

Hostages and families clash with Netanyahu

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Recently released hostages and families of hostages still held in Gaza vented their anger over Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's refusal to make the safety and release of the remaining 138 hostages a priority.

Emerging from a tense and angry meeting with members of the "war cabinet" on Tuesday afternoon, they denounced the government, saying it had no plan to secure the release of the remaining hostages and that its tactics were endangering their lives. Some reportedly told Netanyahu to step down, echoing the now daily calls for his resignation.

While 110 captives were returned to Israel, of whom 86 are Israelis and 24 are foreign citizens, under a seven-day ceasefire, an estimated 138 hostages remain, of whom 117 are men and 20 women. While 11 are foreign nationals or holding dual citizenship, the rest are Israelis, of whom most are thought to be soldiers.

Since the "operational pause" ended on Friday morning, Israel has resumed its savage aerial bombardment, targeting Khan Younis, Gaza's second city in the south, with a renewed ferocity ahead of an expected ground attack, as Israeli tanks approach the city from the north.

The UN said "some of the heaviest shelling in Gaza so far" took place between Sunday and Monday afternoon. On Monday, it was reported that Israel had prepared plans to flood Hamas's network of tunnels under the Gaza Strip with water pumped from the Mediterranean Sea.

Such a move, aimed at driving Hamas's fighters above ground, is to be carried out with no consideration for the safety of the remaining hostages, who have been cynically employed to justify the genocidal assault on Gaza. The truth is that Netanyahu and his fascist allies could not care less whether the hostages live or die. "Bring them home" is a useful slogan, but the real goal is mass murder and ethnic cleansing, whatever collateral damage this might involve.

Largely ignored by Netanyahu and his cabinet of war criminals, the families, who had only been granted one meeting since the October 7 incursion, had been demanding an urgent meeting to discuss what the

government was doing to secure the safe return of the remaining hostages. Netanyahu was finally forced to agree a meeting on Monday.

This followed a small rally—joined for the first time by families of some of the captives—on Saturday evening outside Israel's military headquarters in Tel Aviv to protest the resumption of the bombardment of Gaza they blamed for halting the release of the captives still held by Hamas. The protest was a breakoff from the regular gathering calling for the Netanyahu government to prioritise and secure the release of hostages, which takes no position against the slaughter in Gaza.

The meeting in Herzlyia, attended by Netanyahu, Defence Minister Yoav Gallant and opposition leader Benny Gantz, as well as Gal Hirsch, Netanyahu's coordinator for captives and missing persons, confirmed that the hostages are viewed as cannon fodder in the wider cause of Zionist expansionism "from the river to the sea," and American imperialism's domination of the resource-rich region.

The war cabinet kept the former hostages and families waiting 45 minutes after the arranged time. According to one of the attendees, "There was great disrespect at the entrance and there was a camera in the room, despite promises of a sterile meeting." She said it was "turbulent and tense." Their phones were taken away so they could not record what was said. Many families left in disgust even before the meeting started.

Netanyahu's pro-forma responses prompted a furious response, with people shouting and screaming that they wanted all the hostages brought back and that the prime minister should resign.

One of the former hostages explained that Netanyahu "didn't respond to the questions that were posed—instead, he read from prepared remarks on a piece of paper." She added that "Netanyahu stated that it wasn't feasible to bring everyone back, and questioned whether any of us thought that if such an opportunity was available, anyone would reject it." Some of the families were so outraged that they got up and left the meeting mid-stream.

Bashir Alziadana, one of Israel's Bedouin citizens whose brothers remain in captivity after two other relatives were released, said, "We asked if returning the captives is the primary goal now, and I didn't leave with a clear answer."

As reported by Channel 12, Sharon Cunio, one of the released hostages, whose husband David and other relatives are still held captive, told the war cabinet, "You are putting politics above returning the hostages." *Ha'aretz* reported that another hostage who had been held separately from her husband challenged Netanyahu, saying, "He was taken to the tunnels, and you talk about flooding the tunnels with seawater."

Another person said, "Gallant informed us that Hamas only responds to the use of force, insinuating that any cessation in the hostage release stages was purely Hamas' decision. The discussions were truly distressing, and those who attended were visibly upset about the divisions made between various groups and categories. Netanyahu's reply was curt, and he seemed detached from the conversation."

Gallant's response was met with anger from the mother of one of the hostages, who said: "I'm not prepared to sacrifice my son for your career... My son did not volunteer to die for the homeland. He was a civilian abducted from his home and his bed... Promise me that you'll get back my son and all the other hostages, alive."

While the Israeli media carried reports of the families' meeting with the war cabinet, they were low-key and headlined the hostages' mistreatment in line with government's attempts to portray the Palestinians in general and Hamas in particular as monsters to justify their extermination.

While some of the hostages reported that they had been denied adequate food and water and kept in horrible conditions underground and without access to the news, it was clear they were unaware of both Israel's denial of all supplies of food, fuel, power and even water and its carpet bombing of Gaza.

Further fueling the families' anger are the almost daily revelations indicating that the Netanyahu government possessed detailed advance knowledge of the Hamas battle plan for the October 7 attack, but took the decision to stand down the military and intelligence forces to create a pretext for its ethnic cleansing of Gaza.

On Monday, *Ha'aretz* reported that just hours before the October 7 attack, Israel's security forces, having received warnings that Hamas was trying to stage an attack inside Israel, could have prepared at least partially for the

possibility of an incursion from Gaza. Although the Gaza Division's Northern Brigade had approved the staging of the SuperNova music festival in the Kibbutz Re'im parking lot, was responsible for its security, and its commander was aware of the warnings, the military had not informed either the organisers or the thousands of party-goers about the threat or demanded that the event be shut down. Even the army units on duty in the area at the start of the Hamas attack were unaware that the music festival was taking place.

The organisers said that if they had received a warning even an hour beforehand, they could have evacuated the festival in time. The army's failure to warn the organisers led to the deaths of 360 attendees in a shoot-out between the Palestinian infiltrators and the Israeli military, and the capture of at least 40 hostages.

It also now appears that some of those in the know sought to take advantage of the inevitable military repercussions by selling their shares on the Tel Aviv stock exchange. Reuters news agency reported on a detailed study by two US professors, who wrote, "Days before the attack, traders appeared to anticipate the events to come."

They cited short interest in the MSCI Israel Exchange Traded Fund (ETF) that "suddenly, and significantly, spiked" on October 2, based on data from the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA). They added, "And just before the attack, short selling of Israeli securities on the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange (TASE) increased dramatically."



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