Iran Update, January 10, 2024

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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.

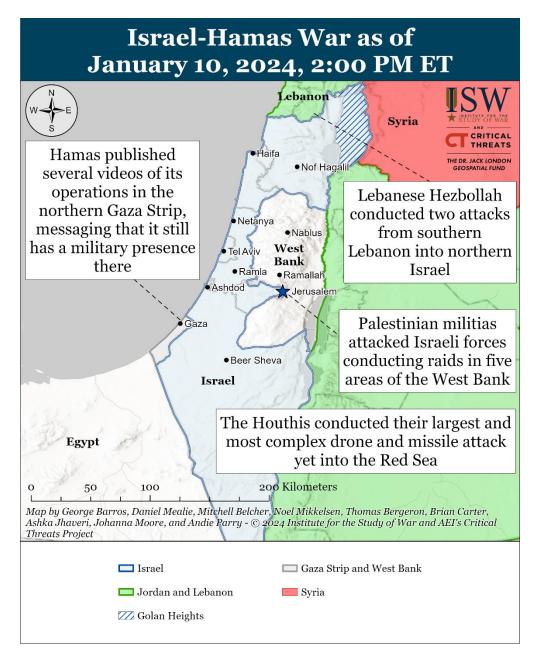
Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are well-covered 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 published several videos of its operations in the northern Gaza Strip, messaging that it still has a military presence there. The al Qassem Brigades and other Palestinian militias are not destroyed in the northern Gaza Strip and maintain a limited presence there, especially around southern Gaza City.
- 2. A Palestinian journalist reported that Israeli forces "repositioned" themselves in Gaza City after withdrawing from several areas in the city over the past two weeks.
- 3. The Israel Defense Forces continued clearing operations in the Central Governorate of the Gaza Strip. Palestinian militias continued attempting to defend against Israeli clearing operations in the central Gaza Strip.
- 4. The Israel Defense Forces continued clearing operations in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip. The Israel Defense Forces said that it completed operations in Khuzaa, south of Khan Younis.
- 5. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in an interview with NBC News that normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel is still possible.
- 6. Israeli media reported that the latest Qatari proposal for a ceasefire agreement would include exiling Hamas leaders from the Gaza Strip.
- 7. Palestinian fighters attacked Israeli forces conducting raids in five locations in the West Bank. Hamas Political Bureau leaders have in recent days called attention to violence and Israeli raids in the West Bank.

- 8. Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted two attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel on January 10, compared to the weekly average of around nine attacks.
- 9. Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani is attempting to balance pressure from Iranian-backed Iraqi actors to expel US forces from Iraq with his administration's reported desire to sustain the US-led coalition presence in Iraq.
- 10. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed responsibility for three attacks targeting US positions in Iraq and Syria.
- 11. The Houthis conducted their largest and most complex attack yet into the Red Sea.
- 12. Iran has reportedly developed a new Shahed drone for Russian forces to use against Ukraine and is "close" to providing Russia with surface-to-surface ballistic missiles and systems.



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.

Hamas published several videos of its operations in the northern Gaza Strip, messaging that it still has a military presence there. Hamas' military wing—the al Qassem Brigades—published these videos on January 9 and 10.[1] The footage features various al Qassem Brigades operations, including the capture of an Israeli drone in Beit Lahia, rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) attacks on Israeli armor and dismounted infantry in the northwestern Gaza Strip and southern Gaza

City, and an ambush on Israeli soldiers in a tunnel in Sheikh Radwan dating to late December 2023.[2] Hamas' political wing similarly messaged on January 9 that the group retains a strong and cohesive command-and-control network in the Gaza Strip.[3] CTP-ISW has repeatedly assessed, however, that Hamas has lost command-and-control over some units that are engaged with Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip.[4]

