

Israel: Gantz joins Netanyahu in National Unity government to wage war on Palestinians

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National Unity party leader Benny Gantz, one of the two most prominent leaders of the opposition to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's bid to establish a dictatorship, has lost no time in joining his wartime national unity government. Its aim is the ethnic cleansing of Gaza.

Gantz was chief of staff in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) from 2011 to 2015, when he led the murderous assaults on Gaza in 2012 and 2014. The 2012 operation killed 177 Palestinians, while the 50-day assault in 2014 claimed close to 2,200 Palestinian lives, overwhelmingly civilians, and destroyed much of the enclave's infrastructure.

Gantz served as defence minister and deputy prime minister under a previous Netanyahu government, when he presided over Israel's 11-day war on Gaza in May 2021 that killed more than 250 Palestinians, including at least 66 children and 41 women.

The emergency government was formed on Wednesday afternoon after Likud Prime Minister Netanyahu and Gantz met in the IDF headquarters in Tel Aviv for just 30 minutes. Apart from National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, all of Netanyahu's far-right and religious coalition partners agreed.

Gantz will sit in a special war cabinet alongside Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant to plan the genocidal slaughter of the Palestinians in Gaza already underway. His loyalty throughout the past 10 months and today is to the Zionist state, which he will defend no matter what bloody crimes are required.

Former IDF chief of staff Gadi Eisenkot, long-time Likud party member turned Netanyahu opponent Gideon Sa'ar and Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer will join the special war cabinet as observers, as will opposition lawmakers Hili Tropper and Yifat Shasha-Biton. Sa'ar will join the cabinet while five members of Gantz's National Unity party will serve as ministers without

portfolio for the duration of the war.

The only major figure in the leadership of the opposition not to have already signed up is Yair Lapid, who has a seat reserved for him. Lapid was the first opposition figure to propose a coalition but wanted the exclusion of the leaders of Netanyahu's two fascist coalition partners, Bazalel Smotrich of Religious Zionism and Itamar Ben-Gvir of Jewish Power.

The *Times of Israel* reported this week that there had been weeks of secret discussions with Netanyahu, but Lapid cautioned that a government with two fascist provocateurs in its leadership would not be able to maintain the national unity necessary to wage a long and likely "multi-front war."

The Labor Party's Efrat Rayten already wrote last weekend that she would support the government for the duration of the war and "every serious political offer which will assist to manage the confrontation," while also demanding, "The extreme elements which have failed at their job must be removed from the government immediately and replace them with experienced and responsible professionals."

Whatever Lapid's tactical concerns, he has insisted publicly that an emergency government is needed to "make clear to our enemies that the overwhelming majority of Israeli citizens stand behind the Israeli army and defence agencies." Last March, he denounced Netanyahu for sacking Gallant, who had called on the prime minister to scrap his proposals to neuter the judiciary, saying it constituted a "new **low** for the anti-Zionist government that harms national security and ignores warnings of all defence officials."

Lapid portrayed Gallant as a hero and made him the cause célèbre of the protest movement. Reinstated on April 10, Gallant resumed his leadership of the military and settler provocations targeting the West Bank and launched five days of unremitting air strikes on Gaza in

May, hitting 370 targets and killing 35 Palestinians.

No less than Gantz, Gallant was a war criminal then and is a war criminal now. As commander of the IDF's Southern Command, Gallant was in charge of Operation Cast Lead in 2008-9, the brutal war on Hamas in Gaza that resulted in the deaths of 1,400 Palestinians, including some 300 children and hundreds of unarmed civilians, including more than 115 women and 85 men aged over 50. The Israeli NGO Yesh Gvul unsuccessfully filed suit against Gallant's appointment as IDF chief of staff, claiming that his command role in Cast Lead confirmed him as a suspect in "grave violations of international law."

Gallant is now presiding over an assault compared to which Operation Cast Lead pales. Having activated an unprecedented 360,000 reservists, many already gathered on Gaza's borders, he is expected to launch a ground invasion shortly. Israel said it had fully deployed 35 military battalions and four divisions and was "building an infrastructure for future operations".

Indiscriminate aerial bombardment by Israel has already killed over 1,200 in Gaza, on top of the 1,500 Hamas fighters killed during the "Al Aqsa Flood" incursion. Large swathes of infrastructure and housing already lie in ruins and the Strip's 2.3 million inhabitants have been denied any possibility of flight by Israel's bombing and closure of the Rafah crossing into Egypt.

The US is now speaking of an agreement to allow a few thousand US citizens to leave Gaza into Egypt.

Israel's real aims have been given their most grotesque expression by Gallant himself, who stated at the weekend, "We are fighting human animals and we act accordingly... We are imposing a complete siege on Gaza. There will be no electricity, no food, no water, no fuel. Everything will be closed."

In a further fascist rant, he told IDF troops on the border Tuesday, "I have released all the restraints, we have [regained] control of the area, and we are moving to a full offense... You will have the ability to change the reality here. You have seen the prices [being paid], and you will get to see the change. Hamas wanted a change in Gaza; it will change 180 degrees from what it thought. They will regret this moment; Gaza will never go back to what it was."

It is now clear for all to see that Gantz and Lapid never represented any form of progressive alternative to dictatorship and authoritarianism, much less to war against the Palestinians, Iran and its allies. Their opposition to Netanyahu stemmed solely from their fear

that he and his far-right coalition partners were threatening Israel's global standing, above all in the Jewish community in the United States, by tearing down the state's thin democratic veneer and splintering an already deeply polarised society to the point of civil war.

No attempt was ever made to bring down his government, despite overwhelming opposition. Now, amid widespread criticisms of the disastrous impact of his policies, of military and security failures, and questions raised as to how much he knew of a potential action by Hamas, it is the "opposition" that has rushed to prop up Netanyahu and his far-right allies.

Gantz and company could only channel discontent behind an orgy of Israeli flag waving and professions of patriotism because the mass movement encompassing broad sections of the middle class, youth and workers never embraced a conscious opposition to the nationalist ideology of Zionism and did not make a defence of the Palestinians central to their demand for "democracy."

Bitter experience has proven that there can be no genuine democracy for anyone, Jews included, in a state based on religious exclusivism and the forcible expulsion and brutal repression of the Palestinians. The only outcome to such a project is fascism, war and genocide.

The Zionist protest movement has collapsed and cannot be revived. It is necessary now for Jewish workers who do not want to see the Middle East run with rivers of blood to take a stand against nationalism. They must adopt a socialist strategy based on the revolutionary unification of Jewish and Arab workers in a common struggle—beginning by workers in Israel taking a stand in defence of the Palestinians and against this filthy war.

Formulating such an opposition begins with the most farsighted workers and youth familiarising themselves with the historical and strategic lessons drawn by the world Trotskyist movement and its revolutionary socialist and internationalist alternative to the nightmare of Zionism.



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