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Israel and Middle East News Update

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Headlines:

- **US bombs Fordo, 2 other nuclear facilities, joining Israel's war in Iran**
- **Satellite images indicate severe damage to Fordow, but doubts remain**
- **Hegseth says US strikes 'obliterated' Iran's nuclear ambitions; now Iran should negotiate**
- **86 wounded by Iranian missile attacks on Israel after US strikes 3 Iran nuclear sites**
- **Israel, U.S. simulated Iran nuclear strike in joint exercise a year ago, Israeli official reveals**
- **Israeli security sources to i24NEWS: Hezbollah chief rebuffed Khamenei's demand to join war**
- **Suicide bombing at Damascus church kills at least 20, bomber member of Islamic State**
- **IDF recovers bodies of three abducted Israelis from Gaza in overnight op.**
- **Gazans 'desperately need more aid,' says humanitarian group backed by US and Israel**
- **Oil hits five-month high after US attacks key Iranian nuclear sites**

Commentary:

- **Times of Israel: This had to be done**
 - By Yossi Klein Halevi
 - **Ynet News: No more games: US strike on Fordow marks bold stand against the Iranian bully**
 - By Nadav Eyal
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Times of Israel

US bombs Fordo, 2 other nuclear facilities, joining Israel's war in Iran

The US carried out a “successful attack” on the Fordo, Natanz and Isfahan nuclear sites in Iran, US President Donald Trump announced early Sunday. “A full payload of BOMBS was dropped on the primary site, Fordo,” Trump wrote on Truth Social, referring to the difficult-to-destroy underground site, which has been characterized as integral to the Islamic Republic’s rogue nuclear weapons program and the most impregnable of its nuclear facilities. “All planes are now outside of Iran air space [and are]... safely on their way home,” he wrote. “Congratulations to our great American Warriors. There is not another military in the World that could have done this.”

Reuters

Satellite images indicate severe damage to Fordow, but doubts remain

Commercial satellite imagery indicates the U.S. attack on Iran’s Fordow nuclear plant severely damaged - and possibly destroyed - the deeply-buried site and the uranium-enriching centrifuges it housed, but there was no confirmation, experts said on Sunday. “They just punched through with these MOPs,” said David Albright, a former U.N. nuclear inspector who heads the Institute for Science and International Security, referring to the Massive Ordnance Penetrator

bunker-busting bombs that the U.S. said it dropped. “I would expect that the facility is probably toast.”

Times of Israel

Hegseth says US strikes ‘obliterated’ Iran’s nuclear ambitions; now Iran should negotiate

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said on Sunday that US military strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities were an incredible and overwhelming success that had “obliterated” Tehran’s nuclear ambitions. As Washington warned Tehran against responding to the strikes, Hegseth also said that the US did “not seek war” with Iran or regime change, that the strikes were “intentionally limited” to Iran’s nuclear facilities, and that the regime should now negotiate peace.

Times of Israel

86 wounded by Iranian missile attacks on Israel after US strikes 3 Iran nuclear sites

An Iranian ballistic missile barrage injured dozens of people in Israel on Sunday morning as nearly 30 projectiles targeted the country, causing widespread destruction to residential areas in Tel Aviv and the central town of Ness Ziona. An air defense interceptor, meanwhile, malfunctioned and impacted the northern city of Haifa, causing damage and slightly wounding three people. No sirens had sounded in the city during the incident. The Health Ministry reported that among those who arrived at hospitals were two in moderate condition, 77 in good condition, four victims suffering from acute anxiety, and three more people who were undergoing medical evaluation and whose condition had not been immediately determined.

i24 News

Israel, U.S. simulated Iran nuclear strike in joint exercise a year ago, Israeli official reveals

An Israeli official has confirmed that the United States and Israel conducted a joint military exercise roughly one year ago simulating a strike on Iranian nuclear facilities. The drill, which took place under the Biden administration, included scenarios explicitly focused on neutralizing Iran's nuclear infrastructure.

Speaking to ABC News on Saturday evening, the Israeli official described the exercise as unprecedented in scope, noting that it marked the first time the two allies had rehearsed a coordinated offensive operation of this nature.

i24 News

Israeli security sources to i24NEWS: Hezbollah chief rebuffed Khamenei's demand to join war

Iranian Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had instructed Hezbollah chief Naim Qassem to enter the fighting and launch missiles at Israel after the launch of Operation Rising Lion last week, high-ranking Israeli security sources told i24NEWS, speaking on the condition of anonymity. Qassem—whose organization, a Shiite Iranian proxy, was decimated by Israel since joining the war against the Jewish state on October 8, 2023—refuses to comply for fear of devastating Israeli reprisals against Hezbollah.

