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READER EDITION

March 19, 2026

ISRAEL BRIEF

Thursday, March 19

Israel kills Iran's de facto leader and strikes South Pars — then Trump tells Jerusalem to stop. The war enters the phase where escalation constrains allies faster than enemies.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVER

THE BOTTOM LINE Ashab Al Yamin's operational pattern — three countries, one week, no prior footprint, immediate IRGC-linked distribution — fits Iran's documented playbook for deniable strikes on Jewish targets abroad. The name may be new; the template is not. European Jewish communities face a threat that is coordinated, kinetic, and directly linked to the current war. The UK prosecution data puts numbers on what Jewish communities already know. The criminal justice system treats Jew-hate as a lower enforcement priority than "Islamophobia," despite Jews being targeted at ten times the per-capita rate. When the former head of Tell Mama — a Muslim hate-crime monitoring organization — warns that new definitions will make the disparity worse, the diagnosis is conclusive. The campus poll is the generational pipeline: one in five students wouldn't live with a Jew, and one in ten doesn't recognize Holocaust denial as antisemitic. Welcome to mainstream British higher education.

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BODY

Shalom, friends.

WE'VE been off since Monday, and the war did not wait. Buckle up — this is a long one. In the past three days, Israel eliminated the man running Iran's war, struck the Caspian corridor feeding Russian weapons to Tehran, hit South Pars gas infrastructure for the first time, expanded ground operations across southern Lebanon, and received an unprecedented kill-chain directive removing the political echelon from the targeting loop. The Gulf states that opposed this war two weeks ago are now privately begging Washington not to stop. NATO allies are doing the opposite. And inside Israel, the coalition is running a budget crisis and a Kotel fight as a multi-front war rages on — with twelve days until the government falls if the math doesn't hold. Here's where it stands.

Flash Brief

- **Larijani killed:** IAF eliminated Iran's de facto leader, his son, deputy, Intelligence Minister Khatib, and Basij commander Soleimani in 48 hours.
- **Caspian corridor struck:** IDF hit Iranian Navy vessels at Bandar Anzali — first Israeli strike on the Iran-Russia supply lifeline.
- **South Pars escalation:** Israel struck Iran's largest gas facility; Iran retaliated against Qatar's Ras Laffan; Trump warned both sides to stop.
- **Kill-chain unlocked:** Netanyahu and Katz authorized IDF and Mossad to eliminate senior targets without awaiting political approval — a first.
- **Lebanon ground push:** Three divisions expanding south of the Litani; IDF destroyed key bridges cutting Hezbollah's resupply routes.
- **Defense budget surges:** Demand hits NIS 177 billion; Knesset advances deficit hike 53-45; March 31 budget deadline looms.
- **Western Wall bill advances:** Coalition moves to criminalize non-Orthodox prayer at the Kotel — during a time in which Diaspora synagogues are under physical attack.
- **Gulf states pivot:** Arab capitals now urging Washington to finish degrading Iran; Israeli interception expertise confirmed in use across the Gulf.
- **European Jews targeted:** Coordinated synagogue bombings in Netherlands and Belgium by an IRGC-linked front group; UK prosecution data reveals Jews half as likely to see charges.

The War Today

ISRAEL STRIKES IRAN'S CASPIAN LIFELINE, KILLS REGIME'S DE FACTO LEADER, AND HITS SOUTH PARS GAS INFRASTRUCTURE

IAF jets — guided by Navy and Military Intelligence — struck Iranian Navy vessels at Bandar Anzali on the Caspian Sea, the first Israeli strikes in northern Iran since Operation Roaring Lion began. Bandar Anzali is the main base

of Iran's northern naval fleet and the hub of the Iran–Russia maritime smuggling corridor — used to transfer drones, missiles, mortar shells, and ammunition between Iranian ports (Anzali, Amirabad) and the Russian port of Astrakhan, with ships routinely switching off tracking systems. The corridor now operates in reverse: Russia is supplying Iran with the Geran-2, an upgraded version of the Shahed drone equipped with improved navigation, communications, and targeting systems refined through Russia's war in Ukraine, along with intelligence on U.S. force positions in the region. Ukraine has previously struck targets along this route — hitting Kaspiysk port in Dagestan in November 2024 and partially sinking a Russian cargo ship carrying Iranian drone components in August 2025 — but this marks the first Israeli hit on the supply line.

