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READER EDITION

February 19, 2026

ISRAEL BRIEF

Thursday, February 19

A Gaza ‘police’ plan recruits gangs while the Iran clock forces Israel to print shelter maps. Washington stacks aircraft; Tehran stacks excuses.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

THE BOTTOM LINE This is *_Controlled Surrender_* in miniature. Institutions discover antisemitism wearing a fashionable mask, then ask that mask to grade the exam. Dehumanization isn't a bad word choice—it's pre-violence. When a broadcaster can platform "human fragments" and call it acceptable because it's "opinion," it isn't being neutral. It's licensing the vocabulary that makes the next harassment, attack, or exclusion feel normal. New York's policy rollback is the municipal variation of the same moved. Strip definitions. Blur lines. Pretend the consequences are abstract until Jewish security becomes a budget item after an incident. I wonder if anyone could have seen that coming? And the "Christians in Israel are persecuted" genre is not about Christians—it's about creating an emotionally satisfying permission structure for abandoning Israel while still feeling righteous. An apartment in Doha might tell you what's going on with that motivation. The smear merchant won't even leave the airport—but he's happy to export the narrative into millions of homes.

CLASSIFICATION

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TODAY reads like a systems test across three arenas: Gaza governance by hired guns, an Iran timeline that drags Israel's civilians back into the target set, and a home front forced to prove it can function under stress.

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Flash Brief

- **Gaza “Police” Plan:** U.S.-backed model leans on armed anti-Hamas militias—bringing jihadists right into the tent; partners resist deployment. *See The War Today.*
- **Iran Readiness:** Home Front Command and emergency services move to war preparation orders nationwide. *See Israel and the World.*
- **U.S. Strike Stack:** Officials signal near-term strike readiness; carrier movement becomes a timing lever. *See Israel and the World.*
- **Hezbollah Targets:** IDF strikes Hezbollah infrastructure in southern Lebanon after repeated violations. *See Northern Front.*
- **Judea & Samaria:** IDF demolishes homes tied to major attacks; Hebron action rolls up weapons suspects. *See The War Today.*
- **Oct. 7 Tribunal:** Special military tribunal legislation advances; public trials framework locks in release restrictions. *See Inside Israel.*
- **Flood Alert:** Heavy rain triggers rescues and road-closure planning; disruptions ripple into readiness. *See Inside Israel.*

As always, everyone wants outcomes without paying the cost. Gaza’s planners want “order” without disarming anyone. Tehran wants time without concessions. Israel is responding with readiness orders and enforcement—and then the weather shows up to remind everyone that real life doesn’t wait for strategy meetings.

The War Today

Iran Clock Tightens; Israel Hardens Home Front and Northern Deterrence

Home Front Command and emergency services have moved into their highest alert levels and instructed their constituencies to ready wartime response scenarios—as assessments point to near-term escalation risk with Iran. Jerusalem is distributing updated civilian preparedness guidance, and national readiness measures are being coordinated tightly with Washington. U.S. officials brief that strike readiness could come within days (including as soon as this weekend), with the carrier *Ford* moving toward the region and long-range strike basing explicitly name-checked (Diego Garcia and RAF Fairford) as part of deterrent messaging. Iran simultaneously issued a NOTAM consistent with live-fire or missile activity. Tehran’s play of pressuring Hezbollah to join the fight if war breaks out is hardly subtle. And Israel has reportedly delivered an unambiguous warning that Hezbollah intervention will draw a far more severe response. The IDF is already striking Hezbollah infrastructure in southern Lebanon after repeated violations, while the Northern Command is briefing local leaders that the posture remains offensive and preemptive, with forces deployed along and beyond the border—with outposts maintained in southern Lebanon to prevent a surprise penetration. In the

background, Iran continues to seek legitimacy and survivability simultaneously—winning procedural seats in UN legal bodies while sustaining sanctions-evasion and proxy financing pipelines that run through crypto rails and third-country laundries—because the regime’s doctrine is endurance, not honesty.

