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

*Friday, April 4*

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- **Hundreds of thousands flee as Israel seizes Rafah in new Gaza 'security zone'**
- **IDF okayed Nova music festival, but didn't inform troops deployed at border, probe finds**
- **IDF operated in Syria to prevent Turkish takeover**
- **Houthi missile hits Saudi Arabia en route to Israel**
- **Israeli FM says indirect US-Iran talks likely, hails 'common objective' with France**
- **Top US general calls out Houthi-Shabaab ties across Yemen-Somalia strait**

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Arutz Sheva

## **IDF Spokesperson: 'We have progressed to another stage of the renewed operation'**

IDF Spokesperson Brigadier General Effie Defrin delivered a briefing this evening on the IDF's recent actions in the various combat arenas. "In recent days, we have progressed to another stage of the renewed operation. The plan serves the objectives of the war – the return of the hostages and the dismantling of Hamas's military and governmental capabilities," Defrin said. "The operation began with coordinated air and ground activity. We struck more than 60 terrorist targets in the northern and southern parts of the Gaza Strip to damage Hamas's military and governmental capabilities and to prepare the environment for a ground operation."

Reuters

## **Hundreds of thousands flee as Israel seizes Rafah in new Gaza 'security zone'**

Hundreds of thousands of fleeing Gazans sought shelter on Thursday in one of the biggest mass displacements of the war, as Israeli forces advanced into the ruins of the city of Rafah, part of a newly announced "security zone" they intend to seize. A day after declaring their intention to capture large swathes of the crowded enclave, Israeli forces pushed into the city on Gaza's southern edge which had served as a last refuge for people fleeing other areas for much of the war.

Times of Israel

## **IDF okayed Nova music festival, but didn't inform troops deployed at border, probe finds**

On the morning of October 7, 2023, more than 100 Hamas terrorists stumbled upon the Supernova music festival, an outdoor rave taking place near the Gaza border community of Re'im, where they brutally massacred and abducted partygoers, in what became the single deadliest terror attack in Israel's history. More than 3,000 partygoers were attending the overnight rave, along with some 400 staff and 75 unarmed security guards.

## **Arutz Sheva**

### **IDF operated in Syria to prevent Turkish takeover**

Security sources on Thursday morning said that the IDF strikes in Syria on Wednesday were intended to prevent the intended Turkish takeover of the targeted area. On Wednesday night, the IAF struck the remaining military capabilities in the Syrian Hama and T-4 military bases, alongside additional military infrastructure in the Damascus area. The sources noted that the military airports, Tadmor and T-4, were completely destroyed in the strike - including their planes, radar systems, control towers, parking areas, and storage - and that the runways are no longer usable.

## **Jerusalem Post**

### **Houthi missile hits Saudi Arabia en route to Israel**

A ballistic missile launched from Yemen by the Houthis fell in Saudi Arabia as it was en route to Israeli territory, Army Radio reported on Thursday evening. This is the second time a Houthi missile has landed in Saudi Arabia while heading toward Israeli territory. The last time this occurred was in late March. Houthi missiles most recently triggered sirens across Israel on Sunday, the third time in a single week.

## **AI-Monitor**

## **Israeli FM says indirect US-Iran talks likely, hails 'common objective' with France**

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said Thursday that preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons "is a common objective of France and Israel" and said that indirect talks between Washington and Tehran were likely to start soon. During a one-day visit to Paris, Saar addressed the possibility that the Trump administration will initiate indirect talks with Iran regarding a nuclear agreement. He stated, "We don't hold discussions with the Iranians, as you know, but [Tehran] made clear they are ready to enter into indirect negotiations with the US, and I won't be surprised if such negotiations start."

**AI-Monitor**

## **Top US general calls out Houthi-Shabaab ties across Yemen-Somalia strait**

The top US military commander for Africa sought to highlight links between al-Qaeda's Somali offshoot, al-Shabaab, and the Houthi rebels in nearby Yemen during an appeal to Senate lawmakers on Thursday. US Marine Corps Gen. Michael Langley, who leads US AFRICOM, told the Senate's influential Armed Services Committee that the Somali group is "a heightened terrorist threat, namely because they're colluding with the Houthis" across the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

