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READER EDITION

July 22, 2026

ISRAEL BRIEF

Wednesday, July 22

Trump answers Tehran's pause with Pickaxe Mountain, Aoun promises Washington forever, and Netanyahu runs against the exemption he legislated.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

THE BOTTOM LINE A royal commission is a state paying to learn what its Jews could have itemized for free: 113,700 volunteer hours and Shabbat canceled for want of a guard. Foster kept more discipline than the moment invites — he declined the Weimar comparison and entered the parallels into the record anyway. Britain answered the same picture with £250 million and a state-threat designation on the IRGC — Australia is answering with hearing blocks and a memorial [the guard at the shul door is still a volunteer]. The commission's report will land on a community that has already written it.

CLASSIFICATION

Reader Edition

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TRUMP gave Tehran's pause a day, then promised to hit the mountain holding its enriched uranium. Iran's foreign minister supplied the better measure of the offer: memorandum decisions fall to a six-man committee, and Araghchi has never met the man whose signature Washington is negotiating for. Israel passed the eleventh night of the American campaign at highest alert with nothing to intercept, while Jordan's hills and Kuwait's water plants took the fire. At home, one week of campaigning put the president on television drawing red lines — and at sundown begins the fast for the last two times Jewish sovereignty fell.

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FLASH BRIEF

- **Iran:** Trump rejects Tehran's ten-day pause and puts Pickaxe Mountain next on the target list. *See The War Today.*
- **Tehran:** Araghchi admits a six-man committee made the memorandum decisions and he has never met Iran's supreme leader. *See The War Today.*
- **Gulf ring:** Iranian missiles echo over Eilat as Kuwait rations power and the Houthis blockade turns back its first tankers. *See The War Today.*
- **Lebanon:** The Lebanese army takes its first village as Aoun promises Trump the hostility ends forever. *See The War Today.*
- **Campaign:** Likud runs against the haredi exemption it legislated, planning the alliance's restoration after October 27. *See Inside Israel.*
- **Red lines:** Likud spends two days answering for an AI campaign ad as Herzog discloses Shin Bet election-integrity briefings. *See Inside Israel.*
- **Sovereignty:** Smotrich makes the Settlement Administration a permanent Defense Ministry body before the election. *See Inside Israel.*
- **Saudi nuclear:** The 123 Agreement heads to Congress with no enrichment ban and no snap inspections. *See Israel and the World.*
- **Britain:** Burnham reportedly approves continued American use of British bases a day into the job. *See Israel and the World.*
- **Mamdani:** New York's mayor concedes he cannot arrest Netanyahu while keeping the charge in the video's title. *See Israel and the World.*
- **Hamas in Europe:** German prosecution files detail a planned anniversary wave of Hamas attacks on Europe's synagogues. *See Israel and the World.*
- **Australia:** Australian synagogues cancel Friday-night services rather than seat congregants without guards they cannot afford. *See Israel and the World.*

Nearly everything that moved today was designed to outlast a verdict. Aoun wrote forever into a plan his army cannot enforce, Riyadh is signing thirty years Congress can only watch, and Smotrich moved the Settlement Administration onto the Defense Ministry's books before the voters weigh in. Even the campaign runs on that logic — Likud is selling distance from the haredi parties while keeping the alliance filed for retrieval on October 28.

The War Today

Trump Rejects Tehran's Pause and Promises to Hit Pickaxe Mountain

Trump rejected the ten-day pause Tehran routed through its mediators, saying the regime is “desperate to meet” because “they’re getting decimated.” He put Iran’s rebuild horizon at 20 to 25 years and said the United States is “not leaving right now.” Rubio followed from Manila this morning: “If they’re serious, we’re serious.” American forces struck an eleventh consecutive night — operations centers, aircraft hangars, drone stores, naval logistics. Explosions rolled through Bushehr, Tabriz, Chabahar and Konarak, and the campaign’s tally reportedly stands near 1,000 targets across ten nights. CENTCOM counts more than 30 commercial vessels attacked by Iran in three months, against

