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Israel and Middle East News Update

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Times of Israel

**Netanyahu, Trump said working on plan to end
Gaza war and expand Abraham Accords**

US President Donald Trump is reportedly pushing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to conclude the 20-month-old war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip following the success of the 12-day war against Iran, several Hebrew media outlets reported Thursday, amid calls in Israel for the same. The Kan public broadcaster reported that Trump's demand to cancel Netanyahu's criminal trial was also linked to this effort. The report said that an unnamed senior Israeli official close to Netanyahu had said Trump's Truth Social post demanding that Netanyahu no longer be forced to stand trial on multiple criminal charges "wasn't sent out for no reason." "It is part of a larger move that is meant to bring an end to the war in Gaza, the release of all the hostages, an end to Netanyahu's trial, and a serious regional move," said the official.

Reuters

**Gaza clans deny Hamas is stealing aid, after Israel
partially halts deliveries**

Clan leaders in Gaza denied on Thursday that armed men who were seen riding atop trucks of humanitarian aid in the Strip were Hamas operatives, saying instead that they were protecting the aid from being stolen, after Israel scaled back aid deliveries to the territory over the assertion that Hamas operatives had returned to stealing the supplies.

Reuters

State Department approves \$30 million in funding for Gaza Humanitarian Foundation

The U.S. State Department has approved \$30 million in funding for the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, the State Department said on Thursday, calling on other countries to also support the controversial group delivering aid in war-torn Gaza. "This support is simply the latest iteration of President Trump's and Secretary Rubio's pursuit of peace in the region," State Department deputy spokesperson Tommy Pigott told reporters at a regular news briefing.

Al-Monitor

Iran open to regional consortium, enriched uranium transfer in US nuclear talks

Ambassador Amir Saeid Iravani, the Islamic Republic of Iran's permanent representative to the United Nations, said in an exclusive written interview with Al-Monitor that Iran is willing to "collaborate with all countries in our region that operate nuclear reactors — whether on issues of reactor safety or the supply of reactor fuel," as long as it serves as a "complementary initiative" and is not a substitute for Iran's own domestic nuclear program.

Ynet News

US offered Iran investments worth tens of billions of dollars

The Trump administration offered Tehran foreign investments of \$20 billion–\$30 billion in a new Iranian civilian nuclear program, as part of the effort to bring Tehran back to the negotiating table, CNN reported Thursday night, citing four sources. In addition, the Iranians also were offered sanctions relief and the release of about \$6 billion in frozen assets in discussions that took place behind

the scenes including during Israel's operation inside the Islamic Republic, during which the United States struck the nuclear facility at Fordow and two other nuclear sites.

Jerusalem Post

Iran denies any meeting with US next week, foreign minister says

Iran currently has no plan to meet with the United States, Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said on Thursday in an interview on state TV, contradicting US President Donald Trump's statement that Washington planned to have talks with Iran next week. The Iranian foreign minister said Tehran was assessing whether talks with the US were in its interest, following five previous rounds of negotiations that were cut short by Israel and the US attacking Iran's nuclear facilities.

i24 News

Mossad launches emergency medical service for Iranians affected by conflict

In an unprecedented initiative, the Mossad has set up an emergency medical center for Iranian citizens affected by the conflict between Israel and Iran, Israeli public radio Kan revealed on Thursday. The service set up, accessible via WhatsApp, Telegram, or Signal, offers assistance from a team of specialized doctors who speak Persian and English. The areas covered include cardiology, diabetes, infectious diseases, oncology, monitoring of pregnant women, and psychological support.

