



# Defense officials say U.S. strike on Iran could happen sooner than anticipated

Amos Harel,  
Yaniv Kubovich  
and Ben Samuels

The United States has significantly increased its military forces in the Middle East in recent days, in advance of a possible attack on Iran. The latest moves and statements from the Trump administration seem to show that the Americans are now seriously considering beginning a military campaign relatively soon. The United States is also preparing for a long campaign, which could involve Israel, in an attempt to apply heavy pressure on

the regime in Tehran, and even lead to its fall.

Israeli defense officials say that the likelihood of a U.S. strike on Iran has increased over the past 24 hours, following the latest round of talks between Washington and Tehran.

The signs of accelerated preparations for war have multiplied over the past few days, for both the Americans and Israel. The second round of talks over a new nuclear agreement, which were held in Geneva on Tuesday be-

tween the United States and Iran ended, as expected, without any real progress. Senior Iranian officials tried to present an optimistic face after the talks, but U.S. officials said all that happened is that the Iranians were given an opportunity to make their positions more flexible for a limited time.

According to Israeli security assessments, despite Iran's public statements at the conclusion of the meeting, significant gaps remain that the United States is

struggling to bridge, chief among them the demand that Iran relinquish uranium enrichment on its own soil.

Statements by senior Iranian officials show that as of now, the regime is unwilling to make significant compromises over the American demand to impose strict restrictions on its nuclear program. Israel's Channel 12 News quoted one of U.S. President Donald Trump's advisers on Wednesday who said his boss was losing his patience in light of the Iranian positions

in the negotiations, and he gave a 90 percent probability of an American military operation in the next few weeks.

With talks increasingly appearing to be deadlocked, Israeli officials believe Trump could opt for military action sooner than expected. They are also not ruling out an active Israeli role in any U.S. strike on Iran. The two countries are closely coordinating on intelligence, communications and air defense.

The United States began deploying forces in the re-

gion in the second week of January, but until recently, they were brought in at a particularly fast pace. But this has changed over the last few days, and in the last 48 hours, another 50 warplanes of various types have arrived. In addition, dozens of refueling planes have been deployed after the Americans concentrated large naval forces in the Middle East and gathered hundreds of combat planes within attack distance of Iran.

At the same time, the Israel Defense Forces is completing its preparations – defensively, and if Israel

is attacked then offensively, too – for the possibility of another war breaking out soon. Raising the level of preparedness and alert in the military could affect leave for soldiers, and, if necessary, could lead to a broad call up of reservists in the relevant branches – initially the Air Force, Home Front Command and intelligence units.

Senior IDF commanders said that at this stage no instructions have been given to change the level of preparedness of the home front beyond its already high level of alert

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President Trump, possibility of peace in your hand **Editorial Page 5**

## Police extend Temple Mount visiting hours for non-Muslims

Nir Hasson  
and Jack Khoury

Israel Police agreed on Wednesday to extend morning visiting hours for Jews and tourists on the Temple Mount (Haram al-Sharif), marking a significant departure from long-standing Ramadan protocols at the holy site. According to the status

quo established after the Six-Day War, the Temple Mount is a site of worship for Muslims and a place of visitation for non-Muslims. Under this arrangement, the site is typically closed to non-Muslims in the afternoons during the month of Ramadan.

During Ramadan, midday visits are canceled to allow the Waqf custodians of the site to prepare for the massive evening prayers. Since the appointment of Maj. Gen. Avshalom Peled as commander of Israel Police's Jerusalem District, police have been apparently trying to placate Jewish activists. The police recently approved the introduction of prayer sheets to the compound, and, in contrast to the past, unlimited prayers, singing and bowing in the morning and an additional hour midday.

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This year, visiting hours for Jews were extended during the morning hours as "compensation" for the clos-

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Itai Cohen

## Police detain Women of the Wall leaders for reading Torah at Kotel

Judy Maltz

Two leaders of Women of the Wall, the multidenominational feminist prayer group, were detained by police on Wednesday morning for reading from the Torah outside the entrance to Jerusalem's Western Wall.

Police claimed they were blocking the line at the security checkpoint located at the entrance to the Jewish holy site, thereby creating a "disturbance to the public order."

The women detained for questioning were Yochi Rapaport, CEO of Women of the Wall, and Tammy Gottlieb, vice chair of the board. They were held at the police

station in the Old City until the afternoon.

Police issued a restraining order that prevents the two from accessing the Western Wall for 15 days.

The organization said it plans to appeal the decision, which would prevent Rapaport and Gottlieb from participating in the annual Purim megillah-reading service at the holy site.

