

# Iran Update, December 30, 2023

Annika Ganzeveld, Ashka Jhaveri, Andie Parry, Amin Soltani, Peter Mills, and Nicholas Carl  
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](#).*

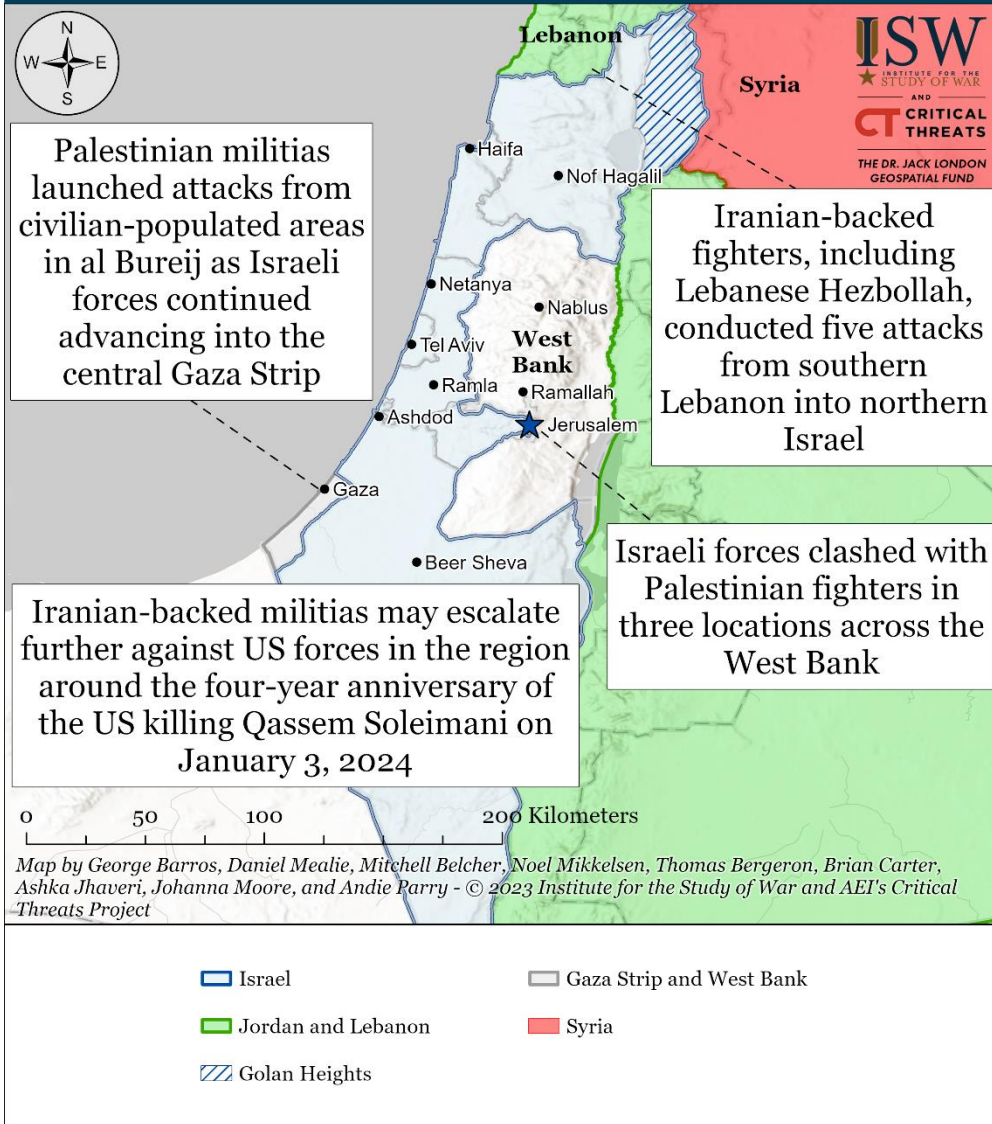
*Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are 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. Palestinian militias continued to defend against Israeli clearing operations in Daraj and Tuffah neighborhoods of Gaza City. Israeli forces continued executing tasks consistent with holding operations in some areas of Gaza City. Israeli forces continued clearing operations in Beit Lahiya and Sheikh Radwan in the northern Gaza Strip.
2. Palestinian militias are launching attacks from civilian-populated areas of al Bureij as Israeli forces advance clearing operations in the Central Governorate. Palestinian militias claimed several attacks on Israeli forces north and east of al Bureij, which is consistent with CTP-ISW's observation that the IDF appears to be isolating Hamas' Bureij Battalion and other Palestinian militias there before reducing them.
3. The IDF continued to make ground advances in and around Khan Younis. At least five Palestinian militias attempted to defend against Israeli advances into Khan Younis. Palestinian militia fighters attacked Israeli forces south of Khan Younis.
4. Hamas and PFLP officials messaged a unified and positive position on the Egyptian peace proposal and accused Israel of spreading disinformation about the negotiations.
5. Palestinian fighters conducted at least two indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel.
6. Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters in three locations across the West Bank.
7. Iranian-backed fighters, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted five attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel.
8. The Axis of Resistance may escalate further against US forces in the region around the four-year anniversary of the US killing Qassem Soleimani on January 3, 2024. The IRGC Quds Force is engaging with senior Iranian-backed Iraqi militia and political leaders likely to discuss their military and political campaign to expel US forces.
9. Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani ordered the opening of Celebration Square in Baghdad's Green Zone for New Year's Eve.
10. The Islamic Resistance of Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed responsibility for three attacks targeting US positions in Iraq and Syria.
11. The Shia Coordination Framework—a loose coalition of Iranian-backed political parties—is conducting a series of political maneuvers to try to increase its political influence in Basra.
12. Israel was likely responsible for a series of airstrikes targeting Aleppo International Airport and Iranian and Iranian-backed targets in Albu Kamal, Syria, to interdict Iranian weapons shipments to Lebanese Hezbollah.
13. The Houthi military spokesperson warned the United States against “escalating” with the Houthis and rallying other nations to protect Israeli shipping.

