

# Iran Update, December 24, 2023

Brian Carter, Annika Ganzeveld, Johanna Moore, and Nicholas Carl  
Information Cutoff: 2:00pm 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.*

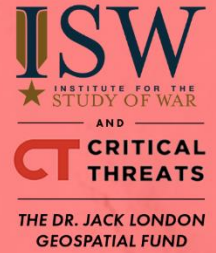
Click [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

**Note: ISW and CTP will not publish an Israel–Hamas War (Iran) Update (or maps) tomorrow, December 25, in observance of the Christmas holiday. Coverage will resume Tuesday, December 26.**

## Key Takeaways:

1. The Houthi movement likely conducted four attacks targeting civilian and military vessels in the Red Sea. Iran and the Houthis are functioning as a coalition to conduct combined military operations targeting international shipping in the Red Sea.
2. Multiple Israeli sources told Israeli media that Egypt presented a three-stage ceasefire and hostage-for-prisoner exchange deal to Israel and Hamas. Informed sources told Saudi Arabia-based al Sharq that Hamas “expressed agreement” with a separate Egyptian initiative that seeks to form a “technocratic” Palestinian government after the war.
3. Israel announced that 15 of its soldiers were killed by enemy action across the Gaza Strip in several engagements.
4. The Israeli Army Radio's military correspondent reported that Hamas is implementing lessons learned in the fight against the IDF to improve its ability to defend against IDF operations.
5. Palestinian militias continued trying to defend against IDF clearing operations in Jabalia. Israeli forces continued clearing operations in Khan Younis.
6. Palestinian militias conducted at least one rocket attack from the Gaza Strip targeting southern Israel.
7. Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters four times across the West Bank.
8. Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted six attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel.
9. Iranian Foreign Affairs Ministry Senior Advisor Ali Asghar Khaji discussed the Israel-Hamas war in a meeting with Russian Foreign Ministry Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process Vladimir Safronkov in Tehran.

# Israel-Hamas War as of December 24, 2023, 2:00 PM ET

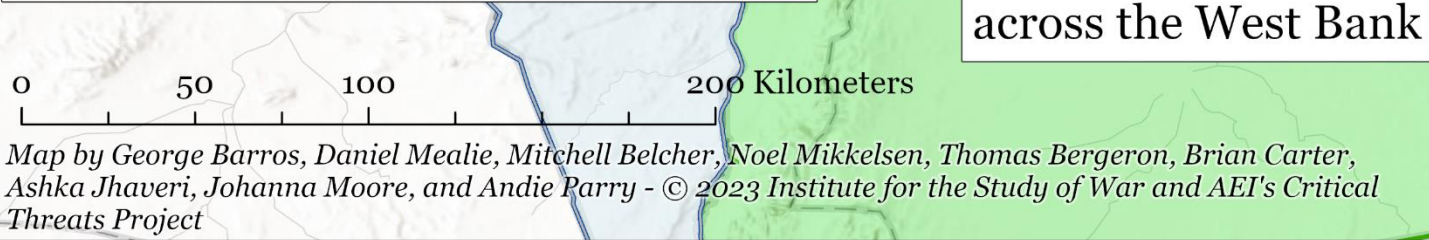


Multiple Israeli sources told Israeli media that Egypt presented a three-stage ceasefire and hostage-for-prisoner exchange deal to Israel and Hamas

Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted six attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel

Likely Houthi fighters conducted four attacks targeting civilian and military vessels in the Red Sea

Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters four times across the West Bank



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
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Golan Heights
- Gaza Strip and West Bank
- Syria

