



Operation Iron Swords Updated to 1 p.m., February 21, 2024

Northern Arena	Israeli Casualties	Rocket Fire
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 872 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 operated in two main locations, to the west of Khan Yunis, where the forces increased and expanded their hold, and the Zeitoun neighborhood in Gaza City, where they cleared the area. With aerial support, they attacked armed terrorist squads remaining in the area and terrorist facilities.

► **According to unofficial data, since October 7, 2023, approximately 1,500 Israeli civilians and security personnel have been killed, 576 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 released.**

► **Negotiations for a hostage deal:** A Hamas delegation led by Isma'il Haniyeh has gone to Egypt. According to several reports, the delegation went to repair relations with Egypt after the Egyptian foreign minister spoke out against Hamas. On the other hand, some progress in the talks has been reported. Senior Hamas members continue reiterating their demands for a

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

ceasefire agreement and a hostage deal, claiming Hamas will not abandon its principles. The spokesman for Qatar's foreign ministry claimed Hamas had begun to deliver the medicines sent for the hostages.

► **The situation in the Gaza Strip:** Reports are increasing that severe hunger is spreading throughout the Gaza Strip, especially in the north. The UN World Food Programme (WFP) announced the halting of aid deliveries to the northern Gaza Strip following civilian attacks on the delivery trucks. The Hamas government media office in the Gaza Strip responded to the announcement and called on the WFP to reverse its decision.

► **The northern arena:** Hezbollah claimed responsibility for nine attacks during the past day. A UAV from Lebanon was discovered in the Bustan HaGalil area near Acre. It was the second aircraft to enter Israeli territory during the past few days. Na'im Qassem, Hezbollah deputy secretary general, said that so far the level of conflict in south Lebanon was limited, but if Israel escalated its activities, they would reciprocate in kind. In **Syria**, a building on the outskirts of Damascus was attacked where Hezbollah and Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps operatives lived. The Syrian News Channel reported that in an unusual move, Hezbollah and pro-Iranian militia operatives had been deployed to the Ayn al-Sahab area in northern Damascus, in the wake of the increase in attacks attributed to Israel in the area. It was also reported that the militias intended to situate factories for the development of UAVs and precision weapons in the region.

► **Judea and Samaria:** During the past day activity focused mainly on the Jenin refugee camp, where Israeli security forces detained a wanted Palestinian who had barricaded himself inside a house; a UAV was deployed.

► **The pro-Iranian militias:** The spokesman for Houthi armed forces reported a UAV attack on "sensitive Israeli sites" in the Eilat area and a missile attack on an Israeli ship.

The Southern Arena

► Palestinian media reported on the IDF's attacks in the Gaza Strip during the past day. In **Gaza City** there were massive attacks in the Zeitoun neighborhood, in the southeast of the city, as well in the Sabra and Tel al-Hawa neighborhoods. In the **central Gaza Strip** there were aerial attacks in the Nuseirat refugee camp and Deir al-Balah. In **Khan Yunis** IDF forces operated the Mawasi area west of the city and Khiza'a area to the east. The forces surround Nasser Hospital, where 120 patients remain after the Palestinian Red Crescent evacuation of

21 patients. In **Rafah** the IDF attacked the city center while Israeli Navy ships fired missiles at the Mawasi area of Rafah (Wafa, February 21, 2024).



Right: Residents in Rafah visit a building attacked by the Israeli Air Force (Wafa YouTube channel, February 21, 2024). Left: Residents leave the Zeitoun neighborhood in Gaza and move towards the Shifa Hospital (Wafa, February 20, 2024)

► **The southern Gaza Strip:** IDF forces continued to penetrate and expand their activities in western Khan Yunis. They raided terrorist targets and killed a large number of armed terrorist operatives (IDF spokesperson, February 21, 2024). Last week the forces raided a building where they found large quantities of weapons and ammunition. The building was near a UNRWA school which served as a shelter for displaced persons. The terrorists passed quickly through a hole in a school wall to the nearby building, where they took weapons and went to attack. In another nearby building, the forces located weapons, vests and Hamas uniforms. They also raided the house of the commander of the Khan Yunis Brigade's anti-tank unit, finding weapons and intelligence materials. At the same time, the forces evacuated civilians to keep them safe. During the operation, about 60 terrorist operatives who were hiding in the school were detained, as mentally challenged individuals took advantage of the humanitarian evacuation efforts to escape (IDF website, February 20, 2024).