The al Qassem Brigades and other Palestinian militias are not destroyed in the northern Gaza Strip and maintain a limited presence there, especially around southern Gaza City.[5] Israeli forces began clearing operations in southern Gaza City in late October 2023 to isolate the northern Gaza Strip from the rest of the territory.[6] The IDF announced on November 18, 2023, that Israeli forces expanded clearing operations to Zaytoun and began targeting fighters and infrastructure belonging to the Hamas' Zaytoun Battalion.[7] Palestinian militias have continued conducting occasional attacks on Israeli forces in Zaytoun since then, despite the IDF announcing on January 6 that it had "dismantled" the 12 Hamas battalions in the northern Gaza Strip.[8] The commander of the Zaytoun Battalion is one of the three Hamas commanders remaining in the Gaza City Brigade, who held their current positions before the war began, according to IDF reports on December 21, 2023.[9] Palestinian fighters in the Zaytoun Battalion probably have access to a rear area and safe haven in the Gaza Strip's Central Governorate, given its proximity to where the battalion operates and the fact that the IDF has not completed clearing operations.[10]

A Palestinian journalist reported on January 9 that Israeli forces "repositioned" themselves in Gaza City after withdrawing from several areas in the city over the past two weeks.[11] The journalist said that Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters in Sheikh Radwan and Zaytoun in Gaza City.[12] The IDF confirmed on December 31 that it withdrew five brigades from the northern Gaza Strip and said that it would transition to limited raids in the area.[13] Israeli forces have degraded several Hamas units and rendered others combat ineffective since the beginning of the clearing operations, particularly in the northern Gaza Strip. Hamas' military forces are neither defeated nor destroyed at this time, however.

Hamas fighters in the northern Gaza Strip may be attempting to fix Israeli forces in the area to prevent any Israeli attempt redeploy forces southward. A fix is a tactical mission task wherein "a commander prevents the enemy from moving any part of that force from a specific location for a specific period."[14]

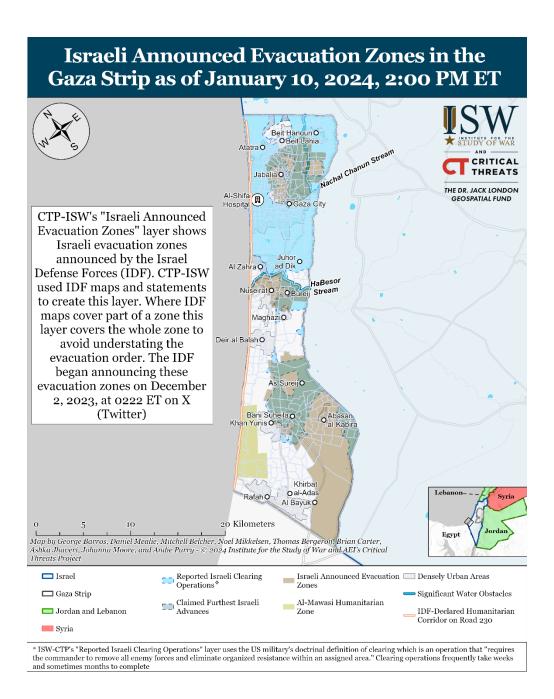
The IDF continued clearing operations in the Central Governorate of the Gaza Strip on January 10. The IDF Golani Brigade (assigned to the 36th Division) directed an airstrike targeting fighters in Maghazi and located over 15 militia tunnels in the area.[15] The Golani Brigade also located platforms for launching rockets, missiles, and drones and destroyed an RPG manufacturing system in Maghazi. Palestinian sources said that an Israeli airstrike targeted an ambulance in Deir al Balah and killed four members of the ambulance crew.[16]

