



## Israel: Elections further shatter two state solution

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Benjamin Netanyahu called the 17 September Knesset election in the hope that it would give him the majority he needed to create a new coalition and remain prime minister. He was not motivated simply by the desire to hang on to power but because as PM he would be immune from facing serious court charges of fraud, bribery and breach of trust.

In the event, the Blue and White list (Kachol Lavan) headed by the former Chief of the Israeli General Staff, Benny Gantz, became the largest block by the narrowest of margins - 25.95 percent of the votes and 33 seats against Netanyahu's 25.10 percent and 32 seats. Even with the help of allied parties, neither camp has a majority of deputies.

Despite suggestions in the western media that Gantz is a centrist, he is no progressive when it comes to the oppression of the Palestinians. He was the commander of the Israeli forces in both the murderous Gaza wars of 2012 and 2014 and expressed satisfaction that "parts of (it) were sent back to the Stone Age". Although he wants to oust Netanyahu, he is prepared to form a coalition with his party, Likud, on condition that its leader does not belong to the government.

The latter has again been charged with forming a government, but this will prove fruitless for as long as no potential coalition will accept his leadership. As after the April election, this will probably not be realised because of the demand for the abolition of the exemption of ultra-Orthodox Jews from compulsory military service, made by Avigdor Lieberman, leader of the right wing secular party, Our Home Israel (Yisrael Beiteinu).

As long as no party abandons its election pre-conditions for joining a government, repeated returns to the polls are likely. Without a majority in the Knesset, Netanyahu's goal of obtaining immunity from prosecution by changing the law has also failed.

### No illusions in Gantz

The feud between Netanyahu and Gantz cannot hide the fact that the programmes of Likud and the so-called centre-left Blue and White list are largely the same - specifically regarding Israeli control of the Jordan Valley, the status of East Jerusalem, the incorporation of settlements on the West Bank and the rejection of the right of return.

When Netanyahu announced his annexation plan, Gantz and Blue and White responded;

"Blue and White have made clear that the Jordan Valley is part of Israel forever. Netanyahu drafted a plan to cede the Jordan Valley in 2014. We are happy that the Prime Minister has come around to adopt the Blue and White plan to recognise the Jordan valley."

Together the Netanyahu and Gantz blocks won 51 percent of the vote. A further 19 percent were cast for parties of the religious ultra-right. Then there was the 7 percent gained by Our Home Israel, which draws on support from voters from a Soviet immigrant background.

The once mighty Israeli Labour Party (HaAvoda), has been reduced to a bit player with 5 percent, now only a whisker above the 4 percent received by the list headed by Meretz (Vigour) which sees itself as the political expression of the peace movement and advocates the "two state solution". The United List of Arab Parties, with 11 percent, is the third strongest faction in the Knesset. However, 10 of its 13 MPs have declared their support for a Gantz-led government, in order to block Netanyahu.

The election results show how far to the right Israeli politics has shifted. More than three-quarters of the votes were cast for right-wing to far-right parties. Even if the Likud loses its leading role in a government, core elements of its Zionist-expansionist programme shape the entire political landscape.

#### Failure of the two-state solution

With the announcement that he would annex the Jordan Valley, Netanyahu is burying the so-called two-state solution, despite this being in breach of existing treaties and international law. Of course, the Palestinians, who make up 85 percent of the population of the Jordan Valley, occupied since 1967, have always been denied the right to self-rule and been kept under strict military occupation under the pretext of assuring Israel's security.

The territory marked for annexation by Netanyahu consists largely of the "C-areas", which, according to the Oslo Accords, are already under sole Israeli control. 85 percent of this area may not be entered or used by Palestinians. 46 percent of the Jordan Valley is a militarily restricted area. This also includes the Israeli settlements. In fact, it has long been under de facto Israeli sovereignty. The annexation would be the logical conclusion of the occupation policy since 1967, and could at the same time be accompanied by a further expulsion of the Palestinian population.

For 25 years, the two-state solution served the purpose of legitimising the occupation regime in the West Bank as a merely temporary "solution". Its international treaty recognition as not forming part of Israel was the illusory basis for a future Palestinian state. The question of how "the only democratic state in the Middle East" can deny democratic rights to half of its population was answered with reference to this future Palestinian state, justifying the lack of legal human and national rights for the Palestinians with the "temporary" character of the occupation.

With the annexation of the occupied territories, the character of the state constitution of Israel, which denies civic rights to part of its population on the basis of its ethnic origin, would become even clearer and be extended to a larger territory and its population. The failure of the two-state solution and the annexation of parts of the West Bank will dispel any doubt that Israel is actually a racist apartheid state.

#### Annexation and expansion

In addition, a successful annexation of the Jordan Valley would in all probability only represent an intermediate step towards the incorporation of the entire West Bank. Already today, right-wing extremist Avigdor Lieberman is drumming for this "solution" whose logical end would be the expulsion of the remains of the Palestinian people and their "non-violent", step-by-step, genocide.

The so-called two-state solution is finally being banished to the realm of dreams. With the annexation of the Jordan Valley, any hope of a Palestinian state alongside Israel can only be an object of ridicule.

For 25 years, the central institution of the "Oslo system", the autonomous Palestinian Authority, has been responsible for the co-administration of the West Bank as an extended arm of the occupation. With the proposed annexation, the "Palestinian Authority", which emerged from the Oslo process as the receiver for the bankrupt PLO, would finally have served its purpose. Its last official act would be to switch off the lights and hand over the keys.

Under any governing coalition the expansionist policy will continue. It will go hand in hand with the further siege and starvation of the population of Gaza, which is economically far less attractive for annexation, as well as continuing aggression against Lebanon and Iran. These reactionary projects will win support from the USA and tacit agreement from Saudi Arabia.

In this respect, the Zionist right in Israel is in the process of reshuffling the cards regarding Palestine. "Democratic" Israel will advance to the Jordan and with it the carefully constructed dividing lines between 1948 Palestine on the one hand and the inhabitants of Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank on the other, will disappear.

But this will oblige the Zionists to expel all, or most, of the Palestinians, a difficult task even under Donald Trump's world disorder, or it will require an Apartheid state, naked and unashamed. However, any such plans by the Zionist right will undoubtedly encounter the bitter resistance of the Palestinians.

## Perspectives

The leading Palestinian representations and the Fatah-led government, which to this day hold on to the illusion of the two-state solution, will contribute little more to this resistance than useless appeals to the "world community" and the Israeli state to continue the "peace process". Fatah Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh is threatening to suspend all agreements with Israel, which the latter never fulfilled anyway.

The only alternative to the racist status quo, that is, the Zionist one-state solution, is a, socialist, secular workers' state in Palestine/Israel with equality for both nationalities, Arab Palestinians and Hebrew-speaking Israelis. It must include the right of return for the Palestinian refugees and the socialisation of the land for those all who want to work it.

This can only be achieved through the overthrow of the Israeli bourgeoisie by methods of class struggle, by Palestinians and by progressive Israeli workers and the socially oppressed. Determined international solidarity with the Palestinian resistance can play a decisive role in this. That is the task, and the duty, of all Left, progressive and democratic forces around the world.

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