

Iran Update



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December 10, 2024, Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm ET

The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) publish the Iran Update, which provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests.

Click [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations, and [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of the ongoing opposition offensive in Syria. These maps are updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

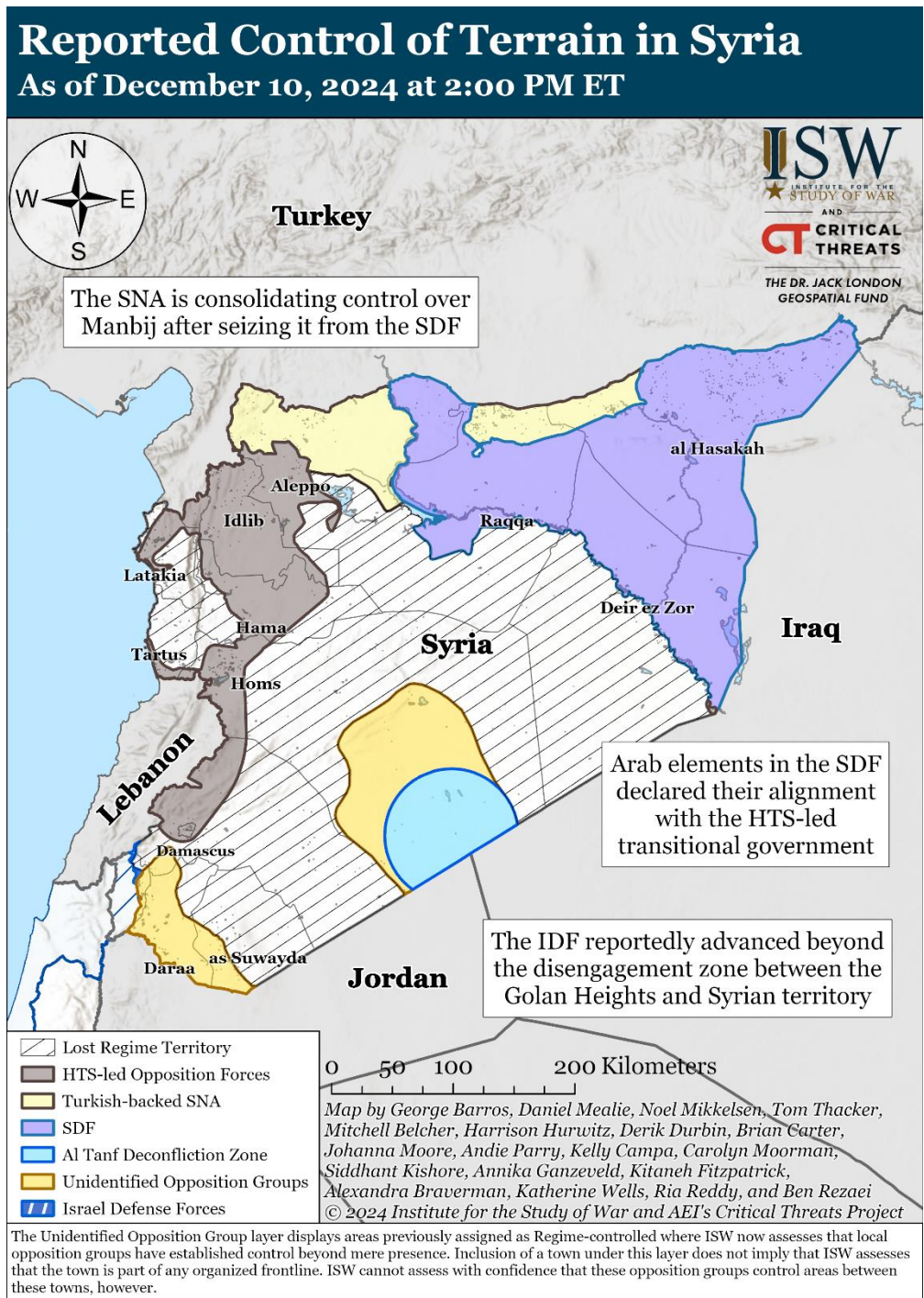
We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We utterly condemn violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

Senior Syrian officials from the deposed Bashar al Assad regime have begun to transfer power to the HTS-led interim government as of December 10. Outgoing Prime Minister Mohammed al Jalili reported that former Assad officials are working with the interim government to preserve state institutions and government workers' jobs.[1] The chief executive of Sawsan Abu Zainedin—an umbrella group of 200 Syrian civil society groups—emphasized that the interim government would refrain from the “de-Baathification” of the Syrian state.[2] CTP-ISW previously noted that Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) likely recognizes that its own, smaller government apparatus in Idlib Province is ill-equipped to govern all of Syria and that it will need to rely on Syrian institutions at least for a period.[3] US Secretary of State Antony Blinken voiced the United States' support for a Syrian-led political transition leading to a “credible, inclusive, and non-sectarian governance” in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2254.[4]

