

DAILY BRIEFING

The Dispatch

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MAIN STORY: LEBANON ESCALATION DERAILS THE OPENING ROUND OF US-IRAN TALKS

- The first round of technical talks to implement the US-Iran agreement, set for Friday at the Bürgenstock resort in Switzerland, was postponed indefinitely. Vice President JD Vance, whom Trump tapped to lead the negotiations, canceled an overnight flight Thursday evening with his staff and a press pool already waiting at Joint Base Andrews and dozens of White House advance personnel and media deployed to Switzerland. Switzerland's foreign ministry said the discussions among the United States, Iran, Qatar, and Pakistan were off with no new date, and that Bern remains willing to host. The White House said the logistics were never finalized and "have never been simple or predictable."
- The 14-point Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding, signed this week by Trump and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, halts fighting on all fronts including Lebanon, commits to Lebanon's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and opens a 60-day window to settle Iran's nuclear program and the remaining disputes needed for a durable deal. The war it freezes began on February 28, when the United States and Israel opened the campaign, and has killed thousands, the bulk in Iran and Lebanon, while shaking the global economy.
- The trigger was the sharpest Israel-Hezbollah escalation in south Lebanon since the agreement, which Tehran cast as a violation of the text's "all fronts, including Lebanon" clause. Iran demanded guarantees that Israeli attacks stop before it would sit, its deputy foreign minister stating Tehran is "ready to move forward" on diplomacy only if Washington ensures Israel abides by the deal. Araghchi told counterparts the Lebanon ceasefire is "decisive" for the US-Iran track. A renewed Lebanon ceasefire took effect Friday afternoon under US and Qatari mediation, but the talks' timing stayed unresolved.
- Iran's negotiating team, chief negotiator Bagher Qalibaf and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, was "all set" to depart for Switzerland before pulling out at the last minute on directives from the top Iranian leadership. The order may trace to Supreme Leader Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei, who has said he holds a "different view" of the deal to end the war. A separate diplomatic read holds that Tehran is pressing its own interpretation of the memorandum's Lebanon clause. Islamabad conveyed Tehran's decision to Washington, prompting Vance to scrap his trip.
- Mediators moved quickly to salvage the track. Envoy Steve Witkoff is heading to Switzerland to join Jared Kushner, who is already there, with Araghchi expected to travel Saturday, signaling both sides still intend to open technical talks. Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, a principal go-between, arrived Friday. The foreign ministers of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia,

Turkey, and Egypt are to meet in Cairo on Sunday to set a new date, while the State Department scheduled a separate round of Lebanese-Israeli talks in Washington for June 23 to 25.

- Trump answered the stall with defiance, posting that “We didn’t meet out of desperation, Iran did. They are FINISHED! We’ll play out the 60 days. They get no money, not ten cents.” In separate remarks he framed the memorandum as a possible “unconditional Iranian surrender” and credited it with averting a global recession, while branding the 2015 nuclear accord “catastrophic.” The posture lands against rising Republican criticism of the agreement at home.

STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

The framework is intact but unimplemented, and Lebanon is now the load-bearing variable deciding whether it becomes a permanent deal or a 60-day pause. The collapse of the opening round shows the fight has shifted from signing the memorandum to enforcing its “all fronts” clause, and Iran has demonstrated it will withhold its negotiators rather than legitimize talks while Israeli strikes continue. Trump’s all-or-nothing framing and the threat to deny Iran any funds narrow the room for the technical compromises the 60-day window requires. The next observable is whether the Būrgenstock and Cairo tracks produce a confirmed new date and whether Friday’s renewed Lebanon ceasefire holds through the weekend. A resumption of Israeli strikes would keep Iran’s delegation home and put the timetable, not yet the framework, at risk.

