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Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update November 21, 2023

JINSA's [Israel at War](#) webpage is a dedicated resource for analysis, commentary, webinars, and media coverage about the 10/7 attacks and the ensuing Israel-Hamas conflict. An update with the latest information and analysis about the war is below.

Analysis

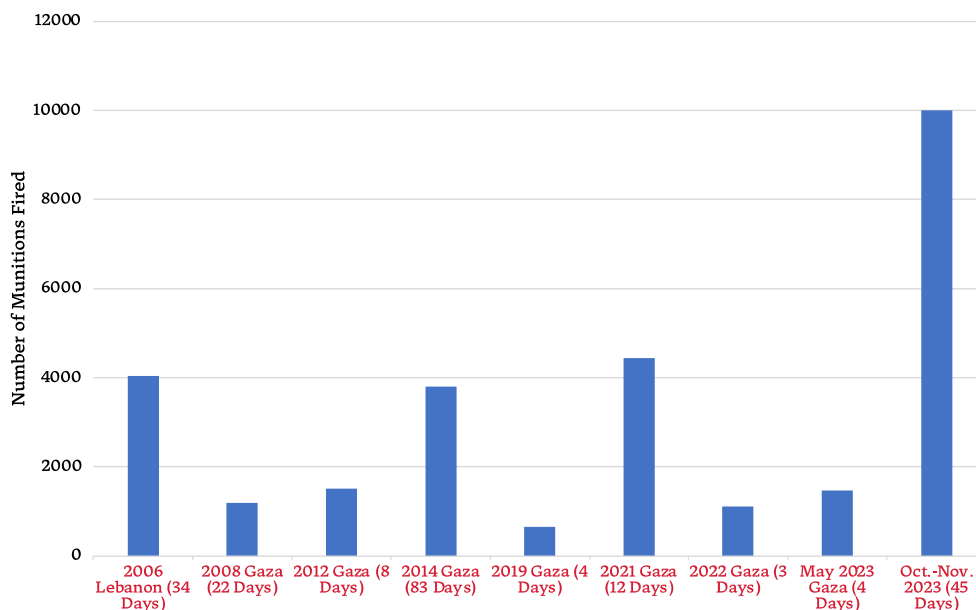
- Negotiations for the release of some hostages that Hamas and other Palestinian terrorists have held in Gaza since October 7, potentially in return for a pause in combat, are ongoing. Leaders involved in the talks, including President Biden, have indicated that they are reaching the final stages of a deal.
 - » Such a deal would enable the return of hostages to Israel but could potentially allow Hamas and other terrorist groups to rearm or evade Israeli efforts to neutralize them.
 - » In addition, Hamas's strategy of releasing hostages incrementally in exchange for fighting pauses might allow the group to secure longer combat cessations by repeating the tactic. Long periods of fighting pauses could make it politically difficult for Israel to resume fighting once it has stopped, preventing it from achieving its objectives of eliminating Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad's military and political capabilities in Gaza.
- On November 20, JINSA's Vice President for Policy Blaise Misztal moderated a [webinar](#) with JINSA Distinguished Fellow IDF Major General (ret.) Yaakov Amidror and JINSA Senior Vice President for Israeli Affairs IDF Major General (ret.) Yaacov Ayish about the developing situation in Israel and Gaza and the latest in ceasefire-hostage negotiations.
 - » Maj. Gen. Amidror argued, "Shifa [Hospital] is about legitimacy. It's not about the continuation of the military attack on the Hamas system. It is very important for us to show ... that Hamas used hospitals and schools as shields for its barbarian operation. We found more evidence that Shifa was used for that."
 - » Reflecting on the broader state of the IDF's operation, Maj. Gen. Ayish said that "right now, the strategic goal is to eliminate Hamas capabilities and its leadership ... so far, it seems like the IDF ... is doing a pretty remarkable job."

