[Palestinians would like to see Netanyahu lose in elections](#)

Tue, 2019-09-17 23:25

JERUSALEM: The Israeli elections have divided Palestinians between those who feel there is little or no difference between the leading Zionist Israeli parties (Likud and Blue and White) and those who insist that the failure of Netanyahu is of utmost importance.

The largest selling Palestinian daily Al Quds led with an editorial on Monday titled "Two faces of the same coin," arguing that expecting much from either of the main Zionist parties is "betting on a loser in many ways." The Jerusalem-based newspaper said that the only bet should be on "our own people and the Arab and Islamic peoples."

But the director general of the Masarat think tank in Ramallah thinks that there is a clear difference. "The substantive difference between (Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu and (opposition leader Benny) Gantz is that Netanyahu is stronger, more dangerous, much more experienced and trying to please the radical right so that they give him immunity from the trial on corruption charges." Hani Masri says that the strong relations between Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump also gives Netanyahu another dangerous tool against Palestinians.

Naser Laham, the editor of the Maan News Agency, notes that dramatic changes will happen after the elections from Netanyahu. "If Netanyahu wins, he will find the resistance waiting for him and if he loses, he will have the police ready to put him in jail for corruption."

Ibrahim Milhem, spokesman for the Palestinian government, told Arab News that the sharp shift in the Israeli political map toward the right and far-right has led to the retraction of the left-wing and peace camp. "This has led many to believe that there is no difference between right and left except in how badly they want to oppress Palestinians."

LIVE: [Coverage of the Israel's do-over election. Exit polls show Netanyahu, Gantz in tight race](#)

Milhem believes that the absence of Netanyahu from the political scene is important. "The absence will be a punishment for his foolish policies. This doesn't mean that his opponents will have any important initiative regarding the two-state solution or the recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people in their independent state on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital and the recognition of the right of return of the refugees based on UN resolution 194."

Former senior editor of Al-Hayyat Al-Jadida, Montaser Hamdan, told Arab News that the election campaign needs are behind all recent acts and statements. "The threat of annexing the Jordan Valley is clearly aimed at pleasing the far right in Israel as is the call for annexing parts of Hebron." Hamdan says that Israeli candidates are "dealing with Palestinian and Arab blood and rights with the aim of expanding their occupation."

Hamadeh Faraneh, a member of the Palestinian National Council, told Arab News that no two individuals are the same. "There are always differences between people and Netanyahu is clearly the more dangerous of the two candidates for prime minister."

Faranheh says that the current Israeli prime minister is ideologically and politically committed to opposition to the Palestinian people and their rights and in carrying out the most radical Israeli program against Palestinians. "Getting rid of him will remove a major obstacle for peace and allow for a gradual return especially if leaders from the Arab community inside the 1948 areas can have a role with Gantz in a coalition government."

Botrus Mansour, a Nazareth-based lawyer, told Arab News that Palestinian citizens of Israel can have a role in blocking the chances of Netanyahu's return to power. "Their role is important in that they can participate in a blocking coalition that prevents Netanyahu from returning to power even if a left-wing government is not established."

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[Israel exit polls show Netanyahu, Gantz in tight race](#)

Tue, 2019-09-17 23:06

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his main challenger Benny Gantz were locked in a tight race in the country's general election after polls closed on Tuesday, exit surveys showed.
Three separate exit polls carried by Israeli television stations showed Netanyahu's right-wing Likud and Gantz's centrist Blue and White alliance with between 31 and 34 parliament seats each out of 120.
Ex-defense minister Avigdor Lieberman's nationalist Yisrael Beitenu party, which could play a kingmaker role, could win between eight and 10 seats, according to the polls.
If the exit polls are reasonably accurate — and they have in the past been off-base — either Netanyahu or Gantz will face tough negotiations to form a government.

Lieberman called for a unity government between his party, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud and the main opposition Blue and White, after polls closed.
The results prompted initial cheers at Blue and White's post-election party in Tel Aviv, where they were shown on large screens, before doubts began to set in.
"We have an advantage, but I see that we are dependent on Lieberman," said supporter Dina Margoli, 40.
The stakes could not be much higher for the 69-year-old Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving prime minister, who is facing possible corruption charges in the weeks ahead.
He spent the day warning he was on the verge of losing if his supporters did not turn out to vote, and made appearances at Jerusalem's main market and its central bus station, wielding a megaphone to exhort the crowds.
He repeatedly warned, as he has in previous elections, that left-wing and Arab voters were showing up in large numbers to vote him out, appearing on Facebook live to do so.
US "President (Donald) Trump said yesterday that the elections will be tight," Netanyahu said when voting on Tuesday morning, referring to comments by his staunch ally who called the polls "50/50."