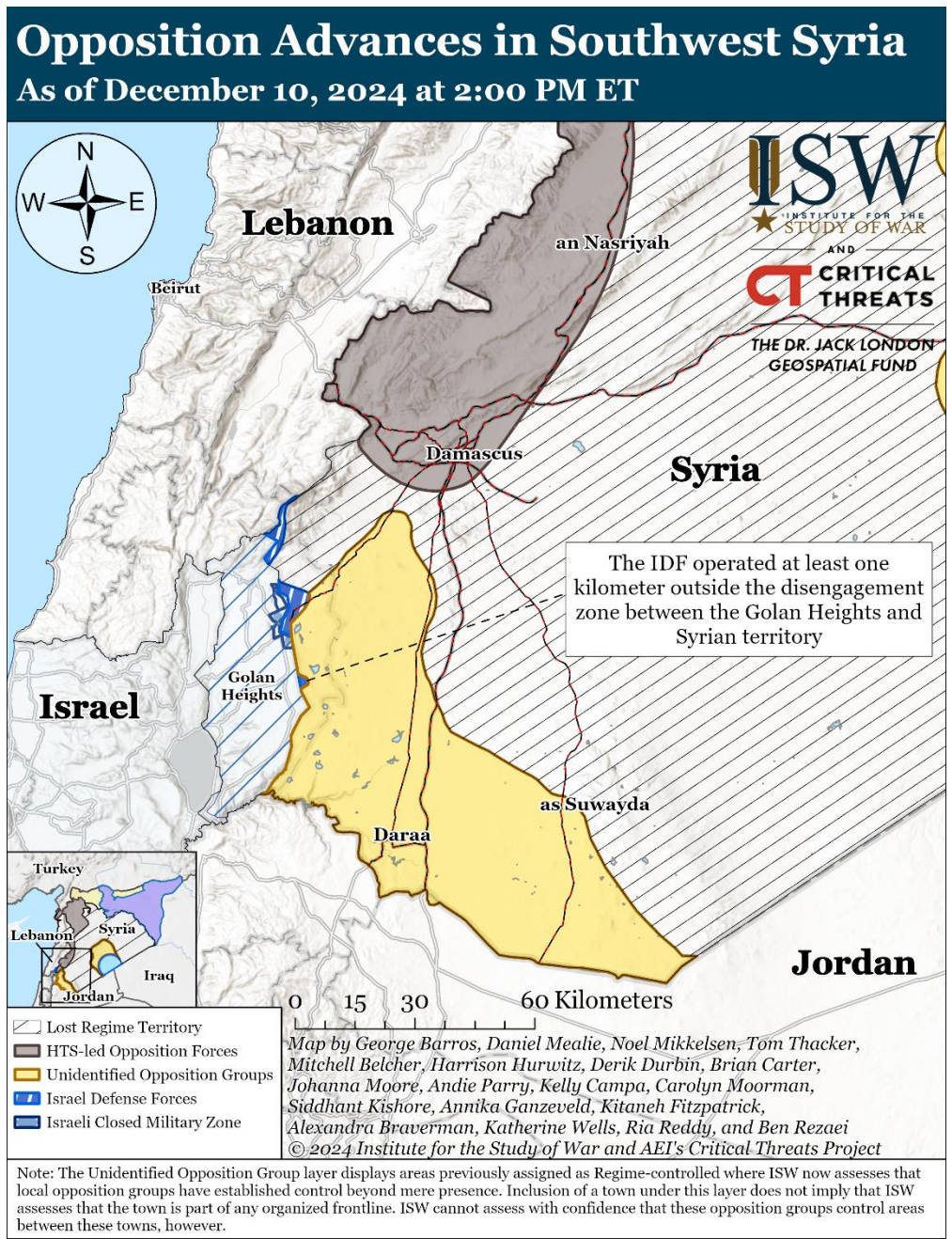
Syrian media reported that the interim Syrian Salvation Government will conduct an assessment of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) prior to its reorganization.[5] This activity is part of a broader HTS-led effort to reconcile with members of the former Syrian regime and SAA. HTS announced on December 9 a general amnesty for all Syrian regime military personnel, whom the regime conscripted under compulsory service.[6] HTS has similarly sought to integrate Syrian regime military and security personnel into civilian life in Aleppo City since seizing the city in November 2024.[7] CTP-ISW previously noted that integrating former combatants into civilian life could help ensure security and stability during the post-conflict transition period.[8]

HTS leader Abu Mohammad al Julani stated that “we” will hold former regime officers “accountable” for torturing civilians under Assad.[9] Julani's statement is alarmingly

ambiguous regarding whether HTS or a new Syrian government will oversee the judicial proceedings for former regime officials. While it is necessary to hold former regime officials accountable for crimes committed against the Syrian people, HTS lacks the formal authority to prosecute regime officials. That authority should rest with a new Syrian government and constitution that have yet to be established or with an international tribunal. Julani may be reacting to pressure from hardliners in HTS, as there have already been reports of revenge killings in HTS-controlled territory. Revenge killings have historically exacerbated sectarian conflict, as seen in neighboring Iraq.



The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) reportedly advanced beyond the disengagement zone further into Syrian territory on December 9. Geolocated imagery posted on December 10 showed the IDF near Kudna, which is approximately one kilometer from the disengagement zone.[10] Syrian media claimed on December 10 that the IDF advanced to the towns of Beqaasem, Erneh, Heeneh, and Rima in Damascus Province.[11] Beqaasem is around 25 kilometers from Damascus.[12] CTP-ISW cannot verify these claims. The IDF denied reports on December 9 that it is “advancing [toward] or approaching Damascus” and emphasized that the IDF is operating within the disengagement zone and at “defensive points close to the border.”[13]



