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ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
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Commentary...

Bennett Brought About his Own Downfall By Yifat Erlich

Although it is too early to write off Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's political career completely, his (temporary?) resignation is an opportunity for reflection.

It was Ayelet Shaked who recruited Bennett for the position of Benjamin Netanyahu's chief of staff. Sixteen years later, Bennett was prime minister. Now, he has left Shaked alone in the arena.

Throughout his career, Bennett's wisdom, maturity and broad vision grew and expanded. In one year alone, he went from being leader of a small party to prime minister. Not perfect, but not bad either, especially given the difficult political circumstances of the time. And he was a prime minister full of passion, mission and dedication to the public.

After four elections, Israel began to function again. It was slow at times, but we have discovered that the world keeps turning even after Netanyahu leaves office.

It is true that, on his way to the premiership, Bennett undermined his former party Jewish Home and went against his electorate, but perhaps this was inevitable. His journey teaches us about the process religious Zionism has undergone.

Many religious Zionists have engaged in politics and sought a leadership that put the good of the country ahead of the good of the sector. They wanted to become a mainstream political force, and turn the fervor of religious Zionism into construction in Judea and Samaria, appointments to senior positions in the IDF and the flourishing of yeshivas and girls' schools across the country. To no longer be a follower, but a leader.

Bennett was the first religious Zionist leader to achieve this. The first to reach the most senior political position in the country.

But Bennett's desire to hold on to the wheel at all costs is what eventually brought about his downfall. The train did not stop at the speed he wanted, and went off the rails. He remained a locomotive without train cars, a leader without a public, a prime minister who would not win enough votes in the next election to enter the Knesset.

Bennett's "experiment" has failed, but the path Bennett paved remains open, which will help future leaders who walk in the path of Torah and morals to march in the front and lead. (Israel Hayom Jun 30).

Biden's Mideast Visit will be More Complicated than He Thought By Oded Granot

Two weeks before visiting the Middle East, U.S. President Joe Biden has been reminded that this is an unpredictable region. In Israel, he will be greeted by political chaos. In Saudi Arabia, he will have to put on a brave face as Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), once a pariah in Washington, takes center stage.

The Biden administration deserves credit for deciding to push through with the visit to Israel despite our political upheaval, but circumstances will dull the occasion. Biden will undoubtedly reiterate the United States' strong commitment to Israel's security and the need to resolve the Palestinian issue, but he will be careful not to come across as interfering in the election process. He won't make any promises nor will he flatter the government too much. He will try to hide his well-known aversion to opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu.

Saudi Arabia will be the focal point of the Mideast tour. While there, Biden will have to meet and deal with MBS, who until recently was the target of calls for sanctions by Washington. But the war in Ukraine has shuffled the deck and Biden is now forced to reconcile with the crown prince so the latter will keep up the production of oil,

the prices of which are soaring.

Moreover, while for a moment it seemed that MBS's entanglement in the Jamal Khashoggi affair would hurt his chances of succeeding his father, Mideast politics have allowed the crown prince to mark

achievements in Turkey, Egypt and Jordan, which he recently visited.

One can point to an inherent and continuous failure in the pattern of thinking of American presidents, especially from the Democratic Party, who believe that tyrants can be "educated" to respect human rights. They only sober up when it's too late. The same is true of Biden, who has had to acknowledge the unfortunate fact that the price of oil is more important than human rights issues.

To head off criticism in Washington over the reconciliation with MBS, Biden will try to get the crown prince to agree to not only increased oil production, but also to joining the Sunni states that are normalizing relations with Israel.

While the crown prince supports the process of normalization, he is slow and careful, and prefers back channels. He sends his aides to meet with senior Israeli officials, but shies away from public meetings. If he does grant any of Biden's requests on the matter, it will be via measured steps rather than a dramatic announcement.

As for Iran, Biden's interlocutors in Israel and Saudi Arabia will meet a president eager to renew the nuclear deal.

Israel will be unable to prevent such a deal, but it should take advantage of the visit to secure a pledge that any agreement will not tie Israel's hands if it turns out that the Iranians continue to lie about their progress toward a nuclear bomb. (Israel Hayom Jun 29)

The Aid Industry's Blindness to Terror By Yona Schiffmiller

A verdict issued by Israel's Beersheva District Court on June 15, which convicted the aid organization World Vision's Gaza manager Muhammad el-Halabi of a series of security-related offences, revealed many of the fundamental problems plaguing the humanitarian aid industry. The court described in stark terms how Halabi used his position to bolster Hamas' military capabilities and pay salaries to its fighters, all under the guise of humanitarian assistance to vulnerable Gazans.

