

Iran Update



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Information Cutoff: 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. This map is 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.

Syrian Arab Army (SAA) reinforcements fortified defensive lines north of Hama City and prevented Syrian opposition forces from advancing into Hama City. The Syrian Defense Minister announced on December 1 that it sent large reinforcements to Hama's northern countryside to bolster the SAA's defensive operations in the area.[1] SAA Chief of Staff General Abdel Karim Mahmoud Ibrahim arrived to oversee SAA operations in the area.[2] Opposition forces began advancing south from Idlib towards Hama City on November 30.[3] The Syrian Defense Ministry claimed that SAA units expelled opposition fighters from the town of Maardis, about 10 kilometers from Hama City.[4] The SAA 25th Special Mission Forces Division secured and fortified defensive lines in several villages and towns north of Hama, including villages that rebels claimed to seize on November 30, such as Tayyiba al Imam.[5] Local Syrian sources reported that SAA forces pushed opposition fighters north towards the town of Morek.[6] Fateh Mubin—a joint operations room including Hayat Tahrir al Sham and several other armed opposition factions leading the offensive—appears to remain in control of Khan Sheikhoun, a town immediately north of Morek on the other side of the Hama-Idlib border.[7] This suggests that opposition forces remain in control of Idlib Province. Syrian opposition forces conducted a drone strike that killed the commander of Hama's Military Security in Souran amid clashes in the area.[8] An SAA-affiliated social media account claimed that the Syrian army would advance into Idlib before continuing to Aleppo.[9]

The Syrian regime appears to be concentrating its efforts on securing Hama Province and has not yet attempted to re-capture or send reinforcements towards Aleppo. The SAA's defense of northern Hama is the first effective defense that pro-regime forces have mounted against Syrian opposition forces since the offensive began on November 27. Russian forces separately conducted multiple airstrikes—some in cooperation with the SAA—targeting opposition forces in Aleppo City and Idlib Province on December

Syrian opposition forces also advanced southeast of Aleppo to the town of Khanasir on December 1, which is probably part of an effort to isolate Aleppo and block resupply and reinforcements. Syrian opposition forces advanced through Safirah and captured the largest group of SAA forces they have captured so far.[11] The opposition forces captured an SAA general in Safirah.[12] A Syria-focused analyst reported that rebels have captured over 150 Syrian regime soldiers so far.[13] Fateh Mubin announced that it took control of the town of Khanasir and the Khanasir-Aleppo highway.[14] Cutting off this highway would prevent regime reinforcements from approaching Aleppo City from the southeast, further isolating the city from regime attacks.

The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) announced that it captured Tel Rifat, north of Aleppo City, from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on December 1.[15] The SNA launched a separate operation into regime-controlled territory on November 30 to take territory from the SDF, Syrian regime, and Iranian-backed militias.[16] The SNA seized Deir Jamal and blocked off access to Tal Rifaat before moving into the town.[17] The SNA also seized several towns and military positions north of Aleppo along Highway 214, including the Menagh military airport.[18] Regime-affiliated media reported that SDF forces based in Deir ez Zor mobilized to deploy to Manbij to increase the SDF's force presence there.[19]

The SNA continues to retain territory that it seized during the first day of its operation, including the Kuweires military airport, east of Aleppo City.[20] Local sources circulated footage of SNA fighters seizing SAA L-39 fighter jets, a Syrian Pantsir air defense system, and an Iranian drone from the Ababil family at the airport.[21]

Fateh Mubin and the SNA appear to be coordinating operations to seize territory from the Syrian regime and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Social media users circulated footage of SNA and HTS fighters joining convoys near the Aleppo International Airport to launch an operation northeast of Aleppo City reportedly.[22] It is unclear if HTS's forces were involved in the seizure of Tal Rifaat or any nearby towns. Fateh Mubin and the SNA have both operated in some of the same towns during the ongoing operation, suggesting that they have at least some degree of tactical coordination.[23] It is not immediately clear to what degree Fateh Mubin and the SNA are coordinating to isolate Aleppo.

Fateh Mubin issued a statement addressed to all SDF combat units in Aleppo City.[24] The group said that they would allow SDF units safe passage out of Aleppo city towards northeastern Syria. The group said that Syrian Kurds are "our people" and that Fateh Mubin is "responsible for protecting [the Kurds] and ensuring a decent life for "them." [25] It is unclear if SNA forces will follow Fateh Mubin's calls for safe passage for the SDF. Damascus-based media reported that SDF forces began to evacuate from Aleppo City towards Manbij.[26]

Syrian regime leadership held several diplomatic meetings with regional officials almost certainly to coordinate with allies and other stakeholders amid the opposition offensive.

President Bashar al Assad was reportedly in Moscow, Russia on November 30, though the Kremlin spokesperson declined to comment on the matter.[27] Assad met with Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi in Damascus on December 1 to discuss Iranian support for Assad's regime in Syria.[28] Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi will meet with Turkish officials in Ankara, Turkey after he visits Damascus on December 1.[29] Assad also spoke with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani on November 30.[30] Syrian Foreign Affairs Minister Bassem Sabbagh also spoke with his Jordanian counterpart Ayman Safadi in a telephone conversation.[31]

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian stressed the importance of cohesion among Islamic countries in countering "regional terrorism" in a telephone conversation with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani on December 1.[32] The phone conversation focused on northern Syria.

