

Israeli Arab parties back Gantz for PM in break with precedent

Author:

AFP

ID:

1569167760171961300

Sun, 2019-09-22 15:50

JERUSALEM: Israel's Arab-dominated Joint List party moved on Sunday to back the centre-left bloc of Benny Gantz, who is challenging Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing alliance, to form a new government. With final results all but in, neither Gantz nor Netanyahu command a majority in parliament, so the Arab List's decision to end its usual policy of withholding support for any candidate in the wake of elections could nudge President Reuven Rivlin to ask Gantz to form a government.

Rivlin, who began consulting with party leaders on Sunday to discuss who should lead the country after no clear victor emerged from Tuesday's election, suggested Gantz and Netanyahu join forces, though it is uncertain who would be the senior partner.

Netanyahu's right-wing Likud failed, for the second time in five months, to secure a clear election victory. The centrist Blue and White party led by ex-armed forces chief Gantz has a slight lead with nearly all votes counted. No party drawn from the 21% Arab minority has ever been part of an Israeli government. But an increased turnout saw the Joint List win 13 seats, making it the third largest grouping.

This would provide an outlet to voice Arab complaints of discrimination in Israeli society and give a bigger platform to Arab parties which differ markedly with those drawn from the country's Jewish majority on many political issues.

"We want to bring an end to the era of Netanyahu, so we recommend that Benny Gantz be the one to form the next government," party head Ayman Odeh told Rivlin on Sunday as part of consultations to form a new government coalition. Joint List's support does not mean it will sit in the governing coalition, but its backing gives Gantz's centre-left bloc 57 seats, compared to Netanyahu's right-wing bloc of 55.

Netanyahu denounced the Arab party support of Gantz. He said it meant only two choices – "a minority government that leans on those that reject Israel as a Jewish, democratic state," or a "broad national government".

Gantz has so far rebuffed Netanyahu's calls to join a unity government. Near-final results show Blue and White will be the largest single party in the new parliament with 33 of the 120 seats, while Likud has won 31 seats, three less than it had before.

In a meeting with Likud party leaders on Sunday, Rivlin said it was up to the "two biggest parties, the first and second that are almost equal in size, to join forces ... so that you together manage and establish a system that brings a stable government."

"This is what the people want. None of us can ignore that," he said.

The president's role is largely ceremonial, but it includes consulting with

factions and choosing which party leader has the best chance at forming a coalition.

There were only narrow differences in the two main parties' campaigns on many important issues during the campaign. An end to the Netanyahu era would be unlikely to bring significant changes in policy on relations with the United States, the regional struggle against Iran, or the Palestinian conflict.

Netanyahu and Gantz are now seeking other potential coalition allies, prominent among whom is the far-right former defence minister Avigdor Lieberman. He secured eight seats for his Yisrael Beiteinu party, making him a potential kingmaker.

Lieberman on Sunday reiterated his call for a unity government and said he would not recommend either candidate in his meeting with Rivlin.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Israel](#)

[Arabs](#)

[benny_gantz](#)

Israeli president Reuven Rivlin begins talks to form new government
Syria 'captures' drone near Israeli-occupied Golan Heights

Syria 'captures' drone near Israeli-occupied Golan Heights

Author:

Sat, 2019-09-21 22:53

DAMASCUS, ISTANBUL: Syrian authorities captured and dismantled on Saturday a drone rigged with cluster bombs near the border with the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, state news agency SANA said.

SANA gave no further details about the drone but posted several photos of the unmanned aerial vehicle.

Israel frequently conducts airstrikes and missile attacks inside war-torn Syria but rarely confirms them. Israel says it targets mostly bases of Iranian forces and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah in Syria.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said it was not clear if Syrian troops or members of Lebanon's Hezbollah controlled the drone. Hezbollah has fighters in different parts of Syria where they are fighting on the side of Bashar Assad's forces.

The incident came two days after another drone was destroyed over the Damascus suburb of Aqraba, where an Israeli airstrike killed two Hezbollah operatives last month.

No one claimed responsibility for the drones on Saturday.

In neighboring Lebanon, a government investigation concluded on Thursday that two Israeli drones were on an attack mission when they crashed in the capital last month, one of them armed with 4.5 kilo of explosives.

Erdogan frustrated

Meanwhile in neighboring Turkey, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday expressed frustration with what he said was the US' continued support for Syrian Kurdish militants.

