



Ari Cicurel
Assistant Director of Foreign Policy

Yoni Tobin
Policy Analyst

Zachary Schildcrout
Policy Analyst

Anna Schafel
Programs and Outreach Associate

Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update January 3, 2024

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

- Israel's reported January 2 killing of Saleh al-Aroui in Lebanon marks a significant achievement toward Israel's objective of neutralizing Hamas's military and its political ability to control Gaza. Since the attack occurred on Lebanese soil, there is significant risk that Hezbollah will escalate against Israel, as Hezbollah's Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah [warned](#) four months ago against any assassinations on Lebanese soil.
 - » As the deputy head of Hamas's political bureau, founding member of its military wing, and considered to be the de facto head of its military wing in the West Bank, al-Aroui was the most senior commander that Israel has killed during the war.
 - » Through its Rewards for Justice initiative, the U.S. State Department had [promised](#) a reward of up to \$5 million for information about al-Aroui. The U.S. Treasury Department designated him as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist on September 10, 2015.

Last 24 Hours

Attacks Against Israel

- At least [13,000](#) rockets, mortars, drones, and other projectiles have been fired at Israel during the war.

Gaza

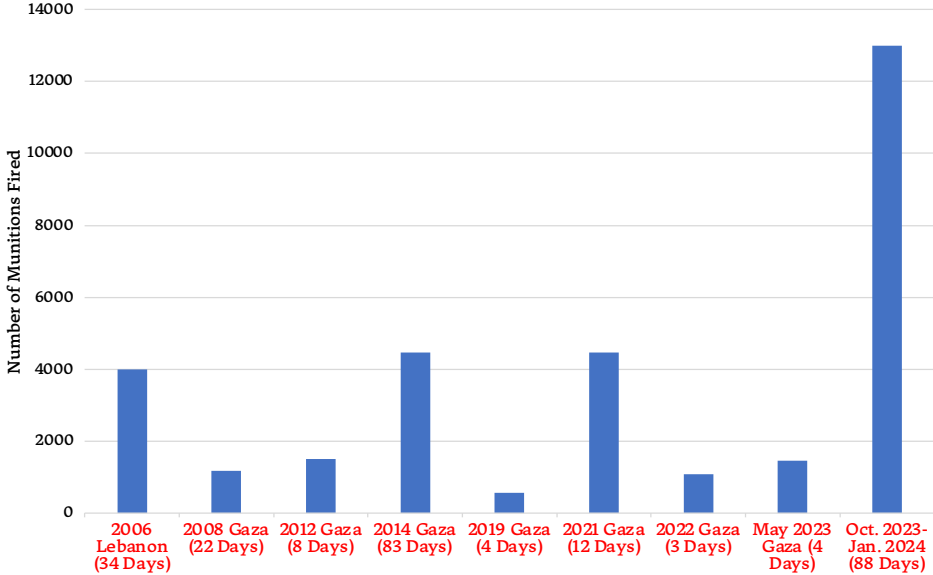
- Sirens sounded in [Sderot, Ibim, Nir Am, Netiva Ha'asara, and Yad Mordechai](#).

Lebanon

- Sirens [sounded](#) in Arab al-Aramshe, Misgav Am, and Shlomi.
- On January 3, two IDF soldiers at an outpost near Menara in northern Israel were lightly [injured](#) in a Hezbollah anti-tank missile attack launched from southern Lebanon.
- On January 3, Hezbollah [launched](#) an anti-tank missile attack at an IDF outpost near Ramim Ridge in northern Israel.

- According to [reports](#) from January 3, Hezbollah took responsibility for 10 missile and drone attacks against northern Israel that day, including four over the course of one hour.
- On January 2, in its deepest strike since October 7, Hezbollah [launched](#) explosive-laden drones toward the IDF’s 91st Division’s headquarters in Illit in northern Israel.

