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Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update March 1, 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

- On February 29, the Gaza Futures Task Force, a joint project of JINSA and The Vandenberg Coalition chaired by JINSA Randi and Charles Wax Distinguished Fellow John Hannah, issued a report, [The Day After: A Plan for Gaza](#), calling for the creation of an International Trust for Gaza Relief and Reconstruction.
 - » Supported by the United States and other nations, the Trust would be led by a group of Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates that have the greatest legitimacy, resources, and interest in assisting Gaza, advancing Middle East peace, and countering Iran.
 - » “Two things are essential to get to a better day after for Gaza,” said John Hannah in a [press release](#). “First, Israel needs to succeed in dismantling Hamas’s political and military power and delivering a major blow to Iran’s proxy strategy. No less important, however, responsible states need to fill the vacuum with a viable alternative that mitigates the suffering triggered by Hamas’s attack and helps build a more hopeful future for Gaza and the Middle East. After studying many other options and finding them wanting, we believe that the most realistic option for mobilizing rapid action by the key concerned states is the creation of a private Trust.”
- During a February 29 JINSA [webinar](#) about recent developments in the Israel-Hamas war, JINSA’s Julian and Jenny Josephson Senior Vice President for Israeli Affairs IDF MG (ret.) Yaacov Ayish indicated that the IDF will “mobilize the population [in Rafah] and make sure they are secure outside of the area ... [the IDF] can communicate with the population via text messages, via leaflets ... these tools are quite effective, and it seems that the awareness of the locals inside Gaza is very high, and they are very attentive to what the IDF is publishing.”
 - » Regarding escalation on the northern front with Hezbollah, Ayish argued, “the most important part is that the [Israeli] residents in the [northern] region are not in their houses, and this is something that we cannot accept. And I think that we are about to exhaust all other options ... [like] the tactics that were used in the north on one hand and negotiations on the other hand ... I’m afraid that ... it’s going to affect policy and strategy

in the near future. And it seems to me like Hezbollah is understanding it and is trying to avoid full escalation, but I'm not sure it's enough from the Israeli side.”

Last 48 Hours

Attacks Against Israel

- At least 15,000 rockets, mortars, drones, and other projectiles have been fired at Israel from all fronts combined during the war, according to JINSA data.
- On February 29, Israel's Shin Bet security agency and the Israel Police [said](#) in a statement that a 17-year-old resident of Jerusalem and his cousin, a 29-year-old from Nablus, were arrested after devising a future terrorist attack in Israel in coordination with a Gaza-based Hamas operative. The 17-year-old contacted the Hamas member over Telegram before October 7.
- On February 28, head of Hamas's political bureau Ismail Haniyeh urged Palestinians to [protest](#) at the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem as Ramadan begins given limits on the number of worshippers Israel will allow at the complex due to security concerns.
 - » Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said on February 28 at a press conference, “Hamas's overarching goal at this moment is to cause the Temple Mount to catch fire.”

Gaza

- Sirens sounded in [Sa'ad and Kfar Aza](#).
- On February 29, the IDF [said](#) that a rocket fired from Gaza impacted an unpopulated field in southern Israel.
- *The Wall Street Journal* [reported](#) on February 29 that amid a meeting in Doha, Qatar among Hamas leadership to discuss worries about the terror group's performance against the IDF, a courier delivered a sanguine message from Yahya Sinwar, the leader of Hamas in Gaza. The message reportedly said that the group's fighters are doing well and are ready for an IDF operation in Rafah. The message also reportedly noted that large quantities of civilian casualties will augment international pressure on Israel for a ceasefire.

