



US Okays \$20b in Arms Sale to Child-killer Israel

'2,100 babies under two' killed in Gaza

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An injured child sits next to a woman at al-Ahli Arab hospital in Gaza City following Israeli bombardment on the Hassan Salameh and al-Nassr schools housing displaced Palestinians on August 4, 2024.

● OMAR AL-QATTAA/AFP



Reactions to Iran's new cabinet: Responsible friendship or hasty acts



By Ali Karimi Maleh
Political analyst

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Following a period of anticipation, speculation, and individual and collective consultations through novel yet ambiguous mechanisms that held some promise, President Masoud Pezeshkian finally unveiled his proposed cabinet to parliament. The reactions to the appointees and the political makeup of the cabinet from various individuals and political factions were not entirely unexpected. In my view, while these critical reactions serve as constructive and instructive

warnings for the president's future path and choices of statesmen, they also signal a continued commitment to civil participation. However, I find the subsequent actions by certain influential figures to be unrealistic, provocative, and somewhat rash.

As an expert of political science who has advocated for voter turnout as a path toward Iran's emancipation, enduring reproaches along the way, I have consistently made two key points in my speeches and writings since the day after Pezeshkian's victory: Firstly, I have emphasized that Pezeshkian's cabinet will undoubtedly spring surprises, but we must not let these surprises deter us.

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Efforts underway to link Gaza cease-fire to Iran's response to Israel

PERSPECTIVE

According to various media outlets, the Qatari capital of Doha is the hotspot for talks aimed at brokering a cease-fire deal between the Israeli regime and Hamas. Delegations from Qatar, Egypt, and the United States are in attendance, putting negotiations into high gear. The urgency of a cease-fire was also a hot topic at the UN Security Council session on Wednesday. Rosemary DiCarlo, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, pointed to Israel's recent strike on the Al-Tab'e'en school in the Al-Daraj neighborhood as a stark reminder of why a cease-fire in Gaza is of the essence. Meanwhile, CNN, quoting an informed Israeli source, reported that US officials have given their Israeli counterparts a heads-up

that it's high time to hammer out an agreement to stave off a regional war.

The reference by American officials to averting a regional war alludes to Iran's response to Israel following the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh, the head of Hamas's political bureau, in Tehran. In the past few days, after Tehran's official announcement of the necessity to punish Israel, concerns have grown about a new war in the region or the escalation of the Gaza war. Extensive consultations have also been held by officials from various countries with officials in Tehran to persuade Iran to exercise restraint. In light of these developments, the European troika—the UK, France, and Germany—issued a joint statement calling on Iran and its allies to lay off any attacks that could ratchet up regional tensions.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Pakistani official urges completion of gas project with Iran

A Pakistani politician has called for the completion of the Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline project aimed at providing energy for his country.

Hafiz Naeemur Rehman made the remarks in a press conference in Islamabad on Tuesday, as reported by Mehr News Agency.

Rehman said Iran's energy resources can help provide Pakistan with 25% of its energy needs, urging the Pakistani government to not further delay the completion of the gas project with Iran.

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch announced in May that the "Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline is included in the priority of Pakistan."

In February, Islamabad approved the construction of an 80-kilometer section of the pipeline to avoid having to pay Iran some \$18 billion in penalties for years of delays.

The United States has threatened Pakistan with sanctions if it goes ahead with a plan to build the pipeline to import gas from Iran.

Iran's exports of handwoven carpets hit \$13m in four months

The caretaker of Iran National Carpet and Creative Industries Center said that the country exported \$13 million in handwoven carpets in the first four months of the current Iranian year (started March 20, 2024).

Iran's export of handwoven carpets in the period registered a six-percent growth compared to the last year's corresponding period, Mohammadreza Zare stated, according to Mehr News Agency.

Turning to the growing trend of producing handwoven carpets in the country over the past three years, he pointed out that handwoven carpet production indicated an 11 percent growth in the previous Iranian year.

According to the statistics of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), Iran exported \$11.5 million in handwoven carpets in the first four months of the previous Iranian year (March 21 to July 22, 2023).

Iran's 8% economic growth demands '\$100b in annual investment'

In order to achieve eight percent economic growth that is targeted in the Seventh Development Plan, Iran needs \$100 billion in annual investment, said a deputy head of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) on Tuesday.

Mehdi Sadeqi-Niaraki put the amount of foreign investment during 2011 to 2022 at \$1.5 billion per annum.

Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have a great role in Iran's economy, as SMEs account for more than 94% of the number of industrial and mining units, noted the senior businessman adding that 43% of the country's employment is related to the field.

Referring to the submission of the list of new cabinet members to the Parliament by President Masoud Pezeshkian, Sadeqi-Niaraki announced the readiness of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines & Agriculture to cooperate with the president and his colleagues in related areas.

"The ICCIMA considers the empowerment of the private sector as its most important mission, and we believe that the empowerment of the private sector will happen through the strengthening of the NGOs," he stated.



Makran serving as watershed in promotion of blue economy



The geopolitical features of Iran are considered as one of the most important indicators of its empowerment, including turning the country into a regional magnet for commerce and investment.

The ancient region of Makran located in the southeast of the Iranian plateau and on the northern shores of the Sea of Oman has been in

the crosshairs of the enemies which coveted it for its resources or tried to choke off Iran's access to its wealth throughout history, Press TV wrote.

Since 2008, when Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei underlined the significance of Makran, saying the development of the region has been put on the frontline of Iran's drive

to reorient its economy. The general policies of sea-based development call for a whole-of-government approach to develop Iran's coasts, especially Makran beyond the strategic port of Chabahar.

The geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic advantages of Makran hosting a comprehensive sea, road, rail and air

transportation network along oil and gas transmission lines would enormously fortify Iran and upgrade its status.

Due to its privileged position in the east of the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman, the port of Chabahar is located on the route of the main shipping lines to Africa, Asia and Europe. It is also the shortest communication and transit route for the Central Asian countries and Afghanistan to reach the Persian Gulf, East Africa and other markets. A mere 70 km away from Pakistan's Gwadar on the Arabian Sea, Chabahar is also a potential gateway to the North-South trade corridor, a crucial element in regional trade integration. Hence, Makran is a trump card in Iran's hands and a unique opportunity to leapfrog development hurdles and step into the vast landscape of future possibilities.