some 900 escorted through Hormuz since May. An Israeli assessment reportedly places part of Iran's 440 kilograms of 60 percent uranium inside Pickaxe Mountain. The thousands of centrifuges assessed moved there last fall would give that stockpile something to spin in. Trump promised the US "will be hitting that area pretty soon, and very heavily." He also insisted the material is covered: "We follow the material. They don't have it." Iran's Khatam al-Anbiya command answered that a strike on the nuclear sites would put every American and allied interest in the region on its target list. A new American intelligence assessment reportedly finds the strikes unlikely to move Tehran's negotiating position. Hegseth put the war's cost at \$37.5 billion so far and asked the Senate for a \$67 billion supplemental. And Araghchi admitted a six-man committee made the memorandum decisions on the spot "because it was difficult to communicate with the top." He has never met "Khamenei."

ASSESSMENT

The war for the strait is becoming a war over the mountain. The intelligence is thinner than the headlines — nothing in it independently verified, and top American and Israeli defense officials were still calling the site inactive a month ago. Araghchi's admission is the harder product: there is no address in Tehran that can deliver what Washington demands [a foreign minister who has never met his own head of state is a courier]. The strikes continue because the alternative on offer is a signature from a committee.

The Houthi Blockade Bites as Iran's Missiles Echo Over Eilat

Iran fired at Aqaba again this morning, and the explosions carried across the water into Eilat. Jordan reported six missiles, four intercepted and two down in open ground. Flights circled while security forces scanned the hills for fragments. The IDF fired no interceptors and knows of no impact on Israeli territory, and the expanded security cabinet convenes Sunday evening. In Amman, dozens of national and tribal figures demanded the government publish its military agreement with Washington and remove American forces, insisting Jordan is not a party to the war. Iranian state media claimed eleven bases struck across Bahrain, Kuwait and Jordan in a single day. Kuwait is rationing electricity in 50-degree heat after a fourth straight night of Iranian hits on its power-and-desalination plants. Ninety percent of the country's drinking water comes out of those plants. Tehran also warned Bulgaria, whose parliament is weighing eight American refuelers at a base southeast of Sofia, against becoming "a partner to aggression and war crimes." The Houthi blockade of Saudi ports produced its first confirmed reroutes: at least four tankers tied to Yanbu crude turned back toward Suez rather than run Bab el-Mandeb. Yanbu has carried nearly 4.9 million barrels of Saudi crude a day since Hormuz closed. The IEA, 290 million barrels into a 400-million-barrel emergency release, warned that only an "unconditional" reopening of Hormuz stops a further slide in global energy security. Trump's answer to the blockade: "Might happen, but we take care of things." Gulf governments are meanwhile pressing Washington to keep Israel out of the campaign, fearing Tehran's answer would land on their energy infrastructure. Jerusalem is not arguing. Officials count three ways in: an Iranian strike on Israel, an Iranian move

toward one, or an American request. None has arrived — and the wider campaign Trump is threatening, officials assess, raises the odds Tehran finally turns west.

ASSESSMENT

Iran is drawing down everyone's defenses but Israel's. Jordan's interceptors, Kuwait's grid, Riyadh's export route, Bulgaria's parliament — the ring absorbing Iranian fire runs from the Red Sea to the Balkans while Israel holds its fire. The Gulf capitals hosting the American campaign would sooner ration their own drinking water than share a front with the IDF [Israel's absence is the one war aim every party in the region still agrees on]. Every trigger on Jerusalem's list is someone else's finger.

