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Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update December 22, 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. JINSA's Swords of Iron updates will be periodic until January 2, 2024.

Analysis

- During a JINSA [webinar](#) on December 21, JINSA Distinguished Fellow IDF MG (ret.) Yaakov Amidror argued that Israel has “only two interests in the Gaza Strip [after IDF forces leave] ... first that the [border] fence will be secured. No one will reach the fence ... and the second interest is freedom of action for Israel militarily in the Gaza Strip based on intelligence that will be gathered.”
- JINSA Vice President for Israeli Affairs IDF MG (ret.) Yaacov Ayish noted during the same [webinar](#) that Hezbollah's “Radwan unit that was deployed on October 7 ... on our border, as of yesterday evening, it seems like they were pushed 2-3 miles north of the border ... [it is] one of the missions that the IDF is trying to achieve.”

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 Ashdod, Ashkelon, Nahal Oz, and Lakhish.
- On December 22, during a rocket attack against Ashdod, [shrapnel](#) fell onto the city.

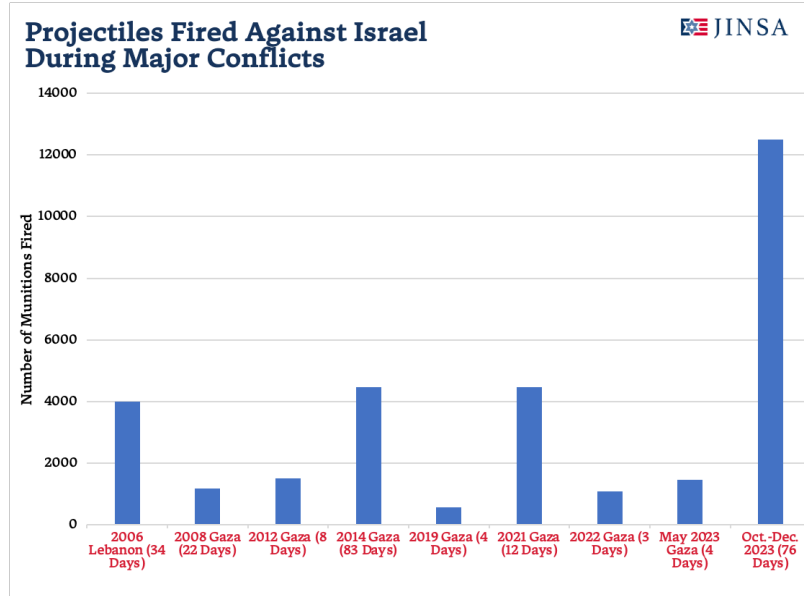
Lebanon

- Sirens [sounded](#) in Arab al-Aramshe.

West Bank

- After police stopped a suspicious vehicle at a [checkpoint](#) near the town of Barta'a on December 22, the driver attempted to attack the officers, and a border police officer was wounded when another driver put his vehicle in neutral and directed it toward the officers.

- » Police at the scene shot the leg of the driver who rammed into the officers and detained both drivers.



IDF Operations

Gaza

- Reports from December 22 [indicated](#) that the IDF has asked Gazans who live in the town of Bureij in the center of the Strip to evacuate south to shelters in Deir al-Balah. The IDF’s Arabic-language spokesperson, Lt. Col. Avichay Adraee, published a map delineating the relevant zones and warned that the major Salah ad-Din thoroughway in Gaza in areas northeast of Khan Younis is a “battle zone.”
- » He also said that for “humanitarian purposes,” the IDF will help civilians evacuate through an alternative route along the coast and that the IDF will make “tactical pauses in military activities” in Rafah from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.



Source: [Israel Defense Forces](#)

