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Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update December 13, 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

- President Biden [alleged](#) on December 12 that Israel is conducting “indiscriminate bombing” while pledging during the same speech that “we’re not going to do a damn thing other than protect Israel ... [and ensure they have] what they need to defend themselves and to finish the job against Hamas.”
 - » In fact, Israel has taken myriad steps to protect civilians during its campaign to destroy Hamas, including canceling airstrikes due to the prospect of civilian casualties, and dropping leaflets, sending text messages, and making phone calls to warn civilians to evacuate, as JINSA’s Director of Research Jacob Olidort and Policy Analyst Yoni Tobin [note](#).
- Another Iran-backed Houthi [attack](#) on commercial vessels in the Red Sea on December 12, in which the group launched two missiles at a Marshall Islands-flagged oil and chemical tanker, but missed the ship, and in which the group launched a drone in the direction of a nearby U.S. warship that was shot down, underscores the continued erosion of U.S. deterrence against such attacks.
 - » As JINSA’s Assistant Director of Foreign Policy Ari Cicurel and Policy Analyst Zac Schildcrout have [noted](#), Iran and its Houthi proxies continue to threaten global commerce with attacks in the Red Sea on shipments of vital economic goods like oil and chemicals.
 - » Cicurel and Schildcrout noted that “insurance costs for commercial shipping through the Red Sea have nearly tripled” in recent weeks due to Houthi attacks.

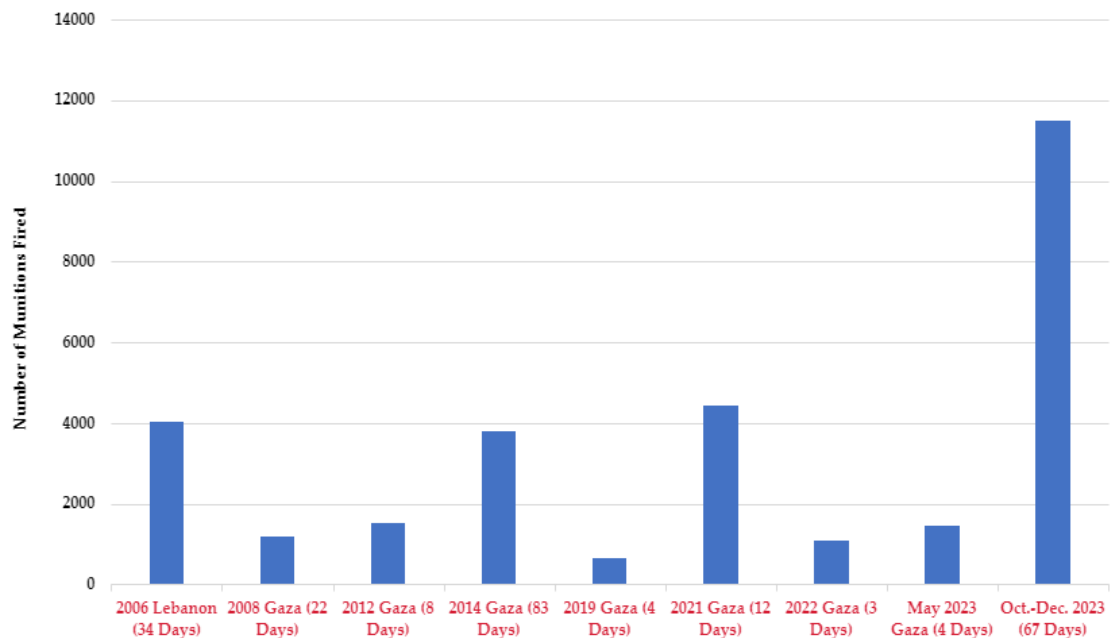
Last 24 Hours

Attacks Against Israel

- At least [11,500](#) rockets, mortars, drones, and other projectiles have been fired from Gaza during the war.
 - » Sirens [sounded](#) in Kissufim, Mefalsim, Sderot, Ibim, Nir Am, Gevim, [Nahal Oz](#), [Ein Hashlosha](#), and [Nirim](#).