IRAN

- Tehran is presenting the memorandum as a strategic victory secured from a position of strength, stressing strict oversight of its implementation and warning Washington against violations. The Islamic Republic emerged from the war intact despite the death of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in a US-Israeli strike on the first day, and it has moved to consolidate at home as the opposition fragments further. Exiled groups failed to coalesce, Reza Pahlavi did not establish himself as a unifying figure, and jailed activist Narges Mohammadi and other domestic critics face a renewed wave of repression. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi accused Israel of seeking “permanent war” after its ministers called for Lebanon to burn. Deputy Foreign Minister Saeed Khatibzadeh said Iran will proceed step by step only if Washington ensures Israel halts its attacks on Lebanon. Trump countered that the war left Iran financially and militarily spent, claiming it has lost its air force, navy, and air defenses.
- Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGC-N) again closed the Strait of Hormuz, broadcasting on maritime frequencies that vessels stay clear until its conditions are met. It set Israel’s withdrawal from south Lebanon, the full lifting of the naval blockade, and the departure of US forces from the Persian Gulf as conditions for keeping the strait open, the reclosing following Israel’s refusal to withdraw and its strikes in Lebanon. Earlier the Supreme National Security Council waived all transit fees for 60 days but required vessels to file passage requests at least 48 hours in advance and to follow routes and timetables set by the waterway authority because of mine-affected zones. About 80 mines that Tehran laid in the strait’s traffic separation scheme remain to be cleared before normal shipping can resume, leaving roughly 20,000 seafarers stranded on either side. US Central Command lifted its blockade on all maritime traffic to and from Iranian ports, keeping warships in the area to enforce the agreement.

- Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has established secretive new cells in Iraq to strike Gulf states that host US forces, bypassing its established militia networks to evade detection. Three or four cells of about ten elite Iraqi Shiite fighters each launched at least seven drone attacks from desert areas near Basra and Samawa against targets in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates between April 20 and May 17. The fighters were drawn from the Islamic Resistance in Iraq umbrella but operate outside its command, reporting directly to the IRGC, a shift in tactics to preserve Iran's regional reach as its proxy groups are diminished and its resources depleted. New Iraqi Prime Minister Zaidi condemned the attacks and pledged a joint inquiry with Gulf states. Tehran said its support for "resistance groups" is not up for discussion.
- Australian police charged a third suspect over the December 2024 arson of the Adass Israel Synagogue in Melbourne, an attack Canberra attributes to Iran. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has accused the IRGC of directing the fire and a separate arson at a Sydney kosher restaurant, with the head of the domestic intelligence agency saying the Guard used a web of proxies to conceal its involvement.
- The war's reckoning is taking shape as the memorandum halts the fighting. Official counts put more than 7,300 people killed across Iran and Lebanon since the February 28 outbreak, including hundreds of children and dozens of health workers, and the true total may never be known because reporting restrictions have produced a likely undercount. At least 3,468 Iranians had been killed by mid-April, 1,460 of them civilians and 2,008 military, among them 499 women. The United States lost 13 troops. One strike, likely a Tomahawk, killed 170 people at a girls' school. Analysts assess the outcome as a strategic defeat for Washington that leaves Iran and its nuclear ambitions in a stronger position than before the war, with one former British ambassador to Saudi Arabia calling it "a terrible agreement for everyone except Iran" and warning of a dilemma for the Gulf states over whether the US can still be trusted to secure their interests.
- An Iranian court in Qom sentenced singer Parastoo Ahmadi and eight members of her production team to 74 lashes, a two-year ban on all artistic activity, and a two-year travel ban over a livestreamed performance in which she sang without a headscarf. The sentences, which can be appealed, drew condemnation from rights groups over the tightening curbs on women's freedoms.

ISRAEL

- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ruled out any Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, tying the security of northern Israel to holding the self-declared security zone "as long as Israel's security needs require it," while the military said it would keep operating, including removing threats, beyond that zone. Diaspora Affairs Minister Amichai Chikli cast any pullback as defeat, calling a retreat behind the yellow line, where Israeli forces now sit deep in Lebanese territory around Tebnin and the outskirts of Nabatieh, "a failure in my eyes," and arguing Israel must hold strategic points rather than again defend border towns like Metula from inside Metula. After four soldiers, including a lieutenant colonel, were killed and five wounded near Nabatieh, Netanyahu vowed to "exact a very heavy price from Hezbollah." Defense Minister Israel Katz hardened the posture toward Washington, declaring "no one can tell us what to do," promising immediate force if Iran attacks, and stating Israel will not leave the security zones in Lebanon, Syria, or Gaza under any circumstances, while expecting from the US a diplomatic umbrella, not a military one. Israeli officials are separately pressing Washington to keep forces in the south despite the memorandum's

affirmation of Lebanese sovereignty.

