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Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update February 20, 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. This week, JINSA will release the Swords of Iron Update on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday. An update with the latest information and analysis about the war is below.

Analysis

- It has been reported that Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps—Quds Force (IRGC-QF) Commander Ismail Qaani [traveled](#) to Iraq shortly after the Iran-backed attack on January 28 that killed three U.S. service members in Jordan. The purpose of the visit was allegedly to persuade Tehran's proxies to lie low, thereby pointing to the control the Iranian regime continues to exert over these groups and Iran's ultimate culpability for attacks on U.S. personnel. Qaani reportedly sought to decrease the proxy attacks to avoid a strong U.S. response in the wake of the January 28 attack, including anticipated strikes against militia commanders, infrastructure, or Iran itself.
 - » Following Qaani's meeting in Iraq, proxy attacks against U.S. personnel have declined precipitously, and no such attacks have occurred in nearly two weeks. However, it is too soon to draw conclusions regarding whether or not the U.S. retaliatory strikes on February 2 have strengthened deterrence against the Iranian regime and its proxies.
 - » Qaani's visit also indicates he was concerned about a potential U.S. strike against him in Iraq, much as a U.S. strike killed his predecessor Qassem Soleimani in January 2020.
 - » Yet, Qaani's efforts to pause proxy attacks in Iraq and Syria, at least temporarily, have not applied to the Houthis in Yemen, who continued to target ships in nearby waters, including with an [unmanned underwater vessel](#) (UUV) for the first time since the escalation began in October and forcing the crew of a U.K.-owned bulk carrier to [evacuate](#). This suggests that either Tehran does not want the Houthis to decrease their attacks in the Red Sea and/or the Houthis operate far more independently than Iran's other proxies.
- Though the U.S. Treasury Department's sanctions against the Houthis as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) entity [went into effect](#) on February 16, this move is unlikely to deter the group's ongoing attacks on global shipping. Since the initial sanctions designation announcement in mid-January, the Houthis have conducted dozens of attacks, including several since February 16.

- » As JINSA has noted, the administration [undermined](#) the effect of its SDGT designation of the Houthis last month when it [stated](#) on January 17 that “we are willing to relook at this designation” against the Houthis “if the Houthis stopped [their attacks] tomorrow.”
- » As JINSA Fellow Gabriel Noronha [observed](#) at the time, the United States also declined to designate the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), which would have imposed more stringent restrictions such as forcing U.S. banks to seize Houthi funds.

Since February 16

Attacks Against Israel

- At least 13,000 rockets, mortars, drones, and other projectiles have been [fired](#) at Israel during the war.
- According to a February 19 [report](#) from *The Times of Israel* citing data from Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics, in the final three quarters of 2023, Israel’s economy shrunk at a 19.4 percent annual rate. This is the steepest quarterly contraction since the coronavirus-induced contraction in the second quarter of 2020.
 - » The report noted that private consumption declined by 26.9 percent from October to December 2023 and imports of goods and services declined by 42.4 percent.
- On February 17, an Israeli special forces unit [apprehended](#) a man near Karmiel Junction in northern Israel who was smuggling large quantities of weapons, including an anti-tank missile launcher, over 1,000 rounds of bullets, and nine grenades.
 - » The missile launcher and ammunition contained Hebrew markings, suggesting that the weapons may have been stolen from IDF arsenals.
- Although Fatah, the dominant faction in the Palestinian Authority (PA), issued a [statement](#) on February 16 lauding the [shooting](#) that day near Kiryat Malachi that killed two and injured four, the office of PA President Mahmoud Abbas denounced the statement and said that the statement was unauthorized. The PA president’s office also said, “the president is against violence and against terror attacks.”
 - » The attacker [killed](#) 23-year-old Yishai Gartner and a 27-year-old reservist [soldier](#), Sgt. First Class (res.) Ori Yaish.
 - » Israel’s Shin Bet security agency [said](#) that 37-year-old East Jerusalem resident Fadi Jamjoum committed the shooting.

Gaza

- Sirens sounded in [Ein Hashlosha, Nirim, Nir Oz, Zikim and Ashkelon’s southern industrial zone](#).
- According to [reports](#) from February 20, IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi has chosen to commence an investigation into the IDF’s operational failures before the October 7 attack. Halevi’s investigation involves Operations Directorate, Southern Command, Gaza Division, and Military Intelligence Directorate Unit 8200 commanders.
- Israel’s *i24 News* [reported](#) on February 20, citing an Israeli security source, that IDF troops uncovered over \$250 million in Hamas funds during an operation in a Khan Younis bank earlier this week.

