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Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update November 17, 2023

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 Israel-Hamas conflict. An update with the latest information and analysis about the war is below.

Analysis

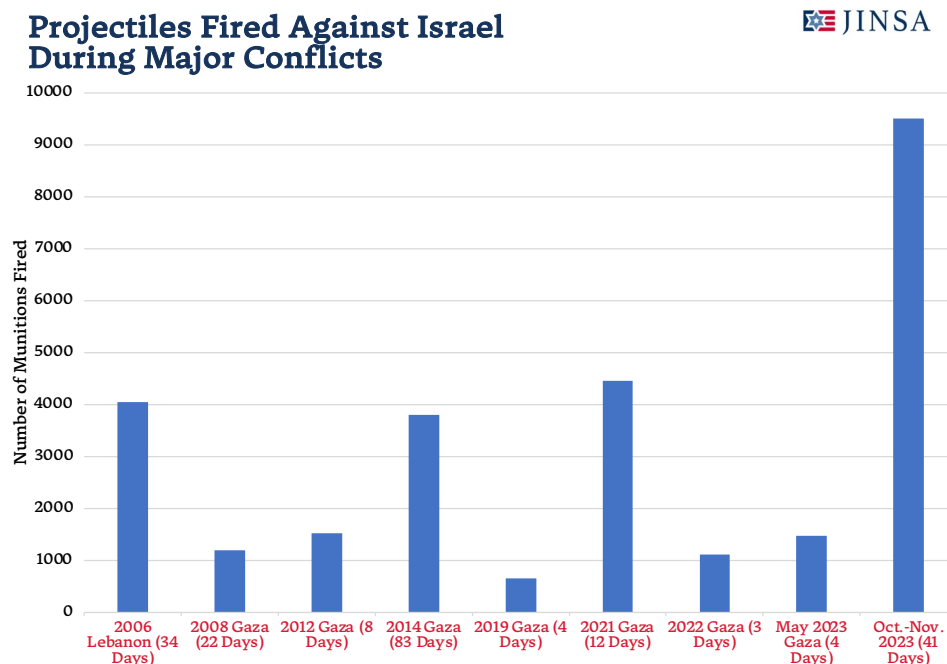
- As the IDF has continued its operations at Gaza's Shifa Hospital, international pressure has mounted for Israel to release further support for its claims, which the United States has [corroborated](#), that Hamas has used it as its headquarters and that it sits above a complex tunnel network.
 - » The IDF has released videos and images of weaponry and tunnels at the hospital, though these have not quelled [growing](#) international concerns about military operations at a hospital, despite Hamas's clear illegal use of the facility and IDF troops [finding](#) the bodies of a kidnapped Israeli soldier and a kidnapped Israeli civilian nearby.
 - » As JINSA's Jacob Olidort and Yoni Tobin detailed in a November 16 [NatSec Brief](#), Israel has surged medical supplies and equipment to the hospital and even sent medical staff and Arabic-speaking troops along with its combat units, demonstrating the IDF's immense challenge of balancing its tactical aims with its humanitarian efforts in Gaza.

Last 24 Hours

Attacks Against Israel

- Roughly [9,500](#) rockets, mortars, drones, and other projectiles have been fired from Gaza during the war.
 - » Sirens [sounded](#) in Even Menachem, Kfar Aza, Kissufim, Nirim, Sa'ad, Shtula, Even Menachem, and communities in the Eshkol Regional Council, as well as other locations in southern Israel.
- Terrorists in Lebanon continued to launch rockets, mortars, and anti-tank missiles at Israeli military positions and civilian locations in northern Israel over the last 24 hours.
 - » On November 17, terrorists in Lebanon [launched](#) rockets at Israeli military positions near the Israeli communities of Malkia and Menara.

- » On November 17, terrorists in Lebanon [fired](#) mortar shells toward the northern Israeli cities Adamit and Arab al-Aramshe, causing no damage or injuries.
- » On November 17, terrorists [fired](#) a number of mortar shells from Lebanon at a military post in the Upper Galilee. No casualties or damage were reported.
- » According to the IDF, on November 16, terrorists from Lebanon “[attempted](#) to carry out a number of launches toward the area of Misgav Am in northern Israel, as well as IDF posts in the areas of Metula and Yiftah.”
- » On November 16, Lebanese terrorists [launched](#) anti-tank missiles towards the towns of Dovev, Biranit, and Rosh HaNikra where IDF posts are located.
- The IDF [said](#) on November 16 that Military Police soldier Cpl. Avraham Fetena was killed in a shooting attack at the “tunnel road” West Bank checkpoint near Jerusalem earlier that day.
 - » Five others were injured, and the three Palestinian assailants were killed.



IDF Operations

- During an [interview](#) with *CBS News* on November 16, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that “we are closer than before we began the ground action” to achieving a deal to secure the release of some hostages in exchange for a multiple-day pause in fighting.
 - » He explained that “the ground action has put pressure on Hamas to achieve a ceasefire. We’ll have a temporary ceasefire if we can get our hostages. I don’t think it serves that purpose for me to elaborate further on that.” He stressed that “there are certain things we are holding confidential until we have something to tell.”
 - » He reiterated the centrality of securing the release of every hostage to Israel’s operations as well as ensuring “that [a] terrorist threat never rises again from Gaza, and that Gaza has a different future.”

- » Netanyahu insisted that Israel has “concrete evidence” that terrorists in Gaza used Shifa Hospital for military purposes, but group leaders and “terrorist minions” fled as the IDF closed in.
- » He explained that “we are doing this very gingerly because we’re trying to do the moral thing, the right thing, to deprive Hamas of having this safe zone in a hospital, but at the same time to neutralize its use as a command center for terror. And so far we’ve achieved that.”
- » He lamented that “we’ll try to finish that job with minimal civilian casualties, that’s what we’re trying to do, minimal civilian casualties, but unfortunately we’re not successful.”
- » He further clarified that Israel does not want to occupy the Gaza Strip but wants “overall military responsibility to prevent the re-emergence of terror.”
- » Addressing a question about Israelis in the West Bank who commit violent acts against Palestinians, Netanyahu said that “we hold anyone taking the law into their own hands or committing vigilante violence — that is out, we cannot accept that.”
- » Netanyahu also [spoke](#) of the whereabouts of the Israeli hostages, saying “we had strong indications that they were held in the Shifa Hospital, which is one of the reasons we entered the hospital.” However, Netanyahu and the IDF strongly believe that the hostages are no longer within the confines of the hospital, stating, “If they were [there], they were taken out.”
- » He also [said](#) in the interview that the IDF located “military equipment, coded equipment ... bombs, weapons, and we also found terror tunnels in the hospital compound.”
- The IDF continued its operations to neutralize Hamas personnel, weapons, and infrastructure in Gaza in the last 24 hours.
 - » IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi [said](#) on November 16 while visiting the Gaza Strip that the IDF is “close” to eradicating Hamas’s “military system” in the north of Gaza.
 - He said, “we will complete it, we have some finishing to do, but we are getting close to it nicely,” and the IDF will operate “in more and more areas, and... kill [Hamas] commanders and operatives and destroy the infrastructure.”
 - » The IDF said on November 17 that it [took control](#) of a Palestinian Islamic Jihad northern command stronghold containing offices of senior terrorists and a weapons manufacturing site.
 - The IDF located rockets, drones, and other weapons at the facility.
 - » On November 17, the IDF [engaged](#) Hamas terrorists operating from inside a school, killing an unspecified number of terrorists. The IDF also stated that it located a large number of weapons inside the school.
 - » On November 17, Palestinian media outlets reported that senior Hamas operative Ahmad Bahar, former vice president of the Palestinian Legislative Council, was [killed](#) in an Israeli strike. Israel has not commented on the report.
 - » On November 16, IDF Spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari [said](#) that the IDF launched two major airstrikes targeting two Hamas underground infrastructure sites.
 - Commander of Hamas’s northern Gaza brigade Ahmed Ghandour and head of Hamas’s rocket firing array Ayman Siam were hiding in one site, and senior members of Hamas’s politburo Rawhi Mushtaha, Essam al-Dalis, and Sameh al-Siraj were hiding in the other underground location.

- » Hagari added that “ Hamas is trying to hide the results of the strike,” and “ it can be said with certainty that the underground where they were was very heavily damaged.”
- » The IDF [said](#) on November 16 that it discovered a Hamas tunnel entrance in the Shifa Hospital complex, a pickup truck carrying Hamas weapons, and weapons in Gaza City’s Al-Quds Hospital.
 - The IDF published images of the weapons discovered in Al-Quds Hospital and another of a Hamas tunnel inside Rantisi Hospital.
 - The IDF also [found](#) Hamas intelligence material, weapons, and information relating to hostages.
- » The IDF [said](#) on November 16 that troops from its 188th Armored Brigade and Flotilla 13 seized control of the Gaza harbor, which had been controlled by Hamas and was used as a Hamas training facility for their naval commandos.
 - The IDF killed 10 terrorists in the operation and also destroyed 10 terror tunnel shafts and four buildings used for terrorism.
- » Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant’s office [said](#) in a statement on November 16 that he held a meeting with senior Defense Ministry officials to discuss allowing those living four to seven kilometers away from Gaza to return to their homes early next year. This would occur “ following the rehabilitation of the towns and creation of the required security conditions.”
 - He said further, “ everyone who cannot return to his home will continue to receive full backing and support from the government,” including northern Israeli residents.
- » On November 16, the IDF [released](#) a video of its Commando Brigade engaged in combat in Gaza and said the troops raided the al-Shati camp in Gaza City with tanks, combat engineers, and air support.
 - The IDF said that the forces directed 54 airstrikes, navy strikes, and artillery shelling that killed Hamas operatives and infrastructure. The military also said that the commandos located a weapons depot, which it later destroyed, during a raid in a booby-trapped northern Gaza hotel.
- The IDF launched strikes against terrorist cells in Lebanon that had launched attacks at Israel over the last 24 hours.
 - » On November 17, the IDF [shelled](#) terrorist cells in Lebanon that had targeted Israeli military positions near the Israeli communities of Malkia and Menara.
 - » On November 16, the IDF [stated](#) that Israeli soldiers “ struck a terrorist cell in Lebanon that attempted to launch anti-tank missiles toward Israeli territory.” The IDF also responded to threats along the border with heavy artillery fire.
 - » The IDF stated on November 16 that it [struck](#) multiple Hezbollah targets in Lebanese territory.
- Syrian state media reported [strikes](#) against Damascus that were likely conducted by Israel.
- Israeli forces fought and killed Palestinian gunmen in the West Bank over the last 24 hours.
 - » During an overnight IDF raid in the West Bank, Israeli forces [killed](#) five gunmen in a drone strike in Jenin on November 17.
 - » Reservists in Israel’s 8106th Battalion [opened fire](#) on a gunman shooting at troops from a vehicle in Hebron, killing the gunman and the driver.

- *The Times of Israel* [reported](#) on November 17, citing a senior Israeli official, that Israel has not actually ruled out the possibility of the Palestinian Authority ruling the Gaza Strip if it makes “significant reforms.”
 - » The report states that Israel has tasked a group of officials with working on “day after” plans for Gaza. The group reportedly is collaborating with White House and State Department officials who are also working on the issue.
 - » Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [stated](#) on November 12 that Israel would not accept the Palestinian Authority administering Gaza due to its payment to the families of terrorists and Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas’s refusal to condemn the October 7 attack.

Casualties and Hostages

- Over 1,200 people in Israel have been [killed](#), and another 6,900 have been injured in the war.
 - » [371](#) Israeli soldiers have been killed.
 - » 55 IDF soldiers have been [killed](#) during ground combat in Gaza so far.
 - » Numerous foreign nationals have been killed in the war, including at least 32 [American](#) nationals, 34 [Thai](#) nationals, 39 [French](#) nationals, 17 [British](#) nationals, 10 [Nepalese](#) nationals, 7 [Argentinian](#) nationals, 16 [Russian](#) nationals, 4 [Romanian](#) nationals, 4 [Chinese](#) nationals, 3 [Brazilian](#) nationals, 3 [Belarusian](#) nationals, 3 [Philippines](#) nationals, 2 [Ukrainian](#) nationals, 2 [Peruvian](#) nationals, 5 [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 unverified figures from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Health Ministry, at least 11,470 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza, and roughly 30,000 have been [injured](#) during the war.
 - » On October 25, 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.”
- According to the Palestinian Authority-run Palestinian Ministry of Health, 197 people have been [killed](#), and an additional 2,750 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.
- According to the IDF, terrorists in Gaza currently hold [238](#) individuals as hostages.
 - » So far, [four](#) hostages in Gaza have been released, [one](#) has been rescued by the IDF, and [four](#) have been [found](#) dead.
 - » On November 16, the IDF [said](#) it had recovered the bodies of two Israeli hostages, 65-year-old Yehudit Weiss and 19-year-old Cpl. Noa Marciano, from Gaza.
- Foreign nationals also remain missing, including at least 11 [American](#) nationals, 9 [French](#) nationals, 15 [Argentinian](#) nationals, 9 [Ukrainian](#) nationals, 8 [Russian](#) nationals, 3 [Canadian](#) nationals, 3 [Philippines](#) nationals, 2 [Austrian](#) nationals, 3 [Italian](#) nationals, 2 [Paraguayan](#) nationals, 5 [Peruvian](#) nationals, 2 [Sri Lankan](#) nationals, 2 [Tanzanian](#) nationals, a [Chilean](#) national, an [Azeri](#) national, and a [Nepalese](#) national.

- » At least 8 [German](#) nationals, 23 [Thai](#) nationals, 4 [Portuguese](#) nationals, 3 [British](#) nationals, 2 [Italian](#) nationals, 3 [Romanian](#) nationals, and 2 [Mexican](#) nationals have been taken hostage.

Humanitarian Efforts

- On November 17, *The Times of Israel* [reported](#), citing a senior Israeli official, that Israel will allow two fuel trucks and an unspecified number of trucks with water and sewer systems for UN purposes to enter Gaza daily.
 - » The decision was reportedly made at the request of U.S. officials and the recommendation of the IDF and Shin Bet.
 - » The official said the policy is intended to “enable the minimal maintenance necessary for water, sewer and sanitary systems to prevent pandemics that could spread to the entire area, hurting residents of the Strip as well as our own forces and potentially spreading into Israel as well” and that the policy “will offer Israel the necessary diplomatic maneuvering room to eliminate Hamas.”
- *Israel Hayom* [reported](#) on November 17 that Israel and Cyprus are working to establish a maritime humanitarian corridor so that aid to Gaza does not have to be transferred through Israel via the Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings, both during and after the war.
 - » The concept is reportedly being discussed by Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen and Cypriot Foreign Minister Constantinos Kombos, and the two reportedly agreed to establish a working group to research how the initiative can best be implemented.
 - » Under the proposal, which is reportedly also being discussed by members of the IDF and Shin Bet, Cyprus would designate an area in its Larnaca Port where all humanitarian supplies to Gaza would first enter, and then Israel would inspect the products before their delivery to Gaza.

Iranian Involvement and Response

- On November 16, Iranian state media [reported](#) that Iranian Quds Force commander Esmail Qaani wrote a letter to senior Hamas leader Mohammed Deif saying Iran will do “whatever it takes” to ensure a Hamas victory in the war.
 - » The letter reportedly states, “your brothers in the resistance axis stand united with you and will not allow the enemy to reach its dirty goals in Gaza and Palestine. We stand by our fraternal pledge that unites us and we assure you that we will do whatever it takes in this historic battle.”

U.S. and International Response

- On November 17, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken [called](#) Israeli Minister Benny Gantz to tell him that Israel should take “affirmative steps to de-escalate tensions in the West Bank, including by confronting rising levels of settler extremist violence.”
 - » While Blinken’s counterpart is Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen, Gantz sits on the Israeli war cabinet.
- On November 17, *Bloomberg* [reported](#) that the United States and its European allies are pushing a plan to deploy an international peacekeeping force after the war.

- » The report, citing unnamed officials, stated that Israel remains skeptical of the idea and that U.S. and European officials acknowledge that “big questions remain about whether such an operation would be workable in Gaza.”
- » One possibility being discussed would involve the UN Truce Supervision Organization, and the report noted that any force would likely require the authorization of the UN Security Council.
- On November 16, U.S. National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby [said](#) that the United States is “still convinced of the soundness” of its intelligence that Hamas is using Shifa Hospital as a command center.
 - » Kirby added, “we have our own intelligence that convinces us that Hamas was using Al-Shifa as a command-and-control node, and most likely as well as a storage facility. And they were sheltering themselves in a hospital, using the hospital as a shield against military action and placing the patients and medical staff at a greater risk. We are still convinced of the soundness of that intelligence.”
- Addressing Israel’s goal of eliminating Hamas, Kirby also [said](#) on November 16 that “what we have learned through our own experiences, that [through] military and other means you can absolutely have a significant impact on terrorist groups ability to resource itself, to train fighters, to recruit fighters, to plan to execute attacks,” and “look at the shadow of itself that ISIS is right now, look at the shadow of itself al-Qaeda is right now.”
 - » However, he added that “it doesn’t mean that the ideology withers away and [dies].”
- On November 16, 24 Democrats from the House of Representatives [wrote](#) a letter to President Biden, urging a ceasefire in Israel.
 - » The letter was introduced by Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), Betty McCollum (D-MN), and Mark Pocan (D-WI). In the letter, the Democratic representatives accuse Israel of violating human rights, especially the rights of children. The letter specifically demands an “immediate cessation of hostilities in order to stop the bombing and provide for much-needed relief to Palestinian civilians.”
 - » The letter makes no direct mention of Hamas’s war crimes, including the use of civilians as human shields, and does not call on Hamas to release the Israeli citizens being held in captivity in Gaza.
- When asked about the spread of conflict in the Middle East on November 16 at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Defense Ministers’ Meeting-Plus in Jakarta, U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin [responded](#), “our goal is to make sure that, if possible, we can contain what’s going on with Israel and Gaza and not have it cause an all-out regional conflict.”
 - » In response to a question about what a threshold would look like to determine a “regional conflict,” Secretary Austin responded, “if you saw us in a fight with Iran or if you saw us in a fight with the Houthis, an all-out fight, I think that’s a regional conflict.”
 - » Secretary Austin was also asked about defense collaborations between the U.S. and other Gulf nations against Iran. He explained that the U.S. has strengthened its military presence in the region, as well as the protection of other forces in Gulf countries. He also explained that the U.S. has placed “additional Patriot elements” in the region.
 - » Asked about Israel’s ability to “achieve a military victory in Gaza in the absence of clear political objectives,” Secretary Austin responded that Israel cannot let Gaza “go back to the status quo.”