On Tuesday night, IAF strikes killed Ali Larijani, head of Iran's Supreme National Security Council and the regime's de facto operational leader since Mojtaba Khamenei's injury on the war's first day. Larijani's son and deputy were killed in the same strike. Also eliminated: Gholamreza Soleimani, commander of the paramilitary Basij forces for six years. Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib, who oversaw internal repression during the Mahsa Amini protests and directed terrorist operations against Israeli and American targets during the current war. And the third consecutive commander of Hezbollah's Imam Hussein Division, Hassan Ali Marwan, killed in Beirut. Netanyahu and Katz have since issued an unprecedented directive granting the IDF and Mossad pre-authorization to eliminate any senior Iranian or Hezbollah figure upon identification, without awaiting political-echelon approval — a first in Israeli operational history. "From the moment the information comes in, you have to move quickly," a senior official said. "There is no time to wait for approvals." Israeli officials described Larijani as behaving like a hunted man — never staying in one location, maintaining extreme security awareness — before a combination of intelligence capabilities and rapid political decision-making put aircraft in the air on short notice.

The IAF struck Iran's largest gas processing facility in Bushehr Province, targeting infrastructure tied to the South Pars offshore gas field — the first Israeli strike on Iranian economic infrastructure. The strike halted gas flow from Iran to Iraq entirely. An Israeli official described it as "the promised escalation." The U.S. confirmed the strikes were coordinated with the Trump administration. Oil prices surged to \$108 per barrel. Iran retaliated Wednesday by firing missiles at Qatar's Ras Laffan Industrial City — responsible for roughly 20% of global LNG supply — claiming the strike was retaliation for an alleged Israeli attack on Iran's portion of the same field. Israel has not taken credit for that initial strike. Qatar expelled Iran's military and security attachés, giving them 24 hours to leave. Trump responded on Truth Social, distancing the U.S. from the South Pars strike — "The United States knew nothing about this particular attack" — and warned both sides: Israel would make "NO MORE ATTACKS" on South Pars, while Iran was told that any further strike on Qatar's LNG would trigger the U.S. to "massively blow up the entirety of the South Pars Gas Field."

The Iron Beam — Israel's new laser air defense system — is active and conducting live interceptions in northern Israel, a significant operational milestone. Iranian ballistic missile fire continued, with multiple salvos hitting central and southern Israel over the past two days, including cluster munitions that killed two civilians in Ramat Gan, a foreign worker in Adanim, and injured three — including two children — in Petah Tikva. Three private planes at Ben Gurion Airport were damaged; El Al canceled flights for another week ahead of Passover, affecting 25,000 tickets.

ASSESSMENT

Three strikes redraw the map of this war. Bandar Anzali puts the Iran–Russia supply corridor under direct Israeli fire for the first time — and the message is aimed as much at Moscow as at Tehran. Russia cannot resupply Iran through the Caspian without accepting Israeli targeting of the route. The Larijani elimination, combined with Khatib and Soleimani, collapses the regime's operational chain of command below the Supreme Leader — a Supreme Leader who has not appeared on video since the war began and whose physical condition remains unknown. Against that, Israel's political echelon has effectively removed itself as a bottleneck in the kill chain, accepting that the intelligence tempo now exceeds its typical decision cycle. The South Pars strike is the most consequential escalation yet — not because of the gas infrastructure itself, but because of the chain reaction it triggered. Iran's retaliation against Qatar's LNG — a non-belligerent, hosting U.S. forces — drove Trump to publicly distance himself from Israel and issue an ultimatum to both sides. That ultimatum constrains Israeli freedom of action while simultaneously binding the U.S. to "massive" retaliation if Iran touches Qatari infrastructure again.

