

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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IDF ATTACKS MORE THAN 140 HAMAS TARGETS (Arutz-7 8/9/18)

IDF fighter jets targeted over 20 terror sites in military compounds and in a Hamas training camp early Thursday morning.

Among the sites targeted were a weapons manufacturing and storage facility, a complex used for the Hamas' naval force, and a military compound used for rocket launching experiments.

Additionally, five training camps were targeted as well as a main warehouse and a meeting point used by the senior commanders of the Khan Yunis Brigade. Thus far, over 140 of Hamas' strategic military sites have been targeted, the IDF Spokesperson's Unit said.

Also on Thursday morning, an IDF aircraft carried out an attack on a terrorist cell that fired rockets from southern Gaza into Israeli territory.

The strikes were in response to a barrage of at least 150 rockets that were fired from Gaza into southern Israel on Wednesday. The IDF said early Thursday morning that since midnight alone, about 80 launchings had been identified from the Gaza Strip toward Israeli territory.

The Iron Dome system intercepted a total of 25 launches. Most of the rockets exploded in open areas.

On Thursday morning, a 30-year-old woman was seriously injured when a rocket hit a building in the Eshkol Regional Council of southern Israel. Another man was lightly injured by shrapnel.

HAMAS: INDIRECT GAZA TRUCE TALKS WITH ISRAEL 'ADVANCED' (YNet 8/8/18)

UN and Egyptian-mediated talks on a deal to tamp down tensions between Israel and the Gaza Strip are in "advanced stages", a senior member of the Palestinian enclave's dominant Islamist Hamas group said on Wednesday.

The remarks were echoed by a top Israeli lawmaker, suggesting a possible breakthrough after four months of confrontations and clashes that stirred mutual threats of war.

Israel wants to recover the bodies of two soldiers killed in the Gaza war, and two of its civilians who wandered into the enclave, in exchange for any far-ranging truce deal with Hamas.

For its part, Hamas demands that Israel free Palestinian security prisoners - a proposal that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners balk at.

"We want to free our brave prisoners and we have no objection to beginning now," Hayya said. "Let it be a prisoner swap deal, (Palestinian) prisoners in return for Zionist soldiers."

Gazans launched weekly, sometimes violent, border protests against Israel on March 30, their anger exacerbated by a grinding Israeli-Egyptian blockade and funding cuts by Hamas's rival, the Western-backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

The Israeli army has killed at least 158 Palestinians, while a Gaza sniper killed an Israeli soldier, and Israel has lost tracts of forest and farmland to fires set by incendiary kites and helium balloons flown over the frontier. There have also been several, mostly bloodless shelling exchanges.

Neither Hamas nor Israel, which last fought a war in 2014, appears keen on another full-blown conflict. But public demands by either side for a detainee release by the other appear to have been a stumbling block in securing a long-term truce.

"We can say that actions led by the United Nations and Egypt are in advanced stages and we hope it could yield some good from them," Khalil Al-Hayya, deputy Hamas chief in Gaza, told Al Jazeera television.

"What is required is for calm to be restored along the border between us and the Zionist enemy (Israel)."

Israel has played down prospects for a comprehensive ceasefire, speaking in terms of a more limited quid-pro-quo.

In return for calm in Gaza, Israeli officials said on Sunday they would reopen a commercial border terminal that had been shuttered in response to the fire damage, and expand a Palestinian fishing zone.

Avi Dichter, of the Israeli parliament's foreign affairs and defense committee, struck a cautiously upbeat note on Wednesday. "I very much hope that we are on the brink of a new day on the matter of Gaza," he told reporters.

Neither the United Nations nor Egypt have publicly detailed their proposals for Gaza, beyond saying they should bring extensive economic relief for its 2 million Palestinians, many of them plagued by unemployment and failing public utilities.

Prime Minister Netanyahu called off a trip to Colombia this week to attend to the Gaza truce talks, and was due to convene his decision-making security cabinet on Thursday to discuss the negotiations.