# Israel-Hamas War as of December 30, 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.

### **Palestinian militias continued to defend against Israeli clearing operations in Daraj and Tuffah neighborhoods of Gaza City on December 30.**

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced that it was operating in Daraj and Tuffah on December 21.[1] Palestinian militias have since then claimed several attacks on Israeli forces attempting to clear the remaining areas in the northern Gaza Strip. The al Qassem Brigades—the militant wing of Hamas—published footage on December 29 of its fighters firing rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) at Israeli tanks from destroyed buildings in Darraj and Tuffah.[2] The al Quds Brigades—the militant wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)—fired tandem charged anti-tank rockets and RPGs at Israeli tanks and troop carriers as Israeli forces advanced into the neighborhoods.[3] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades—the self-proclaimed militant wing of Fatah—fired tandem charged anti-tank rockets and RPGs at an Israeli tank and bulldozer in Tuffah.[4]

### **Israeli forces continued executing tasks consistent with holding operations in some areas of Gaza City.**

CTP-ISW reported on December 20 that Israeli forces are transitioning from clearing operations to holding operations in some areas of the northern Gaza Strip.[5] Violence decreases during a hold phase but is not absent, as the

holding force seeks the complete destruction of the enemy force.[6] Palestinian attacks in these areas demonstrate that the militias have retained some forces capable of targeting Israeli operations.

- Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters on December 30 in Sheikh Ijlin neighborhood for the first time since mid-November.[7] Israeli forces initially advanced toward the neighborhood in southern Gaza City in mid-November.[8] The al Qassem Brigades conducted several attacks, including a complex attack in which its fighters detonated improvised explosive devices (IED) in the path of two Israeli vehicles and subsequently engaged Israeli ground forces.[9]
- Israeli forces identified Palestinian fighters operating near them in Shujaiya, according to an IDF report on December 30.[10] The IDF stated that it established “operational control” of Shujaiya on December 21 after dismantling Hamas’ battalion there.[11]
- Israeli forces engaged in a multi-hour battle with Palestinian fighters in Gaza City, according to an IDF report on December 30.[12] Israeli air forces killed more than 15 Palestinian fighters in less than three hours.[13] Israeli ground forces engaged Palestinian fighters following the airstrikes.[14]

The al Qassem Brigades and al Quds Brigades conducted a combined operation firing mortars and rockets at an Israeli combat outpost southeast of Zaytoun neighborhood in Gaza City on December 30.[15] The Hamas Zaytoun Battalion commander is one of the three remaining commanders in the Gaza City Brigade, who held their current positions before the war began, according to Israeli reports on December 21.[16]

**Israeli forces continued clearing operations in Beit Lahiya and Sheikh Radwan in the northern Gaza Strip.** Israeli forces destroyed two Hamas-affiliated buildings in Beit Lahiya and found a large quantity of weapons, including explosive devices.[17] The IDF identified two Palestinian fighters observing Israeli forces from a building and directed tank fire at their position.[18] The al Qassem Brigades claimed that its fighters clashed with Israeli special operations forces and detonated a Shawaz explosively formed penetrator (EFP) targeting an Israeli tank in Sheikh Radwan on December 30.[19] Palestinian militias have claimed nearly daily attacks in Sheikh Radwan neighborhood since the humanitarian pause expired on December 1, suggesting that it is one of the remaining areas with significant Palestinian militia defensive capabilities in the northern Gaza Strip.

**Palestinian militias are launching attacks from civilian-populated areas of al Bureij as Israeli forces advance clearing operations in the Central Governorate.** Israeli forces received intelligence on December 28 that Hamas fighters were hiding inside a school where civilians were sheltering in southern al Bureij.[20] Palestinian fighters fired RPGs and small arms at Israeli forces while hiding behind women and children inside the school, according to the IDF.[21] Israeli forces raided the school and cleared the building of Palestinian fighters.[22] US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said that Hamas continues to use civilians as human shields, which intentionally puts these civilians in harm's way, to protect Hamas’ military infrastructure and weapons.[23] Israeli forces in a separate instance encountered Hamas fighters, who launched attacks from civilian sites in al Bureij.[24]

Palestinian militias claimed several attacks on Israeli forces north and east of al Bureij, which is consistent with CTP-ISW's observation that the IDF appears to be isolating Hamas’ Bureij Battalion and other Palestinian militias there before reducing them.[25] The al Qassem Brigades conducted several attacks on Israeli forces in the area, including claiming to use a Shawaz EFP to target an Israeli tank north of al Bureij.[26] Israeli forces face other Palestinian militias in the central Gaza Strip. The al Nasser Salah al Din Brigades—the militant wing of the Popular Resistance Committees—claimed that its fighters clashed with Israeli forces north of al Bureij.[27] The al Quds Brigades detonated an unspecified explosive device targeting an Israeli military vehicle east of al Bureij.[28] The Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades—the militant wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)—claimed to fire tandem-charge anti-tank rockets at Israeli forces east of Bureij as well.[29]

**The IDF continued to make ground advances in and around Khan Younis on December 30.** The IDF said it began ground maneuvers deeper into southern Khan Younis on December 30, a day after it said it was expanding operations there.[30] The IDF 98th Division conducted around 50 airstrikes as part of shaping operations to enable ground force maneuvers.[31] Shaping operations conducted through airstrikes change the operational environment in urban areas to favor Israeli clearing operations on the ground.[32] The 7th Brigade Combat Team raided a Hamas military intelligence headquarters in central Khan Younis as part of the clearing operations.[33] Israeli forces also found an al Quds Brigades operations room inside the Hamas compound.[34] This raid could degrade the defensive capabilities of Hamas’ Khan Younis Battalion and al Quds Brigades forces in Khan Younis. Israeli forces separately clashed with Palestinian fighters as Israeli air support struck fighters, weapons manufacturing sites, and a Hamas stronghold in Khan Younis.[35] The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said on December 30 that intensified clashes in Khan Younis and Deir al Balah have caused at least 100,000 internally displaced people to arrive in Rafah in recent days.[36]

At least five Palestinian militias attempted to defend against Israeli advances into Khan Younis on December 30. The al Qassem Brigades conducted several attacks on Israeli armor and dismounted infantry on December 30, including sophisticated house-borne IED and EFP attacks.[37] Fighters from the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and the Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades fired anti-tank shells and small arms at Israeli armor and dismounted infantry on the advancing line in Khan Younis.[38] National Resistance Brigades fighters clashed with Israeli forces in central Khan Younis.[39] The al Quds Brigades mortared Israeli positions in north and east of Khan Younis.[40]