The route between the building and the school (IDF spokesperson, February 20, 2024)



UN and Palestinian Red Crescent teams evacuate sick and wounded patients from Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis (al-Jazeera YouTube channel, February 20, 2024)

- Gaza City:** During the past day, IDF forces operated to clear the area in the Zeitoun neighborhood, south of Gaza City, raiding suspicious buildings, locating weapons and killing dozens of terrorists in clashes, some of whom tried to launch anti-tank missiles at the forces. The Israeli Air Force attacked dozens of targets, including terrorist squads threatening the forces, observation posts, weapons warehouses and underground targets (IDF spokesperson, February 21, 2024).



IDF forces in Zeitoun (IDF spokesperson, February 21, 2021)

The Palestinian perspective on the fighting

► **Ali Abu Shahin, a member of the political bureau of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and head of its media information department,** held a press conference in Tehran where he claimed the "firm stance" of the Palestinian people and unity on the battlefield in the Gaza Strip and among the "resistance" forces [terrorist operatives] had prevented Israel from achieving its goals. He claimed Israel's ongoing "plot" to displace the residents of Gaza beyond the Strip threatened Arab national security. He claimed the "resistance" forces [terrorist organizations] fully adhered to their "principles," and what Israel had not achieved on the battlefield it would not achieve in negotiations. He added that they appreciated the presence of the resistance forces,² especially the Yemeni front, whose attacks on Israel ships were "very influential," and said he hoped more "forces" would join the Yemeni position of supporting the "resistance." Abu Shahin called for turning the month of Ramadan into the "month of al-Aqsa," which is in great danger and great threats (al-Alam TV website, February 20, 2024; al-Arabi TV X account, February 20, 2024).

Israeli casualties

► **According to unofficial data, since October 7, 2023, approximately 1,500 Israeli people have been killed. According to the IDF spokesperson, 576 of them are soldiers and officers (238 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 released.**

The issue of the hostages and a ceasefire agreement

► Following the arrival in Cairo of a Hamas delegation led by **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, Husam Badran, a member of Hamas' political bureau,** claimed the Hamas delegation had been invited by Egypt for consultations. Regarding the negotiations, he claimed that Hamas' answer was "reasonable and realistic." He claimed Hamas was not intransigent and was certain its path would eventually lead to a comprehensive ceasefire, but Israel had withdrawn from the Paris proposal, which it had helped frame. He said Mahmoud Abbas' statements regarding the need for Hamas and Israel to reach an agreement were counterproductive, because Israel refused to reach a reasonable

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

agreement which would meet the minimum needs of the Palestinian people. He claimed the basic problem was Israel's refusal to agree to a ceasefire.

► Badran said Hamas had initiated contact with the Fatah movement but had no contact with the Palestinian Authority, and even during Mahmoud Abbas' visit to Doha there had been no contacts or meetings with Hamas. On the other hand, consultations were underway with the Palestinian "organizations" that shared the "Hamas vision." He also emphasized that all Hamas positions had been coordinated with the Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip, headed by Yahya al-Sinwar (al-Arabiya.net, February 20, 2024; X account of interviewer Rasha Nabil, February 21, 2024; al-Arabiya TV X account, February 20, 2024).

► **Muhammad Nazal, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, said the Hamas delegation's visit to Cairo "was held at an important and sensitive time." He noted the importance of the visit and the meetings with the Egyptian officials, because Egypt was one of the main mediators and in recent weeks had participated in meetings between the parties in Paris. Regarding the latest developments in the negotiations, he said that the negotiations had stalled, sometimes progressing and sometimes retreating. He claimed Hamas' approach was based on negotiating for specific understandings which would lead to a ceasefire, the withdrawal of the IDF forces, the introduction of food, medicine and fuel into the Gaza Strip, the reconstruction of the Strip, and the release of "as many Palestinian prisoners as possible from Israeli prisons." He added that the "devil is in the details," therefore the details required patience and continuous contact with Egypt and Qatar. He claimed Hamas was not "stiff-necked," but rather insisted on the minimum that would allow the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip to continue with their lives (al-Shorouk website, Egypt, February 20, 2024).