Lebanon's Army Takes Its First Village as Aoun Promises Forever

The Lebanese army deployed into Zawtar al-Gharbiya yesterday after the IDF pulled off the village — the first territory Israel has handed back since the March ground invasion. Jeeps, armor and an engineering team rolled in, and the army told residents to stay out until the area stabilizes. Within hours, a separate Lebanese force crossed roughly 150 meters into the security zone at neighboring Zawtar a-Sharkiya, engineering vehicle in tow, and breached barriers outside the agreed pilot area. IDF troops fired warning shots into the air. Beirut's army called the fire an attempt to obstruct the pilot it was executing. Prime Minister Nawaf Salam toured the village this morning with his defense minister and said infrastructure work for returning residents has begun. In Washington, Aoun told Trump that Lebanon will end hostility with Israel “forever” — the first Lebanese head of state at the White House since 2009. His written plan disarms Hezbollah and every other militia and concentrates the weapons with the state, with the pilot zones certified clean of the group's men and arms. It asks Washington to build up the Lebanese army, and it asks Trump to press Israel on the phased withdrawal. An American source confirmed Washington pressed for hard verification mechanisms inside the plan. Trump ordered direct US flights to Beirut restored, four decades after Hezbollah's TWA hijackings shut them down. He offered to “speak to Hezbollah” if Aoun asked, urged repeal of Lebanon's law criminalizing contact with Israelis, and put Beirut near the front of the Abraham Accords queue. A senior Israeli official expects Trump to push Aoun toward the meeting nobody in Beirut will photograph: a trilateral with Netanyahu. The State Department's travel advisory did not move: “Do not travel to Lebanon for any reason.”

ASSESSMENT

The framework's first live day delivered one real handover and one breached barrier. Aoun added the promise of forever — from a president whose army was taking warning shots within hours for missing the map's edge [Lebanon signed a treaty with Israel once before, in May 1983, and Beirut tore it up within ten months]. Forever is easy to promise when the rifles that would break it answer to Tehran. The disarmament his plan assigns to the Lebanese army is being performed today by Israeli soldiers holding the tunnel exits above the Ali al-Taher bunkers. Let's see whether the second village goes smoother than the first afternoon.

Inside Israel

Netanyahu Runs Against the Exemption He Just Legislated

Likud has turned its campaign on the haredi parties. Netanyahu's rejection of Rabbi Dov Landau's charge against religious-Zionist soldiers was the opening move. His adviser Yonatan Urich went further and invited the community's operatives to keep their mouths shut until after the elections. Likud officials state the reason plainly. The arrest-freeze and Basic Law: Torah Study bled mainstream right-wing votes. The plan is distance before October 27 and the alliance restored after it. The polls carry the damage he is repairing. Channel 12 puts Eisenkot's Yashar! largest at 24 seats, with Eisenkot preferred for prime minister. The Zionist opposition sits at 59 — short of a majority without the Arab parties' ten. Channel 13 has Likud shedding another seat and Bennett at a new low of fourteen. Likud still cannot set its own primary, now pushed from August 4 to August 17. If the reserved-slot fight drags, cancellation and an arranging committee are next.

ASSESSMENT

The pivot concedes what the legislation cost. The audience is the mainstream right-wing voter bleeding to Eisenkot. Channel 12's own coalition respondents like the haredi agreements and want the parties back in government. What that voter is offered is tone: the campaign attacks Landau's rhetoric and leaves the exemption law standing [the Basic Law itself is not on the ballot]. The IDF, short of combat commanders three years into the war, opened a new officer-training battalion at Bahad 1. Netanyahu is running against the cost of his own coalition — and keeping the receipt to rebuild it after October 27.

Likud's AI Video Backfires as Herzog Warns the Campaign Off Red Lines

Likud published an AI-generated video Monday night. Eisenkot runs open-armed toward a young man cast as "Israeli unity," then swerves into Mansour Abbas's embrace. A narrator closes: Eisenkot has no government without Yair Golan and the Arab parties. Viewers read the young man at once as Gal Eisenkot ז"ל, Eisenkot's son, who fell in northern Gaza at 25. Maayan Sherman's son Ron ז"ל was kidnapped on October 7 and killed in captivity. When she thought there was nothing lower, she wrote, "they managed to go down another floor." Limor Livnat, Likud's own former minister, wrote that Arthur Finkelstein would never have let it run. By yesterday afternoon Likud had posted a second video to contain the damage. Herzog took to television last night — "elections are not a civil war," and candidates must not cross red lines or turn rivals into enemies. He also disclosed a briefing this month from Shin Bet chief David Zini and elections committee chairman Justice Noam Sohlberg. The subject: threats to the vote's integrity, internal and external. He set it against the fast that begins tonight — two sovereignties already lost to hatred between Jews.

