Israel’s Operation Swords of Iron Update
March 8, 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 his State of the Union address on March 7, President Biden announced that “Israel has a right to go after Hamas” and that his administration has worked “to establish an immediate ceasefire that would last for at least six weeks” that “would get the hostages home, ease the intolerable humanitarian crisis, and build toward something more enduring.”

  » Yet, Rep. Cory Mills (R-FL) and JINSA President and CEO Dr. Michael Makovsky recently wrote in 19FortyFive that “agreeing to a brief pause in fighting in return for the freeing of all hostages is understandable. However, agreeing to a ceasefire [that] keep[s] Hamas intact and in power, as Israel has done in previous conflicts, would pose an unacceptable risk to Israeli and Palestinian civilians.”

- President Biden’s announcement during the State of the Union that the United States will open a temporary pier in Gaza to enable greater humanitarian assistance to Gaza is a creative step. Other countries, like Egypt, should step up their efforts as well. Yet, the United States should avoid doing anything that helps Hamas, and the Biden administration should give up on the dangerous idea of unilaterally recognizing a Palestinian state.

- Although President Biden highlighted the two-state solution during his State of the Union address, as JINSA President and CEO Michael Makovsky and JINSA’s Randi and Charles Wax Senior Fellow John Hannah argued in The National Interest, U.S. recognition of a Palestinian state right now would reward terror, create U.S.-Israel tension, abandon allies, and create an unstable, radical Palestinian government, with Iran as the winner.

  » Instead, the Gaza Futures Task Force, a joint JINSA and Vandenberg Coalition project, has released a report, The Day After: A Plan for Gaza, calling for a new private entity, an International Trust for Gaza Relief and Reconstruction, to lead Gaza’s post-war recovery, restore a two-state political horizon & counter Iran-led threats.

- While President Biden noted during his State of the Union address that “creating stability in the Middle East also means containing the threat posed by Iran,” the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen have escalated their deadly and destructive attacks against ships, despite an
increase in U.S. strikes in Yemen. The United States should not let Tehran hide behind proxies and should strike Iran directly, as VADM John Miller, USN (ret.) and JINSA Assistant Director of Foreign Policy Ari Cicurel argued in *The Hill*.

- During a March 7 JINSA webinar, IDF MG (ret.) Amikam Norkin, a JINSA Distinguished Fellow, discussed the strategic importance of a major IDF operation in Rafah, stating, “we always should remember the goal of this war: no military threat from the Gaza Strip. So, we can’t leave those four [Hamas] battalions in Rafah.”

  > During the webinar, IDF MG (ret.) Yaacov Ayish, JINSA’s Julian and Jenny Josephson Senior Vice President for Israeli Affairs, noted that Israel’s strategic goal of “push[ing] Hezbollah north to the Litani River” 15 kilometers north of Israel’s border is a “limited” and “reasonable” goal, but that “later on, it will be a challenge to enforce it and sustain it.”

### 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.

- Israel’s National Security Council issued a travel warning for all Israelis during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, which begins March 10 and ends April 8. The travel advisory also warned of increased attacks on Western targets.

**Gaza**

- Sirens sounded in Sderot and Kibbutz Nahal Oz.

- On March 7, terrorists in Gaza fired three rockets toward Sderot in Israel’s south, one of which struck within the city, causing no reported injuries or damage.

- Citing Israel’s Channel 12, *The Times of Israel* reported on March 6 that Israel’s Shin Bet security agency assessed following several months of investigation that Gazans permitted to work in Israel did not furnish Hamas with intelligence to aid its October 7 massacre. The Shin Bet reportedly scrutinized approximately 3,000 Gazans permitted to work in Israel—roughly 18 percent of the total number of Gazans that possessed work permits (16,000).

**Lebanon**

- Rockets struck Metula, and sirens sounded in Dafna, Kibbutz Dan, Sha’ar Yeshuv, Avdon, Ya’ara, Netua, Avivim, and Shtula.

- On March 7, Hezbollah took credit for a salvo of projectiles targeting Israel that triggered sirens near the northern Israeli city of Kiryat Shmona, causing no reported injuries or damage.

- On March 7, terrorists in southern Lebanon fired 10 rockets toward the northern Israeli town of Rosh Hanikra. Nine of the rockets were intercepted, and the tenth landed in an open area. No injuries or damage were reported.

- On March 7, two Hezbollah drones entered Israel’s airspace from southern Lebanon. One of the drones was equipped with explosives and was downed by the IDF near the town of Bar’am, while the other crashed near Mount Hermon. No injuries were reported.
• On March 7, Hezbollah fired a number of rockets and missiles toward Metula and Mount Dov. One missile struck a house in Metula, causing property damage and no reported injuries.

• On March 7, Hezbollah claimed credit for a Katyusha rocket attack on the northern Israeli town of Avdon. No injuries or damage were reported.

• According to Israel’s Channel 13, an Israeli official denied a March 7 report from Israel’s Channel 12 citing Lebanon’s Hezbollah-affiliated Al Akhbar outlet that Israel has set March 15 as a deadline for a diplomatic deal to be reached before it escalates its military activity in Lebanon.

  » The Israeli official stated, “there’s no date for going to war in Lebanon.”

Syria

• On March 6, two rockets were fired from Syria towards the Golan Heights, landing in open areas and causing no reported injuries.

West Bank

• Israel’s Ynet outlet reported on March 6 that unnamed Israeli officials witnessed efforts by Iran-backed militias in Iraq to attack Israel via the Israel-Jordan border.

IDF Operations

Gaza

• On March 8, the IDF said that only minutes after terrorists in Gaza fired rockets toward Sderot and Nahal Oz the previous day, IDF strikes eliminated the launch sites, as well as additional weapons depots, a tunnel shaft, a Hamas building, and other projectile launchers. The IDF also detailed continuing operations against Hamas in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis and in central Gaza, including neutralizing 15 terror operatives.

• On March 7, the IDF sent formal instructions to commanders of relevant units regarding how to carry out internal investigations of their units’ conduct during the days leading up to
October 7, on the day itself, and the three days following the attack. The results are expected to be presented to IDF Chief of Staff Lt Gen Herzi Halevi in June.

According to a report from The Times of Israel, the investigations “are not related to planned external probes of the army’s conduct in the lead-up to October 7, which are currently on hold” due to reported opposition from political leaders.

- On March 7, the IDF published a video of Shayetet 13 and Maglan commando unit troops operating to dismantle Hamas infrastructure in the Qatari-funded Hamad Town residential complex in Khan Younis. The IDF said that it has confiscated weapons, killed and arrested gunmen, and carried out airstrikes against terrorist operatives in the complex.

- On March 6, the IDF and Shin Bet announced that an Israeli airstrike killed Amar Atiya Darwish Aladini, commander of Hamas’s central Gazan rocket unit. The IDF also said that it launched several more strikes against terrorist targets in Jabaliya in northern Gaza during the prior day.

**Lebanon**

- On March 8, the IDF said that it launched strikes in the southern Lebanese towns of Mansouri and Bint Jbeil against Hezbollah command centers and against buildings used by the terror group in Tallouseh and Majdal Zoun on March 7.

- On March 7, the IDF conducted airstrikes against Hezbollah facilities in the southern Lebanese towns of Aitaroun, Ayta ash-Shab, Matmoura, and Zibqin, and struck a Hezbollah observation post in the town of Jebbayn. That day, the IDF also conducted artillery shelling against targets in southern Lebanon in response to earlier rocket attacks.

- On March 7, Reuters reported that a contractor hired to investigate an October 13 incident in which a Reuters journalist was killed concluded that an Israeli tank fired two shells toward a group of journalists and then “likely” used machine gun fire targeting the location of the journalists.

  » The Netherlands-based Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research analyzed audio recordings of the incident captured by Al Jazeera and determined that “it is considered a likely scenario that a Merkava tank, after firing two tank rounds, also used its machine gun against the location of the journalists,” while noting “the latter cannot be concluded with certainty.”

**Syria**

- Syria’s Daraa 24 outlet reported on March 6 that the IDF launched strikes against Syrian military targets in Jasim, near the border with Israel, following a rocket attack against the Golan Heights.

**West Bank**

- On March 8, the IDF said that Duvdevan and Border Police personnel killed Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) operative Muhammad Shalabi during a raid in Silat al-Harithiya in the West Bank.

- On March 7, the IDF said it had arrested 34 wanted Palestinians and seized weapons during overnight raids in the West Bank, during which soldiers were attacked by Palestinians throwing explosive devices. No soldiers were injured.
Humanitarian Efforts

- On March 8, the IDF said that according to its recent probe of the deadly February 29 stampede near an aid convoy in Gaza, IDF soldiers only fired at people who were threateningly approaching them, not the aid convoy, as Hamas originally claimed.

- During the State of the Union address on March 7, President Biden stated that though Israel has an “added burden because Hamas hides and operates among the civilian population like cowards,” Israel also has a “fundamental responsibility” to “protect innocent civilians in Gaza.”
  
  » President Biden claimed, “Israel must allow more aid into Gaza and ensure humanitarian workers aren’t caught in the crossfire” and, directly addressing Israel’s leaders, added that “humanitarian assistance cannot be a secondary consideration or a bargaining chip. Protecting and saving innocent lives has to be a priority.”

  » President Biden also announced that the U.S. will establish a “temporary pier … that can receive large ships carrying food, water, medicine and temporary shelters” to enable greater quantities of aid to reach Gaza directly from the Mediterranean Sea.
    - On March 9, Israel’s Foreign Ministry said, “Israel will continue to facilitate the transfer of humanitarian aid to Gazans, in accordance with the laws of war and in coordination with the US and our allies around the world.”

  » Biden added that “no U.S. boots will be on the ground.”

- On March 8, Palestinian media reported that at least five Gazans were killed after being hit by airdropped U.S. aid packages. According to the reports, the parachutes attached to the aid packages did not open.

- On March 8, U.K. Foreign Minister David Cameron posted on X that, along with the United States and other partners, the United Kingdom will “open a maritime corridor to deliver aid directly to Gaza.”

- On March 7, the U.S. military announced that it airdropped more aid into Gaza in a joint operation with Jordan, the third such U.S. airdrop. The military said that it dropped over 38,000 meals.

- On March 7, Israel’s Kan outlet reported that the Iranian Red Crescent has established shelters in northern and southern Gaza. The network aired footage showing an aid shelter in Gaza that displayed a flag with the Iranian Red Crescent logo and Iran’s flag.
  
  » According to a March 7 report from The Times of Israel, Egypt had denied requests from Iran in November to be involved in aid efforts in Gaza over fears that Iran would exploit the opportunity “to gain a foothold” in the Gaza Strip.

- On March 7, the Turkish Red Crescent sent a shipment of approximately 3,000 tons of humanitarian aid supplies, including food and medicine, to Egypt to be sent into the Gaza Strip.

- On March 6, Norway’s Foreign Minister Barth Eide stated that several countries that had previously paused funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), in light of Israel’s assertions that roughly a dozen UNRWA employees participated in the October 7 massacre and hundreds more are Hamas terrorists, are considering resuming UNRWA funding in the near future.
On March 6, a Canadian official told Canada’s CBC News that Canada would be resuming funding for UNRWA, including a previously-scheduled April donation of roughly $18.5 million as well as unspecified additional funds.

- In response to a March 5 question about currently paused U.S. support for UNRWA, State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said that while “our funding of UNRWA is paused, we are also in conversations with other international partners about the ways that they can fill gaps. Remember, our funding that we suspended—we weren’t due for another large payment until June. That’s still several months away.”

- On March 5, Pentagon Press Secretary Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder told reporters that the United States has provided “more than $180 million in humanitarian assistance to Gaza since October 7th.”

**Ceasefire and Hostage Negotiations**

- The Wall Street Journal reported on March 7, citing unnamed officials, that Hamas announced a halt in its participation in ceasefire negotiations. This comes amid Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar’s demands that Israel commit to discussing an enduring end to the war. Reportedly, other Hamas leaders—including Ismail Haniyeh, who is said to be “willing to accept” an initial six-week fighting pause—disagree with Sinwar’s demands.

- According to a March 7 ABC News report citing two senior U.S. officials, after Israel “signed off on a number” of Hamas demands in the latest round of negotiations, Hamas then “ramped up its demands,” including a permanent ceasefire and an agreement in which Hamas would maintain control over the Gaza Strip.

- A senior Biden administration official told reporters on March 7 that part of a hostage negotiation deal on the table is “returning people to the north” of Gaza, noting, “that is something that has been worked on in some detail.”

**Post-War Planning**

- During the State of the Union address on March 7, President Biden stated, “as we look to the future, the only real solution to the situation is a two-state solution over time.”
  - President Biden argued that “there is no other path that guarantees Israel’s security and democracy” and no alternative path that “guarantees Palestinians can live with peace and dignity.”
  - President Biden further stated, “there is no other path that guarantees peace between Israel and all of its neighbors, including Saudi Arabia, with whom I’m talking.”

**Casualties and Hostages**

- Over 1,200 people were killed in Israel, and 13,000 Israelis have been injured in the war.
  - 587 Israeli soldiers have been killed.
  - 247 IDF soldiers have been killed during ground combat in Gaza so far.
  - The IDF announced the death of Staff Sgt. David Sasson, 21, from Ganot Hadar.
  - 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 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 Philippine nationals, 4 Austrian nationals, 4 Romanian nationals, 4 Portuguese nationals, 4 Chinese nationals, 3 Brazilian nationals, 3 Belarussian 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 30,878 people have been killed in Gaza, and 72,402 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 29 that it 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 420 people have been killed, and an additional 4,600 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.

Iranian Involvement and Response

- On March 7 between 3:35 p.m. and 4:55 p.m. local time, the Iran-backed Houthis launched three drones from Yemen toward the Gulf of Aden. U.S. forces later shot the drones down.

- On March 6, the Houthis fired missiles toward the Greek-owned, Barbados-flagged ship True Confidence in the Red Sea approximately 50 nautical miles from Yemen’s Aden port. Three individuals were killed, and at least four were injured. This was the first Houthi strike against ships that caused fatalities since the group began its escalation after the 10/7 attack.
U.S. and International Response

- On March 8, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France submitted an official request for an emergency UN Security Council session about special representative Pramila Patten’s report alleging that Hamas committed sexual crimes during its October 7 attack and afterward.

- During his State of the Union address on March 7, President Biden announced a “pledge to all the families that we will not rest until we bring their loved ones home” and that “Israel has a right to go after Hamas … Hamas could end this conflict today by releasing the hostages, laying down arms, and surrendering those responsible for October 7th.”
  - He added, “we’ve been working non-stop to establish an immediate ceasefire that would last for at least six weeks.”
  - President Biden also noted that “creating stability in the Middle East also means containing the threat posed by Iran … That’s why I built a coalition of more than a dozen countries to defend international shipping and freedom of navigation in the Red Sea … I’ve ordered strikes to degrade Houthi capabilities and defend US forces in the region.”
  - He further indicated that “as commander-in-chief, I will not hesitate to direct further measures to protect our people and military personnel.”

- Members of Congress reportedly brought at least 17 relatives of hostages held in Gaza to the State of the Union address, and former hostage Mia Schem, who was released in a hostage deal in November, reportedly attended as a guest of Speaker of the House of Representatives Rep. Mike Johnson (R-LA).

- On March 7 between 3:35 p.m. and 4:55 p.m. local time, the United States struck four Houthi anti-ship cruise missiles and one Houthi drone in Yemen that were prepared to target ships.

- Citing testimony from unnamed U.S. officials in a classified congressional briefing, The Washington Post reported on March 6 that since October 7, the United States has “approved and delivered more than 100 separate foreign military sales to Israel,” including “thousands of precision-guided munitions, small diameter bombs, bunker busters, small arms and other lethal aid.” Prior to the Post’s report, information about only two such sales had been released in the public domain.

