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## UAE, Belarus accept offer to join Trump's Board of Peace; Norway, UK voice concerns

*Qatar pushes back against Israeli criticism over its involvement, joins Abu Dhabi in endorsing plan as best option for Palestinians; Hamas officials said preparing to depart Gaza*

By Agencies, [Lazar Berman](#), [Jacob Magid](#)

and [Tol Staff](#) Today, 7:02 pm



*UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (R) welcomes his US counterpart Donald Trump upon arrival at the presidential terminal in Abu Dhabi on May 15, 2025. (Giuseppe Cacace/AFP)*

The United Arab Emirates accepted an invitation to join US President Donald Trump's newly proposed "Board of Peace," the UAE Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday, placing Abu Dhabi among the first governments to publicly endorse the initiative.

The ministry said the UAE stood ready to "contribute actively to the mission of the Board of Peace, supporting greater cooperation, stability, and prosperity for all," marking a formal alignment with

### Washington's new conflict-resolution effort.

"The UAE's decision reflects the importance of fully implementing President Donald J Trump's 20-point peace plan for Gaza, which is critical for the realization of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people," Emirati Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed said.

Abu Dhabi's acceptance comes as governments worldwide react cautiously to Trump's plan, which aims to begin with Gaza before widening to tackle other conflicts.

The Board of Peace was initially presented as a body that would exclusively oversee the postwar management of Gaza, and, in November, the UN Security Council voted to give it a two-year mandate to do so.

But its [charter](#), obtained by The Times of Israel earlier this week, makes no mention of Gaza and appears to take a swipe at the UN, saying that the new board should have "the courage to depart from approaches and institutions that have too often failed."

The document was attached to invitations to join the board that were sent to dozens of world leaders on Friday, some of whom have since confirmed receiving the invitation, although few have publicly accepted it, and fewer still have declined.



*(From left) Officials from Qatar, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan, Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates pose for a photo during a meeting to discuss the US-backed Gaza peace plan in Istanbul on November 3, 2025. (Ozan KOSE / AFP)*

Hours after Abu Dhabi said it would accept the invitation, the office of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko confirmed that he, too, would join the board of peace.

Lukashenko is a close ally of Russia's President Vladimir Putin, whose invitation to join the board raised eyebrows in Europe.

On Tuesday, China confirmed that it had been invited to join the Board of Peace, but did not specify whether it would accept. "China has received the United States' invitation," foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun told a regular news briefing.

In addition to the UAE and Belarus, Trump's offer to join the Board of Peace has so far been accepted by Argentina, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Morocco, and Vietnam.

Turkey's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said on Tuesday that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan would soon decide whether to accept Trump's invitation.

"We have received an invitation. Our president is being invited as a founding member, on behalf of Turkey, [and] will likely make his decision on this matter very soon," Fidan said in a televised interview with state media.

#### **Europe makes concerns known**

Some leaders offered ambiguous responses to the invitation. Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said her country was "ready to do our part," while Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney said Ottawa had agreed "in principle" pending further details.

Less ambiguous was the United Kingdom, which on Tuesday flagged Trump's invitation to his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, to join the board.

"We are concerned about reports that Putin and Lukashenko could be members of that board," British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's spokesperson said, before the Belarusian leader confirmed that he would be joining.

"Putin is the aggressor in an illegal war against Ukraine, and he has shown time and time again he is not serious about peace," the spokesperson added.

A day earlier, French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel said that his country "cannot accept" the offer to join "at this stage," over concerns shared by some European governments that the Board of Peace could undermine the work of the United Nations, which Trump has accused of not supporting his efforts to end conflicts around the world.



**US President Donald Trump (right) greets Norway's Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre during a summit to support ending the more than two-year Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, October 13, 2025, in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. (Suzanne Plunkett/Pool via AP)**

Likewise, Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Andreas Motzfeldt Kravik told the daily Aftenposten on Tuesday that Oslo would not take part in the initiative in its current format. The Norwegian foreign ministry did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

By contrast, Qatar defended Trump's vision for Gaza, saying there was "no alternative" to it.

"The Gaza Board of Peace is presenting a path," said Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

"The first stage of the deal being implemented doesn't mean that the deal is done," Al Thani warned, referring to the ceasefire in Gaza. "We have a lot of work to be done right now."

"We are happy to be a contributor to peace and stability in our region," he said of Qatar's inclusion on the Board of Peace. "We have no alternative paths to seek right now."

One of the most important things to focus on in Gaza right now, Al Thani said, is to "make sure that the withdrawal of Israeli forces is happening as soon as possible."

#### **Qatar pushes back**

In Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was yet to confirm on Tuesday whether he would accept an invitation to join the board.

The premier has criticized Washington's decision to place senior representatives from Turkey and Qatar on the Board of Peace's operational arm for Gaza, confusingly called the Gaza Executive Board, making it unclear whether he would want to legitimize the panel's makeup by joining the Board of Peace.

He admitted on Monday to an "argument" with the US over the "makeup" of the board, and portrayed the involvement of Qatar and Turkey as minimal, asserting that they were "barely members of an advisory committee of one of the three commissions, in which they don't have any authority or any influence or any soldiers."

Qatar appeared to push back against that depiction on Tuesday, with a foreign ministry spokesman saying that the country was "involved in consultations for the establishment of the Board of Peace" as well as being "involved in the mediation process and in contact with the US administration."

"Israel's objections do not bother us," he said. "Israel's position will not deter Qatar from carrying out its role, and we are in contact with the US on this issue. Qatar is committed to the success of the Gaza ceasefire agreement."



**Heavy construction equipment bearing the flags of Egypt (front) and Qatar line up on the Egyptian side of the Rafah border crossing with the Gaza Strip on February 20, 2025, as Hamas handed over the bodies of four deceased Israeli hostages, to the Red Cross early in the morning within a truce deal with Israel. (AFP)**

Discussions over the makeup of the board are taking place against the backdrop of the US's announcement last week that it was launching the second phase of Trump's 20-point plan to end the Gaza war.

The second phase of the plan involves the disarmament of Hamas, the demilitarization of the Gaza Strip and the establishment of a new technocratic Palestinian administration for the Strip.

To that end, the Saudi Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper reported Tuesday that senior members of Hamas were preparing to depart the war-torn Strip after receiving guarantees that they would be able to leave safely during the second phase of Trump's plan.

Citing a source from within the terror group, the newspaper reported that the exile of Hamas officials would be voluntary, and carried out in coordination with Hamas leaders abroad.

Several of the Hamas operatives expected to leave Gaza in the coming weeks are doing so after being appointed to leadership positions within the terror group's politburo wing, based in Qatar, Asharq reported. Others still were reportedly due to depart for Turkey, which hosts a significant number of senior Hamas officials.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/uae-belarus-accept-offer-to-join-trumps-board-of-peace-norway-uk-voice-concerns/>

## **As Israel pushes back, Gaza becomes testing ground for emerging post-war governance - analysis**

***The emergence of a Palestinian technocratic governing committee alongside Trump's US-backed Board of Peace has triggered sharp Israeli backlash, exposing cabinet rifts and deep unease.***

***(By GABRIEL COLODRO/THE MEDIA LINE JANUARY 20, 2026 18:44 Updated: JANUARY 20, 2026 18:55***



**Palestinians stand near the rubble in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip, January 17, 2026 (photo credit: REUTERS/Haseeb Alwazeer)**

**Israel's concern over Gaza's postwar trajectory has intensified with the emergence of two frameworks that many Israeli political leaders now view as interconnected and deeply problematic.**

For more stories from The Media Line go to [themedialine.org](http://themedialine.org)

**One is a Palestinian technocratic governing committee tasked with administering Gaza's internal affairs. The other is an international oversight panel, known as President Donald Trump's Board of Peace, intended to supervise reconstruction, coordination, and political guarantees.**

**Israeli politicians argue that, taken together, the two bodies risk entrenching a new governing reality in Gaza without elections, without Israeli consent, and without clear proof that Hamas' power structures have been dismantled.**

**The international oversight panel was announced following the acceptance of President Donald Trump's plan, which formally ended the war after more than two years.**

The framework brings together a wide and politically diverse [group of international figures](#). On the American side, it includes US Secretary of State Marco Rubio alongside senior envoys and advisers such as Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, with former British Prime Minister Tony Blair involved in an advisory capacity.

