



Operation Iron Swords Updated to 1 p.m., February 19, 2024

Northern Arena	Israeli Casualties	Rocket Fire
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 860 attacks• 205 Hezbollah operatives killed• 37 operatives of other terrorist-organization killed• One non-affiliated operative• One Lebanese army soldier killed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approximately 1,500 military and civilian dead (unofficial estimate)• 130 hostages remain in the Gaza Strip	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approximately 11,000 rockets and mortar shells• Approximately 9,000 rockets and mortar shells launched from the Gaza Strip• Approximately 2,000 rockets launched from Lebanon and 30 from Syria

Overview¹

► **The southern arena:** The IDF forces continued to focus their activity on the Khan Yunis area in the southern Gaza Strip, clashing with squads of terrorist operatives. During the activities the forces found large quantities of weapons. At Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis, where the forces have been operating for several days, hundreds of Gazans hiding in the hospital and suspected of terrorist activities were detained, among them operatives who had participated in the October 7, 2023 terrorist attack and massacre. Large quantities of weapons were also found in the hospital, as well as cartons of medicine intended for Israeli hostages which had not been delivered to them.

► **According to unofficial data, since October 7, 2023, approximately 1,500 Israeli civilians and security personnel have been killed, 574 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.**

¹ 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 reiterated its claim that given the difficult humanitarian situation in the northern Gaza Strip, if the issue of humanitarian aid to the northern Gaza Strip was not resolved, they would have no choice but to suspend the negotiations for a hostages deal.

► **The situation in the Gaza Strip:** Senior Hamas members denied Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant's statement that Hamas was looking for a replacement for Yahya al-Sinwar and claimed it had been made to raise the morale of the IDF fighters and the Israeli public.

► **The northern arena:** During the past day Hezbollah claimed responsibility for nine attacks.

► **The Palestinian Authority:** Senior Palestinian figures criticized the Israeli government's decision to limit the entry of Israeli Arabs to the Temple Mount for prayers during the month of Ramadan and warned "the situation would explode." Criticism was also leveled at the Israeli government for stating that Israel rejected international dictates regarding a permanent arrangement with the Palestinians and such a settlement would only be achieved through direct negotiations between the sides.

► **The pro-Iranian militias:** The Houthis attacked a British-registered cargo ship operated by a Lebanese company. The ship was damaged and the crew abandoned it.

► **The International Court of Justice** in The Hague has begun discussing the Palestinian Authority's request for a Court opinion on the legality of the "Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories." Israel decided not to send legal representation to the discussion. Representatives of Egypt and Jordan are scheduled to appear before the court in the coming days.

The Southern Arena

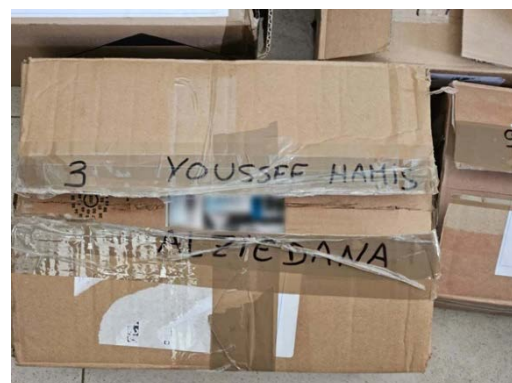
► The IDF forces continued to clear the western Khan Yunis area, raiding terrorist targets where weapons, drones, an RPG launcher, IEDs and other military equipment were located. The forces attacked terrorist squads with close aerial support (IDF spokesperson, February 19, 2024).

► Meanwhile, the forces continued their activity at Nasser Hospital. So far, hundreds of terrorists and Gazans suspected of terrorist activity who were hiding in the hospital have been detained. Among the detainees are terrorists who participated in the October 7, 2023 terrorist attack and massacre, terrorists with connections to the hostages and senior Hamas operatives. Large quantities of weapons were found in the hospital, some of which were

hidden in vehicles used by Hamas terrorist operatives to carry out the October 7, 2023 attack and massacre. A vehicle belonging to Kibbutz Nir Oz, apparently stolen during the attack, was found in the hospital complex. Cartons of medicine were found with the names of Israeli hostages on them, the individual boxes were sealed and had not been transferred to the hostages (IDF spokesperson, February 18, 2024).