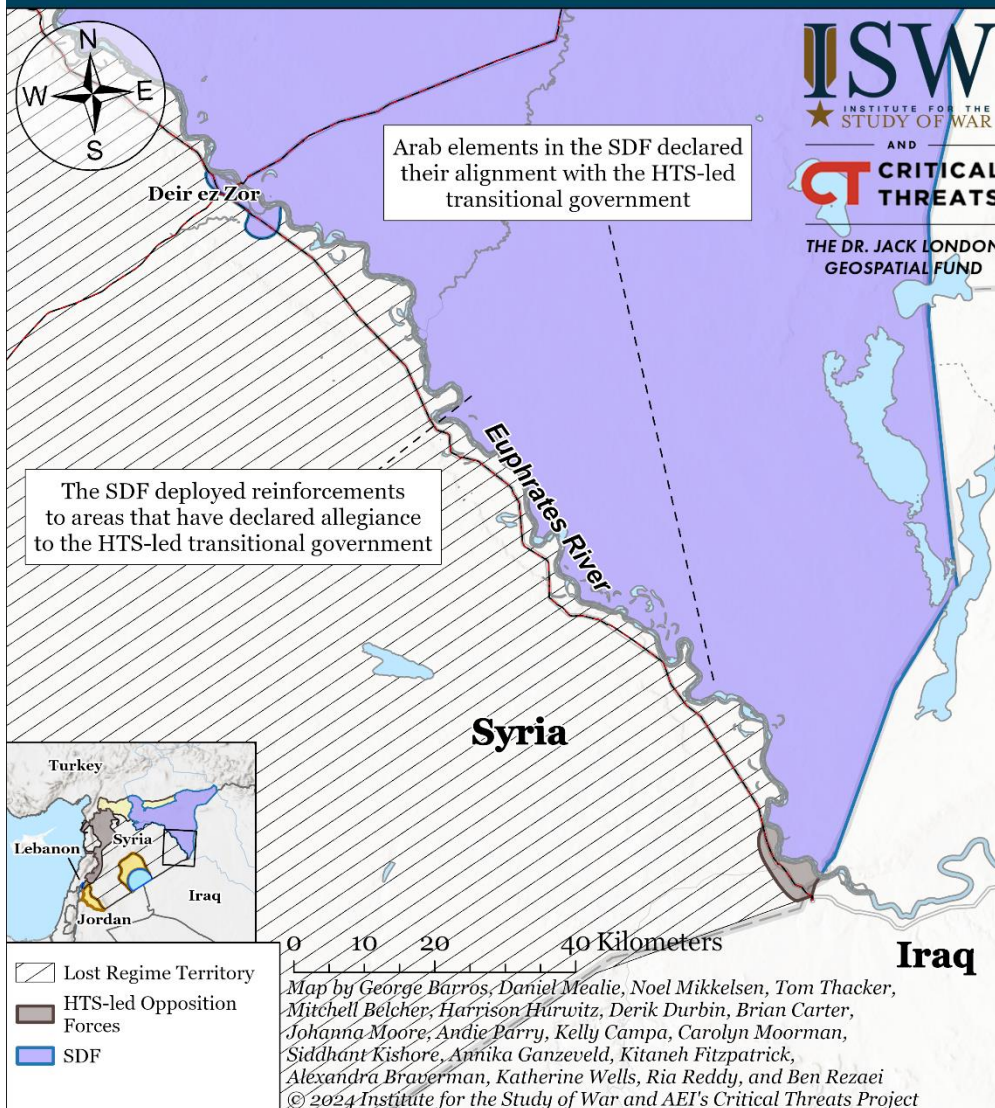
The IDF continued to destroy former SAA sites across Syria on December 10. The IDF announced on December 10 that it has destroyed around 70-80 percent of the Assad regime's military capabilities.[14] The IDF added that it has struck most of the SAA's strategic weapons stockpiles in the past 48 hours to prevent "terrorist elements" from seizing the weapons.[15] The IDF Navy struck the ports of al Bayda and Latakia on December 9.[16] Fifteen Syrian naval vessels were docked at the ports at the time of the strikes.[17] The IDF reported that it destroyed dozens of anti-ship missiles with ranges of 80-190 kilometers.[18]

The Arab contingents within the US-backed, Kurdish-controlled Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) defected to the HTS-led transitional government. The leader of the Hajin Military Council—an Arab-majority militia in the SDF—declared allegiance to the Fateh Mubin operations room on December 10.[19] Fateh Mubin is the coordinating element for the HTS-led forces that were formerly centered in Idlib Province and recently took Damascus City. Two militia leaders in eastern Deir ez Zor Province have separately posted videos declaring allegiance to the HTS-affiliated coalition.[20] A tribal leader who incited an Arab uprising against the SDF in the autumn of 2023 and later defected to regime-controlled territory called for Arabs to leave the SDF on December 9.[21] Some of the Arab-majority communities in Deir ez Zor Province hold longstanding grievances against the SDF due to limited reconstruction efforts, repeated SDF abuses of the local populations, and a lack of representative Arab leadership.[22] Local sources reported that the SDF deployed reinforcements to areas where the Arab commanders defected, including Hajin, Hawji, and Theban on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River.[23]

The defected militias have no guarantee of holding territory in Deir ez Zor Province, particularly without military support from the Fateh Mubin operations room. The SDF quashed an Arab-militia revolt in Deir ez Zor Province in ten days in the autumn of 2023.[24] Arab-majority militias under the SDF led the offensive into regime-controlled areas of Deir ez Zor Province on December 6, but other likely Kurdish SDF units have since deployed to province.[25]

Control of Terrain in Deir ez Zor, Syria

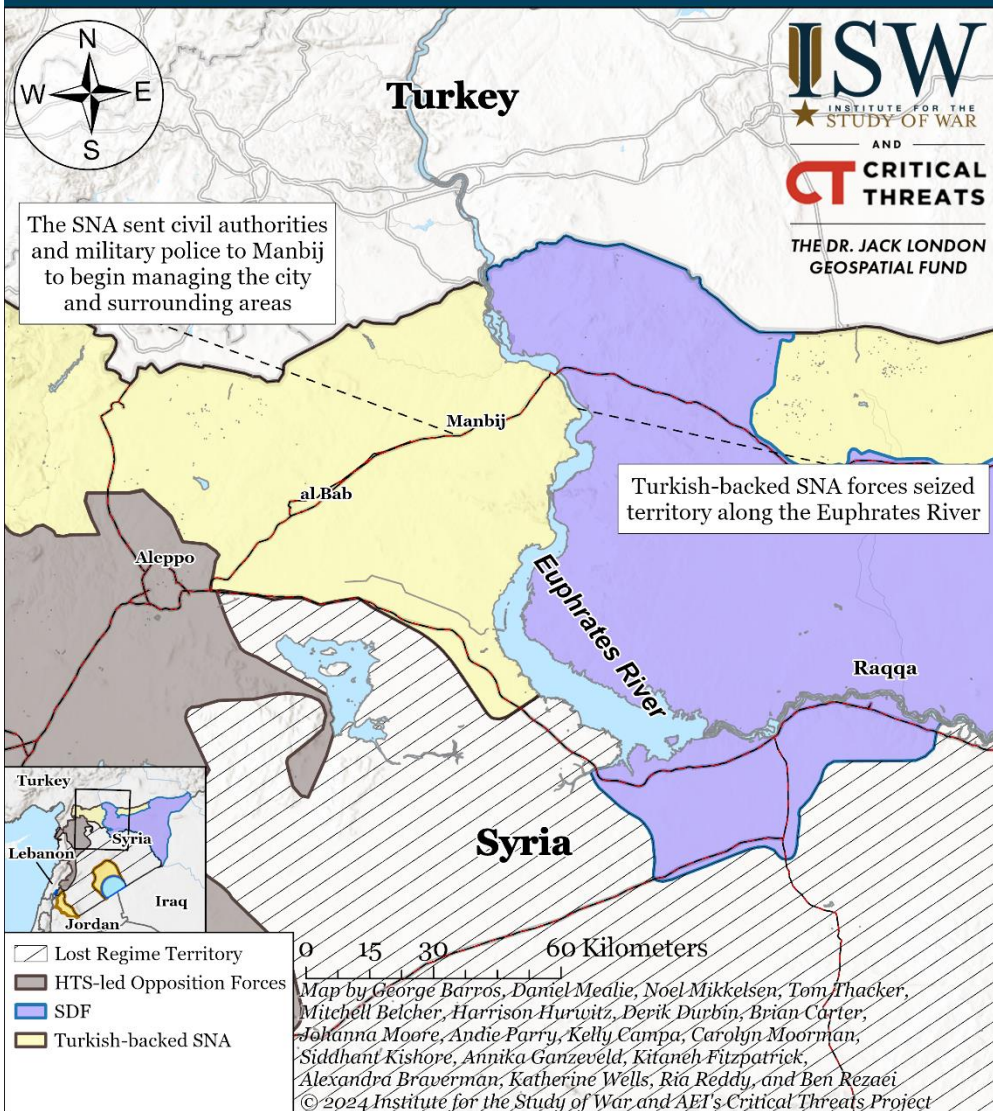
As of December 10, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) is consolidating control over Manbij in northern Syria after seizing it from the SDF on December 8.[26] The SNA claimed that it began providing basic services to locals and that “life has returned to normal” there.^{v[27]} The SNA sent civil authorities and military police to Manbij to begin managing the city and the surrounding areas.[28] The SNA deployed its forces east of Manbij along the line of contact with the SDF.[29] The SNA claimed control over a site east of Manbij along the Euphrates River on December 10.[30]