**Palestinians walk past the rubble of residential buildings destroyed during the war, in the northern Gaza Strip, January 6, 2026. (credit: Mahmoud Issa/Reuters)**

The panel also involves senior regional and [international figures](#), including Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, Jordan's King Abdullah II, Egyptian intelligence chief Hassan Rashad, UAE Minister Reem Al-Hashimy, former UN officials Nickolay Mladenov and Sigrid Kaag, and Argentine President Javier Milei, who publicly confirmed he had been invited to take part in the initiative.

Figures named publicly are understood to represent only part of a broader diplomatic outreach, with [additional leaders](#) and officials invited as the framework continues to take shape.

While Washington has described the panel as supervisory rather than executive, Israeli leaders stress that its composition directly affects the legitimacy and durability of any governing structure it oversees. From their perspective, international supervision does not mitigate risk if the underlying authority remains contested or advances independently of Israel's stated security and political red lines.

#### **Prime Minister's Office formally distances Israel from Gaza Executive Board**

The Prime Minister's Office moved to formally distance Israel from the initiative, stating that the announcement regarding the composition of the [Gaza Executive Board](#), which operates under the broader Board of Peace, "was not coordinated with Israel and runs contrary to its policy." The statement highlighted Jerusalem's position that key elements of the postwar framework were advanced without Israeli approval, reinforcing concerns that international arrangements are taking shape independently of Israel's stated security and political red lines.

At the center of the controversy remains the Palestinian technocratic governing committee. Headed by Ali Shaath, the committee includes portfolios that mirror those of a sovereign government, among them interior, judiciary, religious affairs, land authority, municipal affairs, water, telecommunications, trade and economy, tribal affairs, education, health, housing, finance, agriculture, and social and women's affairs. Israeli politicians argue that this scope goes far beyond humanitarian coordination or temporary civilian management and instead signals the formation of a *de facto* government in Gaza.

Opposition leader Yair Lapid described the current framework as the outcome of a strategic failure by the government. In a statement released this week, Lapid recalled that nearly a year earlier, he presented what he called the "Egypt plan" to the US administration and other international actors, proposing that Egypt assume responsibility for managing Gaza in close security coordination with Israel. "As we said all along: Egypt is preferable to Turkey and Qatar," Lapid wrote, citing Egypt's past governance of Gaza, its shared border with the Strip, its cooperation with Israel on security matters, and its long-standing fight against the Muslim Brotherhood.

Lapid said he discussed the proposal extensively with the US administration, the European Union, Gulf state leaders, and Egyptian officials themselves, adding that only one actor refused to engage with the plan: the Netanyahu government. According to Lapid, that refusal led directly to the current situation in which Turkey and Qatar were incorporated into the Trump-led framework.

He described both countries as ideological partners of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, warning that their involvement poses a direct risk to Israel's security interests. Lapid added that a recently announced gas agreement with Egypt could still serve as a foundation for repositioning Cairo as the leading actor in Gaza's reconstruction and demilitarization, urging the government not to miss what he called another historic opportunity.

Within the governing coalition, Likud lawmaker Moshe Saada focused his criticism squarely on the international oversight panel. "The State of Israel must not agree to the involvement of terror patron Qatar and Turkey, and its antisemitic foreign minister, Hakan Fidan, in President Trump's peace council," Saada wrote.

He warned that these countries "cannot be part of the day after in Gaza in any way" and cautioned against allowing Erdogan to gain a foothold along Israel's border. Saada praised Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for publicly stating that such involvement was unacceptable to Israel and called on him to stand firm despite international pressure.

National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir rejected both the technocratic committee and the international framework outright. "Gaza does not need any 'administrative committee' to oversee its 'reconstruction,'" Ben-Gvir said, arguing that the Strip must instead be "cleansed of Hamas terrorists." He called for the encouragement of what he described as massive voluntary emigration and urged the prime minister to instruct the Israel Defense Forces to prepare for a renewed military campaign "with overwhelming force" in order to achieve what he defined as the war's central goal: the destruction of Hamas.

The disagreement moved beyond public statements and into the heart of Israel's decision-making apparatus. During a recent meeting of the security cabinet, Ben-Gvir confronted Maj. Gen. David Zini over the advancement of civilian governance frameworks before Hamas had been fully defeated. Ben-Gvir reiterated that "Gaza does not need any 'administrative committee' to oversee its 'reconstruction,'" insisting that Israel must be

prepared to return to fighting “with overwhelming force” rather than transition toward civilian administration.

Zini warned that the absence of an organized civilian alternative would leave Gaza in prolonged chaos and force the Israel Defense Forces to shoulder indefinite responsibility for governing the Strip. He cautioned that without a structured administrative framework, Israel could find itself trapped in an open-ended military presence with no viable exit strategy. Ben-Gvir dismissed that warning, reiterating that any governing body established before Hamas’ destruction would simply reproduce the same threat under a different name.

Alongside the harsher criticism, some coalition figures sought to reassure that Israeli red lines were being enforced. Likud lawmaker Tally Gotliv, a member of the Israeli parliament’s Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, argued that fears of Turkish military involvement were unfounded and said the prime minister had already intervened decisively with Washington. “Just as there were those who once believed that Turkish armed forces would enter Gaza, the prime minister succeeded in moving President Trump away from that decision,” Gotliv told The Media Line. “This time as well, Turkish forces will not enter Gaza. I have no doubt about that.”

Gotliv emphasized that the core issue remained Hamas, not the architecture of international committees. “In Gaza, there is Hamas, a terrorist organization that is growing stronger,” she said. “It is dangerous not only to Israel, but in general, because it is an extremely brutal terror organization. Israel, therefore, has no choice but to insist on the obligation to dismantle Hamas’ weapons.” She added that, in her assessment, Hamas would not disarm voluntarily and that Israel would be the one to ensure it happens, reiterating her certainty that there would be no Turkish forces in Gaza.

Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich framed the dual-committee controversy as the outcome of what he described as a foundational policy failure. “The original sin is the prime minister’s refusal to take responsibility for Gaza, establish a military administration there, encourage migration and settlement, and thus guarantee Israel’s security for many years,” Smotrich wrote. That refusal, he argued, produced “strange constructions” to manage civilian life in Gaza that are neither Hamas nor the Palestinian Authority.

Smotrich said that even under the assumption that Israel would accept a non-Hamas civilian body, strict red lines must apply. “The countries that sustained Hamas cannot be the ones that replace it,” he wrote. “Those that supported it and continue to host it will not gain a foothold in Gaza. Period.” He added that the prime minister must uphold those red lines even if doing so requires managing a dispute with Washington and with President Trump’s envoys.

Taken together, the reactions from Lapid, Saada, Ben-Gvir, Gotliv, and Smotrich reveal both convergence and fracture. There is broad agreement that the Palestinian technocratic governing committee and the international oversight panel raise fundamental questions about who will wield power in Gaza and under what conditions. Yet the sharp divergence in proposed alternatives, ranging from Egyptian stewardship to renewed military control or prolonged Israeli administration, emphasizes how unresolved Gaza’s “day after” remains.

As both frameworks move from announcement toward implementation, Israel faces a narrowing margin for strategic maneuver. What is unfolding in Jerusalem is no longer a technical debate over committees, but a deeper struggle over timing, control, and political sequencing in the postwar arena.

What unsettles Israeli decision-makers is not only who sits on the various panels, but the possibility that Gaza is becoming the testing ground for a wider political experiment, one whose parameters are being set before Israel has clarified its own endgame. Israeli leaders warn that decisions taken now, even under the banner of reconstruction and oversight, could lock in realities that extend far beyond Gaza itself.

Whether the government can prevent Hamas’ reemergence, block the empowerment of hostile actors, and safeguard key alliances while retaining meaningful influence over Gaza’s future governance remains unanswered. The outcome of that tension is likely to shape not only Israel’s approach to Gaza, but its broader regional posture in the postwar period. <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/defense-news/article-883979>

## **Israel demolishes UNRWA’s East Jerusalem headquarters; UN agency: ‘Unprecedented attack’**

***Israel, which has banned the agency, says compound doesn’t enjoy immunity as UNRWA had ceased operations there; Ben Gvir celebrates at scene: ‘Terror supporters being kicked out’***

By [Noam Lehmann](#), [Agencies](#) and [Tol Staff](#) Today, 12:23 pm

Israel demolishes a structure inside the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in East Jerusalem on January 20, 2026 (Ilia Yefimovich / AFPTV / AFP) [Go to website for video rdb](#)

**Israel on Tuesday began demolishing the East Jerusalem headquarters of UNRWA, the UN**

agency for Palestinian refugees and their descendants, with Israeli forces entering the compound with bulldozers and other demolition equipment in the early morning and destroying buildings in what UNRWA called an “unprecedented attack.”

