



Ari Cicurel  
*Assistant Director of Foreign Policy*

Yoni Tobin  
*Policy Analyst*

Zachary Schildcrout  
*Policy Analyst*

Anna Schaftef  
*Programs and Outreach Associate*

# Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update February 23, 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. JINSA will release the Swords of Iron Update on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. An update with the latest information and analysis about the war is below.

## Analysis

- During a February 22 JINSA [webinar](#) about the latest developments in the Israel-Hamas war, JINSA Distinguished Fellow IDF MG (ret.) Yaakov Amidror argued that implementing new leadership in Gaza “is a decision that the Palestinians should take ... I think that at the end, it is a decision that should be taken by the local people. For that ... the best help we can provide is to smash Hamas.”
  - » Addressing Israel's operations against Hezbollah, Amidror said, “we succeeded to erode part of [Hezbollah's] capabilities ... look at two numbers. The number that Israel lost taking [all] of the Gaza Strip ... is the number of terrorists that Hezbollah lost in a war in which it didn't achieve anything. The only achievement of Hezbollah is the fact that Israel evacuated 80,000 people from the north, and they will not go back unless they feel security. To achieve security, we might have to go to war.”

## Last 48 Hours

### *Attacks Against Israel*

- At least 15,000 rockets, mortars, drones, and other projectiles have been fired at Israel from all fronts combined during the war, according to JINSA data.
- On February 21, the Israeli police [said](#) that IDF Arabic-language spokesperson Lt. Col. Avichay Adraee was the original intended target of attackers who carried out a car-ramming attack in Ra'anana that killed one and injured 17. West Bank residents Ahmed Zidat, 25, and Mahmoud Zidad, 44, saw Adraee in a restaurant and looked for him while armed with a knife, according to police.

### **Gaza**

- Sirens sounded in [Kibbutz Mefalsim and Nir Am](#).

## Lebanon

- Sirens sounded in [Metzuba, Shlomi, Hanita, Ya'ara, Metula, Zar'it, Snir, Mas'ade, and Ein Qiniyye](#). Hostile aircraft sirens [sounded](#) in Kiryat Shmona, Metula, and Kfar Yuval.
- On February 23, Hezbollah [said](#) that it launched two drones toward the Upper Galilee Regional Council headquarters in the northern Israeli city of Kiryat Shmona, one of which the IDF said that it shot down. The attack was purportedly in response to Israel's attacks against "southern [Lebanese] villages and civilian homes." The drones did not strike the headquarters.
- On February 22, terrorists in Lebanon [fired](#) several rockets at the northern Israeli towns of Metula and Zar'it. No injuries were reported.
- On February 22, terrorists in Lebanon [fired](#) two anti-tank missiles toward the northern Israeli towns of Kiryat Shmona and Kfar Yuval. One missile [impacted](#) a home in Kfar Yuval, setting it ablaze, while the other struck unpopulated areas in Kiryat Shmona. No injuries were reported.
- On February 22, the IDF [said](#) that two "suspicious aerial targets" from Lebanon entered Israeli airspace near Mount Dov, prompting interceptor fire, although the IDF is unsure if the interceptors successfully shot down the objects.
- On February 22, the IDF [said](#) that terrorists in Lebanon fired at least nine rockets toward the northern Golan Heights, several of which the Iron Dome shot down.
- On February 21, witnesses [reported](#) seeing the Iron Dome interdict projectiles from Lebanon over Israel's Western Galilee region.

## Syria

- On February 21, a member of the Syrian ruling party, Muta'a A-Sarhan, was [detained](#) for questioning by Israeli forces after he entered Israeli territory.

