



## Operation Iron Swords Updated to 1 p.m., February 18, 2024

Northern Arena	Israeli Casualties	Rocket Fire
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 851 attacks</li><li>• 205 Hezbollah operatives killed</li><li>• 37 operatives of other terrorist-organization killed</li><li>• One non-affiliated operative</li><li>• One Lebanese army soldier killed</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Approximately 1,450 military and civilian dead (unofficial estimate)</li><li>• 132 hostages remain in the Gaza Strip</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Approximately 11,000 rockets and mortar shells</li><li>• Approximately 9,000 rockets and mortar shells launched from the Gaza Strip</li><li>• Approximately 2,000 rockets launched from Lebanon and 30 from Syria</li></ul>

### Overview<sup>1</sup>

► **The southern arena:** The IDF forces increased their hold on the Khan Yunis area while significantly damaging Hamas' Khan Yunis Brigade. They focused on Nasser Hospital, where according to intelligence, there was Hamas military activity and Israeli hostages had been held. As far as was possible, the IDF activity allowed the hospital to continue functioning normally. Palestinians condemned the IDF activity ignoring the fact that Hamas was conducting military activity in the hospital. Hamas members commented on Israeli Minister Benny Gantz's statement that the fighting would continue during the month of Ramadan and be extended to Rafah, and claimed his threats would not deter them.

► **According to unofficial data, since October 7, 2023, approximately 1,500 Israeli civilians and security personnel have been killed, 573 of them soldiers and officers; 130 civilian and military hostages are still being held by the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip; 123 hostages have been returned to Israel.**

<sup>1</sup> Click <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en> to subscribe and receive the ITIC's daily updates as well as its other publications.

► **Negotiations for a hostage deal:** Hamas claimed it had shown "flexibility" in its terms for a hostage deal but Israel sabotaged them. Hamas threatened to suspend the talks until aid was brought to the northern Gaza Strip.

► **The situation in the Gaza Strip:** A demonstration was held in the Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip to protest Israel's [alleged] "policy of starvation" and to demand that UNRWA resume its activities. A conflict was reported over at the Rafah Crossing the distribution of humanitarian aid. In the wake of concerns that the IDF would expand the integrated ground maneuver to the Rafah area, displaced persons continued to set up tents near the Rafah-Egypt border. Egypt continues to express concern regarding the movement of Gazans into its territory.

► **The northern arena:** Over the weekend Hezbollah claimed responsibility for 20 attacks on Israeli targets. Two of the attacks targeted Kiryat Shmona. Nasrallah gave a militant speech in which he noted the harm to civilians and assured Israel that Hezbollah had weapons capable of reaching Eilat. He also rejected any negotiations between Israel and Lebanon.

► **Israel:** A shooting attack was carried out at the Re'im Junction near Kiryat Malachi. Two Israelis were killed and four were wounded. The terrorist who carried out the attack, a Palestinian from the Shuafat refugee camp, was shot and killed. Hamas issued a mourning notice and claimed that the attack was a "natural response" to Israel's actions in Gaza. Hamas also called on the Palestinian public to expand the "confrontation" with Israel.

► **The Palestinian Authority (PA):** PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh participated in the African Union meeting held in Addis Ababa. He gave a speech on behalf of the Mahmoud Abbas, the PA chairman, calling for an international boycott of Israel and the imposition of sanctions. He met with South Africa's prime minister on the sidelines of the conference.

► **The pro-Iranian militias:** The Houthis attacked two ships sailing in the Red Sea.

► **The international arena:** The annual Munich Security Conference was held, attended by many world leaders. Two of the main topics discussed were the fighting in the Gaza Strip and the situation in the Middle East. Several meetings were held on the sidelines of the conference.

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## The Southern Arena

► Palestinian media reported IDF attacks in the Gaza Strip during the past day: in **the northern Gaza Strip**, the Israel Air Force attacked Tel al-Za'atar and the Jabalia refugee camp. In **Gaza**

**City**, the Israeli Air Force attacked in the Sheikh Radwan neighborhood (north of the city) and the Zeitoun neighborhood (south of the city), and in the east of the city. In **the central Gaza Strip**, the Israeli Air Force attacked in the Nuseirat, Zuweida and Deir al-Balah refugee camps. In **Khan Yunis** the IDF attacked in the Qarara area (north of Khan Yunis), carried out controlled explosions in residential areas of the city, and continued its activities inside Nasser Hospital. In **Rafah** the IDF attacked in the north of the city and near the Egyptian border, and Israeli Navy ships attacked western Rafah (Ma'an, February 18, 2024).



**Right: An al-Jazeera presenter describes the IDF attacks in the south and east of Gaza City. Left: Attacks in the al-Bureij and al-Maghazi refugee camps in the central Gaza Strip (al-Jazeera's YouTube channel, February 17, 2024)**

► **The southern Gaza Strip:** Over the past few days, IDF forces have strengthened their hold on the Khan Yunis area, while causing significant damage to Hamas's Khan Yunis Brigade. The forces killed dozens of terrorists in short-range clashes, sniper ambushes, and airstrikes on observation posts and anti-tank squads (IDF spokesperson, February 16, 2024).

► One of the centers of activity is **Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis**. The activity of the IDF forces is based on intelligence revealing that Hamas conducts military activity in the hospital compound. During the operation, the forces inside the hospital detained more than 100 Gazans suspected of terrorist activity. Among the detainees, more than 20 were terrorists who took part in the October 7, 2023 attack and massacre. The forces searched the compound and found mortars, grenades and other weapons. Medicines were also found with the names of Israeli hostages on them. The origin of the medicines and their use are being investigated.



**Weapons found at Nasser Hospital (IDF spokesperson, February 16, 2024)**

► During the IDF activity, the hospital's ordinary functioning was maintained as far as was possible. After a technical fault was found in the hospital's generator, IDF forces attempted to fix it, and in coordination with the hospital administration brought in a replacement generator. All the vital systems of the hospital continued to operate with a previously-existing uninterruptible power supply (UPS). In addition, the IDF forces brought food, baby food and water into the hospital, and with international aid organizations, the Gaza Coordination and Liaison Directorate arranged a supply of diesel fuel for the continued operation of the hospital (IDF spokesperson, February 16, 17, 2024).



**Right: The IDF forces coordinate with the hospital administration. Left: Food and water brought by the IDF forces (IDF spokesperson, February 16, 2024)**

► The Hamas-controlled ministry of health in the Gaza Strip claimed the IDF had [allegedly] detained a large number of medical staff and members of the hospital's administration, a "war crime" endangering the lives of patients (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page, February 17, 2024). The ministry of health also [falsely] claimed the IDF forces did not allow the evacuation of seriously ill patients to other hospitals (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page, February 17, 2024).

►The director general of the World Health Organization reported that after the "siege" imposed on it last week, the hospital was no longer functioning. He claimed 200 patients were hospitalized, 20 of whom were in serious condition and needed to be transferred to other hospitals. The Palestinian media reported that **Dr. Atef al-Hout, the director of the hospital**, had been detained by IDF forces. The media also claimed that tanks fired at the third floor of **Amal Hospital in Khan Yunis** (Shehab X account, February 18, 2024).

