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Tel Aviv radio station opposition party poll strengthened Bennett over Netanyahu

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Gantz opposed each and every PM effort to lockdown restrictions on the virus

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Thousands of protesters with torches stormed PM's home & scuffled with police
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PA security arrests six Palestinians who approve annex on Israel Channel 13 report

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Police break 35 day sit-in outside PM residence, citing no permit, harms public order
Led by former Israeli air force general Haskel

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Israel elite 7th Wing unveiled Special Forces commando schools & rescue units
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Palestine supports Biden to change Trump policies; So far have had little impact

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Seven ship fire at Iranian nuclear facility port, similar to underground fire July 2
Wednesday

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Iran funds 28 missile sites in Beirut Lebanon using public buildings as human shields

07.15.20

Tel Aviv radio station opposition party poll strengthened Bennett over Netanyahu

07.15.20

Likud loses support as far-right Yamina gains strength new polling shows

An April poll had Netanyahu's Likud winning 40 seats after Israel's initial coronavirus response; the prime minister though increases his right-wing and religious parliamentary bloc after polling shows a 64 member backing

Ynet| Published: 07.15.20 , 15:06

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party has lost public support as far-right Yamina, led by Naftali Bennett gained strength according to a public opinion poll published Wednesday by the Tel Aviv radio station 103FM.

The poll was conducted by Panels Politics and included 543 Israelis aged 18 years and older, from the Jewish and Arab sectors.

If elections were to be held now, Likud would win 34 Knesset seats, according to the poll, down from their current number of 36.

Naftali Bennet's Yamina received 14 seats, a considerable jump from the five seats they had won in the March 2020 elections.

Polling conducted in April for Israel's Channel 12, after the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party was given 40 seats.

The Blue and White party that had split from its partners to join the Netanyahu coalition is shown to have a 9-seat support only. In earlier polling this year, Benny Gantz's party polled at 19 seats.

Opposition parties have gained strength in this latest poll with the Yesh Atid-Telem alliance receiving 16 seats and Avigdor Liberman's Yisrael Beytenu party with 9 seats. The Joint List would remain with 15 seats and Meretz would increase its strength from three seats currently to seven if a vote were to be held today.

The ultra-Orthodox block according to the poll would have 16 seats, one less than they currently occupy.

Despite Likud's apparent drop in polling, Netanyahu's right-wing and religious parliamentary bloc has gained strength and would allow him a 64-seat majority while the fragmented opposition would be able to muster 57 seats only.

07.15.20

Gantz opposed each and every PM effort to lockdown restrictions on the virus

07.15.20

Likud: PM blames Gantz' recklessness for next general lockdown

Source claims 'Blue & White try to sabotage every decision' that does not match their populist agenda'; Blue & White calls to delegate duties to the military and Defense Ministry

Moran Azulay, Itamar Eichner | Published: 07.15.20, 12:35

A senior Likud official said on Tuesday that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu blames Alternate Prime Minister Benny Gantz and his Blue & White Party of blocking the necessary measures to rein in the spread of coronavirus due to political concerns.

"Blue & White's recklessness will definitely lead us to general lockdown and unnecessary economic costs. Today, Gantz opposed each and every measure to stop the spread of coronavirus that could have prevented the next general lockdown," said the Likud official.

"Gantz and Blue & White have to stop their political game in issues related to coronavirus. That puts Israeli citizens' lives at risk. Since the unity government requires both Likud and Blue & White to agree on decisions, they sabotage every decision that does not match their populist agenda."

A senior official in Blue & White responded to Netanyahu's remarks and called on the premier to stop shifting the blame for the handling of the epidemic and delegate duties to the military and Defense Ministry.

"Netanyahu must let the IDF and Defense Ministry lead the battle from the ground," said the official. "This is not the time for politics or anything else besides rebuilding the economy, healthcare system, and society."

Netanyahu's words come as a response to Gantz' rejection of a National Security Council suggestion to impose far-reaching restrictions if the rise in infections continues in the coming days.

Some of the options presented were a prohibition on gatherings of more than 10 people; closure of synagogues, beaches, public swimming pools, and gyms; among others.

