Lapid says Yesh Atid would step in to replace coalition hardliners to secure hostage deal

By Lazar Berman / 7 March 2024

Opposition Leader Yair Lapid says that he is still willing to join the government if Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expels the far-right flank of his coalition.

"Kick out of the extremists. To get the hostages out I'll come in and give you a security net," he says at the **INSS conference** in Tel Aviv. Lapid adds that Netanyahu has received his offer, but indicates it was dismissed by the Likud leader, who he says only cares about keeping the coalition intact.

Lapid criticizes Netanyahu's management of the war and the way the Gaza humanitarian aid effort is being run, noting that the war cabinet and larger security cabinet are working at cross purposes. The war cabinet, which is controlled by moderates, is working with the US to get aid in, but the security cabinet, which includes far-right hardliners like Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir, is urging civilians to block the aid convoys into Gaza, he says.

Hamas too has an interest in keeping Gazans starving, he argues.

The Yesh Atid head also pooh-poohs a reported government plan to use local clans to maintain civil control in Gaza, saying it "won't happen and is an invitation for chaos." He calls for Gaza to be run by "a regional coalition."

While appearing to share Netanyahu's skepticism regarding the Palestinian Authority taking Gaza's reins, Lapid leaves open the possibility that it handle the task in some form, though he says it needs a ""different leadership."

"We know they're not Hamas and we know they know how to sweep the streets," he says, yet adds that the PA "must prove to us, and not the other way around, that it is not part of the threat."

Lapid avoids the term "two-state solution," instead calling for Israel to "separate from the Palestinians… from a position of strength."

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