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Bennett announces first close staff picks as prime minister

A close confidant, a journalist and 25-year-old communications consultant, all tapped to man fresh premier's circle as chief of staff, political advisor and spokesperson, respectively; further appointments said to be coming soon

Itamar Eichner | Published: 06.15.21 , 22:41

Naftali Bennett announced Tuesday evening the first round of appointments as prime minister, most of whom appear to be close staff picks.

Bennett officially became prime minister on Sunday after a vote in the Knesset, approving the new government. Among the appointments are chief of staff, political advisor and spokesperson.

The fresh premier has tapped his long-time confidant Tal Gan-Zvi to serve as his chief of staff. Gan-Zvi, 40, has been by Bennett's side since he first entered politics about a decade ago, and had served as his chief of staff during his stints as economy and education minister.

Gan-Zvi is seen as the Yamina leader's closest ally and had headed the coalition talks on behalf of the party.

Bennett has also named journalist Shimrit Meir as his new political advisor.

Meir, 41, who was poised to become the first woman to occupy the position, had worked prior as a political-security commentator in several media outlets, including Ynet's sister publication Yedioth Ahronoth and Army Radio. She also served as the CEO of Link Online - The Center for Strategic Communication in the Middle East.

For the post of the prime minister's official spokesperson, Bennett has appointed communications consultant Matan Sidi. The 25-year-old Sidi had served as spokesman for the defense and education ministers back when Bennett filled these positions.

He later advised State Comptroller Matanyahu Englman and headed the communications team of Yamina's campaign during the last election. Per the prime minister's request, National Security Advisor Meir Ben-Shabbat and Military Secretary Avi Bluth will both maintain their posts.

The Prime Minister's Office said appointments for the positions of the office's director-general and cabinet secretary, among others, would be announced at another time. Among the candidates for the post of director-general of the Prime Minister's Office are Eyal Gabay, 54, who had already held the position during the second Netanyahu

Authority and held a senior position in the Finance Ministry; and Amit Lang, 50, who was the director-general of the Economy Ministry during Bennett's tenure as economy minister.

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Flag parade passed through Jaffa Gate as Gaza sent arson balloons starting 26 fires

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17 arrested during flag parade in Jerusalem after march rerouted

Israeli officials apparently inform Egypt that march was not meant to incite and urged them to 'restrain' Hamas terrorists; Lapid condemns those who shouted derogatory slogans during the parade, calling them 'a disgrace' to the Israeli people  
News Agencies, Ynet | Published: 06.15.21 , 21 :51

Police said at least 17 people were arrested during Tuesday's flag parade through Jerusalem after the controversial march was rerouted in order to avoid a fresh spark of violence between Jews and Arabs.

Some 2,000 police officers were deployed in the afternoon to the scene of the nationalist march for the annual event that drew Palestinian warnings of violent protests and posed a first test for the new government. The parade was cut short on its original May 10 date due to rocket fire on Jerusalem from Gaza.

The streets surrounding the **Damascus Gate**, which the parade passed by, were **cleared of people and traffic** ahead of the parade **but once the march reached the area, clashes broke out between marchers and Arab youths** waving Palestinian flags, which were quickly broken up by police forces.

In addition, in East Jerusalem about **27 people** were **hurt in clashes** with the police, most of them sustaining **mild injuries**. Three people were evacuated to a hospital. The police said that at least **17 people** were **arrested** for **throwing rocks** and **assaulting policemen** across several locations along the far-right parade's route. The **parade eventually reached** the **Western Wall** plaza where a **mass prayer was held** with **thousands in attendance** and eventually tailed off **without major incidents**.

Midway through the **parade**, however, marchers faced a surprising development when **passing through the Jaffa Gate** area in the Old City.

When the marchers reached the area, officials told them they were allowed to enter in small **groups of 50 people** and under heavy security in order to avoid crowds of Jewish nationalists harassing Arab-owned shops at the location.

The move was allegedly done to avoid confrontations between Israelis and Palestinians in the area, which would have likely spilled into Gaza and the West Bank.

Furthermore, Israeli officials apparently informed Egypt that the march had been rerouted and its purpose is not to incite. The officials also apparently told Egypt that they expect them to restrain Hamas terrorists, who threatened to retaliate if the march went ahead.

