# Iran Update, January 11, 2024

Ashka Jhaveri, Andie Parry, Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, Peter Mills, Kathryn Tyson, Alexandra Braverman, and Brian Carter

# **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.

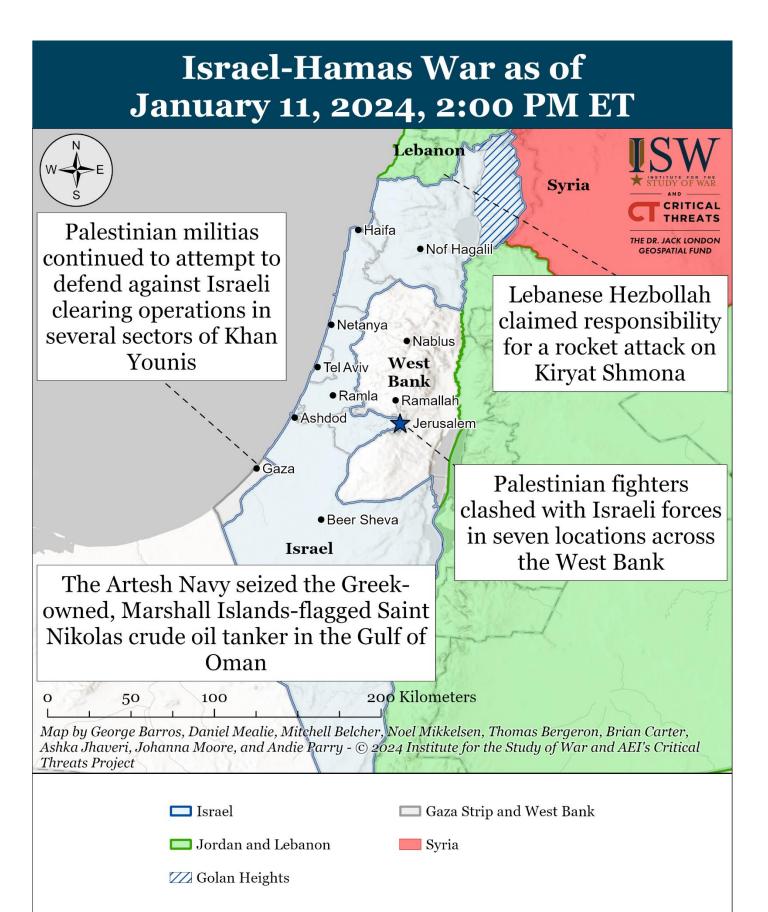
Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are well-covered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

- Israeli forces continued clearing operations in the central Gaza Strip.
- The IDF 98th Division continued clearing operations in Khan Younis.
- Hamas and other unspecified Palestinian political factions discussed the state of the Israel-Hamas war in an "emergency national meeting," which may signal that Palestinian political factions are considering re-opening indirect talks with Israel after talks froze on January 2.
- Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah (LH), conducted 11 attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel.
- The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed a rocket attack targeting US forces at al Shaddadi, Hasakah Province, Syria.[1]
- Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein stated that the Iraqi federal government will announce a start date soon for talks to remove US forces from Iraq during an interview with Saudi-owned al Arabiya.
- Houthi Spokesperson Mohammad Abdulsalam rejected United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2722 and announced that the Houthis will continue to target Israeli ships in the Red Sea.

Abbas, Hormozgan Province, Iran.							



### **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.

# Palestinian militias claimed several attacks in the northern Gaza Strip on January 11.

The military wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the al Quds Brigades, claimed to fire tandem-charge anti-tank rockets at an Israeli tank in Jabalia City. The group also said that it shot down an Israeli tactical reconnaissance drone in the same area. [2] A Palestinian journalist reported on January 9 that Israeli forces and Palestinian fighters clashed in Sheikh Radwan neighborhood bordering Jabalia City as Israeli forces "repositioned" in Gaza City. [3] Palestinian militias conducted nearly daily attacks targeting Israeli forces throughout December in Jabalia City, Jabalia refugee camp, and Sheikh Radwan. [4] The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) reported on January 6 that it had "dismantled" the 12 Hamas battalions in the northern Gaza Strip. [5] Palestinian militias operating in the northern Gaza Strip remain capable of disrupting Israeli operations there, however.

