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Netanyahu briefed Herzog messages to Biden, Harris, Blinken & Congress July 18

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Supreme Court agrees to hear arguments of opposition to oust PM, coalition outraged

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Some 250 reserve & veterans join opposition, Faithful IDF oppose their interference

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Lebanon seeks to determine land border with Israel through UN

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Israeli minister says Biden advised by members of the radical left

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Hezbollah's provocations on the northern border shaping public opinion for war

7.13.23 – Th

Netanyahu briefed Herzog messages to Biden, Harris, Blinken & Congress July 18

7.13.23 – Th

Netanyahu tells Herzog sees no point in resuming judicial overhaul talks

Prime minister meets president who is to meet U.S. President Joe Biden at the White House next week and relays his government's opposition to a U.S. return to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal

Itamar Eichner|| 15:39

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Thursday that he saw no point in returning to talks with the opposition over his coalition's judicial overhaul legislation despite

continued public protests and international criticism including from U.S. President Joe Biden. Netanyahu and Herzog ahead of the president's trip to the U.S. that will include a visit to the White House to meet Biden, next week.

Herzog asked Netanyahu to agree to a resumption of the talks that were suspended by the opposition last month after the coalition failed to elect its representative to the panel for the selection of judges. Netanyahu has since ordered legislation to be advanced. The prime minister told Herzog he would consider "softening" the wording of the bill.

Protesters took to the streets again on Thursday including thousands who demonstrated outside the U.S. consulate in Tel Aviv calling for the Biden administration to increase efforts to stop what they called Netanyahu's assault on the judiciary and on Israeli democracy. Outgoing U.S. ambassador Tom Nides said Israel was going off the rails, amid Netanyahu's legislation and Biden himself described the coalition as the most extreme in memory.

"The two men discussed matters on the national agenda, primarily the risk of Iran obtaining nuclear weapons," the President's Residence said in a statement. Sources close to Netanyahu said the prime minister said Israel will oppose a return by the U.S. to the 2015 Iran deal and will take any action necessary to prevent the Islamic Republic from possessing a bomb. They also said Israel would not agree to the U.S. request that there be "no surprises," regarding any Israeli action.

Netanyahu had previously criticized former prime minister Yair Lapid and his predecessor Naftali Bennet for agreeing to inform the U.S. in advance if Israel was planning actions against Iran and claimed it would limit its freedom of operation.

In their meeting, the prime minister and the president discussed the government's legislative push to overhaul the judicial system as well as the "Palestinian issue." In a joint statement, they said Netanyahu briefed Herzog on messages he should relay to Biden in their meeting as well as messages to Vice President Kamala Harris and Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The White House issued a statement earlier in the day, ahead of Herzog's visit.

"President Biden looks forward to welcoming Israeli President Isaac Herzog to the White House on July 18. As Israel celebrates its 75th anniversary, the visit will highlight our enduring partnership and friendship. President Biden will reaffirm the ironclad commitment of the United States to Israel's security," White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said.

"The two leaders will discuss opportunities to deepen Israel's regional integration and to create a more peaceful and prosperous Middle East. President Biden will stress the importance of our shared democratic values, and discuss ways to advance equal measures of freedom, prosperity, and security for Palestinians and Israelis."

Jean-Pierre said the leaders will also discuss Russia's deepening military relationship with Iran, and Iran's destabilizing behavior in the region. Herzog will also address a joint session of Congress during his visit. Netanyahu has yet to receive an invitation to the

White House but will be in New York in September, to address the UN security council although **no meeting with Biden** on the sidelines of the UNGA has been announced.