LEBANON GROUND OPERATION EXPANDS AS IDF CUTS HEZBOLLAH'S LIFE-LINES

The 91st "Galilee" Division, 36th Division, 146th Reserve Division, and 401st Armored Brigade are conducting expanded ground operations in southern Lebanon. The 91st Division pushed into the eastern sector. The 36th Division has deepened operations toward additional objectives in recent days, killing dozens of Hezbollah operatives and dismantling over 80 infrastructure sites. The 300th "Baram" Brigade demolished another 80-plus sites separately. The IDF struck and dismantled two crossings over the Litani River, along with the Zrariyeh, Khardali, and Qasmiyeh bridges — all key Hezbollah logistics arteries connecting southern Lebanon to resupply zones north of the Litani. Several of these bridges were last struck during the 2006 Second Lebanon War and subsequently rebuilt. Lebanese media aligned with Hezbollah acknowledged the strikes are isolating the operational area between the border and the Litani into a "semi-isolated zone." The IDF also struck Hezbollah financial infrastructure — Al-Quard al-Hassan Association assets in Beirut and Hezbollah-owned Al-Amana Fuel Company gas stations in the south, which funnels millions in profit to fund Hezbollah operations.

Defense Minister Katz said displaced Lebanese south of the Litani will not return until northern Israeli residents' safety is guaranteed, comparing the operation to the IDF's approach in Rafah, Beit Hanoun, and Gaza's tunnel networks. He told Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem that if he misses Nasrallah and Khamenei, "he will soon be able to meet them in the depths of hell."

Hezbollah is averaging roughly 150 rockets per day, with roughly two-thirds targeting IDF forces in southern Lebanon and one-third aimed at Israeli territory. One of those barrages hit Nahariya — six wounded including four minors — and a separate impact near Kabri wounded one. On Tuesday evening, Hezbollah fired rockets reaching as far as Ashkelon and Gaza-border communities — approximately 200 km from Lebanon, the first time Hezbollah has targeted that far south. The IDF disrupted more than half of a planned barrage, with Hezbollah firing roughly 40 rockets instead of the intended 100-plus.

Qassem issued a written statement read on Al-Mayadeen — not delivered in his own voice — telling fighters their “jihad has spread far and wide.” Hezbollah leadership also warned Lebanon’s government against negotiating directly with Israel, calling any such talks liable to have “consequences.” The Israeli security cabinet stated negotiations are “no longer an option.” The U.S. explored whether Syria might send forces into Lebanon to counter Hezbollah; Damascus declined.

ASSESSMENT

Cutting Litani crossings does what a buffer zone alone cannot — it denies Hezbollah the ability to rotate forces, resupply launchers, or reinforce southern cells from the north. Hezbollah’s rocket tempo is sustained but declining in intensity per barrage, and the organization is decentralizing its launcher network — smaller, dispersed cells replacing concentrated salvos. That complicates Israeli targeting but also reduces Hezbollah’s ability to deliver the kind of mass attack that generates pressure. Qassem’s written-only message — no audio, no video — is Hezbollah’s version of Mojtaba Khamenei’s silence. The organization’s top surviving leader cannot or will not appear on camera. Hezbollah sees diplomatic engagement as a greater threat than the ground operation, because a deal that empowers the Lebanese state is the one outcome the organization cannot survive.