Projectiles Fired Against Israel During Major Conflicts



IDF Operations

Gaza

- On January 3, the IDF said that Israeli forces had recently [thwarted](#) an attempt by a terrorist to place an explosive device on a tank in southern Gaza’s Khan Younis.
- On January 3, the IDF also said it recently [directed](#) an airstrike against a Palestinian Islamic Jihad weapons manufacturing plant.
- On January 3, IDF troops [neutralized](#) a terrorist cell in northern Gaza that had been using drones to monitor Israeli forces.

Lebanon

- On January 2, Israel’s *Channel 12* reported that Israel had carried out the [assassination](#) of Hamas officials Saleh al-Aroui, Samir Fandi, Azzam Al-Aqraa, and Khalil al-Hiya in Beirut. According to *Al Jazeera*, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh [said](#) in a media appearance on January 2 that an additional four Hamas members were also killed in the strike: Mahmoud Zaki Shaheen, Muhammad Al-Rayes, Muhammad Bashasha, and Ahmed Hammoud.
 - » According to reports, the assassination was [carried out](#) by a drone strike on Hamas offices in southern Beirut.
 - » Al-Aroui was among the most senior Hamas leaders, [serving](#) as the terror group’s deputy political leader and deputy to Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas’s leader. al-Aroui was also previously in charge of Hamas’s West Bank operations, where, according to his own account, he helped [orchestrate](#) the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenagers in 2014. Al-Hiya was a senior member of Hamas’s political wing.

- » Hamas [confirmed](#) through a spokesperson that al-Arouri had been killed, but denied that al-Hiya was killed. A Hamas spokesperson also stated that the strike meant that hostage swap negotiations would be halted, though it was unclear whether this meant permanently or just temporarily.
- » After the assassination, Hezbollah [said](#), “we affirm that this crime will never pass without response and punishment,” and “God almighty concluded the career of this great leader [Arouri] with the highest medals of honor and dignity, and he obtained the martyrdom that he had long sought and longed for.”
 - The terror group added, “the criminal enemy — which after ninety days of crime, killing and destruction was unable to subjugate Gaza — is resorting to a policy of assassination... of... whoever planned, carried out or supported” the October 7 terrorist attack in Israel.
- » Following the [assassination, reports](#) from the same day noted that Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah had said in an August speech that “any assassination on Lebanese soil against a Lebanese Syrian, Iranian or Palestinian will be met with a decisive response. We will not tolerate this, and we will not allow Lebanon to become a new killing field for Israel.” Nasrallah is scheduled to deliver a televised speech on January 3.
- » In response to the attack, Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati [said](#) that the strike represented a “new Israeli crime aimed at inevitably dragging Lebanon into a new phase of confrontation, following the daily ongoing assaults in the South, resulting in a significant number of martyrs and wounded individuals,” according to Lebanese state media.
 - Mikati also requested that Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib file a complaint against Israel with the United Nations Security Council, describing the strike as a violation of Lebanese sovereignty.
- » According to a January 3 [report](#) from Israel’s *Walla*, citing an Israeli official, Israel did not warn the United States in advance of the strike and instead gave American officials a heads-up while the operation to eliminate the Hamas officials in Beirut was already in progress. On January 2, *Axios* similarly [reported](#), citing two U.S. officials, that Israel did not notify the United States in advance of the planned strike.
- On January 3, the IDF [struck](#) Hezbollah infrastructure in the town of Yaroun in southern Lebanon.

Humanitarian Efforts and Hostage Release Negotiations

- On January 2, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [said](#) during a meeting with the families of hostages in Hamas captivity that Israel was “talking about” a potential deal under which Hamas’s leader in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, would be allowed to leave the Gaza Strip in exchange for the release of hostages. Netanyahu also stated that Israel was considering publishing an “outline” for such a deal without specifying further.
- On January 2, Israel’s *Channel 12* [reported](#) that a Hamas delegation was in Cairo, Egypt, to discuss the prospect of a deal after Sinwar softened his position on negotiations. The report said that Arab media sources also reported that Israeli mediators were in Cairo.
 - » According to reports, Israel is seeking a humanitarian pause, while Qatari mediators have advocated for a deal in which all IDF forces withdraw from Gaza in return for the release of all hostages.

