Iran Update, January 7, 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.

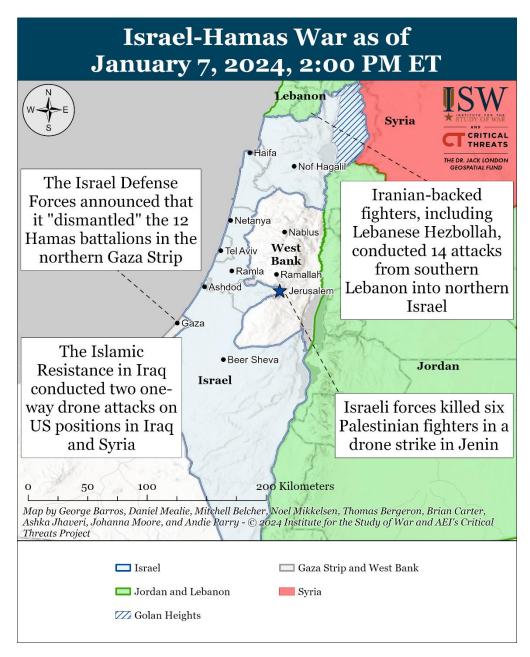
Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are well-covered 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. The Israel Defense Forces announced that it "dismantled" the 12 Hamas battalions in the northern Gaza Strip. CTP-ISW has warned that the third phase of Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip, as described, will very likely enable Hamas to reconstitute itself militarily.
- 2. The Israel Defense Forces reported that it uncovered evidence of Iran training Hamas in constructing precision munitions in the Gaza Strip.
- 3. The Nahal Brigade Combat Team located a Palestinian compound with dozens of rocket launchers in Beit Lahia.
- 4. The Golani Brigade continued conducting clearing operations in Maghazi and Bureij in the Central Governorate of the Gaza Strip.
- 5. The Kfir Brigade continued conducting clearing operations in Khan Younis.
- 6. Former IDF Military Intelligence Directorate chief Amos Yadlin reported that the IDF knows where Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip Yahya Sinwar is located but that he has surrounded himself with many of the remaining hostages, which complicates Israeli targeting.
- 7. The al Quds Brigades fired five rocket salvos from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel.
- 8. Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters ten times across the West Bank.
- 9. Iranian-backed fighters, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted 14 attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel.

- 10. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed that it conducted a long-range cruise missile attack targeting Haifa. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq also conducted two one-way drone attacks on US positions in Iraq and Syria.
- 11. Unspecified actors conducted an airstrike targeting an Iranian-backed militia convoy reportedly transferring military equipment in Albu Kumal, Syria. Israel has conducted an air campaign in Syria in recent months meant to disrupt Iranian military transfers into the Levant.
- 12. The Jordanian armed forces reported that they eliminated five Iranian-backed militia members attempting to smuggle drugs and weapons into Jordan from southern Syria.
- 13. IRGC Quds Force officer Brigadier General Eraj Masjedi stated that the Palestinian militias will eventually obtain unspecified "defensive weapons" that would prevent Israel from conducting airstrikes into the Gaza Strip.



<u>Gaza Strip</u>

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.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced on January 6 that it "dismantled" the 12 Hamas battalions in the northern Gaza Strip. IDF officials added that they have dismantled Hamas' "military framework" in the northern Gaza Strip.[1] An Israeli Army Radio defense correspondent reported on January 6 that Israeli forces no longer permanently operate in the entire area of the northern strip and have moved to the border with Israel.[2] IDF spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said on January 6 that the IDF would focus on the central and southern parts of the Gaza Strip and strengthen defenses along the Israel-Gaza Strip border fence.[3] These announcements are consistent with the IDF stating that it would establish a security buffer zone in the northern Gaza Strip in the third phase of its operations. This third phase also involved Israeli forces conducting raids against Hamas compounds, destroying tunnels, killing remaining fighters, seizing intelligence and military equipment.[4] CTP-ISW assessed on December 22 that, in Hamas' Northern Strip Brigade and Gaza City Brigade, three battalions are combat ineffective, eight are degraded, and one is combat effective.[5] CTP-ISW assesses that the al Qassem Brigades' Radwan Battalion is degraded but not combat ineffective. Israeli forces captured a Hamas compound in Sheikh Radwan neighborhood of Gaza City on January 2.[6] The militia has not claimed attacks in the neighborhood since December 30, 2023.[7]

