

Iran Update, December 11, 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 degrading Hamas' battalions in Shujaiya and Jabalia.
2. Palestinian militias continued to resist Israeli advances in Khan Younis. Palestinian militias in the Gaza Strip conducted seven indirect fire attacks into Israel.
3. Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters nine times in the West Bank.
4. Lebanese Hezbollah and other Iranian-backed militias attacked nine Israeli towns and military positions.
5. Top Israeli security and military officials discussed how to deal with the threats on Israel's northern border.
6. Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba Political Council called for simultaneous political and military actions to expel the United States from Iraq.
7. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed responsibility for three attacks on US positions in Iraq and Syria.
8. US officials are continuing to pressure the Iraqi central government to protect US personnel in Iraq.

Israel-Hamas War as of December 11, 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 degrading Hamas' battalions in Shujaiya and Jabalia. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said on December 11 that Hamas' Jabalia and Shujaiya Battalions are “on the verge of being dismantled.”[1] CTP-ISW defines “degrade” as a temporary effect whereby a unit’s losses seriously impede its ability to continue executing assigned missions while the unit remains able

to operate.[2] Israeli forces captured Hamas military infrastructure in Jabalia, including explosives manufacturing facilities, training facilities, and weapons caches.[3] The loss of these facilities will temporarily negatively affect Hamas' Jabalia al Balad Battalion's ability to execute its assigned missions, which include using improvised explosive devices and rocket-propelled grenades to resist Israeli advances.

Palestinian fighters are continuing to resist Israeli advances in Shujaiya and Jabalia. The al Quds Brigades—the militant wing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)—detonated an explosively formed penetrator (EFP) targeting an Israeli military vehicle as it advanced in Shujaiya on December 11.[4] The al Quds Brigades also attacked Israeli infantry at close range in Shujaiya.[5] An Israeli journalist embedded with the IDF's Kfir Brigade in Shujaiya reported that Hamas forces in Shujaiya are "waging a guerrilla war" and have not "abandoned the fight," suggesting elements of Hamas' Shujaiya Battalion remain combat effective.[6]

Israeli forces are also continuing their advance in southern Beit Lahiya, north of Jabalia city and camp. The al Qassem Brigades claimed that its fighters fired a thermobaric rocket targeting Israeli special forces in a building in the Beit Lahia Project area.[7]

Palestinian fighters are continuing to attack Israeli forces behind the Israeli forward line of troops, which is consistent with the nature of clearing operations. Al Quds Brigades fighters sniped two Israeli soldiers near Zaytoun on December 10.[8]

Palestinian militias continued to resist Israeli advances in Khan Younis. The al Qassem Brigades claimed three mortar attacks on Israeli forces as Israeli units advanced north and east of Khan Younis.[9] The militia claimed that it targeted an Israeli combat outpost in one of the attacks.[10] The al Qassem Brigades separately claimed that it targeted two Israeli tanks north of Khan Younis using anti-tank munitions.[11] The al Quds Brigades claimed two mortar attacks on Israeli forces in Khan Younis.[12] The National Resistance Brigades—the militant wing of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)—clashed with Israeli forces in the western Satar area north of Khan Younis.[13] The Israeli media outlet Ynet News reported on December 11 that a militia fighter used a tunnel entrance inside a building to plant and detonate an anti-personnel device near Israeli forces in al Qarara, northeast of Khan Younis.[14]

Israeli Defense Minister Gallant noted that Hamas is "still organized militarily" in the southern Gaza Strip.[15] The BBC reported that Israeli tanks are advancing slowly and approaching the eastern part of Khan Younis where Israel has reportedly captured four villages.[16] The IDF reported on December 11 that it has supplied seven tons of logistical supplies to its forces currently fighting in Khan Younis.[17] Israeli forces have been operating in Khan Younis to target Palestinian militia strongholds and leaders for the past week.[18]

Israeli forces have detained more than 500 Palestinian militia fighters in the Gaza Strip in the last month. The IDF reported on December 11 that it has detained more than 350 Hamas fighters and more than 120 PIJ fighters, some of whom were taken for further investigation in Israel.[19] The Human Rights Watch director for Israel and Palestine told the *Washington Post* that Israel's Unlawful Combatants Law allows Israel to hold Palestinians from the Gaza Strip "in what is effectively administrative detention, a form of incarceration without charge or trial that authorities can renew indefinitely." [20] An anonymous Israeli security official told the *Wall Street Journal* that the IDF assumes that military-aged males remaining in evacuated areas are militia fighters, as they

have issued several evacuation orders to residents.[21] Residents told the *Wall Street Journal* that the IDF is detaining military-aged males for questioning.[22]

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Yahya Sinwar “cut off communications” with negotiators “to pressure Israel to agree to a pause to” allow Hamas to “regroup.”[23] Sinwar told Egyptian negotiators that the war will “last for weeks.”

