



Forensic intelligence for those who act.

READER EDITION

February 16, 2026

ISRAEL BRIEF

Monday, February 16

Tunnels surface as governance is tested. Tehran sells “progress,” keeps missiles holy, and dares everyone to pretend that’s a deal.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

THE BOTTOM LINE This is what the “moderate” ecosystem looks like when you read the fine print instead of the press release. Qatar sells diplomacy abroad while bulk printing antisemitism and jihad at home—because the product is not peace. The constitutional draft is an expected incentive design: reward the attacker, sanctify the grievance, keep the conflict evergreen. And the Gaza “committee” angle is the sharpest proof that foreign planners still don’t understand the basics. You cannot outsource disarmament to men whose formative political résumé includes organizing attacks and baptizing them as civic virtue. As for stone-throwing—this isn’t childhood mischief, it’s a mass-casualty lottery ticket. Thrown rocks kill, maim, blind, and crash vehicles. They train crowds to escalate from stones to firebombs to rifles while preserving the comforting Western label of “protest.” Layer the online grooming pipeline on top and you get a full-spectrum conveyor belt: schools write the ideology, institutions launder it, platforms scale it, and someone eventually turns it into a weapon in the real world.

CLASSIFICATION

Reader Edition

DISTRIBUTION

Open · Free to share with attribution

Israel Brief: Monday, February 16

IN THIS EDITION

Flash Brief	4
The War Today	4
Hamas Probes, Israel Strikes, And “Transition” Keeps Hitting The Wall .	4
Hizma Attempt, Bnei Brak Inflow, Lebanon Strikes, And Oct. 7 Lessons .	5
Inside Israel	6
Haredi Street Veto Escalates From Protests To Assault On Uniform . . .	6
Jerusalem Boundary Push Advances De Facto Sovereignty East Of The Line	7
Israel and the World	8
Washington Signals “Defense Only,” While Tehran Keeps Missiles Sacred	8
Europe Tests Its Israel Posture Through Quiet Visits and Loud Statistics .	8
Gaza’s “Moderates” Keep Their Hands Dirty, and the Internet Finds Their Recruits	9
Briefly Noted	10
Economy, Tech & Infrastructure	10
Diplomacy & Geopolitics	10
Culture, Religion & Society	10
Developments to Watch	10
Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)	10
Gaza & Southern Theater	11
Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)	11
Diplomatic & Legal	11
Home Front & Politics	11

TUNNELS surface as governance is tested. Tehran sells “progress,” keeps missiles holy, and dares everyone to pretend that’s a deal.

Shalom, friends.

Gaza reminds everyone that “transition” is a PowerPoint until the gunmen are disarmed, and Bnei Brak reminds everyone that “unity” is a slogan until the state enforces law inside its own cities. Meanwhile Washington keeps saying “negotiations” while Iran keeps saying “missiles don’t exist,” which is a convenient way to negotiate with a launch schedule.

Flash Brief

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaza tunnel breach: Armed operatives emerge near the Yellow Line; IDF strikes across north, Gaza City, Khan Yunis. See The War Today. • Rafah tunnel clearing: Troops confirm additional eliminations during follow-on searches inside a contested shaft complex. See The War Today. • Northern enforcement: IDF strikes PIJ in Majdal Anjar and eliminates a Hezbollah operative in Hanin. See Northern Front. • Judea and Samaria: Hizma ramming-stabbing attempt reaches indictment; illegal entry lane into | <p>Bnei Brak disrupted. See The War Today.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bnei Brak disorder: Mob chases female commanders; police restore order, arrests mount, commanders receive Chief of Staff backing. See Inside Israel. • Iran talks window: Rubio keeps talking diplomacy; Netanyahu lists conditions; Tehran rejects missile and enrichment concessions. See Israel and the World. • Iran penetration: Shin Bet announces indictment over alleged collection on a senior figure tied to Iranian tasking. See Israel and the World. |
|--|---|

Below: operational enforcement in Gaza and Lebanon, internal security breakdowns, judicial pressure points, and Iran decision risk.

