



Forensic intelligence for those who act.

READER EDITION

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ISRAEL BRIEF

Sunday, December 14

Hamas loses commanders, Hezbollah hides under weather, and Jews are attacked for lighting candles.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

THE BOTTOM LINE Ireland's "narrow scope" isn't reassurance. It normalizes punishing Jews for living on the country's defensive high ground, then waits for the next activist escalation to expand the target list. Sydney shows why the digital front matters: propaganda doesn't stay online, it becomes permission structure. We don't yet know exactly what's going on, but initial reports are not good. The F-35 fight is the same story in armaments: Israel refuses to let diplomatic fashion reshape security reality.

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ON Israel's borders, enforcement is replacing ambiguity— Hamas command nodes are being removed, the Yellow Line is hardening, and the northern calendar is compressing under storm cover. Abroad, the same hatred driving October 7 is surfacing again, this time where Jews gathered simply to light a Hanukkah candle. Initial reports indicate multiple casualties—killed and wounded—at a Sydney Chabad Hanukkah event at Bondi Beach. The details are still emerging.

IN THIS EDITION

Flash Brief	3
The War Today	3
Hamas Loses Its Architect, Doubles Down on the Hostage Veto	3
Storm Cover, Radwan Targets, and the December Clock	4
Inside Israel	4
Hostage Protest Politics Meets Draft Arithmetic	4
Gatekeepers Escalate Opposition	5
Israel and the World	5
Doha Builds a Force That Won't Fight Hamas	6
Europe Tests Boycotts While Jew-Hatred Hits Hanukkah Events	6
Briefly Noted	6
Culture, Religion & Society	7
Diplomacy & Geopolitics	7
Frontline & Security	7
Developments to Watch	7
Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)	7
Gaza & Southern Theater	8
Judea & Samaria	8
Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)	8
Diplomatic & Legal	9
Frontline & Security	9
Home Front & Politics	9
Today's Takeaways	9

In just a few hours, we will light Hanukkah candles. We do so with a prayer for those killed or wounded, for the protection of Jewish communities everywhere, and for clarity in dark moments. The candles are both a symbol of comfort and are a declaration that light is defended.

Here's the day in ninety seconds.

Flash Brief

- **Gaza:** Israel eliminated senior Hamas commander Ra'ad Sa'ad while enforcing the Yellow Line after repeated ceasefire violations.
- **Hostages:** Hamas and Islamic Jihad continue stalling on returning Ran Gvili's body despite narrowed Israeli intelligence leads.
- **Northern Front:** IDF struck Radwan Force training sites as Hezbollah redeployed operatives under storm cover.
- **Iran / Axis:** Tehran restarts missile production and demands "wartime" IAEA carve-outs while proxies probe new corridors.
- **Judea & Samaria:** Cabinet advanced legalization of 19 communities as roadside attacks and arrests persisted along key routes.
- **Sydney:** Reports indicate a shooting attack near Bondi Beach during a first-night Hanukkah candle-lighting ceremony; casualties reported, details unconfirmed.
- **Diaspora Security:** Additional unverified claims reference a possible incident in another Sydney suburb; authorities urge caution as information develops.

R EAD together, today's signals point to a single truth: this war does not respect geography. Hamas and Hezbollah test Israel's borders while the same ideology targets Jews abroad. Enforcement is working in Gaza and preparing in the north—but Jewish life everywhere is being treated as a provocation by the same actors who call murder "resistance."

What follows breaks down where pressure is being applied, where it is slipping, and what comes next.

The War Today

Hamas Loses Its Architect, Doubles Down on the Hostage Veto

Israel eliminated Ra'ad Sa'ad, Hamas's second-in-command and a chief architect of October 7, in a precise Gaza City strike after he was identified actively rebuilding weapons production during the ceasefire, even as Hamas stalled on returning the body of Ran Gvili ז"ל. The strike followed multiple ceasefire violations, including explosive attacks on IDF troops and repeated infiltrations across the Yellow Line, which the IDF continues to enforce as a lethal boundary while expanding engineering works into a de facto border. Parallel

intelligence shows Israel handed mediators names and maps of Islamic Jihad operatives believed to know Gvili's burial site, underscoring that recovery is a choice Hamas is refusing to make. As winter storms flooded Hamas-run tent camps and exposed the movement's extortion economy, Hamas responded by accusing Israel of sabotaging the ceasefire while reiterating its refusal to disarm absent a Palestinian state—confirming that delay, not compliance, remains its strategy.