Commentary:

Israel Hayom

End the War? Prime Minister Caught between Deri and Smotrich

By Yehuda Schlesinger, Danny Zaken and Shachar Kleiman

- Now that the war in Iran is over, the political and military establishments have renewed their focus on the war in Gaza. Currently, the political leadership is deliberating between two opposing views, as represented by two security cabinet ministers who have the prime minister's ear, Aryeh Deri and Bezalel Smotrich.
- Deri has argued that now, after achieving victory over Iran, circumstances have changed that make reaching a hostage deal and even ending the war possible. Smotrich, alternatively, has said that the war in Iran has not changed the situation in Gaza and that Israel should now accelerate the pace of the war and defeat Hamas.
- Smotrich has expressed at meetings his absolute opposition to any deal that might halt the IDF's progress and allow Hamas to recover. Well informed sources told Israel Hayom that Netanyahu is in the middle, and is inclined to agree with Deri.
- They said that Netanyahu is determined to dismantle and destroy Hamas's military and governmental capabilities, but if a hostage deal in keeping with the Witkoff outline becomes possible, he would take it. In the latest meetings discussing Gaza, the defense establishment was asked to draft a plan for evacuating the population and applying more massive pressure [on Gaza] than had been applied during the war with Iran.
- Deri explicitly said yesterday in an interview to Kikar Hashabat: "A meeting will soon be held on this issue. I cannot divulge details (but) a big opportunity has been created regarding the hostages in Gaza, depending, of course, on what we do. I think that more than before, the conditions have been created for ending the war in Gaza."
- Smotrich said yesterday: "Witkoff is a big mistake. We have to throw everything at Gaza, not stop for deals. If we agree to a ceasefire, Hamas will recover and rebuild, and that is bad for us. Agreeing to a ceasefire would be a bad mistake."
- Before the war, the political and military leadership drafted a plan for Gaza. That plan called for highly intense military pressure to be applied over the course of two months, during which the IDF would seize control of 75% of the Gaza Strip.

- Yesterday, Degel Hatorah Chairman MK Moshe Gafni criticized the ongoing war in Gaza. Gafni said, “Up until this very moment, I don’t understand what we are fighting for, to serve what need—what are we going to do there while soldiers keep getting killed all the time,” he said at the start of a meeting of the Finance Committee, which he chairs. “We need a Trump of our own to say ‘bring back the hostages, stop all this stuff and get back to normal,’ but we haven’t been so lucky.”
- And what is happening in the negotiations? Israel is waiting for Hamas’s answer to the Witkoff plan and for an interim agreement for the hostages’ release and a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. The new plan was approved by Israel two weeks ago and it submitted its response to Witkoff and his team, but Hamas has yet to give its full answer. Well-informed sources said that last week Hamas demanded further clarifications and revisions to the wording of the document, and delayed its answers—perhaps because it wished to wait to see the results of the war in Iran.
- In any case, the number of issues in contention has decreased considerably, after Hamas dropped some of its demands, including its demand for explicit Israeli and American commitment to end the war and for a broad Israeli withdrawal within a short time after the deal is implemented.
- According to information Israel Hayom has received, the proposal currently being discussed would secure the immediate release of eight living hostages and the remains of six dead hostages, followed by the release of another two hostages during the ceasefire. The proposed duration of the ceasefire is 60 days, during which negotiations will be held to end the war and release the remaining hostages.
- Hamas is focusing on two issues—disarmament and its leadership’s exile. It is opposed to both, but these disagreements are not expected to prevent it from agreeing to the first stage and a ceasefire. Hamas has come under intense pressure in the last few days to submit its response so that the process can be put in motion. The US has voiced some optimism, as indicated in Witkoff’s statements, the president’s statements and the messages that they have relayed to Israel.
- An Israeli source said that Hamas “looks behind it and doesn’t see anyone supporting it.” Only Qatar, which hosts most of Hamas’s top leaders, is still by its side though it also has reservations. The source said that Hamas has the option of accepting the proposed deal, which will grant it a respite from fighting for a certain period of time. But even after that period ends, it will not be able to rearm since it will not have sources.

- The official said that it was important for the US and Israel to present clearly to Hamas the new reality, in which it has its back to the wall, as well as the situation of the population in Gaza. Hamas has been holding meetings between its overseas leadership in Qatar and its shrunken leadership in the Gaza Strip, and it is expected to submit its response very soon. If it accepts the proposal, delegations will probably depart for Cairo or Doha to sew up the final details. Envoy Witkoff might also attend the meetings.
- A well-informed Arab official told Israel Hayom that the war between Israel and Iran had impacted the negotiations and that Hamas's leadership had received clear messages from the mediators. The mediators said that now that the war with Iran was over, in the absence of an agreement on Gaza, Israel would unleash its full strength against Hamas, without any American or other restrictions. Furthermore, if Hamas wished to retain something of its organization, it must now agree to a deal. Otherwise, they said, it would completely disappear, since "even if the price for the Israelis is high, they're willing to pay it."

