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READER EDITION

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ISRAEL BRIEF

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Ceasefire Theater, Combat Math — Hamas games the bodies while Iran shrinks the clock.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

THE BOTTOM LINE The reaffirmation of Nostra Aetate and Israel's outreach to African Christianity signal the re-emergence of a civilizational alliance — Jews and Christians united by faith in truth, the sanctity of life, and the defense of human dignity against ideological totalitarianism. The silence over Islamist massacres, from Darfur to Gaza, is not ignorance but intent: a refusal by secular elites to acknowledge that moral clarity still exists. Expect Jerusalem and its allies in the Church and across Africa to deepen religious diplomacy as both shield and signal — a coalition grounded in realism and moral conviction. The West's survival may once again depend on those who remember that evil begins when lies replace outrage.

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Opening Commentary

S HALOM, friends.

The map moved without changing shape. In Rafah, Hamas turned a ceasefire corridor into a kill box—sniper, RPG, one of ours down—then “delayed” a body return after drone footage caught them staging the previous one like a morgue pageant. The ICRC finally said “unacceptable,” which is diplospeak for “we were used,” and Jerusalem answered with sharp strikes before the ceasefire choreography resumed.

Up north, the Lebanese are bracing for an Israeli push that the IDF hasn’t signaled; panic can start wars as surely as plans. UNIFIL is already jittery—remember Paris ordering the shoot-down of our UAV—and Hezbollah reads every restraint as room to expand. The DTW board today keeps the needle near red there: one wrong contact along the Blue Line and the frozen “man-aged war” thaws fast.

Meanwhile, Tehran is busy with a different clock. New build-out at Kolang-e Gazla points to a ~60% enrichment line targeting roughly 400 kg. That compresses breakout math and boxes U.S. and European diplomacy at the exact moment Washington is pressing Israel to keep Gaza responses “calibrated.” Iran tightens the spring; Hamas tugs the thread. Same loom.

At home, the covenant is under strain. Hostage families want a real plan, not adjectives. Combat trauma shows up in the suicide ledger—grim, specific—and the streets will clog tomorrow as the Haredi draft fight crests at Jerusalem’s gates. Police are prepping full closures; politicians are prepping soundbites.

Here’s the signal: the ceasefire now functions as Hamas’s mask, U.S. messaging is the tie holding it on, and Iran is shortening the time available to make good decisions. Everything else is noise—sometimes loud, sometimes armed.

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The War Today

Ceasefire in Name Only: Hamas Defiance and U.S. Restraint Collide in Gaza
Hamas’s sniper attack in Rafah has stripped away the last pretense of a functioning ceasefire. During the lull, IDF reservist **Master Sergeant Yona Efraim Feldbaum, z”l**, was **killed by sniper fire targeting an excavator inside Israeli-controlled territory**, followed by RPG fire on nearby forces. **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu immediately ordered “powerful strikes,”** and **Israeli jets hit more than 30 terror commanders** and infrastructure targets across Gaza, reportedly **killing over 100 operatives**. Hamas then claimed it would “delay” returning the body of another hostage, citing Israel’s “violations.” The

Red Cross's credibility plunged further after drone footage showed Hamas staging the earlier recovery of Ofir Tzarfati's remains — the third time his family was forced to rebury him. **Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich demanded the re-arrest of freed terrorists**, while Washington pressed Jerusalem to hit back "within limits." In parallel, **Senator Lindsey Graham warned that Hamas will never disarm without renewed confrontation**, echoing intelligence assessments that the group is **consolidating control**, not collapsing. Polling released this week confirms **about half of Gazans and nearly two-thirds of "Palestinians" in Judea and Samaria still support the October 7 massacre**, with 69% opposed to any disarmament under Trump's peace plan — a measure of why the ceasefire is rotting from within.

ASSESSMENT

Hamas is treating the ceasefire as operational camouflage, not constraint. Each "body handover" is a psy-op; each sniper shot a test of Israel's threshold for humiliation. Jerusalem's responses — precision barrages followed by restored truces — signal discipline but also diminishing deterrence. Trump's plan hinges on Hamas disarming itself, a fiction both Hamas and its supporters no longer bother to pretend. U.S. restraint now functions as a de facto umbrella for Hamas's recovery period, forcing Israel to strike hard enough to bleed terror cells but not enough to break them. The inevitable next phase is a return to war — not as policy, but as physics. Force will fill the vacuum that diplomacy can no longer hold.

