Forward

In Israel's election, Netanyahu faces a reckoning over Oct. 7 failure

Two weeks before Israelis vote, Netanyahu's former aides deliver explosive testimony, allegations of falsified records and demands for an independent inquiry.

Israeli polls show Gadi Eisenkot (L) and Benjamin Netanyahu (R) as frontrunners in Oct. 27 election. *Photo by DEBBIE HILL / POOL / AFP and Jack GUEZ / AFP via Getty Images*

Dan Perry October 12, 2026

With barely two weeks remaining before Israel's Oct. 27 election, the country has been consumed by an extraordinary confrontation between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and senior former aides over what he knew before the Hamas massacre of Oct. 7, 2023, what he did with that knowledge and whether his office subsequently sought to rewrite the historical record.

The immediate catalyst was a bombshell television interview in recent days with Maj. Gen. (res.) Avi Gil, Netanyahu's former military secretary, who served alongside him before and during the attack that killed approximately 1,200 people and saw 251 taken hostage. Gil had remained largely silent for three years, expecting to present his evidence to a state

commission of inquiry. But with Netanyahu blocking such an inquiry, amid transparent scheming to deflect blame, Gil decided to speak publicly.

What he described went considerably beyond the failures of intelligence and military preparedness that have already been extensively documented. Gil accused Netanyahu's office of attempting to falsify an official record from the morning of the attack. He challenged the prime minister's account of early warnings he received. He confirmed that Netanyahu rejected recommendations for preventive military operations against Hamas. And he described how political considerations influenced decisions over hostage negotiations, potentially prolonging the captivity of people who could have been brought home earlier – and alive.

His testimony is particularly consequential because it directly challenges a 55-page document Netanyahu released in February, presenting his version of the events preceding Oct. 7. Submitted to Israel's state comptroller, the document portrayed Netanyahu as having repeatedly advocated tougher action against Hamas while *security officials* underestimated the threat. It has become central to his defense against accusations that his longstanding policy of containing Hamas helped create the conditions for the catastrophe.

Gil, who attended the relevant meetings and recorded his experiences in 16 notebooks, described the published document as a profoundly incomplete and misleading account, containing lies and half-truths. It failed to reflect even half of what he witnessed.

A separate investigation published Friday by *Yedioth Ahronoth*, comparing Netanyahu's account with original records of security deliberations, reported significant omissions and distortions, including instances in which Netanyahu allegedly rejected proposals to target Hamas leaders that his February document presented as initiatives of his own.

Most explosive was Gil's account of an alleged attempt by Netanyahu's then-chief of staff, Tzachi Braverman, to change the official time of a telephone conversation on Oct. 7 from 6:40 a.m. to 6:29 a.m. Moving the time backward could create the impression that Netanyahu had been issuing instructions from the first moments of the assault. Gil said a stenographer told him she had been instructed to alter the record, prompting him to notify the attorney general.

Nitzan Alon, another retired general who headed the government's hostage release operation, and took part in negotiations throughout much of the war, also told reporters that "it was possible to end the war a year earlier" and save the lives of numerous hostages who eventually died in captivity.

Another remarkable confrontation involves Ronen Bar, the former head of the Shin Bet domestic security agency, whom Netanyahu has repeatedly blamed for the failures of Oct. 7. In late September, Bar announced plans to sue Netanyahu for defamation, accusing him of conducting a campaign of false allegations about his conduct before the massacre. Bar said he had warned Netanyahu about a looming security disaster and demanded disclosure of the original records of security meetings, communications and warnings, including the prime minister's contacts with foreign officials.

Those demands have acquired additional significance amid reports that senior officials from Egypt and the United Arab Emirates warned Netanyahu about Hamas preparations shortly before the attack. Netanyahu categorically denies receiving such warnings and has threatened legal action over the reporting.

Gil's revelations arrived alongside another striking intervention from a former Netanyahu confidant. Yoav Horowitz, , once Netanyahu's chief of staff and director-general of the Prime Minister's Office, told Kan's Reshet Bet radio last week that he had gradually come to understand that Netanyahu's decisions were driven primarily by considerations of personal political survival rather than the national interest.

Now a senior aide to leading opposition figure Gadi Eisenkot, Horowitz attributed that transformation to the corrosive effects of prolonged power, observing that "too much time in power corrupts," and framed the approaching election as being about saving the country.

Horowitz now heads the team preparing its first 100 days in government. His criticism therefore comes from a former trusted aide who has become an active political opponent, adding another dimension to the dispute over Netanyahu's leadership.

The question of political survival also figured prominently in Gil's account of the hostage negotiations. Asked whether coalition pressures had influenced decisions that delayed agreements to free hostages, Gil said some hostages could have returned earlier and that political calculations had played a role in the decisions that kept them in captivity.

Netanyahu has rejected Gil's allegations, and his Likud party has characterized the latest revelations as politically motivated propaganda. Netanyahu and his supporters maintain that senior security officials failed to recognize the imminent danger.

The country is still struggling to establish a common factual account of its most traumatic day in decades, while the officials who participated in the crucial decisions offer sharply conflicting versions of what happened. Meanwhile, the families of those killed on Oct. 7, survivors of the massacre and former hostages continue demanding answers about the decisions that shaped their lives.

The public appetite for an inquiry into the disaster is overwhelming. A September 2025 survey by the Israel Democracy Institute found that 74 percent of Israelis supported establishing a state commission of inquiry, including 68 percent of Jewish respondents identifying with the political right. A subsequent survey conducted in February 2026 found that 92 percent of Israelis considered it important to investigate the events.

The absence of such an inquiry has left journalists, former officials, politicians and bereaved families conducting an increasingly contentious public investigation of their own. Documents appear selectively, witnesses offer competing recollections, and allegations that might otherwise be tested through sworn testimony and access to classified evidence become weapons in an election campaign. With spiraling suspicions being leveled at Netanyahu, the election will take place amid unresolved questions – and a rage that grows more toxic by the day.

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