►Hamis condemned the IDF's "assault" on the Nasser Medical compound, [falsely] claiming the forces had laid siege to the compound and forced all the medical staff, the displaced persons and the wounded to evacuate. Hamas claimed it was the continuation of the [alleged] war of "extermination" which focused on hospitals and the destruction of civilian buildings which were supposed to serve as protected areas for the Gazans (Hamas Telegram channel, February 15, 2024).

►**Izzat al-Rishq, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, claimed all the IDF spokesperson's statements about Hamas' military use of Nasser Hospital were "baseless lies." He claimed Israel continued its destruction of the public health system in the Gaza Strip and the accusations of military [terrorist] use of hospitals had become a narrative that "no longer worked on anyone" (Izzat al-Rishq's Telegram channel, February 15, 2024).

►**Husam Badran, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, claimed Hamas has stated it was prepared for any international body to come to Nasser Hospital or any other hospital in the Gaza Strip to prove that the hospitals' operations were purely medical, and that there was no "military" presence and no hostages were being held there (al-Jazeera Mubasher YouTube channel, February 16, 2024)

►**The central Gaza Strip:** IDF force activities focused mainly on armed terrorist squads. An Israeli Air Force force identified a terrorist squad near the ground forces and attacked it, killing several terrorists (IDF spokesperson, February 16, 2024). On the evening of February 17, 2024, based on intelligence information, fighter jets attacked Hamas targets in the Nuseirat refugee camp and Deir al-Balah areas, including Hamas terrorists in operational headquarters (IDF spokesperson, February 17, 2024).

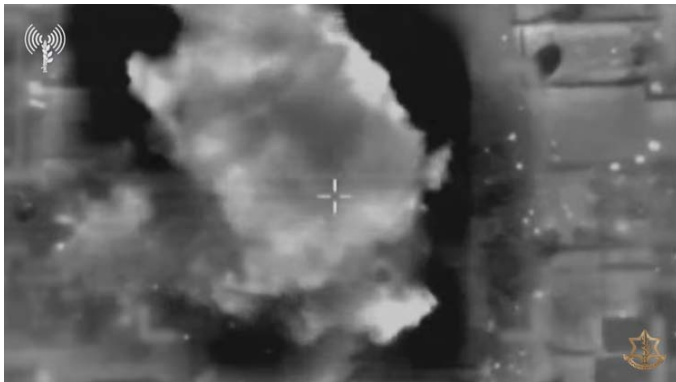
►**The northern Gaza Strip:** IDF forces operating in the area directed an aircraft to attack several Hamas targets, and during one attack an aide to the commander of the Sabra Battalion was killed; an attack on a vehicle killed three armed Hamas operatives (IDF spokesperson, February 16, 2024).

► **Gaza City:** In a joint IDF-Israeli Security Agency (ISA) operation, Ahmed Ghoul, commander of the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades' Shati Battalion, who participated in the October 7, 2023 attack and massacre, was killed in an airstrike. He also held a kidnapped female soldier who was later murdered by Hamas inside Shifa Hospital (IDF spokesperson, February 15, 2024).



**An al-Jazeera TV correspondent reports from Israeli territory on IDF attacks in the Mughraqa area, south of Gaza City (Aljazeera YouTube channel, February 17, 2024)**

► **Aerial activity:** The Israeli Air Force attacked a large number of Hamas targets throughout the Gaza Strip, including operational headquarters, military buildings and rocket launching positions. Targets were also attacked from the air to help the ground forces' operations (IDF spokesperson, February 16, 2024).



**Attacks on Hamas terrorist squads (IDF spokesperson, February 18, 2024)**



**Right: Israeli Air Force strikes in northeastern Rafah (Shehab X account, February 17, 2024). Left: IDF attacks in the Zeitoun neighborhood in Gaza City (Shehab X account, February 17, 2024)**

## Palestinian perspective on the fighting

► In response to Israeli Minister Benny Gantz's statement that the war could continue into the month of Ramadan (March) if the hostages were not released, **Husam Badran, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, said the Israeli leadership's threats did not frighten or influence the leaders of the "resistance" [terrorist operatives] or Hamas. He claimed that Gantz's threat regarding an operation in Rafah was meaningless, since Israel had been committing [alleged] "crimes and a war of extermination" against the Palestinians from the beginning, "expanding the circle of attacks" was meaningless and there was nothing that could prevent Israel from continuing the ground maneuver towards Rafah as well (al-Jazeera Mubasher YouTube channel, February 16, 2024). **Mahmoud Mardawi, a senior Hamas member**, said that linking Ramadan to the ground operation in Rafah was an Israeli attempt to exert pressure on Hamas to withdraw their demands for a hostage deal (al-Arabi TV X account, February 16, 2024).

## Rocket fire from the Gaza Strip

► On the morning of February 17, 2024, rockets were launched from the Gaza Strip at the city of Ashkelon; Israel's aerial defense fighters successfully intercepted the launch. Less than 30 minutes after the attack, the terrorist who had launched the rockets was detected in the al-Furqan area in the northern Gaza Strip; he was attacked and killed by an Israeli Air Force aircraft (IDF spokesperson, February 17, 2024).

► The Jerusalem Brigades, the military wing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), announced that it had launched rocket barrages at Ashkelon and the cities, towns and villages surrounding Gaza (Paltoday Telegram channel, February 16, 2024). The al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades also reported they had launched a barrage of KN-103 rockets at Ashkelon and the IDF Zikim base (QudsN Telegram channel, February 17, 2024).

## Israeli casualties

►According to unofficial data, since October 7, 2023, approximately 1,500 Israeli people have been killed. According to the IDF spokesperson, 573 of them are soldiers and officers (235 since the start of the ground maneuver on 27 October, 2023); 130 civilian and military hostages are still being held by the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip; 123 hostages have been returned.

## The issue of the hostages and a ceasefire agreement

► Hamas-affiliated media outlets reported that according to "sources close to Hamas," it intended to suspend the negotiations until humanitarian aid was brought into the northern Gaza Strip. They claimed it was "impossible to hold negotiations while hunger was killing the Palestinian people" (al-Aqsa TV Telegram channel, February 17, 2024; Palinfo, February 17, 2024).

► In response to the report, **Mahmoud Mardawi, a senior Hamas member**, claimed Hamas had provided everything required as a basis for "genuine negotiations" which would lead to an agreement, but Israel misunderstood Hamas' "flexibility" and its "cooperation with the mediators," and had taken additional measures [allegedly] violating international and humanitarian law. He claimed Hamas was sending a clear message to Israel and to the mediators that the blockade and [alleged] "systematic starvation" would lead to the suspension of the negotiations, and that it was impossible for Hamas and the "resistance" to continue making it possible for the mediators to succeed and reach an agreement, while Israel turned its back and violated the law and the special measures requested by the International Court of Justice regarding the northern Gaza Strip and Rafah. According to Mardawi, the events in the northern Gaza Strip violated "all norms." Israel, he claimed, attacked all the "resources" and prevented the entry of anything related to aid (al-Arabi YouTube channel, February 17, 2024).

