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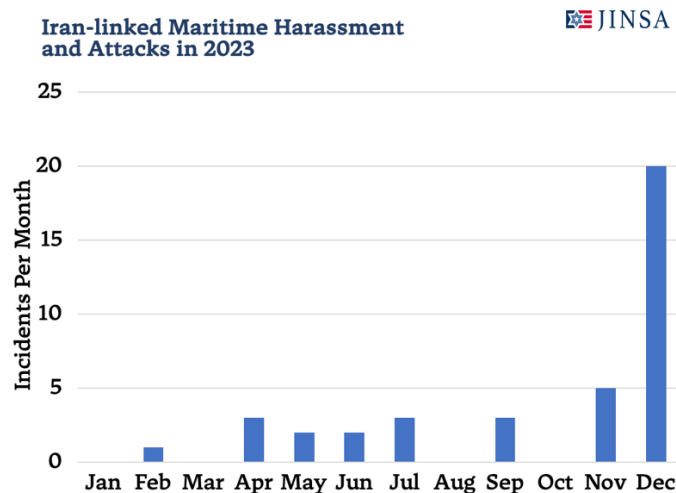
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# Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update December 18, 2023

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

- Egypt's December 16 interception of a drone flying off the coast of the Sinai Peninsula that could have been intended to strike Israeli territory could indicate an increasing level of air defense cooperation between the two countries.
- The Iran-backed Houthis continued their wave of aggression against commercial shipping vessels in the Red Sea over the weekend. The escalation of Houthi attacks has caused BP and five major shipping companies, including French CMA CGM, the Danish Maersk, Hong Kong-based OOCL, German Hapag-Lloyd, and the Italian-Swiss-owned Mediterranean Shipping Co, the world's largest shipping company, to suspend travel through the Red Sea.
  - » Maersk [controls](#) 14.8% of the global shipping containers market, making any long-term suspension of travel through the Red Sea devastating to the Egyptian economy and likely raising global costs for goods.
  - » The 20 incidents of maritime aggression that the Iranian regime and Houthis have conducted in December surpassed the 19 incidents that had occurred throughout the rest of 2023.



- The IDF [uncovered](#) the largest Hamas tunnel it has discovered to date over the weekend.
  - » The tunnel, which was found roughly 165 feet below ground, had multiple branches and was constructed using technology and materials not used in other Hamas tunnels, according to the IDF. It also contained communication lines, plumbing, electricity, and large weapons stockpiles. The IDF released footage of Muhammad Sinwar, the brother of Hamas leader in Gaza Yahya Sinwar, driving through the tunnel. The IDF said the tunnel was constructed under Muhammad Sinwar's supervision and orders.
  - » The tunnel's entrance was located just a quarter-mile from the Erez border crossing on the Israel-Gaza border, through which Hamas terrorists [infiltrated](#) during the October 7 attack.
- A December 16 [report](#) from the *New York Times* that Hamas had a portfolio worth up to half a billion dollars of assets, including property in the United Arab Emirates and real estate assets in Algeria and Turkey, underscores the wide-ranging and global aspects of Israel's war against Hamas.
  - » Israel reportedly was aware of the portfolio as early as 2018, but the entities were not sanctioned by either Israel or the United States. Former head of the Mossad's economic warfare division Udi Levy said, "everyone is talking about failures of intelligence on Oct. 7, but no one is talking about the failure to stop the money," and "it's the money — the money — that allowed this."

