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READER EDITION

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ISRAEL BRIEF

Wednesday, January 28

Rafah gets a date and Hamas gets a rebrand. Washington says “months,” Tehran answers with hangings.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

THE BOTTOM LINE Social media is where reality gets laundered into vibes. “Building by building” becomes morality play; reasons those buildings matter—tunnels, shafts, command posts embedded in “civilian” space—get buried like inconvenient footnotes because footnotes don’t trend. This isn’t reporting adapted to platforms; it’s platforms optimized to punish Israel for doing the one thing the West demands elsewhere: remove the armed actor and dismantle infrastructure making war possible.

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Flash Brief

- **Rafah Sunday:** Crossing likely opens with external staffing; Israel pushed toward remote verification only.
 - **Hamas Rebrand:** Hamas seeks to fold 10,000 police into a new Gaza “police” force as “order.”
 - **Northern Enforcement:** IDF strikes Hezbollah underground rebuild nodes near Nabatieh and Deir Qanoun amid violations.
 - **Iran Signal:** Iran executes alleged Mossad agent while U.S. messaging frames Iran window in months.
- **Pressure Tools:** White House considers naval oil-export blockade; Riyadh denies airspace and Turkey urges restraint.
 - **Courts & Media:** High Court cases grow around overhaul and Army Radio; government attempts shortcuts anyway.
 - **Diaspora Enforcement:** NYC probes terror-branded merchandise; Iowa mandates antisemitism reporting; San Diego reverses rabbi disinvite.
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The War Today

“Disarmament” Turns Into Amnesty, While Hamas Rebrands Its Gunmen

With hostages returned, attention shifted to Phase II: disarming Hamas and demilitarizing Gaza on paper while the Rafah crossing reopens under outside management. European monitors and Palestinian staff will manage operations, with Israel reportedly limited to remote checks and procedural oversight rather than physical control.

Hamas fundamentally rejects disarmament as an internal resistance right while demanding full IDF withdrawal, reconstruction, and expanded aid. Simultaneously, they propose folding roughly 10,000 Hamas “police” into a new Gaza security force—marketed as civil order while preserving the same organizational structure that ran the war.

Washington is floating a “program” tying disarmament to amnesty and safe-passage options, with intermediaries discussing weapon buybacks for light arms and seizure/destruction of heavier weapons. Egypt, Qatar, and Turkey serve as mediators in this arrangement. Turkey’s role proves particularly problematic: a review of Turkish opinion pages found Hamas routinely framed as “resistance,” October 7 treated with apathy or celebration, and antisemitic motifs normalized—the exact worldview that would sustain Hamas survival. This ignores Hamas’s documented diplomatic and financial support from the Turkish government.

The UN is launching a massive back-to-school drive targeting hundreds of thousands of children in tent classrooms with tens of millions in funding appeals, coordinating with PA education structures and UNRWA. Israel confirms entry of learning kits but not textbooks, as Gaza education has not been neutral.

ASSESSMENT

If Rafah opens as a bureaucratic ribbon-cutting with remote checks and international staffing, Hamas will use it as a resupply and identity-laundering hub. The “Hamas police” rebranding is a scam enabling terrorists to be called law enforcement, with weapons becoming “personal arms” and tunnels becoming “legacy infrastructure.”

Turkey being invited into this mechanism resembles hiring an arsonist as fire marshal. UN education expansion is necessary—children need stability—but if institutions that incubated incitement rebuild classrooms, the next recruiting class gets restocked. Comprehensive oversight preventing further indoctrination represents the only long-term hope.

“Ceasefire Understandings” Meet Underground Sites And Target Lists

Israel continued northern enforcement with strikes on Hezbollah operatives working from underground infrastructure in southern Lebanon, including action in Nabatieh against personnel at a subterranean site assessed as a Hezbollah position being restored, and removal of a terrorist working to reestablish military infrastructure in Deir Qanoun.

Lebanese security officials signal Hezbollah may not escalate immediately unless it concludes U.S. objectives are regime overthrow—meaning Hezbollah treats escalation as a strategic decision rather than reflex, waiting to assess what kind of war it faces.

