



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and Middle East News Update

*Thursday, April 18*

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# News Excerpts

April 18, 2023

## Israel Hayom

### **Hezbollah Launches Major Rocket Attack That Injures 18**

Lebanon's Hezbollah said it launched missiles and drones on an Israeli military facility in Arab al-Aramshe, in response to the Israeli killing of Hezbollah members and commanders in Lebanon. This escalation comes as tensions between Israel and Iran are reaching new heights after a series of strikes and counterstrikes. Hezbollah says it targeted a military facility in the border town of Arab al-Aramshe to avenge the killing of a number of its fighters, including a commander, in Israeli strikes the day before. Israeli media said the rockets struck a community center. The Israeli rescue service Magen David Adom said 18 people were wounded, four of them seriously. The Israeli military said it identified a number of launches in the area and struck the sources of the rocket fire. It said it also targeted a compound in southern Lebanon. Israel and Hezbollah have traded fire on a near-daily basis since the start of the war in Gaza.

## Times of Israel

### **Netanyahu Shelved Plans for Iran Reprisal After Biden Call**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu shelved pre-prepared plans for retaliation against Iran's weekend barrage after speaking with US President Joe Biden immediately following the attack, Israeli television reported. According to the Kan public broadcaster, the cabinet had already approved a series of possible responses depending on the scope of the Iranian attack, which were slated to be carried out immediately following the Iranian fusillade early Sunday. The report noted the comments likely pointed to a weaker response than what had been approved. Kan also quoted unnamed Western diplomats saying that "the understanding is that Israel will respond." A separate report by the [Axios](#) said the war cabinet also considered green-lighting a strike on Iran during a meeting Monday but later decided not to "for operational reasons." According to the report, which cited Israeli and US officials, Israel informed the Biden administration after the meeting that it decided to hold off on a response.

## Jerusalem Post

### **Jordan: Israeli Retaliation for Iran Strikes Risks Wider War**

Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said an Israeli retaliation against Iranian strikes could bring a real risk of dragging the whole region into a devastating war. In an interview released by state media, Safadi said his country was lobbying major powers against an escalation that would have far-reaching consequences for regional stability and security. "The risks are enormous. That could drag the whole region into war, which would be devastating to us in the region and we'll have very, very serious implications for the rest of the world including the US," Safadi said. "The situation is too dangerous. The chances of regional explosion are real, and that has got to stop. We've got to make sure there's no further escalation," he added.

## **Egypt: Op in Rafah Would Endanger Israeli-Egyptian Peace**

The IDF operation in Rafah has raised concerns in Egypt, with the Egyptian Ministry of Information issuing a warning about the potential consequences for the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty. Diaa Rashwan, the spokesperson for the ministry, voiced these concerns during an interview with the Saudi channel Al-Arabiya. "Does Israel fully understand the meaning of Egypt's warnings against entering Rafah? Will it choose this option to the detriment of the peace that has lasted for 45 years?" Rashwan questioned, highlighting the gravity of the situation. Rashwan emphasized the importance of negotiations in resolving the hostage situation, criticizing previous attempts by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to address the issue through military means. "Netanyahu said he would overthrow Hamas and failed, that he would free the hostages and failed and that he would ensure that Gaza no longer poses a threat to Israel's security and failed," Rashwan remarked, underscoring the necessity for a diplomatic approach.

## **Qatar Ending Role as Mediator in Israel-Hamas Talks**

Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed Al Thani said that his country was "reconsidering" its role as a mediator between Israel and Hamas in negotiations for a deal to release the 133 Israeli hostages held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip since the role "has been harmfully exploited by certain politicians for their private interests." Al Thani didn't name anyone but Doha had criticized Prime Minister Netanyahu on several occasions in recent months - and at the same time was on the receiving end of criticism from Israeli government officials and lawmakers. Qatar's critics claim the Gulf nation has not been a fair and impartial mediator since it maintains close ties with Hamas and is responsible for its financing. On the other hand, Qatar said its funding of the Gaza terror group, was at Netanyahu's behest.

