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Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update May 24, 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 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

- On May 24, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) sided with a motion brought by South Africa and ordered Israel to “immediately halt” its offensive in Rafah, [citing](#) “exceptionally grave” developments for the “extremely vulnerable” and stating that it was “not convinced that the evacuation effort” for Palestinian civilians is sufficient to “alleviate the immense risk.” However, as Judge Julia Sebutinde wrote in her [dissenting](#) opinion, “a suspension of Israel’s military offensive in Rafah, whether temporary or indefinite, has no link to South Africa’s plausible rights or Israel’s obligations under the Genocide Convention.”
 - » She added, “this directive, which could be erroneously misunderstood as mandating a unilateral ceasefire in part of Gaza, amounts to micromanaging the hostilities in Gaza by restricting Israel’s ability to pursue its legitimate military objectives, while leaving its enemies, including Hamas, free to attack without Israel being able to respond. This measure also implicitly orders Israel to disregard the safety and security of the over 100 hostages still held by Hamas, a terrorist organization that has refused to release them unconditionally.”
- During a JINSA [webinar](#) on May 23, IDF MG (ret.) Yaakov Amidror argued that: “[A] reason for not deciding now [who will run Gaza] ... no one will come in before we finish the job of destroying Hamas. Not local guys, not Arabs, not westerners ... if there is someone who will be ready ... he will wait until we finish the job. Before that, he understands he has to fight Hamas, and no one wants to go in and fight Hamas.”
 - » IDF MG (ret.) Amikam Norkin argued, “I’m not sure this is the right time to declare who’s going to control Gaza. I think this is the right time to start to discuss it. We should do some ... war games, talk about the scenarios, the options, and this is what some of the cabinet members talk about ... it doesn’t mean that we are going to start to ... declare the best option. It’s not black and white.”
 - » IDF MG (ret.) Yaacov Ayish argued that “we have to remember that there is a direct linkage also to the north. Hezbollah is not going to stop its ongoing attack ... as long as

we are fighting in Gaza. So, there are two options. Either we are going to make it stop with different tools because the tools we have been using in the last seven months are ineffective ... the Israeli residents from the north are still uprooted from their villages ... I think there is a paradigm that we have to solve here, and without offering a reasonable alternative to the administrative capabilities of Hamas, we won't be able to complete our mission, which is dismantling Hamas and releasing the hostages."

- During a JINSA [webinar](#) on May 22 about the implications of the death of Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi, Ray Takeyh, a member of JINSA's Iran Policy Project, noted his "legacy as a president was largely an inconsequential one ... He was probably the least persuasive and imaginative of all of Iran's presidents going back to 1979. But he was Ali Khamenei's probably favorite president in the sense that he did what he was told, and he never challenged the leader in any significant way ... His larger legacy is that he has spent his entire career in the security services and the judicial apparatus and the dark rooms of the Islamic Republic as an enforcer of its cruelty, [including] its executions of many people."
 - » Gabriel Noronha, a JINSA Fellow, argued that "when the [Biden] administration offered its official condolences on the passing of Raisi and Amir-Abdollahian, there's an instinct of [not to] antagonize, but this seemed to go almost back to the era of trying to empower the moderates and improve the United States' standing among the regime, which is an ill-fated and discredited theory. I would have liked to see a proper tribute to Raisi's thousands and thousands of victims."

Last 48 Hours

Attacks Against Israel

Gaza

- Sirens [sounded](#) in Bitkha, Tidhar, Brosh, and Ta'ashur.
- On May 23, the IDF [said](#) that terrorists in Gaza launched two rockets toward the area near Ofakim in southern Israel, impacting unpopulated areas and inflicting no injuries.

