

Iran Update, December 1, 2023

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Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm EST

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The Iran Update provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities abroad that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests. It also covers events and trends that affect the stability and decision-making of the Iranian regime. The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) provides these updates regularly based on regional events. For more on developments in Iran and the region, see our interactive map of Iran and the Middle East.

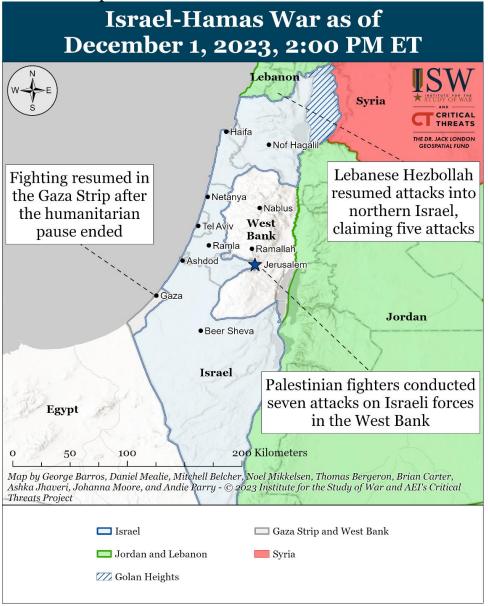
Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We utterly condemn violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

Click here to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Key Takeaways:

• Fighting resumed in the Gaza Strip after negotiations between Israel and Hamas broke down. Palestinian militias targeted Israeli forces along Israeli lines of advance north and south of Gaza city. Palestinian militias resumed indirect fire from the Gaza Strip into Israel after the truce ended.

- The IDF published a map dividing the entire Gaza Strip into blocks to facilitate civilian evacuations.
- The Israel government reportedly informed Arab states that it wants to establish a buffer zone in a post-war Gaza Strip.
- Palestinian fighters conducted seven attacks targeting Israeli forces in the West Bank. Hamas called for anti-Israel demonstrations across the West Bank.
- Lebanese Hezbollah conducted five attacks into northern Israel.
- An Iraqi social media account reported that the 30th Brigade of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces blocked a convoy of Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service and US forces in Iraq.



Gaza Strip

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Erode the will of the Israeli political establishment and public to launch and sustain a major ground operation into the Gaza Strip
- Degrade IDF material and morale around the Gaza Strip.

Fighting resumed in the Gaza Strip after negotiations between Israel and Hamas broke down. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) reported one hour before the truce was set to end that it intercepted an aerial object fired from the Gaza Strip into Israel.[1] The IDF stated that Hamas violated the agreement and renewed military operations in the Gaza Strip.[2] Hamas stated that Israel is responsible for the reignition of hostilities and blamed Israel for rejecting multiple offers to amend the swap of hostages in the Gaza Strip for Israeli-held prisoners.[3] Hamas Political Bureau member and representative of Gaza city Khalil al Hayya said on December 1 that Hamas will resume hostilities.[4] The Israeli Air Force and various combat elements attacked over 200 militant targets in the Gaza Strip, including in Khan Younis and Rafah.[5] Ground forces directed airstrikes and cleared destroyed areas booby-trapped with IEDs, tunnel shafts, rocket launching positions, and a Hamas military headquarters.[6] The IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi said the war is entering a second phase.[7] Several Palestinian militias claimed to clash with Israeli forces across the northern Gaza Strip, the area that Israel has declared a "war zone."[8]

- The al Qassem Brigades—the militant wing of Hamas—claimed several attacks on Israeli forces using indirect fire, tandem charge anti-tank rockets, and anti-personnel munitions.[9] The al Qassem Brigades also claimed to use a Shawaz explosively formed penetrators (EFP) to target an IDF tank.[10] Hamas has manufactured and used EPFs in the Gaza Strip since 2007.[11] The IDF seized Shawaz EFPs during a raid on November 16.[12]
- The al Quds Brigades—the militant wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)—claimed several attacks on Israeli forces north and south of Gaza city.[13] The al Quds Brigades shot down an Israeli Skylark drone in the central area of the Gaza Strip.[14]
- Other Palestinian militias also resumed attacks on Israeli forces. The National Resistance Brigades—the militant wing of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)—sniped an Israeli soldier north of the Martyr's junction in Gaza city and mortared groups of Israeli soldiers west of Gaza city.[15] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades—the self-proclaimed militant wing of Fatah—clashed with Israeli forces in the Sheikh Radwan neighborhood.[16]