Gantz deemed it was not right for the government "to make decisions about additional restrictions before two weeks have passed since the last restrictions were introduced and we have examined their effect."

07.14.20

Thousands of protesters with torches stormed PM's home & scuffled with police Tuesday

07.14.20

Thousands of protesters try to break into PM's residence in Jerusalem

The demonstrators carrying torches had to be pulled away from the gate by the police, resulting in clashes between law enforcement officials and the protestors, who called on Netanyahu to resign; rally meant to coincide with The Storming of the Bastille

Yael Freidson | Published: 07.14.20 , 21:17

Thousands of protesters carrying torches, on Tuesday scuffled with police in front of Prime Minister's Residence in Jerusalem and tried to break into the compound.

The "Black Flags" demonstration began in the evening hours in response to police's removal of tents set up by anti-corruption activists outside the premier's residence. The demonstrators have staged a sit-in outside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's official residence in Jerusalem for the past month, calling on him to resign while facing corruption charges.

The protestors were waving black flags, which they say symbolize the death of Israel's democracy during Netanyahu's tenure as Israeli leader, and shouting, "Bibi, go home" and "This is our country, no Netanyahu's".

Many held posters, saying "You are detached. We are fed up," or saying there is "no way" a politician under indictment can be prime minister. Demonstrators, defying orders to maintain social distancing requirements, chanted slogans, blew horns and threw water bottles at the police.

The activists at some point tried to storm the residence but were dragged away by police officers, resulting in scuffles.

Amir Haskei, a former Israeli air force general and one of the leaders of the protest, said the protest is meant to coincide with The Storming of the Bastille in Paris in 1789.

"Today, 231 years ago, the French Revolution broke out with a motto: 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity'" he wrote on Twitter. "We seek to add to that: morality and justice." Netanyahu has seen his popularity drop in recent weeks as he comes under criticism from a series of directions. A loose-knit movement has held a number of demonstrations saying that Netanyahu is unfit to lead at a time when he is on trial. Others have taken to the streets to protest a worsening economic crisis caused by the coronavirus.

In addition, a rally marking nine years since the start social justice protests in the summer of 2011, took place at Charles Clore Park in Tel Aviv. Around 400 people gathered at the part ahead of the protest, organized by Daphni Leef, one of the organizers of the July 2011 demonstrations.

"We are in the beginning of a huge crisis, and it is clear that there is no leadership to expect solutions from," said Leef. "The trust has been destroyed, despair is on the rise, but the people are waking up," she added.

"It is also time to remember and inspire hope that only together will we create the strength to create solutions and change."

07.14.20

Jordan monarch told Brits, peace requires state on 1967 lines & Jerusalem capital

Monday

07.14.20

Jordan king: Israel's annexation plans jeopardize regional peace

Abdullah tells British lawmakers in virtual meeting that only path to comprehensive and lasting Mideast peace is establishment of independent Palestinian state based on 1967 lines and with East Jerusalem as its capital

Reuters| Published: 07.14.20 , 12:43

Jordan's King Abdullah warned on Monday that any unilateral Israeli moves to annex territory in the West Bank would fuel instability and dim hopes of a final settlement of the decades-old Arab-Israeli conflict.

The monarch told British lawmakers the only path to a comprehensive and lasting Middle East peace was the establishment of an independent Palestinian state based on land captured by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day-War, and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

"Any unilateral Israeli measure to annex lands in the West Bank is unacceptable, as it would undermine the prospects of achieving peace and stability in the Middle East," the monarch told members of the British foreign and defense parliamentary committee in a virtual meeting, according to Al Husseinia Palace.

Jordan has led a diplomatic campaign along with most other European countries that oppose the Israeli plans that envisage annexing parts of the West Bank as part of a deal being promoted by U.S. President Donald Trump's administration.

King Abdullah, a staunch U.S. ally, has also in recent months warned that Israeli policies along with Trump's peace plan would lead to conflict and deal a blow to Israeli-Jordanian relations.

Jordan lost the West Bank and East Jerusalem to Israel during the 1967 Six-Day war.

It was the second Arab country after Egypt to sign a peace treaty with Israel and many of its more than 7 million citizens are of Palestinian origin.