The court determined that, while heading the NGO's Gaza operations, Halabi aided Hamas in a variety of ways, including diverting World Vision building materials to Hamas military installations, doling out World Vision funds to the group's fighters and securing equipment for terrorists.

The Halabi case highlights the ease with which an aid agency can be taken over by a terrorist organization. Due to Halabi's position and the lack of effective supervision of World Vision operations in Gaza, his fraud and diversion of funds and equipment to terrorists were easily hidden. For example, an outside auditor would see vouchers provided to eligible Gazans, but did not know that recipients were armed Hamas members. Similarly, an auditor would identify equipment and materials that had been issued to construct a hothouse, but did not know that the structure was built to hide Hamas tunnels.

Even given such difficulties, the Israeli court's verdict found World Vision's monitoring woefully lacking, labelling it "remote control oversight."

Frighteningly, World Vision's one genuine attempt at responsible oversight was thwarted. According to the verdict, in 2015 a Gaza-based accountant for World Vision informed the organization about his concerns regarding the diversion of funds to Hamas. He was fired and then interrogated by Hamas. Halabi had a copy of the interrogation on his personal computer.

The Gaza affair was not the only terror-related World Vision scandal in recent years. In December 2020, the U.S. Senate Finance Committee published a memo detailing its investigation into the partnership between World Vision and a U.S.-designated terror organization—the Islamic Relief Agency (ISRA). The Finance Committee document notes that ISRA has "an extensive history of supporting terrorist organization [sic]"—such as Hamas—"and

terrorists, including Osama Bin Laden.”

While it would be comforting to believe that this problem is limited to World Vision, it is actually much bigger. Many aid industry officials espouse a “humanitarian imperative,” which prioritizes the provision of humanitarian aid over all other considerations. As a result, humanitarian actors around the world have sought exemptions and dispensations that allow them to avoid anti-terror regulations, particularly since 9/11. They have lobbied to have as few strings attached to government funding as possible, arguing that their motives are pure and their judgement is sound.

For example, UNICEF calls on humanitarian organizations to “maintain their ability to obtain and sustain access to all vulnerable populations and to negotiate such access with all parties to the conflict.” The implication is that aid organizations should engage with terror groups in order to gain access to affected populations, as has occurred in Syria and Somalia over the past decade.

Similarly, on December 17, 2020, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Secretary-General Jan Egeland addressed a conference organized by the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. He demanded “exemptions from counter-terrorism laws and sanctions regimes. ... We need blanket humanitarian exemptions.” Egeland added, “We need you to champion that there will be no vetting of the ultimate beneficiaries of humanitarian relief.”

In May 2020, NRC and its partners successfully convinced the primary U.S. aid funding mechanism—USAID—to relax the vetting procedures incumbent upon primary grantees when considering partners. As a result of the lobbying, USAID removed language that required aid recipients to “consider all information about that individual or entity of which it is aware and all public information that is reasonably available to it or of which it should be aware.” USAID also reportedly agreed to cut the “look-back” period in which a grantee certifies it has not provided material support to terrorist entities for three to 10 years.

Egeland’s position belies the aid industry’s dogmatic self-assurance that its members can always navigate the risks associated with working in conflict areas. As the Israeli judges observed regarding World Vision employees who testified in the Halabi case, “They are apparently trapped in a preconceived notion that does not accord with the circumstances in the region: That their professionalism will absolutely and always prevent any fraud or abuse of trust.” This appeared to be borne out when the leadership of both World Vision International and World Vision Australia initially claimed that Israeli charges of aid diversion in Gaza were “hard to reconcile.”

It is precisely for that reason that it is incumbent on donor governments to maintain rigorous and robust standards when working with the aid industry. NGOs like NRC and World Vision may not like them, but anti-terror regulations exist to prevent malign actors from exacerbating volatile situations and subsidizing their war machines through aid money and materials. For all of its assumed good intentions, the aid industry should not receive a blank check.

(JNS Jun 26)

Bolstering Bibi by Deriding his Backers By Ruthie Blum

In an interview with Israel’s Channel 13 on Monday, former TV news anchor Gadi Sukenik unwittingly gave a boost to the very politician whose supporters he was trying to discredit. Discussing Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid, the alternate premier who is about to replace Prime Minister Naftali Bennett at the helm until the next government is established, he took a typically elitist stab at the competition.

