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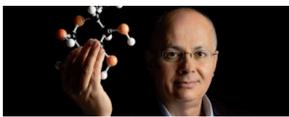
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Life in the postwar period

Haaretz magazine, inside



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Gidi Weitz

In Gaza and north, Trump is restraining PM's warmongering

Amos Harel

"Everyone is apprehensive about Hamas – and Netanyahu is afraid of Trump," a senior defense official on Thursday said to sum up the situation in the Gaza Strip. U.S. President Donald Trump stated on Wednesday that the names of the members of the Board of Peace intended to manage Gaza's affairs will be announced early in 2026.

It will be, Trump characteristically promised, "one of the most legendary peace councils ever. Kings, presidents, prime ministers – they all want to be on the peace council." For a moment, it sounded like the president was talking about the ballroom he's building in the White House, at enormous expense.

The Board of Peace might actually happen. But in the meantime, the circumstances on the ground in the enclave are very different. Hamas rules western Gaza with an iron hand – the half that's across the Yellow Line, beyond which Israel controls. And the countries being mentioned as possible members of the international stabilization force aren't rushing to send their troops to disarm the organization, because they see that for now as a suicide mission – and rightly so.

The situation is ostensibly playing into the hands of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Israel has



Destruction and flooding near Jabalya, northern Gaza, on Thursday.

Bashar Taleb/AFP

already received the 20 living hostages and the bodies of all the dead hostages, except for police officer Ran Gvili. Netanyahu apparently has no real interest in

moving to the deal's second phase because that would renew international pressure to make concessions to the Palestinians and possibly to grant the Palestinian

Authority a role in the new administration.

A return to limited fighting, with Hamas militarily weak and not holding live hostages, could serve him,

not least because it will also impact the domestic political agenda in an election year. However, Trump is restraining him. The two are expected to meet late

this month at Mar-a-Lago. Trump is still seeking an international win. This week, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded in Oslo, without him. The missed opportunity probably still smarts.

Poison machine's new target: chief police investigator

The mafia's typical practice is to isolate a representative of the state and spur distrust around him before eliminating him, Peter Robb wrote in his book "Midnight in Sicily." That makes it easier to catch him and reduces fear of retaliation.

Robb was talking about investigating judge Giovanni Falcone. At that time, he wrote, Falcone was isolated and vulnerable, a victim of gossip spread through anonymous letters, with interested parties in the government attacking him both overtly and covertly.

But while the book was about Falcone, Israel's gatekeepers could also identify with the above description. Anyone who dares to refuse to dance to the government's tune, even for a moment, becomes a target for a psychological terror attack aimed at breaking him and making him throw in the towel.

"Agents of the new order," as Shlomit Barnea Farago, a former legal adviser of the Prime Minister's Office, once called them, paint the victim du jour as a criminal to strip him of legitimacy. Then they begin demanding that he be investigated.

Former spokesman in the Prime Minister's Office Eli Feldstein – the foot soldier who was recruited immediately after Hamas' massacre in southern Israel on October 7, 2023 to lay the blame on the heads of the defense establishment – later became embroiled in two criminal cases. Under interrogation by the Shin Bet security service, he explained how the system works.

"They hurl filth at you un-



Boaz Balat Sraya Diamant

til you won't stick your nose out of your house for the rest of your life, regardless of whether what was said is true or not," Feldstein said.

The next in line to receive the same treatment meted out to Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara and Supreme Court President Isaac Amit is the head of the police's investigations department, Maj. Gen. Boaz Balat. Originally appointed by National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, who now regrets that decision.

People who have spoken with Balat in recent weeks say he has noticed attempts to smear him and lay the groundwork for his removal, so that the executive branch can either control the department or clip its wings. "They're creating an atmosphere of ouster around me," colleagues quoted him as saying. In the dark corners of the internet, it's already possible to find delusional conspiracy theories shared by many people that attribute an illegal sexual relationship to him.

Balat joined the blacklist

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Justice Ministry likely to oppose PM's bid for presidential pardon, sources say

Chen Maanit

The Justice Ministry's pardon department is not expected to recommend that President Isaac Herzog accept Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's pardon request without amends being made, senior sources in the judicial system told Haaretz.

The senior sources added that if amends are made to the request, that could affect the pardon department's final decision.

Haaretz learned that the pardon department at the

Justice Ministry recently asked the State Prosecutor's Office for a formal legal opinion on the pardon request as part of its evaluation.

