

With Ceasefire Calls Growing, Israeli Military Launches Closed-door “PR Blitz” on Capitol Hill

The Intercept has learned of around half a dozen events coordinated with Israeli officials during recent weeks — some of them hastily organized.

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High-level Israeli military officers are conducting private briefings for members of the U.S. Congress on Israel’s war on Gaza, according to documents reviewed by The Intercept. The briefings ramped up as questions emerged on Capitol Hill about Israel’s conduct in the war and ceasefire calls gained steam.

“There’s an Israel PR blitz happening this week facilitated by a handful of senators,” said a source familiar with the meetings in the upper chamber. “Practically all of the briefings on this issue these last few weeks have been members-only,” meaning congressional staff and the public are not welcome.

One briefing exclusive to members of the Senate scheduled on Monday and organized by Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., involved three senior Israel Defense Forces officers stationed at the Israeli Embassy.

“Sen. Duckworth would like to invite your boss to a last-minute meeting with Israeli Defense officials to discuss Israel’s strategy, how they are waging the war and what to expect in the day after the scenarios,” according to a memo obtained by The Intercept. (Duckworth did not immediately respond to a request for comment.)

The briefings are coming as Israel faces an international backlash over its assault on the Gaza Strip. Israel says it is seeking to eliminate Hamas, the Palestinian terror group that killed hundreds of Israeli civilians in its October 7 surprise attack.

The Intercept has learned of around half a dozen events coordinated with Israeli officials during recent weeks. The Intercept reviewed materials relating to four of the briefings. Sen. J.D. Vance, R-Ohio, who said he had not spoken with the Israel Defense Forces in recent

days, told The Intercept,

“I know there are going to be some folks from the IDF here tomorrow or the day after to brief members of Congress.”

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., told The Intercept,

“I have had private conversations with IDF officials but I didn’t attend any briefings.”
(She declined to comment on her meetings.)

In response to the Hamas attack, Israel launched airstrikes against Gaza and undertook a ground invasion. Israel’s offensive has faced criticisms for its death toll, with more than 14,000 Palestinians dying, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, and enormous damage to Gaza, one of the most densely populated places on Earth. Over the weekend, Hamas and Israel agreed to a “pause” in fighting to allow for the release of Israeli hostages in Gaza in exchange for humanitarian aid for Palestinians. The temporary truce is set to expire, but talks for an extension are ongoing.

Calls for a ceasefire on Capitol Hill [started slowly](#) but have [gained steam](#) in recent weeks. As of Tuesday morning, a total of 43 members from both chambers of Congress had [called for a ceasefire](#). Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., a progressive who had publicly sided with Israel after the October 7 attack, said on Tuesday he may put forward a bill conditioning aid to Israel, [The Intercept reported](#).

The shifts spurred the increased pace of congressional briefings with IDF officials, some of which were hastily arranged.

“The IDF didn’t anticipate that there would be this much backlash to Israel,” said the source, who asked for anonymity because they were not authorized to speak. “And, with the prospect of an even longer-term ceasefire, are putting together an all-hands-on-deck PR blitz to keep Senators at bay.”

Frequent and Secret Briefings

While members of Congress and their staff frequently hold meetings with foreign officials, including military officials, the invitations for briefings with current and former Israeli officials have come in rapid succession over recent weeks.

“It isn’t entirely unusual for senators to have member-only meetings or briefings on sensitive or classified issues,” said the source. “What is unusual is the frequency with which they’ve happened recently — especially this week — the secrecy involved, and the single-issue focus.”

Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., appeared to suggest some of the briefings were secret.

“My friend, I would not speak about those classified meetings,” Booker told The Intercept when asked about the IDF briefings. (None of the materials reviewed by The Intercept indicated the briefings were classified.)

Briefers in the closed-door meetings were to include several senior Israeli military officials stationed at the embassy, including Maj. Gen. Tal Kelman, former head of the strategic

directorate and Iran Division; Col. Itai Shapira, a former senior Israeli Defense Intelligence officer; and Lt. Col. Yotam Shefer of the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, the Israeli military unit responsible for mediating between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. (The Israeli Embassy referred questions to the IDF, which did not immediately respond.)

One briefing was scheduled to take place in-person on Capitol Hill for an hour on Monday evening.

Another briefing, scheduled for Tuesday, is slated to have the former chief of Israeli military intelligence, retired Maj. Gen. Amos Yadlin, brief Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M. Yadlin has issued fiery statements following the Hamas attack, [saying](#) that Hamas “will pay like the Nazis paid in Europe.” (Heinrich and Yadlin did not immediately respond to requests for comment.)

Another briefing, scheduled for Tuesday morning and organized by Sens. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., and Marco Rubio, R-Fla., is a closed screening of 47 minutes of footage of Hamas atrocities committed on October 7.

“It’s important to bear witness in real time,” Sen. Jacky Rosen, D-Nev., who helped arrange the viewing, told reporters. “Sometime in the future, we’ll go — there’ll be a museum, there’ll be a memorial, there’ll be another Yad Vashem or Holocaust museum.”

“It isn’t a coincidence that these briefings are now happening as public opinion is shifting and the pressure to corral lawmakers,” the source said, “and the recipients of their campaign contributions.”

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