



ISRAEL UPDATE



Update from Israel

February 5, 2026

Iran confirms talks with the US to begin tomorrow. Rampant crime in the Arab sector

What is the "Zionism Gap?" In a new op-ed, Mimi Kravetz, Chief Impact Officer at Jewish Federations, discusses new data that shows a strong Jewish connection to Israel, but "definition creep" around the term Zionism. [Read more.](#)

Iran

- Over the past several days, US.–Iran **diplomacy has edged forward** in parallel to military pressure and sharp public statements on both sides.
- Yesterday, there was considerable uncertainty over whether talks would proceed and where they would be held. Last night, Tehran said that "nuclear negotiations" with Washington are **set to begin tomorrow** in Muscat, Oman, with Omani mediation reviving a channel that has been repeatedly disrupted since last year's war and the ongoing unrest inside Iran. The US has yet to publicly confirm that the talks will proceed.
- Yesterday, Iranian and American officials **issued military threats** against each other, even as diplomacy continued behind the scenes.
- According to reports, the two sides appear to be approaching the talks with **different expectations**. Iranian officials have said that discussions should

focus on nuclear limits and sanctions relief, while senior US figures have said that Washington also seeks to address Iran's ballistic missile program, regional Iranian-activity, and the regime's violent crackdown on dissent.

- In parallel, Iran's leadership has continued this week to **warn that any U.S. military strike would trigger a regional war**. American messaging has combined pressure and outreach, with officials framing talks as the preferable alternative to further escalation while maintaining a very considerable American military presence in the region.
- According to Israeli news outlets, senior intelligence officials say that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was told in a late-night briefing with US envoy Steve Witkoff yesterday that **Iranian leaders are not expected to compromise** on their nuclear ambitions. Instead, the Iranians are using negotiations primarily to buy time ahead of a possible US strike. The analysis challenges the optimism surrounding renewed diplomacy and argues that Western policymakers are misreading Tehran by "assuming rational, deal-driven behavior."
- Israeli commentary also claims that while economic logic would suggest that **Ayatollah Khamenei should accept** an agreement to ensure its regime survives, Iran's leadership is driven by factors that defy standard cost-benefit analysis. The Supreme Leader's belief in his divine authority could lead him to believe that retreat from confrontation with the United States could undermine the religious legitimacy of his regime.
- The analysis also says that following years of filtered reporting and repression, **Khamenei is increasingly "insulated from reality**, limiting his ability to recalibrate even in the face of mass protests and internal crisis."
- Israeli security forces are also operating under the assumption that **Yemen's Houthi terrorists will strike back against Israel** if the US attacks Iran. One source within a Yemenite faction combating the Houthis has also warned about the potential for a resurgence in attacks on US ships in the Red and Arabian Seas.

Gaza

- A new proposal backed by the United Arab Emirates is emerging as a possible first step toward **establishing civilian control in the Gaza Strip**. Under the plan, the UAE would take charge of Gaza's commercial supply chain, purchasing goods in Israel and moving them into the Strip, while existing aid distribution centers would be converted into logistics hubs. Goods would then be handed off to Gaza's private sector, with security for facilities and transport provided by Emirati forces and US private security firms. The model is strongly supported by Israel, as it would bypass Hamas-controlled distribution networks and cut the group off from revenues derived from controlling aid and commerce. The plan could be an attempt to bypass the stalled moves to

establish a “technocratic civilian council” to run Gaza by people loosely associated with the Palestinian Authority.

- Israel’s Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism announced it is **terminating the activities of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)** – Doctors without Borders – in the Gaza Strip, citing what it described as a serious and ongoing violation of registration and transparency requirements governing humanitarian organizations. According to the Ministry, MSF failed to submit mandatory lists of local employees, despite committing in early January to do so. Under the regulations, MSF is required to cease operations and leave Gaza by February 28, 2026, while Israeli authorities develop alternative medical arrangements to ensure continuity of humanitarian care. The Ministry also accused MSF of coordinating with Hamas-run health bodies; they said that MSF had been given ample opportunity to comply and chose not to.

