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ISRAEL BRIEF

Monday, February 23

Control migrates from conference rooms to launch corridors. Talks proceed, but the operational map expands faster than the diplomatic one.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

THE BOTTOM LINE Israel is learning—again—that partners are fickle. So you diversify. The India shift is a transactional alignment between states that live in the real world. They know terrorism is not a metaphor. That technology is power. And industrial resilience beats hashtags. Modi's visit being framed as strategic architecture—rather than as an “Israel is isolated” pity rebuttal—is the right posture. Israel needs partners who aren't governed by Brussels' mood swings. As for the UN ambassadors tour: it won't “solve” the UN, because the UN's problem is incentive design. But it does force a subset of diplomats—especially from states not fully captured by the NGO-industrial script—to reconcile accusations with what October 7 actually looked like, and what Gaza's aid interface actually is. The risk is that Israel treats these tours as persuasion campaigns.

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Control migrates from conference rooms to launch corridors. Talks proceed, but the operational map expands faster than the diplomatic one.

By Uriel Zehavi · מִיטְצֵה מִיטְצֵה Feb 23, 2026

Shalom, friends.

Tehran talks in Geneva while positioning assets westward and signaling retaliation logic. Gaza finishes one clearance phase while multiplying “police” concepts that avoid disarmament. Inside Israel, the coercive organs of the state are arguing about who controls them. The pattern is familiar. Paperwork in public, force positioning in private.

Flash Brief

- **Geneva Window:** Oman confirms Thursday talks; Iran rejects zero enrichment and keeps missiles off the table. *See The War Today.*
- **Force Posture:** USS *Gerald Ford* moves toward Israel; refueling tracks suggest bomber repositioning; Qasrak drawdown begins. *See The War Today.*
- **Iraq Geometry:** Reports describe IRGC missile assets along the Iran–Iraq border and possible deployment onto Iraqi territory. *See The War Today.*
- **Rafah Sweep:** IDF completes three-month Yellow Line operation; tunnel route dismantled; dozens of terrorists killed underground. *See The War Today.*
- **Disarmament Clock:** Smotrich signals ultimatum in coming days; Hamas-linked online networks designated ahead of Ramadan. *See The War Today.*
- **Internal Threat:** Carmiel cell indicted; Beit Furik approachers carrying explosives engaged; one eliminated, one neutralized. *See The War Today.*
- **Coalition-Court Clash:** Bills advance to curb High Court reach over Kotel governance and ministerial appointments. *See Inside Israel.*

Below: escalation math across Iran, Gaza, Lebanon, internal security, and the governance stress fractures shaping Israel’s next moves.

Iran is attempting to widen the map—geographically and politically—before any strike decision lands. Gaza is attempting to widen the “day after” bureaucracy before any rifle is confiscated. And Israel’s internal political system is widening the argument over who gets to define legitimacy at home.

That widening is the risk.

The War Today

GENEVA TALKS BECOME COVER FOR FORCE POSTURE AND CROSS-FRONT PREDELEGATION

Iran’s foreign minister publicly reiterated the regime’s red lines—no “zero enrichment,” missiles off the table, and retaliation focused on U.S. regional

bases rather than U.S. territory—while signaling another indirect round with Washington in Geneva this week as Oman confirmed talks for Thursday and Axios reported a possible Friday session contingent on an Iranian proposal arriving within 48 hours. Iranian official messaging says forces are on the highest alert—reporting describes IRGC short- and medium-range missile launchers positioned along the Iran–Iraq border. Iranian reports claim IRGC Aerospace elements entered Iraq and deployed ballistic missile batteries on Iraqi territory to stage potential launches at U.S. facilities. Israel’s assessment of the U.S. posture remains “any time now.” The carrier *Gerald Ford* is reported south of Italy and moving toward Israel’s coast, aerial refueling activity suggests long-range bomber repositioning, and U.S. forces have begun withdrawing from the Qasrak base in Syria—one more sign of pre-impact risk management. Russia is simultaneously thickening Iran’s survivability with an arms deal worth roughly €500 million (for thousands of Verba MANPADS scheduled for 2027–2029, delivery of up to six Mi-28 attack helicopters, and additional night-vision systems). Opposition channels in Iran also reported an explosion at the IRGC “Imam Ali” missile base in Khorramabad. Regionally, Saudi messaging reportedly shifted from blocking to effectively green-lighting a U.S. strike. Bahrain tested its emergency alert system. And Hezbollah posted an unusual “tomorrow at 17:00” teaser—classic ambiguity meant to force Israel to waste attention. It’s come and gone at any time zone. Inside the Iranian opposition space, five Iranian Kurdish groups announced a new coalition framework explicitly oriented toward self-determination, democracy, and “liberated areas” governance.

