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January 20, 2026

ISRAEL BRIEF

Tuesday, January 20

Control tries to move from rifles to signatures as Davos pushes a Gaza board. Israel keeps Rafah shut and demands disarmament first.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVER

THE BOTTOM LINE This is the sane way to build alliances. Embed Israel into other countries' schedules, supply chains, and infrastructure so that "pressure" stops being free. Education cooperation with the UAE isn't sentiment—it's long-horizon normalization that survives headlines because it's built into institutions and innovation—especially on the heels of the UAE's discontinuance of funding for its citizens to study in Muslim Brotherhood-captured universities (like King's College, London). The Turkey factor is not a surprise, but it is a reminder that Ankara treats maps as negotiable if it can intimidate the room into accepting a new one. That means Israel's regional architecture has to include protection—legal, diplomatic, and if needed, operational—for the assets it helps build.

CLASSIFICATION

Reader Edition

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DAVOS wants a camera-ready Gaza “board” while ignoring the key fact that the only actor in the region who can enforce disarmament is still Israel. Rafah remains the last lever that forces outsiders to choose between optics and coercion, and today Washington is pushing hard on the former. Up north, Hezbollah is being reminded that rebuild lanes remain targetable, and the Iran file keeps stacking signals on top of internal bloodshed.

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Flash Brief

- **Gaza Board:** Rafah stays closed as Davos signing pressure grows around U.S. oversight with both Turkey and Qatar.
- **Gaza Line:** Multiple Yellow Line crossings toward IDF positions trigger fire; Hamas maps response under Phase One rules.
- **Northern Front:** IDF strikes Hezbollah training sites, tunnel shafts, and launch prep; Zibqin operative removed.
- **Iran Signaling:** USS Abraham Lincoln enters Indian Ocean toward Arabian Sea, expanding U.S. strike reach.
- **Iran Crackdown:** Khamenei cites thousands killed; police give three-day surrender ultimatum to protest participants.
- **Draft Collision:** High Court contempt remedies loom as 2026 budget arrives late and March 31 deadline nears.
- **Home-Front Failure:** Unlicensed Jerusalem daycare incident kills two infants; dozens treated; suspects held for court.

TODAY'S dashboard shows a familiar trade being offered: signatures for control. Rafah is the hinge, because once it opens on someone else's timetable, leverage is gone. In parallel, Israel is keeping the north and Iran's network on a short clock by making rebuild and intimidation costly.

The War Today

Gaza Board Pushes Davos Optics, Israel Keeps Rafah Closed

Israel held its last hard lever on Gaza in place—the security cabinet decided not to open the Rafah Crossing “at this time,” despite U.S. pressure, as Washington pushes for a public Davos signing around its Gaza “Board of Peace” virtue signaling and the newly revealed oversight layer that elevates Turkey’s foreign minister and a senior Qatari official into supervisory roles. Israeli leadership publicly drew red lines while arguing with itself. Netanyahu framed “Phase II” as disarmament and demilitarization “either the easy way or the hard way,” and promised there will be no Turkish or Qatari soldiers in Gaza. Lapid blasted the board as a diplomatic failure and claimed the “technocratic” committee is effectively PA-dominant. Smotrich called the U.S. plan “bad,” urged cancellation, and demanded Israeli military rule and rapid-force options. Hamas, for its part, struck the exact pose you’d expect: a senior official said they still don’t understand the board’s mission, but “welcome” it if it means reconstruction, aid, and funding—i.e., the weapons stay, the money flows, and the world calls it governance. On the ground, the ceasefire remained a reconnaissance-and-probing environment. IDF forces reported multiple “Yellow Line” breaches—two terrorists crossed and approached forces in the south (one eliminated), and three crossed and approached forces in

the north (one eliminated)—with troops maintaining deployment “in accordance with the ceasefire agreement” while removing immediate threats. Israeli planning chatter openly sketches that if the U.S. architecture fails to deliver physical demilitarization (highly likely), Israel will be forced back into the job itself—potentially requiring mobilization of four to five reserve divisions and a renewed offensive deeper into Gaza, floated in timing terms as spring, post-Passover, in a politically charged window.