The move to demolish UNRWA’s headquarters comes after years of legislative measures against the agency, which Israel accuses of collusion with Hamas and participation in terror activities.

The Knesset passed a pair of laws in late October 2024 banning UNRWA from operating within Israeli territory. Despite the ban, UNRWA operations, including schools, healthcare and other social services, are still hobbling along in East Jerusalem.

UNRWA spokesman Jonathan Fowler said in a statement to the international press that Israeli forces

“stormed into” the compound shortly after 7 a.m. local time.

“This is an unprecedented attack against UNRWA and its premises. And it also constitutes a serious violation of international law and the privileges and immunities of the United Nations,” he added.

Israel defended the move to demolish the compound, with the Foreign Ministry saying in a statement that “UNRWA-Hamas had already ceased its operations at this site and no longer had any UN personnel or UN activity there.”

*Machinery demolishes a structure inside the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem on January 20, 2026 (Ilia Yefimovich / AFP)*

“The compound does not enjoy any immunity and the seizure of this compound by Israeli authorities was carried out in accordance with both Israeli and international law,” it added.

As the bulldozers began tearing down structures, National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir arrived at the scene to watch the demolition.

“This is an important day for sovereignty in Jerusalem,” he said. “Today these terror supporters are being kicked out of here with everything they’ve built. This is what will be done to every terror supporter.”

Last month, Israeli authorities raided the compound, raising an Israeli flag over the main building and seizing assets it said were related to municipal tax disputes, though the UN maintained that the raid had nothing to do with taxes and the East Jerusalem compound “remains United Nations premises and is inviolable and immune from any other form of interference.”

Israel has long sought to shutter the agency altogether, saying it perpetuates the conflict by continuing to confer refugee status on Palestinian descendants rather than resettling them, unlike the practice with the rest of the world’s refugees.

It ramped up its campaign against the agency after evidence showed that employees of the agency had participated in the October 7, 2023, onslaught by Hamas.



*Protesters outside the UNRWA offices in Jerusalem, January 30, 2025. (Aron Leib Abrams/Flash90)*

Israel has also alleged that more than 10 percent of UNRWA’s staff in Gaza have ties to terrorist factions, and that educational facilities under the organization’s auspices consistently incite hatred of Israel and glorify terror.

In February 2024, the IDF revealed the existence of a subterranean Hamas data center directly beneath UNRWA’s Gaza Strip headquarters. The IDF has also repeatedly targeted Hamas command centers and gunmen hiding out in UNRWA schools.

A number of freed hostages have also testified after returning to Israel that they were held in captivity in UNRWA schools and facilities.

However, some supporters have noted the key role the agency fills in providing relief to Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank and keeping them from deeper poverty that could fuel violence and terrorism, saying no other body or group is equipped to handle that responsibility. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-demolishes-unrwas-east-jerusalem-headquarters-un-agency-unprecedented-attack/>

## Netanyahu plans US trip amid escalating Iran threats and American military buildup

Iran warns any attack on Khamenei would be treated as declaration of war and could trigger call for jihad, as Washington reinforces forces in the region and Tehran maintains sweeping internet blackout after deadly protests

Itamar Eichner | 11:36

**Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to travel to the United States later this month to attend the annual AIPAC conference in Washington, against the backdrop of rising tensions with Iran and a growing U.S. military buildup in the region, ynet learned on Tuesday.**

The conference is scheduled for Feb. 22–24, and officials in the Prime Minister's Office confirmed that a trip is under consideration. A possible meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump is also being discussed, according to officials.



(Photo: Lev Radin/Shutterstock, AP, REUTERS/Nathan Howard)

Iran is expected to top the agenda if the visit goes ahead, particularly if the United States has not taken military action against Tehran by then. In recent days, the U.S. military has reinforced its presence in the Middle East, including the deployment of an F-15E fighter squadron. U.S. Central Command published images of the aircraft, saying their presence enhances combat readiness and promotes regional stability. The buildup

has also included the movement of two additional C-17A Globemaster III transport aircraft from Britain to a base in Jordan to support fighter operations. The United States has announced plans to deploy the aircraft carriers USS Abraham Lincoln and USS Gerald R. Ford to the region as well, though their arrival is expected to take more time.

Meanwhile, Tehran has ramped up its rhetoric. Lawmakers issued a statement warning that any attack on Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei would amount to a declaration of war on the Islamic world and could trigger a fatwa, or religious ruling, calling for jihad. The statement followed comments by President Masoud Pezeshkian, who said that [striking the supreme leader would mean “all-out war,”](#) after [Trump renewed calls for regime change in Iran.](#)

Inside Iran, large-scale clashes between security forces and protesters have subsided in recent days, but an [extensive internet shutdown remains in place](#). The blackout — the longest in the history of the Islamic Republic — began on Jan. 8, when anti-regime demonstrations escalated into mass protests. During the unrest, the Revolutionary Guard carried out a violent crackdown. Iranian authorities have acknowledged that at least 5,000 people were killed.

The government has cut internet access to hinder protesters' ability to organize and to prevent images and videos of the unrest from reaching the outside world. While brief and partial connections have been restored at times, access remains severely restricted. Even users who manage to connect report limited functionality, with services such as Google searches largely inaccessible. <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/by5gu4prze>

## 'We are 80 million hostages': What's really happening inside Iran's digital iron curtain

*"The Islamic Republic turned the streets into rivers of blood. No one has been able to show the depth of the crimes, because the regime shut down the internet," one anonymous citizen wrote.*

By [ALEX WINSTON](#) JANUARY 20, 2026 20:13 Updated:

JANUARY 20, 2026 21:13

Iranians gather while blocking a street during a [protest in Tehran, Iran on January 9, 2026](#). The nationwide protests started in Tehran's Grand Bazaar against the failing economic policies in late December, which spread to universities and other cities (photo credit: MAHSA/Middle East Images/AFP via Getty Images)

Many have [described the current protests inside Iran as a “Berlin Wall” moment, meant to portray the unforgettable, positive change that European geopolitics underwent when the wall came down.](#)



Instead, for the past few weeks, you could describe what has taken place in Iran as a digital Iron Curtain descending upon the country.

What little information escapes the digital wall erected by the Islamic Republic comes in fragments. Text-only messages, broken calls that last seconds, testimony passed through intermediaries abroad. Together, they describe a country under de facto martial law, where the streets are controlled by guns and communication is a punishable act.



One message, sent from Fardis in Alborz Province and passed to the National Union for Democracy in Iran (NUFDI), captures the scale of what Iranians say they are living through.

“Today, with great difficulty, after almost two weeks I managed to connect to my landline internet,” the message reads. “Mobile internet is still cut off. I can only send text messages. It is absolutely impossible to send audio or video.

“I experienced the worst, worst, worst days of my life. With the things I saw and experienced, I don’t think I will ever be the same person as before. It is a crime against humanity. Tell the whole world that a crime against humanity has taken place here.”

*Members of the Iranian police stand guard at a protest in front of the British embassy following anti-government protests in Tehran, Iran, January 14, 2026.*

(credit: MAJID ASGARPOUR/WANA (WEST ASIA NEWS AGENCY) VIA REUTERS)

The writer states that thousands of innocent people have been killed, that children and young people were shot in the streets, and that the internet shutdown has made it impossible to show the scale of what occurred.

“The Islamic Republic turned the streets into rivers of blood,” the message says. “No one has been able to show the depth of the crimes, because the regime shut down the internet.”

The account comes from trustworthy sources and aligns with a growing body of testimony emerging from inside Iran as connectivity briefly flickers on before being cut again.

One Iranian living in Europe told *The Jerusalem Post* that he managed to speak to a friend inside the country for five minutes before the call was abruptly terminated.

“What I heard was out of a nightmare,” he said. “Much worse than we are being told and shown.”

By nearly all accounts, Iran is now operating under conditions that residents describe as martial law in all but name. Members of the Basij militia patrol Tehran on motorbikes, some reportedly shouting, “Don’t come out! We’ll shoot you!” Police loudspeakers order residents to stay away from windows, an apparent attempt to prevent people from chanting protest slogans from their homes, as Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi has urged.

