

# [***Gideon Sa'ar: the Israeli Version of Liz Cheney | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BP8-5DH1-JBR6-917W-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** Gideon Sa'ar, who resigned last week as a minister in Israel's government, is the Israeli version of former Republican Rep. Liz Cheney.

**Body**

Gideon Sa'ar, who resigned last week as a minister in Israel's government, is the Israeli version of former [*Republican*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republican?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) Rep. [*Liz Cheney*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/liz-cheney?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships).

Like Cheney, Sa'ar comes from the conservative wing of his erstwhile political party—the Likud—which he left in December 2020 because he could no longer stomach the moral corruption and dishonesty of the man who had hijacked the party and reforged it into a personality cult.

Like Cheney, Sa'ar is no political lightweight. His credentials include stints as minister of education, the interior, and justice, and as deputy prime minister.

Like Cheney, Sa'ar holds and expresses hardline political views. For instance, he is adamantly opposed to a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and has argued against offering territorial concessions to Palestinian leaders who, he maintained, were uninterested in serious peace negotiations.

He has also urged the government to take more forceful military action in Gaza which, in his opinion, would have shortened the war. "I warned at a very early stage that we do not have all the time in the world," he said in a recent [*interview*](https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-03-29/ty-article/.premium/apocalypse-now-netanyahu-has-nothing-left-to-offer-but-endless-lies-and-temper-tantrums/0000018e-86a8-d9dd-a39f-ceea6d9d0000). "That we must end it as quickly as possible. Some thought that, after a few months, the international community would no longer be interested in what was happening in Gaza. I thought otherwise."

And yet, Sa'ar is anything but the conventional Israeli right winger. More often than not, he wears a suit and tie, and he does not speak in canned jingoistic sound bites. He is comfortable with the cosmopolitanism of Israel's largest city­—in a classic 2020 [*profile*](https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2020-12-09/ty-article/.highlight/gideon-saar-netanyahu-could-be-ousted-likud-israel-election/0000017f-dc49-d856-a37f-fdc9dfeb0000?utm_source=App_Share&utm_medium=iOS_Native), Haaretz's Anshel Pfeffer contrasted his "dual persona" as a "cool secular Tel Avivian" and a "pro-settler nationalist." Sa'ar is a policy wonk who once upon a time worked for two leftist media outlets. As a child, he accompanied his father, then a kibbutz doctor, to home visits with Israel's founding father David Ben-Gurion.

Also, like Cheney, and like the equally conservative former Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, for that matter, Sa'ar is committed to a political conservatism rooted in principled ideology as opposed to blind, knee-jerk allegiance or subservience to the strutting tinpot caudillo at the core of the aforementioned personality cult.

I have never met either Gideon Sa'ar or Liz Cheney and lest anyone erroneously think that I am aligned with them politically, let me make clear that I disagree with both on just about every issue of consequence. I nevertheless respect the two of them for their ​integrity and for their refusal to compromise that integrity.

Sa'ar, who stands ideologically considerably to Netanyahu's right, is also a rarity in another respect: he is a politician guided by a moral compass rather than expediency or self-interest. "Sa'ar's views scare me," [*wrote*](https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2021-04-01/ty-article-opinion/.premium/gideon-saar-is-a-courageous-man/0000017f-dee7-df62-a9ff-def7306e0000?utm_source=App_Share&utm_medium=iOS_Native) journalist Ravit Hecht back in 2021. "He's the man who wanted to close grocery stores on Shabbat. He's the man who sees [the West Bank city of] Hebron, where an unruly, extremist Jewish minority imposes a reign of terror on the Palestinian majority, as an Israeli city no less legitimate than Tel Aviv. He's the man who, as interior minister, presided over the establishment of [an] open detention facility for asylum seekers, then enthusiastically defended it and even wanted to expand it."

And yet, Hecht continued, she considered Sa'ar to be "the bravest politician in our political world," pointing to Sa'ar's unequivocal rejection of an offer to enter a rightwing government headed by Netanyahu.

"On the same day that he and his people are once again spreading false, delusional conspiracy theories about me and about the president of the state, Netanyahu is asking me to join him," Sa'ar declared on that occasion. "My answer is that I'll keep my promise to the voters. I will not join a government headed by Netanyahu and I won't support him. Netanyahu's continuance in power harms Israel because he prefers his personal welfare to the country's welfare."

Haaretz columnist Yossi Verter [*reminds us*](https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-03-29/ty-article/.premium/apocalypse-now-netanyahu-has-nothing-left-to-offer-but-endless-lies-and-temper-tantrums/0000018e-86a8-d9dd-a39f-ceea6d9d0000) of a number of out-of-the-box proposals that Sa'ar made while still a minister without portfolio in the present government but which were not given serious consideration. Among them was allowing [*Hamas*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/hamas?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and Palestinian Islamic Jihad military leaders to leave Gaza for political exile in any country of their choice in return for the release of hostages which, he argues, "would mean ending the war and preventing the loss of life that would incur. For me, it would also be possible to include a certain number of [Palestinian] prisoners, who we would release on the condition that they too would leave the country. Even if the proposal was rejected, at least Israel would have placed something on the table that would have received support from the world."

Another unheeded Sa'ar suggestion, made when it became obvious that a humanitarian catastrophe was unfolding as a consequence of the war, was for Israel to proactively propose the establishment of "a special humanitarian administration," with Israel working together—rather than at cross-purposes—with the international community to provide food, water, medicine, and other humanitarian assistance into Gaza.

Unlike Netanyahu, who relishes sticking his fingers into the eyes of allies to show how tough he is, Sa'ar understands that Israel cannot allow itself to be isolated on the word stage. "The humanitarian issue is creating a serious problem for us—both in terms of image and real damage to the accomplishments of the war and achieving its objectives," Sa'ar explains, which is why he believes that Israel should "have taken the initiative. Said to the world: Come, let's work together!"

All of which is not to suggest that Sa'ar is either a political moderate or a likely future prime minister—he and his party may not even get enough public support in the next elections to make it into the next Knesset on their own—but then again, Liz Cheney was defeated in her congressional primary by a MAGA-endorsed challenger. That didn't lessen her continued influence on the U.S. political scene.

Benny Gantz, the centrist former chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces and former defense minister is still Netanyahu's most likely successor if and when the present governing coalition implodes. Gantz remains one of the responsible adults (together with Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and another former IDF chief of staff, observer Gadi Eisenkot) in the Israeli war cabinet.

The reality, however, is that Israel is not a left-leaning country, certainly not after Oct. 7. Which means that in order to be viable, any post-Netanyahu Israeli government (may it come speedily and in our days) will have to include political conservatives such as Sa'ar, former Prime Minister [*Naftali Bennett*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/naftali-bennett?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), and/or former Likud Knesset member and communications and education minister Limor Livnat. And Israel could do far worse than having Gideon Sa'ar inside that particular tent, just as the U.S. body ***politic*** would benefit considerably from Liz Cheney's return to the corridors of power.

*Menachem Z. Rosensaft is adjunct professor of law at Cornell Law School and lecturer-in-law at Columbia Law School. He is the author of* Poems Born in Bergen-Belsen *(Kelsay Books, 2021) and of the forthcoming* Burning Psalms *(Ben Yehuda Press, 2025).*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2370881/gideon-sa-ar.jpg)

**Graphic**

Gideon Sa-ar

JALAA MAREY/AFP via Getty Images

Gideon Sa'ar attends a campaign event for the new center-right "National Unity Party," in the Druze village of Hurfeish in northern Israel on Oct. 11, 2022.

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