



Iran Update, January 12, 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.

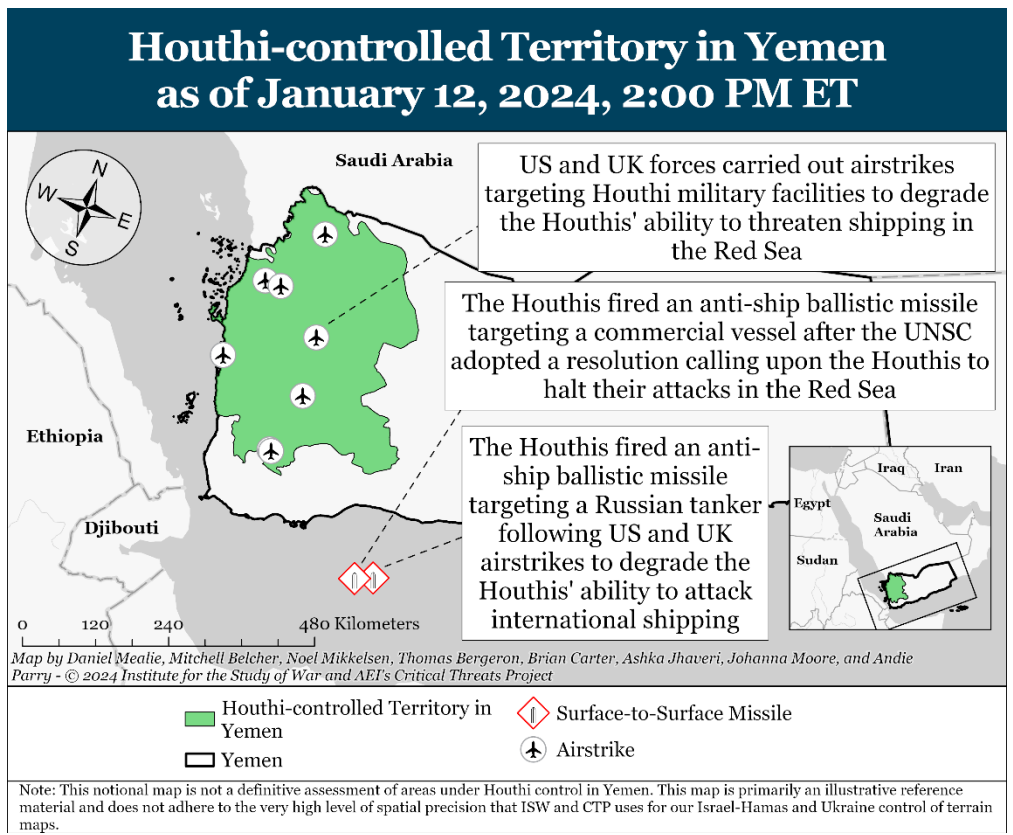
Click [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Key Takeaways:

1. The United States and the United Kingdom conducted joint strikes on January 11 that targeted Houthi military facilities to degrade the group's capability to attack ships transiting the Red Sea.
2. The Houthis will likely continue to attempt attacks against international shipping in the Red Sea because the January 11 airstrikes do not sufficiently threaten the Houthis' position within Yemen.
3. Palestinian militias in the northern Gaza Strip are disrupting Israel Defense Forces (IDF) operations to destroy military infrastructure and secure areas bordering Israel.

4. The IDF is conducting clearing operations in Bureij and Maghazi in the Central Governorate of the Gaza Strip.
5. The IDF continued clearing operations in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip.
6. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed two attacks targeting Israel on January 12.