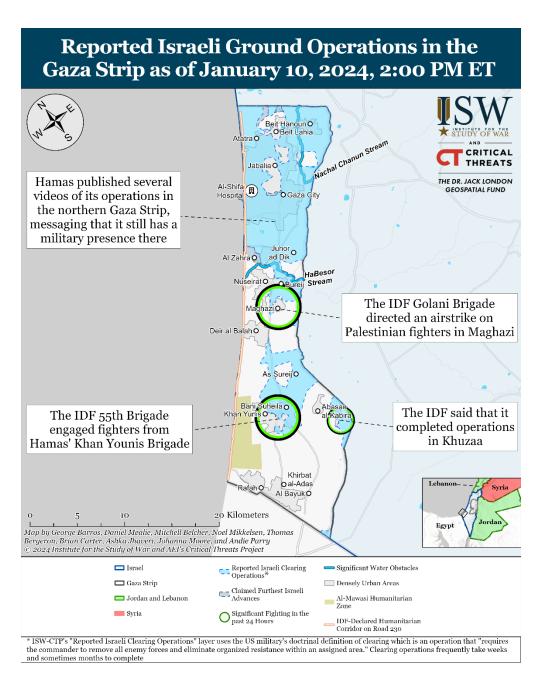
Palestinian militias continued attempting to defend against Israeli clearing operations in the central Gaza Strip on January 10. The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades—the self-proclaimed military wing of Fatah—clashed with Israeli forces in central Maghazi.[17] The al Quds Brigades—the military wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)—fired an RPG at an Israeli Merkava tank north of Nuseirat.[18] The National Resistance Brigades—the militant wing of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)—fired mortars at Israeli vehicles northwest of Bureij.[19]

The IDF continued clearing operations in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip on January 10. The IDF 55th Brigade (assigned to the 98th Paratroopers Division) has targeted fighters from Hamas' Khan Younis Brigade in recent days.[20] The IDF located a drone launch site, weapons, and a tunnel shaft in Khan Younis. The IDF also directed airstrikes on four Hamas sites in the area, including a Hamas operational headquarters.[21] The IDF 4th (Kiryati) Brigade Combat Team identified a Palestinian fighter who planted an IED in Khan Younis and directed an airstrike to eliminate the fighter.[22] The IDF Air Force conducted strikes killing over ten Palestinian fighters in Khan Younis.[23] The 98th Paratrooper Division also killed dozens of fighters during clashes in Khan Younis.[24]

The IDF engaged several Palestinian militias in clashes in Khan Younis. The al Qassem Brigades fired mortars at Israeli forces south of Khan Younis.[25] The al Quds Brigades fired mortars at Israeli forces in Khan Younis.[26] The National Resistance Brigades clashed with Israeli soldiers in the Jourat al Lot neighborhood of Khan Younis.[27]

The IDF said that it completed operations in Khuzaa, south of Khan Younis, on January 10.[28] The IDF began combat operations in Khuzaa on December 27, 2023.[29] The IDF said that its 5th Brigade (assigned to the 143rd Division) killed dozens of Hamas fighters and destroyed hundreds of Hamas infrastructure, including weapons depots, rocket launching positions, and tunnels in Khuzaa.[30] The IDF said Hamas' fighters used the infrastructure in Khuzaa to conduct attacks on Nir Oz, Nirim, and Ein HaSlosha in southern Israel on October 7.[31]





US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in an interview with NBC News on January 10 that normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel is still possible.[32] Blinken said that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman supports advancing the normalization process in a recent meeting.[33] An Israeli journalist reported that Blinken told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during their meeting on January 9 that Saudi Arabia intends to continue normalization with Israel only if Israel agrees to a two-state solution after the Israel-Hamas war.[34] Blinken said in a press conference after meeting with Netanyahu that Israeli leaders will have to make "difficult decisions" if Israel "wants its Arab neighbors to make difficult decisions to ensure its security."[35]

Israeli media reported on January 10 that the latest Qatari proposal for a ceasefire agreement would include exiling Hamas leaders from the Gaza Strip.[36] The Israeli

security cabinet is discussing the proposal, which also involves Hamas releasing all Israeli hostages in stages and Israeli forces withdrawing from the Gaza Strip.[37] The proposal is incompatible with Israel's stated war aims, which includes the destruction of Hamas, demilitarization of the Gaza Strip, and "deradicalization of Palestinian society."[38]

Palestinian militias did not claim any indirect fire attacks into Israel from the Gaza Strip on January 10.

