



ISRAEL UPDATE



Update from Israel

January 15, 2026 - October 7 War, Day 832, 1 hostage body remains in captivity.

Israel on high alert as tensions in Iran escalate

Iran

- Mass protests in Iran, now in their third week, have continued to **escalate into what is now the most serious challenge** to the Islamic regime since its founding in 1979.
- The Iranian government has **shut down Internet and phone access** inside the country, making it difficult to know what is taking place on the ground. The communications freeze is now in its fifth day.
- President **Trump has repeatedly warned** the Islamic Republic that the US would not stand by idly if the Iranian government killed its own citizens. Estimates of the number of protestors killed by regime forces trying to end the demonstrations and gatherings range from 2,000 to more than 20,000.
- Many reports suggest that the **US is now poised to strike** Iranian government targets. A significant build-up of US military power is already in the region, with additional resources on the way.
- Iran has threatened to **strike back at both US and Israeli interests** if the US attacks.
- The Israeli government has said that it is on the **highest level of preparedness**, but, so far, no special new orders have been given to citizens. Beersheba municipality has opened public shelters as a precaution. Daily life continues as usual, although there is grave concern over what the coming days may bring.
- Yesterday, the **Lufthansa group suspended its flights to Israel**; so far, all other carriers continue their operations in and out of Israel.
- The **US Embassy in Jerusalem issued a travel caution** for American citizens planning to visit Israel, urging heightened awareness amid "ongoing regional tensions," although it did not include specific safety directives. The UK's Foreign Office also warned against all but essential travel to Israel.

- Last night, President Trump said that he understood that the Iranian regime had **stopped executing citizens**, which was the red line he had drawn for US intervention. Some see this as a ruse by the US, to cause Iran to lower its guard.
- Iran's military capabilities are no match for Israel and the US. However, given its stockpile of ballistic missiles, Iran has the ability to **inflict considerable damage on Israel**. In the "12-Day-War" between Iran and Israel last June, Iranian missiles killed 28 civilians, destroyed or damaged dozens of buildings, shut down Israeli airspace for almost two weeks, and caused considerable damage to the Jewish state's economy.
- Nevertheless, Israel's political and military leadership reportedly **favor a US strike on Iran** to finally bring the regime to an end. They assess that the regime's collapse could cripple Hezbollah, weaken Hamas and the Houthis, and, in general, reduce Iran's ability to provide both money and weaponry to its proxies. Also, eliminating Iran's nuclear and missile threats could free up around \$30 billion for other needs.

Gaza Ceasefire: Stage Two

- In a statement last week, the **UN announced that humanitarian aid to Gaza in January meets 100 percent of the minimum caloric standard**, and there is sufficient stock for all of Gaza's citizens. Many Israelis pointed out that this piece of good news was almost completely ignored by global media.
- Yesterday, the U.S. launched **Phase Two of its Gaza peace plan**, establishing a transitional "technocratic" Palestinian administration to replace Hamas governance and begin Gaza's reconstruction and demilitarization.
- A dozen or so experts were invited to join a **Transitional Technocratic Committee** to manage day-to-day governance in Gaza. Hamas says it will "hand over control," but in practice appears to be delegating administration while retaining real power, likely aiming to secure reconstruction funds without disarming.
- A key unresolved issue is the **remains of the last hostage**, Ran Gvili.
- U.S. and Israeli officials also emphasize that **disarmament remains non-negotiable**, with Israel positioned to act if Hamas refuses, after which the committee and a potential International Stabilization Force (ISF) would assume governance in cleared areas. For now, Israel is responsible for Hamas disarmament; the ISF may take over the task at a later date.
- The **new Gaza technocratic committee** is being formed, but it is not expected to enter Gaza soon, and the IDF will remain in ultimate control for the foreseeable future. Hamas may hand over civilian administration while retaining its weapons, meaning that disarmament will still have to be carried out by the IDF, which is already planning for a major military operation in Gaza City. The committee is expected to be based in the recently rebuilt "New Rafah" under Project Sunrise, with the IDF securing its borders and the ISF handling internal policing. Overall, the initiative represents a civil challenge to Hamas, but the military reality on the ground — and Israel's control — has not fundamentally changed.

At the end of last week, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu **met with Nickolay Mladenov, the incoming director** of the Gaza Strip Board of Peace.

Israeli Public Opinion

- A recent Israel Democracy Institute **public opinion poll** provides new insights into Israeli attitudes toward security, government accountability and support for Jewish communities abroad.
- Around 76% of Jewish Israelis say it is **safer for Jews to live in Israel** than abroad. Among Arab Israelis, opinions are divided: 32% say Israel is safer for Arabs, 35% prefer living abroad, and 29% see both as equally safe.
- **Optimism about Israel's national security has fallen** by roughly 8 percentage points, with Jewish respondents consistently more optimistic than Arab respondents on issues including security, the economy, and democratic governance.
- Overwhelming majorities of Jewish **Israelis support government actions to assist Jewish communities abroad**: 90% favor diplomatic pressure for their protection, 80% support sending official emissaries, and about 50–60% back direct involvement in security or financial aid efforts.

Other News

- An **earthquake with a 4.2 magnitude** was felt across Israel earlier today. The quake, centered around the Dead Sea, caused no injuries or significant damage. Millions of Israelis received emergency notifications on their phones from the Home Front Command, a message system usually used for incoming rocket and missile attacks. Amid the tensions with Iran, many citizens were temporarily alarmed when warnings were issued.
- Lebanon's Foreign Minister Youssef Rajji said that "so long as Hezbollah is not completely disarmed, **Israel has the right to continue its attacks**," drawing sharp internal backlash from Hezbollah-aligned figures who accused him of acting as an "enemy mouthpiece" and called for political action against him.
- A new report from the Israel Democracy Institute highlights that the **economic impact of Israel's ultra-Orthodox community** is as significant as their lack of military service, costing the government roughly \$8.8 billion annually in direct subsidies and public services — about \$3,600 per non-Haredi family each year. Large families, low labor participation and heavy reliance on welfare drive the imbalance. The average non-Orthodox Jewish household contributes a net \$370 per month to the state; an Arab household costs \$1,380; and an ultra-Orthodox household represents a net loss of \$2,830 per month.
- Yaakov Harari, a 72-year-old Israeli-Argentinian citizen who had been **imprisoned in Venezuela for over a year, was released** and arrived safely in Tel Aviv. Harari was held without clear legal justification in harsh conditions after being accused by Venezuelan authorities of being a mercenary. His release was part of a broader goodwill gesture by the Venezuelan government following the capture of former president Nicolas Maduro by the US. Upon his return, Harari spoke to Israeli leaders and was welcomed by family and officials.
- In an interview with *The Economist*, Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu announced that he **aims to phase out US military aid to Israel** over the next decade. Netanyahu reduced US civilian aid during his first term in the late 1990s, leaving primarily military assistance, which today amounts to about \$3.8 billion annually under the current 10-year Memorandum of Understanding, which expires in 2028. Most aid is earmarked for purchases from U.S. defense contractors. (During the war, emergency military funding increased to \$18 billion per year). Analysts suggest Netanyahu is trying to align with US Republican sentiment, while giving the IDF and other defense sectors a decade to adapt gradually to the loss of aid.

Further Reading

- [Fall of the ayatollahs would be bittersweet poetic justice for October 7, but it's not guaranteed](#)
- [All the Mullahs Have Left Is War on Their Own People](#)
- [Tehran doubles down on repression, believing US reluctance will delay new strikes](#)

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