- » The report cites IDF spokesperson Col. Olivier Rafowicz as saying that Hamas has for years stolen hundreds of millions of dollars in donations from the international community intended for humanitarian aid.
- On February 20, Israeli officials [denied](#) a Saudi report that claimed Israeli security officials said that Hamas's leader in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, had escaped from Gaza into Egypt.
- On February 19, rocket sirens [sounded](#) in the Gazan border communities of Ein Hashlosha, Nirim, and Nir Oz for the first time in several weeks.
- On February 18, PA Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh [said](#), "Russia has invited all Palestinian factions who will be meeting on the 26th of this month in Moscow. We will see if Hamas is ready to come to the ground with us," and "we are ready to engage. If Hamas is not then that's a different story. We need Palestinian unity." He also said, "one should not continue focusing on October 7."
 - » Shtayyeh added that "it's not about reform, it's not about anything. It's about Palestinians wanting an end to occupation."
- On February 17, a Hamas operative [fired](#) a rocket from Gaza City toward the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon. The rocket was intercepted.
- On February 16, terrorists in northern Gaza [fired](#) at least three rockets toward Ashkelon, and every rocket landed in the Mediterranean Sea.
- On February 16, Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant [released](#) the names of the 12 United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) employees accused of taking part in Hamas's October 7 massacre.
 - » Gallant said to foreign reporters that "in addition to these 12 workers, we have significant indications based on intelligence, that over 30 UNRWA workers participated in the massacre, facilitated the taking of hostages, looted and stole from Israeli communities, and more."
 - » He added that UNRWA has "lost legitimacy and can no longer function as a UN body," and "1,468 workers are known to be active in Hamas and PIJ. 185 UNRWA workers are active in the military branches of Hamas and 51 are active in the PIJ military branch."

Lebanon

- Rockets struck [Shtula and Yiftah](#), and sirens [sounded](#) in [Arab al-Aramshe](#) and a number of locations in the Upper Galilee.
- On February 20, terrorists in Lebanon who were likely affiliated with Hezbollah [launched](#) numerous anti-tank guided missiles into Israel. The missiles struck an unpopulated area near the northern Israeli town of Margalioth, causing no reported injuries or damage.
- The Israeli outlet *Ynet* [reported](#) on February 19, citing the French outlet *Liberation*, that for the past 30-plus years, Hezbollah has constructed a hundreds-of-kilometers-long underground tunnel network with North Korean technology that is "more complex and dangerous than those in Gaza."
- Sirens indicating drone infiltrations [sounded](#) in a number of locations in the Upper Galilee region on February 19. IDF spokesperson Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari later [announced](#) that an explosive-laden drone launched by Hezbollah struck an open field near the town of Arbel, but caused no reported injuries.
- According to [reports](#) from February 19, Israel has charged 52-year-old Dalal al-Arouri, the sister of assassinated Hamas deputy leader Saleh al-Arouri, in a military court with funding

Hamas and incitement. She and her sister Fatima were arrested in January during raids in ‘Arura and al-Bireh, towns close to Ramallah in the West Bank.

- On February 18, an anti-tank guided missile [fired](#) from Lebanon struck the entrance to the northern Israeli town of Shtula. Two people were treated for acute anxiety.
- On February 18, a rocket [fired](#) by Hezbollah terrorists landed in an open area near the northern Israeli town of Yiftah. The rocket caused no reported damage or injuries.
- During a speech on February 16, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah [said](#), “the response to the massacre [Israeli airstrikes targeting terrorists in Lebanon] should be continuing resistance work at the front and escalating resistance work at the front,” and “our women and our children who were killed in these days, the enemy will pay the price of spilling their blood in blood.”
 - » During the speech, Nasrallah also [said](#) that in its “aggression,” “the enemy [Israel] could have avoided killing civilians in southern Lebanon” and that the terror group will respond with an “increase in resistance.”

