Iran Update, January 31, 2024

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Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm EST

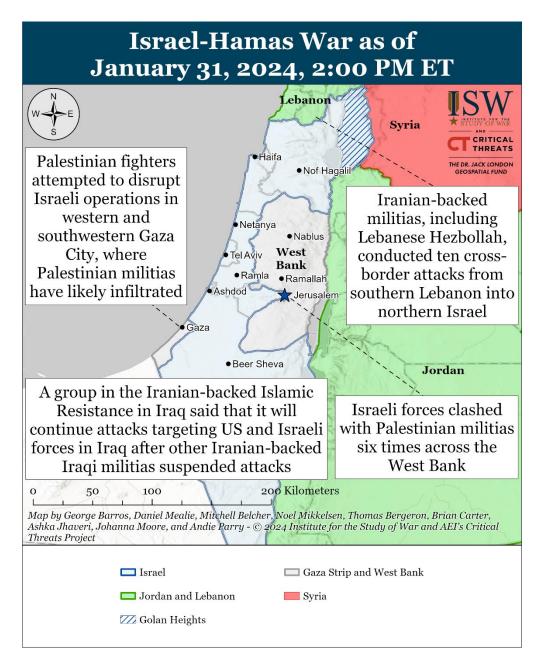
The Iran Update provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities abroad that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests. It also covers events and trends that affect the stability and decision-making of the Iranian regime. The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the 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. Click here to subscribe to the Iran Update.

Key Takeaways:

- **Northern Gaza Strip:** Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters in western and southwestern Gaza City. Palestinian fighters likely infiltrated these areas during January.
- **Political Negotiations:** An unspecified senior Hamas official told Reuters on January 30 that mediators provided a ceasefire proposal of unspecified length to Hamas.
- **West Bank:** Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian militias six times in the West Bank on January 31.
- **Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights:** Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said that northern Israel may lose power in the event of a wider war with Lebanon during a meeting with the heads of local municipalities in northern Israel.
- **Iraq and Syria:** An "informed source" told Iraqi media that IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani traveled to Baghdad on January 29 to "stop [the Iranian-backed Iraqi militias'] military escalation" against US forces.
- **Iran:** Iranian officials are attempting to deter a US response to the January 28 attack that killed three US servicemembers in northeastern Jordan. Iranian officials warned on January 30 and 31 that Iran would respond "decisively" to any US retaliation targeting 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.

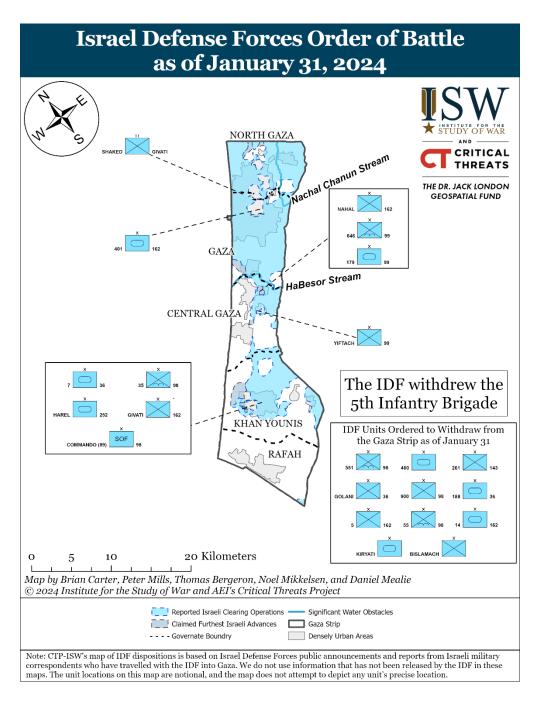
Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters in western and southwestern Gaza City. Palestinian fighters likely infiltrated these areas during January. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) 5th Infantry Brigade (assigned to the 99th Division) killed an unspecified number of Palestinian fighters on the outskirts of al Shati camp.[1] The IDF resumed operations in al Shati camp on January 29.[2] The 401st Brigade (assigned to the 162nd Division) killed at least 16 Hamas fighters in the

northern Gaza Strip during operations on January 31.[3] Israeli forces raided a school in the northern Gaza Strip, detaining ten Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fighters. The IDF also destroyed five rockets during the raid that Palestinian fighters had prepared to launch.[4] A local Palestinian journalist also reported that Israeli tanks have taken up positions in several areas in western Gaza City.[5]

