

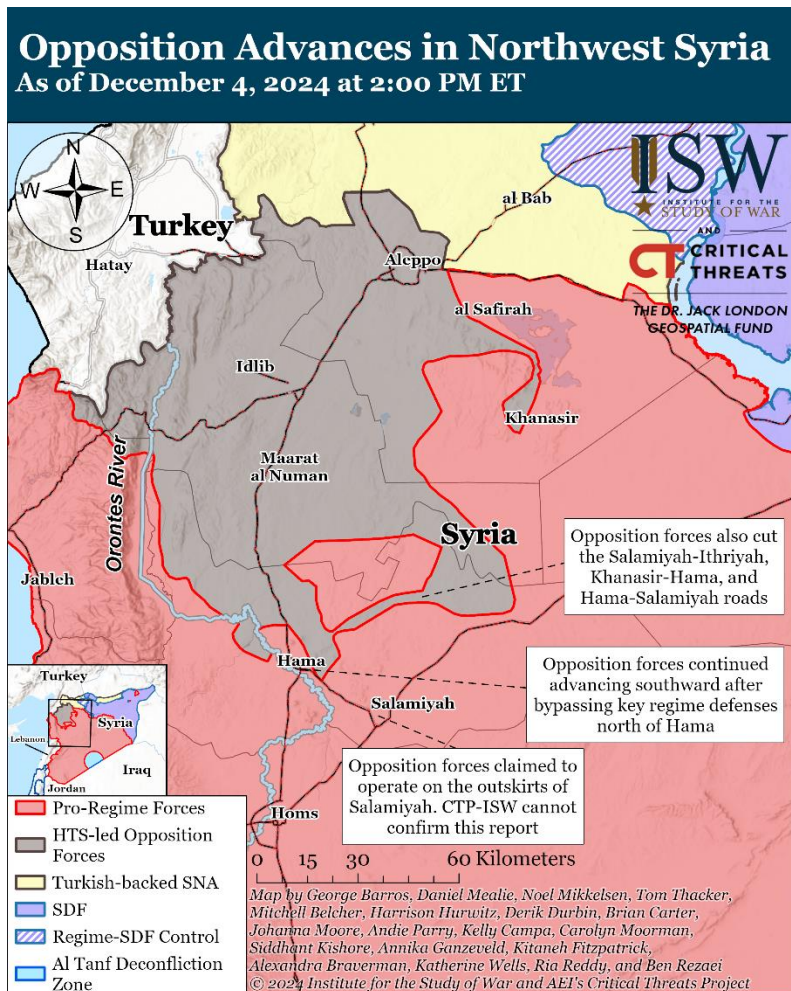
# Iran Update

## Iran Update, December 4, 2024

Andie Parry, Johanna Moore, Siddhant Kishore, Alexandra Braverman, Annika Ganzeveld, Katherine Wells, Ria Reddy, and Brian Carter

Information Cutoff: 2:00pm ET

**Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS)–aligned opposition groups are likely prioritizing the capture of Hama City.** Fateh Mubin—a joint operations room led by HTS—is conducting a campaign that appears to have several different subordinate objectives. Fateh Mubin's main effort is focused around the city itself. The main effort aims to isolate Hama City, presumably before assaulting it. The group is supporting its main effort by interdicting regime reinforcements coming from eastern Syria in order to prevent any relief force from reaching the city.

