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F-22 jets deploy at Israeli Air Force base as US builds up forces for Iran strike

Israeli officials reportedly believe US attack is 'unavoidable'; Iran said to okay counterproposal for next round of nuclear talks on Thursday as IRGC holds drills on Iran's coast

By [Emanuel Fabian](#), [Lazar Berman](#), [Nava Freiberg](#)
and [Tol Staff](#) 24 February 2026, 11:28 pm



US F-22 stealth fighter jets are seen before taking off from Royal Air Force Lakenheath in England, en route to Israel, February 24, 2026.

(@TallGlenn85 on X)

American F-22 stealth fighter jets were deployed at an Israeli Air Force base in southern Israel on Tuesday, as part of the United States's massive buildup of military forces in the Middle East, The Times of Israel has learned.

The jets were stationed at an airbase in the United Kingdom in recent days, according to open-source flight tracking data and aircraft spotters, and were seen taking off earlier on Tuesday.

Their arrival in Israel is another step in the amassing of American aircraft in the region as tensions between Iran and the US threaten to erupt into war.

Negotiations between the two countries over the Iranian nuclear program are ongoing, and the sides are due to meet on Thursday in Geneva. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has reportedly gotten the green light for a counterproposal to submit to the American negotiating team.

But US President Donald Trump has repeatedly threatened that he will attack Iran if those talks fail. Iran has vowed to strike Israel and US targets in the region in response.

Israeli officials are said to believe that a US strike is inevitable, and top military brass from the two countries have reportedly been in contact. One official quoted by Channel 12 news on Tuesday said that a diplomatic resolution to the conflict would be the "surprise of the year."



A US F-22 stealth fighter seen taking off from Royal Air Force Lakenheath in England, en route to Israel, February 24, 2026. (@TallGlenn85 on X)

Aircraft gather in Israel; White House threatens 'lethal force'

Against that backdrop, a total of 12 F-22s were seen taking off from Royal Air Force Lakenheath in England, although one reportedly returned to the airbase due to a technical issue.

The stealth fighters had arrived at Lakenheath last week and remained there for several days, reportedly due to issues with their accompanying refuelers.

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The F-22, operated exclusively by the US Air Force, is the world's most advanced air-superiority fighter, built for unmatched speed, maneuverability, and stealth in air-to-air combat.

The deployment of US fighter jets at Israeli airbases for operational activities — rather than for joint training with the IAF — is extremely rare.

In total, dozens of fighter jets — including F-35s, F-22s, F-15s, and F-16s — have been spotted heading to the Middle East in recent days by the Military Air Tracking Alliance, a team of about 30 open-source analysts that routinely analyzes military and government flight activity.

The team says it's also tracked dozens of accompanying fuel tankers, as well as hundreds of cargo flights,

heading into the region since mid-February. On Monday, American refueler and cargo planes were spotted at Ben Gurion Airport.

The jets are part of a historic gathering of US forces reported to be the largest in the region since the US invaded Iraq in 2003. On Monday, Trump denied that his top general, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Dan Caine, had expressed reservations about a strike.

“General Caine, like all of us, would like not to see War but, if a decision is made on going against Iran at a Military level, it is his opinion that it will be something easily won,” Trump wrote.



US President Donald Trump arrives in the East Room of the White House, Feb. 23, 2026, in Washington. (AP Photo/Alex Brandon)

On Tuesday, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters that Trump’s “first option is always diplomacy,” but added: “As he has shown, he is willing to use the lethal force of the United States military if necessary.”

She stressed that Trump will be the one who decides what course of action to take against Iran. Recent reports have suggested that Trump is considering an initial limited strike on Iran, though he is also said to be frustrated by the assessments of what a US strike could achieve.

“I’ve seen a lot of sensationalist reporting over the past day that is just completely untrue,” Leavitt said. “And anyone speculating to the media, hiding behind an anonymous source, pretending to know what President Trump is thinking or a decision he will make with respect to action against Iran, has no idea what they’re talking about.”

Meanwhile, as protests have sprung up again in Iran, the CIA published a [video in Persian](#) explaining how Iranian dissidents can securely contact the US intelligence agency.

The video walks viewers through several steps that should be taken to ensure that any contact with the CIA from within Iran will be kept private and to ensure that the identity of the dissident cannot be found out.

It suggests that anyone wishing to contact the CIA should do so from a burner device and using the most up-to-date version of their internet browser of choice. **Iran holds drill as its officials stress commitment to talks**

One of the main impasses in the talks concerns Iran’s nuclear enrichment. Trump is demanding that Iran cease all enrichment, while the Iranians are insisting on their right to continue.



Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi speaks during a second round of US-Iranian talks, with Washington pushing Tehran to make a deal to limit its nuclear program, in Geneva on February 17, 2026. (CYRIL ZINGARO / POOL / AFP)

On Tuesday, Iranian officials stressed their commitment to diplomacy. In a series of social media posts, Foreign Minister Araghchi said that “a deal is within reach, but only if diplomacy is given a priority.”

“Pillared on the understandings forged in the previous round, Iran will resume talks with the US in Geneva with a determination to achieve a fair and equitable deal—in the shortest possible time,”

Araghchi wrote, reiterating that while Iran “will under no circumstances ever develop a nuclear weapon,” it refuses to give up its rights to “peaceful nuclear technology.”

Channel 12 reported that Araghchi has received approval from Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on a draft counterproposal ahead of Thursday’s talks. The US reportedly views those talks as a final chance at harnessing diplomatic momentum instead of choosing to confront Iran militarily. The draft has reportedly not been seen yet by the US team.

Iran, which openly seeks Israel’s destruction, has consistently denied seeking nuclear weapons but enriched uranium to levels that have no peaceful application, obstructed international inspectors from checking its nuclear facilities, and expanded its ballistic missile capabilities. The US struck Iran’s nuclear facilities in June, at the end of the 12-day Israel-Iran war.

Alongside the pledges to continue diplomacy, the ground forces of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps held military drills on the country’s southern coast, state TV reported. Iran has stepped up its military drills in the area in recent days, and footage broadcast by the Fars outlet showed troops using drones, mortars and missiles to attack ships off the coast and targets on the shore, while amphibious vehicles carried out drills in the

surf.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi told state media on Tuesday that the Islamic Republic “will do whatever it takes” for talks to succeed. But he added: “If there is an attack or aggression against Iran, we will respond according to our defense plans... A US attack on Iran is a real gamble.”

Israeli officials say US strike ‘unavoidable’ — report

Israeli political and military officials do not appear to be putting much stock in the talks, and believe a US strike on Iran is “unavoidable,” according to Channel 12. The report said they are warning American counterparts against allowing the talks with Iran to drag on or result in a poor deal.

