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READER EDITION

September 18, 2025

ISRAEL BRIEF

Thursday, September 18

Hostages in Gaza, rebels against Hamas, lasers over the Negev, and Jews defending themselves from Halifax to Houston—this is our present tense.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

CLASSIFICATION

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The War Today

Israel tells families it lacks precise Gaza hostage locations as IDF advances in Gaza City – report

ISRAELI officials privately acknowledged to hostage families that they cannot pinpoint exact locations of captives in Gaza, according to N12 reporting. This contradicts earlier public statements that operations were being carefully calibrated around hostage sites. As Hamas continues relocating hostages and using them as human shields, families grow increasingly concerned about their loved ones' safety. The uncertainty compounds existing risks from ongoing military operations.

Hamas reaching 'breaking point' as Gaza City evacuation expands, security source says

An Israeli security source told Walla that Hamas fears mass evacuations from Gaza City more than military defeats. With approximately 400,000 Palestinians already displaced southward, the IDF believes crossing the half-million mark could spark public anger sufficient to destabilize Hamas rule. The strategy combines military pressure with managed evacuations to accelerate this shift while minimizing chaos.

Armed Gaza clans turn on Hamas as IDF advances deeper into Gaza City

Armed clans throughout Gaza are openly challenging Hamas control, with some negotiating deals with the IDF and Shin Bet for safe zones and aid access, according to Jerusalem Post reporting. The Abu Shabab clan has engaged in lethal clashes with Hamas operatives. Israeli officials view these clan uprisings as potentially pivotal for dismantling Hamas's grip on the territory.

Israel unveils 'Or Eitan' laser defense system after successful tests

Israel announced operational tests of Or Eitan—a high-power laser system named after Captain Eitan Oster—that successfully intercepted rockets, drones, mortars, and loitering munitions during multi-salvo trials. The system will integrate with the IAF as a low-altitude defense layer alongside Iron Dome. Its interception costs measured in shekels versus thousands per rocket represents a significant shift for Israel's defense budget amid repeated escalations.

Inside Israel

90% of Gaza Envelope evacuees have returned home post-Oct. 7

NINE of ten residents evacuated following the October 7 massacre have returned to their homes in the Gaza Envelope, with 42 of 47 communities now repopulated, according to JNS reporting. More than 2,500 new residents have also moved to the Western Negev. Return rates remain lower in heavily

affected kibbutzim like Nahal Oz and Nir Oz, where trauma and security concerns persist, yet the overall trend demonstrates community resilience.

Three brothers shot dead as illegal weapons deal goes bad in south

Three brothers in their twenties were killed near Segev Shalom in what police characterized as a failed illegal weapons transaction. Times of Israel reporting indicates Arab community murders have reached 185 cases this year, representing an 8% increase from 2024. Critics blame National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir for inadequate response to organized crime, with the Abraham Initiatives calling the situation a national crisis requiring accountability.

Rare coins from the last Jewish rebellion under Roman rule excavated in the Galilee

Archaeologists uncovered 22 bronze coins in Hukok bearing images of Roman emperors Constantius II and Constans I, dated to 351–352 CE. These coins provide rare physical evidence of the Gallus Revolt—the final Jewish uprising against Rome. The discovery reflects hardships and resilience of Galilee’s Jewish communities, who subsequently built a grand synagogue with mosaic floors at the site.

Israel and the World

Egypt’s Sisi refers to Israel as ‘enemy’ for first time since before 1977 Sadat visit to Jerusalem

EGYPTIAN President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi publicly called Israel an “enemy” during an Arab-Islamic summit in Doha, marking the first such designation by Cairo since before Anwar Sadat’s 1977 Jerusalem visit. His remarks connected Israel’s Gaza operations to threats against Egyptian security, particularly regarding refugee flows through Rafah. The statement represents a rhetorical shift from decades of “cold peace” and accompanies Egyptian efforts to establish a NATO-style Arab defense force.

Signal to Israel: Saudi Arabia signs defense pact with nuclear-armed Pakistan following Doha strike

Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed a mutual defense agreement declaring that attacks on one constitute attacks on both, according to AP reporting. The timing follows Israel’s strike on Hamas leaders in Doha and suggests Riyadh now falls under Pakistan’s nuclear umbrella. This marks the first major Gulf defense alignment since October 7, introducing new strategic pressure on Israel.