► **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, claimed Hamas had responded positively from the beginning and "demonstrated complete flexibility," but it was clear that Israel continued its "tricks and procrastination." He reiterated Hamas' claim that they would not accept anything less than a complete cessation of "aggression," the withdrawal of the IDF from the Gaza Strip, the lifting of the "siege," the provision of safe and adequate shelter for the displaced persons, the return of the displaced persons, mainly to the north of the Gaza Strip, the end of the [alleged] "policy of starvation" and a commitment to reconstruction. All,



he claimed, were humanitarian demands which had received consensus in the United Nations, human rights organizations, and the ruling of the International Court of Justice, and Israel had to comply with them. He reiterated that a hostage deal in which the Palestinian prisoners would be released, especially those who had been sentenced to long prison terms, was one of the goals of the negotiations and it could not be omitted. He claimed that Hamas related the ongoing negotiations "positively and very responsibly," but it would not waste the enormous sacrifices of the Palestinians and the achievements of the "resistance," and they would use all the means at their disposal to stop the Israel's [alleged] "bloodbath" (Hamas Telegram channel, February 17, 2024).

► **Abu Obeida, spokesman for Hamas' military wing**, claimed in a recorded speech that the "events" of October 7 marked the beginning of the end and the decline of Israel. He condemned the actions of the IDF and praised the Palestinian "resistance" and the firm stand of the Palestinians. He strongly denied Israel's claims regarding the destruction of the military battalions and claimed that the statements, numbers and information provided by Israel were false propaganda. Referring to the Israeli hostages, he said "many had been lost" and claimed Hamas had not wanted "such losses and suffering among the hostages." He claimed they had tried to "protect" and "care for them" for months to achieve a "humanitarian goal," which was the release of their prisoners and the realization of the legitimate human rights of the Palestinian people. He claimed they were still trying "to protect" the hostages by all means and had warned dozens of times of the dangers to which they were exposed, but the Israeli leadership ignored them. He falsely claimed the IDF deliberately killed and wounded the hostages, and warned that time was running out for them. He said the injured and sick Israeli hostages were "living in very difficult conditions and struggling to stay alive" (Abu Obeida's Telegram channel, February 16, 2024). It is unclear when the speech was recorded, and it did not mention the two hostages who were released in an Israeli security force operation on February 12, 2024.



**Abu Obeida (Abu Obeida's Telegram channel, February 16, 2024)**

► **Husam Badran, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, said their priority now was to stop the "aggression," and that progress in the negotiations was being personally prevented by Netanyahu and the members of the "war cabinet," who were determined to continue the war (al-Jazeera Mubasher YouTube channel, February 16, 2024).

► **Taher al-Nunu, Isma'il Haniyeh's media advisor**, said that the Israeli side was preventing a hostage deal from being reached and undermining any serious attempt to reach a ceasefire. He claimed Israel was promoting a "media fraud" by claiming progress was being made for an exchange deal, while digging its heels in and refusing to comply with demands for a ceasefire, withdrawal and the introduction of aid to the Gaza Strip. He added that consultations with the Egyptian side would continue, and if the talks required another Hamas delegation to Egypt, one would go (Arab World Press News Agency (AWP), February 16, 2024).

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## The Gaza Strip

### Palestinian casualties

► **The Hamas-controlled ministry of health in the Gaza Strip** reported at 11:25 a.m., February 18, 2024, that during the past day 127 Gazans had been killed and 205 wounded, bringing the number of dead since the beginning of the war to 28,985 and the number of wounded to 68,8834 (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page, February 18, 2024).

### The situation in the Gaza Strip

► On February 17, 2024, a demonstration was held in the Jabalia refugee camp, in the northern Gaza Strip, protesting Israel's [alleged] "starvation policy" and demanding that UNRWA resume its activities in the camp (al-Sharq TV X account, February 17, 2024; al-Jazeera YouTube channel, February 17, 2024). A Shehab reporter who covered the event claimed there

were no more medicines or food in the northern Gaza and families were forced to eat animal feed (Shehab X account, February 17, 2024).



#### **The demonstration in the Jabalia refugee camp (Safa X account, February 17, 2024)**

►Several UNRWA employees said that they had received letters from the agency's administration demanding that on February 17, 2024 they return to work in the schools which had been turned into shelters. They said UNRWA was trying to gradually renew its activities in Gaza City and the northern Gaza Strip despite the difficult situation. A correspondent for the Quds Press website reported that on February 16, 2024, he saw an UNRWA vehicle which had been damaged in an attack, being taken from the al-Jarjawi government school in the Daraj neighborhood to be repaired and returned to work. The report about the resumption of UNRWA activities in Gaza City and in the northern Gaza Strip was not confirmed by any UNRWA official (Quds Press, February 16, 2024).

►Displaced persons continued erecting tents near the Rafah-Egypt border to find a safe haven. A resident of the northern Gaza Strip, who was staying in Rafah with his family, said that since he left his home he had changed his location ten times. He said he decided to set up the tent for his family near the Egyptian forces at the Rafah-Egypt border in the hope that the IDF would not attack (Wafa YouTube channel, February 16, 2024). See Egypt's position on the matter below.



### Tents erected near the Rafah-Egypt border (Wafa YouTube channel, February 16, 2024)

►Wafa TV aired a report about a factory in Rafah that manufactured diapers. According to the owner, he decided to renew the factory's activity to help residents in need, because a package of diapers is currently sold for \$50. He said he was forced to use the raw materials he had in stock because currently raw materials did not enter through the crossings (Wafa YouTube channel, February 18, 2024).



### Manufacturing diapers in Rafah (Wafa YouTube channel, February 18, 2024)

## The Rafah Crossing

►Photos were circulated on social media that showed chaos at the Rafah Crossing. Several people entered through the outer gate in an attempt to reach the crossing's inner area, a fire was seen burning at the main gate, and gunshots were heard (Arabi21 website, February 16, 2024). According to several reports on social networks, the crossing was stormed because a Hamas policeman had killed a child who asked for assistance (@fateh\_pal65 X account, February 16, 2024; Ziyad al-Ayoubi's X account, February 16, 2024).



**Pictures circulated on social media showing Palestinians storming the Rafah Crossing and smoke from the fire (Arab21 website, February 16, 2024)**

►An "official source" at the Borders and Crossings Authority denied the reports. He claimed a group of displaced persons had set tires on fire in front of the main gate of the crossing, opened the gate and attacked aid trucks that were en route to the Strip. He added that Palestinian police patrols were sent to the scene to take control of the situation and secure the trucks (Shehab Telegram channel, February 16, 2024). **Wa'el Abu Omar, Rafah Crossing spokesman**, said that all that had happened was that some Palestinians set fire to tires in front of the aid trucks that were about to leave the crossing and the authorities immediately took control of the situation. He added that the residents were angry because no aid has come in for two weeks (alarabia.net, February 17, 2024).

## **The Egyptian position on admitting Gazans into Egyptian territory**

►The Wall Street Journal reported from its "sources" that Egypt was concerned that another Israeli military advance in the southern Gaza Strip towards Rafah would cause a flood of refugees, and therefore it was building a buffer zone in an area that extended over eight square miles in the Sinai Peninsula near the border. It was also reported that for weeks Egypt had been reinforcing security along the border, deploying soldiers and armored vehicles and strengthening fences, and that the new compound was part of an emergency plan in case a large number of residents of the Gaza Strip managed to enter. The "sources" also stated that more than 100,000 people could be accommodated in the compound, it is surrounded by a concrete wall and a large number of tents have been erected there. According to the sources, in the event of a large exodus of Palestinians from the Strip, Egypt would limit the number of refugees to well below the region's capacity (The Wall Street Journal, February 15, 2024).

