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Abbas-Ra'am halt coalition talks amid Gaza violence, stalemate once again

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Abbas Ra'am party halts coalition talks amid Gaza violence, stalemate once again

05.11.21

Arab party head halts coalition talks amid Gaza violence

Most issues in discussions between Abbas and members of anti-Netanyahu 'coalition for change' were already finalized based on earlier understandings with Likud head; other potential coalition partners meet in hopes of preventing fifth election since April 2019
Moran Azulay | Published: 05.11.21 , 14:53

The efforts of the anti-Netanyahu Knesset factions to reach a coalition agreement stalled Tuesday after Islamist Ra'am party leader Mansour Abbas on Monday said he was canceling all negotiation meetings until the latest cycle of violence subsides.

The violence that began in Jerusalem with clashes between the police and rioters on the al-Aqsa mosque compound and clashes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of Jerusalem over the possible expulsion of Palestinian families from their homes, escalated into strikes on Gaza after hundreds of rockets were launched from the Strip at Israeli communities.

Rocket fire on southern Israel continued on Tuesday as the IDF launched numerous attacks against targets in Gaza.

Sources in the so-called "coalition for change" to replace Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister said Tuesday that progress in their efforts to form a government would depend on the security situation, and that a coalition with Abbas was becoming increasingly unlikely despite his earlier statements that his party would support such a government. The support of Ra'am is critical for the success of the negotiations to form an alternative government to Netanyahu's right-wing, religious coalition.

Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid was given the mandate to form a government, but his time to do so was limited to 28 days and six of them have already elapsed.

Most matters were already agreed on in talks with Abbas, based on the agreements the Islamist leader reached with Netanyahu during the latter's attempts to form a coalition, among them the allocation of funds for the Arab population and for infrastructure, and a comprehensive plan to fight the violent crime plaguing Arab communities.

Parties involved in the coalition talks were set to meet on Tuesday to finalize outstanding differences but since the outbreak of violence, some political sources said that the option of a fifth election since April 2019 was once again on the table due to the political stalemate.

05.11.21

137 Hamas rockets in five minutes hits Ashdod, Ashkelon, 2 dead, 2 hurt

05.11.21

2 dead, 2 hurt as 'largest ever' Hamas barrage hits Ashdod, Ashkelon

In an apparent attempt to overwhelm the Iron Dome, terror groups fire 137 rockets in minutes into south; 2 people are wounded, including 1 critically; attack came shortly after 2 Islamic Jihad senior officials, several Hamas fighters were killed in IDF strike

Ynet reporters| Published: 05.11.21 , 14:16

Israel suffered its first casualties of the current round of fighting with Palestinian militants after two people were killed and two others wounded Tuesday by rocket fire on the city of Ashkelon.

Magen David Adom said one of the victim was an 80-year-old resident of the city. The other victim is also an elderly woman killed when a rocket hit her apartment building.

Two other people sustained wounds in the rocket attack, including one person who is in a critical condition. Another person suffered serious injuries.

The southern cities of Ashdod and Ashkelon sustained over ten direct hits from rockets after Gaza militants fired 137 projectiles in five minutes in what Hamas said was "largest ever barrage".

This the first time Ashdod was targeted by rockets since the start of the current round of fighting between Israel and the terror groups in Gaza.

The massive bombardment came shortly after the Islamic Jihad confirmed two of its military wing's senior officials were killed in an IDF strike on an apartment in a multi-story residential building.

Palestinians reported the apartment belonged to Mohhammad Salim Abu Al Atta, the brother of a Islamic Jihad commander killed by Israel in 2019. He appears to have been seriously wounded in the strike.

The terror group said it will avenge the strike against its senior commanders. "Our response will be grave and the enemy should expect it at any moment," the terror group said in a statement.

In an unusual move, Hamas also announced Tuesday morning that several people were killed and some were missing after an IDF attack on a building used by its members.

Shortly after the bombardment, Hamas issued another statement, calling it "the largest ever" rocket salvo and claiming they fired 137 rockets in five minutes.

Two of the direct hits occurred in Ashdod and six in Ashkelon, including a school. Four people, including a young girl, were lightly hurt in Ashdod after suffering shrapnel wounds. Magen David Adom teams also provided treatment to a man in his 40s, who was lightly injured while running for the bomb shelter.

More than 300 rockets have been fired from the Strip since Monday evening, when Hamas launched a barrage at the Jerusalem area in response to what it called Israeli "crimes" in the capital. The IDF has responded with airstrikes on dozens of targets in Gaza, in what it has dubbed "Operation Guardian of the Walls."