Right: A vehicle used by Hamas terrorists on October 7, 2023. Left: Weapons found in the hospital (IDF spokesperson, February 18, 2024)



The sealed boxes of medicine found in the Nasser Hospital which had not been received by the hostages (IDF spokesperson, February 18, 2024)

► **Hashem Zaqout, a correspondent for al-Jazeera TV in Rafah**, reported that after the IDF repositioned itself outside eastern Khan Yunis, tanks and armored vehicles entered the Algerian Hospital area in Abasan during heavy exchanges of fire with the "resistance [terrorist]" operatives. He reported that the IDF's ground activity focused on the west of Khan Yunis, on Nasser and Amal Hospitals, whose surroundings were under fire from artillery. He claimed the IDF was preventing medicines, medical equipment and food from being brought into Nasser Hospital, and had detained all the men, including the medical staff, and taken them to an unknown location. He added that the conditions in Amal Hospital were no better (al-Jazeera YouTube channel, February 19, 2024).

► In **Rafah** attacks were reported in the area of Khirbat al-Adas and the Shaboura neighborhood. It was also reported that Israeli Navy ships fired at the west of the city (Ma'an, February 19, 2024; Wafa, February 19, 2024). Al-Arabi TV reported that Khan Yunis had been under siege by IDF forces for two weeks, and claimed the IDF forces did not allow aid to enter the city and prevented the displaced persons from reaching the places designated for obtaining water (al-Arabi TV, February 18, 2024).

► **The central Gaza Strip:** Palestinian media reported casualties in attacks on houses in Deir al-Balah, the Nuseirat refugee camp, the Bureij refugee camp, the Maghazi refugee camp, and al-Zuweida (Ma'an, February 19, 2024; Wafa, February 19, 2024).

► **The northern Gaza Strip:** According to Palestinian reports, a house in the Beit Lahia area was attacked, and artillery was fired at a group of Palestinians in east Jabalia. In Gaza City, according to reports, the Israeli Air Force attacked the Rimal, Zeitoun, Sheikh Radwan and Shejaiya neighborhoods (Ma'an, February 19, 2024; Wafa, February 19, 2024).



Israeli Air Force strikes in the northern Gaza Strip (Shehab X account, February 18, 2024)

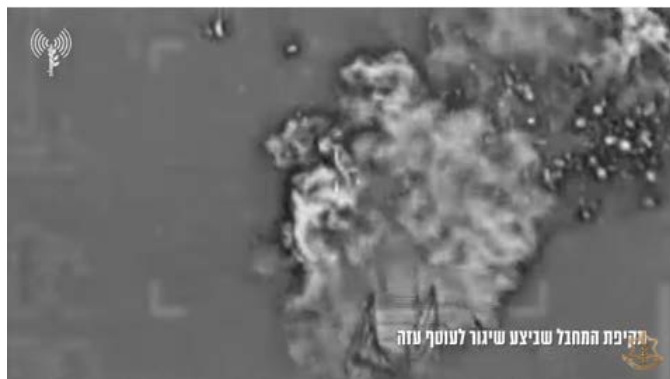
The Palestinian perspective on the fighting

► **Osama Hamdan, a senior Hamas member** who is visiting Tehran, said in a television interview that the figure of 12,000 Hamas deaths published by Israel was incorrect. He claimed fear ruled Israel because the "resistance" [Palestinian terrorist organizations] still existed and could repeat their attacks a second and third time. He also claimed they could stay in the tunnels for several more months, "until the final victory" (Afaq network, February 18, 2024).

Rocket fire from the Gaza Strip

► On the morning of February 18, 2024, a rocket was launched from the central Gaza Strip into Israeli territory and fell in an open area near the Gaza Strip. A few minutes later, the terrorist

who carried out the launch was located in the Gaza City area, and attacked and killed by an Air Force aircraft (IDF spokesperson, February 19, 2024).



