

Ynet-News, Jun 02, 2021 – Wednesday

06.02.21 – Tu- - - News Placed in Jun 02 spot – Wednesday

Bennett will serve as prime minister for the next two years in a rotation with Lapid

06.02.21 – Tu- - - News

UN Gaza relief chief removed after comments over Israeli airstrike precision

06.02.21 – Tu- - - News

IDF arrests West Bank Hamas Sheikh & several planning to run in PA elections

06.02.21 – Tu- - -

Lapid coalition by midnight Wednesday or Knesset has three weeks for new candidate

06.02.21 – Tu- - - News

Israelis seeking US travel visa told to wait until August 2022 from backlog

06.02.21 – Tu- - - News Placed in Jun 01 spot – Tuesday

Isaac Herzog elected 11th president of State of Israel, seven-year term on July 9

06.02.21 – Tu- - - News

Herzog vs. Peretz: MKs to choose between two very different president candidates

06.02.21 – Tu- - - News Placed in May 31 spot – Monday

Iran's largest navy ship catches fire during maneuvers, sinks in Gulf of Oman

05.26.21 – We- - - News Placed in May 26 spot – Wednesday

US concerned Chinese military aircraft in the UAE may null arms deal

05.31.21 – Mo- - - News

Egypt deal - return bodies of IDF for billions of dollars to rebuild Gaza

05.31.21 – Mo- - - News Placed in May 30 spot – Sunday

Gantz expects to retain defense & justice position in Lapid-Bennett government

05.30.21 – Su- - - News

Hamas leader & Gaza FM to visit Cairo, discussing prisoner swap & rebuilding funds

05.27.21 – Th- - - News Placed in May 27 spot – Thursday

Series of talks allowed plane carrying 109 Ukrainians & 64 Russians from Gaza

05.27.21 – Th- - - News

Kansas Republicans declare Jewish state as trusted ally, necessary for God's blessing

05.26.21 – We- - - News Placed in May 25 spot – Tuesday

Qatar pledged \$500 million reconstruction of Gaza & Blinken rallies to rebuild

06.02.21

Bennett will serve as prime minister for the next two years in a rotation with Lapid

06.02.21

Lapid informs Rivlin he has succeeded in forming a government

Negotiations between broad coalition of parties from across spectrum last almost until midnight deadline; coalition agreement includes Arab party for first time in Israel's history; deal sidesteps threat of fifth round of elections since April 2019

Ynet| Updated: 06.02.21 , 23:35

An amalgam of parties from across the political spectrum reached agreement Wednesday night to form a government that spells the end of Benjamin Netanyahu's 12 years as prime minister.

Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid struck deals with his partners in the so-called coalition for change with less than an hour to go before a midnight deadline that would have seen the mandate for forming a government return to President Reuven Rivlin and likely sent Israel into its fifth round of elections since April 2019.

For the first time in Israeli history, the coalition agreement includes an Arab party. Lapid called Rivlin with minutes to spare to inform him that he had successfully put together a government.

As the clock ran down on Lapid's allotted time to form a government, pressure was mounting Wednesday on his prospective coalition partners to reach an agreement. Lapid met Wednesday night at the negotiation headquarters at Kfar Maccabiah near Tel Aviv with Ra'am leader Mansour Abbas and Yamina head Naftali Bennett in a last-ditch effort to resolve outstanding issues before midnight, when the mandate would have returned Rivlin.

The coalition deal hinged on support from eight parties from across the political spectrum, as each faction's seats are required to reach the support of the 61 lawmakers needed to form a majority government.

Yesh Atid has 17 seats; Benny Gantz's Blue & White has eight seats; Labor, Yamina and Avigdor Liberman's Yisrael Beytenu each have seven; Gideon Saar's New Hope and Meretz under Nitzan Horowitz have six apiece; and Ra'am has four.

The major remaining stumbling block was the appointment of Labor party leader Merav Michaeli to the committee to select judges, which Yamina no. 2 Ayelet Shaked was demanding in order to join the new government.

The two parties ultimately reached a compromise as talks ran into the night.

Yamina's agreement with Yesh Atid states that Bennett will serve as prime minister for the next two years in a rotation with Lapid.

Abbas had posed another potential roadblock for the new government, but by Wednesday evening, his Islamist party had reportedly softened its conditions for supporting the new government, apparently withdrawing its demands for a deputy ministerial position and to overturn a law on illegal construction that disproportionately affects Israeli Arabs.

If Lapid had not mustered a coalition by midnight, the entire Knesset would have had three weeks in which to agree on a new candidate who can muster the support of 61 MKs. If that had failed, Israel would have been plunged into its fifth election since April 2019.

First published: 17:12 , 06.02.21

06.02.21

UN Gaza relief chief removed after comments over Israeli airstrike precision

06.02.21

UN Gaza relief chief called in by bosses after comments over Israeli airstrikes
Protests erupt in coastal enclave following local UNRWA head Matthias Schmale's interview with Israeli media, during which he said he did not dispute Israel's assertion that its attacks during the latest round of fighting were 'precise'

Reuters| Updated: 06.02.21 , 22:09

The Gaza director of the UN agency that deals with Palestinian refugees has been called in for consultation with his bosses in Jerusalem after angering Palestinians with comments they said favored Israel during last month's fighting.

