



## Two aides to PM arrested over connection between PMO, Qatar

**Bar Peleg and Ran Shimoni**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu testified on Monday as part of an investigation into ties between Qatari officials and his office. His testimony, which was recorded, was taken at his Jerusalem office with the approval of Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara and in the presence of three senior officers.

Earlier in the day, Netanyahu's aides, Eli Feldstein and Yonatan Urich, were arrested as part of the probe. They are suspected of contact with a foreign agent, money laundering, bribery, fraud and breach of trust. Police are expected to seek an extension of their detention.

The decision to summon Netanyahu for testimony during their investigation was aimed at preventing obstruction of justice. Netanyahu's testimony in his corruption trials at the Tel Aviv District Court ended earlier than usual after a closed-door session requested by the prosecution.

Following his testimony in the investigation into his office's ties with Qatar, Netanyahu claimed his aides were being held as hostages and accused the probe of being politically motivated.

"They are holding Yonatan Urich and Eli Feldstein as hostages, making their lives miserable over nothing," Netanyahu said.

He asserted that the investigation's "sole purpose was to prevent the dismissal of the Shin Bet [security service] chief." Despite having cleared his schedule for four



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Tel Aviv District Court on Monday with his lawyer Amit Hadad.

Miriam Alster/Flash90

hours, he added, "The investigators ran out of questions after just one hour."

Another suspect, who is a central figure in the case, is currently being questioned under caution, or as a possible suspect. The investigation is being conducted by the

police's International Crime Investigations unit in Lahav 433.

Alongside the suspects and those questioned under caution, the police collected testimony from a journalist who had a business relationship with Feldstein while he

was employed as the prime minister's spokesman.

The journalist wasn't originally summoned for questioning as a suspect, but during his interrogation, police changed their view and warned him that he is now suspected of contact with a

foreign agent because he apparently served as a middleman between Feldstein and Birger.

Permission from the State Prosecutor's Office was required to question the journalist, and a police source familiar with the case con-

firmed that all necessary approvals have been obtained.

The source also said that another journalist who "echoed Qatar's messages on behalf of Feldstein" will be summoned for questioning

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## Likud sources: PM may renege on new Shin Bet chief pick

**Noa Shpigel and Michael Hauser Tov**

Coalition members attacked Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's appointment of former Navy commander Eli Sharvit as the next head of the Shin Bet, citing Sharvit's past opposition to the government's judicial overhaul.

Likud officials, as well as those in Netanyahu's inner circle, are urging him not to follow through with the appointment and political sources estimate that Netanyahu will withdraw the appointment.

Netanyahu's announcement of the appointment of Sharvit came as a surprise, and has drawn criticism

from both the opposition, for selecting Sharvit before the High Court ruled on petitions against Ronen Bar's dismissal, and several members of the prime minister's own coalition due to Sharvit's criticism of the judicial coup.

Heritage Minister Amichay Eliyahu wrote on X that the new appointee shares his predecessor Ronen Bar's "world view that sees democracy as a tool that must be protected by 'gatekeepers' who know better than the people." He added that if the government wants to "strengthen the democratic system," they must guarantee that the heads of

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Analysis **Amos Harel**

## Let's face it: PM is no longer fit to govern

The last time the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem was so busy so early in the morning was presumably on October 7, 2023, when at 6:29 A.M. Hamas began firing thousands of rockets into Israel and Benjamin Netanyahu, along with everyone else in the country, woke up to the sound of sirens. At 6:53 A.M. on Monday, the PMO deviated from its usual routine and issued a statement announcing the prime minister's decision to appoint a surprising candidate as the next director of the Shin Bet security service: the former commander

of the Israel Navy, Vice Admiral (res.) Eli Sharvit.

Netanyahu took advantage of the loophole left by the Supreme Court's decision to let him interview candidates for the position. He hastened to advance the appointment, despite the court's temporary injunction blocking the dismissal of the agency's current chief, Ronen Bar. The injunction was issued after the cabinet voted to fire Bar. Netanyahu is moving forward despite the clear conflict of interest - he's acting quickly

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## 14 aid workers found dead week after IDF Gaza strike

**Jack Khoury**

The Red Crescent and the Gaza Health Ministry announced on Sunday that they have located the bodies of 14 aid workers who had lost contact with their teams about a week and a half ago while attempting to rescue casualties during an Israel strike in western Rafah.

According to the Hamas-run ministry's statement, some of the workers were found with their hands bound. The victims included eight Red Crescent workers, one UNRWA staff member, and five Civil Defense workers, an emergency rescue group belonging to Gaza's Interior Ministry. The Health Ministry "strongly condemned"

the Israeli airstrike that targeted "rescue workers and medical teams of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society and Civil Defense while they were carrying out their humanitarian missions in the Rafah district."

The statement added that the bodies showed signs of "head and chest injuries" and were "buried in a deep pit to prevent their discov-

ery." The statement concluded with a call to international organizations for an "urgent investigation" and emphasized the "urgent need to ensure the protection of medical teams, their safe access to those in need, and to provide services in accordance with international law."

