



Iran Update, December 14, 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 engaged in intense fighting around Shujaiya and Zaytoun neighborhoods of Gaza city. Hamas is trying to defend against an Israeli advance toward Shujaiya from southern Gaza city.
2. Palestinian fighters continued to resist Israeli forces' northeastward advance in Khan Younis.
3. Palestinian militias conducted two indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel.
4. Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters nine times in the West Bank. Israeli forces concluded an over two-day-long operation in Jenin.
5. Iranian-backed fighters, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted four attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel.
6. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed responsibility for a one-way drone attack targeting US forces in Syria.
7. Iraqi military spokesperson Major General Yahya Rasoul claimed that Iraqi security services arrested “a number of perpetrators” responsible for the December 8 attack on the US Embassy in Baghdad.
8. The Houthis conducted a missile attack targeting the Danish-owned, Hong Kong-flagged *Maersk Gibraltar* container ship near the Bab al Mandeb.
9. Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian continued his meetings with his foreign counterparts in Geneva.
10. European authorities arrested seven individuals linked to Hamas in Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands for allegedly planning terror attacks targeting Israeli and Jewish civilians in Europe.

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 engaged in intense fighting around Shujaiya and Zaytoun neighborhoods of Gaza city. Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff Herzl Halevi told Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip that they are facing challenging terrain in these areas.¹ These remarks are unsurprising in part because Shujaiya is one of the most densely populated areas of the Gaza Strip.² Israeli forces searched on December 13 a school compound that Hamas' Shujaiya Battalion used.³ Israeli forces also cleared nearby tunnels.⁴

The al Qassem Brigades—the militant wing of Hamas—is trying to defend against an Israeli advance toward Shujaiya from southern Gaza city. The militia claimed to target Israeli forces with unspecified explosives in Shujaiya on December 14.⁵ The militia also used rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) to target Israeli tanks and military vehicles in Shujaiya and Zaytoun.⁶ Other Palestinian militias are operating in Shujaiya and Zaytoun neighborhoods to defend against Israeli advances as well. The al Quds Brigades—the militant wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)—claimed that its fighters ambushed Israeli forces and targeted Israeli military vehicles in both neighborhoods.⁷ The Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades—the militant wing of Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)—clashed with Israeli forces in Shujaiya with unspecified weapons.⁸

The IDF announced on December 14 that Palestinian militias conducted a complex ambush on Israeli forces at some point in the past week in the Jabalia refugee camp. Palestinian fighters conducted small arms, anti-tank guided missile, and IED attacks from multiple directions targeting Israeli forces there.⁹ Israeli forces also at some point in the past week conducted a drone strike on Palestinian fighters who were conducting anti-tank attacks in the camp.¹⁰

The IDF is using combined arms maneuver, involving dismounted infantry, armor, air, and reconnaissance elements, to degrade Hamas' battalions in the Jabalia area.¹¹ The IDF destroyed militia infrastructure and found weapons in the Jabalia refugee camp in addition to directing a helicopter assault on a Hamas sniper position on December 13.¹²

Palestinian militias are attempting to resist Israeli advances west of Jabalia city. The al Qassem Brigades claimed that its fighters fired a thermobaric rocket targeting Israeli forces in a building in Sheikh Radwan neighborhood of Gaza city.¹³ The militia separately claimed to target three Israeli tanks and two bulldozers with anti-tank munitions southwest of Jabalia city.¹⁴

Israeli forces detained 70 Palestinian militia fighters in the northern Gaza Strip on December 14. The IDF published documentation of Palestinians leaving the Kamal Adwan Hospital, some of whom carried weapons.¹⁵ Israeli forces located buildings in the vicinity of the hospital that Hamas fighters used.¹⁶ Israeli forces removed the detainees from the field for interrogations, which supports Israel in uncovering information regarding the locations of Hamas military infrastructure, according to the IDF.¹⁷ The Hamas-run Health Ministry spokesperson accused Israel of preventing medical staff from providing care to ten injured people in the hospital.¹⁸ Israel has repeatedly reported that Hamas uses hospitals for military activity.¹⁹

