

Ynet-News Aug 28

08-28-19

British Minister & Queen suspend Parliament 5 wks to avoid Brexit deals before Oct 31

08-28-19

Alabama State Rep. Tommy Hanes introduced resolution to expel Omar (D-Minn.) from Congress

08.28.19 Wednesday

Greenblatt says no parts of the plan will be released until after Israelis go to the polls

08.26.19

Amid tensions, Netanyahu added Gantz of opposition party to security briefings

08.26.19

Gaza rockets fired at music festival, IDF strikes office of Hamas commander

08.25.19

Lebanon celebrated shooting down an Israeli Drone, but drone was Iranian not Israeli

08-28-19

British Minister & Queen suspend Parliament 5 wks to avoid Brexit deals before Oct 31

Boris Johnson just suspended Parliament over Brexit. Here's what's going on. The prime minister's move is going to make it a lot harder for Parliament to oppose leaving the European Union without a deal in place.

By Jen Kirbyjen.kirby@vox.com Aug 28, 2019, 1:50pm EDT

Heads Of Government Attend G7 Summit

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson at the G7 in Biarritz, France, on August 24. Jeff J. Mitchell/Getty Images

Who had "proroguing Parliament" on their Brexit bingo card?

On Wednesday, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson asked Queen Elizabeth II to suspend — otherwise known as "prorogue" — Parliament until October 14, in what very much looked like an attempt to prevent members of Parliament (MPs) from blocking a no-deal Brexit before the October 31 deadline.

The queen has approved Johnson's request, which was mostly a formality anyway. (There was practically no chance that the queen, who stays above the political fray, would deny Johnson's request, though technically she could have.) Now Parliament will

be suspended for five weeks, from September 9 at the earliest, or September 12 at the latest, until October 14.

Here's what this means in practice: Members of Parliament will now have a very narrow window to a) debate, scrutinize, and pass a Brexit deal if there's one on offer; or b) stop the UK from exiting the European Union without an agreement in place on October 31.

Leaving the EU without a deal is something Johnson has said he's willing and ready to do, but MPs largely oppose that route because of the potential economic fallout.

Johnson has denied that putting Parliament on a five-week break as the United Kingdom is in the middle of a national crisis over Brexit has anything to do with the national crisis over Brexit. In a letter to lawmakers, the prime minister said this legislative session had to end, as it's one of the longest in history.

"I therefore intend to bring forward a new bold and ambitious domestic legislative agenda for the renewal of our country after Brexit," Johnson wrote. "There will be a significant Brexit legislative programme to get through but that should be no excuse for a lack of ambition!"

Not many MPs are buying Johnson's excuse. Some are accusing him of flinging the UK into a constitutional crisis.

Speaker of the House John Bercow called it "a constitutional outrage." "However it is dressed up it is blindingly obvious that the purpose of prorogation now would be to stop Parliament debating Brexit and performing its duty," he added.

Opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn described Johnson's move as "an outrage and a threat to our democracy." "Labour will work across Parliament to hold the government to account and prevent a disastrous No Deal," Corbyn tweeted Wednesday.

Proroguing Parliament is a totally normal thing that happens, but in recent decades, it has usually lasted just a week or two. It's also true that Parliament hadn't planned, at least on paper, to be sitting most of September: It was supposed to meet for the first two weeks of the month and then take a recess for party conferences until October 9. MPs could have always canceled their party conferences, and there was some speculation they might be headed down that route. Johnson's maneuver means MPs now have no say.

As for what this all means for Brexit, and UK politics — no one really knows, and trying to predict what will happen ends up looking something like this. Johnson has set up a showdown with MPs, which will force those in his Conservative Party to consider whether they'll risk a no-deal Brexit or break with him and his party. Johnson has a majority of one in the House of Commons, and Wednesday's decision might make that minuscule lead even more precarious.

Proroguing Parliament was always a risk. Johnson took it.

This idea of proroguing Parliament to push through Brexit has been floating around for some time — a few candidates during the Conservative leadership contest last month outwardly embraced the strategy.