Hamas and PIJ fighters attempted to defend against Israeli raids in the Tel al Hawa neighborhood of Gaza City.[6] CTP-ISW previously reported that Palestinian militias infiltrated some areas in southwestern Gaza City, including Tel al Hawa, on or before January 19.[7] Hamas published footage on January 31 that shows Hamas rocket teams firing rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) targeting Israeli tanks.[8] The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a leftist militia aligned with Hamas in the current war, mortared Israeli vehicles in Tel al Hawa.[9] The Palestinian Mujahideen Movement clashed with Israeli infantrymen in western Gaza City.[10] The Palestinian Mujahideen Movement is a Palestinian militia aligned with Hamas in the current war.

Israeli airstrikes struck the Hamas-run Interior Ministry's headquarters in Gaza City on January 31. Local residents and Hamas-affiliated media reported the incident, according to Reuters.[11] Hamas appointed the current undersecretary of the interior ministry in 2021 and a founder of the al Qassem Brigades, Hamas' military wing, previously served as Hamas-run interior minister between 2009 and 2014.[12] The ministry's undersecretary in Gaza now functions as the de facto minister for the Gaza Strip. Hamas has been attempting to rebuild its governance system in the northern Gaza Strip as it infiltrates into areas where Israeli forces operated previously.[13] There is currently no functioning civil apparatus in the northern Gaza Strip, which enables Hamas-backed governing structures to reemerge in some areas. Hamas' return to providing services undermines Israeli efforts to destroy Hamas.

The IDF withdrew the 5th Infantry Brigade (assigned to the 162nd Division) from the northern Gaza Strip.[14] The 646th Reserve Paratrooper Brigade (assigned to the 99th Division) is the only reserve brigade still operating in the Gaza Strip. The withdrawal of the 5th Infantry Brigade is consistent with the Israeli third phase of operations, which reportedly includes the release of reservists and a transition to targeted raids.[15]

