

# Israel's Netanyahu gives up effort to form new government

Mon, 2019-10-21 20:28

JERUSALEM: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu informed Israel's president Monday he could not form a new government following deadlocked September elections, making way for his opponent Benny Gantz to try.

The decision was an important defeat for Netanyahu as he seeks to continue his tenure as Israel's longest-serving prime minister, but it does not mean the end of those efforts since he still has various cards to play.

Gantz will also face long odds in forming a government, with many analysts predicting he too will fail to negotiate a unity coalition.

In that case, President Reuven Rivlin could ask a majority of parliament members to agree on a candidate.

Rivlin has vowed to do all he can to prevent yet another election – a third since April – but the possibility remains that the stalemate could eventually trigger it.

Netanyahu has been battling the threat to his political survival on two fronts, also facing the possibility of corruption charges in the weeks ahead.

"A short time ago I informed the president that I was handing back my mandate to try to form a government," Netanyahu said in a video posted on his official Facebook page.

The prime minister blamed Gantz for refusing to negotiate on Netanyahu's preferred terms.

Rivlin said shortly afterwards that he intended to ask ex-military chief Gantz, head of the centrist Blue and White alliance, to try to form a government.

Like Netanyahu, he will have 28 days to attempt to do so.

Rivlin can take up to three days to hear out the parties elected to parliament before officially tasking Gantz, who had no political experience before mounting his challenge to the premier he once worked with as military chief of staff.

Blue and White said in a statement: "The time of spin is over, and it is now time for action."

"Blue and White is determined to form the liberal unity government, led by Benny Gantz, that the people of Israel voted for a month ago," it said.

By "liberal," it signalled it would seek to limit the influence of religious parties in forming a coalition.

Netanyahu argued that he had "made every effort to bring Benny Gantz to the negotiating table, every effort to form a broad national government, every effort to prevent further elections."

"Unfortunately, time and time again he simply refused."

But Gantz has repeatedly said he cannot negotiate based on the terms Netanyahu wants.

Netanyahu's right-wing Likud has been seeking to negotiate based on a compromise set out by Rivlin that takes into account the possibility the premier will be indicted for corruption in the upcoming weeks.

It could see him remain prime minister for now, but step aside at some point

later as he combats the charges.

Gantz would take over as acting premier under such a scenario.

The Blue and White leader, however, says he should be prime minister first under any rotation arrangement since his party won the most seats in September 17 elections, finishing with 33 compared to Likud's 32.

Gantz also says Blue and White cannot serve in a government with a prime minister facing serious indictment.

Netanyahu has added a further complication to the coalition talks.

He has pledged not to abandon the smaller right-wing and religious parties that support him in parliament, saying he represents the entire bloc in coalition negotiations.

That condition is also unacceptable to Gantz, who says it would mean Blue and White joining a Netanyahu government as a junior member.

Netanyahu received the endorsement of 55 members of parliament for the post of prime minister after the election, while Gantz received 54.

Ten of the parliament members endorsing Gantz, however, are from Arab parties and have said they will not serve in a government with the ex-military leader.

While the 70-year-old Netanyahu was yielding to his opponent at least temporarily on Monday, he has shown no sign of willingly giving up the post he has held for a total of more than 13 years.

A prime minister does not have to step down if indicted – only if convicted with all appeals exhausted – while other ministers can be forced to do so when charged.



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## [US, European, Asian chiefs of staff support Saudi Arabia's right to self-defense](#)

Author:

AFP

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1571677665792410600

Mon, 2019-10-21 13:26

JEDDAH: Saudi Military Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Fayyad bin Hamad Al-Ruwaili said the Kingdom's armed forces are confronting all threats from Iran and its allies, adding that he is looking forward to producing a stance that stresses international support in protecting oil facilities and ensuring their protection from future attacks.

He pointed out that everyone should actively be involved in strengthening the capabilities to resist Iran's threats and those of its allies.

Al-Ruwaili's statement came during the Security and Defense Conference of the chiefs of staff of GCC states and other countries including Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan, Britain, the US, France, South Korea, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, New Zealand and Greece.

The aim of the conference was to emphasize maritime and air protection, discuss Iranian hostilities and participate in the procurement of capabilities needed for the security of the region.

Highlighting the importance of the region, Al-Ruwaili said it contains about 30 percent of the world energy supplies and shipping lanes that constitute 20 percent of the global trade paths, which is equivalent to 4 percent of the world gross domestic product.

He said: "Today's meeting aims to find appropriate ways for joint military cooperation to ensure the protection of vital and sensitive facilities, as the region continues to suffer from ongoing crises since the time the regime came to power following (1979) revolution in Iran, which aims to export the revolution to other countries, in contradiction with international conventions and treaties."

He added that this has contributed to "spreading chaos by using religious sectarianism to serve political objectives, adopting and supporting loyal armed groups and forming parties and militias that contribute to destabilizing security and stability in several countries in the region.

The participants visited an exhibition, in which they were briefed on the unprecedented attack on vital facilities in the Kingdom as well as intercepted ballistic missiles, Iranian drones and photos of Iranian terrorist tools used to destabilize the region. Participants issued a joint statement denouncing the attacks on the Kingdom, and expressing their determination to deter future attacks on vital facilities that are crucial for the global economy. They also expressed their full support for Saudi Arabia's efforts to deal with attacks, and affirmed its right and the right of its neighbors to self-defense in accordance with international law. They also stressed the need to identify the best ways to support the Kingdom, deter threats against vital infrastructure in Saudi Arabia and the safety of navigation in its waters, which will be discussed in the upcoming meeting on Nov. 4.













