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ISRAEL BRIEF

Wednesday, February 4

Iran is trying to compress diplomacy into a single bilateral box while still turning maritime friction into leverage. Gaza's gate experiment is already colliding with reality. Meanwhile, Israel's internal fights keep marching into court. And the IDF tries to scale manpower but keeps hitting the Haredi wall.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

THE BOTTOM LINE The “rising antisemitism” isn’t organically grown, it’s the output of a pressure machine that uses four lanes at once: jihadist intent (the ISIS case), glorification and intimidation (Bondi-terror posters in “diversity” packaging), institutional laundering (publicly funded venues hosting Iranian-regime megaphones), and lawfare aimed at making Israeli officials and ordinary Jews expensive to host, expensive to employ, and risky to defend. Italy’s move toward making IHRA binding is one of the few responses that understands the problem is operational—definitions are enforcement infrastructure, not poetry—while the Harvard fight shows Washington is willing to turn funding and oversight into leverage. The rest of the West remains stuck in the habitual ritual of issuing statements while still funding the institutions that incubate the hate.

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Israel Brief: Wednesday, February 4

Shalom, friends.

IRAN is trying to compress diplomacy into a single bilateral box while still turning maritime friction into leverage. Gaza's gate experiment is already colliding with reality. Meanwhile, Israel's internal fights keep marching into court. And the IDF tries to scale manpower but keeps hitting the Haredi wall.

Flash Brief

- **Iran Talks:** Meeting shifts toward Oman and bilateral format as Tehran narrows terms to uranium only.
- **Maritime Friction:** U.S. downs Iranian drone near USS Abraham Lincoln; Tehran launches follow-on surveillance drones.
- **Hormuz Standoff:** Iranian boats try to stop a U.S.-linked tanker; Tehran denies; escort ends it.
- **Gaza Fire:** Gunmen shoot at IDF on Israel's side of the Yellow Line; strikes follow.
- **Rafah Screening:** Approvals collapse; masked gunmen question entrants before Israeli screening and confiscations.
- **Northern Border:** Unit 869 reports sustained interdiction; vegetation clearing starts; UNIFIL reports drone stun grenade incident.
- **Courts & Draft:** High Court pushes back on Broadcasting Law and Ben-Gvir; IDF codifies Haredi tracks.

The War Today

OMAN TALKS, SEA HARASSMENT, AND PROXY TRIGGERS TIGHTEN THE IRAN CLOCK

Iran publicly whittled its negotiating lane down to basically nothing. No uranium leaving Iran. No talks on missiles or proxies. Retaliation guaranteed “even if” a U.S. strike is limited—explicitly naming Israel, U.S. Gulf assets, Azerbaijan, and broader regional targets. Hours after their list of No's, the U.S. shot down an Iranian drone that approached the USS *Abraham Lincoln* in the Arabian Sea—triggering a surge of additional Iranian surveillance drones afterward. In the Strait of Hormuz, Iranian gunboats attempted to seize control of a U.S.-linked tanker before it was escorted away—though Iran publicly denied involvement. The planned U.S.–Iran meeting remains on the calendar but is now being re-routed from Istanbul to Oman at Tehran's request. U.S. officials, meanwhile, have signaled there is a time limit on the current force concentration: either negotiations move, or the posture gets used. In Jerusalem, Prime Minister Netanyahu held a three-hour session with U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff and the full senior security corps—pressing Israel's red lines, freedom of action, and warning that Tehran will use talks to buy time while hiding offensive capabilities. Israeli briefers also conveyed that any strike on Israel would draw an immediate, unusually powerful response against unexpected targets.

ASSESSMENT

Tehran is buying time and issuing ultimatums—not exactly indicative of an earnest diplomatic endeavor vis-a-vis these talks. The drone incident and the Hormuz “incident/denial” pattern are classic Iran: create ambiguity, raise commercial risk, and let weak capitals pressure Washington and Jerusalem to “avoid escalation.” All the while Iran gets to keep the tools that are escalation (missiles, proxies, enrichment, and cash logistics). Moving talks to Oman and stripping away observers is an attempt to control the room, the leaks, and the blame.