“It will be the surprise of the year if Iran agrees to a real diplomatic solution,” one senior Israeli official was quoted by the Hebrew network as saying, adding that “if [Iran] will submit to US demands [in the nuclear talks] it will go against the entire spirit of this regime. But it will be no less surprising if the Americans agree to a stalling and deceptive deal.”



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks at a leadership conference of the Shin Bet domestic intelligence agency, on February 24, 2026. (Screenshot/GPO)

In conversations over recent days between IDF Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir and US Joint Chiefs of Staff head Caine, Zamir presented a range of military options from Israel’s perspective, warning that “any agreement [with Iran] will be an insurance policy for the Iranian regime.”

Senior Israeli officials are pushing to carry out a forceful attack that will make Iran cautious or incapable of retaliating harshly against the US or Israel, Channel 12 reported.

In a potential sign of preparations for such a strike, Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Shin Bet intelligence agency leadership that Israel is working to create its own regional alliance to oppose axes led by Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The emerging alliance “includes many countries,” Netanyahu told a conference of the intelligence agency’s leadership. “Some visit us, even these days. Some — we visit them. I am talking about an entire circle that encompasses the Middle East.” <https://www.timesofisrael.com/f-22-jets-deploy-at-israeli-air-force-base-as-us-builds-up-forces-for-iran-strike/>

Trump said frustrated with limits of military leverage against Iran

US president reportedly to base strike decision on Witkoff, Kushner’s assessments of Tehran’s intentions after Thursday talks; Iran says protesting students must respect ‘red lines’

By [Tol Staff](#) and [Agencies](#) 24 February 2026, 12:49 pm

US President Donald Trump is becoming frustrated with “the limits of military leverage” against Iran, CBS News reported Tuesday, citing multiple sources familiar with the matter.

According to the report, advisers have told the US president that it was unlikely that limited strikes on Iran would be decisive, and that there was a risk of escalation into a wider conflict. Trump is considering launching a limited strike on Iran in the immediate future to pressure Tehran to agree to his nuclear demands, multiple reports have said in recent days.

If the Islamic Republic continued to hold out, that strike could be followed by a far larger campaign potentially targeting regime change, the reports said.

But US options may be limited. An Israeli intelligence official told the UK’s Financial Times in an article published on Tuesday that Israel believes that — despite the US assembling a massive military force in the region, including two aircraft carriers — it only has the capacity to sustain four or five days of intense aerial assault on Iran.

The official said the force could maintain a week of lower-intensity strikes.

Israel is said to be fearful that limited US strikes on Iran could only embolden the regime. Iran has warned that even a limited US strike would draw a strong military response.

Trump will base his decision on whether to strike Iran based on the assessments of his two chief negotiators, Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, of Tehran’s intentions, The Guardian [reported](#) Tuesday.



In this handout photo released by the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs on February 6, 2026, US special envoy Steve Witkoff (C), Jared Kushner (L) and Oman's Foreign Minister Badr bin Hamad al-Busaidi pose for a photo during a meeting in Muscat. (Handout/Omani Foreign Ministry/AFP)

The report, which cited people familiar with the matter, said that Witkoff and Kushner will brief the US leader on their impressions regarding whether Iran is serious about reaching a nuclear deal or just stalling for time.

The two have reportedly been pressing the US president to give negotiations more time and are set to meet Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in Geneva

on Thursday.

Iran has consistently denied seeking to acquire nuclear weapons. However, it enriched uranium to levels that have no peaceful application, obstructed international inspectors from checking its nuclear facilities, and expanded its ballistic missile capabilities.

Iran: Students must respect 'red lines'

Meanwhile, the Iranian government's spokeswoman said Tuesday that university students have the right to protest but everyone must "understand the red lines," in the first official reaction to renewed rallies on campuses since the weekend.

At least eight new anti-regime protests erupted at Iranian universities in recent days, some of which have seen clashes with the Basij militia or students aligned with it. They were the first large-scale demonstrations since the mass killings last month.



Students seen holding up the banned flag of the shah of Iran at protests on campuses against the regime on February 22, 2026. (Screen capture/X)

"Sacred things and the flag are two examples of these red lines that we must protect and not cross or deviate from, even at the height of anger," Fatemeh Mohajerani said.

She said Iran's students "have wounds in their hearts and have seen scenes that may upset and anger them; this anger is understandable."

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Protests began in December, sparked by economic woes in the sanctions-hit country, but grew into nationwide

demonstrations against the regime.

The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) has recorded more than 7,000 deaths, while warning the full toll is likely far higher.

Trump repeatedly [vowed](https://www.timesofisrael.com/trump-said-frustrated-with-limits-of-military-leverage-against-iran/) to aid anti-government protesters in Iran, telling them to keep demonstrating because "help is on the way," as the regime killed them en masse. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/trump-said-frustrated-with-limits-of-military-leverage-against-iran/>

US military chief Dan Caine remains Trump's top policy advisor on Iran since June war - exclusive



CENTCOM Chief Admiral Brad Cooper, who replaced Kurilla in August 2025, is as influential as ever, in particular as the top commander who has planned the current potential operations against Iran. By [YONAH JEREMY BOB](#) FEBRUARY 24, 2026 20:05 Updated: FEBRUARY 24, 2026 22:05

US President Donald Trump, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth and General Dan Caine, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. (photo credit: REUTERS/JONATHAN ERNST)

US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Dan Caine is President Donald Trump's dominant adviser on Iran, and this dates back to June 2025, The Jerusalem Post has learned.

Many other top officials, including Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and special envoys Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff, too, have been heavily involved in advising the president in this matter.

Yet now that much of the talk revolves around potential military scenarios – in terms of America's offensive capacity and limits, as well as the military costs of an Iranian counterattack – Caine's concerns appear to be getting the most attention.

While *Axios* and *The Wall Street Journal* [both reported on Tuesday](#) on Caine's role in the current Iran situation, the *Post* can confirm that the US Joint Chiefs chairman assumed this central role on Iran as early as the 12 Day War in June 2025.

According to sources, when key officials wanted to influence Trump and the direction of that war, they made special efforts to approach Caine over other officials.

Some officials experienced this as a shift, given that during the Biden administration, the impression was that more could sometimes be achieved by communicating with then-CENTCOM chief Gen. Erik Kurilla rather than his superior, then-Joint Chiefs chairman Gen. C.Q. Brown. Kurilla and Brown's relative influences were often covered in the media at that time.



Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dan Caine arrives to brief senators on the situation in Venezuela, on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, US, January 7, 2026. (credit: REUTERS/EVELYN HOCKSTEIN)

However, the *Post* understands that, while some viewed Brown as heavily influential, he was an unusually modest chairman who did little to cultivate his image with the media.

In any event, sources indicated to the *Post* that efforts to influence Trump and the direction of the current situation have focused heavily on Caine.

When IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Eyal Zamir, Mossad Director David Barnea, and IDF Intelligence Chief Maj.-Gen. Shlomi Binder visited Washington recently to make their case directly to a variety of officials, they chose to do so collectively to Caine in particular.

On Tuesday, when Trump posted about Caine on Truth Social, he did not deny the US military chief's influence; he rejected characterizations of Caine's views on a potential war with Iran.

With all of that said, [CENTCOM Chief Adm. Brad Cooper](#), who replaced Kurilla in August, is as influential as ever as the top commander who has planned the current potential massive American military operation against Iran, and he will lead it if it comes to pass, the *Post* understands.

Recent implied criticism of Cooper by *Axios* for being less influential than Kurilla in his time, due to Caine being Trump's primary briefer – whereas Kurilla only sometimes directly briefed Biden – can also be viewed as a low-grade issue combined with much larger quirks regarding the hows of both Biden's and Trump's national security decision-making processes.

For example, president Joe Biden had a large, powerful, and influential National Security Council run by Jake Sullivan.

In contrast, Trump fired his first national security advisor, Mike Waltz, in May, and proceeded to take apart much of his own NSC, directing Rubio to assume the position of national security advisor as somewhat of an afterthought, in addition to his position as secretary of state.

Cooper might be 'key operational mastermind' in event of war

Next, the *Post* has learned that as influential as Kurilla was, his direct briefing function was limited.

Some might even consider Cooper to have been the key operational mastermind and point out that if and when there is a war, the world would “see” Cooper's influence play out on the international stage, without him having to talk it up, even if – as a commander of a foreign theater – he is not formally a policy advisor.

In addition, Cooper was sent by the White House to inject fear into the Iranians when he joined Kushner and Witkoff in the first negotiations meeting with Iran earlier in February.

As deputy CENTCOM chief, Cooper also ran significant aspects of US operations in June.

All of that is only in the Iranian arena.

Regarding Gaza, Cooper has been more obviously a critical point man. He was in Cairo with Kushner and Witkoff to help seal the Israel-Hamas War ceasefire.

In Syria, when tensions started to unravel the situation between Syrian ruler Ahmad al-Sharaa and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, Cooper was sent again by the White House to Syria and Iraq to ensure that the SDF could withdraw safely.

He arrived in a helicopter at the front lines to ensure that the most dangerous Iraqi detainees in Syria remained in custody during their transfer.

Some might say that it is not fair to compare the influence of Caine under Trump – a different president – to Brown’s influence under Biden, with the more relevant comparison being to former Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Mark Milley under Biden.

Different presidents rely on differing advisers as they weigh distinct elements of complex issues, such that two separate presidents’ ways of employing their advisers and commanders are not comparable.

After all the debates about how much influence one or another adviser may have, all sources point to the bottom line that Trump himself will have the final word. <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-887820>

State of the Union could be Trump’s best chance to sell voters on Iran plans

Annual address before Congress late Tuesday comes as US president has amassed forces in the Mideast and threatened strikes, but has yet to publicly make detailed case for an attack

By [Patricia Zengerle](#) 24 February 2026, 7:24 pm

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US President Donald Trump delivers his State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress in the House Chamber on Capitol Hill in Washington, February 4, 2020. (Leah Millis/Pool via AP)

Reuters — US President Donald Trump’s State of the Union address on Tuesday provides him with a nationally televised opportunity to persuade skeptical American voters to rally behind his threatened strikes against Iran over its nuclear program and its deadly crackdown on anti-regime protesters.

Advisers have urged Trump to focus on the economy, immigration and other domestic policy issues when he

takes the US House of Representatives podium for the speech at 9 p.m. Eastern Time (4 a.m. Israel time on Wednesday).

Even with midterm elections approaching in the US, that has not been his focus to date.

Instead, the run-up to the event has been overshadowed by a huge buildup of US military forces in the Middle East and preparations for a potential conflict with Iran that could last for weeks if Tehran does not reach a deal to solve a longstanding dispute over its nuclear program.

Trump has not laid out in detail to the American public why he might be leading the US into its most



aggressive action against the Islamic Republic since its 1979 Islamic Revolution. Trump previously ordered strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities at the end of the 12-day Israel-Iran war in June 2025.

On Monday, he [dismissed talk](#) that some members of his administration, including the chief of the US military, have doubts about going to war with Iran.

“I am the one that makes the decision, I would rather have a Deal than not but, if we don’t make a Deal, it will be a very bad day for that Country and, very sadly, its people,” Trump wrote in a social media post.

Trump rose to the top of US politics with the passionate support of a political base that embraces his “America First” policies and his vow to end an era of “forever wars” like the long conflicts in past decades in Iraq and Afghanistan.

He has also portrayed himself as the “peace president,” pointing to his efforts to obtain ceasefires, including the truce that began in October in Gaza. He has repeatedly suggested that he deserved the Nobel Peace Prize.

And Trump’s fellow Republicans took control of both the US House of Representatives and the Senate in the 2024 presidential elections, as his “Make America Great Again” message resonated with many Americans, but opinion polls show the party will struggle to keep control of Congress in the November midterms.

Polls also show that Americans are wary of foreign conflicts. A Reuters/Ipsos poll from January showed 69 percent of Americans agreed with the statement that the US should only use its military when facing a direct and imminent threat, while 18% disagreed and the rest weren’t sure or didn’t answer the question.

US aircraft carrier USS Gerald Ford is pictured docked at Souda Bay in the Greek Mediterranean island of Crete, on February 24, 2026. (Photo by Costas METAXAKIS / AFP)

The risks from an Iran conflict are not merely political.

Trump and his aides have touted his successful capture last month of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, whom the US accuses of narco-terrorism.



But Iran, a nation of 93 million people with a large supply of missiles that it has fired repeatedly at Israel and a US military base in Qatar, is a more formidable foe. Its leaders have threatened to attack Israel and US targets in the region in the event of an American strike.

Trump asserted in July that the US strikes on Iran the previous month had been so successful that they “obliterated” the country’s nuclear facilities, saying: “It would take years to bring them back into service.”

US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff speaks during a meeting of the

Cabinet in the Cabinet Room of the White House on January 29, 2026, in Washington, DC. (WIN MCNAMEE / GETTY IMAGES NORTH AMERICA / Getty Images via AFP)

However, as US ships and other military equipment amassed near Iran, Trump’s special envoy Steve Witkoff, who leads nuclear negotiations on the US side, said on Sunday on Fox News that Iran was “probably a week away from having industrial-grade bomb-making material.”

Trump’s audience on Tuesday includes Democrats in Congress who criticized him for his 2018 withdrawal from a 2015 agreement that limited Iran’s nuclear program in return for sanctions relief, only to later threaten military action while seeking a new pact.

