

Netanyahu meets with Trump at the White House; El Paso airspace quickly reopens; U.S. sends 200 troops to Nigeria

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DROP SITE NEWS

The Gaza Genocide, West Bank, and Israel

- **Israel bombs east of Khan Younis:** Israeli military attacks on Gaza continued on Wednesday, with air strikes and artillery shelling on areas east of Khan Younis, according to Al Jazeera. In southern Gaza, a Palestinian child was shot and wounded by Israeli gunfire.
- **Casualty counts:** At least five Palestinians were killed and 20 injured in Israeli attacks in Gaza over the past 24 hours, while three bodies were recovered from under the rubble. The total recorded death toll since October 7, 2023 has risen to 72,045 killed, with 171,686 injured. Since October 11, the first full day of the so-called ceasefire, Israel has killed at least 591 Palestinians in Gaza and wounded 1,578, while 730 bodies have been recovered from under the rubble, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health.
- **Israel continues to harass returnees to Gaza:** At least 41 Palestinians who had sought medical treatment abroad returned to Gaza via the Rafah land crossing on Tuesday. As in previous cases, the returnees were subjected to humiliating searches and interrogations by Israeli troops on their arrival in Gaza, according to Al Jazeera.
- **Rafah crossing extremely limited:** Only 102 patients left Gaza in 9 days after Rafah partially reopened. Israel had said 50 patients with two companions each would exit daily (150 total departures), plus 50 daily entries—1,800 total crossings over nine days. Gaza's Government Media Office released new figures on movement through Rafah from February 2–10 showing that just 488 people crossed, about 27% of the projected movement. Only 102 were patients. Meanwhile, roughly 20,000 people in Gaza are on the WHO-approved list for urgent medical evacuation.
- **Forced displacements in West Bank village:** At least 15 Palestinian families have been forced out of their homes in the village of Deir al-Dik village, west of Jericho in the occupied West Bank, as a result of ongoing settler attacks, according to the Wafa news agency.

Meanwhile, Israeli raids have continued across Al-Khalil/Hebron, with several Palestinians suffocating from tear gas fired by Israeli troops, according to Al Jazeera.

- **Israeli court blocks cancer-stricken Palestinian child from entering the country for treatment:** An Israeli court [barred](#) a five-year-old Palestinian boy with aggressive cancer from entering Israel for a life-saving bone marrow transplant, citing a blanket ban on Gaza-registered residents, according to the rights group Gisha. The child has lived in the West Bank since 2022. Gaza officials say cancer deaths have tripled since the war, and the Gaza Health Ministry estimates nearly 1,300 Palestinians have died in Gaza waiting for medical evacuation.

- **Far-right Israeli bill would mandate death penalty for Palestinians:** A draft law authored by the “Jewish Power” party (Otzma Yehudit) would [require](#) execution for Palestinians from the West Bank convicted of deadly “terror” offenses, while allowing Israeli citizens convicted of the same crimes to receive life imprisonment. The bill would also bar commutation for Palestinians and permit the prime minister to delay executions of Israelis.

U.S. News

- **Netanyahu at the White House:** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is holding talks with President Trump Wednesday morning at the White House primarily focussed on U.S. talks with Iran. Netanyahu had been expected to come to Washington on February 19 for a Board of Peace meeting on Gaza, but reportedly brought forward his visit as the U.S.-Iran talks proceeded.

- **FAA closes, then reopens airspace around El Paso:** The Federal Aviation Administration briefly halted all flights to and from El Paso International Airport citing “special security reasons.” Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said in a [social media post](#) the FAA and the War Department “acted swiftly to address a cartel drone incursion. The threat has been neutralized and there is no danger to commercial travel in the region.”

