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READER EDITION

December 4, 2025

ISRAEL BRIEF

Thursday, December 4

Deadline in the north. Israel rebuilds everywhere.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

THE BOTTOM LINE The split screen is stark. On one side you have the UN and Damascus play-acting about “occupation” and pretending the Golan should go back to the same Syrian system that turned half the country into an Iranian launchpad. On the other you have Israel and India quietly converging on the same rule set: terror directed by states is war; pre-emption is legitimate; external mediators are a luxury, not a leash; and high ground like the Golan is not a bargaining chip, it’s life insurance. Israel’s job is to keep acting like a serious state among other serious states — and treat UN resolutions the way it treats Hezbollah press releases.

CLASSIFICATION

Reader Edition

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FIRST, a quick apology: yesterday's brief died somewhere between "WiFi on board" and reality. The plane's network was pure fiction. Back on solid ground, the picture is anything but: Rafah's tunnels still obey Hamas HQ, the Yellow Line continues to behave like an electrified border, and the north is in the long last minute before a decision. On the ridge, Judea and Samaria are being treated as the country's firewall, not a diplomatic abstraction, while inside Israel the legal guild, draft fight, and security services continue to collide in the open.

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Here's the map before we drop into the sectors.

Flash Brief

- **Gaza:** Rafah tunnel cells attack under ceasefire, Yellow Line infiltrators are killed, one hostage body returned, one still held.
- **North:** U.S.–Israel line is “Hezbollah disarms or Israel acts” by year-end, ISR over Beqaa and Beit Jinn strikes continue.
- **Judea & Samaria:** Surif, Beit Ummar, Tammun–Tubas and UAWC raids keep grinding down Iran–PA– Hamas infrastructure on the ridge.
- **Law & power:** High Court demands an Arab draft policy, AG fights to keep her monopoly, Shin Bet and Ben-Gvir push back.
- **Security:** IDF says it can absorb large Haredi cohorts, Hashmonaim officers graduate, and a new Samaria city is pitched as a security belt.
- **Info-war & diplomacy:** Hamas control of Gaza NGOs is documented, UN votes for Golan withdrawal, India formalizes pre-emption, TikTok keeps feeding Hamas narratives.

ON the surface, you can read today as more of the same: tunnels, drones, court squabbles, UN votes, campus madness. Underneath, three things are shifting at once: Hamas is shrinking into hardened pockets east and west of the Yellow Line, the northern front now has a written deadline instead of vague dread, and the state is finally treating geography—Samaria, the Golan, the Negev belts—as something you design on purpose, not inherit by accident.

The War Today

Rafah Tunnels Still Obey Hamas HQ

Hamas's pretense of “rogue cells” in Rafah collapsed this week. Every tunnel unit still hiding under the city remains in direct communication with the Khan Yunis command, which itself answers to the group's senior military leadership. That explains why ceasefire violations continue in the same pattern — terrorists emerging from shafts, attacking IDF forces, and retreating into Hamas-run tunnel grids — including the attack that wounded five Golani soldiers with an RPG yesterday. Throughout the Strip, IDF forces enforcing the Yellow Line eliminated multiple infiltrators advancing toward Israeli troops in both north and south Gaza, with the Air Force completing the kills. In eastern Gaza City, armored units uncovered loaded multi-barrel launchers primed to fire at Israeli territory despite the truce. Meanwhile, Israel prepared to reopen Rafah Crossing for outbound civilian traffic under the EU-supervised mechanism, only for Egypt to publicly deny any such

agreement, insisting that any opening must be two-way per the Trump plan. On the humanitarian front, Hamas delivered one coffin to the Red Cross — now confirmed to contain Thai agricultural worker Sudthisak Rinthalak — while still withholding the body of Master Sgt. Ran Gvili ז"ל and continuing to search Jabaliya for leverage. Reports from Gaza residents paint the same picture: Hamas rules the ceasefire through fear, interrogations in hospitals, broken legs for dissidents, and the same intimidation networks that kept the Strip quiet before October 7.