Palestinian militias targeted Israeli forces along Israeli lines of advance north and south of Gaza city. The IDF stated that its forces were engaged in battles against militants to defeat the Hamas Zaytoun Battalion, operating in the Zaytoun neighborhood prior to the truce.[17] The al Quds Brigades mortared Israeli soldiers stationed near the Netzarim junction on the Salah al Din Road south of Zaytoun neighborhood.[18] Axis of Resistance-affiliated media said unspecified Palestinian fighters ambushed Israeli forces in the Tal al Hawa neighborhood west of Zaytoun.[19] The IDF stated on November 18 that it is expanding offensive operations toward Jabalia city in the northern Gaza Strip.[20] Local Palestinian media said that Palestinian fighters and Israeli forces engaged in fierce clashes southwest of Jabalia.[21]

Palestinian militias resumed indirect fire from the Gaza Strip into Israel after the truce ended. The al Qassem Brigades fired nine rocket salvoes into Israel, including at Tel Aviv.[22] The Times of Israel reported that Hamas expanded the range of its rocket fire as sirens went off in several cities of central Israel.[23] The al Quds Brigades fired five rocket salvoes at targets in southern Israel, including Nir Am, where Israeli Army Radio reported five Israeli injuries.[24] The Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades—the militant wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)—fired two rocket salvoes into southern Israel in response to Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip.[25] The National Resistance Brigades fired rockets at unspecified Israeli towns bordering the Gaza Strip.[26]

The IDF published a map dividing the entire Gaza Strip into blocks to facilitate civilian evacuations. The IDF said the map is in preparation for the next stages of the war and is designed to allow residents of the Gaza Strip to understand instructions to leave certain areas.[27] Senior Adviser to the Israeli Prime Minister Mark Regev told BBC that Israel shared its plans with US Secretary Blinken to show the United States that Israel is making "every effort to see civilians safely evacuate areas of combat."[28] The AP reported on December 1 that the IDF dropped leaflets over an area east of Khan Younis urging residents to leave for their safety and declaring the Khan Younis a "dangerous battle zone."[29] The IDF did not confirm that it advised people to leave, as it has done in the past, however.[30]

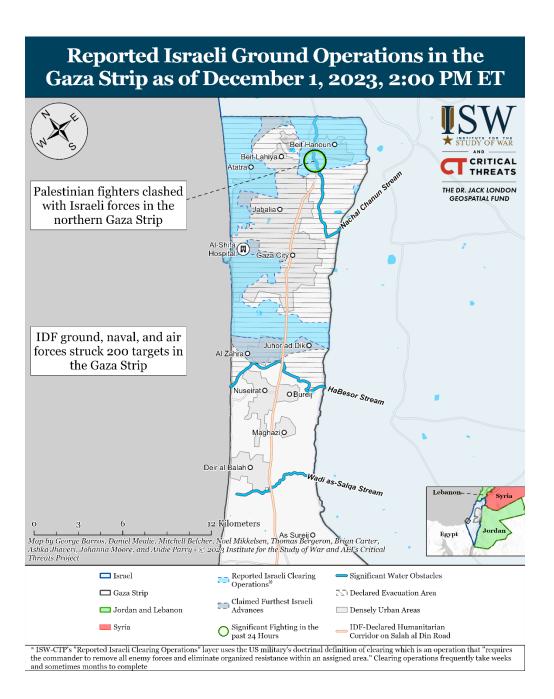
The Israel government reportedly informed Arab states that it wants to establish a buffer zone in a post-war Gaza Strip. Egyptian and regional sources told Reuters that Israel relayed its plans to Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia.[31] One of the sources said that Israel wants to prevent any future infiltration attack by Hamas or other militia infiltration attack.[32] An Israeli Prime Minister foreign policy adviser said the buffer zone plan is part of a "three-tier process" that includes destroying Hamas, demilitarizing Gaza, and deradicalizing the enclave.[33]

