

Iran Update, January 20, 2024

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Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm ET

CTP-ISW will publish abbreviated updates on January 20 and 21, 2024. Detailed coverage will resume on Monday, January 22, 2024.

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:

- Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters in eastern Jabalia on January 20. A local Gazan activist also reported that an Israeli armor convoy reentered eastern Jabalia from the Gaza “envelope.”
- The IDF 7th Armored Brigade continued clearing operations in Khan Younis City on January 20.
- Palestinian fighters clashed with Israeli forces three times across Nablus Governorate in the West Bank on January 19.
- Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) conducted three attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel targeting Israeli military facilities.
- The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed responsibility for a missile attack targeting US forces at Ain al Asad Airbase in Anbar Province, Iraq, on January 20.
- The IRGC announced on January 20 that Israel killed five IRGC “advisors” in an airstrike on Al Mazzah, Damascus, Syria
- US Central Command (CENTCOM) forces conducted two separate preemptive airstrikes on January 19 and 20 targeting anti-ship missiles that the Houthis had prepared to launch from Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen towards the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea.

Israel-Hamas War as of January 20, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Gaza Strip

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Erode the will of the Israeli political establishment and public to launch and sustain a major ground operation into the Gaza Strip
- Degrade IDF material and morale around the Gaza Strip.

Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters in eastern Jabalia on January 20. The al Qassem brigades fired small arms and Yasin-105 rockets at Israeli forces in the al Jaabari area of eastern Jabalia.^[1] A local Gazan activist also reported that an Israeli armor convoy reentered eastern

Jabalia from the Gaza “envelope.”[2] The Gaza Envelope describes populated areas in southern Israel that are within seven kilometers of the Israel-Gaza border. Commercially available satellite imagery also shows fresh tank tracks east of Jabalia, corroborating this report.

The al Quds Brigades, the military wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, fired small arms at Israeli forces advancing in Bureij and Maghazi in the Gaza Strip’s Central Governorate.[3]

The IDF 7th Armored Brigade continued clearing operations in Khan Younis City on January 20.[4] Israeli forces raided a militia compound, destroyed six rocket launchers, and found a tunnel shaft in the surrounding area.

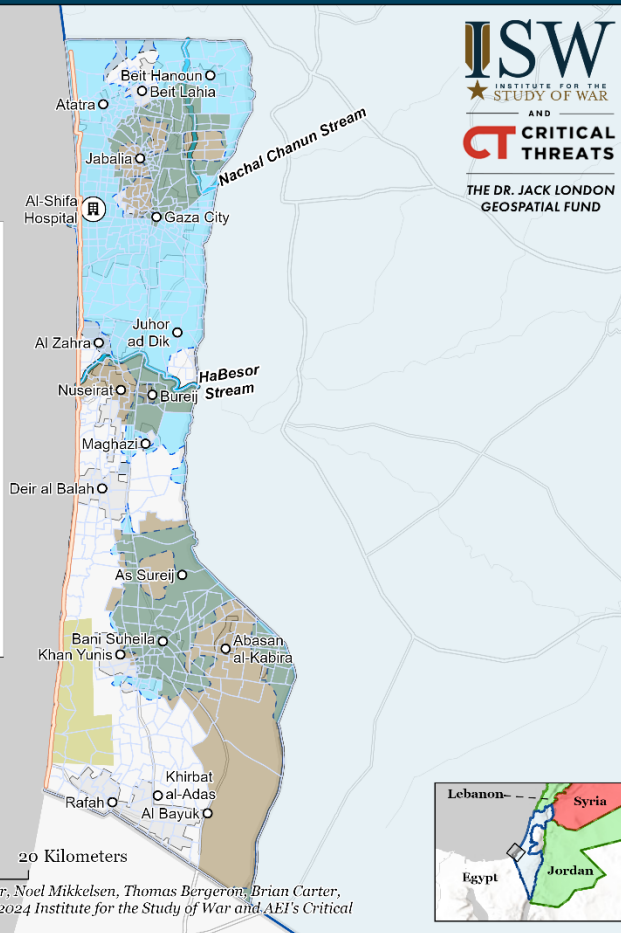
Palestinian fighters conducted multiple mortar attacks targeting Israeli forces operating in Khan Younis. The al Quds Brigades fighters mortared an Israeli combat outpost in southern Khan Younis and an Israeli position at Rumaydah, east of Khan Younis City.[5] The al Qassem Brigades mortared Israeli forces advancing in the northern and southern areas of Khan Younis.[6]

The Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa Brigade—the militant wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine —claimed one rocket attack targeting unspecified targets in Israel.[7]

Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip as of January 20, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



CTP-ISW's "Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones" layer shows Israeli evacuation zones announced by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). CTP-ISW used IDF maps and statements to create this layer. Where IDF maps cover part of a zone this layer covers the whole zone to avoid understating the evacuation order. The IDF began announcing these evacuation zones on December 2, 2023, at 0222 ET on X (Twitter)



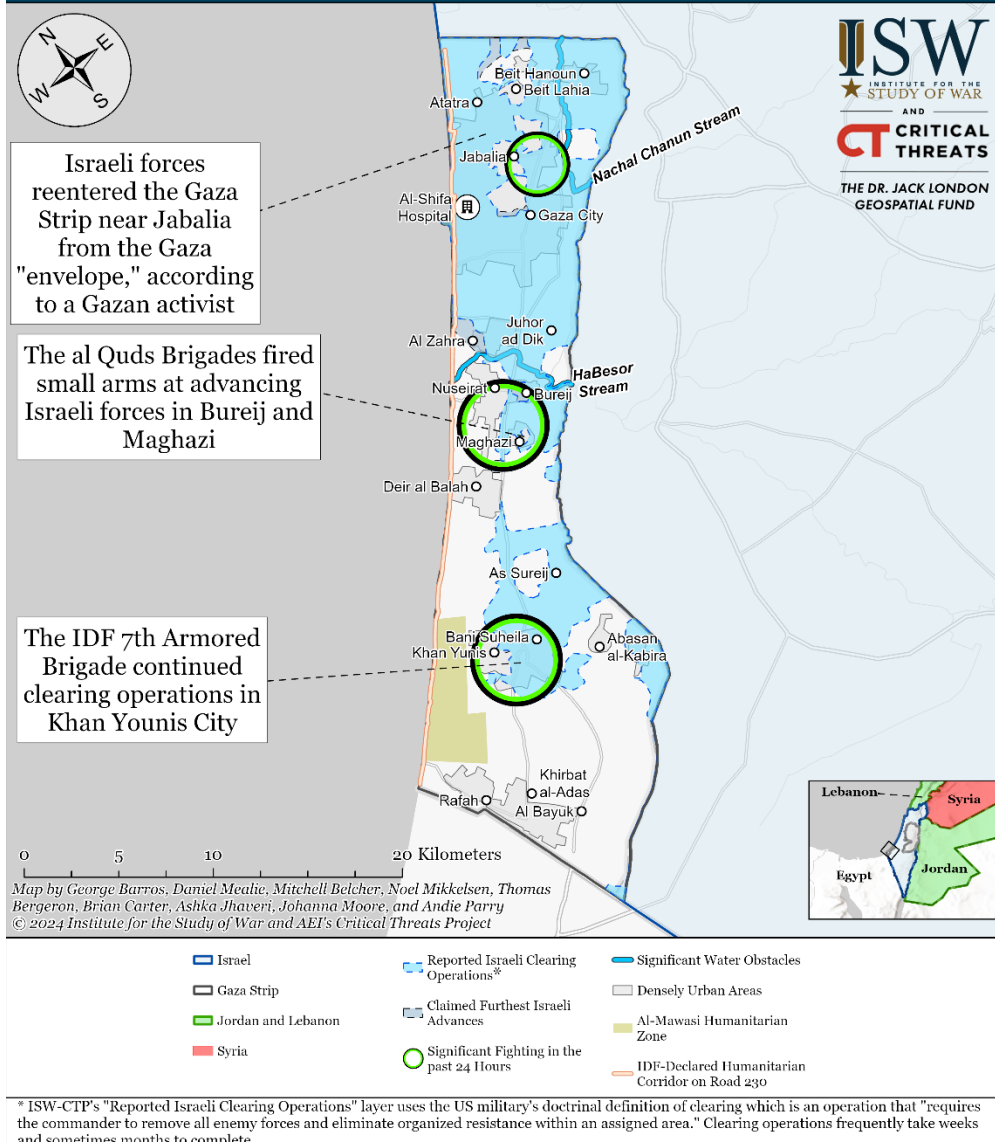
0 5 10 20 Kilometers

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

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

* ISW-CTP's "Reported Israeli Clearing Operations" layer uses the US military's doctrinal definition of clearing which is an operation that "requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance within an assigned area." Clearing operations frequently take weeks and sometimes months to complete

