



Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update December 20, 2023

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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

- Reports have indicated that a possible pause in combat operations and hostage release deal could materialize soon, enabling Israel to achieve one of its main objectives for the war. However, Hamas could again use the pause in combat operations to evade Israeli forces and plan to target them more effectively once the fighting resumes.
 - » A pause in combat could interrupt Israeli efforts to decapitate the Hamas leadership who appear to be closing in on senior Hamas figures in Gaza. On at least two occasions in December, IDF troops reached tunnels in Gaza where they believed Hamas's military leader in Gaza Yahiya Sinwar was [hiding](#) shortly before they arrived.

Last 24 Hours

Attacks Against Israel

- At least 12,500 rockets, mortars, drones, and other projectiles have been [fired](#) at Israel during the war.

Gaza

- Sirens [sounded](#) in Kibbutz Sufa.

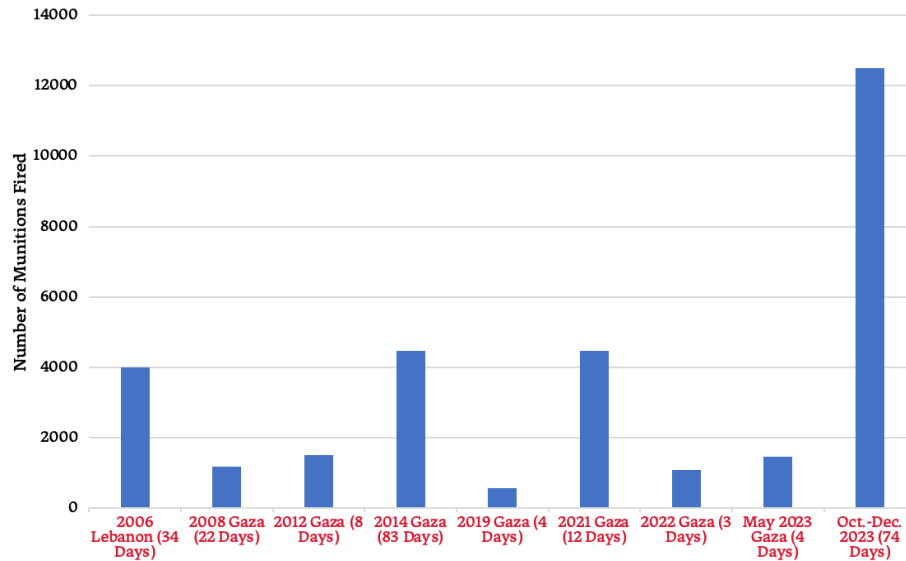
Lebanon

- On December 19, a drone infiltration alert [sounded](#) across Upper Galilee, including in Ayelet HaShachar, Mishmar HaYarden and Sde Eliezer.
- The IDF [said](#) the Iron Dome intercepted a "suspicious aerial target" that entered Israeli airspace from Lebanon on December 19.
- On December 19, Hezbollah [fired](#) six projectiles toward the area of the northern Israeli city of Yiftah.

West Bank

- On December 20, IDF troops guarding an intersection in the southern West Bank [shot](#) and critically wounded a Palestinian driver who attempted to ram his car into the troops, according to United Hatzalah.

Projectiles Fired Against Israel During Major Conflicts



IDF Operations

Gaza

- On December 20, the IDF [said](#) that it struck over 300 targets in Gaza throughout the past day, killing dozens of Hamas members and neutralizing its infrastructure, including a long-range rocket launcher. Soldiers in southern Gaza also located a weapons cache containing firearms, ammunition, explosive devices, and mortars.
- On December 20, the IDF said troops operating in Jabaliya [discovered](#) a truck with long-range rockets inside.
 - » The IDF said other weapons caches were also found in the area, and that troops identified several Hamas operatives hiding in buildings and directed airstrikes on them.
 - » The IDF also carried out a strike against a building previously used to fire anti-tank rockets at IDF troops.
- On December 19, the IDF deployed an additional brigade to Khan Younis. According to IDF Spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, “in southern Gaza, in the Khan Younis area, we are expanding our operations, and deepening it. We added a full brigade and additional combat engineering forces for operations in the area, to improve our operations.”
- On December 19, commander of the IDF’s 162nd Division, Brig. Gen. Itzik Cohen, [said](#) his forces have been able to “break the operational abilities” of Hamas’s northern Gaza City brigade, and “The 162nd Division has operational control in Jabaliya.”
- On December 19, the IDF [said](#) troops operating in Atatra and Jabaliya located weapons caches and manufacturing plants, recovering large numbers of firearms, rockets, and explosives.
 - » The troops also raided the homes of Hamas operatives, recovering additional weapons, and intelligence materials, and also found pictures of children posing with weapons in Hamas uniforms.

