



Update from Israel

December 18, 2025 - October 7 War, Day 804, 1 hostage body remains in captivity.

These updates will be on pause until January 8. We will continue to closely monitor the situation and share additional information as needed.

Australia Terror Attack

- In the **worst-ever attack on Australia's Jewish community**, terrorists opened fire indiscriminately on Jews celebrating Chanukah on Bondi Beach in Sydney on Sunday evening.
- At least **15 people were killed**, including a 10-year-old child, rabbis, and a Holocaust survivor, as well as at least one non-Jewish man. More than three dozen were wounded in one of Australia's deadliest shootings in decades.
- **Jewish Federations of North America** joined people across the world [in](#) condemning the attack and mourning the victims. See our blog post [here](#).
- The attack follows more than **two years of rising antisemitism** in Australia, which many in the Jewish community say the country's government did little to stem.
- The Israeli government, along with local Jewish leaders, have been warning the government that an attack was almost inevitable. When the Australian government formally recognized a Palestinian state in September, Prime Minister Netanyahu said that such a move awarded a prize for terror and that it encouraged antisemitic attacks.
- **Two gunmen, a father and son, opened fire on the crowd**; the 50-year-old father was shot dead at the scene, and his 24-year-old son, Naveed Akram, was wounded and taken to hospital under guard.
- Naveed Akram has now been **charged with 59 offenses**, including 15 counts of murder and committing a terrorist act.

- Investigators found terror-related material and **improvised explosive devices** both at the scene and in the suspects' vehicle, underscoring the planned nature of the assault.
- Amid the tragedy, stories of bravery have emerged, including that of Ahmed al-Ahmed, a **Muslim bystander who wrestled with one of the attackers**, seizing his weapon and likely saving many lives. Al-Ahmed has received significant praise for his brave actions by the Jewish community, and leaders across the world.
- The attack has prompted **national grief**, calls for tougher gun and hate-speech laws, and widespread vigils and tributes to the victim. Josh Frydberg, Australia's Jewish former treasurer (the second most important position to the prime minister), who is from the conservative party (now in opposition), [slammed the current government](#).
- Some State governments in Australia, as well as the national government in the UK, have outlawed the phrase "globalize the Intifada," as a result of the terror attack.
- Watch [the promise of one Jewish Australian](#), "**We won't turn our menorahs off.**"
- The Jewish Agency for Israel, together with Israel's Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism, has deployed an **expert delegation from Israel** to support the Australian Jewish community and assist in immediate recovery and resilience-building efforts.
- The delegation was dispatched as part of JReady, the joint emergency preparedness and community resilience platform of the Agency and the Ministry. The team arrived in Sydney on Tuesday, and began field operations immediately. The delegation includes leading Israeli experts in trauma response, mass-casualty events, and community recovery. Members include Prof. Moshe Farchi, a world-renowned trauma expert and developer of the Six Cs Model for Psychological First Aid; Ayelet Shmuel, Director of the International Resilience Center in Sderot; and specialists from the International Center for Functional Resilience, the Israel Trauma Coalition, and One Family. The Jewish Federations of North America and other major Jewish organizations are supporting the Jewish Agency's efforts to assist the Australian Jewish community.

Hostages

- One final hostage body remains in Gaza, that of **Ran Gvili**.
- Gvili was a police special forces officer, on **injury leave** on October 7, 2023. Despite his injury, Gvili voluntarily grabbed his personal weapon and drove towards the fighting on October 7.
- According to many accounts, **Gvili saved the lives of close to 100 people** at the Nova Festival before being killed.
- Hamas took his body and has held it in Gaza ever since.
- Israeli authorities say that they will not rest until **Gvili's body is returned**.
- Last Friday new [videos surfaced](#) showing the **six hostages who were executed in August 2024** celebrating Hanukkah while held by Hamas.
 - The clips—recovered by the IDF and supplemented with family testimony—span several months and **depict the hostages** playing cards, marking the new year, and lighting Hanukkah candles just months after their abduction.
 - The six, including American-Israeli **Hersh Goldberg-Polin**, were later discovered executed in a Rafah tunnel as Israeli troops approached.

- The footage, **filmed by Hamas** as propaganda, aimed to manipulate public perception while psychologically torturing Israelis.
- The videos reveal **severe conditions**: the hostages were visibly starved, lacked medical care, and endured both physical and psychological abuse. Most had lost significant weight and injuries were left untreated despite pleas for help.
- The clips also show Hamas exploiting news reports to torment the hostages.
- Yet, amid the staged scenes, the hostages' **courage and humanity are evident**. They shared moments of warmth, humor, and support for one another—helping Hersh play cards with his one remaining hand and exchanging affectionate gestures. Another hostage smiles and wishes a happy holiday, while Hersh references a famous Hanukkah image of a menorah in a window in Nazi Germany, where a swastika flag can be seen outside.

