

Update March 18, 2024

Past updates can be found [here](#).

- **Volunteering:** Read [this](#) updated Jewish Federations' overview on the latest volunteering opportunities in Israel right now.
- Join the Jewish Agency for Israel for a webinar: **Israel and the War in International Media**, which will take place on **Thursday, March 21 at 11am ET**, featuring (1) recently- retired IDF Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Conricus, senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and owner of Conricus Communications, and (2) Gadeer Kamal-Mreeh, The Jewish Agency's Senior Emissary to Washington DC and the first Druze woman elected to Israel's Knesset. Jonathan represented the IDF in hundreds of interviews during the first three months of the war and will speak about these experiences as well as about the ongoing complexities of the conflict; Gadeer will discuss her work since October 7. Register [here](#).

Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Activities

- Following careful analysis of intelligence and other evidence, the IDF announced that **Captain Daniel Perez**, who has been missing, and presumed held hostage by Hamas, was killed on October 7; his body is being held by the terror group. [South African-born Perez](#) was the son of Rabbi Doron Perez, head of the World Mizrahi Organization, and a member of the Jewish Agency Board of Governors.
- The Israeli government **proclaimed an annual national day of remembrance** to mark October 7, and the provisionally-named Swords of Iron War. In the decision, it was announced that the war will be commemorated each year on the 24th of the Hebrew month of Tishrei, and that the day will be marked with two state ceremonies: A memorial ceremony at 11:00 for those who fell in the war, and a memorial ceremony at 13:00 for the civilians who were murdered in acts of terrorism. This year, due to the fact that the date falls on Shabbat, the ceremonies will be held on the following day, **Sunday, October 27**. In addition, a state ceremony will take place – on the first anniversary only – on October 7, the civil calendar date of the terrorist attack.
- Early this morning, IDF troops conducted a raid on Gaza City's **Shifa Hospital**, amid intelligence that senior Hamas officials were in the area and using the hospital to plan and carry out terror activity. One **IDF soldier was killed** in a gun battle in the area of the hospital; there have now been 250 IDF deaths since the ground invasion began. The raid was launched at around 2:30 am and it encircled the hospital which is the largest medical center in the Gaza Strip. As troops arrived at the medical center, Hamas gunmen opened fire from, according to the IDF, "within the hospital compound." Prior to the battle, the IDF made a [warning call](#) to the head of the hospital.

Humanitarian Aid

- The issue of humanitarian aid for the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza continues to be a major issue. Last week, Israel [said](#) that it plans to "flood Gaza with humanitarian supplies."
- Generally, aid in active war zones where terrorists are hiding and operating within civilian populations poses a tremendous danger to militaries, including the IDF operating in Gaza. Despite the challenging and complicated conditions, the IDF continues to facilitate the continued flow of humanitarian aid from land and air and—for the first time since the war broke out—from [sea](#).