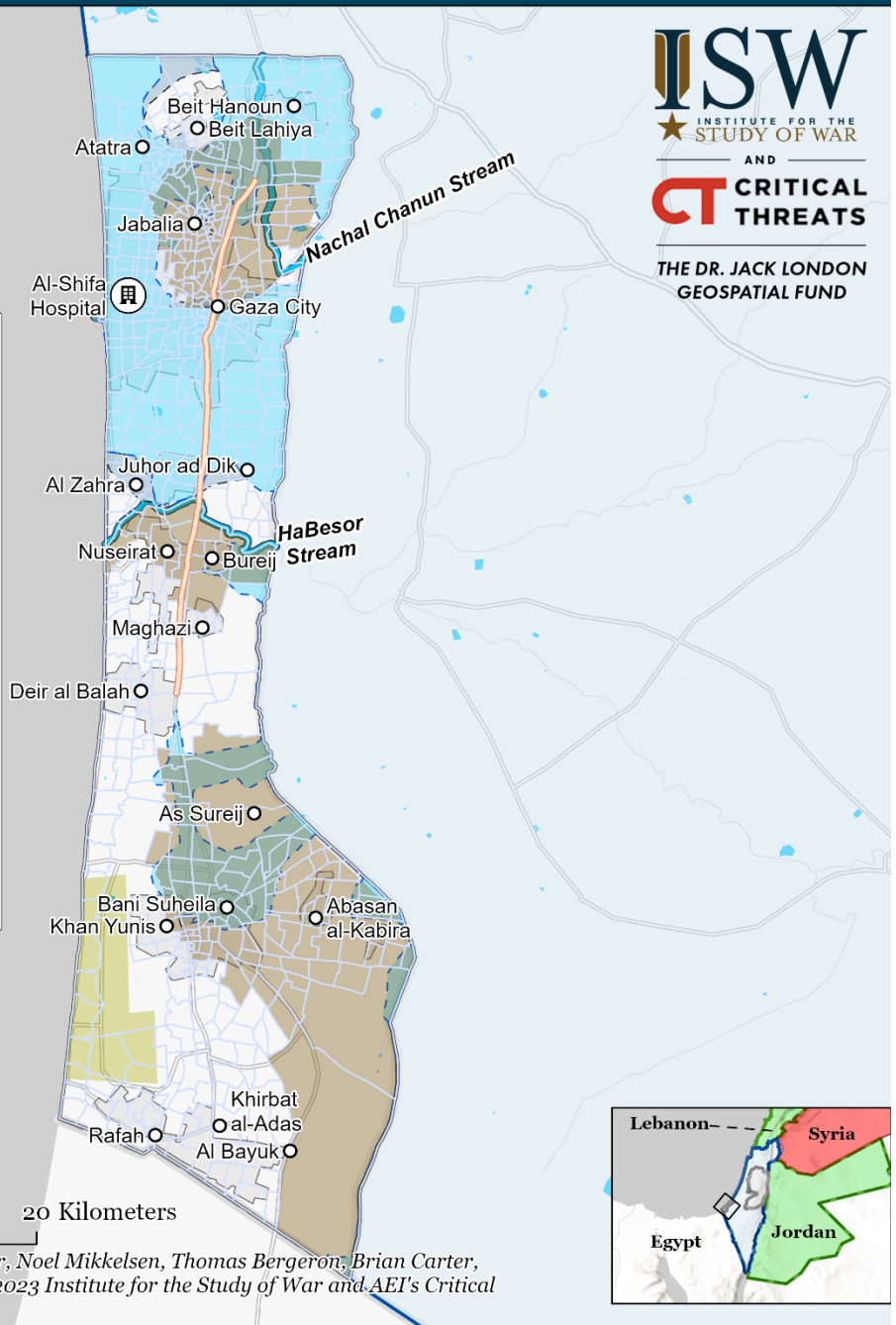
Palestinian militia fighters attacked Israeli forces south of Khan Younis on December 30. The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, al Qassem Brigades, and National Resistance Brigades mortared Israeli forces in Khuzaa, southeast of Khan Younis.[41] The IDF began clearing operations in Khuzaa on December 27.[42] The al Qassem Brigades fired an anti-tank shell at Israeli armor in Khuzaa.[43] The al Qassem Brigades and al Quds Brigades each mortared Israeli forces east of Rafah as well.[44]  **Hamas and PFLP officials messaged a unified and positive position on the Egyptian peace proposal and accused Israel of spreading disinformation about the negotiations on December 30.** Israeli media said that Hamas had "agreed in principle" to the release of further hostages in exchange for a month-long pause in fighting, in contrast to Hamas' previous position requiring the complete cessation of the conflict.[45] Hamas political officials abroad, such as Osama Hamdan and Hossam Badran, and senior PFLP official Maher Mezher rebuked the claim from Israeli media.[46] Hamdan reiterated that Hamas will only release the Israeli hostages once Israel stops its operation in the Gaza Strip.[47] Badran said that Hamas is discussing all peace proposals with the various factions but that hostages will only be released after the war ends.[48] Mezher said that the Palestinian political factions will deliver an amended proposal to Egypt in the coming days after they met to discuss and revise the Egyptian peace deal proposal on December 27.[49]. Mezher said that the Egyptian proposal is "suitable to be a cornerstone" of a deal.[50] The Israeli security cabinet has indicated that it will not seriously consider the Egyptian three-phase peace plan, as the Egyptian plan would prevent Israel from achieving its stated war aims and is therefore tantamount to a defeat for Israel.[51] The Egyptian proposal would form a transitional government in the Gaza Strip that would include "various Palestinian factions, including Hamas." [52] Mezher and Hamdan claimed that Israel leaked the story to harm the united Palestinian front against the war and mislead Israelis about the release of hostages due to internal political pressure.[53] The Palestinian leaderships' recent comments are consistent with CTP-ISW's assessment that both Hamas' political leader in Gaza Yahya Sinwar and Hamas' external political leaders seek to use their Israeli hostages as leverage to maintain their influence in negotiations.[54]

**Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu reaffirmed his commitment to pursuing his stated objectives in the war against Hamas and his preparedness to fight for many months on December 30.** Netanyahu held a press conference and declared that "the war will continue for many more months." [55] He also reiterated that Israel would fight until the elimination of Hamas and the release of all hostages.[56] He stated the IDF is employing new methods in the northern, central, and southern Gaza Strip.[57] Netanyahu had further clarified his war objectives of destroying Hamas, demilitarizing Gaza, and deradicalizing "Palestinian society" in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed on December 26.[58]

# Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip as of December 30, 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)



0 5 10 20 Kilometers

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 30, 2023, 2:00 PM ET

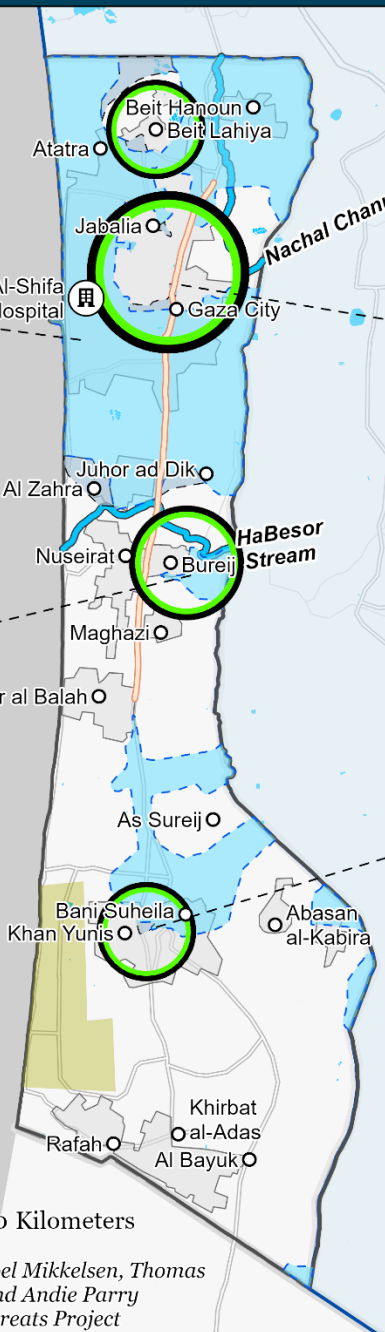


Palestinian fighters clashed with Israeli forces in Sheikh Ijlin neighborhood for the first time since mid-November

Palestinian militias are launching attacks from civilian-populated areas in al Bureij as Israeli forces advance clearing operations into the central Gaza Strip

Israeli forces continued executing tasks consistent with holding operations in some areas around Gaza City

Israeli ground forces expanded their clearing operations around southern Khan Yունis after Israeli air support conducted shaping operations



0 5 10 20 Kilometers

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

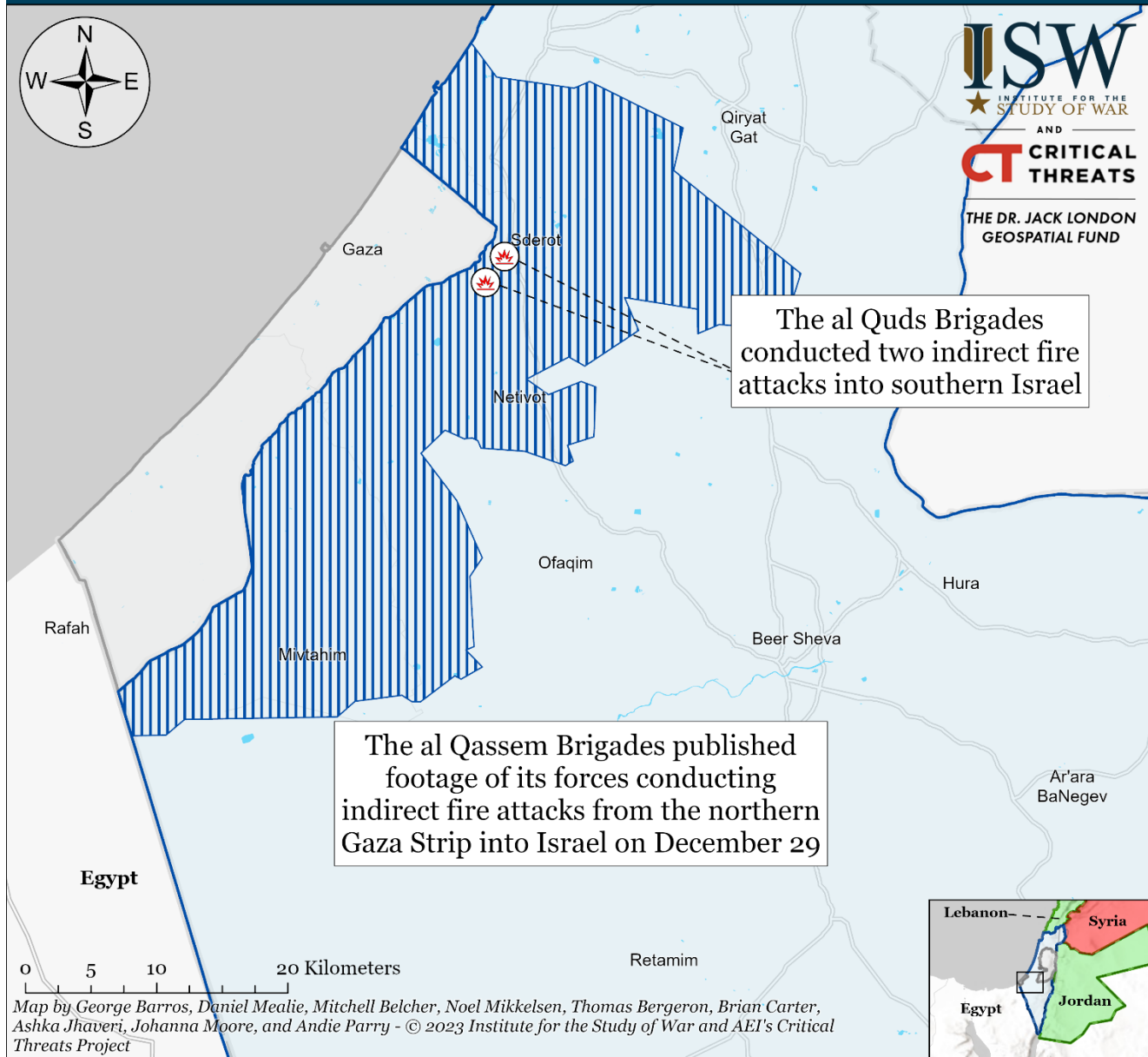


- Israel
- Gaza Strip
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations\*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Significant Water Obstacles
- Densely Urban Areas
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Salah al 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 fighters conducted at least two indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel on December 30.** The al Quds Brigades claimed two rocket attacks targeting southern Israel on December 30.[59] The al Qassem Brigades published footage of its fighters firing approximately ten rockets into unspecified areas of Israel on December 29.[60]

# Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of December 30, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



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
- Israeli Closed Military Zone
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Rocket Attacks
- Gaza Strip and West Bank
- Syria

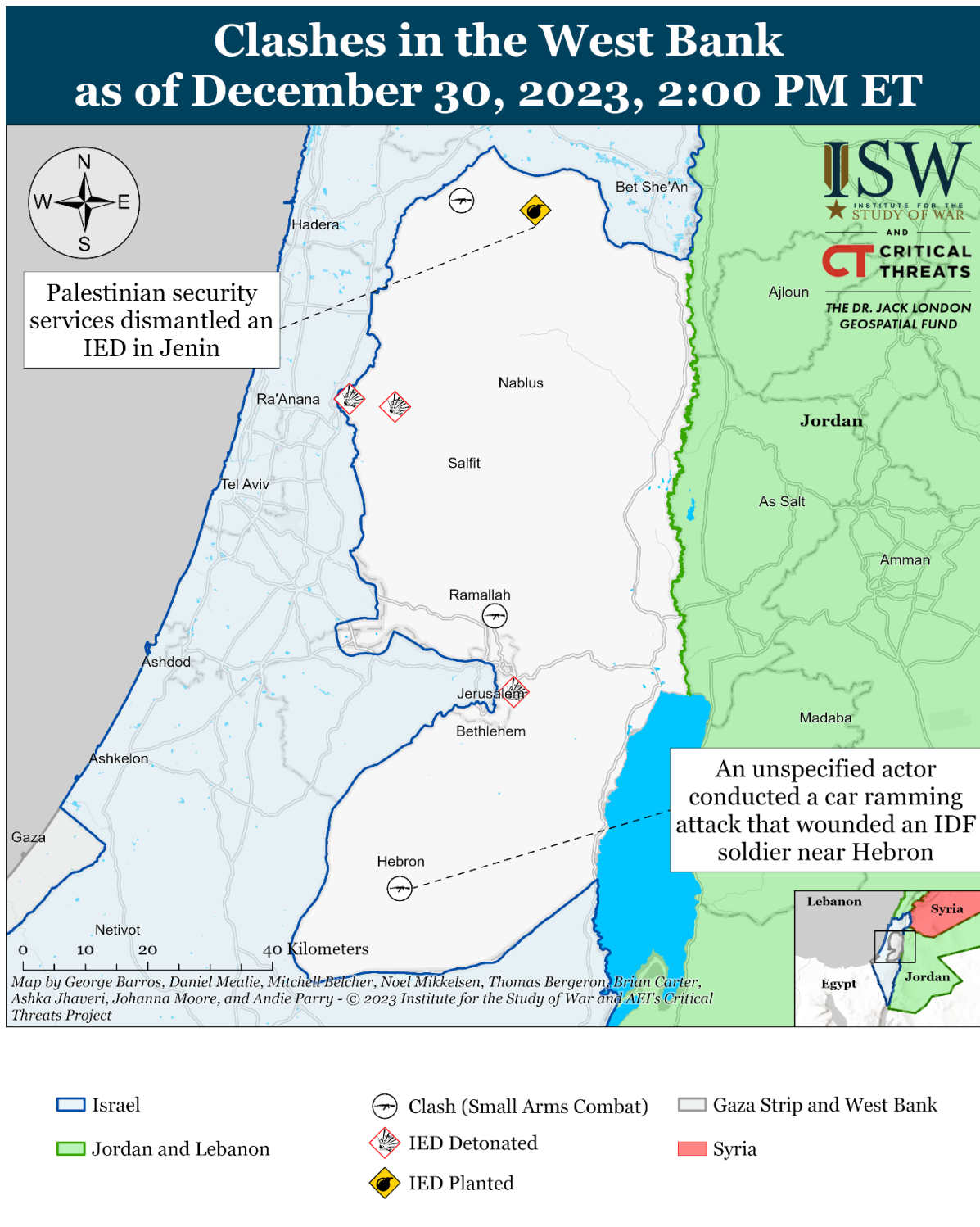
*Recorded reports of rocket attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.*

## 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 in three locations across the West Bank on December 30. The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades claimed that it detonated an IED against an unspecified target in Azzun, east of Qalqilya.[61] Hamas praised a car-ramming attack that injured an IDF soldier near Hebron.[62] Palestinian security forces dismantled planted IEDs in Jenin on December 30.[63] Israeli forces conducted raids to arrest wanted Palestinians near Ramallah.[64]



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



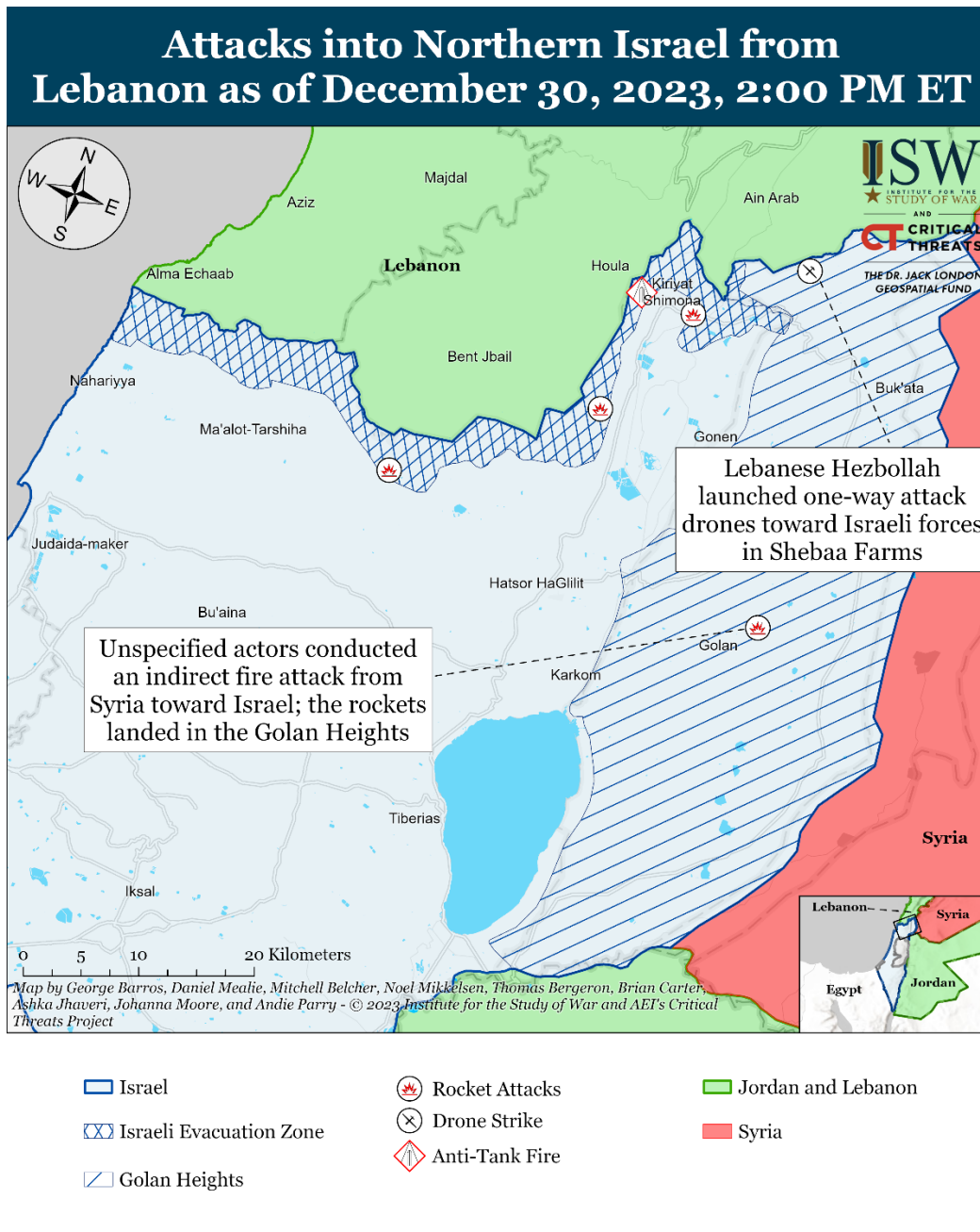
## Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

### 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 fighters, including Lebanese Hezbollah (LH), conducted five attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel on December 30.** LH fired rockets and anti-tank guided missiles toward three Israeli border positions.[65] LH also claimed that it attacked an Israeli military position in Shebaa Farms with one-way attack drones.[66] Unspecified fighters separately launched rockets toward Yiftah on December 30.[67]

Israeli politicians continue to emphasize that LH must withdraw from Lebanon's border with Israel. Israeli war cabinet member and former Defense Minister Benny Gantz stated in a call with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz that Israel cannot tolerate the threat that LH poses and that LH must withdraw from the border for the sake of regional stability.[68] The chairman of Israeli political party Israel Beitenu and former Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman separately called for Israel to control southern Lebanon up to the Litani River until the Lebanese government can exercise its sovereignty over the area.[69]



## **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 Axis of Resistance may escalate further against US forces in the region around the four-year anniversary of the US killing Qassem Soleimani on January 3, 2024.** The United States killed Soleimani and his top Iraqi lieutenant, Abu Mehdi al Muhandis, in an airstrike at the Baghdad International Airport in 2020.[70] Iranian leaders have vowed to expel US forces from the region as part of their revenge for the United States killing Soleimani.[71] Iranian-backed militias have conducted an abnormally high rate of attacks around the anniversary of Soleimani's and Muhandis' deaths ever year except for the anniversary in January 2023.[72] The absence of an Iranian-led escalation around January 2023 is unsurprising given that the Iranian regime was focused heavily on internal security in the aftermath of the Mahsa Amini protest movement at the time. Iranian proxy and partner militias have conducted a concerted attack campaign targeting US forces in Iraq and Syria in recent months as part of Tehran's effort to expel US forces, as CTP-ISW has reported extensively. The coincidence of this campaign with the anniversary of Soleimani's and Muhandis' deaths presents an increased risk to American servicemembers in the Middle East during this period.

The IRGC Quds Force is engaging with senior Iranian-backed Iraqi militia and political leaders likely to discuss their military and political campaign to expel US forces. The Iranian Embassy in Baghdad organized a ceremony to honor Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mehdi al Muhandis on December 30.[73] The following senior Iranian and Iranian-backed Iraqi actors attended the ceremony:

- Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Mohammad Kazem al-e Sadegh[74]
- Former Kataib Hezbollah Secretary General and current Poplar Mobilization Forces (PMF) Chief of Staff Abdul Aziz al Muhammadawi[75]
- PMF Chairman Faleh al Fayyadh[76]
- Former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki[77]

The presence of al-e Sadegh is noteworthy given that he is a senior IRGC Quds Force officer. Iranian leaders have long appointed such officers as ambassador to Iraq, highlighting the degree to which the IRGC Quds Force controls and influences Iranian policy toward Iraq. These officers who dual hat as diplomats to Iraq serve as key liaisons between Iranian and Iraqi military and political leaders.

The presence of Mohammadawi and Fayyadh is noteworthy given their influential roles over Iranian-backed militias in Iraq. The PMF is an Iraqi security service containing numerous Iranian-backed Shia militias.[78] Several of these militias, such as Kataib Hezbollah and Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba, are members of the Islamic Resistance of Iraq which is a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias. The Islamic Resistance of Iraq has conducted almost daily attacks on US forces in Iraq and Syria in recent weeks as part of their campaign to expel US forces.

IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani appeared to speak on behalf of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias in a speech on December 29. Ghaani warned that militias will “put aside their considerations” and “respond” to the United States if the United States continues its “irrational behavior” in Iraq.[79] Ghaani was likely referring to the self-defense strikes that the United States has conducted on Iranian-backed Iraqi militias when he referred to “irrational behavior.” Ghaani ignored in this statement that the United States has a legitimate right to self-defense as it operates in Iraq to fight ISIS at the invitation of the Iraqi federal government. Ghaani's comment is especially noteworthy given that the IRGC Quds Force—and he as its commander—directs, manages, and supports the Iraqi Shia militias that have been conducting the attack campaign to expel US forces. The IRGC Quds Forces provide military equipment, funding, and training to its proxies and partners throughout the region to support Iran's pursuit of its strategic objectives, which include expelling the United States from the region.[80] Ghaani's remark belies repeated claims by Iranian officials that “resistance groups” in the Middle East act independently.[81]

Iranian-backed political actors continued to call for the removal of US forces from Iraq in statements on December 30. Iraqi militia leaders and politicians have increased their calls for the expulsion of US forces since the United States conducted self-defense strikes on three Kataib Hezbollah facilities in Hillah, Babil Province, on December 25.

