no one will understand, why he did it. These are just two examples from a long list.

In his first two terms, Netanyahu was prime minister. Towards the end of his third term, he became king, in his own eyes and in his voters' eyes. And a king can do whatever he wants.

During this period, he widely expanded the permission he gave himself to act on issues he is personally involved in. When businessman Arnon Milchan accepts his demands and supplies him with goods worth hundreds of thousands of shekels, they're friends. When he caters to Milchan's needs and promotes a law aimed at infusing hundreds of millions into the businessman's pockets or pleads with the American secretary of state to arrange him a visa, he is repaying an Israeli agent (what kind of agent was the second goods supplier, James Packer?) And we have yet to discuss the Bezeq affair (Case 4000), which pointed to an identical if not worse pattern—intervening in professional decisions to promote the business interests of a personal friend, and receiving a return in the media.

The police are saying that the deals Netanyahu made—or tried to make—as prime minister and communications minister, were nothing but an act of bribery. Netanyahu is saying: The things I received are of little importance, and what I wanted to give was aimed at benefitting the state and wasn't implemented in any event. There was nothing because nothing was executed.

The gap between these perceptions should not only interest criminal law experts. Both sides are putting the prime minister's status and power in a democratic state to the test. Netanyahu is expanding it; the police are narrowing it down. The attorney general, and then possibly the courts, will be required to decide on a constitutional issue.

The investigation conclusions call for a debate on another issue: Netanyahu's character. Case 2000 is an instructive example. Netanyahu argued in his interrogation that the negotiations he held with Noni Mozes were a false pretense: He had no intention of promoting any agreement. The police are saying: Netanyahu is lying. There is evidence that he took real steps towards implementing the agreement.

The police aren't dealing with the public question. Nevertheless, the question must be asked. What is the meaning of false pretense? Is a politician who holds secret negotiations for fraud purposes worthy of being prime minister in a law-abiding state? When is his pretense real and when is it false?

There is nothing wrong with conversations between a prime minister and a newspaper's publisher. There is nothing wrong with understandings between the two sides. These kinds of events take place every day, in every democratic state.

The deal was problematic: Both sides promised something they were not allowed to promise and had no intention of doing. And there is also the fact that the two sides held negotiations at a time when Netanyahu turned Mozes into a monster, into the people's enemy, and many of Yedioth Ahronoth's reporters kept slamming Netanyahu mercilessly. This is a public problem, not a criminal problem. Both sides have yet to explain their motives to the public. Netanyahu is allowed to fight to remain in office. He is allowed to—although when Ehud Olmert faced a similar situation, Netanyahu told the public the exact opposite. What he is not allowed to do is to throw dust in his voters' eyes.

The police commissioner noted that the police officers who investigated the affair were followed by certain elements. He was telling the truth. Netanyahu is now arguing that the fact that the investigators knew they were being followed created prejudice, which disqualifies them and their recommendations.

This is false pretense, an invention copied from Trump's campaign against the investigators of the Russian affair. According to Netanyahu's method, any interogatee can thwart the investigation against him. All he has to do is send someone to follow the investigators, write out a check to one of the investigators and post a false story about him on social media.

Netanyahu didn't know. He never knows.