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READER EDITION

April 16, 2026

ISRAEL BRIEF

Thursday, April 16

The IDF finishes Bint Jbeil as the cabinet considers capping the operation. Hamas, Tehran, and Luxembourg spend the week it bought them.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

THE BOTTOM LINE The Le Pen meeting is part of a two-year Sa'ar project to re-sort Israel's European relationships against actual strategic reality rather than inherited Cold War taboos. The French far-right has been more reliably pro-Israel than the French far-left for a decade and more reliably pro-Israel than Macron's current coalition for the duration of this war. The historical concerns — Nazi legacies, antisemitic elements, Holocaust ambiguity — are real and in several cases still present, which is exactly why Sa'ar kept the AfD and the Austrian Freedom Party outside the tent. Sweden Democrats, Vox, and RN cleared the four criteria, and they are three of the most functional pro-Israel voices remaining in European legislative politics. Paris lost the privileged access it held through a century of colonial-residual ties to Lebanon the moment Macron made Israel's Lebanese operations a stick to beat his domestic opposition with, and the U.S. picking up those lines leaves France with neither the economic leverage it once had nor the diplomatic standing it thought it did. [The French Foreign Ministry will not publicly admit it, but this week's sidelining is a measure of how little Paris has left to offer that Washington and Jerusalem both want.] Le Pen's July court ruling is the remaining variable. If she is barred from running in 2027, RN's internal succession — Jordan Bardella is the named successor, has spoken in Israel at an antisemitism conference, and is more tactically pro-Israel than Le Pen herself — means the Israeli relationship survives the founder. That is a measure of the project Sa'ar has been quietly running, and of the maturity of RN's current generation of leaders, which can be criticized on many fronts but no longer plausibly mistaken for the Front National of Jean-Marie Le Pen.

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Reader Edition

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THE battlefield has moved faster this week than the table negotiating over it. Bint Jbeil has been cleared, the Litani is a designated killing zone, and the cabinet sat Wednesday night to discuss capping Silver Plow at seven days under Washington's pressure. Tehran has bought an "in principle" truce extension. Hamas has formally rejected the disarmament framework. Forty Senate Democrats voted to block arms sales. And Brussels is lining up sanctions for next week's Luxembourg meeting. The operational track did its job — everyone else is spending the time it bought.

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Flash Brief

- **Bint Jbeil cleared:** IDF demolishes 70 terror sites in one minute as the cabinet weighs a one-week U.S. truce proposal. *See The War Today.*
- **Iran truce extended ‘in principle’:** Treasury hits Shamkhani’s son; U.S. blockade passes 48 hours with not a single ship through. *See The War Today.*
- **Hamas rejects BoP disarmament framework:** Senior leadership relocates from Qatar to Turkey; bereaved families demand decisive military action. *See The War Today.*
- **Ben-Gvir survives the hearing:** Nine justices decline to fire him but engineer a framework to constrain the minister. *See Inside Israel.*
- **Three Jewish communities demolished overnight:** Civil Administration razes Metzad, Beit Anot, and Kol Mevaser during Yom HaShoah week. *See Inside Israel.*
- **Ben-Gvir climbs to 10 seats:** Smotrich again below threshold as the Reservists Party launches against Haredi and Arab parties. *See Inside Israel.*
- **40 Senate Democrats vote to block arms sales:** Every rumored 2028 candidate supports both Sanders resolutions; the Iran war cited as cover. *See Israel and the World.*
- **EU sanctions revive post-Orban:** Foreign ministers meet April 21 in Luxembourg; Tisza expected to reverse ICC withdrawal before June 2. *See Israel and the World.*
- **Zarka meets Le Pen quietly:** Leiter publicly cuts Paris from Lebanon talks — “not a positive influence.” *See Israel and the World.*

BELOW: why the cabinet’s “no choice” framing is the messaging of a decision already mostly made, what the Shamkhani designation says about what Treasury already knows about the IRGC’s bloodlines, and the forty Senate Democrats who could not find their way to voting for bulldozers.