ASSESSMENT

Hamas (not so shockingly) used the pause to rearm, Sa'ad was central to that effort, and his removal signals that Israel will not allow a "quiet" rebuild under diplomatic cover. By tying Phase II explicitly to Ran Gvili's return while decapitating Hamas's rebuilding leadership, Israel is collapsing Hamas's two leverage points at once: time and ambiguity. Hamas can return the body and disarm, or Israel will continue degrading its command until there is nothing left to negotiate with.

Storm Cover, Radwan Targets, and the December Clock

Under cover of severe weather, Hezbollah redeployed operatives south and probed IDF positions while Israel struck multiple Radwan Force training compounds across southern Lebanon and the western Bekaa again, expanding well beyond symbolic targets. Lebanese officials openly admit Hezbollah refuses to surrender its weapons without Iranian approval. Concurrently, Iranian commanders publicly touted upgraded aviation readiness and missile production, while Tehran acknowledged Mossad-trained Iranian operatives carried out past assassinations—prompting internal executions born of paranoia. With U.S. warnings relayed to Beirut naming Dahieh and the Bekaa as next if precision weapons remain past year's end, volatility is increasing.

ASSESSMENT

Hezbollah is testing under storm concealment because it understands the calendar is no longer open-ended, and Israel is deliberately stripping training capacity, infrastructure, and deniability before that window closes. Lebanon's own leadership conceding Iran's veto over Hezbollah removes the any fiction of sovereign restraint, aligning any coming operation with Tehran rather than Beirut.

Inside Israel

Hostage Protest Politics Meets Draft Arithmetic

As Ran Gvili's father publicly refused to accept condolences "until I see his body," the hostage movement visibly shifted from mass Saturday rallies into smaller, Friday Kabbalat Shabbat gatherings, with the main forum planning to wind down and volunteers staying to support the Gvili family. In parallel, a competing narrative hardened: families aligned with a tougher posture

argue the demonstrations merged with Kaplan's anti-government machinery and fed Hamas leverage. One released hostage described a Hamas interrogator explicitly asking how to pull more Israelis to the Saturday night rallies. The same domestic fault line now runs through conscription: bereaved voices and senior politicians are demanding a state commission of inquiry and warning against draft evasion, while the opposition keeps trying to turn grief into an election platform. Polling reflects the churn—Likud rebounds, and smaller right-wing lists wobble.

ASSESSMENT

The hostage cause was never a problem—indeed it's something everyone could get behind. However, the political hijacking of it was problematic. When Hamas is literally workshop-testing Israeli protest mechanics on captives, anyone pretending visible division has no operational impact is playing with matches in a munitions shed. The closing of the mass rallies and the pivot to disciplined, family-anchored gatherings is healthy—less theater, more leverage, fewer useful idiots. On the draft, manpower is the war's limiting resource, and exemptions are not a "lifestyle choice" when reservists keep returning to the same front. The only workable path is what we've already laid out: expand service fast, build real tracks that are appropriate to the observance of the Haredim, and then tighten.

Gatekeepers Escalate Opposition

The attorney general signaled she will not defend the prime minister in court if he refuses to dismiss Ben-Gvir, turning a political demand into a legal pressure tactic and inviting the judiciary to referee coalition composition during wartime. At the same time, opposition figures are sharpening their own lines. A retired general who joined Lapid pitched a "fix the IDF" agenda, accused the government of failure, and framed Ben-Gvir as the symbol of "terrible" domestic security—conveniently ignoring that the public elected a government that promised to restore governance, not politely manage decline. Gadi Eisenkot's comments about forming a government with fewer than a clear majority triggered backlash across the spectrum over reliance on Arab parties, while he escalated personal attacks on Netanyahu—another sign that the opposition is trying to relitigate pre-Oct-7 politics instead of presenting a coherent wartime alternative.

ASSESSMENT

This is the unfinished constitutional fight in miniature: unelected legal actors threatening to abandon representation to force a political outcome, and retired security elites trying to climb back into command through television studios and party lists. Ben-Gvir's critics are free to campaign; they are not entitled to outsource ministerial appointments to the High Court by way of the attorney general's office. The country needs a chain of authority that runs from voters to government to enforcement, not a relay race of vetoes. If Israel wants to survive long wars without internal paralysis, it needs rules that clarify who governs—and who merely advises.

Israel and the World

Doha Builds a Force That Won't Fight Hamas

Washington is pushing the International Stabilization Force forward at speed—25+ countries meet in Doha to discuss command, basing, training, and rules of engagement—while U.S. officials simultaneously concede the force is not designed to fight Hamas, which is an impressive way to “demilitarize” a terror army without touching a rifle. Cairo is warning that Hamas won't disarm without guarantees Israel won't strike again and without a Palestinian state first—meaning “disarmament” gets redefined as “never.” On the northern lane, Lebanon's prime minister says Lebanon is “ready for peace” if the Arab Initiative is implemented—translation: a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem, and then we can “discuss” whether Israel may exist.

