

Iran Update



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Information Cutoff: December 6, 2024, 2:00 pm ET

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

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

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

The Bashar al Assad regime faces an existential threat given the widespread collapse of regime forces and lack of sufficient external backing to bolster these forces. Various Syrian groups opposed to Assad, including local opposition in southwestern Syria, the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and the Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS)-led Fateh Mubin Operations Room, have each rapidly seized territory across Syria in the past 24 hours as Assad regime forces have collapsed. Assad's backers do not appear willing to bolster the Syrian Arab Army by rapidly deploying additional forces. One source "close to the Kremlin," for example, told *Bloomberg* that unless Assad's forces manage to form a defensive line—a scenario that is becoming increasingly less likely as more and more Syrian regime units break—Russia will not "save" Assad.[1]

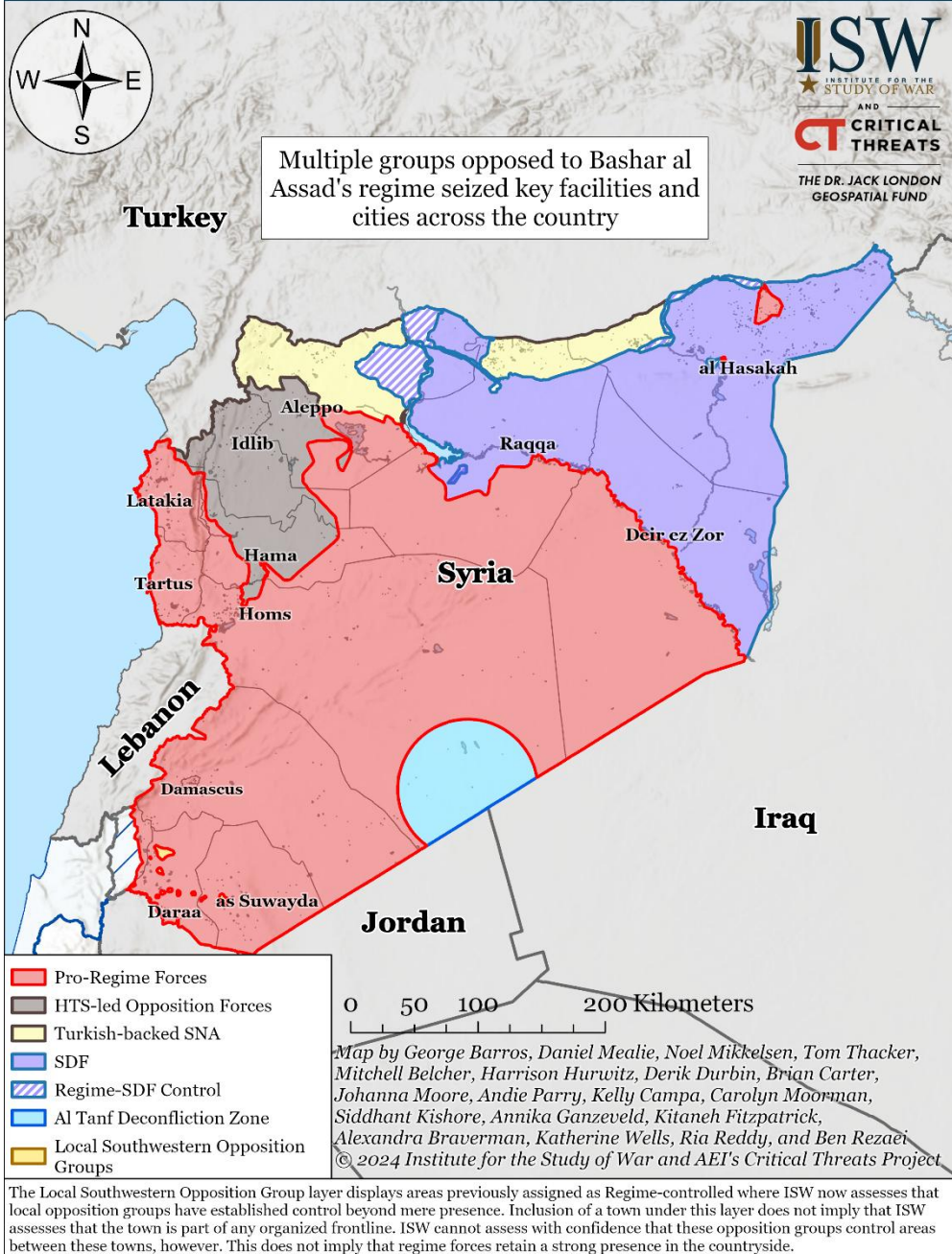
The Axis of Resistance's support to the Assad regime will almost certainly fail to stop the opposition offensive at this time unless ground forces are deployed rapidly and in larger numbers. Iran reportedly plans to send missiles and drones to Syria, and both Iran and Hezbollah will reportedly provide military advisers.[2] Hezbollah sent a "small number" of "advisers" to Syria on December 5 and Hezbollah has already deployed Hezbollah advisers to Homs.[3] The small number of advisers is unlikely to reverse the country-wide collapse of Syrian forces, and missiles and drones cannot hold or take ground on their own. Hezbollah is unlikely to deploy the larger number of fighters required for Assad to regain territory, given Hezbollah's requirements in Lebanon after the group suffered heavy losses during the Israeli ground campaign in Lebanon.

The Iranian, Iraqi, and Syrian foreign ministers held a trilateral summit in Baghdad on December 6 to coordinate responses to Syria’s security crisis.[4] The purpose of Araghchi’s visit to Baghdad was likely to solidify a coordinated approach among Iraq, Syria, and Iran. Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi said on December 4 that Iran would “consider” any Syrian request for Iranian ground forces, though no such request has been made at this time.[5] The rapid collapse of Syrian forces across the country will make it difficult for these Iranian ground forces to be able to stop the advance of the Syrian opposition. The opposition is rapidly seizing Assad-held territory, which will make it difficult for Iran to mobilize and then deploy its forces to Syria against the rebels before the rebels destroy much of Assad’s remaining forces.