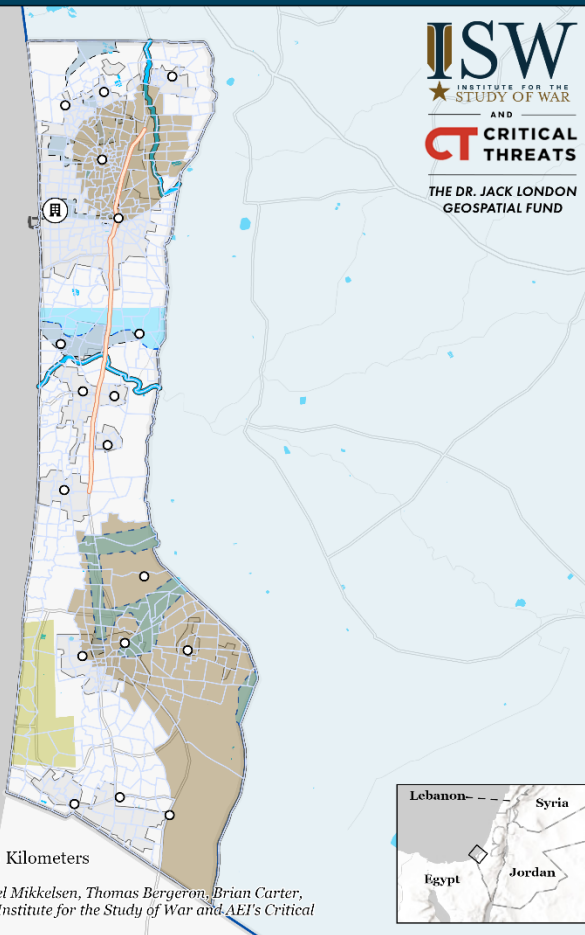
UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)’s communications director reported a near “total breakdown of civil order” around its aid deliveries in the Gaza Strip, which is consistent with previous reports about governance breakdown in the strip.[24] The policy lead at Oxfam—an anti-poverty non-profit—said the situation in the Gaza Strip was “absolute chaos” on November 28.[25] The Associated Press also reported that Gazans in the southern Strip were “openly challenging” Hamas’ authority on November 12.[26]

The UNRWA communications director also said that UNRWA takes reports of Hamas members using UNRWA facilities and assets “very, very seriously.”[27] The director added that UNRWA struggles to get information from northern Gaza due to a lack of access, however.

Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip as of December 11, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



CTP-ISW's "Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones" layer shows Israeli evacuation zones announced by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). CTP-ISW used IDF maps and statements to create this layer. Where IDF maps cover part of a zone this layer covers the whole zone to avoid understating the evacuation order. The IDF began announcing these evacuation zones on December 2, 2023, at 0222 ET on X (Twitter)

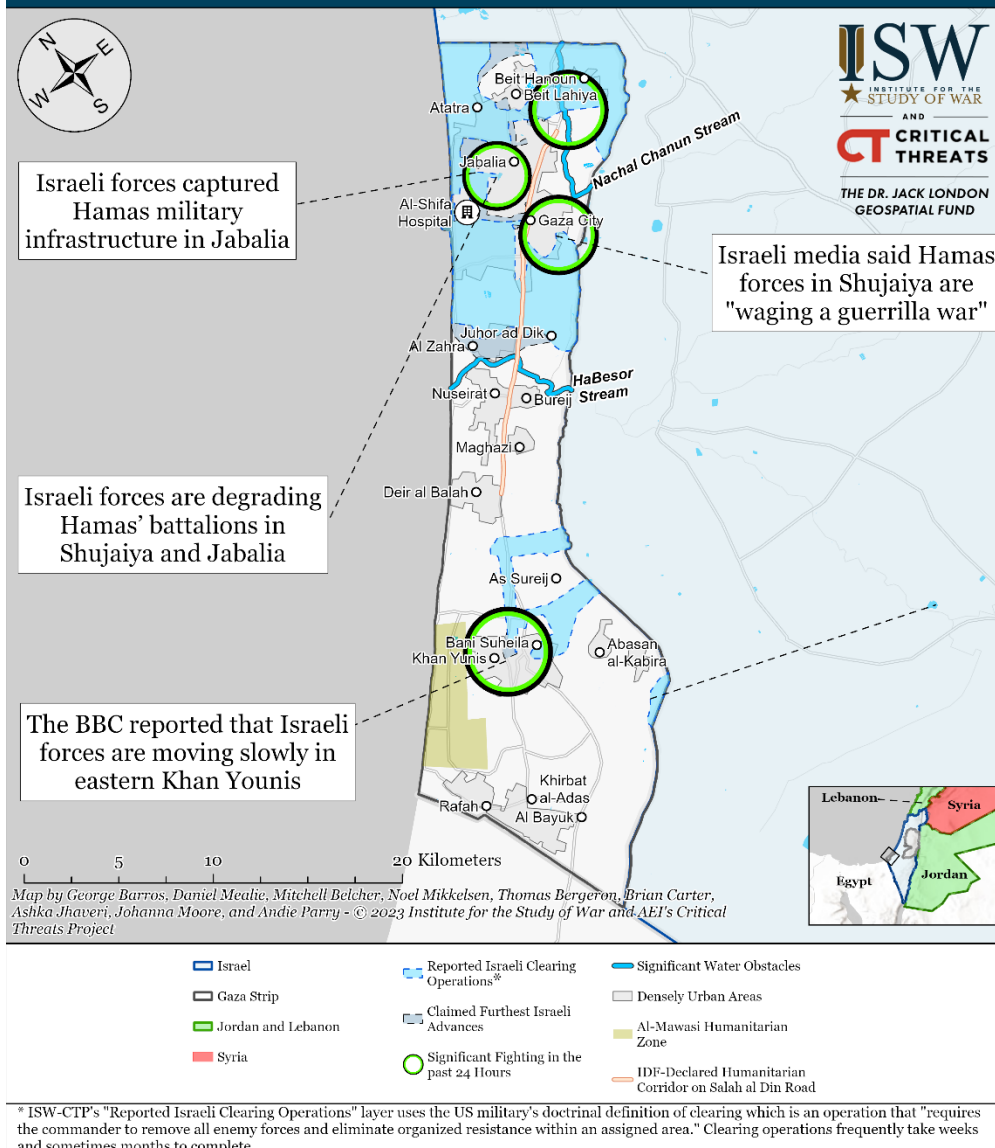


Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Israel
- Gaza Strip
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Salah al Din Road
- Densely Urban Areas
- Significant Water Obstacles

