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## **Israel and Middle East News Update**

*Thursday, April 3*

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- **Israel to seize parts of Gaza as military operation expands**
- **Hamas rejects Israel's ceasefire counter-proposal, sticks to mediators' plan**
- **Hamas threatens protesters, as new mass rallies against terror group held in Gaza**
- **Netanyahu says IDF carving new corridor across Gaza to cut off Rafah, pressure Hamas**
- **Hamas admits 72% of deaths are combat-aged men as it quietly reduces civilian death toll**
- **F-35s, carriers and B-2 bombers: Pentagon reinforces Mideast military presence**
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## Times of Israel

### **Hamas ready to free all hostages at once for end to war — Palestinian official**

Hamas is prepared to release all of the remaining hostages at once in exchange for a permanent ceasefire, a senior Palestinian official familiar with the ongoing truce talks told The Times of Israel on Wednesday. Amid Israel's longstanding rejection of this type of trade, Hamas is still prepared to release a number of hostages as part of a renewed temporary ceasefire. However, Hamas wants guarantees from the mediators that Israel will agree to subsequently enter negotiations on ending the war, said the Palestinian official, which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has to date refused to do.

## Reuters

### **Israel to seize parts of Gaza as military operation expands**

Israel announced a major expansion of military operations in Gaza on Wednesday, saying large areas of the enclave would be seized and added to its security zones, accompanied by large-scale evacuations of the population. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said troops were seizing an area he called the Morag Axis, a reference to a former Israeli settlement once located between the cities of Rafah and Khan Younis in the south of the Gaza Strip, some 3-4 kilometres from the southern border.

Arutz Sheva

## **Hamas rejects Israel's ceasefire counter-proposal, sticks to mediators' plan**

Hamas has opted not to respond to Israel's latest counter-proposal for a ceasefire in Gaza, instead reaffirming its commitment to the terms set forth by international mediators, a Hamas official told Reuters on Wednesday. On March 29, Israel confirmed it had submitted a revised proposal to mediators, working in full coordination with the United States, following Hamas's earlier acceptance of a ceasefire framework outlined by Egypt and Qatar.

Times of Israel

## **Hamas threatens protesters, as new mass rallies against terror group held in Gaza**

A Gaza family's open admission this week that they killed an officer from the Hamas-run police force after they said a relative had been shot dead added to signs of popular dissent against the Palestinian terror group after 18 months of war with Israel. It drew a warning from the Hamas-run interior ministry that actions that undermined public order would not be tolerated.

Times of Israel

## **Netanyahu says IDF carving new corridor across Gaza to cut off Rafah, pressure Hamas**

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Wednesday that advancing IDF forces were carving out a new security corridor across southern Gaza that would likely cut off the city of Rafah from the rest of the Strip, as Israel seeks to pile pressure on Hamas to free the hostages. Israel is "shifting gears" in Gaza and creating a

“second Philadelphi” route, Netanyahu said in a video message, referring to the corridor on the Gaza-Egypt border.

**Jerusalem Post**

## **Hamas admits 72% of deaths are combat-aged men as it quietly reduces civilian death toll**

Hamas quietly removed the names of thousands of Palestinians it had previously alleged were killed during the Israel-Hamas war, Salo Aizenberg, from the US-based non-profit organisation Honest Reporting told The Telegraph on Tuesday after analyzing Hamas’s March 2025 casualty update. Hamas has previously claimed that 70% of casualties have been women and children, a claim no longer reflected in their recently updated lists, according to the research. Approximately 72% of fatalities between the ages of 13-55 are men - the demographic category aligns with Hamas combatants.

**AI-Monitor**

## **F-35s, carriers and B-2 bombers: Pentagon reinforces Mideast military presence**

The US military is building up forces across the Middle East and Indian Ocean as US President Donald Trump threatened to “bomb” Iran if it does not negotiate new limits on its nuclear enrichment. The ongoing buildup includes two US Navy carrier strike groups (CSGs) and at least six stealth B-2 Spirit bombers — composing roughly half of the US Air Force’s fieldable fleet of the strategic stealth bombers.