Inside Israel

DEFENSE BUDGET SURGES TO NIS 177 BILLION AS KNESSET ADVANCES DEFICIT HIKE

The defense establishment has raised its budget demand to NIS 177 billion in closed discussions with Netanyahu — up from NIS 144 billion and more than double the NIS 65 billion gap between the December-approved NIS 112 billion and current requirements. The Knesset voted 53–45 early Tuesday to advance Smotrich’s bill raising the deficit ceiling to 5.1% of GDP (from 3.9%), increasing the legal expenditure cap by NIS 32 billion, and creating a NIS 7 billion contingency war reserve. The government estimates every day of fighting costs NIS 1.5 billion in military expenditure alone. The IDF is dropping about 1,000 munitions daily, some 150 aircraft accumulating heavy hours over Iran, and nearly 100,000 reservists are on active duty — up from 60,000 at the war’s outset and far above the 40,000 the December budget assumed. The Finance Ministry estimates the total war economic cost could reach NIS 50 billion. Credit card purchases dropped 19% in the first ten days (though much of Israel was closed during that time). The education system remains closed across most of the country, costing some NIS 1.2 billion per

week. Shuttered economic sectors cost NIS 2.4 billion per week. Reserve mobilization costs NIS 660 million per week. The Bank of Israel considers the Finance Ministry's revised 4.7% growth forecast over optimistic. The debt-to-GDP ratio is expected to rise from 68.5% to 70%.

Shas and UTJ initially threatened to vote against the deficit bill. Both ultimately voted in favor except for UTJ chairman Yitzhak Goldknopf and MK Ya'akov Tessler. The coalition simultaneously approved over NIS 5 billion in discretionary funds for Haredi institutions, Judea and Samaria communities, and party priorities — but those allocations have not cleared legal review, creating the leverage the Haredi parties used as pressure. The draft exemption bill has been shelved “for unity.” The 2026 budget must pass its second and third readings by March 31 or the government falls automatically.

ASSESSMENT

The NIS 177 billion demand is the number that tells you where the defense establishment thinks this war is heading — not three weeks but six or more, with a full-scale Lebanon operation running concurrently. The budget arithmetic is operating on a continuation basis that structurally cannot hold. The government is spending at wartime rates under a one-twelfth monthly cap, patching gaps with emergency supplements that require Knesset votes the coalition can barely win. The Haredi parties' leverage — vote for the deficit hike or we kill the budget and trigger elections — is the inverse of unity. They are using the war as a window to lock in NIS 5 billion in coalition funds before the legal review catches up. The March 31 deadline is a political grenade with the pin half-pulled. If the Haredi allocation fails legal review and UTJ or Shas defects on the budget's final reading, the government collapses — not because of the war, but because of a yeshiva funding dispute conducted under the cover of one with people who'd rather assault cops and riot than fight in Israel's defense. Pathetic.

COURT FORCES BEN GVIR'S HAND ON POLICE PROMOTION; NETANYAHU CHALLENGES ELECTIONS COMMITTEE ADVISER

Jerusalem District Court Judge David Gidoni gave Ben Gvir five days to sign off on the promotion of Superintendent Rinat Saban — a police investigator whose promotion he has blocked for a year because of her role in Netanyahu's corruption trial. If Ben Gvir does not comply by Monday, Saban will be promoted by judicial decision regardless, and Ben Gvir was fined NIS 2,500 for the contempt motion. Ben Gvir admitted he blocked the promotion over Saban's involvement in what he called an illegal investigation of the prime minister. Separately, Netanyahu twice attempted to halt the Central Elections Committee's appointment of a new legal adviser — attorney Yifat Siminovski, an Intel executive with National Cyber Directorate experience. Both attempts were rejected by committee chairman Deputy Supreme Court President Noam Sohlberg who told Netanyahu's attorney Ilan Bombach his claims were “baseless” and asked whether he had “even read Siminovski's CV.” The committee emphasized her AI and cyber expertise amid rising concern about generative AI's impact on the October Knesset election.

ASSESSMENT

Two institutional confrontations, one pattern. That is the judiciary encroaching on the executive branch without formal legal basis. Regardless of one's own opinion on those two matters (and the many others at issue overall), it is the proper function of the executive branch rather than that of the legal guild. Regardless of outcome, it is everyday Israelis who will pay the price for the consequences of the feuding parts of its government.

