



Israel & the United States at War with Iran Special Update from Israel

April 16, 2026

Prepared by and sent from Jewish Federations of North America's Israel Office

Breaking News: President Donald Trump announced a 10-day Israel–Lebanon ceasefire set to begin at 5 p.m. ET, following calls with both countries' leaders.

- **Rocket attacks on Israel's north continue**
- **Ceasefire between Iran and Israel + the US holding. Negotiations over the next stage continue informally.**

Iran

- Following its imposition of a shipping **blockade on Iran**, the US warned that buyers of Iranian oil could face secondary sanctions and indicated it expected China to pause purchases. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said Washington had told countries that Iranian funds sitting in their banks could trigger secondary sanctions, and that letters had also been sent to two Chinese banks warning of possible punitive measures. The Treasury Department also targeted Iran's oil transportation infrastructure, sanctioning more than two dozen individuals, companies, and vessels. Bessent confirmed a 30-day waiver on sanctions for Iranian oil at sea, issued March 20 and due to expire April 19, was not renewed.
- US Central Command said it **turned back 10 vessels that attempted to sail out of Iranian ports** during the first 48 hours of the naval blockade.

- CENTCOM claimed no ships broke through, including one vessel it said was redirected back to Iran by a guided missile destroyer.
- A senior adviser to Iran's supreme leader publicly **threatened to sink American ships** if the US attempted to "police" the Strait of Hormuz during the blockade. Mohsen Rezaei said US ships "will be sunk" by Iranian missiles if Washington continued, and he also issued an explicit threat about taking hostages in the event of a ground invasion.
 - Iran's parliament speaker said a Lebanon ceasefire would be the result of Hezbollah's "steadfast struggle" and the **unity of the "Axis of Resistance,"** while pressing the view that Lebanon should have been included in the ceasefire reached between Washington and Tehran.

Lebanon

- IDF Sgt. Maj. (res.) **Ayal Uriel Bianco, 30, from Katzrin was killed** on Monday, when a military vehicle he was traveling in overturned during operational activity in southern Lebanon amid ongoing fighting with Hezbollah. Three other reserve soldiers were injured in the incident, and the IDF said the circumstances of the crash were under investigation.
- In what would be a historic move, Prime Minister Benjamin **Netanyahu is expected to speak directly with Lebanese President** Joseph Aoun in the near future— possibly as early as today, as the two countries engage in direct negotiations and move closer to what could be a new peace deal. The talks were confirmed by an Israeli minister, although no formal announcement has been made.
- Earlier in the week, **Israel began direct negotiations with Lebanon,** marking the first such talks between the two countries since 1993, following decades of formal hostilities and indirect contacts. Israeli and Lebanese delegations met this week in Washington, DC, in US-mediated talks hosted at the State Department. The Washington meeting brought together Israeli Ambassador to the US Yechiel Leiter and Lebanese Ambassador to the US Nada Hamadeh Moawad, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio and senior US officials acting as mediators.
- **Hezbollah rejected the talks outright** and stepped up rhetoric against the Lebanese government as it continued its attacks on northern Israel with repeated barrages of rockets, missiles, and drones launched from southern Lebanon, triggering air raid sirens across the Galilee and border communities, including Kiryat Shmona, Nahariya, Safed, Shlomi, and Karmiel.
- More than 40 rockets were fired in one barrage earlier this week, and **additional attacks** included multiple explosive drones, several of which penetrated Israeli airspace before [being intercepted](#), while at least one drone struck a building in Shlomi, causing property damage. Most projectiles were