Videos have shown armed guards patrolling the streets sitting on the back of trucks, in images reminiscent of scenes from October 7.

There have been multiple reports and videos of [Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps \(IRGC\)](#) security forces breaking down doors of private properties and beating residents. Civilians inside Iran have stated that IRGC men have been going door-to-door in an attempt to discover secret Starlink devices or satellite dishes, which people use to connect with the outside world.

Universities in Tehran remain closed to prevent student gatherings. A majority of shops and shopping centers are shuttered. Armed security forces dominate city centers. Public gatherings are dispersed within minutes.

Reports have also emerged of Arabic-speaking mercenaries from Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan reinforcing regime forces in several cities.

### The human cost: Arrests, killings, and executions

The human cost is huge. According to figures cited by Iranian officials themselves, at least 5,000 people have been killed since protests erupted on December 28, including around 500 members of the security forces. Authorities blame “terrorists and armed rioters.” Human rights activists and opposition groups dispute that narrative and say the death toll could be far higher, potentially exceeding 20,000.

At least 24,669 Iranians have been arrested.

A doctor inside Iran described the killings as “genocide under digital darkness,” to British newspaper *The*

*Sunday Times*. One couple told the paper they were given “ten minutes to cry” when shown the body of their daughter — after being forced to pay a \$5,000 “bullet fee” to recover her remains. After paying, they were driven five hours to another town, where her body had been thrown into an old grave.

Numerous families have reported being charged exorbitant sums to retrieve the bodies of loved ones killed by the regime.

Images shared from within Iran during the past week also show injured protesters admitted to hospitals, tubes and catheters still attached, admission tags visible — and then shot point-blank in the head, their bodies lying on the ground. Doctors have also refused to treat protesters as enemies of the regime.

The blackout is the Islamic Republic’s central weapon against the demonstrators beyond live fire. With mobile data cut nationwide and only sporadic landline access available, Iranians are isolated from one another and from the outside world. Evidence cannot be shared. Deaths cannot be documented.

Several Iranians contacted by *The Jerusalem Post* used the same word to describe their condition.

Hostages.

“We are hostages inside our own country,” one message read. “We don’t know what is happening in the next street, let alone the next city.”

In the early days of the protests, before the streets emptied and the internet went dark, Iranians appealed outward for the help they needed.

Handwritten signs addressed to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and [US President Donald Trump](#) appeared at demonstrations. Video messages circulated online calling on Israel and the United States to intervene. In some cities, streets were symbolically renamed after Trump, reflecting a belief that foreign warnings would translate into protection.

Those appeals were made after explicit statements from abroad warning Tehran against killing protesters and promising consequences if it did.

But the momentum on the ground of the demonstrators has passed, at least for now, as they have been confined to their homes, and it has given the regime the one thing it needed to cling on to power - time. Time to arrest, time to murder and time to release to the world a narrative that suits them. They may have told Trump that executions have been halted, but one look at what has taken place inside Iranian hospitals, shows that executions are still being carried out.

As the internet shutdown entered its twelfth day on Tuesday, Iran’s exiled Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi addressed the nation and the regime in a video message broadcast on social media.

“My address is to Ali Khamenei, the leader of the occupying regime of Iran,” Pahlavi said. “You are an anti-Iranian criminal. You have neither honor nor humanity. Your hands are stained with the blood of tens of thousands of Iranians.”

“You, your regime, and all your mercenaries will be held accountable for every single drop of blood you have spilled — without exception.”

He urged Iranians not to allow grief and fear to halt the movement.

“Be ready,” he said. “The moment of returning to the streets will come — broader, stronger, more determined than ever; to take Tehran; to reclaim Iran.”

But inside Iran, the present reality is captivity and a people held hostage.

“I am suffocating. We in Iran are 80 million hostages of this regime” the message to NUFDI concluded. “The world must act now.”

For Israelis, the word “hostages” carries a weight unlike almost any other. For two and a half years, it has barely left our lips or our thoughts.

Innocent Iranians right now, are being held hostage by their own government. Help them now.

<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/iran-news/article-883992>

## Executions in Iran soared in 2025 as regime used killings as 'tool of intimidation,' UN says

*Human rights groups warned the regime stepped up executions in response to the 2022 Women, Life, Freedom protests, which erupted in response to the regime's murder of Mahsa Amini.*

By [DANIELLE GREYMAN-KENNARD](#) JANUARY 20, 2026 12:30 Updated: JANUARY 20, 2026 18:29



*A woman is holding a sign with the portrait of a man condemned to death by hanging and the slogan No to Execution in Paris in France on January 18, 2026(photo credit: JOHN MACDOUGALL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES)*

**The Islamic Republic executed at least 1,500 people in 2025, nearly half (47%) as a penalty for drug offenses, according to a release published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on Monday.**

**Noting that the regime has used killings “as a tool of state intimidation,” the OHCHR’s High Commissioner Volker Turk said that the executions had a “disproportionate impact on ethnic minorities and migrants.”**

**While global trends in 2025 saw countries reduce the number of crimes met with the death penalty, the total number last year exceeded that of previous years, the office confirmed.** “My office monitored an alarming increase in the use of capital punishment in 2025, especially for offenses not meeting the ‘most serious crimes’ threshold required under international law, the continued execution of people convicted of crimes committed as children, as well as persistent secrecy around executions,” Turk said.

The report’s data analysis pertains to global trends beyond the specific uptick of such cases in Iran. Amnesty International had previously warned that [Tehran](#) uses ambiguous charges when pursuing the death sentence. Those facing sentencing based on crimes described as “enmity against God,” “Corruption on Earth,” and “Armed rebellion against the state,” do not receive fair trials, the group added.



*Protesters display a banner calling for a halt to executions in Iran during a rally in Berlin, Germany, on January 10, 2026 (credit: JOHN MACDOUGALL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES)*

Further, it noted that court proceedings are conducted behind closed doors in a break from standard procedure.

#### **Murder of Mahsa Amini by Iranian regime**

Human rights groups warned Iran stepped up executions in response to the 2022 Woman, Life, Freedom protests, which erupted in response to the [regime’s](#) murder of Kurdish-Iranian woman Mahsa Amini in custody.

The Islamic Republic also targeted individuals in the wake of the 12-day war with Israel in June, these groups said.

Apart from Iran, 356 people, including two children, were executed in Saudi Arabia last year. The majority (78%) were killed for drug-related offenses.

The OHCHR noted that the true extent of the executions committed in 2025 was difficult to surmise, as executions in China and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea were shrouded in secrecy.

Without mentioning the parameters that would lead to execution in Israel, the OHCHR also condemned plans for Israel to start executing convicted terrorists, citing that such a law would only apply to Palestinians.

The death penalty law would see military courts impose a death sentence for all convictions deemed “intentional killing” cases in the West Bank.

In the same paragraph, the UN body condemned Hamas’s [executions](#) but did not touch upon the numbers or the alleged crimes that led to the murders.

“The death penalty is not an effective crime-control tool, and it can lead to the execution of innocent people,” Turk said. “In practice, the death penalty is also often applied arbitrarily and discriminatorily, in violation of fundamental principles of equality before the law.” <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/iran-news/article-883935>

**High Court nixes autopsies of babies found dead at daycare as Haredim riot in protest**

**Elderly man assaulted as ultra-Orthodox rage against ‘desecration’ of infants who died at unlicensed Jerusalem daycare; teen protester run over blocking road, is moderately injured**

By [Stav Levaton](#)

and [Tol Staff](#) Today, 7:40 pm Updated at 8:31 pm

*Ultra-Orthodox rioters protesting the autopsies of two Haredi babies in Jerusalem, January 20, 2026. (Israel Police) [Go to website for video rdb](#)*

**The High Court of Justice ruled Tuesday that autopsies will not be performed on the two infants who died a day earlier in an unlicensed, overcrowded Jerusalem daycare facility, as ultra-Orthodox riots erupted in protest of the postmortems.**

The court held a hearing on the petition Tuesday afternoon filed by the ultra-Orthodox ZAKA emergency service on behalf of the deceased infants’ families. The hearing included a phone call with the head of the Abu Kabir Forensic Institute, Dr. Chen Kugel, during a closed-door section of the proceedings.

The court ruled that an autopsy was not necessary if all other required tests, including needle-based procedures not involving surgery, were completed, and that the infants could be buried without further delay.