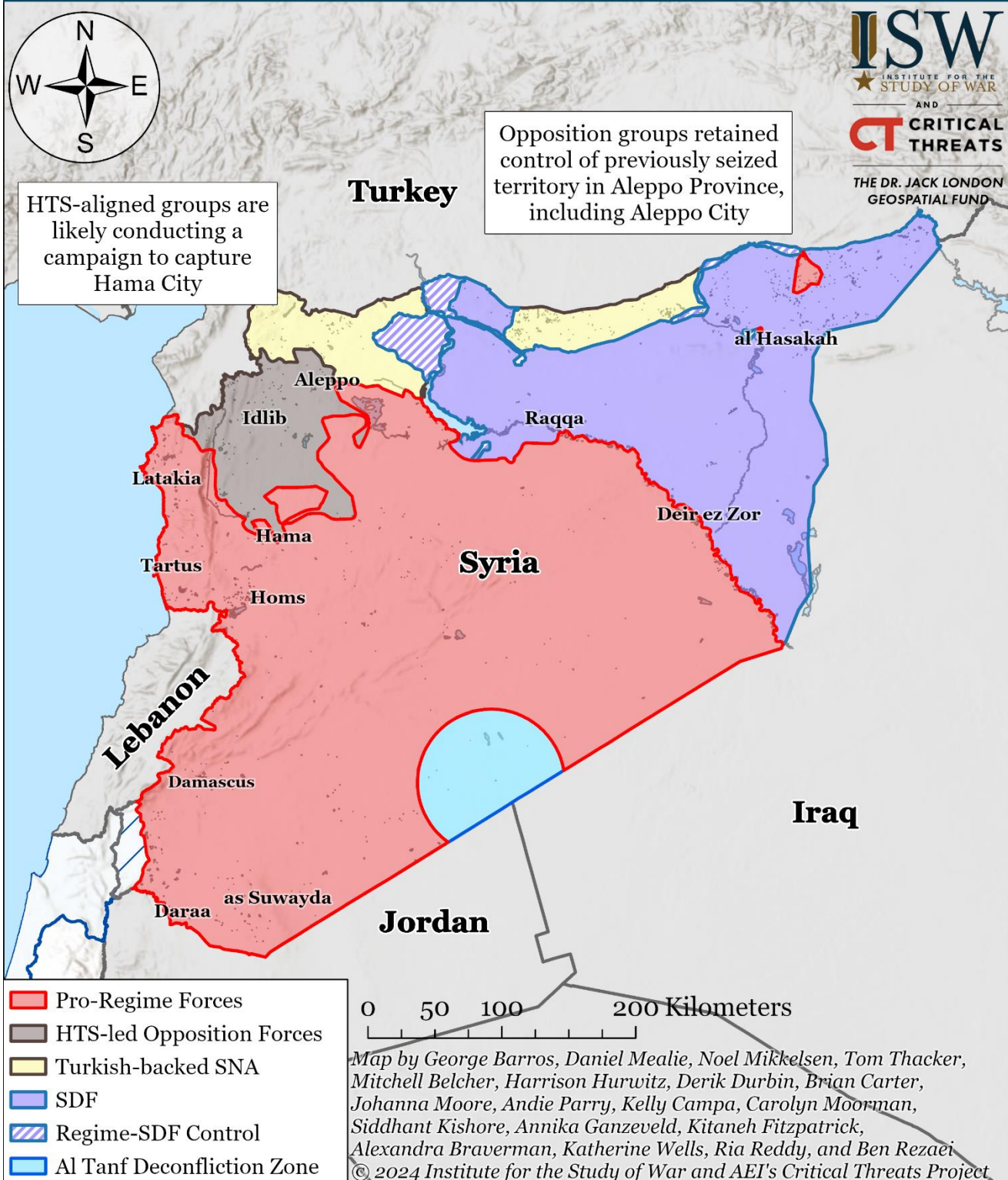


The main effort bypassed key regime defensive positions north of the city and proceeded to cut ground lines of communication (GLOCs) traveling into the city from the east and southeast, thus isolating the city from the east. A second force to the west may be seeking to capture Hama Military Airport. A commander directs their unit to bypass an obstacle in order to maintain the momentum of an operation.[1] The regime has positioned forces on Zain al Abidin Hill, north of the city, and Qomhana town, a key town northwest of the city.[2] The hill is a tactically advantageous position from which a defender has sweeping views northwards up the M5 Highway. Some opposition forces likely fixed these forces while the main western Hama and eastern Hama advances proceeded southwards. Opposition forces east of Hama had proceeded directly south along the M5 Highway before swinging east, bypassing the hill.[3] Opposition forces in the west attacked Qomhana while the remainder continued towards the Hama Military Airport.[4] An unspecified Fateh Mubin military source cited by al Quds al Araby stated that opposition forces plan to "encircle" the city of Hama, which is consistent with CTP-ISW's observation that opposition forces cut two major roads connecting Hama City to areas east of it.[5] Hama is not fully isolated, given major roads moving south.

**Fateh Mubin's supporting effort captured key ground lines of communication (GLOCs) connecting Hama City to eastern Syria likely in order to interdict resupply and reinforcements from the east.** Interdict is defined as a tactical mission task that "prevents, disrupts, or delays the enemy's use of an area or route ... [to] impact ... an enemy force's plans and ability to respond to friendly actions." [6] Opposition forces have captured SAA bases northeast of Hama and cut multiple roads far east of Hama to prevent or delay regime forces from reaching the battlefield in time to support regime forces in Hama.[7] Pro-Syrian regime sources claimed that the SAA has continued to send reinforcements to Hama City from Raqqa and Rusafa, which are connected to Hama by these roads, to counter the expected attack on the city.[8] Opposition forces' advance into towns surrounding Hama with little SAA resistance suggests that the supporting line of effort has had some success.

# Reported Control of Terrain in Syria

## As of December 4, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



**Opposition groups retained control of previously seized territory in Aleppo Province, including Aleppo City, on December 4.** Social media users posted footage of HTS leader Abu Mohammad al Julani visiting Aleppo Citadel on December 4, emphasizing the extent of control that opposition forces maintain in Aleppo City.[9]

**US Central Command (CENTCOM) conducted several self-defense airstrikes targeting weapons systems in Deir ez Zor Province, Syria, on December 3.**[10] The strikes targeted three truck-mounted Multiple Rocket Launchers, a T-64 tank, and an armored personnel carrier.[11] CENTCOM confirmed that unspecified fighters fired mortars toward US forces at Conoco Mission Support Site before the strikes.[12] The strikes occurred during a Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) offensive into seven regime-controlled villages on the left bank of the Euphrates River.[13] CTP-ISW has not yet observed lasting control-of-terrain changes on the left bank of the Euphrates River as a result of the SDF offensive.

**The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) reported on December 4 that it recovered the body of an Israeli hostage from an unspecified location in the Gaza Strip.**[14] The IDF said that Hamas fighters killed the hostage, Itay Svirski, in January 2024 and kept his body in the Gaza Strip.

**An IDF investigation revealed that Hamas fighters shot and killed six hostages in the Gaza Strip in early 2024.**[15] The IDF launched an investigation after recovering the bodies of six hostages and six Hamas fighters from a tunnel in Khan Younis in August 2024.[16] Hamas moved the hostages to the tunnel in January 2024.[17] The IDF conducted an airstrike that struck the tunnel in February 2024. The IDF clarified that it did not have any information on the presence of hostages there during the time of the airstrike, however.[18] The investigation found that the bodies had bullet wounds and assessed with high confidence that Hamas fighters shot and killed the hostages. The IDF could not clarify if the Hamas fighters shot and killed the hostages before or after the IDF struck the tunnel. The IDF investigation determined that if the hostages had been alive at the time of the airstrike, the collapse of the tunnel would have killed them by causing the hostages to suffocate. The forensic investigation revealed that the Hamas fighters likely suffocated to death inside the tunnel after the IDF airstrike.[19]

**Lebanese Hezbollah will likely try to reconstitute its forces despite significant Israeli degradation to the organization.** Reuters, citing a senior US official, a senior Israeli official, and US lawmakers, reported that Hezbollah has begun recruiting new fighters and trying to find new ways to rearm through domestic production and by smuggling materials through Syria in recent weeks.[20] It is unclear, however, if those efforts have slowed due to the Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire deal on November 26. US intelligence agencies assessed that Israel destroyed more than half of Hezbollah's weapons stockpile and killed "thousands" of Hezbollah fighters. CTP-ISW has previously assessed that Hezbollah will almost certainly try to reconstitute its forces despite Israel's victory in Lebanon.[21]

Hezbollah is likely unable to send its newly recruited fighters to Syria due to the severe losses it suffered in Lebanon and the requirements on the group to train its new fighters. Hezbollah may choose to send these fighters to Syria in the future if the group becomes concerned that it will lose its overland resupply route through Syria due to the Syrian Opposition offensive. Reuters reported that US officials are "concerned" about Hezbollah's access to Syria following the recent Syrian opposition offensive due to Hezbollah's previous use of Syria as a safe haven for fighters and a weapons transport corridor.[22] Hezbollah also historically maintained GLOCs in Syria.[23]

## Key Takeaways:

- **Hama Campaign:** Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS)-aligned opposition groups are likely prioritizing the capture of Hama City. The main effort bypassed key regime defensive positions north of the city and proceeded to cut ground lines of communication (GLOCs) traveling into the city from the east and southeast, thus isolating the city from the east. Fateh Mubin's supporting effort captured key GLOCs connecting Hama City to eastern Syria likely in order to interdict resupply and reinforcements from the east.
- **Eastern Syria:** US Central Command (CENTCOM) conducted several self-defense airstrikes targeting weapons systems in Deir ez Zor Province, Syria, on December 3.
- **Gaza Strip:** The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) reported on December 4 that it recovered the body of an Israeli hostage from an unspecified location in the Gaza Strip.
- **Hezbollah and Syria:** Lebanese Hezbollah will likely try to reconstitute its forces despite significant Israeli degradation to the organization. Hezbollah is likely unable to send its newly recruited fighters to Syria due to the severe losses it suffered in Lebanon and the requirements on the group to train its new fighters.

# Key Takeaways in the October 7 War

As of December 4, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



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The IDF recovered the body of an Israeli hostage from an unspecified location in the Gaza Strip

Lebanese Hezbollah will likely try to reconstitute its forces



Gaza Strip and West Bank Golan Heights

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  
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## **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 continued clearing operations in the northern Gaza Strip on December 4.** The IDF operated overnight on December 3 and 4 in Beit Lahia.[24] A Palestinian journalist reported that Gazans evacuated Beit Lahia amid IDF clearing operations there.[25] Geolocated images show Gazans evacuating Beit Lahia and moving south towards the Salah al Din Road.[26] The IDF started facilitating evacuations in Beit Lahia on November 6, when it began clearing operations there.[27] A Palestinian journalist reported gunfire from Israeli vehicles in the eastern Jabalia refugee camp.[28] The IDF reported that it destroyed militia infrastructure and killed several Palestinian fighters in Jabalia via ground and air operations during the past week.[29] The IDF also located an explosives manufacturing facility inside a residential building and separately confiscated dozens of weapons in Jabalia.

**Hamas claimed four attacks targeting the IDF in the northern Gaza Strip on December 4.[30]** Hamas fired a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) and detonated an improvised explosive device (IED) targeting an Israeli tank and an armored personnel carrier (APC) in Jabalia refugee camp. A Hamas sniper also fired at two Israeli soldiers in Jabalia refugee camp. Hamas also fired an RPG and detonated an IED targeting two Israeli tanks in Beit Lahia.

