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## Netanyahu killing Palestinians for his political survival



Political tensions in Israel, especially those pushing Prime Minister Netanyahu to the corner, are at the heart of Israel's relentless killing of Palestinians. For more than 7 months, Israel has killed almost 34,000 Palestinians. Although Israel claims to have killed thousands of Hamas fighters too, there is no evidence as to how many of those killed were actually Hamas fighters! Yet, the narrative is pitched in a way that showcases an imminent Israeli victory due to the strategic 'correctness' of Netanyahu's strategy.

Yet, this 'correctness' is little more than a giant smoke screen that he has built and is using to ensure his political survival. The bottom line of Israel's genocidal war on Palestine is that it has become politically too costly for Netanyahu to stop. On the other hand, if he, in his brutal calculation, can continue to kill Palestinians in the name of 'protecting' Israel by fully eliminating Hamas, he can project his indispensability and overcome any political challenge threatening his power.

### **Internal Challenges and Coalition Strains**

Yet, challenges are already mounting. A *New York Times* [report](#) on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May said that “Israel’s Wartime Government Frays as Frustration with Netanyahu Grows”. The main source of this challenge is Benny Gantz, leader of the National Unity Party, who has threatened to quit the coalition cabinet if Netanyahu failed to develop, by the 8<sup>th</sup> of June, a plan for the future of the war on Gaza. The demand is for Netanyahu to ensure the release of hostages taken on October 7 by Hamas. Another demand is to make a post-war plan. As it stands, people like Gantz and defence minister like Yoav Gallant are demanding for Jerusalem not to establish an Israeli military government in Gaza. There is, in simple words, a dispute developing over the conspicuous absence of any plan for the future, a plan that might show something beyond the relentless killing of the people of Palestine.

Netanyahu’s own response to these threats is telling. Instead of counter-challenging his opponents with details of his plans, he accused them of undermining his efforts to protect Israel. Netanyahu said that these demands were tantamount to ensuring “Israeli defeat” and allowing Hamas to remain in power. He went on to say that Gantz was putting ultimatums for the prime minister rather than Hamas.

### **Self-Preservation and Power Retention**

Netanyahu’s response tells many different things. First, he sees his war on Gaza, even without any plan, in the name of eliminating Hamas (whatever this goal means) as the only source of maintaining his popular legitimacy. Second, he wants to continue to use this war to minimise the opposition, allowing him to frame people like Gantz as those opposing Hamas’ permanent elimination. Third, he is using this war to escape the question of fresh elections. If Netanyahu had believed he was popular – and indispensable – enough, he might have chosen to win popular legitimacy via fresh elections. The fact that he has taken this road shows his lack of confidence and the fact that he will probably lose power.

Therefore, more than the preservation of Israel, sheer self-preservation is at the heart of Netanyahu’s plan. If he were to lose power, he knows he could end up facing several criminal charges. In December, the corruption trial against Netanyahu resumed after a pause of two months following the start of the war in October. He fears prosecution – and even a conviction – because he will lose the next elections, especially if they are held without him leading Israel’s ultimate victory over Palestine. “There is no alternative to military victory,” [Netanyahu said in a video](#) released by the prime minister’s office on the same day as Gallant’s (above-mentioned) message. “The attempt to bypass it with this or that claim is

simply detached from reality”, he added. Therefore, his only plan is to continue to wage war and use the war to reinforce his own position in power.

Part of this plan is also conditioned by Netanyahu’s struggle to maintain his fragile majority in the legislature. This is especially the case because of his dependence on far-right parties in his cabinet supporting a long war on Hamas. His far-right partners, Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, together control 14 seats, and they have vowed to leave the government if the prime minister makes too many concessions and agrees to a cease-fire in Gaza. They have insisted, as Netanyahu has also done, that the military will move on Rafah.

### **Diplomatic Clashes and International Pressure**

This blind emphasis on military victory alone has even led to diplomatic clashes with Israel’s ultimate allies, including the US. Netanyahu is resisting all international pressure to ceasefire. While this disagreement might seem like a cleavage developing between Israel and the US, it is far from it. This disagreement, however, is working for Netanyahu in other, political ways. First, he can showcase his unflinching commitment to preserve Israel at any cost, i.e., if it costs his political relations with Washington. Second, he is already selling Washington’s warnings about not sending military support for the Rafah attack to his voters as the most important reason why Israel must fight this ‘existential’ war all alone. With him as the leader of this war, Netanyahu, in his calculation, once again becomes indispensable.

However, the question is: how long can Netanyahu continue to defy his political opponents, the people frequently mobilizing against him in Israel for his failure to secure the hostages, and the international pressure mounting on him? The fact is that he may not have enough time. Clearly, his priority is not to secure the hostages. If this had been his priority, he would have entered into negotiations and accepted the ceasefire deal that Hamas recently agreed to. His priority is to use this war to stay in power. Israelis are surely coming to grips with this objective, which might soon culminate in a much bigger movement than the one Netanyahu can manage, even by projecting his indispensability for Israel’s permanent preservation.

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