

## Removal of Israel's Defence Minister Gallant Reveal Fissures within Israel

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### Introduction

On 05 Nov, Israel's Prime Minister (PM) Benjamin Netanyahu handed a letter of dismissal, which takes formal effect after 48 hours, to his Defence Minister Yoav Gallant. Reportedly, it is over differences on the prosecution of the war in Gaza which has come at a crucial moment when Israel is fighting on multiple fronts. PM Netanyahu, who announced the decision in a video statement, said "Significant gaps on handling the war" emerged between him and Gallant.

"More than ever, at the height of a war, complete trust is needed between the Prime Minister and the Defence Minister", PM Netanyahu said in the video statement. "In recent months, that trust between the Defense Minister and I was damaged".[\[1\]](#)

The move sparked protests across the country, including a large gathering near the PM's residence in Jerusalem, as the 65-year-old Gallant is viewed increasingly as an internal opponent to the PM, and he has been a moderate voice within the government on security issues. Large crowds opposing Gallant's dismissal blocked traffic and lit bonfires on a major highway in Tel Aviv. A group representing the families of people taken hostage by Hamas also condemned Netanyahu's dismissal of Gallant, calling it a continuation of efforts to "Torpedo" a release deal.[\[2\]](#)

### The Differences

The three main disagreements between PM Netanyahu and Gallant are the conscription of ultra-Orthodox Jews, a deal to release hostages and Gallant's call for a State Commission of Inquiry into the security failures surrounding the attack Hamas led on Israel on 07 Oct 2023.[\[3\]](#)

Gallant and PM Netanyahu clashed over the conscription of ultra-Orthodox Jews. Gallant has said that "My firm stance is that every military-age person must be enlisted. They must serve in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and defend the State of Israel. This is no longer just a social issue. It is a paramount issue for our existence and future".[\[4\]](#)

The 'Discriminatory, corrupt law' on Haredi enlistment must not be allowed to pass, he warned, referring to legislation being pushed by Haredi parties—United Torah Judaism and Shas—that would preserve the exemption of ultra-Orthodox males from military service, after the High Court ruled earlier this year that there was no longer any legal framework allowing the state to refrain from drafting them.[\[5\]](#)

The coalition depends on the support of the two ultra-Orthodox parties. Gallant was aware that the standing army and the reserves are under extraordinary strain, and that the IDF needs all the recruits it can get, as Israeli casualties in Gaza and Lebanon mount was leading the opposition to it. It is felt that if Gallant had succeeded in advancing his position, it could have put PM Netanyahu's coalition at risk.

Gallant was pushing for a ceasefire deal in Gaza that would secure the release of hostages, and his dismissal removes the main proponent in the Israeli government for such an agreement. He was arguing, with the support of the nation's Security Chiefs, that Israel should be pursuing a wide arrangement that would end the fighting in the North, where Hezbollah has been greatly degraded, and in Gaza, where Hamas has been largely destroyed.[\[6\]](#)

Gallant has urged prioritising the return of the 97 hostages still held by Hamas, even at the price of ending the war, arguing that Israel could, and likely would, return to further tackle Hamas in the future. He said there was a “Moral obligation and responsibility to bring our kidnapped sons and daughters back home”.

“This is achievable but involves painful compromises that Israel can bear, and the IDF can deal with”, Gallant said. “There is and will not be any atonement for abandoning the captives. It will be a mark of Cain on the forehead of Israeli society and those leading this mistaken path”.[\[7\]](#)

Prime Minister Netanyahu approved a temporary ceasefire deal in November 2023, resulting in the release of 105 Israeli captives in exchange for 240 Palestinian prisoners. However, since then, he has reportedly blocked subsequent ceasefire proposals, potentially to prolong the war in Gaza and, as analysts suggest, to bolster his political career.[\[8\]](#)

The Hostages and Missing Families Forum called on the incoming Defence Minister to “Express an explicit commitment to the end of the war and to carry out a comprehensive deal for the immediate return of all the abductees”.

Addressing Israel’s military officers in July, Gallant [called for an investigation](#) into the vulnerabilities and failures in government, military and security circles that allowed the 07 Oct attack to happen. He acknowledged that the inquiry must investigate him, PM Netanyahu as well as the culpability of the internal security agency Shin Bet. He had said, “I have said and I repeat, I am responsible for the security establishment over the past two years — for the successes and the failures. Only sunlight and a truthful investigation will allow us to learn and build our strength to face future challenges”. PM Netanyahu has [resisted all efforts](#) to form a State Commission of Inquiry, saying the investigation must wait until after the war. [\[9\]](#)

Gallant, a member of PM Netanyahu’s Likud party, has been the Defence Minister since 2022, and also [clashed with the PM over legislation](#), seeking the overhaul of the Israeli judiciary and [proposals for the future administration of Gaza](#). He wanted PM Netanyahu to declare publicly that Israel has no plans to take over civilian and military rule in Gaza.