- Israel's public broadcaster *Kan* [reported](#) that no one briefed the IDF battalion that accidentally shot and killed three Israeli hostages about the Hebrew sign placed on a nearby building that said "Help—three hostages."
 - » The IDF sniper who shot Alon Shamriz and Samar Talalka apparently did not recognize the hostages' white cloth and was permitted to fire at anyone who appeared suspicious.
 - » The other hostage, Yotam Haim, escaped to a nearby building after being shot but was shot again after re-emerging, even after the battalion commander instructed the soldiers to cease fire.
- Israel's *Channel 12* [reported](#) that IDF troops had twice in recent days reached tunnels in north Gaza where they believed Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar had been hiding just before they arrived.

Lebanon

- On December 20, the IDF [said](#) that it launched airstrikes targeting several Hezbollah sites in Lebanon's south, including military sites and additional infrastructure. The strikes were preemptive, which is rare for the IDF's operations against Hezbollah.
- Lebanese media [reported](#) on December 20 that Israeli airstrikes were impacting the Lebanese towns of Aita al-Shoub and Ramieh near the Israel-Lebanon border, with no casualties reported.
- *Axios* [reported](#) that Israeli officials [told](#) the Biden Administration it wants Hezbollah's forces to be pushed six miles back from its northern border, as part of efforts to secure a diplomatic deal to ease tensions between Israel and the Islamic Republic-backed terror group.
 - » Israeli officials [said](#) that they cannot accept the continued displacement of tens of thousands of Israeli citizens in the north, and don't want Hezbollah fighters to be able to return to the outposts they previously occupied on Israel's border.

West Bank

- Last week, the IDF [conducted](#) a drill to practice defending settlements in the West Bank and northern Israeli cities near the territory's boundary against an October 7-type attack. Unnamed sources said that the drill was one of several in the wake of Hamas's October 7 massacre.

Humanitarian Efforts

- A [report](#) by Barak Ravid in *Axios* on December 20 indicated that Israel proposed through Qatari mediators a deal to pause combat operations in Gaza for one week if Hamas releases more than three dozen hostages.
 - » The offer is the first that Israel has made since the collapse of the pause in combat operations deal that began on November 24 and expired on the morning of December 1.
- On December 20, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh [arrived](#) in Cairo for talks with Egyptian officials, which reportedly include a possible pause in combat operations and a hostage release deal.
- Israeli Ambassador to the United States Michael Herzog told [CNN](#) on December 20 that Hamas was "hoping for a permanent ceasefire, but I hope that under the pressure of what we're doing on the ground, plus the pressure from the Qataris, they will agree to do a deal, but it's premature at this phase."

- According to Israel's Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) military liaison to the Palestinians, 127 trucks carrying humanitarian aid [entered](#) Gaza on December 19, lower than the 200 per day figure to which Israel agreed under the terms of the November fighting pause agreement.
 - » Israel inspected 67 of the trucks at its Nitzana Crossing that later entered through the Rafah crossing in Egypt, and it inspected and allowed through another 60 at the Kerem Shalom crossing.
- On December 19, Hamas [said](#) that it rejects “holding any form of negotiations over a prisoner exchange” as the war continues, but “we are, however, open to any initiative that contributes to ending the aggression on our people and opening the crossings to bring in aid and provide relief to the Palestinian people.” The terror group also said that a future deal must involve the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza.
- On December 19, Israeli President Isaac Herzog [told](#) ambassadors from 80 countries that Israel is willing to implement another fighting pause that would involve additional hostage releases, and “the amount of humanitarian aid [entering Gaza] can be tripled instantaneously.”
 - » He added, “you can triple the amount of trucks easily if there was only an effort by the United Nations and its partners. The world has to know that you could have had tens of thousands of tons a day more going into Gaza.”
 - » According to the Israeli readout, Herzog “noted that Israel was not in a war with the Palestinian people, but was fighting its enemy the terrorist organization Hamas.” He also said that the responsibility for reaching a deal “lies fully with [Yahya] Sinwar and the leadership of Hamas.”