Jerusalem Post

Suicide bombing at Damascus church kills at least 20, bomber member of Islamic State

At least 20 people were killed and dozens injured when a suicide bomber blew himself up at the Mar Elias Church in the Dweila neighborhood of Syria's capital Damascus on Sunday, health authorities and security sources said. The incident

marks the first suicide bombing inside Damascus since Bashar al-Assad was toppled by an Islamist-led rebel insurgency in December. Syria's interior ministry said the suicide bomber was a member of the Islamic State. He entered the church, opened fire and then detonated his explosive vest, the ministry added in a statement.

i24 News

IDF recovers bodies of three abducted Israelis from Gaza in overnight op.

In a joint overnight operation, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and Shin Bet recovered the bodies of three Israeli hostages—Ofra Kedar, Yonatan Samirano, and Staff Sergeant Shai Levinson—from the Gaza Strip, the military announced on Sunday. The operation, led by the Southern Command and the Gaza Division, was made possible through precise intelligence provided by Shin Bet, the Kidnapped and Missing Command, and the IDF Intelligence Directorate. All three had been kidnapped and murdered by Hamas terrorists during the October 7, 2023, massacre.

Times of Israel

Gazans 'desperately need more aid,' says humanitarian group backed by US and Israel

The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, an organization backed by the United States and Israel that began distributing food rations in the Gaza Strip last month, said on Saturday that people in the Palestinian enclave “desperately need more aid.” The admission by the GHF that it has been unable to meet demand came after severe criticism from other aid groups and amid near-daily deadly shootings near distribution points. Gaza’s Hamas-run civil defense agency said Saturday that Israeli troops had killed at least 17 people, including eight who were seeking food

at the time of the shooting. The IDF told AFP it was looking into the deaths that the civil defense agency reported near GHF distribution centres.

Reuters

Oil hits five-month high after US attacks key Iranian nuclear sites

Oil prices jumped on Monday to their highest since January as the United States' weekend move to join Israel in attacking Iran's nuclear facilities stoked supply worries. Brent crude futures was up \$1.92 or 2.49% at \$78.93 a barrel as of 0117 GMT. U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude advanced \$1.89 or 2.56% to \$75.73. Both contracts jumped by more than 3% earlier in the session to \$81.40 and \$78.40, respectively, touching five-month highs before giving up some gains.

Commentary:

Times of Israel

This had to be done

By Yossi Klein Halevi

- Power is not the answer to all problems. But neither is restraint. If you have the power to prevent the world's biggest exporter of terrorism from developing nuclear immunity yet fail to use it, then disarm, embrace pacifism, and prepare to suffer the consequences.
- To those who blame President Trump for abandoning the JCPOA, Barack Obama's deal with Iran, consider this: Had the JCPOA still been in effect, its "sunset clause," allowing Iran to produce advanced centrifuges capable of enriching uranium to weapons grade level in a matter of weeks, would be coming into effect around now. At the same time, the JCPOA would have permitted Iran to continue developing nuclear warheads and delivery systems.
- And had the economic sanctions ended, Iran would have benefited from a massive infusion of funds, immensely strengthening the regime and its

terror proxies. Iran would have become the regional power in the Arab world; a nuclear Iran would have been virtually unstoppable.

