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READER EDITION

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ISRAEL BRIEF

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Control shifts from committees to checkpoints as Rafah Border Crossing turns biometric—and Iran tries to bill the world through shipping lanes.

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THE BOTTOM LINE When the pressure ecosystem stops just arguing with Israel, it starts making it expensive for individual Israelis to exist. Detaining a tourist on politicized “insult” grounds. Doxxing a soldier through sloppy/activist journalism. And letting the mob do the rest. When something happens, they’ll just call the outcome “accountability.” Israel’s response cannot be hand-wringing or “engagement.” These things must incur cost and legal challenges: intelligence-sharing pauses, aggressive defamation actions, rapid injunctions, platform takedowns, and a clear reciprocity posture toward states that weaponize policing as theater.

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TWO timers are running at once: Gaza's gate-control experiment is becoming real infrastructure, and Tehran's pressure campaign is widening from threats to chokepoints. Israel Defense Forces built a filtering system at Rafah, treats rebuild equipment in Lebanon as part of the target set, and trains the home front for messy impact scenarios. Meanwhile, the regional diplomatic class is already acting like volatility is scheduled.

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** Flash Brief: The Day in 90 Seconds or Less**

- **Rafah Gate:** Regavim checkpoint screens returnees; Israel runs facial-recognition gates remotely; Palestinian Authority and European Union staff exits.
- **Kerem Shalom:** IDF reassigns Bedouin battalion after smuggling allegations implicate soldiers and commanders near Philadelphi corridor.
- **Northern Front:** Strikes hit Hezbollah engineers and vehicles; IDF confirms Ali Dawoud Amich eliminated in Doueir.
- **Samaria:** Attackers target Israeli shepherd near Homesh and try to seize a firearm; forces surge.
- **Iran Clock:** Eyal Zamir briefs Washington; Israel cites weeks-long decision range as Tehran threatens Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb.
- **Home Front:** Zikim drill models submunitions, secondary strikes, armed attacks, and cyber disruption at impact sites.
- **Draft Enforcement:** Data shows 71,000 Order 12 and evasion cases; police coordination gaps blunt sanctions.

CONTROL is being tested where paperwork usually replaces force—crossings, rebuild logistics, and civilian resilience. These systems only work when they run automatically and punish cheating every time.

The War Today

Iran Window Narrows As Israel Drills For Mass-Casualty Impact

Israel widened senior-level operational coordination with Washington as the IDF chief of staff made an (cleared-for-publication) unannounced two-day visit to the United States for contingency planning with top American counterparts. Afterward he described an American strike window on Iran somewhere in the range of two weeks to two months—while emphasizing no expectation of an imminent U.S. attack in the coming days. Israeli officials underscored unprecedented intelligence-sharing across military and intelligence channels between it and the United States. The regional defense stack continued to thicken with additional layered air defenses in motion to bases across Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar (not yet complete). Israel's home-front posture tracked the threat model as rescue forces ran a large-scale drill simulating Iranian missile strikes with wide-area destruction consistent with cluster-type submunitions, secondary strikes on responders, armed attacks at impact sites, and cyber disruption that degrades command systems. Tehran paired military NOTAM activity with escalating coercion language. Senior Iranian figures publicly threatened to close Hormuz and

endanger Bab el-Mandeb and the Suez lane if struck. Additionally, Iran summoned EU ambassadors over the IRGC terrorist designation and foreign missions (including Italy's) suspended or limited consular activity amid rising tension.

ASSESSMENT

Iran's playbook is frustratingly familiar—threaten global commerce so third parties beg the West to blink first. Shipping lanes are Tehran's hostage note because it lets them punish everyone without bothering with a battlefield. Israel's drills admit that the next round may target the home front at scale, with messy munitions and follow-on attacks designed to break rescue efforts and public confidence. The U.S. timeline talk ("weeks to months") is also a weapon—and must be interpreted rather than simply believed. Defensive deployments help, but they do not remove capability.

Rafah Reopens Under Biometric Control As The Aid Pipeline Leaks

Israel moved Rafah from "discussion" to execution with a pilot being run. Israel is screening returnees through a new IDF-held checkpoint just outside the crossing ("Regavim") with luggage inspections and list verification, while exits to Egypt are supervised remotely from an Israeli control room using facial-recognition gating as PA representatives and EU monitors conduct the on-site screening on the Gaza side. Of course, the reality of war continues as a terror cell crossed the Yellow Line in the south and approached the IDF—troops shot one operative to remove the threat. Meanwhile, at Kerem Shalom, after an uptick in smuggling allegations tied to soldiers and commanders in a Bedouin battalion, the IDF reassigned the unit away from the Philadelphi corridor-facing sector. "International pressure" is being kept on Israel, as eight Muslim-state foreign ministers issued a joint statement blaming Israel for ceasefire breakdowns and as the obstacle to Phase II—without naming Hamas *once*. Separate talks reportedly advanced a UAE bid to take full control of Gaza's civilian administration in coordination with Israel and the U.S.