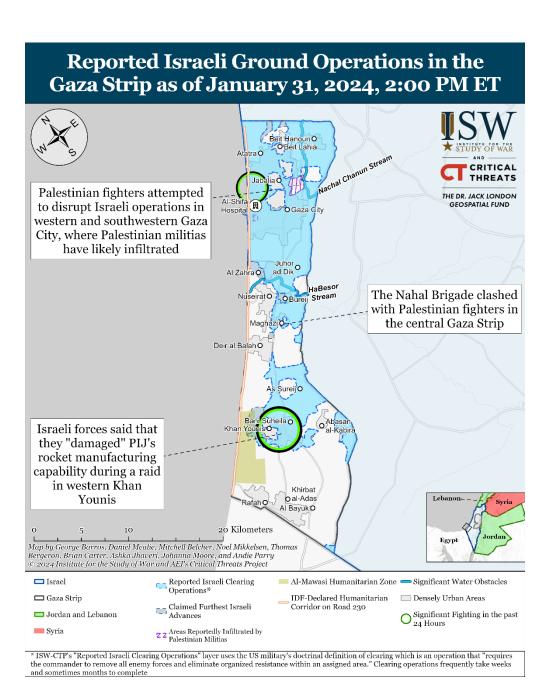


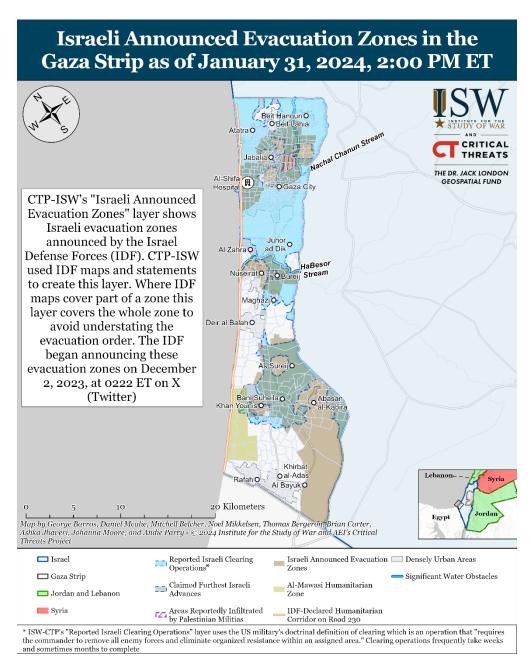
Israeli forces engaged Palestinian fighters in the central Gaza Strip on January 31. The IDF Nahal Brigade clashed with armed Palestinian fighters in unspecified areas of the central Gaza Strip.[16] PIJ's military wing said that it targeted Israeli forces east of Bureij with mortar and rocket attacks.[17]

The IDF 98th Division continued to conduct clearing operations focused on western Khan Younis on January 31. The 7th Brigade Combat Team (assigned to the 36th Division) raided a PIJ munitions manufacturing facility in western Khan Younis.[18] The IDF destroyed manufacturing equipment, weapons, and tunnels in the facility.[19] The IDF said that the raid "damaged" PIJ's ability to "produce rockets for a significant period of time."[20] IDF 35th

Paratrooper Brigade (assigned to the IDF 98th Division) and other units in the 98th Division directed airstrikes targeting Palestinian fighter cells in western Khan Younis.[21] The IDF 414th Reconnaissance Battalion and elements of the 143rd Gaza Division also directed strikes targeting Hamas fighters in Khan Younis.[22] The 414th Reconnaissance Battalion previously operated in Bureij in the central Gaza Strip.[23]

Palestinian militias continued to attempt to defend against Israeli forces in western Khan Younis. The Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and the military wings of Hamas and PIJ conducted at least 9 attacks on Israeli forces in western and southern Khan Younis using mortars, rockets, anti-tank RPGs, and small arms.[24] PIJ's military wing fired mortars and rockets at Israeli forces operating in eastern Khan Younis.[25] The group also detonated an explosively formed penetrator (EFP) targeting Israeli armor in Jurat al Aqqad in western Khan Younis.[26]





Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip have been implementing a plan to flood Hamas' tunnel system with seawater.[27] Israeli officials have been sharing information with foreign media about the operation for months.[28] Israel only recently allowed journalists to report details of the flooding plan. The IDF said that the flooding operation is one of many methods for destroying Hamas' tunnels. Israel previously informed the United States in early November that it was considering flooding the tunnels and in December the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the IDF began flooding the tunnels.[29]

An Israeli Army Radio correspondent cited unspecified Israeli security sources that reported on January 31 that the IDF has only destroyed a few kilometers of the tunnel system. The sources added

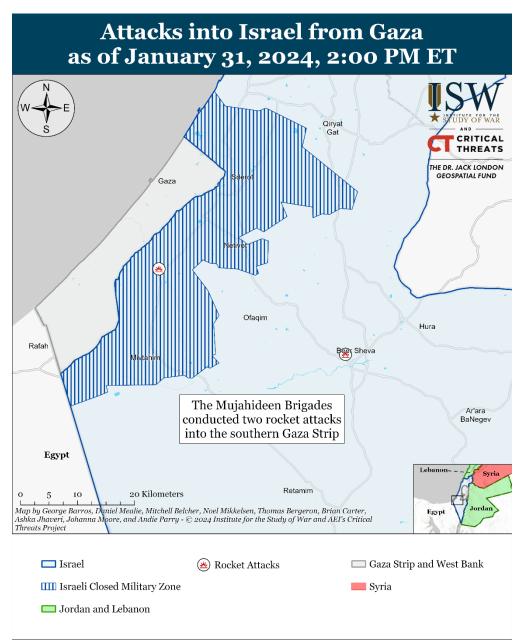
that the IDF is experiencing issues achieving sufficient water pressure to flood tunnels further inland.[30] The sources admitted that they did not have a "decisive solution" to deal with tunnels in Gaza prior to the war.[31] The New York Times reported on January 16 that the IDF now believes that there are more tunnels underneath the Gaza Strip than the IDF previously believed.[32]

