



Forensic intelligence for those who act.

READER EDITION

January 16, 2026

ISRAEL BRIEF

Friday, January 16

Trump advances “technocratic” rollout while Hamas keeps guns, cashflow, and a missing Israeli underground. Washington buys optionality on Iran. Israel’s fronts keep getting tested anyway.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

THE BOTTOM LINE Humanitarian language becomes personal-sanctions machinery and civil-rights enforcement becomes a way to neutralize Jewish defense while pro-Hamas intimidation gets processed as “activism.” Fueling it all, universities keep laundering anti-Zionism as the enlightened Jewish voice by hosting it under the “Jewish left” label—because nothing says intellectual integrity like pretending the heirs of Ben-Gurion and Rabin are the same thing as IfNotNow cosplay. The “Judea and Samaria” state-law push is the mirror image: terminology warfare as a sovereignty wedge, designed to build U.S. domestic facts the way Israel’s enemies build international bureaucratic facts. The throughline is selective enforcement—rules for Jews, therapy for those targeting Jews—and Israel should treat it as a strategic arena, not a PR irritation.

CLASSIFICATION

Reader Edition

DISTRIBUTION

Open · Free to share with attribution

IN THIS EDITION

Flash Brief	3
The War Today	3
Gaza “Technocrats” Launch As Hamas Keeps Guns And Leverage	3
Lebanon And Samaria Heat While Washington Delays Iran Decision . .	4
Inside Israel	5
Haredi Conscription Fight Escalates Into Violence, Payoffs, and Opposition Theater	5
Frontier Agriculture Rebrands as Internal Security Infrastructure . . .	6
Quake Jolt and “DEFCON” Noise Expose Home-Front Psychology	6
Israel and the World	7
Washington Postures, Region Denies, Tehran Sells Confusion	7
Syria’s Druze Seek Israeli Umbrella as Jihadists Reprice Borders	8
“Jewish Left” Branding, Boycotts, and Selective Enforcement Tighten the Noose	9
Briefly Noted	10
Diplomacy & Geopolitics	10
Economy, Tech & Infrastructure	10
Domestic & Law	11
Developments to Watch	11
Judea & Samaria	11
Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)	11
Gaza & Southern Theater	11
Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)	11
Diplomatic & Legal	12
Home Front & Politics	12

Flash Brief

- **Gaza Committee:** Mediators ignore Ran Gvili z”l and his family; Hamas and Islamic Jihad weapons untouched as Trump moves on.
 - **Yellow Line:** IDF finds launchers and tunnel chambers; troops remove infiltrators approaching positions under strict rules.
 - **Iran Window:** Israel stays on peak alert as U.S. strike option delays amid basing refusals.
 - **Lebanon:** IAF hits Hezbollah storage and underground sites; targeted strike removes operative tied to repeat violations.
 - **Samaria:** Terrorists throw IED and Molotovs at road to base; forces encircle Kafr Malik.
 - **Draft Fight:** Coalition blocks anti-harassment bill; UTJ job shuffle seeks votes as reservists stage counter-event.
 - **Jerusalem:** Police close UNRWA clinic under new ban framework; utilities cutoff and signage removal follow.
-

The War Today

Gaza “Technocrats” Launch As Hamas Keeps Guns And Leverage

The ceasefire’s second phase is being prematurely declared “underway” even as the last Israeli captive in Gaza remains missing in the most basic sense. Intelligence indicates Ran Gvili’s body is held by Islamic Jihad in Hamas-controlled northern Gaza, with identifying details—including names and aerial imagery of the suspected burial site—yet neither Hamas nor Islamic Jihad has produced his remains.

A transitional “technocratic” committee is being rolled out under a Board-of-Peace framework, with a named administrator and additional committee names expected imminently, while Trump signals he will not “hold up” phase advancement over Ran’s return and plans to unveil board membership around the Davos window. Officials are leaning on an International Stabilization Force concept (though it’s still short on anyone willing to disarm the jihadists), talk up local Palestinian “police” as the enforcement layer, and float demilitarization via “decommissioning” heavy weapons—alongside discussion of amnesty ideas.