HIGH COURT RULING FORCES CHOICE: HAREDI CONSCRIPTION OR EARLY ELECTIONS (Israel Hayom 8/9/18)

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has no interest in calling an early election. Anyone who thinks this is his plan is wrong. Netanyahu meant every word he said when told the leaders of coalition parties a few weeks ago that he wanted the next general election to take place as originally planned (early November 2019). But on Tuesday, the High Court of Justice ruled that the contentious bill on to conscript haredi yeshiva students into the military could be postponed for only four months. That might change things.

The ruling means that the coalition will only have two months from the time

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the Knesset winter session opens to pass a law that for now appears to be unpassable. The government's original request that the High Court allow it more time, until April 2019 – or the end of the winter session – had the clear goal of preventing the haredi conscription bill from being used as leverage to move up the general election.

It looks like the upcoming winter session will be the last one for the current Knesset. If the High Court had allowed the government to put off passing the conscription bill until April, the government could have wound up in a situation in which it ended the winter session not by passing legislation on haredi conscription, but by passing a law to disperse the Knesset. The shorter-term postponement allowed by the High Court demands that the coalition decide: haredi conscription or an early election. The ball is in Netanyahu's hands, but his coalition partners are in the game, too.

The conscription bill passed its first reading with the support of the centrist Yesh Atid party, which is not a member of the coalition. The haredi parties abstained. Theoretically, it could have passed the requisite second and third readings in the same manner, but United Torah Judaism made it clear that such a gambit would force it to resign from the government.

On the other hand, if the bill is changed to suit the haredim, Yisrael Beytenu Chairman and Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman could also wind up leaving the government. The last thing Netanyahu wants is an early election because of the conscription issue. So many believe he would prefer to disperse the current Knesset as soon as the next session starts, about two months from now.

Meanwhile, Kulanu leader Moshe Kahlon has been saying for months he thinks that the election will be held this coming January or February, and has already launched a rebranded campaign.

But there is another possibility – that either the haredim or Lieberman will send a signal to Netanyahu that he can proceed with the bill without concern that they will abandon the government. If that happens, Netanyahu would prefer to pass the bill and clear the issue of haredi military conscription off the national agenda for decades to come, or until the next High Court petition.

NETANYAHU SAYS HE DOESN'T WANT EARLY ELECTION (JPost 8/8/18)

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu does not want an election to be held before November 2019, the Likud's spokesman said on Wednesday.

Netanyahu spoke to Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman and Deputy Health Minister Ya'acov Litzman to try to reach agreements on how to proceed with the haredi IDF conscription bill.

The discussion came a day after the High Court of Justice gave the government a three-month extension of its September deadline to pass the law. Due to the intractability of coalition parties' disagreements on the matter of conscripting haredi men into military or civilian service, many in the political field saw the court's new date – December 2 – as a deadline to call an election. However, the Likud spokesman said that Netanyahu, Lieberman and Litzman "have a shared will to solve the issue of conscription and go to an election on time.

"The discussions will continue in the coming weeks," he added.

A Likud source told The Jerusalem Post Wednesday that beating David Ben-Gurion's record as longest-serving prime minister is an important benchmark for Netanyahu.

In order to surpass Ben-Gurion, Netanyahu would have to remain premier at least until May 31, 2019.

KNESSET SPEAKER REFUSES TO RECEIVE RESIGNATION IN ARABIC (Arutz-7 8/8/18)

Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein refused to accept the resignation of MK Wael Yunis from the Joint Arab List because the letter was written in Arabic.

Knesset Member Yunis today submitted his resignation in protest of the Nationality Law drafted in Arabic only. Edelstein refused to sign on receipt of

the letter and demanded another letter be submitted in Hebrew. "I cannot sign a letter that I don't understand," he said.

Without the Knesset Speaker's signature the resignation does not take effect. "No man will sign a document he can't read. I respect the Arabic language, but it's a fundamental matter," Edelstein wrote on Twitter.