- Several projectiles were fired from Lebanon in the last 24 hours.
 - » [Sirens sounded](#) in Acre, Bar'am, Betzet, Rosh Hanikra, and Shlomi.
 - » On December 12, the Israeli Air Force's Aerial Control Unit identified and [launched interceptors](#) at a suspicious aerial target that entered Israeli airspace from Lebanon.
 - » On December 12, terrorists [fired](#) an unspecified number of anti-tank missiles and mortars from southern Lebanon at the northern Israeli town of Bar'am, causing property damage.
- Projectiles were fired from Syria toward Israel in the last 24 hours.
 - » On December 12, terrorists [fired](#) three rockets from Syria at the Golan Heights, with two rockets landing short in Syria and a third landing in an open area, causing no reported injuries or damage.

Projectiles Fired Against Israel During Major Conflicts



IDF Operations

- The IDF stated that it [launched](#) strikes on over 250 targets in Gaza in the last 24 hours.
 - » The IDF [retrieved](#) the bodies of two Israelis taken hostage by Hamas, Eden Zechariah and IDF Warrant Officer Ziv Dado. Master-Sgt. (res.) Gal Meir Eisenkot and Master-Sgt. (res.) Eyal Meir Berkovich were killed in an earlier operation to retrieve the two bodies on December 7.
- The IDF stated that it launched strikes on targets in Lebanon in the last 24 hours.
 - » The IDF [said](#) on December 13 that it used aircraft and tanks to strike targets in both southern Lebanon and Syria in response to earlier attacks against Israel.

- The military specified that in Syria, it struck an observation post used by the Syrian Army, and in Lebanon, it struck a Hezbollah rocket launcher.
- The IDF stated that it launched strikes on targets in Syria in the last 24 hours.
 - » On December 13, IDF aircraft and tanks [struck](#) a number of military targets in Syria, including a Syrian Army military post.
 - » On December 12, the IDF [conducted](#) artillery shelling against targets in Syria in response to an earlier rocket attack.
- The IDF conducted operations in Jenin in the West Bank.
 - » On December 13, the IDF [killed](#) six suspected terrorists in a raid in Jenin. Two were killed by gunfire, and another four were killed in a drone strike. During the raid, three IDF soldiers were lightly injured in an explosion. Palestinian health authorities [said](#) that seven people were killed in the Jenin fighting, including a man who was shot in the leg and a sick 13-year-old boy.
 - » On December 13, the IDF [announced](#) that its troops and the Israeli Border Police jointly searched roughly 400 buildings in the Jenin refugee camps, detaining hundreds of suspected terrorists, seizing over 30 weapons, destroying six weapons labs, four terrorist meeting centers, and several terror tunnel shafts.
- The *Wall Street Journal* [reported](#) on December 13, citing U.S. officials, that Israel has begun flooding Hamas’s tunnel network of over 300 miles with seawater from the Mediterranean Sea.
 - » According to the report, Israel is using at least seven large pumps to carry out the operation, which is likely to take weeks to complete.

Humanitarian Efforts

- AFP reported on December 12, citing humanitarian sources in Egypt, that Egypt [sent](#) an aid convoy of 80 trucks that day to the Kerem Shalom crossing on the Israeli-Gaza border, which Israel recently reopened for inspecting aid trucks going into Gaza through the Rafah crossing. Another 100 trucks were sent the same day to the Nitzana border post, where all international aid is processed before entering Gaza through the Rafah crossing.
- A White House National Security Council spokesperson [told](#) *The Times of Israel* on December 13 that the administration has been requesting that Israel inspect aid trucks at its Kerem Shalom crossing with Gaza—which Israel has agreed to do—“for quite some time now,” but “the Israeli government’s answer has been that they can build the capacity of Rafah to get enough humanitarian assistance in, but [we] have definitively reached the conclusion that that is not the case.”
 - » The spokesperson added, “it is a question we are making with a level of urgency and immediacy now, that we would hope for a response from the Israeli government on soon,” and “Kerem Shalom should be open indefinitely, but at the least it should be open for as long as there is the humanitarian need.”

