

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.

Issue 1094 • February 23, 2018 • 8 Adar 5778

SECURITY CABINET: NO LONGER STICKING THEIR NECKS OUT FOR THE PM (JPost 2/22/18)

When *The Jerusalem Post* asked a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's security cabinet Wednesday why he does not defend Netanyahu in interviews, he responded bluntly and honestly that his conscience limited what he could defend.

In the past, Likud politicians fought over who would go on top television and radio programs to advocate on the prime minister's behalf.

Now, the best Netanyahu got was a strange speech by Culture Minister Miri Regev in the Knesset in which she made grammatical errors in Hebrew and made a joke about whether the prime minister's kindergarten teacher would be arrested for giving him an extra cookie more than 60 years ago.

What the security cabinet minister did not say but his silence made clear was that he no longer saw any benefit in being the prime minister's proponent. For a long time, giving interviews and defending questionable policies and behavior could be seen by Likud politicians as a worthwhile investment.

By questioning so many former Netanyahu aides and advisers and putting a fair share under house arrest recently, the police have sent a message that speaking on the prime minister's behalf can do more harm than good.

That certainly could be gleaned from the testimony of Netanyahu's former bureau chief Shlomo Filber, who has turned state's witness against the prime minister. In the police testimony, which was leaked to Channel 2, he admitted that Netanyahu and his wife, Sara, had just "used him" all the years that he was an aide and an operator behind the scenes. According to the leaks, he witnessed plenty that was problematic over the years.

Filber, along with former Netanyahu chief of staff Ari Harow, took great personal risks when they returned to Netanyahu's inner circle after a healthy hiatus. Both ended up becoming reluctant state's witnesses.

Former Netanyahu spokesman Nir Hefetz went even further in his loyalty to Netanyahu. Unlike other aides who did their best to keep their distance from Sara, Hefetz became her close friend.

He strove to defend her in background briefings to the press, stressing that despite there being 70 witnesses and 16,500 documents in the multiple cases against her, the police recommendations were relatively minor, focusing only on meals ordered from a caterer despite the availability of an in-house cook. Hefetz mocked the charges against Benjamin Netanyahu as well, comparing the cigars Netanyahu received from Hollywood producer Arnon Milchen to the lavish gifts the Saudis gave visiting US President Donald Trump, which included matching bathrobes for him and his wife, Melania, made out of cheetah fur.

Media reports Wednesday night were conflicted about whether Hefetz would be offered to become a state's witness. If he does, then like Filber, he will have much to tell. But it could be that there will be no such offer and that he will end up going to prison for his actions helping the Netanyahus.

The same could hold true for Benjamin Netanyahu's trusted lawyers/advisers/ relatives David Shimron and Isaac Molcho.

The message has been heard loud and clear. In retrospect, it was a bad idea for the prime minister's former aides to stick their necks out for Netanyahu.

TRUMP'S ENVOY SEEKS UN SUPPORT FOR PEACE PLAN (Arutz-7 INN.com 2/22/18)

U.S. President Donald Trump's two top envoys on the Middle East told UN Security Council ambassadors that they hope for their support for the upcoming peace plan, diplomats said Wednesday, according to *AFP*.

Jason Greenblatt, Trump's envoy for Middle East peace, and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and adviser, met behind closed doors with the ambassadors on Tuesday, the report said.

During the one-hour meeting, the envoys did not share details of the Trump plan nor did they indicate when the U.S. administration planned to unveil its proposals, diplomats told *AFP*. "They asked for support at the time the plan comes out," said a diplomat, who asked not to be named. Another diplomat confirmed that Greenblatt and Kushner had made the request, even though no details of the plan were shared.

French Ambassador Francois Delattre said the U.S. administration was signalling its willingness to engage on the Middle East peace process and its respect for the Security Council by dispatching the two envoys.

"They talked about the progress in their efforts and contacts, and this was useful," said Delattre.

While France said it would consider Abbas's proposal for an international conference, Delattre stressed that the United States plays an "indispensable" role in the search for an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement.

Abbas has refused to accept the United States as a mediator in the peace process ever since Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

On Tuesday, after Abbas's speech, the State Department said the United States would consider supporting the involvement of other countries in Israeli-PA peace talks in the future if it believes it would be helpful in reaching an accord.