Control of Terrain in North Syria

As of December 10, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Iran is trying to project continued confidence in its regional position despite the fall of the Bashar al Assad regime in Syria. This comes amid reports of infighting within the Iranian security establishment. Senior Iranian officials, including Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Commander Major General Hossein Salami, have asserted in recent days that Iran and the Axis of Resistance remain strong.[31] Salami said that Iran has "not been weakened, and Iranian power has not diminished." [32] The supreme leader representative to the IRGC, Abdollah Hajji Sadeghi, similarly said that the Axis of Resistance "has not changed at all" while acknowledging that the fall of Assad has created "a major obstacle." [33] CTP-ISW has contrastingly assessed that the fall of Assad marks the end of the greater Iranian project in the Levant for the foreseeable future.[34] Iranian influence in Syria historically allowed the IRGC to project force westward and move material to proxy and partner forces around the Israeli periphery. The sudden loss of Assad deprives Iran of these military

and strategic advantages and will severely undermine future Iranian efforts to rebuild Hamas and Lebanese Hezbollah.

The fall of Assad has reportedly stoked divisions within the IRGC. An unspecified IRGC official told the *Telegraph* that senior IRGC officers are blaming one another for the fall of Assad.[35] Another unspecified IRGC official said that Iran is at an "impasse" in its efforts to rearm Hezbollah because everyone who Iran sends to move the weapons "are either getting killed or escaping." The officials noted that some officials are blaming IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani and that "many are now calling" for his removal as he is formally responsible for managing the Axis of Resistance, of which Assad was a part. Ghaani does not solely manage Iranian policy vis-a-vis Syria, however. Other key Iranian officials, including officials close to the supreme leader, are involved as well. These officials include senior advisers to the supreme leader, such as Ali Larijani and Ali Akbar Velayati.[36] CTP-ISW previously assessed that regime infighting could lead to the removal of top Iranian military commanders.[37]

Iranian-backed Iraqi militias responded on December 10 to the fall of Assad. Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba claimed that a Turkish operations room facilitated the fall of Assad with Israeli, UK, and NATO support, while the Axis of Resistance was "preoccupied with supporting Gaza." [38] Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba claimed that the operations room seeks to "sabotage Iraq." [39] Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba also claimed that Syrian opposition forces allowed Israel to "create a federation" in Suwayda Province in return for its support for the opposition forces.[40] The militia claimed that Israel seeks to annex parts of Syria and receive guarantees from the new Syrian government that it will work to normalize ties with Israel.[41]

Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada separately stated that it will approach the situation in Syria based on the national security interests of Iraq, and Kataib Hezbollah stated that it is "monitoring the situation" in Syria.[42] Kataib Hezbollah stated that HTS and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) will retain their core character "no matter how much they pretend to be humane in front of the cameras." [43] Kataib Hezbollah added that it is waiting for the establishment of a new Syrian government to "reach an understanding [with it] on the basis of resistance and the Palestinian cause." [44]

Commander of the Iraqi Rapid Response Division, Lieutenant General Thamer al Hussein, stated on December 10 that Iraqi forces will "crush anyone" who tries to approach the Iraq-Syria border. [45] This statement reflects Iraqi concerns that the conflict in Syria could create a security vacuum and allow ISIS to resurge. Iraqi political and military officials have emphasized in recent days the need to prevent a "repetition of 2014," referring to the ISIS takeover of Mosul in June 2014.[46] The statement also reflects how the Iraqi federal government appears to be equating Syrian opposition forces with Salafi-jihadi groups, such as ISIS. Popular Mobilization Committee Chairman Faleh al Fayyadh emphasized on December 2, for example, that the Syrian opposition forces are "internationally recognized as terrorist organizations." [47]

US Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander General Michael Kurilla traveled to Syria and Iraq. [48] Kurilla discussed international efforts to fight and defeat ISIS during his travels. Kurilla met with senior Iraqi officials, including Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani and Chief of Staff General Abdul Amir Rashid Yarallah. Kurilla also met with US officers and SDF members in

Syria. Kurilla's travel comes after CENTCOM struck over 75 ISIS targets in central Syria on December 8.[49]