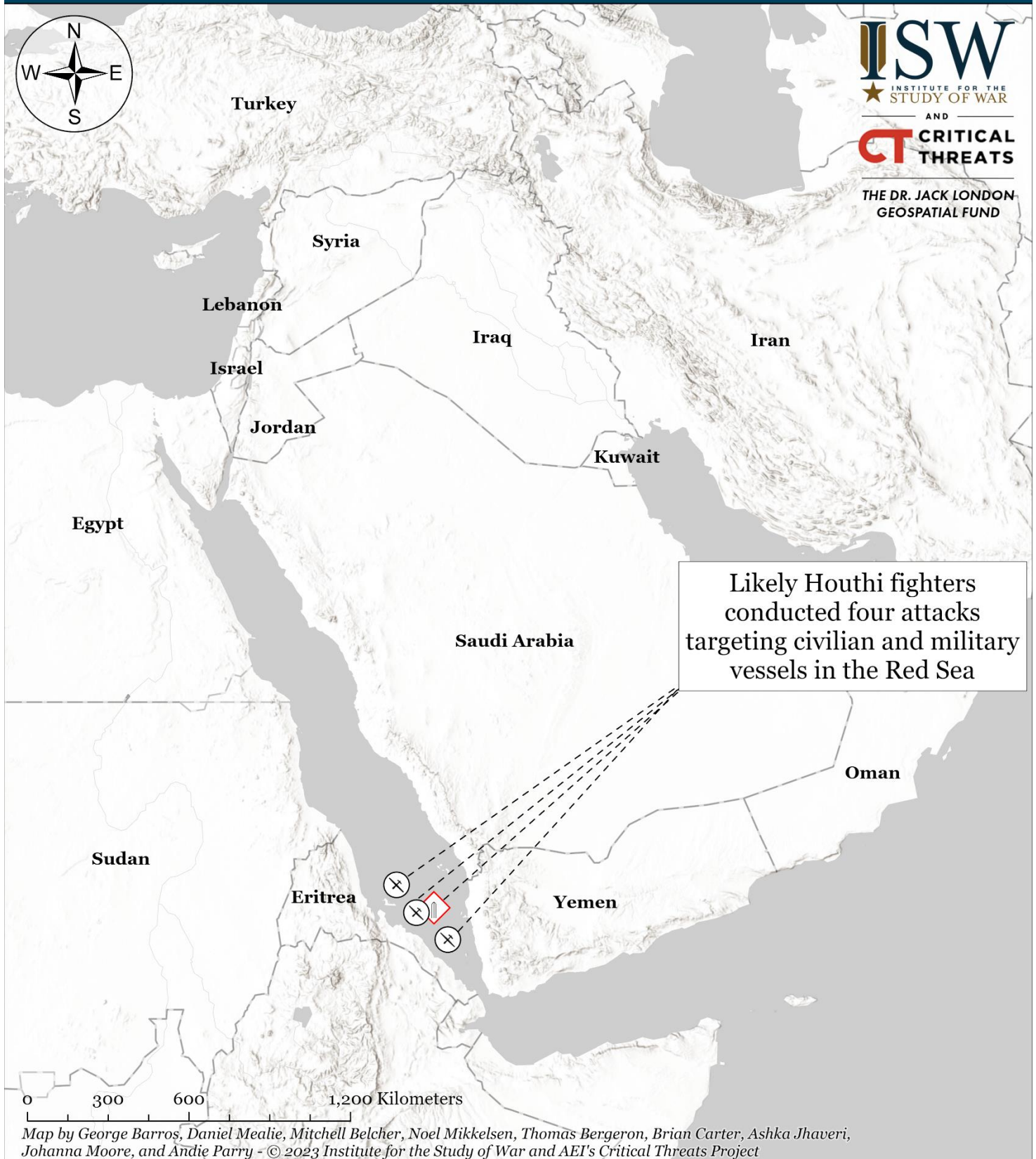
## **The Houthi movement likely conducted four attacks targeting civilian and military vessels in the Red Sea on December 23.**

- US CENTCOM reported that unidentified fighters fired two anti-ship ballistic missiles from Houthi-controlled Yemeni territory into international shipping lanes in the southern Red Sea.[1] A Yemeni journalist reported that Houthis launched both missiles from Huban, Taiz governorate.[2] CENTCOM said that no ships reported that they were hit by the missiles.[3]
- US CENTCOM reported that unidentified fighters targeted the USS *Laboon* in the southern Red Sea with four drones.[4] CENTCOM reported that the drones originated from Houthi-controlled Yemeni territory. The USS *Laboon* intercepted all four drones and reported no injuries or damage from the attack.
- Houthi fighters conducted two attacks targeting the Norwegian-flagged *Blaamanen* and Indian-flagged *Saibaba* with one-way attack drones in the southern Red Sea.[5] The *Blaamanen* reported that the Houthi drone missed the ship. The *Saibaban* reported that one attack drone hit the ship but did not cause in casualties among the crew. CENTCOM reported that the USS *Laboon* responded to distress signals from both vessels at approximately 2000 local time.[6]

**Iran and the Houthis are functioning as a coalition to conduct combined military operations targeting international shipping in the Red Sea.** Iran considers the Axis of Resistance as its unconventional alliance of state, semi-state, and non-state actors.[7] Their anti-US and anti-Israeli ideology unites the Axis of Resistance, creating strategic alignment across its members. Multiple US officials have highlighted the role Iran plays in the targeting and execution of Houthi attacks against international shipping.[8] Iran provides the weapons and uses advisers on the ground in Yemen and at least one spy ship anchored in the Red Sea to support its Houthi partners, who execute the attacks based on Iranian advice and intelligence.[9]