- US-Israel ties frayed sharply over the Iran memorandum. Vice President JD Vance, speaking from the White House the day after the signing, told far-right ministers Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir to stop attacking Trump, calling him “the only head of state in the entire world who is sympathetic to the nation of Israel” and noting that two-thirds of the defensive weapons protecting Israel are US-built. Read in Israel as a veiled threat to review US military support if the criticism continued, the remarks left political circles in a “state of shock,” and the government withheld any response to avoid widening the breach. Trump mixed pressure with reassurance, calling Netanyahu a “warrior prime minister” who deserves credit and saying that without him “Israel would have been eviscerated,” even as US intelligence warned the White House that Netanyahu is expected to try to sabotage the deal, his political survival bound to refusing a Lebanon withdrawal Israelis would read as a defeat. American officials are opening informal back channels with opposition figures Naftali Bennett and Gadi Eisenkot. Opposition leader Yair Lapid warned that Israel’s foreign relations will be “wiped out” unless the government is replaced quickly. The accord is widely viewed across Israel as a strategic failure for Netanyahu, even as some, including residents of the border settlement of Trump Heights, keep faith in the US president.
- France pressed Israel to honor the ceasefire, with Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot insisting the Israeli government “must respect” the cessation of hostilities and that Washington exert all necessary pressure to ensure it, after overnight Israeli strikes in southern Lebanon. Trump said he had spoken with Israel and asked it to accept a ceasefire with Hezbollah, claiming he can restrain it because “they have a lot of respect for me, and they do as I say,” and adding of Netanyahu that “we have to keep him a little bit sane.” Foreign Minister Gideon Saar separately severed all contact with EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas over reports she likened Israel’s treatment of Palestinians to South African apartheid, branding the comparison a “blood libel” and demanding a retraction. Kallas declined to deny or withdraw the remarks, reaffirming the bloc’s commitment to dialogue and a two-state solution, and Saar concluded that her silence “speaks for itself.”
- A new Maariv poll showed the opposition Yashar party, led by former military chief Gadi Eisenkot, climbing to 21 seats to tie Netanyahu’s Likud for the first time, with the Likud down seven seats since the war with Iran and at its weakest showing since August 2025. The opposition bloc, excluding Arab parties, would command a 61-seat majority in the 120-member Knesset against 49 for the governing coalition, with Arab parties taking 10. Naftali Bennett’s Together party has shed 11 seats since its April merger, and a combined Yashar-Together list led by Eisenkot would draw more support than one led by Bennett.

LEBANON

- Israeli airstrikes after midnight Friday killed at least 18 people and wounded 33 across the Nabatieh district, the deadliest bombardment of the south since the US-Iran memorandum took effect and among the most intense of the entire war. The strikes hit residential homes in Harouf, where eight died, alongside Kfar Sir, Al-Sharqiyah, Kfarjoz, Doueir, and Jabshit, with several people still missing under the rubble. The Israeli military said it struck more than 80 Hezbollah targets and killed dozens of members, casting the wave as retaliation for repeated ceasefire violations. Residents who had returned to the Nabatieh basin over the prior three days, after roughly 24 hours of calm, were forced to flee again, and the Bekaa was hit as well. President Joseph Aoun condemned the widening attacks in the south and Bekaa as a dangerous and unacceptable escalation that has

killed dozens of civilians including women and children and is undermining every effort to consolidate the ceasefire, and he said he instructed the Lebanese delegation heading to Washington the week of June 22 to secure a comprehensive ceasefire before any talk of Israeli withdrawal, army deployment, or the return of detainees. By Friday afternoon a renewed Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire was in place on the Lebanon front, governed by the understanding that Israel holds fire so long as Hezbollah does, though strikes continued through the day. Israeli Arabic-language spokesman Avichay Adraee declared the army has full freedom of movement to remove threats inside Lebanon and, for the first time, published a map delineating a vast Israeli operations zone inside Lebanese territory that formalizes its claimed security posture in the south ahead of the Washington talks, with fresh evacuation warnings expected.

