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Israel's Operation Swords of Iron Update January 5, 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

- General Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., USMC (ret.), former Commander of U.S. Central Command and a participant on JINSA's 2023 Generals and Admirals Program trip to Israel, [wrote](#) in *The Wall Street Journal* that “[e]ven before Hamas’s Oct. 7 attack, Iranian forces were launching missile and drone strikes on our bases across the region, acting through proxies that gave them a measure of deniability ... Our response has consistently been tentative, overly signaled and unfocused ... To reset deterrence, we must apply violence that Tehran understands.”
 - » Gen McKenzie noted that the lesson from the U.S. strike on January 3, 2020, that killed Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF) Commander Qassem Soleimani, which took place under his command, was that Iranian “leaders understand the threat of violence and its application. It takes will and capability to establish and maintain deterrence ... The Iranians have always feared our capabilities, but before January 2020, they doubted our will.”
- During a JINSA [webinar](#) on January 4, JINSA Distinguished Fellow IDF MG (ret.) Yaakov Amidror argued that “the assassination of [Saleh al-]Arouri was an important event because after many years during which we didn’t kill anyone directly in Beirut, someone [who was] a clear part of the Hamas terrorist mechanism was killed ... The fact that [Arouri] was [killed] ... was a clear signal to the leaders of Hamas [that] no one is immune.”
 - » IDF MG (ret.) Amidror’s “assessment [of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah’s recent speech] was that ... Hezbollah will not risk [itself] for the fact that one Hamas leader was killed in Beirut ... The ball is in the court of Nasrallah to make a decision. He said he doesn’t want a war ... so I don’t know what they’ll do ... but I think they won’t do something that might take both sides into a big war.”

Last 24 Hours

Attacks Against Israel

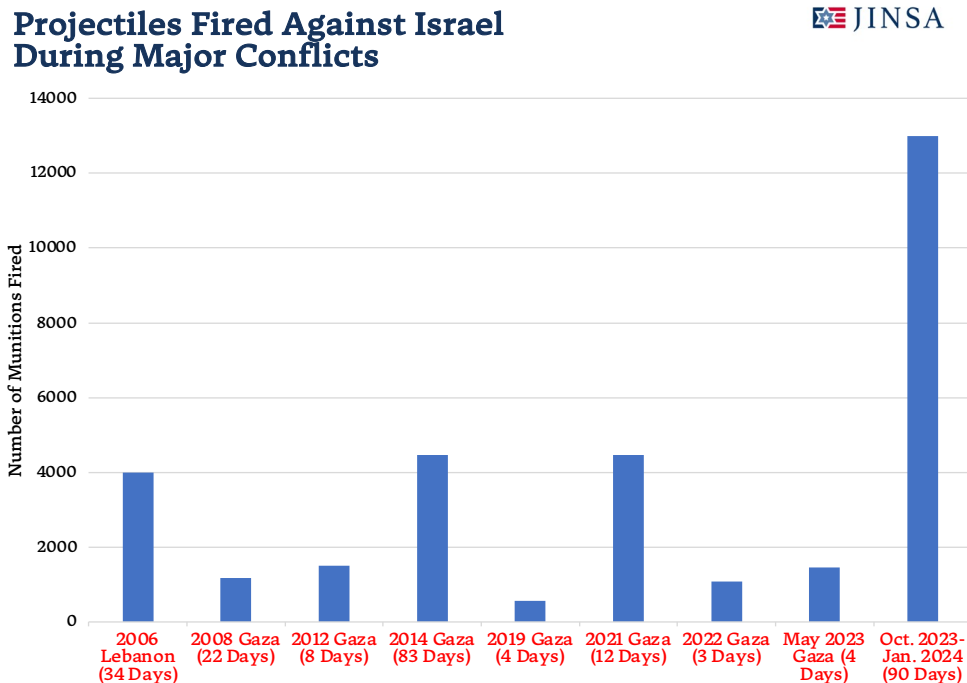
- At least [13,000](#) rockets, mortars, drones, and other projectiles have been fired at Israel during the war.

