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# Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update May 17, 2024

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JINSA's <u>Israel at War</u> webpage is a dedicated resource for analysis, commentary, webinars, and media coverage about the 10/7 attacks and the ensuing conflict between Israel, the Iranian regime, and the regime's proxies. 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 IDF's recovery on May 17 of the bodies of three hostages in Gaza underscores the importance of Israel continuing its operations throughout Gaza, in particular Hamas's last remaining stronghold in Rafah, where additional hostages are likely being held.
- On May 17, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) announced that humanitarian aid arrived at a temporary pier in Gaza. This pier could enable larger amounts of humanitarian aid to enter Gaza. Hamas maintains the ability to target the pier, so protecting the area and ensuring that Hamas does not steal the aid will remain a challenge.
- On May 17, Israel responded to South Africa's request before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on May 16 that the court impose additional measures on Israel to compel it to cease operations in Rafah and elsewhere in Gaza. Any measure from the court in support of South Africa's request that delays or prevents Israel from conducting operations in Rafah, Hamas's last stronghold, would embolden it during ceasefire and hostage negotiations and could allow the group to reconstitute itself.
- During a JINSA webinar on May 16, IDF MG (ret.) Yaacov Ayish, JINSA's Julian and Jenny Josephson Senior Vice President for Israeli Affairs argued that the Biden administration's decision to withhold an arms shipment of 500-lb and 2,000-lb bombs to Israel sent "its own bad signal to the region ... I think that these types of delays ... should be ... out of the game. It's not something that you can play with."
  - » IDF MG (ret.) Yaakov Amidror, a JINSA Distinguished Fellow, explained, "what is important from our point of view is to have the capability to continue the war in Gaza ... and Lebanon [if needed] ... if the diplomatic efforts do not succeed. And for that, you need the munitions, and they are coming from America."

## Last 48 Hours

Attacks Against Israel

#### Gaza

- Sirens sounded in Yad Mordechai and Netiv Ha'asara.
- On May 16, the IDF said one rocket fired from the Gaza Strip towards Sderot was intercepted by the Iron Dome.

#### Lebanon

- Sirens sounded in Dalton, Kadita, Katzrin, Kiryat Shmona, Metula, Rehaniya, Zar'it, the Western Galilee, and Jordan River Village.
- On May 17, a barrage of 75 rockets was launched from southern Lebanon towards northern Israel. Dozens of the rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome. Two people were lightly injured by the rocket attack and taken to the hospital.
- On May 17, several drones were <u>launched</u> from Lebanon towards the Western Galilee, at least one of which was downed by Israeli air defenses over the sea. Another drone crashed near Ga'aton.
- On May 16. Hezbollah claimed responsibility for the barrage of rockets fired at the Golan Heights, claiming to have targeted three military bases in the area with 60 Katyusha rockets. The IDF said around 40 rockets crossed into Israeli territory during the attack.
- On May 16, the IDF said a one-way drone crashed and exploded near Metula, injuring three soldiers. One of the soldiers was seriously injured, while the other two were lightly hurt. Hezbollah claimed responsibility for the attack.
  - Israel's Maariv outlet reported on May 16 that Hezbollah claimed to have used two drones armed with S-5 missiles in the attack, marking the first time thus far in the war that Hezbollah has used S-5 missiles.
- On May 16, the IDF said that terrorists in southern Lebanon launched five projectiles towards the town of Zar'it. No injuries were reported.
- On May 15, Hezbollah said that it fired a drone toward an IDF base in the Lower Galilee area. The Times of Israel noted that the attack was the terror group's deepest into Israel since the war began.
  - » On May 16, the IDF confirmed that Hezbollah struck the base after firing two drones, one of which was intercepted. Later that day, IDF Spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said during a press briefing that although one drone hit a missile-detecting blimp, "there are no injuries and there is no damage to the IDF's ability to build an aerial image of the area. The IDF acts against Hezbollah's drones and the aerial threat on all borders."

## West Bank

On May 16, the IDF said that an assailant stabbed a noncommissioned officer who was in his vehicle at the Yitzhar Junction before the attacker fled. The victim was reported to be in moderate condition. The assailant was <u>arrested</u> in the nearby town of Awarta following a three-hour manhunt.