Some of Assad's allies have already begun assisting the regime. Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have reportedly been active in northwestern Syria since Syrian opposition forces began their surprise offensive on November 27. Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada's Secretary General, Abu Alaa al Walai, claimed that Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada helped to defend against Turkish-backed SNA offensives on November 30.[33] A Syrian journalist claimed that Iranian-backed Iraqi militia the Badr Organization deployed fighters in an unspecified area in Syria.[34] These militias have long operated in Syria to support the Syrian regime.[35] Iran and Iranian-backed Iraqi militias will probably deploy additional forces into Deir ez Zor Province to secure ground lines of communication between Iraq and the frontline areas if Iranian-backed militias continue to fight in northwestern Syria.

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reportedly replaced Lieutenant General Sergei Kisel with Colonel General Alexander Chaiko, who will reprise his previous assignment as commander of the Russian force grouping in Syria, though it remains unclear how Russian operations in Syria may change. Russian ultranationalist milbloggers, including the Kremlin-linked Rybar Telegram channel, claimed on November 30 and December 1 that the MoD removed Kisel as Commander of the Russian Force Grouping in Syria and replaced him with Chaiko.[36] Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on December 1 that Chaiko replaced Kisel and that Russian Navy Commander-in-Chief Admiral Alexander Moiseyev arrived in Tartous, Syria.[37] Chaiko served as chief of staff of the Russian Force Grouping in Syria from 2015 to 2017 and served as overall commander of the Russian force grouping in Syria from September 2019 to November 2020, February to June 2021, and from September to December 2022.[38] It is unclear what position Chaiko held from December 2022 until present. Kisel has reportedly commanded the Russian force grouping in Syria since at least May 2024.[39] Some Russian milbloggers claimed that Kisel's removal will not significantly change the situation or Russian operations in Syria because the Russian military command has routinely rotated commanders to positions in Syria after battlefield failures in Ukraine.[40] ISW is unable to independently confirm this reported command change at this time.

Key Takeaways:

- **Syrian Regime Operations:** Syrian Arab Army (SAA) reinforcements fortified defensive lines north of Hama City and prevented Syrian opposition forces from advancing into Hama City. The

Syrian regime appears to be concentrating its efforts on securing Hama Province and has not yet attempted to re-capture or send reinforcements towards Aleppo.

- **Syrian Opposition Operations in Tel Rifat:** The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) announced that it captured Tel Rifat, north of Aleppo City, from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on December 1.
- **Syrian Opposition Operations near Aleppo:** Syrian opposition forces also advanced southeast of Aleppo to the town of Khanasir on December 1, which is probably part of an effort to isolate Aleppo and block resupply and reinforcements.
- **Coordination Between Opposition Groups:** Fateh Mubin and the SNA appear to be coordinating operations to seize territory from the Syrian regime and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Fateh Mubin and the SNA have both operated in some of the same towns during the ongoing operation, suggesting that they have at least some degree of tactical coordination. It is not immediately clear to what degree Fateh Mubin and the SNA are coordinating to isolate Aleppo.
- **Syrian Regime Diplomatic Response:** Syrian regime leadership held several diplomatic meetings with regional officials almost certainly to coordinate with allies and other stakeholders amid the opposition offensive.
- **Iranian-backed Iraqi Militias in Syria:** Some of Assad's allies, including Iraqi militias, have already begun assisting the regime. Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have reportedly been active in northwestern Syria since Syrian opposition forces began their surprise offensive on November 27.
- **Russian Forces in Syria:** The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reportedly replaced Lieutenant General Sergei Kisel with Colonel General Alexander Chaiko, who will reprise his previous assignment as commander of the Russian force grouping in Syria, though it remains unclear how Russian operations in Syria may change.

Key Takeaways in the October 7 War

As of December 1, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Gaza Strip:

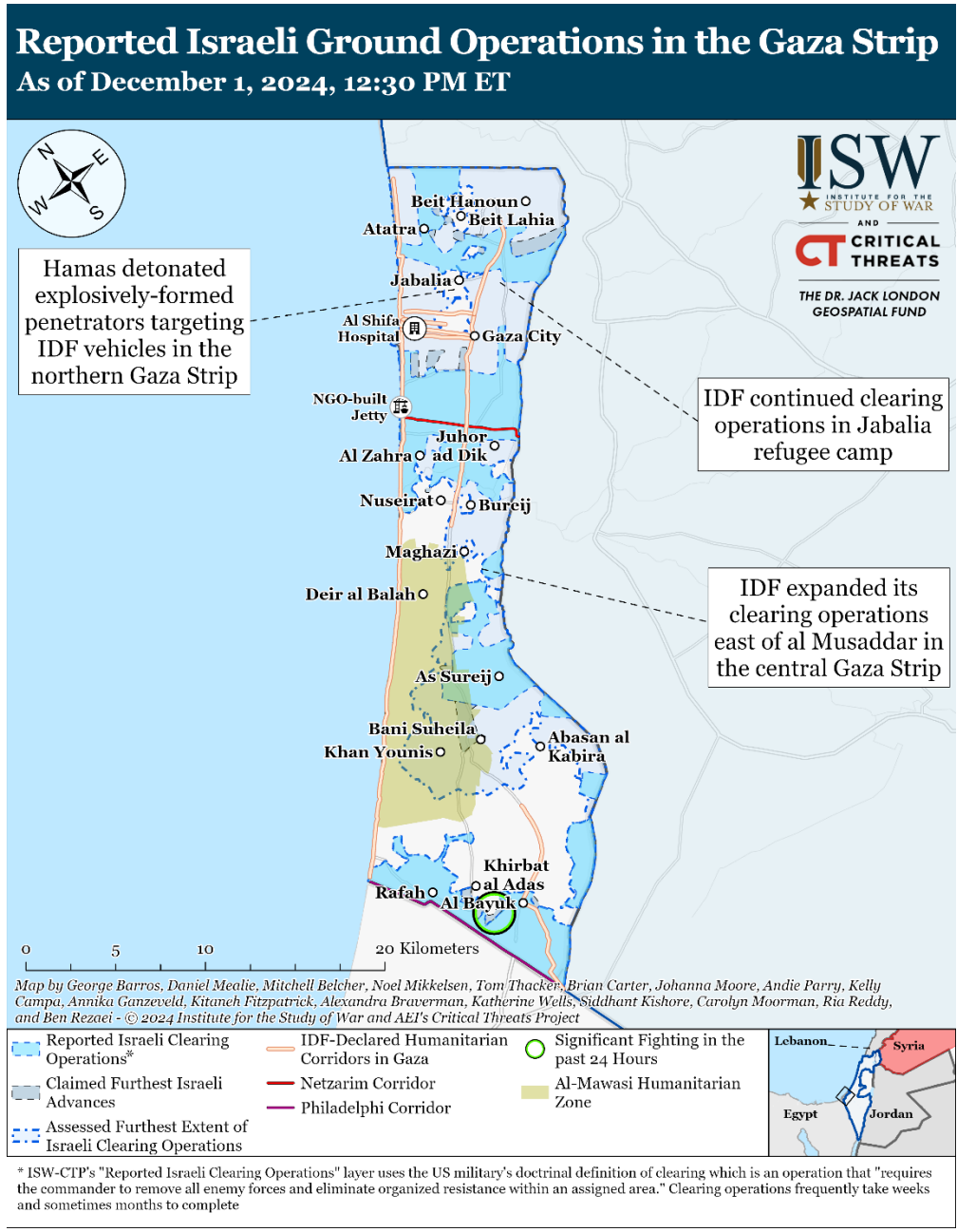
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- 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 162nd Division continued clearing operations in the northern Gaza Strip on December 1. A Palestinian journalist reported gunfire from Israeli vehicles in areas west of Beit Lahia and Jabalia refugee camp.[41] Geolocated footage from December 1 shows the IDF conducting controlled demolition of civilian infrastructure in Jabalia refugee camp.[42] A Palestinian journalist also reported Israeli gunfire and demolition activities in Saftawi, northern Gaza Strip.[43] Hamas

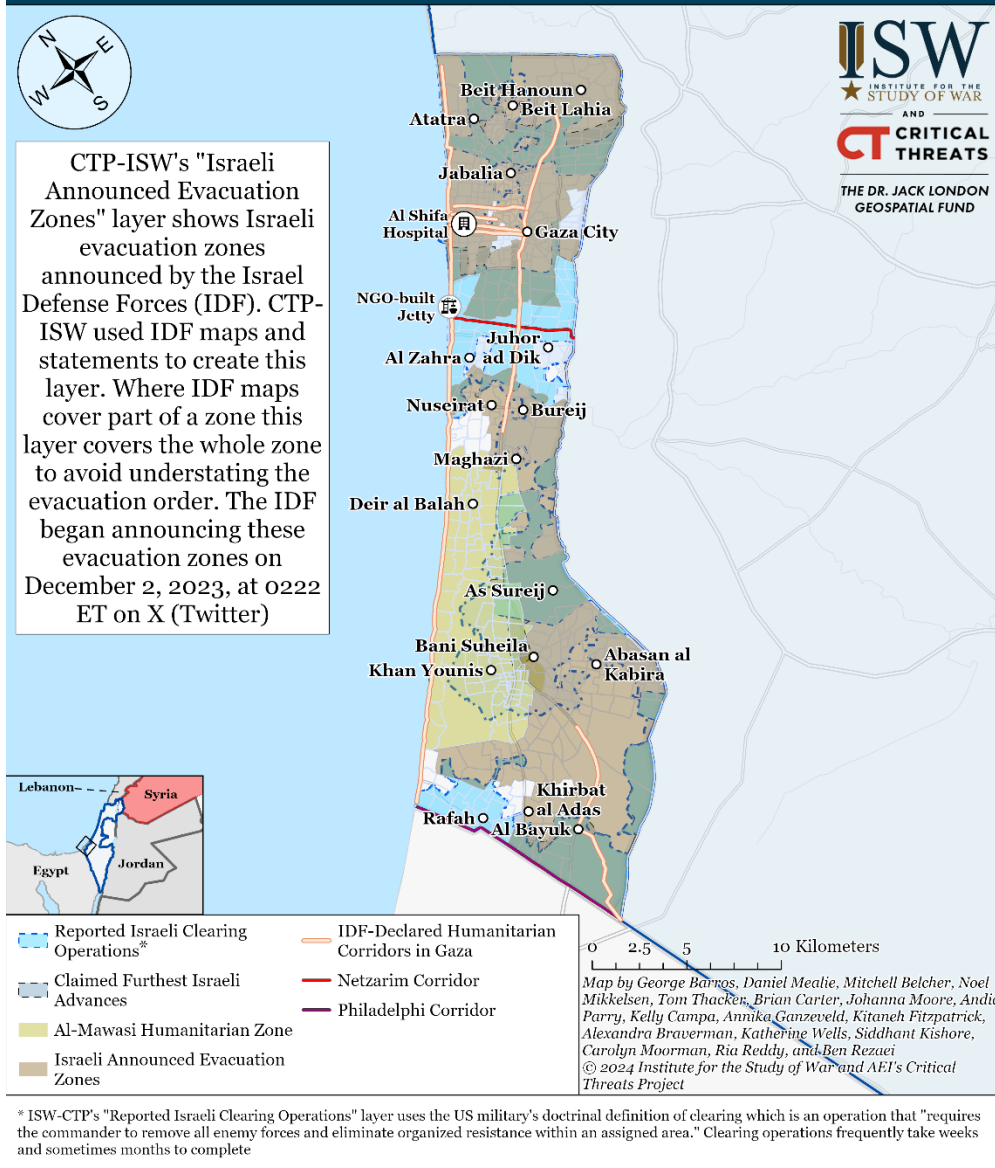
detonated explosively formed penetrators (EFP) targeting an Israeli tank and a bulldozer in Saftawi on November 30.[44]

