

Benny Gantz resigns from Netanyahu's war cabinet, calls for a better strategy for genocide and war

Jean Shaoul
16 June 2024

Last week, the former military chiefs Benny Gantz and Gadi Eisenkot, two of the so-called centre-right opposition leaders, announced they were quitting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's war cabinet.

Speaking at a press conference, Gantz accused Netanyahu of "preventing us from progressing to real victory" by obstructing important decisions, including refusing to present a viable plan for Gaza after the war, for his own political gain. Therefore, "We are leaving the emergency government today with a heavy heart but wholeheartedly."

He voiced his support for the Biden administration's proposals for a ceasefire and prisoner exchange, called for early Israeli elections and appealed to other politicians, including Defence Minister Yoav Gallant whom he called a "brave and determined leader," to quit the government.

Eisenkot said he was resigning because the government "had completely failed" in all its objectives.

In an empty gesture, their National Unity Party submitted a bill to dissolve the 120-seat Knesset that would trigger fresh elections, safe in the knowledge that it had no chance of winning the vote, and to set up an independent inquiry to investigate the circumstances leading up to the Hamas attack on October 7 and other aspects of the war.

Their resignations, a day after a self-imposed deadline that they postponed due to the news of the rescue of four hostages after a massive attack on the Nuseirat refugee camp that killed at least 274 Palestinians and wounded more than 600, was a damp squib. Not a single protester took to the streets on Sunday night to support Gantz and Eisenkot, or to demand Netanyahu's ouster and fresh elections. Even had such a demonstration been organised, it would not have called for an end to the genocide in Gaza—which both these war criminals support.

Netanyahu greeted their resignation with a shrug, merely saying, "Don't leave the emergency government; don't give up on unity," secure in the knowledge that their departure will not collapse his government of ultra-nationalists and religious Zionists. Their aims are to annex the West Bank, ethnically cleanse Israel, re-establish settlements in Gaza and impose authoritarian rule along with a greater role for the religious forces.

Gantz and Eisenkot's tactical differences with Netanyahu

The pair have no principled differences with Netanyahu. They demonstrated their loyalty throughout the war to his government and the Zionist state, defending every single one of the bloody crimes the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have committed. Their decision to quit was clearly made in consultation with Washington, as "Genocide" Joe's "ironclad support" for Israel faces mass opposition from workers and youth in key

Democrat-voting states.

Gantz and Eisenkot are keen to pause the war to secure the release of the surviving hostages—at least 43 of the 120 are believed to be dead—to reinforce domestic support for the war going forward and hopefully bring a temporary halt to the almost daily skirmishes with Lebanon's Hezbollah in the north. This would enable Saudi Arabia, Egypt and other states to sign on to some form of post-war policing of the ruins of Gaza that Washington is seeking to organise.

Last month, Gantz submitted a six-point plan for Gaza and threatened to quit if the government did not agree to it. The plan included a temporary US-European-Arab-Palestinian system of civil administration, with Israel retaining overall control of security; the normalisation of relations with Saudi Arabia that would necessarily involve agreeing to some illusory Palestinian statelet alongside Israel; and an end to the ultra-Orthodox Jews' exemption from army service.

For months last year, Gantz was one of the self-proclaimed leaders of the nine-month-long protest movement against Netanyahu's efforts to establish dictatorial rule. One of the factors driving the mass protests was deepening social inequality within one of the most unequal societies in the OECD group of advanced countries, sparking fears of a civil war. More than 10,000 army reservists announced they would refuse to serve and risk their lives for an undemocratic government if Netanyahu's judicial coup went ahead.

The massive opposition movement gave the lie to claims that criticizing Israel was tantamount to antisemitism. Israel and the imperialist powers who back the Zionist regime as the custodian of their interests in the resource-rich region have used such claims to silence the left and discredit opponents of Israel's repression of the Palestinians and apartheid rule. But Gantz, Eisenkot, and other opposition leaders, such as former Prime Minister and Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid, were able to come to the head of a movement that never politically challenged Zionism, or linked the struggle against Netanyahu to opposition to the oppression of the Palestinians. They ensured that the protest was characterised by the waving of Israeli flags and a commitment to defend the state's bogus democratic credentials on the world arena.

The opposition leaders did nothing to oppose Netanyahu's escalating provocations against the Palestinians, aimed at inciting a response that could be used as the pretext for all-out war. From the moment Netanyahu seized on the Palestinian October 7 incursion into Israel, which the security services clearly allowed to happen, to launch his genocidal war on Gaza, Gantz and Eisenkot called a halt to all opposition and rushed to join his war cabinet.

Gantz said, "We are brothers, we all have a common destiny. These are not days for political arguments, there are no winners and losers today. Today we have only one common goal—to win the war, together."

While Lapid refused to join Netanyahu's war cabinet, not one of the opposition leaders—former military and intelligence chiefs and politicians who had all served under Netanyahu—opposed Gantz and Eisenkot's decision. They all lined up behind the warmongers. Their "opposition" was confined to blaming Netanyahu for the supposed political, military and intelligence failures that had enabled the October 7 attack.

