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Israel and the Middle East News Update

Tuesday, September 10

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News Excerpts

September 10, 2019

Jerusalem Post

Netanyahu Exposes Previously Unknown Nuclear Site in Iran

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu revealed what he said was a newly discovered Iranian nuclear weapons development site at Abadeh, south of Isfahan, during a hastily called press conference Monday afternoon. The prime minister showed satellite photos of the site taken in June, and then – after the Iranians discovered that the site had been uncovered – pictures from July showing their attempts to cover-up and destroy the site. “They destroyed the evidence, or at least tried to destroy the evidence,” he said. Netanyahu, who spoke briefly in both Hebrew and English, said that he has a message “to the tyrants of Tehran.” “Israel knows what you are doing, Israel knows when you are doing it, Israel knows where you are doing it,” he said. “We will continue to expose your lies. What you see is a consistent pattern of Iranian lies, deception and violations.”

See also, [“NETANYAHU SOCHI TRIP TO FOCUS ON MILITARY COORDINATION, AFTER IRAN EXPOSÉ” \(JPOST\)](#)

Ma’ariv

Resentment in Security Establishment: “We’re Being Used”

IDF and Mossad officials criticized the prime minister for his press conference yesterday, in which he presented Iranian nuclear facilities, one of them that had been unknown to the West until that point. The criticism was professional and also addressed the fact that the recent series of revelations by the prime minister, even if some of it was justified, was creating an uncomfortable atmosphere and was getting the IDF and the Mossad involved in Netanyahu’s election campaign. They also criticized the fact that Netanyahu’s press conference was also broadcast on political Facebook pages, along with the relevant captions. The general sense is that political use is being made of state security organizations. The picture that they are trying to show, namely that the professional people support and even initiate the announcements, the revelations, and the press conferences, is not true. In some cases, the professional recommendation was different. For others, the professionals were forced to look the other way. In any case, the general feeling is not good.

Times of Israel

Gantz Raises Alarm Over Possible Violence at Polls

Blue and White head Benny Gantz expressed fears Monday that Israel could see violence at ballot stations when the country heads to the polls next week, after a controversial legislative bid to allow voters to be filmed to thwart alleged fraud was shot down earlier in the day. Gantz, speaking in an on-stage interview co-sponsored by The Times of Israel and the Tel Aviv International Salon, said he was “afraid” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did not believe violence should be rejected. Urging the audience to go out and vote on September 17, Gantz called on voters to “reject any kind of violence that you see on election day.” In April, Netanyahu’s party equipped some 1,200 of its polling station representatives in Arab towns with cameras. At several locations, the discovery of the cameras led to skirmishes between Likud officials and local poll workers, who were frustrated over having been targeted in the covert operation.

Voter Turnout Expected to be a Crucial Factor

Next Tuesday the polling stations will open and Israelis will head out to vote, after which we will learn which party won the repeat 2019 elections. While all the parties have mounted their usual campaigns, the prevailing assessment in political corridors at present is that voter turnout, more than any other factor, will decide the results of next week's election. Overall voter turnout is expected to drop in the upcoming elections by close to one percent, from 68.5% to 67.5%, a number that reflects a five percent drop relative to the 2015 elections. Professor Gabi Weiman, a political communications expert from the University of Haifa, said: "Low voter turnout benefits parties that have high and stable voter turnout among their supporters. In our case, that is mainly the Haredi parties."

Israel Hayom

48,000 New Voters Added to the Rolls Since April Elections

The Central Bureau of Statistics releases the official voter figures ahead of the September 17 election. Some 5.8 million people are eligible to vote. Of those, 14 percent are aged 18-24, 30% age 25-39, 31% age 40-59, and 25% are 60 or older. The voter rolls grew by some 48,000 people since the April 9 race, the committee says, or 0.8% of the total. Of those eligible voters, 79% are Jews, 16% are Arabs and 5% are from other minorities, including non-Arab Christians and non-Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union. The Arab portion of the electorate is likely to grow, the figures reveals, as the Arab population is younger: 38% of Arab Israelis are under 18, compared to 32% among Jews.