Attack on the terrorist who launched the rocket (IDF spokesperson, February 19, 2024)

►On the morning of February 19, 2024, sirens were activated in the cities, towns and villages surrounding the Gaza Strip, but no rockets entering Israel territory were detected (IDF spokesperson, February 19, 2024).

Israeli casualties

►According to unofficial data, since October 7, 2023, approximately 1,500 Israeli people have been killed. According to the IDF spokesperson, 574 of them are soldiers and officers (236 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

►Osama Hamdan, a senior Hamas member, said during an interview given at a media exhibition in Iran, that there would be no hostage deal with Israel until various critical issues had been dealt with. He claimed that talks about the terms of a deal were meaningless while Israeli attacks continued. He said that only after the Israeli attacks stopped would it be possible to discuss issues such as the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and aid to the Palestinians. A hostage deal, he stated, would come only after all those issues had been resolved (Tehran Times, February 18, 2024).

►Mahmoud Mardawi, a senior Hamas member, said that Netanyahu prioritized remaining in power and surrendered to the demands of his coalition partners from the national religious faction, and therefore ignored the issue of the hostages. Due to the opposition of his coalition partners, he was also unwilling to show flexibility on the issue, and he was working to fulfill their ambitions, including the displacement of the Palestinians from the Gaza Strip. He said

that had caused Hamas to warn Israel that if it did not change its policy, Hamas would end the negotiations because they were useless and led nowhere. He claimed suspending the negotiations would reveal Netanyahu's lack of seriousness. He also said that Hamas insisted that if the issue of aid to the northern Gaza Strip, which Israel used to exert pressure on Hamas, was not resolved, they would have no choice but to suspend the negotiations. He claimed Hamas' position was a clear compromise, and the ball was now in the court of the mediators, who had to reexamine their method of mediation if no breakthrough was achieved (al-Jazeera TV X account, February 18, 2024).

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The Gaza Strip

Palestinian casualties

- ▶ **The Hamas-controlled ministry of health in the Gaza Strip** reported at 12 noon, February 19, 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 69,028 (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page, February 19, 2024).
- ▶ On the evening of February 14, 2024, the death of journalist Mu'ataz (or al-Mu'ataz Ballah) Mustafa al-Ghafari was reported. He was killed along with his wife and son in a targeted attack on vehicle near the Sheikh Radwan pond in the north of Gaza City (Palinfo, February 14, 2024). According to his Facebook page, Ghafari, 25 years old, was a photographer and graphic designer. He previously worked as a media photographer under Muhammad al-Dasouqi, a journalist for the al-Alam news network (al-Alam al-Akhbariya network), which is apparently no longer active. According to his Facebook page, he was a "jihad fighter" [terrorist operative], most likely in the military wing of the Resistance Committees, the Salah al-Din Brigades (Mu'ataz al-Ghafari's Facebook page, April 25, 2020).



Right: Mu'ataz al-Ghafari while working as a photographer for the al-Alam news network (Mohmedaldasoqe's Facebook page, August 18, 2016). Left: An award from the Resistance Committees and Salah al-Din Brigades for "the brother of the beloved jihadist Mu'ataz Mustafa al-Ghafari on the occasion of his wedding" (Mu'ataz al-Ghafari's Facebook page, April 25, 2020)

► **The al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades (AAMB)** issued a mourning notice for the death of Yusuf Dhib Abu 'Adi, the commander and released prisoner who was deported to the Gaza Strip, and who was a prominent AAMB commander and killed in an attack in Rafah (elaqsa_1965, the AAMB Telegram channel, February 15, 2024). It was reported that Yusuf Dhib Hamad Abu 'Adi, 47 years old, from Kafr Na'ama, west of Ramallah, was released in the Gilad Shalit exchange deal in 2011 and deported to the Gaza Strip. Fatah's Awda channel described him as a senior movement operative (Facebook page of Abu 'Adi's niece, Ola Ibrahim Ramadan, February 14, 2024; Telegram channel of the Awda channel of Fatah's media information and cultural commission, February 14, 2024). Abu 'Adi stabbed an IDF soldier to death at the Qalandiya checkpoint on December 8, 2005, and subsequently served a prison sentence in Israel (Haaretz, December 8, 2005). He was released as part of the Gilad Shalit exchange deal and deported to the Gaza Strip.



