



Forensic intelligence for those who act.

READER EDITION

April 26, 2026

ISRAEL BRIEF

Sunday, April 26

Three adversaries weaker than they have been in decades — and the political calendar finally moves.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

THE BOTTOM LINE The “year of Palestinian democracy” formula stages a political process enforced by Hamas’s police and produce uncontested slates in Judea and Samaria’s largest cities while granting automatic delegate status at the ruling party’s national conference to convicted murderers of Israelis. Democracy theater — performed for the foreign-aid audience that funds the apparatus. 20-year sentences “imposed on murderers or attempted murderers” are now an automatic qualification for Palestinian political leadership — is the current reality. What the Eighth Conference adds is the public-facing organizational ratification: the leadership cadre being credentialed through prison time becomes the voting majority on the next political program, the next reconciliation track with Hamas, and the next generation of PA institutional leadership. The Western response — Suica’s Luxembourg formulation last week, “they wouldn’t have survived without our money, without our help” — funds it. Abbas has not held national elections since 2006. The local-council vote and the May 14 conference are the legitimacy theater that lets Brussels keep paying without admitting what it pays for.

CLASSIFICATION

Reader Edition

DISTRIBUTION

Open · Free to share with attribution

STEP back from this morning's news cycle. Two and a half years after October 7, the Hamas military command that planned it no longer functionally exists — Sinwar, Deif, Marwan Issa, every Khan Younis brigade commander gone. Operation Rising Lion erased the Iranian regional deterrent in twelve days last June. Operation Roaring Lion (which launched almost two months ago now) went after what Rising Lion left standing — the supreme leader the first morning, the IRGC senior command in the same window, the regime's command-and-control. A US naval blockade is now squeezing the Iranian economy past its breaking point. Hezbollah has lost four consecutive sector commanders in Bint Jbail since the truce took effect three weeks ago. Lebanon sits at the negotiating table for the first time since 1983 [though it's worth less than that sounds]. The Saudi crown prince co-authored the framework Hezbollah is currently trying to break. Today's brief covers the next moves on each front, and the Political Security Cabinet meets this afternoon.

IN THIS EDITION

Flash Brief	5
Two Middles — Open. No Paywall.	5
The War Today	6
Iran Strangulation Holds as Trump Cancels Pakistan and Plans Strike Options	6
Netanyahu Orders Lebanon Strikes “Forcefully” as Hezbollah Tests the Yellow Line	7
Hamas Exploits the Ceasefire as IDF Eliminates an October 7 Infiltrator	8
Inside Israel	9
Likud B Quietly Forms as Likud Falls Out of Polling Lead	9
Netanyahu Discloses Treated Tumor Held Back Two Months for the War	10
Hamas Financial Network Sentenced as Palestinians Breach IDF Cordon at Jenin	10
Israel and the World	11
Mamdani Vetoes School Buffer Bill, Lets Houses of Worship Bill Pass	11
California Voter Guide Mails Jew-Hate Conspiracies Under State Seal	12
Fatah Stages Sweeping Victory while Convening a Conference of Convicted Terrorists	12
Briefly Noted	13
Frontline & Security	13
Diplomacy & Geopolitics	13

Culture, Religion & Society	14
Developments to Watch	14
Judea & Samaria	15
Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)	15
Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)	15
Diplomatic & Legal	15

