

# [***Israel's repudiation of a deal with Hamas draws fury from hostages' families***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B95-18K1-DY7V-G004-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** By Ivana Kottasova and Adi Koplewitz CNN

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**Body**

Tel Aviv (CNN) &#8212; The deadly Hamas attacks of October 7 united a shocked, grieving Israel behind its leaders, burying at a stroke the divisions that had riven the country for years. Four months into the war and with hopes for a new [*deal to return Israeli hostages from Gaza in doubt*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/07/middleeast/hamas-counterproposal-israel-pullout-ceasefire-hostages-intl/index.html), those divisions are re-emerging - and Israelis are increasingly ready to speak their mind.

Many, including the families of those hostages still held by Hamas, direct their anger toward Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who dismissed the terms of a ceasefire and hostage deal put forward by Hamas in forthright terms.

"Surrendering to Hamas' delusional demands will only ask for another disaster for the State of Israel, another massacre," Netanyahu said, adding that continuing military pressure was a "necessary condition" for Israel's safety.

Survivors of the October 7 terror attack and the families of hostages were furious at the uncompromising repudiation of a deal that - ultimately - could have resulted in the return of all the remaining hostages in Gaza.

Adina Moshe, 72, who was [*released during a ceasefire deal*](https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2023/12/world/hostage-israel-hamas-deal-dg/index.html) agreed in November, was among [*five former hostages*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/17/middleeast/freed-israeli-hostage-says-held-in-gaza-hospital-intl/index.html) who spoke out against Netanyahu on Wednesday.

"Mr. Netanyahu, I'm turning to you. It's all in your hands. You are the one. And I'm really afraid that if you continue the way you do, the destruction of Hamas, there won't be any hostages to release," Moshe said at a press conference for the Hostages and Missing Families Forum. Moshe's words carried power - she was kidnapped by Hamas from Kibbutz Nir Oz and held hostage in Gaza for seven weeks. Her husband David (Sa'id) Moshe was murdered by Hamas.

Another former hostage, Sahar Kalderon, 16, said she was grateful to the government for bringing her back, but asked: "But what about my father who is abandoned anew every day, uncertain if he will live or die?"

"Bring him back, do not make me lose faith in our country a second time," the teenager said.

Protesters back in the streets

As the war drags on, the emergency unity government that was established after the attacks is looking increasingly fragile, with disagreements mounting over Netanyahu's strategy for getting hostages home, the future of Gaza and attempts to recruit more soldiers.

The families of the hostages held in Gaza have emerged as a leading voice and they attract huge support among Israelis. For months, they mostly held off from criticizing the government and stayed away from ***politics***. But this has now changed.

Israel was consumed by months of weekly anti-government protests before the Hamas attack - October 7 was meant to be the 44th consecutive Saturday of mass demonstrations against Netanyahu's controversial plans to overhaul the judicial system.

The proposed reform would have weakened the power of the courts and given the government more control over the appointment of judges. The opposition and the protesters criticized the plan as an attempted power grab by Netanyahu.

Lital Shochat Chertow, from Israel Democracy HQ, the group that organizes the protests, said that most Israelis found themselves in "survival mode" after the October 7 attacks and that everyone's focus immediately shifted from political protest to aid. There was a sense that it was not the time to oppose the government.

There were protests and gatherings, but they were apolitical and solemn in nature. Most were held to express solidarity with the hostages and their families, to call for more action to bring them back, and to honor the victims.

Political protesters like Shochat Chertow were keeping themselves away from these events.

"And before we even dared to think of going out and protesting, we had bereaved families approaching us and saying 'we lost our son or daughter, our entire family, and we haven't heard from the government. They didn't come to the funeral, they didn't come to the shiva, we didn't get a letter, nothing,'" Shochat Chertow said. Shiva is the traditional seven-day Jewish mourning period.

Shochat Chertow spoke to CNN as thousands of people started to gather for an anti-government protest in central Tel Aviv on Saturday. It was the tenth consecutive week of protests since they restarted in early December.