ASSESSMENT

Iran’s best retaliation option against Washington is to hit Israel—because it’s closer, it’s politically combustible, and Tehran believes it can turn Israeli civilian pain into U.S. hesitation. That’s why Israel continues to treat civil defense as a front-line system and Hezbollah as a second-strike arm—not a Lebanese domestic actor. The IDF will keep degrading launch capacity before Tehran flips the switch. The cynical comedy is that UN bit—elevating Iran inside a committee meant to “strengthen” the Charter while Iran simultaneously builds the missile-and-proxy apparatus that makes such charters irrelevant.

Gaza “Police” Plan Slides Toward Gang Rule Under Foreign Cover

Washington’s Gaza-endgame lane is mutating in real time. A newly reported plan would stand up a new security/policing force staffed heavily by armed militias opposed to Hamas—some of which are criminal gangs with long-running ties to looting, kidnappings, and aid-truck predation, to say nothing of being chock full of jihadis—triggering pushback inside the U.S. military and unease among partner states. The International Stabilization Force roster is expanding (now including Kosovo and Kazakhstan alongside Indonesia, Morocco, Greece, and Albania), with talk of operating “behind the Yellow Line” in relatively secure areas to maintain public order and block terrorist re-infiltration. Key regional states still refuse to deploy troops. And the force’s operational readiness is described as distant rather than imminent.

ASSESSMENT

Gaza doesn’t reward branding. It rewards monopoly-of-force. A policing model built on militias with criminal DNA doesn’t neutralize Hamas—it creates a second predatory layer that Hamas can infiltrate, intimidate, tax, or later absorb. The Stabilization Force expansion is bureaucratic comfort-food. More countries. More acronyms. More uniforms. Nary any willingness to confiscate rifles. Meanwhile, every month the “force won’t be ready” is another month Hamas’s underground economy, patronage networks, and intimidation machinery regenerate.

Counterterror Pressure Tightens in Judea and Samaria; Jerusalem Cuts Incitement Nodes

Israel widened its internal security pressure set across Judea and Samaria and Jerusalem. Engineering and special units demolished the home of Walid Tzabarna (in Beit Ummar)—tied to the November Gush Junction ramming-and-stabbing murder of Aharon Cohen, ז”ל—and separately demolished the home of Hamas operative Raafat Dawasi in Silat al-Harithiya—an operator linked to the June 2024 Jenin roadside bomb that killed Cpt. Alon Sacgiu, ז”ל, and wounded 16 soldiers, and the August 2024 Jordan Valley shooting that killed Yonatan Deutsch, ז”ל, and wounded a civilian. In Hebron, following reports of gunfire in the Jalis neighborhood, combined IDF/Shin Bet/Border Police forces launched a large-scale action. Blocking roads. Searching dozens of

sites. Detaining numerous suspects to seize weapons and arrest armed actors. In Jerusalem's Old City, a six-month closure order shut the Burj AlLuqLuq association compound in the Muslim Quarter—on claims of incitement activity and support links to terror-adjacent bodies. Police physically sealed the site to prevent reconstitution under new signage. Complementing that, a Jerusalem District Court conviction landed on a weapons case involving the sale of a handgun used in the 2022 Shuafat checkpoint attack that murdered Sgt. Noa Lazar, ז"ל, and wounded others—underscoring Israel's focus on the procurement chain, not just the trigger-puller.

ASSESSMENT

The State is removing physical infrastructure tied to murder, choking the weapons market, and disrupting armed clusters before they metastasize into the next "spontaneous" shooting spree. Much left to do, but progress is visible and pressuring bad actors. Home demolitions are signaling and deterrence aimed at the incentive structure that terror networks exploit. The Old City closure is the Jerusalem version of the same sort of logic. You don't wait for Ramadan rumor cycles to ignite crowds. You shut down the incitement venue and make reconstitution costly. Israel's main advantage here is still intelligence and enforcement capacity. The risk is political or bureaucratic softness that turns these actions into episodic theater instead of sustained pressure.

