

Iran Update, December 13, 2023

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Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm EST

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](#).

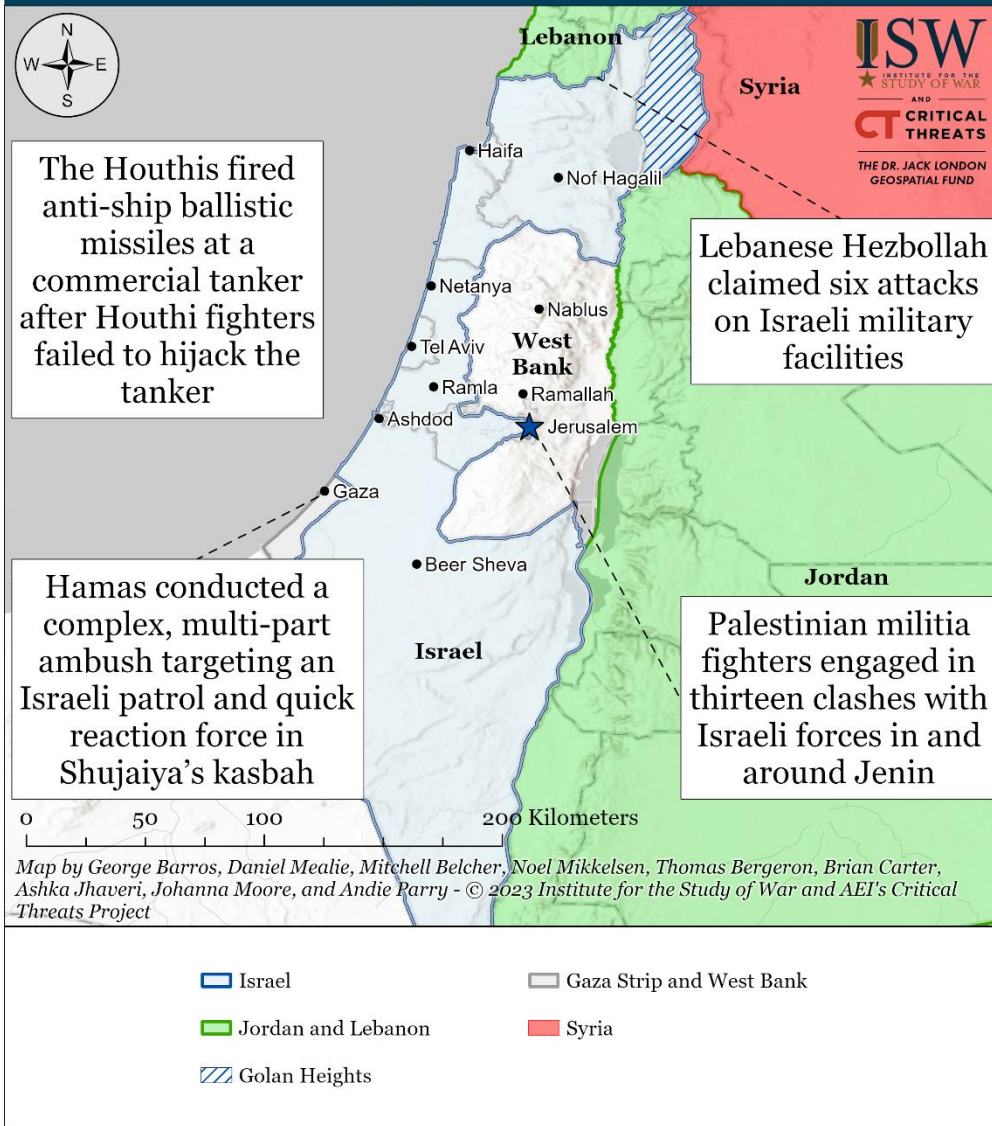
Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are well-covered 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:

1. Hamas conducted a complex, multi-part ambush targeting an Israeli patrol and quick reaction force in Shujaiya's kasbah on December 12.
2. Israeli forces are continuing to degrade Hamas forces by targeting military infrastructure and weapons caches throughout the Gaza Strip.
3. Hamas published a video of its fighters engaging Israeli forces from a school in Khan Younis. The video is notable as Hamas claims that its military forces do not use civilian infrastructure for military operations.
4. Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters 19 times in the West Bank.
5. Iranian-backed fighters, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted ten attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel.
6. The Israeli Air Force conducted an airstrike targeting Syrian Arab Army military infrastructure and positions within Syrian territory on December 12 according to a post from the IDF.
7. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed responsibility for two one-way drone attacks targeting US positions in Syria.
8. The Houthis fired two anti-ship ballistic missiles targeting a Marshall Islands-flagged vessel after Houthi fighters failed to hijack the ship.

Israel-Hamas War as of December 13, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



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.

Hamis conducted a complex, multi-part ambush targeting an Israeli patrol and quick reaction force (QRF) in Shujaiya's kasbah on December 12.[1] Hamas ambushed an Israeli fireteam entering a three-building complex during Israeli clearing operations in Shujaiya. Hamas fighters detonated an IED and fired small arms at the Israeli fireteam during the initial ambush.[2] Israeli forces nearby lost contact with the Israeli fireteam inside the building and

launched a QRF to rescue the fireteam.[3] One Israeli force moved north of the three-building complex, while another moved south.[4] Hamas fighters continued to attack the QRF by setting off IEDs and throwing grenades at Israeli forces.[5] Israel recovered the bodies of the Israeli fireteam, but five additional Israeli soldiers died during the rescue operation including a battalion commander, three company commanders, and the “head of the Golani Brigade’s forward command team.”[6]

Hamas’ Shujaiya Battalion remains capable of executing its defense mission in Shujaiya, indicating that it is not combat ineffective. Several Israeli military sources, including the Israeli defense minister, have said since December 11 that Hamas’ Shujaiya Battalion is “dismantled” and lost its “command and control” capabilities.[7] The complex, multi-part nature of this ambush requires significant coordination between multiple Hamas tactical units. This suggests that at least some elements of Hamas’ Shujaiya Battalion remain able to conduct military operations to defend Shujaiya.