Casualties and Hostages

- 1,245 people in Israel have been [killed](#), and another approximately 6,900 have been injured in the war.
 - » 444 Israeli soldiers have been [killed](#).

- 115 IDF soldiers have been [killed](#) during ground combat in Gaza so far.
- On December 13, the IDF announced the deaths of nine soldiers [killed](#) in a Hamas ambush in Shejaiya neighborhood of Gaza City: Col. Itzhak Ben Basat, 44, head of the Golani Brigade's commander's team, from Sde Ya'akov; Lt. Col. Tomer Grinberg, 35, the commander of the Golani Brigade's 13th Battalion, from Almog; Maj. Roei Meldasi, 23, a company commander in the 13th Battalion, from Afula; Maj. Moshe Avram Bar On, 23, a company commander in the Golani Brigade's 51st Battalion, from Ra'anana; Cpt. Liel Hayo, 22, a platoon commander in the 51st Battalion, from Shoham; Sgt. Achia Daskal, 19, a soldier in the 51st Battalion, from Haifa; Sgt. Eran Aloni, 19, of the 51st Battalion, from Ofakim. Maj. Ben Shelly, 26, a squad commander in the Israeli Air Force's Unit 669, from Kidron; and Sgt. First Class Rom Hecht, 20, of Unit 669, from Givatayim.
- On December 13, the IDF [announced](#) the death of another soldier, Staff Sgt. Oriya Yaakov, 19, from Ashkelon, in a separate incident in northern Gaza. Three other soldiers were seriously wounded in the incident.
- The IDF [said](#) that four soldiers were lightly wounded by controlled explosions and friendly fire during a raid of the Jenin refugee camp on December 11.
- Numerous foreign nationals have been killed in the war, including at least 31 [American](#) nationals, 34 [Thai](#) nationals, 39 [French](#) nationals, 19 [Russian](#) nationals, 12 [British](#) nationals, 10 [Nepalese](#) nationals, 9 [Argentinian](#) nationals, 6 [Canadian](#) nationals, 4 [Philippines](#) nationals, 4 [Austrian](#) nationals, 4 [Romanian](#) nationals, 4 [Portuguese](#) nationals, 4 [Chinese](#) nationals, 3 [Brazilian](#) nationals, 3 [Belarusian](#) nationals, 3 [Italian](#) nationals, 3 [Peruvian](#) nationals, a [Cambodian](#) national, a [Chilean](#) national, an [Irish](#) national, a [Spanish](#) national, an [Australian](#) national, an [Azeri](#) national, a [Honduran](#) national, a [Swiss](#) national, and a [Turkish](#) national.
- According to unverified figures from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Health Ministry, 18,412 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza, and 50,100 have been injured during the war.
 - » On December 4, Associated Press and AFP [reported](#), citing an IDF official, that roughly 15,000 Palestinians have died since the war began and that roughly 5,000 of those killed were terrorists.
 - » 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, 271 people have been [killed](#), and an additional 3,566 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.
- So far, [105](#) hostages in Gaza have been released, [one](#) has been rescued by the IDF, and [seven](#) [have](#) been [found](#) dead.
 - » 81 Israeli hostages have been released.
 - » 46 hostages with foreign nationalities—some also holding Israeli citizenship—have been released.
 - Thus far, 23 [Thai](#) nationals, 6 [Argentinian](#) nationals, 5 [German](#) nationals, 3 [French](#) nationals, 4 [Russian](#) nationals, 1 [Dutch](#) national, 1 [Filipino](#) national, 1 [Mexican](#) national, 1 [Uruguayan](#) national, and 1 [American](#) national have been released.
 - Hamas has released [36 children](#) and still holds two as hostages.

