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Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update January 31, 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. JINSA will release the Swords of Iron Update on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. An update with the latest information and analysis about the war is below.

Analysis

- Contrary to United Nations (UN) officials' [claims](#) that the “abhorrent alleged acts” of several United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff members who allegedly [participated](#) in the October 7 attack—including by kidnapping Israeli civilians and procuring weapons—should not impugn the overall mission and work of the agency, recently revealed Israeli intelligence suggests that the agency's operations are fundamentally compromised by systemic ties to terrorism.
 - » As JINSA Policy Analyst Yoni Tobin described in a recent [NatSec Brief](#), Israeli intelligence indicates that nearly 200 UNRWA staffers are documented members of terrorist organizations, that well over a thousand staffers have direct ties to terrorism, and that roughly half the agency's approximately 12,000 staffers have relatives in terrorist groups.
 - » Additionally, as Israel's intelligence dossier reportedly shows, far from being the exception to the norm, UNRWA staffers who allegedly participated in the October 7 attack are symptomatic of a larger problem with the agency, whose aid deliveries in Gaza are routinely coordinated and overseen by Hamas operatives.
- While President Biden acknowledged that Iran is responsible for the deadly attack that killed three U.S. service members in Jordan on January 28 by supplying weapons to the proxies that carried out the attack, his [statement](#) that he wants to “avoid a wider war in the Middle East” and [other statements](#) by Biden administration officials hinted at a reluctance to strike Iranian regime targets directly.
 - » Solely targeting Tehran's proxies has neither degraded their capabilities enough to prevent them from launching attacks nor deterred Iran-backed aggression.
- During a January 29 JINSA [webinar](#) addressing whether the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) preliminary ruling was a win for Israel, JINSA Distinguished Fellow LTC Geoffrey S. Corn, USA (ret.) noted that the irony of the case is that the court is “discussing genocide when one party to the conflict [Hamas] has a charter that is an overt statement of genocidal

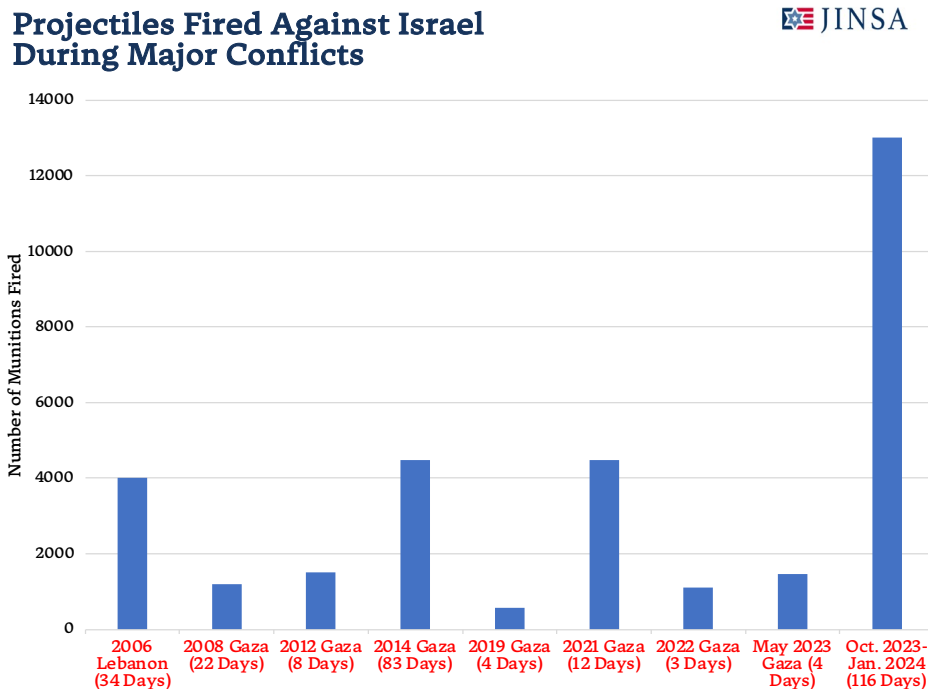
intent whose conduct [aligns with] that assertion ... but the ICJ has no jurisdiction over Hamas.”

