

Netanyahu wants six more months in power to annex Jordan Valley



Tel Aviv, December 3 (RHC)-- Benjamin Netanyahu's playing the security card in an effort to stay in power, telling supporters that he only needs six more months as premier in order to annex a large swath of the West Bank -- and become immune from prosecution.

The Jordan Valley, the eastern part of West Bank bordering Jordan, was targeted by Netanyahu in September ahead of Israel's second general election this year. The embattled prime minister promised that, if he stays in power, he would annex the area as Israel's sovereign land, because that's what is needed for national security.

How big an impact his pledge made is not clear, but Netanyahu's Likud party ended up almost tied with the Blue and White party of Benny Gantz. The outcome was just as inconclusive as the one from April's election, and the two parties have since been struggling to form a government of national unity.

On Monday, Netanyahu repeated his annexation pledge, saying he'd discussed the plan to formally incorporate the Jordan Valley with U.S. President Donald Trump during an earlier phone call. He said Israel currently has a "historic opportunity" to move its eastern border towards Jordan and called on Gantz

to work harder on a coalition agreement.

The Blue and White are fine with annexation, but it's Netanyahu himself who stands in the way of the unity government. Gantz refused to join a government that would be headed by an indicted prime minister. Incidentally, on Monday Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit served to the Knesset a formal indictment of Netanyahu on charges of bribery, fraud and breach in three corruption cases.

According to Israel Hayom, a daily newspaper with strong ties to Likud, the party offered a deal that would keep Netanyahu in the prime minister's chair for six months, after which he will cede it to Gantz, who in turn will vacate the office 18 months later to a nominee from Likud.

The half-year in power is, presumably, needed to enact the annexation of the Jordan Valley. Ze'ev Elkin, a leading Likud member involved in coalition negotiations, explained that Netanyahu's personal good relations with Trump would secure Washington's acceptance of the annexation, in much the same way that it did the relocation of the American embassy to Jerusalem, and acknowledgement of Israel's annexation of Syria's Golan Heights.

Blue and White MK Yehiel Tropper, who was interviewed by the Kan public radio after Elkin, said his party would agree to the annexation if it is carried out "in coordination with the international community and moderate Arab states." After Netanyahu announced his plan in September, it was met with widespread condemnation from Arab nations, including Jordan, and from the United Nations.

The proposed deal is reportedly perceived with suspicion in the Gantz camp, where people are concerned that Netanyahu would use the six months to push through an immunity package that would insulate him from criminal prosecution. The Israel Hayom report said the Blue and White would not get a better one.

Netanyahu may tout his international credentials to keep his grip on power, but the reality is that his days in politics are numbered, believes Gideon Levy, a Haaretz columnist and long-time critic of the Israeli PM. "I think Trump would love to see Netanyahu stay in power, sure. But I don't think it's relevant. Finally, Netanyahu is finished. It may take a few more months or less, but he is finished, so why try to help him?" he told RT.

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