**Jerusalem Post**

## **Global leaders, including Israel, push back against Trump's tariff policy**

Countries around the world comment on US President Donald Trump's executive order on Wednesday to impose tariffs on the global countries. A 17% tariff was imposed on Israel. "We are working to understand the motivation behind this move," Dr. Ron Tomer, President of the Manufacturers Association of Israel, said in a statement on Wednesday night. "However, the claim that Israel imposes a 33% tariff on American goods is puzzling, and in that context, the US decision to impose 17% tariffs on Israeli goods remains unclear."

**i24 News**

## **Trump to meet with Syrian leader during Saudi visit**

U.S. President Trump will meet with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa during his upcoming visit to Saudi Arabia in mid-May, a Syrian source told i24NEWS. The expected meeting was arranged through the personal mediation of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Earlier this week the White House announced Trump's plans of visiting Saudi Arabia and other Mideastern countries in May.

**Ynet News**

## **Massive explosions reported in Syria strikes; airbase runway wiped out**

The Israeli Air Force carried out extensive airstrikes Wednesday evening on multiple military targets in Syria, including sites near Damascus, the T4 airbase near Homs, and the military airport in Hama, where large explosions were reported. The strikes targeted strategic infrastructure and weapon stockpiles left behind by Syrian President Bashar Assad's military, including runways, fuel depots and radar systems.

Jerusalem Post

## **US Treasury sanctions Houthi pipeline for Russian arms and stolen Ukrainian grain**

The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned a network of Houthi terrorist "financial facilitators and procurement operatives" who procured "tens of millions of dollars worth of commodities from Russia, including weapons, and stolen Ukrainian grain for onward shipment" to Yemen, the Treasury announced on Wednesday. The network was operating in coordination with Sa'id al-Jamal, a senior "Houthi financial official backed by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF)," the Treasury added.

**Commentary:**

Yediot Ahronot

## **Egyptian Official: We Knew This Was Coming**

By Smadar Peri and Lior Ben Ari

- Following the decision to lift the gag order on the Qatargate scandal, the media has been cleared to report that Prime Minister's Bureau officials Jonatan Urich, Yisrael Einhorn and Eli Feldstein allegedly passed on to journalists, including the Jerusalem Post's editor, messages on behalf of Qatar ostensibly in the name of Israeli political officials.
- This allegedly was done while Qatar and Egypt have been fighting one another behind the scenes [for credit as mediators between Israel and Hamas]. In the context of that fight, Qatari media outlets just recently described the latest Egyptian proposal as unserious, adding that Qatari officials had taken the matter up with American officials.
- No Egyptian official has agreed so far to share publicly what the Egyptian presidential palace and Egyptian intelligence think about Qatar. The competition between the two countries, which infrequently surfaced

publicly, was kept under a tight lid, but was shared [privately] with Israeli envoys.