Hostage Leverage Collapses: Hamas Turns Ceasefire Access Into Exploitation

Hamas's manipulation of the hostage-body recovery process has detonated the last illusion of compliance. A newly released **IDF drone video** showed operatives **burying and re-digging the remains** of murdered hostage **Ofir Tzarfati** — already returned and buried twice before — before summoning **Red Cross observers** to witness a fake "discovery." **Israeli officials watched the staging in real time** but held fire, releasing the footage later to expose the deception. Within hours, **Hamas gunmen attacked IDF troops in Rafah**, killing **Master Sergeant Yona Feldbaum**, marking the **third Israeli death since the ceasefire began**. The IDF struck back with **targeted air raids**, and **Prime Minister Netanyahu ordered "powerful strikes"** while the **Trump administration's coordination center in Kiryat Gat urged restraint**. **Hamas then postponed returning another hostage's body**, accusing Israel of "violations," as evidence mounted that the group was **using permitted search missions to hunt weapons**, not remains. The **ICRC condemned the staged recovery as "unacceptable"**, while **Finance Minister Smotrich demanded the re-arrest of terrorists released under the hostage deal**. Israeli sources confirmed the government is weighing **"nibbling" expansion of presence in Gaza sectors** if violations continue — a clear sign that **the ceasefire is hanging by a thread**.

ASSESSMENT

What was sold as humanitarian cooperation has devolved into psychological warfare and tactical deceit. Hamas is using graves as stage props and ceasefire clauses as camouflage for rearmament. Israel's patience is transactional now—each fake body or sniper shot narrows the pause between diplomacy and demolition. Washington's message is mixed: defend yourselves, but don't upset the choreography. Yet every staged atrocity erodes the fragile foundation on which the truce was built, leaving Jerusalem boxed between credibility and coordination. The next Hamas "discovery" may not be met with cameras—but with arms.

Northern Reset: Hezbollah Weakens as Lebanon, Syria, and Israel Align

Hezbollah's grip on Lebanon is fracturing. The **Lebanese army**, now dismantling the group's weapons caches with **Israeli and U.S. intelligence**, has reportedly **run out of explosives** after destroying dozens of sites in the south — a symbolic measure of how deep the cleanup has gone. **Beirut's five-phase plan** to impose a state monopoly on arms has pushed Hezbollah out of most **southern villages** and forced it into a defensive crouch, even as its deputy leader **Naim Qassem** vows the militia will "resist to the last breath."

Iran's support continues, smuggling through Syria under strain as **Tehran scrambles to preserve its last intact proxy**. Meanwhile, **Syria's post-Assad government** is actively blocking Hezbollah transfers, dismantling Iranian positions, and coordinating with **Israel and Lebanon's president** — an unprecedented regional convergence aimed at erasing Hezbollah's military footprint.

Across the northern frontier, **IDF units remain deployed at select hilltops** inside Lebanon to enforce the truce, while residents of **Kibbutz Misgav Am and El-Rom** watch from rebuilt observation posts, confident but vigilant. One Golan resident observed: "**We're not worried, but we're ready**," echoing the uneasy quiet now stretching from Metula to Mount Hermon.

ASSESSMENT

The north is in suspension — neither open warfare nor peace, but a slow-motion dismantling of Iran's forward base. Hezbollah remains dangerous yet hollowed, its leadership decimated and its arsenals mapped by adversaries turned collaborators. The Lebanese army's cooperation with Israel and Syria marks a historic inversion of regional alignments—a shared interest in neutralizing Tehran's proxy. If the coming months hold, this war will stand as the first time in decades, if ever, that Israel's enemies dismantled themselves under international and domestic pressure. But the margin for error is thin: one misstep or assassination could reignite the border before the dismantling is complete. For now, Hezbollah bleeds quietly, and the region exhales—but not deeply.

Inside Israel

Strain on the Home Front: Hostage Fury, Soldier Trauma, Justice Fractures
As **hostage families demand an immediate plan from the Prime Minister** following **documented ceasefire violations by Hamas**, a new Knesset study shows the war's human cost at home: **combat troops comprised 78% of IDF**

suicides in 2024, with 279 suicide attempts logged since January 2024 and most affected soldiers never seeing a mental-health officer in the weeks prior. In parallel, 55 coalition MKs urged President Herzog to pardon “Jewish security prisoners” after thousands of terrorists were freed under the truce, framing continued Jewish incarceration as an “injustice” while opponents warn it erodes the rule of law and mirrors the ethos of our enemies. Together, these threads signal a tightening loop: public grief turning to pressure, force readiness strained by trauma, and politics testing the state’s moral ballast—all while the ceasefire remains fragile and the hostage file defines legitimacy.