West Bank

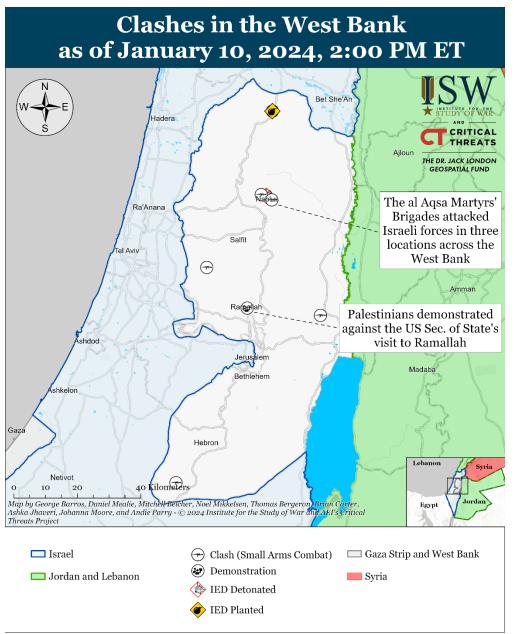
Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

Palestinian fighters attacked Israeli forces conducting raids in five locations in the West Bank on January 10.[39] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades claimed a series of small arms clashes and IED detonations targeting Israeli armor and dismounted infantry in Jenin, Nablus, and al Dhahiriya.[40] The Nablus Battalion of the al Quds Brigades also participated in the Nablus clashes.[41] Israeli forces uncovered over 180 IEDs during the raids and detained 14 wanted Palestinians.[42]

Hamas Political Bureau leaders have in recent days called attention to violence and Israeli raids in the West Bank. Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh claimed on January 9 that Israeli forces have killed over 350 Palestinians in the West Bank since October 7, describing Israeli actions there as "dangerous and major."[43] Osama Hamdan—Hamas' senior representative to Lebanon—similarly condemned on January 10 Israeli raids that destroy homes and infrastructure in the West Bank.[44] Israeli forces uncovered over 80 road buried IEDs intended to target Israeli armor and dismounted infantry in Jenin on January 10.[45]

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah on January 10. Blinken told Abbas that the United States supports "tangible steps" toward establishing a Palestinian state alongside Israel.[46] The leaders also discussed reforming the PA and improving how it governs.[47] Palestinians demonstrated against Blinken's visit in Ramallah.[48] A Fatah leader separately called for Abbas to cancel his meeting with Blinken.[49]



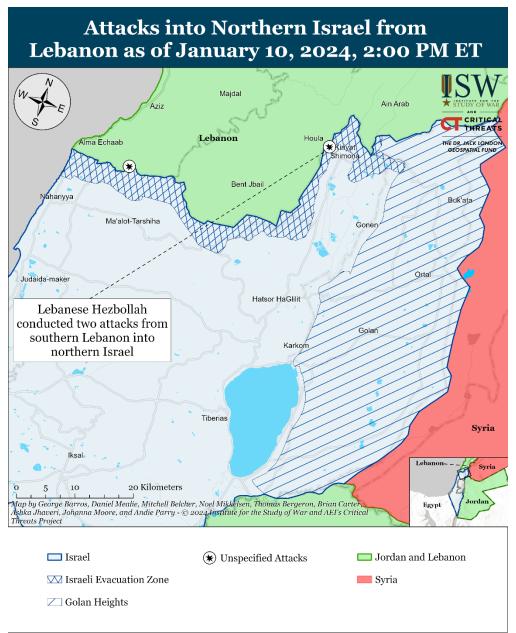
This map is not an exhaustive depiction of clashes and demonstrations in the West Bank.