Times of Israel

4th Poll Shows Extremist Otzma Yehudit in Knesset

An opinion poll published Tuesday, a week ahead of the election, showed the extremist Otzma Yehudit party entering the next Knesset with four seats — the fourth poll in recent days predicting such a result. In previous polling, the far-right party had been seen as close to the threshold but still short of passing it. But polls in recent days by Walla, the Israel Hayom newspaper and the Knesset Channel each saw Otzma Yehudit passing the electoral threshold of 3.25 percent, entering the legislature with four seats. Tuesday's poll, published by the Kan public broadcaster, shows Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu still falling short of a 61-seat majority of right-wing parties without Yisrael Beytenu and being able to cobble together only 58 seats. The centrist Blue and White party got 32 seats in the poll, one ahead of Netanyahu's Likud, which garnered 31.

See also, ["Shaked: Otzma Yehudit should drop out of election" \(Israel Hayom\)](#)

Good for Netanyahu, Bad for Israel

By Ben-Dror Yemini

- For more than 40 years, ever since [the Likud rose to power in] 1977, we've been told that fascism is at our doorstep and that democracy is either at risk or has since come to an end. Sometimes we're told that we're already under fascist rule, and that we simply haven't realized that yet. Others draw comparisons to Germany in the 1930s and talk about "processes." Quite a few of them have turned raising those alarming cries into a fairly good livelihood.
- In the last few days the proposed cameras amendment was cited as further proof that the end of democracy was nigh. Wrong. That only proved one thing: Netanyahu is a political genius. He succeeded once again at confounding all of his opponents. He once again successfully dictated the public agenda. All the news programs devoted between 70% and 90% of their attention to one issue only. And the general public saw all the thunder and lightning and couldn't fathom what all the brouhaha was about.
- Have all of you in politics and the media gone mad? Cameras? Is that the straw that is going to break the democratic camel's back? Everyone knows that a recommendation to install cameras at the polling stations was first made by the Supreme Court justice, Elyakim Rubinstein, back in 2013 when he served as the chairman of the Central Elections Committee. There are cameras on nearly every street corner in Israel. Are you seriously arguing that placing cameras at the polling stations, of all places, is going to end democracy?
- Given the timing and the circumstances of the proposal [to install cameras at the polling stations], it was obvious that that had to be opposed. But it should have been clear from the outset that the cameras were nothing but a political spin that was designed to dictate the agenda in the run-up to elections.
- That spin was a stellar success. Cameras aren't going to be installed; the bill was shot down in a preliminary vote in the Knesset committee that was formed to discuss the bill. The national savior, Avigdor Lieberman, changed his stance and decided not to let Netanyahu see this initiative through.
- But the picture hasn't changed, since Netanyahu once again stole the show. And with all due disrespect for the initiative, the dismayed cries about the "end of democracy" ought to be reserved for slightly more serious developments. Because the surfeit of needless cries of alarm has only lulled us into a self-induced sleep in the face of developments that truly are liable to jeopardize democracy and the Zionist vision.
- Annexation [of the West Bank or parts thereof], which parts of the right are leading us to, is a far greater danger to the existence of the Jewish state and a democratic Israel than the cameras initiative. Netanyahu isn't eager to annex. He's been prime minister for more than a decade—and there hasn't been any annexation. But he is susceptible to pressure. He has shifted further to the right. He has repeatedly capitulated to the Haredim and has undermined the national interest [by so doing]. Just as he has capitulated to Litzman and Gafni, he is liable to capitulate to Feiglin and Smotrich. And if, heaven forbid, the Kahanists are elected to Knesset—he'll capitulate to them as well. That has already begun to happen.