Arab Sector Violence

- Violent crime in Israel’s Arab communities continues to rise sharply, with **four murders reported over the past two days** — two today and two yesterday.
- The surge comes amid what police and civil society groups describe as the **deadliest period on record** for Arab Israeli communities.
- Multiple studies and police data show that **murders in the Arab sector have increased by roughly 250%** since 2018, that around 75% of killings are linked to organized crime networks, and that Arab communities account for about 80% of Israel’s violent crime, despite making up only about 20% of the population.
- The homicide rate among Arab Israelis is estimated to be more than **fourteen times higher** than among Jewish Israelis.
- The escalating numbers have driven widespread protests and strikes across Arab towns in recent weeks, with Arab and other demonstrators **demanding stronger police enforcement** and greater budget allocations. Protest organizers and local leaders say policing levels and investigative resources in Arab localities lag far behind those in Jewish areas, contributing to low arrest and indictment rates for murder cases.
- Unlike similar debates in the United States, Arab Israeli protests have focused on **calls for more policing and expanded law-enforcement budgets**, arguing that years of under-enforcement have allowed criminal organizations to entrench themselves and drive the current spike in violence.

Other News

- Israel's President Isaac **Herzog will depart next week on a diplomatic trip to Australia**. The visit, which is primarily designed to express solidarity with the Australian Jewish community in the wake of the Bondi terrorist attack, will also include meetings with Australia's top government officials. Islamic, pro-Palestinian, anti-Israel and far-left groups in Australia have been putting immense pressure on the government to cancel the invitation, branding him a "war criminal" and the "head of state of a country committing genocide." Mass protests have been planned, while what are being described as "unprecedented security measures" are being put in place. The Australian Jewish community has said that it is "thrilled by the visit" and the expression of solidarity it represents at this difficult time.
- A **policy fight over milk** has captured headlines in Israel, as Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich pushes to roll back decades-old state controls on the dairy sector. Farmers and milk producers have held large protests and threatened to strike, causing many Israelis to stock up on dairy products. The government currently tightly regulates who can produce milk, how much they can produce, and the price consumers pay; this system often results in limited choice and periodic shortages. The current framework is a legacy of Israel's early socialist economy.
- Israel's government convened a **special cabinet meeting in Kiryat Shemona** earlier this week as it commits to the rehabilitation and long-term development of the country's north after more than two years of displacement and conflict along the Lebanese border. The government approved an initial \$130 million assistance package to rebuild and expand the cities of Kiryat Shemona, Shlomi and Metula. The plan includes grants for residents and businesses; incentives to spur demographic growth; investments in housing, healthcare, and industry; and major transportation upgrades.
- Israeli prosecutors on Thursday **indicted Bezalel Zini, the brother of Shin Bet chief David Zini**, on multiple charges related to the smuggling of goods into the Gaza Strip. Zini and several other defendants are accused of aiding the enemy during wartime, engaging in prohibited dealings in property for terror purposes, aggravated fraud, and accepting bribes. Prosecutors allege that Zini accepted payments in exchange for facilitating the illegal transfer of goods into Gaza, which authorities claim strengthened Hamas economically during the conflict.
- Deni Avdija has made history by becoming the **first Israeli player ever selected for the NBA All-Star Game**, earning a reserve spot in the Western Conference for the 2026 showcase. The Portland Trail Blazers forward was chosen by NBA head coaches following a breakout season and will appear in the All-Star Game later this month in Los Angeles.

Further Reading

- [The IDF's haredi pivot: From integration to accommodation](#)
- [Qatar's Global War on Israel](#)
- [Fears Grow Among Iranians as U.S. Weighs Talks with Tehran](#)
- [Just released: 2025 Statistical Report on Ultra-Orthodox Society in Israel](#)
- [For more information, please contact: Jewish Federations of North America's Dani Wassner \[dani.wassner@jewishfederations.org\]\(mailto:dani.wassner@jewishfederations.org\). Subscribe to this weekly update \[here\]\(#\).](#)

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