The United States and the United Kingdom conducted joint strikes on January 11 that targeted Houthi military facilities to degrade the group’s capability to attack ships transiting the Red Sea. US aircraft, surface, and subsurface vessels launched over 100 precision-guided munitions that targeted more than 60 Houthi command and control, munitions depots, production facilities, air defense radar systems, and drone and missile launching systems in 16 locations across Yemen.[1] The UK Defense Ministry reported that four RAF Typhoons used precision-guided bombs to target Houthi drone and cruise missile launching positions in northwest Yemen.[2] The Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Sarea said that US and UK forces carried out 73 raids across Yemen which killed five Houthi fighters and wounded six more.[3] The UK Defense Ministry reported that the Houthis’ ability to threaten international shipping "has taken a blow.”[4]



The Houthis will likely continue to attempt attacks against international shipping in the Red Sea because the January 11 airstrikes do not sufficiently threaten the Houthis’ position within Yemen. The Houthis said after the attacks that they would retaliate against the United States and the United Kingdom.[5] The Houthis aim to control all of Yemen. Houthi spokespersons said on January 12 that the airstrikes will not deter Houthi forces from supporting Palestine.[6] The Houthis launched an anti-ship ballistic missile targeting a Russian tanker south of

Yemen on January 12.[7] The Houthis believe that attacks on international shipping help the group solidify its control in Yemen by demonstrating Houthi support to the Palestinian cause.[8]

The Houthis and their Iranian patrons continue to blame the United States for “escalating” in the region in response to the airstrikes.[9] Houthi spokespersons said on January 11 that the Houthis do not threaten international shipping in the Red Sea.[10] A former IRGC commander also warned that the strikes could escalate tensions in the region.[11] The United States and the United Kingdom did not escalate against the Houthis. The Houthis have conducted 27 piratical and terrorist attacks targeting international shipping in the Red Sea since October 17 without a response.[12] The United States and 11 partners warned the Houthis against further attacks on international shipping on January 3.[13] The Houthis conducted their largest and most complex attack to date on January 9 targeting HMS *Diamond* and US naval vessels after the warning.[14] The United States and the United Kingdom repeatedly called upon the Houthi movement to cease attacks prior to the strikes, including through a UN Security Council Resolution that called upon the Houthis to cease attacks in the Red Sea on January 10.[15]

Iranian officials and state media condemned the US-UK strikes on Houthi targets inside Yemen as a violation of international law and Yemen's sovereignty on January 12.[16] The Houthis are not the internationally recognized government of Yemen.

Israel-Hamas War as of January 12, 2024, 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.

Palestinian militias in the northern Gaza Strip are disrupting Israel Defense Forces (IDF) operations to destroy military infrastructure and secure areas bordering Israel. 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.[17] Israeli media began reporting in December that the IDF would transition to a third phase of

operations that includes securing a buffer zone in the northern Gaza Strip and transitioning to targeted raids.[18] Palestinian militias are not destroyed in the northern Gaza Strip and maintain a limited presence in the northern Gaza Strip. *The Economist* reported on January 12 that Israeli forces recently found a Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) underground tunnel network in Shujaiya neighborhood of Gaza City.[19] *The Economist* noted that Israeli forces were not previously aware of the network in the neighborhood, which is one kilometer from the border with Israel. An Israeli colonel said that the IDF has killed most of the local Hamas battalion commanders, but that dozens of fighters remain there and are now in “guerilla mode.”[20]

Other Palestinian militias threaten Israeli operations in the northern Gaza Strip. The military wing of the Palestinian Mujahideen Movement, the Mujahideen Brigades, mortared Israeli forces west of Beit Lahia on January 12.[21] PIJ’s military wing, the al Quds Brigades, claimed to conduct a multi-stage combined arms attack on an Israeli supply route south and east of Gaza.[22] The militia did not specify the exact location of the attack. The al Quds Brigades’ footage shows fighters observing Israeli armor, jeeps, and personnel and its fighters’ firing mortars and rockets.[23] The militia claimed that it detonated a minefield targeting Israeli armor along the supply route. The military wing of Hamas, the al Qassem Brigades, has likely used a rear area in the central Gaza Strip to conduct several attacks on Israeli forces in the northern Gaza Strip since mid-December.[24] Israeli forces are actively clearing in the central Gaza Strip to dismantle the four Hamas battalions there.