► At a press conference in Tehran, **Osama Hamdan, a senior Hamas member**, said their position was clear and fixed: a complete and total cessation of "aggression" and the full withdrawal of IDF forces from the Gaza Strip, the introduction of urgent aid to the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, the beginning of the reconstruction process and the lifting of the blockade. He emphasized that the hostage deal would be the result of meeting those demands. He claimed that Israel's insistence on changing facts under threat of military pressure would not affect their position, adding that Hamas considered all initiatives presented to it, but would not waive any of the Palestinians' rights. The initiatives presented so far did not meet the aspirations and resolve of the Palestinian people (al-Alam TV website, February 20, 2024; al-Arabi TV X account, February 20, 2024).

► Rai al-Youm reported that according to "sources close to the Palestinian organizations," the Hamas delegation in Cairo was not discussing the hostage deal or negotiations related to the first phase, but rather an attempt to resolve the differences of opinion between Hamas and Egypt following the statements made by Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry³ on the legitimacy of Hamas and its departure from the Palestinian consensus. According to reports, Hamas received messages from the upper echelons of Egyptian security which attempted to moderate the influence of Shoukry's statements. Egypt also expressed a desire that the foreign ministry's statements would not control relations and contacts with Hamas (Rai al-Youm, February 21, 2024). On the other hand, "diplomatic sources" stated that the discussions in Cairo were progressing towards a compromise regarding the first phase of the proposed agreement, adding that Egypt had made progress in the discussions with Hamas (al-Sharq, February 21, 2024).

► **Mohammed al-Ansari, spokesman for the Qatari foreign ministry**, said that their mediation efforts continued, as did the contacts between all parties. He noted that the humanitarian issue was a central part of the current negotiations (al-Jazeera, February 20, 2024). He also reported that as part of the agreement reached last month between Hamas and Israel, mediated by Qatar and France, they had received assurances from Hamas that the shipment of the drugs for the hostages had arrived and that "they were [allegedly] beginning to deliver the drugs to their destination." He noted that the agreement included the introduction of medicines and humanitarian aid to the residents of the Gaza Strip in exchange for the delivery of medicines to the hostages (Qatari foreign ministry X account, February 20, 2024).

► **Brett McGurk, the American envoy to the Middle East**, is expected to visit Cairo, and an "Egyptian source" said that during the visit a ceasefire agreement would be proposed for the month of Ramadan, which might be extended by two weeks, during which Israeli civilian hostages and six American hostages would be released in exchange for extensive humanitarian aid and preventing the entry of IDF forces into Rafah before Ramadan. A "Hamas source" said in any agreement, the "resistance axis" was committed to adhering to three

³ During the Munich Security Conference, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said the position of Hamas was contrary to the accepted opinion of the Palestinian people, as well as alongside peace-loving groups, the Palestinian Authority and Fatah, when it came to recognizing Israel and reaching a settlement (al-'Ahed, February 17, 2024).

conditions: the release of hostages, a ceasefire, withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and its reconstruction (al-Araby al-Jadeed, February 21, 2024).

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The Gaza Strip

Palestinian casualties

► **The Hamas-controlled ministry of health in the Gaza Strip** reported at 11:15 a.m., February 21, 2024, that during the past day 118 Gazans had been killed and 163 wounded, bringing the number of dead since the beginning of the war to 29,313 and the number of wounded to 69,333 (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page, February 21, 2024).

The situation in the Gaza Strip

► The claims that severe hunger was spreading throughout the Gaza Strip increased in recent days, as well as reports of significant hardships and the need for immediate humanitarian aid, especially in the northern Gaza Strip. On February 20, 2024, the **UN World Food Programme** (WFP) announced the suspension of aid deliveries to the northern Gaza Strip following civilian attacks on trucks delivering food. The deliveries will only resume after conditions are met which allow the aid to be safely distributed. According to the announcement, deliveries were recently resumed after a three-week suspension following the attack on a UNRWA truck. When the current shipment began driving towards Gaza City, the convoy was surrounded by Gazans who tried to climb onto the trucks, and then shots were fired (WFP website, February 20, 2024).