GAZA GOVERNANCE COSTUMES FAIL FIRST CONTACT

Rafah’s limited reopening produced a sobering first-day outcome: only 12 of 42 attempted entrants were allowed into Gaza, and 12 crossed out into Egypt—far below the stated daily quotas. Those who did enter reportedly ran a multi-stop interrogation gauntlet, including questioning by unknown, masked, armed men near the crossing before being handed to an IDF screening point—“managed movement” is already being contested by armed actors. Meanwhile, Gaza’s ceasefire temporarily collapsed again. Terrorists opened fire on IDF forces on Israel’s side of the Yellow Line in northern Gaza—severely wounding a reserve officer. Armored units and the Air Force struck back, with Hamas reporting at least nine dead in subsequent strikes. More newly reviewed captured Hamas materials document a “guarantor” system embedded inside humanitarian organizations and hospitals—Hamas-linked liaisons tasked with monitoring NGOs, coercing staff, steering aid, and using civilian frameworks as both cover and command infrastructure.

ASSESSMENT

Rafah’s first lesson is that the “international community” still confuses a gate opening with control. Hamas and allied gunmen will keep trying to exert control over the flow of people and goods and will continue probing the ceasefire like it’s an elastic boundary—because they’re ideologically committed to jihad and the political system that demanded “progress” now punishes Israel for enforcement actions. The further proofs offered by the captured-documents on NGO and hospital penetration should end the era of naive humanitarian exceptionalism, though it won’t. Hamas embeds liaisons inside aid and medical systems as a formal protocol. Lab coats or press passes are not licenses to commit terror. Vetting, control, and coercive enforcement are the minimum price of preventing the next war from being restocked under the banner of compassion.

DRONES, DITCHES, AND RAIDS: THE BORDER WARS NOBODY APPLAUDS

Unit 869 under the 91st Division is aimed at preventing Hezbollah reestablishment—so far it has managed roughly 60 Hezbollah terrorists eliminated, dozens of terrorist structures and weapons sites dismantled, and hundreds of precision ground and air fires directed from observation centers. Additionally, the IDF began vegetation-clearing near the border between Israel and both Lebanon and Syria using herbicides to remove concealment options. UNIFIL reported Israeli drone activity over its positions in Kfar Kela, including the unlikely and contested claim that a drone dropped a stun grenade near peacekeepers before returning toward Israeli territory. Away from the northern fence, Israel hit the broader “seams” problem. A joint IDF–Border Police–ISA operation caught a cell of Israeli smugglers with off-road vehicles and drone equipment. In Judea and Samaria, stone-throwers near Jericho were engaged

with live fire, killing one attacker and wounding others (mercifully, no IDF injuries reported). Separately, security forces arrested a wanted operative from the Balata camp after a dayslong manhunt—found hiding on a rooftop in Kafr Qassem. The terrorist, described as skilled in explosives preparation and suspected of planning an attack in central Israel, was transferred for ISA interrogation and is held in administrative detention.

ASSESSMENT

Monotonous prevention, technical dominance, and relentless seam control. UNIFIL's complaints are predictable—peacekeepers notice Israeli drones, but somehow never develop a comparable appetite for noticing Hezbollah's long-term militarization projects. The Jericho/Kafr Qassem actions underline the domestic reality. The line between "minor" disturbance and major attack planning is short—especially when explosives expertise is roaming around.