ARMED men test boundaries, civilians and institutions absorb the cost, and foreign “process” tries to make time look like progress. Gaza’s underground remains the governing party; Lebanon’s rebuild crews remain the launch team; and Bnei Brak shows what happens when a subculture treats the uniform like an invading army.

The War Today

Hamas Probes, Israel Strikes, And “Transition” Keeps Hitting The Wall

After a “blatant” violation (in which five armed Palestinians emerged from a tunnel and approached IDF troops on the Israeli side of the ceasefire line near the Yellow Line), the IDF launched overnight and morning airstrikes

across the northern Strip, Gaza City, and Khan Younis—targeting operatives assessed to be rebuilding capabilities and advancing attacks. The IDF said it killed Ahmad Bayouk, an Oct. 7 infiltrator at Re'im, and separately confirmed the elimination of Azem Abu Huli, described as the head of Palestinian Islamic Jihad's elite Nukhba array in the Central Camps sector—responsible for weapons procurement, directing attacks, and training for IDF-soldier abduction scenarios. Palestinian reporting claimed additional senior PIJ losses, including a Gaza City commander identified as Sami al-Dahdouh, while Hamas-run services reported 12 dead overall. The IDF reported another airstrike after “suspicious” operatives approached troops near the Yellow Line, with two killed. On the ground in Rafah, the IDF reported a week-long continuation of tunnel-shaft clearing after close-quarters combat. Searches confirmed three terrorists killed in the initial encounter and six more eliminated during follow-on activity inside the shaft, reinforcing that tunnel spaces remain live maneuver terrain even under ceasefire branding. Politically, the “transition” scaffolding continued to admit its own helplessness: the Board of Peace's Gaza high representative publicly set disarmament of all factions as a precondition for reconstruction and for any Israeli withdrawal from the Yellow Line—while warning that inserting the technocratic committee amid ongoing violations would simply “embarrass” it into irrelevance. Meanwhile, Hamas has reportedly demanded a model of continued political control alongside partial disarmament—explicitly seeking a Hezbollah-style arrangement.

ASSESSMENT

Hamas and PIJ treat “ceasefire” as a financing window and a probing license. The West keeps trying to build governance on top of an armed monopoly. The “Board” line—disarmament first, reconstruction second—is correct, but it’s also a confession. There can be no transition without coercion (and nobody wants to be the one doing the coercing). Hamas’s Hezbollah fantasy is a standard Islamist governance model under pressure—retain the AKs, concede the paperwork, and wait for foreigners to start policing Israel’s responses for you.

Hizma Attempt, Bnei Brak Inflow, Lebanon Strikes, And Oct. 7 Lessons

In Judea and Samaria, prosecutors filed an indictment against Mahmoud Hamad of Qalandiya for an attempted ramming-and-stabbing attack targeting soldiers at the Hizma checkpoint. He armed himself with two large knives, intended to ram troops and then stab survivors, but traffic congestion prevented adequate speed. After passing through and losing his way, he collided with the separation fence at the Ginat Sakhrov interchange and was arrested as an illegal entrant (also facing charges for illegal entry, knife possession, and driving without a license/insurance). Police stopped a vehicle carrying 15 Palestinian residents suspected of illegal entry en route to work and extended stay in Bnei Brak. Seven were arrested for indictments and eight deported. On the northern front, the IDF struck Palestinian Islamic Jihad operatives in Majdal Anjar (Lebanon), and then—responding to repeated Hezbollah violations—struck and eliminated a Hezbollah operative in the Hanin area involved in efforts to reestablish infrastructure. Over the past week, troops under the 91st Division reported eliminating at least three infrastructure rebuilders

and dismantling structures and engineering vehicles used to advance attacks in southern Lebanon. In an intelligence disclosure with direct operational implications, the IDF permitted publication that Hamas's elite Nukhba force used a sequence of emojis as a coded launch instruction for Oct. 7—linked to switching to Israeli SIM cards—echoing earlier large-scale attack preparations in 2022 and 2023 and reinforcing that “odd communications behavior” was not random noise but a rehearsed trigger.

