



Forensic intelligence for those who act.

READER EDITION

January 15, 2026

ISRAEL BRIEF

Thursday, January 15

Israel buys hours while Tehran sells uncertainty. Hamas tests the line, and the West tries to turn committees into control.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

THE BOTTOM LINE This is “Controlled Surrender” in real time: build a protected category for anti-Zionist aggression, then pretend it’s just “politics,” while Jewish communal life gets managed as a provocation problem. Once “genocide” becomes an accepted litigation tactic, an asylum argument, and a courtroom excuse for vandalism, it stops being rhetoric and becomes infrastructure—permission for intimidation, institutional cowardice, and selective prosecution. The most corrosive part is that the respectable systems—courts, agencies, universities—are teaching that Jews don’t get full protection. That doctrine leads to the neat little hate-meme (the attack on the Haredim) packaged for export and to further acts of violence.

CLASSIFICATION

Reader Edition

DISTRIBUTION

Open · Free to share with attribution

THE map stays contained, but it's twitchy. Iran's strike rumor cycle ran hot, then flipped into an "off-ramp." Modi and I felt the ground move in Be'er Sheva this morning — a 4.2 quake in the Dead Sea/South Negev area — and our first thought wasn't "earthquake." The IDF is tracking Iran closely and says civilian instructions remain unchanged for now; the rest of the noise is just noise.

IN THIS EDITION

Flash Brief	3
The War Today	3
Iran's Strike Window Opens, Then Whipsaws Into An Off-Ramp	3
Rafah Breach And Ready Rockets Expose The "Technocrats" Illusion . .	4
Inside Israel	5
Leak Probe Reaches PMO As Public Trust Keeps Sliding	5
Opposition Blocs Cannibalize Themselves While Netanyahu Watches . .	6
Women Surge Into Combat As The IDF Hard-Codes "People" As The Core	6
Israel and the World	7
IRGC Designation Pressure Rises As Tehran Outsources Violence	7
New Foothold Draws OIC Condemnations And Al-Shabab Threats	8
Western Systems Build An Anti-Zionist Exception To Law And Protection	8
Briefly Noted	9
Diplomacy & Geopolitics	9
Frontline & Security	9
Culture, Religion & Society	9
Developments to Watch	10
Judea & Samaria	10
Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)	10
Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)	10
Diplomatic & Legal	11
Home Front & Politics	11

Here's the dashboard.

Flash Brief

- **Iran Clock:** U.S. evacuation moves and airspace closures flip into a pause; Israel tracks fallout. *See The War Today.*
- **Gaza Line:** Six-man cell attacks near Rafah; rockets found ready for launch; searches continue. *See The War Today.*
- **Northern Front:** Hezbollah ties its restraint to Tehran's survival; Beirut warns of internal chaos. *See The War Today.*
- **Inside Israel:** Leak probe reaches senior PMO staff; polling shows trust falling across blocs. *See Inside Israel.*
- **Diaspora & Lawfare:** Genocide language becomes paperwork, court strategy, and policing loophole across the West. *See Israel and the World.*
- **Home Front:** Earthquake hits Dead Sea and the Negev; IDF says civilian instructions stay unchanged. *See Developments to Watch.*
- **Red Sea & Horn of Africa:** Somaliland recognition adds a maritime lever and a target list. *See Israel and the World.*

B ELLOW: Gaza contact math, Iran timing whiplash, internal trust breaks, and Western pressure tools.

London note: I'll be in town through the 22nd (so long as flights are still going out of Tel Aviv this afternoon). A couple of evenings remain open if a small, off-the-record conversation would be useful.

The combined picture is simple: enemies keep proving they still have hands on triggers while outsiders keep offering frameworks as if that will disarm anyone. Iran's chaos exports outward by default—which means Israel's job is to separate signal from theater without becoming numb to either.

