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## Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update January 18, 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

- During a January 17 JINSA [webinar](#), JINSA Senior Advisor Hon. Stephen Rademaker stressed that the Biden administration's Iran policy is "the same today as it was before October 7, and that is they're trying to avoid a crisis in U.S.-Iranian relations ... The big picture here is, well over a year ago, the Biden administration reluctantly came to the conclusion that they weren't going to be able to put the nuclear deal back together again," so they tried to avoid escalation.
  - » JINSA Fellow Gabriel Noronha pointed out that "we've seen no released administration policy or strategy for how they are going to deal with this nuclear problem ... for such a frankly existential issue for Middle East security, it's unfortunate and shocking for me that we haven't seen [more from the administration]."
- Growing hostilities between Iran and Pakistan, which began on January 16 with an Iranian [airstrike](#) on an alleged terrorist target in southwestern Pakistan, indicate that Iran is growing increasingly emboldened due to the combination of its [nuclear advances](#) and the [timid U.S. response](#) to Iran-backed attacks across the region.
  - » Iran's willingness to strike Pakistan, as JINSA's Gabriel Noronha noted during a January 17 JINSA [webinar](#), is indicative of "what Iran considers itself willing and capable of doing, even to its neighbors who have nuclear weapons."
- The January 18 [strikes](#) that the United States conducted in Yemen against 14 Houthi missiles that were ready for launch came shortly after the Houthis had launched a drone that struck a U.S.-owned cargo ship, indicating that previous U.S. efforts had not sufficiently degraded the terrorist group's ability to launch attacks.
  - » Given the immense [consequences](#) of the Houthis' attacks on ships in Middle Eastern waters, the United States should focus on imposing [deterrent](#) costs that undermine the group's ability to control territory in Yemen.
- [Reports](#) that Hezbollah has refused U.S. proposals to withdraw from the Israel-Lebanon border and will continue to attack Israel until fighting in Gaza stops indicate that diplomacy is

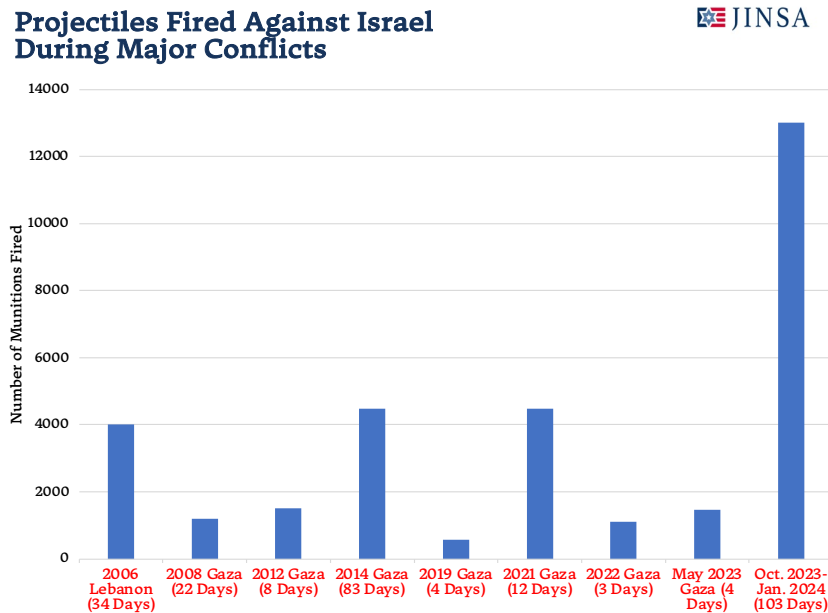
unlikely to successfully mitigate tensions in the north, raising the risk of escalation by projecting diminished U.S. willingness to back Israel in the face of aggression.

- » This underscores the importance of U.S. support for Israel’s military efforts to compel Hezbollah’s retreat from the border, as JINSA Policy Analyst Zac Schildcrout has [argued](#).

