



Israel fears U.S. may drop plan to disarm Hamas

Sources close to PM: Trump seeks to start reconstruction before Gaza demilitarized

Jonathan Lis

MIAMI – On Monday afternoon, a short time after the meeting in Mar-a-Lago, the members of the Israeli entourage headed back to the Four Seasons Hotel where Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is staying. Their faces radiated relief and smugness.

“Trump is unpredictable. You couldn't tell if he'd be angry or friendly. In the end, he wants to start phase two in Gaza, and not everything is going smoothly,” one said. “There were no disagreements, even behind closed doors,” another who's close to the prime minister said. A third, who attended the closed-door meeting, added, “Everything went better than we expected. The media again had headlines about disagreements and conflicts that don't exist.”

U.S. President Donald Trump heaped praise on Netanyahu and gave him public backing on the Iranian issue, which will help the prime minister justify making the trip. But, as Washington readies to announce the transition to phase two of the Gaza reconstruction plan, the president failed to provide answers to questions that concern the Israeli

side, and could push Netanyahu's coalition partners to dissolve the government and bring forward the elections.

Thus, the feeling among Netanyahu's entourage now is that Trump will allow the reconstruction to begin, most likely in the cleared Rafah area, even before the disarmament of Hamas is completed, the remain-

Trump's gifts have a price

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ing tunnels are destroyed and Gaza is demilitarized. Trump will ultimately not insist on eliminating Hamas.

Trump himself preferred to keep the points of disagreement with Netanyahu in the background, not relating to them in answering questions from the Israeli media. Among other things, he did not say publicly whether he would order the transition to phase two in the coming weeks, even if the body of Ran Gvili isn't

returned. Sources said that U.S. officials don't believe the chances of finding the remains of Givili, the last still in the Strip, are good, therefore, Trump doesn't believe it should be an obstacle to moving forward.

Trump also did not make clear whether he would insist on deploying Turkish soldiers as part of the international stabilization force in Gaza, which Netanyahu opposes. He also did not indicate whether he would pressure Israel to reach a security agreement with the Syrian government, a move that his administration has been pressing Israel on. The Israeli side is also in no hurry to answer these questions.

No matter, if Netanyahu's government falls in the coming months, the possibility of Trump coming to Israel to accept the Israel Prize could play into his hands in the campaign.

Netanyahu often extends his visits abroad at the last minute. Sources in the entourage said that as of now, there were no plans to extend his stay to this coming weekend, and that he would land in Israel on Friday afternoon.

Officially, the prime minister's schedule for Tuesday was vague. In fact, the

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Mourners at the funeral for Aviv Maor, 18, who was killed in a terror attack in northern Israel last week. See story, Page 2.

Gil Eilahu

The year that was: A gruesome war and a volatile region reshaped in Trump's shadow

Analysis Joshua Leifer

On its way to the United States on Sunday, ahead of Benjamin Netanyahu's visit with Donald Trump in Mar-a-Lago, the prime minister's plane Wing of Zion took a longer-than-usual route to avoid the airspace of countries where he might face

arrest.

In late November 2024, the United Nations-backed International Criminal Court issued a warrant for Netanyahu, as well as for former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. Both are charged with committing war crimes and

crimes against humanity.

The situation captured in miniature the paradox of Israel's place in the world at the end of 2025. The country continues to enjoy the protective umbrella of the United States – for now, at least, still the global hegemonic power – and Netanyahu still boasts of his close relationship with the U.S. president. Yet across much of the rest

of the world, Israel has become a pariah state: its institutions boycotted, its representatives shunned and its international legitimacy imperiled.

Israel is, at once, stronger and more isolated than it has been in several decades. On the one hand, it has solidified its military dominance in the region. Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Shi'ite mili-

tia, has been decapitated. The collapse of the Assad regime in Syria further enabled Israel's unprecedented aerial dominance, which it displayed in June during the 12-day war with Iran. The U.S. not only backed, but also joined in Israel's assault on the Iranian nuclear program, which has been set

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Smotrich, left, and Amit.



Oren Ben Hakoon, Olivier Fitoussi

Smotrich doubles down on violent call against Amit

Noa Shpigel

Far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich reiterated on Tuesday his call for violence against the Supreme Court president after threatening to “run him over” and calling him a “violent megalomaniac” the day before.

In an interview with Army Radio in which he refused to apologize for his remarks, Smotrich accused Supreme Court President Isaac Amit of acting forcefully and “trampling the people” of Israel. His remarks come amid escalating right-wing criticism of the Supreme Court and judicial system, which they claim is overly left-leaning and not representative of the government that the public elected into office.

To this end, over 10,000 people, including several ministers, attended a protest in June outside the Supreme Court under the banner, “They won't invalidate the people's choice.”

The minister added that “the inevitable result of one side acting with violence is that the other side also has to act with violence and bend its arm.”