“Yesh Atid members are at a much higher level than the societal average,” he announced, referring to himself and his cohorts, of course.

“Compare it to other parties that are ostensibly ‘democratic,’” he continued, using air quotes to demonstrate his disdain for the fact that the Likud Party, headed by opposition chair and former Prime Minister Benjamin “Bibi” Netanyahu, holds primaries to select its list for the parliament. This is while Yesh Atid did so in January for the first time in a decade.

“Take a look at the body that elects [their Knesset members]; Likud, for instance. The Likud Central Committee is rife with

interests, infected with all the diseases of the world. Those it selects are in kind. And, as a citizen—I try to say this as an objective citizen—they are generally at a much lower level than those of Yesh Atid.”

Asked what he meant by that, Sukenik replied, “A low level of functioning, of intelligence, of culture and discourse.”

Coming from the person who makes his living as the face of the company Credit Clean—and whose most recent claim to fame was his participation in the Israeli version of the reality show, “The Masked Singer”—this remark was both amusing and revealing.

Questioned as to whether he was really saying that Likud MKs are “less intelligent” than Yesh Atid’s, he gave a resounding positive answer.

“Check out the people!” he insisted. “The whole tradition of screeching and verbal violence in the Knesset—look at who’s been leading that, for years. Check it out.”

His attitude is par for the Lapid-led party’s course. That it will be magnified in the few months before Israelis go to the polls for the fifth time in three and a half years is also a given, as was the angry reaction on social media to Sukenik’s snobbery.

Though he avoided casting direct aspersions on Likud voters in the general population, the critique was clear: Anyone casting a ballot for that party and others in its camp belongs in the baboon category. Never mind that it’s more than half of the electorate. Since Menachem Begin became Israel’s prime minister in 1977, wresting the reins from the socialist Labor bloc, the likes of Sukenik have considered the “others” to constitute the dregs of the populace.

Many openly attribute the schism to the Mizrahi Jews, those of North African backgrounds, going as far to use epithets that they would never dare hurl at Arabs. The only thing accurate about the accusation is that the Mizrachim—hailing from anti-Semitic Muslim/Arab states—have tended to be on the right of the foreign-policy political map, as they have a dim view of the prospects of peace with the Palestinians. Begin was championed by a majority of them at the time.

This was long before Netanyahu emerged on the scene. But the same snootiness is applied to Likud voters today, despite the left’s forecasts over the decades having been repeatedly proved false.

This hasn’t stopped its members from remaining on their high horses, however, because much of the debate centers on the “quality” of the people who disagree with them.

Lapid supporters are particularly prone to this holier-than-thou mindset, which has more to do with culture and class than with policy. The legislators representing them are perfect for the task.

Take acting coalition whip MK Boaz Toporovsky, for example. During the plenary session last Wednesday on dissolving the Knesset, he announced that his party will be asking the public: “What do you prefer—love, light and unity, or fear, hatred and loathing?”

The chutzpah is so jaw-dropping it almost renders one speechless. Yet it nicely illustrates how Yesh Atid sees Israel as a collective.

Less apparent is what it stands for, other than aversion to religious “coercion.” This in itself is funny, since other parties, such as Finance Minister Avigdor Lieberman’s Yisrael Beiteinu, also highlight this issue.

Ironically, Likud has just as liberal a take on Jewish ritual and the freedom of individuals to choose whether and to what extent to observe it. It’s the coalition system that’s been responsible for haredi power over religious institution and practice—something the left has experienced from within.

Furthermore, if Lapid and Netanyahu end up in a tie, the former will think nothing of wooing the haredim to push his bloc to victory, and it would be in his voters’ interest for him to do so. The same goes for Likud. It’s in the nature of Israel’s fractured parliamentary beast, which is in sore need of changing.

But one aspect of the anti-Likud crowd that can be counted on as a constant, with or without electoral reform, is contempt. The good news for Netanyahu is that the more Lapid and his ilk let their snootiness show, the greater the chance of spurring Likud voters to retaliate by shunning any potential inclination to stay home on election day.

Rather than going wild over the tone and content of Sukenik’s

remarks, offended Israelis should welcome the transparent arrogance. His assertion of Yesh Atid's "much higher level" of intelligence and culture is the best possible campaign slogan—for Likud. (JNS Jun 28)

Who Cares when the Palestinian Authority Violates Human Rights? By Nitsana Darshan-Leitner

Over the past decade, the Palestinian Authority has poured considerable energy into branding itself internationally as a champion of human rights and a victim of Israeli human rights violations.