The War Today

Iran's Strike Window Opens, Then Whipsaws Into An Off-Ramp

Across the region, force posture screamed “incoming” and then abruptly shifted into ambiguity. U.S. non-essential personnel were ordered out of key hubs, personnel were redistributed away from exposed sites, and naval/air assets repositioned as Washington reviewed options ranging from cyber to strikes on regime security organs and potentially additional strategic targets. Iran answered with explicit threat signaling—warning regional states their U.S. bases would be hit if Washington strikes—and ramped readiness messaging as aerial and maritime movement intensified, navigation disruption reports spread, and civil aviation lanes briefly tightened via short-duration airspace restrictions before reopening. In Israel, defensive posture visibly expanded.

Air-defense batteries were deployed across multiple population and strategic corridors. Multiple municipalities moved to open shelters while stressing that formal Home Front guidance had not changed. Airlines began canceling flights and preparing staff evacuations. And senior Israeli messaging signaled readiness for multi-day exchanges if Tehran retaliates. The political temperature spiked further with a serious internal-security rupture: an active-duty IDF soldier was arrested on suspicion of spying for Iran—including transferring imagery and material tied to sensitive sites and weapons-related information for money. Meanwhile in Lebanon, Hezbollah warned the Lebanese state that pressing disarmament north of the Litani would mean chaos and civil war—while simultaneously claiming it would not fight the army (classic militia logic for we’ll burn the house down, but *sorta* politely). Lebanese leadership is still talking about expanding state monopoly on arms, but a senior Lebanese official publicly stating Israel has the right to keep striking until Hezbollah is fully disarmed triggered immediate pro-Hezbollah backlash, underlining that Beirut’s “sovereignty” remains conditional on Hezbollah’s permission.

ASSESSMENT

This is what pre-strike weather looks like when everyone wants “decisive” outcomes but nobody wants to pay the retaliation bill up front. Evacuations. Dispersals. Alerts. Followed by a rhetorical off-ramp the moment Tehran offers even a thin excuse (“killings stopped,” “no executions”) to slow the clock. Tehran’s goal is not to convince anyone. It wants to buy hours, fracture coalition will, and keep enough uncertainty in the air that markets and ministries do its deterrence for it—in the hopes it can find a way to cling to power. It may yet survive this cycle. However, the writing is on the wall for the regime—without massive economic improvements (highly unlikely), in a year or two the regime will likely fall of its own accord. Israel’s posture—distributed air defense, shelter readiness, aviation contingency planning—is the correct assumption set. But the espionage arrest is the warning flare: Iran doesn’t only shoot missiles; it hunts access, imagery, and routines, and it will spend cheap money to turn OPSEC into a punchline. In Lebanon, Hezbollah’s civil-war threat is a confession that “state disarmament” is merely a slogan. When even Lebanese officials say the strikes are justified until disarmament is real, that is the closest thing to regional permission you’ll ever get—use it.

Rafah Breach And Ready Rockets Expose The “Technocrats” Illusion

Hamas ran a coordinated contact attempt near the Yellow Line in the Rafah-Khan Younis sector. A six-man cell crossed, opened fire on troops, and appears to have carried explosive devices as part of a planned attack. Armored forces shelled the position—the exchange ran roughly an hour. Two soldiers were lightly wounded by shrapnel, and follow-on searches confirmed all six armed terrorists were killed. The IDF is assessing that this was not a one-off and is still checking whether any additional terrorists slipped away via undiscovered subterranean routes. In parallel, forces operating in Gaza located additional launch capability already staged for fire—an east-of-line launcher

loaded with a rocket (in the north), plus a multi-barrel launcher and a separate rocket positioned (in the south). All now mercifully dismantled. Washington launched some “Phase Two” branding. A 15-member Palestinian technocratic committee is being named to run day-to-day governance functions under a “Peace Council” structure, with the international force still unresolved. U.S. officials also said they intend to engage Hamas on demilitarization and discuss an amnesty framework with Israel. The one hard fact refusing to move with the PowerPoint is Ran Gvili, *z”l*. His remains have not been returned, and his family says the new committee announcements will not alter the demand: the Rafah crossing stays closed, and the IDF will not withdraw under any model that leaves Hamas armed. Separately, an IDF reserve soldier was severely injured in northern Gaza by an accidental discharge.