**Iranian state media claimed that the US-led Red Sea security coalition, Operation Prosperity Guardian, is collapsing.**[10] An Iranian state Arabic-language media outlet claimed that France, Spain, and Italy's decision to operate outside of Operation Prosperity Guardian was evidence that they and other countries in the coalition are unwilling to be the "aggressor" in the Red Sea to protect Israeli economic interests.[11] The outlet reiterated the Houthi's false claim that its fighters only target ships en route to Israel. Recent Houthi attacks have targeted many commercial ships not traveling to Israel. US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin announced the establishment of Operation Prosperity Guardian on December 18 as a multinational security force to address security challenges in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden following Houthi attacks threatening freedom of navigation.[12] Austin reported that the coalition is composed of the United Kingdom, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles, and Spain.[13] Italy and France released separate statements announcing that their forces would operate independently in the Red Sea to secure freedom of navigation and would not operate under Operation Prosperity Guardian.[14] Spanish officials said separately that their forces would only operate under a NATO- or EU-led operations.[15]

# Iranian-sponsored Attacks in the Middle East as of December 24, 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.

**Multiple Israeli sources told Israeli media that Egypt presented a three-stage ceasefire and hostage-for-prisoner exchange deal to Israel and Hamas.**[16] The first phase of the deal would include Hamas releasing 40 women, the elderly, and sick men in exchange for a two-to-three week pause in fighting. The second phase would include the release of female Israeli soldiers and dead hostages and discussion on the “day after” the war in the Gaza Strip.[17] The third phase would include the release of Israeli men and soldiers in return for the release of Palestinian fighters from Israeli prisons and the withdrawal of the IDF from the Gaza Strip.

Senior Israeli officials told an Israeli journalist that the Egyptian proposal was not ready and “preliminary” but that the presentation of the proposal was “positive.”[18] One official added that Israel is “considering” the plan, but another official added that it is “difficult to see” how Israel could agree to the plan’s third stage.[19] The official added that the plan’s first stage is nearly identical to the hostage exchange plan that Mossad Director David Barnea proposed to Qatar on December 18, which called for the release of forty Israeli hostages in exchange for at least a weeklong pause in fighting.[20] A senior Israeli official told the journalist that Israeli officials are not sure if Hamas would agree to the plan. Hamas said on December 23 that it will not discuss any prisoner exchange until there is a permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.[21] A separate Israeli media outlet reported that Israel is prepared to execute the plan’s first stage, but that the second two phases are unacceptable.[22]

**Informed sources told Saudi Arabia-based al Sharq that Hamas “expressed agreement” with a separate Egyptian initiative that seeks to form a “technocratic” Palestinian government after the war.**[23] Al Sharq reported on December 24 that Egypt presented the concept to unspecified Palestinian factions. The initiative notably does not contain a provision to disarm or disband Hamas as a governing body or a military force based on the details reported publicly. Israel’s stated objective for the war is the destruction of Hamas’ military and governing capacity. Al Sharq reported that Hamas seeks to hold its Israeli hostages as leverage to encourage Israel to end the war. A Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) delegation traveled to Cairo on December 24, to discuss hostage-for-prisoner exchanges with Egypt, meaning that PIJ would likely be involved in any the Egyptian initiative to end the war and form a “technocratic” government.[24] A PIJ official told Reuters that its talks in Cairo would “center on ‘ways to end’” the Israeli ground operation into the Gaza Strip. The official added that PIJ would not release hostages for prisoners until Israel agrees to a “ceasefire.”

**Israel announced that 15 of its soldiers were killed by enemy action across the Gaza Strip in several engagements on December 23 and 24.**[25] This rate of casualties makes December 23 and 24 one of the deadliest two-day periods for the IDF since the war began.[26] The IDF has said that 154 of its soldiers have died since the ground operation into the Gaza Strip began.[27]

**Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated Israel’s war aims in response to criticism from his economy minister on December 24.** The minister said that it is “unacceptable that [Israel] would endanger [Israeli] soldiers” by sending troops into uncleared areas without preparatory bombardments.[28] Netanyahu responded that the IDF makes its decisions based on the context on the ground. He also reiterated that Israel “will fight to the end” and that “this will be a prolonged war” aimed at freeing hostages and “eliminating Hamas.”[29]

**The Israeli Army Radio’s military correspondent reported on December 24 that Hamas is implementing lessons learned in the fight against the IDF to improve its ability to defend against IDF operations.** The correspondent said that Hamas is now executing “guerrilla warfare.” He said that Hamas is learning “how the IDF works and what its weak points are.”[30] The correspondent said that Hamas learned that the IDF uses unarmored vehicles to travel down some roads that Israeli forces believe are safe and that the Hamas has begun to target these unarmored vehicles.[31] He added that the IDF is forced to prioritize “strategic tunnels” due to the large number of Hamas tunnels, which allows Hamas to take advantage of other small tunnel shafts to mount attacks on IDF units.[32]