ASSESSMENT

This is a stress test of national endurance. Hostage families’ demands, the suicide spike among combat soldiers, and the pardon campaign are converging into a single question: can Israel prosecute a protracted conflict without breaking the covenant between the state and its citizens—the covenant that promises rescue, care, and equal justice. Expect near-term moves on all three axes: a more explicit hostage-return playbook with timelines, a surge in mental-health capacity and commander training inside the IDF, and a measured presidential stance that resists blanket clemency while considering narrowly tailored humanitarian reviews. If leadership fumbles—by offering rhetoric in place of returns, or optics instead of care—the backlash will accelerate, feeding polarization and reserve fatigue. If it delivers visible progress on hostages and soldier care while holding the legal line, public patience holds and deterrence gains time to work.

Democracy Under Pressure: Policing, Press, and Public Trust

Israel’s internal institutions are showing stress fractures. A **High Court petition by the Union of Journalists** accuses the government of **ramming through sweeping media reforms** that would **dissolve existing regulators and allow outlets to self-police under ministerial control**, bypassing legal oversight. The bill’s sponsor, **Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi**, touts the move as “liberating elected officials from legal bureaucrats,” while critics call it a **direct assault on press independence and rule-of-law procedure**. Hours later, public confidence took another hit when the **Israel Police, arresting 14, released a video comparing Hapoel Tel Aviv soccer fans to East Jerusalem rioters**, prompting **outrage from Yair Lapid and club officials**, who warned the state’s own police were **fueling incitement instead of defusing it**. Together, the controversies **reveal a widening rift between authority and accountability**, where heavy-handed messaging and procedural shortcuts risk eroding the social contract they are meant to defend.

ASSESSMENT

These episodes expose a governance pattern drifting toward performance over prudence—using spectacle to project control while bypassing the slow machinery of law. The press-freedom fight and the policing debacle share DNA: both substitute narrative dominance for institutional credibility. In a country that relies on civic trust to mobilize under fire, that’s strategic malpractice—to say nothing of terrible optics. Expect Israel’s courts, civil-society leaders, and opposition figures to make this the next domestic front: who defines professionalism, who guards restraint, and whether power can still self-limit when the war drum drowns the rulebook.

Israel and the World

Britain's Breaking Point: Antisemitism Normalized, Pushback Begins

Across the United Kingdom, antisemitism is shifting from outbreak to atmosphere. Justice Minister Sarah Sackman, one of the highest-ranking Jewish MPs, warned of **"ambient antisemitism" saturating British cultural life**, as Jewish families in areas like Finchley report fear attending synagogue or displaying symbols of identity. Her comments follow **the suspension of Nottingham Imam Umayr Mulla**—punished by his mosque for saying he "had no issue with Israel" and acknowledging Jewish history in the land during an interview filmed in Jerusalem. Meanwhile, British public discourse continues to fracture. **Alex Witkoff called for U.S. refugee programs for British Jews**, comparing the U.K.'s paralysis to **"Europe in the 1930s,"** while critics accuse the British left of **laundering antisemitism behind "anti-fascist" myths** and police of **shielding Jew-haters in the name of free protest**. From parliament to pews, the theme repeats: British Jews feel both besieged and abandoned, and the establishment's self-image as tolerant Britain is collapsing under the weight of denial.

ASSESSMENT

The U.K.'s antisemitism crisis has passed the rhetorical threshold—it now defines social acceptability tests in culture, politics, and faith communities. The punishment of an imam for recognizing Jewish legitimacy and the open talk of Jewish "refugees" from Britain signal a Western democracy that has lost moral coherence. For Israel, this is not merely diaspora distress; it's an opportunity and a warning. Expect tighter U.S.–Israel coordination on diaspora protection, and growing aliyah interest among U.K. Jews. The next phase will determine whether London can be a partner in the defense of Jewish life again—or a cautionary tale of how civilizations forget who they are.

Western Decay: Academia, Bureaucracy, and the New Sanctioned Antisemitism

Across Western institutions, antisemitism is no longer shouted—it's administered. In the United Kingdom, **Israeli-born economist Michael Ben-Gad** was threatened with beheading inside his London classroom, while in Rotterdam, **Professor Elena Kantorowicz-Reznichenko** was barred from campus over pro-Israel posts. More than **1,600 academics and public figures** have signed a letter defending both. Yet as Jewish professors are harassed, others are told **not to acknowledge Jewish holidays** unless they "omit references to the land of Israel," effectively banning Judaism's historical truth from public discourse. The same mindset now punishes speech rather than crime: New York's **Tarek Bazrouk received 17 months in prison for attacking Jews at three rallies** while pro-Hamas mobs remain free to march under police escort. In Europe, Israel and Hungary have joined forces to **counter institutional antisemitism**, even as **the U.N. employs staff tied to the October 7 massacre** and defends its "rapporteurs" who recycle Hamas talking points as human-rights law. Beneath it all lies the architecture of an older war: the

Soviet-engineered fusion of anti-Zionism and moral virtue, which turned hatred of Israel into a credential of conscience.

