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Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update January 4, 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

- The U.S. drone strike that killed a commander in an Iran-backed militia on January 4 in Baghdad indicates that the United States and Israel are increasingly going on the offensive against Iran and its regional network of proxies, who have been responsible for a wave of aggression throughout the Middle East since October 7. Other recent strikes include those that killed Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Maj. Gen. Sayyed Razi Mousavi in Syria, Hamas deputy leader Saleh al-Arouri in Lebanon, and now the U.S. strike in Baghdad.
 - » The Iran-backed escalation in Iraq and Syria, as well as the attacks by the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen against ships in the Red Sea, shows that the October 7 terrorist attack against Israel was part of a much broader war being waged by the Iranian regime.
 - » Yesterday's [statement](#) from the United States and several of its partners warning that the Houthis will "bear the responsibility of the consequences" of its aggression in international waters could signal a greater willingness to strike the group.

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

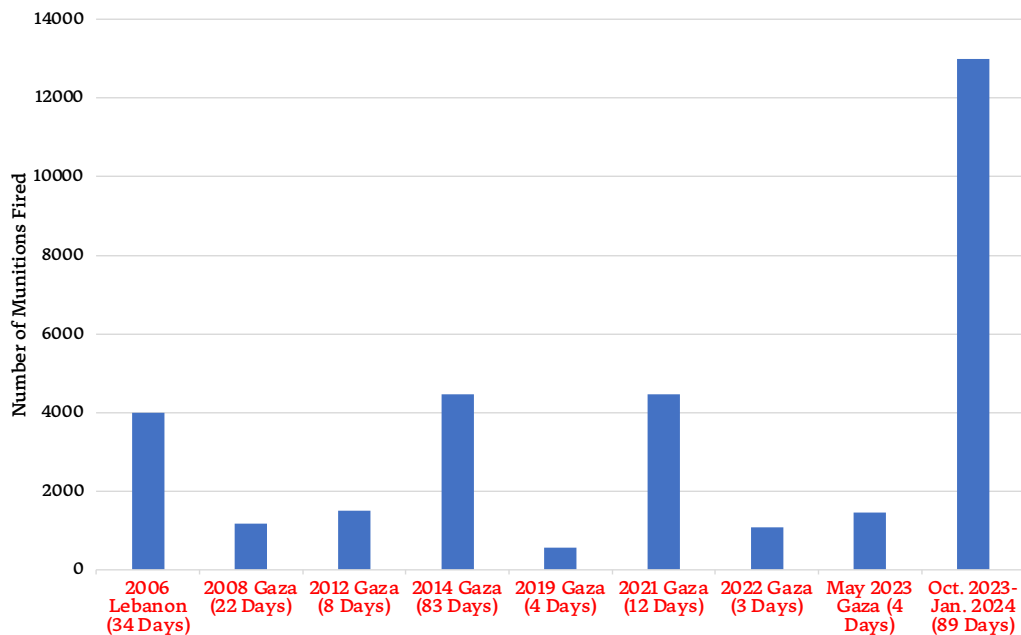
- [Sirens sounded](#) in Netiv Ha'asara, Sderot, Yad Mordechai, and [Ashkelon](#).
- On January 3, the IDF [showed](#) reporters footage of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) inculcating terrorist ideology in children. The IDF obtained the footage in Gaza during its ground operations.

- » The IDF said that “a large number of minors are active” in the terror groups, and “even during the war, the Hamas terror organization uses minors for various tasks, for example sending children for the purposes of conveying messages and ammunition.”
- » Over 170 minors across Gaza have been [forced](#) to be active members of either Hamas or PIJ, according to the IDF.

