



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Monday, June 3*

### Headlines:

- Likud May Have Trouble Forming a Coalition Without Lieberman
- Ehud Barak says Netanyahu is 'Finished,' Predicts Likud Will Turn on Him
- Skeptical Pompeo says Peace Plan Could be 'Unexecutable'
- Trump to Israel: Get Your Act Together Over 'Messed-Up' Elections
- Netanyahu Fires Bennett, Shaked from Ministerial Posts
- Liberman Denies Vendetta Against Netanyahu
- Gantz and Lapid to Continue Rotation Agreement
- Five Killed in Israeli Attack on Syrian Airbase

### Commentary:

- **New York Times: "Trump's Middle East Peace Plan Faces a Crossroads"**  
– By Mark Landler, White House correspondent at The New York Times

# News Excerpts

June 3, 2019

## Jerusalem Post

### **Likud May Have Trouble Forming a Coalition Without Lieberman**

The Right-wing parties may be facing a crisis if they will need to build a coalition without Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beytenu party, according to a poll conducted by Yisrael Hayom. The poll found that if citizens were to vote today, Yisrael Beytenu would increase from its five seats to eight, making it the third-largest party after Likud, which would stand at 36 seats, and Blue and White, which would stand at 34. This structure may pose a problem for the Right if the Likud is chosen to build a government again, as the Right-wing parties not including Lieberman would be standing at 59 mandates while the minimum to build a coalition is 61.

## Times of Israel

### **Barak says PM is 'Finished,' Predicts Likud Will Turn on Him**

Former prime minister Ehud Barak on Friday said that he believes that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is "basically finished" and that members of his Likud party will turn on him after the September elections. "Netanyahu has clearly failed. No government was formed [after the last elections] and there will not be any legislation to give him immunity or to override [the Supreme Court's authority]," the Ynet news site quoted Barak as saying at a conference. "The cracks in support run deep in the home." Barak's assessment echoes murmurings of discontent in the Likud reported late Thursday by Zman Yisrael, The Times of Israel's Hebrew news site.

## Times of Israel

### **Skeptical Pompeo says Peace Plan Could be 'Unexecutable'**

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo gave a somber assessment of the chances of the not-yet released Trump peace plan, acknowledging that parts of it might be "unexecutable," could fail, or will be dismissed out of hand by either the Israelis or the Palestinians. In remarks made last Tuesday in a closed-door conversation with the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations that was leaked to the Washington Post, Pompeo said he could understand why many see the deal as one "only the Israelis could love" and said the US was also planning for a failure.

See also, ["Pompeo delivers unfiltered view of Trump's Middle East peace plan in off-the-record meeting" \(Wash Post\)](#)

## Ha'aretz

### **Trump to Israel: Get Your Act Together**

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Sunday night that he is "not happy" about the new elections in Israel, and that Israel "should get their act together." Trump made the comments during a short conversation with journalists in the White House, during which he was asked about comments that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made about the prospects of the administration's plan for Middle East peace. "Israel is all messed up with their election - I mean that came out of the blue three days ago. So that's all messed up. They ought to get their act together," Trump said, visibly irritated. "I mean, Bibi got elected, now all of a sudden they're going to have to go through the process again until September. That's ridiculous. So we're not happy about that."

## **Netanyahu Fires Bennett, Shaked from Ministerial Posts**

Prime Minister Netanyahu on Sunday informed Education Minister Naftali Bennett and Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked that they have been fired from the government and the cabinet. "Bennett and Shaked cannot continue in their sensitive roles in the cabinet for another six months as they were not elected by the public," government sources said. The two split from Jewish Home ahead of the April 9 elections to form the New Right party, which narrowly failed to pass the threshold to enter the Knesset. The party was just 1,400 votes shy of winning seats in the short-lived 21st Knesset.

See also, ["Report: PM's wife vetoes Shaked joining Likud" \(Israel National News\)](#)

Times of Israel

## **Liberman Denies Vendetta Against Netanyahu**

Yisrael Beytenu party chief Avigdor Liberman on Saturday denied having a "vendetta" against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after coalition talks collapsed and led to new September elections, but did not rule out a potential bid to succeed him. Speaking to Channel 12's "Meet the Press," Liberman, whose refusal to join the government under the terms offered was blamed for the political deadlock, said his party continued to support the formation of a right-wing government after the upcoming vote. "We are definitely in favor of a right-wing government. I don't care who leads it," Liberman said. "But we will not agree to an ultra-Orthodox government. "We are in favor of a Jewish state but against a *halacha* state," he said, referring to Jewish religious law.