Johnson has the power to request this, and, realistically, if the party conferences did happen, the timeline wouldn't be all that different. The queen was never going to deny this request. The monarch stays out of politics, which includes the Brexit debate, despite both sides believing she may swoop in and save the day.

But it's still a warning shot from Johnson to MPs.

The idea is pretty much to **give Parliament less time, so it has less opportunity to make mischief**. Back in the Theresa May days, Parliament thrice rejected the Brexit divorce agreement and couldn't agree on an alternative Brexit plan. But it rejected a no-deal exit. It also asked May to negotiate for an extension to Brexit, which is how the current October 31 deadline exists.

Johnson may be the prime minister now, but the makeup of Parliament mostly hasn't changed.

In his campaign for prime minister, Johnson had promised to renegotiate May's Brexit deal with the European Union. The EU repeatedly said it wasn't going to reopen talks on the divorce deal, and that even if it did, it would not accept Johnson's terms to get rid of the Irish backstop, a plan to avoid border checks on the boundary between Northern Ireland (part of the UK) and Ireland (which will remain part of the EU). Johnson tried it anyway; the EU, surprising no one, said no. The impasse continues. There's no new agreement to be had. **So the prospect of a no-deal Brexit on October 31 seems a lot more possible.**

The conundrum, of course, is that **most of Parliament doesn't want a no-deal scenario**. The UK is extracting itself from a decades-long trading relationship, with unpredictable economic and political consequences. This doesn't mean all MPs are supportive of staying in the EU; they just don't want to be responsible for food and fuel shortages.

So it seems likely that Parliament would try to frustrate Johnson's attempts to extract the UK from the EU without a plan in place on October 31. Which would ultimately mean Johnson — who won on the vow that he'd deliver Brexit — would have failed to achieve what the Conservative Party (which is largely pro-Brexit) elected him to do.

And Johnson's not totally wrong here that Parliament would try to foil a no-deal exit. That looks like the strategy that the opposition and no-deal opponents agreed to on Tuesday, the day before Johnson put Parliament on a very long holiday.

The suspension of Parliament is going to make no-deal legislation a lot harder to accomplish, especially since the body remains a fractious bunch. Those who support leaving without a deal, leaving with a deal, or remaining in the EU don't split neatly

along partisan lines. Even though a majority of MPs might oppose a no-deal Brexit, they'll have to cross party lines, or join up with opponents to do so. Success was never guaranteed.

Even more critically, if Johnson does, miraculously, come back with a new Brexit deal (or somehow tries to rebrand May's deal), it will give Parliament very, very little time to consider alternatives. MPs will likely have little choice at that stage but to back Johnson's Brexit plan, if he has one, or they'll risk being responsible for pushing the UK off the no-deal cliff. Essentially, the shorter timeline would narrow Parliament's options — it's Johnson's (hypothetical) deal or no deal at all.

Ramming through momentous, country-changing legislation may be a winning strategy if it works, but it is denying Parliament some of its power to scrutinize and debate.

“What [Johnson's] doing, frankly, is hiding from parliamentary scrutiny: denying MPs the opportunity to question him and to hold him to account, and potentially denying them the opportunity to express no confidence in him,” Meg Russell, a senior fellow of the UK in a Changing Europe and the director of the constitution unit at University College of London, told the Guardian.

“No confidence” in this case refers to the formal mechanism by Parliament to basically take down Johnson's government. This is something the opposition Labour Party very much wants, and it has proposed joining forces with the rest of the opposition parties to form a caretaker government (meaning, just to take care of business) to negotiate a Brexit delay and then call new elections. For that plan to succeed, it's going to need to flip some Conservative MPs willing to betray their party leader and vote in Corbyn, who's, quite simply, not well-liked and not totally trusted.

But Johnson's decision to put Parliament on hold for five weeks might unite angry and frustrated MPs. Even those who may support Johnson's agenda might be a bit uncomfortable with his tactics; if it's okay if our guy does it, what happens when it's the opposing side? Johnson's strategy might be exactly what the opposition needed to unite and focus skeptical MPs to join in a no-confidence vote against Johnson.

