

# Would Israel Be Any Different Without Netanyahu ?

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**What if Benjamin Netanyahu hadn't been prime minister for 16 years - would this terrible war not have broken out ?**

*Ofer Prison in the West Bank, 2019. Credit : Olivier Fitoussi*

Would the war have looked different ? Can we be sure the surprise and fiasco of [October 7](#) wouldn't have happened ? The hostages wouldn't have been taken ? Israel wouldn't have carried out such a gruesome mass killing in Gaza ?

These aren't « what if » questions, nor are they meant to reduce by one iota the hugeness of [Netanyahu's responsibility](#) and the severity of his blame for [what has taken place](#). Netanyahu has to go, yesterday, today, tomorrow, like the entire insane government of zeroes he formed, which has brought us to the brink of the abyss.

But are there any leaders in Israel who would act in a fundamentally different way toward Gaza and the Palestinians ? No way.

Placing the full blame for all Israel's woes on Netanyahu is saying that had it not been for him, everything would have been different. That's what the « anyone but Bibi » people have been doing since their first day. Had it not been for Netanyahu, Gaza wouldn't have been a prison, the settlements wouldn't have rotted Israel and the IDF would have been a moral army.

That's not true, of course. There are enough things for which, had it not been for Netanyahu, Israel would have been a better place, but lifting the curse of the occupation and the siege is not one of them.

There are decent politicians in Israel, full of good intentions, who are more modest and faithful to their positions than him - it would have been nicer to be occupiers under them.

Israel would have remained the same apartheid state, only more dolled up. Netanyahu corrupted the political system and infected it, destroyed the justice and [law enforcement systems](#), and as for his personal conduct, it's better not to start.

But when it comes to the core of the matter, the core Israel is fleeing from as from fire, the core Netanyahu had planned to remove from the agenda - it appears that Netanyahu acted as his predecessors did and as his successors will.

Apart from the commendable efforts of former prime ministers such as Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, Ehud Barak, Ehud Olmert and Ariel Sharon to find a solution, if only partial, none of them had any

intention of giving the Palestinians the minimum justice they deserve, without which there is no solution.

All the premiers sided with continuing the occupation and the [siege on Gaza](#). None of them thought for a moment to allow a real Palestinian state, with full powers, a state like any other. It didn't occur to them to liberate the Gaza Strip from the strangling siege. Had it not been for all those, perhaps there would not be a Hamas.

The siege of Gaza wasn't laid by Netanyahu ; the change government didn't think of lifting it. The money from Qatar may have flowed to Hamas in a more responsible way under Naftali Bennett, but the policy would basically have been the same. Nobody thought of opening Gaza to the world even in a controlled way - the only policy not tried, and the only one that could, perhaps, have advanced a solution.

It is also difficult to assess whether the IDF under another prime minister would have been a different army.

Would the fiasco have been avoided ? It's not certain. The occupation missions that became the majority of the IDF's activity weren't invented by Netanyahu. Any other prime minister would also have directed insane forces and resources to mollify the settlers and their whims. That's how it was under all Israel's governments.

The candidates are warming up on the starting line. Each one of them will be a better prime minister than Netanyahu. Certainly more honest, modest and decent than him. But will any of them alter Israel's steep downward trajectory ?

Yair Lapid announced he's in favor of bringing the Palestinian Authority into Gaza, and immediately changed his mind, and he's already against it. Lapid has no opinion.

Benny Gantz and Gadi Eisenkot are taking part in conducting the war, with all its crimes, which will yet turn out to have been futile. Neither of them has proposed a new way, one we've never tried before. It's only force and more force.

Netanyahu has to go, there's no more doubt. But Israel will continue its course.

**Gideon Levy**

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