



Update from Israel

February 19, 2026

The situation with Iran remains unclear and violence continues to surge in the Arab-Israeli sector.

On Wednesday, **IDF Staff Sergeant Ofri Yaffe**, a soldier in the Paratroopers Reconnaissance Unit, was killed in a friendly fire incident near Gaza.

Iran

- Indirect US-Iran **negotiations continued** this week, with American and Iranian envoys meeting in Geneva after an earlier round in Oman and agreeing to keep talking despite major gaps over scope and substance. Iranian officials described the discussions as more constructive and said “guiding principles” had been identified, while US officials stressed that no deal is imminent and that key issues remain unresolved.
- Alongside diplomacy, Washington **sharply increased its military pressure**, moving to establish a rare “two-carrier formation” in the region as the USS Abraham Lincoln was joined by preparations to deploy the USS Gerald R. Ford, reinforcing a broader buildup of naval, air and missile-defense assets. Iran responded with visible signs of its own, conducting military drills and briefly restricting shipping in parts of the Strait of Hormuz during Revolutionary Guard exercises.
- President Donald Trump said **negotiations would continue** but warned that failure would carry consequences, while Vice President JD Vance emphasized that the US focus is on preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, not engineering regime change.
- Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali **Khamenei rejected US demands on enrichment** and missiles outright, framing Iran’s deterrent capabilities as non-negotiable and mocking American naval pressure.

- Israel remained closely engaged in the background, with Prime Minister Benjamin **Netanyahu** **pressing Washington to expand any potential agreement** beyond a nuclear deal to include Iran's missile program and regional proxies, even as Trump publicly acknowledged that no definitive understandings had been reached.
- Israel and Israelis remain on high alert. Nonetheless, the **Home Front Command has not altered current directives**, and no special precautions or rules have been put in place. Life in Israel continues as normal, albeit with some trepidation.

Arab Sector Violence

- As reported last week, **violent crime in Israel's Arab communities has surged** sharply this year, driven largely by feuds between various organized crime organizations and the widespread availability of illegal firearms.
- About **50 Arab citizens have been murdered** since the start of 2026, putting the pace at close to one killing per day and following a record 252 murders in 2025. Police and watchdog groups attribute most cases to gang warfare, extortion networks, and family-based criminal rivalries, rather than ideological or nationalist violence.
- The **last week has been particularly deadly**. Between February 12–16, multiple shootings of Israeli Arabs, by Israeli Arabs, were reported across the country, including five killings in less than 24 hours, several daylight shootings and at least three separate multi-victim incidents.
- The spike has **triggered nationwide protests**, joint Arab-Jewish demonstrations and unusually blunt warnings from senior officials, with President Isaac Herzog and police leadership describing the situation as a "national emergency." While police have launched large-scale crackdowns and weapons seizures, critics argue that enforcement remains inconsistent and that low homicide police-clearance rates in Arab communities, coupled with a sense of a lack of policing, continue to fuel public anger and distrust.

The Economic Case for the US-Israel Partnership

- A [new article](#) by Zineb Riboua, titled "The Economic Case for the US–Israel Partnership," was published by the **Hudson Institute** this week.
- The piece argues that the US–Israel relationship should be understood not primarily as security aid, but as a **deeply integrated economic and technological partnership** that directly strengthens American prosperity and competitiveness.
- Riboua challenges the post–October 7 assumption that Israel's economy would falter under prolonged war, noting that despite a credit downgrade, reserve mobilization, and increased defense spending, **Israel's innovation ecosystem has remained resilient** and globally integrated.
- The article emphasizes Israel's role as a **critical innovation hub for US industry**, with Israeli firms supplying key technologies to major American companies, including Intel, Cisco, HP, Motorola and Applied Materials.
- It highlights that roughly **two-thirds of the more than 300 foreign R&D centers in Israel are American-owned**, reflecting how US firms use Israel to boost productivity, competitiveness and profitability.
- Riboua notes that **Israeli companies are the second-largest source of foreign listings on NASDAQ**, and that Israeli investment in the United States has tripled over the past decade to nearly \$24 billion, underscoring the partnership's two-way economic nature.
- The article also says that **Israeli innovation delivers tangible benefits to the US** in strategic fields, including cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, water management and energy efficiency.

- The central conclusion is that the **US–Israel economic relationship is structural rather than sentimental**, and that its importance will grow as the United States seeks to maintain technological and industrial advantages in an increasingly competitive global environment.

Other News

- Police restored order Monday night in the ultra-Orthodox city of **Bnei Brak after riots erupted** during a routine operation amid tensions over military conscription. Two female officers were surrounded and later forced to withdraw as crowds gathered, a patrol car was overturned, and a police motorcycle was set on fire. Riot police used tear gas to disperse demonstrators. Authorities and political leaders said the unrest was driven by extremist groups rather than by the broader Haredi public. However, the incident highlights the escalating strain over draft enforcement between the state and parts of the ultra-Orthodox community.
- For the first time in nearly six decades, Jerusalem’s municipal footprint is set to expand, following **government approval of a housing plan linking the northern Jerusalem neighborhood of Pisgat Ze’ev with the nearby settlement of Adam**. The move is described by some in Israel as part of a broader effort led by Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich to deepen Israeli control over the West Bank/Judea and Samaria through settlement recognition, new construction and infrastructure development, including in sensitive areas such as the E1 corridor. Supporters frame the plan as strengthening Israel’s capital, while critics warn it advances de facto annexation and further complicates prospects for a future Palestinian state.
- US President Donald **Trump publicly rebuked Israeli President Isaac Herzog** after meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, saying Herzog “should be ashamed of himself” for not granting Netanyahu a presidential pardon. Speaking to reporters, Trump praised Netanyahu as a “very good wartime prime minister” and criticized Herzog for allowing the pardon request, which was submitted in November, to remain under legal review at the Justice Ministry. Herzog’s office responded that no decision can be made until the formal advisory process is completed, stressing Israel’s sovereignty and adherence to the rule of law.
- An **IDF reservist and an Israeli civilian have been indicted** in Tel Aviv District Court on charges of exploiting classified military information to place bets on the prediction-market platform Polymarket. Prosecutors allege the reservist passed sensitive operational intelligence to the civilian, enabling them to wager on the timing of Israeli military actions and profit from the trades; both face charges including serious security offenses, bribery and obstruction of justice. The case, investigated jointly by the Shin Bet, the Defense Ministry, and police, has raised concerns about operational security risks posed by political betting markets during wartime.
- Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said this week that the IDF “is no place for women,” doubling down on his **opposition to female military service** just as the army is reporting record-high enlistment of women and an expanding reliance on female combat soldiers. The remarks are in contrast with IDF data showing women making up a growing share of frontline roles amid significant manpower shortages driven by the continued absence of large-scale Haredi enlistment.

Further Reading

- [Hezbollah’s Human Shield Map](#)
- [IDI: 12 Necessary Changes for the Government’s Conscription Bill](#)

- [To Prevent a Regional War, Secure Bahrain](#)

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