Protests have erupted in the territory over the comments by UNRWA Gaza chief Matthias Schmale in an interview with Israel's N12 television on May 22, in which he said he did not dispute Israel's assertion that its airstrikes were "precise".

Eleven days of conflict between Israel and Hamas erupted on May 10. More than 250 Palestinians were killed in hundreds of Israeli airstrikes in Gaza. More than 4,000 rockets, many intercepted, fired by Gaza militants killed 13 people in Israel.

Hamas, the Islamist militant group that rules the enclave has ridiculed him as "a spokesman for the Israeli military".

Schmale, based in Gaza, has apologized for his remarks in which he was commenting on the ferocity of the airstrikes and said: "... precision was there but there was unacceptable and unbearable loss of life on the civilian side".

Sami Mshasha, UNRWA's spokesman in Jerusalem, said on Wednesday Schmale and his deputy had been "called in for consultation and discussion at the Jerusalem headquarters over the latest developments in Gaza".

Another official told Reuters that Deputy Commissioner-General Leni Stenseth would temporarily lead the Gaza team.

UNRWA provides education, health and relief services to around 5.7 million Palestinian registered refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

"In the coming few weeks, UNRWA will review the emergency response mechanism in Gaza to determine lessons and conclusions to improve UNRWA's response and performance during times of crisis and emergency," Mshasha said in a statement.

In a statement on May 25, Schmale said in apology: "There is no justification whatsoever for killing civilians." He said: "Military precision and sophistication are never a justification for war."

Israel's foreign ministry has said its forces acted "in accordance with international law, in defending our citizens from Hamas' indiscriminate rocket fire".

06.02.21

IDF arrests West Bank Hamas Sheikh & several planning to run in PA elections

06.02.21

IDF arrests Hamas leader planning base in West Bank

Military says Sheikh Jamal al-Tawil took an active part in organizing violent riots and re-establishment of terror group's headquarters in Ramallah; arrest comes after Egyptian-brokered ceasefire halted 11 days of fighting in Gaza

AFP| Published: 06.02.21 , 19:44

The IDF said Wednesday it has arrested a Hamas leader in the West Bank accused of setting up a base for the Palestinian terror group in the territory.

Special forces arrested Sheikh Jamal al-Tawil in the city of Ramallah late Tuesday, the army said.

The military said Tawil took an active part in organizing violent riots and the re-establishment of the Hamas headquarters in Ramallah.

Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem in Gaza confirmed the arrest.

"The occupation forces' arrest of movement leader Jamal al-Tawil will not quell the voice of resistance in the West Bank," he said.

The arrest came after a May 21 Egyptian-brokered ceasefire halted 11 days of fighting between Israel and Hamas.

On Wednesday, Iyad al-Bozom, spokesman for the Hamas-run interior ministry in Gaza, said two more Hamas combatants died while dismantling Israeli ordnance in the enclave.

Children at a rally days after a cease-fire was reached in an 11-day war between Gaza's

Israel has arrested dozens of Hamas members in past weeks in the West Bank, including several who had planned to run in Palestinian elections scheduled for late May but postponed by President Mahmoud Abbas.

Hamas controls the Israeli-blockaded Gaza Strip, while Fatah dominates the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

Israel, the United States and the European Union consider Hamas a "terrorist" organization.

06.02.21

Lapid coalition by midnight Wednesday, or Knesset has three weeks for new candidate

06.02.21

Pressure grows as clock ticks on Lapid's coalition efforts

Yamina No. 2's demand for seat on judicial selections panel remains largest roadblock to announcement of new government before midnight deadline; Ra'am leader Mansour Abbas reportedly softens demand for his signature on coalition agreement

Ynet| Updated: 06.02.21 , 19:03

With just hours left of Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid's allotted time to form a government, pressure was mounting Wednesday on his prospective coalition partners to ink an agreement.

The major remaining stumbling block was the appointment of Labor party leader Merav Michaeli to the committee to select judges, which Yamina no. 2 Ayelet Shaked was demanding in order to join the new government.

Labor however has said that it has already signed its own agreement with Lapid and will not be revisiting it.

Shaked has said she would not support the new coalition if her demands are not met. Labor denied Wednesday evening that there had been a last-minute compromise was floated by Yamina for Michaeli and Shaked to rotate the membership of the committee, with Shaked taking the first stint.

Yamina's agreement with Yesh Atid states that its party leader Naftali Bennett would serve as prime minister for the next two years in a rotation with Lapid, who has until midnight to inform President Reuven Rivlin that he has managed to form a government. Another potential roadblock for the new government was Ra'am chair Mansour Abbas, who was at the negotiation headquarters at Kfar Maccabiah on the outskirts of Tel Aviv on Wednesday but had yet to sign the coalition agreement.

But by Wednesday evening, the Islamist party had reportedly softened its conditions for supporting the new government, apparently withdrawing its demands for a deputy

ministerial position and to overturn a law on illegal construction that disproportionately affects Israeli Arabs.

The Islamist party remained on the fence Wednesday afternoon, unwilling to reveal progress in talks with Lapid and Bennett. On Tuesday, however, Abbas said that talks were heading in "the right direction."

