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READER EDITION

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ISRAEL BRIEF

Sunday, February 15

Gaza turns “transition” into target practice, while Washington puts “weeks” on the Iran calendar. At home, sovereignty advances through small rules—and enemies read the hesitation around them.

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THE BOTTOM LINE Institutions don't have to "hate Jews" to produce anti-Jewish outcomes—they just need to treat Jewish security and Jewish identity as the one set of concerns that must be endlessly balanced, contextualized, and explained away. The result? Diaspora continues to exist under increasing threat. Haverford is the operational edge: masked entrants, bypassed controls, blocked exits, and a security posture that looks designed for a polite panel discussion rather than the reality of organized intimidation. "Persona non grata" is a start, but it's also what you do when you don't want to admit your event model is broken. The library fight is the softer layer of the same campaign: sanitize violent political terms for children, then scold the community for reacting too loudly—because the goal isn't persuasion, it's normalization. And the Texas housing probe cuts to a broader Western dilemma. Parallel communal projects are fine until they start advertising exclusion or imposing religious financial obligations, at which point the state has to choose whether civil-rights law is real or just a costume. Jewish communities should stop treating these incidents as PR problems and treat them as governance problems. The corrective isn't yet another "dialogue series." It's security protocols that assume bad intent. Disciplinary rules that bite. Hard. And civil-rights enforcement that doesn't require Jews to be the dead body before anyone admits the threat was predictable.

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GAZA continues proving that committees don't control territory—guns do, and Hamas still has them in spades—stashed in tunnels, rubble, and hospitals. Washington is talking about operations measured in weeks, while Hezbollah keeps trying to rebuild under the familiar “surely Israel will get tired” theory. Inside Israel, the state keeps moving reality forward by micro-decisions—Temple Mount enforcement, licensing rules, public-order discipline.

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Flash Brief

- **Gaza Line Contact:** IDF identifies armed cell near troops, strikes, then searches for remaining gunmen. *See The War Today.*
- **Hezbollah Rebuild Lane:** IDF hits weapons storage and launchers in southern Lebanon after repeated violations. *See Northern Front.*
- **Iran Campaign Talk:** U.S. officials describe planning for weeks-long operations and targets beyond nuclear sites. *See Israel and the World.*
- **Smuggling Air-Bridge:** IDF intercepts weapon drones from the west carrying rifles, pistols, and magazines. *See The War Today.*
- **Sovereignty by Enforcement:** Limited Jewish prayer allowances on the Mount expand under escort. *See Inside Israel.*
- **Domestic Discipline:** Police extract IDF soldiers from a Bnei Brak riot after disturbances and projectiles. *See Inside Israel.*
- **Hostage Aftermath:** Freed hostage testimony details systematic abuse, isolation, and violence in Gaza captivity. *See Inside Israel.*

Below: operational enforcement in Gaza and Lebanon, U.S.–Iran decision pressure, and the domestic governance fights that shape capacity.

Every arena is testing whether Israel and its allies will enforce lines or outsource them to process.

The War Today

Hamas Tests The Perimeter While “Transition” Stays Imaginary

Multiple armed terrorists emerged from underground infrastructure in the Beit Hanoun sector, crossed/operated east of the Yellow Line, and then took cover under debris adjacent to IDF positions—triggering an airstrike that killed at least two and likely more, with follow-on searches to locate remaining gunmen. The IDF released footage of the armed cell under rubble before the strike. Other incidents included a separate infiltrator crossing the Yellow Line and being eliminated at close range, and subsequent strikes reported overnight across Khan Younis and near Jabalia following additional armed approach attempts. The Board-of-Peace Gaza envoy publicly conceded the technocratic committee cannot enter Gaza while ceasefire violations persist and warned that inserting it under current conditions would “embarrass” it into irrelevance—while simultaneously sketching a disarmament concept that is explicitly incremental and, like most else about it, is unlikely to work. Israel reiterated that the war’s objectives remain full Gaza demilitarization and Hamas disarmament, and directed continued dismantling of underground infrastructure while signaling readiness to shift from defensive to offensive posture if required. Doctors Without Borders quietly suspended non-critical

operations at Nasser Hospital on January 20 after reporting masked armed men inside the compound, intimidation, arbitrary arrests of patients, and suspected movement of weapons. And a Gaza militia figure, operating in coordination with Israeli security forces, openly claimed his group is already working inside Hamas tunnels in Rafah, starting with tunnel neutralization before moving on to production sites, rockets, and eventually rifles.