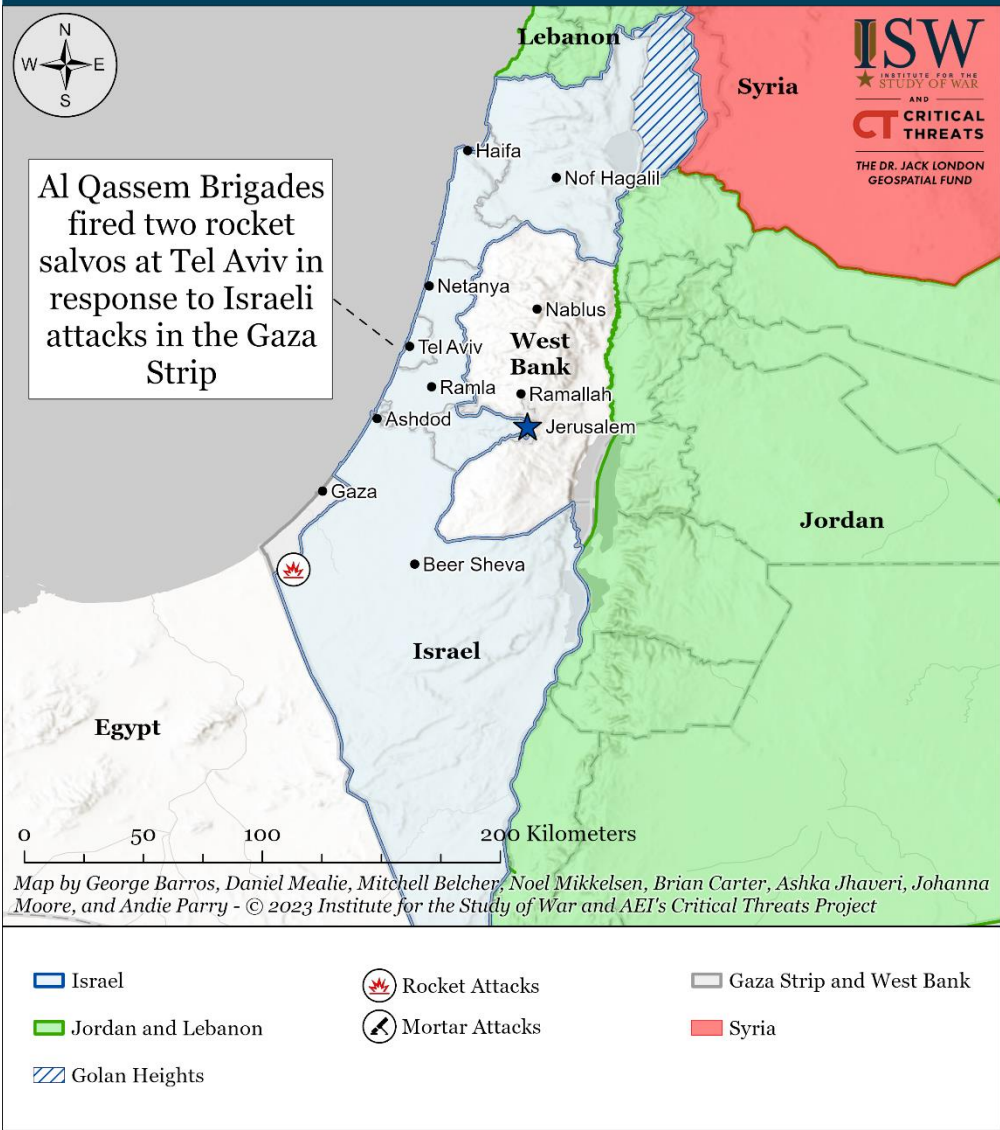
* ISW-CTP's "Reported Israeli Clearing Operations" layer uses the US military's doctrinal definition of clearing which is an operation that "requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance within an assigned area." Clearing operations frequently take weeks and sometimes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

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of December 11, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