Post-War Gaza Planning

- According to [Washington Post](#) columnist David Ignatius, the Biden administration would like Israel to finish high-intensity combat operations in Gaza by the end of December and the U.S. State Department has drafted a 20-page document with post-war options for Gaza that involves “Palestinians who aren’t affiliated with Hamas and are willing to cooperate with the Israeli troops still ringing the border. Ideally, this policing force would be bolstered by foreign troops, operating under a UN mandate.”
 - » Ignatius also reports that Israel is exploring creating “humanitarian islands” in northern Gaza as fighting shifts toward southern Gaza.
- According to a December 20 [report](#) in *The Wall Street Journal*, Hamas political leaders have discussed how to govern Gaza and the West Bank after the war with leaders in Fatah, the main political party in the Palestinian Authority. Senior leaders on the Hamas side involved in the talks have included Ismail Haniyeh and Khaled Meshaal, and on the Fatah side, the talks are led by Hussein Al-Sheikh, who is the secretary general of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and a possible successor to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.
 - » The report indicated that the talks have caused tensions with Yahya Sinwar, the head of Hamas’s leader in Gaza, who does not want Hamas to govern Gaza but feels that Hamas has not lost the war yet and it is too soon to make compromises.
 - Sinwar was reportedly not told about the talks and demanded that they be stopped.

Casualties and Hostages

- Over 1,245 people in Israel have been [killed](#), and another 6,900 have been injured in the war.
 - » 466 Israeli soldiers have been [killed](#).
 - 134 IDF soldiers have been [killed](#) during ground combat in Gaza so far.
 - The IDF [announced](#) the deaths of Master Sgt. (res.) Uriel Cohen, 33, from Tsur Hadassah; [Cpt. \(res.\) Lior Sivan](#), 32, from Beit Shemesh; and [Sgt. First Class \(res.\) Maoz Fenigstein](#), 25, from Susya.
 - » 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, roughly 20,000 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza, and 52,586 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](#) 129 hostages.
 - » 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 19, the terror group Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) [released](#) a video of Gadi Mozes and Elad Katzir, both of whom were abducted on October 7. They urged Israel to

secure their release and warned that IDF airstrikes endanger their lives, although they seemed to be coerced into making these statements.

Iranian Involvement and Response

- On December 19, Hamas politburo chief Ismail Haniyeh [met](#) with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in Doha before traveling to Egypt for negotiations over a pause in combat and hostage release deal.

U.S. and International Response

- U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry [spoke](#) by phone on December 19 and “discussed their shared commitment to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state,” according to the State Department.
 - » Blinken “expressed gratitude for Egypt’s essential role in increasing the volume of humanitarian aid and commercial products reaching Palestinians in Gaza, the release of hostages and facilitating the safe cross-border exit of US and other foreign nationals via Rafah,” according to the readout.
 - » The readout also said that the two leaders “discussed the importance of concrete steps to minimize harm to Palestinian civilians in all of Gaza and rejection of any forced displacement of Palestinians.”
- On December 19, the U.S. Treasury Department [sanctioned](#) ten entities and four people in Iran, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Indonesia who facilitate Iranian drone production through acquisition of hundreds of thousands of dollars-worth of drone parts for the IRGC’s Aerospace Force Self Sufficiency Jihad Organization.
 - » U.S. Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian Nelson said, “Iran’s illicit production and proliferation of its deadly UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) to its terrorist proxies in the Middle East and to Russia continues to exacerbate tensions and prolong conflicts, undermining stability.”
- On December 19, International Committee of the Red Cross President Mirjana Spoljaric [said](#) to journalists, “I have been speaking of moral failure because every day this [Israel-Hamas conflict] continues is a day more where the international community hasn’t proven capable of ending such high levels of suffering and this will have an impact on generations not only in Gaza.”
 - » She also said, “there’s nothing without an agreement by the two sides, so we urge them to keep negotiating and to keep facilitating the space that we need in order to operationalize the releases (of hostages and detainees).”
- On December 19, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres [viewed](#) the IDF’s compilation of footage of the October 7 attacks, which includes direct bodycam video from the terrorists.

Rising Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Protests, and Attacks

- On December 19, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) President Sally Kornbluth, who was widely criticized for her congressional testimony of the university’s response to antisemitism, [attended](#) a screening of Bearing Witness, the footage compiled from Hamas’ October 7 massacre.
- On December 19, around 60 anti-Israel protesters, including Linda Sarsour, were [arrested](#) by U.S. Capitol Police after staging an illegal rally inside the Capitol Rotunda. Sarsour, who

led the rally, is a pro-Palestinian activist, and the former leader of the Women's March, who has a history of making anti-Israel and [antisemitic](#) statements.

- Anti-Israel protesters [went](#) to the home of Rep. Shri Thanedar (MI-13) at around 3:00 AM on December 18, laying on their car horns and yelling, with one protester yelling, "you are complicit in the bombing of Gaza ... Your silence is violence. Your silence is abhorrent, and we will not let you sleep!"

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