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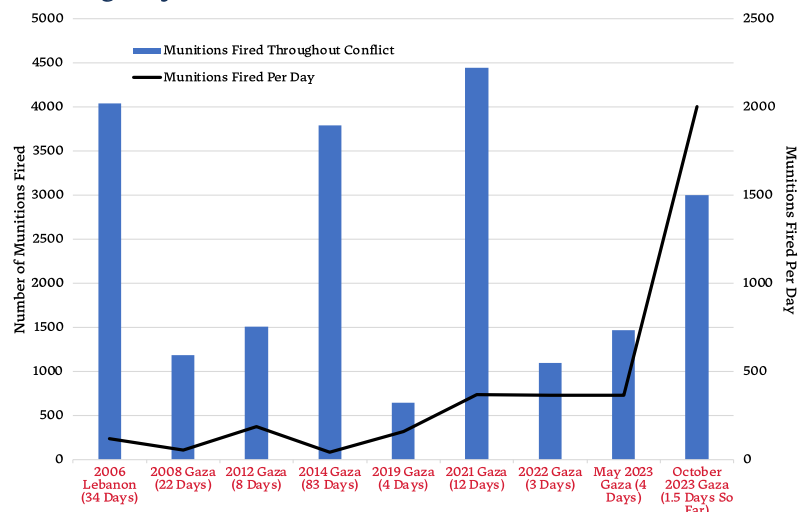
# Israel’s Operation Swords of Iron Update

On October 7, the day after the fiftieth anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, Hamas launched the deadliest attack in Israel’s history, firing over 3,000 rockets and sending gunmen to attack Israeli communities in the south by land, sea and air, killing at least 700 people and injuring at least 2,048. As Hamas’s main benefactor, Iran likely condoned, if not directed, the attack and could benefit if the war disrupts ongoing efforts to achieve normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Hezbollah’s decision to also fire rockets and mortars at Israel raises the specter of escalation to a multi-front conflict, potentially also involving Iran. The United States should continue to support Israel’s right to defend itself and to neutralize terrorist threats, including by replenishing Israel’s stocks of air defense interceptors or other critical capabilities, rapidly confirming a U.S. ambassador to Israel, and upgrading the depleted and obsolete prepositioned stockpile of U.S. weaponry in Israel.

## What Happened?

- On October 7, Hamas initiated an unprovoked, unprecedented, and surprise multi-pronged attack against Israel by firing thousands of rockets, mortars, and drones and sending hundreds of gunmen into Israeli communities by land, sea, and air, including for the first time by breaking through the Gaza border fence at multiple points en masse and paragliding over it.
  - These assault teams killed and kidnapped Israeli civilians and soldiers to hold as hostages in Israel and in Gaza.
- At the time of publishing, [terrorists](#) have killed at least 700 Israelis, injured at least 2,048, and taken at least one hundred Israeli civilians and soldiers as hostages into Gaza, with media reports saying as many as 170 may be captive. Israel claims to have killed at least 400 terrorists in southern Israel and the Gaza Strip and captured dozens more.
  - Palestinian terrorists have already fired over 3,000 rockets and drones

Projectiles Fired Against Israel During Major Conflicts



into Israel from Gaza, nearing the total from the 12-day 2021 and 83-day 2014 conflicts with Gaza and the 34-day Lebanon war in 2006.