The al Quds Brigades claimed on January 11 that its fighters returned from the front lines in Jabalia City and reported that they fired anti-tank rockets at Israeli armor and clashed at close range with Israeli ground forces. [6] The inability of these fighters to communicate with higher headquarters until returning to rear areas indicates that their commanders may be unable to transmit orders to fighters that are engaged with Israeli forces. Hamas' military wing, the al Qassem Brigades, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine's (PFLP) military wing, the Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades, have similarly reported that their fighters resumed contact with their command after returning from the front lines in the northern Gaza Strip. [7]

Israeli forces continued clearing operations in the central Gaza Strip on January 11. The Golani Brigade (assigned to the 36th Division) directed airstrikes targeting Palestinian fighters in the Maghazi area. [8] A Yiftach Brigade (assigned to the 99th Division) unit killed Palestinian fighters operating near a school in Maghazi that Palestinian fighters used for military activity. [9] The al Qassem Brigades conducted a multi-stage attack in Nuseirat targeting Israeli armor on January 11. The al Qassem Brigades first targeted Israeli armor with anti-tank rockets before mortaring the Israeli quick reaction force that responded to the initial engagement. [10] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades acknowledged the group's military media commander was killed by an Israeli airstrike in Deir al Balah on January 11.[11]

#### The IDF 98th Division continued clearing operations in Khan Younis on January 11.

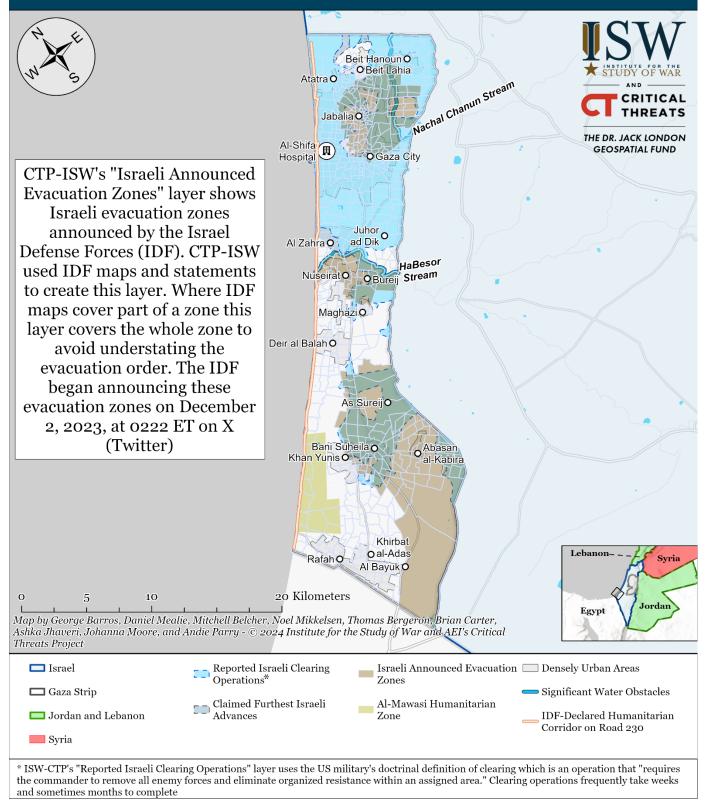
Israeli forces published footage of a tunnel system in Khan Younis that connects to an extensive underground network.[12] The IDF said that the tunnel is in the heart of a civilian area and cost Hamas hundreds of thousands of dollars to construct.[13] Israeli ground, engineering, and special operating forces (SOF) are leading the effort to locate and destroy tunnels in Khan Younis.[14] The

IDF has located over 300 tunnel shafts and destroyed 100 of them.[15] Palestinian militias use the tunnels to conduct hit-and-run attacks targeting Israeli forces and to store weapons. The IDF Givati Brigade directed several airstrikes targeting Palestinian fighters in Khan Younis who were planting improvised explosive devices, observing Israeli forces, and exiting buildings where Israeli forces had found weapons.[16] The IDF 4th Brigade (assigned to the 98th Division) engaged Palestinian fighters who previously fired anti-tank rockets at IDF forces.[17]