The IDF is conducting clearing operations in Bureij and Maghazi in the Central Governorate of the Gaza Strip on January 12. The IDF 414th Reconnaissance Battalion conducted a drone strike targeting a Palestinian fighter who fired at them from a building in Bureij.[25] The IDF 36th Division killed 20 Palestinian fighters on January 11 and 12, including a commander of Hamas’ Nukhba (Elite) Forces, and captured many weapons during clearing operations in Maghazi.[26]

Palestinian militias are attempting to defend against Israeli clearing operations in the Central Governorate. The self-proclaimed military wing of Fatah, the al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, fired rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) at Israeli infantry as they advanced in Maghazi.[27] Palestinian media reported that Israeli bulldozers and tanks operated north of Nuseirat on January 12.[28] The military wing of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the National Resistance Brigades, fired an RPG at an advancing Israeli vehicle northeast of Nuseirat.[29] The Mujahideen Brigades claimed that it clashed with Israeli forces and targeted Israeli armor using unspecified weapons east of Nuseirat.[30]

The IDF continued clearing operations in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip on January 12. The IDF 98th Division directed airstrikes targeting a Hamas-controlled building and killed a commander in Hamas’ Nukhba Forces and six other Hamas fighters.[31] The IDF said that the Hamas Nukhba commander participated in attacks on Israeli towns near the Gaza Strip on October 7.[32] The 89th Commando Brigade (assigned to the 98th Division) also killed three Hamas fighters in Khan Younis.[33] Israeli forces located weapons and RPGs in the area and destroyed a weapons cache.[34]

Palestinian militias attempted to defend against Israeli clearing operations in Khan Younis on January 12. The al Quds Brigades engaged Israeli forces in small arms clashes and fired an RPG targeting an Israeli bulldozer in Khan Younis City.[35] The al Quds Brigades also fired mortars targeting Israeli

forces in central Khan Younis.[36] The al Quds Brigades said that it mortared Israeli forces in central Khan Younis in a combined operation with the al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades.[37]

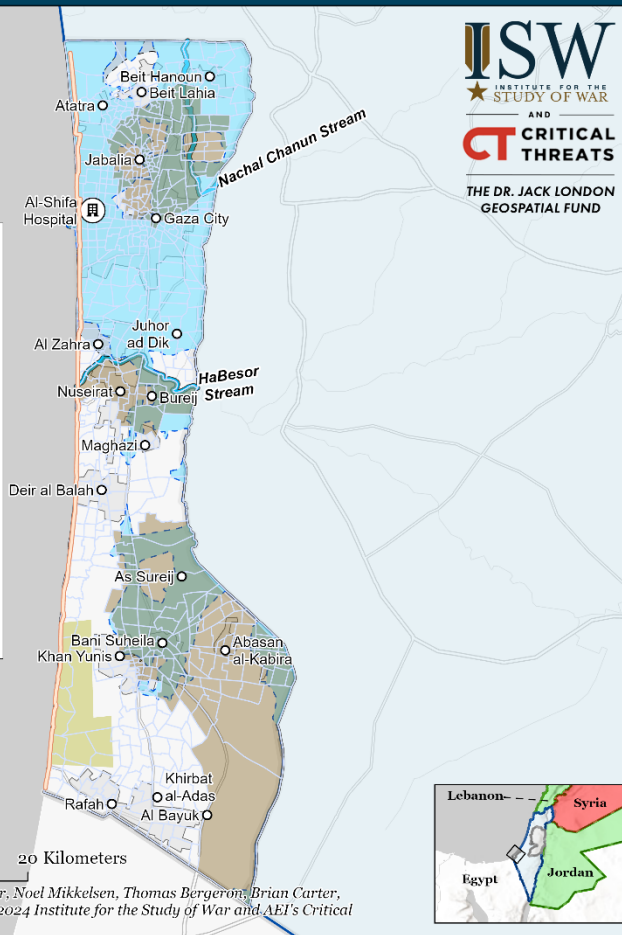
The IDF said that Israeli forces have destroyed over 700 Hamas rockets and rocket launchers in the Gaza Strip since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war.[38] The IDF said on January 12 that the IDF Golani Brigade (assigned to the 36th Division) destroyed rocket launchers in a cemetery in the Gaza Strip.[39] The IDF said that it aims to destroy Hamas' rocket launching capabilities in the Gaza Strip and stop Hamas rocket attacks into Israel.[40] The al Qassem Brigades have only conducted five rocket attacks into Israel from the Gaza Strip since December 21, indicating that Israeli operations have degraded Hamas' rocket capability.[41]

