

Israel's Perfect Storm: Fighting Enemies Abroad and Each Other at Home

For months, Israelis put aside their deep rifts to fight a common enemy. Now, amid a renewed government push for power, they are battling one another.



A protest against Israeli government efforts to dismiss Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara and the security agency chief, Ronen Bar, near the Jerusalem residence of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, on Monday. Ammar Awad/Reuters

By **Patrick Kingsley** Reporting from Jerusalem March 24, 2025

Eighteen months ago, in the aftermath of Hamas's attack on Israel, Israelis suspended their [internal conflicts](#) to form a united military front against a shared external threat.

Now, that semblance of common cause has been cast aside. Beyond its borders, Israel has resumed fighting on four fronts — in Gaza, Lebanon, the occupied West Bank and Yemen. And internally, Israel's citizens have returned

to the [bitter domestic feuds](#) that once again, pose existential questions about their country's future.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ruling coalition has [revived its contentious efforts](#), frozen after the attack in 2023, to expand its control over other branches of government. The moves have set off mass protests after the government tried to fire the head of Israel's domestic intelligence service as well as the attorney general — two powerful gatekeepers who are overseeing investigations into both Mr. Netanyahu and his aides.

This week, Parliament will vote on the government's plan to give itself greater control over the selection of justices on the Supreme Court, an institution that has long thwarted the ambitions of Mr. Netanyahu's ultranationalist and religiously conservative allies.

"The foundations of the state are shaking," Ehud Olmert, a former Israeli prime minister, said in an interview. "In Israel, Netanyahu is ready to sacrifice everything for his survival and we are closer to a civil war than people realize. In Gaza, we have returned to fighting — and for what? And overseas, I never remember such hatred, such opposition, to the state of Israel."

To Mr. Netanyahu and his supporters, the moves are a legitimate effort to rein in unelected bureaucrats and judicial officials who have stymied the will of an elected government. "The leftist Deep State weaponizes the justice system to

thwart the people's will," Mr. Netanyahu wrote on social media last week.



Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, left, after the Israeli Parliament approved the reappointment of Itamar Ben-Gvir, right, as the country's national security minister, last week. Oren Ben Hekoon/Reuters

But to his critics, Mr. Netanyahu's decisions constitute, at best, a huge conflict of interest for a prime minister [currently standing trial for corruption](#). At worst, they are an attempted putsch against the judicial branches of government.

Mr. Netanyahu has further spurred domestic anger by breaking the cease-fire with Hamas in Gaza; the return to war endangers not only Palestinians but up to 60 Israeli hostages still held in the territory. In returning to war, Mr. Netanyahu has also drawn retaliation from Hamas's allies in [Lebanon](#) and Yemen. And he has tested the patience and resolve of tens of thousands of exhausted military reservists who will be required to sustain what was already Israel's longest war.

The public anger is exacerbated by the impression that Mr. Netanyahu has benefited politically from the return to war, which has helped shore up his fragile coalition government.

A far-right faction, Jewish Power, quit the government at the outset of a cease-fire in January, which raised the possibility that the war might end with Hamas still in charge of Gaza.

Hours after Israel restarted strikes on Gaza last Tuesday, killing hundreds of Palestinians, the party's leader, Itamar Ben-Gvir, praised the move and returned his group to the government, bolstering Mr. Netanyahu's majority in Parliament. That paves the way for the party to vote in favor of a new national budget whose passage by the end of the month is necessary to prevent the government's collapse.

Mr. Ben-Gvir, who now oversees the police, is also one of the strongest supporters of the move to sack Ronen Bar, the head of the domestic intelligence service, and Gali Baharav-Miara, the attorney general. Both are considered to be significant checks on the far-right leader who was barred from serving in the Israeli military because of his extreme views and who has several convictions for incitement to racism and support for a terrorist group.

Analysts are divided about whether Mr. Netanyahu intends to continue endlessly with his various moves — both on the battlefield in Gaza and against

his critics at home.



A protest in Tel Aviv against the Israeli government and demanding the release of all hostages held in the Gaza Strip, on Saturday. Amir Levy/Getty Images

Some think he could soften some of his stances after the budget votes at the end of March, reducing his reliance on Mr. Ben-Gvir. A major litmus test is expected on April 8, when the Supreme Court is scheduled to rule on the legality of Mr. Bar's firing. Mr. Netanyahu has hinted that he may ignore the ruling, and his response will indicate how far he is willing to defy the constitutional order.

"I don't see him saying 'no' to the Supreme Court," said Nadav Shtrauchler, a former adviser to Mr. Netanyahu, adding, "In the vast majority of cases, Netanyahu ends up being conservative." But even if the Israeli leader steps back from the brink, his critics say that Mr. Netanyahu has already caused irreparable damage by breaking so many norms to reach this point.

Mr. Olmert, the former prime minister, was also investigated for corruption while in office, and was ultimately [convicted and jailed](#). But he resigned his

post before the case reached trial, and his government never tried to fire the attorney general who oversaw the investigation.

“What Netanyahu is doing would have been unthinkable,” Mr. Olmert said.

Myra Noveck contributed reporting.

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