HAMAS WILL PAY FOR BORDER ATTACK, DEFENSE MINISTER WARNS (Israel Hayom 2/21/18)

Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman toured the Israel-Gaza Strip border on Tuesday and visited the site where four soldiers were wounded on Saturday

Israel Report is a Student Publication of

Torah Academy of Bergen County

Alex Ostrin, Yoav Zolty, Editors-in-Chief

Akiva Sturm, Eli Jarashov, Ezra Sepowitz and Bentzion Rotblat, Editors

We are proud to be distributed by these institutions, though they do not necessarily support or condone any of the material published:

Anshei Chesed Cong., Boynton Beach, FL	Hillel at Brandeis University
Bergen County High School of Jewish Studies	Hillel at California State University - Long Beach
Boca Raton Synagogue, FL	Hillel at Columbia University
Carmel School, Hong Kong	Hillel at Johns Hopkins University
Cong. Agudath Achim, Bradley Beach, NJ	Hillel at Yale University
Cong. Ahavas Achim, Highland Park, NJ	Hillel High School, Deal NJ
Cong. Ahavath Achim, Fairfield, CT	Jewish Center of Teaneck, NJ
Cong. Anshe Shalom, Jamaica Estates, NY	Kehillas Bais Yehudah Tzvi, Cedarhurst, NY
Cong. Anshe Shalom, New Rochelle, NY	Kemp Mill Synagogue, Silver Spring, MD
Cong. Beth Aaron, Teaneck, NJ	Mizrachi Shul, Johannesburg, SA
Cong. Beth Shalom, Monroe Twp, NJ	North Shore Hebrew Academy HS, NY
Cong. Bnai Yeshurun, Teaneck, NJ	Suburban Torah Center, Livingston, NJ
Cong. Etz Ahaim, Highland Park, NJ	The Learning Shul, Columbia, SC
Cong. Ohr Torah, Edison, NJ	Woodsburgh, NY Minyan
Cong. Rinat Yisrael, Teaneck, NJ	Young Israel Bet Tefilah of Aberdeen, NJ
Cong. Shomrei Torah, Fair Lawn, NJ	Young Israel of Brookline, MA
Cong. Sons of Israel, Allentown, PA	Young Israel of East Brunswick, NJ
Cong. Zichron Mordechai, Teaneck, NJ	Young Israel of Fort Lee, NJ
Cong. Zichron R. M. Feinstein, Brooklyn, NY	Young Israel of Hancock Park, CA
Delray Orthodox Synagogue, Delray Beach, FL	Young Israel of Holliswood, NY
East Denver Orthodox Synagogue, CO	Young Israel of Houston, TX
Flatbush Park Jewish Center, Mill Basin, NY	Young Israel of New Hyde Park, NY
Harvard University Library	Young Israel of North Woodmere, NY
Hebrew Academy of Long Beach, NY	Young Israel of New Rochelle, NY
Hillel at Baruch College	Young Israel of Sharon, MA

YI Shomrai Emunah, Silver Spring, MD

We encourage our readers to subscribe to our sources on the internet. For more information or to subscribe by e-mail, reach us at IsraelReport@tabc.org



by a bomb attached to the security fence.

Lieberman said all signs point to Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, as being behind the attack and vowed the Islamist terrorist group would be made to pay for it.

"It is clear that Hamas was behind the event, which obviously has consequences and implications," he said.

He criticized Hamas for "using the residents of Gaza as ammunition," saying, "When Hamas sends civilians to clash with IDF soldiers on the [border] fence it knows the price entailed.

"Hamas is also using civilians to carry out terrorist attacks during the demonstrations. We find that reprehensible, and we won't be party to this game. Hamas' leaders, who lack for nothing, don't send their relatives to clash with IDF soldiers, they send the most impoverished people to do it. That speaks to their [Hamas leaders'] character.

"Terrorism and poverty go hand in hand. Hamas is preventing economic growth in Gaza. It can only recruit terrorists and suicide bombers via poverty and despair, so Hamas is doing all it can to maintain poverty and despair."

GOC Southern Command Maj. Gen. Eyal Zamir accompanied Lieberman on his tour and briefed him on recent developments.

After the tour, Lieberman visited the wounded soldiers at Soroka University Medical Center in Beersheba.

"The IDF will settle the score with the perpetrators and their dispatchers," he promised them.