- Terrorists in Gaza currently [hold](#) 138 hostages, including 114 men, 20 women, and two children. 10 hostages are 75 and older, 127 are Israeli, and 11 are foreign nationals, including eight from Thailand.
 - » Many of the hostages are foreign or dual nationals, including up to 9 [American](#) nationals, 6 [German](#) nationals, 13 [Thai](#) nationals, 4 [Portuguese](#) nationals, 3 [British](#) nationals, 2 [Italian](#) nationals, 4 [Romanian](#) nationals, and 2 [Mexican](#) nationals.
- On December 13, President Biden will [meet](#) with family members of the eight Americans thought to be held hostage in Gaza. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Deputy National Security Advisor Jon Finer will reportedly attend as well.
- President Biden [said](#) during a press conference on December 12, “with regard to [Israel’s] flooding of the [Hamas] tunnels... There (are) assertions being made that there [are] no hostages in any of these tunnels, but I don’t know that for a fact,” and “I do know that, though, every civilian death is an absolute tragedy, and Israel has stated its intent to match its words with actions.”

Iranian Involvement and Response

- On December 13, two missiles [fired](#) from Iran-backed Houthi territory in Yemen missed a Marshall Islands-flagged commercial tanker, the *Ardmore Encounter*, near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. According to a U.S. official, an American warship also shot down a suspected Houthi drone that was flying in the warship’s direction.
- On December 13, a speedboat with armed men aboard [approached](#) two vessels in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, off the coast of Yemen’s Red Sea port of Hodeidah: a Marshall Islands-flagged commercial tanker and a Malta-flagged bulk carrier. The speedboat fired upon the tanker, and there was an “exchange of fire,” according to a Reuters [report](#), which stated that the speedboat also approached the Malta-flagged tanker nearby. No injuries were reported.

U.S. and International Response

- During a December 12 campaign fundraiser in Washington, D.C., President Biden [said](#), “one of the things that [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu] understands ... is that Israel’s security can rest on the United States. But right now it has more than the United States — It has the European Union, it has most of the world supporting it.” However, he warned that “[Israel is] starting to lose that support by the indiscriminate bombing that takes place.”
 - » The president criticized Israel’s government, arguing that “[Netanyahu is] a good friend, but I think he has to change and ... this government in Israel is making it very difficult for him to move,” and “this is the most conservative government in Israel’s history.”
 - » Biden added, “[Israeli Minister of National Security Itamar] Ben Gvir and company and the new folks don’t want anything remotely approaching a two-state solution,” and “they not only want to have retribution — which they should — for what Hamas did, but against all Palestinians ... they don’t want anything to [do] with the Palestinians.”
 - » He also criticized Palestinian leadership, saying, “the Palestinians have been not [sic] governed well at all.”
 - » He further stressed that “you cannot say there’s no Palestinian state at all in the future” but said that Israel faces “an existential threat.” He also reiterated that “there’s no question about the need to take on Hamas. None. Zero. They have every right.”