Gaza

- Rockets [struck](#) Kibbutz Nirim and [Sderot](#), and sirens [sounded](#) in Ashkelon, Nitzanim, Kibbutz Nir Am, and Kibbutz Nahal Oz.
- According to Arabic media, Hamas official Khaled Mashal [said](#) on January 5, “this arrogant, criminal Zionist enemy, despite its failure and disappointment after three months of its barbaric aggression against Gaza ... wants to export their crisis abroad,” and “they want to expand the circle of aggression, thinking that this will confuse the calculations of the resistance and the calculations of the region.”
 - » He added, “the enemy also thinks that the assassination of our leaders will break the will of the resistance and weaken the leadership. It does not know that this is a big illusion,” and “every time a leader fell, a leader rose, and the martyrdom of a leader sets others on the same path, with the same will, with the same determination.”

Lebanon

- On January 4, Hezbollah [fired](#) projectiles toward the Israeli towns of Manara and Misgav Am.



IDF Operations

Gaza

- On January 5, the IDF said that it [struck](#) more than 100 Hamas targets over the last day, including command centers, launch positions, weapons depots, and other infrastructure.

- On January 4, the IDF [said](#) that Kiryati Armored Brigade and 55th Paratroopers Brigade reservists have killed many Hamas combatants who were part of the group's northern and eastern Khan Younis battalions as well as damaged their command and control, impeding significant attacks against IDF troops.
 - » Kiryati Brigade Commander Col. Mickey Sharvit said that "there is no innocent infrastructure" where the brigade is operating because "we encounter terror in almost every home, in hospitals and schools. Our forces even eliminated terrorists who emerged from an underground [tunnel] in a school."
 - » The IDF also said that the troops destroyed a Hamas tunnel shaft that provided access to a hundreds of meters-long underground passage near Khan Younis, and Sharvit said that the IDF killed roughly 20 Hamas members inside the tunnel, including a company commander.
 - » Hamas members who surrendered told Israeli interrogators that Israeli strikes against underground Hamas facilities killed many of the group's members, including two northern and eastern Khan Younis battalion company commanders.
 - » Commander of the 55th Brigade Col. Oded Ziman said, "I never dreamed of such good and fast cooperation" between ground troops and the Air Force.
- In the wake of the 179th Armored Brigade, the Navy's Shayetet 13 commando unit, and the elite Yahalom combat engineering unit's raid on a Hamas compound during the past week, the IDF [said](#) on January 4 that it destroyed a weapons manufacturing plant on the central Gaza coast used by Hamas.
 - » The IDF said that it found several tunnel shafts in the compound leading to a hundreds of meters-long underground network, and the military also found mortars, grenades, and rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) in a weapons cache. Other nearby tunnel shafts led to an additional underground tunnel network with blast doors guarding the manufacturing plant, which contained machinery, cooling fans, explosive materials, and rocket fuel.
 - The combat engineers later destroyed the tunnels.
- On January 4, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant [said](#) while touring the central Gaza border that Hamas should not expect the IDF to evacuate the territory soon and "need[s] to change the count until the end of their lives." He added that "in the north of the Gaza Strip, forces are completing the current mission. They are reorganizing with the intention of carrying out raids and airstrikes soon" and that fighting in central Gaza "is intense."
 - » Gallant also said, "the forces are working above ground and underground, destroying central infrastructures of the Hamas organization, including the places where Hamas produced all its missiles and supplied them all over the Strip." He said further that in southern Gaza, "the operation is a powerful operation and it is getting stronger, above ground and below ground."
- The IDF [said](#) on January 4 that the Air Force's elite search and rescue unit, Unit 669, has completed hundreds of evacuations from Gaza, rescuing over 1,000 injured soldiers and transferring them to Israeli hospitals.
- According to [reports](#) from January 4, former IDF chief of staff Shaul Mofaz, former Military Intelligence Directorate chief Aharon Ze'evi-Farkash, former Southern Command chief Sami Turgeman, and former Operations Directorate chief Yoav Har-Even will be members of a team formed by IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi to investigate the IDF's failures that enabled Hamas's terrorist attack on October 7.