ASSESSMENT

A traffic jam stopping a ramming attempt is a pretty dire reminder that the gap between “attempt” and “mass casualty” is often mundane luck. Luck is not a defense plan. The illegal-entry employment lane is not a paperwork nuisance either—it’s the soft underbelly of internal security. The same route that gets a worker to a job site gets a terrorist to a target. And “extended stay” is how routines become cover. The emoji-code revelation is the cherry on top of the same failure. Pattern recognition dying under bureaucracy. When an enemy rehearses a trigger multiple times and you train yourself to call it “not unusual,” you are not doing analysis.

Inside Israel

Haredi Street Veto Escalates From Protests To Assault On Uniform

Violent unrest in Bnei Brak escalated from a false “draft enforcement” alarm into a direct assault on the state’s uniformed presence. Two female Education Corps commanders conducting a welfare home visit to one of their soldiers were chased by a large crowd of Haredi men who believed—incorrectly—they were Military Police delivering conscription orders. The mob shouted “Nazis,” surged the soldiers, and forced them to shelter until police extracted them. Rioters overturned a patrol car, set a police motorcycle on fire, and injured officers. Police used crowd-control measures, deployed large forces (including aerial support), and announced mass arrests—reported as 12 in initial updates and rising to 23–27 in subsequent accounts—while political leadership across the spectrum issued condemnations and demands for enforcement. The hardline “Jerusalem Faction” ecosystem was explicitly tied to the ignition mechanism: a community hotline circulated an alert claiming soldiers were “delivering enlistment orders,” and the group’s messaging framed the ensuing crowd as a protest against “persecution of the Torah world.” The episode immediately metastasized into a secondary fight. Senior Haredi MKs condemned the rioters while accusing police of “collective punishment” and “show arrests,” claiming most detainees were quickly released without indictments. Defense and coalition figures simultaneously demanded “zero tolerance” and swift prosecution. Public figures floated maximalist draft-coercion frameworks—e.g., proposals to cut state benefits and institutional funding for non-service—while the Chief of Staff personally backed the attacked soldiers and declared any reality where IDF personnel cannot move freely inside Israel “intolerable” and requiring full enforcement.

ASSESSMENT

This riot (not a mere protest) was a live-fire rehearsal for how a subculture tries to turn draft law into a veto power—by making enforcement physically dangerous, then wrapping the danger in sanctimony, then blaming police for restoring order. A hotline turns rumor into mobilization. Rabbinic rhetoric turns refusal into honor. Teenagers, at-risk youth, and demented adults supply the violence. Politicians condemn the optics, but to what end? The Haredi pressure is working, because the moment after the stones and flames is always the same: a pressure campaign to reframe arrests as persecution, and to teach the state that touching the draft file carries a domestic price tag. The country can't build a larger army while tolerating an internal enclave that treats uniformed soldiers as intruders. Enforce the law, prosecute organizers and repeat inciters where evidence exists, and stop indulging the "extremist fringe" bedtime story when the mobilization infrastructure is industrial and the slogans are mainstream enough to be spoken from big podiums.