The IDF declared the Nitzana border crossing with Egypt a closed military zone on January 31.[33] The decision follows protesters attempting to block humanitarian aid convoys destined for the Gaza Strip from crossing for inspection.[34] The IDF created a closed military zone at Kerem Shalom crossing on January 28 amid similar demonstrations.[35]

An unspecified senior Hamas official told Reuters on January 30 that mediators provided a ceasefire proposal of unspecified length to Hamas. The deal involves a three-stage truce, during which Hamas would release the remaining civilians held hostage in the Gaza Strip, then soldiers, and finally the bodies of killed hostages.[36] Hamas is still considering the proposal. Israeli security cabinet Minister Miri Regev said that the Israeli government would likely approve the deal despite opposition from far-right ministers.[37] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on January 30 that he would not release "thousands" of Palestinian prisoners or remove Israeli forces from Gaza until achieving total victory, however.[38]

Israel's public broadcaster reported that Hamas demanded for Israel release all elite Nukhba unit fighters as part of hostage negotiations.[39] Hamas has not made this claim publicly but has repeatedly raised it with negotiators, according to the public broadcaster.[40] The Nukhba units are Hamas' special operations forces that participated in Hamas' October 7th attacks.[41] These forces also form the nucleus of Hamas' military capabilities.[42] The release of Nukhba fighters would permit Hamas to more rapidly reconstitute by providing it with hardened, elite combat veterans that could train new recruits.

The Palestinian Mujahideen Movement conducted two rocket attacks into southern Israel from the Gaza Strip on January 31.[43] The group fired one salvo at Reim military base and one salvo at Beer Sheva. The Palestinian Mujahideen Movement is a Palestinian faction aligned with Hamas.[44] The group has expressed close ties with Iran.[45]



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

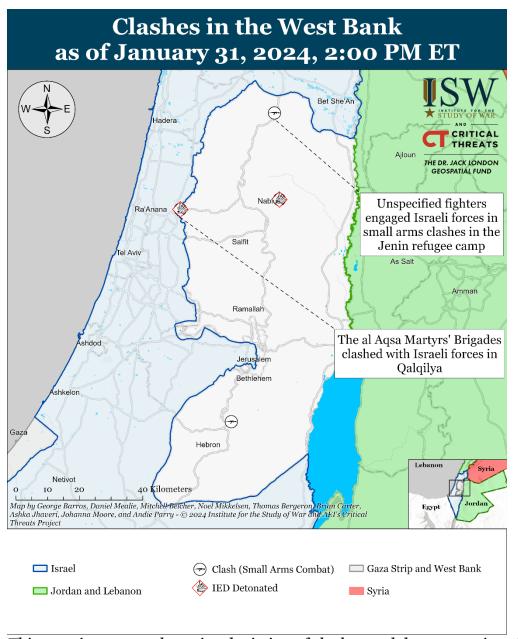
West Bank

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian militias six times in the West Bank on January 31.[46] Israeli forces detained 14 wanted individuals and confiscated weapons across the West Bank.[47]

IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi told IDF commanders on January 31 that the IDF will not allow Palestinian militia fighters to use hospitals in the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and Lebanon as shelter.[48] Halevi made this remark after an IDF raid in the West Bank on January 30 in which Israeli forces killed three Palestinian militia fighters inside a hospital. Israel said that the fighters were planning an attack on Israeli citizens.[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:

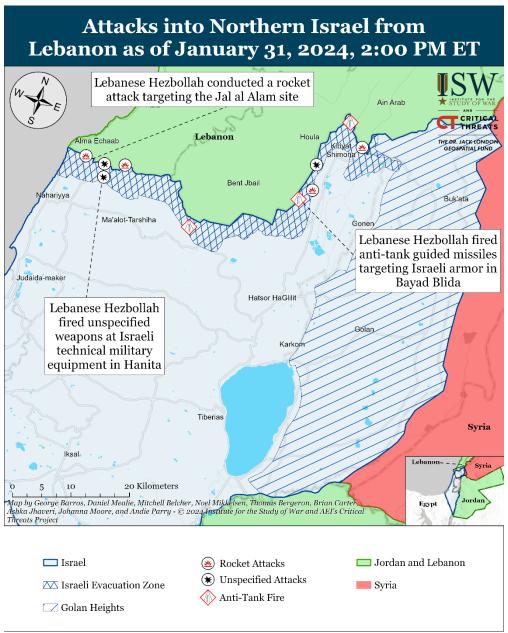
- Draw IDF assets and resources toward northern Israel and fix them there
- Set conditions for successive campaigns into northern Israel

Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted ten cross-border attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel on January 31.[50]

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said that northern Israel may lose power in the event of a wider war with Lebanon during a meeting with the heads of local municipalities in northern Israel.[51] Israeli officials have repeatedly expressed concerns about the threat that Hezbollah poses to Israel.[52] Gallant said on January 4 that Israel prefers a diplomatic solution to Hezbollah's attacks targeting northern Israel, but he added that there is a "short window of time" to find a diplomatic solution.[53]

Israeli media reported that the IDF withdrew soldiers from Israeli towns on the northern Israeli border with Lebanon on January 31.[54] Unspecified officials told Israeli media that the move is intended to prevent damage to homes in northern Israel near areas where IDF soldiers are located.[55] Hezbollah targets Israeli military positions in northern Israel daily.

The Israeli Air Force struck Syrian military infrastructure in Daraa city, southern Syria on January 31 following an attack from Syria into the Golan Heights on January 30.[56] Syrian opposition media reported that the strike injured Syrian Military Security head Louay al Ali and two other officials in the local Military Security branch.[57] Ali previously served as the head of military intelligence in Daraa.[58]



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Iran and Axis of Resistance

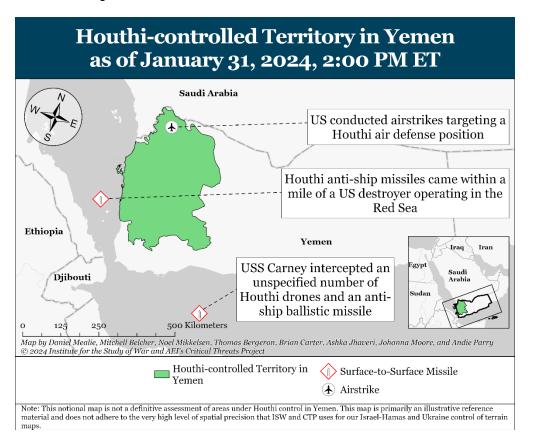
Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- 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

The Houthi movement targeted at least one US vessel in the Red Sea on January 30 and 31.[59] CENTCOM reported that the USS *Gravely* shot down a Houthi anti-ship cruise missile in the Red Sea on January 30.[60] CNN reported that the Houthi cruise missile came within a mile of the *Gravely* before the *Gravely* intercepted the missile.[61] This is the closest a Houthi missile has

come to a US warship.[62] The USS *Carney* separately intercepted several Houthi drones and an antiship ballistic missile on January 31.[63] The Houthi military spokesperson claimed that the group fired multiple unspecified anti-ship missiles that hit an "American commercial ship" on January 31 after the US airstrikes in Saada.[64] US officials reported that the Houthis did not hit any US warships or commercial vessels on January 31.[65]

US aircraft destroyed a Houthi surface-to-air missile in Saada, Yemen, on January 31 that was ready-to-fire and "presented an imminent threat to US aircraft." [66]