“Whoever tramples me, I

trample him back,” he said, adding that “a large part of the nation's people are being trampled over, their ballots get shredded in a machine.”

When asked whether his comments could pose a real danger to the life of the Supreme Court president, he said, “In the meantime, me and my colleagues are the ones suffering. Do you want to talk about the persecution

that the cabinet members are going through? Enough with the hypocrisy,” he said. “I stand by my words.”

Smotrich's comments also come as Justice Minister Yariv Levin has maintained a boycott of Amit for over a year and a half, insisting that he should have the authority to appoint a president

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‘You give us this information, or you get out’:

Israel to revoke licenses of dozens of NGOs aiding Gazans

Linda Dayan

Dozens of international NGOs providing aid to Palestinians in Gaza will lose their licenses to operate in Israel as of January 1, 2026, and will be required to cease their activities by March, the Diaspora Ministry announced Tuesday.

The move is part of a reform of NGO registration procedures, which the ministry said follows violations of security and transparency standards. The affected organizations warn that the decision will have severe consequences for Palestinian life in the Gaza Strip.

The Diaspora and Combating Antisemitism Ministry, which leads an interministerial committee overseeing the registration of international NGOs, said in its statement it had identified links between affiliates of certain organizations and terrorist groups in Gaza.

“Security reviews revealed that employees of certain organizations were involved in terrorist activity,” specifically accusing affiliates of Doctors Without Borders of ties to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. “Despite repeated requests,

the organization failed to provide full disclosure regarding the identities and roles of these individuals,” it added.

Philippe Ribero, the head of mission for Gaza and the West Bank in Doctors Without Borders, or MSF, said the Diaspora Ministry announcement was the first they had heard of the alleged links of their affiliates to Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and that they have not been provided with proof.

“They never came back to us with these allegations,” he told Haaretz on Tuesday. “We have never been informed beforehand by any authority about any of our staff members who could be problematic.” They are taking the claim seriously, he said.

MSF has its own vetting process, and stresses that anyone involved in military activity would endanger its operations, and that it takes all possible steps to prevent this. Ribero added that “We also have to make the point that this public claim came without any kind of evidence about it. Nothing has been substantiated, and it actually puts the humanitarian staff at risk.”

When trying to register the organization, the Dias-

pورا Ministry requested that MSF send a list of its staff members with their personal information – part of new licensing guidelines announced last year, which are beginning to go into effect. “We sent a letter telling [the ministry] that we are not opposed, in principle, [to] providing a list, but we would like a few answers” regarding how the data will be used, and who will have access to it. MSF proposed compromises, but did not receive a response from the ministry.

MSF has worked with COGAT, the Defense Ministry office that oversees the Palestinian territories, but has never had a meeting with the Diaspora Ministry. “We would love to actually meet with them and have a conversation about the allegations ... But we never met them.”

The organization treats tens of thousands of people per year in Gaza and the West Bank, Ribero said. If they lose their registration, as they are set to on January 1, “we don't really know what will happen, and if we'll be able to keep running our operations in both the West Bank and Gaza.”

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Emigration pushes population growth to a dramatic low in 2025

Nati Tucker

Israel's population growth marked a new low in 2025, increasing by just 0.9 percent, Prof. Alex Weinreb, research director at the Taub Center for Social Policy Studies and an expert in demography, estimated in the chapter on population appearing in the center's annual State of the Nation Report 2025.

He ascribes the drop principally to a decline in the birthrate and rising mortality, but mainly to net negative migration. Taub calls 2025 a turning point year regarding demographic trends in Israel. Before the Gaza war broke out in 2023, the population typically grew between 1.9 and 2 percent annually, a pace unlikely to return in the future. Going forward, Israel will need to attract large numbers of immigrants to maintain lower growth rates.

Israel's high rate of population growth over the past decades had important macroeconomic effects. Demographic growth increased the youth's percentage of the overall population, which in turn contributed to high labor force growth which in turn encouraged economic growth.



Crowds in the Mahane Yehuda market in Jerusalem.

Olivier Fitoussi

Israeli economic growth over the previous decade had ranged between 3 and 4 percent annually, but when measured on a per capita basis (gross domestic product per person), the rate of growth was slower due to Israel's fast-growing population.

The slowdown in population growth is likely, on the one hand, to weigh on overall economic growth, especially if it impinges on the

most skilled and productive workers. On the other hand, at least mathematically, when population increases more slowly, per capita GDP is likely to grow faster.

The Taub Institute called the estimated 0.9 percent rise in population “an unprecedented decline.” It noted that since the establishment of the state, population growth has only declined to less than 1.5 percent annually twice, to 1.45 percent

in 1982 and 1.35 percent the year after. However, the official Central Bureau of Statistics figure for 2024 was an even lower 1.1 percent.

Population growth is determined by mortality (deaths), fertility (births) and migration (people coming and going). Weinreb's analysis shows that each of these three components has undergone significant

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