Among other things, after it was granted non-member observer state status by the United Nations General Assembly, the P.A. joined a host of international conventions pertaining to human rights, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court at The Hague, and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (the "Torture Convention"). Its goal in signing these conventions was two-fold: Establish the P.A.'s status as a state and, more importantly, use them as a tool with which to bludgeon Israel.

The P.A.'s use of these international forums, however, is cynical and manipulative. The one thing it lacks is any real intention of respecting human rights and complying with international law. Anyone looking at the human rights situation in the P.A. will see an appalling reality, with torture in Palestinian prisons being just one example of its egregious violations of basic human rights. The situation for women, children, homosexuals and minority groups is even worse. According to Palestinian law, a husband is allowed to rape his wife. Women are forced to marry the rapist who impregnated them. Homosexuals are brutally persecuted and so-called "honor killings" are still prevalent. These and many other injustices are commonplace in the Palestinian Authority and are met with leniency by the governing authorities.

Particularly disturbing is the conspiracy of silence on the part of the international community, the media and international human rights groups on this issue. Not only do they perpetually turn a blind eye to these violations—which they definitely know about—they obsessively pin the blame on the "Israeli occupation." Indeed, the issue of torture in Palestinian prisons is nothing new. As early as 2015, the Shurat Hadin-Israel Law Center filed a detailed complaint on the matter to the ICC.

Despite the complaint, the matter evaporated into thin air when the prosecutor announced the issues she was willing to investigate. The use of torture by the P.A. was not one of them. Topping her list of priorities were "crimes against humanity" perpetrated by Israel. From the perspective of other countries, the world would keep on spinning. The P.A. would continue its gross violations of human rights, continue receiving hundreds of millions of dollars annually, continue opening embassies and consulates across the globe as if it were a country and its leader Mahmoud Abbas would continue being greeted by honor guards on official visits. From the point of view of these international institutions, the hundreds of people murdered and tortured to death by the P.A. aren't worth one Jamal Khashoggi.

This conspiracy of silence exposes the hypocrisy of the international community, the ICC, the press and human rights organizations. All are derelict in their duties and willing to sacrifice their principles on the altar of slandering Israel, so long as not one hair falls from the head of Mahmoud Abbas. For them, those disenfranchised, defenseless people in Palestinian society are just a minor inconvenience. (Israel Hayom Jun 29)

The Latest Killings in Iran May Indicate a Notable Shift in Israeli Strategy By Jonathan Spyer

The killing of Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Col. Hassan Sayad Khodaei outside his home in Tehran on May 22 appears to have manifested a significant shift in Israel's strategy toward Iran.

In the past, the Jewish state's alleged efforts on Iranian soil have been directed toward personnel and facilities connected to the Iranian nuclear program. However, Jerusalem now appears to have expanded the scope of its operations against the Islamic Republic.

Khodaei had no known connection to the nuclear program.

Instead, he was one of the IRGC-Quds Force's most seasoned special operations men. Khodaei was a senior commander in the Quds Force's Unit 840, which is engaged in external operations including kidnappings and assassinations. He also played an essential role in transferring drone and missile technology to Lebanese Hezbollah, Tehran's key regional proxy. Moreover, according to Hebrew media reports, Khodaei was masterminding a plan to abduct Israelis overseas at the time of his demise.

Khodaei's killing was the second known operation attributed to Israel on Iranian soil against a target unconnected to Tehran's nuclear program. The first was a strike at an airbase at Kermanshah in mid-February which decimated Iran's UAV fleet.

Israeli operations on Iranian soil, famously, are not a rarity. They have in recent years included the theft of the Iranian nuclear archive in 2018, the killing of several scientists associated with the nuclear program and probably also acts of sabotage against nuclear facilities, such as the explosion at the uranium enrichment complex at Natanz in December 2021.

These actions indicate that Israel has succeeded in thoroughly penetrating Iran's defenses. More broadly, Israel has in recent years been engaged in a shadow war against Iranian efforts at power-building across the Middle East. Israeli air power has been active in disrupting and damaging Iranian infrastructure in Syria. Individual assassinations have taken place in Syria and probably also in Lebanon. Israeli planes have struck as far afield as Iraq.

Israeli action against Iranian efforts at power projection across the poorly governed spaces of the Levant and Iraq has been frequent. And a campaign on Iranian soil to disrupt nuclear-related activity is long-standing. But the extension of Israel's campaign against Iran's non-nuclear subversive activities onto Iranian soil is a new development and a significant escalation.