CTP-ISW warned on January 2 that the third phase of Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip, as described, will very likely enable Hamas to reconstitute itself militarily.[8] Israeli forces have degraded several Hamas units in the northern Gaza Strip, as noted above. But Hamas' military forces are neither defeated nor destroyed at this time.[9] Palestinian militias continued to operate in the northern Gaza Strip and have targeted Israeli forces in areas where Israel has degraded the local Hamas units.[10]

The IDF reported on January 7 that its forces uncovered indications of Iran training Hamas in constructing precision munitions in the Gaza Strip. The IDF Nahal Brigade Combat Team (assigned to the 162nd Division) conducted raids in Daraj and Tuffah neighborhoods of Gaza City.[11] The unit and Israeli special operations forces (SOF) located a Hamas tunnel shaft that led to a 100-meter-long tunnel containing a weapons production site. Israeli forces found components of precision weapons and shared images of what it said are the rocket engine and warhead designed for a Hamas cruise missile. The IDF said the components prove that Hamas "studied under Iranian guidance how to operate and build precision components and strategic weapons."[12] Iran funded, supported, and provided the weapons and training used in the October 7 attacks, in addition to providing sums of military aid to Hamas in recent years.[13]

The Nahal Brigade clashed with Palestinian fighters in Daraj and Tuffah on January 7 during raids.[14] The brigade commander reported that his forces have encountered many Palestinian fighters in the last few days and found tunnels and rocket launchers. An Israeli drone and combat helicopter provided close air support to the ground forces.

Palestinian militias did not claim any attacks on Israeli forces in Daraj and Tuffah on January 7. Palestinian fighters shot at Israeli forces in Tuffah on January 6, interrupting an interview with an IDF company commander.[15] The interview took place on the Marzouk Street in Tuffah, close to Shujaiya neighborhood in Gaza City.[16]

The Nahal Brigade Combat Team located a Palestinian compound with dozens of rocket launchers in Beit Lahia on January 7. Palestinian fighters had fired rockets into southern Israel earlier this week from the compound.[17] The Nahal Brigade destroyed the compound during the raid.[18] The launch demonstrates that Palestinian militias in the northern Gaza Strip retain some capacity to fire rockets into Israel, despite Israeli operations. Israeli forces advanced into Beit Lahia to conduct clearing operation on December 31.[19]

The IDF Golani Brigade (assigned to the 36th Division) continued conducting clearing operations in Maghazi and Bureij in the Central Governorate of the Gaza Strip on January 7. Israeli forces located a tunnel shaft containing large quantities of weapons in Maghazi.[20] The IDF 646th Paratroopers Brigade Combat Team (assigned to the 99th Division) also operated in the central Gaza Strip on January 7 to uncover Hamas infrastructure.[21] An Israeli Army Radion correspondent reported on January 6 that Israeli forces are reportedly on the outskirts of Nuseirat and Maghazi.[22]

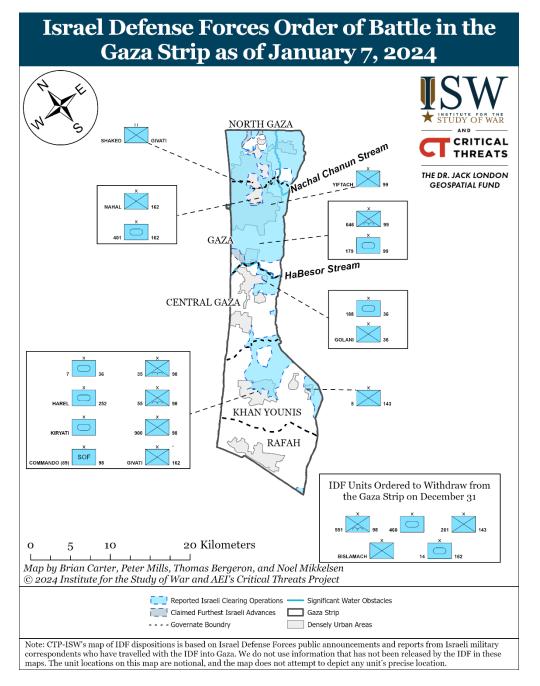
Palestinian militias continued trying to defend against Israeli clearing operations in the Central Governorate of the Gaza Strip on January 7. Hamas' military wing, the al Qassem Brigades, mortared Israeli forces as they advanced into Maghazi.[23] The militia also fired an anti-tank rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) at Israeli armor and published footage of the attack.[24] The Palestinian Islamic Jihad's (PIJ) military wing, the al Quds Brigades, mortared an Israeli position on the forward line of advance in Maghazi.[25]