ISRAEL TO TRIPLE SIZE OF SETTLEMENT AMIHAI (JPost 8/8/18)

Israel plans to triple the area of the newly created Amihai settlement, so that its boundaries would include the Adei Ad outpost.

Such a move would allow for the legalization of Adei Ad, which was first built in 1998 with NIS 2.9 million from the Ministry of Construction and Housing.

According to the Talia Sasson's 2005 outpost report, it was never approved by the government or the Ministry of Defense. It is located on both state and private Palestinian property. Both Adei Ad and Amihai are located a short distance away from the Shiloh settlement.

The Civil Administration sent a letter to the left-wing NGO Yesh Din stating its intention to increase Amihai's boundaries.

The group had petitioned the High Court of Justice against the Adei Ad outpost in 2014 on behalf of four nearby Palestinian communities; Turmus Aya, Karyut, Jalud and Mughair.

It has asked the court to evacuate the outpost, because it was illegally built and its presence causes harm to the nearby Palestinian communities. The state has already told the court that it plans to legalize it.

Adei Ad is one of some 70 outposts which Israel is working on authorizing. In cases where an outpost is located outside of a settlement, like Adei Ad, Israel's preference has been to expand the boundaries of West Bank communities rather than creating a new settlement.

Since the 1993 Oslo Accords and until the end of the Obama Administration, Israel has largely refrained from creating new settlements.

It is unclear if it will continue this policy under the Trump Administration. For the first time in 25 years, Israel created an entirely new settlement in 2017, when it authorized the Amihai community for the 40 families who had lived in the evacuated Amona outpost.

In 2018, Israel agreed to transform the Havat Gilad outpost into a new settlement, either in its current location or nearby.

Yesh Din charged that the plan to expand Amihai's boundaries was an attempt to create a new territorial bloc in the heart of the West Bank that would also include the Jewish city of Ariel and the Shiloh settlement.

"This is a vicious and malicious expropriation plan with far-reaching implications, first and foremost for the residents of the Palestinian villages," Yesh Din said.

It added that the villages had petitioned the High Court in the hope it would protect them against acts of vandalism, violence and property damage.

The creation of a new settlement bloc is part of the government's plan to annex the West Bank and to legalize the outposts at the expense of the Palestinians, Yesh Din said.

Right-wing politicians in Netanyahu's government have been blunt about their intention to apply sovereignty to Judea and Samaria and to increase Jewish building and development in that area.

They have pushed back against any portrayal of the settlements as a stumbling block to peace with the Palestinians.

BAYIT YEHUDI LAUNCHES ANTI-HAREDI CAMPAIGN IN JERUSALEM (YNet 8/6/18)

Bayit Yehudi launched a campaign in Jerusalem in order to shake up the race for mayor of the city, claiming only members of its party will be able to effectively counter the ultra-Orthodox influence on the life in the capital.

The party does not actually have a representative running for the position and the three leading candidates currently in the race are: Ze'ev Elkin (Likud), member of the city council Ofer Berkowitz and Moshe Leon, who is running as an independent candidate.

All three are reinforcing the ultra-Orthodox message in order to increase their chances of winning. The Bayit Yehudi campaign explores this aspect as they put up banners around the city showing the three candidates wearing photoshopped ultra-Orthodox attire.

"While they are worried about their fate, only a Bayit Yehudi win will stop the influence of the ultra-Orthodox," exclaims the banners' slogan.

The goal of the campaign is to increase the number of its members in the city council—which currently has only two Bayit Yehudi members serving there—Hagit Moshe, head of the party's Jerusalem branch and Dov Kalmanovich.

"We have nothing against the Haredim, but the reality of life proves that making Jerusalem more and more ultra-Orthodox keeps the Zionist and secular public away from it," said a party's representative in the city's municipality.

The party's campaign is a strategic change since Kalmanovich, during his last term in office, voted with the ultra-Orthodox on various issues, such as against the decision to allow businesses to stay open in the city during the Shabbat.

The party reiterates that the campaign is about the composition of the next coalition in the municipality, no matter who wins the election.

