



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
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Israel and Middle East News Update

Friday, April 25

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Headlines:

- **Trump poised to offer Saudi Arabia over \$100 billion arms package, sources say**
- **Top US general visits Israel ahead of next round of US-Iran nuclear talks**
- **Palestinians establish vice presidency post, no candidate named yet**
- **Ahmed al-Sharaa said to seek peace with Israel, eyes Syrian entry to Abraham Accords**
- **Lebanon passes banking secrecy law in third attempt to meet IMF demands**
- **In boost to Israel, ICC Appeals Court reverses lower court ruling**
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Reuters

[Trump poised to offer Saudi Arabia over \\$100 billion arms package, sources say](#)

The United States is poised to offer Saudi Arabia an arms package worth well over \$100 billion, six sources with direct knowledge of the issue told Reuters, saying the proposal was being lined up for announcement during U.S. President Donald Trump's visit to the kingdom in May. The offered package comes after the administration of former President Joe Biden unsuccessfully tried to finalize a defense pact with Riyadh as part of a broad deal that envisioned Saudi Arabia normalizing ties with Israel.

Al-Monitor

[Top US general visits Israel ahead of next round of US-Iran nuclear talks](#)

The top commander of American forces in the Middle East, Gen. Michael "Erik" Kurilla, arrived in Israel Thursday evening, an Israeli security source and a US defense official confirmed to Al-Monitor. Kurilla's latest visit to Israel came ahead of other expected stops in the Middle East as the Pentagon continues to sustain two aircraft carriers in the region amid the Trump administration's nuclear diplomacy with Iran. Citing unnamed security sources, Israeli news site Ynet reported Kurilla's expected 36-hour stay will entail coordination with top Israeli military officials on the potential for joint strikes against Iran as well as defensive measures to blunt any Iranian retaliation.

Reuters

Palestinians establish vice presidency post, no candidate named yet

The Palestinian leadership approved the creation of the position of vice president of Mahmoud Abbas, and possibly his successor, on Thursday, a step widely seen as needed to assuage international doubts over Palestinian leadership. A statement published by state news agency WAFA said 170 members of the Palestinian Central Council, the Palestinians' highest decision-making body, voted in favour of the decision, while one member voted against it and another abstained.

Times of Israel

Ahmed al-Sharaa said to seek peace with Israel, eyes Syrian entry to Abraham Accords

New Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa said that Damascus seeks to normalize ties with Israel, US Congressman Cory Mills told Bloomberg on Thursday after a meeting with him last week in Syria. Mills said he held talks with Sharaa about the conditions for removing US-imposed economic sanctions, as well as the possibility of peace with Israel, according to the report.

Reuters

Lebanon passes banking secrecy law in third attempt to meet IMF demands

Lebanon's parliament on Thursday passed a new banking secrecy law allowing authorised entities to access records from the last decade, a long-awaited measure demanded by the International Monetary Fund to set the country's shattered economy on track. It is parliament's third attempt at amending banking secrecy regulations in Lebanon, after previous versions were considered by the

IMF as insufficient, partly because they did not grant enough government bodies access to banking data.

Jerusalem Post

[In boost to Israel, ICC Appeals Court reverses lower court ruling](#)

In a potential historic comeback, the Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Court on Thursday reversed the November 2024 ruling of the ICC lower court against Israel's jurisdictional objections to the issuing of arrest warrants for alleged war crimes against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and then-defense minister Yoav Gallant.

Times of Israel

[Mossad head travels to Doha for meeting with Qatari PM on hostage deal efforts](#)

Mossad head David Barnea traveled on Thursday to Qatar, an Israeli source told The Times of Israel, possibly marking the spy chief's return to the hostage negotiating table after being demoted from the role two months ago. According to Walla, Barnea will meet Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani there to discuss ongoing efforts to reach a hostage deal in Gaza.

Commentary:

Yediot Ahronot

[The Options in Gaza: The IDF Would Prefer to Intensify the Current Course in Gaza](#)