## **Haniyeh to Visit Turkey as Erdogan Hits Back at Criticism**

Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh will visit Turkey on Saturday, as Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is hitting back at domestic criticism over Gaza. "The leader of the Palestinian cause will be my guest this weekend. We will confer with each other and talk about many things," Erdogan said during a parliamentary address to his party members, without mentioning Haniyeh by name. Haniyeh will meet with Erdogan, Turkey's private NTV television reported on the same day. Turkey does not designate Hamas as a terrorist organization, unlike the United States, and the militant group's leaders can freely travel to the country from the Qatari capital, where their political bureau is based. Haniyeh also held talks with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan in Doha, where the top Turkish diplomat also met with Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Al Thani. The pair discussed a potential cease-fire in Gaza, humanitarian aid, as well as hostages Hamas, is keeping in the Palestinian enclave.

Axios

## **Abbas Rejected US Requests to Hold off on UN Membership Vote**

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas rejected requests by the Biden administration to not move forward with a vote at the United Nations Security Council on accepting Palestine as a full member of the UN, according to four Palestinian, US and Israeli. Tension, frustration and mistrust have been growing between the Abbas government and the Biden administration over the last three years. The Palestinian president sees the administration as not acting to push a two-state solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The UN Security Council is expected to vote as soon as Friday on a draft resolution that would give Palestine full member status at the UN instead of its current observer status. Gaining full member status — which would amount to the UN recognizing a Palestinian state — first requires nine votes to bring a resolution before the 15-member UN Security Council. The council, which includes the US, would need to approve the application, and it would then have to receive at least two-thirds of General Assembly votes. US and Israeli officials said the Biden administration is trying to prevent the Palestinians from getting the nine votes so the US won't have to veto the resolution.

Reuters

## **Israel Approves \$5 Billion Plan to Bolster, Develop Gaza Border Towns**

Israel's cabinet approved a five-year, 19-billion-shekel (\$5 billion) plan to rebuild and strengthen communities near the Gaza border after the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas militants, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said. Prime Minister Netanyahu said Israel would invest the funds in housing, infrastructure, education, employment, health and other areas. "Hamas terrorists wanted to uproot us - but we will uproot them and deepen our roots," he said in a statement. "We will build the Land of Israel and protect our country." His office said local communities would work with government ministries, and along with the business sector and philanthropy, to bring the region to be a "vital, flourishing and attractive area". [Read More "Gaza's IVF Embryos Destroyed by Israeli Strike" "UN Agency Says Staff, Other Gaza Detainees Subjected to Ill-Treatment" \(Reuters\)](#)

## **Dangerous Reaction**

By Giora Eiland

- Judging by the nearly explicit statements made by senior Israeli officials, a decision has already been made to retaliate for the recent Iranian attack. For obvious reasons, no details have been provided as to the when, the which and the magnitude [of the future Israeli attack]. The considerations in favor of an attack in general, and against Iran itself, are readily understandable and logical, but there are at least five reasons why an overt attack on Iranian soil should be avoided. First, if the attack is “measly,” and is carried out merely as a performative duty, the damage it causes Israel will outweigh the benefits derived. Alternatively, if it is massive, it will almost certainly prompt Iranian retaliation, which will lead us into a long war against Iran, contrary to our own intentions. That is probably not what we want.
- Given the ongoing war in Gaza and the conflict with Lebanon, now is not the time to risk a prolonged war in an additional sector. Second, Iran’s retaliatory attacks might be directed against American interests in Iraq and/or the Persian Gulf, and/or Saudi, Emirati and/or Jordanian targets. That might then spiral out of control into a regional war, with the attacked countries blaming Israel for starting it. Third, Israel has a far more pressing interest than Iran, which is to restore life to normal along its northern border by September 1 so as to allow the residents to return to their homes.
- It would be smart to utilize the international support we have been given and to reinforce it by agreeing to heed the advice we have been given by London, Washington and Paris, and to demand, in exchange, unqualified support on the Lebanese issue, support that is translated into effective pressure (mainly American and French) to reach a settlement in the north and—should that effort be unsuccessful within a short amount of time—then unqualified support for a major Israeli military operation in Lebanon. Fourth, Israel’s paramount interest in terms of Iran is to deny it nuclear weapons.
- Currently, Iran appears to be sailing confidently towards achieving that dangerous objective. The most recent Iranian attack ought to prove just how dangerous an Iran equipped with nuclear weapons would be, and not only for Israel. This is an opportunity to renew international pressure on Iran. That pressure needs to include economic sanctions that are coupled with a credible (American) military threat. The right course of action, therefore, would be for Israel to trade its justifiable wish to attack Iran for a Western commitment to act on that issue. Enlisting the United States won’t be enough. All of the European Union member states need to be enlisted as well, as does India (17 Indian sailors were kidnapped by Iran) and, most important of all, Saudi Arabia.
- Apparently, Saudi Arabia has been helping Iran circumvent the oil boycott against it by having Saudi tankers transport forbidden Iranian oil. That must be brought to an end. Fifth, a prolonged military conflict between Israel and Iran could impact Jordan’s stability.