- Hezbollah killed four Israeli soldiers in an overnight ambush on the Ali al-Taher ridge overlooking Nabatieh, the costliest blow to the Israeli ground force since the truce. At roughly 00:20 an explosive drone or anti-tank missile struck the Merkava tank of Lieutenant Colonel Dor Ben Simhon, 32, commander of the 401st Armored Brigade's 52nd Battalion, killing him and his three crew, after an Israeli armored-and-infantry force tried to infiltrate the ridge's northern side. Hezbollah said it destroyed three Merkava tanks with guided missiles and then halted the advance with ATGM volleys targeting the assaulting force and its launch operators, while two drones crossed from Lebanon into Israel during the exchanges. Five more soldiers were wounded hours later near Kfar Tebnit, one seriously. Israel is trying to seize Ali al-Taher to reach a roughly one-kilometer tunnel complex dug into the mountain since 2014 and expanded again in 2025, housing weapons stores, a command node, and missile facilities that have survived repeated bombing because Israel lacks bunker-penetrating ordnance, with the struck tank reaching about 300 meters from a main tunnel entrance. Hezbollah largely avoided clashes elsewhere in the south, withdrawing rather than engaging, but mounted a determined defense of this asset, vowing its fighters will defend their land while rejecting accusations that it broke the truce. The 52nd Battalion is the same unit tied to the killing of Hind Rajab in Gaza, and Hamas spokesman Abu Obeida praised Hezbollah's stand after the failed advance. Israeli reserve officers warned the army is in its worst operational position in Lebanon and that troops are dying for no gain, with one urging a pullback to the border fence.
- The humanitarian toll deepened as the strikes resumed. Across Lebanon more than one million people have been displaced, many of them repeatedly, and since 2 March more than 3,700 have been killed and over 11,700 wounded, with over 200 attacks on healthcare killing more than 130 medical workers and hospitals, water and fuel installations, bridges, and tens of thousands of housing units destroyed at a cost running into the billions. Villagers returning to towns such as Qlaileh in the Tyre district found their homes reduced to rubble, several of them rebuilt only after the 2024 round of war and now destroyed again. In Nabatieh, among the hardest-hit cities, the Ashura procession wound through cleared rubble with roughly 200 mourners where the commemoration normally draws up to 30,000. OCHA published a conflict-intensity snapshot covering 2 March to 18 June.
- Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea rejected a reported US proposal for Syrian forces to enter Lebanon to help resolve the Hezbollah weapons file, calling it unviable and without Lebanese or Arab backing. He said neither Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, whom he credited with a constructive approach toward Lebanon, nor Saudi Arabia, nor the wider Arab community, nor the Lebanese state supports the idea.
- Mohammad Raad, head of Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc, set a 60-day deadline for Israel to complete its withdrawal from Lebanese territory, anchoring the demand in the memorandum's first clause calling for an immediate and permanent cessation of operations on all fronts including Lebanon and a guarantee of Lebanese sovereignty. He urged Lebanese authorities to study the

understanding carefully and objectively as Israeli troops remain inside the south.

- The US Treasury sanctioned Sleiman Frangié, Hezbollah's most durable Christian ally and a perennial presidential candidate, along with Mahmoud Comati, deputy head of the party's political council, a Beirut-Baghdad operative named Wael Constantine, and companies in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Oman. Coming less than a week after the US-Iran accord, the move signals Washington's intent to deny Hezbollah any political or financial comeback off a regional settlement favorable to Iran, choking the party's hope of converting the deal into recovered domestic standing.
- A call between Secretary of State Marco Rubio and President Aoun was set for Friday evening Beirut time, the highest-level US-Lebanese contact scheduled as the escalation unfolded.
- The General Directorate of State Security said it averted a potential disaster at Beirut Port, evacuating highly flammable petroleum materials and re-exporting them out of the country in what it cast as decisive action to prevent a repeat of the August 4, 2020 explosion.