- » The IDF said that “the investigation process is being formulated,” and “when things are finalized, they will be announced to the public.”
- Reports from January 3 [indicated](#), citing an unnamed U.S. official, that 44-year-old Zahra Sckak and her brother-in-law Farid Sukaik, a U.S. citizen, were rescued from Gaza on New Year’s Eve in a clandestine operation involving the IDF and local Israeli officials that the United States, Israel, Egypt, and others coordinated. Zahra Sckak’s son, 24-year-old Ragi A. Sckak, is an infantryman in the U.S. military.
 - » The anonymous U.S. official said, “the United States played solely a liaison and coordinating role between the Sckak family and the governments of Israel and Egypt.”

Lebanon

- On January 5, the IDF [said](#) that it struck Hezbollah targets in Ayta-ash Shab and Majdal Zoun in Lebanon’s south, including an observation post and military site at which members of the terror group were stationed.
- On January 4, the IDF [said](#) that it used a fighter jet to strike several Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon, including a rocket launch position, observation post, and additional infrastructure.
 - » The military also said that it struck another Hezbollah observation post in the Lebanese village of Maroun el-Ras, fired to “remove a threat” near the Lebanese border town of Ayta ash-Shab, and used artillery to shell launch sites from which the Israeli towns of Manara and Misgav Am were attacked earlier with projectiles.
- On January 4, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant [told](#) U.S. envoy Amos Hochstein during the latter’s visit to Israel that there is “a short window of time for diplomatic understandings” with Hezbollah, and “there is only one possible result — a new reality in the northern arena, which will allow for the secure return of our [80,000] citizens [who have evacuated northern Israel].”
 - » Gallant also said that while Israel prefers diplomacy, “we will not tolerate the threats posed by the Iranian proxy, Hezbollah, and we will ensure the security of our citizens.”
 - » IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi, Israeli Ambassador to the United States Michael Herzog, and other officials also attended the meeting at the Israeli Defense Ministry headquarters in Tel Aviv.

West Bank

- On January 5, Palestinian media outlets [said](#) a 17-year-old was killed during an Israeli raid in the West Bank town of Beit Rima, near Ramallah. The outlets also reported clashes in the Balata refugee camp near Nablus.
- On January 4, the IDF [said](#) that it completed its raid in the Nur Shams refugee camp near the West Bank city of Tulkarem that lasted 40 hours, during which troops found a daycare center operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) booby-trapped with explosive devices.
 - » The IDF said that it questioned hundreds of suspects during the raid, arresting 11, and that it confiscated several weapons and destroyed hundreds of explosive devices. One soldier was lightly wounded and another moderately wounded after an assailant threw an explosive device toward them.
- On January 4, the IDF [said](#) that a soldier was seriously injured by an explosive device during a raid in Sir in the West Bank near Jenin.

Humanitarian Efforts

- On January 4, 187 trucks carrying humanitarian aid such as food, water, and medical supplies [entered](#) Gaza. Of the 187 trucks, 88 entered Gaza via the Rafah Crossing and 97 entered via the Kerem Shalom crossing.

Post-War Gaza Planning

- According to a January 5 [report](#) from Israel's *Kan* network, a cabinet meeting to [discuss](#) post-war Gaza turned into a shouting match over the makeup of an IDF panel set up to investigate IDF mistakes in the lead-up to the October 7 attacks. The meeting, which lasted three hours, involved loud shouting that could be heard down the hall, and several ministers reportedly excoriated IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi.
 - » Several ministers, including Miri Regev, David Amsalem, and Itamar Ben Gvir, reportedly strongly objected to the panel's inclusion of former Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz. Ben Gvir reportedly said Halevi had "appointed people behind the Gaza disengagement."
 - Ben Gvir also reportedly criticized military planners for having a failed conception of geopolitics.
 - » One of the ministers was quoted as saying, "this was a despicable discussion ... They attacked the army. Some of the senior defense officials left in the middle."
 - Another minister cited in the report said, "what happened there was a shameful embarrassment ... you can criticize the IDF, but they went after the chief of staff relentlessly."
 - » *Kan* quoted a minister as saying that the Israeli government needs to rethink whether the security cabinet is currently "fit to make decisions on our defense policies."
 - » The report stated that Prime Minister Netanyahu told IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi at the end of the meeting that "sometimes, you need to listen to the ministers."
- On January 4, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant outlined his [plan](#) for a post-war Gaza, in which there will be a "four-cornered civilian square," including Israel, the Palestinians, a multinational task force, and Egypt.
 - » Israel "will provide information to guide civilian operations" and inspect goods before they enter Gaza.
 - » A Palestinian entity in Gaza would focus on civil administration. Gallant did not specify who this entity would be and avoided mentioning the Palestinian Authority.
 - According to Gallant's [plan](#), "there will be no Israeli civilian presence in the Gaza Strip after the goals of the war have been achieved ... Gaza residents are Palestinian, therefore Palestinian bodies will be in charge on the condition that there will be no hostility to Israel." Gallant added that Israel will not allow Hamas to control Gaza.
- A multinational force led by the United States and Israel's European partners would focus on Gaza's reconstruction.