Maybe! Brexit and the UK politics surrounding it are complicated, intense, divisive, and never predictable. Parliament may have less of a chance to challenge Johnson, but they may still be able to do so. And beyond what happens next in Brexit, the UK is grappling with much bigger questions about its democratic process.

08.28.19 Wednesday

Greenblatt says no parts of the plan will be released until after Israelis go to the polls

U.S.: No peace plan before September 17 elections in Israel

Two days after Trump says the long-delayed proposal could be published ahead of the Israeli vote, his Mideast special envoy Jason Greenblatt tweets that no parts of the plan will be released until after Israelis go to the polls

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The United States will not be releasing any or all of its plan for Middle East peace before the September 17 elections in Israel, Donald Trump's special envoy to the Middle East, Jason Greenblatt, said Wednesday.

The plan, referred to by U.S. President Donald Trump as the "deal of the century" and developed by his son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner, was scheduled to be revealed sometime this summer.

Those plans, however, were put on hold after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu failed to form a coalition government following the April 9 national elections in Israel, leading to an unprecedented second vote within the same year.

We have decided that we will not be releasing the peace vision (or parts of it) prior to the Israeli election.

The Twitter comment by Greenblatt comes just two days after Trump announced on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Biarritz, France on Monday that the plan may be revealed before the Israeli elections.

That claim contradicted Trump's own statement last week when he told reporters the long-delayed proposal would most likely be delayed until after the vote in Israel.

"We will probably wait for the release of the Middle East peace plan until after the Israeli elections," Trump said at the time.

Kushner has long been involved in the Trump administration's plans for Middle East peace. In June, he spearheaded a two-day workshop in Bahrain aimed at building support for a program to combine private investment and support from regional governments to transform economically devastated Palestinian communities.

"My direct message to the Palestinians is that despite what those who have let you down in the past have told you, President Trump and America has not given up on you," Kushner said at the conference. "This workshop is for you, and if this is executed correctly, it will lead to a better future for the Palestinian people: a future of dignity, prosperity and opportunity."

Kushner's audience in the tiny Gulf kingdom did not include any official Palestinian delegation. Israel, which will have to sign off on many of the proposal's projects, was not invited to send any government officials, either.

Those who heard Kushner in person were Arab finance ministers, the heads of international financial organizations and global business executives and investors.

Trump-Rouhani summit seen as cause for concern in Israel

Israeli officials fear they would not be in position to exert pressure on a president that has already showered them with so much, if he fails to include conditions they see as crucial in any future U.S.-Iran nuclear deal

Itamar Eichner|Published: 08.27.19 , 19:14

Israeli officials are concerned that U.S. President Donald Trump will try to replicate the relations he maintains with North Korea in future relations with Iran, following his bombshell announcement at the G7 summit on Monday that a meeting with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani is possible in a matter of weeks.

Jerusalem's main concern is its difficulty to gauge where a meeting between the two presidents may lead.

Israeli officials say the possibility that Rouhani will meet with his American counterpart before sanctions on Iran are lifted could be seen as an Iranian capitulation.

Tehran has consistently demanded that sanctions reimposed by Trump after he pulled out of the 2015 nuclear deal be lifted before any progress on talks can be made.

Israeli officials fear that Trump will, as he did with North Korea, give more credence to the actual meeting of the leaders, which will then be followed by a milder tone in public statements.

Nonetheless, the same sources note, sanctions on North Korea have remained in place despite the niceties.

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence called to discussed events with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu soon after the president's statements, and then tweeted support for Israel on Monday night.

Vice President Mike Pence

Had a great conversation with Prime Minister @netanyahu this morning. The United States fully supports Israel's right to defend itself from imminent threats. Under President @realDonaldTrump, America will always stand with Israel!

