

# **Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update December 23, 2024 (Kislev 22, 5785)**

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## **Israel-Hamas War, Day 444**

### **Israeli Army Says It Intercepted Drone Launched From Yemen**

- **ISRAEL:** Two protesters advocating for a hostage deal arrested in Jerusalem
- **GAZA:** Israeli strikes reportedly kill at least 20 people overnight, including two children
  - **SYRIA:** Senior Qatari foreign official arrives on first Syria visit since Assad's fall
  - **IRAN:** Iran reportedly considering smuggling arms directly to Hezbollah, avoiding Syria
- **ISRAEL:** Houthi missile launched from Yemen falls in central Israel, wounding 23, after interceptor failure
  - **GAZA:** Israeli strikes reportedly kill at least 30
- **SYRIA:** Two Syrians detained by IDF on suspicion of espionage; UNDOF mandate extended by six months

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***Defense Ministry Announces Over 75,000 Wounded, About 13,500 During Current War;*** More than 75,000 soldiers have been wounded in Israel's wars, including nearly 13,500 in the current war, the Defense Ministry said Tuesday, December 17. Israel's national day for recognizing wounded soldiers was this Wednesday. An estimated 20,000 soldiers would be wounded this year, the ministry said in April. There was a significant drop in fighting between February and May, and in July, the Defense Ministry said about 14,000 soldiers would be wounded in 2024. About 9,250 soldiers had been wounded in nine months of fighting, the ministry said in July. The slight drop in wounded soldiers compared with the pace of wounded soldiers earlier in the war can be attributed to very little in terms of major ground forces' battles since Hamas was defeated in Rafah in June and August. It is important to note that the vast majority of those killed and wounded by Hamas during the October 7 massacre were civilians. The number of killed and injured civilians dwarfed any comparative number for decades. In general, the number of former soldiers who have sought recognition as wounded soldiers, including some of the social, economic, and therapy rights that come along with that recognition, has tripled to 19,500. (JPost / VFI News)

***Syrian Mass Grave: At Least 100,000 Bodies Were Discarded Outside Damascus Claims Advocacy Group;*** A mass grave containing the bodies of at least 100,000 people tortured and killed under the brutal dictatorship of ousted President Bashar al-Assad was discovered outside Damascus, according to the head of a US-based Syrian advocacy group — who said the corpses were squished by bulldozers to “fit them in.” Mouaz Moustafa, the executive director of the Syrian Emergency Task Force (SETF), said the regime's victims were found in al-Qutayfah, about 25 miles north of the capital. “One hundred thousand is the most conservative estimate,” Moustafa told British media of the amount of bodies he believed were dumped at the chilling site. “It's a very, very extremely, almost unfairly conservative estimate.” Moustafa also warned that it was just one of eight mass graves created by Assad's fallen government. Moustafa, who arrived in Syria after Assad fled to Moscow, said the grave was likely the outcome of the work entrusted to the former regime's military. “[The Syrian Air Force was] in charge of bodies going from military hospitals — where bodies were collected after they'd been tortured to death — to different intelligence branches, and then they would be sent to a mass grave location,” he said. Moustafa added that the grave matches the description from funeral officer personnel who helped unload the bodies and later escaped Syria to spread the word of the atrocities committed under Assad. (NYP/VFI News)

***School Near Tel Aviv Ravaged by Houthi Missile Warhead, No Children Harmed;*** A multistory school building in Ramat Gan, collapsed when it was hit by the rocket warhead from a partially intercepted ballistic missile fired at Israel by Houthi rebels in Yemen. On Thursday, December 19, the city's mayor said the school building will be torn down and rebuilt, as he visited the site and locals assessed the heavy damage. Ramat Gan Mayor Carmel Shama-Hacohen estimated the damage at ILS 40 million (\$11 million) and said the Ramat Ef'al Elementary School would get a replacement building. The IDF initially said that overnight it intercepted a missile fired at central Israel by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis. It said sections from the missile or from an interceptor fell to the ground, with one chunk landing on the main building of the school, demolishing it. Later on Thursday, however, the military said that according to an initial probe, the school was likely hit by the missile warhead after a partial interception. There were no injuries in the

incident, though parked cars in the area were damaged by falling debris. Students will be transferred to another school in the meantime, Shama-Hacohen said, and the city's psychological services will provide support. *(TOI/VFI News)*

***Report: Breakthrough in Normalization Talks with Saudi Arabia;*** A significant breakthrough toward normalization of ties with Saudi Arabia, which will also ease conditions for a hostage deal, was recently achieved, according to a report by Chaim Levinson in Israeli media on Tuesday evening, December 17. Instead of the Saudi demand, which it has stated so far, for an Israeli promise to establish a Palestinian state, Riyadh will suffice with a declaration by Israel that it is committed to enable "a path toward a Palestinian state." The talks between the parties were concluded mainly after the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Lebanon, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu conducting the negotiations through Minister of Strategic Affairs, Ron Dermer. According to the report, normalization between the two countries will also accelerate the advancement of a hostage deal, as Riyadh has shown interest in being involved in the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, something that could also benefit Israel, which has an interest in involving moderate Arab countries in the region. *(INN /VFI News)*

***Danon Warns of Potential Dangers with Islamist Forces in Syria, US Officials Fear Turkish Invasion of Northern Syria;*** Israeli ambassador to the UN Danny Danon spoke to Israeli media and said that multiple countries, including Russia, France, and Syria, have already complained about Israel's actions in Syria: "They claim that we are invading, taking over and occupying. These are allegations that we reject." "Our position is clear, we have taken defensive measures to ensure that extremist Islamist forces do not take over positions on our border and we are waiting to see whether the government in Syria stabilizes and whether the borders are going to be quiet or not," he said. He also spoke of the effort to replace UNRWA given its ties to the Hamas terrorist organization. Moving in that direction, the Dutch Parliament recently passed a bill to gradually cut off funding to UNRWA, joining 12 other former donor nations that already have. Meanwhile, Turkey has been recently building up troops on its border with Syria, causing US officials to fear that Ankara is planning a major invasion into territories controlled by the US-backed Kurds. Senior US officials told American media on Monday night, December 16, that the Turkish forces on the border include militia fighters, Turkish uniformed commandos, and a large force of artillery. The troop buildup is concentrated near Kobani, a Kurdish-majority city in Syria on the northern border with Turkey. The officials said that the invasion could be imminent and the current troop buildup appears similar to Turkish military moves ahead of its 2019 invasion of northeast Syria. *(INN / VFI News)*

***Report: Canadian Government on Verge of Collapse; PM Trudeau Is Expected to Resign;*** Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is expected to resign according to media reports. The move is expected to take place after the surprise resignation of his finance minister, Chrystia Freeland. If the prime minister resigns, Canada will go to the polls ten months before the legal deadline and in light of the strengthening of the right-wing party, which has been in opposition in recent years. The finance minister's decision to resign follows a dispute with Trudeau over how to deal with the Trump administration, which wants to promote tariffs on imports to the US, which would severely harm the Canadian economy. Polls in Canada predict a victory for the conservative party, which is considered a strong supporter of Israel. Opposition leader, Pierre Poilievre, expressed strong support for Israel and on the possibility of attacking Iran, said that if Israel crushes this regime, such an act would be "a gift by the Jewish state to humanity." At the same time, throughout the war, Poilievre often spoke about the rise of antisemitism in Canada. *(INN/VFI News)*

***King Charles to Visit Auschwitz for 80th Anniversary of Liberation;*** King Charles has accepted an invitation to visit the Auschwitz concentration camp in January 2025, joining representatives from 20 different countries to mark the 80th anniversary of the camp's liberation. The king, who visited Auschwitz

in 2020 when still Prince of Wales, has had a long-standing connection with survivors, several of whom, though now frail, are expected to attend the commemoration ceremonies. During his 2020 visit, he warned that “hatred and intolerance still lurk in the human heart.” Though not in the best of health himself — he is still continuing a weekly treatment for cancer — King Charles has vocally opposed antisemitism and was determined to attend the historic occasion on January 27. It will almost certainly be the last such event attended by Holocaust survivors. Organizers say he will be the first British monarch to visit Auschwitz. His mother, the late Queen Elizabeth, made her final foreign trip in 2005 when she visited Bergen-Belsen. The king has had a long-standing commitment to the Jewish community, particularly in Poland where his close connection to World Jewish Relief led to the opening of a Jewish community centre in Krakow. He remains a patron of the charity. The UK government has announced additional funding for the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, of which the king is also a patron, to support the anniversary. (JN/ VFI News)

***Satanic Temple's Nativity Display in New Hampshire Destroyed, Dem Rep Calls for New Display;*** A satanic ‘nativity’ display involving an occult statue erected on Concord city property near the New Hampshire State Capitol was destroyed shortly after several vandalism incidents last week. Democratic state Rep. Ellen Read is saying that the temple “probably should” get to erect a new display in its place. “I think they probably should because I think the vandalism and the hatefulness shouldn’t go without a response. But it’s up to them,” Read said, Catholic media reported. Read told the outlet she came up with the idea to suggest that the satanic temple (TST) put up the Christmas display, which was a statue of Baphomet – despite significant pushback from local officials – arguing that a Catholic group’s Nativity scene of Yeshua should not be the only decoration there. She also said she is a member of TST but has not participated in any of its meetings or events. Avoiding a legal dispute over the First Amendment, the Concord City Council approved the organization’s permit to show the display, despite the mayor saying earlier this week he wished the city had not approved it. Meanwhile, the city also put out a statement saying that due to the First Amendment and the potential for a lawsuit, the city was forced to choose between banning all holiday displays or allowing TST's statue. (FN/ VFI News)

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