The IDF said on January 11 that Israeli forces continue to locate and destroy Hamas tunnels in the Gaza Strip.[42] The IDF reported that Hamas has spent tens of millions of dollars constructing hundreds of kilometers of tunnels.[43] Unspecified senior Israeli officials told *The Economist* on January 11 that the IDF has yet to destroy half of Hamas' tunnels in the Gaza Strip.[44]

Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip as of January 12, 2024, 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)



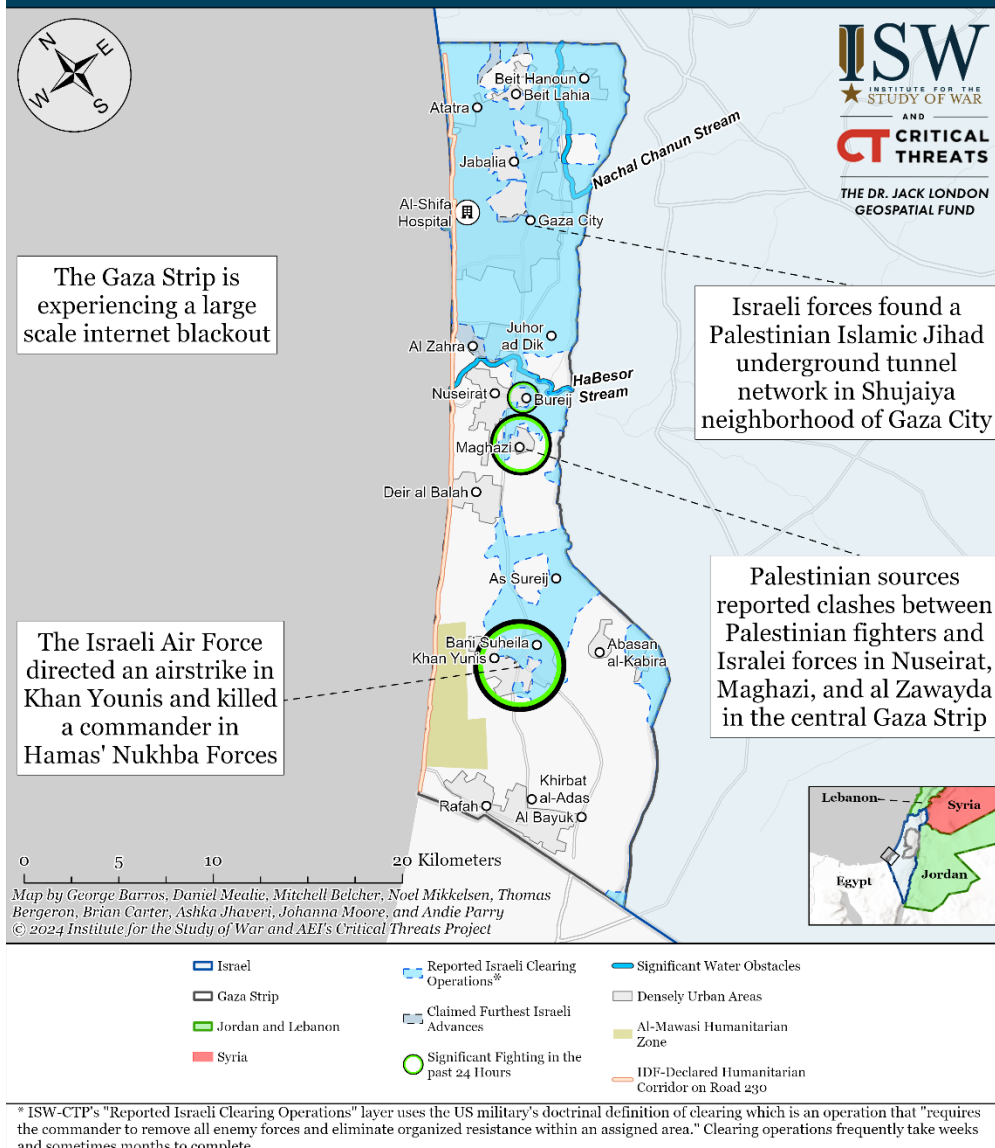
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Map by George Barros, Daniel Meatic, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Israel
- Gaza Strip
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- Densely Urban Areas
- Significant Water Obstacles
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230