Inside Israel

Women In Tanks Becomes A Proxy Fight For "People's Army" Legitimacy

A bloc of rabbis sent a letter to the prime minister, defense minister, finance minister, and the chief of staff demanding an urgent meeting to stop the integration of women into the Armored Corps, warning that a mixed-gender corps would create an "impossible contradiction" for Torah-observant soldiers and "weaken" the combat array. The trigger is the IDF's pilot program for female Armored Corps training. Originally slated for November 2025, postponed to November 2026 due to wartime operational burden, equipment wear, and resource allocation constraints, with the IDF stating multiple bodies (Ground Forces, Medical Corps, Combat Fitness) are designing a track meant to reduce injuries while holding a uniform standard. Participants will be designated "Armored Corps soldiers" and receive the full corps kit and insignia. A religious female veteran of an earlier women's tank pilot track in Caracal, Tal Sarah Biton, publicly rejected the rabbis' framing. She described an all-women crew model that maintained separation from male troops, argued critics are speaking from ignorance, and pointed to women's performance on October 7 as proof the capability argument has long been over. She also noted the practical reality of operational compromises (women housed separately, far from tanks, even in live-fire zones). In parallel to the gender argument, the IDF is elevating visible symbols of integration and operational professionalism on other fronts. The Navy announced its first female Sa'ar 4.5 missile boat commander will take command this week, tied explicitly to wartime operational record and merit-based command progression.

ASSESSMENT

Israel is in a manpower war and an authority war at the same time. You don't get to run a prolonged multi-front security posture while treating half the population as a ceremonial auxiliary—especially in roles where separation frameworks already exist and have been field-tested. The rabbis' letter isn't more about veto power than tanks. It attempts to redefine "Torah-observant contribution" as something that must be protected from the inconvenience of modern service design, rather than demanding Torah-observant soldiers take personal responsibility as they serve in designated frameworks meant to accommodate their lifestyle choices. Meanwhile, Biton's point that the people's army only survives if it can carry multiple subcultures without letting any one of them hold the entire force design hostage is on target.

Israel Prepares Public Trials For Oct. 7

After two years of internal deliberation on how to prosecute captured October 7 perpetrators, the Attorney General's Office announced that state prosecution services agreed to use a proposed special military tribunal—now in advancing Knesset legislation—as the framework for trying Palestinians who massacred, raped, tortured, and committed other atrocities during the October 7 invasion. Roughly 300 of those invaders are currently held in detention. The emerging law (already passed first reading and in committee preparation) would empower the tribunal to prosecute a broad slate of offenses, including genocide. Cases would be heard by three-judge panels led by a retired district court judge alongside two judges qualified for district court service with criminal-law expertise. Appeals would be heard by a tribunal appeals bench led by a figure drawn from senior retired judicial ranks (including a retired Supreme Court justice or equivalent) with two retired district court judges. Trials are stipulated to be public and broadcast via a dedicated website. The legislation explicitly bars suspects/defendants/convicts of October 7 crimes from being released through prisoner-release agreements.

ASSESSMENT

October 7 wasn't "an incident." It was a campaign of exterminatory violence with documentation. The tribunal is designed to do three things here. Move faster than the standard bureaucracy. Control the evidentiary narrative in public view. And close the revolving-door vulnerability where the worst perpetrators become bargaining chips in the next hostage/prisoner deal. Broadcasting—not for catharsis, but because the world will lie about what happened unless Israel forces a public record—is important, but will lead to inversion and manipulation in public discourse. Those convicted under the genocide statute would be liable for death-penalty exposure. Expect the usual chorus—"due process" as a weapon, not a principle—especially from actors who never demanded "restorative justice" when Jews were butchered. Of course, if the tribunal becomes yet another arena for procedural sabotage, delay, and petition warfare, Israel will relive the same legitimacy bleed it's already suffering in other governance battles.

Israel and the World

India–Israel Alignment Deepens Despite Europe’s Pressure Cycle

India’s prime minister is slated to visit Israel next week for a two-day trip, including an expected address to the Knesset—his second visit and another signal that New Delhi is not outsourcing its Middle East policy to Europe’s moral weather. The visit follows a recent run of high-level exchanges and momentum on defense-industrial and technology cooperation, with both sides framing ties as strategic rather than sentimental. The relationship has already moved beyond photo-ops into co-development, trade expansion, and corridor-thinking tied to the India–Middle East–Europe connectivity concept. Israel is being targeted for diplomatic constriction, while India is making a different bet—Israel is a capability partner in a world where drones, missiles, desalination, and industrial resilience matter more than Brussels’ lectures. Modi’s trip formalizes that bet in public, in Jerusalem. While others still pretend “engagement” is a punishment tool.