7.13.23 – Th

Supreme Court agrees to hear arguments of opposition to oust PM, coalition outraged

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Supreme Court agrees to hear arguments in bid to oust PM, coalition outraged
Netanyahu was **warned by the AG not to intervene in judicial overhaul** amid criminal proceedings against him, on corruption charges; coalition leaders say ruling is an assault on democracy
Gilad Morag | 09:24

The **Supreme Court** on **Thursday**, agreed **to hear arguments** in a **motion to oust** Prime Minister Benjamin **Netanyahu** from office after he allegedly violated his conflict of interest agreement and **interfered in the legislation of the judicial overhaul**, despite being warned by Attorney General Gali Baharav Miara last March, that due to criminal proceedings against him, he must refrain from involvement.

A **panel of justices** will be selected in the coming days, the court said. The **motion** was brought last month by 39 members of "Fortress Democracy," an **advocacy group** led by former Chief of Staff Dan **Halutz**. Attorney for Fortress Democracy said she was **pleased** that the **court decided to hear arguments**.

A **similar motion** was rejected by the court after the AG said Netanyahu was not in contempt when he said he would be stepping in, to take control of the legislative process that has thus far **brought hundreds of thousands to the streets** for mass **demonstrations** for the **past 27 weeks**.

Coalition leaders said Netanyahu was elected by a **vast majority** of Israelis and an extremist group was attempting to oust him from power. "We are **shocked by the Supreme Court's ruling to hear arguments**," they said in a statement. "This is a fatal blow to democracy and the will of the people.

The legislative **push to weaken** the authority of the **Supreme Court** over the legislative and executive branches and politician's control over the selection of justices and judges in lower courts, came after the prime minister was indicted on charges of corruption, which he denied. He claimed the **cases against him were trumped up by the police commissioner and the then AG**, both people he appointed.

In the years **before his 2019 indictment**, **Netanyahu was** a staunch **supporter of the independence of the courts** and the AG, against efforts by his right-wing and religious partners, some from his ruling Likud Party, to change the judicial system.

The **attorney** representing Fortress Democracy said she was **pleased** that the **court decided to hear arguments**.

7.12.23 – We

Some 250 reserve & veterans join opposition, Faithful IDF oppose their interference

7.12.23 – We

Hundreds of IDF reservists hit out at insubordination as judicial reform tensions simmer
Some 250 reserve soldiers and veterans of elite Paratroopers Brigade reconnaissance unit sign letter addressed to defense minister and IDF chief, decrying calls by reform opponents to not report for duty

Itamar Eichner|07.12.23 | 13:44

Some 250 reserve soldiers and veterans of the elite Paratroopers Brigade reconnaissance unit have signed a letter addressed to Defense Minister Yoav Galant and IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi, expressing their opposition to insubordination as opponents of the government's judicial reform push threaten to not report for duty.

A senior official says despite differences of opinion, U.S.-Israel ties remain strong
"We, the veterans of the Paratroopers reconnaissance unit throughout generations, write this letter to express our resistance to the blatant insubordination observed in certain reserve units that unfortunately choose to serve in the reserves only under certain conditions or specific government decisions," they wrote.

"Since our forefathers dreamed of returning to the Holy Land thousands of years ago, through persecutions and pogroms across Europe and Africa, culminating in the Holocaust that threatened to annihilate the Jewish people, the dream of Israeli soldiers serving in the ranks of the IDF to protect its people and borders has been the essence of the sacred vision reserved for devout believers.

Today, as we have the privilege to serve in the IDF, we have no intention of forsaking it for any reason in the world. Serving in the IDF and standing for reserve duty is a right and a source of pride," the letter stated.

"Until now, the fighters of the unit have refrained from withholding their service in the reserves due to political decisions that may be made, whether through significant legislation or political processes chosen by decision-makers. Reserve duty is the foundation of our existence in this country. Without it, the IDF cannot fulfill its missions and safeguard the security of Israeli citizens.

We believe that in military service and reserve duty, there is no place for such political considerations and any others. We must prevent societal disputes from entering the gates of the IDF. In our opinion, the IDF is the holy of holies and the cornerstone of Israeli society, and there is no room for politics to interfere.