Lebanon

- Sirens [sounded](#) in Shamir, Sdeh Nechemia, Amir, Neot Mordechai, Lehavot HaBashan, Kfar Szold, Kfar Blum, Gonen, Snir, Shear Yeshuv, Dan, Ghajar, HaGoshrim, Dafna, Tel Hai, Kiryat Shmona, Misgav Am, Margalioth, Ma'ayan Baruch, Manara, Metula, Kfar Yuval, Kfar Giladi, Beit Hillel, and [She'ar Yeshuv](#).
- On May 23, the IDF [said](#) that terrorists in Lebanon launched approximately 30 projectiles toward northern Israel, triggering sirens. Hezbollah claimed that it targeted an IDF base near Safed with Katyusha rockets.
- On May 23, the IDF [said](#) that terrorists in Lebanon fired two drones rigged with explosives toward northern Israel, one of which a fighter pilot shot down. The other impacted near Kiryat Shmona, inflicting no injuries.
- On May 23, Hezbollah [said](#) that it fired several rockets toward an IDF position in Kiryat Shmona and Beit Hillel. The IDF observed five launches.
- On May 22, the IDF and local politicians [said](#) that a drone rigged with explosives fired from Lebanon struck Beit Hillel, causing no injuries or damage.

Iraq

- On May 24, the Iran-backed Islamic Resistance in Iraq [claimed](#) credit for launching the drone that was shot down by Israeli fighter jets, claiming it was targeting Haifa port. The IDF said the drone was downed before reaching Israeli territory.
- On May 23, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq [launched](#) two drones targeting Eilat, which were downed by Israeli fighter jets before they could reach Israeli airspace.

IDF Operations

- On May 22, *The Times of Israel* [reported](#) that “IDF Central Command head Yehuda Fox has signed a military order temporarily barring Israelis from entering three settlements that were evacuated by Israel as part of the 2005 Gaza Disengagement.” The settlements are Sa-Nur, Ganim, and Kadim.

Gaza

- On May 24, the IDF [said](#) that it used a drone to destroy the rocket launcher that was used to launch two rockets toward the Ofakim area.
- On May 24, the IDF Military Police indicated that they had opened a [probe](#) to investigate soldiers who had allegedly filmed themselves burning a Quran and other books during operations in Gaza. The videos and images were uploaded to social media.
- According to [reports](#) from May 23, an IDF spokesperson said in a letter to the NGO Hatzlacha, “during 2023, between March and July, four different warning letters were passed by the intelligence directorate [to Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu], which showed how Israel’s enemies across theaters viewed the harm to cohesion in the State of Israel and the IDF in particular.”
 - » In response, Netanyahu’s office [released](#) a statement that said that “not only is there no warning in any of the documents about Hamas’s intentions to attack Israel from Gaza, but they instead give a completely opposite assessment” and that the documents’ references to Hamas “indicate that Hamas did not want to attack Israel from Gaza.”
- On May 23, the IDF [said](#) that it eliminated numerous gunmen in Rafah and carried out airstrikes throughout Gaza, killing a participant in the October 7 massacre. The IDF said that it conducts its operations in Rafah neighborhoods in a “precise manner ... while preventing harm to the civilian population as much as possible, after the civilians have evacuated the area.”
- On May 23, the IDF [said](#) that it killed the commander of Hamas’s Beit Hanoun Battalion, Hussein Fiad, in a tunnel near Jabaliya.
- The IDF [said](#) on May 23 that several troops, including the Kfir Brigade’s Netzah Yehuda Battalion, initiated a targeted raid in Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza to eliminate gunmen and find tunnels.
- On May 22, the IDF [said](#) that the Air Force struck over 130 terrorist targets throughout Gaza.
- On May 22, the IDF [said](#) that it deployed the Nahal Brigade to Rafah, now the fifth in the city, alongside the 162nd Division.

Lebanon

- The IDF [said](#) on May 23 that it killed Nasser Farran, a “prominent” Hezbollah operative who helped the terror group build and obtain arms, in a drone strike.

- On May 23, the IDF [said](#) that it used fighter jets to strike Hezbollah targets in Ayta ash-Shab, Rab Thalathine, Markaba, and Odaisseh.
- On May 23, the IDF [said](#) that it used fighter jets to destroy the launchers used to launch roughly 30 projectiles toward northern Israel that day.
- On May 22, the IDF [said](#) that it used fighter jets to target a pair of Hezbollah rocket launchers in Marwahin and Rab Thalathine.
- On May 22, the IDF [said](#) that it used fighter jets to target Hezbollah operatives in a building in Mays al-Jabal, as well as additional terror infrastructure in Ayta ash-Shab and Alma ash-Shab.

West Bank

- Reports from May 23 [indicated](#) that IDF troops have left Jenin after operating there for 40 hours, killing 12, according to Palestinian accounts. The IDF has not confirmed that it withdrew from the city.

Humanitarian Efforts

- According to Israel's Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories ([COGAT](#)), from the beginning of the war to May 22, there have been 590,920 tons of humanitarian aid that entered Gaza on 30,511 trucks.
- On May 24, U.S. Vice Admiral Brad Cooper [said](#) that three U.S. soldiers were injured, although not in combat, during the operation to construct a pier near Gaza to help deliver aid to the territory. Reuters [reported](#) that day that one of the soldiers was critically injured, per an unnamed U.S. defense official.
- On May 23, the head of UNRWA, Philippe Lazzarini, [said](#), “when it comes to the crossing in Kerem Shalom, the private sector for the time being is being prioritized,” but “we need a combination of both humanitarian aid and market [goods]” entering Gaza.
- On May 23, Reuters [reported](#) that “the United Nations has resumed transporting humanitarian aid arriving at a US-built pier off the coast of the Gaza Strip after halting deliveries for two days because some truckloads of supplies were intercepted by Palestinians.”
- On May 23, the Associated Press [reported](#) that the UN World Food Program said “that it has handed out in Gaza in recent days a ‘limited number’ of high-energy biscuits that arrived from a US-built pier, the first aid from the new humanitarian sea route to get into the hands of Palestinians in grave need.”

Ceasefire and Hostage Negotiations

- On May 22, Diaa Rashwan, head of Egypt's State Information Service, released a statement that “attempts to cast doubt and offend Egypt's mediation efforts... will only lead to further complications of the situation in Gaza and the entire region and may push Egypt to completely withdraw from its mediation in the current conflict.”
 - » The statement followed criticism of Egypt over a May 22 [CNN report](#) that Egyptian officials altered the terms of a ceasefire and hostage deal presented to Hamas after Israel had agreed to it.

Post-War Planning

- A [Politico report](#) on May 23 citing four U.S. officials indicated that the Biden administration is considering several post-war plans for Gaza, including appointing a U.S. official to serve as the top civilian advisor to a force composed mostly of Palestinians or pushing for a multinational peacekeeping force.
 - » According to the *Politico* report, the U.S. advisor would never enter Gaza and could be based in the Sinai or Jordan.
 - » U.S. officials who spoke with *Politico* claimed that there is broad agreement among U.S., Israeli, and regional officials to establish a Palestinian Council composed of Gazans to serve as an interim governing structure.
 - » A classified U.S. State Department document from March that *Politico* obtained proposed the formation of the Temporary Security Mission for Gaza. The security mission “could be a hybrid model of police and Carabinieri/gendarmerie” and that “State recommends branding this as a security mission not a ‘force.’”
 - The force would be led by an “an appropriately senior officer” from Israel, Egypt, or the Palestinian Authority. It would start in a “limited area of responsibility” focused on “key humanitarian assistance hubs” before it would then “gradually expand.”

Iranian Involvement and Response

- On May 23, on the margins of the funeral for Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi, Iranian officials [met](#) with the leaders of proxy groups. IRGC Commander Hossein Salami, IRGC-Quds Force Commander Esmail Qaani, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, Hezbollah deputy Naim Qassem, and Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdulsalam were all reportedly present at those meetings.
- On May 23, terrorists in Yemen fired a missile [toward](#) the *Yannisa*, a Maltese-flagged, Greek-owned bulk carrier, as it sailed 98 nautical miles south of Yemen’s port city of Hodeidah. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but the Houthis have repeatedly launched strikes against ships sailing in the area.
- On May 22, at approximately 3:16 pm local time, the Houthis [launched](#) four drones from Yemen. U.S. forces shot down the drones over Yemen.