ASSESSMENT

*Lists, biometric gating, and a hardened returnee checkpoint buy Israel time and reduce obvious infiltration lanes. They do not solve the two real problems—(1) the incentive to launder terrorists through "medical/escort" exceptions, and (2) the simple fact that any leak in the broader crossings ecosystem turns humanitarian throughput into Hamas payroll and procurement. The joint Muslim statement is meant to set the narrative so Israel carries the blame for the next Hamas stunt. The UAE angle could be useful only if Abu Dhabi brings real administrative competence **and** accepts the obvious prerequisite: no Hamas guns, no Hamas "police," no Hamas courts.*

Lebanon Enforcement Tightens As Samaria Sees Weapon-Seizure Attempts

Israel expanded strikes on engineering vehicles caught reestablishing infrastructure in the Mazra'at Aboudiyeh area, plus additional targeted strikes on Hezbollah operatives in southern towns including Doueir and Ansariyah, alongside the reported elimination of a senior Hezbollah engineering figure tied to

the rehabilitation work. IDF troops from the 769th Brigade conducted night-time operations in multiple border villages, destroying anti-tank missile storage, additional weapons depots, and demolishing a structure assessed as having been used to launch anti-tank fire into Israel during the war—explicitly labeling the sites and weapons as violations of the ceasefire understandings. Separately in Samaria, four “Palestinian” terrorists attacked a shepherd east of Homesh and attempted to seize an Israeli farm owner’s personal firearm—the owner fired warning shots, security forces surged, and the incident ended without casualties.

ASSESSMENT

If enforcement becomes episodic, Hezbollah will simply price it in, rotate personnel, and keep rebuilding in the gaps. Israel has to keep this boring and automatic—every time. The incident in Samaria is a reminder that while the spotlight sits on Gaza and Iran, the local theater keeps producing cheap attempts at weapon acquisition and intimidation. Israel’s answer here cannot just be speeches—fast response, arrests, and consequences that make the next would-be weapon snatch feel like a fatal choice.

Inside Israel

High Court Deadline Exposes 71,000 Evaders and Police Gaps

Enforcement data showed a dramatic surge in formal evasion: from 2,257 draft evaders and 3,732 “Order 12” notices in July 2025 to 15,085 evaders and 17,220 Order 12 notices by early January 2026, with the total national pool of Order 12 + formal evaders around 71,000 and an estimate that roughly 80% are Haredi. Though sanctions and funding suspensions create real consequences, the mere expectation of a coming exemption law blunts the effect by telling every ultra-orthodox 19-year-old to wait it out. The High Court has demanded an effective plan and progress updates, and the security establishment is already planning sharper tools—intelligence-led proactive operations that need not enter ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods (nothing says a sovereign state like no-go zones, just ask France), lowering the threshold for shifting from disciplinary to criminal proceedings from 540 to 365 days, and raising maximum military-judge detention from 20 to 35 days. Officials described uneven enforcement, coordination failures between Israel Police and Military Police, random arrests that end with release-and-summons instead of handoff, and refusals to approve proactive operations in ultra-orthodox areas—explained internally as manpower strain, which reads externally as selective enforcement.

ASSESSMENT

Once the state shows it can enforce universally, the system starts to self-correct. Though, once it hints it will “understand” and “postpone,” the evasion market spikes overnight. The Court’s pressure has cornered the government into choosing between equal obligation and perpetual improvisation. The police coordination gap is the scandal inside the scandal.

