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Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update October 23, 2023

On October 7, Hamas launched an unprovoked and unprecedented multi-pronged attack on Israel by land, air, and sea. An update with the latest information and analysis about the war is below, which JINSA will regularly produce.

Analysis

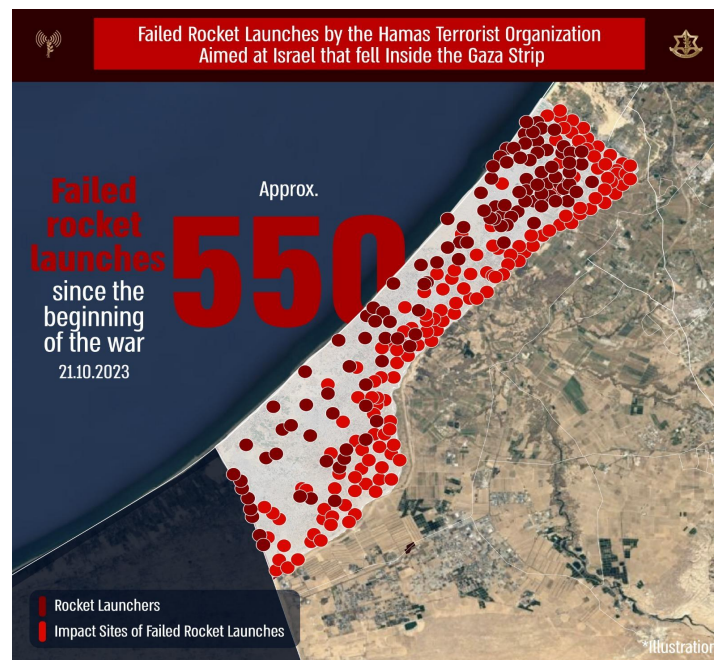
- Despite growing anticipation and pressure, Israel has yet to launch a full-scale major ground offensive into Gaza.
 - » Two parallel lines of effort likely explain the delay, with one being, as [Israeli media](#) sources and [The New York Times](#) reported over the weekend, a coordinated effort with the United States to boost the latter's force posture in the region in light of increased Iranian proxy attacks over the past week.
 - » A second line of effort is the campaign to free hostages from Hamas captivity, two of which—American nationals who were taken from the Israeli kibbutz of Nahal Oz in the October 7 attack—were freed on October 20 after mediation from the government of Qatar.
 - » [The New York Times](#) also [reported](#) on October 20 that U.S. officials are worried about “harsh Israeli tactics in an expected ground offensive against Hamas in Gaza that would compel Hezbollah to enter the war,” suggesting that certain members of the Biden administration view Israeli operational restraint as necessary to avoid regional escalation.
 - However, President Biden has [stated](#) since the October 7 attack that he believes Hamas must be eliminated.
 - Similarly, when speaking with a [bipartisan delegation](#) of U.S. senators visiting Israel on October 22, Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD) underscored Israel's right to self-defense and that “at the end of the day, Hamas must be eliminated... There is no future with Hamas” for the Palestinians.
- The U.S. activation of air defense systems such as the Patriot and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) systems to protect assets and forces in Iraq and Syria, coupled with the redeployment of the USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower* aircraft carrier from the Eastern Mediterranean to an unspecified location in the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility, indicate the U.S. Defense Department seeks to deter and enhance defenses against further Iran-backed attacks on U.S. forces and partners in the region.
 - » An imminent Israeli ground offensive into Gaza could increase the rate and potentially the intensity of Iran-linked attacks, underscoring the importance of strong U.S. backing

of Israel and a credible U.S. deterrent posture against Iran's various proxy forces in the region.

Last 72 Hours

Attacks Against Israel

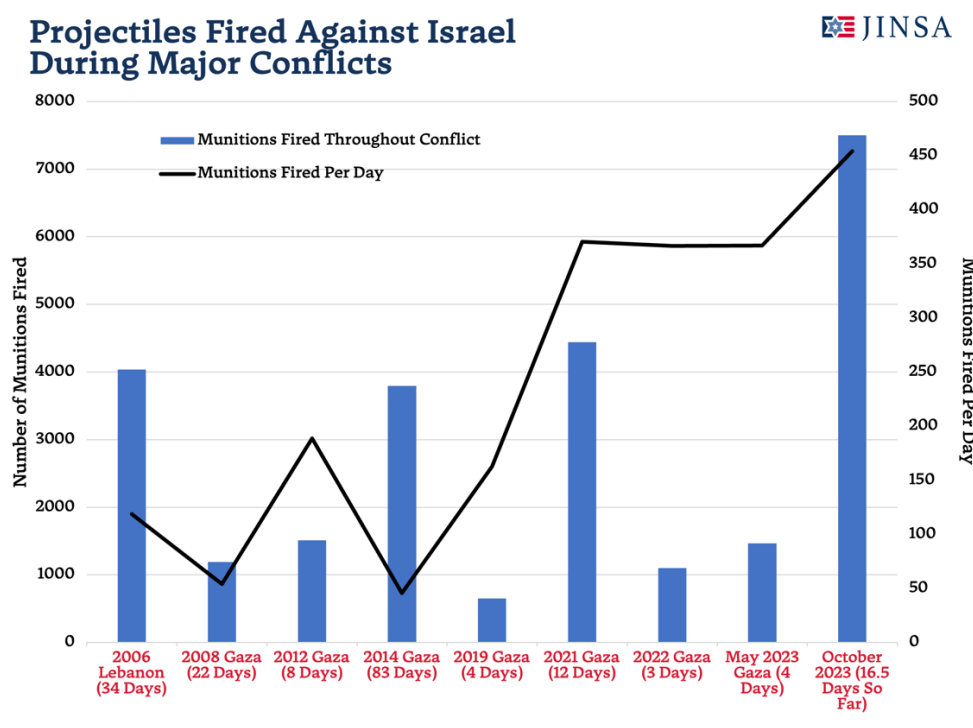
- At least [7,500](#) rockets, mortars, drones, and other projectiles have been fired from Gaza during the war.
 - » Sirens [sounded](#) in Amioz, Ashkelon, Bat Hadar, Be'er Sheva, Carmia, Kfar Silver, Mavki'im, Netiv Ha'asara, Yad Mordechai, Yesha, Zikim, and Ein Habsor, as well as other locations in southern Israel.
 - » Approximately 550 projectiles that terrorists fired from Gaza misfired and landed in the Gaza Strip between October 7-21.



Source: [Israel Defense Forces](#)

- In the last 72 hours, terrorists in southern Lebanon fired rockets, drones, and anti-tank missiles that killed and injured Israelis.
 - » On October 21, an IDF soldier was struck and [killed](#) by an anti-tank guided missile in the Bar'am region of northern Israel near the border with Lebanon.
 - Two other soldiers were lightly injured by the strike.
 - The soldier killed was an [Israeli-American national](#) who was raised in the United States.
 - » An unspecified "suspicious" aerial target [entered](#) into Israel from Lebanon and was shot down on October 23 by the IDF.
 - » An anti-tank missile [struck](#) an open field in the northern Israeli town of Arab al-Aramshe on October 22, causing no injuries or damage.
 - » The IDF [said](#) it intercepted a drone fired from Lebanon on the morning of October 22.

- » A rocket strike in Netivot on October 22 [injured](#) a local resident, who was transported to a hospital in moderate condition.
- According to [reporting](#) from Barak Ravid of *Axios* on October 21, Israeli officials claimed that the IDF found a USB with instructions for how to produce a "cyanide dispersion device" on the body of a Hamas terrorist in Israel. It was not clear from the files if Hamas had an operational plan to use or produce chemical weapons.
 - » According to Ravid, the Israeli Foreign Ministry sent a cable to embassies on October 19 with the headline "Hamas intention of using chemical weapons," which traced the origin of the instructions to a 2003 al-Qaeda manual.



IDF Operations

- On October 23, a number of top Israeli security and defense officials [met](#) at the IDF headquarters in Tel Aviv, including Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi, Shin Bet head Ronen Bar, Mossad director David Barnea, director general of the Defense Ministry Maj. Gen. (res.) Eyal Zamir, and Maj. Gen. (res.) Nitzan Alon, who is leading intelligence efforts to locate hostages in the Gaza Strip.
- Overnight between October 22 and October 23, the IDF reported that it [struck](#) over 320 Hamas targets across the Gaza Strip.
 - » The IDF reported that it [struck](#) a weapons manufacturing facility, a Hamas command center, dozens of tunnels, operational centers, and a rocket-launching facility in Gaza.
 - » The IDF also [destroyed](#) dozens of anti-tank positions and mortar launches across the Gaza Strip.
 - » The IDF reported on October 22 that it [killed](#):
 - Muhammad Qatwash, deputy head of Hamas’s Artillery Array and the individual in charge of the artillery operations for Hamas’s Central Brigade.

- Two other unnamed terrorists, [including](#) one operative in Hamas’s elite forces unit Nukhba.
- On October 23, the IDF [arrested](#) sixty-four terrorists, of which thirty-seven are Hamas operatives, across the West Bank in a series of operations, including an [airstrike](#) on a Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad target in Jenin.
 - » The IDF announced that two terror operatives were killed in the operations, which it stated was [conducted](#) to prevent an imminent terrorist attack, including:
 - Osama Bani Padel, who the IDF said planned the murder of two Israelis in Huwara, in the West Bank, in August.
 - » The Palestinian Authority-run Palestinian Health Ministry stated that four people were [killed](#) in the raids.
 - » The IDF [announced](#) on October 23 that a total of over 800 terrorists have been arrested in the West Bank since the war began, of which around 500 are Hamas operatives.
- An IDF soldier was [killed](#) and three others injured by an anti-tank missile [launched](#) during a ground operation on October 22 on targets in the Gaza Strip.
 - » The ground raid was conducted “to dismantle terror infrastructure, clear the area of terrorists and weapons, and locate missing persons and bodies,” according to the IDF.
- The IDF stated that it launched strikes on cells of fighters in southern Lebanon in the last 72 hours.
 - » The IDF [announced](#) on October 23 that it had struck Hezbollah terrorist infrastructure in Lebanon, including an observation post and a military compound, and also struck four Hezbollah terrorist cells near the Lebanese-Israeli border.
 - » Hezbollah said in a statement on October 23 that the IDF had [killed](#) two of its members in a military operation.
- Syrian state-run media [reported](#) on October 22 that Israel had launched airstrikes against the international airports of Damascus and Aleppo, killing one person.

Casualties and Hostages

- On October 20, Hamas [released](#) two American nationals, Judith and Natalie Ranaan, who it had been holding hostage, to the Red Cross in Gaza. They were later reunited with family members in Israel.
 - » Qatar helped facilitate the release of the two hostages, whom Hamas abducted from the home of a family member in Nahal Oz during the October 7 attacks.
- Over 1,400 people in Israel have [died](#) and over 5,132 have been [injured](#) in the war.
 - » The Israeli Health Ministry [announced](#) on October 23 that 295 people were hospitalized in Israel, of which forty-six were in serious condition, 166 are in moderate condition, and 83 are in mild condition.
 - » 307 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, 4,740 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza, and 13,651 have been [injured](#) during the war.
- According to the Palestinian Authority-run Palestinian Ministry of Health, [ninety-seven](#) Palestinians in the West Bank have been [killed](#), and over 1,650 have been wounded.
- 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, the families of 222 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.

Iranian Involvement

- Deputy chief of the IRGC Ali Fadavi [threatened](#) to attack the Israeli city of Haifa on October 23 during an address at the University of Tehran.
 - » Fadavi stated, “some of you young people consider practical action to be a direct missile to Haifa, of course, if it is necessary, this will be done, and it will be done without hesitation.”
- On October 20, two rockets were [fired](#) at U.S. positions at a diplomatic support center in Baghdad’s Green Zone near the Baghdad International Airport.
 - » One rocket was intercepted by a counter-rocket system, and the other [struck](#) an empty storage facility in close proximity to U.S. forces, causing no injuries.
 - » Such attacks almost invariably are launched by Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and are often orchestrated in conjunction with the Iranian regime.
- Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian [spoke](#) with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh by phone on October 22 to discuss the “latest developments” in Gaza, according to Iranian media reports.
 - » A readout of the call stated that the two men “discussed and exchanged opinions on the latest developments related to the continuous aggression of the Zionist regime in the Gaza Strip.”
 - » The readout also reported discussion of “ways to stop the brutal crimes committed by the enemy in Gaza.”

U.S. and International Response

- After attacks against U.S. service members in Iraq and Syria, U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin took several [measures](#) on October 21 to increase preparedness in the CENTCOM area of operations, including:
 - » Redeploying the USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower* Carrier Strike Group, which had been deployed to the Eastern Mediterranean along with the USS *Gerald R. Ford* Carrier Strike Group due to the Israel-Gaza war, to another unspecified location in the CENTCOM area of responsibility, which includes the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea;
 - » Activating Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battalions and Patriot batteries in the region “to increase force protection for U.S. forces”; and
 - » Placing additional troops on “prepare to deploy orders...to increase their readiness and ability to quickly respond as required.”
- According to Israeli media [reports](#) and [reporting](#) from *The New York Times* citing U.S. officials, the United States has asked Israel to delay its ground offensive into the Gaza Strip until more American forces are deployed to the Middle East in the coming days.
 - » *The New York Times* [report](#) also stated that Israel was delaying the offensive in order to increase its operational preparedness and other unspecified efforts to free hostages in the Gaza Strip as well as mitigate civilian casualties in Gaza.
- On October 22, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin separately [stated](#) that the Biden administration will respond against Iran or its proxies if American personnel or forces come under attack in the Middle East after an escalation this past week of drone and rocket attacks against U.S. assets in the region.
 - » Secretary of State Blinken told *NBC*’s “Meet the Press” that he anticipates “escalation by Iranian proxies directed against our forces, directed against our personnel” and added that “we are taking steps to make sure that we can effectively defend our people and respond decisively if we need to.”
 - » Secretary of Defense Austin [told](#) *ABC*’s “This Week” that “recently we’ve seen rocket and UAV attacks against bases housing our troops in Iraq and Syria. We’re concerned about potential escalation.”
 - Austin added that “we maintain the right to defend ourselves, and we won’t hesitate to take the appropriate action.”
 - » On October 20, the U.S. State Department announced that it had ordered family members and non-emergency personnel to [evacuate](#) from the U.S. embassy in Baghdad and the U.S. Consulate in Erbil, Iraq due to “increased security threats against U.S. government personnel and interests.”
- On October 22, President Biden [spoke](#) with Prime Minister Netanyahu to discuss humanitarian aid flows into Gaza as well as efforts to free hostages held by Hamas and ways to provide safe passage for U.S. citizens and other civilians to leave Gaza amid the war.
- On October 22, President Biden held a call with the leaders of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom to reiterate their collective support for Israel and discuss hostage issues and humanitarian matters in Gaza.
 - » The [readout](#) from the call stated, “the leaders reiterated their support for Israel and its right to defend itself against terrorism and called for adherence to international

humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians. They welcomed the release of two hostages and called for the immediate release of all remaining hostages.”

- » The readout also noted that the leaders praised the arrival of humanitarian convoys in Gaza and that they committed to coordinate diplomatically to “prevent the conflict from spreading, preserve stability in the Middle East, and work toward a political solution and durable peace.”
- The United States has [drafted](#) and circulated a United Nations Security Council resolution condemning Hamas as well as Iran, according to an October 21 report from *Axios*, citing a U.S. official and another Western diplomatic source.
 - » The resolution also reportedly calls for Hamas to release all hostages and calls on Iran to “cease the export of all arms and related [material] to armed militias and terrorist groups threatening peace and security.”
- Humanitarian aid began entering Gaza on October 21 through the Rafah crossing along the Egyptian-Gazan border.
 - » These shipments [included](#) twenty trucks on October 21 containing water, food, and medical equipment, and an additional seventeen trucks reportedly crossing into Gaza on October 22.
 - The United Nations stated that no aid trucks had entered on October 22, contradicting Egypt’s state-run media as well as several AP journalists who reportedly saw at least seven fuel trucks [enter](#) Gaza.
- A bipartisan Congressional delegation of ten Senators, including five Democrats and five Republicans, traveled to Israel over the weekend to express solidarity with Israel.
 - » The delegation included senators Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Jack Reed (D-RI), Susan Collins (R-ME), John Thune (R-SD), Chris Coons (D-DE), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Daniel Sullivan (R-AK), and Katie Britt (R-AL).
 - » Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) [delivered](#) remarks in Tel Aviv on October 22, including a warning to Iran to not get involved: “We’re here today to tell Iran, we’re watching you. If the war grows, it’s coming to your backyard.”
 - » Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD) stated during the same press conference that “there is no future with Hamas” and that “at the end of the day, Hamas must be [eliminated](#).”
- On October 23, Prime Minister Netanyahu met with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in Israel, who [visited](#) to show solidarity “not only as an ally, but as a true friend.”
 - » Mitsotakis added, “you can count on our support and help” and that “from the first moment, Greece defended and supported Israel’s right to self-defense in accordance with international law.”
- Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni [visited](#) Israel on October 21, where she spoke with Prime Minister Netanyahu about humanitarian and security issues, according to a readout from her office.
 - » The readout further stated that Prime Minister Meloni reiterated “the right of Israel to defend itself under international law and to live in peace.”
- A [report](#) in *Al-Monitor* on October 22 indicated that Turkey asked the head of Hamas’s political bureau, Ismail Haniyeh, and other Hamas officials to leave the country after the October 7 attack. Haniyeh and other Hamas senior leaders reside in both Turkey and Qatar.

- » On October 23, *The Times of Israel* [reported](#) that an anonymous Turkish government official stated that the report indicating that Turkey had removed the Hamas leadership, including Haniyeh, from the country is “not true.”
- On October 23, The *New York Times* published an [editors’ note](#) acknowledging that its coverage of the al-Ahli Baptist Hospital explosion, which initially “attributed the claim of Israeli responsibility to Palestinian officials, and noted that the Israeli military said it was investigating the blast...should have taken more care with the initial presentation, and been more explicit about what information could be verified.”
 - » The editors’ note further expressed that the coverage “relied too heavily on claims by Hamas, and did not make clear that those claims could not immediately be verified... The report left readers with an incorrect impression about what was known and how credible the account was.”
 - » Also on October 23, *The New York Times* [reported](#) that Hamas has not released any information to back up its claims that Israel was responsible for the explosion at the hospital.
 - » Investigations by [The Wall Street Journal](#), [CNN](#), and the [Associated Press](#) all support Israel’s claim that the projectile that struck the hospital was fired from inside the Gaza Strip.