

Iran Update, December 6, 2023

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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](#).

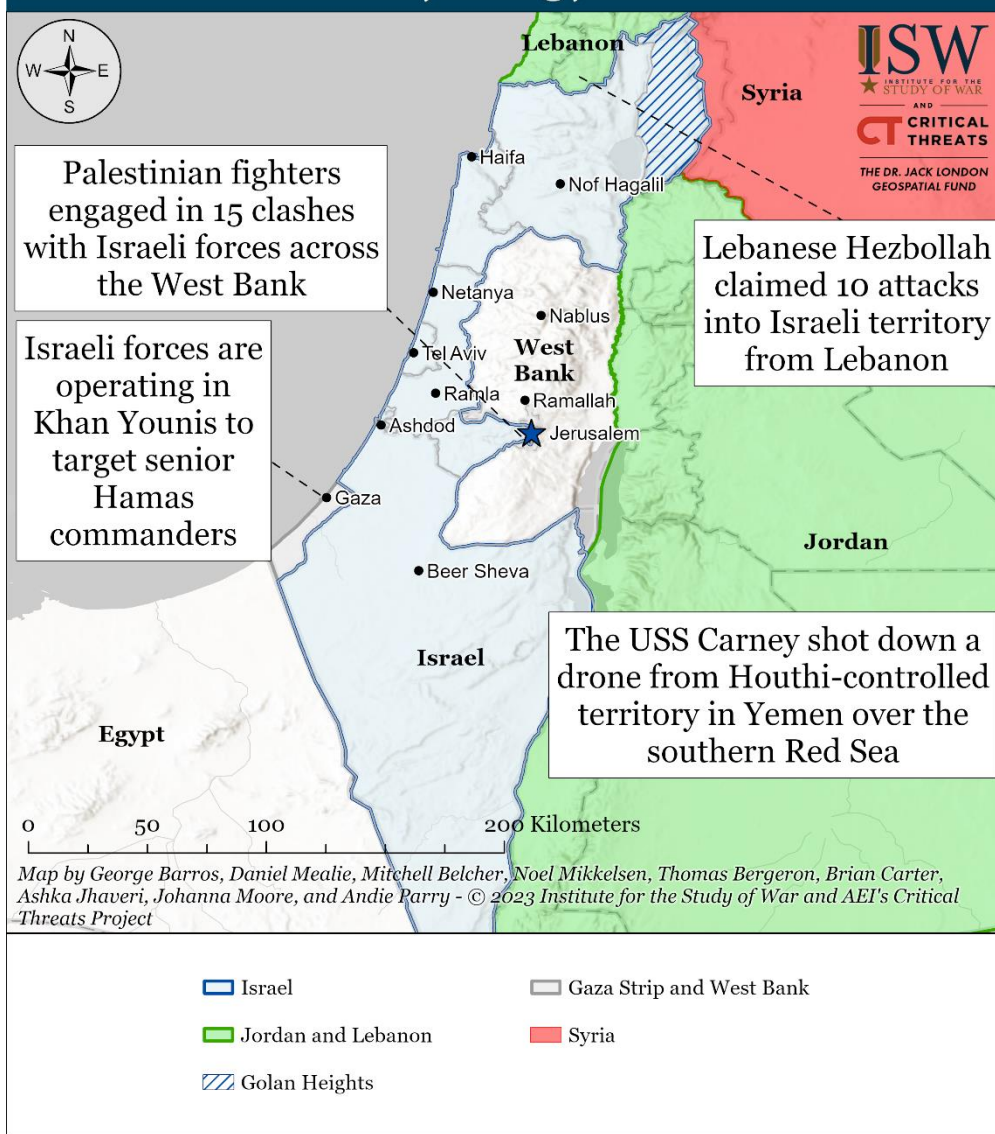
Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are well-covered 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. Israeli forces are operating in Khan Younis as part of the Israel Defense Force (IDF)'s effort to target senior Hamas commanders. Palestinian militias claimed several attacks along Israeli lines of advance in Khan Younis.
2. Israeli forces continued clearing operations in Jabalia and the Shujaiya neighborhood of eastern Gaza City.
3. Israeli forces and Palestinian fighters engaged in 15 clashes across the West Bank.
4. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said that Israel is pursuing diplomacy to enforce UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which bans Lebanese Hezbollah from positioning military forces south of the Litani River.
5. Lebanese Hezbollah claimed 10 attacks into Israeli territory from Lebanon.
6. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed responsibility for three attacks targeting US positions in Iraq on December 5 and 6.
7. The Houthi movement said that it launched several ballistic missiles targeting Eilat in southern Israel on December 6.

Israel-Hamas War as of December 6, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



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 are operating in Khan Younis as part of the Israel Defense Force (IDF)'s effort to target senior Hamas commanders. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on December 6 that the Israeli military had encircled Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip Yahya Sinwar's house in Khan Younis.[1] Residents in the area told Reuters that Israeli tanks neared his home.[2] IDF spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said that Sinwar is likely underground in

Hamas' extensive tunnel network.[3] Israel has claimed repeatedly that senior political and military Hamas leadership, including Sinwar and Hamas' military chief Mohammed Deif, are hiding in Khan Younis.[4]