* 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

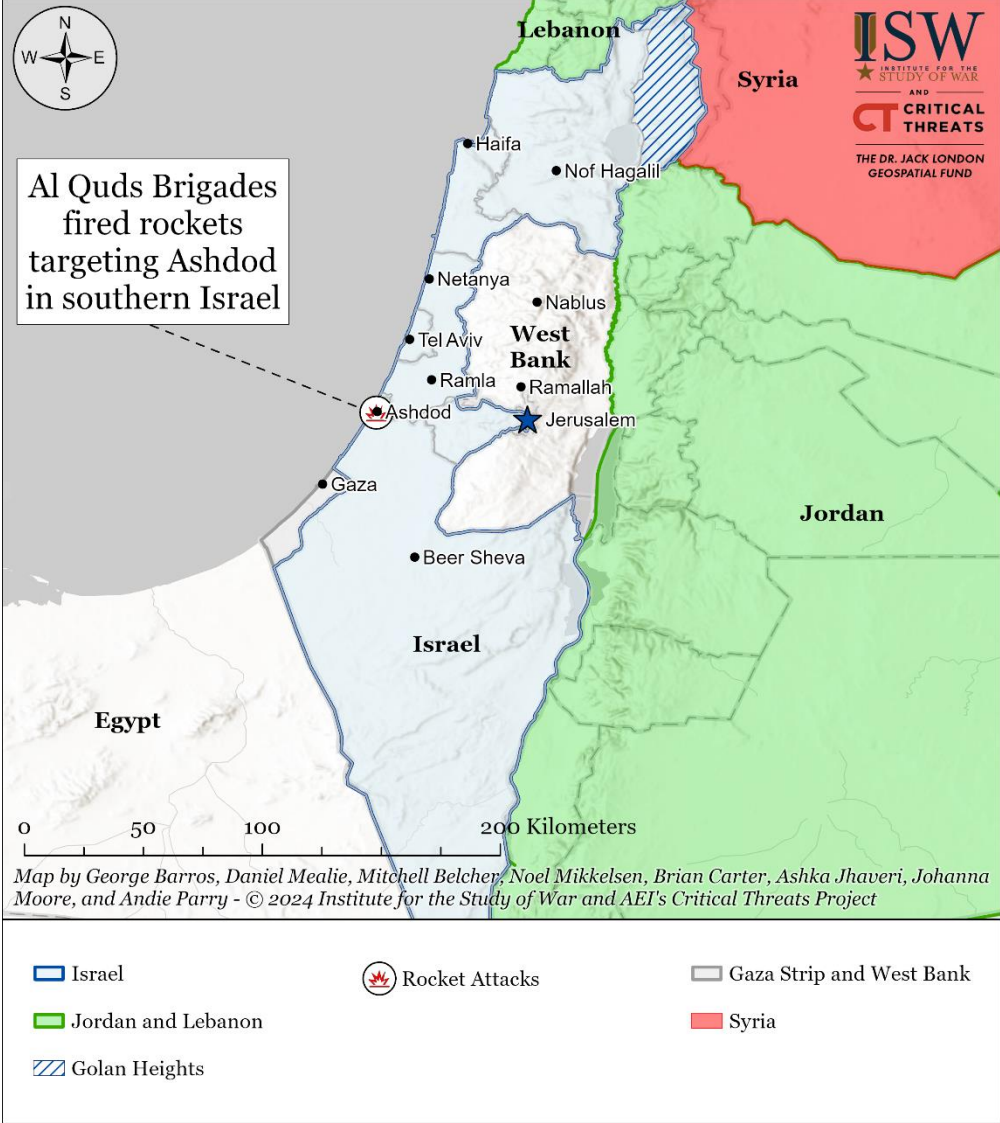
Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of January 12, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