Israeli forces are continuing to degrade Hamas forces by targeting military infrastructure and weapons caches throughout the Gaza Strip. The IDF said that its ground, air, and naval forces had attacked over 250 militant and infrastructure targets across the Gaza Strip on December 13.[8] The Israeli Defense Minister said on December 12 that Israeli troops had now descended deep underground to locate Hamas bunkers, command centers, communication rooms and weapon storage sites.[9] Israeli forces used drones to conduct reconnaissance of tunnels underneath Gaza city at the beginning of the ground operation.[10]

Palestinian militias claimed that they fired small arms targeting Israeli forces along the Israeli line of advance in the northern Gaza Strip on December 13. The al Quds Brigades—the militant wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)—claimed that its fighters clashed with Israeli forces in the Sheikh Radwan, Rimal, Shujaiya, and Zaytoun neighborhoods.[11] The al Qassem Brigades and al Quds Brigades fighters said that they ambushed Israeli forces in the Mughraqa area.[12] The Al Nasser Salah al Din Brigades—the militant wing of the Popular Resistance Committees—also said that it targeted Israeli forces with small arms fire and improvised explosive devices in the Shujaiya and Zaytoun neighborhoods.[13] National Resistance Brigades—the militant wing of Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)—claimed that it detonated IEDs and fired small arms targeting Israeli forces in Shujaiya.[14]

The al Qassem Brigades is attempting to defend against an Israeli advance towards Shujaiya from southern Gaza City. The al Qassem Brigades posted a video showing its forces detonating an explosively formed penetrator (EFP) targeting an Israeli tank in Zaytoun, southwest of Shujaiya.[15] The militia also shelled Israeli command posts with rockets and mortars in southern Gaza city.[16] The brigades did not provide any proof that their attacks were successful in either destroying Israeli armor or hitting Israeli command posts.

Israeli forces continued targeting Hamas’ military infrastructure during clearing operations in Khan Younis. Israeli forces destroyed Hamas operations centers and outposts in Bani Suheila, east of Khan Younis City.[17] Other Israeli units discovered “significant” tunnel shafts.[18]

Hamas published a video of its fighters engaging Israeli forces from a school in Khan Younis. The IDF also said that it raided a school in Khan Younis after Palestinian fighters fired at IDF forces from the same school.[19] Hamas published a video of its fighters firing at IDF forces from the same school.[20] Hamas’ video is notable in the context of the group’s repeated claims that its

military forces do not use civilian infrastructure for military operations.[21] The IDF also said that it discovered and destroyed an underground complex close to the school.[22]

Hamas and other Palestinian militias are attempting to blunt the Israeli advance in Khan Younis. Al Quds Brigades fighters east of Khan Younis mortared Israeli forces near the al Zalal Mosque, and the al Qassem Brigades fired rocket-propelled grenades and detonated EFPs targeting Israeli tanks east of Khan Younis city.[23] Al Qassem Brigades fighters also detonated EFPs and conducted hit-and-run attacks targeting Israeli armor north of the city.[24] Al Qassem Brigades fighters attacked Israeli forces advancing in western Khan Younis city with mortars.[25]

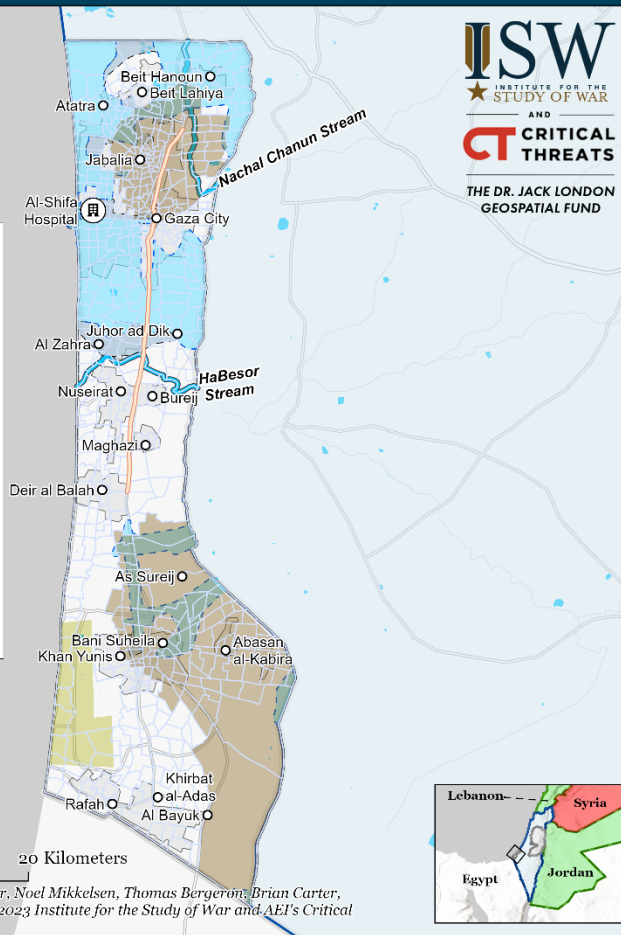
The IDF advised residents in central Khan Younis to evacuate towards al Zuhor, al Shaboura, and Tal al Sultan in Rafah governorate on December 13.[26]

Hamas stated its terms for freeing the Israeli hostages in the Gaza Strip. Hamas National Relations official and former al Qassem Brigades senior leader Mahmoud Mardawi stated that Israel must withdraw its forces from the Gaza Strip and commit to a ceasefire before negotiations can resume on prisoner swaps and unspecified other issues.[27] Mardawi confirmed that Hamas is in contact with third-party mediators.[28] The al Qassem Brigades released a propaganda poster on December 12 with the words “without a conditional exchange [the prisoners] will not emerge alive,” which is part of an information operation that aims to undermine Israeli public support for the ground operation in the Gaza Strip.[29] Israeli forces recovered the bodies of two hostages held in the Gaza Strip on December 12.[30]

Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip as of December 13, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



CTP-ISW's "Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones" layer shows Israeli evacuation zones announced by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). CTP-ISW used IDF maps and statements to create this layer. Where IDF maps cover part of a zone this layer covers the whole zone to avoid understating the evacuation order. The IDF began announcing these evacuation zones on December 2, 2023, at 0222 ET on X (Twitter)