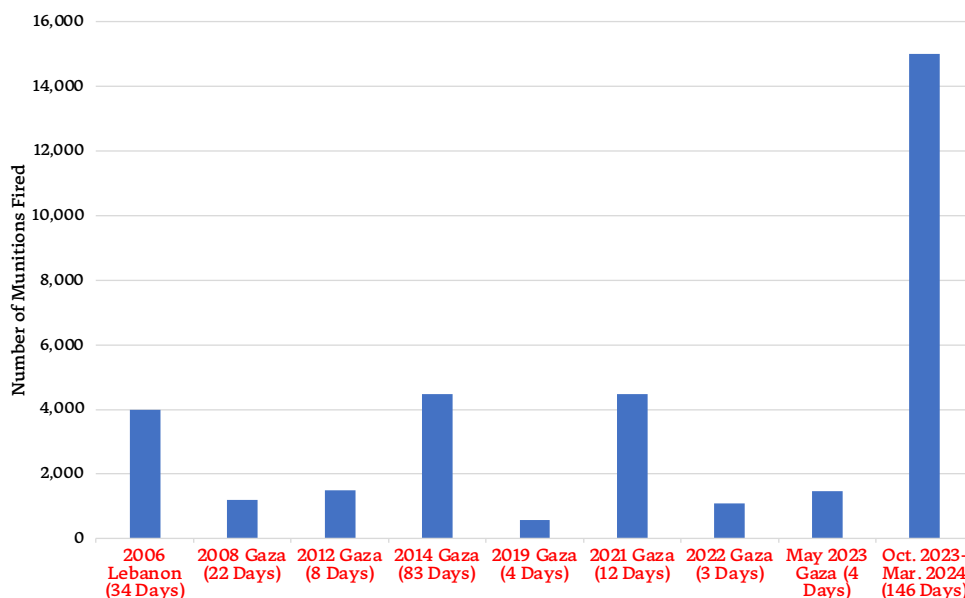
Lebanon

- Sirens sounded in [Ghajar](#) and [Adamit](#).
- On February 29, terrorists in Lebanon [fired](#) one rocket toward northern Israel, which struck an unpopulated area, the IDF said.
- On February 29, terrorists in Lebanon [fired](#) rockets toward the northern Israeli town of Goren. The attack did not cause injuries.

West Bank

- On February 29, Israeli medics [said](#) that two people were seriously injured in a probable terrorist shooting near Eli in the West Bank. Security forces subsequently shot at least one gunman. The two victims later [died](#).

Projectiles Fired Against Israel During Major Conflicts



IDF Operations

Gaza

- IDF Spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari [said](#) on February 29, “in total, since the beginning of the war, we have eliminated more than 13,000 terrorists,” including over 450 Hamas combatants in Gaza over the previous 10 days.
- On March 1, the IDF [published](#) video of the 7th Armored Brigade’s combat in the southern Gazan city of Khan Younis and said that soldiers have detained terrorists attempting to hide in schools and have searched Hamas officials’ homes in new areas of Khan Younis.
 - » The IDF said, “in the heart of the residential neighborhoods, the troops encountered dozens of terrorists and eliminated them with tank shelling, in close-quarters combat, and by directing airstrikes,” and “during their interrogation [of captured terrorists hiding in school], the terrorists provided intelligence information that went directly to the forces operating in Khan Younis.”
- On February 29, the IDF [said](#) that combat against Hamas continued in the Zeitoun neighborhood of Gaza City, and that troops eliminated several Hamas combatants during the past day. The IDF also said that it continues to operate against and kill numerous Hamas combatants in central Gaza and in Khan Younis.
 - » Troops from the IDF’s Nahal Brigade [located](#) a Hamas weapons production facility in Zeitoun. The facility was used to manufacture rockets and explosives. At the site, troops found a weapons depot, tunnel shafts, firearms, and other military equipment.
- On February 29, after the IDF ordered the withdrawal of the IDF’s Paratroopers Brigade from Gaza, Brig. Gen. Dan Goldfus [said](#), “Paratroopers Brigade, be proud of the many achievements you have achieved,” and “we have not yet finished the war and our duties, we continue to dismantle Hamas, destroy its systems above and below ground, strike it and defeat it.”

- » In Khan Younis, the Bislamach Brigade, or the School for Infantry Corps Professions and Squad Commanders in wartime, [took](#) the Paratroopers' place and is operating within the 98th Division. On February 28, the Brigade requested an attack helicopter strike against two Hamas gunmen, one of which possessed an explosive device.