- intercepted or fell in open areas, but rocket shrapnel wounded an Israeli civilian in the Western Galilee, and damage was reported to residential structures.
- In recent days, the IDF has **continued its combined air and ground campaign against Hezbollah** across southern Lebanon, [striking](#) what the military described as [command centers](#), [weapons depots](#), rocket launch sites and Radwan Force infrastructure. Airstrikes targeted Hezbollah positions in southern Lebanon, the Tyre and Nabatieh areas, and parts of the Bekaa Valley, but not Beirut.
 - Israeli **ground forces continued an expanded offensive** just north of the border. The main focus of [ground fighting](#) has been the town of Bint Jbeil, a longtime Hezbollah stronghold and symbolic center of the group's "resistance," where the IDF said troops have surrounded the town, destroyed dozens of sites used by Hezbollah and killed over 100 fighters in close-quarters combat and air support operations.
 - During the **fighting in the Bint Jbeil** area, [IDF forces located](#) more than [130 weapons](#) inside a school building. The weapons included Kalashnikov rifles, pistols and additional arms, along with Hezbollah flags and other organizational insignia found at the site. The IDF said the weapons were confiscated, and troops continued operations in the area as part of efforts to locate additional weapons and Hezbollah operatives.
 - President Donald **Trump publicly urged Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to avoid actions** that could derail diplomacy, saying Washington wanted to create "breathing room," though he also stressed that Hezbollah was not covered by the Iran ceasefire. Israeli officials said operations against Hezbollah would continue, arguing the campaign was aimed at pushing the group away from the border and dismantling its military capacity.
 - The IDF reiterated a **broad evacuation warning for residents of southern Lebanon**, urging people to evacuate immediately and move north of the Zahrani River.

Israel's Home Front

- Israel's Health Ministry said **7,791 people had been admitted to hospitals due to the fighting** with Iran and Hezbollah since the war began on February 28. It reported 83 still hospitalized, including one in critical condition, 15 in serious condition, 26 in moderate condition, and 41 in good condition, with the figures including both soldiers and civilians.
- The Israeli **shekel has strengthened sharply** in recent days, reaching its strongest level against the US dollar in roughly 30 years, with the exchange

- rate briefly breaking below 3 shekels to the dollar for the first time since the mid-1990s. Over roughly the past year, the shekel has appreciated close to 20% against the dollar, making it one of the world's strongest-performing currencies over that period. Economists and market analysts attributed the surge to improving investor sentiment following the ceasefire with Iran, expectations of reduced regional risk, continued strong capital inflows, and a broader weakening of the dollar globally. The shekel has also gained against other major currencies, pushing it to record levels on a trade-weighted basis, a development that has helped moderate inflation and lower import costs, while raising concerns among exporters about pressure on competitiveness.
- Israel's aviation sector has begun a **gradual return to normal operations** following the ceasefire with Iran, with Ben Gurion Airport fully reopened and servicing an expanding—but still limited—range of international flights. Israeli carriers El Al, Arkia, and Israir have resumed broader schedules, with El Al set to expand service to around 40 destinations starting April 19, including routes to Boston and multiple European cities.
 - Among **foreign airlines**, Etihad Airways has restarted two daily Tel Aviv–Abu Dhabi flights, while Bluebird Airways and TUS Airways have resumed service to Athens and Larnaca, respectively. Ethiopian Airlines, Smartwings, Hainan Airlines, and several smaller European and regional carriers are also returning this week, though capacity remains constrained. Major North American and Western European airlines—including United, Delta, Air Canada, Lufthansa Group, Air France–KLM and British Airways—have largely kept suspensions in place for now, citing security assessments and regulatory guidance. As a result, flight availability remains limited, fares are high, and the authorities say a full recovery will depend on continued stability and the pace at which foreign carriers regain confidence in the market.
 - The government approved a five-year **development plan for the Golan Heights** and Katzrin for 2026–2030, with total investment estimated at about \$330 million. The plan aims to significantly expand Katzrin, which cabinet minister Ze'ev Elkin said would become the Golan's first city, and to strengthen infrastructure, housing, employment and public services across the region along the Syrian and Lebanese borders. According to the Prime Minister's Office, the plan envisions bringing about 3,000 new families to Katzrin and the Golan Heights by 2030, alongside investments in higher education and research. Plans include establishing a branch of the University of Kiryat Shmona in Katzrin, as well as a veterinary hospital.

Diplomatic Developments

- Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar publicly thanked Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky for signing a **law that introduced criminal penalties for**

- antisemitic action in Ukraine**, including prison sentences of up to eight years. The law was signed on Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day, and the update said it was overwhelmingly supported by Ukraine's parliament.
- The **US Senate voted down two resolutions aimed at blocking weapons sales to Israel**, while a large share of Senate Democrats supported the efforts. Forty of 47 Senate Democrats voted to back one resolution seeking to block a \$295 million sale of bulldozers, while 59 senators voted against it. Thirty-six Democrats supported another resolution seeking to block a \$152 million sale of 1,000-pound bombs, while 63 senators voted against blocking it.
 - Prime Minister Benjamin **Netanyahu was included on Time magazine's 2026 list of the 100 most influential people**, marking his fifth appearance. The publication criticized Netanyahu for his responsibility for the October 7, 2023 failure while crediting him with subsequent political recovery amid Israel's conflicts in Lebanon and Iran and the release of Gaza hostages.

