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READER EDITION

February 22, 2026

ISRAEL BRIEF

Sunday, February 22

A strike window tightens as Tehran builds redundancy and Hamas auditions “police” as a costume (and it’s not even Purim yet).

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THE BOTTOM LINE Can Western societies still even enforce the basic rule that minorities get to live in public without being singled out, smeared, and punished for association—real, imagined, or purely invented? It doesn’t really seem like it at the moment. The bakery attack lets the intimidation do the work of making Jews hide or flee. The Turkish doxxing campaign is the next rung up though. Convert social media into a cross-border threat system, outsource prosecution fantasies to hashtags, and dare a state to decide whether it protects its own citizens or performs for the mob. When its ideological bent is as toxic as Turkey’s we know where the answer will lie.

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Flash Brief

- **Iran Window:** U.S. airlift surges as strike timing shifts; Tehran signals talks while building continuity layers.
 - **Hezbollah Beqaa:** IDF hits missile-array command centers in Baalbek; Hezbollah reports multiple killed.
 - **Hamas In Lebanon:** IDF strikes a Hamas command site in Ain al-Hilweh tied to planning and training.
 - **Yellow Line Contact:** IDF eliminates a terrorist approaching troops in northern Gaza.
- **Gaza “Police” Recruitment:** New Gaza force marketed as independent while Hamas police enforce Ramadan control on streets.
 - **Jerusalem Ramadan:** Mass prayer movement managed under tightened controls; an attempted infiltration near Nebi Samuel is intercepted.
 - **Home Front Continuity:** IAF base families cleared; long-range alert guidance emphasizes early warning and Shabbat monitoring tools.
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The War Today

Regime Continuity Planning Meets U.S. Airlift Surge And Jerusalem Movement Lock

Israel and the U.S. moved deeper into an Iran decision window. Inside Iran, protests and sit-ins were reported across multiple universities and cities explicitly targeting the regime—predictably these came alongside reports of clashes and live fire against civilians in Ilam Province. The Supreme Leader issued layered succession/continuity directives—four-deep replacement tiers for key military and government roles, a delegated “tight circle” authorized to decide if communications break down, and Ali Larijani described as effectively running day-to-day continuity since January unrest—even if Khamenei is eliminated.

Israeli reporting said a U.S. strike expected over the weekend was postponed to an unspecified near-term date as U.S. thinking shifts from a short strike to a longer, attritional campaign aimed at nuclear facilities, missile systems, and IRGC infrastructure. At least nine U.S. C-17 transport aircraft were observed overnight en route to the Middle East, the USS *Gerald R. Ford* entered the Mediterranean en route toward Israel’s coast, and U.S. force-protection measures were taken across the region (including evacuations and staging of aircraft in Jordan).

Diplomacy continues as camouflage: Tehran signaled indirect talks in early March and floated a temporary agreement while insisting enrichment is a recognized “right,” rejecting U.S. control over Iranian resources, warning the UN that regional bases would be targets if Iran is attacked, and branding EU member-state naval and air forces “terrorist organizations.” Israel expects

retaliation to distribute across fronts—the security cabinet is set to convene on Iran, Gaza, and Lebanon.

On the home front, Israeli guidance emphasized unchanged public instructions but highlighted longer warning windows for long-range missile scenarios and the practical requirement to receive alerts even on Shabbat—pushing “Shabbat and Holiday Mode” and silent emergency broadcasts as continuity tools.

ASSESSMENT

To Iran, nuclear ambiguity (or capability), missiles, and proxies aren't bargaining chips—they're the internal and external leverage architecture that keeps foreigners cautious and its own population frightened. The continuity stack is the regime admitting it expects impact and wants the machine to keep operating regardless of consequences. On the U.S. side, the airlift volume, carrier geometry, and base-protection posture point to preparation for sustained exchange rather than a one-night fireworks show, even as timing slips and “one more day” diplomacy teaches Tehran that stalling is a capability. If Tehran believes it can distribute cost through Hezbollah rockets, Iraqi militia “autonomous attack” frameworks, and Yemen launches while hiding behind “talks in March,” it will try.

Hamas Sells “Peacekeepers,” Keeps Control Of “Internal Affairs”

In the northern Strip, IDF troops operating near the Yellow Line identified a terrorist who approached their position and eliminated him as an immediate threat. The National Committee for the Administration of the Gaza Strip announced recruitment for a new Gaza police force—thousands of 18–35-year-old Gazan men, trained in Egypt and Jordan, marketed as “independent” and non-factional—while the committee itself still has not entered Gaza to operate. The whole thing is absurd. Local voices backing the idea still admitted the whole thing requires Israeli permission, border control, and logistical cooperation to function.

