

Israeli leaders split over post-war Gaza governance

AFP, Jerusalem

New divisions have emerged among Israel's leaders over post-war Gaza's governance, with an unexpected Hamas fightback in parts of the Palestinian territory piling pressure on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The Israeli army has been battling Hamas militants across Gaza for more than seven months while also exchanging near-daily fire with Iran-backed Hezbollah forces along the northern border with Lebanon.

But after Hamas fighters regrouped in northern Gaza, where Israel previously said the group had been neutralised, broad splits emerged in the Israeli war cabinet.

Netanyahu came under personal attack from Defence Minister Yoav Gallant for failing to rule out an Israeli government in Gaza after the war.

The Israeli premier's outright rejection of post-war Palestinian leadership in Gaza has broken a rift among top politicians wide open and frustrated relations with top ally the United States.

Experts say the lack of clarity only serves to benefit Hamas, whose leader has insisted no new authority can be established in the territory without its involvement.

"Without an alternative to fill the vacuum, Hamas will continue to grow," International Crisis Group analyst Mairav Zonszein told AFP.

Emmanuel Navon, a lecturer at Tel Aviv University, echoed this sentiment.

"If only Hamas is left in Gaza, of course they are going to appear here and there and the Israeli army will be forced to chase them around," said Navon.

"Either you establish an Israeli military government or an Arab-led government."

Gallant said in a televised address on Wednesday: "I call on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to make a decision and declare that Israel will not establish civilian control over the Gaza strip."

The premier's war planning also came under recent attack by army chief Herzi Halevi as well as top Shin Bet security agency officials, according to Israeli media reports.

Netanyahu is also under pressure from Washington to swiftly bring an end to the conflict and avoid being mired in a long counterinsurgency campaign.

Washington has previously called for a "revitalised" form of the Palestinian Authority to govern Gaza after the war.

But Netanyahu has rejected any role for the



Displaced Palestinians walk along a devastated street in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

PA in post-war Gaza, saying Thursday that it "supports terror, educates terror, finances terror".

Instead, Netanyahu has clung to his steadfast aim of "eliminating" Hamas, asserting that "there's no alternative to military victory".

Experts say confidence in Netanyahu is running thin.

"With Gallant's criticism of Netanyahu's failure to plan for the day after in terms of governing Gaza, some real fissures are beginning to emerge in the Israeli war cabinet," Colin P. Clarke, director of policy and research at the Soufan Group think tank, wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

"I'm not sure I know of many people, including the most ardent Israel supporters, who have confidence in Bibi," he said, using Netanyahu's nickname.

The Gaza war broke out after Hamas's attack on southern Israel which resulted in the deaths of more than 1,170 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

They also seized about 250 hostages, 125 of whom Israel estimates remain in Gaza, including 37 the military says are dead.

Israel's military retaliation has killed at least 35,386 people, mostly civilians, according to Gaza's health ministry, and an Israeli siege has brought dire food shortages and the threat of famine.

Many Israelis supported Netanyahu's blunt goals to seek revenge on Hamas in the aftermath of the October 7 attack.

But now, hopes have faded for the return of the hostages and patience in Netanyahu may be running out, experts said.

On Friday, the army announced it had recovered bodies of three hostages who were killed during the October 7 attack.

After Israeli forces entered the far southern city of Rafah, where more than a million displaced Gazans were sheltering, talks mediated by Egypt, the United States and Qatar to release the hostages have ground to a standstill.

"The hostage deal is at a total impasse -- you can no longer provide the appearance of progress," said Zonszein of the International Crisis Group.

"Plus the breakdown with the US and the fact that Egypt has refused to pass aid through Rafah -- all those things are coming to a head."

PRO-GAZA PROTESTS International students at US campuses risk deportation

AGENCIES

Just last week, US Representative Ogles introduced a bill called the Study Abroad Act that would take away student visas "for rioting or unlawful protests, and for other purposes".

Legal experts and civil rights advocates warn that even temporary suspensions could have severe consequences for students who depend on educational visas to stay in the country.

When a student-visa holder is no longer enrolled full time, the university is obliged to report the student to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) within 21 days.

DHS oversees immigration services for the US government. Students must then make plans to leave or risk eventual deportation proceedings.

Even outside of an academic context, non citizens face the possibility of heightened consequences should they choose to protest.

While non citizens enjoy many of the same civil rights as US citizens, experts said that laws like the Patriot Act may limit how those protections apply.

Passed in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the Patriot Act includes language that could be used to interpret protests as "terrorist" activity, according to civil rights lawyer and New York University professor Elizabeth OuYang.

Three Spaniards among 6 killed in Afghan shooting

KABUL, AFP

The bodies of three Spanish tourists and three Afghans shot dead while visiting a market in Afghanistan were transported to Kabul along with multiple wounded, the Taliban government said yesterday.

The group was fired on while walking through the bazaar in the mountainous city of Bamiyan in central Afghanistan, around 180 kilometres from the capital Kabul, on Friday.

"Among the eight wounded, of whom four are foreigners, only one elderly foreign woman is not in a very stable situation."