## 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

- On January 18, sirens [sounded](#) in a number of Israeli communities near the southeastern corner of the Gaza Strip, indicating a rocket barrage. No injuries or damage were reported.

### Lebanon

- Rockets struck [Arab al-Aramshe](#), and sirens sounded in [Metula, Shlomi, and other Israeli communities](#) on the border.
- According to a [report](#) from January 18, Hezbollah rejected U.S. proposals to mitigate tensions with Israel, including retreating from the Israel-Lebanon border, but a senior Lebanese official said that Hezbollah, which saw U.S. envoy Amos Hochstein’s proposals, “is ready to listen.”
  - » The report notes that Hezbollah’s position is that its rocket attacks against Israel will continue until fighting between Israel and terrorists in Gaza ceases. However, it also notes that according to unnamed Lebanese officials and a security source, Hezbollah seeks to avert a larger war.
- On January 18, Hezbollah [fired](#) two projectiles at the northern Israeli town of Arab al-Aramshe. The two projectiles landed in open areas, causing no injuries or damage.

- On January 17, Hamas in Lebanon carried out a rocket [barrage](#) targeting the Israeli town of Rosh Hanikra, and Hezbollah targeted the Mount Dov area in Israel in an earlier rocket attack.

## Red Sea

- On January 18, the IDF said that it [intercepted](#) a “suspicious aerial target” flying over the Red Sea toward Israel. However, the IDF later [announced](#) that the incident was a false alarm and that the aerial target “was determined to be false identification.”

## IDF Operations

### Gaza

- The IDF [said](#) on January 18 that it killed around 40 Hamas members in Khan Younis during the past day. The IDF reported shelling four Hamas combatants approaching troops, seizing weapons from a Hamas member’s home, launching airstrikes and tank shelling in northern Gaza against Hamas gunmen, incapacitating a vehicle that an Islamic Jihad operative rigged with explosives in northern Gaza, and uncovering a storage of anti-tank mines, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), and other military items in Sabra in Gaza City.
- On January 18, the IDF [said](#) that its Givati Brigade raided and captured the “Shuhada Outpost,” a chief stronghold of Hamas’s South Khan Younis Battalion with a training site and offices, in which troops confiscated firearms and intelligence documents.
- A [report](#) in *The Wall Street Journal* on January 17 indicated that Israel had withdrawn one of its four divisions in Gaza following pressure from the United States. The report indicated that the decision gives Israel flexibility to deploy forces to other areas of hostility, including the West Bank, but Israeli officials are concerned that it could leave Israel vulnerable to another attack and undermine efforts to neutralize Hamas.
- On January 17, the IDF [released](#) footage of an airstrike targeting two Hamas members who tried to fire mortars toward Israeli troops in Deir al-Balah in central Gaza. The IDF also said that it used a fighter jet to eliminate a rocket launcher in Rafah used to attack Israel the morning of January 17.
- On January 17, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant [told](#) soldiers in the Israeli Navy’s Shayetet 13 unit that “if the fate of Hamas is not complete dismantlement, we will not be able to live in the State of Israel,” and “we continue fighting until victory ... until we defeat the Hamas organization, take away all of its significant military capabilities and remove it from power in Gaza.”
  - » Gallant added, “we have no right to stop the fighting as long as there are hostages in Gaza. The only way and thing that brings hostages [back] is military pressure, because Hamas understands only one thing.”

### Lebanon

- On January 18, the IDF [conducted](#) airstrikes against Hezbollah targets in the southern Lebanese towns of Kafr Kila, Marjaayoun, and Odaisseh in response to earlier projectile attacks.
- On January 17, *NBC News* [reported](#), citing three U.S. senior officials, that during U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s visit with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on January 9, Netanyahu agreed to a request from the United States that Israel not “attack”

Hezbollah in Lebanon. According to a [report](#) from *The Times of Israel*, citing another U.S. official, Netanyahu agreed not to launch a “major attack” on Hezbollah.