The IDF continued clearing operations in the central Gaza Strip on December 1. A Palestinian journalist reported gunfire from Israeli vehicles around the Bureij and Nuseirat refugee camps.[45] The IDF also operated in eastern Deir al Balah, according to the journalist.[46] Commercially available satellite imagery captured on December 1 showed that the IDF expanded clearing operations east of al Musaddar in the central Gaza Strip.



Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip

As of December 1, 2024 at 12:30 PM ET



The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) paused humanitarian aid delivery into the Gaza Strip via the Karem Shalom border crossing on December 1 due to increased looting of aid trucks by armed groups in the Gaza Strip.[47] UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said that the road leading to the Gaza Strip from the Karem Shalom border crossing is no longer safe after armed groups looted an unspecified number of aid trucks there on November 30.[48] Lazzarini is likely referring to the road stretch connecting Karem Shalom crossing to Salah al Din Road in eastern Rafah City where armed groups intercept and loot humanitarian aid trucks.[49] Armed groups previously stole approximately a hundred aid trucks entering the Gaza Strip on November 16.[50]

Hamas and Fatah officials convened in Cairo, Egypt to discuss post-war governance for the Gaza Strip on November 30.^[51] Unspecified Palestinian sources told London-based, Saudi-owned media outlet *Asharq al Awsat* that Hamas is “more open than ever” to a ceasefire agreement.^[52] The sources also claimed that Hamas will accept a Lebanon-like ceasefire agreement which will allow a gradual withdrawal of the IDF from the Gaza Strip and the return of Gazans to the northern Gaza Strip. Hamas stated that it agrees with the Palestinian Authority (PA) assuming control of the Gazan side of the Rafah crossing, according to the sources cited by *Asharq al Awsat*.^[53] A Hamas decision to concede on some of its maximalist ceasefire demands is likely influenced by Israel and Hezbollah reaching a ceasefire deal on November 26.^[54] Hamas may calculate that it needs to offer concessions to ensure its survival.^[55] Yahya Sinwar previously calculated that Hamas could survive if the October 7 War expanded and thus compelled the IDF to reduce military pressure on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.^[56] That scenario is less likely since Hezbollah exited the war.

West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

The IDF conducted an airstrike targeting a Palestinian militia cell in Jenin, West Bank on December 1.^[57] **The airstrike killed four Palestinian fighters including a Hamas member.**^[58] The IDF said that the Hamas member was responsible for a shooting attack that killed an Israeli civilian in the Jordan Valley in August 2024.^[59] The militia cell was also responsible for conducting shooting attacks targeting Israeli towns located in Israel along the Israel-West Bank boundary.^[60] The IDF also confiscated three firearms and explosive materials from the target site.^[61]

Northern Israel and Lebanon

Lebanese Hezbollah objectives:

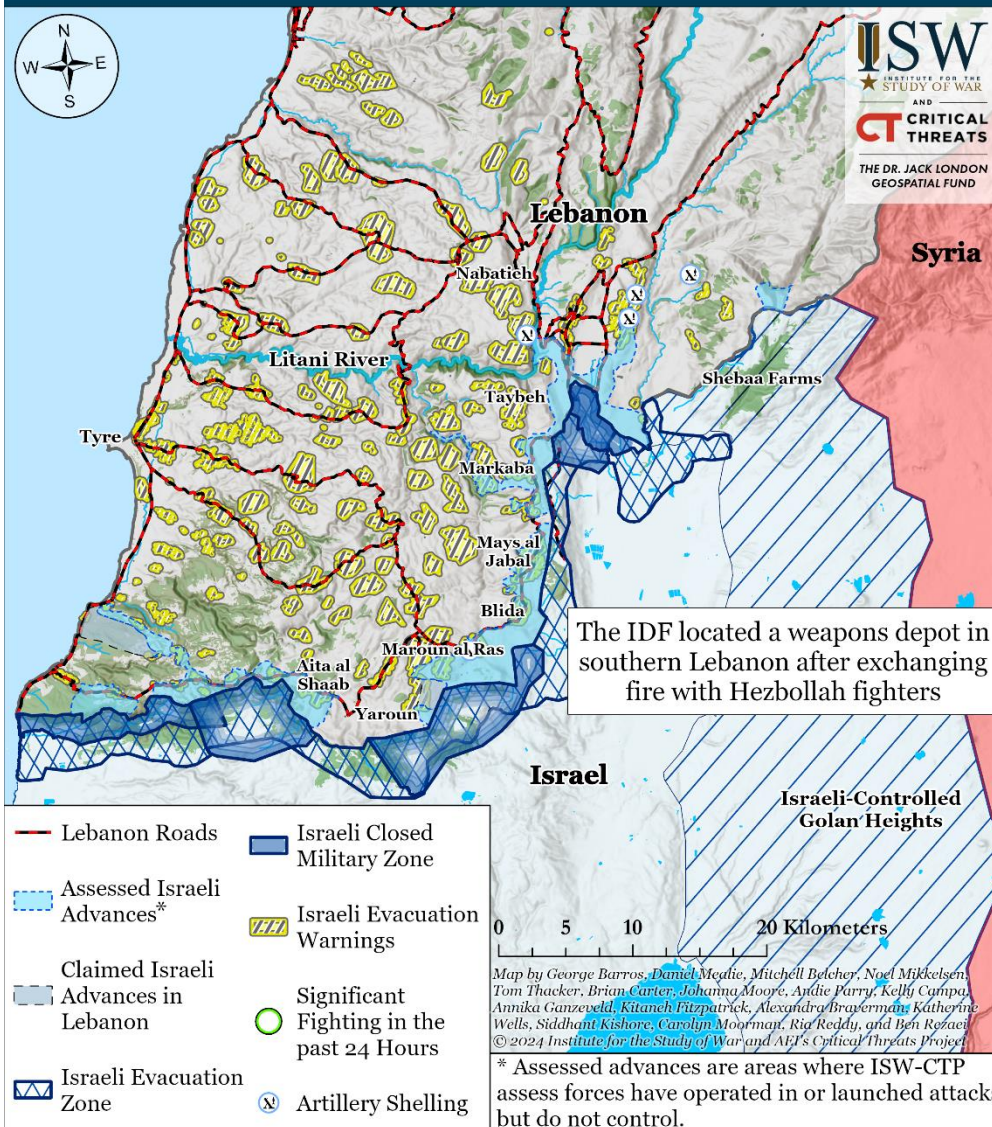
- End Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip
- Survive the October 7 War as a capable political and military organization with control over Lebanon

The Israel-Lebanese Hezbollah ceasefire continued to hold for the sixth day since the ceasefire went into effect on November 26. Hezbollah has conducted no attacks into Israel.

The IDF has continued to order Lebanese civilians from returning to the areas of southern Lebanon where IDF units are deployed. The IDF Arabic-language spokesperson republished “no-go” zones in southern Lebanon on November 30 and reiterated that citizens are prohibited from returning until further notice.^[62] Lebanese media reported five incidents of IDF artillery shelling in areas like Aitaroun and Arnoun al Shaqif.^[63]