07.14.20

PA security arrests six Palestinians who approve annex on Israel Channel 13 report

07.14.20

Palestinians 'arrested for backing annexation' on Israeli TV

Despite PA denial, relative of one detainee says he has been in jail for weeks and will face trial; Channel 13 report disguises faces and voices as interviewees express desire for Israeli identity card, say they don't see Israelis as enemies and even 'chose Israel'

AFP| Updated: 07.14.20 , 10:02

The Palestinian Authority has arrested several people who said they would favor Israeli annexations in parts of the West Bank, corroborating sources say, despite Ramallah's denial.

In a television report aired on Israel's Channel 13 in early June, several Palestinians in the West Bank were heard expressing the hope of becoming Israelis if annexation under a U.S.-Israeli plan moves forward.

The comments by those interviewed directly contradict the Palestinian Authority's total opposition to any West Bank annexations, a view shared by an overwhelming majority of the Palestinian public, according to surveys.

The Palestinians featured in the program were captured by hidden camera and their identities concealed in the broadcast through blurred faces and distorted voices.

"I want an Israeli identity card," one Palestinian is heard saying. Another stated that he didn't see "Israelis as enemies -- their government is the enemy". And a third said he "chose Israel" and wasn't afraid to speak out publicly.

The Israeli journalist who made the report, Tzvi Yehezkeili, said at least six people who spoke out in favor of annexation were subsequently arrested by the PA's security services.

"I was surprised to see that even though I had blurred the faces of all the people filmed and distorted their voices, the Authority has reached and arrested [some] of them, it's just amazing," he said.

Contacted by AFP, several PA security sources rejected the claims.

"We have not arrested anyone in connection with this case," Palestinian interior ministry spokesman Ghassan Nimr said, while Palestinian police spokesman Louay Arzeikat also denied anyone was being held over the report.

Israel had set July 1 as the date from which it could decide on the implementation of the Middle East plan proposed by U.S. President Donald Trump and backed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

It proposes Israel's annexation of its West Bank settlements and the Jordan Valley.

No announcement has so far been made on annexation - a move that would violate international law according to the EU and others - but Netanyahu has said talks with Washington are ongoing.

Palestinian leaders have warned annexation would shatter any hopes for enduring peace and a two-state solution and risk sparking a new uprising.

Some 88 percent of Palestinians oppose the "Trump plan," according to a poll last month by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, and 52 percent even said they would support a return to armed struggle.

There have been waves of demonstrations against annexation and the Trump plan across the West Bank in recent weeks.

Nonetheless, Yehezkeili, who has been a correspondent in the Palestinian territories for nearly 25 years, said he realized there are also many Palestinians who do not share the outright opposition of their leaders.

Some interviewees had told him that "we don't care about annexation" and that "the Palestinian Authority has failed" and was "corrupt", he said, adding that he regretted not airing all those comments on television.

He insisted he had been told of their subsequent arrests by their families and stressed that he felt "responsible."

One Palestinian said his relative, who had criticized the PA in the report, had been held for several weeks by Palestinian police and was due to face a court soon.

The individual said he was also in favor of annexation and, despite "fear" of being arrested, added he remained hopeful "that Israel will give us citizenship".

Some Palestinian commentators say such statements reflect the deep dejection of people who have spent decades under occupation, denied the peace and prosperity they had long hoped for.

"Why did those people say that?" asked Shawan Jabarin of the Palestinian rights organization Al-Haq. "They said that because they have lost hope in peace, in a two-state solution.

"We can't take this question out of context. The context is: there is injustice, occupation, oppression, and the Palestinian Authority doesn't act for the Palestinian national interests... They failed to bring peace.

"The question is: is Israel ready to accept them as full citizens, equal citizens?"

The answer appears to be no. Netanyahu in late May said that Palestinians who find themselves on annexed land will not obtain Israeli citizenship.

Their status will remain unclear since they will no longer be answerable

07.13.20

Police break 35 day sit-in outside PM residence, citing no permit, harms public order
Led by former Israeli air force general Haskef

07.13.20

Israeli police break up anti-Netanyahu protest in Jerusalem

Video footage shows city officials and police officers tearing down banners and tents while tussling with demonstrators, who have staged a sit-in outside PM's official residence for the past month, wounding five of them

Associated Press, Ynet| Published: 07.13.20, 12:13

Israeli police and Jerusalem municipal officials scuffled with protesters demonstrating against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday as officers dismantled tents set up by the demonstrator's outside the premier's residence.