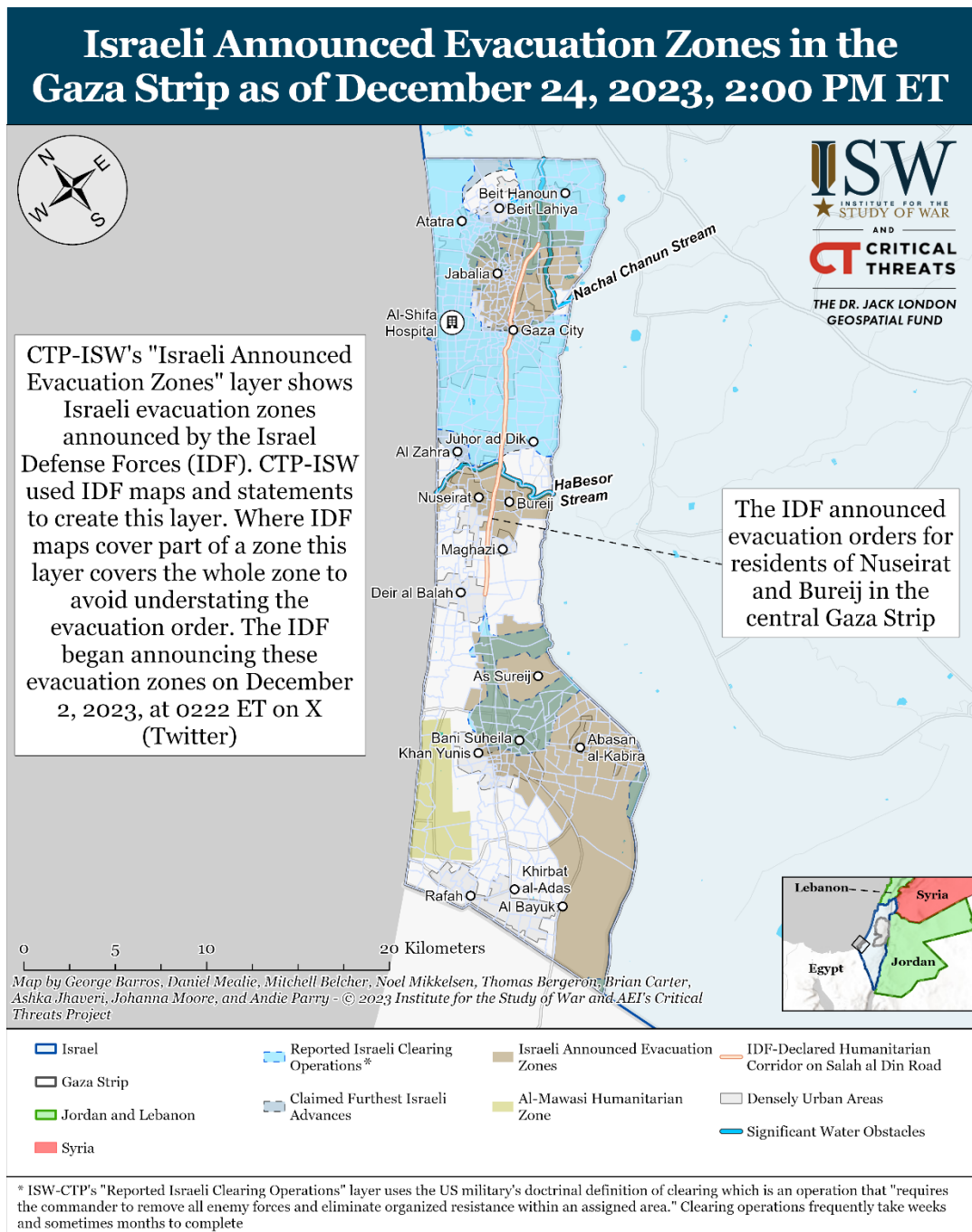
**Palestinian militias continued trying to defend against IDF clearing operations in Jabalia on December 24.** The al Qassem Brigades—the militant wing of Hamas—said that they engaged advancing Israeli forces with thermobaric rockets and anti-tank rockets between an unspecified “military camp” and Jabalia City.[33] The National Resistance Brigades—the militant wing of X—said that its forces were defending against IDF advances in Jabalia City.[34] The al Qassem Brigades also claimed two attacks in al Qasaib neighborhood in Jabalia, including a combined

operation with the al Quds Brigades—the militant wing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ).[35] The IDF's 460<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat Team reported on December 24 that it killed seven Hamas fighters and destroyed four Hamas observation posts in Jabalia.[36]

Palestinian militias continued to attack Israeli forces behind the Israeli forward line of advance in Zaytoun on December 24. The al Quds Brigades claimed that it fired two rocket propelled grenades and detonated an anti-tank sticky grenade targeting Israeli vehicles in Zaytoun.[37]

The al Qassem Brigades also attacked Israeli infantry conducting clearing operations near Juhor ad Dik on December 24.[38] It claimed that the attack killed six Israeli soldiers but provided no supporting evidence.