WESTERN WALL BILL ADVANCES, HANDING ORTHODOXY VETO POWER OVER PLURALISTIC PRAYER

The Knesset House Committee voted to send MK Avi Maoz's bill expanding Orthodox control over the Western Wall Plaza to the Constitution, Law and Justice Committee — chaired by Religious Zionism's Simcha Rothman. The bill would give the two chief rabbis ultimate authority over all Jewish holy sites including the egalitarian plaza, define any activity contrary to their instructions — including non-Orthodox worship — as “desecration,” and attach a seven-year prison penalty. The bill is designed to undercut a recent High Court ruling requiring the state to upgrade the egalitarian plaza under the decade-old Western Wall Compromise agreed to by Netanyahu's government.

The preliminary reading passed 56–47 last month. Netanyahu canceled a Ministerial Committee meeting to avoid formally backing the bill, then allowed a free coalition vote. Several Likud MKs, including Yuli Edelstein and Knesset Speaker Amir Ohana, skipped the vote. The Israeli Movement for Progressive Judaism called it a move that “defines citizens as second-class Jews.” Women of the Wall said advancing the bill during wartime — “when millions of Israeli citizens are in safe rooms” — was beyond belief. The Democrats' MK Gilad Kariv noted the bill advanced days after the Temple Israel synagogue attack in Michigan. Former Diaspora Minister Nachman Shai sarcastically asked who said the government doesn't identify with Diaspora Jews.

ASSESSMENT

The coalition is advancing a bill that criminalizes non-Orthodox prayer at Judaism's holiest accessible site — during a time in which Diaspora Jews are facing coordinated physical attacks for being Jewish. The strategic incoherence is total. Israel needs Diaspora political support, financial solidarity, and grassroots advocacy at exactly the moment this legislation tells the majority of world Jewry that their Judaism is a criminal act at the Kotel. Maoz gets his ideological prize. Rothman gets committee jurisdiction. The Haredi parties get another institutional win. And the cost is exported to every Jewish community leader trying to rally non-Orthodox congregations behind Israel while rockets fall. Netanyahu's maneuvering — canceling the committee vote, allowing a free vote, having senior Likud figures vanish — tells you he knows the optics are toxic. He advanced it anyway. The bill may not survive committee; the damage to Diaspora relations already has.

Israel and the World

GULF STATES PIVOT FROM OPPOSITION TO URGENCY — PRESS U.S. TO FINISH THE JOB ON IRAN

Gulf Arab states that initially opposed the war are now privately urging Washington not to stop short of comprehensively degrading Iran's military capacity. "At first we defended them and opposed the war," said Abdulaziz Sager, chairman of the Saudi-based Gulf Research Center. "But once they began directing strikes at us, they became an enemy." Iran has attacked airports, ports, oil facilities, and commercial hubs across all six GCC states with missiles and drones. The prevailing mood among Gulf leaders is that Trump should fully degrade Iran's offensive capability, because the alternative is living under permanent threat. "If the Americans pull out before the task is complete, we'll be left to confront Iran on our own," Sager said.

Israel's Ambassador to the U.S. Yechiel Leiter confirmed that certain Gulf states are actively using Israeli expertise in drone and missile interception against Iranian fire, saying Israel "extended our help to all the Gulf countries interested in receiving it." Gulf sources say their reluctance to claim public action stems from fear about "the day after" — the possibility that the regime survives and Gulf states must resume relations with Tehran. UAE presidential adviser Anwar Gargash said that Iran "made a mistake when it attacked the UAE and other countries in the Persian Gulf — it brings them closer to Israel and the United States." He added that countries with Israel relations will see them deepen, and countries without them should expect "additional channels to open."