### IDF Operations

#### Gaza

- On May 17, the IDF recovered the bodies of Yitzhak Gelernter, Shani Louk, and Amit Buskila, who were murdered by Hamas on October 7 near the Supernova festival and their bodies abducted into Gaza. Interrogations of Palestinian terrorists who were captured in Gaza informed the Israeli operations to recover their bodies.
- On May 17, The Times of Israel reported that "recent fighting in northern Gaza's Jabaliya is being described by officers as some of the most intense amid the ongoing war, as Hamas operatives are launching massive numbers of RPGs at tanks and armored vehicles."
- On May 16, the IDF <u>said</u> it discovered two rocket launching sites in Rafah.
  - » One of the sites had several rocket launchers primed with long-range projectiles. The IDF used drones to strike and demolish the launchers.
  - » At a second site, dozens of launchers were discovered. The IDF also demolished the site, which it said was used in recent attacks against Israel, including last week's barrage targeting Beersheba.
- On May 16, Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant's office released a statement that said, "this operation [in Rafah] will continue with additional forces that will enter [the area]. Several tunnels in the area have been destroyed by our forces and more tunnels will be destroyed soon," and "this operation will intensify and Hamas is not an organization that can regenerate itself now. It has no reserves, it has no ability to manufacture weapons, it has no supplies, it has no munitions, it has no ability to properly treat terrorists who are injured, and this means that we are wearing it down."
- On May 15, five IDF soldiers were killed, and seven were wounded in a friendly-fire incident in the Jabaliya area of northern Gaza.
  - » An initial IDF probe into the incident found that the soldiers, all from the Paratroopers Brigade's 202nd Battalion, had established a post in a building in Jabaliya. The probe found that a tank shelled the building in which the paratroopers were operating.
  - » According to The Times of Israel, IDF tank forces "identified a gun barrel from one of the windows of the building and believed it was enemy forces, leading them to fire two shells."
- On May 15, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told CNBC that Israel is moving ahead with its offensive in Rafah despite U.S. opposition. Netanyahu stated, "I hope we can see eye to eye with the United States, we're talking to them. But ultimately we have to do what we have to do to protect the life of our nation."
- On May 15, an Israeli delegation led by Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) head Maj. Gen. Ghassan Alian and senior officials in Israel's internal security agency Shin Bet reportedly traveled to Egypt to meet with senior officials.
  - » According to The Times of Israel, the trip is an "attempt to smooth things over amid the ongoing offensive in Rafah, which shares a border with Egypt."
  - Talks between the leaders reportedly focused on the need to reopen the Rafah Crossing on the Egypt-Gaza border. The Times of Israel reported that "Egypt has refused to reopen the crossing in protest of the [IDF] offensive in Rafah."

#### Lebanon

On May 17, Lebanese media reported an Israeli airstrike near Najjarieh.

- The IDF confirmed the strike and said three separate drone strikes targeted facilities that were used by Hezbollah's air defense unit. Hezbollah announced that three people were killed in the strike—one member of the terror group, Hussein Khader Mahdi, and two Syrians.
- On May 16, Lebanese media reported that the IDF struck a vehicle between the towns of Seddigine and Rmadiyeh in southern Lebanon.
- On May 16, Lebanese media reported Israeli airstrikes in northeastern Lebanon's Baalbek region. The reports described the strikes as the largest in the Baalbek area since the beginning of the war. Other reports indicated that the IDF targeted a weapons manufacturing plant.
- On May 16, the IDF conducted an airstrike against a Hezbollah rocket launching post in southern Lebanon used to fire rockets that day into Israel. The IDF also struck facilities in which Hezbollah operatives had gathered in the southern Lebanese towns of Halta and Ayta ash-Shab.
- On May 16, the IDF struck approximately 10 Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon, including a vehicle with two terror operatives near the town of Seddigine who were en route to conduct an imminent attack on Israel. The IDF also struck a building and observation post in Mays al-Jabal and facilities in Kafr Qila, Nagoura, and Houla.
- On May 15, the IDF said that it used fighter jets to target a Hezbollah rocket launcher used to attack the Mount Meron region that day, as well as a building used by the terror group's Radwan unit near Jabal Rezlane and an additional Hezbollah building in Blida. The IDF also said that it fired artillery toward the origin point of the barrage earlier.