ASSESSMENT

The argument the video was built to carry is the one the polls make for free. The opposition reaches a majority only through the Arab parties, and most opposition voters accept that. Likud dressed it in a fallen soldier's likeness and spent two days answering for the costume [Livnat's Finkelstein line will outlive the ad]. The disclosure outlasts the ad cycle — Israel's first campaign since October 7 opens with the Shin Bet already working the election itself.

Smotrich Bolts the Settlement Administration Down Before the Election

Smotrich announced this morning that the Settlement Administration becomes an official Defense Ministry body. The Civil Service Commission signed off. He also extended deputy Civil Administration head Hillel Roth's term from four years to six. Roth stays past October 27. The body was stood up in March 2023 under the coalition agreements as an informal one — dissolvable by any minister who wanted it gone. For three years it has decided which plans advance and where new communities rise in Judea and Samaria. The stated motive: fear that a successor government dissolves the body and hands its planning powers back to the Civil Administration. The next Civil Administration head remains unnamed — Hisham Ibrahim moves over as the defense minister's military secretary.

ASSESSMENT

Sovereignty in Judea and Samaria has advanced all term by accumulation — 103 approved communities, with the budgets and roads behind them. An accumulation is only as durable as the office administering it. Smotrich spent the morning making the office permanent [a coalition improvisation now has a civil-service personnel file]. A successor who wants the powers back must legislate and litigate them out of the Defense Ministry. Roth's extended term was written to outlast the result.

Israel and the World

Burnham Keeps Britain's Bases in the American War

Andy Burnham reportedly approved continued American use of British bases for strikes on Iran, one day into the job. The approval extends Starmer's license and keeps the classification that spares London the word war: the strikes are "defensive." Starmer chaired the government's last war session Friday. The handover left the policy running, and Burnham's office has issued no statement. Miliband opened his tenure pledging to end the Iran conflict and fully reopen the Strait of Hormuz — plus "a sustainable peace in Palestine and Israel." The White House had reportedly warned Burnham's team off that appointment. Ministers keep examining the "most effective way" to sanction Israel over building in Judea and Samaria.

ASSESSMENT

The Burnham government's first war decision went to Washington. The bases answer to the alliance. The trade ban answers to the Labour selectorate, and nothing in the first constrains the second. Nightly American strikes stay "defensive" because the honest word obliges a Commons vote [wars need votes, adjectives don't].

The Saudi Nuclear Pact Heads to a Congress That Cannot Stop It

The Trump administration reportedly submits its 123 Agreement with Riyadh to Congress within days. Energy Secretary Chris Wright and his Saudi counterpart, Abdulaziz bin Salman, may sign as early as today. The text omits the two instruments Washington once required. No "Gold Standard," so nothing in the pact bars Riyadh from enriching uranium or reprocessing spent fuel. No Additional Protocol, so no IAEA snap inspections at undeclared sites. The deal reportedly runs thirty years and is valued in the tens of billions. American firms would build the kingdom's program, and a joint study could seat an American-built enrichment plant on Saudi soil. The UAE accepted the Gold Standard in 2009. Riyadh reserves the right to enrich. MBS said it plainly in 2018: if Iran builds a bomb, "we will follow suit as soon as possible." Israeli officials privately concede the decoupling from normalization cost Jerusalem its leverage — and hope American-built means American-watched. Yaakov Nagel, who ran Israel's National Security Council, calls enrichment on Saudi soil a mistake no supervision fixes. His alternative: foreign-supplied fuel rods, removed after use. Herzog told Al Arabiya last week that Saudi rapprochement remains his "dream." A retired Saudi air-force major general answered days later on Channel 12.