**Israeli forces continued clearing operations in Khan Younis on December 24.** Israeli forces captured a weapons and explosives cache in Khan Younis on December 24.[39] The al Quds Brigades shelled advancing Israeli forces east of Khan Younis.[40] The Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades—the militant wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—said that it attacked Israeli forces advancing east of Khan Younis.[41]



# Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of December 24, 2023, 2:00 PM ET

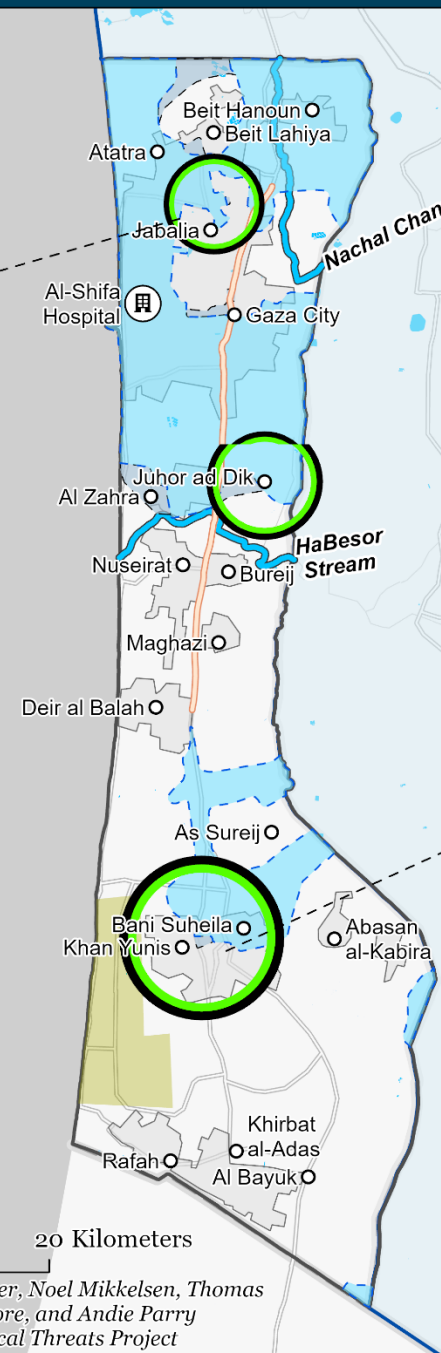


Palestinian militias continued to attempt to defend against IDF clearing operations in Jabalia

Israel announced that 15 of its soldiers were killed by enemy action across the Gaza Strip in several engagements on December 23 and 24

The Israeli Army Radio's military correspondent reported that Hamas is implementing lessons learned in the fight against the IDF to improve its ability to defend against IDF operations