ASSESSMENT

Hamas is centralizing around its tunnel brigades and using the ceasefire to probe for exploitable seams — militarily and politically. The Yellow Line is now the only stable truth in Gaza. Egypt's denial over Rafah signals Cairo's refusal to absorb Gaza's problems while Hamas still governs the west. Israel's task is unchanged: finish Rafah's underground, collapse the command channel from Khan Yunis, and refuse all "phase two" choreography while a single hostage body remains in the Strip.

Syria Opens the Corridor Iran Always Wanted

The diplomatic niceties are just about finished. In meetings with Netanyahu, U.S. envoy Morgan Ortagus delivered the blunt message now circulating in every regional capital: Hezbollah disarms or Israel acts, and the deadline is the end of December. Israel and the U.S. are aligned on the ultimatum; Lebanese leaders are already speaking as if escalation is inevitable. UAVs and manned jets increased coverage of the Beqaa the moment the Pope's plane cleared Lebanese airspace, confirming Israeli preparation for a wider operation. At Naqoura, for the first time, both sides sent civilian diplomats — a U.S.-pushed signal that normalization is no longer theoretical — even as Lebanon's prime minister admits Hezbollah's arsenal neither deterred nor protected the country and that the state must regain authority over war and peace. Parallel pressure hits the Syrian flank: Israel struck near Beit Jinn again after surveillance spotted a vehicle burying an object, reportedly an IED. Syrian President al-Sharaa and his UN envoy responded by accusing Israel of sabotaging Syria's "recovery," even as Israeli intelligence shows jihadi networks — ISIS, PIJ, Julani's own General Security, and Houthi-linked units — embedding along the Damascus belt under Iranian patronage. Washington simultaneously warns Iraq that Iranian militias intervening for Hezbollah will result in Israeli strikes inside Iraq. Hezbollah's internal paranoia is visible: IDF intelligence exposed Unit 121's assassinations of Lebanese officials who knew too much about Hezbollah's responsibility for the Beirut Port blast.

ASSESSMENT

The northern front has entered its pre-war geometry: U.S. diplomatic cover, Israeli operational freedom, Hezbollah strategic paralysis, and a Syrian regime serving as an Iranian staging corridor while pretending to seek "peace." The December deadline is the hinge between managed friction and open war. Israel is shaping the battlespace now so that when escalation comes, it comes on Israel's terms — not Iran's.

Iran's Ridge Corridor Starts to Collapse

While Gaza and the north absorb headlines, the ridge is where Iran's slow-burn project is being dismantled. Overnight operations in Surif capped a two-month Etzion-area campaign: three terrorists arrested, over 40 suspects detained, and weapons and incitement networks stripped out across Beit Um-mar and neighboring villages. Earlier this week, forces shut down UAWC's Ramallah and Hebron offices — a PFLP operational node disguised as an agricultural NGO with 700,000 shekels in terror financing on site. Tubas and Tammun remain under heavy pressure as Israel seals off the junctions Iran, the PA, and Hamas hoped to fuse into a battalion corridor mirroring the northern Samaria model. Multiple rammings and stabbings — in Hebron, Ateret, and Judea Junction — were resolved the same way: fast pursuit and neutralization, and a doctrine of no containment. Senior officers confirm the shift: early-stage elimination of infrastructure, not reactive raids, and no tolerance for PA-run “gray zones.” The discovery that Hezbollah's funding streams into Lebanon pass through Turkey reinforced Israel's broader picture of a single Iranian financial and operational pipeline running through Syria, Judea and Samaria, and Lebanon.

ASSESSMENT

Iran's strategy relies on time, permissive NGOs, PA cover, and slow weapons saturation. Israel is denying all four. The move from “manage the West Bank” to “own the ridge of Judea and Samaria” is now policy, and it is working. It won't wait for a northern war to mature — it is itself a front in the war, and Israel is treating it accordingly.

