



**IT IS THE MARK OF AN** EDUCATED MIND TO BE ABLE **TO ENTERTAIN A THOUGHT** WITHOUT ACCEPTING IT. ARISTOTLE

## The US might finally unveil deal of the century, in the

More than any of his recent predecessors, Mr Trump has shown a repeated willingness to meddle in

## JONATHAN COOK

sraeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu needs all the help he .can muster before voters head the third time in a year. Once again, it seems as though US President Donald Trump intends to ride to his rescue.

Despite Mr Trump's best efforts, Israel's two elections last year ended in stalemate. Each time, Mr Netanyahu's Likud party and its religious, pro-settler coalition partners tied Netanyahu. with the secular, yet hawkish right Gantz.

The pressure on Mr Netanyahu to win this time has intensified. His opponents in the Israeli parliament 1,800-square-kilometre territory advanced plans last week to set up a in 1967 remains illegal under intercommittee to weigh whether or not national law. And days before the he should be immune from prosecution in three corruption cases.

likely, the path will be clear for a trial pact. that might make it impossible for him to head the next government whatever the outcome.

This was the background to intimations from the Trump administration last week that it may finally plan.

delayed the plan's release over the course of last year as it waited for Mr Netanyahu to secure a majority government to put it into effect.

Leaks suggest the document will to the ballot box on March 2 – for bolster Israel's maximalist demands, scuppering any hopes of establishing a viable Palestinian state. The Palestinian leadership severed ties with Washington a while back in protest.

More than any of his recent predecessors, Mr Trump has shown a repeated willingness to meddle in Israeli elections to the benefit of Mr

Shortly before last April's vote, led by Blue and White leader Benny Mr Trump declared that the US would formally recognise Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights from Syria. The seizure of the most recent ballot in September, If he is denied immunity, as seems possibility of a US-Israeli defence

> Now US officials, including Sec- overseeing the peace plan. retary of State Mike Pompeo, have March election.

Israeli officials have been saying publish its long-anticipated peace much the same to local media since anyahu had been reluctant for the an unexpected visit this month by so-called "deal of the century" to precarious political and legal straits army general like Mr Gantz. The White House reportedly AviBerkowitz, Mr Trump's new aide be published because it would be that he appears ready to gamble.

interference" in the election.

In fact, until recently, Mr Net- hardline parties.

unlikely to satisfy the settlers' most Publication of the peace plan could This prompted Mr Gantz, the extreme demands. He had feared attract some more uncompromising yahu and M hinted that the US peace plan could prime minister's main challenger, to that disappointment might drive Blue and White voters to his side. is on annex be published in the run-up to the condemn any such move as "blatant some Likud voters further to the They may prefer a seasoned player right, towards smaller, even more like Mr Netanyahu to manage White

But Mr Netanyahu is now in such politically inexperienced former

docu Isra deman hopes viable The Pal sev Washin

Lea

that could s a result of a are the lync Netanyahu grip on po party may 1 overall his f per, ultima anyahu the from prosec The key is

Bank – terri

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Mr Netany:

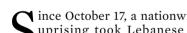
House expectations, rather than a of any futur

Furthermore, the settler parties annex the .

## Syria's invisible hand in Lebanon confror

Prime Minister designate Hassan Diab appears to be standing up to Hizbe who nominated him, to the advantage of other pro-Syrian f

## **BASEM SHABB**



being weak and isolated, has considerable support from Pro-Syrian ↑ ince October 17, a nationwide factions opposed to the resigned prising took Lebanese by prime minister Saad Hariri. Grand





Storm, forcing then prime min- Mufti Abdul Latif Darian and oth-Christian Free Patriotic Movement, within the community. or FPM, were duped into naming Dr Hassan Diab, a Sunni academ- ership has yet to take a position on ic, as prime minister designate. It Mr Diab, which may indicate that is the prime minister designate's they are ready to give him a chance. duty by law to form the cabinet but Syrian President Bashar Al Assad acting foreign minister and head has yet to comment on the situation of the FPM, Gebran Bassil mistak- but Druze politician Wiam Wahenly thought he could impose his hab, one of Syria's closest allies in preferred nominees on a relatively Lebanon, has indicated he was the unknown prime minister and divide one to suggest Mr Diab for the posithe spoils with Hizbollah.

Much to the dismay of Mr Bassil. Mr Diab appears bent on forming a Mr Diab was officially nominated, government of unaffiliated experts, they have assumed a neutral stance. in compliance with the demands of Western powers are closely watchprotesters. Mr Diab has challenged ing as Lebanese politicians bicker Mr Bassil as well as his father-in-law while the economy is in free fall. Lebanese President Michel Aoun. with active support from pro-Syrian to cope with the deep recession yet politicians, most notably member of Hizbollah is only concerned with parliament Jamil Al Sayyed. Other consolidating its power in governpro-Svrian factions voiced their de- ment while the FPM is preoccupied mands to be represented in the new with the issue of presidential sucgovernment, effectively competing cession. Other players such as parwith the FPM for the next cabinet's 18 ministries.

ister Saad Hariri and his cabinet er Sunni dignitaries have refrained to step down. In December, Iran- from criticising Mr Diab, avoiding backed Hizbollah and its ally, the the thorny issue of his legitimacy

> More importantly, the Saudi leadtion of prime minister. The Russians first endorsed Mr Hariri but after

Ordinary Lebanese are struggling liamentary speaker Nabih Berri, and

Poster of Hizbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and Syrian President Bashar Al Assad in South Lebanon

Mr Jumblatt are worried about the non. Mr Diab's intransigence poses So much so that Mr Bassil now sees It seems that Mr Diab, far from return of Syrian influence in Leba- a threat to traditional politicians. common cause with Mr Berri.

Since the end of the Syrian occu- in Lebanon pation in 2005, Damascus' influence ably. During

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