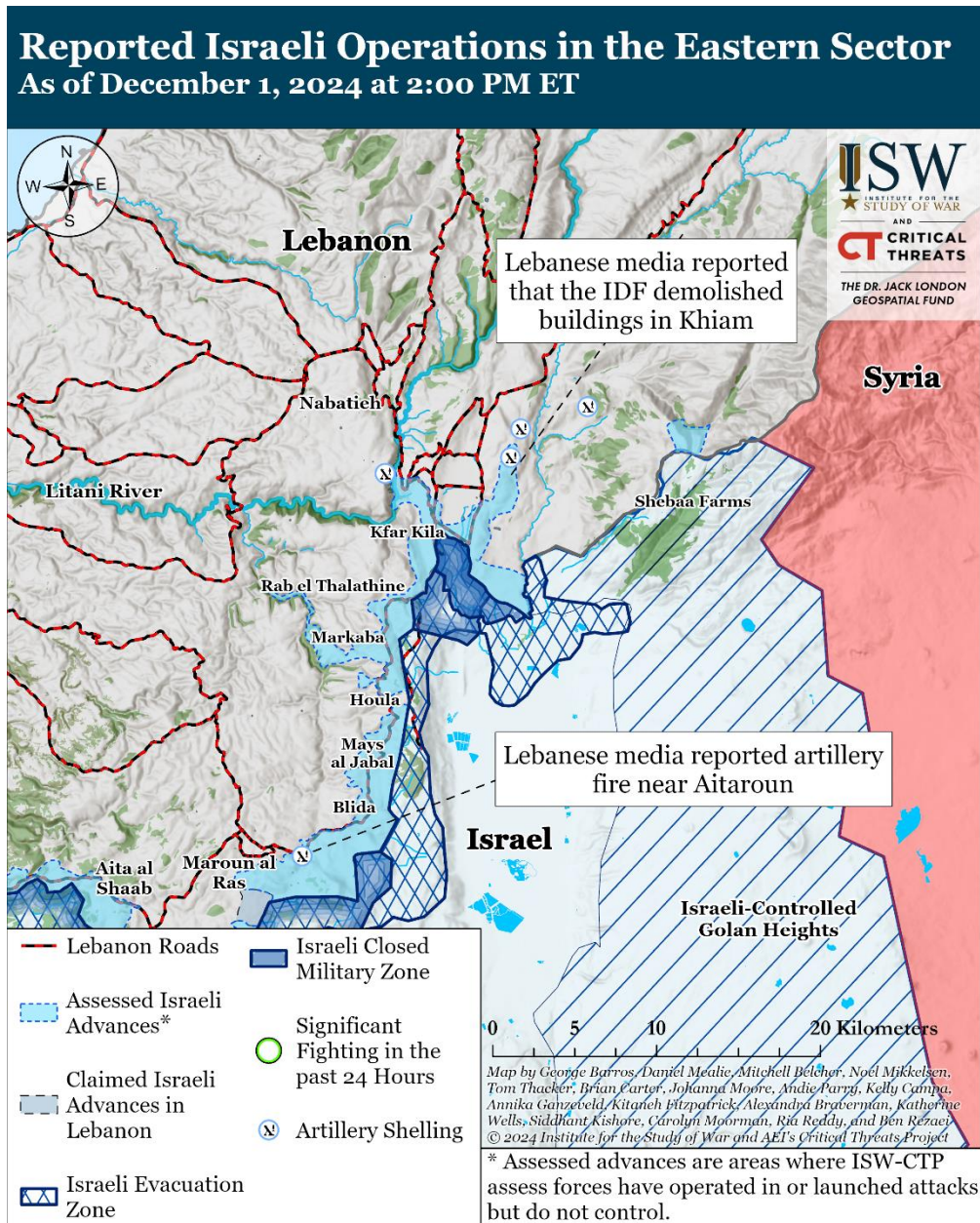
Reported Israeli Operations in Lebanon

As of December 1, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET

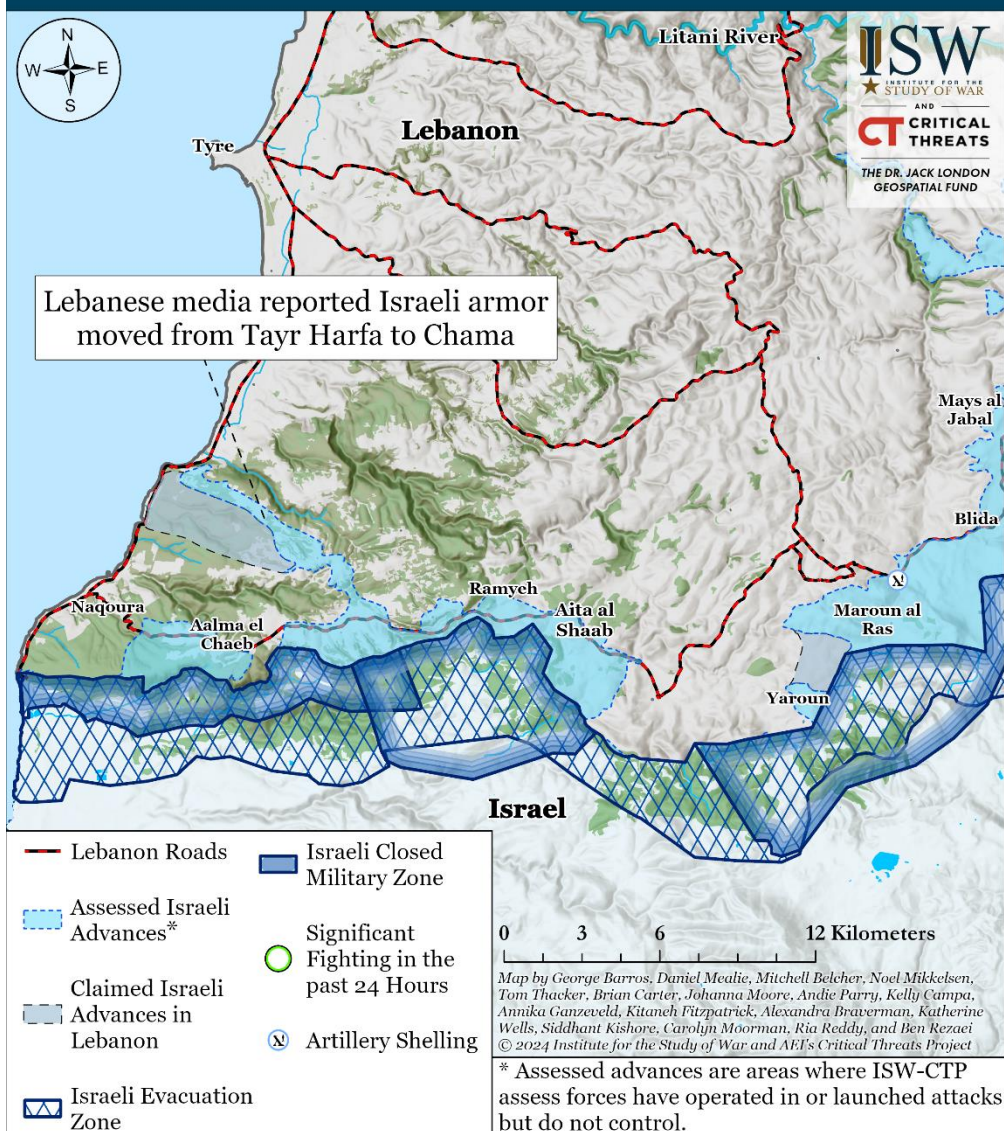


The IDF continued operations in southern Lebanon to counter any potential violations of the ceasefire by Hezbollah on December 1. An Israeli Army Radio correspondent reported on December 1 that the Israeli forces exchanged fire with Hezbollah fighters operating near Hezbollah infrastructure in southern Lebanon.[64] Israeli forces raided the facility after killing the fighters and located a weapons depot. Lebanese media reported on December 1 that IDF armor moved from Tayr Harfa toward Chama.[65] Lebanese media also reported that the IDF demolished buildings in Khiam on December 1.[66] The IDF confirmed to Western media that it continues to operate around Khiam on November 29.