ASSESSMENT

Congress gets ninety days, and objecting takes a joint resolution plus two-thirds against a veto. The pact enters force [the review is furniture]. The fix Nagel proposes is how Russia services Iran at Bushehr. Herzog performs the courtship on Saudi television, and the pact just removed Riyadh's reason to reciprocate.

Mamdani Retires the Arrest Threat and Keeps the Charge

New York's mayor conceded yesterday that he cannot arrest Netanyahu. The concession arrived in a video his office titled "Benjamin Netanyahu is a war criminal." Mamdani said he "reviewed every avenue available" and that the city holds no independent authority to enforce the ICC's November 2024 warrant. He then urged Washington to join the court and pronounced Netanyahu "not welcome in New York City." The "genocide" charge rests on the Hamas-run health ministry's 73,000 count, which does not distinguish combatants from civilians. Trump had already answered: Netanyahu "will not be arrested, in any way, shape, or form, while in the United States of America." The climb-down drew fire from both directions. Jewish and Republican lawmakers counted the week's costs at home: five Legionnaires' disease deaths and a hate-crime count still climbing. Within Our Lifetime's Nerdeen Kiswani urged the NYPD to make the arrest anyway — "the law never mattered when it comes to the

state asserting its power.” And the mayor’s own Office for International Affairs reportedly booked a meeting with Iran’s UN envoy. The State Department stepped in to cancel it.

ASSESSMENT

The accusation was the product all along, and it survives the concession intact. Mamdani reviewed every avenue, found none, and shipped the finding under a title that does the prosecuting for him [an ICC warrant, reissued as a campaign thumbnail]. Kiswani demanding the NYPD move without authority is the same politics with the filter off — the flank that elected him never wanted the legal review. The ICC-accession pitch lands two days before member states vote on keeping Karim Khan, the prosecutor who signed the warrant.

German Files Detail the Second October 7 Hamas Planned for Europe

Hamas’s military wing spent years assembling a covert attack network in Europe, according to a Neue Zürcher Zeitung investigation published yesterday and drawn from German federal prosecution files. The network reportedly ran to hidden weapons caches and smuggling routes, with dormant cells set to activate on an order from the leadership. German authorities assess the plan was a coordinated wave of attacks on Jewish and Israeli institutions across the continent, reportedly timed to the second anniversary of the October 7 massacre. Investigators found a claim-of-responsibility video filmed in advance, styled on Hamas’s own October 7 footage. The anniversary cell was broken up, and the investigations since indicate the threat has not lifted. Arrests and raids have run through Germany, Austria, Denmark, Britain, Greece, and Cyprus. Vienna allegedly served as the logistics hub — a cache seized there last year held five loaded pistols and several explosive devices. Smugglers allegedly moved 13 pistols, a Kalashnikov, and more than 900 rounds of ammunition through Denmark, Germany, and Austria. A Berlin cell reportedly received its order in February 2023, eight months before the massacre, to prepare strikes on Jewish, Israeli, or American targets. Four Hamas operatives drew multi-year sentences in Berlin this spring. Greek special forces arrested an Egyptian suspect in Crete in June, bomb-making materials in his flat. His cell was allegedly scouting an Israeli cruise ship due to dock on the island. Federal Prosecutor General Jens Rommel says the network’s men often hold European citizenship or Schengen residency and move unhindered. Separately, Munich prosecutors charged a 15-year-old Islamic State sympathizer with planning an attack on a synagogue near Augsburg.

ASSESSMENT

Hamas has spent two decades insisting it fights only between the river and the sea; its military wing was digging weapons caches into Vienna as early as 2019 [a long way from Khan Yunis]. The plan in the files made Europe’s synagogues a second front, and only arrests, cell by cell, stood between it and the anniversary. The convictions reach the men who tended the caches. The leadership that would give the order sits hosted abroad, where European dockets do not reach.