Israeli forces continued clearing operations in Khan Yunis



Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry  
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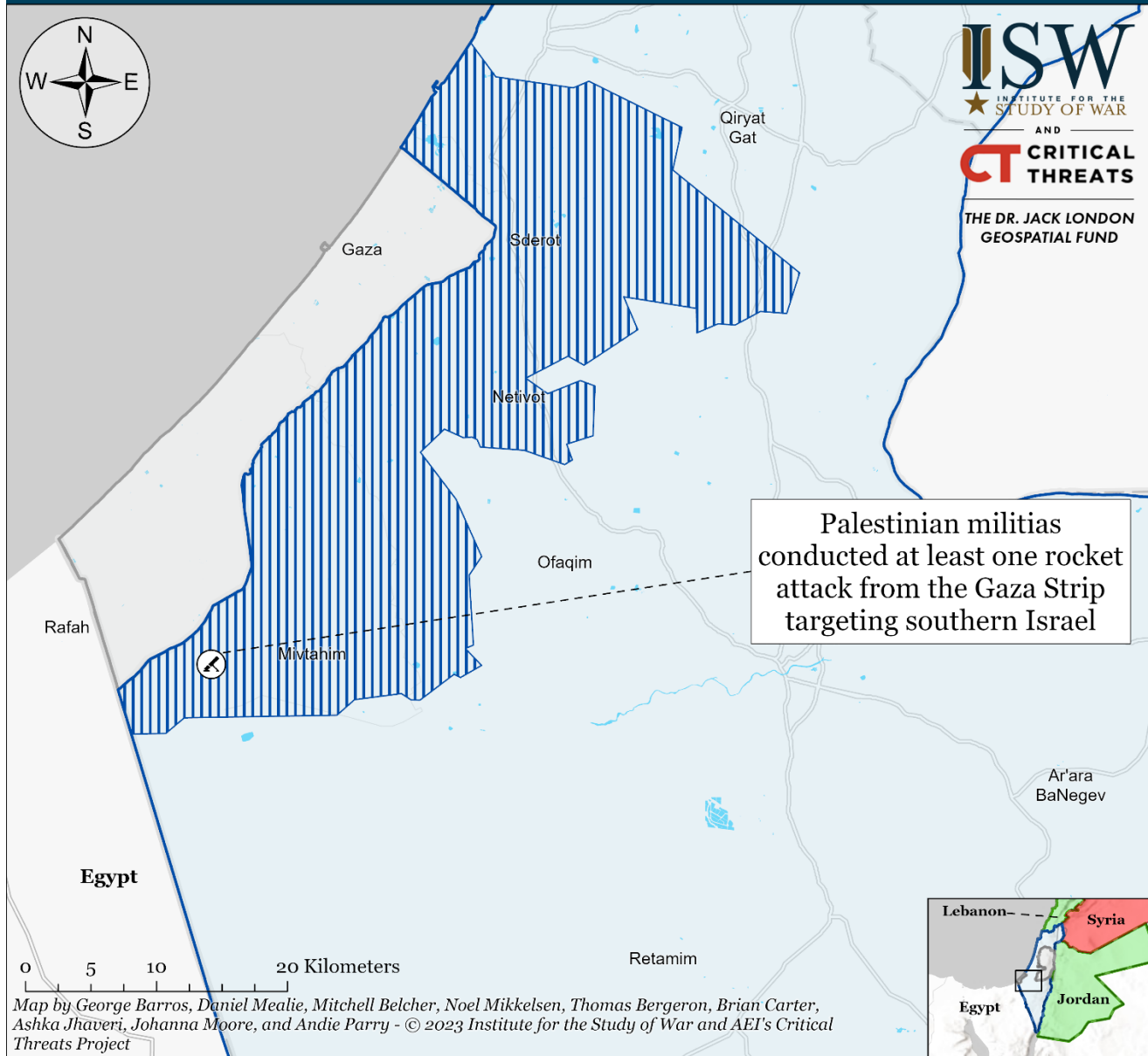


Israel	Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*	Significant Water Obstacles
Gaza Strip	Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances	Densely Urban Areas
Jordan and Lebanon	Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours	Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
Syria		IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Salah al Din Road

\* 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

**Palestinian militias conducted at least one rocket attack from the Gaza Strip targeting southern Israel on December 24.** The al Quds Brigades claimed that it shelled Sufa using mortars on December 24.[42] Palestinian media said that rocket fire targeting two other areas in southern Israel causing sirens to sound off.[43] CTP-ISW could not verify launches or impacts elsewhere in southern Israel, and no Palestinian militias claimed the attacks.

## Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of December 24, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



- Israel
- Israeli Closed Military Zone
- Gaza Strip and West Bank
- Jordan and Lebanon
- ⚡ Mortar Attacks
- Syria