But a Palestinian source told Ynet on Tuesday that the **terror group that rules Gaza** would **limit their activities to protests** on the border, **including igniting fires** in nearby Israeli fields **with the use of incendiary balloons**.

Local officials said **at least 26 fires broke** out in communities bordering Gaza since the morning hours. In addition, an explosive device attached to a balloon exploded mid-air above a kindergarten in Sha'ar HaNegev Regional Council.

Some media reports said Bennett's administration would order retaliation for the resumption of the balloon launches, though not necessarily immediately.

During the parade, at one point, several dozen youths, jumping and waving their hands in their air, chanted: "Death to Arabs!" In another anti-Arab chant, they yelled: "May your village burn."

In a scathing condemnation on Twitter, Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said those shouting racist slogans were "a disgrace to the Israeli people," adding: "The fact that there are radicals for whom the Israeli flag represents hatred and racism is abominable and unforgivable."

**06.15.21**

**West Bank & Gaza survey 53% Hamas, 14% Abbas, 77% PA won the recent war**

06.15.21

### Poll finds dramatic rise in Palestinian support for Hamas

Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research survey shows 53% of Palestinians believe Hamas is 'most deserving' of representing and leading the Palestinian people' and 77% believe the terror group won the recent war with Israel  
Associated Press | Published: 06.15.21 , 19:56

A new poll released Tuesday finds a dramatic surge in Palestinian support for Hamas following last month's Gaza war, with around three quarters viewing the Islamic militants as victors in a battle against Israel to defend Jerusalem and its holy sites.

The scientific poll by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research also found plummeting support for President Mahmoud Abbas, who was sidelined by the war but is seen internationally as a partner for reviving the long-defunct peace process.

The poll found that 53% of Palestinians believe Hamas is "most deserving of representing and leading the Palestinian people," while only 14% prefer Abbas' secular Fatah party.

Head pollster Khalil Shikaki, who has been surveying Palestinian public opinion for more than two decades, called it a "dramatic" shift, but said it also resembles previous swings toward Hamas during times of confrontation. Those all dissipated within three to six months as Hamas failed to deliver on promises of change.

The march to war began in April, when Palestinian protesters clashed with Israeli police on a nightly basis in east Jerusalem over restrictions on public gatherings during the holy month of Ramadan. The clashes eventually spread to the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, a flashpoint holy site, and were also fueled by Jewish settlers' attempts to evict dozens of Palestinian families.

Israel captured east Jerusalem, along with the West Bank and Gaza, in the 1967 war and annexed it in a move not recognized internationally. The Palestinians want a state in all three territories, with east Jerusalem as its capital. Hamas, which is seen as a terrorist organization by Israel and Western countries, does not recognize Israel.

After warning Israel to halt the evictions and withdraw security forces from Al-Aqsa, Hamas launched a barrage of long-range rockets at Jerusalem on May 10, disrupting an annual parade by Jewish ultranationalists celebrating Israel's conquest of east Jerusalem. That sparked an 11-day war in which more than 250 Palestinians were killed, as well as 13 people in Israel.

The poll found that 77% of Palestinians believe Hamas emerged as a winner, with nearly as many saying that it fought the war to defend Jerusalem and its holy sites, rather than as part of an internal struggle with Abbas' Fatah party.

The pollsters held face-to-face surveys with 1,200 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza last week, with a 3 percentage point margin of error.

“Clearly, in the eyes of the public, Hamas came out as a winner,” Shikaki said, adding that it may struggle to maintain those gains as it has little control over events in Jerusalem.

An early test loomed Tuesday, when Jewish ultranationalists planned to march through east Jerusalem again. Hamas has called on Palestinians to “resist” but may be reluctant to risk another war just weeks after the last one was halted by an informal cease-fire.

The Biden administration and the international community are meanwhile looking to bolster Abbas. Hamas drove his forces out of Gaza in 2007, confining his Palestinian Authority to parts of the West Bank.

Abbas faces a major crisis of legitimacy among Palestinians after calling off the first elections in 15 years in April.

At the time, it appeared Fatah would suffer another humiliating defeat to Hamas, which won a landslide victory in 2006 parliamentary elections. But his decision, citing Israel’s refusal to grant permission for voting in east Jerusalem, also helped clear the way for Hamas to draw attention to Abbas’ weakness in the holy city.