We have never examined who are the ones fighting alongside us, whether they are kibbutzniks, settlers, secular or religious, or any political affiliation, and we will continue to do so as required. Furthermore, we expect you to act to mitigate this inappropriate

phenomenon of calling for insubordination to reserve duty, which is heard in various places."

"Throughout the years, we have left our spouses, children, families and businesses when we were required to fulfill our reserve duty, and we have done so without any hesitations or conditions, and we will continue to do so as required. If the current situation necessitates additional reserve duty days due to the refusal of some reservists, we will respond at the moment it is required. We call on you with a clear call to fulfill any mission whenever needed. We love the IDF and the State of Israel!"

The initiator of the letter is Hallel Shnekolski, a soldier in the unit, who said:

"Unfortunately, there have been calls recently from several reservists from different units to refuse service due to judicial reforms. In my opinion, regardless of opinions regarding the reforms, there is no place to involve the IDF in the controversy. The IDF is the holy of holies of Israeli society, and we do not have the privilege to refuse to attend reserve duty and weaken the IDF."

7.12.23 – We

Lebanon seeks to determine land border with Israel through UN

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Lebanon seeks to determine land border with Israel

Lebanese Foreign Ministry launches initiative through members of the United Nations Security Council, saying a clear agreement on the border would eliminate tensions on northern border; Israel declines move

Daniel Salami | 07.12.23 | 04:11

Lebanon's Foreign Minister, Abdallah Bou Habib, recently launched talks with foreign ministers from countries currently serving on the United Nations Security Council in order to begin a process for setting the country's land border with Israel, mimicking the method used to solve the maritime border issue. Lebanese television channel MTV reported on the move on Tuesday.

The minister suggested the idea to the UNIFIL commander in Lebanon during a trilateral meeting with Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati, according to the report. Bou Habib told the channel that "there are many issues with Israel regarding the border, and therefore we believe that delineating the border is the best solution."

"It's a serious initiative – there are 13 points on which we disagree, seven of which are already practically resolved, and the remaining six can be negotiated. The main dispute is between the Blue Line and the 1949 Armistice Line," he said.

Bou Habib added that "this can solve the issue of Hezbollah tents and northern Ghajar as well as other problems, so that each side knows its border limits and acts accordingly."

The report added that Israel responded to the initiative through the UN and indicated that it has no current interest in pursuing it. The minister emphasized that "this idea is serious and can be a solution, but the move isn't one meant to normalize relations."

Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah is expected to give a speech on Wednesday, which was planned in advance as part of an annual event, where he may address the issue of Hezbollah's tents and the terror organization's accusations that Israel annexed the village of Ghajar.

Standing at the center of the struggle between Hezbollah and Israel is the allegation that Israel controls the northern territory of the Ghajar village in the Golan Heights, a territory that, according to a UN decision from 2000, belongs to Lebanon.

Almost a year ago, a new border fence was completed by Ghajar's municipality, alongside a new wall. However, Hezbollah accuses the IDF of carrying out the work to occupy the Lebanese part of the village.

Alongside tensions surrounding Ghajar, friction between Israel and Hezbollah continues on another issue: The terrorist organization established two tents about three months ago in Israeli territory on Mount Dov, near the Lebanese border, and dismantled one of them about a week ago.

However, the number of people staying in the tent site didn't change – between six to eight armed individuals – and they all congregated in the remaining tent.

On Tuesday, Amos Hochstein, U.S. President Joe Biden's special envoy, arrived in Israel against the backdrop of tensions on the northern border. Hochstein arrived in the country discreetly and met secretly with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and National Security Advisor Tzachi Hanegbi.