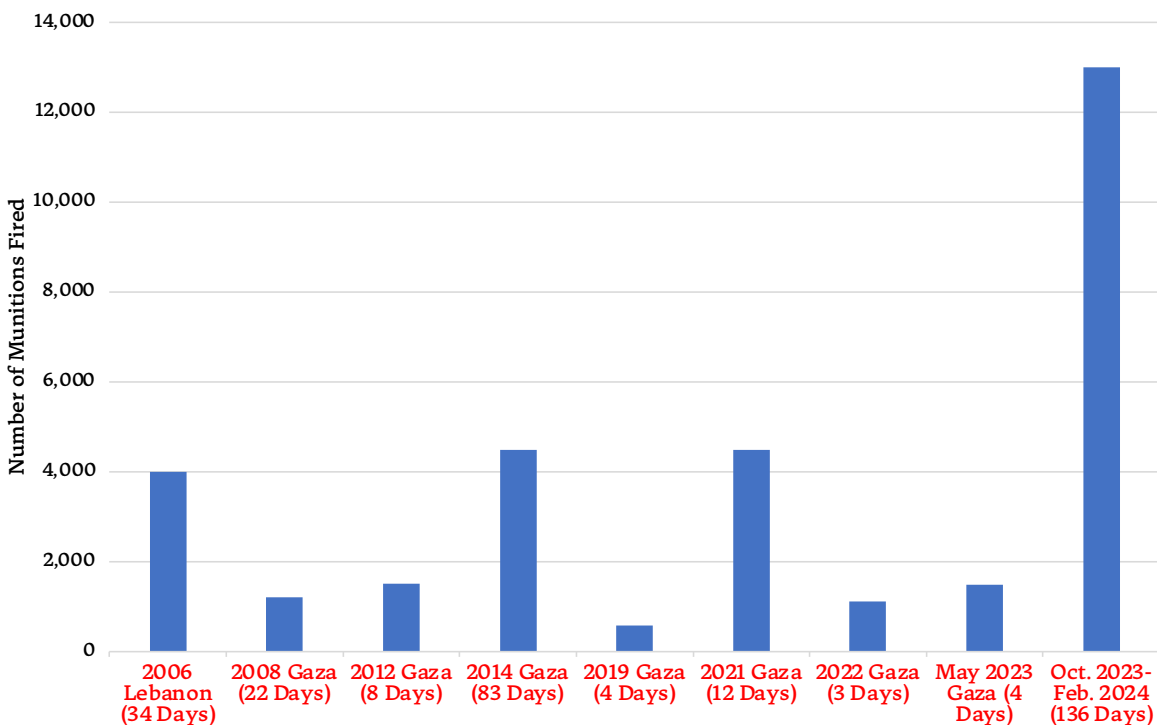
Syria

- On February 16, rockets were [launched](#) from Syria toward the Golan Heights area of northern Israel. The rockets did not enter Israeli territory.

West Bank

- On February 19, terrorists [threw](#) an explosive device at a vehicle near the West Bank town of Homesh, lightly injuring one person. The IDF said soldiers were searching for suspects involved in the attack.

Projectiles Fired Against Israel During Major Conflicts



IDF Operations

- On February 19, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) [reported](#) that it struck over 31,000 targets during the war on multiple fronts, but largely in Gaza.

Gaza

- On February 20, the IDF [announced](#) that it had almost completed its offensive against terrorists in Khan Younis. Last week, the military withdrew its final reserve brigade, the 646th Brigade, from Gaza.
- The IAF [said](#) on February 19 that of more than 31,000 targets that it struck during the war, over 29,000 have been affiliated with Hamas and other terrorists in Gaza. The IDF also [said](#) that day that it has killed approximately 12,000 Hamas members during the war, not including the roughly 1,000 attackers that Israel killed in the country during the October 7 massacre.
- On February 19, the IDF [said](#) that it killed several Hamas members during operations in central Gaza and in Khan Younis in southern Gaza. These operations included striking a combatant in central Gaza who launched a rocket at southern Israel on February 18, and raiding Hamas outposts, confiscating arms, and eliminating fighters in Khan Younis.
- According to a [Reuters](#) report on February 19 citing two unnamed Israeli officials and two unnamed regional officials, Israel believes its full-scale combat in Gaza will persist for six to eight more weeks before it begins a ground incursion into Rafah in southern Gaza.
- During a February 18 speech in Jerusalem to the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, Prime Minister Netanyahu [said](#) that Israel will achieve “total victory against these savages.”
 - » He also said, “when we set out to do this, even our best friends said to us it can’t be done,” and “our brave soldiers are in the tunnels demolishing the infrastructure of these killers.”
 - » Netanyahu added, “the Israeli army is going through lengths that no other army has gone through in protecting civilians,” and “we cannot leave a quarter of Hamas’s fighting battalions intact.” He also pledged to ensure that Palestinian civilians can access safe zones.
 - » He denounced Brazilian President Lula da Silva’s earlier comparison of Israel to Nazi Germany and insisted that “total victory means the release of the hostages.”
 - » Netanyahu also [argued](#), “one thing Israel cannot agree to is an international diktat that would seek to unilaterally recognize a Palestinian state, basically force a Palestinian state on Israel after the horror of October 7.”
- On February 18, Israel’s Defense Minister Yoav Gallant [said](#), “Hamas does not trust its commanders, this is a very, very noticeable thing,” and “the Hamas-Gaza station does not answer, there is no one to talk to as leadership on the ground.” He added, “that means there is a tender for who will manage Gaza.”
 - » Gallant noted that in the Nasser and Al-Amal hospitals in Gaza, “people who had RPGs, weapons and guns reached the moment of truth and did not fight. This indicates something about their understanding of the power relations, that they understood that their fate would be to surrender or die — there is no third option.”
 - » He also said that Hamas’s Khan Younis Brigade is “defeated and does not function as a military entity in any way,” and “Hamas is left with marginal [forces] in the central camps

and with the Rafah Brigade, and what stands between them and a complete collapse as a military system is a decision by the IDF.”

- » Gallant said further that “there is no one here to come to their aid, no Iranians, no international aid,” and “we have no right to stop as long as [Hamas holds] 134 hostages.”
- On February 18, the IDF [said](#) at least 45 Hamas operatives had been killed within the past day.
- On February 17, IDF special forces units Egoz and Maglan continued [conducting searches](#) inside Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, arresting over 100 terror operatives at the medical facility and killing several terrorists on the hospital’s outskirts.
 - » Troops also called in airstrikes on Hamas terrorists operating nearby, including three terrorists attempting to launch a rocket attack on troops.
 - » Soldiers from a paratroopers unit also eliminated a terror cell during fighting.
- The IDF [said](#) on February 17 that it struck Hamas “operational headquarters” in Gaza’s Nuseirat and Deir al-Balah neighborhoods with fighter jets that day.
- On February 17, the IDF [said](#) that soon after a Hamas combatant fired a rocket toward Ashkelon from northern Gaza’s Sheikh Radwan neighborhood, the IDF killed him. The Iron Dome intercepted the rocket.
- On February 17, IDF soldiers from the Nahal Brigade [clashed](#) with terrorists in central Gaza, killing several terror operatives.
- On February 16, Israel’s Defense Minister Yoav Gallant [said](#) during a press briefing, “the State of Israel has no intention of evacuating Palestinian civilians to Egypt. We respect and value our peace agreement with Egypt, which is a cornerstone of stability in the region as well as an important partner.”
 - » He added that the military is “thoroughly planning future operations in Rafah, which is a significant Hamas stronghold” and that “the IDF takes extraordinary measures to avoid civilian casualties, and is operating in accordance with international law.”

