



ISRAEL UPDATE



Israel at War

Thursday, April 3, 2025

Day 545, 59 Hostages Remain in Captivity

LATEST UPDATES

IDF Activity

- Heavy fighting in Gaza began on Tuesday night for the first time since the end of the ceasefire last month.
- Most of the new activity, which involved troops on the ground, in the air and on the sea, has taken place in the **Rafah area**. The civilian population was advised to evacuate on Tuesday. Tens of thousands of residents have already moved to nearby humanitarian zones.
- Israel's Defense Minister Yisrael Katz said that the military operation "is expanding to crush and cleanse the area of terrorists and terror infrastructure, and to **seize large areas that will be added to Israel's security zones** – I call on the residents of Gaza to act now to remove Hamas and return all the hostages."
- Senior Israeli officials have argued that **increased military activity is the only way to put pressure on Hamas** to reach a deal and release the hostages. Representatives of the hostages' families have countered that the renewed military actions endanger the hostages' lives and decrease the chances of a new agreement being reached.
- Some Israeli media are reporting that the **IDF intends to capture and occupy around 25% of Gaza** in the coming two to three weeks to pressure Hamas to agree to a new deal. They also note that two key factors led to Israel's "newfound boldness" in Gaza. First, the IDF's new Chief of Staff is taking a much more aggressive approach to Hamas than his predecessor. And in Washington, the Trump Administration is giving Israel much more leeway in fighting than President Biden did.
- Reports suggest that the **latest negotiations** involve a deal that could see five to ten hostages freed in exchange for a 30-50 day ceasefire.
- Earlier this week, a second "**sign-of-life**" video was released by Hamas of 35-year-old hostage Elkana Bohbot. In the footage, Bohbot is seen pleading for his life and wishing to see his wife and young daughter.

- Several hundred Gazans have **demonstrated against Hamas almost daily for over a week, calling on the terror organization to release the hostages and end the war.** While commentators feel it is too early to call this development significant, the ramifications for Hamas could be dramatic.
- **On Tuesday night, the US military again struck Houthi targets.** The US has asked Israel not to retaliate against the terror group for its rocket fire on the Jewish state, saying that the US will handle the military response. Yesterday, the Pentagon announced it is deploying a second **aircraft carrier to the Middle East**, keeping one that is already there and sending another from the Indo-Pacific theater. The Harry S. Truman will be joined by the Carl Vinson “to continue promoting regional stability, deter aggression, and protect the free flow of commerce in the region,” the Pentagon said.

Rockets

- **Sirens are sounding across Israel every two to three days as a result of ballistic missiles fired by the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen.** While all missiles have been successfully intercepted by Israel’s defense systems (and some have crashed before reaching Israel), every alert sends millions running to shelters, causing psychological and mental anguish for citizens and sometimes resulting in injuries to those who fall while rushing to safety. In addition, debris from interceptions typically falls following each attack, reinforcing the need for all residents to continue to take cover.
- A few **rockets have also been fired at Israel from Gaza**, including a barrage last night. None have caused either injury or significant damage.
- **Over the weekend, two rockets were fired at Kiryat Shmona** (following six rockets that were shot at Metulla the previous week). Israel has been taking a very tough stance both on these attacks and on all ceasefire violations in the north. The IDF has said that any rocket fire will be met with a strong response; Israel sent a message to the Lebanese government, holding it responsible for any attacks that emanate from its territory. As a result, in response to the rockets on Kiryat Shmona, the air force hit a Hezbollah drone storage facility in Beirut. Shortly afterwards, the Lebanese government announced that it had arrested those who had launched the rockets, adding that the government “did not want to jeopardize the ceasefire.”

Political Developments

- The “**Qatargate**” affair continues to make headlines in Israel.
 - Two of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's senior media advisors, Yonatan Urich and Eli Feldstein, **have been arrested** and are being held until a Court hearing later today.
 - The two are being investigated for allegedly **receiving kickbacks** in exchange for promoting Qatar's public relations in Israel, while serving in the Prime Minister’s Office.
 - Netanyahu himself was questioned about the affair, but the police say **he is not considered a suspect**. The Prime Minister has strongly backed his aides, calling the investigation an “orchestrated witch hunt.”

- The Likud party said that the arrests are part of the attorney general and Shin Bet's "**fabricated investigations**" to "carry out a coup d'état through arrest warrants."
- In addition, **Zvika Klein, the Editor-in-Chief of the Jerusalem Post**, was brought in for questioning and is currently under house arrest for his role in the affair. Klein allegedly visited Qatar and was asked to support the country's public relations efforts in Israel.

- **Ongoing controversy surrounding the head of the Shin Bet (Shabak, Israel's FBI-equivalent) continues.**

- Last week Israel's Supreme Court issued a temporary injunction **freezing the dismissal of Ronen Bar**, the current head of the domestic security organization, until a final ruling on the matter on April 10. The Prime Minister had announced that he had lost confidence in Bar and the Cabinet voted unanimously to replace him.
- The Court accepted the Government's request to allow the Prime Minister to **interview potential candidates** to replace Bar. On Monday, the Prime Minister's Office announced that Eli Sharvit, a former head of the Navy would be the new Shin Bet head. It then emerged that Sharvit had penned an article criticizing the Trump Administration's climate policies. In addition, stories circulated that Sharvit had been active in anti-government protests during the judicial reform debate in Israel. Within hours, it was announced that Sharvit would not assume the Shin Bet leadership.
- Yesterday, the government said that it **needed time to find a new candidate**, and that the current deputy head of the Shin Bet would lead the organization in the interim.

- **Former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has registered a new party and announced his intent to run in the next elections, which must take place by October 2026; however, they could be held sooner, depending on political developments. Polls indicate that Bennett could beat the current prime minister and form a new government if elections were held now.**

- Israel has **cancelled all customs duties levied on products from the US**, Israel's largest trading partner. In 2024, the export of goods to the US stood at \$17.3 billion, while the export of services was estimated at \$16.7 billion. The 1985 free trade agreement with the US means that some 99% of goods imported from the US are already fully exempt from customs duties. The new reduction in customs duties will affect a limited number of products, all of which are in the category of imported food and agricultural products from the US.

For Further Reading

- ['Do Not Leave Any Alive': Sunnis vs. Alawites in Syria](#)
- [Hezbollah's Leadership Faces its First Strategic Test](#)
- [Explainer: Ministers Levin and Saar's Proposed Changes to the Judicial Selection Committee](#)
- [Some Advice from a Gentile about Combating Anti-Semitism](#)
- [Unpacking the New Agreement in Syria](#)

Am Yisrael Chai!

Pamela Garron

Director, Strategic Initiatives

pamela.garron@jewishtampa.com

813.739.1688