#### Humanitarian Efforts

- According to Israel's Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), from the beginning of the war to May 16, there have been 542,570 tons of humanitarian aid that entered Gaza on 28,255 trucks.
- On May 17, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) announced that "trucks carrying humanitarian assistance began moving ashore via a temporary pier in Gaza."
  - » On May 15, the first British maritime aid shipment to Gaza thus far in the war departed Cyprus en route to the new maritime pier in Gaza. The shipment contained nearly 100 tons of humanitarian aid.
- On May 16, COGAT announced that 365 humanitarian aid trucks were transferred to Gaza that day, and that 76,000 liters of fuel entered Gaza on May 15.

#### Post-War Planning

- On May 17, Israel's Ynet News outlet reported that Israel has conducted an assessment of the costs of having an Israeli military government control Gaza following the war.
  - The assessment estimated that an Israeli military government in Gaza would cost over \$5.3 billion a year, excluding reconstruction costs. The assessment, which was reviewed by Ynet News, also found that such a scenario would require 400 Israeli staffers and five IDF divisions.
- On May 17, Israel Hayom reported that Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant's plan for post-war Gaza includes arming local Palestinians affiliated with the Palestinian Authority.

- Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said during a televised speech on May 15, "as long as Hamas retains control over civilian life in Gaza, it may rebuild and strengthen, thus requiring the IDF to return and fight in areas where it has already operated." and "we must dismantle Hamas's governing capabilities in Gaza. The key to this goal is military action, and the establishment of a governing alternative in Gaza."
  - He added, "in the absence of such an alternative, only two negative options remain: Hamas' rule in Gaza or Israeli military rule in Gaza," and "the meaning of indecision is choosing one of the negative options. It would erode our military achievements, reduce the pressure on Hamas, and sabotage the chances of achieving a framework for the release of hostages."
  - He went on, "the end of the military campaign must come together with political action. The 'day after Hamas' will only be achieved with Palestinian entities taking control of Gaza, accompanied by international actors, establishing a governing alternative to Hamas's rule. This, above all, is an interest of the State of Israel," and "unfortunately, this issue was not raised for discussion, and worse, no alternative was brought up in its place."
  - He argued that "indecision is, in essence, a decision," and "this leads to a dangerous course, which promotes the idea of Israeli military and civilian governance in Gaza. This is a negative and dangerous option for the State of Israel — strategically, militarily, and from a security standpoint."
  - Gallant said that "[should this be the decision], military rule in Gaza would become the main security and military effort of the State of Israel over the coming years, at the expense of other arenas. The price paid would be bloodshed and victims, as well as a heavy economic price," and "I will not agree to the establishment of Israeli military administration in Gaza. Israel must not exercise civilian control in Gaza."
  - He said further, "the security establishment and the IDF are responsible for destroying Hamas and retaining full military freedom of action in Gaza. The capacity to do so depends on the creation of alternative governance in Gaza," and "all parts of the government of Israel have to work on this."
  - Gallant urged, "I call on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to make a decision and declare that Israel will not exercise civilian rule in the Gaza Strip, because no Israeli military administration will be established in Gaza, and that an alternative government to Hamas in the Gaza Strip will be advanced immediately. That is our obligation and responsibility in order to lead the state to a better place."
  - He argued further, "right now, on our watch, for the sake of the state's future, we have to take tough decisions — advancing the national interest over all other interests, even if this requires paying personal or political costs."
  - In response, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on May 15, "after the terrible massacre on October 7, I ordered the destruction of Hamas," and "as long as Hamas remains intact, no other party will step in to manage civilian affairs in Gaza. certainly not the Palestinian Authority. 80 percent of the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank] support the terrible massacre of October 7."
    - He said, "I am not prepared to switch from Hamastan to Fatahstan," and "the Palestinian Authority supports terror, educates for terror, funds terror. And so the first condition for preparing the ground for another party is to eliminate Hamas, and to do so without excuses."

- » A senior Biden administration official told The Times of Israel that "we share the defense minister's concern that Israel has not developed any plans for holding and governing territory the IDF clears, thereby allowing Hamas to regenerate in those areas. This is a concern because our objective is to see Hamas defeated."
- On May 16, Reuters reported, citing two Egyptian security officials, that Egypt rejected a proposal from the Israeli delegation that day for the two countries to coordinate the reopening of Rafah Crossing and plan the future management of its operations.
  - » According to the Reuters report, "The Israeli proposal included a mechanism for how to manage the crossing after an Israeli withdrawal," but that the proposal was turned down because "Egypt insists the crossing should be managed only by Palestinian authorities."
- On May 15, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh stated that the terror group will reject any postwar plan for Gaza that does not have a role for Hamas. Haniyeh said in a speech that "the movement [Hamas] will decide, along with all national factions, the administration of the Gaza Strip after the war."

### U.S. Response

- On May 16, the House of Representatives <u>passed</u> the Israel Security Assistance Support Act, in a vote of 224-187. The bill would freeze the budgets for the offices of the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State, and the National Security Council unless President Biden delivers the 2,000-lb. and 500-lb. bombs that his administration announced it was withholding.
  - The legislation now heads to the Senate, but Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) stated on May 15 that he would not give it floor time. The Biden administration has also indicated that President Biden would veto the legislation.
- A Reuters/lpsos poll of registered voters released on May 16 found that 34% of respondents approved of Biden's handling of the war in Gaza, including 53% of Democrats, 31% of independents, and 22% of Republicans.
- In response to a report in *The Intercept* that roughly 20 American doctors are trapped in Gaza, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters on May 16 that "we're tracking this matter closely and working to get the impacted American citizens out of Gaza," and "we need to get them out. We want to get them out and it has nothing to do with anything else."
- On May 15, Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant stated that the U.S.-Israel relationship is "vital, strong, and steady." He noted that there are "differences of opinion, but I would like to make it clear that the US was the first to stand with us in actions, not in words." He added, "we resolve the disputes in the closed rooms, not in interviews or in tweets."
- On May 15, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan held a meeting with 17 ambassadors from foreign countries to the United States, in which they "discussed their collective call for Hamas to immediately release the hostages and ways to bring an end to the crisis," according to a White House readout. The countries participating included Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Thailand, and the United Kingdom.

#### International Response

On May 17, Israel responded to South Africa's request arguments before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on May 16 that the court should impose additional emergency

measures against Israel that require Israel to cease its operations in Rafah, as well as the rest of Gaza. Israeli attorney Gilad Noam stated, "we do not wish harm to these civilians as Hamas does, which is why we are taking steps to address the complexity of the situation."

- Noam added, "this is why there has not been [a] widescale operation in Rafah, and why there are preparations to deal with the challenges."
- On May 16, the United Nations Security Council held its first meeting solely focused on the hostages being held in Gaza.
- On May 16, the Arab League released the "Manama Declaration," which called for "international protection and peacekeeping forces of the United Nations in the occupied Palestinian territories" until the implementation of a two-state solution.
  - » The declaration calls for "all Palestinian factions to join under the umbrella of the Palestine Liberation Organization."
  - » It also "strongly condemned the attacks on commercial ships." which threaten freedom of navigation, international trade, and the interests of countries and peoples of the world."
  - » On May 16, State Department Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel responded by arguing, "the addition of security forces could potentially put [Israel's current] mission [against Hamas] into compromise."
- On May 17, Spain's Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares confirmed that it would not allow ships carrying weapons to Israel to use its ports.
  - » On May 16, reports had indicated that Spain had denied the Marianne Danica access to its ports, a cargo ship carrying 27 tons of explosive material from India.

#### Rising Antisemitism, Protests, and Attacks

- On May 17, French police killed an armed man who was attempting to set fire to a synagogue in Rouen.
- On May 17, the IDF said that a group of Israelis in the West Bank attacked an Israeli and set the victim's truck on fire before wounding two officers and a soldier who arrived to impede the violence.
- On May 16, a group of protesters set up tents on the lawn of University of Michigan regent Sarah Hubbard's house and left fake bloody corpses at 6:00 a.m., and a masked individual placed a list of demands at regent Jordan Acker's home at 4:40 a.m.
- On May 16, Sonoma State University President Mike Lee announced that he was now on leave a day after he agreed to establish an "advisory council" of members of the school's Students for Justice in Palestine chapter. Lee released a statement indicating that "in my attempt to find agreement with one group of students, I marginalized other members of our student population and community. I realize the harm that this has caused, and I take full ownership of it. I deeply regret the unintended consequences of my actions."
- On May 16, police <u>retook</u> control of a lecture hall at the University of California, Irvine, from anti-Israel protesters who had occupied it for hours.
- On May 15, anti-Israel protesters clashed with police in Athens, Greece, as they marched to the Embassy of Israel. More than 2,500 people participated in the protest, during which several protesters hurled stones at police who had formed a security cordon outside the embassy. Police deployed tear gas to disperse the protesters and detained three people.