Flash Brief

- **Iran vise holds:** Bessent ends oil waivers, Trump cancels Pakistan trip, Pentagon prepares Hormuz strike options including IRGC commander targeting. *See The War Today.*
- **Lebanon escalation:** Netanyahu orders strikes after Hezbollah rocket-and-drone barrage; Yahalom accelerates demolition of southern Lebanon infrastructure. *See The War Today.*
- **Gaza ceasefire exploited:** Intelligence shows Hamas continuing to rebuild under cover; IAF kills October 7 infiltrator Hazem Aidi in Thursday central Gaza strike. *See The War Today.*
- **Likud B forms:** Edelstein, Kahlon, Haskel, and Erdan in talks for a new right-wing party as poll shows Likud out of first place. *See Inside Israel.*
- **Netanyahu discloses tumor:** Two months after successful prostate-cancer treatment [disclosure held back through the war]; Hadassah confirms full clearance. *See Inside Israel.*
- **Mamdani's first veto:** New York mayor kills the school buffer-zone bill; lets the near-identical houses-of-worship version become law. *See Israel and the World.*
- **California Jew-hate under state seal:** Secretary of state mails voter guide carrying Goyim Defense League boilerplate; deletes own guidelines after Jewish protest. *See Israel and the World.*
- **Fatah elections theater:** "Sweeping victory"; May 14 conference credentials 20-year terror prisoners as automatic delegates. *See Israel and the World.*
- **Cabinet convenes today:** Political Security Cabinet meets this afternoon on Lebanon enforcement, Iran escalation, and the Gaza decision window. *See Developments to Watch.*

BELOW: the Pentagon target list that names Ahmad Vahidi and what it means for a negotiation Tehran cannot bind, why Netanyahu held the cancer disclosure for months and what the timing of its release reveals about the campaign now starting, and the procedural sequence California's secretary of state ran after Goyim Defense League boilerplate landed in her own voter guide.

Two Middles — Open. No Paywall.

THE Arizona Democrat — astronaut, former Navy combat pilot, the name floated in 2028 primary speculation — walked Bernie Sanders's resolutions to the Senate floor on April 15. Forty of forty-seven Senate Democrats voted to block the Caterpillar D9 sale to Israel. Eighteen months ago, the same caucus delivered 19 votes on the same kind of resolution [the trajectory is the story; the failed resolution is incidental].

I *Israel was not abandoned. Israel was sorted.*

Climate entered the American partisan-sorting mechanism in 1992. Immigration in 2009. Israel in 2001, inflected sharply in 2014, accelerated again after 2021. Ukraine reached a 47-point partisan gap in 28 months while running the consensus-era advocacy playbook to perfection — no settlements, no joint-session speeches, no partisan endorsements, sympathy of a Democratic White House. Israel hit a 44-point gap last month. The curve has eight to twelve years left to finish running.

Two Middles traces the mechanism, the inverted horseshoe (the extremes converge on Jew-hate; the moderate cores diverge through two different moral vocabularies), why AIPAC's 2021 break with the no-endorsement rule is an institutional admission rather than a strategy, why the MFA's NIS 729 million is being deployed at the wrong category of audience, and what a two-track architecture would actually look like — alongside the three other scenarios the institutional class is more likely to pick instead.

The paywall is down this week so the argument moves.

Forward it. Post it. Restack it.

Rabbi Jonathan Lieberman argued in JPost this week that *calm, on its own, is not a strategy*, and cited Hillel's *if not now, when?* as the question Israel has kept pretending is rhetorical. Today's items are what happens when several actors finally answer it. Trump answers by canceling the trip and putting the Pentagon planners to work. Hezbollah answers by firing on Margaliot. Hamas answers by holding municipal elections behind its own armed police. The center-right answers by drawing up an alternative ballot. Mamdani answers, in a different language, by signing one bill and killing the near-identical other. The deferrals are coming to an end.

The War Today

Iran Strangulation Holds as Trump Cancels Pakistan and Plans Strike Options

The Iran-US standoff has settled into an economic war of attrition that Tehran cannot afford and Washington can. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent says that Iranian and Russian oil waivers — exemptions for cargoes already at sea — will not be renewed, and predicted Iran will begin shutting down production within two to three days. Once that happens, Iranian wells lose internal pressure within months and require expensive rehabilitation to restart. US naval forces have redirected 37 vessels since the blockade began and seized M/V Sevan — one of 19 sanctioned shadow-fleet tankers — last week off Oman. Treasury's freezing of \$334 million in IRGC-linked cryptocurrency wallets, on top of the estimated \$90 million crypto theft a year earlier, has gutted part of the regime's sanctions avoidance tools. Trump canceled Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner's flight to Islamabad over the weekend with a public dismissal — "We have all the cards; they have none. If they want to talk, all they