Inside Israel

Courts Push ‘Equality’ While Dodging Their Own Double Standard

The High Court ordered the government to finally explain why Arab citizens enjoy a silent blanket exemption from IDF service or mandatory national service, after decades of “policy by shrug” dressed up as security prudence. The petition came from a Haredi who quite reasonably asked why equality in burden suddenly became sacred only when it was time to draft yeshiva boys. The justices gave the state until March 1 to either produce a real policy for Arabs under the Security Service Law or admit it has no intention of ever applying its own equality doctrine beyond Bnei Brak. At the same time, the AG is still trying to run the country from her office: she blasted the government proposal to split her role into a political Attorney General for the cabinet and a separate independent Chief Prosecutor, screaming that this will “damage rule of law” — meaning her monopoly. She also sent a complaint to the Prime Minister accusing the national security minister of being “improperly involved” in police work, as if the minister in charge of the police is supposed to sit quietly in the corner while unelected lawyers run internal security. On the oversight front, the High Court torpedoed the appointment of Judge Ben Hamo to investigate the former MAG leak affair, prompting the justice minister to lay out, in public, the incestuous ties and

mutual protection racket inside the judicial hierarchy that keeps any serious probe from touching its own.

ASSESSMENT

The courts and the AG are trying to weaponize “equality” and “rule of law” selectively: maximal against Haredim and the elected government, minimal against Arabs and the legal guild itself. For now, the state is being forced to put its Arab-service evasions in writing, which is healthy; the next step is to end the era where the same handful of jurists both writes the rules and exempts themselves from them.

Army Says ‘Send Them,’ Politics Says ‘Not Like This’

Boaz Bismuth’s Haredi draft bill continues grinding through the Knesset committee in a cloud of yelling and spin, with opponents calling it “not nearly enough” and the opposition leader promising to kill it outright. Behind the noise, the IDF quietly told legislators something very simple: Brig. Gen. Shay Tayeb, who actually runs manpower planning, said the army can absorb 5,760 extra Haredi soldiers this year and — given advance warning — “everything needed” beyond that. In other words, the bottleneck isn’t capacity, it’s politics and rabbinic signatures. The bill’s targets — crossing 8,000 Haredi recruits in year one and climbing, with most in genuine combat or security tracks — are ambitious but squarely within what the army says it can use. Simultaneously, the first cohort of Hashmonaim Brigade Haredi squad commanders just graduated: about 70 combat soldiers who trained in urban and open terrain, fought in Gaza, and are now the first layer of Haredi NCO leadership in a full brigade built for their community. That’s what real integration looks like: officers, not talking points. The High Court, meanwhile, just lobbed a grenade into the broader equality debate by demanding an explanation for the lack of any formal draft or service policy for Israel’s Arab citizens, putting the “only Haredim must pay” narrative under judicial spotlight.

ASSESSMENT

The political system is still stuck arguing over which clauses please which pundits while the army and Haredi soldiers already demonstrate the direction of travel: more Haredim in uniform, more in real combat roles, and frameworks that work when rabbis green-light them. The next coherent law will need to do what the IDF has already said is feasible and what our own Dossier spelled out: universal obligation, tailored tracks, and no more sacred exemptions for any sector — including Arabs — wrapped in legal double-speak.

From ‘Community as Fortress’ to Samaria Belt: The State Broadens Defense Posture

After two years of multi-front war and October 7 seared into everyone’s cortex, the IDF is rewriting its defense doctrine for every border and every community. The new concept pushes authority down — more power to divisions and brigades, rapid-response reserve brigades on permanent alert, and even converting training bases into on-call combat units. The “community as fortress” idea now comes with real hardware: stronger rapid-response teams, more weapons in community hands, and tighter integration between civilians and

army so no kibbutz, moshav, or hilltop is ever again left to scream into an empty radio net. At the same time, the state comptroller just dumped a thick stack of warnings on ministers' desks: security on the Tel Aviv light rail is under-strength and under-trained, Ramon Airport is not fully ready for mass-casualty scenarios, critical infrastructure fortification lagged for years, defense export agents are too loosely supervised, dangerous-pathogen labs still lack proper regulation, and cyber hygiene in Defense Ministry databases is sloppy. In simple language: the enemy is upgrading; parts of the bureaucracy are still behaving like it's 2015.