The ruling, issued by justices Alex Stein, Yechiel Kasher, and Ruth Ronen, overturned a decision by the Jerusalem Magistrate’s Court to allow the autopsies, which law enforcement authorities had requested to determine the cause of death.

The families are ultra-Orthodox and opposed the autopsies on religious grounds. Jewish law in general proscribes autopsies because the human body is sacred and thus should not be tampered with after death, and urges that funerals be held as quickly as possible after a person dies. However, Jewish law does permit autopsies in some situations involving saving another life.

Dror Shoshim, the attorney who represented the families in court, described the ruling as “an important decision demonstrating humane sensitivity and respect for the dead,” according to a statement from Zaka.

Police and the State Attorney’s Office had pushed for the autopsies to uncover the exact cause of death for 4-month-old Leah Goloventzitz and 6-month-old Aharon Katz, [whose bodies were found](#) on Monday morning, along with 53 other babies and toddlers with varying degrees of injuries at the overcrowded Haredi daycare center in Jerusalem’s Romema neighborhood.

Police reportedly believe the two babies may have died of heat exhaustion and dehydration linked to a faulty heating system in the daycare, but are looking to confirm their suspicions with forensic medical procedures.

*Haredi protesters in Jerusalem on January 20, 2026. (Flash90)*

On Monday, the Jerusalem Magistrate’s Court ruled in favor of the authorities’ request for an autopsy, triggering petitions from both families of the deceased children and ZAKA, arguing that the matter should be left to the families.

Meanwhile, ultra-Orthodox protesters staged a second wave of riots against the requested autopsies, as a judge extended the detention of the two suspects in the children’s deaths, who are facing reported charges of reckless homicide and negligence.

By late afternoon, police reported that 11 people were arrested, including one who bit an officer’s hand.

The riots were even more violent than the ones that took place in Jerusalem and the nearby Haredi-majority city of Beit Shemesh on [Monday night](#). **More-** <https://www.timesofisrael.com/high-court-nixes-autopsies-of-babies-found-dead-at-daycare-as-haredim-riot-in-protest/>

## **Defense Ministry halts US takeover bid for Iron Dome software developer**

**Proposed deal would value Amprest at over \$200 million and leave Rafael as a minority shareholder, but security officials are wary of foreign control over classified command-and-control software tied to Iron Dome and other air defense systems**

*Yuval Azoulay, Calcalist|01.18.26 | 02:02*

**The Defense Ministry is delaying approval of a planned takeover of Amprest Systems, a company that develops command-and-control software for the Iron Dome air defense system, amid**



**concerns over foreign control of sensitive defense technology, according to people familiar with the matter.**

**The deal would give U.S.-listed holding company Ondas Holdings control of Amprest, whose software plays a central role in Iron Dome and other air defense systems. Ondas is seeking to buy out Amprest's shareholders for about \$100 million, valuing the company at more than \$200 million. If completed, the transaction would leave Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, the developer and manufacturer of Iron Dome, as a minority shareholder.**



*(Photo: IDF)*

**Amprest's largest shareholder today is Rafael. The remaining shares are held by Amprest founder and CEO Natan Barak, the OurCrowd investment platform and other investors.**

The transaction is being reviewed by the Defense Ministry's Department for Security of the Defense Establishment, known by its Hebrew acronym Malmab, headed by Yuval Shimoni. Officials involved in the review have raised concerns about a foreign company gaining control of Amprest given its classified activities tied to Iron Dome and other air defense programs.

People close to the deal said the prolonged review has delayed the transaction for several months, with no clear timeline or outcome. The holdup has underscored tensions inside the Defense Ministry between efforts to attract foreign investment into defense technology and strict security oversight that can slow or block such deals.

Amprest was founded about 25 years ago by Barak, a retired Navy officer with the rank of colonel. Its profile rose roughly 15 years ago after its command-and-control software was integrated into Iron Dome. In 2012, Amprest received the Israel Defense Prize for its role in developing the air defense system.

Most of Amprest's activity is in the military sector, with Rafael as its main customer. The company had never been put up for sale before Ondas made its offer. One person involved in the talks described the proposal as "an offer shareholders couldn't refuse."

Critics of the delay say the lack of coordination inside the Defense Ministry sends mixed messages to investors. While Director General Maj. Gen. (res.) Amir Baram and the head of the Defense Ministry's research and development directorate, Brig. Gen. (res.) Danny Gold, have publicly encouraged deeper cooperation with foreign investors to increase capital flows into defense-tech companies, Malmab has effectively become a bottleneck, they say.

"There is no holistic view," said a senior source familiar with the process. "Each body looks at the issue through its own narrow lens, with interests that sometimes clash. Investors put tens of millions of dollars into Amprest years ago and are now told they cannot exit for security reasons. Under those conditions, who will want to invest in defense tech?"

Supporters of the deal argue it could move forward under strict conditions that safeguard security interests, including limits on access, governance and technology transfer. They say the current process has been marked by unusually slow decision-making and heavy bureaucracy.

Ondas, which trades on Nasdaq, has rapidly expanded its footprint in the local defense sector since the Oct. 7 war, assembling a portfolio of nine defense-related companies. The company says it has spent about \$400 million on acquisitions to date.

Its recent purchases include Sentrycs, which develops counter-drone technologies, acquired in November for \$125 million in cash and \$100 million in stock, and Roboteam, a military ground robotics company, bought for about \$80 million. Ondas has also acquired M4 Defense, Iron Drone, Apeiro Motion, Insight Intelligent Sensors and S.P.O., a manufacturer of precision optical components.

In late 2022, Ondas acquired Airobotics for about \$15 million and folded it into American Robotics. Airobotics developed autonomous drones and received approval from the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration to operate over populated areas.



**Yoav Har-Even (Photo: moti Kimchi)**

The company's leadership includes several former senior figures from Rafael. Among them are former Rafael CEO Maj. Gen. (res.) Yoav Har-Even, who serves on Ondas' advisory board, and Brig. Gen. (res.) Oshri Lugassy, a former senior engineering officer who until late 2023 served as a senior executive at Rafael and now acts as Ondas' co-CEO.

Some industry figures have voiced concern over Ondas' rapid growth and sharply rising market valuation, which has climbed to about \$5 billion after the company raised roughly \$1 billion in a large stock offering. One market source compared the surge to the speculative

SPAC boom earlier in the decade.

"The Iron Dome name is a premium brand," the source said. "Ondas needs it to impress investors and open doors."

Questions have also been raised about what Rafael stands to gain from the Amprest transaction. Rafael is expected to remain Amprest's main customer even if Ondas ultimately takes control.

At the same time, Ondas is in talks with Rafael over the possible purchase of Controp, another subsidiary that develops electro-optical systems, including cameras for unmanned aerial vehicles. Unlike Amprest, Controp has been openly offered for sale. Last summer, U.S.-based AeroVironment was reported to be interested in acquiring a 50% stake in Controp at a valuation of at least \$600 million to \$700 million.

Ondas declined to comment. The Defense Ministry said defense exports are rising but stressed there would be no compromise on security needs. Rafael said any sale of holdings in defense companies is subject to strict regulation and approval by the Defense Ministry and the Government Companies Authority, adding that it has always operated under those rules and will continue to do so.

<https://www.ynetnews.com/business/article/h1kwg9b11g>

## 'Are you Zionists?' British Jewish family seeks relocation due to rising antisemitism - report

*A Jewish family in Bristol says growing antisemitism since October 7, including school incidents and public hostility, has pushed them to seek a new, more neutral neighborhood.*

By **JAMES GENN** JANUARY 20, 2026 18:08 Updated: JANUARY 20, 2026 19:21



*Protestors block the road with a lock on as activists from Palestine Action protest at the HQ of Elbit, an Israeli owned company that makes drones for use by the Israeli military and other foreign powers on May 15, 2022 in Bristol, England; illustrative.(photo credit: Guy Smallman/Getty Images)*

**A Jewish family in a supposedly progressive neighborhood of Bristol, England, is seeking to relocate to a new area after facing rising antisemitism, especially since Hamas's October 7 massacre and the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas War, British outlet The Sunday Times reported last week.**

**A family in their neighborhood found out that they were Jewish and asked, "Well, you're not Zionists, are you?"**

**The family stated that it has seen a gradual increase of "a permissive culture of antisemitism" since the massacre began, with the final straw coming when a local school canceled a visit by a Jewish MP, with the school's head of diversity being revealed by The Times to be a supporter of the October 7 massacre.**

**The school's diversity head, Saima Akhtar, said that Hamas terrorists were "heroes fighting for justice," and told people to ignore "media attempts to paint Israel as a victim" as early as October 8, 2023, The Times reported.**

This development led the family to worry about their child attending this school, and to search for a home in a more "neutral neighborhood."