Simultaneously, European allies rebuffed Trump's request for Strait of Hormuz support. Germany's defense minister asked what "a handful of European frigates" could accomplish that the U.S. Navy could not. Spain, Italy, Greece, and Germany declined. Britain and Denmark signaled vague willingness to explore options. The EU is discussing whether to extend the mandate of its Aspides Red Sea mission to include the Strait. Trump responded that NATO "has always been a one-way street" and declared the U.S. does not need allied help. He also mused about simply abandoning Hormuz to the countries that depend on it. Estonia was the sole European state to unequivocally offer support.

Meanwhile, Iraq reached a deal to resume oil exports via the Kurdistan Region's pipeline to Turkey, brokered by U.S. Ambassador Tom Barrack — a critical workaround as Iraq's exports collapsed from 3.2 million barrels per day to roughly 10,000 via tanker to Jordan. The Kurdistan Region agreed to open the pipeline in exchange for renewed U.S. pressure on Baghdad to lift its trade embargo on the territory.

ASSESSMENT

The Gulf pivot is the most important strategic development outside the kinetic arena. States that spent the first week distancing themselves from the war are now telling Washington the worst outcome would be stopping too soon. Iran demonstrated it can reach every Gulf capital with missiles and drones, and every Gulf leader now fears that a surviving Islamic Republic with residual offensive capability will hold the region hostage indefinitely. The Israeli interception assistance is the operational expression of normalization that diplomats spent years negotiating on paper. Gargash's comment about "additional channels" opening is as close to a public invitation for new Abraham Accords relationships as any UAE official has made. The Iraq-Kurdistan pipeline deal is a small but telling indicator. When Hormuz closes, the geography of Middle Eastern oil reroutes through actors — Kurds, Turks — whose leverage increases with every day the Strait stays shut.

COORDINATED ATTACKS ON EUROPEAN JEWISH INSTITUTIONS ESCALATE; UK PROSECUTION GAP WIDENS

A bomb struck a Jewish school in Amsterdam late Friday — the second attack on a Dutch Jewish institution in two days, following an arson attack on a Rotterdam synagogue Thursday. There were no injuries in either incident. A previously unknown group calling itself Ashab Al Yamin (Islamic Movement of the Companions of the Right) claimed responsibility for both attacks and a synagogue bombing in Belgium earlier in the week. The group's videos first appeared on Shiite axis Telegram channels associated with Hezbollah and the IRGC; its logo matches the design template of Iranian proxy organizations. Amsterdam Mayor Femke Halsema condemned the attack; Dutch PM Rob Wetten said "there must be no place for antisemitism" in the Netherlands. The Dutch House of Representatives adopted a PVV motion — proposed by Geert Wilders — to ban the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliated organizations, the first time such a motion has succeeded. It passed with 76 votes. The motion is politically powerful but does not automatically become law; it requires government follow-through, a legal assessment, and a court ruling under Article 2:20 of the Dutch Civil Code.

Separately, UK Home Office data obtained under freedom of information laws revealed that hate crimes targeting Jews are prosecuted at roughly half the rate of those targeting Muslims — 3.8% versus 6.7% resulting in a charge or summons. Jews are nearly ten times more likely than Muslims to be victims of religious hate crime per capita: 106 incidents per 10,000 Jews versus 12 per 10,000 Muslims. The Community Security Trust said the figures raise "serious questions about consistency in the criminal justice response." Former Attorney General Sir Michael Ellis said two years of allowing hate to go "largely unchecked inevitably leads to violence, just as we saw with the Manchester synagogue attack." Tell Mama founder Fiyaz Mughal rightly warned that a new anti-Muslim hatred definition could cause authorities to "focus even more on crimes against Muslims at the expense of others."

A UJS campus poll found one in five UK students would not want a Jew as a roommate. One in ten did not regard Holocaust denial as antisemitic. MPs from Labour, the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, and Reform UK called

for stronger oversight and, in extreme cases, revocation of degree-awarding powers for universities that fail to protect Jewish students.