ASSESSMENT

Lebanon performs sovereignty like community theater performs Shakespeare—earnest costumes, no power. Israel rightly treats rebuild as attack preparation, destroying it early and repeatedly. Hezbollah’s conditionality on Iran reveals it wants the “right” war—one preserving the Iranian patron system, not risking its collapse. Deterrence here concerns Iranian interests, not Lebanese ones; it’s a remote-controlled franchise calculating whether the mothership faces risk.

Washington Signals “Months,” Tehran Executes, And Everyone Pretends Time Is Neutral

Iran executed a man accused of being a Mossad operative, underscoring that regime repression never paused despite external claims. Tehran issues regional threats treating neighboring territory used for strikes as hostile and runs emergency continuity measures for potential leader targeting.

Israel reportedly received U.S. messaging that Iran attack preparations aren’t complete, with the window potentially “months” away, even as Washington builds posture through large CENTCOM air exercises, visible long-range aerial activity, and high-end collection asset repositioning. Active consideration includes a naval blockade choking oil exports.

Diplomacy remains as stage lighting: Trump says Iran reached out wanting a deal; the White House says it’s “open” if terms are met. Regional players sprint to deny basing and overflight—Saudi Arabia reportedly told Iran it won’t allow its airspace or territory for action. Turkey quietly treats Iran as hostile, reporting dismantlement of an Iranian intelligence cell tasked with collecting imagery around key NATO/U.S. facilities.

Europe reportedly moves toward additional Iran sanctions on individuals/entities while failing to agree on IRGC terror designation due to internal opposition—particularly French resistance to naming the problem.

ASSESSMENT

Washington assembles leverage while outsourcing waiting risks to everyone in the blast radius. Tehran understands this perfectly. If the U.S. stretches the runway, Israel should assume Iran uses time for “cheap” lanes: proxy activation, maritime harassment, cyber, and diaspora intimidation—requiring only permission, not completed preparations.

Regional airspace refusals are hedges—states buying insurance hoping Israel pays premiums. Turkey’s dual behavior mirrors the whole region: publicly preaching restraint, privately arresting Iranian operators and preparing for Iranian collapse.

Inside Israel

Court–Government Standoff Turns Media and Reform Into Court Dockets

Israel’s top judge publicly signaled the government’s fast-moving judicial overhaul will reach the High Court “sooner or later.” Coalition figures warned the Court president to “stay in his lane,” even as the attorney-general recently blocked attempts to discipline him as procedurally unsound.

The attorney-general’s office filed warnings ahead of a High Court hearing on shutting down Army Radio, arguing the closure cannot occur by cabinet decision without primary legislation and flagging serious procedural and judgment flaws.

ASSESSMENT

Israel’s constitutional vacuum turns every basic governance disagreement into High Court collision. The judiciary sells itself as neutral “service” while serving as de facto constitutional referee. The political echelon insists it governs while outsourcing hardest fights to procedural warfare and nomination brinkmanship. Everyone demands others “respect democracy,” meaning “stop blocking my power.” The Court should stop pretending it floats above politics while acting as system stabilizer of last resort. This represents the structural rot described in prior analysis.

Coalition Manpower Math Turns Into A Deadline–Driven Coup Attempt

The government’s first-reading budget vote is now a coalition survival event—Israeli politics collapses more often from calendars than ideology. By law, the budget must pass by March 31; the mandatory 60-day interval between readings means the first vote must happen now or the government runs out of runway.

Haredi parties signal they can withhold support unless the draft framework is watered down. Smotrich warns the budget cannot be hostage-taken and publicly floats dissolving the Knesset if partners try it. Early elections panic is partly theater—elections are due later in 2026 anyway—but the coalition’s

real problem is that pre-election mode has started. Each party optimizes for its base, not for coalition survival.

Draft numbers have become too ugly to ignore. An IDF manpower official told lawmakers that draft-dodger/deserter counts surged from roughly 13,000 to roughly 68,000 in two years, with assessments that a dominant share is Haredi—either definitively identified or likely based on background markers.

A Likud MK openly suggests “solving” this by punting the draft law to the next government, claiming the current version lacks real sanctions and will face High Court strikes anyway. The Knesset’s Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee chair declared the draft law’s clause-by-clause reading complete with an imminent committee vote.

ASSESSMENT

A budget vote supposedly funds the state; under this coalition it’s escrow for exemption politics. The IDF’s “68,000” is where the spreadsheet screams—no patriotic speeches compensate for a shrinking serving class while everyone else negotiates carve-outs. Likud’s postponement suggestion is classic Israeli governance: delay as policy, then blame courts for wreckage you refused preventing. Haredi parties only care about keeping money, exemptions, and coalition life for next concessions. Israel cannot afford a luxury manpower model.