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 militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah (LH), conducted two attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel on January 10, compared to the weekly average of around nine attacks. LH conducted attacks both targeting Israeli military facilities near Margaliot and al Jardah.[50] The IDF reported that the LH attack targeting al Jardah did not cause any damage.[51]



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

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

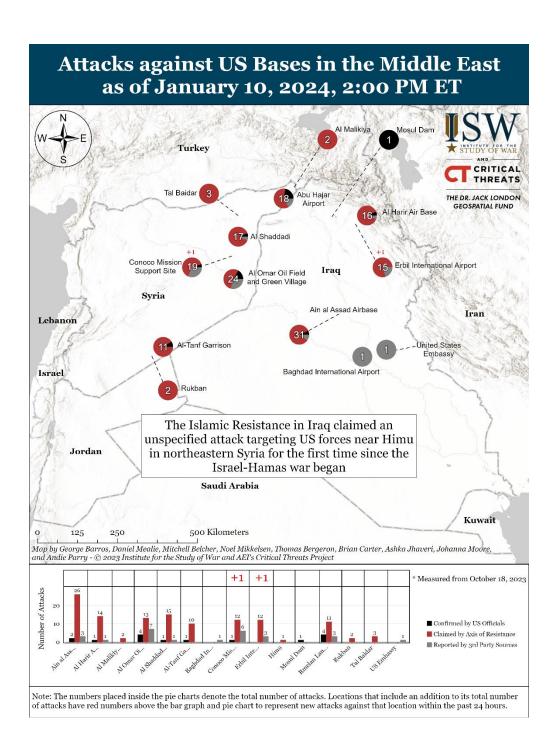
Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani is attempting to balance pressure from Iranian-backed Iraqi actors to expel US forces from Iraq with his administration's reported desire to sustain the US-led coalition presence in Iraq. Sudani stated that his administration seeks a "quick and orderly" exit of US-led coalition forces from Iraq during an interview with Reuters on January 9.[52] Sudani described the presence of US-led coalition forces as "destabilizing" and claimed that Iraq can fight terrorism without international support. This claim ignores the fact that the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) still faces significant deficiencies in fire support, intelligence, and logistics that inhibit their ability to defeat ISIS alone.[53] CTP-ISW continues to assess that an Iraqi decision to expel US forces from Iraq would very likely create space for ISIS to rapidly resurge in Syria within 12 to 24 months and then threaten Iraq.[54] Sudani also stated that Iraq remains open to engaging in security cooperation with the United States, including having the United States advise and train the ISF. The United States formally ended its combat mission in Iraq in December 2021 and transitioned to a solely advisory role.[55]

Sudani's statements to Reuters contradict a report from Politico on January 9 that said that Sudani has privately informed US officials that he wants US forces to remain in Iraq.[56] Politico, citing a US State Department cable, reported that Sudani announced on January 5 the formation of a committee to facilitate the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq in order to "satisfy domestic political audiences." The Politico report is consistent with US Department of Defense Press Secretary Major General Patrick Ryder's saying on January 8 that the Iraqi federal government has not notified the department about any decision to expel US forces from Iraq.[57]

This episode is the latest in the long-standing Iranian effort to drive US forces out of Iraq. Iran and its Iraqi clients and partner groups have tried repeatedly in recent years to catalyze a US exit. Each attempt to remove US forces from Iraq since they returned to fight ISIS has failed up to this point. The most recent efforts have involved Iranian-backed factions and militias using attacks and legal mechanisms to force the United States to withdraw militarily, on which CTP-ISW has reported extensively.

There is no guarantee that these latest Iranian-backed efforts will continue to fail, as they have historically. Iranian-backed Iraqi actors are pursuing their campaign to catalyze a US departure with renewed energy. US policymakers cannot assume that the US military position in Iraq is secure, as the Middle East has undergone tectonic shifts in recent months.