In May, Gallant warned that the lack of a post-war plan for governing Gaza could force Israel into a permanent military occupation, costing it “In blood and many victims, for no purpose”. His remarks were seen as being critical of the PM. In August, Gallant said that PM Netanyahu’s declared goal of ‘Total Victory’ over Hamas in Gaza is ‘Nonsense’. It is clear that the two shared a divisive relationship.[\[10\]](#)

Israel Katz, the Foreign Minister who has been named as the new Defence Minister, is seen as hawkish, has little security experience, but is an ally of the PM, and is unlikely to stand in the way of PM Netanyahu’s approach to ceasefire talks, which many say have undermined the possibility of a deal. He is also expected to align with the PM when it comes to deciding how long to fight in Lebanon and how to respond to threats from Iran. The appointment, however, requires the approval of the government and then, the Knesset.[\[11\]](#)

### **Seen as an Important Conduit with the United States**

In June, relations between Israel’s PM Netanyahu and the United States (US) President Joe Biden appeared to fray after the PM [accused the US](#) of withholding weapons. Gallant then went and met President Biden, and affirmed his [commitment to a ceasefire deal](#) and emphasised Israel’s [appreciation of the US support](#). Gallant was seen as a critical interlocutor between the

US and Israel. It is also reported that he spoke to the US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin very often.

Bob Woodward, the well-known journalist, has been quoted recently describing the deep distrust between the Netanyahu and Biden administrations, saying that President Biden had told his close aides that “18 of the 19 people who work for Netanyahu are liars”. Israeli media have speculated that Gallant was the sole Israeli official who was still trusted in Washington.<sup>[RS1]</sup> <sup>[12]</sup>

On 04 Nov, Antony Blinken, the US Secretary of State, called Gallant to discuss the situation in Gaza and Lebanon.

The White House’s National Security Council avoided directly criticising PM Netanyahu for the removal of Gallant. It said that Gallant “Has been an important partner on all matters related to the defence of Israel” and pledged to “Work Collaboratively” with the next Israeli Defence Minister.<sup>[13]</sup>

## Conclusion

This is not an easy time for Israel. The Leader of the Opposition, Yair Lapid has termed PM Netanyahu’s sacking of Gallant “An act of madness”. Israel is fighting against Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, and bracing for [a possible Iranian attack](#) in a cycle of retaliatory strikes. It is also conducting raids to try to root out Palestinian militants in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Apart from this, there are strikes by Houthis and an enlargement of the conflict by Israel attacking targets in Syria.

However, PM Netanyahu considers that his ultra-Orthodox and far-right partners can be accommodated as his most irritating critic will be gone, and his hold on power will be secure for the foreseeable future.

Unfortunately, the PM has removed an experienced ex-General, an independent thinker dedicated to the security of Israel, who sought to strengthen the army despite the potential political cost. Highly regarded, his ouster may result in undermining military competence, unity and morale, and raise new concerns about the oversight of the army during a conflict. It also exposes the internal cohesion within Israel at a time when it is engaged in a prolonged and complex war on several fronts.

No wonder, Israel’s President Isaac Herzog called on leaders to act with great responsibility. “The last thing Israel needs right now is an upheaval and a rupture in the middle of the war. Israel’s security must be above all considerations”.

## Endnotes

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<sup>[1]</sup> McKernan, B. (2024, November 6). Benjamin Netanyahu fires defence minister Yoav Gallant, triggering protests across Israel. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/05/benjamin-netanyahu-fires-israeli-defence-minister-yoav-gallant>

[2] Netanyahu fires Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant in surprise announcement, France 24, 05 November 2024 <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20241105-%F0%9F%94%B4-israel-s-netanyahu-fires-defence-minister-gallant>

[3] Israel's Netanyahu Fires Defense Minister, Citing 'Gaps' in Approach to War, New York Times, 05 November 2024 <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/05/world/middleeast/netanyahu-fires-gallant.html>

[4] ibid

[5] Lazar Berman & Sam Sokol, Netanyahu fires Gallant, saying disagreements and lack of mutual trust helped the enemy, The Times of Israel , 06 November 2024 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-fires-gallant-says-disagreements-lack-of-mutual-trust-helped-the-enemy/>

[6] McKernan, B. (2024, November 6). Benjamin Netanyahu fires defence minister Yoav Gallant, triggering protests across Israel. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/05/benjamin-netanyahu-fires-israeli-defence-minister-yoav-gallant>

[7] Full text of Gallant speech: There will be no atonement for abandoning the hostages, The Times of Israel, 05 November 2024. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-of-gallant-speech-there-will-be-no-atonement-for-abandoning-the-hostages/>

[8] David Gritten, Netanyahu putting politics before Gaza deal, dead hostage's daughter says, BBC, 21 Aug 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjdkyyn1lr4o>

[9] Israel's Netanyahu Fires Defense Minister, Citing 'Gaps' in Approach to War, New York Times, 05 November 2024 <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/05/world/middleeast/netanyahu-fires-gallant.html>

[10] ibid

[11] ibid

[12] Vikrant Singh, Joe Biden said '18 of the 19 people who work for Netanyahu are liars', WION, 16 Oct 2024, <https://www.wionews.com/world/joe-biden-said-18-of-the-19-people-who-work-for-netanyahu-are-liars-in-major-revelation-767945>

[13] Singh, Maj Gen Jagatbir. 2024. "Opinion | Defence Minister Gallant's removal exposes deepening fault lines within Israel." Firstpost, November 7, 2024. <https://www.firstpost.com/opinion/opinion-defence-minister-gallants-removal-exposes-deepening-fault-lines-within-israel-13833066.html>.

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