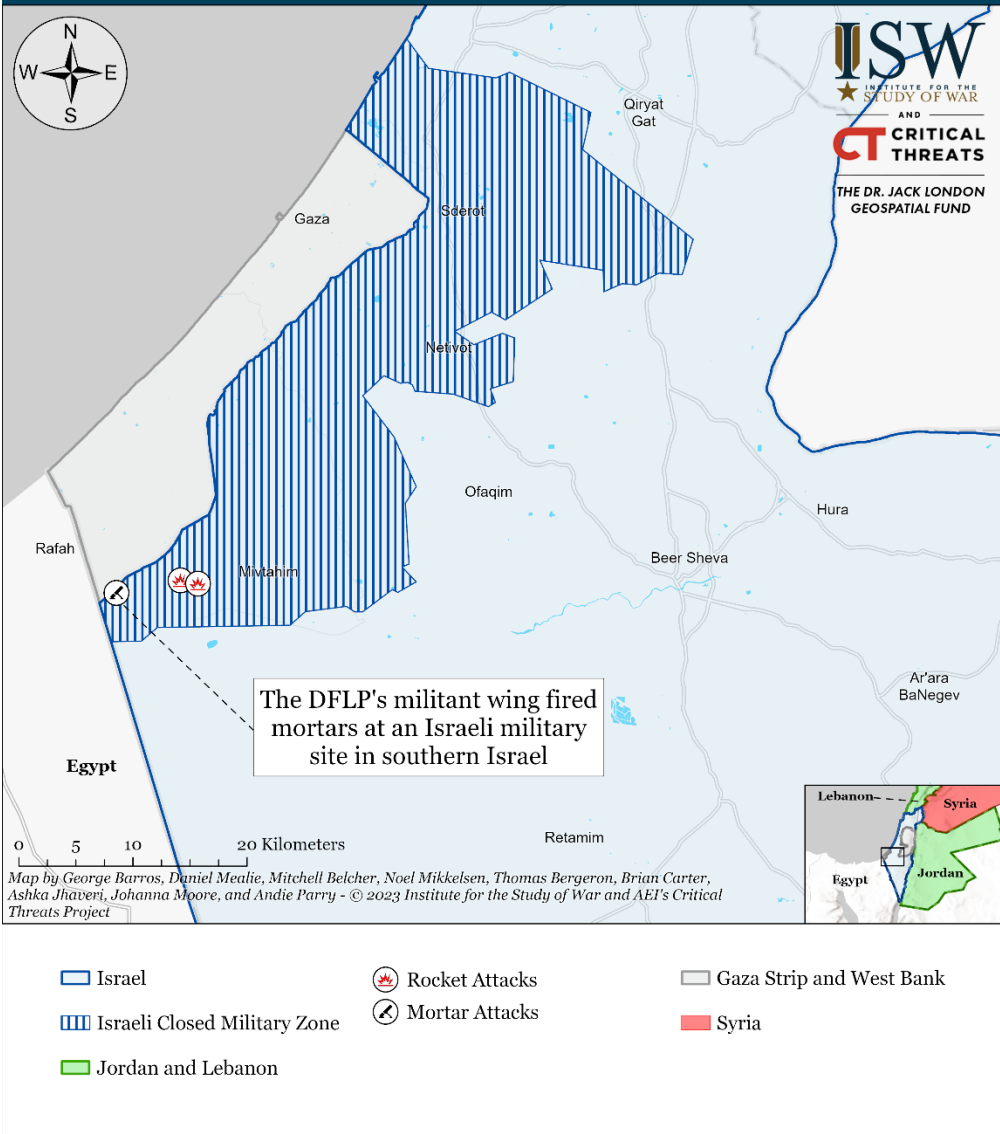
Palestinian militias in the Gaza Strip conducted seven indirect fire attacks into Israel on December 11. The al Qassem Brigades claimed responsibility for three rocket attacks, including two at Tel Aviv.[28] The al Quds Brigades claimed responsibility for three attacks in southern Israel.[29] The National Resistance Brigades claimed responsibility for a rocket attack targeting an Israeli military site in southern Israel.[30]

Indirect Fire Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of December 11, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



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

Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of December 11, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



West Bank

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

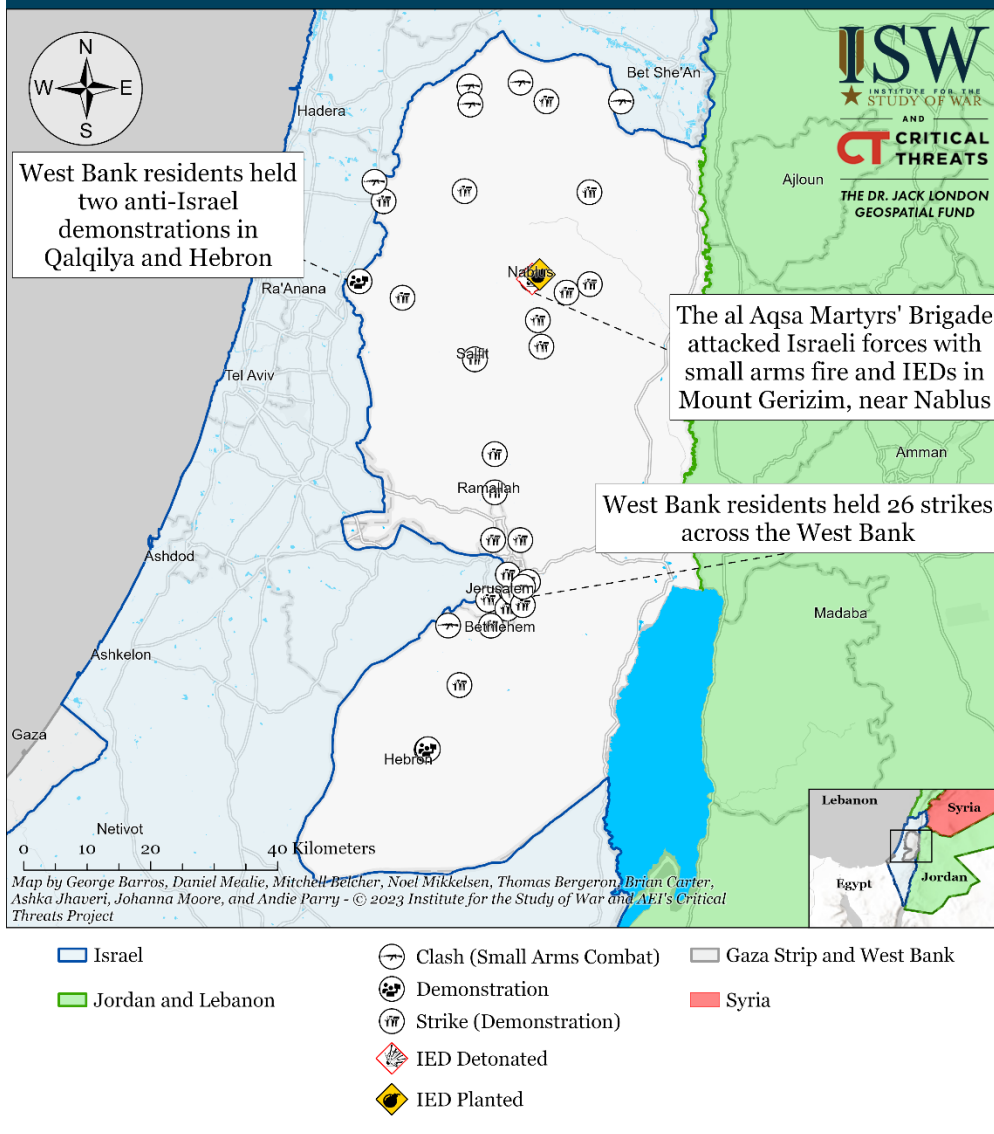
Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters nine times in the West Bank on December 11.[31] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade—a self-affiliated militant wing of Fatah—fired small arms and detonated IEDs targeting Israeli forces in Mount Gerizim, near Nablus.[32] The al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades fired small arms targeting Israeli forces in two separate attacks near Jenin.[33] Unspecified Palestinian fighters fired on an Israeli settlement in the northern West Bank and also fired across the West Bank-Israel border towards an Israeli settlement.[34]

