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READER EDITION

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ISRAEL BRIEF

Sunday, January 18

Gaza committees multiply while rifles set terms. Iran's crack-down meets U.S. signaling and Russian freelancing.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

THE BOTTOM LINE Europe keeps treating Israel as a morality play because it is easier than admitting Europe is losing control of its own streets. The French argument reframes the connection correctly: Islamism is not a “community issue,” it is a regime-and-network problem that targets Jews first and the state second. Britain’s policing scandal is the practical application—when law enforcement becomes a reputational management service for activists, Jews get “risk assessed” and everyone else gets “understood.” Multiculturalism? Nope. It’s just institutional cowardice with more paperwork. And the demographic framing—whether one accepts every rhetorical flourish or not—captures the lived reality. When a society loses confidence in its own legitimacy, it stops enforcing norms, and the loudest organized actors reprice the public square. Europe doesn’t need more “concern.” It needs symmetrical enforcement and explicit naming of Islamism as a security doctrine—because the alternative is exactly what we’ve been tracking: selective policing, intimidation normalized, Jews treated as the irritant, and the state acting surprised when the intimidation metastasizes.

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WELCOME to a new week. Gaza is being “managed” by people who can’t confiscate a rifle. Iranians are being “managed” by being massacred. Israel keeps removing commanders and intercepting weapons—and the world keeps announcing councils and calling it progress.

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Flash Brief

- **Gaza Decapitations:** Israel publishes names of Hamas and Islamic Jihad commanders killed after Rafah attack. *See The War Today.*
- **Gaza Governance Pitch:** Armed local militias reject the civilian committee and warn the Yellow Line stays. *See The War Today.*
- **Northern Enforcement:** Israel strikes Hezbollah infrastructure and kills a terror operative; UNIFIL reports a near miss. *See The War Today.*
- **Iran Decision Cycle:** Strike planning is said to have paused; a new decision window is described as up to 2–3 weeks out as assets arrive, airspace warnings spread, and Iran tightens internal controls. *See Israel and the World.*
- **Russia Inserts Itself:** Putin calls Bibi offering mediation on Iran while Moscow reaffirms partnership with Tehran. *See Israel and the World.*
- **Home Front Load:** Defense figures cite rising PTSD and suicide attempts as the hostage vigil marks 835 days. *See Inside Israel.*
- **Airspace Signal:** Europe's aviation regulator warned airlines off Iranian airspace; Lufthansa extended overnight Israel cancellations through Jan. 31—civil aviation reacting to military risk is a quiet but serious indicator. *See Developments to Watch.*
- **State Systems:** Levin presses a disciplinary case against the Supreme Court chief as Israel signs a U.S. AI framework. *See Inside Israel.*

BELOW: command removals, governance fiction, Iran decision timing, and the domestic cohesion ledger.

Armed actors keep veto power while administrative actors keep publishing new job titles. That mismatch drives every other risk line—Gaza's "next phase," Lebanon's "buffer" theater, Iran's crackdown calculus, and Israel's own internal bandwidth.

The War Today

Targeted Decapitations, Militia Defiance, And A PowerPoint Without Power
Following the western Rafah ceasefire violation in which armed terrorists fired on an armored IDF vehicle, Israel conducted targeted strikes across the Strip—decapitation hits on Hamas and Islamic Jihad command nodes, including the Hamas Central Camps operations commander Muhammad Hamed Muhammad Khuli (a long-time Central Camps Brigade figure involved with October 7 preparations and the 1995 Nahal Oz roadblock murder of Yevgeny Gromov *z"l*), Islamic Jihad's Central Camps rocket-and-missile commander Ashraf Adnan Muhammad al-Khatib, and Hamas Deir al-Balah sniping chief Saeed Khaled Ali Abd al-Rahman, alongside additional Hamas operatives attempting to reestablish terror infrastructure. The "next phase" governance