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, at least 22,600 people have been [killed](#) in Gaza, and 57,910 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, at least 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, 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 [includes](#) two Israeli civilians and the bodies of two IDF soldiers held in Gaza since 2014 and 2015.
- » Kibbutz Nir Or [announced](#) that one of its residents, Tamir Adar, 38, who was taken hostage on October 7, was killed in Hamas's attack on the kibbutz, and his body is being held by the terror group.

Iranian Involvement and Response

- On January 5, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi [said](#) while speaking at the funeral for the victims of the January 3 terrorist attack in Kerman, which has been claimed by the Islamic State, that the October 7 attacks would bring about the destruction of Israel. Raisi stated, "we know that 'Al-Aqsa Flood' operation will bring about the end of the Zionist regime. Our enemies can see Iran's power and the whole world knows its strength and capabilities. Our forces will decide on the place and time to take action."
 - » Mourners attending the funeral chanted "revenge, revenge," "death to America," and "death to Israel."
- On January 5, speaking at the funeral, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) leader Hossein Salami [vowed](#) to take revenge against the perpetrators. Salami said, "we will track you down, wherever you may hide. Our forces will determine the response to the enemy, who feels despair and disappointment in the resilience of our people."
- On January 4, the terrorist group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) [took credit](#) for the January 3 attack that killed over 80 people at a memorial ceremony for former Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani, whom the United States killed in a drone strike in January 2020, in Iran. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi had [blamed](#) American and Israeli operatives for the attack.

U.S. and International Response

- During a White House press conference on January 4, White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby [claimed](#) that United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) does "important work" and is "doing a lot of the heavy lifting right now in terms of trying to get food, water and medicine to the people of Gaza all down the Strip ... and are doing it very much in harm's way."
 - » He further argued that "you can't hold [UNRWA] accountable for the depredations of Hamas and the way Hamas uses civilian infrastructure, including hospitals as command and control centers, for storage of weapons, for the holding of hostages."
- During a January 4 press briefing, U.S. State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller [said](#) that during Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to Israel next week, he will discuss "transitioning to the next phase" of Israel's operations against Hamas, which includes "enabling Palestinians to return to their homes and neighborhoods as fighting curtails."
 - » Miller also said that Blinken will discuss "immediate measures to substantially increase humanitarian assistance to Gaza" and that the United States has spearheaded such efforts, although "conditions remained extremely difficult."
 - » Miller added, "the secretary will stress the imperative of expanding and sustaining safe access for humanitarian organizations to deliver food, water, medicine, as well for

commercial goods to enter all areas of Gaza,” and “there still remain a number of logistical hurdles to getting the level of trucks back to the level we need.”