ASSESSMENT

Tehran talks like a diplomat but moves like a terrorist dictatorship. Are we surprised? The real story is the attempted expansion of the battlespace—missile assets near (and reportedly inside) Iraq to shorten flight times and multiply attribution fog. Moscow doesn’t invest in Tehran’s air-defense recovery because it loves Iranians—it invests because a resilient Iran keeps the West busy, markets nervous, and American bandwidth diverted. Hezbollah’s little “tomorrow” post is the proxy equivalent of tapping the mic before a speech—meant to remind everyone that Iran’s deterrence model is distributed across fronts. The Kurdish coalition announcement signals that Iran’s internal cohesion problem is not solved (no surprise there), and any external strike sequence will intersect domestic fracture lines the regime fears more than the bombs. Unless Washington likes being played, it must treat “proposal coming in 48 hours” as a stalling tactic.

GAZA “POLICE” PLANS MULTIPLY WHILE ISRAEL FINISHES RAFAH’S YELLOW-LINE SWEEP AND PREPARES THE NEXT ULTIMATUM

Israel completed a major three-month security effort along the Rafah sector of the Yellow Line, with the 7th Brigade operating under Gaza Division command reporting dozens of terrorists killed inside underground routes, hundreds of terror infrastructure sites dismantled, and a roughly one-kilometer tunnel route destroyed that contained hideouts and weapons. Troops also dismantled a tunnel shaft linked to the October 28, 2025 death of MSG (res.) Efi (Yona Ephraim) Feldbaum, ז”ל, underscoring that specific sites remain operationally relevant long after the headlines move on. In a separate incident, IDF

troops operating in southern Gaza identified a terrorist who crossed the Yellow Line and approached forces, and eliminated him as an immediate threat. Against that operational backdrop, political “day after” architecture keeps breeding new uniforms. Reporting describes a proposed Palestinian policing force—figures as high as ~5,000 mentioned—trained in Egypt under the National Committee for Gaza Management, paired with an international stabilization concept across multiple sectors and a larger civilian policing construct. Yet key technical details remain conspicuously absent (weapons authorities, supply chain, on-ground oversight, and enforcement mechanisms). Smotrich sharpened the Israeli government line by stating Hamas will receive an ultimatum to disarm “in the coming days,” with plans being prepared for reconquest beyond the Yellow Line if disarmament fails—coordinated with and backed by the United States. Meanwhile, Hamas is working the Ramadan ignition lane through information operations. Israeli security services detected Hamas efforts operating from Gaza and Turkey to inflame Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. Defense Minister Israel Katz signed an order designating Hamas-linked online networks as terrorist organizations—enabling disruption and blocking of platforms that disseminate incitement and assist terrorists, timed to prevent online agitation from becoming street violence during Ramadan.

ASSESSMENT

The Rafah sweep is the real governance story—tunnels, kill zones, and denial work... not committees. Israel continues to quietly strip Hamas of maneuver space—underground routes adjacent to the line, the places Hamas uses to probe, stage, and survive. The policing-force talk is familiar Oslo nostalgia dressed in crisis-management jargon. Smotrich is essentially stating the obvious constraint Westerners continue to ignore. If disarmament doesn't happen, Israel will force it the hard way because nobody else will. Katz's designation is the right kind of preemption for Ramadan—because Hamas doesn't need to smuggle a battalion into Jerusalem to create chaos, just a crowd that has been emotionally primed to treat rumor as a duty. Cut the networks, degrade the ignition. Bottom line: Gaza's “police” fantasies are either (a) a coercive disarmament project, or (b) a Hamas continuity project. And “a” isn't the likely outcome.

