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# Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update December 29, 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

- U.S. efforts to better deter Iran-backed Houthi attacks face several key deficiencies.
  - » Several European partners that the United States had announced would join Operation Prosperity Guardian, a multinational task force to better protect shipping in the Red Sea, have since [backed away](#) from the task force.
  - » The United States has bolstered its efforts to protect Red Sea shipping but has been unwilling to move from defense to offense by striking the Houthis in Yemen. Deterring the Houthis and their Iranian regime benefactors will require the United States to take direct military strikes against the fighters in Yemen responsible for launching attacks, as VADM Mark Fox, USN (ret.), VADM John W. Miller, USN (ret.), and Ari Cicurel argue in an [op-ed in Breaking Defense](#).
  - » While the United States has sanctioned individuals and entities associated with the Houthi attacks, the Biden administration has not yet [redesignated](#) the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) after having delisted the terrorist group in February 2021.

## 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**

- Following a 21-hour lull that ended on December 28, sirens sounded in [Nirim, Ein Hashlosha, Nahal Oz, Nir Itzhak, Sufa, and Holit](#).
- On December 28, *the New York Times* published an [exposé](#) detailing the systemic sexual violence that Palestinian terrorists inflicted during the October 7 attack. The investigation

included interviews with over 150 witnesses, medical personnel, soldiers, rape counselors, and government officials, as well as video, photographs, and GPS data.

- On December 27, Israel's *Channel 12* [reported](#) that the Shin Bet, Israel's internal security service, received intelligence from a human source that Hamas was planning "a big move" the week after Yom Kippur, which was on September 25. The October 7 attack occurred the Saturday afterward. However, the intelligence was deemed insignificant, according to the *Channel 12* report.

## Lebanon

- Rockets struck [Kiryat Shmona](#), and sirens sounded in [Haifa](#), [Acre](#), [Kiryat Shmona](#), [Tel Hai and Margaliot](#), [Iftah](#), [Malkia](#), [Hermon Regional Council](#), [Ramot Naftali](#), [Dishon](#), [Shtula](#), [Zarit](#), [Even Menahem](#), [Shomera](#), [Kfar Blum](#), and [Neot Mordechai](#).
  - » Hezbollah [claimed](#) responsibility for the barrage of approximately 30 rockets fired at Kiryat Shmona on December 27, four of which hit the city causing damage to homes and infrastructure.
  - » On December 28, rockets were reportedly [intercepted](#) over Acre and north of Haifa.
- On December 28, Hezbollah [fired](#) a total of roughly 50 rockets and missiles at Israel throughout the day, as well as two drones.
- On December 28, the IDF [said](#) several missiles were fired from southern Lebanon towards Dovev and Bar'am. No injuries were reported, and the IDF said it was shelling the source of the fire with artillery.
- On December 28, the IDF said that the suspected drone infiltration sirens that [sounded](#) in Iftah, Malkia, Hermon Regional Council, Ramot Naftali, Dishon, and other communities in northern Israel were a false alarm.
- French newspaper *Le Figaro* [reported](#) on December 26 that Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah [received](#) 30 minutes notice before Hamas began its terrorist attack on October 7.