West Bank residents held widespread strikes across the West Bank on December 11. CTP-ISW recorded 26 strikes across the West Bank, including in major cities such as Hebron, Jenin, and Jerusalem.[35] The strikes come after Palestinian activists and organizations called on December 10 for a global strike in response to Israel’s invasion of the Gaza Strip.[36] The strikes also followed a call by Hamas for strikes in the West Bank on December 10.[37] Hamas has repeatedly called for an escalation of anti-Israel demonstrations and attacks in the West Bank in recent weeks, but these calls have not previously generated increased attacks or demonstrations.[38]

West Bank residents held two anti-Israel demonstrations in Qalqilya and Hebron on December 11.[39]

Israeli sources are framing the West Bank as a supporting effort for the IDF’s main effort in the Gaza Strip. The Israeli Army Radio reported that the IDF will reduce its forces guarding settlements in the West Bank by at least a quarter “soon,” citing an unspecified source.[40] The Israeli Army Radio said that an IDF spokesperson responded to the report and said that Israel is working to “preserve the longevity and competence” of the IDF over time.[41] The Israeli defense minister added separately that IDF operations in the West Bank are secondary to the Gaza Strip, but that Israel is taking steps to “prevent an escalation” in the West Bank.[42]

Clashes in the West Bank as of December 11, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



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:

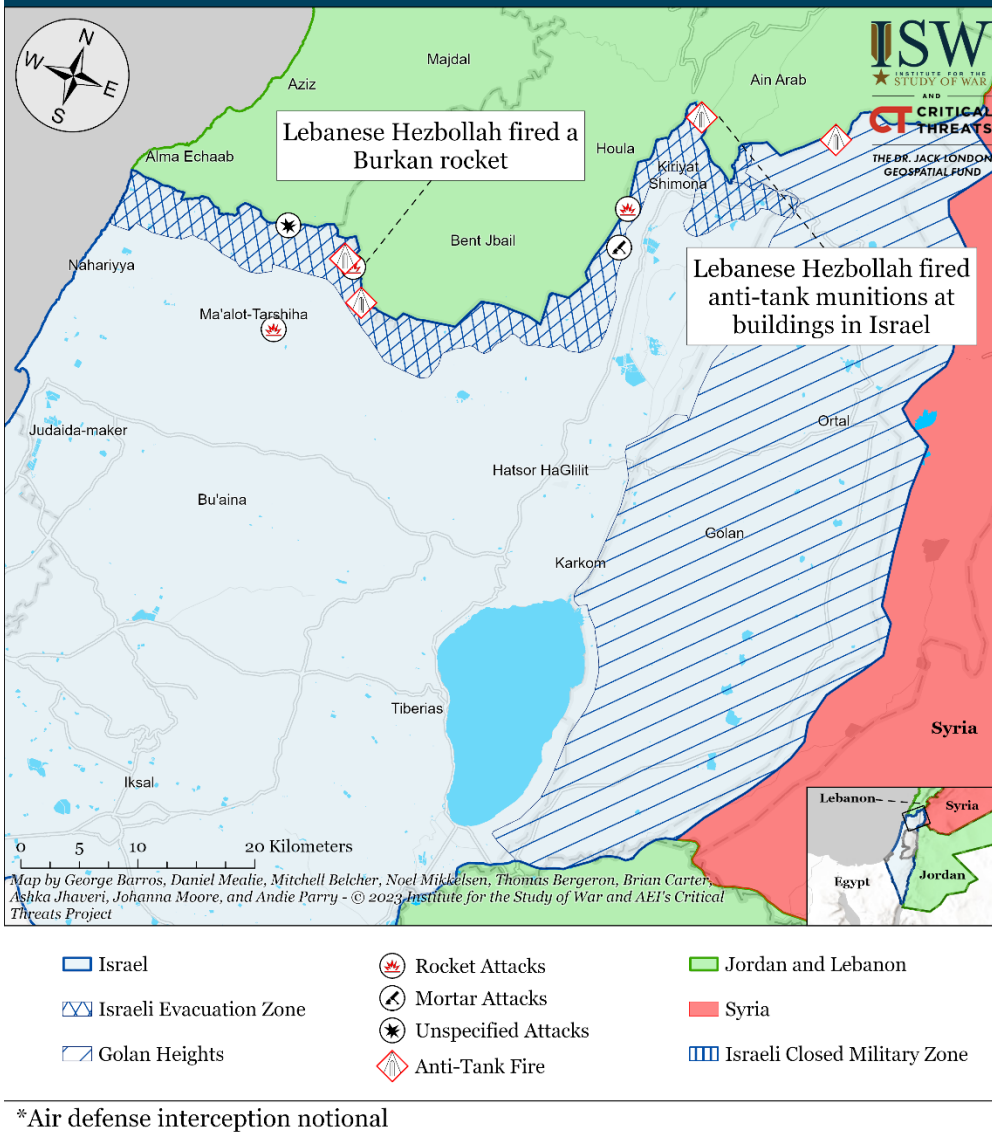
- Draw IDF assets and resources toward northern Israel and fix them there
- Set conditions for successive campaigns into northern Israel

Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) and other Iranian-backed militias attacked nine Israeli towns and military positions on December 11. LH claimed seven attacks on Israeli military positions in northern Israel.[43] Israeli and Palestinian media reported two other attacks that hit civilian targets in northern Israel, including the non-evacuated town of Maalot Tarshiha.[44] LH fired anti-tank guided munitions at Israeli forces in Metulla.[45] LH said that the attack was in retaliation for

IDF shelling that LH claimed killed a southern Lebanese mayor.[46] LH fired Burkan rockets at one Israeli military site.[47] The warheads for Burkan rockets range from 300 to 500 kilograms, making them a more lethal weapon system than the smaller rockets LH usually employs.[48]

Top Israeli security and military officials discussed how to deal with the threats on Israel's northern border on December 11. Israeli war cabinet minister and former defense minister Benny Gantz discussed security in northern Israel in a phone call with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.[49] Gantz said he conveyed that LH's heightened aggression and attacks mean that Israel must "remove" the threat from northern Israel.[50] Gantz's statement singled out the Lebanese state, not just LH, and called for international pressure on Lebanon to stop attacks on its southern border.[51] Gantz's statement is likely a request for Lebanon to hold LH to UNSC Resolution 1701, which ended the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War and created a demilitarized zone in Lebanon between the Blue Line and the Litani River.[52] Israeli officials have called for Lebanon to enforce the UNSC Resolution in recent days through either diplomatic or military means.[53] Separately, the Israeli defense minister said that he is making every effort to prevent an escalation in northern Israel.[54]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon as of December 11, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