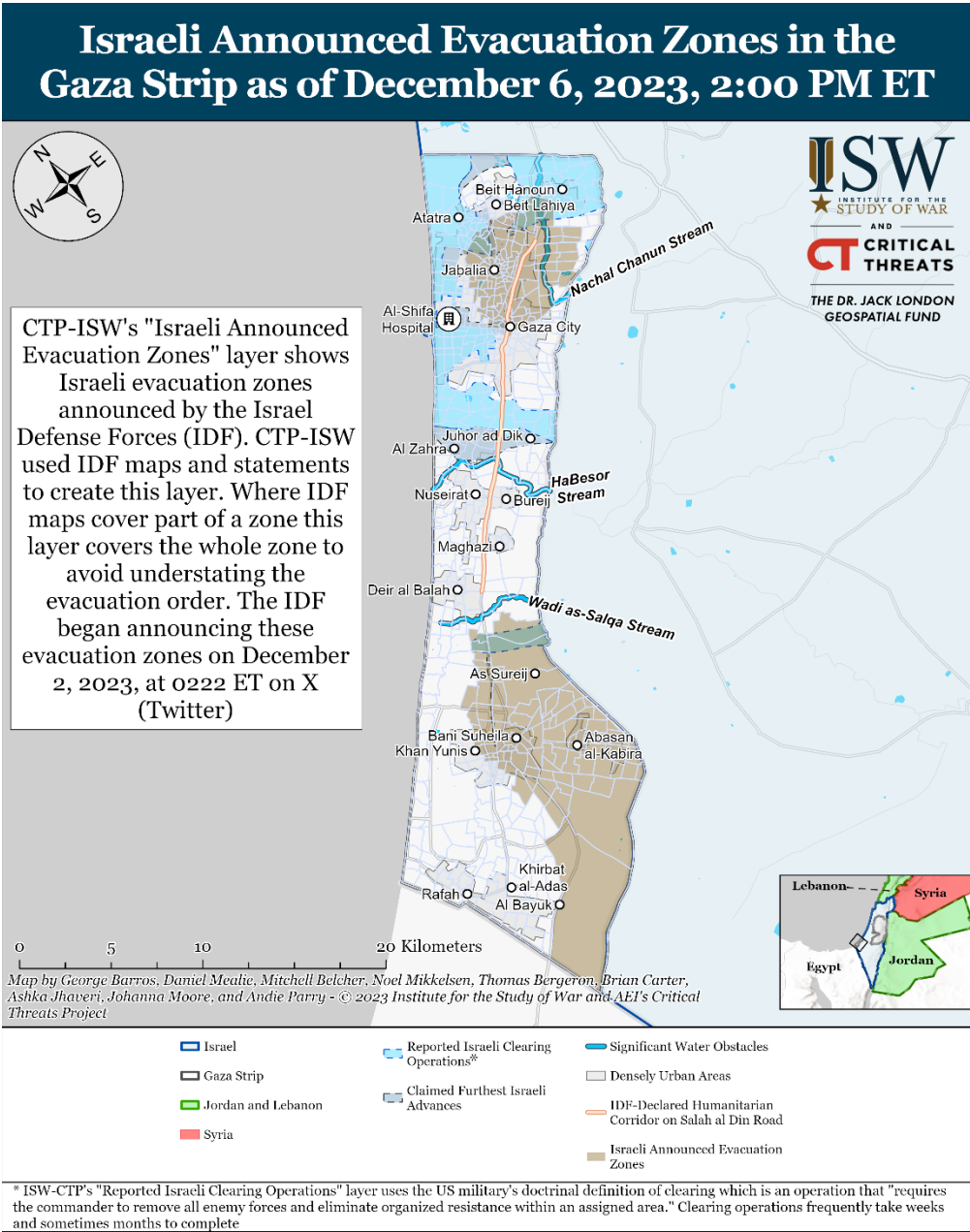
The IDF 98th Paratrooper Division led the attack on Khan Younis to target Hamas' "centers of gravity," which is presumably a reference to Hamas' critical command node in the city.[5] The IDF said that its forces encircled the city after it broke through Hamas' Khan Younis Brigade's defenses. The IDF reported that it began conducting targeted raids within the city.[6] The IDF issued urgent warnings to residents in the Khan Younis area against traveling on the Salah al Din Road as Israeli forces are operating on parts of the road.[7] The Israeli Air Force attacked 250 targets across the Gaza Strip on December 6, targeting weapons, tunnels, IEDs, and other military infrastructure.[8] Hagari stated that the four IDF divisions operating across the Gaza Strip are fighting with a high intensity as they break down defensive lines.[9]

Palestinian militias claimed several attacks along Israeli lines of advance in Khan Younis. The al Qassem Brigades—the militant wing of Hamas—claimed that its fighters detonated a house-borne improvised device (HBIED) targeting Israeli forces east of Khan Younis on December 6.[10] The use of more sophisticated tactics, such as rigging a house to explode, is consistent with Hamas' shift from less sophisticated to more sophisticated tactics after the end of the humanitarian pause.[11] The al Qassem Brigades claimed several other indirect and direct fire attacks using anti-tank rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), small arms, and mortars.[12] Other Palestinian militias allied with Hamas also attacked the IDF near Khan Younis. The al Quds Brigades—the militant wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)—claimed that it used a high-explosive fragmentation grenade and mortars to attack Israeli forces, east of Khan Younis.[13] Bani Suheila residents reported on December 6 that Israeli forces reached Bani Suheila.[14] The al Nasser Salah al Din Brigades—the militant wing of the Popular Resistance Committees —claimed that its fighters fought Israeli forces advancing in Khan Younis.[15] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade—a self-affiliated militant wing of Fatah—claimed that its fighters targeted an Israeli tank with an anti-tank munition east of Khan Younis.[16]

