



ISRAEL UPDATE



War in Israel: Update on Current Situation

October 23, 2025 - October 7 War, Day 748, 13 hostage bodies remain in captivity

LATEST UPDATES

The ceasefire in Gaza holds as bodies of additional hostages are returned. A “spectacular parade” of high-level US visitors to Israel continues as VP Vance wraps up visit. Secretary of State Rubio to arrive tonight.

Gaza Ceasefire

- The **ceasefire in Gaza is holding**. As agreed, the IDF currently maintains control of around half the area of the Strip, with Hamas controlling the other half (despite its severely depleted resources and capabilities).
- The Hamas-controlled area runs along the coastal strip and is divided from the Israel-controlled zone by the “**Yellow Line**.”
- On Sunday, in a **major breach of the ceasefire**, two IDF soldiers were killed and one severely injured in Rafah, an area under Israeli control. It occurred when their position was attacked by pro-Hamas forces with rocket-propelled grenades. Israel responded with widespread airstrikes across Gaza, claiming Hamas fighters had violated the agreement. Hamas denied involvement, stating it had no contact with the fighters in Rafah.
- The **two fallen soldiers** were Major Yaniv Kula, 26, and Staff Sergeant Itay Yavetz, 21, both from Modi'in.
- In a private meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu, U.S. Special Envoy Steve Witkoff and senior adviser Jared Kushner delivered a clear message from President **Trump: Israel has the right to defend itself** against terrorist attacks, but must avoid actions that could jeopardize the fragile ceasefire with Hamas. Meanwhile, President Trump publicly warned Hamas that if it violates the agreement, Israel would be free to respond immediately and forcefully, stating that he would have Israel “eradicate them within two minutes.”
- Despite the recent flare-up, Trump maintained that the **ceasefire remains intact** and expressed belief that Hamas leadership is committed to the deal.
- After more than a day of fighting, both sides agreed to **resume the ceasefire**. The breach notwithstanding, many in Israel noted that a similar incident occurred following the ceasefire agreement with Hezbollah in the north. Then, the terror group attacked Israeli forces days

after the agreement went into effect. Israel retaliated heavily, signaling that zero tolerance towards any attacks or breaches of the deal. The ceasefire resumed quickly and remained in place afterwards.

- While the **Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen** were not formally part of the deal between Israel and Hamas, the terror group announced that they would stop firing at Israel while the ceasefire is in place. As a result, there have been no sirens since the deal took effect.

Against significant public objections, the Israeli government has officially approved **renaming the current conflict to the "War of Revival"** (Milchemet Hatkuma), moving away from the commonly used "October 7 War." However, many Israelis noted that history shows that while governments can propose names, it's usually the public that determines which one is used. After the Six-Day War in 1967 and the First Lebanon War in the 1980s, public consensus ultimately shaped the terminology.

Bodies of Hostages Released

- Despite stipulations in the ceasefire agreement that called on Hamas to **release the bodies of all 28 deceased hostages** it was holding within 72 hours, that deadline passed with just a small number of remains being returned.
- Hamas has repeatedly said that **it does not know where the rest of the bodies are**. However, under pressure from the mediators – the United States, Egypt, and Qatar – and other parties, the terror group has "found" additional hostages, and has returned one or two at a time.
- On Tuesday, the bodies of **Tamir Adar, 38, and Arie Zalmanowicz, 85**, were returned to Israel. Both were residents of Kibbutz Nir Oz. Tamar was killed while fighting Hamas terrorists on October 7, and his body was taken into Gaza. Arie, one of Nir Oz's founders, was kidnapped alive and, according to the IDF, murdered in captivity in November 2023.
- The day before, the body of **Tal Haimi from Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak** was returned to Israel for burial. Haimi was a member of the kibbutz emergency squad whose wife and three young children remained in their safe room on October 7 while he left to defend the Kibbutz. Haimi was killed battling terrorists and Hamas took his body to Gaza. His wife later gave birth to their fourth child.
- On Saturday night, Hamas returned the bodies of two other hostages. One was identified as **Ronen Engel, 54**. On October 7, Ronen volunteered as a medic in Kibbutz Nir Oz before he was murdered by Hamas terrorists who also kidnapped his wife, Karina and their daughters Mika and Yuval. Karina, Mika, and Yuval were released in November 2023. On Sunday, Mika posted on Instagram: "After 744 days, my father finally returned to Israel. It's not what we hoped, it's not what we wished for him, but the day is finally here."
- The second body was of **Sonthaya Oakkharasri, 30**, a Thai farmer who was murdered on October 7 while working near Kibbutz Be'eri. He left behind a seven-year-old daughter.
- As of today, the bodies of 15 have been returned under the new agreement and **13 remain with Hamas**.