By Ron Ben-Yishai

- **IDF and other defense officials have refused to respond to the accusations and insults that were hurled on Tuesday evening at Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir and Defense Minister Yisrael Katz by ministers Bezalel Smotrich and Yariv Levin.**
- **Even after the juicy headlines that were produced by the meeting, which was supposed to have focused on professional issues and decisions that impact human life, senior defense officials, including the defense minister, the chief of staff, GSS director and Mossad Director David Barnea have tried to remain focused on the issues and to keep things professional in all that pertains to freeing the hostages and defeating Hamas in the Gaza Strip.**
- **Several weeks ago, immediately upon his assumption of duties, Chief of Staff Zamir held a series of meetings in which the IDF—with Defense Minister Katz’s approval—drafted a sober situation assessment that takes into account the various military and political constraints that exist in the current situation.**
- **The goal was to formulate operational plans that the IDF and the defense establishment would present to the security cabinet either to choose from or to opt for a combination of the different plans. Only one of the proposed plans will necessitate a widespread call-up of reservists, but no further details can be provided at present.**
- **In the context of the defense establishment’s situation assessment, four possible political and security courses of action were presented. The first is a stable and permanent ceasefire, as Hamas has demanded, which would result in the release of most of the hostages but would oblige the IDF to withdraw from the Gaza Strip, coupled with international and American guarantees that would be given to Hamas that the fighting will not be resumed.**
- **The second possible course of action is to act to have the hostages released in groups in exchange for ceasefires that will last between weeks and months, while simultaneously formulating a proposal for the “day after” in the Gaza Strip.**
- **The third possible course of action is to fully defeat Hamas, which would involve an offensive by several divisions, in the course of which the IDF would seize control of most of the Gaza Strip’s territory and rule it until Hamas has been completely defeated.**
- **The fourth possible course of action would be to gradually continue ratcheting up the intensity of the fighting in its current format, while providing minimal humanitarian aid to the uninvolved Gazan population**

in the humanitarian zones. The provision of humanitarian aid is to begin in another few weeks, once all of the food products, water and medicine that were hoarded by Hamas and the civilian population in the Gaza Strip run out.

- The goal is to prompt the civilian population in Gaza to pressure the terrorist organization and, by so doing, to bring about a release of the hostages either in several groups or in one go. This option also involves drafting a “day after” plan that has the consent of the Trump administration, the regional mediators and other Arab countries.
- Each one of the proposed courses of action that are before the State of Israel has advantages and disadvantages. Ending the war is something Hamas would very much like to see happen since that would allow it to survive and remain armed in the Gaza Strip, even if it no longer is formally in power.
- The war’s end would be a major psychological victory for Hamas, one that will continue to reverberate across the Arab and Muslim world for a long time moving forward. Israeli political and defense officials, including military officials, have ruled out that option under the current circumstances because it might incentivize and serve as a guide for additional October 7-like attacks on Israel—not only by the Iranian axis of resistance, but also by the Sunni-Islamist axis that is currently emerging to the northeast of Israel, an axis that includes Turkey and Syria, and which in the future might also include Jordan as well.
- Israeli capitulation to Hamas’s demands, in which Israel would stop fighting for at least several years, would also constitute a victory for the “strategy of kidnapping,” and might precipitate in the near future a wave of kidnappings of Israeli citizen in Israel and overseas.
- Up until October 7, the kidnapping of Israeli civilians and soldiers was geared only to secure the release of Palestinian security prisoners incarcerated by Israel. Acceding to Hamas’s demands now to end the fighting would incentivize future kidnappings that would be used to force Israel to make political and territorial concessions that would endanger its existence.
- In this context, it is important to say that Israel, even if it agrees to a “stable and permanent ceasefire,” can act precisely the way it is currently acting in Lebanon until Hamas is defeated. However, it will be impossible to erase the psychological victory that Hamas will chalk up if Israel agrees to end the fighting.
- Furthermore, and possibly most importantly of all, it is entirely likely that Hamas and Islamic Jihad will not release all of the living and dead

hostages, and will hold onto several of them to serve as an “insurance policy” for if and when Israel resumes fighting against them and/or if the mediators demand that they disarm. For all of the above reasons, IDF officials believe that ending the war is the least-preferable option at the current juncture in time.

