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READER EDITION

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ISRAEL BRIEF

Thursday, February 26

Diplomacy buys Iran another day. Force posture buys Israel another option.

◇ URIEL ZEHAVER

THE BOTTOM LINE “Emirates City” runs reconstruction ahead of political reality. No contract changes Netanyahu’s condition: no rebuilding before disarmament. The \$17 billion should be evaluated against historical track records. The PA curriculum inadvertently gave credible sources to thirty years of incitement documentation—intifada martyr math problems, terrorists celebrated, blood libel in educational texts. The PA pledged to end incitement at Oslo and did opposite. No donor made curriculum reform an enforceable precondition.

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Overview

THE Geneva talks proceeded as scheduled, with Iran presenting a nuclear proposal while the U.S. military buildup continued independently. As one analyst noted, “One is buying hours. The other is synchronizing their watches.” Trump’s stated deadline approaches this weekend.

Flash Brief

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Geneva Talks Open: Iran delivers nuclear proposal; Araghchi’s framing makes contents predictable• Strike Architecture Confirmed: F-22s at Israeli bases, Fifth Fleet dispersed, Al Udeid down to four refueling aircraft• India-Israel Deals: Defense package estimated at \$8–10B covers missile defense plus offensive systems• Hezbollah’s Contradiction: Lebanese PM cites non-intervention pledge; Qassem says otherwise | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kotel Bill Advances: Preliminary reading passes 56–0; Netanyahu avoided formal ownership• Netanyahu Summoned: AG approves police request for testimony in Parking Lot case• UK Councillors Pledge Divestment: 1,000+ officials sign pledge to divest pension funds of Israeli-linked investments• Hamas on Camera: Sahm Unit filmed destroying vendor tents in Khan Younis for non-payment• Haredi Protests: Rebbe orders Jerusalem street protest after draft-dodger arrests |
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Publication Schedule Update

BEGINNING this week, Daily editions publish Sunday through Thursday. Friday is reserved for Shabbat preparation. Long Briefs now release Friday mornings. Due to Purim next week, the Watchwords and March Vantage will both publish Sunday.

The War Today

Geneva Opens; Strike Architecture Closes In Around the Table

The third round of indirect U.S.-Iran nuclear talks began Thursday at the Omani embassy in Geneva. Iran delivered a detailed nuclear proposal approved at senior leadership level, but Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi telegraphed rejection before negotiations started, claiming Trump is a “victim of

fake news” and that Iranian missiles are “capped at 2,000 kilometers purely for self-defense.”

The military posture surrounding the talks contradicted diplomatic messaging. The USS Gerald Ford departed Crete toward the eastern Mediterranean. Chinese firm MizarVision published satellite imagery confirming 11 U.S. F-22 stealth fighters at Israel’s Ovda Airbase alongside what appears to be a Patriot battery; six additional F-22s arrived Thursday, bringing the declared total to 18 aircraft. U.S. Navy vessels normally docked at Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain dispersed to sea—the same behavior preceding Iran’s June attack on Qatar. Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar reportedly dropped to four refueling aircraft. Australia directed embassy families to evacuate from Israel and Lebanon, offering voluntary departure from UAE, Qatar, and Jordan. Iran loaded oil from Kharg Island at nearly three times January’s pace during February 15–20, roughly 3 million barrels per day—consistent with pre-conflict stockpiling. Saudi Arabia similarly accelerated production and exports. The IAF ordered soldiers at the Kirya headquarters in Tel Aviv to arrange food delivery away from base gates, citing concern that volume spikes could function as intelligence indicators.

ASSESSMENT

Araghchi’s framing that Iran “deliberately capped” missiles at 2,000 km deserves careful reading as “voluntary restraint” rather than “our current reach already covers Israel, the Gulf, and southeastern Europe.” Eighteen F-22s in Israel, Fifth Fleet dispersed, Al Udeid emptying—these are operational, not exercises. Politico’s reporting that Trump advisers privately prefer Israel strike Iran first so Iranian retaliation builds domestic support for a U.S. follow-on represents the “coldest possible read of allied burden-sharing.” The Kirya pizza restriction indicates Israeli operational security now assumes delivery-pattern analysis is part of hostile intelligence collection.

