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READER EDITION

April 28, 2026

ISRAEL BRIEF

Tuesday, April 28

Three exposures in one day: FBI affidavit, UNIFIL meeting, Hormuz traffic count.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

THE BOTTOM LINE Qatar's mediation portfolio lost two arms in two weeks. The Doha eviction of al-Hayya ended its Hamas-mediation value. The FBI affidavit alleges Qatar paid for the corruption of the ICC chief prosecutor in exchange for the Netanyahu warrants. The "honest broker" license depended on the mediation looking neutral. A naive view at best. The recordings rewrite the brief Western capitals were writing about Qatari leverage.

CLASSIFICATION

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ISRAEL keeps winning kinetic rounds and the institutions targeting Israel keep failing to constrain them. Tehran's security council met this morning on inevitable protests. The NPT installed Iran as a vice president yesterday. Both happened during the same war Iran started over the program the NPT will spend a month reviewing.

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Flash Brief

- **Lebanon:** Qassem pledges “Karbala” and rejects disarmament; Sa’ar hands UNIFIL the 10,000-launch tally. *See The War Today.*
- **FPV gap:** Fiber-optic drones killed Sgt. Fooks *z”l*; the IDF still has no effective counter two years late. *See The War Today.*
- **Iran:** Rubio rejects the Hormuz-only proposal; Tehran has 13 days of onshore oil storage before wells start shutting in permanently. *See The War Today.*
- **Bibi trial:** Cross-examination resumes on a notebook from 2015; the hearing ends two-and-a-half hours early. *See Inside Israel.*
- **Rabbinate:** Three women sit certification exam after the High Court forces a 2:55 p.m. start. *See Inside Israel.*
- **PA funds:** A year of Smotrich’s withholding becomes coalition policy; Mustafa pays NIS 2,000 January salaries. *See Inside Israel.*
- **NPT:** The “non-aligned” bloc installs Iran as vice president of the conference reviewing its nuclear program. *See Israel and the World.*
- **Sherman:** Biden’s deputy Secretary of State calls Netanyahu the author of “a genocide” in Gaza. *See Israel and the World.*
- **Qatar/Khan:** FBI affidavit alleges Qatar bought the ICC prosecutor’s Netanyahu warrants in exchange for protection. *See Israel and the World.*

B ELOW: what Qassem’s Karbala speech did to Beirut’s direct track, why the IDF moved late on a \$200 weapon, and the FBI affidavit that names Qatar as the ICC prosecutor’s client.

UNIFIL has shared real estate with Hezbollah for two decades. Sa’ar handed the UN coordinator the receipt yesterday. An FBI affidavit alleges Qatar bought the ICC chief prosecutor’s Netanyahu warrants. None of these are scandals — they are how the architecture has been operating all along.

The War Today

Qassem Pledges “Karbala” as Sa’ar Hands UNIFIL the 10,000-Launch Tally
Hezbollah’s Naim Qassem rejected disarmament in a written statement yesterday and pledged a “Karbala-like epic” — a 7th-century Shi’ite martyrdom reference. He thanked Tehran for “insisting on including Lebanon” in the Pakistan negotiations. He called Beirut’s direct talks with Jerusalem a “grave sin.” Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar met UN Special Coordinator Jeanine Hennis Plasschaert in Jerusalem the same afternoon. He handed her the operational tally: roughly 10,000 missiles, rockets, and drones launched at Israel since March 2. A significant share originated from positions adjacent to UNIFIL stations. Hezbollah operatives move in vehicles identical to the UN’s own. UNIFIL spent two decades pretending that cohabitation was not happening.

President Joseph Aoun answered Qassem in a public statement: “Treason is the one who takes his country to war for external interests.”

ASSESSMENT

Qassem’s Karbala speech is an admission Beirut has spent weeks trying to avoid. Hezbollah will not be a party to anything Lebanon signs. Aoun answers with rhetoric his courts and forces cannot match. Sa’ar handing UNIFIL the 10,000-launch tally puts the cohabitation on the UN’s record — not that it will matter. Trump’s diplomatic track over optimistically assumed a Lebanese state that could speak for the territory it nominally controls.

