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By Joe Lauria  
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## **Ex-Israeli Defense Chief: Israel Guilty of Ethnic Cleansing**

Moshe Ya'alon has refused to apologize for saying Israel is committing ethnic cleansing in Gaza because it “reflected reality on the ground.” He also said the IDF was “not the most moral army.” Joe Lauria reports.



Israel's then Minister of Defense Moshe Ya'alon at the Pentagon, Oct. 28, 2015. (Sr. Master Sgt. Adrian Cadiz/Wikimedia Common)

Moshe Ya'alon, a former Israeli defense minister and army chief, has caused an uproar in Israel by publicly accusing the Israeli government of ethnically cleansing Palestinians in Gaza.

Twenty-four hours after he first made the remark he was invited by a television interviewer on Monday to apologize. He refused.

“What I said accurately reflects what’s happening on the ground,” he said, adding that he intentionally used the term “ethnic cleansing.”

Ya’alon defined it as “evacuating civilians from their homes and demolishing those homes, as is happening in Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiya,” in northern Gaza. In his initial remarks, Ya’alon said Israel’s aim in Gaza was to “conquer, to annex, to purify an ethnic identity.” He added: “They are cleansing the area from the Arabs.”

Ya’alon is not blaming the IDF, but the government, whose extremist ministers like National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and Finance Minister Betzalel Smotritch “have repeatedly declared their intentions to build Jewish settlements in Gaza,” according to the *Haaretz* daily. “These politicians ... speak openly and proudly of depleting Gaza’s population by half and building settlements on the ruins of the Strip’s destroyed cities and villages,” the newspaper said.

Ya’alon said these ministers should have been issued arrest warrants by the International Criminal Court with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant.

Despite not blaming the IDF, Ya’alon told Channel 12 News in Israel: “Thanks to political intervention, which has corrupted the army, it would be hard for me to say that the IDF is the most moral army in the world.”

The IDF denied their former chief’s accusation, contending that it is “acting in accordance with international law, and evacuating the population temporarily in accordance with operational need, for its defense.” It accused Ya’alon of harming the army and its soldiers.

Though the International Court of Justice is trying Israel for genocide, Ya’alon said he was not accusing Israel of that crime. Nonetheless, the outrage against Ya’alon was fierce in a society clearly in denial.

### **‘Sick With Hatred’**

Naftali Bennett, the former prime minister, tweeted: “There is no military more moral than the Israel Defense Forces. The IDF has bent over backwards to minimize loss of civilian life. All of Israel’s actions in Gaza adhere to the Geneva Conventions.”

May Golan, a Likud member of the Knesset, said: “It’s clear that we’re dealing with a sick person, sick with power, sick with envy, sick with hatred, sick. The man is simply sick. It’s clear. .... Show empathy for his condition, don’t let his nonsense go viral. It also harms the country, but mainly humiliates him.”

“Ya’alon has long since lost his direction and moral compass, and his false and slanderous statements are a gift to the International Criminal Court and to Israel’s enemies,” read a statement from his former party, Likud.

“Israel is waging a just war against a murderous terrorist organization that carried out a mass slaughter against it,” the statement said.

These reactions reflect widespread credulity — or cynicism — in Israel that says the purpose of the “war” is to defeat Hamas and rescue the hostages, despite all evidence to the contrary: Hamas has not been defeated in 14 months and the hostages have not been returned, when they could have been in a prisoner swap.

This major Israeli military operation is instead intended to complete the process of ethnic cleansing indeed of Arabs in Palestine envisioned by Israeli founding father David Ben Gurion, first carried out on a large scale in 1948 and now continuing in Gaza.

Bluster about Hamas and hostages is an excuse and a cover for massive criminal intent.

There are too many clear statements of such intent and corresponding action by high-ranking Israeli officials to think otherwise, and those statements and those actions now appear as evidence before two world courts.

**Joe Lauria is editor-in-chief of *Consortium News* and a former U.N. correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, and other newspapers, including *The Montreal Gazette*, the *London Daily Mail* and *The Star* of Johannesburg. He was an investigative reporter for the *Sunday Times* of London, a financial reporter for *Bloomberg News* and began his professional work as a 19-year old stringer for *The New York Times*. He is the author of two books, *A Political Odyssey*, with Sen. Mike Gravel, foreword by Daniel Ellsberg; and *How I Lost By Hillary Clinton*, foreword by Julian Assange.**

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