U.S. Response

- During a hearing of the House Appropriations Committee on May 23, Secretary of State Antony Blinken [testified](#) that the finalization of an agreement between the United States and Saudi Arabia over nuclear energy and a security and defense pact “could be weeks away” but depends on calm in Gaza and a pathway to a Palestinian state.
- On May 23, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen [signaled](#) that she is concerned about a threat from Israel’s Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich to not renew a waiver that expires on July 1 that allows Israeli banks to process payments to the Palestinian Authority. She argued that “these banking channels are critical for processing transactions that enable almost \$8 billion a year in imports from Israel, including electricity, water, fuel, and food, as well as facilitating almost \$2 billion a year in exports on which Palestinian livelihoods depend.”
 - » She added that the United States and its partners “need to do everything possible to increase humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in Gaza, to curtail violence in the West Bank, and to stabilize the West Bank’s economy.”

- On May 22, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan [argued](#), “we believe the only way to defeat Hamas and lead to Israel’s long-term security is [to] connect the military effort to a holistic, integrated strategy for [the] defeat of Hamas and securing all of the other objectives that we’ve discussed. That’s something that we think Israel could be clearer about publicly as well as privately, and we’ll continue to work on that.”
 - » Sullivan noted that “Israel’s military operations in that area [Rafah] has been more targeted and limited, has not involved major military operations into the heart of dense urban areas.”
 - » He added, “we certainly have seen a growing chorus of voices, including voices that had previously been in support of Israel, drift in another direction. That is of concern to us because we do not believe that that contributes to Israel’s long-term security or vitality.”

International Response

- On May 24, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) [ruled](#) that “Israel must immediately halt its military offensive” in Rafah. The court [cited](#) “exceptionally grave” developments for the “extremely vulnerable” population since it last issued emergency orders in March and stated that it was “not convinced that the evacuation effort” for Palestinian civilians is sufficient to “alleviate the immense risk.”
- On May 23, Colombia’s President, Gustavo Petro, [ordered](#) the opening of an embassy in the West Bank city of Ramallah after he severed Colombia’s diplomatic relations with Israel.
- On May 22, Steffen Hebestreit, the spokesman for Germany’s Chancellor Olaf Scholz, [stated](#), “of course. Yes, we abide by the law” when asked whether Germany would enforce an ICC arrest warrant against Prime Minister Netanyahu.
 - » Avi Hyman, the spokesman for Prime Minister Netanyahu’s office, [responded](#), “I am old enough to remember the German leader coming here days after October 7, and stating that Hamas are the new Nazis. They seek a genocide against the Jews. Many in the world need to check their moral compass and be on the right side of history.”

Rising Antisemitism, Protests, and Attacks

- On May 23, a group of students [walked out](#) of Harvard University’s commencement ceremony, chanting “Free Palestine,” and “Let them walk,” referring to 13 students who were barred from walking at graduation for participating in the anti-Israel encampment on campus.
- On May 23, Drexel University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, [announced](#) its decision to call in police and public safety officers to clear the anti-Israel campus protesters erected on its campus. Many of the protesters left the encampment after the university’s warning.
 - » University President John Fry said, “an unauthorized encampment that involves large numbers of people unaffiliated with Drexel trespassing on our campus is illegal ... The language and chants coming from this demonstration, underscored by protestors’ repugnant ‘demands,’ must now come to an end.”
- On May 23, the head of the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), Gene Block, [testified](#) during a hearing of the House Committee on Education and Workforce and told the committee, “with the benefit of hindsight, we should have been prepared to immediately remove the encampment if and when the safety of our community was put at risk.”