- On December 22, the IDF's Spokesperson Unit [announced](#) that the IDF had uncovered a Hamas financial document showing that Hamas spent over \$1 million on the production of doors, concrete, and other workshop expenses in 2022.
 - » The document was addressed to Abu-Mohammed, the commander of Hamas's Khan Yunis Brigade, and was written by Abu-Ali Albari from the Operations Department of the Khan Yunis Brigade.
- On December 22, the IDF's 646th Reserve Paratroopers Brigade located [weapons](#) and long-range rocket launchers in central Gaza's Juhor ad-Dik.
- On December 22, the IDF's 7th Armored Brigade located weapons inside [residential homes](#) in southern Gaza's Khan Younis.
- On December 22, the IDF's 179th Reserve Armored Brigade found weapons, including a [rocket launcher](#), in homes south of Gaza City.
- On December 21, the IDF's 99th Division conducted an operation south of Gaza City to establish "operational control" between central Gaza and Gaza City as the IDF [said](#) it expanded ground operations in central Gaza.
 - » The IDF said that the 179th Reserve Armored Brigade and the 646th Reserve Paratroopers Brigade killed Hamas Nuseirat battalion members, demolished Hamas weapons and tunnels, and carried out an airstrike targeting Hamas cells launching rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) from a building.
 - » The IDF also said that the Yiftah Brigade continued to dismantle Hamas infrastructure in the western areas of Gaza City.
 - » Some weapons that the IDF located and later destroyed were found in dolls and under children's beds.
- On December 21, the IDF's elite Yahalom combat engineering unit and the 401st Armored Brigade [demolished](#) a large Hamas tunnel complex located under Palestine Square in Gaza City that the IDF said senior Hamas members used on October 7.
 - » Hamas officials Muhammad Deif and Yahya Sinwar had homes, offices, and hideouts connected to the complex, and the IDF obtained intelligence after searching the tunnels.
- On December 21, IDF Spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said that the IDF has killed [2,000 Hamas terrorists](#) since the end of the pause in combat operations on December 1.
 - » The IDF claims to have killed 8,000 Hamas terrorists throughout the entirety of its ground operations.

Lebanon

- On December 22, Hezbollah [said](#) that Israel has killed 121 of its members, including [two](#) on December 22, since the terror group began attacking Israel after Hamas's October 7 massacre. During JINSA's December 21 [webinar](#), JINSA Distinguished Fellow IDF MG (ret.) Yaakov Amidror said that the figure is likely higher.
- The IDF [said](#) on December 22 that it used fighter jets to strike several Hezbollah targets, including military compounds and other infrastructure, in southern Lebanon following rocket fire against northern Israel. It also fired artillery toward the source of an earlier Hezbollah rocket attack against Shomera.
- On December 21, the IDF [said](#) that it launched additional airstrikes and tank fire targeting Hezbollah sites in southern Lebanon, including projectile-launching sites, following earlier attacks by the terror group against Israeli targets.

Humanitarian Efforts

- On December 21, Israeli media outlets [reported](#) that senior Hamas official Ghazi Hamad said that Hamas is not interested in releasing hostages in exchange for a weeks-long pause.
 - » Hamad said, “some people are looking for a small pause — a pause here and there for one week, two weeks, three weeks ... I think Israel will take the card of the hostages, and after that they will start a new round of mass killing and massacres against our people. I think we will not play this game.”
- On December 21, an unnamed senior Israeli official reportedly indicated that there were [no active negotiations](#) for a new hostage release agreement with Hamas.

Post-War Gaza Planning

- An unnamed Israeli official who [briefed](#) the press on December 21 argued that the Palestinian Authority (PA) cannot play a role in post-war governance of Gaza. The Israeli official also claimed that a recent op-ed by Israeli National Security Advisor Tzachi Hanegbi that appeared to indicate Israel would support the PA’s involvement in governance in Gaza, provided it initiated reforms, had been misunderstood.

Casualties and Hostages

- Over 1,245 people in Israel have been [killed](#), and another 6,900 have been injured in the war.
 - » 471 Israeli soldiers have been [killed](#).
 - 139 IDF soldiers have been [killed](#) during ground combat in Gaza so far.
 - The IDF [announced](#) the deaths of Sgt. First Class Tal Shua, 31, from Beersheba, and Lt. Shai Ayeli, 21, from Ashkelon.
 - » 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, 20,057 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza, and 53,320 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, 303 people have been [killed](#), and an additional 4,655 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, and [three](#) were mistakenly killed by the IDF.
 - » 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 22, Kibbutz Nir Oz [said](#) that 73-year-old Gadi Haggai, whom Hamas kidnapped during its October 7 massacre, is dead, and terrorists in Gaza are holding his body. His wife Judith is still being held hostage and is thought to have been wounded on October 7.

Iranian Involvement and Response

- Israel’s internal security service, the Shin Bet, claims that Iran has tried to [recruit](#) Israelis to spy by contacting them over social media sites, including X, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Telegram. The Iranians posed as people interested in photo shoots, real estate, dating, private investigators, courier services, and drones.
- The head of Israel’s Eilat port told [Reuters](#) that the port has seen an [85% drop](#) in traffic since the Iran-backed Houthis began launching their attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea.

U.S. and International Response

- On December 21, the United Nations Security Council resolution on Gaza was delayed again until December 22, after having been [postponed](#) each day since December 18.
 - » U.S. Permanent Representative Linda Thomas-Greenfield [said](#) on December 21 that the United States is “ready to vote on” the resolution and that “we can support” the resolution.
 - » The United States had previously [objected](#) to language calling for the United Nations to create its own mechanism to monitor aid going into Gaza. However, in the latest draft, this language has reportedly been cut.

