

Nine Palestinians killed in Israeli airstrikes on Gaza; Hegseth fires Navy Secretary; Journalist Ahmed Shihab-Eldin acquitted in Kuwait

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Iran and Ceasefire

- **U.S. Navy intercepts at least four Iranian oil tankers in Asian waters:** The U.S. military has [intercepted](#) at least four Iranian oil tankers in waters near India, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka in recent days, redirecting them as part of its naval blockade on Iran, Reuters reports. U.S. Central Command confirmed that the supertanker Dorena is under Navy escort in the Indian Ocean, with the Department of War reporting forces seizure of the tanker Majestic X also in the Indian Ocean; shipping sources also reported the interception of the Deep Sea and the Sevin, while a fifth vessel, the Derya, may have been stopped after last being tracked off India's west coast Friday. CENTCOM also claimed to have directed 31 vessels to turn around or return to port as part of its blockade against Iran in a [post](#) on X.
- **Trump says new Iran talks possible as soon as Friday:** President Donald Trump [told](#) the New York Post Wednesday that good news on a second round of U.S.-Iran negotiations could come "as soon as Friday," texting the paper: "It's possible!" Pakistani sources told the Post they are working a 36-to-72-hour diplomatic window with Tehran, with one source saying "the ceasefire is holding despite heightened rhetoric, indicating positive intent on both sides." Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said Tehran remains open to dialogue and a negotiated agreement, but meaningful talks are being undermined by "breach of commitments, blockade and threats." In a [post](#) on X, he also accused the United States of "hypocritical rhetoric" and of acting in contradiction to stated positions.
- **Two Iranian Women in ICE Detention are not related to Qasem Soleimani:** Drop Site News reviewed Iranian birth records, identification papers and other personal documents and found no evidence connecting Hamideh Soleimani Afshar, 47, and her daughter Sarina Hosseiny, 25, to the late Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani, whose green cards Secretary of State Marco Rubio revoked on April 3 after right-

wing activist Laura Loomer flagged them on social media. Soleimani's own daughters publicly denied any family connection, with his youngest daughter, Zeinab Soleimani, calling the State Department's allegations "false." Hamideh, who suffers from autoimmune hemolytic anemia, has been repeatedly denied blood transfusions at the South Texas ICE Processing Center in San Antonio, where friends say she recently lost consciousness for more than ten minutes. "She's basically just trapped in there watching her mom die," a friend said of Sarina's detention. **Read the full report from Ryan Grim and Murtaza Hussain [here](#).**

· **Trump orders Navy to shoot and kill Iranian boats laying mines in Strait of Hormuz:** President Donald Trump [announced](#) Thursday on Truth Social that he has ordered the U.S. Navy to "shoot and kill any boat" laying mines in the Strait of Hormuz, adding "there is to be no hesitation." Trump also said he was ordering minesweeping operations already underway to continue "at a tripled up level." The Pentagon [told](#) members of the House Armed Services Committee in a classified briefing Tuesday that fully clearing Iranian mines from the Strait of Hormuz could take up to six months and would likely not begin until the war ends, according to three officials who spoke to the Washington Post.

· **Pakistan's army chief emerges as lead U.S.-Iran mediator:** Field Marshal Asim Munir, Pakistan's most powerful figure, has taken on the role of the primary broker between Washington and Tehran, spending days in the Iranian capital meeting political leaders and Revolutionary Guards commanders while maintaining constant contact with the White House, the Financial Times [reports](#). Analysts and diplomats are increasingly questioning, however, Pakistan's ability to serve as an honest broker, citing its mutual defense agreement with Saudi Arabia, deepened financial ties with figures close to President Donald Trump, and its silence on the ongoing naval blockade.

Lebanon

· **Israeli strikes and violations continue in southern Lebanon:** Israeli violations of the ceasefire continued across southern Lebanon on Wednesday and Thursday, including airstrikes, demolitions, and forced displacement orders, according to Lebanon's National News Agency. A drone strike targeted the Rihan heights in the Jezzine area, while another strike on the town of Yahmar al-Shaqif in Nabatieh [killed](#) two people and wounded two others Wednesday. Israeli forces also [set fire](#) to homes in the Mufailha neighborhood west of Mais al-Jabal on Thursday morning. Separately, the Israeli military re-issued warnings ordering residents not to approach areas near the Litani River, while prohibiting returns to dozens of villages across southern Lebanon.