ASSESSMENT

Ashab Al Yamin's operational pattern — three countries, one week, no prior footprint, immediate IRGC-linked distribution — fits Iran's documented playbook for deniable strikes on Jewish targets abroad. The name may be new; the template is not. European Jewish communities face a threat that is coordinated, kinetic, and directly linked to the current war. The UK prosecution data puts numbers on what Jewish communities already know. The criminal justice system treats Jew-hate as a lower enforcement priority than "Islamophobia," despite Jews being targeted at ten times the per-capita rate. When the former head of Tell Mama — a Muslim hate-crime monitoring organization — warns that new definitions will make the disparity worse, the diagnosis is conclusive. The campus poll is the generational pipeline: one in five students wouldn't live with a Jew, and one in ten doesn't recognize Holocaust denial as antisemitic. Welcome to mainstream British higher education.

Briefly Noted

FRONTLINE & SECURITY

- **JNS:** Hamas confirmed that Wissam Taha, killed in an IDF strike in Sidon, was a Hamas official — despite presenting himself internationally as a fundraiser for “sustainable development” NGOs. His brother Jihad Taha is Hamas's international spokesperson in Lebanon and, per UN Watch, “close to UNRWA.”
- **JNS:** The IDF killed a seven-member Hamas cell planning to attack troops in Gaza, including two Nukhba Force operatives who infiltrated Israeli territory on October 7. Separately, Trump's Board of Peace met Hamas representatives in Cairo to preserve the “ceasefire.” Hamas warned it could renege on commitments if Israel maintains wartime restrictions on Gaza, and Jerusalem subsequently announced plans to reopen the sole pedestrian crossing to Egypt.

DIPLOMACY & GEOPOLITICS

- **Ynet:** Israeli ambassadors worldwide are living under the strictest security restrictions in the Foreign Ministry's history — some confined to safe houses, barred from leaving without security approval, unable even to buy groceries unsupervised. The ministry divided all missions into four operating tiers: 65 open at half capacity, 12 at 30%, 10 open three days a week, and 12 operating entirely from diplomats' homes. Iran's activation of sleeper cells and the wave of attacks on Jewish institutions have made what was already elevated into existential for diplomatic families — children cannot go to playgrounds, and some ambassadors have been evacuated from their host countries entirely.
- **Ynet:** Egypt's Suez Canal revenue collapsed 61% year-over-year — from \$10.25 billion in 2023 to \$3.99 billion in 2024 — as the Houthi blockade of Bab el-Mandeb exposed Cairo's inability to secure its own economic artery. Egypt simultaneously purchased 20 emergency LNG cargoes on the spot market after the Zohr field's depletion left its “energy hub” dependent on

Israeli gas imports from Tamar and Leviathan just to avoid rolling black-outs.

CULTURE, RELIGION & SOCIETY

- **Times of Israel:** Israel ranked 8th in the World Happiness Report for the second consecutive year despite the war — with Israelis under 25 ranked third happiest globally, a sharp contrast to American youth at 60th. The flip side: worry, sadness, and anger metrics worsened from 119th to 39th, and depression rates jumped from 25.5% to 33.9% between 2023 and 2024.
- **Times of Israel:** Polymarket gamblers threatened Times of Israel military correspondent Emanuel Fabian with death, offered bribes, fabricated email screenshots, and referenced his family's home address — all to pressure him into changing a report about an Iranian missile impact in Beit Shemesh, because more than \$14 million in bets depended on whether a missile had struck Israel on March 10. Fabian filed a police complaint. Polymarket banned the accounts but did not answer questions about whether it can prevent recurrence.
- **JNS:** Jewish undergraduate enrollment at Harvard dropped to approximately 7% in 2025 — its lowest since before World War II and less than a third of the late-20th-century average. The Harvard Jewish Alumni Alliance tested standard explanations (geographic diversification, financial aid expansion, international growth) and found none accounts for the sharper decline at Harvard relative to peers. Rep. Elise Stefanik: "I strongly believe the anti-semitism does not just impact students on campus at Harvard; it shapes admission."
- **Times of Israel:** Researchers using satellite imagery and AI identified 28 large circular stone structures within 25 km of Rujm el-Hiri in the Golan — all sharing the same architectural logic as the site long considered unique. The discovery reframes "Israel's Stonehenge" as one node in a regional network built 5,000–6,500 years ago, likely for seasonal nomadic gatherings rather than astronomical observation.
- **Times of Israel:** Jerusalemites are sheltering from Iranian missiles in Ottoman-era basements, Barclays Bank vaults built in 1930 — once used to store Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie's gold — and a 1,500-year-old Byzantine cistern beneath the Old City. With roughly 10,000 buildings predating 1948 and no standard safe rooms, the city's residents improvise with whatever the layers of history left them.