have to do is call” — after the second round of talks was postponed indefinitely. The Pentagon has prepared three escalation options. (1) Dynamic strikes on IRGC fast-attack boats and minelayers in Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman. (2) Strikes on Iranian energy infrastructure that Trump had previously threatened. And (3) targeting of IRGC commanders Washington considers obstructionists, with IRGC commander-in-chief Ahmad Vahidi named in the planning. Iranian lawmaker Mahmoud Nabavian disclosed the demands that produced the cancellation — a US role managing Hormuz, a 20-year halt to Iranian enrichment, and transfer of Iran’s enriched uranium stocks — and framed Tehran’s posture as ‘compromise or surrender’ the regime would not accept ‘until final victory.’ Pakistan, the formal mediator, received \$3 billion in fresh Saudi central-bank support on April 17 and a three-year rollover of an existing \$5 billion facility, plus a \$500 million critical-minerals MOU between an American firm and the Pakistani military’s engineering unit — a structural compensation regime that pays Islamabad to keep talks alive, not to close them.

ASSESSMENT

The mediator is being paid by both sides not to finish the job, the foreign minister Iran sends to Pakistan cannot bind the IRGC that already overrode him on Hormuz, and the Pentagon is moving from contingency planning to target lists [Vahidi by name, energy infrastructure by category]. Which is a process whose participants have all priced in continuation as the optimal payoff. Iran is bleeding an estimated \$400 million a day to a blockade it cannot break. Pakistan is collecting Saudi liquidity for as long as the bleeding continues. Trump can wait — and is showing he intends to. The Iranian position rests on the bet that Trump’s polling forces capitulation before Iranian wells lose pressure permanently. The math is brutal. Iran’s annual budget of roughly \$56 billion can’t hold its own against a US budget over \$6 trillion — especially not with Beijing’s strategic petroleum reserve also draining. The off-ramp Beijing might offer — taking custody of Iran’s enriched uranium without either side calling it surrender — is the only structural exit that does not require Tehran to publicly fold. Of course, Beijing might not be the most reliable partner to the West in that formula. Regardless, until that mechanism crystallizes or Iranian production hits irreversible damage, the question is which clock runs out first. The IDF’s standing skepticism — that only national infrastructure strikes break extremist regimes — is being held in reserve as Plan B, with CENTCOM and Aman gathering target packages they previously did not have.

Netanyahu Orders Lebanon Strikes “Forcefully” as Hezbollah Tests the Yellow Line

Hezbollah fired two rockets into the Galilee Panhandle Saturday afternoon — sirens in Manara, Margaliot, and Misgav Am, one rocket intercepted, one allowed to strike open ground — followed by drone-infiltration alerts in Hanita, Ya’ara, Rosh Hanikra, and Malkia. Netanyahu ordered the IDF within hours to strike Hezbollah “forcefully.” Over the weekend, Israel killed 15 Hezbollah operatives — six yesterday alone, including three in an armed pickup, one on a motorcycle, and two near the Litani — and struck Radwan Force buildings, a weapons cache, and rocket launchers in Deir al-Zahrani, Kfar Rumman, and al-Samiyah. Yahalom has accelerated robot-assisted demolition in Bint Jbail and Shia villages along the Forward Defense Line, with the IDF citing

uncertainty about how long diplomatic conditions permit ground operations [which is military-bureaucratise for: demolish what you can while you can]. The new Elbit “Ro’em” self-propelled howitzer — fully automatic, six to eight rounds per minute at 40 km — has entered the artillery rotation. Israel has formally asked Washington to pressure Beirut into acting against Hezbollah outside the Forward Defense Line; whether the US delivers is unclear.

ASSESSMENT

The Trump-Saudi framework Israel signed onto trades territorial concessions in southern Lebanon for a Lebanese-Israeli normalization track that strips Hezbollah of legitimacy and weapons [that latter claim is rather aspirational, to be sure]. Hezbollah’s incentive is to break that framework before it solidifies. Netanyahu’s “forcefully” order tells Riyadh and Washington the Yellow Line is not negotiable downward, and tells Hezbollah that the diplomatic track does not buy operational immunity. Yahalom’s acceleration is an admission that the political clock could close at any time. Hezbollah cannot decide whether it is “letting the field speak” — Qassem’s doctrinal language from last week (to say nothing of the rocket fire) — or trying to remain inside truce text. The IDF has now killed four consecutive sector commanders in Bint Jbail since the truce took effect [a turnover rate that is its own pricing signal].