Hezbollah Rearming Under IRGC Command; IDF Documents South Lebanon Violations

The IDF disclosed systematic operations by its 300th Brigade in southern Lebanon, locating and dismantling weapons caches, observation posts, and firing positions equipped with anti-tank launchers—all ceasefire violations. Al Arabiya reported that Hezbollah’s military apparatus is now effectively directed by IRGC officers, with internal meetings accelerating. Israel warned Lebanon via intermediaries that any Hezbollah military intervention in a U.S.-Iran exchange would trigger heavy Israeli strikes on Lebanese territory. A Hezbollah official told AFP the group would not intervene in “limited” U.S. strikes but declared any attack on Khamenei a red line—contradicting Secretary-General Naim Qassem’s public declaration otherwise.

ASSESSMENT

If IRGC officers direct Hezbollah’s military structure, then “we won’t intervene” messaging carries the reliability of every IRGC commitment—holding until Khamenei decides otherwise. Israel’s warning about Beirut’s airport was calibrated for Lebanese politicians. Anti-tank launchers inside observation posts in southern Lebanon represents systematic positioning, not anomaly.

Aqabat Jaber Cell Rolled Up; Jewish Heritage Site Defaced in Samaria

Undercover Border Police and IDF soldiers arrested several terrorist suspects in Aqabat Jaber, two miles from Jericho, in a Shin Bet-directed operation. Suspects were transferred for further questioning. This followed a multi-day IDF counter-terrorism push across Binyamin (Turmus Aya, Sinjil, Al-Lubban ash-Sharqiya) described as proactive and planned. The Cave of the Seventy Elders in Awarta, Samaria was desecrated Tuesday night with Hamas and “Al-Quds” graffiti and smashed ancient stones—the second attack on the site within six months. Organizations petitioned Heritage Minister Amichai Eliyahu to establish permanent protection.

ASSESSMENT

Aqabat Jaber operations follow standard intelligence-led procedures: simultaneous, low-profile, immediate Shin Bet transfer. The parallel Binyamin operation indicates coordinated tempo across theater. The Awarta desecration represents cultural elimination rather than tactical violence. Two incidents at the same site in six months without permanent protection constitutes institutional failure.

Inside Israel

Netanyahu Gets a Summons; Kotel Bill Passes First Hurdle; Coalition Runs Its Standard Mechanics

Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara approved a police request to summon Prime Minister Netanyahu for open testimony in the “Parking Lot” case, which centers on suspicions that Netanyahu’s Chief of Staff Tzachi Braverman obtained classified-documents investigation information and informed suspect Eli Feldstein he could “shut it down.” Braverman denies allegations.

The Western Wall bill authored by MK Avi Maoz passed preliminary reading with 56 MKs in favor after Netanyahu withdrew it from the ministerial committee to avoid formal coalition position, then authorized a “free vote.” The bill would place all Kotel prayer areas under Chief Rabbinate authority and classify prayer contrary to rabbinic instruction as “desecration,” punishable by up to seven years imprisonment. Reform, Conservative, and World Zionist Organization leadership condemned the legislation. Yesh Atid announced a boycott of the Modi Knesset session but said members would enter during Modi’s speech to protest Supreme Court President exclusion.

ASSESSMENT

The Netanyahu summons represents a formal legal step in a case alleging interference with active criminal investigation in the PM’s orbit. On the Kotel bill: Netanyahu’s ministerial-committee withdrawal followed by a “free vote” is his standard move when seeking outcome without ownership. The timing is problematic. The Diaspora is already paying an escalating price for visible Jewish identity. This moment should signal that Israeli Jewishness has room for millions of American Jews who fund, defend, and lobby for the state. Instead, legislation making their synagogue practice a jailable offense at Judaism’s holiest site advanced.

Haredi Draft Tensions Produce Street Protests and a Threats Complaint

The Rebbe of Toldot Avraham Yitzhak ordered an extremist Haredi protest at Kikar Hashabbat in Jerusalem following arrests of yeshiva students classified as draft-dodgers—including cases of students taken from apartments and detained during police checks. Yair Lapid filed a police complaint after a yeshiva student sent him what police described as an offer to harm Prime Minister Netanyahu and Justice Minister Yariv Levin. Conscription legislation returns to Knesset committee this week precisely as eight Likud MKs who broke on Tuesday's VAT vote warned they would withhold support on the draft bill.

Declared draft-dodger numbers jumped from 2,257 to 16,880 in seven months, with a High Court compliance hearing scheduled for Sunday.

