



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
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Israel and the Middle East News Update

Friday, July 6

Headlines:

- **Israeli Court Suspends Razing of Bedouin Village in E1**
- **Iran talks in Vienna Aim to Save Nuclear Deal after US Pullout**
- **Israel Lays Down Red Lines for Postwar Relations with Syria**
- **3 Minor Earthquakes Hit Israel, Serious One Only a Matter of Time**
- **Mossad Recovers Israeli Spy Eli Cohen's Wristwatch**
- **Holocaust Survivors Feel Betrayed by Polish-Israeli Statement**
- **Ruth Bader Ginsburg in Israel: I Pity Your Supreme Court Justices**
- **Claude Lamzmann, Maker of 'Shoah' Film Dies at 92**

Commentary:

- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "Former IDF Chief Benny Gantz Might Change Power Balance"**
 - By Sima Kadmon, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth
- **AI Monitor: "How Israel's Left Could Challenge Netanyahu"**
 - By Yossi Beilin, former Israeli minister of Justice

News Excerpts

July 6, 2018

Reuters

Israeli Court Suspends Razing of Bedouin Village in E1

Israel's top court suspended on Thursday the planned demolition of a Bedouin village in the occupied West Bank whose fate has become a focus of Palestinian protests and international concern, a lawyer for the residents said. The Supreme Court injunction, issued a day after Israeli security forces sparked scuffles at Khan al-Ahmar by moving in bulldozers, gave the state until July 11 to respond to the villagers' contention that they had been unfairly denied building permits, lawyer Alaa Mahajna told Reuters. The court spokesman could not be reached for comment. Around 180 Bedouin, raising sheep and goats, live in tin and wood shacks in Khan al-Ahmar. See also, ["High Court freezes demolition of West Bank Bedouin village" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Times of Israel

Iran talks in Vienna Aim to Save Nuclear Deal after US Pullout

The top diplomats of Iran and five world powers meet Friday as Tehran seeks assurances it will benefit economically from the nuclear deal despite the US withdrawal from the pact. But in a setback on the eve of the talks, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani told French President Emmanuel Macron that European economic measures now on offer did not go far enough. Rouhani, who this week visited Europe to rally support for the nuclear deal's survival, said in a phone call with Macron that the package "does not meet all our demands," Iran's IRNA state news agency reported. See also, ["Struggling to save nuclear deal, Iran and world powers meet" \(Reuters\)](#)

AP

Israel Lays Down Red Lines for Postwar Relations with Syria

As Syrian government forces press on with a furious offensive against rebel-held areas in the country's south, Israel is quietly acknowledging that President Bashar Assad's forces will soon be on its doorstep, laying down red lines for postwar relations with the Syrian leader. Israel's main concern is to keep archrival Iran, an Assad ally, as far away from its border as possible — along with its proxy, the Lebanese militia Hezbollah. "Our demand is that the Iranian forces will go out or withdraw from Syria as a whole, and in it specifically southwest Syria," said a senior Israeli military official. See also, ["Israel threatens Syria over Golan deployment, extends refugee aid" \(Reuters\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

3 Minor Earthquakes Hit Israel, Serious One a Matter of Time

A bigger earthquake than those felt by Israelis over the past couple of days is sure to come — and Israelis should be ready for power outages and if necessary to leave their homes. So warned Amotz Agnon, professor at the Institute of Earth Sciences at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem on Thursday. In an interview conducted by the Israel Project, Agnon said that the "when, how bad and where" are not clear, but additional and more severe earthquakes are sure to come. Israelis have felt three earthquakes over the past two days; additional ones were recorded by instruments of the Geophysical Institute of Israel. On Thursday an earthquake measuring 3.2 on the Richter scale was reported in the cities of Tiberias and Safed in northern Israel. On Wednesday night Haifa and Western Galilee region residents felt a quake measuring 4.5.