pitch is deteriorating on contact with reality. Armed local militias in Gaza openly derided the proposed civilian committee as irrelevant, drew hard red lines against any IDF withdrawal from the Yellow Line, and framed Hamas disarmament as impossible—while boasting of rapid expansion capacity and insisting that “street power” will decide Gaza’s next phase. Washington nevertheless pushed forward publicly, with Trump promising a “comprehensive” Hamas demilitarization deal—surrender of all weapons and dismantling every tunnel—while declining to treat hostage return and disarmament as preconditions. He also announced the membership of a new Gaza “Peace Council,” naming senior American and international figures. Israel’s Prime Minister’s Office immediately stated the announcement was uncoordinated and contradicts Israel’s policy, and directed Israel’s foreign minister to raise objections directly with the U.S. secretary of state. Parallel pressure is being built through reconstruction framing: a senior UN official claimed Gaza holds over 60 million tons of debris and estimated it could take more than seven years to clear, alongside renewed calls for expanded crossings access, a “Jordan corridor,” dual-use items, and fuel flows—exactly the categories Hamas monetizes and repurposes.

ASSESSMENT

People are trying to declare coercive control into existence while the men with rifles still run Gaza. Israel’s targeted removals degrade planning bandwidth and specialist knowledge—integral under a ceasefire that Hamas treats as a reload window. The U.S. published a “Peace Council” roster as if a list of names (and Trump really found the “best names” for it) is a substitute for confiscating weapons. This is the opening Hamas and Islamic Jihad will pry open, especially while the hostage file remains a leverage valve. Meanwhile, the militias’ contempt is a warning that Gaza is not transitioning into “technocratic governance.” The reconstruction push—debris, corridors, dual-use—will be used as the moral lever to force Israel to trade physical control for humanitarian optics, i.e., to fund and rebuild the same armed ecosystem that wants to wipe it off the map.

Hezbollah Threatens Civil War As Israel Keeps Southern Lebanon Perishable

Strikes and targeted removals continued up north—tied to Hezbollah’s ongoing attempts to rehabilitate its infrastructure. Lebanese reporting said an Israeli strike hit a vehicle in the Mansuri area and killed one person, following another strike the prior night. UNIFIL claimed an IDF drone dropped a grenade near a peacekeeper patrol near Odaisseh after they found an explosive device—the IDF said it had been tracking suspects near a Hezbollah-linked structure, redirected the drone after identifying UNIFIL personnel, and dropped the munition in an open area roughly 370 meters away. Hezbollah’s leader explicitly threatened Lebanon’s government that disarming the group would mean “the end of Lebanon”—warning the country could descend into a state where “no one is safe,” and signaled willingness to pay “additional prices” to keep its weapons.

ASSESSMENT

Lebanon, while it might have a recognizable flag, is merely a hostage to Hezbollah—and therefore Iran. The Lebanese Armed Forces are structurally unwilling or unable to conduct real demilitarization—especially inside private homes and embedded civilian terrain—without external conditioning, verification, and consequences. Which leaves Israel in the position where it must treat Hezbollah rebuild lanes as perishable through repeat interdiction. The UNIFIL episode is the usual genre. International forces positioned between Israel and Hezbollah act surprised when they're standing near Hezbollah-linked terrain and the battlefield doesn't pause to respect their paperwork.

Inside Israel

Rolling Trauma Becomes Force Readiness, Not A Wellness Memo

Israel's home front is absorbing a long-duration stress profile, with trauma professionals describing a persistent, stop-start "rolling trauma" cycle driven by two years of war and the current Iran-tension uncertainty—routine on the outside, constant threat-perception underneath, repeatedly re-triggered by alerts, rumors, and long silences that land like preludes. This is showing up as more than mood. Reported rises in fatigue. Sleep disruption. Pain. Worsening chronic conditions. Alongside a widening mental-health load on soldiers and reservists after sustained multi-front deployments. Defense Ministry figures cited a near-40% increase in PTSD cases since September 2023 and project a sharp rise by 2028. Of roughly 22,300 treated for war wounds, a majority are described as suffering PTSD, with health providers reporting large shares of military patients seeking mental-health support and reporting depression concerns. A Knesset review cited 279 soldier suicide attempts between January 2024 and July 2025—with combat soldiers comprising the bulk of Israel's suicide cases in 2024. Paired with reports that the recognition process for state support runs through committees that can take months. This psychological load is reflected in lots of areas. The country marked Ran Gvili's abduction with a public Kabbalat Shabbat vigil in Hostages Square (now 835 days since), where families framed his return as a national "last mile" obligation and warned against advancing phases of any process while he remains in Gaza. Against that backdrop, senior IDF leadership visibly leaned into reassurance and preparedness rituals—air-defense inspections and missile-attack simulations framed as proof the system is "always ready"—a necessary message in a public environment where ambiguity itself has become a stressor.

