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Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update January 17, 2024

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

- While the United States has continued to strike Houthi targets in Yemen, another Houthi missile attack against a commercial ship in the Red Sea further indicates that repeated U.S. strikes have neither sufficiently degraded the group's capabilities nor deterred it from launching further attacks.
 - » Instead of focusing solely on degrading Houthi capabilities to strike ships in Middle Eastern waters, U.S. efforts should also seek to deter the Iran-backed group by conducting more frequent, deadlier, and damaging strikes that undermines its ability to maintain control of territory in Yemen.
- The U.S. Senate [rejected](#) (72-11) a resolution put forward by Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) that would have frozen all U.S. aid to Israel pending a State Department investigation of whether or not Israel was committing human rights violations in Gaza. The vote indicated the persistence of overwhelming bipartisan support for Israel and recognition that it has not purposely targeted civilians, contrary to Sanders' [allegations](#).
- The Biden administration will reportedly [redesignate](#) the Houthis as a specially designated global terrorist (SDGT) entity, after having removed it in February 2021, but will not relist it as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO). Redesignating the Houthis would send an important [signal](#) that the Biden administration acknowledges its conciliatory approach has failed and display solidarity with U.S. partners who have faced repeated attacks from the Houthis.
 - » JINSA Fellow Gabriel Noronha [noted](#) that under the SDGT designation Iran-backed terrorists "can still get US visas," that it is "[n]ot a criminal penalty to support them" and that U.S. banks are unable "to seize their funds."

Last 24 Hours

Attacks Against Israel

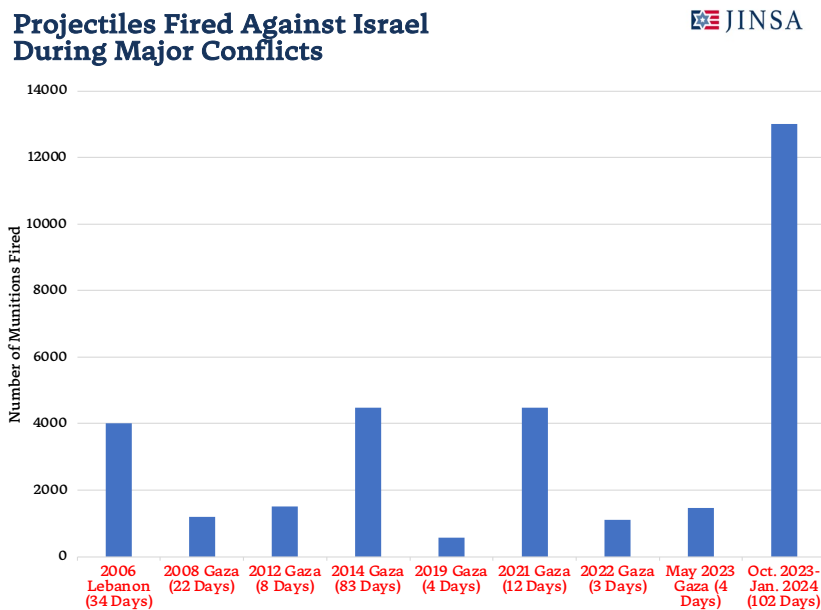
- At least 13,000 rockets, mortars, drones, and other projectiles have been [fired](#) at Israel during the war.

Gaza

- According to a January 16 [report](#) in *The New York Times*, unnamed senior Israeli defense officials believe that Hamas’s network of underground tunnels in Gaza consists of 350 to 450 miles of tunnels with 5,700 separate entry shafts.
- On January 16, *The Times of Israel* [reported](#), citing Israeli military sources, that the barrage of roughly 50 rockets fired from Gaza at the Israeli city of Netivot earlier that day was launched from a location in central Gaza from which the IDF recently withdrew.
 - » According to the report, Hamas fired the rocket barrage from an area in central Gaza that the IDF’s 36th Division had been operating in but no longer operationally controls. The IDF withdrew the troops from the areas as part of its scaling down of higher-intensity operations in Gaza.
- On January 15, the IDF [announced](#) that Hamas had fired a rocket at IDF troops from Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis earlier in the week.
 - » The IDF, which released imagery from internal radar systems showing the rocket launch, said in a statement that “Hamas operates systematically in the hospitals in the Gaza Strip and in the areas adjacent to them, using the civilian population as a human shield and exploiting the hospital infrastructure.”