Speaking to reporters before his departure for the UN meetings in New York, Erdogan reiterated that Turkey had completed all preparations for a possible unilateral military operation in northeast Syria, along the Turkish border east of the Euphrates River.

Last month, Turkey and the US agreed to take steps toward establishing a so-called "safe zone" in the area that would keep US-backed Syrian Kurdish forces away from Turkey's border.

Turkey has, however, warned that it will not allow the US to delay the establishment of the safe zone and has threatened to launch an operation on its own within two weeks.

Ankara considers the Syrian Kurdish fighters to be “terrorists” due to their links to Kurdish rebels in Turkey.

“We have no wish of confronting the United States,” Erdogan said. “However, we don’t have the luxury of ignoring the support that the United States is giving terrorist organizations in an area where it was not invited to be.”

Erdogan said he would discuss the issue during a possible meeting with US President Donald Trump in New York.

The YPG-led Syrian Democratic Forces has said they will pull back up to 14 km in some areas. Turkey says the US had agreed that the “safe zone” should extend 32 km into Syria.

Erdogan reiterated complaints over US support for the Kurdish fighters, saying Washington was providing them with arms.

His comments about border preparations came a day after two security sources said doctors have been stationed in southern Turkish provinces to prepare for a possible incursion into Syria.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Syria](#)

[Golan Heights](#)

[Israel](#)

Syrian state media says drone destroyed over Damascus countrysideLebanon concludes Israeli drones were on attack mission

[Iraq detains suspect in deadly bombing that killed 12](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-09-21 22:35

BAGHDAD: Iraqi security forces boosted their presence and measures around the Shiite city of Karbala on Saturday, a day after a deadly bombing hit a minibus packed with passengers outside the city.

"Twelve civilians have been killed and five wounded in an explosion on a bus at the main checkpoint for the northern entrance to Karbala," the city's health authorities said, adding the victims included women and children. Iraq's prime minister said security forces have detained a man suspected of detonating the bomb.

The blast was one of the biggest attacks targeting civilians since the extremist Daesh group was declared defeated inside Iraq in 2017.

The group's sleeper cells continue to wage an insurgency and carry out sporadic attacks across the country.

The charred minibus was still on the road near the city on Saturday morning, hours after the blast killed 12 people and wounded five others.

At least two police spokesmen in the area said an explosive device planted on the bus detonated at a northern entrance to the city, setting fire to the vehicle.

According to the officials, the blast occurred as the bus was passing through an Iraqi army checkpoint between Karbala and Al-Hilla.

Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi in a statement released by his office on Saturday gave no further details about the suspect.

Parliament Speaker Mohamad Al-Halbousi expressed in a statement his frustration with the repeated "failures of intelligence agencies" to prevent such attacks. He added that security plans should be reviewed and intelligence gathering intensified.

On Saturday, security was tight on the roads entering Karbala with added checkpoints searching cars.

The explosion occurred as the bus was passing through an Iraqi army checkpoint, about 10 km south of Karbala in the direction of the town of Al-Hilla.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack, which took place during a holy period marked by Shiites in Iraq between two important

religious events, Ashoura and Arbaeen.

Daesh insurgents have continued to carry out regular attacks mostly against security forces in the north of the country, however.

Arbaeen is the annual commemoration marking the end of the 40-day mourning period for the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, a central figure in Shiite Islam. Imam Hussein was one of the Prophet Muhammad's grandsons.

Thirty-one pilgrims were killed and about 100 injured 10 days ago as hundreds of thousands of Shiites marked Ashoura, one of the most solemn holy days of the year.

It was the deadliest stampede in recent history during Ashoura commemorations.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iraq](#)

[Baghdad](#)

[Adel Abdul Mahdi](#)

Bus bombing kills 9 people, injures 6 near Iraqi city of Kerbala
Al-Nouri Mosque restoration aims to revive spirit of Iraq's ruined Mosul

US sending more troops to Gulf, as Iran begins to feel the sanction pinch

Author:

Sat, 2019-09-21 22:04

WASHINGTON, DUBAI: The US announced on Friday that it was sending military reinforcements to the Gulf region following attacks on Saudi oil facilities that it attributes to Iran, just hours after President Donald Trump ordered new sanctions on Tehran.

Separately, Iran's foreign minister on Saturday denounced renewed US sanctions against its central bank as an attempt to deny ordinary Iranians access to food and medicine.