ASSESSMENT

This is Hamas’s modus operandi... probe the line with an attack package, keep rockets staged, then let foreigners re-label the ecosystem as “governance” so the rearm cycle can run with donor cover. A technocratic committee that cannot confiscate rifles is camouflage for terrorists. The amnesty talk is worse than naïve—it is an incentive signal dressed up as conflict resolution, and Hamas will (unfortunately) rightly read it as proof that endurance plus theatrics eventually wins concessions. Israel’s only sane posture is to treat “demilitarization” as a physical program—cashflow strangulation, tunnel attrition, weapons seizure, commander removal—and to keep the hostage issue as a hard gate on movement and legitimacy. If Phase Two becomes a mechanism that pressures Israel to trade control for committees, it will end the way Gaza mechanisms always end: with another “surprising” incident that was rehearsed in plain sight.

Inside Israel

Leak Probe Reaches PMO As Public Trust Keeps Sliding

A classified-document leak investigation has climbed into Israel’s top executive office. The former chief of staff has been summoned to explain how the original military probe into the leak was launched and managed. Police and court proceedings laid out suspicion that a senior aide to the prime minister interfered with the IDF investigation through a late-night meeting in the Kirya’s parking lot—presenting a list of names and signaling the probe could be “switched off.” Investigators sought to obtain raw, unaired materials from a televised interview with a key figure in the affair, and a magistrate sharply questioned the timeline—why caution-status questioning didn’t happen immediately after the interview, and why detentions and re-questioning happened in that sequence. The judge openly mocked the idea that a minor aide “holding phones” is suddenly a criminal mastermind. Overlay that with fresh public sentiment data on “Qatargate.” A clear majority describe the affair as serious, nearly half say the prime minister should be investigated for personal involvement tied to his close circle, and a majority of Israelis report they do not trust the government—numbers that spike even higher among Arab citizens and split sharply by political camp.

ASSESSMENT

Israel is fighting Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah—and simultaneously running a domestic mini-series about whether the state can protect secrets, enforce procedures, and keep its own senior staff from treating investigations like a dimmer switch. The damage is the slow habituation of the public to the idea that everything is factional theater, including national security. When trust collapses, two things happen: (1) people stop listening to instructions when you actually need them to listen, and (2) adversaries get cheaper influence routes—money, kompromat, and “helpful” leaks start to look like normal politics. If you want judicial reform and stronger elected authority, you cannot run a government that looks like it needs a court warrant to search its own filing cabinets.

Opposition Blocs Cannibalize Themselves While Netanyahu Watches

The opposition’s internal decay got a new, ugly demonstration: a centrist faction launched campaign ads insisting a “broad Zionist consensus” government must exclude both Arab parties and the far-right—explicitly equating Ra’am with Ben-Gvir and warning against any coalition reliant on Arab votes during wartime. The backlash was immediate and brutal from within the opposition. Rival leaders called it hypocritical (given recent governing history that included Ra’am support), argued the messaging simply serves Netanyahu by shrinking the opposition’s coalition math, and accused the campaign of laundering exclusion as “security.” Arab lawmakers responded that they are citizens by right, not by favor, and warned that delegitimization only strengthens the hard right. The political subtext is not very subtle. Polling has the party struggling to clear the electoral threshold, and senior opposition figures have urged its leader to quit the race. In that context, an anti-Arab pivot reads less like principle and more like a flare to remain relevant—or to keep the option open to join Netanyahu later under the banner of “isolating extremists.”

ASSESSMENT

Even if it was done in good faith, the optics are insane. This is like cutting your own parachute to prove you’re not afraid of heights. The messaging of this hands Netanyahu a gift: fewer viable paths to replace him. Meanwhile, Ra’am gets to play the part of an aggrieved actor for the cameras. The only “broad consensus” being built here is consensus that politics is a dead end and the state will be saved by whoever shouts loudest. That is not strategy.