- » [Reportedly](#), there are dozens of American citizens who were taken hostage into Gaza.
- » On the first day of the war, Israeli forces retook the Re'im military base in southern Israel, which houses the Gaza Division, after Hamas militants overran it.
- » In total, there were twenty-two locations with fighting reported in southern Israel, and hostage situations in Be'eri and Ofakim.
- Israel responded on October 7 by conducting airstrikes on at least seventeen Hamas military locations in Gaza connected to the group's leadership that [reportedly](#) killed at least 200 people and injured 1,600. Israel also [deployed](#) four divisions to the Gaza border, adding to the thirty-one battalions that were already there.
  - » "Citizens of Israel, we are at war. Not an operation, not a round [of fighting,] at war! This morning Hamas initiated a murderous surprise attack against the state of Israel and its citizens," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [warned](#) in a video he released in Hebrew on October 7.
- President Biden released a [statement](#) that "The United States unequivocally condemns this appalling assault against Israel by Hamas terrorists from Gaza, and... we stand ready to offer all appropriate means of support to the Government and people of Israel. Terrorism is never justified. Israel has a right to defend itself and its people. The United States warns against any other party hostile to Israel seeking advantage in this situation. My Administration's support for Israel's security is rock solid and unwavering."
- Late at night on October 7, Israel's security cabinet [approved](#) a declaration of war.
- Two Israelis and their Egyptian guide were killed in Egypt on October 8 when a local opened fire upon them. It is not clear if the incident is related to the ongoing fighting between Israel and Gaza.
- On October 8, Hamas fired more rocket salvos at Israel, and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) continued its airstrikes against terrorist locations in Gaza. That same day, Hezbollah [fired](#) dozens of rockets and mortar shells from Lebanon on three locations in the contested Shebaa Farms area of northern Israel. The IDF responded by [targeting](#) what it called "Hezbollah infrastructure," what reportedly included a tent the terrorist group had set up months ago just inside Israel's border with Lebanon.
  - » The IDF subsequently [fired](#) warning shots at Hezbollah members who attempted to rebuild the tent.
  - » IDF spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said the IDF would [evacuate](#) all civilians from the twenty-four villages near the Gaza border.
- ◀ Secretary of State Antony Blinken [said](#) on October 8 that there are reports of several missing Americans in Israel and that the Biden administration could [announce](#) new military support to Israel based on its requests later today. According to Blinken, "President Biden's direction was to make sure that we're providing Israel everything it needs in this moment to deal with the attacks from Hamas."



- ← The Pentagon will [reportedly](#) send ships and aircraft closer to Israel in response to attacks against Israel.



## Why Is It Important?

- Hamas's large-scale multi-pronged attack against Israel marks an unprecedented escalation by the Iran-backed terrorist group and demonstrates significant shortfalls in Israeli deterrence and intelligence. The war has already proven deadlier and could last much longer than Israel's recent conflicts with Gaza since 2019, each of which have lasted between three to twelve days since 2019. As Hamas's chief benefactor, and even if it gave no direct support, the Iranian regime looks favorably on Hamas's actions, which could aid its efforts to disrupt Israel-Saudi normalization. Hezbollah, another Iran-backed terrorist group, has also launched rockets and mortars at Israel, raising alarms that the conflict could turn into a widespread, potentially catastrophic, multi-front war, potentially also involving Iran. Hamas's ability to rapidly infiltrate Israeli territory via air, land, and sea to massacre and kidnap Israeli civilians and soldiers will certainly lead to a large Israeli response in Gaza with potentially more ambitious strategic objectives than previous rounds of conflict there, in which Israel sought primarily to restore deterrence against Hamas.
- In less than a day, Hamas made this war the deadliest conflict Israel has faced in its history. In comparison to previous attacks that Palestinian militants have launched, the assault plan indicated a more sophisticated combination of rocket, mortar, and drone strikes not only to target and potentially kill Israelis but as cover for a large invasion.
  - » The roughly 3,000 projectiles that Palestinian terrorists launched at Israel on the first day of the war is more than it has faced on any other single day.
  - » Despite increasingly frequent multi-day conflicts, the pre-existing, widespread assumption had been that both Hamas and Israel wanted to avoid a full-scale war. This war will force a reassessment of Hamas's desire for a full-scale war.
    - Hamas had avoided fighting directly during the two most recent conflicts between Israel and terrorist groups in Gaza in [May 2023](#) and [August 2022](#), refusing entreaties to join the fighting from Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), another Iran-backed terrorist group in Gaza. Israel had successfully messaged to Hamas that it would not strike the group so long as the latter stayed out of the fighting.

- Palestinian terrorists and their Iranian benefactors have likely seized on the confluence of several events as motivation for the attacks:
  - » Hamas has [called](#) its attack “Operation Al-Aqsa Deluge” and Hamas military commander Muhammad Deif [claimed](#) in a video that it launched the attack as retaliation for what it called Israel’s “desecration” of the Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.
  - » Iran, the chief benefactor of Palestinian terrorist groups in Gaza, namely Hamas and PIJ, condoned, if not coordinated, the attacks.
    - A spokesperson for Hamas, Ghazi Hamad, [told](#) the *BBC* that Iran gave its support for the terrorist group’s surprise attacks on Israel.
    - Iran did not take credit for Hamas’s attack, but Yahya Rahim-Safavi, an adviser to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, [said](#), “we congratulate the Palestinian fighters for this operation.”
    - The October 7 attack began just four days after Khamenei [posted on X](#) that “The usurper regime is coming to an end. Today, the Palestinian youth and the anti-oppression, anti-occupation movement in Palestine is more energetic, more alive, and more prepared than ever during the past 70 or 80 years. God willing, the movement will achieve its goals.”
    - As JINSA’s Randi and Charles Wax Senior Fellow John Hannah [told](#) *The New York Times*’ Peter Baker on Saturday, “it is highly probable” that the attacks had their origin in Tehran or Beirut with the hopes of “derailing the momentum toward peace” between Israel and Saudi Arabia. As Hannah noted, “Israel-Saudi normalization poses a mortal threat to the genocidal project that lies at the core of the Iranian revolution: wiping Israel off the map.... Hamas and its Iranian and Hezbollah backers are no doubt hoping to use the pain and deaths of their own people to inflame hatred of Israel across the Middle East, including the streets of Arabia, thereby making it impossible for the peace train between Riyadh and Jerusalem to pick up more speed.”
  - » This month is also the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hezbollah’s attack on the U.S. Marine Barracks in Beirut, the deadliest single Iran-directed terrorist attack on Americans to date and a strategic shock to the United States, which had not suffered so many Marine casualties in a single day since Iwo Jima.
- While Hezbollah has already joined the conflict in a limited capacity, the potential for it to fire larger barrages at Israel and/or for Iran and its other proxies to join a multi-front escalation against Israel is worrying given their larger, more advanced arsenals than those of Palestinian terrorists in Gaza.
  - » Hezbollah has roughly 130,000 rockets and missiles that could enable it to overpower and overwhelm Israeli air defenses.
  - » Unlike the rockets that militants in Gaza have used, Hezbollah possesses dozens or hundreds of precision munitions. Tehran has also tried to proliferate technology that can convert Hezbollah’s large arsenal of unguided rockets into precision weapons, and it



persistently attempts to make Syria, Iraq, and Yemen into additional launchpads for encircling Israel in a “ring of fire.”

- » Hezbollah may [launch an estimated](#) 3,000 rockets, missiles, and drones per day at the outset of any conflict, and sustain a rate of around 1,000 projectiles per day after that. Given Hezbollah’s large supply of weaponry, it could likely sustain high rates of fire against Israel for longer than militants in Gaza.
- » Hezbollah demonstrated its readiness to allow attacks from Lebanon that were synched with attacks from Gaza during the May 2023 conflict, as [JINSA previously noted](#).
- Escalations between Israel and Gaza have also grown increasingly frequent. There has been a steady drop in the number of days between conflicts since 2019, with this latest war starting only 147 days after the conflict in May.
- » The increasing frequency, severity, and shock of the attack could lead to calls in Israel to [reoccupy the territory](#), something Israeli leaders conspicuously avoided doing during the last major IDF ground incursion into Gaza in 2014.



- Regardless of whether a multifront offensive similar to what Israel confronted fifty years ago materializes in this war, the symbolism of the anniversary enables Iran and its proxies to demonstrate the potency of its self-proclaimed “resistance axis” which seeks to destroy Israel and intimidate Arab states like Saudi Arabia that seek to end the seventy-year-long Arab-Israeli standoff.
  - » In an [interview](#) with NBC News’ Lester Holt in September, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said, “we are against any bilateral relations between our regional countries and the Zionist regime,” a reference to Israel. Raisi added, “we believe that the Zionist regime is intending to normalize this bilateral relations with the regional countries to create security for itself in the region.”
  - » In June, Raisi [told](#) the head of PIJ, Ziad Nakhleh, that Israel seeks to normalize relations with Muslim countries “to discourage young Palestinians from [seeking to] liberate the occupied territories,” the president’s office said in a statement, as he hailed Palestinian “resistance” against Israel.
- Ominously, Hezbollah and Hamas leadership have been talking of total war against Israel over the summer. They might now be acting on those threats precisely to try and bring to a stop the Israel-Saudi peace process.
  - » In August, Hamas official Saleh al-Arouri [talked](#) of “total war” with Israel, but emphasized that “it will not be like the war in 1967.”

- He noted, however, that Israel’s “superiority [is] in classic warfare. Therefore, we are convinced that if a total conflict begins, the airspace, seaports of this entity [Israel] will be shut down, and they will not be able to live without electricity, water, and communications. In an open war, they will have a curfew and their economy will come to a standstill.”
- » That month, Secretary-General of Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah [said](#) that his group can produce a map or a list of “civilian airports, military airports, the air force bases, the power plants, and electricity distribution grid, the water plans, the main communications centers, various infrastructure,” and went on, including mentioning Israel’s Dimona nuclear facility.
  - He also dismissed the Iron Dome’s ability to intercept missiles, claiming some will still get through to strike Israel.
- The U.S. stockpile of U.S.-owned weaponry in Israel, called War Reserve Stockpile Ammunition-Israel (WRSA-I) has become obsolete and no longer serves its strategic purpose of providing Israel with access to weaponry it would need in an emergency like a prolonged or multi-front war, as JINSA CEO and President Mike Makovsky and Vice President for Policy Blaise Misztal wrote in the [Wall Street Journal](#).
  - » WRSA-I’s [primary purpose](#) is to serve as a readily accessible forward-based arms depot for Israel to obtain vital munitions that would ensure its military superiority in wartime.
  - » The Biden administration [transferred](#) 300,000 155-millimeter artillery shells in WRSA-I to Ukraine, depleting the stockpile and opening up room within it for the advanced weaponry Israel needs.
  - » JINSA also understands that the United States has not upgraded WRSA-I since before the Obama administration, thus rendering the depot full of unguided “dumb” bombs, which are almost entirely eschewed by the IDF.
  - » Instead, the IDF relies primarily on precision-guided munitions (PGMs) to accurately strike targets located in complex, crowded environments while minimizing collateral damage, especially considering Hamas and Hezbollah’s deliberate placement of weapons stockpiles, launchers, and other military infrastructure near and often within civilian sites.
    - Despite procuring tens of thousands of PGMs in recent years, Israel’s ongoing operations raise the risk of critical PGM shortfalls that could threaten its deterrence and self-defense against Iran or Hezbollah in a [major conflict](#) that likely would be as intense as the 1973 Yom Kippur War.
- Hamas kidnapping Israelis and holding them hostage in Gaza potentially complicates Israeli operations. A major question will be whether Israel decides to launch a ground operation into Gaza to recover the hostages and/or neutralize terrorist operatives and capabilities.
- The United States has not had an ambassador to Israel since former Ambassador Tom Nides resigned in mid-July. President Biden has nominated former Obama administration Treasury Secretary and White House Chief of Staff Jack Lew to be the next ambassador.
  - » Following the attacks, Senate Democrats have [expressed](#) desires to expedite Lew’s confirmation process.

## What Should the United States Do Next?

- Just as the Yom Kippur War did not end with Israel's destruction and instead ushered in peace between Israel and Egypt, this war should also push U.S., Israeli, and Arab leaders to expedite the normalization process between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Conversely, any conspicuous slackening of U.S. support for continued talks would only encourage further Iranian aggression and dissuade further diplomatic progress between Israel and the Arab world.
- The Biden administration should continue supporting Israel's right to defend itself against terrorist threats and conduct operations until the terrorist threat is neutralized, including at the United Nations Security Council.
  - » This should include support for Israeli ground operations into Gaza, should it choose to initiate them.
- President Biden should pledge to replenish Israel's supply of Tamir interceptors for the Iron Dome short-range air defense system, as he did after the 2021 Gaza conflict, as well as any other critical capabilities that Israel expends.
  - » The United States should also provide funding so that Israel can acquire additional Iron Dome batteries beyond the ten or so it reportedly currently fields.
- Given the urgent need to signal U.S. support for Israel and to ensure effective diplomatic communication between Washington and Jerusalem, the Senate should expedite the confirmation process for the U.S. ambassador to Israel.
- Working with Israel, the Biden administration urgently should replenish WRSA-I with much-needed PGMs, chiefly Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) tailkits and GBU-39 and GBU-53/B small diameter bombs, and potentially other much-needed weapons.