ASSESSMENT

A country can run on adrenaline for a week. Two-plus years? Certainly not. “Rolling trauma” is just the clinical way of saying Israel is living in an always-on mobilization culture: body, mind, workplaces, marriages, reserve units, and civic patience all kept on standby while the next siren might be real or might be yet another false positive. The immediate risk, operational: decision quality degrades when everyone is tired, cynical, and constantly braced for the next thing. The medium-term risk is manpower: PTSD, suicide attempts, and delayed recognition pipelines translate into fewer people willing—or able—to re-enter the cycle, exactly when force design and reserve endurance matter most—since whole swaths of society exempt themselves. And the strategic risk is trust: if the public believes no one is “managing reality” clearly, rumor becomes governance. Israel needs discipline—clear explanations, credible timelines when possible, honest uncertainty when not—and a benefits pipeline that treats mental injury like shrapnel: triage fast, treat early, don’t make the wounded audition for bureaucracy.

Levin-AG Collision Turns Judicial Reform Into Institutional Hand Combat

The justice minister moved toward a disciplinary complaint against the president of the Supreme Court, despite the judge-ombudsman, who found a conflict-of-interest problem, but explicitly recommended against disciplinary proceedings and dismissed nine other complaints. The attorney general formally told the minister the planned complaint does not meet the narrow legal criteria for such action, called it legally invalid, and faulted the minister for not consulting her before proceeding, stressing that ministerial disciplinary authority is extremely limited. The minister responded by branding the AG’s letter “one big criminal offense,” accusing her of acting out of conflict of interest and personal favor-trading tied to prior court decisions that benefited her position, and vowed to proceed anyway. This latest exchange lands in a public environment already primed for institutional distrust: polling cited in recent days shows a plurality opposing Supreme Court intervention in cabinet-minister dismissal decisions, with a substantial minority supporting judicial involvement—an electorate split not only on policy, but on which institutions get to decide what “law” means.

ASSESSMENT

Judicial reform is not the problem. Institutional arson during wartime is. When senior officials treat the legal system as a personal enemy list—and when the legal system answers with procedural barricades—Israel gets the worst of both worlds: neither clean reform nor stable legitimacy. The timing is grotesque: while Iran tension keeps the home front on edge and the military runs air-defense drills to keep the public steady, civilian leadership (both the judiciary and some ministers—to be clear, none of these people are fully in the right) is teaching Israelis that the rule-set itself is optional.

Shomron Expansion, Drone Guns, And The Smog Economy

A major “Roof Agreement” initiative is poised to convert Karnei Shomron from incremental growth into a state-structured expansion project with roughly NIS 2 billion in promised development and nearly six-thousand housing units, framed by officials as a strategic shift toward a regional metropolis with upgraded infrastructure, public buildings, education campuses, cultural and commercial facilities, and new transportation links. The plan also addresses

longstanding planning choke points—particularly in areas where zoning status prevented straightforward mortgages—while pointing toward dense, high-rise construction models that reshape the town’s character and economics. Local reaction is split: some residents warn existing infrastructure and traffic (especially along Route 55) already strain under current population levels and fear congestion and “planned obsolescence” of the community’s village feel. Others argue dense, legally structured building is precisely how *de facto* sovereignty is created and how young families priced out of single-dwelling stock can remain in the region. Parallel to the “build” story is the “govern” story—less glamorous, more decisive. Israeli forces intercepted two drones entering from the western border carrying six M-16 rifles—with data presented to lawmakers showing a sharp rise in drone-smuggling attempts along that corridor. In Judea and Samaria, a targeted nighttime enforcement operation seized five trucks carrying over 100 tons of waste intended for illegal burning in Palestinian Authority areas—scrap metal, electronic waste, construction materials, and soil—part of an ongoing campaign against the illegal-waste fire economy that degrades air quality and public health. And the friction on the ground remains physical: dozens of Arab rioters attacked the Shirat Tzion homestead area in Samaria with stones and clubs, injuring a resident and destroying a vehicle, with residents describing an organized pattern of assaults and logistical support from nearby villages. Add to this the ongoing debate—still partly allegation, partly warning—over hostile actors using property purchases and population shifts as an internal-security lever in sensitive northern cities, and you get one integrated domestic picture: sovereignty is being contested simultaneously through planning, policing, logistics, and demographic maneuver.

