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READER EDITION

October 16, 2025

ISRAEL BRIEF

Thursday, October 16

Bodies withheld, guns holstered for now. Israel tightens leverage and keeps its powder dry.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

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WE come off *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah* with the truth laid bare—and a briefing that runs a little longer than usual. I’ve tightened the blurbs so you can still skim it over coffee, but there was too much this morning to leave on the cutting-room floor.

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Hamas returned some bodies (including one it cynically misrepresented), then claimed it has no more. Israel closed Rafah, cut aid shipments, and told mediators the meter is running. In Gaza, Hamas has resumed public executions to masquerade as law enforcement. In Jerusalem, the High Court lit a 30-day fuse for a state inquiry into October 7. In the Knesset, Trump praised Israel while the names of the murdered were still being read at Abu Kabir. Along the “yellow line,” the IDF holds its forward positions. Raids continue in Judea and Samaria. A full combat plan sits ready if Hamas keeps playing games with the dead.

Read this with three lenses: **leverage, timelines, and deterrence.**

Leverage is Rafah and reconstruction.

Timelines are the Court’s 30 days and the ceasefire’s breaking strain.

Deterrence is the quiet muscle along both borders—and whether Hezbollah mistakes silence for hesitation.

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The War Today

IDF receives two bodies from Red Cross; Hamas claims to have returned all dead hostages it could find

Hamas transferred two more bodies said to be of Israeli hostages, while claiming it has recovered all the deceased captives it can locate. Defense Minister Israel Katz warned that Israel will resume combat if Hamas fails to fully comply with the Trump-brokered truce.

Israel frees nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners, including hundreds of terror convicts

Israel released 1,968 prisoners after Hamas freed the last 20 living hostages, including 250 life-term terrorists and 1,718 Gazans detained during the war; 154 of the worst offenders were deported to Egypt. The list includes high-profile murderers, including one who nearly killed a friend of ours in a machete ambush and murdered her companion.

After Hamas breaches deal, Israel fears group hiding deceased hostages for future negotiations

Israel says Hamas violated the ceasefire-hostage agreement by returning only four bodies, far fewer than expected by the 72-hour deadline, and suspects the terror group is withholding remains to retain leverage. Arab sources have disclosed Hamas intentionally returned a Gazan body as psychological warfare. Jerusalem is weighing targeted penalties on aid and reconstruction flows while pressing mediators, as bereaved families demand enforcement of the deal’s terms.

Israel decides on punitive measures as Hamas fails to release remaining killed hostages

Jerusalem plans targeted sanctions on aid and reconstruction flows after Hamas returned far fewer bodies than the deal required, while mediators are pushed to force compliance; further steps will be set after *Simchat Torah*.

Hamas said to kill over 30 Gazans, publicly execute 7, as it reasserts its grip on Strip

Hamas gunmen resurfaced across Gaza during the ceasefire, executing alleged “collaborators” in public and killing more than 30 rivals as the group moves to re-impose control—a clear reminder that talk of a “civilian wing” is a fig leaf for the same terror machine. Footage shows masked fighters shooting seven kneeling men in Gaza City, while “clan” militias report ongoing clashes.

Netanyahu: Hamas must disarm or ‘all hell breaks loose’

Prime Minister Netanyahu said Israel would honor the Trump-brokered ceasefire only if Hamas fully disarms and Gaza is demilitarized, warning that failure to comply would trigger the return of war. He emphasized that peace depends on “strength,” noting Israel’s ongoing readiness to act if smuggling, arms production, or violations resume.

Defense Minister orders IDF to draft full plan to defeat Hamas if fighting resumes in Gaza

Israel Katz told the IDF to prepare a decisive campaign blueprint in case Hamas refuses the ceasefire terms: return all the bodies of hostages and disarm. The plan pairs Israeli action with a US-led international mechanism to dismantle tunnels and terror infrastructure so Gaza is demilitarized and cannot threaten Israel again.

IDF fires warning rounds at suspects near Gaza ‘yellow line’ as West Bank raids continue

The IDF fired warning shots after several suspected infiltrators approached the Gaza “yellow line,” the buffer area marking Israel’s new defensive perimeter inside the Strip. No casualties were reported, and the military continues nightly raids in Judea and Samaria, including weapons seizures in Kalkilya.