- For the last 40 years, the Iranian regime has consistently expressed, in rhetoric and policy, its intention to destroy the Jewish state. Yet the international community took those threats and actions in stride. There has been little or no outrage from governments, human rights organizations, or religious leaders at the genocidal threat aimed at Israel.
- Most of all, the UN accepted as a given the violation of its own charter, which states that a member state may not threaten the existence of another. The moral burden for the current crisis is not on Israel but the world.
- There will almost certainly be painful repercussions to America's attack. We shouldn't minimize the Iranian potential for retribution, especially through global terrorism. Israelis are paying a painful price for this war. And Jews around the world are now even more vulnerable. Israel – and “the Jews” – will be widely blamed, by both right and left, for “dragging America into war.”
- But there are moments when leaders need to decisively deal with an existential threat and not allow fear of the consequences to paralyze them. We will deal with the consequences as they unfold.
- For those spreading dire predictions of a “forever war,” the precedent of America's failed wars in the Middle East is sobering. But it is not the knock-out argument its proponents believe it to be. Had Israel listened to the warnings of some of its well-intentioned friends not to go to war on October 8, we would still be surrounded on most of our borders by terror entities committed to our destruction. Israel's stunning achievement in breaking that vise refutes the pessimists.
- Israel's strike on Iran is the culmination of the war that began on October 7. Hamas's massacre of Israelis was not an expression of an oppressed people revolting against occupation, as much of the world believes; it was the latest phase of the radical Islamist war against Israel's existence. What began on October 7 was the Israeli-Iranian war. For the last 18 months, we have been fighting Iran's proxies. Now, finally and inevitably, we have taken the war to its source.
- In the past, in warning against a nuclear Iran, Israel and its supporters invoked the Holocaust: A Holocaust-denying regime obsessed with the destruction of Israel could not be permitted to go nuclear. Since October 7, though, our frame of reference has shifted to the Middle East, where it always belonged. What we learned that day was never to minimize the

intentions of genocidally-minded enemies. When they promise to slaughter you, don't dismiss them.

- The banners hung along Tel Aviv's highway – "Thank you, President Trump" – speak for most Israelis. As for Prime Minister Netanyahu, he deserves our gratitude for his decades-long courageous campaign against a nuclear Iran, withstanding ridicule and accusations of "warmongering" and now bringing that effort to fruition.
- That historic achievement doesn't absolve him of his responsibility for corrupting the soul of Israeli politics. Appallingly, he has failed to accept any responsibility for October 7, refused to establish a commission of inquiry into the events leading up to the disaster, or to curtail the endless incitement among his most fervent supporters against political opponents even during war. History will judge him as both savior and destroyer.
- Another word of gratitude belongs to the two spiritual fathers of Israel's Iran doctrine. The first is Menachem Begin. His attack against Saddam Hussein's nuclear reactor established the doctrine that Israel's enemies cannot be allowed to attain nuclear capability.
- The second is Yitzhak Rabin. In September 1993, just after signing the Oslo Accords with Yasser Arafat, Rabin explained in an interview his rationale for seeking an agreement with the Palestinians. Israel was surrounded by two rings of threat, he said. The "inner ring" – the enemies along our borders – didn't pose an existential threat to Israel. The real threat, he said, would come from the "outer ring" – Iran. Israel needed to try to make peace with the Palestinians, the Jordanians and the Syrians to neutralize the threats along its borders and instead concentrate on preventing a nuclear Iran. Rabin predicted that a showdown with Iran was inevitable.
- Israel's Iran policy, then, was jointly established by leaders of the right and of the left. That bipartisan legacy is playing out today in the virtual consensus among Israelis for the attack on Iran.
- A word, as well, about the American organizations – AIPAC and the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, among others: They led the domestic fight against a nuclear Iran, braving accusations of dual loyalty and even treason.
- For the Jewish people, this is a time for courage and resolve. Whatever one's opinion on the Gaza war, there should be no disagreement among us about the imperative of preventing the nuclear capability of a regime obsessed with the destruction of Israel. We know that an obsession with

the Jews usually ends in mass murder. That possibility has now been thwarted.

- In 2007, Michael Oren and I wrote an essay in The New Republic warning against a nuclear Iran. We ended with these words: “A Jewish state that allows itself to be threatened with nuclear weapons – by a country that denies the genocide against Europe’s six million Jews while threatening Israel’s six million Jews – will forfeit its right to speak in the name of Jewish history.”
- Today, I am as proud as I’ve ever been of the Jewish state and grateful to our truest ally, America.