Israeli forces uncovered weapons inside a car near the house of senior Hamas member and spokesperson Mushir al Masri in Beit Lahiya during a raid several weeks ago.²⁰ The IDF found small arms and grenades inside the car in addition to a driver's license belonging to Masri.²¹ The IDF Arabic-language spokesperson noted that the findings from the raid are evidence of how connected Hamas' militant and political wings are.²²

Palestinian militias continued attacks on Israeli forces behind the Israeli forward line of advance, which is consistent with the nature of clearing operations. The al Quds Brigades shelled Israeli forces in Netzarim southwest of Gaza city.²³ The al Qassem Brigades targeted six Israeli tanks in the Beit Lahiya area north of Gaza city with anti-tank munitions.²⁴ The militia claimed its fighters used anti-personnel devices and small arms to target Israeli forces and military vehicles in addition to using rocket and mortars to attack Israeli combat outposts.²⁵

Palestinian fighters continued to resist Israeli forces' northeastward advance in Khan Younis. The al Qassem Brigades and al Quds Brigades claimed at least one combined mortar attack on advancing Israeli forces east of Khan Younis.²⁶ Hamas and PIJ leadership have coordinated closely against Israel throughout the war.²⁷ The Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades claimed that its fighters clashed with Israeli forces in Khan Younis.²⁸ Israeli forces conducted several raids in Khan Younis and destroyed tunnel shafts, a rocket launching site, and a weapons storage facility.²⁹

Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh gave a televised address discussing the war on December 13.³⁰ Haniyeh said Hamas is certain that the Israeli clearing operations will end because of the Palestinian militia fighters' capabilities. Haniyeh referenced the complex, multi-part ambush targeting an Israeli patrol and quick reaction force in Shujaiya on December 12 as evidence of the militias' success. Haniyeh called for the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital and dismissed any arrangements for a post-war Gaza Strip without Hamas.³¹

Hamas representative to Lebanon told Iranian state media that Hamas is prepared for a prolonged fight in the Gaza Strip, which is consistent with Hamas and the Axis of Resistance consistently messaging that the defense of the Gaza Strip is sustainable. Hamas Representative Osama Hamdan gave an interview to Press TV, which is an English-language outlet that the Iranian regime uses for messaging to English-speaking audiences, on December 13.³² The *Wall Street Journal* similarly reported on November 4 that Hamas has privately stated that its weapons arsenal can sustain a prolonged conflict.³³ The Lebanese foreign affairs minister claimed that Hamas told Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian shortly after the war began that it could fight for months without additional weapons.³⁴

Palestinian militias conducted two indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel on December 14. The al Qassem Brigades and al Quds Brigades both claimed responsibility for separate attacks on Sufa in southern Israel.³⁵ The IDF reported on December 13 that Hamas has fired 116 rockets from the Israeli-declared al Mawasi humanitarian zone in southern the Gaza Strip into Israel.³⁶

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 14.³⁷

The al Qassem Brigades' Qabatiya Battalion engaged Israeli forces in small arms clashes and detonated IEDs targeting these forces in Jenin.³⁸ Palestinian fighters also clashed with Israeli forces in the Jenin refugee camp.³⁹ Israeli forces conducted drone strikes in Jenin, which Palestinian authorities said killed at least two people.⁴⁰ Palestinian fighters separately clashed with Israeli forces in Beita, near Nablus.⁴¹ The IDF said that it detained 14 individuals, including three Hamas fighters, in overnight raids across the West Bank.⁴²

Israeli forces concluded an over two-day-long operation in Jenin on December 14. The IDF, Shin Bet, and Israeli Border Police have conducted widespread "counterterrorism" operations in Jenin since December 12.⁴³ The IDF said that it searched hundreds of buildings and detained over 60 wanted individuals for questioning.⁴⁴ The IDF said that it confiscated weapons and destroyed underground shafts, observation posts, and explosives laboratories.⁴⁵ The IDF said that it killed more than 10 "terrorists" during its operations in Jenin.