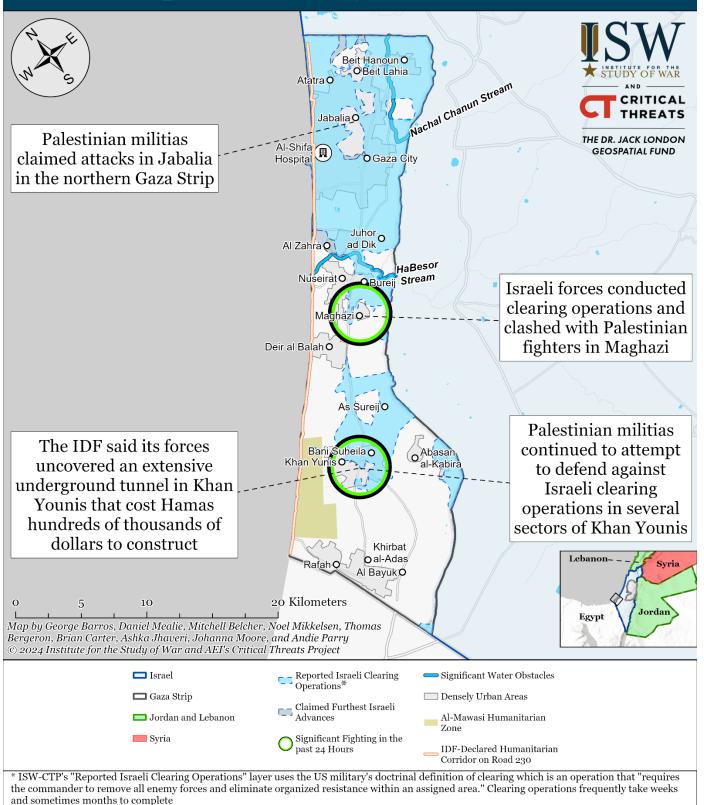
Palestinian militias continued to attempt to defend against Israeli clearing operations in Khan Younis city and sectors south and east of the city on January 11. The al Qassem Brigades claimed that it detonated a Shawaz explosively formed penetrator (EFP) targeting an Israeli bulldozer east of Khan Younis City.[18] The al Qassem Brigades and al Quds Brigades conducted a combined attack on an Israeli command center east of Khan Younis City.[19] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades—the selfproclaimed military wing of Fatah—published a video compilation on January 11 that showed its forces firing rockets and mortars at Israeli forces east of Khan Younis and in the central city area.[20] The al Qassem Brigades targeted an Israeli bulldozer surrounded by ground forces with an anti-tank IED and an anti-personnel IED south of Khan Younis City.[21] Israeli forces expanded clearing operations in southern Khan Younis on January 8.[22]

Hamas and other unspecified Palestinian political factions discussed the state of the Israel-Hamas war in an "emergency national meeting" on January 11.[23] The meetings and the statement that the parties issued afterward may signal that Palestinian political factions are considering re-opening indirect talks with Israel after talks froze on January 2.[24] The factions emphasized their continued unity and responded to Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant's fourpronged security and governance plan for the Gaza Strip floated on January 4 that would place a USled multinational task force in charge of "running civil affairs and the economic rehabilitation" in the strip.[25] The Palestinian factions emphasized that the governance of the Gaza Strip is a Palestinian issue. The factions said that this meant Israel and its supporters cannot "impose guardianship" over the Palestinian people.[26] The Palestinian political factions last issued a joint statement on post-war plans and stipulations on December 27, which was before indirect talks between Israel and Hamas froze.[27]

