

Israel-Hamas war

Benjamin Netanyahu accuses defence minister of 'anti-Israel narrative'

Latest tensions between cabinet colleagues come after Yoav Gallant says idea of total victory over Hamas is 'gibberish'



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, left, and defence minister Yoav Gallant have been at odds more than once over the war in Gaza © Abir Sultan/REUTERS

James Shotter in Jerusalem YESTERDAY

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has accused defence minister Yoav Gallant of adopting an “anti-Israel narrative”, after Gallant dismissed the idea of achieving total victory over Hamas as “gibberish”.

The exchange of barbs is the latest sign of tensions between the two men over the conduct of Israel’s 10-month-long [war with Hamas](#) in Gaza, and came just days before US-led talks to broker a deal to end the fighting and release the hostages still held by Hamas were due to resume.

Netanyahu has repeatedly promised the war will continue until Israel has achieved “total victory” over Hamas, and in recent weeks has steadily hardened the Jewish state’s stance in talks over a ceasefire, putting him at odds with his security chiefs who believe a deal would be in Israel’s interest.

Gallant has also frequently stressed the need for an agreement, and in a parliamentary hearing on Monday branded those promising total victory “heroes with [war] drums”, according to reports in Israeli media.

This sparked an angry response from [Netanyahu](#), whose office issued a statement saying Gallant should direct his criticism at Hamas leader [Yahya Sinwar](#) who was “the

only obstacle to a hostage deal”.

“Israel has only one choice: to achieve total victory, which means eliminating Hamas’s military and governing capabilities, and releasing our hostages,” Netanyahu’s office said.

“This is the clear directive of Prime Minister Netanyahu and the Security Cabinet, and it obligates everyone — including Gallant.”

The talks on a ceasefire deal, due to resume on Thursday, are seen by the US and others as the best chance of preventing a further escalation of hostilities in the Middle East, which has been on edge since the assassination of two senior Hizbollah and Hamas figures last month.

Iran and Hizbollah have vowed to retaliate against Israel for the killings, prompting the US to build up its [military presence](#) in the region, and sparking a frantic effort by diplomats to de-escalate the situation.

The US, Egypt and Qatar, which have been mediating the Israel-Hamas talks, have been pushing for them to agree to a three-stage deal set out by US President Joe Biden earlier this year to end the fighting and free the roughly 115 hostages still held by Hamas in the wake of its October 7 attack on Israel.

However, multiple rounds of talks have failed to yield a breakthrough, and Hamas and Israel still disagree on key terms, including the presence of Israeli forces in strategic locations in Gaza, and the return of Palestinians to the north of the enclave.

Hamas on Sunday accused Israel of attempting to draw out the talks without any intention of reaching a deal, and called on mediators to compel Israel to implement the Biden’s plan.

The clash between Netanyahu and Gallant is the latest in a string of public spats between the two cabinet colleagues. Netanyahu attempted to sack Gallant last year for criticising his plans for a controversial judicial overhaul, before backing down in the face of huge street protests.

More recently, they have feuded over how Gaza should be ruled once the war with Hamas is over, with Gallant criticising the prime minister for his failure to draw up a realistic plan for the enclave’s postwar governance.

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