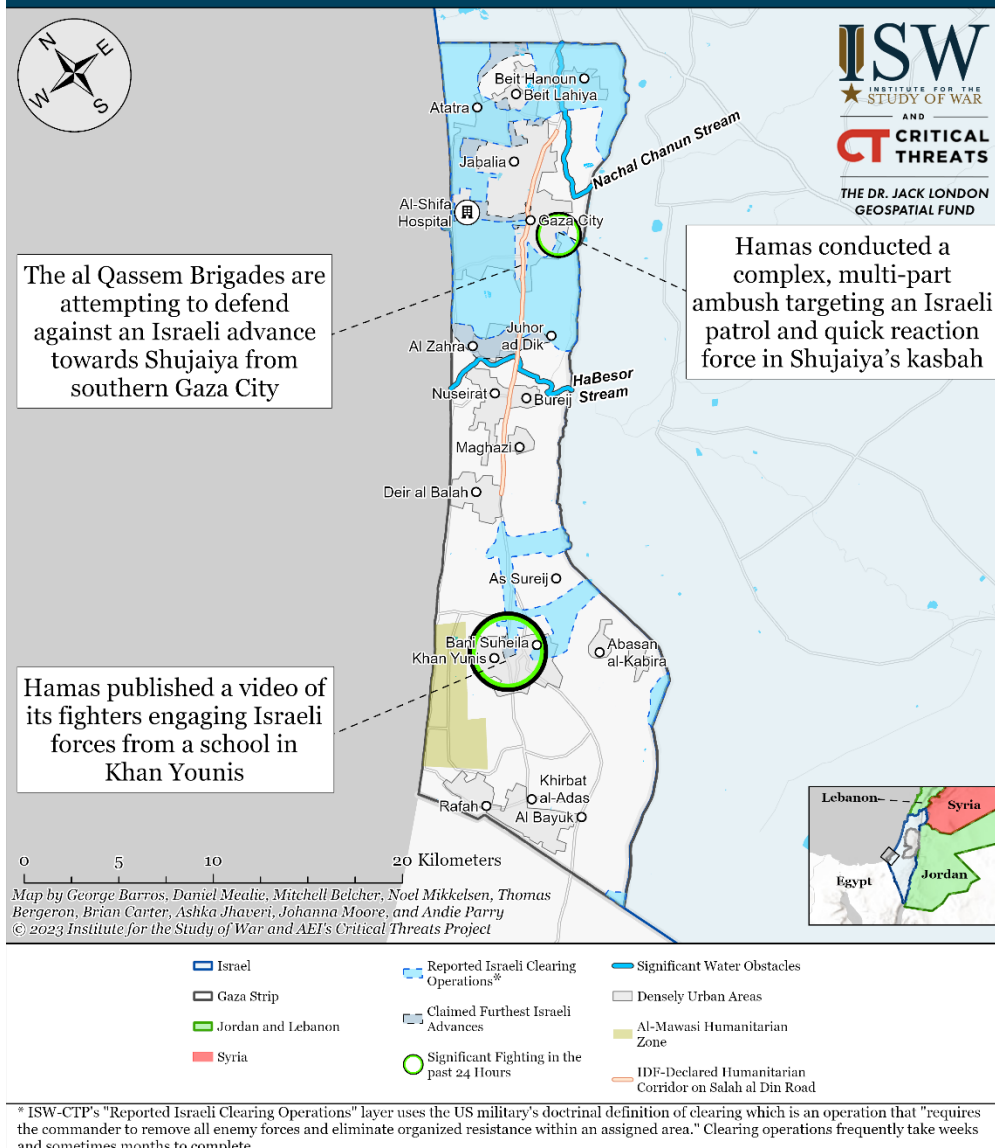


Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Israel
- Gaza Strip
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Salah al Din Road
- Densely Urban Areas
- Significant Water Obstacles

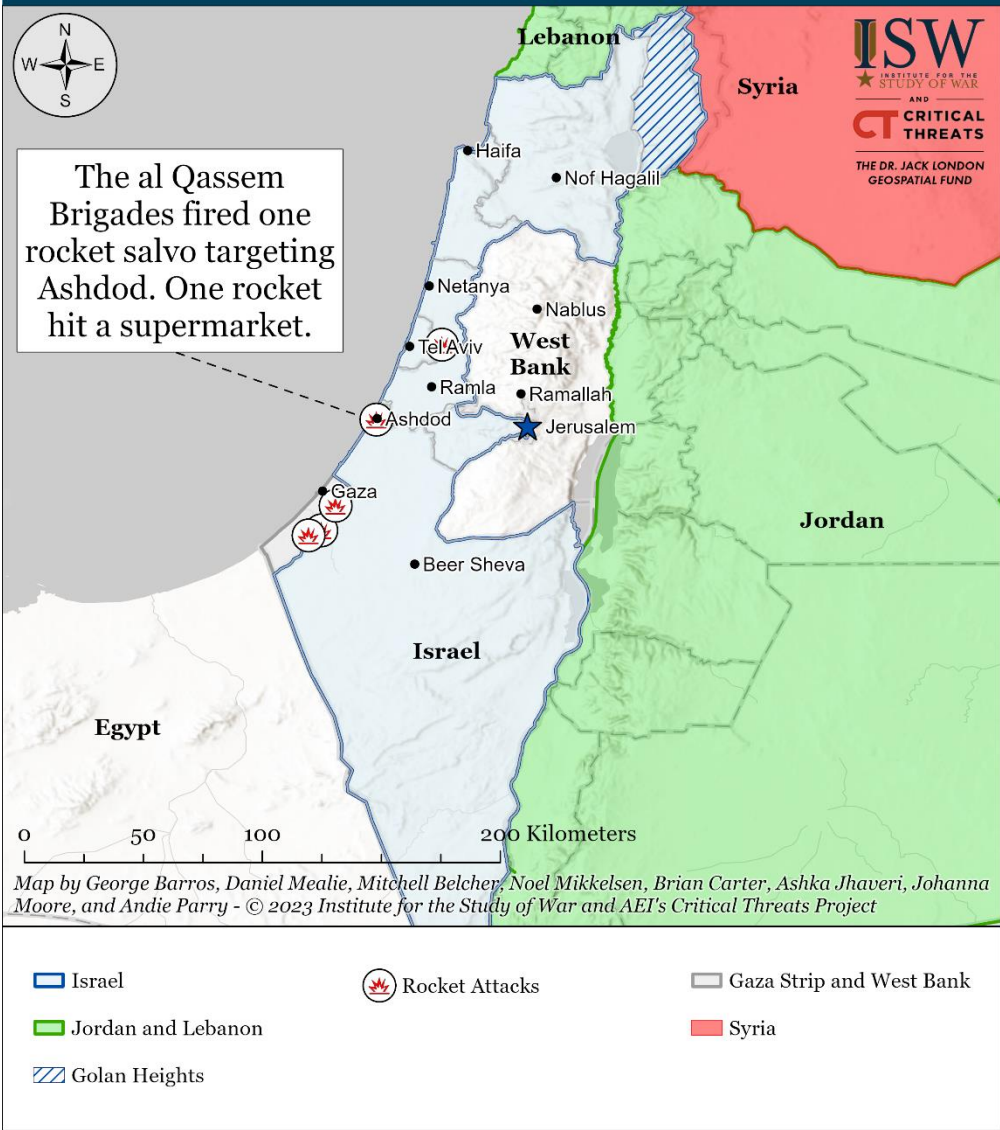
* ISW-CTP's "Reported Israeli Clearing Operations" layer uses the US military's doctrinal definition of clearing which is an operation that "requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance within an assigned area." Clearing operations frequently take weeks and sometimes months to complete