ASSESSMENT

Hamas doesn't "violate" agreements by accident—it probes boundaries, using the underground to reinsert armed men into zones everyone pretends are stabilized. The technocrats' entry problem is physics. A committee without coercive capacity in a territory where gunmen surface from tunnels under rubble is not "transition governance"—it's a hostage to the first burst of gunfire. The Board-of-Peace posture is drifting right into the classic Western self-own. Defining "progress" and ignoring reality.

Washington Quietly Prepares For a Long Iran Fight as Jerusalem Plods Along

U.S. officials described planning for potentially weeks-long operations—explicitly including strikes on Iranian state and security targets beyond nuclear infrastructure—while more assets from the US Navy and Air Force have been sent into theater, and long-range strike assets remain on alert. Trump framed the decision to send a second carrier group in blunt terms (“we will need it if we don’t make a deal”) and senior U.S. messaging emphasized maintaining forces in-region because Iran can and will hit U.S. presence. Iran, for its part, is projecting high readiness through senior adviser statements and issuing multiple NOTAMs across regions as channels speculate about missile-test activity. In the northern arena, Israel struck Hezbollah weapons storage facilities and rocket launchers across southern Lebanon in response to repeated ceasefire-understandings violations and continued Hezbollah attempts to reestablish infrastructure. On Israel’s internal perimeter, interdiction activity continued: drones attempting to smuggle weapons into Israel were intercepted, including one carrying three M-16 rifles and another previously downed platform carrying ten handguns and thirty magazines. In Judea and Samaria, ISA-guided Yamam/IDF forces arrested Muhammad Zidan in Jenin—an operative tied to financing and advancing terrorism and described as an aide to the perpetrator of the January 6, 2025 Al Funduq shooting—while a separate attempted infiltration near Karmei Zur was closed out with the second suspect captured after a long pursuit.

ASSESSMENT

“Weeks-long operations” lets us know that U.S. planners have finally stopped pretending a one-night strike plus a podium will collapse an industrial, ideological, missile-backed regime. The risk, as always, is political wobble. Washington can assemble a real campaign plan and still negotiate itself into a paper outcome that leaves missiles and proxies intact. Speaking of paper outcomes. Hezbollah’s storage and launch infrastructure does not rebuild because it misunderstood the deal; it rebuilds because it expects Israel to tire first. The weapon-smuggling drones are the home-front version of the same problem—cheap platforms, high impact, constant repetition until routes are hunted as a system rather than treated as isolated “attempts.”

Inside Israel

Status Quo Erodes By Police Practice, Court Orders, And Administrative Drift

Authorities have begun permitting limited Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount under controlled conditions. And the Chief Rabbinate opened state rabbinical certification exams to women after a unanimous High Court ruling forced implementation—something the rabbinate is clearly happy with. On the Mount, escorted groups have been allowed brief prayer, singing, and even limited prostration in defined areas, alongside the quiet green-lighting of printed prayer guidance sheets. The change follows rising Jewish ascent numbers and comes amid a security posture that insists “no formal change” even as enforcement behavior tells a different story. The Rabbinate—after months of stalling and attempted carve-outs—opened registration for women to sit the same state-recognized certification tracks as men (with exams scheduled after Pesach) because the court treated these credentials as civil-professional instruments (salary, eligibility, public-sector equivalencies), not a private clerical rite.

ASSESSMENT

“Nothing changed” said loudly, while everything changes quietly. That gap is where riots, international pressure campaigns, and internal delegitimization breed. On the Temple Mount, the reality is simple. If Jews can only “visit” but Muslims can openly pray, the site becomes a sovereignty Rorschach test. On the Rabbinate front, the court forced the state to admit what it built: “religious” certification that functions as a state license.

