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# Will Disagreements over the Day after the War on Gaza Shatter the Netanyahu Government?

Unit for Political Studies

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Series: [Situation Assessment](#)

28 May 2024

## Unit for Political Studies

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Disagreements between members of Israel's ruling coalition, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, have worsened in recent weeks after Benny Gantz threatened to resign from the War Cabinet if a post-war plan for Gaza was not approved by 8 June. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Galant had previously announced that he would not agree to Israeli military rule in Gaza after the end of the war, and that he had requested the formation of an alternative to Hamas leadership, but he did not receive a response from the Prime Minister. The matter of the day after the war on the Gaza Strip has become a central point of contention among the Israeli political and military leadership, although the differences extend to other issues such as the prisoner exchange agreement between Israel and Hamas, the issue of appointing senior commanders of the army and security services, and the enactment of the Haredi enlistment law, as well as the formation of inquiries into the security, intelligence, and military failure on 7 October 2023.

## Plans for the Day After

Since the beginning of the genocidal war on the Gaza Strip, Netanyahu has adopted the most extreme and aggressive attitude towards the Palestinian people within his government coalition. He called for the displacement of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip to Sinai, and, despite his failure to achieve it, he made huge political and diplomatic efforts to further this goal.<sup>1</sup> While clinging to his declared goal of eliminating Hamas rule and military capacity in the Gaza Strip, Netanyahu refuses to provide a vision for how the war will end, or determine how long it will last in order to prolong the fighting and buy time to improve his popularity. His government was on the brink of collapse at the time of the 7 October attack. From the outset, Netanyahu has rejected the US vision for the day after in Gaza, which involves the withdrawal of the Israeli army from Gaza after achieving the war aims and the return of a restored Palestinian Authority in place of Hamas. Netanyahu has re-affirmed his rejection of the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and seeks Israeli security control over the Gaza Strip for an indefinite period of time.

As a result of continued pressure to present a vision for the day after the war in the Gaza Strip, applied by both the UA administration and the Israeli military establishment, on 23 February 2024, more than four months into the war, Netanyahu presented his plan for the day after in Gaza in a brief document. It did not explain how or when the war would end.<sup>2</sup> The document indicated that once Hamas' rule and military power had been eradicated in the Gaza Strip, a transitional phase with no specific timeframe will see the Gaza Strip subject to Israeli security control, just as the occupied West Bank. During this phase, Israel will carry out military operations throughout Gaza whenever it wants, build a security wall above and below the ground extending along the border between the Gaza

<sup>1</sup> Mahmoud Muhareb, "The War on Gaza and the Expulsion of the Palestinians," Case Assessment, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 19/3/2024, accessed on 26/5/2024, at: <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/PoliticalStudies/Pages/the-war-and-the-displacement-of-palestinians-from-the-gaza-strip.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Jonothan Liss, "Netanyahu presented his plan for the next day in the Gaza Strip: disarming the Strip and changing UNRWA," *Haaretz*, 2/23/2024, accessed on 26/5/2024, at: <https://cutt.ly/6eykUV4l> [Hebrew]



Strip and Egypt, and work to end the activity of UNRWA. Reconstruction will only be permitted after Gaza's disarmament and only with the contribution of countries approved by Israel. Regarding civil administration, the document stated that it would be based as much as possible on local individuals not linked to countries or bodies that support "terrorism."<sup>3</sup>

## Proposed Direct Military Rule

Given the failure to establish a civil administration made up of local residents in the Gaza Strip as an alternative to Hamas rule, and the regrouping of Hamas in the cities, camps, and towns from which the Israeli army has withdrawn, Netanyahu and his far-right and fascist followers face a huge dispute with the military and security establishment regarding an alternative to Hamas rule in the Gaza Strip. The military and security establishment confirmed that the failure to propose an alternative to Hamas rule, plans for which should have already been implemented in order to fill the vacuum left by the Israeli withdrawal, opens a wide field for Hamas to regain control every time the Israeli army withdraws and thus necessitating re-occupation, which the Israeli army cannot continue.

In response, Israeli Army Chief of Staff, Herzi Halevi, requested a meeting between the military and Netanyahu, in order to develop a comprehensive strategy for managing the ongoing confrontations in the south and on the border with Lebanon in the north as well as future post-war plans for Gaza.<sup>4</sup> But Netanyahu refused to hold this meeting. After that, Brigadier-General Roman Gofman, in a document drawn up in April 2024 and distributed to the members of the Security Cabinet, during his short tenure in COGAT, the unit that coordinates government activities in the [occupied] territories, proposed the establishment of temporary Israeli military rule in the Gaza Strip, as an alternative to Hamas. Netanyahu paid special attention to the document, and as a result appointed Gofman Military Secretary to the Prime Minister.<sup>5</sup>

## Views of Gallant and the Military Establishment

Netanyahu's continued refusal to conduct an in-depth discussion about post war plans and the appointment of Gofman has raised suspicion within the military and political establishment that Netanyahu seeks to establish Israeli military rule in the Gaza Strip; a matter which he neither denies nor confirms. On 15 May 2024, Gallant asked Netanyahu to announce that Israel would not lay down military rule in the Gaza Strip,<sup>6</sup> which he believes would be "a dangerous and bad thing for Israel"

