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READER EDITION

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ISRAEL BRIEF

Sunday, May 3

Iran rebuilds in the pause — while three Western institutions catch up to what Israel has been naming.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

THE BOTTOM LINE The emergency designation answers the Senate Democrats who blocked Caterpillar sales last month. Patriot replenishment for Qatar is the price of Doha's mediation. By all means, let's give the radical jihadists funding one of the largest propaganda outlets in the world more weaponry and whitewash the issues. The FBI affidavit alleges those services included buying ICC arrest warrants for Israeli leadership. The arms sales arrive in the same package as the corruption.

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Israel Brief: Sunday, May 3

SHAVUA tov, friends.

The kinetic round is won. Good. But is it quite enough? The reconstitution is ongoing without pause. Iran digs out while three Western institutions audit themselves and Israel orders two more squadrons. While today's news is harsh, the structural picture is sturdier than it has been in months.

FLASH BRIEF

- **Iran:** Tehran digs out missiles and launchers as Trump questions whether to take a deal at all. *See The War Today.*
- **Gaza:** The cabinet meets today to weigh war renewal as Hamas refuses to disarm. *See The War Today.*
- **Lebanon:** Hezbollah closes Meron and triggers alerts at Avivim as Aoun's direct-talks push splits Lebanon three ways. *See The War Today.*
- **Polls:** Bennett's party overtakes Likud as Gafni demands the AG's removal and Shas keeps its ministries. *See Inside Israel.*
- **Judea:** Foreign cameras stage Umm al-Khair "siege;" the council's video runs the timer. *See Inside Israel.*
- **Hasbara:** INSS audit lands as Hotovely takes a chair empty for two and a half years. *See Israel and the World.*
- **Australia:** Royal Commission documents NSW Police denial of Sydney's Jewish security request three days before the Bondi massacre. *See Israel and the World.*
- **Arms:** Trump bypasses Congress on \$8.6B in Mideast sales, including \$4B in Patriot replenishment to Qatar. *See Israel and the World.*

The institutions are catching up to what Israel has been naming. The Royal Commission, INSS, and the IDF all issued audits this week on problems Israel has been calling out for years. The reconstitution in Iran is the regime's answer to losing the kinetic round. The procurement in Israel is the answer to that. What comes next? Depends on the mood of the man in Washington.

The War Today

IRAN DIGS OUT AS TRUMP WEIGHS A PLAN HE ALREADY REJECTS

Iran is digging missiles and launchers out of the rubble of US and Israeli strikes during the pause. The IAEA has asked Russia and the US about extracting Iran's roughly 400 kilograms of 60%-enriched uranium. Most of it sits buried at Isfahan. Tehran sent a 14-point proposal through Pakistani mediators rejecting the US 9-point framework. The demands are to lift the blockade and get all US forces out of the region—not to mention stopping the fight on all fronts including Lebanon. Oh, and to pay reparations paid and release blocked assets. Iran insists on resolution within 30 days. Trump said he would review the plan but "can't imagine that it would be acceptable." He added that the US "might be better off without a deal at all." A Begin-Sadat Center report catalogs Iran's expanding chemical and biological weapons program.

Blister agents, nerve agents, pulmonary agents, and biological toxins are documented. The IDF has shifted nearly all Iran attention to the nuclear question. Officers concede the regime-change theory “fell by the wayside.” Some Basij strikes “may have been a waste.” Israel’s Defense Ministry approved a fourth F-35I squadron and a second F-15IA squadron. The IAF will reach roughly 100 F-35Is and 50 F-15IAs in coming years. Iran executed two men accused of spying for Mossad near Natanz.

ASSESSMENT

Trump’s “might be better off” line marks the administration discovering that negotiations were the time the regime needed to re-entrench and reconstitute some of their capacity. With the two-squadron procurement, Israel is preparing for the next round with a regime that outlasted this one.

HAMAS REFUSES TO DISARM AS THE CABINET WEIGHS RENEWING THE WAR

The security cabinet is scheduled today to discuss renewing the war in Gaza. Hamas has not handed over weapons under Trump’s 20-point plan and submitted a counter-offer instead. The terror group demands disarmament be tied to a framework producing a Palestinian state. The plan’s first 90 days were to cover heavy weapons and tunnel maps. Hamas refused. The IDF killed Ibrahim Abu Tzakar in a precision strike. Abu Tzakar faked being a paramedic throughout the war and was preparing an “imminent” attack. Three Hamas operatives were eliminated at the Yellow Line yesterday after they crossed it and approached IDF troops. A fourth was hit. The Board of Peace denied Reuters reporting that the Civil-Military Coordination Center in Kiryat Gat will close. Diplomatic sources say the CMCC will fold into the International Stabilization Force. US troop numbers will drop from roughly 190 to 40. Hamas concluded its first internal vote since the war. Khaled Mashaal and Khalil al-Hayya stand as the candidates with results expected this week.