Iran denies involvement in the attacks, which initially halved oil output from Saudi Arabia. Responsibility was claimed by Yemen's Houthi militants, an Iranian-aligned group fighting an Arab alliance in Yemen's civil war.

"But this is dangerous and unacceptable as an attempt at blocking ... the Iranian people's access to food and medicine," Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif told reporters in remarks shown on state television.

Zarif was speaking after arriving in New York for the annual UN General Assembly next week.

Sanctions 'toughest'

Trump said the sanctions were the toughest-ever against another country, but indicated he did not plan a military strike, calling restraint a sign of strength.

The Treasury Department renewed action against Iran's central bank after US officials said Tehran carried out weekend attacks on rival Saudi Arabia's oil infrastructure, which triggered a spike in global crude prices.

Those attacks, combined with an Iranian attack on an American spy drone in June, represented a "dramatic escalation of Iranian aggression," Secretary of Defense Mark Esper said.

The Pentagon chief announced that the US would send military reinforcements to the Gulf region at the request of Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

"In response to the kingdom's request, the president has approved the deployment of US forces, which will be defensive in nature, and primarily focused on air and missile defense," Esper said.

However Joint Chiefs of Staff Joe Dunford categorized the deployment as "moderate," with the number of troops not expected to reach thousands.

Meanwhile, there were reports on social media that a number of Iranian

servers and websites – including those of some petrochemical firms – were under a cyberattack. There was no immediate official comment, and the websites of the main state oil company NIOC appeared to be functioning normally. Residents said their Internet access was not affected.

NetBlocks, an organization that monitors internet connectivity, said its data showed “intermittent disruptions” to some internet services in Iran starting from Friday evening.

But the group said the impact was limited, affecting only specific providers, and the cause was unclear.

“Data are consistent with a cyber-attack or unplanned technical incident on affected networks as opposed to a purposeful withdrawal or shutdown incident,” it said in a tweet.

The fresh sanctions target the Central Bank of Iran, which was already under other US sanctions, the National Development Fund of Iran – the country’s sovereign wealth fund – and an Iranian company that US officials say is used to conceal financial transfers for Iranian military purchases.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[US troops](#)

[Gulf](#)

[Iran](#)

Trump reveals latest wave of US sanctions on Iran, including central bankUS sanctions target Iranians’ access to food, medicine: foreign minister

[Saudi Arabia's Al-Jubeir says Iran bears responsibility for Aramco attacks](#)

Sat, 2019-09-21 16:41

RIYADH: Iran bears responsibility for the attacks on Saudi Aramco facilities on Sept. 14 and that the Kingdom was working with allies to decide an appropriate response, Saudi Arabian minister of state for foreign affairs Adel Al-Jubeir said on Saturday.

Al-Jubeir said the attacks were undertaken with Iranian weapons and it was for this reason that Iran should be held accountable for the incident, adding: "We are certain that the attacks did not come from Yemen but from the north. Investigations will prove that."

Saudi Arabia has said already that the investigation so far shows that Iranian weapons were used and the attack originated from the north, and that it was pinpointing the exact location

In a press conference held in the Saudi capital, Al-Jubeir also said that the attacks on Aramco facilities were also targeting global energy security and that Saudi Arabia would take appropriate steps to respond if investigations confirm that Iran is responsible.

"The Kingdom will take the appropriate measures based on the results of the investigation, to ensure its security and stability," Al-Jubeir said.

Saudi Arabia has rejected claims from Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthis that they carried out the strikes, the largest-ever assault on Saudi oil facilities in the world's top oil exporter. Tehran has denied any involvement in the attacks.

Saudi Arabia is consulting with its allies to "take the necessary steps", Al-Jubeir said, urging the international community to take a stand.

"The Kingdom calls upon the international community to assume its responsibility in condemning those that stand behind this act, and to take a firm and clear position against this reckless behaviour that threatens the global economy," he said.

"The Iranian position is to try to divide the world and in that it is not succeeding."

The US this week imposed more sanctions on Iran and approved the sending of American troops to the region.

(With Agencies)



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Middle East](#)

[Saudi Arabia](#)

[Iran](#)

[Adel Al-Jubeir](#)

[aramco attacks](#)

[Saudi Aramco Attacks](#)

World media shown damage at sites of Aramco attack Saudi Aramco has emerged from attacks 'stronger than ever': CEO