- Nouri al Maliki claimed that US forces in Iraq have transformed “from advisory forces into killers” and that the Iraqi people will not accept the presence of foreign forces in Iraq during a speech at the Iranian Embassy in Baghdad.[82] Maliki's claims echo similar ones from other Iranian-backed Iraqi actors that the presence of US forces in Iraq threatens Iraqi security and stability.[83] US advisory forces are currently deployed in Iraq

for counter-ISIS operations at the invitation of the Iraqi government and provide planning, operational, intelligence, logistical, and fire support to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).[84] CTP-ISW previously assessed that an Iraqi decision to expel US forces will very likely create space for ISIS to rapidly resurge in Syria within 12 to 24 months and then threaten Iraq.[85] The ISF still faces significant deficiencies in logistics, intelligence, and fire support that inhibit its ability to defeat ISIS alone.[86]

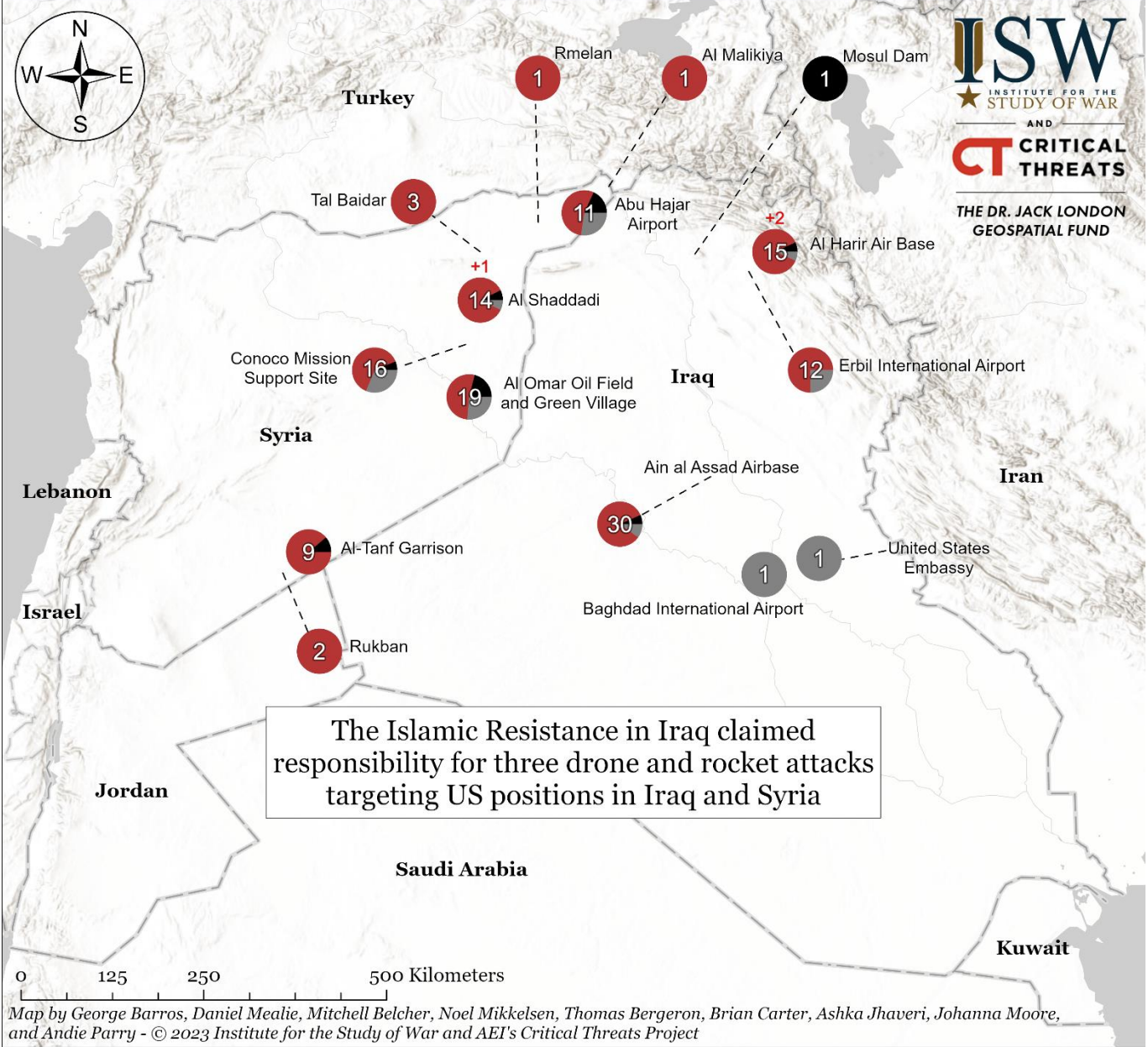
- A member of Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Asaib Ahl al Haq’s political wing, Ali Turki, stated that “dirty American hands” cannot shed the blood of the PMF and ISF.[87] Turki called on the Iraqi federal government to expedite the expulsion of US forces from Iraq.
- A member of the Iranian-backed Badr Organization’s political wing, Faleh al Khazali, separately stated that the presence of US forces in Iraq is “unjustified” because of the presence of 1.6 million Iraqi security personnel in the country.[88] Other Iranian-backed Iraqi politicians, including Mohammad Shia Sudani, have similarly cited Iraqi forces’ “increased capabilities” as justification for the removal of US forces.[89]

**Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani ordered the opening of Celebration Square in Baghdad’s Green Zone for New Year’s Eve.[90]** Sudani ordered that the gates of the Green Zone, where the US Embassy and other government and highly sensitive facilities are located, remain open for an unspecified amount of time after midnight on December 31. PIJ and Hamas-affiliated Quds News Network separately called for demonstrations in front of US embassies across the world on New Year’s Eve to demand an end to “Israeli aggression” in the Gaza Strip.[91]

