



Drop Site

Drop Site Daily

Trump’s “Board of Peace” convenes in Washington; Congress to force vote on Iran war; UN finds “hallmarks of genocide” in El-Fasher

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The Gaza Genocide, West Bank, and Israel

- **Casualty counts:** Over the past 24 hours, two Palestinians were killed and four were injured in Israeli attacks in Gaza. The total recorded death toll since October 7, 2023 has risen to 72,069 killed, with 171,728 injured. Since October 11, the first full day of the so-called ceasefire, Israel has killed at least 611 Palestinians in Gaza and wounded 1,630, while 726 bodies have been recovered from under the rubble, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health.
- **Israeli attacks kill three Palestinians in southern Gaza:** Three Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire east of Khan Younis on the first day of Ramadan as Israel continued air, artillery, and tank strikes across the Gaza Strip, medical sources told Palestine Online. One person was killed in the Al-Tahlia neighborhood and two in Bani Suheila. Israeli artillery hit eastern Gaza City and homes were demolished in Beit Hanoun. Airstrikes also targeted Khan Younis and Rafah, extending attacks across both northern and southern Gaza.

- **Palestinians detained by Israel released back to Gaza:** Israel released 13 detainees back to the Gaza Strip on Wednesday evening via the International Committee of the Red Cross, including one woman and a 15-year-old boy detained during earlier ground incursions. They arrived at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah in poor health, with signs of malnutrition and physical abuse, according to medical sources.
- **U.S. officials prepare ISF military base in Gaza:** The Trump administration is planning a 5,000-person military base in Gaza spanning more than 350 acres to serve as an operating hub for the International Stabilization Force (ISF) under the “Board of Peace,” according to contracting records reviewed by The Guardian. The plans outline a phased construction of a fortified base featuring 26 armored watchtowers, a small arms range, bunkers, equipment warehouses, and barbed-wire perimeter defenses, to be built in southern Gaza.
- **White House weighs using Israeli-backed gangs to form Gaza police force:** The White House is considering a proposal to recruit anti-Hamas Palestinian gangs—armed by Israel since the onset of the genocide—into a new Gaza police force, The Telegraph reports. Some of these gangs, which include organized crime groups and drug-trafficking clans, have been reported to have been looting aid amid famine conditions and carrying out murders and kidnappings, with members of at least two groups reportedly having fought for or pledged allegiance to Islamic State.
- **Settlers kill Palestinian-American in the West Bank:** Israeli settlers shot and killed Nasrallah Muhammad Jamal Abu Siyam, a 19-year-old Palestinian-American, in the village of Mukhmas, north of Jerusalem on Wednesday night, according to reports citing the Health Ministry. The Israeli military said soldiers responded to a violent confrontation in the area and attempted to disperse a riot. Several Palestinians were shot and evacuated for medical treatment. Abu Siyam’s mother told the Associated Press that he held American citizenship.
- **Israeli police kill Palestinian citizen of Israel; additional shootings reported:** Israeli border police shot and killed 18-year-old Palestinian citizen of Israel Ahmad Mohammad Ashqar during a stop in Kabul in the Galilee on Wednesday, according to The Times of Israel. Police said an officer opened fire after Ashqar, riding a motorcycle, allegedly failed to heed orders to stop; footage showed him crashing into a parked car after being shot. National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir said the officer had his “full backing.” Separately, three other Palestinian citizens of Israel were shot dead on the same day amid a surge in violence affecting Palestinian communities within Israel.
- **U.S. approves coordination between Palestinian Authority and BoP:** The United States has approved the creation of a formal coordination committee between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and President Trump’s Board of Peace to oversee postwar reconstruction in Gaza Strip, U.S. and Palestinian officials told The Times of Israel. The panel will include PA Prime Minister Mohammed Mustafa and Gaza High Representative Nickolay Mladenov, as Ramallah seeks greater influence over Gaza’s future despite continued U.S. and Israeli opposition to an expanded PA role. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has not been invited to Thursday’s Board of Peace meeting.
- **Palestinian photographer killed in Gaza named 2026 George Polk Award winner:** Palestinian photojournalist Mariam Dagga was posthumously named as one of the winners

of the 2026 George Polk Awards for photojournalism. Dagga was killed in an Israeli “double tap” attack on Nasser Hospital in southern Gaza’s Khan Younis that killed at least 21 Palestinians, including five journalists. The second strike of the attack was captured on camera directly hitting journalists and rescuers on a staircase.