- **Iran is even now trying to cast Jordan as having betrayed the Palestinian cause and Muslim fraternity by having taken an active role alongside Israel in foiling the Iranian attack. Jordan and Sudan are the next countries that Iran hopes to infiltrate and to undermine their sovereignty. The above is not a recommendation not to act at all. Moreover, the Iranian attack this week was launched in response to an Israeli strike in Syria, and we mustn't blink on that issue. Israel's operations in Syria in the past nine years prevented a second Hizbullah from being established in that country, and the operations against Iranian targets in Syria should be continued. My assessment is that the Iranians will not respond to the ongoing war-between-wars in Syria and, if they do, it will be far easier to form an offensive coalition against them. Israel has a range of other ways to hurt Iran, to send a deterring message, but not necessarily actions that would force Iran to launch another counterattack.**

## **Deadline Rising**

By Ron Ben Yishai

- It turns out that Hizbullah is an organization that studies, learns quickly and improves its ability to operate the weapons it uses. Evidence for this are the Hizbullah drones that exploded in the Galilee, two on Tuesday adjacent to Beit Hillel and one yesterday in Arab al-Aramsha that wounded 20 Israelis. Residents of Beit Hillel had not had advance warning; residents of Arab al-Aramsha did. But in neither case did Israel manage to intercept the threat.
- The reason for this is apparently that the IDF's detection and interception systems failed to detect the explosive drone in time. In the past, there have been incidents in which Iron Dome batteries failed to intercept unmanned drones, but those incidents were apparently accidents, failures or bad luck. There weren't many of those, and one can attribute them to the fact that despite the fact that the Iron Dome can shoot down airborne vehicles, it does not provide a hermetic seal. The past 48 hours appear to point to a significant turn in favor of Hizbullah, allowing the organization to evade the detection and warning apparatus in the north.
- Several facts may explain this trend: The UAVs reach their targets using three basic navigation systems. One uses a ground-based operator to drive the UAV using a camera installed in the belly or the nose of the UAV which allows the operator to direct it to the target and to decide precisely when the UAV nosedives and explodes on its target. The second UAV navigation system is programmed ahead of time and makes its way to the target by a predetermined route using radio signs it receives from satellites. In other words, a form of GPS. The third method is for the UAV to follow a pre-programmed route, but navigation is done via an automatic inertial system installed in it. That makes it virtually impossible to disrupt because it does not require any communication with an outside source—either satellites or human operators. The dense, mountainous area like the Israeli-Lebanese border is perfect for operating UAVs utilizing any of the three methods.
- Hizbullah operatives prefer, of course, the inertial navigation system that cannot be detected and which also renders irrelevant the need to direct the offensive UAV during the last stage of its flight in order to make it crash. This type of UAV programming requires technical know-how and operators with skills we know the Iranians already have, but that Hizbullah has apparently only recently started to acquire in the course of its fighting with Israel, among other things. The UAVs that hit the Beit Hillel area and the UAVs that hit the Arab al-Aramsha community center yesterday were apparently not Shehad 136 drones, the type Hizbullah and the Iranians have used in the past, nor were they the more modern Shehad 238 model, which the Iranians used in the major attack early Sunday morning. Hizbullah apparently used a Marsad UAV, an improved version of an older, Iranian-made UAV called Ababeel. This is a larger UAV that can carry about 50 kilograms of explosives, possibly more, and when it hits a building while traveling quickly it causes relatively extensive damage.

- **It is apparently harder to detect the Marsad for a variety of reasons. Hizbullah has apparently studied how Israel's detection and interception systems work and understands that Israel's ability to intercept their UAVs depends on early detection, and having enough advance notice for the interception missiles to be fired and to hit their targets. Presumably, Israeli technology will soon regain the upper hand in this competition between the IDF and Hizbullah, but it is important to remember: that the enemy studies every tool you use and will eventually employ countermeasures. There will never be a situation in which an active defense system, of which Iron Dome and David's Sling are components, will intercept everything fired at us, from mortars to cruise missiles.**