- “The sense we had was that they were playing with us,” said one Egyptian official who has been involved in talks with Israel, but insisted on remaining fully anonymous. “[Our sense was] that Israel was vacillating between Qatar and Egypt and would choose the mediator based on its own interests.”
- Commenting on the Qatargate scandal that recently became public, the Egyptian source said, “You see? We knew that this was coming.” Anyone looking for proof of the tense relationship between Qatar and Egypt needn’t look too far.
- In 2017, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates declared a complete boycott of Qatar. Egypt joined the boycott. “Now Israel is reeling,” said the Egyptian official with clear pleasure. “You got shafted by Qatar, just like we knew would happen.”
- Outwardly, Egypt has pretended to go about business as usual, and envoys have continued to travel back and forth between Qatar and Egypt. Egypt has unequivocally signaled that despite all the difficulties in the negotiations with Hamas, and despite the fiery statements made by Israeli officials (anonymously), it has no intention of abrogating the peace treaty between the two countries.
- While it may be true that the countries have not had ambassadors in Cairo and Tel Aviv for several months, Egypt, which is very skilled at diplomacy, has closely followed all the turns of events in Jerusalem and the statements made. Nothing has eluded top officials in Cairo. By all assessments, President Sisi and his close advisers are waiting for the moment—one that Cairo believes will shortly arrive—when Netanyahu is replaced [by a different prime minister].
- The Egyptians told Yedioth Ahronoth that they are definitely considering improving relations with Israel under a new prime minister, though not to form close relations.
- “But bear in mind,” said the Egyptian official, “Sisi isn’t opposed to peace with Israel. Now you are unwelcome in Cairo, and we are making efforts to prevent attacks on tourists from Israel of the kind that have happened in the past two years. The Israelis have less patience. Egypt, a large country, has [a] responsibility [towards] and a senior role [to play] in the Arab world. We have patience. You’ll yet come to court us.”

## Israel Hayom

# Which Bennett Will We Get This Time?

By Yehuda Schlesinger

- Two political surprises were recorded this week. The first was Prime Minister Netanyahu's decision to nominate Vice Admiral (res.) Eli Sharvit to head the General Security Service, only to rescind the appointment the following day.
- The second was former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's selection of April 1 as the date to register his new party. Netanyahu and Bennett are both meticulous, measured people who pay attention to details. Nevertheless, at first glance both were fairly messed up. Although it is tempting to compare the two cases, the comparison isn't really accurate: Netanyahu, according to people in his inner circle, missed Sharvit's opinion column lambasting US President Donald Trump's climate policies.
- Bennett, on the other hand, knew that yesterday was April 1 but didn't think the date was important, possibly the opposite. Bennett's advisers knew that political journalists and the Twittersphere wouldn't be able to resist linking April Fools' Day and his candidacy; that would only increase exposure of the move and, ultimately, exposure is critical in politics.
- Bennett thinks that the elections will be held in 2026, hence the temporary name given to the party—"Bennett 2026." Had he registered the party under the name "Bennett 2025," that would have opened up the possibility of him finding himself in the same situation as Opposition Chairman Yair Lapid, who upon leaving the Prime Minister's Office, left a note with a promise he would return there in 2024—a note that made a mockery of his predictions.
- Registering a political party is an important act, but as of yesterday it was more or less a technicality. The act of registration neither dictated the party's final name nor did it present an election slate. Potential candidates that have met with Bennett were not told that things were about to get underway; Naftali Bennett's explicit policies aren't going to change. He's not going to become an alternative leader of the parliamentary opposition and isn't going to comment on every issue. He is selective in the issues he wants to address; issues that are part of the relatively broad consensus that spans both camps, such as Iran and drafting Haredim.



- **Issues at the heart of [Israel's domestic] disagreements, such as freeing hostages by stopping the war or governmental reforms are not addressed. It is an attempt to keep a foot in each camp.**
- **Which bloc will Bennett choose? That appears fairly obvious. During the run-up to the last election, one question that was put to him in interviews consistently tripped him up: would he commit to going with the Netanyahu bloc? At first, he said "I will replace Netanyahu;" slowly, he tripped himself up when forced to choose a side, even signing a document saying he would not join forces with Yair Lapid—and broke that commitment.**
- **This time, the answers to that question are ready. The answer is in hand: "I will replace Netanyahu." That's the answer. It won't necessarily work for him, since what has changed now from the last time around? In any event, which political bloc will he choose? The direction he is leaning in is reasonably clear. It can be deduced from the first statement of congratulations that was issued yesterday—from none other than his fellow member of the so-called "coalition of brothers," Yair Lapid: "I congratulate Naftali Bennett on the creation of his new party. Israel needs a good government." There is nothing new under the sun. For the time being.**