Back in the real world, the IDF’s operational picture is the opposite of administrative transition. Hamas is using the pause to rearm and entrench, with Israeli troops uncovering suspected tunnel-shaft chambers near outposts, locating multiple ready-to-fire launchers, and continuing to eliminate armed infiltrators who cross into IDF-controlled areas and approach troop positions. Commanders describe strict engagement constraints even when Hamas operatives are visible just beyond separation barriers.

Military assessments describe Hamas retaining a meaningful fighting core (thousands to at least ~10,000 prewar-registered fighters), maintaining deep

tunnel networks and command redundancy, rebuilding weapons workshops in less-damaged central areas, and sustaining itself financially with large cash reserves hidden underground plus systematic monetization of aid flows—taxation layers that generate steady daily revenue, keep salaries moving, and buy social control.

ASSESSMENT

If Hamas cannot—or will not—force Islamic Jihad to hand over a body whose location is being fed to the system, then every promise about “policing,” “demilitarization,” or “good faith” is decorative. Moving the process forward while Ran remains underground hands Hamas a lesson in leverage: stall, blame weather, shuffle excuses, and the ignoramuses will advance the agenda anyway. The “decommissioning” language is surrender-by-synonym—heavy weapons placed “somewhere” under Hamas’s shadow is merely a storage policy for the next round. Gaza doesn’t need another administrator. Gaza needs the confiscation of rifles, interdicted cashflows, and the destruction of its terror tunnel grids.

Lebanon And Samaria Heat While Washington Delays Iran Decision

Israel enters the weekend at peak readiness under an Iran-driven uncertainty cycle in which overnight activation and strike reporting swung toward a delayed—not canceled—U.S. option, with internal U.S. debate focused on delivering a “swift, decisive” blow without triggering a prolonged regional war and with doubts about whether strikes alone topple Tehran. Israeli assessments described postponement dynamics shaped by retaliation risk to Israel and by regional constraints—reported reluctance by key states to enable launch or overflight—while diplomatic drawdowns and travel warnings hardened (including embassy evacuations and public advisories).

Iran and its proxies continued to message deterrence by threatening regional bases and widening target sets, while the Houthis raised readiness, tested missiles in the Red Sea arena, and explicitly threatened any accessible Israeli presence tied to the Horn-of-Africa maritime corridor.

Meanwhile, the IDF struck Hezbollah infrastructure across multiple Lebanese areas, including weapons storage facilities and an underground storage site, and separately targeted a Hezbollah operative in southern Lebanon tied to ongoing violations. In Judea and Samaria, a separate containment action unfolded after terrorists threw an explosive device and Molotov cocktails at a civilian vehicle on a road leading to a military base—fortunately, the device did not detonate and no injuries were reported. Forces closed key routes, brought in disposal and forensic teams, encircled the nearby village, and launched searches.

ASSESSMENT

You cannot “pause the region” just because Washington is debating timelines. You keep Hezbollah’s rebuild lanes fragile, you keep Samaria cordons tight, and you deny every actor the comfortable assumption that Israel is distracted. The regional airspace-and-basing hedging is not moral philosophy—it’s self-preservation dressed up as diplomacy, and it should be priced accordingly in Israel’s planning. Fewer “guaranteed” corridors, more reliance on Israel’s own posture, and no illusions about who absorbs the first wave of retaliation. Readiness is not a hashtag, ceasefire “understandings” are not disarmament, and any perimeter lapse—north, Samaria, or maritime lanes—turns into the kind of “surprise” that only surprises the people who believe in the UN.

Inside Israel

Haredi Conscription Fight Escalates Into Violence, Payoffs, and Opposition Theater

The coalition voted down legislation that would have criminalized harassment and threats against ultra-Orthodox men who enlist—after extremist protesters broke into a parents’ conference for the new Hasmonean Brigade in Bnei Brak and attacked attendees. Despite public condemnation from parts of the defense establishment and opposition figures, there were no reported arrests and little to no public denunciation from senior haredi rabbinic or political leadership.

