

Netanyahu fires Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, signalling escalation of war

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On Tuesday, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu fired Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, citing significant disagreements between them over how Israel's wars in Gaza and Lebanon should be managed.

Netanyahu said, "In the midst of a war, more than ever, full trust is required between the prime minister and the defence minister. Unfortunately, although in the first months of the campaign there was such trust and there was very fruitful work, over the past few months this trust has cracked between me and the defence minister."

Itamar Ben-Gvir, the fascistic National Security Minister and leader of the Jewish Power Party, applauded the move, saying that Netanyahu had "made the right decision" and that it was "impossible to achieve a total victory" as long as Gallant was Defence Minister. His comments express the government's intention to pursue an even more aggressive stance in Israel's wars on the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank and against Iran and its allies in Lebanon, Syria and Yemen.

Gallant is to be replaced by Foreign Minister Israel Katz, a member of Netanyahu's Likud Party who is publicly opposed to a Palestinian state in any form. Gideon Sa'ar, a former Likud member who split with Netanyahu to form his own party New Hope and joined his coalition last September, will become foreign minister.

Responding to calls from opposition leaders, anti-Netanyahu protest groups and hostages' families, thousands of Israelis took to the streets in protest. In Tel Aviv, they marched on the Ayalon Highway where the police blocked them. In Jerusalem, around 1,000 demonstrators gathered near Netanyahu's residence. Other protests took place in Haifa and Be'er Sheva.

That Netanyahu and Gallant were barely on speaking terms was well known. Netanyahu had tried to sack him in March 2023 over Gallant's opposition to his plans to neuter the judiciary and establish an authoritarian regime and had only backed down in the face of mass opposition to his move.

Gallant is a vicious war hawk, whose disagreements with

Netanyahu are over how best to assert Zionism's interests militarily. In the immediate aftermath of October 7 he infamously ordered a "complete siege of Gaza, no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed," saying, "We are fighting human animals." He had earlier warned Lebanon saying in August 2023 that Israel would not hesitate to attack Hezbollah and "return Lebanon to the Stone Age" if Israel was attacked. Days after the start of Israel's all-out war on Gaza, he threatened, "What we can do in Gaza, we can also do in Beirut."

In a speech on his sacking, Gallant declared, "The decision to dismiss me comes after a series of impressive achievements, unprecedented in the history of the State of Israel. Achievements of the IDF, the Shin Bet, the Mossad and the entire security system. We struck in Gaza and Lebanon, in Judea and Samaria. We eliminated terrorist leaders across the Middle East and, for the first time ever, carried out a precise and lethal strike in Iran, among other operations. I am proud of the security establishment's achievements. I trust the commanders and the soldiers. Israel's security has been and remains the mission of my life, and I am committed to it. Since October 7, I have focused on one and only one issue: victory in the war."

He said he had been fired over disagreements on three issues: the need to end an exemption from conscription for almost all ultra-orthodox Jews, the importance of a deal to free hostages still held by Hamas in Gaza, and the need for an immediate, all-encompassing commission of inquiry into the failings that allowed the Palestinian militant group's October 7, 2023 incursion, including into those of the Israel Defense Forces, the security services and the government, including Netanyahu.

The row over ending the ultra-orthodox Jews' (known as Haredim) exemption from compulsory military service if they are studying in religious seminaries (yeshivas) was placed centre stage by Gallant. It has roiled Netanyahu's coalition, amid increasing concern over the IDF's lack of manpower to prosecute war simultaneously on the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, Hezbollah in

Lebanon and against Iran and its allies in Syria and Yemen.

Gallant insisted that “everyone of conscription age must serve in the IDF and defend the State of Israel. This issue is no longer just a social matter; it is the most critical matter for our existence—the security of the State of Israel and the people living in Zion. In this campaign, we have lost hundreds of soldiers, we have suffered thousands of wounded and disabled, and the war is still continuing. The coming years will present us with complex challenges; wars are not over, and the sound of battle has not ceased... Under these circumstances, there is no choice—everyone must serve in the IDF and participate in the mission to defend the State of Israel.”

At least 772 soldiers and security personnel have lost their lives in the genocidal assault on Gaza and at least 12,000 more have been injured—while tens of thousands of reservists have been forced to do months of reserve duty, provoking anger among secular Israelis already alienated by the increasing dominance of the religious authorities over daily life.

Last June, the High Court ordered an end to the Haredi exemption by November this year, with Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara later ruling that draft evaders would not be entitled to government allowances and day-care subsidies. Just under half of ultra-Orthodox males do not work and rely on the allowances negotiated by the ultra-religious parties as the price for their support for keeping Netanyahu in power.

A government-supported bill to overturn the Attorney General’s ruling, and subsidize day care for children of full-time yeshiva students who dodge the draft at a cost of \$54 million—in return for the support of the religious parties for the 2025 budget—prompted uproar. When at least nine members of his own coalition members, including Gallant, threatened to vote down the bill, Netanyahu was forced to withdraw it.

Netanyahu has refused to consider any deal to rescue the remaining hostages, believed to number around one hundred, still held in Gaza. Last week, a court partially lifted a gag order on an investigation into the leaks over discussions with Hamas over a deal to release the hostages that were published last August by a fake journalist in Britain’s *Jewish Chronicle* and Germany’s *Bild* to undermine negotiations. Five people, including one of Netanyahu’s media advisers, have been arrested. The Hostages and Missing Families Forum expressed their “outrage and deep concern at discovering” that officials had “worked to undermine public support for the hostage deal.”

Gallant’s sacking comes amid increasing concerns within the military establishment that the war in Lebanon and Gaza has exhausted itself and risks heavy troop losses if the IDF is

required to continue the fighting. Sections of the military would prefer a deal to secure a ceasefire in Gaza to concentrate on the conflict with Lebanon and Iran.

Gallant had played a key role in discussions with the Biden administration, which has funded and directed Israel’s war of annihilation of the Palestinians in Gaza, and its war on Iran and its allies in Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. He was sacked on the day it became clear that Donald Trump had won the US presidency. Netanyahu congratulated Trump effusively for what he called “history’s greatest comeback” and called his campaign “a huge victory” and “a new beginning for America and a powerful recommitment to the great alliance between Israel and America.”

Trump, who draws significant support from the US evangelical Christian movement, which has long supported the Zionist project, has made contradictory remarks on the campaign trail about the war in Gaza, alternately condemning the anti-Israel protests while promising peace in Gaza and Lebanon to US voters of Arab origin. But Netanyahu calculates that he will be backed by Trump once he becomes president.

During his 2017-2021 term of office, Trump gave Netanyahu his full support—closing down the Palestine Liberation Organisation’s office in Washington; recognising Jerusalem as Israel’s capital; moving the US embassy to Jerusalem; recognising Israeli sovereignty over the occupied Syrian Golan Heights; withdrawing from the United Nations Human Rights Council; cutting \$200 million funding to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank; unilaterally abandoning the nuclear treaty with Iran; negotiating the Abraham Accords between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco; designating Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) a terrorist organisation; assassinating its leader General Qassem Soleimani; and strengthening US ties with the dictators in Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Recognising the threat posed by Trump’s call for Israel to end its wars in Gaza and Lebanon before he takes office in January, and sacking Gallant, Netanyahu is following Israel’s well-worn policy of “creating facts on the ground”—preparing for an even more aggressive military policy now so that the incoming Trump administration will have to support him.



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