► **Mohamed Abdel-Fadil Shousha, the governor of North Sinai**, said that Egypt was prepared for all scenarios resulting from an Israeli military operation in Rafah. He denied the reports of the construction of a security buffer zone on the border with Rafah whose objective would be to absorb Palestinians from the Gaza Strip (al-Arabiya, February 15, 2024).

► During a panel discussion at the Munich Security Conference, **Sameh Shoukry, the Egyptian Foreign Minister**, said that the talks about building a wall on the border with Egypt were speculations and claimed that they were only carrying out maintenance operations in the area. He emphasized that they did not intend to prepare designated areas in Egyptian territory for displaced persons from the Gaza Strip, but if necessary they would act "humanely." He also noted that Hamas' position was contrary to the accepted opinion among the Palestinian people, the Palestinian Authority and Fatah in terms of recognizing Israel (al-Hadath, February 17, 2024).

### "The day after"

► The Arab Rai al-Youm website revealed that senior Hamas members told "Jordanian officials" that Hamas was not opposed to the establishment of a Palestinian technocratic government which would lead the next regional phase, based on the future connection of the Gaza Strip to the West Bank and the integration of Hamas movement into the Palestinian leadership. It also claimed that recently Hamas had been showing "flexibility" on the issue because of direct pressure from Qatar. The PIJ informed the Jordanian mediators that they had no problem "in principle" with the establishment of such a government, but only if there was an agreement between the "organizations" and the direct participation of all "resistance" [terrorist] factions in the government (al-Ra'i, February 15, 2024).

► **Muhammad Nizal, a member of the Hamas political bureau**, said that Hamas was in contact with all the Palestinian "forces" that wanted to discuss the situation in the Gaza Strip and its future. He confirmed that he had been in contact with Muhammad Dahlan, a senior member of "Fatah in exile," and that there had been meetings, but said he did not intend to provide details. He said Dahlan was part of the Palestinian political map, and that their doors were open to negotiations with everyone except Israel. Regarding Hamas' relationship with the Fatah movement, he said that they did not seek to clash with anyone, but noted that since the beginning of the war, no one from Fatah had established official contact with them. He said they were calling for general Palestinian elections in which everyone could present their

candidacy, and admitted that there were also disputes, but the current situation required that no one be politically boycotted (al-Arabi YouTube channel, February 16, 2024).

## Hamas delegation visit to Nigeria

►A delegation of the Hamas leadership, including, Ghazi Hamad, Sami Abu Zuhri and Ali Barakeh, all members of the political bureau, conducted a four-day visit to Nigeria. They met with representatives of Nigerian society and with a number of senior officials. They reviewed the situation in the Gaza Strip for their hosts, the political developments, the movement's position, and Nigeria's position towards the Palestinian people and Hamas. The delegation heard positions from the Nigerians regarding the consensus behind the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian issue (Hamas Telegram channel, February 15, 2024).

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## The Northern Arena

### Hezbollah attacks

►During the weekend of February 15-18, 2024, Hezbollah claimed responsibility for **20 attacks** using anti-tank missiles, Katyusha, Falaq 1 and Burkan rockets, whose warheads weigh between 300 and 500 kilograms (between 660 and 1100 pounds) (Hezbollah combat information Telegram channel, February 15-18, 2024). On February 15, 2024, Hezbollah claimed responsibility for two attacks on Kiryat Shmona, a few hours apart, using Falaq missiles. According to Hezbollah, the attacks were an initial response to the [alleged] "massacre" carried out by Israel in Nabatiyeh and Sawana in south Lebanon (Hezbollah combat information Telegram channel, February 15, 2024).

►**Na'im Qassem, Hezbollah deputy secretary general**, said that they would not permit Israeli "aggression" against the civilians in south Lebanon without responding to it "in the appropriate manner. He added that if they were forced to use all their might, they would be ready for any conflict, no matter how large, and they would teach the Israelis lessons they would not forget. He also claimed the only way to end regional tensions was by ending the "aggression" against the Gaza Strip, adding that they would not withdraw their "support" from the Gaza Strip, whatever the cost. He said they would also not engage in discussions about the future of south Lebanon until the end of the "aggression" in the Gaza Strip and that all the discussions currently taking place were a waste of time (Radio al-Nur, February 15, 2024).

►Earlier, **Na'im Qassem** claimed that Hezbollah had not planned to attack the Meron base or the Northern Command in Safed, but since civilians had been attacked the decision was made to expand the attacks. That was because in response to an attack on civilians or the expansion of Israeli attacks, Hezbollah reacted in a similar way. However, he pointed out that although so far it was unlikely there would be a comprehensive war, the possibility existed because any mistake or miscalculation could cause the situation to deteriorate (al-Alam, February 15, 2024).

## Israel's response

►In response to Hezbollah's attacks, IDF forces fired artillery at several areas in south Lebanon and IDF warplanes attacked a series of Hezbollah targets. A fighter jet attacked a military structure in Nabatiyeh on the night of February 14, 2024, killing Ali Muhammad al-Debs, a senior commander in the Radwan force, along with his lieutenant Hassan Ibrahim Issa and another operative. Al-Debs was involved in the terrorist attack at the Megiddo junction in March 2023. He led, planned and carried out many terrorist acts against the Israel, in particular during the war (IDF spokesperson, February 15, 2024). Among the other targets were military facilities in the Jebel Blat area, during which a terrorist was killed, a military building in the Bint Jbeil area, naval military buildings and military facilities in Qantara, Yarine and al-Taybeh (IDF spokesperson, February 15-17, 2024).



**Right: IDF attacks in Blida (Fouad Khreiss' X account, February 16, 2024). Left: Attacks in Maroun al-Ras (Ahmad Rahhal's X account, February 15, 2024)**





**IDF attack on Hezbollah facilities in the Yaroun region (IDF spokesperson, February 18, 2024)**



**IDF attacks in Yaron (X account of Fouad Khreiss, February 18, 2024)**

## Hezbollah casualties

► Hezbollah reported the death of ten operatives from south Lebanon (seven of them on February 15, 2024) (Hezbollah combat information Telegram channel, February 15-16, 2024):

- ◆ Ali Muhammad al-Debs, aka Haidar, born in 1976 in Blat and a resident of Zebdin.
- ◆ Hassan Ibrahim Issa, aka Karar, born in 1997 in Houmin al-Tahta.
- ◆ Hussein Ahmed Akil, aka Abu Aqil, born in 1988 in al-Jabbayn.
- ◆ Hussein Ali Nur al-Din, aka Mahdi, born in 2004 in Khirbet Selem.
- ◆ Nasser Ahmed Saad, aka Abu Mahdi, born in 1961 in Ayta al-Jabal.
- ◆ Abdelkarim Muhammad Ali Samhat, aka Jafar, born in 1991 in Aynatha.
- ◆ Abbas Ali Mahdi, aka Lawa', born in 1978 in al-'Ayshiyah.
- ◆ Mustafa Khader Qusayr, aka Haidar al-Karar, born in 1991 in Deir Qanoun al-Nahr.
- ◆ Muhammad Ali Darwish, aka Mahdi, born in 1995, from Srebbein.
- ◆ Khaled Muhammad al-Tamer, aka Abu Muhammad Faras, born in 1980, from Arzi and a resident of Khirbet Selem.



