**Gantz says Israel moving to protect citizens from ICC**

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<https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/israel-moves-to-protect-hundreds-of-personnel-against-icc-probe-660700>

Defense Minister and Justice Minister Benny Gantz set off unexpected alarms on Tuesday giving the impression to Reuters that Israel estimates that hundreds of its citizens might be subject to war crimes probes by the International Criminal Court, in the not so distant future.

Gantz said that Israel is hard at work protecting those Israelis.

The defense minister and justice minister’s comments went in direct contradiction to comments made by top Israeli legal officials from multiple ministries to the press both on and off-the-record in early February when Israel’s confrontation with the ICC went into high gear.

Although Israel’s Foreign Ministry and Justice Ministry have worked on and off for around two decades to protect Israeli officials from prosecution overseas for various military operations, all government experts have said that any possibility of arrest by the ICC is several months, if not years away.

Gantz’s interview clearly caught officials off-guard and was not part of the government’s standard messaging.

The issue came to a head on February 5 after the ICC Pre-Trial Chamber recognized a State of Palestine for ICC purposes and approved ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda’s request to move forward towards a full war crimes probe against Israelis and Hamas.

There is hope in Israel that the new incoming ICC Prosecutor, Karim Khan, who replaces Bensouda in June, may be more amenable to Jerusalem’s viewpoint.

Israel is not a member of the court and rejects its jurisdiction, a position backed by allies such as the US, Germany and several other countries. Palestinians have welcomed the ruling as a chance for justice for victims of Israeli attacks.

Including himself among Israelis who could be threatened with arrest, Benny Gantz told Reuters: "I was never afraid to go across enemy lines, I will continue to stand wherever I have to."

In an interview on Israel's fortified border with Gaza, Gantz called the ruling a "negative development" and added: "We have our own teams working in different (places) to try (and) influence (the ICC)."

Gantz was the military's chief of staff during the 2014 war between Israel and militants in Hamas-controlled Gaza. The ICC has pointed to that conflict as a potential issue to be probed along with the settlement enterprise and the 2018 Gaza border conflict.

Asked by Reuters how many Israelis, including himself, might expect to be subject to arrest should the probe lead to criminal investigations, Gantz said: "I guess several hundred, but we will take care of everybody."

Gantz called that "an estimate," declining to say if Israel had drawn up a list of officials. Israel will provide legal assistance to any implicated Israelis and will give them legal warnings regarding travel if necessary, Gantz said.

Asked if he himself might change his travel plans in light of the ICC probe, Gantz said: "So far, no."

Gantz has successfully fought off a previous war crimes case in the national courts of the Netherlands.