Netanyahu Tries To Make Death Penalty Durable, Ben-Gvir Tries To Make It Loud

The terror death-penalty bill is being pushed toward a more appealable, discretionary framework at Netanyahu’s request (and against Ben-Gvir’s insistence on a harsher mandatory model). After security bodies and legal advisers warned the current draft risks constitutional and international-law blowback. Proposed revisions would remove mandatory death sentences without judicial discretion, add the right to appeal the sentence (not just the conviction), and strip language that could be read as discriminatory. At the same

time, internal cohesion stress kept leaking into public view. Ayman Odeh, an Arab MK, again refused to explicitly call Hamas a terrorist organization under direct questioning on live television. A disorderly incident in Bnei Brak saw a mob surround IDF soldiers and confront police—including throwing garbage bins at a police vehicle, torching another, and overturning yet another. Layered on top, external political noise bled into domestic institutions when Trump publicly attacked President Herzog over the prime minister's pardon request—while Herzog's office responded that the matter is still under legal review and that Israel's rule-of-law process will not be dictated by “external or internal pressures.”

ASSESSMENT

Ben-Gvir's instinct—close the hostage-swap loophole and make murderers fear something permanent—is directionally right. His drafting posture—no discretion, no appeal, maximal headline value—is bad optics though understandable given the unwillingness on the judiciary's part to use such a law (as indicated by their refusal to use the one already on the books). Netanyahu's instinct here is to make it legally durable enough to live through petitions, foreign pressure, and bureaucratic sabotage. And the Odeh exchange is not a “media moment”—it's a baseline test of whether Israel's legislature treats Hamas as an enemy force or as a rhetorical bargaining chip. If elected officials can't say “terror group” about the organization that butchered Israelis and still hold the moral megaphone against the IDF, you're not debating policy—you're normalizing incoherence.

Israel's Home Front Fights Weather, Pollution, And Trauma At Once

A severe dust storm pushed Jerusalem and Tel Aviv to the top of global pollution rankings with “hazardous” fine-particle levels, triggering Health Ministry guidance to stay indoors for sensitive groups, seal windows, wear masks (even indoors), and run purifiers. While forecasters warned the dust may return as temperatures whip from hot to colder conditions with possible rain. The environmental hit landed alongside the human one: freed hostage Arbel Yehoud publicly described repeated abuse, isolation, starvation, and multiple suicide attempts during her 482 days in Gaza captivity, saying she stopped trying to end her life after being shown protest footage from Hostages Square and realizing strangers were fighting for her. Her partner, Ariel Cunio, described the crushing psychological toll of prolonged solitary confinement, and both recounted how captors passed brief letters between them until threats ended the contact. Air you can't breathe, and stories you can't unhear—the country is being asked to keep functioning while carrying trauma that does not politely confine itself to “the war section.”

ASSESSMENT

Yehoud's account detonates one of the West's favorite lies: that “captivity” is detention-with-bad-food rather than systematic dehumanization. And the pollution episode is not just weather trivia. Public health is operational readiness—when the air goes toxic, the vulnerable stay home, hospitals fill, and normal life thins out. Add the chronic reality of cross-border environmental abuse (like persistent illegal trash burning that Israel keeps getting told to treat as “someone else's problem”), and you get a simple, predictable result.

Israel and the World

Europe's "Proportionate" Enforcement Keeps Teaching Extremists To Escalate

A UK-focused analysis described the lived pattern Jewish communities have long internalized. Repeated non-enforcement against open incitement and overt support for banned terror groups at pro-Gaza demonstrations, paired with lower-risk enforcement against Jews and legal observers because "risk management" has displaced equal justice, and because prosecutors cannot even reliably scope antisemitic victimization in their own data systems. In France, President Macron used the 20-year commemoration of Ilan Halimi's torture-murder to argue antisemitism has advanced into every crevice, naming Islamist, far-left, and far-right variants—including the anti-Zionism mask—and signaled intent to strengthen penalties and impose mandatory electoral bans for officials guilty of antisemitic acts or remarks, explicitly framing Oct. 7 as "pogrom" logic. Given his track record, we ought to wait for results rather than believe the rhetoric.

