

## Israel

# Israeli cabinet sacks head of Shin Bet intelligence agency

Move set to intensify split between Netanyahu government and legal authorities



Tensions between Shin Bet head Ronen Bar, pictured, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have simmered since Hamas's October 7 2023 attack on Israel © Gil Cohen-Magen/AP

**James Shotter** in Jerusalem

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Israel's cabinet has voted to sack the head of the Shin Bet internal security agency, in a move likely to intensify the stand-off between Benjamin Netanyahu's government and the country's legal authorities.

Defying thousands of protesters outside the prime minister's office in Jerusalem, in the early hours of Friday the cabinet voted unanimously to dismiss Ronen Bar, after Netanyahu said he had lost confidence in his domestic spy chief.

"Ronen Bar will end his role as Shin Bet head on April 10, 2025 or when a permanent Shin Bet head is appointed — whichever comes first," Netanyahu's office said in a brief statement.

Tensions between Netanyahu and Bar have simmered since Hamas's devastating October 7 2023 attack on [Israel](#), which is widely seen as the worst security and intelligence failure in Israeli history.

Netanyahu has fought to avoid a public inquiry into the events that led up to Hamas's assault, and sought to pin the blame for the debacle on his security chiefs. Herzi Halevi, chief of the military, [was forced out](#) earlier this month

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As with other senior security officials who were in post on October 7, Bar, who took office in 2021, has acknowledged responsibility for the failures that allowed the attack, and had indicated his intention to step down before the end of his term.

But he has also accused Netanyahu of failings, issuing a defiant statement this week arguing that Netanyahu's governments had defined policy towards Hamas for years before the assault and disregarded Shin Bet's warnings.

The tensions between the two men have also been exacerbated in recent weeks as Shin Bet has pursued an investigation into lobbying on behalf of Qatar that was allegedly carried out by aides in the prime minister's office.

Netanyahu has dismissed the probe as politically motivated. But in a letter to ministers published by Israeli media on Thursday night, Bar warned that sacking him now could "jeopardise" the investigation, which he said would be a danger to Israel's security.



Protesters block the road leading into Jerusalem during a demonstration against Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's decision to oust the head of Shin Bet © John Wessels/AFP/Getty Images

Netanyahu announced his intention to remove Bar on Sunday, prompting Israel's attorney-general Gali Baharav-Miara — whom Netanyahu is also trying to sack — to warn the prime minister that he could not do so "until the factual and legal basis underlying your decision and your ability to deal with this matter is clarified".

But the government rejected Baharav-Miara's warning, with the government secretary accusing her of "exceeding her authority" in a letter published by Netanyahu's office on Thursday.

The spat over Bar's exit comes amid a [broader clash](#) between Netanyahu's far-right government and Israel's judicial and legal authorities, which began when the government embarked on a controversial attempt to limit the powers of the judiciary in 2023, and has flared again in recent weeks.

Netanyahu's justice minister has refused to recognise the authority of the new head of the supreme court, whose appointment the government had delayed for more than a year in the hope of installing a different appointee. The government is also advancing legislation designed to give it greater control over the appointment of supreme court judges.

At the same time, it is trying to remove Baharav-Miara, the country's most senior legal official, who has repeatedly clashed with the government on issues ranging from political appointments to the judicial overhaul.

The plan to sack Bar has sparked protests all week, with tens of thousands of people joining rallies in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem on Tuesday and Wednesday, and police clashing with demonstrators near Netanyahu's house during another protest on Thursday.

Aharon Barak, the former head of the supreme court, said he feared that the stand-off between the government and Israel's legal and judicial institutions could create a disastrous rift in Israeli society.

"In the end I fear it will be like a train that goes off the tracks and plunges into a chasm causing a civil war," he said in an interview with Israeli website Ynet. "We have to prevent the tyranny of the majority."

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