- » Corn added, “one of the most disappointing aspects of the opinion is the way that many of the judges seemed to take at face value the claims provided by South Africa and the numbers from the Hamas-controlled Ministry of Health.”
- » JINSA Distinguished Fellow Col. Marc Warren, USA (ret.) pointed out that several of the court’s “preliminary measures are already underway by Israel or would be due course by the IDF as a military force that adheres to its international legal obligations,” and “the bar to prove genocide, even in the ICJ, is a high bar requiring systematic action. But the bar to get in the court in the first place is a very low bar.”
- » Outlining the threats that the court proceedings present, IDF Colonel (res.) Adv. Pnina Sharvit Baruch warned, “we have to rely on our allies, mainly the U.S. The idea of this international campaign against Israel is not just to make Israel look bad. It has a very concrete aim, which is to make Israel a state that is suspected of carrying out the worst crimes possible to put pressure on its allies not to assist it.”

Last 48 Hours

Attacks Against Israel

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



Gaza

- Sirens sounded in [Nahal Oz](#).

Lebanon

- Sirens sounded in [Arab al-Aramshe](#), [Kiryat Shmona](#), and [Ya'ara](#).

- On January 30, a rocket [fired](#) from Lebanon landed in an open area near the northern Israeli town of Arab al-Aramshe, causing no reported damage or injuries.
- On January 30, several projectiles [launched](#) from Lebanon landed in open areas near the towns of Manara and Yuval. No injuries were reported.
- Several missiles that entered Israeli territory on January 29 [triggered](#) sirens in Kiryat Shmona.

Syria

- On January 30, three rockets [fired](#) from Syria landed in open areas in the southern Golan Heights, causing no reported damage or injuries.

IDF Operations

Gaza

- The IDF [said](#) that on January 31, it demolished numerous weapons in a Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) weapons manufacturing facility in western Khan Younis. This included explosives discovered in bags with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) logo. The IDF also said that it destroyed a tunnel network below the facility.
- On January 31, the IDF [said](#) that in central and northern Gaza, the 162nd Division engaged in numerous battles with Hamas fighters during the previous day, while troops, including the Paratroopers Brigade, continued fighting against Hamas in Khan Younis in southern Gaza.
- The IDF [confirmed](#) on January 30 for the first time that it has been flooding Hamas's tunnel network in the Gaza Strip with seawater after weeks of reports that Israel was doing so. The IDF said that it has been injecting high-flow seawater in conjunction with other measures to address the tunnel threat, and that it carries out frequent soil and water checks to make sure that groundwater is not contaminated by these measures.
- During a press conference on January 29, IDF Spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari [said](#), "more than 2,000 Hamas operatives have been killed above and below ground" in Khan Younis since the IDF commenced operations in southern Gaza in December.
- The IDF [said](#) on January 29 that it "raided hundreds of terrorist infrastructures" in Khan Younis, including the office of Hamas leader in Gaza Yahya Sinwar and those of other Hamas officials, a military intelligence building, and a large rocket production factory.
- On January 29, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant [said](#) to IDF reservists that "it's hard for [Hamas] to take care of themselves, of their wounded, and other things. We have killed already a quarter of the Hamas terrorists at least, and the same number are wounded."

Lebanon

- On January 30, the IDF [carried out](#) airstrikes on several Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon, including two observation posts, a command-and-control center, and a military compound.
- The IDF [said](#) on January 29 that it struck sites from which several missiles entered Israeli territory earlier, as well as numerous Hezbollah targets.

Syria

- On January 31, the IDF [launched](#) airstrikes against Syrian Army targets near the southern Syrian city of Daraa in response to earlier rocket attacks.

- On January 30, the IDF [conducted](#) shelling against targets in Syria in response to earlier rocket attacks.

West Bank

- On January 30, the IDF, Israel's Shin Bet internal security agency, and the Yamam counterterrorism unit of Israel's Border Police conducted an undercover raid on the Ibn Sina hospital in Jenin, killing three terrorists.
 - » Israeli authorities said that one of the terrorists was the leader of a Hamas terror cell that was planning a "raid attack inspired by the events of October 7," another was a member of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and a third was involved in shooting attacks on IDF troops in the West Bank.
 - » The hospital has repeatedly been used to plan and conduct terrorist attacks, according to Israeli authorities, in the hopes the hospital would afford the terrorists protection from Israeli counterterrorism raids.
 - » IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi [said](#), "we do not want to turn medical centers into battlefields ... but we are much more determined not to allow hospitals in Gaza, Judea and Samaria [West Bank] or Lebanon—neither above ground or in shafts and tunnels under hospitals—to become a shelter for terror."

