



## War in Israel: Update on Current Situation

March 25, 2024

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

**Jewish Federations** have collectively raised just shy of \$800 million and allocated more than \$400 million for humanitarian needs and economic support in Israel since October 7. For an updated list of allocations, click [here](#).

Federations have also announced the **Israel Emergency Loan Fund**, with a goal of bringing together \$100 million towards small Israeli businesses that are struggling because of the war. Read more [here](#).

Sources are **questioning the numbers that Hamas is providing** the international media:

- Newsweek: [A More Accurate Accounting of the War in Gaza](#)
- Abraham Wyner, Professor of Statistics and Data Science at the University of Pennsylvania: [How the Gaza Ministry of Health Fakes Casualty Numbers](#)

### International Response

- A vote passed in the **UN Security Council today**, calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. At the last moment, the US did not exercise its right of veto, allowing passage of the resolution. Earlier, Prime Minister Netanyahu said he would ask members of his

government to cancel expected meetings in Washington this week if the US did not veto the vote.

- Israel's **Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant is visiting Washington, D.C.** to coordinate the next steps in the war with the US administration. Separately, Minister for Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer and National Security Advisor Tzahi Hanegbi were also planning to visit the US for talks.
- After attending a traditional reading of Megillat Esther over Purim, Prime Minister Netanyahu vowed to **kill Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar**. He said, "We will unite, fight, and win just as we did in ancient times. We will enter Rafah and achieve total victory. We took out Haman; we will also take out Sinwar." After again stressing that the IDF would carry out its invasion of Rafah, Netanyahu explained that "absolute evil cannot be defeated when it is left to its own devices."
- The US-based **Pew Research Center** has released [new findings](#) exploring the complex views of Americans about the Israel-Hamas war, including views among Jewish and Muslim Americans. The survey was conducted from Feb. 13-25.
  - Regardless of whether they approve of how Israel is fighting the war, most U.S. Jews (89%) see Israel's reasons for going to war against Hamas as valid; only 18% of US Muslims see Israel's reasons as valid.
  - Around half of Muslims (49%) say Hamas' reasons for fighting Israel are valid, regardless of how they feel about the acceptability of the Oct. 7 attack on Israel; 16% of US Jews see Hamas' reasons as valid.
  - 62% of US Jews say the way Israel is carrying out its war in Gaza is acceptable; only 5% of American Muslims agree. Most Muslim Americans (68%) describe Israel's methods as unacceptable.
  - Few people in any religious group describe Hamas' Oct. 7 attack as acceptable (roughly 5% or fewer), including 3% of Jewish Americans. However, among US Muslims, 10% say the way Hamas carried out the attack was completely acceptable and 11% say it was somewhat acceptable.

## **Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Activities**

- **A completely false and fabricated story** about IDF soldiers raping a pregnant woman at Shifa Hospital has been circulating on social media. After more than 24 hours of allowing the story to run freely, Qatari-based Al Jazeera [deleted the page](#) featuring the item after overwhelming evidence came to light that the facts had been made up.
- **Rafah** is the last bastion of Hamas control. The IDF claims that it has disbanded 18 of 24 Hamas battalions, while four of the intact battalions are in Rafah. Approximately [1.3 million](#) Palestinians are sheltering in Rafah, including many who followed Israel's orders to evacuate northern Gaza to safer territory. Rafah is also a major entry point for humanitarian aid. The United States has expressed its concerns over an Israeli operation in Rafah, while Israel insists that entering Rafah is critical to destroying Hamas and safeguarding Israel. Some background and additional information on Rafah:
  - Located on the Egyptian border with Gaza, Rafah has served for many years as a key [site](#) for Hamas to smuggle weapons backed by Iran and other terrorist proxies into the Strip. According to [military analysts](#), most of the weapons Hamas used to massacre Israelis on October 7 came through the Rafah crossing.
  - If Israeli troops enter Rafah, the [focus](#) of the fighting will be on engaging entire units of Hamas terrorists, as opposed to targeting individual Hamas operatives.
  - Senior Israeli military expert Col. Gabi Siboni [explained](#) that because Hamas has situated its military infrastructure under civilian homes and facilities as part of its strategy to hide behind human shields, there is no way the IDF can dismantle Hamas in Rafah without causing significant destruction to the infrastructure.
  - Earlier this week, President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke about a potential military operation in Rafah. President Biden [expressed](#) his concerns that a major ground offensive would be a mistake due to the high number of civilians sheltering there. He emphasized that in order to defeat Hamas, Israel needs a strategy that does not put thousands of innocent civilians at risk.