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

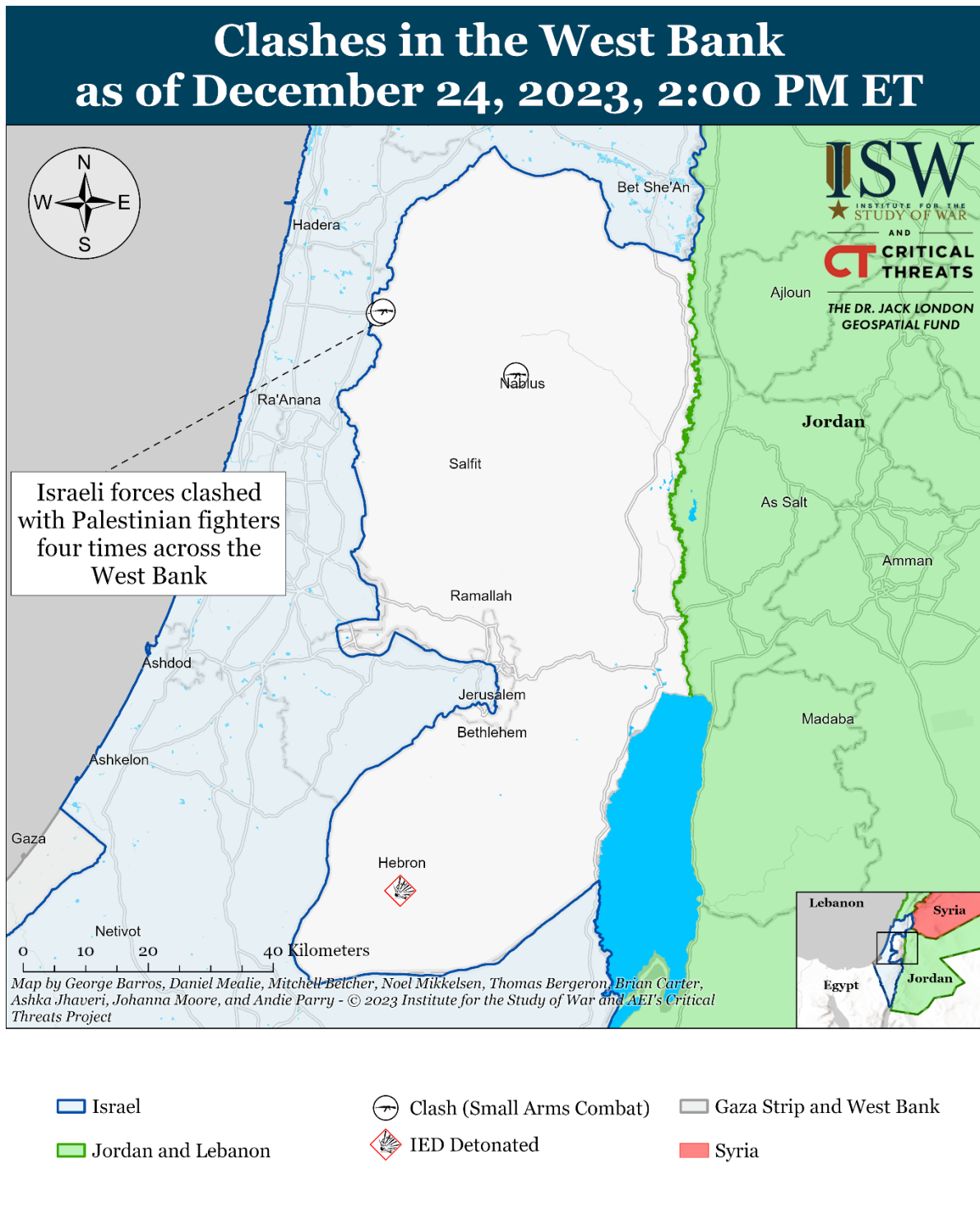


## West Bank

### Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

**Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters four times across the West Bank overnight on December 24.**[44] Palestinian fighters blocked roads with burning tires and targeted Israeli forces with multiple improvised explosive devices (IED) in Tulkarm and Tulkarm refugee camp.[45] Nablus locals posted footage of heavy fire exchanges between Israeli forces and Palestinian fighters.[46]