Meanwhile, Hamas publicly said it is “open” to international forces in Gaza only as monitors and buffers—explicitly rejecting any interference in Gaza’s “internal affairs,” while welcoming police training so long as it serves “internal security” and fights “chaos.” On the ground, Hamas police remained visible during Ramadan—uniformed officers stationed at intersections and markets, enforcing price controls and detaining merchants—advertising control while the “new force” is still a sign-up form.

ASSESSMENT

Hamas's terms are a confession of intent—bring in foreigners to supervise Israel, not to confront Hamas. Monitor the line, but don't touch our us. A neat trick to keep coercion while outsourcing constraint. The committee's recruitment drive is a dive into a labor pool that Hamas has already infiltrated, intimidated, and can absorb—or simply outwait. Especially if “solutioning” includes incorporating Hamas's existing police so they “don't become an obstacle.”

Hamas Enters Lebanon's Camps As Israel Expands Targeting

Israel widened its Lebanon strike set over the past 24 hours, hitting both Hezbollah's strategic architecture and Hamas entrenchment. The IDF struck three Hezbollah command centers in the Baalbek area used by the organization's missile array to accelerate readiness, advance force build-up, and plan rocket and missile launches toward Israel. The IDF eliminated multiple operatives inside those sites. Hezbollah acknowledged eight killed in the Beqaa Valley, including a figure it called a "commander." Lebanese reporting cited at least 10 killed and over 50 wounded.

Separately, Israel struck a Hamas headquarters in the Ain al-Hilweh area of southern Lebanon, describing it as a command center used to plan attacks and to conduct training—again embedded inside a civilian-populated area. These strikes landed as Israel tracked unusual Hezbollah rocket movements and assessed that if the U.S. hits Iran, Hezbollah could be pulled into coordinated firing alongside other Iranian-aligned actors.

ASSESSMENT

Lebanon is an Iranian weapons franchise. The Baalbek strikes were denial against an organization actively preparing fire plans. Hezbollah's standard play is to rebuild quietly, then pretend any Israeli action is "escalation" rather than prevention. Hitting command nodes in the Beqaa punctures that rhythm and forces Hezbollah to absorb losses.

Inside Israel

Right-Bloc Influence Becomes The "Unity" Tripwire, Again

Naftali Bennett publicly clarified he will not form a government that includes Itamar Ben-Gvir, calling him a failed minister whose conduct is bullying and racist, after earlier floating a 1984-style "unity government" concept. Election modeling is increasingly hinging on Arab turnout and list-configuration rather than persuasion— with polling assumptions that Hadash and Ra'am each land around five seats if they run separately, Balad risks falling under the threshold, and a reunited joint list could push toward ~15 seats—yet historical turnout has been volatile (near ~80% in early decades, ~65% in the 1970s–80s, ~75% during Intifada/Oslo-era cycles, and a dramatic collapse in 2001 to ~19% amid the Barak–Sharon contest).

Recent cycles show turnout tends to sink when Arab parties splinter and rise when they unify. The net effect is that "who sits with whom" is becoming the dominant story again, while the Arab sector's participation rate remains the swing variable that decides whether opposition coalition arithmetic is real or just another press conference with graphics.

ASSESSMENT

Bennett's "no Ben-Gvir" line is more insurance than principle as he's trying to market "responsibility" while pre-emptively quarantining the one figure the media reliably demonizes into caricature. Israel governs on parliamentary numbers, and purity tests are how you end up with a bloc that can't form a government but can still wreck one. On the Arab turnout side, the system keeps pretending this is about "civic awakening" when it's mostly about list mechanics and leadership credibility. Unify and you mobilize. Splinter and you depress. The public watches leaders who won't clearly separate themselves from Hamas-adjacent rhetoric while demanding the state solve Arab-society violence for them. 2026 looks like it's going to be yet another season of veto politics—where everyone swears they're building unity while merely building excuses.

