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## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Wednesday, July 12*

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# News Excerpts

July 12, 2017

## Jerusalem Post

### **Ya'alon Pulls No Punches: Bibi Will Absolutely Be Indicted**

Former Israeli defense minister Moshe Ya'alon pulled no punches when, on prime time US television Tuesday night, he announced his belief that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, will be indicted on corruption charges. CNN's Christiane Amanpour could hardly believe what the former IDF Chief of Staff had just said. There are serious charges and there are serious investigations underway about the prime minister and the issue of corruption. How do you think that is going to end up?" asked Amanpour. "By indictment. That's my assessment and belief," answered Ya'alon. "Too many issues are under investigation, and questions. I believe that in the end we will witness indictment."

See also, ["Former Navy Commander Marom Detained in Israeli Submarine Corruption Probe" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

See also, ["Netanyahu's Lawyer Being Held in Submarine Corruption Deal Inquiry" \(The Guardian\)](#)

## BICOM

### **Bibi Leads Polls Despite Ongoing Submarine Sale Investigation**

Two new polls indicate Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is still Israel's preferred choice to lead the country. According to a poll published by *Channel 2 News*, a day after Avi Gabbay was elected as head of the Labor Party, if elections were held tomorrow Netanyahu's Likud party would receive 24 seats to Gabbay's 20. The poll also indicates Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid Party, which had become the most popular party over the past year, would follow closely behind Gabbay with 18 seats.

See also, ["Two Polls Indicate Netanyahu Still Untouchable" \(Ynet News\)](#)

## Times of Israel

### **Bibi Meets w/Trump Envoy Amid Reported US Peace Push**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday met with US President Donald Trump's peace envoy to the Middle East Jason Greenblatt, following reports earlier in the day that the US would soon announce a resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Earlier Wednesday, the pan-Arabic Al-Hayat daily reported that the US intends to facilitate talks between Israel and the Palestinians, which Trump will "soon" be calling for. The daily quoted Greenblatt as telling a senior Palestinian official on Tuesday that Israel had agreed to "slow down" settlement construction during formal negotiations between Palestinians and Israel.

See also, ["Israel Denies It Agreed to Settlement Slowdown During Talks" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

## Ha'aretz

### **Two Pal. Killed in Clashes w/Israeli Forces in WB Refugee Camp**

Israeli forces carrying out a raid in the West Bank refugee camp of Jenin early Wednesday came under attack by residents armed with firebombs. Palestinian sources said two Palestinians were killed and two others were wounded as a result of the clashes. The Israeli army said the forces came under a hail of dozens of makeshift explosives and gunfire from rooftops while the infantry unit was carrying out an operation in the refugee camp. When the forces returned fire, a resident later identified as Mohammed Salah, 20, sustained bullets to his head and chest and died at the scene.

## **Security Cabinet to Discuss Kalkilya Construction Plans Today**

The security cabinet is scheduled to discuss today the plan to expand the city limits of Kalkilya. That plan has been a source of tension between settler leaders and cabinet ministers, who have come under pressure from the settlers to vote against. Samaria Regional Council Chairman Yossi Dagan has spent the past number of days trying to persuade the Likud ministers Yisrael Katz, Gilad Erdan and Zeev Elkin—all members of the security cabinet—to adopt the position that has been taken by Naftali Bennett and Ayelet Shaked, who voted against the plan when it was first presented to the security cabinet. Dagan has also been working to persuade Minister Yoav Galant of Kulanu to oppose the plans. Figures on the right have said that it is still unclear whether Galant will vote in favor or against the plan.

See also, [\*"Divisive Expansion Plan Highlights Crowded West Bank City's Plight" \(Times of Israel\)\*](#)

### NRG

## **Saeb Erekat Very Ill; PA Intel Director Appointed to Replace Him**

Saeb Erekat, the head of the Palestinian negotiating team, is very ill. Palestinian sources told *NRG* that Erekat can no longer fulfill his duties and that Commander of the General Intelligence Service Maj. Gen. Majed Faraj has replaced him. The Palestinian sources said that the reason for Erekat's replacement is a worsening of medical problems from which he has been suffering over the past several years. The Palestinian source said that the process of transferring responsibility for negotiations and the Palestinians' foreign relations to Faraj was completed in an orderly manner, and that Faraj, who is considered to be Abu Mazen's right-hand man, has overseen the talks with the Americans ever since the American presidential elections.

See also, [\*"Palestinian Chief Negotiator Erekat in Immediate Need of Lung Transplant" \(i24 News\)\*](#)

### Jerusalem Post

## **State Department Shortages Under Trump Are Hurting Israel**

Carmel Shama HaCohen, Israel's ambassador to UNESCO, is second to none in his admiration for the Trump administration's United Nations envoy, Nikki Haley. Shama HaCohen appreciated Haley's efforts in trying to head off last week's vote by UNESCO's Heritage Committee naming Hebron's Old City an endangered heritage site. And he believes the joint U.S.-Israeli bid to kill a resolution Israel saw as one-sided might have succeeded had a U.S. official of Haley's caliber been onsite in Krakow, where the vote took place. "We didn't have the spirit that was strong enough," Shama HaCohen said in an interview. Crystal Nix-Hines, the Obama administration's UNESCO envoy, left on January 20. The Trump administration's failure to replace her is part of a broader slowdown in naming top State Department positions. According to reports, fewer than 10 of the approximately 200 State Department positions that require nomination and confirmation have been filled. Shama HaCohen, a blunt-speaking former Likud member of Knesset, said the absence of Israel's most important ally at UNESCO was having far-reaching effects on defending his country.