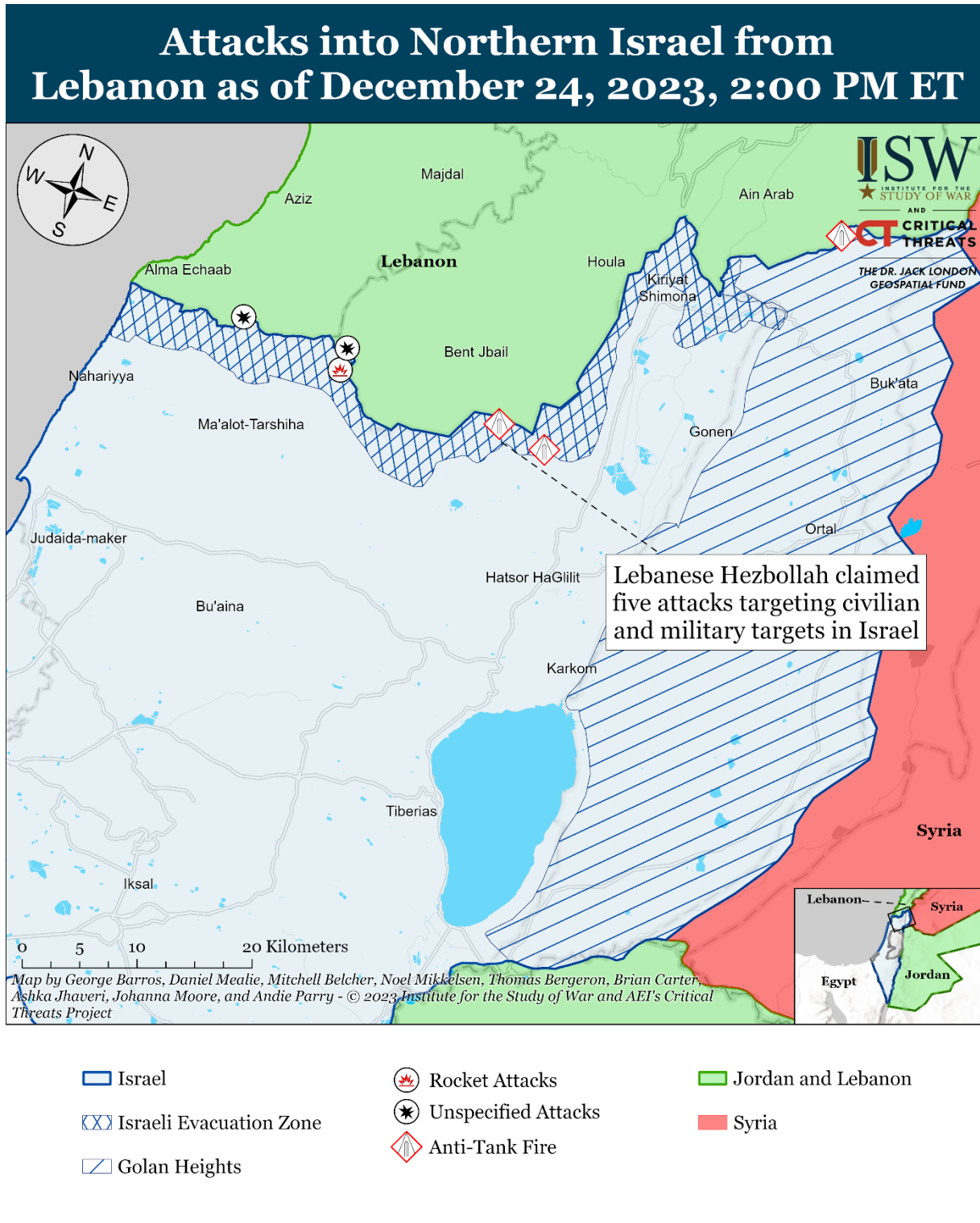


*This map is not an exhaustive depiction of clashes and demonstrations in the West Bank.*

**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

**Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah (LH), conducted six attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel on December 24. [47] LH claimed five attacks targeting civilian and military targets in Israel. [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 Pentagon confirmed that Iran conducted the one-way drone attack on the Israeli-linked *Chem Pluto* off the coast of India on December 23.**<sup>[49]</sup> CTP-ISW previously assessed that the attack was likely part of Iran and the Axis of Resistance's efforts to signal their capability and willingness to attack maritime targets beyond just the Persian Gulf and Red Sea.<sup>[50]</sup>

**Iranian Foreign Affairs Ministry Senior Advisor Ali Asghar Khaji discussed the Israel-Hamas war in a meeting with Russian Foreign Ministry Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process Vladimir Safronkov in Tehran on December 24.**<sup>[51]</sup> Khaji and Safronkov discussed "political ways" to end the Israeli ground operation in the Gaza Strip, implement an immediate ceasefire, and provide humanitarian aid to Gazans.

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[1] <https://thehill.com/policy/international/4375697-houthis-fire-missiles-at-ships-in-red-sea-pentagon/#:~:text=Yemen's%20Houthi%20rebels%20fired%20two,were%20hit%20by%20the%20missiles.>

[2] <https://twitter.com/Alsakaniali/status/1738775814450114960?s=20>

[3] <https://twitter.com/CENTCOM/status/1738719550122975698>

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[7] <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/pivot-to-offense-how-iran-is-adapting-for-modern-conflict-and-warfare/>

[8] <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/iran-involved-red-sea-attacks-white-house-claim/>; <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2023/12/19/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-karine-jean-pierre-and-nsc-coordinator-for-strategic-communications-john-kirby-34/>; <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/3605010/houthi-attacks-on-commercial-shipping-in-international-water-continue/>; <https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-allies-mull-naval-task-force-to-protect-shipping-in-red-sea-after-houthi-attacks/>

[9] <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/yemens-houthis-and-the-expansion-of-irans-axis-of-resistance/>

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[11] <https://www.alalam dot>

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[14] <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-red-sea-taskforce-gets-limited-backing-some-allies-2023-12-20/>

[15] <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-red-sea-taskforce-gets-limited-backing-some-allies-2023-12-20/>

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[32] [https://x.com/Doron\\_Kadosh/status/1738835744100122935?s=20](https://x.com/Doron_Kadosh/status/1738835744100122935?s=20)  
[33] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1027>  
[34] [https://t.me/kataeb\\_moqawma/4009](https://t.me/kataeb_moqawma/4009)  
[35] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1032>; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1029>; <https://t.me/sarayaps/17049>  
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[37] <https://t.me/sarayaps/17045>  
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[39] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1738818395259253078?s=20>  
[40] <https://t.me/sarayaps/17046>; <https://t.me/sarayaps/17039>  
[41] <https://t.me/kataebabuali/10559>  
[42] <https://t.me/sarayaps/17044>  
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[47] [https://t.me/C\\_Military1/42456](https://t.me/C_Military1/42456)  
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