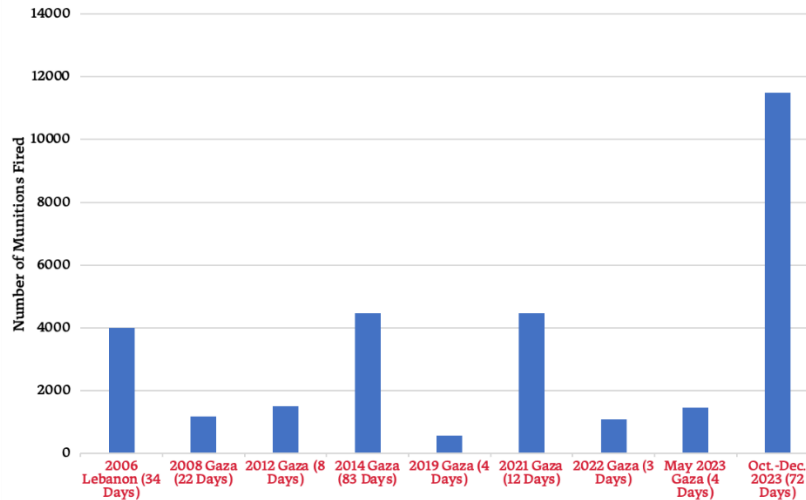
## Last 72 Hours

### *Attacks Against Israel*

- At least [11,500](#) rockets, mortars, drones, and other projectiles have been fired from Gaza during the war.
  - » Sirens sounded in [Lakhish](#), [Kiryat Gan](#), [Sufa](#), [Nir Yitzhak](#), [Sufa, Holit](#), [Kibbutz Mefalsim](#), [Netiv HaAsara](#), [Ein HaShlosha](#), and [Nirim](#).
  - » On December 17, a rocket was [intercepted](#) over Ashkelon. A man was seriously injured when he touched the intercepted rocket, causing an explosion.
  - » On December 15, Hamas [fired](#) a barrage of at least six rockets toward Jerusalem, three of which were intercepted and three of which landed in open areas, causing no reported damage or injuries. The IDF [released](#) footage of one of the rockets falling near a hospital in Ramallah in the West Bank.
- Terrorists in Lebanon continued to launch missiles, drones, and rockets at Israel over the last 72 hours.
  - » [Sirens sounded](#) in Margaliot, Arab al-Aramshe, Kiryat Shemona, Sasa, Dovev, Kfar Blum, Kfar Szold, Neot Mordechai, Lehavot HaBashan, Iftach, Ramot Naftali, Gonen, Malkia, Sdeh Nechemia, Dishon, Shamir, Amir, [Zar'it](#), [Tel Hai](#), [Misgav Am](#), [Kfar Giladi](#), and [Manara](#).
  - » On December 18, the IDF [intercepted](#) an aerial target that entered Israeli airspace from Lebanon. Earlier in the day, terrorists launched rockets from southern Lebanon at the Israeli town of Ya'ara.
  - » On December 17, terrorists [launched](#) rockets and missiles from southern Lebanon at the Israeli towns of Arab al-Aramshe and Sasa, causing property damage. Some of the rockets landed in Lebanon.

- » On December 17, Hezbollah [launched](#) an anti-tank missile that struck Kibbutz Sasa near the border with Lebanon.
- » On December 16, Israeli air defenses [intercepted](#) a surface-to-air missile that was launched at an IDF drone over Lebanese airspace. The drone was not struck and the missile did not enter Israeli airspace.
- » On December 16, terrorists [launched](#) three rockets at northern Israel, causing no reported injuries or damage.
- » On December 16, two drones carrying explosives [crossed](#) into Israeli airspace from Lebanon, triggering alert sirens in the Galilee. The Iron Dome intercepted one, and the other struck north of the northern Israeli town of Margaliot, the IDF said.
- On December 18, a terrorist [opened](#) fire on two vehicles driving near the town of Ateret in the West Bank, moderately injuring one woman. Israeli authorities [announced](#) a manhunt for the suspects, who are still at large.
- On December 16, the Egyptian Air Force [shot down](#) a drone off the coast of the Sinai Peninsula near the city of Dahab. According to Egyptian state-run media, witnesses saw a second object crash nearby.
  - » The Houthis claimed credit for the attack, stating that they launched multiple drones at southern Israel.
- On December 17, the IDF [said](#) that it arrested a Palestinian suspect in the West Bank town of Rantis after the suspect stabbed an IDF reservist at a gas station. The soldier was moderately injured and transferred to a hospital.
- According to a *New York Times* [report](#) from December 16, Israeli security officials obtained documents in 2018 that listed Hamas-controlled assets, including mining, chicken farming, and road building companies, buildings in the United Arab Emirates, an Algerian property developer, and a real estate company on Turkey's stock exchange. The portfolio was worth half a billion dollars at its peak, according to Israeli and U.S. officials.
  - » Israel stole the documents from a senior Hamas official's computer. The *New York Times* report said that neither the United States nor Israel sanctioned the companies named on the documents until 2022.
  - » Former head of the Mossad's economic warfare division Udi Levy said, "everyone is talking about failures of intelligence on Oct. 7, but no one is talking about the failure to stop the money," and "it's the money — the money — that allowed this."
  - » The U.S. Treasury Department's Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian Nelson said, "[Hamas funding its war and rebuilding afterwards is] something we are deeply worried about and expect to see given the financial stress Hamas is under," and "what we are trying to do is disrupt that."