Hamas indicated willingness to concede slightly on some of its maximalist demands for a ceasefire-hostage deal with Israel. Hamas leaders are reportedly willing to accept an extended IDF presence along the Netzarim and Philadelphi corridors while still demanding an eventual, complete IDF withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, according to a Hamas source speaking to the *New York Times*.^[50] Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu's insistence on a continued IDF presence on the Philadelphi Corridor has been one of the most significant obstacles in negotiations.^[51] Netanyahu has said that retaining a presence in the corridor is required to achieve Israeli war aims.^[52] An unspecified Israeli official reported that Israeli leaders hope that the combined effect of Yahya Sinwar's death, the ceasefire in Lebanon, and the incoming Trump administration will facilitate further ceasefire-hostage negotiations.^[53] Israel reportedly assessed that Hamas wanted a ceasefire deal in late November 2024, marking the first suggestion that Hamas would break from its maximalist demands maintained throughout most of the ceasefire-hostage negotiations.^[54]

Hamas' unwillingness to grant even minimal concessions until this point in the ceasefire-hostage negotiations highlights the group's zealous commitment to fighting Israel. The IDF has already defeated Hamas militarily and is close to destroying the group militarily as well. That Hamas has retained such a hardline negotiating position is remarkable in this context.

An Egyptian official told Israeli media on December 10 that a ceasefire-hostage deal between Israel and Hamas is "imminent."^[55] Egypt presented an Israeli-proposed ceasefire-hostage deal to Hamas on December 2.^[56] The updated Israeli proposal included a ceasefire between 42-60 days and the release of all surviving female hostages, men over the age of 50, and hostages in a serious medical condition. An Egyptian official told Ynet on December 10 that an Israeli delegation will receive a list of names for a hostage-prisoner release in Cairo in the coming days.^[57] Hamas provided this list to Egyptian intelligence officials after asking other Palestinian militias in the Gaza Strip to share the names of the hostages in their custody, according to Egyptian and Palestinian officials.^[58]

Key Takeaways:

- **Syria:** Senior Syrian officials from the deposed Bashar al Assad regime have begun to transfer power to the HTS-led interim government. HTS leader Abu Mohammad al Jolani vowed to hold accountable former regime officials for crimes against the Syrian people.
- **Syria:** The IDF reportedly advanced further into southwestern Syria. The IDF is also conducting a large-scale air campaign to destroy sensitive SAA capabilities that other armed Syrian groups could seize.
- **Syria:** Arab contingents in the US-backed SDF defected to the HTS-led interim government. These defections highlight the tenuous relationship that the SDF has with some of the Arab communities in its territory.
- **Iran:** Iran is trying to project continued confidence in its regional position despite the fall of the Bashar al Assad regime in Syria. This comes amid reports of infighting within the Iranian security establishment.

- **Gaza Strip:** Hamas indicated willingness to concede slightly on its maximalist demands in ceasefire-hostage negotiations with Israel. Hamas' unwillingness to grant even minor concessions until now highlights its zealous commitment to fighting Israel.

Gaza Strip:

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Erode the will of the Israeli political establishment and public to sustain clearing operations in the Gaza Strip
- Reestablish Hamas as the governing authority in the Gaza Strip

The IDF 162nd Division continued clearing operations in Jabalia, northern Gaza Strip, on December 10. The IDF killed Palestinian fighters and destroyed militia infrastructure.[59] Geolocated footage posted on December 8 and 10 shows that the IDF conducted demolished buildings in Jabalia refugee camp.[60] A Palestinian journalist reported shooting from military vehicles in Jabalia and near Jabalia refugee camp.[61]

The IDF Air Force struck and killed 10 Palestinian militia fighters responsible for the anti-tank missile attack that killed three IDF soldiers in Jabalia recently.[62] The militia attack killed three soldiers from the IDF 84th Infantry Brigade (162nd Division) and injured 18 other soldiers on December 9.[63] An IDF investigation revealed that the soldiers were boarding an armored personnel carrier to return to Israel when Hamas fired an anti-tank missile at the vehicle. The IDF returned fire, but it was unclear whether the IDF killed the Hamas fighters.

The Mujahideen Brigades mortared an IDF site east of the Netzarim Corridor on December 10.[64]

The IDF continued operations in the central Gaza Strip on December 10. A Palestinian journalist reported shooting north of Nuseirat refugee camp, east of al Maghazi refugee camp, and east of Deir al Balah.[65]

The IDF 143rd Division continued clearing operations near Rafah City in the southern Gaza Strip since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on December 9. Geolocated footage from December 9 shows the IDF demolishing buildings southeast of Rafah City.[66]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