## **Polls: Gabbay Surges Past Yesh Atid**

By Arik Bender and Yuval Shapira

- **Avi Gabbay's election has had an immediate impact on the electoral map, according to several polls. Two polls that were published last night by Channel Two News and Channel Ten News show the Zionist Union surging ahead impressively, overtaking Yesh Atid under Yair Lapid's leadership after a lengthy period in which the party lagged in the polls.**
- **The poll run by Channel Two News gave the Zionist Union 20 seats, whereas Channel Ten News' poll found that the Zionist Union would win 24 seats, if elections were held today. The big loser from Gabbay's election is Lapid, whose party is no longer the second-largest. Yesh Atid received 18 seats in Channel Two's poll and 16 in Channel Ten's.**
- **The Jewish Home party emerges stronger in both polls, receiving 13 seats on Channel Two and 14 on Channel Ten. The results for the Joint List are surprising: Channel Two's poll found it retaining its strength with 13 seats, Channel Ten's poll found that the party would plunge to just eight seats.**
- **Another person who takes a blow from Gabbay's election is Kulanu Chairman Moshe Kahlon. Kulanu loses two seats in Channel Two's poll and four in Channel Ten's. Yisrael Beiteinu rises in strength from its current five seats to eight and seven in Channel Two and Channel Ten's polls respectively.**
- **Meretz remains stable with five seats, whereas a change in balance is recorded among the Haredi parties. UTJ emerges as the larger Haredi party with seven seats, as opposed to just six for Shas in Channel Two's poll; in Channel Ten's poll the balance was six to five seats for UTJ.**
- **On the question of who is best-suited to be prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu continues to lead by a large majority, with 37% and 34% in the two polls. Lapid no longer comes in second as the person best-suited to be prime minister, receiving 12% in both polls and trailing behind Gabbay, who received 14% and 13% in the polls.**
- **Channel Ten's pollsters also asked respondents to who is best-suited to be prime minister, when they could only choose either Gabbay or Netanyahu. Here the results were far more clear-cut in Netanyahu's favor, who won 51% as opposed to Gabbay's 25%.**
- **Channel Two's poll was conducted by Mano Geva and Dr. Mina Tzemah; Channel Ten's poll was conducted by Professor Camil Fuchs.**

*Arik Bender is a Parliamentary reporter and Yuval Shapira is a contributor, both for Ma'ariv.*

### **Summary:**

***Avi Gabbay's election has had an immediate impact on the electoral map, according to several polls. Two polls that were published last night by Channel Two News and Channel Ten News show the Zionist Union surging ahead impressively, overtaking Yesh Atid under Yair Lapid's leadership after a lengthy period in which the party lagged in the polls.***

## **Israel to American Jews: You Just Don't Matter**

By Thomas Friedman

- To the casual observer, Israel has never looked more secure and prosperous. Its Arab neighbors are in disarray. Iran's nuclear program has been mothballed for a while. The Trump team could not be friendlier and the Palestinians could not be weaker. All's quiet on the Tel Aviv front. ...
- Look again. In fact, the foundations of Israel's long-term national security are cracking.
- Under the leadership of Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu, Israel is overstressing itself by simultaneously erasing the line between itself and the Palestinians — essentially absorbing 2.5 million Palestinians, which could turn Israel into a de facto Jewish-Arab binational state — and drawing a line between itself and the Jewish diaspora, particularly the U.S. Jewish community that has been so vital for Israel's security, diplomatic standing and remarkable economic growth.
- Netanyahu is setting himself up to be a pivotal figure in Jewish history — the leader who burned the bridges to a two-state solution and to the Jewish diaspora at the same time.
- I won't waste much time on Bibi's deft manipulation of President Trump to shift all the blame onto the Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas for the absence of progress in the peace process. Bibi masterfully distracted Trump with a shiny object — a video of extreme statements by Abbas (with no mention of extremist actions by Israeli settlers).
- It worked perfectly to deflect the U.S. president from pressing the relevant questions: "Bibi, you win every debate, but meanwhile every day the separation of Israel from the Palestinians grows less likely, putting Israel on a 'slippery slope toward apartheid,' as former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak recently warned. Where is your map? What are you going to do with 420,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank? Where is your imagination for how to reverse this trend that will inevitably lead to the end of Israel as a Jewish democratic state?"
- But now an even bigger threat looms. In recent weeks, Netanyahu collaborated with the Orthodox Jewish parties in his right-wing ruling coalition to deal a double blow to the non-Orthodox Jewish diaspora living around the world, particularly in America. There are roughly six million Jews in Israel, six million in the U.S. and four million spread elsewhere. About 75 percent of the 10 million diaspora Jews are non-Orthodox, mostly followers of the Reform and Conservative streams of Judaism.
- First, in order not to risk his hold on power, Netanyahu bowed to the demands of the Orthodox parties and canceled a 2016 agreement to create a distinct egalitarian prayer space adjacent to the Western Wall of the ancient Jewish temple in Jerusalem — the holiest site of the Jewish faith — where men and women of the non-Orthodox movements could pray together. The Orthodox rabbis who control the Western Wall insist that men pray in one area and women in a separate, smaller area.