## Projectiles Fired Against Israel During Major Conflicts



### IDF Operations

- The IDF stated that it launched strikes on hundreds of targets in Gaza over the last 72 hours.
  - » On December 17, the IDF [revealed](#) the largest Hamas tunnel it has ever uncovered. The tunnel, located in northeast Gaza roughly a quarter-mile from the Erez border crossing with Israel, was located approximately 165 feet underground. The IDF uncovered approximately 2.5 miles of the tunnel, but the total length of the tunnel was not revealed.
    - The tunnel had several branches, and also had plumbing, electricity, internal communication lines, and blast doors, and allowed for the movement of vehicles through it. The tunnel did not stretch into Israeli territory.
    - The IDF stated that troops from its elite Yahalom unit and the Gaza Division's Northern Brigade uncovered the tunnel, which contained large weapons stockpiles, using advanced technology and intelligence. The tunnel was constructed using technology and materials that have not been seen in any other Hamas tunnel.
    - The IDF said the tunnel was constructed under the direction of Muhammad Sinwar, Yahya Sinwar's brother. The IDF released a video of Muhammad Sinwar driving through the tunnel.
    - At a press conference, IDF spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said the tunnel was "no ordinary tunnel. It's a city. A terrorist city underground that Hamas dug and built instead of investing money in the residents of Gaza."
  - » On December 17, the IDF [announced](#) that it carried out strikes against approximately 200 Hamas targets across the Gaza Strip.
  - » On December 17, the IDF's 7th Armored Brigade [raided](#) the vacation home of Yahya Sinwar, Hamas's leader in Gaza, and the vacation homes of other Hamas leaders as well as offices of the commander of Hamas's Khan Younis battalion.
    - During the operation, troops eliminated Hamas operatives, uncovered approximately 30 terror tunnel shafts, eliminated dozens of anti-tank missile launching posts and observation posts, and seized weapons and intelligence materials.

- Troops also raided the home of a member of Hamas’s elite Nukhba cell and an outpost of Hamas’s Deir al-Balah battalion.
- » The IDF [raided](#) several Hamas apartments in the Shejaiya neighborhood in Gaza City, locating firearms, explosive devices, and other military equipment. IDF troops also destroyed a 15-meter long tunnel in Shejaiya and [eliminated](#) a Hamas tunnel entrance under a baby’s crib in a home in Jabaliya.
- » In southern Gaza, IDF troops [eliminated](#) seven Hamas operatives in an airstrike near Khan Younis and struck a major Hamas weapons depot.
- » IDF troops [located](#) a rocket manufacturing site in a building next to a United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) school, and also located three terror tunnel shafts near the school.
- The IDF stated that it launched strikes against terrorist targets in Lebanon that had conducted strikes against Israel over the last 72 hours.
  - » On December 18, the IDF [conducted](#) artillery shelling against terrorist targets in southern Lebanon in response to earlier rocket fire.
  - » On December 17, the IDF [struck](#) a Hezbollah site in southern Lebanon and an anti-tank missile squad it said was preparing to carry out an attack near Yir’on. Earlier that day, the IDF [shelled](#) a Hezbollah target in southern Lebanon in response to earlier rocket and missile fire.
  - » On December 16, the IDF [conducted](#) artillery shelling against targets in southern Lebanon in response to earlier drone attacks and rocket fire.
  - » The IDF [said](#) that on December 16, it fired artillery into southern Lebanon in response to a drone attack that targeted an area near Margaliot.
  - » On December 16, the IDF launched [artillery](#) into Lebanon at the origin of earlier rocket, missile, and drone attacks against Israel.
  - » On December 15, an IDF attack helicopter and drone [carried out](#) multiple strikes against Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon, including a rocket launcher that had been used by the terror group to attack sites in northern Israel.
  - » On December 15, following an attack against Shtulah, the IDF conducted [strikes](#) against a Hezbollah command center, military compound and other terrorist infrastructure in Lebanon.
- On December 17, Syrian state-run media SANA [reported](#) that two Syrian soldiers were wounded in Israeli airstrikes on targets near Damascus. According to the report, the strikes also caused “material losses,” and Syrian air defenses struck down several of the missiles launched in the airstrike.
- The IDF conducted operations in Tulkarem, Deir Amar, and Beit Ummar in the West Bank.
  - » On December 18, the IDF [arrested](#) 10 wanted individuals and confiscated 50 vehicles in the West Bank.
  - » On December 17, the IDF [carried out](#) airstrikes in Tulkarem after Israeli troops in the area were attacked with explosive devices. According to Israeli media reports, four Palestinians were killed in the airstrikes, including an unspecified number of wanted terrorists.
    - [According](#) to the IDF, in an overnight operation, the IDF arrested four wanted Palestinians, seized two firearms, and discovered explosive devices planted on the