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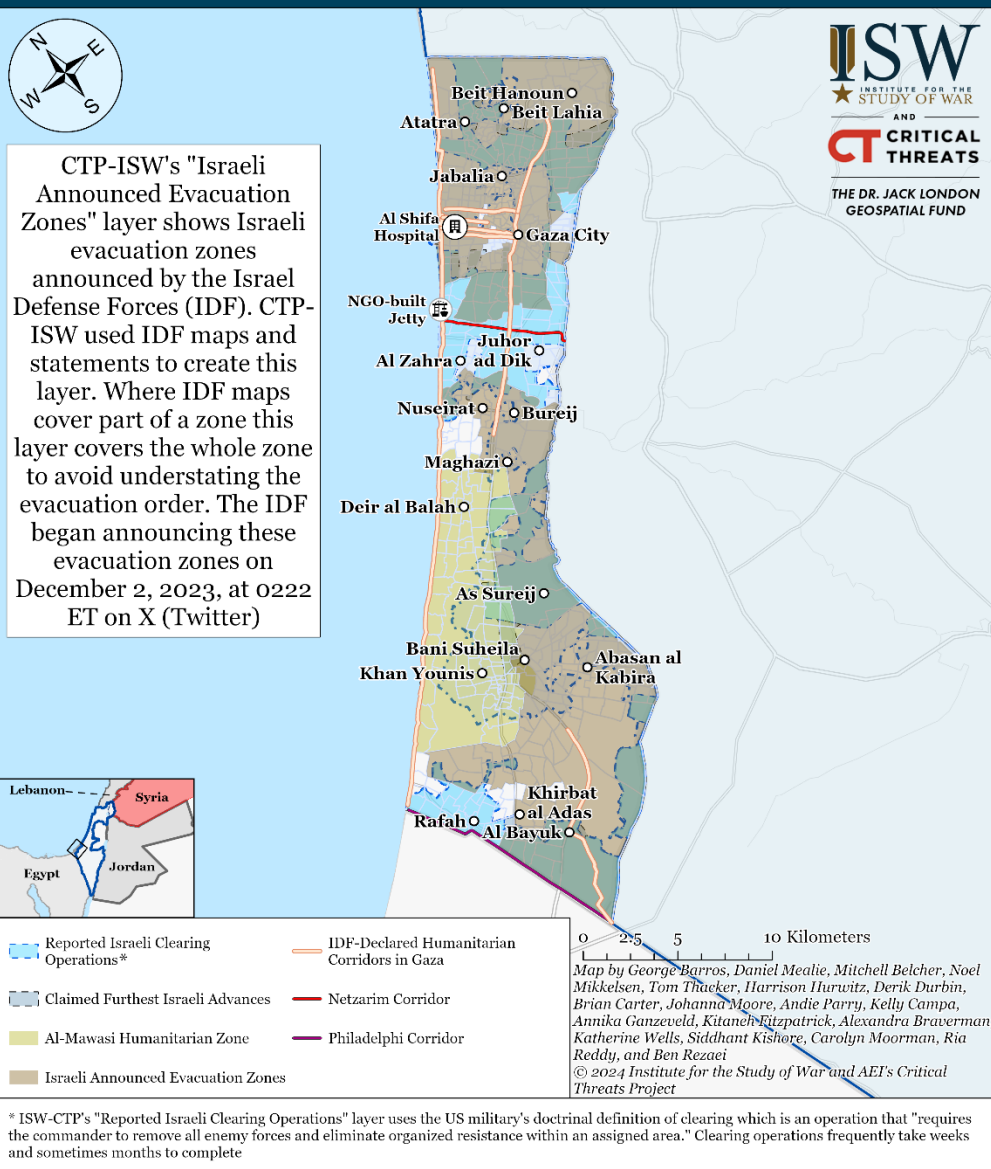
Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Tom Thacker, Harrison Hurwitz, Derik Durbin, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, Siddhant Kishore, Carolyn Moorman, Ria Reddy, and Ben Rezaei - © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridors in Gaza
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Netzarim Corridor
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- - - Assessed Furthest Extent of Israeli Clearing Operations
- Philadelphi Corridor



* 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

Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip As of December 10, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) reported that 201 trucks of humanitarian aid entered the Gaza Strip on December 9.[67]

West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

Palestinian fighters engaged Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces in Nablus and Tulkarm between December 9-10.[68] The clashes reportedly began after a gunman fired a small arm at a PA security forces headquarters in Tulkarm. These clashes follow days of protests in Jenin

after PA security forces killed a Hamas operative.[69] The PA operation in Jenin refugee camp is notable because it is the first PA operation there in several years.[70] Hamas called on all groups and fighters to "take a firm stance" against the PA actions.[71] Hamas called on all Palestinian people to stop the PA from arresting Palestinian fighters.

Israeli media reported an Israeli Arab man conducted a car ramming in Bnei Brak, central Israel, on December 10.[72] The attacker wounded one Israeli civilian. No Palestinian militia has claimed this attack at the time of this writing.

An Arab man conducted a stabbing attack at a police station in Karmiel, northern Israel, on December 10.[73] The attacker injured two security officials at the station. No Palestinian militia has claimed this attack at the time of this writing.

Northern Israel and Lebanon

Lebanese Hezbollah objectives:

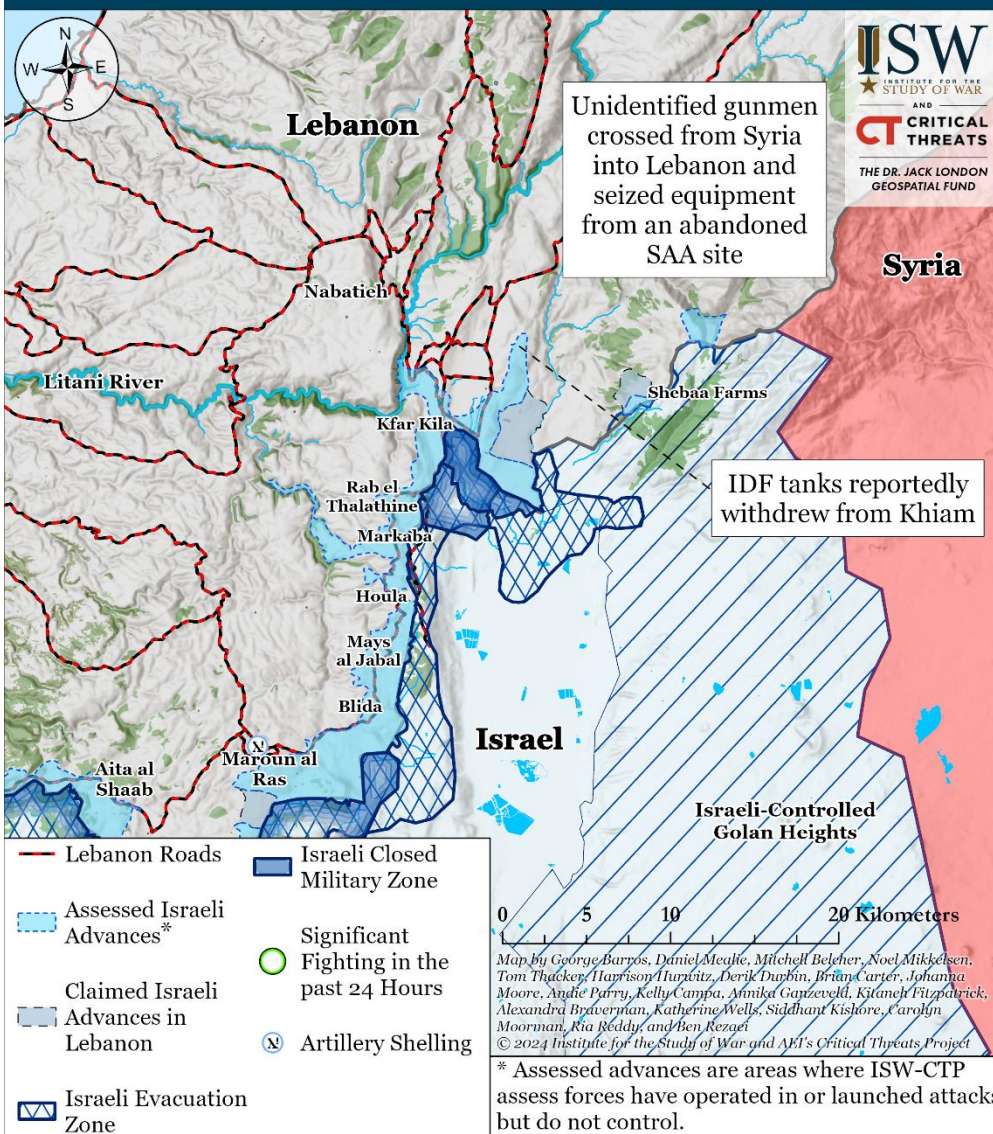
- End Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip
- Survive the October 7 War as a capable political and military organization with control over Lebanon

