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READER EDITION

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ISRAEL BRIEF

# Tuesday, December 16

*Enforcement tightens as ceasefire talk drifts and the diaspora absorbs the blowback.*

◇ URIEL ZEHAVER

**THE BOTTOM LINE** Europe's institutional theater is losing relevance as bilateral realism grows. Israel should keep bypassing performative venues, deepen ties with serious partners, and treat lawfare as a cost of doing business—not a veto. Defense, energy, and technology corridors matter more than resolutions and boycotts. When values are contested, outcomes decide—Israel should keep choosing partners who deliver them.

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**I**SRAEL’S posture today is bifurcated. On the ground, enforcement is tight: Borders are hardened. Enemy commanders are being removed. “Rebuild” itself is being treated as a violation—though, unfortunately, Israel seems to be getting stuck with the bill. In the diplomatic world, however, language is loosening: Ceasefires are being “checked.” Stabilization is being “discussed.” And, frankly, responsibility is being blurred.

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Abroad, the cost of that blur is not theoretical. Jewish visibility is being punished in real time, from Sydney to Amsterdam and New York—as narrative permissions turn into operational violence.

Here is the situation in ninety seconds.

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## Flash Brief

- **Gaza:** IDF continues the long slog of enforcement along the Rafah Yellow Line, dismantling Hamas infrastructure and eliminating imminent threats despite ceasefire optics. *See The War Today.*
- **Hamas Leadership:** Senior commander Ra'ad Sa'ad killed while tied to weapons restoration, triggering U.S. “violation review” language rather than operational pushback. *See The War Today.*
- **Northern Front:** Lebanon showcases staged “disarmament” while Hezbollah rebuilds south of the Litani under diplomatic cover. *See Developments to Watch.*
- **Judicial Front:** High Court restricts police ID-check authorities as internal security demands expand. *See Inside Israel.*
- **Diaspora:** Antisemitic mass-casualty attack in Sydney and assaults in New York accelerate global Jewish-site threat posture. *See Israel and the World.*
- **United States:** Washington affirms alliance strength while signaling pressure to preserve ceasefire optics over enforcement reality. *See Israel and the World.*

**R**EAD together, these signals show a familiar pattern. Israel is enforcing control, while others seem to prefer chaos as they attempt to convert enforcement into a diplomatic inconvenience. Hamas and Hezbollah are exploiting that gap, betting that international patience with Israeli action will run out before their own capabilities do.

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## The War Today

Familiar Script: Hamas Rearms, IDF Enforces, Washington Complains

The ceasefire remains in name only. Not really a surprise. Golani forces (under the 143rd Division) have operated for weeks along the eastern Rafah Yellow Line, dismantling above- and below-ground infrastructure, locating AK-47s, RPG rockets, and Hamas surveillance cameras, and eliminating dozens of terrorists moving through tunnel routes that posed immediate danger to troops. Parallel to that tactical grind, the IDF's elimination of Ra'ad Sa'ad—described as a senior Hamas commander tied to weapons restoration/production—triggered overt U.S. pushback, with reports that the White House rebuked Netanyahu and framed the strike as a ceasefire violation undermining Trump's role as broker. Trump publicly rejected “friction” reporting and said the U.S.

is “checking” whether Israel violated the ceasefire, while Hamas’s political leadership continued doing what it always does: rejecting disarmament and treating any “deal” as staging ground for the next round—into the analytic question of whether the ceasefire is being used to reduce violence or to preserve Hamas’s gun monopoly.

#### ASSESSMENT

*The ceasefire isn’t a permission slip for Hamas to rebuild. Rafah’s Yellow Line activity continuously shows how Israel is converting that line into controlled space—find the cameras, pull the RPGs, kill the tunnel movers, and delete the “imminent threat” before it becomes a headline. Washington wants the optics of “peace achieved,” Hamas wants the physical reality of “armed and intact,” and Israel is choosing to work towards security rather than work off of a press release. The U.S. rebuke matters more as a constraint signal—pressure will mount to stop enforcing precisely when enforcement is working if it’s expedient for DC. Washington’s ‘checking’ language is the opening bid of a constraint campaign: reduce Israeli enforcement so the ceasefire can look ‘real’ on television.*