- » Biden pledged, “but in the meantime, we’re not going to do a damn thing other than protect Israel... [and ensure they have] what they need to defend themselves and to finish the job against Hamas.”
- » Biden noted that during earlier conversations with Netanyahu, the prime minister said, “you carpet-bombed Germany. You dropped the atom bomb. A lot of civilians died,” but Biden retorted at the time, “yeah, that’s why all these institutions were set up after World War II to see to it that it didn’t happen again.”
- » Biden urged Israel, “don’t make the same mistakes we made [after] 9/11. There was no reason why we had to be in a war in Afghanistan [after] 9/11. There was no reason why we had to do some of the things we did.”
- » He described Hamas as “animals” and argued that the group “exceeded anything that any other terrorist group has done ... in memory.”
- » The president endorsed moving toward a two-state solution and noted that Netanyahu’s judicial reform plans prompted IDF soldiers to refuse to serve.
- Responding to a question about Biden’s speech, IDF Spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari [said](#), “we maintain close relations with the United States. We conduct near-daily conversations with the commander of US Central Command, as well as with the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff,” and it is “always right to show them and explain the facts” when necessary.
 - » Hagari added, “we know how to explain exactly how we operate, in a precise and intelligence-based manner. We operate to maintain the security of our forces, but we know how to act against the centers of gravity of Hamas.”
 - » He also said, “we operate in such a manner that does our best to separate the civilians who are not involved in terror from the terror,” and “the IDF has been doing this since the beginning of the fighting and certainly now in the last days. We will know how to show and present it, certainly to our ally.”
- On December 12, Beirut-based Hamas official Osama Hamdan [argued](#) during a news conference that “the resistance and the steadfastness of the Palestinian people have made Biden understand that the Israeli military operation is a crazy act,” and “the repercussions [of the war] will be catastrophic on the entity [Israel] and on the results of elections in which Biden might lose his seat in the White House.”
- U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan [said](#) on December 12 that during his visit to Israel later this week, he will be discussing “timetables” for the war with Israeli leaders.
 - » Sullivan stated, “I will certainly be talking to Prime Minister Netanyahu and the war cabinet and the senior national security leadership about timetables, about how they are thinking about that. The subject of how they are seeing the timetable of this war will certainly be on the agenda for my meetings.”
- U.S. Department of Defense spokesperson Pat Ryder [said](#) during a December 12 briefing that U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin will visit Bahrain, Qatar, and Israel next week—his second visit to Israel since October 7—to further the Defense Department’s objectives of protecting regional U.S. forces, supporting Israel’s right to defend itself, securing hostage releases, and containing the Israel-Hamas war so that it does not engulf the region.
- On December 12, the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly [voted](#) in favor of a nonbinding resolution introduced by Egypt that called for an immediate ceasefire, the unconditional release of hostages, and greater humanitarian aid access in Gaza.
 - » 153 countries voted in favor of the resolution, including U.S. allies like Australia, Canada, and Japan, while 23 abstained.

- » The United States and Israel were two of just 10 countries voting against the resolution, with Austria, Czechia, Guatemala, Liberia, Micronesia, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, and Paraguay also voting against the resolution.
- » The resolution [states](#) that the assembly “demands an immediate humanitarian ceasefire” and that “all parties comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, notably with regard to the protection of civilians.”
- » Palestinian Authority Ambassador to the UN Riyad Mansour [said](#), “today was a historic day in terms of the powerful message that was sent from the General Assembly. And it is our collective duty to continue in this path until we see an end to this aggression against our people.”
- On December 12, the prime ministers of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand [released](#) a joint statement calling for a “sustainable ceasefire” and a two-state solution.
 - » The statement also called on Israel to respect international humanitarian law and stated, “we are alarmed at the diminishing safe space for civilians in Gaza. The price of defeating Hamas cannot be the continuous suffering of all Palestinian civilians. We remain deeply concerned by the scale of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and ongoing risks to all Palestinian civilians. Safe and unimpeded humanitarian access must be increased and sustained.”
- According to [reports](#) from December 13, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said to Russian senators, “the only way for this [Israeli-Palestinian] problem to be solved forever, and to be solved in a just way, is to hold an international conference with all five permanent members of the UN Security Council,” including Arab League, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and Gulf Cooperation Council representatives.
 - » He also said, “continuing injustice against the Palestinian people, to whom the creation of a Palestinian state was promised ... fuels very serious terrorist and extremist sentiments,” and he asserted that Israel is “flattening” civilian areas of Gaza in a “horrific” situation, doubting figures Israel provided about how many combatants it has killed compared to civilians.
- On December 13, Pope Francis [said](#), “may both sides involved have courage to take up the negotiations again, and I ask everyone to take on the urgent job of getting humanitarian aid to the population of Gaza. They are at the end of their rope and really need it,” and he added, “free all the hostages immediately who saw some hope in the ceasefire a few days ago. May this great suffering for the Israelis and the Palestinians end. Please no to arms and yes to peace.”
- On December 13, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen [told](#) European Union (EU) lawmakers that “extremist” Israelis who attack Palestinians in the West Bank should be sanctioned, and “this violence has nothing to do with the fight against Hamas and must stop.”