Last 24 Hours

Attacks Against Israel

- Terrorists have launched at least [10,000](#) rockets, mortars, drones, and other projectiles at Israel during the war.
- Rockets from Gaza caused [sirens](#) in Tel Aviv, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ramat Gan, Holon, Yavne, Givatayim, Petah Tikva, Rishon Lezion, Bat Yam, Elad, Rehovot, Ra'anana, Lod, Sderot, Ibim, Nir Am, Netiv Ha'asara, Yad Mordechai, Erez, Mefalsim, Kerem Shalom, Bar'am, and the Upper Galilee region, as well as other locations in southern Israel.
 - » On November 20, Hamas claimed responsibility for a [barrage](#) of rockets launched at southern and central Israel.
 - » The IDF then [announced](#) that the rocket sirens in central Israel “were due to just two projectiles fired from the Gaza Strip” and that the sirens were precautionary due to the potential of falling rocket shrapnel.
 - » According to a *Times of Israel* [report](#), “both rockets fired by Hamas were intercepted, one by the short-range Iron Dome air defense system, and the second by the medium-range David’s Sling.”
- Terrorists in Lebanon continued to fire anti-tank missiles, mortars, and other projectiles at Israel over the last 24 hours.
 - » On November 21, terrorists [fired](#) a barrage of 25 unspecified projectiles from Lebanon at several locations across northern Israel.
 - » On November 21, terrorists [launched](#) mortar shells at an IDF post in northern Israel. No casualties or damage were reported.
 - » On November 21, terrorists [fired](#) three anti-tank guided missiles from southern Lebanon at the Metula area of northern Israel. No casualties or damage were reported.

Projectiles Fired Against Israel During Major Conflicts



IDF Operations

- The IDF continued airstrikes and ground operations in northern Gaza.
 - » On November 21, the IDF [struck](#) approximately 250 targets across Gaza:
 - The IDF struck a rocket launcher that had been used to launch a barrage of rockets at Israel on November 20 and which was [located](#) next to a residential building.
 - The IDF [located](#) a weapons stockpile in a senior member of Hamas's elite Nukhba unit's house.
 - The IDF [located](#) weapons in residential buildings and children's bedrooms, and [found](#) an anti-tank missile hidden under a baby's crib.
 - Israel's 215th Artillery Regiment and Air Force carried out airstrikes in order to "prepare the ground for battle" and [struck](#) three Hamas tunnel entrances, with Hamas operatives inside.
 - » On November 21, the IDF's 162nd Division [completed](#) the encirclement of the Jabaliya area in northern Gaza.
 - » On November 20, the IDF [eliminated](#), with the assistance of Shin Bet intelligence, three Hamas company commanders in airstrikes. The IDF also said its troops struck a terrorist cell and weapons depot.
 - » On November 20, troops in Israel's 188th Armored Brigade [found](#) various weapons, a rocket-making lab, and an entrance to a Hamas tunnel inside a mosque in the Zeitoun neighborhood of Gaza City.
- On November 21, the IDF targeted terrorists in Lebanon that had attacked northern Israel over the last 24 hours.
 - » The IDF [struck](#) three Hezbollah anti-tank missile squads in southern Lebanon and also targeted other Hezbollah sites in response to earlier mortar launches into Israel.
 - » Israel [shelled](#) positions in southern Lebanon in response to earlier anti-tank missile launches.
- Israel's internal security service, called the Shin Bet, and the Israeli Border Police [announced](#) on November 20 that roughly two weeks ago, its elite forces detained two terrorists in the southern Bedouin city of Rahat that had entered Israel on October 7 and remained in hiding for a month.
 - » Israel's *Channel 12* network reported that the two terrorists were hiding in the house of a local resident who claimed not to have known the two men were terrorist fugitives.
- The Israeli embassy in Washington, D.C., [issued](#) a statement that Israeli Intelligence Minister Gila Gamliel's [op-ed](#) calling for the transfer of Gazans to Western nations is not Israeli policy and noted that she is not part of Israel's war cabinet.
- A November 20 [report](#) indicated that recent tests of Rafael Advanced Defense Systems' Iron Beam system, which uses high-powered lasers to intercept projectiles, have shown promising results. Rafael and the Israeli Defense Ministry believe that the current Israel-Hamas war presents an opportunity to test the efficacy of the system.
 - » Although the system was set to be deployed in 2025, that timeframe has been accelerated to 2024.
 - » The Israel supplemental funding proposed by President Biden and under consideration in the Congress would allocate [\\$1.2 billion](#) for further Iron Beam research and development.