Mossad Recovers Israeli Spy Eli Cohen's Wristwatch

The Mossad has recently retrieved a wristwatch that belonged to spy Eli Cohen, it was cleared for publication on Thursday. Eli Cohen, Israel's spy in Damascus was caught and hanged by the Syrians in 1965. His wristwatch was recovered in a recent special Mossad operation. "After Eli Cohen's execution on May 18, 1965, the wristwatch was held by an enemy state. Upon the watch's return to Israel, special research and intelligence operations were carried out which culminated in the unequivocal determination that this was indeed Eli Cohen's watch," the Mossad said. During an annual service in Cohen's memory in May, Mossad Director Yossi Cohen presented the wristwatch to the spy's family. See also, ["Mossad somehow brings home wristwatch of legendary Israeli spy Eli Cohen" \(TOI\)](#)

Holocaust Survivors Feel Betrayed by Polish-Israeli Statement

Many Holocaust survivors felt betrayed by joint statement released by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki aimed at ending a dispute over Holocaust legislation in Poland. Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial Museum, criticized the statement, which was published in newspapers in Israel and abroad on Thursday, as historically inaccurate, challenging in particular the validity of the leaders' assertion that the Polish underground and government-in-exile in World War Two came to the aid of Jews facing death at the hands of the Nazis. Many Holocaust survivors said the State of Israel should not have reached an agreement with Poland over the European nation's controversial Holocaust law. See also, ["Israel's Holocaust memorial says agreement between Israeli and Polish leaders includes deceptions" \(L.A.Times\)](#)

Ruth Bader Ginsburg in Israel: I Pity Your S. Court Justices

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg expressed sympathy for her counterparts on Israel's highest court on Thursday – but not because of any thorny human rights situations they might face. "Here, there is a compulsory retirement age. If I was in Israel I would have retired 15 years ago," she told an audience at the Jerusalem Cinematheque, following a screening of the hit documentary about her life and career, "RBG." The 85-year-old jurist's resistance to retirement is one of the subjects covered in the film, when she says she is committed to staying in place as long as she can do her job "at full steam" – and visibly taking umbrage when asked if she regretted not stepping down during the Obama administration, in order to be replaced by a liberal justice.

Claude Lanzmann, Maker of 'Shoah' Film Dies at 92

Claude Lanzmann, one of the world's foremost makers of documentary films about the Holocaust, has died. Lanzmann, a French Jew who directed the canonical 1985 film "Shoah," died at the age of 92 in Paris on Thursday, Le Monde reported. Although he is best known for the 9-hour-long documentary bearing the Hebrew-language name of the Holocaust, his many projects "have changed the history of film making forever," a Le Monde author wrote in an obituary for Lanzmann. His works about the Holocaust were extensive and innovative in how they were among the first to tackle, for a wide audience, aspects of the genocide that had been scarcely discussed for their sensitivity, including the role and level of knowledge of locals in Eastern Europe about the mass murder of Jews in their countries. See also, ["Remembering 'Shoah' Filmmaker Claude Lanzmann" \(NPR\)](#)

Former IDF Chief Benny Gantz Might Change Power Balance

According to a poll conducted regarding the IDF draft bill, it seems most of the public supports Lapid's decision to vote in favor of it. However, data shows Netanyahu's Likud still sweeps the votes but polls show that Benny Gantz throwing his hat into the ring would cost the Likud 4 mandates.