Meanwhile, Transportation Minister Miri Regev of Likud arrived at Kfar Maccabiah on Wednesday to join protesters opposed to the formation of a new government to replace Netanyahu after 12 years in power.

If Lapid cannot muster a coalition by midnight Wednesday, Knesset has three weeks in which to agree on a new candidate. If that fails, Israel will hold its fifth election since April 2019. First published: 17:12 , 06.02.21

06.02.21

Israelis seeking US travel visa told to wait until August 2022 from backlog

06.02.21

Israelis seeking U.S. travel visa told to wait until August 2022

Backlog in consular services caused by pandemic means American nationals, foreigners traveling for work, studies or medical purposes given priority over tourists; Jerusalem embassy warns against companies claiming they can expedite process

Itamar Eichner | Published: 06.02.21 , 16:18

Israelis hoping to obtain an entry visa to the United States are being informed that the next available appointment for an interview by U.S. consular services is in August 2022.

Nationals of countries that do not have a visa waiver agreement with the U.S., which includes Israelis, must apply for a visa in person at an American embassy or consulate.

But the U.S. shut down its consular service in March 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. In Israel, it was only partially reopened a year later in March 2021.

Facing a massive backlog of requests, the U.S. decided to give priority for consular services to its own citizens, causing long waiting periods for non-Americans.

Thousands of Israelis who contacted the U.S. Embassy to enquire about obtaining an entry visa were informed they would have to wait up to 18 months for an appointment or to check online for a potential vacant spot at an earlier date.

The delays, which have caused many Israelis to scrap travel plans for the summer, apply to all requests to travel to the U.S., although those traveling for medical reasons are given preferential treatment.

Israel is not one of the 39 countries whose citizens are exempt from needing an entry visa to the United States, despite the two countries' close ties and repeated requests by Israel to join the American visa waiver program.

While Israel has seen its coronavirus infection rate shrink to almost zero, the U.S. embassy is not operating at full capacity.

Many employees returned home at the start of the pandemic and have not yet been reassigned to their posts.

Liam Schwartz, an attorney who represents Israelis relocating to the U.S. for work, said tourist visas could be renewed by mail.

"If a tourist visa expired no more than four years ago, it can be renewed without the need to schedule an appointment at the embassy," he said.

Gilad Erdan, Israel's ambassador in Washington, said he has raised the issue with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Israel's efforts to join the visa waiver program have been repeatedly rejected over the years and Erdan said he was trying to enlist the State Department's help in accelerating the process for Israelis wishing to travel.

Some Israeli companies have offered to expedite the visas process at a cost of 500 shekels. But many who paid this fee discovered that the promises of a swifter visa application meant the companies were merely searching online for earlier appointments with the consular services.

The U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem confirmed that American nationals have been given priority for consular services, leading to delays for visas requests.

The embassy recommended that Israelis who have received a visa for the U.S. in the past four years apply to renew it online."

It also said that preference was being given to Israelis who are studying in the U.S. or needed to travel there for work. As such, all requests for tourism purposes were on hold until those given priority had been processed.

The embassy also cautioned against using companies that claimed they could expedite the visa process in return for a fee as they "were not being truthful and were not offering a legitimate service."

06.02.21

Isaac Herzog elected 11th president of State of Israel, seven-year term on July 9

06.02.21

Isaac Herzog elected 11th president of State of Israel

Jewish Agency boss, former Labor leader and son of prior president beats settler icon Miriam Peretz in secret vote cast by MKs; in first speech after win, Herzog vows to 'build bridges of agreement' to unite Israelis and Diaspora Jews

Ynet, News Agencies | Updated: 06.02.21 , 12:53

Former Labor party leader, current Jewish Agency chair and son of a previous president Isaac Herzog was elected as the 11th president of the State of Israel on Wednesday, beating his rival Miriam Peretz with 87 votes to 26 in a secret ballot of Knesset members.

The result was decided **in the first round of voting** as Herzog secured more than half of the votes in the 120-seat Knesset.

He **will be sworn into** office for a single **seven-year term on July 9**.

Herzog said after the vote that he intends to be the president for all Israelis.

He vowed to lend "an attentive ear to every position and respect every person," while also working to "identify the lines that connect us and build bridges of agreement in order to bring together even the furthest apart, here within Israel and with our brothers and sisters in the Diaspora."

Prime Minister Benjamin **Netanyahu** was quick to offer his best wishes to the new president.

"I **congratulate Isaac Herzog** on his election as president and wish him great success in the name of citizens of Israel," Netanyahu said.

"I thank Miriam Peretz for her honorable candidacy and I am certain she will continue to contribute to Israeli society as she has done all her life," he said.

Peretz congratulated Herzog on his election, calling him a "worthy" man for the job.

"Today we have elected a worthy president who respects us," she said.

"I pray with all the citizens of the State of Israel for his success because his success is my success and the success of my country."

President **Reuven Rivlin**, who is **coming to the end of his seven-year term**, also congratulated his successor.

"Dear **Bougie**, guarding the character of the State of Israel is a heavy responsibility,"

Rivlin wrote on Twitter, **referring to Herzog by his commonly used nickname**.

"I have no doubt that you will carry it superbly. I will be proud to pass it on to you. Long live the State of Israel! Long live the President of the State of Israel!"