INTERNAL THREAT PRESSURE CONTINUES: CARMIEL CELL INDICTED AS IDF ENGAGES EXPLOSIVE-BEARING APPROACHERS IN BEIT FURIK

Israeli security forces announced they thwarted a planned shooting attack in Carmiel targeting IDF soldiers, arresting four Israeli citizens from the Galilee—two 18–19-year-olds and two minors—after an investigation found they conspired to carry out the attack and that some had trained and received instructions. In Judea and Samaria, IDF troops operating in the Beit Furik area identified two terrorists with an explosive device. Troops opened fire to remove the threat—eliminating one and neutralizing the other. Separately, Israel Police and Border Police announced the death of a Border Police Training Brigade cadet, Ori Mechtaiev (18), ז”ל, with circumstances under investigation by Israel Police and the Military Police Criminal Investigation Division.

ASSESSMENT

Carmiel is the kind of story that gets sanitized into “security incident,” when it’s actually the core problem. The war—existential, jihadist-driven, isn’t tucked safely away over the border fences. It’s inside citizenship, inside recruitment, inside who can be tasked and coached to shoot soldiers in an Israeli city. Some of these suspects trained and received instructions show that we aren’t dealing with “spontaneous radicalization” but rather a pipeline. Beit Furik is another outlet of that same pipeline. With the IDF operating in a threat environment where “approachers with an explosive” is a routine pattern (and routine patterns are exactly where complacency kills). The Border Police cadet death investigation sits uncomfortably beside both—training institutions are part of warfighting capacity.

Inside Israel

NETANYAHU DUCKS FORMAL BACKING, WHILE COALITION PUSHES COURT-OVERRIDE BILLS

After the High Court ordered the state to advance upgrades to the egalitarian prayer plaza at the Kotel, the coalition is now trying to legislate the Court’s fingers out of that pie. A bill, slated for a preliminary vote Wednesday, would hand the Chief Rabbinate authority over all prayer areas at the Western Wall—explicitly defining activity contrary to rabbinic instructions—non-Orthodox worship included—as “desecration.” The prime minister blocked a ministerial-committee vote so the government would not formally adopt a position, but then authorized a “free vote,” and the coalition’s religious parties signaled they will back the bill anyway—an elegant Israeli maneuver. *No official government stance, just a governing majority acting like one. Nothing to see here... move along.* In parallel, the coalition is moving to revive a previously-advanced law that would bar High Court intervention in ministerial appointments/dismissals—originally designed to neutralize the Deri ruling, now positioned to shield Ben-Gvir amid petitions seeking his removal.

ASSESSMENT

This is the constitutional vacuum in effect. Every branch treats “legitimacy” as a weapon to be seized, not a structure to be preserved. The coalition wants to discipline the Court. The Court wants to discipline the coalition. So all the public gets is a state that governs by ambush—preliminary readings, “free votes,” and procedural tricks that are supposed to make consequences optional. The Kotel bill is especially dangerous. Internally, Israeli’s don’t really support the Rabbinate and this is unlikely to change the perception. For the Diaspora? This is a rupture generator—especially in a climate where Jews abroad are already paying an escalating price for visible identity. Israel does not get to casually signal to millions of its most reliable external backers that their Judaism is second-class while simultaneously expecting them to fund, defend, and lobby for the state like first-class partners. On the appointments bill, the Coalition needs better communications advisors. Stripping High Court review of ministerial fitness is sold as “democracy,” but it reads abroad as “impunity,” and inside Israel as “we’ll change the rules whenever the referee blows the whistle.” That is an accelerant for internal mistrust and external lawfare—which is further unfortunate, because a recalibration between the executive and the judiciary is essential.

BEN-GVIR AND THE AG TURN POLICING TOOLS INTO A POWER STRUGGLE

A cabinet discussion on wiretapping technology collapsed into a governance farce. The attorney general arrived insisting the relevant police intelligence/investigations chief attend—Ben-Gvir barred him. The attorney general and state attorney walked out. And the police commissioner decided not to show up. Ministers were then told wiretapping was no longer on the agenda. This comes atop an already-festering clash over the government's attempt to create an inquiry into alleged unlawful surveillance—an inquiry the AG has framed as an attempted backdoor intrusion into ongoing criminal cases, including those touching the prime minister—while the government claims the attorney general is obstructing accountability.