Lebanon

- Sirens sounded in [Arab al-Aramshe](#), [Manara](#), [Metula](#), [Shtula](#), [Dovev](#), and [Shlomi](#).
- On January 3, several unspecified projectiles [launched](#) from southern Lebanon landed in open areas in the northern Israeli town of Goren.
- On January 3, Hezbollah [said](#) that it launched a Burkan heavy short-range missile toward an IDF position near the town of Malkia in northern Israel, and Israel’s Army Radio said that an anti-tank missile was fired toward the town, damaging electricity infrastructure.
- During a speech on January 3, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah [said](#) that in the event of war between Israel and Lebanon, there will be “no ceilings” and “no rules” in Hezbollah’s combat.
 - » He called Israel’s presumed assassination of Hamas official Saleh al-Arouri and other Hamas members on January 2 “a major, dangerous crime about which we cannot be silent,” and said that Israel “will not succeed in achieving the war’s goals” in Gaza.
 - » He wrongly asserted that Israel is keeping thousands of casualties from Hezbollah’s incessant attacks against Israel secret and that “hundreds of thousands” of people have fled the country since October 7.

Projectiles Fired Against Israel During Major Conflicts



Gaza

- On January 4, an Israeli [airstrike](#) in Gaza killed Mamdouh Lulu, an assistant to the commanders of the Islamic Jihad's (PIJ) northern Gaza division. He maintained contact with PIJ officials abroad and "was a central figure in the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, initiating and leading numerous terror attacks and assaults from Gaza against the State of Israel, routinely and during the war," according to an IDF statement.
- On January 4, the IDF [said](#) it had struck several Hamas anti-tank squads, including in Khan Younis, where three Hamas operatives were attempting to plant a bomb, and in southern Gaza and Deir al Balah, where Hamas operatives were firing anti-tank missiles.
- On January 3, the IDF said it had [opened](#) an investigation into its bombing of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) headquarters in Gaza on January 2. PRCS said that five people were killed and three injured in the strike.
 - » As JINSA's Yoni Tobin has [noted](#), a different PRCS-run facility in Gaza had been used by Hamas terrorists to launch attacks on IDF troops during the war, and the PRCS has dishonestly characterized Israeli responses to terrorist activity as unprovoked attacks.
- The IDF [said](#) on January 3 that it destroyed a network of Hamas tunnels located beneath al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, arguing that Hamas "systematically operates in the hospitals in the Gaza Strip and in the areas adjacent to them, using the residents as human shields and exploiting the hospital's infrastructure, including electricity and water."
- While speaking to a class of intelligence officer graduates on January 4, IDF intelligence chief Maj. Gen. Aharon Haliva [left out](#) the goal of completely destroying Hamas while listing Israel's goals in the war. Haliva stated that Israeli goals included restoring Israeli deterrence in the region, striking a major blow to Israeli enemies in Gaza and Iran, and freeing hostages.

Lebanon

- On January 4, Lebanon's *Al Akhbar* [reported](#) that the office in which Hamas deputy leader Saleh al-Arouri was assassinated on January 2 had not been used by Hamas after the October 7 attack until the meeting in which al-Arouri and other Hamas members were killed.
 - » Al-Arouri reportedly had been spending his time between Qatar and Turkey after the October 7 attack and had not been in Lebanon until the week of his assassination.
 - » The report also stated that the strike involved small missiles with explosive charges, which were "not of the type used to demolish [a] building, but rather to kill those in it."
- Hezbollah [said](#) on January 4 that four members were killed in an Israeli airstrike, bringing the total number of Hezbollah fighters killed since the start of the war in Lebanon and Syria to 151.
 - » Hezbollah stated that Hussein Hadi Yazbek, a senior official in Hezbollah, was one of the four killed in the strike.
- On January 4, the IDF [struck](#) a Hezbollah observation post and a Hezbollah military facility in the southern Lebanese town of Maroun el-Ras in response to earlier Hezbollah projectile attacks. The IDF also launched mortars at a terrorist position in the southern Lebanese village of Rab el-Thalathine to avert an imminent threat.

- On January 3, the IDF [struck](#) a Hezbollah cell and a [number](#) of Hezbollah sites in southern Lebanon, including observation posts and military infrastructure, in response to earlier projectile attacks.
- On January 3, IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi [said](#) while visiting the northern border that the IDF is in a “very strong state of readiness in the north,” and “I think readiness is at its peak.”
 - » He added, “we are very well prepared in all areas, and we are currently focusing on fighting Hamas,” and “we are looking ahead, we are going to change the routine defense, we are going to have at least in the next year many more forces on the borders, and we will reach something much stronger. Because this incident [October 7], as difficult as it is, and we will talk a lot more, it cannot repeat itself, that’s for sure.”