- President Biden had invited Prime Minister Netanyahu to send a delegation to Washington to discuss the pending operation. Israel's Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant, Minister of Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer, and National Security Advisor Tzachi Hanegbi are in Washington this week.
- Netanyahu [told](#) a Knesset committee last Tuesday, "We do not see a way to eliminate Hamas militarily without destroying these remaining battalions." The prime minister reportedly [told](#) security cabinet members that he never said an operation would take place during Ramadan, which ends on April 9.
- Israel looks likely to approve an evacuation plan for Palestinians in Rafah. Netanyahu stated, "I have already approved the IDF's operational plan, and soon we will also approve the plan to evacuate the civilian population from the battle zones."
- Minister for Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer, often referred to as the person closest to Prime Minister Netanyahu, said over the weekend that Israel will have to enter Rafah, with or without the international community's (and American) support.
- The Egyptian government and military are extremely concerned about an IDF Rafah operation. While officially the main worry is over the fate of Gazan civilians, many commentators have said that Egypt fears that hundreds of thousands of Gazans will storm the border and cross into Egypt. Israel has [said](#) that it would do its best to coordinate moves with the Egyptian government.
- The IDF has so far arrested and taken for interrogation over 800 suspects at Gaza's **Shifa Hospital**. In response to accusations that Israel is harming patients and medical staff at the hospital, the IDF published the following statement:
  - *"IDF and Israel Security Agency forces are operating in the area of the Shifa Hospital while avoiding harm to civilians, patients, medical teams and medical equipment. As part of the operation at the hospital, the sick and wounded were evacuated to a designated compound in the hospital in order to prevent harm to them....IDF*

*soldiers... facilitated the entry of trucks full of medical equipment, food, and water into the hospital....The medical equipment that was brought into the hospital includes over ten thousand units of medications, hundreds of pain relievers, over a hundred packages of bandages and infusions, and dozens of advanced monitoring devices....about two tons of food and three tons of water were brought in, along with the medical equipment."*

- The government of Israel continues to [debate](#) possible new legislation regarding the **ultra-Orthodox draft exemption**. War Minister and National Unity Party Leader Benny Gantz threatened to [quit the government](#) if the bill passes in the Knesset.

## Humanitarian Aid

- The IDF has reiterated that **Israel allows the full and free entry of humanitarian aid** into Gaza on the ground, in the air and from the sea according to the rules of international law.
- There is currently **no limit on the amount of aid** that can be sent to Gaza, and Israel has been encouraging international aid organizations and countries to send additional supplies.
- Since the beginning of the war, **Israel has facilitated** the entrance of over 17,400 trucks of food and medicine into Gaza, carrying over 218,000 tons of aid.
- Before October 7, international organizations brought an average of 70 trucks a day to Gaza. The **current daily average is significantly more** than that – some 125 trucks per day.
- However, a large percentage of the aid has been **confiscated by Hamas** or looted by Palestinian gangs and others who storm the trucks as they enter Gaza.
- Israel has said that the **United Nations is not ensuring the proper distribution** of the food and not allocating enough of its personnel to make sure the food is given out, and not looted.
- Israeli officials **strongly deny that there is mass starvation** in Gaza, saying that there is no food shortage in the southern Gaza Strip (where the overwhelming majority of Gazans are currently living);

while in the northern Strip there are some areas that are experiencing moderate levels of shortage.

- See the latest facts and figures on Israel's humanitarian aid to Gaza [here](#).

## Rockets

- In the **north**, Hezbollah continues to fire at Israeli targets, triggering significant Israeli retaliations.
- The number of **Hamas** rocket attacks on Israel remains negligible, due to Hamas' significantly diminished capabilities. However today, a number of rockets were fired at the southern Israeli city of Ashdod – a sign that Hamas still has some capacity.
- In the **Red Sea**, the US, the UK and Israel continue to defend against attacks by the Iran-back Houthi rebels in Yemen. The US military also continues to strike at pro-Iranian targets in Syria and Iraq.

## Hostages

- Amid declarations by **US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken** that a hostage deal is within reach, Mossad Chief Dadi Barnes is currently in Qatar with CIA Director William Burns, Qatar's Prime Minister, and Egypt's Minister of Intelligence, where talks on a new hostage deal continue.
- Still being negotiated is the number of Palestinian prisoners to be released in exchange for every Israeli hostage. Over the weekend, it was reported that **Israel had agreed to a compromise** by agreeing to release considerably more prisoners than had earlier been proposed. **Hamas has yet to respond** to the new proposal.
- In exchange for the release of some 40 women, elderly, and wounded hostages, Israel has reportedly agreed to **release between 700-800 Palestinian prisoners**. These would include hundreds who are serving life sentences for murdering Israelis in terror attacks.
- **Hamas' priorities** from [ongoing negotiations](#) are "stopping the aggression, bringing in aid, the return of the displaced, and a clear reconstruction plan," said Hamas spokesperson Hossam Badran, according to Hezbollah-owned news site Al-Ahed News. See more [here](#).

## Stories of Heartbreak, Heroism, and Hope

- In an **exclusive interview** with the *Daily Mail*, Israeli hostage [Liri Albag](#)'s family stated that they marked the Purim holiday by sharing childhood photos of her costumes throughout the years, pressuring negotiators not to forget her as she remains captive by Hamas. See more [here](#).
- The defenders of **Kibbutz Alumim** [fought off Palestinian terror squads](#) on Oct. 7 and saved their homes and families.
- Remarkably, Israel placed fifth in the world in the newly released **UN World Happiness Index**. While the study was taken after October 7, it reflects a three-year average (had the data reflected 2023 only, Israel would have ranked 19<sup>th</sup> – still ahead of the US and the UK). Read more [here](#).
- **See this story** of 23-year-old **Amit Lahav** from Rishon Lezion, described by her father as “a child of light and love.” Amit loved adventure and lived life to the fullest. She hiked up volcanic mountains in Central America, swam with sharks and ziplined in rainforests. Lahav was celebrating life at the Nova festival when she was murdered by Hamas terrorists. She was looking forward to beginning her university studies just a week later.