ASSESSMENT

Hamas was never going to disarm under the conditions the framework set. The counter-offer demands a precondition — a Palestinian state — that the framework cannot supply. Renewing the war moves the cabinet onto a pathway Trump has been holding shut.

HEZBOLLAH CANCELS MERON AS AOUN’S DIRECT-TALKS PUSH SPLITS LEBANON

This morning, missile and rocket sirens were activated in the area of Avivim. An initial IDF inquiry indicates that the sirens were sounded following interceptors launched toward false targets. Police closed Mount Meron as a closed military zone through May 6, cancelling this year’s Lag B’Omer event. The IDF dismantled approximately 70 Hezbollah infrastructure sites over the past day. Around 70 ceasefire violators were eliminated east of the Yellow Line in recent operations. The US embassy in Beirut called publicly for a direct Aoun-Netanyahu meeting “facilitated by President Trump.” Saudi envoy Yazid bin Farhan visited Beirut last week and advised Aoun against an early Netanyahu meeting. He cautioned Lebanon’s progress toward Israel “should not outpace Saudi Arabia’s.” Speaker Nabih Berri publicly accused

Aoun of making statements that were “inaccurate, to say the least.” The IDF acknowledged the Iron Beam laser system saw limited use during the Iran war. The system needs 14 batteries to deliver the promised effect. Bennett’s Friday statement called Lebanon restrictions “tying the hands” of soldiers. He demanded the political echelon “let the IDF win.”

ASSESSMENT

Washington’s Aoun-Netanyahu meeting cannot disarm Hezbollah. Aoun cannot speak for territory Hezbollah controls — Berri reminds him of that regularly. The restraint produced the Meron Lag B’Omer cancellation. That same restraint lets Hezbollah launch rockets at Avivim and drones at school buses.

The kinetic round is won. The reconstitution is the next round. The brief tracks the architecture between them, daily and sourced. Subscribe.

Inside Israel

LIKUD FALLS BEHIND BENNETT AS GAFNI DEMANDS THE AG’S REMOVAL

A new Maariv poll has Bennett’s party at 28 seats and Likud at 26. Likud no longer leads the field. Eisenkot’s Yashar! party comes in third with 14 seats. The opposition bloc reaches 60 seats, the coalition holds 50, the Arab parties hold the remaining 10. Forty-six percent rate Bennett suitable for prime minister. Forty-four percent rate Eisenkot suitable. Forty-one percent say so of Netanyahu. The Bennett-Lapid Together merger sits three seats below the pre-merger sum (28 versus 31). UTJ chairman Moshe Gafni called himself “boiling with rage” at Shas leader Aryeh Deri in a Radio Kol Barama interview. UTJ exited the coalition. Shas did not, and continues to run government ministries while admitting it remains a coalition partner. Gafni called Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara — who closed yeshiva donor tax credits Thursday — “outright antisemitic.” He demanded Netanyahu fire her [maybe he forgets that Bibi has been *trying* to do so].

ASSESSMENT

The coalition cannot defend itself anymore. Polls register the constraint. Gafni’s “outright antisemitic” line is rhetoric not reason. Shas’s free-ride confirms what UTJ already calculated: there is nothing left to defend by sitting at the table. All that said, it’s a long way until the elections — don’t celebrate or mourn prematurely.

THE UMM AL-KHAIR PRODUCTION

Daily protests have run in Judea’s South Hebron Hills since April 13. The accusation is that Bedouin children are allegedly blocked from school by a fence Carmel residents built. The Hebron Hills Regional Council says Carmel security officials erected the fence in coordination with the IDF due to repeated infiltration attempts on the moshav. Umm al-Khair sits inside Carmel’s municipal boundaries as an illegal outpost. Council head Eliram Azulay drove from the school to Umm al-Khair in 1 minute, 10 seconds (the timer is in a video he posted). The council says foreign camera crews “instructed children to sit in the scorching sun to create a false impression of a ‘siege.’” There are alternative routes accessible (confirmed by the council, the IDF, and maps). The IDF confirmed soldiers used riot dispersal measures

against adults attempting to breach Carmel's perimeter — children were at distance and not the target. Regavim's Naomi Linder Kahn names roughly 100 Area C points where the same playbook has run since Khan al-Ahmar.