Turkey appears equally unwilling to broker a settlement short of Assad’s removal as HTS seeks to overthrow Assad. HTS leader Abu Mohammed al Jolani said that his forces seek to replace the Assad regime in Damascus with a government and a “council chosen by the people.”[6] Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that the opposition’s goal was “Damascus,” and that he had tried to broker an agreement with the Assad Regime in the past, but that the regime was unwilling to do so.[7] Turkey has previously flirted with the idea of an agreement with the Assad Regime in recent years that would allow Turkey to return its Syrian refugee population to Syria, but these negotiations failed.[8]

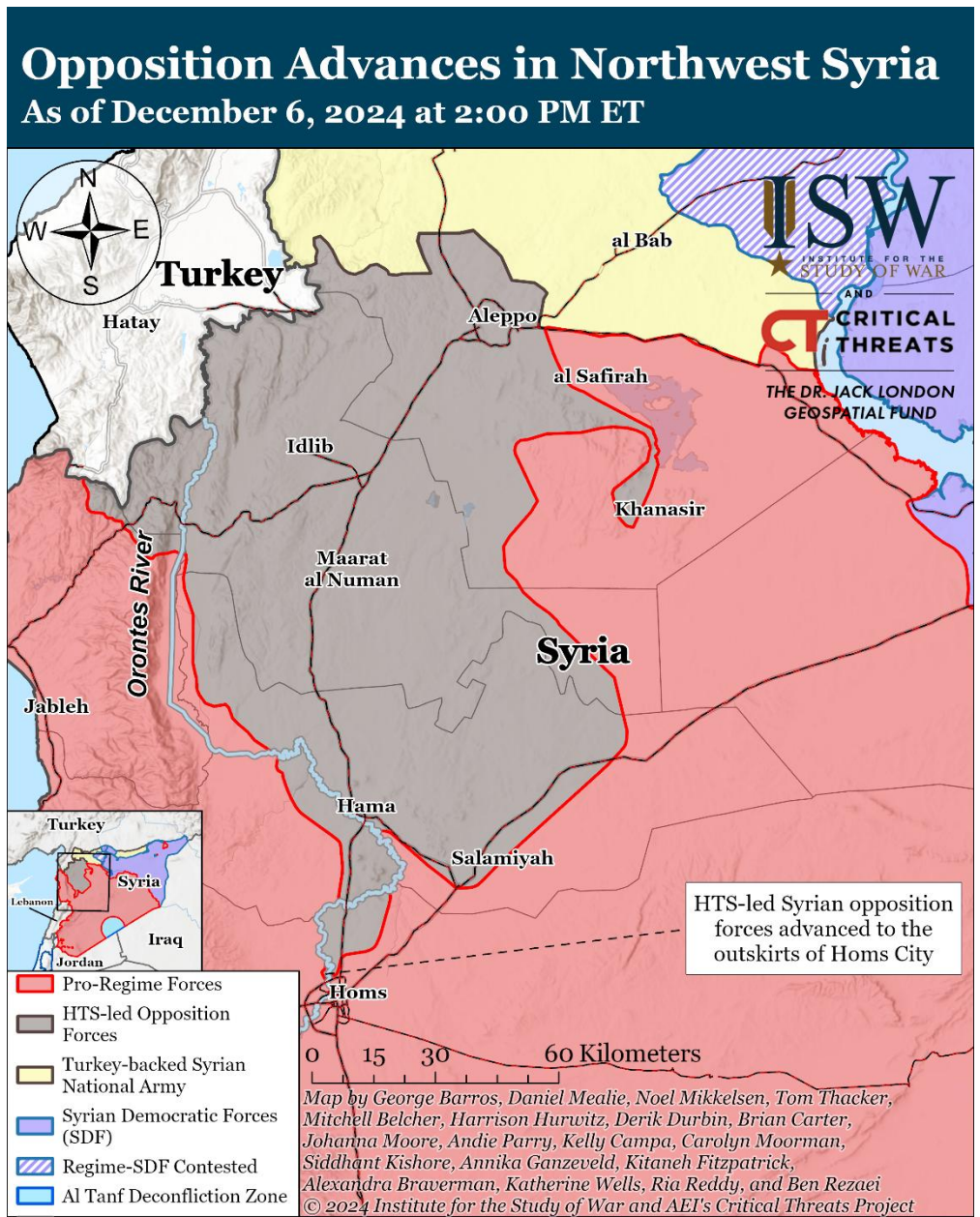
Reported Control of Terrain in Syria

As of December 6, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



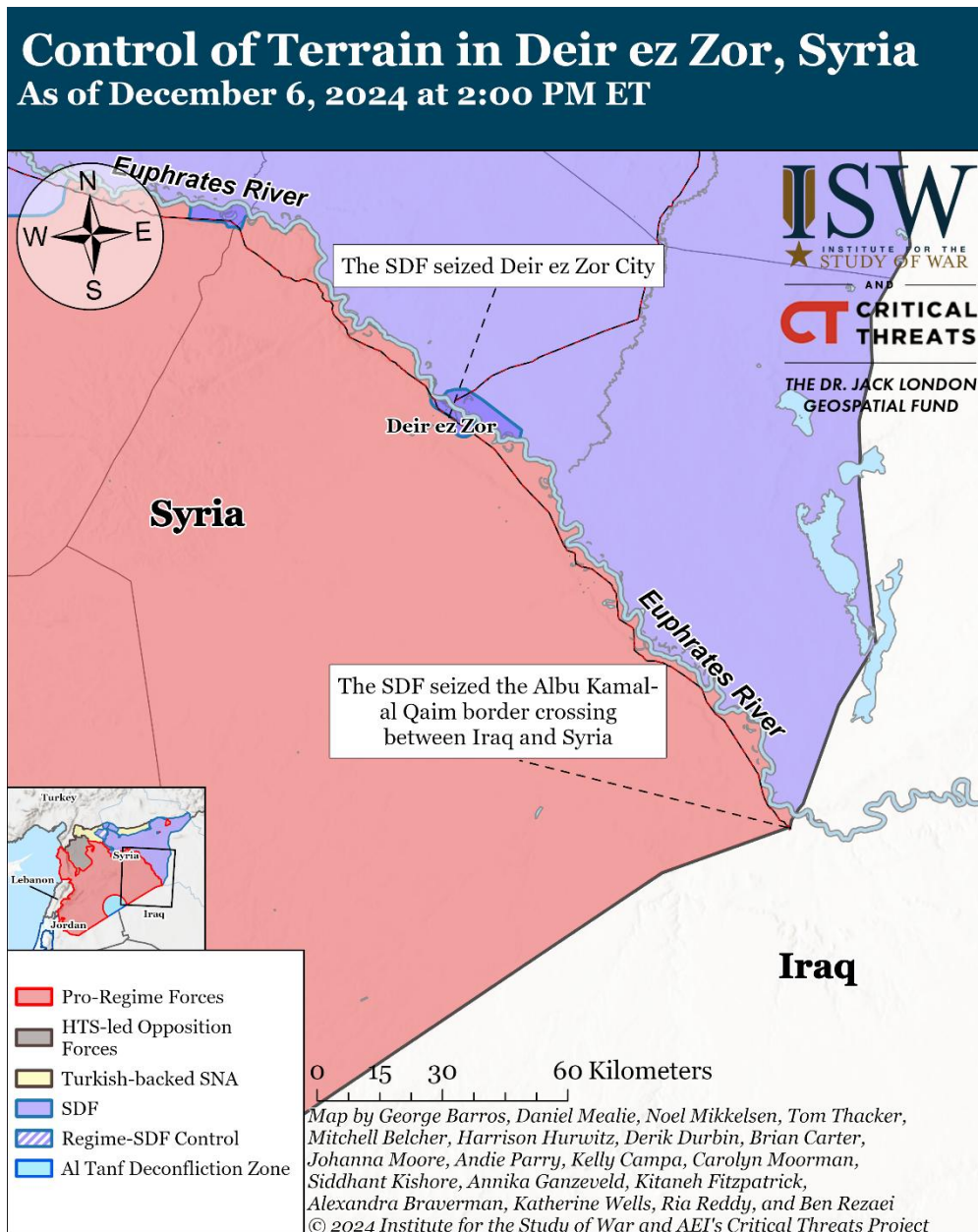
Syrian opposition forces led by HTS are now on the outskirts of Homs City after seizing Hama City on December 5. Geolocated footage posted on December 6 showed HTS-led forces seized Rastan (12 kilometers north of Homs City) from the SAA.[9] Geolocated footage posted on December 6 shows that HTS-led forces continued their advance south and seized Talbiseh, approximately 4 kilometers north of Homs City.[10] Opposition forces are likely northwest of Homs City, just outside the ring road. Regional and local media posted videos showing opposition forces in