Egyptian and other international groups are assisting in **trying to locate additional hostages' remains**. However, Israel claims that Hamas knows where numerous other bodies are located and are leveraging their return as a negotiating tactic.

International Diplomacy

- Negotiations have begun on **Phase 2 of the ceasefire agreement** that will involve discussions on disarming Hamas, the IDF's withdrawal, the future governance of Gaza, and other issues.
- According to Israeli media, **Egypt, Turkey, and Qatar are quietly coordinating** with Hamas to shape the future "technocratic government" in Gaza. Hamas is reportedly selecting half of the ministers, who will be sympathetic to its agenda but not openly affiliated. The other half is being chosen by the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, whose proposed list was shared with Hamas by Egypt to ensure its approval. If accurate, this arrangement contradicts the Trump peace plan's stipulation that Hamas should have no influence over Gaza's future governance.
- Following the visit by President Trump to Israel last week, Israeli media have described a "**spectacular parade**" of top American officials coming to Israel.
- **Vice President JD Vance** arrived in the Jewish state on Tuesday. Vance has held meetings with Prime Minister Netanyahu, President Herzog, Defense Minister Katz, and senior IDF officials. His visit focused on reinforcing the Gaza ceasefire and discussing the next phase of the peace plan.
- The Vice President was **joined** by Trump's Mid-East Special Envoy Steve Witkoff, CentCom Commander Brad Cooper, and senior advisor Jared Kushner.
- Vance emphasized that the **U.S. is not in Israel to "babysit" the ceasefire**, but "to support a partnership." He expressed optimism about the deal's durability and the potential for long-term quiet, while acknowledging the complexity of coordinating an international security force for Gaza.
- Vance also inaugurated the **U.S.-led Civil-Military Coordination Center in Kiryat Gat**, which will oversee ceasefire logistics and Gaza's rehabilitation. The center will be staffed by approximately 200 US military personnel.
- The **UK has sent a number of officers to participate** in the multinational task force that will oversee and maintain the ceasefire in Gaza under the leadership of the US. Britain will join Egypt, Jordan, Canada, and Qatar in that task force.
- Those who have met with Vance say that he has expressed "**foundational support**" for Israel and is "sympathetic to the Jewish state and its needs." The Vice President has also said that he won't force Israel to accept Turkish soldiers operating in Gaza. He recognizes and respects Jerusalem's concerns over certain aspects of Washington's plan for the Strip.
- Kushner said during the visit that the **rehabilitation of Gaza can already begin** in areas under the control of the IDF, where Hamas is not in power.

As Vance's three-day visit wraps up this afternoon, **Secretary of State Marco Rubio** is set to arrive in Israel for a two-day visit. His agenda also includes meetings with Israeli leadership to support the ceasefire and advance the second phase of the Trump peace initiative.