Around two-thirds of Palestinians opposed his decision to call off the vote, the poll found. A similar number believe Abbas did so because he was worried about the results and not because Israel refused to explicitly allow voting in east Jerusalem, as he claimed.

Shikaki said Abbas could potentially regain support, but only if he shows initiative, either by reforming the PA, which is seen as increasingly corrupt and authoritarian, or by taking part in some kind of diplomatic push after a 12-year hiatus in the peace process. “Unfortunately, so far, we are not seeing Abbas take the initiative,” Shikaki said. “We don’t see him talking to the public, he does not have a strategy, he does not have a plan. He is instead waiting... I don’t think that alone is going to work unless Hamas really fails miserably.”

06.15.21

IDF & PA clash ahead of Jerusalem march with arson wild fires in the south

06.15.21

IDF, Palestinians clash on Gaza border ahead of contentious Jerusalem march

Three wild fires break out in south, believed caused by incendiary devices launched from Gaza; Palestinian source says Hamas instructed Gaza factions to refrain from rocket fire at Israel and limit action to altercations along shared border

Ynet, Associated Press| Published: 06.15.21 , 14:51

Israeli forces clashed Tuesday with a small number of Palestinian protesters near the Gaza border fence as tensions rose over a planned right-wing march in Jerusalem later in the day.

One Palestinian was lightly hurt by a gunshot wound in his leg during the riots in the southern Strip, the IDF said.

Tensions rose ahead of a controversial flag-waving procession by right-wingers in Jerusalem that risked igniting tensions with Palestinians in Jerusalem and on the West Bank as well as across the Gaza border.

Hamas warned that it would launch rockets into Israel if the march went ahead, but a Palestinian source told Ynet that the terror group that rules Gaza instructed the Palestinian factions there to refrain from rocket fire and limit their activities to protests on the border, including igniting fires in nearby Israeli fields with the use of incendiary balloons.

Three separate fires had already broken out in the area Tuesday, all suspected to have been caused by incendiary devices from Gaza.

Extra batteries of the Iron Dome missile defense system were deployed to the south of the country and to other locations following the warning from Hamas that it would launch rockets over the parade .

IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi said late Monday that the situation due to the march was volatile.

"We are preparing for renewed fighting," he said, warning that Israel's response to rocket fire from Gaza would be more severe than during the bitter May conflict.

The annual march, known as the Flag Parade, usually takes place in May but was cut short this year by a barrage of rockets on Jerusalem from Gaza that signaled the start of an 11-day conflict.

The new public security minister, Labor's Omer Barlev, decided that the event could go ahead Tuesday, arguing that in a democracy, citizens have the right to demonstrate.

One of the organizers of the parade said the event would follow the route it is provided by officials.

"We will march, thousands of us, with flags where we're told. Anywhere we're told not to march - we won't march," Matan Peleg told Army Radio.

Police approved a route that will pass by the Damascus Gate entrance to the Old City, where Palestinian protesters repeatedly clashed with Israeli police over restrictions on public gatherings during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan in April and May.

But the crowd will not pass through the gate into the heart of the Muslim Quarter, a crowded Palestinian neighborhood with narrow streets and alleys. Instead, police said they are to walk around the ancient walls of the Old City and then enter through Jaffa Gate, a main thoroughfare for tourists, head toward the Jewish Quarter and on to the Western Wall, the holiest site where Jews can pray.

Mansour Abbas, whose Ra'am party is the first Arab faction to join a governing coalition, told a local radio station he was opposed to any "provocation," adding that "anyone who has watched and followed this parade knows what its purpose is."

Also assailing the march as a "provocation," Palestinian factions called for a "Day of Rage" in Gaza and the West Bank.

Palestinian protests were planned for 6pm across the Gaza Strip, and Hamas and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah faction have called on Palestinians to flock to the Old City to counter the march.

The U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem prohibited its employees and their families from entering the Old City on Tuesday.

"Due to calls for a Jerusalem Flag March in Jerusalem's Old City, U.S. government employees are prohibited from Jerusalem's Old City on June 15. U.S. citizens are strongly encouraged to take appropriate steps to increase security awareness," the embassy said in a statement.