“Trump is bumbling his way toward war with Iran in a feeble attempt to accomplish what had already been done by a diplomatic deal that was effectively curbing Iran’s nuclear program — until Trump tore it up, over the objections of his then-Secretaries of Defense and State,” Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia said in a statement.

The Iran deal, which Israel’s leadership staunchly opposed, officially expired last year.

Times of Israel staff contributed to this report. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/state-of-the-union-could-be-trumps-best-chance-to-sell-voters-on-iran-plans/>

**Defying Trump, senior Palestinian official rejects demand for Hamas disarmament, PA reforms
PLO secretary general claims Hamas isn’t a terror group, should have a role in governing postwar Gaza;
dismisses as ‘impossible’ expected reforms of Palestinian Authority**

By [Noam Lehmann](#) and [Jacob Magid](#)

24 February 2026, 9:09 pm

Azzam al-Ahmad gives a press conference at a hotel in Cairo, August 13, 2014. (photo credit: AFP/Khaled Desouki)

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) does not consider Hamas a terror group, rejects demands to disarm it, and will let it run in the Palestinian Authority’s municipal elections in April, PLO Secretary General Azzam al-Ahmed said this week.



“All talk of disarming Hamas and their being a terrorist organization is unacceptable to us,” Ahmed told Egyptian outlet Shorouk News in an interview published Monday.

His remarks ran contrary to the insistence of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump that the terror group give up its weapons in the near future as part of the second phase of the Gaza ceasefire. Trump has repeatedly asserted that Hamas “promised” to lay down its arms, and has threatened the terror group over the issue.

However, at least [publicly](#), Hamas has [not agreed](#) to disarm.

“We’ve never regarded them as a terrorist organization,” Ahmed said. “They are part of the Palestinian national fabric.”



For a similar reason, the PLO also rejects the demand in Trump’s Gaza peace plan that Hamas play no part in governing the Strip, said Ahmed.

Ahmed claims that the Trump administration rejects any role for Palestinians in governing the Strip.

Gaza’s then-Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, right, sitting next to senior Fatah official Azzam al-Ahmad during a press conference at Haniyeh’s house in Shati Refugee Camp, in the northern Gaza Strip, April 23, 2014. (Adel Hana/AP)

“They don’t want Palestinians generally,” Ahmed said, pointing to the demand that Hamas play no role in Gaza and to the

absence of Palestinian members on the US-led Board of Peace, which is supposed to facilitate Gaza’s reconstruction.

As for the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza — the group of independent Palestinian technocrats meant to oversee the Strip’s reconstruction — Ahmed said it’s clear the US, with Israel’s support, wants to “take control” of the mission, given Washington’s “empty talk” of rebuilding Gaza as a “riviera” dotted by skyscrapers — a plan Trump championed early last year but which he hasn’t mentioned recently.

Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said Monday that he expects Hamas to be given an ultimatum on its disarmament “in the coming days.” He noted the ultimatum would be “not very long” in duration, and that it would be made by Washington, not Israel.

Last week, Cabinet Secretary Yossi Fuchs, a senior adviser to Netanyahu, [said](#) that Hamas will have a 60-day period to disarm, a condition given by the White House, and “we are respecting that.”

In his Monday interview, Ahmed assailed as a “false pretense” the peace plan’s stipulation that the Palestinian Authority must reform itself before it can take control of Gaza.

The reforms that the US is demanding — including changes to the PA’s anti-Israel school curriculum and a complete halt to monthly stipends to prisoners, including terrorists, and to families of slain attackers, dubbed “pay-to-slay” — are “impossible” to implement, said Ahmed. He claimed that the requested changes to the school curriculum include the removal of the Palestinian flag and the word “Palestine” from textbooks.

“We believe the primary goal of these demands is to waste time,” said Ahmed. He added that the PLO believes that the Hamas-led onslaught of October 7, 2023, “was a strategic error that inflicted immense damage on Gaza.” Ahmed rejected the claim that the attack breathed new life into the Palestinian issue. The October 7 invasion of southern Israel killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and triggered the Gaza war, which was halted by the US-brokered ceasefire in October 2025.



Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich heads a Religious Zionist party faction meeting at the Knesset in Jerusalem, February 23, 2026. (Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

Separately, Ahmed said the PLO is “in constant national talks with [Hamas] on fulfilling the requirements to join the organization.”

Under the Palestinian Authority’s recently unveiled provisional constitution, the PLO is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and the PA adheres to the PLO’s commitments, which include recognition of Israel.

The PLO recognized Israel as part of the 1993 Oslo Accords, which established the PA as a body to administer Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and which Hamas and numerous other Palestinian factions have rejected.

In a move seen as preventing Hamas and other non-PLO factions from running in future elections —

including municipal elections slated for April — PA President Mahmoud Abbas in January [signed a decree](#) requiring candidates to sign a statement accepting the PLO’s “national program.”

Speaking to Shorouk, Ahmed said “there was an error in the law,” adding that it was agreed that even parties opposed to the PLO could run in the April municipal elections, because those elections were about “providing services, not political work.” But the requirement would still hold for legislative elections, whose date is still not set, he said.



Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank city of Ramallah, December 22, 2025. (AP Photo/Nasser Nasser, Pool)

A senior Palestinian official told The Times of Israel that despite Ahmed’s senior position in the PLO, his comments do not reflect the stances of the umbrella Palestinian political body nor the PA.

The official noted that PA President Mahmoud Abbas has long called for Hamas to disarm and accused Ahmed of “electioneering” ahead of the Fatah central committee election in May.

The US-brokered ceasefire plan reached in October foresees the demilitarization of Gaza, including the disarmament of Hamas, along with a gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Strip. However, implementation of the plan has remained unclear, with Israeli officials increasingly believing that stripping Hamas of its weapons will be impossible without the Israel Defense Forces taking action.

In the meantime, the Israeli military is [drawing up plans](#) for a renewed offensive in the Gaza Strip to disarm the terror group by force. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/defying-trump-senior-palestinian-official-rejects-demand-for-hamas-disarmament-pa-reforms/>

Israel said to warn Lebanon it’ll be hit hard if Hezbollah takes part in any US-Iran war Lebanese FM says ‘signs’ point to airport, key infrastructure as potential Israeli targets, says Beirut has appealed to Hezbollah not to join fight: ‘This war does not concern us’

By [Agencies](#), [Emanuel Fabian](#)

and [Tol Staff](#) 24 February 2026, 4:59 pm Updated at 7:22 pm



A bulldozer clears debris near heavily damaged buildings in the village of Bednayel in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley region on February 21, 2026, following Israeli strikes. (AFP)

Israel sent an indirect message to Lebanon that it would strike the country hard, targeting civilian infrastructure, including the airport, in the event that Hezbollah gets involved in any US-Iran war, two senior Lebanese officials said Tuesday.