On Tuesday, a High Court of Justice held a hearing on petitions filed against the government for not delivering on its commitment from several years ago to renovate the plaza designated for egalitarian prayer at the Western Wall. The panel of seven justices is expect-

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Yaniv Kubovich

The Israeli military said on Wednesday that Staff Sgt. Ofri Yaffe was killed Tuesday in a "friendly fire" incident in southern Gaza.

According to a preliminary investigation, Yaffe was killed by Israeli fire during an IDF search of a suspicious building in the southern Gaza Strip and was mistakenly identified as a terrorist.

Yaffe's parents, Hadas and Yiftach, said in a news conference that they have "no anger toward the army," but adding, "We are angry

at the state, which puts our best sons – the salt of the earth – into illogical and unnecessary situations now that all our hostages have returned home."

Yaffe, 21, from Moshav Hayogev, in northern Israel, served in the Paratroopers Reconnaissance Unit.

Since October 7, 2023, the IDF has announced the deaths of 925 soldiers. Since the cease-fire on October 10, 2025, five Israeli soldiers have been killed.

Yaffe is survived by his parents and three siblings. He is set to receive a military funeral Thursday.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu offered his condolences alongside his wife, Sara, and said in a statement that they "share in the intense sorrow of the family." Netanyahu said that Yaffe fell in the painful friendly fire incident in the Gaza Strip. The entire people of Israel bows its head over the fall of Ofri, of blessed memory, who fought with heroism in order to protect the security of Israel."

Shalom Shihor Reichman, the head of the Jezreel Valley Regional Council, paid

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## Soldier, 21, killed by friendly fire in Gaza; parents blame the gov't

Yaniv Kubovich

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Showing fealty to Chairman Trump

WASHINGTON – U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday will convene the inaugural meeting of the Board of Peace – the body on which the future of Gaza hinges, although it increasingly appears to be a vanity project whose goal is not to improve the lives of Palestinians but rather for countries to appease Trump, according to long-time regional observers and former U.S. officials.

The meeting will take place at the U.S. Institute of Peace, a formerly independent non-profit that still managed to become one of the Washington institutions rebranded as the Donald J. Trump Institute of Peace as part of his effort to dramatically refashion U.S. global engagement and to entrench his own status as a legacy-defining peacemaker.

The meeting's details, agenda and full list of participants have yet to be confirmed 24 hours prior to the gathering, though Trump has already highlighted \$5 billion in member-state commitments toward Gaza humanitarian and reconstruction efforts – a figure that he himself has dismissed as "pennies" for certain wealthy donor-states and far from adequate for what is actually needed on the ground for stabilization, let alone reconstruction.

"Trump knows that boards don't negotiate tough conflicts. Boards can raise money; they can help him reprise his role in The Apprentice [his former TV show], being chairman for life. They can create camera-ready moments, as they will on Thursday, in a conflict where there's more motion than serious movement," says Aaron David Miller, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and a former U.S. State Department Middle East negotiator.

The countries for whom

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Family wasn't told cause of death and hasn't received his body

## Ex-soldier died in administrative detention, said he feared for his life

Josh Breiner

A demobilized soldier from the Bedouin city of Rahat who was put under administrative detention nine months ago on suspicion of being a member of the Islamic State died in Gilboa Prison in January. The state is refusing to release his body to his family or to provide information regarding the circumstances of his death.

The soldier, Hassan Kashallah, 26, was detained for a month before being placed under administrative detention. During his detention, he warned that his life was in danger, since he was a demobilized soldier imprisoned with Palestinian security prisoners, and because he was in poor health and not receiving the medical attention he needed.

"I was a soldier up to 2023, and every day Palestinians attacked me, since I had photos of myself in uniform," he said at a hearing at the Be'er Sheva District Court in August. "I'm at risk in prison. I'm afraid they'll identify me, since I am a soldier who did a full term of service. I didn't go to the bathroom for 25 days, and no one helped me. How can they do this to a citizen who helped the country?" he said, bursting into tears. "I'm afraid I'll die here."

Kashallah enlisted in 2020, joining the Bedouin re-



Gilboa Prison, where Hassan Kashallah, 26, died in January.

Gil Eliyahu

connaissance unit, in which he served for three years. According to his family, he also served in Gaza during the war.

In May 2025, he was arrested by the Shin Bet security service, along with two other suspects, on suspicion of belonging to ISIS. He was also suspected of further criminal wrongdoing, including planning to carry out a terror attack with another person. He was not given access to a lawyer throughout his detention.

Kashallah claimed the allegations against him were unfounded, and that his en-

trative detention, his attorney, Efrat Tzafati, claimed his life was at risk. She argued he was being held with terrorists who knew about his military past and about his serious medical condition, which continued to deteriorate. Despite this, his administrative detention was extended after the first term ended.

According to someone close to the family, on January 1, 2026, Kashallah's father, Issa, was summoned to the police station in Rahat. "An officer came out and

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