

**Manfred Gerstenfeld: DEADLOCK BETWEEN THE LIKUD AND
THE ZIONIST UNION CONTINUES**

isranet-publications

Blog, February 25, 2015

<https://www.isranet.org/blog/manfred-gerstenfeld-deadlock-between-likud-and-zionist-union-continues/>

Over the past week, the political debate became heated but remained unfocused. There was a brief moment of unity after MK Uri Orbach of Bayit Yehudi and Minister of Pensioner's Affairs passed away at the age of 54. He was eulogized by politicians of many parties across the board.

The debate over Netanyahu's scheduled speech to the US Congress continued. To avoid having it become election propaganda, the Chairman of the Elections Committee, Supreme Court Judge Salim Joubran, decided that the speech will not be broadcast live in Israel. A delay of five minutes will enable broadcasting companies to cut out any elements they would consider to be propaganda.^[1] The speech will be followed online in real time, thus the measure remains largely symbolic.

In view of the fragmented and often low-level debates, President Reuven Rivlin said at the Institute for National Security Studies conference that the candidates for prime minister should focus on the more important issues. He mentioned the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, security threats, the economic situation and the treatment of minorities. In view of Netanyahu's upcoming speech to the US Congress, Rivlin remarked that Israelis have the right to hear what Netanyahu has to say first, and hear it in Hebrew.^[2]

The Supreme Court overruled the Central Elections Committee's disqualifications of MK Haneen Zoabi and Yahad candidate Baruch Marzel. Eight judges voted in favor of reinstating them, and only one voted against.^[3] Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and other right-wing MKs stated that letting Zoabi run for the Knesset was akin to supporting terrorism.^[4]

The marginal issue of the Prime Minister's home expenses became one of the most

**Manfred Gerstenfeld: DEADLOCK BETWEEN THE LIKUD AND
THE ZIONIST UNION CONTINUES**

isranet-publications

Blog, February 25, 2015

<https://www.isranet.org/blog/manfred-gerstenfeld-deadlock-between-likud-and-zionist-union-continues/>

discussed topics of the week. The State Comptroller's office published a report on the expenses of the Prime Minister's residence, which, from 2009 to 2011, rose from NIS 1.8 million to 3.1 million. In 2013 they declined to 2.4 million. The report also mentioned several potentially criminal issues related to these expenses.^[5] The Attorney General will now have to decide whether or not to have the police probe the issue.^[6] Likud minister Yuval Steinitz said that, "in 2012, [President] Peres' household expenditures were 20 times as much as Netanyahu's." Steinitz questioned the timing of the report, the more so as the State Comptroller had never investigated the residential expenses of any previous prime ministers. Steinitz added, "Perhaps the comptroller gave in to pressure from the media."^[7]

In response to the criticism, the Prime Minister's wife, Sara Netanyahu invited a well-known Israeli interior designer to visit the residence and testify that it was not without its problems. This visit was filmed and put online,^[8] which led to further criticism of various kinds. Former domestic intelligence Shin Bet chief Yuval Diskin wrote on Facebook that, "filming the Prime Minister's residence is a serious breach of security." He added that, "every intelligence service or foreign terrorist organization would pay a fortune to get all those details."^[9]

The sniping between the parties continued. Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid said that Israel would be in a better position to improve the upcoming agreement between Iran and the West if Prime Minister Netanyahu had not caused the deterioration of relations between Israel and the US.^[10] It was a doubtful comment, as the US President Barack Obama has, on multiple occasions and for many years, been whitewashing extreme crimes coming out of the world's Muslim communities.^[11]

Zionist Union leaders Isaac Herzog and Tzipi Livni, along with their security executives, visited the periphery of Gaza. Their "security outlook would be based on defense, deterrence and changing our strategy to initiating and building a future and a horizon," said Herzog. He added that Gaza remains a "ticking time bomb, and Netanyahu failed against Hamas." Netanyahu responded in a speech in Ashkelon and called Livni "a danger to the state." He said that Livni claimed that she would not negotiate with Hamas, yet she went to visit Mahmoud Abbas, the

**Manfred Gerstenfeld: DEADLOCK BETWEEN THE LIKUD AND
THE ZIONIST UNION CONTINUES**

isranet-publications

Blog, February 25, 2015

<https://www.isranet.org/blog/manfred-gerstenfeld-deadlock-between-likud-and-zionist-union-continues/>

President of the Palestinian Authority, only a few days before he signed a unity agreement with Hamas.[\[12\]](#)

The Likud has been rather successful in drawing viewers for two of its videos on line. The first one was called the ‘Bibisitter”, where Netanyahu presents himself as a babysitter to a young couple who are going out for an evening. Bibi tells the couple that they can choose between him or Herzog and Livni. The couple answered that in the latter case, it would be their children that would have to babysit Herzog, rather than the reverse, while Livni would leave in the middle. The latter refers to the fact that Livni has been a candidate of four different political parties – the Likud, Kadima, Hatnuah and the Zionist Union – throughout her various election campaigns.[\[13\]](#)