ASSESSMENT

Europe keeps talking like it understands the threat while acting like it's negotiating with it. The police do the predictable thing—avoid confrontation in the moment, clean up later if the footage is clear enough—and extremists learn the lesson that matters: be loud, be many, be chaotic, and the state will bargain with itself. The UK "two-tier outcomes" argument lands because it describes a mechanism, not a conspiracy. The system enforces where compliance is easiest, not where justice is required. Meanwhile Macron's language is correct, late, and only as real as prosecutions and sentencing will make it. Europe doesn't have an "antisemitism problem" in the abstract—it has an enforcement problem that produces antisemitism as an output. The anecdote that tells the whole story is banal: if prosecutors can't even count Jewish victims accurately, the rest of the system is just vibes and apology tours. Equal protection isn't a sentiment; it's arrests, charges, and consequences that make the next would-be attacker feel hunted instead of licensed.

America's Institutional Front: Masked Mobs, Children's Shelves, And Housing Lines

Things aren't that much better for Jews on the other side of the Atlantic. In the U.S., the pressure campaign against Jewish normalcy is showing up as institutional behavior—campuses, libraries, and even housing disputes are arenas where Jews are told to accept intimidation as "speech" and politicized standards as "inclusion." At Haverford College, a masked keffiyeh-clad protester disrupted an Israeli journalist's lecture with a bullhorn and apocalyptic threats ("When Gaza is burned, you will all burn, too"), while witnesses described masked individuals bypassing check-in through an emergency exit, blocking egress points, and creating an atmosphere rife with fear of physical harm. The college later identified the bullhorn user and an audience member who

made physical contact, declared them persona non grata, and promised tightened event policies amid ongoing civil-rights scrutiny and prior federal attention. In Baltimore County's public library system, local controversy flared over multiple copies of a children's alphabet book that frames "intifada" as "rising up for what is right," with a state senator flagging the term's violence connotation to most Jews while an as-a-Jew librarian argued against rage or bans and pointed to library pluralism and the presence of Israel-related children's books in the same system. HUD opened an investigation into a Texas planned development marketed as a "Muslim community" and an "epicenter of Islam in America," citing potential Fair Housing Act violations and financial terms that appear to require residents to fund religious institutions—after a similar federal inquiry into the project's earlier iteration had reportedly been closed following assurances and marketing revisions.

ASSESSMENT

Institutions don't have to "hate Jews" to produce anti-Jewish outcomes—they just need to treat Jewish security and Jewish identity as the one set of concerns that must be endlessly balanced, contextualized, and explained away. The result? Diaspora continues to exist under increasing threat. Haverford is the operational edge: masked entrants, bypassed controls, blocked exits, and a security posture that looks designed for a polite panel discussion rather than the reality of organized intimidation. "Persona non grata" is a start, but it's also what you do when you don't want to admit your event model is broken. The library fight is the softer layer of the same campaign: sanitize violent political terms for children, then scold the community for reacting too loudly—because the goal isn't persuasion, it's normalization. And the Texas housing probe cuts to a broader Western dilemma. Parallel communal projects are fine until they start advertising exclusion or imposing religious financial obligations, at which point the state has to choose whether civil-rights law is real or just a costume. Jewish communities should stop treating these incidents as PR problems and treat them as governance problems. The corrective isn't yet another "dialogue series." It's security protocols that assume bad intent. Disciplinary rules that bite. Hard. And civil-rights enforcement that doesn't require Jews to be the dead body before anyone admits the threat was predictable.

Briefly Noted

Domestic & Law

- **JNS:** Israel's cabinet approved measures—and advanced legislation—to shift oversight of archaeological sites in Areas A and B of Judea and Samaria from the military chain of command to a new civilian "heritage authority" with enforcement and expropriation powers. It's Oslo-era creep in reverse: building a permanent administrative chassis for direct Israeli responsibility where the P.A. has treated history like a demolition permit.
- **Jerusalem Post:** A JPost opinion argues Israel didn't "annex" the Golan in 1981 so much as extend Israeli law, administration, and jurisdiction—legal framing that later shaped how the world litigated Trump's 2019 sovereignty recognition. The distinction is catnip for future sovereignty fights in Judea

and Samaria: wording becomes policy armor when international lawfare shows up with a clipboard.

Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- **JNS:** A JNS op-ed says Europe is sliding into performative distance from Washington even as the U.S. surges major naval power toward the Middle East and demands sweeping Iranian concessions. Europe's favorite hobby—anti-American moral posing—doubles as strategic self-harm when Iran's missiles don't care whether the target is Tel Aviv or Brussels.
- **Jerusalem Post:** A JPost opinion claims Iran studied Trump's "contradictory signals" playbook from the June 2025 conflict and is now using deliberate message-whiplash—talks plus threats plus missile theatrics—to box him in. If Tehran can keep negotiations as the product (not the path), it buys time, blunts deterrence, and turns U.S. domestic politics into a negotiating asset.
- **HonestReporting:** HonestReporting traces the viral "50,000 Hamas fighters killed" claim to a misread Hamas-run aid program for widows, not confirmed combatant deaths, and flags demographic indicators (including WHO vaccination counts) that complicate popular casualty narratives. Sloppy stats become sanctions pressure, ICC fuel, and ammunition for every useful idiot with a retweet button.

Culture, Religion & Society

- **Times of Israel:** Times of Israel reports on Judea and Samaria "settler influencers" trying to demystify life on the other side of the green line by sharing their existence.
- **Ynet:** Ynet publishes a Valentine's letter from Rivka Bohbot to her husband Elkana, freed after 738 days in Hamas captivity, describing the aftershocks of return and rebuilding a marriage after trauma.
- **Times of Israel:** Times of Israel profiles couples who met while serving, noting the IDF's rules around relationships (especially commander-subordinate bans) and how bonds formed under pressure carry into civilian life.
- **Jewish Chronicle:** The Jewish Chronicle argues the Washington Post's layoffs reflect a broader credibility collapse driven by "journalism activism," and warning the BBC and others are on the same glide path. When legacy outlets trade standards for moral cosplay, they don't just lose subscribers—they hand the information battlefield to whoever lies louder.

Developments to Watch

Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)

- **Hezbollah Storage Strike Cycle** — The IDF struck multiple Hezbollah weapons depots and launchers in southern Lebanon overnight and eliminated an operative in At-Tiri tied to rebuild efforts.
- **Syria Leadership Under ISIS Threat** — A UN report says Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa has survived five ISIS-linked assassination attempts in the past year. If Damascus destabilizes, southern Syria becomes even more of a terror playground. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE**

Gaza & Southern Theater

- **Yellow Line Contact Expands** — Armed terrorists emerged from underground infrastructure east of the Yellow Line, took cover under debris adjacent to IDF positions, and were struck; additional strikes followed overnight.
- **Hospital Weaponization Confirmed** — MSF said it suspended non-critical work at Nasser Hospital after masked armed men operated inside the compound and weapons were suspected on-site. “Medical neutrality” ends where gunmen store hardware.
- **Western Border Drone Pipeline** — IDF intercepted yet another drone crossing from the west carrying M-16s and separately recovered a previously downed platform loaded with pistols and magazines. This is a supply chain, not a hobby—hunt the network, as well as the aircraft.

Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)

- **U.S. Strike Planning** — U.S. officials briefed media that preparations include continuous operations against Iran lasting weeks and potential strikes beyond nuclear sites.
- **Iran NOTAM + Readiness Signal** — Tehran issued multiple NOTAMs across its airspace as senior advisers declared “high military readiness” and warned of severe costs for miscalculation.
- **Iraq Transfers ISIS Detainees** — Baghdad confirmed transfer of over 5,000 ISIS detainees from Syria for trial under Iraqi law. Mass processing of jihadist prisoners amid Syrian instability is a volatility multiplier on eastern horizon.

Diplomatic & Legal

- **Pardon Pressure Becomes Public** — President Trump publicly criticized President Herzog over the Netanyahu pardon review, while Herzog’s office reaffirmed legal process independence.

Home Front & Politics

- **Bnei Brak Mob Incident** — Police were attacked and managed to extract two IDF soldiers surrounded by a disorderly crowd in Bnei Brak. If the Haredim can manage to be violent against the IDF and the Israeli Police services, then they can turn that violence toward jihadi enemies of the Am Yisrael.

Closing Assessment

HAMAS will keep pushing armed men into contact and the outcome will be determined by whether Israel answers with a pattern that removes the underground advantage, not just the intruders. Up north, Hezbollah will keep betting that storage today becomes launchers tomorrow unless every rebuild attempt gets priced immediately. And on Iran, the “weeks-long” language is either real planning—or another round of American theater with expensive props. The region is rewarding enforcement and punishing ambiguity, and it’s doing it in real time.

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

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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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