

# Trump's attack on Herzog shows PM's U.S. trip aim

After someone whispered in his ear, Trump will visit Israel as a Likud campaigner

Analysis **Yossi Verter**

U.S. President Donald Trump emerged from his long meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – two hours and 45 minutes, at times with only the two of them in the room – pumped up, breathing fire and brimstone. His wrath wasn't aimed at Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Iran's terrorist government but at Israel's President Isaac Herzog and the dallying pardon for Netanyahu in his ongoing criminal proceedings. It seems that someone – God knows who – had filled the American president's head with utter nonsense.

Trump rushed to share what he had heard in the Oval Office with the world. "You have a president who refuses to give him a pardon; he should be ashamed of himself," said Trump. "I think the people of Israel should really shame him. He's disgraceful for not giving it. ... The primary power he's got is ... to give pardons, and he's not. He said he's giving it five different times, but he doesn't want to do it because I guess he loses his power."

Here are the facts: One, Herzog is not "refusing" to grant a pardon. He hasn't decided yet, and the process

is still in progress. Two, Herzog never said "five different times" that he would grant a pardon. In all the times he's commented on the issue, he said the request would undergo the usual legal process. Three, even if he refuses Netanyahu's request, he would not "lose" his authority to grant pardons.

**Driving PA to collapse**  
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On Saturday, sources close to Herzog said Trump is undermining Israel's sovereignty by exerting pressure to pardon Netanyahu.

Trump would not have demonstrated such familiarity with the issue had not "some-unnamed-person" spun him such tales. This was the second meeting, by the way, in which a private meeting between the two leaders led to a presidential statement on a pardon. The first time was when Trump tripped up Herzog at the Knesset, just after Trump and Netanyahu had enjoyed a ride in the presidential lim-

ousine from Ben-Gurion Airport to Jerusalem.

Thus, judging by the stream of statements from Washington, another reason for the prime minister's rushed trip to the White House emerges. The situation in Iran is complex, but his personal situation isn't any better. By Passover, his cross-examination is scheduled to be over. He will be released from the obligation to testify in court and will be able to devote himself entirely to leading the country. His main argument for ending the trial will no longer be valid. Meanwhile, the election is approaching and for defendant number one, losing it while the trial is still underway is a catastrophe no less devastating than a nuclear missile finding its way to a certain factory in Dimona.

The notion that an Israeli prime minister sits with a U.S. president for almost three hours discussing an issue critical to Israel's security – a deal or a war with Iran – not just preoccupied with his personal and legal problems, but actually talking about them with his host is insane, inconceivable and intolerable. He, or some-unnamed-person, not only relayed his troubles to the president. He also lied about

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Tel Aviv on Saturday. Air quality in many parts of Israel was the worst in the world due to a sandstorm from northern Africa.

Itai Ron

## Officials: U.S. readies for Iran strikes

As Trump weighs attack, Pentagon prepares for prolonged campaign with expected retaliations

**Ben Samuels and Reuters**

The U.S. military is preparing for the possibility of sustained, weeks-long operations against Iran if President Donald Trump orders an attack, two U.S. officials told Reuters, in what could become a far more serious conflict than previously seen between the countries.

The disclosure by the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the

sensitive nature of the planning, raises the stakes for ongoing diplomacy between the United States and Iran.

On Friday, Trump said that he thinks negotiations with Iran will be successful, "and if they're not, it's going to be a bad day for Iran - very bad," adding that a deal "seems like the best thing that could happen. For 47 years, they've been talking and talking and talking. In the meantime, we've lost

a lot of lives while they talk."

U.S. and Iranian diplomats held talks in Oman last week in an effort to revive diplomacy over Tehran's nuclear program, after Trump amassed military forces in the region, raising fears of potential military action.

U.S. officials said on Friday the Pentagon was sending an additional aircraft carrier to the Middle East, along with thousands more troops, fighter aircraft,

guided-missile destroyers and other firepower capable of waging attacks and defending against them.

Trump, speaking to U.S. troops on Friday, said it had "been difficult to make a deal" with Iran. "Sometimes you have to have fear. That's the only thing that really will get the situation taken care of," Trump said.

Asked for comment on the preparations for a potentially sustained U.S. mili-

tary operation, White House spokesperson Anna Kelly said: "President Trump has all options on the table with regard to Iran."

"He listens to a variety of perspectives on any given issue, but makes the final decision based on what is best for our country and national security," Kelly said.

The Pentagon declined to comment.

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Nickolay Mladenov

Fabrice Coffrini/AFP

## Board of Peace rep warns of war if phase two delayed

**Liza Rozovsky**

The high representative appointed by U.S. President Donald Trump to manage the Board of Peace's presence in the Gaza Strip outlined his vision for the near future on Friday, while speaking at the Munich Security Conference.

Nickolay Mladenov, the former UN diplomat who

was appointed by Trump to be the point man liaising between the Gaza Strip and the Executive Board of the Board of Peace, said that "Gaza needs to be governed by a transitional authority, as authorized by the Security Council resolution, under which it needs to take on the full civilian and security control of Gaza."

According to Mladenov,

that requires "the disarmament of all factions in Gaza, not just Hamas: Hamas, Islamic Jihad and others. There are plenty of them who have weapons and tunnels and production facilities inside Gaza," he said.