Milk, Migration, and the North: Pressure Politics Returns

The northern recovery looks like optics to locals, and domestic pressure groups are openly rehearsing “hostage tactics” on the economy and demography. Eitan Davidi described the cabinet’s arrival in Kiryat Shmona—more than two years into the war’s northern disruption—as belated theater forced by resident protests, warning of negative migration, shuttered commerce, and factories that reclosed instead of reopening. At that same cabinet event, dairy farmers protesting the accelerated milk-sector reform were pushed hundreds of meters away so ministers would not see them. Agricultural leaders announced protest measures beginning tomorrow with a gradual reduction in milk supply that could produce dairy shortages. Bezalel Smotrich publicly framed it as a refusal to let “monopolies and pressure groups” hold the public hostage. The cabinet approved a plan to reactivate the city’s airstrip after two decades—with commercial routes planned to Ben Gurion Airport and Eilat and an annual budget around NIS 10 million, pitched as a strategic infrastructure asset for routine and emergency continuity. Netanyahu and Miri Regev sold it as part of a broader connectivity “revolution.” Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael–Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF) approved tens of millions of shekels for war-affected communities—purchasing up to 120 apartments in Kiryat Shmona for mission-driven groups/educators/community professionals, renting apartments in Ofakim, increasing its educational budget by NIS 30 million to NIS 280 million, and allocating NIS 15 million to Ramat HaNegev Regional Council for land and infrastructure development and resident support.

ASSESSMENT

A northern resident cannot rebuild life on press-conference renderings—they can only rebuild with jobs, schools, transport, and the confidence that the state will remain serious next month. The airstrip decision and the apartment purchases are directionally correct—but the local verdict (“too late, too staged”) is a warning light. Meanwhile the milk threat is the same genre as every other Israeli domestic crisis right now—a sector proves it can inflict pain, then demands policy by coercion. The coalition cannot run national cohesion as a series of ad-hoc payouts and postponements while expecting the public to treat “unity” as anything other than a slogan.

Hostage Era Ends; The Blame War Over Gal Hirsch Begins

With the final hostage returned, the civic machinery that dominated Israeli public life is now splitting into rival narratives rather than dissolving. The Hostages’ Families Headquarters announced it is ceasing operations and moving into shutdown procedures after the return and burial of the last captive, framing its mission as complete. In parallel, the Hostages and Missing Families Forum issued an open letter accusing Gal Hirsch of abusing his role as coordinator to intimidate families into silence regarding criticism of the prime minister, alleging he failed to treat returns as the “supreme goal,” and demanding his resignation. A freed hostage, Or Levy, publicly attacked him as self-exculpation and contemptuous toward grieving families. Countering this, the Tikva Forum defended Hirsch and argued that wartime protests and

calls for surrender hardened Hamas's stance, raised the price of deals, and prolonged captivity.

ASSESSMENT

Israel didn't "move on" from the hostage era—the polarized levels of it remain deeply frustrated. One camp wants closure and the other wants culpability. Both want the public to salute. That fight will not stay confined to social media posts and open letters—because it touches the rawest nerve: whether the state treated its people as ends or as instruments. The pro-government lesson is blunt and mostly correct: public pressure during war signals weakness to the enemy and incentivizes extortion. The anti-government lesson is also clear. Families who think they were managed for political convenience will not quietly accept a "thank you for your service." This kind of internal delegitimization corrodes public trust. Leaders must stop treating national trauma as a campaign asset.

Israel and the World

From Bologna Stages To Kids' Maps, Palestine Becomes Mandatory

UK Lawyers for Israel says Britannica Kids is publishing children's maps and entries that label the entire territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea as "Palestine," with no reference to the modern State of Israel. They also argue the materials apply "Palestine" to ancient eras in ways that collapse history into today's slogan. In parallel, The Lancet's Gaza correspondence became a case study in how a prestige institution can launder a contested legal accusation into default vocabulary. An August 2025 piece framed the conflict as genocide. A January 2026 reply asked for methodological rigor, and the rebuttal treated that demand as moral disqualification rather than debate. Meanwhile in Bologna, the TPO Bologna venue canceled a Earth concert after frontman Dylan Carlson asked that a Palestinian flag be removed from the stage. The venue refused on political grounds, canceled minutes before showtime, then led the crowd in "Free Palestine" chants.

ASSESSMENT

This is permission not "public opinion." Children's maps that erase Israel condition them into embracing "from the river to the sea" with crayons. The flagship medical-journal turning a legally explosive, factually false accusation into a default framing stops curating inquiry and starts becoming science cosplay for activists. Europe's moral-theater reflex is now embedded in "education," "culture," and "expertise," which is why it metastasizes so fast.

Turkey Arrests Tourists, Media Mislabels Soldiers, Then Shrugs

An Israeli woman has been held for more than 10 days in Istanbul after being detained at Taksim Square on suspicion of insulting Turkey's flag, Erdogan, and the State of Palestine. She was traveling alone and remains in custody as quiet efforts attempt to resolve the case. Separately, a German-Israeli IDF soldier is suing The Guardian and multiple German outlets after being falsely

identified and pictured as a war-crimes suspect connected to a sniper interview. His lawyer says the soldier was not present at the alleged location, affidavits from commanders and the interviewed soldier support that claim, and the newspaper signed a cease-and-desist agreement to stop using his name and photo. The fallout spread anyway through other publications (including Der Spiegel and ZDF), viral reposting, and a formal complaint by ECCHR. A German court issued an interim injunction against Abendzeitung barring specific defamatory claims.