- » In addition, Blinken will discuss “the need to do more to lower tensions in the West Bank” with Israeli officials, and he will also discuss “specific steps parties can take, including how they can use their influence with others in the region to avoid escalation,” according to Miller.
- » Miller added further that Blinken will urge “a sustained mechanism for reconstruction and Palestinian-led governance of a unified West Bank and Gaza.”
- » Miller argued, “we don’t expect every conversation on this trip to be easy. There are obviously tough issues facing the region and difficult choices ahead, but the secretary believes it is the responsibility of the United States of America to lead diplomatic efforts to tackle those challenges head-on, and he’s prepared to do that in the days to come.”
- During a [press conference](#) on January 4, Admiral Brad Cooper, Commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command and the U.S. Fifth Fleet, noted the recent reporting about an Iranian frigate “showing up could not be more false. That vessel has actually been in the Southern Red Sea for 55 straight days, and they typically operate there for 60 to 90 days. So what’s been reported previously just simply is not accurate. That vessel has been present there; represents little concern today.”
- A report in *Politico* on January 4 indicated that the Biden administration is forming [contingency plans](#) should the war in Gaza spread to become a protracted regional war, which include options to strike the Houthis in Yemen. Intelligence officials are also working on ways to predict future strikes on U.S. personnel in Iraq and Syria as well as where the Houthis will strike.
- On January 3, *Politico* reported that the Biden administration is considering [creating](#) a new diplomatic post for a special envoy for long-term Israeli-Palestinian relations with a broader mandate than the current position.
 - » The new post being considered would have a humanitarian focus but would also involve work on efforts to bring about long-term Israeli-Palestinian peace. Currently, Amb. David Satterfield holds the title of U.S. Special Envoy for Middle East Humanitarian Issues.
- During a phone call on January 3, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna “discussed the importance of measures to prevent the conflict in Gaza from expanding, including affirmative steps to de-escalate tensions in the West Bank and to avoid escalation in Lebanon and Iran,” [according](#) to State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller.
 - » The State Department subsequently said on January 4 that the two leaders agreed to try to avoid a broader war in the Middle East in the wake of strikes in Lebanon and Iran.
- On January 3, a senior Biden administration official [told](#) reporters that during a trip to the region, U.S. special envoy Amos Hochstein met with Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib, and the official said that the United States has a “diplomatic effort underway to help resolve some of the [Israel-Hezbollah] tension.”
- Speaking next to the destroyed police station in Sderot at which Hamas and Israeli police officers fought on October 7, former U.S. Vice President Mike Pence [said](#) on January 4, “the world community always seems to find its way eventually to criticizing Israel, particularly in places like the United Nations,” and “in this dark hour, I wanted to do my part to make sure the people of Israel know that the people of the United States are with you and that we will stand with you.”

- Following a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem on January 4, U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) [argued](#) that Saudi Arabia and Israel can still normalize relations, but in June, intense U.S. election campaigning would close the window.
 - » Graham also argued that “the military campaign to destroy Hamas is not inconsistent with [Israeli] normalization [with Saudi Arabia],” and “the worst thing for the Crown Prince [of Saudi Arabia] and the [Gulf Cooperation Council] and everyone else in the region is for Hamas to survive.”
 - » Graham added, “there is no way [Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman] or anyone else can deal with a better future for the Palestinians if Hamas is still there,” and he also said, “I don’t trust the [Palestinian Authority]. I won’t put 15 cents into a group that can’t deliver [in rebuilding Gaza].”
- On January 5, Reuters [reported](#) that the Iraqi government is forming a bilateral committee to prepare for the end of the U.S.-led international coalition’s mission in Iraq.
 - » According to the statement, the Iraqi “government is setting the date for the start of the bilateral committee to put arrangements to end the presence of the international coalition forces in Iraq permanently.”
- After Israel recalled her in November due to Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez’s allegation that Israel was not complying with international law in its war against Hamas, Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz [decided](#) on January 4 to return Israeli Ambassador to Spain Rodica Radian-Gordon to Madrid next week.
 - » Israel’s Foreign Ministry said, “in light of a positive change in the messages coming from the Spanish government and the importance of Israel-Spain relations, it was decided that the ambassador will return to Madrid and will continue her activities to promote support for Israel’s right to defend its citizens against the Hamas terror group and to build international pressure for the release of all the hostages in the Gaza Strip.”
- On January 4, British Foreign Secretary David Cameron [said](#) to reporters while visiting Kosovo, “[Houthi attacks on shipping are] illegal. It’s not to do with Gaza, it’s not to do with Israel. This is about the freedom of navigation. This is about the ability of ships to carry their cargo.”
 - » He added, “the world economy, every economy, will suffer if ships keep coming under attack in this illegal and unacceptable way. And these attacks need to stop or actions will be taken.”

Recent and Relevant JINSA Products About Israel at War

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- Gen Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., USMC (ret.), “[Lesson of the Strike That Killed Soleimani](#),” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 4, 2024
- 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