- On January 17, the IDF [said](#) that within minutes of a rocket attack on the Israeli town of Rosh Hanikra, it destroyed the cell that orchestrated it. Hamas took credit for the barrage and said the Israeli strike killed one of its members. The IDF also said that it struck additional rocket launching sites and Hezbollah infrastructure, including a site used to carry out an earlier attack on Mount Dov.
- On January 17, while speaking to IDF troops in northern Israel amid a drill focused on combat in Lebanon, IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi [said](#) the military is “increasing readiness for fighting in Lebanon, we have a lot of lessons from the fighting in Gaza, many of them are very relevant to fighting in Lebanon, and there are some that must be adjusted.”
  - » He added, “we want to reach a very clear goal in Lebanon, to return the [80,000 evacuated Israeli] residents to the north, all the communities in the north.”
  - » Halevi also said, “I don’t know when the war in the north [will happen]. I can tell you that the likelihood of it happening in the coming months is much higher than it was in the past,” and, “I can tell you that I think we are starting it with many more advantages.”

### *Humanitarian Efforts*

- On January 17, Israel’s Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) [clarified](#) that “per the directive of the political echelon, five trucks carrying medicine [including medicine for Israeli hostages in Gaza] will undergo a security check at the Kerem Shalom crossing,” and “at the end of the inspection, the trucks will enter the Gaza Strip.”
  - » Hebrew-language media [reported](#) on January 17 that Israel had inspected the five trucks at the Kerem Shalom crossing, and the trucks subsequently entered Gaza via Egypt.

### *Post-War Gaza Planning*

- According to a January 17 *NBC News* [report](#) citing three senior U.S. officials, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected a proposal earlier this month from Saudi Arabia and four unnamed Arab countries to fund Gaza reconstruction efforts and support a “new, reformed Palestinian government” in Gaza if Israel would provide the Palestinians a pathway towards a state. The proposal also reportedly included a commitment from Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to normalize ties with Israel if Israel would agree to provide a pathway to a Palestinian state.
  - » The report stated that U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken secured the commitments from Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and four other Arab leaders to help fund the reconstruction of Gaza after the war during his Middle East trip. When Blinken arrived in Israel on January 9, marking the final stop of the trip, he presented the proposal to Netanyahu, who rejected it and said he was not prepared to recognize a Palestinian state.
  - » *The Times of Israel* [reported](#), citing two U.S. officials, that the Saudi normalization proposition was contingent on Israel creating a pathway to a Palestinian state, rather than the immediate recognition of one.

- » According to *The Times of Israel* report, after Netanyahu rejected the deal, Blinken said that Hamas cannot be eliminated through military means alone and that history will repeat itself if Israel does not recognize this reality.
- » The *NBC News* report states, citing three U.S. senior officials, that after Netanyahu rejected the offer, the Biden administration began “looking past Netanyahu to try to achieve its goals in the region.”

### *Casualties and Hostages*

- Over 1,200 people in Israel have been [killed](#), and at least 11,000 have been [injured](#) in the war.
  - » 529 Israeli soldiers have been [killed](#).
    - 195 IDF soldiers have been [killed](#) during ground combat in Gaza so far.
    - The IDF [announced](#) the deaths of Master Sgt. Anwar Serhan, 26, from Hurfeish and Staff Sgt. Oriya Ayimalk Goshen, 21, from Jerusalem.
  - » 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, 360 people have been [killed](#), and an additional 4,234 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 18, the IDF [announced](#) that a pathology report showed that two soldiers who were taken hostage by Hamas on October 7 and subsequently died in captivity were not killed in an IDF airstrike, contrary to Hamas’s claims.
  - » The pathology report could not determine the cause of deaths of Sgt. Ron Sherman, 19, and Cpl. Nik Beizer, 19, but the pathology reports—which the IDF presented to the families of the two men—showed no signs of trauma or gunshot wounds.
  - » Hamas had released a propaganda video last week purporting to show the two soldiers’ bodies, along with the body of a third Israeli, Elia Toledano, 28, who was also kidnapped on October 7. Hamas claimed the three were killed in an IDF airstrike.
  - » The IDF stated that it did carry out an airstrike on a tunnel near where the bodies of the three men were found, which targeted the commander of Hamas’s Northern Gaza Brigade, Ahmed Ghandour, but that it was not aware the hostages were held nearby. The IDF stated that the bodies were found during scans of the tunnels.
- On January 17, IDF Spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari [said](#) during a press conference that the military is “making every effort to build an intelligence picture regarding the hostages” and that “we are adapting the fighting [in Gaza] according to the intelligence we have. We must say to the public, we do not have a full picture of the hostages.”
  - » He added, “we are in continuous effort, intelligence-wise, to complete the picture,” and “most important is to create ideal conditions on the ground ... so that there will be moves to return the hostages.”