Lebanon

- Sirens [sounded](#) in Ramot Naftali and Shtula.
- On January 18, Hezbollah [fired](#) an anti-tank missile at an IDF military post near the Lebanese-Israeli border. No injuries or damage were reported.
- On January 16, Hezbollah [fired](#) rockets and missiles at the northern Israeli towns of Ramot Naftali and Shtula as well as nearby IDF posts close to the Lebanese-Israeli border. No injuries or damage were reported.



IDF Operations

Gaza

- On January 17, the IDF [said](#) that 646th Reserve Paratroopers Brigade troops destroyed three rocket launchers in central Gaza – some of which were ready to fire additional rockets – that were used to fire several rockets toward the Israeli city of Netivot on January 16.
- On January 17, the Jordanian military released a statement in which it [alleged](#) that IDF shelling had struck its military field hospital in the southern Gazan city of Khan Younis. The IDF said it was investigating the report.
 - » The Jordanian military said that it held Israel responsible for a “flagrant breach of international law.”
- On January 17, the IDF [said](#) Israeli airstrikes killed six Hamas operatives, including Bilal Nofal, an officer in charge of catching and interrogating suspected spies.
- According to [reports](#) from January 16 citing Israel’s *Channel 12*, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly told council chiefs from towns close to Gaza during a meeting at the IDF’s Beersheba-based Southern Command headquarters that he thinks the war with Hamas will extend into 2025.
 - » The council chiefs reportedly said that residents do not want to return to their communities because of persistent rocket fire and other security threats, and they requested a delay in the return process until the summer and new school year with adequate government funding for temporary housing in the meantime. Netanyahu reportedly accepted the request.
 - » After the meeting, Netanyahu said publicly, “we are determined to rehabilitate the kibbutzim and communities in what is known as the so-called Gaza envelope area, to return the residents to their homes, and to ensure that [the area] thrives and grows far more than it was before the war.”
- On January 16, the IDF [said](#) 646th Reserve Paratroopers Brigade, elite Yahalom combat engineering, and other combat engineering troops found and demolished a “strategic,” nine meter-deep Hamas tunnel below Salah a-Din road. The IDF said that Hamas utilized the passage to travel from northern Gaza to southern Gaza.

Lebanon

- On January 17, the IDF [carried out](#) airstrikes and artillery shelling against Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon, including a Hezbollah cell and military facilities.
- On January 16, the IDF [conducted](#) artillery shelling and airstrikes against a number of Hezbollah targets, including military installations, in the towns of Houla, Marwahin, and Aytash-Shab in southern Lebanon in response to earlier projectile attacks.

West Bank

- On January 17, the IDF [said](#) a drone strike near the Balata refugee camp killed Abdallah Abu Shalal, a terror leader who was planning an imminent attack with financing and instruction from Iran and terrorist groups in Gaza.
- On January 17, the Palestine Red Crescent Society [said](#) four people were killed in an Israeli drone strike in Tulkarem. The IDF said the strike targeted suspects who were shooting and throwing explosive devices at Israeli troops.