[67] Lebanese media reported two Israeli low-altitude reconnaissance flights over Beirut, which are allowed under the ceasefire's terms.[68]

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) continued post-war operations in southern Lebanon on December 1. The LAF said it detonated unexploded ordinances in multiple areas in southern Lebanon.[69]



Reported Israeli Operations in the Western Sector As of December 1, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET

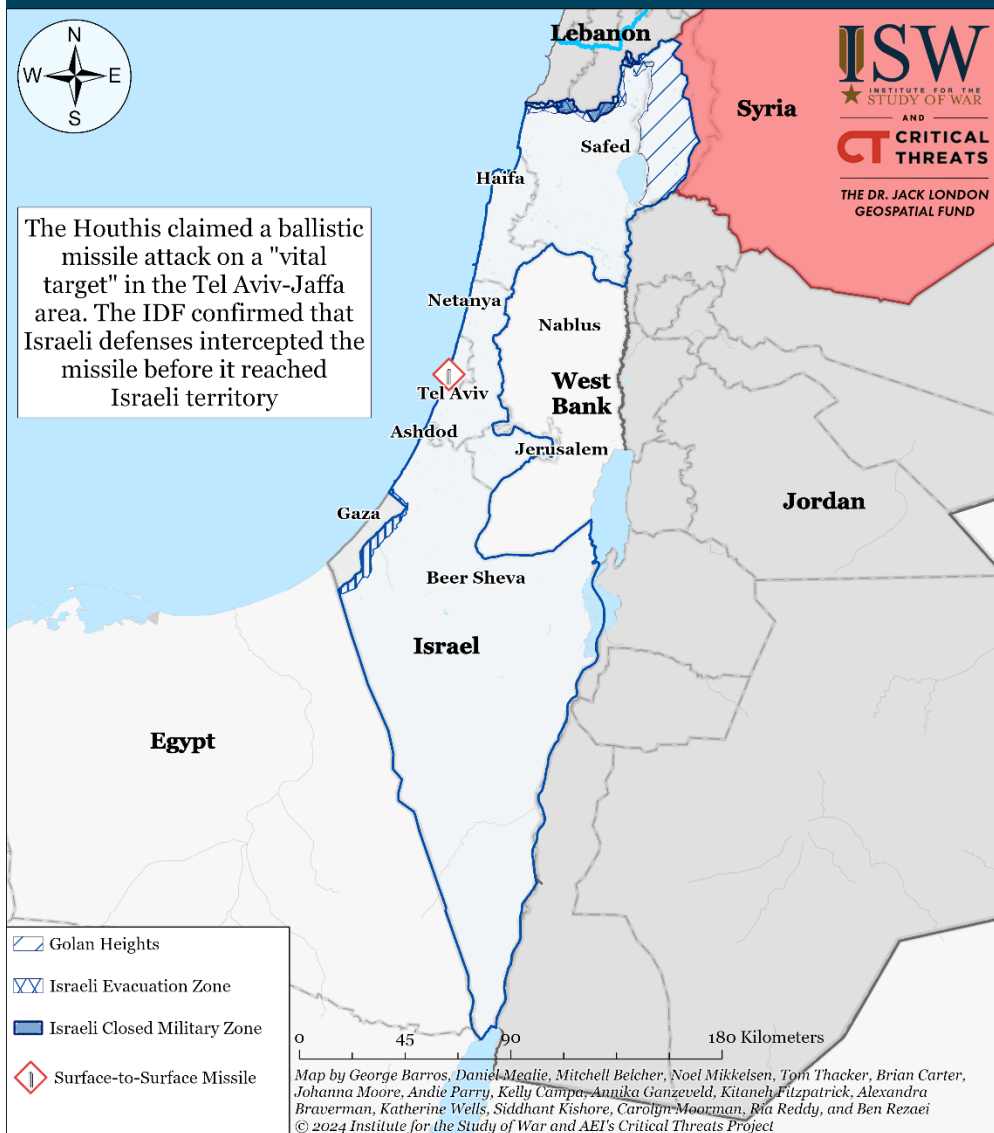


Iran and the Axis of Resistance

Houthi military spokesperson Brigadier General Yahya Sarea claimed on December 1 that the Houthis fired a Palestine 2 “hypersonic” ballistic missile targeting a “vital” location in the Tel Aviv-Jaffa area, Israel.[70] The IDF intercepted the missile on November 30 before the missile entered Israeli territory.[71]

Houthi Attacks in Israel

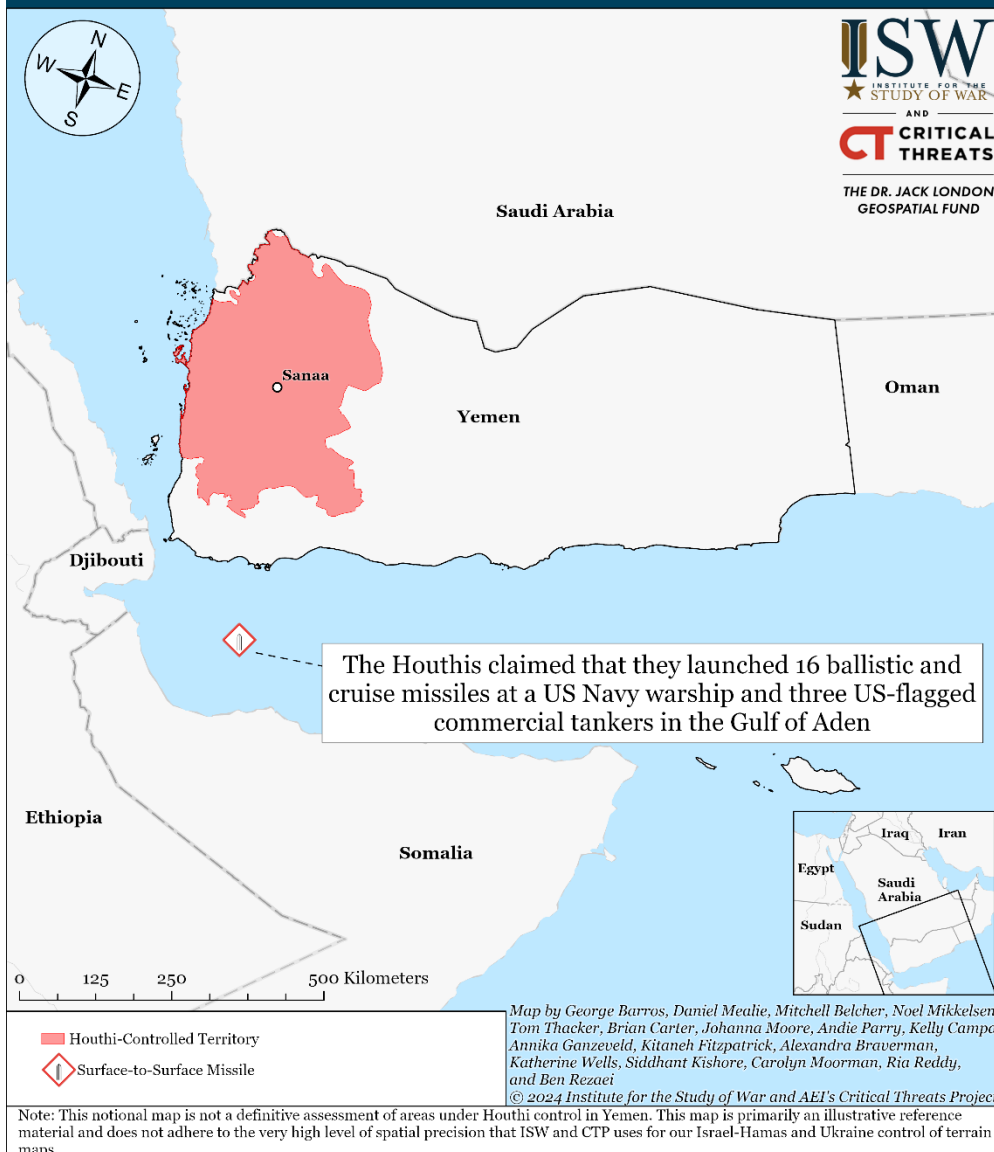
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Houthi fighters fired ballistic and cruise missiles and a drone targeting a US military vessel and three American-flagged commercial vessels in the Gulf of Aden on December 1. Houthi spokesperson Yahya Sarea claimed on December 1 that the Houthis launched 16 ballistic and cruise missiles and a drone at an unnamed US military destroyer and American-flagged oil tanker *Stena Impeccable*, container ship *Maersk Saratoga*, and bulk carrier *Liberty Grace* in the Arabian Sea, near the Gulf of Aden.[72] The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) reported an incident on an unspecified vessel 80 nautical miles south of Aden in the Gulf of Aden.[73]

Houthi Attacks in the Red Sea

As of December 1, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



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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