



# ISRAEL UPDATE



## Update from Israel

January 29, 2026

October 7 War, Day 843, 0 hostages remain in captivity

**Ran Gvili's body was returned to Israel for burial, marking the first time since 2014 (4,208 days) that no Israeli is being held hostage in Gaza.**

### Ran Gvili

- On Monday, Israel announced that the remains of Staff Sgt. Ran Gvili, the **last Israeli hostage still in Gaza**, had been recovered and returned to Israel for burial, after being held for 843 days.
- In an official statement delivered shortly after the news of Gvili was released, President Isaac Herzog called it **a national exhale**: "An entire nation is breathing an enormous sigh of relief tonight. All of our hearts are with Ran Gvili's family."
- For many Israelis, the recovery marked the **closing chapter of Israel's longest war** that began in October 2023. One reporter announced, "The October 7 War has finally ended."
- Israeli news was filled with images of **leaders removing the yellow hostage pins** from their lapels, giant hostage posters coming down, and the removal of symbolic empty yellow chairs that many businesses and public institutions have left out for more than two years. U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee said, as he was removing the hostage pin he had worn, "Today, I remove it, and I will get rid of it... and I will pray that never in the history of the nation of Israel will anyone ever wear a yellow ribbon on their clothing again."
- The **giant clock in Hostage Square** that counted the days, hours and minutes that the hostages had been held, was [finally stopped](#) at 843 days, 12 hours, 5 minutes and 59 seconds.
- Listen [here to the BBC's interview](#) with an Israeli journalist about the nation's mood.
- Gvili was a **24-year-old police officer** on leave, who voluntarily went to the Gaza Envelope area on Oct. 7, 2023 to help fight the invading terrorists. Gvili helped repel dozens of attackers before being killed. His body was captured by Hamas and taken into Gaza that day.
- The recovery of his body was achieved through "**Brave Heart**," a large-scale IDF operation, involving hundreds of troops that took place at a cemetery in northern Gaza, where intelligence suggested Gvili's body was located. Forces conducted an intensive search that involved 20 military dentists to identify his remains through dental records. Listen to the [army communications message](#) announcing the confirmation that Gvili's body had been found and identified.
- In video footage, [soldiers involved in the rescue effort](#) were seen embracing, [crying](#) and [singing](#) the national anthem when the recovery was confirmed.

- From the Knesset podium the same day, **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu** declared: "We have returned Ran Gvili, of blessed memory, a hero of Israel. There are no more hostages in Gaza.... He was the first one to enter, and the last to leave."
- Gvili's **funeral took place yesterday**, in Meitar, his hometown, with national leaders in attendance. In his eulogy, President Isaac Herzog framed the burial as both sacred closure and national reckoning, saying: "At this moment, I ask... for your forgiveness. Forgiveness that we were not there for him... [and] you were forced to wait for his return for so many long, agonizing days."
- Talik Gvili, **Ran's mother**, told journalists: "The pride is so much stronger than the sadness....We have closure."

After Gvili's remains were returned, the government announced that the **Rafah crossing with Egypt would reopen**, ending Israel's earlier condition that the crossing remain closed until the last hostage was brought home. The Prime Minister's Office confirmed the reopening, stating that Rafah would be opened in a limited capacity for pedestrian passage only.