Casualties and Hostages

- Over 1,200 people in Israel have been [killed](#), and another 6,900 have been injured in the war.
 - » [390](#) Israeli soldiers have been killed.
 - On November 20, the IDF [announced](#) the death of 21-year-old Staff Sergeant Eytan Dishon, who was killed in battle in northern Gaza.
 - 68 IDF soldiers have been [killed](#) during ground combat in Gaza so far.
 - Two IDF soldiers were [killed](#), and four were seriously wounded during combat operations in Gaza on November 14.
 - On November 20, *The Times of Israel* [reported](#) that the IDF has suffered several “friendly fire” incidents in Gaza, some deadly, and the military is attempting to implement lessons learned from the incidents.
 - » Numerous foreign nationals have been killed in the war, including at least 32 [American](#) nationals, 34 [Thai](#) nationals, 39 [French](#) nationals, 17 [British](#) nationals, 10 [Nepalese](#) nationals, 7 [Argentinian](#) nationals, 16 [Russian](#) nationals, 4 [Romanian](#) nationals, 4 [Chinese](#) nationals, 3 [Brazilian](#) nationals, 3 [Belarusian](#) nationals, 3 [Philippines](#) nationals, 2 [Ukrainian](#) nationals, 2 [Peruvian](#) nationals, 5 [Canadian](#) nationals, a [Cambodian](#) national, a [Colombian](#) national, an [Irish](#) national, an [Italian](#) national, a [Spanish](#) national, a [Swiss](#) national, a [Turkish](#) national, and an [Austrian](#) national.
- According to unverified figures from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Health Ministry, 12,700 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza, and 27,490 have been [injured](#) during the war.
 - » On October 25, President Biden [cautioned](#) against trusting Gaza Health Ministry casualty figures, stating: “I have no notion that the Palestinians are telling the truth about how many people are killed ... I have no confidence in the number that the Palestinians are using.”
- According to the Palestinian Authority-run Palestinian Ministry of Health, 212 people have been [killed](#), and an additional 2,800 have been wounded in the West Bank.
- The IDF [claims](#) that it has killed at least 1,500 infiltrators from Gaza since the start of the war.
- According to the IDF, terrorists in Gaza currently hold [236](#) individuals as hostages.
 - » So far, [four](#) hostages in Gaza have been released, [one](#) has been rescued by the IDF, and [four](#) have been [found](#) dead.
- Foreign nationals also remain missing, including at least 11 [American](#) nationals, 9 [French](#) nationals, 15 [Argentinian](#) nationals, 9 [Ukrainian](#) nationals, 8 [Russian](#) nationals, 3 [Canadian](#) nationals, 3 [Philippines](#) nationals, 2 [Austrian](#) nationals, 3 [Italian](#) nationals, 2 [Paraguayan](#) nationals, 5 [Peruvian](#) nationals, 2 [Sri Lankan](#) nationals, 2 [Tanzanian](#) nationals, a [Chilean](#) national, an [Azeri](#) national, and a [Nepalese](#) national.
 - » At least 8 [German](#) nationals, 23 [Thai](#) nationals, 4 [Portuguese](#) nationals, 3 [British](#) nationals, 2 [Italian](#) nationals, 3 [Romanian](#) nationals, and 2 [Mexican](#) nationals have been taken hostage.

Humanitarian Efforts

- On November 20, President Joe Biden [said](#) he believes a hostage deal is close to finalization.
- On November 21, Qatari foreign ministry spokesperson Majed Al-Ansari [claimed](#), “we are at the closest point we ever had been in reaching an agreement” and added that talks are in a “critical and final stage.”
- [CNN reported](#) on November 21 that, according to U.S. and Israeli officials, a deal to pause fighting between Israel and Hamas in exchange for the release of several hostages that Hamas abducted on October 7 is close to fruition.
 - » Terrorists in Gaza would release 50 women and children in exchange for a fighting pause of four to five days and the release of three Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons. Hamas would use the pause to gather the remaining women and children hostages together, something it has claimed it cannot do as long as there is ongoing combat. The temporary pause could be extended for the release of more hostages.
 - » 3-year-old American Abigail Edan may be among the hostages released.
 - » Israel would also cease flying surveillance drones above northern Gaza for at least six hours per day, according to unnamed sources.