**The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) mortared Israeli forces along the Netzarim Corridor on December 4.[31]**

**The IDF continued operating in the central Gaza Strip on December 4.** IDF special operations forces raided a house in Deir al Balah and detained a Hamas intelligence operative on December 3, according to a Palestinian journalist.[32] A Palestinian journalist also reported gunfire from Israeli vehicles near Gaza City.[33] A PIJ sniper shot an Israeli soldier in eastern Gaza City.[34]

**Palestinian militias claimed two attacks targeting the IDF in the southern Gaza Strip on December 4.[35]** The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired rockets targeting Israeli forces at the Rafah border crossing.[36] PIJ mortared the IDF in eastern Rafah City.[37]

# Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

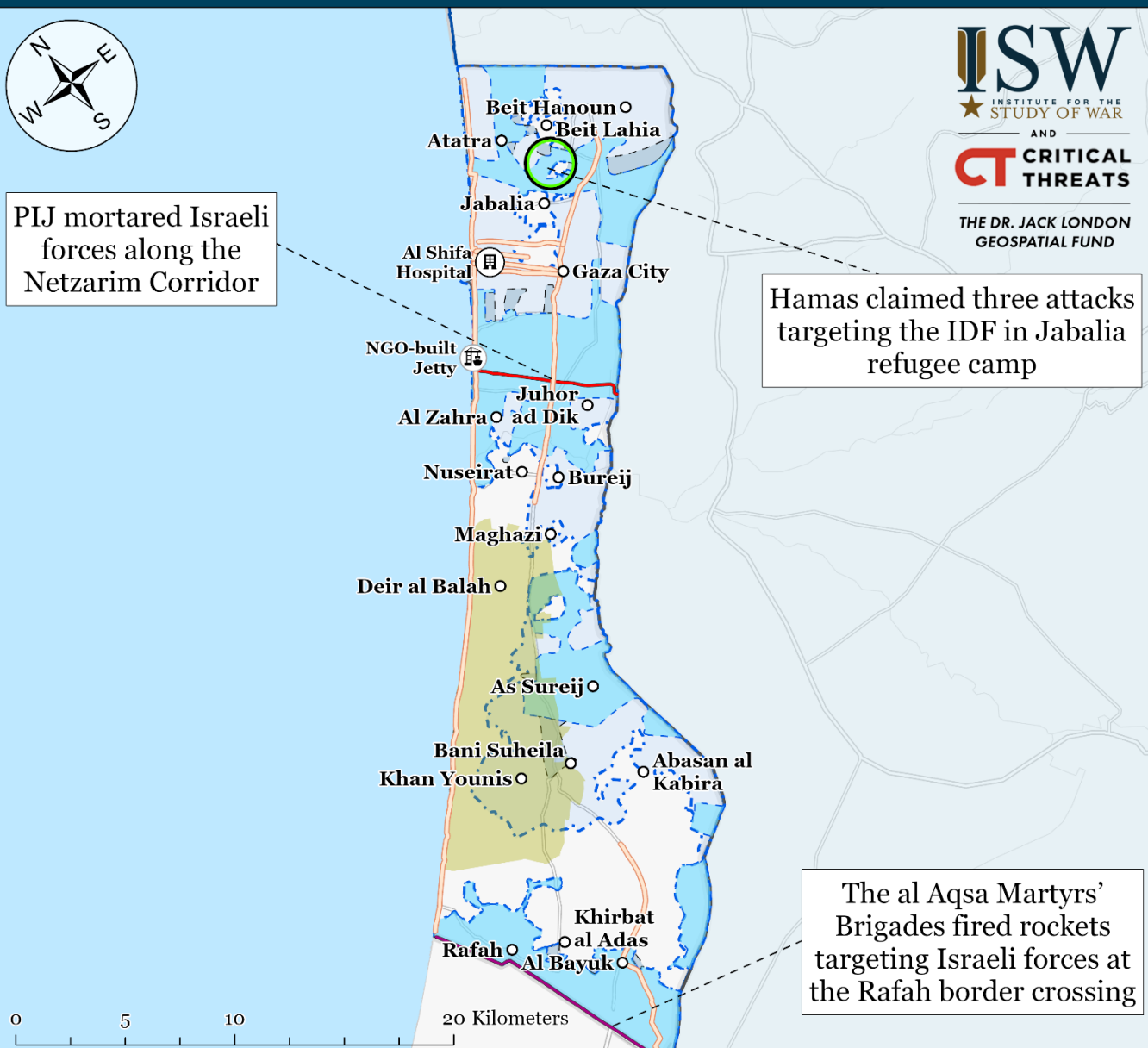
## As of December 4, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



PIJ mortared Israeli forces along the Netzarim Corridor

Hamas claimed three attacks targeting the IDF in Jabalia refugee camp

The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired rockets targeting Israeli forces at the Rafah border crossing