- sides of the road in the Nur Shams refugee camp in Tulkarem. The IDF also discovered an explosive device in a clinic.
- During the raid, Palestinian gunmen opened fire and threw explosive devices and Molotov cocktails at the IDF troops, prompting the Israeli airstrike.
  - » Palestinian reports on December 17 [said](#) that several people were killed in clashes with the IDF, including:
    - A 16-year-old boy, who was shot and killed while confronting IDF troops in Deir Amar, and
    - A 20-year-old man, who died of his wounds after he was shot in the stomach while confronting IDF troops in Beit Ummar.
  - On December 15, the IDF [said](#) that it accidentally killed hostages Yotam Haim, Samer Talalka, and Alon Shamriz, all of whom Hamas abducted during its October 7 attack, after the military mistakenly identified them as threats. The hostages were shirtless and [holding](#) white flags. [Signs](#) reading “S.O.S.” and “help, three hostages” in Hebrew were found outside of the building where they were mistakenly killed.
    - » IDF Spokesperson Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said that the incident is “under review,” and the military will investigate the incident with “full transparency.”
    - » Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, “together with the entire people of Israel, I bow my head in deep sorrow and mourn the death of three of our dear sons who were kidnapped,” and “my heart goes out to the grieving families in their difficult time.”
    - » On December 16, IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi [said](#) he bears responsibility for the incident, stating, “the IDF, and I as its commander, are responsible for what happened, and we will do everything to prevent the recurrence of such cases in the continuation of the fighting.”
      - Halevi added, “I try to place myself in the head of the soldier in Shejaiya, after days of hard fighting, close encounters, encounters with terrorists dressed in civilian clothes, who arrive in various deceitful ways. He must be alert and ready for any threat. A split-second decision can [result in] life or death.”
      - Halevi further stated that the shooting was “carried out contrary to the open-fire regulations. It is forbidden to shoot at those who raise a white flag and ask to surrender,” but Halevi noted that “this shooting was carried out during combat and under pressure.”
      - Halevi also announced that the IDF has opened a preliminary investigation into the incident and has sent new protocols to its ground forces.
  - On December 17, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant [stated](#) while visiting the northern Israeli border that “if Hezbollah wants to go up one level, we will go up five.”
    - » Gallant further stated that Israel will do whatever it takes in order to enable Israelis to return to towns near the Lebanese border, “either through an agreement process, or with forceful actions, with all its implications,” adding, “we don’t want war but we won’t hold it for too long.”
  - On December 15, Minister without portfolio Benny Gantz [said](#) while visiting the northern Israeli town of Ma’alot-Tarshiha that “if the world doesn’t get Hezbollah away from the border, Israel will do so,” adding that he has invited Western diplomats to visit the border to better understand the threat Hezbollah poses to Israel.
  - On December 15, the IDF [announced](#) that its soldiers were conducting intensive training in northern Israel to prepare for “additional possible scenarios on the northern border.”