Yosef Dhib Abu 'Adi (Ola Ibrahim Ramadan's Facebook page, February 14, 2024)

►The IDF spokesperson said that in a joint IDF-Israeli Security Agency (ISA) operation, Ahmed al-Ghoul, commander of Hamas' Shati Brigade, who participated in the October 7, 2023 attack and massacre, was eliminated by an aircraft in Gaza City. After his return to the Gaza Strip, he held a kidnapped female soldier who was murdered by Hamas inside Shifa Hospital (IDF X account, February 15, 2024). On February 13, 2024, one of al-Ghoul's relatives reported the death of "jihad fighter" Ahmed al-Ghoul Abu Bilal in Gaza City (Facebook page of La'i Abu Muhammad, February 13, 2024).



Ahmed al-Ghoul (Facebook page of La'i Abu Muhammad, February 13, 2024)

The situation in the Gaza Strip

►Anas al-Sharif, a correspondent for al-Jazeera TV in the northern Gaza Strip, reported that the IDF had intensified its attacks on civilian homes. He said the humanitarian situation was "catastrophic" and hunger was increasing in the northern Gaza Strip, and the more than 700,000 Palestinians who remained in Gaza City and the northern Gaza Strip were unable to obtain flour, canned goods, rice and drinking water because the IDF was [allegedly] preventing the entry of aid (al-Jazeera YouTube channel, February 19, 2024).



Anas al-Sharif, correspondent for al-Jazeera TV in the northern Gaza Strip, reports on the difficult humanitarian situation in the northern Gaza Strip (al-Jazeera YouTube channel, February 19, 2024)

Reactions to the Israeli defense minister's statement about replacing Yahya al-Sinwar

► Asked about Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant's statement that Hamas was looking for a replacement for Yahya al-Sinwar, **Muhammad Nizal, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, said that "Galant competed with Netanyahu in telling lies." He claimed al-Sinwar was the head of the Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip, the political and military leadership continued the "resistance" [terrorism and violence directed at Israel], and talk about harming it or disbanding it was incorrect. He claimed that if Israel had succeeded in dismantling Hamas' capabilities and its control centers, they would have been able to prove it with photographs. Netanyahu's statement that Israel had succeeded in disbanding 75% of the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades battalions was also "a big lie" because if that were true, who was fighting the IDF in Khan Yunis, Gaza City and the northern Gaza Strip, and who was launching rockets?

► He claimed the statements made by Israeli officials were intended to raise the morale of the Israeli public and to provide justification for continued "aggression." Al-Sinwar, he claimed, continued to head the Hamas leadership in Gaza, and it would be impossible for them to look for a replacement because Hamas leaders were elected at the polls. Regarding the publication of the number of Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades operatives who had been killed, he claimed only the leadership on the ground in the Gaza Strip knew the real number of dead and wounded. The leadership's policy was not to provide Israel with any information on the subject, and they did not reveal the names and number of the dead and wounded because Israel would [allegedly] persecute and kill their families. At the end of the war, the leadership on the ground would decide what to make public (al-Jazeera Mubasher YouTube channel, February 18, 2024).

► A "high-ranking member of the Hamas leadership" responded to Israeli Defense Minister Gallant's statement by saying that Israel's [alleged] "attempts to fabricate information" about the movement's leadership and Yahya al-Sinwar were "ridiculous" and intended to raise the morale of the IDF and the Israeli public. He claimed Gallant's statements about internal Hamas leadership disagreements and the search for a replacement for Yahya al-Sinwar were "empty words and overt psychological warfare" (Quds Press, February 19, 2024).