Iranian Involvement and Response

- According to a readout of a [phone call](#) on November 20 between Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to discuss the war, “concern was voiced by both sides regarding the ongoing armed conflict in the Gaza Strip. The need for an immediate ceasefire and urgent assistance to the affected civilian population was emphasized.”
- On November 20, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian [spoke](#) by phone with Qatar’s foreign minister, to discuss the war.
 - » According to a readout, the two countries discussed strategies to stop Israel from continuing its combat operations in Gaza.
- Following the Houthis’ November 19 [hijacking](#) of the Israel-linked ship *Galaxy Leader* in the Red Sea, Houthi military official Major General Ali Al-Moshki [said](#) on November 20 to the organization’s *Al-Massirah* television station that “Israeli ships are legitimate targets for us anywhere ... and we will not hesitate to take action.”

U.S. and International Response

- After an [attack](#) that caused “minor injuries to U.S. personnel and damage to infrastructure” at the Ain al-Asad base in Iraq on November 21, U.S. forces “responded in self-defence against those who carried out the strike,” according to a U.S. defense official.
 - » Defense officials declined to provide details about the incidents, but they occurred amid reports that an air strike hit a truck belonging to an Iran-backed militia in Iraq west of Baghdad, killing one person.
 - » This was the first U.S. strike in Iraq since the Israel-Hamas war began. The United States has previously conducted three strikes against Iran-linked targets in Syria amid an escalation of at least 61 strikes against U.S. personnel in Syria and Iraq.
- On November 20, Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) became the first U.S. senator to [call](#) for an unconditional ceasefire, saying on X, “I am calling for a ceasefire—a cessation of hostilities

by both sides. To endure, the ceasefire and the following negotiations must accomplish other essential objectives, including the release of all hostages and a massive influx of humanitarian aid.”

- » Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) said earlier this month that he supported a ceasefire, but contingent on Hamas releasing all hostages.
- » Roughly 40 Democratic members of the House of Representatives have called for a ceasefire in recent weeks.
- On November 20, U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller [said](#) that the Biden administration objects to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s insistence that the IDF will retain security responsibility over Gaza following the war’s end.
 - » He also said, “we understand that the Israeli military is not going to ... just disappear the next day [after the war]. There is going to have to be some sort of transition period, so there isn’t a vacuum of security in Gaza. We will work with partners in the region to figure out what that transition period [will look like].”
- Miller [said](#) on November 20 that Israel will need to clarify how it plans to protect civilians who fled southward in Gaza following the IDF’s instructions to do so. He added, “we do have concerns that concentrating all civilians in one area does leave them vulnerable to harm, and we are trying to work through [this] with the government of Israel.”
- On November 20, Miller [said](#) that the United States is considering further measures to limit settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank.
 - » Miller said, “in addition to the Government of Israel taking steps to promote accountability, there are steps that we can take as well, and we have a number of those steps under consideration.”
 - » Miller added, “if we saw a significant diminution in violence against Palestinians in the West Bank, and if we saw the Government of Israel taking steps to hold those responsible for violence accountable, that’s certainly something we would welcome, something we would consider in taking into account what kind of actions we might take.”
- On November 20, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby [refuted](#) claims made by anti-Israel activists that Israel’s campaign in Gaza constitutes genocide, noting, “this word ‘genocide’ [is] getting thrown around in a pretty inappropriate way by lots of different folks.”
 - » He added, “Israel is not trying to wipe the Palestinian people off the map. Israel is not trying to wipe Gaza off the map. Israel is trying to defend itself against a genocidal terrorist threat. So if we’re going to start using that word, fine. Let’s use it appropriately.”
- On November 20, U.S. energy envoy Amos Hochstein [traveled](#) to Israel to brief Israeli leaders after visiting Lebanon, where he had urged the Lebanese government to quell Hezbollah’s attacks against Israel to prevent further escalations.
- On November 21, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman will [attend](#) a virtual meeting with leaders from the BRICS bloc to discuss the war.
 - » The leaders of BRICS members Brazil, China, India, Russia, and South Africa will be present, as will the leaders of Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates. The latter five countries are slated to join BRICS in January.
 - » UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres will also be in attendance, according to reports.
- On November 21, approximately 300 diplomats [viewed](#) footage of the October 7 attack at the United Nations headquarters in an event organized by the Israeli Mission to the United Nations.