- On November 16, Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi [announced](#) that Jordan will exit a deal under which Jordan would supply Israel with solar energy, and Israel would supply Jordan with desalinated water.
 - » The United Arab Emirates brokered the deal, and a preliminary version was signed in November 2021.
 - » Safadi told *Al Jazeera*, “Israel is pushing the whole region toward hell [and] will have to bear the consequences,” and “we are doing whatever we believe will help to support the Palestinian people.”
- On November 16, countering an earlier resolution by smaller parties that called for immediate recognition of a Palestinian state, Norway’s ruling coalition [introduced](#), and the parliament subsequently adopted, a resolution that calls on the government to “be ready” to recognize a Palestinian state.
 - » The resolution “asks the government to be ready to recognize Palestine as an independent state when recognition could have a positive impact on the peace process, without making a final peace accord a condition.”
- On November 16, German authorities [launched](#) a nationwide raid on 54 sites across the country linked to the Islamic Center Hamburg, also known as IZH, and five affiliated groups for their suspected connections to Hezbollah.
 - » German authorities said no arrests were made at the time.
 - » The authorities noted that it was collecting evidence to substantiate or refute allegations that IZH and its network “supports the activities of the Lebanese terrorist Hezbollah organization” and is involved in “spreading the revolutionary concept of the Supreme [Iranian] leaders” and reinforcing “a clear anti-Semitic and anti-Israel attitude.”
- On November 16, Israeli Ambassador to the UN Gilad Erdan [announced](#) that he invited UN envoys and officials to view footage from Hamas’s October 7 attack on November 20.
 - » He argued that “the time has come for the distorted UN, which makes immoral equivalencies between Israel and Hamas, to see with its own eyes what kind of barbaric murders it is worried about and maybe understand how much it has betrayed its original mission.”
- Pope Francis will [meet](#) with the families of Israeli hostages held in Gaza next week.

Rising Antisemitism and Protests

- On November 17, the West Bank-based Birzeit University’s Arab World for Research and Development released a [poll](#) showing that approximately 80 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza view Hamas’s military wing, the Al-Qassam Brigades, positively and that 75 percent of Palestinians supported the October 7 attack.
- Police in California [arrested](#) Loay Alnaji, 50, on November 16. Alnaji, a known supporter of the Palestinian movement, is suspected of killing Paul Kessler, a Jewish man, after he struck Kessler in the head with a megaphone during a rally on November 5.
 - » According to an autopsy report, Kessler died of blunt force trauma to the head.
 - » An *ABC News* report [stated](#), “Alnaji will be booked on a charge of involuntary manslaughter with a bail set at \$1 million.”

- On November 16, protesters in Boston [blocked](#) a bridge near Boston University campus, chanting “ceasefire now!” and holding signs that said, “Let Gaza Live.” The activists reportedly demanded that Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren work toward a cessation of IDF operations in Gaza.

Recent and Relevant JINSA Products About Israel at War

- Jacob Olidort and Yoni Tobin, [Israeli Precautions Save Palestinian Lives](#), November 16, 2023
- Sander Gerber and Ezra Gontownik, [“The Palestinian Authority cannot govern Gaza,”](#) *Jerusalem Post*, November 13, 2023
- Ari Cicurel, [Iranian Regime Continues Escalation, Despite Limited U.S. Strikes](#), November 9, 2023
- Webinar: [Gaza Update](#), with JINSA President and CEO Michael Makovsky, JINSA Distinguished Fellow IDF MG (ret.) Yaakov Amidror, and JINSA Senior Vice President for Israeli Affairs IDF MG (ret.) Yaacov Ayish, November 9, 2023
- Webinar: [Hamas’s Assault and the Antisemitic Aftermath](#), with Michael Makovsky, JINSA President and CEO, and Natan Sharansky, Chairman of The Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy and Former Deputy Prime Minister of Israel, November 8, 2023
- Michael Makovsky, [“Biden’s Iran policy needs to match post-10/7 realities,”](#) *The Hill*, November 7, 2023
- Webinar: [Hezbollah’s Escalation Dilemma](#), with John Hannah, JINSA’s Randi & Charles Wax Senior Fellow; Hanin Ghaddar, Friedmann Senior Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy; IDF Lieutenant Colonel (Res.) Sarit Zehavi, founder and president of Alma; and Orna Mizrahi, senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), November 7, 2023
- Yoni Tobin, [U.S. Aid to Gaza Almost Certain to End Up in Hamas Hands](#), November 6, 2023
- Thomas Trask and Jacob Olidort, [“The Case for Upgrading Israel’s ‘Major Non-NATO Ally’ Status,”](#) *RealClearDefense*, November 6, 2023