The demonstrators have staged a sit-in outside Netanyahu's official residence in Jerusalem for the past month, calling on him to resign while facing corruption charges. They said police used excessive force to dismantle the sit-in while opposition politicians decried the move as a restriction of free expression.

Video footage from the scene appeared to show city officials and police officers tearing down banners and removing chairs and tents while tussling with demonstrators. At least five protesters were lightly wounded, with one needing a medical treatment at a hospital. Jerusalem city hall said in a statement that the municipality had removed the protesters' equipment for a second consecutive day because it "was placed without a permit and harms public order."

Amir Haskel, a former Israeli air force general and one of the leaders of the protest, told Army Radio that the demonstrators were undeterred. "There's no chance that we're moving from here," he said. "You can't ignore the fact that we've been here 35 days." Last month, Haskel was arrested by police for allegedly holding a protest without a permit, but was later released without charges. He denounced his detention as an attempt to stifle the protest, which has grown in numbers since his arrest. On Friday, several thousand people gathered outside Netanyahu's residence, calling for his resignation.

Separately, thousands demonstrated on Saturday in downtown Tel Aviv, protesting what is widely seen as Netanyahu's failure to address economic woes brought on by the coronavirus pandemic.

After Monday's dismantling of the sit-in, opposition leader Yair Lapid wrote on Twitter that "Netanyahu has lost public trust, and with it the courage to stand before citizens who tell him the truth daily - that he's failed."

The incident came a day after public opinion polls showed dismal approval of Netanyahu's handling of the pandemic. A Channel 13 survey found that 75% of respondents were unsatisfied by the government's performance, while a similar poll by public broadcaster Kan showed that 85% were dissatisfied.

07.13.20

Israel elite 7th Wing unveiled Special Forces commando schools & rescue units
Sunday unveiled

07.13.20

Israel's air force unveils new special forces squadron

The army says the new 7th Aerial Special Forces Wing will include search-and-rescue Unit 669, Shaldag commando unit and outfit that builds airfields behind enemy lines, combining all IAF's special forces under one command

i24NEWS| Published: 07.13.20 , 09:33

The Israeli Air Force on Sunday unveiled a special squadron, which contains all the special forces of the aerial warfare branch, consolidating them under one command.

"The 7th Aerial Special Forces Wing was established to meet operational needs and respond to changing and growing threats in the various arenas," according to an army press release.

The move aims "to increase the operational effectiveness of the units. The wing will function as a complementary and unique component to IAF activities through special depth, routine and emergency operations."

The IAF routinely carries out military operations in the Gaza Strip, typically targeting terror installations of the ruling terrorist group Hamas, as well as airstrikes against Iranian targets in Syria, as part of the effort by Israel to ensure Tehran does not expand its military presence in the war-torn country.

The new wing will contain the air force's elite search-and-rescue Unit 669; the Shaldag commando unit; the Frontal Landing Unit, which builds ad hoc landing strips behind enemy lines; a dedicated intelligence unit for the wing; and a special forces school.

The unit will be under the command of an officer who can only be identified by his rank and first Hebrew initial of his name, Col. "Ayin."

IAF Commanding Officer Maj. Gen. Amikam Norkin said Israel is moving into a new era in the history of the Aerial Special Forces Wing, "we are standing on the shoulders of our predecessors, who were courageous and took action, and now we are leading the way."

"Today we move forward to a new chapter," he said.

07.12.20

Thousands in Tel Aviv massive brawl, 19 arrested, seek PM's economy safety net Saturday

07.12.20

Dozens detained as Israelis protest PM's economic response to virus

Police say at least 19 protesters were arrested following a mass rally in Tel Aviv over the government's response to economic woes brought on by coronavirus; protesters brawl with police, shouting, 'police state,' 'Bibi, resign', and set garbage bins on fire

Itay Blumenthal | Published: 07.12.20 , 08:53

Dozens of protesters were detained late Saturday and in the early hours of Sunday in Tel Aviv following a massive rally against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's alleged failure to address economic woes brought on by the coronavirus pandemic.