Ashkelon became the preferred target for Gaza militants in this round of fighting and earlier in the day, at least six people were wounded when two residential buildings were hit in the city in the early hours of Tuesday.

The southern city, which is just 6km from Gaza, was targeted by dozens of rockets in a period of some 30 minutes.

Among the wounded were four members of the same family, whose eight-story apartment building sustained a direct hit.

The father of the family was seriously wounded, his wife suffered moderate wounds and their two children were both lightly hurt. Two other residents of the building also sustained minor injuries.

05.11.21

IDF increases Gaza attacks to make a substantial impact on Hamas infrastructure

05.11.21

Bracing for extended Gaza violence, Israel calls up reservists, opens shelters
IDF strikes multiple targets in Strip as rocket fire on south continues unabated; Gantz
okays deployment of 5,000 reserve soldiers as army places artillery batteries, cannons
close to border; schools closed and gatherings restricted
Yoav Zitun ,Elior Levy,Matan Tzuri,Ilana Curie|| Published: 05.11.21 , 13:09

Israel made preparations Tuesday for an extended round of fighting in Gaza, as
Palestinian terror groups in the Strip kept up their rocket barrages on the south.

A senior source in Jerusalem said Tuesday that Israel wants to step up the intensity of the
IDF attacks in Gaza.

Ashkelon was pounded repeatedly throughout Tuesday, after a short respite from a night
of heavy fire that wounded six people in the southern city.
Sirens also repeatedly sounded across the communities close to the Gaza border as
rockets were launched from the Strip. Balloons bearing incendiary devices were also sent
from Gaza into Israel, setting fields alight.
More than 200 rockets have been fired from the Strip since Monday evening, when
Hamas launched a barrage at the Jerusalem area in response to what it called Israeli
"crimes" in the capital.

The IDF has responded with airstrikes on dozens of targets in Gaza, in what it has dubbed
"Operation Guardian of the Walls."

Schools and workplaces without a bomb shelter remained closed Tuesday in communities
within a 40 kilometer range of the Gaza border.

Public bomb shelters were also opened in the Tel Aviv area as Israel prepared for rocket
fire on the center of the country.

Schools in communities beyond the 40 kilometer range that do not have proper bomb
shelters were also closed, including in the central cities of Rishon Lezion, Bat Yam and
Holon.

Limits were also placed on gatherings of more than 10 people outdoors and 50 people
indoors.

On Tuesday morning, IDF troops struck a cell firing anti-tank missiles across the border
before a missile could be launched at an Israeli target. An airstrike also hit a high-rise
apartment building in western Gaza City, although the target of the strike was not
announced by the military.

Islamic Jihad said Tuesday morning, however, that two of its senior officials were killed in the strike. A third official, the brother of a Islamic Jihad commander killed by Israel in 2019, was seriously wounded in the strike.

In an unusual move, Hamas also announced Tuesday morning that several people were killed and some were missing after an IDF attack on a building used by its members.

After Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Monday night that the fighting could last for days, Defense Minister Benny Gantz on Tuesday approved the deployment of some 5,000 reservist soldiers, including in the Southern Command, the Home Front Command and the Operations Directorate.

IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi on Monday also canceled a large scale military drill in order to free up troops for operations in Gaza.

The IDF also Tuesday began placing artillery batteries and howitzer cannons close to the Gaza border as well as deploying anti-drone measures in the south. Terrorist organizations have used UAVs in the past, and Israel expects them to be used again, mainly against targets close to the border.

The Palestinians said Tuesday that at least 24 people have been killed in the IDF airstrikes.

Tensions have been spiraling in Jerusalem for days, as Palestinians clashed with Israeli security forces on the Temple Mount, at the Damascus Gate and in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem.

IDF Spokesperson Brig. Gen. Hidai Zilberman told reporters early Tuesday that the IDF attacked 130 terror targets in the Strip overnight.

"We hit 15 terrorists, attack tunnels near the border fence, the home of a senior Hamas commander and the Hamas intelligence command in the southern part of the Strip. We also hit rocket production sites, weapons depots, military posts and an Islamic Jihad training facility," Zilberman said.

"We will increase the level of attacks in the coming hours," he added. "We will not stop until we make a substantial impact on the Hamas terror group's infrastructure. This will take days and not hours," he said.