Inside Israel

High Court rules state inquiry into October 7 to be established within 30 days

The High Court ordered the government to form a full commission of inquiry into the October 7, 2023 failures within 30 days, declaring there is “no real

dispute” over the need for an independent body with sweeping investigative powers. Interestingly, the court felt empowered to dictate the thirty day timeline—a call critics claims oversteps its bounds.

‘The best friend Israel ever had’: Trump cheered in Knesset after hostage releases

President Trump addressed the Knesset after the return of the 20 living hostages, earning 22 standing ovations as Speaker Amir Ohana hailed him as “the best friend Israel has ever had in the White House.” The speech, briefly disrupted by a “pro-Palestinian” protest, doubled as a victory lap for the hostage deal and a public embrace from Israel’s legislature.

Supreme Court chief, AG weren’t invited to Trump speech; Trump: I’d told PM I didn’t want to bring up the pardon

Knesset Speaker Amir Ohana did not invite Supreme Court President Isaac Amit or Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara to President Trump’s Knesset address. The snub lands amid a broader power struggle: the coalition is moving to oust the AG, Justice Minister Yariv Levin disputes Amit’s authority, and the Court has pressed into policy terrain that exceeds its mandate. Trump, meanwhile, said he told the prime minister he would avoid the pardon topic, then raised it anyway because “it was a perfect spot.”

Netanyahu’s approval ratings at all-time high: Poll

A survey finds Netanyahu at 58% suitability for prime minister and his coalition projected at 66 Knesset seats if elections were held today, reflecting broad support as rivals are far behind, confirming international opinion doesn’t always reflect the political reality on the ground domestically.

Families of slain hostages outraged over Hamas deal: ‘We’ve vanished from public consciousness’

Families of the slain hostages whose bodies remain in Gaza accused the government of abandoning them after Hamas returned only some of the 28 promised under the ceasefire agreement. Relatives condemned what they called “a political show” that erased their grief, demanding renewed pressure on Hamas and warning that the dead risk being forgotten.

Freed Israeli hostages recount torture, starvation and two years in Gaza tunnels

The *Jewish News* reports harrowing testimony from Israelis freed after more than two years in Hamas captivity, revealing a pattern of starvation, isolation, and psychological torment. Survivors described being chained in cages and tunnels, subjected to beatings and deception, and denied basic human contact—while a few recalled fleeting moments of humanity from guards. As Israel celebrates their release, doctors and families warn that the physical and emotional recovery will be long and uncertain.

Freed hostages Herkin, Kupershtein speak out: “Protests gave us strength—it wasn’t easy, to say the least”

Two newly freed hostages, Maksim Herkin and Bar Kupershtein, said the nationwide protests and public pressure during their 738 days in Hamas captivity gave them hope they would not be forgotten. Herkin described the rallies as a “lifeline in hell,” while Kupershtein thanked Israelis and “the Creator of the world” for their support and said he is still adjusting to freedom.

On Sukkot, eroding Temple Mount status quo lays bare rifts in the Orthodox world

Thousands of Jews ascended the Temple Mount over Sukkot, reflecting a steady erosion of the Israel–Jordan “status quo” and a widening split between religious-Zionist rabbis who now permit visits and Haredi leaders who warn of *karet* for stepping on the sanctum. Police have increasingly tolerated quiet Jewish prayer in specified areas, while detaining a few for overt ritual acts, as Jordan’s *waqf* presence recedes from close oversight.

IDF soldiers dance with Torah at Nova festival massacre site

Hundreds of IDF soldiers and civilians gathered at the site of the Nova music festival massacre to celebrate *Simchat Torah*, singing *Am Yisrael Chai* and dancing with Torah scrolls where so many Israelis were murdered on October 7, 2023. Parallel gatherings took place in Sderot, where police officers fell defending the city.

Rom returned from captivity and donned tefillin

Freed hostage Rom Braslavski immediately put on *tefillin* upon returning home, reaffirming his Jewish faith after enduring two years of Hamas captivity. His mother, Tami Braslavski, said his captors tried to force him to convert to Islam in exchange for food and privileges, but he refused, insisting, “I am Jewish, I am strong, I will not break.” She described his survival as an act of faith and resilience and said the family is “back to life” though healing will take time.

Once hailed for Oct. 7 heroism, Bedouin bemoan a state they say has since turned its back

Bedouin citizens who rescued Israelis on October 7 say the state later ramped up demolitions in unrecognized Negev villages, denied gun permits to threatened rescuers, and left communities to spiraling crime and poverty. Officials call the razings equal enforcement of planning law.