Hamas Exploits the Ceasefire as IDF Eliminates an October 7 Infiltrator

An intelligence document reports Hamas is rebuilding military and civilian capability under cover of the Gaza ceasefire — accelerating recruitment, taking control of incoming goods, and using international focus on Iran and Lebanon to avoid disarmament under Trump’s twenty-one-point plan. [I’m sure even *Haaretz* could have figured that out by now]. Israeli security officials warn that without full disarmament and demilitarization, Gaza returns to its October 6 baseline. The IAF struck a Hamas cell planning an imminent attack in central Gaza Thursday, killing Hazem Rami Ali Aidi — a Hamas commander who infiltrated Israeli territory on October 7 — along with platoon commander Ibrahim Mansour and military-intelligence operative Maher Tantawi. IDF troops eliminated three additional Hamas terrorists at the Yellow Line in northern and southern Gaza this week, plus a fourth transporting weapons in the south. The Hamas-controlled Deir al-Balah municipality held local elections Saturday alongside PA-run elections elsewhere, with armed Hamas police surrounding polling stations despite Hamas’s formal exclusion from the ballot [the formal exclusion mattering somewhat less than the armed thugs (excuse me, “police”) at the polling station].

ASSESSMENT

The Fatah pitch — disarmament after governance, Northern Ireland precedent, “process not slogan” — is the framework that allows Hamas to keep its weapons by handing the appearance of authority to a body it controls or can outwait. The Hazem Aidi strike is an operational counter-statement. The IDF is still hunting October 7 infiltrators (ceasefire or not). The Deir al-Balah vote is the legitimacy laundering Israeli officials anticipated — Hamas formally absent, Hamas police on the perimeter, the headline reading “first Gaza election since 2006” without footnoting which armed faction guarded the ballot box. Everyone knows that every week the truce holds is a week Hamas converts into recruits, food monopolies, and reconstituted command. The IDF’s quiet warning — that without Lebanon and Iran resolution it lacks the combat manpower to do what Gaza needs — is the constraint causing maneuvers in the cabinet. Today’s Political Security Cabinet agenda has Gaza one decision closer to either resumed western-Strip operations or formal acceptance of the Board of Peace runway. The Aidi strike was Israel keeping its options open while the politicians decide which path to take.

Inside Israel

Likud B Quietly Forms as Likud Falls Out of Polling Lead

Senior figures — including Likud MK Yuli Edelstein, former finance minister Moshe Kahlon, Deputy Foreign Minister Sharren Haskel, and former UN ambassador Gilad Erdan — are advancing a “statesmanlike” alternative to Likud. The framework, informally called Likud B, would not commit in advance to Netanyahu’s bloc, to Naftali Bennett, or to Gadi Eisenkot, and would aim to make a broad coalition without “extremist parties” possible — a euphemism understood across Israeli politics to mean without Smotrich and Ben-Gvir. The unresolved question is the prime ministerial candidate: some involved favor Bennett or Eisenkot, others still prefer Netanyahu. Erdan is the swing figure, weighing whether to commit or preserve the option of a post-Netanyahu Likud leadership run. The talks come after a Maariv poll found Likud has lost first-place standing for the first time since June 26, 2025, now running neck and neck with Bennett 2026 — the same polling environment in which Religious Zionism falls below the electoral threshold and the coalition collectively sits at 51 seats.

ASSESSMENT

The “statesmanlike” framing is cover language. The actual proposition is a pre-positioned receivership — a parking lot for Likud voters who favor a government without Smotrich, Ben-Gvir, and the coalition arithmetic that has defined the post-October 7 government. Erdan is the credibility hinge because his name carries with the Anglo-diaspora donor class and the Likud center the Edelstein-Kahlon axis cannot reach on its own. The unresolved prime ministerial candidate is the structural problem. A list whose voters split between “Netanyahu” and “not-Netanyahu” cannot run on either flag. Likud is losing (more or less) on the war that should be its strongest issue, against an opposition leader who left office in disgrace less than three years ago [the Israeli electorate has a forgiveness curve that is shorter than most political scientists assume]. Anything can still happen between now and when the country goes to the polls, however.