One key feature of Makran is that it is less prone to the regional and international tensions due to its geographical and strategic location outside the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.

The Sea of Oman, on the other hand, is part of the transportation route of the Persian Gulf and its oil-rich areas with the Indian Ocean, the Far East, East Africa, the Mediterranean Sea and Europe, which grants special geoeconomic weight to Makran.

This unique location at the mouth of the Sea of Oman and the Persian Gulf gives Iran an unparalleled geopolitical advantage to balance its ties with China and India and make use of countless economic and political benefits in the northern Indian Ocean.

Under Iran's Seventh Development Plan, the share of sea-based economy must rise by one percent

every year. This requires investment in infrastructure such as docks, development of rail network, roads and airports, as well as joint investment in the Makran coasts.

The plan envisages the share of sea economy in the GDP to increase to 6% from 2% now, including through building large ports, roads, railways, airports and sea lines and strengthening agricultural, tourism, fishing and commercial infrastructures.

The unique agricultural capacities of Sistan and Baluchestan are, with its rolling groves, banana gardens, fisheries and thousands of marine species such as corals, oysters, algae, fish and shrimp making it an ideal place for growth and development.

It will make the development of Makran coast under a sea-based economy plan will mark a turning point in Iran.

Households received 22.7% of bank loans in four months: CBI

Figures by the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) show that households accounted for 22.7% of the total loans granted by the country's banking system

in the four months to July 21. CBI figures indicated that the Iranian state and private banks had granted a total of 16,957 trillion

rials (\$28.7 billion) of loans to businesses, industries and households in April-July, up 20.6% from the same period in 2023, reported Press TV. Small loans (loans below 3 billion rials or \$5,000) accounted for 24.7% of all loans, while loans granted to households reached 3,672.2 trillion rials of which some 1,429 trillion rials went to purchases of personal appliances, the figures showed.

Working capital loans granted to all businesses in Iran topped 10,035 trillion rials in April-July with mining and manufacturing sector receiving the lion's share of 44.6%, the data showed. The CBI said the total loans granted by the Iranian banking system to the mining and manufacturing sector in the country in the four months to late July had exceeded 5,202 trillion rials (\$8.8 billion).



Kouchesfahani Mansion: Echoes of Rasht's architectural past



● ISNA

Iranica Desk

The Kouchesfahani Mansion, located in the old market of Sabzeh Meydan in Rasht, Gilan Province, showcases exquisite brickwork and reflects the architectural style of the early Pahlavi era. However, it has not yet been registered nationally. The mansion's remaining portions are divided among various owners who reside there. While half of the street-facing

walls are covered in cement, the original beauty of the red brickwork remains visible. A tall wooden door enhances the grandeur of this mansion nestled in a narrow cul-de-sac. While the building appears to have two stories, it actually contains three levels, including a basement. The wooden windows on each floor are adorned with decorative elements known as keystones, which reflect the architectural influences

of the late Qajar and early Pahlavi periods, ISNA wrote. The tall windows illuminate the dark hallway, and sunlight streaming through the window grilles adds an exquisite touch. The main hall and the numerous rooms on the second floor, along with the tall wooden doors and windows, maintain a minimalist decor. However, the high ceiling, adorned with white wooden paneling, evokes the tranquility and charm reminiscent of

grandmothers' homes.

Among the mansion's most striking features are the exquisite brickwork in the courtyard and the building's exterior. Unfortunately, access to the courtyard is restricted, as the first floor and courtyard are occupied by a private owner. Nonetheless, from the second-floor balcony overlooking the courtyard, one can appreciate the beauty of the mansion's intricate brickwork and glimpse a small, roofed area of the courtyard.

According to an inscription on the wall, the Kouchesfahani Mansion was originally quite large, but parts of it were destroyed during the construction of Alam al-Huda Street in the early Pahlavi era. What remains today is a tall, two-story building adorned with brick decorations at the entrance and along the walls. The mansion features brickworks and columns that have unfortunately suffered damage and been filled with

cement. Some sections of the facade have been completely destroyed, revealing a clothing store located behind the tall commercial unit.

In 2017, a dossier was prepared by Gilan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization; however, the mansion has not yet been nationally registered.

The floor plan is quadrilateral, and the building topped with a sloped roof. Its estimated height is 10 meters, and the maximum length of its exterior facade is approximately 31 meters. The primary materials used in its construction are brick and wood, while the outer walls are covered with cement up to a height of 1.5 meters. The main decorative elements include brickwork and wooden adornments beneath the ceiling. There are four entrances featuring wooden doors with rectangular frames and floral carvings. A metal gate was later added to the building, and the exterior features seven small and large windows on the eastern side.

A journey into Peraw Cave in Kermanshah Province



● eligasht.com

Iranica Desk

If you're seeking adventure, Peraw Cave in Kermanshah Province is a tempting destination. However, it's essential to complete professional caving courses and join an expert group equipped with the necessary gear before exploring. Also known as "Killer Cave" (Ghar-e Qatel in Persian), it was registered as the second national natural heritage of the province in 2009 and rec-

ognized as a national heritage in 2010. The cave stretches 1,454 meters in length and reaches a depth of 752 meters, situated between the Taq Bostan and Bisotoun mountains, south of an area known as Peraw Square. Inside this mysterious cave, there are 26 shafts, the deepest of which descends about 42 meters.

In 1971, Peraw Cave was recognized as the deepest vertical cave in the world, earning it the title of "Everest of Caves."