Sovereignty is being exercised in quieter ways too. Environmental Protection Minister Idit Silman rolled out a plan to treat Judea and Samaria waste burning as what it is — environmental terror — and to build “environmental sovereignty” with new landfills, enforcement, and the ability to claw costs directly out of PA tax transfers. In parallel, Samaria's regional head and the mayor of Rosh HaAyn proposed a new 130,000-resident city east of Rosh HaAyn on Samaria farmland, explicitly as a security belt for the coastal plain and a way to anchor the “Million in Samaria” plan in concrete. On the ridge itself, Operation Five Stones keeps rolling: hundreds of structures searched, more than 30 suspects arrested, six terrorists killed, 24 structures demolished to prevent new terror hubs, and air-ground integration normalized in Kabatiya, Faraa, and Tammun.

On the moral and psychological home front, the hostage file remains open and raw. Forensic teams confirmed that the remains Hamas handed over this week belong to Thai worker Sudthisak Rinthalak, murdered on October 7 and held by Islamic Jihad in Gaza for over two years; one murdered hostage, Ran Gvili ז”ל, is still inside. A separate set of “findings” Hamas sent turned out not to belong to either hostage, underlining again that even in “ceasefire” optics Hamas treats bodies as bargaining chips, not basic decency.

ASSESSMENT

The state is doing three things at once: fixing the doctrinal failures that let October 7 happen, exposing and patching homefront gaps the comptroller just lit up, and extending real sovereignty — environmental, demographic, and security — across Judea and Samaria. The direction is right: more authority for field commanders, more responsibility and capability in communities, more Jewish depth on the ridge, and fewer comforts for enemies whether they sit in tunnels, waste fires, or VIP cells. The work now is to keep pushing reforms faster than the next round arrives.

Israel and the World

Hamas Runs Gaza NGOs While Donors Queue Up With Cash

Newly published Hamas documents show what Jerusalem has said for years: international NGOs in Gaza do not operate “independently,” they operate inside a Hamas-run intelligence and coercion grid. Hamas's Interior Ministry vetted staff at dozens of organizations, cataloguing their finances, family ties,

politics, even how modestly they dressed, then designated approved “guarantors” in 48 NGOs — local senior staff who served as liaisons, enforced Hamas security rules, built Hamas-approved beneficiary lists for UN and Western aid, and gave the terror group effective veto power over projects and visitors. Some guarantors were themselves Hamas members or affiliates; internal memos explicitly describe them as exploitable assets for infiltrating and surveilling international organizations. Western brands like Oxfam, Save the Children, IMC, MAP-UK and others deny coordination, but the paperwork shows Hamas treating their Gaza branches as another lever of regime control. This lands just as governments and the UN float billions for Gaza “reconstruction,” with the same NGO ecosystem expected to run cash, services, and contracts into a Strip where Hamas still controls the red zone and every serious operation requires its approval.

ASSESSMENT

Anyone still pretending Gaza aid is a neutral humanitarian sphere is either naïve or on the payroll. If reconstruction runs through the same compromised NGO channels, Hamas will skim, steer, and weaponize it exactly as before — only this time with Western signatures on the checks. Israel’s line is obvious and non-negotiable: no money, no projects, and no foreign logos inside Gaza without hard Israeli control over who touches what and zero tolerance for “guarantors” who answer to Hamas.

TikTok Hamas, Billion-Dollar Hate, and a Disorganized Jewish World

Hillary Clinton — not exactly a Likud Central Committee member — is now saying out loud what every sane person watching TikTok already knows: huge chunks of American youth, including young Jews, are being radicalized by “totally made up” Gaza content with no history, no context, and zero contact with reality. Short-form pro-Hamas propaganda, deepfakes, and decontextualized clips dominate the feeds; anything that demands attention span or mentions Hamas atrocities dies on arrival. At the same New York conference circuit, Malcolm Hoenlein warned that anti-Israel and openly antisemitic actors are receiving “massive funding,” building disciplined, demographically growing networks, while the Jewish world has spawned more than 200 “fight antisemitism” outfits in two years that mostly duplicate work and fight over donors. As he put it, we’re winning a few battles and losing the war — not because the other side is smarter, but because it is coordinated, angry, and speaking directly to young people while communal institutions deliver talking points that sound like they were written for a 1987 synagogue dinner.