Officials in Jerusalem warn Israel's special relationship with the American president could become an impediment, should Trump reach a new deal with Iran that does not include elements critical to Israel, such as ending Tehran's missile program and its continued support for terrorism and extremists in the Middle East.

Israel would be at a disadvantage, the officials say, to exert pressure on the president who has already provided the Jewish State with many gestures and benefits.

There may also be some positive outcomes from a Trump Rouhani summit, some say.

The U.S. demands of Iran were laid out in Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's speech last year that included Iran:

- End its proliferation of ballistic missiles and halt further launching or development of nuclear-capable missile systems.
- End support to Middle East "terrorist" groups, end its threatening behavior against its neighbors, many of whom are US allies, end the Islamic Revolutionary Guard corps' support for "terrorists" and "militant" partners around the world.
- Stop enrichment and never pursue plutonium reprocessing, including closing its heavy water reactor.

"We understand Iran is not going to just disappear," said the official.

"Israel wants an end to the Iran's nuclear program." "Israel wants an end to the Iran's nuclear program."

He said he is relatively calm because Trump is advised by Pompeo and his national security adviser John Bolton, both of whom advocate a very hawkish policy towards Iran.

Even so, the Israeli official conceded, "we do have some concerns because we don't really know what will happen."

The official said that Israel would have preferred a resumption of talks not to have been raised now, because the sanctions imposed by the U.S. on Iran are working and a few more months they would, in his view, had made Tehran recognize the need to compromise. Now that is no longer likely.

A second official saw a way forward that might stop further escalating tensions between Israel and Hezbollah, as the Iranian-backed Lebanese terror group would have no interest in risking the summit.

As for the actual meeting Trump and Rouhani, the official saw an opportunity but also a problem, since French President Emmanuel Macron has apparently sided with Iran and has made it more difficult for the United States to break Iranian resistance.

"France is keeping the Iranians alive and has opposed sanctions," the official noted. He added that only someone as aggressive as Donald Trump may be able to get concessions out of Tehran, in contrast to the negotiating abilities of his predecessor.

Even in the event that these starting positions are not kept, any deal reached will be better than the one signed by Obama in 2015.

08.27.19

Israeli drone attack in Beirut targeted precision guided missiles technology

Report: Israeli drone attack in Beirut targeted precision guided missiles technology

British daily newspaper The Times reports that shipping containers with 'machinery to mix high-grade propellant' for advanced weapons were attacked by 2 Israeli UAVs in Hezbollah's stronghold in the southern part of the Lebanese capital

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An alleged Israeli drone attack in Lebanon's capital targeted shipping containers with "machinery to mix high-grade propellant" for precision guided missiles, the British daily newspaper The Times reported Tuesday.

The Lebanese terror group Hezbollah said two Israeli drones rigged with explosives came down over Beirut on Sunday on the roof of a building housing Hezbollah's media office in the Moawwad neighborhood in Dahiyeh, the group's stronghold in the southern part of the Lebanese capital. The second drone, which arrived in the area 45 minutes later, exploded in the air and crashed nearby.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu earlier on Tuesday warned Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah to "calm down," after the leader of the Iran-backed terror group threatened to retaliate to the alleged attack.

"I heard what Nasrallah said. I suggest to Nasrallah to calm down. He knows well that Israel knows how to defend itself and to pay back its enemies," Netanyahu said in a speech.

The prime minister also sent a message to Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani, whom Israel accuses of masterminding a drone attack from Syria that it thwarted with its airstrike.

"Be careful with your words and even more so be careful with your actions," Netanyahu said.

Meanwhile, the Russian foreign ministry said Tuesday that Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri called Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, asking him to use his "influence to prevent a further escalation of tensions between Israel and Lebanon."

According to Hariri's office, Hariri told Lavrov that the attack in southern Beirut was "a dangerous act and aggression" and that he's counting on Russia's role to "avoid more escalation and tension and to send message to Israel to stop violating Lebanese sovereignty."