Women Surge Into Combat As The IDF Hard-Codes “People” As The Core

Israel is widening who carries the load, and it is debating how visibly it punishes those who try to kill it. New IDF data show female combat service reached record highs in 2025—roughly 8,500 women in combat roles, more than double 2020 levels and almost ten times what they were in 2013. Alongside a steep rise in women’s share of the overall combat force to about one-fifth and a wartime jump in women’s presence in combat reserves to unprecedented levels. Attrition rates in border infantry appear similar for men and women, hundreds of women have crossed into enemy territory in operational activity, and the officer corps now includes multiple female battalion commanders. Religious women are a major driver: enlistment climbed to about 4,000 in 2025, many choosing the army over exemptions or civilian service, with

new frameworks expanding religious women into combat and intelligence tracks—and even pathways for former civilian-service women to volunteer into reserve roles aligned with professional skills. At the same time, the IDF chief is building a new 2026–2030 multi-year roadmap explicitly framed around lessons from the October 7 reviews—named “Hoshen,” structured as 12 major “stones” each led by a major general, with a set timeline to conclude staff work by Pesach—placing “People” first, with an organized program for treatment, development, recognition, and compensation of conscripts, career personnel, reservists, and IDF employees.

ASSESSMENT

Israel is quietly answering the manpower crisis by broadening the service base and professionalizing how the state treats the people who show up. Now, if only they could resolve the draft crisis vis-a-vis the Haredim. The female combat surge—especially among religious women—exposes the moral fraud of any camp that demands permanent exemptions while others volunteer into the hardest jobs. “Hoshen” gets the doctrine right by placing “People” as the first stone. Without incentives, rehab, and long-term retention, force design is nearly useless.

Israel and the World

IRGC Designation Pressure Rises As Tehran Outsources Violence

With Iran’s internal crackdown still driving the timetable, regional capitals are trying to manage escalation risk without granting Tehran a free murder window. Israeli and Arab officials have urged Washington to delay large-scale strikes until the regime is further stretched—warning that premature action may fail to topple the system and could even unify Iranians *just enough*. They pushed alternative destabilization tools—helping Iranians bypass the communications choke, tightening economic pressure, cyber action, and narrower strikes aimed at senior regime figures tied to repression. Tehran answered by warnings that regional states hosting American bases would be hit if the U.S. attacks—plus diplomatic messaging to the U.N. blaming Washington and Israel for internal bloodshed. In Europe, Jerusalem pressed a key holdout to back formal terrorist designation of the IRGC—explicitly tying it to the regime’s regional terror architecture and to the domestic repression now running openly under blackout conditions. Meanwhile, Iranian external operations led to arrests in Iraq—coordinated with Australia and Sweden—targeting leaders of major criminal networks used as cutouts for Iran-backed attacks on Jewish and Israeli targets.

ASSESSMENT

The Iran issue is no longer “merely” its nuclear program and terror proxies. Debating whether to strike now or later misses the operational point. Tehran is running active measures across the world, not just its own soil—arsons, intimidation, hit-planning, and criminal outsourcing—because it is cheaper than missiles and harder to deter with air defense. If Europe (looking at you, Westminster) still can’t bring itself to label the IRGC what it is, it will keep treating Iran’s overseas violence as “organized crime” instead of state-directed war.

New Foothold Draws OIC Condemnations And Al-Shabab Threats

Israel's recognition of Somaliland some three weeks ago has detonated a new variable in the Horn of Africa—with voices of displeasure building their chorus. Somaliland's leadership is pitching the move as a mutually beneficial partnership—trade, investment, technology, and openly discussed defense cooperation—while signaling interest in joining normalization frameworks, and Israel gains a strategic perch along a major maritime corridor near Yemen that can support monitoring and response against Houthi disruption. Islamist actors are already threatening violence and framing the relationship as a rallying cry. Regional bodies condemned the recognition. Somalia rejected it as a sovereignty violation. And local power politics spun up fast—including Somalia annulling security and defense arrangements with a Gulf partner tied to Somaliland's port investments. Great-power and regional rivals are now pricing the move—Turkey, China, and Gulf states—because a small footprint in the right geography can impose disproportionate consequences on shipping, basing competition, and proxy warfare lanes.

