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JUGGLES CENTER-LEFT/RIGHT COALITIONS; HAREDIM : IN OR  
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## **COALITION TALKS ENTER OVERTIME**

*Mati Tuchfeld, Gideon Allon & Yehuda Shlezinger*

*[Israel Hayom](#), Feb. 28, 2013*

After almost four weeks of official coalition talks, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to arrive at President Shimon Peres' residence on Saturday to receive a 14-day extension to form a government. While the president has legal authority to issue a two-week extension, in practice, due to the Knesset's procedural rules, this would give Netanyahu an additional 22 days to present his coalition to the Knesset. If granted the extension, he would have to conclude talks by March 16 and then inform Acting Knesset Speaker MK Binyamin (Fouad) Ben-Eliezer that his government is ready to be sworn in. Ben-Eliezer would then set in motion a process that would culminate with the Knesset plenum convening several days later to vote on the new government.

Article 13b of the Basic Law: Government stipulates that this session must take place within seven days of the Knesset speaker being informed on the new government. Thus, Netanyahu would have until March 24. With Passover Eve falling on March 25, the Knesset may decide to postpone the vote by another week.

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Meanwhile, talks between Likud-Yisrael Beytenu and the other parties have entered crunch time. The talks are primarily focused on whether Yesh Atid and the haredi parties can coexist in the coalition. Another lingering question is whether the alliance between Yesh Atid and Habayit Hayehudi can withstand the various and intensive efforts to break it.

People in Netanyahu's inner circle say he is currently trying to forge a coalition that would include the haredim, Yesh Atid and Habayit Hayehudi. Talks with Habayit Hayehudi have intensified over the past several days, with a special emphasis placed on a new national service mechanism and the state budget. The Likud-Beytenu and Habayit Hayehudi held two additional meetings on Wednesday.

Yesh Atid and Likud-Beytenu negotiators were expected to meet Thursday. Likud-Beytenu officials reported significant progress on Wednesday after holding talks with Habayit Hayehudi, saying the two sides had bridged some of the gaps on a military draft bill that would be acceptable to both Yesh Atid and Habayit Hayehudi. Habayit Hayehudi and Yesh Atid have reportedly agreed on a joint stance on the matter.

Habayit Hayehudi officials say that the alliance with Yesh Atid will remain intact and that the former will enter the government only if the latter enters as well. However, they stressed that the alliance will expire once the parties join the government and that after the parties' ministers are sworn in, the factions would go their separate ways and neither would be bound by the other.

Likud-Beytenu officials say that it would not be possible to convince Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid to sit with the haredim as he would like to see them left out of the government for political reasons, even if there is agreement on the new military draft bill.

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The ruling party has mulled the possibility of signing a coalition agreement with the haredim if no progress is made in the coming days. Officials in the party believe that if this happens, Habayit Hayehudi would pressure Yesh Atid to join the government. Alternatively, Habayit Hayehudi might become convinced it should discard the alliance with Lapid and enter the government without Yesh Atid.

On Wednesday [Feb. 27], Channel 2 reported that Netanyahu associates had informed haredi parties Shas and United Torah Judaism that they might have to stay out of the government until a new national service bill and the 2013 state budget is passed. Sources at the Prime Minister's Office and the Likud negotiating team denied the report. Haredi lawmakers rejected such a two-phased approach outright on Wednesday. One top Shas official said the party would "serve as a true opposition and would not enter the government in a future date or in any later phase."

"A haredi-free government would not survive and we would have no interest in entering such a government, we would simply wait for it to topple," he said. Some politicians believe, however, that the haredim may indeed be left out of the coalition for several months. They say that the haredim would be promised several portfolios which would remain vacant until they officially joined the coalition, after the budget was passed and the new draft mechanism was enacted.

Interior Minister Eli Yishai from Shas attacked Yesh Atid and Habayit Hayehudi on Thursday [Feb. 28] and stressed that his party could serve Israel well from the opposition benches. "I don't know what the future has in store. The various reports suggest that Lapid and Bennett's efforts to have Shas out of the government are bearing fruit for now," he wrote on his Facebook page....

"Saying you are going to be part of the opposition, if that becomes necessary, should not be considered foul language. Those who have come to serve the public

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and consider it their over-arching concern should do so regardless of their location. It is unfortunate that some have been rallying against the world of the Torah and its representatives in politics. It is unfortunate that some politicians are not ripe and fail to realize that change must be effected with respect, understanding and handshaking, not through alienation, radicalization and the ruling out of others. It is unfortunate that they have failed to realize that their actions may transform a society that has divisions into a society that is divided."