The Gaza Strip is experiencing a large-scale internet blackout. A Palestine-based communication company announced a complete interruption of cellular, fixed, and internet services on January 12.[45] NetBlocks later confirmed that most residents are unlikely to have telecom services.[46]

The al Quds Brigades fired rockets from the Gaza Strip targeting Ashdod in southern Israel on January 12.[47]

Indirect Fire Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of January 12, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



West Bank

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

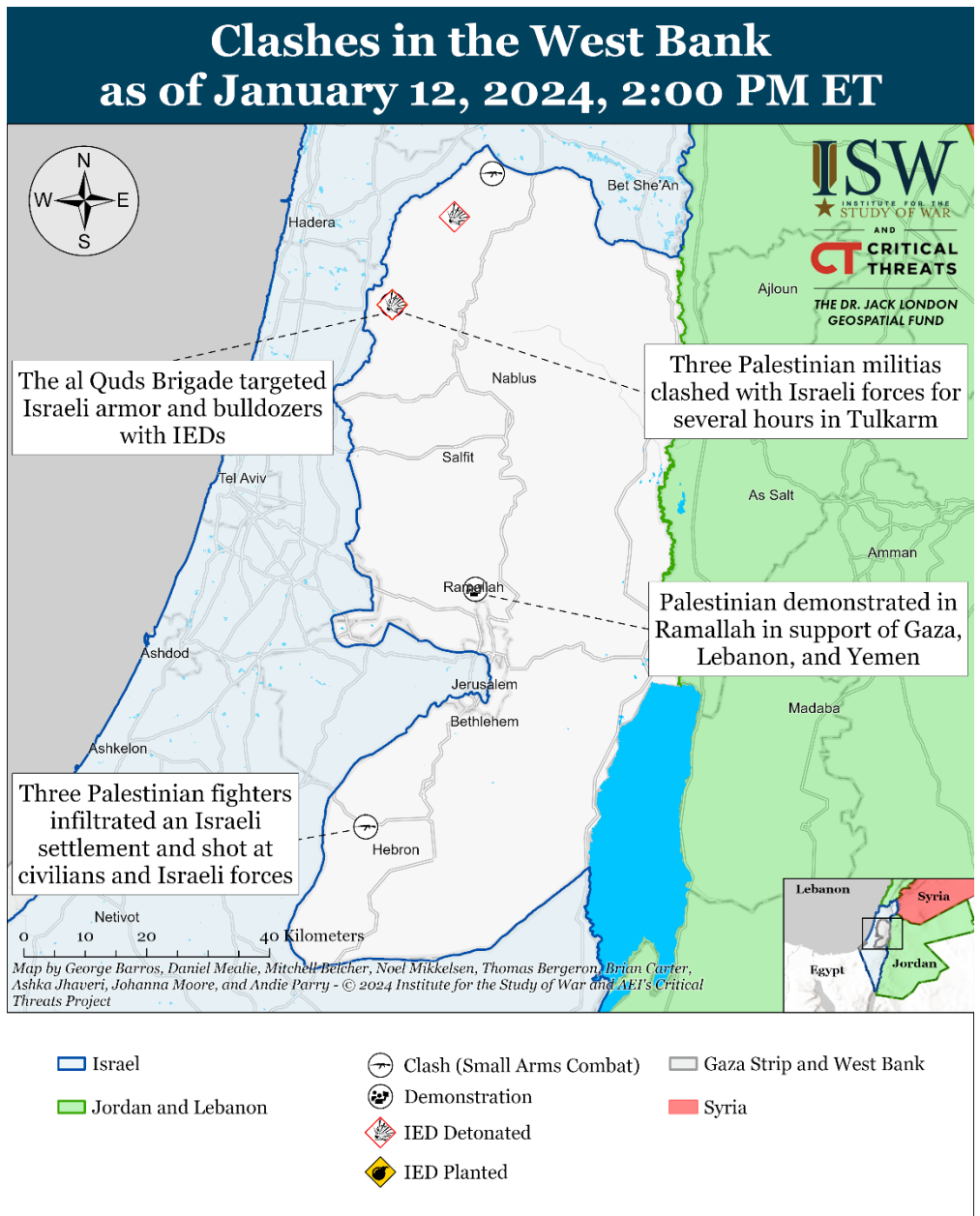
- Draw IDF assets and resources toward the West Bank and fix them there