Lebanon

- On March 1, the IDF said that it [conducted](#) airstrikes against a Hezbollah facility in the southern Lebanese town of Ayta ash-Shab and other terrorist infrastructure in the town of Labbouneh in response to projectile attacks.
- The IDF [said](#) on February 29 that it launched airstrikes against a Hezbollah complex and numerous rocket launchers in Jabal Blat and that it shelled additional rocket launch sites in response to projectile attacks against Adamit and Shlomi, northern Israeli towns, that morning.
- According to the IDF, on February 29, the military [launched](#) a strike against a building in Blida in Lebanon's south that Hezbollah used. The IDF also said that it launched strikes in Mays al-Jabal to neutralize a threat and that it fired artillery toward the source of an earlier rocket attack against Goren in Israel's north.
- On February 28, the IDF [said](#) that in response to Lebanon-based terror groups' attacks against northern Israel, it struck Hezbollah targets in Kafra and Seddiqine in southern Lebanon and fired artillery near Houla.

Syria

- *The Times of Israel* reported on March 1, citing Syrian sources, that several officials in Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) were [killed](#) in an Israeli airstrike that day on the coastal city of Baniyas.
- On February 29, the pro-Syrian regime *Sham FM* radio station [reported](#) a drone strike targeting a vehicle in al-Nahariya in Syria near Lebanon. The station later [alleged](#) that the strike killed one person, reportedly a civilian.
- On February 28, Syrian state media [said](#) that the state's air defenses shot down projectiles from Israeli strikes near Damascus, and the Lebanese outlet *al-Mayadeen* reported a loud explosion in the Sayeda Zainab area of Damascus. Subsequent [reports](#) that day from the state-run Syrian *SANA* outlet claimed that strikes from Israeli jets inflicted "material losses" but that Syrian air defenses intercepted "most" Israeli missiles.

West Bank

- On February 28, Israel's *Channel 13* [reported](#) that Israel will be undertaking measures to advance settlement construction plans announced last week by Finance Minister Betzalel Smotrich.
 - » The first of these steps reportedly was a February 29 government designation of roughly 750 acres in the West Bank city of Ma'ale Adumim as "state land" to enable further expansion of Ma'ale Adumim.
 - » In early March, the Defense Ministry's High Planning Subcommittee will reportedly meet to discuss the implementation of Smotrich's planned construction of 3,000 new homes in Ma'ale Adumim, Efrat, and Kedar.
 - » On March 20, the government is reportedly slated to announce the designation of an additional 1,730 acres in the Jordan Valley as "state land," likely paving the way for future settlements.

Humanitarian Efforts

- On March 1, Israel [announced](#) that residents who evacuated from southern Israeli communities near Gaza can remain in state-subsidized hotels until July, but that residents will receive a government stipend if they return to their homes.
 - » Residents who return to their homes in the first week of March will reportedly receive a grant of approximately \$4,300 per adult and around \$2,150 per child up to roughly \$18,000.
 - » However, the grant offered will reportedly be halved each subsequent week.
- On February 29, dozens of Palestinians were killed in a [stampede](#) as thousands of Palestinians swarmed aid trucks in Gaza City.
 - » Thousands of Palestinians swarmed the 30 aid trucks that were driven by private contractors into the city after passing through an IDF checkpoint.
 - » According to the IDF's initial investigation, dozens of Palestinians began moving toward an IDF tank and troops in the area, and an Israeli officer ordered soldiers to fire warning shots in the air and at the legs of those who continued moving toward the Israeli forces.
 - » The IDF concluded that Israeli [gunfire](#) caused ten casualties, but the majority of casualties were [caused](#) by people being trampled and struck by the aid trucks.
 - » The IDF's initial probe found that some of the aid trucks were able to continue north past the swarm of people until armed men opened fire and looted them.
 - » IDF Spokesperson Daniel Hagari later [clarified](#) on February 29 that “no IDF strike targeted the aid convoy. Our mission was solely to facilitate the safe delivery of aid to Gaza's civilians.”
- The IDF [announced](#) on February 29 that a portion of aid airdropped by the Jordanian military over Gaza that day landed in Israel due to heavy winds.
 - » Jordan had previously, on February 26, [airdropped](#) aid over Gaza that mostly landed in the Mediterranean Sea.
- A February 28 *Axios* report indicated that the Biden administration is considering [airdropping aid](#) into Gaza.

Ceasefire and Hostage Negotiations

- Hamas official Mohammad Nazzal [told](#) Saudi Arabia's *Asharq News* on February 28 that a permanent ceasefire is not a Hamas precondition for the first stage of a hostage deal.
 - » Nazzal stated that “there must be a permanent ceasefire sooner or later, but it does not have to be in the first stage.”
 - » Nazzal added, “[Israel] can begin to position themselves outside large residential areas (during the first stage), but after that they must leave the Strip.”