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of December 13, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



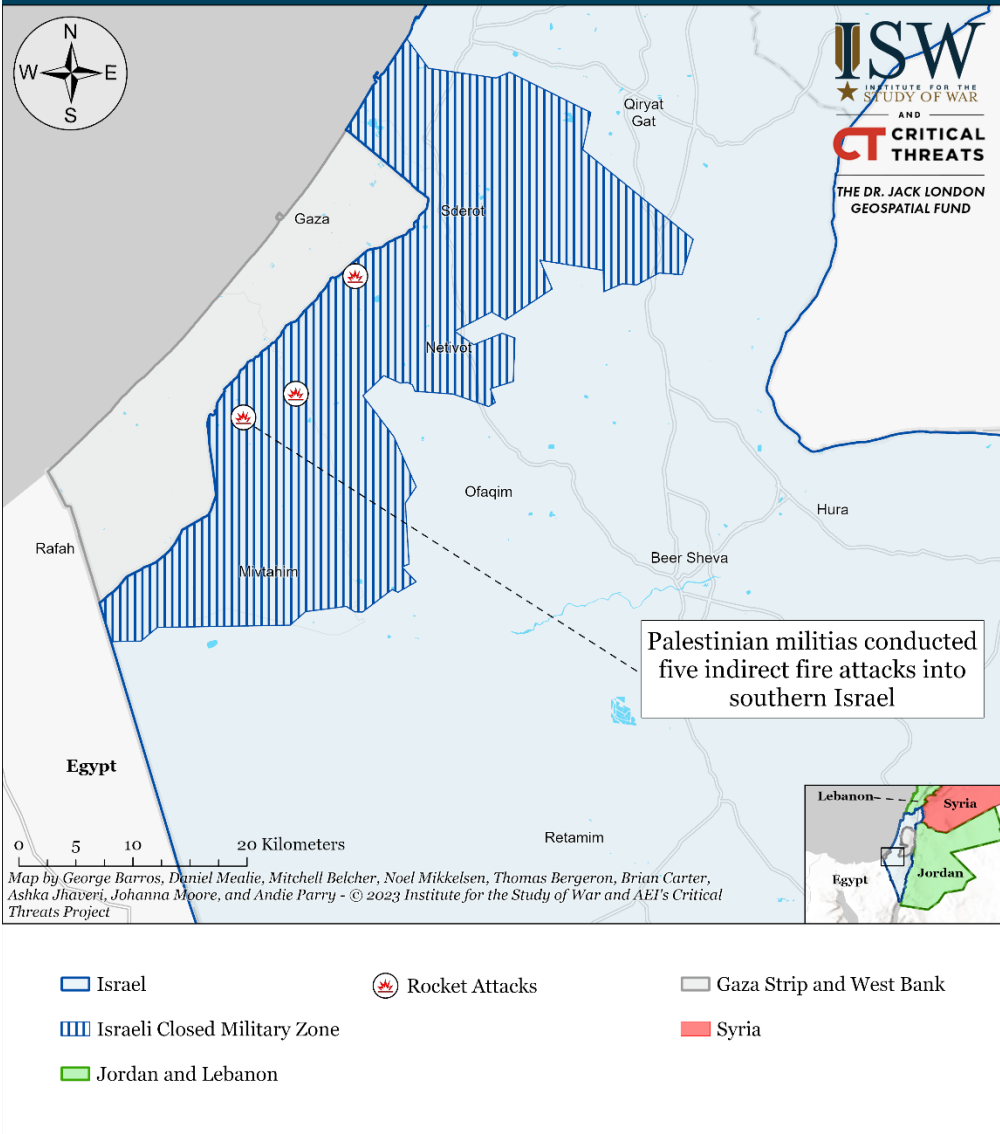
Palestinian militias in the Gaza Strip conducted five indirect fire attacks into Israel on December 13. The al Quds Brigades and the al Qassem Brigades both claimed responsibility for two attacks in southern Israel.[31] The National Resistance Brigades claimed responsibility for a rocket attack targeting an Israeli military site in southern Israel.[32]

Indirect Fire Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of December 13, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



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

Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of December 13, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