West Bank

- On January 4, the IDF announced that it had [arrested](#) 29 Palestinian terror suspects in overnight raids across the West Bank.
- The IDF said on January 4 that it was [continuing](#) a counterterrorism operation in the Nur Shams refugee camp that began over 30 hours prior. The IDF questioned hundreds of suspects in the camp, which is located near the city of Tulkarem, and arrested several suspects as well as seized several weapons.

Humanitarian Efforts

- On January 3, U.S. State Department spokesperson Matt Miller stated that the Biden administration is [dissatisfied](#) with the current status of humanitarian aid flows into the Gaza Strip, saying that aid shipments need to go up “dramatically.”
 - » Miller said that “there’s not enough of it coming in. It’s too inconsistent and the number of trucks that get in every day, they need to go up dramatically, and they need to stay up,” adding that the issue is the subject of “very direct” conversations with the Israeli government.
- On January 3, Israel’s Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) [wrote](#) on X, responding to an accusation by United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) commissioner-general Philippe Lazzarini that “the Palestinian people subjected to collective punishment with too little humanitarian aid allowed in,” that “you can’t keep avoiding the facts: There is no collective punishment. 2 crossings are open. You said you can transfer 200 trucks a day in Kerem Shalom, yet you’re not scraping 100.”
 - » COGAT added, “over the last 80 days, we’ve adjusted ourselves, all you’ve been doing is stalling.”

Post-War Planning

- Following a January 2 [report](#) that Israeli officials are “in talks with the Congo” to potentially resettle thousands of Gazan citizens in that country, a senior Israeli official [told the Times of Israel](#) on January 3 that such reports are untrue and that “it’s a baseless illusion in my opinion. No country will absorb 2 million people, or 1 million, or 100,000, or 5,000. I don’t know where that idea came from.”

Casualties and Hostages

- Over 1,300 people in Israel have been [killed](#), and another 6,900 have been [injured](#) in the war.
 - » 509 Israeli soldiers have been [killed](#).
 - » 175 IDF soldiers have been [killed](#) during ground combat in Gaza so far.
 - » 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, 22,313 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza, and 57,296 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, 325 people have been [killed](#), and at least 3,400 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, three were [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](#) 133 hostages, according to Israeli President Isaac Herzog, a figure that may include the dead bodies of some hostages.
 - » 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.

- » Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office [said](#) in late December that of the 129 hostages currently believed to be held in Gaza, 23 have died or been murdered in captivity and their bodies are being held.
- On January 3, the IDF [told](#) the family of Sahar Baruch, whom Hamas abducted on October 7, that he was killed during the failed attempt to rescue him on December 8, but the IDF could not discern whether Hamas or IDF fire killed him.

Iranian Involvement and Response

- *The Wall Street Journal* [reported](#) on January 4 that Russia is planning to buy short-range ballistic missiles from Iran.
 - » The report quoted a U.S. official as saying, “the United States is concerned that Russian negotiations to acquire close-range ballistic missiles from Iran are actively advancing. We assess that Russia intends to purchase missile systems from Iran.”
 - » According to the report, a Russian delegation traveled to Iran in December to visit an Iranian training facility and look at Iranian ballistic missiles and other military equipment, including Iran's Ababil short-range missile.
 - » The report also states that in September, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu met with Iranian military head Mohammed Bagheri in Tehran to discuss missile acquisitions.
- On January 3, Iranian leaders [threatened](#) retaliation for two major explosions, which officials [said](#) killed at least 84 people, in the southern Iranian city of Kerman earlier that day during a commemoration of the four-year anniversary of the death of Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani in a U.S. airstrike.
 - » Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a statement that “the evil, criminal enemies of the Iranian nation have once again created a tragedy and martyred a large number of our dear people in Kerman. This tragedy will be met with a strong response.”
 - » Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said in a televised speech that “the criminals who have the blood of the innocent people on their hands, they can't even tolerate [Soleimani's] burial site.” According to a January 4 *NBC News* [report](#), Raisi said that American and Israeli operatives orchestrated the attack.
 - » The deputy governor of Kerman characterized the incident as a “terrorist attack.”
- Despite his inflammatory rhetoric in the wake of the Kerman explosions, Iranian regime officials told *The New York Times* that Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has told his military commanders to practice “strategic patience” and avoid a major escalation with the United States. This reportedly includes limiting the proxy attacks on U.S. personnel in Iraq and Syria.
 - » According to the report, Khamenei believes that the assassination of IRGC Maj. Gen. Sayyed Razi Mousavi in Syria, Hamas deputy leader Saleh al-Arouri in Lebanon, and the Kerman explosions are an effort by Israel to distract from the international condemnation of Israeli operations in Gaza.