Israel and the World

World leaders hail hostage release as step toward peace in the Middle East

At the Sharm el-Sheikh summit, world leaders praised the Trump-brokered hostage deal as a milestone toward regional peace while urging Hamas to return the remaining bodies — hailing the development as proof that diplomacy can still yield results amid war, though the results remain to be seen.

Netanyahu turns down last-minute invite to Egypt summit, citing upcoming holiday

Prime Minister Netanyahu declined President Trump's invitation to the Sharm el-Sheikh "peace summit," citing *Simchat Torah*, though political considerations likely weighed as well. The meeting brought together world leaders to finalize the Gaza ceasefire's next phase.

Syrian Leader Ahmed al-Sharaa Meets with Russia's Putin at Kremlin

Syria's interim president traveled to Moscow to discuss turning the page on Assad, including pressure to hand over the ex-dictator, and to negotiate Russia's military footprint in Tartous and Khmeimim as Damascus heads toward elections. The meeting signals a reshaped regional board where Iran's camp weakens and Russian leverage is tested, with implications for Israel's northern front.

Indonesian president reportedly planning historic visit to Israel, though Jakarta denies it

Reports say Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto is preparing to visit Israel in what would be the first-ever trip by a leader of the world's largest Muslim-majority nation. The visit would signal a potential thaw after Subianto's recent UN speech supporting Israel's security and a two-state solution, but Indonesia's Foreign Ministry has publicly denied the plan amid domestic opposition. The ambiguity underscores how normalization talks—once linked to Indonesia's bid to join the OECD—remain politically delicate after many months of anti-Israel unrest.

Israel rejects claim UK played 'key role' securing Gaza ceasefire

Israel's deputy foreign minister Sharren Haskel publicly contradicted a British minister's claim that the UK had a "key role" in brokering the Gaza ceasefire, saying London's recent recognition of "Palestinian" statehood sent Hamas the wrong message. The exchange came ahead of Prime Minister Keir Starmer's visit to Egypt for the Trump-led peace summit, where London hoped to reclaim relevance in postwar negotiations.

British Lawyers Send Major UK Studios, Distributors Legal Warning Over Israel Film Boycott

UK Lawyers for Israel warned dozens of major studios, platforms, and agencies that an industry pledge to boycott Israeli film institutions likely violates the UK Equality Act, exposing companies to litigation, funding clawbacks, and insurance risks.

Briefly Noted

- *Times of Israel*: Iran blasted Trump's Knesset peace appeal as "criminal hypocrisy," playing victim while bankrolling proxies.
- *Globes*: Inflation cooled to 2.5% in September, its lowest in over a year and below the Bank of Israel's target ceiling.
- *Times of Israel*: Norway jailed a former US embassy guard for selling staff data and floor plans to Russian and Iranian intel "to protest" US support for Israel.
- *Times of Israel*: Eurovision delayed a vote on expelling Israel, citing "developments"—boycotting Israel during a ceasefire would look indecent even in Europe.
- *JNS*: Five died as Pakistani police clashed with armed Islamists outside the US embassy in Islamabad during a "pro-Palestinian" march.
- *Jerusalem Post*: A top Sunni candidate in Iraq's November vote was assassinated in Baghdad, a warning shot in Iran-shadowed politics.
- *Jerusalem Post*: UN-source docs and interviews depict Houthi-ruled north Yemen as a police state—aid diversion, prisons, child conscription—despite the group's "pro-Palestinian" veneer.
- *Times of Israel*: Italian police locked down Udine with rooftop snipers as Israel played Italy amid hostile protests.
- *Israel National News*: Netanyahu ordered a national plan to counter Egypt-origin weapons drones after officials admitted only half are intercepted.
- *Jerusalem Post*: Argentina's President Milei delivered a thank-you letter from freed Argentine-Israeli hostages praising Trump's role and urging the return of a slain hostage's remains.
- *Israel National News*: FM Gideon Sa'ar heads to Italy for talks and the MED conference, deepening Mediterranean coordination on Gaza's "day after."
- *Israel National News*: Police identified Shirley Yehuda, 34, as the victim of a Tel Aviv park murder; the suspect is a convicted child rapist recently paroled, reigniting fury over lenient releases for violent offenders.
- *JNS*: Antony Blinken claimed Trump's Gaza ceasefire built on a Biden plan, prompting bipartisan ridicule.
- *Jerusalem Post*: The U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces are negotiating integration into Syria's new military under a post-Assad government, testing Kurdish autonomy and American influence.
- *Jerusalem Post*: Activists from Palestine Action Netherlands vandalized Amsterdam's Royal Palace on October 7, splashing red paint and anti-Israel graffiti while promoting "emancipatory violence" and claiming to honor "resistance fighters."
- *JNS*: U.S. lawmakers Tom Cotton and Elise Stefanik urged the Treasury Department to investigate CAIR for alleged Hamas ties and sanctions violations.