Jewish Federations and Partners

The Jewish Agency for Israel

- Through the Jewish Agency's Roaring Lion Fund for victims of the war, 1,165 assistance requests were approved and 325 remain in process, with total allocations reaching approximately \$1.36 million. In parallel, \$4.3 million in loans and grants were provided to 336 small businesses to support economic recovery.
- Jewish Agency subsidiary Amigour continued disruption at its sheltered housing facilities in northern Israel. A total of 11,909 food packages were distributed to elderly residents, including 76 deliveries this week to seniors in Nahariya. The organization renovated 153 shelters and has been asked to repair 730 homes and public buildings.
- The Wings program for new immigrant lone soldiers expanded support following the outbreak of the war, mobilizing staff to conduct proactive outreach to hundreds of participants. Approximately 100 emergency grants and shopping vouchers were distributed to participants financially impacted by the fighting, and around 40 individuals were referred for mental health treatment, including wounded soldiers, evacuees, and those affected by nearby rocket impacts. The program also provided dedicated assistance to evacuees and parents of lone soldiers, including online resilience workshops for families abroad, while continuing all counseling and scholarship preparation services remotely to maintain continuity. The Wings program supports an average of 3,600 lone soldiers annually.

Kulna

- Kulna, an initiative that strengthens and empowers Mizrahi Jewish communities across Israel, is playing a critical role in this moment. Supported through iRep (Israel Religious Expression Platform), a coalition of Jewish Federations working to advance religious pluralism in Israel by supporting civil society organizations, building public awareness, and strengthening dialogue between Israeli and North American Jewish leadership on issues of religion and state.
- In Tiberias, the local Kulna community led by Yossi Ben Hamo, is helping operate the municipal emergency center, supporting about 2,000 families. Their work focuses on three areas: meeting urgent community needs, including refurbishing shared shelters; supporting evacuated families with essentials and activities for children; and providing meals, care packages, and morale-boosting support for soldiers in the region. In Kiryat Shmona, where the situation is even more severe, Kulna has shifted programming online with Zoom learning sessions and in-shelter activities.

The Aguda

- The Aguda, formally known as The Association for LGBTQ Equality in Israel, is Israel's oldest national LGBTQ organization, a nonprofit advocacy and support group founded in 1975 that works to advance equality, combat discrimination and provide services to the LGBTQ community nationwide.
- During Operation Roaring Lion, The Aguda's "Someone to Talk To" Hotline, supported by Jewish Federations, demonstrated the value of sustained philanthropic investment by maintaining full operational continuity under emergency conditions. As the war unfolded, the hotline rapidly absorbed increased demand, providing immediate emotional support and stabilization to LGBTQ individuals across Israel — many of them first time callers — while operating remotely under security constraints. Prior investment in volunteer training, digital infrastructure, and cross organizational coordination enabled uninterrupted access to crisis listening, containment, and referral, even as anxiety, loneliness, and emotional distress sharply intensified nationwide.
- Long-term capacity building also enabled swift escalation from listening, to action in high risk cases, including suicide prevention, emergency shelter placement, and urgent financial assistance. At the same time, hotline leadership prioritized volunteer resilience through proactive outreach and group support, ensuring staff well-being and service quality despite widespread personal and communal strain. Together, these measures allowed the hotline to remain a trusted, responsive point of care throughout the crisis—providing stability, safety, and connection when they were needed most.

Reshut Harabim

- Reshut Harabim, another iRep grantee, is a Jerusalem-based network of over 40 Israeli-Judaism organizations and 25 communities working to promote a pluralistic, tolerant, and accessible public sphere in the capital. In recent weeks, the organization has provided support across multiple cities and strengthened Jerusalem-based partners, so they have the resources and infrastructure needed to sustain community life under extreme conditions. It has also kept Beit Reshut Harabim operational (including its functioning bomb shelter) to enable safe programming and ongoing work. In parallel, Reshut Harabim is preparing for longer-term needs and “the day after,” helping civil-society organizations plan for recovery, resilience, and the rebuilding of communal life once the immediate emergency subsides.

Jewish Federations continues to monitor the situation on the ground very closely and will report as needed.

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