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READER EDITION

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ISRAEL BRIEF

Friday, February 20

Disarmament promised. Recruitment continues.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

THE BOTTOM LINE Yet another play from the modern anti-Jewish playbook... Deny Jewish peoplehood. Claim targeting is “political.” Demand Jews accept the new normal as “debate.” On a campus, the translation is always the same: intimidate through numbers and symbols, dare the administration to enforce rules, and when the school freezes, call the resulting fear “speech.” The hearing’s core dispute is whether institutions will keep pretending Jewish identity is uniquely negotiable. If a symbol communicates “we hunt you,” it doesn’t become harmless because a law professor calls it an “ism.” Moral laziness dressed as constitutional literacy.

CLASSIFICATION

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GAZA’s “new police” scaffolding goes up while Hamas keeps staffing the rooms. The Iran timeline tightens as aircraft and evacuation warnings pile up. And Israel’s own institutions keep arguing about signatures while everyone else is stocking generators.

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Flash Brief

- **Gaza Governance:** Hamas re-seats loyalists in ministries and police while new “civilian force” plans circulate.
- **Tunnel Denial:** IDF dismantles a one-kilometer Beit Hanoun route with explosives and hideouts.
- **Yellow Line Contact:** IAF eliminates a terrorist crossing the line and approaching troops in the south.
- **Egypt Smuggling:** IDF downs a drone carrying assault rifles into Israel from Egypt.
- **Iran Countdown:** Trump signals 10–15 days as airpower, tankers, and AWACS movements accelerate.
- **Northern Risk:** Israel declares alert in the north as Hezbollah contingency planning activates; Beqaa strike reported.
- **Courts Freeze:** High Court presses Levin over appointments, warning the system is failing basic governance functions.

DON'T MISS — Purim Carnival of Healing (Unity Warriors / Na'aleh Therapy Farm)

A concrete way to help this week: Unity Warriors' Na'aleh Therapy Farm is holding a Purim carnival for IDF soldiers dealing with PTSD and their families—gift boxes for soldiers, Purim gifts for kids, and wellness packages for spouses—at their therapy farm that also rescues abused animals. I volunteered there recently (and was wearing their shirt yesterday when I got a request to share this). These people are the real deal, so if you can, sponsor a family and make it tangible.

The War Today

Gaza Governance Theater Meets Underground Reality

The latest Gaza “transition” architecture is colliding head-on with facts on the ground. A renewed push to sell “deradicalization” as a near-term solution imagines post-World War II-style transformation, yet Gaza sits plugged into regional Islamist ecosystems that continuously supply ideological reinforcement, financing lanes, and operational mentorship. With Hamas dominance spanning nearly two decades, even optimistic reform timelines stretch 20–25 years—requiring either a long-duration governing authority with daily coercive capacity or a foreign force willing to absorb sustained attrition and political blowback. Meanwhile, Israeli military assessments describe Hamas consolidating control “from the bottom up.” Embedding loyalists in ministries and security organs, appointing district governors tied to its armed wing,

reopening police stations, resuming tax collection, and paying fighters and civil servants—funded in part through taxes on smuggled goods.

The Board of Peace advanced an absurd 50,000-man “professional civilian police” concept—trained in Egypt and backed by a “stabilization” roster (Indonesia, Morocco, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Albania, and Turkey—great choices). Public claims promise one authority, one law, one weapon—and disarmament of all factions. Hamas, however, is working to integrate roughly 10,000 of its own police (including internal security) into that very force. On the ground, Israel continues dismantling the physical infrastructure that actually governs Gaza. A one-kilometer tunnel route destroyed in Beit Hanoun. Terrorists eliminated after crossing the Yellow Line. A drone-borne rifle smuggling attempt from Egypt foiled.

ASSESSMENT

“Deradicalization” is how Western planners describe a clean ending without the dirty middle. Gaza is run by whoever can enforce compliance with rifles. Swapping signage on ministries while leaving Hamas staffing payroll, collecting taxes, and embedded inside any new structure refurbishes its rule. If an international force is not mandated—and willing—to confiscate weapons and confront those who refuse, it becomes a human tripwire. Israel’s operational freedom narrows while Hamas retains armed control. Gaza’s underground remains an active maneuver network—dismantling shafts is not cleanup, it is continuity of war without admitting it. The durable metric is monopoly of force. Everything else—committees, acronyms, training rotations—is décor. If the political track does not internalize that reality, it will keep colliding with it.

