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FRIDAY, JUNE 14, 2024 ■ 8 SIVAN, 5784

Bring them home



Romi Gonen, age 23, kidnapped from the Nova music festival



Haredi conscription, not Gantz, may topple gov't



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President Milorad Dodik speaks to the 'Post'



Israel's 'ally' - Iran

MAGAZINE

BIDEN:

Hamas is blocking a deal, we're continuing to push

• By TOVAH LAZAROFF

Hamas is preventing a ceasefire deal, US President Joe Biden told reporters in Italy as the terror group continued to insist on amendments that American and Israeli officials found unworkable.

"I've laid out an approach that has been endorsed by the UN Security Council, by the G7, by the Israelis," he said as he referred to the three-phase plan that he first unveiled on May 31.

"The biggest hang-up so far is Hamas refusing to sign on, even though they have submitted something similar," Biden said, adding that it remained to be seen whether the deal would come to fruition.

"We're going to continue to push," he said while in Italy for a meeting of the G7, where he discussed the situation with leaders from those countries, including the US, Italy, Canada, Japan, France, Great Britain, and Germany.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken blamed Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar for the absence of a deal.

"It's time for the haggling to stop; it's time for a ceasefire to start," Blinken stated.

There's "one man who's probably somewhere deep underground in Gaza for Hamas, Mr. Sinwar, who's making all of these decisions.

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Haifa	7:19 p.m.	8:33 p.m.
Beersheba	7:26 p.m.	8:29 p.m.
Eilat	7:11 p.m.	8:23 p.m.

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14/06/2024

Hezbollah launches massive rocket barrage

Two soldiers wounded in North • IDF finds 800-meter-long tunnel in central Gaza

• By Yael Halfon and Maya Gur Arie

Hezbollah launched a massive barrage of rockets toward northern Israel throughout Thursday, accentuating the dire situation it leaves the region in with no apparent end in sight to the war.

One of the launches included a barrage of 40 rockets and five UAVs, the IDF said.

Police said that reports of impacts had been received. Two soldiers were wounded, one moderately and one lightly, in the attacks. They were evacuated and received medical treatment, and their families were informed.

One house in Birya was hit, the Upper Galilee Regional Council announced, with damage detected to the house and agricultural areas nearby, while the Safed municipality said that schools in the city had been shut down following the barrage. The Fire and Rescue Authority received 15 reports of fires erupting in the Golan Heights and Upper Galilee areas.

Ten teams from the Fire and Rescue Authority, KKL-JNF, and the IDF worked to extinguish an extensive forest fire in the Birya area. An additional ten teams worked to extinguish fires in the central region of the Golan Heights.

IAF fighter jets struck Hezbollah terrorist infrastructure in the area of Deir Siriane in



COWS FEED from troughs as plumes of smoke rise behind them in a field that caught fire after a rocket strike originating from southern Lebanon hit landed near Katzrin in the Golan Heights yesterday. (Jalaa Marey/AFP via Getty Images)

southern Lebanon, the military said. These air strikes follow alerts activated due to hostile aircraft intrusions in the Golan Heights area, and Israel's air defenses intercepted three targets, the IDF noted. An additional rock-

et and missile warning was sounded at Mount Hermon due to fear of fallen intercepted fragments.

Local leaders did not wait to respond, with Moshe Davidovich, head of the Match Asher Regional Council, say-

ing, "The North is attacked continuously and non-stop. The residents of the North are used as cannon fodder for Nasrallah's whims, and the Israeli government is falling asleep while standing."

"We demand the govern-

ment present an immediate plan to maintain the security of northern residents. It was also decided that if such a plan is not presented by the beginning of July, we will take a series of steps to be announced later."

ISRAEL AT WAR



Poll shows rise in support among Palestinians for armed struggle, Page 2

Hostage rescue won't soften anti-Israel attitudes, Page 3

Lobby 1701, a group representing thousands of northern residents, said, "The Israeli government is endangering the settlements of northern Israel. Destruction, fires, and not a word from the government.

"The division commanders are ready, the brigades are ready, the home front is ready. And only the Israeli government and the IDF Chief of Staff are afraid to make a decision. The residents of the North are all awed by the government's abandonment, neglect, and cowardice. If Israel is burning, Lebanon should be burning. This is the only equation

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France seeks road-map to end fighting in North

• By TOVAH LAZAROFF

France is seeking a diplomatic road-map to end the war between the IDF and Hezbollah along Israel's northern border with Lebanon, as the US said that Gaza quiet was needed for diplomacy to work in that sphere.