The IDF’s Workshop-War Gap on Fiber-Optic FPV Drones

The IDF has no effective counter to Hezbollah’s fiber-optic-guided FPV drones. (The category of weapon which killed Sgt. Idan Fooks *z”l* on Sunday). The Defense Ministry’s Directorate of Defense Research and Development issued a public solicitation for solutions on April 11. Fiber-optic FPV drones have been operating on the Ukrainian battlefield since spring 2024. Range estimates have moved with the threat. The IDF first assessed Hezbollah’s fiber-optic reach at a few kilometers and later discovered launches from up to 15. The drones cost a fraction of an anti-tank missile. They are built from off-the-shelf components and 3D-printed parts, and they typically carry RPGs as warheads. Hezbollah’s standing missile arsenal is now roughly 10% of pre-war stocks. Fiber-optic FPV does not need the production lines Israel destroyed. It needs plastic, fiber, and a willing operator. The IDF ordered 5,000 FPV drones from Israeli firm XTEND last year for its own use.

ASSESSMENT

The IDF won the missile war and is losing the workshop war. Fiber-optic FPV bypasses the country’s electronic air defense. And the weapon does not need the production lines Israel spent six weeks destroying. The April 11 R&D solicitation came nearly two years after Ukraine made the threat undeniable. Hezbollah will continue to target Israelis with \$200 weapons until that gap closes.

Rubio Rejects Iran’s Hormuz Proposal; Tehran’s Security Council Concedes Internally

Secretary of State Marco Rubio rejected Iran’s Hormuz-only proposal yesterday. Iran’s offer, in his translation: “we’ll blow you up and you pay us.” Trump called the proposal “much better” than the previous Iranian framing but “not enough.” Seven ships transited the strait yesterday (against a pre-war daily average of 140). Six Iranian tankers returned to Iranian ports without offloading, carrying some 10.5 million barrels. Tehran’s Supreme National Security Council met this morning on internal protest fears. The body concluded the economy cannot withstand more than six to eight weeks of the US blockade. The blockade has been in place two weeks. Iran’s onshore oil storage runs roughly 13 days from capacity, per an April 12 estimate. Once full, Tehran must shut in production. Shut-in wells lose pressure permanently. The crude solidifies. The wells do not come back. Internet outages have left internet-dependent workers without work. Two million more private-sector

jobs are projected to disappear by end of spring. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi spent yesterday in Saint Petersburg. Putin told him Russia “intends to continue our strategic relationship.” German Chancellor Merz said Iran’s leadership was “humiliating” the US in the talks. The 142-meter Russian superyacht *Nord* crossed Hormuz on Saturday from Dubai to Muscat. The vessel is registered to a firm owned by the wife of sanctioned Russian steel magnate Alexey Mordashov, who is reportedly close to Putin. The yacht is valued above \$500 million and includes 20 staterooms, a helipad, and a submarine. How a sanctioned Russian’s pleasure craft cleared a US blockade is not clear.

ASSESSMENT

Tehran’s “Hormuz-only” proposal asks Washington to end the war and leave the centrifuges spinning. Rubio rejected it. The SNSC’s six-to-eight-week ceiling reflects the 13-day storage limit, not the political calendar. Pakistani mediators cannot bind a team “Khamenei” (or more likely the IRGC itself) overrides at every step. The negotiating track is the time Tehran’s own security council says it cannot afford.

Inside Israel

Netanyahu’s Trial Resumes on a Notebook from Another Decade

Netanyahu returned to the Tel Aviv District Court this morning after a two-month war pause. Cross-examination resumed in Case 4000, the Bezeq-Walla affair the prosecution has been building since 2020. Prosecutor Yehudit Tirosh worked from Filber’s “yellow notebook,” a handwritten pad recovered years after the events it purports to record. Tirosh pressed the prime minister on entries under the heading “Prime Minister.” These included “speak with Avichai about changing legislation for a minister in the ministry.” Avichai meant then-AG Mandelblit. Other entries referenced Ofir Akunis, Ran Shitrit, and a NIS 200 million Broadcasting Authority budget item. Netanyahu said he did not recall the specifics. “Who can remember such a thing?” he said. He had “nothing to hide.” Many things since then had demanded his attention “in a dramatic manner,” he added. Tirosh insisted earlier testimony does not change just because the witness no longer recalls. Six years of cross-examination, two wars, and a notebook from another decade — and the prosecution still expects clean recollection. Court staff delivered an envelope around noon. Presiding Judge Rivka Friedman-Feldman ended the testimony at 2 p.m., two-and-a-half hours early.