"Elkin, Leon or Berkowitz, must not face the ultra-Orthodox by themselves. The religious Zionism factions must play a big part in the coalition in order to ensure that Jerusalem will be a capital of all Israeli society, not only of a small sector," said Hagit Moshe.

The data indicates that over the past years, the mayoral elections in the city have been decided by the ultra-Orthodox public.

In the 2013 election, Nir Barkat won by forming an alliances with the Haredim.

The National Union party strongly condemned the campaign saying it is designed to create a division between the right-wing factions.

"The National Union party wishes to distance itself from the painful campaign. Jerusalem is a city of unity, and creating division among the population is not our way. We're investigating with our partners how such a campaign could have gone ahead and we'll make sure it is shelved immediately. It is unacceptable to us and we apologize for the terrible mistake that has been made, and ask for forgiveness of all those who have been hurt by it," concluded the statement.

Chairman of the Bayit Yehudi party, Naftali Bennett, has also denounced the campaign saying he had no prior knowledge on the issue.

"The Bayit Yehudi party strongly condemns the elections campaign created by the party's Jerusalem branch. The leadership of the party on the national level had no prior knowledge on the matter and does not share the views represented in it," said the education minister via his official Twitter account.

INTERIOR MINISTER: I WILL NOT FORCE STORES TO CLOSE ON SHABBAT (Israel Hayom 8/7/18)

One day after Interior Minister and head of the ultra-Orthodox Shas party Aryeh Deri sparked a firestorm by refusing to approve municipal bylaws that allow shops to operate on Shabbat, he clarified his remarks, telling Israel Hayom on Monday that he does not plan to actively crack down on businesses.

The controversy revolves around recent efforts by ultra-Orthodox lawmakers to force the closure of shops on Shabbat, the Jewish day of rest. The efforts have elicited a backlash from secular Israelis who do not observe the Sabbath religious laws and wish to have the freedom to work or rest as they please.

Under new legislation known as the supermarket law, the interior minister has the authority to overrule municipal bylaws that allow businesses to operate on Shabbat.

The law, which is currently being challenged in court, grants the interior minister almost complete discretion in deciding whether to approve such bylaws, unlike the previous law that gave the interior minister a passive role

in the bylaw approval process.

Earlier this week, Deri struck down the bylaws of several municipalities that let businesses operate freely on Shabbat. His move drew widespread criticism. But in private conversations, Deri insisted he refused to approve the bylaws because they were procedurally flawed. He also stressed that once bylaws are approved, their enforcement is left to the local authorities.

"I am not going to force any store to close on Shabbat and I have no power to do so because the enforcement of Shabbat regulation is carried out by the municipalities themselves," Deri told Israel Hayom.

"Any mayor who wants to keep businesses open on Shabbat can do so, and it is at that mayor's discretion to decide how to enforce the law and how to issue fines."

Deri said that attacks on him involve "a great deal of ignorance and an embarrassing amount of shallowness," and that the supermarket law "has not forced any business to close on Shabbat; this is a well-known fact."

Deri says the law "cements what has long been the arrangement in Israel since its founding: that all bylaws require the approval of the interior minister, including those that regulate the operation of businesses."

He said the bylaws that were struck down had not been properly drafted and gave blanket permission to all businesses to operate on Shabbat without proper consideration as to how this would affect residents, forcing him to intervene.

He said the bylaws were just a tactical power grab by the mayors in order to make the businesses staying open on Shabbat a fait accompli "even before the High Court of Justice hands down its ruling on the matter."

"I don't see any compelling reason to force hundreds or even thousands of workers into slavery, seven days a week," he said, referring to concerns that if businesses operate on Shabbat, employees will be pressured to work on Saturdays.

He accused his detractors of "trying to make political hay over this matter on the backs of the ultra-Orthodox, telling us that the unenlightened haredi minister is imposing his way of life on others – but this could not be farther from the truth."

HYSTERIA OVER NATION-STATE LAW (Isi Leibler, JPost 8/7/18)

It is inevitable – and laudable – that there are debates and differences over most new legislation. However, that does not justify the global hysteria generated over the recently passed Nation-State Law, which the clear majority of Israelis support.