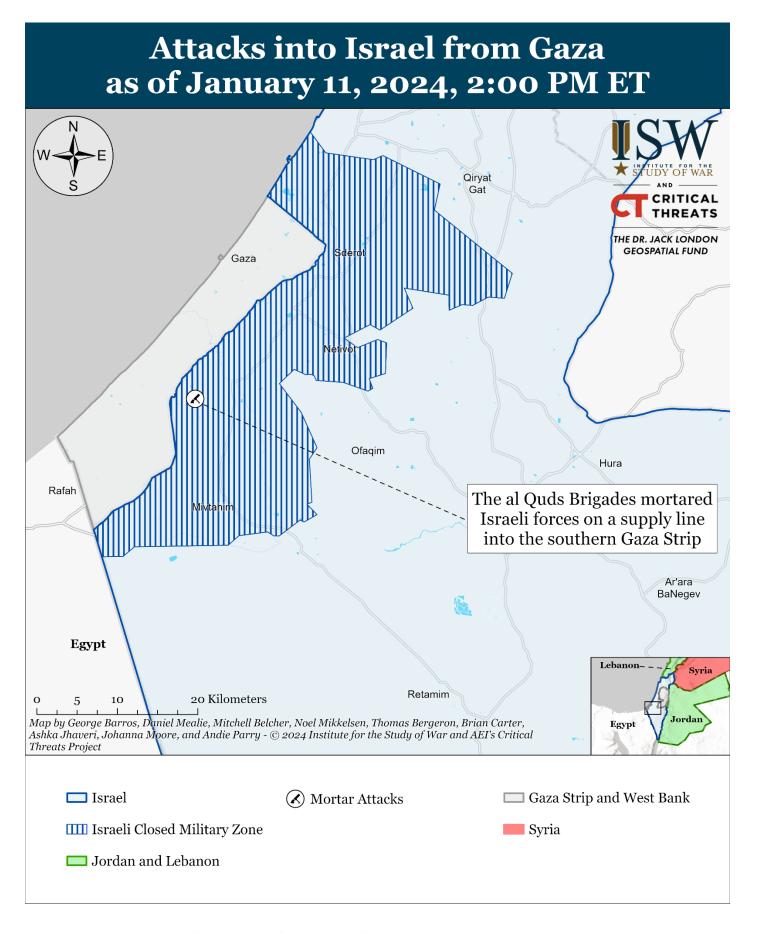
# Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip as of January 11, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



# Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of January 11, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



The al Quds Brigades fired mortars from the Gaza Strip targeting Kissufim in southern Israel on January 11.[28] The number of indirect fire attacks conducted daily by Palestinian militias has decreased significantly since early December, which is consistent with the assessed degradation of their indirect fire capacity.



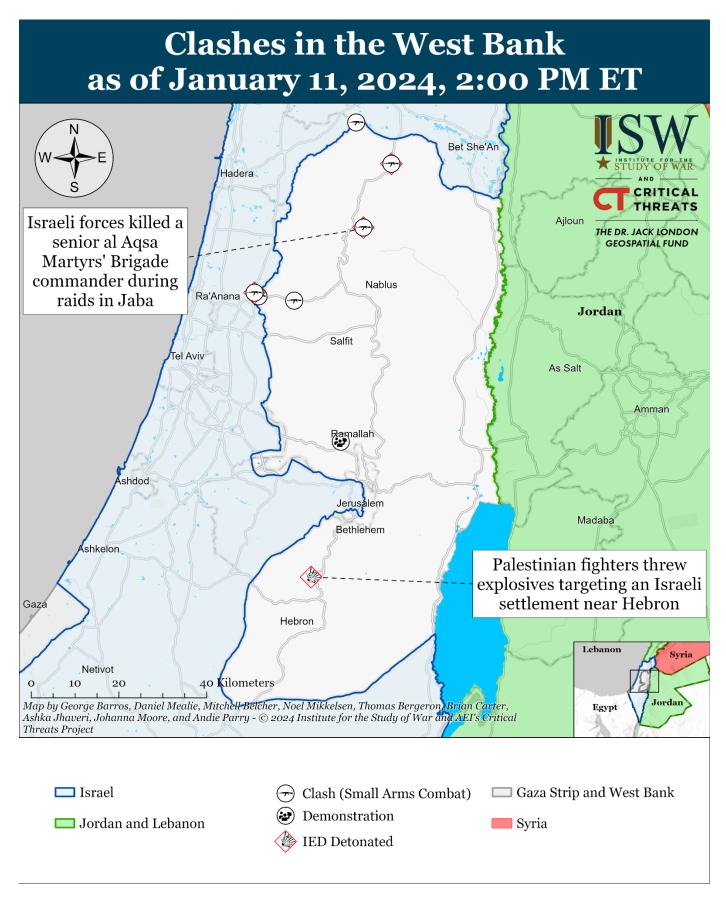
#### **West Bank**

# Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

Palestinian fighters targeted Israeli forces in seven locations across the West Bank.[29] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades claimed small arms clashes and IED attacks targeting Israeli forces during Israeli raids in Qalqilya and Jaba, south of Jenin on January 11.[30] The IDF stated that it killed a senior PIJ operative during the Jaba raids.[31] The al Quds Brigades separately claimed small arms clashes targeting Israeli forces in Jenin.[32] Other unspecified Palestinian fighters detonated IEDs targeting Israeli forces during the Jenin raid.[33] Palestinian fighters threw explosives targeting an Israeli settlement near Hebron.[34]