- On November 21, European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell [said](#) that “the best guarantee for Israel’s security is the creation of a Palestinian state,” while speaking with foreign ministers from 27 European countries by video call.
- On November 21, foreign ministers from Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and the Palestinian Authority, as well as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation’s secretary general, [traveled](#) to Russia to discuss the war.
 - » The delegation, which was in China on November 20, reportedly will also travel to France and the United Kingdom on November 22-23 to discuss the war.
- After South Africa [referred](#) Israel to the International Criminal Court on November 18, accusing Israel of committing war crimes in Gaza, Israel’s Foreign Ministry [recalled](#) Israeli Ambassador to South Africa, Eli Belotserkovsky, for consultations on November 20.
- On November 20, the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Mirjana Spoljaric, [spoke](#) with Ismail Haniyeh, a senior leader of Hamas, in Qatar. In a statement, the ICRC called on Hamas to “release the hostages” and announced that “the ICRC is insisting that our teams be allowed to visit the hostages to check on their welfare and deliver medications, and for the hostages to be able to communicate with their families.”

Rising Antisemitism and Protests

- On November 21, German police [raided](#) the homes of 17 people accused of spreading antisemitic hate speech and threats targeting Jews online.
- On November 21, Polish authorities [arrested](#) a 38-year-old Polish woman with Islamic extremist sympathies who planted an explosive device in central Warsaw on November 10.
- On November 20, the Michigan home of U.S. Ambassador to Japan, Rahm Emanuel, who is Jewish, was [defaced](#) with graffiti that said “Nazis.”
- On November 20, three anti-Israel protesters were [arrested](#) after they defaced and damaged the Elbit Systems building in Merrimack, New Hampshire. Elbit Systems is an Israeli defense contractor.
 - » The protesters allegedly blocked the entrance to the building, spray painted the entrance red, smashed windows and skylights, damaged HVAC equipment, locked the main lobby door with a bicycle lock, and placed an incendiary device on the roof.
- On November 19, three synagogues in Massachusetts—in Needham, Hingham, and Northampton—were [forced to evacuate](#) after receiving bomb threats. No explosive devices were found at any of the synagogues.
- On November 17, actress Susan Sarandon faced backlash for [saying](#) at a recent pro-Palestinian rally that American Jews concerned for their safety amid rising antisemitism “are getting a taste of what it feels like to be a Muslim in this country.”
- *NBC News* [ended](#) its relations with a freelance Palestinian reporter, Marwat al-Azza, after she posted messages on Facebook celebrating the October 7 attack and was arrested by Israeli police for incitement. *NBC* released a statement that “[t]he investigation of Ms. Azza is unrelated to NBC News. It is based on her personal Facebook posts that predate her time with us as a freelancer. We were not aware of those posts before we engaged Ms. Azza four weeks ago. She will not be contributing to our coverage going forward.”

Recent and Relevant JINSA Products About Israel at War

- Webinar: [War Update](#), with JINSA Vice President for Policy Blaise Misztal, JINSA Distinguished Fellow IDF Major General (ret.) Yaakov Amidror, and JINSA Senior Vice President for Israeli Affairs IDF Major General (ret.) Yaacov Ayish, November 20, 2023
- Jacob Olidort and Yoni Tobin, [Israeli Precautions Save Palestinian Lives](#), November 16, 2023
- Sander Gerber and Ezra Gontownik, "[The Palestinian Authority cannot govern Gaza](#)," *Jerusalem Post*, November 13, 2023
- Ari Cicurel, [Iranian Regime Continues Escalation, Despite Limited U.S. Strikes](#), November 9, 2023
- Webinar: [Hamas's Assault and the Antisemitic Aftermath](#), with Michael Makovsky, JINSA President and CEO, and Natan Sharansky, Chairman of The Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy and Former Deputy Prime Minister of Israel, November 8, 2023
- Michael Makovsky, "[Biden's Iran policy needs to match post-10/7 realities](#)," *The Hill*, November 7, 2023
- Webinar: [Hezbollah's Escalation Dilemma](#), with John Hannah, JINSA's Randi & Charles Wax Senior Fellow; Hanin Ghaddar, Friedmann Senior Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy; IDF Lieutenant Colonel (Res.) Sarit Zehavi, founder and president of Alma; and Orna Mizrahi, senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), November 7, 2023
- Yoni Tobin, [U.S. Aid to Gaza Almost Certain to End Up in Hamas Hands](#), November 6, 2023
- Thomas Trask and Jacob Olidort, "[The Case for Upgrading Israel's 'Major Non-NATO Ally' Status](#)," *RealClearDefense*, November 6, 2023
- Yaakov Amidror, "[Initial Lessons From the October 2023 War](#)," *Jerusalem Strategic Tribune*, November 1, 2023