- **Lancet study finds Gaza death toll far higher than previously reported:** A new study published in *The Lancet* estimates more than 75,000 people were killed in the first 16 months of Israel’s war on the Gaza Strip—at least 25,000 more than figures released by local authorities at the time—while confirming that Gaza health officials accurately reported the share of women, children, and elderly among the dead. Researchers found that about 56 percent of violent deaths between October 2023 and January 2025 fell into those groups and that thousands more people likely died from indirect causes such as disease and malnutrition. The study challenges Israeli claims that combatant and civilian deaths were roughly equal following the October 7 attack by Hamas and the subsequent Israeli assault, suggesting the official toll substantially undercounted fatalities by a margin similar to earlier independent estimates.

U.S. News

- **Congress to vote on Iran war:** Reps. Ro Khanna (D-Calif.) and Thomas Massie, (R-Ky.) are forcing a vote on Trump’s war with Iran by using the privileged procedure associated with the War Powers Act. The resolution is likely to come to the floor of the House next week, yet has been assiduously ignored by the mainstream press. It could end up becoming as politically consequential as the 2002 vote to authorize war in Iraq.
- **Trump hosts inaugural Board of Peace meeting:** President Donald Trump opened the inaugural meeting of the Board of Peace in Washington, D.C. on Thursday where representatives from more than 45 countries are expected to attend. “In terms of power and in terms of prestige there’s never been anything close because these are the greatest leaders,” Trump said in his opening remarks. There is no Palestinian representation on the board, while Israel holds a seat. According to a run of show circulating online, Trump and Vance will open, followed by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Envoy Steve Witkoff and Ambassador Mike Waltz. Dr. Ali Shaath of the NCAG on Gaza’s future will follow, then Tony Blair on capacity building, World Bank President Ajay Banga on fiscal oversight, and Jared Kushner on “measurable” results in Gaza. Roundtables will cover Gaza aid, policing, reconstruction, sovereign wealth funding, supply chains, and redevelopment plans. The agenda also features a “FIFA video presentation.”
- **U.S. holds quiet backchannel talks with Castro grandson:** Secretary of State Marco Rubio reportedly held secret discussions with Raúl Castro’s grandson and close confidant, Raúl Guillermo Rodríguez Castro, according to Axios, citing three sources including a senior Trump administration official. The outreach suggests Washington views Raúl Castro—rather than President Miguel Díaz-Canel—as a power broker who can facilitate a deal. In February, the U.S. diplomat for Cuba Mike Hammer said, “Obviously there are

conversations with some very high-ranking people within the regime,” and added, “Yes, there is a Delcy Rodríguez” in Cuba.