- » According to the statement, the drills, called “Precious Time,” are being conducted both during the day and at night, involve training in both open and urban areas, and include training troops on armored vehicles and other unspecified weaponry.
- During a press conference on December 16, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant [said](#) that Israelis will start returning to their homes near Gaza in January.
  - » Gallant also said that “deterrence is strong” in the north, but Israeli civilians will not return there until an area with no Hezbollah presence on the Lebanese side of the border is established, either through diplomacy or force.
  - » Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said during the press conference that while international stakeholders agree with his position that the Palestinian Authority (PA) should not run Gaza, they will not say so publicly. He also said that he can impede international pressure to revamp the process to attempt to achieve Palestinian statehood.
    - Netanyahu recalled that during President Biden’s previous visits to Israel as vice president, he told the U.S. leader, “the Palestinians can have all the rights to run their lives but none of the sovereign rights to endanger our lives” and acknowledged that this would not constitute sovereignty. He expressed hope that he can reach an agreement with the United States about day-after plans in Gaza.
  - » Netanyahu said that the terms of the November fighting pause involved an Israeli pledge to allow “minimal fuel” to enter Gaza for humanitarian reasons as well as the entry of 200 trucks per day containing food and humanitarian aid.
  - » He said further that he harbors “heavy criticism” of Qatar vis-a-vis its relationship with Hamas, which “you’ll hear more about” later. Regarding Qatari funds to Hamas, Netanyahu said the funding occurred “before my governments and after... not to strengthen Hamas but to prevent humanitarian disaster.” He insisted that the allegation that he funded Hamas “is a fiction that they are always nurturing... the truth is what I’m telling you now.”
    - To buttress his point, Netanyahu noted that Israel conducted several operations to kill thousands of terrorists in Gaza during his time leading Israel, but noted, “we didn’t go to invade Gaza or to do what we are doing now because there was no national consensus for it, and certainly no international legitimacy.”
    - He lamented, “there is national consensus [now] but look how hard we have to fight on the question of international legitimacy” for military operations in the wake of October 7.
  - » Netanyahu [argued](#) during the press conference that “the decision [during the Oslo Accords] to bring the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] from Tunis, and plant it in the heart of Judea and Samaria [West Bank], and in Gaza, was a decision made and implemented before I became prime minister. I thought it was a terrible mistake and I still do.”
    - He said further to a reporter, “you and your journalist friends have been blaming me for almost 30 years for putting the brakes on the Oslo Accords, and preventing the Palestinian state. That’s true.”
    - He went on to say, “I’m proud that I prevented the establishment of a Palestinian state because today everybody understands what that Palestine state could have been, now that we’ve seen the little Palestinian state in Gaza. Everyone understands what would have happened if we had capitulated to international pressures and enabled a state like that in Judea and Samaria, surrounding Jerusalem and on the outskirts of Tel Aviv.”

- Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said at the press conference that after thousands of Palestinian policemen entered Palestinian areas under the provisions of the Oslo Accords, weapons proliferated across those areas.
- » Gallant argued that recent Houthi aggression against ships in the Red Sea is “a world problem that also affects Israel.” He noted that the Houthis have fired “dozens of missiles” at Israel, the majority of which Israel intercepted, and insisted, “we are ready to act. We know what to do. We will find the timing.” He also said that “we are giving a chance” for international stakeholders to address the Houthis’ threats to shipping.
- » Gallant [said](#) during the press conference, “as defense minister, I take responsible [sic] for everything that happens in the security establishment, and everything that happens in this war, the achievements and the costs, and the severe mistakes. The same is true for the incident yesterday,” referring to the IDF’s accidental killing of hostages in Gaza.
  - He said that his conversations with their families were “charged, painful, and difficult, first of all for the families, but also for me personally.”
  - Gallant described the difficult fighting conditions, rife with enemy combatants, booby traps, and other threats, and said, “I have lost commanders and brothers in arms, I have seen a lot of difficult incidents, a lot that were close to me, including friends dying in battle. This is one of the most tragic incidents I have ever known.”
  - He said, “the price of war is very high. We pay it every day, but when you know that you are on a path that is just, then you are willing to pay a price until you achieve your entire goal, which here is destroying Hamas and returning all the hostages to their homes.”
- » Netanyahu [said](#) during the press conference that after “crushing victory” over Hamas, Israel will direct its attention to Hezbollah’s threat in Lebanon and solve the issue either through diplomacy or “a different way.”
  - He did not indicate whether he declined an opportunity to send the Mossad head to Qatar to negotiate a new hostage deal but said that Israel is “negotiating” with Hamas with “blood, fire and pillars of smoke,” and military pressure coupled with diplomacy secured the earlier hostage deal.
  - Netanyahu elaborated that Hamas has “all kinds of demands” for a new deal, which include “the war end[s] and [Israel’s] troops are booted out... the minute we capitulate to that, Hamas wins. And we are obligated to eliminate [Hamas] and to get all the hostages back.”
  - Addressing Gaza’s post-war situation, he said, “there will be demilitarization. I said the IDF will be responsible for security in the Gaza Strip, because there is no other factor that will ensure the fight against terrorism. And I can tell you that there will be a civil governance that does not educate its children to destroy Israel... I’m very clear on this.”
  - Netanyahu also said that he was unaware of the *New York Times* report about failures to stifle Hamas’s vast financial network and that Israel will address such issues “after the war.”
- » Netanyahu [insisted](#) again that “only military pressure” brought about the earlier hostage deal, and “without it, we have nothing.” He also said he will not allow “‘Hamastan’ to turn into ‘Fatahstan’” in Gaza after the war. Noting that the PA has not condemned Hamas’s October 7 attack, Netanyahu asked, “they should control Gaza?” and said that “Gaza will be demilitarized.”