The office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Lebanese presidency did not immediately respond to requests for comment. But Lebanon’s Foreign Minister Youssef Raggi confirmed Beirut’s fears of its infrastructure being

targeted by Israel in the event of escalation.

“There are signs that the Israelis could strike very hard in the event of an escalation, potentially including strategic infrastructure such as the airport,” Raggi told reporters in Geneva. “We are currently conducting diplomatic efforts to request that, even in the event of retaliation, Lebanese civilian infrastructure not be targeted,” he said.

Raggi said Lebanese authorities had appealed to Hezbollah not to respond in any way that could trigger “bad situations” for Lebanese civilians.

He stressed that his country’s leadership had been very clear: “This war does not concern us.”

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, whose government has sought the disarmament of Iran-backed Hezbollah since taking office a year ago, urged the terror group not to drag the country into a new conflict, speaking

in a newspaper interview published on Tuesday: “The Gaza adventure imposed a high cost on Lebanon. We hope that we will not be dragged into another adventure.”

During the fighting between Israel and Hezbollah in 2023 and 2024, the Israeli military said it only targeted sites belonging to the Iran-backed terror group. No Israeli strikes targeted key Lebanese infrastructure.



Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, center, tours areas in southern Lebanon along the border with Israel in the village of Tayr Harfa, February 7, 2026. (AP Photo/Mohammed Zaatari)

Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem said in a televised address last month that the group was “not neutral” in the standoff between Washington and Tehran, and that it was “targeted by the potential aggression.”

“We are determined to defend ourselves. We will choose in due course how to act, whether to intervene or not,” Qassem said.

According to a Saturday [report](#), Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has effectively taken charge of Hezbollah in

anticipation of a war with the US and Israel, with officers, some of whom recently arrived in Lebanon from Iran, being tasked with rebuilding the Shiite group’s capabilities.

In recent weeks, the Israeli military has stepped up airstrikes against Hezbollah in Lebanon, with [assessments](#) indicating that the Iran-backed terror group may join Tehran in a new conflict against Israel.



Mourners carry the coffins of three Hezbollah terror operatives killed in Israeli strikes during their funeral procession in the village of Nabi Sheet in eastern Lebanon, February 21, 2026. (AP Photo/Bilal Hussein)

IDF fires warning shots at Lebanese soldiers building ‘uncoordinated’ post

Meanwhile, Lebanon’s army on Tuesday accused the Israeli military of firing near a position it was setting up in the country’s south, saying it had instructed troops to return fire.

In a statement, the Lebanese Armed Forces said that while its troops were “establishing an observation post” near the southern border in the Marjayoun area, “the

vicinity of the post was subjected to gunfire from the Israeli side, coinciding with the flight of an Israeli drone at low altitude that issued threats aimed at forcing the personnel to leave.”

“The army command issued orders to reinforce the post, remain in place, and respond to the sources of fire,” the LAF said, adding that the incident was being followed up in coordination with the US-led ceasefire oversight mechanism and United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

In response to a query by The Times of Israel, the Israel Defense Forces confirmed firing warning shots toward Lebanese soldiers, saying that the LAF was establishing “an uncoordinated military post” near Israeli troops.

According to the IDF, the military issued warning calls to Lebanese soldiers after they began to establish their “uncoordinated” post. The military said it also contacted “coordination and liaison channels” and requested that the work on the LAF post be halted.

“After no response was received, IDF troops carried out warning shots in order to stop the activity,” the military added.

Lebanese army vehicles secure the street as residents gather during a visit by Lebanon’s prime minister to the heavily damaged southern village of Kafr Kila, near the border with Israel on February 8, 2026. (Rabih DAHER / AFP)



Israel has consistently targeted what it says are Hezbollah attempts to rebuild its force following the November 2024 ceasefire that ended a year of conflict between Israel and the Iran-backed terror group.

Under the agreement, Hezbollah was required to

withdraw and disarm south of the Litani River, but Israel alleges that the terror group remains entrenched in the area, leading the IDF to conduct near-daily strikes.

Lebanon's government has committed to disarming Hezbollah, and the army last month said it had completed the first phase of its plan to do so, covering the area between the Litani River and the Israeli border about 30 kilometers (20 miles) further south.

The Israel-Hezbollah war started when the terror group began firing missiles across the border on October 8, 2023 — a day after the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel.

The November 2024 ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel followed an Israeli ground invasion and concurrent air assault that severely degraded the group and killed much of its leadership.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-said-to-warn-lebanon-itll-be-hit-hard-if-hezbollah-takes-part-in-any-us-iran-war/>

China pivoting toward antisemitism, driven by geopolitics, report finds

JPPI says Beijing's escalating rivalry with the US, alignment with Muslim nations, and adoption of anti-Western narratives is changing its previously positive attitude to Jews

By [Zev Stub](#)

24 February 2026, 2:02 pm



Illustrative: Lion dancers perform at Dongyue Temple on the first day of the Lunar New Year of the Horse in Beijing on February 17, 2026. (Pedro PARDO / AFP)

Antisemitism is rising in China, a country previously considered almost free of anti-Jewish hatred, according to a new research report by the Jewish People Policy Institute.

Anti-Jewish tropes have moved from marginal online spaces into official media, academia, and state-sanctioned discourse, often through a deliberate and complete blurring of distinctions between Israel, Jews, and Judaism, the study found.

Using a comprehensive analysis of Chinese media publications, statements by influencers and academics and social media activity, senior JPPI fellow Shalom Wald identified an “antisemitic wave” that had intensified following the Gaza conflicts in 2021 and 2023.

This phenomenon has wide potential ramifications given China's global influence, noted JPPI, an independent Israeli think tank.

“When the nation with the second-largest population in the world and one of the principal architects of the global information environment permits the dissemination of antisemitic ideas, fuels them, or tolerates them, its conduct resonates far beyond its borders,” said JPPI president Yedidia Stern.

Antisemitism in China is developing without a historical background of Jewish persecution and without a significant Jewish presence in the country – a fact that makes the phenomenon particularly unique and troubling, the report found.



About 2,500 to 3,500 Jews are believed to live in mainland China, along with another 3,500 to 5,000 in Hong Kong, according to estimates.

The current trend is not “homegrown” but driven by strategic geopolitical shifts, the report said. These include China's escalating rivalry with the United States, its growing alignment with Arab and Muslim-majority nations, and a broader adoption of anti-Western narratives.

A search for scapegoats for internal problems may also be partially to blame, it added.