Qani said that the death toll included two Afghan civilians and one Taliban member.

A diplomatic source told AFP the foreign nationals had been part of an organised tour of 13 people, all of whom were evacuated along with the wounded to Kabul overnight by road, since bad weather made an airlift impossible. Spain's government on Friday announced that three of the dead were Spanish tourists, adding that at least one other Spanish national was wounded.

Slovakia PM 'still in serious condition'

BANSKA BYSTRICA, Reuters



Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico remains in serious condition and still faces risks of complications but has stabilised, officials said yesterday, following Wednesday's assassination attempt.

The prime minister, 59, was shot at five times at point-blank range in an attack that sent shockwaves through Europe and raised concerns

over the polarised state of politics in Slovakia, a central European country of 5.4 million people.

"We have not won yet, that is important to say," Deputy Prime Minister Robert Kalinik said, giving an update on Fico's condition.

The Slovak Specialised Criminal Court ruled on yesterday that the suspect, identified by prosecutors as Juraj C., would remain in custody after being charged with attempted murder.



Tamil women grieve during a commemoration ceremony in Mullivaikkal village in northern Sri Lanka yesterday to remember victims of the country's 37-year Tamil separatist war that claimed at least 100,000 lives 15 years ago.

Flash floods kill 50 in western Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Flash flooding has killed at least 50 people in western Afghanistan, provincial police said yesterday, with some residents reaching safety on higher ground mere minutes before the water hit.

The floods on Friday also destroyed about 2,000 houses, and damaged thousands more homes and businesses, Ghor police spokesman Abdul Rahman Badri said in a statement.

The fresh flooding in the country -- which has experienced above-average rainfall this spring -- comes after flash floods on May 10 in northern Baghlan province washed away hundreds. Survivors were still searching for missing relatives days after the disaster.

"Fifty residents of Ghor province were killed by the floods on Friday and a number of others are missing," Badri said.

"These terrible floods have also killed thousands of cattle... They have destroyed hundreds of hectares of agricultural land, hundreds of bridges and culverts, and destroyed thousands

of trees."

A resident of Firozkoh district in Ghor told AFP he and his family raced to higher ground when they were alerted by the sound of aerial firing and urgent warnings over mosque loudspeakers of oncoming flash floods.

"Within five minutes of our escape, a huge and horrible flash flood came and washed away everything. I watched the flood destroy my house with my own eyes," Zahir Zahid told AFP.

The UN's World Food Programme and Taliban officials said more than 300 people died as a result of the flood disaster earlier this month, which left homes and roads coated in thick mud.

The destruction of roads and bridges hampered rescue efforts, with United Nations agencies and Taliban authorities warning the death tolls would rise.

The rains come after a prolonged drought in Afghanistan, which is one of the least prepared nations to tackle climate change impacts, according to experts. The country, ravaged by four decades of war, is also one of the world's poorest.

Oil tanker hit by missile off Yemen

AFP, Dubai

A crude oil tanker was hit by a missile off the coast of Yemen's southwestern city of Mokha overlooking the strategic Bab al-Mandeb strait, maritime security firm Ambrey said yesterday.

"A Panama flagged crude oil tanker was reportedly 'attacked' about 10 nautical miles southwest of Mokha, Ambrey said, adding that information 'indicated the vessel was hit by a missile and that there was a fire' in the ship's rear.

The British navy's maritime security agency said earlier it had received a report of a vessel "sustaining slight damage after being struck by an unknown object".

"The vessel and crew are safe and continuing to its next port of call," it said.

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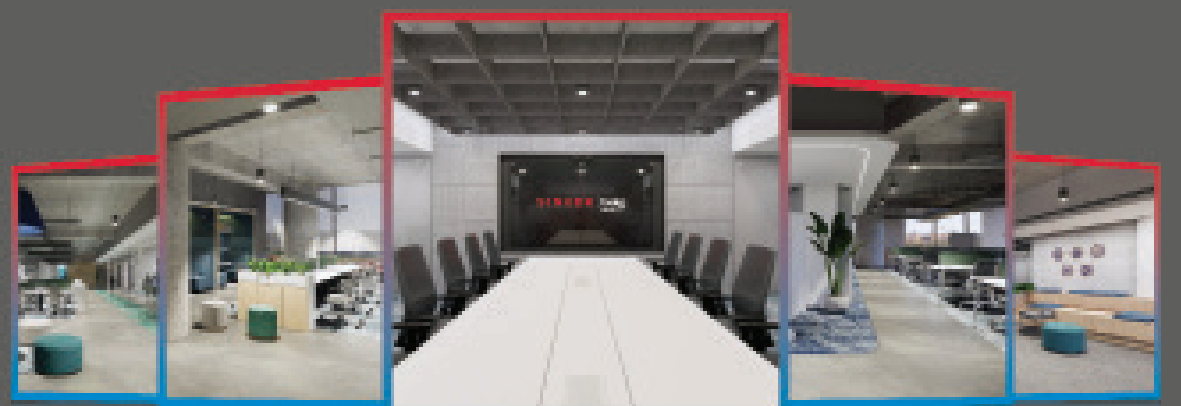


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