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READER EDITION

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ISRAEL BRIEF

# Wednesday, September 17

*From Gaza's streets to Europe's trade halls, Israel faces fire on every front: military, moral, and economic.*

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

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## The War Today

ISRAEL'S military has launched a comprehensive ground offensive in Gaza City, striking Hamas positions with artillery and airstrikes while ordering civilian evacuations southward. Defense Minister Israel Katz stated that "Gaza is burning," though international reporting of casualty figures from Gaza hospital sources requires cautious interpretation. Prime Minister Netanyahu confirmed an invitation to visit the White House on September 29, while hostage families continue pressing the government to halt operations.

The IDF reports striking approximately 50 Hamas-linked targets overnight in Gaza City, bringing the 24-hour total to 140 sites. Operations targeted tunnels, weapons facilities, and militant cells as ground forces advanced through the city. The military opened new evacuation corridors along the Salah al-Din highway and accused Hamas of spreading disinformation to prevent civilian movement.

Within the military itself, personnel challenges have emerged. Major General Dado Bar Kalifa warned the Knesset that career officers are seeking early retirement amid the Gaza City campaign, while the army faces a shortage of 12,000 soldiers. One reserve commander described being on his sixth deployment, highlighting strain on rotation schedules.

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## Inside Israel

NETANYAHU walked back recent comments about Israel potentially adopting "autarkic" self-reliance or becoming a "super-Sparta," after markets declined and business leaders expressed concerns about isolation policies. At a press conference, he clarified remarks were limited to defense industries. The Tel Aviv Stock Exchange dropped nearly 2% amid investor concerns about both military operations and government economic direction.

Culture Minister Miki Zohar announced termination of state funding for the Ophir Awards following the Best Picture selection of the film "The Sea," described as depicting a Palestinian boy from Judea and Samaria. The decision prompted support from other government officials who opposed funding what they characterized as Palestinian narratives during wartime. The film automatically becomes Israel's submission for the 2026 Academy Award for Best International Feature.

## Israel and the World

PENNSYLVANIA Governor Josh Shapiro, a prominent Democratic figure, stated his pro-Israel position stems from faith and longstanding connections rather than political calculations. He condemned Hamas, called for hostage releases and war cessation, and criticized Netanyahu's leadership while defending the Israel-American alliance.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez faced criticism from political opponents, Jewish leaders, and Israeli officials after endorsing anti-Israel protests that disrupted the Vuelta a España cycling race. Spain has announced an arms embargo, called for Israel's expulsion from international sports bodies, and canceled a significant weapons contract. Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar responded harshly to what he characterized as discriminatory policies favoring Hamas.

A UN commission of inquiry issued findings claiming Israel committed genocide in Gaza, citing four of five legally defined genocidal acts. Israel's Foreign Ministry rejected this as "distorted and false," alleging the report relied on Hamas sources and disregarded independent research contradicting genocide claims, while calling for the commission's dissolution.

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## Briefly Noted

- Iran's foreign minister plans diplomatic engagement with Britain, France, and Germany to prevent UN sanctions snapshots related to nuclear enrichment and missile development
- Reports indicate Syria and Israel approach a potential security agreement involving Israeli territorial adjustments and constraints on Iranian presence
- Israel prevented two British Labour MPs from entering on a West Bank visit, continuing a pattern of barring UK lawmakers accused of supporting anti-Israel campaigns
- A former U.S. contractor who made false accusations against the IDF will speak at a CAIR conference, raising concerns about amplification of disinformation
- German Chancellor Friedrich Merz pledged "war on antisemitism" at a Munich synagogue reopening, receiving appreciation from Israeli opposition leader Benny Gantz
- Net emigration exceeded immigration in the past year, reflecting concerns about economic conditions and national direction
- A documentary features Ada Karmi-Melamede, architect of Israel's Supreme Court and Ben Gurion Airport, exploring her legacy through her daughter's perspective
- Tel Aviv offered its first historic kiosk on Rothschild Boulevard for rent as part of a revival initiative for café culture

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## Developments to Watch

**I**SRAELI jets targeted Iranian weapons facilities in Yemen's Hudaydah port; Houthi forces subsequently launched a ballistic missile toward Tel Aviv that was intercepted, part of 84 missiles launched since March.

IDF Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir visited Gaza City with division commanders, urging troops to "decisively defeat" Hamas's Gaza brigade while emphasizing the moral obligation to recover hostages.

The IDF confirmed Hamas has relocated captives above ground to obstruct military advances, raising concerns about human shield tactics. A brigade commander pledged the army would "do its best" to safeguard hostages.

The EU's foreign policy chief indicated Brussels may suspend 37% of Israel's preferential trade benefits under the Association Agreement pending qualified majority approval among member states. Israel's foreign minister criticized this approach as empowering Hamas.

Germany issued its most severe travel warning regarding Iran, directing citizens to leave immediately due to flight cancellation risks and escalating tensions.

Washington reportedly pressures Hezbollah to dismantle suicide drones and specified missile types while potentially accepting retention of longer-range systems. Israel regards remaining weaponry as destabilizing.

Thousands of Iranians marked Mahsa Amini's death anniversary with protests declaring "Death to Khamenei," prompting fresh UK travel warnings for citizens in Iran.

Intelligence sources report 16,000 foreign fighters, many redeployed from Lebanon, gathered along Syria's coast, with Israel allegedly supporting Druze militias through weapons supplies and payments for 3,000 fighters.

Iraqi intelligence assesses Israel is preparing for strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities, while Tehran, with Russian and Chinese backing, advances UN resolutions prohibiting attacks on nuclear sites.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Uriel Zehavi is the executive director of Mitzpe Institute, where he writes the daily Israel Brief and co-directs its Institutional Intelligence practice with Modi Zehavi. He is the author of four books from Mitzpe Press and advises Israeli and allied clients on strategic communications for Western audiences.

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Mitzpe Institute is an intelligence and strategy organization focused on Israeli security, diaspora threat assessment, and the strategic challenges confronting the Jewish people and the West. We produce daily intelligence, forensic analyses, strategic assessments, and tactical briefings read by policymakers, military leaders, and institutional decision-makers across more than 90 countries and all 50 US states — from the Knesset and the US Congress to allied governments, major policy institutions, and Jewish organizational leadership worldwide.

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