7.12.23 – We

Israeli minister says Biden advised by members of the radical left

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Israeli minister says Biden advised by members of the radical left

Speaking to Ynet after reports that the U.S. was reassessing its relations with Israel, Amihai Eliyahu says the president should hear from Netanyahu about the judicial overhaul and not rely on what he is told by his advisers from the far left

Alexandra Lukash|07.12.23 | 03:14

Heritage Minister Amihai Eliyahu said on Wednesday that U.S. President Joe Biden was being fed information by members of the extreme left and in order to understand the situation in Israel, he should hear from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

This guide might save your life! What you should and shouldn't do when drowning
Eliyahu spoke to Ynet and responded to the column by New York Times's award-winning journalist Tom Freidman who said on Tuesday that the administration was reassessing its relations with Israel, amid the policies of the Netanyahu government. "In

order for Biden to see the real picture he should first hear Benjamin Netanyahu before reaching any conclusions," Elihu said.

Freidman's column raised the ire of other members of Netanyahu's coalition. Likud firebrand Tali Gottleib said she would not be intimidated by threats. "Israel is understood when it stands strong," she said in a tweet. "I will not bow down to anyone. There is no threat that will sway me as a politician."

Adan Iluz a lawmaker for the Likud accused Freidman of anti-Netanyahu bias claiming he had been gunning for the prime minister for years. "even if there is currently some tension between Washington and Jerusalem, the bond between the two nations is strong and unbreakable," he said. "It is based on the wide support of the American public and the doomsday prophecies will not come to pass."

Freidman's report came on the heels of comments made by Biden and his outgoing Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides. Both voiced the opinion that Israel was "going off the rails," to use Nides words, in the government's rush to pass legislation that would alter Israel's balance of power between the Supreme Court and the government, a policy many inside Israel agreed would be an assault on its very democracy.

While Netanyahu came to power again after the elections last November, enjoying a clear coalition of 64 Knesset seats out of the 120-member parliament, his proposed judicial overhaul has not been easy to advance amid mass protests that have been persisting for the past 27 weeks, since the legislation was announced. He was also facing international pressure including from Bidens who still refuses to invite him to the White House. Oded Revivi mayor of the West Bank settlement of Efrat said the Biden administration perceives the government's legislative move as a tool that may hinder the prosecution of Jewish rioters who attacked Palestinian villages, such as the case of Huwara when rioters burned dozens of homes and cars after two brothers from a nearby settlement were murdered in a terror attack. "The fire ignited in Huwara compromised American neutrality regarding the reform," Revivi said.

Netanyahu has yet to comment on the NY Times report.

7.11.23 – Tu

Biden coordinated with former PMs Lapid and Barak to fuel demonstrations

7.11.23 – Tu

Biden's comments fueled massive demonstrations, Diaspora Affairs minister says
Amichai Chikli charges Biden's remarks made in coordination with former PMs Yair Lapid and Ehud Barak

Ynetnews|07.11.23 | 09:09

Diaspora Affairs and Social Equality Minister Amichai Chikli accused U.S. President Joe Biden of fueling the massive demonstrations taking place across the country.

Chikli, in an interview on Tuesday morning with the Kol Barama radio station, also charged that Biden's remarks in an interview on Sunday with CNN – in which he criticized the government, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the judicial overhaul push – were made in coordination with Opposition Leader Yair Lapid and former Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

"President Biden's statements are timed with Yair Lapid and Ehud Barak. Biden's people coordinate with them every time they want to inflame the protest in Israel. Yair Lapid is one of the most harmful politicians who has arisen in the history of the State of Israel, an extreme and childish person," Chikli said.

Chikli also said that there is no point in returning to the President's Residence for further negotiations on judicial reform.

"Going to the President's Residence today for talks is irrelevant, today's bills are not far-reaching and there is no need for that." The wording of the president's speech two days ago was too dramatic for the issues at hand. We are in the most elitist protest in Israel's history. Our challenge now is less the police, but that people will pay a price," he said, threatening legal procedures against the protesters, comparing it to those who demonstrated against the disengagement.