► **The Hamas government media office** in the Gaza Strip responded to the announcement of the WFP by calling on it to reverse its "devastating" decision. According to the office, they were shocked by the decision, which was a death sentence for three quarters of a million people, they rejected the decision and said it was urgent for all UN institutions to return to operating in Gaza City and the northern Gaza Strip instead of shirking their international responsibilities (Hamas government media office Telegram channel, February 20, 2024).

► Gazans called on the Arab countries to intervene for a ceasefire in the Strip. They said they could no longer tolerate the lack of food and water, they had nowhere to go and were tired of living under such conditions (Wafa YouTube channel, February 20, 2024).



Gazans call for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip (Wafa YouTube channel, February 20, 2024)

The Rafah Crossing

► A delegation from the US House of Representatives, led by Congressman Adam Smith, visited the Rafah Crossing for a first-hand examination of the issue of transferring humanitarian aid to the Strip (NBC network, February 20, 2024).

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The Northern Arena

Hezbollah attacks

► During the weekend of February 15-18, 2024, Hezbollah claimed responsibility for **nine attacks** using anti-tank missiles, rockets and Burkan rockets, whose warheads weigh between 300 and 500 kilograms (between 660 and 1100 pounds) (Hezbollah combat information Telegram channel, February 20-21, 2024). A UAV from Lebanon was detected in the Bustan HaGalil area, near the northern coastal city of Acre. It entered Israeli airspace without alerts. It was the second UAV which recently penetrated into Israeli airspace without an alert.

IDF retaliatory attacks

► In response to Hezbollah's attacks, IDF forces continued to attack terrorist targets in south Lebanon. Israeli Air Force planes attacked a military building in the KaferKila area, where a number of operatives were detected. Terrorist facilities in Balida and Aita al-Sha'ab were attacked (IDF spokesperson, February 20, 2024).



Right: Attack on a terrorist facility in the Balida area. Left: Attack on military buildings in the Aita al-Sha'ab area (IDF spokesperson, February 20, 2024)

- ▶ Lebanese media reported attacks in the area of Jabal Safi, KaferKila and Balida (Fouad Khreiss' X account, February 20, 2024).



Right: Attack in Jabal Safi. Center: Attack in KaferKila. Left: Attack in Balida (Fouad Khreiss' X account, February 20, 2024)

- ▶ A "source" in Hezbollah said that the Israeli attacks in al-Ghazia in the Sidon region had targeted industrial facilities and were an escalation that had to be stopped. According to the source, Israel was acting "insanely" because of its losses, failure and inability to realize its goals in the Gaza Strip. He claimed Israel was trying to drag Lebanon and Hezbollah into war, but it wanted Hezbollah to start it. However, they were considering what they would do and how they would react, and would not give Israel what it wanted. Meanwhile, said, the source, they were prepared for all possibilities and scenarios (al-Araby al-Jadeed, February 20, 2024). The Hezbollah-affiliated al-Akhbar published an article about the attack entitled "The southern front: the enemy is trying to force new equations." The article stated that the entire "resistance axis" was not prepared to submit to Israel's conditions, which would open the door to a radical change in the "equation" protecting Lebanon, and it would not allow Israel to impose an "equation" of unilateral attack and response (al-Akhbar, February 20, 2024).

Statements by senior Hezbollah figures

► **Na'im Qassem, Hezbollah deputy secretary-general**, said that so far, the level of confrontation in south Lebanon had been limited, but that if Israel escalated its activity, they would escalate theirs. He added that they would not be surprised by any "aggression" that might come from Israel. He noted that their presence in the conflict was what deterred Israel, and that Western diplomacy was working to disrupt their power to achieve security for Israel (Na'im Qassem's X account, February 21, 2024).

► **Hashem Safi al-Din, chairman of Hezbollah's Executive Council**, spoke at a ceremony commemorating a Hezbollah operative in al-Dahiyah al-Janoubiyah in Beirut, saying that Lebanon's only guarantee against the threats and "vicious" plans of its enemies was the use of weapons. He stressed the need for the Lebanese to place their faith in the "resistance" and distance themselves from Arab guarantees, which had achieved nothing to defend Lebanon or the Gaza Strip from Israeli attacks (al-Manar, February 20, 2024).

UNIFIL

► A UNIFIL vehicle was involved in an accident in al-Sadana, on the outskirts of Kafr Shuba. Three soldiers were reportedly wounded, one of them severely (al-Akhbar Telegram channel, February 21, 2024).

The Lebanese government

► **Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib** met with Hervé Magro, the French ambassador to Lebanon. Bou Habib noted Lebanon's appreciation for France's role in the current situation to prevent escalation and restore stability in south Lebanon. He said solutions to the current situation had to be found through full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 (al-Nashra, February 20, 2024).

Syria

► According to a "Syrian military" source, at 9:40 a.m., Israel carried out an airstrike from the direction of the Golan Heights against a residential building in the Kafr Sousah neighborhood in western Damascus, in which two civilians were killed and another was wounded. The building and nearby structures were damaged (Syrian News Agency, February 21, 2024). It was later reported that the number of fatalities had risen to three, one of whom was Syrian. It was noted that the residential building was located near an Iranian school and commanders of Lebanese Hezbollah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) frequently visited the area (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 21, 2024).



The building that was attacked and the damage to it (Right: journalist Hossein Mortada's X account. Left: Saber in News, February 21, 2024)

► On February 20, 2024, the Syrian news channel Sawt al-Asima reported that in an unusual move, operatives from Hezbollah and other pro-Iranian militias had changed their locations to the Ayn al-Sahab area to the north of Damascus, about 16 kilometers (about 10 miles) from the Syria-Lebanon border. According to the report, senior IRGC's Qods Force commanders and Iraqi and Lebanese militias recently visited several Syrian military bases where training camps and underground warehouses were located, to relocate themselves following the increase in attacks attributed to Israel in the Damascus area. It was also reported that the militias intended to set up factories in the area for the development of UAVs and precision weapons.

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Israel, Judea and Samaria

Counterterrorism activities

- The Israeli security forces continued their counterterrorism activities in Judea and Samaria, detaining 40 wanted Palestinians. Since the beginning of the war, about 3,200 wanted Palestinians have been detained, more than 1,350 of them Hamas operatives (IDF spokesperson's X account, February 21, 2024).
- On the night of February 20, 2024, Israeli security forces operating in the Jenin refugee camp detained 14 suspects, located weapons and uncovered IEDs planted under roads. An Israeli Air Force aircraft fired at armed Palestinians who shot at the forces (IDF spokesperson's X account, February 21, 2024).
- The Palestinian media reported that armed Palestinians had exposed an undercover Israeli force traveling in a vehicle with Palestinian license plates and positioning itself near the

house where a wanted Palestinian had barricaded himself. The heavy exchange of fire between armed Palestinians and the Israeli force led to the killing of Aref Marwan Aref Ali (al-Qaddumi), 25 years old, from Kafr Qaddum (east of Qalqilya), who was wanted by Israel and was hiding in the refugee camp. The Israeli security forces reportedly sent reinforcements to the site, and the mosques in the camp called on the public to go out and confront the Israeli forces (al-Arabi TV, February 21, 2024).



Right: IDF activity against a terrorist squad in Jenin (IDF spokesperson, February 21, 2024). Left: Israeli security forces in the Jenin refugee camp (Wafa, February 20, 2024)



Wanted Palestinian Aref Ali (Shehab X account, February 21, 2024)

▶ The Israeli security forces also operated in Samu'a (south of Hebron), where they seized funds intended for financing terrorist activity. In Hebron, they detained five operatives of the Islamic Bloc, Hamas' student faction. In Abu Dis (east of Jerusalem), a wanted Palestinian was detained, and weapons were seized. In Rantis (northwest of Ramallah), funds intended to finance terrorist activities were seized (IDF spokesperson's X account, February 21, 2024).