French President Emmanuel Macron spoke of setting up a trilateral summit with the US and Israel, in an effort to secure a diplomatic solution amid escalating violence.

He spoke in Italy at a meeting of the G7, where leaders from those countries, including the US, Canada, Japan, Great Britain, and Germany, discussed global threats, among them the possibility of an all-out war in Israel's north.

A draft communique that speaks about the Israeli-Lebanese crisis is due to be released following the G7 summit.

Israel's National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi and Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer are set to head to Washington next week to discuss Iran and its proxies Hezbollah and Hamas, according to media reports.

In Washington, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said that the cross-border IDF-Hezbollah violence "remains an extremely concerning situation

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MICHAEL OREN TO 'POST': US must openly back Israel against Hezbollah

• By HANNAH SARISOHN
Jerusalem Post Correspondent

NEW YORK – Nearly a dozen displaced residents of the Galilee returned to Israel on Thursday amid a barrage of heavy Hezbollah fire, after spending several days in Washington where they met with elected and administration officials to share their eight months of experiences living along Israel's second battlefield.

Facilitated by Michael Oren, former Israeli ambassador to the United States and founder of the Israel Advocacy Group, the delegation was organized in a matter of days, reflecting the urgency of the unfolding crisis creeping southward and westward.

"The situation is simply intolerable," Oren said. "What's happening is that Hezbollah is realizing Israel's worst nightmare which is a war of creeping attrition, where every day the rocket fires are advancing southward, but Hezbollah is not giving us a clear trigger that

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The real danger of Iran tying Hezbollah to Gaza

Like Sarajevo that triggered the Great War

• By SETH J. FRANTZMAN

Eight months of war have provided Israel with a deeper understanding of the role of Iran in creating multifront threats against Israel. Prior to October 7, it was widely believed that the real threat in the region was Iran and that Iran's provision of weapons to Hezbollah was the main front that Israel should concentrate on. However, October 7 showed that Hamas could trigger a regional war by attacking Israel.

This means that it's worth understanding now how Hamas continues to have its hand on the trigger. If there is a ceasefire in Gaza, for instance, there may be "quiet" in northern Israel. This means that Hamas's actions may determine Hezbollah's actions. Together, their actions are likely coordinated with Iran and also its other proxies such as the Houthis.

Any escalation in Gaza may therefore lead to escalation in the North. This is one of the main learning curves of this conflict. Israel did not plan for this eventuality. While

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Gantz: Netanyahu put political considerations before a hostage deal

• By MAYA GUR ARIEH

Israel should pay the price of a "year- or two-year-long" ceasefire in Gaza for the return of all the hostages taken by Hamas, MK Benny Gantz said in an interview with Channel 12 on Thursday.

The National Unity faction leader, who spoke following his resignation from the emergency war government on Sunday, said that Israel "must do whatever it takes to return the hostages."

Gantz, while interviewed by KAN, spoke about the Bibas family, who were kidnapped on October 7 and held hostage, among them

Shiri and Yarden and their two children, four-year-old Ariel and one-year-old Kfir.

"I think Israel knows what happened to the members of the Bibas family. The public will know when it will be possible to verify things," Gantz noted.

These statements come amid Gantz's interviews with KAN, Channel 12, Channel 13, and Channel 14.

The Likud responded before the interviews, stating that "it is unfortunate that Gantz decided to sit in TV studios tonight instead of in the cabinet, which continues to do everything to return the hostages and eliminate Hamas."

The National Unity Party



BENNY GANTZ speaking at a faction meeting in March in the Knesset in Jerusalem. (Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)

responded to the Likud's statements, saying, "What is unfortunate is that [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu continues to sit for discussions with-

out making strategic decisions that would return our hostages, return the residents of the North home, and eliminate Hamas."

"Discussions do not win – only actions," National Unity's statement concluded.

Religious Zionism chairman Bezalel Smotrich responded to Gantz's interview in a statement to X, noting that, "Gantz's statements in favor of ending the war are shameful and surrender to Sinwar and [to] moral and national bankruptcy."

"In front of the tired generals stand the courageous soldiers who continue to fight bravely and will bring victory to the people of Israel and the return of the hostages," his statement concluded.