ASSESSMENT

The case is in year six. The witness sat down in December 2024. The witness has been running a country through two wars. Tirosh’s complaint that the witness no longer recalls treats those years as a static interval. Convenient, given that what the prosecution still has is Filber’s notebook from 2015. Six years of grinding has not produced better.

Rabbinate Stalls First Female Examinees Until High Court Forces 2:55 p.m. Start

Three women took the Chief Rabbinate's certification exam yesterday for the first time in Israel's history. The exam started after a 2.5-hour delay and an emergency High Court injunction. The women had registered for the test on laws of mourning. The Rabbinate scheduled their exam at the Religious Services Ministry. The men sat at the Jerusalem International Convention Center. The men's exam started on time. The women waited without an exam paper for over four hours. ITIM filed an emergency motion at the High Court of Justice. The Court gave the Rabbinate until 3 p.m. to respond. The candidates received their exam paper at 2:55 p.m. The Chief Rabbinate said the women were tested separately. The reason given: "to prevent disturbances and disruption to the proper order of the exams." A Rabbinate testing staffer would not enter the women's exam room. Questions would go by phone to Chief Rabbi Kalman Ber, "grouped" if needed. ITIM is preparing both a new High Court petition and a contempt-of-court motion. The High Court ruled last July that women cannot be excluded from the Rabbinate's certification exams. The exams operate as state-backed professional certification with public consequences for salary and recognition. The ruling does not order the Rabbinate to ordain women.

ASSESSMENT

The Rabbinate is implementing technical compliance with the High Court's July ruling. The substantive variables it controls — building, proctor, question delivery — all violate the equality principle the court ordered. The court explicitly rejected a parallel testing track in July. The Rabbinate built one anyway. ITIM's contempt motion is the next step in a sequence the institution invited.

A Year of Withheld PA Funds; The Pay-for-Slay Tab Comes Due

Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich confirmed yesterday that the Finance Ministry has not transferred Palestinian Authority clearance revenues for a year. The April figure withheld is NIS 740 million (\$248.7 million). PA Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa said Sunday that PA employees received NIS 2,000 (\$672) for January salaries (the salaries came late). The clearance revenues fund roughly 60% of PA income. They consist of VAT, customs, purchase taxes, and fuel excise on PA-bound goods. Israel has been deducting amounts equivalent to PA pay-for-slay payments to convicted terrorists and their families since 2019. Israel deducted additional sums tied to PA Gaza spending after November 2023. The deduction model funded the rest of the PA while billing it for pay-for-slay. Smotrich's freeze ended the arrangement. Ministry policy now holds the remaining funds. The cited reason: the PA's "actions against the State of Israel" abroad and "support for incitement to terrorism." The Trump administration has pressed Netanyahu to release the funds, including during the Florida summit in December. Netanyahu shelved plans in November to constrain Smotrich after Smotrich threatened to resign and bring down the coalition. The PA's pay-for-slay budget remains active.

ASSESSMENT

The PA is a terrorist organization with better branding than Hamas. Its pay-for-slay program rewards terror with budget lines that survive Israeli deductions because money is fungible. Smotrich's freeze ended the funding arrangement that kept the rest of the PA solvent. The harder question is why Washington is still pushing to restore the transfers. Mustafa can fix the salary line whenever the PA stops paying for its people to murder Jews and Israelis.

Israel and the World

The "Non-Aligned" Bloc Installs Iran as NPT Vice President

Iran joined the slate of vice presidents at the 11th Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons yesterday. The "non-aligned and other states" group made the nomination, per conference chair Vietnam's UN ambassador Do Hung Viet. [Iran is at war with the United States over the program this conference is reviewing.] US assistant secretary for arms control Christopher Yeaw called the selection an "affront" to the NPT. He said it was "beyond shameful and an embarrassment to the credibility of this conference." Iran has refused to cooperate with the IAEA on its program. It has enriched uranium far beyond peaceful applications and obstructed international oversight. Reza Najafi, Tehran's IAEA ambassador, fired back. The only state ever to have used nuclear weapons, Najafi said, cannot serve as "arbitrator of compliance."