The day’s pattern is the gap between what the people closest to the fight know and what the institutions acting on their behalf will admit. The bereaved families know Hamas won’t disarm. The 162nd Division knows the Litani is not a seven-day job. And the residents of three demolished hilltops know those were the ones the state promised the IDF it would regularize. The cabinet is instead managing a Trump timeline, an AG running a political project in legal packaging, and a Western alliance whose center of gravity is shifting under everyone simultaneously. Security is the one thing Israel cannot afford to lose — the rest are preferences dressed up as commitments.

The War Today

Bint Jbeil Finishes as the Cabinet Weighs U.S. Pressure for a One-Week Truce

IDF Egoz operators raided a Hezbollah combat compound in Bint Jbeil on Wednesday, eliminating dozens of terrorists and soldiers demolishing approximately 70 terror infrastructure sites in a single minute. The IDF has laid

three threshold conditions before the political echelon as the basis for any arrangement: A sterile buffer zone south of the Litani free of Hezbollah operatives and infrastructure. Full IDF operational freedom across Lebanon, including north of the Litani. And a U.S.-led, internationally-supervised mechanism to disarm Hezbollah over the long term. Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir designated the area up to the Litani a “killing zone for Hezbollah terrorists” during a Wednesday visit to the 162nd Division in Beit Lif, approved new battle plans for both Lebanon and Iran, and stated that aircraft are armed and targets loaded for immediate large-scale strikes. Five IDF soldiers were wounded, one seriously, in Hezbollah rocket fire Wednesday. Netanyahu’s security cabinet convened Wednesday night to discuss a one-week truce that Washington has pressed through envoy Steve Witkoff, and the meeting ended without a decision. A senior Israeli political source says “within a few days, we will have no choice but to fully cease fire in Lebanon.” The U.S. publicly denied pressuring Israel, with a senior U.S. official stating that a truce is “not something we have asked for.” Hezbollah official Ibrahim al-Moussawi told Reuters that Iran’s Hormuz blockade had produced the diplomatic window.

ASSESSMENT

The IDF cleared 70 sites in one push, published its conditions in a newspaper, and let Zamir call the Litani a killing zone. The cabinet then sat Wednesday night to discuss capping the operation at seven days. There is a clear gap between the battlefield and the political track, and Washington produced it. Whether or not they want to be seen as having constructed it. Iran played Hormuz as the lever, and the truce reportedly on the table is calibrated to Tehran’s April 22 clock, not to Hezbollah’s battlefield position. A week-long halt aligned with the Iran framework lets Hezbollah preserve what remains of its leadership, gives the regime a diplomatic wedge, and lets Beirut open the State Department talks without committing to disarmament. The IDF’s three-condition publication is the General Staff telling the cabinet, on the record, what the operational minimum looks like. [A seven-day pause is not that.] The “no choice” framing from the senior political source is the political echelon beginning to message a decision already mostly made.

Truce Extension Reaches “In Principle” as Blockade, Sanctions, and Pakistan Converge

U.S. and Iranian negotiators reached an “in principle” agreement to extend the truce beyond the current two-week window, with a second Islamabad round expected this weekend. A U.S. official noted no formal agreement has been approved. Washington’s red lines in further talks remain full enrichment cessation, dismantlement of major enrichment facilities, recovery of highly enriched uranium, reopened Strait of Hormuz without tolls, a broader peace covering regional proxies, and an end to Iranian support for Hezbollah and the Houthis. Trump told Fox’s Maria Bartiromo that the Iran war was “very close to over” and added that “if they’re going to have a nuclear weapon, we’ll be living with them for a little while. But I don’t know how much longer they can survive.” The U.S. Treasury sanctioned Iranian oil magnate Mohammad Hossein Shamkhani — son of Ali Shamkhani, killed in the