ASSESSMENT

Washington is trying to buy progress with signatures and governance branding while leaving Israel stuck with disarming jihadists who still hold a captive Israeli underground and treat ceasefires as reload time. Turkey and Qatar don't enter as neutral administrators... they enter as the Muslim Brotherhood ecosystem's external managers—an oversight layer designed to make Hamas' survival look like “stability.” Hamas' public line—we don't know what it is, but we welcome the money—is the whole scam in one sentence. Israel's insistence on Rafah staying shut is nearly the last bit of its leverage. If Davos optics become the substitute for confiscating rifles, Israel will either (1) eat humiliation and watch Hamas regenerate under a donor umbrella, or (2) mobilize and finish the job while being told to “show restraint” by the same people who just tried to hand Gaza's keys to Ankara and Doha. Choose (2) and accept the screaming.

Expanded Lebanon Strike Signals No Safe Rebuild Cycle South Of Litani

The IDF struck more Hezbollah infrastructure across multiple areas in southern Lebanon, including military structures used for drills, weapons training, and planning attacks against Israeli civilians and IDF troops. Strikes also hit tunnel shafts used for weapons storage at several Hezbollah sites where terrorist activity had been identified over recent months, alongside launch sites and additional military structures tied to advancing attacks. Separately, the IDF announced it killed a Hezbollah terrorist in the Zibqin area—the third strike announcement in a single day in response to repeated Hezbollah violations.

ASSESSMENT

Hezbollah wants the old model back. Rebuild quietly, posture loudly, and outsource the risk to Lebanese civilians and international observers. “Training compounds,” storage shafts, and launch preparation are the factory floor of the next October-style surprise. Israel has stopped pretending otherwise.

Davos Snub, Carrier Shift, and Israel's “Absorbable” Deterrence Line

The Iran-adjacent posture continued to harden in visible operational and political ways as Davos optics and live-force signaling converged. The World Economic Forum canceled Iran's foreign minister's scheduled appearance, explicitly citing the “tragic loss of civilian lives” in Tehran's crackdown, and the regime answered with its reflex script—blame Israel, blame “U.S.-based proxies,” and reframe mass repression as a fight against “armed terrorists” and “ISIS-style killings.” Khamenei publicly acknowledged “several thousand” killed while naming Israel and the U.S. as culprits, and Iran's law enforcement chief issued a three-day ultimatum for “rioters” to surrender for reduced sentences. Against this backdrop, the USS *Abraham Lincoln* moved into

the Indian Ocean toward the Arabian Sea, positioning U.S. naval airpower within rapid reach of Iran while reducing Gulf chokepoint vulnerabilities. Macron signaled to Trump that France wants in on whatever Iran “thing” is forming. And Netanyahu warned that if Iran “makes a mistake and attacks,” Israel will respond with forces Iran “has not yet experienced.” Israel also conveyed to Washington that it assesses it could absorb even a worst-case Iranian barrage of roughly 700 ballistic missiles if that exchange precipitated regime collapse. IDF leadership reinforced the home-front doctrine publicly as the chief of staff toured Home Front Command, stressed constant readiness across scenarios, and emphasized “unprecedented offensive capabilities” alongside preparations for the possibility of surprise war, citing lessons implemented from Operation “Rising Lion.”

ASSESSMENT

Davos didn't “punish” Iran, but it did remove a photo-op. The real story is “pre-action insurance.” A carrier repositioning, while not a declaration of war, is a billboard that says escalation meets capacity. Israel's “absorbable” barrage language is bargaining power meant to force a decision cycle out of limbo, but it carries a poison risk—outsiders may be tempted to treat Israeli civilians as an acceptable shock-absorber for someone else's grand theory of regime change. Both external and internal adversaries will try to test the claim in ways that turn even “successful” interception into fires, trauma, and political chaos. The Wing of Zion plane movement out of the potential fall-out zone and the blunt language are continuity-of-government discipline in a region where ambiguity is treated as an invitation.