- At the same time, Bibi caved and endorsed an Orthodox party bill in the Knesset that handed the ultra-Orthodox what amounts to a monopoly over conversions to Judaism in Israel “by pulling government recognition for private conversions” — basically those done by non-Orthodox rabbis, *The Times of Israel* reported. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency pointed out that Israel’s Orthodox parties and Chief Rabbinate essentially control “all Jewish marriage in Israel, and immigrants who wish to wed there must first prove they are Jewish according to Orthodox law. ... The Chief Rabbinate’s antipathy to Reform and Conservative rabbis is well documented.”
- As an editorial in *The Forward* in New York put it, Netanyahu “just gave the finger to a huge chunk of American Jews and, by doing so, dangerously upset the already precarious relationship between the Israeli government and the diaspora.”
- After an outcry led by the American pro-Israel lobby Aipac, Bibi negotiated a six-month freeze on putting the conversion legislation in effect. But it is a time bomb.
- How could this have happened? I asked Gidi Grinstein, founder of the Reut Group, a leading Israeli public policy research/strategy institute, and the author of “Flexigidity,” a really smart book about the sources of Jewish survival and the relationship between Israel and world Jewry today.
- “This is a moment of truth for Israel’s national security and ethos,” said Grinstein. “Does Israel view itself as the nation-state of Israelis or as the nation-state of the entire Jewish people — nearly 60 percent of whom live outside of Israel? Is the purpose of Israel to serve the continuing resilience, prosperity and existence of the Jewish people, as the founders of Zionism envisioned, or just its own well-being? That is the question at stake now.”
- If you think it’s the latter, you’d better speak out. Former Israeli ambassador to the U.S. Michael Oren did not mince words about this moment, telling *The Jerusalem Post* that the machinations of Bibi and the Orthodox parties constituted an “abandonment of Zionism. The [Western Wall] belongs to the Jewish people as a whole.”
- For years, said Grinstein, “many non-Orthodox, including myself, tried to plaster over the tension on this issue, thinking pragmatism would prevail.” While complaining about the Orthodox rabbis, “we pointed out that a couple can have a civil marriage abroad, which will be recognized in Israel,” and that Reform and Conservative rabbis were always *de facto* respected in Israel. That’s why “the recent government decision is like a punch in the stomach to so many,” he added.
- Now many diaspora Jews are seeing the true double standard by which the Israeli state and society view them, Grinstein noted: “For years the diaspora’s rabbis were not recognized by Israel’s government, but their political support was sought and their congregants’ money was requested. Israeli politicians who voted against the diaspora’s interests in the Israeli Parliament begged for the stage at the Aipac convention in Washington, with all its perks. Well, that game may be over, and the recent government decision may turn out to be the straw that broke the camel’s back.”

- Israelis have long taken for granted the fact that America — the world’s greatest superpower — is a steadfast supporter of Israel in the U.N., looks the other way on settlements, secures Israel’s technological edge over its enemies through defense systems like the Iron Dome, and just promised Israel \$38 billion in security aid over 10 years. Most Israelis, said Grinstein, “are ignorant of the fact that this astonishing reality is the outcome of tireless work by hundreds of thousands of Jews — Democrats and Republicans, most of them non-Orthodox — who are passionately mobilized to enhance Israel’s security and prosperity with their money, time and talent.”
- Today, Israel’s very identity is at a crossroad: Runaway Jewish nationalism threatens to meld Israel with the Palestinians in the West Bank, while runaway Orthodox politics threatens to disconnect Israel from its most committed supporters.
- A double blow to Israel’s future, undermining the national security of the Jewish state, is unfolding before our eyes.

*Thomas L. Friedman is a foreign affairs, globalization, and technology Op-Ed Columnist for The New York Times.*

**Summary:**

***Israelis have long taken for granted the fact that America — the world’s greatest superpower — is a steadfast supporter of Israel in the U.N., looks the other way on settlements, secures Israel’s technological edge over its enemies through defense systems like the Iron Dome, and just promised Israel \$38 billion in security aid over 10 years. Most Israelis, said Grinstein, “are ignorant of the fact that this astonishing reality is the outcome of tireless work by hundreds of thousands of Jews — Democrats and Republicans, most of them non-Orthodox — who are passionately mobilized to enhance Israel’s security and prosperity with their money, time and talent.” Today, Israel’s very identity is at a crossroad: Runaway Jewish nationalism threatens to meld Israel with the Palestinians in the West Bank, while runaway Orthodox politics threatens to disconnect Israel from its most committed supporters.***