Inside Israel

BEN-GVIR, BROADCAST LAW, AND LEAK PROBE CONVERGE INTO INSTITUTIONAL WAR

Israel's institutional knife-fight continues seeking more blood. The attorney-general asked the High Court to step in early against the government's sweeping Broadcasting Law, arguing the communications minister shoved a 100+ page overhaul through first reading. The High Court issued a conditional order forcing Netanyahu to explain why he will not dismiss Itamar Ben-Gvir—expanding the March 24 hearing panel to nine justices and setting a calendar for state response and affidavits—centered on allegations Ben-Gvir violated agreed limits meant to prevent political capture of police operations. Separately, police say the main investigative stages are complete in the probe into the leak of a video from Sde Teiman tied to the former Military Advocate-General—but investigative materials have not been transferred to the attorney-general (who is also implicated in the affair). The commissioner is pushing for an external senior body to review investigative actions due to the case's sensitivity. Meanwhile, in the Gaza smuggling case involving soldiers, the state prosecutor ordered—at the last moment—the addition of the offense "assisting the enemy in wartime," a maximal-charge escalation.

ASSESSMENT

This is the same structural sickness wearing fresh costumes. Ministers try to govern by speed-running procedures, the attorney-general and court respond by trying to capture what should have been settled through clean legislation, and the public gets another demonstration that the government and the judiciary are dysfunctional at home. The Broadcasting Law fight is less about "media freedom" slogans than about power. The Ben-Gvir docket is the Court playing politics and calling it tightening the leash on police politicization. The leak investigation's "external review" posture is the bureaucratic version of passing a live grenade down the hall. Everyone wants process insulation, nobody wants ownership.

MARCH DRAFT CLOCK TIGHTENS AS NEW TRACKS MEET MORE RESISTANCE

The IDF moved from improvisation to formal doctrine on Haredi service, warning it must see a significantly larger intake by March to prevent a manpower cliff—especially with a scheduled January 2027 release of roughly 2,500 combat soldiers at once and a shortage in combat and support roles. A new General Staff-level directive establishes binding service arrangements for Haredi recruits *only* within designated tracks: “Magen” (gender-separated team “capsules” inside broader units, largely non-combat), “Herev” (male-only unit frameworks with Haredi/religious command structures), and the strict “David” track (fully Haredi, fully gender-separated units—currently centered on the Hasmonean Brigade). The directive consolidates accommodations (prayer time, kosher standards, an alternative declaration in place of an oath, and other defined provisions) and elevates the Haredi portfolio by creating a senior adviser role to the chief of staff for Haredi affairs; the outgoing Hasmonean Brigade commander is slated for promotion into that advisory position, while a new commander was appointed for the brigade. The “integration” effort immediately met its predictable counterforce on the street. Haredim rioted outside the Tel Hashomer draft office to disrupt Haredi enlistment day. Forcing police to declare the protest illegal, deploy heavy forces, and make at least one arrest while traffic arteries were shut down.

ASSESSMENT

By turning Haredi service conditions into a General Staff order—tracks, eligibility criteria, enforcement of the framework, and a senior adviser with rank and budget pull—the military is signaling it’s ready to scale. The problem isn’t the IDF but the state’s willingness to enforce equality of obligation. The Haredim seem to have no problem leaving the study halls to commit violence, just so long as they don’t have to wear drab green uniforms, it seems. If the government keeps tolerating disruption as “sensitivities,” it will get a further shrinking serving class and a growing class that learns the system bends when you throw yourself in front of a bus lane.

SOVEREIGNTY POLITICS SPREADS FROM JUDEA AND SAMARIA TO THE SUPERMARKET

The defense minister announced he is moving to legalize roughly 140 farming outposts in Judea and Samaria—framing the effort as strengthening Israeli control. The move is presented as coordinated with Netanyahu and Smotrich. In the economic arena, a fast-developing dairy disruption ended when the Finance Ministry signaled Smotrich intends to cancel tariffs in the dairy market for an extended period to break what it described as a deliberate supply squeeze tied to protests against dairy-sector reforms. Within hours, farmers halted the strike and resumed supply after supermarket purchase limits and reported shortages spread, amid estimates of a roughly 20% consumption deficit from slowed production lines. Wading into the chaos, Yair Lapid escalated his clash with Netanyahu. He defended his own meeting with senior Qatari officials as a hostage-family effort while accusing Bibi’s circle of taking Qatari money during wartime—and arguing he has “no problem” with the Palestinian Authority playing a civilian role in Gaza.