- **“This is no dress rehearsal”:** U.S. amasses major military buildup near Iran as talks proceed: The United States is deploying a massive concentration of air and naval power in the Middle East as talks continue with Iran. Vice President JD Vance said Tuesday the talks in “some ways...went well” but warned that the administration has set red lines Iran has not accepted; Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has rejected what he called ultimatums disguised as negotiations. The deployment includes two carrier strike groups—the USS Abraham Lincoln and USS Gerald R. Ford—dozens of advanced fighter jets and refueling aircraft, expanded missile defense batteries, and more than 30,000 U.S. personnel positioned within range of Iran. Current and former U.S. officials told Drop Site that the scale of the buildup would support sustained strikes targeting Iranian air defenses, missile forces, and senior leadership if diplomacy collapses, while Tehran has signaled it would retaliate forcefully and could threaten shipping through the Strait of Hormuz. **Read the full report on the buildup from Jeremy Scahill and Murtaza Hussain for Drop Site, here.**
- **Trump threatens potential Iran strikes from UK bases amid dispute over Diego Garcia:** President Donald Trump suggested the United States could launch attacks on Iran from British territory—including the major U.S.-UK base on the island of Diego Garcia—with or without London’s consent. Trump also used the opportunity to criticize Prime Minister Keir Starmer over a sovereignty deal that transferred the Chagos archipelago to Mauritius.
- **Lawmakers press State Department over detention of Palestinian-American teen:** Fifteen U.S. lawmakers led by Sen. Peter Welch wrote to Rubio to demand answers about the nine-month imprisonment of Palestinian-American teenager Mohammed Ibrahim in Israel. Arrested at 15 in the occupied West Bank, Ibrahim was allegedly beaten, pepper-sprayed, and denied adequate food and medical care, losing roughly a third of his body weight before his release in November. The lawmakers asked whether the State Department has sought an independent investigation and accountability for those responsible.
- **U.S. delays Taiwan arms package amid pressure from Xi ahead of Beijing summit:** The Trump administration is holding up a major U.S. weapons sale to Taiwan after Chinese leader Xi Jinping urged caution in a recent call with Trump, the Wall Street Journal reports, with officials fearing approval could derail Trump’s planned April visit to Beijing. Advisers are weighing the deal—expected to include Patriot missile interceptors—against broader efforts to preserve a trade truce and stabilize relations between the U.S. and China.
- **Regulators face pressure over Blackstone’s early equity move in New Mexico utility takeover:** Private equity giant Blackstone purchased \$400 million in shares of TXNM Energy—the parent of the Public Service Company of New Mexico—before receiving the approval from the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission it is legally required to obtain, according to filings tied to Blackstone’s proposed acquisition of the utility. Mariel Nanasi of New Energy Economy said the move shows “reckless disregard for New Mexico law,” arguing the unauthorized purchase of equities should block the broader merger, which would be a major victory for consumer advocates in the state who have sought to prevent private equity’s takeover of the state’s largest electricity provider. Read more at the The American Prospect, here.

Epstein

- **Israeli government ran security operation at Epstein-linked Manhattan apartment:** The Israeli government installed and maintained security equipment beginning in early 2016 at a Manhattan apartment building controlled by convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, according to emails recently released by the Department of Justice and reviewed by Drop Site News. The system covered a unit where former Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak stayed for extended periods, with officials from Israel's permanent mission to the United Nations coordinating regularly with Epstein's staff over access and arrangements. Epstein frequently loaned apartments to his contacts and used the building to house underage models. **The full report from Ryan Grim and Murtaza Hussain is available here.**
- **WSJ: "French model scout Jean-Luc Brunel was negotiating to provide prosecutors with evidence against the sex offender in 2016—three years before he was finally arrested—but ultimately backed out."** The Wall Street Journal reports that in 2016 Epstein ally Brunel was in talks with federal investigators to flip on Epstein in exchange for immunity. Epstein got wind of the talks and told his attorney, Kathy Ruemmler, that Brunel wanted \$3 million to stay quiet. Brunel ultimately backed out of the talks with investigators and was later arrested in France in 2020 in connection with the Epstein probe, and charged with rape of a minor under 15. He died in prison under contested circumstances. WSJ: "Brunel was a central figure in Epstein's orbit who used his position atop a U.S. modeling agency to recruit foreign girls and young women, securing work visas and providing the appearance of real employment. The Frenchman traveled on Epstein's plane, visited his island and exchanged hundreds of emails with him."
- **Wexner says DOJ and FBI never questioned him over Epstein ties:** Billionaire retail executive Les Wexner told lawmakers during a congressional deposition at his Ohio mansion that he was never interviewed by the Department of Justice or the Federal Bureau of Investigation about his decades-long relationship with Jeffrey Epstein, according to Rep. Robert Garcia and Rep. Yassamin Ansari. Wexner, 88, maintained in his opening statement before the committee that he was "duped" by Epstein, denied knowledge of criminal activity, and said he cut ties in 2007. The lawmakers said during his testimony that he claimed federal authorities never sought to question him during any prior Epstein investigation, even though he provided the financier with roughly \$1 billion in financial support. Ansari called the failure to probe him "completely inconceivable" and likened it to one of the largest coverups in history.
- **Former Prince Andrew arrested on suspicion of misconduct in public office over Epstein ties:** Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, the younger brother of King Charles, has been arrested in Britain on suspicion of misconduct in public office by police investigating the former prince's dealings with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Police have not said what led them to arrest Mountbatten-Windsor, but they have previously said they were reviewing allegations that a woman was trafficked to the UK by Epstein to have a sexual encounter with Mountbatten-Windsor, and claims he shared sensitive information with Epstein while serving as the UK's trade envoy. King Charles released a statement expressing