By Sima Kadmon, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

- The commentators and politicians who had a hard time on Tuesday to decipher the motives behind Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid's decision to support the new IDF [draft bill](#) instead of joining the opposition for a no-confidence vote against the government got their answers on Wednesday.
- According to a poll conducted by Dr. Mina Zemach on Tuesday among 532 respondents representing a sample of Israel's adult population, the public appears to understand Lapid's motives. Furthermore, the public also agrees with Lapid.
- When asked: Do you think Lapid was right to decide to support the IDF draft law, 23 percent said he was very right and 28% said he was pretty right. In total, 51% believe Lapid was in the right, and only 29% think he wasn't.
- Among those who voted for Lapid's Yesh Atid party in 2015, the support is even higher: 70% of Yesh Atid voters think Lapid was right in his decision, and only 21% think he was wrong. For someone who was the victim of much mockery and criticism for his decision, these are not bad numbers. So either Lapid knows something we don't know—perhaps based on a poll he did ahead of the vote—or his instincts about what the public wants are better than anyone thought.
- But the public, as expected, is not stupid. It doesn't really believe the main purpose of the legislation is to bring equality in carrying the burden of service. In fact, only 28% of the public believes that is its goal. Sixty percent of the public thinks this is a political solution meant to prevent a governmental crisis and won't truly bring to the enlistment of Haredim.
- Who knows, maybe this data can bring an end to the rollercoaster this legislation is riding, which has been successfully fooling us for 20 years, and force the politicians to think about a different solution to the Haredi enlistment problem. The Likud headed by Netanyahu—of course—suffered no losses by the bill passing in its first reading. If elections were to be held today, the Likud would have received 33 mandates. It is interesting to see what heights the draft law will elevate Netanyahu.
- Following the Likud is Yesh Atid with 18 mandates, the Zionist Union with 15 mandates, the Joint list with 12 mandates, the Bayit Yehudi with seven mandates, United Torah Judaism with seven mandates, Kulanu, Yisrael Beytenu and Meretz with six mandates each, and Orly Levy-Abekasis and Shas with five mandates. With those numbers, why would the parties want the election to be held today?

- However, the power each bloc has does not change—The Right bloc has 52 mandates, the center-left has 39 mandates, the ultra-Orthodox and the Arabs have 12 mandates, and Orly Levy-Abekasis has five mandates while it is still unclear which bloc she will join.
- The picture seems a bit different when former IDF chief of staff Benny Gantz is taken into account. If he was to head a new party, it would receive 14 mandates (one mandate more than Gantz received in the previous poll conducted by Mina Zemach to channel 2 news), whereas the Zionist Union would plunge to merely 10 mandates. The Likud would also lose power, according to the poll, receiving only 29 mandates.
- But look at what happens when Gantz heads the Zionist Union instead of Avi Gabbay: The Zionist Union leaps forward to 24 mandates (as in the current Knesset) and Yesh Atid loses four mandates in comparison to its predictions in elections held without Gantz.
- So it is true that it looks this way when Gantz is still out of the picture and we have witnessed what happens when a new player enters the ring and how fast he wears out. But it is no wonder that nobody—Netanyahu included—is in a rush to run for elections. No one wants to see what happens when a new guy comes on the bloc.

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How Israel's Left Could Challenge Netanyahu

By Yossi Beilin, former minister of Justice

- The Israeli peace camp can defeat the right in the next election, facing a prime minister the police have already recommended for indictment in at least two cases of bribery and may yet face additional ones by the next election. Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit may actually decide to indict him by then. They are also facing a minister of welfare (Haim Katz, also of the Likud) who is expected to stand trial for bribery pending a hearing. And then there is Interior Minister Aryeh Deri, a convicted criminal who already served time in prison and yet, much to the country's shame, returned to the government and even to the ministry where he first committed his crime, only to be investigated again for additional crimes. It would be hard for the current coalition to ask the public for its trust for another four years.
- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is far from enjoying the support of a majority of the country. He relies on the backing of about a quarter of the public to form a very narrow coalition. Because he is dependent on the smaller parties, he has a hard time fulfilling his promises. In the past, his electoral defeats were always a knockout, while his victories came down to a sparse few points.
- In 1996, for example, when Israel had direct elections for its prime minister, Netanyahu defeated Shimon Peres by less than one percentage point, while the Likud's Knesset faction had fewer seats than the Labor Party. Three years later, in 1999, Netanyahu was defeated in another direct election, this time pitting him against Labor's Ehud Barak. When he ran again as head of the Likud in 2006, the party won just 12 seats and Netanyahu was almost deposed. After the 2009 election, Netanyahu managed to put together a narrow coalition even though the Likud under his leadership won 27 seats, while Kadima, headed by Tzipi Livni, won 28 seats.
- When he called an early election in 2012, Netanyahu felt it necessary to unite his party with Yisrael Beiteinu, headed by Avigdor Liberman. Even running together, these two parties lost 11 seats. Yesh Atid head Yair Lapid, whose new party won a remarkable 19 seats, almost formed a coalition, though it was Netanyahu who did so in the end.
- In the last election, in 2015, the Likud headed by Netanyahu won 30 seats, while Labor under Isaac Herzog won an impressive 24 seats. The only reason that Netanyahu was able to form a coalition was because his rival, Kulanu head Moshe Kahlon, decided to join him with 10 seats. Throughout this term, Netanyahu has found himself politically dependent on this uneasy partnership.
- The predominant feeling that Israelis are shifting to the right is laughable, given the number of people who were historically on the right and have shifted to the center. Parties and people who insisted for decades on slogans such as, "Not one inch!" (no withdrawal from the occupied territories) have long since forgotten that time-worn mantra. Labor has already forgotten that it once included a "Group for the Integrity of the Land of Israel." The "Princes of the Likud" (Ehud Olmert, Dan Meridor, Livni, Roni Milo and many others) have admitted their mistake and come to support a two-state solution. The permanent solution that receives the most widespread support among Israelis is the creation of a Palestinian state. The current and furthest right government in Israel considers dialogue with the Palestine Liberation Organization to be the