ASSESSMENT

In Judea and Samaria, legalization pushes are about facts on the ridge line. Every formalization step shifts enforcement expectations, international leverage, and internal coalition cohesion. But the government can't pretend it's building strategic depth while tolerating lawlessness narratives that opponents and foreign pressure machines weaponize instantly. Lapid's PA-in-Gaza posture shows the opposition is already rehearsing a "post-Hamas" story that smuggles PA symbolism and legitimacy back into the mechanism. The coalition needs to keep one thing straight: sovereignty isn't just outposts.

Israel and the World

ALLIES OPEN DOORS IN JERUSALEM AS ACTIVISTS TRY VISA VETOES

In the U.S., a 22-year-old Islamic State devotee received a 20-year sentence after describing a planned mass shooting of “Jews and Zionists” as his fall-back option if he couldn’t reach Somalia to join the group’s growing local franchise—then vowed he would still execute the plan when released, at age 42. In Australia, an anti-Zionist Jewish group teamed up with organizations linked to Hezbollah and Muslim Brotherhood networks to demand that the government deny President Isaac Herzog a visa and open a criminal probe ahead of his expected February 8–12 visit. Melbourne’s central business district was hit with scores of posters lionizing one of the Bondi Beach Hanukkah-party terrorists—designed to mimic a well-known pro-inclusion street-art campaign. A Holocaust Remembrance Day mural in Milan featuring Primo Levi and Anne Frank was vandalized. And in Britain, a publicly funded Birmingham arts venue hosted the launch event for an “unapologetically pro-armed resistance” group featuring figures tied to Iranian state media and repeat “Jewish supremacy” agitators. Governments are belatedly starting to grope for tools. An Italian Senate committee advanced draft legislation that would make the IHRA definition of antisemitism binding for law enforcement and courts—enabling authorities to curb gatherings that promote antisemitism. In the U.S., the White House signaled a maximalist posture toward elite-campus impunity—publicly floating a push for a \$1 billion settlement with Harvard over alleged civil-rights violations tied to antisemitism after prior funding freezes and court reversals. Against the isolation campaign, Israel still banked quiet diplomatic gains: Herzog received credentials from Fiji’s first-ever resident ambassador after Fiji opened an embassy in Jerusalem, and also welcomed Thailand’s new envoy amid efforts to deepen cooperation. Israel simultaneously widened pragmatic regional outreach through new cooperation steps with Azerbaijan, including an AI memorandum, and exploratory trade talks with Somaliland.

ASSESSMENT

The “rising antisemitism” isn’t organically grown, it’s the output of a pressure machine that uses four lanes at once: jihadist intent (the ISIS case), glorification and intimidation (Bondi-terror posters in “diversity” packaging), institutional laundering (publicly funded venues hosting Iranian-regime megaphones), and lawfare aimed at making Israeli officials and ordinary Jews expensive to host, expensive to employ, and risky to defend. Italy’s move toward making IHRA binding is one of the few responses that understands the problem is operational—definitions are enforcement infrastructure, not poetry—while the Harvard fight shows Washington is willing to turn funding and oversight into leverage. The rest of the West remains stuck in the habitual ritual of issuing statements while still funding the institutions that incubate the hate.

Briefly Noted

DIPLOMACY & GEOPOLITICS

- **UNRWA Misrepresentation:** UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini is misrepresenting a GAO report as an exoneration, stressing it documents steps and gaps without judging whether UNRWA actually mitigated incitement and terror-link risks. UNRWA tried to spin “we described the problem” into “we’re vindicated,” and Congress now has cleaner grounds to keep the funding spigot closed.
- **Iran’s EU Designation:** Iran’s parliament speaker said Tehran has designated EU militaries as terrorist organizations, framed as a retaliation to European moves targeting the IRGC.
- **Libya’s Instability:** Libyan outlets reported Saif al-Islam Qaddafi was shot dead, with conflicting accounts on the location and no clear perpetrator. Libya’s succession rot is back on docket, and the beneficiaries are the militias, smugglers, and jihadist networks that monetize state collapse.