his “deepest concern” over his brother’s arrest and said “the law must take its course.” In November, King Charles stripped his brother of his title as prince and duke of York, and evicted him from his royal residence over his relationship with Epstein.

International News

- **Mexico explores mediating between U.S. and Cuba as aid shipments continue:** President Claudia Sheinbaum said Wednesday that Mexico is holding talks to explore facilitating dialogue between the United States and Cuba. Sheinbaum said any mediation would depend on the will of Washington and Havana and must respect Cuba’s self-determination, adding that feasibility hinges on the conditions set by both governments. Mexico recently sent 814 tons of aid to Havana and is preparing another shipment, while acknowledging it has “for now” paused fuel exports following new U.S. sanctions targeting countries supplying oil to Cuba, deepening the island’s economic strain.
- **South Korean court sentences former president to life in prison over failed self-coup attempt:** A Seoul court sentenced former president Yoon Suk Yeol to life imprisonment with labour for attempting to spark an insurrection with his December 2024 martial law declaration. The court found that Yoon sought to block access to the parliament building with troops and to arrest political leaders, with the intent to disrupt the country’s constitutional order. Judges cited Yoon’s lack of remorse, refusal to attend hearings, and the severe social and political damage caused by his decision, though they stopped short of the death penalty because his plans were poorly executed and largely failed. The verdict marks the harshest sentence imposed on an elected leader in South Korea’s democratic era. Yoon is expected to appeal.
- **UN mission finds “hallmarks of genocide” in RSF takeover of El-Fasher:** A “campaign of destruction” by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in El-Fasher in October shows “hallmarks of genocide” according to a report by the UN’s Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan. The report documented mass killings, starvation, rape, torture, and ethnically targeted killings, particular against the Zaghawa and the Fur communities, after the RSF takeover of El-Fasher following an 18-month siege. The Genocide Convention sets out five criteria to assess whether genocide has taken place; a genocide determination can be made even if only one of the five criteria is met. The mission concluded the RSF committed at least three: killing members of a protected ethnic group; causing serious bodily and mental harm; and deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the group’s physical destruction in whole or in part. Investigators said the scale, coordination, and public endorsement by RSF leadership show the crimes were planned and warned the risk of further genocidal acts remains serious without accountability.
- **U.S. begins full military withdrawal from Syria:** The Trump administration is pulling all roughly 1,000 U.S. troops out of Syria over the next two months, the WSJ reports. This ends the U.S.’s decade-long deployment of military forces against the Islamic State, with U.S. military officials arguing the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces have effectively

disbanded and integrated into the Syrian army. U.S. officials say their withdrawal is “conditions-based” and could be reconsidered if the Islamic State regains strength.

