



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Netanyahu's concession – a belated manoeuvre to correct bad strategies



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has hinted he would back down in the face of the demands of mass protests, but that will probably not be enough to get his government out of its bind of internal and foreign policy problems.

Netanyahu has been preoccupied with establishing control over the judiciary, which has been conducting proceedings against him for corruption charges. Netanyahu has led the country into a situation where it has to deal with internal problems, thus weakening its options under the influence of far-right coalition partners.

Since the beginning of its mandate last December, the largely right-wing Israeli government has opened many fronts that it could not lead.

By trying to subordinate the judiciary to its executive authority, Netanyahu's government has confronted not only a large part of the Israeli population, sensitive to the independence and objectivity of its courts, but also partners in the democratic world who see these steps as an undemocratic change.

Israel has been simultaneously losing pace with strategic shifts in the region and the Ukrainian conflict, which has been a priority of its Western partners, but not Netanyahu's government.

Abandoning the main cause of the protest

Mr Netanyahu has announced that he will abandon a key problematic position in his attempt to impose influence on the judiciary: that parliament be given the power to overturn a Supreme Court decision.

"I threw that out", the Israeli PM told The Wall Street Journal, while the opposition, protesting in the streets for months, had no immediate comment on this shift.

It is now likely that the government will give in to the pressure and try to work out a compromise and perhaps devote itself to the accumulated problems, primarily regarding foreign policy. But it may very well turn out to be too late for such a manoeuvre.

Israel has been self-excluded from significant changes in the region for months. First of all, the rapprochement of Saudi Arabia and Iran, under the mediation of China, then the return of Syria to the family of Arab states, and perhaps most importantly, it has been excluded from the advanced agreements between the US and Iran on a new model for limiting the Iranian nuclear programme.

Netanyahu and his partners in the government have steadfastly refrained from sending military aid to Ukraine, as they do not want to disrupt Russian oversight of Israel's military operations in Syria.

Distancing from partners

Altogether, it distances Israel from its traditional partners, particularly the US, because Israel is failing to show "team spirit" in crises and changes where it is supposed to.

The latest message came from the White House, which blamed Israeli officials for leaking information about indirect talks between the US and Iran on a new control arrangement for Iran's nuclear programme.

This is a low blow to Washington, which has been trying to work out at least a temporary and limited agreement with Tehran during the

term of President Joe Biden, and stop the development of the nuclear programme.

Israel opposed the original agreement from 2015 (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action - JCPOA) and any future agreement with Tehran, which it considers an existential threat.

However, with the latest sabotage of the US-Iran deal, Israel is taking one step further and plays a destructive role regarding the US interests.

Will Israel make concessions regarding Ukraine?

It is the same situation with Israel's excessive and continuous reticence to help Ukraine's defence seriously against Russian aggression that angers both Kyiv and the US-led bloc of allies.

Netanyahu rejected the possibility of sending modern anti-missile systems to Kyiv, allegedly due to fear of their being seized and reaching Iran through Russia, which could use them against Israel.

"The whole world is focused on this war and Israel is still deliberating and dragging its feet. It is clear to everyone what is the right and moral thing to do, and every day that we sit on the fence, we are isolating ourselves and giving the Iranians more time to get stronger. This must change immediately", said Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee chairman Yuli Edelstein, a native Ukrainian and Netanyahu's party partner.

Perhaps some of Netanyahu's new steps under pressure will be precisely on the issue of more decisive support for Ukraine, because in the

bloc of states to which Israel belongs, it is treated as a fundamental issue based on shared values.

After all, Netanyahu, due to his undemocratic internal policies regarding the judiciary, radicalisation towards the Palestinians and his passivity towards Ukraine, has not met with US President Joe Biden.

However, as with concessions on the judiciary, Netanyahu's possible concessions on Ukraine may be overdue.

False expectations and political inertia

Netanyahu's government policy is based on a series of wrong expectations, inertia regarding conflict approach towards Iran and the self-confidence that it will always have support in the region, particularly from the Gulf.

A change in the region, and the war in Ukraine, did not lead to changes in Israeli strategies, due to which the country has remained isolated and frowned upon by its main partners.

"The Israeli government needs to take account of the changing strategic situation and recalibrate accordingly", wrote Yossi Mekelberg of The Middle East and North Africa Programme at Chatham House for RUSI.

"Israel is not the only country that would like to contain and deter Iran, but its potential allies are finding it increasingly difficult to align with it - at least openly - as long as the sixth Netanyahu government is in its current self-destructive mode. Yet for Israel, operating unilaterally might prove too costly", said Professor Meckelberg.

Benjamin Netanyahu has been trying to reach a compromise with internal opponents through concessions. Tomorrow he might make new concessions to regain the trust of his allies, but there is no guarantee that after these manoeuvres he and his government would remain in the saddle.

Exposed to a combination of strong internal and external pressures and criticism due to a series of controversial decisions, the Israeli PM and his cabinet are more likely on the way out than a big return, which he certainly hopes for as an experienced politician.