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Israel agrees to Gaza ceasefire with Islamic Jihad

A ceasefire came into effect at 23:00 last night (IL Time) after 60 rockets were fired yesterday into Israel by Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

- According to the Israel Defence Force (IDF) the Iron Dome missile defence system intercepted 90 per cent of rockets that would otherwise have landed in populated areas. One Israeli man sustained moderate injuries and 15 people were treated at Barzilai Hospital in Ashkelon with light injuries.
- The IDF responded with air strikes on the Gaza Strip, including Islamic Jihad compounds used for naval weapons storage and military compounds used for training.
- Islamic Jihad's military wing declared that it had "completed the military response," but warned that it would continue its jihad and would retaliate for any Israeli attempt to attack the Palestinian people and its land.

- Last night IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi said, “I can’t say whether we are in the middle or toward the end, whether the situation will escalate or abate. It appears to me that the fragility of the situation is clear as well as the speed with which our borders can be breached, with which dangers can take place and in which we can find ourselves in an operation. A good many of the operations in the last 20 years, even wars, began this way, from escalation that devolved into something much bigger....We will do everything to protect the citizens of the Gaza periphery communities and prevent them from feeling a sense of insecurity.”
- The ceasefire agreement was reached with the mediation of Egypt intelligence officials and the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Nickolay Mladenov.

Despite the ceasefire, IDF Home Front Command said schools in the Gaza periphery should remain shut and people should only go to work if they have access to a shelter.

- Israel announced last night that it was closing all border crossings to the Gaza Strip until further notice and prohibited fishing. Humanitarian goods are permitted to go through the Kerem Shalom crossing and patients receiving treatment in Israeli hospitals can still enter through the Erez crossing.
- The current ceasefire is viewed by security experts as particularly fragile with more rocket attacks expected before the Israeli election on 2 March.

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Likud ahead in election polls

For the first time in several months the Likud has taken a lead over Blue and White in the polls ahead of next week’s elections.

- A *Channel 13 News* poll conducted yesterday found that the Likud is predicted to stay on 33 seats whilst Blue and White will lose 4 seats and end up with 32. The Joint List will be the third largest part with 14 seats, followed by Labour-Gesher-Meretz on 10, Shas on 8, Yisrael Beiteinu on 8, Yamina on 8 and UTJ on 7.
- The result mirrors two other polls that were published the evening before by *Hahadashot* and *Kan*. All three polls showed that while the Likud had pulled ahead of Blue and White as the front-runner in the election, neither political bloc had a 61-seat majority.
- The fall of Blue and White in the polls comes after acting State Attorney Dan Eldad’s sudden decision last week to open a full criminal probe into a company led by Blue and White leader Benny Gantz. Whilst Gantz is

not suspected of any wrongdoing, the company he led, called Fifth Dimension, is being investigated for misleading the police in order to secure a lucrative contract with the Israel Police. Gantz became chairman of the Tel Aviv-based cybersecurity company in 2015 but the firm went bankrupt in 2018.

Since the turn of the year, Likud Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has pulled out all the stops in order to prevent Blue and White from appearing to run away with the election.

- In late January he travelled to the White House to unveil US President Trump's plan for Israel and the Palestinians. He then solicited the release of Israeli Naama Issachar who had been convicted of drug smuggling in Russia. He then promised to bring 400 Falash Mura (Ethiopian Jews) to Israel three weeks before the election despite some community members waiting many years to immigrate to Israel.
- The Israel Lands Authority have issued tenders for the construction of 1,077 housing units in the Jewish neighbourhood of Givat Hamatos in southern Jerusalem, breaking a freeze on settlement building in East Jerusalem. The plan for Givat Hamatos was approved in 2014 but was delayed because of opposition from the Obama administration.
- Environmental Protection Minister Zeev Elkin, who also holds the Jerusalem Affairs portfolio, praised the issuing of the tenders and said a new neighbourhood in Jerusalem, "in a strategic place in the south of the city, is turning into a reality. A determined struggle of many years has brought results."
- Yesterday Netanyahu travelled to Ariel and toured the area with US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman, Tourism Minister Yariv Levin and several US administration officials who arrived in Israel to work on the "joint mapping work" that is required by the Trump plan in order to demarcate the boundary line in the West Bank.

The change in polling figures indicates a change in momentum between Likud and Blue and White. However, the polls are liable to reverse after considering the last two days of rocket fire from the Gaza Strip to southern Israel. As it currently stands, no bloc is predicted to win the 61-seat majority to form a government



PM Benjamin Netanyahu Calls Benny Gantz's Public Support Of Trump's Mideast Peace Plan 'One Big Con Job'

(Feb. 24, 2020) [Mark Levin](#) sits down with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for an exclusive interview to discuss foreign policy, the Israeli election and relations between Israel and the U.S.

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US and Israel form team to apply sovereignty to settlements

A US-Israeli committee has been established to start work on the process of applying Israeli sovereignty to settlements in the West Bank.

- The US team will be led by US Ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, Arie Lightstone, and Scott Leith – who is responsible for Israeli-Palestinian affairs in the US National Security Council. The Israeli team includes Israeli Ambassador to Washington, Ron Dermer, Yariv Levin and Israeli Prime Minister's Office Director-General Ronen Peretz.
- The committee plans to convert the conceptual map in the Trump plan into what Friedman described as: "A more detailed and calibrated rendering so that recognition can be immediately achieved." Ambassador Friedman said he hoped the committee would begin work immediately.

The US has said it does not expect any announcements about applying Israeli sovereignty to West Bank settlements until after the 2 March election. The Trump plan proposes that Israeli sovereignty would be applied to 30 per cent of the West Bank, including all of the Jewish settlements and the Jordan Valley.



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