An "informed source" told Iraqi media that IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani traveled to Baghdad on January 29 to "stop [the Iranian-backed Iraqi militias'] military escalation" against US forces.[67] Ghaani's visit to Baghdad followed the January 28 one-way drone attack that killed three US servicemembers in northeastern Jordan.[68] Western media previously reported that Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah launched the drone from western Iraq.[69] Ghaani met with militia leaders from the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias that includes Kataib Hezbollah.[70] Ghaani asked the militia leaders to "calm the security situation." Kataib Hezbollah's announcement on January 30 that it suspended its "military and security operations" against US forces notably came after Ghaani's reported visit.[71]

A member of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq said that it will continue attacks targeting US and "Israeli forces" in Iraq after other militias suspended their attacks.[72] The

group, Faylaq al Waad al Sadiq (The Truthful Promise Corps), has unconfirmed ties to Iranian-backed Iraqi militias Asaib Ahl al Haq and Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba. Faylaq al Waad al Sadiq proclaims adherence to Wilayat al Faqih, which is the founding principle of the Islamic Republic of Iran.[73] Wilayat al Faqih refers to a governing system in which a supreme clerical leader provides guardianship over the state. Faylaq al Waad al Sadiq previously condemned the Islamic Resistance of Iraq's December 8 attack that targeted the US Embassy in Baghdad on the grounds that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq should only target military forces that "threaten the security of Iraq."[74]

The US Treasury Department's Undersecretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian Nelson met with senior Iraqi officials on January 28 and 29 to discuss illicit financial activity in the Iraqi financial system. [75] Nelson met with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani, Central Bank of Iraq chief Ali al Allaq, Chief Justice of the Iraqi Supreme Judicial Council Faiq Zaidan, and Transport Minister Razzaq Muhaibis, Trade Bank of Iraq Chairman Bilal al Hamdani, and representatives from privately owned banks in Baghdad. [76] CTP-ISW previously reported that Nelson and Zaidan may have discussed the US Treasury Department's decision to sanction Iraqi airline Fly Baghdad for aiding the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force (IRGC-QF) and its militias in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. [77] An unidentified senior US Treasury official cited by Reuters claimed that the United States "expects" the Iraqi government to "identify and disrupt" Iranian-backed financial networks in Iraq that support Iranian-backed Iraqi militias. [78]

The Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enhancement Network issued a notice that isolated the al Huda Bank from the US financial system, citing a "primary money laundering concern." The Treasury Department said that Iran and Iranian-backed Iraqi militias used the bank to launder funds.[79] The Office of Foreign Assets Control also imposed sanctions on the al Huda Bank CEO.[80]

Iraqi Shia cleric and politician Ammar al Hakim met with Russian Ambassador Elbrus Kutrashev on January 31.[81] Hakim's office reported that Hakim and Kutrashev discussed strengthening bilateral relations between Iraq and Russia and domestic Iraqi politics, including ongoing provincial council appointments. Hakim and Kutrashev also discussed establishing a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and post-war reconstruction efforts in Gaza.

Iranian officials are attempting to deter a US response to the January 28 attack that killed three US servicemembers in northeastern Jordan. Iranian officials warned on January 30 and 31 that Iran will respond "decisively" to any US retaliation targeting Iran. Western media previously reported that Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah conducted the one-way drone attack targeting US forces in Jordan.[82] Multiple US officials, including US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby, said that the United States may use a "tiered approach" involving "multiple" operations and targets to respond to the attack.[83] IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami warned on January 31 that Iran will respond to any US "threat."[84] Multiple Iranian officials, including Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian, warned that Iran will respond to "attacks" and "threats" targeting Iran "decisively" and "immediately."[85] Iranian officials often use fiery rhetoric like this during periods of heightened tension with the United States.

The Iranian Deputy Interior Minister for security and law enforcement discussed Iranian training to support the Syrian security forces in counter terrorism and drug trafficking with the Syrian interior minister in Damascus on January 29.[86] The Iranian Interior Ministry oversees the Law Enforcement Command (LEC), which is the Iranian national police force. The LEC has many subordinate units conducting internal security-related activities, including intelligence gathering on criminals, protest suppression, border security, and counterterrorism.[87]

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