ASSESSMENT

Israel loves arguing about sovereignty—it makes for fiery politics. However, Israel has enemies (who knew?). And they love working it in spreadsheets: zoning loopholes, smuggling corridors, illegal burning profits, and organized riot logistics. The Roof Agreement is the right genre—scaled up planning that treats Judea and Samaria as a long-term civic project rather than a series of tactical approvals. But if the government cannot deliver the boring parts—roads that work, policing that shows up, enforcement that sticks—then “metropolis” becomes a traffic jam—with real risk to those stuck in that traffic. Meanwhile, the drone rifles and the waste-fire pipeline are the same operational lesson. Internal security isn’t only measured in terror cells. Illegal burning is not mere pollution. Riot patterns around homesteads are not “local disputes.” These are both pressure tactics to push Jews out of strategic terrain. And the population-movement alarm bells point to a real vulnerability. Adversaries look for ways to create internal friction when border fronts are already hot.

Israel and the World

Iran’s Clampdown Deepens While Russia Tries To Freeze The Board

Trump publicly called for the end of Khamenei’s rule after a hostile exchange. Israel stayed on peak alert and the U.S. posture remained heightened—with

continued asset movement. Putin inserted himself on a phone call with Netanyahu, offering Russian “mediation” and urging intensified diplomatic efforts for “stability and security.” Putin then spoke with Iran’s president about de-escalation—while reaffirming a long-term strategic partnership agreement and joint economic projects. Russia positioning itself as the firefighter while holding the gasoline can. On the ground inside Iran, the repression posture tightened more. Checkpoints. Movement restrictions. Phone checks. All enabled by heavy security presence across cities. A rare, high-friction glimpse into regime rot also surfaced via an interview with the daughter of a senior IRGC commander. She described, in horrifying detail, abuse at home, beatings after she protested, friends sexually assaulted by security forces, and claimed the elites are well on with their contingency planning—fake passports, cash, and “escape routes.”

ASSESSMENT

“Russian mediation” is an attempt to buy time for its Iranian partner. Moscow wants three outcomes here. Keep Tehran alive enough to keep bleeding the West. Keep Israel constrained enough to keep escalation manageable. And keep itself indispensable as the switchboard operator. More or less it’s just a protection racket. Trump’s leadership-change framing sharpens deterrence, but it also incentivizes Tehran to crack down on its public by any means at its disposal—to nothing of its proxies elsewhere trying to change the subject. The internal testimony—whatever its downstream propaganda use—fits the operational logic: elites secure exit plans first, then preach “resistance” to everyone else. Israel should assume that as the regime hardens internally, it will look outward for stunts: proxies, cyber, symbolic attacks, anything that re-centers the story away from Iranian streets and back onto “Zionists.”

Pax Silica Links Israel To U.S. Supply-Chain Power, Not Sympathy

Israel and the United States signed a joint strategic framework for cooperation in critical technologies—explicitly including AI, advanced computing, semiconductors, energy, space, and “edge innovation”—as part of a wider “Pax Silica” partnership designed to de-risk supply chains that are currently over-dependent on China for critical minerals and semiconductor nodes. The initiative is framed as implementation-focused: logistics “arteries,” industrial “muscle,” and energy/capital “fuel,” with a stated goal of secure, trusted research environments and tighter protection of sensitive technologies. The coalition’s membership includes countries that do not share Israel’s regional posture but do share supply-chain interests—including Gulf signatories—turning Israel’s tech ecosystem into a hard-power input to American security planning rather than a charity case.