Yishai further stressed that being in the opposition was as plausible as entering the government. "Shas will strive to be part of the next government, and to continue where it has left off when it comes to housing, internal affairs, the defense of the state's Jewish character, the return of the infiltrators back to their home countries and so forth," he said.

"But it will not engage in a sell-out of its values, its convictions and its principles for sake of sitting in the same government as those whose only common denominator is their shared desire to hurt the world of the Torah, which has protected us and served as our identity over the years. Shas may take part in the government, but it will not hesitate, if the need arises, to serve as a worthy and determined alternative, until the government serves out its term."

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**ISRAELI POLITICS: ON THE EDGE OF THE PRECIPICE**

*Isi Leibler*

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*Jerusalem Post*, Wed. Feb 27, 2013

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**There is madness in the air. Israel faces extraordinary challenges whilst virtually all our leaders uninhibitedly continue their intrigues and machinations in pursuit of power. They regard their responsibility to the national interest as a distant mirage uttering occasional hypocritical rhetoric. Our friends and allies rub their eyes in disbelief and the barbarians at our gates rejoice as they observe such irresponsible posturing. Enough is enough. We must convey the message that if our politicians fail to behave responsibly and get their act together, we will send them home at the next elections.**

**I appeal to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. Let the nation know that you are willing to accommodate and reach an agreement on the central issue which purportedly represents a barrier to the formation of a government. Make it clear that you accept, with possible minor modifications, the demand from Yesh Atid that gradually, over a five-year period, haredim will be obliged to serve in the IDF or a form of National Service; that reforms will be implemented to enable ultra-Orthodox Jews to earn a livelihood rather than rely on state welfare; that any haredi school receiving state subsidies will be obliged to teach a core curriculum; that state religious instrumentalities will be staffed by religious Zionist rabbis; and that the government will endorse Rabbi David Stav, the head of the Tzohar rabbinical movement, as their candidate to assume the role of Chief Rabbi.**

**Such intervention in religious and state issues is highly overdue and would clearly reflect the will of the people. This is an historic opportunity to bring about these reforms. Any attempt to maintain the old regime by merely introducing cosmetic changes will enrage the nation. Besides, in view of the dramatic demographic growth of the haredi sector, failure to act now could undermine the social fabric of Israeli society and, in a few short years, result in an economic crisis as a consequence of an ever-growing number of able bodied Israelis becoming dependent on state welfare. Once agreement is achieved around these parameters there should be absolutely no excuse for not forming the widest possible national government.**

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In terms of the peace process, other than Bayit Yehudi which seeks to annex Judea and Samaria, the divergence between Netanyahu and other parties over external policies are minimal. Yesh Atid calls for greater efforts to negotiate with the Palestinians but is clearly not promoting additional unilateral concessions and supports an undivided Jerusalem and the retention of Ariel. Even if Tzipi Livni retains her absurd fig leaf role of “heading the peace process”, her activities are unlikely to eventuate because Mahmoud Abbas and the PA are neither willing to compromise nor in a position to exercise any reciprocity. Indeed, their preconditions would probably preclude Livni from engaging in any discussions with them.

Ministerial portfolios at such a critical time should not be regarded as sacred cows and should be allocated to the most appropriate candidate rather than extorted on a purely party political level. Aside from the position of Prime Minister, even allowing for political representation and senior ministerial roles being affected by numbers, positions such as Foreign Minister should be filled by the person best equipped to promote the case for Israel. In all probability, had Netanyahu not so stubbornly protected the vested interests of the haredim, a new government would already have been formed.

But this is water under the bridge. If Netanyahu now accedes to the reforms relating to religion and state, both Yesh Atid and Bayit Yehudi - who publicly proclaim that, like the majority of the nation, they also support him as Prime Minister - should speedily overcome any remaining minor obstacles and join the government. Yet, regrettably there are signs that both of these parties, somewhat giddy about their electoral triumphs, are making additional unreasonable demands.

I personally have little sympathy for Shas and believe that throughout their existence they have concentrated on exploiting successive governments and extorting exclusive privileges for their own sector rather than being concerned

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with the national interest. Furthermore, they contributed to the degradation and corruption of state religious instrumentalities and played a major role in creating the tensions and prejudice against religion. They have also behaved abominably towards the religious Zionist sector of the community.