Israel Expands Financial-Crime Pressure As Security Governance Stays Unwritten

A joint investigation tied to a Kafr Kara concrete-block factory produced charges linked to a criminal organization accused of laundering and tax offenses on an estimated NIS 50 million scale. Seizures included checks worth NIS 7 million, \$50,000 in cash, and vehicles—alongside arrests of four suspects in their 40s. Separately, a covert cyber-financial probe culminated in raids in Rishon LeZion that arrested five suspects (ages ~30–50) over an illegal cryptocurrency financial service and illegal weapons possession, with cash seized (~NIS 80,000) and an inventory that included guns, ammunition, plastic explosives, stun grenades, and cocaine.

Additional arrests in Kafr Qassem targeted an unlicensed change-and-loans operation suspected of extending tens of millions of shekels in loans to criminals, with large cash seizures (~NIS 430,000) and files taken. At the same time, a Knesset research report found Ben-Gvir's flagship "National Guard" is recruiting, receiving budget allocations, forming brigades, and has already been used operationally (including dispersing protests) despite missing published procedures, and unclear chain-of-command boundaries.

ASSESSMENT

The enforcement side gets it: money-laundering, illegal finance, and weapons ecosystems are the quiet logistics of violence and corruption. It can't be fixed with speeches, instead it calls for raids, seizures, indictments, and making criminals feel hunted in their own offices. Good. Then you look at the National Guard mess and wonder why the state enjoys creating ad hoc solutions without robust foundations. If you want a force that can help governance... you write the authorities, publish the procedures, and lock professional independence into law before you use it to disperse demonstrations. Late is better than never, so let's hope some papers can move through the Knesset before this becomes yet another cudgel for those in Brussels and Geneva to use against Israeli interests. Israel can ill afford ambiguous internal coercive tools while the security cabinet is convening on Iran, Gaza, and Lebanon and the home front is already bracing for the next round of regional fireworks.

Israel and the World

Western Institutions Keep Calling The Threat “Opinion” Until It’s A Crime Scene

Across the West, the pressure campaign is moving from loud marches to quieter mechanisms that make Jewish life costly. A newly opened bakery branch in north London was vandalized with red paint and “Free Gaza” slogans after a protest built on false claims of “links to Israel.” Footage showed a Jewish bystander confronted and the targeting justified as “boycott” activism while police investigate the criminal damage.

In Turkey, Islamist activists escalated a public “hunt” for dual-citizen IDF soldiers by publishing names and photos and urging arrests, travel bans, and prosecutions under “genocide/crimes against humanity” theories—explicitly framing Israelis “disguised as tourists” as legitimate targets. The laundering apparatus is not very subtle.

A major peer-reviewed journal published a “rebuilding Gaza’s health system” article co-authored by a senior Hamas-run Gaza health official, embedded political claims like “ongoing genocide,” and declared “no competing interests.” A neat trick for turning a terror-run bureaucracy into a neutral expert voice via academic formatting. Yet the West will still fall for it. Again.

Hugh Laurie, a major British actor, mourned an Israeli TV producer and then publicly insisted “nothing” about him could suggest he is a Zionist—treating the word itself as reputational shrapnel—while telling those celebrating her death to “fuck off.” A perfect snapshot of where public life is headed: moral clarity about cruelty, and cowardice about Jewish self-determination.

France is considering a move which would criminalize “anti-Zionism” (explicitly framed as denying Israel’s right to exist) amid historically high anti-semitic incident levels. In the U.S. CAIR took the extraordinary step of labeling a House “Sharia Free America Caucus” an anti-Muslim hate group and defending Sharia as a broad religious-legal system comparable to Catholic canon law and Orthodox halachah—an American reminder that identity-law fights are not going away.

The connective tissue across these episodes is the same, however. Intimidation becomes “activism.” Doxxing becomes “accountability.” Propaganda becomes “scholarship.” And institutions keep reaching for the softest available language right up until someone gets hurt.

ASSESSMENT

Can Western societies still even enforce the basic rule that minorities get to live in public without being singled out, smeared, and punished for association—real, imagined, or purely invented? It doesn’t really seem like it at the moment. The bakery attack lets the intimidation do the work of making Jews hide or flee. The Turkish doxxing campaign is the next rung up though. Convert social media into a cross-border threat system, outsource prosecution fantasies to hashtags, and dare a state to decide whether it protects its own citizens or performs for the mob. When its ideological bent is as toxic as Turkey’s we know where the answer will lie.