Jerusalem Boundary Push Advances De Facto Sovereignty East Of The Line

A new housing plan advanced through the Civil Administration is being framed as settlement expansion but is designed to create functional territorial continuity with Jerusalem—effectively enlarging the capital's municipal footprint beyond the Green Line in a way not done since 1967, by routing access from Jerusalem's Neve Yaakov and returning into it, with hundreds of units reportedly aimed at the ultra-Orthodox public. (I'm for sensible strategic depth around Jerusalem, but the only new Haredi housing I can get behind is in military barracks.) The move fits the broader acceleration of planning mechanisms inside the Civil Administration following administrative restructuring and expedited approval channels, and it lands amid a wider package of state actions that critics label "de facto annexation" while supporters treat as sovereignty-by-infrastructure. On the security-mobility seam, residents of Otniel and Telem protested the decision to reopen checkpoints to Palestinian Arab traffic near Dahariya and Idhna, warning against "concessions at the expense of our lives" and citing a deadly Highway 35 attack that occurred after checkpoints had previously been removed.

ASSESSMENT

This is sovereignty the way it actually happens: not by declarations, but by roads, jurisdiction logic, and the planning process that determines whose map becomes lived reality. Expanding Jerusalem by functional continuity is the kind of move foreign critics hate precisely because it's durable. It creates facts that survive elections and outlast diplomats' outrage cycles. The predictable whining about "violating commitments" is leverage theater—because the same actors demanding Israeli restraint usually have no plan to reduce Israeli risk. Israelis near the seam don't treat movement controls as a human-rights seminar—they correctly treat them as a probability engine for the next shooting. If the state reopens lanes without a credible enforcement posture—intelligence, patrol patterns, rapid interdiction, and consequences—local communities are stuck. If Jerusalem is being strengthened by administrative design, then the surrounding movement regime must be managed like a security system, not a temporary convenience. Otherwise you get the worst hybrid: expanded jurisdiction with diluted control—more responsibility, less authority.

Israel and the World

Washington Signals “Defense Only,” While Tehran Keeps Missiles Sacred

Over the past 24 hours, Washington publicly re-anchored itself to diplomacy on Iran while simultaneously reinforcing its regional military posture as protective “insurance” for U.S. forces, with the Secretary of State stressing negotiations remain the sole active track and that any shift would run through U.S. legal and congressional lanes. In parallel, Israel sharpened its public red lines: Netanyahu said any deal must (1) remove all enriched material from Iran, (2) end enrichment by dismantling capability—not pausing activity, (3) address ballistic missiles with explicit reference to MTCR-range limits Iran ignores, and (4) dismantle the terror axis Iran built—damaged but regenerating. Tehran’s deputy foreign minister, meanwhile, framed talks as “positive,” floated compromises only in exchange for sanctions relief, and explicitly ruled out ending enrichment or linking negotiations to ballistic missiles—i.e., the regime’s survival instrument stays off the table. Reporting folded into this posture claims Trump previously told Netanyahu he would support Israeli strikes on Iran’s ballistic missile program if talks fail, with U.S. officials discussing support options such as aerial refueling and overflight permissions. Israel also disclosed a new Iran penetration case: an Israeli citizen from Kaukab Abu al-Hija indicted for allegedly collecting intelligence on a senior figure—reported as former defense minister Yoav Gallant—on behalf of Iranian intelligence for money.

ASSESSMENT

America says “defensive” because “offensive” spooks voters, markets, and the committee class. Iran says “talks are positive” because “positive” buys time, and time buys missiles, and missiles buy immunity. Tehran’s position is not subtle. Enrichment stays. Missiles stay. Proxies stay. Only sanctions must go. The American administration must confront the obvious: a “nuclear-only” understanding is a permission slip for the missile factory to run uninterrupted while everyone congratulates themselves for avoiding war—right up until the next launch wave makes the avoidance strategy look like something out of the DSM-5.