Hamas-Brazil

► **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, met with Rui Costa Pimenta, chairman of the Brazilian Workers' Cause Party, and with the delegation accompanying him. They

discussed the need to stop the "aggression," introduce urgent humanitarian aid to the residents of the Gaza Strip and begin restoring and rebuilding what Israel had destroyed. The right of the Palestinian people to "resist the occupation" [attack Israel] until its removal from the land of "Palestine" was also discussed. Haniyeh and senior Hamas officials who participated in the meeting expressed their appreciation to the Brazilian party for its positions supporting Hamas and for organizing activities where Palestinian and Hamas flags were raised (Hamas Telegram channel, February 18, 2024).

►Meanwhile, Hamas issued a statement welcoming the remarks of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the president of Brazil, in which he compared Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip to the actions of the Nazis. Hamas claimed the statement of the president of Brazil accurately described what the Palestinian people were experiencing with the full support of the American administration under the leadership of President Joe Biden. Hamas demanded that the International Court of Justice in The Hague take into account the president of Brazil's statement (Hamas Telegram channel, February 18, 2024).

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The Northern Arena

Hezbollah attacks

►During the past day, Hezbollah claimed responsibility for **nine attacks** using anti-tank missiles, rockets and a Burkan rocket, whose warheads weigh between 300 and 500 kilograms (between 660 and 1100 pounds) (Hezbollah combat information Telegram channel, February 18-19, 2024).



IDF forces on the Lebanese border (IDF spokesperson, February 19, 2024)

IDF strikes in response to Hezbollah's attacks

► In Lebanon, it was reported that an attack was carried out in the al-Hariqah neighborhood in the suburbs of Aitaroun (Fouad Khreiss' X account, February 18, 2024) and an attack in the Abu al-Laban neighborhood in Aita al-Sha'ab, as well as in the village's suburbs (Fouad Khreiss' X account, February 18, 2024).



Right: Attacks in Aitaroun (Fouad Khreiss' X account, February 18, 2024). Center and left: Attacks in Aita al-Sha'ab (Fouad Khreiss' X account, February 18, 2024)

The Lebanese government

► On the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, **Najib Mikati, prime minister of the interim government in Lebanon**, met with Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, the prime minister of Qatar, to discuss the situation in south Lebanon and the efforts to reach a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip (Lebanese prime minister's office X account, February 18, 2024).

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Israel, Judea and Samaria

Counterterrorism activities

► Since the beginning of the war in the Gaza Strip, more than 3,100 wanted Palestinians have been detained, of whom more than 1,350 are Hamas operatives (IDF spokesperson's Telegram channel, February 18, 2024).

► On the night of February 18, 2024, Israeli security forces detained 22 wanted Palestinians in Judea and Samaria. Security forces carried out a counterterrorism operation in the village of Qabatiya (south of Jenin) and detained nine wanted Palestinians. In the village of Ras Karkar (northwest of Ramallah), they detained two wanted Palestinians and seized two handguns. In al-Bireh (northeast of Ramallah), they detained a wanted Palestinian and seized funds intended to finance terrorist activity. In the village of Qaddum (west of Nablus), the forces

seized weapons, and in an operation in Hebron, they detained two wanted Palestinians and questioned suspects (IDF spokesperson, February 19, 2024).



Documentation of the IDF forces' activity (IDF spokesperson, February 19, 2024)

► On February 18, 2024, Israeli security forces detained Ahmed Ofi, a senior wanted Palestinian from Tulkarm who was involved in several shooting attacks. He was also involved in the murder of Tulkarm residents suspected of collaborating with Israeli security forces. Ofi resisted arrest and after an exchange of fire with the forces, he was killed and his weapon seized. The forces clashed with armed operatives who shot and threw IEDs at them, killing one of the operatives (IDF spokesperson, February 18, 2024). The PA ministry of health reported that those killed in Tulkarm were Muhammad Ahmad Fayez al-Ofi, 36, whose body was taken by IDF forces, and Nabil Ata Muhammad Amer, 19 (Wafa, February 18, 2024).