However, after 40 years and the discovery of deeper caves, it now ranks as the 221st. Due to its high altitude, cold temperatures, and natural glaciers, traversing Peraw Cave poses significant challenges for spelunkers. Visitors face additional difficulties, including narrow openings that require crawling through frigid water; almost freezing on their stomachs. If you plan to explore this daunting cave, be aware of the numerous dangers you may

encounter, such as the risk of falls from heights, getting stuck in flooded areas or narrow passages, becoming disoriented, sustaining physical injuries, facing insufficient lighting, poor air quality, adverse weather conditions, and the potential for natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, or bursts of water or gas. In addition to the dangers associated with visiting the cave, there are many wonders to discover, such as the breathtak-

ing and unique experience of interacting with diverse rock formations, gemstones, and underground waterfalls. You'll embark on an adventure filled with excitement amidst nature while facing a physical challenge that demands focus, strength, mountaineering skills, and high endurance. Exploring this cave allows you to uncover new sights, find peace and concentration in its darkness, and forge a direct connection with nature,

including the underground waters, rocks, natural minerals, and subterranean plants. These experiences offer a profound appreciation of the natural world around you. If you have the physical strength and necessary skills for this caving expedition, gather a strong team and embark on your adventure. Due to the cold temperatures in winter and autumn, summer and spring are the ideal seasons to visit the Killer Cave.

AIPAC growing desperate



By Rami G. Khouri
Scholar, journalist

OPINION

As we approach the November elections in the United States, political dynamics related to Israel-Palestine continue to influence key developments in the American political arena. Public opinion is no longer as dominantly favourable towards Israel as it used to be, which worries the Israeli cabinet and its American supporters. This is most apparent in the actions of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the leading pro-Israel lobbying group in the US. Over the past few months, it invested \$8.5m in a campaign to defeat progressive Democratic Congresswoman Cori Bush in the Democratic primaries in Missouri. Bush, who championed Palestine justice issues in Congress, lost to St Louis prosecutor Wesley Bell last week. This followed AIPAC providing the unprecedented single-contest amount of \$17m to defeat another Palestine supporter, Congressman Jamal Bowman, in the Democratic primaries in New York.



Reps. Jamaal Bowman (R), Cori Bush (C), and Rashida Tlaib (L) attend a vigil outside the White House to demand that the US president call for a permanent cease-fire in Gaza, on November 29, 2023. Both Bowman and Bush had their primary challengers fueled by big spending from the AIPAC and eventually lost their primaries.
NATHAN HOWARD/AP

AIPAC's funding of Bush's and Bowman's defeats shows that it must now provide ever greater sums of cash to keep Congress Israel-friendly and minimise the impact of progressive members. This reveals how challenging it has become for the Israeli lobby to counter the growing popularity of the Palestinian cause. Such aggressive funding campaigns by AIPAC and other pro-Israeli forces may soon be perceived as another dimension of foreign interference in US elections.

After Bowman's loss, AIPAC declared the pro-Israel position in the US as "both good policy and good politics". Responding to this claim, leftist activist Medea Benjamin wrote: "On the contrary, it showed that pro-Israel groups can buy elections and it sent a frightening message to all elected officials that if they criticize Israel, even during a genocide, they may well pay with their careers." She pointed out that while AIPAC's funding of Bush's and Bowman's defeats demonstrate the pro-Israel lobby's power and resources, they also show that it must now provide ever greater sums of cash to keep Congress Israel-friendly and minimise the impact of progressive members. This reveals how challenging it has become for the Israeli lobby to counter the growing popularity of the Palestinian cause. This makes it look increasingly desperate as it takes measures that are likely to backfire, generating greater resentment among the public and within the political system.

Such aggressive funding campaigns by AIPAC and other pro-Israeli forces may soon be perceived as another dimension of foreign interference in US elections, which has grown as a national concern since 2016. Americans who want their government to be even-handed on Palestine-Israel might see greater Israeli funding or social media campaigns to favour certain candidates as inappropriate foreign meddling in US elections. Israel may soon join Russia, China, Iran, and Cuba as countries perceived to be tampering with US elections. Another desperate pro-Israel measure that could backfire is the push for legislation to criminalise pro-Palestinian advocacy, punish nonprofit organisations that support the Palestinian cause, or deprive universities of federal funds for allowing pro-Palestinian protests. Such legislation can infringe on freedom of expression and First Amendment rights and would further stain pro-Israeli lobbying as a regressive, anti-democratic force in the eyes of many Americans.

Such measures are being pursued because the dominance of the Israeli narrative in shaping public opinion in the US is slowly declining. This is because social media, progressive media outlets, and more dynamic Palestinian activism allow Americans today to easily see and assess Israeli genocidal actions in Palestine that are enabled by US government support. This has moved public opinion in a more balanced direction with more Americans sympathising with the Palestinians. According to a March Gallup poll, nationwide this number is 27 percent; among Democrats, it is 43 percent, and among young people 45 percent. Views of the war are even more critical of Israel. A Data for Progress poll released in May revealed that 56 percent of Democrats believe Israel is committing genocide. Another of its surveys released in June showed 64 percent of likely voters support a cease-fire and withdrawal of

Israeli troops from Gaza; among Democrats, the number was 86 percent. A June poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs showed 55 percent of Americans reject sending American troops to defend Israel if it comes under attack by its neighbours. US politicians cannot perpetually ignore such changing public attitudes — especially among Democrats. And it seems they are taking them into consideration. Last month when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gave his fourth address to the US Congress, nearly half of its Democratic members were absent. Along with shifting public opinion, other forces are steadily opening cracks in the pro-Israel consensus in US politics. One of them is the National Uncommitted Movement, which during the Democratic primaries asked registered Democrats to vote "uncommitted" to show their rejection of the Biden administration's policies on Israel's Gaza genocide. The campaign gained more than 700,000 votes, many of which came from critical battleground states like Michigan and Wisconsin. If the movement holds together until November and the election is close, their votes could be enough to sink Kamala Harris, President Joe Biden's successor on the Democratic ticket, who faithfully supported his pro-Israel policy in Gaza. Harris's campaign — just like Biden's before that — is clearly worried. One sign is her decision to choose Minnesota Governor Tim Walz as her running mate over Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro, whose strong pro-Israel and Zionist positions on the pro-Palestine student protests, the campaign to boycott Israel, and the Gaza war, among other issues, were discussed in public as possibly hindering Harris's chances to win.