ASSESSMENT

The information environment is now a strategic battlespace: Hamas and its friends treat it that way, Western elites still treat it like PR, and too much of the Jewish world treats it like a fundraising theme. If Israel and serious diaspora leadership don’t build a single, hard-edged, youth-focused ecosystem for education, content, and pushback, the next generation will inherit a “truth” about Israel written by Qatari money, Iranian bots, and American campus ideologues — and they’re already halfway there.

UN Orders Golan Exit While Serious States Embrace Deterrence

The UN General Assembly just voted — 123 states in favor — to demand Israel withdraw from the Golan Heights, with a long list of European countries flipping from abstention to support, while Syria cheers from a regime that can't even hold its own border without Iran and militias. Danny Danon answered simply: Israel will not return to 1967 lines and will not give up the Golan, ever. On the diplomatic track, Netanyahu is telling Western envoys he's "open" to a security arrangement with Syria but only on terms that matter: a demilitarized buffer from Damascus to the Golan and Hermon, no terror entrenchment, and protection for Israel's Druze allies. At the same time, India is openly walking away from the old "strategic restraint" model that treated terror as a police problem; its new doctrine treats major proxy attacks as acts of war, embraces pre-emption, rejects third-party mediation, and uses everything from water treaties to long-range precision strikes as coercive tools. That doctrine — compellence, not begging — looks very familiar in Jerusalem.

ASSESSMENT

The split screen is stark. On one side you have the UN and Damascus play-acting about "occupation" and pretending the Golan should go back to the same Syrian system that turned half the country into an Iranian launchpad. On the other you have Israel and India quietly converging on the same rule set: terror directed by states is war; pre-emption is legitimate; external mediators are a luxury, not a leash; and high ground like the Golan is not a bargaining chip, it's life insurance. Israel's job is to keep acting like a serious state among other serious states — and treat UN resolutions the way it treats Hezbollah press releases.

Briefly Noted

Culture, Religion & Society

- **Denmark's Antisemitism Strategy:** Denmark rolled out an \$18 million, five-year plan including a dedicated institute to help police decode hate speech and prosecute terror glorification.
- **University of Florida Case:** A federal judge ordered the university to readmit a law student who posted that Jews must be "abolished by any means necessary," ruling the threats didn't meet legal threshold. American doctrine protects eliminationist rhetoric while Jewish students face harassment.
- **European Parliament Conference:** Brussels hosted a high-level conference on antisemitism in academia, warning dozens of EU universities cut ties with Israeli institutions and Jewish students face escalating harassment.
- **Koreatown Synagogue Attack:** Pro-Palestinian protesters infiltrated a synagogue event, smashed property, screamed slurs, and terrorized attendees before LAPD arrests. Vandalism and intimidation now characterize activism labeled "anti-genocide."

- **ADL/AJC Response:** ADL and AJC blasted a National Communication Association report claiming “Zionists” and “whiteness” undermine academic freedom, dismissing rising antisemitism as a smokescreen.
- **Italian UN Official Controversy:** Italian UN official Francesca Albanese sparked national outrage appearing to rationalize a violent pro-Palestinian raid on a newspaper newsroom, prompting mayors to reconsider honors.

Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- **Netanyahu at DealBook:** Netanyahu told the NYT DealBook Summit he’ll visit New York despite incoming mayor Zohran Mamdani’s threat to “arrest” him on ICC warrants the U.S. doesn’t recognize.
- **Qatar Charm Offensive:** Qatar is flying in GOP lawmakers, influencers, celebrities, and media executives while the House votes on terror-designating the Muslim Brotherhood.

Frontline & Security

- **Former Hostage Reenlistment:** Former hostage Edan Alexander returned to the Gaza border in IDF uniform, vowing to “give hell back” after surviving captivity and choosing to reenlist.
- **Iranian Militia Strikes:** Iran-backed militias carried out drone strikes on U.S.-run oilfields in Iraqi Kurdistan, prompting Washington to pressure Baghdad into reopening a key export pipeline, pushing Iraq closer to Washington.