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of January 20, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



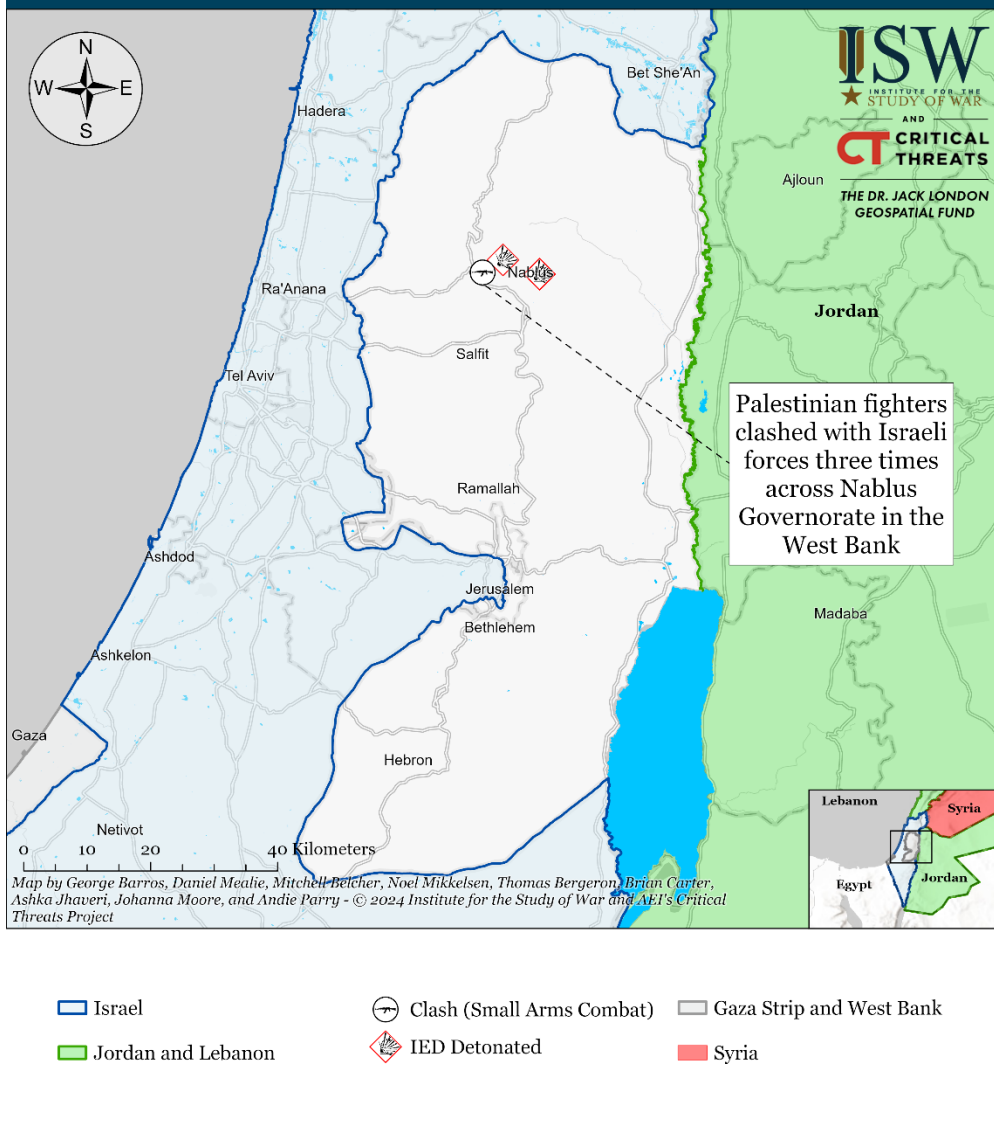
West Bank

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

Palestinian fighters clashed with Israeli forces three times across Nablus Governorate in the West Bank on January 19.[8]

Clashes in the West Bank as of January 20, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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