ASSESSMENT

Absurdly, the "non-aligned" bloc routes Iran into a chair the US cannot block. The procedural cost to Tehran is zero. The legitimacy currency is real. The conference will spend a month reviewing the program Iran's vice president is helping run. The institutional answer to whether the NPT can constrain a state actively obstructing it is now in writing.

Biden's Deputy Secretary of State Names Netanyahu as "Genocide" Cause
Wendy Sherman accused Netanyahu of "creating a genocide in Gaza" last week. Sherman was Biden's deputy secretary of state and a 2015 Iran deal architect. She made the claim on Bloomberg. She walked it back when pressed. "I can't make the legal analysis about whether it is literally a genocide," she said. Sherman is Jewish. She retired from the State Department in summer 2023, before October 7. Vice President Kamala Harris came similarly close last October during the campaign. Harris invited the framing without endorsing the term. The mainstream Democratic Party has done all but formally embrace it. The rhetorical floor of senior Democratic foreign-policy alumni is not what it used to be.

ASSESSMENT

Sherman's specific contribution is naming Netanyahu as cause. He "led us down a road" that "has, in essence, created a genocide." The walk-back preserves the original framing while dodging legal exposure. The Overton window of senior Democratic foreign-policy alumni now contains the term as shorthand. The center is following its alumni.

FBI Affidavit Alleges Qatar Bought ICC Prosecutor Khan's Netanyahu Warrants

An FBI affidavit alleges Qatar offered to “take care of” ICC chief prosecutor Karim Khan. The condition was advancing an arrest warrant against Netanyahu. A person familiar with a private intelligence operation linked to the case provided the affidavit. Audio recordings support it. The materials have circulated among members of Congress. Khan sought arrest warrants against Netanyahu in November 2024. A subordinate had accused him of sexual assault shortly before. Khan denies the allegations and went on leave a year ago. The ICC’s governing body decided this month that disciplinary proceedings should advance. The recordings include the operation manager saying: “It was all in the context of issuing the warrant. That was essentially the deal.” Khan was told, the manager said: “If you do it, we will take care of you.” The support, the manager said, came from “the state.” The operation also targeted Senator Lindsey Graham and ICC official Thomas Lynch — who first reported the assault allegation. Investigators referred to Qatar by code names “client state” and “State Q.” Multiple sources confirmed Qatar was the client.

ASSESSMENT

Qatar’s mediation portfolio lost two arms in two weeks. The Doha eviction of al-Hayya ended its Hamas-mediation value. The FBI affidavit alleges Qatar paid for the corruption of the ICC chief prosecutor in exchange for the Netanyahu warrants. The “honest broker” license depended on the mediation looking neutral. A naive view at best. The recordings rewrite the brief Western capitals were writing about Qatari leverage.

Briefly Noted

Frontline & Security

- *Israel National News*: The IDF Northern Brigade and Yahalom have dismantled roughly 14 kilometers of Hamas tunnels around Beit Hanoun in recent months. Troops have eliminated about 70 ceasefire violators east of the Yellow Line, where Hamas counted on the reconstruction zone holding.

Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- *Jerusalem Post*: Iraq’s Coordination Framework named banker Ali al-Zaidi prime minister after a 167-day deadlock. His bank faces US sanctions and IRGC-launderships allegations — weakness in Baghdad is what Tehran prefers.
- *Algemeiner*: Bahrain revoked 69 citizenships for “glorifying or sympathizing with” Iranian attacks during the war. The first mass revocation since 2019 catalogues which residents the regime now considers Iranian assets.
- *Jerusalem Post*: An Iranian Telegram account offered an undercover LBC journalist \$5 to burn a Trump-Netanyahu photo on a London street. The bait landed hours into the reporter’s UK arson-attack investigation linked to an Iranian front group.