Europe Tests Its Israel Posture Through Quiet Visits and Loud Statistics

Israel used a rare European diplomatic opening to shape internal EU dynamics: Finland’s foreign minister made her first Jerusalem visit since 2016, met with Foreign Minister Sa’ar in both private and expanded formats, and was positioned by Israel as a timely channel amid ongoing EU deliberations over ties with Jerusalem. Sa’ar explicitly credited Finland for supporting the EU’s designation of Iran’s IRGC as a terrorist organization and pushed a security framing on Israel’s constraints, including presenting a scale comparison map to reinforce the country’s narrow strategic depth. Separately, official French figures illustrated the trendline Europe keeps trying to manage with speeches: Jews are ~0.6% of France’s population yet were the targets in more than half of recorded religiously motivated hate crimes in 2025 (1,320 antisemitic incidents out of 2,489), with antisemitic incidents down year-over-year but still the third-highest annual total since 2000—far above pre-Oct. 7 baselines. Macron

marked the Ilan Halimi commemoration with language acknowledging anti-semitism's advance, even as France's posture toward Israel has been... shall we say... politically confrontational.

ASSESSMENT

Europe's Israel policy is increasingly a two-channel system: the polite diplomatic lane (visits, "in-depth talks," carefully worded support on IRGC) and the street reality lane (Jews as a standing target category regardless of what Israel does on any given day). The EU runs on coalition physics—small states can tilt language, votes, and timing when larger capitals are busy moralizing, so Finland can make a dent. The French data shows us that Europe does not have an "Israel problem," it has a governance and enforcement problem that expresses itself as antisemitism, and then gets laundered into "foreign policy concerns" about Israel because that's safer than admitting the republic can't protect its own Jews. If European leaders want credibility, they can start with consequences—prosecutions, sentencing, and a refusal to treat Jewish security as a special-interest request. Until then, Jerusalem should treat EU criticism as leverage and noise: a pressure instrument that often tracks domestic European weakness more than Middle Eastern reality.

Gaza's "Moderates" Keep Their Hands Dirty, and the Internet Finds Their Recruits

A new review of Qatar's state textbooks found persistent antisemitic tropes, denial or erasure of Jewish history, normalized hostility to non-Muslims, and legitimization of violent jihad and martyrdom—unchanged for a fourth year despite Qatar's cultivated "moderate mediator" branding and U.S. criticism. In the Palestinian arena, a newly public draft constitution for a future Palestinian state reportedly codifies state obligations to support "martyrs," prisoners, and families—entrenching the pay-for-slay incentive structure Abbas claimed he was reforming—while omitting Jewish ties to Jerusalem and gesturing toward a "right of return" framework. In Gaza's postwar governance lane, the chief commissioner of the so-called National Committee for the Administration of Gaza was shown on record describing his past role organizing stone-throwing attacks on Israeli soldiers in Khan Yunis, describing it as a "national act," and presenting a biography that undercuts the fiction of a clean, apolitical technocrat class ready to replace Hamas without importing the same militant premises. Finally, Western security services report that terror and hate groups are exploiting children through mainstream gaming and chat platforms—using private servers, voice chat, and friend networks as trust funnels, then migrating minors to less-moderated spaces for ideological reinforcement and tasking—at a pace outstripping regulators, with a sharp rise in minors comprising terrorism-related investigations and workload in Europe and North America.

ASSESSMENT

This is what the “moderate” ecosystem looks like when you read the fine print instead of the press release. Qatar sells diplomacy abroad while bulk printing antisemitism and jihad at home—because the product is not peace. The constitutional draft is an expected incentive design: reward the attacker, sanctify the grievance, keep the conflict evergreen. And the Gaza “committee” angle is the sharpest proof that foreign planners still don’t understand the basics. You cannot outsource disarmament to men whose formative political résumé includes organizing attacks and baptizing them as civic virtue. As for stone-throwing—this isn’t childhood mischief, it’s a mass-casualty lottery ticket. Thrown rocks kill, maim, blind, and crash vehicles. They train crowds to escalate from stones to firebombs to rifles while preserving the comforting Western label of “protest.” Layer the online grooming pipeline on top and you get a full-spectrum conveyor belt: schools write the ideology, institutions launder it, platforms scale it, and someone eventually turns it into a weapon in the real world.

