Iran Update, January 8, 2024

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Information Cutoff: 2:00pm EST

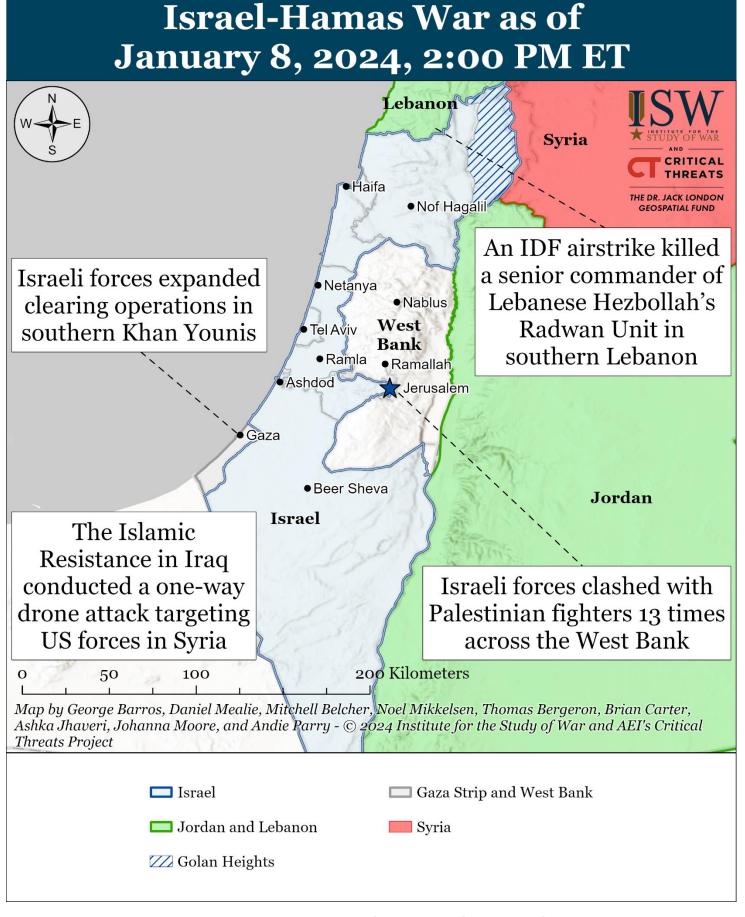
The Iran Update provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities abroad that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests. It also covers events and trends that affect the stability and decision-making of the Iranian regime. The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the 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. PIJ released a video on January 8 showing one of its Israeli hostages appealing for a renewed hostage exchange with Israel, which is an effort to pressure the Israeli government to agree to a ceasefire.
- 2. IDF spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari reported on January 8 that the war "shifted to a stage" that will involve fewer ground forces and airstrikes in the Gaza Strip.
- 3. The IDF killed a senior commander in LH's Radwan Unit, Wissam Hassan al Tawil, in an airstrike on January 8.
- 4. Tawil's death in southern Lebanon indicates that LH is not complying with UNSC Resolution 1701, which mandates that LH cannot deploy military forces south of the Litani River. UNSC Resolution 1701 ended the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War.
- 5. Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba spokesperson Hussein Moussawi stated that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—conducted an attack targeting Haifa, Israel, on January 7 to signal to Israel its ability to attack targets "beyond [Haifa]."
- 6. An Iraqi official close to the Shia Coordination Framework claimed on January 7 that the framework recently "authorized" Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani to discuss the removal of US forces from Iraq with the US Government.



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.