Harris herself has also hinted in her rhetoric that she wants to put some distance between herself and Biden's staunchly pro-Israel position. She has spoken more firmly about an immediate cease-fire and expressed her concern about Palestinian civilian suffering. She has also told leaders of the Uncommitted campaign whom she briefly met in Detroit last week that she would accept their request to meet and discuss their demand for an immediate US arms embargo on Israel. However, pro-Palestinian and Uncommitted activists insist that to vote for her they must see tangible actions, like an arms embargo on Israel and applying US laws that bar the US from providing military aid to foreign security forces that violate human rights. In recent days, Harris was interrupted during two rally speeches by activists demanding that she break from the Biden policy. Her inadequate responses showed she is struggling to address the progressive Democrats' demands for a more humane Gaza policy. We will only learn of any substantive changes in her position on Israel-Palestine after the Democratic National Convention in Chicago this month. Whatever the Harris campaign decides to do, it is increasingly clear that for the first time, American voters supportive of the Palestinian cause might have enough clout to impact the presidential and congressional elections, and thus Washington's foreign and domestic policies in the future. This rather sudden transformation of the electoral landscape will give the pro-Israeli lobby new headaches that it will have a hard time addressing.



Pro-Palestinian protesters interrupt a speech by US Vice President and Democratic Presidential candidate Kamala Harris during a campaign rally in Romulus, Michigan, on August 7, 2024. "If you want Donald Trump to win, then say that. Otherwise, I'm speaking," Harris snapped back.
REBECCA COOK/REUTERS

The article first appeared on Al Jazeera.

AIPAC had some recent wins but isn't invincible



By Aaron Sobczak
Reporter

OPINION

America's most influential pro-Israel lobby group, AIPAC, has been boasting about its success in recent congressional primary elections. Rep. Cori Bush's (D-Mo.) loss on August 6 was the second instance of a so-called "squad" member losing their primary against an AIPAC-backed candidate this election season, following Rep. Jamal Bowman's (D-N.Y.) defeat on June 25. AIPAC and its partners have spent over \$24 million so far this year to influence elections and have enjoyed a series of successes all summer, bragging on X that 100% of the Democratic candidates it endorsed have so far won their primaries, a narrative that may cause many aspiring politicians to see AIPAC as a force they cannot afford to cross. But that may be more a function of AIPAC simply opting not to intervene in races in which it is unlikely to win, even if it means allowing critics of the US-Israel relationship to coast to victory.

Rep. Ilhan Omar's (D-Minn.) primary this week, for example, was a race that AIPAC preferred not to call attention to. AIPAC didn't offer significant support to Omar's Democratic challenger, former Minneapolis City Council member Don Samuels, who pleaded for AIPAC's assistance. And judging from AIPAC's social media activity and public statements, the lobby group was largely signaling it has no interest in this race, which could unseat one of the most outspoken critics of US arms transfers, foreign aid, and political support for Israel in Congress today.

da Jones challenged Rep. Tlaib's first reelection campaign during the 2020 primary, but Tlaib won the nomination with over 66% of the vote, despite AIPAC spending more than \$600,000 in an effort to defeat her. Tlaib defeated three other candidates in 2022 with almost 64% of the vote. One of her challengers that year, Janice Winfrew, received support from AIPAC, as well as from a new organization largely funded by out-of-state billionaire pro-Israel donors, the Urban Empowerment Action PAC. After her victories in 2020 and 2022, Tlaib ran unopposed

ference MN, to assist Samuels in the final weeks of that campaign, which ultimately proved ineffective. UDP is a group largely funded by pro-Israel Republicans seeking to influence Democratic primary races. Over the past week, however, mysterious anti-Omar mailers have shown up in her district, sent by Make a Difference MN. The group has spent around \$90,000 on anti-Omar mailers in the last days of the primary this week, an amount that is unlikely to affect the election outcome. AIPAC does like to brag about its successes, and will largely



Minnesota Rep. Ilhan Omar (L) and Michigan Democratic Rep. Rashida Tlaib
● ALLISON BAILEY/NURPHOTO

Indeed, at times, AIPAC has pulled the trigger and misfired. For example, Rep. Thomas Massie (R-Ky.) — a member of the House Liberty Caucus and a strong defender of non-intervention overseas — has been critical of how much American aid goes to Israel, and other nations, and spoke out against anti-Semitism laws proposed in Congress this year as potential violations of the First Amendment's free speech guarantees. AIPAC spent roughly \$400,000 in an effort to defeat him in his primary in May. Rather than succumbing to AIPAC's efforts, Massie trounced his opponent, pulling in over 75% of the vote. A few Democrats who have criticized America's relationship with Israel have also successfully dodged AIPAC's wrath. It doesn't appear that AIPAC tried to unseat Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) during her first re-election campaign in 2020, perhaps realizing it would be a lost cause and thus tarnish its stellar endorsement record. Ocasio-Cortez won almost 75% of the vote in her 2020 primary, went unchallenged in 2022, and won 82% in the 2024 primary. Another strong critic of Israel is Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.). Tlaib, who won her first race in 2018, was the first Palestinian-American to be elected to the United States Congress. Detroit City Councilwoman Bren-

in 2024 and appears to be on a safe glidepath to another term, with no AIPAC intervention, in November. Omar used to be a big target of AIPAC. Americans for Tomorrow's Future, an AIPAC-connected PAC, spent around \$2.5 million trying to defeat her during her first reelection campaign in 2020, but she still won 58% of the vote. The 2022 Democratic primary would prove to be much more competitive — in that case, Omar won by just two percentage points against Don Samuels, the former Minneapolis city council member who is also running against her this year. United Democracy Project, an AIPAC-connected group, quietly spent \$350,000 via a shadowy group, Make a Dif-

persist in endorsing candidates who criticize Israel in ways that AIPAC considers too harsh or too effective. But in choosing not to invest heavily to defeat Omar, apparently to avoid an embarrassing loss, it seems that the purportedly all-powerful pro-Israel lobby group knows its limits. The electoral victories of Reps. Massie, Omar, Tlaib, and Ocasio-Cortez should offer some hope to lawmakers who, for example, do not believe that the US should continue providing billions of dollars in aid to Israel without conditions. Perhaps AIPAC isn't so invincible after all.

The article first appeared on Responsible Statecraft.