ASSESSMENT

Haredi media will frame this as a community under siege by a state that enters homes to take yeshiva boys. Extreme Haredi leadership waited for an incident legitimizing street presence. The Lapid threat complaint inverts usual rhetoric direction. Committee return this week arrives when eight coalition rebels broke on VAT, making them suboptimal audiences for a draft vote during simultaneous Haredi street protests.

Israel and the World

India-Israel Defense Architecture Crosses \$10 Billion; Herzog Adds Ethiopia and Somaliland

The Modi visit defense deal package reached estimated values of \$8–10 billion. Agreements span all four tiers of Israel's multi-layered missile defense—IAI's Arrow, Rafael's David's Sling, Iron Dome, and Rafael/Elbit's Iron Beam—plus offensive and drone capabilities including Elbit's Hermes, Rafael's guidance kits, Elbit's air-to-ground missiles, and IAI's supersonic missiles. India's explicit motivation: the May 2025 India-Pakistan conflict exposed critical vulnerabilities in drone defense, precision strike, and missile interception, and S-400 dependency on Russia became a strategic liability.

India has been Israel's largest defense purchaser for years—34% of total arms sales 2020–2024, totaling roughly \$20.5 billion—with 2026 on track to break records. Netanyahu framed the partnership as architecture for an “axis of nations” explicitly oriented against radical Shi'ite and Sunni blocs. IAI delivered its BlueWhale unmanned submarine to the German Navy—a 10.9-meter autonomous intelligence and mine-detection platform marking the system's first international sale, with Greece among potential buyers. President Herzog returned from Ethiopia after meetings with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and President Taye Atske Selassie, describing shared threat perceptions and innovation ties. Israel simultaneously accepted Somaliland's first ambassador appointment with reciprocal Israeli appointment to follow.

ASSESSMENT

The Modi deal package restructures India's air-defense and precision-strike architecture around Israeli systems as Russia transfers MANPADS to Iran. India's Pakistan conflict vulnerability opened negotiations into imminent agreements. Netanyahu's "axis of nations" framing was deliberate—transactional security architecture between states with shared threat calculus. The Africa thread adds operational depth; Somaliland's ambassador represents nodes Europe cannot block. BlueWhale in German hands carries long-term implications—Israeli autonomous naval systems now operate within NATO navies recalibrating defense posture. Israel generates material relationships outlasting political cycles.

Diaspora: San Francisco, New York, Illinois, London — Same Week, Same Direction

At a San Francisco economic opportunity event, attendees switched chants from "tax the rich" to "tax the Jews." In Chicago, far-left influencer and Illinois 9th District candidate Kat Abughazaleh stated at televised debate she does not support Iron Dome because "defensive weaponry is an oxymoron," declined to affirm Israel's right to exist, and characterized potential U.S. military action against Iran as Trump wanting to "bomb more brown people." Fellow candidate Evanston Mayor Daniel Biss—who weeks earlier said he would not fund any Israeli arms—endorsed the Block the Bombs Act, contradicting a written position paper provided to AIPAC.

In New York, City Council Speaker Julie Menin—highest-ranking Jewish official under Mayor Zohran Mamdani—advances a legislative package including 100-foot buffer zones around schools and houses of worship, security camera programs for religious schools, and \$1.2 million in Holocaust education funding. Mamdani has not publicly supported it.

In Britain, more than 1,000 local councillors—383 Green, 359 Labour, 111 Liberal Democrat, 41 SNP—signed a "Pledge for Palestine" committing to divest council pension funds from companies identified as complicit in Israel's alleged "genocide" and "apartheid." Thirty councils have already backed the divestment call.

ASSESSMENT

Abughazaleh's Iron Dome answer—"defensive weaponry is an oxymoron"—gifts her opponents and previews her House Foreign Affairs Committee stance while running in a district with substantial Jewish population. Biss's position evolution from written AIPAC commitment to Block the Bombs Act reflects calculation that activist base needed for primary victory justifies alienating AIPAC position needed to enter the race. Labour's 359 signatories combined with party exposure constitutes structural UK-Israel relations problem independent of party leadership. New York counters this: 70% of New York State voters support buffer zones around houses of worship, while Mamdani opposes protections for synagogues he'd extend to abortion clinics.