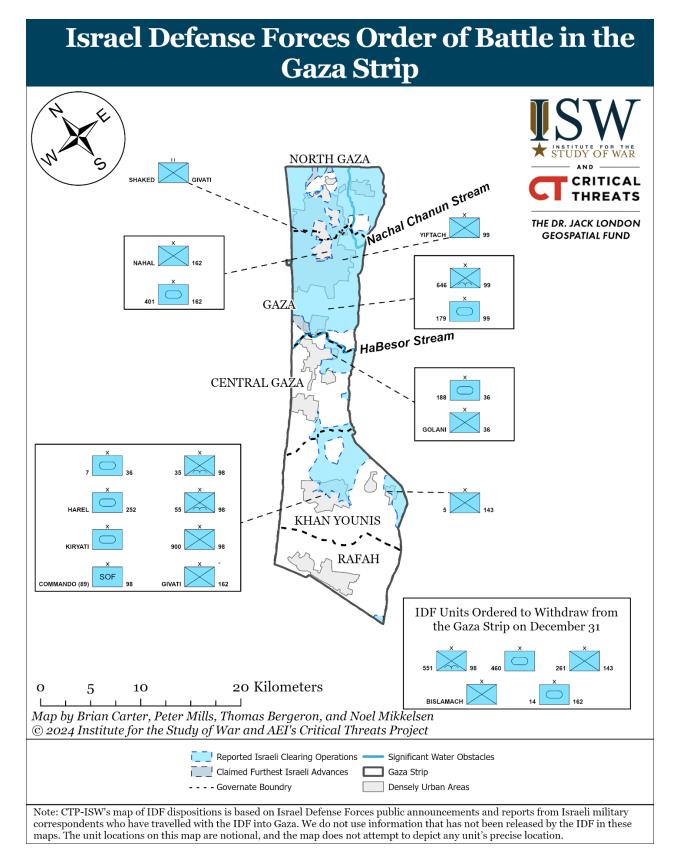
Palestinian militias are continuing to report attacks in the northern Gaza Strip to their higher headquarters after their fighters return to rear areas. The delays in reporting may indicate a loss of command and control over some units that are engaged with Israeli forces, as CTP-ISW previously assessed.[1] Hamas' military wing, the al Qassem Brigades, claimed on January 8 that its fighters "returned from the [frontlines in northwest Gaza City]" and reported that they fired anti-tank rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) at an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Engineering Corps armored personnel carrier.[2] These fighters' inability to communicate with higher headquarters until returning to rear areas means that their commanders may be unable to transmit orders to fighters engaged with the IDF. These possible difficulties in command and control extend to other Palestinian militia groups fighting in the northern Gaza Strip. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine's (PFLP) military wing, the Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades, claimed on January 8 that it reestablished "contact with combat units" and confirmed that its fighters targeted three IDF vehicles with unspecified weapons in Tuffah in the northern Gaza Strip.[3]

The IDF continued clearing operations in the Central Governorate of the Gaza Strip on January 8. The IDF 179th Armored Brigade (assigned to the 99th Division) located a tunnel shaft, weapons, and thousands of dollars in an unspecified area in the central Gaza Strip.[4] The Golani Brigade (assigned to the 36th Division) and 188th Armored Brigade (assigned to the 36th Division) located a weapons production facility in Bureij that the IDF said was the largest weapons facility that Israeli forces have discovered since the Israel-Hamas war began.[5] The IDF reported that the facility included long-range rockets, explosives materiel, drones, light weapons, and tunnel shafts 30 meters underneath the facility. The al Qassem Brigades claimed that its fighters clashed with Israeli forces that attempted to recover a Hamas-held hostage in the central Gaza Strip on January 8.[6] The Golani Brigade called in an airstrike targeting a weapons depot containing long-range rockets in Maghazi.[7]

The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine's (DFLP) military wing, the National Resistance Brigades, was the only militia that claimed attacks on Israeli forces in the Central Governorate of the Gaza Strip on January 8. The militia said that its forces clashed with Israeli forces with "heavy weapons" northeast of Deir al Balah.[8]