ASSESSMENT

When the pressure ecosystem stops just arguing with Israel, it starts making it expensive for individual Israelis to exist. Detaining a tourist on politicized “insult” grounds. Doxxing a soldier through sloppy/activist journalism. And letting the mob do the rest. When something happens, they’ll just call the outcome “accountability.” Israel’s response cannot be hand-wringing or “engagement.” These things must incur cost and legal challenges: intelligence-sharing pauses, aggressive defamation actions, rapid injunctions, platform takedowns, and a clear reciprocity posture toward states that weaponize policing as theater.

Briefly Noted

Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- *Jerusalem Post*: IDF chief of staff Lt Gen Eyal Zamir made a quiet trip to Washington to brief senior US defense officials on Iran and float military options as the Trump team probes talks with Tehran. Israel is warning that a “freeze” deal that leaves missiles and stockpiled enriched uranium untouched is just capitulation with paperwork.
- *JNS*: A JNS essay challenged Hamas casualty claims by arguing the Gaza Strip lacks physical and logistical evidence consistent with the reported death totals.

Frontline & Security

- *Ynet*: Home Front Command reopened Zikim base as a rubble-and-rescue training site, drilling mass-casualty response for Iranian cluster-missile strikes plus follow-on gunfire and cyber disruption.

Economy, Tech & Infrastructure

- *Jerusalem Post*: A peer-reviewed paper in Science warned that coordinated AI “swarms” can impersonate online crowds to push disinformation and harass users at scale while staying hard to detect.
- *Algemeiner*: The social network Moltbook launched as a bots-only platform where AI agents post, argue, and role-play emotion without human users. Remove humans and you also remove responsibility—which makes it a perfect lab for autonomous persuasion and mischief before it escapes into real-world networks.

Culture, Religion & Society

- *Times of Israel*: A 2,000-year-old Pilgrimage Road running from the City of David area up toward the Temple Mount reopened to the public after years of excavation.
- *Times of Israel*: Deni Avdija was named an NBA All-Star Game reserve, the first Israeli selected, and will play Feb 15 in Los Angeles. In a season of boycotts and Jew-hate posturing, an Israeli starring on the league's biggest stage is soft-power oxygen—and, happily, it infuriates the would-be censors.
- *Jewish Insider*: At Web Summit Qatar in Doha, Issam Hijazi blamed “Jewish tech execs” for media control, sneered at “Zionist money,” and pitched Up-Scrolled as an escape hatch after the TikTok deal news. Qatar's conference circuit is glad to host it because laundering Jew-hate helps their influence game.

Developments to Watch

Judea & Samaria

- **Halhul demolition** — IDF demolished the home of a July 2025 attacker in Halhul tied to the Gush Etzion Junction attack.

Northern Front (Lebanon/Syria)

- **Rebuild crews stay targetable** — Israel continues treating Hezbollah “rehabilitation” as attack-prep, not postwar entitlement.

Gaza & Southern Theater

- **Rafah gate wedged open** — Rafah Crossing is moving from pilot to people flow under list-based controls.

Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)

- **NOTAM windows as cover** — Iran's active NOTAM blocks through Feb 4 create a permissive layer for UAV and missile movement and “launch rehearsal” ambiguity.
- **Chokepoint blackmail widens** — Tehran's menu explicitly includes Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, and the Suez Canal—we can also expect “accidents” designed to make third parties pressure Israel and the West to blink first.
- **Iraq file uncertainty, proxy nerves** — Mixed signals out of the United States on who actually owns the Iraq militia problem (and whether the envoy even still holds the job) invites militias to test the theatre.

Diplomatic & Legal

- **Ankara mediation as time-buying** — If a U.S.–Iran meeting is floated via Ankara, Tehran will demand Israeli “restraint” as the cover charge while keeping missiles and proxies safely off the agenda.

Hamas will go hunting for the soft lanes at the Rafah crossing first (medical exceptions, escorts, and camera-ready denials). Unfortunately, we can expect a Rafah friction incident designed for headlines. On Iran, the threat map is being stretched to Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, and the Suez because “global commerce” is Tehran’s favorite hostage note.

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