### Lebanon Performs Disarmament While Hezbollah Rebuilds

Lebanon is running a two-track campaign: public demonstrations of “progress” against Hezbollah, and a private scramble to prevent Israel from concluding that only escalation will change facts on the ground. The Lebanese army escorted a high-profile delegation—including U.S., Saudi, French, and Egyptian ambassadors—through a newly located Hezbollah tunnel and showcased its activity south of the Litani, framing this as Phase I of disarmament with an end-of-year deadline. Lebanese military chief Rodolphe Haykal reportedly briefed visiting diplomats with maps and imagery of staged operations and argued that Israeli strikes and continued Israeli positions on Lebanese soil are the primary obstacles—explicitly tying Phase II of disarmament to Israel halting attacks and withdrawing. At the same time, Israeli officials—speaking through the same diplomatic channel—are warning time is running out, while U.S. officials urge restraint but also signal they may not be able to prevent a larger Israeli operation if Hezbollah is not disarmed. The Lebanese foreign minister publicly called Iran’s influence “extremely negative,” argued Hezbollah’s weapons must be handed to the state, and set a second benchmark: by end-2026, all weapons should be confined to the state across Lebanon—while Iran publicly reaffirmed Hezbollah as a “pillar” and continues treating Lebanon as a franchise.

#### ASSESSMENT

*Lebanon’s army tours and PowerPoints are not meaningless—but they are not decisive. They are an attempt to buy time, retain U.S. involvement, unlock reconstruction money, and delay an Israeli escalation that would embarrass the State and potentially fracture Lebanon internally. Hezbollah’s south-of-Litani presence is not a misunderstanding—it’s the core strategy, and any “disarmament” that depends on Israel stopping strikes first is an inversion of cause and effect. The Lebanese FM’s anti-Iran rhetoric is useful only in that it admits the truth—Hezbollah’s weapons are the engine of instability—but rhetoric does not seize rockets.*

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## Inside Israel

### ID Checks Curtailed, Crime Surges, Judges Stay Busy

Israel's internal security posture is colliding with legal constraint in real time, again. The High Court struck down key parts of police ID-check procedures, ruling that lowering the threshold from "reasonable suspicion" to subjective "concern" enables arbitrary stops and unlawful profiling, and that running names through police databases without suspicion constitutes an unauthorized added policing act that infringes privacy and dignity. The decision cancels two specific procedural clauses and orders police to amend related provisions, limit duration of checks, and avoid database access absent lawful grounds—while explicitly noting disproportionate impact claims regarding Ethiopian Israelis, Arab citizens, and Mizrahi-looking Israelis. This ruling lands as the government is trying to expand internal security capacity amid rising violence and nationalism stress, and as ministers simultaneously signal "more enforcement, fewer illusions" in multiple domains: the same cabinet ecosystem is authorizing funding shifts to strengthen policing and Shin Bet capacity in the Arab sector, and is dealing with escalating incitement on the street in mixed cities.

#### ASSESSMENT

*This is the chronic Israeli governance mismatch. The legal system optimizes for preventing abuse by restricting discretion, while security reality optimizes for speed, friction management, and anticipatory control. In peacetime, you can afford some of this tension. In a long war with a degraded but still active internal threat environment, you are building a bureaucracy of hesitation. The court's intent—prevent discriminatory policing—is laudatory. The operational effect—fewer low-threshold checks and less database visibility—shifts burden onto intelligence-led targeting and reactive response. However, when you look at the meat of the claim, this revolves around the checkpoints at the green line—not some NYPD racial profiling case on a Manhattan sidewalk. What is a defacto border will either become more porous or everyone's passage will become more onerous. The state can't fight a war and a crime wave with a legal doctrine built for Scandinavian calm.*