Analysis: [**Palestinians would like to see Netanyahu lose in elections**](#)

"I can guarantee you this morning that they are very tight."
Gantz voted in his hometown of Rosh Haayin near Tel Aviv and called on the

country to reject corruption and "extremism."

"We want new hope. We are voting today for change," Gantz said after voting with his wife Revital.

"We will succeed in bringing hope. We will succeed in bringing change, without corruption and without extremism, all together."

Later he visited a shopping mall in the northern city of Haifa and addressed the public through a megaphone on the beach in Tel Aviv.

Fears of election fatigue appeared not to have materialized.

Turnout as of 8:00 p.m. (1700 GMT) was at 63.7 percent, higher than the same time during April's election, official figures showed.

Netanyahu, who has been prime minister for a total of more than 13 years, suffered one of the biggest defeats of his political career following the April vote.

His Likud, along with its right-wing and religious allies, won a majority which led President Reuven Rivlin to task him with forming a government.

But following weeks of discussions, Netanyahu failed, opting for an unprecedented second election rather than risk Rivlin choosing someone else.

Many believe that if he wins, Netanyahu could seek to have parliament grant him immunity from prosecution ahead of a possible corruption indictment in the weeks ahead.

Recognizing the stakes, Netanyahu spent the final days of the campaign seeking to appeal to right-wing nationalists — key to his re-election bid — and to boost turnout among his base.

Those efforts included a controversial pledge to annex the Jordan Valley, which makes up a third of the occupied West Bank.

He issued unfounded warnings that the vote could be stolen by fraud in Arab communities, leading critics to accuse him of racism.

But Netanyahu has also highlighted the country's growing economy and his relationships with world leaders such as Trump.

Gantz has presented himself as an honorable alternative.

He repeatedly spoke of Netanyahu's willingness to form a coalition with far-right parties that could help him secure immunity.

Gantz says his alliance, which includes three former armed forces chiefs of staff, wants a unity government that the vast majority of Israelis would support.

A campaign by Lieberman's nationalist Yisrael Beitenu to "make Israel normal again" appeared to have resonated with voters.

The staunch secularist has long campaigned against what he sees as the undue clout of ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties, which he accuses of seeking to impose Jewish religious law on Israel's secular population.

Lieberman has demanded legislation to make military service mandatory for the ultra-Orthodox as for other Jewish Israelis — a demand he refused to drop after April polls, eventually blocking Netanyahu's efforts to form a coalition.

It is not clear he will endorse Netanyahu as prime minister again, which could be enough for Rivlin to allow Gantz to try to form a government.

And if exit polls showing Israel's newly reunified Arab parties with between 11 and 13 seats are accurate, they could block Netanyahu from continuing as prime minister by recommending Gantz.

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[New spats shake Iraq's teetering stability — and its PM](#)

Author:
Tue, 2019-09-17 22:18

BAGHDAD: As fissures within a powerful paramilitary force go public for the first time and a revolving door of top politicians consults Tehran, Iraq's fragile political balance is crumbling, analysts say, with worrying consequences for its premier.

It has been a shaky 11 months for Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi's government since it was painstakingly stitched together in the prolonged wake of May 2018 elections.

The administration's power rests on the curious coupling of firebrand cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr with Fatah, the political arm of the Hashd Al-Shaabi armed network.

But a cocktail of new pressure points — from Sadr's frustration with the Hashd to purported Israeli strikes targeting the force — are fraying this tenuous deal, said Ihsan Al-Shammari, head of the Iraqi Center for Political Thought.

"The situation is messy. The political parties are repositioning themselves and the major alliances have broken apart," Shammari told AFP.

He predicted the "tactical partnership" between Sadr and Fatah will collapse amid the cleric's escalating criticism of the Hashd's possession of arms and moves to create its own air force.

Sadr even dramatically tweeted last week that Iraq was turning into a "rogue" state.

Days later, he appeared in an unannounced visit to Iran, the influential power broker consulted during times of crisis in Iraq's political scene.

Sadr was likely there to complain about the Hashd or lobby for more support, including having a say in selecting Iraq's next premier in case the government falls, said Shammari.

Sadr would also probably use the specter of popular protests to secure his political goals.

"Sadr remains the government's biggest sponsor, but if it doesn't make progress, he'll put the possibility of protests forward — and we're starting to see him hint at that," Shammari said.

In a sign of what may be to come, Iraq's Sadr-backed Health Minister Alaa Alwan resigned on Sunday out of frustration with what he said was a corrupt administration.

Since Saddam Hussein's regime was toppled by the US-led invasion of 2003, Iraq's Shiite parties have revived and thrived.

For years, they were broadly split between those loyal to Iran and its supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei against those supporting Iraq's own Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, said Renad Mansour, a researcher at the Chatham House think-tank.