The al Qassem Brigades reported attacks in Bureij only after its fighters returned to rear areas.[26] CTP-ISW assessed on January 6 that the delays in reporting to higher headquarters may indicate a loss of command-and-control over some al Qassem Brigades units engaged with Israeli forces.[27] An Israeli Army Radio corresponded noted that Israeli forces are still fighting with the Hamas battalion in Bureij on January 6.[28] The IDF reported on January 7 that it identified four Hamas SOF members loading weapons into a vehicle and subsequently conducted a drone strike on their position.[29] Israeli forces also killed an armed Palestinian fighter who advanced toward the Israeli forces in the area.[30]

The IDF Kfir Brigade continued conducting clearing operations in Khan Younis on January 7. Israeli forces operating in Bani Suhaila east of Khan Younis City recently encountered a

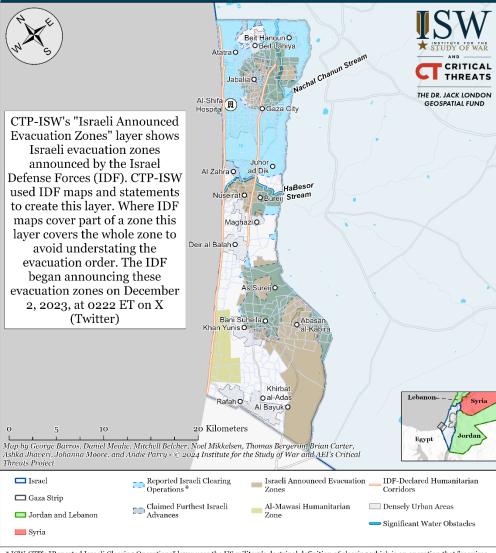
five-man Hamas cell and directed an airstrike onto their position.[31] In another instance, Israeli forces found a large cache of weapons of grenades, improvised explosive devices (IED) and RPGs hidden inside UNRWA bags.[32] The Kfir Brigade destroyed over 100 targets in Khan Younis, including observation and anti-tank launch positions, tunnel shafts, and underground passages.[33] An Israeli Army Radio correspondent reported on January 6 that Israeli forces are close to dismantling Hamas' Khan Younis Brigades' northern and eastern battalions.[34] The IDF reported on January 4 that it has significantly damaged specifically the command-and-control of the Hamas' northern and eastern battalions.[35]

Palestinian militias continued attempting to defend against Israeli clearing operations in Khan Younis on January 7. The al Qassem Brigades mortared Israeli forces advancing in Khan Younis City.[36] The al Quds Brigades mortared Israeli soldiers and vehicles in al Katiba, Khan Younis.[37] The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) militant wing, National Resistance Brigades, clashed with Israeli forces near Mahatta, Khan Younis.[38]

