



Ari Cicurel
Assistant Director of Foreign Policy

Yoni Tobin
Policy Analyst

Zachary Schildcrout
Policy Analyst

Anna Schaftel
Programs and Outreach Associate

Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update October 20, 2023

On October 7, Hamas launched an unprovoked and unprecedented multi-pronged attack on Israel by land, air, and sea. JINSA issued a NatSec Brief with an [early assessment](#) of the war on October 8 and is producing daily updates during the war. Updated information and analysis are below, which JINSA will continue to produce throughout the war.

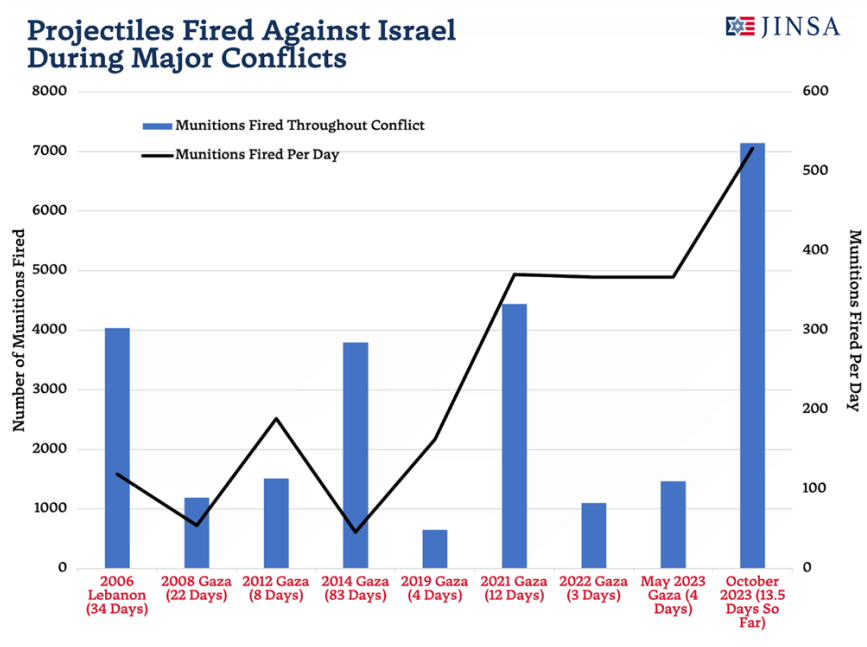
Last 24 Hours

Attacks Against Israel

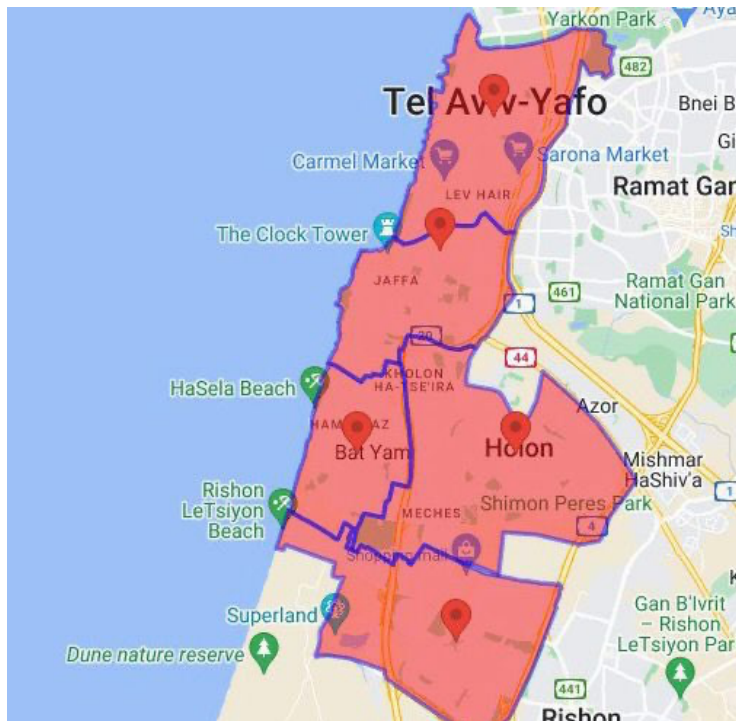
- More than [7,144](#) rockets, mortars, drones, and other projectiles have been fired from Gaza during the war.
 - » Of the over 7,000 rockets launched by Hamas against Israel, at least 770 have [failed](#), including falling short and landing inside Gaza.
 - » Rockets [struck](#) Sderot, and sirens [sounded](#) in Aderet, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ein HaBsor, Kfar Aza, Kissufim, Ibim, Mefalsim, Tel Aviv, Rishon Lezion, Holon, Bat Yam and Yavne as well as other locations in southern Israel.
 - » A missile [struck](#) a building in Qiryat Shemona in northern Israel on October 19, causing three injuries, including one minor injury and two moderate injuries.
 - The IDF announced on October 20 that it was [evacuating](#) residents of Qiryat Shemona to a number of state-funded guesthouses indefinitely. The town is [approximately](#) two kilometers from the Israel-Lebanon border, outside the [zone](#) from which Israel already ordered an evacuation for the safety of its citizens in the north.
 - » Four rockets were [fired](#) at Tel Aviv on October 19, of which two were intercepted. No damage or injuries were reported.
- Terrorists in Lebanon fired a barrage of rockets from Lebanon on October 19 and shot at IDF soldiers on the border.
 - » Over twenty rockets were [fired](#) into Israel from Lebanon in a one-hour span on October 19, according to Israeli press reports.
 - Hamas [claimed responsibility](#) for several of the rockets launched against Israel from southern Lebanon. One journalist [said](#) the barrage against Kiryat Shmona “appeared to be the most serious assault on the city since 2006, when it came under heavy

attack from Hezbollah during Israel’s thirty-four-day war with the Iran-backed terror group.”

- » On October 20, terrorists in southern Lebanon [fired](#) on IDF soldiers near Margaliot, a town near the Lebanon border.
- » Also on October 20, terrorists in Lebanon fired [mortars](#) toward Mount Dov.



Targets of Rocket Fire from Gaza in Southern and Central Israel on October 19



Source: [Israel Defense Forces](#)

IDF Operations

- The IDF stated that it [launched](#) over 100 strikes on targets in Gaza in the last 24 hours.
 - » According to an IDF [press release](#), the IDF struck Hamas infrastructure targets including weapons depots, “dozens” of operational command centers, and a tunnel used for terrorist activity.
 - » The IDF [claimed](#) that it killed:
 - Mamdouh Shalabiya, a member of Hamas’s naval commando unit, who reportedly orchestrated attacks from the sea.
 - Amjad Majed Muhammad Abu Odeh, a Hamas naval operative who [participated](#) in the October 7 attacks that killed over 1,300 Israelis.
 - » IDF spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said on October 20 that Israeli [airstrikes](#) in Gaza are being conducted “at a rate that has not been seen for decades.”
- The IDF struck Hezbollah targets, and IDF forces returned fire following a shooting attack from southern Lebanon that targeted Israeli forces.
 - » On October 20, an IDF used a [drone](#) to kill three Hezbollah terrorists in southern Lebanon.
 - » Also on October 20, the IDF [shelled](#) a target in Lebanon that was the source of the mortar fire toward Mount Dov.
 - » The IDF [opened fire](#) on gunmen in southern Lebanon near the Lebanese-Israeli border on October 19.
- On October 19, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant laid out Israeli [strategic plans](#) for the war against Hamas at a meeting with the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee of the Knesset, the Israeli parliament.
 - » Gallant told the members of the Knesset that Israel’s objectives include destroying Hamas’s military and political capabilities and replacing it with a new “security regime” in the Gaza Strip.
 - » Gallant also stated that the war would have three primary phases:
 - First phase: airstrikes and ground operations to kill terrorist operatives and destroy infrastructure targets.
 - Second phase: low-intensity conflict to eliminate “pockets of resistance.”
 - Third phase: the establishment of a “new security regime” in Gaza, “the removal of Israel’s responsibility for day-to-day life” in Gaza, and an unspecified “new security reality” for citizens of Israeli areas near Gaza.
 - » Regarding the planned third phase, Israeli Agriculture Minister Avi Dichter said on October 19 that after its war with Hamas ends, Israel would establish a large buffer zone around Gaza.
 - Dichter stressed the importance of establishing a wide berth of unoccupied land around Gaza.
 - Dichter [stated](#), “Nahal Oz [where over 100 civilians were killed in the October 7 attacks], that is 800 meters from the border [with Gaza]. So, you need to take more