So what has precipitated this broadening of Israel's secret war?

Firstly, such a change is not merely tactical, and a decision to adopt it would not have been taken at the professional-operational level. Such operations would need to have received the nod from the prime minister.

The growing perception in Israel in recent years is that the Iranian nuclear program cannot be seen in isolation from Tehran's broader strategy for regional domination. Outgoing Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has long been vocal in support of this view.

While serving as then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's defense minister in February 2020, Bennett told Israeli reporters, "When the octopus tentacles hit you, you must fight back not just against the tentacles, but also make sure to suffocate the head of the octopus, and the same applies to Iran."

He added, "For years, we have fought against the Iranian tentacles in Lebanon, Syria and the Gaza Strip, but we have not focused enough on weakening Iran itself. So now we are changing the paradigm."

In June 2020, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) established the Strategy and Third Circle Directorate, a body tasked with formulating a comprehensive view of the Iranian threat. The Directorate's express purpose is to avoid compartmentalization of the Iranian threat and instead see all aspects of it as connected.

Now, this approach is being extended to the operational sphere. Israel sees Iran as engaged in a comprehensive, strategic drive intended to result in Tehran's emergence as the dominant power in the Middle East. The destruction of Israel is a critical element of this strategy.

This project is not led by the employment of conventional armed forces. Instead, it is focused on political and proxy military activity, investment in its ballistic missile program and the development of a nuclear capability as an insurance policy for the other two elements. The Jewish state, in turn, is in the process of formulating and implementing a comprehensive response.

A counter-envelopment of Iran through deepening ties with states surrounding it—including Azerbaijan to the north and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia to the southwest, form part of this approach. Israel's transfer to U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) offers potential for operationalizing these growing links in key areas, such as air defense.

A notable change of the rules of engagement has taken place, in

which the totality of Iranian actions will now be opposed, including on Iranian soil. The strike on the UAV fleet at Kermanshah and the assassination of Col. Khodaei in Tehran were the first manifestations of this new approach.

This is not a strategic change in direction for Israel, but a significant broadening of its target bank and perhaps its understanding of the nature of the Iranian challenge.

Some additional suspicious deaths of significant figures within Iran's national security apparatus have occurred since Khodaei's death, though none were as senior as him.

With a change of government now a matter of time in Israel, it will be interesting to see if this significant shift is maintained in the period ahead. (Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security Jun 29)

Netanyahu is a True Right-Winger By Limor Samimian-Darash

Another election is coming, and along with it a host of right-wing pundits are seeking to convince the public that Benjamin Netanyahu isn't really right-wing. Those who endorsed the boycott of a right-wing government led by Naftali Bennett, Gideon Sa'ar and Ayelet Shaked, and accepted with equanimity a government consisting of left-wing parties and Ra'am, cannot let Netanyahu live down the fact that in 2009, for example, he failed to form a right-wing government. Because when it comes to Netanyahu, they only remember the tiny details and forget all of his strategic achievements, while blatantly ignoring historical context.

It appears that Netanyahu, who fought an all-out war against Iran's nuclear program and was a catalyst for the United States' withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal, the reimposition of sanctions and the inclusion of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations, is not right-wing enough for them. The person who took Israel's tiny, centralized, socialist economy and spearheaded free market policies, while advancing Israel's natural gas project against all of its opponents, thus turning Israel into an economic power, is not right-wing enough for them. The person who pioneered a series of new alliances in Europe, Africa and Asia, and above all else brought four new peace agreements that completely altered the previous pro-Palestinian paradigm in the Middle East, is not right-wing enough for them. Indeed, the very same Netanyahu under whose leadership the Jewish population in Judea and Samaria doubled over the past decade without conceding an inch of land is not right-wing enough for them.

Despite all of these mega-achievements, right-wing pundits kept protesting: "But he didn't evacuate Khan al-Ahmar."

In addition to the exaggerated weight these pundits give to minor issues, they also endeavor to obfuscate historical context. It's impossible to understand the 1997 Hebron agreement, for example, without understanding the entire Oslo period. Netanyahu's inclusion of the reciprocity clause at the time of the agreement's ratification, which essentially prevented the Oslo Accords and the entire diplomatic process from progressing, was a dramatic initiative.