## Iran

- U.S. and Israeli **preparations for a potential strike on Iran** continue, including visible military and diplomatic coordination between the two allies. The commander of U.S. Central Command, Adm. Brad Cooper, visited Israel earlier in the week for meetings with senior Israeli defense officials.
- Earlier this week, commenting on the military build-up, President Trump said, "By the way, there's another beautiful armada floating beautifully toward Iran right now. So, we'll see."
- **Israeli and Saudi defense and intelligence officials** are in Washington this week for high-level talks with the Trump administration on Iran. IDF Intelligence Directorate chief Maj. Gen. Shlomi Binder has been meeting with senior officials at the Pentagon, CIA and White House to share intelligence on potential Iranian targets, while Saudi Defense Minister Khalid bin Salman is holding meetings with Secretary of State Marco Rubio and U.S. Envoy Steve Witkoff "aimed at preventing a wider regional war." Saudi Arabia has made clear it will not allow its territory or airspace to be used in any strike on Iran.
- The US has significantly **reinforced its regional military posture** with the arrival of the USS Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group into CENTCOM's area of responsibility, accompanied by multiple destroyers and combat aircraft.
- **Dozens of cargo jets** have been flying in and out of the region, including to Israel, and Israeli reporters say the transports are likely delivering missile-defense systems to prepare for an Iranian response.
- U.S. officials have described the deployment as **expanding American options** and signaling readiness should President Trump decide to authorize military action against Iran.
- Some in Israel say that a U.S. strike could mirror **Washington's earlier approach in Venezuela**: targeting the regime's leadership rather than pursuing gradual pressure.
- Reports suggest **Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei** has been moved into a bunker, while day-to-day authority has reportedly shifted to his son, an arrangement widely seen as unstable and lacking legitimacy in a system designed to reject dynastic succession.
- Israeli Iran specialists say that **several scenarios are being weighed**. One is that Khamenei is removed, but the regime largely survives with a new clerical figurehead. Another is the decapitation of both clerical and IRGC leadership in a way that triggers mass protests and a democratic transition. However, both are considered improbable. More likely is that an attack strips away clerical rule but leaves the IRGC intact, allowing it to reconstitute power as a nationalist military dictatorship, possibly using symbolic figures like the crown prince while retaining real control.
- Under this logic, Washington may be aiming not for a democratic transformation but for a **weaker, more compliant Iranian regime** that is shorn of its nuclear and ballistic missile ambitions and less capable of projecting regional power.
- Even so, the argument suggests that the collapse or mutation of the Islamic Republic **does not guarantee a "better future for Iran,"** and the decisive factor will be how power is consolidated — or contested — in the critical days immediately following any strike.

Israel's **Home Front Command** has not issued any new directives or ordered any additional or special precautions for the country's citizens. Ben Gurion Airport remains open and fully operational, as does the Jewish State's airspace.

## Other News

- New reporting based on U.S. State Department findings shows that the Palestinian Authority continued **large-scale payments to terrorists** and their families despite public pledges to end the so-called “pay-for-slay” program. According to the assessment, the PA transferred at least \$214 million in 2025 after funneling about \$144 million in 2024, shifting payments to a rebranded “welfare” mechanism intended to obscure their purpose from international donors. These payments continued for months after PA President Mahmoud Abbas announced the program’s cancellation.
- A senior Hamas official has publicly **rejected claims that the group agreed to disarm**, pushing back against statements by Israel and the United States that Hamas must give up its weapons as part of ending the war in Gaza. In an interview, Mousa Abu Marzouk said Hamas had never discussed, negotiated, or accepted any formula for surrendering or destroying its weapons, arguing that if two years of fighting failed to disarm the group, negotiations were unlikely to do so. Abu Marzouk also stressed that Hamas remains firmly in control of Gaza, asserting that the movement has restored order and will continue to “provide security.”
- The Israeli government has approved a \$2 billion **Reservists Assistance and Appreciation Plan**, a wide-ranging package designed to recognize the enormous burden carried by IDF reservists after more than two years of sustained combat. The plan prioritizes combat reservists through a tiered compensation model and includes grants, expanded tuition coverage, mental health support for soldiers and their families, and additional welfare benefits, while also reducing the average daily number of reservists on active duty to ease long-term strain on families and the economy.
- The Israeli military has, for the first time, **formally assessed Gaza war fatalities** at roughly 70,000, while disputing international claims that widespread starvation caused civilian deaths. According to the IDF, about 25,000 of those killed were Hamas operatives, and many civilian deaths resulted from factors such as misfired Hamas rockets or internal executions carried out by the terror group. The military said no healthy individuals died from starvation, emphasizing that Israel facilitated the entry of over 112,000 humanitarian aid trucks, including large quantities of food, medications, tents, and other supplies, throughout the war. At the same time, the IDF is still working on a fuller breakdown of civilian versus combatant casualties.

## Further Reading

- [The War Is Over](#)
- [Conscription of Haredi Yeshiva Students to the IDF and the Emerging Constitutional Crisis](#)
- [Remembering Zechariah Haber who fell in the war. An interview with his wife](#)
- [Is Washington Undermining Its Own Syria Strategy](#)
- [The Next Iran: Turkey](#)
- [Israel at a Demographic Crossroads](#)

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