UNRWA let Hamas control its schools, report claims

A report cites evidence that UNRWA knowingly permitted Hamas operatives to dominate its schools, with at least 15% of senior Gaza educators tied to Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad. UN Watch charges that Western donors

have effectively funded “classrooms turned into incubators of hate,” noting that UNRWA schools produced terrorists including Mohammed Deif. The report underscores how Hamas weaponized education through UNRWA’s local staff payroll.

Briefly Noted

- **UK Palestinian statehood recognition:** British PM Keir Starmer plans to announce Palestinian state recognition following Trump’s UK visit, joining France in wider European recognition efforts (Israel Hayom).
- **Syria-Israel security talks:** Syria’s new president indicated that U.S.-mediated security negotiations with Israel may yield results soon, though Golan status remains excluded (Times of Israel via Reuters).
- **US Jewish community security:** American Jewish security officials urge enhanced protection for outdoor events following recent violence, warning that heated political climate affects Jewish communal safety (Times of Israel).
- **High Holiday prayers reflect war reality:** The Masorti movement compiled new High Holiday prayers invoking hostages, bereaved families, and soldiers’ parents, reflecting post-October 7 circumstances (JNS).
- **Halifax antisemitic graffiti arrest:** Halifax police arrested a suspect for antisemitic graffiti defacing three synagogues, charging him with mischief to religious property and public incitement (Global News Canada).
- **Montreal assault ruling:** A Montreal judge ruled an assailant who attacked a Jewish father in a park is not criminally responsible due to psychosis; prosecutors declined to pursue hate crime charges (CBC Canada).
- **Tony Blair Gaza governance proposal:** Former UK PM Tony Blair, backed by the U.S., proposed a multinational transitional authority to govern Gaza post-Hamas, though the plan faces skepticism domestically and regionally (Times of Israel).
- **U.S. activist group imagery concern:** A Maryland Socialist Rifle Association event featured imagery resembling PFLP hijacker Leila Khaled and Hamas spokesman Abu Obeidah, raising concerns about normalization of terrorist figures (Jerusalem Post).
- **Pro-Palestinian activist deportation:** An immigration judge ordered pro-Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil deported to Syria or Algeria for green card application omissions; his lawyers plan to appeal (Politico).
- **Medieval Sephardic manuscript reunited:** The National Library of Israel reunited all three sections of a 15th-century Lisbon Mahzor produced before Portugal’s 1496 expulsion, now digitized and preserving Portuguese Jewish heritage (JTA).

- **London pro-Palestine fundraiser:** London's Ovo Arena Wembley hosted "Together for Palestine," Britain's largest Gaza fundraiser, featuring celebrity speakers making genocide allegations against Israel (Times of Israel).

Developments to Watch

- **Hostages under threat:** A senior Hamas official warned Al-Arabiya that "the fate of the hostages will be unknown" as Israel expands operations. Hamas claims relocating captives across Gaza City. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**
- **Hezbollah arms dealer eliminated:** The IDF confirmed a Baalbek strike killing Hussein Sharif, a senior Hezbollah weapons supplier linked to Syrian terror cells.
- **U.S. weapons delivery:** An American military cargo plane delivered arms from Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar to Israel's Nevatim Air Base, reinforcing IDF supplies.
- **Travel warning upgraded:** Israel's National Security Council designated Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan as "real danger to life" destinations, discouraging non-essential Israeli travel.
- **Fiji opens Jerusalem embassy:** Fiji became the seventh nation formally establishing an embassy in Jerusalem, indicating steady diplomatic recognition momentum.
- **Uman draft dodgers arrested:** Israeli authorities detained 25 additional Haredi men at Ben Gurion Airport heading to Uman, bringing weekly arrests to 70, highlighting conscription tensions.
- **Haredi protest violence:** Outside Prison 10, Haredi protesters assaulted IDF soldiers with pepper spray and stones during draft dodger transport. One conscript escaped after jumping from the vehicle.
- **Regional instability warning:** Arab sources warn of major shifts before October, citing Lebanon fragility, Iranian unrest, Houthi threats, and Syrian weakness, indicating climbing regional volatility.
- **Poland requests NATO nukes:** Poland requested NATO nuclear-capable missile deployment after repeated Russian drone strikes. The alliance approved, escalating NATO-Russia confrontation stakes.

HAMAS faces pressure from both the IDF and Gaza's internal clan opposition alongside weary civilian populations. Israeli communities devastated by October 7 continue returning and rebuilding. Internationally, allies and adversaries are recalibrating strategic positions affecting the war's next phase.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Uriel Zehavi

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR · MITZPE INSTITUTE

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.



ABOUT MITZPE INSTITUTE

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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