### *Iranian Involvement and Response*

- On January 18, a Houthi military official told the Houthi-run *Al-Masirah* TV that the Houthis would [continue](#) launching attacks on ships in the Red Sea, despite the latest round of U.S. airstrikes targeting the Houthis. The official stated, “we will continue to target Israeli ships heading to the ports of occupied Palestine, no matter how the American-British aggression tries to prevent us from doing so.”
- On January 17, Pakistan [announced](#) that it had conducted airstrikes, including the use of drones, against seven locations in southeastern Iran to target Balochistan separatist terrorists in the Saravan area, about 30 miles inside Iran.
  - » The latest tit-for-tat came after Iran conducted an [airstrike](#) inside Pakistan’s Baluchistan Province on an alleged terrorist target that the Pakistani government alleged killed two children. Iran claimed the strike [targeted](#) Jaish al-Adl, a Sunni separatist terrorist group.
  - » Pakistan [recalled](#) its ambassador to Iran following the Iranian airstrike, which it denounced as a “blatant violation” of its sovereignty, and also asked the Iranian ambassador to Pakistan—who had been in Tehran at the time—not to return to Pakistan.

- On January 17 at approximately 8:30 p.m. local time, the Iran-backed Houthis [launched](#) a one-way attack drone that struck the MV *Genco Picardy*, a Marshall Islands-flagged, U.S.-owned and operated bulk carrier ship, as it sailed in the Gulf of Aden. There were no reported injuries, and the MV *Genco Picardy* continued its transit.
- On January 17, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian [said](#) at the World Economic Forum in Davos, “an end to the genocide in Gaza will lead to an end of military actions and crises in the region,” and “the security of the Red Sea is tied to the developments in Gaza, and everyone will suffer if Israel’s crimes in Gaza do not stop ... All the fronts will remain active.”
- On January 17, Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdulsalam [told](#) Reuters that the Biden administration’s redesignation of the group as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGT) will not impede Houthi attempts to interrupt maritime traffic in the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait heading toward Israel.

### *U.S. and International Response*

- On January 18 at approximately 2 a.m. local time, the United States launched strikes in Yemen against 14 Houthi missiles. “These missiles on launch rails presented an imminent threat to merchant vessels and U.S. Navy ships in the region and could have been fired at any time,” according to a [statement](#) from U.S. Central Command.
- On January 17, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan [announced](#) in a statement that “in response to these continuing threats and attacks [from the Houthis], the United States announced the designation of Ansarallah, also known as the Houthis, as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist [SDGT]. This designation is an important tool to impede terrorist funding to the Houthis, further restrict their access to financial markets, and hold them accountable for their actions.” U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken released a similar [statement](#) on January 17.
  - » According to Sullivan’s statement, “the designation will take effect 30 days from now, to allow us to ensure robust humanitarian carve outs are in place so our action targets the Houthis and not the people of Yemen. We are rolling out unprecedented carve outs and licenses to help prevent adverse impacts on the Yemeni people. The people of Yemen should not pay the price for the actions of the Houthis.”
- During a January 17 [teleconference](#) with reporters, a senior administration official in the State Department said, “we believe that the SDGT designation is the appropriate tool at the moment to pressure the Houthis” in response to Missy Ryan from *The Washington Post*’s request for clarification about why the administration chose to redesignate the Houthis as an SDGT as opposed to a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).
  - » The official also said, “we think the SDGT [pressures the Houthis] in a number of ways, including cutting off Houthis from financing, putting pressure on them, and calling out their terrorist behavior in a clear manner,” and “the SDGT allows us the possibility of making sure that we are continuing to – in our efforts to resolve the conflict in Yemen to deliver humanitarian assistance, to make sure that there aren’t unintended consequences for the humanitarian situation and the people of Yemen.”
  - » After Reuters’ Simon Lewis asked why the administration couldn’t implement the same humanitarian carveouts in 2021 when the Houthis were designated as terrorists, an administration official said, “we think that it is the correct step, and it was the correct step in 2021, to revoke the [FTO] and SDGT designations for the Houthis. That was made by