towns just outside the ring road, and opposition and regional media claimed that the Assad regime conducted airstrikes targeting opposition forces in these towns.[11]



The SDF seized key areas in regime-held Deir ez Zor and Raqqa provinces on December 6, making it more difficult for Iran to move forces to Assad or to supply Iranian-backed forces in Syria. Geolocated footage posted on December 6 showed the SDF in both Deir ez Zor City and Abu Kamal City after the withdrawal of Syrian forces.[12] Later reports claimed that the SDF had captured Abu Kamal crossing after Iranian-backed Iraqi militias retreated from the area.[13] The seizure of these sites would prevent Iran from securing a key ground line of communication—the Abu Kamal-al Qaim Border Crossing and the M4 Highway—that Iran uses to transport weapons and personnel to support its Axis of Resistance partners.[14] The fact that neither the regime nor the

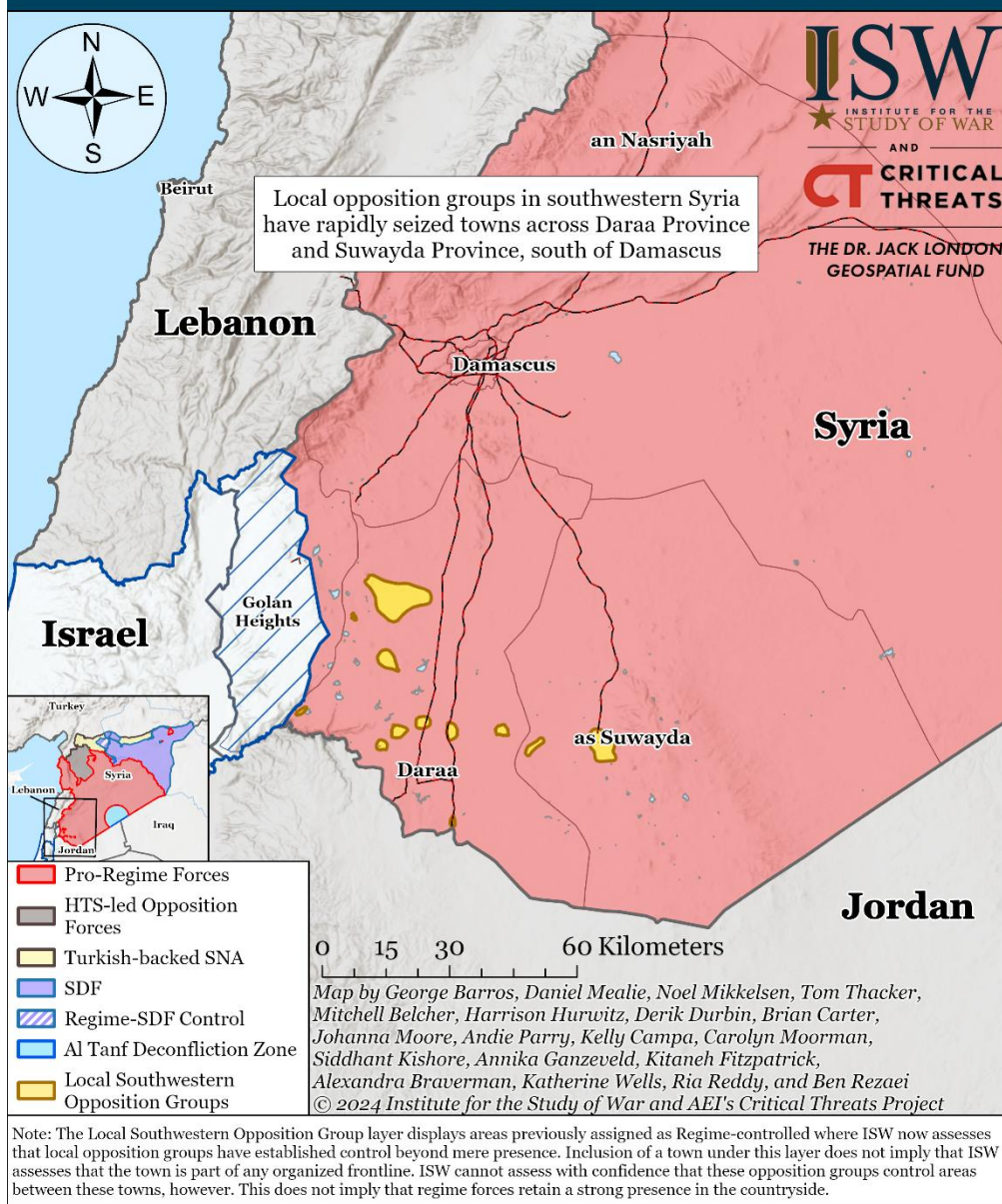
Iranian-backed forces attempted to hold this key ground demonstrates the degree to which these forces are collapsing.