Netanyahu Discloses Treated Tumor Held Back Two Months for the War

Hadassah Hospital released the prime minister's annual medical report Friday confirming Netanyahu underwent successful targeted radiation for an early-stage 0.9 cm malignant prostate tumor two and a half months ago — discovered incidentally during routine follow-up after his 2024 surgery for an enlarged benign prostate. Prof. Aharon Popovtzer, head of Hadassah's oncology division, said the tumor has disappeared with no evidence of disease and that Netanyahu will remain on standard surveillance. Netanyahu confirmed that he had requested the report's release be delayed two months "so that it would not be published at the height of the war, in order not to allow the terrorist regime in Iran to spread further false propaganda against Israel." He framed the disclosure in three lines — healthy, in excellent condition, "minor medical issue" treated.

ASSESSMENT

A prime minister who chose targeted treatment over surveillance and concealed the diagnosis for the duration of Operation Roaring Lion made a national security judgment that the regime's propaganda apparatus would weaponize the disclosure. He was almost certainly correct. The Iranian regime spent twelve months manufacturing claims about Israeli leadership stability and a prime ministerial cancer diagnosis would have been the propaganda gift the missiles could not deliver. The political timing is the other half of the calculation. With the Maariv poll showing Likud out of first place, Smotrich below threshold, and the coalition at 51 seats, Netanyahu disclosing a fully-treated minor tumor following Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'Atzmaut [the calendar was certainly charitable to a leader's biographical disclosure] lets him close the medical question before the campaign officially opens. Disclose now, take the news cycle, move on well before the next election.

Hamas Financial Network Sentenced as Palestinians Breach IDF Cordon at Jenin

The Central District Court ruled this week on a covert Hamas-affiliated financial network that funneled millions of shekels from Turkey-based Hamas operatives to handlers in Gaza and in Judea and Samaria through intermediaries inside Israel. Adem Dolani received five years and a NIS 270,000 fine for executing seven transfers totaling roughly NIS 2.2 million. The operation was led by Fadi Arabi, whose brother is connected to Hamas in Turkey, with co-defendant Muhammad Alziz directing recruitment. Judge Michael Karshan accepted the plea agreement as "appropriate and balanced," noting Dolani conducted the seven transfers after October 7 with full knowledge of their purpose. Saturday afternoon, dozens of Palestinians breached IDF checkpoints to enter the Jenin refugee camp — designated a closed military zone — with at least 11 detained for Shin Bet questioning [the cordon held; the principle behind it less so]. The IDF said most suspects have been apprehended and forces continue searching the area.

ASSESSMENT

Hamas's financial architecture inside Israel proper runs on welfare-dependent recruits handling small-volume transfers, and the Israeli court system is processing it case by case while the volume continues. The Jenin breach matters less for the eleven detentions than for what it reveals. The regional commander's entry ban was tested within twenty-four hours of being issued, by a crowd large enough to overwhelm the cordon, with no organized Palestinian Authority objection. PA-run elections elsewhere in Judea and Samaria the same day produced "sweeping" Fatah victories alongside ceremonial Deir al-Balah ballots Hamas police protected from the perimeter. The combination — Hamas funded through Israeli front-men, PA performing democracy without contesting Hamas's local control (yes, in Judea and Samaria), Palestinian crowds testing IDF closures the day the polls open — should make clear that the architecture being built is not directed toward governance. It is toward the next round.