Lebanese media reported on December 10 that the IDF conducted multiple strikes around Mays al Jabal near the Israel-Lebanon border.[74] The IDF has not commented on the incident at the time of this writing.

Hezbollah-affiliated media reported that IDF tanks withdrew from Khiam southward toward al Wazzani on December 10.[75] CTP-ISW cannot independently verify these reports.

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) reported on December 10 that unidentified fighters crossed from Syria into Lebanon and approached an LAF post.[76] The LAF reported that the fighters seized equipment from an abandoned SAA site. The LAF fired warning shots which prompted the fighters to return to Syria.

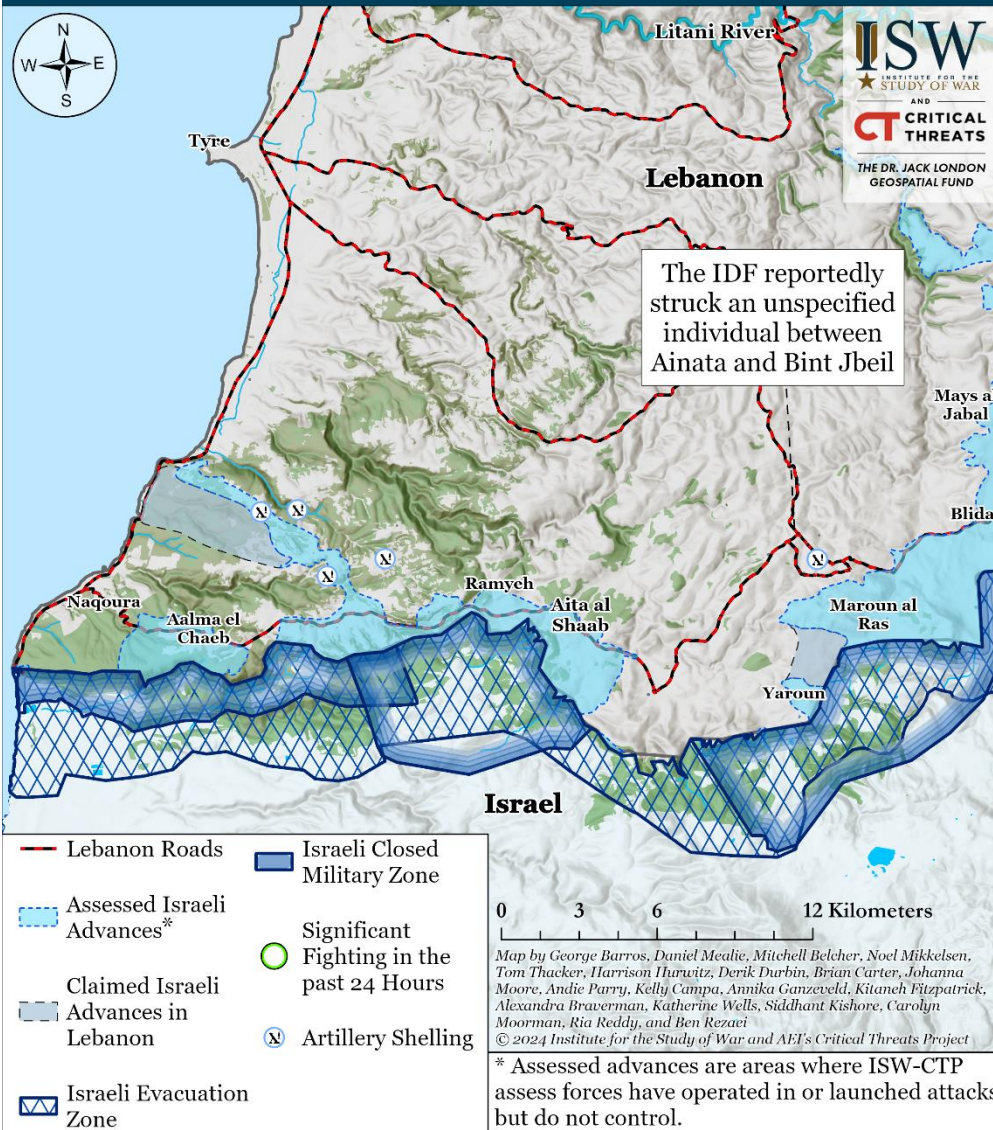
Reported Israeli Operations in the Eastern Sector As of December 10, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Lebanese media reported that the IDF conducted a drone strike targeting a car near Bint Jbeil, southern Lebanon, on December 10.[77] Geolocated footage posted to X (Twitter) confirmed a drone strike destroyed a vehicle between Ainata and Bint Jbeil.[78]

Lebanese media reported on December 10 that the IDF shelled a site in Chama, southwestern Lebanon.[79]

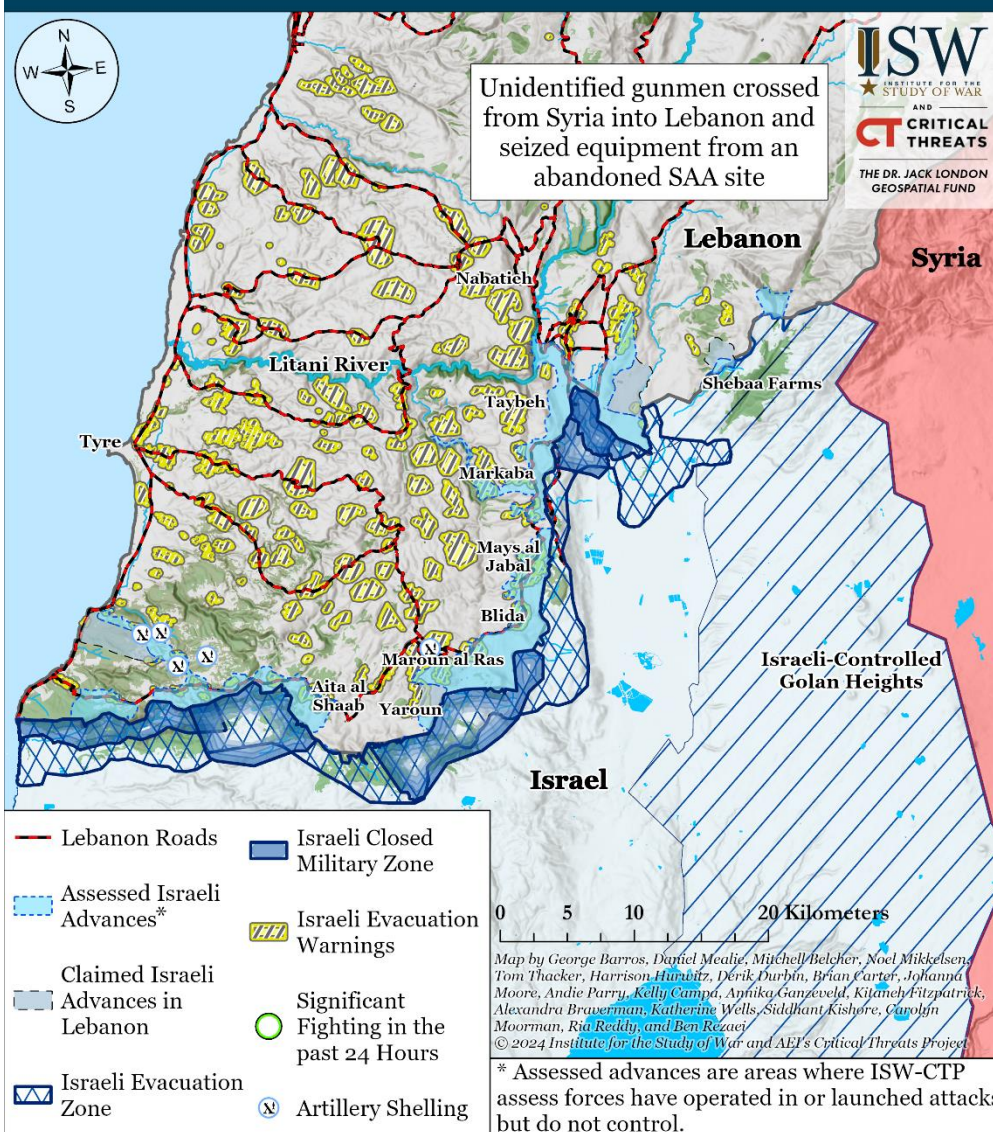
Reported Israeli Operations in the Western Sector As of December 10, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Lebanese media reported on December 9 that Hezbollah fighters facilitated the evacuation of senior Assad regime officials and Assad family members from Syria to Lebanon.[80] *Nidaa al Watan* reported that special security adviser to Assad, Ali Mamlouk fled to Lebanon. The newspaper also reported that various members of Assad’s family fled to Beirut. A Lebanese political party, the Progressive Socialist Party, released a statement on December 10 that Lebanon must not become a “safe haven” for former Assad regime officials.[81]

Reported Israeli Operations in Lebanon

As of December 10, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Iran and the Axis of Resistance

Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Sarea claimed two separate attacks on alleged US vessels on December 10.[82] Sarea stated that the Houthis launched an unspecified number of drones and missiles on three US supply ships leaving Djibouti Port, which “had previously practiced their aggression against Yemen.” It is unclear whether these were US military vessels and how far these ships were from Djibouti Port at the time of the attack. Sarea could be referring to when the Houthis attacked three US merchant vessels in the Gulf of Aden between November 30 and December 1, which two US Navy destroyers, escorting the vessels, intercepted.[83] Data from MarineTraffic.com showed that the three US commercial vessels were sailing toward Djibouti on December 1.[84] Sarea also claimed on December 10 that the Houthis targeted two US military destroyers in an unspecified location in the Gulf of Aden with an unspecified number of drones and missiles.[85]

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi had a phone call with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi on December 9 to review Iran-IAEA collaboration under the Safeguards Agreement.[86] Araghchi criticized the recent IAEA Board of Governors censure resolution against Iran, which he claimed obstructed progress. Grossi highlighted the IAEA commitment to serious engagement with Iran and ongoing efforts to facilitate a conducive environment for resolving outstanding issues.[87]

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.

CTP-ISW defines the “Axis of Resistance” as the unconventional alliance that Iran has cultivated in the Middle East since the Islamic Republic came to power in 1979. This transnational coalition is comprised of state, semi-state, and non-state actors that cooperate to secure their collective interests. Tehran considers itself to be both part of the alliance and its leader. Iran furnishes these groups with varying levels of financial, military, and political support in exchange for some degree of influence or control over their actions. Some are traditional proxies that are highly responsive to Iranian direction, while others are partners over which Iran exerts more limited influence. Members of the Axis of Resistance are united by their grand strategic objectives, which include eroding and eventually expelling American influence from the Middle East, destroying the Israeli state, or both. Pursuing these objectives and supporting the Axis of Resistance to those ends have become cornerstones of Iranian regional strategy.

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