U.S. and International Response

- A U.S. [drone strike](#) on January 4 killed Mushtaq Talib al-Saidi, the deputy commander of operations for the Iran-backed Harakat al-Nujaba militia. The United States reportedly [blamed](#) him for attacks against U.S. personnel.
 - » Iran-backed groups in Iraq claimed the strike killed another individual and injured seven other militia members.
 - » Iran-backed groups have conducted at least 118 attacks on U.S. personnel in Iraq and Syria since October 17 amid the Israel-Hamas war. This was the eighth time that the United States has conducted strikes against Iran-backed groups since that escalation began.
 - » Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani argued that the attack was "unjustified."
- On January 4, Reuters [reported](#), citing a senior U.S. official, that U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken would be traveling on January 4 to the Middle East to visit Israel and other regional countries. According to Turkey's Foreign Ministry, Blinken will be [visiting](#) with Turkish officials on January 6.
- On January 4, U.S. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby [said](#) South Africa's filing to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) calling for the court to charge Israel with genocide is "meritless, counterproductive, completely without any basis in fact whatsoever."
 - » U.S. State Department spokesman Matt Miller [said](#) the United States is "not seeing any acts that constitute genocide" being committed by Israel.
- U.S. Special Envoy and Coordinator for International Energy Affairs Amos Hochstein [arrived](#) in Israel on January 4 on a diplomatic mission to [ease tensions](#) between Israel and Hezbollah.
 - » Hochstein had led U.S. efforts to negotiate a maritime demarcation deal between Israel and Lebanon in 2022.
- On January 3, according to Israel's *Channel 12*, Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Biden [spoke](#) by phone to discuss the war. According to the report, President Biden committed to the United States maintaining a "significant" military presence in the Middle East.
 - » The report alleged that Israeli officials had, in recent days, expressed concern to U.S. officials at the United States withdrawing the USS *Gerald R. Ford* Carrier Strike Group from the region. Prior to the withdrawal, Israeli officials reportedly requested that the United States keep the Carrier Strike Group in the region.
 - » According to the report, Israeli intelligence agencies have assessed that the presence of the aircraft carrier and accompanying warships were an important factor in Israel's ability to deter its enemies. Reportedly, Israeli officials are concerned that Carrier Strike Group's withdrawal will negatively impact Israel's ability to deter its adversaries, including Hezbollah.
- On January 3, White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby [noted](#) that Hamas "still has a significant force posture inside Gaza, but Israel's goal to defeat the terror group remains attainable." He also contended that Israel will not likely be able to "erase the group from existence ... You are probably not going to eliminate the ideology."