Post-War Planning

- Israel is in talks with Congo to receive emigrants from Gaza, according to a January 3 [report](#) in Hebrew-language news outlet *Zman Yisrael*.
- According to Israel's *Channel 12*, Hamas's leader in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, has [demanded](#) to Palestinian Authority (PA) officials that the PA bring Hamas into its organization after the war, a process which he wants to begin even before the end of the war. In addition, Sinwar demanded that elections be held by the Palestinian Authority in which Hamas is eligible to participate.
 - » Turkish media outlets [reported](#) on January 2 that Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said in a speech that Hamas is willing to join the PA as part of a unity Palestinian government controlling both the West Bank and Gaza.

Casualties and Hostages

- Over 1,300 people in Israel have been [killed](#), and another 6,900 have been [injured](#) in the war.
 - » 509 Israeli soldiers have been [killed](#).
 - 175 IDF soldiers have been [killed](#) during ground combat in Gaza so far.
 - The IDF [announced](#) the deaths of Sgt. First Class Meiron Moshe Gersch, 21, from Petah Tikva and [Staff Sgt. Sufian Dagash](#), 21, from Maghar.
 - » 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.
- According to unverified figures from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Health Ministry, 22,313 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza, and 57,296 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, at least 324 people have been [killed](#), and at least 3,400 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 January 3, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian [claimed](#) that the killing of Hamas deputy leader Saleh al-Arouri in Beirut was a “cowardly terrorist operation” that indicates “that the Zionist regime [Israel] has not achieved any of its goals after weeks of war crimes, genocide and destruction in Gaza and the West Bank despite the direct support of the United States.”
- On January 2, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani [condemned](#) the “despicable” killing of Saleh al-Arouri, for which he blamed Israel, saying that “the martyr’s blood will undoubtedly ignite another surge in the veins of resistance and motivate the fight against the Zionist occupiers, not only in Palestine but also in the region and among all freedom-seekers worldwide.”
- On January 3, two explosions [killed](#) at least 70 people near the tomb of Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani in a cemetery in the southern Iranian city of Kerman during a ceremony to commemorate Soleimani, who was killed in a U.S. drone strike on January 3, 2020. Reports said Iranian authorities were [investigating](#) the incident.
- Iran-backed groups in Iraq and Syria launched at least three attacks against U.S. personnel on January 2.
 - » An armed drone was [shot down](#) over the Erbil Airport where U.S. personnel are located.
 - » Multiple rockets were [fired](#) at the base in al-Shaddadi, Syria.
 - » A one-way attack drone [targeted](#) Mission Support Site Euphrates in Syria.
- The Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen continued to attack commercial shipping in the Red Sea.
 - » On December 3, the Houthis [announced](#) that they had conducted an unverified attack against the *CMA CGM Tige* heading to Israel.
 - » On December 2, Houthis in Yemen [fired](#) two anti-ship ballistic missiles into the Red Sea near multiple commercial vessels. There was no reported damage.