Humanitarian Efforts

- Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh [said](#) on January 30 that Hamas had received an updated ceasefire proposal after having rejected an earlier proposal on January 29 that, according to Haniyeh, did not address Hamas's demand for a comprehensive ceasefire. Haniyeh stated that he would study the proposal and travel to Cairo in the coming days to discuss its details.
- Reuters [reported](#) on January 30, citing a senior Hamas leader, that the updated proposal has the release of hostages proceeding along three stages and includes a combat pause.
 - » The first stage would involve the release of women, children, elderly, and injured, while the second stage would involve the release of the remaining individuals. In the third phase, all bodies held in captivity would be released. According to the report, fighting would be halted throughout all three phases of the deal.
 - The report stated that the number of Palestinian prisoners that would be released under the deal has not yet been determined.
- On January 29, senior Hamas official Taher al-Nunu [said](#) that Hamas wants a "complete and comprehensive ceasefire, and not a temporary truce," adding that after a ceasefire, "the rest of the details can be discussed," including hostage release negotiations.

Post-War Gaza Planning

- Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant reportedly [insisted](#) to the United States that Israel will not build settlements in Gaza under his watch, according to reports from January 29.

Casualties and Hostages

- Over 1,200 people were [killed](#) in Israel, and 13,000 Israelis have been [injured](#) in the war.

- » 560 Israeli soldiers have been [killed](#).
 - 223 IDF soldiers have been [killed](#) during ground combat in Gaza so far.
 - The IDF [announced](#) the deaths of Maj. (res.) Netzer Simchi, 30, from Masad; Cpt. (res.) Gavriel Shani, 28, from the West Bank settlement of Eli; Warrant Officer (res.) Yuval Nir, 43, from the West Bank settlement of Kfar Etzion.
- » 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 26,900 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza, and 65,949 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 380 people have been [killed](#), and 4,386 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 those of four hostages 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 31, the Israel National Police [announced](#) the death of Sgt. First Class Ran Gvili, who was killed and then taken into Gaza by Hamas on October 7.

- » His death raised the official number of Israeli police officers killed during the war to 61.
- On January 30, a statement from the Israeli Prime Minister’s Office [said](#), “the prime minister’s position is consistent—the war will only end when all its goals are achieved, the IDF will not withdraw from the Strip and thousands of terrorists will not be released.”
 - » The statement also said, “the reports that a so-called agreement was reached on a solution for the release of security prisoners are not true,” and that “the issue was not discussed at all.”
- On January 30, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [stated](#) that Israel will not release “thousands of terrorists” from Israeli prisons and “will not remove the IDF from the Gaza Strip” amid reports that those are two key Hamas demands in ongoing hostage negotiations.
- On January 30, PIJ Secretary-General Ziad Nakhleh [said](#) in a statement that the group will not agree to any hostage deal unless Israel agrees to a comprehensive ceasefire and the withdrawal of all Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip.

Iranian Involvement and Response

- On January 31, Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commander Hossein Salami [said](#), “we hear threats coming from American officials. We tell them that they have already tested us and we now know one another. No threat will be left unanswered.”
- On January 30 at approximately 11:30 p.m. local time, the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen [launched](#) one anti-ship cruise missile toward the Red Sea. The USS *Gravelly* shot down the missile, and there were no reported injuries or damage.
- On January 30, Mohamed al-Atifi, commander of the Iran-backed Houthis, [said](#) in a statement that the Houthis are “prepared for a long-term confrontation with the forces of tyranny. The Americans, the British, and those who coordinated with them must realize the power of the sovereign Yemeni decision and that there is no debate or dispute over it.”
- On January 30, Iran-backed terrorist group Kataib Hezbollah [announced](#) “the suspension of our military and security operations against the occupying forces to avoid any embarrassment for the Iraqi government.”
 - » Pentagon spokesperson Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder [said](#) when asked about the statement that “actions speak louder than words,” noting, “there has [sic] been three attacks, to my knowledge, since the 28th of January.”

U.S. and International Response

- Israel’s Strategic Affairs Minister and former JINSA Distinguished Fellow Ron Dermer is scheduled to [meet](#) with U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan at the White House on January 31 to discuss the war and securing the release of the remaining hostages in Gaza.
- On January 30, President Biden said that he [held](#) Iran responsible for the deadly attack that killed three U.S. service members at an outpost in Jordan on January 28 “in the sense that they’re supplying the weapons” to Kataib Hezbollah, the group alleged to be behind the attack. But President Biden added, “I don’t think we need a wider war in the Middle East. That’s not what I’m looking for.”
- On January 30, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby [told reporters](#) that the “guiding principle [regarding a response to the January 28 drone strike in

Jordan that killed three U.S. troops] is making sure that we continue to degrade the kinds of capabilities that these groups have at their disposal to use against our troops and our facilities and to send a strong signal to their backers and the IRGC that these attacks are unacceptable.” Kirby added that “it’s very possible that what you’ll see is—is a tiered approach here, not just a single action but potentially multiple actions over a period of time.”