Australian Shuls Cancel Friday Nights They Cannot Afford to Guard

Australia's Royal Commission into Antisemitism and Social Cohesion opened its security-focused hearing block in Melbourne this week, and the testimony put numbers on Jewish life under guard. Senior counsel Richard Lancaster told the commission that synagogues across the country have canceled Friday-night services because they could not afford a guard and would not seat congregants without one. An anonymous witness put volunteer community-protection work at 113,700 hours in 2025 and called the figure a substantial undercount. A CSG Victoria volunteer described safeguarding Jewish life as "a second life." School witnesses put Bialik College's security levy up roughly 230 percent since October 7, with Mount Scopus doubling its own. Students are told to keep uniforms out of public view, and Jewish youth camps reportedly instruct children to hide identifying items and disable phone location services. George Foster, president of Australia's Holocaust survivors' association, testified that the country is not Germany of the 1930s. Then he entered the "disturbing parallels" into the record: Jews easing out of public space and afraid to display who they are. The Executive Council of Australian Jewry counted 2,062 antisemitic incidents in the year after October 7 — a fivefold jump. Last week the New South Wales government unveiled an \$8.3 million recovery package. It funds a permanent memorial at Bondi for the fifteen murdered at the Hanukkah celebration, plus expanded community security and a Sydney Jewish Museum redevelopment.

ASSESSMENT

A royal commission is a state paying to learn what its Jews could have itemized for free: 113,700 volunteer hours and Shabbat canceled for want of a guard. Foster kept more discipline than the moment invites — he declined the Weimar comparison and entered the parallels into the record anyway. Britain answered the same picture with £250 million and a state-threat designation on the IRGC — Australia is answering with hearing blocks and a memorial [the guard at the shul door is still a volunteer]. The commission's report will land on a community that has already written it.

✘ Field Dossier: *The Wrong Map* — The commission's numbers — 113,700 volunteer guard-hours, Shabbat services canceled for want of a guard — are the Dossier's Australia indicator arriving under oath: a Jewry no longer what it was in 2023, still funded as if it were.

Briefly Noted

Frontline & Security

- *Times of Israel*: The IDF and Shin Bet named two October 7 abductors killed in weekend Gaza strikes. Adham Nasman commanded the Gaza City Brigade's infiltration and held Emily Damari among seven hostages; Osama Abu Teim took three captives from Nir Oz.

- *Israel Hayom*: Undercover officers, directed by the Shin Bet, arrested two Shuafat camp residents overnight on suspicion of planning an imminent Jerusalem attack.
- *Jerusalem Post*: A Jerusalem Center study by Maurice Hirsch counts some 70,000 armed PA “soldiers” — the Oslo Accords permitted a 12,000-man police force. Qalqilya sits 14 kilometers from the sea.

Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- *Ynet*: The Netherlands gazetted its ban on goods from Israeli communities in Judea and Samaria yesterday, effective September 22. Belgium’s cabinet approved its own decree two days earlier — the ban Brussels could not pass is passing capital by capital.
- *Times of Israel*: Pacific microstate Nauru will open an embassy in Jerusalem — the tenth, a week after Colombia committed to the same move.
- *Jewish Insider*: House Democrats urged Rubio to suspend Malaysia’s US military-training aid over its pledge to deport Israeli nationals. The letter gives Kuala Lumpur 15 days and notes Hamas fighters have trained on Malaysian soil.
- *JNS*: Israel’s Canberra embassy issued a lengthy public takedown of the ruling Labor Party’s draft platform ahead of tomorrow’s conference. The draft reaffirms Palestinian-state recognition and floats sanctions over “extremist settler violence.”

Public Diplomacy & Media

- *Jerusalem Post*: The Second Circuit threw out the release order for Columbia anti-Israel activist Mohsen Mahdawi, ruling the Vermont judge lacked jurisdiction. His deportation case now belongs to the immigration courts, which answer to the Justice Department.
- *Times of Israel*: Greg Stanton held his Phoenix seat yesterday against socialist Kai Newkirk, who ran the primary on Stanton’s AIPAC money. Michigan’s Stevens–El-Sayed primary is August 4.
- *Algemeiner*: The Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry’s own new breakdown puts women and children at roughly 32,000 of 73,066 dead — under half. The Washington Post is still printing “the majority.”