Local opposition groups in southwestern Syria have rapidly seized towns across Daraa Province and Suwayda Province, south of Damascus. Geolocated footage posted on December 6 shows fighters from the Southern Operations Room seized control of the SAA 52nd Brigade base in eastern Daraa Province.[15] Syrian opposition media claimed that opposition forces have seized over a dozen towns across Suwayda Province.[16] Additional footage posted on December 6 indicates that Druze fighters have seized Suwayda City.[17] CTP-ISW cannot assess with confidence that opposition forces control rural terrain between these towns and cities, however, that does not necessarily imply that regime forces retain any control over the rural terrain in southwestern Syria.

Opposition Advances in Southwest Syria

As of December 6, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



The following text also appears in the Institute for the Study of War's Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment:

Russian forces have not yet evacuated the Russian naval base in Tartus, Syria as of December 6, but it remains unclear whether Russia will keep its vessels at the port as Syrian rebels continue to advance swiftly across regime-held territory. Former Norwegian Navy officer and independent OSINT analyst Thord Are Iversen assessed that the Russian *Novorossiysk* Kilo-class submarine, a Gorshkov-class frigate, the *Admiral Grigorovich* Grigorovich-class frigate, and possibly the *Vyazma* Kaliningradneft-class oiler have

returned to the port in Tartus based on satellite imagery collected on December 6.[18] Satellite imagery collected on December 3 showed that Russia had removed all of its ships stationed at Tartus - the *Admiral Grigorovich* frigate, the *Novorossiysk* submarine, the *Admiral Gorshkov*, and *Admiral Golovko* Gorskho-class frigates, and likely the *Vyazma* oiler and the *Yelnya* Altay-class oiler - from the port sometime between December 1 and 3.[19] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed on December 3 that ten Russian naval vessels, including the *Admiral Gorshkov* and *Admiral Golovko* frigates and *Novorossiysk* submarine, participated in hypersonic and cruise missile launch exercises in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, and Russian Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov reportedly informed the US about Russian exercises in the Mediterranean during a call on November 27.[20] It is unclear if Russia removed the *Admiral Grigorovich* and the two oilers from Tartus as part of the exercise as well. Some of the vessels that Russian forces removed from Tartus between December 1 and 3 have not returned to port as of December 6. *Bloomberg* reported on December 6 that a person close to the Kremlin stated that Russia does not have a plan to save Syrian President Bashar al Assad and that Russia is unlikely to create such a plan as long as pro-regime forces continue to abandon their positions.[21] The Russian Embassy in Syria notably announced on December 6 that Russian citizens living in Syria should leave the country on commercial flights due to the "difficult military and political situation" in Syria.[22] It remains unclear whether Russia plans to continue to maintain all of these vessels at Tartus or is planning to evacuate all or some of them elsewhere.

Russia appears to be redeploying at least some of its air defense assets that were defending Russia's Khmeimim Air Base in Syria, but the reason for this redeployment remains unclear at this time. Geolocated footage published on December 6 shows Russian forces transporting S-300 or S-400 and Tor-M1 air defense systems near Baniyas along the M1 Lakatia-Tartus highway.[23] A Russian milblogger posted the same footage on December 6 and claimed that it showed Russian forces moving an S-400 system and a Tor-M2 system that Russian forces had deployed near Masyaf (about 50 kilometers southeast of Khmeimin Air Base) in 2017 to protect Khmeimin Air Base.[24] The milblogger claimed that Russian forces are either redeploying the air defense systems to Khmeimim Air Base or Tartus due to Syrian rebel groups' recent seizure of Hama City (roughly 35 kilometers east of Masyaf). It is unclear if Russian forces are redeploying the air defense systems to new positions within western Syria in order to improve their survivability or if Russian forces are moving the air defense systems for evacuation from Syria through Tartus.

Key Takeaways:

- **State of the Syrian Regime:** The Bashar al Assad regime faces an existential threat given the widespread collapse of regime forces and lack of sufficient external backing to bolster these forces. One source "close to the Kremlin," for example, told *Bloomberg* that unless Assad's forces manage to form a defensive line—a scenario that is becoming increasingly less likely as more and more Syrian regime units break—Russia will not "save" Assad.
- **Support to Assad:** The Axis of Resistance's support to the Assad regime will almost certainly fail to stop the opposition offensive at this time unless ground forces are deployed rapidly and in larger numbers.

- **Turkish Response:** Turkey appears equally unwilling to broker a settlement short of Assad's removal as HTS seeks to overthrow Assad. HTS leader Abu Mohammed al Jolani said that his forces seek to replace the Assad regime in Damascus with a government and a "council chosen by the people."
- **Homs City Front:** Syrian opposition forces led by HTS are now on the outskirts of Homs City after seizing Hama City on December 5.
- **Deir ez Zor Front:** The SDF seized key areas in regime-held Deir ez Zor and Raqqa provinces on December 6, making it more difficult for Iran to move forces to Assad or to supply Iranian-backed forces in Syria.
- **Daraa Front:** Local opposition groups in southwestern Syria have rapidly seized towns across Daraa Province and Suwayda Province, south of Damascus.