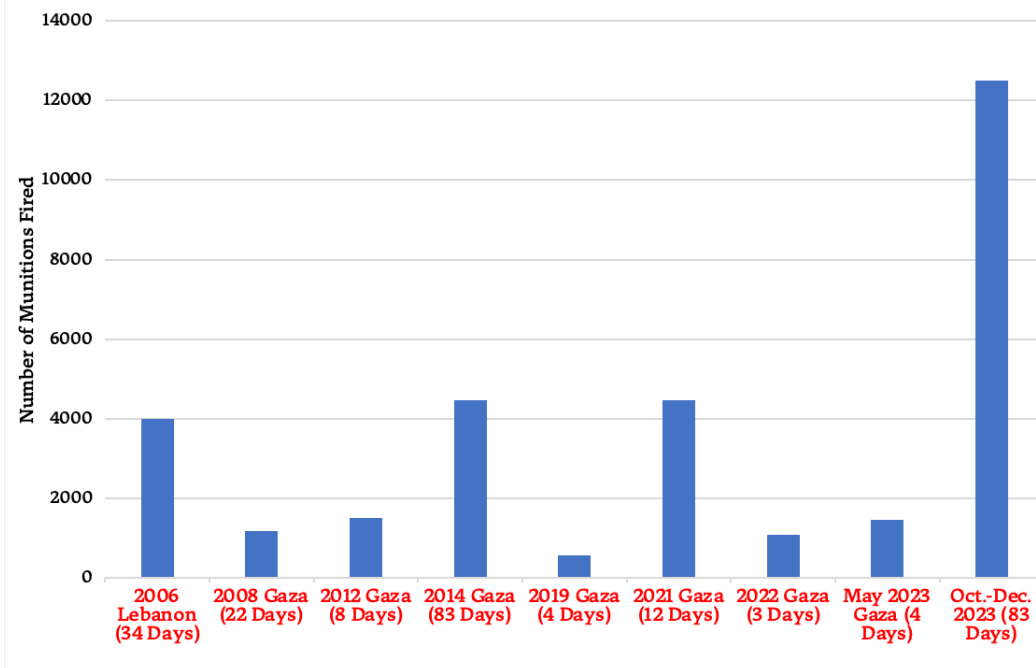
## West Bank

- On December 29, four people were [injured](#), including one moderately and three lightly, in a car ramming attack near Otniel. The assailant was shot dead by IDF troops at the scene.
- On December 28, two people were moderately [injured](#) in a stabbing attack at a checkpoint in the Har Homa neighborhood of East Jerusalem. The assailant was shot by security forces at the scene.

## Iraq

- On December 27, a kamikaze drone [struck](#) the southern Golan Heights in an attack claimed by Iran-backed militias in Iraq. No injuries were reported but a building was damaged.
  - » This was the first instance of a one-way attack drone falling in the Golan Heights since the war began.

## Projectiles Fired Against Israel During Major Conflicts



### IDF Operations

#### Gaza

- The IDF [announced](#) on December 29 that it was making considerable advances in the town of Khuza'a in southern Gaza, near Khan Younis. The operation is targeting Hamas terrorists who attacked the Israeli town of Nir Oz on October 7, where dozens of Israelis were killed and over 70 Israelis were kidnapped.
  - » The IDF said troops from its 5th Reserve Brigade had killed numerous Hamas operatives and eliminated infrastructure, including tunnel networks and missile launching posts. The brigade also seized assault rifles, explosive devices, and mortars.
- According to Israeli media reports, on December 28, the IDF [killed](#) Muhammad Issa, the son of Hamas's Deputy Military Commander Marwan Issa. The senior Issa is the top deputy to Hamas's military leader, Muhammad Deif.
- On December 28, the IDF's 55th Reserve Paratroopers Brigade [eliminated](#) several tunnel shafts in the Khan Younis area, including one that connected to a command center used by Hamas's elite Nukhba unit. The unit also found a tunnel shaft inside a mosque, and also found a rocket launcher nearby inside the mosque.
- On December 28, the IDF [battled](#) Hamas operatives in the Gaza City neighborhoods of Daraj and Tuffah, killing several terrorists in Hamas's Daraj-Tuffah battalion.
  - » The IDF also destroyed Hamas infrastructure, including a building from which Hamas had fired rocket-propelled grenades at troops and a building from which Hamas was preparing to conduct an anti-tank guided missile attack on troops.
  - » The IDF said that Hamas's Daraj-Tuffah battalion is the last remaining Hamas battalion in northern Gaza.