Herzog's victory was also welcomed by current Labor party leader Merav Michaeli, who highlighted the broad support for his candidacy in the Knesset vote.

"Isaac Bougie Herzog, the next president of the State of Israel, former party leader, our flesh and blood, we are proud of you," Michaeli wrote on Facebook.

"There is no one more worthy than you for the job. The tremendous and overwhelming support you have received in parliament is testimony to the extent to which you are accepted by huge sections of Israeli society. The Labor Party is behind you dear **Bougie**. Good luck!"

Michaeli also offered her congratulations to Miriam Peretz "for her candidacy and experience and encouragement" throughout the campaign.

The race, which began exactly two weeks ago with the announcement of the respective candidacies, took place amid Israel's ongoing political chaos and without a permanent government.

The two candidates each completed an exhausting campaign that included dozens of meetings with Knesset members and long talks with party leaders, as well as efforts to mobilize broad support - ideally among the public as well.

On Wednesday morning, the chair of the extreme-right Religious Zionist party, Bezalel Smotrich, announced his faction's support for Peretz.

But United Torah Judaism leader Yaakov Litzman, a minister who does not serve as a Knesset member, told Ynet on Wednesday morning that he believes his faction supports Herzog. He said that if he had the right to cast a ballot, he would also vote for Herzog. The largely figurehead position is meant to serve as the nation's moral compass and promote unity.

Herzog, 60, is a former Labor opposition leader who unsuccessfully **ran against** Prime Minister Benjamin **Netanyahu** in the **2013** parliamentary elections.

He is scion of a prominent Zionist family. His father, Chaim Herzog, was Israel's ambassador to the United Nations before being elected president.

His uncle, Abba Eban, was Israel's first foreign minister and ambassador to the United Nations and United States. His grandfather was the country's first chief rabbi.

He is also the current head of the Jewish Agency, a nonprofit that works closely with the government to promote immigration to Israel. Given given his deep ties to the political establishment, he is widely seen as the favorite to win.

Peretz, 67, is seen as a more conservative, nationalist candidate.

She immigrated from Morocco as a child and has worked as a teacher, educator and lecturer on Judaism, Zionism and grief. Two of her sons died serving in the Israeli military. In 2018 she was awarded the Israel Prize, the country's top award, for lifetime achievement.

Had she been elected, Peretz would have been the first woman to hold the office and also the first settler.

She and her family lived in one of Israel's settlements in the Sinai Peninsula until a peace treaty was struck with Egypt in 1979 and the territory was returned. Peretz then moved to the West Bank settlement of Givat Zeev, just north of Jerusalem, where she lives today.

The **president**, while largely a ceremonial head of state, **is tasked with tapping a political party leader to form governing coalitions after parliamentary elections.**

Israel has held four national elections in the past two years amid a protracted political crisis. First published: 11:49 , 06.02.21

06.02.21

Herzog vs. Peretz: MKs to choose between two very different president candidates

06.02.21

Herzog vs. Peretz: MKs to choose between two very different presidential candidates

Former minister, Labor leader and son of previous president **Yitzhak Herzog seen as favorite, while settler **Miriam Peretz** - who lost saw two sons fall during military service - would be Israel's first woman president**

Associated Press| Published: **06.02.21** , 09:24

The Knesset on Wednesday is set to choose the country's next president, a largely figurehead position that is meant to serve as the nation's moral compass and promote unity.

The election will be conducted in Knesset, where the 120 lawmakers will cast their votes anonymously.

Two candidates are running — Isaac Herzog, a veteran politician and scion of a prominent Israeli family, and Miriam Peretz, an educator who is seen as a down-to-earth outsider.

Herzog, 60, is a former head of Israel's Labor Party and opposition leader who unsuccessfully ran against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the 2013 parliamentary elections.

He is scion of a prominent Zionist family. His father, Chaim Herzog, was Israel's ambassador to the United Nations before being elected president. His uncle, Abba Eban, was Israel's first foreign minister and ambassador to the United Nations and United States. His grandfather was the country's first chief rabbi.

Herzog has served as head of the Jewish Agency, a nonprofit that works closely with the government to promote immigration to Israel, for the past three years since resigning from parliament. Given his deep ties to the political establishment, he is widely seen as the favorite to win.

Peretz, 67, is seen as a more conservative, nationalist candidate.

She immigrated from Morocco as a child and has worked as a teacher, educator and lecturer on Judaism, Zionism and grief. Two of her sons died serving in the Israeli military. In 2018 she was awarded the Israel Prize, the country's top award, for lifetime achievement.

If elected, Peretz would be the first woman to hold the office and also the first settler. She and her family lived in one of Israel's settlements in the Sinai Peninsula until a peace treaty was struck with Egypt in 1979 and the territory was returned. Peretz then moved to the West Bank settlement of Givat Zeev, just north of Jerusalem, where she lives today.

To win, a candidate must receive at least 61 votes in the 120-seat Knesset. If neither does, a second round of voting will be held. Once elected, the country's 11th president will hold office for a single seven-year term starting July 9.

The winner will succeed President Reuven Rivlin, who is set to leave office next month, and the new president will take office at a politically crucial time.

The president, while largely a ceremonial head of state, is tasked with tapping a political party leader to form governing coalitions after parliamentary elections.