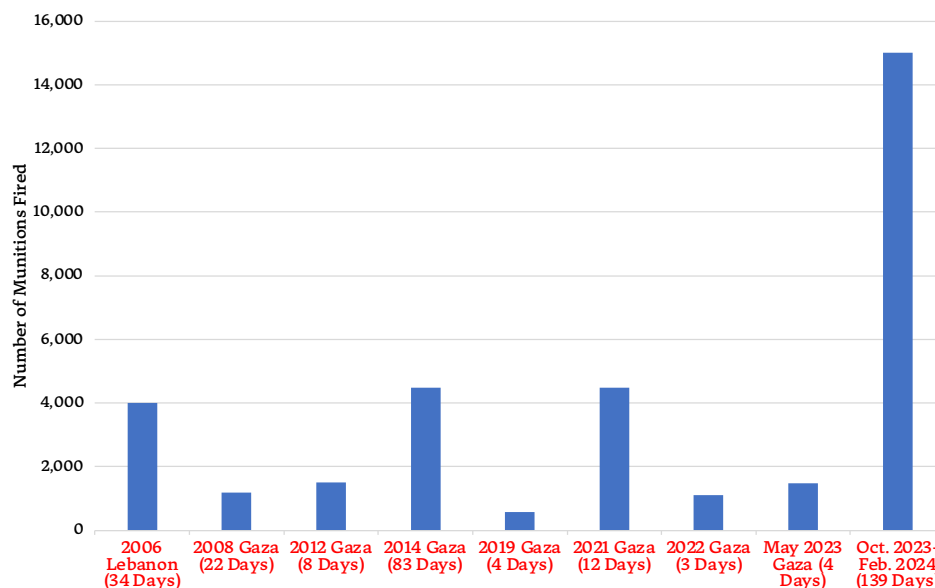
## West Bank

- On February 22, three Palestinian terrorists carried out a shooting [attack](#) with automatic weapons against Israeli drivers held up in traffic near the az-Za'ayem checkpoint between Jerusalem and Ma'ale Adumim in the West Bank, killing one, a 26-year-old man named Matan Elmaliah, and injuring 11.

## Red Sea

- On February 22, Houthi spokesperson Yahya Saree [said](#) during a speech that the group launched ballistic missiles and drones toward the southern Israeli city of Eilat. The IDF [said](#) that day that its Arrow air defense system shot down a ballistic missile fired from Yemen heading toward Eilat.

## Projectiles Fired Against Israel During Major Conflicts



### IDF Operations

#### Gaza

- On February 23, the IDF [reported](#) continued combat against Hamas in Khan Younis and in Gaza City's Zeitoun neighborhood. The military eliminated Hamas gunmen, struck combatants firing rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) toward IDF troops, confiscated weapons, and uncovered tunnel shafts.
- According to a February 22 report from Israel's *Ynet News*, Israel's political leadership [rejected](#) at least six proposed attempts by Shin Bet to assassinate Hamas's leader in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, since he was released from Israeli prison in 2011 in a deal to exchange Israeli hostages.
  - » The report stated that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied five separate Shin Bet requests to assassinate Sinwar over fears that killing Sinwar would spark a war with Hamas.
  - » According to the report, former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett also considered a Shin Bet proposal to assassinate Sinwar after a May 2022 terror attack in the central Israeli town of Elad. The assassination proposal was reportedly opposed by both then-Defense Minister Benny Gantz and the IDF's leadership and was ultimately rejected.
- The IDF [continued](#) its large-scale operation in the Gaza City neighborhood of Zeitoun on February 22, targeting at least 10 Hamas sites. Troops from the 401st Armored Brigade killed over 20 operatives in Zeitoun and eliminated a number of Hamas targets.
- IDF troops [conducted](#) operations in Khan Younis targeting Hamas sites across the city on February 22.
  - » Soldiers from the IDF's 7th Armored Brigade killed at least 15 Hamas operatives and troops from the Givati Brigade ambushed a Hamas cell, killing a number of operatives.

- » In a series of raids, the IDF's Commando Brigade located a weapons cache and intelligence materials.
- » The Israeli Navy struck a number of naval vessels belonging to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.
- According to [reports](#) from February 22, during combat in Gaza, the IDF arrested eight employees of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) with alleged links to Hamas. The suspects were transferred to Israel pending additional investigations.
- On February 22, Hamas-linked Palestinian media sources [reported](#) overnight Israeli strikes in Rafah and other sites in the Gaza Strip.
- On February 21, the IDF [said](#) that it eliminated a Hamas member in an airstrike who launched mortars into southern Israel from Jabaliya in northern Gaza soon after the attack.
- On February 21, the IDF [said](#) a Hamas tunnel network that it discovered in Khan Younis, which included living areas, water supplies, and electricity, "is part of a strategic and branching underground network located below Khan Younis, which was used by senior Hamas officials and the [terror group's] Khan Younis Brigade for hiding and combat." Yahalom combat engineers and 98th Division troops entered the tunnel network and killed Hamas gunmen in combat.