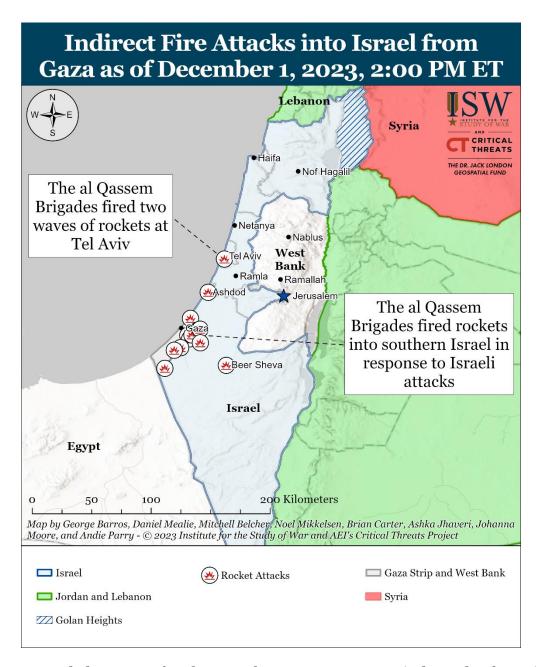
PIJ Deputy Secretary General Muhammad al Hindi told Al Jazeera about PIJ's coordination with Hamas on the battlefield and during the humanitarian pause.[34] Al Hindi said that PIJ played an important role "behind Hamas" in imposing truces and completing the hostage/prisoner swap with Israel.[35] CTP-ISW previously reported on November 28 that PIJ fighters accompanied hostages through the Gaza Strip as they were released.[36] Al Hindi also said the Hamas and PIJ militant wings are coordinating in the field and working together.[37] The al Quds Brigades and the al Qassem Brigades have claimed joint operations during the Israel-Hamas War.[38] Al Hindi has previously commented on growing coordination with Hamas. He publicly claimed that there was consensus between PIJ and Hamas in confronting Israel in May 2023 and said PIJ enters battles with Hamas "side by side" in August 2022.[39] Al Hindi was elected to the PIJ political bureau in March 2023 and subsequently reportedly became the Political Bureau's head.[40]

Anonymous Israeli officials told the Wall Street Journal that Israel plans to target Hamas leaders abroad after the war ends.[41] The report claims Israel has already started the preparation for targeted killings abroad. Several members of Hamas' leadership live in Lebanon, Qatar, and Turkey.[42]

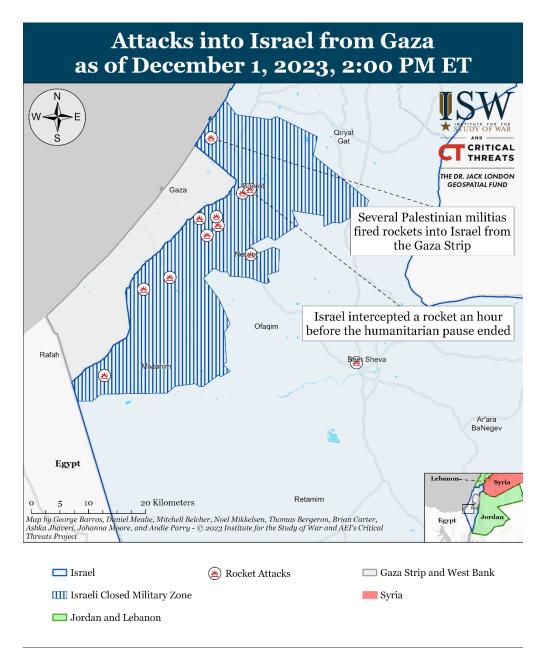
Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov claimed that a second group of Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip arrived in Chechnya on December 1, possibly partially