SYRIA

- Syrian security forces detained British-Syrian activist Hassan Akkad, founder of the "Give Us the Money That You Owe!" campaign, at a cafe in Damascus's al-Malki neighbourhood on Wednesday night, over online comments criticising a prominent media presenter. Public Prosecutor Hossam Khattab tied the arrest to a June 3 defamation complaint by presenter Mousa al-Omar and said Akkad had ignored repeated summonses from the cybercrime branch before a search warrant was issued on June 9, with the original case dropped but further citizen complaints following. Akkad remains in custody. Separately, the counter-terrorism branch arrested two former-regime officers in Damascus at dawn Friday, Major General Humaidan Arsan, a founder of the National Defense militia that served as an auxiliary to the ousted army and a figure linked to abuses against regime opponents during his service in the Republican Guard, and Brigadier General Abdul Sarhan al-Ali.
- A drone strike, likely by International Coalition aircraft, killed one person when it hit a motorcycle in the Idlib countryside of northern Syria on the evening of Friday, June 19. In a separate predawn attack on Thursday, unidentified assailants ambushed a Defense Ministry bus carrying troops from Division 60 on the Tel Tamr to Ras al-Ayn road in the Hasakah countryside, wounding 12 soldiers with injuries ranging from light to moderate. No party claimed the ambush, and security forces opened a criminal and intelligence investigation.
- Syria's wheat harvest is projected to more than double this year, with the agriculture ministry estimating 2.3 to 2.5 million metric tons against roughly 900,000 tons last year. The jump reflects heavy rainfall reversing last year's historic drought and the state's recapture of the northeastern breadbasket from Kurdish forces. Three reabsorbed provinces account for more than half the total, with Hasakah expected to yield around 800,000 tons, Raqqa 300,000, and Deir ez-Zor about 250,000, the roughly 1.5 million tons that constitute the real year-on-year gain. Demand has risen in parallel.
- A joint FAO and World Food Programme report placed Syria among 13 global hunger hotspots, warning of deepening food insecurity between June and November 2026, with armed conflict the principal driver in 12 of the 13 countries listed. It ranked Sudan, South Sudan, Yemen, and Palestine at the highest alert level. The warning sits against the parallel wheat recovery, indicating that improved output has not closed the country's food gap.

- German journalist Eva Maria Michelmann, detained in Syria since January, was released and flew home to Germany on Friday after leaving via a third country. She had gone missing during the government's northeastern offensive against Kurdish-held territory, seized in a government military vehicle in Raqqa alongside Turkish-Kurdish journalist Ahmed Polad, both staff of the Istanbul-based Etkin News Agency and Ozgur TV. Damascus said she had entered the country illegally and was detained alongside a senior PKK figure while embedded with Kurdish forces during the Raqqa operations. Her lawyer alleged she was tortured in custody.

PALESTINE

- UNICEF branded the eight-month-old Gaza ceasefire a "cruel and deadly illusion," counting at least 265 Palestinian children killed since the October 2025 truce, an average of one child per day, most in Israeli airstrikes, bombings, and drone fire, with a smaller number from unexploded ordnance and fewer from militia fire. Total Palestinian deaths since the truce reached at least 992 by mid-June. An Israeli drone strike on a civilian car near Gaza City's municipal park killed three, while Israeli forces wounded a girl in Beit Lahia to the north and rigged and demolished residential blocks east of Khan Younis to the south. At an emergency Security Council session on Gaza's humanitarian situation, China's UN envoy Fu Cong pressed Israel to halt its ceasefire violations and voiced concern over the continued expansion of Israeli military control in the enclave.
- IDF Military Advocate General Maj.-Gen. Itay Offir will issue his first Gaza war-crimes rulings in the coming weeks, covering the April 2024 World Central Kitchen strike that killed aid workers, the March 2025 Palestinian Red Crescent incident, and several other high-profile cases. They are his first public Gaza decisions since he took office in November 2025, after his predecessor Yifat Tomer Yerushalmi resigned for illegally leaking video evidence from the Sde Teiman detainee-abuse case.
- Freed Israeli hostage Guy Gilboa-Dalal publicly recounted sexual abuse he suffered in Hamas captivity, giving the account to First Lady Michal Herzog, who tied it to Israel's inclusion on the UN blacklist of parties that use sexual violence in conflict, a listing the UN qualified by noting returned hostages' allegations it said it could not verify.
- Former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert accused the current government of directly organizing, funding, and protecting Jewish terrorism in the West Bank, calling it an "organised, systematic, state-funded campaign of ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity." He dismissed the official portrayal of settler violence as the work of isolated individuals and rejected Netanyahu's characterization of the attackers as "70 kids from broken homes."
- US and Israeli officials are pressing the Palestinian Authority to restructure its security forces and dismantle its elite units.