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

West Bank

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

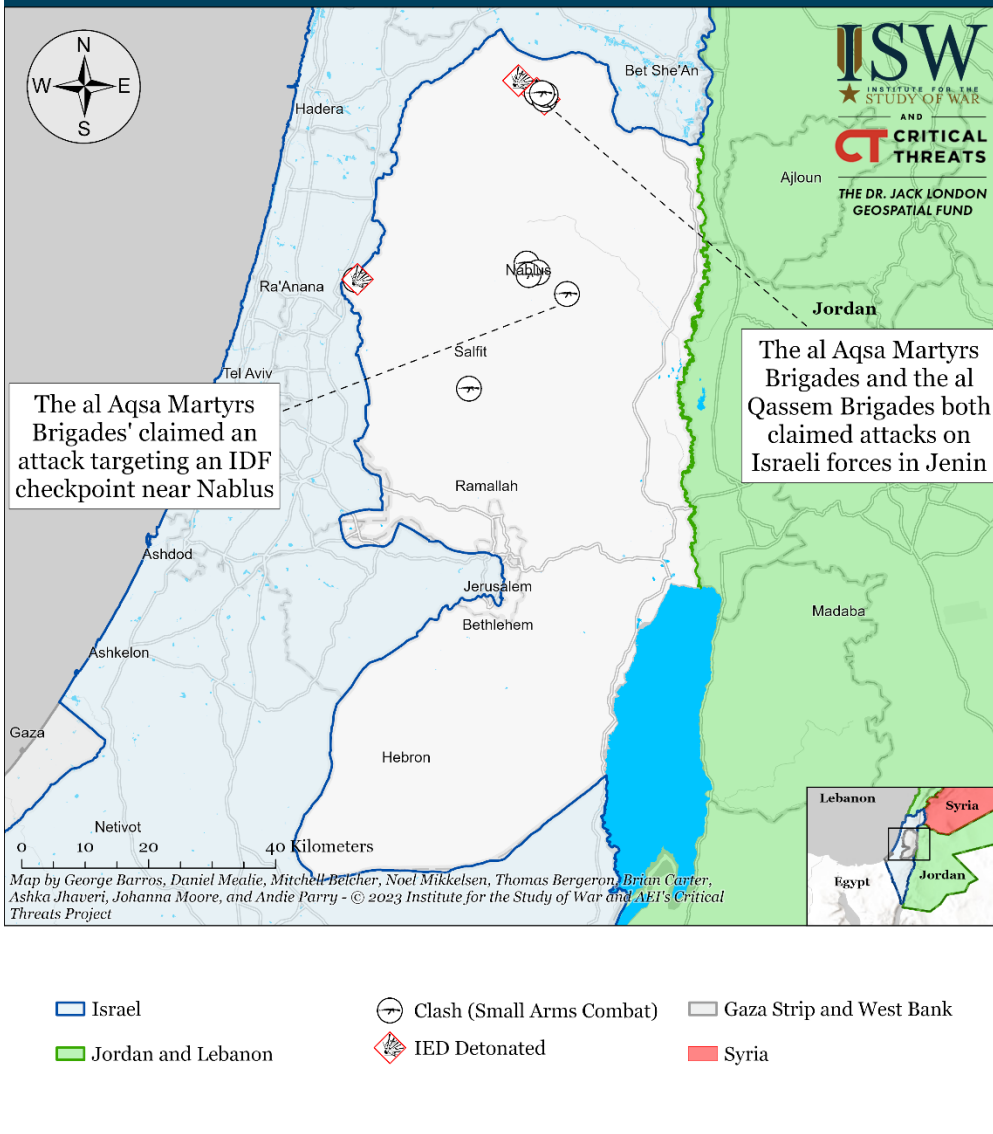
Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters 19 times in the West Bank.^[33] Thirteen of those clashes occurred in Jenin Governate.^[34] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade—a self-affiliated militant wing of Fatah—claimed two attacks targeting Israeli forces in Jenin and one attack on an IDF checkpoint near Nablus.^[35] The al Qassem Brigades claimed that it detonated an IED targeting an IDF vehicle during Israeli operations in Jenin.^[36] The IDF reported that it has searched 400

buildings, captured six IED manufacturing facilities, and arrested hundreds of individuals in Jenin since December 12.[37]

Hamas circulated flyers in the West Bank calling for a mass protest on December 15 under the slogan of “victory for Gaza.”[38] Hamas condemned Israeli operations in Jenin and claimed that the IDF arrested at least 120 individuals in Jenin.[39] Hamas framed Israeli operations in Jenin as an extension of Israel’s “comprehensive war against our people [Palestinians]”.[40] PIJ stated that its forces in Jenin would continue to escalate against Israel alongside other Palestinian militia groups.[41]

A Palestinian think tank reported survey results showing that Palestinian support for Hamas in the West Bank has tripled since September.[42] 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 44 percent in December.[43] The director of the center added in November that the hostage/prisoner release deal between Hamas and Israel was the most important factor increasing support for Hamas. The center said that Palestinian support for armed groups in the West Bank has increased in response to Israeli settler attacks from 47 percent in September to 56 percent in December.[44]

Clashes in the West Bank as of December 13, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



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

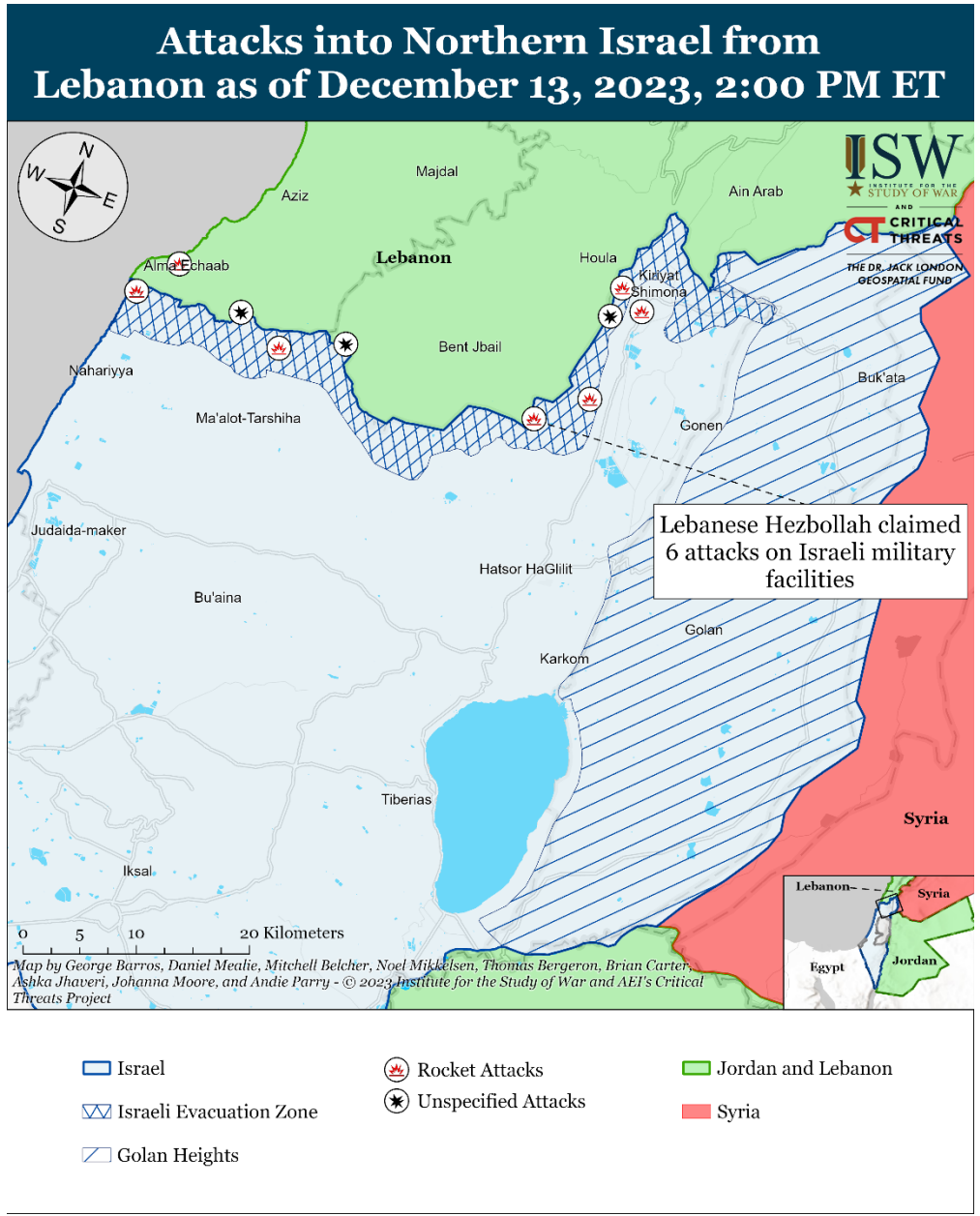
Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