7.11.23 – Tu

US indicts Biden whistleblower as foreign agent for violating sanctions

7.11.23 – Tu

U.S. indicts Israeli Biden whistleblower as foreign agent for violating U.S. sanctions
NY prosecutors file charges against Gal Luft of 'multiple international criminal schemes,' including dealing with Iran in violation of sanctions
Luft was named the whistleblower in the Republican's probe of Hunter Biden

Daniel Edelson, New York | 07.11.23 | 06:42

Prosecutors of the state of New York's Southern District on Monday filed charges against Lt. Col. (ret.) Prof. Gal Luft, an Israeli-American, was accused of acting as a foreign agent and violating U.S. sanctions on Iran. He was arrested in Cyprus last February on arms trafficking charges but was released from prison and had since disappeared.

Luft, who serves as the chairman and founder of the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security in Washington, was charged with eight offenses referred to by the prosecution as "multiple international criminal schemes."

These include acting as an unregistered foreign agent, arms trafficking, violating American sanctions against Iran, and making false statements to American agents in the service of China. If found guilty on all eight counts, he will likely spend over 100 years in an American prison.

The indictment against Luft, who claims in his defense that he fell victim to an attempt to cover up a corruption scandal linking U.S. President Joe Biden and his son Hunter to the Chinese government, represents another development in a long-standing affair. "Luft subverted foreign agent registration laws in the United States to seek to promote Chinese policies by acting through a former high-ranking U.S. Government official," the indictment read.

"He acted as a broker in deals for dangerous weapons and Iranian oil, and he told multiple lies about his crimes to law enforcement," it adds. The indictment also includes quotes from conversations Luft had with his partners, various contacts, and authorities. In the first count, the indictment claims Luft "conspired with others in an effort to act within the United States to advance the interests of the People's Republic of China." The official, whose name is not mentioned in the indictment, was an adviser to President Donald Trump's election campaign and later served in his administration.

Luft is accused of recruiting him and paying him on behalf of his Chinese employers. Even before the official joined the Trump administration, Luft allegedly promised his Chinese contact that his acquaintance with the official would be valuable in the future. The additional charges against Luft include working as a middleman between arms manufacturers in China and countries such as Kenya and the UAE and attempting to violate American sanctions on Iran by selling Iranian oil to third parties.

The indictment states that Luft tried to convince the Chinese that Israel was not suitable as a mediator in arms deals with Qatar because it had the same "problem" as the Qataris do with their "uncle" (the United States).

The indictment quotes him as saying, "Need a third party. I will activate." In his role as an illicit arms deals facilitator, Luft allegedly operated with commissions as payment and traveled worldwide to obtain and deliver the required documentation to secure his deals.

During his questioning by authorities, Luft was asked about his involvement in arms trafficking, but he allegedly made several false statements, claiming that he didn't seek to engage in or profit from arms deals but was simply "asked by a bona fide arms dealer, an Israeli friend, to inquire with a company I knew if they had an item and what would be the price of an item." In reality, the prosecutors said, Luft was very active and acted to broker many arms deals in several different countries for profit.

According to the documents filed in court, Luft's presence in Cyprus wasn't coincidental, and he hid there in anticipation of his indictment. In February, Luft was arrested by Cypriot authorities at the request of the U.S. but escaped after being released on bail while awaiting extradition.

His whereabouts have remained unknown since then, despite remaining active on his Twitter account. He embarked on a campaign to defend himself, which included hiring a lawyer, appearing in interviews with Israeli media and pro-China newspapers, and even speaking out against his persecution in a video published by the New York Post.

"I, who volunteered to inform the US government about a potential security breach and about compromising information about a man vying to be the next president, am now being hunted by the very same people who I informed — and may have to live on the run for the rest of my life," He said in his video. "I'm not a Republican. I'm not a Democrat.

I have no political motive or agenda ... I did it out of deep concern that if the Bidens were to come to power, the country would be facing the same traumatic Russia Collusion scandal — only this time with China. Sadly, because of the DOJ's cover-up, this is exactly what happened."