Lebanon

- On February 20, the IDF [launched](#) airstrikes against a number of Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon, including two rocket launchers in the southern Lebanese towns of Marwahin and Yahoun; two facilities in the southern Lebanese towns of Dhayra and Yaroun; and two buildings in the southern Lebanese towns of Blida and Houla.
- The IAF [said](#) on February 19 that of its more than 31,000 targets struck during the war, more than 1,000 have been Hezbollah positions in Lebanon.
- On February 19, the IDF [struck](#) a Hezbollah target in the southern Lebanese town of Marwahin after Israeli intelligence units observed terror operatives entering the site.
- On February 19, the IDF [conducted](#) airstrikes [targeting](#) two Hezbollah weapons depots near the central Lebanese city of Sidon, roughly 40 miles from the Lebanese-Israeli border, in response to an earlier Hezbollah drone attack.
 - » The IDF released [footage](#) later that day of IDF airstrikes targeting Hezbollah sites near the southern Lebanese towns of Mays al-Jabal and Odaisseh.
 - » That day, Lebanese media sources [reported](#) that Israel struck sites in the town of Ghaziyeh, near Sidon.

- » The Associated Press released photographs on February 20 indicating that one of the weapons depots struck by the IDF, reportedly in the town of Ghaziyeh, was still [engulfed in flames](#) approximately 24 hours after the initial strike.
- On February 18, the IDF [conducted](#) artillery shelling against a site in Lebanon in response to an earlier rocket attack.
 - » Lebanese media sources [reported](#) IDF artillery shelling in the Lebanese town of Beit Lif that day.
- On February 18, the IDF [carried out](#) artillery shelling against Hezbollah targets in the southern Lebanese towns of Alma ash-Shab and Dhayra.
- On February 18, the IDF [launched](#) a strike targeting Hezbollah rocket launching posts in the southern Lebanese town of Aitaroun, and it struck other Hezbollah infrastructure in Odaisseh that day.
- On February 18, the IDF [launched](#) airstrikes against Hezbollah positions in the southern Lebanese town of Yaroun.
 - » That day, the IDF [conducted](#) an airstrike against a Hezbollah operative in the southern Lebanese town of Ayta ash-Shab.
- On February 17, the IDF [conducted](#) airstrikes against two targets, a Hezbollah rocket launching position and an unspecified Hezbollah facility, in the southern Lebanese town of Jabal Blat.
 - » The IDF also [conducted](#) artillery shelling that day against a position near the Lebanese town of Hamoul and [shelled](#) additional targets in Bint Jbeil.
 - » That day, the IDF announced it [killed](#) a Hezbollah operative in an airstrike on a position in Jabal Blat.
- The IDF [said](#) on February 16 that it is bolstering its preparedness for war on Israel's northern border, including via drills involving the 146th and 210th Divisions. In addition, the Golani Brigade initiated a "procedure for increasing readiness on the northern border" this week, according to the IDF.

Syria

- On February 17, the IAF [struck](#) a Syrian army munitions warehouse in the Mahajjah area.
 - » The IDF also shelled the source of rockets fired from Syria toward the Golan Heights. The rockets did not reach Israeli territory.

Iran

- *The New York Times* [reported](#) on February 16, citing two unnamed Western officials and an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) strategist, that Israel orchestrated clandestine sabotage against two significant natural gas pipelines in Iran that week. Iran's Minister of Petroleum Javad Owji said, "the enemy's plan was to completely disrupt the flow of gas in winter to several main cities and provinces in our country."

Humanitarian Efforts

- On February 20, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) [said](#) that although it resumed food deliveries to Gaza on February 18, it is now "pausing the delivery of lifesaving food assistance to Northern Gaza until safe conditions are in place for our staff and the

people we are trying to reach” amid “complete chaos and violence due to the collapse of civil order” and “unprecedented levels of desperation.”