Israel has held four national elections in the past two years amid a protracted political crisis.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's opponents faced a midnight deadline Wednesday to put together a new coalition government. If they fail, the country could be plunged into another election campaign.

The president also has the power to grant pardons — creating a potentially sensitive situation as Netanyahu stands trial for a series of corruption charges.

06.02.21

Iran's largest navy ship catches fire during maneuvers, sinks in Gulf of Oman

06.02.21

Iran's largest navy ship catches fire, sinks in Gulf of Oman

Iranian news agencies say fire on board the Kharg breaks out during naval maneuvers in the straits of Hormuz, used to transport one fifth of the world's oil supply; crew reported to have been evacuated to safety

Ynet, Agencies | Published: 06.02.21, 10:22

The largest ship in the Iranian navy caught fire and later sank Wednesday in the Gulf of Oman under unclear circumstances, semiofficial news agencies reported.

The Fars and Tasnim news agencies said efforts failed to save the support ship Kharg, named after the island that serves as the main oil terminal for Iran.

"All efforts to save the vessel were unsuccessful and it sank," the semi-official Fars reported.

The blaze began around 2:25 a.m. and firefighters tried to contain it, state TV said. The vessel sank near the Iranian port of Jask, some 1,270 kilometers (790 miles) southeast of Tehran on the Gulf of Oman near the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf.

Photos circulated on Iranian social media of sailors wearing life jackets evacuating the vessel as a fire burned behind them. State TV and semiofficial news agencies referred to the Kharg as a "training ship."

The fire was reported to have broken out during naval maneuvers in a maritime route used to transport one fifth of the world's oil supply.

The Kharg serves as one of a few vessels in the Iranian navy capable of providing replenishment at sea for its other ships. It also can lift heavy cargo and serve as a launch point for helicopters. The ship, built in Britain and launched in 1977, entered the Iranian navy in 1984 after lengthy negotiations that followed Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The sinking of the Kharg marks the latest naval disaster for Iran. In 2020 during an Iranian military training exercise, a missile mistakenly struck a naval vessel near the port of Jask, killing 19 sailors and wounding 15. Also in 2018, an Iranian navy destroyer sank in the Caspian Sea.

In April, Iran said one of its vessels, the Saviz, had been targeted in the Red Sea, after media reports the ship had been attacked with limpet mines.

It was the latest in a reported series of attacks on Israeli- and Iranian-owned cargo ships since late February in which the two arch-enemies accused each other of responsibility. Last year, an Iranian warship accidentally struck another with a missile during an exercise, killing 19 sailors and wounding 15 others.

05.26.21

US concerned Chinese military aircraft in the UAE may null arms deal

05.26.21

U.S. concerns over China said threatening UAE arms deal

Unease grew after Chinese army planes spotted in Emirati airport; WSJ quotes American officials as saying that preserving Israel's military qualitative edge, preventing China from accessing its advanced technology are preconditions for weapons deal

Ynet | Published: 05.26.21 , 13:25

The U.S. sale of F-35 fighter jets and other advanced weaponry to the UAE is in doubt over signs of expanding ties between Beijing and Abu Dhabi, the Wall Street Journal reported Tuesday, quoting unnamed American officials.

U.S. President Joe Biden in April approved the \$23 billion sale that was negotiated by his predecessor Donald Trump as Israel and the UAE signed a normalization agreement last summer.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied that the arms sale, which sparked concern in Israel, was a secret clause in the so-called Abraham Accords with the UAE and Bahrain. The deal included 50 F-35 stealth fighter jets, drones and other advanced munitions. According to the report, the U.S. had three criteria for the sale: "that Israel's qualitative military edge be maintained; that the U.A.E. ensure third countries, particularly China, don't have access to the F-35 and drone technology; and that there be curbs on the weapons' use in Yemen and Libya, war zones where Emirati forces have operated." The U.S. officials told the Wall Street Journal that administration was seeking guarantees that the UAE would not grant China or other nations access to the latest American military technology.

They said the U.S. was concerned over China's aspirations in the Gulf region, including Saudi Arabia, adding that a delegation of senior American officials was due to visit the UAE early next month and would discuss the matter with Emirati officials.

According to the report, concerns surfaced after U.S. intelligence agencies observed two aircraft belonging to the Chinese military touched down at an airport in the UAE and "unloaded crates of undetermined materiel."

One of the officials told the paper that Washington informed the Emirati government that the establishment of a Chinese base on UAE soil would "effectively kill" the arms deal. But, the paper quoted the official as saying, "Washington and Abu Dhabi may not agree on what constitutes a 'base.'"

The report quoted UAE ambassador to the U.S., Yousef Al Otaiba as saying that his country has "a long and consistent track record of protecting U.S. military technology." The WSJ report added that officials from the Biden administration were still negotiating the terms of the weapons sale with the Emirati government as they insisted that Israel's qualitative military edge will not be compromised by the deal.