- **Famine risk surges in North Darfur as RSF attacks cut off aid and livelihoods:** Nearly 25,000 people in Umm Buru, Karnoi, and Al-Tina are on the brink of famine as fighting and drone warfare sever humanitarian access and local economies, according to the Sudanese outlet The Ayin Network. The Rapid Support Forces have assaulted the areas since mid-December in a bid to seize control of the North Darfur region, while the Sudanese Armed Forces claim to have slowed the advance with the help of Turkish-made drones. Aid workers said insecurity has halted farming and trade, blocked exit routes into Chad, and left communities trapped as hunger rapidly worsens.
- **Egypt pressures Haftar to cut ties with Sudan militia as Libya supply route exposed:** Senior officials from Egypt have repeatedly traveled to eastern Libya to urge Khalifa Haftar, head of the Libyan National Army, to end his alleged support for Sudan’s Rapid Support Forces, amid fears the war could spill across Egypt’s borders, according to Asharq Al-Aswat. Satellite imagery and a detailed investigation by Reuters point to heavy cargo flights into the Kufrah airstrip that funneled supplies to the RSF, helping it regain ground in Darfur after setbacks in Khartoum. While the LNA denies backing either side, analysts say mounting pressure from Egypt and Turkey could force Haftar to distance himself from the RSF as concerns grow over Libya’s fragile internal stability.
- **France presses ahead with bid to oust UN rapporteur despite debunking of claims:** More than 150 former ministers, ambassadors, and senior officials accused French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot of spreading disinformation by citing a doctored video to call for the resignation of UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese, after independent fact-checkers found she never labeled Israel an “enemy of humanity.” The coalition urged the French government to retract the claims it made about Albanese and to defend the UN’s ability to conduct its business in Gaza without external interference. Despite this, and despite criminal claims lodged against him by French legal groups, Barrot doubled down in parliament on Wednesday, saying France still plans to formally seek Albanese’s removal at the United Nations Human Rights Council session on February 23, 2026. Barrot pointed to a ministry-curated compilation of Albanese’s past social media posts—some from 2014 and 2023—as evidence to justify his decision.
- **Rights group alleges record extrajudicial killings by Punjab police unit:** The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, an independent, non-profit organization, says that more than 900 people have been killed in extrajudicial “encounters” by Punjab’s Crime Control Department between April and December of 2025, according to a summary of their report in Al Jazeera. HRCP documented at least 670 encounters resulting in 924 deaths—more than double the total recorded across Punjab and Sindh in all of 2024. Critics say a pattern of strikingly similar police reports and the sheer scale of the deaths suggest malfeasance and dispute the state’s account that the killings were done in “self-defence.”
- **Cambodia accuses Thailand of occupying territory despite U.S.-brokered truce:** Prime Minister Hun Manet said Thai forces remain inside Cambodian territory months after a ceasefire brokered by Trump, calling the situation fragile and urging Bangkok to allow a joint boundary commission to begin border demarcation work, according to Reuters.

Thailand denied occupying land, saying it is maintaining existing troop deployments as part of de-escalation measures. Manet made the comments while in Washington for Trump's Board of Peace meeting, warning Cambodia cannot accept what it views as a violation of its sovereignty and stressing that talks are needed to prevent renewed conflict along the disputed border.

- **Congo offers rebel-held Rubaya coltan mine to U.S. in strategic minerals push:** The Democratic Republic of the Congo has added the rebel-controlled Rubaya coltan mine—which produces about 15 percent of the world's coltan—to a shortlist of strategic assets it is offering Washington under a new minerals cooperation framework, according to Reuters. The offer was made even though the site is presently under the control of M23 and its political affiliate, and in spite of the continued fighting in the region. U.S. officials say that under the agreement, American companies will receive preferential access to the site. Congolese authorities estimate that Rubaya would require up to \$150 million to restart production.
- **U.S.-brokered Russia–Ukraine talks in Geneva end without a breakthrough:** The latest U.S.-organized negotiations in Geneva between envoys from Russia and Ukraine concluded Wednesday with both sides calling the discussions “difficult” and acknowledging no major progress. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused Moscow of dragging out talks while continuing its military onslaught, though he noted some constructive movement in the talks concerning on military issues, such as potential ceasefire monitoring with U.S. involvement. The disputes over Russian-occupied eastern territory remain, however. Both delegations said another round of talks is planned.