



Jewish Federation
of Greater Portland

Eisen explains Israel's neighborhood

by *Rockne Roll*



Retired Israel Defense Forces Col. Miri Eisen has some experience with war due to a lengthy career in military intelligence followed by her work with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

"War is not pretty. It's not nice. There's nothing good about it," Eisen explained to the crowd assembled at the Mittleman Jewish Community Center in Portland

Wednesday, Feb. 4 for a presentation about the state of the Middle East. "At the most, you can hope that it's slightly heroic, and you really want to be sure that it's just. That's all I can aspire to when I'm talking about war."

In a talk presented by the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland in partnership with the Jewish Federations of North America, the American Jewish Committee, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the Anti-Defamation League and the MJCC, Eisen went through the status of each front in the multi-front war that Israel has been fighting since Oct. 7, 2023 – some of them more obvious than others.

The way those ongoing, sometimes interlocking fronts affect Israeli society is amplified by the physical scale of the place.

"The amount of time that it takes to fly on an airplane from Las Vegas to Portland is the amount of time that it takes me to drive from my house next to Tel Aviv up to the Syrian border," Eisen explained. Syria, along with its neighbor Lebanon, have both been in a declared state of war with Israel since 1948.

The most obvious front is, of course, against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Days before her address, the body of Ran Gvili, z"l, was returned to Israel from Gaza on Jan. 26. A ceasefire with Hamas remains in place as a mechanism for long-term governance and rebuilding in Gaza grinds haltingly forward. Israelis, almost universally, give credit for both of those achievements to US President Donald Trump.

"Inside Israel, nobody believed that in October of 2025 we were going to see the 20 live [hostages], let alone all the other dead ones, coming back, and that it would be closed on Jan. 26, 2026," Eisen said.

None of that credit, Eisen continued, goes to their own government.

"There is no plan in the Israeli government of what to do in the Gaza Strip," she said. "All that has been brought up, from October of 2023, is what can't happen, not what can happen. And I don't have to like it, but President Trump brought something to the table: a plan."

A ceasefire is not peace, Eisen said, demonstrating the point by standing less than an arm's length from the audience's front row and jabbing at them with an outstretched finger without actually touching them.

Accessibility
Menu

"This is what's been happening in the Gaza Strip since October," she said. "It's poking. It's edging out the lines. It's each side trying to show, 'I defined it.'"

One of the next steps of the plan is an International Stabilization Force in the Gaza Strip, an idea which Israel has opposed but which will be necessary, Eisen said, because the alternatives are the IDF fully occupying Gaza (again) or no one occupying Gaza and Hamas retaking control.

"This is called compromise. It doesn't sound nice. It doesn't feel nice. It isn't a win-win. I'm going to go so far as to say that when it comes to the Gaza Strip, there is no win-win. That's the tragedy," she said. "It's a tragedy for 2.2 million people who live there, who have names and families and they wake up in the morning right now, I'm sure that all they think of is that they hate us, but they're living in tents in the rain for the second winter."



Another obvious front is against Hezbollah in Lebanon. Following tens of thousands of rocket strikes and the evacuation of much of Northern Israel, Israel struck back, culminating in the September 2024 pager explosions and the assassination of longtime Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, followed shortly thereafter by the assassination of his successor, Hashem Safieddine. Leadership fell to Naim Qassem, widely seen as an inferior leader, and a ceasefire soon followed.

"You know why you see the new guy? Can I be really rude? Because we haven't killed him," Eisen explained. "Nobody's killing him as of yet, and you see a dramatic difference that's happened inside Hezbollah the last year and a bit."

Hezbollah has now retreated north of the Latani River, away from the Israeli border, and is under increasing pressure from the Lebanese government to disarm. While life in northern Israel is not back to normal by any stretch, the situation is much improved from 30 months ago.

"I want you to understand that for a Lebanese president to stand up and say to Hezbollah, 'you can't have arms,' that's huge. Can we take a win?" Eisen explained. "I would say that both the President of Lebanon and the Prime Minister of Lebanon hate Israel, at least detest Israel, but you know who they hate more? Hezbollah. You know who they hate even more? Iran."

The hamstringing of Hezbollah also weakened the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria. The new president, Ahmed al-Sharaa, is a former terrorist who has since renounced his former associations and, while admittedly not warm toward Israel, is of a similar mind to his Lebanese counterparts in being more occupied with thwarting Iranian influence in his country, Eisen said.

These changes, along with the international response to the interference of Houthi militias in Yemen on international shipping, which has simultaneously weakened their ability to attack Israel, has ushered in a new state of affairs in Israel's neighborhood.

"It's a whole new world," Eisen said. "These are new alliances. It's not the same as it was before Oct. 7."

What there isn't yet, she cautioned, is peace.

"We're still in a multi-front war. In some of them, we're in ceasefires, and that's good. We're not in the high intensity warfare, which is very challenging for all of us," Eisen explained. "But none of them are over."

Feb 18, 2026

RELATED

Mikvah lift donation marks
new era of accessibility at
Rachel's Well

Accessibility
Menu

Dream Deli awakens in
Southeast Portland

Keeping up with the Joneses

Mikvah lift donation marks new era of accessibility at Rachel's Well

