

Middle East war

Israel cancels defence minister's visit to US

Gallant's delayed trip raises concern it could affect co-operation with Washington over response to Iran's missile strike



Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant, pictured, had been scheduled to meet US defence secretary Lloyd Austin for a bilateral meeting in Washington on Wednesday © Reuters

Steff Chávez and James Politi in Washington and Neri Zilber in Tel Aviv YESTERDAY

Israel has told the US that defence minister Yoav Gallant will no longer travel to Washington this week, prompting fears the cancellation could jeopardise co-ordination with Israel over its response to Iran's missile attack.

"We were just informed that minister Gallant will be postponing his trip to Washington, DC," deputy Pentagon press secretary Sabrina Singh said on Tuesday, hours before he was due to fly to the US.

The visit, which had been scheduled at Gallant's request, was seen as a crucial chance for the US and Israel to discuss Israel's planned retaliation against Iran for its [ballistic missile attack](#) last week and its [expanding conflict](#) in Lebanon.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Gallant to postpone his visit to Washington, said a person familiar with the matter.

The prime minister did not want Gallant to go until his cabinet votes on the country's response to [Iran's ballistic missile strike](#) and Netanyahu speaks with US President Joe Biden on the phone, the person said.

A call between Netanyahu and Biden has been in the works for "many days" but has not taken place, they added.

A US official said a call between the two leaders was expected soon.

Defence secretary Lloyd Austin had been scheduled to host the Israeli defence minister for a bilateral meeting in Washington on Wednesday.

While the US has backed Israel's right to respond to Iran's missile attack, Washington has sought to place some limits on the retaliation, warning Netanyahu's government against striking Iranian nuclear facilities and indicating it would not be in favour of an attack on the Islamic republic's oil sector.

US and Israeli officials have been in frequent contact in recent days and officials in Washington say they do not believe Israel has taken any final decision on its response to Iran.

But the postponement of Gallant's visit is likely to raise concerns about a rift in relations between US and Israel. Although Washington has continued to supply weapons to its ally and helped its defence, Israel has frequently defied US wishes to pursue a diplomatic solution to the [conflict in the Middle East](#) that erupted after Hamas's attack on Israel a year ago.

Singh insisted relations between Austin and Gallant remained strong. "I don't think there's tension . . . you can have direct conversations with your friends. You're not always going to agree on everything but that doesn't mean that there's tensions," she said.

She added the US would "continue to consult with the Israelis on what their response [to the Iranian strikes] might be", and said the cancellation of Gallant's trip would not have any impact on

the dialogue between the two countries.

Another US official said they expected to see Gallant soon and did not view the cancellation of his visit as significant.

Singh added Austin and Gallant had not spoken on Tuesday but it was "still early, and they're in touch pretty frequently, so a call could always be scheduled for later today or later this week".

The cancellation of Gallant's visit comes as Israel has continued to pummel targets in Lebanon and has expanded its ground offensive in the south of the country in an attempt to weaken Hizbollah, the Iran-backed proxy group.

Netanyahu on Tuesday released a video message in which he called on the Lebanese population to rise up against Hizbollah, urging them to "save" their country "before it falls into an abyss of destruction and suffering like Gaza".

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