Inside Israel

Draft Crisis Forces Court Escalation As Budget Clock Tightens

Israel's haredi conscription vacuum is moved beyond a policy debate into a direct rule-of-law confrontation. After the Supreme Court's November 19th ruling ordering an effective enforcement plan within 45 days, the government failed to produce one. A contempt motion followed, and the State Attorney's response effectively concedes noncompliance. The court is now being pushed toward “unprecedented remedies,” ranging from personal contempt sanctions against officials, to rigid timetables for draft notices, to court-appointed monitoring that would drag the judiciary into executive mechanics. This is landing as the 2026 budget finally reaches the Knesset 80 days late—NIS 662 billion framework, NIS 112 billion defense line-item, and a process that must clear by March 31 or the Knesset dissolves into elections—while haredi parties are openly threatening to withhold support because the conscription bill still isn't a real enforcement program. Street-level friction is tracking the institutional breakdown. Violent disorder in Jerusalem and Beit Shemesh saw rioters blocking bus routes, throwing stones and objects, setting trash bins on fire, and damaging vehicles before police cleared the area and moved to extend detentions in the related investigations.

ASSESSMENT

A government that won't enforce the draft wants the court to stay "restrained." A court that is being openly ignored is being dared to either become decorative—or become the executive. All of these signaled outcomes are corrosive. If the court chooses contempt sanctions, ministers will [almost rightly] treat it as an attempted coup. If it chooses "supervision," the court becomes the draft office, and democratic accountability becomes a courtroom calendar. Meanwhile, the budget clock turns the haredi exemption industry into a government-survival weapon. Coalition discipline is being purchased with national manpower. The state cannot run both a war and a welfare state with one-third of the eligible population bargaining its way out of duty. The coalition should stop improvising and legislate a real universal-service architecture with real enforcement—or admit it is choosing factional peace over national endurance.

Israel Reprices The War Covenant For Orphans And Reservists

A sweeping reform to the Families of Fallen Soldiers law cleared the Labor and Welfare Committee for second and third readings, expanding recognition and benefits for IDF orphans, widows, and bereaved parents. Orphan recognition age rises to 30. Monthly stipends extend to age 40 (NIS 3,651.92 for ages 21–30, NIS 2,000 for ages 30–40), and a one-time NIS 50,000 grant is set for orphans over 40. A funded personal-support program allocates NIS 50,000 per orphan up to age 21. Marriage and housing grants are doubled to roughly NIS 300,000. Academic tuition assistance extends to age 60. Fertility treatments are recognized. And mental-health treatment is covered with no age limit, including for those bereaved after age 21—alongside a dedicated unit focused specifically on orphans and expanded support for unique cases including double-orphaning. In parallel, a government committee approved a roughly \$2 billion 2026 framework for reserve soldiers, explicitly aimed at reducing reserve service by about one-third while preserving and expanding benefits from 2025—dropping to an average of about 40,000 reservists on duty per day—and introducing a new six-tier differential model tying benefits to type and intensity of service, with cabinet ratification expected in the coming week.

ASSESSMENT

War is not only fought with ammunition, it is sustained with families (at least those that still trust the covenant). Orphans, widows, bereaved parents, and a reserve force entering a third year of intensive activity are the price tag of sovereignty. The benefit expansions are morally correct—and strategically necessary—because the reserve system doesn't collapse with a dramatic headline. It collapses one exhausted employer, one broken marriage, one untreated trauma case, one "I can't do another cycle" conversation at a time. The differential-tier model is also an admission that Israel can no longer pretend all service is equal in cost and that it needs a benefits architecture that matches reality. If the budget-draft standoff detonates into elections, the very mechanisms designed to keep Israel's fighters and families stable become bargaining chips in coalition roulette. Treat mental injury like shrapnel. And never let the war covenant become a line item that can be "delayed" without consequences.