*Five of the Elbit Bristol 7 stand outside the crown court behind a banner saying Elbit is Guilty (LtoR) Archie Sadler, Eliza Sarson-Dumont, Stavit Sinai, Finton Owens and Ronnie Barkan during their trial on January 18, 2024 in Bristol, United Kingdom; illustrative. (credit: Martin Pope/Getty Images)*

The family's father, who works for a local charity, told the outlet that he saw parents wearing keffiyehs at local playgrounds and school gates, and that his family was forced to confront the Israel-Hamas War during their daily walk to school, including "bloody hand prints" and "declaring a genocide in Gaza."

"The small Jewish community is being ostracised in an organized way," he said, comparing the treatment of the city's Jews to how black and Asian minority groups were treated in the past. "It is being done by [those on] the Left and 'polite society' isn't doing enough," he said.

His child had "already experienced hassle from another pupil over Gaza" at their elementary school, leaving them in tears, he was cited as saying.

It was "perfectly normal" for people to talk about their racial heritage and which protests they had participated in, he commented.

#### **UK Jewish family says they were 'tested' to see if they were Zionists**

"People are regularly testing you. There are very few spaces where you are not getting it in your face with the Gaza conflict. We are not Israelis, but it's pumped into our lives like it's happening" close by, he said.

"We believe in a two-state solution, but the only way you can navigate this neighborhood is to say you believe in the destruction of Israel. People lose their minds if they suspect you have any sympathy for Israel's right to exist," he added.

A local union secretary for the aforementioned school stated she was proud of forcing the school to cancel the MP's visit, and noted that they also successfully pressured to remove a speaker employed by Check Point Software Technologies, an Israeli-owned security company, from a July conference. "We are not here to play," she wrote on social media.

Bristol is also the city where Elbit Systems' UK subsidiary is based, and has seen recurring vandalism by pro-Palestinian protesters, including Palestine Action. <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-883955>

## **Global Holocaust survivor population drops to about 196,000 worldwide, half in Israel, data shows**

*New data shows the global number of Holocaust survivors has fallen to about 196,000, with nearly half living in Israel and most having survived as children. By JAMES GENN JANUARY 20, 2026 21:10*

*Hanoch Shahar, 90-year-old Holocaust survivor presents items from the Holocaust in the northern Israeli city of Safed, April 23, 2025; illustrative. (photo credit: David Cohen/Flash90)*

**Approximately 196,000 Holocaust survivors are alive globally, with half of those living in Israel, data from the New York-based Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany showed on Tuesday.**

**This is a decrease from the conference's January 2025 data, which estimated that approximately 220,000 survivors were alive at the time.**

**The conference broke down where the remaining survivors are believed to be living.**

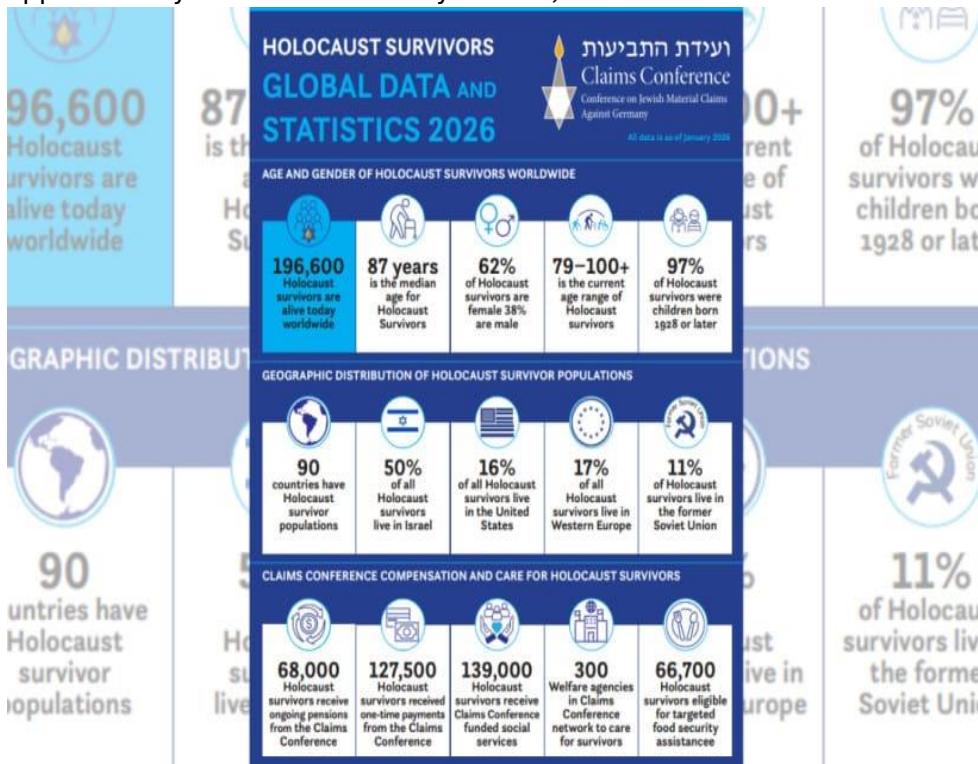
**Approximately half (97,600) are living in Israel, 16% (31,000) are in the US, 9% (17,300) are in France, 7% (14,300) are in Russia, 5% (10,700) are in Germany. Other survivors are in countries including Ukraine, Canada, Hungary, Australia, and Belarus, all of which have over 1,000 survivors.**

**Almost all remaining Holocaust survivors were children at the time**



Nearly all of the remaining survivors, at 97%, are classified as "[child survivors](#)," and were born in 1928 and afterwards, the conference noted.

The median age of remaining survivors is 87 years old, just over 1% are over 100 years old, and approximately 30% are at least 90 years old, the data showed.



*Data from Conference on Jewish Material*

*Claims Against Germany on remaining Holocaust survivors, January 2026. (credit: Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany)*

A majority, 62%, are female, compared with male survivors, who only make up 38%.

The conference was established in 1951 following negotiations among 23 national and international Jewish organizations and the then-West German chancellor, Konrad Adenauer's government.

<https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/article-883969>

## European Parliament debates listing IRGC as terror org., motion critics place Israel in spotlight

*Opening the discussions, European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas complained that Iran's internet blackout was an attempt by the regime to conceal "the scale of oppression."*

By DANIELLE GREYMAN-KENNARD JANUARY 20, 2026 20:07 Updated: JANUARY 20, 2026 21:57



*Members of special IRGC forces attend a rally marking the annual Quds Day, or Jerusalem Day, on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan in Tehran, Iran April 29, 2022.(photo credit: MAJID ASGARPOUR/WANA (WEST ASIA NEWS AGENCY) VIA REUTERS)*

European officials **discussed on Tuesday the possibility of listing the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), along with its subsidiary forces, the Quds Force and the Basij force, as terrorist organizations in response to the Islamic regime's brutal treatment of Iranian protesters.**

**Opening the discussions, European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas complained that Iran's internet blackout was an attempt by the regime to conceal "the scale of oppression, the human rights abuses, and repression."**

**Kallas claimed that the killing and suppression of protests were just "the latest examples of deterioration" in the Islamic regime's conduct, pointing to Tehran's illicit nuclear activities, arbitrary**

**detention of EU citizens, hybrid attacks on EU soil, support for Russia in its invasion of Ukraine, and backing of terrorist groups in the Middle East.**

**She announced that export restrictions would also seek to disrupt Tehran's missile and drone production, stressing that such actions would limit the material support Iran could provide to Russia.**

In recent weeks, the regime has acknowledged the [deaths of at least 3,000 Iranians](#) but has denied being responsible for the deaths. Thousands have been detained, and human rights experts have warned that the regime has committed a number of grave violations, including firing into crowds attempting to demonstrate.