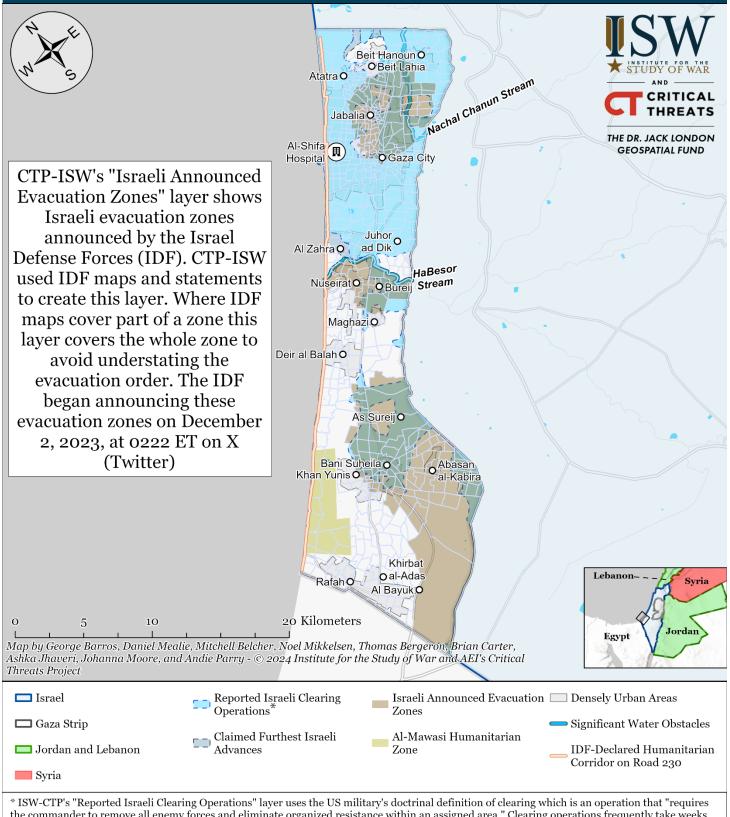
The IDF 7th Armored Brigade expanded clearing operations in southern Khan Younis on January **8.[9]** Israeli forces searched military infrastructure near civilian homes and uncovered a tunnel shaft in the area of a school.[10] Palestinian fighters fired RPGs at Israeli forces that returned fire with tanks and air support.[11] Israeli special operations forces (SOF) located more than ten Palestinian fighters who were launching rockets into Israeli territory and directed a drone strike on their position.[12] The IDF 55th Paratrooper Brigade (assigned to the 98th Division) targeted several Palestinian fighters who emerged from buildings in Khan Younis on January 8.[13] The Israeli Air Force conducted airstrikes on 30 targets, including underground tunnels and weapons depots, in Khan Younis on January 8.[14]

Palestinian militias continued attempts to defend against Israeli clearing operations in Khan Younis on January 8. The al Qassem Brigades claimed that it conducted four attacks on Israeli infantry and armor in Khan Younis on January 8.[15] The militia detonated an anti-personnel improvised explosive device and fired small arms targeting Israeli forces inside a school in Khan Younis City.[16] The al Quds Brigades clashed with Israeli forces using small arms and RPGs as Israeli forces advanced in the northern, eastern, and central areas of Khan Younis.[17] The Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades fired RPGs at Israeli forces in central and eastern Khan Younis City.[18]



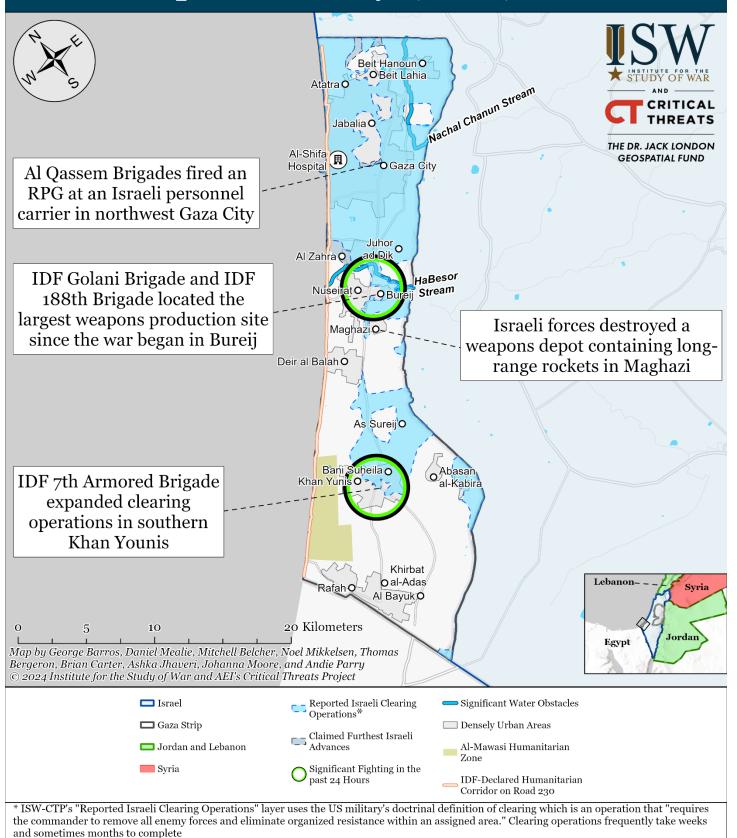
CTP-ISW's map of IDF dispositions is based on Israel Defense Forces public announcements and reports from Israeli military correspondents who have traveled with the IDF into Gaza. We do not use information that has not been released by the IDF in these maps. The unit locations on this map are notional,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

Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip as of January 8, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



^{*} 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 January 8, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project 2024

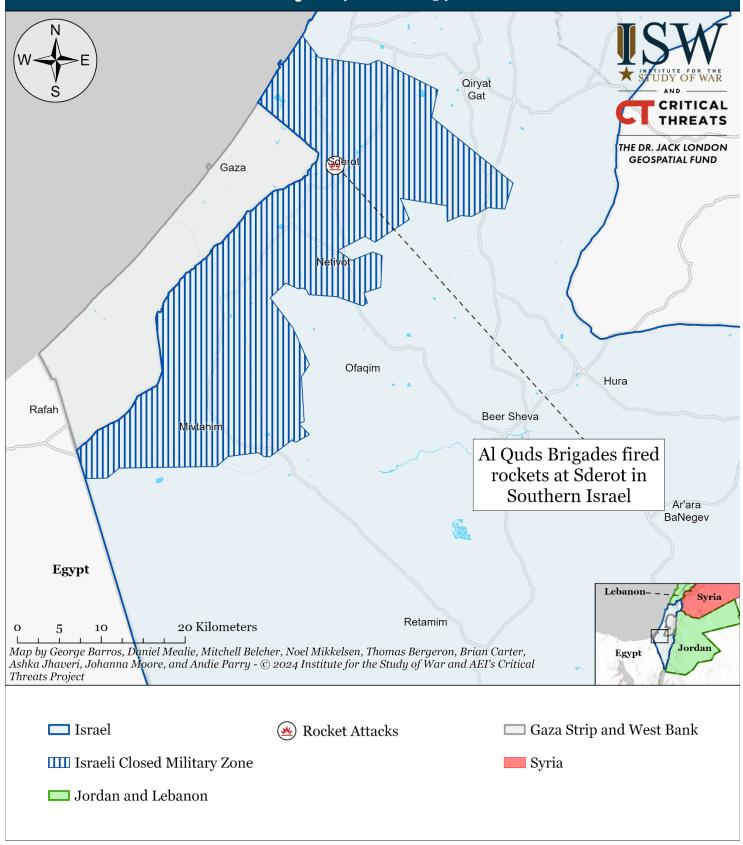
PIJ released a video on January 8 showing one of its Israeli hostages appealing for a renewed hostage exchange with Israel, which is an effort to pressure the Israeli government to agree to a ceasefire.[19] Palestinian militias' demands for a renewed hostage-for-prisoner deal include the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip and an end to the war, neither of which are compatible with Israeli war aims.[20] Israeli Army Radio reported that the hostage referenced information in recent Israeli media.[21]

IDF spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari reported on January 8 that the war "shifted to a stage" that will involve fewer ground forces and airstrikes in the Gaza Strip.[22] Hagari's comments to the *New York Times* are consistent with the reports of Israeli forces withdrawing reservists from the Gaza Strip and transitioning to targeted raids in the northern Gaza Strip.[23] Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant told the *Wall Street Journal* on January 7 that Israeli forces would shift from the "intense maneuvering phase of the war" to special operations.[24] Gallant cautioned that the conflict "will last for a longer time" as Israel has not abandoned its stated war objectives.