- On May 15, extremists in Israel attacked a commercial truck in the West Bank that they mistook as being part of an aid convoy to Gaza.
- On May 15, a staffer in the U.S. Department of the Interior, Lily Greenberg Call, announced she was resigning from her position in protest of U.S. support for Israel during its ongoing war with Hamas. Call is the first Jewish political appointee to publicly resign in protest of U.S. support for Israel, according to *The Times of Israel*.

## Since the War Began

## 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.

### Casualties and Hostage Figures

- Over 1,200 people were killed in Israel, and 13,000 Israelis have been injured in the war.
  - » 627 Israeli soldiers have been killed.
    - 279 IDF soldiers have been killed during ground combat in Gaza so far.
    - The IDF announced the death of Sqt. Mai. (res.) Ran Yavetz, 39, from Modin.
    - The IDF <u>named</u> Cpt. Roy Beit Yaakov, 22, from Eli; Staff Sgt. Gilad Arye Boim, 22, from Karnei Shomron; Sqt. Daniel Chemu, 20, from Tiberias; Sqt. Ilan Cohen, 20, from Karmiel; and Staff Sgt. Betzalel David Shashuah, 21, from Tel Aviv, as the soldiers killed in a friendly fire incident in Jabaliya on May 15.
    - As of May 17, 3,503 IDF soldiers have been injured during ground combat in Gaza, including at least 541 who have been severely injured.
  - Numerous foreign nationals have been killed in the war, including at least 34 American nationals, 39 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.
    - On May 16, the IDF announced that two Thai nationals who were previously thought to have been taken hostage alive by Hamas, had been killed on October 7 and their bodies being held in Gaza by the terror group. Sonthaya Oakkharasr and Sudthisak Rinthalak were agricultural workers in Kibbutz Beeri.
- According to unverified figures from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Health Ministry, at least 35,303 people have been killed in Gaza, and 79,261 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 as of 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 502 people have been killed, and an additional 4,950 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, eleven 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 <u>Uruquayan</u> national, and 1 <u>American</u> national have been released.
    - Hamas has released <u>36 children</u> and still holds two as hostages.
- Terrorists in Gaza currently hold at least 129 hostages and deceased hostage bodies.
  - Israeli officials have confirmed the deaths of at least 40 of the hostages in Gaza.
  - 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 <u>Italian</u> nationals, 4 <u>Romanian</u> nationals, and 2 <u>Mexican</u> nationals.

## Recent and Relevant JINSA Products About Israel at War

- Webinar: Gaza Update 5/16, with IDF MG (ret.) Yaakov Amidror, IDF MG (ret.) Yaacov Ayish, and Ari Cicurel, May 16, 2024
- LTC Geoffrey Corn and Emanuela-Chiara Gillard, "The War Crime Of Starvation The Irony Of Grasping At Low Hanging Fruit," Articles of War, May 15, 2024
- Jacob Olidort, Possible Terrorist Ties to U.S. Campus Protests, May 15, 2024
- "Open Letter from Retired U.S. Military Leaders in Support of Israel," Originally Released on May 10, 2024, Updated and Published in The New York Times on May 15, 2024
- Michael Makovsky and Blaise Misztal, "Biden's Israel arms embargo will go down as one of the worst American betravals," New York Post, May 9, 2024
- Michael Makovsky, "Statement on Biden's Threat to Withhold Offensive Weapons to Israel," May 8, 2024
- Matthew Kenney, Zac Schildcrout, and Yoni Tobin, Biden Threatens to Stop Arms Shipments to Israel, Harming Both Countries, May 8, 2024
- Gabriel Noronha and Yoni Tobin, ICC Lacks Moral and Legal Authority to Issue Israel Arrest Warrants, May 8, 2024
- Zac Schildcrout, Israel Begins Limited Military Operation in Rafah, May 7, 2024