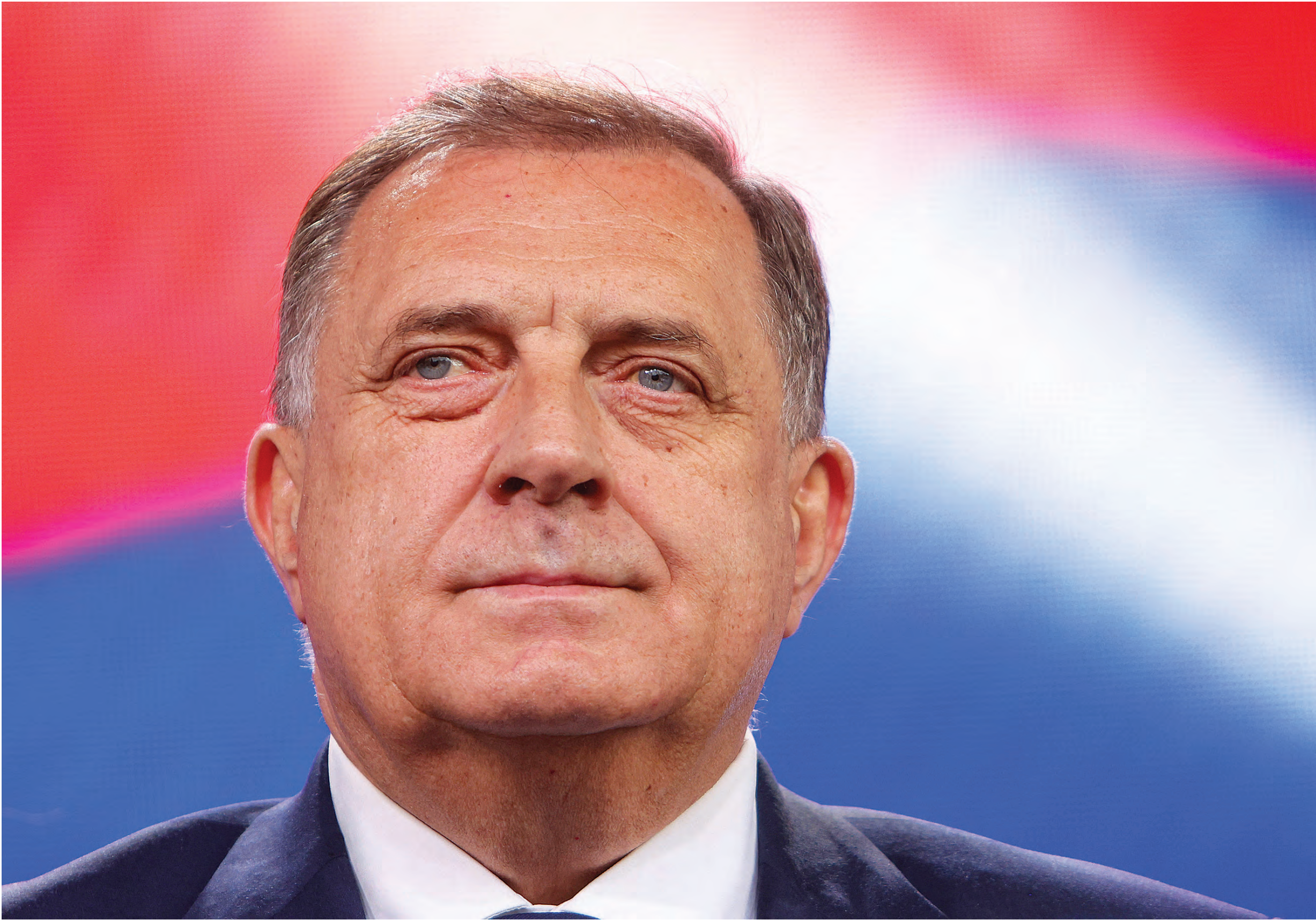
In his interview with Channel 14, Gantz explained why he didn't stay in Netanya-

hu's emergency government, saying, "Since my influence [in the government] is subject to Netanyahu, I have no problem serving Israel in the broadest possible way."

Gantz then confirmed that Netanyahu blocked his own hostage deal proposal, stating, "He approved a plan to return hostages and did nothing to promote it due to political considerations. Netanyahu did not advance the matter strongly enough."