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 four attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel on December 14.⁴⁶ This rate of attack marks a noteworthy dip from the average rate of 12 attacks per day since December 1. LH claimed three of the four attacks, which targeted Israeli military positions along the border.⁴⁷ Unidentified Palestinian fighters conducted one rocket attack into northern Israel targeting civilian areas.⁴⁸

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—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed responsibility for a one-way drone attack targeting US forces in Syria on December 14.⁴⁹ The group claimed that it targeted US forces at al Shaddadi, Hasakah Province, Syria. The group has claimed 11 previous attacks on al Shaddadi since the Israel-Hamas war began.

Iraqi military spokesperson Major General Yahya Rasoul claimed that Iraqi security services arrested "a number of perpetrators" responsible for the December 8 attack on the US Embassy in Baghdad.⁵⁰ Rasoul stated that Iraqi security services also arrested individuals who provided logistical and other unspecified forms of support to the perpetrators. Rasoul previously claimed on December 9 that an investigative team would work with local authorities to identify and arrest individuals responsible for the attacks.⁵¹ Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani ordered the establishment of a working group to investigate the attacks on December 9.⁵² US officials have urged the Iraqi central government to protect US personnel in Iraq, as CTP-ISW previously reported.⁵³

The Houthis conducted a missile attack targeting the Danish-owned, Hong Kong-flagged *Maersk Gibraltar* container ship near the Bab al Mandeb on December 14. The Houthi Navy initially directed the *Gibraltar* to alter course to Yemen before firing a missile at the ship.⁵⁴ The Houthi military spokesperson claimed that the Houthis also launched a drone to target the ship, although there is no evidence to support this claim.⁵⁵ US Central Command stated that there were no injuries or damage from the missile attack.⁵⁶ A US official similarly told the Associated Press that the Houthi missile missed its target.⁵⁷ The Houthis threatened on December 9 and 12 to expand their attacks on maritime traffic around the Red Sea to include all vessels traveling to Israel.⁵⁸ Western media reported that ship was headed to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.⁵⁹

The UKMTO reported that unknown actors boarded an unspecified vessel 700 nautical miles east of the coast of Bosaso, Somalia on December 14.⁶⁰ The UKMTO reported that it received a distress call from the vessel as it was boarded. It is unclear what party was responsible for the boarding at this time.

Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Gharai Ashtiani warned the United States against getting involved in the Red Sea on December 14.⁶¹ Ashtiani stated the “foolish” decision by the United States to create a multi-national naval task force in the Red Sea would “face extraordinary problems”.⁶² Ashtiani stated there is no more room in the region for outsiders to establish a presence. Ashtiani was responding to the United States discussing establishing an international naval task force to safeguard commercial shipping around the Red Sea.⁶³

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian continued his meetings with his foreign counterparts in Geneva on December 14. Abdollahian met with his Japanese counterpart, the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government’s interior minister, and the UN high commissioner for refugees.⁶⁴ Abdollahian discussed the Israel-Hamas war in each of these meetings. Abdollahian also held a phone call with his Brazilian counterpart on December 14 to discuss bilateral relations and the Israel Hamas war.⁶⁵

European authorities arrested seven individuals linked to Hamas in Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands on December 14 for allegedly planning terror attacks targeting Israeli and Jewish civilians in Europe. German federal prosecutors reported that the four individuals arrested in Berlin and the Netherlands had long-standing ties to Hamas’ military wing, the al Qassem Brigades.⁶⁶ Hamas leaders based in Lebanon tasked these individuals with procuring weapons for terror attacks against Jewish institutions, according to German prosecutors.⁶⁷ Danish intelligence stated that the three individuals arrested in Denmark were preparing a terror attack but did not release further details.⁶⁸ The Israeli prime minister’s office stated that the seven arrested individuals were acting on behalf of Hamas and that Mossad would continue to assist partners around in the world in countering terrorist activity.⁶⁹

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