In parallel, Netanyahu is expected to appoint UTJ’s Yisrael Eichler as deputy communications minister in a move budgeted at NIS 3.5 million and designed to reshuffle Knesset seats—bringing Yitzhak Pindrus back in and, in turn, securing votes to advance the revised conscription bill as marathon committee sessions continue. The government is staring down the end-of-March state budget deadline that would otherwise trigger automatic dissolution and elections.

Against this, reservists and their political patrons staged a counter-pressure event in Jerusalem, with Lapid, Eisenkot, and Bennett appearing alongside reservists framing the draft outline as an evasion law rather than a draft law. Even former committee chair Yuli Edelstein was spotted, a reminder that enforcement mechanisms were once on the table before the haredi parties blew up the arrangement.

Layered over the draft fight is a widening legitimacy brawl about protest culture itself: prominent voices on the right are arguing that parts of the protest ecosystem have normalized disruption, delegitimization rhetoric, and even military refusal as “tools,” blurring the line between civic pressure and coercive breakdown at the exact moment the state’s manpower and cohesion are supposed to be non-negotiable.

ASSESSMENT

When the coalition blocks basic protection for haredi soldiers while simultaneously engineering paid positions to lock in votes for a soft conscription framework, it broadcasts a single message: enforcement is for other people. The opposition's protest line is not wrong on substance—reservists really are carrying a grotesque share of the load—but it's also not a plan. Israel can be sympathetic to religious life and still insist that the state is not a charity that only some pay into.

Frontier Agriculture Rebrands as Internal Security Infrastructure

A veteran Zionist farm-protection organization that began as a response to relentless agricultural harassment and clan crime has now effectively become a national auxiliary capability—built on volunteer presence, rapid mobility, and deterrence in places the state admits it cannot reach fast enough. They've endured repeated invasions, poisonings, fence-cutting, and violent attacks—pushing them to use a mutual-defense model after police complaints were routinely closed as “lack of public interest.”

That same volunteer infrastructure was later operationalized on October 7 into a rapid mobility force: within hours, volunteer off-road drivers were moving forces into the central Negev, and within weeks the framework was formalized into a reserve division model with four battalions, thousands of vehicles, and sustained activity across Gaza, Syria, and Judea and Samaria—reportedly transporting tens of thousands of soldiers over millions of kilometers.

They now warn that Israeli agriculture's long-term survival is no longer self-evident after decades of lowered prestige, farm closures, and policy choices that weaken domestic production in the name of theoretical import-driven savings. Into that already tense space comes explicit ideological targeting: a far-left activist publicly called for the execution of Jordan Valley farmers—prompting a legal appeal to police demanding arrest and indictment on grounds of direct threats and incitement.

ASSESSMENT

Nothing says “healthy politics” like fantasizing about firing squads for people growing food. The volunteer-security story is impressive—and also an indictment. When a Home Front general has to ask a civilian organization to design an emergency mobility concept because the system can't guarantee response to remote communities, it's a big problem. Then add leftist incitement that names individuals and romanticizes execution. The Jordan Valley and the agricultural belt are strategic buffer—this sits directly in the doctrine of Where Israel Must Stand: depth, corridors, the Jordan Valley buffer, and internal security capacity are not optional line-items.

Quake Jolt and “DEFCON” Noise Expose Home-Front Psychology

A 4.2-magnitude earthquake hit the Dead Sea/southern Israel area Thursday morning, triggering Home Front guidance to move into open areas or protected spaces while emergency services reported no injury calls—an ordinary natural event that still lands differently in a country living on alert, where the first instinct is often “incoming” rather than “geology,” especially

as online rumor cycles push misleading “DEFCON” claims that imply an official, public, regional war-readiness level that does not exist.