IDF REVEALS IT THWARTED ATTEMPTED ISLAMIC STATE BOMBING OF AUSTRALIAN FLIGHT (Times of Israel 2/21/18)

The Israeli army on Wednesday revealed that the Military Intelligence Unit 8200 foiled an Islamic State attempt to bomb a flight from Australia last August.

"The unit provided exclusive intelligence that led to the prevention of an air attack by the Islamic State in 2017 in Australia," a senior IDF officer said.

"The foiling of the attack saved dozens of innocent lives and proved Unit 8200's position as a major player in the intelligence fight against the Islamic State," the officer said, on condition of anonymity.

Wednesday's revelation was an unusual move for the Israeli army, which generally keeps mum on the operations of the secretive Unit 8200, which is similar to the American National Security Agency, collecting information from electronic communication, also referred to as signals intelligence.

Later in the day Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu thanked the unit for foiling the attack.

"Thank you to the Israeli intelligence services. We revealed today that the security agencies prevented the shooting down of an Australian airliner. This is just one of the dozens of terrorist attacks that we have stopped around the world. [The intelligence services] deserve all the support we can give, not only for protecting the citizens of Israel, but for protecting people all over the world," he said in a speech to American Jewish leaders.

Indeed, this prowess in intelligence gathering and counter-terrorism is a central selling point for Israel in its efforts to create and maintain relationships with foreign countries.

Unit 8200 is one of the largest units in the IDF.

According to the prime minister, the unit is the "second largest" national security agency in the world, after only that of the United States.

"The United States is 42 times larger than the State of Israel. Its NSA is not 42 times the size of Israel's NSA, it's not even 10 times the size," Netanyahu boasted to business leaders in Munich on Friday.

ISRAELI SCIENTISTS COMPLETE MOCK MARS MISSION IN NEGEV DESERT (YNet 2/18/18)

A team of six Israeli researchers on Sunday ended a four-day Mars habitat experiment in Israel's Negev desert where they simulated living conditions on the Red Planet, Israel's Science and Technology Ministry said.

The experiment was held near the isolated township of Mitzpe Ramon, whose surroundings resemble the Martian environment in its geology, aridity, appearance and desolation, the ministry said.

The participants were investigating various fields relevant to a future Mars mission, including satellite communications, the psychological effects of isolation, radiation measurements and searching for life signs in soil.

Participant Guy Ron, a nuclear physics professor from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, said the project was not only intended to look for new approaches in designing a future mission to the Red Planet but also to increase public interest.

"D-Mars is half about the research, and the other half is about the outreach. A major part of this project is getting public interest and getting students interested in space," he said.

The D-Mars project was being held in Israel for the first time in cooperation with the Israel Space Agency. It is one of a number of Mars simulation projects taking place worldwide.

CURRENT ISRAELI BIRTH RATES UNSUSTAINABLE, SAYS EXPERT (YNet 2/21/18)

The creation of large Jewish families has long been viewed by many as a patriotic duty in the country's existential struggle.

With today's population in excess of 8.7 million Jews and Arabs (74.5% and 20.9%, respectively) averaging 3.1 children per family, the nation could face an overpopulation crisis within 35 years exacerbated by a profoundly limited infrastructure, experts contend.

The issue took center stage Tuesday at a joint conference of the University of Maryland, Tel Aviv University and Zafuf: The Israel Forum for Population, Environment, and Society, called "Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Culture and Sustainable Population Dynamics."

Prof. Alon Tal, chairman of Tel Aviv University's department of public policy, said the conference was the first international gathering of academic experts to focus on the issue of overpopulation in Israel.

"Most of our research about this issue has been limited to economics," said Tal.

"Now, we're really talking about the sociology and the culture of Israelis having lots of children, why they have lots of children, and what might be a strategy for changing the paradigm where people have less children for the good of the nation."

According to Tal, Israel is the second-most densely populated country in the developed world and has the highest per capita rate of population growth.

He added that Israel's population is growing by more than two million people each decade, with its average 3.1 children per family dwarfing normative rates within Western countries, most of which average 1.7 children.

"So we're an outlier. And if people think there is a problem now, it is going to be catastrophic," he cautioned. "We are basically on a treadmill that is running faster and faster, and the gap between infrastructure and demand is getting bigger and bigger."

The good news, Tal said, is that Israelis are increasingly aware of the bad effects of high population density, including limited accessibility to resources; crowded hospitals, classrooms, and roads; depletion of biodiversity; and mounting greenhouse emissions.

"This is the result of public policies and cultural norms," he explained.