ASSESSMENT

Umm al-Khair an illegal outpost reframing itself as a community. Foreign cameras film children sitting in the sun. The story writes itself as a "siege" Israel must answer for. Azulay's 70-second video is would decimate the story if people were open to logic and facts.

The coalition is losing authority faster than the polls show. The Section 46 ruling, the AG fight, the haredi rotation: the institutional machinery behind the news. Subscribe.

Israel and the World

THE INSS AUDIT LANDS AS HOTOVELY TAKES THE EMPTY CHAIR

INSS researchers Yair Dayan and Gideon Tor published a public diplomacy audit this week. Their diagnosis starts with the empty chair. The head of national public diplomacy sat vacant for 2.5 years. The cabinet appointed former deputy foreign minister Tzipi Hotovely this week. [Two and a half years and a multi-front war later.] Authority is scattered across five offices. The Foreign Ministry, the Prime Minister's Office, the Diaspora Affairs Ministry, the Government Press Office, and the IDF. The system is "not being run." Self-censorship runs both directions. Ministers claim humanitarian aid is not entering Gaza when hundreds of trucks pass daily. Ministers also signal demolitions of Lebanese cities the IDF has no plan to carry out. Tor: "I'm not aware of a situation in which Israel's government did not want to explain itself." The prescriptions list one centralized body, a public ICJ defense, \$100 million for academic outreach, scaled Birthright and Christian programs.

ASSESSMENT

INSS reaches the institutional diagnosis but stops at the institution. The chair Hotovely fills was built for a consensus that no longer exists. Centralizing the same pipeline does not produce two messages for two coalitions; it produces one... just louder. The \$730 million the budget assigned funds the architecture the audit names broken, faster.

SYDNEY POLICE DENIED THE REQUEST THREE DAYS BEFORE THE BONDI MASSACRE

Australia's Royal Commission on Antisemitism issued its first report Thursday. Three days before the Bondi Beach Hanukkah massacre, the Sydney Community Security Group asked NSW Police for officers at Jewish events. The CSG called the threat level "HIGH." The note: "A terrorist attack against the NSW Jewish Community is likely." NSW Police declined the request. The force said it would send patrols by instead. Three days later, two gunmen opened fire on the "Chanukah by the Sea" event. Fifteen people died, including rabbis and a child. The commission's recommendations include applying the Operation Jewish High Holy Days protocol to all major Jewish events.

The Australian Jewish Association faulted the report for failing to name radical Islamist extremism as the operative motive. In Maryland, Anne Arundel County Executive Stuart Pittman, a Democrat, denied a Jewish security-grants request for a third time last week. In Maryland in 2024, the ADL recorded 356 antisemitic incidents — the sixth-highest state total in the country.

ASSESSMENT

Sydney police had three days, a written warning, and a known venue. They sent patrols by. Fifteen people died in the difference between diligence and dereliction. The Royal Commission's protocol fix acknowledges the difference. And the Australian Jewish Association names the motive the report is too cowardly to say. Maryland's Anne Arundel rejection runs the same calculation in grant lines. The security gaps don't seem to matter to the powers that be. [Paging Dara Horn: Any idea as to why that might be?]

TRUMP BYPASSES CONGRESS FOR \$8.6 BILLION IN MIDEAST ARMS

The Trump administration bypassed congressional review on Friday and approved \$8.6 billion in military sales to four Middle East countries. Qatar receives \$4.01 billion in Patriot air-and-missile-defense replenishment services and \$992.4 million in Advanced Precision Kill Weapon Systems. Kuwait receives a \$2.5 billion integrated battle command system. Israel and the UAE each receive APKWS purchases at \$992.4 million and \$147.6 million respectively. Secretary of State Rubio determined an emergency existed and waived congressional review requirements. The principal contractors are BAE Systems, RTX, Lockheed Martin, and Northrop Grumman. The Patriot replenishment to Qatar arrives weeks after the FBI affidavit surfaced. The recordings allege Qatar paid for ICC prosecutor Karim Khan's Netanyahu warrants. [Yes, the same Qatar.]

ASSESSMENT

The emergency designation answers the Senate Democrats who blocked Caterpillar sales last month. Patriot replenishment for Qatar is the price of Doha's mediation. By all means, let's give the radical jihadists funding one of the largest propaganda outlets in the world more weaponry and whitewash the issues. The FBI affidavit alleges those services included buying ICC arrest warrants for Israeli leadership. The arms sales arrive in the same package as the corruption.

