

Israeli protests centre on Netanyahu's dismissal of Shin Bet chief amid new stage in Gaza genocide

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On Tuesday, Israel's prime minister and indicted war criminal Benjamin Netanyahu ordered the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) to resume the bombardment of Gaza in a renewed offensive aimed at the systematic extermination or displacement of Gaza's remaining Palestinian population. Some 400 Palestinians—nearly half of them children—were killed.

Itamar Ben-Gvir, the far-right leader of Jewish Power and former national security minister, has rejoined Netanyahu's coalition government after resigning in protest over the January ceasefire. This ensures the smooth passage of the budget, opposed by some of Netanyahu's ultra-orthodox partners, in a key vote later this month that would otherwise have precipitated early elections.

The resumption of the war took place as the US continued its days-long bombing of Yemen, part of its wider campaign against Iran and ultimately China.

Hours later, 40,000 Israelis took to the streets of Tel Aviv in one of the largest demonstrations for months. This was not centred on the resumption of a genocidal war but was planned earlier to oppose Netanyahu's plan to fire Shin Bet domestic security chief Ronen Bar.

Other rallies took place in Jerusalem and elsewhere, with further protests planned, including a long-term tent encampment outside the prime minister's official residence. Former military chief Gadi Eisenkot, who joined Netanyahu's security cabinet to prosecute the war on Gaza, and former prime minister and military chief Ehud Barak, joined the protests in Jerusalem Wednesday.

The families of hostages held in Gaza held demonstrations protesting against how the resumption of fighting would make it more difficult to secure the release of the 59 remaining hostages, less than half of whom are thought to be alive.

The main rally in Tel Aviv's Habima Square was organised by the group "Protective Wall for Israel"—a front for scores of former top officials from the military, police, the domestic and external intelligence services Shin Bet and Mossad.

The focus of the rally was Netanyahu, with protesters chanting, "The time has come to topple the dictator" amid a sea of Israeli flags. One of the speakers was former Mossad chief Tamir Pardo, who accused Netanyahu of being a "coward, charlatan and liar" and putting Israel on track to self-destruction. "We won't forgive and won't forget the abandonment of the country's defence," he added. "You, the suspect Benjamin Netanyahu, pose a clear and present danger to the nation's security."

Once again, as in the nine-months-long protests against Netanyahu's plans to neuter the judiciary and give his government unrestrained powers prior to October 7, the military and intelligence chiefs along with opposition leaders—who have all at some time served under

Netanyahu—are dominating over anti-war sentiment focused on the fate of the hostages, not the Palestinians. This opposition is politically centred on hostility to Netanyahu's fascistic government as a threat to the Israeli state.

The protest movement is not politically homogeneous. As they have progressed, many more placards have focused on calls for an end to the war on Gaza and the violence directed against them has been stepped up, with the police knocking Yair Golan, leader of the Democrats Party, to the ground and using water cannons to spray them with foul-smelling liquid.

Significantly, one protester denounced opposition National Unity party leader Benny Gantz for joining Netanyahu's coalition when he attempted to address Wednesday night's protest. Gantz later posted on X attacking "an unrepresentative handful of arsonists who hate Netanyahu more than they love the country." He lambasted them for calling him a traitor, insisting that "this handful of extremists are no less dangerous than the extremists on the other side, and I do not intend to surrender to them."

Nevertheless, the protests are led by individuals and tendencies no less committed than Netanyahu to the Zionist project and Israel's expansion at the Palestinians' expense. They have nothing to say about Netanyahu's total blockade of the enclave, preventing the entry of food, fuel and medication and shutting off Gaza's electricity supply, that started earlier this month. They have issued no statements opposing the resumption of the war. They are all complicit in Netanyahu's war crimes.

Their fear is that the turn to open dictatorship and the domination of religious forces over everyday life will jeopardise the interests of Israel's corporate and financial elite. They offer no alternative to the working class, both Jewish and Palestinian in Israel, and nothing whatsoever to the occupied territories. In essence, the difference between the two wings of the Israeli bourgeoisie rests upon which faction is best suited to defend Zionism.

The infighting between Netanyahu and the military-security forces

Netanyahu's announcement of his intention to fire Ronen Bar and take control of Shin Bet along with his expected call for the dismissal of Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara has reignited bitter factional warfare. The military and intelligence chiefs and their political allies have condemned his attack on Israeli "democracy" while both sides blame each other for the failings that led to the October 7 Palestinian cross-border attack, despite the mounting evidence that they all knew that such an attack was in the offing and deliberately stood down their forces to provide the pretext for an all-out war of annihilation on the Palestinians.

Control over Shin Bet would give Netanyahu's fascistic government almost unlimited access to information about its critics and rivals, as well as the ability to conduct investigations under the pretext of "state security". He is widely expected to choose a compliant replacement who will carry out his orders unquestioningly as he restarts the war in Gaza, escalates attacks on the Palestinians in the West Bank, carries out airstrikes against Syria and threatens Iran.

In announcing his decision in a video statement on Sunday, Netanyahu said that "ongoing distrust" made it impossible for him to continue to work with Bar, who has led Shin Bet since 2021. It follows his sacking last November of Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, the forced resignation of IDF Chief of the General Staff Herzl Halevi earlier this month and the resignation of several other senior military commanders and officials in the wake of October 7.