precautions ... we have seen what happened when we took risks. It was a mistake we are not going to repeat.”

- » On October 19, head of IDF Southern Command Maj. Gen. Yaron Finkelman said the [impending](#) ground operation would be “long and intense.”
- The IDF [conducted](#) security operations in the West Bank on October 19, including ground raids and an airstrike, near the city of Tulkarem.
 - » According to the Palestinian Health Ministry, thirteen Palestinians were killed in the operations.
 - » Israeli police have arrested [584](#) Palestinians in the West Bank since October 7.
- On October 20, Israeli Border Police located and [arrested](#) four Gazans, illegally in Israel, in an apartment in Beersheba. The police have not stated whether they were part of the terrorist infiltration on October 7.

Casualties and Hostages

- Over [1,400](#) people in Israel have died and over 4,500 have been injured in the war.
 - » 306 Israeli soldiers have been [killed](#).
 - » Numerous foreign nationals have been killed in the war, including at least thirty-two [American](#) nationals, twenty-four [Thai](#) nationals, twenty-one [French](#) nationals, seventeen [British](#) nationals, ten [Nepalese](#) nationals, seven [Argentinian](#) nationals, sixteen [Russian](#) nationals, four [Romanian](#) nationals, four [Chinese](#) nationals, three [Brazilian](#) nationals, three [Belarusian](#) nationals, three [Chilean](#) nationals, three [Philippines](#) nationals, two [Ukrainian](#) nationals, two [Peruvian](#) nationals, five [Canadian](#) nationals, a [Cambodian](#) national, a [Colombian](#) national, an [Irish](#) national, an [Italian](#) national, a [Spanish](#) national, a [Swiss](#) national, a [Turkish](#) national, and an [Austrian](#) national.
- According to the Hamas-controlled Gaza Health Ministry, 4,137 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza, and 13,162 have been injured during the war.
 - » On October 20, the Gaza Health Ministry said that sixteen Palestinians had been [killed](#) in an explosion in the Church of St. Porphyrius and many were injured. The cause of the explosion was not immediately known.
 - » The IDF later released a statement saying that an airstrike on a Hamas command and control center had “damaged the wall of a church in the area” and that the incident was under review.
- According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, eighty-one people have been [killed](#), and over 1,230 have been wounded in the West Bank.
- The IDF claims that at least 1,500 infiltrators from Gaza have been [killed](#) in Israel since the start of the war.
- According to the IDF’s latest press release, the families of 203 individuals have been notified that their loved ones were [taken hostage](#).
- Foreign nationals also remain missing, including at least eleven [American](#) nationals, fifteen [French](#) nationals, fifteen [Argentinian](#) nationals, nine [Ukrainian](#) nationals, eight [Russian](#) nationals, three [Canadian](#) nationals, three [Philippines](#) nationals, two [Austrian](#) nationals, three [Italian](#) nationals, two [Paraguayan](#) nationals, five [Peruvian](#) nationals, two [Sri Lankan](#)

nationals, two [Tanzanian](#) nationals, a [Chilean](#) national, an [Azeri](#) national, and a [Nepalese](#) national.

- » At least eight [German](#) nationals, seventeen [Thai](#) nationals, four [Portuguese](#) nationals, two [Italian](#) nationals, and two [Mexican](#) nationals have been taken hostage by Hamas.
- On October 20, a ten-year-old girl in Ashdod fainted and [lost consciousness](#) as a result of air raid sirens and was rushed to the hospital.