- **Even without a formal declaration about annexation, Jewish settlement outside the major settlement blocs has expanded. That is the path to creating a bi-national reality. That is the path to the destruction of the Jewish state. That is the real danger. And that danger was complemented by yet another statement about annexation that Netanyahu made just a week ago, but which failed to receive even one percent of the media attention that the cameras initiative received.**
- **Why is that a tremendous success for Netanyahu, regardless of whether the proposed amendment is ultimately passed into legislation? Because roughly one-third of the Likud voters, and possibly more, are opposed to annexation. They are nationally-minded. They don't like the left. But they do support a Jewish state and are opposed to annexation.**
- **They tend to vote for the Likud more because of the Zionist left's drift further to the left and not because they support the greater Land of Israel. But on the issue of the cameras, as on most issues that are discussed in the context of the alarmist cries about the "end of democracy," they feel that those cries of dismay are an attempt to pull the wool over their eyes. And they're right. Because those issues are all hugely inflated with the help of large parts of the media and Netanyahu's opponents.**
- **The reactions by Benny Begin and Dan Meridor to that festival haven't merely failed to help, but have actually pushed more people into the Likud's arms. Instead of engaging with voters from the moderate right about the true dangers posed by Netanyahu's rule, they get high on more palaver about democracy's demise.**
- **We have a week to go until the elections. The Likud, acting on orders from the omnipotent leader, knows that after yesterday's failure the chances of the cameras amendment being passed into legislation are between negligible and nil. And even if it is passed into legislation, the amendment will be disqualified by the High Court of Justice. Furthermore, even if it isn't disqualified, that legislation is more likely to spur voters from the Arab sector to head out to the polling stations—as a recent poll by Stat-Net found. But the objective has already been achieved. Netanyahu put up a scarecrow, and the festival surrounding "democracy's demise" was reinvigorated. That is good for Netanyahu, but is bad for Israel.**

What Really Matters to Israeli Arab Voters

By Yossi Beilin

- The problem that most concerns Israel's Palestinian citizens is personal safety, an issue on which the Blue and White could make significant positive contributions and in doing so attract Arab voters, potentially breaking the prevailing electoral deadlock with the right.
- In the past as Israeli elections approached, television news programs would begin with the anchors promising to share new poll results during the broadcast. The audience would anxiously wait for the predictions, generally until the latter half of the broadcast. Viewers had no choice but to sit through all sorts of other, usually less interesting stories. The hearts of politicians would skip a beat during each sampling, and viewers could feel tensions rising as election day approached. This campaign season, however, with elections for the 22nd Knesset rapidly approaching, it is hard to find anything more boring than the polls.
- Survey results these days are consistently similar, even when compared to those from weeks and months earlier. The right and center-left blocs each poll at 54 to 56 seats, and Avigdor Liberman's Yisrael Beitenu polls at 10 seats. It seems highly unlikely that any of the major parties will fail to pass the electoral threshold. If anything is happening, it is taking place within the blocs.
- The Blue and White's promise to attract votes from the right, and Labor leader Amir Peretz's assurances that Labor-Gesher can win support from the periphery have yet to be realized. The same dynamic holds on the right, where none of the parties has managed to draw siphon from the other bloc. This includes the religious Yamina (Rightward), which had selected the secularist Ayelet Shaked as its leader in the hope that it would win votes from secular Jews who respect tradition.
- While the media is pouring enormous resources into trying to generate interest in the election, it appears to be in vain. To date, the most newsworthy stories seem to be the decision by the Labor-Gesher chair to shave his trademark mustache and the bizarre phone calls made by the wife of Minister Rafi Peretz slandering Yamina's Naftali Bennett, who was forced to relinquish his brief tenure as leader of the religious right. What could break the standoff between the blocs is voter turnout.
- The greatest unexploited potential for increasing the number of votes is turnout among the Arab population. That more than half of this voting bloc stayed home for the April 9 election means that under certain specific circumstances this sector could determine the outcome of this month's election. That sector would, however, have to bring the same percentage of voters to the polls as the Jewish sector.
- Ostensibly, circumstances have changed for Palestinian Israeli voters. The creation of the Joint List was one reason for an increase in voter turnout among this sector in 2015. The party breaking up before the April elections contributed to the decline in voter participation, but the party has reemerged, meaning more Arabs could again come out to vote.