- » The WFP added that on February 18 in Gaza, its convoy “was surrounded by crowds of hungry people” and faced gunfire in Gaza City.
- On February 19, World Health Organization (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus [said](#) that after two days of being denied access, the WHO was permitted to enter Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis.
 - » The WHO announced that over 180 patients and 15 medical staff remain in the hospital, which it said was “experiencing an acute shortage of food, basic medical supplies, and oxygen.” Tedros added that the hospital lacks electricity, save for a backup generator, and tap water.
 - » The IDF has said its recent operation at the hospital resulted in around 100 terror suspects being detained, including terrorists dressed as hospital staffers. In addition, troops found vehicles stolen from Israel on October 7 at the hospital.
 - » On February 16, the IDF [said](#) that it discovered medications bearing hostages’ names in Nasser Hospital, and that “the origin of the medication and their use is under investigation.”
- On February 19, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) [announced](#), citing a new report from the Global Nutrition Cluster, that 15.6 percent—roughly 1 in 6—of the children under the age of 2 in Gaza are acutely malnourished.
 - » UNICEF Deputy Executive Director for Humanitarian Action and Supply Operations Ted Chaiban said that Gaza “is poised to witness an explosion in preventable child deaths which would compound the already unbearable level of child deaths in Gaza ... If the conflict doesn’t end now, children’s nutrition will continue to plummet, leading to preventable deaths or health issues which will affect the children of Gaza for the rest of their lives and have potential intergenerational consequences.”
- On February 18, Norway’s Foreign Ministry [announced](#) that it was “facilitating an arrangement” that will enable the PA to receive the tax revenues that Israel collects on its behalf.
 - » Israel has [withheld](#) some of the tax revenue since October 7, as the Israeli cabinet initially blocked the release of funds the PA uses “to pay for services and employees in Gaza, arguing that the money could reach Hamas,” according to *The Times of Israel*. The frozen revenues amount to roughly \$75 million, according to reports.
 - However, to protest Israel’s initial decision, the PA had until recently refused to accept any tax revenues from Israel.
- *The Wall Street Journal* [reported](#) on February 18 that the Biden administration seeks an influx of funds to the PA as the governing body warns that it might exhaust its funds as early as late February.
 - » The administration reportedly seeks to bolster the PA in ways that do not run afoul of U.S. legislation that forbids funding the PA. The administration is also reportedly urging U.S. allies to increase financial support for the PA.
- On February 17, Qatar’s Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani [said](#) at the Munich Security Conference in Germany that “I believe that we can see a deal happening very soon ... yet the pattern in the last few days is not really very promising.”

- » Al-Thani stated that “time is not in our favor,” a reference to the imminent start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan on March 10.
- » Al-Thani noted that he believes a ceasefire should not be conditioned on the release of hostages, stating, “this is the dilemma that we’ve been in and unfortunately that’s been misused by a lot of countries—that in order to get a ceasefire, it’s conditional to have the hostage deal. It shouldn’t be conditioned.”
- On February 16, Hamas reportedly shot and [killed](#) a Palestinian teenager trying to steal humanitarian aid on the Gazan side of Rafah Crossing along the Gazan-Egyptian border. The shooting reportedly caused a riot in which parts of the border crossing were set on fire and border officials were attacked by the victim’s family members.
- On February 16, the IDF [found](#) medications with the names of hostages written on them at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis. The medications were [sent](#) in November as part of a private initiative by the families of the hostages that did not involve the State of Israel. It is unclear whether the medications ever reached the hostages.
- On February 16, U.S. Special Envoy for Middle East Humanitarian Issues David Satterfield [said](#) that IDF troops killed a Palestinian police contingent that was protecting a humanitarian aid convoy earlier this month in the southern city of Rafah. He noted that Palestinian police have since refused to protect aid convoys, hampering shipments.
 - » Satterfield stated that “with the departure of police escorts, it has been virtually impossible for the UN or anyone else, Jordan, the UAE, or any other implementer to safely move assistance in Gaza because of criminal elements.”
 - » Elaborating on the incident, Satterfield said, “the IDF, 10 days, two weeks ago, did indeed strike at seven, eight, or nine police officials, including a commander whose units had been involved in providing escorts.”
 - » Satterfield noted that the police “certainly include Hamas elements. They also include individuals who don’t have a direct affiliation with Hamas who are there as part of the Palestinian Authority’s remnant presence and security.”
 - » Satterfield further stated that such escorts were needed due to repeated attacks on aid convoys, first by “desperate” Palestinian civilians and “then by criminal elements.” He also noted the rise of black markets for aid across Gaza.

Post-War Planning

- On February 17, Israel’s President Isaac Herzog [said](#) while meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken at the Munich Security Conference that Blinken’s remarks referencing potential Israeli normalization with Saudi Arabia were “very interesting” and “need to be studied in depth,” but that “first and foremost, Israel’s security must be preserved, and for this, we have to complete the work of undermining and eradicating the basic infrastructure of Hamas.”

Casualties and Hostages

- Over 1,200 people were [killed](#) in Israel, and 13,000 Israelis have been [injured](#) in the war.
 - » 575 Israeli soldiers have been [killed](#).
 - 237 IDF soldiers have been [killed](#) during ground combat in Gaza so far.