Itamar Eichner and Adir Yanko contributed to this report

05.11.21

Israel bombarded by over 150 Gaza rockets; IDF hits Hamas in Strip

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Israel bombarded by over 150 Gaza rockets; IDF hits Hamas in Strip

No injuries reported in barrages fired primarily at Gaza border communities; Palestinians say 20 killed as IAF strikes Hamas targets in Strip, including military positions and rocket launchers; PM warns escalation could last for some time

Ynet,News Agencies| Updated: 05.11.21 , 00:12

Southern Israel was hit by repeated barrages of rocket fire from the Gaza Strip on Monday night, as Palestinian terror groups in the coastal enclave attacked civilian targets over what Hamas called Israeli "crimes and aggression" in Jerusalem.

There were no reports of injuries in the wave of attacks, which set off sirens in multiple locations in the south. Two people did go to the ER at Barzilai Medical Center in Ashkelon suffering from shock.

The IDF said that some 150 rockets were fired into Israel throughout the evening, most of them aimed at Gaza border communities.

One rocket fell in the southern city of Sderot on Monday night, causing some damage to a building and a road.

There were no casualties reported but a woman was treated for shock.

School has been cancelled throughout southern Israel on Tuesday and the IDF has closed some roads near to the Gaza border.

Israel was also bracing for rocket fire on the center of the country, including its cultural and economic hub of Tel Aviv.

Hamas, which rules Gaza, launched a rocket strike on the Jerusalem area shortly after 6pm Monday, having warned of a response if Israel did not withdraw its security forces from the Temple Mount compound and the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah by then.

Both locations were the scenes of clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli security forces on Monday.

Following the rocket attacks, Islamic Jihad issued the statement: "Watch 9pm." The heavy rocket fire resumed soon after.

The IDF responded with airstrikes on Hamas targets throughout Gaza. The army said rocket launchers, two military posts and eight Hamas terrorists had been targeted. The IAF attacks came after the security cabinet authorized a "significant airstrike" in the Gaza Strip, with no ground action.

An Israeli official said following the cabinet meeting that, "Hamas has to be dealt a hard blow, but we all understand our limitations. We have no will for major wars and there is nothing to be gained from them. Obviously we will pay a certain price, but they will pay a heavy price. Everyone hopes that this will be over by Eid al-Fitr - within two or three days."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned after the attack on Jerusalem on Monday that the terrorist groups in Gaza "have crossed a red line."

"Israel will respond with great force. Those who attack us will pay a heavy price," he said.

"The current confrontation could last for some time. We do not want an escalation, but those who do chose to escalate will feel our might."

Defense Minister Benny Gantz signaled at the close of the cabinet meeting that Israel could resume targeted assassinations of Palestinian terror leaders.

" Hamas bears the sole responsibility, and its senior officials will be responsible and pay the price for their aggression," he said.

"The offensive operations [in Gaza] are expected to continue until we achieve the objectives that we have set," said Gantz, who served as IDF chief of staff during the 2014 Gaza war.

"We have approved various offensive activities that will severely harm Hamas and the other terrorist organizations and ensure Israel's security and the return of long-term calm."

The Hamas military wing, meanwhile, warned that if Israel harmed civilian infrastructure or the homes of Gaza residents, "the response will be stronger and more painful than expected."

In Gaza, health officials reported a total of 20 deaths in the airstrikes Monday, including nine children.

It did not provide a breakdown, but at least seven members of a family, including three children, were killed in a blast in the northern town of Beit Hanoun.

It was not immediately clear if the blast was caused by an airstrike or errant rocket. The IDF said a rocket had misfired.

Ashraf al-Masri, a member of the family, said there was an explosion outside the house. "We don't know where it came from," he said. "We are trying to get the children for burial but the situation is difficult in Beit Hanoun and we are afraid to leave our houses."

Abu Obeida, a spokesman for Hamas' military wing Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, said the rocket attacks were a response to what he called Israeli "crimes and aggression" in Jerusalem.

"This is a message the enemy must understand well," he said.

05.10.21

US & UN condemn Gaza rocket attacks on Israel as unacceptable escalation

05.10.21

U.S. condemns Gaza rocket attacks on Israel as 'unacceptable escalation'

State Department spokesman says Washington recognizes Israel's right to defend itself and its citizens, reiterates U.S. support for two-state solution; EU, UK join in condemnation of violence

i24NEWS| Published: 05.10.21 , 22:27

The U.S. State Department condemned Gaza militants' repeated rocket attacks on Israel Monday as an "unacceptable escalation."