funded by his daughter's "Children of Chechnya - Children of Palestine" organization. (NOTE: This text also appeared in the Institute for the Study of War's December 1 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment) Kadyrov published footage claiming to show 116 Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip, including 60 children, arriving in Chechnya and claimed that it is Chechnya's "moral duty" to help the civilians of the Gaza Strip.[43] Kadyrov claimed that his daughter and head of the Grozny City Hall Preschool Education Department, Khadizhat Kadyrova, provided the children gifts through the "Children of Chechnya - Children of Palestine" organization. Kadyrov announced Kadyrova's patronage of the organization in a Telegram post on November 11, encouraging his followers to purchase crafts made by Chechen preschoolers to fund humanitarian aid for Palestinian Muslims.[44] Regional outlet Caucasian Knot reported on November 15 that the organization raised more than 68 million rubles to purchase aid for Palestinians.[45] Caucasian Knot reported on November 16, citing unnamed Chechen government officials, that Kadyrov pressured Chechen officials to spend up to a third of their monthly salaries buying crafts from the "Children of Chechnya - Children of Palestine" organization.[46] Chechnya's Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Development stated on November 18 that fundraisers for the organization are taking place "in all corners" of Chechnya.[47] ISW cannot independently verify this footage or any of Kadyrov's claims, however. But if true, Kadyrov may be using the funds from this organization to at least partially finance the relocation of Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip, an effort that could help Kadyrov in his guest to balance his desire to curry favor with Russian President Vladimir Putin with the need to appeal to his own Chechen constituency.[48] Kadyrov posted footage on November 29 purportedly showing an initial group of 50 Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip arriving in Chechnya.[49] Kadyrov's claims and the alleged work of the "Children of Chechnya-Children of Palestine" organization reflect the Kremlin's shift to a much more anti-Israel positions in the Israel-Hamas war.[50]





Recorded reports of rocket attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.



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West Bank

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

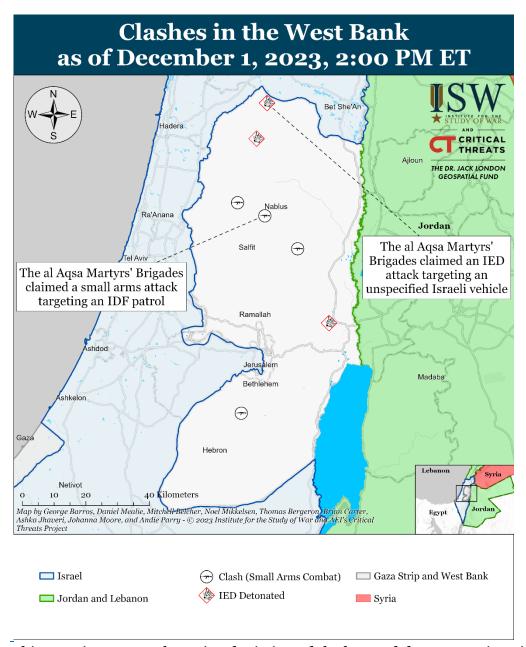
• Draw IDF assets and resources toward the West Bank and fix them there

Palestinian fighters conducted seven attacks targeting Israeli forces in the West Bank on December 1. The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades—the self-proclaimed militant wing of Fatah—engaged Israeli forces in a small arms clash near Nablus and detonated an IED targeting Israeli forces

near Jenin.[51] Unspecified Palestinian fighters conducted three small arms attacks against Israeli forces across the West Bank and detonated two IEDs targeting Israeli forces near Jenin.[52] The IDF reported that it detained 15 wanted persons and seized weapons, explosives, and unspecified military equipment across the West Bank.[53]

Hamas called for anti-Israel demonstrations across the West Bank. Hamas branches in Ramallah, Bethlehem, Tulkarm, Jenin, Hebron, Qalqilya called for protests on December 1 against the resumption of Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip.[54] CTP-ISW did not observe any demonstrations in the West Bank on December 1, however.