The two fatalities in Tulkarm. Al-Ofi on the left (Tamimi qaseme's X account, February 18, 2024)

► An IDF force carried out procedure for detaining a Palestinian suspect at the checkpoint between Itamar and Beit Furik. As he did not respond to the force's calls, he was shot. A military medical team pronounced him dead (Judea and Samaria Rescue Without Borders

Telegram channel, February 18, 2024). The Palestinians reported that he was Anas Jamil Dweikat, from the village of Rujib, east of Nablus (Wafa, February 18, 2024). According to his Facebook page and Palestinian web surfers, he was an officer in the PA's security apparatus (khalidounnaji X account, February 18, 2024). A military funeral was held for him.



Right: Anas Dweikat (Dweikat's Facebook page, October 13, 2022). Left: The military funeral held for him (QudsN X account, February 19, 2024)

Reactions to the restriction on access to the Temple Mount during the month of Ramadan

► The Israeli government decided to restrict Arab citizens of Israel from praying on the Temple Mount during the month of Ramadan. The decision sparked a wave of angry reactions. Many officials warned Israel that the step would lead to an "explosion of the situation:"

◆ **Mahmoud al-Habbash, advisor to Mahmoud Abbas bureau for religious affairs and Islamic relations**, warned against Israel's intention to restrict the entry of worshippers, saying that such a step would ignite the situation in a way that could not be predicted or controlled. Al-Habbash called for increased presence at al-Aqsa Mosque and also called on the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to take immediate and serious action on the international and regional levels to "defend" the mosque (Wafa, February 19, 2024).

◆ **Hamas** claimed it was a religious war waged by the Israeli government ("the occupation") against the Palestinian people. Hamas also claimed that the decision indicated Israel's intention to escalate its "aggression" against al-Aqsa Mosque during the month of Ramadan. Hamas called on Palestinians in Judea and Samaria to "resist" the decision and unite, warning that harming al-Aqsa or freedom of worship would not go unanswered (Hamas Telegram channel, February 19, 2024).

◆ **The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)** issued a warning about Israel's plans to restrict the access of worshippers, claiming the significance of the step was that the Israeli government had targeted al-Aqsa as part of the [alleged] “genocide” in the Gaza Strip, and that Israel's attack was directed at the entire Arab-Muslim nation and its holy sites. The organization called on the Palestinian people everywhere to use all means to defend the holy sites, especially al-Aqsa (PIJ Telegram channel, February 19, 2024).

Israel's declaration on permanent status

► At an Israeli cabinet meeting on February 18, 2024, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu submitted a joint statement for the ministers' approval. According to the statement, Israel rejects out of hand international dictates regarding the final status agreement with the Palestinians. The statement further says that such an arrangement will only be achieved through direct negotiations between the sides, without preconditions (Israeli prime minister's website, February 18, 2024).

► **Nabil Abu Rudeina, spokesman for Mahmoud Abbas' office**, said in response that Israeli “aggression” would not lead to regional and global security and stability, and that the Palestinian position was clear in the face of the extremist and uncompromising Israeli position. He said Arab activity had to be intensified and the international position in the world had to be developed (Wafa, February 18, 2024).

► Hamas condemned the decision of the "Zionist terrorist government to refuse to recognize a Palestinian state" and claimed that the decision was an international challenge that emphasized Israel's attempts to evade international resolutions and had been part of Israel's policy since the beginning of the negotiations more than 30 years ago, which was based on "buying time" (Hamas Telegram channel, February 18, 2024).

Palestinian Authority (PA)

► **Mahmoud Abbas, PA chairman**, held an extended meeting of the Palestinian leadership attended by **Hussein al-Sheikh, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee**, members of Fatah's Central Committee, several ministers and heads of the security services. Abbas said the objective of the meeting was to discuss preventing attacks on the Palestinians and stopping activities to expel the Palestinian people from its land, especially from Rafah. He said he had contacted the leaders of more than 80 countries, "who had begun to understand the Palestinian position." He also welcomed Russia's invitation to the Palestinian organizations to attend a meeting (Wafa, February 18, 2024).