### Lebanon

- On February 22, the IDF [said](#) that it launched airstrikes against Hezbollah targets in Maroun al-Ras, Kafr Kila, and Khaim in southern Lebanon. The IDF also said that it fired artillery toward the source of an earlier missile attack that day against the northern Israeli towns of Kiryat Shmona and Kfar Yuval, and IDF tanks fired toward a target in Jebbayn in Lebanon.
- On February 22, the IDF [eliminated](#) three Hezbollah operational command centers in southern Lebanon in airstrikes and also [carried out](#) an airstrike against a building in which Hezbollah operatives were spotted in the southern Lebanese town of Blida.
  - » That day, the IDF [conducted](#) artillery shelling against additional Hezbollah targets in the southern Lebanese towns of Aalma El Chaeb and Dhayra.
- Reuters [reported](#) on February 21, citing two security sources and a medical source in Lebanon, that an IDF airstrike on February 20 in southern Lebanon killed a woman and a six-year-old girl.
  - » According to the report, the two were killed near the southern Lebanese village of Majdal Zoun. The IDF said in a statement that it struck "a Hezbollah operational command center in the area of Mansouri" near Majdal Zoun.
  - » The IDF stated, "as a result of the presence of Hezbollah weapons and ammunition within the command center, a large explosion occurred which most likely caused damage to the surrounding area," adding that the incident was "under review."
- On February 21, the IDF [said](#) that it struck Hezbollah targets, including a military site in Zibqin, an observation post in Khaim, and other targets with fighter jets. The military also said that it hit Hezbollah targets in Ramyeh and fired artillery toward a target near Aitaroun to neutralize a threat.

### West Bank

- On February 23, the IDF and Israel's internal security agency, the Shin Bet, [killed](#) a Palestinian Islamic Jihad operative in a drone strike in Jenin as he was on his way to

perpetrate a terrorist attack. The terrorist, Yasser Hanoun, was responsible for at least three shooting attacks in recent months.

### *Humanitarian Efforts*

- On February 23, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh left Egypt after finishing [talks](#) with Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel about a hostage deal and ways to end the war.
- On February 23, an Israeli [delegation](#) headed by Mossad chief David Barnea and Shin Bet head Ronen Bar traveled to Paris, France, for high-level hostage talks.
- On February 23, Israel reportedly [agreed](#) to allow a U.S. shipment of flour for Gazan civilians to move forward after it had been stalled at Israel's Ashdod Port for one month, after Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich blocked its transfer to UNRWA. Under a new reported arrangement, the UN World Food Programme will instead now transport the flour, which is enough to feed 1.5 million Gazans for five months.
- An Israeli official told *The Times of Israel* on February 21 that hard [evidence](#) that Hamas actually delivered medication to hostages would be an "important indicator" of likely success in ongoing hostage negotiations.
- On February 21, Britain and Jordan [airdropped](#) four tons of aid, including medicines, fuel, and food to Tal Al-Hawa Hospital in the northern Gaza Strip.
- On February 21, a French foreign ministry spokesperson [confirmed](#) Qatar's February 20 announcement that medications bound for hostages in Gaza, as per an earlier agreement finalized by Qatar and France, did reach 45 hostages.
  - » The Hostages and Missing Families Forum praised France's President Emmanuel Macron's "meaningful initiative and involvement in facilitating this process through Qatar" and said, "we anxiously followed this effort and are grateful for the compassion and humanity displayed by President Macron on this issue. France is a true friend to the families of the hostages, and we will not forget their support in this matter."
- On February 21, Israel's minister without portfolio Benny Gantz [said](#) to reporters that "initial signs ... indicate the possibility of moving forward" on a "new framework" for a hostage deal, and "we will not miss any opportunity to bring the [hostages] home." He also stressed Israel's willingness to begin an offensive in Rafah during Ramadan if no deal is finalized by March 10 around the beginning of the holiday.
- According to [reports](#) from February 21, Israel blames a large drop in the flow of aid to the Gaza Strip since February 9 on the UN, while the UN blames the lack of security in the territory. According to the UN, the number of trucks delivering aid to Gaza per day fell from its prewar average of 200 to an average of 57 from February 9-20. Aid shipments through the Rafah crossing on the Gaza-Egypt border have almost stopped completely.

### *Post-War Planning*

- On February 22, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [presented](#) his plan for postwar Gaza to the Israeli security cabinet. The plan calls for maintaining Israeli security control over all land between Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea, and it opposes "unilateral recognition" of a Palestinian state while arguing that an agreement with the Palestinians can only occur through bilateral negotiations.