- *JNS*: CNN's Christiane Amanpour apologized after implying Hamas treated Israeli hostages "better than Gazans," the latest in a long series of tone-deaf remarks about Israel.
- *Jewish News*: The BBC drew outrage for a "sympathetic" interview with a woman filmed cutting down yellow hostage ribbons, as families accused the network of normalizing hate.
- *JNS*: Nearly 1,000 leaders from 18 countries met in Rio de Janeiro for the Latin American Forum Against Antisemitism, declaring support for Israel and adoption of the IHRA definition while condemning Iran and Hamas.
- *Jewish Journal*: Yoav Potash's documentary *Among Neighbors* exposes post-war Polish pogroms long buried by official silence, forcing a reckoning with Poland's suppressed antisemitic history.

Developments to Watch

- **Rafah leverage tightened** – Israel is holding the Rafah crossing closed and halving aid truck entries until Hamas accelerates the return of slain hostages' bodies; mediators urge patience while Jerusalem signals the clock is ticking. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**
- **Stabilization force shopping** – Washington is sounding out contributors for a Gaza stabilization force, with Pakistan, Indonesia, and Azerbaijan floated; none have committed, and Jerusalem would balk at hostile contingents near its border. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**
- **Hezbollah phones keep exploding** – Lebanese outlets report a fifth Hezbollah operative's phone "mysteriously" detonated this week, alongside a separate UAV strike near Sidqin; the message on SIGINT and targeting is loud even if the border stays officially quiet. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**
- **Civilians scouting for Hezbollah** – New footage shows Lebanese civilians approaching the fence to gather intel for Hezbollah, underscoring the militia's use of "non-uniformed" spotters as Israel weighs broader strikes in Lebanon. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**
- **SIM cards as a weapon** – i24 says Hamas misused Israeli SIM cards (originally issued for hostage tracking) to harass families ahead of releases; the IDF reportedly knew, highlighting the cat-and-mouse of info-ops during the ceasefire.
- **IDF nabs tunnel crew** – Troops detained ~20 Hamas operatives near the European Hospital inside Gaza with ~50 SIM cards, plus three more look-outs including two professional tunnel diggers; all were transferred for interrogation.
- **Zikim Beach reopens** – For the first time since Oct. 7, the beach abutting Gaza will open in daylight hours, a small return to normal for border communities.

- **Gag-order highway hit** – A gunman on a motorcycle opened fire into a car on Route 443, leaving multiple casualties before a gag order dropped over the probe; police are treating it as a targeted hit while hardening the corridor.
- **CENTCOM warning to Hamas** – The US military publicly pressed Hamas to halt executions and disarm, hinting others will “do the job” if it doesn’t; no American boots promised for Gaza, but the subtext backs Israeli freedom of action.
- **Czech foreign minister’s clarity** – Prague declared Israel “defeated Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas” and called Israel “our shield” against jihadism—a rare European statement without the usual hedging.
- **Etihad adds Israel flights** – The UAE carrier will raise Abu Dhabi–Tel Aviv frequencies to 35 weekly from Dec. 1, a quiet sign regional commerce is moving even as politics churn.

Closing Thoughts

HERE is what matters this morning. Israel brought living sons and daughters home. Israel also freed killers. That trade stains quite a lot—though it had to be made. Hamas calls the pause a victory while it shoots “collaborators” in the street and haggles over the dead. Iran tests the margins and funds the usual proxies. European capitals march and pretend its conscience. The right response is sober strength. Reject any stabilization force that embeds hostile troops on our border. Hold the line against Hezbollah while grinding its infrastructure.

We keep faith, we keep watch, and we keep our hands on the tools of defense.

Am Yisrael chai.

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

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