



By: The Editorial Board

Trump wants to choose Israel's government



On 18 October, nine days before parliamentary elections in Israel, **Donald Trump** said that “anyone but Bibi” would be the wrong leader for the country.

He tied his support for Benjamin Netanyahu to future American engagement against Iran, stating that with another prime minister, America would have to do the job alone, which he is not in the mood for.

The president of Israel’s most important ally thus told Israelis that, by changing the government, they could jeopardise the cooperation on which their security depends.

Among the politicians he ruled out in advance is **Gadi Eisenkot**, the former Chief of the General Staff of the Israeli army, who, after the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023, joined Netanyahu’s war cabinet.

In an interview with Time magazine, **Trump** declined three times to endorse a new mandate for Netanyahu and said of Eisenkot that he does not “hear bad things” about him.

Trump did not explain how, in just three weeks after that answer, he arrived at the claim that Eisenkot’s coming to power would also threaten the joint policy towards Iran.

A Channel 12 survey gives Eisenkot’s Yashar party 23 seats to Likud’s 20, and a **survey** by the Zman Yisrael portal from 14 and 15 October shows a ratio of 26 to 20. However, this lead does not guarantee power.

An average of four **polls** published by the Jerusalem Post gives Netanyahu’s allies about 51 seats, as many as the Jewish-led opposition parties.

Arab parties are counted separately, and a majority requires 61 of the 120 seats in the Knesset, Israel’s parliament. **Netanyahu** immediately drew on American support in this uncertain race, urging citizens to listen to Trump and vote for him.

Trump’s statement is not a decision to end military aid, the funding for which is

determined by Congress. However, it comes at a time when negotiations on a new security cooperation agreement have begun.

The current memorandum provides \$38 billion in aid for the 2019–2028 budget years, and Israel’s defence ministry confirmed in June that negotiations had begun to replace it, announcing a gradual transition from aid to joint investment in arms development and production.

The next Israeli government will negotiate cooperation for the next decade with a president who has pre-emptively rejected all of Netanyahu’s opponents.

Washington has the right to assess and oppose the policies of any Israeli government. By declaring all but one of the possible prime ministers unacceptable, without any policy-based justification, the US president is attempting to turn personal favouritism into a condition for cooperation between the two countries. Such pressure on voters deserves unequivocal condemnation.

Netanyahu defeated the American favourite

In 1996, Bill Clinton tried to help Shimon Peres, whom he regarded as a more reliable partner in the peace process. He received him at the White House before the elections and years later admitted that he had assisted him, while trying not to expose himself personally.

In the direct election for prime minister at the time, Netanyahu still won by less than one percentage point, despite the support his opponent enjoyed in Washington.

Today’s endorsement continues the use of the alliance for campaign purposes

On 3 March 2015, two weeks before the Israeli elections, Netanyahu used an invitation from the Republican Speaker of the House of

Representatives, John Boehner, to challenge Obama's negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme in Congress.

The American podium allowed him to display his international influence to a domestic audience, but it dragged relations between the two countries into an American partisan conflict.

Today's endorsement continues that use of the alliance for campaign purposes, with Trump's claim that choosing another leader would leave America isolated in the face of Iran.

Israel is not the first country in which Trump has tried to install a government

In Hungary, Trump supported **Viktor Orbán**, and Vice-President JD Vance travelled to Budapest five days before the 12 April election, took part in his rally and phoned Trump, accusing the European Union of meddling in the vote.

Orbán lost power after sixteen years, with turnout at 79.6 per cent, and Tisza's Péter Magyar won 141 of the 199 seats in parliament. Domestic factors prevailed, above all dissatisfaction with the economy and public services, but the Hungarian leader gained an additional argument when he challenged foreign interference and insisted on Hungarians' right to decide for themselves.

In Argentina, the outcome was favourable for Trump's ally. When the country regained access to US dollars in October 2025 through an agreement worth up to \$20 billion to stabilise the currency, Trump linked continued support to the success of President Javier Milei's party.

It won the parliamentary elections on 26 October. In Honduras, Nasry Asfura was declared the winner after a campaign in which Trump threatened to withhold financial support if his preferred candidate lost.