Addressing the deadlock with Hamas, Gantz noted, "Hamas rejected the Israeli proposal. Despite this, we need to do everything to

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PRESIDENT OF Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik looks on as Bosnian Serbs protest against the UN resolution on the genocide in Srebrenica in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in April. (Amel Emric/Reuters)

Republika Srpska and Israel

In this ‘Jerusalem Post’ exclusive, President Milorad Dodik of Republika Srpska, one of two entities that make up Bosnia and Herzegovina, talks about Srebrenica, modern-day Bosnia, Israel, and Putin

Are the Balkans heading to a renewed interethnic explosion due to the intervention of the international community, thus becoming a potential new war zone on the edges of Europe?

On June 8 Belgrade, capital of Serbia, hosted in pomp and circumstance the first gathering of the All-Serbian Assembly in the presence of representatives of Serbs from across the Balkans. Main speakers at the grand event were the president of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic, and Milorad Dodik, president of the autonomous Serbian entity in neighboring Bosnia-Herzegovina, Republika Srpska.

The assembly adopted a 49-article declaration on the future of Serbs, emphasizing the unity between Serbs in the Balkans and recommending that institutions of Serbia and Srpska act in a united and coordinated manner to invest efforts to stop the assimilation of Serbs in countries of the region as well as around the world.

Following the gathering in Belgrade, President Dodik announced that he intends to hold in Srpska a referendum on independence from Bosnia-Herzegovina, suggesting the end of the existing multiethnic state at the heart of the Balkans and the Dayton peace agreement sponsored by the US 29 years ago.

The reactions to the All-Serbian Assembly and its adopted declaration, which still has to be approved by the parliaments of both Serbia and Srpska, met with harsh criticism from the US and its Muslim allies in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Vucic and Dodik, known for their close relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin, are accused of reviving the “Grand Serbia Project” of the former Yugoslav dictator Slobodan Milosevic, and by doing so threatening peace and stability in southeastern Europe.

Zeljko Komsic, the pro-Muslim member of the Federal Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina, stated that the All-Serbian Assembly has defined targets and a political-religious platform that is preparing for

a new conflict.

The US Embassy in Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, issued a statement saying: “This is dangerous. The public statements of the officials of the Republika Srpska, especially the president of the RS, Dodik, and the president of the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska, [Nenad] Stevandic, about the conclusions and plans for the ‘disunification’ of the RS, another name for secession, represent an attack on Dayton and on territorial integrity, sovereignty, and the multiethnic character of Bosnia and Herzegovina.”

In a rare interview for a foreign outlet, Dodik explains why he sees no future for coexistence with Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina and draws parallels to the situation in the Middle East.

Dodik, 63, serving since 2022 his second term as president of Srpska, and who has been on the US sanctions list since 2016, speaks about his staunch support of Israel, on opening a representation in Jerusalem well before the moving of the US Embassy, and warns of weapons supplies produced in Bosnia for Hamas and of the growing Iranian influence in a very explosive spot of Europe.

The UN General Assembly recently adopted a resolution on an International Day of Remembrance for what it defines as the genocide in Srebrenica. How do you see today what happened in Srebrenica and can it be called genocide?

It cannot be called genocide. Authoritative experts who have devoted their entire professional lives to the study of genocide have determined that it was not genocide. All those with authority on the matter say that it was not genocide. I trust these people more than the politicians, who decided it was a genocide.

The assertion that it was not genocide is reinforced by the unusual way in which the resolution was adopted in the General Assembly, a way that indicates that

it was a political decision.

In the past, resolutions on international days of remembrance were passed unanimously or by a two-thirds majority, since it is an important issue. The adoption of the resolution on Srebrenica was treated as a marginal technical matter, only because they wanted to pass it no matter what. Therefore, the resolution was adopted this time by a simple majority – 84 countries out of 193 voted in favor of the decision. One hundred and nine countries did not vote in favor – opposed it, abstained, or were absent from the vote. The debate on the decision was postponed several times because its initiators repeatedly tried to secure a larger majority.

The only body in Bosnia-Herzegovina that has the authority to decide on foreign affairs is the federal presidency, which consists of three members. Bosnia-Herzegovina did not initiate this decision, because there was no decision from the federal presidency. However, the procedure for making the decision at the UN began following the initiative of the Muslim representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the UN, who acted without authority.

Now, because of this resolution, extremely severe tensions have arisen between the different population groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The resolution made at the General Assembly is illegal, illegiti-

mate, and nonbinding. The resolution violates the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It broke the authority of the federal presidency and caused the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to be more in conflict than before.