This murderous war cabinet, acting in the name of national unity, authorised the mass bombing of Palestinian civilians along with a deliberate effort to starve the population of Gaza into submission. The Israeli military have killed more than 38,000 Palestinians, most of them women, children and the elderly, wounded 85,000 more and forcibly displaced three quarters of Gaza's 2.3 million population from their homes, most of which have been destroyed. There is nowhere safe for the Palestinians to go.

As a United Nations commission reported earlier this week, the Israeli government and its military have committed systematic "crimes against humanity," including "extermination." The commission concluded that the Israeli military and government "committed the war crimes of starvation as a method of warfare; murder or willful killing; intentionally directing attacks against civilians and civilian objects; forcible transfer; sexual violence; outrages upon personal dignity; and [sexual and gender-based violence] amounting to torture or inhuman and cruel treatment."

Gantz and Eisenkot's bloody record

The record of Gantz and Eisenkot, which the mainstream media continues to describe as a restraining hand on Netanyahu that will be sorely missed, is of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Both were war criminals long before October 7.

Like so many of Israel's leaders, they spent most of their working lives in the military, in both cases reaching the top slot with Netanyahu's approval, before moving into politics.

Gantz was appointed chief of staff of the IDF in 2011 in preference to the expected appointee, Yoav Gallant, now Minister of Defence. He headed the IDF during its murderous assaults on Gaza in 2012 that killed 177 Palestinians, while the 50-day assault in 2014 claimed close to 2,200 Palestinian lives, overwhelmingly civilians, and destroyed much of the enclave's infrastructure. He boasted of returning Gaza to the "stone age" and pulverizing entire neighbourhoods, repeating this in media adverts during his 2019 election campaign. He served as defence minister and deputy prime minister under Netanyahu, when he presided over Israel's 11-day war on Gaza in May 2021 that killed more than 250 Palestinians, including at least 66 children and 41 women.

As for Eisenkot, he succeeded Gantz as IDF Chief of Staff in 2015, serving until 2019. He authored the infamous Dahiya Doctrine, named after the Beirut suburb that Israel had pulverised during its 2006 war on Lebanon. It outlines "what will happen" to any enemy that dares attack Israel—an indiscriminate and disproportionate retaliatory attack.

He said in 2008, "What happened in the Dahiya quarter of Beirut in 2006 will happen in every village from which Israel is fired on," adding, "We will apply disproportionate force on [the village] and cause great damage and destruction there. From our standpoint, these are not civilian villages, they are military bases."

This is the doctrine now guiding the assault on Gaza and the slaughter of innocent civilians and destruction of schools, hospitals and other public services and infrastructure.

Gantz and Eisenkot's leadership of the opposition movement

Gantz and Eisenkot's despicable role in bolstering the Netanyahu regime in its war on Gaza came as no surprise to the *World Socialist Web Site*. As the WSWS explained, these opposition leaders, backed by Israel's high-tech industry that paid for the mass production and distribution of the Israeli flag for the demonstrations, were never concerned with the democratic rights of Israeli citizens. They insisted on loyalty to the Zionist state and prevented any turn to Israel's Palestinian citizens, let alone those of the Palestinians in the occupied territories who are subject to arbitrary military rule, and banned Palestinian flags at their demonstrations. They made no attempt to bring down the government, despite polls showing the overwhelming opposition to the Netanyahu government.

Their concern was not with "democracy," but that Netanyahu "was destabilising Israel and risked discrediting it politically, under conditions where Israel is a social and political powder keg and the entire Middle East has been destabilised by the deepening global economic crisis, the pandemic, climate change and US-led plans to escalate the war against Russia in Ukraine and its regional allies, Iran and Syria, with Tel Aviv as its chief attack dog."

For all the opposition's support for the judiciary against Netanyahu, at no point have Israel's senior law enforcement officials, including the High Court justices, the Attorney General and the State Prosecutor, taken any action against senior politicians and officials for their declarations of genocidal intent. Neither have they investigated war crimes committed by the IDF or called for a halt to the war following the International Court of Justice's ruling that there were plausible grounds for believing Israel was committing genocide in Gaza and that Israel must actively ensure the protection of the lives and basic needs of civilians in any Rafah operation.

The terrible experience of the last eight months has confirmed that it is impossible to have democracy in a state based upon rights for one people at the expense of another and the forcible expulsion and brutal repression of the Palestinians. The end result of the Zionist project has been the growth of fascistic forces in Israel that have paved the way for war and genocide.

Israel's war against Gaza, backed by the US and imperialist powers, is a second front in a wider war for hegemony against Iran, Russia and China for which Israeli workers and youth will pay with their lives. Putting an end to the war is impossible without rejecting the Zionist project and taking a stand against both nationalism and capitalism on which it depends.

It means adopting a socialist strategy based on the revolutionary unification of Jewish and Arab workers in a common struggle—beginning by workers in Israel fighting for the defence of the Palestinians and not just the hostages—against the Israeli bourgeoisie and imperialism and its other regional puppets, championing a binational and socialist state.

Such a struggle can only be conducted on an international scale. Trotskyist parties must be built throughout the region to unite the working masses under the banner of the United Socialist States of the Middle East, as part of the world socialist revolution. This struggle must be consciously linked with the mounting struggles of workers in the advanced capitalist countries, many of which have large populations of Arab workers from the Middle East.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact