Israel’s Operation Swords of Iron Update
March 13, 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

- The Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen have continued their escalation against ships in nearby waters, despite repeated U.S. strikes to destroy Houthi capabilities in Yemen. In recent days, U.S. partners have shot down Houthi drones more frequently as part of the European Union’s Aspides mission to protect Red Sea shipping.

- Hezbollah’s escalation of rocket salvos against Israel, including as many as 100 rockets fired on March 12, suggests that the terror group is especially sensitive to recent IDF strikes deep into Lebanon as opposed to the country’s south, which is where the bulk of the current fighting occurs.
  » Hezbollah’s March 12 attacks mark the largest daily number of projectiles that Lebanon-based terrorists have fired into Israel since October 7, according to JINSA data.
  » JINSA Policy Analyst Zac Schildcrout has argued that deterring further Hezbollah attacks “largely requires convincing Hezbollah that the United States will back Israel in, and possibly even enter, a full-scale war should one become necessary to restore security for Israel’s northern residents.”

- Reports that, if Israel initiates a ground operation in Rafah, President Biden is considering conditioning U.S. military assistance to Israel, restricting Israel’s use of U.S. weaponry, and ending U.S. diplomatic support for Israel at the United Nations further indicate the growing tensions between the Biden administration and Israeli government.

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 March 12, the Jerusalem police department published data showing that 12 terror plots have been foiled in the Jerusalem area since the start of 2024, and that a total of 38 such plots have been foiled in the Jerusalem region alone since October 7.

According to the released figures, 21 terror suspects have been arrested in the previous two weeks, of which six were indicted on charges. Since October 7, approximately 100 terror-related indictments have been filed in total.

On March 12, a grenade was found next to an apartment building in the Tel Aviv neighborhood of Bavli. The grenade was neutralized by authorities.

Lebanon

Sirens sounded in Shtula, Maalot Tarhisha, Hosen, Kiryat Shmona, and other areas in northern Israel.

On March 12, Hezbollah took credit for launching approximately 100 Katyusha rockets, purportedly toward two IDF bases in the Golan Heights. The terror group claimed that it was responding to Israeli strikes in Baalbek in Lebanon the prior night.

Reports emerged the morning of March 12 that the Iron Dome intercepted several rockets from Lebanon, triggering sirens in the northern Golan Heights and Galilee Panhandle. Soon afterward, the IDF said that Hezbollah launched approximately 70 rockets.

Later that morning, Hezbollah launched another salvo of roughly 30 rockets, and according to Hebrew-language reports, the projectiles landed in unpopulated areas.

West Bank

On March 13, after a 15-year-old Palestinian stabbed a Military Police soldier and a civilian security guard at a checkpoint close to Jerusalem, police said, “the terrorist was neutralized by an IDF soldier and a civilian security guard who fired at him, and he was later pronounced dead.”

According to a March 12 report from Israel’s Maariv outlet, a violent incident took place in East Jerusalem’s Shuafat refugee camp in which individuals set fires and threw Molotov cocktails and fireworks toward Israeli authorities. One perpetrator, a 13-year-old who fired fireworks, was shot by authorities and taken to the hospital, and later died.

On March 12, Israeli authorities located and seized a bag containing six pipe bombs in East Jerusalem.

On March 12, the IDF said that its “troops have launched a pursuit after the terrorist and are conducting searches in the area” after a Palestinian unsuccessfully tried to stab an Israeli near the West Bank’s Givat Ronen outpost.

On March 11, Israel’s Defense Minister Yoav Gallant told elite Duvdevan unit troops, “we must prepare for an increase in terror during Ramadan,” and “Iran is working to up the severity of attacks by smuggling in many [high-quality] weapons” into the West Bank.
IDF Operations

- In remarks to the AIPAC conference, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on March 12, “[I] deeply appreciate the support we have received from President Biden and the administration, and I hope it will continue. But let me be clear, Israel will win this war, no matter what.”
  
  » He also said, “to our friends in the international community, I say this: You cannot say you support Israel’s right to defend itself, and then oppose Israel when it exercises that right.”

  » He added, “you cannot say you support Israel’s goal of destroying Hamas, and then oppose Israel when it takes the actions necessary to achieve that goal,” and “you cannot say that you oppose Hamas’s strategy of using civilians as human shields, and then blame Israel for the civilian casualties that result from this Hamas cynical strategy.”