Thousands gathered at Tel Aviv's Rabin Square on Saturday evening, protesting what is widely seen as the government's failure to compensate hundreds of thousands of workers who lost their jobs as a result of restrictions and shutdowns. Unemployment has surged over 20%, and Netanyahu has seen his popularity dwindle.

Police confirmed that at least 19 protesters were arrested following the rally after they blocked major streets and interchanges to traffic as well as scuffled with the officers at the scene.

When the police began using crowd-dispersal measures, the protesters allegedly began pepper-spraying the officers as well as throwing rock and water bottles at them, shouting, "police state," "Bibi, resign" and "this is war". Some protesters smashed the windows of a bank and set several dumpsters on fire.

Around 2am, a massive brawl between protesters and the officers erupted at Tel Aviv's Habima Square, where at least three officers were said to have been lightly wounded. "As opposed to the protest, which took place at the start of the evening, this protest is illegal that violates public order and the rule of law," said the police in a statement following the arrests. "The police is working to disperse the rioters and will not allow the rally to continue and damage the fabric of life."

The protest was organized by unemployed, self-employed, entrepreneurs and business owners. Participants wore masks, but did not appear to be following social distancing rules. One man held a photo of Netanyahu with the words "The No. 1 Corrupt Person." "We are not working already nearly five months and unfortunately most of us have not received any compensation from the Israeli government and this is really a tragedy," said Daniel Tieder, a protester. "In every country all over the world people have received compensation and support from their government. Unfortunately, here in Israel, nothing yet."

On Thursday, Netanyahu announced an economic "safety net" promising quick relief to the self-employed and stipends over the coming year for struggling workers and business owners. The government is expected to approve the plan on Sunday. But the large turnout at Rabin Square was a sign of widespread discontent with the government's policies. In the face of an angry electorate, Netanyahu's support has tumbled. A recent Midgam Research & Consulting poll on Channel 12 TV found just 46% of respondents approved of Netanyahu's job performance, down from 74% in May.

07.09.20

Palestine supports Biden to change Trump policies; So far have had little impact

07.09.20

Palestinians hope Biden would roll back Trump's pro-Israel policies

120 prominent Palestinian-Americans, who have been pressing U.S. presidential hopeful to take pro-Palestinian stance, sign 'Statement of Principles' that includes making aid to Israel conditional on it ending 'practices that violate Palestinian rights'

Reuters| Published: 07.09.20 , 13:20

Palestinian leaders hope Democrat Joe Biden will tone down Washington's pro-Israel policies if he becomes U.S. president, and Palestinian-Americans have been pressing his campaign for a change, sources familiar with the efforts said.

So far, their efforts have had little impact, the sources said.

U.S. President Donald Trump has recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, moved the U.S. Embassy to the city and made peace proposals envisaging Israeli sovereignty over parts of the West Bank, territory Palestinians seek for a state.

Trump's moves - including aid cuts to the Palestinian Authority that exercises limited self-rule in the West Bank - have prompted Palestinian officials to sever ties with Washington.

"If Mr Biden (is) elected in November, we hope that it will be a totally different dynamic," Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said last week during a virtual conference with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Biden is the presumptive Democratic challenger in November's election. He is on record as challenging plans by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to extend sovereignty to Jewish settlements in the West Bank - de facto annexation of territory Israel seized in a 1967 war.

"Biden opposes any unilateral action by either side that makes the prospects of a two-state solution less likely - including annexation, which Biden opposes now, and would continue to oppose as president," campaign spokesman Michael Gwin said in a statement. Gwin did not address what action Biden might take if he were president and Israel annexed West Bank land.

Netanyahu's proposed move, under Trump's peace blueprint, has been criticized by Arab and European nations. The Israeli leader is awaiting the green light from Washington.

PROGRESSIVE SUPPORT

Buoyed by support from progressives in the Democratic party, Palestinian diaspora activists want Biden to take a more critical look at Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.

More than 120 prominent Palestinian-Americans have signed a "Statement of Principles" that they say determine their community's support for candidates for federal office.