Reps. Rashida Tlaib (L) and Cori Bush (R) hold signs reading "Lasting Cease-fire Now" as President Joe Biden delivers the State of the Union address in Washington, D.C., on March 7, 2024.
● ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS/AFP

AIPAC hijacks US elections



By Medea Benjamin
Co-founder of peace group CODEPINK

OPINION

Representative Cori Bush, a progressive black woman from St. Louis, MO who is a member of the "Squad" and has been a powerful voice in Congress for poor people, women's rights, healthcare, housing, and Palestine, just lost her primary because pro-Israel lobby groups flooded the race with outside funding. Her loss is a tremendous blow to progressives and to the US electoral process itself.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addresses the annual policy conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in Washington, D.C., on March 6, 2018.
● CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES

This is the pro-Israel lobby's second "win" of the season. The first was the June defeat of progressive, black congressman from Westchester County, N.Y., Jamaal Bowman, who was a forceful critic of Israel's attacks on Gaza. AIPAC and its misnamed super PAC, the United Democracy Project, barged into Westchester County to anoint an opponent — white, pro-Israel Westchester County Executive George Latimer — and then shower him with cash. The ads against Bowman were not about Israel. Instead, AIPAC smeared the congressman's character and criticized him as a "hot head" who was not a reliable member of the Democratic team. In the words of the President of the Arab American Institute Jim Zogby, the race became "the angry, frightening young black man versus the calm, thoughtful older white guy". By throwing \$17 million into the race, pro-Israel groups turned Bowman's primary into the most expensive one in US history. When Bowman was defeated, AIPAC declared the outcome showed that the pro-Israel position is "both good policy and good politics". On the contrary. It showed that pro-Israel groups can buy elections and it sent a frightening message to all elected officials that if they criticize Israel, even during a genocide, they may well pay with their careers. Buoyed by its success, AIPAC then took on Cori Bush, marching into St. Louis, MO determined to defeat a black woman who was one of the most unique voices in all of Congress. Once an unhoused single mother of two, and a survivor of gun violence, domestic violence, and sexual assault, Bush became a nurse and a pastor, and in the wake of the killing of the unarmed black man Michael Brown in Ferguson in 2014, she became an activist on the frontlines of the movement to save black lives. After protesting in the streets for 400 days, she jumped into the political arena. In 2020, made a successful run for Congress, becoming the first black representative from Missouri. In Bush's two terms in Congress, she demonstrated leadership on many fronts, including reproductive justice and abortion rights. At a House of Representatives committee hearing in 2021, Bush was one of three congresswomen to share her abortion story publicly. And after the Dobbs decision that overturned Roe v. Wade, she introduced a host of bills, including the Reproductive Health Care Accessibility Act, the Protecting Access to Medication Abortion Act, the Reproductive Health Travel Fund Act, and the Protect Sexual and Reproductive Health Act. She also championed housing rights. When the COVID moratorium on evictions was about to expire, she grabbed her sleeping bag and lawn chair and organized a "sleep-in" on the steps of the US Capitol that resulted in an extension of the moratorium on

evictions. Foreign policy was not her focus, but in the wake of the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, and Israel's subsequent bombing of civilians in Gaza, Bush felt compelled to speak out. Just nine days after the October 7 Hamas attack, she had the courage to introduce a cease-fire resolution in the House. She was one of only nine House members who opposed a resolution supporting Israel. She boycotted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech before Congress, calling him a "war criminal". As a result of defending Palestinians, she found herself in AIPAC's crosshairs. "Cori Bush has been one of the most hostile critics of Israel since she came to Congress in 2021 and has actively worked to undermine mainstream Democratic support for the US-Israel relationship," AIPAC claimed. AIPAC's super PAC spent nearly \$9 million, much of it coming from Republican mega-donors, to buy ads smearing Bush and shoring up contender Wesley Bell, a St. Louis County Prosecutor. The attacks were vicious, including ads that darkened Bush's skin and manipulated her racial features. They also distorted her domestic voting record, condemning her for not supporting Biden's Infrastructure Bill instead of explaining that her vote was part of a strategy to gain leverage for key social programs in the Build Back Better Act. Curiously, in the cases of both Bowman and Bush, the attack ads did not even mention Israel. But if Israel is AIPAC's singular focus, why did the ads avoid the issue? That's because most Americans, especially in those liberal Democrat districts, agree with their positions. Most Americans want a cease-fire and disapprove of Israel's military actions in Gaza. As Jewish Voice for Peace Executive Director Stephanie Fox said during a call to rally support for Congresswoman Bush, "She has been a life raft for our values and principles in Congress and she has been under attack because far-right extremist groups like AIPAC are scared." Jim Zogby of the Arab American Institute agrees. "Pro-Israel groups are running scared," he said. "They are losing the public debate over policy — especially among Democrats. Most Democrats are deeply opposed to Israeli policies in Gaza and the Occupied Palestinian lands. Majorities want a cease-fire and an end to settlements. And they want to stop further arms shipments to Israel." So, AIPAC hides the Israel issue and then claims the "win" is a victory for Israel. If we are going to stop US support for Israel's genocide, prevent the Middle East from erupting in flames, and reclaim our elections here at home, we have to stop AIPAC.

The article first appeared on Medea's Substack.

Iranian Ne'matzadeh sets sights on LA gold

Sports Desk

Olympic bronze medalist Mobina Ne'matzadeh said she is already keen on walking away with the ultimate prize when the Games return to Los Angeles in four-years' time.

The teenage sensation was one of the four Iranians in a remarkable taekwondo event for the country at Paris Olympics, defeating Saudi opponent Dunya Abutaleb in straight rounds to win the women's -49kg bronze and become only the second Iranian girl to win a medal in Olympic history.

Her success was followed by silver medals for Nahid Kiani (women's -57kg) and Mehran Barkhordari (men's -80kg) before Arian Salimi grabbed the men's +80kg gold on the final day in the French capital's Grand Palais.

"The taekwondo contests featured the best in the world. I was the first Iranian representative in action at the sporting extravaganza and knew my performance would impact on my teammates' results," Ne'matzadeh told Mehr News Agency.

"Thank God my bronze motivated them for more achievements," added the 19-year-old, whose senior debut came at the Asian Championships two years ago, when she won a prestigious silver to help the women's team claim a first-ever title in the continent.

"The greatest champions in the world have won their first Olympic medal at a young age. That really inspired me, not to mention my coach Mahrouz Saei and my family, namely my father, always said: 'You have what it takes to stand on the Olympic podium.' They gave me the confidence and eagerness for the start of the Games."