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

Iranian-backed fighters, including Lebanese Hezbollah (LH), conducted ten attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel on December 13.[45] LH claimed six attacks targeting Israeli military positions along the border.[46] Unidentified Palestinian fighters conducted four separate rocket attacks into northern Israel targeting civilian areas.[47]

The Israeli Air Force conducted an airstrike targeting Syrian Arab Army military infrastructure and positions within Syrian territory on December 12 according to a post from the IDF.[48]

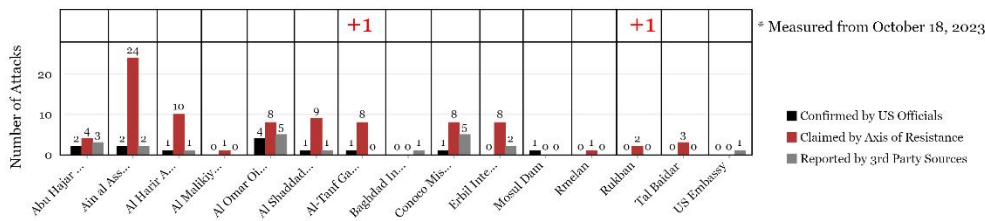
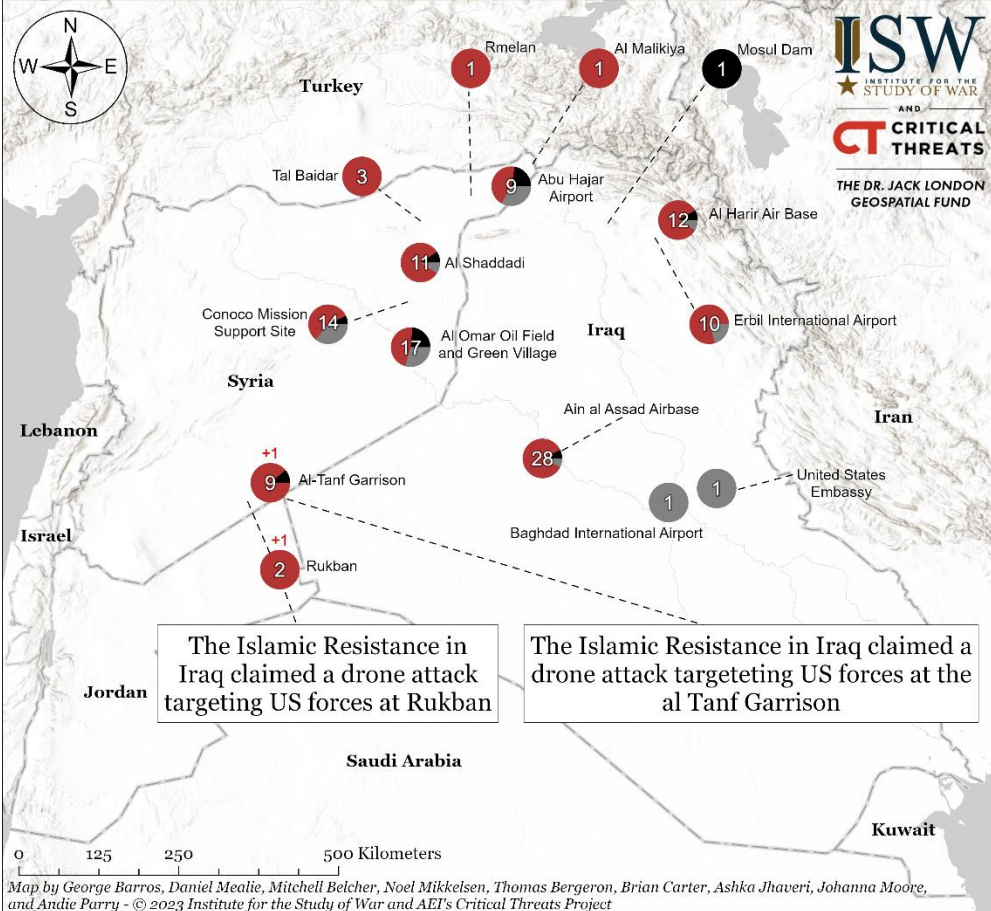