- On December 28, the IDF published the final results of its [probe](#) into the accidental killing of three hostages in Gaza on December 15, which indicated that ground forces did not have “sufficient awareness” that they would encounter hostages.
  - » Two of the hostages were killed during “intense fighting” when IDF soldiers wrongly identified them as terrorists. The third hostage fled to a nearby building and a commander ordered IDF soldiers to cease firing so that he could be identified after he asked for help in Hebrew. However, two Israeli soldiers did not hear the commander’s order and fired on the hostage.
  - » The probe noted that “some of the forces heard the cries but suspected it was an attempt by the terrorists to draw the forces inside the building to harm them, as had happened in the past.”
  - » The probe added that “there was insufficient awareness among the forces in the field in the case of hostages reaching IDF forces, or when the forces would encounter hostages during the clearing of buildings as part of combat and not as part of a special operation to free hostages.”
- On December 28, the IDF [revealed](#) that 65 million digital files and 500,000 physical documents it has found in Gaza have helped it locate terrorist infrastructure in Gaza.
- On December 27, the IDF said that it had [located](#) and destroyed three tunnel shafts used by Hamas terrorists near Gaza City’s Rantisi Children’s Hospital that connect to passages beneath the medical center.
  - » The IDF said the tunnel beneath the children’s hospital was used as a command center by Hamas, and connected to shafts that ran beneath a nearby high school, and another, which had a blast door, in the home of a Hamas naval commander.
- On December 27, IAF Chief of Staff Brig. Gen. Omer Tischler released a video [rejecting claims](#) that Israel has been conducting indiscriminate bombing and detailed Israel’s four planning principles, which include:
  - » “Striking targets based on intel, and military necessity for close air support;”
  - » “Evacuation efforts: They enable us to strike and maneuver in areas with minimal civilian presence;”
  - » “Selecting the right munitions to minimize collateral damage: This allows us to accurately strike Hamas even though it operates within civilian areas;” and
  - » “Real-time monitoring: During the strike, we are monitoring the target area. If it does not comply with our Standard Operating Procedures, we will abort.”
  - » Tischler noted regarding Israel’s “use of so-called ‘dumb bombs,’” that “the term ‘dumb bombs’ describes munitions that are not guided-based. These are standard munitions that are regularly used by militaries worldwide ... The claim that such munitions are indiscriminate or cause uncontrollable damage is misleading. Even though these munitions are not GPS-guided, they are still used accurately. It is released in a specific release point calculated by the aircraft’s system to allow the pilot to strike a target accurately.”
  - » According to Tischler, “heavy munitions are detonated underground, preventing fragmentation and significantly reducing the blastwave and debris as a result. In these strikes, the resulting crater visible in satellite images indicates that the underground detonation has actually occurred on a military target, and directly minimized damage to the surrounding areas ... Additionally, in many cases, we use small PGMs (precision-

guided munitions) to strike targets near sensitive areas. Those targets include rocket launchers, commanders, tunnel shafts, and command and control centers, which are located throughout the Gaza Strip.”

- » He added, “in war, mistakes can happen. While they are exceptional, they are still made. We study them, learn from them, and make changes to our process as a result.”

## **Lebanon**

- On December 29, Lebanese media [reported](#) that a car near the Lebanese-Israeli border was struck by a UAV, and alleged Israel was responsible.
- On December 28, the IDF [announced](#) that it carried out “widespread” strikes on targets in southern Lebanon in response to earlier rocket fire.
  - » The IDF said it struck Hezbollah targets near the towns of Ayta ash Shab and Ramyeh using fighter aircraft, tanks, and artillery, and eliminated a Hezbollah military compound, a Hezbollah launching post, and other military infrastructure.
  - » The IDF said it also struck a Hezbollah terror cell that was readying an imminent anti-tank missile attack on Israel.

## **Syria**

- Overnight on December 29, Syrian state media [reported](#) that its air defenses intercepted “Israeli air aggression” over and around Damascus, stating there were some “material losses.”

## **West Bank**

- The IDF, Shin Bet, and Israeli Police [conducted](#) raids across the West Bank on December 28 in the cities of Ramallah, Jenin, and Hebron, and the town of Tulkarm. The raids primarily targeted foreign exchange businesses, money transfer businesses, and cryptocurrency firms believed to be involved in Hamas funding.
  - » The IDF said it seized millions of dollars suspected to be used for the funding of Hamas, and that Israeli forces made 21 arrests.
  - » During the raids, one person was killed and 14 were injured during clashes with security forces in Ramallah.