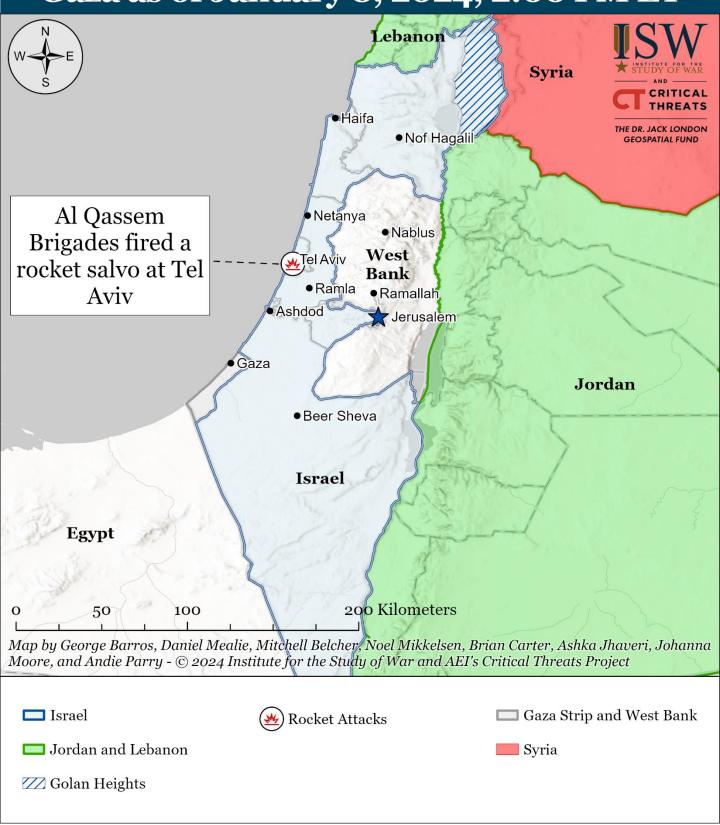
The World Health Organization (WHO) halted a medical aid delivery to the northern Gaza Strip on January 7 in the absence of safety guarantees.[25] This marked the fourth cancellation since December 26 of the mission to sustain operations at five hospitals in the north. The WHO said that heavy bombardment, restrictions on movement, and interrupted communications make delivering medical supplies regularly and safely across the Gaza Strip, particularly in the north "nearly impossible."[26] Israeli forces are clearing areas in Bureij and Nuseirat In the central Gaza Strip.

Palestinian militias conducted three rocket attacks into Israel from the Gaza Strip on January 8. The al Qassem Brigades fired a rocket salvo targeting Tel Aviv.[27] The al Qassem Brigades have only conducted four rocket attacks into Israel from the Gaza Strip since December 21, indicating that Israeli operations have degraded Hamas' rocket capability.[28] The al Quds Brigades separately fired rockets targeting Sderot and Nir Aam in southern Israel on January 8.[29]

Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of January 8, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Indirect Fire Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of January 8, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



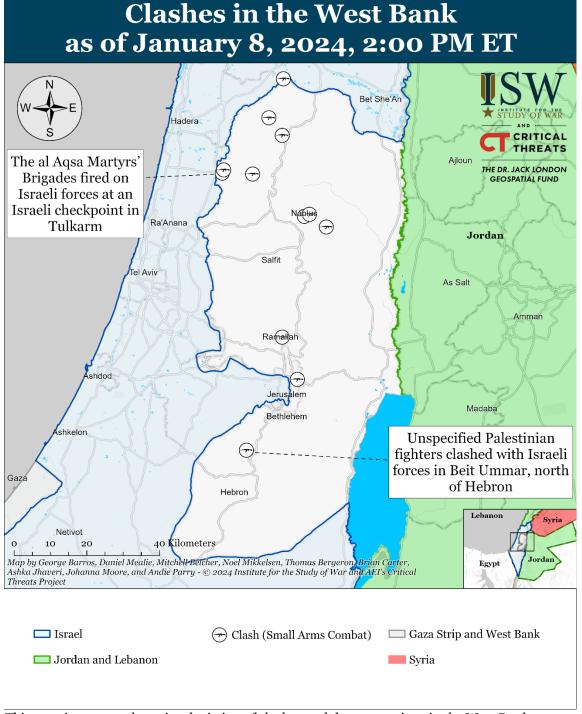
Recorded reports of rocket attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