most natural thing in the world, and it clings to the 1993 Oslo Accord, which was just an interim agreement, as if it were God's law, handed down to Moses on Mount Sinai.

- In 1977, in the wake of the terrible shock of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the country's politics experienced a tectonic shift (Likud won the elections for the first time). Ever since then, there has been a center-left camp that makes up about 40% of the Knesset and a center-right camp of similar size. The left cannot cobble together a bloc that would prevent the right from forming a coalition without the support of the Arab parties, while the right cannot form a bloc to stop the left without the support of the ultra-Orthodox. That is the story of Israeli politics over the last generation. The taboo against basing a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the creation of a Palestinian state and engaging with the PLO was broken in 1993, but there has been no dramatic shift in the way that people vote. With the two blocs more or less equal in size, important incidents specific to a particular time (such as Netanyahu's deceptive 2015 election-day warning that Arab voters were heading out to vote "in droves") can sometimes shift the balance one way or the other.
- No argument is more mistaken than the claim that there is no replacement for the man who blocked all progress toward peace, who lost Israel the support of American Jewry, who instigated greater hostility to Israel among the Democratic Party in the United States and who helped pass legislation that delivered a serious blow to Israeli democracy. People like Labor Party Chair Avi Gabbay and Meretz Chair Tamar Zandberg as well as prominent members of the Knesset like Hatnua head Livni can lead the peace camp to victory if they work together boldly. Here are three practical suggestions:
- Opposition head Herzog left politics following his appointment as chief of the Jewish Agency. And so, I propose to immediately appoint Livni to this position. The reason I brought the Leader of the Opposition Law before the Knesset in 2000 was because as justice minister, I already knew I would get a majority, while as a member of the opposition, there was no chance that it would pass. In many ways, the model is based on the British system. It accords official status to the opposition leader, granting that person the right to address the Knesset right after the prime minister in any parliamentary debate and makes the position one of the symbols of government in Israel. A successful opposition leader can set the agenda for the opposition as a whole, and not just herself. Gabbay must not hesitate in making this appointment. Not only has Livni already served in the role, she is also capable of dealing with Netanyahu's rhetoric and overcoming it.
- A new faction should be formed during the Knesset's summer recess. It would include Labor under Gabbay, Hatnua headed by Livni, and Meretz under the leadership of Zandberg. Each party would remain independent and free to make the decision on whether to run together or separately in the next election. The new faction would have 29 Knesset members, making it almost equal in size to the Likud at 30. Given the problematic composition of the Likud (such as Knesset member David Bitan, who is suspected of committing criminal offenses, or Oren Hazan's scandal-ridden term), it can be far more influential than the Likud is now.
- The peace camp headed by Gabbay must speak clearly about its plans. The only times the Labor Party won in the last few decades were when leaders like Yitzhak Rabin (who said he would reach an agreement with the Palestinians in six to nine months) and Ehud Barak (who promised to pull Israel out of Lebanon within a year) made concrete promises and fulfilled them. Now, a statement that a government headed by Gabbay would partition the country within a

predetermined amount of time in order to ensure that Israel remains a Jewish and democratic state is both essential to Zionism and the key to political success.

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