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 reported on December 6 that it conducted airstrikes that killed several Hamas fighters in the Gaza Strip during the past week.[25] The IDF said that these fighters participated in the October 7 attacks and targeted the Israeli forces operating inside the Gaza Strip.[26]

The IDF continued clearing operations in the northern Gaza Strip on December 6. A Palestinian journalist reported gunfire from Israeli vehicles in Beit Lahia and Jabalia refugee camp.[27] The IDF also demolished civilian infrastructure in Beit Lahia and Jabalia, according to the journalist.[28]

The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired rockets targeting Israeli forces along the Netzarim Corridor on December 6.[29]

The IDF reported on December 6 that the 933rd Infantry Brigade (143rd Division) located and destroyed a tunnel rigged with explosives in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip.[30] The IDF also located weapons stockpiles while operating in Rafah in recent days. The IDF killed members of a militia cell that mortared Israeli forces in the area.

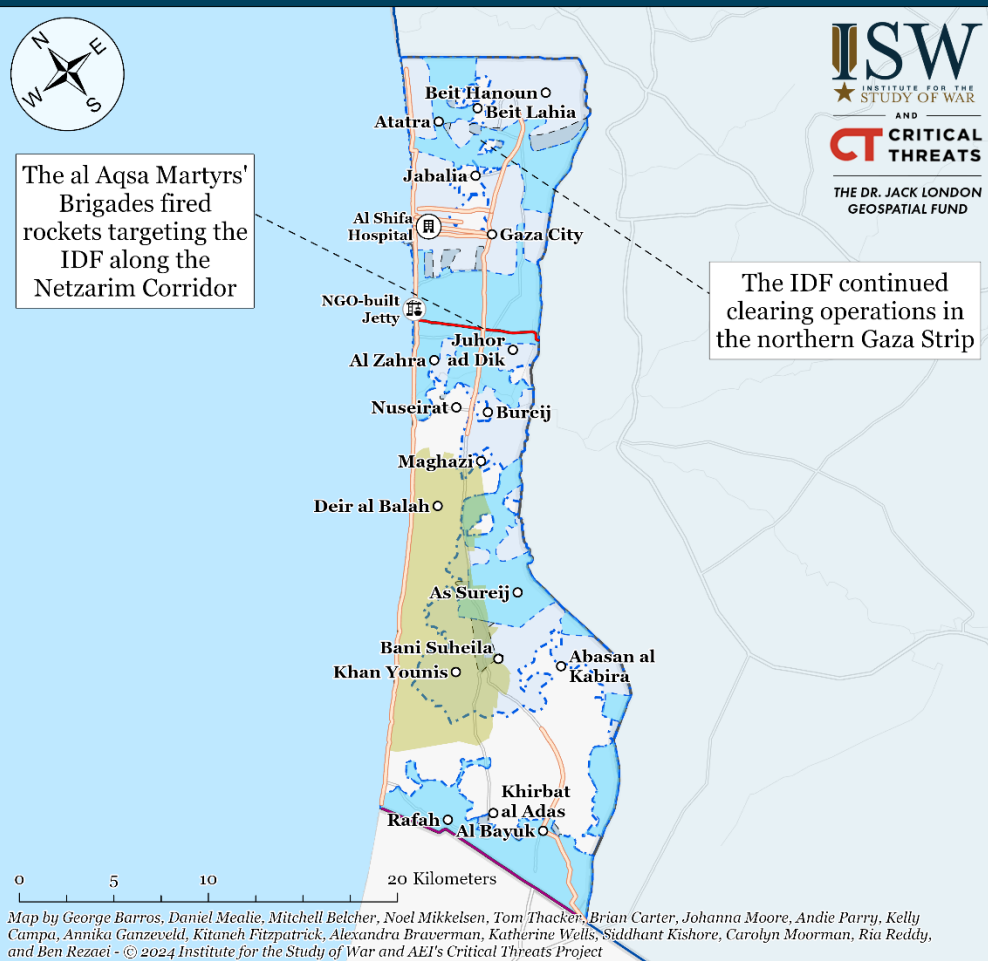
Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of December 6, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired rockets targeting the IDF along the Netzarim Corridor

The IDF continued clearing operations in the northern Gaza Strip



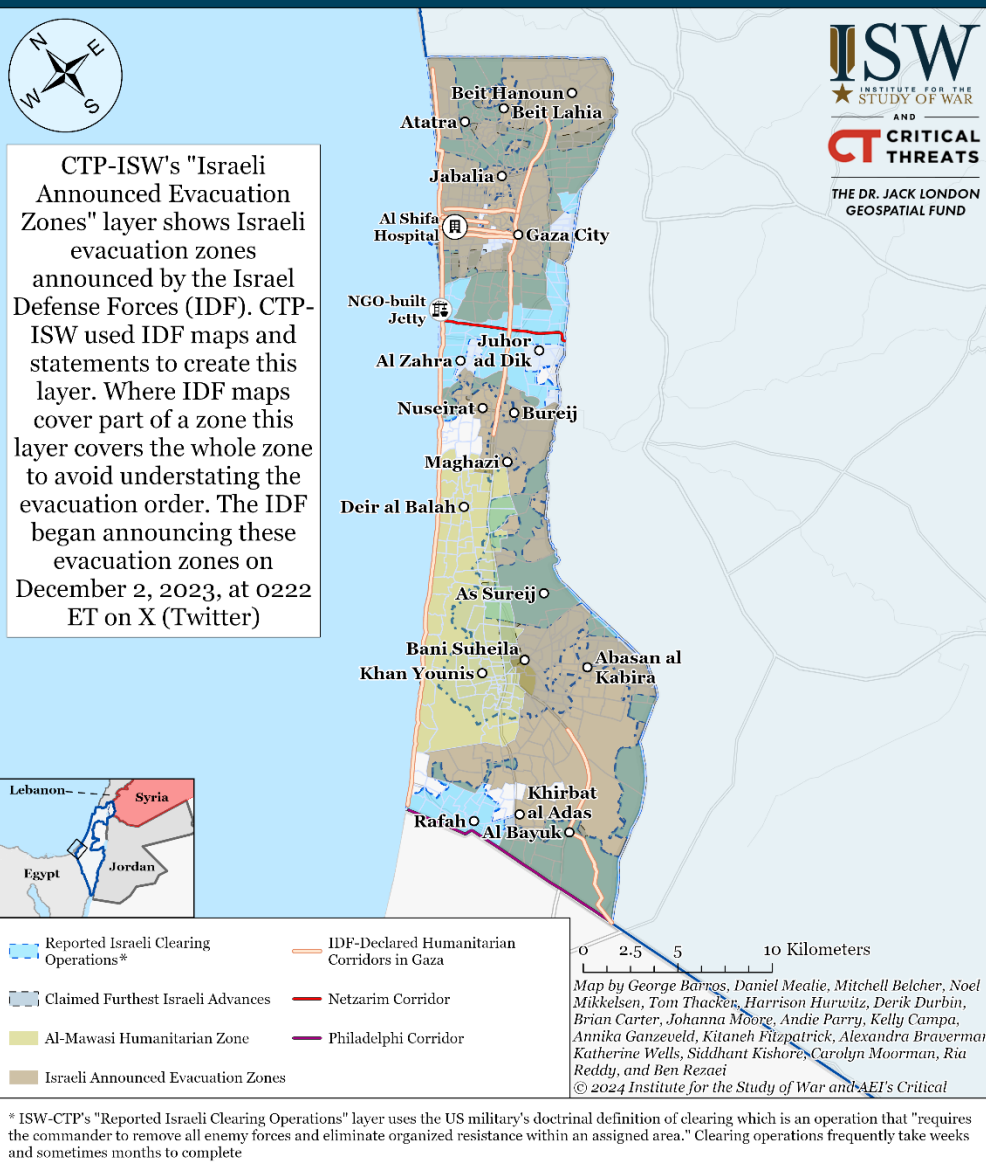
Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Tom Thacker, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, Siddhant Kishore, Carolyn Moorman, Ria Reddy, and Ben Rezaei - © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEL'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 6, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