State Department spokesman Ned Price said the U.S. condemned "in strongest terms" the salvos launched into the Jewish state by Gaza terrorist groups.

He added that Washington recognized Israel's right to defend itself and its citizens, but would not delve into the specifics on Israel's retaliatory strikes. Price said that there had been multiple outreach efforts to both Israel and Palestinians on the prospect of de-escalation.

He reiterated the U.S. support for the two-state solution as the optimal scenario for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but said that the prospect of progress towards long-term peace seemed distant under the current conditions.

U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said that "rocket attacks on Israel should stop now" and that Israel and the Palestinians "need to take steps to de-escalate the situation."

Earlier in the day, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki also commented on the latest escalation between Israel and Gaza terrorist factions, as well as clashes between Israeli police and Palestinians in Jerusalem.

She voiced a "serious concern" on these matters, urging restraint from both Israel and the Palestinians.

Psaki also said U.S. President Joe Biden was closely monitoring the situation in Israel. Extremely concerned by today's violence in East Jerusalem. The firing of rockets from Gaza to Israel is totally unacceptable and needs to stop. We need immediate deescalation to step back from the brink and protect civilians.

— Emanuele Giaufret (@EGiaufretEU) May 10, 2021

European Union Ambassador to Israel Emanuele Giaufret said he was "extremely concerned" by the violence in East Jerusalem, condemning the rocket fire on Israel from the Gaza Strip as "totally unacceptable."

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said that the United Kingdom condemned the rocket launches at Jerusalem and multiple other locations within Israel.

"The ongoing violence in Jerusalem and Gaza must stop. We need an immediate de-escalation on all sides, and end to targeting of civilian populations", Raab said.

05.10.21

IDF strikes Gaza killing 20 people, vows further response to rocket fire

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IDF strikes Gaza, vows further response to rocket fire

Twenty people said killed in airstrikes, including Hamas field commander; military says Hamas will pay price for its actions, Israel 'will respond severely'; Home Front Command orders schools in areas surrounding Strip to stay closed Tuesday

Elior Levy, Yoav Zitun | Published: 05.10.21 , 20:56

The Israel Air Force struck targets in the Gaza Strip on Monday evening, after a rocket barrage was fired at the Jerusalem area and repeated rockets were launched at southern Israel.

The army said it was mulling a further response to what it called "an unacceptable attack."

Palestinian reports said that at least 20 people were killed in the IAF strikes, including a field commander for the Hamas terror group that controls the Strip. Nine children were reported among the dead. Gaza's Health Ministry did not provide a breakdown on the cause of deaths. At least seven members of one family, including three children, were killed in an explosion in northern Gaza whose origins were unknown.

The **death toll** made it one of the **bloodiest** days of fighting **in several years**. The rocket fire began a little after 6pm, the deadline Hamas had given Israel a short time earlier to remove its forces from the Temple Mount and Sheikh Jarrah, two East Jerusalem locations at the center of recent violent clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police. Palestinian sources also said that a motorcyclist had been killed in an IAF strike, while the military said it had foiled rocket fire from a cell of three Hamas members in the northern Strip.

The **IDF** Home Front Command has issued a **ban** on **schools opening in the communities surrounding the Gaza** Strip on Tuesday as well as in some areas further north. The army also called on Israelis to obey the instructions issued by the IDF and **avoid entering areas** that have been declared out of bounds due to the security situation. The attacks from Gaza included the Islamic Jihad launching an anti-tank missile at a jeep close to the border.

The terrorist organization reported that it had scored a direct hit. While the IDF confirmed the attack, it said the missile fired from northern Gaza had hit a civilian vehicle and that the driver had been hospitalized with minor wounds. According to the army, the man was standing outside the vehicle when the rocket hit, which apparently prevented him from sustaining more serious injuries.

The IDF called the missile attack a "very serious incident that will not pass unanswered." It said that most of the rockets fired Monday evening had been intercepted or fallen in open areas, while the anti-tank missile was directed at an unpopulated hill south of the city of Sderot. "Hamas will pay a price for its conduct and we will respond severely," the army said. "Hamas will understand this after we have taken action in the Strip. One option is to carry out a widespread operation. We have prepared an extensive and well-ordered plan and we will not hesitate to implement it," it said. "This is an unacceptable attack on the State of Israel. Even now, we are bolstering our forces for a defense mission by the Gaza Division.