Israeli forces continued clearing operations in Jabalia on December 6. The IDF stated its Nahal Brigade fought Palestinian fighters in Jabalia on December 6.[17] The IDF announced it had "encircled" the neighborhood and was operating at its "core" on December 5.[18] Geolocated footage posted on December 5 shows armed clashes between Palestinian fighters and Israeli troops that occurred near Kamal Idwan Hospital on the northern border of Jabalia.[19] The Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry reported Israeli tanks fired at the hospital's main generator on December 5, indicating Israeli forces advanced into Jabalia.[20] The IDF said its fighters operating in Jabalia recovered one of the largest stockpiles of weapons in the Gaza Strip, consisting of hundreds of missiles and launchers, long-range rockets, RPGs, drones, and explosively formed penetrators.[21]

The al Qassem Brigades attacked Israeli military vehicles along the Israeli line of advance in the Beit Lahia Project area, just north of Jabalia.[22] The al Nasser Salah al Din Brigades said that its fighters fought field coordination with the al Qassem Brigades and the al Quds Brigades in neighborhoods near Jabalia camp including Tal al Zaatar, Kamal Adwan, and al Fallujah.[23] The al Nasser Salah al Din Brigades is a loose group of local militias and the third largest armed group in the Gaza Strip.[24]

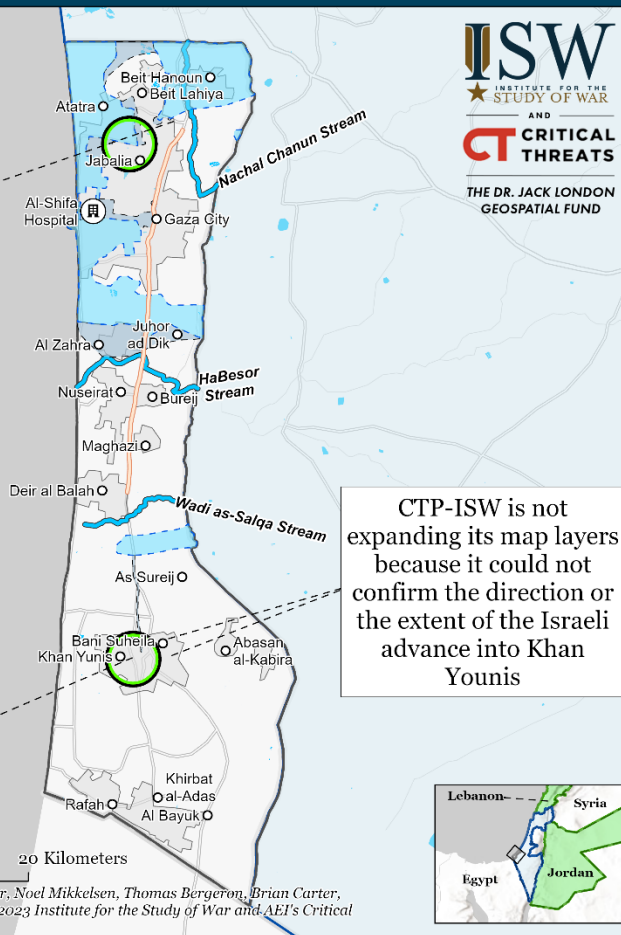
The IDF also continued clearing operations in the Shujaiya neighborhood of eastern Gaza City. The IDF said on December 5 that it was in the “core” of Shujaiya on December 5.[25] The al Quds Brigades attacked Israeli forces on the lines of advance into Shujaiya with IEDs, RPGs, and anti-armor shells.[26] The al Quds Brigades also fired anti-tank rockets at Israeli forces advancing into Shujaiya from the al Tuffah neighborhood, northwest of Shujaiya.[27] The al Qassem Brigades posted a video of its fighters attacking Israeli military vehicles with anti-tank rockets in the Shujaiya neighborhood on December 5.[28] The video included a burning Israeli Merkava tank in Shujaiya.[29]



Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of December 6, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



Israeli forces continued clearing operations in Jabalia and Shujaiya neighborhoods



CTP-ISW is not expanding its map layers because it could not confirm the direction or the extent of the Israeli advance into Khan Younis