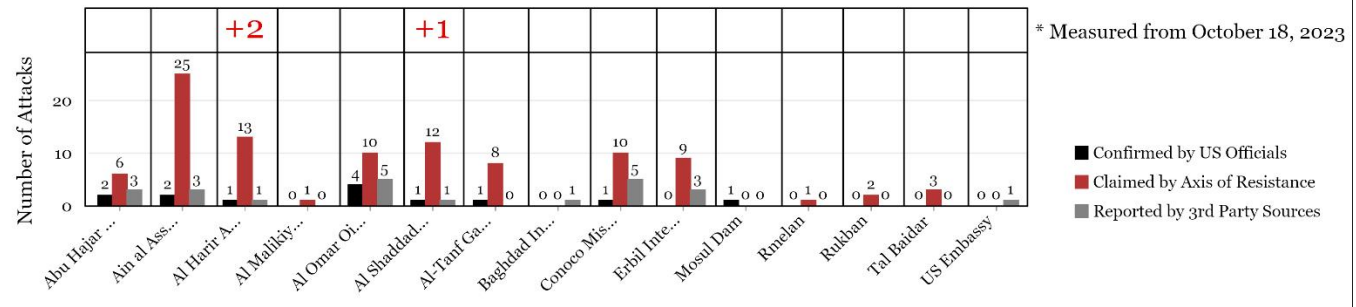
**The Islamic Resistance of Iraq claimed responsibility for three attacks targeting US positions in Iraq and Syria on December 29 and 30.[92]** The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed a rocket attack targeting US forces at al Shaddadi, Hasakah Province, Syria. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq also claimed two separate one-way drone attacks targeting US forces at al Harir airbase in Erbil Province, Iraq.

**The Shia Coordination Framework—a loose coalition of Iranian-backed political parties—is conducting a series of political maneuvers to try to increase its political influence in Basra.** Basra is an important Shia stronghold in southern Iraq. Current Basra Governor Asaad al Eidani’s political party, the Design Alliance, won 12 out of 23 seats in the recent provincial council elections.[93] Informed sources told an independent Iraqi news outlet that members of the Shia Coordination Framework are lobbying the Iraqi judiciary to rule that a majority of seats in Basra requires 13—not 12—seats.[94] Such a decision would deprive Eidani’s party of a majority. Iranian-backed Iraqi actors have historically co-opted elements of the judiciary to politically benefit themselves and disadvantage opponents, especially in recent years.[95] The independent Iraqi outlet reported that the Shia Coordination Framework is suspicious of Eidani’s ties to rival Shia cleric Muqtada al Sadr. Sadr has previously praised Eidani and members of the Design Alliance.[96]

# Attacks against US Bases in the Middle East as of December 30, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



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THREATS  
THE DR. JACK LONDON  
GEOSPATIAL FUND



Note: The numbers placed inside the pie charts denote the total number of attacks. Locations that include an addition to its total number of attacks have red numbers above the bar graph and pie chart to represent new attacks against that location within the past 24 hours.

**Israel was likely responsible for a series of airstrikes targeting Aleppo International Airport and Iranian and Iranian-backed targets in Albu Kamal, Syria, on December 29-30 to interdict Iranian weapons shipments to LH.** Western and Israeli media reported and several social media accounts circulated reports of the airstrikes.[97] An unspecified American military official denied to Western media that the United States conducted any self-defense strikes.[98] The Syrian Defense Ministry claimed that the airstrike at Aleppo damaged the airport.[99] Israel has historically conducted airstrikes on major Syrian airports to prevent Iranian weapons deliveries to proxy and partner militias in Syria and Lebanon.[100] CTP-ISW has previously written on how the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) uses Iranian regime-affiliated airliners to transport military equipment and personnel to the Levant.[101] The likely Israeli airstrikes at Albu Kamal reportedly hit IRGC and Iranian-backed targets, including weapons depots and truck convoys as they crossed from Iraq into Syria. Those airstrikes killed several Iranian-backed militants, according to social media claims and Western and Israeli media reports. Israeli media reported that the airstrikes at Albu Kamal killed four LH members who were members of a unit responsible for transferring military technologies and weapons from Iran to Lebanon.[102] An Israeli social media account reported that Israel also targeted an IRGC Quds Force unit with similar responsibilities in the same strikes.[103]

The airstrikes follow reports that Israel has targeted IRGC and IRGC-affiliated actors that are trying to prepare LH for a wider conflict with Israel in recent weeks. Israeli media reported that an Israeli airstrike on the Damascus International Airport on December 28 was meant to interdict Iranian weapons transfers to LH.[104] An Israeli airstrike on the IRGC military headquarters in Sayyidah Zainab, Syria, on December 25 killed a senior IRGC commander who oversaw Iranian materiel support to LH.[105] Israeli media further reported that Iran has accelerated its weapons transfers to LH in anticipation of a wider war with Israel.[106]

The IDF stated that unspecified actors fired two rockets from Syria toward northern Israel following the most recent airstrikes on Albu Kumal.[107] This attack is unsurprising given that unspecified actors have repeatedly conducted small-scale indirect fire attacks into Israel immediately in response to Israeli airstrikes in Syria since the Israel-Hamas war began.

**The Houthi military spokesperson warned the United States against “escalating” with the Houthis and rallying other nations to protect Israeli shipping on December 29.** Brigadier General Yahya Sarea emphasized the Houthis’ defensive readiness and commitment to the Palestinian cause, which is consistent with prior Houthi rhetoric.[108] The Houthis have conducted an anti-shipping attack campaign around the Red Sea in recent weeks to disrupt commercial shipping to Israel and demonstrate both the willingness and capability of the Axis of Resistance to disrupt maritime traffic around strategic maritime chokepoints.[109] The United States announced Operation Prosperity Guardian on December 18 to counter Houthi attacks on international shipping.[110]

**Senior Iranian military and political officials attended a commemoration ceremony for IRGC Brigadier General Razi Mousavi, whom Israel killed in an airstrike in Syria, on December 30.**[111] The Iranian regime previously held a funeral ceremony for Mousavi on December 28.[112] Western and anti-regime media have reported that Mousavi headed IRGC Quds Force Unit 2250, which manages Iranian weapons shipments to LH and Iranian-backed militias in Syria.[113] Many high-ranking IRGC officials attended the most recent commemoration ceremony, including:

- IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami;
- IRGC Aerospace Force Commander Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajji Zadeh;
- IRGC Ground Forces Commander Brigadier General Mohammad Pak Pour;
- IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani; and
- IRGC Quds Force Deputy Commander Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Fallah Zadeh.

Other notable attendees included Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Interior Minister and former IRGC Quds Force officer Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi, Law Enforcement Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan, and former IRGC commanders Major General Mohammad Ali “Aziz” Jafari and Major General Mohsen Rezaei. The presence of such senior Iranian military and political officials at Mousavi’s commemoration ceremony and funeral highlights his prominence in the regime and its regional project.

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