- **Justice Department unmasking alleged Epstein co-conspirators:** The United States Department of Justice released newly unredacted portions of a 2019 FBI document naming billionaire Les Wexner, Epstein aide Lesley Groff, modeling agent Jean-Luc Brunel, and convicted trafficker Ghislaine Maxwell as co-conspirators with Epstein, after Reps. Thomas Massie and Ro Khanna accused the department of illegally withholding names under the Epstein Files Transparency Act. Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche said Wexner’s name had already appeared thousands of times in the files and that nothing was being hidden, while Wexner’s lawyers said prosecutors previously told him he was neither a target nor a co-conspirator. Four additional names in the document remain redacted, which lawmakers say

violates the law's requirement that only victims' identities be concealed. **Sen. Ed Markey commented to Drop Site on DOJ's uneven redactions [here](#).**

- **Grand jury rejects Trump effort to indict Democratic lawmakers:** Federal prosecutors in Washington failed Tuesday to secure indictments against six Democratic lawmakers, after a grand jury refused to take criminal action against them for appearing in a video reminding service members that they can refuse illegal orders. Prosecutors targeted Sens. Mark Kelly and Elissa Slotkin and Reps. Jason Crow, Maggie Goodlander, Chrissy Houlahan, and Chris Deluzio, seeking to indict them under a statute that bars interference with military morale. In November, Trump threatened to “hang” the lawmakers “immediately” for their “seditious behavior.” Sen. Kelly is still under Pentagon investigation for misconduct related to his comments.

- **Nancy Guthrie's Nest camera:** On Tuesday, law enforcement released footage from the Nest camera of Nancy Guthrie—the 84-year-old mother of Today show host Savannah Guthrie who has been missing for almost two weeks. The retrieval of footage, when Guthrie reportedly did not have a [Google Nest](#) subscription and the camera was previously said to have been “disconnected” is raising surveillance and privacy concerns. On Wednesday, a man who had been detained for questioning and whose home was raided in connection with the investigation was released.

- **Trump weighs second U.S. aircraft carrier deployment to Middle East:** President Donald Trump [told](#) Axios he is considering sending a second U.S. aircraft carrier strike group to the Middle East if negotiations with Iran fail. Trump said Tehran is taking the talks seriously this time and suggested any agreement should go beyond Iran's nuclear program to include its ballistic missile stockpiles, a position Iran has rejected.

- **Progressive challenger wins Democratic primary in New Jersey special House race:** Analilia Mejia, backed by Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, officially [won](#) the Democratic primary for New Jersey's 11th House district on Tuesday. Former Representative Tom Malinowski conceded yesterday as Mejia's lead grew to several hundred votes. Mejia is now the heavy favorite heading into the April 2026 general election against Republican Joe Hathaway. Malinowski also [indicated](#) that if AIPAC tries to back a candidate against Mejia in the June primary (which will determine who gets a full two year term; the April election only fills the seat until January) he will encourage his supporters to vote against that candidate.

- **Instagram suspends AIPAC tracker:** Instagram has [suspended](#) Track AIPAC, the highly popular watchdog project that documents AIPAC's political spending, citing a violation of

Instagram's intellectual property rules. The account tracks donations to candidates and highlights the lobby's biggest beneficiaries in Washington.

· **Children in Texas ICE family detention describe fear, illness, and months without school:**

Children [held](#) at the Dilley ICE detention center in Texas are experiencing depression, unreliable medical care, and prolonged confinement while missing school, according to a new report from [ProPublica](#). The facility holds more than 750 families, nearly half of them with children, according to the report. Access to outside observers is tightly restricted.

· **Children zip-tied during militarized immigration raid at Idaho horse racing venue, lawsuit says:**

A federal civil rights suit [filed](#) by the American Civil Liberties Union alleges children—including a 14-year-old U.S. citizen—were zip-tied, threatened at gunpoint, and traumatized during an October raid by federal agents and local law enforcement at a community horse racing venue in Wilder, Idaho, according to reporting from CBS News.

· **House progressives introduce legislation to bury Monroe Doctrine:**

House progressives led by Nydia Velázquez and Delia Ramirez [introduced](#) the New Good Neighbor Act, a resolution urging Congress to formally end the 200-year-old Monroe Doctrine and replace it with a policy rooted in sovereignty, partnership, and mutual respect with Latin America and the Caribbean. The measure sharply rebukes the Trump administration's aggressive interventionism, including its recent military operation in Venezuela and the Cuba oil embargo.