Deterrence Works; Bureaucracy Still Refuses Responsibility

A murdered IDF officer’s family says they learned months after burial—via police briefing, not state decency—that their son was decapitated on October 7, with no authority actively searching for the missing head. They describe bouncing between agencies, denial of meaningful forensic options (including requests for advanced DNA work abroad), and post-October 7 decisions reportedly aimed at reducing exposure by withholding details and not notifying families of additional body parts later found.

The family cites lingering unidentified remains and unresolved backlogs, pleading for a designated authority and intelligence-level effort to determine whether the missing part was taken into Gaza or remains in rubble.

In Tel Aviv, the public ritual reversed: the Hostages’ Square “clock” stopped after 843 days, marking the hostage chapter’s end as national countdown and signaling a shift from “return them” to “what now” as public posture.

In Hebron’s southern neighborhoods, Palestinian residents described temporary calm after an Israeli operation that searched hundreds of buildings and seized illegal weapons amid violent clan feuds. Local “understandings” and arbitration claims are framed as fragile and time-bound, with Ramadan flagged as the stress test.

Along Israel’s internal enforcement seams, security inspectors stopped a gold-smuggling attempt from Judea and Samaria—high-value contraband in a vehicle—while policy planning continues for Gaza’s next control mechanism: a proposal from retired security leadership describes a large organized camp area in Rafah with controlled entry/exit and potential biometric-style checks for movement toward Egypt under the coming reopening framework.

ASSESSMENT

Israel can run world-class intelligence and battlefield logistics, then go soft at the unforgivable place: responsibility to its dead and truth to families. A “committee” deciding parents don’t need to know what happened to children before burial is institutional cowardice masquerading as order. The family’s question—who is responsible—shouldn’t require pilgrimage through police, IDF, and security bureaucracies.

On Hebron: deterrence works, pressure changes behavior, and “understandings” last exactly as long as the next escalation season allows. Ramadan will reveal whether anyone disarmed a single gunman or just redistributed fear.

On Rafah camp concepts and biometric control: the predictable chorus will scream “forced displacement”; Israel needs a controlled, enforceable mechanism preventing Hamas from turning movement and aid into resupply and coercion. The only question is whether Israel designs competently and firmly—or lets outsiders design with paperwork then blame Israel when physics defeats bureaucracy.

Israel and the World

Memory Week, Weaponized: Dublin Performs; Tehran Engineers

Ireland’s prime minister used Holocaust Remembrance Day to publicly endorse “you cannot hate Jews and call it virtue” baseline while admitting the country has denial-and-ignorance problems no longer fringe. An Irish national survey found staggering young-adult Holocaust denial and distortion rates, plus nontrivial respondents never hearing of the Holocaust.

He backed a plan giving schools direct access to survivor testimony via video calls, reiterated IHRA definition support, and explicitly rebuked Dublin’s grotesque attempt to rename a public park named for Irish-born Chaim Herzog—with patronizing offers to “find a Jew we deem worthy.”

An Israeli Holocaust scholar mapped how Tehran turned denial into a state instrument after 1979, going fully overt in the mid-2000s: official denial, an international “conference” legitimizing it, imported deniers and useful Jewish anti-Zionist props, a dedicated denial website, and later a “free speech” cartoon contest functioning as incitement with better graphic design.

ASSESSMENT

Ireland does what Europe increasingly prefers: commemorate dead Jews, manage living ones, legislate Jew-hate framing it as anti-Zionism, and call management “social cohesion.” Regardless of interviews or speeches, Ireland like most Europe gave permission to treat Jewish identity as conditional branding revisionable after committee meetings and angry tweets.

Tehran’s denial machine is the same war: erase the Holocaust, erase the West’s basis for accepting Jewish sovereignty, demand Israel justify existence to people who would liquidate it. Europe’s speeches are cheap. Iran’s denial is strategic. When the West treats memory as ceremony instead of security

firewall, it hands Jew-haters the right to rewrite reality while scolding Jews for noticing.