Israeli forces are operating in Khan Younis to target senior Hamas commanders

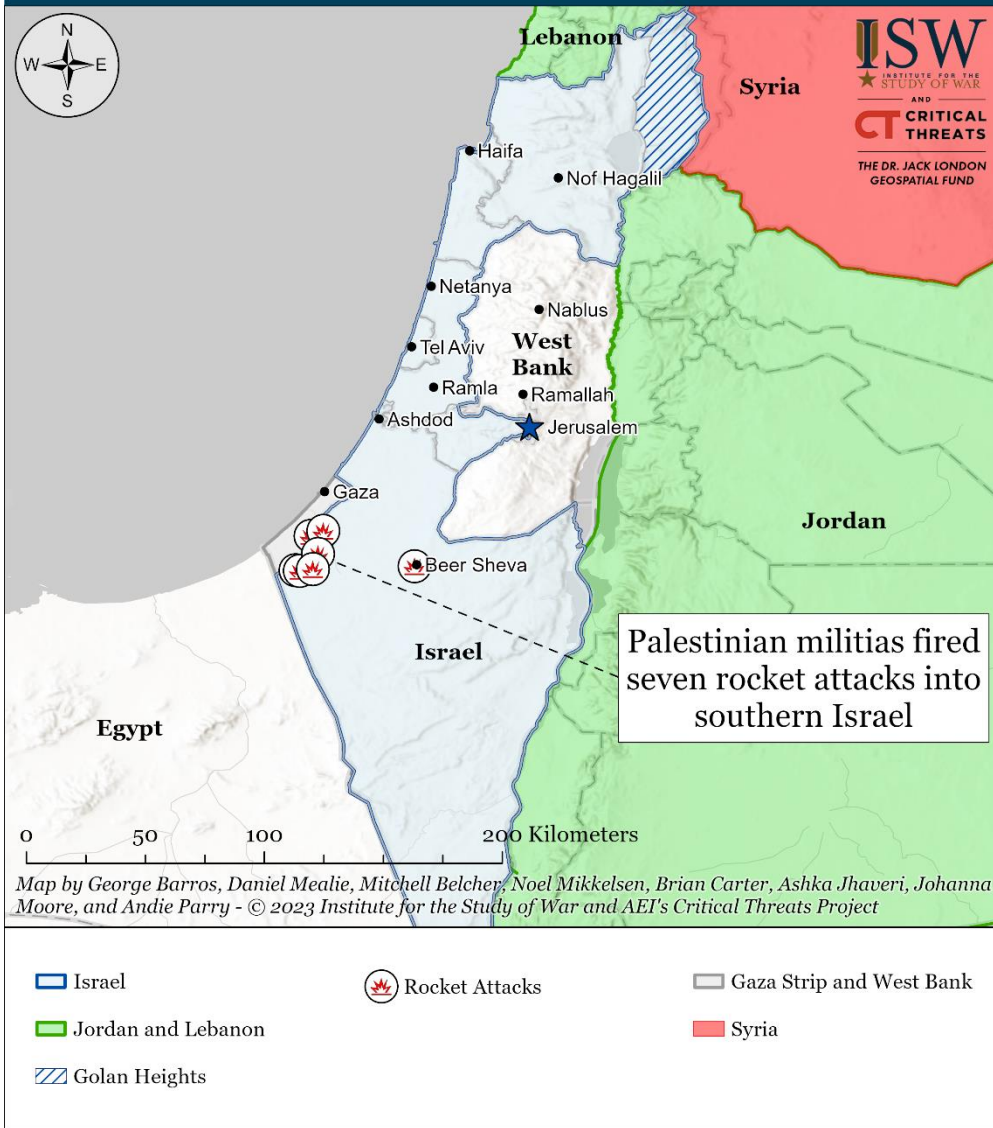
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Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Israel
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Significant Water Obstacles
- Gaza Strip
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Densely Urban Areas
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Syria
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Salah al Din Road

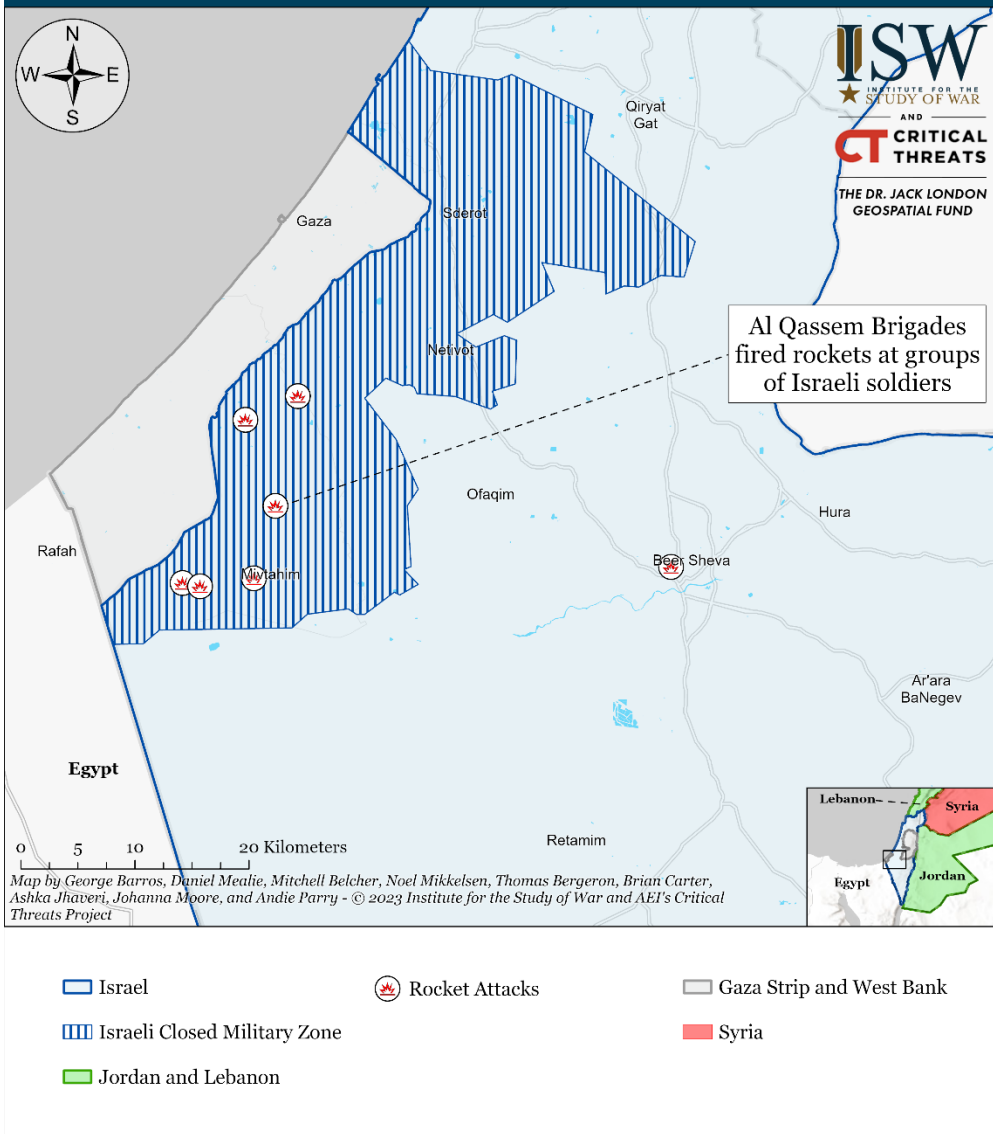
* ISW-CTP's "Reported Israeli Clearing Operations" layer uses the US military's doctrinal definition of clearing which is an operation that "requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance within an assigned area." Clearing operations frequently take weeks and sometimes months to complete