Many critics simply did not read the law, which is purely declarative and in no way detracts from the existing rights of minorities. Others merely echoed the exaggerated criticism in the press.

On the other hand, had the government not made certain mistakes, much of the criticism could largely have been preempted.

It should have accepted MK Benny Begin's amendment, which included two phrases: "full equality of rights for all its citizens" and "Jewish and democratic state." In practical terms, this was repeating the obvious but would have made it more difficult for those seeking to slander Israel.

The second error was the failure to informally consult minorities, especially the Druze whom Israeli Jews genuinely love and admire.

Many Druze have been deceived; the new law in no way discriminates against them. Because of the affection for them prevailing throughout the nation, some are cynically exploiting the situation and making demands. The government is highly unlikely to alter the law but will try to placate them by providing other sweeteners that would have been unnecessary had it consulted in advance with Druze community leaders. If the Druze persist in seeking to extort the government unreasonably, this will disappoint many Israeli Jews who heretofore have had only admiration for them.

The suggestion that this law denies the rights of any minority is humbug and allegations that it represents "extreme" nationalism would not be substantiated if one accepts the premise that Israel is a Jewish state. I would

in fact challenge critics to display one clause that denies the rights of minorities that were initially incorporated in Israel's Declaration of Independence. They were reaffirmed in Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty, passed in 1992, whose stipulated purpose was "to protect human dignity and liberty, in order to establish in a Basic Law the values of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state."

Is not Israel entitled, as the nation-state law says, "to exercise national self-determination" on behalf of the Jewish people without in any way depriving minorities such as the Arabs of their democratic rights?

Is not a Jewish state entitled to reinforce its national anthem, reiterate that Independence Day is a national holiday, restate support for its flag and encourage Jewish immigration? Is that a declaration of extreme nationalism?

Is not a Jewish state entitled to reiterate that its national language is Hebrew? In order to avoid any other misunderstanding, specific mention is made in this clause that this "does not harm the status given to the Arabic language before this law came into effect."

Is not a Jewish state entitled to reiterate its support for settlement construction as articulated in the Declaration of Independence?

The principal (but not sole) source of the shrill hysteria (as distinct from moderate critics) emanates from those with a record of demonizing or criticizing Israel. They include the European countries that have always sought to besmirch Israel, progressives and large segments of Diaspora Jewry, particularly Americans.

It is important to note that this law was democratically enacted and supported by the nation. A poll last week showed 58% of Israelis supported the bill with 38% opposing. The projected strength of Netanyahu's Likud in the next election also increased from 30 to 33 seats after the bill was passed.

The criticism voiced by the Europeans is particularly offensive because many of them have similar constitutions and are governed by similar laws. Most countries are officially Christian. Many are officially Muslim and a few are Buddhist. Where is the rationale for castigating Israel for describing itself as a Jewish state? Indeed, almost a dozen European countries, including England, have official state religions. The Basic Law is more liberal and does not stipulate that Judaism is the official religion of the state.

Many American Jews seized on this law to criticize Israel as a means of reinforcing their image as liberals. Some Jewish organizations that rarely engage in public criticism of Israel did so because of grassroots pressure, often emanating from liberal rabbis.

In Israel, the opposition parties bitterly condemned the law even though seven years ago, the now-defunct Kadima Party headed by Tzipi Livni, who now leads the charge of "radical nationalism," was promoting a very similar bill. In fairness, some of them claim they may not have opposed the bill had the government incorporated Begin's suggestions.

The leading elements hysterically assert that the bill is racist, discriminates against minorities and has transformed Israel into an apartheid and fascist state. They represent the far Left and their media mouthpiece is Haaretz. They do so because they ideologically oppose the concept of a Zionist state that this law endorses and seek to de-Judaize Israel, transforming it into "a state for all its citizens."