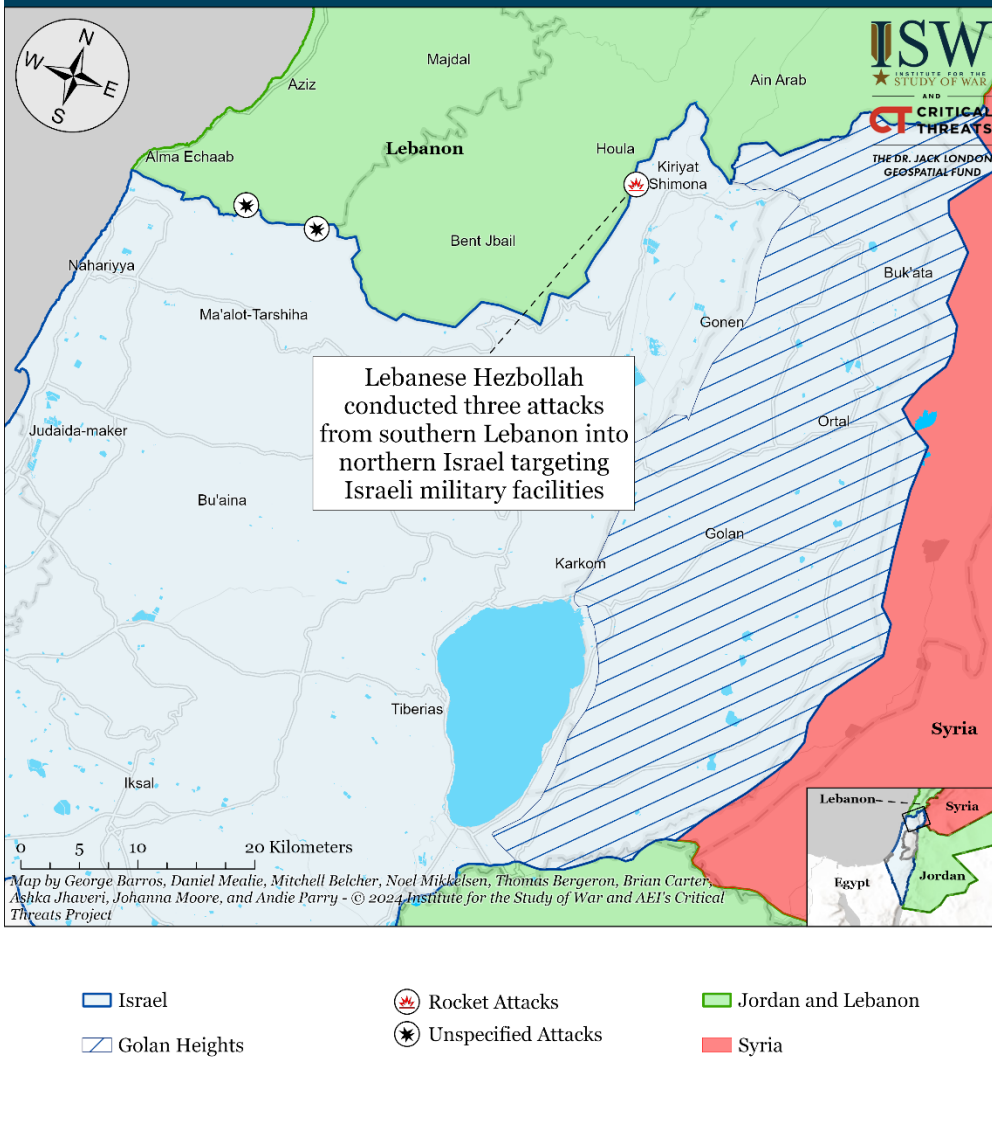
Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Draw IDF assets and resources toward northern Israel and fix them there
- Set conditions for successive campaigns into northern Israel

Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) conducted three attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel targeting Israeli military facilities.[9]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon as of January 20, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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

Iran and Axis of Resistance

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Demonstrate the capability and willingness of Iran and the Axis of Resistance to escalate against the United States and Israel on multiple fronts
- Set conditions to fight a regional war on multiple fronts