While noting that there is no "magic number" as to when the population level will reach crisis proportions, Tal said if the growth rates for families do not slow down, within 35 years there will be roughly 15 million citizens.

"David Ben-Gurion encouraged people to have many children, but now we need to have a collective conversation as a nation and realize that while there was once a period in Israeli history when having lots of children was absolutely a patriotic thing to do, today it is an unpatriotic thing to do because it harms the common good," he said.

Asked how to effectively address the issue without taking the draconian

approach of China, Tal said society must cease incentivizing large families by emphasizing the limits of sustainable growth, making birth control more accessible and lessening abortion standards.

"We have to address this through public policy by making it clear there are physical limits, and teach children at a young age that having two children is the right number," he said.

In terms of the wide-held belief that Jews must continue to outpace Arab birthrates in order to ensure a Jewish majority, Tal said that race has already been won. "That used to be an absolutely valid argument, but today Arabs are averaging roughly 40,000 births a year and the Jews are averaging over 100,000. So if there was a demographic battle, it's over," he said.

ISRAELI GROWS 'MINI BRAIN' IN A TEST TUBE (Times of Israel 2/20/18)

An Israeli research team has discovered a way to grow a miniature version of the human brain that undergoes wrinkling in a similar way to a real brain, paving the way for scientists to better understand a congenital defect.

Roughly one in 30,000 babies are born with smooth brains. They go on to suffer from severe developmental difficulties and a relatively low life expectancy.

Scientists from the Weizmann Institute of Science in the central Israeli city of Rehovot sought to understand more about the physical and biological factors that cause the brain to wrinkle, but with existing methods for growing in vitro brains, it was very hard to monitor development.

That led the Institute's Dr. Eyal Karzbrun to develop a new approach to growing organoids — simplified, miniature versions of bodily organs produced in test tubes.

In order to allow for high-quality optical imaging and microscope tracking of wrinkle development, Karzbrun managed to use embryonic stem cells to grow a "mini-brain" that was round and flat with a thin space in the middle.

By the second week of the tiny organoid's growth and development, the team was able to observe wrinkles beginning to appear and then to deepen. Karzbrun said, "This is the first time that folding has been observed in organoids, apparently due to the architecture of our system," he said.

The findings were reported Monday in *Nature Physics*.

The research team then grew a mini-brain incorporating a gene carried by babies with smooth brain syndrome that the institute's Prof. Orly Reiner had identified in 1993.

The organoids with the mutated gene grew to the same proportions as the others, but developed few folds. The ones they did develop were very different in shape from the normal wrinkles.

Using atomic force microscopy, which yields a high level of resolution on extremely tiny surfaces, they found physical and biological differences between the cells in the two little "brains," discovering, for example, that the normal brain cells were about twice as stiff as the soft, mutated ones.

"We now have a much better understanding of what makes a brain wrinkled or, in cases of those with one mutated gene, smooth," Reiner said.

The researchers plan to continue developing their approach, in the belief that it could open new possibilities for understanding developmental disorders such as microcephaly, epilepsy and schizophrenia.

INTEL TO INVEST \$4.5 BILLION IN ITS ISRAELI OPERATIONS IN 2018 (Israel Hayom 2/21/18)

Multinational technology giant Intel is poised to invest some \$4.5 billion in its Israeli ventures this year.

Intel Israel currently employs 11,000 people. According to the company's website, Intel has bought goods and services from local Israeli suppliers to the tune of \$10 billion over the past decade, with exports amounting to \$50 billion. The company's exports for 2017 totaled \$3.6 billion.

"Intel has decided to invest billions of dollars in Israel in 2018," Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon told the Knesset Finance Committee this week, adding that he had received confirmation about the impending investment

from Intel officials.

According to a report in the financial daily *Globes* on Monday, Kahlon revealed the planned investment after receiving a positive response from Intel to an incentive package offered to the chipmaker in exchange for the investment.

Intel stands to receive 20% to 30% of its planned \$4.5 billion investment back in Israeli government grants.

The deal is reportedly awaiting the approval of a joint committee of officials from the Finance Ministry, Economy and Industry Ministry, and Israel Tax Authority.

Intel's facility in the southern town of Kiryat Gat is considered one of the world's most advanced chip fabrication plants. The company invested \$6 billion in expanding and upgrading it during 2016 and 2017.

