



Former Defense Minister Warns of Israel's War Crimes and Ethnic Cleansing in Gaza

Former Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon recently elicited attention when he expressed that Israel is perpetrating war crimes and ethnic cleansing in Gaza, marking the most noteworthy rebuke to date from within the country's military or political establishment towards its actions in the Palestinian territory. Yaalon's statements, given that they are coming from a high-ranking former official who also served in the armed forces, highlight the degree to which Israel's military operations in Gaza have been condemned across the board. They also echo the growing concern with Israeli war crimes and human rights violations, which have now prompted the International Criminal Court (ICC) to formally issue arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and one of Yaalon's successors, Yoav Gallant. Since nearly the onset of the Gaza War, numerous reputable international aid organizations have attempted to underline the immoral policies initiated by Israel and the dire humanitarian crisis that has been created as a result.

Moshe Yaalon's remarks should force those that have not been doing so to sit up and take notice. He has an extensive history in the Israeli military and political scene, and thus, his criticism of Israel's actions speaks volumes as it shows that even those with deep connections to the government apparatus can no longer deny the glaring war crimes and human rights violations that have been committed in Gaza. Yaalon, once an ally of current Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, has become a vocal critic and warned that extremist and dangerous elements have taken hold of Israeli politics. In an [interview](#) with an Israeli media network, Yaalon stated, referring to Israel's ongoing military operation in Gaza, that "The path they're dragging us down is to occupy, annex, and ethnically cleanse – look at the northern strip." When asked specifically about ethnic cleansing, he responded that "There's no Beit Lahia. There's no Beit Hanoun. They're now operating in Jabaliya. They're basically cleaning the territory of Arabs."

The three locations referenced in northern Gaza continue to be decimated by Israeli military activity. Since early October, the area has been under a total siege, with aid being cut off. Israel has tried to claim that the siege is necessary to fight regrouping Hamas cells, however as noted in a [Guardian](#) article from early November, international humanitarian law experts see Israel's actions as the war crimes of using food as a weapon and forcibly displacing civilians. In fact, later that same month, both the use of starvation as a method of warfare and intentionally directing attacks against civilians were listed against Netanyahu and Gallant in the ICC arrest warrants. With the siege taking place, civilians are being prevented from returning to their homes, which has led to a legitimate concern that Israeli forces are making way for illegal Israeli settlements in the area. Given that these have only increased in the occupied West Bank during the conflict, with Trump's recent election to a second term in the White House, some observers suspect that Israeli officials might feel emboldened to do so in Gaza as well.

Yaalon's warnings have also been substantiated by the rhetoric from multiple Israeli officials. This includes key figures in Netanyahu's cabinet whose support is needed to maintain the fragile current coalition government. Itamar Ben-Gvir, for example, has been fervent in his advocacy for the forcible displacement of Palestinians out of Gaza and subsequent illegal Israeli settlements after the war, saying that "[We cannot withdraw from any territory in the Gaza Strip. Not only do I not rule out Jewish settlement there, I believe it is also an important thing.](#)" This has been echoed by Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who has said "[We want to encourage willful](#)

[emigration, and we need to find countries willing to take them in.](#)" The U.S. State Department has called this rhetoric "[Inflammatory and irresponsible.](#)" Still, despite this, the United States government continues to fund and give diplomatic cover to Israel.

Ultimately, Moshe Yaalon's comments are not surprising to those closely watching what has been transpiring in Gaza over the past 14 months. The United States government, its citizens, and the Israeli public – together with the global community – must pressure Israel to end the destructive war and achieve a lasting peace built on fair compromise, not war crimes and ethnic cleansing which will only serve to fuel further animosity.