- On January 30, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan [encouraged](#) Qatar’s Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani to bring “all possible efforts ... to bear on Hamas to secure the release of hostages without delay” during a meeting between the two in Washington, according to a White House readout.
 - » Al-Thani had said the previous day at an event that Qatar is not “a superpower that can impose something on this party or the other party,” and that hosting Hamas leaders in Qatar does not afford Qatar leverage over the group, but rather enables “a channel of communication that we are using for good causes.”
- On January 30, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller [announced](#) that the United States would be suspending roughly \$300,000 earmarked for UNRWA in light of Israeli intelligence allegedly showing that members of the agency participated in the October 7 attack.
 - » Approximately \$51 million in U.S. funding is earmarked for UNRWA this fiscal year, as JINSA’s Yoni Tobin noted in a recent [NatSec Brief](#), and U.S. annual funding to the agency is typically in the hundreds of millions of dollars.
 - » Miller also [claimed](#) that UNRWA’s work is “critical” and that “there is no other humanitarian player in Gaza who can provide food and water and medicine at the scale that UNRWA does.” As JINSA has [noted](#), Israeli intelligence reportedly shows that UNRWA’s aid dispersal in Gaza is coordinated by Hamas.
- On January 30, Miller [said](#), “we saw Hamas fighters pop up and start launching rocket attacks into Israel, start shooting at Israeli forces. That made the conditions on the ground not tenable or safe for conducting this [UN] humanitarian mission [to assess safety conditions in northern Gaza for the return of Palestinian civilians].”
 - » He also said, “we do expect some initial movements north to take place in the next few days to pave the groundwork for that assessment mission to move forward.”
- On January 30, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield [said](#) that the United States would “need to see fundamental changes before we can resume providing funding directly to UNRWA.”
 - » Thomas-Greenfield added that “we need to look at the organization, how it operates in Gaza, how they manage their staff, and to ensure that people who commit criminal acts, such as these 12 individuals [who allegedly were involved in the 10/7 attack], are held accountable immediately so that UNRWA can continue the essential work that it is doing.”
- On January 30, CIA Director Bill Burns wrote in [Foreign Affairs](#) that “[w]inding down the intense Israeli ground operation in the Gaza Strip, meeting the deep humanitarian needs of suffering Palestinian civilians, freeing hostages, preventing the spread of conflict to other fronts in the region, and shaping a workable approach for the ‘day after’ in Gaza are all incredibly difficult problems.”
 - » Burns added, “resurrecting hope for a durable peace that ensures Israel’s security as well as Palestinian statehood and takes advantage of historic opportunities for normalization with Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries.”

- » According to Burns, the “[k]ey to Israel’s—and the region’s—security is dealing with Iran,” he says.
- » Burns also noted that “the United States is not exclusively responsible for resolving any of the Middle East’s vexing problems. But none of them can be managed, let alone solved, without active US leadership.”
- According to [reports](#) from January 30 citing an Egyptian official’s correspondence with Qatar’s *Al Araby* channel, a Hamas delegation is scheduled to meet with Egyptian intelligence head Abbas Kamel on January 31 to discuss details of a potential hostage deal.
 - » Hamas politburo official Muhammad Nazal said that the group seeks a permanent end in fighting for a prisoner exchange, and negotiations toward that end will not succeed absent a full Israeli evacuation from Gaza.
- On January 30, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres [met](#) with 35 donor nations and urged them to restore funding and provide new donations to UNRWA.
 - » Earlier that day, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters that “no other organization than UNRWA has the infrastructure to do what they do” in Gaza and “it’s not feasible in any way, shape or form” to quickly replace the organization.
 - Dujarric also claimed that UNRWA provides a list of staff to Israel and the Palestinian Authority every year, and “as far as I’m told by UNRWA, concerns have not been raised when the list of staff have been shared.”
- On January 30, Russia called for an [investigation](#) into the allegations that UNRWA’s staff was involved in the October 7 attack.
- During a January 29 press conference, U.S. National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby [said](#), “let’s not impugn the good work of a whole agency [UNRWA] because of the potential bad actions here by a small number.”
 - » He also said that a resumption of U.S. funding to the organization in the wake of the revelations that several of its members allegedly participated in Hamas’s October 7 attack will “depend on what [UNRWA’s] investigation finds and what accountability measures and corrective measures UNRWA is willing to make.”
- On January 29, U.S. Department of Defense Spokesperson Sabrina Singh [said](#) that the attack that killed three soldiers in Jordan on January 28 has the “footprints” of the Iran-backed Iraq-based Kataib Hezbollah terrorist group, and that “we don’t seek war, but we will take action, and respond to attacks on our forces.”
- On January 29, the U.S. Department of the Treasury and the United Kingdom [announced](#) sanctions on an Iranian network that “targeted Iranian dissidents and opposition activists for assassination at the direction of the Iranian regime.”
 - » The network, which operated under the leadership of Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), has “plotted operations in the United States” including recruiting the Hells Angels motorcycle gang to assassinate Iranian dissidents in the United States, according to the Department of the Treasury.
- On January 29, the White House released a [statement](#) that it was “troubled” and that “we have also been clear, consistent, and unequivocal against the forced relocation of Palestinians outside of Gaza.” The statement followed a conference on January 28 in Jerusalem that several Netanyahu government cabinet members attended during which participants advocated constructing Israeli settlements in Gaza and displacing its civilian population.