Israel and the World

Mamdani Vetoes School Buffer Bill, Lets Houses of Worship Bill Pass

New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani vetoed Int. 175-B Friday — the bill creating security perimeters around educational institutions to address “physical obstruction, physical injury, intimidation and interference” — while letting Int. 1-B, the near-identical houses-of-worship version, become law. Council passed Int. 175-B 30 to 19, and Int. 1-B with 44 of 51 (veto-proof). Mamdani's stated rationale was that the educational-institution definition was too broad — universities, museums, teaching hospitals — and that it would chill labor-union, federal-immigration, and pro-Palestinian campus protest. He left untouched the buffer-zone protections for synagogues, even after his spokeswoman stated that synagogues hosting pro-Israel events violate international law [her understanding of international law seems to be much like her understanding of anything requiring sound logic]. Council Speaker Julie Menin said the bill required NYPD to outline how it would protect safe access while preserving First Amendment rights. B'nai B'rith called the veto “an outrage.” The Republican Jewish Coalition called it a courtesy to Mamdani's “radical Islamo-leftist base.” Council Member Eric Dinowitz, co-chair of the Council's Jew-hate task force, called it a broken safety promise. [It's all of those things. The only thing it isn't is unexpected.]

ASSESSMENT

Mamdani signed the houses-of-worship buffer because the council had a 44-seat veto-proof majority on it. He killed the schools buffer because he had the procedural margin to do so and the political coalition to defend it. The “protest” justification is a pretext — the two bills' operative language is near-identical. The actual distinction is constituency. The schools bill would have constrained the campus encampment infrastructure that delivered him his primary margin. What he vetoed was the legal infrastructure that would make organized harassment of Jewish students at school entrances actionable, while preserving protest infrastructure his electoral coalition runs on. Schumer, Jeffries, and the New York Democratic establishment have, as yet, taken no public position. The 2028 Democratic primary calendar runs through New York earlier than most realize, and the silence is itself a vote.

California Voter Guide Mails Jew-Hate Conspiracies Under State Seal

California Secretary of State Shirley Weber's office mailed a 64-page voter guide to every household with a registered voter this week, ahead of the June primaries, containing a candidate statement from gubernatorial candidate Don J. Grundmann that asserts Israel assassinated Charlie Kirk "with the knowledge of the US government," that Israel murdered USS Liberty sailors in 1967, that Israelis perpetrated 9/11, and that Israel plans to "suitcase nuke" the United States. Grundmann's statement also claims Jews refer to non-Jews as "goyim" which he then defines as "less than human," that the Talmud teaches Christ "boiling in" excrement, and that "Christian Zionism = soul poison." The statement links to Goyim Defense League flyer archives and to Grundmann's own National Straight Pride Coalition. The state's own guidelines limit statements to "personal background and qualifications" and require an attestation of truthfulness — guidelines the secretary of state's office removed from its website after Jewish groups filed a protest letter [the procedural cleanup happened after the publication, not before]. JCAN, the Jewish Federation of Orange County, the ADL Orange County and Long Beach, and the Israeli American Council jointly demanded an explanation, procedural clarification, and enforcement assurance for the November cycle. The voter guide remains live on the state's website and printed copies will continue mailing through May 12.

ASSESSMENT

The official voter guide is a state-published document. Every household received the literal Goyim Defense League boilerplate under California's seal, with a generic "views are the candidate's own" disclaimer attached to Grundmann's statement. The secretary of state's office had standing authority to disqualify the statement under its own guidelines and chose not to use it — and then quietly removed the guidelines from its website after the protest. Include the Jew-hate. Take the calls. Scrub the rule that documents the violation. Decline comment. Weber's pattern is a state office that functionally treats Jewish communal complaint as a public-relations management problem, not a civil-rights enforcement obligation. And Weber is not a fringe politician. The Jewish groups' question — would the office have permitted equivalent statements about Black, Latino, Asian, or LGBT Californians — answers itself before it finishes being asked.