We must also place Netanyahu's 2009 Bar-Ilan speech in historical context. Those were not the heady Donald Trump years, and Israel was not as strong or influential as it is today. They were the days after the Olmert government, and the ink from that government's plan to evacuate all of Judea and Samaria and divide Jerusalem was still wet. Barack Obama had entered the White House, ushering in doomsday prophecies of a diplomatic tsunami against Israel. In this context, Netanyahu spoke about the historical right of the Jewish people to their land and Israel's security needs, and in indirect terms also discussed the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state under strict conditions, in order to avoid diplomatic concessions.

Similarly, we can discuss the judicial reforms that never came to fruition. Even in the full right-wing government established in 2015, Moshe Kahlon's Kulanu party had 10 Knesset members who exercised veto power over such changes. They received a degree of support from Shaked, Sa'ar and Benny Begin. Not to mention the fact that the public mood at the time was relatively indifferent to such issues. Few people, if any, understood the gravity of the matter and its ramifications in terms of the country's Jewish and democratic character, as many have come to understand it today.

We can continue debunking all the various grievances cited to

weaken Netanyahu's right-wing credentials. But perhaps the time has come to ask those who can't appreciate the tectonic changes he instituted about their own right-wing credentials? It would also be interesting to see when they finally shed the false prophecies of "right-wingers" like Bennett, Sa'ar and Shaked. Are they waiting for a government with Balad in order to finally wake up? And how is it possible that these same "right-wingers" haven't aimed one iota of the criticism unleashed against Netanyahu throughout the years at the outgoing government and the dangerous initiatives it pursued? (Israel Hayom Jun 29)

For Netanyahu, Winning Over the Center is More Than a Tactic By Nadav Shragai

Don't misjudge opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu again. He is intentionally targeting Israel's political "center"—and no, this is not just a tactic. At the end of the day, once the outcome of the coming elections is clear, Netanyahu may prefer the "center" to his loyal partners on the ideological right, and toss aside those who crossed the opposition desert with him.

How do we know this is the case? It's simple, really: Netanyahu has been here before. He has often preferred left-wingers and centrists as coalition partners over his natural and loyal allies on the right.

In 2009, Netanyahu partnered with the Labor Party, appointed then-Labor leader Ehud Barak as defense minister and left the right-wing National Union in the opposition. In 2013, he integrated Hatnua Party leader Tzipi Livni into the coalition and put her in charge of the Justice Ministry and diplomatic talks. He tried to leave Jewish Home and its leader Naftali Bennett outside the government, but an alliance between Bennett and Yesh Atid head Yair Lapid thwarted his plan.

Netanyahu came close to forming a coalition with one-time Labor head Avi Gabbay. His emissaries said he would have been willing to make Labor's Shelly Yachimovich justice minister and appoint Amir Peretz as Israel's president. In 2017, he offered Zionist Union head Isaac Herzog a unity government on the basis of a peace initiative centered on significant restrictions on construction in Judea and Samaria, territorial compromise and the two-state solution.

Netanyahu is capable of mercilessly attacking people like Livni and Barak and labeling them members of the "dangerous left." Once the elections are over, however, he is able to find various excuses for integrating them into key positions in his government and sidelining the ideological right.

Netanyahu is a lot of things, some of them good and some of them less so. He is a multi-talented phenomenon who has known both achievement and failure. Netanyahu is not, however, representative of the ideological right.

Not convinced? Recall his support for the disastrous plan to disengage from the Gaza Strip in 2005 and the fact that he signed on to the Wye River Memorandum in the 1990s, giving up most of Hebron. Recall how he missed the opportunity of the century when he refrained from applying sovereignty to 30% of Judea and Samaria and the Jordan Valley and the fact that he released over 1,000 terrorists with blood on their hands in a deal to free Gilad Shalit and after.

In his speech at Bar-Ilan University in 2009, Netanyahu supported the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state. Over the years, he has either frozen or slowed Jewish construction in Judea and Samaria and Jerusalem, and in the framework of talks with then-US Secretary of State John Kerry, was willing to cede large portions of Judea and Samaria, as revealed by Israel Hayom's Ariel Kahana.

Do what you will with this information. You can excuse it, explain it away or justify it, but whatever you do, don't call Netanyahu right-wing, because he is not.

It may be that, with the personal and political complications he has gotten himself into, the 2022 version of Netanyahu will not have an opportunity to choose between the right and the center-left. If, however, by some miracle, he manages to secure 61 Knesset seats, don't be surprised if he once again abandons the genuine right. Because for Netanyahu, targeting the "center" is more than a tactic, it is the heart of the matter. (Israel Hayom Jun 29)