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 13 times across the West Bank on January 8.[30] This level of attacks is consistent with daily attack counts in the West Bank over the past week. The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired small arms targeting Israeli forces seven times in major cities in the West Bank including Jenin, Nablus, and Tulkarm.[31] The Tulkarm Battalion of the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired small arms at Israeli forces at an Israeli checkpoint in Tulkarm.[32] Unspecified Palestinian fighters clashed with Israeli forces in Beit Ummar, north of Hebron.[33] The IDF said that it arrested ten wanted individuals and seized weapons during operations across the West Bank.[34]



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:

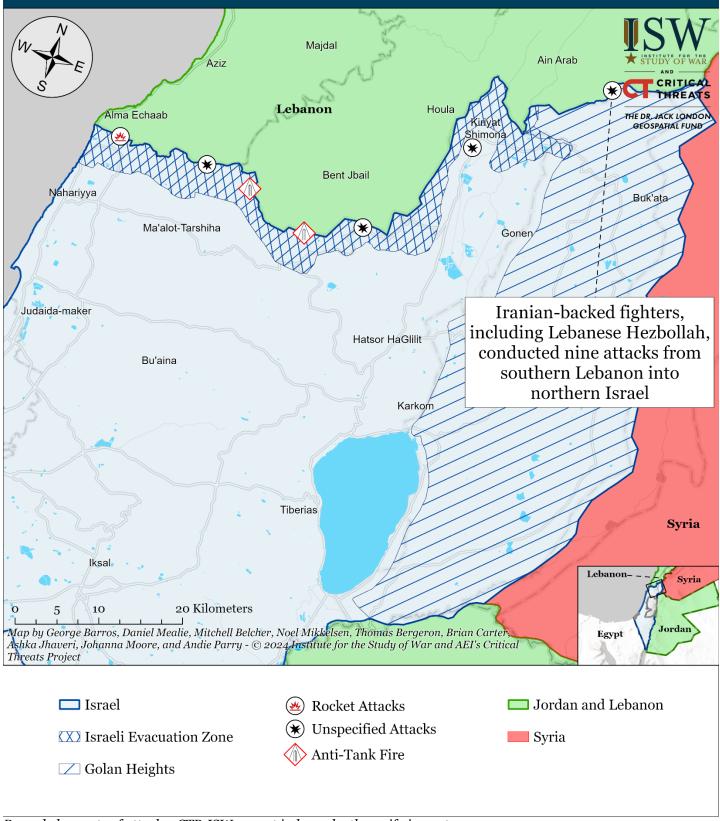
- Draw IDF assets and resources toward northern Israel and fix them there
- Set conditions for successive campaigns into northern Israel

The IDF killed a senior commander in LH's Radwan Unit, Wissam Hassan al Tawil, in an airstrike on January 8.[35] LH-affiliated media Al Mayadeen reported that Tawil was a senior commander and that he is responsible for many attacks against IDF targets on the Israel-Lebanon border since the start of the Israel-Hamas war on October 7.[36] LH said that Tawil assisted in planning and reconnaissance operations in southern Lebanon since 1992. He also participated in the planning for the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers along the Israel-Lebanon border, which sparked the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war.[37]Tawil was involved in LH weapons manufacturing and oversaw the Radwan Unit's operations in southern Lebanon, according to Israeli and Western reporting.[38] LH denied that Tawil was the commander of the Radwan Unit.[39] LH's Radwan unit was established by the IRGC Quds Force and is the group's special operations forces unit focused on infiltrating Israeli territory.[40] Israeli media reported that the IRGC Quds Force, particularly the Sabeerin Commando Battalion, provides the Radwan Unit with military and financial support.[41] The Sabeerin Battalion specializes in military intelligence.[42] Anonymous LH officials told the Wall Street Journal that LH transferred Tawil from Syria to southern Lebanon approximately one month ago.[43] The IDF did not confirm if Tawil was the target of an Israeli airstrike.