They are also frantic because this declarative law will need to be considered by the Supreme Court, which since the era of its former president Aharon Barak has been excessively interventionist and heavily tilted in a direction most Israelis oppose.

The shrieks from radical Arab Knesset members are consistent with their unremitting attacks on their own country. The allegations of apartheid from Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and other Palestinians are pathetic, considering that a Palestinian state would prohibit the entry of all but the most compliantly anti-Israel Jews.

The reality is that most Israeli Arabs are happy to live in Israel, which is stable and the only genuine democracy in a region of barbaric conflict and dictatorships. While they strive to elevate their roles in society, they enjoy a

higher standard of living and far better opportunities than they would in any Arab country. An increasing number are engaged in professions and one need only enter an Israeli hospital where Arab and Jewish doctors and nurses treat Jewish and Arab patients on a basis of equality, in order to repudiate slanders of apartheid or racism.

The rule of law applies to Arab citizens as it does to any other Israeli and they enjoy total freedom of religion.

The reality is that this law was designed to ratify classical Zionism, reject post-Zionism and reiterate that Israel is a Jewish state. Not a single clause can be construed as racist, denigrates minorities or suggests that they will be denied state support. Israel remains a democratic Jewish state with or without the law, which merely seeks to reinforce its identity.

There are legitimate grounds for criticizing the law, particularly errors of omission by the government due to a lack of foresight, but the hyperbole employed by some of those opposing it is malicious and will serve to foment hatred within Israel and provide aid to those nations seeking to besmirch us.

NEUTRALIZED AT THE LAST MINUTE (Yoav Limor, Israel Hayom 8/6/18)

The final stage of the Syrian civil war offers an opportunity, maybe the last one, for any entity that wants to eliminate threats without paying too high a price. The moment the war officially ends, which will happen soon, everything will become more complicated, from airstrikes to assassinations.

It is likely that this played a part in the killing of Syrian scientist Aziz Azbar over the weekend. The operation combined tactical and intelligence capabilities and a cost-benefit analysis. It took considerable time to gather the necessary intelligence, and the action needed to be precise, not only to ensure that it took out the target, but also to prevent collateral damage. The operational side was simpler, especially in light of the plethora of weapons available and the number of operatives in Syria looking for action.

The decision-making process for an operation like this one is complex. The rebel factions in Syria are uninhibited and would have acted without hesitation. But despite their claim of responsibility for the killing, it is unlikely they were behind it, not because they feel pity for the life of any Syrian official, but because Azbar was not an attractive target to them and was not worth the effort, certainly not as they are battling with their last breath.

It is more likely that others were more interested in Azbar's activities. He was a senior missile engineer, No. 3 in the Syrian weapons industry, a close associate of Syrian President Bashar Assad and the point where Iranian-Syrian-Hezbollah weapons interests converged.

For years, that weapons axis has been a focal point for Israel because of Hezbollah's attempts to arm itself, and because of the additional effort this past year to establish and arm Iranian militias in Syria. Azbar oversaw missile production in Syria, and according to foreign reports was recently involved in laying the groundwork for missile production in Lebanon as well. For Israel, this is a critical issue. According to the same reports, Israel took care to strike the weapons convoys on Syrian soil, before they entered Lebanon, to avoid an escalation with Hezbollah, which had made it clear that it would consider a strike in Lebanese territory to be a *casus belli*.

The manufacture of missiles in Lebanon, if it begins, would eliminate the need for weapons convoys and would allow Hezbollah to build its capabilities without concern. Taking Azbar out of the game will not stop anyone in Lebanon from gaining the ability to make their own missiles, but will definitely complicate things for Iran and Hezbollah, because he was not only a source of knowledge, but also someone both sides trusted. It will take time to find a replacement.

This is another stage in a long battle, as was the series of strikes in Syria attributed to Israel, at least three of which targeted the factory where Azbar worked. It is rare that killing one person changes everything, but in a war of shadows like this one, any delay caused to the other side, any time they are forced to suspect that they might have a mole, and every failure to acquire weapons staves off the threat, and by doing so keeps the next war at bay.