- » During the press conference, Netanyahu [said](#) that the accidental killing of three hostages by the IDF “broke my heart” and the “hearts of the nation,” but the operation to destroy Hamas will continue.
  - He argued that “we are fighting for our existence,” and “we have to continue until victory” in the face of international pressure and the losses from fighting.
  - He mourned the loss of the hostages and said, “they touched salvation, and then the disaster happened,” and “if only something had been different ... We were so close to embracing them.”
  - Netanyahu said, “we can’t turn back the clock,” and “the distance between victory and disaster is a hair’s breadth.” He insisted that the military will learn lessons and continue efforts to secure the return of every hostage.
- On December 15, two border police officers were [filmed](#) using the barrel of their weapons to beat Mustafa Haruf, a Palestinian photojournalist, in East Jerusalem. The border police announced that it had suspended the two officers involved in the incident.

### *Humanitarian Efforts*

- On December 17, the first humanitarian aid convoy of 79 trucks [crossed](#) into Gaza via the Kerem Shalom border crossing, the first since Israel approved its reopening, according to an Egyptian Red Crescent official.
- On December 17, *The Times of Israel* [reported](#) that video footage showed Hamas stealing trucks of humanitarian aid that entered the Gaza Strip from Egypt. Other videos showed Gazan civilians looting the aid after it had crossed into the Gaza Strip.
- Egyptian sources who spoke with Reuters indicated that Israel and Hamas are open to [another pause](#) in combat operations, and said that the [meeting](#) in Norway on December 15 between Israeli Mossad chief David Barnea and Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani raised hopes that such a pause would be reached.

### *Post-War Gaza Planning*

- Reuters [reported](#) on December 18 that several top U.S. officials have traveled to the West Bank in recent weeks to meet with PA President Mahmoud Abbas, to urge him to overhaul and revitalize PA leadership in order to make them a more viable option to govern Gaza after the conclusion of the war.
- PA President Mahmoud Abbas told U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan during their [meeting](#) on December 16 that “the Gaza Strip is an integral part of the Palestinian state.”

### *Casualties and Hostages*

- Over 1,245 people in Israel have been [killed](#), and another 6,900 have been [injured](#) in the war.
  - » 459 Israeli soldiers have been [killed](#).
    - 127 IDF soldiers have been [killed](#) during ground combat in Gaza so far.
    - In the past 72 hours, the IDF announced the deaths of 10 soldiers [killed](#) in combat in Gaza, including Master Sgt. (res.) Tomer Myara, 28, from Netanya; Warrant Officer (res.) Yehezkel Azaria, 53, from Petah Tikva; Staff Sgt. Boris Dunavetski, 21, from Kiryat Bialik; Sgt. Major (res.) Shalev Zaltsman, 24, from Ramat Yishai; Master Sgt.