- The second option—to opt for the release of hostages in exchange for time-limited ceasefires—is the most desirable option for Israel, but Hamas has refused amid its recognition that time is working against it. The Gazan population is showing clear signs of unrest and readiness to revolt, and several Israeli officials have come to the conclusion that that dissent is gradually mounting and is now a source of concern for Hamas in Gaza.
- The IDF has been killing terrorists with Hamas, which is still led by Muhammad Sinwar, who commands Hamas troops in the central and southern Gaza Strip, mainly those who fled to the humanitarian areas earlier in the fighting and have now returned to fight in the area of Rafah and Khan Yunis. A second Hamas commander is Ezz al-Din al-Haddad, who commands Hamas forces in the northern Gaza Strip, mainly in Gaza City. The option of releasing hostages in “installments” is currently not on the table due to Hamas’s staunch refusal because, as noted, it recognizes that time is working against it
- Regarding the option of fully “defeating” Hamas, this would oblige the IDF to call up tens of thousands of reservists to facilitate a simultaneous offensive in all parts of the Gaza Strip by a number of divisions. The prevailing assessment is that the IDF would be able to seize most of the Gaza Strip above ground within a week or two. That is an issue that needs to be stressed: a major ground maneuver by the IDF to defeat Hamas would allow Israel to control Gaza above ground, concomitant with laying siege to the humanitarian areas in Al-Mawasi and the refugee camps in the central Gaza Strip that the IDF has refrained from entering so far for fear of possible harm to the hostages. Under those circumstances, the IDF would be both able and obliged to completely control the entry and distribution of humanitarian aid to the civilian population. Before operating, the IDF would also have to evacuate some of the civilians who still live in their homes in the Gaza Strip and force them to relocate to the humanitarian shelters
- The major advantage of this course of action is that it would create the conditions necessary for Hamas’s full defeat by systematically demolishing its underground infrastructure—namely, the tunnels that Hamas currently uses to hide its fighting troops—and for a brutal siege

on the humanitarian areas where the Gazan civilian population has been living in crowded tent cities, until that population vomits the Hamas terrorists who have taken refuge among them from its midst. This course of action—the total defeat of Hamas—would also necessarily require the denial of humanitarian aid to the civilian population and Hamas terrorists, and could prompt international aid organizations to refuse to distribute aid. If that happens, the IDF will have to distribute the aid.

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denial of humanitarian aid to the civilian population and Hamas terrorists, and could prompt international aid organizations to refuse to distribute aid.

- If that happens, the IDF will have to distribute the aid itself, which would put soldiers at risk because they would be stationary and would be in direct contact with the civilian population. Israel would also be accused by the international community—in particular by the UN Security Council—of starving and killing the civilian population.
- If Israel wants to defeat Hamas by taking this course of action, sooner or later Israel will find itself before the International Criminal Court. IDF officials have come to the conclusion that the option of a major offensive to fully defeat Hamas and to seize control of the Gaza Strip is feasible and that it might ultimately have to be chosen if all other efforts end in failure, but they believe it to be undesirable at the current stage.
- First of all, because if the IDF takes this course of action, it will almost certainly lead to the death of some and possibly most of the hostages. Second, even though the territory above ground can be seized quickly by means of heavy firepower and a large number of troops, the IDF would then have to root out the Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists who are hiding in tunnels, and the access shafts to those tunnels are booby trapped. Consequently, that effort would progress slowly in order to protect soldiers' lives as much as possible and to avoid risking the hostages' lives.
- Hamas will only be able to put up weak resistance since it has been stripped of most of its military capabilities, and the majority of its new recruits have no combat skills. Those Hamas troops have been paid to make public appearances at Hamas's propaganda shows of strength at hostage-release ceremonies.
- Hamas's more seasoned troops have been using guerrilla tactics, emerging from tunnel shafts that the IDF either has not yet found or destroyed, firing a rocket-propelled grenade or planting bombs in urban areas, and sniping lethally at IDF troops—tactics that resemble those used by the Vietcong against American troops in the 1970s.
- Once the IDF seizes control of the territory, its troops—even if they only supervise the distribution of humanitarian aid—will become easy, stationary targets for guerrilla warfare of that kind.
- Furthermore, Israel will have to establish a military administration; even if that administration enjoys the cooperation of international and UN organizations, Israel would have to shoulder the economic and political

burden of tending to the Gazan population's welfare and primarily will have to prevent starvation and the spread of disease.