- The IDF [announced](#) the deaths of Staff Sgt. Simon Shlomov, 20, from Kiryat Bialik; and [Staff Sgt. Maoz Morell](#), 22, from Talmon.
- » On February 18, the IDF [announced](#) that an officer in Israel's Border Police, First Sgt. Or Ohad, 33, from Hadera, was shot dead on Route 6 in southern Israel while traveling to work.
- » On February 17, the IDF [announced](#) the death of a reservist soldier, Sgt. First Class (res.) Ori Yaish, 27, from Modi'in, in the February 16 terrorist attack on the Re'em junction in southern Israel.
- » 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, 29,092 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza, and 69,028 have been injured during the war.
 - » On October 25, 2023, 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."
 - » The IDF [said](#) on February 19 that it has killed approximately 12,000 Hamas operatives over the course of the war.
- According to the Palestinian Authority-run Palestinian Ministry of Health, 393 people have been [killed](#), and an additional 4,511 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, [three](#) have been rescued by the IDF, [seven](#) have been [found](#) dead, three have been [mistakenly](#) killed by the IDF, and one was [killed](#) during an IDF attempt to rescue him.
 - » 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.
- Israel has said that terrorists in Gaza currently [hold](#) 134 hostages, and according to IDF spokesman Rear Adm Daniel Hagari, the IDF has [notified](#) the families of 31 of the 136 hostages that their loved ones died, including two who were abducted prior to October 7.
 - » 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.

- According to a February 19 Israeli media report, Gazans have been [receiving](#) text messages in recent days, ostensibly from Israel, offering money in exchange for information regarding the whereabouts of hostages.
 - » The texts reportedly include such messages as, “are you interested in a better future for your family, and in a handsome financial reward? Do you have information about the hostages or who is holding them? Don’t hesitate to get in touch with us at the following number.”
 - » The texts also reportedly include links with images of hostages and links with multiple channels through which to contact the sender.
- On February 19, IDF spokesperson Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari revealed that the IDF has uncovered [footage](#) of the kidnapped Bibas family, who were kidnapped from the southern Israeli town of Nir Oz, in the southern Gazan city of Khan Younis on October 7.
 - » The video shows hostages Shiri Bibas and her son, 4-year-old Ariel. In the footage, which was uncovered by IDF troops in Khan Younis in recent weeks, Shiri can also be seen holding what is believed to be her baby son, Kfir.
 - » Hagari said in a press release, “the footage shows the terrorists wrapping Shiri and her babies in a sheet, trying to hide them ... they were forced into a car and taken somewhere else. From the information available to us, we are concerned for the well-being of Shiri, Ariel, and Kfir.”
 - » Hagari added, “those who have the audacity to question our need to operate in Gaza, but don’t have the basic decency and humanity to demand that Hamas release our hostages first of all, they all should take a good look at this terrified mother, Shiri, clutching her babies.”

Iranian Involvement and Response

- On February 20, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations and the private security firm Ambrey reported a Houthi [attack](#) by the Iran-backed Houthis against a ship in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait near Djibouti.
- Overnight from February 19 to February 20, the Houthis [launched](#) two drones over the Red Sea. French multi-mission frigates later detected and destroyed the drones.
- On February 19, the Houthis claimed to have [shot down](#) a U.S. drone off the coast of Yemen. U.S. officials confirmed that a U.S. MQ-9 Reaper drone fell out of the sky but were still investigating the cause.
- On February 18 between 9:30 p.m. and 10:45 p.m. local time, the Houthis [launched](#) two anti-ship ballistic missiles toward the MV *Rubymar*, a Belize-flagged and U.K.-owned bulk carrier, in the Red Sea. One of the missiles struck and damaged the ship, forcing the crew to [evacuate](#).
- According to [reports](#) on February 18, Iran’s Quds Force Commander Ismail Qaani visited Iraq on January 29, less than 48 hours after an Iran-backed attack killed three U.S. service members at the Tower 22 military outpost in Jordan. Qaani reportedly urged Tehran’s proxy militias to lie low to avoid strikes against their commanders, infrastructure, or direct strikes against Iranian targets.
 - » Qaani’s trip was reportedly quick and he did not leave the airport for security reasons.

- Between 1:15 p.m. local time on February 16 and 1 a.m. on February 17, the Houthis [launched](#) four anti-ship ballistic missiles over the Red Sea. Three of the missiles targeted the MT *Pollux*, a Panamanian-flagged, Denmark-owned, Panamanian-registered commercial vessel.