Nevertheless Shas is a democratically elected party and if it (unlike United Torah Judaism) accommodates the will of the people in terms of religious reforms, it would be discriminatory if they were excluded from participating in a broad national government.

There are unconfirmed rumors that Yair Lapid (backed by Naftali Bennett) is now refusing under any circumstances to join a government in which Shas is also a component. If this is true, it is scandalous. Both Lapid and Bennett are political newcomers and they should not lose sight of the fact that voters supported them despite the absence of any track record. The bulk of their support was generated because Israelis were fed up with the machinations of the establishment political parties.

If Yesh Atid and Bayit Yehudi are now calling for a boycott or exclusion of any political party willing to accept the will of the people, they are contradicting all the rhetoric of unity which they were promoting during the course of the elections. Lapid and Bennett should display a little humility, at least initially, until they learn the ropes. If, after Likud meets their demands to reform the religion and state issues, they make additional unreasonable demands, obliging the nation to face another costly election, they would be opposing the will of the nation and betraying their voters who supported them to overcome petty politics and unite the nation.

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**BENNETT-LAPID: GENIUS TACTIC OR GROSS IRRESPONSIBILITY?**

*Gil Ronen*

*[Israel National News](#), Feb. 25, 2013*

The big story currently driving the political system in Israel to distraction is the completely unexpected and unprecedented post-election pact between Bayit Yehudi, under MK Naftali Bennett, and Yesh Atid, under MK Yair Lapid. The heads of the two parties have agreed between them that neither will enter the coalition without the other. The chances that Labor (15 seats), which is extremely leftist on economic matters and suspiciously coy about diplomatic and security matters, will join Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, are extremely slim.

Given the election results, therefore, Netanyahu (with 31 seats) cannot establish a coalition if both Yesh Atid (19 seats) and Bayit Yehudi (12 seats) refuse to join it. The pact between the two parties is one of three things, or a combination thereof. It could be a brilliant, cynical tactical move by Bennett to force Netanyahu to give him powerful portfolios in his new government. It could be a revolutionary ideological-political pact signalling a seismic change in Israeli society and government, which will drive non-Zionist forces to the sidelines. It could also be an act of irresponsible and amateurish brinkmanship that might bring down Likud and the entire nationalist camp from its leadership position. It cannot be all three.

Bayit Yehudi is the current incarnation of the National Religious Party, or Mafdal, which has been a part of Israeli politics in one form or another since the state's establishment, and which in turn represented the movement known in the early decades of modern Zionism as the Mizrachi movement.

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**Yesh Atid is a new party. It belongs to the centrist variety of parties, which Israel has seen in numerous elections over the years. Centrist parties in Israel usually stand for very little other than the fact that they are neither too leftist nor too nationalistic, and they tend to disappear from the scene after a few years in the Knesset.**

**A favorite centrist issue, however, is the objection to what is perceived by many Zionist Israelis as an unfair hareidi privilege: the exemption of men from compulsory military service. The main plank in Yesh Atid's platform is a plan to force most hareidi men to enlist into the military or national service, and to limit the exemptions for Torah students to 400 annually. The fact that the hareidi world is largely perceived as un-Zionist and even anti-Zionist feeds a general anti-hareidi sentiment which bolsters support for the anti-exemption initiative. This sentiment is particularly strong in secular and leftist circles. The further left one goes, the more likely one is to see hareidim demonized, alongside right wing "settlers."**

**Over the years, Israel's religious parties, including the hareidi ones, have come to be seen as part of the "right wing bloc." They are perceived, rightly or not, as "natural allies" of Likud. Although hareidi parties, and Mafdal as well, have been accused of betraying nationalist causes on different occasions, it is undeniable that by definition, the religious parties tend to be less leftist and more traditionalist than non-religious parties. By siding forcefully with Lapid on hareidi enlistment, Bennett is thus adopting an issue that is generally perceived as one that unites the Israeli center and left wing, while splitting the religious-nationalist camp....**

**Another factor working in his favour is that besides angering secular Israelis, hareidi leaders have succeeded in alienating many religious Zionist leaders as well. Pre-election statements slamming Bayit Yehudi as "the home of gentiles" and accusing it of "uprooting the Torah" deeply insulted the religious Zionist sector, and the apologies delivered thus far have been partial in nature. Religious Zionists**

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are also upset over what they see as their deliberate distancing, over the years, out/ from seats of influence in the Chief Rabbinate, Rabbinical Courts, Religions Ministry and other official positions, by the hareidi parties.