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## [Trump says US troops to deploy to other areas before leaving Syria](#)

Mon, 2019-10-21 19:09

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump on Monday said he did not want to leave any American troops in Syria, but that US forces leaving the country now would deploy elsewhere before eventually returning to the United States. Trump, speaking at a meeting of his Cabinet at the White House, also said it appeared a five-day pause negotiated last week in the Turkish offensive against US-allied Kurdish-led fighters in northern Syria was holding despite some skirmishes, and that it could possibly go beyond Tuesday's expiration. "I'm sure if we needed a little extension that would be happening," he told reporters at the meeting.

Turkey began its cross-border operation following Trump's decision two weeks ago to withdraw US troops from the area. US officials said then that those troops were expected to be repositioned in the region. Some of them could go to Iraq.

A small number of US troops would stay "in a little different section to secure the oil," as well as in "a totally different section of Syria near Jordan and close to Israel," Trump said on Monday.

"That's a totally different mindset," Trump said, adding: "Other than that, there's no reason" for US troops to remain. "They're going to be sent initially to different parts," he added. "Ultimately, we're bringing them home."

The American withdrawal has been criticized by US lawmakers, including some of Trump's fellow Republicans, as a betrayal of Kurdish allies who for years have helped the United States fight the Islamic State.

On Monday, US Defense Secretary Mark Esper said the Pentagon was considering keeping some US troops near oilfields in northeastern Syria alongside Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to help deny oil to Daesh militants.

Trump defended the withdrawal decision saying, "we never agreed to protect the Kurds for the rest of their lives."

"We helped the Kurds. And we never gave the Kurds a commitment that we'd stay for the next 400 years and protect them," he added.

Trump also said he was fulfilling a campaign promise to disengage from international conflicts as part of his "America first" agenda as he seeks re-election next year.

"I want to bring our soldiers back home," he said. "I have to do what I got elected on, and I have to do what I think is right."



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## [Egypt to press for outside mediator in Ethiopia dam dispute](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sun, 2019-10-20 18:55

CAIRO: Egypt will push Ethiopia this week to agree to an external mediator to help resolve a deepening dispute over a giant hydropower dam being built on Ethiopia's Blue Nile, officials said on Sunday. Egypt sees the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) as an existential risk,

fearing it will threaten scarce water supplies in Egypt and power generation at its own dam in Aswan.

Cairo says it has exhausted efforts to reach an agreement on the conditions for operating GERD and filling the reservoir behind it, after years of three-party talks with Ethiopia and Sudan.

Ethiopia has denied that three-way talks are stalled, accusing Egypt of trying to sidestep the process.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is expected to raise the demand for a mediator when he meets Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed during a Russian-African summit in Russia this week.

"We're hoping this meeting might produce an agreement on the participation of a fourth party," an Egyptian foreign ministry official told journalists at a briefing. "We're hopeful to reach a formula in the next few weeks."

Egyptian officials said they had suggested the World Bank as a fourth party mediator, but were also open to the role being filled by a country with technical experience on water sharing issues such as the United States, or the European Union.

Recent proposals put forward by Egypt for a flexible reservoir-filling process and a guaranteed annual flow of 40 billion cubic metres were rejected by Ethiopia.

The latest rounds of talks in Cairo and Khartoum over the past two months ended in acrimony. "The gap is getting wider," the Egyptian foreign ministry official said.

Egypt draws almost all of its fresh water supplies from the Nile, and is faced with worsening water scarcity for its population of nearly 100 million. It says it is working to reduce the amount of water used in agriculture. Hydrologists consider a country to be facing water scarcity if supplies drop below 1,000 cubic metres per person per year.

Egypt currently has around 570 cubic metres per person per year, a figure that is expected to drop to 500 cubic metres by 2025, without taking into account any reduction in supply caused by GERD, Egyptian officials said. Ethiopia is expected to start filling the GERD reservoir next year.



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## [Tunisia says militant leader killed in anti-terror raid](#)

Author:

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Sun, 2019-10-20 16:33

TUNIS: An Al-Qaeda leader was killed and another wounded during an anti-terror raid in Tunisia on Sunday, according to the country's defense ministry.

Tunisian armed forces and national guardsmen led the operation against Al-

Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the mountainous Kasserine region near the Algerian border, ministry spokesman Mohamed Zekri told AFP.

“A terrorist leader from the Okba Ibn Nafaa group was killed” and another injured in the ongoing operation, he said.

Okba Ibn Nafaa is the Tunisian branch of AQIM.

Various extremist groups are active in the rugged frontier region of Kasserine, including the Daesh group-affiliated Jund Al-Khalifa, or “Soldiers of the Caliphate.”

Security forces regularly carry out raids in the area.

Tunisia faced a rise in extremist activity after its 2011 revolution, with attacks killing dozens of security personnel, civilians and foreign tourists.

While the security situation has significantly improved since a series of deadly attacks in 2015, Tunisia has maintained a state of emergency for four years and assaults against security forces have persisted.



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