According to *Globes*, Intel has also been in talks with government officials about an additional investment in the operations of Jerusalem based driver-assistance tools developer Mobileye, which it acquired for \$15.3 billion last year.

THE ISRAELI-PA CONFLICT: THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX (Maj. Gen (res) Gershon Hacohen, Arutz-7 INN.com 2/21/18)

In a recent lecture on the topic of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, *New York Times* journalist Thomas Friedman wondered how the highly creative state of Israel had not found a creative solution to the conflict beyond the quest for the best way to separate from the Palestinians.

In order to think outside the box, one has to be familiar with the structure of the box and its intricacies, especially with the lid. As far as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is concerned, four basic assumptions, firmly endorsed by the EU and the US administrations since the days of President Clinton, have kept the box tightly closed:

- The solution to the conflict must be geographically confined to the territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.
- The solution requires a fully sovereign Palestinian state.
- The border between Israel and Palestine must be based on the 1967 lines with minor revisions.
- The 'West Bank' and the Gaza Strip must constitute a single political entity.

Leaving no room for negotiations, these four assumptions have led time and again to a dead end. Gaza's economic plight, for example, could have been substantially relieved had Egypt been prepared, with extensive international assistance, to expand the strip into the open spaces of the Sinai desert in the direction of al-Arish.

The prevailing, conventional Israeli and international discourse has placed Israel at a conceptual crossroads between only two possibilities: preserving the Jewish-democratic state by withdrawing to the June 4 lines with small adjustments (that is, retaining the settlement blocs) or ending up with a conflict-ridden, binational state leading inevitably to an apartheid regime. Creative thinking of the kind sought by Friedman should be able to salvage Israel from the trap of having to choose between these polar and impossible alternatives.

The creativity of Einstein's theory of general relativity could provide inspiration for escaping this conceptual fixation. Einstein did not offer new laboratory discoveries. He simply proposed a different general theory in which the invariance of the speed of light becomes a law of nature. In comparable fashion, creative thinking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict entails recognizing that the narrow landmass between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River cannot be divided into two fully-fledged states.

It is not only the Jewish 'settlements' in the 'West Bank' that make it difficult to partition the Land of Israel. The difficulty stems from a range of geophysical factors: communal, ecological, transportation-related, economic, and those involving water, sewage, and electricity infrastructures. The difficulty also arises, of course, from the security aspects of partitioning the land.

Since the time of the September 1993 Oslo Accord, two different models

have emerged. In one, situated in the 'West Bank', the territory in question has been organized – through its division into Areas A, B, and C – into a kind of Palestinian-Israeli coexistence marked by varied forms of governance. The second model, situated in the Gaza Strip, entails a binary division: “They are there, we are here,” with a fence, a rigid and uncompromising boundary, between Israel and the Hamas-controlled territory.

The path to creative thinking begins with pondering the different patterns of security activity that have emerged in Gaza and the 'West Bank'. In the Gaza model of total separation, Israel's use of military force requires considerable resources: tanks, warplanes, and, from time to time, high-intensity military operations, along with huge investments in counteracting the extensive tunnel network. In the West Bank model, by contrast, security is organized in a hybrid spatial balance with daily meeting points between Israelis and Palestinian Arabs, as a dynamic of economic cooperation that includes an Israeli civilian presence makes the massive use of military power unnecessary. When it comes to quality of life, the 'West Bank' model turns out to be far more beneficial to both sides.

A creative solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must thus start with appreciating the advantages of the hybrid spatial model that has emerged in the 'West Bank', notably the powers granted to the Palestinian Authority as far back as January 1996 in Areas A and B. Thinking out of the box, then, means discarding the stillborn paradigm of total separation in the 'West Bank'.

COULD NETANYAHU SURVIVE AND WILL ISRAEL'S GOVERNMENT COLLAPSE? THREE SCENARIOS (Allison Kaplan Sommer, Ha'aretz 2/22/18)

At first, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu looked as if he might ride out the corruption storm raging around him (at least temporarily). After the police recommendations last Tuesday that he be indicted for bribery, fraud and breach of trust in two of the corruption cases involving him, he initially stood strong, issuing a defiant statement.

Politically, he maintained strong support within his Likud party, with no one daring to even speculate on who might take over in a post-Netanyahu world. Similarly, his key governing coalition partners said they would adopt a wait-and-see approach, committing to stand by him at least until the attorney general made his final decision on whether the prime minister would face criminal charges.