ASSESSMENT

This is the cleanest truth about alliances. The U.S. does not “support Israel” because it feels guilty—it partners with Israel because Israel is useful. Talent density. Security R&D. Deployable capability. Pax Silica shows that chips, models, compute power, and trusted supply routes are the next war’s ammunition. Israel is being slotted into that ecosystem as a producer, not a dependent.

France's Anti-Islamism Case Meets Britain's Policing Collapse

A former French prime minister, visiting Israel, delivered a blunt thesis that European leaders usually avoid admitting in public. Israel's struggle sits on the same axis as Europe's fight against Islamism and against the Iranian regime's threat network, and "if Israel falls, we fall." He framed modern antisemitism as intertwined with hatred of Israel, argued that parts of France's political class still misread the shift, and singled out the far-left as having turned antisemitism into an electoral business model—pointing to the post-October 7 inversion where the far left skipped major anti-antisemitism mobilization while the far right showed up. He also called France's 2025 recognition of a Palestinian state a mistake, warning that unconditional recognition in this environment gives legitimacy to Hamas and rewards the region's most violent veto players. In Britain, meanwhile, the administrative story kept matching the cultural one: the chief constable of a major police force retired with immediate effect after a damning review tied to the "Maccabi fan ban" affair—another episode where institutions tried to manage Jewish public life as a liability rather than enforce laws evenly. Layered over this, a separate European commentary argued that demography and civic confidence—rather than formal war—are driving a rapid civilizational shift in London, citing long-run population-change figures and the visible normalization of Islamist public outreach in central areas as a proxy for deeper state hesitancy.

ASSESSMENT

Europe keeps treating Israel as a morality play because it is easier than admitting Europe is losing control of its own streets. The French argument reframes the connection correctly: Islamism is not a "community issue," it is a regime-and-network problem that targets Jews first and the state second. Britain's policing scandal is the practical application—when law enforcement becomes a reputational management service for activists, Jews get "risk assessed" and everyone else gets "understood." Multiculturalism? Nope. It's just institutional cowardice with more paperwork. And the demographic framing—whether one accepts every rhetorical flourish or not—captures the lived reality. When a society loses confidence in its own legitimacy, it stops enforcing norms, and the loudest organized actors reprice the public square. Europe doesn't need more "concern." It needs symmetrical enforcement and explicit naming of Islamism as a security doctrine—because the alternative is exactly what we've been tracking: selective policing, intimidation normalized, Jews treated as the irritant, and the state acting surprised when the intimidation metastasizes.

Briefly Noted

Frontline & Security

- **JNS:** The Pentagon ordered the USS Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group to redeploy from the South China Sea toward the Middle East amid Iran's unrest and U.S. warnings to Tehran. A carrier isn't a magic wand, but it's a 100,000-ton billboard that says "we're still watching," which matters when Tehran is pricing a stunt.

- *JNS*: A report dissected claims that Israeli intelligence is driving Iran's uprising, citing everything from Mossad's Farsi messaging to competing assessments that the regime is inflating "foreign plot" narratives to justify repression. Tehran wants "Mossad did it" because it's the cheapest excuse to massacre its own people while pretending it's counterterrorism.
- *Algemeiner*: An Iranian regime official publicly urged capturing Trump and endorsed terrorist violence in U.S. cities, including arson and vehicle ramming.

Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- *Times of Israel*: Khamenei called Trump a "criminal," blamed him for protest deaths, and said the regime must "break the back" of protesters while hinting "several thousand" were killed. Tehran wants to delegitimize protests as foreign ops and legalize murder as "national defense."
- *JNS*: Trump's envoy said Washington has been messaging Tehran and claimed planned mass hangings were "shut down," while laying out four required deal conditions: enrichment, missiles, nuclear material stockpiles, and proxies. The "conditions" are fine, but the trap is familiar—diplomacy becomes a stopwatch Iran uses to rebuild.
- *Jerusalem Post*: A former Israeli national security adviser argued Trump must strike Iran—even symbolically—warning that drifting into negotiations will be sold as "calm" while Tehran resets and protesters conclude no help is coming. The key risk here is narrative: if Washington stalls, Israel gets blamed anyway and Tehran learns that brutality plus patience still works.