Post-War Planning

- On February 29, members from Hamas and the rival Fatah Palestinian Authority political party [agreed](#) during a meeting in Moscow to pursue a “unity of action” for post-war Gaza

and that there will be an “upcoming dialogue” to bring them under the banner of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Casualties and Hostages

- Over 1,200 people were [killed](#) in Israel, and 13,000 Israelis have been [injured](#) in the war.
 - » 582 Israeli soldiers have been [killed](#).
 - 242 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, 30,035 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza, and 70,457 have been injured during the war.
 - » On October 25, 2023, 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.”
 - » The IDF [said](#) on February 29 that it has killed approximately 13,000 Hamas operatives over the course of the war.
- According to the Palestinian Authority-run Palestinian Ministry of Health, 406 people have been [killed](#), and an additional 4,606 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, [three](#) have been rescued by the IDF, [seven](#) have been [found](#) dead, three have been [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.
- Israel has said that terrorists in Gaza currently [hold](#) 134 hostages, and according to IDF spokesman Rear Adm Daniel Hagari, the IDF has [notified](#) the families of 31 of the 136 hostages that their loved ones died, including two who were 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.

Iranian Involvement and Response

- On February 29 at approximately 5:10 p.m. local time, the Houthis [launched](#) a drone over the Red Sea. U.S. forces later shot the drone down.
- According to a February 29 [report](#) from Israel's *i24 News* citing Turkey's *Arabic Post*, the IRGC has greenlit an escalation of Hezbollah attacks "in the event of an IDF ground operation in Rafah" and has agreed to send more weapons to Hezbollah to prepare for a potential major IDF operation in Lebanon.
 - » The original report, which cited IRGC and other Iranian sources, stated that during a meeting in Beirut, Lebanon earlier this week, IRGC-QF Commander Esmail Qaani and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah discussed the need "to prepare for a possible wide-scale [IDF] operation in Lebanon" and the imperative for a "harsh" Hezbollah response to such an operation.
 - » Nasrallah reportedly asked Qaani to transfer more short-range and medium-range ballistic missiles, drones, and Russian communication and surveillance systems to Lebanon. An Iranian source cited in the report said the weapon shipments would be sent through Syria and could begin to be delivered in the coming days.
 - » The report also alleges that Russia has agreed to provide Hezbollah with anti-ship missiles and surveillance ships in exchange for Iran providing Russia with missiles.

U.S. and International Response

- On March 1, the United States [vetoed](#) a UN Security Council statement in a closed-door hearing that would have blamed Israel for opening fire upon Gazans who were waiting for humanitarian aid on February 29.
 - » Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian UN ambassador, claimed that 14 of 15 UN Security Council members were supportive of the statement put forward by Algeria.
 - » U.S. Deputy Ambassador to the UN Robert Wood argued, "we don't have all the facts on the ground – that's the problem" but that diplomats are working "to see if we can find some language that everyone can agree on."
- According to a February 29 [report](#) citing senior Biden administration officials and U.S. intelligence officials, the Biden administration is "concerned" about indications "that Israel is planning a ground incursion into Lebanon that could be launched in the late spring or early summer" if diplomatic efforts with Hezbollah fail to push it back from the Lebanese-Israeli border.
 - » The report quotes a senior Biden administration official as saying, "we are operating in the (sic) assumption that an Israeli military operation is in the coming months." The official noted that an operation is not expected "in the next few weeks" but potentially "later this spring."
 - » The report alleges that there are "differing opinions within the Israeli government about the need to go into Lebanon."
 - » A senior administration official told *CNN* that they believe Israel prefers a diplomatic arrangement to push Hezbollah back from the border, and that the official believes Israel is "raising this threat in the hope that there will be a negotiated agreement."