*Members of the Iranian police attend a pro-government rally in Tehran, Iran, January 12, 2026. (credit: STRINGER/WANA (WEST ASIA NEWS AGENCY) VIA REUTERS  
ATTENTION EDITORS)*

Countering Iran's claim that the protests were the result of foreign interference, many of the politicians asserted that the demonstrators represented the will of the people, noting that similar allegations were used to suppress the 2022 Women, Life, Freedom protests. Defending the need for EU involvement, MEPs supporting the proposed motion pointed to Iran's destabilizing role in Europe, the Middle East, and Yemen, emphasizing that the consequences of the Islamic regime's actions extend beyond the Iranian civilians it abuses.

MEP Nicola Procaccini in particular condemned the lack of demonstrations in the West, highlighting the significant disparity between public responses to the war in Gaza and to events in Iran.

MEP Bart Groothuis and French MEP François-Xavier Bellamy shamed France, [Spain](#), and Italy for claiming there are "legal obstacles" preventing the IRGC from being listed as a terrorist organization.

Groothuis asked the high representative to confirm that it is those three nations enabling the families of regime officials to enjoy the freedoms of Europe while "their relatives are pouring chemical weapons over the heads of innocent, law-abiding Persians."

Opponents of the proposed measures repeatedly diverted the parliament's attention to Israel, alleging that the discussions surrounding a response to Iran reflected double standards.

Opposing the suggested actions, Belgian MEP Marc Botenga argued that academic literature showed Western sanctions crushing the middle class and forcing millions into poverty, ultimately benefiting the IRGC.

"Sanctions weaken the forces of social change inside Iran, fostering inequality, corruption, and the militarization of the Iranian economy," he claimed, adding that sanctions "breed chaos."

Botenga further claimed that EU sanctions had been used to illustrate double standards in the parliament's response to global affairs, citing civilians killed in Israeli-US strikes on Iran and Jerusalem's claims of covert operations in Iran. He urged parliamentary members to cancel sanctions affecting civilians and continue cultural exchange programs.

Famously pro-Russia Slovak MEP L'uboš Blaha condemned the parliament for speaking out against human rights violations in Iran while failing to condemn the "genocide" Israel committed in Gaza or the United States' actions in Venezuela.

Accusing parliamentarians of being "hypocritical," Blaha said that Iran was a sovereign country and that it was not necessary to agree with the actions of the state, but wrong to involve themselves.

Other MEPs opposed to sanctions similarly argued that change in Iran must come from within and that it was not Europe's role to violate Iranian sovereignty.

Portuguese MEP João Oliveira questioned European Conservatives and Reformists Group Vice-Chair Charlie Weimers on whether he supported attacks on Iran by Israel and the US, asserting that democracy in Iran could not be built by bombing the country.

In response, Weimers said he supported "targeted attacks against the [IRGC](#) leadership" because they would remove the "murderers" responsible for the deaths of thousands of Iranians. Weimers then returned the question, asking why Oliveira failed to show the same solidarity with Iranians that he showed to Palestinians.

#### **Proposed motion in the European Parliament against Iran**

The motion, pursuant to Rule 136, called on EU member states to expel Iranian diplomats and prevent relatives of Iranian officials from receiving study or work visas, including the removal of those already present.

Demanding the immediate restoration of internet access in Iran, the motion condemned the regime's continued brutality against protesters and its use of the death penalty as a tool of repression. It also called on EU

member states to provide financial and technological support for censorship-circumvention tools and digital protection for Iran's civil society.

The motion supported strengthening independent UN fact-finding missions in Iran, ensuring they receive adequate funding to pursue justice against all regime officials responsible for human rights violations.

MEPs supporting the motion also called for Iranian opposition figures to visit parliament, including Crown Prince of Iran Reza Pahlavi. Some 35 MEPs earlier penned a letter to European Parliament President Roberta Metsola ahead of the session, backing Pahlavi's appearance and stressing that he is a unifying figure among the Iranian people.

The vote on the motion will take place on Thursday. <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/iran-news/article-883991> [Just how many people have to be killed for the EU people to understand what a terrorist is? Stupid is hardly the word for these folks. rdb

## OP ED

# The European Union's 'Woke Stasi Commissars': Europeans Turned into 'Second Class' Citizens

by [Guy Millière](#)

January 20, 2026 at 5:00 am



**Every effort is being made by those in power within the ruling structures of the European Union to ensure that parties in favor of national sovereignty and opposed to uncontrolled immigration and the Islamization of Europe are kept out of power, despite the exploding support from voters.** *Pictured: The headquarters of the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium. (Photo by Emmanuel Dunand/AFP via Getty Images)*

**December 15. France. Two men, Jacques Baud and Xavier Moreau, who commented online about the war in Ukraine, discovered that they were among 12 people being sanctioned by the European Union for allegedly spreading propaganda for the Russian government. Some of the 12 people are propagandists, just not them. No evidence so far has proven that they had any ties with either the Russian government or Russian intelligence agencies.**

Baud, who lives in Belgium, is both a former colonel in the Swiss Army and a former member of the Swiss Strategic Intelligence Service. He has published several books on the war in Ukraine, and apparently uses various sources, most not Russian. He appears on radio in France, Belgium and Switzerland. Moreau, a former captain in the French Army, lives in Russia, where he created a consultancy business, [Sokol Holding](#), for several embassies, and [Stratpol](#), a website for geopolitical analysis. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, he has used many sources, some Russian, most not.

The EU sanctions have resulted in grotesque [consequences](#) for both men. Their bank accounts in the EU have been frozen. They cannot use their credit cards. They have no right to enter EU countries.

Baud is subsisting on the food stored in his house in Belgium. He has also been deprived of his right to speak on EU television or radio stations. According to one [report](#), "[h]is ability to travel inside the EU was revoked. He cannot even return to his own country." Lawyers are trying to help him obtain authorization to travel back to Switzerland.

Xavier Moreau, in Russia, also has an apartment in Paris. He [cannot even pay](#) his French property taxes. Lawyers are trying to help him find a way to pay what the French government claims he owes.

The [French government](#), which sanctioned both men while providing no proof of guilt or affording them due process, has asked that the sanctions be extended to all EU member countries. The French government and the EU did not even send them a letter to inform the two men of the sanctions against them, let alone give them an opportunity to [defend themselves](#) or prove their innocence in a court of law. The decisions against them appear arbitrary and authoritarian.

While one might disagree with what the two men said and wrote, freedom of speech is, or should be, one of the [fundamental principles](#) of a democratic society, which France and the EU purport to be. Political disagreements should not lead to [punishment](#).

It would be a mistake to think that the sanctions against these men are a mistake or just a simple and

regrettable slip-up. It is part of a trend.

The French government has increasingly been making overbearing decisions that infringe on freedom of speech. An official French institution, [Arcom](#), in charge of controlling what is said on French television and radio, has the power of life and death over them. In February 2025, Arcom decided to [close a French television channel](#), C8. Arcom claimed that C8 did not respect its "public service" obligations. C8's main talk show host, Cyril Hanouna, has often criticized French President Emmanuel Macron and has invited commentators who are never invited on other talk shows, such as [members of the "yellow vest revolt"](#) or [physicians](#) who disagreed with Macron's decisions during the Covid-19 crisis.

Macron reportedly asked members of the French government to [boycott](#) Hanouna; several accused him of belonging to the ["far right"](#). Arcom -- claiming that Hanouna spoke "[disrespectfully](#)" to both the socialist mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, and a [leftist member](#) of the national assembly, Louis Boyard -- imposed heavy fines on the channel: €300,000 (\$350,000) for Hidalgo and €3.5 million (\$4,000,000) for Boyard; then simply decided to close the channel. Four hundred people lost their jobs. Hanouna could, theoretically, create a new talk show on a different channel, but his [new employer](#) strongly "invited" him to adopt an "apolitical tone".

In June 2025, [TV Libertés](#), a small, private television station that includes commentators [who criticize](#) [Macron](#) and often disagree with French foreign policy, was confronted with the [closure of its bank accounts](#) -- forcing it to the brink of bankruptcy. The bank gave no explanation; it just said that the decision had been made "at a high level". TV Libertés could survive by opening a bank account at a different bank, but what just happened could easily happen again -- and the channel might not survive.

What happened to TV Libertés was also visited upon Marc Touati, a French economist who produces a successful weekly [podcast](#). Not only was his [bank account closed](#), but also the accounts of his wife and children. Again, the bank gave no explanation other than, again, that the decision had been made "at a high level".

Macron, responding to a journalist who asked him if he wanted to control information in France, [said](#):

"I think it would be important to have labels given by professionals who can say 'This complies with ethical standards,' or 'This comes from people who manipulate information'; it's a dangerous matter, information."

