

Netanyahu's associates: Political motives played a role in his decision to go to war against Iran

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With the end of the 12-Day War, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that Israel had "removed two immediate existential threats," and declared a "historic victory that will stand for generations." But the day before yesterday he had already explained that Israel was launching another operation in order to remove the "existential threat from the terrorist regime in Iran." What happened in the eight months between June and February?

Along with the desire to see the collapse of the ayatollahs' government, a series of unflattering polls and an upcoming election campaign had an impact on the decision-making process. "For Netanyahu, the road to the polls runs through Washington and Tehran," one of the ministers close to him recently told Haaretz. "The collapse of the Iranian axis of evil is the move Netanyahu estimated, already after October 7, that would succeed in restoring his image".

The 12-Day War was supposed, from the Prime Minister's perspective, to bring about a change in public opinion. But it did not deliver. The extensive Israeli attack in recent days was intended to provide significant security gains, but ministers close to Netanyahu say that political motivation also played an important role. Polls after the war in June showed that the public was thrilled by the achievement, but remembered Netanyahu's failures and the shortcomings of his government.

Now, as the election campaign approaches, it is clear that Netanyahu no longer stands by his statements that the existential threat to Israel has been removed: When embarking on the operation on June 13, Netanyahu made it clear in a video message that "the goal of this unprecedented operation is to damage Iran's nuclear infrastructure, Iran's ballistic missile factories and many of its military capabilities of Iran." He added that the operation "will continue as long as necessary until we complete the mission of repelling the threat of annihilation that hangs over our heads."

On June 24, upon the end of the operation, Netanyahu convened a press conference in which he listed a long list of achievements: "We hit the senior scientists at the beginning of the war," Netanyahu noted. "We hit the main enrichment facility in Natanz very hard. We destroyed centrifuge manufacturing industries and a uranium conversion facility that is essential for breaking through to nuclear weapons." Regarding the ballistic missile stockpiles, he said at the time that Israel hit "the production plants one

after the other. We neutralized hundreds of ballistic missiles and hit a huge number of launchers. "It doesn't matter how many missiles they have, it only matters how many launchers they have."

The elections are officially scheduled to take place at the end of October. Likud ministers have claimed that Netanyahu is working to bring them forward to September 1, but the assessment that they will take place as early as June is still reasonable: The coalition members, who refused to approve Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich's customs decree last week, may signal a breakdown in discipline that will prevent approval of other measures, primarily the budget. If the budget is not finally approved by the end of the month, the government will dissolve - and the elections will be held about three months later. In such a situation, Netanyahu may stop the approval of the conscription law and go to the elections even before then, so as not to play into the hands of the opposition campaign. The reconstruction efforts in Gaza, which are expected to begin in the coming months with the support of Turkey and Qatar and with the involvement of the Palestinian Authority, may embarrass his election campaign in front of the Likud base. Netanyahu is expected to try to squeeze the lemon of his personal relationship with President Trump in favor of a campaign that will highlight the unprecedented alliance with America.