Developments to Watch

Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)

- **Pope-Window Closes, Airframe Density Rises** — Israeli UAVs and jets surged over southern Lebanon and the Beqaa the moment the Pope departed Beirut, signaling ISR saturation ahead of possible preemptive action. This is the classic pre-operation pattern before Israel shapes the battlespace. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**
- **U.S. Warning to Iraq on Militia Intervention** — Washington told Baghdad that any Iraqi militia move to support Hezbollah will trigger Israeli strikes inside Iraq. If Hezbollah fires first, the war may automatically expand eastward by American design, not Iranian choice. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**
- **Israeli Strike Pattern Deepens in Beit Jinn** — ISR caught a vehicle burying an object near Beit Jinn; Israel neutralized it with a drone strike, treating the zone as an extension of Hezbollah’s corridor. Syria’s “peace rhetoric” won’t mask the growing permissiveness Israel claims along the Damascus belt.

Gaza & Southern Theater

- **Rafah Tunnels Still Attacking Under Truce** — Tunnel teams in Rafah continue surfacing to attack troops, including the RPG strike that wounded five Golani soldiers; Israel is still eliminating infiltrators along the Yellow Line daily.
- **Gaza's East-West Split Hardens** — Intelligence and mapping confirm a durable “Green Zone” east of the Yellow Line under IDF control and a Hamas-run “Red Zone” to the west, with a 1.7 km Israeli corridor blocking smuggling. This is the closest Gaza has come to de facto partition since 2005 — and it will shape every “day after” fantasy.
- **Hamas Stalls Hostage-Body Sequencing Again** — Islamic Jihad located one hostage body; Hamas transferred only one coffin (Thai national), leaving Ran Gvili's body as a bargaining chip. As long as one body remains inside, “phase two” diplomacy is dead on arrival. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**

Judea & Samaria

- **Tammun-Tubas Belt Under Sustained Pressure** — Heavy IDF activity continues around Tubas, Kabatiya, and Tammun; dozens of suspects detained and multiple cells disrupted. Iran's plan for a northern-Samaria replica of the Jenin-Tulkarem corridor is being broken node by node.

Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)

- **Iran Moves Air Defenses North** — Iranian AD systems were spotted redeploying toward the Azerbaijan border region. Tehran is signaling anticipation of external strikes — either Israeli preemption or fear of a second front emerging from the Caucasus. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**
- **Houthi Narrative Ops After Hostage-Style Releases** — Houthis released 11 sailors kidnapped after the Eternity C attack, forcing scripted “confessions” and staging a surrender ceremony.

Diplomatic & Legal

- **Egypt Denies Rafah Deal Despite U.S. Backing** — Egyptian officials publicly denied any one-way Rafah opening, contradicting Israeli announcements and U.S. approval of an outbound-only humanitarian corridor. Cairo is refusing to become Gaza's demographic sponge, limiting the humanitarian leverage Hamas hoped to weaponize.

Home Front & Politics

- **AG-Shin Bet Clash Points to Authority Crisis** — AG Baharav-Miara challenged the Shin Bet chief over internal polygraph probes; he responded that he answers only to the PM, not her.

Closing Assessment

In Gaza, the ceasefire is no longer a moral debate, it's a test range: every time Hamas sends a tunnel team up the shaft, someone dies and the Yellow Line moves a little in Israel's favor. In the north, the polite fiction that "everyone wants calm" has given way to dated, signed sentences: Hezbollah disarms or Israel acts; Syria stays a corridor and gets treated like one. On the ridge, Iran's long game is being dismantled in raids, demolitions, and settlement plans that treat Judea and Samaria as a National Priority Area, not a negotiating chip.

Inside, the mask is off: the courts push "equality" while ducking Arab service, the AG treats the Shin Bet like a subordinate ministry, and the government, for all its noise, is actually building the manpower and territorial doctrines it will need when the northern round opens. The next inflection isn't abstract. It's the post-Pope window on the Lebanese border, the last tunnel pockets under Rafah, the decision on whether the ridge becomes a real population belt or stays a thin line of caravans.

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