February 28 U.S.-Israeli strikes on Tehran — along with ten UAE-based companies, Panama- and Cameroon-flagged vessels, and ship managers in the Marshall Islands and India. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent sent warning letters to two Chinese banks suspected of facilitating Iranian sanctions evasion and announced designations on Hezbollah financier Seyed Naiemaei Badroddin Moosavi and three companies laundering oil proceeds through Venezuelan gold. The U.S. naval blockade of Iranian ports has passed 48 hours without a single ship transiting through. Pakistani Army Chief Asim Munir traveled to Iran to carry a U.S. message and coordinate the next Islamabad round. Iran's Major General Ali Abdollahi threatened that Iran "will not allow any exports or imports in the Gulf and the Sea of Oman if the American blockade continues" and called a sustained blockade "a prelude to a violation of the ceasefire." The Pentagon is sending thousands of additional U.S. troops to the region.

ASSESSMENT

The "in principle" extension is Tehran buying time against a fiscal wall Pezeshkian put at three-to-four weeks from late March. The regime has no arrangement that solves both the blockade and the domestic revenue crunch by April 22. Trump's architecture — blockade, Shamkhani sanctions, Chinese-bank warnings, Pakistani courier, troop surge — is pressure running against Iran's calendar. But his "living with them for a little while" framing is reversible, not terminal dismantlement, and Ahmad Vahidi only needs Washington to accept reversibility to win the round he lost in Islamabad. Abdollahi's Red Sea threat is an admission, not an escalation — Iran can disrupt adjacent waters, but the force-opening of Hormuz stopped being an option when the navy Trump described as "gone" actually went. And Pakistani Army Chief Munir's Tehran run is a measure of how few capitals still have working channels to both sides. [Less a Pakistani diplomatic achievement than an admission of where everyone else no longer sits.]

Hamas Uses Lebanon and Iran to Run Out the Clock on Disarmament

In a move that should not surprise our readers, Hamas rejected the U.S.-led Board of Peace disarmament framework on Wednesday and asked the board to modify it. The deadline for Hamas to accept the plan expired at the end of last week. An Israeli security source admits Hamas is using the instability in southern Lebanon and on the Iranian front to buy time and avoid progress on disarmament — running tax collection, activist recruitment, and control of aid-truck flows as its actual governance program while appearing to negotiate. They compared the emerging Hamas strategy to Hezbollah under Nasrallah: not direct state control of Gaza, but sufficient political-military leverage to operate without government reprisal. The proposed BoP timeline spans six to eight months covers both Israeli elections and the U.S. midterms. Most senior Hamas officials have left Qatar for Turkey and other destinations. The Hagevura Forum of bereaved families sent Netanyahu a letter Wednesday morning calling for a transition to decisive military action: "No one will do the State of Israel's work for us. The only one who can remove the threat is the IDF."

ASSESSMENT

Hamas rejected the framework because Hamas was always going to reject the framework. Khaled Mashaal went on the record in Istanbul in December calling weapons “the ummah’s honor and pride.” Musa Abu Marzouk has said the same thing in every language an interviewer has offered him. The Hezbollah-Nasrallah parallel is the literal template the organization has been studying since 2006. [Spoiler: they won’t disarm. They said they won’t. They’ve been saying it for the past twenty months and their ilk have been saying it for a lot longer than that.] The BoP’s six-to-eight-month runway functions as cover-provision, taking Hamas through both national election cycles that matter to its survival. The Qatar-to-Turkey exodus, however, is interesting. Hamas leaders now rate Doha as unsafe enough to require physical relocation, a measure of how far the post-Haniyeh, post-Sinwar calculus has shifted and of how little leverage the mediators retain over the only actors who can actually disarm the organization. The bereaved families’ letter — “the only one who can remove the threat is the IDF” — is the domestic counterweight. Every day the BoP process continues is a day Israeli families who buried their children are asked to wait on a disarmament mechanism the security establishment knows won’t deliver.