Several Palestinian militias targeted Israeli forces conducting a raid in Nour Shams refugee camp in Tulkarm on January 12. The al Qassem Brigades said that its fighters, alongside other militias, clashed with Israeli forces in Nour Shams refugee camp.[48] The Tulkarm Battalion of the al Quds Brigades detonated two types of IEDs on Israeli armor and a bulldozer operating in the camp.[49] The al Quds Brigade also fired small arms at Israeli infantry during the multi-hour Israeli operation.[50] The Tulkarm Battalion of the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades targeted Israeli forces in the

camp with IEDs and small arms.[51] The al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade said that it prepared to confront the Israeli operation after a raid killed three militants in Tulkarm on January 9.[52]

Palestinian fighters also attacked Israeli targets elsewhere in the West Bank on January 12. Unspecified Palestinian fighters targeted Israeli forces with IEDs and small arms in two towns in Jenin Governorate on January 12.[53] Three Palestinian fighters infiltrated into an Israeli settlement west of Hebron and fired small arms at an IDF force and a civilian there.[54] Israeli forces arrested four people in the overnight West Bank raids.[55]

Palestinians demonstrated in Ramallah in support of Gaza, Lebanon, and the Houthis on January 12.[56] Hamas called for the Ramallah demonstrations.[57]