The Red Cross said it was "appalled" by the deaths of

the medical teams. The organization stated, "While carrying out their work, along with first responders from the Civil Defense in Gaza and a staff member of the United Nations, their bodies were identified today and have been recovered for dignified burial."

The Red Cross added, "Medical and humanitarian personnel, as well as

civil defense organizations, play a crucial role in responding to emergencies and serve as a lifeline for their communities. They must be able to carry out their work safely. International humanitarian law is clear: medical personnel, ambulances, humanitarian relief personnel, and civil

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First responders in Khan Yunis in Gaza on Sunday. AFP

### Abuse by settlers under guise of IDF activity

## Army, settlers run joint terror campaign against Palestinians

**Nir Hasson**

To understand what happened at the village of Jinba in Masafer Yatta over the weekend, it's best to look at a drawing by a young boy in this region of the southern West Bank. The work, which the boy Jafar Rabai calls "Settlers Dress Up as Soldiers," depicts six soldiers with sidelocks, marking them as religious settlers.

In the drawing, a boy is lying on the ground with his head bleeding; another boy is lying on the ground as a soldier holds a rifle to his head. Another soldier is halting an ambulance, and the other four are brandishing their rifles.

The drawing is a good depiction of the events over the weekend, which started with reports of an attack on an Israeli shepherd - reports that triggered harsh reprisals by settlers and Israeli soldiers.

The blackboard in the little village school still bears the date of the 26th of Ramadan, last Wednesday. The school also fell victim in the attack - soldiers broke down its doors and destroyed dozens of desks and chairs.

In one classroom, they tore down a Palestinian

flag from a wall and set it on fire in the middle of the room. Almost all the school's windows were broken; someone even took the trouble to break the loudspeaker that sounds the bell.

The soldiers also went to the small clinic next door that is visited once a week by a physician from Doctors Without Borders. The soldiers carefully destroyed furniture in the clinic, then they did the same thing to a sink and a water dispenser. Jinba is one of the most remote villages in Masafer Yatta, where settlers and the military are most violent in their attempt to drive the people from their homes, on land the army wants for a firing zone. Many people in the village live in caves or use them for storage; the people make their living shepherding and in agriculture.

The sequence of events began Friday. "A Jewish shepherd has been attacked. ... Terrorists from the village of Jinba attacked the shepherd with clubs while he was out with his flock and wounded him," the settlers said in a statement.

The announcement was accompanied by two photos

of the shepherd with blood on his clothes and hands. But on Saturday, it turned out that this was no ordinary shepherd. In footage released by people from Jinba, the shepherd is seen driving toward two Palestinian shepherds on an all-terrain vehicle, before he attacked one of them.

It's unclear what happened next and whether the Israeli shepherd was indeed wounded by the Palestinian shepherds or someone who came to help them. Either way, reprisals by settlers quickly followed.

Shortly after the attack, around 15 young settlers covering their faces stormed the village armed with clubs. Footage shows them entering the first home and viciously beating 15-year-old Ahmed al-Amur, even after he fell down bleeding.

They then turned on Ahmed's 64-year-old father, Aziz, who was struck several times and was left with a fractured skull, presumably from an iron bar. Next came his second son, Kosay, whose hand was broken. In the yard around the house one can still see bloodstains

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Ran Mendelson

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## Head of GOP in Israel to lobby for pro-Russian separatist republic



President of Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik.

Amel Emric / Reuters

**Omer Benjakob**

Attorney Marc Zell, chair of the Republican Party in Israel, recently registered as a lobbyist on behalf of Republika Srpska, the president of which was issued an international arrest warrant as he was attending a conference in Israel hosted by the Diaspora Affairs Ministry.

One of Zell's lobbying goals is getting U.S. sanctions imposed on the secessionist,

pro-Russian republic's president, Milorad Dodik, lifted.

Under the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), any American citizen or firm representing a foreign entity must disclose such activity in advance. According to U.S. filings, in January, Zell's firm - Zell & Associates International Advocates - registered as a lobbyist for Republika Srpska - one of the two entities that make up Bosnia and Herze-

govina.

Zell, who resides in the West Bank settlement of Kfar Etzion, listed that address on the registration. His firm, documents show, maintains offices in New York, Washington, Toronto, Moscow, and Amman. The filing states that Zell is to receive \$840,000 for his services.

The filing includes the full contract between Zell's firm and Dodik's chief of staff - who acted on behalf of the

separatist republic's presidency - outlining the goals of the lobbying effort.

The primary objective, as is written in the contract, is "to create and promote a dialogue between the [Republika Srpska] and the incoming Trump 2.0 Administration aimed at improving relations between the RS and its leadership and the United States."

According to the documents, this potential rapprochement is advanced "in light of the evolving geopolitical conditions affecting the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe caused, among other things, by the Ukrainian-Russian War and its possible termination."

The registration is dated January 13 - just a week before Trump's return to the White House and well before his administration began any talks with Russia or Ukraine regarding an end to the war, which began with Russia's invasion in 2022.

Zell, whose firm specializes in international legal advocacy and has represented Israelis facing similar legal entanglements, responded to Haaretz's request for comment, saying that "The information you provided to me

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