- » The White House also said in its statement, “this rhetoric is incendiary and irresponsible, and we take the prime minister at his word when he says that Israel does not intend to reoccupy Gaza.”
- On January 30, Sweden announced that it will [pause](#) funding to UNRWA in light of allegations that UNRWA staffers participated in the October 7 attack, and that funds “will go instead to other humanitarian organizations,” according to Swedish Minister for International Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade Johan Forssell.
- On January 30, days after it announced it was [pausing](#) funding to UNRWA, Canada announced \$29.8 million in humanitarian aid to Gaza to be allotted to the World Food Program, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization, and other aid agencies.
- The United Kingdom’s Foreign Office [said](#) in a statement that the United Kingdom was “alarmed” by the January 28 conference in Jerusalem attended by multiple cabinet members that advocated for Israel to re-establish settlements in Gaza.
 - » The statement added, “the U.K.’s position is clear: Gaza is occupied Palestinian territory and will be part of the future Palestinian state. Settlements are illegal. No Palestinian should be threatened with forcible displacement or relocation.”
- *The Times of Israel* [reported](#) on January 29 that according to an unnamed U.S. official, Israel has informed the United States that the buffer zone the IDF is implementing in Gaza near the Israeli border will only last until Hamas is overthrown in Gaza, although the Biden administration does not support the effort at all, let alone temporarily. The official also said that the United States is skeptical that Israel will remove the buffer zone.

Rising Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Protests, and Attacks

- On January 30, activists and family members of the hostages taken by Hamas [blocked](#) the Nitzana border crossing to prevent aid from entering the Gaza Strip.
- On January 30, a group of more than 1,000 musicians in Sweden, where the 2024 Eurovision Song Contest will be held, [signed](#) a petition calling for Israel to be banned from competing. The artists accused Israel of perpetrating “war crimes” in its war against the Hamas terror group.
- On January 29, London police [arrested](#) a man after he tried to carry out a knife attack at a kosher supermarket. During the attack, he asked shoppers whether they supported “Israel or Palestine.” No injuries were reported.
- On January 29, a 59-year-old Massachusetts man, John Reardon, 59, was [arrested](#) after he threatened to kill Jewish community members and bomb local synagogues. In one of the threats, he said, “if you can kill the Palestinians, we can kill you.”

Recent and Relevant JINSA Products About Israel at War

- Yoni Tobin, [Alleged UNRWA Involvement in 10/7 Attack Highlights Dangers of Agency](#), January 30, 2024
- Webinar: [Was the ICJ Ruling a Win for Israel?](#) with COL Marc Warren, USA (ret.), LTC Geoffrey S. Corn, USA (ret.), IDF Colonel (res.) Adv. Pnina Sharvit Baruch, and Blaise Misztal, January 29, 2024

- GEN [Joseph Votel, USA \(ret.\)](#) and Claire O. Finkelstein, “[Why the ICJ Ruling Misses the Mark: Mitigating Civilian Harm With An Enemy Engaged in Human Shielding](#),” *Just Security*, January 29, 2024
- Blaise Misztal and Ari Cicurel, [Deadly Iran-backed Attack Requires Response Against Iranian Regime Targets](#), January 29, 2024