· **Lebanese journalist bombed and left to die by Israel:** Prominent Lebanese journalist Amal Khalil was killed on Wednesday in southern Lebanon after what appeared to be a

targeted Israeli strike, according to her employer Al-Akhbar. Khalil and freelance photojournalist Zeinab Faraj had been reporting on attacks in Bint Jbeil when a nearby vehicle was hit by a drone, killing two people, prompting the two journalists to take shelter in a house that was later bombed. Rescue efforts were obstructed amid continued Israeli fire, with reports that Red Cross teams and vehicles came under attack while attempting to evacuate the wounded. Faraj was eventually rescued with critical injuries, while Khalil's body was recovered later after access was granted. The Committee to Protect Journalists condemned the incident, citing "repeated strikes on the same location" and the obstruction of humanitarian access as a serious violation of international law. Lebanese President Joseph Aoun expressed his condolences over Khalil's death and said in a post on X that Israel's "deliberate and consistent targeting of journalists" was aimed at "concealing the truth of its aggressive acts against Lebanon" and that such acts constitute "crimes against humanity punishable under international laws and conventions." **Read the full report from Drop Site contributor Jeremy Loffredo [here](#).**

· **Lebanese and Israeli envoys meet Thursday as Beirut seeks ceasefire extension and Israeli withdrawal:** Lebanese and Israeli envoys [meet](#) Thursday at the State Department—their second round of direct talks in two weeks and the first sustained direct negotiations between the two countries in decades—with Secretary of State Marco Rubio chairing the session. Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam [stressed](#) that Beirut cannot accept any deal without a "full withdrawal" of Israeli forces. In an interview with The Washington Post, Salam rejected the idea of a buffer zone, and urged an extension of the ceasefire. Salam said Lebanon is entering negotiations "convinced that the U.S. is the party that can have leverage over Israel." President Joseph Aoun said any extension of the ceasefire, which expires Sunday, should be "significant, not just for a few days."

· **Hezbollah carries out four attacks on Israeli positions in southern Lebanon, citing ceasefire violations:** Hezbollah said Wednesday it [struck](#) an Israeli artillery bunker on Lebanon's Mediterranean coast in Al-Bayyada using loitering drones, and targeted a command vehicle and troop gatherings in Al-Qantara and the nearby Nabatieh-region villages of At-Tiri and Yohmor Al-Shaqif. The group also claimed it shot down four Israeli reconnaissance drones over Al-Mansouri, a coastal town south of Tyre. Hezbollah described the operations as retaliation for Israeli ceasefire violations and strikes on civilians in southern Lebanon, calling them the minimum necessary to deter further attacks and defend Lebanese territory.

· **Haaretz: Israeli soldiers engaged in widespread looting in Lebanon:** Israeli soldiers have been looting significant amounts of property from homes and businesses in southern Lebanon, [according](#) to testimonies given to Haaretz by Israeli soldiers and commanders

stationed inside the country, including stealing motorcycles, televisions, paintings, sofas, and rugs on a wide scale.

Genocide in Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel

- **Casualty count:** Over the last 24 hours, six Palestinians were killed and 18 were injured in Israeli attacks across Gaza. The total recorded death toll since October 7, 2023 has risen to 72,568 killed, with 172,338 injured. Since October 11, the first full day of the so-called ceasefire, Israel has killed at least 792 Palestinians in Gaza and wounded 2,235, while 761 bodies have been recovered from under the rubble, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

- **Israeli strikes kill at least nine Palestinians across Gaza, including three children:** At least nine Palestinians, including three children, were killed in Israeli strikes across the Gaza Strip on Wednesday and Thursday, according to WAFA. Three people were [killed](#) Thursday when an Israeli aircraft targeted a vehicle at the entrance to Al-Maghazi refugee camp in central Gaza. In Khan Younis, a man was killed and three others injured after a drone strike hit an area south of the city. An Israeli drone strike on civilians near a mosque in the Beit Lahia Project area of northern Gaza [killed](#) five people, including three children, and wounded others Wednesday evening.

- **Israeli settlers and soldiers have killed 40 Palestinians in 2026:** At least sixteen Palestinians have been killed by settler gunfire in the occupied West Bank since the beginning of the year, according to the [Palestinian Health Ministry](#)—surpassing the total killed by settlers in 2025. Additionally, over 24 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli soldiers in the occupied territory since the start of 2026, reported [OCHA](#). Data from the Wall and Settlement Resistance Commission shows that Israeli forces and settlers carried out 1,819 attacks in March alone, including 1,322 by Israeli forces and 497 by settlers.

U.S. News

By Julian Andreone, with Ryan Grim. Have a tip on Capitol Hill? Email Andreone at Julian@dropsitenews.com.