In Jerusalem, the state moved from rhetoric to enforcement against UNRWA infrastructure: police shuttered a UNRWA health clinic in the Old City for 30 days under Israel’s legal framework that bans the agency’s operations on Israeli territory, bars official contact, and is set to cut off utilities to additional UNRWA facilities in Jerusalem in the coming weeks—ordering removal of UN insignia and signaling that the era of treating the agency as an untouchable sovereign-within-a-sovereign is officially over—regardless of what the Secretary General posts on X.

ASSESSMENT

The quake is a reminder that resilience is not only interceptors—it’s public trust, clear guidance, and an information environment that doesn’t let Telegram fantasies substitute for reality. Jerusalem’s UNRWA enforcement is part of the same. If an organization is structurally contaminated and functionally hostile, you don’t negotiate your own authority with it—you terminate its footprint and absorb the diplomatic screaming as a cost of governance.

Israel and the World

Washington Postures, Region Denies, Tehran Sells Confusion

A credible “day after” pitch for Iran is being road-tested in public even as the operational clock stays ambiguous. Exiled Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi declared that a post-Islamic Republic Iran would immediately recognize Israel, normalize relations with the United States, expand the Abraham Accords into a “Cyrus Accords” framework, end Iran’s nuclear program, and stop sponsorship of terror while repositioning Iran as a transparent energy supplier and anti-money laundering state. (I mean, if I was living a pampered life of leisure in New York, I’d make similar promises to be given a country—wouldn’t you?)

In parallel, the region’s real posture looked like a strike cycle that can’t find clean geometry: Israel remained at peak alert with heightened readiness heading into the weekend. Actions included an overnight activation and then a last-minute call-off, followed by Israeli assessments that U.S. military action was postponed rather than canceled. Netanyahu reportedly asked Trump to delay any strike due to concerns about Iranian retaliation landing on Israel before interceptor stockpiles are sufficiently replenished.

The U.S. side projected indecision discipline—Trump refusing to commit publicly, insisting any action deliver a “swift and decisive blow” without sliding into prolonged conflict—while American officials acknowledged they cannot guarantee rapid regime collapse and worried about insufficient regional assets to absorb an aggressive Iranian response.

Regional capitals tightened the vise by denying launch support: reports said Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia opposed escalation and would not allow use

of their airspace or bases for fighter operations. Iraq publicly rejected use of its territory or airspace to target any state.

Meanwhile, the public internet filled the gap with nonsense—claims of “DEFCON 2/3 in the Middle East”—a category error, since DEFCON is a classified U.S. military readiness posture, not a regional warning label.

On the ground, the diplomatic drawdown and coercive signaling continued anyway. The British ambassador and embassy staff left Iran. The U.S. Embassy in Israel and U.S. personnel in Qatar received heightened caution guidance. The U.K. warned against non-essential travel to Israel. And Treasury announced new sanctions on senior Iranian security figures and networks tied to protest suppression.

Tehran added its usual noise layer—claims of foreign coordination centers and paid unrest—while the U.S. simultaneously floated a desire to see Israel and Turkey rebuild ties, i.e., the same region that just said “no” to basing suddenly gets treated as the bridge to de-escalation.

ASSESSMENT

Iran's regime is trying to survive by turning uncertainty into a weapon—make outsiders argue about “imminence,” force planners to chase basing permissions, and let rumor cycles do deterrence work for free. The opposition pitch matters only insofar as it becomes a real alternative that can hold the state together after collapse. Right now, it functions more as a Western comfort blanket than a likely governing mechanism. The practical constraint is launch geometry, interceptor math, and whether the U.S. has the appetite to absorb a week of messy retaliation without blinking. The basing refusals are regional insurance policies—everyone wants Tehran weakened, nobody wants to deal with the fallout. Israel should treat this as the reliable shape of the next phase: American intent remains an option, not a certainty. Regional partners will preach restraint while hedging for benefit. And Tehran will keep killing its citizens and exporting confusion until someone forces a change.