### Hezbollah casualties

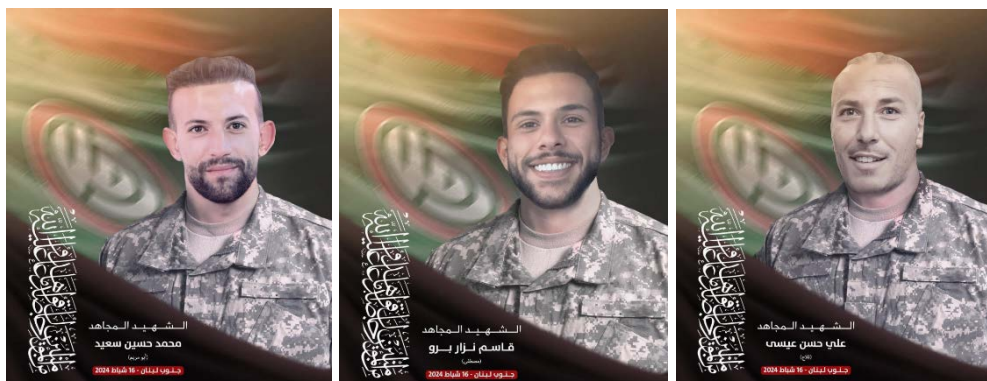
(Telegram channel of Hezbollah's combat propaganda arm, February 15-16, 2024)

► **Na'im Qassem, Hezbollah deputy secretary general**, said during a memorial ceremony for the operatives that there was no solution in the face of "arrogance and injustice" other than armed "resistance" [terrorism]. He also claimed that Operation al-Aqsa Flood had [allegedly] exposed Israel's weakness and laid the foundations for the beginning of its collapse (Radio al-Nur, February 17, 2024).

### Amal casualties

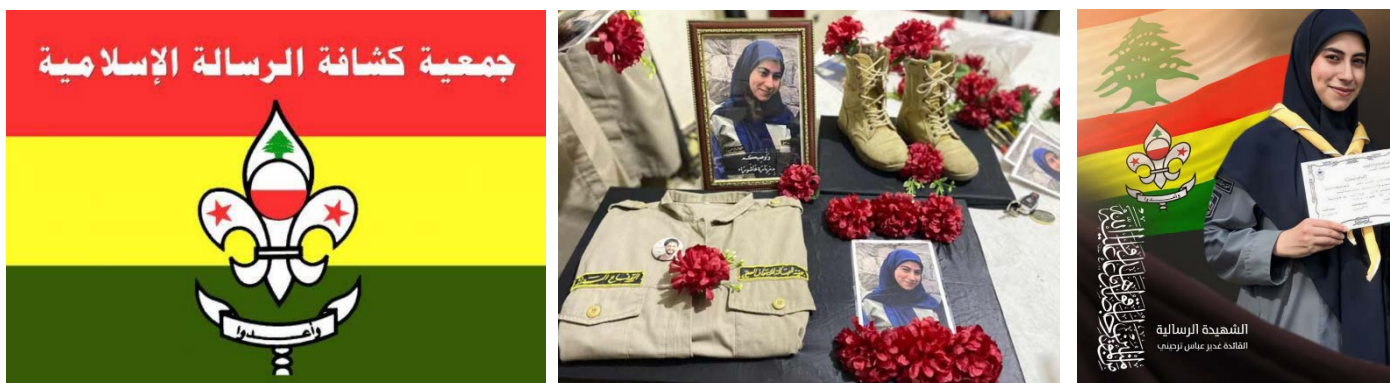
► The Amal movement announced the death of three operatives, killed "while fulfilling their national and jihadist duty in the defense of Lebanon and south Lebanon" (X account of Amal's central information bureau, February 16, 2024).

- ◆ Ali Hassan Issa, aka Falah, born in 1971, from Jibsheets.
- ◆ Qassem Nizar Baru, aka Mustafa, born in 1996, from al-Sharqiyah.
- ◆ Muhammad Hussein Sayid, aka Abu Maryam, born in 1995, from al-Qsaibeh.



#### Amal casualties (X account of Amal's central information bureau, February 16, 2024)

- The Islamic Risala Scout Association (kashshafat al-risala al-islamiyya), which was founded by Imam Musa al-Sadr in 1977 in Lebanon and operates under the auspices of the Amal Movement, announced the death of the "commander" Ghadeer Abbas Tarhini, killed in a "massacre" in Nabatiyeh (X account of Amal's central information bureau, February 16, 2024).



#### Right and center: Ghadeer Abbas Tarhini (X account of Amal's central information bureau, February 16, 2024). Left: The Islamic Risala Scout Association Flag (Wikipedia)

- According to reports, three people were killed in an attack in al-Souaneh in south Lebanon. Among the dead was the child Hussein Muhsen, his brother Amir and his mother Ruah al-Muhammad, who were buried in al-Qantarah al-Janoubiyah (Sawt Beirut International, February 15, 2024).

## Nasrallah's speech

- Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah secretary general**, delivered a speech in memory of the organization's leaders Abbas al-Masawi, Imad Mughniyeh and Ragheb Harb, entitled "The

Fallen Commanders (the Shaheeds)." He related to a number of issues (al-Manar, February 16, 2024):

► **South Lebanon front:** They are currently in the midst of a real campaign that stretches over a hundred kilometers, and the death of "resistance" operatives is part of the campaign. The killing civilians is a sensitive issue for them. When they can act to protect civilians, they should, as Israel has gone too far in harming civilians and is killing them to pressure them to end their support for the Gaza Strip. However, harming civilians only increases their rage and expands the scope of the operation. It is impossible to remain silent in the face of attacks on civilians, and the attacks on Kiryat Shmona were an initial response. Israel will pay the price for the death of the women and children who were killed in Nabatiyeh, Sawana and other areas in south Lebanon. Blood will be answered by blood, not by attacking outposts, espionage equipment or vehicles.

► **Hezbollah's weapons:** Nasrallah boasted of Hezbollah's capabilities and claimed they had an arsenal of missiles that could reach from Kiryat Shmona to Eilat. Those who talk about the cost of "resistance" and the consequences for Lebanon and call for them to surrender have two options, "resistance" or surrender, and what has to be weighed is which has the higher cost. As far as Nasrallah is concerned, the price of surrender is high, heavy and more dangerous. He said Hezbollah demanded that the Lebanese army be strengthened and developed, but the United States prevented it from possessing weapons and missiles that would provide it with a deterrent balance that allowed it to defend Lebanon.

► **The fighting in the Gaza Strip and the activity in Judea and Samaria:** Despite all the actions that Israel and the United States carry out in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip, they have to understand that the Palestinian people will not retreat, regardless of the number of victims. He accused the West of judging Hamas and the PIJ based on Israeli accusations "without an investigation or evidence's being presented." Israel, he claimed, "kills women and children in front of cameras every day and the world does not react." If the transfer of American weapons to Israel stopped, the war in the Gaza Strip would end regardless of what the Israeli government wanted. Operation al-Aqsa Flood revealed the real Israeli goal, to force the Palestinian people to emigrate from their territories and establish a purely Jewish state.