The IDF released 34 Palestinian detainees into the Gaza Strip via the Kerem Shalom border crossing on December 5.[31] A Palestinian journalist reported that the IDF transferred 26 detainees to a hospital in Khan Younis.[32] The IDF presumably detained them when it started clearing operations in the northern Gaza Strip in October 2024, given that almost all the detainees are residents of the northern Gaza Strip, according to the list published by a Palestinian journalist.[33]

West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

Nothing significant to report

Northern Israel and Lebanon

Lebanese Hezbollah objectives:

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

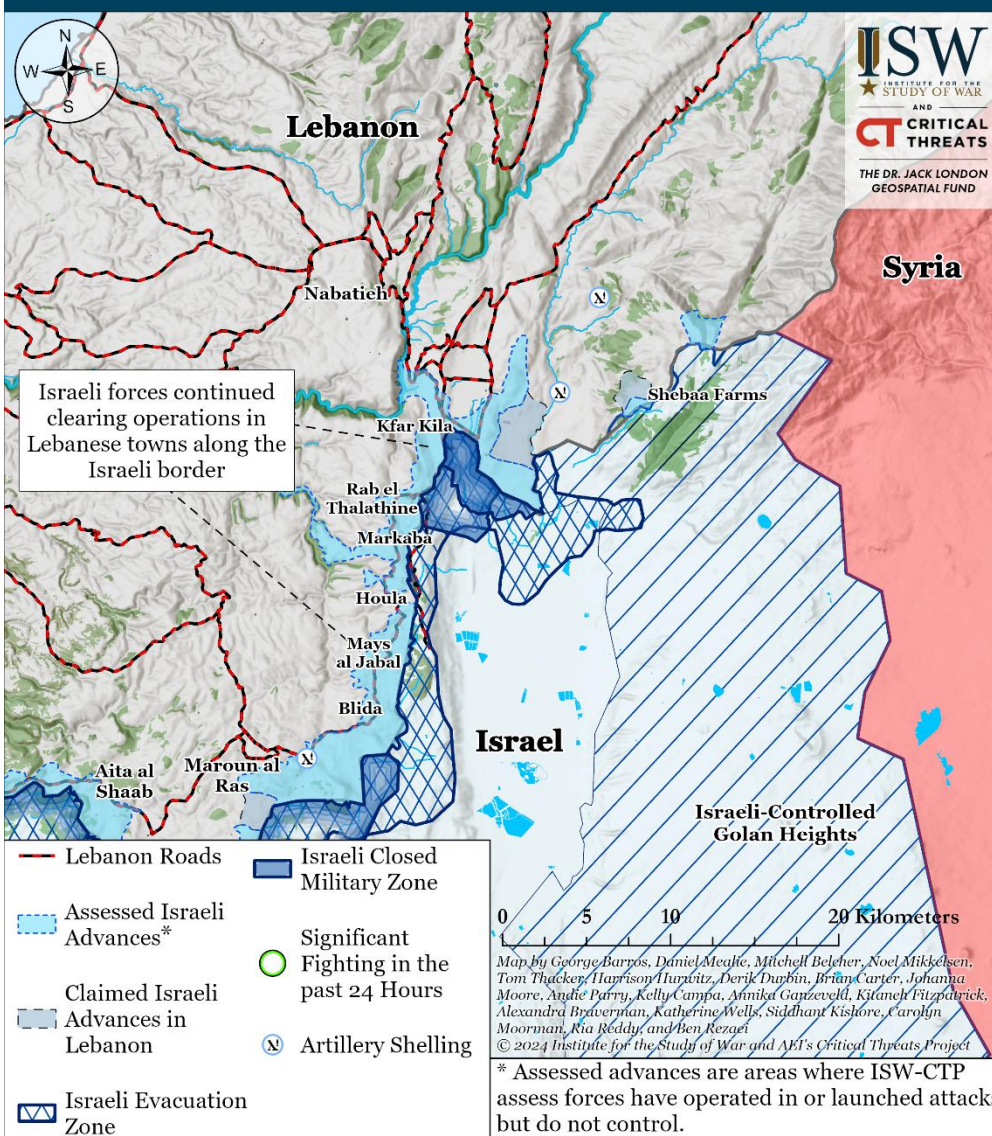
Lebanese media reported that Israeli forces conducted clearing operations in towns in southern Lebanon on the border with Israel on December 6. Lebanese media reported that the IDF conducted clearing operations in Kfar Kila and Mays al Jabal.[34]

Lebanese media reported that Israeli forces conducted clearing operations in Khiam on December 6.[35] The IDF previously destroyed a Hezbollah weapon stockpile in Khiam on December 4.[36]

Lebanese media reported IDF gunfire in Ramyeh and separately in Aita al Shaab on December 6.[37]