08.26.19

Gaza rockets fired at music festival, IDF response strikes office of Hamas commander

IDF strikes office of high-profile Hamas commander in response to Gaza rockets
Israel also orders to cut by half the fuel transferred to the enclave after rockets are fired at the city of Sderot during a festival attended by some 4,000 people; meanwhile, Palestinian group based in Lebanon said 3 Israeli air strikes targeted their military position

Itai Blumenthal, Liad Osmo | Published: 08.26.19, 09:02

Israeli military said Monday they've struck two Hamas positions in the Gaza Strip, including an office belonging to a high-profile commander in the terror group's military wing, in response to rockets being fired at southern Israel during a mass event.

At least three rockets have been fired at Israeli communities near the Gaza border including the city of Sderot where some 4,000 people, who were attending a music festival, had been forced to look for shelter in panic as rocket alert sirens wailed.

The shocked crowd watched as two of the rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome defense system. A shrapnel from one of the projectiles fell on the soccer stadium where the event was held, but fortunately no one was hurt.

"IAF fighter jets have attacked several terror targets located in a military compound belonging to Hamas terrorist organization in the northern Gaza Strip, including the office of Hamas military wing's battalion commander," said the military in a statement. "The attack was carried out in response to the rocket fire overnight."

Hamas Spokesman Hazim Qasim, however, rejected Israel's accusations, saying neither Hamas nor any other Palestinian factions in the Strip are responsible for the rocket fire. Qasim added that Israelis are shifting the blame onto Hamas in order to justify military strikes on Gaza.

In addition, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered to cut in half the amount of fuel being transferred to Gaza via the Kerem Shalom border crossing, starting Monday and until further notice, said Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, Maj. Gen. Kamil Abu Rokon in a statement.

In the meantime, an official from a military position belonging to a Palestinian group in the Lebanese town of Qusaya, near the Syrian border, said three Israeli air strikes targeted it, causing only material damage.

"MK planes (drones) targeted one of our sites with three small rockets. There were no casualties, only material damage," Abu Muhammad told An-Nahar.

The comes after Israel staged airstrikes in Syria on Saturday against what it said were Iranian "killer drones" being readied to attack Israel.

News agencies contributed to this report

08.25.19

Lebanon celebrated shooting down an Israeli Drone, but drone was Iranian not Israeli

Beirut fallen drones were Iranian not Israeli, images show

Despite footage from the crash scene revealing the UAVs were manufactured in Iran, Lebanese prime minister goes on the offensive, accusing Israel of 'posing a threat to regional stability'

Ron Ben-Yishai|Published: 08.25.19 , 13:13

Images from the scene of the two drones that crashed in Beirut on Sunday reveal the unmanned aerial devices were manufactured in Iran and not in Israel, as was reported in Arab media earlier.

Lebanese terror group Hezbollah claimed earlier on Sunday that two Israeli drones came down over Beirut, with one of the pair being rigged with explosives and causing serious damage to a building housing Hezbollah's media office.



Drone which crashed in Beirut, manufactured in Iran (Photo: Reuters)

The footage shows the same type of drones are used by Iranian allies - Shiite Houthi rebel groups - in Yemen and during attacks on oil facilities in Saudi Arabia.

In the meantime, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri has described the crash of two as violation and "aggression" against Lebanese sovereignty, adding that Israeli drones is a "threat to regional stability and attempt to increase tension."

He said Sunday that the developments overnight constitute a threat to regional stability and an attempt to push the situation toward more escalation.

The reported incident came hours after the IAF struck an Iranian force near Syria's capital Damascus, which Israel said had been planning to launch "killer drones" into its territory.

Associated Press contributed to this report

08.26.19

Amid increased tensions, Netanyahu added Gantz of opposition party to security briefing

Amid tensions on five fronts, Netanyahu invites Gantz for security briefing

Military secretary holds meeting with Blue and White leader and former IDF chief of staff, as PM believed head of largest opposition party should be informed

Moran Azuly and Itamar Eichner|Published: 08.26.19, 22:26

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's main political rival, Blue and White leader Benny Gantz, was invited to a security briefing following recent events on five different fronts - Gaza, Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank and Iraq.