Syria's Druze Seek Israeli Umbrella as Jihadists Reprice Borders

Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri, described as the spiritual leader of the Druze in Sweida (over 300,000), said his community wants autonomy edging toward independence and a “strong alliance” with Israel, framing Israel as the only actor that intervened militarily to stop a genocide of Druze (among others). He described a July massacre by forces aligned with Syria's new Sunni Islamist president—roughly 2,000 killed, atrocities including executions, rape, and people burned alive—and said more than 200 hostages remain held with unknown fates.

He rightly argued the current Damascus regime is effectively an ISIS/Al-Qaeda continuation and that coexistence is impossible. He also described Sweida as functionally sealed off—villages burned, transitional government control over dozens of burned villages, shortages of food and medicine, patients denied external care, and residents mobilized for self-defense—while suggesting a transitional self-government stage under an external guarantor, explicitly naming Israel as the “right party.”

ASSESSMENT

Sweida is offering Israel a strategic temptation—a minority partner pleading for protection, autonomy, and alignment with the only regional actor that can actually deliver hard security. The reward is obvious—buffer depth, intelligence expansion, and a rare moral clarity case that doesn't require pretending Damascus is a normal state. The cost is just as obvious. Anyone who wants to brand Israel as the arsonist of the region will repackage Druze survival as "partition engineering," and proxies will use it as recruitment fuel. Israel should assume any new protective relationship will immediately generate lawfare, condemnation, and proxy targeting, and do it anyway. Moral clarity, durable border security, and deterrence are more essential than diplomatic applause (which isn't often forthcoming anyway).

"Jewish Left" Branding, Boycotts, and Selective Enforcement Tighten the Noose

In the Senate, Ron Wyden introduced a bill designed to authorize visa and financial sanctions against foreign officials deemed to be restricting or undermining delivery of "sufficient humanitarian assistance," written as a global standard but plainly built around Gaza. It would allow lawmakers to request assessments of specific officials, and mandates recurring reporting—while leaning on claims of acute hunger even as a referenced U.N. update said Gaza's basic food needs were fully met.

The bill's text and supporters also leaned on the increasingly compromised NGO ecosystem, explicitly citing organizations including UNRWA and MSF—even as Israel has flagged terror-linked staffing and moved to ban or restrict groups that refuse staff vetting.

At the same time, New York's attorney general announced a settlement compelling Betar US to cease allegedly bias-motivated threats and harassment, with a suspended \$50,000 penalty and the group signaling it is winding down operations in New York—triggering immediate claims of a double standard as overtly anti-Israel groups and street movements face little scrutiny.

Boston University's annual "Jewish left" conference scheduled for February advertised workshops with anti-Israel groups and a keynote from Peter Beinart—packaging anti-Zionist activism as the authentic Jewish moral center while smearing Zionism as the thing that must be expelled from polite society.

Meanwhile, the pro-Israel counter-offensive inside America moved in a different register: settlement leaders pushed state-level legislation to purge "West Bank" from official documents and replace it with "Judea and Samaria," with activity reported in multiple states and explicit intent to build momentum that pressures Trump toward sovereignty recognition and blocks any future push toward Palestinian statehood.

ASSESSMENT

Humanitarian language becomes personal-sanctions machinery and civil-rights enforcement becomes a way to neutralize Jewish defense while pro-Hamas intimidation gets processed as “activism.” Fueling it all, universities keep laundering anti-Zionism as the enlightened Jewish voice by hosting it under the “Jewish left” label—because nothing says intellectual integrity like pretending the heirs of Ben-Gurion and Rabin are the same thing as IfNotNow cosplay. The “Judea and Samaria” state-law push is the mirror image: terminology warfare as a sovereignty wedge, designed to build U.S. domestic facts the way Israel’s enemies build international bureaucratic facts. The throughline is selective enforcement—rules for Jews, therapy for those targeting Jews—and Israel should treat it as a strategic arena, not a PR irritation.