Inside Israel

The Court Can’t Fire Ben-Gvir, So It Engineers a Framework Instead

The High Court’s expanded nine-justice panel adjourned Wednesday after nearly ten hours of argument on petitions demanding the dismissal of National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, without issuing a ruling. The petitioners argued that Ben-Gvir’s direction of police promotions, his handling of incitement investigations, and his personal involvement in operational matters constituted improper politicization. Justice Alex Stein called ordering a dismissal “the most extreme step” and noted that “no country in the world has a mechanism that allows a court to dismiss a minister from his position.” The justices instead indicated they would order the government to reach a framework with Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara that would constrain Ben-Gvir while leaving him in office. Shosh Shmueli, representing the AG, asked the court to bar Ben-Gvir from appointments to sensitive roles, from operational participation, and from meeting officers outside the presence of Commissioner Danny Levy. Ben-Gvir’s counsel David Peter argued that the proceeding sought to “tear up the ballots” voters and characterized the real case as being about “one thousand police appointments” — that is, the full exercise of ministerial authority. Ben-Gvir himself, outside the courthouse: “Gali Baharav-Miara wants to take your voice from you... I was elected to govern, not to be a model for the prosecution.” MKs Tally Gotliv and May Golan (Likud), Limor Son Har-Melech (Otzma Yehudit), and Idit Silman were ejected from the courtroom for repeatedly challenging the justices. Separately, Israel Police went public Wednesday with a dispute against the State Attorney’s Office, accusing prosecutors of abandoning officers facing tort claims from protest policing.

ASSESSMENT

The “case” against Ben-Gvir is that an elected minister ran his ministry. That is not a case. That is a cabinet. Ministers set priorities within their portfolios, direct their apparatus, appoint officials, and discipline subordinates who decline to execute policy. Every Israeli government in modern memory has operated this way — Labor ministers appointed Labor-aligned commanders, Kadima ministers reshuffled ahead of coalition needs, Yesh Atid ministers set their own enforcement tone. No one went to the High Court to remove them over the ordinary exercise of ministerial authority. The AG marched into court to restrict a sitting minister from the same policy authority every previous minister has exercised, and did so in lockstep with petitioners drawn from the political camp that lost the 2022 election. I have some large differences of opinion with this Minister and with the Coalition. That doesn’t mean I think we should remove them by a court lacking that authority. It’s a democracy. It’s Israeli. Of course it’s going to be messy and opinionated — but the rule of law must not be politicized to the extent it supersedes the voter. We see that in Tehran. The specific episodes cited will not survive scrutiny outside a sympathetic bench. Rinat Saban’s promotion was paused by a minister who noted, correctly, that she is personally involved in the Case 4000 prosecution — the political prosecution that has consumed the sitting prime minister’s calendar through active wartime. A minister questioning her elevation in that context is cabinet prerogative in plain language, not corruption. Ruti Hauslich clashed with Ben-Gvir on incitement policy. Policy disputes between ministers and subordinates are resolved in favor of the minister in every functioning democracy on earth. Justice Stein’s comparison of Ben-Gvir’s counter-incitement unit to East German and Soviet parallel institutions is rhetorical inflation — Germany’s existing Volksverhetzung statutes prosecute online speech at substantially higher volume, France’s counter-incitement apparatus is larger, and the UK jails people for tweets in numbers that would make you believe its being run by an Ayatollah. [When a justice reaches for the Stasi analogy on live television, the bench is not being careful. It is being political.] The compromise now being engineered — a “framework” that constrains the minister without firing him is more or less dismissal by process when direct dismissal is legally indefensible. The police-prosecutor split published that afternoon is operational evidence of the legal apparatus trying to do the same thing they accuse Ben-Gvir of.