► **"The resistance axis:"**<sup>2</sup> The "resistance" had to retain its weapons, capabilities and presence more than ever because it frightened and deterred Israel, and that was the advantage of the "popular resistance." The goal of the entire "resistance axis" was to defeat Israel, prevent it from achieving its goals, inflict losses on it and help Gaza win.

► **The negotiations:** Those involved in the "political negotiations" as part of the fighting were the Palestinian "organizations," led by Hamas, and Hezbollah did not intervene in the negotiations between Hamas and the Palestinian "resistance" and Israel.

► **Hezbollah's status in Lebanon:** The "resistance" is tied to the defense of Lebanon and its inhabitants, and Hezbollah did not impose political decisions on Lebanon in the name of the "resistance." The "weapon of resistance" is meant to protect Lebanon and all its inhabitants, whether it is used against Israel or against ISIS in Syria. The "weapon of resistance" does not intend to change the political system in Lebanon or the system of government.

► At the end of his speech, Nasrallah said that Lebanon's land borders would be demarcated, and any future negotiations would be based on the principle of "[Everyone,] leave Lebanese territory!"



**Hassan Nasrallah (al-Manar, February 16, 2024)**

**Ali Abu Shahin, a member of the PIJ's political bureau**, claimed that the Muslim nation, and even Israel, was used to the "credibility" of Hassan Nasrallah's speeches, and said that the message was clear, the "resistance" was prepared for "any stupid Israeli act" and had the ability to attack Israel and inflict great losses. He alleged Israel was waging a psychological war to deter the "resistance fronts" from supporting the Palestinian people and the Palestinian "resistance," and there were threats and temptations for Lebanon to stop its support for Gaza, but Israel was incapable of waging an open war on any front other than the

<sup>2</sup> Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, the Palestinian terrorist organizations, the Shi'ite Houthis in Yemen and the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq.

Gaza Strip. He said the "Islamic resistance" in Lebanon had a lot of experience and knew how to manage the conflict, and it was the effective activity of the Lebanese front that pushed Israel to issue threats (Shams News, February 17, 2024).

## UNIFIL

► **Andrea Tenenti, UNIFIL spokesman**, said that over the past few days they had witnessed a worrisome change in military activity, including focusing on areas far from the border. He said attacks targeting civilians violated international law and constituted a war crime, and noted that the escalation of the conflict had cost too many lives, including the lives of children, and caused massive damage to homes and infrastructure (Lebanese News Agency, February 15, 2024).

## The Lebanese government

► **Abdallah Bou Habib, Lebanese foreign minister**, instructed Lebanon's ambassador to the UN to file a complaint with the Security Council following Israel's series of attacks on civilian targets. According to the wording of the complaint, "An Israeli UAV attacked a residential building in Nabatieh, killing ten people, including women and children" (al-Nur Radio, February 16, 2024).

► On the sidelines of the 60<sup>th</sup> annual Munich Security Conference, **Najib al-Mikati, Lebanon's interim prime minister**, held a series of meetings with **Amos Hochstein, the American mediator**, **Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry**, and **Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani**. Al-Sudani said the "aggression" against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip had to be stopped. Mikati stressed Lebanon's desire to continue its collaboration with Iraq to strengthen regional security and stability (Iraqi News Agency, February 16, 2024).

## Syria

► On the night of February 16, 2024, several missiles were launched from Syrian territory at the southern Golan Heights but did not enter Israeli territory. IDF forces responded with artillery fire at the area from which the launches had been carried out, and fighter jets attacked a Syrian army weapons depot in the Mahja area, about 47 kilometers (about 29 miles) northeast of the Syria-Jordan-Israel tri-border area (IDF spokesman, February 17, 2024).

## Israel, Judea and Samaria

### Terrorist attack in Israel

- ▶ On the afternoon of February 16, 2024, a shooting attack was carried out at the Re'im Masmiya Junction, near Kiryat Malachi. A Palestinian terrorist drove up near a bus stop at the intersection, exited the vehicle and shot at civilians standing at the bus stop. An armed civilian who was near the scene shot and killed him. Two Israelis, a soldier and a civilian, were killed and four others were wounded (Israeli media, February 16, 2024).
- ▶ The Palestinians reported that the shooter was Sheikh Fadi Jamjoum, 40, from the Shuafat refugee camp in northeast Jerusalem. He reportedly lived there with his family, originally came from Hebron (al-Araby al-Jadeed, February 17, 2024). Following the attack, Israeli security forces raided his home in the Shuafat refugee camp and detained several members of his family for questioning, during which Palestinians rioted. The Israeli security forces dismantled a mourning tent erected in his memory in Hebron (Ma'an, February 16 and 17, 2024).



**Right: The scene of the shooting attack (al-Arabi TV, February 16, 2024). Left: Hamas' death notice (Yassin Izz al-Din's X account, February 17, 2024)**

- ▶ Hamas issued an announcement claiming that the attack had been a "natural response" to Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip. It called on the Palestinian public to expand the "confrontation" with Israel and stressed that it would continue the "struggle and resistance" [terrorist attacks] until the "liberation of their land" (al-Jazeera.net, February 16, 2024). **Ghazi Hamad, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, praised the attack, claiming it was a "natural response" to Israel's [alleged] crimes against the Palestinian people. He claimed "resistance" was the only way to achieve their legitimate rights (al-Arabi, February 16, 2024). The PIJ issued an announcement praising the "heroic operation" carried out in response to the continued "massacres" perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West

Bank. The announcement called for increased actions against Israel "because it is the only language Israel understands" (PIJ Telegram channel, February 16, 2024).

## Counterterrorism activities

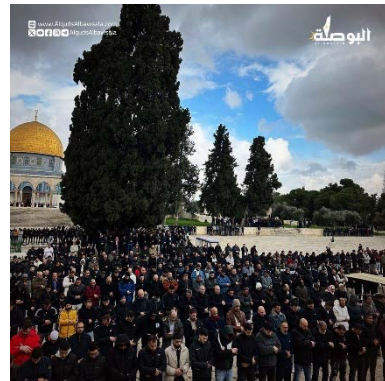
►The Israeli security forces continued their counterterrorism activities in Judea and Samaria. The Palestinian media reported several detentions during the past day in Bethlehem, the Balata refugee camp in Nablus, and Umm Safa and Turmus Aya (north of Ramallah). In addition, Israeli security forces reportedly operated in the Tulkarm refugee camp, killing a Palestinian during clashes (Ma'an News Agency, February 18, 2024).



Israeli security forces' activity in the Tulkarm refugee camp  
(QudsN X account, February 18, 2024)

## Solidarity with the Gaza Strip

►According to a senior official in the Palestinian Waqf (department of religious endowments) in Jerusalem, about 25,000 worshippers participated in the Friday prayer on the Temple Mount (Anadolu News, February 16, 2024). After the Friday prayers, a march was held in Ramallah and al-Bireh in support of the Gaza Strip and the "resistance" (al-Araby al-Jadeed, February 16, 2024).



