

Israeli air force veterans and reservists call for hostage deal and end to Gaza war

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An open letter signed by almost 1,000 current and retired Israeli Air Force (IAF) reservists has called for an end to the war on Gaza. The letter signed last week urged all Israeli citizens to demand the war's end, focused on warnings that Israel's bombardment of Gaza was putting the lives of Israeli hostages at risk.

The open letter initiative involves prominent Zionist figures whose concerns are for the immediate and long-term security of the Israeli state—which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's fascist government is bringing into question.

One signatory is Dan Halutz, retired Chief of the General Staff of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). He commanded the IAF during the second Intifada, ordering targeted killings of Palestinian militants. Other signatories include former heads of Israel's intelligence agency Mossad.

The letter is a symptom of growing divisions and crisis in Israel, which have been heightened by the immense costs of the military assault on Gaza, economically, socially and politically—including, though this finds no conscious expression in the open letter, the discrediting of the entire Zionist project amidst a campaign of genocidal violence without precedent since the Nazi's war of extermination against European Jewry.

Signed by members of the same IAF that has destroyed more than 69 percent of Gaza, killing more than 60,000 Palestinians, the letter expresses most openly growing popular anger over the fate of Israeli hostages who are being used as a smokescreen to carry out a war of annihilation. It has sparked political uproar in Israel and has been followed by other open letters from senior military and intelligence personal, doctors, paratroopers and reservists calling for Netanyahu's government to prioritize the return of the hostages in Gaza, even if it means ending the war.

The letter by IAF reservists stated, "The continuation of the war doesn't advance any of the declared goals of the war, and will bring about the deaths of the hostages, of IDF soldiers and innocent civilians. As has been proven in the past, only a [ceasefire] deal can bring back the hostages safely, while military pressure mainly leads to the killing of

the hostages and the endangerment of our soldiers."

It added, "Currently, the war serves mainly political and personal interests, not security interests". This references the widely held belief that Netanyahu ended the ceasefire in March that would have secured the release of the remaining 59 hostages to appease his far-right coalition partners and thereby secure the survival of his government and the abandonment of his corruption trial.

Reflecting the same divisions that erupted into mass protest in 2023 prior to October 7 over Netanyahu's attack on the judiciary and moves to establish dictatorial rule, the signatories also opposed the firing of Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) head Ronen Bar and attempts to remove Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara.

It is measure of the protesters' loyalty to the Zionist state that following meetings held by IAF chief Tomer Bar and IDF chief of Staff Eyal Zamir with some of the signatories, the letter has not been published.

Netanyahu has responded by stepping up his murderous offensive in Gaza and accusing his opponents of treachery. Emboldened by the full-throated backing of the Trump administration, he made it clear that even if a deal is reached to free all hostages, Israel's war of annihilation will continue.

Demanding the unconditional surrender of Hamas, Netanyahu insisted that Israel's war would only end if Hamas were disarmed, and its leaders sent into exile. He insisted that Israel would retain control of Gaza's "security," a euphemism for annexation, and would implement Donald Trump's plan to ethnically cleanse the Palestinians.

On Wednesday, Defence Minister Israel Katz warned that the assault on Gaza would escalate with "tremendous force," with an extended blockade of humanitarian aid even as United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) officials warned of famine conditions, if Hamas did not agree to Israel's terms.

Netanyahu lashed out against the letter by IAF reservists, declaring that "Refusal to serve is refusal to serve, even if

it's only hinted at in whitewashed language... Statements that weaken the IDF and strengthen our enemies in a time of war are unforgivable."

He supported the IDF's decision to discharge active-duty reservists who signed the letter, although the military claimed that most of those who signed were retired personnel.

He described the signatories as "a group of fringe extremists who are trying once again to break Israeli society from within. They tried to do it before October 7 and Hamas interpreted the refusal calls as a weakness."

This was an attempt to pin the blame for the October 7 attack by Hamas on the reservists who had vowed during the mass anti-government protests in 2023 that they would "cease to volunteer" for military duty if the country became a regime they no longer viewed as democratic.

Netanyahu accused the signatories of "acting toward one goal—bringing down the government."

Shortly after the Air Force letter, more than 1,600 former Israel Defence Forces paratroopers and infantry soldiers, including some still serving as reservists, also signed an open letter demanding the government reach a deal to bring the hostages home.

Soldiers in the IDF's intelligence unit 8200 wrote a letter April 11 calling on the government to release the hostages, even if it means stopping the fighting in Gaza. The 8200 officers said, "We identify with the grave and troubling assertion that, at this time, the war serves primarily political and personal interests, not security interests."

On Sunday, a group of around 200 reservist doctors signed a similar letter, while hundreds of Israeli writers, poets, and literary figures, including Israel Prize laureate Nitza Ben-Dov, playwright Yehoshua Sobol, Sapir Prize winner Ofra Offer Oren, journalist and writer Daniella London Dekel, signed an almost identical petition calling for the immediate end of the war in Gaza. It also demanded the return of the remaining 59 hostages, many of whom are dead, and the formulation of a clear but unspecified plan for the future of Gaza and its residents.

On Monday, graduates of the IDF's prestigious Talpiot program said they too support the letter signed by air force reservists and veterans. Their letter warned of "the erosion of Israel's reserve forces" and urged the public to condemn efforts to silence dissenting voices.

Other letters have come from ex-Mossad members, including three former Mossad chiefs—Danny Yatom, Efraim Halevy, and Tamir Pardo—Navy reservists, and reservist Air Force personnel.

The open letters follow a significant decline in reservists reporting for duty. While the IDF claimed the attendance rate in mid-March was 80 percent, *Kan*, Israel's public

broadcaster said it was around 60 percent and *Haaretz* cited 50 percent. IDF Chief of Staff Zamir told national security cabinet members recently that they should "give up on some of their fantasies" about conquering Gaza, due to a lack of combat soldiers, according to a report on *Ynet*.

Many reservists have seen 18 months of combat duty, fighting on seven fronts, that has impacted their income, jobs and businesses, while many families have been forced to leave their homes near the border with Lebanon and Gaza. In January, the IDF reported 891 soldiers had died during 2023-2024, including 38 suicides, and more than 5,500 had been injured. The 2025 budget foreshadows no end in sight. According to the Bank of Israel, the cost of the war from 2023 to 2025 could amount to \$55.6 billion, 10 percent of Israel's GDP.

The growing number of refuseniks doubtless has many causes—economic concerns, war weariness, resentment toward the domination of the ultra-orthodox parties over political life, and demoralization over a war that is opposed by millions around the world, including Jews. In a small number of cases, reservists are refusing to serve due to their opposition to genocide. But no progressive struggle can be waged against Netanyahu's far-right government without opposing the genocide and dispossession of the Palestinians.

The military and intelligence officials calling for an end to the fighting are the same political forces who led the 2023 protests against Netanyahu's efforts to neuter the judiciary. Theirs is a purely tactical disagreement over how the Zionist state can survive—and, moreover, with an eye to furthering US and Israel's war plans against Iran that are undermined by the never-ending war in Gaza.

Workers in Israel must adopt a new political axis, in unity with and fighting for the liberation of the Palestinian masses from Zionist oppression. In opposing all factions of their ruling class, they must place opposition to the genocide in Gaza and the apartheid-style ethno-religious exclusion that forms the basis of the Israeli state at the very centre of their struggle.



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