ASSESSMENT

Somaliland is the kind of move that looks like a diplomatic footnote until it isn't. The opportunity is a strategic corridor lever, plus a state-level partner that wants legitimacy and protection. The danger is that extremists will treat it as a recruitment poster, rivals will treat it as a reason to meddle, and the international system will treat it as a pretext to smother Israel with more, if such a thing were possible, lawfare.

Western Systems Build An Anti-Zionist Exception To Law And Protection

In Britain, an Arab-Israeli activist was granted asylum on the claim he would face persecution in “genocidal/apartheid” Israel due to his activism—turning a political libel into an immigration finding with bureaucratic permanence. In the U.S., a House committee referred a major Islamist civil-rights organization's California branch to the IRS over allegations of misused federal funds, political activity inconsistent with tax-exempt status, and institutional support for unlawful campus encampments—while the organization's public defense leaned on genocide language and “silencing” claims. On campus, defense arguments in a Stanford vandalism case tried to justify criminal acts as morally necessary due to “genocide,” explicitly seeking jury sympathy and normalizing lawlessness as virtue. At the state level, a Washington bill sought to bar police from training with foreign militaries and security services—insisted to be neutral, but challenged in hearing as a practical boycott of Israeli counterterrorism and de-escalation know-how. In New York, the city's new governing tone is the same split-screen: the mayor, when pressed, condemns obvious antisemitism, but dodges the antisemitism question when pro-terror or anti-Israel targeting hits Jewish institutions—while also stripping the city's prior antisemitism framework. In parallel, the state attorney general ordered a Zionist activist group to halt “violence” activity under threat of major fines, a move the group calls selective enforcement in an environment where pro-Hamas street intimidation keeps finding daylight. In Europe, Israeli haredim were attacked near the Poland-Ukraine border by

an assailant who forced open doors, threw their belongings, and shouted that “even in Israel they hate you.”

ASSESSMENT

This is “Controlled Surrender” in real time: build a protected category for anti-Zionist aggression, then pretend it’s just “politics,” while Jewish communal life gets managed as a provocation problem. Once “genocide” becomes an accepted litigation tactic, an asylum argument, and a courtroom excuse for vandalism, it stops being rhetoric and becomes infrastructure—permission for intimidation, institutional cowardice, and selective prosecution. The most corrosive part is that the respectable systems—courts, agencies, universities—are teaching that Jews don’t get full protection. That doctrine leads to the neat little hate-meme (the attack on the Haredim) packaged for export and to further acts of violence.

Briefly Noted

Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- **Jerusalem Post:** Iranians fled the brutal regime into Turkey via the Kapikoy border as Tehran’s crackdown intensified and foreign governments urged citizens to leave Iran.
- **Israel National News:** Saudi Arabia announced it will not allow its territory or airspace to be used for any attack on Iran. Riyadh is hedging—seeking insulation from retaliation while preserving leverage with Washington and Tehran alike.
- **Times of Israel:** Analysts assess Iran’s regime is unlikely to collapse imminently despite nationwide protests, even as it lacks credible solutions to economic and governance failure. This locks Tehran into repression-plus-deterrence mode, raising the odds of external escalation to change the subject, as they chase away their [inevitable] fall [in the next year or two].
- **Israel National News:** Washington is hardening entry controls, as the U.S. freezes visa processing from 75 countries while reassessing immigration rules tied to welfare eligibility.

Frontline & Security

- **Jerusalem Post:** U.S.-backed planning for a post-Hamas Gaza administration shows partial movement, with technocratic names circulating while the stabilization force remains undefined. Committees are easier than coercion, and disarmament remains the real bottleneck.