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) set up checkpoints and conducted patrols along the Syria-Lebanon border following the Syrian opposition offensive.[38] Lebanon closed all its land borders, except the main one that links Beirut and Damascus, on December 6.[39]

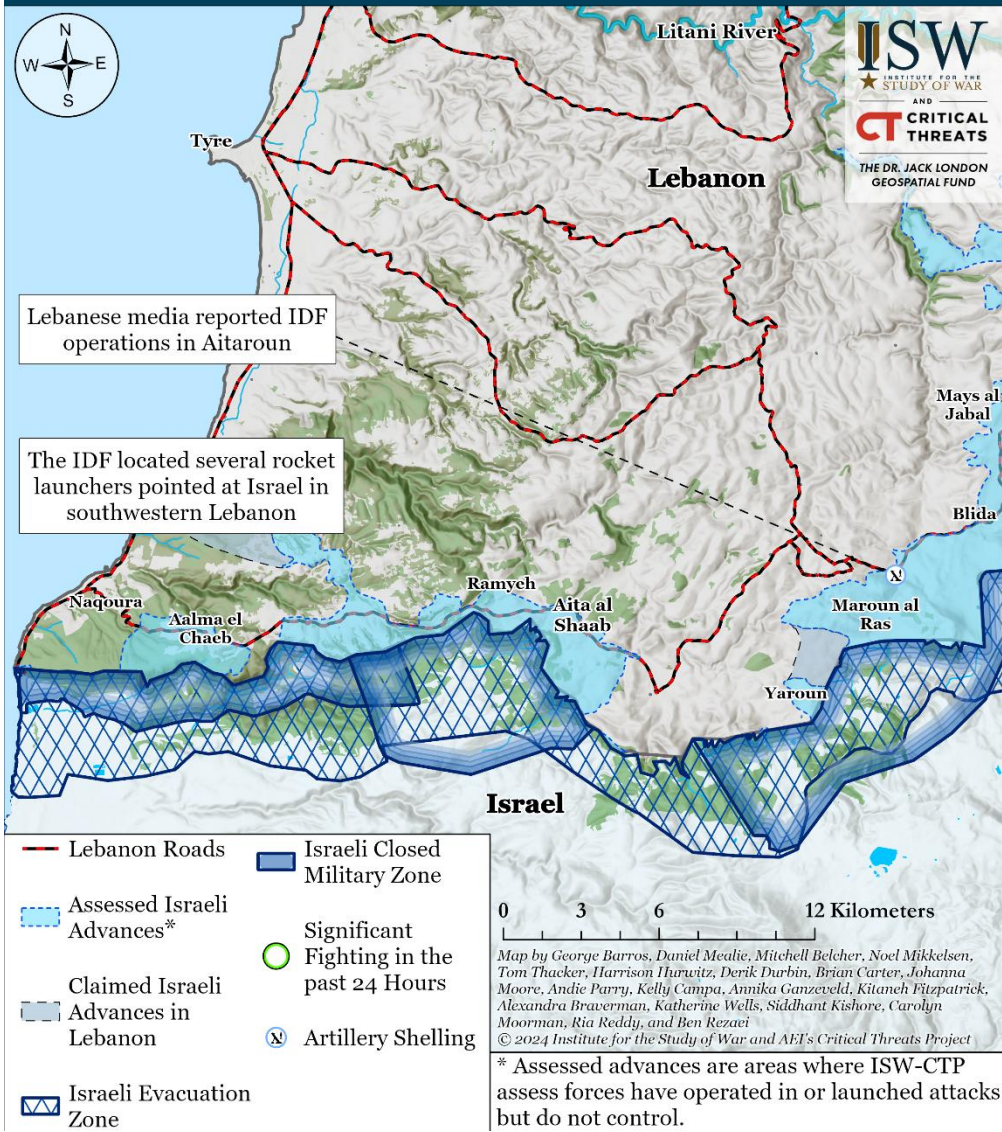
Reported Israeli Operations in the Eastern Sector As of December 6, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



The IDF 226th Paratroopers Brigade (146th Division) and IDF 300th Territorial Brigade (146th Division) continued operations in southwestern Lebanon.[40] The IDF located rocket launchers aimed at Israel during searches in southwestern Lebanon over the past week. The IDF destroyed dozens of rockets, boxes of ammunition, and Kalashnikov rifles. The Israel-Lebanon ceasefire permits the IDF to operate in southern Lebanon until January 25, 2025.[41] The IDF 226th Paratroopers Brigade deployed to southwestern Lebanon on November 14.[42] The IDF 300th Territorial Brigade has operated in southern Lebanon in recent days.[43]