Indirect Fire Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of December 6, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



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

Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of December 6, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



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

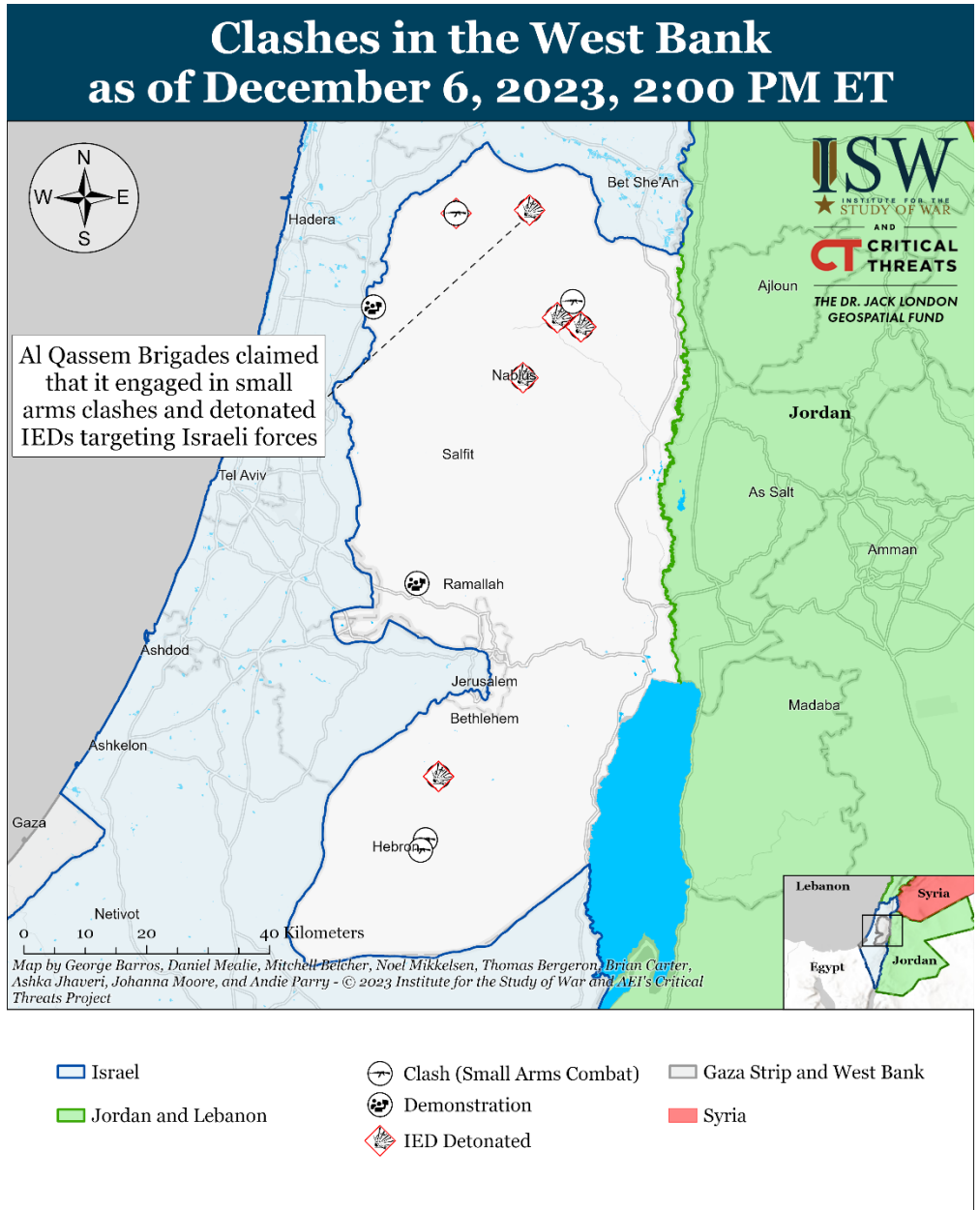
Palestinian militias in the Gaza Strip conducted seven indirect fire attacks into Israel on December 6. The al Qassem Brigades conducted six rocket attacks targeting southern Israel.^[30] The al Quds Brigades conducted one rocket attack.^[31]