05.31.21

Egypt deal - return bodies of IDF for billions of dollars to rebuild Gaza

05.31.21

Egypt said working on Gaza 'mega deal' that will return Israeli captives

Palestinian sources at meeting between PA and Egyptian officials say Cairo pushing for all-inclusive agreement; Egypt has embarked on major diplomatic drive to shore up ceasefire that ended latest round of fighting between Israel, Gaza terror groups

Mohammad al-Kassim/The Media Line, Ynet| Published: 05.31.21 , 17:37

Egypt is reportedly working on a "mega deal" between Israel and Hamas that will see the return of the bodies of two IDF soldiers and two Israeli citizens held in Gaza in return for the reconstruction of the coastal enclave after this month's 11-day war.

The report came from Palestinian sources in Ramallah who attended a meeting Sunday between Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and senior Palestinian Authority officials.

"The Egyptians are insisting on an all-encompassing deal that includes the reconstruction of Gaza for the return of Israelis held by Hamas," said one source.

Kamel also met Sunday with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem as Cairo pushed to solidify the Hamas-Israel truce it brokered to end the fighting on May 21.

A statement from Netanyahu's office said the prime minister had reiterated Israel's demand "for the prompt return" of its citizens being held in the Gaza Strip.

The statement also said that Netanyahu and Kamel had discussed "mechanisms and processes to prevent the strengthening of Hamas and its use of the resources that will be directed to the civilian population in the future."

Kamel met Monday with Hamas officials in Gaza, having entered the Strip through the Erez Border Crossing from Israel.

Hamas in the past has said any prisoner exchange must include influential Fatah official Marwan Barghouti, who is serving five life sentences in Israel for the murders of four Israelis and a Greek Orthodox priest during the Second Intifada.

The 61-year-old Barghouti is seen as a possible successor to Abbas, 85, who has been president since 2005.

Barghouti's wife Fadwa on Sunday posted a picture of her husband with the caption, "I'll see you soon," fueling speculation that a deal is imminent.

Egypt's success in securing a ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian terror groups in Gaza propelled it into the diplomatic spotlight, prompting top-level communication from Washington, something President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi had been hoping for. The diplomatic flurry also sent Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi to Cairo on Sunday — the first official visit of an Israeli foreign minister in 13 years — to discuss a "permanent" Gaza ceasefire with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry.

Eli Nesan, an Israeli political analyst and expert on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, says Egypt has an important part to play in the wake of the latest round of Gaza fighting. "Several issues are on the negotiating table: a long-term truce, the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, for Egypt to play a greater role in preventing the smuggling of weapons into the Strip from Sinai," he says.

As part of efforts to ease the tensions and boost the fragile ceasefire, Washington has also renewed its financial commitments to the Palestinians, promising hundreds of millions of dollars in aid.

Some estimates put the Gaza rebuilding price tag in the billions of dollars.

Sisi has pledged \$500 million for reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip and indicated that at least some of the work should be carried out by Egyptian companies.

Nesan said funds donated for the rebuilding of Gaza should not go through Hamas, but rather through the PA and the organizations responsible for rebuilding.

Israel and the U.S. have both made clear that the international aid cannot be handed over to Hamas, which has publicly pledged not to appropriate any of the funds.

"Israel will not allow it [Hamas control of the money]. These funds are for the benefit of the residents of Gaza, and they must be prevented from falling into the hands of Hamas," he said.

All these matters, Nesan says, are dependent on the return of the bodies of the two soldiers and the two Israeli civilians in Hamas custody.

"Hamas was somewhat strengthened at the expense of the Palestinian Authority, but it is still the Palestinian Authority that controls the course of affairs and communications with the Biden administration," he says.

Nesan says the White House also played a crucial role in defusing the tension and bringing an end to violence.

"The American role was very important. Biden had not spoken to Sisi since he [Biden] took office, but the matter changed and he quickly contacted him after things exploded," he says.

05.31.21

Gantz expects to retain defense & justice position in Lapid-Bennett government

05.31.21

Gantz: Israel 'on eve' of having new government

Blue & White chief slams those who've been threatening Yamina officials after leader Naftali Bennett announced he will join a Yair Lapid-led coalition; 'We have not learned a lesson from Jewish history, assassination of Rabin,' Gantz says

Gilad Morag | Published: 05.31.21 , 12:47

Blue & White leader Benny Gantz said Monday that he hopes Israel is "on the eve" of forming a new government after Yamina leader Naftali Bennett announced his intention to join the so-called "coalition for change."

Bennett announced on Sunday that he would be joining centrist Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid in his effort to form a government without Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, more than two months after the March 23 elections.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the 20th annual conference of Israel's Bar Association in Eilat, the Blue & White chief - who holds posts as both defense and justice minister - blasted those who have threatened members of the right-wing party.

"The fact that due to democratic moves, elected officials are threatened, raises a great concern that we have not learned a lesson from either the Jewish history or the assassination of [former Prime Minister Yitzhak] Rabin," he said.

"It is time for all public leaders to come out unequivocally against any threats, whatever the democratic decisions may be taken. Everyone should respect them and refrain from fighting or God forbid, starting a civil war."

He said if the new government is formed, it will reflect the Israeli society and consist of "Jews, Arabs, women, men, religious and secular, with much political diversity, but with a basic common denominator of a desire for unity and social responsibility."

Gantz added that threats will not deter the coalition for change from taking shape in the near future.

"I hope we are on the eve of forming a new government. I will not get into the negotiation tactics, we said what we want. I am the one who gave up the Prime Minister's Office to allow the change of government," he said.

