



Update from Israel

May 21, 2026

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

- **Iran talks at critical juncture; Trump-Netanyahu call reported as tense as new framework circulates**
- **Ben Gvir's video of bound flotilla activists triggers international diplomatic crisis; Netanyahu issues rare rebuke**
- **Knesset dissolution bill passes preliminary reading 110-0; Netanyahu absent from vote**

Lebanon ceasefire extended 45 days; three IDF soldiers killed during nominal truce

Iran

- Multiple countries are now involved in drafting a framework to end the US-Iran war. According to Axios, a revised "peace memo" crafted by Qatar and Pakistan, with input from Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt, is under review by Iranian officials. The proposed memorandum of understanding consists of 14 points. It would officially declare an end to the war while opening 30 days of negotiations on the Strait of Hormuz and Iran's nuclear program.
- The central nuclear dispute concerns Iran's uranium enrichment. The proposed framework would impose a moratorium on enrichment, but the duration remains unresolved: Iran has proposed five years; the US has demanded twenty. Three sources told Axios the likely outcome is at least twelve to fifteen years. Iran would also ship its stockpile of highly enriched uranium out of the country, with the US as the proposed destination, and commit not to operate underground nuclear facilities. A snap-inspection regime under UN oversight is also on the table.
- Iran has shown no public flexibility on the new draft. Its foreign ministry confirmed it is reviewing the updated proposal. Still, spokesman Esmail Baghaei has defended the country's demands, including the lifting of sanctions, the release of frozen assets and arrangements in the Strait of

Hormuz, as positions that have been “firmly defended in every round of negotiations.”

- President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu held a tense phone call on Tuesday in which Trump briefed Netanyahu on the new multilateral mediation effort. According to three sources cited by Axios, Netanyahu’s reaction was sharply negative, with one source saying his “hair was on fire” after the call. Netanyahu has pushed for resuming military operations against Iran, arguing that its nuclear program, missile capabilities, and proxy networks have not been adequately addressed. Israeli sources noted that Netanyahu “is always concerned” about how negotiations with Iran will go, even at stages that previously came to nothing. Read more on [Axios](#).
- Trump publicly dismissed the reported rift on Wednesday. Speaking to reporters after stepping off Air Force One, he said Netanyahu “will do whatever I want him to do. He’s a very, very good man.” He described the talks with Iran as “right on the borderline,” adding: “If we don’t get the right answers, it goes very quickly.”
- Iran has used the ceasefire period to rebuild its military capacity. According to a New York Times report citing a US military official, Iran has excavated bombed ballistic missile sites, relocated mobile missile launchers, and adjusted tactics for a possible resumption of fighting. The official said US strikes hit the entrances to missile sites but not the launchers themselves, which were buried in underground caves. Iran’s missile stockpile is estimated at roughly 70% of pre-war levels.
- Oil markets remain under pressure. Commercial oil inventories are depleting rapidly, International Energy Agency head Fatih Birol warned at the G7 in Paris, with strategic reserve releases adding 2.5 million barrels per day to the market but described as “not limitless.” In peacetime, the Strait of Hormuz carries roughly one-fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas shipments.

Lebanon

- This week, the US announced a 45-day extension of the ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon, following two days of talks in Washington that State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott described as “highly productive.” The third round of negotiations was the first to include military officials from both sides. A security track will launch at the Pentagon on May 29; the political track reconvenes June 2 and 3.
- The ceasefire has not stopped the fighting. Eight IDF soldiers have been killed in southern Lebanon since April 16; three died in the past week alone, two of them in Hezbollah drone strikes. Captain Maoz Israel Recanati, 24, a Golani Brigade platoon commander who was to be married next month, was killed in a drone strike on May 16; additional soldiers were seriously wounded in the same attack. A second soldier was killed in a drone strike on May 19, with others seriously injured. Staff Sergeant Negev Dagan, 20, also of the Golani Brigade, was killed by mortar fire on May 14. The deaths bring the IDF toll to 21 since hostilities escalated at the start of the Iran war.
- Hezbollah has kept up near-daily drone attacks on IDF troops in southern Lebanon, which the IDF has called repeated violations of the ceasefire. At his weekly cabinet meeting, Netanyahu acknowledged he had warned about FPV drones six years ago, but did not explain why the threat went unaddressed. He said the army is now working on countermeasures: “Soon, we will replace them and fix this.” The IDF separately announced it is procuring an additional

188,000 square meters of mesh netting to deploy on vehicles and at military posts to block Hezbollah's fiber-optic-guided drones.