Developments to Watch

NORTHERN FRONT (LEBANON / SYRIA)

- **Hezbollah reaches Ashkelon for the first time** — Rockets from Lebanon triggered sirens in Gaza-border communities roughly 200 km south, the deepest Hezbollah has ever fired. The IDF assessed the barrage as limited — a few projectiles, intercepted or landing in open areas — but the range extension changes the calculus for southern municipalities that assumed distance was protection.

- **U.S. pushed Syria to deploy forces into Lebanon** — Washington explored whether Damascus would send troops to counter Hezbollah; Syria declined, citing escalation fears and sectarian risk. The al-Sharaa's government has zero appetite for becoming Iran's next target—especially as its jihadist ideology remains firmly baked-in.

GAZA & SOUTHERN THEATER

- **Hamas warns it may renege on ceasefire** — Hamas told Trump's Board of Peace in Cairo that it could abandon prior commitments if Israel maintains wartime restrictions on Gaza. Israel's subsequent announcement re-opening the pedestrian crossing to Egypt suggests the threat carried weight — which means Hamas retains operational leverage over the terms of a deal it is nominally bound by but does not respect.

REGIONAL AXIS (IRAN, HOUTHIS, MILITIAS)

- **Russia expanding military support to Iran** — Moscow is providing satellite intelligence, improved drone technology, and tactical advice based on Ukraine experience. Russia benefits from prolonged conflict through elevated oil prices and reduced Western focus on Ukraine — every week this war continues is a week Kyiv loses attention.
- **Mohsen Rezaei appointed Khamenei military adviser** — Mojtaba Khamenei named the former longtime IRGC commander as his military adviser — the first personnel appointment by a Supreme Leader who still has not appeared on video. Whether this reflects operational decision-making capacity or a regime generating the appearance of it remains the central intelligence question.
- **Kataib Hezbollah spokesman killed; drone hits Baghdad Green Zone** — Abu Ali al-Askari, one of the most prominent Iran-backed militia figures in Iraq, was killed in a U.S. strike. Separately, a drone struck the Royal Tulip Al Rasheed Hotel in Baghdad's Green Zone — housing the EU Advisory Mission — expanding the war's footprint into Iraq's diplomatic infrastructure.

HOME FRONT & POLITICS

- **March 31 budget deadline: 12 days** — The 2026 budget must pass second and third readings or the government falls automatically. The NIS 5 billion Haredi allocation has not cleared legal review. If it doesn't, UTJ has already demonstrated willingness to defect. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**

Iran's regime cannot show its Supreme Leader, cannot keep a successor alive for a full week in the command chair, and is firing cluster munitions at Israeli children because it has nothing left that can reach a military target. Three civilians are dead in central Israel. A foreign worker bled out from shrapnel in Adanim. Flights are grounded before Passover. And the coalition is spending the war's political capital on yeshiva funding and a bill that could jail a Conservative rabbi for davening at the Kotel. Twelve days until the budget deadline. At least another month of fighting. The regime in Tehran is breaking apart from the top down — and the question is whether Jerusalem can keep its own house together long enough to collect.

Shabbat shalom!

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