"I could have been prime minister for the next two and a half years and I gave it up. I allowed change in Israel, and I expect people to appreciate it."

Gantz is apparently set to retain his position as defense minister in the Lapid-Bennett government.

"Security is in good hands now and will remain in good and responsible hands in the new government as well. As I promised, political considerations will not overlap with security issues."

05.30.21

Hamas leader & Gaza FM to visit Cairo, discussing prisoner swap & rebuilding funds

05.30.21

Gaza focus of first Egypt visit by Israeli FM since 2008

Visit comes 10 days after Egypt brokered Gaza truce; Ashkenazi says meetings to focus on bilateral issues; Israeli embassy in Cairo says FM will demand release of IDF soldiers and civilians held in Strip; Egyptian intel chief in Israel to meet PM, will also hold talks with Palestinian officials in Ramallah

Associated Press, Ynet| Updated: 05.30.21 , 14:21

Egypt and Israel were holding high-level talks in both countries Sunday to shore up a fragile truce between Israel and the Hamas terror group, and rebuild the Gaza Strip after a punishing 11-day war.

Gabi Ashkenazi, making the first visit to Cairo by an Israeli foreign minister since 2008, was meeting with Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shukry and other officials.

Arriving in Cairo on Sunday, Ashkenazi said his meetings would include "bilateral matters and the strengthening of economic and trade relations as well as improved mechanisms for the rehabilitation of Gaza under international supervision."

The Israeli Embassy in Cairo said Ashkenazi's meetings would also include discussions on the release of the bodies of two fallen IDF soldiers and two Israeli citizens being held by Hamas.

Israel has said it would not agree to any long-term agreement on Gaza that does not include a release of Israelis held in the Hamas-controlled enclave.

Meanwhile, Egypt's intelligence chief Abbas Kamel flew to Israel for talks with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian officials in the West Bank city of Ramallah, an Egyptian official said.

Kamel was to discuss with Netanyahu and the Palestinian Authority how to rebuild Gaza. He was then expected to meet with Hamas leaders.

The discussions with Israeli officials were expected to touch on a set of measures that would allow materials, electricity and fuel into the Gaza Strip, as well as the possible expansion of the maritime space allowed for Gaza fishermen, an Egyptian official said.

"The role of the Palestinian Authority is central in the talks," he said. "Egypt is seeking to have it deeply involved in the reconstruction process."

The Egyptian official, who had close knowledge of the proceedings that led to the cease-fire, spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not allowed to brief reporters.

The 11-day war killed more than 250 people, mostly Palestinians, and caused heavy destruction in the coastal territory. Preliminary estimates have put the damage in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Egypt was key in mediating a deal between the two sides.

The official said **Egypt would offer guarantees** that rebuilding **funds will not** find its way **to Hamas**, possibly going through an international committee led by Egypt or the United Nations that would oversee the spending.

Kamel will also discuss the situation in Jerusalem and ways to water down tensions in the holy city, **including an ease of Israeli restrictions at the al-Aqsa Mosque** and how to prevent the planned eviction of Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in East Jerusalem.

The talks would also look into the **possibility** of a **release of Palestinian prisoners** in Israel **in return for the four Israelis** held by Hamas, the official said.

Egypt last week invited Israel, Hamas and the Palestinian Authority for separate talks in Cairo to consolidate the Cairo-mediated cease-fire and accelerate the reconstruction process in Gaza.

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was **expected to visit Cairo this week**, according to the group's spokesman Abdelatif al-Qanou, who also said **Hamas is open to** discussing a **prisoner swap** with Israel. First published: 13:17 , 05.30.21

05.27.21

Series of talks allowed plane carrying 109 Ukrainians & 64 Russians from Gaza

05.27.21

Ukraine, Russia evacuate dozens from Gaza

Some 200 Ukrainian and Russian passport-holders are repatriated back to their home countries following requests **to leave** the conflict-torn **Palestinian enclave**

AFP| Published: **05.27.21** , 16:35

Ukraine and Russia both said Thursday they had **evacuated dozens of their citizens** from the **Gaza** Strip following hostilities between Israel and Palestinian terror groups there.

The worst exchange of fire in years between the Jewish state and Palestinian groups in the enclave started on May 10 after clashes in Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque compound.

In 11 days of fighting, Israeli airstrikes and artillery **fire on Gaza** killed **254 Palestinians**, including 66 children, and **wounded** more than **1,900** people, the health ministry in Gaza says.

Rocket and other fire from Gaza claimed **12 lives in Israel**, including one child and an Arab-Israeli teenager, medics say. Some **357** people in Israel were **wounded**.

A plane carrying 109 Ukrainian passport-holders who had requested to leave the enclave landed in a Kiev airport early Thursday, President Volodymyr Zelensky's office said in a statement.

Zelensky hailed the "successful homecoming" and said the same plane had delivered to Kiev thirteen Moldovans and four Bulgarian nationals.

Ukrainian diplomats had held "a series of difficult negotiations" to ensure the safe passage to Ukraine, Zelensky's office said. Separately Moscow announced Thursday that it had also brought dozens of its nationals to Russia, with the emergency situations ministry saying a plane had repatriated 64 people from Gaza.