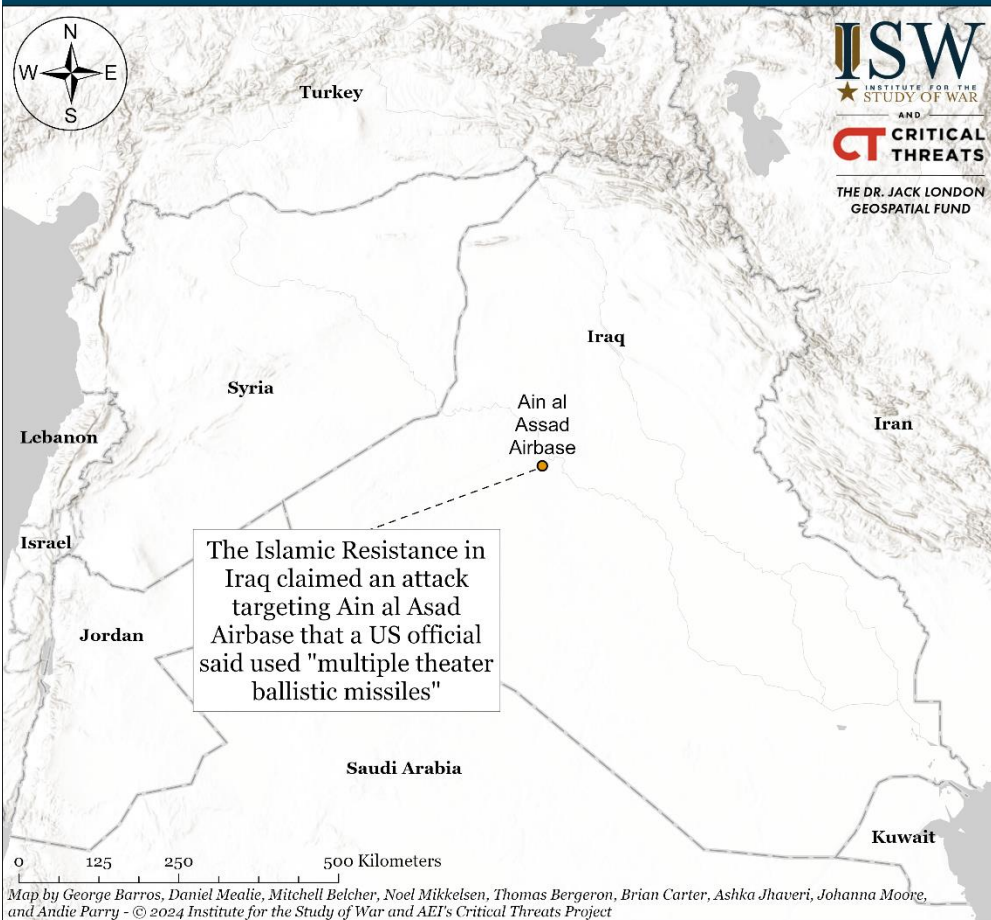
The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed responsibility for a missile attack targeting US forces at Ain al Asad Airbase in Anbar Province, Iraq, on January 20.[10] A US official told Reuters that “multiple theater ballistic

missiles” hit the airbase, causing several minor injuries to US personnel and “severe injuries” to Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) members.[11]

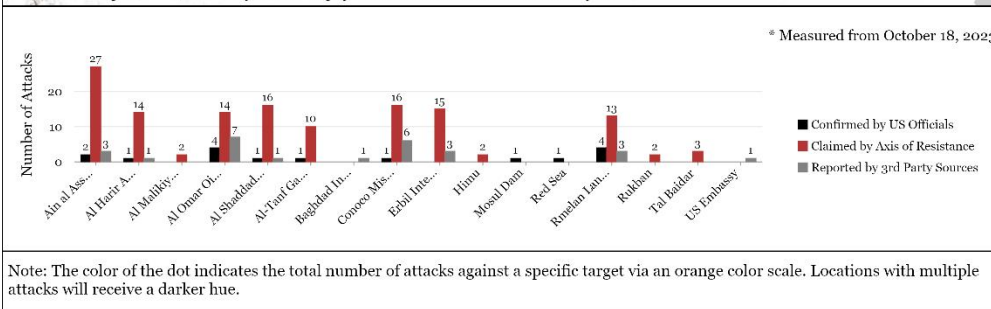
The IRGC announced on January 20 that Israel killed five IRGC “advisors” in an airstrike on Al Mazzah, Damascus, Syria.[12] Among the killed individuals were Brigadier General Sadegh Omid Zadeh, the IRGC Quds Force’s intelligence deputy in Syria, and Omid Zadeh’s deputy, Haj Gholam.[13] A June 2023 Washington Post article citing leaked documents, which CTP-ISW has not reviewed, reported that Omid Zadeh worked with Iranian proxies in Syria, such as LH, to develop EFPs to target US forces.[14] The Washington Post reported, citing the leaked documents, that Omid Zadeh was responsible for “identifying US Humvee and Cougar armored vehicles in Syria” as EFP targets.