Moussa Abu Marzouk (R), senior member of the Hamas terror group (R) signs a document as China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi (C) and Mahmoud al-Aloul, Vice Chairman of the Central

Committee of Palestinian organization and political party Fatah, look on during the signing of the ‘Beijing declaration’ at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing on July 23, 2024 (Pedro Pardo/AFP)

China perceives Jews as having significant influence over American policy, so hostility toward the US is frequently translated into anti-Jewish rhetoric, the report said. This has led to the adoption of Western-style antisemitic tropes, such as claims of global economic control and comparisons between Israel and Nazi Germany.

The Chinese embassy in Israel did not immediately respond to a query about the report or the country’s attitudes toward Jews.

According to JPPI, universities in China are “influential incubators” for anti-Jewish sentiment, with leading Chinese lecturers and students increasingly adopting extreme anti-Israel positions that cross into explicit antisemitism. This is particularly concerning because they are training the next generation of Chinese decision-makers, the report warned.

Chinese social media platforms have also become fertile ground for propaganda, as popular influencers, some with millions of followers, publish overtly anti-Jewish content.

Because China maintains strict control over digital and other media, this may suggest that these ideas are “officially sanctioned” or at least tolerated by authorities, the report suggested.



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (C) adjusts his kippa, the traditional Jewish skullcap for men, as he visits the Western Wall, Judaism’s holiest prayer site, in Jerusalem’s Old City on December 20, 2013. (Photo by AHMAD GHARABLI / AFP)

Wald noted the case of a blogger with 15 million followers who quoted from “Mein Kampf” and “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” and told readers to identify Jews by their “long nose.” Another online influencer cited in the report declared after October 7 that “ Hamas acted too softly.”

Antisemitism has historically been absent from China’s political landscape and the country had long [celebrated](#) the role of Shanghai as a sanctuary for more than 20,000 Jewish refugees during World War II, JPPI

said.

Wald himself previously [wrote](#) in 2004 that the Chinese reflect little or none of the traditional forms of antisemitism, although he warned then of the risk of a resurgence of “the old canard of a Jewish world conspiracy” in the country.

“Many Chinese often tend to see the Jews as a mirror of their own history, they admire Jewish wealth and successes, they respect the great contributions that Jews have made to Western civilization, and they perceive themselves and the Jews as representing the ‘two oldest living civilizations,’” the JPPI report from 2004 said.



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi during a meeting with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov and Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Kazeem Gharibabadi, regarding the Iranian nuclear issue at Diaoyutai State Guest House on March 14, 2025 in Beijing, China. (Pool Photo via AP)

Since Israel and China first established formal diplomatic relations in 1992, China’s mainstream discourse about Israel has been overwhelmingly positive, analysts [say](#).

A 2014 survey by the Anti-Defamation League [found](#) that 20% of Chinese agreed with negative stereotypes of Jews, placing relatively low compared to other countries.

However, government officials have recently begun to “uproot” the positive memories from the previous century, the new report indicated.

In 2024, a nonpolitical musical about the Shanghai refugees was canceled in Beijing.

In the city of Harbin, memorial plaques were removed from buildings once belonging to the Jewish community, including the former synagogue, and a small Jewish museum was closed.



People visiting the site of a former synagogue at the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum on the day the museum reopened to the public after an expansion project in Shanghai, December 8, 2020. (Photo by STR / AFP)

“Inevitably, the Nazi practice of eliminating all traces of Jewish contributions to Germany comes to mind,” the report said.

While in the past, Chinese nationalists often commended Jewish perseverance, stereotypes of Jewish power and wealth have been reinterpreted as evidence of a malevolent force undermining the global order, the report found.

“Philosemitism and antisemitism are two sides of the same coin in China,” the report said, suggesting that the same generalizations used to

praise Jews are now used to vilify them.

The report recommended Israel push against the trend by preserving diplomatic ties with China while setting clear red lines and boundaries against antisemitic expressions. It also suggests increasing ongoing monitoring of Chinese discourse, and strengthening academic and cultural cooperation where possible.

“We must view the phenomenon with clear eyes,” Stern wrote. “The diplomatic consequences are practical and immediate. Israel must continue to maintain its invaluable relationship with the United States while preserving room for constructive engagement with China. It must mobilize Jewish communities worldwide and join forces with governments – especially in Europe – that consistently condemn antisemitic speech and actions, and impose penalties for such conduct.” <https://www.timesofisrael.com/report-finds-geopolitics-driving-chinese-pivot-toward-antisemitism/>

China accused of tapping US AI models in escalating tech showdown

Anthropic says Chinese firms created thousands of accounts and ran millions of prompts to extract data from its Claude model, raising concerns over intellectual property, chip export controls and national security
[Tal Shahaf](#) | 18:27

U.S. artificial intelligence company Anthropic has accused several Chinese firms of improperly extracting data from its large language models, alleging conduct that could carry economic and national security implications.

In a technical paper published Monday, Anthropic said it had uncovered evidence that three Chinese AI companies — DeepSeek, MiniMax and Moonshot — engaged in large-scale “distillation” of its models. The practice involves using outputs from a powerful AI system to train another model, potentially replicating its capabilities.



(Photo: Reuters, Getty images) by Taboola

Anthropic said the companies created more than 24,000 paid user accounts on its Claude platform and conducted more than 16 million interactions with the chatbot. Through those exchanges, the company alleged, the firms systematically collected responses, explanations, reasoning processes and code examples to train their own systems.

The report was widely circulated on social media and quickly drew attention across the technology sector.

Distillation is commonly used by AI developers to create smaller or more efficient models based on systems they have trained themselves. Anthropic alleges the Chinese companies violated copyright protections and terms of service by using the technique at scale on models developed by U.S. firms.

The allegations come amid intensifying U.S.-China competition over artificial intelligence. Earlier this year, DeepSeek drew global attention when it unveiled a model that analysts said rivaled leading U.S. systems. Some experts at the time questioned how the company had achieved rapid progress with reportedly limited and older AI chips.

Anthropic’s findings suggest that at least part of that progress may have relied on U.S.-developed

technology.

Google and OpenAI have also reported similar attempts to extract data from their AI systems. In a memo to Congress, OpenAI said DeepSeek had used distillation techniques to replicate advanced U.S. models, including its own. “DeepSeek’s rapid advances have been built on the capabilities developed by OpenAI and other U.S. AI laboratories,” the company wrote.

Anthropic said it and other firms have implemented safeguards to detect unusual patterns in application programming interface, or API, usage, and that companies are cooperating to identify and block such activity. Still, it warned that the threat extends beyond any single company.



(Photo: shutterstock)

“Chinese tools are growing in power and sophistication,” Anthropic said. “The window for action is narrow, and addressing this will require fast, coordinated efforts among industry, policymakers and the global AI community.”

