



Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update December 15, 2023

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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

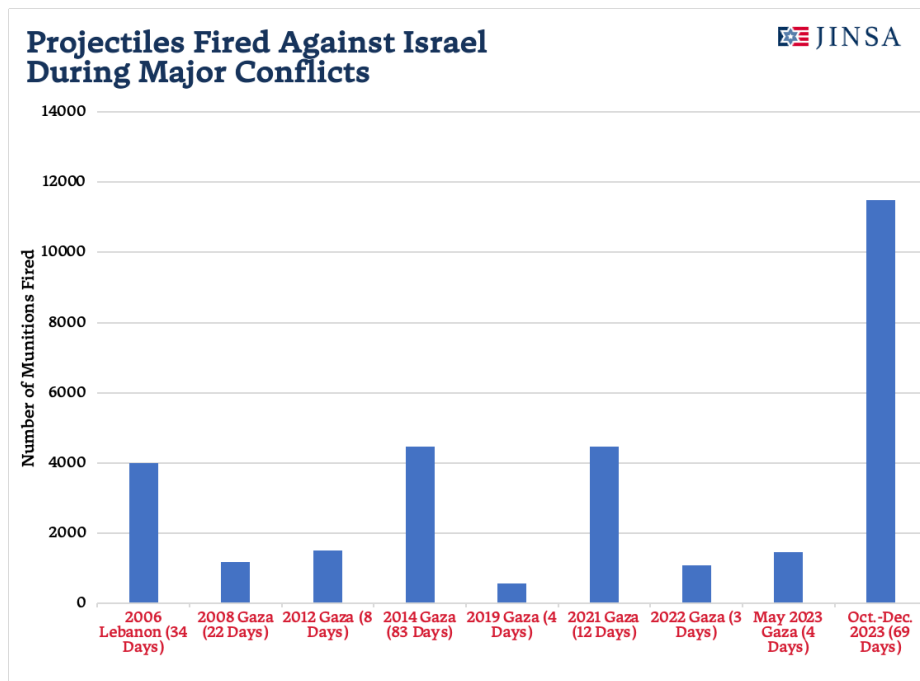
- As detailed in this [NatSec Brief](#) by JINSA Vice President for Government Affairs Mathew Kenney, Congress passed the Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act on December 14, which included several notable JINSA priorities to strengthen U.S. and Israeli security, in particular requirements to assess the U.S. stockpile in Israel called WRSA-I, train Israeli pilots on KC-46A aircraft refueling tankers, develop a strategy alongside U.S. partners to address Iran-linked maritime aggression, and establish a special envoy for the Abraham Accords.
- A [report](#) in *The Washington Post* noting that U.S. officials assessed Israel has used unguided “dumb bombs” for roughly half of its strikes on Gaza during the war lacked context for when and why Israel uses the dumb bombs.
 - » The U.S. resupply of weaponry, including precision-guided munitions, has been uncertain since Congress has not passed a supplemental aid package.
 - » Israel needs to maintain its stockpile of precision-guided munitions in reserve for a potentially much-larger multifront war with Hezbollah in Lebanon and Iran.
 - » As a U.S. official points out in the article, Israel has used the “dumb bombs” to target areas where there is little to no risk of collateral damage and is using additional measures and tactics, such as laser designators, to increase the accuracy of their attacks.
 - » The killing of nine soldiers from the IDF's Golani Brigade and Unit 669 on December 12 in an [ambush](#) in a building in Gaza City that had not been bombed by the Israeli Air Force demonstrates how U.S. pressure on Israel to scale back the extent of its air campaign has tangible, and tragic, consequences for Israeli troops.
- During JINSA's [webinar](#) on December 14 about Iranian and Houthi maritime aggression, VADM John Miller, USN (ret.) argued, “if we're going to put our warships in the region, and if we are going to be dedicated to ensuring the free and open transit and ships through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait ... we look at these carrier strike groups that have been brought into the area [and other assets] ... but if it just shows up [and] you're not willing to use it ... we're not deterring the Houthis, and we're not deterring the Iranians.”

- » VADM Mark Fox, USN (ret.) added that “we should be more willing to take actions at a time and place that satisfy us ... we’ve created kind of our own handcuffs because it has to be ‘proportional.’ ... but I would say that any time there are attacks against the United States or our friends ... there should be consequences for that, and maybe you don’t talk about them.”

Last 24 Hours

Attacks Against Israel

- At least [11,500](#) rockets, mortars, drones, and other projectiles have been fired from Gaza during the war.
 - » Sirens [sounded](#) in the southern Israeli town of Lakhish, Sufa, Ein Hashlosha, Nirim, and Nir Yitzhak.
- Terrorists in Lebanon continued to launch attacks against Israel over the last 24 hours.
 - » Sirens [sounded](#) in Kiryat Shmona, Hanita, Arab al-Aramshe, [Yiftah](#), and other locations in northern Israel.
 - » The IDF [said](#) that 1 in 5 rockets launched by Hezbollah toward Israel fail and land short in Lebanon.



IDF Operations

- The IDF continued to expand its operations in Gaza over the last 24 hours.
 - » On December 15, the IDF [captured](#) and destroyed the command center of Hamas’s Shejaiya battalion in northern Gaza. IDF troops eliminated Hamas operatives and destroyed a tunnel shaft during the operation.
 - » On December 15, IDF forces [eliminated](#) terrorists, terrorist infrastructure, and tunnel shafts in Khan Younis.

- » On December 14, the IDF [announced](#) that in the past week, it has carried out more than 500 airstrikes across the Gaza Strip. The strikes targeted Hamas cells, observation sites, weapons depots, tunnel shafts, and other infrastructure.
- » According to information [relayed](#) to *The Times of Israel*, Israel has been successful in its trial run of filling Hamas's tunnels with seawater. IDF Spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said that the army possesses intelligence regarding the locations of the hostages and will not operate in a manner that would harm them.
- » The IDF [released](#) additional information about the Nahal Brigade's operations in the Jabaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza.
 - In one incident, troops came under machine gun fire from one direction and anti-tank missile fire from another direction, and the troops eliminated terrorists with gunfire and shelling.
 - In a second incident, troops came under anti-tank missile fire, and responded by killing three terrorists with gunfire. A fourth terrorist was killed in a drone strike.
- On December 15, the IDF [struck](#) a Hezbollah target in Lebanon and carried out a strike on two terrorist gunmen near the Lebanese-Israeli border.
- The IDF continued its multi-day operations in the West Bank over the last 24 hours.
 - » The IDF [concluded](#) its 60-hour counterterrorism operation in Jenin in the West Bank.
 - The IDF searched hundreds of buildings, arrested 60 suspected terrorists, seized 50 weapons and hundreds of explosive devices, and eliminated 10 tunnel shafts, seven explosives labs, and five operational rooms.
 - The IDF said 10 Palestinian gunmen were killed during the raid.
 - » On December 15, the IDF [detained](#) 14 suspected terrorists, including three Hamas members, in raids in unspecified locations across the West Bank.
- On December 14, during U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan's visit to Israel, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant [told](#) him that operations against Hamas will require "more than several months."
 - » Gallant also said, "Hamas is a terrorist organization that built itself over a decade to fight Israel, and they built infrastructure under the ground and above the ground and it is not easy to destroy them. It will require a period of time — it will last more than several months, but we will win and we will destroy them."
 - » He thanked the United States for its support, saying, "we appreciate your personal commitment to the State of Israel – to releasing the hostages, and to the diplomatic effort [you are leading] and your support in the military channel."
 - » Gallant added, "the United States and Israel share common interests, common values and in this war, we [also] share common goals. This is important to the State of Israel and it is essential to the rest of the region, to the Middle East."
 - » The two leaders also discussed developments with Hezbollah and threats from Iran and its other regional proxies.

Humanitarian Efforts

- On December 14, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) President Mirjana Spoljaric Egger traveled to Israel and [met](#) with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

and Israeli President Isaac Herzog. Egger separately [met](#) with Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen, Israeli Health Minister Uriel Busso, Israeli Health Ministry director-general Moshe Bar Siman Tov, and representatives from the Hostages and Missing Families Forum.

- » Prime Minister Netanyahu [demanded](#) during the meeting that the Red Cross “fulfill its purpose” by providing medical care to hostages, and said that Egger has “every right and every expectation to place public pressure on Hamas.”
- » When Egger responded that “it’s not going to work because the more public pressure we seemingly would do, the more they would shut the door,” Netanyahu stated, “I’m not sure about that. Why don’t you try?”
- » Foreign Minister Cohen [criticized](#) the ICRC after his meeting with Egger, saying, “the Red Cross’s number-one priority must be to bring medical help and medications to the hostages. For 67 days, the ICRC has failed in its responsibility to reach the hostages, give their families a sign of life, check their condition, and give them medications. Every day that passes is another failure for the Red Cross.”

Post-War Gaza Planning

- On December 15, a Palestinian Authority (PA) official [told](#) *The Times of Israel* that the PA would be able to “re-activate” at least 3,500 of approximately 15,000 former members of its security forces in Gaza in a post-war Gaza. The official also stated that additional forces would eventually join the first 3,500 but would need additional training.
 - » The report quoted a senior U.S. official as saying that “there are a number of security personnel in Gaza linked to the Palestinian Authority who we think might be able to provide some sort of nucleus” in Gaza after the war.
- On December 14, senior Hamas official Mousa Abu Marzouk [tried](#) to walk back comments he had previously made which suggested that Hamas could recognize Israel for the first time.
 - » Earlier, he had [told](#) *Al-Monitor*, “you should follow the official stance... that the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] has recognized the state of Israel.”
 - » He later qualified his comments, [saying](#), “Hamas does not recognize the legitimacy of the Israeli occupation and does not accept giving up any of the rights of our Palestinian people. We affirm that the resistance will continue until liberation and return.” He added, “several points and phrases mentioned in my interview with *Al-Monitor* were distorted and do not express my position and the position of the movement, which has not changed.”
- On December 14, Israel’s *Channel 12* [reported](#) that the Israeli security establishment had drawn up proposals for the post-war governance of Gaza, that would seek to establish a multinational force, with participation from the United States, France, and Germany, to take overall control of the Gaza Strip. The report doesn’t specify how long this arrangement would remain in place.

Casualties and Hostages

- Over 1,245 people in Israel have been [killed](#) and another 6,900 have been injured in the war.
 - » 449 Israeli soldiers have been [killed](#).

- 118 IDF soldiers have been [killed](#) during ground combat in Gaza so far.
- On December 15, the IDF [announced](#) the deaths of Sgt. Oz Shmuel Aradi, 19, from Hatzor, and Sgt. First Class (res.) Shay Uriel Pizim, 23, from Ein Hanatziv.
- The IDF [said](#) the bodies of two soldiers who had been taken hostage by Hamas on October 7 were recovered in Gaza: Cpl. Nik Beizer, 19, from Be'er Sheva, and Sgt. Ron Sherman, 19, from Lehavim.
- The IDF [announced](#) it had recovered the body of Elia Toledano, 28, in Gaza, a civilian who had been taken captive by Hamas at the Supernova music festival on October 7.
- » Eight IDF soldiers were seriously [injured](#) in southern Gaza on December 14, including four soldiers from the Combat Engineering Corps' 603rd Battalion, two soldiers from the Commando Brigade's Maglan unit, a soldier from the 7th Armored Brigade's 82nd Battalion, and a soldier of the Golani Infantry Brigade's 12th Battalion.
 - 648 soldiers have been [injured](#) during fighting in Gaza, including 146 in serious condition, 257 in moderate condition, and 245 lightly injured.
- » Numerous foreign nationals have been killed in the war, including at least 31 [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, 18,787 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza and over 50,500 people have been injured during the war.
 - » On December 4, Associated Press and AFP [reported](#), citing an IDF official, that roughly 15,000 Palestinians have died since the war began and that roughly 5,000 of those killed were terrorists.
 - » 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, 276 people have been [killed](#) and an additional 3,587 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, [one](#) has been rescued by the IDF, and [seven have](#) been [found](#) dead.
 - » 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.
- Terrorists in Gaza currently [hold](#) 138 hostages, including 114 men, 20 women, and two children. 10 hostages are 75 and older, 127 are Israeli, and 11 are foreign nationals, including eight from Thailand.
 - » Many of the hostages are foreign or dual nationals, including up to 9 [American](#) nationals, 6 [German](#) nationals, 13 [Thai](#) nationals, 4 [Portuguese](#) nationals, 3 [British](#) nationals, 2 [Italian](#) nationals, 4 [Romanian](#) nationals, and 2 [Mexican](#) nationals.

Iranian Involvement and Response

- On December 15, two attacks launched from an area controlled by the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen struck two Liberian-flagged cargo ships in the Red Sea.
 - » A projectile, likely a drone, [hit](#) the German-owned *Al Jasrah*, causing a fire.
 - » Two ballistic missiles were fired and at least one [struck](#) the *MSC Palatium III* cargo ship in the Red Sea near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

U.S. and International Response

- At a press conference on December 15 during his trip to Israel, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan underscored that there is [not a disagreement](#) between the White House and Israeli government that the fight against Hamas will take many months and that both sides agree there will be a transition from the current high-intensity phase to precision operations.
 - » Following recent reports that the Biden administration has been pressing Israel to end the current phase within the next few weeks, Sullivan noted, “we’re not here to tell anybody you must do X, you must do Y.”
 - » Sullivan repeated the Biden administration’s position that “the Palestinian Authority needs to be revamped and revitalized, needs to be updated in terms of its method of governance, its representation of Palestinian people ... that will require a lot of work by everybody who is engaged in the Palestinian Authority, starting with the President, Mahmoud Abbas, who I will go to see... and ultimately, it’s going to be up to the Palestinian people to work through their representation.”
 - Sullivan [told](#) Israel’s *Channel 12* that the U.S. view is that “ultimately governance of the West Bank and Gaza needs to be connected, and it needs to be connected under a revamped and revitalized Palestinian Authority.” Sullivan added that the West Bank and Gaza must be under leadership that “does not represent any form of terrorist threat to Israel.”
 - » On the threat to Israel from Hezbollah in Lebanon, Sullivan also [told](#) reporters, “the citizens of Israel who have been evacuated from the north have to be able to return to their homes and have to be able to do so with a true sense of security ... and that means dealing with the threat that comes from the other side of the border.”
 - However, Sullivan argued, “that threat can be dealt with through diplomacy and does not require the launching of a new war,” while also noting the necessity of “deterrence as well, because we need to send a clear message that we will not tolerate the kinds of threats and terrorist activity that we have seen from Hezbollah and from the territory of Lebanon.”