**Hamas called for Palestinians to march on the al Aqsa Mosque on January 12.**[35] Hamas stated that this protest would challenge Israel's restrictions on the number of people allowed to perform Friday prayers at the al Aqsa Mosque since October 7.[36] Hamas separately called for marches in solidarity with Gaza January 12-14.[37]



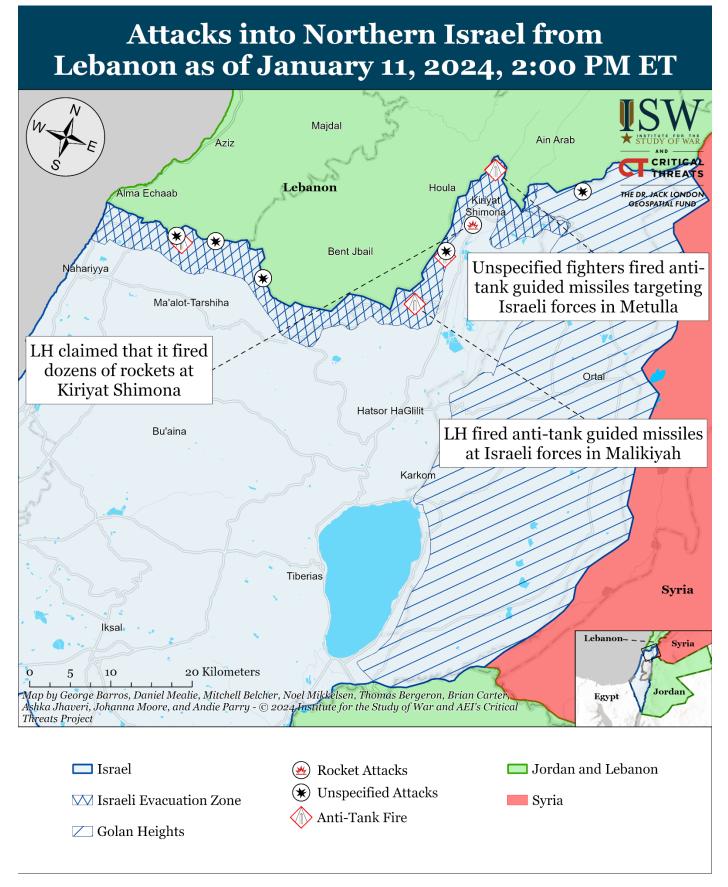
This map is not an exhaustive depiction of clashes and demonstrations in the West Bank.

### **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 11 attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel on January 11.[38] This number of attacks is consistent with daily attack rates in northern Israel during the past week. The IDF said that unspecified fighters fired 10 rockets from Lebanon into Kiriyat Shmona and that Israeli forces shot down three of the rockets.[39] A video of the attacks shows rockets damaging buildings in the town.[40] LH claimed the attack, adding that it launched dozens of rockets on Kiriyat Shmona in retaliation for an Israeli strike that killed two paramedics in Lebanon.[41] Unspecified fighters conducted anti-tank guided missile attacks targeting Israeli forces in Metulla and Adamit.[42] The IDF conducted multiple strikes on LH military infrastructure in southern Lebanon on January 11.[43]



#### 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

A member of the Iraqi Sovereignty Alliance, Youssef al Sabaawi, told Iraqi media on January 10 that the Iraqi parliament has reduced the list of potential candidates to replace former Parliament Speaker Mohammad al Halbousi to three individuals.[44] The Iraqi Federal Supreme Court issued a ruling to remove Halbousi from Parliament in November 2023.[45] CTP-ISW assessed that the court removed Halbousi as part of Iranian-backed efforts to reduce US influence in Iraq.[46] The Council of Representatives will vote for a new speaker on January 13.[47] Sabaawi told Iraqi media that the following individuals are among the three candidates most likely to become parliament speaker:

- Mahmoud al Mashhadani: Mashhadani was elected to the Council of Representatives in 2005 as a member of the Iraqi Accord Front, also known as Tawafuq.[48] Mashhadani cofounded the Iraqi National Dialogue Council (INDC), a Sunni political party.[49] Mashhadani served as parliament speaker between April 2006 and December 2008 under former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki and reportedly has a strong relationship with Maliki.[50] Maliki heads the State of Law Coalition. Iraqis elected Mashhadani as an MP representing Baghdad Governorate in October 2021.[51] Mashhadani is currently part of the Sunni-dominated Azm Alliance, which is headed by Muthanna al Samarrai.[52] The Shia Coordination Framework supports Samarrai.[53] Samarrai supports Mashhadani to become parliament speaker.[54] The Azm Alliance won 14 seats in the October 2021 parliamentary elections.[55] An individual needs an absolute majority (50 percent plus 1) of votes to become parliament speaker.[56]
- Salem al Issawi: Issawi was a member of the Anbar Governorate Council between 2010 and 2014.[57] Issawi is a member of US-sanctioned and Iran-linked businessman Khamis al Khanjar's Sovereignty Alliance[58] He is also a member of the Leadership Alliance, which includes both the Sovereignty Alliance and Halbousi's National Progress Alliance.[59] Khanjar—who is a longtime rival of Halbousi—supports Issawi.[60] Issawi served in the Council of Representatives between 2014-2018.[61] Former Parliament Speaker Mohammad al Halbousi reportedly prevented Issawi from obtaining a seat in parliament in 2018 although he was a winner in the 2018 elections.[62] Issawi has been a representative for Fallujah, Anbar Province, in the Council of Representatives since 2021 and is a member of the Integrity Committee.[63]

Iraqi media reported that a third likely candidate to replace Halbousi is **Shaalan al Karim**.[64] Karim is the head of the Albu Issa tribe, an important Sunni Arab tribe in Iraq.[65] Karim was born in Samarra, Salah al Din Province, and heads Halbousi's National Progress Alliance in this province.[66] Iraqi state media reported on January 11 that Halbousi supports Karim to become parliament speaker.[67]

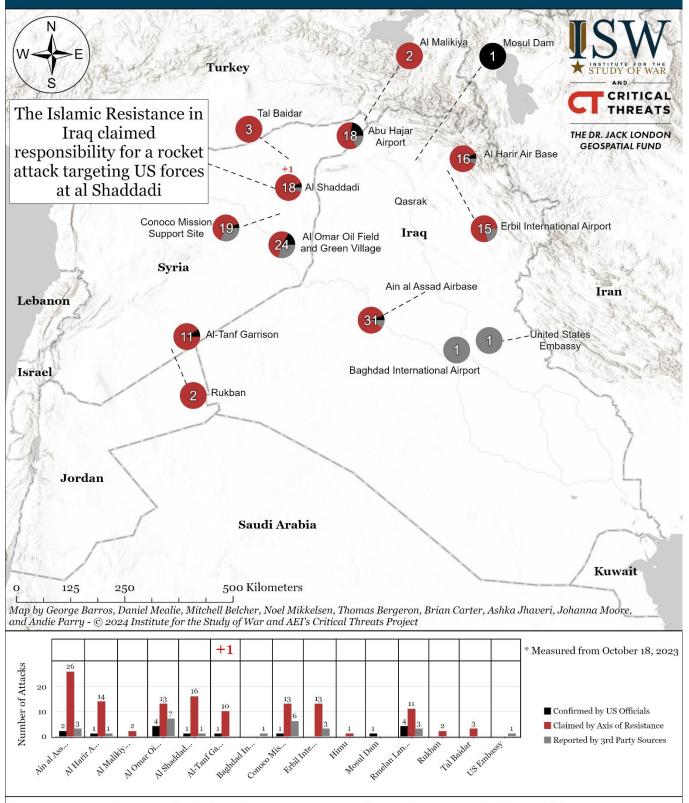
The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed a rocket attack targeting US forces at al Shaddadi, Hasakah Province, Syria, on January 11.[68]

Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein stated that the Iraqi federal government will announce a start date soon for talks to remove US forces from Iraq during an interview with Saudi-owned al Arabiya on January 11.[69] Hussein described both Iranian-backed Iraqi militia attacks targeting US forces in Iraq and US self-defense strikes on these militias as "unacceptable." Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani announced on January 5 the formation of a committee to facilitate the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq. US forces are deployed in Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi federal government to fight ISIS.[70]

Houthi Spokesperson Mohammad Abdulsalam rejected United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2722 and announced that the Houthis will continue to target Israeli ships in the Red Sea.[71] The UNSC passed Resolution 2722 on January 10. The resolution demands that the Houthis cease all attacks on merchant and commercial vessels in the Red Sea.[72] Abdulsalam claimed that there is no threat to international navigation in the Red Sea. The Houthi movement claims that it is only targeting Israeli-owned or Israel-bound vessels.[73] The Houthis have repeatedly targeted ships with no connection to Israel.

The resolution also condemned unspecified actors for violating UNSC Resolution 2216 by directly or indirectly supplying military materiel and/or personnel to the Houthi Movement.[74] US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken reported that Iran has provided technology, equipment, intelligence, and information to the Houthis for attacks targeting shipping in the Red Sea.[75] Blinken said that the Houthis have conducted "hundreds" of attacks in the Red Sea since November 2023. CTP-ISW assessed on December 31 that this Houthi campaign is part of a wider regional escalation by Iran and its so-called Axis of Resistance which is intended to support Iranian strategic objectives in the region.[76]

# Attacks against US Bases in the Middle East as of January 11, 2024, 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.

The Artesh Navy seized the Greek-owned, Marshall Islands-flagged Saint Nikolas crude oil tanker in the Gulf of Oman on January 11.[77] Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and Iranian Armed Forces General Staff-controlled media said that the seizure was a retaliation against the United States after the US Navy seized the same tanker and then offloaded the ship's Iranian crude oil in April and August 2023.[78] The Saint Nikolas was formerly known as the Suez Rajan. The United States seized the Suez Rajan in April 2023 and offloaded its oil in August 2023 to enforce US unilateral sanctions on Iranian oil exports.[79] Senior Iranian military officials vowed in July and September 2023 that Iran would retaliate against the United States after the US Navy seized and offloaded Iranian oil from the tanker in April and August 2023.[80] The Artesh and IRGC navies seized several commercial tankers in the Persian Gulf from April to July 2023 in response to the US seizure. These seizures caused a US military buildup in and around the Persian Gulf during the same period.[81] CTP assessed in August 2023 that the Iranian regime may seize additional commercial vessels in response to the US Navy's seizure of the Suez Rajan.[82]

An online shipping tracker organization reported that the IRGC spy ship *Behshad* has left the Red Sea and is en route to Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province, Iran on January 11.[83] The *Behshad* is an IRGC intelligence gathering ship stationed off the Dahlak archipelago in the Red Sea.[84] The *Wall Street Journal* reported on December 22, 2023 that the *Behshad* provides the Houthis with real-time intelligence, which enables the Houthis to target ships that have gone silent to avoid detection.[85] Western media and officials also said that the IRGC is helping the Houthi forces plan and execute the movement's drone and missile attacks on ships in the Red Sea.[86] The IRGC has likely used the *Behshad* and its predecessor, the *Saviz*, to provide new systems and intelligence to the Houthis to facilitate Houthi operations in the Red Sea prior to this round of escalation.[87] Iran and the IRGC have also hosted and trained Houthi military forces.[88]

The Iranian Ministry of Intelligence provided a detailed report on January 11 covering the ISKP fighters who conducted the January 3 Kerman attack.[89] Iranian Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi claimed that the Ministry thwarted "thousands" of operations like the ISKP attack in Kerman.[90] The Intelligence Ministry claimed a Tajik national was the main planner of the attack. The ministry claimed that local smugglers helped the ISKP-affiliated individual enter Iran illegally on December 19 from Iran's southeastern border. The Intelligence Ministry further claimed that one of the suicide bombers was an Israeli national with Tajik citizenship, which is a continuation of Iran's information effort to link Israel and the Islamic State.

The Intelligence Ministry also linked the ISKP terror attack in Kerman to Afghanistan. The Ministry claimed that ISKP trained one of the attackers at an ISKP training camp in Badakhshan Province, Afghanistan. Badakhshan borders Tajikistan. CTP-ISW previously assessed that ISKP established a support zone in Badakhshan Province. [91] CTP-ISW previously assessed that ISKP terrorist attacks inside Iran will likely exacerbate tensions between Iran and the Afghan Taliban. [92]



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1 https://t.me/elamharbi/220
[2] https://t.me/sarayaps/17191; https://t.me/sarayaps/17192
[3] https://twitter.com/ytirawi/status/1744859177887973846
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