Briefly Noted

Economy, Tech & Infrastructure

- **Jerusalem Post:** The Pentagon is weighing whether to scrap its \$200 million contract with Anthropic after the company resisted allowing its Claude AI model to be used for “all lawful purposes,” including weapons development and battlefield operations.
- **Jerusalem Post:** The US transported a nuclear microreactor by C-17 from California to Utah in a first-of-its-kind test to prove it can rapidly deploy portable nuclear power for military and civilian use. If it works at scale, forward bases—and AI infrastructure—won’t be hostage to diesel convoys or fragile grids.

Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- **Times of Israel:** France’s justice minister blamed the “ultra-left” for the fatal beating of a 23-year-old aligned with the far right during a protest in Lyon, as elections loom and political tensions spike.

Culture, Religion & Society

- **Israel National News:** Security at Paris’s Casino de Paris confiscated Israeli flags from fans attending singer Itay Levy’s concert, even removing those smuggled inside during the show. In 2026 France, the Jewish state’s flag is treated as contraband—another data point in Europe’s slow normalization of public Jew-hate dressed up as “security policy.”

Developments to Watch

Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)

- **Hezbollah “rebuild” crew reprisal calculus** — After the Hanin elimination and the 91st Division’s week-long interdictions, Hezbollah has to choose

between swallowing enforcement or staging a “measured” response to reassert deterrence.

- **PIJ in Lebanon as a deniable trigger** — The Majdal Anjar PIJ strike creates a useful proxy lane for Hezbollah: retaliate without owning it. Watch for rocket/drone harassment attributed to “Palestinian factions” to test whether Israel treats Lebanon as one battlespace.

Gaza & Southern Theater

- **Yellow Line tunnel surfacing repeat** — Armed operatives are continuing to emerge from underground infrastructure adjacent to troops.
- **Abduction-training personnel removed, abduction logic remains** — Killing Bayouk and Abu Huli degrades specific expertise, not the underlying incentive.

Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)

- **Geneva round as a spoiler window** — With talks set for Tuesday, Tehran and proxies have every incentive to generate “manageable” friction that pressures Washington to narrow scope (nuclear-only) and de-risk markets.
- **Missiles kept sacred** — Iran publicly ruling missiles out of talks is a threat dressed as policy.

Diplomatic & Legal

- **“Defensive posture” while enabling options** — Rubio’s “strictly defensive” framing is political cover; the real tell is whether enabling moves (refueling logistics, basing permissions, overflight geometry) quietly tighten. Watch for allied airspace cues and force-protection escalations around U.S. facilities.

Home Front & Politics

- **Bnei Brak enforcement test** — Arrest counts and rhetoric don’t matter; charging decisions and organizer attribution do. Watch for whether police/State Attorney treat this as riot and assault on security forces (with real indictments) or let the “handful” narrative launder the mobilization machine.

The coming days are about whether Israel keeps treating violations as assembly-stage attacks—everywhere—or lets them become “incidents” again. Expect more tunnel surfacing attempts near the Yellow Line, a likely Hezbollah reply through a deniable lane, and Tehran to use Tuesday’s Geneva round as cover for intimidation without responsibility. Inside Israel, the real test is prosecutions, not condemnations. Either the state can move freely in Bnei Brak, or it’s negotiating sovereignty street by street.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Uriel Zehavi

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR · MITZPE INSTITUTE

Uriel Zehavi is the executive director of Mitzpe Institute, where he writes the daily Israel Brief and co-directs its Institutional Intelligence practice with Modi Zehavi. He is the author of four books from Mitzpe Press and advises Israeli and allied clients on strategic communications for Western audiences.



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.

PASSED ALONG TO YOU?

The daily Israel Brief is free at mitzpe.org. The operational layer — Closed Dossiers, Vantage, and Watchwords — is members-only. Become a member, gift a membership, or book a briefing at mitzpe.org.

Reader Edition · Free to share with attribution to Mitzpe Institute.