Fatah Stages Sweeping Victory while Convening a Conference of Convicted Terrorists

Fatah declared "sweeping victory" in the 2026 Palestinian council elections Sunday, claiming wins in most local councils — including Jenin, where the PA had previously been assessed to have lost ground to Palestinian Islamic Jihad — and 197 municipal and village councils formed by "consensus" without competing slates in Nablus, Ramallah, Qalqilya, and elsewhere. Voter turnout was 53.44% per the Ramallah-based Central Elections Commission. In Deir al-Balah, the first Gaza poll since 2006, turnout was 22.7% of 70,000 eligible voters with armed Hamas police surrounding stations despite Hamas's formal exclusion. Mahmoud Abbas declared 2026 the "year of Palestinian democracy." In roughly two weeks, Fatah will convene its Eighth Movement

Conference, with Revolutionary Council member Tayseer Nasrallah confirming on PA radio that “anyone who spent 20 years in Israeli prisons will be a member” — automatic delegate status for convicted terrorists serving life sentences [20 years being roughly the standard sentence for the murder of Israeli civilians]. Yasser Abu Bakr — three life sentences for the murders of nine-month-old Avia Malka ז”ל, Israel Yihye ז”ל, and Constantine Danilov ז”ל — published in Al-Najah that prisoner treatment is the “moral standard” by which Fatah’s national commitment is measured.

ASSESSMENT

The “year of Palestinian democracy” formula stages a political process enforced by Hamas’s police and produce uncontested slates in Judea and Samaria’s largest cities while granting automatic delegate status at the ruling party’s national conference to convicted murderers of Israelis. Democracy theater — performed for the foreign-aid audience that funds the apparatus. 20-year sentences “imposed on murderers or attempted murderers” are now an automatic qualification for Palestinian political leadership — is the current reality. What the Eighth Conference adds is the public-facing organizational ratification: the leadership cadre being credentialed through prison time becomes the voting majority on the next political program, the next reconciliation track with Hamas, and the next generation of PA institutional leadership. The Western response — Suica’s Luxembourg formulation last week, “they wouldn’t have survived without our money, without our help” — funds it. Abbas has not held national elections since 2006. The local-council vote and the May 14 conference are the legitimacy theater that lets Brussels keep paying without admitting what it pays for.

Briefly Noted

Frontline & Security

- *Algemeiner*: The Senate Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health Policy held a hearing this week framing Africa as the “center of gravity for global terrorism,” with Bureau of Counterterrorism official Monica Jacobson explicitly naming radical Islamic terror against African Christians as a focus of US response. The “respect for sovereignty and realism” formulation State testified to is the diplomatic register of the same doctrine that produced last week’s AFRICOM strikes on Islamic State positions in Puntland — the policy is moving in roughly the opposite direction of the Biden-era “root causes” framework the Sahel coup regimes tested to destruction.

Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- *JNS*: Reza Pahlavi accused European journalists and politicians of “abdicating their professional responsibilities” after 150 reporters at his Stockholm and Berlin briefings asked nothing about the 40,000 Iranians killed by the regime, the 19 political prisoners executed in the past two weeks, or the 20 currently sentenced to death — preferring to ask why the US and Israel killed “the dictator that has slaughtered our people for 47 years.” A protester then doused him in red liquid (his team said tomato sauce) outside the Berlin event, which is the European tableau in single-frame:

ignore the dissidents he brings, throw paint on the way out, keep funding the regime that produces them.

- *Jerusalem Post*: Maj.-Gen. (ret.) Amir Eshel, former IAF commander and Defense Ministry director general, published a memo arguing the proposed transfer of approximately 50 F-35s to Saudi Arabia — without robust offsets — would severely undermine Israel’s Qualitative Military Edge codified in Section 36(h) of the US Arms Export Control Act. The recommended Israeli countermoves include exclusive F-35I upgrades unavailable for export, additional F-35 deliveries to Israel, partner-country status in the F-47 program, and inclusion of any Turkey F-35 readmission in the QME assessment — a policy inflection the post-Roaring Lion air campaign has only sharpened.
- *Jerusalem Post*: Cole Tomas Allen — a 31-year-old California man, Caltech mechanical-engineering graduate, and Kamala Harris 2024 campaign donor working part-time as a tutor in Torrance — opened fire at a Secret Service agent at the Washington Hilton’s magnetometer Saturday evening before being taken into custody, with Trump, Vance, and the cabinet rushed off the stage uninjured and the agent’s vest absorbing the round at close range. Allen told investigators after his arrest that he had intended to shoot Trump administration officials; Trump’s public response — “this is not going to deter me from winning the war in Iran” — is the relevant signal for Tehran, which is currently betting that US domestic fragility produces an off-ramp before Iranian wells lose pressure permanently.