They include making aid to Israel conditional on it ending "practices that violate Palestinian rights and contravene international law", and revoking any potential U.S. recognition of Israeli sovereignty in occupied territory.

"We want to see Biden embrace the party's progressives, who have recognized the shared struggle between Palestinians living under military occupation, and Black and brown Americans who face police brutality, systemic racism and injustice," said Zeina Ashrawi Hutchison, a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in August.

Those positions have failed to gain traction with Biden's team, three people familiar with the campaign's thinking said.

"The progressives want a full-throttle platform change - a pro-Palestinian flank, an anti-annexation flank - but there just isn't appetite in the campaign so far," one of the sources said.

07.15.20

Seven ship fire at Iranian nuclear facility port, similar to underground fire July 2 Wednesday

07.15.20

Report: At least seven ships catch fire at Iranian port

State news agency doesn't say what started the blaze in Bushehr, the province housing the Islamic Republic's only nuclear plant; incident is latest in a recent series of fires and accidents at key Iranian installations

Reuters| Published: 07.15.20 , 17:16

At least seven ships have caught fire at the Iranian port of Bushehr, the Tasnim news agency reported on Wednesday, in what appeared to be the latest in a series of unexplained incidents around nuclear and industrial installations since late June.

No casualties have been reported, the agency said.

There have been several explosions and fires around Iranian military, nuclear and industrial facilities since late June, including a fire at Iran's underground Natanz nuclear facility on July 2.

Natanz is the centerpiece of Iran's enrichment program, which Tehran says is for peaceful purposes. Western intelligence agencies and the UN's nuclear watchdog (IAEA) believe it had a coordinated, clandestine nuclear arms program that it halted in 2003. Tehran denies ever seeking nuclear weapons.

Iran's top security body said on July 3 that the cause of the Natanz fire had been determined but would be announced at a later time. Some Iranian officials have said it may have been cyber sabotage and one of them warned that Tehran would retaliate against any country carrying out such attacks.

In an article in early July, state news agency IRNA addressed what it called the possibility of sabotage by enemies such as Israel and the United States, although it stopped short of accusing either directly.

Defense Minister Benny Gantz said last week that Israel is not "necessarily" behind every mysterious incident in Iran, after a fire at the Natanz nuclear site prompted some Iranian officials to say it was the result of cyber sabotage.

In May, Israel's national cyber chief officially acknowledged the country had thwarted a major cyber attack against its water systems, an assault widely attributed to arch-enemy Iran, calling it a "synchronized and organized attack" aimed at disrupting key national infrastructure.

07.13.20

Iran funds 28 missile sites in Beirut Lebanon using public buildings as human shields

07.13.20

Israeli watchdog reveals 28 Hezbollah missile sites in Beirut civil centers

Report uncovers sites used for production, storage, and launches of medium-range ballistic missiles; Hezbollah reportedly holds hundreds of missiles with range of up to 300 km (185 miles)

i24NEWS, Ynet| Published: 07.13.20 , 21:13

At least 28 missile sites connected to Lebanon's Hezbollah terrorist organization have been located in civilian areas across Beirut, The Jerusalem Post reported on Monday, citing a report from the Alma Research and Education Center.

The report reveals that the sites are used for the production, storage, and launches of medium-range surface-to-surface ballistic missiles, such as the Iranian Fateh-110 and its Syrian equivalent, the M600.

"The world must understand and know that these launch sites are located in the very heart of residential and urban areas," the head of the research department at the Alma Center, Tal Beer, told JPost. "Hezbollah uses the population of Beirut as human shields, and does not hesitate to place its launch sites near public buildings, educational establishments, factories, and more."

Hezbollah is said to have around 600 Fateh-110 and M600 missiles with a range of up to 300 km (185 miles), the report said, adding that, "the sites in question are already available and operational."

The Alma Center noted that its report relied on information published on Wikimapia.org, by a user identified as "Dalany_Mokus," who could be "a Russian citizen supporting the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad."

Senior Israeli security officials have been warning for years against Hezbollah's precise missile production apparatus backed by Iranian funds and manpower, even labeling Lebanon as "one large missile factory."