Ynet News

No more games: US strike on Fordow marks bold stand against the Iranian bully

By Nadav Eyal

- As these words are written, sunlight falls on Fordow – or what remains of it. Spy satellites worldwide now focus on this fortified base, built 60-80 meters (200-260 feet) deep into mountain rock and touted by Iran as nuclear-attack-proof, to assess the damage inflicted by unmatched U.S. bunker-busting bombs.
- While the full extent of destruction at Iran's deepest nuclear site will emerge within hours, the strategic significance transcends physical damage: U.S. President Donald Trump made an extraordinary decision to end Iran's deadly game.
- Calling Iran the "bully of the Middle East" in his dawn address, Trump conveyed utter exhaustion with Tehran's provocations, culminating in a massive military investment proving U.S. commitment to prevent an Iranian nuclear weapon. This unambiguous demonstration of resolve – that America will pursue those walking this path – carries greater weight than the rubble itself.
- This strike marks the definitive end to an "age of bluffs" in the Middle East, declared after October 7 – the era where genocidal terror groups built infrastructure to destroy Israel on its borders while we told ourselves they were deterred; where Israeli society pretended it could handle draft inequality; where our deterrence and warning capabilities were overestimated.
- The most dangerous strategic bluff was Iran's: presenting as a state while effectively operating as a terror organization – funneling millions to

Hamas for arming, building unprecedented rocket stockpiles via its proxy Hezbollah, aiding the Houthis and propping up Bashar Assad's criminal regime – all while negotiating respectably with the West.

- **It played a game, framing its nuclear program as sovereign rights when it was a transparent bid to reach, if not cross, the nuclear weapons threshold. Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrallah, Hamas's Ismail Haniyeh, Syria's Assad and now Iran's Ali Khamenei all underestimated the profound shift in Israel post-October 7 and the determination of Israeli society to defeat those seeking its elimination.**
- **They overestimated their own power to deter Israeli action in Gaza, against Hezbollah or inside Iran. Part of this miscalculation stemmed from underestimating Israel's high-tech culture, which fuels its remarkably effective military intelligence apparatus. The price paid by these "Axis of Resistance" leaders for these errors has been devastating, often fatal.**
- **America's entry into direct conflict with Iran represents Israel's clearest political victory since the war began on October 7. Primary credit goes to Trump: his measured address demonstrated responsibility and resolve. The secrecy of the U.S. operation, devoid of leaks and marked by deliberate media deception, signals the administration's rapid maturation.**
- **Trump consistently demanded one of two outcomes: Iran's "unconditional surrender" – meaning halting enrichment – or U.S. military involvement. There was no middle ground; this president rejected endless, fruitless negotiation rounds, often romanticized internationally as "chess games" showcasing Iranian diplomatic prowess but achieving nothing.**
- **Credit also belongs to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Security Cabinet for a decisive double victory: first, securing Trump's crucial green light for Israeli airstrikes – without which nothing would have happened.**
- **Second, prompting the White House decision to join the war directly following the Israeli Air Force and the Military Intelligence Directorate's operational successes, leading to U.S. strategic bombers and cruise missiles striking Natanz, Isfahan and Fordow nuclear sites.**
- **Until the U.S. struck at dawn, few Iran experts believed regime change was possible. The Military Intelligence Directorate reacted cautiously and skeptically to suggestions that an aerial bombing campaign could spark an Iranian counter-revolution.**

- Intelligence officers, achieving remarkable successes now, were candid about the unlikelihood of revolution or coup, noting their failure even to predict the Syrian regime's near-collapse. Iran's policy and the scale of its response to the U.S. attack will crystallize within the next 24 hours, shaping the path ahead for both the U.S. and Israel.
- With the U.S. now actively at war with Iran, all options are on the table. A superpower bombing Iran vividly illustrates the regime's weakness to internal opposition and factions, tempting attempts to topple it.
- Beyond these questions lies a simple fact: the U.S. bombed Iran's nuclear facilities and Trump thanked Israel, the IDF and Netanyahu. Those who claimed Trump would waver, fear the decisive step or fold at the last minute were proven wrong. China observed a great power willing to defend its interests and allies regionally.
- Russia saw Iran's capabilities, partly reliant on Russian weapon systems, easily shattered by the Israeli Air Force. By deciding to bomb Iran's nuclear sites, Trump began rebuilding the image of a superpower that stands by its principles and is prepared to deter adversaries. This matters not just to Israelis but to the entire world.
- Iran relentlessly invested its resources in building militias and pursuing nuclear enrichment – an outward-facing strategy solely directed at enemies, the supreme priority of a fascist theocracy seeking confrontation. It was all in vain.
- Not grand strategists, but a fundamentalist gang that crushed its own nation, brought death and suffering to the region and built towers on imagined power. It is good to witness their unraveling following Israel's war and now the U.S. strike. This is not the end but it is certainly the end of the beginning.