Three Jewish Communities Demolished Overnight during Yom HaShoah Week

Civil Administration inspectors and Border Police demolished three sites in Judea and Samaria. The first operation ran at an outpost near Metzad in eastern Gush Etzion, where structures were demolished within minutes and calls for Arab riots circulated on social media in nearby villages during the operation. At 1 a.m., forces arrived at “Beit Anot,” a strategic hill between Gush Etzion and Mount Hebron, and demolished structures housing a family with three children and a shepherding group. Toward 4 a.m., forces raided “Kol Mevasser” in the Binyamin region — residents said they were given one minute to prepare, that a heavy engineering vehicle piled dirt over their belongings to prevent retrieval, that crowd-dispersal measures and illumination flares set off local brush fires, and that tefillin and holy books were recovered from the rubble only in daylight. Residents framed the timing: “Precisely at this time, following Holocaust Remembrance Day — a day that recalls the exile of the Jewish people and the hatred of nations — the system is carrying out widespread destruction at several significant and important settlement points that symbolize the return of the Jewish people to their land.”

ASSESSMENT

The Civil Administration should be able to read a calendar. Three demolitions in one night — a family with children, a shepherding group on a strategic hill between Gush Etzion and Mount Hebron, a Binyamin hilltop where tefillin were buried under dirt pushed by a government engineering vehicle — executed during the week the country observed the annihilation of European Jewry. [The optics are, flatly, terrible. The operational timing was not accidental — the demolition officer plans these nights, they don't just happen.] The Beit Anot hill sits on contested high ground between illegal Arab encroachment in Area C and Israeli demographic presence, a strategic belt Regavim audits have consistently flagged. Every structure the state demolishes there is a structure not being built by the Palestinian Authority, except that PA construction is demolished with vastly less frequency and vastly more paperwork. The residents' closing line — "we are not the enemy" — is the point. The hilltops the state dismantles overnight are the same hilltops the 2023 government pledged to regularize and integrate, the same hilltops the defense establishment has repeatedly described as strategically necessary, and the same hilltops the IDF has relied on during the war for freedom-of-movement corridors. The Civil Administration reports to the Defense Minister — the same minister now insisting Hezbollah must be removed from south of the Litani. Internal consistency is not this coalition's strongest export.

Ben-Gvir Climbs to Ten Seats as Smotrich Falls Below the Threshold

A Kan poll projected Ben-Gvir's Otzma Yehudit at 10 seats — up from six — while Smotrich's Religious Zionism again failed to cross the 3.25% electoral threshold, as it has in most polling for months. Pollster Mitchell Barak told the Times of Israel that Ben-Gvir's appeal runs on being "hardcore," with his base concentrated among traditional Mizrahi voters from the periphery who prize anti-establishment confrontation over policy record. Ariel Finkelstein of the Israel Democracy Institute noted that Ben-Gvir competes with Likud and Shas — not with Religious Zionism. Smotrich, managing a wartime fiscal portfolio while representing a community disproportionately bearing reserve duty and casualties, is caught between his voters' anger over Haredi exemptions and his coalition need not to break the Shas-UTJ bloc. Meanwhile, the Reservists Party — founded in September 2025 by former Communications Minister Yoaz Hendel and comprising reservists, wounded veterans, bereaved families, and civilian volunteers — launched a campaign Wednesday modeled visually on Netanyahu's 2019 "They won't decide" anti-journalist ads, substituting four Haredi and Arab MKs (UTJ's Yitzhak Goldknopf and Moshe Gafni, Hadash-Ta'al's Ahmad Tibi and Ayman Odeh) and branding on "Whoever does not serve will not be able to vote or be elected to the Knesset." Religious Zionism MK Simcha Rothman, chair of the Knesset Constitution, Law and Justice Committee, told the Times of Israel he was "certain that Religious Zionism will be very successful in the upcoming elections."