- **The unanimous view held by military officials is that any effort to fully defeat Hamas will have to involve denying it any option of controlling the entry and distribution of humanitarian aid. Hamas has not only robbed that aid to feed and equip its troops; it has primarily done so to sell the aid at exorbitant prices that it sets. Hamas and Islamic Jihad then use those revenues to pay salaries and to recruit 14-year-old and 15-year-old boys, as well as adult males who have no combat experience.**
- **"One truck of humanitarian aid allows Hamas to recruit and maintain an entire brigade of new recruits who operate on its behalf," said a high ranking IDF field commander who has closely tracked this issue.**
- **Consequently, denying the terrorist organization the ability to commandeer the humanitarian aid is just as important as the physical fighting against it. Even if the IDF escorts the convoys of aid to established and protected compounds whose entry will be under GSS supervision, the uninvolved civilian population might still be robbed by armed Hamas men once they leave the distribution centers. But if Hamas does that it will rile up the civilian population, which will starve if its food rations are stolen by Hamas.**
- **The IDF will also have to cope with suicide bombers that Hamas will send into the compounds. As such, it would be best in any event if the IDF was not responsible for the actual distribution of food to the Gazan public and if it only assumed responsibility for securing the aid's entry into the compounds, remotely supervising the turn of events in those compounds and preventing civilians from being robbed upon leaving them.**
- **That is what the chief of staff meant when he said at the security cabinet meeting on Tuesday that he does not want the IDF to be engaged in the distribution of humanitarian aid. It is important to know that the IDF has drafted plans for the event that international organizations should refuse to distribute minimal humanitarian aid to the local public and if the IDF is forced to do so itself. "We will do everything necessary to free the hostages and to bring down the Hamas regime," said one high-ranking IDF officer on the issue of humanitarian aid. But it is clear that the IDF would prefer not to place its troops at risk by directly distributing the aid, and would prefer for that to be done by international organizations.**
- **Another issue that military and other defense officials have said requires advance planning before launching a large-scale offensive to fully defeat Hamas is the governance of Gaza on the day after. The IDF has refrained from delving into the details of that issue since it is clear that politicians**

like Ben Gvir and Smotrich want the IDF to establish a military administration in the Gaza Strip and to seize control of the enclave to allow for the renewed settlement of Jews in it. The IDF does not want to take a stance on that issue, which is political in nature.

- The option preferred by the IDF at present, given all of the above-cited issues, is to continue with the current heightened scope and pace of military action. This will allow Israel to tighten the screws on Hamas and Islamic Jihad gradually, while either entirely preventing the entry of humanitarian aid or allowing only minimal quantities into Gaza to prevent starvation and widespread disease.
- The ongoing destruction of Hamas infrastructure above ground, and even more so the destruction of the tunnels below ground that Hamas has been using to shelter its troops, will cause two things. The first is a high number of Hamas casualties. [The second, which] IDF officials say is a realistic possibility, is that the civilian population will pressure Hamas and force it to release the hostages and possibly also to disarm.
- Defense officials said they cannot be certain the gradually-mounting pressure will ultimately prompt the civilian population in Gaza to revolt against Hamas and that the terrorists would agree to lay down their arms. However, the officials said that under the current circumstances, Israel must give that possible development a chance, even if doing so obliges the hostages' families on the one hand—and Ben Gvir and Smotrich on the other—to be patient.

Israel Hayom

Motivation Sky-High

By Lilach Shoval

- Despite the ongoing fighting, and in the shadow of public disagreement about the continued prosecution of the war, new IDF recruits who enlisted in the military during the current March-April recruitment cycle have shown high willingness to serve in combat units, above and beyond original projections that were submitted by the IDF Manpower Directorate, Israel Hayom has learned.
- In the Armored Corps, for example, 115% of the number of combat troops needed according to the original plan were drafted—a particularly impressive number in light of the fact the IDF had already raised the

number of soldiers needed for the Armored Corps due to the closure of reserve companies as part of the lessons of the war.

- In the infantry units, 107% of the IDF's plan signed up to join the Golani and Nahal brigades; 106% joined the Givati and Kfir brigades. For the Engineering Corps, the number was 100%, and 113% for Border Defense Infantry.
- The percentages were even higher among female conscripts: 129% for mixed-gender Border Defense Infantry, 132% for combat collection units, 132% for search and rescue; 129% for Combat Intelligence Collection; 115% for air defense units and 107% for Border Police units. [...]
- The fact that there are more recruits who have volunteered to serve in combat units than the IDF called for in its original plan— is significant both in terms of filling out the ranks and in light of the expected dropout rate during training, including cases in which soldiers are injured.
- The IDF said, "The data show that even during this recruitment cycle, there is high motivation among recruits to play an active and meaningful role in the various IDF challenges, as soldiers and fighters in the various units."
- Military officials said that the high recruitment rates relative to the plan "make it possible to strengthen the various units." However, make no mistake about it: the impressive recruitment rates do not solve the military's manpower shortage: The IDF still lacks about 7,500 soldiers for active duty.
- The IDF has continued to demand the extension of compulsory service from 32 months to 36 in order to make up for some of that shortfall, and would like to establish new units to ease the heavy burden shouldered by regular and reserve soldiers: Due to the severe shortage of manpower, reservists received emergency call up orders in recent days to replace standing army battalions on the front lines.