## *Humanitarian Efforts*

- On December 28, the Israeli Foreign Ministry [said](#) it gave preliminary approval to Cyprus to create a maritime humanitarian corridor in order to ship aid to the Gaza Strip.
  - » Foreign Ministry spokesman Lior Haiat said that Israel had tentatively approved a system in which aid would be checked in Cyprus “with Israeli supervision” before being shipped to Gaza. He said, “there’s a basic authorization to use this route, but there are still some logistical problems that are waiting to be solved.”

## *Casualties and Hostages*

- Over 1,245 people in Israel have been [killed](#) and another 6,900 have been injured in the war.

- » 502 Israeli soldiers have been [killed](#).
  - 168 IDF soldiers have been [killed](#) during ground combat in Gaza so far.
  - The IDF [announced](#) the deaths of Sgt. First Class (res.) Asaf Pinhas Tubul, 22, from Kiryat Motzkin; Cpt. (res.) Neriya Zisk, 24, from Masu'ot Yitzhak; Maj. Dvir David Fima, 32, from Kfar Yona; [and](#) Capt. (res.) Harel Sharvit, 33, from Kochav Ya'acov.
- » Of the more than 500 soldiers [killed](#) in the war, 274 soldiers and 38 local security officers were killed by Hamas terrorists on October 7; nine soldiers were killed in attacks claimed by the Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad terror groups on Israel's border with Lebanon; two soldiers were killed in terror attacks in the West Bank; and a number of soldiers killed in friendly fire and malfunctioning equipment incidents, as well as other deadly accidents not directly related to the fighting.
- Numerous foreign nationals have been killed in the war, including at least 33 [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.
  - » Israeli-American dual citizen Judith Weinstein was [killed](#) in the October 7 massacre and her body is being held in Gaza, her hometown, Kibbutz Nir Or, announced on December 28. The kibbutz announced less than a week ago that her husband, Gadi Haggai, was also murdered by Hamas on October 7 and that his body is being held by the terror group.
- According to unverified figures from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Health Ministry, 21,507 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza and 55,915 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, 315 people have been [killed](#) and an additional 3,300 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 8 [American](#) nationals, 6 [German](#) nationals, 13 [Thai](#) nationals, 4 [Portuguese](#) nationals, 3 [British](#) nationals, 2 [Italian](#) nationals, 4 [Romanian](#) nationals, and 2 [Mexican](#) nationals.
  - » Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office [said](#) that of the 129 hostages currently believed to be held in Gaza, 23 have died or been murdered in captivity and their bodies are being held.

### *Iranian Involvement and Response*

- On December 28, Iran-backed groups in Iraq took credit for a [drone attack](#) against U.S. personnel at the Erbil International Airport. The drone reportedly never reached its target and fell in a nearby village.
- On December 28, the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen [fired](#) a drone and ballistic missile over the Red Sea in the vicinity of 18 ships.
- A number of senior Iranian officials praised the recently deceased Razi Mousavi, a senior IRGC official who [coordinated](#) between the Iranian and Syrian militaries and supplied weapons to Hezbollah. An Israeli strike reportedly killed Mousavi in Syria on December 25.
  - » On December 28, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei led prayers at Mousavi’s funeral, and [praised](#) “this martyr’s tireless struggle” and “called for his companionship with the guardians of God.”
  - » On December 28, Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) leader Hossein Salami [stated](#) at Mousavi’s funeral that Mousavi was “one of the most experienced and effective IRGC commanders in the Axis of Resistance.”
  - » On December 27, IRGC spokesman Ramezan Sharif released a [statement](#) that the Iranian regime’s “response to [IRGC Brig. Gen. Razi] Moussavi’s assassination will be a combination of direct action as well as (from) others led by the Axis of Resistance.”
  - » At a rally to commemorate Mousavi in Tehran on December 28, thousands of attendees [chanted](#) “Death to Israel” and “Death to America.”