Israel National News

## **Gantz and Lapid to Continue Rotation Agreement**

The heads of the Blue and White party, Benny Gantz and Yair Lapid, on Sunday agreed to continue the partnership between them, including a rotation in the post of prime minister if they win the upcoming elections. Gantz and Lapid had met with Moshe Ya'alon and Gabi Ashkenazi to discuss the party's preparations for the coming elections. "Despite the speculation and false rumors, Blue and White will stand in the coming elections in the same format that brought a huge success of 35 seats only a few months ago," the party said in a statement. "That includes the rotation agreement between Gantz and Lapid, exactly as agreed upon by the leadership and presented to the public," it added.

See also, ["Ofer Shelah: There Must Be an Arab Candidate in Blue and White" \(Ma'ariv\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

## **Five Killed in Israeli Attack on Syrian Airbase**

At least five Syrians were killed in an alleged Israeli attack on the T4 airbase in the eastern Homs province on Sunday night, one day after limited clashes between the two foes. Iran has been moving its assets from areas repeatedly struck by Israel to locations closer to the border with Iraq, specifically the T4 Airbase strategically located between Homs and Palmyra and just yesterday a Fars Air jumbo jet returned to Iran from a possible arms delivery flight at T4.

## **Trump's Middle East Peace Plan Faces a Crossroads After Coalition Talks in Israel Crumble**

By Mark Landler, White House correspondent at The New York Times

- **President Trump plans to throw his full weight behind Benjamin Netanyahu's campaign to save his job as prime minister of Israel. But to do that, analysts and former diplomats said, the president will have to sacrifice any last hopes of proposing a peace plan that is acceptable to both Israelis and Palestinians.**
- **Mr. Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner, met Mr. Netanyahu in Jerusalem to discuss the status of the plan on Thursday, hours after the prime minister failed to form a governing coalition. Mr. Kushner emerged with a longer timetable and a narrower diplomatic mission, these people said.**
- **Rather than make concessions to the Palestinians, Mr. Kushner will be under pressure to tilt the plan ever further in Israel's favor. Far from being a bold effort to break decades of enmity between the two sides, it could end up becoming a vehicle to resurrect Mr. Netanyahu's political fortunes and to protect Mr. Trump's.**
- **The plan, which Mr. Kushner has drafted under a veil of secrecy for more than two years, was already looking like a doomed effort. Though its details remain unknown, Mr. Kushner has suggested it will not call for the creation of a Palestinian state, jettisoning decades of American policy toward the conflict. The Palestinians have vowed to reject it out of hand, branding it a blueprint for Israeli domination.**
- **Certainly, a wounded Mr. Netanyahu lost no time in exploiting his friendship with Mr. Trump. He brandished a copy of a map of Israel that Mr. Trump had signed and sent to him with Mr. Kushner. In the margins, the president had drawn an arrow pointing to the long-disputed Golan Heights, which he had recognized as Israeli territory, and had scrawled "Nice."**
- **The White House is expected to hold off on the political component of its plan — which deals with thorny issues like borders, security and the status of Jerusalem — until after the Israeli elections, scheduled for Sept. 17. A senior administration official said only that the plan would be presented when the "timing is right."**
- **But that timing has grown increasingly problematic. Any new Israeli coalition probably would not be formed until at least October, which would delay the announcement of a Trump plan until November, uncomfortably close to the first primaries of the 2020 election in the United States.**
- **Mr. Trump, eager not to alienate evangelical voters or influential pro-Israel donors like the casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, is unlikely to present a plan that would put Israel or Mr. Netanyahu in an awkward position. For both leaders, therefore, the political calculus will argue for a plan that makes as few demands of Israel as possible. "To get Netanyahu re-elected, Trump is clearly now willing to take instructions from him," said Martin S. Indyk, a former American ambassador to Israel. "I believe Netanyahu will return the favor by arguing forcefully to American Jews and evangelical voters that they should vote for Trump because he's the best friend Israel has ever had."**