- Israeli airstrikes have continued across southern Lebanon against what Israel describes as active Hezbollah threats to troops in the field. Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam said his country had suffered enough "reckless" wars fought for foreign interests, and called for Arab and international support in Beirut's negotiations with Israel. Lebanon's Health Ministry reports at least 380 people killed by Israeli strikes since the ceasefire took effect.
- Rocket and drone fire from Lebanon has caused continuous disruptions to northern Israeli communities throughout the week. Air raid sirens sounded repeatedly in Kiryat Shmona, Safed and communities across the Galilee Panhandle as Hezbollah launched barrages at civilian areas; some rockets were intercepted while others struck open areas. The IDF called each incident a ceasefire violation. The government has stated that, unlike the 2024 conflict, when hundreds of thousands of northern residents were evacuated, residents will not be evacuated from their homes during the current fighting. Northern communities have still not fully recovered from the damage sustained in 2024.

Gaza Flotilla

- The Israeli Navy on May 18 intercepted the Global Sumud Flotilla in the Mediterranean, the largest effort to challenge Israel's naval blockade of Gaza since a smaller flotilla was stopped in late April. More than 50 vessels carrying approximately 500 activists from 45 countries had departed the Turkish port of Marmaris on May 14. The interception took place roughly 250 nautical miles from Gaza. By Wednesday, Israel had stopped all ships in the flotilla, with over 400 activists transferred to Ashdod port for processing ahead of expected deportation.
- Israeli naval commandos boarded the vessels in broad daylight. Prime Minister Netanyahu, at the Kirya military headquarters in Tel Aviv alongside Defense Minister Israel Katz and IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir, commended the Navy commander, saying Israel was "effectively thwarting a malicious plan intended to break the isolation we are imposing on Hamas terrorists in Gaza." Israel has dismissed the flotilla as "a PR stunt at the service of Hamas" and said no humanitarian aid was found on the intercepted boats.
- The flotilla is led by Turkish aid organization IHH, which Israel designates as a terrorist organization. IHH organized the 2010 Mavi Marmara flotilla, in which nine Turkish activists were killed. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan condemned the interception as "piracy and banditry carried out with a fascist mentality".
- National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir posted several videos of himself at Ashdod port taunting the detained activists, triggering a diplomatic crisis. In one clip, dozens of activists kneel with their hands bound as Ben Gvir waves a large Israeli flag and shouts in Hebrew, "Welcome to Israel, we are the masters," while Israel's national anthem plays over a loudspeaker. In a second clip, he forces the head down of an activist who shouts, "Free, free Palestine," responding, "Shut up!" In a third, he tells the activists they "came here all full of pride like big heroes — look at them now," and appeals to Netanyahu to imprison them for a "long, long time." Read more and watch the controversial video [here](#).

- Italy, France, the Netherlands, Canada, Sweden, Switzerland, Germany, Greece, the United Kingdom and several other countries summoned the Israeli ambassadors to their capitals in protest.
- Netanyahu issued a rare public statement criticizing one of his own ministers: "Israel has every right to prevent provocative flotillas of Hamas terrorist supporters from entering our territorial waters and reaching Gaza. However, the way that Minister Ben Gvir dealt with the flotilla activists is not in line with Israel's values and norms." Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar went further, writing on X: "You knowingly caused harm to our State in this disgraceful display — and not for the first time. You have undone tremendous, professional and successful efforts made by so many people — from IDF soldiers to Foreign Ministry staff and many others. No, you are not the face of Israel."
- US Ambassador Mike Huckabee said Ben Gvir had "betrayed the dignity of his nation." Israel's Ambassador to Washington, Yechiel Leiter, called the conduct "reckless grandstanding" that was "not representative of government policy." Read more in the [Times of Israel](#).