I do not believe that this was the goal of the initiators of the resolution, but they cannot be forgiven for the worldview they are trying to impose on the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Maybe they thought that the Serbs would be angry about the decision for a few days and then calm down. But they are completely wrong. We have no intention of living with those who are working to discredit our name in history because of what they claim we did.

‘Jews around the world should organize and help the Republika Srpska to break away from the Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina’

Foreigners who thrust themselves into our affairs do not know our history, and it seems to me that they do not try to understand it at all. They have their own ideas, which they try to impose on us. The American structure, which is active in southeast Europe, leads this line.

We are not the only ones who suffer from this. In the same way, the attitude towards the conflict between the Palestinians and Israel does not correctly reflect history. Instead of ensuring Israel’s security, for decades they have maintained a state of a frozen conflict, which erupts from time to time. This is the situation they also created in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Historically, Bosnia and Her-

zegovina has never been a state. Under the Muslim Ottoman Empire it was an administrative zone, a province that was later annexed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire and was under the direct control of Vienna. Afterwards, as part of Yugoslavia, it was one of six republics that made up the federation. It was different from the other republics, [such] as Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia, whose population was fairly homogeneous. Bosnia and Herzegovina was a kind of mini-Yugoslavia – that’s what we called it – where Serbs, Croats, and Muslims lived together. The Muslims later got the name Bosnians.

When Yugoslavia broke up, forces that didn’t understand the situation here prevented the Serbs from joining Serbia, the Croats from Croatia, and the Muslims from getting their own territory, thus ensuring permanent peace and stability. I assume that there were elements in Washington who did not want to allow the Muslims to have their own state and therefore “glued” them to the Serbs and Croats.

Now we are part of an unstable society, which 30 years after the civil war is still under international rule, and which is run by Western countries, increasingly Germany. This rule imposes terrible decisions on our lives. Among the nine judges of the Constitutional Court, three are foreigners. Nothing is functioning in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is a failed country, where those who impose decisions pursue politicians, whom they accuse of not following their orders.

In the imagination of the Westerners, this is a mini Yugoslavia. But how can Mini Yugoslavia survive, when Greater Yugoslavia did not?

The best definition of Bosnia-Herzegovina was given by the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1961, Ivo Andric (Yugoslav-Croat, whose parents lived in Sarajevo), who wrote about Bosnia and Herzegovina, which he knew well. He said: When you come to Bosnia and Herzegovina and step on its land – it doesn’t matter where you come from – you lose any sense of logic.

He wrote this about 80 years ago, but it reflects reality today as well. The Germans, in the person of Angela Merkel, and the British declared that multiculturalism was a mistake. But in their eyes, this understanding is not valid in our case.

You compared the conflict between Israel and the so-called Palestinians to the situation here. The Hague International Court of Justice, which ruled that Srebrenica was a case of genocide, is now hearing claims that Israel intends to commit genocide in the Gaza Strip. How is it that every time Muslims are involved in a conflict, which they often initiate themselves, they end up being victims of genocide?

It seems to me that the Germans are the ones interested in relativizing the Second World War. In the German establishment and government there are descendants of SS officers and other people who held senior positions during the war. Take, for example, the family history of the minister of foreign affairs, Annalena Baerbock (according to publications in the German media, Baerbock’s grandfather was a staunch Nazi, fought as an officer on the Eastern Front, and received an honorary medal from the Nazi regime in 1944). The Germans now want to cleanse themselves of the crimes their ancestors were responsible for, of the crimes of genocide they committed, including the Holocaust.

How is it possible for a single case like Srebrenica to be perceived as genocide? The court never brought evidence of the exact number of murdered people there. And now, a resolution of the United Nations raises the event to the level of a universal event. This, while there isn’t, for example, an international day of remembrance for the victims of the Jasenovac extermination camp (where between 200,000 and 500,000 people, most of them Serbs, and several tens of

thousands of Jews, were murdered by Croats and Muslims who collaborated with the Nazis).

We will not commemorate this day of remembrance, which was decided by the UN.

There are countries that stand behind this self-purification initiative. The Muslims conquered Europe, and they became a political force in various countries. The current governments of Germany and France take this reality into account. They think that by courting the Muslim public in their countries, they will succeed in calming them down.

Now they have chosen what is happening in the Gaza Strip to promote the narrative of Muslim victimhood.

I am against wars. The sight of children and civilians being killed is painful. If I had the ability, I would eliminate all terrorists and those who cause suffering to others. But the world works differently. Now they are only concentrating on what is happening in Gaza while completely ignoring the horrible acts of murder which Hamas committed on October 7 only because of the hatred for the Jews. They murdered children, teenagers, people in their sleep who did not believe what was happening to them. This cannot be compared to Israel's justified response.

