

Yellow Journalism Roils Final Week Before Israel's Knesset Election



Isarel PM Netanyahu on Campaign Trail

Source Gali Tibbon/ AFP/ Getty Images

When Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called for a snap election in December 2014 for next Tuesday, March 17th, it was on the basis that he would be popularly returned to serve an unprecedented third term as the Jewish nation's political leader. That prediction is now ancient history, given what has turned into one of the nastiest of Israel's Knesset elections. While he has admirers outside of Israel exemplified by his laser-like focus on the dangers of Iran bent on obtaining a nuclear weapon, that doesn't appear to be the case inside Israel in the midst of the current electoral campaign. Some in Israel and abroad looking at the alleged dead heat between Likud and the so-called Zionist Union in notoriously-biased polls in Israel say, in retrospect, perhaps Bibi made a mistake. Add to that the biased print and even TV media in Israel that have waged a daily war against him touting the meme of "anyone but Bibi". He has been chastised for some maladroit TV political spots. The opposition has emblazoned phony \$100 bills with his punim (face in Hebrew) trying to make him out as the poster boy for plutocrats. The left in Israel accuse him of pushing the economic land values in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem into the stratosphere out of range of young families who need affordable housing. All while many secular Jews have found such housing in the forbidden zone, the disputed territories of Judea and Samaria driving the population in those so-called settlements to more than

350,000. Last Saturday evening there was a monster rally in Tel Aviv with overblown estimates of the crowd ranging from “tens of thousands to over 400,000” who thronged Rabin Square. Israel’s economy overall is booming, jobs are being created, overseas direct investment is pouring into “silicon wadi” from across the globe.

Nonetheless the country’s economic future and wealth creation is being constrained by the dead hand of the dual economic structure in basic sectors controlled by the remnants of the Histadrut Labor Federation. Regulation by mind numbing bureaucracies defies imagination in the mixed economies of the West. It is exemplified, by the virtual stop of development of [Israel’s significant off shore gas fields](#). Their development could pour billions into the economy, alleviate the burden of defense in the country’s budget and greatly enhance productivity and job creation. Billions have been spent by a joint US-Israeli partnership on that development and billions of royalty and tax revenues were about to flow. That stoppage is attributable to [Dr. David Gilo](#), who heads the independent Israel Antitrust Authority who unilaterally pulled the plug within days of PM Netanyahu’s calling a snap Knesset election in December 2014. Gilo issued a consent decree accusing the US-Israel partners of constituting an anti-competitive cartel. Recently Gilo suggested that any final resolution of the impasse would have to wait until after next Tuesday’s Knesset elections. Cynics abound accusing Gilo of being a political hack of the left opposition.

The left opposition itself isn’t robust. The Zionist Union was the merger of Netanyahu’s former Justice Minister Tzipi Livni’s party [Hatnuah](#) and the Labor Party. The Labor Party, resuscitated from a near death spiral, is headed by [Yitzhak Herzog](#). Israel’s antique political system, the proportional representation for Party lists, is plagued by jockeying among the many parties for membership in so-called ruling coalition governments for control of a majority of the 120 Knesset

seats. Israelis cast ballots for the party lists. The country's basic law does not have the equivalent of ridings as in the Westminster or Canadian Parliamentary systems or Congressional Districts here in the US. A suggested change in the proportion for party representation under Israel's basic law of 5.00 was [compromised](#) at 3.25 percent in a March 2014 Knesset vote. This was a marginal increase from the previous threshold of 2 Percent. That led the Arab list of parties, harboring seditious MKs, to [announce](#) a unified list that enabled them to pick up 11 mandates in the new Knesset. That led the Zionist Union to consider a possible alliance with Arab MKs to join the government and possibly fill Ministerial posts. The polls [currently](#) bounce around showing on any given day a swing of three votes giving Likud a lead one day and on another day the Zionist Union. There is a 20 Percent undecided which has to be factored into final outcome. That might break in favor of Netanyahu and Likud. The only poll that counts in Israel is the one on March 17th in the polling booths.

In the midst of this roiling unseemly campaign, classic yellow journalism has reared its ugly head in the form of a disinformation campaign by one of largest dailies, *Yediot Ahronoth* (YA). But first let's set the stage by looking at the media and the major opponents in this titanic struggle.

Most of Israel's dailies like [Ha'aretz](#), [Ma'ariv](#) and YA align their editorial and news slants with the left opposition in Israel. Channel 2 and 10, the government owned outlets, also engage in broadcasting opinion as news; especially with it comes to the Netanyahu government. The media is unstinting about uncovering whiffs of corruption such as the alleged lavish spending on cleaning at the PM's official and other residences following a [report](#) by the Auditor General.

The lone exception is [Israel Hayom](#) (IH), a virtually free newspaper widely distributed and funded in large measure by American billionaire [Sheldon Adelson](#). IH is the newspaper of

record of the center right in Israel, Likud and [Habayit Hayehudi](#) (The Jewish Home) headed by [Naftali Bennett](#), a former IDF Special Forces commando and high tech centi-millionaire. Bennett had a center left counterpart headed by former Israeli TV news reader, [Yair Lapid](#), whose Yesh Atid party levered the grumblings of what passed for the Israeli version of the Occupy Movement. That movement sought to obtain increases in government social programs and housing allotments. Some might argue forgiveness for over draft checking account bank balances that many Israel families use to keep body and soul together. Both Bennett and Lapid held ministerial posts in the Netanyahu cabinet until a blow up with Netanyahu resulted in Lapid and Livni, the former Justice Minister, being fired.

The owner of YA, [Arnon Mozes](#), sought last weekend to destroy Netanyahu's center right alliance with a [report](#) last Friday that the Prime Minister had sanctioned a 2013 peace proposal created by the US to provide concessions including dividing Israel's eternal capital of Jerusalem. It is alleged his objective was to divide the center right, defeating another term for Netanyahu and scoring a tie vote resulting in a unity government. Israel's President Reuven Rivlin had [suggested](#) that as a possibility. A majority of Israelis (53%) [polled](#) about that prospect rejected it. Mozes' manipulation of the truth led to [rejection](#) by Likud and Netanyahu and ultimately by US Ambassador [Dennis Ross](#) and a PA negotiator as a total fabrication. Ross was [cited](#) by *IH* saying, that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "never agreed to Israeli withdrawal to 1967 borders, dividing Jerusalem or the right of return."

That didn't stop the editors at *Bloomberg* from published a column by Dr. Daniel Gordis, an American ordained Conservative rabbi, who made aliyah to Israel with his family in 1998. Next to *CNN* in the US, *Bloomberg* has a pronounced bias in favor of the Administration in Washington that would dearly welcome a possible defeat for Likud and Netanyahu.

Gordis had been the founding dean of the Zeigler School of Theology at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. He is widely published, an author whose books have won Jewish National Book awards. His columns and articles have been featured in publications like the *New York Times* and *Commentary* in the US and *Azure Quarterly* in Israel. He serves as Senior Vice President and