"Now, it's murky and much more fragile. The biggest credit for that goes to the challenge facing the Hashd in becoming a post-Daesh Iraqi institution," he said.

The Hashd was established in 2014 from mostly Shiite armed groups and volunteers to fight Daesh militants, who had swept across a third of Iraq. But that common enemy was defeated in 2017.

"Because the front has dried up, the groups are no longer able to profit and are now competing with each other for profits and political positions," Mansour said.

And this summer, purported Israeli strikes on Hashd bases exposed another rift, this time between the force's official leader Faleh Fayyadh and his deputy Abu Mehdi Al-Muhandis, who is much closer to Iran and is said to hold the real power.

Muhandis was quick to blame Washington and Israel for the strikes, but Fayyadh publicly walked back his statement and said the accusation didn't reflect the Hashd's position. Weeks later, a decree signed by Muhandis appeared to authorize the Hashd to create its own air force, later denied by the force.

It was "the first time" the leaders had publicly clashed like this, said Mansour.

"The divide was not a big deal until Muhandis decided that Fayyadh needed to do a better job in protecting Hashd from these strikes," he told AFP.

"That's the most important thing — because if Muhandis determines that the leadership is not protecting him, he'll make moves to remove them," he said.

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Iraq parliament strips outspoken liberal MP of immunityIraqi PM tightens government grip on country's armed factions

[10 pro-Iranian militiamen killed in eastern Syria](#)

Author:
Tue, 2019-09-17 22:15

BEIRUT: Overnight airstrikes killed 10 pro-Iranian Iraqi militiamen in eastern Syria, a war monitor said Tuesday, without specifying who carried them out.

The strikes targeted "three positions of the (Iranian) Revolutionary Guards and allied (Iraqi) militias" in Albu Kamal, in the Euphrates Valley just across the border from Iraq, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

"Ten Iraqis from pro-Iranian militias were killed," the Britain-based monitor said.

The strikes came as tensions mounted between archfoes Iran and the US after Washington blamed Tehran for weekend attacks on Saudi oil installations.

They were the second to hit pro-Iranian forces in eastern Syria in little more than a week.

On Sept. 9, airstrikes killed 18 fighters, including Iranians, according to the Observatory.

In June last year, strikes near the Iraqi border killed 55 fighters, most of them Syrian or Iraqi. A US official speaking on condition of anonymity said Israel was responsible.
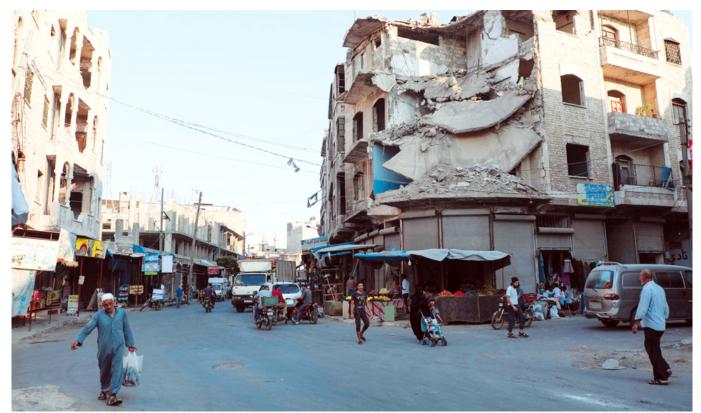
Much of the east of Syria was held by Daesh militants before their defeat in March.

It is now divided by the Euphrates Valley into a zone held by forces loyal to the Syrian regime and its ally Iran and another held by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces and their allies in a US-led coalition, which has in the past carried out air raids on pro-regime forces.

Meanwhile, the leaders of Turkey, Russia and Iran agreed on Monday to ease tensions in northwest Syria's Idlib region, but disagreements between the countries appeared to linger, especially over the threat from Daesh.

The summit of the three countries aimed to find a lasting truce in Syria. Recent attacks by the regime forces risk deepening regional turmoil and pushing a new wave of migrants toward Turkey.

"We are in a period when we need to take more responsibility for peace in Syria, when we (three countries) need to carry more weight," Turkey's Tayyip Erdogan said, adding that all three leaders were in agreement that a

political solution was necessary to end the crisis in Syria.

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Coalition says 'good progress' in north Syria buffer zone, thousands return to government-seized areasUN launches probe into raids on Syria hospitals, civilians

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[Beginnings: Arabic music in the 'Ezra Hakkāk and Emile Cohen Collection](#)

Hazem Jamjoum joined the British Library Qatar Foundation Partnership Project in April 2019 as Gulf Audio Curator and Cataloguer. Over the next 2-3 years he will be working on the Library's audio collections connected with the Gulf region to scope, catalogue and research them, to manage their preservation and access…