There are people who do not like Israel, and they are now trying to take advantage of the situation to spread all kinds of narratives about what is happening.

They don't like me in the West, because I speak my mind directly. But if we look back at history, there has never been a peaceful coexistence between Palestinians and Jews, in the same way that coexistence is not possible here, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, between Muslims and Serbs.

a separate national identity. In the Constitution of Yugoslavia, adopted in 1974, they were recognized as a nation.

'We Serbs have always had an understanding of Israel. Serbs and Jews are united by a shared history of suffering'

In the census conducted in Yugoslavia in 1961, 63% of the inhabitants of Bosnia were Serbs. Thirty years later, in the 1990 census, there were only 31% Serbs in Bosnia. Many left for Serbia since the Muslim government here was very oppressive towards them. In Banja Luka there were only 13% Muslims and over 60% Serbs. But all the top positions in the city were held by Muslims. At the time, Banja Luka had 13 mosques and only two Catholic churches and one Orthodox church (Serbs are Orthodox Christians). It shows how Muslims used their ruling power to impose themselves on others. We have no common interests with them. We don't share anything in common.

In my understanding, this is also the situation in Israel. Israel was established to allow the Jews to return to their roots. After all the suffering they went through and the Holocaust, their right to their own country was recognized. The return to the roots was accompanied by the ideal idea that the Arabs would agree to live in peace and tolerance with the Jews. It turned out that it was not possible.

We Serbs have always had an understanding of Israel. Serbs and Jews are united by a shared history of suffering. In the 20th century, Germans killed 50% of Serbian men in two world wars. And now, Germany is back here to rule us. Of course, we cannot accept that.

not interested in such a conflict. However, they impose a policy here that cannot be implemented at all. They don't want to understand the

reality. We say: we tried the solution you formulated for 30 years. It does not work. Let us find another solution. They refuse and continue to impose what was decided 30 years ago: multiethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Muslims rule. We cannot accept that, and we will not accept that. They prevent us from holding a referendum, to express our opinion. They don't see us as part of civilization; that's why they sponsored the shameful Srebrenica resolution of the UN.

How do you explain the fact that Iran has so much influence on the Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina?

During the civil war here, between 1991 and 1995, and also later, the largest embassy in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in terms of the number of its employees, was the Iranian embassy – 480 people. They were all spies.

America was not only silent in the face of this large Iranian presence, but actually agreed to it, because the Iranians were working against us, the Serbs. The Iranians even had a camp here where they trained mujahideen. Among them were people who attacked the US on September 11. Only then did the Americans start doing something against the Iranian presence here. The US only cares about its own interests, not ours. That's why they ignore the Iranian influence.

the political elites there. I have many good and honest friends in the US. Also among Muslims, by the way. During Bill Clinton's presidency, the lies about what was happening in Bosnia-Herzegovina served as the starting point for the political careers of hundreds of American government officials, mostly Democrats.

We're pretty fed up with the way the Americans conduct themselves here. If the US wants to restore its position here, its leadership should come and say that it will respect the will of the people, and that those who try to provoke a war will have problems with Washington. Let them say: if you want to live together, that's fine; if not – break up peacefully. Only this is how the US can return to its greatness.

But it seems to me that the Americans don't have enough power to do this, and they really don't care about what I say.

Would a Trump victory in the upcoming presidential elections do the world any good?

I wish for his victory. I supported his candidacy in 2016. We know, and he does, too, that the majority of Serbs living in the US voted for him. I was invited by his people to attend his inauguration as president. I applied to the US Embassy to get a visa. Two days before I was supposed to fly, the Democratic administration put me on the sanctions list, so I couldn't travel.

To this day I am on the sanctions list. I am not angry with the US, but with the rogue officials of the American government. It might seem that I also have a reason to be angry with Trump, since he had four years to lift the sanctions on me and he did not do it. Maybe he was not able to do it.

We hope for his victory, so that it will be easier for us to work with the

from the Croatian Ustasha regime deported Serbs from this area to Jasenovac and other camps and murdered them there.

My family members told me about the terrible suffering at that time, and they also told me about the Jews, who suffered with us. There were Jewish families who lived with us and were completely annihilated.