- » Discussing the growing [maritime threat](#) in the Red Sea and other Middle Eastern waters, Sullivan also noted that “while the Houthis are pulling the trigger, so to speak, they’re being handed the gun by Iran.”
- On December 14, Sullivan [met](#) with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel to discuss “the continuation of the war until victory and the achievement of the common goals, which are, first and foremost: the elimination of Hamas, the release of all the hostages, the dismantling of Hamas’ military capabilities, and the end of its rule in Gaza,” according to a readout from the Israeli prime minister’s office.
 - » U.S. officials at the meeting included White House Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa Brett McGurk, Special Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs David Satterfield, and U.S. Deputy Ambassador to Israel Stephanie L. Hallett.
 - » Also at the meeting on the Israeli side were Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, Minister Without Portfolio Benny Gantz, IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Col. Harzi Halevi, Shas party head Aryeh Deri, National Security Advisor Tzachi Hanegbi, Netanyahu’s Chief of Staff Tzachi Braverman, Cabinet Secretary Yossi Fuchs, and Israeli Ambassador to the United States Mike Herzog.
- A [report](#) in *The Washington Post* on December 14 indicated that U.S. officials assess Israel has used unguided “dumb bombs” for roughly half of Israeli strikes on Gaza. Of the 29,000 air-to-ground munitions that Israel has fired into Gaza since the war began on October 7, 55 to 60 percent of them have been precision-guided, according to an assessment from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.
- On December 14, President Biden [said](#) about Israel, “I want them to be focused on how to save civilian lives — not stop going after Hamas, but be more careful.”
- According to December 14 [reporting](#) by Barak Ravid in *Axios*, the United States has warned the Houthis to stop their maritime attacks on commercial and U.S. Navy ships in the Red Sea. The report also indicates that the White House is expected to announce an upgraded multinational task force on December 15 that will operate under U.S. Central Command to deter and counter further Houthi attacks.
- Israel’s *Channel 12* [reported](#) on December 14 that U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Charles Q. Brown will be visiting Israel in the coming days, with Gen. Brown scheduled to arrive on December 15 and Secretary Austin scheduled to arrive on December 17.
- On December 14, Congress [passed](#) the Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act, which included several JINSA priorities:
 - » The Ensuring Peace Through Strength in Israel Act, which requires an assessment of precision-guided munitions in America’s War Reserve Stockpile in Israel (WRSA-I);
 - » The Expediting Israeli Aerial Refueling Act of 2023, which requires the Department of Defense to expedite training for Israeli pilots and mechanics on KC-46As before they are delivered to Israel;
 - » The MARITIME Act of 2023, which requires the Secretary of Defense to develop a strategy to counter maritime threats posed by Iran and other terrorist or criminal groups; and
 - » The Special Envoy for the Abraham Accords Act, which establishes the position of a Presidential Special Envoy for the Abraham Accords as a direct report to the Secretary of State.

- On December 14, Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) [introduced](#) legislation demanding answers on Israel’s human rights practices as it continues operations in Gaza. Per the Foreign Assistance Act, the resolution is privileged, meaning that Sanders can force a vote on the Senate floor.
 - » While highly unlikely to occur, if such a resolution passed in both chambers of Congress and was signed by President Biden, the U.S. State Department would have 30 days to respond or security aid would be cut off.
- On December 14, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres held what Israeli press have called a [contentious meeting](#) with the families of Israeli hostages being held in Gaza, who claimed that Guterres has not done enough to free the hostages.
- President Biden and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan held their first [phone call](#) since the October 7 attacks, during which “President Erdogan stated that the intensification and prolongation of Israeli attacks could have negative regional and global consequences,” according to a readout from the Turkish president’s office.
- On December 14, scholars from the University of Haifa’s Ruderman Program for American Jewish Studies [released](#) a report estimating that North American Jews have raised about \$1 billion for Israel during the war, including more than \$600 million raised by the Jewish Federations of North America and approximately \$400 million raised in other campaigns.

Rising Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Protests, and Attacks

- On December 14, Israel’s Prime Minister’s Office released a statement [praising](#) Denmark’s intelligence agencies for their “intensive and comprehensive intelligence investigation” that led Danish police to arrest “seven terrorist operatives acting on behalf of the terrorist organization Hamas, and foiled an attack aimed at killing innocent citizens on European soil.”
- On December 14, German authorities [said](#) that four senior Hamas members had been arrested for plotting to attack Jewish sites. Three of the men were arrested in Berlin, while the fourth was taken into custody by Dutch police in Rotterdam.
 - » According to the *BBC*, Danish intelligence [said](#) the Danish and German terror investigations were not directly linked.
- On December 14, Shir Ami synagogue in Newtown Township, Pennsylvania, [received](#) a bomb threat via email, forcing the synagogue and its preschool to be evacuated.
- On December 14, two menorah displays were [vandalized](#) and damaged in Kensal Rise and Islington in London, England.
- On December 12, the director of a nursery in Champigny-sur-Marne, a suburb of Paris, was [threatened](#) by a man with a knife, who broke into the nursery and told her, “You’re Jewish, you’re a Zionist. Five of us will come to rape you, cut you up like they do in Gaza.”

Recent and Relevant JINSA Products About Israel at War

- Mathew Kenney, [Key Middle East Provisions in the Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act](#), December 15, 2023
- Webinar: [Escalation of Iranian and Houthi Maritime Aggression](#), with former Deputy Commander of U.S. Central Command VADM Mark Fox, USN (ret.), former Commander of

U.S. Naval Forces Central Command VADM John Miller, USN (ret.), and JINSA Assistant Director of Foreign Policy Ari Cicurel, December 14, 2023

- VADM John Bird, USN (ret.), Jacob Olidort, and Ari Cicurel, “[Deterrence Is More Than Deployments: The Effects, and Limitations, of the Administration’s Naval Movements in the Middle East](#),” *RealClearDefense*, December 14, 2023
- Jacob Olidort and Yoni Tobin, [EU Foreign Policy Chief Defames Israel With Baseless Claims](#), December 13, 2023
- LTG H. Steven Blum, ARNG (ret.) and Jacob Olidort, “[Communication of intent and the importance of language to deterrence](#),” *Military Times*, December 7, 2023
- Jonathan Ruhe, Yoni Tobin, and Jordan Bridwell, [Iran on Nuclear Precipice as Oversight Dwindles](#), December 7, 2023
- Webinar: [Gaza War Update](#), with IDF Major General (ret.) and JINSA Distinguished Fellow Yaakov Amidror and JINSA Senior Vice President for Israeli Affairs IDF Major General (ret.) Yaacov Ayish, December 7, 2023
- Ari Cicurel and Zac Schildcrout, [Failure to Deter Houthi Attacks Endangers Global Shipping](#), December 6, 2023
- Yoni Tobin, [Hamas War Crimes Harm Palestinians and Israelis Alike](#), December 6, 2023
- Jonathan Harounoff, “[The Pandemic of Academic Antisemitism](#),” *JNS*, December 6, 2023
- Webinar: [Reflections From Law Enforcement Trip to Israel](#), with JINSA Homeland Security Program Director Steven Pomerantz, Executive Director and CEO of the National Sheriffs’ Association Jonathan Thompson, and President of the National Sherriff’s Association Sheriff Greg Champagne of St. Charles Parish, Louisiana, December 5, 2023
- Yoni Tobin, [The United States Must Re-Designate the Houthis as Terrorists](#), December 5, 2023
- Ari Cicurel, [First Preemptive U.S. Strike Since 10/7](#), December 4, 2023
- Zac Schildcrout, [10/7 Attack Highlights Need to Sanction Iran-Backed Terrorists](#), December 1, 2023
- Webinar: [Flying Blind? Electronic Warfare’s Impact on Civilian Planes](#), with JINSA Vice President for Policy Blaise Misztal, Former Deputy Commander of U.S. Central Command Lt Gen Thomas Bergeson, USAF (ret.) and Former Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, U.S. Air Force Lt Gen Joseph Guastella, USAF (ret.), November 29, 2023
- Webinar: [Britain’s Reaction to Israel-Hamas War](#), with JINSA President and CEO Michael Makovsky, Editorial Board Member and Opinion Columnist at The Wall Street Journal Joseph Sternberg, and former president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews Jonathan Arkush, November 27, 2023
- Michael Makovsky, “[What Israel Needs](#),” *The National Interest*, November 24, 2023