ASSESSMENT

India doesn’t need to “like” Israel to need Israel. It needs the technologies, the defense-industrial interfaces, the intelligence habits, and the shared realism about jihadist threats that don’t dissolve when a UN committee votes. The deeper mechanism is leverage insurance—India diversifies suppliers and doctrine partners as China tightens its own axis relationships and as Western politics grows more performative and less reliable. For Israel, this is an antidote to the isolation campaign. Not because India is a savior, but because it’s a large, consequential power that treats anti-Israel pressure as someone else’s endeavor. Of course, Europe will still buy the capability (or its “European wrapper”) while denouncing the source—India just skips the hypocrisy and signs the paperwork.

New York, Media, and Influencers Converge on the Same Pressure Point

A British state broadcaster’s internal complaints unit has effectively blessed incendiary Arabic-language framing—treating dehumanizing language about Israelis as permissible “personal opinion” not requiring challenge—while its complaint architecture leaves no external regulator as a meaningful appellate lane for that service. In the U.S., New York City is now facing a lawsuit seeking records around the new mayor’s rapid cancellation of prior executive policies that recognized a mainstream antisemitism definition and barred Israel boycotts in city contracting—an early-term signal move made without an accompanying public rationale, now colliding with transparency law. Layer onto this the American conservative ecosystem’s own fracture. Tucker Carlson, a high-profile commentator, flew in for a tightly controlled, airport-only sit-down with U.S. Ambassador Huckabee after pushing a “Christian persecution” narrative that relies on demographic sleight of hand (shrinking share versus growing absolute numbers) and the classic trick of laundering regional Christian decline into “Jewish sovereignty did it.” A separate rebuttal ecosystem is already counter-programming the claim set—arguing Israel is one of the only places in the region where Christian life is legally protected and publicly visible.

ASSESSMENT

This is Controlled Surrender in miniature. Institutions discover antisemitism wearing a fashionable mask, then ask that mask to grade the exam. Dehumanization isn't a bad word choice—it's pre-violence. When a broadcaster can platform "human fragments" and call it acceptable because it's "opinion," it isn't being neutral. It's licensing the vocabulary that makes the next harassment, attack, or exclusion feel normal. New York's policy rollback is the municipal variation of the same moved. Strip definitions. Blur lines. Pretend the consequences are abstract until Jewish security becomes a budget item after an incident. I wonder if anyone could have seen that coming? And the "Christians in Israel are persecuted" genre is not about Christians—it's about creating an emotionally satisfying permission structure for abandoning Israel while still feeling righteous. An apartment in Doha might tell you what's going on with that motivation. The smear merchant won't even leave the airport—but he's happy to export the narrative into millions of homes.

Briefly Noted

Frontline & Security

- *JNS*: Israel's Diaspora Affairs Ministry, with partners, is sending 4 million shekels (\$1.27M) to support Ukrainian Jewish communities facing winter power outages, including heated lodging and meals. Jewish security isn't a slogan—it's an operational obligation even outside Israel's borders.

Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- *HonestReporting*: Al Jazeera's Doha forum featured Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal, Iran's foreign minister, and UN rapporteur Francesca Albanese sharing a platform and laundering Hamas talking points, including praise for Oct. 7 as a strategic win and rejection of disarmament. When "media conferences" normalize jihadist leadership as respectable stakeholders, they're not reporting the war—they're recruiting for it.
- *Israel National News*: An opinion column frames the government's move to advance land registration in Judea and Samaria as a sovereignty step meant to end legal ambiguity and shrink the Oslo-era negotiating fiction. Whatever you call it, registration is governance which quietly converts international pressure into a record-keeping problem Israel controls.