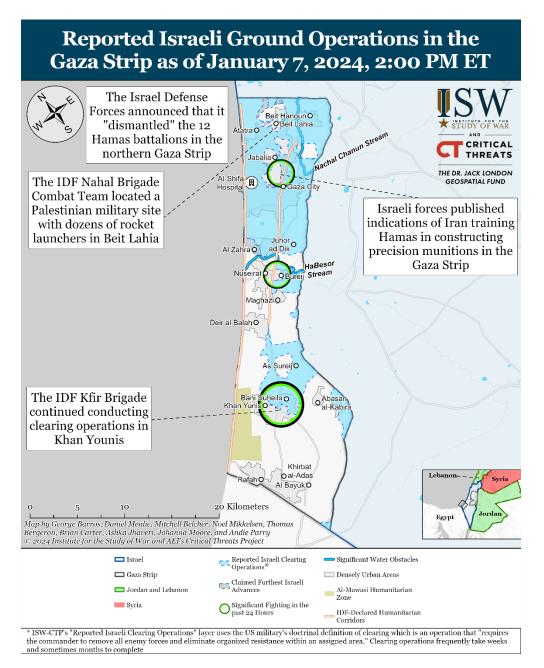


CTP-ISW's map of IDF dispositions is based on Israel Defense Forces public announcements and reports from Israeli military correspondents who have traveled with the IDF into Gaza. We do not use information that has not been released by the IDF in these maps. The unit locations on this map are notional, and the map does not attempt to depict any unit's precise location.





* 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

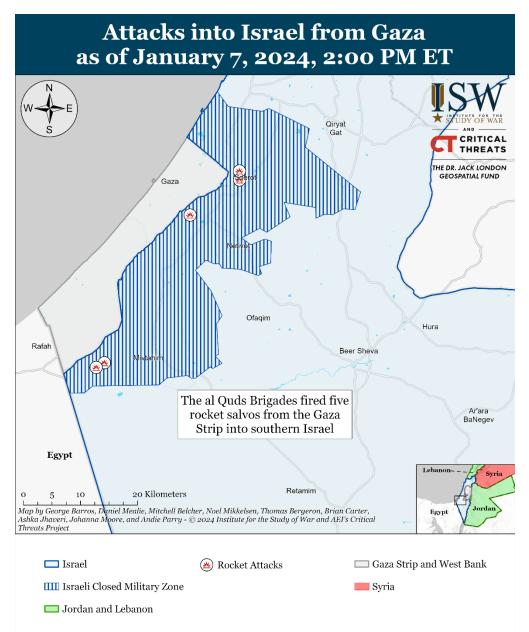


Former IDF Military Intelligence Directorate chief Amos Yadlin reported that the IDF knows where Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip Yahya Sinwar is located but that he has surrounded himself with many of the remaining hostages, which complicates Israeli targeting.[39] US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said that Hamas continues to use civilians as human shields, which intentionally puts these civilians in harm's way, to protect itself.[40] The IDF believes that Sinwar is hiding underground in the southern Gaza Strip.[41]

The Qatari prime minister told families of US and Israeli hostages in Doha that Israel killing of senior Hamas official Salah al Arouri in Beirut has made efforts to secure a hostage-for-prisoner deal much more difficult.[42] A Qatari official and unspecified Israeli source told Axios on January 7 that the Qatari prime minister hosted the families of six hostages in

Doha.[43] The prime minister told the families that it is more difficult to talk to Hamas since Arouri's death on January 2. Arouri was involved in Qatar-mediated talks with Israel over a possible ceasefire in the war and further releases of Israeli hostages before his death.[44]

The al Quds Brigades fired five rocket salvos from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel on January 7. The militia claimed to target Nahal Oz, Sufa, and Holit in one salvo and Sderot and Nir Aam in others.[45] Israeli Army Radio reported red alerts in town surrounding the Gaza Strip after a 17-hour lull of indirect fire attacks.[46]



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

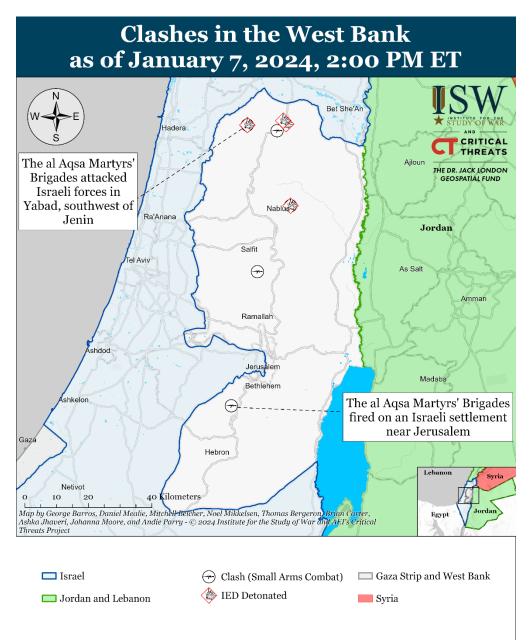
West Bank

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters ten times across the West Bank on