The second Likud clip is called Pizza Buji, a play on Herzog’s nickname “Buji”. It had close to 500,000 views within 12 hours. A young man orders a pizza and finds out that it comes with a side order of Tzipi Livni, which the young man does not want. It presents Livni as a liability to the Zionist Union. Herzog wants to debate Netanyahu directly, but Netanyahu is only willing to do so if Livni also participates, as the agreement between Livni and Herzog is that she will replace him midterm should he be elected as prime minister.[\[14\]](#)

The social media network further fragments the election campaigns and makes it increasingly difficult to keep track of developments. This the more so as individual candidates also promote messages in their own field of expertise on their Facebook sites. In the meantime, Herzog has bolstered the Zionist Union’s campaign team with Reuven Adler, an experienced advertiser, who worked closely with the late Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.[\[15\]](#)

Polls keep contradicting each other. While there are shifts within various blocs, there are hardly any between them. The Likud, Israel Beiteinu and Bayit Yehudi in the Knesset currently have 43 seats, and most polls give them a combined 41-43

**Manfred Gerstenfeld: DEADLOCK BETWEEN THE LIKUD AND
THE ZIONIST UNION CONTINUES**

isranet-publications

Blog, February 25, 2015

<https://www.isranet.org/blog/manfred-gerstenfeld-deadlock-between-likud-and-zionist-union-continues/>

seats. The Zionist Union and Meretz have 27 seats in the current Knesset, and according to the polls, may perhaps gain 1 or 2 seats. Centrist party Yesh Atid currently has 19 seats. The polls say that it may have to share with the other centrist party, Kahlon-led Koolanu, to garner up to 20 seats. The three Orthodox parties may share the 18 seats that Shas and United Torah Judaism currently hold. The United Arab List may gain 1 seat over and above the 11 it holds at present.

Polls occasionally ask questions about the public's favorites for particular minister posts. A Walla poll found that Kahlon was preferred as finance minister by 34% of the respondents, followed by the Zionist Union's Manuel Trajtenberg with 17% and Lapid with 13%. Surprisingly, Livni was found to be the preferred candidate for foreign minister with 24%, followed by the Likud's Gilad Erdan with 18%, and Liberman with 17%. Lapid came in with 14% and Koolanu's Michael Oren at 7%.[\[16\]](#)

[\[1\]](#) Jonathan Lis, "Israeli TV to broadcast Netanyahu's Congress speech with five-minute delay," *Haaretz*, 16 February 2015.

[\[2\]](#) "Rivlin wants election campaign to refocus on 'content and values'," *Haaretz*, 16 February 2015.

[\[3\]](#) Yonah Jeremy Bob, "High Court: Zoabi, Marzel back in race," *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 February 2015.

[\[4\]](#) Lahav Harkov, "Right-wing MKs: Allowing Zoabi to run in election is supporting terrorism," *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 February 2015.

[\[5\]](#) Yaron Druckman, "Comptroller: Netanyahu family spending raises criminal concern," *Ynetnews*, 17 February 2015.

**Manfred Gerstenfeld: DEADLOCK BETWEEN THE LIKUD AND
THE ZIONIST UNION CONTINUES**
isranet-publications
Blog, February 25, 2015
<https://www.isranet.org/blog/manfred-gerstenfeld-deadlock-between-likud-and-zionist-union-continues/>

[6] Yaniv Kubovich, "Israel Police expect investigation of spending at Netanyahu's residence," *Haaretz*, 4 February 2015.

[7] Gil Hoffman, Lahav Harkov, "Likud on comptroller report: Peres was worse," *The Jerusalem Post*, 17 February 2015.

[8] "Watch: Sara Netanyahu takes celebrity interior designer on tour of PM's residence," *The Jerusalem Post*, 16 February 2015.

[9] Hezki Ezra, Cynthia Blank, "Diskin: Filming PM's Residence 'Serious Breach of Security'," *Israel National News*, 16 February 2015.

[10] Niv Elis, "Lapid: PM's US row hurts ability to influence Iran deal," *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 February 2015.

[11] Manfred Gerstenfeld, "Obama's Negligence," *The Jerusalem Post*, 9 February 2015.

[12] Gil Hoffman, "Netanyahu, Zionist Union spar on security matters," *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 February 2015.

[13] Gil Ronen, "Netanyahu offers Bibi-sitting services," *Israel National News*, 31 January 2015.

[14] Gil Ronen, "'Pizza Buji' Likud Video Goes Mega-Viral," *Israel National News*. 18 February 2015

[15] Lahav Harkov, "Zionist Union pulls itself together with ad guru Reuven Adler,"

**Manfred Gerstenfeld: DEADLOCK BETWEEN THE LIKUD AND
THE ZIONIST UNION CONTINUES**

isranet-publications

Blog, February 25, 2015

<https://www.isranet.org/blog/manfred-gerstenfeld-deadlock-between-likud-and-zionist-union-continues/>

***The Jerusalem Post*, 20 February 2015.**

[16] Tova Dvorin, “Who do Israelis want to see as their next ministers?” *Israel National News*, 20 February 2015.