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Eisenkot and the Prospects for Political Change in Israel

Dr. Tughral Yamin[1]

Following inconclusive national elections in October 2026, Israeli President Isaac Herzog tasked Eisenkot[2] on November 8, 2026, with forming the country's next coalition government. This places Eisenkot in a position to challenge long-serving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Born to working-class Moroccan-Jewish immigrants, Eisenkot would become Israel's first Mizrahi prime minister if he succeeds in forming a government.

The term Mizrahi (literally meaning "Eastern" or "Oriental" in Hebrew) refers to Jews whose ancestry is rooted in the Middle East, North Africa, and parts of Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Unlike Ashkenazi Jews, whose historical roots are primarily in Europe, Mizrahi Jews have lived in Arab- and Muslim-majority lands for centuries, including present-day Iraq, Morocco, Yemen, Iran, Syria, and Egypt. Some trace their communities' histories to antiquity, including the period of the Babylonian exile.

Eisenkot's rise could signal a potential shift in the style and domestic priorities of Israeli leadership, although observers note that his security positions remain strongly hawkish. His political profile can be understood through three key dimensions:

1. Leadership Style and Political Positioning

According to a profile by The Guardian[3] , Eisenkot positions himself as the "anti-Netanyahu" i.e., unpolished, soft-spoken (not brash), and running on a platform of transparency and institutional normalcy. His party's name, Yashar (meaning "straight" or "honest"), is designed to contrast with the corruption cases and polarizing rhetoric that have defined the Netanyahu era. Additionally, Eisenkot carries deep personal resonance with an Israeli public exhausted by conflict; his youngest son and two nephews were killed in action during the war in Gaza.

2. Domestic Reforms and Accountability

As detailed by CNN,[4] Eisenkot's immediate domestic priorities represent a stark departure from the outgoing government:

- **October 7 Inquiry:** He has promised a formal state commission of inquiry into the security and intelligence failures

[1] Brig (r) Dr. Tughral Yamin is a Senior IPS Associate. He can be reached at tughral@ips.net.pk
[2] Gadi Eisenkot is a retired military general, former chief of staff of Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and leader of the center-right Yashar ("Straight") party.
[3] Peter Beaumont, "Unpolished, Anti-Bibi, but Evasive on Peace: Who Is the Israeli Opposition Candidate Gadi Eisenkot?" The Guardian, October 15, 2026, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/oct/15/israel-gadi-eisenkot-profile-netanyahu-election
[4] Tal Shalev, "Who Is Gadi Eisenkot, Netanyahu's Main Challenger in Israel's Elections?" CNN, October 24, 2026, https://edition.cnn.com/2026/10/24/middleeast/gadi-eisenkot-israel-election-netanyahu-intl

surrounding the October 7, 2023 attacks, a move Netanyahu has consistently resisted.

- **Universal Enlistment:** He advocates for mandatory military or national service for all citizens, directly threatening the blanket draft exemptions historically enjoyed by the ultra-Orthodox community—a pillar of Netanyahu's religious-nationalist bloc.
- **Judicial Defusal:** He aims to reverse the highly contentious government efforts to weaken the Israeli judiciary.

3. Continuity in Military and Palestinian Policy

Although Eisenkot may represent a shift in Israel's domestic political direction, his emergence as a potential leader does not necessarily indicate a more conciliatory approach toward the Palestinians or regional security.

- **Opposition to Palestinian Statehood:** Eisenkot explicitly opposes a two-state solution and a Palestinian state, and he supports maintaining a high degree of settlement presence in the West Bank.
- **Hawkish Military Outlook:** As a career general, he was the architect of the "Dahiya doctrine," which advocates the use of disproportionate force against civilian infrastructure as a military deterrent. While he is a realist who has openly doubted the possibility of "total victory" over Hamas, his broader strategic outlook aligns closely with mainstream Israeli security orthodoxy.

Coalition-Building Challenges and Political Prospects

Although Eisenkot secured 67 recommendations from lawmakers, compared with Netanyahu's 46, forming a 61-seat majority in the 120-member Knesset remains a significant challenge. His diverse anti-Netanyahu bloc includes right-wing secularists who oppose joining a government that depends on Arab-led parties which won a record 19 seats. To broaden his options, Eisenkot has left the door open to members of Netanyahu's own party to break away and join a broad national unity government under his leadership. He has 28 days to navigate these deep ideological rifts to attempt to assemble a governing coalition.

Eisenkot's potential elevation to the premiership would not necessarily lead to a fundamental change in Israel's policies toward the Palestinians or its regional security posture. While his leadership could bring a different approach to domestic governance and institutional accountability, substantial continuity in these policy areas may remain.