Culture, Religion & Society

- *Algemeiner*: CNN, BBC, the Guardian, NBC, the Washington Post, and the New York Times broadcast and ran homecoming footage from southern Lebanon during the ten-day ceasefire window saturated with Hezbollah flags, Nasrallah-martyr posters, and explicit terror iconography — and consistently failed to identify any of it as such. “Hezbollah strongholds” applied without explanation becomes the editorial equivalent of running a photo and refusing to caption it — letting the visuals do the work the text declines to do.
- *Algemeiner*: Israel’s representative at the International Cheer Union General Meeting in Orlando voted Iran into the body, stating that the vote “expresses a clear distinction between the Iranian people and the terrorist regime” and that Iranians are “not enemies.” The gesture toward the population is rhetorically defensible. Unfortunately, the Iranian Cheer Federation is in the regime’s hands and represents nobody who is not, which is what makes the vote a soft-power donation to the apparatus that spent January killing protesters and loves to launch ballistic missiles with cluster bombs at Israeli civilians.

Developments to Watch

Judea & Samaria

- **Eastern border smuggling intercepts** — IDF and Israel Police seized 12 handguns, off-road vehicles, and drone equipment in a weekend bust along the eastern border after surveillance and pursuit.
- **Negohot residence cache** — Following last week's Negohot knife infiltration, Shin Bet-directed searches of the attacker's residence uncovered weapons and equipment staged for further attacks. Post-incident raids continue surfacing infrastructure that the single-actor framing the legacy media run with cannot accommodate.

Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)

- **Three-week Lebanon truce expires ~May 7** — Lebanon's ceasefire window closes within ten days, with daily Hezbollah violations and no permanent framework on the table. Whether Netanyahu's "forcefully" order produces enough Yahalom demolition before the political clock catches up is the operational question. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**
- **Netanyahu-Aoun Washington summit week of May 11** — Netanyahu is expected in Washington in mid-May for a potential Aoun summit, contingent on the regional security situation. Aoun's earlier refusal of a direct call leaves the White House format as the only viable channel for binding text [the room mattering more than the call].

Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)

- **IRGC declares full readiness, POW camps** — Iran's Revolutionary Guard announced full armed-forces readiness, including infrastructure preparation for prisoner-of-war camps in anticipation of a ground attack. Khatam al-Anbiya warned that continued US "piracy" will produce "a strong response."
- **Iranian water-and-power infrastructure threats** — Iranian lawmaker Mahmoud Nabavian threatened that any attack on Iranian water or power infrastructure would mean "the whole region will fall into complete darkness" — an explicit pre-commitment to retaliate against Gulf grid systems.
- **Trump's "haven't even thought about" ceasefire posture** — Asked whether he would continue the Iran ceasefire, Trump replied "I haven't even thought about it" days after canceling the Witkoff-Kushner Pakistan trip and dismissing Tehran's proposal as "not enough." The combination puts the Pentagon's three-tier strike planning back on the working table.

Diplomatic & Legal

- **UK IRGC terrorist designation pending** — UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said Iran's Revolutionary Guard will be declared a terrorist organization "soon," a designation London has resisted for years.

Today the cabinet decides whether the Aidi strike was a one-off or the first move in a renewed Gaza campaign. Bessent's window for Iranian wells losing pressure permanently runs out this week. The Lebanon truce is at the halfway point of its three-week extension — with four sector commanders

dead in Bint Jbail and Hezbollah firing on the Galilee Panhandle last night. Netanyahu disclosed the tumor Friday morning and the Likud B figures held their meeting that same night, in roughly the same news cycle. The strategic position is the strongest it has been in fifty years. The political calendar has just opened. What Israel does with the combination is now the only question that matters.

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.

PASSED ALONG TO YOU?

The daily Israel Brief is free at mitzpe.org. The operational layer — Closed Dossiers, Vantage, and Watchwords — is members-only. Become a member, gift a membership, or book a briefing at mitzpe.org.

Reader Edition · Free to share with attribution to Mitzpe Institute.