ASSESSMENT

Israel fights, everyone else drafts paperwork that assumes Hamas politely disappears. An ISF that won't fight Hamas doesn't stabilize Gaza—it stabilizes the illusion that someone else is responsible for removing Hamas's guns. Cairo's “guarantees” demand is patently absurd... they want Israel to stop hitting terrorists before terrorists stop being terrorists.

Europe Tests Boycotts While Jew-Hatred Hits Hanukkah Events

Australia's police are responding to reports of an active shooter situation at Bondi Beach in Sydney, with early claims it targeted a Hanukkah event—details still developing, but the pattern is old: Jewish visibility keeps drawing violence and “developing incidents.” At the same time, Ireland is advancing a settlement trade restriction now framed as limited to goods, not services, and “not this year.” Really, just making Jew-hate somehow acceptable in polite society. Add the information layer: Israeli defense officials describe a state-run online influence campaign pushing antisemitism and anti-Israel hate, with Qatar, Russia, and China suspected, while Qatar-backed clerics publish straight-up extermination fantasy about Jews “being gone by 2033.” On the hard-security lane, Israel is quietly working to prevent F-35 sales that would change the region's air-power balance—especially to Turkey—because “trust us” is not an air-defense plan.

ASSESSMENT

Ireland's “narrow scope” isn't reassurance. It normalizes punishing Jews for living on the country's defensive high ground, then waits for the next activist escalation to expand the target list. Sydney shows why the digital front matters: propaganda doesn't stay online, it becomes permission structure. We don't yet know exactly what's going on, but initial reports are not good. The F-35 fight is the same story in armaments: Israel refuses to let diplomatic fashion reshape security reality.

Briefly Noted

Culture, Religion & Society

- **JNS:** A Jerusalem event spotlighted the newly opened City of David Pilgrimage Road as tangible Second Temple-era proof of Jewish presence and pilgrimage to the Temple. It matters because archaeology is now a battlespace—NGOs, UNESCO, and Islamists attack digs precisely because stones don't negotiate, and Jewish history is the one thing they can't "re-frame."
- **The Jewish Chronicle:** The Guardian is being criticized for still hosting multiple opinion columns by Khaled Mashal with no disclaimer noting Hamas's full UK proscription as a terror group. It matters because legacy media keeps laundering jihadist legitimacy as "context," then acts shocked when the public can't tell the difference between analysis and propaganda.

Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- **Ynet:** Ireland clarified its proposed settlement-trade ban would target imports of goods only, not services, and won't take effect this year. It matters because this is a test-run for EU lawfare-by-commerce—start small, normalize the mechanism, then let activists demand the next expansion.
- **Times of Israel:** Chile heads into a polarized runoff between José Antonio Kast and communist Jeannette Jara, whose camp has floated suspending relations with Israel amid a domestic crime-and-migration backlash. It matters because Latin America's Israel posture is increasingly a proxy for internal political identity fights—Jerusalem becomes a convenient punching bag when regimes want moral theater without paying any price.
- **JNS:** A congressional push to designate the Muslim Brotherhood was watered down in committee to target only select chapters, as lawmakers warn Qatar's influence is distorting U.S. policy. It matters because half-measures are how Islamist networks survive—"review the affiliates" becomes "never touch the hub," and Doha keeps cashing the checks.

Frontline & Security

- **Jerusalem Post:** Israel is facing mounting boycott pressure across arenas from UN resolutions to Eurovision mechanisms to Guinness World Records policies that effectively freeze Israeli participation. It matters because boycott isn't about chicken wings or song contests—it's a low-cost delegitimization campaign designed to turn Jewish existence into a permissions-based activity.

Developments to Watch

Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)

- **Storm Window Probing** — Hezbollah operatives are disguising themselves as farmers and approaching forward IDF posts as storm cover degrades ISR.