January 7.[47] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and al Quds Brigades engaged Israeli forces in small arms clashes and detonated IEDs targeting these forces in and around Jenin.[48] The IDF said that an IED attack in Jenin killed an Israeli Border Police officer and wounded several others.[49] Israel responded by conducting a drone strike and killing at least six fighters in Jenin.[50] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, al Quds Brigades, and Hamas released statements mourning the fighters.[51] Hamas called for an escalation in "resistance activities" in the West Bank.[52] The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine said that the West Bank is "entering a new phase" and called on fighters in the West Bank to intensify attacks on Israeli forces.[53]



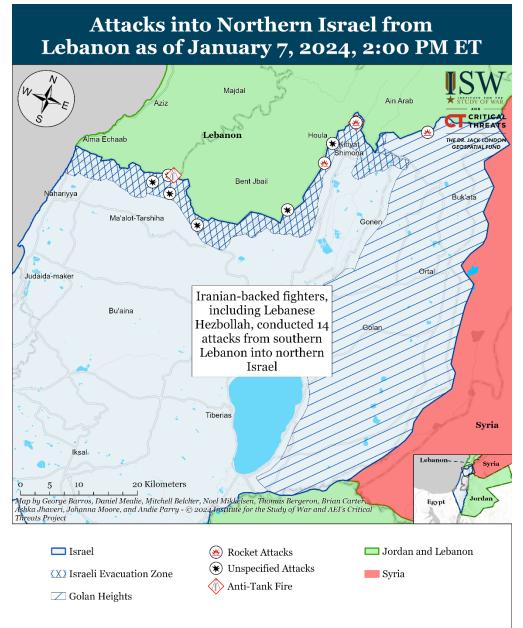
This map is not an exhaustive depiction of clashes and demonstrations in the West Bank.

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 14 attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel on January 7.[54] LH claimed six attacks targeting Israeli forces and military infrastructure on the Israel-Lebanon border with rockets and anti-tank munitions.[55] **The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed on January 7 that it conducted a long-range cruise missile attack targeting Haifa.[56]** Israel has not commented on the claimed attack at the time of publication. CTP-ISW cannot independently verify this claim. Palestinian and LH-affiliated media claimed the cruise missile landed in Haifa bay.[57] The Islamic Resistance in Iraq also claimed an attack targeting an unspecified Israeli military target in the Golan Heights.[58]



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

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq conducted two one-way drone attacks on US positions in Iraq and Syria on January 7. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq conducted a one-way drone attack on US forces stationed at Ain al Asad Airbase in Anbar Province, Iraq.[59] The Islamic Resistance in Iraq also conducted a one-way drone attack on US forces stationed at Qasrak base, Hasakah Province, Syria.[60]

Unspecified actors conducted an airstrike targeting an Iranian-backed militia convoy reportedly transferring military equipment in Albu Kumal, Syria, on January 7.[61] The truck reportedly entered Deir ez Zor Province from Iraq, which is a common ground route through which the IRGC transfers military equipment and personnel into the Levant.[62] Syrian and Iraqi Kurdish media claimed that the truck was transporting unspecified weapons and that several Iranian-backed militants were injured in the strike.[63]

Israel has conducted an air campaign in Syria in recent months meant to disrupt Iranian military transfers into the Levant.[64] Israel has conducted several airstrikes on the Aleppo and Damascus international airports, which are critical nodes through which the IRGC transfers military commanders and materiel into Syria.[65] Israel also killed Razi Mousavi, a senior IRGC officer who oversaw military transfers to the Levant, on December 25.[66]