U.S. and International Response

- On January 3, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) [announced](#) that a bipartisan delegation of five lawmakers on the Senate Intelligence Committee would be traveling to Israel later that day to meet with senior Israeli officials and would also be traveling to Jordan and Saudi Arabia to discuss the war. The names of the other lawmakers were not released.
- On January 3, a [report](#) in *The New York Times* indicated that U.S. intelligence has assessed that Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad used Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza and tunnels beneath it as a command center and to hold hostages but largely evacuated the complex and destroyed evidence of their activities there days before Israeli troops arrived.
- On January 3, *Middle East Monitor* [reported](#) that businesses across the West Bank were closed as a number of Palestinians in the West Bank observed a general strike to protest the killing of Hamas deputy leader Saleh al-Arouri. This included banks, shops, and public facilities, and involved disruptions to public transit, according to the report.
 - » Previously, on January 2, the Ramallah branch of the PA [announced](#) a general strike in response to the alleged Israeli airstrike that killed several Hamas officials, including senior official Saleh al-Arouri.
- On January 2, in response to recent comments from Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir that Palestinians should voluntarily leave Gaza en masse and live elsewhere, U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller [said](#) in a statement that such “rhetoric is inflammatory and irresponsible ... We have been clear, consistent, and unequivocal that Gaza is Palestinian land and will remain Palestinian land, with Hamas no longer in control of its future and with no terror groups able to threaten Israel.”
 - » On January 3, French President Emmanuel Macron [spoke](#) with Israeli minister without portfolio Benny Gantz by phone about the war. During the call, Macron warned Gantz that Smotrich and Ben Gvir’s comments “were unacceptable and contradicted the two-state solution which constitutes the only viable solution for a return to peace and security for all,” according to a French readout.
- On January 2, the United States quietly reached a [deal](#) with Qatar to extend its military presence at the Al Udeid base for another 10 years, according to *CNN*, despite the country's ties to Hamas. The Department of Defense has not announced the deal publicly.
- U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken will be [postponing](#) his trip to Israel for an additional week, according to a U.S. official cited by *the Times of Israel*.
 - » A reason was not given for the postponement, although the official stated that the death of senior Hamas leader Saleh al-Arouri on January 2 was completely unrelated to the postponement.
- On January 2, the *Washington Free Beacon* reported that former Vice President Mike Pence would be [traveling](#) to Israel later this week to meet with senior officials and discuss the war.
- On January 2, the French Permanent Representative to the United Nations [told](#) reporters that the United Nations Security Council would likely be meeting this week to discuss Houthi attacks on vessels in the Red Sea. France assumed the council’s rotating presidency for the month of January this week.

Rising Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Protests, and Attacks

- On January 3, Argentinian police [arrested](#) three Syrian and Lebanese nationals at Jorge Newbery Airport in Buenos Aires for allegedly plotting a terror attack. Argentinian media reported that authorities' concerns were heightened because the Pan American Maccabi games, a sporting competition that hosts around 4,200 Jewish athletes, are currently being held in Buenos Aires.
- On January 2, Harvard University President Claudine Gay [resigned](#) following weeks of widespread criticism and scrutiny regarding her handling of antisemitism on campus and congressional testimony in which she refused to say that calls for the genocide of Jewish people violated campus rules against bullying and harassment. Gay was also [accused](#) of dozens of cases of plagiarism.
- On January 2, Israeli government spokesperson Eylon Levy [announced](#) at a press briefing that Israel will appear before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at the Hague to challenge South Africa's request for the court to declare that Israel is violating the UN'S Genocide Convention.
 - » Levy stated, "in giving political and legal cover to the October 7 massacre and the Hamas human-shields strategy, South Africa has made itself criminally complicit with Hamas's campaign of genocide against our people."
- On December 31, hundreds of pro-Palestinian protesters were [arrested](#) in Berlin, Germany, after they illegally protested, threw explosives, attacked police, and vandalized a memorial dedicated to the children who were killed or survived the Holocaust.
- The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), with the backing of over 100 groups, is [organizing](#) a "March on Washington for Gaza" on January 13, which they expect to be the largest pro-Palestine event in Washington, D.C. since the Israel-Hamas War began.
 - » As JINSA has [noted](#), the executive director of CAIR, Nihad Awad, has praised Hamas's October 7 attack as an act of "self-defense" and an event which he was "happy to see."
- In the United Kingdom, six major anti-Israel groups are [organizing](#) what is expected to be one of the largest protests since the Israel-Hamas War began in London on January 13.
 - » The groups, The Palestinian Forum in Britain (PFB), Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Friends of Al-Aqsa, the Stop the War Coalition, Muslim Association of Britain, and Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, released a joint statement, calling for "a day of action for Gaza" to call for "a permanent ceasefire, to stop the Gaza Genocide, to end the occupation, and dismantle Israeli apartheid."

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