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed responsibility for three attacks targeting US positions in Iraq and Syria on January 10. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed that it conducted an unspecified attack targeting US forces near Himu in northeastern Syria.[58] The Islamic Resistance in Iraq has not claimed an attack on Himu since the Israel-Hamas war began. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq also claimed a rocket attack targeting US forces at Conoco Mission Support Site in Deir ez Zor Province, Syria, and a drone attack targeting US forces at Erbil International Airport in Erbil Province, Iraq.[59]





The Houthis conducted their largest and most complex attack yet into the Red Sea on January 9.[60] The Houthis claimed that they targeted an unspecified US naval vessel and framed the attack as retaliation for the United States killing 10 Houthi fighters as they tried to hijack a commercial vessel on December 31.[61] US and UK naval forces intercepted 18 one-way attack drones, two anti-ship cruise missiles, and an anti-ship ballistic missile fired by the Houthis.[62] CENTOM reiterated that the Houthis bear responsibility for any of the consequences for their continued attacks in the Red Sea.[63]

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian discussed the Israel-Hamas war and security in the Red Sea in a phone call with his Russian counterpart, Sergei

Lavrov, on January 9.[64] Abdollahian called for an end the fighting in the Gaza Strip. Abdollahian also implicitly blamed Israel for Houthi attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea. Lavrov claimed that the United States is using the Houthi attacks as a pretext to expand its military presence in the Middle East. The Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry's readout of the call did not include Abdollahian's statements regarding a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.[65]

The PIJ Representative to Iran, Nasser Abu Sharif, discussed the Israel-Hamas war in an interview with IRGC-affiliated media on January 10.[66] Sharif claimed that Israel is in a state of weakness and will become even weaker if it decides to fight Iran and LH. Sharif further claimed that Israel does not have the power to confront LH and cannot expand the war into Iraq, Lebanon, or Yemen. Sharif emphasized that LH will never allow Israel to "change the rules of the game."

Salafi-jihadi group Jaish al Adl claimed responsibility for an attack on a police outpost near Rask, Sistan and Baluchistan Province, on January 10.[67] This attack marks the third that Jaish al Adl has conducted since December 2023.[68] Jaish al Adl killed one Iranian Law Enforcement Command officer in the attack. Iranian state media reported that Jaish al Adl militants tried and failed to enter the police station. Jaish al Adl previously claimed responsibility for an attack on a Rask police station, killing 11 Iranian security personnel on December 15, 2023.[69] CTP-ISW assessed that Jaish al Adl was also responsible for an IED targeting an IRGC special operations forces unit in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province, on December 19, 2023.[70]

Note: The following text also appears in CTP-ISW's Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 10, 2024 update.

Iran has reportedly developed a new Shahed drone for Russian forces to use against Ukraine and is "close" to providing Russia with surface-to-surface ballistic missiles and systems. An unspecified security source told Sky News in an article published on January 10 that Iran has developed an "explosive and reconnaissance" Shahed-107 drone and has offered "a few units" to Russia for over \$2 million.[71] The source stated that the Shahed-107 has a range of up to 1,500 kilometers and has a video livestream transmitter.[72] ISW recently observed reports that Russian forces had launched a new Shahed model, the Shahed-238, which is different from the Shahed-107, against Ukraine.[73] Sky News' source also stated that Russia is expecting to receive surface-tosurface ballistic missiles and systems from Iran "sometime soon." [74] US National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby reported on January 4 that Russian officials continue efforts to buy ballistic missiles from Iran. [75] ISW assessed that Russia may be intensifying efforts to source ballistic missiles from abroad because these missiles appear more effective at striking targets in Ukraine in some circumstances.[76] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian discussed the development of a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement, trade cooperation, the construction of the Rasht-Astara railway in Iran, and the Israel-Hamas war among other topics in a January 9 phone call. [77]



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[2] https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1292; https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1294; https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1291; https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1297; https://twitter.com/ja31ck/status/1745075280006312147?s=20; https://twitter.com/fdov21/status/1744858323021652474?s=20

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