Humanitarian Efforts

- On January 16, 218 aid trucks [entered](#) Gaza, with 99 going through Egypt's Rafah Crossing and 119 entering via Israel's Kerem Shalom, according to Israel's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT).
 - » Seventy percent of the aid consisted of food, and the remaining thirty percent included water, medical supplies, and shelter equipment.
- On January 16, Qatar [announced](#) that it mediated an Israel-Hamas agreement to transport medicine to the hostages Hamas is holding captive in Gaza, and French President Emmanuel Macron's office noted its role in reaching the deal. On January 17, the medicine will arrive in el-Arish in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt by way of two Qatari military aircraft and then enter Gaza, according to Qatar's Foreign Ministry.
- Qatar's Foreign Ministry said that its diplomatic efforts will go on "within the framework of Qatari efforts to bring about an end to the war in Gaza."
- Macron's office said that he instructed France's Foreign Affairs Ministry to put together a list of medicine for 45 hostages, buy the necessary medicines, and send them to Qatar.
- Prime Minister Netanyahu confirmed the forthcoming delivery without specifying a date. The Prime Minister's Office later [released](#) a statement saying that Prime Minister Netanyahu "conveys his appreciation to all those who helped during the process."
- Israel agreed to increase the medical and humanitarian aid entering Gaza daily, according to an Israeli official.
- Hamas official Mousa Abu Marzouk [wrote](#) on X on January 17 that 1,000 medicine boxes would reach Palestinian civilians for every box for Israeli hostages, and the International Committee of the Red Cross would transfer all the medicines. He also claimed that Israel will not be able to inspect the medicine shipments.
 - » Netanyahu [denied](#) that medicines will not go through security checks. His office said on January 17, "the prime minister authorized sending the medicines to the hostages but did not deal at all with the security procedures that are set by the IDF and security officials."
 - » In addition, unnamed military sources [told](#) Israel's *Channel 12* that the IDF was unaware of this provision and the deal itself until Mousa Abu Marzouk addressed it on X.

Post-War Gaza Planning

- On January 16, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan [laid out](#) four principles guiding the U.S. approach to post-war planning for the Gaza Strip, including ensuring Gaza is never used for terror attacks on Israel; peace between Israel and the Arab countries in the region; a Palestinian state; and security assurances for Israel.

Casualties and Hostages

- Over 1,200 people in Israel have been [killed](#), and at least 11,000 have been [injured](#) in the war.
 - » 527 Israeli soldiers have been [killed](#).
 - 193 IDF soldiers have been [killed](#) during ground combat in Gaza so far.

- The IDF announced the deaths of Master Sgt. (res.) Zechariah Pesach Haber, 32, from Jerusalem and Sgt. Maj. (res.) Yair Katz, 34, from Holon.
- » Numerous foreign nationals have been killed in the war, including at least 33 [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, at least 24,448 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza, and 61,504 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, at least 360 people have been [killed](#), and at least 3,500 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, [seven](#) [have](#) been [found](#) dead, one was [mistakenly](#) killed by the IDF, and one was [killed](#) during an IDF attempt to rescue him.
 - » 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](#) 136 hostages, according to Israeli government spokesperson Eylon Levy, a figure that includes the dead bodies of 25 hostages and four abducted prior to October 7.
 - » Many of the hostages are foreign or dual nationals, including up to 8 [American](#) nationals, 6 [German](#) nationals, 13 [Thai](#) nationals, 4 [Portuguese](#) nationals, 3 [British](#) nationals, 2 [Italian](#) nationals, 4 [Romanian](#) nationals, and 2 [Mexican](#) nationals.
 - » According to IDF spokesperson Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the 136 hostages [include](#) two Israeli civilians and the bodies of two IDF soldiers held in Gaza since 2014 and 2015.
- On January 16, Kibbutz Be’eri [said](#) that Hamas is holding the bodies of residents Yossi Sharabi and Itay Svirsky, who were the subject of the terror group’s January 15 propaganda video that purported to show the two hostages’ bodies.
- On January 16, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken [discussed efforts](#) to release hostages in Gaza during separate meetings on

the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland with Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani.

- » According to White House spokesperson John Kirby, “we are having very serious and intensive discussions in Qatar about the possibility for another deal,” and the United States is “hopeful that it can bear fruit soon.”
- » According to Kirby, U.S. envoy Brett McGurk was in Qatar earlier this week to discuss hostage negotiations.

Iranian Involvement and Response

- U.S. Central Command [wrote](#) on X that on January 16 at 1:45 p.m. local time, the Houthis fired an anti-ship ballistic missile toward international shipping lanes in the southern Red Sea, striking the MV *Zografia*, a Maltese-flagged bulk carrier. The ship continued transiting, and it did not report injuries.
- On January 16, Israel’s Shin Bet security agency [released](#) a video of an interrogation during which Palestinian Islamic Jihad platoon commander Basel Mahadi said, “my commander called me and said that I should go to Iran for a sniper course, I will benefit from it and my salary will increase when I return,” and “I went from the Gaza Strip to Egypt where I stayed for about two weeks, from there I went to Syria for a few days and then to Lebanon. After two weeks we went from Syria to Iran.”
 - » He added, “in Iran, the course was 15 days. It had physical fitness training and shooting training on different types of weapons.”
- On January 16, Iran’s Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian told [CNBC](#) that the Houthis “are not receiving any orders or instructions from us,” despite [clear evidence](#) that the terrorist group receives weapons from the Iranian regime.

U.S. and International Response

- The Biden administration is expected to designate the Iran-backed Houthis as a specially designated global terrorist (SDGT) entity, according to a January 17 [report](#) by Reuters.
- On January 16, the U.S. Senate [voted](#) 72-11 to reject a resolution brought forth by Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), which would have required a total freeze of all U.S. security aid to Israel unless the State Department issued a report within 30 days that assesses whether or not Israel is committing human rights violations in its operations in Gaza.
 - » The 11 senators who [voted](#) in favor of the resolution in addition to Senator Sanders included Sens. Rand Paul (R-KY); Jeff Merkley (D-OR); Chris Van Hollen (D-MD); Martin Heinrich (D-NM); Ed Markey (D-MA); Laphonza Butler (D-CA); Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM); Mazie Hirono (D-HI); Peter Welch (D-VT); and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA).
 - » 17 Senators were absent from the vote, primarily due to flight delays and cancellations.
- At 4:15 a.m. local time on January 16, the United States [struck](#) and destroyed four anti-ship ballistic missiles in Yemen that the Houthis had prepared to launch, according to U.S. Central Command.
- On January 16, White House spokesman John Kirby [said](#) that the IDF’s ongoing shift to low-intensity fighting in northern Gaza and the imminent IDF shift to low-intensity fighting in southern Gaza would allow for greater aid flows and the potential return of Palestinians to their homes.

- » Kirby said that the tactical shifts would hopefully “set the conditions for the population to return to north Gaza where the UN hopes to conduct assessment missions over the coming weeks.”
- » Israel has stated that it will not permit evacuated Palestinians to return to northern Gaza unless advances are made in hostage release talks.
- On January 16, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan [said](#) at the World Economic Forum that peace between Israel and the Palestinians is possible “not years down the road but in the nearer term” if part of a broader initiative involving Saudi-Israeli normalization.
- On January 16, Secretary of State Antony Blinken [told](#) *CNBC* that though Arab countries are more willing to collaborate with Israel in ways “they were never prepared to do before,” increased regional integration is contingent on a Palestinian state.
 - » Blinken said that Arab countries are “committed to a pathway to a Palestinian state” and that until there is a Palestinian state, the United States as well as Arab countries believe that Israel will never have “true security.”
 - » Blinken added, “you have to resolve the Palestinian question. Arab countries are saying this. They’re saying, look, we’re not going to get into the business, for example, of rebuilding Gaza only to have it leveled again in a year or five years and then be asked to rebuild it again.”
- On January 16, U.S. Special Envoy for Middle East Humanitarian Issues David Satterfield reportedly held a [frustrating meeting](#) with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli military officials, who rejected a U.S. request to expand humanitarian aid in Gaza.
 - » Netanyahu reportedly told Satterfield that the level of aid entering Gaza daily is sufficient and that the issue is the distribution of aid once it is already inside Gaza.
- On January 16, the House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman Rep. Michael McCaul (R-TX) and committee members Brian Mast (R-FL), Chris Smith (R-NJ), and Darrell Issa (R-CA) sent a letter to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini [requesting](#) more information about reports that UNRWA is funneling “hundreds of millions of dollars” to Hamas.
- The letter requests that Lazzarini appear before the committee to testify and that he indicates his availability to do so no later than January 24.
- On January 17, Japanese shipping firm Nippon Yusen [announced](#) that it would be suspending all shipping through the Red Sea to “ensure the safety of crews” in light of ongoing Houthi attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea.
 - » Japan’s *Nikkei* reported on January 16 that two other leading Japanese shipping companies, Kawasaki Kisen and Mitsui O.S.K. Lines, also suspended shipments through the Red Sea indefinitely.
- On January 16, *The Wall Street Journal* [reported](#) that British oil company Shell suspended all shipments through the Red Sea after the January 12 U.S.-U.K. airstrikes on Houthi targets in Yemen.
 - » According to the report, the decision has already raised costs by between 5 and 10 percent due to logistical challenges and the additional extra roughly two weeks it takes cargo ships to avoid the Red Sea by going around Africa.