The dispute carries geopolitical implications. The Trump administration has imposed export controls on advanced AI chips to limit China’s access to cutting-edge computing power. Anthropic has called for stricter limits on chip exports, arguing that large-scale model extraction requires advanced hardware.

At the same time, U.S. officials have recently allowed companies such as Nvidia to export certain AI chips to China, a policy that could face renewed scrutiny.

The controversy could also reverberate on Wall Street. Earlier developments involving DeepSeek contributed to volatility in AI-related stocks, as investors questioned the scale of U.S. companies’ spending on AI development. The latest allegations may ease concerns that such investments were unnecessary, but they also raise questions about the ability of firms to protect proprietary technology.

The episode underscores how economic and military interests are increasingly intertwined in the race for AI dominance, with investors and policymakers closely watching whether China can match or surpass U.S. capabilities in advanced artificial intelligence. <https://www.ynetnews.com/tech-and-digital/article/skpibai00wx>

US ambassador to France ignores summons from French Foreign Ministry, denied access to officials

France’s Foreign Minister, Jean-Noël Barrot, said the senior American representative is required to explain his absence, and until he does so, he will be denied access to senior figures.

By **ELI LEON** FEBRUARY 25, 2026 01:11



CHARLES KUSHNER attends the funeral for Ivana Trump, socialite and first wife of former U.S. President Donald Trump, at St. Vincent Ferrer Church, in New York City, US, July 20, 2022. (photo credit: REUTERS/BRENDAN MCDERMID/FILE PHOTO)

The diplomatic crisis between France and the United States escalated on Tuesday after the US ambassador to Paris, Charles Kushner, ignored an official summons from the French Foreign Ministry.

France’s Foreign Minister, Jean-Noël Barrot, said the senior American representative is required to explain his absence, and until he does so, he will be denied access to senior figures in the French government.

According to a report by the Associated Press, French authorities summoned Kushner, father of [Jared Kushner](#), the son-in-law and adviser of US President Donald Trump, to a meeting scheduled for Monday evening. Diplomatic sources in France confirmed that the ambassador chose not to attend the meeting.

Charles Kushner (L), the US ambassador to France and Monaco, and his wife Seryl Kushner leave the Elysee Presidential Palace in Paris after a



meeting with the French president on July 18, 2025. (credit: Ludovic MARIN / AFP via Getty Images)

US officials say far-right activist death caused by 'violent radical leftism'

The summons followed a series of statements issued by the US State Department and the US Embassy in Paris after the death of [Quentin Deranque](#), a French far-right activist who was beaten to death last week in the city of Lyon.

US officials described the incident as “terrorism,” claimed that “violent radical leftism is on the rise,” and warned of a threat to public security. In Paris, officials expressed anger over what they viewed as interference in internal affairs, and Barrot made clear that France rejects any “political exploitation” of the tragedy, stressing that his country “will not accept moral lectures on violence from the international reactionary movement.”

In an interview given earlier on Tuesday to the public broadcaster France Info, Barrot described Kushner’s failure to appear as a “surprise” that constitutes a blatant breach of accepted diplomatic protocol. Barrot warned that the move would have practical consequences for the ambassador’s work, saying, “This will, naturally, affect his ability to carry out his mission in our country.”

Barrot concluded with a clear warning regarding Kushner’s continued engagement with local authorities, “When those explanations are provided, then, naturally, the US ambassador to [France](#) will regain access to members of the French government.” <https://www.jpost.com/international/article-887844>

US DOJ sues California University alleging 'antisemitic hostile work environment' at UCLA campus

The US Justice Department filed a lawsuit against the University of California, alleging an antisemitic hostile work environment at its Los Angeles campus. By REUTERS, [JERUSALEM POST STAFF](#) FEBRUARY 24, 2026 21:46 Updated: FEBRUARY 24, 2026 21:57



Protesters supporting Palestinians in Gaza gather at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) during the Israel-Hamas War, May 1, 2024; illustrative. (photo credit: REUTERS/DAVID SWANSON)

The US Justice Department said on Tuesday that it had sued the University of California, accusing the university of engaging in "an antisemitic hostile work environment" at its Los Angeles campus (UCLA).

In July, the Justice Department ruled that UCLA failed to prevent a hostile environment for its Jewish and Israeli students since the start of October 2023.

According to the Justice Department at the time, UCLA "violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by acting with deliberate indifference in creating a hostile educational environment for Jewish and Israeli students."



Earlier in July, the [University of California announced that BDS is banned](#) from all university entities, and student governments may not boycott any company “based on their association with a particular country,” as of Thursday, according to international media reports.

That same month, [UCLA settled a lawsuit](#) brought by a Jewish professor and Jewish students over its alleged failure to prevent antisemitic discrimination on campus during protest activity in 2024.

Members of UCLA faculty stand on the frontlines as protesters stand together in the encampment after they were asked to leave by UCLA campus police, during a protest in support of Palestinians in Gaza, May 1, 2024; illustrative. (credit: REUTERS/DAVID SWANSON)

The total amount that was to be paid by UCLA following the Frankel v. Regents of the University of

California case is \$6,450,000, comprising \$6,130,000 to the plaintiffs and \$320,000 to the UCLA Initiative to

Combat Antisemitism.

However, in November, a [federal judge indefinitely barred the Trump administration](#) from levying a fine in excess of \$1 billion against the University of California system for failures in addressing campus antisemitism.

This followed an August announcement that the [Trump administration had frozen \\$584 million in federal funding](#) for UCLA after the government reprimanded the university over pro-Palestinian protests.

Antisemitic vandalism against UCLA Jewish employees

In February last year, a Jewish University of California Regent's [home was vandalized](#) and surrounded by anti-Israel UC Los Angeles (UCLA) activist students, according to demonstration organizers.

Early on the morning of February 5, 2025, flyers were taped and red hands were painted onto the garage of UC regent and United Talent Agency vice chairman Jonathan Sures's home, according to footage published on Instagram by Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) UCLA.

"Disclose, divest, we will not stop, we will not rest," read a banner placed on a hedge in front of the home, according to a photograph shared on social media by the Rank & File academic workers group at UCLA.

<https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-887831>

Moscow warns against plot to arm Kiev with nukes

British and French leaders have "lost touch with reality," Russian envoy told the UN Security Council

24 Feb, 2026 23:54



FILE PHOTO © Stephanie Keith / Getty Images

Russia has accused Western European powers of pursuing a dangerous escalation in the Ukraine conflict, warning at the UN Security Council on Tuesday that alleged plans to provide Kiev with nuclear capabilities could trigger severe global consequences.

Russia's Permanent Representative to the UN, Vassily Nebenzia, accused Kiev's European backers of openly prioritizing Russia's "strategic defeat" while

derailing any prospects for peace in Ukraine.