Activities of the PA's security services

► The London daily al-Araby al-Jadeed reported that the PA's preventive security apparatus continued to hold Khalil Hanbali, 40 years old, from Nablus, who was also wanted by Israel for his involvement in shooting attacks. He was reportedly detained on February 18, 2024, in the Old City of Nablus by preventive security operatives. After he tried to escape from detention, he was shot and wounded and is currently hospitalized under security. The London daily also reported that Palestinian Preventive Security had recently detained ten terrorist operatives in Nablus who belonged to a new network calling itself "Descendants of al-Yassin" (al-Araby al-Jadeed, February 20, 2024).

Palestinian Authority (PA)

► At the end of its weekly meeting, the PA government announced it would appoint a committee to prepare a legal case to prosecute the Israeli officials directly responsible for the [alleged] "financial crimes" against the PA, including the "theft" of tax revenues, as well as "deprivation, starvation and the uprooting of the Palestinian people" (Wafa, February 20, 2024).

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Iran

► **Hossein-Amir Abdollahian, Iranian foreign minister**, met in Colombo with **Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe**. He said the main priority was "stopping the war and the [alleged] crimes of the Israeli regime in Gaza and realizing the rights of the Palestinian people" (IRNA, February 21, 2024).

► **Javad Oji, Iranian minister of petroleum**, claimed that blowing up the gas pipelines in Iran last week had been an "Israeli plot." He claimed Israel had intended to cut off the domestic gas distribution network in various provinces in Iran, but thanks to full preparedness, the operation was thwarted, it did not cause events in the cities and villages, and the gas pipelines were quickly repaired (SNN, February 21, 2024).

► **Ahmad Vahidi, Iranian minister of the interior**, met with **Osama Hamdan, senior Hamas member, and Ali Abu Shahin, head of the PIJ's media information department**. The meeting was also attended by Hamas and PIJ representatives in Iran. Hamdan reviewed the motives and goals of Operation al-Aqsa Flood and some of its political and military achievements and expressed his gratitude and appreciation for Iran's support. Ali Abu Shahin

reviewed the role of the organizations, including the PIJ, in Operation al-Aqsa Flood, and mentioned Ali Khamenei's remarks about the necessity of cooperation, coordination and unity between the "resistance" organizations. The Iranian minister of the interior expressed his appreciation for the Palestinian people and their “resistance” (Mehr News Agency in Arabic, February 20, 2024).



**Iranian interior minister meets with Hamdan and Abu Shahin
(Mehr News Agency in Arabic, February 20, 2024)**

Pro-Iranian militias

Yemen

- ▶ **Yahya Saria, spokesman for the Houthi armed forces**, claimed they had attacked sensitive Israeli sites in the Eilat area with several UAVs. They also attacked the Israeli ship MSC Silver in the Gulf of Aden with naval missiles, as well as several American warships in the Red and Arabian seas using UAVs (Yahya Saria’s Telegram channel, February 20, 2024).
- ▶ The United States Central Command (CENTCOM) reported that coalition forces had shot down ten UAVs in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. An anti-ship cruise missile directed at an American destroyer was also shot down. In addition, coalition forces in Yemen attacked a surface-to-air missile launcher and a UAV prepared for launching at ships (CENTCOM X account, February 21, 2024) .
- ▶ The French defense ministry said French warships in the Red Sea had intercepted and destroyed two UAVs arriving from Yemen overnight (Reuters, February 20, 2024).

The Arab Arena

Egypt

► An "Egyptian source" denied reports in the Israeli media that **Yahya al-Sinwar, head of Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip**, had left for Egypt accompanied by several hostages through tunnels in Rafah, noting that the reports were baseless and that there were no tunnels that could be used to begin with. The source claimed the reports were Israeli inventions whose purpose was to provide justification for entering Rafah. He also noted that Egyptian monitoring of the events in the border strip between Egypt and the Gaza Strip had been tightened (al-Akhbar, February 21, 2024).