Institutions Test-Drive Courage, Then Ask Security to Clean Up

New York City lawyers opened investigation after a Brooklyn fundraiser displayed and sold merchandise celebrating U.S.-designated terrorist groups and leaders—logos and hero-worship for Hamas, Hezbollah, and PFLP—plus items calling for violence against Tel Aviv and iconography turning murder into lifestyle branding. The event hosted at a youth center tied to a major Muslim civic organization receiving significant discretionary public funding since 2023.

Iowa's governor introduced legislation codifying statewide antisemitism order for schools and public higher education—mandating annual incident reporting and documented investigative outcomes, hard-wiring federal civil-rights enforcement cooperation.

A San Diego civic group apologized after disinviting a rabbi from MLK Day program over “safety concerns” tied to pro-Israel stance—an apology trying to preserve “we meant well” while admitting results echoed classic exclusion patterns.

A prominent “progressive Zionist” argument spreads in U.S. Jewish politics: the center is collapsing, teachers’ unions and progressive institutions normalize anti-Zionism as acceptable prejudice, and Jews face loyalty tests where Israel support is disqualifying unless accompanied by correct denunciations.

ASSESSMENT

This is institutional cowardice: fund a community organization, look away during radicalization, discover “zero tolerance” after their incompetent villainy becomes public. The extremist pipeline needs no state sponsorship, though public money, space, and sector terror of being named helps. Iowa’s approach is correct bureaucratic countermeasure: require documentation, force patterns into daylight, make investigations unavoidable.

New York’s approach is reactive damage control: commission reviews hoping nobody asks why merch praising terrorists triggered basic due diligence.

The MLK event is the moral portrait: “Choose courage” banners followed by “please don’t bring that Jewish person on stage, it might cause discomfort.” The problem isn’t disagreement—it’s new rules treating Jewish belonging as contingent on political self-erasure while pro-terror aesthetics get treated as edgy philanthropy.

Gaza Narrative Is Curated; Small Allies Still Speak Plainly

A media watchdog dissected how The New York Times repackaged a Gaza “demolitions” story for social media. Satellite images and emotionally loaded framing pushed to millions while key context was minimized or stripped—Hamas’s embedded infrastructure, operational reality of cleared zones beyond the new contact line, and basic fact that dismantling terror infrastructure isn’t “collective punishment.”

A parliamentary delegation from North Macedonia—led by a Jewish member previously serving as the country’s first Jewish minister—visited Israel to signal public solidarity and push practical cooperation (water, agriculture, cyber, health, tourism) rather than performative, explicitly arguing small states with real security concerns understand Israel’s constraints better than Europe’s moral-theater capitals.

ASSESSMENT

Social media is where reality gets laundered into vibes. “Building by building” becomes morality play; reasons those buildings matter—tunnels, shafts, command posts embedded in “civilian” space—get buried like inconvenient footnotes because footnotes don’t trend. This isn’t reporting adapted to platforms; it’s platforms optimized to punish Israel for doing the one thing the West demands elsewhere: remove the armed actor and dismantle infrastructure making war possible.

North Macedonia’s posture shows what solidarity looks like when unallergic to consequences: show up, talk deliverables, don’t pretend terrorist governance gets managed by captions and hashtags.

Briefly Noted

Frontline & Security

- **WCNC Charlotte:** A federal grand jury indicted 18-year-old Christian Sturdivant for attempting to aid ISIS after prosecutors say he planned a New Year’s Eve attack using knives and hammers against local targets. The jihadist pipeline doesn’t need training camps recruiting online toward soft targets.

Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- **Times of Israel:** Azerbaijan arrested three men accused of plotting an ISIS-K-directed attack on Israel’s embassy in Baku after obtaining weapons and planning months ago.
- **Jerusalem Post:** The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists set the Doomsday Clock to 85 seconds before midnight, citing nuclear brinkmanship, wars, AI military misuse, and climate risks. The clock is performance art, but the trend line is somewhat indicative.
- **Jerusalem Post:** A Holocaust survivors’ grandson was barred from a UN Holocaust memorial event after photographing security confronting Lizzy Savetsky over an Israeli-flag jacket—alleging guards took his phone and forced image deletion. The UN can’t run Holocaust commemoration without policing Jewish symbols, which is why anti-antisemitism efforts evaporate.