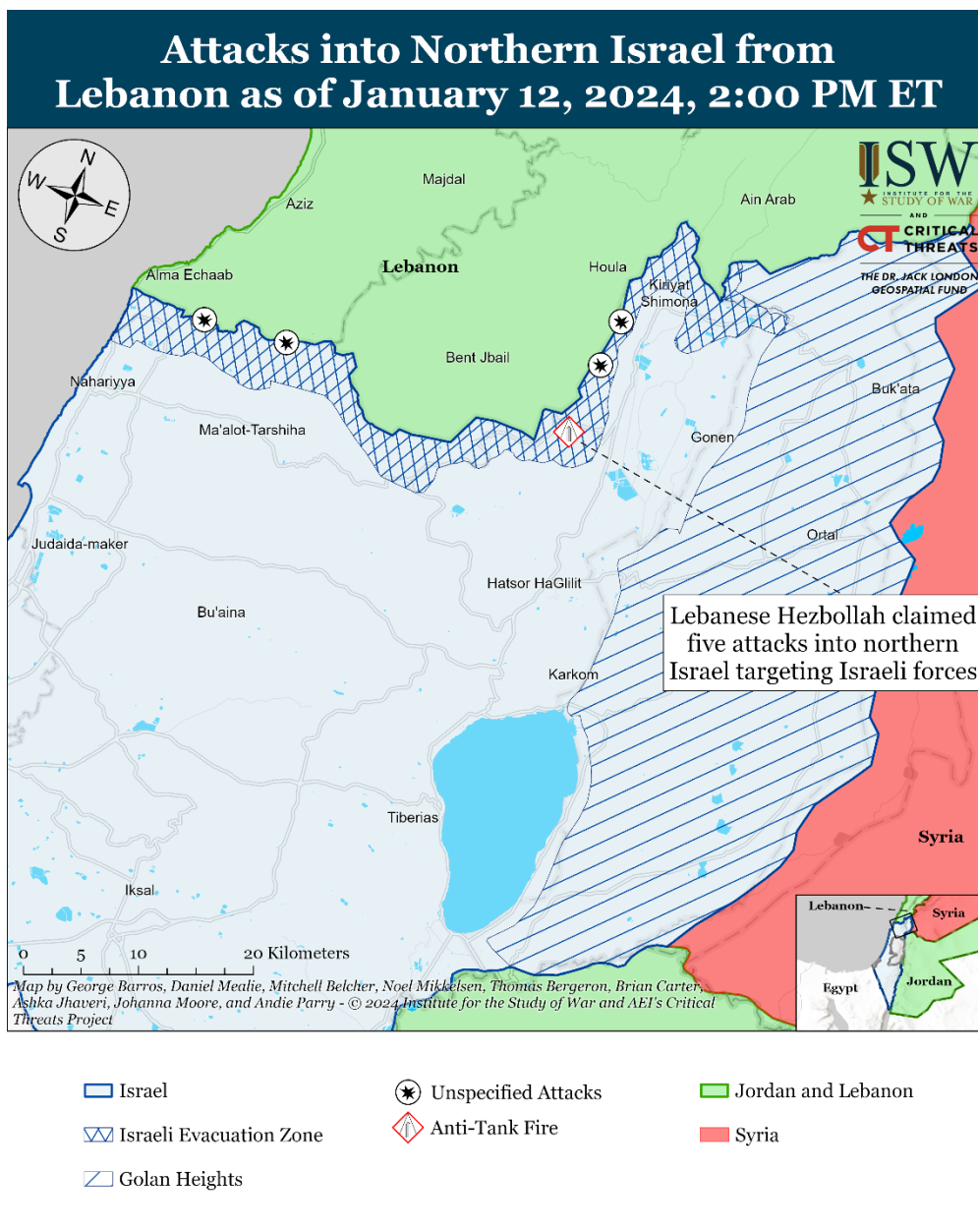
This map is not an exhaustive depiction of clashes and demonstrations in the West Bank.

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) claimed five attacks into northern Israel targeting Israeli forces on January 12.[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—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed two attacks targeting Israel on January 12. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq stated that it attacked an unspecified Israeli military target in the Golan Heights and an unspecified target in Eilat.[59]

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian and Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Bart Eide discussed the combined US-UK airstrikes targeting Houthi military positions in Yemen during a phone call on January 12.[60] Abdollahian emphasized that the Houthis are a permanent actor in the Middle East's regional security and reiterated prior calls for providing humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip. The Houthis are not the internationally recognized government in Yemen.

Abdollahian and Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan discussed the Israel-Hamas war during a phone call on January 11.[61] The two discussed the provision of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, the South Africa-led International Court of Justice case against Israel. The two also discussed efforts to bring about an end to the Israel-Hamas War.

Iranian-sponsored Attacks in the Middle East as of January 12, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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