- On January 3, the United States, along with the governments of Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Singapore, and the United Kingdom, [released](#) a statement warning the Iran-backed Houthis against conducting further attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea.
 - » The statement cautioned that “ongoing Houthi attacks in the Red Sea are illegal, unacceptable, and profoundly destabilizing. There is no lawful justification for intentionally targeting civilian shipping and naval vessels. Attacks on vessels, including commercial vessels, using unmanned aerial vehicles, small boats, and missiles, including the first use of anti-ship ballistic missiles against such vessels, are a direct threat to the freedom of navigation that serves as the bedrock of global trade in one of the world’s most critical waterways.”
 - » In addition, the statement noted that Houthi attacks demand “collective action” and that the signatory countries “call for the immediate end of these illegal attacks and release of unlawfully detained vessels and crews.”
 - » The statement also stated that “the Houthis will bear the responsibility of the consequences should they continue to threaten lives, the global economy, and free flow of commerce in the region’s critical waterways. We remain committed to the international rules-based order and are determined to hold malign actors accountable for unlawful seizures and attacks.”
 - » According to a Reuters report on January 2, French shipping group CMA CGM will be [doubling](#) its shipping rates for voyages that travel through the Red Sea en route to Asia due to the recent Houthi attacks.
- On January 3, State Department spokesperson Matt Miller [said](#) that the recently deceased Hamas deputy chief Saleh al-Arouri, who was killed in a January 2 airstrike in Lebanon, was a “brutal terrorist centrally responsible for the attacks on October 7 and other attacks against innocent civilians going back well beforehand.” Miller also stated that the likelihood of escalation between Israel and Lebanon is no higher than it was after the October 7 attack.
- On January 3, 17 campaign staffers for President Biden’s reelection campaign [signed](#) a letter, which was reviewed by *Politico*, that calls on Biden to end unconditional military aid to Israel and call for an immediate permanent ceasefire.
 - » The letter states, “as your staff, we believe it is both a moral and electoral imperative for you to publicly call for a cessation of violence.” The letter also states that the staffers have seen “volunteers quit in droves” over Biden’s stance on the war.
- On January 4, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin [criticized](#) Houthi attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea without naming the Houthis. Wenbin said at a press briefing that “China opposes attacks against civilian vessels. I believe all sides need to play a constructive and responsible role in safeguarding the security of shipping lanes in the Red Sea.”
- On January 3, Germany’s Foreign Ministry [posted](#) on X that German citizens in Lebanon should “leave the country as quickly as possible” due to potential escalation in the wake of the killing of Saleh al-Arouri.
- On January 3, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) [announced](#) it would begin holding hearings on January 11 and January 12 in the proceedings initiated by South Africa that accuse Israel of violating the Genocide Convention of 1948 in the war in Gaza.
- On January 3, United Nations associate spokesperson Florencia Soto Nino [told](#) reporters that “no one should be advocating for mass displacement of Palestinians out of Gaza.” Soto

Nino's comments were likely a response to remarks made by Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich this week and last week that he supports the "voluntary" mass emigration of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip to other countries willing to take them.

Rising Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Protests, and Attacks

- On January 3, dozens of members of the activist group Jewish Voice for Peace staged a protest inside the California State Capitol in Sacramento, California, which [forced](#) the California State Assembly to prematurely end its session for the day. Protestors held banners reading, "Jews say no U.S. funding for Israel's genocide in Palestine," and chanted "ceasefire now," "not in our name," and "let Gaza live."
- On January 3, a Jewish-owned deli in Toronto, Canada, was [set on fire](#) and graffitied with "Free Palestine." Toronto police are investigating the arson as an antisemitic hate crime.
- On January 3, six synagogues in the San Diego, California area [received](#) bomb threats in a group email. The threats, which included claims that explosives would "soon" be donated at each synagogue, were determined to be hoaxes.

Recent and Relevant JINSA Products About Israel at War

- RADM Steven B. Kantrowitz, USN (ret.) and VADM Herman A. Shelanski, USN (ret.), "[The Casualties in Gaza Don't Indicate War Crimes](#)," *The Messenger*, January 3, 2024
- Zac Schildcrout, [IDF Deaths Highlight Perils of Urban Warfare](#), January 3, 2024
- VADM Mark Fox, USN (ret.), VADM John W. Miller, USN (ret.), and Ari Cicurel, "[To Deter Houthi Strikes in Red Sea, US Must Turn From Defense to Offense](#)," *Breaking Defense*, December 28, 2023
- Ari Cicurel, [Seventh U.S. Strike Amid Over 100 Iran-backed Attacks in Iraq and Syria](#), December 27, 2023