Fighting

- The IDF **killed senior Hamas commander Raad Saad** in a targeted strike in Gaza City last weekend, marking one of the most prominent assassinations of a Hamas leader since the ceasefire took effect. Israeli officials said Saad was one of the key architects of the 7 October 2023 attack on Israel and a senior figure in Hamas's armed wing, the al-Qassam Brigades, involved in rebuilding weapons and military capabilities in violation of the truce.
- According to the IDF, the strike, which was carried out by drone on a vehicle on the Al-Rashid road, was **retaliation for an earlier explosion in Gaza** that injured Israeli soldiers and was aimed at degrading Hamas's operational capacity.
- In Syria last weekend, a **joint US-Syria convoy came under attack** by an armed ISIS gunman who was then eliminated. Two US military servicemen and a US civilian working as a translator were murdered. Three others were injured and air-evacuated to a US army base near the Iraqi border.
- For much of the world, the ceasefire reached in October and the return of the hostages marks the end of the war that began on October 7, 2023. Yet, according to [new polling](#) by the Israel Democracy Institute, **most Israelis remain convinced that military conflict will erupt again** in the coming year. The study finds that 71% of Israelis believe there will be a renewed conflict with Hezbollah in Lebanon in the coming year, 69% think that there will be another round of war with Iran, 53% believe the conflict with Hamas in Gaza will resume, and 47% think there will be a conflict with the Houthis in Yemen. Additionally, 64% of Jewish Israelis believe a Palestinian uprising (Intifada) will erupt in the West Bank in the foreseeable future.
- Iran-linked hacker group **Handala** claims to have breached former Prime Minister **Naftali Bennett's** phone in what they call *Operation Octopus*, leaking contacts and sensitive documents, including the personal phone numbers of international leaders. Bennett denies his device was compromised, saying only his Telegram account was accessed, but the incident underscores growing cyber threats and the irony given his past cybersecurity credentials.

Israeli Economy

- Israel approved its **largest-ever natural gas export deal**, signing a historic agreement worth about \$34.7 billion to supply Egyptian markets with gas from the Leviathan offshore field through 2040, with roughly 130 billion cubic meters contracted, a move that Israel said would boost state revenue, enhance the country's role as a regional energy power, and contribute to regional stability.
- The German parliament (Bundestag) has approved an **expansion of the Arrow 3 defense system contract** with Israel, valued at approximately \$3.1 billion, which will complement the initial purchase agreement signed by Israel and Germany approximately two years ago, valued at roughly \$3.5 billion. Together, the Arrow agreement, signed by the Israel Ministry of Defense (IMOD) and the German Federal Ministry of Defense (BMVg), totals approximately \$6.5 billion, representing the largest Israeli defense export deal ever.
- According to the Economy Ministry, **Israeli exports are expected to reach close to \$160 billion** by the end of the year, a 3% increase compared to 2024 and close to the peak year to date, 2022, when exports stood at \$165 billion.
- Nvidia has **signed a major deal with Israel to build a landmark AI and research campus** in Kiryat Tivon near Haifa, one that could host up to 10,000 employees and span more than 1.7 million square feet of facilities. The investment represents one of the largest commitments by a foreign tech firm in Israeli history. The government says it strengthens Israel's role as a global hub for AI research, chip design, and cutting-edge computing. It also states that the project is expected to create thousands of high-tech jobs in the north, cultivate deep collaboration with local universities and startups, and anchor long-term innovation activities across hardware, software, and AI.
- Wizz Air, the Hungarian low-cost airline, is moving forward with **plans to establish a major operational hub** in Israel, likely at Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv, with the goal of having it operational by around April 2026. This hub would allow the airline to base aircraft and crews locally, expand its route network significantly, and increase flight frequencies, which the Israeli government says could help lower high airfares and boost competition in the market. Once completed, the hub would mark one of the airline's largest forays into the Middle East and could reshape international travel connections to and from Israel.
- More than two years after the 2023 Hamas massacre, the question of how to preserve the destroyed kibbutzim continues to be debated. Be'eri, one of the hardest-hit communities where 102 residents were killed, **voted 196–146 to preserve a single house and demolish the rest**. Residents cited concerns that young children could not safely grow up near the remains of their grandparents' homes; some proposals, including relocating burned houses to a festival site or preserving only those near the fence, aimed to balance commemoration with daily life.

Further Reading

- [Does the United States Need Extreme Vetting?](#)
- [A Fake Haredi Draft Law Is Worse Than No Law at All](#)
- [The Authority of the President of the State of Israel to Pardon the Prime Minister](#)
- [One Year Since the Ceasefire: Did Lebanon Miss the Opportunity for Change?](#)