Iranian Involvement

- On October 19, the *USS Carney* [intercepted](#) three missiles and several drones fired north from Yemen.
 - » According to Pentagon press secretary Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Houthis launched the projectiles, and the United States shot them down over the water off the coast of Yemen.
 - He specified during a briefing, “we cannot say for certain what these missiles and drones were targeting, but they were launched from Yemen heading north along the Red Sea, potentially towards targets in Israel.”
 - He reiterated U.S. preparedness “to protect our partners and our interests in this important region.”
- The Ain al-Asad base in Iraq, which hosts U.S. service members, [came under fire](#) from drones and rockets on October 19, and [rockets](#) also hit a base that hosts U.S. service members near Baghdad International Airport.
- These attacks closely follow rocket and drone strikes against the Ain al-Asad Air Base and al Harir Air Base in Iraq, which host U.S. service members, as indicated in JINSA’s [October 19 Swords of Iron Update](#).
 - » Also that day, the facility in Tanf, Syria, that hosts U.S. service members was attacked, resulting in the [death](#) of one U.S. contractor as the result of a cardiac episode, and the Conoco gas facility where U.S. troops are present was reportedly attacked.
 - » Iran-linked groups claimed responsibility for the attacks in Iraq. Iran-backed militia have a [history](#) of launching attacks against U.S. service members in Syria.
- The head of Iran’s Basij paramilitary forces, one of the IRGC’s five main units, [stated](#) this week on Iranian television that “significant developments are imminent” in the war, and the “ultimate achievement in this conflict’s second phase will be the disappearance of Israel.”
- The Associated Press [reported](#) on October 19 that some of the weaponry Hamas used during the October 7 terrorist attack was likely North Korean, likely in a shipment directly facilitated by Iran.
 - » Hamas reportedly used the North Korean F-7 rocket-propelled grenade (RPG), according to South Korean officials, outside experts, and AP’s own analysis.
 - » The UN Panel of Experts on North Korea [found](#) in a 2021 report that North Korea and Iran cooperate closely on weapons development.
 - » Director of Armament Research Services N.R. Jenzen-Jones [told](#) AP that “many North Korean weapons have been provided by Iran to militant groups, and this appears to be the primary way by which Palestinian militants have come to possess North Korean weapons.”

- » Small Arms Survey researcher Matt Schroeder [told](#) AP that Hamas’s published images of its fighters wielding an RPG with a red stripe on the warhead suggest use of the F-7.
- On October 17, South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff [relayed](#) that it believed Hamas used the F-7 during the attack.

U.S. and International Response

- On October 19, U.S President Joe Biden [delivered](#) an Oval Office speech at 8:00 PM ET, stressing that due to Hamas’s attacks, Gaza’s need for humanitarian assistance, and Russia’s war against Ukraine, “we are at a global inflection point that is bigger than party or politics.” To address these challenges, the president is [seeking approval](#) from Congress for a \$100 billion foreign aid package, most of which will reportedly benefit Ukraine and \$10 billion of which will reportedly benefit Israel.
 - » During the speech, Biden addressed the threats that Hamas and Russian President Vladimir Putin present: “the assault on Israel echoes nearly twenty months of war, tragedy and brutality inflicted on the people of Ukraine, people that were very badly hurt since Putin launched his all-out invasion.”
 - He elaborated further, “Hamas and Putin represent different threats, but they share this in common: they both want to completely annihilate a neighboring democracy — completely annihilate it.”
 - » The president argued that the United States should continue to invest in Israel’s and Ukraine’s success because “history has taught us that when terrorists don’t pay a price for their terror, when dictators don’t pay a price for their aggression, they cause more chaos and death and more destruction. They keep going. And the cost and the threats to America and the world keep rising.”
 - » In addition, he noted that on October 20, “I’m going to send to Congress an urgent budget request to fund America’s national security needs, to support our critical partners, including Israel and Ukraine. It’s a smart investment that’s going [to] pay dividends for American security for generations, help us keep American troops out of harm’s way, help us build a world that is safer, more peaceful and more prosperous for our children and grandchildren.”
 - » Addressing threats to communities outside the Middle East heightened by violence inspired by the Israel-Hamas war, Biden said, “in recent years, too much hate has been given too much oxygen, fueling racism, a rise in antisemitism, Islamic-phobia [*sic*], right here in America.”
 - He added, “today, Jewish families [are] worried about being targeted in school, wearing symbols of their faith walking down the street, or going out about their daily lives.”
 - Biden continued, “and I know many of you in the Muslim American community, the Arab American community, the Palestinian American community and so many others are outraged and hardened saying to yourselves, ‘Here we go again with Islamophobia and the distrust we saw after 9/11.’”
- The U.S. State Department [issued](#) a “Worldwide Caution” warning on October 19, urging citizens to “exercise increased caution” overseas “due to increased tensions in various locations around the world, the potential for terrorist attacks, demonstrations or violent actions against U.S. citizens and interests.”