Briefly Noted

DIPLOMACY & GEOPOLITICS

- *Times of Israel*: Iran's economy is failing on every visible metric: double-digit GDP contraction, currency at record lows, mass joblessness. The regime stockpiled six months of essentials before the war; Tehran's runway is longer than the West has assumed.
- *Jerusalem Post*: The Foreign Ministry, not the IDF spokesman, led the campaign that neutralized the Sumud flotilla within 24 hours. Branding the vessels the "condom flotilla" and routing activists to Greece pre-empted the detention-photo cycle the organizers wanted.
- *Jerusalem Post*: Spain summoned Israeli charge d'affaires Dana Erlich after Israel detained 175 flotilla activists near Crete, 31 Spaniards among them.

The Sanchez government has made Spain the EU's most reliable amplifier of the boycott line.

- *Times of Israel*: Israel's 2026 budget allocates \$730 million for public diplomacy. Pew shows 60% of Americans now view Israel unfavorably — the curve no PR budget reverses unless its dispersal is structurally changed.
- *Jerusalem Post*: David Weinberg's column on the new hasbara playbook engages the *Two Middles* long brief at length, accepting the partisan-sort diagnosis but contesting the two-track prescription. The architecture debate runs publicly while \$730 million flows into the same tired pipeline.
- *Jewish Insider*: Mike Lawler told JI he expects a renewed push to fill the Abraham Accords envoy role once Iran calms. The 2023-mandated position has stayed vacant under both administrations. Witkoff, informally, carries the work.

CULTURE, RELIGION & SOCIETY

- *Times of Israel*: LBCI aired an Angry Birds parody of Naim Qassem and Hezbollah fighters. Supporters insulted the Maronite Patriarch, the judiciary summoned LBCI, and Hezbollah still defines what Lebanon can mock.

Developments to Watch

NORTHERN FRONT (LEBANON / SYRIA)

- **Syrian air defense reconstitution** — IAF officers assess Syria is gradually rebuilding radar and air-defense systems. Whether the buildup crosses Israel's threshold determines whether the IAF's freedom of operation in Syrian airspace holds when the next Iran round forces use of it.

REGIONAL AXIS (IRAN, HOUTHIS, MILITIAS)

- **Trump's Iran proposal review** — Trump said he would review Tehran's 14-point plan but "can't imagine that it would be acceptable." The decision in coming days determines whether Washington's response is a counter-proposal, a hardened blockade, or renewed kinetic action.
- **Iraqi cabinet formation** — The Coordination Framework named banker Ali al-Zaidi prime minister last week after a 167-day deadlock. His bank faces US sanctions and IRGC-laundering allegations. Cabinet formation over four weeks fixes whether Tehran's preferred Baghdad outcome consolidates.
- **Iranian protest trigger window** — Tehran's Supreme National Security Council assessed a six-to-eight-week economic ceiling under the US blockade. Roughly three weeks in. The trigger calendar runs through early summer, with Pahlavi exile network activation as the SNSC's named concern.

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 travel with Khan whether he is removed or not.

- **Iran NPT procedural votes** — Iran's vice-president slot at the month-long Review Conference produces a discrete procedural vote each session. Whether Washington's challenges find arithmetic among non-aligned states tests the conference's credibility against an active treaty-violator.

HOME FRONT & POLITICS

- **Eisenkot's merger choice** — Bennett-Lapid's Together consolidation puts the call to Eisenkot in plain form. A combined list could top 41 seats. His decision determines whether the merger drives soft-right turnout or splits the same vote in two.
- **Netanyahu trial Case 2000 pivot** — Prosecutor Tirosh aimed to close Case 4000 cross-examination by Monday before pivoting to Case 2000 on the Mozes affair. The pivot reframes the witness from publisher-shareholder to publisher-suppliant. The week's testimony decides the optics.
- **Sohlberg June 1 enforcement deadline** — Justice Sohlberg's operative deadlines for police arrests of haredi draft evaders run through June 1. The AG's Section 46 ruling layered the donor-economy mechanism on top of the arrest mandate. Whether police execute decides whether June 1 produces compliance or a contempt sequel.

Meron is unlit. The IAF ordered the next two squadrons. Iran rebuilds from a base weaker than the one that started the war. Israel procures from a position stronger than the one that ended it. The architecture is sturdier than it was two months ago. But the light at the end of the tunnel seems further away than we'd like.

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