Domestic & Law

- *The Forward*: Israeli police detained two Women of the Wall leaders after a Rosh Chodesh prayer service at the Kotel, one day after a seven-justice High Court hearing on the stalled egalitarian plaza upgrades. This isn't "religious tension," it's coalition management by obstruction—another avoidable diaspora rupture engineered for Haredi veto power.
- *JNS*: A JNS legal analysis argues Israel's "constitutional crisis" language is mostly a political weapon, spotlighting Supreme Court interventions and the fight over ministerial appointments and judicial authority.

Culture, Religion & Society

- *The Forward*: A Ramchal autograph letter that once sat in JTS's library resurfaced at an auction and sold for nearly \$400,000 after being quietly deaccessioned years ago. Once heritage goes private, scholarship loses leverage—and so do those who paid for the “public” collection.
- *Jewish Insider*: The International Federation of Social Workers voted down efforts to expel or suspend Israel's social work union after complaints tied to Israeli social workers' combat service.
- *Algemeiner*: A historical overview traces Brazil's Jewish presence from Recife's 1636 synagogue through Inquisition-era persecution to a modern community of roughly 130,000 Jews. Diaspora durability depends less on “tolerance” slogans and more on institutions that can outlast the next political mood swing.
- *Jerusalem Post*: A former IDF/Mossad psychologist who debriefed returned hostages argues Israel should treat the post-war period as a national shift from trauma to post-traumatic growth, with serious investment in reservist reintegration and mental health capacity. State capacity doesn't end at the ceasefire line—ignore the psychological after-action report and you'll pay for it in readiness, families, and the workforce.

Developments to Watch

Gaza & Southern Theater

- **60-day clock meets sabotage logic** — The 60-day disarmament demand is now the incentive for Hamas (and its “anti-Hamas” rivals) to manufacture a headline breach near the Yellow Line. Expect a staged “impossible condition” narrative paired with a real probe meant to force foreigners to beg Israel for restraint.

Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)

- **Ceasefire violations priced in real time** — The IDF's overnight strike set on Hezbollah infrastructure is not “response,” it's preemptive denial of rebuild-to-launch cycles.
- **Hezbollah pulled toward Iran's timetable** — Tehran told Hezbollah not to “sit on the fence.” Lebanon becomes Iran's second-strike arm if the Iran issue immolates. Watch for deniable harassment (rockets/drones via “Palestinian factions”) to test Israeli red lines without owning escalation.

Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)

- **Iran NOTAM: live window, real signal** — Iran issued a NOTAM for rocket launches/live-fire activity today (Feb. 19) with a defined time window. It's not proof of imminent war; it is a calibration step—airspace management often precedes larger military moves and messaging.

- **“Ready this weekend” talk hardens** — Multiple reports now say U.S. strike readiness could be achieved within days (including as soon as this weekend), with the *Ford*’s arrival treated as a pacing item.
- **Carrier geometry tightens** — USS *Gerald R. Ford* transiting toward the theater is a clock. Once it clears into useful range, the U.S. has fewer excuses to pretend it doesn’t have more options than just diplomacy. Tehran will read it the same way.

Diplomatic & Legal

- **Rubio visit becomes an alignment test** — SecState Rubio is slated to meet Netanyahu on Feb. 28.

Home Front & Politics

- **Home Front Command on war footing** — Israel’s Home Front Command and rescue services were ordered to prepare for war. Leadership is acting like retaliation hits Israeli cities, not “regional assets.”
- **Red-alert storm stresses readiness** — The rainfall/flooding warning (with rescues already in Samaria) is a natural event that competes with wartime readiness—road closures, emergency bandwidth, and response time under stress.

Let’s see who flinches first. Hamas will try to turn the 60-day demand into a staged “impossible” narrative. Hezbollah will weigh whether to answer strikes with a calibrated reminder. And Tehran will keep pairing paperwork with live-fire signaling. Israel’s advantage is still the boring stuff—civil defense, rapid recovery, relentless enforcement, and refusal to let foreigners fence off the necessary. Though, if Israel doesn’t keep control over coercion, it will get stuck paying for everyone else’s illusions.

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

Send this to a friend still waiting for Tehran to keep a deadline—like it’s a dentist appointment.

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