**Commentary:**

**Maariv**

## **IDF Plans to Divide the Gaza Strip into Four Enclaves**

**By Avi Ashkenazi**

- **The IDF intends to divide the Gaza Strip into four separate enclaves in a bid to ratchet up pressure on Hamas.**
- **On Tuesday night, the IDF intensified its offensive operations and attacked a number of specific targets across the Gaza Strip. At least ten people were killed in an air strike that targeted a building in central Khan Yunis.**
- **Troops from the IDF's 36th Division are in the process of seizing control of the "Morag buffer zone," which is a corridor that cuts across the width of the southern Gaza Strip and creates a buffer zone between Khan Yunis and Rafah. The Morag Corridor runs parallel to the Philadelphi Corridor to its south and the Netzarim Corridor to its north.**
- **Meanwhile, the IDF has also sent troops further into Beit Lahiya to form a northern buffer zone, cutting off Gaza City from the north as well. Israeli defense officials said that the military operations are being carried out in parts of the Gaza Strip in which, according to IDF information, no living or dead hostages are being held.**
- **Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir and GSS Director Ronen Bar visited the Tel a-Sultan area in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday and held a situation assessment meeting there with OC Southern Command Maj. Gen. Yaniv Asor, Gaza Division Commander Brig. Gen. Barak Hiram, 36th Division Commander Brig. Gen. Moran Omer and other high-ranking officers. Zamir and Bar spoke with the field commanders and shared with them the operational deployment and the offensive and defensive plans moving forward.**
- **Zamir said, "The only thing that can stop us from ongoing advancement is the release of our hostages. Their release will allow our troops to return to the opening positions and for further negotiations."**
- **Bar said, "Terrorism gets prevented by means of offense, and Hamas is going to encounter prevention every place it operates from against Israeli citizens. The purpose of the maneuver and the seizure of territory is to make it clear to Hamas that it will continue to pay prices as long as the 59 hostages aren't returned."**
- **Defense Minister Yisrael Katz toured southern Lebanon yesterday. When asked about the IDF's operations in Gaza, Katz said, "The purpose of the operation is to advance the hostages' release. We are exerting pressure to prompt Hamas to accept the Americans' proposal—the release of 11 living hostages and another 16 deceased.**
- **And, in the course of the ceasefire, we will set in motion a process of further dialogue. At the moment, we are acting in stages to ratchet up the**

pressure. The operations we are taking on the ground are also in preparation for the large operation that I demanded that the IDF prepare. If we don't reach the hostages being released, the IDF will act to defeat Hamas."

- A defense official said the IDF had also operated in the past number of days to expand the width of the perimeter [the swath of territory inside the Gaza Strip that runs along the length of the Israeli border] and had taken further bites out of territory deeper inside the Gaza Strip. The assessment as of yesterday afternoon was that the IDF currently holds roughly 30% of the Gaza Strip's territory.
- Israeli officials are encouraged by the anti-Hamas demonstrations that were resumed by Gazan civilians in the past day. The previous demonstrations were violently and viciously suppressed by Hamas's security forces.
- IDF officials said they believed that the pressure currently being applied on the Gaza Strip would shortly prompt Hamas to be more flexible in the hostage deal negotiations.

## **Yediot Ahronot**

### **Missed Opportunity in Gaza**

By Avi Shilon

- It could have been the most important moment in the war in Gaza since it broke out almost a year and a half ago. In fact, it could have been the moment at which, at long last, we could have agreed that we had made progress toward "total victory." But it seems that this opportunity was also missed because of the government's short-sightedness.
- It happened in the last few days, when courageous demonstrations by frustrated residents broke out to protest the Hamas government. These demonstrations, even if not attended by large numbers of people, were the maximum that Israel could have expected: Gaza residents rebelling against a regime that had sacrificed them.
- The first wave could have been utilized to fuel the demonstrations' intensification to the point of a real rebellion against Hamas. That could have been highly effective action toward destroying Hamas's regime, more than any military effort, since it could have ended Hamas's governance in an authentic manner, by the residents themselves, and brought about the beginning of a sea change in Gaza.

- **The truth is that Israel knows what to do in such situations. Binyamin Netanyahu made a lot of speeches that were uploaded to YouTube during the war, in which he encouraged the residents of Iran to rebel against the ayatollahs' regime, and the residents of Lebanon to rebel against Hizbullah's grip on the country. In his speeches, he promised that Israel sought peace and would help the Iranian and Lebanese people if only the government or the terrorist elements were replaced.**
- **Of course, Israel can also help covertly, but this time Israel chose to suffice with messages issued by the IDF Spokesman's Office.**
- **But things did not end there. One report about a security cabinet meeting spoke about suspicions regarding the authenticity of the demonstrations, questioning whether the protests might not be a Hamas ruse to paint a false picture as if its regime were in danger. This was absurd: what could Hamas gain from painting a picture as if its rule was in danger?**
- **The above developments mainly point to one thing: the current Israeli government has no interest in presenting the Gazans as potential partners for coexistence, just as the hostages' release is not its top priority. It is simpler and more convenient to present the need—which is justified of course—to fight Hamas rather than to try to distinguish between the population and the terrorist regime. Furthermore, the government is shackled by Smotrich and Ben Gvir and others in the Likud who would prefer to dupe the Israeli public with promises about implementing Trump's transfer plan.**
- **But we must not harbor any illusions, of course. The demonstrations were small and reflected a small part of the population. Israeli support for them might have placed the demonstrators in greater danger, as Hamas is already viciously suppressing them. Nor do the demonstrations against Hamas necessarily indicate a desire for coexistence with Israel, and chiefly reflect the protesters' frustration with the situation that Hamas's leadership created after October 7.**
- **And still, insofar as it was possible to observe the buds of an awakening in Gaza about the Hamas government, it was the duty of the Israeli leadership to support and to promote, by various means, any display of authentic denouncement of Hamas.**
- **Furthermore: one of the reasons for Hamas's rising popularity in the last few years was the view—which is also what justified in sending Qatari money in Netanyahu's eyes and supporters' eyes—that Hamas's rule of the Gaza Strip was good for Israel. Since as long as Hamas was in power, it would obviously be impossible to achieve a two-state solution, as the PA that governs Judea and Samaria seeks. It was therefore convenient**

**for government—which in any case does not believe in the option of compromise—to face an antagonist that was entirely hostile.**

- **But sticking to the view that Hamas’s rule is preferable to any attempt to engage with a different Palestinian government even after October 7—that is no longer merely a strategic mistake. It is tantamount to forsaking the future for the sake of a view that believes that reality can only be changed through force. Without understanding that life is more complicated.**