- » The draft resolution [reportedly](#) includes calling for “urgent steps to immediately allow safe and unhindered humanitarian access, and also for creating the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities.”
- On December 22, the European Commission [announced](#) that it finalized an aid package to support the Palestinian Authority worth 118 million euros, or \$130 million, to help cover the salaries and pensions of West Bank Palestinian civil servants, aid to vulnerable families, and medical referrals to hospitals in East Jerusalem.
 - » European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that the European Union is prepared to assist the Palestinian Authority over the longer term.
- On December 21, Israeli media outlets [reported](#) that a group of six Democratic lawmakers signed a letter to President Biden asking him to “use all [U.S.] leverage” to force Israel to change the way it is fighting in Gaza. The letter was signed by Rep. Jason Crow (D-WI); Rep. Mikie Sherill (D-NJ); Rep. Chrissy Houlahan (D-WA); Rep. Seth Moulton (D-MA); and Rep. Elissa Slotkin (D-MI).
 - » The letter states, “we are deeply concerned by PM Netanyahu’s current military strategy in Gaza. The mounting civilian death toll and humanitarian crisis are unacceptable and not in line with American interests; nor do they advance the cause of security for our ally Israel.”
 - » The letter further urges Biden “to use all our leverage to achieve an immediate and significant shift of military strategy and tactics in Gaza.”
- On December 21, Pentagon spokesperson Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder [said](#) that Operation Prosperity Guardian, the new multinational maritime task force created to protect ships in the Red Sea from Houthi attacks, now has over 20 nations who have agreed to participate.
 - » Ryder gave additional details about the task force, saying that the task force would “serve as a highway patrol of sorts. Patrolling the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden to respond to and assist as necessary, commercial vessels that are transiting this vital international waterway. It’s a defensive coalition meant to reassure global shipping and mariners that the international community is there to help with safe passage.”
- On December 21, Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley [told](#) *ABC News* that she believes Palestinians fleeing the war should be taken in by “pro-Hamas countries — Qatar, Iran, Turkey ... send them there ... Those are pro-Hamas countries,” adding, “why isn’t everybody talking to Egypt? Why aren’t they talking to Turkey? Why aren’t they talking to Qatar? Why aren’t they talking to Iran? Why aren’t they doing something to help the Palestinians? Why is it that you come back to Israel and the US? It’s always the case.”
- On December 21, Russian President Vladimir Putin [told](#) Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas that “Russia will continue to supply the Gaza Strip with essential goods, including medicines and medical equipment,” according to a readout from the Kremlin.
- On December 22, the International Red Cross [appointed](#) as its director-general Pierre Krahenbuhl, a controversial former head of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).
 - » Krahenbuhl was appointed to be the head of UNRWA in 2014 and resigned in 2019 amid an internal probe alleging mismanagement and ethical abuses at the organization. He was later largely cleared of the allegations.
- Beginning on January 9, Canada will allow Canadian citizens’ extended families who live in Gaza to [live](#) in the country for up to three years.

Rising Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Protests, and Attacks

- On December 21, vandals used red paint to [splatter](#) the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. and graffitied “Free Gaza.”
- The U.S. Department of Education added the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the University of California, Davis to a list of six schools that it recently began [investigating](#) for civil rights violations. The department has not revealed the incidents or complaints that led to the investigations, but all of the schools have faced recent incidents of antisemitism.
 - » MIT President Sally Kornbluth, who is Jewish, recently came under heavy scrutiny for failing to say whether calling for the genocide of Jews violated the school’s code of conduct during her congressional testimony.
 - » The other schools being investigated are the University of Illinois at Chicago, Drexel University, a public school in Springfield, Illinois, and another public school in Chandler, Arizona.

Recent and Relevant JINSA Products About Israel at War

- Webinar: [Gaza Update](#), with JINSA Distinguished Fellow IDF MG (ret.) Yaakov Amidror, JINSA VP for Israeli Affairs IDF MG (ret) Yaacov Ayish, and JINSA Assistant Director of Foreign Policy Ari Cicurel, December 21, 2023
- Zac Schildcrout, [To Counter Hezbollah Aggression, Strengthen U.S. Support for Israel](#), December 21, 2023
- Jacob Olidort and Yoni Tobin, [Israel Prioritizes Civilian Safety in Southern Gaza Campaign Despite Hamas Efforts](#), December 20, 2023
- Ari Cicurel and Yoni Tobin, [New Maritime Task Force Needs Credible Military Force for Successful Deterrence](#), December 19, 2023
- Yoni Tobin, [Red Cross Violates Mission of Impartial Humanitarian Assistance](#), December 18, 2023
- Mathew Kenney, [Key Middle East Provisions in the Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act](#), December 15, 2023