- **Hegseth fires Navy Secretary Phelan mid-war:** Defense Secretary **Pete Hegseth** [forced](#) out Navy Secretary **John Phelan** on Wednesday, giving him the choice to resign or be fired, with the Pentagon announcing the departure as effective immediately and offering no public explanation. A person familiar with the situation told Axios that Hegseth believed Phelan “didn’t understand he wasn’t the boss,” was moving too slowly on shipbuilding reforms, and

had irritated Hegseth by communicating directly with President Donald Trump. Navy Undersecretary **Hung Cao** will serve as acting Navy secretary.

· **Senate Republicans advance \$70 billion immigration enforcement funding blueprint:**

The Senate voted 50-48 just after 3:30 a.m. Thursday to adopt a budget blueprint that would [send](#) roughly \$70 billion to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Border Patrol, and other agencies through the remainder of President Donald Trump's term, with only Republican **Sens. Rand Paul** of Kentucky and **Lisa Murkowski** of Alaska breaking from their party. The vote completed the first step in the GOP's plan to fund the agencies through the filibuster-skirting reconciliation process, bypassing Democrats who have refused to approve the funding without new restrictions on how the agencies operate.

· **Rep. Scott dies at 80:** Rep. David Scott of Georgia, the first Black man to serve as chair of the House Agriculture Committee, died on Wednesday at the age of 80. Scott was seeking his 13th term in office despite concerns about his health. His death leaves Democrats with 212 seats in the House, compared to 218 members for Republicans

· **FBI opened inquiry into New York Times reporter who wrote about Kash Patel's use of bureau resources for his girlfriend:** The FBI [investigated](#) New York Times reporter **Elizabeth Williamson** last month after she wrote about Director **Kash Patel** using bureau personnel to provide his girlfriend, **Alexis Wilkins**, with government security and transportation—interviewing Wilkins, querying databases for information on Williamson, and recommending a preliminary investigation into whether her reporting broke federal stalking laws, according to a person briefed on the matter. Justice Department officials determined there was no legal basis to proceed and blocked the inquiry, which some viewed as retaliation for an article Patel and Wilkins disliked. Times executive editor Joseph Kahn called the FBI's actions “a blatant violation of Elizabeth's First Amendment rights and another attempt by this administration to prevent journalists from scrutinizing its actions.” On Monday, Patel filed a \$250 million defamation lawsuit against The Atlantic over an article that discussed allegations about his excessive drinking and mismanagement at the FBI.

· **Kalshi penalizes three political candidates for betting on their own elections:**

Prediction market platform Kalshi [announced](#) Wednesday it had sanctioned three unnamed U.S. political candidates—from a Minnesota Democratic congressional primary, a Texas Republican congressional primary, and Virginia's U.S. Senate Democratic primary—for placing bets on the outcomes of their own races, with fines ranging from \$539 to \$6,229 and five-year platform suspensions in each case. Kalshi and Polymarket are regulated federally by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, though Arizona became the first state to attempt to regulate the platforms, filing criminal charges against Kalshi in March for running an “illegal gambling platform.”

· **Chemical leak at West Virginia silver recovery plant kills two, hospitalizes nearly 30:**

A chemical reaction involving nitric acid during a shutdown process at the Catalyst Refiners plant in Institute, West Virginia, [killed](#) two workers and sent approximately 30 others to hospitals on Wednesday, with one person in serious condition, according to Kanawha County officials. The reaction, believed to have occurred during a cleaning process, produced toxic hydrogen sulfide. Among the injured were seven ambulance workers who responded to the scene. A shelter-in-place order for the surrounding area was issued and lifted more than five hours later, with authorities saying all deaths occurred on the plant site and that local air quality and water supply were believed unaffected.

· **Texas refineries emit benzene at rates five times higher than California peers:**

A new Environmental Defense Fund study published in Environmental Research Letters found that from 2018 to 2023, Texas and Louisiana refineries averaged five times the fenceline benzene levels of facilities in California and Washington state, with nine of the 20 worst benzene polluters in the country located in Texas—including Port Arthur’s TotalEnergies refinery, which ranked third nationally despite processing significantly less crude oil than California’s largest refinery. Pointing to a 2019 tank fire in the Houston area, one advocate said about the rising benzene levels: “It’s not just an immediate impact, but a multigenerational toxic harm that we experience because of emissions like benzene and all of these other petrochemicals.” More on Texas’ benzene problem from Capital & Main [here](#).