Mladenov said that such a move is the "condition under which we can see Israeli forces withdraw from the current Yellow Line," he said, the bor-

der marking Israel's territorial control of parts of Gaza, "in order to be able to begin any reconstruction for the Gaza Strip."

Mladenov stressed that the current situation in Gaza is quite volatile, and warned against a renewal of the war, as well as the temporary division of the Gaza Strip turning into an entrenched situation.

"The first risk," he said,

"is that we're not going to go back, that we're not going to implement the second phase of the cease-fire, but we're going to go to the second phase of the war. And that is a serious threat to the situation on the ground."

Mladenov said that "if Gaza returns to the war, there's no place for the Board of Peace, there's no place for any of us until we see what is

left and pick up the rubble, potentially, at the end of it."

He also warned of Gaza being divided into two separate zones.

"To me, the biggest risk right now is that we cement the reality that we have on the ground," he said. "Not just Gaza being divided from the West Bank under the

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Details still in the air

## Israel approves Wizz Air base at Ben-Gurion Airport

**Yifat Reuven and Hadar Kane**

A Wizz Air operational base at Ben-Gurion Airport was approved on Thursday, after winning the backing of an interministerial committee.

The deal, however, is far from finalized. No agreement has yet been signed with the Hungarian airline, and key details remain unresolved. The committee includes representatives from the Prime Minister's Office as well as the transportation, finance, and

tourism ministries.

In late November, Wizz Air CEO József Váradi said after meeting Transport Minister Miri Regev that the airline planned to start operating the base in April.

However, a government source cautioned that talks are still ongoing over how many aircraft could stay overnight at Ben-Gurion for morning departures and whether a secondary hub might be opened at the Ramon Airport in the Arava desert in southern Israel. Officials expressed doubt that the arrangements

would be settled in time for an April launch.

Wizz Air would open its Ben-Gurion base with at least one aircraft and submit official requests for additional takeoff and landing slots, with operations expected to begin in March or April. The airline plans to establish an Israeli subsidiary employing both local crews and foreign pilots who will reside in Israel. A mini-base is also planned at Ramon Airport, operating at least two international routes, with domestic flights to Eilat under consideration.

A preliminary agreement was reached on what is known in aviation as the "Seventh Freedom of the Air." This would allow Wizz Air to operate flights directly between two foreign countries – such as Israel and Morocco – without returning to its home country, Hungary. Final approval for these routes depends on bilateral agreements between Israel and each destination country.

Government planners see Wizz Air's entry as a potential way to drive down fares. Israeli airlines, however, are pushing back, warning that

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Tomer Appelbaum

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## A new museum in rural Lithuania brings the shtetl back to life

**Liam Hoare**

SEDUVA, Lithuania – At the end of a dirt road beyond wooden houses and a time-worn workshop, the winter sun reflects off the pitched aluminum rooftops of Seduva's Lost Shtetl Museum, a startling building unlike any other in this small town two hours northwest of Vilnius.

Designed by Finnish architectural firm Lahdelma & Mahlamäki behind the landmark POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, the campus' nine buildings are arranged in a cluster to resemble a village. Some architectural cues are recognizable from POLIN, including the below-ground core exhibition, which summons up the lost world of the shtetl entirely eradicated by the Holocaust.

A decade in the making, the Lost Shtetl Museum opened its doors in September 2025. A month prior, Israeli President Isaac Herzog ceremonially affixed the mezuzah to its entranceway; his great-grandfather Rabbi Shmuel Yitzchak Hillman – the father of his paternal grandmother, Sarah – was born in Seduva. On the eve of the Holocaust, 700-800 Jews lived in what they would have called Shadeve in Yiddish,



The creation of the Lost Shtetl Museum was born out of an effort to preserve the memory of those buried in Seduva's Jewish cemetery.

Kivaitoimisto Kivaito

one of more than 200 prewar shtetls in Lithuania.

The museum could have cost as much as \$140 million, according to leading Lithuanian business newspaper Verslo Zinios. "The museum is funded by a private foundation in Switzerland,"

Marija Dautartaite, the museum's head of communications, tells Haaretz. Ivan Glasenberg – a descendant of Lithuanian Jews and the former CEO of the Anglo-

Swiss mining company Glencore, worth \$13 billion, per Forbes – is a supporter of the private project, according to Lithuanian National Radio and Television.

In an interview with Verslo Zinios, Glasenberg said, "I helped the Lost Shtetl Museum. This is a project I believe in, and I think it is important," while claiming the private foundation's investments "do not come directly from me. The amount

is confidential."

Glasenberg declined to comment directly, instead referring to Haaretz to the museum. Dautartaite declined to comment on the identity of its donors saying, "The museum does not comment on rumors, and we encourage journalists not to pursue them either."

The Lost Shtetl Museum's founder, Sergey Kanovich,

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### To our readers:

Over the past year, Haaretz's production and distribution costs have risen significantly, alongside a rise in Israeli VAT. Haaretz was also affected by government decisions which included reducing advertising and cancelling subscriptions. As a result, we have no choice but to increase the cost of subscriptions, starting in March 2026.

Monthly subscriptions will increase by NIS 20 to NIS 370.

The price of the daily edition, Sunday through Thursday, will be NIS 18, and on Fridays, NIS 36.

All prices include VAT.

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