### Jaffa Tests Governance as Police, Courts, and Money Re-align

Police arrested a senior Islamic figure (deputy head of the Jaffa Islamic Council) after he addressed the Tel Aviv-Jaffa mayor at a rally and referred to Jewish neighbors as "dogs," demanded that religious-Zionist families leave, and framed coexistence as a "dog park" compromise—language designed to delegitimize Jewish presence rather than resolve a dispute. The protest began around a pepper-spray assault on an Arab family (including a pregnant woman who required medical attention), where police say they do not suspect a nationalist motive and describe a roadside confrontation. The victim claims anti-Arab motivation and said the sheikh's arrest was "absurd" while perpetrators were still at large. After rumors spread that yeshivah students attacked an Arab woman, multiple Jews were assaulted on Jaffa streets, and

police later arrested additional Jaffa residents connected to an illegal procession with chants explicitly targeting the Shin Bet and invoking “blood” to “redeem” Jaffa—language that telegraphs confrontation with the state itself. This lands alongside a government decision to divert over NIS 220 million from a broader Arab-sector development plan toward policing and Shin Bet reinforcement (technology, digital integration, specialized units, and weapons-smuggling disruption), framed by Netanyahu, Ben-Gvir, and May Golan as part of a “zero tolerance” strategy to tackle crime and illegal weapons in Arab society—while Arab local leaders and NGOs argue that cutting development money undermines root-cause interventions.

#### ASSESSMENT

*Jaffa is the micro-front where three Israeli problems overlap: (1) mixed-city friction and incitement; (2) the Arab-sector crime crisis; (3) the legitimacy war over who “belongs” where. The government’s money move—shifting funds toward enforcement—will produce results only if it is paired with sustained, local, boring policing (presence, investigations, prosecutions), not intermittent “raid theater.” Meanwhile, street incitement that targets Jews in Jaffa isn’t “protest culture”—it’s a parallel sovereignty narrative. The state’s job is to make that narrative expensive. Arrests for incitement, rapid case-closure on assaults against both Arabs and Jews, and unambiguous enforcement against illegal weapons and violent organizers. Coexistence does not survive on speeches alone.*

#### Kidnapping Incentives Rise as Israel Prices Deals

Israel’s internal-security calculus is shifting from “front lines” to “systems” as the Shin Bet warns that kidnapping risk is rising—inside Israel and abroad—because enemies learned that abducting Israelis “pays,” a point raised by Shin Bet chief David Zini in a cabinet discussion focused on aviation and protective measures rather than as a critique of past hostage deals. Ministers debated the death penalty bill for terrorists and related legislation on prosecuting Nukhba attackers, with a shouting match between Ben-Gvir and Levin that Netanyahu shut down bluntly (“Cease-fire”), as urgency collides with coalition ego and ministerial turf. Separately, the cabinet approved humanitarian assistance for Druze and Christians in Israel’s Syrian buffer/security zone (as a stabilization and influence play). Layered under that: a city-level fight over Tel Aviv–Jaffa’s chief rabbi election, with council members petitioning the High Court to freeze the January 6 vote, claiming the Religious Services Ministry turned “consultation” into a procedural sham by sending names late and without meaningful bios—another example of governance disputes migrating into courtrooms by reflex.

## ASSESSMENT

*Kidnapping risk rising is a problem. Once you negotiate with terrorists and once ransom and prisoner-release logic becomes a demonstrated “success,” it becomes a standing operational plan for every (and there seem to be a lot of them) enemy organization and every freelance cell. Meanwhile, the sovereignty moves (legalizing communities, rebuilding evacuated ones) and stabilization moves (aid to minorities in Syria’s buffer zone) over the last week or so show a state trying to shape terrain and demographics while the legal-political system continues to litigate everything from rabbi elections to policing tools. Israel can absorb many threats; what it cannot afford is blurred authority while those threats compound.*

**Perfect for anyone who hears “stabilization force” and relaxes.**

## Israel and the World

### The Intifada Goes Global—Again

The violence can no longer be dismissed as either episodic or abstract—it is geographic and personal. In Sydney, Jews were massacred for lighting Hanukkah candles. In Amsterdam, anti-Israel demonstrators blocked entrances to a Chanukah concert, threw a smoke device, and tested police tolerance until arrests followed. In New York City last night, visibly Orthodox Jews were physically assaulted on a subway and threatened with death—another reminder that Jewish visibility itself has become the trigger. Authorities worldwide are scrambling to reinforce Jewish sites as copycat risk rises. In the United States, the FBI interdicted an imminent New Year’s Eve bombing plot by a pro-Palestinian extremist cell with assembled IEDs and test detonations already conducted. These are not disconnected “incidents.” They follow years of rhetorical permission—“globalize the intifada,” campus intimidation, street marches—now converting cleanly into violence against Jews in public space.