- **Mr. Trump has already gone further in his support of Mr. Netanyahu than any president has for any Israeli leader. Before recognizing Israeli authority over the Golan Heights, he moved the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. And in a remarkable intrusion into Israeli electoral politics, Mr. Trump on Monday tweeted his support of Mr. Netanyahu's efforts to form a coalition. "Hoping things will work out with Israel's coalition formation and Bibi and I can continue to make the alliance between America and Israel stronger than ever," Mr. Trump said, using the prime minister's nickname. "A lot more to do!"**
- **Two days later, the White House announced an unprecedented three-way meeting in Jerusalem of its national security adviser, John R. Bolton, with his Israeli and Russian counterparts, Meir Ben-Shabbat and Nikolay Patrushev. The meeting, to discuss security issues in the Middle East, is a feather in the cap for Mr. Netanyahu, underlining his ability to convene the world's major powers.**
- **Mr. Indyk said a staunchly pro-Israel peace plan — one that snuffed out the goal of a two-state solution, for example — would constitute Mr. Trump's third major gesture to Mr. Netanyahu, after the embassy and the Golan Heights.**
- **This week, after Mr. Netanyahu's coalition negotiations collapsed, Mr. Trump made no effort to disguise his disappointment. "It looked like a total win for Netanyahu, who's a great guy," the president said. "That is too bad. Because they don't need this. I mean they've got enough turmoil over there. It's a tough place."**
- **Mr. Kushner's visit to Jerusalem coincided with the Israeli Parliament's vote to dissolve itself and call for new elections — arguably one of the darkest days in Mr. Netanyahu's career. But rather than wave him off, the prime minister welcomed Mr. Kushner, posing for pictures and showing off the letter from Mr. Trump. A spotlight on the people reshaping our politics. A conversation with voters across the country. And a guiding hand through the endless news cycle, telling you what you really need to know.**
- **The next gift for Mr. Netanyahu could come on June 25, when Mr. Kushner convenes an economic conference in Bahrain. The Palestinians have announced they will boycott the meeting; the Israelis are going. That will allow Mr. Netanyahu to showcase another of his long-term strategic goals — closer ties between Israel and Sunni Muslim leaders in the Persian Gulf, with whom he shares a deep hostility toward Iran.**
- **By holding the meeting, which he calls a "workshop," Mr. Kushner split the economic component of his plan from the more fraught political solution. The idea was to give the Palestinians and other Arab leaders an incentive — in the form of billions of dollars of investment — to support a peace accord.**
- **Mr. Kushner made some headway on this front. He won a pledge by Qatar, a major financial supporter of the Palestinian enclave of Gaza, to attend the workshop, even though it was pushed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which are engaged in a bitter feud with the Qataris.**
- **During his tour of the region, Mr. Kushner worked to build Arab support for his plan. His meetings with King Mohammed VI of Morocco and King Abdullah II of Jordan were "very positive and productive," according to an administration official, though King Abdullah pointedly declared that any plan must provide for a Palestinian state.**

- The refusal of the Palestinians to attend the Bahrain meeting was a reminder of Mr. Kushner's uphill struggle to engage with them, ever since they broke off communications with the White House after Mr. Trump moved the embassy. In the wake of Mr. Netanyahu's setback, the chief Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Erekat, cracked that the "deal of the century," as people have taken to calling the Trump plan, had become the "deal of the next century."
- Given that the plan was almost certain to be summarily rejected by the Palestinians if Mr. Kushner had presented it in the coming weeks, some former diplomats said the Israeli elections amounted to a reprieve for him and his partner, Jason D. Greenblatt, the president's special envoy. "What happened in Israel over the last 48 hours gives them a more public rationale for why they're delaying, so it's actually good news for them tactically," said David Makovsky, who negotiated between the Israelis and Palestinians during the Obama administration. "The Israeli election has given them an out."
- The trouble is, the political atmosphere for a peace initiative is not likely to get any less forbidding in the fall. Mr. Kushner, who helped manage his father-in-law's campaign in 2016, will be as aware as anyone of the domestic political cost of a plan that puts pressure on Israel. "You'll see the political folks in the administration weighing in on how it affects the election dynamics," said Ghaith al-Omari, a former Palestinian negotiator who is a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "We'll get into a totally different set of considerations by November and December."

**Summary: Mr. Trump, eager not to alienate evangelical voters or influential pro-Israel donors like the casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, is unlikely to present a plan that would put Israel or Mr. Netanyahu in an awkward position. For both leaders, therefore, the political calculus will argue for a plan that makes as few demands of Israel as possible. "To get Netanyahu re-elected, Trump is clearly now willing to take instructions from him," said Martin S. Indyk, a former American ambassador to Israel. "I believe Netanyahu will return the favor by arguing forcefully to American Jews and evangelical voters that they should vote for Trump because he's the best friend Israel has ever had."**

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