Philippe de Villiers, a businessman, former Member of the National Assembly and former Secretary of State for Culture, [replied](#):

"A Ministry of Truth is what Macron dreams of, but he doesn't know that it has already been imagined, in a book by Orwell."

France's request that the EU sanction "propagandists," and the EU's decision to take arbitrary measures without even asking France for any proof of wrongdoing or offering any kind of due process, signals that what is happening in France could easily spread to the rest of Europe. The EU already [has in place](#) crippling [censorship measures](#) for online media and social networks.

The European Commission (the executive arm of the EU that writes European laws and directives and then enforces them) in 2023 created the [Digital Services Act](#) (DSA). It aims to control the content of social media and websites (every newspaper, magazine, TV, or radio station has a website) and to forbid content defined as "illegal" or "harmful". The DSA decrees that social media and websites must "[police what they publish](#)" or risk high fines. It is, of course, the European Commission itself that decides what is "illegal" or "harmful", so it can issue whatever judgments it wants.

During the 2024 US election campaign, when Elon Musk said he would conduct an interview with then-candidate Donald Trump on X, the social media Musk owns, Thierry Breton, then European Commissioner for Internal Market and Services and the ["mastermind"](#) behind the DSA, sent Musk a letter saying that the EU could levy fines against X if the interview contained "illegal content."

Musk, replying that he did not accept threats, went ahead with the interview. The EU promptly [fined](#) X €120 million (about \$140 million) in December 2025 for breaching the DSA. Musk described the EU officials as "[Woke Stasi commissars](#)" and [added](#), "The EU should be abolished".

The DSA was written by unelected, unaccountable, untransparent and irremovable [senior EU officials](#), then voted in by the European Parliament, which has no real power and is just an approval body for what the European Commission decides. The DSA was *not* voted on by the national parliaments of EU member states. All citizens of EU member countries are now faced with a mandated requirement to which they never agreed.

The European Commission, apparently not content with that, is reportedly planning to go further. It is preparing a new law, "[Chat Control](#)", which would allow the "automatic scan[ning]" of private content (texts, images, videos) sent through messaging platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram, or prompts sent to AI platforms (e.g.

ChatGPT) [that] would take place 'client-side,' before its encryption, meaning directly on your phone, tablet or computer."

The "Chat Control" software would [then](#) "forward any material flagged as prohibited to law enforcement agencies." This would herald [potential total control](#) of every online conversation and the impossibility of speaking freely without being monitored.

Freedom of speech -- one of the main components of democracy, which goes hand-in-hand with [political freedom](#) -- is under [severe threat](#) in the EU. One [report](#) characterized the EU's attitude toward citizens' online participation as "Europe's tech law has turned Europeans into second-class digital citizens."

In Romania's 2024 presidential election, polls showed that Calin Georgescu, the leading candidate in the first round, would win. Georgescu, highly critical of the EU, was advocating for his country to regain more sovereignty. Pressure from the EU, amid [unproven rumors](#) that he benefitted from "Russian interference," led to the [cancellation](#) of the second round of the election. When the presidential election was held again in 2025, Georgescu was [banned from running](#).

In Germany, the AfD (Alternative for Germany) is now the country's [strongest political party](#). Its [program](#) is nationalist and conservative. The AfD supports free market economics and backing the only democracy in the Middle East, Israel. Germany's domestic intelligence agency, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, classified the AfD as a "[right-wing extremist](#)" group. Understandably, its rivals, other German political parties, would evidently be happy to see it [banned and permanently excluded](#) from German political life.

In France, on May 31, 2025, a court -- on the pretext of misappropriation of EU funds -- [handed down](#) a four-year prison sentence to National Rally Party leader Marine Le Pen, and banned her from holding public office for five years. Le Pen, who had been favored to win the 2027 presidential election, has appealed, but it is unlikely that a court will overturn the sentence. Her party's next-in-line, Jordan Bardella, could also reportedly [win](#) the presidential election, but in the summer of 2025 police, acting on the orders of the National Financial Prosecutor, [seized](#) documents concerning him from the party headquarters, and he is expected to be prosecuted and convicted on some pretext, as well.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán refuses to allow mass immigration into his country -- which was already occupied by the Islamic Ottoman Empire for nearly 160 years ([1541-1699](#)). He does not appear eager for a return to that and is determined to [defend Hungary's sovereignty](#). As a result, he faces significant EU pressure, which includes [heavy fines](#) imposed on Hungary.

The political positions of Slovakian Prime Minister [Robert Fico](#) and Czech Prime Minister [Andrej Babiš](#) are similar to Hungary's; they too could soon face the same EU punishments as Orbán.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who [shares](#) many of Orbán's positions, is currently an exception -- she has no problem with the EU. Italy, however, already has admitted vast numbers of migrants. They now number [roughly 9%](#) of the population -- but reportedly commit [30% of the crimes](#), often against other migrants. Last October, Human Rights Watch [urged](#) "Italy to end its migration cooperation agreement with Libya, saying the arrangement 'has proven to be a framework for violence and suffering, and should be revoked, not renewed.'"

Every effort is being made by those in power within the ruling structures of the EU to ensure that parties in favor of national sovereignty and opposed to uncontrolled immigration and the Islamization of Europe are [kept out of power](#), despite the exploding support from voters.

Historian Daniel Pipes calls these parties "[civilizationist](#)": their main aim is to save European civilization, whereas those in power within the ruling structures of the EU seem ready to let European civilization fade away.

US Vice President J.D. Vance, in [saying](#) that Europe is eroding free speech and core democratic values, [shocked](#) most European leaders, yet every day shows how [right](#), if not inordinately diplomatic, he was.

Europe, according to the Trump administration's 2025 [National Security Strategy](#), is not just in decline, but risks "civilizational erasure." Most European leaders again appeared ruffled, offended and shocked, but the words, sadly, [appear true](#).

The fatal vulnerability of all democracies is that politicians are usually more concerned with seeking votes and keeping their jobs than about where their countries are going.

Undermining [freedom of speech](#), freedom of the media, and [freedom of political choice](#) -- as well as treating disagreements on important issues such as foreign policy, immigration, Islamization and national sovereignty as punishable crimes -- has become an integral part of the [erosion of European civilization](#). The idea of democracy was born in Europe, but European countries and the EU are painstakingly [throwing it away](#). It would be most unfortunate if old authoritarian temptations from a hundred years ago were to resurface in Europe just when

they finally seemed to have been eradicated.

Those in power in France and within the ruling structures of the EU have been increasingly violating the [fundamental principles](#) upon which the "European project" was founded. These rulers seem indifferent to the possibility that they are leading Europe to its irrevocable doom.

*Dr. Guy Millière, a professor at the University of Paris, is the author of 27 books on France and Europe.*

<https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/22208/european-union-woke-stasi>



#### STEP BY STEP

STEP BY STEP: Good news is that many friends and supporters of Lev U'Neshama (Heart and Soul) donated towards the Education Fund project to provide basic school supplies for actually 350 children within our Lev U'Neshama families.

We are grateful that the school supply part of our effort has been successful.

According to the Israel Population and Statistics office, Tzfat's population is about 40,000, and one third live at the poverty level. We do what we can so at least the children within our struggling LUN families can get the things they need.

Every week we are providing new sport shoes and eye exams/eyeglasses to the children on our request list. However, previous donations are rapidly dwindling. I am reaching out now before the fund has been emptied and we will have to say "no" to additional requests.

We work with two local shoe merchants who give Lev U'Neshama a discount but they advised us the cost of the shoes has increased. Also, we work with an accredited optician in town who also gives us a discount but his cost is stable.

Lev U'Neshama is an Israeli registered non-profit charity organization, volunteer run, no business expenses whatsoever and every \$ goes into our programs.

Shoes: \$45 per pair regular and \$60 for First Steps, baby shoes.

Eye Exam/Eyeglasses: \$60 per child.

Your support is urgently requested.

Or use the Zelle US to US bank transfer system (contact me at [mortsмо@aol.com](mailto:mortsмо@aol.com) for bank information. US Donors may also send checks made payable to

Simcha Smolensky, my son, who is also a volunteer. Send to:

Rabbi Simcha Smolensky, 6739 N Mozart St Chicago IL 60645

**Your support will be appreciated.**

Yaffa Smolensky