He went on to say that he had warned the government about potential risks to the 2020 elections. "Ask yourself, who is the real criminal in this story?" he said. He claimed that he had provided the FBI with information about a meeting that Joe and Hunter Biden had in Washington with official representatives of CEFC and presented what he called evidence of financial payment to members of the Biden family in exchange for their connections with the FBI and the use of the Biden name to promote their business.

7.10.23 – Mo

Knesset passes 1st reading of bill curbing Supreme Court, protests begin

7.10.23 – Mo

Knesset passes 1st reading of bill curbing the power of the Supreme Court

Police say dozens arrested since the early morning hours when protesters blocked main roads around the country after the coalition passed the first reading of a bill curbing judicial oversight of government

ynet correspondents, Agencies|Updated:07.10.23 | 16:57

Lawmakers late on Monday were poised to pass a bill that would weaken the Supreme Court's ability to weigh in on decisions made by the legislative and executive branches in what is seen as the first step in the government's planned change of the judicial system. Protesters breached the building and demonstrated outside the plenum.

Justice Minister Yariv Levin said the bill would not place the government above the law but would enable it to carry out its policies. "We cannot allow any three random judges to decide that the vote of a majority is irrelevant when electing its leaders to carry out their policies. The public decides what is reasonable, not the judges," he said. The minister later called on the opposition to meet and reach broad agreements on the bill before it is brought to a final reading, which is expected before the end of the summer session at the end of July.

Religious Zionist lawmaker and an architect of the legislative agenda Simcha Rothman said the legislation is balanced. Opposition leader Yair Lapid said in response that the bill if passed will allow the coalition to appoint convicted criminals to high office with impunity, adding to concerns that the government would sack Attorney General Gali Baharav-Mirara and replace her with someone who may decide to end the criminal proceedings against Netanyahu who is facing corruption charges in the Jerusalem District Court. "Who are you kidding?" Lapid asked. "How is this helping Israelis' wages, their security and Israel's standing in the world which you are destroying," Lapid said.

Benny Gantz called on the prime minister not to turn his back on the country and its citizens. "Our relations with our most important strategic partner the U.S. is at an all-time low, our society and economy are in crisis," Gantz said adding that this was the last moment to prevent Israel's crash into the abyss.

The coalition has quickly shepherded the bill through the legislative process so that it can become law before the end of the Knesset's summer session on July 30. If it passes the vote on Monday, the legislation still faces two more votes in the Knesset plenum, usually held on the same day.

The legislation was approved by the Knesset's Constitution Committee last week. According to the wording of the proposal, "those who have judicial authority according to law, including the Supreme Court when sitting as a high court of justice, will not discuss or issue an order against the government, the prime minister, a minister or another elected official regarding the reasonableness of their decision."

The reasonableness clause currently authorizes the courts, including the Supreme Court, to overturn a decision of elected authorities, to the extent that it is found to be unreasonable. The reasonableness standard is part of the mechanism of checks and balances and is a significant tool used by the court to protect the public's rights against arbitrary decisions of the government and state authorities. If an elected official's decisions were influenced by extraneous, discriminatory or arbitrary considerations, or if significant information was not taken into account, such decisions can be disqualified on the grounds that they are unreasonable.

The reasonableness standard has been used by Israel's High Court justices for decades, but it was never written into the law. Its power is drawn from previous rulings of the Supreme Court, as well as from the Basic Law: The Judiciary which states that "The Supreme Court shall also sit as a High Court of Justice. When so sitting it shall deliberate matters, in which it deems it necessary to provide relief for the sake of justice, and are not under the jurisdiction of another court or tribunal."

According to Rothman, the reasonableness standard is not used by the court or the legal advisor to prevent corruption or to prevent illegal activity. Rothman claims that it is "a powerful legal tool – undemocratic - which takes the hands of the elected officials off of the steering wheel, and states that the final and exclusive decision on any issue is only in the hands of the court, in complete opposition to the principle of separation of powers."