ASSESSMENT

Israel can ill afford to run internal security like a coalition WhatsApp group. Wiretapping either sits inside a clearly-defined chain of authority with enforceable oversight, or it becomes a permanent liability for enemies (internal and external) to exploit. The attorney general's walkout is a reminder that the legal establishment is perfectly willing to weaponize procedure too—by withholding participation until terms are met. Endless friction that turns basic governance into theater is not good for anyone. Not the coalition. Not the opposition. Not the legal class. And certainly not the public.

TRADITION RISES, DRAFT ANGER HARDENS, AND SCHOOLS RUN OUT OF ADULTS

New polling data points to an accelerating cultural-political shift. First-time voters identify as right-wing at even higher rates than older cohorts, and report higher levels of traditional practice and belief—more mezuzah-kissing, more belief in God and Messiah—alongside a sharper suspicion of institutions and a stronger tendency to see October 7 failures as “betrayal from within.” The same cohort also treats the Haredi draft exemption as disqualifying at roughly the same high rate as older voters, even as some of their vote distribution still flows to parties most associated with the exemption. Inside the state apparatus, the “builders” are thinning out. The education system's teacher shortage is described as severe enough that officials discussed importing thousands of kindergarten workers from abroad, while internal data points to high early-career attrition and significant gaps in core subjects like English and math. Politically, conscription legislation is returning for committee discussion this week, meaning the coalition is walking into the same pressure point: manpower arithmetic colliding with coalition arithmetic.

ASSESSMENT

Israel's next electorate is drifting toward identity, deterrence, and impatience with institutions—with the added volatility of trauma narratives that social media will happily weaponize. The dangerous part is the unresolved social contract. The public expects a people's army and a competent state. Increasingly, all it seems to get is a partisan patchwork of exemptions, underperformance, and bureaucratic decay. The education data is a national resilience problem. The coalition should treat this as an opportunity. A more conservative generation is not asking for slogans, but for duty. If the conscription file is “managed” the old way—endless promises, soft enforcement, opaque deals—this cohort will actively punish the parties propagating the disaster.

Israel and the World

DIASPORA SECURITY DEGRADES AS INSTITUTIONS MANAGE OPTICS, NOT THREATS

Anti-Jewish pressure campaigns kept migrating from loud marches to concrete targeting. In Australia, an 18-year-old Jewish scout wearing a kippah and an Israeli flag was attacked at a large Scouts camp—accused of “murdering children” and then punched repeatedly in the face. An identity check delivered with fists, followed by the usual institutional line about inclusion and a written apology from the offender. In Germany, an antizionist group is planning a protest around Buchenwald’s keffiyah restriction—explicitly re-framing a memorial site as “genocide denial” territory for refusing pro-Palestinian symbols—turning Holocaust commemoration into a staging ground for contemporary intimidation. Meanwhile, US attitudes are feeding the pipeline. AJC polling indicates Americans under 30 are increasingly willing to label Hamas “resistance,” with that share reportedly rising sharply over the past year. The result is a generation-level normalization of terror aesthetics. In parallel, ADL leadership messaging continues to lean on “complexity” and both-sides affect—publicly lamenting losses “on both sides” and emphasizing universalism—while the operational reality for diaspora Jews is that threats, doxxing, harassment, and physical attacks are outpacing the institutional response capacity that organizations like ADL actually have.

ASSESSMENT

Diaspora security is no longer a “spike.” It’s a system. The system works thusly: Propaganda turns “Zionist” into a permission-slip slur. Institutions treat the slur as political speech. Activists use that ambiguity to target Jews as Jews. And enforcement arrives late (if at all) and costs someone in blood. Australia’s Scouts incident is the same doctrine: isolate, accuse, strike, then launder it as a one-off “behavior” issue. Buchenwald’s keffiyah fight is a European version... take a Holocaust site, accuse it of “revisionism” for refusing contemporary faction symbols, and normalize harassment under the halo of “anti-fascism.” As far as the ADL? I’m happy Jonathan Greenblatt is going on a PR offensive. ADL has the platform, funding, law-enforcement interfaces, corporate reach, and training footprint to shape actual deterrence. Unfortunately, it doesn’t use its capacity. It chooses reputational risk management. Calibrated language. Universalist framing. And an allergy to naming the pipeline because naming it might offend donors, allies, or the wrong side of the partisan map. Maybe he’ll get the message that the old tune is not working. Diaspora Jews do not need another symposium on the “complexities of hate.” They need institutions that behave responsibly. Aggressive litigation. Political consequences for enabling environments. Relentless exposure of doxxing networks. And no rhetorical surrender on Jewish peoplehood or Zionism as a legitimate identity.