Culture, Religion & Society

- **Algemeiner:** A former Yale Law School lecturer dismissed Iranian protests as “Zionist-backed” and justified regime repression. This is academic laundering of authoritarian violence—proof that anti-Zionism reliably curdles into apologetics for tyranny.

Developments to Watch

Judea & Samaria

- **Wrong Turn Into Area A** — Two Israeli civilians mistakenly entered the village of Raba; forces located them and escorted them out. This is how kidnappings start: bad navigation (just use Waze!) meets bad judgment plus a hostile village that doesn't need an excuse.
- **Weapon Recovered After Nablus Attack** — Shin Bet-directed forces found the shooter's weapon overnight in the Nablus area, plus a magazine and extra ammunition.

Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)

- **Hezbollah Sets An "Existential" Trigger** — Hezbollah refused to guarantee it will stay out if Iran is struck, framing action as conditional on Tehran facing an "existential" hit.
- **Lebanon Tightens Checkpoints, Talks Clash Risk** — A Lebanese military source claims checkpoints were reinforced to prevent weapons transfers north of the Litani, with confiscations ongoing, while warning clashes could occur if there is "no alternative" to UNIFIL. Translation: Beirut wants credit for paperwork while the militia still runs the country.

Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)

- **Short-Duration Airspace Shutdowns** — Iran issued a short NOTAM closing its airspace except pre-approved international flights; Iraqi and Iranian skies were cleared as aircraft rerouted. This is the region reducing surprise friction before something kinetic—or theatrically "almost kinetic."
- **Sonic Booms Over Basra Corridor** — Iraqi locals reported sonic booms and "balls of light," with reports of jets of unknown origin over Basra near the Iranian border. Fog is part of the strategy—it keeps everyone guessing while the next moves are staged.
- **Carrier Reposition Signals Intent** — A U.S. carrier strike group is being repositioned from the South China Sea toward CENTCOM's dominion, even as strike talk whipsaws. When assets move, it means the option didn't die—someone just asked for better odds. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**
- **IRGC Highest Alert, Navigation Disruptions** — IRGC-affiliated reporting claims the Guard is at maximum alert while heavy GPS interference is reported across parts of Iran and Iraq.
- **Starlink Free, Countermeasures Next** — Starlink says service has been activated for free in Iran after disruption, while Tehran continues hunting satellite links.

Diplomatic & Legal

- **UN Security Council Engagement Push** — The U.S. is seeking an emergency UNSC meeting on Iran as top-level calls continue between Washington and Jerusalem. Tehran will try to turn this into a procedural shield since the West loves meetings that replace action.

Home Front & Politics

- **Quiet Mobilization And Civil Defense Tweaks** — Reports say Order 8 emergency call-ups have begun circulating, while municipalities open shelters ahead of any formal instruction change. Even the ambulance service is changing its siren tone to one that less resembles the air raid sirens—because in a high-alert country, confusion is also a threat.

The tempo of uncertainty, rather than a simple battlefield action, is what shifted in the last twenty-four hours. Tehran and Washington demonstrated how easily the region can be pushed to the brink by movement, rumors, and short-notice aviation directives — then pulled back without anyone publicly admitting what, if anything, changed. Gaza’s “Phase Two” branding is already colliding with the only metric that matters: guns and hostages still decide outcomes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Uriel Zehavi

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR · MITZPE INSTITUTE

Uriel Zehavi is the executive director of Mitzpe Institute, where he writes the daily Israel Brief and co-directs its Institutional Intelligence practice with Modi Zehavi. He is the author of four books from Mitzpe Press and advises Israeli and allied clients on strategic communications for Western audiences.



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.

PASSED ALONG TO YOU?

The daily Israel Brief is free at mitzpe.org. The operational layer — Closed Dossiers, Vantage, and Watchwords — is members-only. Become a member, gift a membership, or book a briefing at mitzpe.org.

Reader Edition · Free to share with attribution to Mitzpe Institute.