"We have prepared for an extensive range of scenarios, reinforced our air defense and deployed forces to put out fires" caused by arson attacks from the Strip. President Reuven Rivlin said in response to the renewed rocket fire that "those who will test our resilience, will discover a fist of steel."

"We will not let anyone disrupt our lives, we will not bow down our heads in the face of any danger," he said.

05.10.21

Hamas warns Israel: Pull forces from Temple Mount, Sheikh Jarrah by 6pm

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Hamas warns Israel: Pull forces from Temple Mount, Sheikh Jarrah by 6pm
Ultimatum by terror group comes after IDF closes off several roads in the border region and shuts Erez Crossing into Strip until further notice, following continued rocket and arson attacks on southern Israel; Israel said bracing for rocket fire on center
Ynet, i24NEWS | Published: 05.10.21 , 17:37

The Hamas terror group that controls Gaza issued an ultimatum to Israel on Monday, demanding the withdrawal of all security forces from the Temple Mount and the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in East Jerusalem by 6pm.

The group also demanded that Palestinians detained during days of clashes in Jerusalem were freed by the same deadline.

Similar threats were made by the Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine terror groups.

Jerusalem has been the site of days of violence as Palestinians clashed with Israeli security forces across the city, culminating in massive confrontations on Temple Mount on Monday morning as Israel held its annual Jerusalem Day to celebrate the reunification of the city after the 1967 Six-Day War.

The hilltop location is home to the al-Aqsa Mosque compound, the third holiest site in Islam that is built on the ruins of the biblical Jewish temples that are the holiest site in Judaism.

The Hamas ultimatum came after the IDF closed off several roads in the Gaza border region in response to repeated rocket fire and arson attacks from the Strip, and scrapped a massive military drill so as to have all troops available should there be an escalation in violence.

Train services between the southern cities of Be'er Sheva and Ashkelon were also halted Monday, with visitors barred from arriving at Zikim Beach just north of the Gaza Strip.

IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Kohavi decided to cancel the "Chariots of Fire" drill following a security assessment in light of the ongoing violence.

According to the Kan national broadcaster, Israel is bracing for rocket fire from Gaza at the center of the country Monday night and is directing planes to avoid a flight path that approaches the Strip.

Earlier Monday, the military said it was sending reinforcements to the country's south after also deploying additional forces to the West Bank.

The Palestinian factions in Gaza resumed the rocket attacks at dawn Monday just hours after firing several projectiles at the south as tensions on the border increased due to the Jerusalem clashes.

Rocket alert sirens blared in the southern city of Sderot and communities near the Gaza border just after 6am, a few hours after three rockets were fired toward Ashkelon and the surrounding areas.

One of the rockets was intercepted by Iron Dome and no injuries or property damage in the bombardment was reported.

In response to the rocket fire and incendiary balloon attacks that caused over 40 fires in Israeli fields on Sunday, IDF tanks struck Hamas military posts in the Gaza Strip.

The IDF also said the Erez Crossing between Israel and Gaza was closed until further notice, save for humanitarian and other extraordinary cases.

05.10.21

As calm returns, police leave Temple Mount and Palestinians declare victory

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As calm returns, police leave Temple Mount and Palestinians declare victory

Violent riots at al-Aqsa Mosque compound resumed early morning on Jerusalem Day, with Palestinians hurling rocks and Israeli police responding with stun grenades; Palestinians say 215 people wounded; police say 16 officers hurt
Ynet reporters, Associated Press | Updated: 05.10.21 , 12:58

Relative calm returned to the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the Old City of Jerusalem on Monday afternoon, with police withdrawing after hours of clashes and Palestinian protesters at the site declaring victory.

The clashes began in the early hours of the morning, as contentious Jerusalem Day events to mark Israel's "reunification" of the capital after the 1967 Six-Day War gounderway.

Although the police on Sunday gave the go-ahead to Israeli nationalists to parade through the Old City in an annual flag-waving display, the event also appeared to be doubt Monday due to daily riots at the site over the past week.

The clashes in Jerusalem initially began weeks ago, when police blocked the plaza outside the Damascus Gate entrance to the Old City, a popular gathering spot for

Jerusalem's Palestinian residents during the holy month of Ramadan. The barriers were removed after prolonged protests.

The tensions were compounded by growing anger over the potential eviction of several Palestinian families from their homes in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah and a spate of attacks on ultra-Orthodox Jews in the city by young Palestinians, which were then posted on the TikTok social media site.

Despite heavy police presence at the site Monday morning, clashes erupted once again shortly after 8am, with Palestinians hurling stones at officers, who responded by firing stun grenades.