Israeli Politics

- Netanyahu reportedly **fired the head of the National Security Council**, Tzahi Hanegbi, who acted as a close confidante on security matters to the prime minister. While Hanegbi did not state any reasons for his departure, Israeli media reported that he had had numerous recent disagreements with him. In his announcement, Hanegbi said that there should be a comprehensive investigation into the failures of October 7, including an examination of his own role.
- At the same time, it is understood that **Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer will leave his position** next month. Dermer is widely regarded as the person closest to Netanyahu on all diplomatic and security matters. Netanyahu reportedly offered Dermer a coveted reserved slot on the Likud party's list of candidates for the Knesset in the next elections if he stays, but Dermer refused the offer.
 - This week, the Knesset approved **two sovereignty-related bills** in preliminary readings.
 - The first, introduced by MK Avi Maoz of the Noam party, seeks to **apply Israeli law and sovereignty to all settlements** in Judea and Samaria. The initial reading passed 25–24, amid a boycott by most of the Likud party and criticism from international actors concerned about its impact on the Gaza ceasefire.
 - The second bill, proposed by opposition MK Avigdor Liberman, the leader of Yisrael Beiteinu, aims to **annex the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim** near Jerusalem. With almost 40,000 residents, Ma'ale Adumim is one of the largest Jewish settlements; there is near consensus in Israel that the city will remain under Israeli control. That proposal passed 32–9.
 - Both bills now move to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee for further deliberation. Without government backing, they are **unlikely to pass**.
 - Many Israelis **noted the irony** of opposition members pushing a bill that seems to serve a rightist agenda, and the center-right coalition voting against. Commentators suggest that Liberman's goal was to pass the law in the hope that it would anger President Trump, and, by extension, embarrass Netanyahu. At the same time, by voting against the law, Likud supporters – and others on the right – would be disappointed with the prime minister and his party.
 - President Trump said that Israel would 'lose all of its support' from the US if it annexed the West Bank, and Vice President Vance said that the Knesset vote was "very stupid" and an "insult."
- The ultra-Orthodox Shas party announced it is **stepping back from coalition roles** after the government failed to pass a draft exemption law for Haredim. While this move doesn't formally remove Shas from the coalition, it signals pressure on Netanyahu to act quickly. Despite the announcement, party leader Aryeh Deri continues to participate in key cabinet meetings, including a recent one on Gaza.
 - The coalition also faced **internal rebellion when Likud MK Yuli Edelstein** broke ranks to support Avi Maoz's sovereignty bill (see above). In response, Likud removed

Edelstein from the influential Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, just months after he was ousted as its chair.

- Coalition discipline further unraveled as Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir also **voted for Maoz's bill**, defying coalition lines. Maoz, representing the one-seat Noam party, pushed the bill forward despite significant pressure to withdraw it.
- The governing coalition also **failed to block several opposition bills**, adding to the sense of instability.
- Prime Minister Netanyahu **expressed frustration with the timing** of the sovereignty votes, especially during Vice President Vance's visit to Israel. He warned Smotrich that such moves were diplomatically provocative, but those who backed the bills appeared unfazed, signaling growing defiance within the coalition.
- Elections in Israel must be held by October 2026, but all signals suggest they will

Hostage Releases

- In January, Israeli musician Yoni Bloch released an AI-generated music video titled Sof Tov ("Good Ending"), which captured the collective yearning of Israelis for the release of all hostages and an end to the war. The video resonated deeply, especially as it portrayed scenes of national celebration and hope that felt distant at the time. One particularly emotional moment came when freed hostage Aviva Siegel watched the video while her husband, Keith remained in Hamas captivity.
- Now, with all living hostages returned home, Bloch has re-created the video using real footage of reunions and celebrations across Israel. In an earlier interview, Bloch explained that the original video's power lay in its blend of optimism and fantasy, serving not as a reflection of reality but as a reminder to keep dreaming. Israelis dared to dream—and that dream came true.

Further Reading

- [No ceasefire for the Jews](#)
- [Stopping Houthi Attacks: How to Secure the Red Sea](#)
- [Boots on the Ground and Strikes in Lebanon – A Strategic Military Lesson in Response to a Persistent Threat](#)
- [What if we began to have hope?](#)

For more information, please contact: Jewish Federations of North America's Dani Wassner dani.wassner@jewishfederations.org. Subscribe to this weekly update [here](#).