Terror Drops; Infiltration Adapts And Jerusalem Pays The Price

Israel's security trendline in Judea and Samaria is improving on paper while it still keeps finding new ways to humiliate the system. The IDF reported

a sharp drop in Palestinian terror attacks over 2025—down to 20 Israeli fatalities, compared to 41 fatalities in 2024—crediting sustained operations in northern Samaria “refugee” camps, more proactive control of disorder, increased arrests (about 3,500, up 25%), higher weapons seizures, and more aggressive terror-fund confiscation. Rock-throwing and Molotov incidents were down overall versus 2024, but spiked in the last three months of 2025. Illegal crossings remain industrial-scale. Jerusalem’s newest illustration is almost comedic (that is, if you don’t live there). Palestinian Authority infiltrators are reportedly using widened manholes and sewage routes to bypass observation systems, with smugglers using electric cutting tools to breach protective bars; infiltrators pay about 800 shekels per crossing, split between the “engineer” preparing the passage and the driver waiting on the Israeli side to move them onward. Jerusalem also absorbed a separate governance failure with immediate human cost: a suspected hazardous-materials/poisoning incident at an unlicensed daycare operating out of a private home as roughly 55 babies and toddlers were evacuated from an unlicensed apartment nursery; two infants died and dozens were treated for respiratory distress as investigators probed overheating/ventilation failures and other causes. Suspects were detained and brought for extensions as the investigation continues. Prime Minister Netanyahu, addressing crime and violence, framed criminal organizations as “terror organizations” and cast the issue as a core national challenge.

ASSESSMENT

The IDF’s 2025 numbers show that when Israel stays inside the problem—camps, routes, weapons, money—the incident curve bends. But pressure displaces. When you harden one lane, the market finds another—sometimes literally underground. A sewage-route infiltration business is a logistics service for everything Israel is trying to suppress. Labor exploitation. Criminality. Terror mobility. And the public buck-passing—“it’s the IDF’s infrastructure,” “it’s under review”—is exactly how these gaps survive long enough to become routine. Finally, the daycare disaster is a reminder that home-front resilience is not only rockets and sirens. It’s mundane governance: licensing, inspections, accountability.

Israel and the World

UAE, Cyprus, Greece Deals Lock Israel Into Regional Architecture

While parts of the West posture about Israel in conference halls, Israel is tightening real-world integration with partners who trade in capability, not sermons. Israel’s first official education delegation to the UAE concluded a multi-day visit, with discussions reportedly covering how Jewish history, Israel, and the Holocaust appear in curricula, and exploring deeper academic collaboration—including joint research initiatives and a potential artificial-intelligence project—alongside visits to major Emirati universities and Jewish educational institutions in the Emirates. In the Eastern Mediterranean, Israel is sending an energy delegation to Cyprus to finalize a long-stalled agreement on the Aphrodite-Ishai gas reservoir (estimated at about 129 BCM), about

90% in Cypriot waters and roughly 10% in Israel's zone, with negotiations focused on a compensation mechanism and a joint development framework built around an independent expert review of geological data and development plans. The export concept centers on piping gas to Egypt for liquefaction and global LNG sales. Of course, Turkey rejects regional EEZ borders and could attempt a maritime challenge—potentially via alignment with Syria's new regime—aimed at repricing Cypriot control. Parallel to the energy track, Defense Minister Israel Katz began a four-day security visit to Greece as Israel, Greece, and Cyprus advance a 2026 military cooperation plan involving exercises, training, working groups, and strategic dialogue.

ASSESSMENT

This is the sane way to build alliances. Embed Israel into other countries' schedules, supply chains, and infrastructure so that "pressure" stops being free. Education cooperation with the UAE isn't sentiment—it's long-horizon normalization that survives headlines because it's built into institutions and innovation—especially on the heels of the UAE's discontinuance of funding for its citizens to study in Muslim Brotherhood-captured universities (like King's College, London). The Turkey factor is not a surprise, but it is a reminder that Ankara treats maps as negotiable if it can intimidate the room into accepting a new one. That means Israel's regional architecture has to include protection—legal, diplomatic, and if needed, operational—for the assets it helps build.