It appears that the prosecutor's office, which is in the midst of heading the criminal trial against Netanyahu, will oppose a pardon for the prime minister, which is likely to influence the pardon department's recommendation to Herzog. The prime minister is charged with bribery, fraud and breach of trust. He denies any wrongdoing.

Herzog could pardon Ne-

tanyahu even if the pardon department advises against it. Such a move, however, might provoke strong public opposition and be grounds for the High Court of Justice to reverse the president's decision.

Haaretz has learned that Herzog is likely to convene a meeting between representatives of the pardon department and Netanyahu and his lawyers to discuss the pardon request, which was submitted to the president last month. A final decision on the pardon department's recom-

The pardon and the fractures

Yossi Verter, Page 2

mendation isn't expected for weeks or even months.

Netanyahu's lawyers wrote in their formal request that a pardon "would enable a healing of the divisions among various segments of the people, would provide an opening for lowering the intensity of the flames and

... strengthen the country's national resilience."

The request, which includes a letter from Netanyahu, doesn't include an admission of guilt or an expression of remorse on his part. The prime minister is taking the position that the president has the power to grant him a pardon even without a conviction in the case, as the trial is still ongoing.

Netanyahu's letter also doesn't indicate any intention on his part to retire

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Gazan baby dies of exposure

Winter storm Byron wrecks havoc across Israel, Gaza Strip



A delivery driver riding through flooding in Charles Clore Park, Tel Aviv on Thursday. Itai Ron

Nir Hasson, Yair Foldes, Deiaa Haj Yahia, Adi Hashmonai and Reuters

Winter storm Byron continued to sweep through Israel and the Gaza Strip on Thursday, bringing with it large amounts of rain and flooding.

The areas in Israel hit hardest on Thursday morning were the Haifa and Mount Carmel region, with the Tel Aviv and central Israel region taking the brunt of the storm in the early afternoon hours. Snow fell on the peak of Mt. Hermon. In Yavneh, 40-50 millimeters of rain fell over the course

of an hour, causing flooding in at least eight locations; 14 people were rescued.

In Gaza, the downpour flooded hundreds of tents sheltering families displaced by the war, with the local health ministry saying a baby girl died due to exposure after her family's tent flooded. "When we woke up, we found the rain over her and the girl died of cold suddenly," Hejar Abu Jazar, the mother of 8-month-old Rahaf, told Reuters.

Medical personnel and human rights groups in Gaza fear that many more residents will die from disease and hypothermia.

In the city of Rishon Letzion, two young girls were lightly injured when a tree fell in a schoolyard within the city and were taken to Shamir Medical Center.

Significant floods were also recorded in the Arab city of Baka al-Garbiyeh. Many of the city's streets were flooded, leaving cars and their drivers stranded. One of the stranded drivers escaped to the roof of his car, from where he was rescued.

The Israel Meteorological Service said that Kibbutz Ein Carmel had the most rainfall in Israel since Byron arrived in the region, with 193 mm (7.59 inches).

AG likely to back Ben-Gvir's dismissal

Response due on High Court petition after Netanyahu refuses to act on 'political' police control

Chen Maanit

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu this week rejected Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara's demand that he act to prevent far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir from asserting control over the police, Haaretz has learned.

On Sunday, the attorney general is expected to submit her position to the High Court of Justice regarding the petitions seeking Ben-Gvir's removal from his government post.

According to assessments within the legal system, she is likely to support his dismissal in light of Netanyahu's stance and Ben-Gvir's



Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara. Oren Ben Hakoan

conduct unless there is a significant change. Still, it is unclear whether she will state this explicitly as early

as Sunday.

Petitioners argue that Ben-Gvir's removal is required due to what they

describe as systematic, ongoing violations of police independence and the transformation of the police from a law-enforcement body into a political instrument.

Supreme Court President Isaac Amit, his deputy Noam Sohlberg, and Justice Daphne Barak-Erez are scheduled to hear the petitions on January 15.

Netanyahu wrote to Baharav-Miara through Cabinet Secretary Yossi Fuchs that in the letter she sent him roughly ten days ago, in which she charged that Ben-Gvir had repeatedly and improperly interfered in police operations, she failed to address the government's claim that the authority to dismiss a

minister lies solely with the prime minister.

Netanyahu and his government made this argument in their preliminary response to the petitions in September, asserting that neither the attorney general nor the High Court has the power to order a minister's removal.

Fuchs did not respond to her criticism of the prime minister, instead writing that only after she replies in detail to the ministers' arguments can a meeting be scheduled between her, Ben-Gvir, and Netanyahu to discuss the matter formally. He also accused her of adding nothing new in her letter.

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