- Since the war broke out, 312,560 tons of aid have been [delivered](#) by Israel into Gaza (as of March 14). Humanitarian aid includes food, water, medical supplies, shelter equipment, fuel, cooking gas and other necessities.
- Humanitarian aid is [delivered](#) through either Al Arish Port in Egypt, the Allenby Bridge in Jordan, or Israel's Ashdod Port. From there, all aid goes through Israel's Nitzana Crossing for inspection.
- Additional measures being planned include the floating pier off Gaza's coast that President Joe Biden announced last Thursday in his State of the Union address. A team of experts from the U.S. Central Command is scheduled to arrive in Israel over the next few days to discuss how to carry out this project with the IDF.
- Delivery of aid is slowed down by inspections, which ensure the safety and security of Israeli civilians. Hamas has repeatedly smuggled deadly weapons in humanitarian aid convoys and ambulances. For example, rice packs [served](#) as ammunition pouches for weapons used on October 7 including AK47s, Dragunov sniper rifles, and MPK machine guns. Equipment for terror purposes has also been found [hidden](#) in UNRWA shipments.
- After passing inspections, supplies enter Gaza through either the Rafah crossing with Egypt or the Kerem Shalom crossing with Israel. The Erez crossing, which would have provided another passage for aid distribution, was [destroyed](#) on October 7 by terrorists who infiltrated into Israel.
- Once in Gaza, international organizations distribute the aid. The ability to effectively distribute aid is hampered both by [lack of capacity](#) of UN organizations to deliver the assistance, particularly in northern Gaza, and by often-violent [stealing](#) carried out by Hamas members and other armed gangs.
- Major John Spencer, who was responsible for distributing aid to civilians in northern Iraq, [discussed](#) his own experience as a platoon leader. "No matter the commands to form a line or back up," he said, "nobody would listen. They crowded the security trucks screaming in Arabic, making the soldiers extremely nervous. The crowd began throwing women into the razor wire as they shoved each other for a better position. This caused injuries we then had to help care for. It rapidly became uncontrollable, and I had to give the order to pack up and withdraw."
- Since the beginning of the war, the IDF has [increased](#) measures to improve the facilitation of aid. This includes opening a second border crossing, increasing the amount of scanning equipment, and coordinating with other countries to create new channels for the distribution of aid that bypass the aforementioned obstacles.
- Earlier this week, Israel opened a third humanitarian aid corridor to Gaza on a new road that was especially paved into the northern zone of the Strip. The road was used by humanitarian aid trucks for the first time on Tuesday, despite complaints from members of Netanyahu's ruling coalition that the government and the IDF were indirectly helping Hamas. Food for 25,000 Gazans was transferred by the UN on the new road.
- On March 7, the first [airdrops](#) took place, delivering 750 packages of humanitarian aid with support of the U.S., UAE, Egypt, Jordan and France. These deliveries were coordinated with Israel.
- For the first time, the IDF prepared for the arrival last week of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip by [sea](#). This was carried out in coordination with Israeli security and civilian authorities, and was facilitated after all the equipment on the ship underwent comprehensive security checks.

Rockets

- In the **north**, Hezbollah continues to fire at Israeli targets, triggering significant Israeli retaliations.

- The number of **Hamas** rocket attacks on Israel remains very low (less than one per day, on average), due to Hamas' significantly diminished capabilities.
- In the **Red Sea**, the US, the UK and Israel continue to defend against attacks by the Iran-back Houthi rebels in Yemen. Similarly, the US military continues to strike at pro-Iranian targets in Syria and Iraq.

Hostages

- Yesterday evening, the security cabinet [delineated the parameters](#) for negotiations on a hostage deal, before Mossad Head Dadi Barne'a departed for further negotiations in Qatar earlier today. According to reports, Barne'a has a "broad mandate" to negotiate a deal.
- Amid many voices calling on the government to agree to a **hostage deal – even at a very high price** – was former government minister Yizhar Shay whose son was killed in battle on October 7. Shay told media that even if the killer of his son is currently in an Israeli prison right now, he would favor the terrorist's release as part of a hostage deal.

International Response

- The low-cost airline giant **EasyJet** has announced that it will resume its flights to and from Israel starting March 25. In a first stage, the company will fly to London, Berlin, Amsterdam, Geneva, Basel, and Milan. Flights to other destinations will return in October.
- In an unusual statement, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' **Fatah faction** has slammed Hamas for "returning Israeli occupation to Gaza with its Oct. 7 adventure." Read more [here](#).

Stories of Heartbreak, Heroism, and Hope

- **Read** the story of 23-year-old [Cpt. Alina Pravosudova](#), a ballet dancer and aikido enthusiast from Haifa. Alina served as a combat soldier in the search and rescue team of the Home Front Command and was an officer on duty at the Urim base when Hamas terrorists invaded. Alina was killed while trying to protect her fellow soldiers from a grenade launched by the terrorists. Described as "a rose in the desert," Alina had a beaming smile that penetrated the hearts of everybody she met.
- **Read** about [Sgt. David Mittelman](#), 20 a former ultra-Orthodox Israeli who "hovered between worlds," and fell in battle.