

# [***Israeli political tensions boil over, revealing new danger for Netanyahu***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C2H-0VG1-DY7V-G0BX-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Divisions and disagreements [*within the Israeli cabinet*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/19/middleeast/eisenkot-netanyahu-israel-war-politics-gaza-intl/index.html) on the conduct and priorities of the war against Hamas have simmered since the onset of the crisis.

Now they've boiled over, revealing a new level of public vitriol - as well as [*an ultimatum from one of three members*](https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-05-18-24/h_323a8f114cf162c9f37ecd2400e7bfe0) of the war cabinet - as the seven-month long conflict potentially enters a new phase.

On Saturday Benny Gantz, the leader of the National Unity Party, who joined the war cabinet after Hamas' attack in October, demanded by June 8 the adoption of a six-point plan. That plan would secure the return of Israeli hostages, the demobilization of Hamas and the demilitarization of the Gaza Strip.

It would also lead to the creation of an alternative government for Gaza, "an American-European-Arab-Palestinian administration" that would "lay the foundation for a future alternative that is not Hamas or [Mahmoud] Abbas," the President of the Palestinian Authority.

The Gantz plan would also ensure the return of residents displaced by attacks from Hezbollah, the Iran-backed militia in Lebanon, and measures to [*ensure ultra-orthodox Jews can be drafted*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/24/middleeast/israel-gallant-ultra-orthodox-conscription-opposition-intl/index.html) into the military just like any other citizen. That has been a red line for the religious right in the Israeli cabinet.

In an unveiled swipe at [*Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/05/middleeast/netanyahu-icc-warrants-israel-intl-latam/index.html), Gantz, who is widely seen to be a leading contender to be the next Israeli leader, added that "personal and political considerations have begun to penetrate into the holy of holies of Israel's security."

"If you choose to lead the nation into the abyss, we will withdraw from the government, turn to the people, and form a government that can bring about a real victory."

"Unity cannot be a fig leaf for stagnation in the management of the campaign," Gantz added.

Within hours the accusations were flying, laying bare the fissures in Israeli ***politics*** and the personal animosities that pervade the government.

The prime minister's office shot back. "The conditions set by Benny Gantz are washed-up words whose meaning is clear: the end of the war and a defeat for Israel, the abandonment of most of the hostages, leaving Hamas intact and the establishment of a Palestinian state," it said in a statement.

One far-right member of the cabinet, National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir, said Gantz was "a small leader and big trickster, who, from the first moment of joining the government has chiefly been trying to dismantle it."

He added: "Whoever offered the ultra-Orthodox agreements on a conscription law in exchange for the dissolution of the government and now chants slogans about responsibility, is a hypocrite and a liar."

From a very different point of view, opposition leader Yair Lapid said Gantz should act now.

"Enough with the press conferences, enough with the empty ultimatums, get out! If you weren't sitting in the government, we would already be in the post Netanyahu and Ben Gvir era," he said.

Gantz's broadside did not come in isolation. Last week, the third member of the war cabinet, [*Defense Minister Yoav Gallant*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/15/middleeast/israel-gaza-yoav-gallant-intl-latam/index.html), spoke of decisions that he said should have been made at the start of the war. He also said: "I will not agree to the establishment of Israeli military rule in Gaza. Israel must not establish civilian rule in Gaza."

Illusion of unity shattered

It's against this background of internecine warfare that Israeli troops continue to fight in Gaza, unsure of how their mission will end and of any plan for the day after the guns fall silent.

Gantz himself made reference to this Saturday, saying that "while the Israeli soldiers show supreme bravery on the front - some of the people who sent them into battle behave with cowardice and irresponsibility."

Israeli commentators Sunday said the illusion of unity within the cabinet that had been fostered in the early phase of the conflict had been shattered.

The Jerusalem Post reported Sunday that the comments were remarkable in that for the first time, "Gantz publicly accused the prime minister of prioritizing his political survival over the nation's interests. For the first time, he set a clear deadline for remaining in the government."

Writing in Haaretz, Anshel Pfeffer said that whoever had written Gantz's speech "did nothing more than recycle the dozens of leaks on the divisions within the war cabinet over the past few months."

Pfeffer, author of the unauthorized biography "Bibi: The Turbulent Life and Times of Benjamin Netanyahu," says the bottom line, at the end of a week of political turmoil, is that "of the three war cabinet members...two have now publicly accused the third member, Netanyahu, of not having a strategy for a war that has been ongoing for seven and a half months."

Despite all this, Pfeffer and other analysts contend that the status quo may persist, because for Netanyahu, the presence of Gantz and Gallant in the three-man war cabinet provides protection from right-wing members of the larger cabinet.

Some of them want Israel to rebuild settlements in Gaza and a much more aggressive approach in the north. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who wants the Israeli military to take control of Gaza after Hamas is liquidated, on Sunday also called for Israeli forces to enter and establish a security zone in southern Lebanon should Hezbollah rocket attacks continue.

On Saturday night, Gantz told Netanyahu: "I look into your eyes tonight and I tell you - the choice is in your hands."

He said the moment of truth had arrived.

Has it? Over the next three weeks, compromise may yet keep the war cabinet intact. And Gantz is not part of the broader coalition government, which means his potential withdrawal from the war cabinet would not automatically trigger a collapse of Netanyahu's government.

It would, however, leave the prime minister more exposed to the demands of far-right- members of his cabinet.

All this comes at a time of daily protests in Israel, from those calling for immediate elections to those demanding that securing the hostages' release should be the absolute priority, and those wanting an end to further humanitarian aid being allowed into Gaza. And at a time when the Israeli military is fighting in north, central and southern Gaza, and preparing for what may be the toughest phase of the campaign to date.

Analysis by Tim Lister

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