- » The Islamic State’s October 19 edition of its weekly magazine *Al-Naba* advocated for a worldwide “[battle with the Jews](#)” and exhorted readers to attack houses, nightclubs, synagogues, Israeli embassies, clubs, and other similar targets across the world.
- On October 19, *Axios*, citing American and Israeli officials, [reported](#) that Israel is slated to receive two U.S. Iron Dome batteries in the coming days.
- On October 18, the United States [vetoed](#) a UN Security Council resolution addressing the Israel-Hamas war put forward by Brazil.
 - » The resolution endorsed a “humanitarian pause” in fighting, but U.S. Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said, “the United States is disappointed this resolution made no mention of Israel’s right of self-defense.”
 - » Thomas-Greenfield also said, “following previous terrorist attacks by groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, this council reaffirmed that right. This text should have done the same.”
- American officials have [stated](#) they believe the U.S. force posture in the Eastern Mediterranean, including the deployment of two carrier strike groups and a Marine Expeditionary Unit, has deterred Hezbollah from launching major attacks against Israel.
- The *BBC* [admitted](#) that it made mistakes in its coverage of the explosion at the Al-Ahli hospital in Gaza and that it was wrong for one of its correspondents, Jon Donnison, to speculate that he could see no possibility other than an Israeli airstrike as the cause. Israel has released evidence demonstrating that the attack emanated from inside of Gaza.
 - » The *BBC* maintains a policy of [not referring](#) to Hamas as a terrorist group.

Analysis

- Increasing Iranian proxy-launched drone, rocket, and missile attacks on U.S. assets in the region - including attempted attacks on U.S. bases or facilities in Iraq and Syria and three cruise missiles and several drones fired from Yemen in the direction of Israel - in the past two days appear to be an Iranian-orchestrated effort to raise costs for the United States in the region, gauge the U.S. commitment to responding militarily, and attempt to deter the United States from standing steadfast with Israel.
- While Hezbollah has sporadically attacked Israel, there remains the [dangerous](#) risk of a multi-front war with Hezbollah and/or Iran. As JINSA has previously [noted](#), increased terrorist activity in the West Bank also threatens to stretch Israeli resources and attention thin.
 - » The [potential](#) for a [multi-front](#) war underscores the need for a strong U.S. [deterrent](#) against Iran to complement Israel’s efforts.
 - » As JINSA Distinguished Fellow and former Israeli National Security Advisor Major General (ret.) Yaakov Amidror told *Fortune* magazine on October 15 when discussing the potential for a multi-front war, Israeli forces are “movable in minutes if it will be needed. Of course it is not easy to deal with two fronts at the same time,” but the IDF “[can do it.](#)”
 - Amidror also [underscored](#) the importance of Israel’s own deterrents against Hezbollah in an October 17 interview with the *Washington Times*, saying Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah “sees what’s going on in Gaza, and the last thing he wants is that that will be the same situation in Beirut.”