- The same official noted, “some Israeli officials suggest that it is more of an effort at creating a threat that they can utilize. Others speak of it more as a military necessity that’s going to happen.”
- On February 29, White House spokesperson Olivia Dalton [told](#) reporters that the deadly crowd rush for humanitarian aid in Gaza “needs to be thoroughly investigated ... this event underscores the need for ... expanded humanitarian aid to make its way into Gaza.”
 - » Earlier on February 29, when asked about the Gazans who were killed while swarming aid trucks, President Biden had [said](#) that “there’s two competing versions of what happened. I don’t have an answer yet.” He also said, “I know it will,” when a reporter asked him if he believed that the situation would complicate hostage negotiations.
- On February 29, Reuters/Ipsos released a poll indicating that 56 percent of Democrats would be [less likely](#) to support a presidential candidate who supports military assistance for Israel, compared to 40 percent who said they would be more likely to support a candidate who supports military aid to Israel.
- On February 29 between 6 p.m. and 7:15 p.m. local time, the United States [struck](#) six anti-ship cruise missiles in Yemen that were prepared to target ships in the Red Sea.
- On February 28, U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller [said](#), “we continue to urge Israel to facilitate access to the Temple Mount for peaceful worshipers during Ramadan consistent with past practice, and that’ll continue to be our position.”
 - » Miller added, “it’s not just a matter of granting people religious freedom that they deserve and that – to which they have a right. But it’s also a matter that directly is important to Israel’s security. It is not in Israel’s security interest to inflame tensions in the West Bank or in the broader region, and so we’ll continue to make that clear.”
 - » Miller’s comments were in response to a reporter’s question about reports that “ Hamas is calling on Palestinians to march on al-Aqsa [Mosque]” on the first day of Ramadan.
- On March 1, senior officials from [Germany](#) and the [European Union](#) called for an investigation into the incident on February 29 during which several Palestinians were killed during a stampede in Gaza around humanitarian aid trucks.
 - » UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres [condemned](#) the incident, as did senior officials from [France](#), [Colombia](#), and [China](#).
- On February 29, Norway [announced](#) that the Palestinian Authority (PA) received \$114 million in tax revenue from Israel that Israel had frozen early in the war, following an agreement earlier this month to release the funds.
 - » Israel had [refused](#) to release part of the tax revenue it collects on behalf of the PA over fears it would be used to fund Hamas, as part of the PA tax revenue is used to pay for services and personnel in Gaza.
 - » Norway had agreed to assist in the funds transfer by agreeing to temporarily hold the funds until a deal was reached and its release approved by Israel.
- On February 29, New Zealand [announced](#) that it would be designating the entirety of Hamas as a “terrorist entity.” That day, New Zealand also [imposed](#) travel bans on “extremist” Israeli settlers that it alleged were responsible for attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank.
 - » New Zealand had [previously](#) only designated Hamas’s so-called military wing. According to reports, the designation will require banks to freeze all Hamas assets in the country and a ban on providing Hamas with material support.

Rising Antisemitism, Islamophobia, Protests, and Attacks

- A [poll](#) published by the Anti-Defamation League Center for Antisemitism Research on March 1 found that 24 percent of Americans hold antisemitic beliefs, up from 20 percent in 2022.
- On March 1, families of hostages being held in Gaza held a [rally](#) outside of the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv urging President Biden to pressure the Israeli government to accept a deal for the release of the hostages.
- Pro-Palestinian protesters [vandalized](#) New York City's Charging Bull statue during an anti-Israel protest at night on February 29 by writing "Free Palestine" and "Death to Israel" on it. New York City police arrested nine people at the protest.
- On February 29, settler activists participating in a protest near the Erez Crossing [broke into Gaza](#) and made it 500 meters into the territory before IDF soldiers stopped them.

Recent and Relevant JINSA Products About Israel at War

- The Gaza Futures Task Force, [The Day After: A Plan for Gaza](#), February 29, 2024
- The Gaza Futures Task Force, [The Day After: A Plan for Gaza Action Plan](#), February 29, 2024
- Webinar: [Gaza Update 2/29](#), with IDF MG (ret.) Yaacov Ayish and Blaise Misztal, February 29, 2024
- LTC Geoffrey S. Corn, USA (ret.), "[Ground Truth: The Disconnect, Context and Challenges of Israel's War against Hamas](#)," *The Cipher Brief*, February 29, 2024
- LTG Raymond Palumbo, USA (ret.) and Jacob Olidort, "[A U.S. Hostage Rescue Operation in Gaza Should Not Be off the Table](#)," *RealClearDefense*, February 29, 2024
- Jonathan Ruhe and Yoni Tobin, [Don't Fall for Iran's Empty Nuclear Gesture](#), February 27, 2024