Right: The prayer on the Temple Mount (@alqudsalbawsala X account, February 16, 2024). Left: The solidarity march (al-Araby al-Jadeed, February 16, 2024)



## Palestinian Authority (PA)

► **Mahmoud Abbas, PA chairman**, swore in **Preventive Security chief Abed Suleiman Ahmad Abu Mahmid** to his new position, as well as his deputy, **Iyad Taher Muhammad Aqra**.

The ceremony was attended by Palestinian Interior Minister Ziad Hab al-Reeh (Wafa, February 15, 2024). The ceremony took place amid statements made by Mahmoud Abbas and senior PA figures about reforms, including changes in the security apparatuses.



**The swearing-in ceremony of Abdel Qader al-Tamari (right) and Iyad Aqra (left) in Mahmoud Abbas' office (Mahmoud Abbas' Facebook page, February 16, 2024)**

► **PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh** participated in the 37<sup>th</sup> African Union Conference held in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. Speaking on behalf of PA chairman Mahmoud Abbas, he called for an international boycott of Israel and imposing sanctions on it for its [alleged] crimes and violations of international law. He called for recognition of a “State of Palestine” and for the UN Security Council to set a timetable for ending the "occupation." He also called for imposing international sanctions on Israel’s settlement project (Wafa, February 17, 2024).



**Right: Muhammad Shtayyeh giving a speech at the summit. Left: Mohammad Shtayyeh meets with the president of South Africa (Wafa, February 17, 2024)**

► Shtayyeh held several meetings on the sidelines of the conference. Meeting with **Cyril Ramaphosa, president of South Africa**, Shtayyeh said the PA was grateful to South Africa for appealing to the International Court of Justice in The Hague and accusing Israel of committing "genocide," adding that the act had left its mark in the hearts of the Palestinian people. He also said that the decision had been in the name of "all the free people in the world and as a sign of victory for justice, truth and humanity," and that South Africa had known colonialism and apartheid, opposed it and won as it would today (Muhammad Shtayyeh's Facebook page, February 18, 2024).

► In a meeting with **Brazilian President Luiz Inácio da Silva**, with **Riyadh al-Maliki, PA foreign minister**, in attendance, they discussed international efforts to stop the "aggression" against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. Shtayyeh said their top priority was to prevent Israeli entry into Rafah, where there were approximately 1.4 million displaced persons, a ceasefire, the opening of all the crossings, the entry of aid and the restoration of electricity and water facilities. The Brazilian president affirmed his country's position on the immediate need for a ceasefire and the entry of aid and confirmed Brazil's support for "Palestine's" request for full membership in the United Nations. He also expressed support for the case filed by South Africa at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, saying Brazil was the first country in South America to recognize a Palestinian state (Wafa, February 17, 2024).

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## Iran

► **Hossein-Amir Abdollahian, Iranian foreign minister**, spoke with Hossein Ibrahim, secretary-general of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), to discuss developments in the Palestinian arena, especially Israel's attacks in Rafah and the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. Abdollahian stressed the need for increased international activity, especially of the OIC, to stop the Israeli attacks. He also asked to convene the OIC's Council of Ministers to discuss the situation in the Gaza Strip (Mehr, February 15, 2024).

► Abdollahian spoke with **Faisal bin Farhan, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister**, to discuss relations between the countries and international and regional issues, including developments in the Gaza Strip. Abdollahian expressed concern over the humanitarian situation in the northern Gaza Strip and Israel's threats to expand its activity to Rafah. The two

agreed on the need for an emergency meeting of the OIC foreign ministers (IRNA, February 16, 2024).

► **Ali Akbar Velayati, Iranian supreme leader's senior advisor for international affairs**, said in an interview that the "resistance front" was more successful and was achieving more victories by the day. He noted that the expansion of the "resistance axis" provided greater opportunities in the campaign against Israel (the "Zionists") and the United States in the region. He criticized the conduct of some of the Arab and Muslim countries, saying that they did not work for the Palestinians and made do with issuing announcements for economic reasons and to win American support (al-Jazeera, February 16, 2024).

► Citing "Iranian and Iraqi sources," Reuters reported that the visit of **Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani** to Baghdad on January 29, 2024, had led to the cessation of the attacks by Iraqi pro-Iranian militias against the American forces in Iraq and Syria. According to the report, Qaani made it clear to the militias that they had to keep a low profile to prevent American attacks against their senior figures, the destruction of significant infrastructure, and even a direct American response against Iran itself. Without Qaani's intervention, the report stated, it would not have been possible to persuade the Kataib Hezbollah (Hezbollah Brigades) militia to stop its military operations (Reuters, February 18, 2024).

► Citing "two senior Western officials," The New York Times reported that Israel had attacked two gas pipelines in Iran and was responsible for the explosion that occurred on February 14, 2024, at the main gas pipeline in the Iranian city of Borujen. A military strategist affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) said the Iranian government also believed that Israel was behind the attack because of the complexity and scope of the operation. He also said such an operation had required the assistance of collaborators inside Iran (The New York Times, February 17, 2024).

## Pro-Iranian militias

### Iraq

► The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for the February 12, 2024 UAV attack on a military target in the "occupied Golan Heights" (Islamic Resistance Telegram channel, February 15, 2024). The statement was issued by a new group of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, which was opened after Kataib Hezbollah announced the suspension of its activities. The statement was not quoted by the Saber Telegram channel, which is affiliated with the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq. However, it was posted on the Telegram channel of the Nujaba

Movement militia, which in the past was reported to be hindering an arrangement with the Iraqi government to stop the attacks. In practice, no such incident was detected.

► An attack was reported on the American Green Village base near the base in the al-Omar oil field in eastern Deir ez-Zor, Syria (al-Mayadeen, February 15, 2024).

## Yemen

► The Houthis reported several American and British airstrikes in the al-Hudaydah area in western Yemen and in the Ras Issa area in the al-Salif District (al-Masirah, February 16, 2024).

◀ **Yahya Saria, spokesman for the Houthi armed forces**, said two ships had been attacked in the Red Sea (Yahya Saria's Telegram channel, February 17, 2024):

◆ The British ship LYCAVITOS in the Gulf of Aden, which was directly hit by several naval missiles. The United States Central Command (CENTCOM) announced that on February 15, 2024, at around 4:30 p.m. (Sana'a time), a ballistic missile was fired at a British ship flying the Barbados flag from Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen towards the Gulf of Aden, and that there were no casualties (CENTCOM Account X, February 16, 2024).

◆ The British oil tanker Pollux in the Red Sea, was attacked with a large number of missiles. CENTCOM announced that on February 16, 2024, from noon until 1:00 a.m. Sana'a time, four anti-ship ballistic missiles were launched in the Red Sea, and at least three of them were aimed at the Danish-owned commercial vessel MT Pollux flying the Panama flag. No casualties or damage were reported from the vessel or any other ship in the area (CENTCOM X account, February 17, 2024).

► **Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, leader of the Houthis in Yemen**, said that their activity at sea had prevented the movement of ships linked to Israel, was a strategic change in the regional situation, and had a major impact on the American-British presence. He noted that they had assured European countries that their attacks on the Red Sea would not be directed at them. He added that the front in Yemen continued despite the American and British "aggression" and their support for Israel. He also said the attacks on Yemen would not achieve their goal and that the only solution was to stop the "aggression" in the Gaza Strip (Ansar Allah Information Center, February 15, 2024).