West Bank

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

Israeli forces and Palestinian fighters engaged in 15 clashes across the West Bank on December 6. This level of violence is consistent with the daily average rate of clashes in the West Bank over the last seven days. Palestinian fighters, including al Qassem Brigades fighters, engaged Israeli forces in two small arms clashes and detonated at least two IEDs targeting Israeli vehicles as Israeli units conducted raids in Jenin.[32] Palestinian fighters also detonated five other IEDs targeting Israeli forces and engaged Israeli forces in seven other small arms clashes elsewhere in the West Bank.[33] Palestinians demonstrated against Israeli operations in Gaza in Ramallah and Tulkarm on December 6.[34] The IDF said that its forces arrested 16 wanted persons, three of whom were affiliated with Hamas, in the West Bank on December 6.[35]



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

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

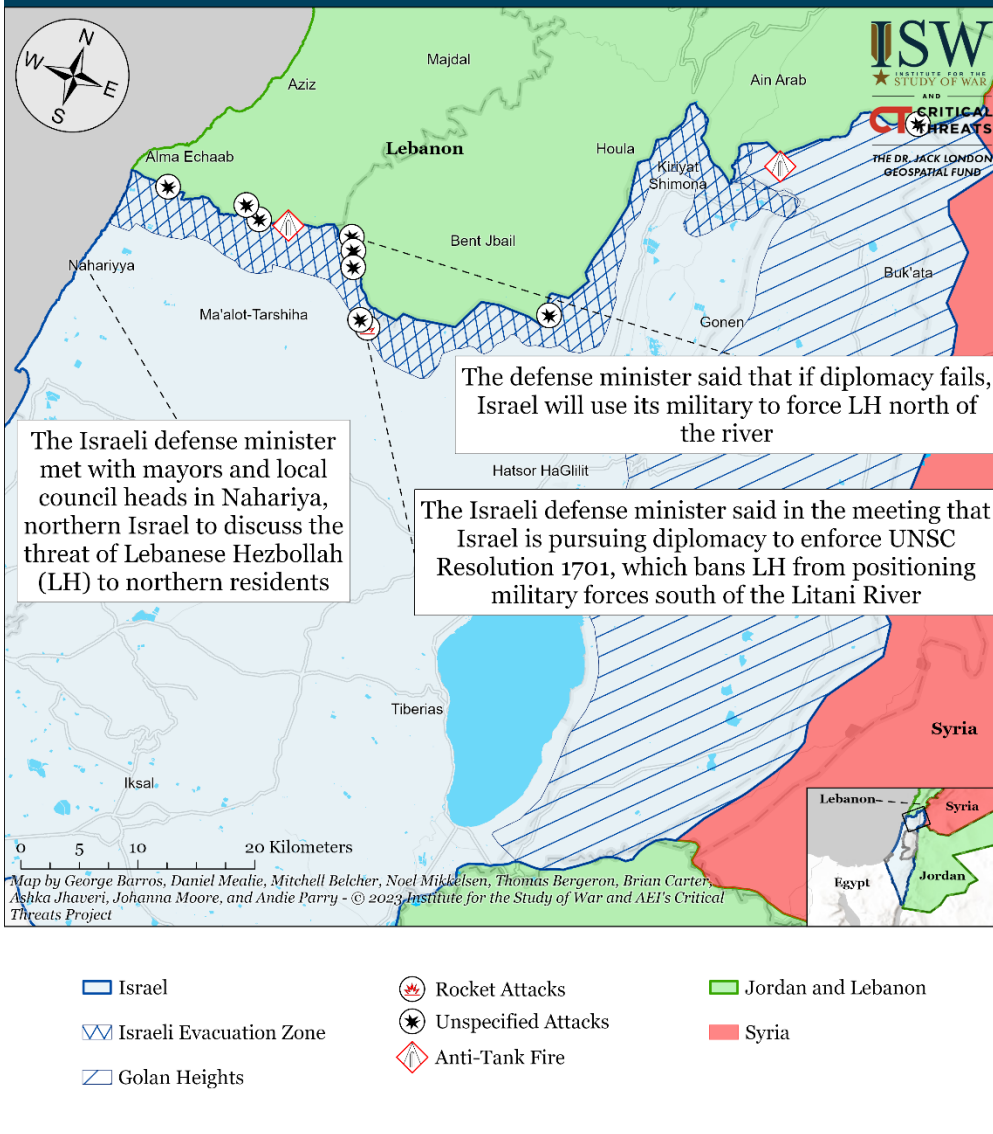
Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said that Israel is pursuing diplomacy to enforce UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which bans Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) from positioning military forces south of the Litani River.^[36] Gallant met with mayors and local council heads in Nahariya, northern Israel, on December 6.^[37] Israel evacuated thousands of northern Israelis from their homes after the October 7 attacks.^[38] Gallant “promised” that northern Israelis will not return to their homes before Lebanese Hezbollah military forces are north of the Litani River. Gallant said that the “best option” is for a diplomatic agreement in which unspecified actors would enforce UN Security Resolution 1701. The resolution, which ended the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War, created a demilitarized zone between the Blue Line and the Litani.^[39] Gallant said that if diplomatic measures fail Israel will use its military to force LH north of the river, according to the Times of Israel.