The Palestinian leadership meeting headed by Mahmoud Abbas (Wafa, February 18, 2024)

► **PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh** took part in the Munich Security Conference on February 18, 2024. In an open interview, he said that an immediate ceasefire had to be reached in the Gaza Strip and that international aid had to be allowed in. He added that they were working to unite the Palestinian ranks and that the UN had to recognize an independent Palestinian state. He claimed Israel was working to undermine the PA and said the two-state solution had to be implemented on the ground. He went on to say that what happened on October 7 was a disaster for "everyone" and that they would not accept the killing of innocent civilians. He also claimed that a solution to the Palestinian issue had to be found, and to that end they were reaching out to the Israeli side, but they had no partner in Israel, and therefore the intervention of a third party was required. Regarding Hamas' joining the PLO, Shtayyeh said that Hamas was an integral part of Palestinian politics but that in order for it to join the PLO, it had to accept the organization's political platform. Moreover, he stressed that Hamas had to understand that they were calling for "popular resistance" and nothing else (Munich Security Conference YouTube channel, February 18, 2024).



**Muhammad Shtayyeh in an interview at the Munich Security Conference
(Muhammad Shtayyeh's Facebook page, February 18, 2024)**

► **Hussein al-Sheikh, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee**, spoke with **Badr bin Hamad al-Busaidi, Oman's foreign minister**. They discussed the latest developments, "Israel's aggression" against the Palestinian people and the unification of the Palestinian ranks. They agreed on an urgent bilateral move to pressure the Israeli government to stop the war and prevent it from operating in Rafah. They stressed that all the prisoners and hostages had to be released, humanitarian supplies had to be brought into the Gaza Strip, the siege of the Strip had to end, and Israeli forces had to leave in preparation for achieving a fair and comprehensive political solution to the Palestinian issue (Omani foreign minister's X account, February 18, 2024).

► Interviewed by the al-Arabiya network, **Hussein al-Sheikh** said that security coordination with Israel had stopped long ago and that the PA had publicly announced it. He added that the issue of safe corridors and safe havens was an Israeli lie and that there was no safe place in the Gaza Strip under Israeli attacks. He estimated that the objective of the IDF forces' entering Rafah was to expel the Palestinians and rearrange the map of the border with Egypt (al-Arabiya, February 18, 2023).

The PA's financial situation

► The Wall Street Journal reported that the American administration wanted to support the PA financially amid warnings by PA officials that the money was running out, which could jeopardize the United States' desire for the PA to control the Gaza Strip after the war with Israel. American officials said the United States was trying to circumvent a law preventing it from donating funds directly to the PA, pushing allies to contribute more to it. According to American officials, Palestinian figures had warned that funds for paying salaries and providing essential government payments would run out by the end of February, and they were concerned that without an increase in revenues, the PA would not be stable enough to maintain its hold on power or take on a broader role (The Wall Street Journal, February 18, 2024).

► The Norwegian foreign ministry announced that they were prepared to assist in transferring the tax revenues to the PA. The ministry's announcement noted that the temporary plan would prevent the PA's financial collapse (Reuters, February 18, 2024).

Iran

- ▶ **Mohammad Bagheri, chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces**, declared at a ceremony in Bandar Abbas that no superpower could change the fate of the war in the Gaza Strip. He said the fate of the war was absolutely clear, there would be an unprecedented defeat of the "Zionist regime" against part of the "oppressed people under siege in Gaza" (Tasnim, February 16, 2024).
- ▶ On February 18, 2024, The Washington Post reported that Iranian officials had urged Hezbollah to exercise restraint vis-à-vis Israel so as not to expand the war in the region or jeopardize the achievements of the war so far, the most important of which was returning the Palestinian issue to the center of global attention and hindering the normalization process between Israel and Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. According to the report, Iranian officials told Hezbollah that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu should not be given an excuse to start a large-scale war in Lebanon.