A Palestinian think tank reported survey results showing that Palestinian support for Hamas and the formation of armed groups in the West Bank has increased due to the Israel-Hamas prisoner/hostage exchange deal and increasing Israeli settler attacks on Palestinian civilians. The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research reported that support for Hamas in the West Bank has increased from 12 percent in September to 40 percent in November.[55] The director of the center reported that the recent hostage/prisoner release deal between Hamas and Israel was the most important factor increasing support for Hamas. The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research reported in November that nearly half of Palestinians in the West Bank support the formation of armed groups in response to attacks by Israeli settlers, which it said have increased 40 percent from 2022 to 2023.[56] US Secretary of State Blinken notified Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu that the United States will begin announcing visa bans against Israeli settlers involved in attacks on Palestinian civilians.[57]



This map is not an exhaustive depiction of clashes and demonstrations in the West Bank.

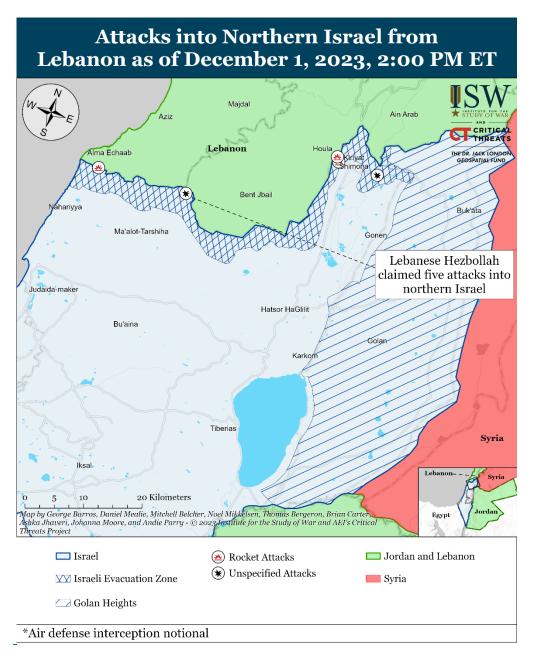
Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Draw IDF assets and resources toward northern Israel and fix them there
- Set conditions for successive campaigns into northern Israel

Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) conducted five attacks into northern Israel on December

1.[58] LH fired rockets at four Israeli military sites, hitting the al Marj site twice.[59] The IDF said that it intercepted a "suspicious" aerial target near HaGorshrim on December 1, although no militant group claimed responsibility for an attempted attack.[60] This is the first day that LH has conducted

indirect fire attacks into Israel since November 23.[61] The IDF said that it conducted strikes on LH squads and positions in southern Lebanon.[62]



Iran and Axis of Resistance

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Demonstrate the capability and willingness of Iran and the Axis of Resistance to escalate against the United States and Israel on multiple fronts
- Set conditions to fight a regional war on multiple fronts

An Iraqi social media account reported that the 30th Brigade of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) blocked a convoy of Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service (CTS)

and US forces in Iraq on December 1.[63] A video from the account shows PMF vehicles blocking a road and preventing military vehicles from passing. An Axis of Resistance-affiliated Telegram channel claimed that the road blocking occurred near Nimrud in northwestern Iraq.[64] The PMF and Iraqi Army conducted a "joint security operation" in Ninewa Province on December 1, but it is unclear if the 30th Brigade participated.[65] The PMF is a state-affiliated umbrella organization of Iraqi militias that ostensibly report to the Iraqi prime minister but frequently subvert the official chain of command to report to their affiliated Iranian-backed proxies.[66] CTP-ISW cannot independently verify Iraqi media's claim.