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

- On December 29, Denmark announced that it would [deploy](#) a frigate to the Red Sea as part of Operation Prosperity Guardian, a new multinational task force to patrol the Red Sea in the wake of the Iran-backed Houthis attacks against commercial shipping.
- On December 28, the USS *Mason* [intercepted](#) the drone and ballistic missile that the Houthis had fired over the Red Sea.
- The U.S. Treasury Department announced [sanctions](#) on December 28 against one individual and three entities for “facilitating the flow of Iranian financial assistance to Houthi forces and their destabilizing activities,” including:



- » Turkey-based Al Aman Kargo Ithalat Ihracat Ve Nakliyat Limited Sirketi (Al Aman), who “serves as a waypoint for money sent by the Houthis’ Iranian financiers to the group’s businesses in Yemen;”
- » The Nabco Money Exchange and Remittance Co., which receives deposits from Al Aman for shipments to Yemen;
- » Nabil Ali Ahmed Al-Hadha, who leads Nabco and is the president of the Currency Exchangers Association in Houthi-controlled areas in Sanaa and serves as a financial intermediary to transfer funds to and from Yemen; and
- » The Houthi-run Al Rawda Exchange and Money Transfers Company, where funds are converted into Yemeni rials to hide the operation.
- According to [reporting](#) from *Axios*’s Barak Ravid, a U.S. official described the call between President Biden and Prime Minister Netanyahu over the weekend as among the most “frustrating” the two have had since the war began. The call focused on the next phase of the war but became more contentious when Biden raised a dispute over Israel’s potential release of tax funds to the Palestinian Authority (PA).
  - » The U.S. official claimed that the Biden administration has been concerned about the collapse of the PA after Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich suspended the transfer of all tax revenue that Israel collects on the PA’s behalf after Hamas’s terrorist attack on October 7.
  - » Israel has said it would transfer all funds to the PA except for those it claims would go to the Hamas-run government in Gaza. However, the PA has refused to accept a partial transfer of the tax funds.
  - » On the call, Biden raised that Israel could transfer the funds to Norway until an arrangement for their transfer could be arranged, a plan the PA and Netanyahu had previously accepted, until Netanyahu backtracked during the call with Biden, according to the *Axios* report.
- On December 28, President Biden released a [statement](#) that he and First Lady Jill Biden are “devastated” by the news that Israeli-American Judith Weinstein was killed on October 7 and that “this tragic development cuts deep, coming on the heels of last week’s news that Judith’s beloved husband, Gad Haggai, is believed to have been killed by Hamas.”
- On December 27, Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) called Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a “genocidal maniac,” in an [Instagram post](#) in which she claimed that “Every member of Congress who sits down with this murderer is supporting a war criminal ... We will never ever forget ... I am so sick and tired of our country funding and supporting a genocide and war on children.”
- On December 28, Germany [announced](#) that it is in talks with European Union partners to form a maritime mission to protect shipping in the Red Sea.
  - » Despite the United States previously announcing their involvement, Italy, Spain, and France have since [distanced themselves](#) from Operation Prosperity Guardian.
    - European governments are reportedly concerned that portions of their electorate who are critical of Israel and concerned about being drawn into war in the Middle East will turn against them.
    - Italy’s defense ministry noted that it would send a ship to the Red Sea but not as part of the new task force.