Domestic & Law

- *Israel Hayom*: Prosecutors filed the state’s first-ever criminal-track request to strip citizenship, against two Cellcom employees convicted of plotting a wartime network shutdown for Hamas. Revocation without a second citizenship means permanent residency under the law — the vote and the state benefits go, the address stays.
- *Jerusalem Post*: The High Court urged Save the Children, Diakonia and CESVI to withdraw their petitions against the state’s refusal to register them — CESVI did. Justice Alex Stein, from the bench: “Anyone who calls the State of Israel an apartheid state should not enter Israel.”

- *Ynet News*: Ex-firearms-licensing chief Israel Avishar faces fraud charges, pending a hearing, over some 38,000 gun permits his division let unauthorized staff issue after October 7. He had asked Ben-Gvir to rein the system in, was refused, and resigned two months after the attack.

Economy, Tech & Infrastructure

- *Jerusalem Post*: Israeli companies raised \$4.1 billion in first-half public offerings, on track for a record 30 IPOs this year. The Tel Aviv exchange rose 38 percent across six months of war.
- *Jerusalem Post*: Elbit Systems of America won more than \$370 million in new US Customs and Border Protection contracts. It already operates the surveillance towers and radar watching the Arizona border.
- *JNS*: Israel's Electricity Authority froze new data-center grid applications for 140 days after requests hit 27,000 megawatts. The queue is about triple the country's average consumption.

Culture, Religion & Society

- *The JC*: City of David excavators uncovered charred sycamore roof beams from a building the Babylonians burned in 586 BCE. Enough rings survived to date the destruction to a ten-year window, and the fast mourning it begins tonight.
- *Israel Hayom*: President Herzog is returning to the Kotel an ancient stone displayed at the President's Residence since 1969. Benjamin Mazar told Shazar in 1969 it was not a Kotel stone — the Antiquities Authority says it likely is.
- *Walla*: Prof. Shlomo Mashiach, who helped deliver Israel's first test-tube baby in 1982, died yesterday at 89. The IVF network he built at Assuta now handles roughly half the country's fertility treatments.

Developments to Watch

Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)

- **Damascus plans what Sharaa refused** — Syria's defense establishment is drafting operational plans against Hezbollah, a single Israeli report claims. Sharaa refused Trump's invitation in public, and a Syrian move would put a second army on Hezbollah's rear.

Gaza & Southern Theater

- **A pilot city in Rafah** — Trump's Board of Peace plans a "humanitarian and governance zone" in Rafah for tens of thousands, behind IDF lines. It proceeds with or without the stalled talks, and Hamas will work to keep it empty.

Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)

- **Erbil's drones arrive unclaimed** — Air defenses reportedly downed three explosive drones near the US consulate in Erbil last night, none claimed. Iraq's militias promise to enter if Washington widens the campaign, and unclaimed drones let them fire without deciding.

Diplomatic & Legal

- **Paris answers a detention with a summons** — France summoned Iran's charge d'affaires over two embassy staffers detained in Tehran, one beaten, and is flying both home. Barrot promised consequences, and a summons tells Tehran the next detention is free.

Home Front & Politics

- **American fighters, Israeli runways** — Channel 14 claims the US is emptying Gulf bases it cannot defend and moving refuelers and fighter squadrons to Israel. Every Gulf host is absorbing Iranian fire, and squadrons on Israeli runways import the same exposure.

The Brief is off for Tisha B'Av and returns Sunday, July 26.

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ABOUT MITZPE INSTITUTE

Mitzpe Institute is an intelligence and strategy organization focused on Israeli security, diaspora threat assessment, and the strategic challenges confronting the Jewish people and the West. We produce daily intelligence, forensic analyses, strategic assessments, and tactical briefings read by policymakers, military leaders, and institutional decision-makers across more than 90 countries and all 50 US states — from the Knesset and the US Congress to allied governments, major policy institutions, and Jewish organizational leadership worldwide.

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