Gaza Reconstruction Advances Without Disarmament; PA Curriculum Documented — Again

The UAE contracted Gaza-based Masoud & Ali Contracting Co (MACC) partnering with Egyptian firms to build “Emirates City” near Rafah—a roughly 74-acre compound capable of housing tens of thousands in multi-story prefabricated units. No construction has begun nor has Israel approved plans. Reconstruction pledges reached \$17 billion, including \$10 billion from the United States, though billions were pledged after previous Gaza conflicts without delivery.

A JNS analysis of a New York Times profile of a Palestinian-American neurosurgeon exposed three PA curriculum examples: a math problem using intifada “martyr” casualty counts, a reading passage celebrating the 1978 Coastal Road massacre perpetrator, and an Islamic studies text recycling blood libel about Jews plotting to murder Prophet Muhammad. Hamas’s Sahm Unit was captured on video destroying vendors’ tents in Khan Younis for non-payment while threatening violence and “metal rods in legs” against resisters.

ASSESSMENT

“Emirates City” runs reconstruction ahead of political reality. No contract changes Netanyahu’s condition: no rebuilding before disarmament. The \$17 billion should be evaluated against historical track records. The PA curriculum inadvertently gave credible sources to thirty years of incitement documentation—intifada martyr math problems, terrorists celebrated, blood libel in educational texts. The PA pledged to end incitement at Oslo and did opposite. No donor made curriculum reform an enforceable precondition.

Briefly Noted

Frontline & Security - The IDF lifted all restrictions in Be’eri Forest, reopening cycling trails more than 28 months after October 7, 2023

Diplomacy & Geopolitics - Prince Harry and Meghan Markle’s Jordan trip included visiting Questscope, a youth NGO whose verified staff accounts include images glorifying Hamas-affiliated militants and celebrating rocket attacks from Gaza

Culture, Religion & Society - David Shuker—believed the last survivor of the ancient Najran Jewish community in Saudi Arabia, expelled in 1948—died at approximately 82. His 2022 appeal to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to allow birthplace and ancestral grave visits went unanswered - A Jewish Chronicle analysis examined Hamas’s 2021 internal strategy document laying out mass cross-border assault logic with specific enough detail to question why it went unread - Smash Mouth—fronted by Jewish vocalist Zach Goode with guitarist Sean Hurwitz born in Israel—played surprise Tel Aviv shows

Developments to Watch

Regional Axis (Iran, Houthis, Militias) - Iran's Proposal Now on the Table: Geneva talks opened with Iran's pre-approved nuclear proposal; Araghchi's public framing rejects negotiation; Trump's deadline arrives Friday-Saturday - **Pre-Strike Architecture Confirmed by Satellite:** MizarVision published F-22 imagery at Ovdá; at least 18 F-22s confirmed; Fifth Fleet dispersed—same behavior before June Iran attack on Qatar. **LIKELY TO ESCALATE - Iran Stockpiling Before Impact Window:** Kharg Island oil exports hit roughly three times January's pace, consistent with front-loading revenues before strike disrupts export capacity - **Australia Evacuating; Polymarket at 61% by March 31:** Canberra ordered embassy families out; Polymarket puts U.S. strike at 61% by March 31

Northern Front (Lebanon/Syria) - Hezbollah's Two Answers: Lebanese PM cited private non-intervention pledges; Secretary-General declared opposite. Events—not statements—will identify which is authoritative.

Gaza & Southern Theater - NGO License Expiry—March 1: Thirty-seven operating licenses expire Sunday; seventeen groups petitioned High Court, which will likely issue temporary stay - **Smuggling Indictment Imminent:** Gaza smuggling indictment covering hundreds of millions of shekels expected shortly, affecting aid apparatus, criminal networks, and American-managed infrastructure

Home Front & Politics - Haredi Draft Compliance Hearing—Sunday: High Court holds Haredi draft compliance review; AG stated no economic sanctions plan exists; declared evaders jumped from 2,257 to 16,880 in seven months - **Kotel Bill—Diaspora Rupture on a Timer:** Western Wall bill passed preliminary reading with 56 votes; Supreme Court challenge nearly certain; coalition's response will be watched by every Reform and Conservative institution defending Israel in hostile environment

Closing

IRAN walked into Geneva carrying a proposal designed to survive the meeting without resolving anything. The force posture surrounding those talks is infrastructure for a decision already made in principle, now waiting on timing. Netanyahu's summons, the Kotel vote, and Haredi draft protests preview governance when a coalition struggles to manage political fires at home.

Shabbat shalom!

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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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