Iran and Axis of Resistance

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

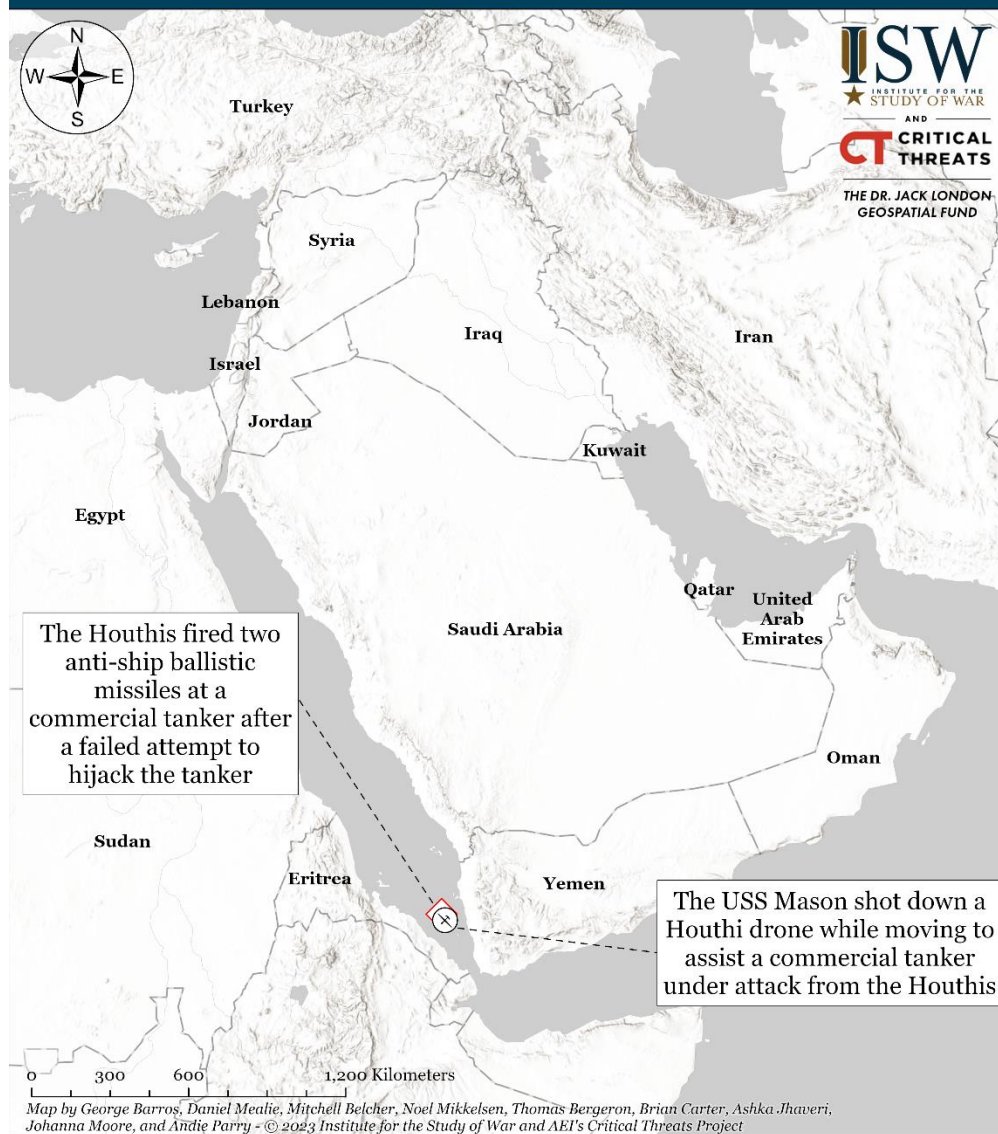
- Demonstrate the capability and willingness of Iran and the Axis of Resistance to escalate against the United States and Israel on multiple fronts
- Set conditions to fight a regional war on multiple fronts

Attacks against US Bases in the Middle East as of December 13, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



Note: The numbers placed inside the pie charts denote the total number of attacks. Locations that include an addition to its total number of attacks have red numbers above the bar graph and pie chart to represent new attacks against that location within the past 24 hours.

Iranian-sponsored Attacks in the Middle East as of December 13, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed responsibility for two one-way drone attacks targeting US positions in Syria on December 13. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed a single drone attack targeting US forces stationed at the al Tanf garrison.[49] The group has claimed eight attacks against al Tanf since October 19. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq also claimed a single drone attack targeting US forces stationed at Rukban.[50] The group has claimed two attacks against Rukban since October 23.

Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah (KH) announced on December 12 that it will support “righteous” and “jihadist” candidates in the upcoming provincial council elections on December 18.[51] KH defined these candidates as individuals who “provide services” to Iraqi citizens and defend citizens’ “rights and dignity.” Iraqi provincial councils are authorized to appoint and remove governors, approve provincial director-general positions, and approve provincial

security plans.[52] KH reiterated that its political party, Harakat Hoquq, will not be running in the provincial elections.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken condemned Iranian-backed Iraqi militias' attacks on US forces and diplomatic personnel in Iraq and Syria during a phone call with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani on December 13.[53] Blinken emphasized Iran's support for these militias and stated that the attacks undermine Iraq's sovereignty and independence. Blinken thanked Sudani for referring to recent attacks as "acts of terrorism" and for his pledge to pursue the perpetrators of the December 8 rocket and mortar attack on the US Embassy in Baghdad.

The Houthis fired two anti-ship ballistic missiles targeting a Marshall Islands-flagged vessel on December 13 after Houthi fighters failed to hijack the ship. The UK Maritime Transit Operations authority reported that a small boat carrying three armed individuals approached the M/T *Ardmore Encounter* and directed the *Encounter* to alter course to Yemen.[54] An armed security team aboard the *Encounter* fired warning shots at the boat, causing it to flee.[55] The Houthis then fired two anti-ship ballistic missiles which hit the water within 200 meters of the *Encounter*. [56] The *Ardmore Encounter* is a Marshall Islands-flagged commercial tanker carrying jet fuel from India.[57] The US destroyer USS *Mason* shot down a Houthi-operated drone while responding to the Houthi attack on the *Encounter*. [58] Key Houthi powerbroker and Member of the Houthi Supreme Political Council Mohammad Ali al Houthi advised ships in the Red Sea not to cut off their communications systems and to quickly follow the orders of the Houthi Navy. [59] The Houthis threatened on December 9 and 12 to expand their attacks on maritime traffic around the Red Sea to include all vessels traveling to Israel. [60] CTP-ISW cannot determine if the *Encounter* was traveling to Israel.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog said on December 13 that the Houthis "crossed a red line" in the Red Sea. [61] Herzog called for strengthening the US-led international coalition in the Red Sea to prevent the Houthis from posing a threat to international trade. [62] The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the United States is pushing allies and partners to reinforce a pre-existing task force, Combined Task Force 153, which is responsible for international maritime security in the Red Sea. [63]

An Israeli OSINT social media account reported that an IRGC-affiliated cargo transport plane landed in Moscow on December 13. [64] The airliner is operated by Pouya Air, which the United States and European Union sanctioned in 2011 and 2023 for transferring military materials throughout the Middle East behalf of the IRGC Quds Force. [65] Flightradar24 data shows that a Pouya Air-operated Ilyushin Il-76 transport plane departed from Tehran on December 13. [66] Flightradar24 incorrectly reported that a Pouya Air aircraft flew to Russian-occupied Crimea on September 7. [67]

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian held separate meetings with his counterparts from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan and Lebanon during the World Refugee Forum in Geneva on December 13. [68] Abdollahian reiterated calls for an immediate ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war and highlighted the need for increased humanitarian support for Palestinians in Gaza. [69] This is part of the Iranian effort to rally support against Israel among the Arab and Islamic worlds.



- [1] <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ambush-kills-7-israeli-soldiers-gaza-city-battles-105614856>
- [2] <https://www.timesofisrael.com/ten-soldiers-including-two-senior-officers-killed-in-gaza-fighting-and-deadly-ambush/>
- [3] <https://www.timesofisrael.com/ten-soldiers-including-two-senior-officers-killed-in-gaza-fighting-and-deadly-ambush/>
- [4] <https://www.timesofisrael.com/ten-soldiers-including-two-senior-officers-killed-in-gaza-fighting-and-deadly-ambush/>
- [5] <https://www.timesofisrael.com/ten-soldiers-including-two-senior-officers-killed-in-gaza-fighting-and-deadly-ambush/>
- [6] <https://www.timesofisrael.com/ten-soldiers-including-two-senior-officers-killed-in-gaza-fighting-and-deadly-ambush/>
- [7] <https://www.timesofisrael.com/ten-soldiers-including-two-senior-officers-killed-in-gaza-fighting-and-deadly-ambush/>; https://twitter.com/Doron_Kadosh/status/1734872801314546125;
<https://twitter.com/manniefabian/status/1734264932714058134>
- [8] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1734842202587578651>
- [9] https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-12-12-23/h_911d6b0b18b7be0766fd9035e535eae3
- [10] <https://twitter.com/IDF/status/1726284807351472556>
- [11] <https://t.me/sarayaps/16921> ; <https://t.me/sarayaps/16923> ; <https://t.me/sarayaps/16918> ;
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- [13] <https://t.me/alwya2000/6152>
- [14] https://t.me/kataeb_moqawma/3996
- [15] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/824>
- [16] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/816> ; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/817>
- [17] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1734929041499517062?s=20>
- [18] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1734929043206631662?s=20>
- [19] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1734981621361627154?s=20>
- [20] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/825>
- [21] <https://www.newarab dot com/news/hamas-denies-having-military-positions-civilian-areas>
- [22] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1734981623513280586?s=20>
- [23] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/820>; <https://t.me/sarayaps/16913>
- [24] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/820>; <https://t.me/sarayaps/16917>; <https://t.me/sarayaps/16924>
- [25] <https://t.me/sarayaps/16914>; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/815>
- [26] <https://twitter.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1734938413508256150/photo/1>
- [27] <https://twitter.com/qudsn/status/1734943277135085795>
- [28] <https://twitter.com/ytirawi/status/1734946143698633130>
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- [30] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1734614258116186426>
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[32] https://t.me/kataeb_moqawma/3997

[33] <https://t.me/QudsN/343270> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343279> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343365> ; [www dot idf dot il/161727](http://www.dot.idf.il/161727) ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343516> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343518> ; <https://t.me/newpress1/61500> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343401> ; https://twitter.com/no_itsmyturn/status/1734879784469987639 ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343471> ; https://t.me/C_Military1/41584 ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343499> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343508> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343525> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343543> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343594> ; <https://t.me/newpress1/61498> ; https://t.me/mihwar_almuqawama/42288 ; <https://t.me/hamaswestbank/48888> ; <https://t.me/hamaswestbank/48889>

[34] <https://t.me/newpress1/61500> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343401> ; https://twitter.com/no_itsmyturn/status/1734879784469987639 ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343471> ; https://t.me/C_Military1/41584 ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343499> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343508> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343525> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343543> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343594> ; <https://t.me/newpress1/61498> ; https://t.me/mihwar_almuqawama/42288 ; <https://t.me/hamaswestbank/48888> ; <https://t.me/hamaswestbank/48889>

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[36] <https://t.me/hamaswestbank/48888> ; <https://t.me/hamaswestbank/48889>

[37] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1734906114368508387> ; [www dot idf dot il/161727](http://www.dot.idf.il/161727)

[38] <https://t.me/hamaswestbank/48878> ; <https://t.me/hamaswestbank/48880>

[39] <https://t.me/hamasps/18354>

[40] <https://t.me/QudsN/343456>

[41] <https://t.me/QudsN/343526>

[42] <https://twitter.com/KShikaki/status/1734972527959474269> ; <https://twitter.com/MairavZ/status/1734947467727077467>

[43] <https://twitter.com/KShikaki/status/1734972527959474269>

[44] <https://twitter.com/KShikaki/status/1734974902279471563>

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[47] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1734953000857174379> ; https://t.me/C_Military1/41599 ; <https://t.me/QudsN/343498> ; https://t.me/C_Military1/41583

[48] <https://twitter.com/GLZRadio/status/1734698387805724866> ; <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1734698052437377317>

[49] <https://t.me/elamharbi/159>

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[51] <https://www.kataibhezbollah dot me/news/3336>

[52] <https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/IraqsProvincialElections-NationalImplications.pdf>

[53] <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinkens-call-with-iraqi-prime-minister-al-sudani-4/>

[54] https://twitter.com/UK_MTO/status/1734892185152073775 ; <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/houthi-anti-ship-ballistic-missiles-miss-tanker-in-red-sea>

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[57] <https://apnews.com/article/yemen-houthi-rebels-ship-attacks-us-navy-1727df3d95e548c6e4d20b51f096268f>
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