► **Brad Cooper, commander of the United States Navy's Fifth Fleet**, said in an interview that IRGC operatives were in Yemeni territory, serving alongside the Houthis and providing them with advice and information about targets. He noted that at the current stage, their job was

to be prepared to continue to be aggressive in exercising their right to self-defense (CBS Network, February 16, 2024).

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## The Arab Arena

### Egypt

► **Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi** spoke with French President Emmanuel Macron and discussed the ongoing efforts to achieve a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, a hostage deal and the entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. The two also noted the need to promote bilateral cooperation to alleviate the Gazans' suffering. El-Sisi noted Egypt's position opposing the displacement of Palestinians to its territory in any way or form (Egyptian presidential website, February 17, 2024).

► **Mikhail Bogdanov, Russian deputy foreign minister**, met with the Egyptian ambassador to Russia to discuss "developments in the situation in the Palestinian territories." The Egyptian ambassador stressed Egypt's opposition to any military operation in Rafah that would threaten regional stability (RT, February 15, 2024).

### Jordan

► After visiting Washington, **King Abdullah II of Jordan** arrived in London and met with **Rishi Sunak, British prime minister**. King Abdullah stressed the need to establish a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, protect civilians, and provide humanitarian aid. He also warned of the consequences of the Israeli attack on Rafah, which was crowded with displaced persons. He said that military and security solutions would not achieve peace and that the only way was to create a political horizon based on the two-state solution. He also said Britain played a key role in creating a political horizon for ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Petra, February 15, 2024).

► After visiting London, King Abdullah arrived in Paris where he met with **French President Emmanuel Macron**. At a joint press conference, King Abdullah said the meeting was part of the ongoing coordination between the two countries in recent months to work to end the war in the Gaza Strip and prevent the humanitarian catastrophe. He said an attack in Rafah would have unprecedented humanitarian and security implications and that a ceasefire had to be achieved in the Gaza Strip (al-Mamlaka, February 16, 2024). Macron said recognizing a

Palestinian state was not taboo for France. He reiterated the warning against an Israeli attack on Rafah, claiming that such an attack would be a turning point in the conflict. He also said he joined Jordan and Egypt's concerns about the forced displacement of Palestinians and that it would be a grave violation of international law (Agence France-Presse, February 16, 2024).

► **Ayman al-Safadi, Jordanian foreign minister**, said that if the Palestinians did not have a state, Israel would not achieve security. He claimed that there was a change in international positions to exert pressure on Israel to stop its “aggression” against the Gaza Strip and that they completely opposed any plan to isolate the Gaza Strip. He said they were coordinating with the Egyptian side, which held the same opinion (al-Jazeera, February 17, 2024).

## Qatar

► **Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman** said that time was not on their side and that with the arrival of Ramadan, the situation would pose a danger to the region. He said they saw no reason to continue the war, and that stopping it would lead to the return of the hostages. He also said they wanted to see a united Palestinian government representing the Palestinian people in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip (al-Jazeera, February 17, 2024).

## Saudi Arabia

► **Faisal bin Farhan, Saudi Arabia’s foreign minister**, told a panel at the Munich Security Conference that Israel's activity in the Gaza Strip constituted a "new level of extremism" and stressed that even before the events of October 7, 2023 [the Hamas attack and massacre], the only solution to the situation in the region had been the establishment of a Palestinian state (al-Hadath, February 17, 2024).

## Turkey

► **Bulent Yildirim, IHH chairman**, who had been in charge of the Mavi Marmara flotilla in 2010, said at "The Resistance Forum" conference in Istanbul that the organization had purchased ships with donations and that a flotilla was supposed to leave next month and was intended to provide humanitarian aid to the residents of the Gaza Strip. He noted that "the time for talking and goodwill is over, and the time for delay has passed, we are going to al-Aqsa Mosque and Gaza" (Anadolu News, February 18, 2024).



**Flags of Hamas, “Palestine” and Turkey at a conference in Istanbul  
(Anadolu News, February 18, 2024)**

## The International Arena

### European Union

► **Josep Borrell, EU foreign policy chief**, said in a statement that the EU had asked the Israeli government not to take military action in Rafah that would exacerbate the already catastrophic humanitarian situation. He added that the EU recognized Israel's right to defend itself in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law. It was also noted that the EU reiterated its call on Hamas to release all the hostages, immediately and unconditionally (EU website, February 16, 2024).

### UNRWA

► **Philippe Lazarini, UNRWA's commissioner general**, alleged that Israel was waging an extensive campaign to eliminate UNRWA. He claimed that the campaign included planning countermeasures at government meetings, calling for his resignation, promoting the removal of the employees' exemption from VAT and issuing orders to stop handling food shipments for the agency. He claimed that behind the statements there was the political goal to decide the fate of the Palestinians (Agence France-Presse, February 17, 2024).

### International Court of Justice

► The International Court of Justice (ICJ) rejected South Africa's second request and announced that at the current stage, no further orders would be imposed on Israel (Israeli media, February 17, 2024).

### United States

► During a discussion at the Munich Security Conference, **American Secretary of State Antony Blinken** said that in the coming months there would be an extraordinary opportunity for Israel to normalize relations with its Arab neighbors. He added that almost every Arab country genuinely wanted to integrate Israel into the region to normalize relations and provide security commitments so that Israel would be able to feel more secure. He also claimed that the Arab states were leading efforts to reform the PA and stressed the need for the establishment of a Palestinian state (Reuters, February 17, 2024).

► On the sidelines of the conference, Blinken met with **French Foreign Minister Stéphane Séjourné**, where they discussed the importance of preventing the conflict from spreading in the Gaza Strip, including avoiding escalation in Lebanon, and the need to deter the Houthis' illegal attacks against merchant ships in the Red Sea (American Department of State website, February 17, 2024).

► Interviewed at the Munich Security Conference, **Amos Hochstein, the American mediator to Lebanon**, repeated the messages of the United States administration, stating that their goal was to end the fighting in south Lebanon and the return of residents on both sides of the border to their homes by creating a complex arrangement that would include reciprocal steps that would provide guarantees for their security. Hochstein refrained from speaking explicitly about Hezbollah, but in response to a question about the complexity of mediation with an organization declared a terrorist organization by the United States, he said the United States had a way of talking to all actors in the Middle East, noting that they would continue to do so. He also said he was in contact with partners from Europe and the Middle East, and that the efforts in Lebanon would require extensive construction of the Lebanese army and economy (al-Arabiya, February 17, 2024).

## Russia

► Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov said Russia had invited representatives of 14 Palestinian organizations, including Hamas and the PIJ, to a meeting in Moscow. He said they were in contact with all sides to release all the hostages. He also noted that Russia was concerned about the situation in the Rafah area (TASS News Agency, February 16, 2024).

► Muhammad al-Haj Musa, spokesman for the PIJ in Lebanon, said his organization had received an official invitation to visit Moscow at the end of February, and that an official PIJ delegation would participate in the Palestinian national dialogue to be held in Moscow (Sputnik in Arabic, February 16, 2024).