Yediot Ahronot

Thanks to Luck, Great Tragedy was Averted

By Giora Eiland

- The prime minister said yesterday, "We removed two immediate threats... we were facing destruction." That was an infuriating statement, an attempt to create a narrative that contradicts the historical truth. Israel truly was facing the danger of an existential war, but that was in the summer of 2023. Netanyahu and his government preferred to ignore that.
- In June 2023, I was invited along with several other former high-ranking officials to a briefing given by the director of the Military Intelligence Directorate and the director of the research department. They presented the situation over the course of three hours. They had two principal messages. The first was that Iran is close to completing its program for destroying Israel even without nuclear weapons. The second was that in the wake of the severe political-public crisis in Israel, the Iranians intend to move up [the execution date of] their program from 2025 to early 2024.
- Worried by what was presented, I wished to study the issue in greater depth. A few days later, I spent an entire day at the Military Intelligence Directorate, where I received a detailed briefing on Iran's capabilities and those of its proxies, primarily Hizbullah. My concern turned into anxiety. I wrote to everyone I could that Israel was close not only to war, and not

only to a multiple-theater war—but to an existential war. That was the logical conclusion.

- In fact, it was the only conclusion because of the combination of three components: the scale of the threat, the seriousness of the enemy's intentions, and Israel's relatively limited ability to contend with this threat defensively and offensively.
- At issue was a realistic scenario of a coordinated surprise attack on Israel that would involve hundreds of ballistic missiles fired from Iran; thousands (!) of rockets and missiles fired by Hizbullah, including precision-guided missiles that would have lethal impact on infrastructure; Hizbullah forces storming the Galilee; missile fire by pro-Iranian militias in Syria, Iraq and Yemen; and a massive attack by Hamas in which of hundreds of rockets would be fired. Had that happened, Israel might have collapsed. Even the IAF's impressive offensive capabilities, which we just now saw in Iran, could not have been utilized at the time with the same efficacy since Syrian airspace, which is now completely open to us, would have posed in 2023 a difficult challenge to the IAF's combat planes, and certainly to its drones and the refueling planes.
- Even though the prime minister was aware of this situation, he refused to be alarmed. Even as late as May 2023, he said that "the intelligence is exaggerated," and consequently refused the entreaties made by the chief of staff and the defense minister to suspend the judicial reform that had deepened the domestic rift and had spurred Iran to move up the date of the attack. We all remember the Knesset session in July 2023 ahead of the vote to repeal the grounds of reasonableness [for Supreme Court intervention in government decisions]. The directors of the IDF's operations and intelligence directorates arrived at the Knesset and asked to speak with the ministers, but the ministers ignored them. In the course of the plenary session itself, the camera caught then-defense minister Gallant begging Minister Levin: "Give me something." Levin refused, and Netanyahu, who sat between them, chose not to intervene.
- And so, when nothing short of an existential war was expected within a few months' time, the prime minister devoted his time to legislating divisive bills and to long trips overseas. The illusory silence was broken on October 7. Yahya Sinwar lost his patience. He chose not to wait for a coordinated attack, as Iran had wanted, and by so doing, he sentenced the Shiite axis to defeat. Sinwar visited upon us a massive disaster, a disaster that will take years to recover from, but he unwittingly may have

prevented a worse disaster that might have unfolded just a few months later.

- **In any event, it is important that we bear in mind that it is not enough merely to remember the October 7 debacle, but to know that in the summer of 2023, the government, with its eyes wide open, was leading us into a possibly even greater disaster. It was either luck or divine intervention that prevented this from happening. Netanyahu deserves praise for leading the war against Iran under perfect timing and conditions, but he, along with others, is not only responsible for October 7, but also for the irresponsible and smug stance that he maintained in the months before it.**