This shared suffering made me empathize with the Jews. During my studies at school in Yugoslavia, I realized that the Jews experienced the same terrible conditions as us Serbs in the Balkans. Muslims and Croats showed hostility towards the Serbs in different historical periods. This is similar to Israel's situation, whose environment is hostile to it.

Later I got to know Jews personally, including Arie Livne, one of the former heads of the Jewish Agency who also served as a representative of the World Jewish Congress and worked with me as a consultant. Livne taught me a great deal about Judaism and contributed greatly to the rapprochement between Republika Srpska and Israel. Thanks to him, we opened a representative office in Jerusalem long before Trump moved the US Embassy there.

In what areas would you like to see a development in the relations between Israel and Republika Srpska? Where would you like to see Israeli investments?

First we must preserve mutual sympathy and the need to remember the historical truth about the suffering of Jews and Serbs. The Muslims are not interested in any economic and commercial collaboration with Israelis.

We already have several businesses active here, and their companies are very welcome with us.

NATO left 11 ammunition and weapons factories with the Muslims and closed all the factories that were on the Serbian side. This is how the conditions were created for the weapons and ammunition produced by the Muslims to reach Hamas. Do you think that the support of the Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina for Hamas is a coincidence? Do not expect that there will be friends of Israel's.

The presidential palace, where we are now sitting, was lit up with the colors of the Israeli flag on the night of October 7. Whenever Israel needs solidarity, the Israeli flag will appear over this building, while in Sarajevo they project the Palestinian flag.

Of course, the Palestinians have a right to exist, but not their terrorist organizations. It is Hamas that ruled Gaza, and you cannot ignore the people there who supported this organization – not only at the political level.

You have good relations with Putin's administration. Do you see a possible end to the war in Ukraine, or do you fear that this war will spill over into other regions of Europe?

Indeed, I have a very good relationship with Putin. Unlike others, I don't hide it. I think that he is a great statesman, who protects the interests of his country and his people. I can confirm that he is not one of those who like to hurt others in order to create chaos in the world.

There are those in the West who are hysterical about the ties between us and Russia. But we get nothing from the West. Russia is traditionally a friend to the Serbian nation.

Here we talk again about history: Historically, Ukraine was part of Russia. Ukraine was created by the USSR, and it was the president of the USSR, Nikita Khrushchev, who gave the Crimean peninsula to Ukraine. It was a meaningless move at the time because all the territory belonged to the USSR. The Russians did not estimate that a conflict would arise with Ukraine. This was the case until 2014, and then it became clear that other agendas came into play.

What is Europe without the Russian resources? We see the answer for this today. There is no more cheap Russian gas or other Russian resources, and the European economy is collapsing.

The American interest is to prevent a rapprochement between Europe and Russia, as such a connection would create serious competition for the US. In my opinion, Europe is the main victim of the current conflict, and therefore Europe is rapidly losing its importance. Putin had to protect his people.

At the time, they allowed a referendum to be held in Montenegro, on the decision to secede from Serbia. In Kosovo, a majority in the parliament was enough to decide on independence from Serbia. But when the people of Crimea voted in a referendum to join Russia, the West went out of its way and shouted that it was wrong. Why do the Western powers interfere in our affairs?

Putin warned in 2007, at the Munich Security Conference, that the expansion of NATO towards Russia must be stopped and that he would not allow NATO's expansion into territories from which it would be possible to attack Russia with missiles. Would the Americans agree to such a situation? No. So why should Russia agree to this?!

The West completely ignored Putin's words. In 2014, we saw in Ukraine an uprising of the extreme Right against a legally and democratically elected president. Even then, Putin tried to prevent war and gave his consent to the Minsk agreement to stop the conflict. The Donbas regions remained within the territory of Ukraine, but got a large degree of autonomy. The sponsors of the agreement were Angela Merkel and François Hollande. A year ago Merkel said that the West was never serious about the Minsk agreement, and the intention was to give Ukraine time to get organized to join the West. (Merkel said in an interview with the weekly *Die Zeit* that the Minsk agreement was intended to give Ukraine time, and Ukraine used this time to strengthen itself.)

So what could be expected from Putin? To move his capital beyond the Ural Mountains? Now the West allows Ukraine to use its missiles and planes to attack Russia. I am afraid of an escalation, but hope that peace will prevail. Russia does not want to stay in Ukraine. The people of Crimea decided to be part of Russia, and this should be respected, just as our desire to separate from Bosnia-Herzegovina should be respected.