· **Vance's office deletes post referencing Armenian genocide during Armenia visit:**

Vice President JD Vance's office [deleted](#) a social media post Tuesday that described his visit to the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex in Yerevan as honoring victims of the "1915 Armenian genocide." An aide said the post was made in error by staff and directed reporters to Vance's remarks calling the events "a very terrible thing" while emphasizing respect for Armenia as a regional partner. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, which rejects the genocide designation, has long opposed U.S. recognition; former President Joe Biden formally recognized the genocide in 2021.

· **U.S. to deploy 200 troops to train Nigerian forces against Islamist militants:**

The United States is [sending](#) 200 troops to Nigeria to train local forces in counterterrorism operations against Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa Province, U.S. and Nigerian officials said Tuesday. The deployment will expand a small existing U.S. presence, and Nigerian officials maintain that American forces will not take part in combat. Abuja says it requested the assistance and that cooperation has intensified since Trump's accusations of government inaction regarding "Christian persecution" in the country.

- **U.S. sanctions Pacific island officials over alleged corruption and Chinese ties:** The Trump administration on Tuesday [announced](#) entry bans to the U.S. against Palau Senate president Hokkons Baules and former Marshall Islands mayor Anderson Jibas and their families, accusing them of “significant corruption” that Washington says might facilitate growing Chinese influence in the Pacific.
- **ICE agent who bit his wife kept on federal payroll:** An Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent, Mayowa Bonojo, remains employed at the Department of Homeland Security in a non-law enforcement role after he was found liable for a domestic violence incident in which he bit his wife and later lied to supervisors about it, according to documents obtained by Migrant Insider. A review board upheld findings of “conduct unbecoming” of an agent and “lack of candor” but decided he would be reassigned rather than terminated. The case is now being heard by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit; the scoop from at Migrant Insider can be read in full [here](#).
- **AIPAC backs Chicago treasurer in Illinois House race with multimillion-dollar ad blitz:** AIPAC shifted its support in Illinois’s Seventh Congressional District to Chicago city treasurer Melissa Conyears-Ervin, fueling her campaign with a roughly \$2.8 million positive ad buy from its super PAC, United Democracy Project, after previously steering donors toward businessman Jason Friedman. The move follows UDP’s recent failure in New Jersey, where its attack ads against former Representative Tom Malinowski helped clear the path for progressive challenger Analilia Mejia, and comes in a crowded Chicago race for the seat now held by the retiring Representative Danny Davis. David Dayen outlines AIPAC’s strategy and recent moves in Illinois in his latest for The American Prospect, available [here](#).

International News

- **Israeli cross-border strikes hit multiple towns in southern Lebanon:** Israeli forces [carried out](#) artillery fire, drone strikes, and machine-gun attacks across southern Lebanon on Tuesday, targeting towns near the border with Israel, according to a correspondent for Al Manar. Quadcopter drones dropped stun grenades over Houla and Aita al-Shaab, lightly wounding one civilian, while artillery and tank fire struck areas including Yaroun and the coastal waters near Naqoura. A Merkava tank also crossed the Blue Line near Hermon and fired toward Yaroun as drones dropped explosives on a residential home in Blida.
- **UN rights chief warns renewed Tigray fighting could trigger deeper humanitarian crisis:** Volker Türk [said](#) late January clashes in northwest Tigray risk plunging Ethiopia back into the conflict that consumed the country from 2020 to 2022 and urged all sides to immediately de-escalate and pursue political dialogue. He cited reports of drones, artillery, arrests, and civilians being targeted for perceived affiliations. Rival Tigray factions are

reportedly fighting near the Afar border. More than one million people are still displaced from the 2020–2022 war.