ASSESSMENT

This is the normalization phase of Western Jew-hate—a bureaucratic, credentialed hatred that dresses itself in ethics codes and academic neutrality. Where the street once burned synagogues, the seminar now deletes Israel from discourse; both serve the same ideology: to exile Jews from belonging. For Israel, the response cannot be limited to defense—it must reclaim the language of liberation and expose anti-Zionism as the Soviet relic it is. Expect Jerusalem to expand its diaspora-protection alliances, public diplomacy on moral clarity, and intelligence coordination with friendly governments like Hungary, the U.S., and Central Europe.

Common Cause, Selective Conscience: Jews and Christians Reaffirm Alliance Amid Islamist and Media Evasion

As Pope Leo XIV marked the **60th anniversary of Nostra Aetate** — the Vatican declaration that ended two millennia of official Christian antisemitism — Israel simultaneously welcomed **thirty African Christian leaders** representing millions of believers from Kenya to Ethiopia. The twin events revealed two sides of a historic reality: Judaism and Christianity remain bound in shared defense against the same ideological enemies — radical Islam and moral relativism. Leo reaffirmed the Church’s “firm stand against all forms of antisemitism,” calling dialogue a “way of life,” while Jewish leaders reminded the Vatican that the same silence that once abetted persecution now greets today’s anti-Israel mobs. In Jerusalem, Deputy Foreign Minister Sharen Haskel described African Christians as “the best bulwark against jihadism” — a statement as strategic as it was theological.

And yet, while Jewish and Christian leaders spoke of reconciliation and shared values, the world’s media remained largely mute on atrocities committed by Islamist or Arab forces. As Israel faced condemnation for defending itself in Gaza, **Sudan’s Rapid Support Forces slaughtered over 2,000 Christians in El-Fasher**, executing women and children in a campaign described by researchers as “a **systematic process of ethnic cleansing**.” The same global institutions that invent war crimes for Israel could not spare a headline for genocide literally visible from space. The contrast is moral blindness disguised as virtue — outrage rationed by identity.

ASSESSMENT

The reaffirmation of Nostra Aetate and Israel’s outreach to African Christianity signal the re-emergence of a civilizational alliance — Jews and Christians united by faith in truth, the sanctity of life, and the defense of human dignity against ideological totalitarianism. The silence over Islamist massacres, from Darfur to Gaza, is not ignorance but intent: a refusal by secular elites to acknowledge that moral clarity still exists. Expect Jerusalem and its allies in the Church and across Africa to deepen religious diplomacy as both shield and signal — a coalition grounded in realism and moral conviction. The West’s survival may once again depend on those who remember that evil begins when lies replace outrage.

Briefly Noted

Frontline & Security

- **Afghanistan–Pakistan peace talks in Istanbul collapsed** after Taliban delegates refused to restrain cross-border militants, prompting Islamabad to warn of possible “open war.”
- **North Korea test-fired sea-to-surface cruise missiles** from the Yellow Sea hours before President Trump’s arrival in Seoul, signaling renewed nuclear brinkmanship.
- **Iran’s Revolutionary Guard demanded \$170 million** from Israeli billionaire Eyal Ofer over a seized cargo ship, accusing him of “financing terrorism” in what Jerusalem calls a state-sponsored shakedown.
- **More than 150 terrorists freed** in the Gaza truce were evicted from a five-star Cairo Marriott hotel after exposure that they were enjoying luxury lodgings; families of Israeli victims called it “a moral absurdity.”

Jew Hate in the West

- **Federal and local agents in Alabama arrested** a heavily armed man who plotted synagogue attacks, preventing what investigators said could have been a mass-casualty assault.
- **An Israeli tourist was hospitalized in Manhattan** after an antisemitic beating outside a kosher restaurant, an assault Israel’s consul general blamed on “daily incitement against Jews and Israel.”
- **California’s education department found** that Oakland schools discriminated against Jews by repeatedly distributing a map erasing Israel and labeling it “Palestine.”
- **A returning IDF reservist was detained for 15 hours in Prague and deported** after France issued an unexplained “criminal alert” barring him from the Schengen zone.

Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- **Taiwan’s President Lai Ching-te hailed Israel’s Iron Dome** and defense ethos as a “valuable model” for countering authoritarian coercion, unveiling a new “T-Dome” shield inspired by it.
- **Rep. Claudia Tenney will introduce a House resolution** affirming Israeli sovereignty over the Temple Mount and guaranteeing Jewish prayer rights at the holy site.
- **Britain’s Labour government drew fire for hypocrisy**—suspending trade with Israel while inking an £8 billion jet-sale deal with Erdoğan’s Turkey, which shelters Hamas.
- **Hungary’s Wizz Air is demanding unprecedented flight rights** for an Israeli hub, seeking to bypass local regulation by operating as a foreign carrier on regional routes.

Culture, Religion, & Society

- **Archaeologists uncovered a 1,500-year-old synagogue** in the Golan Heights, complete with Torah-ark fragments and menorah carvings confirming deep Jewish roots in the region.
- **Ben & Jerry's co-founder Ben Cohen announced plans** for a "Gaza solidarity" watermelon ice cream after Unilever blocked it—another PR stunt steeped in anti-Israel fixation.

Developments to Watch

Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)

- **Lebanon Expects Israeli Push** – Lebanese social channels are flashing warnings of a large Israeli operation in the south; IDF posture hasn't shifted visibly, but panic traffic and militia chatter suggest miscalculation risk along the Blue Line. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**

Gaza & Southern Theater

- **Rafah Sniper, RPG Ambush** – Hamas gunmen hit an IDF excavator and then fired RPGs at an armored vehicle inside the Yellow Line; Israel launched "powerful strikes," then restored the truce on paper. Expect more tit-for-tat under a collapsing ceasefire. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**
- **Staged Body 'Recovery' Exposed** – Verified drone video shows Hamas burying, then theatrically "finding," Ofir Tzarfati's remains before Red Cross witnesses; minutes later Hamas delayed another body return, citing Israeli "violations." Jerusalem is weighing sharper enforcement inside the Yellow Line. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**
- **Search Access Becomes Cover** – Egyptian heavy equipment and ICRC teams received entry to search for 13 fallen hostages; security sources say Hamas used the same corridors to hunt weapons caches. Israel is considering a controlled expansion of the Yellow Line to police abuses.
- **Border Restrictions Lifted** – The IDF removed the last gathering and movement limits around Gaza-adjacent communities at 18:00, signaling partial normalization; commanders warn restrictions will snap back instantly if breach incidents persist.

Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)

- **Iran Builds 60% Enrichment Line** – Satellite-tracked work at "Kolang-e GAZLA" points to new centrifuge assembly and enrichment capacity targeting ~400 kg at ~60% purity—shrinking Tehran's sprint time and complicating any regional de-escalation track. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**

Diplomatic & Legal

- **U.S. Signals Operational Ceiling** – Senior U.S. interlocutors told Israeli officials Washington does not intend to greenlight a full war renewal in

Gaza, pressing for “calibrated” responses; this tightens the leash between tactical necessity and allied tolerance.

- **Red Cross Condemns Hamas Ruse** – The ICRC labeled the staged body hand-over “unacceptable,” handing Israel diplomatic cover to harden ceasefire enforcement and slow or halt escorted search activity until verifiable compliance resumes.

Home Front & Politics

- **Jerusalem Choke Point Thursday** – A mass Haredi anti-draft rally is planned at the city entrance; police are preparing full closures at Route 1/Chords Bridge and surge deployments for spillover protests near the Court and Knesset. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**
- **Army Radio Under Review** – A government panel recommended shuttering Galatz current-affairs programming (or the station), citing relevance and cost; cutting the IDF’s civilian news voice during crisis risks a messaging vacuum and backlash from veterans and press guilds.
- **Re-Arrest Drive Floated** – Finance Minister Smotrich urged immediate re-arrest of terrorists released to Judea and Samaria under the truce; a sweeps campaign would trigger friction in Hebron–Bethlehem and test PA containment capacity. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**

Closing Analysis

THE next moves aren’t mysterious. Hamas will test again along the Yellow Line, this time with a thinner fig leaf. Israel will hit hard, then be told to count to ten. The north will stay brittle until someone blinks or slips. And Iran just stole some minutes from the region’s clock.

If Jerusalem restores deterrence—swift pain for each breach, tighter rules for ICRC corridors, controlled expansion of the Yellow Line, zero theater—it buys time. If not, time will buy more open war back at a higher price.

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