ASSESSMENT

The Ben-Gvir surge is the predictable consequence of his hearing and media caricaturization. Every hour the nine-justice panel spent deliberating whether to fire him, every MK ejected for shouting down judges, and every Otzma Yehudit supporter chanting “judicial dictatorship” outside the courthouse generated political returns and grew his voter base. That is the structural problem with using the court as an instrument of coalition constraint — it compounds the very politics it claims to interrupt. Smotrich’s collapse is the story beneath the headline, and it does not primarily reflect Ben-Gvir. Religious Zionism is being hollowed out by its own voters — people who served, whose sons served, and who have watched the Haredi-draft bill stall while Smotrich manages the fiscal policy of a wartime state. Hendel is targeting the same voter Smotrich is losing: the national-religious reservist whose patience with Haredi exemption has run out and who is watching the political representative of his own community decline to break the coalition over it. [The Reservists Party’s odds of crossing the threshold are better than most observers think. Its odds of entering a post-election governing coalition are probably a little worse than its founders hope.] The Ben-Gvir-Smotrich joint-run talk is the coalition’s likely answer. It is also an admission that Smotrich cannot survive on his own platform while his voters watch his party’s program be enacted and his leadership decline to enforce the one concession those voters actually want.

Israel and the World

Forty Senate Democrats Vote to Block Israeli Arms Sales

Forty Senate Democrats voted Wednesday evening to advance Bernie Sanders’s resolution blocking the sale of bulldozers to Israel, and 36 voted to advance his second resolution blocking the sale of thousands of 1,000-pound bombs — a record for Democratic caucus opposition to Israel arms sales and, more consequentially, a collapse of the traditional pro-Israel Senate Democratic bloc. Thirteen senators flipped from prior positions: Mark Kelly (AZ), Ruben Gallego (AZ), Adam Schiff (CA), Ron Wyden (OR), Maria Cantwell (WA), Gary Peters (MI), Mark Warner (VA), Cory Booker (NJ), Elissa Slotkin (MI), John Hickenlooper (CO), Michael Bennet (CO), Alex Padilla (CA), and Maggie Hassan (NH). Every Senate Democrat with publicly-discussed 2028 presidential ambitions voted to block both sales. Only seven members of the Democratic caucus opposed both resolutions: Schumer, Gillibrand, Rosen, Cortez Masto, Blumenthal, Fetterman, and Coons. Schiff and Padilla framed their votes as opposition to weapons that “might be used in Iran or to facilitate further settlement activity.” Warner explicitly cited “escalatory military actions in southern Lebanon.” Slotkin declared herself “deeply skeptical” of further Iran-war funding. Kelly said the Iran war “is not making us safer” while insisting he would “always support Israel’s right to exist.” J Street — which last week called for the U.S. to end funding for Israeli missile defense after the current MOU expires in 2028 — supported both Sanders resolutions. [And, maddeningly, J Street *still* claims to be pro-Israel. Absurd.] Gillibrand, who introduced a separate war powers resolution to halt the Iran war, said she sees the two issues “very differently.” “I oppose the war in Iran, but I do not believe we should leave an ally [Israel] who is being attacked without support.”

ASSESSMENT

The Iran war is merely convenient cover, and every senator who flipped used it as the stated rationale. What actually happened is that the anti-Israel primary position — Sanders's position, J Street's position, IfNotNow's position — became the Democratic caucus's majority position on an arms vote. Thirteen senators who previously voted otherwise did not experience a sudden change in evidence. They read their primary electorates and updated. Something that should give every friend of Israel pause: each rumored 2028 candidate voted to block both sales. The Democratic presidential primary is now running on a platform that includes, at minimum, a weapons-freeze against the Jewish state during an active multi-front war in which Iran has launched missiles at Israeli civilian population centers. Dara Horn seems to be right in more ways that she counted on. Schiff's framing — weapons "might be used in Iran or to facilitate further settlement activity" — is an admission. The stated concern about Iran is a laundering mechanism for the underlying policy, which is about Judea and Samaria, the status of the Jewish communities there, and is taking a position that Israeli sovereignty east of the Green Line is illegitimate. Maybe they think "the pen is mightier than the sword" is a literal dictum the IDF can use against missiles? The seven Democrats who held the rational line — Schumer, Gillibrand, Rosen, Cortez Masto, Blumenthal, Fetterman, Coons — represent a shrinking, aging minority. Schumer is 75; he is the past. AOC's successors will be the ones writing Iron Dome resolutions — and sooner than you think.