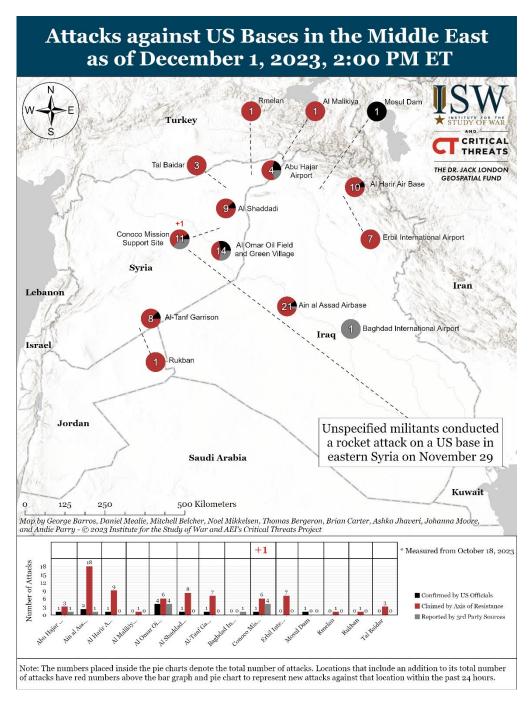
The 30th Brigade operates in Ninewa Province in northern Iraq and has strong ties to members of the Islamic Resistance of Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—including Kataib Hezbollah, Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba, and the Badr Organization.[67] The 30th PMF Brigade, also known as Hashd al Shabak, formed in 2014 under Waad Qado and is primarily made up of the Shabak ethnic group and Shia Turkmen.[68] The United States and locals from the Ninewa Plains have accused the 30th Brigade and Waad Qado of human rights violations, including extortion, illegal arrests, and kidnappings.[69] US-based al Monitor reported that the 30th Brigade has also been accused of targeting minority groups in the Ninewa Plains.[70] The 30th Brigade has previously harassed US forces in northern Iraq.[71] The brigade has resisted orders from former Iraqi prime ministers to withdraw unauthorized checkpoints from Ninewa on multiple occasions.[72]

The 30th Brigade's decision to block US and CTS forces comes shortly after Najm al Jubouri submitted his resignation as the governor of Ninewa on November 26.[73] The Iraqi Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) barred al Jubouri from running in the 2023 provincial elections based on corruption charges brought against him by the Accountability and Justice Commission.[74] The Shia Coordination Framework spearheaded a series of amendments to Iraq's election laws in March 2023, one of which barred individuals charged with corruption from participating in elections.[75] Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani appointed PMF-affiliated Abdul Qadir al Dakhil as the acting governor of Ninewa on November 27.[76] Dakhil served as the head of the Supreme Committee for the Reconstruction of Mosul under al Jubouri but has been supported by the PMF and was seen being escorted in Ninewa Province after being appointed acting governor by Kataib Hezbollah members, according to locals.[77]

Senior Iranian clerics met with Iraqi PMF Doctrinal Guidance Director Mohammad al Heydari in Qom on December 1.[78] Prominent Iranian Shia cleric Hossein Nouri Hamedani praised the PMF and condemned Israeli conduct in the Gaza Strip during his meeting with Heydari. IRGC Quds Force officials have previously consulted Hamedani on Quds Force and Axis of Resistance activities, as CTP-ISW reported.[79] Iranian Assembly of Experts member and Interim Qom Friday Prayer Leader Hashem Hosseini Bushehri separately praised the united front between Iran and the PMF against enemy conspiracies during his meeting with Heydari.

IRGC Navy Commander Rear Admiral Ali Reza Tangsiri met with Omani Armed Forces Deputy Chief of Staff Brigadier General Hamid bin Abdullah al Balushi in Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province, on December 1.[80] Tangsiri repeated long-standing Iranian regime rhetoric that regional countries must ensure the security of the Strait of Hormuz and that Western countries are present in the Persian Gulf to sow discord among Muslim countries. The Artesh and IRGC navies conducted a joint naval exercise with the Royal Navy of Oman in the Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman on November 30.[81] Al Balushi also met with Law Enforcement

Command Border Guard Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Ali Goudarzi in Tehran on November 29.[82]





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