- » The plan also says that demilitarization and deradicalization of Gaza are medium-term goals and that reconstruction of Gaza should be contingent on demilitarization.
- » The prime minister's plan endorses an Israeli presence on Gaza's border with Egypt and argues that Israel should work with the United States and Egypt to halt weapons smuggling attempts through the Egypt-Gaza border.
- » In addition, the plan says that local Gazans "who are not affiliated with terrorist countries or groups and are not financially supported by them" should replace Hamas's rule and that UNRWA should be shut down and replaced with other international organizations that can provide aid.
- » The Palestinian Authority's Foreign Ministry [released](#) a statement on February 22 rejecting Netanyahu's plan and describing it as "a plan to prolong the genocide against our people and an attempt to gain more time to implement the displacement plans."
  - The statement also claimed Netanyahu's plan was "a blatant maneuver to intercept and thwart American and international efforts made to link stopping the war and releasing prisoners and hostages to resolving the conflict and embodying the Palestinian state on the ground."
- On February 22, Israeli officials [confirmed](#) earlier reports that the IDF is advancing plans to run a [pilot program](#) for a local Palestinian governing entity that would replace Hamas governance in the Zeitoun neighborhood of Gaza City. The program's [goal](#) is for the local entity to be responsible for distributing humanitarian aid in Zeitoun.
  - » According to a February 21 [report](#) from Israel's *Channel 12*, local residents met with Israeli officials and promoted the idea.
  - » The report stated that under the plan, the local entity may also ultimately be tasked with a gradual implementation of an educational system that does not involve incitement against Jews and Israel.
  - » In a February 21 speech, Minister without portfolio Benny Gantz briefly [referred](#) to the creation of an international pilot program under which moderate Arab countries would establish a civil authority institution to manage aid in the Gaza Strip following the war.
    - Gantz [stated](#), "we are examining a number of options so that aid to Gaza will be delivered through an international administration of moderate Arab countries with the support of the U.S. We are currently promoting pilot programs of the transfer."
    - Gantz [said](#) the program would likely involve "local Palestinians supported by some sort of regional committee or arrangement."
- On February 22, the IDF [said](#) that Israelis could safely return to communities greater than four kilometers, or 2.5 miles, from Gaza and certain towns less than four kilometers away: Zikim, Karmia, Yad Mordechai, Erez, Or Haner, Ibim, Sderot, Nir Am, Gevim, Mefalsim, Sa'ad, Alumim, Reim, Magen, Nir Yitzhak, Shlomit, Naveh, and Bnei Netzarim. The IDF noted that there is still a risk of rocket fire targeting the towns.
  - » The IDF [stated](#) that the return plan "is still being formulated" by its Homeland Command commander and local political leaders, and that "the decision regarding the timing of the return of the residents of each community will be made in an individual manner and per the current situation."
- On February 21, 99 of 120 members of Israel's Knesset voted to [reject](#) "international diktats regarding a permanent settlement with the Palestinians" and "unilateral recognition of a

Palestinian state.” The resolution also stated, “a settlement, if it is to be reached, will come about solely through direct negotiations between the parties, without preconditions.”

### *Casualties and Hostages*

- Over 1,200 people were [killed](#) in Israel, and 13,000 Israelis have been [injured](#) in the war.
  - » 576 Israeli soldiers have been [killed](#).
    - 237 IDF soldiers have been [killed](#) in combat in Gaza so far.
    - At least 23 U.S. citizens have [died](#) while serving in the Israeli military since the start of the ground operation in Gaza, including 21 killed fighting in Gaza.
  - » 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, at least 29,514 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza, and 69,616 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, over 400 people have been [killed](#), and an additional 4,440 have been wounded in the West Bank since the start of the war.
- 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 says 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 have 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.

#### *Iranian Involvement and Response*

- On February 22, the Iran-backed Houthis released a [statement](#) that U.S.-, Israeli-, and U.K.-flagged vessels and ships that are owned by U.S., Israeli, or U.K. individuals or entities are banned from the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Arabian Sea.
- On February 22, between 4:30 a.m. and 5:30 a.m. local time, the Houthis [launched](#) six one-way attack drones over the Red Sea. U.S. aircraft and a coalition warship later shot down the drones in self-defense.
- On February 22, the Houthis also [launched](#) two drones over the Red Sea that a French frigate intercepted as part of the European Union’s “Aspides” mission to protect Red Sea shipping.
- On February 21 between 8:30 a.m. and 9:45 a.m. local time, the Houthis [fired](#) two anti-ship ballistic missiles in the Gulf of Aden that hit the MV *Islander*, a Palau-flagged and U.K.-owned cargo carrier, causing one minor injury and damage to the ship.
- On February 21, the Houthis [launched](#) a one-way attack drone over the Red Sea. The United States shot down the drone in self-defense.