U.S. and International Response

- On February 20, the United States [vetoed](#) an Algerian-introduced resolution during a UNSC vote calling for an immediate ceasefire.
 - » U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield [said](#) following the veto that “proceeding with a vote today was wishful and irresponsible ... we cannot support a resolution that would put sensitive negotiations in jeopardy.”
 - » Reuters [reported](#) on February 19 that it viewed a U.S.-authored rival draft resolution to the resolution introduced by Algeria, which reportedly [conveys](#) the UNSC’s “support for a temporary ceasefire in Gaza as soon as practicable.”
 - The U.S. draft also reportedly includes a line that the UNSC “determines that under current circumstances a major ground offensive into Rafah would result in further harm to civilians and their further displacement including potentially into neighboring countries.”
 - According to the report, the U.S. draft includes a sentence stating that a major ground offensive into Rafah “would have serious implications for regional peace and security, and therefore underscores that such a major ground offensive should not proceed under current circumstances.”
- On February 19, Senators Chris Coons (D-DE) and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) traveled to Israel and [met](#) with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.
- Speaking at the Conference of Presidents’ annual mission in Jerusalem on February 18, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Jack Lew [refuted](#) reports that the Biden administration is considering recognizing a Palestinian state unilaterally and noted that “we have never said there should be a unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state.”
 - » Instead, he called for an “over-the-horizon process that includes a vision for a demilitarized Palestinian state.” Lew added, “now is a moment in time when there is a real possibility that by engaging in normalization and negotiations with Saudi Arabia,” along with reforms to the PA, “there can be a demilitarized Palestinian state. But Israel will have to make that choice.”
 - » Lew explained, “any solution must ensure the safety and security of Israel” and “there can not be a militarized Palestinian state ... The fact that we have put a bright light on children suffering in Gaza is not an indication that the US is not behind Israel.”
- After the Israeli cabinet [unanimously approved](#) a declaration stating that “Israel categorically rejects international diktats around a permanent settlement with the Palestinians,” and that “a settlement, if it is achieved, will come about only through direct negotiations between the sides, with no preconditions,” a U.S. State Department spokesperson [told](#) *The Times of Israel* on February 18 that the “best way to achieve an enduring end to the crisis in Gaza that provides lasting peace and security, for Israelis and Palestinians alike, is our strong commitment to the creation of a Palestinian state ... As such, the United States continues to support the two-state solution and to oppose policies that endanger its viability or contradict our mutual interests and values.”

- According to a February 17 [Wall Street Journal report](#), the United States is preparing to send Israel a new arms shipment containing roughly a thousand each of MK-82 bombs, KMU-572 Joint Direct Attack Munitions that add precision guidance to bombs, and FMU-139 bomb fuses worth tens of millions of dollars. The shipment is still undergoing review and could still change.
 - » An assessment of the arms transfer by the U.S. embassy in Israel noted that the Israeli government requested the “rapid acquisition of these items for the defense of Israel against continued and emerging regional threats.”
 - » The assessment further asserted that there were no potential human rights concerns because “Israel takes effective action to prevent gross violations of human rights and to hold security forces responsible that violate those rights. In the past, Israel has been a transparent partner in U.S. investigations into allegations of defense article misuse.”
- On February 17, the Council of Bishops of the American Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), a leading Black church in the United States, [released](#) a statement accusing Israel of “mass genocide.”
 - » The statement also says Israel has “trapped 1.6 million desperate Palestinians in the southern Gaza city called Rafah. Most of them are women and children. They have denied them access to food, water, shelter, and health care. After this torture, they plan to murder them.”
- On February 17 between 3:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. local time, the United States [struck](#) three Houthi anti-ship cruise missiles, one unmanned underwater vessel (UUV), and one unmanned surface vessel (USV) in Yemen. This was the first observed case of the Houthis using a UUV since it began targeting ships in October 2023.
- On February 16, the U.S. Department of the Treasury [said](#) in a statement that the Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) sanctions announced last month on the Houthis would take effect that day.
- On February 16, the White House released a [statement](#) from a meeting between Vice President Kamala Harris and Israel’s President Isaac Herzog at the Munich Security Conference. The statement noted that Harris “emphasized the importance of protecting civilians, increasing humanitarian assistance and ensuring proper deconfliction mechanisms to ensure that aid can reach those in need inside Gaza.”
 - » The two leaders also reportedly discussed post-war Gaza, and the statement added “that a military operation in Rafah should not proceed without a credible and executable plan for ensuring the safety of and support for the more than one million people sheltering there.”
- On February 16, U.S. Special Envoy for Middle East Humanitarian Issues David Satterfield [said](#) that Israel has not provided “specific evidence of [Hamas] diversion or theft of assistance” to Gaza but that Hamas “[shapes] where and to whom assistance goes” through third parties.
- On February 16, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Jack Lew [condemned](#) the Palestinian terror attack at Re’em Junction that killed two people and injured four more, saying, “I am appalled by today’s terror attack that resulted in the deaths of two individuals and critical injuries of others. I offer my sincere condolences to the families affected by this tragedy. Such senseless terrorism is absolutely abhorrent.”