Other International News

· **Journalist Ahmed Shihab-Eldin acquitted in Kuwait after 50+ days in detention:**

U.S.-Kuwaiti journalist Ahmed Shihab-Eldin was acquitted of all charges by a court in Kuwait on Thursday and is expected to be released imminently, according to Caoilfhionn Gallagher, international counsel to Shihab-Eldin’s sisters. Shihab-Eldin was arrested by Kuwaiti authorities on March 3 reportedly over social media posts related to the Iran war. “We are relieved that, after 52 days in detention, Ahmed has been found innocent on all charges. Our focus now is upon ensuring the liberty and safety of our client,” Gallagher said in a [statement](#). In its first ruling, a newly established court overseeing state security and terrorism crimes on Thursday issued verdicts for 137 defendants accused of “inciting sectarian strife on social media platforms,” according to Al-Rai newspaper. 17 defendants were sentenced to three years in prison; one was sentenced to 10 years; nine were acquitted; and 109 were not subject to any criminal penalty. Read Drop Site’s coverage of his case [here](#).

· **Peru’s defense and foreign ministers, electoral chief resign:**

Peru’s Defense Minister Carlos Diaz and Foreign Minister Hugo de Zela [resigned](#) Wednesday after interim President Jose Maria Balcazar announced he would defer the decision to buy 24 F-16 fighter jets from

Lockheed Martin to the country's next elected leader, with Diaz writing that "a strategic decision has been taken in the area of national security with which I have a fundamental disagreement." The decision to postpone the \$3.5 billion deal, drew a pointed warning from U.S. Ambassador Bernie Navarro, who posted on social media that if Peru dealt "with the U.S. in bad faith," he would "use every available tool" on behalf of President Donald Trump to protect U.S. interests. Piero Corvetto, head of Peru's National Office of Electoral Processes, also [resigned](#) Tuesday amid what legislators and analysts describe as a coordinated campaign by right-wing political forces to exploit logistical failures in the first-round vote and lay the groundwork for annulling results in certain districts.

- **Sudanese military resumes manned air strikes over Kordofan:** Sudanese army MiG fighter jets [returned](#) to the skies over South Kordofan on Wednesday, carrying out heavy strikes on Rapid Support Forces positions in the Al-Dulaymah, Al-Hujayrat, and Birno areas around Dilling—the region's second-largest city—marking the first manned air operations over Kordofan and Darfur in months, according to eyewitnesses who spoke to Sudan Tribune. The resumed air campaign signals a broader Sudanese military effort to degrade RSF defensive capabilities, following a February operation in which the army said it neutralized a K-2000 air defense system in South Kordofan and destroyed drones at Nyala Airport.

- **Report links UAE-backed Colombian mercenaries to RSF's capture of El Fasher:** A new report by the Conflict Insights Group [found](#) that Colombian mercenaries operating through a UAE-backed network provided direct military support to Sudan's Rapid Support Forces during the October 2025 takeover of El Fasher, using commercially available advertising technology data, satellite imagery, and flight-tracking to identify more than 50 devices associated with the mercenaries operating in Sudan last year. The fighters were associated with the "Desert Wolves" brigade, employed by Global Security Services Group—a UAE-based company linked to senior Emirati government officials—and led by a U.S.-sanctioned retired Colombian army colonel; their roles included flying drones, training RSF troops and child soldiers, and serving as artillerymen throughout the El Fasher siege, with one device connecting to a Wi-Fi network named "ATACADOR"—Spanish for "attacker"—during the October 26 takeover. The mercenary pipeline ran through staging points in Somalia, Abu Dhabi, and Libya before deployment to Darfur. The fall of El Fasher was followed by mass atrocities, including the killing of more than 460 patients at the Saudi Maternity Hospital and filmed executions of elderly civilians. The group's full report is available [here](#).

- **ICC confirms charges against former Philippine President Duterte:** International Criminal Court judges on Thursday [found](#) "substantial grounds" to believe former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, 81, played a key role in the murders of 76 people and the

attempted murder of two others as part of his “war on drugs,” confirming all three counts of murder as crimes against humanity and committing him to trial. Prosecutors allege Duterte created, funded, and armed death squads to kill suspected narcotics dealers and users during his presidency from 2016 to 2022, with estimates of the overall death toll ranging from 6,000—the police figure—to 30,000 according to some human rights groups. Duterte, who was arrested in the Philippines last year, denies the charges and his defense team claims he is mentally unfit to follow proceedings.

· **King Charles will not meet Epstein victims during U.S. state visit:** Lawyers for King Charles III and Queen Camilla **informed Rep. Ro Khanna**, Democrat of California, that the king will not meet with survivors of Jeffrey Epstein’s abuse during his state visit to the United States next week, citing “ongoing police inquiries” in the United Kingdom that prevent him from meeting survivors or commenting directly on related matters. Charles and Camilla are expected in Washington from April 27 to April 30 for events marking the 250th anniversary of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, including a White House state dinner and an address to a joint session of Congress; Khanna, one of Washington’s most vocal advocates for broader Epstein record disclosure, said Wednesday he was disappointed by the decision and called on the king to reconsider.