Lebanese Hezbollah claimed 10 attacks into Israeli territory from Lebanon on December 6.^[40] This rate of attacks is consistent with the daily average. Unspecified fighters conducted three additional attacks into northern Israel, including a 16-rocket salvo targeting Matat, northern Israel.^[41]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon as of December 6, 2023, 2:00 PM ET

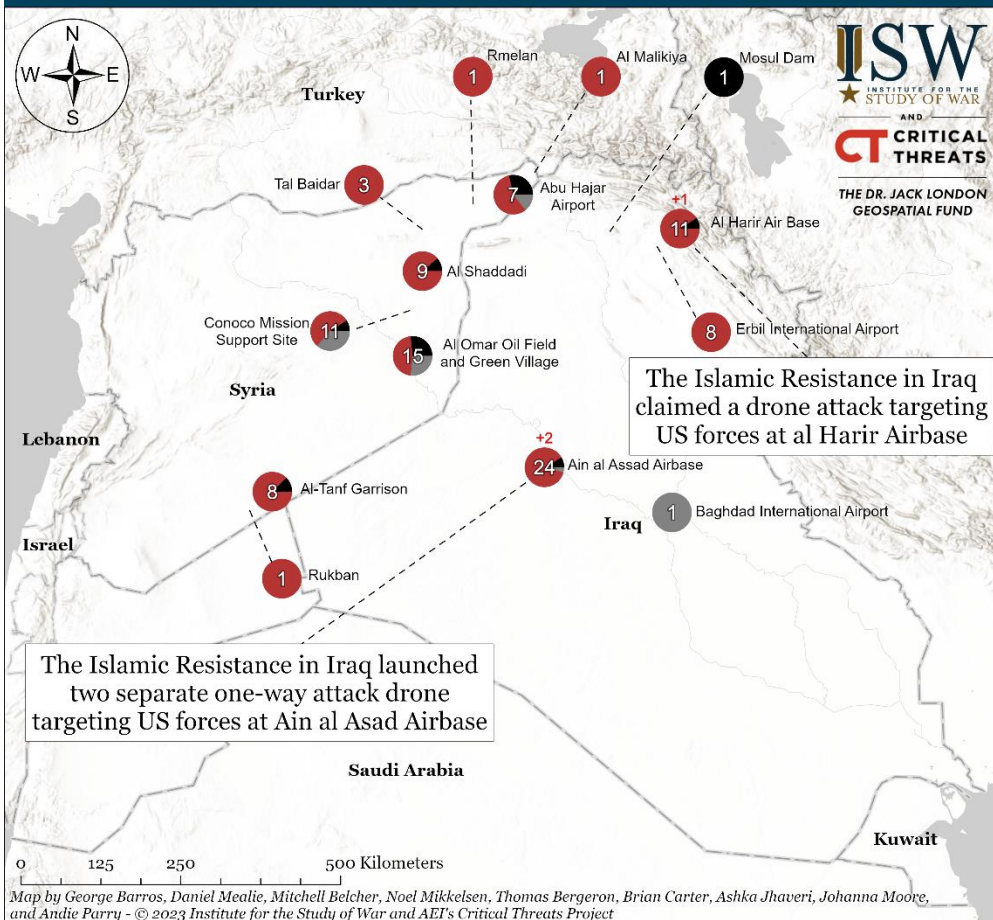


Iran and Axis of Resistance

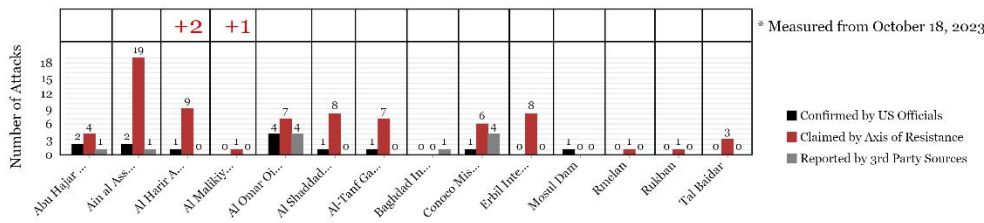
Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- 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

Attacks against US Bases in the Middle East as of December 6, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project



