



Israel at War

Thursday, December 12, 2024

Day 433

Latest Updates

- Earlier today, a 12-year-old Israeli boy, Yehoshua Aharon Tuvia z"l, who was sitting next to his sister, was shot and killed by a terrorist near the Gush Etzion Tunnels Road. The terrorist opened fire on a bus, killing Yehoshua, and wounding three others. A few hours later, the killer turned himself in to security authorities.
- On Monday, seven soldiers fell in two separate events, one that took place in Gaza and the other one in Lebanon. In the Lebanese incident, four soldiers were killed by explosives when they entered a tunnel built by Hezbollah.

Gaza and the Hostages

- According to multiple reports, a deal resulting in a ceasefire as well as a hostage release may be moving closer.
- Commentators point out that a number of factors may help push Hamas towards agreeing to a deal, including:

- Hamas's main backer, Iran, has been significantly weakened militarily and on the international stage by recent events, including the fall of the Syrian regime.
- Hamas has been decimated by 14 months of war against Israel, with significant proportions of its leadership, infrastructure, and fighters destroyed.
- Hamas is fearful of what the incoming Administration in Washington may do. President-Elect Donald Trump has warned that there will be "hell to pay" if the hostages are not released before he assumes office. Last week he added, "Those responsible (for taking the hostages) will be hit harder than anybody has been hit in the long and storied history of the United States of America."
- Intense negotiations between the sides are currently taking place, with the United States, Qatar, and Egypt acting as mediators.
- Israeli media reports that Hamas is pushing for a comprehensive deal that will see an end to fighting, a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, a mass-release of Hamas prisoners from Israeli jails, and the freeing of all the 100 remaining hostages (although it is believed that more than half of these are no longer alive).
- According to most reports, Israel prefers an agreement in stages that would allow the IDF to remain in areas it deems critical to the country's defense (in order to prevent Hamas from rearming and reestablishing its control in Gaza). Under such an arrangement, the first stage of a deal would see a 4–6-week ceasefire and the release of a limited number of hostages, focused on women, the elderly and the injured.
- The media has also reported that Hamas has given the mediators a list of hostages (and their conditions) who could be released in a first stage, which is a new and significant development. While the total number of hostages listed has not been released, four American Israelis are believed to be on it.
- Over the weekend, Hamas released a video showing hostage Matan Zangauker. In the footage, Zangauker, whose words may have been dictated by his captors, criticizes Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, saying, "I am very disappointed. I am now sure you don't understand your enemies or their intentions. This is your failure and that of your government since October 7." He also urged Israelis to

protest outside Netanyahu's residence, saying, “We suffer every day. It’s time you felt our suffering too.” This was the second video released by Hamas in as many weeks.

Rockets and the Ceasefire in the North

- The ceasefire with Hezbollah in Israel’s north seems to be holding, with only a small number of minor infractions being reported.
- The IDF’s Home Front Command has lifted almost all restrictions in the cities and towns that were not evacuated in the region. Schools have returned, stores have reopened, and daily life is returning to normal, even as vast challenges remain for large numbers of residents.
- In the towns that were evacuated, a small number of citizens have begun to return; most, however, have not yet taken this step. The majority of families with school age children are expected to hold off going back to their towns until the end of the current school year to avoid having their children change schools yet again in mid-year.
- See this [IDF video clip](#) summarizing Hezbollah’s aggression against Israel since October 8, 2023 and how the Israeli military responded to drastically weaken its capabilities and eliminate imminent threats to Israeli civilians, leading to the ceasefire.
- For most of the country, rocket fire and sirens are down to a trickle for the first time in 14 months. Nonetheless, a small number of rockets and drones have been fired from Hamas in Gaza, as well as from the Iran-backed Houthis rebels in Yemen.

Syria

- National leaders and international experts alike were taken by surprise by the extremely fast pace of the rebels’ advance in Syria, leading to the fall of the Assad regime last week, after more than 50 years in power. Israel is monitoring the situation very closely.

