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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

Political

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Nabih Awada

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Sacking Gallant and preparing for Trump

Netanyahu's abrupt firing of US-favored Defense Minister Gallant took place under the cover of US elections, in a move intended to safeguard his coalition and stack his cabinet with a line up of hardliners committed to war.



Photo Credit: The Cradle

The [sacking of Yoav Gallant](#), Israel's minister of defense, by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has plunged the occupation state into yet another political crisis amid the ongoing turmoil since last year's Operation Al-Aqsa Flood and the ensuing war on Gaza and now Lebanon.

These conflicts have led to a staggering toll of nearly 200,000 martyrs and missing persons, along with countless injured and prisoners.

The timing of Gallant's dismissal was terrible, at least according to Israeli columnist Nahum Barnea, who wrote in *Yedioth Ahronoth*: "This is how democracy dies."

Netanyahu chose to remove his defense minister just as voting was getting underway in the United States, marking the dramatic return of [Donald Trump](#) – overseer of the Abraham Accords – to the White House in a landslide political comeback.

Poor timing or tactical move?

It appeared to be a calculated move by Netanyahu, possibly to avoid a repeat of the catastrophe last March when he faced a national backlash for dismissing Gallant after the latter [opposed judicial reforms](#). At that time, Gallant had publicly warned about the reforms' impact on reservists, which prompted mass protests throughout Israel.

The Histadrut trade union called a strike, effectively paralyzing Israel's economy, and the White House issued a stern warning, leading Netanyahu to reverse his decision. Gallant returned to his office in Tel Aviv with the backing of the streets, the economists, the military, and even US President Joe Biden.

The “terrible timing” lies precisely here. Within just three minutes of making the decision, Netanyahu sent Gallant a letter of dismissal – journalist Amit Segal, known to be close to Netanyahu, [broke the news](#). The Israeli defense minister, amid an ongoing war on seven fronts, was informed he would be relieved of his duties, effective within 48 hours as stipulated under Article 20 of the Basic Law.

Why Gallant had to go

The reasons behind Gallant's controversial dismissal were manifold, rooted in three key problems that Gallant himself highlighted:

The first issue was army conscription. Gallant insisted that “everyone eligible must join the army.” This was in direct response to a law [exempting](#) ultra-Orthodox Haredim from military service, which was being tabled in the Knesset.

Gallant retaliated by ordering the enlistment of 7,000 religious students – a direct challenge to the Haredim. This decree came in the midst of fierce threats from influential rabbis, such as Rabbi Admur Gur, that the government coalition could collapse if laws promoting military evasion and special nursery support were not passed.

These laws were critical for the Haredim as they allowed males to focus on religious studies without facing military obligations, offering significant privileges to typically large ultra-Orthodox families. The rabbis' condition was clear: if the government did not pass both the military exemption law and financial support for day nurseries, they would not approve the 2025 budget.

Other motives at play

In Israel, if the budget is not passed, the government collapses automatically – a consequence Netanyahu was desperate to avoid. To keep his coalition intact, Netanyahu had to act swiftly and get rid of Gallant.

The second reason, no less important, involved the [return of prisoners of war](#) from Gaza. This was a highly sensitive topic and a source of deep friction between Netanyahu, Gallant, and other senior officials in Israel's military and intelligence services.

Throughout the past year, there have been ongoing debates about whether to prioritize negotiations for a prisoner exchange over the expansion of Israel's military operations on its various borders. Gallant and some in the army argued for prioritizing a deal, while Netanyahu, along with Bezalel Smotrich, Itamar Ben Gvir, and several hardline military commanders, believed in maintaining military pressure on Hamas to force its submission.

Initially, a consensus appeared to exist across the security and political establishment, especially after Gallant and Chief of Staff Herzl Halevy proposed a preemptive strike on Lebanon – an action only postponed due to Biden's direct intervention during a conversation with Netanyahu on 11 October.

Yet, cracks soon emerged as the realities of the Gaza ground maneuvers became clear. Disagreements resurfaced, primarily about whether “absolute victory” in Gaza was more important than freeing the hostages.

Gallant, Halevy, the Shin Bet chief, and the head of Mossad all believed the lives of hostages should take priority, even if it meant pausing military actions. All three are now rumored to be in Netanyahu's crosshairs for dismissal.

Intelligence failures

Finally, there was the [investigation](#) into the failures of 7 October, with calls for an independent judicial probe to determine accountability for the catastrophic security lapse. Netanyahu staunchly opposed this, knowing that such an investigation could endanger his own position at the top.

The [scale of the failure](#) on 7 October was monumental, and Israel's political, military, and security leaderships were under immense scrutiny. It is no secret that Netanyahu wishes to [prolong the war](#) for his own political survival, making battlefield achievements appear to compensate for the disastrous events of that fateful day. However, the debate over accountability grows louder by the day, and the demands for justice are increasingly urgent.

In addition to these key issues, Netanyahu may have also had three other files in mind – issues that he used as pretexts to justify Gallant's dismissal:

First, there were the leaks of sensitive security documents related to Gaza, known as the “[Sinwar Files](#),” which implicated the Shin Bet. Although these files fell under Ronen Bar’s jurisdiction, the main suspicion pointed to individuals close to Netanyahu. Gallant’s removal might also have served as a message to rein in Bar, as some Israeli commentators have suggested.

Second, the immense failure surrounding Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, which again put Chief of Staff Halevy in the spotlight for alleged negligence.

And third, Mossad Chief David Barnea, who is responsible for handling negotiations, might also find himself targeted by Netanyahu. There is speculation that the latter is seeking to turn the former into a scapegoat amid the changes in Washington, with Donald Trump set to take office in two months’ time.

Netanyahu’s power grab

Despite all these tensions, Benjamin Netanyahu has positioned himself as de facto minister of defense – although officially, the role was assigned to Foreign Minister Israel Katz. This move, noted by Ron Ben-Yishai in *Yedioth Ahronoth*, shows Netanyahu’s intention to consolidate power while side-lining anyone who opposes him.

Removing Gallant has had both local and international ramifications. Locally, Netanyahu has brought his opponents together in what appears to be a calculated photo opportunity. He was seen sitting for the first time with Gantz, who condemned Gallant’s removal as a politically motivated decision, and Yair Lapid, the opposition leader, who called the move madness and accused Netanyahu of risking Israel’s security for political survival.

They were flanked by Avigdor Lieberman, leader of Yisrael Beytenu, who demanded Netanyahu’s resignation, and Yair Golan, the leader of the Democrats (the Labor and Meretz alliance), who called for protests.

On the international front, all eyes are on 20 January – the inauguration date of US President Trump. What happens next could redefine the relationship between Tel Aviv and Washington. The question on everyone’s mind: will Netanyahu hand Trump the key to Israel’s defense headquarters in Tel Aviv, just as he recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital during his last term?

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