Tawil's death in southern Lebanon indicates that LH is not complying with UNSC Resolution 1701, which mandates that LH cannot deploy military forces south of the Litani River. UNSC Resolution 1701 ended the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War.[44] Multiple senior Israeli officials have said that Israel seeks a diplomatic agreement to implement UNSC Resolution 1701 and push LH military units north of the Litani River.[45] These officials have said that they will resort to military means if diplomatic means fail.[46] Israeli media reported in late December that LH began withdrawing its Radwan Unit from the Israel-Lebanon border, and some IDF officials reported that the IDF believed that airstrikes targeting LH fighters had forced LH to withdraw some of its forces northward.[47] Tawil's presence in southern Lebanon suggests that at least some elements of the Radwan Unit, including senior leaders, remain in southern Lebanon to plan and execute attacks against Israel.

Iranian-backed fighters, including LH, conducted nine attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel on January 8.[48] LH targeted Israeli military infrastructure and soldiers with anti-tank guided munitions, rockets, and other unspecified weapons.[49] The IDF reported it intercepted a "suspicious aerial target" that crossed from southern Lebanon into Israeli airspace near Kiryat Shmona.[50]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon as of January 8, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



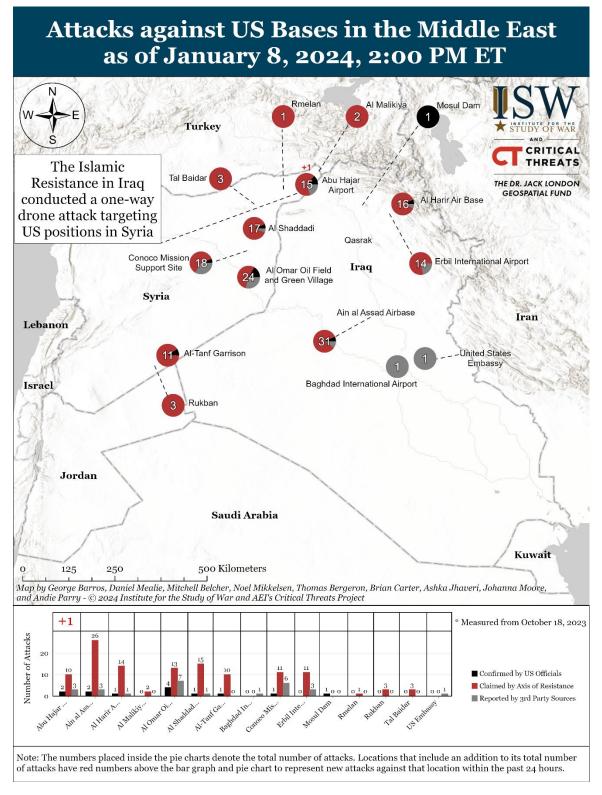
Recorded reports of attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

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 a one-way drone attack targeting US forces in Syria on January 8. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq targeted US forces stationed at the Rumaylan Landing Zone in Syria.[51]



The IDF said on January 8 that it killed a Hamas commander in Syria responsible for launching rockets from Syria into northern Syria.[52] The IDF targeted Hamas commander Hassan Akasha in Beit Jin, Rif Dimashq Governorate, Syria. This strike demonstrates that Hamas has the necessary infrastructure and personnel in southern Syria to target Israel.

Western media reported on January 8 that Israel intensified its air campaign in Syria over the last three months, killing 19 LH members there. [53] Reuters reported that the number of LH members killed in Israeli airstrikes over the last three months is double the amount of LH members killed during the rest of 2023 combined. Israeli media reported on December 28 that recent Israeli airstrikes in Syria targeted IRGC and IRGC-affiliated actors facilitating Iranian weapons shipments to LH. [54] Israeli media added on December 30 that Iran accelerated its weapons transfers to LH in anticipation of a wider war with Israel. [55] An Israeli airstrike targeting the IRGC's military headquarters in Sayyidah Zainab, Syria, on December 25 killed a senior IRGC commander who oversaw Iranian materiel shipments to LH. [56]

President Ebrahim Raisi re-emphasized the Iranian regime narrative that the United States and Israel created ISIS at a meeting with the Speaker of the National Assembly of Tajikistan Rostam Imam Ali on January 8.[57] Raisi said that fighting terrorism, organized crime, and drugs is one of the "requirements" of Iranian-Tajik cooperation.[58] Raisi added that Iran and Tajikistan face "common issues" as neighbors of Afghanistan. The Afghan branch of the Islamic State, known as the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), claimed responsibility for the Kerman terrorist attack on January 4.[59] The Iranian Intelligence Ministry said on January 5 that one of the two bombers responsible for the attack was a Tajik national who traveled from abroad to conduct the attack.[60] An ISKP member and Tajik national conducted a separate terror attack targeting the Shah Cheragh Shrine in Shiraz, Fars Province in August 2023.[61] Iran opened a drone production facility in Tajikistan in May 2022 as part of its counterterrorism and security cooperation with Tajikistan.[62]