ECONOMY, TECH & INFRASTRUCTURE

- **Albania Data Center:** Israeli firm ADC was selected to build Albania’s first data center near Tirana, a €100 million facility designed around Nvidia processors.

CULTURE, RELIGION & SOCIETY

- **Credit Suisse Nazi Accounts:** Sen Chuck Grassley said investigators identified 890 Credit Suisse accounts with Nazi links—including previously undisclosed wartime accounts tied to the German Foreign Office, an arms manufacturer, and the German Red Cross. Swiss banking never truly grappled with its Nazi loot and is fighting the pull back into the spotlight.
- **Christian Perspective on Zionism:** An Aramaic Christian leader in Israel rebutted Jerusalem church heads who warned against “Christian Zionism,” arguing Christians thrive as full citizens in Israel compared with the region’s record of discrimination and flight.

Developments to Watch

NORTHERN FRONT (LEBANON / SYRIA)

- **Beirut pleads, Hezbollah calibrates** — Hezbollah tied “support for Iran” to the moment Beirut vowed Lebanon won’t be dragged into war; Northern Command still expects Hezbollah to join if the U.S. strikes.

GAZA & SOUTHERN THEATER

- **Yellow Line breach** — Overnight, gunmen fired on IDF troops on Israel's side of the Yellow Line in northern Gaza, seriously wounding a reservist; armor and IAF struck back.
- **Rafah gate contested** — Rafah's first-day flow collapsed (12 of 42 entrants approved), with reports of masked armed men interrogating entrants before Israeli screening and confiscations.

REGIONAL AXIS (IRAN, HOUTHIS, MILITIAS)

- **Oman talks, format hostage** — Iran threatens to cancel Friday's meeting unless it shifts to Oman and becomes strictly bilateral; U.S. sources say the Middle East force surge has a shelf-life. A last-minute collapse raises odds the posture gets used. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**
- **Iran's red lines widen targets** — Tehran said uranium stays put and missiles/proxies stay off the table, and warned any U.S. strike would trigger retaliation against Israel, U.S. Gulf assets, and Azerbaijan.
- **Maritime 'incident/denial' loop** — The U.S. downed an Iranian drone near the USS Abraham Lincoln, and reports also claimed IRGC boats tried to stop a U.S.-linked tanker in Hormuz.
- **Houthi lanes warming again** — Intelligence warns the Houthis are relocating missile/drone depots and planning renewed attacks on U.S. shipping, after months of restraint since the May pause. They re-enter when Tehran wants plausible deniability; watch timing around Friday's talks.

DIPLOMATIC & LEGAL

- **Rojava outreach pokes Ankara** — Minister Chikli hosted representatives tied to DAANES/SDF in Jerusalem and publicly embraced Kurdish partners in Syria. Turkey will treat this as provocation; watch for Ankara's posturing and for pressure on Kurdish nodes that drags Israel into 'protection' signaling.

HOME FRONT & POLITICS

- **Haredi draft order meets street veto** — The IDF issued a binding General Staff directive formalizing Haredi service tracks as Hasmonian Brigade command turned over. Extremists already rioted outside Tel Hashomer to disrupt induction; expect more repeat riots this week as the state tries to scale manpower.

Iran didn't move toward *compromise*, it moved toward *control*. Gaza's gate problem revealed itself as expected... you can't outsource authority and then act shocked when armed actors fill the vacuum. Expect more maritime probing, more Gaza line-testing, and more legal escalation inside Israel as ministers and judges keep daring each other to blink.

— *Uri Zehavi* · Intelligence Editor With *Modi Zehavi* · Data + Research Analyst

Forward this to the friend who thinks "moving the talks to Oman" is a peace plan.

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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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