MODI VISIT SIGNALS A MULTI-REGIONAL BLOC STRATEGY, NOT A PHOTO-OP

Israel is pushing two outward-facing lines simultaneously. Expanding alliance geometry with major non-Western powers while forcing diplomatic audiences to confront October 7’s physical record rather than their own slogans. Netanyahu correctly framed Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s scheduled

Jerusalem visit and Knesset address this week as part of a broader “axis of nations” or “hexagon of alliances” concept—anchoring India alongside Mediterranean partners (notably Greece and Cyprus), moderate Arab states, African countries, and additional Asian partners he signaled but declined to name—explicitly aimed at countering both radical Shi’ite and Sunni blocs and translating shared threat perception into economic, diplomatic, and security cooperation. Separately, Israel hosted a delegation of 26 UN ambassadors on a fact-finding tour that ran from Holocaust sites in Poland to massacre sites near the Gaza border and the Nova festival grounds, and then to Kerem Shalom to observe aid-truck inspections and entry—an effort to puncture the UN’s default narrative loop that treats Hamas’s governance and theft ecology as an irrelevant footnote while Israel is tried as if it were the only actor in the theater. The connective tissue between these two moves is leverage. Building a wider coalition of capable partners while confronting institutional hypocrisy with physical evidence and operational facts.

ASSESSMENT

Israel is learning—again—that partners are fickle. So you diversify. The India shift is a transactional alignment between states that live in the real world. They know terrorism is not a metaphor. That technology is power. And industrial resilience beats hashtags. Modi’s visit being framed as strategic architecture—rather than as an “Israel is isolated” pity rebuttal—is the right posture. Israel needs partners who aren’t governed by Brussels’ mood swings. As for the UN ambassadors tour: it won’t “solve” the UN, because the UN’s problem is incentive design. But it does force a subset of diplomats—especially from states not fully captured by the NGO-industrial script—to reconcile accusations with what October 7 actually looked like, and what Gaza’s aid interface actually is. The risk is that Israel treats these tours as persuasion campaigns.

Briefly Noted

DIPLOMACY & GEOPOLITICS

- *Jerusalem Post*: European leaders are struggling to project influence in a Middle East reshaped by October 7, Israel’s war with Hamas, and last year’s clash with Iran—while internal divisions and the Ukraine war sap strategic focus. Brussels unhappily watches from the sidelines as Washington and regional powers set the terms.
- *Jerusalem Post*: Germany’s CDU unanimously adopted a motion to freeze aid to the Palestinian Authority absent reforms, end German and EU funding for UNRWA, and condition assistance on recognition of Israel and compliance with anti-Jew-hate standards.

DOMESTIC & LAW

- *Jerusalem Post*: IDF soldiers filed 6,621 mistreatment complaints in 2025, including racism, denial of medical care, pay disputes, and abusive commanders — with over half deemed justified.
- *Jerusalem Post*: Lawmakers from Likud, Blue and White, Religious Zionism and Yesh Atid are advancing a “semi-open ballot” reform that would let voters boost specific candidates on party lists, potentially reshuffling Knesset slots based on personal votes. If it passed, MKs would answer to

the public instead of just party bosses — a structural hit to machine politics in a system built on centralized control.

ECONOMY, TECH & INFRASTRUCTURE

- *Israel National News*: The government approved fast-tracking construction of a massive AI server farm, with new planning shortcuts and expanded power generation to support energy-hungry data centers. Jerusalem is betting that compute capacity is national power — military edge, economic leverage, and global positioning rolled into one very large electricity bill.