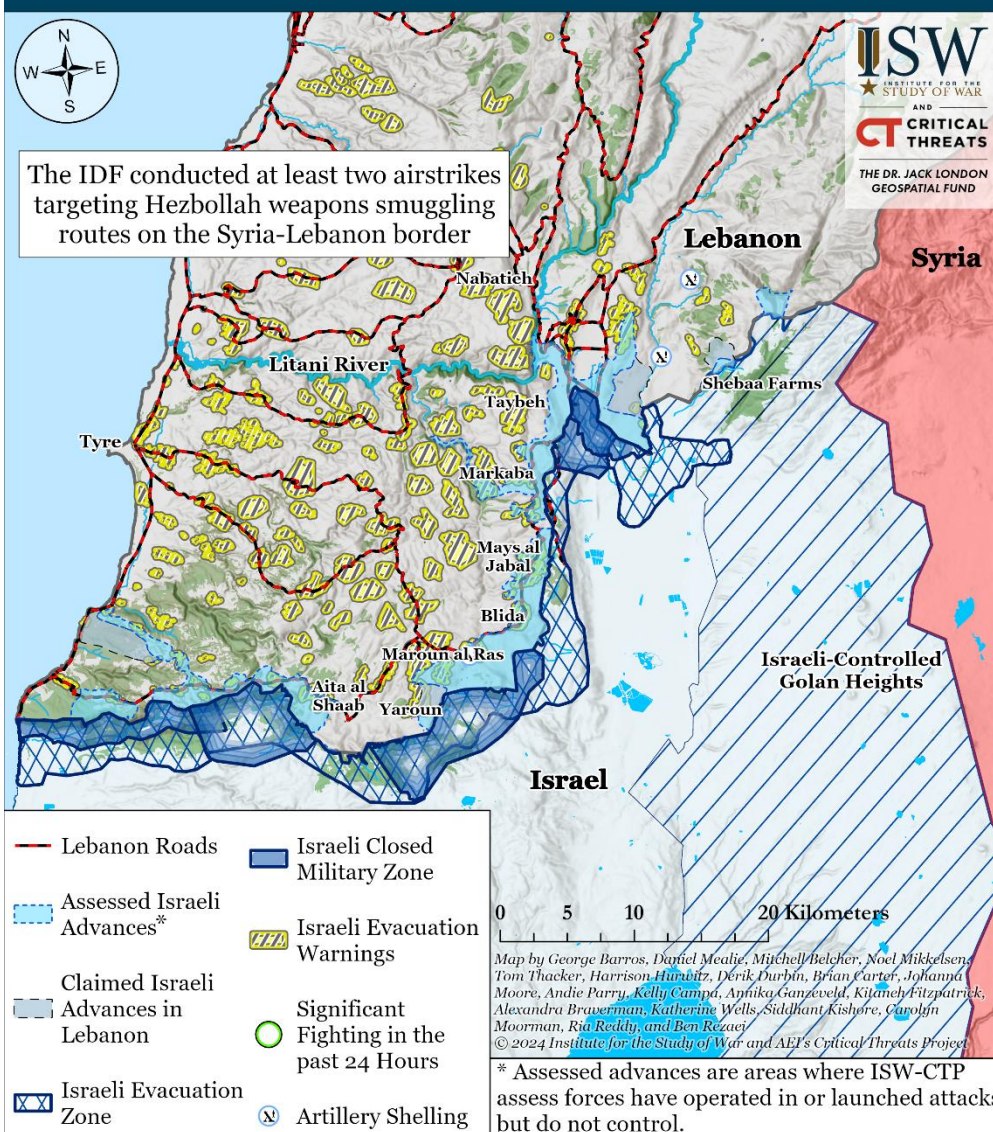
Lebanese media reported that Israeli forces conducted clearing operations in Aitaroun, Lebanon, on December 6.[44] Lebanese media reported the sound of gunfire and explosions in the center of Aitaroun.[45] Lebanese media separately reported that the "IDF launched a missile" in Aitaroun.[46]

Reported Israeli Operations in the Western Sector As of December 6, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Reported Israeli Operations in Lebanon

As of December 6, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



The IDF conducted at least two airstrikes on December 5 targeting Hezbollah weapons smuggling routes along the Syria-Lebanon border.[47] Israeli media reported that the IDF targeted the Arida border crossing in northern Lebanon.[48] Qatari media and a Syria-based journalist reported that the IDF targeted the Jusiayah border crossing, in northeastern Lebanon.[49] Geolocated footage showed the IDF airstrike targeted a structure near the Jusiayah border crossing.[50] The IDF has repeatedly targeted the Jusiayah border crossing due to Hezbollah weapons smuggling there.[51] The weapons are transferred by Hezbollah's Unit 4400, which is responsible for transporting arms to Hezbollah.[52] The IDF reiterated its commitment to remove any threats in Lebanon that violate the ceasefire.[53]

Lebanese media reported that unspecified actors in Lebanon launched a rocket on December 6 targeting the western Galilee region.[54] Hezbollah has not claimed this attack at

the time of writing. Neither Israeli media nor the IDF have commented on the incident at the time of writing.

Hezbollah has not claimed any attacks into Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on December 5.

The head of the five-member Israel-Lebanon ceasefire supervisory committee US General Major General Jasper Jeffers toured the South Litani sector by helicopter on December 6.[55] French General Brigadier General Guillaume Ponchin and LAF Commander of the South Litani Sector Brigadier General Edgar Lowndes accompanied Jeffers. The supervisory committee will hold its first session next week.[56]

Iran and the Axis of Resistance

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi announced on December 6 that the rate at which Iran can enrich uranium up to 60% purity is “increasing dramatically.”[57] The IAEA estimates that Iran's capacity to produce uranium enriched to 60% purity may be increased to 7-8 times more than Iran's previous rate of producing approximately 5-7 kilograms of uranium enriched to up to 60% purity per month. The United States Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) continues to assess that Iran is not building a nuclear weapon[58]. Weapons-grade uranium, suitable for use in nuclear weapons, must be enriched to approximately 90%.

Iran successfully launched its heaviest payload into space on December 6. Iran used the Simorgh Satellite Launch Vehicle, which was carrying a 300km payload.[59] The payload included a Fakhr-1 nanosatellite, a CubeSat, and a module for transferring satellites to higher-altitude orbits. The Fakhr-1 nanosatellite was developed by Iran Electronics Industries in collaboration with Malek Ashtar University of Technology and commissioned by the Iranian Athesheh.[60] After separating from the Simorgh carrier, the Fakhr-1 successfully transmitted telemetry data and responded to ground station commands, confirming its stabilization in orbit.[61]

The Iran Update provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities abroad that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests. It also covers events and trends that affect the stability and decision-making of the Iranian regime. The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) provides these updates regularly based on regional events.

CTP-ISW defines the “Axis of Resistance” as the unconventional alliance that Iran has cultivated in the Middle East since the Islamic Republic came to power in 1979. This transnational coalition is comprised of state, semi-state, and non-state actors that cooperate to secure their collective interests. Tehran considers itself to be both part of the alliance and its leader. Iran furnishes these groups with varying levels of financial, military, and political support in exchange for some degree of influence or control over their actions. Some are traditional proxies that are highly responsive to Iranian direction, while others are partners over which Iran exerts more limited influence. Members of the

Axis of Resistance are united by their grand strategic objectives, which include eroding and eventually expelling American influence from the Middle East, destroying the Israeli state, or both. Pursuing these objectives and supporting the Axis of Resistance to those ends have become cornerstones of Iranian regional strategy.

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[2] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-aims-send-missiles-drones-military-advisers-syria-senior-official-says-2024-12-06/>

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[6] <https://www.cnn.com/2024/12/06/middleeast/syria-rebel-forces-hayat-tahrir-al-sham-al-jolani-intl-latam/index.html>

[7] <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkiye-wishes-syrian-oppositions-march-to-continue-without-accidents-president-erdogan/3416234>

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