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Nir Dvori, "The chief of staff's request that Netanyahu did not pay attention to: We are eroding all achievements", *Channel 12*, 1/5/2024, accessed on 26/5/2024, at: <https://cutt.ly/VeykIH3i> [Hebrew]

<sup>5</sup> Yoav Lemur, "Netanyahu's new military secretary in internal document: control of Gaza the next day", *Yisrael Hayom*, 24/4/2024, accessed on 26/5/2024, at: <https://cutt.ly/ceykOqPB> [Hebrew]

<sup>6</sup> Bar Peleg and Jonothan Liss, "Gallant: I will not agree to military rule in the Gaza Strip, I call on Netanyahu to announce that this will not happen", *Haaretz*, 15/5/2024, accessed on 26/5/2024, at: <https://cutt.ly/8eykO4TL> [Hebrew]



draining its military and security capabilities, at a time when it faces other strategic threats that are more important than the existing risks in Gaza. Accordingly, Gallant threatened to resign from his position if Netanyahu imposed military rule.<sup>7</sup>

A document circulated by the military was leaked to the Israeli media regarding the alternatives to Hamas rule in the Gaza Strip, confirming that the establishment of Israeli military rule is the worst option for Israel, requiring the allocation of a large military force that is difficult for the Israeli army to provide, reliant on maintaining reserve forces into a longer period of service in the army at the expense of Israel's other fronts. The document indicates that the annual cost of military rule in the Gaza Strip will amount to approximately 20 billion shekels per year (1USD is equivalent to 3.66ILS), and much more loss of life.<sup>8</sup>

Another document written by National Security Council, Vice Chairman Yoram Hamo, before resigning from his post, parts of which were leaked to the Israeli media, warned that failure to find an alternative to Hamas rule, and the establishment of Israeli military rule in the Gaza Strip, would eventually lead to the resurgence of Hamas.<sup>9</sup>

## Gantz's Warning

Three days after Gallant threatened to resign from his position in protest of any decision to permanently occupy Gaza, Gantz issued a warning to Netanyahu, calling on him to make a strategic change in his policy, or else his party would withdraw from the government coalition by 8 June 2024.<sup>10</sup> He also asked Netanyahu to approve a plan at the War Cabinet meeting that served six strategic goals: First, the return of the Israeli detainees as soon as possible. Second, eliminating the rule of Hamas and its military power in Gaza and demilitarizing and ensuring Israeli security control over Gaza. Third, establishing "an American, European, Arab and Palestinian administration that will manage civilian affairs in the Gaza Strip and lay the foundation for a future alternative that is not Hamas or Abbas". Fourth, the return of the Israelis who fled the northern towns no later than 1 September 2024. Fifth, pushing forward normalization with Saudi Arabia, within the framework of a comprehensive vision to create an alliance that includes the US, European countries, Israel, and Arab countries allied against Iran. Finally, the enactment of the military service law that compels the enlistment of Haredim Jews in the Israeli army, guaranteeing equal service for all Israelis.<sup>11</sup>

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7 Ibid.

8 Itmar Eichner "5 divisions will be stationed in Gaza, the cost is 20 billion shekels per year, the price of military rule the day after", *Ynet*, 17/5/2024, accessed on 26/5/2024, at: <https://cutt.ly/6eykPmgj> [Hebrew]

9 Michael Hauser Tov, "Israel's strategic modus operandi failed in the war, and cannot succeed: document written by resigned National Security Agency official", *Haaretz*, 20/5/2024, accessed on 26/5/2024, at: <https://cutt.ly/qeykP9RU> [Hebrew]

10 Jonathan Liss, "Gantz to Netanyahu: If you do not approve an alternative plan for Hamas rule in the Gaza Strip by 8 June, we will leave the government", *Haaretz*, 18/5/2024, accessed on 26/5/2024, at: <https://cutt.ly/qeykP9RU> [in Hebrew]

11 Ibid.



And with the exception of his position in favour of Haredim enlistment, the positions identified by Gantz in his warning to Netanyahu regarding Gaza essentially agree with the right and extreme right in Israel; It calls for the continuation of security control over the Strip following the eradication of Hamas, rejects the return of the Palestinian Authority, in step with Netanyahu's slogan rejecting the presence of "Hamasistan and Fatahistan" in the territory.

It is clear that the six goals stipulated by Gantz were basically a cover to justify the withdrawal of his from the governing coalition, without losing his potential voters on the right and the extreme right who do not want to vote for Netanyahu. The public opinion polls show that about 50 percent of Gantz's party voters want him to remain in the government coalition.

## Conclusion

The effect of Galant and Gantz's pressure on Netanyahu's policy towards a number of issues, whether it is related to post-war plan or concluding a prisoner exchange deal between Israel and Hamas before expanding the attack on Rafah, or the decision to expand the incursion on Rafah itself, is unclear. But it is certain that the pressure is increasing on Netanyahu from the military and security establishment and from within the War Cabinet and the leadership of the Israeli delegation negotiating the exchange of prisoners, the families of the Israeli captives, and the US administration. The demand is growing to soften his positions and accept a formula that allows for a ceasefire, agreed to by Hamas. These pressures have certainly increased since the International Criminal Court prosecutor's request for an arrest warrant for Netanyahu and Gallant, and the International Court of Justice decision calling for an end to the Israeli aggression on Rafah, the true effect of which is yet to be felt.