The celebrity flinch—publicly distancing from “Zionism” while benefiting from Israeli creative work—shows how the term is being weaponized as an insult

to force social submission. The West keeps waiting for antisemitism to announce itself in old costumes. It won't. It wears activism, academia, "human rights," and "just asking questions." If enforcement systems don't treat targeted intimidation, doxxing, and institutional laundering as the same threat pipeline, they will keep acting surprised—right on schedule—when the pipeline pumps out even more violence.

Briefly Noted

Frontline & Security

Algemeiner: Hamas officials are pushing an English-language line that Israel killed many Oct. 7 victims, while the same figures have praised and claimed the attack in Arabic settings. Intimidation for the home audience, plausible-deniability bait for Western media ecosystems. And the West falls for it. Incredible.

Diplomacy & Geopolitics

Jerusalem Post: Turkish authorities detained *Deutsche Welle* correspondent Alican Uludag over past social-media posts, accusing him of "misinformation" and "insulting the president," and searched his home and seized devices. Ankara is reminding everyone—including NATO partners—that "press freedom" doesn't mean much in a near-totalitarian regime.

Times of Israel: Proposed U.S.-Saudi civil nuclear framework could leave Riyadh with a path to domestic uranium enrichment, according to congressional documents and nonproliferation experts. This doesn't seem like stabilizing the region so much as franchising the bomb option.

JNS: The Trump administration and international partners are mobilizing massive reconstruction funding for Gaza while largely ignoring the rehabilitation costs borne by Israel's displaced communities and battered border regions.

Culture, Religion & Society

Jerusalem Post: A man rammed a truck into the gates of a Brisbane synagogue and was arrested shortly afterward—with police treating it as a hate crime rather than terrorism. The method? Blunt. The message? Familiar. Diaspora security is *again* being patched together after the impact.

Domestic & Law

Jerusalem Post: Gaza's "day after" hinges on enforced de-radicalization—especially supervision of mosque sermons and school curricula—highlighting Turkish/Qatari religious influence in reconstruction. Whoever writes the sermons and textbooks manufactures the next round of fighters faster than any aid package can manufacture stability.

Developments to Watch

Northern Front (Lebanon / Syria)

- **Hezbollah Rocket Movements Detected** — Israeli reporting flags unusual Hezbollah rocket repositioning in recent days as the U.S. strike window narrows.
- **Baalbek Loss** — Hezbollah acknowledged multiple operatives killed in IDF strikes on missile-array command centers in the Beqaa.

Gaza & Southern Theater

- **Yellow Line Contact** — Another armed approach in northern Gaza ended in immediate elimination by IDF troops. “Ceasefire” continues to mean armed probes priced in real time.
- **Ramadan Surge, Permit Stress** — Tens of thousands moved through Jerusalem crossings on the first Friday of Ramadan under tightened controls. Large flows plus regional tension is a classic ignition cocktail if security services blink.

Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias)

- **Strike Window Narrows** — Israeli assessments say President Trump is close to a decision on Iran, with preparations reportedly complete and submarines in range. Delay buys Tehran posture time, not leverage.
- **IRGC Westward Movement** — Reports indicate IRGC troops and heavy equipment moving toward the Iraqi border.
- **Carrier Distance, Jet Density** — U.S. officials say carriers are being kept farther from Iran while over 60 fighters stage in Jordan and transport aircraft keep landing. Better campaign math than in the Knesset, at least.
- **Geneva Channel Stalls** — Iranian officials reportedly refused to open a U.S. envelope on missile limits while still floating a “temporary” deal.
- **Evacuation Warnings Multiply** — Germany, Japan, and Serbia have joined the chorus urging citizens to leave Iran immediately.

Diplomatic & Legal

- **EU–Iran Tit-for-Tat Escalates** — Tehran designated EU naval and air forces as “terrorist organizations” after the IRGC listing.

Home Front & Politics

- **Cabinet War Stack** — Israel’s security cabinet convenes shortly on Iran, Gaza, and Lebanon simultaneously.
- **Airbase Family Evacuations** — The IAF cleared families from bases while Home Front guidance emphasizes long-range missile alert timing. The state is preparing for sustained incoming fire, not a symbolic exchange.

Iran is building a continuity stack because it expects impact, and Washington is moving enough metal to make “later” a dangerous assumption. Hezbollah’s rocket activity and the Baalbek strike set are the north being pulled toward Tehran’s timetable. While, for its part, Gaza keeps running the same scam. New uniforms, old coercion. The next chapter hinges on whether the U.S. turns the posture into action—and whether proxies decide to “volunteer” first.

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