C O R E G R O U P

KEY REGIONAL EVENTS

Saudi Arabia

- The National Industrial Development and Logistics Program (NIDLP), the Vision 2030 vehicle spanning energy, mining, industry, and logistics, reported its sectors contributed SAR1,045 billion to non-oil GDP in 2025, 39% of the Kingdom's non-oil total and up from SAR996 billion in 2024, with non-oil activity now 55% of overall GDP. Non-oil exports rose 14% to SAR622.87 billion, led by SAR80.3 billion in chemicals, while manufacturing grew 6% and four other tracked sectors between 3% and 5%, marking continued progress in shifting the economic base off crude.
- The Royal Saudi Naval Forces floated HMS AIMadinah, the first of three Avante 2200-class multi-mission corvettes ordered from Spain's Navantia in December 2024, at the San Fernando shipyard, opening the second phase of the Sarawat naval-modernization program after the first delivered five combat vessels. The hull now moves to systems integration and sea trials before entering service, with sister ships HMS Neom and HMS AIUla still under construction.

Qatar

- Qatar positioned itself as the central node of the diplomacy to consolidate the Lebanon cease-fire and frame the "day after," coordinating a regional umbrella with Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and France to underwrite not only the truce and an Israeli withdrawal but Lebanese sovereignty and reconstruction. Doha worked the US-Iran track and the Pakistani channel, backed Beirut in its dealings with Washington, and pressed the Americans to force Israeli compliance, keeping an open line to Washington and Tehran during Thursday's Hezbollah-Amal coordination at Ain el-Tineh.
- Trump unveiled the converted Boeing 747-8 gifted by Qatar's Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani as the new Air Force One at Joint Base Andrews, a roughly \$400 million jumbo refitted by L3Harris to serve as an interim presidential aircraft (designated VC-25B) until a new Boeing fleet arrives in 2028. The gift, which drew foreign-influence and security objections when accepted, will fly Trump to next month's NATO summit in Ankara.

Turkey

- Turkish authorities widened a crackdown on the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), with Friday raids across four cities detaining dozens of officials from CHP-run municipalities on bribery, embezzlement, forgery, and abuse-of-office allegations. Those held included Adalar (Princes' Islands) mayor Ali Ercan Akpolat, accused of taking bribes to permit unauthorized construction on the protected islands, and the mayor of Silifke in Mersin. The operations extend a week of moves against CHP districts including Beylikduzu, Silivri, and Seferihisar, which the party casts as politically motivated as it weathers a leadership crisis.

Yemen

- Yemen's Southern Transitional Council (STC) acknowledged that southern forces formerly under its command had drawn roughly 7 billion Yemeni rials, about \$4.5 million a month, from the internationally recognized government to cover troop sustainment, a disclosure issued to rebut claims that 14 billion rials had been withheld at CAC Bank.

KEY INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

- US domestic reaction to the war and the memorandum hardened across several fronts. Deputy Defense Secretary Stephen Feinberg told lawmakers the Pentagon needs roughly \$80 billion to cover war costs and other expenses, warning the military could run out of operating funds within months without a new wartime spending bill, after an initial \$200 billion supplemental request drew heavy congressional resistance and the Pentagon's own running tally of the war reached near \$29 billion. Senators Lindsey Graham, Tom Cotton, and Ted Cruz pressed for the memorandum to go to Congress under the 2015 Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act, Cruz branding its \$300 billion reconstruction fund "a deeply wrong idea" and warning against giving up hard-won bargaining power, while AIPAC and the AJC flagged unresolved issues and eighteen independent UN rights experts faulted the framework for ignoring repression inside Iran. Polling found 65 percent of Americans disapprove of Trump's Iran handling and his overall approval at 37 percent, with a separate survey showing 51 percent of MAGA Republicans favor regime change over a negotiated deal. Trump declared there are "no limits" to his power after the war, called the memorandum "really probably" an unconditional surrender, and, in a forthcoming book, was said to have assured Tucker Carlson and Elon Musk "we're not doing that" on war with Iran a year before launching it.
- Secretary of State Marco Rubio plans a Gulf tour next week taking in Kuwait, the UAE, and Bahrain, where he is expected to convene a summit with GCC foreign ministers, intensifying US consultations with regional partners on Iran, maritime security, and energy in the aftermath of the war.
- Britain's Bar Standards Board suspended ICC chief prosecutor Karim Khan over sexual misconduct allegations he denies, setting a hearing within four weeks. The move compounds his June 8 suspension by the court's governing body, whose 125 member states vote on his fate on July 24. Khan's supporters cast him as a political target for pursuing arrest warrants against Benjamin Netanyahu and former defense minister Yoav Gallant over Gaza, and the court remains under US sanctions covering eleven of its judges and prosecutors.
- The Netherlands redirected an air defense frigate, now in the Indo-Pacific, toward the Strait of Hormuz to join a possible multinational mission, a transit defense minister Dilan Yesilgoz told parliament would take several weeks. France and Britain are driving the multinational naval plan and Germany is sending two ships to the Red Sea in preparation, even as Tehran signals firm opposition to any foreign military presence in the waterway.
- Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani canceled a US visit set for June 21-22 after Trump claimed Premier Giorgia Meloni had "begged" him for a photo at the G7, remarks Tajani called offensive to all of Italy and Meloni dismissed as "completely fabricated."
- Poland withdrew its highest decoration, the Order of the White Eagle, from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, a move Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha called reckless and said benefits only Moscow, vowing to return the Polish award he received in 2022.
- Afghanistan's Taliban government said its air force struck militant hideouts in Pakistan's Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces, its first major offensive in months and a claim Islamabad rejected, saying only a "rudimentary drone" was involved. Kabul described the targets as staging grounds for cross-border attacks organized with hostile intelligence circles.
- A territory-wide shutdown gripped Pakistan-administered Kashmir after nearly two weeks of unrest left at least 24 people dead, the region's deadliest in years, driven by supporters of the recently banned Joint Awami Action Committee protesting reserved legislative seats ahead of July