On account of the the absence of an opposition chairman for the last four months, Gantz was invited to the Prime Minister's Office by Netanyahu's military secretary, Avi Blut, and the head of the National Security Council, Meir Ben Shabbat.

Netanyahu was absent from the debriefing.

Gantz's invitation to the briefing was unusual. The former IDF chief of staff is not the official head of the current opposition, but in light of recent security events, Netanyahu thought Gantz, as the head of the largest party outside the government, should attend the meeting.

Former Labor faction leader Shelly Yachimovich was the head of the opposition, but has since resigned from political life.

As a result, for the last four months, there has been no official head of opposition in Israel, as Netanyahu failed to put together a coalition and therefore no head of opposition was elected.

Blue and White declined Monday give any details of the briefing.

"Gantz doesn't discuss security meetings, and certainly not their content," the party said.

Gantz on Sunday condemned Qatari aid money distributed in Gaza, in light of a rocket strike from Gaza on the southern city of Sderot.

"The money flows but the caravan moves on," he said.

"Netanyahu, go down south and look the kids who can't sleep at night in the eye. Our deterrence is gone, but we will bring it back on September 17."

2019-08-28

Alabama State Rep. Tommy Hanes introduced resolution to expel Omar (D-Minn.) from Congress

Alabama Republicans seek to expel Rep. Ilhan Omar from Congress

Citing her "engagement in rhetoric that explicitly runs counter to American values" and "a disturbing record of using anti-Semitic language," state GOP passes resolution calling on congressional delegation to "proceed with the expulsion process" against the first-term congresswoman, Fox News reports.

by Israel Hayom Staff Published on 2019-08-28 12:14 Last modified: 2019-08-28 13:42

Alabama Republicans are urging lawmakers to remove Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.) from Congress, Fox News reported on Wednesday, for "engaging in rhetoric that explicitly runs counter to American values and patriotism by falsely accusing US armed forces of committing war crimes while on a mission to liberate her home country of Somalia."

The state GOP, according to the report, passed a resolution last weekend at the party's summer meeting in Auburn calling on its congressional delegation to "proceed with the expulsion process" against the first-term congresswoman.

The resolution also said Omar "dismissed the 9/11 terror attacks waged by radical Islam" and "sympathized with a convicted terrorist" by advocating for "sentencing leniency."

State Rep. Tommy Hanes introduced the resolution, which was approved on a voice vote. One Republican opposed it, according to The Alabama Political Reporter.

Hanes told Fox News that Omar's actions "have proved her to be sympathetic to radical Islam" and said THAT her race and religion were irrelevant.

"Rep. Omar is ungrateful to the United States and the opportunities that have been afforded to her," Hanes said. "Anyone that holds contempt for America ought not to serve this great nation as a member of Congress."

In response, Omar tweeted that she was "elected with 78% of the vote by the people of Minnesota's 5th District, not by the Alabama Republican Party" and referenced Roy Moore, whose 2017 Senate bid was derailed following multiple allegations that he had romantic relationships with underage girls while in his thirties.

"If you want to clean up politics, maybe don't nominate an accused child molester as your Senate candidate?" Omar wrote.

Omar has faced criticism from both political parties over several recent remarks, particularly about Israel and American-Israeli ties.

Alabama Republicans cited "a disturbing record of using anti-Semitic language that includes alleging Jewish money is used to buy American influence" regarding its policy toward Israel."

The resolution also mentioned Omar's support for the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement that has aimed to put economic pressure on Israel over its treatment of Palestinians.

Earlier this month, Omar and Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.) were **barred from entering Israel.**

Prime Minister Benjamin **Netanyahu defended his decision** not to allow the two US Congresswomen into the country, saying that while he respected the US Congress, **advocating boycotts against Israel was a step too far.**

"There is only one exception: the exception is the BDS Law that requires us to check the entrance of supporters of BDS," Netanyahu told reporters.