- Spain said it would not join the task force and opposed using an existing European Union anti-piracy mission, Atalanta, to protect Red Sea shipping.
- France, who has previously shot down Houthi-launched projectiles over the Red Sea, announced that its naval vessels would stay under French command.
- On December 28, UN rights chief Volker Turk released a [statement](#) urging Israel to end what he described as “unlawful killings” and alleging that “[t]he use of military tactics and weapons in law enforcement contexts, the use of unnecessary or disproportionate force, and the enforcement of broad, arbitrary and discriminatory movement restrictions that affect Palestinians are extremely troubling.”
- On December 28, Jordan’s King Abdullah and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi [met](#) in Cairo to discuss the war.
  - » According to an Egyptian readout, the two leaders called for the international community to push for a ceasefire, increase aid into Gaza, and establish “a political track for a just and comprehensive settlement leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state” on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital.
- On December 28, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov [praised](#) Prime Minister Netanyahu for not criticizing Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, and also compared Israel’s war against Hamas to Russia’s war against Ukraine.
- On December 28, Australian Foreign Minister Mark Dreyfus [confirmed](#) that two Australian nationals had been killed in a December 26 Israeli airstrike on southern Lebanon after Hezbollah announced earlier this week that one of the two Australians killed was a Hezbollah member. Dreyfus said Australia is continuing to investigate the incident.
- On December 28, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) director in Gaza, Thomas White, claimed in a [post](#) on X that “Israeli soldiers fired at an aid convoy as it returned from Northern Gaza along a route designated by the Israeli Army - our international convoy leader and his team were not injured but one vehicle sustained damage - aid workers should never be a target.”
  - » The IDF has said it is looking into the incident.
- On December 28, Germany’s Hapag-Lloyd shipping company [announced](#) it would continue to avoid travel through the Red Sea, and Japan’s two largest shipping companies, Mitsui O.S.K. Lines and Nippon Yusen, also announced that their vessels with ties to Israel would avoid traveling through the waterway.
- On December 27, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [spoke](#) with French President Emmanuel Macron about the war, including clashes on the Lebanese-Israeli border and Israeli operations in Gaza, and Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea.
  - » According to an Israeli readout, “Prime Minister Netanyahu thanked President Macron for France’s involvement in defending freedom of navigation in the Red Sea, and its willingness to assist in restoring security to Israel’s border with Lebanon.” According to a French [readout](#), Macron encouraged Netanyahu to work towards a durable ceasefire.
- On December 27, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [responded](#) to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s remarks earlier that day comparing Netanyahu to Adolf Hitler. Netanyahu said in a statement that “Erdogan, who is carrying out a genocide of Kurds and holds a world record number of journalists opposed to his rule in jail, is the last to preach morality to us.”

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

- On December 28, about 1,000 pro-Palestinian protesters [shut down](#) the entrance to the World Trade Center building in New York, chanting, “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”
- On December 28, a bomb threat [sent](#) via email to Bat Yam Temple in Sanibel, Florida, was deemed a hoax.
- On December 27, pro-Palestinian protesters [blocked](#) airport access roads in Los Angeles and New York during one of the busiest travel days of the year. The protesters chanted, “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.” 26 protesters were arrested in New York, and 36 protesters were [arrested](#) in Los Angeles after they became violent.
- On December 27, a man on a bike in London, England, [threw](#) the hats off of Jewish residents and punched several in the head outside a synagogue in Stamford Hill.
- On December 25, the London office of Mike Freer, a Conservative Member of Parliament in the United Kingdom, was [targeted in an arson attack](#). Freer has vocally supported Israel and told *The Jerusalem Post* that the day after the fire, he received an email saying that he was “the kind of person who deserved to be set alight.”

## Recent and Relevant JINSA Products About Israel at War

- VADM Mark Fox, USN (ret.), VADM John W. Miller, USN (ret.), and Ari Cicurel, “[To Deter Houthi Strikes in Red Sea, US Must Turn From Defense to Offense](#),” *Breaking Defense*, December 28, 2023
- Ari Cicurel, [Seventh U.S. Strike Amid Over 100 Iran-backed Attacks in Iraq and Syria](#), December 27, 2023
- Lt Gen Thomas Bergeson, USAF (ret.) and Ari Cicurel, “[The US Must Help Israel Deal with Hezbollah Before It’s Too Late](#),” *The Hill*, December 23, 2023
- Zac Schildcrout, [IDF Deaths Highlight Perils of Urban Warfare](#), December 22, 2023