



Israel at War

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Day 531, 59 Hostages Remain in Captivity

Latest Updates

IDF Activities

- On Monday night, in a move that took some by surprise, the **IDF renewed fighting in the Gaza Strip**. The military activity, which began with wide-scale air attacks on Hamas leadership and terror infrastructure, came almost three weeks after the end of Phase One of the ceasefire. Negotiations towards a Phase Two deal (or an extension of Phase One) were not bearing fruit, and Hamas rejected each of the proposals suggested by the United States, including those that entailed freeing additional hostages in exchange for extending the ceasefire and releasing scores of Palestinian terrorists being held in Israeli jails.
- Israel rejected the Hamas claim that Israel had “broken the ceasefire,” saying that **no ceasefire was in effect** since the previous phase expired at the end of February and Hamas has released no further hostages.

- **Several senior Hamas leaders** were **killed in the Israeli strikes**, including Essam al-Da'alis, a member of Hamas' political bureau and head of the terrorist group's government in Gaza, as well as Islamic Jihad spokesperson Abu Hamza.
- Hamas says that **at least 400 people were killed** in the Israeli attacks.
- Yesterday, a limited number of **ground attacks** also **took place**, mainly along the **Netzarim Corridor** that divides Gaza between north and south. IDF tanks took up positions along the road, effectively dividing Gaza into two sectors. See [video footage here](#).
- Israel has called on **Gazan residents to temporarily evacuate areas** of fighting, particularly those in the eastern part of the Strip, closest to the border with Israel.
- While senior Israeli **military, intelligence, and political figures** (including the main opposition leaders in the Knesset) **have expressed their approval** of the decision to renew fighting, thousands of Israelis have taken to the streets to condemn the move. They are concerned for the fate of the two dozen or so hostages who are still in captivity.
- Meanwhile senior Israeli military and political officials have said that **the attacks on Hamas will greatly increase** if a deal is not reached immediately. Defense Minister Yisrael Katz said that upcoming IDF attacks will be “massive and aggressive.” Similarly, commentators point out that the new IDF Chief of the General Staff is believed to be in favor of harsher military strikes and also that the US Administration will likely support such an escalation by Israeli forces. See [these](#) images of the new IDF Chief briefing troops before fighting began.
- In response to renewed fighting, **Egypt convened an emergency meeting** with Hamas leaders in Cairo at which they reportedly presented them with a proposal for an immediate ceasefire in exchange for the release of an undisclosed number of hostages.
- The **latest US offer that Hamas refused**, as proposed by Special Envoy Steve Witkoff, called for the immediate freeing of three to five live hostages, along with several bodies of those who have been killed, in exchange for a 50-day ceasefire, plus a large prisoner release.

- While Hamas had earlier announced that it had **agreed to US demands to release the last remaining American hostage who is alive**, Idan Alexander, (plus four Americans who are no longer believed to be alive), it remains unclear if, when, or how this will happen.
- US Secretary of State **Marco Rubio seemingly clarified America's position** earlier in the week, saying that “Hamas’ demands are nuts,” and that “We are dealing with savages.”

Rockets

- After months without rocket fire, **sirens have sounded again in Israel** in recent days.
- Earlier today, **three rockets were fired from Gaza** towards the center of Israel, sending millions to run to shelters in Tel Aviv and other areas. One rocket was intercepted by the Iron Dome, while the other two fell in non-urban areas. Shrapnel from the explosions landed in Rishon LeTzion. Ben Gurion Airport halted both takeoffs and landings for a few minutes.
- Last night, **millions of Israelis had to wake up and run to shelters** at 4 am after Iran-backed Houthis fired a ballistic missile at the Jewish state. Sirens sounded across most of central Israel, including in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. The Knesset was holding a marathon overnight budget session; the Prime Minister and others were evacuated from the plenum.
- On Tuesday, a similar incident occurred with **alerts activated in Beer Sheva** and a large area of the country's south.
- The **US military has been striking the Houthis** over the last week and has vowed to continue hitting the terror group's strategic interests.

Political Developments

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- Itamar Ben Gvir's **Jewish Power party has rejoined the coalition** now that fighting has re-commenced in Gaza (which had been a key demand of Ben Gvir). This gives the Netanyahu-led coalition a majority of 68 out of 120 seats in the Knesset. The larger majority should allow the government to easily pass the budget by the end of the month, avoiding new elections and ensuring that the government has a good chance of remaining in power for at least another year.
- The government has also announced **plans to fire Ronen Bar, the head of the Shin Bet** (Shabak) - the Israeli equivalent of the FBI - following tense relations between Bar and the government. Unlike in the US, the head of Israel's internal security organization is not usually a political appointee, and the formal dismissal is almost without precedent. Prime Minister Netanyahu said that there was "growing mistrust" between Bar and himself. A scheduled vote in the cabinet on firing Bar was scheduled to take place yesterday but was postponed, presumably due to the renewed fighting in Gaza. A new vote could take place as early as today.
- Israel's attorney general has **questioned the legality of firing Bar**, saying that the government must obtain a recommendation from an advisory committee before weighing Bar's dismissal.
- The attorney general also **questioned the legality of reinstating Ben Gvir** to the position of Minister of Internal Security, but this recommendation was also ignored.
- In addition, the government has announced its **intention to fire the attorney general herself**. As with all of the above personnel questions, the decisions are likely to face challenges in the Supreme Court.
- In addition, the issues are coming against the backdrop of a significant **investigation into relations between the Prime Minister's Office and Qatar**. While most details are under a court-ordered gag order, some members of the prime minister's inner circle are suspected of receiving payments from a PR company that represented the Qatari government.
- If the Shin Bet head is dismissed, **Netanyahu will remain the only senior defense-related figure from October 7 who is still in power**.

- In recent days, hundreds of thousands of Israelis have taken to the streets to **protest against the recent decisions**, which they see as an attack on democracy.
- In other news, Google's parent Alphabet has announced that it is **buying the Israeli cyber security company Wiz for a record-breaking \$32 billion**. This is the largest amount Google has ever paid for a company. It also represents the largest-ever Israeli exit. Wiz was founded in 2020, and climbed remarkably in under five years.
- The Jewish Federations' Israel Emergency Campaign has raised over \$867 million, with over \$722 million allocated to date. For more on the campaign, see the most recent [allocations update](#). For further background about some of the inspiring and critical projects we have supported, see [here](#).

For Further Reading

- [The Palestinian Authority's Attempt to Resolve Its Rivalry with Hamas](#)
- [Israel's Renewed Judicial Overhaul](#)
- [Time to Revise Israel's Military Doctrine](#)
- [Israel Redrawing Its Borders in Syria and Lebanon](#)
- [The Reality That Will Enable the Return of Northern Residents](#)

Am Yisrael Chai!

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