- On February 20, French shipping and transport company CMA CGM released a [statement](#) that “in coordination with French naval forces, the CMA CGM Jules Verne transited the Red Sea without incident, escorted by the frigate Alsace.”
- On February 17, the foreign ministers from the G7 nations, which include the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan, met at the Munich Security Conference and released a [statement](#) that “called for urgent action to address the catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Gaza, particularly the plight of 1.5 million civilians sheltering in Rafah and they expressed deep concern for the potentially devastating consequences on the civilian population of Israel’s further full-scale military operation in that area.”
- On February 16, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) [rejected](#) South Africa’s February 13 “urgent request” to deliberate over whether Israel’s looming operation in Rafah violates the court’s earlier provisional measures.
 - » The court argued that the situation “demands immediate and effective implementation of the provisional measures indicated by the Court in its Order of 26 January 2024, which are applicable throughout the Gaza Strip, including in Rafah, and does not demand the indication of additional provisional measures.”
 - » The court also said that Israel “remains bound to fully comply with its obligations under the Genocide Convention and with the said Order, including by ensuring the safety and security of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.”
 - » On February 17, Israel’s Foreign Ministry [said](#) in a statement, “South Africa’s failed attempt to undermine Israel’s right to defend itself and its citizens from the Hamas terrorist organization provides further proof that its claims are baseless and unsubstantiated,” and argued that South Africa is “serving as the legal arm of Hamas” while “working to advance the interests of this terrorist organization.”
 - The statement noted further, “Israel is acting and will continue to act based on its right to protect its citizens and to release the hostages, while remaining committed to upholding international law, facilitating the transfer of humanitarian aid, and making every effort to prevent harm to uninvolved civilians.”
- On February 16, President Biden [told](#) reporters, “I’ve made the case, and I feel very strongly about it, that there has to be a temporary ceasefire to get the hostages out, and that is underway. I’m still hopeful that can be done ... In the meantime, I don’t anticipate, I’m hoping that the Israelis will not make any massive land invasion ... It is my expectation that’s not going to happen.”
 - » Biden added, “there has to be a ceasefire temporarily to get those hostages out. We’re in a situation where there are American hostages ... It’s not just Israelis.”
- On February 16 between 1:40 p.m. and 6:45 p.m. local time, the United States [struck](#) one Houthi anti-ship cruise missile and one unmanned surface vessel (USV) in Yemen.
- On February 19, Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah al-Sissi claimed that [revenues](#) from the Suez Canal have dropped 40-50% this year because of Houthi attacks against ships in the Red Sea.
- On February 19, the ICJ began six days of [hearings](#) over the United Nations General Assembly’s request for an advisory opinion about Israel’s 56-year control over the West Bank.

- » Prime Minister Netanyahu’s office released a [statement](#) that “the hearing in The Hague is part of a Palestinian attempt to dictate the results of a diplomatic settlement without any negotiations ... We will continue to fight this attempt, and the government and the Knesset are unified in rejecting his invalid trend.”
- On February 18, Egypt’s Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry [claimed](#) at the Munich Security Conference that “it is not our intention to provide any safe areas or facilities, but necessarily if this was a case we will deal with the humanity that is necessary.”
- On February 18, U.A.E. Ambassador to the U.S. Yousef al-Otaiba [argued](#) that an Israeli operation in Rafah “will displace millions” and reiterated the U.A.E.’s support for an “immediate ceasefire in Gaza.”
- On February 18, Brazil’s President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva [told](#) reporters at the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa that “what’s happening in the Gaza Strip isn’t a war, it’s a genocide ... It’s not a war of soldiers against soldiers. It’s a war between a highly prepared army and women and children ... What’s happening in the Gaza Strip with the Palestinian people hasn’t happened at any other moment in history. Actually, it has happened: when Hitler decided to kill the Jews.”
 - » Later that day, Prime Minister Netanyahu [responded](#), “the words of the president of Brazil are shameful and alarming ... This is about trivializing the Holocaust and trying to harm the Jewish people and Israel’s right to defend itself ... Comparing Israel to the Nazi Holocaust and Hitler is crossing a red line.”
 - » Israel’s Foreign Minister Israel Katz [argued](#) Lula’s comments were “a serious antisemitic attack. In my name and the name of the citizens of Israel—tell President Lula that he is persona non grata in Israel until he takes it back.”
- On February 17, Moussa Faki, the chair of the African Union Commission, [claimed](#) Israel’s operations in Gaza were the “most flagrant” violations of international law and accused Israel of having “exterminated” Palestinians in Gaza.

Rising Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Protests, and Attacks

- On February 19, *The Times of Israel* [reported](#) that 41-year-old Jeffrey Stevens, a freelance reporter in Fort Wayne, Indiana, is facing up to five years in prison for threatening to “kill every Jew” in the city and “shoot every pro-Israel US government official” in social media posts and messages he sent to the CIA and local police department.
- On February 19, the Director General of *BBC News* Tim Davie [sent](#) an email to staffers expressing regret over the antisemitic behavior of his staff. He wrote, “as many of you may have seen, sadly in recent weeks we have been alerted to some antisemitic behavior by people who worked with us. I want to be clear that there can be no place at the BBC for racist abuse of any kind, whether towards our Jewish colleagues or indeed colleagues from any background or belief. Any form of antisemitism, Islamophobia or racist abuse is abhorrent, and we will always act whenever it occurs. We must play our role to build understanding and tolerance.”
- On February 19, Israeli settlers [rioted](#) in the West Bank village of Burqa, following a Palestinian terror attack earlier that day that [injured](#) a 25-year-old Israeli man near the illegal outpost of Homesh. The IDF said that it is looking into reported acts of vandalism and arson in Burqa.

- On February 17, several thousand people [marched](#) against Israel in London. London's Metropolitan Police said 12 people were arrested, including two who had displayed antisemitic signs and others who violently assaulted police officers.
- On February 17, around 3,000 people, including six members of Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's cabinet, [took part](#) in a pro-Palestinian protest in Madrid.
- On February 16, the U.S. House of Representatives Education and the Workforce Committee [subpoenaed](#) Harvard University for failing to produce documents related to its investigation of antisemitism on campus.

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