IRGC-affiliated media reported that Iranian security forces killed a purportedly Jaish al Adl-affiliated individual in Bampur City in Sistan and Baluchistan Province on January 8.[63] IRGC-affiliated media linked the individual to the December 15 Jaish al Adl attack on a police headquarters in Sistan and Baluchistan Province.[64] Jaish al Adl was also likely responsible for an IED attack near Zahedan on December 19.[65]Jaish al Adl also attacked a police station in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province in July 2023.[66]

A UK-based, Middle East-focused outlet reported that LH Representative to Iraq Mohammad Hussein al Kawtharani traveled to Baghdad on January 5 to "coordinate an escalation in operations" against US forces in Iraq.[67] The outlet reported that Kawtharani told Iranian-backed Iraqi factions that the Axis of Resistance should do everything possible to remove the United States from Iraq. Kawtharani's visit to Baghdad on January 5 marks his first trip to Iraq in two years.[68] His visit also coincides with LH Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah's speech on January 5 in which Nasrallah called on Iranian-backed Iraqi militias to expel US forces from Iraq.[69] The US Treasury Department sanctioned Kawtharani in August 2013 for promoting LH's interests in Iraq, including LH's efforts to provide "training, funding, political, and logistical support to Iraqi sectarian armed groups."[70] The US State Department announced in April 2020 that Kawtharani "facilitates the actions of groups operating outside the control of the Government of Iraq that have violently suppressed protests, attacked foreign diplomatic missions, and engaged in wide-spread organized criminal activity."[71]

Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba spokesperson Hussein Moussawi stated that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—conducted an attack targeting Haifa, Israel, on January 7 to signal to Israel its ability to attack targets "beyond [Haifa]."[72] Moussawi made this statement in an interview with LH-affiliated outlet al Mayadeen on January 8. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed on January 7 that it conducted a long-range cruise missile attack targeting Haifa.[73] Moussawi claimed that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq seeks to disrupt US "plans" in the Middle East and Israeli "occupation efforts" in the Gaza Strip. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq has previously claimed attacks on targets outside of Iraq and Syria. The group claimed an unspecified attack targeting a "vital target" in the Mediterranean Sea in late December 2023, for example.[74] CTP-ISW assessed at the time that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq and the Axis of Resistance more broadly were signaling their capability and willingness to attack maritime targets beyond just the Persian Gulf and Red Sea.[75]

An unspecified source told Iraqi media on January 7 that many "armed Iraqi factions" have vacated their headquarters and military sites in urban areas following the January 4 US self-defense strike that killed a senior Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba (HHN) official. [76] "Armed Iraqi factions" very likely refers to Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, given the context of the January 4 US strike that killed a senior HHN official. The unspecified source also told Iraqi media that some Iraqi militia leaders are periodically changing their place of residence to avoid being targeted. The United States reported that the HHN official, Mushtaq Jawad al Jawari, was "actively involved in planning and carrying out attacks against US personnel." [77]

An Iraqi official close to the Shia Coordination Framework claimed on January 7 that the framework recently "authorized" Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani to discuss the removal of US forces from Iraq with the US Government. The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Iranian-backed political parties. Members of the framework have increasingly pressured Sudani to order the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq in recent weeks. This statement is noteworthy given that the Shia Coordination Framework does not have the authority to direct Sudani's actions.

Two unspecified small craft approached a commercial vessel 50 nautical miles southeast of Mokha, Yemen on January 8. Mokha, Yemen is controlled by the UAE-backed, pro-Yemeni government National Resistance Forces. The two boats did not display any weapons and did not engage the commercial vessel.[78]



- [1] https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-january-6-2024
- [2] https://t.me/gassam1brigades/1271
- [3] https://t.me/kataebabuali/10592
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