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



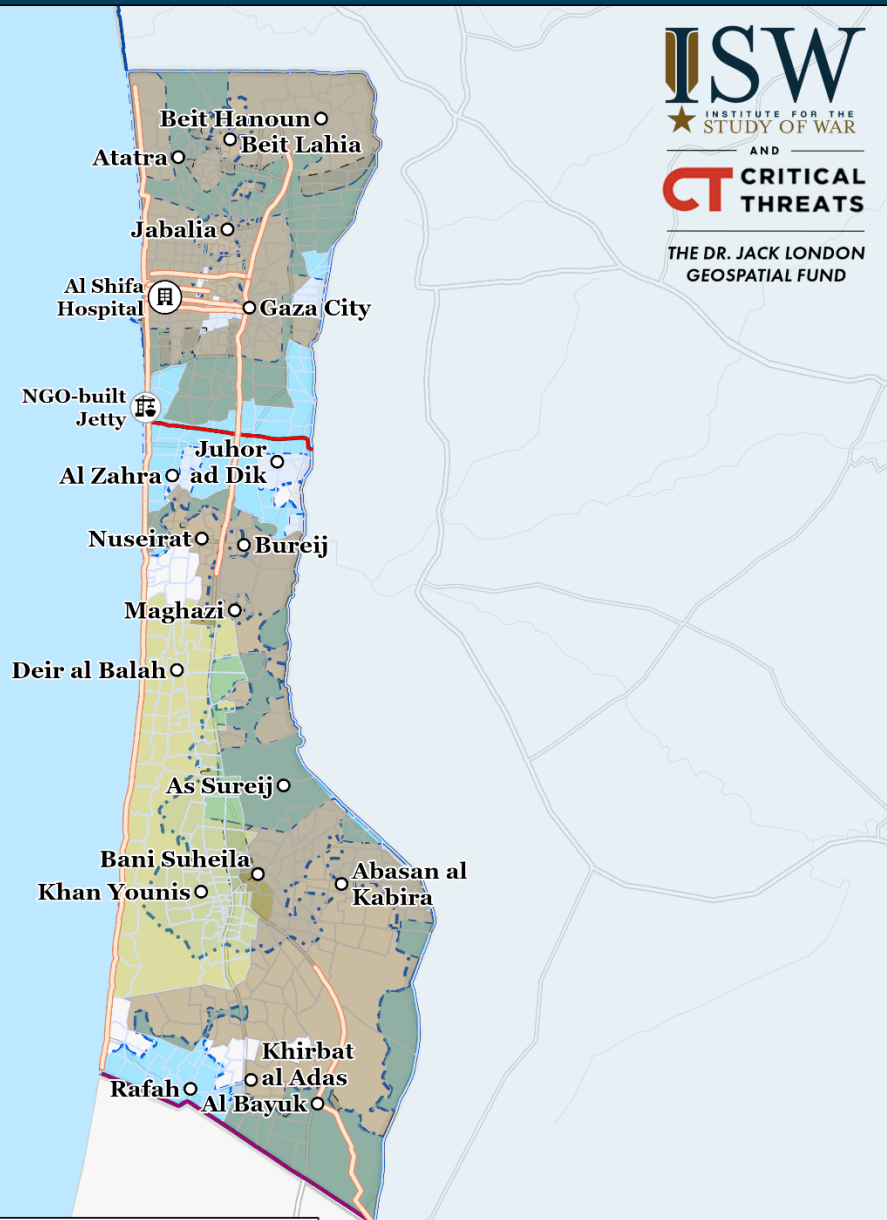
# Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip

## As of December 4, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



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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)



Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*	IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridors in Gaza
Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances	Netzarim Corridor
Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone	Philadelphi Corridor
Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones	

0 2.5 5 10 Kilometers

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  
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\* 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

**The Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) reported that 122 humanitarian aid trucks entered the Gaza Strip on December 3.[38]**

## **West Bank**

### **Axis of Resistance objectives:**

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

**Israeli settlers clashed with IDF forces that were demolishing an illegal outpost in Nablus Governorate on December 4.[39]** The settlers set fire to cars and assaulted Palestinians in neighboring villages including Hawara and Beit Furik.[40] Israeli forces detained at least eight settlers following the attack, though it is unclear if Israeli forces are still detaining the settlers.[41]

**Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz reversed his decision to suspend administrative detention for Israeli settlers in the West Bank on December 4 in response to the settler violence in the West Bank.[42]**

**Israeli forces arrested four Palestinians for throwing explosives at the Israeli settlement of Beit El near Ramallah.[43]**