Economy, Tech & Infrastructure

- *Ynet*: A report warned Wikipedia has become an organized influence arena, with Israel-related entries allegedly distorted and then replicated through search and AI training pipelines. If your enemy can poison the knowledge layer, they don't need to win arguments—they just need to win what the intern reads first.

Culture, Religion & Society

- *Israel National News*: Iranian authorities reportedly demanded large payments from families to retrieve bodies of protesters killed during the crack-down. Extortion-for-corpses is a regime monetizing terror—which tells you exactly how it plans to survive.

Developments to Watch

Judea & Samaria

- **Hashmonaim Infiltration Alert** — A terror-infiltration alert was issued in the Yarkon–Hashmonaim sector overnight. Even a false ping burns attention and forces redeployments; one real breach during “alert fatigue” is how kidnappings and body-count spirals start.
- **Kafr Malik Cordons Tighten** — Forces encircled Kafr Malik after an IED and Molotov attack on a road leading to a base and detained suspects during follow-on searches.
- **Al-Mughayyir Flashpoint** — A delayed report of stone-throwing and route-blocking near Ramallah escalated to live fire when a rioter rushed soldiers holding a weapon and was shot.
- **Western Border Drone Guns** — Two drones carrying six M-16 rifles were intercepted after crossing into Israel from the western border. Drone smuggling is now an industrial pipeline. Every successful drop is one more “lone wolf” that isn’t lone at all.

Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)

- **UNIFIL Proximity Risk** — UNIFIL claims a drone dropped a grenade near a patrol; Israel says the munition was released hundreds of meters away after identifying UN personnel. Hezbollah keeps using peacekeepers as moving shields.
- **Hezbollah Rebuild Personnel Targeting** — Israel struck Hezbollah infrastructure across Lebanon and removed an operative tied to reconstituting capabilities in the south. Enforcement is the only thing keeping “ceasefire” from turning into “reload.”

Gaza & Southern Theater

- **Central Camps Leadership Attrition** — Publication was cleared on decapitation strikes against Hamas/PIJ commanders tied to Central Camps operations, rockets, and sniping, plus operatives rebuilding infrastructure.
- **16th Brigade Rotation Completes** — The 16th Brigade finished a month-long mission east of the Yellow Line in northern Gaza, dismantling hundreds of above/below-ground sites with Yahalom support, and was replaced by the 3rd Brigade.

Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)

- **U.S. Decision Window, Asset Arrival, And Risk Controls** — Reporting describes strike planning that was ready and then paused, with another decision window described as 2–3 weeks out as additional capability arrives. Aviation regulators are now warning carriers off Iranian airspace, and Israel is keeping extended air-defense readiness. Separate reports say non-essential aircraft were moved out of key Gulf bases to reduce exposure. This reads like pre-action insurance being assembled: protect bases, protect airspace, reduce single-point failure risk.

- **Iran Internal Controls Harden** — Multiple cities report martial-law conditions: checkpoints, phone inspections, restricted movement, and heavier Basij/IRGC presence.
- **Putin Inserts “Mediation”** — Netanyahu spoke with Putin as Moscow offered to “promote dialogue” on Iran while affirming strategic partnership with Tehran. Russia is not mediating. It is freezing the board to buy time for its client and to keep Israel constrained.

Diplomatic & Legal

- **Peace Council Friction With Washington** — The U.S. published a laughable Gaza “Peace Council” roster and Israel publicly signaled it was uncoordinated and contrary to policy. Bibi directed immediate MFA engagement with Washington.

Home Front & Politics

- **Peak Readiness Messaging Discipline** — Senior IDF leadership emphasized constant readiness and urged the public to rely on official channels, with no change to Home Front instructions.

Iran is daring the West to flinch. Gaza is daring outsiders to fund its next round. Hezbollah is daring Lebanon to be a country. And Israel is daring its own institutions to stay functional while fighting. While conferences proliferate, consequences will decide what comes next.

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