'I HAVE a very good relationship with Putin. Unlike others, I don't hide it.' Russian President Vladimir Putin meets with President of Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik last week. (Reuters)

Why, in your opinion, is coexistence not possible here or in the Middle East?

Because of our history and yours. Serbs were slaves of the Ottomans for 400 years. Most of the Muslims living here today are Serbs and Croats who converted to Islam. They look like us, speak our language, their surnames are similar to ours. They were forced to convert to Islam under the torture of the Ottoman authorities at the time. Few were those who voluntarily converted to Islam. This was a forced mass conversion to Islam, a policy very different from today's liberal approach that anyone can define themselves as they wish. Those who converted to Islam blame others for their troubles.

During the Yugoslavia period, the narrative about unity and brotherhood between all population groups was created against the background of the difficult history. Until the 1960s, the Muslims here would say they were Serbs or Croats, whose religion was Islam. Tito, who wanted to establish the movement of nonaligned countries, many of which were Muslim – such as Egypt and Indonesia – was proud of having his own Muslims and gave our Muslims the right to

Is there a tendency to forget that part of the Muslim population in Bosnia-Herzegovina collaborated with the Germans in World War II?

Yes. The Muslims served in the most brutal army units, like the SS division *Handschar*. The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Hajj Amin al-Husseini visited them in Sarajevo, to give them his blessing for killing Jews and Serbs.

Now it is clear that the Americans were wrong not to unite the Balkans with the Serbs. It could have been a much more just solution than the one we have now. We didn't impose ourselves on anyone during Yugoslavia. And what do we have today, in Slovenia for example? A Serbian minority without a minority status. The US made a big mistake. They don't like to hear it. They will find with the Europeans new ways not to be fair with us. The Americans told us: the Muslims cannot accept and run their own country; you have to be there to supervise them. Then, the Americans began to demand that we follow their instructions and gave full support to the Muslims.

We cannot accept this policy. It is not easy to be in a conflict with the Americans, and we are

Actually, I feel sorry for the US. It is still a superpower. Thirty or 40 years ago it had widespread support in the world, with the exception of some extreme Muslim countries. Then they decided to break up Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, to create the European Union. The mismanagement of all the crises created by this policy has generated a lot of hostility around the world towards the US.

I, personally, grew up with many values of American society: freedom, human rights, private initiative, the rule of law, the NBA. Then, America, having these values, came to my region and started to impose unreasonable things on us. It is impossible to impose the American model anywhere in the world.

If the United States had said 15 years ago at the UN Assembly that it was essential to pass a resolution on Srebrenica, it would have passed by a huge majority. Today, with all the efforts that the US and Europe invested in passing the resolution, only 84 countries voted in favor of it. The US power is weakening.

Is this situation created because of the administration of a certain party?

When I talk about the US, I mean

US. [US President Joe] Biden built his political career on lies about the Serbs. And he did not apologize for the lies he spread about the number of Muslims killed by the Serbs. Which American president apologizes? Such a thing does not happen. We, the Serbs, suffer the consequences of his lies.

I did not participate in the war as a soldier. I was an opposition politician. No one can accuse me of nationalistic chauvinism. I regret that Yugoslavia fell apart. But that's what happened. I understand that we gave the Croats a country where they are the majority, and the Slovenes a country where they are the majority. But why did they create Bosnia-Herzegovina with a Muslim majority? They should not have forced their way of life on us. It doesn't work here.

Where does your great support for Israel come from?

I was born near the Jasenovac concentration and extermination camp, where half a million Serbs and 30,000 Jews were murdered. There were partisans in my family, and the area where I grew up is the area where the epic fighting against the German occupiers took place. Germans and collaborators

We are about to establish a cyber academy with Israeli businessmen. We are very interested in any type of cooperation in key fields. We can guarantee the security and stability of Israeli projects here.

I hosted Avigdor Liberman at the time, when he was foreign minister. Outside our parliament building there is a memorial site for the victims of the Jasenovac camp. We placed wreaths there, and then I offered him to walk around the city with me. His security men resisted because of the fear of Muslim assassins. I said to them: What are you afraid of? I will walk with him. We took the tour, and he told me it was the first time in a while that he was able to enjoy such a walk. Liberman contributed a lot to understanding between us.

Jews around the world should organize and help the Republika Srpska to break away from the Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

One of the issues that worries Israel is the supply of weapons from ammunition factories in Bosnia-Herzegovina, mainly those in the Sarajevo area, to Hamas. Can you confirm this information?

That is true. The Americans and