- The Jewish State had vowed not to become involved in the civil war, nor to take sides. Nonetheless, experts have pointed out possible consequences for Israel. On the one hand, Iran's most important ally in the region is now gone. (See: [The Fall of the Assad Regime—A Dramatic Blow to Iran's Axis of Resistance](#)). Conversely, the rebels are led by Islamists who were formerly associated with Al Qaeda, and any major instability across the border is always a cause for concern for Israel.
- In recent days the IDF has taken advantage of the power vacuum to ensure that major weapons, particularly those of mass destruction, will not fall into dangerous hands.
- The IDF has struck and destroyed much of Syria's most important military capabilities, at a time when the weapons and bases had been abandoned by the Syrian Army, and before the rebels had assumed control.
- Naval Operations: On Monday, [Israeli Navy](#) missile ships [struck two Syrian Navy facilities](#) simultaneously: the Al-Bayda port and the Latakia port, where 15 Syrian naval vessels were docked. The majority of Syria's navy is now out of commission.
- Targets: Dozens of sea-to-sea missiles with ranges of 50 -120 miles were destroyed. Each missile carried significant explosive payloads, posing threats to civilian and military maritime vessels in the area.
- Air Strikes: [IDF aircraft](#) flew hundreds of hours over Syrian airspace, conducting over 350 aerial strikes.
- Targets Struck: A wide range of [targets were struck](#), including anti-aircraft batteries, Syrian Air Force airfields, and dozens of weapons production sites in Damascus, Homs, Tartus, Latakia, and Palmyra. One of the sites that was hit and destroyed was a research center in Damascus tied to Syria's chemical weapons program. Intelligence on the sites had been accumulated by Israel over many years.
- Assets Neutralized: Numerous strategic weapons were neutralized, including Scud missiles, cruise missiles, surface-to-sea, surface-to-air and surface-to-surface missiles, UAVs, fighter jets, attack helicopters, radars, tanks, hangars, and more.
- Ground Operations: The Northern Command's Fire Control Center conducted strikes on 130 assets in Syria, including weapons depots, military structures, launchers, and firing positions.

- It is estimated that Syrian military capabilities have been set back many years, if not decades, with [approximately 70-80%](#) of its resources destroyed.
- Israel has also been concerned with any threats by terrorists or others from within Syria and has taken numerous precautionary measures.
- Under the [1974 Armistice Agreement](#) that formally concluded the Yom Kippur War, a narrow strip of land, known as the “buffer zone” exists between the Israeli and Syrian borders.
- In the last few days, the IDF has taken up positions inside the buffer zone, for the first time since 1974.
- In addition, the IDF now controls the strategic Syrian side of Mt. Hermon, the tallest peak in the region, and another swath of land that represents the main approach to Israel from Damascus. The IDF has strenuously denied reports that IDF tanks can be found as close as 15 miles from the Syrian capital.
- Israel has stated that these are all temporary measures to ensure Israel’s security and defensive capabilities.
- The IDF has said that it will withdraw from the area once a new government is in place in Syria, one that agrees to abide by the 1974 Agreement.
- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [said](#), “We gave the Israeli army the order to take over these positions to ensure that no hostile force embeds itself right next to the border of Israel. This is a temporary defensive position until a suitable arrangement is found.” He also extended a “hand of peace to all those beyond our border in Syria,” naming the Druze, Kurdish, Christian and Muslim populations, while stressing Israel’s desire for peaceful relations with its neighbors.

For Further Reading

- [The Destruction of the Syrian Army’s Weapons and the Israeli Presence in the Buffer Zone](#)
- [Post-Assad Syria: Winners and Losers, Crisis and Opportunity](#)
- [The Fall of Assad’s Regime: Between Risks and Opportunities](#)

- Who are you? “Abu Muhammad Al-Julani” the Jihadist or the Moderate Ahmed Hussein Al-Shara?

Am Yisrael Chai!

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