Briefly Noted

Frontline & Security

Jerusalem Post: Zelensky announced a revamped air-defense approach built around mobile fire groups and interceptor drones after major Russian strikes hammered power and heating across Ukraine.

Diplomacy & Geopolitics

Times of Israel: Trump told Norway's prime minister he's done thinking "purely of peace" after being "snubbed" for the Nobel, and again argued the US needs "complete and total control" of Greenland. Bruised-ego diplomacy is spooks allies, pressures Denmark/NATO, and advertises that Washington's "rules-based order" now comes with a receipt.

Jewish Chronicle: Iranian dissident Masih Alinejad addressed the UN Security Council on Iran as the piece skewers the UN's selective outrage—obsessive on Israel, evasive on Tehran. The UN will not constrain the Islamic Republic, but it will still keep laundering "international legitimacy" for Israel's enemies.

JNS: Senior Fatah figure Abbas Zaki said in a recent interview that "Israel is doomed to perish," reinforcing eliminationist rhetoric from the PA's ruling party. This should puncture the "moderate partner" fairy tale and should land in every funding, recognition, and "day after" governance conversation—but, don't worry, it won't.

Culture, Religion & Society

Forward: New programs like Rekindle, Van Jones's Exodus dinners, and campus "Unity Dinners" are scaling efforts to rebuild Black-Jewish relationships through moderated dialogue and shared events.

Developments to Watch

Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)

- **Hezbollah rebuild sites burned again** — IDF strikes on training compounds, tunnel shafts, and launch prep keep the south perishable.
- **Southern Syria custody seams widen** — ISIS detention breaches weaken control and create cover for Iran-aligned traffic and weapons routing toward the Golan line. Watch for sudden "counter-ISIS" movements that are really proxy repositioning.

Gaza & Southern Theater

- **Yellow Line probing turns bolder** — Multiple crossings toward IDF positions keep mapping response times under ceasefire constraints. Next step is a packaged incident—IED, sniper, or a grab attempt—timed to force corridor concessions. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**
- **Rafah pressure goes procedural** — With Rafah kept shut, expect Davos-driven demands for "humanitarian timelines" and monitoring optics designed to pry leverage loose. Hamas' play is to stage a blame event that turns closure into "collective punishment."

Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)

- **Iran's 72-hour "amnesty" clock** — Tehran's surrender ultimatum is a drag-net tool: identify, process, punish fast while calling it leniency.
- **Carrier backstop, cheaper retaliation lanes** — The Abraham Lincoln move compresses U.S. strike timelines, so IRGC will hunt lower-cost signaling: maritime harassment, GPS interference, cyber, and deniable proxy noise that tests red lines without firing first.
- **Iranian ship shadows carrier group** — Tracking shows an Iranian bulk carrier sailing in proximity to the Abraham Lincoln group during its west-bound transit. It reads like opportunistic ISR and messaging: "we can watch you, too."

Diplomatic & Legal

- **Davos signing becomes a trap** — Trump's "Board of Peace" signing push is pressure theater: force names onto paper, then treat refusal as sabotage. Europe's early reluctance hints at a public split that will be used to squeeze Israel.

Home Front & Politics

- **Draft crisis nears contempt remedies** — The state's noncompliance on Haredi conscription is pushing the Court toward sanctions or forced timetables. Either outcome invites street intimidation and coalition brinkmanship. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**

The Gaza board is being sold as governance. Yet even Hamas can't describe its mission beyond funding and aid. That contradiction will now be used to pressure Israel into opening Rafah, then blamed on Israel when weapons stay. Watch for "humanitarian timetable" demands tied to Davos optics and Tehran hunting distraction fire as its three-day dragnet closes. Inside Israel, the court-draft fight is heating up as contempt tools or coalition threats could force a fast decision cycle.

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.



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