Briefly Noted

Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- **Jerusalem Post:** A leaked internal Iranian presidential survey found 92% of respondents “hate the regime.”
- **JNS:** A JNS analysis argues Europe’s Gaza condemnations are mostly cost-free rhetoric, citing reliance on US security guarantees and continued European demand for Israeli defense tech. Translation for Jerusalem: expect noise, not bite—until someone in Europe decides moral signaling is worth actual consequences.
- **Times of Israel:** The US criticized South Africa for hosting naval drills that included Iran alongside China, Russia and the UAE, calling Tehran’s participation “unconscionable” amid the crackdown on protests. Pretoria’s BRICS posturing is colliding with Washington’s patience—handy context when South Africa wants to run Gaza-lawfare at The Hague while still trading like a Western partner.
- **Algemeiner:** The US House passed a State Department funding package that includes \$3.3 billion in annual security assistance to Israel, while restricting funds tied to UNRWA and blocking ICC funding. Even when the discourse curdles, Congress is still moving money and cutting oxygen to the lawfare industry.

Economy, Tech & Infrastructure

- **Jerusalem Post:** US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said Iranian leaders are wiring tens of millions of dollars out of Iran as protests spread and the rial hits record lows. We’re watching internal confidence collapse—and getting a map of which banks and jurisdictions to squeeze next.
- **Israel National News:** Israel’s Prime Minister’s Office AI HQ is set to sign a joint declaration with the United States on artificial intelligence. Boring paperwork with strategic weight. Whoever aligns standards and cooperation now will shape the chips, models, and battlefield tooling later.

Domestic & Law

- **Jerusalem Post:** A federal appeals court said a district judge lacked jurisdiction to order the release of Columbia graduate Mahmoud Khalil from immigration detention—opening the door to possible re-arrest as he fights deportation.

Developments to Watch

Judea & Samaria

- **Kafr Malik Encircled After IED Throw** — Terrorists hurled an explosive device and Molotovs at the road leading to a military base; the devices failed and forces encircled Kafr Malik and began searches.

Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)

- **Enforcement Strikes Expand Across Lebanon** — The IDF struck Hezbollah storage and infrastructure sites across multiple areas, including an underground facility, framing it as ceasefire-violation enforcement.
- **Targeted Hit On Hezbollah Operative** — A Hezbollah terrorist was struck in Zawtar al-Sharqiyah after repeated violations, signaling Israel is not letting rebuild personnel feel safe.

Gaza & Southern Theater

- **Yellow Line Approaches Keep Testing ROE** — Multiple armed actors crossed or approached IDF positions in the south and north and were eliminated as imminent threats, while commanders operate under tight engagement constraints.
- **False Alarm Near Nahal Oz** — Sirens sounded in Nahal Oz and were later assessed as false identification. In a high-alert environment, false positives burn attention, erode confidence, and create the perfect window for the next real probe.

Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)

- **U.S. Strike Window Still Active** — Israeli assessments say a U.S. strike was postponed, not canceled; Israel remains at peak readiness, with reporting of overnight activation and last-minute call-off dynamics. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**
- **Houthis Raise Alert, Widen Target Map** — The Houthis declared higher readiness, ran missile tests in the Red Sea arena, and threatened any accessible Israeli presence tied to the Horn-of-Africa corridor.

Diplomatic & Legal

- **Embassy Drawdowns Signal Real Expectation** — UK staff reportedly left Iran; the U.S. and U.K. issued tightened cautions. They're vulnerability math—watch for aviation and basing restrictions to harden suddenly.

Home Front & Politics

- **Interceptor Math Starts Talking Out Loud** — Netanyahu reportedly asked Trump to delay due to retaliation risk landing on Israel before interceptors are replenished, as the IDF heads into the weekend at peak readiness.

The “technocrats” rollout just taught Hamas a clean lesson: you can subcontract the hostage file to Islamic Jihad and still get treated as a responsible party. Inside Israel, the draft fight is further sliding from legislation into intimidation, and the coalition's answer is... fewer consequences—exactly the kind of governance weakness enemies bank on. Process without consequences is just permission.

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.