Jordan

► **King Abdullah II of Jordan** met in Amman with a delegation of American senators and discussed the need to intensify efforts to reach a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. He warned of the consequences of the continuation of the war, the cessation of international support for UNRWA, and the danger of an Israeli attack on Rafah. He also stressed "the important role of the United States in finding a political horizon for ending the conflict" and warned against acts of violence by extremist settlers against Palestinians in Judea and Samaria (Petra, February 20, 2024).

The International Arena

United Nations Security Council

► On February 20, 2024, the UN Security Council convened, at the request of Algeria, and voted on the draft resolution that included a demand for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. Thirteen countries voted in favor of the proposal, and Britain abstained. The United States, which drafted a competing draft resolution to Algeria's, vetoed the resolution. The United States representative to the UN said that demanding an immediate, unconditional ceasefire, without an agreement obliging Hamas to release the hostages, would not bring peace but could prolong the fighting (UN X account, February 20, 2024).

► **White House spokesperson John Kirby** explained the veto, saying they could not support a Security Council resolution that could have jeopardized sensitive negotiations and

that they still did not think it was the right time for a permanent ceasefire. He said they hoped negotiations for the release of the hostages would soon bear fruit. At the same time, he noted that the United States believed that any Israeli large-scale military operation in Rafah without a plan to ensure the safety of the residents would be a disaster (Reuters, February 20, 2024).



Palestinian cartoon condemning President Biden's support for Israel's war in the Gaza Strip (Muhammad Sabaaneh's Facebook page, February 20, 2024)

- ▶ **The office of Mahmoud Abbas, PA chairman,** condemned the United States veto, saying it would give Israel another green light to continue its “aggression” and that this policy made the United States an accomplice to Israel's [alleged] "war crimes" (Wafa, February 21, 2024).
- ▶ Hamas issued a statement saying it regarded the failure to pass the resolution as a disruption of the international will that served Israel's agenda (the "Nazi occupation"), and that the United States administration bore direct responsibility for preventing the resolution that gave Israel a green light to carry out additional "massacres" (Hamas Telegram channel, February 20, 2024).



Palestinian cartoon condemning the veto imposed by the United States in the UN Security Council (al-Quds, February 21, 2024)

► The Egyptian foreign ministry issued a statement expressing its deep regret at the Security Council's inability to re-pass a resolution requiring an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip due to the veto imposed by the United States. According to the statement, preventing the passage of the resolution was a "shameful precedent" in the history of the Security Council dealing with wars, and Egypt strongly condemned the double standards represented by the international arena (Egyptian foreign ministry spokesman's X account, February 20, 2024).

► Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry condemned the American veto and stressed that reform of the Security Council was needed to fulfill its responsibility for maintaining international peace and security (Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry X account, February 21, 2024). The UAE and Jordanian foreign ministries also condemned the American veto and stressed the need to end the war (the UAE foreign ministry X account; the Jordanian foreign ministry X account, February 21, 2024).

International Criminal Court

► Following discussions at the International Criminal Court (ICC) on the legality of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories, the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the Netherlands presented Saudi Arabia's argument that Israel's rejection of the two-state solution [allegedly] indicated its lack of intention to negotiate. He called for classifying Israel's actions as "genocide," adding that no country had submitted documents to the ICC defending Israel's policy, which, he said, showed international non-recognition of the Israeli occupation (al-Sharq, February 20, 2024).

► **Riyadh al-Maliki, PA foreign minister**, met on the sidelines of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) hearing with **Karim Khan, chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC)**, to discuss his involvement and support of the ICC's ongoing and active investigation into the situation in the Palestinian territories (ICC X account, February 20, 2024).

Russia

► The Russian foreign ministry announced that **Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov** had spoken with **Azzam al-Ahmad, a member of Fatah's Central Committee**, and with **Musa Abu Marzuq, senior Hamas figure**, and discussed preparations for the summit meeting of the Palestinian organizations planned to take place in Moscow (RT, February 20, 2024). According to a senior PFLP official, the summit in Moscow is scheduled for February 29, 2024 (Sputnik, February 13, 2024). Fatah also reported that Bogdanov was in

contact with the movement's leadership and Hamas regarding the Palestinian meeting in Moscow (Fatah's Telegram channel, February 20, 2024).