Elections in Israel

- The Knesset on Wednesday passed a preliminary reading of a dissolution bill by a vote of 110-0, with no lawmakers voting against. Netanyahu did not attend. Opposition leader Benny Gantz called it "the beginning of the end of the worst government in Israel's history." Hours later, the Knesset advanced a separate opposition dissolution bill, sponsored by Gantz and MK Pnina Tamano-Shata of Blue and White, by a vote of 53-0. Read more in the [Times of Israel](#).
- The coalition submitted its own dissolution bill on May 13 to retain control over the pace and timing of elections. The bill sets no election date; that would be determined by the Knesset House Committee, on a day at least three months from final approval. Two additional readings are required before the bill becomes law. Elections must be held no later than October 27. Political commentators say the most likely window is the first half of September.
- The immediate cause of the coalition's collapse was the failure to pass a draft exemption law for yeshiva students, the central demand of the ultra-Orthodox Haredi parties. United Torah Judaism and Degel HaTorah have broken with Netanyahu over it. On Wednesday, Haredi MKs voted in favor of opposition dissolution bills as well, a visible marker of the breach.
- With dissolution approaching, coalition members pushed contested legislation through the Knesset. The Constitution Committee advanced a bill splitting the role of attorney general into two positions, separating the government's legal adviser from the chief prosecutor, and cutting the office's authority and independence. A second bill would make it harder to open criminal investigations into senior officials, including the prime minister, cabinet ministers, and members of Knesset. Opposition lawmakers walked out of the committee session.
- Netanyahu testified again in his corruption trial this week, with cross-examination continuing in Case 2000, which concerns alleged negotiations with the publisher of Yedioth Ahronoth for favorable coverage in exchange for regulatory benefits. Netanyahu has denied all charges and maintains they are politically motivated.

Other Developments

- Israel's Noam Bettan finished second at the 70th Eurovision Song Contest in Vienna; Bulgaria took first. The result came despite a change in voting rules introduced ahead of this year's contest, which capped the number of votes per person at 10, down from 20, following allegations that Israel's diaspora campaigns had disproportionately influenced the public vote in previous years. Despite the new restrictions, Israel received the maximum 12 points in the public televote from six countries: Finland, Portugal, Switzerland, Germany, Azerbaijan and France. President Herzog told Bettan he had "brought honor" to Israel with a "perfect" performance. Netanyahu also offered congratulations, saying the country was "very, very proud."
- Mental health: Clalit, Israel's largest healthcare provider, reported it has recruited 290 mental health professionals and expanded dozens of clinics as demand continues to rise following the Iran war.

Jewish Federations and Partners

The Jewish Agency for Israel/Nefesh B'Nefesh

- As Israel marked **Yom Yerushalayim** (Jerusalem Day) this week, Nefesh B'Nefesh released new aliyah data in partnership with the Jewish Agency for Israel, the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael and Jewish National Fund-USA.
- Since the beginning of 2026, 201 new immigrants have arrived in Jerusalem, with projections of approximately 1,200 by year's end, up from 1,128 in 2025.
- Since last year's Yom Yerushalayim, 1,014 North American immigrants have settled in Jerusalem, including 70 families, approximately 400 young singles, and around 180 retirees. The oldest new immigrant was 96; the youngest was 11 months.
- Jerusalem remains the top destination for North American immigrants, with nearly 30,000 having settled there since Nefesh B'Nefesh was founded in 2002.
- North American aliyah has continued through the war with Iran. Approximately 500 North Americans have moved to Israel since the start of 2026, and more than 830 aliyah applications have been opened since the Iran war began in late February. More than half of this year's new arrivals are between the ages of 19 and 35.

The Jewish Agency for Israel — Grant Fund for Spouses of Reservists with Small Businesses

The Jewish Agency for Israel has closed applications for its **Grant Fund for Spouses of Reservists with Small Businesses**, launched to help families whose livelihoods were disrupted by extended reserve duty during the war.

- The fund began at 4 million NIS and grew to 60 million NIS. The Financial Resource Development division raised 40 million NIS of that total; the Class Action Foundation contributed the remaining 20 million NIS, its second project with the Jewish Agency's business assistance unit.
- The Jewish Agency received 6,026 applications, meeting its target of approximately 6,000. To date, 4,737 grants totaling 55.375 million NIS have been approved, roughly 95% of the fund. Another 257 applications remain under review, with potential approvals of up to 3 million NIS.

- Ninety percent of aid recipients are women. Recipient businesses reported an average revenue decline of 60%, with their spouses logging an average of 344 reserve duty days.
- Eighty percent of participating businesses have expressed interest in continuing with Jewish Agency programs, including guidance, mentoring, and loans, and have been enrolled in the Otef Le'Esek program. The fund operated in coordination with local authorities nationwide.

For more information, please contact: Jewish Federations of North America's Dani Wassner

dani.wassner@jewishfederations.org.

Subscribe to this weekly update [here](#).