

Thank God Netanyahu Hit 'Pause' on Judicial Reform—Now He Needs to Build National Consensus for a Final Bill—Here's Why

JERUSALEM, ISRAEL – The last few days have been some of the most tense and crazy days in the modern history of Israel.

As I noted yesterday, the national crisis is unlike anything we've ever seen in the Jewish state since its miraculous rebirth in 1948.

Let's recap for a moment and then talk about where we go from here.

Over the weekend, an estimated 600,000 Israelis—approximately 6.5% of the national population—had poured into the streets over the weekend to protest the current version of the judicial reform legislation barreling its way through the Knesset and set for a final vote before the Passover holiday, which begins on the evening of April 5.

Whether the number is higher or lower, the point is that massive wave of protestors fear the bill would emasculate the power of the Supreme Court from being a proper check and balance on the legislature and could spell the end to Israeli democracy.

In the midst of the unprecedented and rising social and political tensions, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant delivered a speech on live television on Saturday night urging Prime Minister Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu to hit the "pause" button on the legislation.

Gallant argued that it was best to ratchet down tensions as Israelis navigated through Passover, Easter and Ramadan, some of the most sacred holidays on the Jewish, Christian and Islamic calendars.

What's more, Gallant openly worried that in the face of the threats posed by Iran, the Israeli Defense Forces were being pushed to the brink of combat ineffectiveness because so many combat soldiers, intelligence officers, and air force fighter pilots were threatening not to report to their units if Netanyahu jammed through legislation that they feared would bring an end to Israeli democracy.

But on Sunday, rather than agree with Gallant to hit the "pause button" and allow for a "cooling off period" for the next month or so, Netanyahu fired Gallant for insubordination.

In my view, that was a mistake.

For days, Gallant had been making his appeal to Netanyahu privately, voicing his mounting concerns not so much about the specifics in the legislation but by the way Netanyahu was handling the media and legislative process and letting a firestorm build that had direct and serious national security implications.

But Bibi didn't appear to be listening—or, if he was listening, he was not acting.

So, Gallant—not a leftist or an opposition member but a long-time friend and trusted ally of Bibi—went public.

By firing him, Netanyahu poured fuel on the fire.

Many Israelis became frightened that Netanyahu was not going to listen to reason and was going to force the legislation through without any changes or amendments.

By Monday, then, the protests escalated dramatically, as we reported here on ALL ISRAEL NEWS.

- Workers at Ben Gurion International airport went on strike, forcing the airport to shut down to all incoming and outgoing air traffic.
- Workers at Israel's commercial ports went on strike, shutting down all export and import trade.
- All Israeli public schools closed to protest Netanyahu's move.
- All Israeli universities closed, as well.
- Banks shut down.
- All McDonald's restaurants shut down in solidarity with the protestors.
- Major highways were blocked by protestors.
- Upwards of 100,000 protestors surrounded the Knesset building.
- Israeli President Isaac Herzog continued urging Netanyahu to slow down the process and enter talks with opposition leaders to find a way out of the crisis.
- So did at least five members of Netanyahu's Likud party.
- So did Natan Sharansky, the former
- So did Opposition Leader Yair Lapid.
- So did former Defense Minister Benny Gantz.
- So did U.S. President Joe Biden.
- So did the conservative Israeli think tank that originally developed the judicial reform plan.
- Even Netanyahu's personal lawyer advising him during his corruption trial threatened to quit unless the prime minister agreed to pause the judicial reform bill and

discuss a compromise.

Yet Netanyahu continued to resist.

As the situation continued to escalate on Monday, Netanyahu's team notified the press that he would make a public statement at 10:30am.

But he didn't.

The statement kept being postponed hour after hour as Netanyahu met with his coalition partners.

The Religious Zionism party—led by Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir—threatened to bolt the coalition and bring down the government if Netanyahu slowed down or stopped the legislation from being passed before Passover.

But by late Monday, Netanyahu decided that he had had enough.

He informed his coalition partners that for the good of the country, he had to hit the pause button and open up real talks with the opposition.

The Religious Zionism party—for the moment, anyway—backed down.

Then Netanyahu on live national television to address the nation, explain the decision he had made and his willingness to enter into talks, and vowed that he would not lead the country into a "civil war," which many—including President Herzog—fear is coming.

This was the right move.

Netanyahu is to be commended for listening to the will of the Israeli people, calling the bluff of the Religious Zionism leadership and demonstrating true leadership.

He should have done this sooner.

By waiting so long, he has lost a great deal of trust, even among many center-right Israelis who want a balanced version of judicial reform to pass.

Still, Netanyahu acted before it was too late—and I am grateful.

I'm also impressed with and grateful to President Herzog and former Defense Minister Gallant.

The both deserve real credit for selflessly urging the prime minister to open real talks, seek compromise, and dial down the flames.

We are a long way from seeing this conflict resolved.

The protests are continuing.

And Netanyahu's allies on Tuesday actually "tabled" the current version of the legislation, a technical term for getting it ready for final passage.

Opposition members are saying that shows Netanyahu isn't serious about forging a compromise.

Let's pray that's not the case.

I believe judicial reforms are vitally important, as I've argued repeatedly on ALL ISRAEL NEWS and THE ROSENBERG REPORT.

Most of the current package I can accept.

But I'm totally opposed to the "override clause" that only requires 61 Knesset members out of 120 to overturn a Supreme Court decision.

That's a terrible mistake.

It would completely emasculate the High Court, remove a critical check and balance, and severely damage—and possibly destroy—Israel's democracy.

What Israel's needs is a supermajority of 90 out of 120 Knesset members to vote in favor or overriding an unfair or unjust Supreme Court decision.

That would mean an override would necessitate broad national consensus, not a simple majority.

Personally, I could probably live with an 80 seat requirement instead of 61.

But 61 is terrible and would put the human rights and civil rights of Israel's minorities in grave jeopardy.

So, I ask you to join me in praying that the prime minister and the rest of the Israeli government and parliament come together and do the right thing.

Soon, before the forest fires goes out of control. {eo}

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