Ne'matzadeh began with a comfortable win against Lesotho's Michelle Tau but perhaps the pinnacle of her campaign came in the quarterfinals, where she



came out on top in straight rounds against high-profile Spanish Adriana Cerezo, a silver winner in the Tokyo Games three years ago and bronze medalist in last year's World Championships. "We knew the draw prior to the Games, so I was fully focused on my opponents in the buildup to the event. The coaching staff and I analyzed all of them during the training sessions, which is why I

had a proper plan for the Spaniard and managed to keep her at bay throughout the contest," Ne'matzadeh said of her Olympic preparation. The Iranian's winning run came to an end in the last-four encounter against Chinese Guo Qing – a second setback against the world No. 6 after the seminal loss in last year's Asian Games. "I was in my best form for the

Olympics, despite a massive weight loss, and truly deserved to reach the final. I was intent on winning the gold when heading to Paris.

"I would have beaten the Chinese, had it not been for a refereeing mistake. Everyone in the venue saw that, though it's just part of the sports. Maybe it just wasn't meant for me to win the Olympic gold at such a young

age," said the former world junior champion.

However, the Iranian said she will "go all out to get the job done" in the LA 2028.

"I will be just 23 in the next Olympics. When I stepped down the podium in Paris, I was full of determination to make amends in Los Angeles and win the gold, though I know I'll have to work hard to make that happen."

Iran's Mobina Ne'matzadeh celebrates her last-eight victory over Spanish Adriana Cerezo in the women's taekwondo -49kg event at the Paris Olympics on August 7, 2024.

WORLD TAEKWONDO

Gallagher back at Chelsea as Atletico move stalls

BBC – Conor Gallagher is expected to return to training at Chelsea's Cobham training ground after landing back in London with his Atletico Madrid transfer in the balance.

The England international, 24, was pictured in the La Liga club's Metropolitan Stadium on Saturday and spent five days in a hotel in Madrid but has been unable to complete his £33m transfer. His move was halted because Chelsea's

£34.5m deal to sign Spanish striker Samu Omorodion collapsed over personal terms on Sunday.

The Spanish club need to make one major sale to fund their move for Gallagher after signing Manchester City striker Julian Alvarez for £81.5m on Monday.

Gallagher's move is not considered off but remains under threat of collapse.

An alternative deal for Chelsea to sign Portugal forward Joao Felix

from Atletico could salvage Gallagher's move but a fee must first be agreed.

Felix is ready to return to Chelsea after spending six months on loan at the club in 2023.

However, if a fee cannot be agreed for Felix then Gallagher's transfer will likely collapse.

Chelsea want to make the sale to avoid losing Gallagher on a free transfer, with just 11 months left on his contract.



DAVID CLIFF/EPA

Sotiris Manolopoulos named new Iran basketball coach

Sports Desk

Greek coach Sotiris Manolopoulos took charge of the Iranian basketball national team, the sport's national governing body announced on Tuesday.

The appointment ends the Iranian federation's months-long quest for a new head coach after parting ways with Turkish Hakan Demir, following below-par results and performances in last year's FIBA World Cup and Asian Games.

Iran was one of the three teams to leave the World Cup without a single win across in five outings and then failed to progress beyond the quarterfinals at the Asian Games in Hangzhou in October.

Having served as the head coach and assistant at numerous clubs in his home country, including Panathinaikos and AEK Athens, Manolopoulos, 54, was last in charge of Dinamo Bucuresti in the Romanian top-tier league.

An assistant coach on the Greek national team bench two years ago, Manolopoulos was also part of the coaching staff when Panathinaikos won back-to-back league titles as well as three Greek Cup trophies between 2013 and 2015.



EUROKINISSI SPORTS



Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei (c) meets organizers of the National Congress of Martyrs of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province in Tehran on August 14, 2024. khamenei.ir

Leader raps 'nontactical' retreat against enemy

National Desk
Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei rebuked nontactical retreat in all fields, including military

or political ones, stressing that such retreat will precipitate divine wrath. His remarks came as Iran is preparing to avenge Israel's assassination of the Hamas leader, Ismail

Haniyeh, who was killed in an attack in Tehran on July 31. Iran has blamed Israel for the Haniyeh's killing, who had traveled to Tehran to attend the swearing-in

ceremony of Pezeshkian. Israel has not commented. Since then, there have been many diplomatic efforts by many countries, especially regional ones, to persuade Iran not to re-

taliate against Israel. "According to the Qur'an, nontactical retreat in any field, whether military or political, publicity and economic fields, will bring about divine wrath," he told a group of provincial government, military and religious authorities on Wednesday. The Leader said Iran's adversaries try to overstate their power as a main tactic in their psychological war. The Leader said Iran's adversaries have always tried to instill fear in the nation and force it to retreat on the military field. "Since the victory of the Revolution, they have been trying to impress the notion that we should fear America, Britain, and the Zionists." "If the governments that today surrender to the demands of the arrogant powers rely on their nations and their own capabilities and recognize the reality of the enemy's power without exaggeration, they can render those demands ineffective." Ayatollah Khamenei also

said the result of exaggerating the enemy's power in the cultural field is a feeling of passivity, being attracted to the enemy's culture, and belittling one's own culture. "The result of such passivity is accepting the lifestyle of the other side and even using foreign words and expressions." Ayatollah Khamenei had earlier warned Israel of a "harsh punishment," saying Iran sees it as its duty to avenge the blood of Haniyeh. Iran has also dismissed calls by France, Germany and the United Kingdom to stand down its threat against Israel after the assassination of Haniyeh. Nasser Kanaani, the spokesman of Iran's Foreign Ministry, said in a statement on Tuesday that the request "lacks political logic and contradict principles of international law" and also "constitutes public and practical support" for Israel. The European countries "raised no objection to the international crimes" of Israel and "impudently asked Iran not to respond to a violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity," he said. Kanaani said Iran was determined to deter Israel and called on the three countries to "once and for all stand up against the war in Gaza and the war-mongering of Israel."

