TA Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

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The political struggle in Israel will continue as soon as the war ends - but who will declare the end of the war?

On October 7, Israel put aside internal divisions and a severe political crisis and started retaliation against Hamas and the return of hostages. However, fulfilling the war objectives which united the nation will not forever delay the resolution of the deep crisis in the country.

The far-right government of Benjamin Netanyahu has become the generator of one of the biggest political crises in Israel so far in less than a year of its mandate.

Due to tragic circumstances on October 7, the government remained in the saddle as the pivot of the fight against Hamas. However, its position is still questionable, and its survival is uncertain, even though the war objectives are being achieved.

PM Netanyahu and his right-wing alliance saw their approval ratings plummet during the Gaza operation. A recent survey showed that after a month and a half of war against Hamas, the current ruling bloc could count on only 45 out of 120 seats in the Knesset. This is a significant drop from the 64 mandates the ruling coalition had in December 2022 when the government was elected.

On the other hand, the opposing parties could have 70 seats in the parliament, more than enough for the formation of a government, according to the current mood of the voters.

How to boost a failing rating?

Citizens obviously did not forget the state in which the government left the country on October 7. They were shaken by the government's decisions to curb and control the independence of the judiciary, through large civil protests, which have not stopped throughout the year, deeply divided over the ultra-right conservative policies that Netanyahu's cabinet has begun to implement.

On top of all that, it is the government that is still held to be most responsible for Hamas ever getting into a position to launch an attack on Israel on such a large and brutal scale. This was thanks to the lengthy political crisis, which shook the functioning of the security system.

> Netanyahy's trial on corruption charges will resume next week

Prime Minister Netanyahu recently revisited the troops conducting the operation in Gaza, wearing body armour and a helmet. It is part of his duty as head man to implement the Gaza operation, but it is also an integral part of his strategy to raise the rating through the role of wartime prime minister.

For now, it is not helping him. Netanyahy's trial on corruption charges will resume next week. But, still, few are ready to write off "Bibi" and his often-demonstrated instinct for self-preservation in politics, despite his disastrous ratings.

Return from war mode

It appears that timing will play a crucial role in the equation surrounding the future balance of power in Israel.

Israel's goals in Gaza are clear and broadly accepted, which has been recently reiterated by PM Netanyahu when he stood surrounded by fighters on the conflict line - to return the hostages home, destroy Hamas and prevent the possibility of repeated terrorist attacks.

The first 2 are verifiable in due course, measurable, and achievable. Regardless of its fulfilment, the third goal serves as a platform to seek a political proclamation. And Netanyahu will stay in that exact position to ensure his survival.

> The declaration that the danger of repeating terrorist attacks has been eliminated will set the stage for a political re-composition in Israel

Whether the Palestinian extremists, after the presumed destruction of Hamas, are capable of repeating the attack on Israel or not will have to be determined by a political authority.

With such a declaration, Israel will formally exit the war mode and return to civilian and political topics, which have been piling up, as long as the military operation and the fulfilment of its goals lasts.

Netanyahu does not want to face that moment unprepared, particularly with the current catastrophic ratings. However, it would be unacceptable manipulation if his cabinet were to prolong the war effort in Gaza for political reasons, particularly because of the widespread expectation in Israel that the response to October 7 must be swift and decisive.

Ultimately, the declaration that the danger of repeating terrorist attacks has been eliminated will also set the stage for a political re-composition in Israel. The crucial question is whether Netanyahu or one of his successors as prime minister will be able to lay the groundwork.

The Gantz factor

Netanyahu's time trap is strengthened by the fact that in the almost 2-month war, he got a competitor who sublimated the revolt against his government and appeared as a direct aspirant for the PM position.

Benny Gantz, a former chief of the general staff and minister of defence, won broad sympathies because he decided to put aside his political involvement in the opposition National Unity Party at the very start of the crisis and join Netanyahu's war cabinet.

"There is a time for peace and a time for war. Now is a time for war", said Gantz, whose approval ratings have since skyrocketed, while Netanyahu's plummeted.

Benny Gantz's party could count on as many as 36 seats in parliament, twice as many as Netanyahu's Likud (17)

According to research, Gantz's party could count on as many as 36 seats in parliament, twice as many as Netanyahu's Likud (17), which would be a direct consequence of Benny Gantz taking over the prime minister's electorate.

Both are aware that the beginning of the political race depends on when and in what form the end of war operations will be declared.

According to Nimrod Goren of the Middle East Institute, the beginning of that race will happen when Mr Gantz decides to leave Netanyahu's emergency cabinet.

"That will be the significant moment - when Benny decides to quit - and the public political discourse will change overnight", said Nimrod Goren.

Until then, aware of the high probability of such a development, Netanyahu will be working hard to improve his chances of survival. He has been in similar situations before, returning to the leading position several times from the political abyss, but it was never as deep as currently.

However, nobody is willing to underestimate his political survival potential, perhaps even at the expense of attributing Israel's ill-prepared reaction to Hamas strikes to whoever is necessary