- According to reports from March 11, the IDF helped move approximately 70 orphans from the SOS Children’s Village in Gaza to Bethlehem in the West Bank at the German embassy’s request. The orphanage had ceased functioning, compelling the rescue operation. The Defense Ministry and the National Security Council jointly orchestrated the operation but did not gain approval from the security cabinet.

Gaza

- According to a March 13 report from Israel’s Channel 12, the IDF has yet to see signs that Hamas military wing deputy leader Marwain Issa, the third-highest-ranking member of Hamas, is alive after a March 10 strike targeting him in central Gaza. A report the previous day from Israel’s Maariv outlet stated that in Israel’s security establishment, there is growing belief that Issa was killed in the strike.
  
  » The Channel 12 report asserts that Issa has been out of touch with other Hamas members since the strike and that “there are no signs from him that indicate he is alive.”
» The March 10 airstrike, per the report, included the use of bunker-busting bombs and other heavy munitions.

» According to the March 12 report from Israel’s Maariv, the IDF targeted Issa as he briefly emerged from an underground compound to give orders to Hamas terror operatives.

- On March 11, Israel’s Defense Ministry released remarks from Yoav Gallant after he met with IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi and the army’s general staff. Gallant said, “there have been successes, including in recent days, and there will be more successes, the operations are persistent and headed in the right direction.” The Times of Israel noted that this could be a reference to the recent Israeli airstrike against Marwan Issa.

» During a March 11 press briefing, IDF Spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said that the IDF targeted Issa, and that “when we know for certain [if he was killed], we will update the public.”

» That day, The Times of Israel noted an Army Radio report that an Israeli strike against Issa targeted an area below the Nuseirat refugee camp where he allegedly hid. According to an Army Radio source, “the strike would not have gone ahead” if Israel believed that hostages were present in the area targeted.

- The IDF said on March 12 that in dozens of operations in the al-Qarara and Abasan areas near Khan Younis, the Bislamach Brigade killed over 100 gunmen using sniper and mortar fire, tank fire, and airstrikes.

- On March 12, the IDF said that it launched a strike targeting a terrorist in southern Gaza who fired mortars at Israel the previous day. The IDF also detailed its continuing operations against Hamas in the Hamad Town residential complex in Khan Younis and in central Gaza.

- On March 11, the IDF said that troops continue to comb the Hamad Town residential complex in Khan Younis to look for terrorist operatives and weapons. The military noted an incident during which it used a shoulder-fired missile to kill a gunman and subsequently treated a mother and two children who were in a nearby room.

**Lebanon**

- On March 13, Al Arabiya reported that an airstrike in southern Lebanon killed Hamas member Hadi Mustafa. The IDF said that day that it “eliminated a significant Hamas terrorist [Mustafa] in Lebanon who advanced terror attacks against Israeli and Jewish targets around the world” and that Mustafa worked under Samir Fendi, who worked closely with high-ranking Hamas member Saleh al-Aroui, whom the IDF killed in Beirut in early January.

  » That day, Lebanese security officials said that an Israeli drone strike on a car outside of the Palestinian camp of Rashidieh in southern Lebanon killed the two passengers inside. The report did not provide information on the identities of the passengers.

- On March 12, the IDF said it has struck more than 4,500 Hezbollah targets in Lebanon and Syria during the past five months, including 3,100 via ground operations and 1,200 via airstrikes, killing more than 300 operatives of the terror group.

- The IDF announced on March 12 that after Hezbollah fired roughly 100 rockets into Israel that day, the military launched airstrikes against Hezbollah sites in Lebanon’s central Baalbek region used “to store significant assets used to strengthen its weapons arsenal.” The IDF also said that earlier, it struck Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon, including a building in Khiam and other sites in Bint Jbeil.
» Earlier the same day, the IDF said that it conducted airstrikes in the Bekaa Valley area, nearby Baalbek, against facilities belonging to Hezbollah’s air defense unit in response to previous drone attacks against Israel.

» Lebanese media had reported that an IDF strike in the Baalbek region occurred near Saraain, approximately 80 kilometers north of the Israel-Lebanon border. Al-Akhbar, a Lebanese outlet linked to Hezbollah, had reported that the IDF strike in Bint Jbeil hit a house.