- **Iranian security chief holds Oman talks:** In parallel to ongoing U.S.-Iran talks in Oman, Ali Larijani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, [traveled](#) Tuesday to Oman for high-level meetings with Omani Foreign Minister Badr bin Hamad Al-Busaidi and Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. Larijani warned U.S. officials not to let Israel shape the framework of the nuclear negotiations ahead of Netanyahu's White House visit; Oman's top diplomat also urged restraint and compromise to safeguard peace in the region. Larijani [told](#) Omani state television that negotiations between Iran and the United States have seen "gradual development," with Tehran prepared to engage further if talks remain realistic and focused on nuclear issues. Larijani also met with Mohammed Abdulsalam of Yemen's Ansarallah and is expected to continue regional consultations in Qatar on Wednesday.

- **Erik Prince deployed private forces in Congo to help retake border city from M23 rebels:** Erik Prince, the founder of the mercenary company Blackwater and a longtime Trump ally, [sent](#) armed contractors and surveillance drones in December to assist the army of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in retaking the strategic border city of Uvira from Rwanda-backed M23 fighters, according to reporting from Reuters. The team worked alongside Israeli advisors on the ground involved in training elite Congolese battalions in what Reuters said was Prince's first known frontline combat role in Congo, though Prince has reportedly worked to secure mineral tax revenues for the government.

- **Venezuela's oil is reaching Israel under U.S.-managed export system:** A crude oil cargo from Venezuela is en route to Bazan Group, Israel's biggest refinery, marking the first shipment of Venezuelan crude to Israel in years, Bloomberg reported. The delivery was enabled and facilitated by U.S. control over the country's petroleum trade, which ultimately decides the destination for the country's crude. Venezuela's interim leadership, including acting president Delcy Rodríguez, has publicly condemned Israel's actions in the Middle East, describing Palestinians as "victims of genocide" and Israel's conduct as a "policy of extermination," and criticized the U.S. intervention in Venezuela as having "Zionist undertones."

- **Hungarian opposition leader says his sex tape will be released, accuses ruling party of blackmail:** Hungary's opposition leader Peter Magyar [said](#) on Tuesday that a sex tape involving him and a former partner is about to be released, and suggested it reflects a Russian-style blackmail operation by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's embattled government. Acknowledging the relationship while condemning the tactic, Magyar accused the ruling Fidesz party of using personal attacks to cling to power, and added that he will not submit to threats of blackmail.

- **Ukraine preparing for elections and peace deal referendum:** Under U.S. pressure, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is reportedly preparing to announce spring elections as well as a referendum on a peace deal with Russia, FT reports. The announcement is expected by February 24, marking four years since the start of the war. The U.S. has reportedly demanded a June target for a negotiated conclusion to the war, amid Moscow's continued demand that Ukraine withdraw from the Donbas in any deal, a condition that Kyiv rejects.

- **PKK fighters withdrawn from Syria as part of U.S.-brokered deal reshaping Kurdish forces:** At least 100 non-Syrian militants from the Kurdistan Workers' Party have [crossed](#) from Syria into Iraq's Kurdistan Region and relocated to the Qandil Mountains, as part of an integration deal between the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces and the interim government of Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, sources told Al-Monitor. The transfers followed talks involving Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani and SDF commander Mazlum Kobane, and helped ease Turkish opposition to allowing the SDF to retain four brigades under Syria's national army.

- **Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Pablo Guanipa placed under house arrest after a brief release:** Juan Pablo Guanipa, a prominent opposition figure and close ally of María Corina Machado, is under house arrest in Maracaibo after being freed from jail and then recaptured shortly afterward, his son Ramon Guanipa told [Reuters](#) Tuesday. Guanipa, who was jailed for more than eight months on terrorism-related charges, had been released on Sunday as part of a series of prisoner releases that the U.S. pressured the new Venezuelan government to undertake, but was seized on Tuesday and reportedly rearrested for allegedly violating the terms of his release.

- **Colombia's president says helicopter attack was narrowly avoided amid rising political violence:** President Gustavo Petro [said](#) Tuesday that an apparent assassination attempt forced him to divert the helicopter in which he was traveling with his daughters along Colombia's Caribbean coast, after security officials warned him that gunmen were preparing to fire on the aircraft. In comments reported by Radio Nacional de Colombia, Petro said landing sites were left dark and his flight was redirected out to sea with naval support, adding that the threat fits a pattern of alleged plots by drug traffickers since he took office. The incident comes amid escalating violence ahead of national elections and the brief kidnapping of Senator Aida Quilcue in Cauca, a conflict-hit region where armed groups linked to former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia factions remain active; she and her bodyguards were later freed unharmed.