the – a decision that the Secretary of State made in recognition of a very dire humanitarian situation in Yemen, and the revocations were intended to ensure that relevant U.S. policies weren't impeding assistance.”

- The official also said, “I think that there are a couple of things that have changed in the situation at this moment. First of all, there's been a resumption of commercial shipping to Yemen of crucial goods, although we remain concerned about the humanitarian situation, which explains the unprecedented steps that we are taking in conjunction with this action.”
- The official added, “I think the context is also one in which the recent attacks since November are really unacceptable. We cannot sit idly by and watch what the Houthis are doing in the Red Sea and not recognize their actions for what they are.”
- Another administration official said, “we had an extensive engagement even after the previous designation with the NGO community; have also sort of closely studied trade flows, et cetera, and what is most critical for the people of Yemen, and fuel is one of those. So you'll see a fuel authorization, and that's sort of in response to what we see, critical needs on the ground.”
- » However, a State Department official stated during the [teleconference](#) that “if we saw a cessation of Houthi attacks on ships, we are willing to relook at this designation. It is very much targeted on that specific terrorist behavior. We are also – would be willing to look at it not coming into effect. If the Houthis stopped tomorrow, that is something that we, again, would be willing to look at.”
- Despite earlier reports to the contrary, U.S. State Department spokesman Matthew Miller [said](#) on January 17 that during discussions with Secretary Blinken, Israeli officials did not make the return of Palestinian civilians to northern Gaza contingent on a hostage deal, but they insisted that civilians should only return after the fighting lessens.
  - » Miller added that Israel will permit UN personnel to inspect northern Gaza to determine whether conditions allow for Palestinians to return, given that Hamas has booby-trapped homes with improvised explosive devices (IED).
- On January 17, France's Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne [said](#) to the French parliament that “accusing the Jewish state of genocide crosses a moral threshold. The notion of genocide cannot be exploited for political ends.”

#### *Rising Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Protests, and Attacks*

- On January 18, pro-Palestinian protesters [held](#) a protest inside the Maryland State House in Annapolis, chanting, “legislators, you can't hide, you're committing genocide,” and covering their hands in red paint to represent blood.
  - » The protesters reportedly chose the date because it was a budgetary legislative session, with one demonstrator stating, “that's why we chose today, so that the General Assembly knows, we are watching them, we are paying attention and we will not be quiet and complicit.”
- On January 17, the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law and Jewish on Campus [filed](#) a federal complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights against American University, accusing the university of allowing rampant antisemitism on campus and harassing and disciplining Jewish whistleblowers.



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- Webinar: “[Forgotten Threat: Iran’s Accelerating Nuclear Program](#),” with Hon. Stephen Rademaker, Gabriel Noronha, and Blaise Misztal, January 17, 2024
- Ari Cicurel, [Strikes Against the Houthis Should Not Be a One-Off](#), January 12, 2024
- Zac Schildcrout, [U.S. Diplomacy Won’t Deter Hezbollah](#), January 12, 2024