## **Northern Israel and Lebanon**

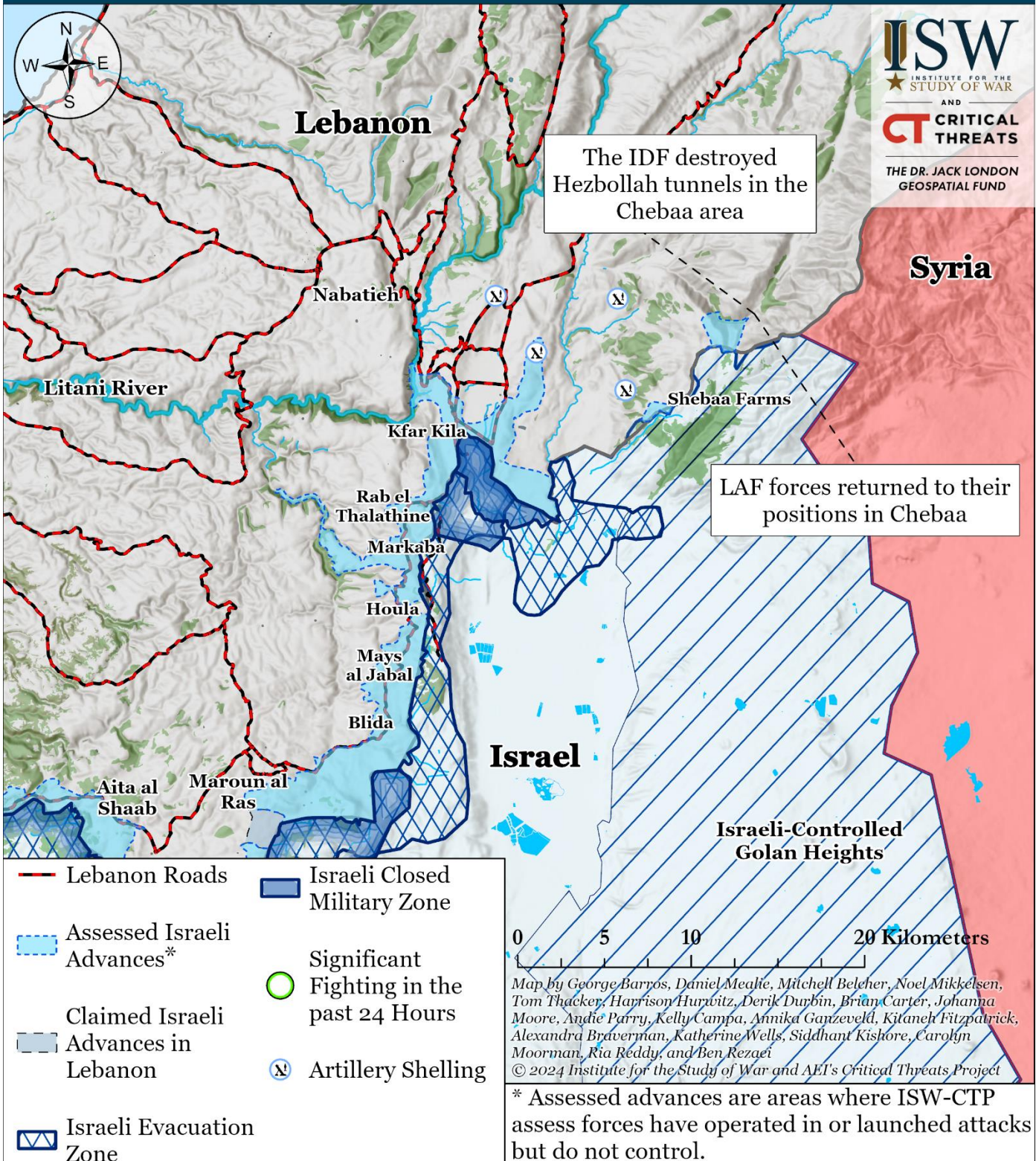
### **Lebanese Hezbollah objectives:**

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

**Geolocated images showed the IDF 810th Mountain Brigade (210th Division) conducting destroying tunnels in the Chebaa area.[44]** Israeli media reported on December 3 that the IDF 810th and 1st Infantry brigades and combat engineers demolished Hezbollah bunkers north of the Israeli border in the Chebaa area in recent weeks.[45] Israeli troops seized weapons in several underground sites and destroyed the underground infrastructure[46] Hezbollah fired two rockets at an IDF border position in the Israeli-controlled Shebaa Farms on December 2.[47]

**The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) continued to deploy to southern Lebanon on December 4.** Lebanese media reported that LAF soldiers returned to their positions in Chebaa, southeastern Lebanon, after withdrawing at the start of the IDF's ground invasion in early October.[48] Lebanese media separately published a video of an LAF convoy heading towards an unspecified area of southern Lebanon on December 4.[49] Lebanese Foreign Affairs Minister Abdallah Bou Habib said on November 26 that the LAF is prepared to deploy at least 5,000 troops to southern Lebanon.[50]

# Reported Israeli Operations in the Eastern Sector As of December 4, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET

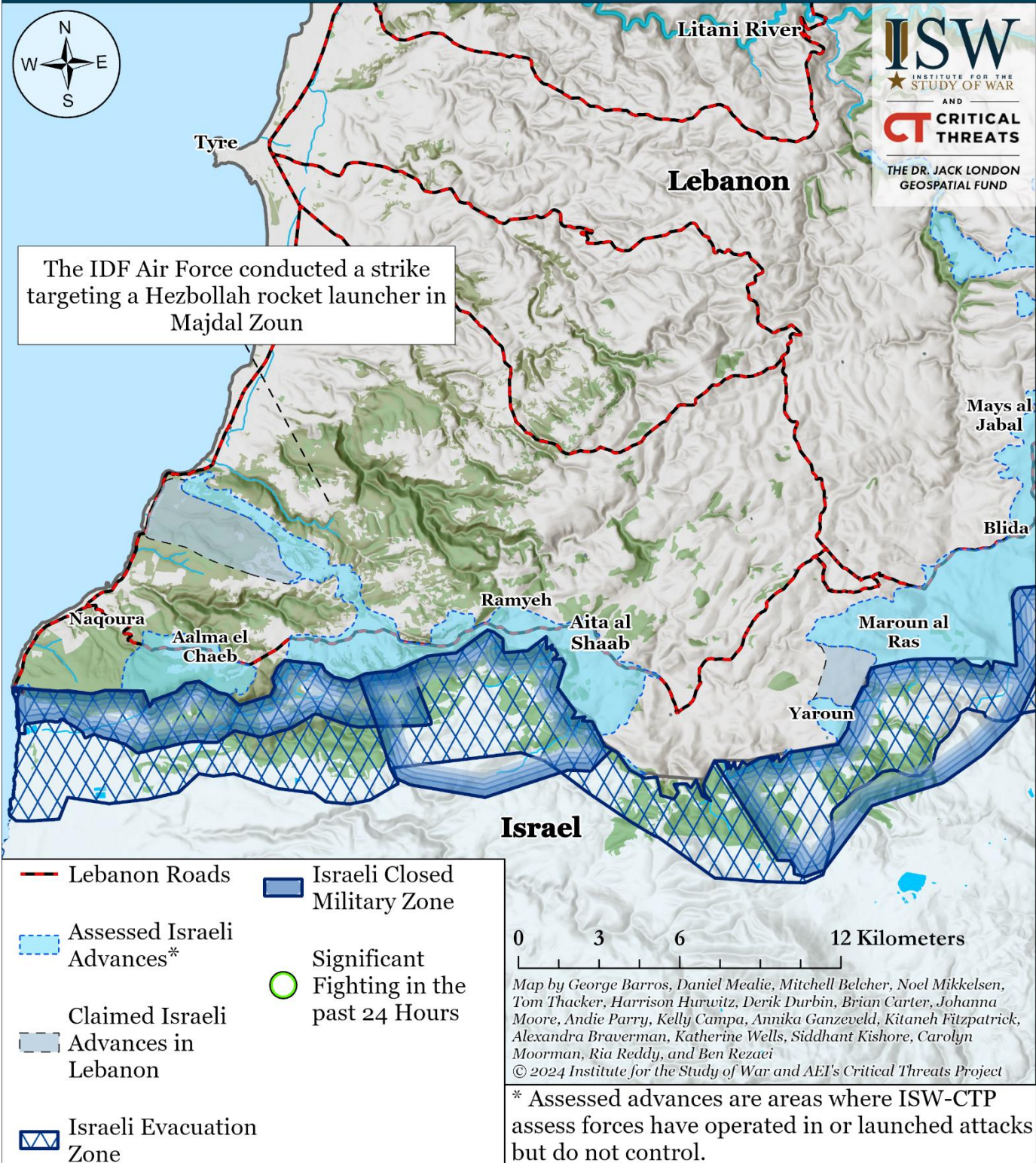


**Israeli forces continued to operate near Maroun al Ras in southwestern Lebanon on December 4.** Lebanese media reported that Israeli forces and tanks operated in Yaroun, near Maroun al Ras, on December 4.[51] Lebanese media separately reported IDF troops fired at Bint Jbeil from an unspecified location.[52]

**The IDF Air Force conducted a strike on December 4 targeting a Hezbollah rocket launcher in Majdal Zoun.[53]** The IDF stated that the launcher posed a threat to Israel and violated the ceasefire agreement.[54] Lebanese media reported two Israeli drone strikes in Majdal Zoun on December 4.[55]

**The IDF destroyed Hezbollah weapon stockpiles in Aitaroun, Khiam, and Souaneh in southern Lebanon on December 4.[56]** It is unclear how the IDF destroyed the Souaneh stockpile, given that it is 3 kilometers from the Israeli lines.

# Reported Israeli Operations in the Western Sector As of December 4, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET

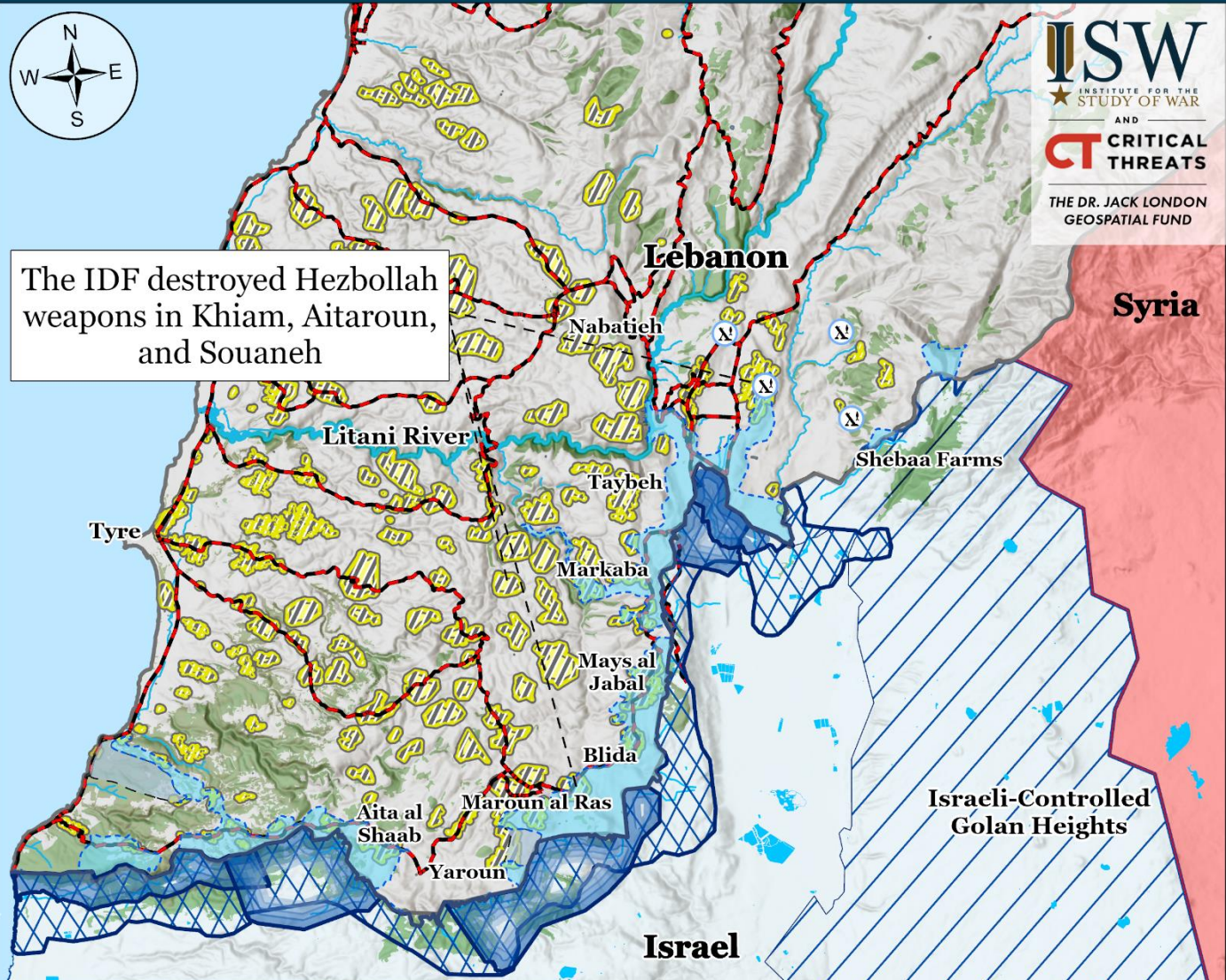


# Reported Israeli Operations in Lebanon

As of December 4, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



The IDF destroyed Hezbollah weapons in Khiam, Aitaroun, and Souaneh



Lebanon Roads	Israeli Closed Military Zone
Assessed Israeli Advances*	Israeli Evacuation Warnings
Claimed Israeli Advances in Lebanon	Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
Israeli Evacuation Zone	Artillery Shelling



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

\* Assessed advances are areas where ISW-CTP assess forces have operated in or launched attacks but do not control.

**US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated that the Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire is “holding” despite a series of incidents in recent days.**[57] Blinken stated that the mechanism the United States established with France to ensure the ceasefire is monitored and implemented is working. Lebanese Interim Prime Minister Najib Mikati stated that the countries that are implementing the ceasefire, namely the United States, are working to address the recent violations.[58]

**Hezbollah has not claimed any attacks into Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on December 3.**

### **Iran and the Axis of Resistance**

**A senior Iraqi military delegation inspected defensive lines along the Iraq-Syria border on December 4.**[59] Iraqi Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Abdul Amir Rashid Yarallah and Joint Operations Command Deputy Commander Lieutenant General Qais Khalaf al Muhammadi led the delegation.[60] The Iraqi Army has deployed forces to secure the Iraq-Syria border in recent days amid the ongoing opposition offensive in Syria.[61] Syrian media reported Iraqi aircraft and helicopter activity near the Iraq-Syria border on December 4.[62]

**Iranian-backed Badr Organization Secretary General Hadi al Ameri discussed the ongoing Syrian opposition offensive with Iraqi President Abdul Latif al Rashid on December 4.** Ameri and Rashid emphasized the need to end the conflict in Syria while preserving security and stability in Syria and the Middle East.[63] Badr Organization fighters have reportedly deployed to northern Syria in recent days to help defend the Syrian regime.[64]

**Iran is trying to prevent the E3 (the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) from triggering "snapback sanctions" by threatening Iranian withdrawal from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).**[65] Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for Political Affairs Majid Takht Ravanchi warned that Iran could leave the NPT if the E3 reimposes UN security council sanctions on Iran through the snapback mechanism. Iranian officials have long threatened to withdraw from the NPT, but these statements are noteworthy given the current standoff between Iran and the West over Iranian nuclear activities.[66] Ravanchi stated that Iran will likely hold another round of discussions with European countries following his meetings with the E3 in Geneva on November 29.[67]

**Iranian leadership met with Chinese officials in Tehran on December 4.** Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said that Iran will continue implementing the 25-year Sino-Iranian cooperation agreement, which Iran and China signed in March 2021, during a meeting with Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing.[68] Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref separately met with Guoqing to discuss the expansion of Sino-Iranian economic cooperation.[69]

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[1] <https://irp.fas.org/doddir/army/fm3-90-1.pdf>

[2] <https://x.com/DeirEzzore/status/1864280395836973073>;  
<https://x.com/DeirEzzore/status/1864382779116400971>;  
<https://x.com/SAMSyria/status/1864272452659957815>

[3] <https://www.alquds.co.uk/%D9%81%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%AD/>

[4] <https://x.com/SAMSyria/status/1864272452659957815>

[5] <https://www.alquds.co.uk/%D9%81%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%AD/>

[6] <https://irp.fas.org/doddir/army/fm3-90.pdf>

[7] [https://x.com/Asia\\_Intel/status/1864301994166374669](https://x.com/Asia_Intel/status/1864301994166374669) ;  
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[8] <https://x.com/muhrez996/status/1864057404536627252> ;

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[14] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1864369408912523700>

[15] <https://x.com/manniefabian/status/1864319593126174821>



- [16] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-August-20-2024>
- [17] <https://x.com/manniefabian/status/1864319593126174821>
- [18] <https://x.com/manniefabian/status/1864319593126174821>
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- [23] [https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Hezbollah\\_Sullivan\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Hezbollah_Sullivan_FINAL.pdf)
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- [35] [https://t.me/elaqsa\\_1965/7941](https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/7941) ; <https://t.me/sarayaps/18888>

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