Crowds filled the square outside Israel's national theater, waving flags and carrying posters that called Netanyahu "Crime Minister," a play on his official title referencing the fact that the [*prime minister is currently on trial*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/04/world/netanyahu-corruption-trial-resumes/index.html) for charges of fraud, breach of trust and bribery.

The protesters have urged the government to call new elections as soon as possible - the first time such a demand was made since the terror attacks. These anti-government protests are still strictly separate from the hostage families' events, which tend to take place just down the road at what has become known as the Hostage Plaza. But more people are coming to both.

Doron Shabtai, who lives with his family in [*Sderot, a town close to the Gaza Strip*](https://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2023/10/08/sderot-israel-idf-hamas-firefight-aftermath-robertson-cnntmw-vpx.cnn) that has for years been subjected to frequent rocket attacks by Hamas, told CNN he felt abandoned.

Hamas militants stormed the town during the October 7 attacks, killing 18 police officers and some 20 civilians. At one point, they were on Shabtai's roof, he said. The vast majority of the town's residents were evacuated following the attacks, but the government is now trying to convince them to return - something Shabtai said he was not prepared to do since rockets are still targeting Sderot on a regular basis.

On Monday, Shabtai spent five hours traveling to Jerusalem with a small group of people to protest outside the government building.

Speaking to CNN at the protest, he said he believed the evacuation of people from harm's way underscored Israel's moral supremacy over Hamas.

"In Gaza, we see a lot of use of civilians for military purposes (as human shields); in Israel, the government actually paid me to find shelter," he said.

Like hundreds of thousands of Israelis, Shabtai serves in the reserves and has spent the past three months fighting in Gaza. He is now being sent up north to Israel's border with Lebanon.

The idea of sending his wife and two young children back to Sderot is a non-starter. "To put it gently, I really disagree with that. I feel like my government is trying to bring us back before they can make sure it's secure - because of the financial cost (of housing the families elsewhere)," he said.

Shochat Chertow said this is exactly why the protesters are back in the streets.

"This is the worst crisis and the families (of the victims of the attack) have been abandoned and they still have no support from the government," she said.

"They say 'it's war time, we don't do ***politics*** and we don't protest during wartime' but the government is doing ***politics***," she said pointing to a recent controversy over the state budget, which saw Netanyahu allocating billions of shekels to provide monthly payments to ultra-orthodox Jews who study the Torah full-time, instead of investing money into aiding survivors of the October 7 attacks and soldiers returning from the war.

The government has left the criticism largely unanswered. Netanyahu has held a couple of meetings with representatives of the hostage families, but most were reported to be hostile and ended up with the families being angry with him.

The latest political row consuming the country is over a proposal by the government to extend the length of both the mandatory military service and time served in the reserves for Israeli citizens.

At the same time, the government is insisting on keeping the exemption for Haredi ultra-orthodox men, who do not have to serve in the military - although they can join, if they choose to, and more have been signing up since the October 7 attacks.

The minority ultra-Orthodox community is a key electorate for Netanyahu, which makes the controversial exception a vital issue for him.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid, from the centrist Yesh Atid party, said on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, that the proposed law would be a "betrayal of IDF soldiers."

"It's not 'together we win', and it's not 'we fight together'. It's young men and women who will serve the country and risk their lives, unlike those who got themselves exempt," he said.

But even as some call for a new election - which would be Israel's sixth in just four years - many are not prepared to ditch Netanyahu. The prime minister, known as "Bibi" in Israel, can rely on a shrinking, but sizable number of voters who would vote for him no matter what.

And even some of those who didn't vote for him before see him as the only possibility.

Evyatar Cohen, a law student, said that while he is no big fan of Netanyahu, and has never voted for him, he doesn't see another option.

"He is our best alternative right now. As a rational person, I have to choose between alternatives. As a right-wing person, I of course, want someone who would be more aggressive, who will have no tolerance against terrorists... but he is the best real alternative that we have right now."

CNN's Amy Cassidy and Lauren Kent in London and Lauren Izso in Tel Aviv contributed to this report.

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