EU States Prepare Israel Sanctions for the First Post-Orbán Meeting

EU member states will reintroduce sanctions proposals against Israel at their April 21 foreign ministers meeting in Luxembourg — the first such gathering since Viktor Orban lost Hungary's April 12 election to Peter Magyar's Tisza Party. Orban had single-handedly blocked consensus proposals to sanction Israel throughout his tenure, withholding the unanimity several measures required. Magyar has not publicly articulated a cohesive Israel position but has simultaneously committed to being a friend of Israel, to closer EU cooperation, to reversing Hungary's withdrawal from the International Criminal Court — that withdrawal becomes permanent June 2, and Tisza is expected to walk it back before the deadline as a demonstration of "rule of law" credentials to Brussels. A qualified-majority EU Council vote to suspend the EU-Israel Association Agreement — the trade pillar of the relationship — would cost Israel roughly \$1 billion annually. The Luxembourg agenda also covers the Iran war.

ASSESSMENT

Orban's defeat removed the veto preventing EU sanctions against Israel from advancing, and the Luxembourg meeting is the first test of what replaces it. Magyar has waffled. So, we will have to wait and see. We do know his credential track to Brussels runs through "rule of law" signifiers, and the cheap public win is the ICC reversal — returning Hungary to the same court currently holding an active arrest warrant for Netanyahu. After that, the Judea and Samaria sanctions package that 26 member states have been waiting on Budapest is up for review. [The qualified-majority threshold for Association Agreement suspension is high, and the Iran war has split European publics enough that governments which want to be seen opposing Israel domestically do not always want to act against it at the Council level.] What matters is how much of the prior trade and political framework survives the Hungarian veto's removal. Italy suspended its defense cooperation last week. France's defense divorce has already been publicly acknowledged by the Defense Ministry as retaliation for Paris's arms-export behavior. The UK has quietly moved to deny the IDF access to Royal College of Defence Studies programs. What Brussels does at Luxembourg will determine whether the Council continues pretending Europe is a single foreign-policy actor on Israel or accepts that it is now running three or four parallel policies disguised as one. Hungary's veto protected Europe from having to make that choice. Now Europe will have to make it.

Zarka Meets Le Pen Quietly as Israel Cuts Paris from Lebanon Talks

Israeli Ambassador to France Joshua Zarka held a meeting this week with National Rally leader Marine Le Pen. And Le Pen reportedly met separately with Lebanese ambassador Rabih Chaer. The meeting was not announced through official diplomatic channels. Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar assessed European far-right parties in late 2024 against four criteria — stance on Israel, attitude toward local Jewish communities, how those Jewish communities view them, and whether the parties have confronted their antisemitic histories — and in November 2024 authorized formal engagement with National Rally, Sweden Democrats, and Spain's Vox, while maintaining non-engagement with Austria's Freedom Party and Germany's AfD. Sa'ar met with Jewish and pro-Israel leaders in Brussels in February 2025 to explain the policy. Israel's U.S. Ambassador Yechiel Leiter, who represented Israel at Tuesday's historic Israel-Lebanon talks in Washington, publicly cut France out: "We'd like to keep the French as far away as possible from pretty much everything, but particularly when it comes to peace negotiations. They're not needed. They're not a positive influence, particularly not on Lebanon." Le Pen — a historical supporter of Israel who backed Jerusalem after October 7 — has recently criticized the Iran war and called for France to "protect Lebanon, its people and its sovereignty." A Paris court decision expected in July will determine whether she remains eligible to run in 2027 following her EU-funds embezzlement conviction.