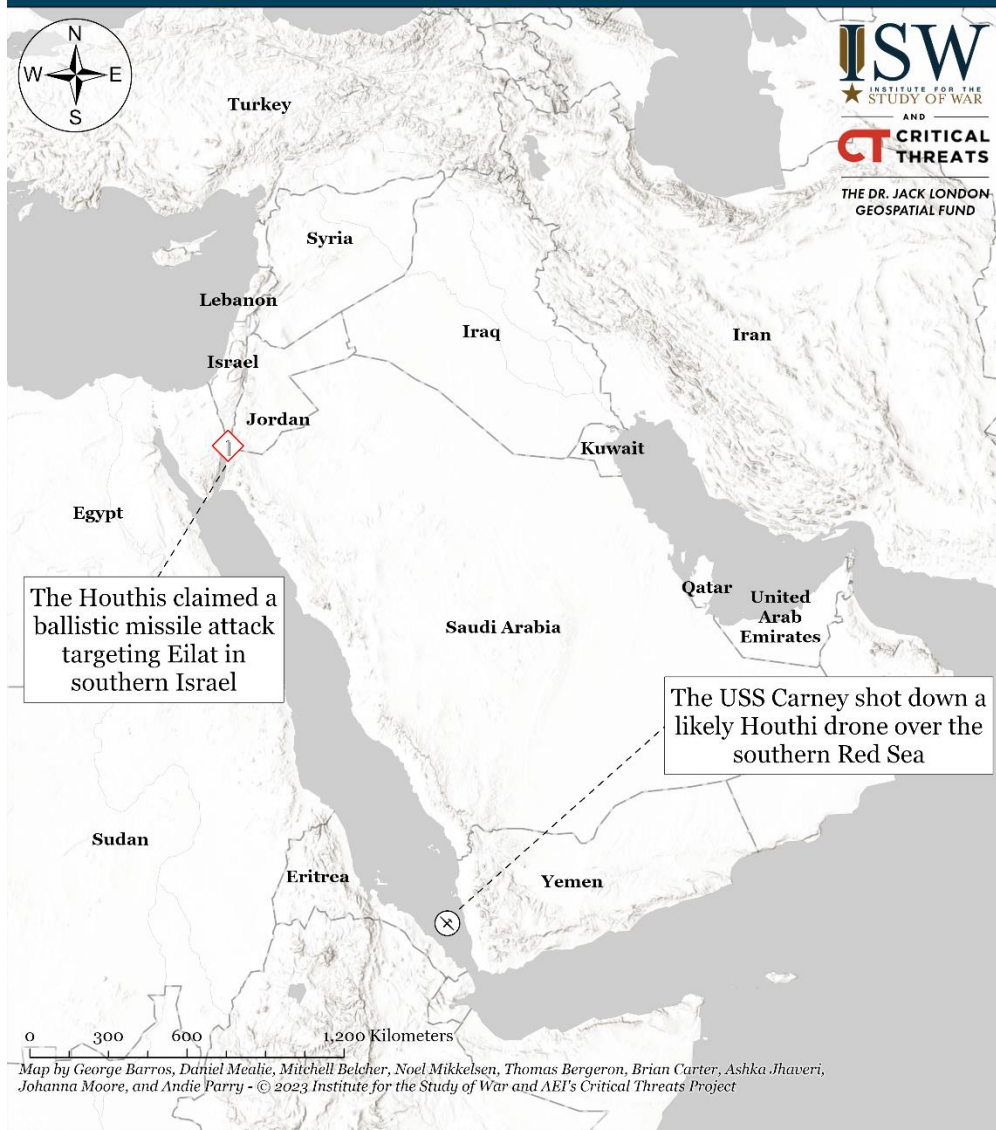
Note: The numbers placed inside the pie charts denote the total number of attacks. Locations that include an addition to its total number of attacks have red numbers above the bar graph and pie chart to represent new attacks against that location within the past 24 hours.

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed responsibility for three attacks targeting US positions in Iraq on December 5 and 6. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq resumed its attacks on US forces on December 3, two days after the humanitarian pause in the Gaza Strip ended on December 1. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq and its affiliated groups have claimed 81 attacks against US forces in the Middle East since October 18.

- The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed two separate one-way drone attacks targeting US forces at Ain al Asad Airbase in Anbar province, Iraq, on December 5 and 6.^[42] The group has claimed 24 attacks at Ain Asad Airbase since October 18.

- The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed a drone attack targeting US forces at al Harir Airbase in Erbil province, Iraq, on December 6.[43] The group last claimed an attack on al Harir Airbase on November 22.[44]

Iranian-sponsored Attacks in the Middle East as of December 6, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



The Houthi movement said that it launched several ballistic missiles targeting Eilat in southern Israel on December 6.[45] The IDF reported that it intercepted a surface-to-surface missile over the Red Sea and said that the missile did not cross into Israeli territory.[46] The Houthi military spokesperson said that the Houthis will continue to target Israel until the end of the Israel-Hamas War.[47]

The USS Carney shot down a likely Houthi drone over the southern Red Sea on December 6.^[48] An unspecified US official told the *Navy Times* that the drone originated from Houthi-controlled territory. There were no injuries to US personnel or damage to the ship and it was not clear what the drone was targeting. The UK Maritime Trade Operations agency also reported a drone incident west of the Houthi-controlled Hudaydah port in the southern Red Sea on December 6.^[49] It is not clear if these are the same incidents.

Two unspecified sources “familiar with Saudi thinking” told Reuters that Saudi Arabia urged the United States to show restraint amid Houthi attacks in the Red Sea.^[50] The sources said that Saudi Arabia is “pleased” with the United States’ handling of the situation and wishes to avoid further escalation. Saudi Arabia is negotiating a bilateral peace agreement with the Houthis that seeks to secure Saudi Arabia’s exit from the war in Yemen.^[51] Saudi efforts to encourage US restraint vis-a-vis the Houthis aim to protect this truce. The Houthis view the United States and Saudi Arabia as belligerents in the war against the Houthis.^[52] The Houthis would likely therefore view a US retaliation against the Houthis as a violation of the Saudi-Houthi informal truce that began in April 2022.^[53]

An unspecified “Iran-aligned” source based in Tehran told Reuters that Houthi representatives discussed their attacks with Iranian officials in November, demonstrating continuing Houthi-Iranian coordination.^[54] The source may have been referencing a meeting between the Houthi Ambassador to Iran Ibrahim al Daylami and Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian in Tehran on November 30.^[55] The source said that the Houthi and Iranian representatives agreed that the Houthis would carry out attacks in a “controlled” way that would help force the end to the Israel-Hamas war. Another “Iran-aligned” source told Reuters that Iran does not want to become directly involved in an “all-out war in the region.”

Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Rear Admiral Ali Akbar Ahmadian discussed the Israel-Hamas war with Chinese Communist Party International Liaison Department head Liu Jianchao on December 6 in Tehran.^[56] The two officials emphasized further cooperation between their countries to end the war.

Iranian First Vice President Mohammed Mokhber discussed the Israel-Hamas war with Omani Trade, Industry, and Development Minister Qais bin Mohammad al Youssef on December 6.^[57] Mokhber thanked al Youssef for Oman’s stance against Israeli “crimes” and criticized international institutions for not taking “serious” action to halt Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip.

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