- **Yanouh Strike Deferred** — The IDF issued an evacuation warning for Hezbollah infrastructure in southern Lebanon, then postponed the strike after the Lebanese army and UNIFIL intervened via the monitoring mechanism. Israel is testing compliance; Hezbollah is testing how much delay it can buy.
- **Syria Friction After ISIS Ambush** — Conflicting accounts around the ISIS attack that killed Americans in Syria, plus regime supporters celebrating openly, underscore how thin deconfliction has become. Netanyahu's upcoming meeting with the U.S. Syria envoy lands in a far more combustible environment. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**

Gaza & Southern Theater

- **Hamas Internal Security Decapitated** — Reports indicate the elimination of Ahmad Zamzam, Hamas's internal security chief for the central camps, a senior enforcer responsible for internal repression, interrogations, and the policing of dissent. His removal further guts Hamas's coercive control apparatus and sharpens the risk of retaliatory action as the ceasefire continues to unravel.
- **Hamas War Architect Eliminated** — Ra'ad Sa'ad, one of Hamas's most senior military commanders and a central architect of the October 7 massacre, was killed while actively rebuilding weapons production during the ceasefire. His removal strikes at Hamas's strategic brain and signals that attempts to rearm under diplomatic cover will be met with targeted, lethal enforcement.
- **Yellow Line Enforcement Tightens** — IDF troops eliminated militants crossing the Yellow Line and responded to explosive attacks that lightly wounded reservists.
- **Gaza Mood Shifts Post-Strike** — Gazan officials and residents are openly warning that Hamas ceasefire violations are inviting renewed Israeli action. Anxiety on the ground suggests Hamas's control narrative is weakening under sustained targeting.

Judea & Samaria

- **Roadside Terror Tests Continue** — An explosive thrown at IDF forces in northern Shomron and armed suspects stopped near Bet El show low-cost (to PIJ, PA, PLO, Hamas, etc.) terror persisting along key routes. These attacks aim to both terrorize and to stretch security bandwidth while Gaza remains the main focus. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**
- **Home Demolition Signal** — Israel confiscated and ordered the demolition of the home of a Gush Etzion attacker, reinforcing the deterrence message that "martyrdom" carries family-level consequences. Expect retaliatory incitement and copy-attempts.

Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)

- **Iran Publicly Signals Readiness** — Iranian commanders are touting nationwide aviation preparedness and upgraded munitions while admitting

Mossad-trained Iranians carried out past assassinations. The regime is projecting strength externally while executing internally out of fear. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**

- **Jordan Corridor Chatter** — Iraqi and Yemeni militia messaging again references transit routes toward the Jordan Valley as Israel accelerates eastern defenses.

Diplomatic & Legal

- **ISF Pressure Hardens** — U.S. officials are telling Europeans bluntly: no troops, no complaints about the IDF in Gaza. This conditionality sharpens near-term friction as Phase II talk collides with Israel's hostage and disarmament red lines.
- **Ireland Tests the Wedge** — Dublin reiterated that a settlement-goods ban is coming, just “not yet” and “narrowly scoped.” This is a trial balloon for lawfare-by-commerce likely to expand under NGO pressure.

Frontline & Security

- **Potential Sydney Hanukkah Attack** — Australian police are responding to reports of a shooting tied to a Hanukkah event at Bondi Beach; details remain fluid. Regardless of outcome, it reinforces the pattern of diaspora Jewish events as near-term targets requiring heightened security.

Home Front & Politics

- **Draft Clock Keeps Ticking** — Coalition hints about alternative service tracks continue, but reserve fatigue and operational tempo mean the window for symbolic fixes is closing fast. Expect pressure to convert talk into binding legislation within weeks.

Today's Takeaways

1. **Gaza is being governed by force, not process.** Senior Hamas figures engaged in rearmament are being removed, and the Yellow Line is becoming a border because Israel is acting like it is one.
2. **The northern clock is ticking audibly.** Storm cover, Radwan redeployments, and U.S. warnings about Dahieh and the Bekaa mean any Hezbollah miscalculation will trigger decisive escalation, not gradual signaling.
3. **Jewish visibility itself is under attack.** When people are shot at for lighting Hanukkah candles in Sydney, it confirms what Jews already know: this is not about borders or policy; it is about Jews insisting on existing in public.

Tonight, we light candles.

We light them not because the darkness is gone, but because it isn't.

We light them because Jews have always answered violence with continuity.

We light them knowing that protection of Jewish life—here and abroad—is not symbolism. It is duty.

Yehi ratzon that the wounded find healing, the threatened find protection, and that light—quiet, stubborn, and unextinguishable—continues to outlast those who hate it.

Chag urim sameach.

We will keep the watch.

— **Uri Zehavi** · *Intelligence Editor*

With **Modi Zehavi** · *Data + Research Analyst*

P.S. If you know someone who still thinks this is “just a ceasefire” or “just overseas,” forward this. Candles don’t light themselves.

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ABOUT MITZPE INSTITUTE

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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