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Israeli Ultra-Orthodox Party Abandons Netanyahu Coalition Over Conscription Dispute

July 15, 2025

– Categories: *Breaking News*



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Israel's political landscape has been rocked by the decision of United Torah Judaism (UTJ), an ultra-Orthodox party, to withdraw from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition government. The move, announced on 15 July 2025, stems from a deepening rift over the

failure to secure a bill exempting yeshiva students from mandatory military service. This contentious issue has long strained relations within the coalition.

The departure of UTJ, which comprises the Degel HaTorah and Agudat Yisrael factions, sees six of its seven Knesset members submitting resignation letters, following the earlier exit of party chairman Yitzhak Goldknopf a month prior. This leaves Netanyahu's government clinging to a fragile 61-seat majority in the 120-seat Knesset, teetering on the edge of instability. A spokesperson for Goldknopf confirmed the resignations, underscoring the party's frustration with the government's handling of the conscription issue.

The ultra-Orthodox parties have long championed exemptions for yeshiva students, arguing that their religious studies constitute a vital contribution to the nation. In a statement, Degel HaTorah cited consultations with its leading rabbis, declaring that "repeated violations by the government" of its pledges to protect the status of yeshiva students left them no choice but to resign. The party pointed to the coalition agreement of late 2022, which explicitly promised to address the exemption issue, a commitment they claim has been ignored.

The conscription debate has grown increasingly divisive in Israel, particularly amid the ongoing war in Gaza, which has placed immense pressure on the military. For decades, ultra-Orthodox Jews have been largely exempt from mandatory service, a policy that has sparked resentment among other Israelis who bear the burden of conscription. The Supreme Court's ruling last year, which mandated the defence ministry to begin drafting yeshiva students, further inflamed tensions, exposing fault lines within Netanyahu's coalition.

While UTJ's exit is a significant blow, uncertainty looms over whether Shas, another ultra-Orthodox party, will follow suit. Shas has yet to clarify its stance, leaving analysts speculating about the coalition's future stability. Some coalition members continue to push for exemptions, while others advocate scrapping them entirely, creating a deadlock that Netanyahu has struggled to resolve.

The timing of the crisis could not be worse for Netanyahu, whose government faces mounting challenges both domestically and internationally. The conscription issue, far from being a mere policy dispute, has become a symbol of broader societal divisions over the role of religion in the state. As one senior UTJ official remarked in a recent interview with *Haaretz*, "The government's failure to honour its promises undermines the trust of our community and our rabbis."

With the coalition now hanging by a thread, Netanyahu must navigate a delicate path to maintain power. The coming weeks will likely see intense negotiations as he seeks to placate religious allies while addressing the demands of a public increasingly frustrated by the exemptions. For now, Israel's political future remains uncertain, with the conscription debate exposing deep-seated tensions that show no sign of abating.