(res.) Joseph Avner Doran, 26, from Jerusalem; Sgt. First Class (res.) Lidor Yosef Karavani, 23, from Eilat; Master Sgt. Tal Filiba, 23, from Rehovot; Master Sgt. Etan Naeh, 26, from Sde Eliyahu; Sgt. First Class Liav Aloush, 21, from Gedera; and Sgt. First Class Urija Bayer, 20, from Maalot Tarshiha.

- » 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, a Tanzanian [national](#), and a [Turkish](#) national.
- According to unverified figures from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Health Ministry, at least 18,787 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza, and at least 50,589 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, 301 people have been [killed](#), and an additional 3,692 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](#) 134 hostages, including 111 men, 20 women, and two children. 10 hostages are 75 and older, 124 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.
  - » Civilian hostage Inbar Haiman, a 27-year-old art student from Haifa, was [murdered](#) at some point after she was taken hostage by Hamas on October 7, according to The Hostages and Missing Persons Families Forum.
- Over the weekend, protesters [marched](#) in Tel Aviv calling for the Israeli government to take action to secure the release of the hostages.

### *Iranian Involvement and Response*

- On December 18, an Israeli-linked hacker called “Gonjeshke Darande,” or “predatory sparrow,” claimed a [cyberattack](#) that forced nearly 70% of Iranian gas stations out of service.
- On December 17, Israel’s National Cyber Directorate claimed that Iran and Hezbollah were behind a [cyberattack](#) last month on the Ziv Medical Center in Safed that stole sensitive medical information. The IDF, the Shin Bet, the Israeli Health Ministry and hospital teams thwarted the attack before it could disrupt hospital services.
- The Iran-backed Houthis escalated their aggression against commercial vessels in the Red Sea.
  - » On December 18 at roughly 9:00 am local time, the MV *Swan Atlantic*, a Cayman Islands-flagged chemical and oil products tanker, was [targeted](#) with projectiles in the Red Sea.
  - » On December 16, the Houthis launched multiple drones over the Red Sea that endangered commercial and military vessels.
    - The Houthis [launched](#) 14 drones over the Red Sea that were later intercepted by the USS *Carney*.
    - A drone launched from Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen also [targeted](#) a commercial vessel. A British ship intercepted the drone.
- On December 16, the Iranian government [claimed](#) it executed an individual who had been spying for Israel, without providing public evidence to support its claim. The Iranian regime frequently claims to have foiled Israeli spying, but the truthfulness of its claims is doubtful.

### *U.S. and International Response*

- During U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin’s visit to Israel on December 18, the United States is expected to announce a new [maritime protection task force](#) to combat the escalation of Houthi attacks against commercial vessels in the Red Sea.
- On December 17, Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) [said](#) on NBC’s “Meet the Press” that more Arab nations will not agree to normalize relations with Israel unless it accepts a two-state solution because “Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries cannot normalize with Israel if they’re having been seen as throwing the Palestinians under the bus.”
- On December 16, the USS *Carney* [intercepted](#) 14 drones that the Houthis had launched over the Red Sea.
- Also on December 16, the British warship HMS *Diamond* [shot down](#) a drone launched from Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen that targeted a commercial vessel in the Red Sea.
- On December 15, referring to IDF accidentally killing three hostages, U.S. National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby [said](#), “It’s heartbreaking. It’s tragic ... I think the Israelis will certainly take a look at this, and I’m sure they will do the forensics and to try to figure out how this happened. That’s certainly the way we would approach a situation like this.”
  - » Kirby also said, “we are mourning with the families who are getting the worst possible news a family can get, and I think we need to keep them foremost in mind,” and he added that President Biden received a briefing from his team about the tragedy.