The envoy pointed to an emergency statement issued earlier by Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), alleging that the UK and France are considering transfers of components, technologies, or equipment enabling Kiev to develop either a nuclear device or a so-called "dirty bomb."

"Such plans are not only irresponsible and dangerous but also a direct violation of Article I of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). That is why the authors of this escapade seek to portray Kiev's acquisition of nuclear weapons as Ukraine's own development," Nebenzia said.

Nebenzia said Moscow views the alleged initiative as evidence that British and French leaders, sidelined from the US-led Ukraine settlement process, have *"completely lost touch with reality."*

"Russia possesses all necessary means to respond to such developments. However, we hope that there are still enough sane and reasonable people in London and Paris who will be able to restrain their leaders from such inadequate steps," he added.

Nebenzia's remarks echoed earlier warnings from Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, who said any effort to grant Ukraine nuclear capabilities risks a [direct military confrontation](#) between nuclear powers.

Ukrainian officials have repeatedly claimed their country once possessed the world's third-largest nuclear arsenal and gave it up under the 1994 Budapest Memorandums. In reality, nuclear weapons were present on Ukrainian soil after the collapse of the Soviet Union but remained under Moscow's control, with Russia regarded as the Soviet Union's sole legal successor.

Ukrainian leader Vladimir Zelensky threatened to review the country's non-nuclear status at the 2022 Munich Security Conference, shortly before the conflict with Russia escalated. Moscow argues that after the 2014 Western-backed coup in Kiev, Ukraine's new authorities breached the neutrality pledge underpinning its post-Soviet independence by making NATO membership a key foreign policy goal. <https://www.rt.com/russia/633003-ukraine-nuclear-weapons-un-nebenzia/>

OP ED

China's Biological Weapons Labs in America

by [Gordon G. Chang](#)

February 24, 2026 at 5:00 am



China has been maintaining at least two facilities — one in California and the other in Nevada — that are part of a biological weapons program.

(Image source: iStock/Getty Images)

A Declaration of Arrest Report, issued by the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department in connection with the detention of Ori Solomon on January 31, states that there is a "deeper conspiracy" between an illegal biological lab in Reedley, California and a residence containing apparently dangerous substances in Nevada.

On January 31, Las Vegas SWAT and federal agents raided a home on the eastern outskirts of the city and [seized over a thousand vials](#) of an unknown substance or substances. Those vials have been sent to an FBI lab in Maryland for analysis.

A housecleaner tipped off authorities after she and others temporarily residing at the home got "[deathly ill](#)." Solomon was the property manager of the location.

Jiabei Zhu, a Chinese national also known as Jesse Zhu, Qiang He and David He, is the listed agent of a company, David Destiny Discovery LLC, that is the registered owner of the Las Vegas house along with Zhaoyan Wang, his business partner and the mother of his child.

Zhu will go to trial in April on federal charges for the operation of the lab in Reedley, near Fresno in the Central Valley.

Fortunately, in California, Code Enforcement Officer Jesalyn Harper in December 2022 noticed a garden hose connected to a supposedly abandoned building. She entered the structure and [discovered](#) what appears to have been a secret biological weapons laboratory. Inside, Harper found Chinese nationals working in white coats.

The lab stored nearly a thousand transgenic mice — 773 live and more than 175 dead — "genetically engineered to catch and carry the COVID-19 virus."

Authorities also found medical waste and chemical, viral, and biological agents. There were on-site at least 20 potentially infectious pathogens, including those causing coronavirus, HIV, hepatitis, and herpes.

The lab contained a freezer labeled "Ebola." The freezer held unlabeled sealed bags used to store high-risk biological materials. Researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology are studying Ebola, which has a natural fatality rate of 50%, undoubtedly to weaponize it.

The Reedley facility was run by Chinese fronting for parties in China. Among the fronts is Zhu.

In 2024, Brandon Weichert, author of [Biohacked: China's Race to Control Life](#), in comments to Gatestone, called the Reedley facility a "kamikaze lab," which was "unsecured, poorly contained, makeshift, containing a couple dozen pathogens near a population center."

There are reasons to be alarmed.

First, as Weichert noted at the time, the Reedley facility could not be a "one-off." Now, we know that he was right. There is — at least — a second location, the "deeper conspiracy" as the Las Vegas police termed it.

Moreover, the Chinese regime is behind that conspiracy. [Wang fled to China](#) sometime in 2023. While there, she kept tabs on the Las Vegas home by, for instance, monitoring cameras at the location.

Zhu was also a top official at one of China's state-controlled companies that had links to the People's Liberation Army. According to recent reporting, he has maintained business relations with parties connected to the Chinese regime.

All this demonstrates that China's Communist Party, which could have ordered Zhu and Wang to shut down the effort after the discovery of the Reedley lab, allowed it to continue. Among other things, the continuation of the effort suggests there is a broader effort to spread disease in the United States.

Second, Zhu operated the Reedley and Las Vegas facilities with malign intent.

Zhu, according to Canadian court statements, told a co-conspirator in an earlier theft of U.S. intellectual property that these efforts would help "defeat the American aggressor and wild ambitious wolf!" "The law is strong," he added at the time, "but the outlaws are ten times stronger."

These statements were included in the Las Vegas Declaration of Arrest Report. As a [recent analysis states](#),

"the declaration reveals, for the first time, the full scope of what U.S. investigators believe they are dealing with: not merely a rogue lab operator, but a PRC-trained biologist with state-linked corporate ties, a proven history of stealing American technology for Beijing's benefit, and language that investigators now treat as evidence of ideological motivation."

As Weichert said of the Reedley lab two years ago, "It is, I believe, a part of a large Chinese military operation to spread disease throughout the American population."

He is undoubtedly correct. A quarter century ago, General Chi Haotian, China's defense minister and vice chairman of the Party's Central Military Commission, [reportedly](#) gave a secret speech advocating the extermination of Americans. "It is indeed brutal to kill one or two hundred million Americans," he said. "But that is the only path that will secure a Chinese century, a century in which the Communist Party leads the world."

Chi's plan was to use disease for this purpose.

The FBI now appears to be concerned about the extent of the Chinese effort. It [executed a search warrant](#) on the Reedley facility on February 8th.

Have U.S. authorities now discovered everything? "We need to know if there is a third biological weapons location and maybe a fourth," Blaine Holt, a retired U.S. Air Force general who now specializes in civil preparedness measures, told Gatestone this month. "We are on notice that the Chinese regime is preparing to spread disease in America. We have been very slow off the mark and have absolutely no time to lose. The Chinese regime could give the go-signal at any moment."

Gordon G. Chang is the author of [Plan Red: China's Project to Destroy America](#), a Gatestone Institute distinguished senior fellow, and a member of its Advisory Board.

<https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/22300/china-biological-weapons-labs>



BS"D

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 mortsmo@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