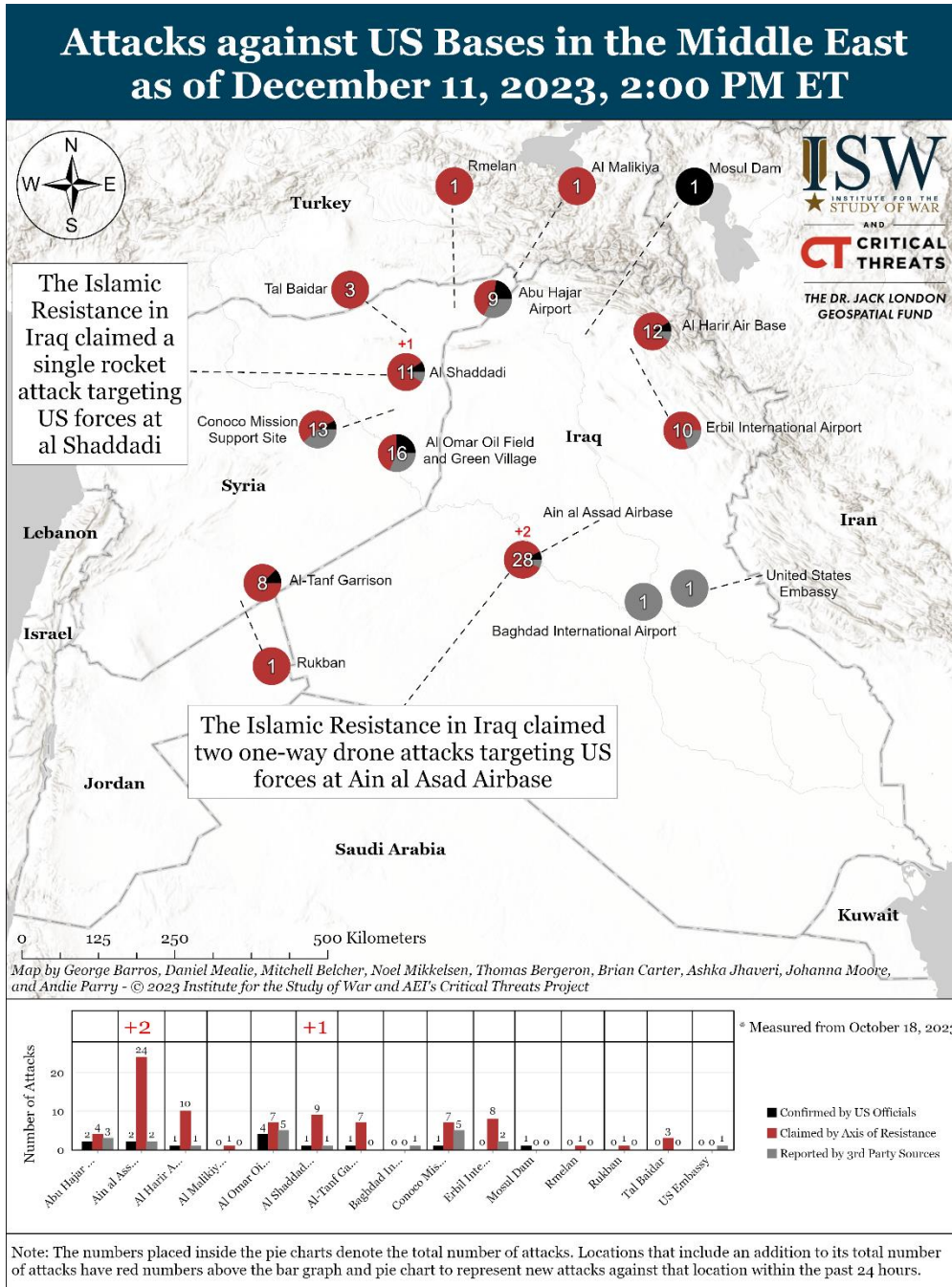
Iran and Axis of Resistance

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

Israel conducted an airstrike targeting IRGC headquarters in Sayyida Zainab, Damascus, and Damascus International Airport on December 10.^[55] IDF airstrikes killed two IRGC general officers in Sayyida Zainab on December 2.^[56] Iranian-backed militia groups and the IRGC maintain a headquarters in Sayyida Zainab and use it to facilitate Iranian lines of effort elsewhere in Syria.^[57] Syrian opposition news outlet Eye of Euphrates reported on October 30 that

the senior-most IRGC commander in Syria has coordinated all attacks on US forces in Syria through a joint operations room based in Sayyida Zainab.[58]



Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba’s (HHN) Political Council published a statement on December 11 calling for simultaneous political and military actions to expel the United States from Iraq.[59] The statement is consistent with CTP-ISW’s assessment that Iranian-backed Iraqi actors are conducting a campaign to expel the United States from Iraq using military and political pressure.[60] The council called on the Iraqi parliament, central government, and unspecified “political forces” to pursue this objective. HHN called for the Iraqi government to

implement the non-binding January 2020 parliamentary resolution to expel “all foreign forces” from Iraq. The council also called on Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani to stop the “US guardianship” over Iraq. The prime minister is the only Iraqi official who can order the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq by rescinding the 2014 executive agreement between Iraq and the United States that allows US forces to combat ISIS in Iraq.[61] The council also called for “military resistance” to “oust the occupation.”

HHN is a member of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias that have attacked US positions in Iraq and Syria almost daily since October 18. US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin stated on December 8 that HHN and Kataib Hezbollah (KH)—both of which are US-designated terrorist organizations—have conducted most Iranian-backed attacks on coalition personnel since the Israel-Hamas war began.[62]

US officials are continuing to pressure the Iraqi central government to protect US personnel in Iraq. Iranian-backed Iraqi militants conducted a rocket and mortar attack on the US Embassy in Baghdad and conducted at least 10 attacks on US forces in Iraq and Syria on December 8.[63] These attacks marked a significant escalation in the Iranian-backed campaign to expel the United States from Iraq. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani after the attacks that the United States expects the Iraqi central government to take “more action” to prevent similar attacks, according to an anonymous US official.[64] CIA Director William Burns similarly warned that the Iraqi central government will face “harsh consequences” if it fails to stop attacks on US personnel in Iraq during a recent meeting with Sudani, according to an anonymous Iraqi official.[65]

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed responsibility for three attacks on US positions in Iraq and Syria on December 11. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed a single rocket attack targeting US forces at al Shaddadi, Hasakah Province, Syria.[66] The group has claimed nine attacks on al Shaddadi since October 18. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed two one-way drone attacks on Ain al Asad Airbase in Anbar Province, Iraq.[67] The group has claimed more than 20 attacks on Ain al Asad Airbase since October 18.

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.[68] The Islamic Resistance in Iraq escalated its attack campaign on December 8, claiming responsibility for attacks on US forces in Iraq and Syria.[69]

Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Faylaq al Wa’ad al Sadiq (The Truthful Promise Corps) announced its opposition to targeting diplomatic missions in a statement on December 11.[70] The group wrote that diplomatic missions are “not responsible for the behavior of the political regimes to which they belong.” The statement follows Iranian-backed Iraqi militias’ rocket and mortar attack on the US Embassy in Baghdad on December 8.[71] Faylaq al Wa’ad al Sadiq is part of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias that has attacked US positions in Iraq and Syria almost daily since October 18. The group has unconfirmed ties to Iranian-backed Iraqi militias Asaib Ahl al Haq (AAH) and Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba (HHN) and proclaims its adherence to the concept of Wilayat al Faqih.[72] Wilayat al Faqih refers to a governing system in which a supreme clerical leader provides guardianship over the state.[73] The group’s statement is inconsistent with other Islamic Resistance in Iraq statements that advocate for attacking diplomatic missions. Kataib Hezbollah Spokesperson Abu Ali al Askari claimed on December 9 that the US

Embassy in Baghdad was a base for planning military and security operations disguised as a diplomatic mission, for example.[74] CTP-ISW assessed that KH is setting informational conditions to justify attacks on the embassy by framing it as a military target.[75]

The IRGC Ground Forces conducted a military exercise in Qasr-e Shirin, Kermanshah Province, Iran, on December 11.[76] The IRGC regional headquarters for Hamedan, Ilam, and Kermanshah provinces, the Najaf-e Ashraf Operational Base, conducted the exercise.[77] The 29th Nabi Akram Operational Division operates under the Najaf-e Ashraf Operational Base.[78] The exercise involved electronic warfare drills, testing of radar and communications systems, and reconnaissance missions.