05.27.21

Kansas Republicans declare Jewish state as trusted ally, necessary for God's blessing

05.27.21

Kansas House weighs in on Gaza war with pro-Israel statement
Legislature's members vote in favor of resolution that describes the Jewish state as 'a trusted ally', although some Democratic representatives blasted the move, saying it supports 'the murder of civilians'
Associated Press| Published: 05.27.21 , 15:38

Republicans on Wednesday pushed a resolution through the Kansas House expressing the state's solidarity with Israel and condemning Hamas militants as "terrorists" after an 11-day war this month in the Gaza Strip.

The House voted 83-27 in favor of the resolution, which will be sent to Israeli government representatives in the U.S. It inspired a brief but intense debate, with two of the Legislature's most liberal members arguing that the measure ignored abuses by the Israeli government against Palestinians.

The resolution was the Legislature's last order of business before members adjourned for the year. Republicans in both chambers approved another non-binding resolution calling on Democrat Gov. Laura Kelly to end extra unemployment benefits in Kansas that were provided under federal coronavirus relief legislation, in the latest attempt by Republicans to ratchet up pressure on her.

The resolution on Israel said Kansas views Israel as "a trusted ally" and "endeavors to work toward peace" while ensuring "security for Israel's people, neighbors and citizens of the world."

"They've been a great partner to us, and we just wanted to acknowledge that to them," said state Rep. Chris Croft, an Overland Park Republican.

The Kansas House's brief debate came a day after U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken traveled to the Mideast to announce initiatives aimed at bolstering the Palestinian government and promising that President Joe Biden's administration was committed to rebuilding the United States' relationship with Palestinians.

The Kansas House's resolution did not mention the war, which killed more than 250 people, mostly Palestinians, and caused heavy destruction. Instead, it condemned Hamas' rocket attacks on Israeli cities.

The resolution also didn't mention questions about Israel's policing of Palestinians or the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families in a land rights dispute in the flashpoint neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem.

Democrat state Rep. Boog Highberger, of Lawrence, argued that Palestinians have been "under occupation" for decades. He said lawmakers should call for lasting peace and dignity for Arabs instead of "supporting the murder of civilians."

And Democrat state Rep. Aaron Coleman, of Kansas City, Kansas, who is Jewish, said: "The American revolutionaries — they used violence to get our independence, and now the Palestinians are using the same tactics that George Washington embraced to get their independence."

All votes against the resolution came from Democrats, but four voted yes. Seven Republicans and eight Democrats were either absent or did not vote.

Rep. Tatum Lee-Hahn, a Ness City Republican, suggested that backing Israel is necessary for "God's blessing and favor in your life."

05.26.21

Qatar pledged \$500 million reconstruction of Gaza & Blinken rallies to rebuild

05.26.21

Israel, Hamas to hold talks in Cairo; Qatar pledges \$500 million for Gaza
Energy-rich Gulf country pledges to boost international reconstruction efforts in Hamas-controlled enclave, while Egypt calls on Israelis and the terror group to restart talks on long-term ceasefire

Associated Press, Ynet | Published: 05.26.21 , 22:59

Qatar pledged \$500 million for the postwar reconstruction of the Gaza Strip after the latest round of hostilities between Hamas and Israel, while Egypt called on the two sides to hold talks in Cairo to solidify the ceasefire reached on Friday.

The Gulf state often serves as a mediator between Israel and Hamas and it has contributed hundreds of millions of dollars in humanitarian and development aid to support past cease fires.

"We will continue to support our brothers in Palestine in order to reach a just and lasting solution by establishing their independent state," Qatar's Foreign Minister, Mohammad bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, wrote on Twitter.

Meanwhile, Egypt has called on Israel and Hamas to return to indirect negotiations in order to establish an outline for a long-term ceasefire, which would include the rehabilitation of the Gaza Strip, and an agreement on the issue of prisoners and missing persons.

If the talks do happen, the Israeli delegation to Cairo will be headed by National Security Council Director Meir Ben Shabbat. The defense establishment has not been updated on the talks.

In addition, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken - who jetted to Egypt and Jordan on Wednesday to "rally international support" to rebuild hard-hit Gaza while promising to make sure that none of the aid reaches Hamas. He is instead trying to bolster Hamas' rival, the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority.

He did however made it clear that the U.S. has no immediate plans to pursue peace talks between the sides. Blinken has done little to address the underlying causes of the decades-long conflict, though he expressed hope for creating a "better environment" that might lead to negotiations.

In Cairo, Blinken on Wednesday met with el-Sissi for nearly two hours. Meeting with American diplomatic staff afterwards, he described Egypt as a "real and effective partner" that helped end the Gaza war and is helping "build something positive."

El-Sissi spoke to President Joe Biden last week before and after the ceasefire was announced.

"I think we both believe strongly that Palestinians and Israelis deserve equally to, to live in safety and security to enjoy equal measures of freedom, opportunity and dignity. And we're working on that together," Blinken said before departing to Jordan.

Both Egypt and Jordan are key U.S. allies that have peace agreements with Israel and frequently serve as mediators between Israel and the Palestinians. Egypt maintains ties with Hamas, but also enforces a tight blockade on Gaza, along with Israel, with a shared goal of preventing the Islamic group from arming.