CULTURE, RELIGION & SOCIETY

- *Israel National News*: Police expanded Jewish visiting hours on the Temple Mount at the start of Ramadan, rejecting the long-standing practice of curtailing access to preempt unrest. The message is simple: sovereignty isn't seasonal, and threats of riots no longer dictate policy on Judaism's holiest site.

Developments to Watch

NORTHERN FRONT (LEBANON / SYRIA)

- **U.S. pulls down Syria footprint** — Reports of U.S. forces beginning to withdraw from Qasrak (largest U.S. base in Syria's Hasakah area) read like pre-impact risk management, not routine redeployment. Reduced U.S. footprint increases freelancing space for Iran-aligned militias and opportunistic jihadist actors—and makes Israel's northern map less buffered by American tripwires.

GAZA & SOUTHERN THEATER

- **Post-Rafah sweep probe window** — With the IDF declaring the Rafah Yellow Line security operation “completed” after months of tunnel and infrastructure dismantling, Hamas/PIJ incentive shifts to testing the new baseline with a cheap breach. Let's hope another round of tunnel dismantling is in the works.

JUDEA & SAMARIA

- **Explosive-approacher pattern persists** — The Beit Furik incident (two terrorists approaching troops holding an explosive device; one eliminated, one neutralized) is the routine threat template that kills when units relax. Ramadan plus Iran tension increases copycat logic: low-cost approach attacks meant to force tactical mistakes and spark localized escalation.

HOME FRONT & POLITICS

- **Border Police trainee death—readiness leak** — The death of Border Police cadet Ori Mechtaiev (ז"ל), now under dual investigation (Israel Police + MP-CID), is not just tragedy—it's an institutional stress signal inside training and force-generation. Training accidents and discipline failures are how manpower and morale bleed out quietly—right before you need both.
- **Conscription file returns to committee** — The draft/conscription law returning to Knesset committee discussion this week is a state-capacity test

in real time. If the coalition tries to “manage” it with soft enforcement and opaque carve-outs, it invites sustained manpower strain plus more public legitimacy erosion.

DIPLOMATIC & LEGAL

- **Geneva talks as strike-cover** — Oman confirming indirect U.S.–Iran talks in Geneva on Thursday (with reporting of a possible Friday round if Iran produces a proposal) creates a classic spoiler window: diplomacy on the calendar, force posture in motion.
- **Larijani’s Muscat delivery run** — Ali Larijani traveling to Muscat “tomorrow” to deliver Iran’s response is Tehran’s bid to look serious while preserving maximalist red lines (enrichment retained, missiles untouched).

REGIONAL AXIS (IRAN, HOUTHIS, MILITIAS)

- **Saudi “no longer blocks” strike message** — The Saudi message to Washington—effectively shifting from blocking to tolerating a U.S. strike—loosens a key regional political constraint on U.S. action. Even if Riyadh stays publicly cautious, the green-light changes the Gulf’s internal risk calculus and makes Iranian retaliation planning more urgent.
- **Iraq as launch geometry** — Reports (even if partially inflated) of IRGC missile assets pushed toward—and possibly onto— Iraqi territory are a doctrinal escalation attempt: shorten timelines, multiply attribution fog, and force Washington to treat Iraq as part of Iran’s strike map.

Tehran is behaving like a regime that expects impact. Missile batteries edging toward Iraq, naval drills, rhetoric about targeting U.S. bases—this is predellegation. The goal is to shorten timelines, blur attribution, and frighten Gulf capitals into lobbying Washington for restraint.

In Gaza, the Rafah Yellow Line clearance matters more than any committee. Tunnels destroyed are governance removed. There’s still, however, a long way to go, as tunnels are not yet in short supply. But the disarmament ultimatum will test whether Israel intends to enforce monopoly-of-force logic or accept another “policing” costume layered over Hamas continuity.

And then there’s the institutional front. Moves to constrain the High Court while sidestepping formal government ownership may protect coalition maneuver space, but they also generate diaspora friction and foreign lawfare invitations. The state cannot afford to look procedurally improvisational right now.

Over the coming days, watch the Geneva proposal delivery. If thin, the strike calculus accelerates. The calendar does not control events. Force positioning does. And right now, force positioning is outpacing diplomacy.

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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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