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

- On February 22, President Biden [posted](#) on X that “I won’t mince words. The overwhelming majority of Palestinians are not Hamas. And Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people. In fact, they’re also suffering as a result of Hamas’ terrorism. We need to be clear-eyed about that reality.”
- During a press briefing on February 22, Defense Department Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh [claimed](#) that the Pentagon has not yet seen a plan from Israel for how to protect civilians in Rafah and “we’re not asking to check their homework. What we’re asking them to do is to put forward a credible plan [to] protect the over one million innocent Palestinians that are there.”
- At a [press conference](#) after meeting with Brazil’s President Lula on February 22, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken responded to a question about Lula’s previous comments comparing Israeli operations in Gaza to the Holocaust. Blinken argued, “obviously the comparison of Gaza to the Holocaust we profoundly disagree. But that’s also something that friends do. We can have these disagreements, even profound disagreements, on one particular issue or I should say even an aspect of the issue and still continue all of the vital work that we’re doing together.”
- On February 21, the U.S. Justice Department unsealed an [indictment](#) against four foreign nationals who were brought to the United States after being detained by U.S. naval forces in the Arabian Sea in January for transporting suspected Iranian-made weapons. Two Navy SEALs [died](#) during the mission to interdict the weapons.
- On February 21 between 12:00 a.m. and 6:45 p.m. local time, the United States [struck](#) seven mobile Houthi anti-ship cruise missiles and one mobile anti-ship ballistic missile launcher that were prepared to target ships in the Red Sea.



- U.S. officials who spoke with *The Times of Israel* for a [news story](#) on February 21 denied earlier reports the United States is preparing to unilaterally recognize a Palestinian state.
  - » One official claimed, “we are not seriously discussing or considering any changes to the longstanding US policy that any recognition of a Palestinian state must come through direct negotiations between the parties rather than through unilateral recognition at the UN.”
  - » U.S. officials also clarified that the tougher U.S. approach with regard to the West Bank does not detract from its support of Israel in Gaza and that the U.S. government continues to oppose a permanent ceasefire. Instead, the United States has supported temporary ceasefires, which the U.S. officials said were not different in principle from the “humanitarian pauses” the Biden administration has been advocating for months.
- A February 21 [report](#) in *The Times of Israel* indicated the U.S. government is preparing a second round of sanctions against Israeli settlers for violence toward Palestinians. The report indicated that “higher-profile Israeli extremists would likely be sanctioned in the second round, though government officials would still not be targeted.”
- According to a report in Qatari-owned *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed* news outlet on February 22, Egypt has taken [measures](#) and conducted training to ensure its forces along the border with Gaza avoid attacking Israeli forces.
  - » These measures include not allowing forces stationed at the border to use their cell phones so they cannot receive news of what is happening in Gaza, over fears that news stories from Gaza could incite them to commit a terrorist attack.
  - » Egyptian security guards at the Nitzana border crossing will not be armed, and plainclothes officials will help prevent disturbances.
- A February 21 [report](#) in *The Guardian* indicated that the U.K. government may consider suspending arms exports to Israel if the latter pursues a ground offensive in Rafah.
- On February 21, Switzerland’s government advanced a bill to [ban](#) Hamas in response to the October 7 attack. The law is currently in a consultation phase and, if implemented, would last only five years.

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

- On February 22, Henri Goldstein, the head of Denmark’s Jewish community, [told](#) the Associated Press, “we have seen the biggest antisemitic wave in Denmark since 1943,” when the country was under Nazi occupation. He also [said](#) Jews in Denmark were advised not to wear Jewish symbols openly.
- On February 21, anti-Israel protesters [projected](#) “From the river to the sea” onto the side of Big Ben in London. This phrase is widely recognized to call for the violent destruction of the State of Israel and to replace it with a Palestinian state that spans from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.
- On February 21, reports indicated that Eurovision organizers have [pushed back](#) against the song that Israeli contestant Eden Golan had hoped to perform, “October Rain,” as too political. The song is believed to reference Hamas’s October 7 massacre.
- An anti-Hamas group, “Gaza’s Liberators,” [released](#) footage of a February 20 protest against the terror group by Gazans in Rafah, who chanted, “Sinwar, Haniyeh, the people are the victims,” and “bring down Hamas.”

## Recent and Relevant JINSA Products About Israel at War

- Webinar: [Gaza Update 2/22](#), with IDF MG (ret.) Yaakov Amidror and John Hannah, February 22, 2024
- Ari Cicurel, [Unnecessary U.S. Investigation into Israeli Operations](#), February 16, 2024
- Zac Schildcrout, [Urging Israeli Restraint Against Hamas Might Enable Group's Survival](#), February 14, 2024