## ASSESSMENT

*When genocidal slogans are treated as speech, they metastasize into action. India’s Hanukkah alert and Sydney’s ISIS-linked trail show the next threat wave won’t wait for ‘community cohesion’ panels—it will move on schedule. Jews are the first targets, though not the last. Jewish holidays are predictable attack windows. Israel must treat diaspora safety as a strategic theater—intelligence sharing, law-enforcement cooperation, travel guidance, and unapologetic naming of incitement as incitement. Western governments can either enforce their own laws or continue discovering—after the fact—that permissiveness has a body count.*

### Trump’s Middle East: Stability First, Israel Second

Washington remains a critical security partner—but alignment is fraying. The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy elevates regional “stability,” de-escalation, and burden-sharing frameworks that privilege managed calm over decisive outcomes. That logic shows up in Gaza sequencing (stabilization forces before disarmament), in Lebanon (time extensions while Hezbollah “processes” disarmament), and in reflexive caution whenever Israeli enforcement risks

rocking diplomatic optics. President Trump publicly insists relations with Netanyahu are strong, even as the White House rebuked Israel for eliminating a senior Hamas commander during a ceasefire and “reviews” whether enforcement violated U.S. credibility. The message is familiar: Israel may act—but not in ways that disturb Washington’s preferred storyline.

#### ASSESSMENT

*This is more a mismatch than hostility, but it cannot be ignored. Israel fights enemies that optimize for time and rebuild. Washington optimizes for managed risk and photo op calm. The result—especially when Israel insists on disarmament before reconstruction and treats rebuild itself as the violation—is messier than DC would like. Jerusalem should continue leveraging U.S. military cooperation while planning for policy whiplash and conditional patience.*

### Punishment Theater Meets Strategic Hedging

Europe’s split deepens. Governments publicly decry antisemitism and privately tolerate marches that require extraordinary policing to contain. Counterweights are forming elsewhere: The Czech Republic’s new government has floated embassy relocation to Jerusalem. Christian allies show up in numbers at Jewish events when institutions falter. And Israel quietly expands defense diplomacy, including a decade-long, multi-billion-dollar strategic system sale that underscores where trust actually exists. Symbolic condemnation proliferates; practical alignment sorts itself out.

#### ASSESSMENT

*Europe’s institutional theater is losing relevance as bilateral realism grows. Israel should keep bypassing performative venues, deepen ties with serious partners, and treat lawfare as a cost of doing business—not a veto. Defense, energy, and technology corridors matter more than resolutions and boycotts. When values are contested, outcomes decide—Israel should keep choosing partners who deliver them.*

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## Briefly Noted

### Frontline & Security

- **CBS News:** Federal authorities arrested four members of the Turtle Island Liberation Front, a far-left, pro-Palestinian, anti-government group, after disrupting an imminent New Year’s Eve bombing plot in Southern California involving tested IEDs. Political violence is now converging from jihadist networks and the radical left (with smaller spillover on the right), and “pro-Palestine” identity has become a recurring mobilizing banner even when Jews aren’t the explicit target.

### Culture, Religion & Society

- **Ynet:** A three-year-old Haredi boy who speaks only Yiddish was found wandering alone overnight at the Qalandia bus terminal near Ramallah after apparently being left on a bus. Fortunately, this one had a good outcome. Routine civilian mistakes can become immediate security incidents in contested space—being in the wrong part of Judea and Samaria can be fatally unforgiving.

### Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- **Israel National News:** Exiled Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad is reportedly living comfortably in Moscow, studying ophthalmology and planning to treat wealthy clients while barred from political activity. The Assad story seems like it ends not with accountability but with asylum and amnesia.

### Culture, Religion & Society

- **Jerusalem Post:** The Aleh disability care center in Bnei Brak reopened after an Iranian missile strike, unveiling a Hanukkah menorah forged from fragments of the missile that demolished it. Israel keeps converting instruments of terror into symbols of continuity—a national reflex also embodied by artists like Yaron Bob, who turns Kassam rockets into roses instead of relics of fear.

### Economy, Tech & Infrastructure

- **Globes:** The U.S. has blocked American missiles from being integrated into Elbit's EuroPULS launchers, citing technology-leak concerns and potentially leaving Germany with unusable systems. "Allied cooperation" ends quickly when defense exports collide with U.S. commercial dominance, and Israel's arms industry is learning where partnership stops.

### Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- **Ynet:** The ICC rejected Israel's appeal by a narrow 3–2 vote, keeping arrest warrants against Netanyahu and Gallant in force despite Israel's independent judiciary. The court has formalized lawfare as a tool against democratic states engaged in self-defense.

### Culture, Religion & Society

- **Times of Israel:** Plans advanced for a major visitor and security center at the Mount of Olives cemetery, drawing claims it is a "right-wing settler project." Apparently, Jewish history, burial, and security in Jerusalem are now just provocation—while 3,000 years of continuity apparently require activist permission.

### Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- **Jerusalem Post:** Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese visited Ahmed al-Ahmed, the hero wounded while disarming a Bondi Beach terrorist, and praised national unity. Western leaders increasingly default to unity

optics while sidestepping explicit moral clarity about antisemitic terror—and Jews are expected to understand the difference quietly.

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## Developments to Watch

### Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)

- **LAF tunnel tour diplomacy** — The Lebanese army escorted a U.S./Saudi/French/Egyptian delegation through a “found” Hezbollah tunnel while briefing “Phase I disarmament” progress south of the Litani. This is Beirut trying to buy time and prevent Israel from changing the facts on the ground. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**
- **Phase II tied to Israeli restraint** — Lebanese commander Rodolphe Haykal reportedly argued that Israeli strikes and IDF positions are the key “obstacles,” explicitly linking Phase II disarmament to Israel halting attacks and withdrawing. That inversion is the tell: Lebanon wants the pressure lifted before Hezbollah’s guns are actually seized.
- **ISIS activity in Idlib lane** — ISIS claimed an attack on a Syrian government patrol near Maarrat al-Numan, killing four and wounding another. The jihadist ecosystem is still alive inside “re-stabilized” Syria, raising the risk of spillover and opportunistic attacks as regional attention shifts north.

### Gaza & Southern Theater

- **Washington tests “ceasefire violation” framing** — The White House reportedly rebuked Netanyahu over the Ra’ad Sa’ad strike and framed it as undermining Trump’s broker credibility; Trump now says the U.S. is “checking” for violations. The near-term risk is not a sudden rupture—it’s creeping pressure to stop enforcement precisely when enforcement is doing its job.

### Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)

- **ISIS flag and prior intel interest** — An ISIS flag was reportedly found in the attackers’ vehicle in Sydney, and ASIO reportedly investigated Naveed Akram years ago over suspected ISIS-cell ties. “We had concerns” after the fact is not a helpful statement.
- **Philippines travel raises questions** — The Bondi attackers reportedly visited areas in the Philippines where ISIS training camps exist. If true, this raises an uncomfortable operational question for allies: why known subjects can still travel, train, and return without tight interdiction.

### Diplomatic & Legal

- **Australia rejects linkage; Jews eat the risk** — Albanese says the Sydney massacre has “nothing to do” with recognizing a Palestinian state and rejects Netanyahu’s linkage, while also floating tougher gun-law constraints.

- **India Hanukkah alert expands** — Indian intelligence reportedly issued a high-level alert for possible terror targeting Jewish institutions over Hanukkah, with increased security at specific sites. That's not "community safety"—it's a global threat posture.

#### Home Front & Politics

- **Kidnapping risk rising** — Shin Bet chief David Zini reportedly told ministers kidnapping risk has risen and will keep rising because enemies learned Israel pays for hostages. More abduction attempts around the periphery (travel, transit, border-adjacent zones) unless disruption gets more aggressive.
- **Prison flashpoint warning** — Israel Prison Service warned it is "on the verge" of an incident as terrorist inmates are "desperate." Prison incidents tend to synchronize with external incitement—especially in a week of elevated emotion and crowded public events.

The Maccabees did not ask for international recognition. They did not negotiate acceptable levels of Jewish practice. They did not wait for calm to defend themselves.

They refused the terms.

That refusal echoes now. In Rafah, where enforcement continues despite ceasefire theater. In the north, where deadlines are approaching regardless of speeches. Abroad, where Jews are being reminded that hiding has never bought safety.

Jews light candles because retreat has never worked — and because survival has always required clarity before comfort.

— *Uri Zehavi · Intelligence Editor With Modi Zehavi · Data + Research Analyst*

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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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