- On March 12, the IDF launched airstrikes against Hezbollah targets in the southern Lebanese towns of Ayta ash-Shab and Odaissheh and conducted artillery shelling against launching posts used to launch projectile attacks against Israel.

- The IDF said on March 12 that it carried out airstrikes targeting three rocket launchers used that morning to attack Israel with rocket salvos.

- On March 11, the IDF carried out airstrikes against Hezbollah targets in the southern Lebanese towns of Ayta ash-Shab and Naquora, and conducted artillery shelling in the area against additional Hezbollah targets.

Syria

- On March 12, the IDF conducted airstrikes against two Hezbollah military installations in Syria. In a statement, the IDF noted that it “holds the Syrian regime accountable for all activities which take place within its territory and will not allow for any attempted actions which could lead to the entrenchment of Hezbollah on the Syrian front.”

West Bank

- On March 12, the IDF arrested a wanted Palestinian Islamic Jihad member, Mahdi Fayyad, in Jenin. Fayyad is accused of shooting and throwing explosives at Israeli troops. The IDF also arrested two wanted Palestinians and seized an assault rifle in Jenin, seized four lathes used to manufacture weapons in the village of Urif, and detained another seven wanted Palestinians in other areas of the West Bank.

- On March 11, the IDF and Shin Bet said that a Palestinian who was “en route to Israeli territory to carry out a suicide attack in the immediate time-frame” was killed by troops from the elite Duvdevan unit in the West Bank.

Humanitarian Efforts

- On March 12, four U.S. Army vessels with roughly 100 soldiers set sail to deploy offshore of Gaza as part of the recently-announced U.S. initiative to build a temporary port on Gaza’s coast to enable greater aid flows into Gaza. It will take an estimated 30 days for the trip to be completed.

  » U.S. Army Brigadier General Brad Hinson told reporters that the port will comprise an offshore platform for transferring aid from larger to smaller vessels and a pier to bring the aid ashore.

  » Hinson stated, “once we get fully mission-capable, we will be able to push up to two million meals, or two million bottles of water, ashore each day.” According to Hinson, the port will be operational “at the 60-day mark.”

  » According to Hinson, unspecified other actors will help to anchor the pier, and a total of approximately 500 U.S. troops will take part in the operation.
On March 12, Israel’s Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) said that after Israel “thoroughly” inspected them, six trucks containing humanitarian aid from the UN World Food Program entered Gaza by way of a road bisecting the territory that the IDF constructed. COGAT specified that the shipments were “part of an experimental pilot in order to prevent Hamas from taking over the aid.”

On March 12, the first boat carrying aid to Gaza left from Larnaca, Cyprus, according to the World Central Kitchen. The ship plans to dock south of Gaza City at a pier built by the World Central Kitchen.

On March 11, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said that a large shipment of flour sent by the United States to Gaza has begun to “make its way into Gaza” after being held up by Israel for nearly two months.

» The shipment arrived at the Israeli port of Ashdod in January but was blocked from being transferred to Gaza by Israel’s Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich.

» The shipment reportedly contains enough flour to feed 1.5 million Gazans for up to five months and will be brought into Gaza by the UN World Food Program.

A *Times of Israel* report on March 11 indicated that the IDF is seeking the dismantlement of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) by discrediting the agency and working with other groups in Gaza, including the UN World Food Program, to deliver humanitarian aid to Palestinians.

**Post-War Planning**

According to Israeli press reports on March 12, Israel’s Defense Minister Yoav Gallant has suggested Majid Faraj as one of several possible candidates to run Gaza. Faraj is the head of the Palestinian Authority (PA) intelligence apparatus and a close confidant of PA President Mahmoud Abbas.

**Casualties and Hostages**

Over 1,200 people were killed in Israel, and 13,000 Israelis have been injured in the war.

» 590 Israeli soldiers have been killed.

» 249 IDF soldiers have been killed during ground combat in Gaza so far.

» As of March 5, 1,453 IDF soldiers have been injured during ground combat in Gaza so far, including 303 who have been severely injured.

» Numerous foreign nationals have been killed in the war, including at least 34 American nationals, 34 Thai nationals, 39 French nationals, 19 Russian nationals, 12 British nationals, 10 Nepalese nationals, 9 Argentinian nationals, 6 Canadian nationals, 4 Filipinos 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 31,272 people have been killed in Gaza, and 73,024 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.”

» Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on March 10 that Israel has killed approximately 13,000 Hamas operatives over the course of the war.

- According to the Palestinian Authority-run Palestinian Ministry of Health, at least 432 people have been killed, and at least 4,700 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 deceased hostage bodies.
  - Israeli officials have confirmed the deaths of at least 34 of the 134 hostages captured on October 7, as well as two additional hostages who were abducted prior to October 7.
  - Many of the hostages are foreign or dual nationals, including up to 5 American nationals, 6 German nationals, 13 Thai nationals, 4 Portuguese nationals, 3 British nationals, 2 Italian nationals, 4 Romanian nationals, and 2 Mexican nationals.
  - On March 12, the IDF announced that dual U.S.-Israel citizen and IDF soldier Itay Chen, who was previously thought to be alive and held hostage by Hamas in Gaza, had been killed during the terror group’s October 7 attack, and his body is being held in Gaza.
    - President Biden said that he was “devastated” to hear Chen was killed, saying, “today, as we join Itay’s parents, brothers, and family in grieving this tragic loss, we keep this reminder close to our hearts. I reaffirm my pledge to all the families of those still held hostage: we are with you. We will never stop working to bring your loved ones home.”

**Iranian Involvement and Response**

- On March 13, the Iran-backed Houthis launched two drones from Yemen over the Red Sea. A Greek military vessel shot at the drones to alter their flight path.
- On March 12, between 2:00 a.m. and 4:30 a.m. local time, the Houthis launched one ballistic missile from Yemen toward the USS Laboon in the Red Sea. The missile did not hit the ship, and there were no reported injuries or damage.
On March 12, the Houthis also launched two drones from Yemen that U.S. forces later intercepted over the Red Sea.

On March 12, the Houthis also launched two drones from Yemen that an Italian ship later shot down over the Red Sea.

On March 12, Iran, Russia, and China began a joint naval drill in the Gulf of Oman involving more than 20 ships. China deployed the guided-missile destroyer Urumqi and the guided-missile frigate Linyi to the exercise. Russia’s naval vessels are led by the Varyag, a Slava-class cruiser.

On March 11, between 8:50 a.m. and 12:50 p.m. local time, the Houthis launched two anti-ship ballistic missiles over the Red Sea toward the Pinocchio, a Singaporean-owned, Liberian-flagged merchant vessel. The missiles did not hit the ship, and there were no reported injuries or damage.

U.S. and International Response

On March 11, President Joe Biden submitted his 2025 budget proposal, which renewed his request for $14 billion in funding for Israel and $100 million in humanitarian support for Palestinians. The new budget proposal does not include funding for UNRWA.

- The Biden administration had paused funding for UNRWA after Israel alleged that UNRWA employees participated in the October 7 attacks.
- When asked about the lack of UNRWA funding during a State Department briefing, a senior State Department official said, “we have a pause on our funding to UNRWA until the investigation is complete. That doesn’t mean we are not providing funding for humanitarian needs in Gaza and the West Bank. [This budget includes] a significant commitment [to Palestinians living there]. But until that particular investigation concludes itself, we’re going to look to other organizations such as the World Food Program, UNICEF, and other outlets.”

According to a report in Axios, U.S. officials have claimed that an Israeli military operation in Rafah would likely trigger a significant shift in U.S. policy, which could include the United States ending its defense of Israel at the United Nations and restricting Israel’s use of U.S. weapons in Gaza.

On March 11, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence’s annual intelligence assessment stated, “distrust of Netanyahu’s ability to rule has deepened and broadened across the public from its already high levels before the war, and we expect large protests demanding his resignation and new elections.” The report also stated, “a different, more moderate government is a possibility.”

- A senior Israeli official who spoke with Israel's Arutz Sheva argued, “those who elect the Prime Minister of Israel are the citizens of Israel and no one else. Israel is not a protectorate of the USA but an independent and democratic country whose citizens are the ones who elect the government. We expect our friends to act to overthrow the terror regime of Hamas and not the elected government in Israel.”

A report in Politico on March 11 indicated that President Biden has considered conditioning aid for Israel if it moves forward with a large-scale ground operation in Rafah.