Likud warns that the Bennett-Lapid pact is forcing it into taking in Lapid as a primary partner, which will be able to topple the coalition at any point it desires. Lapid has declared that he sees himself replacing Netanyahu as prime minister, and recent polls suggest that this is a realistic possibility. Lapid's list of MKs includes some radical left wingers, and should new elections be held and Lapid elected as prime minister, it is highly likely that he would embrace leftist parties like Meretz and Labor as his partners. Reckless and disastrous acts of surrender like the 2005 Disengagement would probably follow.

However, Bennett thinks Netanyahu is being disingenuous when he accuses him of helping the Left. He says that it is Netanyahu who wants to establish a leftist government with Yesh Atid, Tzipi Livni, and the hareidim, who usually do not object too strenuously to leftist policies as long as they receive the portfolios they desire....

Bennett appears to believe that by giving Lapid what he wants, regarding hareidi enlistment, he is actually helping to forge a Zionist coalition that redraws Israeli politics. Hareidi parties would be sidelined, at least for a while, and the government would be established on solid Zionist foundations. Hareidi men would have to start pulling their weight in modern Israel, which depends on its young men - and to a lesser degree, on its young women - to defend it on the field of battle in the daily struggle for existence. Israeli Jewishness itself would be redefined, as the chasm between some parts of the Torah world and the rest of Israeli society would begin to be bridged....

Land surrenders are not on the table anyway, as Bennett sees it, and Lapid, while a prime representative of the smooth-talking and pampered chattering class, is not an ideological leftist. It is true that he wrote an infamous column in which he said that the Disengagement was meant primarily to teach the settlers a lesson,

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and that another column disgustingly attacked a religious soldier who refused to shake hands with the IDF Chief of Staff because of the Disengagement. But Lapid has also made some nationalist-pleasing declarations about the pointlessness of negotiating with the Palestinian Authority. He has refused to form a bloc with "the Zoabis," and he chose to deliver his maiden political speech at Ariel in Samaria....

Bennett and Lapid have found a common denominator in the masculine ethos, as well: Lapid is an amateur boxer and has been a writer for Blazer, a glossy men's magazine. In Tel Aviv's "metrosexual" culture, he is a figure that still stands for the more old-fashioned kind of masculinity, even if his military service as a reporter for the IDF's Bamachaneh magazine was less than heroic. Bennett is an officer in the IDF's most vaunted elite commando unit. The two neophyte parliamentarians appear to have formed excellent chemistry and trust in a very short time.....

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**On Topic**

[Netanyahu Said Ready to Cut Deal With Yesh Atid, Jewish Home: Raphael Ahren, Times of Israel, Feb. 27, 2013](#)— Realizing that he cannot break an alliance between Yesh Atid and Jewish Home, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is ready to build a coalition with these two parties and exclude the ultra-Orthodox Shas and United Torah Judaism, sources close to the coalition negotiations said on Wednesday

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**Tzipi Livni's Misguided Sense of Accomplishments: Eli Hertz, *Israel National News*, Feb. 24, 2013**—Tzipi Livni was recently offered the position of Minister of Justice in Netanyahu's government. At first, Israel's Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni advocated honesty and accountability, but when it came to the Second Lebanese War in 2006, those principles seemed to have left the room.

**The Party Faithful: David Remnick, *The New Yorker*, Jan 21, 2013**—Ayelet Shaked and Naftali Bennett, who are running for the Knesset in the Jewish Home Party. Bennett says, "There will never be a peace plan with the Palestinians."

**Lieberman: 'Good Chance' Hareidi Parties Will Join Gov't: David Lev, *Arutz 7*, Feb. 28, 2013**—Avigdor Lieberman, the number two MK in the Likud/Yisrael Beiteinu, said hareidi parties might still be included in the coalition. Avigdor Lieberman, the number two MK in the Likud/Yisrael Beiteinu, said Thursday that contrary to reports, Binyamin Netanyahu had not given up on the idea of a government including hareidi parties. "There is a good chance the hareidi parties will be able to join," Lieberman said of Shas and United Torah Jewry.

**Two-State Solution is a Deadly Illusion: David Kirshenbaum, *Jerusalem Post*, Feb. 27, 2013**—Only the dangerously foolish would believe that the Arabs would long forgo a fundamental attribute of sovereignty and agree to remain demilitarized.



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