- During his meeting with PA President Mahmoud Abbas on December 15, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan [expressed](#) his condolences for the Palestinians who have died during the war and discussed U.S. efforts to provide humanitarian assistance.
- A draft United Nations Security Council resolution put forward by Arab nations is expected to be brought for a vote on December 18. The resolution [calls](#) for “urgent and sustainable cessation of hostilities to allow safe and unhindered humanitarian access in the Gaza Strip” and the “immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.”
- In response to the continued escalation of Houthi attacks on commercial ships, five shipping companies [Maersk](#), [Hapag-Lloyd](#), [Mediterranean Shipping Company \(MSC\)](#), Compagnie Maritime d’Affrètement Compagnie Générale Maritime ([CMA CGM](#)), and [Orient Overseas Container Line](#) (OOCL), as well as [BP](#) suspended sending shipments through the Red Sea.
- The EU and 14 individual countries, including the UK, Canada, France, and Australia, urged Israel in a [joint statement](#) released on December 16 “to take immediate and concrete steps to tackle record-high settler violence in the occupied West Bank,” and that the attacks are “unacceptable.”
  - » The statement notes with “grave concern about the record number of attacks by extremist settlers,” particularly since October 7, and further states that “Israel, as the occupying power, must protect the Palestinian civilian population in the West Bank ... Israel’s failure to protect Palestinians and prosecute extremist settlers has led to an environment of near complete impunity in which settler violence has reached unprecedented levels.”
    - The statement also claimed that “settlers have committed more than 343 violent attacks, killing 8 Palestinian civilians, injuring more than 83, and forcing 1026 Palestinians from their homes” since October 7.
- On December 15, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan [said](#) that the PA is capable of governing Gaza after the war, stating, “it is capable of shouldering the responsibilities if a Palestinian state is established.”
- German airline group Lufthansa [announced](#) plans to resume flights to Tel Aviv on January 8, after it had suspended service due to the war; Austrian Airlines and SWISS airlines also plan to resume service to Israel.
- A recent Harvard CAPS/Harris poll [found](#) that most Americans continue to support Israel in its campaign against Hamas, except for the 18- to 24-year-old demographic.
  - » The poll found that, overall, 81% of respondents support Israel. However, in the 18- to 24-year-old demographic, views appear to be more confused: 51% said they want to see Israel replaced by a Hamas/Palestinian entity, and 58% think Hamas should be removed from power in Gaza.
  - » Similarly, in that age group, 66% of respondents believe that the October 7 attacks constitute genocide, while 60% believe that the attacks were justified by Palestinian grievances.
  - » These results indicate that at least 16% of respondents aged 18- to 24-years-old believe that genocide against the Jews is justified.

### *Rising Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Protests, and Attacks*

- American Jews were [targeted](#) in nearly 200 swatting and false bomb threat incidents over the weekend, according to the Secure Community Network, including 93 in California, 62 in Arizona, 15 in Connecticut, five in Colorado, and four in Washington state.

- » Swatting refers to falsely reporting a threat at a specific site to police and emergency services so that special weapons and tactics (SWAT) units are deployed.
- A 34-year-old Israeli man, Noam Dayan of Haifa, was indicted on December 18 for incitement to terrorism, violence, and racism after he posted messages on social media that called for violence against and the extermination of Palestinians and Muslims.
- On December 17, a 33-year-old man, Brent Wood, was [arrested](#) after he sprayed an unknown, foul-smelling substance on two people near a synagogue in Georgetown, Washington, D.C., and shouted, “gas the Jews.”
- On December 15, Canadian police [arrested](#) a minor in Ottawa on terrorism-related charges and knowingly instructing a person to carry out terrorist activity against “Jewish persons.”
- British Airways [delayed](#) plans to air a Jewish sitcom on its flights because the airline prefers to “remain as neutral in these situations as possible,” referring to the Israel-Hamas War. The sitcom, “Hapless,” is centered around Jewish characters in London, England. The show’s creator, Gary Sinyor, called the airline’s decision “shocking.”

## Recent and Relevant JINSA Products About Israel at War

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- Webinar: [Escalation of Iranian and Houthi Maritime Aggression](#), with former Deputy Commander of U.S. Central Command VADM Mark Fox, USN (ret.), former Commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command VADM John Miller, USN (ret.), and JINSA Assistant Director of Foreign Policy Ari Cicurel, December 14, 2023
- VADM John Bird, USN (ret.), Jacob Olidort, and Ari Cicurel, [“Deterrence Is More Than Deployments: The Effects, and Limitations, of the Administration’s Naval Movements in the Middle East,”](#) *RealClearDefense*, December 14, 2023
- Jacob Olidort and Yoni Tobin, [EU Foreign Policy Chief Defames Israel With Baseless Claims](#), December 13, 2023
- LTG H. Steven Blum, ARNG (ret.) and Jacob Olidort, [“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
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- 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