- U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan responded during a press briefing that “we’re not going to engage in hypotheticals about what comes down the line and the reports that purport to describe the president’s thinking are uninformed speculation.”
Asked during a March 11 Senate hearing if he “believe[s] Israel is exterminating the Palestinian people,” CIA Director William Burns said, “all I can say is what I’ve said before. I think there are a lot of innocent civilians in Gaza who are in desperate conditions right now,” adding that “it is very important for Israel … to avoid further loss of civilian life.”

Asked the same question, Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines stated, “I really don’t have anything to add to what Director Burns has said, and I fully endorse” his response.

On March 11, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that an IDF “assault” on the southern Gazan city of Rafah “could plummet the people of Gaza into an even deeper circle of hell.” Guterres also remarked that “the killing, bombing and bloodshed continue” in Gaza “at a level that is unprecedented” during his tenure.

On March 11, between 2:50-11:30 p.m. local time, the United States struck a Houthi unmanned underwater vessel and 18 anti-ship missiles in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen.

On March 12, Australia’s Foreign Minister Penny Wong stated that she agrees with President Biden’s recent comments that Prime Minister Netanyahu is hurting Israel more than helping it and added, “the world is horrified with the current situation … unless Israel changes its course it will continue to lose support.”

During a UN Security Council session about her report on the sexual violence that Palestinian terrorists committed on October 7 and against hostages since then, UN envoy on sexual violence Pramila Patten argued, “on the one hand, nothing can justify the deliberate violence perpetrated by Hamas and other armed groups on the seventh of October against Israel … On the other hand, nothing can also justify the collective punishment of the people in Gaza, which has left tens of thousands of Palestinians killed and injured.”

She added, “I must also state that I’m horrified by the injustice of women and children being killed in Gaza by countless bombs and gunfire, and I’m also outraged by the level of deaths and pain of entire families, often generations wiped out.”

Rising Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Protests, and Attacks

On March 12, The Wall Street Journal reported that in December 2023, Austrian and Bosnian police arrested two separate groups of Afghan and Syrian refugees on suspicion of terror activities, discovering arms and ammunition, including Kalashnikov assault rifles and pistols, in their possession. Investigators found pictures of Jewish and Israeli targets in Europe on the suspects’ phones.

During a speech on March 12 at an Israeli tech industry conference in New York, Google CEO in Israel Barak Regev was disrupted by a Google engineer who shouted, “I'm a Google software engineer, and I refuse to build technology that powers genocide, apartheid, or surveillance. Project Nimbus puts Palestinian community members in danger … No cloud for apartheid. No tech for apartheid. Free Palestine! Free Palestine!” Google confirmed the employee was fired after the incident.

On March 11, the assistant principal of Columbia High School in Maplewood, New Jersey, sent a flyer to inform staff members about Ramadan which contained a sentence accusing the United States of “co-conspiring” with Israel to prevent “Muslim Palestinians from partaking in Ramadan, as the Israeli Zionist occupation enacts a genocide against them.”
The Maplewood school district later apologized for the document, and the district superintendent said in a statement that “the document was not reviewed or approved by any district office or personnel.”

On March 11, Irish band Kneecap became the latest musical act to pull out of the annual SXSW (South by Southwest) music festival in Austin, Texas, in protest of the U.S. providing military support for Israel, because the festival is sponsored by the U.S. Army.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott wrote on X, “Bands pull out of SXSW over US Army sponsorship. Bye. Don’t come back. Austin remains the HQ for the Army Futures Command. San Antonio is Military City USA. We are proud of the US military in Texas. If you don’t like it, don’t come here.”

Recent and Relevant JINSA Products About Israel at War

- Yoni Tobin and Myles Behar, *Egypt-Gaza Tunnels Pose Threat to Israel’s War Aims*, March 12, 2024
- Webinar: *Gaza Update 3/7*, with IDF MG (ret.) Yaacov Ayish, IDF MG (ret.) Amikam Norkin, and Jonathan Ruhe, March 7, 2024
- Zac Schildcrout, *Rocket Fire From Lebanon More Than Triples*, March 7, 2024
- John Hannah and Michael Makovsky, “Joe Biden’s Plan for a Palestinian State Will Harm America and Israel,” *The National Interest*, March 6, 2024
- Ari Cicurel, *Monthly Iran Projectile Tracker: February 2024*, March 1, 2024