Iran Clock Compresses As Europe Steps Inside The Coercion Cycle

President Trump publicly signaled roughly 10–15 days for a “meaningful” outcome, while a bipartisan War Powers move in Congress seeks to force a vote constraining unilateral action. Simultaneously, operational indicators have stacked up. Planning options reportedly range from limited strikes on nuclear and ballistic-missile targets to a sustained, weekslong campaign that could include leadership targeting, even as senior advisers caution that regime-change outcomes are uncertain. AWACS aircraft have transited the region, special-operations platforms have landed in Israel, and additional fighter and tanker assets—including F-22 redeployments and clustered refueling aircraft positioned for extended-range sorties—suggest preparations sized for endurance rather than a one-night demonstration. Against that, diplomacy is quite strained. Tehran rejected the latest U.S. offer in Geneva while floating “moderate” nuclear concessions that leave missile capabilities untouched. Moscow signaled readiness to accept Iranian enriched uranium under the right framework. European governments resumed leave-now advisories to their citizens in Iran. The IAEA chief warned publicly that the military buildup is shrinking Tehran’s diplomatic runway. Israel has elevated readiness messaging: Home Front Command warning of multi-front scenarios, hospitals instructed to prepare for operating without grid power, and senior leadership underscoring that any operational shift will draw immediate, heavy response. The northern theater has moved to higher alert as Israel readies a comprehensive Hezbollah target package in case Tehran activates its second front. And, not wanting to

do nothing, Brussels finally, formally designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization, triggering EU sanctions mechanisms targeting the regime's central coercive arm and its economic networks. The move lands amid a U.S.-led buildup that increasingly resembles campaign geometry rather than signaling. Europe is no longer merely commenting on the escalation cycle—it has stepped into it.

ASSESSMENT

When AWACS, refuelers, special operations aircraft, evacuation advisories, and hospital blackout planning align, officials are preparing for impact even as negotiators keep drafting language. Trump's 10-day frame is a countdown, but Congress's maneuvering will factor into Tehran's calculus about whether Washington's fuse is political or operational. Iran's method remains consistent: offer calibrated concessions on enrichment while protecting the missile arsenal and proxy lattice that give it leverage. Keep markets nervous, keep oil premiums elevated, and dare Western capitals to prioritize stability over enforcement. Meanwhile Hezbollah waits as the regime's second-strike instrument, positioned to widen the map if Tehran needs to distribute cost across Israel's northern frontier. Europe's IRGC designation is overdue and strategically relevant—but only if it moves beyond symbolism. Naming the IRGC now signals alignment with a coercion sequence already in motion. The question is whether Europe is prepared to absorb consequences alongside Washington—or retreat to commentary once pressure becomes uncomfortable.

Inside Israel

Judicial Appointments Freeze Deepens Court Dysfunction

High Court justices sharply pressed Justice Minister Yariv Levin over his refusal to cooperate with Supreme Court President Isaac Amit on statutory administrative appointments across the judiciary, warning the impasse is impairing core public services and worsening an already acute judge shortage. The court issued a conditional order requiring Levin to explain, under sworn affidavit by March 15, why he has not acted “in coordination with Amit where required” to carry out appointments such as court presidents and deputy presidents, registrars, retired judges for parole boards, and associate judges. Other parties may file arguments by March 22, with a further hearing expected in the first half of April. Levin's claim is that Amit's presidency is not legally valid because the prime minister has not signed confirmation and the appointment has not been published in the official gazette. Levin told the court that therefore “there is no president of the Supreme Court” with whom he is refusing to work. The State Attorney's Office rejected that position as ongoing harm to foundational governance structures, arguing it affects ordinary people whose legal rights depend on functioning courts. Justices emphasized practical consequences: likening a court without a president to a hospital without a director, and warning that missing authorized officeholders can disrupt time-sensitive court proceedings and administrative approvals. The petition seeks to compel engagement to advance routine appointments, including district court leadership and additional acting judges

amid mounting caseloads. The State Attorney's Office cited upcoming needs in coming months including district presidents in Central and Beersheba, up to 10 parole board roles between March–July, 14 acting judges, 21 deputy presidents, and two more court presidents by year's end. This hearing ran alongside a separate track where the court has already demanded Levin justify a year-long refusal to convene the Judicial Selection Committee—two choke points now producing one outcome: visible, compounding court capacity failure.

ASSESSMENT

Levin is right about the old appointments ecosystem, but he's still wrong about letting governance rot in public as a tactic. The public doesn't "experience" judicial reform theory—they experience cases delayed, hearings pushed, parole processes jammed. Self-inflicted state weakness. The Court, meanwhile, is delighted to turn administrative shortages into a public-safety crowbar—because every backlog becomes another argument for judicial supremacy "since nobody else can govern." The coalition has to stop giving opponents free propaganda. Convene what must be convened. Fill what must be filled. And fight the ruleset change on the merits rather than by creating a courtroom drama. This is exactly the constitutional vacuum problem—power centers acting as if legitimacy comes from procedure games rather than outcomes the public can live with.