Senior Iranian military officials emphasized on December 11 that the purpose of the exercise was to prepare Iranian forces to be able to confront any potential threats emanating from ISIS in Iraq. IRGC Ground Forces Commander Brigadier General Mohammad Pak Pour stated that ISIS elements are still active in Diyala Province, Iraq, and that Iranian forces must be able to counter threats from this group.[79] Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters Deputy Coordinator Brigadier General Ali Shadmani separately stated that Iran faces security threats in the country's western regions, where "counter-revolutionary, opposition, and terrorist" elements can enter Iran.[80] Shadmani additionally claimed that the United States "keeps ISIS under its control." The Iranian regime has historically claimed that the United States created ISIS and provides intelligence, security, and logistical support to the group.[81] IRGC-affiliated media additionally claimed on December 11 that ISIS is aiding Israel in its war against Hamas.[82] Fars News Agency claimed that a large-scale propaganda campaign is underway, led by Israel and the United States, to try to equate Hamas with ISIS. The outlet also claimed that the resumption of ISIS operations in Syria since around the start of the Israel-Hamas war is part of a larger plot to "divert" the Axis of Resistance's operations.

The inability of Iran and its allies to slow ISIS's growth in central Syria is due in part to Iran's prioritization of the Israel-Hamas War over countering ISIS.[83] Iran routinely prioritizes other objectives over countering ISIS's growth in central Syria. ISIS seized gas fields in south central Syria in October and held these areas until early November.[84] Iranian proxies are conducting attacks against US forces in Syria, which limits their ability to support their Syrian regime allies against ISIS. The claim that the United States is using ISIS in Syria to "divert" the Axis of Resistance's operations is part of an information effort that aims to obfuscate Iran's inability to limit ISIS's growth. Iran chose to focus on forcing US forces from the region by using its proxies to attack US forces in Syria, rather than defeating ISIS.

There are several other possible explanations for why the IRGC Ground Forces specifically conducted the military exercise in Kermanshah Province. The Iranian regime is wary of Kurdish opposition groups operating in Iraqi border regions and it has repeatedly called on the Iraqi central government to completely disarm and relocate Kurdish opposition groups away from the Iranian border.[85] The regime has previously accused Kurdish opposition groups of helping Israel smuggle military equipment into Iran to conduct operations against regime facilities.[86] The regime also accused Kurdish opposition groups of supporting Mahsa Amini protesters in late 2022.[87] Kermanshah Province recorded one of the highest rates of Mahsa Amini protests between September and December 2022.[88]

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian discussed the Israel-Hamas War with Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh on December 8. Iranian media reported that Haniyeh said that Palestinian militias have the capability to fight for several years and that the fighting has “practically spread to other regions”.[89] Abdollahian reiterated that “resistance groups” in the region are acting based on their own interests, and not at the direction of Tehran.[90] The support, guidance, and direction that Iran gives to its proxies and partners throughout the Middle East is well-documented. US Deputy National Security Adviser John Finan said on December 7 that Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is integral in planning and executing the Houthi’s drone strikes and missile attacks on ships in the Red Sea, for example.[91]

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian parroted a Russian information operation claiming that Lebanese Hezbollah and Hamas can acquire weapons “in Ukraine via illicit purchases” at the international Doha Forum on December 11.[92] Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev and several Russian state-controlled media outlets made similar claims shortly after the start of the Israel-Hamas war in October 2023.[93] US Department of Defense Inspector General Robert Storch stated in February 2023 that his office has not found evidence that “any of the billions of dollars in weapons and aid to Ukraine has been lost to corruption or diverted into the wrong hands,” indicating that Iranian officials are likely amplifying a longstanding Russian information operation.[94]

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[1] <https://twitter.com/manniefabian/status/1734264932714058134>

[2] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/the-order-of-battle-of-hamas-izz-al-din-al-qassem-brigades-part-1-north-and-central-gaza>

[3] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1734246175560138947>; <https://twitter.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1734096535762219430>; <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1734246175560138947> (Note: The Nahal Brigade has been operating in Jabalia); <https://twitter.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1734096535762219430>

[4] <https://t.me/sarayaps/16888>

[5] <https://t.me/sarayaps/16895>

[6] <https://www.ynet dot co.il/news/article/yokra13709771>

[7] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/793>

[8] <https://t.me/sarayaps/16883>

[9] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/790>; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/797>; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/798>

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[27] https://www.bbc.com/news/live/world-middle-east-67672759?ns_mchannel=social&ns_source=twitter&ns_campaign=bbc_live&ns_linkname=657704a987855b2dac7d3ff0%26Almost%20total%20breakdown%20in%20civil%20order%20around%20aid%20deliveries%20-%20UN%20refugee%20agency%262023-12-11T14%3A01%3A20.630Z&ns_fee=0&pinned_post_locator=urn:asset:6ac14e3f-7362-488f-beaa-9e0df359cd4e&pinned_post_asset_id=657704a987855b2dac7d3ff0&pinned_post_type=share

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[29] <https://t.me/sarayaps/16886>; <https://t.me/sarayaps/16893>

[30] https://t.me/kataeb_moqawma/3991

[31] <https://t.me/kataebaqsapalestine/2532>; <https://t.me/newpress1/61366>;
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<https://t.me/HebronNewss/32125>; <https://t.me/QudsN/342603>

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