Russia says Ukrainian forces stopped from advancing in Kursk region



Russia said it had repelled attempts by Ukrainian forces to push deeper into Kursk region in five areas after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said his forces were advancing. "The attempts by enemy mobile units using armored equipment to break through deeper into Russian territory have been repelled," the Russian Defense Ministry said in a statement. Zelensky on Wednesday said Ukraine's army was advancing in Kursk where it launched a surprise offensive last week, AFP reported.

"In the Kursk region, we are moving further. From one to two kilometers in different areas since the beginning of the day. And more than 100 more captured Russian servicemen over the same period... This will speed up the return home of our boys and girls," Zelensky said. The Ukrainian army entered Russia's Kursk region on August 6, capturing dozens of settlements in the biggest offensive by a foreign army on Russian soil since World War II. Interior Minister Igor Klymenko said Ukraine would create a "buffer zone" in the region to prevent Russian cross-border strikes.

"The creation of a buffer zone in the Kursk region is a step to protect our border communities from daily hostile shelling," he said.

The neighboring Russian region of Belgorod declared its own state of emergency, as the governor warned the situation was "extremely difficult" due to Ukrainian shelling and drone attacks.

Since launching its military operation in Ukraine in February 2022, Russia has captured territory in southern and eastern Ukraine and subjected Ukrainian cities to missile and drone barrages.

Ukraine said Tuesday it would not hold on to Russian land it captured and offered to stop raids if Moscow agreed a "just peace".

"The sooner Russia agrees to restore a just peace... the sooner the raids by the Ukrainian defense forces into Russia will stop," Foreign Ministry spokesman Georgiy Tykhov said.

US okays \$20b in arms sale to Israel

'2,100 babies' under two killed in Gaza

International Desk
The United States has approved another \$20 billion in weapons transfers to Israel despite high civilian casualties from the regime's strikes in the Gaza Strip during its 10 months military campaign in the besieged Palestinian territory. The arms include more than 50 F-15 fighter jets, Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles, or AMRAAMs, 120 mm tank ammunition and high explosive mortars and tactical vehicles, and come at a time of intense concern that Israel may become involved in a wider West

Asia war. However, the weapons are not expected to get to Israel anytime soon as there are contracts that will take years to fulfill. Much of what is being sold is to help Israel increase its military capability in the long term, the earliest systems being delivered under the contract aren't expected until the 2026 timeframe. "The United States is committed to the security of Israel, and it is vital to US national interests to assist Israel to develop and maintain a strong and ready self-defense capability. This proposed sale is consistent with those objectives," the State De-

partment said in a release on the sale. The Biden administration has had to balance its continued support for Israel with a growing number of calls from lawmakers and the US public to curb military support there due to the high number of civilian deaths in Gaza. It has curbed one delivery of 2,000-pound weapons amid continued airstrikes by Israel in densely populated civilian areas in Gaza.

US 'unlimited support'
In a statement, the Palestinian Hamas resistance group said the move "comes within the framework of [the US's] unlimited

support and full adoption of the brutal aggressive behavior of this rogue entity [Israel] from international regulations and laws." "The continuation of the US administration's financial and military support to the Zionist entity confirms once again that it is a full partner in the war of genocide, ethnic cleansing and brutal massacres against our Palestinian people," Hamas's statement added. According to the Gaza health ministry, 39,965 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have been killed in Israel's attacks since October. The Euro-Mediterranean



Human Rights Monitor reported that out of nearly 17,000 Palestinian children killed by Israel in the Gaza Strip, about 2,100 were babies under the age of two. "The number of Palestinian children - whether infants or children in general - killed by the Israeli army

is horrifying, and the rate of their killing is unprecedented in the history of modern wars," said the Geneva-based organization. The regime's atrocities are not limited to Gaza. It has been also killing Palestinians elsewhere in the occupied territories. The regime has also killed more than 500 people in Lebanon since it began its military campaign in Gaza. Since October, the Israeli occupation army has been exchanging fire with Lebanon's Hezbollah group which has conducted military operations against the regime's military targets to support Palestinian resistance in the Gaza Strip.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Responsible friendship or ...

Secondly, drawing on the works of French philosopher Jacques Derrida, particularly his concepts of "friendship to come" and "responsible friendship," I have addressed Pezeshkian's administration. Responsible friendship, in this context, entails three key elements: reflective and independent support, inquisitive companionship, and self-sacrificing actions. Friendship to come also evokes a sense of openness and hope for the future, aligning with a commitment to gradu-

al and prudent progress from the current challenging situation toward a better tomorrow. Taking these into consideration, I believe that the coercive and reclusive actions of certain influential figures during and after the election, despite their deep understanding of political intricacies and the systemic capabilities, do not reflect responsible friendship. Rather, they smack of hasty and impulsive moves, akin to "jumping the gun." This is not about adopting blind optimism or an overly emotional ap-

proach; it's about recognizing the value of timing. Leaving Pezeshkian to face the challenges alone at this critical juncture is like handing the advantage to rival forces who are eagerly waiting to dash even the faintest glimmers of hope for the Iranian people. Effective political action demands effort, perseverance, and pragmatic strategizing in uncertain terrains. For the sake of Iran's future and its advancement, we must take the time to reflect, endure, make sacrifices, and above all, exercise patience.

Iranian filmmaker among five int'l judges at Moscow festival

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian filmmaker Saeed Nejati is among the five international judges of the Creative Cities Festival in the Russian capital, Moscow. The Iranian filmmaker and instructor, alongside Ivan Tordovski from Russia, Tam Lizba from Brazil, Zhang Hiu from China, and Vidhi Khandwal from India, will serve as judges and mentors for the festival, IRNA reported. Nejati is also conducting a workshop titled "Directing for Children and Adolescents" for filmmakers at the festival.

The Creative Cities Festival has accepted works from filmmakers around the world that focus on their hometowns. The festival is organized by the Moscow Tourism Organization, the School of Art and Design at the Moscow University of Economics, and McGuffin University. Accepted filmmakers at the festival are set to initiate a collaborative project titled "The Territory of the Future; Moscow 2030." This year's Creative Cities Festival takes place from August 10 to 25 in Moscow. During the submission phase, 32 films were se-

lected from 294 entries across 12 countries. In the subsequent phase, these films were judged by five judges to ultimately select 10 three-minute films. Among these films is an Iranian entry directed by Hadi Sheibani, which is about the city of Mashhad, the director's hometown. Ten international filmmakers are participating in the festival, pitching their films with the aim of collaboratively creating a film about the city of Moscow (Moscow 2030). The 2030 project envisions Moscow as a fully electronic and creative city.



