

War in Israel: Update on Current Situation

January 23, 2025 – October 7 War, Day 475

The first Jewish Federations mission to northern Israel since the ceasefire in Lebanon went into effect concluded today. Participants included leaders from several communities, as well as Jewish Federations' National Campaign Chair David Heller; Israel Emergency Response Committee Co-Chairs Steve Hoffman and Jeff Schoenfeld; and Jewish Federations of North America's President and CEO Eric Fingerhut.

Ceasefire and Hostages

- The ceasefire between Israel and Hamas that went into effect on Sunday, January 19 **seems to be holding**.
- On Sunday evening Israel Time, amidst highly emotional scenes, three hostages - all young women - **were released following 471 agonizing days in Hamas captivity**. Romi Gonen, Emily Damari and Doron Steinbrecher were in reasonable health (although Damari lost two fingers after she was shot on October 7) and are now recovering at specially-prepared facilities in Israel's Sheba Hospital.
- Watch [this video](#) and see [these photos](#) of the emotional reunions between the women and their immediate families, as well as the following three clips of the hostages being reunited with their mothers shortly after arriving back in Israel:
 - [Romi Gonen](#)
 - [Doron Steinbrecher](#)
 - [Emily Damari](#)
- Some **90 terrorists have been released from Israeli jails** as part of the agreement, with additional groups to be let out with each hostage who is freed in the future. In total, more than 1000 are scheduled for release; this causes profound heartache for many Israelis, especially those whose relatives and friends were murdered by these same terrorists. Israeli commentators have pointed out the stark contrast between the scenes of joyful families celebrating the safe return of their loved ones and scenes of the devastated families coping with the release of those who injured and/or murdered their family members.
- According to the terms of the agreement, **four more hostages will be released** this coming Saturday, with additional small groups coming out every seven days. In the sixth week (which will be the last week in this first stage of the deal), 14 hostages will be released. It is not yet clear how many of those scheduled for release could be dead, although it is believed that the majority are still alive.
- In another 12 days, **discussions will begin on the second stage of the deal**, aiming to reach agreement about the release of the remaining (more than 60) hostages, as well as a permanent ceasefire and other arrangements. Many commentators are skeptical that an agreement can be reached. They anticipate that Hamas will demand an intolerably high price for the remaining hostages, including an Israeli withdrawal from areas that the IDF deems to be imperative for them to occupy to prevent another October 7.
- [Now that the ceasefire has begun](#), Israelis have been [surprised and unsettled](#) by scenes in recent days of Hamas fighters emerging from hiding and reestablishing the **organization's presence** in Gaza,
- Since the ceasefire began, however, **there have not been any rockets fired at Israel**, which may mean that the Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen are also abiding by the deal, despite not being signatories. Yesterday, US President Donald Trump began to reimpose the Foreign Terrorist Organization designation on the Houthis. In his first term, President Trump designated the group as

an FTO, but the move was reversed by former US president Joe Biden due to concerns that the highest-level sanction was preventing aid organizations from delivering humanitarian assistance to civilians in Yemen.

Fighting Continues

- **Despite the ceasefire** with Hamas in the south, and with Hezbollah in the north, attacks against Israelis continue in other areas.
- Last Monday, reserve soldier **Evyatar Ben Yehuda, 31, was killed** in the northern West Bank when his military vehicle was patrolling a road that had not been cleared of threats. He hit an improvised explosive device (IED). Four other IDF soldiers were wounded in the attack, including a Battalion Commander. See [here](#) for a full list of IDF casualties.
- On Tuesday, **four Israelis were wounded** when a terrorist stabbed diners at an outdoor seating area of a restaurant in Tel Aviv. One of the victims was a wounded veteran of the current war. The terrorist was killed by a female border police officer who happened to be nearby. The terrorist was a Moroccan national who held a US residency permit. He had arrived in Israel just three days before the attack.
- Also on Tuesday, the IDF launched a **large-scale anti-terror operation** in the Palestinian city of Jenin. The operation will likely continue for at least a week; it has so far involved both ground troops and aircraft. The Palestinian Authority, which had recently operated against Hamas and Islamic Jihad elements in the city, pulled back from Jenin before the IDF forces entered. The city is known to be a center of terror activity in the West Bank.
- In the north, IDF soldiers operating in southern Lebanon are **continuing to locate weapons and Hezbollah infrastructure**. Yesterday, during searches of villages in south Lebanon, the military found Russian-made anti-tank missiles, grenades, and assault rifles. Similarly, Israel has now formally asked the US for an additional 30 days to carry out the withdrawal of its troops from southern Lebanon—this would take them almost to the brink of the 60-day deadline stipulated in the ceasefire agreement with Hezbollah. Under the terms of that deal, Israel is required by January 26 to vacate all its positions in southern Lebanon in favor of the Lebanese Armed Forces. In recent weeks, however, Israel's military has said that the Lebanese forces have deployed too slowly, consequently delaying the IDF's withdrawal. Media reports suggest that the US prefers to see the withdrawal completed on time, by this coming Sunday.

IDF Activities

- The chief of the General Staff of the IDF, **Hertzi Ha-Levi, announced his resignation** on Tuesday, in the wake of taking responsibility for the failures of October 7. Similarly, the leader of the IDF's Southern Command, Major General Yaron Finkleman, announced he will step down well. Ha-Levi said that before he resigns his post he will complete the IDF's internal investigation into the failures on and before October 7.
- Last week, Israel's Prime Minister's Office released its annual **Report on Terrorism for 2024**. Among other findings, it was revealed that:
 - The number of terrorist attacks in 2024 was 18,365, in which 134 people were murdered and 1,277 people were injured.
 - About 16,400 rockets were fired and crossed into Israel, of which some 15,400 were launched from Lebanon and some 700 from Gaza. October 2024 saw the greatest number of rockets fired at Israel, with more than 6,900 launches.
 - Some 399 hostile UAVs crossed into Israeli territory. Rocket fire and UAVs caused much damage: 71 people were killed, 14 of whom were minors, and 892 people were injured.

In addition, they caused close to 610 fires, which burned 92,417 acres of land belonging to the Nature and Parks Authority and more than 42,749 acres of grazing land.

- An additional 1,900 terrorist incidents were carried out in 2024, including stone throwing, Molotov cocktails, vehicle rammings, shootings, stabbings, assaults, explosive devices and throwing objects. July saw the highest number of incidents—191 attacks. November was the quietest month with 109 attacks. October was the most violent month, in which 37 people were murdered and 394 injured.
- The most common type of terrorist attack was stone-throwing, with 1,248 incidents. April had the most stone throwings, with 130 incidents and November was the quietest with 76 incidents. The next most common attacks were throwing random objects, arson and tire burning (162), throwing Molotov cocktails (140), shootings (132) and explosive devices (89).

Yuval Raphael will represent Israel in the **2025 Eurovision Song Contest** after winning Channel 12's Rising Star competition. Raphael, 24, from Ra'anana, is a survivor of the **Nova music festival massacre** and the fortified shelters where dozens fled the festival and hid during the October 7 Hamas attacks in 2023. Raphael chose to sing Abba's Dancing Queen in memory of those who were killed at Nova.