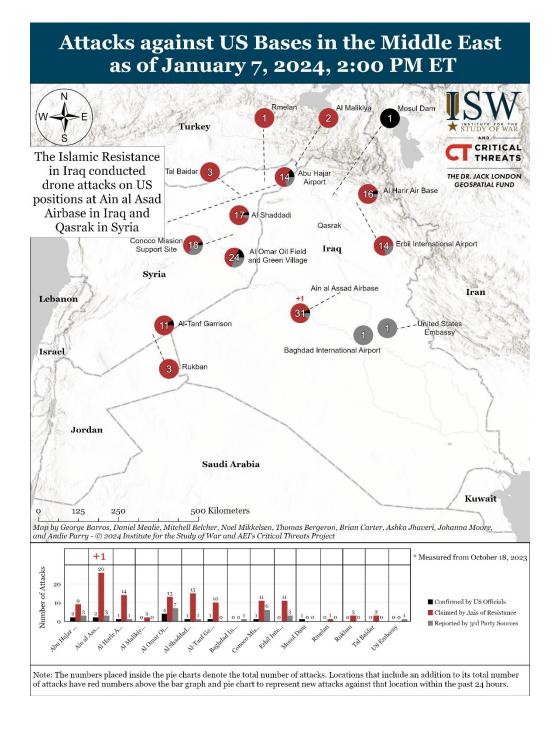
Unidentified actors separately hacked the flight schedule monitors at Beirut International Airport on January 7 and displayed messages stating that the IRGC and LH are exploiting the airport for weapons transfers.[67]

The Jordanian armed forces reported that they eliminated five Iranian-backed militia members attempting to smuggle drugs and weapons into Jordan from southern Syria on January 6.[68] Jordanian officials expressed concern at the rise in such incursions and accused the Syrian regime of failing to stem Iranian-run smuggling networks. The Jordanian Air Force similarly conducted counternarcotics airstrikes on two towns in southern Syria on January 4.[69] The Jordanian Air Force last conducted strikes on Iranian-backed targets in Syria on December 18, 2023, and similarly struck the house of another LH-linked drug smuggler in Shaab in May 2023.[70] Iranian-backed militias and parts of the Syrian regime enable and profit from the drug trade in southern Syria.[71]

IRGC Quds Force officer Brigadier General Eraj Masjedi stated on January 7 that the Palestinian militias will eventually obtain unspecified "defensive weapons" that would prevent Israel from conducting airstrikes into the Gaza Strip.[72] Masjedi was presumably referring to air defense systems and implying that the IRGC Quds Force could provide them. Masjedi is a senior and well-connected member of the IRGC Quds Force. He currently serves as a senior adviser to the overall IRGC Quds Force commander and was previously the Iranian ambassador to Iraq.[73] Iranian leaders have long appointed senior IRGC Quds Force officers to this position, demonstrating the control and influence the IRGC Quds Force has over Iranian policy toward Iraq. **IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani published an open letter to Ismail Haniyeh discussing the Israel-Hamas war on January 7.[74]** Ghaani claimed that Israel is attempting to lessen its defeat in the Gaza Strip and West Bank by assassinating "resistance commanders." Ghaani expressed his condolences to Haniyeh regarding Israel killing Saleh al Arouri on January 2.[75] Ghaani also claimed that the world will soon witness how the "brothers" of Arouri will become a "nightmare" for Israel.[76]

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian discussed the Israel-Hamas war during a phone call with his French counterpart, Catherine Colonna, on January 6.[77] Abdollahian said that the only way to prevent the war from becoming a larger regional conflict is by addressing the root causes.[78] Colonna told Abdollahian that Iran and its proxies must stop their destabilizing activities.[79]

Southern Kerman Province Prosecutor Mehdi Bakhshi said that state security services have arrested 23 individuals in connection with the January 3 Islamic State terror attack.[80] The official specified that these individuals have been arrested over several months, implying that they were connected to a broader network rather than a discrete attack. Bakhshi added that security services have found 16 explosive devices throughout the province. [81] The Afghan branch of the Islamic State, named the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), claimed responsibility for the attack on January 5.[82]



BABELSTREET

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