Pianist's show axed after comments on Israel's 'targeted assassinations of journalists'



The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (MSO) has cancelled an acclaimed pianist's upcoming recital after comments he made on the Israel-Gaza war. Jayson Gillham premiered Witness at a show at the MSO on Sunday. The piece was penned by another composer as a tribute to the Palestinian press. The British-Australian was scheduled to perform again on Thursday, but the MSO has said it is reworking the program after Gillham introduced the piece by saying Israel had killed more than 100 journalists, BBC reported. A spokesperson for Gillham told the ABC he won't comment on the decision to drop him "out of respect to the MSO and his ongoing relationship with them". Gillham - who is billed on the MSO website as "as one of the finest pianists of his generation" - was born in Australia but lives in the UK. At the concert at the Iwaki Auditorium on Sunday, he performed a range of works, from Beethoven to Chopin. He also played

Witness, written by Australian composer Connor D'Netto, which the MSO says was a last-minute addition. "Over the last 10 months, Israel has killed more than 100 Palestinian journalists," Gillham said before starting the piece. A number were "targeted assassinations of prominent journalists" who were travelling in marked press vehicles or wearing press jackets, he claimed. "The killing of journalists is a war crime in international law, and it is done in an effort to prevent the documentation and broadcasting of war crimes to the world," he added. In an email to patrons, the MSO said they were blindsided by Gillham's comments and he had put them in a "difficult situation". "The MSO does not condone the use of our stage as a platform for expressing personal views", it added. Israel launched an air and ground offensive in Gaza following a Hamas attack last October that killed

about 1,200 people in southern Israel. More than 39,790 Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli aggression, according to Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry. The Committee to Protect Journalists, an independent organization that promotes press freedom, reports that 113 of those were journalists. Apologizing for the "offence and distress" caused, the MSO said it had removed Gillham from the program and would update customers soon. In a statement given to local media, a spokesperson for the MSO said: "Mr Gillham's remarks went beyond the remit of his contract." The decision has caused a backlash on social media. High profile barrister Greg Barns said the cancellation was "truly appalling" while arts critics and former Sydney Symphony Orchestra chairman Leo Schofield said "MSO management should hang its collective head in shame". The Israel-Gaza war has become a volatile political issue in Australia that all sides have sought to carefully manage.



MSO management should hang its collective head in shame.

Petroglyphs of Golpayegan's Yan Cheshme enter Iran's heritage list

Arts & Culture Desk

The petroglyphs at the historical site of Yan Cheshmeh in the Gharqab mountain-



ous region of Golpayegan, covering an area of over 16 hectares, have been listed as a national heritage site in Iran, said the head of Isfah-

an Province's National Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts organization. Mostafa Qanouni told IRNA on Wednesday that Yan Cheshmeh is one of the richest petroglyphic sites in the Gharqab, also known as Timreh, due to the variety of its artworks and designs, IRNA reported. The historical region of Timreh, located along the ridgeline of the three provinces of Markazi, Isfahan, and Lorestan, spans about 300 kilometers along the Anar Bar river and contains a wealth of petroglyphs and

rock art. Qanouni said that the file documenting the rock carvings in this area was compiled in 2018 and it was registered under number 34088 in the country's national heritage list. According to the provincial official, these artworks combine animal motifs, customs, hunting methods, and tools, mostly dating back to pre-Islamic times. Qanouni added that the petroglyphs across the entire Timreh region range from pre-Islamic eras to contemporary periods.

Efforts underway to ...

It appears that European countries close to Israel, along with the United States, are trying to link Iran's legal right to respond to Israel's terrorist act to the issue of a cease-fire and, in effect, portray Tehran as responsible for escalating regional tensions and undermining efforts to achieve a cease-fire. It seems that European countries cozy with Israel, in cahoots with the United States, are attempting to tie Iran's legal right to respond to Israel's terrorist act with the cease-fire issue. In doing so, they effectively shift the blame to Tehran for ramping up regional tensions and throwing a spanner in the works of cease-fire efforts. On Tuesday, US President Joe Biden, in response to a question about whether he expected Iran to refrain from responding to Israel if a cease-fire was reached

in Gaza, said that he would expect that. In response to these claims, Iran's mission to the UN emphasized on Friday that "a sustainable cease-fire in Gaza is our priority; any agreement that Hamas accepts will be accepted by us as well. We have the right to self-defense, and this is separate from the Gaza cease-fire, but we hope that our response will be timed and carried out in a way that does not undermine a potential cease-fire." From the outset of the Gaza war, Iran has opposed the continuation of the war and the country has consistently supported efforts to achieve a cease-fire. In the previous confrontation with Israel, which involved the targeting of its consulate building in Damascus, Tehran responded to the terrorist act in a way that did not lead to a wider war or increased regional tensions, taking into account

national and regional interests, and avoided escalating the situation into a full-blown war or heightening regional tensions. Another key point to note is that while Iran stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the people of Gaza and resistance movements, it doesn't meddle in the decision-making of these movements, Hamas included. Hence, Hamas takes the driver's seat when it comes to calls on a cease-fire agreement, and as Iran's mission to the UN has articulated, if such an agreement is clinched, Tehran will be on board. Reuters also claimed, quoting sources in Iran, that Tehran would refrain from retaliating against Israel for the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh if a cease-fire agreement is reached in the Gaza war. However, CNN, citing an informed source, painted a different picture, saying, "Cease-fire talks won't

deter Iran from responding to the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh." Another source told the news network, that there is concern across the region that Iran may not refrain from attacking Israel because the Biden administration is not putting enough pressure on Netanyahu to reach an agreement. As of the writing of this report, the presence of Hamas representatives in today's negotiations remains uncertain. A Hamas official told Lebanon's al-Mayadeen that the group would not participate in Thursday's talks. Netanyahu has put forward new conditions that weaken the negotiation process. Reuters also quoted a source in Hamas as saying that the movement is committed to the previously agreed-upon principles and emphasizes implementing such agreements instead of resuming futile negotiations.