- On May 23, over 1,000 residents of northern Israel, who have been displaced from their homes due to repeated attacks by Hezbollah and other groups in Lebanon, [erected](#) a protest encampment they called the “Displaced people of the Galilee,” near Kibbutz Amiad. The protesters, including several members of the Knesset and mayors of northern communities, called on the Israeli government to take action to allow them to return to their homes.
- On May 23, far-right Israelis [looted](#) two trucks during separate [incidents](#) in the West Bank that they thought were delivering aid to Gaza.
- Overnight on May 23, a theater in London was [vandalized](#) with antisemitic graffiti. The theater was scheduled to screen “Supernova The Music Festival Massacre,” a film about the October 7 attack against the rave in Israel. “Say no to art washing” was written in red paint on the doors of the theater.
- On May 22, antisemitic and threatening language was [written](#) in front of Israel’s Embassy in Denmark in chalk, including “You Son of a Jewess,” in Arabic, “al-Qassam,” “Sinwar,” and “One solution: Intifada!” A picture of Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah was also posted on a nearby street pole.
- On May 22, Israel’s consul general to Southern Germany, Talya Lador-Fresher, [wrote](#) on X, “today, an attack was carried out on the Consulate General of the State of Israel in Munich. It is an attack on the symbol of the State of Israel in Southern Germany. We would like to thank the @PolizeiMuenchen for [its] vigilance...in recent months, there has been repeated antisemitic and anti-Israel rhetoric. This physical attack now goes a step further. It is important that this is seen as a wake-up call for the German authorities about where antisemitism and hatred of Israel are leading.”
- On May 22, *The Times of Israel* [reported](#) that “thousands of Israelis are protesting in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, calling for the immediate release of the hostages hours after the release of footage showing the abduction of five female soldiers by Hamas-led terrorists on October 7.”

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.
 - » 634 Israeli soldiers have been [killed](#).
 - 286 IDF soldiers have been [killed](#) during ground combat in Gaza so far.
 - The IDF [announced](#) the deaths of Master Sgt. (res.) Gideon Chay DeRowe, 33, from Tel Aviv; Cpt. Israel Yudkin, 22, from Kfar Chabad; and Staff Sgt. Elyahu Haim Emsallem, 21, from Ra’anana.
 - As of May 24, 1,781 IDF soldiers have been [injured](#) during ground combat in Gaza, including at least 357 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 [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 35,800 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza, and 80,011 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, 517 people have been [killed](#), and at least 5,000 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 [Uruguayan](#) national, and 1 [American](#) national have been released.
 - Hamas has released [36 children](#) and still holds two as hostages.
 - » On May 24, the IDF [announced](#) that the bodies of three hostages were recovered from the northern Gaza Strip during an operation: Orión Hernández Radoux, 30, Hanan Yablonka, 42, and Michel Nisenbaum, 59. All three hostages, who were previously thought to have been alive, were killed on October 7, according to “reliable intelligence” uncovered during fighting during the past week, according to the IDF.
 - » On May 22, a video recording of Hamas’s abduction of seven Israeli women in the IDF was [released](#) by the victims’ families.
 - Israel has said that terrorists in Gaza currently [hold](#) roughly 130 hostages and deceased hostage bodies.
 - » Israeli officials have confirmed the deaths of at least [39](#) of the 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.

Recent and Relevant JINSA Products About Israel at War

- Webinar: [Gaza Update 5/23](#), with IDF MG (ret.) Yaakov Amidror, IDF MG (ret.) Yaacov Ayish, IDF MG (ret.) Amikam Norkin, and Michael Makovsky, May 23, 2024
- Webinar: [Iran After Raisi](#), with Ray Takeyh, Gabriel Noronha, and Jonathan Ruhe, May 22, 2024
- Jonathan Ruhe and Yoni Tobin, [ICC Prosecutor Requests Arrest Warrants for Israeli Leaders](#), May 21, 2024
- Webinar: [Responding to Legal Challenges to IDF Operations in Gaza](#), with COL Marc Warren, USA (ret.), LTC Geoffrey Corn, USA (ret.), and Jonathan Ruhe, May 20, 2024
- 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, USA (ret.) 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