- According to a March 7 Axios report citing four U.S. officials, the White House has recently requested that the State Department and Defense Department provide it with a list of all weapons transfers to Israel “that are planned or are up for approval in the coming weeks.” The request marks the first of its kind since the war began.
  - The officials stressed the move is “not a signal of an imminent move by the White House to slow-walk or suspend any weapons transfers to Israel” and stressed that “the Biden administration has no plans to restrict military assistance to Israel at this time.”
  - The report stated that Israel has yet to provide a signed letter providing “credible and reliable assurances” that Israel is abiding by international law, pursuant to a memorandum President Biden signed last month requiring that any recipient of U.S. military aid provide assurances it will comply with international law.
  - According to the report, Secretary of State Antony Blinken has until March 25 to certify Israel has signed the commitment or else U.S. weapons transfers will be automatically suspended for an indefinite period.
The Biden administration reportedly asked Israel to provide the letter by mid-March. Israeli officials told Axios that Israel has agreed to do so in principle, but that the matter still needs to be brought before the war cabinet, which reportedly will happen in the coming days.

According to an Axios report from the previous day, a group of Democratic lawmakers in the House of Representatives has sought to make the case to President Biden that an IDF offensive in Rafah could violate the recent national security memorandum.

- On March 6 at approximately 7:14 p.m. local time, the United States struck two Houthi drones in Yemen that were prepared to target ships.
- On March 6, the U.S. Treasury Department announced sanctions against Hong Kong- and Marshall Islands-based ship owners and two vessels for their role in shipping commodities to Sa’id al-Jamal, a previously-sanctioned financial backer of the Houthis.
- After the announcement of thousands of Israeli settlement unit approvals on March 6, U.S. State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller stated that “settlements continue to be a barrier to peace. Settlements continue to be inconsistent with international law … These settlements don’t just harm the Palestinian people, but they ultimately weaken Israel’s security and weaken the prospects for a lasting agreement that would provide real peace and real security for the Israeli people.”
- On March 7, China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi called Israeli operations in Gaza a “disgrace for civilization” and reiterated Beijing’s calls for an “immediate ceasefire.” He added, “it is a tragedy for humankind and a disgrace for civilization that today, in the 21st century, this humanitarian disaster cannot be stopped.”
  - Wang further argued that “no reason can justify the continuation of the conflict, and no excuse can justify being desperately killed,” and that China “support[s] Palestine becoming a formal member of the United Nations.”
- On March 6, U.K. Foreign Secretary David Cameron claimed, as the “occupying power,” “Israel has a legal responsibility to ensure aid is available for civilians … That responsibility has consequences, including when we as the U.K. assess whether Israel is compliant with international humanitarian law.”
- On March 6, South Africa appealed to the International Court of Justice for additional measures against Israel because of what it described as “the situation of widespread starvation” in Gaza.
- On March 6, Saudi Arabia responded to the announcement of Israeli settlement approvals by claiming that Israel is attempting to “Judaize large parts of the West Bank, including Jerusalem, in contravention of all international resolutions, international human rights law and the United Nations Charter, and contradicting efforts to achieve peace and stability in the region.”

Rising Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Protests, and Attacks

- On March 7, dozens of pro-Palestinian protesters blocked roads near the White House and the U.S. Capitol as President Biden was preparing to deliver the State of the Union address. Police arrested one man who allegedly revved his engine and headed toward demonstrators.
On March 7, U.K. counterterrorism commissioner Robin Simcox wrote an article in The Telegraph describing how the streets of central London are “a no-go zone for Jews every weekend” because of the anti-Israel, pro-Palestinian rallies and “skyrocketing” antisemitism.

On March 7, Russia’s Federal Security Service (FSB) said it foiled a terrorist attack on a synagogue in Moscow that it claimed was planned by a cell of the Islamic State in Afghanistan.

On March 6, Jewish Canadian lawmaker Selina Robinson announced her resignation from the ruling New Democratic Party caucus in the British Columbian Legislative Assembly because of its refusal to acknowledge or deal with antisemitism.

On March 4, Six Sailor Cider and Weathered Waves Bar, a cidery and bar in Salt Lake City, announced that they were “banning all Zionists forever from our establishments.” A spokesperson for the Utah Department of Alcoholic Beverage Services said that it has contacted the Utah Attorney General’s office “so they may conduct an investigation on whether the business is violating discrimination laws.”

Recent and Relevant JINSA Products About Israel at War

- 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
- Yoni Tobin, U.S. Officials Should Stop Using Hamas’s Casualty Figures, March 6, 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
- The Gaza Futures Task Force, The Day After: A Plan for Gaza, February 29, 2024