The protest organizations said on Monday there are local organizations planning marches throughout the country, and that more and more sectors are encouraging their members to participate in the protest. Bank managers and other officials in the economic sector announced that they will allow their workers to participate in the protest.

"We are preparing for 34 large centers where there will be significant activities throughout the country besides marches," said a senior official at the protest headquarters.

"The State of Israel is in one of its most critical days. Tomorrow begins a new chapter in the protest. The civil forces are prepared for all the actions necessary to paralyze the state from Dan to Eilat," he said.

Nadav Galon, one of the leaders of the protests, told Ynet Live more about what is on tap for the Tuesday demonstrations.

"We will go out from the early hours of the morning for significant actions, which will send a message to the government – if the legislation is not stopped, then the state will stop. Our main action in the afternoon will be a protest at the National Bank of Israel. That is where we are directing all the people and all the forces in order to produce a significant protest there that conveys a message – if the government turns Israel into a dictatorship and the rules are broken, the protesters will also break the rules."

Regarding the possibility of flight disruptions, he said: "We will try to do everything we can to ensure there is no disruption, but our actions are actions that may cause a flight delay – and a flight delay can happen to anyone on any flight around the globe for reasons unrelated to the protest. So even if a few flights are delayed, it is a small price to pay, marginal, zero - compared to the price the day after the dictatorship."

The former CEO of the National Bank of Israel, Ze'ev Sharig, said in an interview with Ynet Live that he "fully supports the opponents of the revolution." However, he said he was divided about the demonstrations at the airport: "A demonstration yes, blocking passengers –no. That's my approach."

7.10.23 – Mo

Hezbollah's provocations on the northern border shaping public opinion for war

7.10.23 – Mo

Hezbollah's provocations on the northern border bode of imminent war

A Ghajar local council official says the new border fence was built and funded by the village for the protection of residents from wild animals while Hezbollah accuses Israel of using it to cement its occupation of Lebanese land

Yair Kraus|Updated:07.10.23 | 09:56

After months of recurring provocations along the Israel-Lebanon border and an attempt to set off a lethal explosive in Israeli territory, Hezbollah hinted that the current situation could lead to a war against Israel, justifying this by claiming they are answering their duty to be the "defenders of Lebanon." The organization's narrative is largely based on the Israeli takeover of the northern territory of the Alawite-Arab village of Ghajar, located in the Golan Heights - an area that, according to the UN decision in 2000, belongs to Lebanon.

Nearly a year ago, the local council completed the construction of a new border fence, accompanied by a wall, which Hezbollah claimed the IDF had constructed in a move to complete the occupation of the Lebanese part of the village.

The Iran-backed group called on the Lebanese government to take immediate action to "liberate" the village and "return it to its homeland." From the perspective of the powerful Shiite group, it seems that its militants were ready for a brawl, as their attempts to engage in conflict with the IDF become more dramatic and frequent. Meanwhile, the IDF was taking action to eliminate this threat and avoid confrontation.

On Sunday, buses filled with Israeli tourists arrived in Ghajar, unloading dozens of first-time visitors. In September 2022, the military opened the checkpoint that had been closed to visitors from the village since the 2000 withdrawal from Lebanon. From the opening and to this day, the village has been flooded with tourists.

"Since the village opened, it has been visited by no less than 900,000 visitors," Bilal Khatib, the spokesperson for the local council, said. "They come here to enjoy the authentic Syrian-Alawite cuisine and the scenery. People really enjoy it and say it feels like being abroad, visiting a Greek or Italian village."

After a missile was launched from Lebanon on Thursday, the IDF and Border Police repositioned troops at the entrance gate of Ghajar. As Khatib was being interviewed, not far from the council building, several Lebanese parliament members gathered on the Lebanese side of the border as part of Hezbollah's campaign, apparently seeking to sway the public opinion in Lebanon and to prepare them for an imminent war.

