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Yes to occupation, no to peace

That's how the Palestinians view the outcome of the Israeli elections. And they hope the world is watching

Read this article in German.

'It's Time We Admit: Israel Has Become a Dictatorship', reads the unambiguous verdict of the leftist Israeli daily newspaper Haaretz, in which the author Bradly Burston accuses Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of having prevented fair and free elections. The Israeli left, which has been languishing for some time, has suffered a massive defeat in the parliamentary elections yet again. The Labor Party has presumably won six out of 120 Knesset seats, while the left-wing party Meretz won four seats. 'Left' was used as a swearword during the election campaign: anyone who aspired to attracting any votes at all sought to swiftly distance himself from such allegation.

Benny Gantz, Benjamin Netanyahu's most promising challenger, has been widely referred to as a centre-left candidate in the international media. His election campaign, however, didn't really justify such a characterisation. He thanked Donald Trump for moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem and for recognising the Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights. He affirmed that he didn't intend to vacate settlements and accused Netanyahu of military restraint.

Nevertheless, the Israeli left had set its hopes on a change of government, which would have averted one thing above all: another legislative period under Benjamin Netanyahu. The latter had initiated the new election to prevent his corruption scandals from possibly putting him in jail. Now, it rather seems like Netanyahu will form the government once again, along with religious and ultra-right-wing parties.

The reaction of the Israeli left is so fierce because they fear that Israel's democratic character could be lost with a right-wing religious government. Many of the new government's potential members deny equal rights to Palestinians, while voicing their desire to rule over Palestinian land.

Nothing new for the Palestinians

In comparison, the Palestinians reacted in an almost relaxed fashion. Trust in Israeli politics has never been particularly high. But before these parliamentary elections, the Palestinians had even less illusions that their situation could change. Over the past decade, they have born witness over and over again to Benjamin Netanyahu's hostile policies. And from a government under Benny Gantz they expected more of the same, only with slightly more conciliatory and less racist rhetoric.

For many Palestinians, the Israeli parliamentary elections merely confirmed their world views. After all, they could never fathom why the international community doesn't wake up from its dream that everyone seeks peace in the Middle East conflict, and that it's simply the circumstances that currently do not allow for peace to materialise. The Israeli government has long turned its back on the two-state solution.

If the projections are true, about 20 Knesset members out of 120 still openly express support for a two-state solution that would be negotiated on the basis of international law. These include the representatives of the Labor Party, Meretz and the two Arab lists. Benny Gantz's Blue and White representatives never uttered the words 'two-state solution' and reiterated their commitment to Israeli settlements.

It has to get worse before it gets better

As a result, Palestinians feel neglected by all sides. First and foremost, the United States under Donald Trump fully support Israeli policy and are prepared to ignore international law in its service. The recognition of the annexation of the Golan Heights and the transfer of the US Embassy to Jerusalem are the two most striking examples. Moreover, some Arab states have recently revealed their relations with Israel, without the slightest reference to the fate of the Palestinians. When it comes to the Europeans, Palestinians hardly expect anything but empty words.

Last but not least, many Palestinians feel betrayed by their own politicians. The Palestinian Authority continues to work closely with Israel, for instance on security issues, although Israeli policies foil any hope for a two-state solution. It's only through elections that the Palestinian Authority could counteract this lack of trust in its representatives. According to the latest poll, almost 90 per cent of Palestinians demand new elections.

Whilst the majority of Palestinians have lost confidence in anything or anyone, there are those who, with cynicism, see a small advantage in

another Netanyahu government: at least now everyone will see what the political reality looks like, and no one can claim later that they didn't know. In the US, there are first signs that the extreme positions of the Israeli government have an impact, where the unconditional support for Israel is crumbling among the traditionally largely democratically oriented Jewish electorate. Netanyahu's closeness to Donald Trump, which he showcased in the election campaign, has caused irritation. Likewise, Palestinians hope for a European awakening should a new Israeli government actually proceed with plans to annex parts of the West Bank. According to this logic, things first have to get worse before they might get better. However, Palestinians also know that things can always get worse.



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