Foreign parties and politicians have the right to support their allies and openly state whom they would like to see in power

In Brazil, in July 2025, the **White House** cited the legal proceedings against former President Jair Bolsonaro among the reasons for tariffs that raised the overall rate to 50 per cent on a number of Brazilian products. Bolsonaro was then tried for attempting to overturn his election defeat.

His allies feared the pressure would help President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva rally support around the country's defence. However, Bolsonaro's son Flávio finished the first round of the presidential elections on 4 October this year ahead of Lula, with 47.03 per cent of the vote to Lula's 45.16 per cent. The second round is scheduled for 25 October.

When the president of a more powerful country says that money, market access or security cooperation will depend on the victory of their preferred candidate, the citizens of the other country understand that voting for someone else carries a price.

Voters may then support a government with which they are dissatisfied simply because they fear the consequences of its removal. Foreign parties and politicians have the right to support their allies and openly state whom they would like to see in power.

However, when the same message is delivered by a head of state who decides on aid, tariffs and weapons, the recommendation becomes a threat. That is why Trump's pressure was just as unacceptable in Argentina and Honduras, where his candidates won, as it was in Hungary, where Orbán lost.

Trump's protection before the courts and the voters

Trump is also trying to influence Netanyahu's position before the Israeli judiciary. In

November 2025, he wrote to President **Isaac Herzog** to request a pardon for the prime minister, citing his wartime merits and cooperation with the United States. Netanyahu is on trial for fraud, breach of trust and bribery, in cases involving expensive gifts and alleged favours to business interests in exchange for favourable media coverage.

The court has been holding hearings five days a week since early October, but the war gives Netanyahu political cover for delaying other accountability measures. An independent state commission to investigate the failures preceding the 7 October attack has not yet been established.

Israelis have the right to seek answers even during the war, confident that the court will decide independently of American sympathies

The prime minister initially linked the investigation to the end of the war, then challenged the selection of its members, who are appointed by the President of the Supreme Court under the existing model, and argued that politicians should help choose the investigators. Prolonging the conflict gives him scope to postpone answers until a moment he finds convenient.

The letter to Herzog and the electoral support together show what Trump expects from Israeli institutions and voters. The prime minister's partnership with him is intended to justify both special treatment before the court and a new mandate.

Trump thereby subordinated questions of Netanyahu's responsibility to his own political interests. Israelis have the right to seek answers even during the war, confident that the court will decide independently of American sympathies, and that the decision on a new mandate belongs to them alone.

Two allies in search of votes

According to a Pew Research Center survey released on 8 October, 65 per cent of American adults disapprove of the way Trump is conducting **military operations against Iran**. Before the congressional elections on 3 November, the American president is backed by an ally who will present their joint policy as a success.

After expressing his support, Netanyahu issued a message in English promising Americans lower fuel prices once the Iranian regime is gone, crediting Trump. Their mutual support thus takes on the character of an exchange of electoral favours.

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According to the Israel Democracy Institute, in March 64 per cent of Jewish respondents believed that Israel's security was one of Trump's main decision-making criteria, but in a survey conducted in late June and early July that figure fell to 26 per cent.

These data do not measure the reaction to Trump's current support for Netanyahu, but they challenge the assumption that voters necessarily interpret the president's support for Netanyahu's continued term as concern for the country's security.

Some citizens will continue to see an advantage in Netanyahu's approach to the White House, while others may experience

Trump's message as humiliating and as a reason to go to the polls regardless. Eisenkot replied that Israelis choose their own prime minister and said that at meetings – whose participants he did not disclose – he requested that there be no intervention in the election.

If the vote does not produce a clear majority, Netanyahu will have an incentive to draw on American support in coalition negotiations, presenting his remaining in office as a precondition for good relations with Washington.

Trump would need to eliminate that possibility by explicitly confirming that he would cooperate with any democratically elected Israeli government.

Israeli voters have the right to demand from Netanyahu a plan to end the war, an independent investigation into the failures that allowed the 7 October attack, and a clear assessment of what his opponents have to offer on these issues.

In the elections on 27 October, they must be able to vote for a change of government without fearing the loss of American support. American-Israeli ties have endured through every change of government in both countries since 1948. The alliance between the two states must not depend on the friendship between two individuals.