Ramadan Movement Controls Tighten as Jerusalem Braces for Flashpoints

The IDF Central Command finalized Ramadan preparations for Friday as thousands of Palestinian worshippers are expected to travel to Jerusalem for prayers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound (Temple Mount), in a security environment shaped not only by longstanding Ramadan volatility but also by elevated regional tension tied to Iran and uncertainty over potential U.S. action. Central Command described its approach as defensive escalation-prevention while introducing a new monitoring system meant to stop permit overstays. Palestinian worshippers granted entry permits will be required to use a special magnetic card at designated checkpoints near their place of residence, and those who fail to exit by the permit deadline will have their information forwarded to Israel Police and face immediate sanctions. Palestinian leaders are pressing for eased Ramadan restrictions, arguing fighting has subsided compared to the prior two years. Israeli officials counter that conditions within the Palestinian Authority are deteriorating, citing rising crime and violence, worsening economic stress, and public frustration—exacerbated by ongoing disputes over tax clearance revenues and the PA's continued pay-for-slay payments to convicted terrorists and their families. The military also reported increased stone-throwing attacks on Israeli vehicles and reiterated lethal-force authorization in life-threatening cases—driving an emphasis on reinforcement along roads and near areas identified as frequent flashpoints. Administrative and security services are also preparing for the return of settlers to Sa-Nur—evacuated in 2005—after defense approval last month to reopen access roads and set security arrangements. Officials said ongoing clashes are diverting attention and manpower from those preparations. Separately, PA internal stress is rising. PA security forces reportedly shot and killed two

youths in Tamoun—fueling local anger and raising concern about wider unrest. Israeli defense officials said they are monitoring whether this could drive deployment adjustments. The IDF has also arrested suspects for incitement recently, reflecting a broader clamp on online and offline ignition channels ahead of peak Ramadan crowds.

ASSESSMENT

This is what “routine Ramadan” actually means. The magnetic permit is an attempt to close a predictable loophole: entry for prayer that quietly becomes overstaying, then illegal presence, then an operational headache Israel is expected to tolerate until it explodes into a headline. The PA’s decay drives the security reality—rising crime and factional violence don’t typically stay inside PA areas. They leak into roads, checkpoints, rumor networks, and stoning attacks. Add the Sa-Nur return and you’ve got a second pressure line: sovereignty-by-access roads colliding with a manpower-hungry environment where every shepherd clash and roadside incident drags forces away from strategic tasks.

Israel and the World

Title VI Collides With “Zionism Is Politics” Evasion

A U.S. civil-rights panel has reopened a long-dormant national review of antisemitism, focusing on how campus conduct and rhetoric interact with federal civil-rights obligations—especially where protected speech ends and unlawful discrimination or hostile environment begins under Title VI. Testimony exposed a widening fault line. One camp insists the First Amendment protects even repugnant advocacy and that “Zionism” is merely an “ism,” while another argues that repeated targeting of “Zionists,” eliminationist chants, and terror-linked symbols function in practice as targeting Jews as a people—particularly when administrators refuse to credit Jewish identity claims and treat the community’s threat perception as political disagreement rather than a safety signal. The panel signaled its work will culminate in a formal report later this year, meaning the institutional fight is moving from campus incident-response into federal findings, definitions, and enforcement expectations—exactly where anti-Israel activism increasingly tries to win by redefining Jewish peoplehood out of protected categories.

ASSESSMENT

Yet another play from the modern anti-Jewish playbook... Deny Jewish peoplehood. Claim targeting is “political.” Demand Jews accept the new normal as “debate.” On a campus, the translation is always the same: intimidate through numbers and symbols, dare the administration to enforce rules, and when the school freezes, call the resulting fear “speech.” The hearing’s core dispute is whether institutions will keep pretending Jewish identity is uniquely negotiable. If a symbol communicates “we hunt you,” it doesn’t become harmless because a law professor calls it an “ism.” Moral laziness dressed as constitutional literacy.

Briefly Noted

Diplomacy & Geopolitics

- **Israel National News:** Video from Ben Gurion appears to contradict Tucker Carlson's claim that he was detained or had his passport confiscated, with Israeli officials calling it routine questioning handled privately in a VIP area. Yet, incredibly, people still treat him as credible.
- **JNS:** At a Judeo-Christian Zionist congress in Nashville, evangelical and Jewish leaders framed rising anti-Israel sentiment—especially among some right-wing influencers—as a serious but containable threat, and pushed for tighter coordination and messaging.