Pro-Iranian militias

Yemen

- ▶ The British naval security firm Ambrey said a cargo ship registered in Britain, flying the Belize flag and operated by a Lebanese company had reported that it was attacked in Bab el-Mandeb (Reuters, February 19, 2024). The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) cited a report by military authorities that the ship's crew had abandoned it and that everyone was safe. It was also noted that the vessel was anchored and that the authorities remained at the scene to continue assisting (UKMTO X account, February 19, 2024).
- ▶ **Yahya Saria, spokesman for the Houthi armed forces**, said their naval forces had carried out a "high-quality military operation" against the British ship RUBYMAR in the Gulf of Aden, using naval missiles. He said that as a result, the ship was damaged and completely stopped, and was now in danger of sinking. He noted that during the operation, they made sure that the ship's crew got out safely. He also noted that their air defense forces had shot down an American military MQ9 UAV in the al-Hudaydah area (Yahya Saria's Telegram channel, February 19, 2024)
- ▶ The United States Central Command (CENTCOM) reported that on February 18, 2024, between 3 and 8 p.m. (Sana'a time), five strikes were carried out against three mobile anti-ship cruise missiles, one unmanned underwater vessel (UUV), and one unmanned surface

vessel (USV) in Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen. It was also noted that it was the first time that the Houthis had used a UUV since the airstrikes began on October 23, 2023 (CENTCOM X account, February 18, 2024).

► Referring to tension in the Red Sea, **Canadian Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly** said China should take part in maintaining trade traffic in the Red Sea because Chinese ships were also at risk. She said she had conveyed the message to **Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi** on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference (Reuters, February 18, 2024).

► In a speech given by **Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi** at the Egypt Energy Show (EGYPES 2024), he noted that revenues from the Suez Canal had dropped by 40%-50% due to regional developments, especially due to the Houthis' threat to prevent navigation in the Red Sea (al-Arabiya, February 19, 2024).

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The International Arena

International Court of Justice

► On February 19, 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) opened a hearing on the PA's request for an opinion on the legality of the "Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories." Israel decided not to send a legal representative to the hearing. Speaking before the ICJ, **Riyadh al-Maliki, PA foreign minister**, said that "the Israeli occupation must end unconditionally," alleging that "genocide" was taking place in the Gaza Strip. He claimed that "Israel is violating the court's orders to prevent acts of genocide in the Gaza Strip" (al-Mayadeen, February 19, 2024).

► **Ayman al-Safadi, Jordanian foreign minister**, is scheduled to head a Jordanian delegation on Thursday (February 22) to present Jordan's arguments before the ICJ regarding the opinion requested by the UN General Assembly on Israel's policy in the Palestinian territories that affected the human rights of the Palestinian people. The Jordanian foreign ministry's statement noted that in July 2023, Jordan had already filed a statement of claim before the ICJ, emphasizing its support for the Palestinians' right to self-determination (Jordanian foreign ministry X account, February 18, 2024).

► Previously, **Dhiaa Rashwan, head of Egypt's information bureau**, announced that Egypt would take part in the opinion requested by the UN General Assembly on Israel's policy in the Palestinian territories and that it would submit an oral argument before the ICJ in The Hague

on February 21, 2024. He said the argument would emphasize the illegality of the Israeli occupation and [alleged] violations of international humanitarian law, and Israel's policy, which included the annexation of land, demolition of homes and displacement of Palestinians. According to the statement, Egypt will also call for obligating Israel to immediately withdraw from the Palestinian territories and compensate the Palestinian people for the damage it caused them (Egyptian information office Facebook page, February 18, 2024).

► According to "knowledgeable" sources, the reason for Egypt's statement was the lack of progress in negotiations for a humanitarian lull and a hostage deal. Although Qatar is supposed to host another round of talks, Egyptian officials do not expect it to yield results, considering the Israeli government's demands, which cannot be accepted by the Palestinian organizations (al-Akhbar , February 19, 2024).