ASSESSMENT

The Le Pen meeting is part of a two-year Sa'ar project to re-sort Israel's European relationships against actual strategic reality rather than inherited Cold War taboos. The French far-right has been more reliably pro-Israel than the French far-left for a decade and more reliably pro-Israel than Macron's current coalition for the duration of this war. The historical concerns — Nazi legacies, antisemitic elements, Holocaust ambiguity — are real and in several cases still present, which is exactly why Sa'ar kept the AfD and the Austrian Freedom Party outside the tent. Sweden Democrats, Vox, and RN cleared the four criteria, and they are three of the most functional pro-Israel voices remaining in European legislative politics. Paris lost the privileged access it held through a century of colonial-residual ties to Lebanon the moment Macron made Israel's Lebanese operations a stick to beat his domestic opposition with, and the U.S. picking up those lines leaves France with neither the economic leverage it once had nor the diplomatic standing it thought it did. [The French Foreign Ministry will not publicly admit it, but this week's sidelining is a measure of how little Paris has left to offer that Washington and Jerusalem both want.] Le Pen's July court ruling is the remaining variable. If she is barred from running in 2027, RN's internal succession — Jordan Bardella is the named successor, has spoken in Israel at an antisemitism conference, and is more tactically pro-Israel than Le Pen herself — means the Israeli relationship survives the founder. That is a measure of the project Sa'ar has been quietly running, and of the maturity of RN's current generation of leaders, which can be criticized on many fronts but no longer plausibly mistaken for the Front National of Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Briefly Noted

Frontline & Security

- *Israel National News*: IDF Duvdevan operators, acting on ISA intelligence, arrested two terrorists in Ein Umm al-Sharait who had been working to establish terror infrastructure in the area. The nightly arrests across Judea and Samaria keeps the Iranian-funded cell ecosystem from consolidating while Lebanon and Iran consume the headlines.
- *Israel National News*: IDF Farsi-language spokesperson Kamal Penhasi publicly raised doubts Wednesday about whether Ebrahim Zolfaghari — spokesman for the Khatam al-Anbiya headquarters, the top operational coordination body between Iran's army and the IRGC — is a real person or an AI-generated figure, and asked Iranians who may have encountered him to come forward.

Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- *Jewish Insider*: Maine Democratic Senate candidate Graham Platner repeatedly praised Hamas tactics in 2014 Reddit posts on a graphic video of a Nahal Oz raid that killed five Israeli soldiers, writing that “from a strictly professional standpoint, this was a damn fine looking and successful raid against a superior opponent, I dig it” and defending the execution of captured soldiers as “pragmatically” acceptable. This is what Democratic primary candidates look like in 2026. Can we *please* have some better options?

Domestic & Law

- *Jerusalem Post*: Israel Police seized over NIS 5 million in cash along with a pistol, cartridges, and 5.56 caliber ammunition during a week-long crack-down across multiple Rahat neighborhoods, booking suspects on money-laundering and tax charges. The Negev crime economy's relationship to illegal weapons flow is a structural failure the coalition's Bedouin-lawlessness priority was supposed to address — one scattered raid is not it.

Culture, Religion & Society

- *Jewish Insider*: Instagram removed only 11 accounts and 8 posts out of 253 pieces of ADL-reported extremist content linked to white supremacist networks, designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations, and vendors selling Nazi merchandise — a 93% failure rate the ADL traces directly to Meta's January 2025 moderation rollback replacing third-party fact-checking with community notes. Nick Fuentes's 105-account "groyper" network sits at 1.4 million combined followers, PFLP-linked accounts carry another 340,000, and Mark Zuckerberg acknowledged in advance that the policy shift would "catch less bad stuff" — which turns out to be a euphemism for operating distribution infrastructure for the people currently fundraising to kill Jews.

Somewhere between the Senate floor and the Luxembourg foreign ministers' room, a version of this war is being narrated in which Israel is the problem and Iran is the solvable one. That version requires forgetting what October 7 was. Forgetting what Hamas still refuses to give up. Forgetting that Oslo was a temporary framework three decades ago and has been a corpse for most of those decades. The battlefield is not forgetting. Neither are the people paying for the forgetting.

Ribbono shel olam — grant us leaders equal to the moment You have placed us in, and the clarity to recognize them when they arrive. Bring Your people the future we keep almost building, and let us be worthy of it when it comes.

Shabbat shalom!

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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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