Domestic & Law

- **Jerusalem Post:** Belgian MP Sam van Rooy argued Muslims must explicitly reject violent teachings or lose mosques and “leave,” calling for sharply reduced, culturally selective immigration.
- **Jewish Insider:** Tax filings show the nonprofit tied to New York synagogue protests operates under multiple names with revenue jumping from roughly \$44,789 in 2022 to \$451,903 in 2024, with links to broader extremist networks. This isn’t “community outrage”—it’s funded pressure operation making Jewish public life feel conditional.

Culture, Religion & Society

- **Israel National News:** Deutsche Bahn officials proposed a preferred high-speed rail route within roughly a quarter-mile of Bergen-Belsen’s historic loading ramp, drawing warnings it would damage the site. Germany’s sermons don’t mean much if willing to vibrate Holocaust remnants for timetable optimization.
- **Hawaii News Now:** Swastikas were spray-painted for roughly a half-mile along Kauai’s Sleeping Giant Trail before state crews removed the vandalism. Jew-hate is cheap to commit and expensive to police; “this isn’t who we are” is not a security plan.
- **Israel National News:** A rabbi was punched and threatened in Forest Hills, Queens on International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Police arrested the suspect. New York keeps issuing condemnations like parking tickets while Jews keep feeling risk.
- **Israel National News:** Gov. Tim Walz faces backlash after comparing children’s fear of immigration enforcement to Anne Frank—aligning with Palestine Action’s use of Holocaust inversion in propaganda.

Developments to Watch

Judea & Samaria

- **South Hebron Hills Friction Spike:** Clashes around Khirbet al-Khaliyeh / al-Fakhit produced injuries on both sides with an IDF officer assaulted and suspects detained.
- **Gold-as-Cash Smuggling Route:** Inspectors caught Israeli Arabs bringing approximately 12 ounces of gold plus gold lira coins from Judea and Samaria (roughly NIS 300k). Gold moves when people want money traveling quietly. Watch for follow-on arrests mapping who finances what.

Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)

- **Underground Rebuild Gets Hit Again:** The IDF says it struck Hezbollah operatives working at an underground site in Nabatieh and separately targeted a rebuild enabler near Deir Qanoun.

Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)

- **CENTCOM Exercise Goes Live:** The U.S. launched large-scale air exercise in CENTCOM's AOR as high-end assets re-thicken (including the RC-135V Rivet Joint routing toward the region).
- **Turkey Quietly Cuts Iran's Fingers:** Turkey's MIT says it dismantled an Iranian intelligence cell collecting imagery around Incirlik Air Base. Ankara publicly lectures against war while privately treating Tehran as hostile—the region's favorite two-faced survival technique now fully displayed.
- **Tehran's "Negotiations" Script Tightens:** Iran's leadership pushes emergency continuity measures and renewed deterrent messaging while signaling "talks" through mediators.

Diplomatic & Legal

- **Europe Sanctions, France Blocks Reality:** The EU expected to adopt Iran sanctions on roughly 20 individuals/entities while still failing to agree on IRGC designation reportedly due to French opposition.
- **Aviation Blinks Before Governments:** KLM canceled flights to Israel "until further notice," even as officials sell calm. Airlines don't usually do ideology—they do risk math and already price a "sensitive period" as operational.

Home Front & Politics

- **Court Calendar Gets "Re-Managed":** Netanyahu's testimony scheduled for today was canceled, and a planned security briefing with Lapid was also scrapped.
- **Jordan Seam Trigger-Happy:** The Paran/Arava alert ended as a false incident, but reports of Jordanian soldiers pursuing suspects toward the border and the "truck breach" panic show how easily this area spikes post-October 7. Expect tighter rules of engagement and faster closures—the country learned what hesitation costs.

The next happenings hinge on whether Rafah opens as a lever or costume change for Hamas logistics. Hezbollah keeps testing how expensive rebuilding really is until the price becomes automatic. Iran treats extended timelines as permission to crack down at home and abroad.

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ABOUT MITZPE INSTITUTE

Mitzpe Institute is an intelligence and strategy organization focused on Israeli security, diaspora threat assessment, and the strategic challenges confronting the Jewish people and the West. We produce daily intelligence, forensic analyses, strategic assessments, and tactical briefings read by policymakers, military leaders, and institutional decision-makers across more than 90 countries and all 50 US states — from the Knesset and the US Congress to allied governments, major policy institutions, and Jewish organizational leadership worldwide.

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