Iranian officials vowed retaliation against Israel for the killing of the five IRGC officers. Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanani stated that Iran reserves the right to respond to Israel’s “organized terrorism” at an “appropriate time and place.”[15] Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf similarly stated that Israel will face a “harsh punishment” for killing the IRGC officers.[16]

Attacks against US Bases in the Middle East as of January 20, 2024, 2:00 PM ET

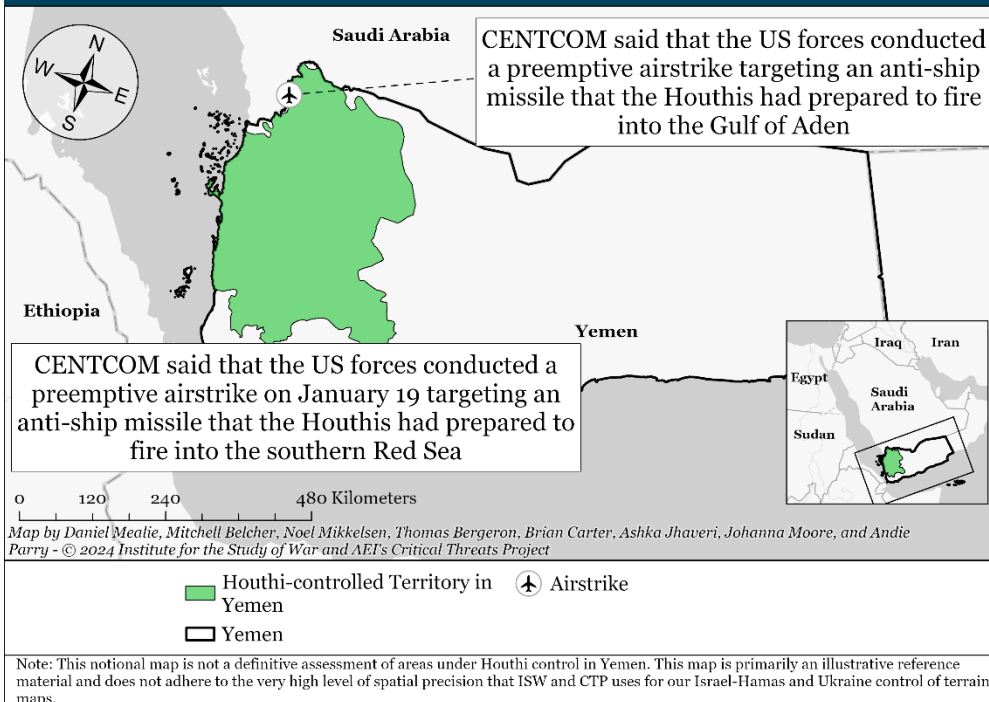


Map by George Barros, Daniel Meadie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project



US Central Command (CENTCOM) forces conducted two separate preemptive airstrikes on January 19 and 20 targeting anti-ship missiles that the Houthis had prepared to launch from Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen towards the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea.[17] CENTCOM conducted the self-defense strikes after determining that the anti-ship missiles presented an "imminent threat" to merchant vessels and US Navy ships.

Houthi-controlled Territory in Yemen as of January 20, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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[1] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1416>; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1417>

[2] <https://t.me/hamza20300/205508>

[3] <https://t.me/sarayaps/17241>

[4] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1748602301894242618>

[5] <https://t.me/sarayaps/17248> ; <https://t.me/sarayaps/17247>

[6] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1418>

[7] <https://t.me/kataebabuali/10602>

[8] <https://t.me/jeninqassamm/3866> ; <https://t.me/jeninqassamm/3867> ;

<https://t.me/QudsN/360400> ; <https://t.me/kataebaqsapalestine/2852> ;

<https://t.me/QudsN/360353> ; <https://t.me/kataebaqsapalestine/2853>

[9] https://t.me/C_Military1/44404 ; https://t.me/C_Military1/44406 ;

https://t.me/C_Military1/44413

[10] <https://t.me/elamharbi/236>

[11] <https://twitter.com/DanWilliams/status/1748726192633422161>

[12] <https://www.presstv dot ir/Detail/2024/01/20/718564/Israeli-regime-airstrike-Damascus-IRGC>

[13] <https://nournews dot ir/Fa/News/161853>

[14] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/06/01/discord-leaks-iran-russia-syria/>

[15] <https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14021030000921>

[16] <https://www.iribnews dot ir/fa/news/4128801>

[17] <https://twitter.com/CENTCOM/status/1748469686470160775> ;

<https://twitter.com/CENTCOM/status/1748726814334214404>