Domestic & Law

- *Jerusalem Post*: Ben-Gvir hired former Netanyahu adviser Ofer Golan as Otzma Yehudit's campaign strategist for October. Golan is under indictment for harassing Filber, the state witness Tirosh cross-examined Netanyahu on this morning.
- *Jerusalem Post*: Walla places the Bennett-Lapid "Together" list at 27 seats, four below the pre-merger total. The merger that was supposed to make $1+1=3$ is producing $1+1=1.5$.
- *Ynet*: The SSQ "Shapira Squad" — children from certain Arab groups and of the African infiltrators south Tel Aviv has been demanding deportations of since 2010 — runs protection rackets upstream into the Jarushi crime family. The state never deported them, so this is what their kids are up to.

Economy, Tech & Infrastructure

- *Jerusalem Post*: Chinese retail car sales fell 26% in the first 19 days of April. Beijing's insulation is cracking on the same Hormuz disruption Tehran's security council cannot outlast.
- *Jerusalem Post*: Sixty governments meet in Santa Marta today on phasing out fossil fuels, with the Iran war cited as accelerant. The actors that would have to phase out — China, the US, Saudi Arabia — are absent.

Culture, Religion & Society

- *JNS*: B'nai Brith Canada recorded 6,800 Jew-hate incidents in 2025, the highest annual figure in 44 years of tracking. "Jewishness itself has become derogatory in contemporary Canada," research director Richard Robertson said.
- *Jewish Chronicle*: The Jewish bloc returns to London Pride on July 4 after two consecutive cancellations over Jewish safety concerns. Antisemitism awareness training is finally on the steward agenda, the training KeshetUK demanded before withdrawing last year.
- *Jerusalem Post*: Two Georgia bills sit on Kemp's desk: state-funding withholding for Title VI campus violations and foreign-funding disclosure above \$10,000. Georgia is filling enforcement gaps Congress has spent two decades not closing.

Developments to Watch

Gaza & Southern Theater

- **Hamis internal elections** — Hamas is preparing its first internal vote since the war, expected in coming weeks. The choice — al-Hayya's Gaza-centered hardline against Mashaal's Sunni Arab pragmatism — settles which patron underwrites a degraded Iran's replacement.

Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)

- **US fighting-resumption decision window** — the administration internally assesses that no shift in Iran's position comes without renewed fighting. The next Trump cabinet review puts the kinetic option formally on the table.
- **Iranian protest trigger window** — Tehran's Supreme National Security Council met this morning over inevitable protests. Specific concern: Reza Pahlavi's exile network activating supporters. The body's own six-to-eight-week economic ceiling sets the trigger calendar through early summer.
- **Iraqi government formation** — Iraq's Coordination Framework gave banker Ali al-Zaidi the PM mandate yesterday after a 167-day deadlock. His bank faces US sanctions and IRGC-launderships allegations. Iran's preference for weak Baghdad leadership now plays out in cabinet formation over the next four weeks.

Diplomatic & Legal

- **Khan ICC removal proceedings** — The ICC's governing body decided this month that disciplinary proceedings against chief prosecutor Karim Khan should advance. The FBI affidavit on alleged Qatari payments accelerates the timeline. The Netanyahu warrants Khan signed travel with him whether he is removed or not.
- **Iran NPT procedural exposure** — Iran holds a vice-president seat for the month-long NPT Review Conference. Procedural votes give Washington and allies opportunities to challenge specific Iranian moves. Whether the "non-aligned" floor holds against US pressure is the test.

Home Front & Politics

- **Eisenkot Beyachad decision** — Former IDF chief Gadi Eisenkot has not committed to folding his nine-seat party into Bennett-Lapid's "Together" list. A combined list would top 41 seats; the right bloc holds either way. His timing decides whether the merger drives turnout or splits soft-right voters.

The frameworks losing in public this week are losing because Israel won the kinetic round. Hezbollah, Hamas, and the IRGC are preparing the next round while the architecture metabolizes the last. Hezbollah's fiber-optic workshop, the IRGC's reconstitution, and Hamas's leadership ballot are all running on the same calendar. The architecture would prefer a longer one.

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