Police said protesters threw stones from the al-Aqsa Mosque compound on the Temple Mount onto an adjoining roadway. Palestinians reported stun grenades fired into the mosque compound, with dozens injured.

Palestinian medics said at least 215 Palestinians were hurt in the violence at the al-Aqsa compound, including 153 who were hospitalized. "There are wounded people who suffered direct damage from rubber bullets to their heads," said the spokesperson for the Red Cross.

Israel Police said at least 16 officers were wounded, including one who was hospitalized.

Israel Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai earlier Monday confirmed that Jews would not be able to ascend to the the Temple Mount on Jerusalem Day in order to avoid provocation.

"We will continue to allow the freedom of worship, but we will not allow any disturbances," the police said in a statement.

The Jerusalem branch of Hamas on Monday morning called for Palestinians to keep fighting at the site.

"What is happening at al-Aqsa - the breach of a house of prayer and attack on the worshipers and those within it - is a religious war being waged by Israel. This is proof of the cruelty of the Zionist occupation," the group said.

"We are calling on our compatriots to keep resisting this breach. Israel will pay a high price for the attack on the Al-Aqsa and the worshipers."

The High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel also condemned what it called "the invasion of the al-Aqsa Mosque by the occupation forces and the brutal attack on worshipers there."

The umbrella organization also said that it held "the Netanyahu government" responsible for "which aimed to inflame the area and ignite a bloody religious war."

The Jerusalem Day march marks Israel's capture of East Jerusalem, home to the Old City and its sensitive holy sites, from Jordan in the 1967 war.

The annual flag parade is perceived as provocative, as nationalist Israelis guarded by police march through the Muslim Quarter to the Western Wall, in a move meant to cement Israeli claims to the area. Last year's parade was cancelled due to the pandemic.

This year's march was set to begin at 4pm Monday on King George Street and follow two routes.

One group of marchers was to enter the Old City via the Damascus Gate, the recent site of repeated clashes between police and Palestinians, go through the Muslim Quarter and end at the Western Wall.

The second group was to enter the Old City via the Jaffa Gate and from there continue down to the Western Wall.

Maj. Gen. (ret.) Amos Gilead, a former high-ranking IDF and Defense Ministry official, told Army Radio on Sunday that this year's **parade should be canceled or rerouted** away from the Damascus Gate.

“**The powder keg is burning and can explode at any time,**” he said.

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05.09.21

Ra'am expected to vote in favor of Bennett-Lapid who honor Abbas demands

05.09.21

Ra'am expected to vote in favor of Bennett-Lapid government

Marking significant progress in government talks, **Yamina chief agrees to honor Abbas' list of demands**, including heading prominent Knesset committees, allocating budgets to tackle issues bedeviling Arab sector; meeting with Lapid slated for Tuesday

Moran Azulay | Published: **05.09.21** , 22:28

The Islamist Ra'am party has reportedly agreed Sunday night to back a unity government led by Yamina and Yesh Atid chiefs Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid but will not be part of it.

In return, the government will honor a list of demands Ra'am tabled to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party when it was in possession of the government mandate, including the chairmanship of prominent Knesset committees and allocation of budgets aiming to tackle the issues bedeviling Israel's Arab sector, such crumbling infrastructure and high rates of poverty and crime.

Bennett and Ra'am leader Mansour Abbas met on Monday at the right-wing lawmaker's office in Ra'anana in their second meeting in two weeks, at the end of which both parties reported significant progress in the talks.

Abbas is reportedly also interested in forming a government as fast as possible and his party will actively support it — meaning it would vote for the government to be formed rather than abstain as was planned under Netanyahu.

The two are slated to meet with Lapid on Tuesday to hammer out further details of the budding agreement.

In the meantime, the emerging government's parties have yet to agree on the distribution of ministerial portfolios, but it is estimated that the gaps are relatively small and could be bridged quite easily.

Earlier on Sunday, two ultra-Orthodox lawmakers urged Prime Minister Netanyahu to step down from his position for 18 months and allow another right-wing lawmaker to serve as premier first to "unite the right-wing bloc's 65 MKs."

United Torah Judaism MKs Meir Porush and Yisrael Eichler said that Netanyahu will be under a power-sharing agreement with said lawmaker.

Nevertheless, Porush and Eichler added they have "no desire" for another election, the fifth in just over two years, predicting a loss for Netanyahu's right-wing-religious bloc.