Rising Antisemitism, Protests, and Attacks

- In a message to Iceland’s public broadcaster, Iceland’s Association of Composers and Lyricists [argued](#) that if Israel is not banned from Eurovision next year as “Russia was in the last contest,” Iceland should boycott the contest because of “a duty to take a stand against war and the murder of civilians and innocent children.”
- On December 12, Turkish lawmaker Hasan Bitmez [suffered](#) a heart attack while giving a speech in parliament seconds after saying that even if Israel is able to “escape the torment

of history, you will not escape the wrath of Allah.” Bitmez fainted directly after and is reportedly in critical condition.

- On December 12, two anti-Israel protesters were [filmed](#) harassing an attendee who was leaving the Israeli Embassy’s Hanukkah ceremony in Washington, D.C., shouting, “we will kill you all, occupiers!”
- On December 12, a far-right Polish lawmaker [used](#) a fire extinguisher to put out Hanukkah candles in the country’s parliament during an event with members of the Jewish community.
- On December 11, police [arrested](#) 41 students at Brown University who had staged a sit-in and occupied the campus’ University Hall, demanding the school divest from Israel and calling for a ceasefire in Gaza.

Recent and Relevant JINSA Products About Israel at War

- Jacob Olidort and Lt Gen (ret.) Steven Blum, “[Communication of intent and the importance of language to deterrence](#),” *Military Times*, December 7, 2023
- Jonathan Ruhe, Yoni Tobin, and Jordan Bridwell, [Iran on Nuclear Precipice as Oversight Dwindles](#), December 7, 2023
- Webinar: [Gaza War Update](#), with IDF Major General (ret.) and JINSA Distinguished Fellow Yaakov Amidror and JINSA Senior Vice President for Israeli Affairs IDF Major General (ret.) Yaacov Ayish, December 7, 2023
- Ari Cicurel and Zac Schildcrout, [Failure to Deter Houthi Attacks Endangers Global Shipping](#), December 6, 2023
- Yoni Tobin, [Hamas War Crimes Harm Palestinians and Israelis Alike](#), December 6, 2023
- Jonathan Harounoff, “[The Pandemic of Academic Antisemitism](#),” *JNS*, December 6, 2023
- Webinar: [Reflections From Law Enforcement Trip to Israel](#), with JINSA Homeland Security Program Director Steven Pomerantz, Executive Director and CEO of the National Sheriffs’ Association Jonathan Thompson, and President of the National Sherriff’s Association Sheriff Greg Champagne of St. Charles Parish, Louisiana, December 5, 2023
- Yoni Tobin, [The United States Must Re-Designate the Houthis as Terrorists](#), December 5, 2023
- Ari Cicurel, [First Preemptive U.S. Strike Since 10/7](#), December 4, 2023
- Zac Schildcrout, [10/7 Attack Highlights Need to Sanction Iran-Backed Terrorists](#), December 1, 2023
- Webinar: [Flying Blind? Electronic Warfare’s Impact on Civilian Planes](#), with JINSA Vice President for Policy Blaise Misztal, Former Deputy Commander of U.S. Central Command Lt Gen Thomas Bergeson, USAF (ret.) and Former Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, U.S. Air Force Lt Gen Joseph Guastella, USAF (ret.), November 29, 2023
- Webinar: [Britain’s Reaction to Israel-Hamas War](#), with JINSA President and CEO Michael Makovsky, Editorial Board Member and Opinion Columnist at The Wall Street Journal Joseph Sternberg, and former president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews Jonathan Arkush, November 27, 2023
- Michael Makovsky, “[What Israel Needs](#),” *The National Interest*, November 24, 2023