Netanyahu has presented himself as the victim of the military and intelligence establishment's failings leading up to October 7 and refused to set up a state commission of inquiry. He is accusing the judiciary and the intelligence services of orchestrating his ongoing corruption trial as part of a "left-wing coup" against him.

While Bar had indicated he too would resign over October 7, his dismissal comes in the wake of a series of incidents that have set the agency in conflict with Netanyahu.

A few days ago, Bar approved the opening of an inquiry into claims that three of Netanyahu's closest aides or former aides—Eli Feinstein, Israel Einhorn and Yonatan Urich—had leaked documents to the press (see also: "Britain's *Jewish Chronicle* exposed as propaganda outlet for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu") and received large sums of money from the Qatari government. Qatar has also handed over billions of dollars to Hamas as part of Netanyahu's bid to erode the standing of President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

Bar's predecessor as Shin Bet chief, Nadav Argaman, who had opposed Netanyahu's "strengthen Hamas" policy between 2014-2023, said in a television interview that he might reveal further accusations of wrongdoing by Netanyahu should he break the law. He, along with other Shin Bet chiefs, "know a lot," said Argaman. If "we think things we know jeopardize Israel's security, we will use them according to the law". Argaman is now subject to a police investigation for "criminal extortion".

While Shin Bet's internal investigation into October 7 largely accepted responsibility for its intelligence failings, it also highlighted Netanyahu's policy of maintaining "quiet" in Gaza and Qatar's funding of Hamas with Israel's encouragement and the Trump administration's support in 2019.

According to TV *Channel 12*, Shin Bet's investigation—whose findings and conclusions were also based on Hamas documentation found in Gaza tunnels, and on interrogations of Hamas detainees—makes clear that this policy was maintained "despite multiple warnings issued by the Shin Bet to the prime minister [ahead of the Hamas invasion] that Israel was facing a disaster". It concluded that "a thorough investigation of the nature of a state commission is needed."

Bar attacked Netanyahu, saying that his "expectation of a duty of personal loyalty, the purpose of which contradicts the public interest, is a fundamentally illegitimate expectation". He added, "The duty of loyalty placed on the Shin Bet is first and foremost to Israeli citizens. This underlies all my actions and decisions".

Some 151 former heads of Mossad and Shin Bet, department heads in both organisations and dozens of former IDF generals and officers signed a letter supporting Bar.

Attorney-General Beharav-Miara, whose position is under threat from Netanyahu, has insisted that Bar's dismissal might be "tainted by illegality and conflict of interest" and "a complete inversion of justice", making it necessary to subject the decision to a judicial review that could end up going to Israel's Supreme Court. Netanyahu rejected this, claiming

in a statement posted on X that it is under his "exclusive authority" to fire the Shin Bet chief and by suggesting otherwise, she is engaging in "dangerous heresy."

Bar's dismissal is subject to a flurry of legal injunctions by opposition figures. Yair Lapid, a former prime minister, claimed that Netanyahu's firing of Bar was motivated by the investigation into Netanyahu's aides' ties with Qatar and called it "a loss of composure and moral collapse". Yair Golan, chair of the Democrats Party formed out of a merger between the remnants of the Labour Party and Meretz, described Netanyahu's decision as a "declaration of war" on the state of Israel. "The greatest existential threat to Israel is not external but internal, and it is Netanyahu himself".

Netanyahu's response to the threat to his personal political position is to escalate Israeli aggression against the Palestinians to create the most right-wing climate possible and embolden his fascist supporters who have been among the loudest voices demanding the firing of Bar and Beharav-Miara.

A new perspective is needed

The political and constitutional crisis now engulfing Israel is not merely the product of Netanyahu's desire to remain in power and somehow avoid imprisonment for corruption via war, as the opposition leaders claim. It is the inevitable outcome of the Zionist project that established the state of Israel in 1948 through the forcible expulsion and brutal suppression of the Palestinians.

Such a state, based upon capitalism, was always incapable of developing a genuinely democratic society. It functions as a Middle East garrison for US imperialism, repeatedly at war with its Arab neighbours, in a state of perpetual war with the Palestinians and engaged in a covert war on Iran and its allies. It is dependent upon US military subventions and political and diplomatic support, without which it could not protect Washington's interests in the resource-rich Middle East.

Pursuing an expansionist "Greater Israel" policy, it rests ever more firmly on the right-wing settler population in the Occupied Territories. It has acute levels of social inequality, among the highest in the world—42 Israelis were featured in Forbes' World Billionaires list for 2024—with a total wealth of \$205 billion, up 7.8 percent on last year's list.

These are the conditions that have paved the way for Netanyahu and his fascistic government. As in the US, Europe and elsewhere, the turn by Israel's ruling elite toward dictatorship and war is rooted fundamentally in the extreme growth of social inequality and the escalation of war that are the twin products of capitalism in its death agony.

It will not be halted by substituting Israel's "opposition" leaders for Netanyahu—they will do everything in their power to prevent any action that threatens the Zionist state. It can only be halted by unifying Palestinian and Jewish workers and developing the escalating class struggle and opposition to war throughout the world into a conscious political movement for socialism.



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