- **Nine killed in Canadian school shooting:** Nine people were [killed](#) in a mass shooting in the rural Canadian community of Tumbler Ridge. Six victims were found dead inside

Tumbler Ridge Secondary School, one died en route to the hospital, and two more were discovered in a nearby home. Police said the suspected shooter was also found dead inside the school from a self-inflicted injury. The current death toll would make this the third deadliest school shooting in Canadian history.

- **Australia seeks charges over 2024 Israeli airstrike on World Food Kitchen aid convoy:** Australia is demanding criminal charges over a 2024 Israeli airstrike on a World Food Kitchen aid convoy in Gaza that killed seven people, including an Australian aid worker, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on Wednesday. Albanese said he conveyed the request to Israeli President Isaac Herzog, who is visiting Australia, during a meeting earlier in the day. Thousands of demonstrators gathered in Sydney on Monday to protest Herzog's visit. Sydney police were widely accused of using excessive force, including punching and attacking protesters and using pepper spray. At least 27 people were arrested.

More from Drop Site

- **Epstein cultivated genomics, cryptography, and Russian tech networks in attempt to “hack” human DNA:** Financier Jeffrey Epstein poured money into elite U.S. research hubs like Massachusetts Institute of Technology while it partnered with Russia's state-backed Skolkovo complex run by billionaire Viktor Vekselberg, backing projects including CRISPR gene-editing, cryptography, and AI-linked biotechnology. Emails released by the U.S. Justice Department show Epstein actively recruiting intelligence-linked hackers and scientists to apply signals intelligence methods to biology, seeking to decode intercellular communication and even alter his own genome for longevity. Framing genetics as a “codebreaking” problem, Epstein wrote that he wanted “to intercept communication between living cells in organisms,” highlighting his long-standing obsession with merging surveillance-style cryptography and human biology. **The full report from Ryan Grim, Murtaza Hussain, and Emily Jashinsky can be read [here](#).**

- **Palestinian man sifts rubble for remains of family killed in Gaza City airstrike:** In Gaza City, Abu Ismail Hammad has spent months digging beneath his destroyed home in the Sabra neighborhood to recover the remains of his family, killed in an Israeli airstrike on December 6, 2023, less than two months into Israel's assault on Gaza. Using a flour sifter to separate bone fragments from sand, Hammad said he located his pregnant wife by the room where her remains and those of their unborn child were found: “Today, I am using it to collect the bones of my wife and children... bone by bone, one by one.” His search reflects a wider crisis as tens of thousands of Palestinians remain buried under rubble, while equipment restrictions and limited forensic capacity leave families relying on primitive methods to identify the dead. **Abdel Qader Sabbah's latest dispatch from Gaza is available [here](#).**

· **Sen. Elizabeth Warren spoke with Drop Site’s Julian Andreone about** the case of Leqaa Kordia—a New Jersey resident who, after participating in a pro-Palestine protest almost a year ago, has been held in ICE detention and recently suffered a seizure, though she has been denied contact with her family and returned to detention after receiving medical care. **Their conversation is available [here](#).**

· **Drop Site correspondent Julian Andreone asked Senator Markwayne Mullin (R-OK)** to explain why he traded up to \$50,000 in Conoco Phillips, Chevron, and Raytheon stocks just days before the Trump administration’s unconstitutional operation to take custody of Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro and turn over Venezuela’s more than \$17 trillion of oil reserves to American oil and gas companies. The senator said the information is “on public record,” and directed Andreone to review his disclosures and ethics reports. The senator has yielded 15-20% returns on his Conoco and Chevron trades, and 3.71% on his Raytheon trade. During his time in Congress, he has bought or sold \$23.68 million worth of stocks in a total of 492 trades. **Andreone’s conversation with Mullin is available [here](#).**