27 elections. Authorities detained 515 people and reported four officers killed.

MARKETS

- Hormuz traffic resumed and spiked, with 12.5 million barrels of oil moving through the strait once the memorandum lifted the wartime closure. Verified commercial crossings hit 25 on June 18, the highest single-day count since April 18 and more than five times the average daily level recorded in the first ten days of June, with traffic split evenly in both directions and five sanctioned vessels among them. That remains far below the roughly 120 vessels a day before the war, when a fifth of the world's oil and LNG exports transited the chokepoint, and above the 7.6-a-day average since early March. Tankers controlled by Grimaldi, Cosco, Knutsen and NYK crossed for the first time in 110 days, alongside two Iran-flagged National Iranian Tanker Company crude carriers. A Liberian-flagged crude tanker owned by Japan's Kyoei Tanker cleared the strait Friday and is sailing home, clearing the last Japan-linked vessel with Japanese crew from the Gulf, though 37 Japan-linked ships still wait to transit.
- Asian shares retreated Friday on doubt over the truce after the Switzerland round collapsed, trading thin with Greater China markets shut for the Dragon Boat festival, the Kospi off 0.5 percent to 9,019.22, Australia's ASX 200 down 1.1 percent to 8,818.40, India's Sensex down 1 percent, and Tokyo's Nikkei flat at 71,082.81 after the Bank of Japan lifted its benchmark rate to a three-decade high of 1 percent. US futures fell ahead of a Juneteenth close, pressured by expectations of further Federal Reserve tightening. In the Gulf, Dubai's DFM dropped 1.7 percent to snap a four-session winning streak, dragged by a 4.4 percent fall in Emirates NBD and a 2.3 percent slide in Salik, partly offset by Amanat Holdings rising 0.8 percent after buying a further 10.03 percent of Cambridge Health Group for 105 million dirhams (\$28.59 million). Europe's Stoxx 600 edged down 0.1 percent as mining and utilities losses erased energy and defense gains, after the index hit record highs earlier in the week on the Hormuz reopening and peace-talk optimism.
- Iraq is preparing to export crude oil and naphtha through Syrian ports after the Hormuz shock cut its main Gulf shipping routes, broadening an arrangement that already moves Iraqi fuel oil through the Mediterranean port of Baniyas. State marketer SOMO is in talks with the Syrian Petroleum Company to expand throughput, and Baghdad has approved the diversification as a permanent strategy to continue even after the war ends and Hormuz normalizes, reducing reliance on a single corridor for OPEC's second-largest producer, which normally ships around 3.6 million barrels a day with about 3.4 million flowing through its southern Basra terminals before the war. Separately, a Ukrainian drone strike, the largest on Moscow in years, set a major oil refinery ablaze and wounded at least 17, adding a fresh supply-side risk to energy markets.