"The provocation of the Israeli enemy in the northern part of Ghajar is an extremely dangerous aggression, a sustained attack on Lebanon's sovereignty, and a violation of all international norms," declared the members of parliament aligned with Hezbollah, who posted photos with Ghajar in the background on social media.

"This is our territory, and the Lebanese know it very well, even the old Syrian maps show it," explained Khatib, presenting such maps that indicate the village was under Syrian and not Lebanese control before the 1967 Six-Day War. Khatib blamed Ehud Barak, for allowing the UN to divide the village in half and declare it Lebanese: "It's clear they won't refuse the gift he gave them, but we haven't encroached on anyone else's territory, and we live well in our own lands and in our homes."

Contrary to Hezbollah's accusations that Israel's "military aggression" in Ghajar, was aimed at paving the way for a military confrontation, Khatib said that it was actually the Ghajar local council that constructed and funded the new fence and wall.

"We had wild animals entering the village and in one case, a jackal carried away a child, and his mother had only noticed it at the last moment and pulled him back. There were many complaints from residents and they approached the head of the council, who requested the construction of a fence to prevent animals from entering," he said. The security reinforcement in the village not only prevented wild animals from entering but also led to an influx of visitors and unprecedented tourism. "Hezbollah is envious and doesn't want the Israeli government to invest here," explained Avi Garyani, an IDF veteran of the Lebanon War who visited the village for the first time.

Ephraim Avraham, a wounded veteran of the Yom Kippur War, looked on with interest at Lebanese who were splashing in the waters of the **Hasbani River**, close by to where the **anti-tank missile struck on Thursday morning**, apparently in response to the military operation in Jenin. "I wasn't afraid to come here," he said. "Why should we be afraid? We fought against them, and we are not afraid of them. Why does our government need to show fear? We have a strong army, so why not use it?"

Tal Be'eri, the Head of the Alma Center think tank that concentrates on the Israel-Lebanon border, is convinced that the recent **Hezbollah provocations**, which began last **April** when an **explosive device** was **detonated on the side of a major highway** in the north, are being carried out with the **clear understanding that they can lead to war**.

"**Hezbollah's position is stronger** than ever, both militarily and politically, and this is the ideal opportunity for them to engage in a war **while Lebanon is in crisis** and they could **potentially increase their grip on the crumbling state**," he said.

Be'eri, a former intelligence officer with years of experience in the Lebanese and Syrian arenas, said that since last week, **Hezbollah** has been **shaping public opinion** and constructing the **narrative and justifications for war**, even inside Lebanon and naming the matter of the **wall in Ghajar as a central reason for engaging in a confrontation with Israel**.

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Ynet-News, July 07, 2023 – Friday

7.07.23 – Fr- - - News Placed in July 07 spot – Friday

IDF makes maiden deployment of high-precision suicide drones in Jenin operation

7.06.23 – Th- - - News Placed in July 06 spot – Thursday

Israel strikes in Damascus; Syrian air defenses fail in defense response

6.25.23 – Su- - - News Placed in June 25 spot – Sunday

Boats set ablaze in Sea of Galilee from arson, 93% paying protection money

6.23.23 – Fr- - - News – Friday

Israel clears major hurdle on way to US Visa Waiver Program inclusion

6.22.23 – Th- - - News Placed in June 24 spot – Saturday

Israeli exports of carrots, potatoes breaking records provided by a wet winter

6.22.23 – Th- - - News – Thursday

n Netanyahu trial: Gideon Sa'ar would struggle to prove bribery; judges tell prosecutors

6.22.23 – Th- - - News Placed in June 23 spot – Friday

US Patel expects detention warrants on Israeli rioters that torched West Bank village

6.22.23 – Th - - News – Thursday

Israel's targeted killing intended to send a message to Jenin and Nablus militants

6.22.23 – Th - - News Placed in June 22 spot – Thursday

Druze angered at wind turbines without negotiations or coordination with residents