

Israel-Hamas war

Israel's far-right ministers call for Benjamin Netanyahu to escalate Gaza war

Bezalel Smotrich says government has 'no right to exist' if it does not occupy Palestinian enclave and expel population



Bezael Smotrich had accused the prime minister of failing to enforce previous cabinet decisions to ensure that Hamas was not able to control aid deliveries © Kobi Wolf/Bloomberg

James Shotter in Jerusalem

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Israel's ultranationalist finance minister Bezael Smotrich has hit out at Benjamin Netanyahu as the prime minister's far-right allies increase pressure on him to intensify the country's campaign in Gaza.

Israel has imposed a total siege on the Palestinian enclave since it broke a two-month truce and in March resumed the [war with Hamas](#), which is still holding 59 Israeli hostages in the enclave. Israel has cut off supplies of food, fuel, medicine and aid to Gaza's 2.1mn population, exacerbating enormous civilian suffering.

But following a cabinet dispute over whether to end the blockade, Smotrich — one of the far-right leaders on whom Netanyahu's coalition depends — said he “will not be a part of” any plan to resume aid flows into Gaza unless the government takes more steps to ensure it cannot fall into Hamas's hands.

Smotrich said in a statement on Wednesday that Netanyahu's government would have “no right to exist” if it did not defeat Hamas, occupy Gaza, install a “temporary military government”, free the hostages and implement US President Donald Trump's proposal to displace Gaza's entire population — an idea widely regarded as ethnic

cleansing.

Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel's far-right security minister, called separately following a meeting with Republican officials at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort for Israel to attack aid depots in the enclave.

Ben-Gvir said the Republicans had "expressed support for my very clear position on how to act in Gaza and that the food and aid depots should be bombed in order to create military and political pressure to bring our hostages home safely".

The comments reflect divisions within the government over how to prosecute the next phase of the war, as Israel seeks to force Hamas to release more hostages in exchange for a further temporary truce.

In addition to blocking aid, Israeli forces have seized large tracts of land in Gaza, and Netanyahu has insisted that Israel will not permanently end the war until Hamas is destroyed.

But Smotrich accused Netanyahu of failing to enforce previous cabinet decisions to ensure that Hamas was not able to control aid deliveries.

Israeli media reported Smotrich had at Tuesday's cabinet meeting threatened to sack the new head of the army, Eyal Zamir, after Zamir said the military would not distribute aid in Gaza, one option officials have discussed as a way of preventing Hamas controlling aid flows. Another option would be for private contractors to deliver aid.

The intensification of the war has so far received the support of Israel's most important ally the US, which under Trump has shown little inclination to put pressure on Israel over harm to civilians in Gaza. The US president said following a call with Netanyahu on Tuesday that the pair "are on the same side of every issue".

But Israel's war conduct has drawn fierce criticism from elsewhere. In a statement on Wednesday, the foreign ministers of Germany, France and the UK branded the decision to block aid "intolerable" and demanded that Israel "immediately" restart a "rapid and unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza in order to meet the needs of all civilians".

"Humanitarian aid must never be used as a political tool and Palestinian territory must not be reduced nor subjected to any demographic change. Israel is bound under international law to allow the unhindered passage of humanitarian aid," the ministers said.

The statement also expressed “outrage at recent strikes by Israeli forces on humanitarian personnel, infrastructure, premises and healthcare facilities” after Israeli soldiers killed 15 emergency workers in Gaza last month, before burying them and their vehicles in a shallow grave.

Additional reporting by Anne-Sylvaine Chassany in Berlin

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