But the cards were reshuffled Tuesday with two bombshells: the first, that a confidant (aka henchman) of Netanyahu's was suspected of offering the job of attorney general to a former judge, in exchange for her killing a case against the premier's wife, Sara Netanyahu.

But potentially more significant was the news that Shlomo Filber, the former director general of the Communications Ministry, had turned state's evidence and would share what is presumed to be highly damaging testimony regarding Netanyahu's role in what is known as Case 4000. This case involves the Israeli telecom giant Bezeq, whose controlling shareholder is Netanyahu's friend Shaul Elovitch.

If Filber testifies that Netanyahu directed him to make decisions benefiting Bezeq, and acknowledges that the positive news coverage of the Netanyahu family on a Bezeq-owned news site was a quid pro quo – many pundits are saying the bribery case against Netanyahu appears to be open-and-shut.

Netanyahu has been declared, depending on the preferred metaphor of any given TV talking head, a “dead man walking” or a “lame duck” – officially running the country, but drained of any real authority.

The atmosphere is reminiscent of the United States during the Watergate era (1973-74), with every day bringing new revelations. So what are the possibilities facing the prime minister moving forward?

Netanyahu government falls: New elections are held

The most dramatic scenario would occur if one or more of Netanyahu's coalition partners – possibly one of the parties headed by a leader who

aspires to replace him in the Prime Minister's Office – decides to quit the government.

If none of the parties currently in the opposition steps up to replace them and save the coalition – and that seems highly unlikely given the current circumstances – the government would officially dissolve. New elections would be called as soon as possible, presumably in the spring or early summer.

Several political parties are already scrambling in preparation for this eventuality. Zionist Union leader Avi Gabbay – whose party is currently the second largest in the Knesset – sent a letter to party members on Tuesday, declaring that “the Netanyahu era is over. We must prepare for an election soon.”

Netanyahu steps down but Likud-led government remains

If Netanyahu's grip on Likud slips far enough, and coalition parties are sufficiently reluctant to give up their positions of power, a deal could be struck between these parties and Likud – with or without Netanyahu's participation. In such a scenario, Netanyahu would step down from the Likud leadership but the Likud-led coalition would remain in place, with the same same ministries and a new prime minister chosen from within Likud.

The move could be framed as either permanent or temporary – an idea to which Netanyahu might be more amenable. Interestingly, while this solution has not been publicly discussed by any members of the coalition, it has been floated by prominent opposition leaders. Yesh Atid Chairman Yair Lapid (who provided key testimony in one of the cases against Netanyahu) has proposed that Netanyahu take a “leave of absence” and “step aside” until the situation is resolved, even if there are no plans for new elections.

Netanyahu hangs on

Some of the party leaders in Netanyahu's coalition have ridden out their own corruption scandals – ministers like Avigdor Lieberman and Arye Dery. This could make them sympathetic enough to maintain a “wait and see” approach, even in the face of the ever-widening and worsening list of suspicions and accusations against Netanyahu.

They are also very comfortable with their jobs heading powerful ministries, and it's far from certain whether a new Knesset election would grant them the level of support needed to keep them there. For example, in the most recent poll about how the public would vote if an election were held tomorrow, Dery's Shas party would not even garner enough votes to gain Knesset representation.

Another volatile factor that might keep the current government in place is the fragile security situation.

Any major military conflict – on the northern front with Lebanon and Syria, or in the Gaza Strip with Hamas – could push elected officials and the general public to “circle the national wagons,” and put political divisions aside in order to project a stronger and more stable image to Israel's enemies.

Within Likud itself, Netanyahu has worked hard for years to make sure he has no natural successor. There is no figure within the party perceived as being able to fill his shoes.

More importantly, he has a powerful base of party loyalists who believe he is such a strong and effective figure that they are prepared to overlook any alleged personal foibles – be they cigars and champagne, or favors to wealthy media barons in exchange for positive coverage for his family.

Much like the acquiescence of the Republican Party to Donald Trump, potential aspirants to the Likud leadership are afraid that a direct attack on Netanyahu will alienate that loyal base and harm their own political futures. For that reason, they would prefer to see prosecutors and judges bring Netanyahu down than do it themselves.

As long as that fear persists, Netanyahu has a chance of holding onto power by his fingernails – as the nation watches and waits for his fate to be decided by the judiciary.