- All indications are that the Arab parties will not reject every opportunity to block the right from forming a government. They might even be willing to join a new government, as infuriating as that sounds to many Arab Knesset members and as much as they half-heartedly deny it. All of this could change the overwhelming feeling among many Palestinian Israelis that their representatives have no impact in the Knesset.
- Furthermore, on Aug. 26 the chairman of the Central Election Committee barred the deployment of cameras in polling stations in Arab communities. The use of cameras in these stations during the April 9 elections was a clever move by the Likud. It caused many voters to fear that the prying eyes of government were watching them vote, even though there were no cameras in the actual voting booths. Without the deterrent of Likud activists filming, it is safe to assume that the number of Arab voters will increase.
- On the other hand, the Blue and White is still indicating that it wants nothing to do with the Arabs. It has said that it will not coordinate in advance with the Arab parties to block the formation of a right-wing government and that under no circumstances will representatives of the Joint List be part of a new center-left government. Such a position could discourage Arab voters from going to the polls.
- Over the last few years, considerable effort has been made to understand why Arab voter turnout is so much lower than Jewish voter turnout. On the face of things, the Arabs would seem to have a greater stake in government decisions. They certainly face discrimination in budgeting. On the other hand, if they had more Knesset representation — or rather, if the number of Arab representatives faithfully represented their actual percentage of the overall population — they could have greater influence on budgets allocations for their sector.
- The fact is, however, that many in the Arab community feel that there is no real difference between the Israeli right and the left and that their own representatives have let them down time and again. As happens in other sectors, the only time Arab candidates visit their constituents is right before an election, after which the politicians forget about them until the next election. Furthermore, while everyone makes promises to the Arabs, the only person to have actually kept his promises was Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and he was assassinated ... by Jews.
- As it turns out, Arab voters' priorities are quite different from those of Jewish voters. What makes this interesting is that most parties and politicians on the center-left, as well as others, could promise to address these voters' agenda and actually keep their promises. The results of an in-depth survey conducted two months ago and recently released by Channel 12 found that Arab voters have one key issue: personal safety in Israel's Arab towns and villages. No other issue — not health care, education or peace between Israel and the Palestinians — polled anywhere near as important.
- Over the years, Arab localities have become a battleground between gangs, racketeers and frustrated youth. Vast stockpiles of small arms, which are used without the slightest hesitation, have been assembled. At some point, the leaders of the Arab community decided to try to sweep the problem under the rug. They claimed that it was not as bad as it seemed and that they could take care of it. They would speak with the heads of families and put an end to the violence plaguing their communities.

- Today, Arab leaders admit that the problem is too big for them alone to handle. They speak openly about how serious the situation has become in the “Wild West,” which is how many of them describe it. The same environment is prevalent among the Bedouins in the south, in the Triangle (in Israel’s Central District) and in the north. All too often, innocent bystanders get caught in the middle of these feuds, some sustaining serious injuries or paying with their lives. Parents are unable to control their kids so people are afraid to walk the streets at night. They need the government to intervene.
- Israel Police stations have become the focus of people's rage toward the government. Whenever there is an eruption of violence, public rage is first directed at the police station and then at the local social security office. The outnumbered police officers in these towns are unable to respond to large mobs and often require reinforcements. The bottom line is that meeting the internal security needs of Arab towns and villages will require much more resources than what has typically been allocated. The larger towns need much bigger police stations, and new stations should be established in smaller towns where there are none.
- If a party like Blue and White were to recognize this problem and express a willingness to advocate for the resources and funding necessary to ensure a greater and more effective police presence in the Arab sector — proposing practical plans for dealing with the problem over the next four years — it would be an important contribution to improving the living conditions of the Palestinian citizens of Israel. This, in turn, could encourage these voters to take part in the upcoming election.

Yossi Beilin has served in various positions in the Knesset and in Israeli government posts, the last of which was justice and religious affairs minister. After resigning from the Labor Party, Beilin headed Meretz. He was involved in initiating the Oslo process, the Beilin-Abu Mazen agreement, the Geneva Initiative and Birthright.