- » The report quotes Shell CEO Wael Sawan as saying, “this is the reaction to what is still a short-lived reality,” but that “we’ll have to see whether this becomes a longer-standing issue.”
- On January 16, Reuters [reported](#) that, according to shipping data, three of the four tankers used for shipments of Qatari liquefied natural gas (LNG) have changed course away from the Red Sea to instead travel around Africa en route to Europe. Qatar is the world’s second-largest natural gas exporter.
- On January 16, London’s Metropolitan Police [announced](#) that its small war crimes team would open a probe into alleged Israeli war crimes in Gaza in response to a complaint filed by the U.K.-based International Centre of Justice for Palestinians.
- On January 16, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong [met with](#) Israeli Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz in Israel. In a statement posted on X, Katz thanked Wong “for her expression of solidarity with Israel and her crystal clear condemnation of the atrocities committed by Hamas on October 7th.”
- At the World Economic Forum in Davos on January 16, Jordanian Prime Minister Bisher Khasawneh [said](#) that despite its “strategic choice” to sign a peace deal with Israel, it sees mass displacement of Palestinians as an “existentialist threat” and would need “to react” if Israel did so.
 - » He said, “we hope that we never arrive at that point” and noted that Jordan is in “serious discussions” to reach a deal with Israel involving energy for water.
 - » Khasawneh also claimed that “today under the existing conditions, it’s quite inconceivable for any Jordanian minister to just sit on a podium and have that type of interaction and transaction with an Israeli counterpart,” and he announced that Jordan will argue on South Africa’s side at the International Court of Justice. Pretoria claims that Israel is perpetrating genocide against Palestinians.

Rising Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Protests, and Attacks

- On January 17, the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) [backtracked](#) on its earlier decision to ban Israel from competing in its upcoming world championship tournament in Bulgaria due to security concerns. The IIHF said in a statement that it had received from local authorities “the required confirmation for the safety and security support needed to allow the Israeli National Team to take part.”
- Israel had called the decision to ban it from the tournament “antisemitic” and “dangerous.”
- On January 16, a [makeshift explosive](#) targeted the Greece offices of Israel’s main shipping company, Zim, causing minor damage. The unknown assailants threw flyers with “Free Palestine” written on them.
- On January 16, Israeli police officers [broke up](#) a protest against the war in Tel Aviv, including by tearing a sign out of a protester’s hands. The protest, which involved fewer than a dozen people holding signs calling for a ceasefire, was reportedly broken up because it was “harming the feelings of the public.”

Recent and Relevant JINSA Products About Israel at War

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- Webinar: [Gaza Update](#), with IDF MG (ret.) Yaakov Amidror, IDF MG (ret.) Yaacov Ayish, and IDF MG (ret.) Amikam Norkin, January 11, 2024
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- Jonathan Ruhe and Yoni Tobin, [Iran Accelerates into the Nuclear Gray Zone](#), January 10, 2024