Domestic & Law

- **Jerusalem Post:** Israeli media's nonstop crisis framing and polarized studio theatrics are grinding down public resilience and trust in core institutions.
- **JNS:** Interior Ministry data says 541,085 Jews lived in Judea, Samaria, and the Jordan Valley as of Jan. 1, 2026, with population growth at 2.2%—double Israel's overall 1.1%—alongside claims of accelerated planning, legalization of communities, expanded state-land designations, and the restart of land registration for the first time since 1967.
- **Jerusalem Post:** A leaked Bennett recording reignited infighting over whether any future unity arrangement can include Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, with rival leaders racing to issue purity-test vetoes before an election is even scheduled.

Culture, Religion & Society

- **Jewish Chronicle:** The *Lancet* amplified a speculative Gaza death-toll projection and later published an updated casualty estimate that major outlets (notably the BBC) repeated as authoritative while applying far more caution to casualty figures tied to Iran's crackdown. The asymmetry isn't an accident—it's how "science" branding gets weaponized to launder narrative into fact, and Israel gets treated as the world's favorite moral piñata.
- **Jerusalem Post:** In other media bias news, the IDF's Rafah operation drew vastly more global media and U.S. protest attention than Iran's protest crackdown. Outrage is selective, and Israel's actions—defensive or not—remain the world's most monetizable hobbyhorse.
- **Jewish Insider:** NYC Councilmember Shahana Hanif reportedly faced backlash in a DSA endorsement interview not for attacking Israel, but for having condemned Hamas and "We support Hamas" synagogue protesters. When condemning a terrorist group becomes disqualifying inside activist politics, "antisemitism discourse" has long turned into a permission structure for Jew-hate.

Developments to Watch

Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)

- **Northern Alert Posture** — A formal state of alert has been declared on the northern border amid fears Hezbollah could activate in tandem with Iran. Target banks are reportedly finalized; the next move depends on whether Beirut wants to test them.
- **Beqaa Strike Signal** — Lebanese media reported an Israeli airstrike in the eastern Beqaa Valley overnight.
- **Suweida Pressure Cooker** — Syrian forces are reportedly preparing to enter Druze-controlled Suweida as Washington moves to withdraw roughly 1,000 U.S. troops from Syria. A power vacuum in southern Syria invites jihadist freelancing and Iranian proxy insertion.

Gaza & Southern Theater

- **One-Kilometer Tunnel Pulled** — IDF forces dismantled a roughly one-kilometer Hamas tunnel route in Beit Hanoun packed with explosives and hideouts.
- **Yellow Line Instant Kill** — A terrorist crossed the Yellow Line in southern Gaza and was immediately eliminated by an IAF strike.
- **Egypt Drone Lane Persists** — The IDF downed a drone smuggling three assault rifles from Egypt into Israel. Cheap air-bridge logistics keep probing; unless the network behind the platforms is hunted, the flights will keep coming.
- **Civilian Crossings Into Gaza** — Several Israeli civilians crossed into Gaza and had to be tracked and retrieved by the IDF. Self-endangerment isn't activism—it's resource diversion.

Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)

- **War Powers Clock Fight** — Reps. Massie and Khanna will force a War Powers vote next week to restrict unilateral U.S. action on Iran. Washington's clock now runs on two calendars.
- **Iraq Militia "Corps System"** — Iran-aligned Al-Nujaba reportedly established a decentralized "corps system" authorizing attacks on U.S. targets without leadership sign-off if Iran is struck.
- **Air Stack Thickens** — Additional F-22s landed in the UK ahead of redeployment, KC-135 tankers clustered in Bulgaria, AWACS transited over Israel, and a U.S. special operations aircraft landed quietly.
- **Tehran's "Moderate Concessions"** — Iran rejected the latest U.S. offer and floated unspecified "moderate" nuclear concessions, with a written proposal reportedly pending.
- **Evacuation Warnings Multiply** — Poland urged its citizens to leave Iran immediately, warning evacuation windows could close within hours or days. Governments don't issue that language for sport; they see a tightening fuse.
- **UK Basing Friction** — London is reportedly refusing approval for U.S. use of Diego Garcia and RAF Fairford for Iran strikes. Allied hesitation complicates routing—but doesn't eliminate other corridors.

Home Front & Politics

- **Hospitals Plan For Blackout** — The Health Ministry instructed hospitals to detail how they would operate without electricity in a potential Iran war scenario.
- **Reserve Policy Reset** — Following field complaints, the IDF announced revised reserve-duty allocations and support frameworks effective April.

Coming up? Hamas will try to launder continuity through “professional policing” and foreign uniforms. Tehran will try to launder survival through “moderate concessions” while proxies pre-delegate attacks. Hezbollah will wait for an instruction it can pretend it never received. Israel’s advantage is still the same boring thing: enforce reality early, and don’t outsource coercion to people who think badges are stronger than rifles.

— Uri Zehavi · *Intelligence Editor*

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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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