

Iran Update



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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.

Iran conducted an air defense exercise for the second time in recent days. This activity reflects Iranian concerns about possible airstrikes on Iranian nuclear facilities, as Tehran has continued to expand its nuclear program. The Artesh—the conventional Iranian military—conducted the latest air defense exercise across northern and western Iran on January 12.[1] This exercise notably covered the Iranian nuclear facilities around Arak and Fordow.[2] Though Iran typically conducts air defense exercises around this time of year, this activity nonetheless probably reflects Iranian leaders' assumption that they will face airstrikes against their nuclear program in the near term. This assumption has no bearing on the likelihood that the United States or Israel would actually conduct such a strike, however.

The Artesh exercises tested the manned and unmanned aircraft as well as the following air defense systems, according to Iranian state media:[3]

- **Rad missile.** An Iranian-made, short-range, anti-tank missile designed for T-72 tanks, fired from a 125 millimeters (mm) caliber barrel, and with a target distance of four kilometers (km).[4]
- **Majid missile.** An Iranian-made, short-range, shoulder-fired, electro-optical-guided missile with a maximum target range of 15 km.[5]
- **Talash missile.** An Iranian-made, long-range, mobile surface-to-air air defense missile system, capable of hitting all altitude targets with at a maximum range of 200km.[6]
- **Misagh-3 missile.** An Iranian-made, short-range, shoulder-fired system with a laser fuse and maximum range of five km and flight altitude of 3,500 meters (m).[7]
- **Khordad-15 system.** An Iranian-made, long-range air defense system with a detection range of 85 km and target range of 45 km.[8]

- **Shahid Jalilvand radar system.** An Iranian-made, medium-range, phased array radar system able to detect small flying targets with low cross-sections in three dimensions and a 24-hour operational continuity.[9]
- **Samavat radar-controlled artillery system.** A short-range Iranian version of the Swiss low-altitude Skyguard radar system with a range of 4 km and uses an anti-aircraft 35mm Oerlikon caliber barrel gun.[10]
- **Seraj radar-controlled air defense artillery system.** Iranian-made artillery system with a 35mm caliber barrel gun, radar, and a new optical system.[11]

This activity comes after the IRGC Aerospace Force conducted an air defense exercise around the other major Iranian nuclear facility at Natanz on January 7.[12] This flurry of air defense activity is part of the larger military exercise that the Iranian armed forces are holding across Iran until March 2025.[13] This exercise includes the Artesh and Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). It is unlikely that Iran could repel a US or Israeli airstrike given the inferiority of the Iranian systems that have been used in these exercises relative to the modern US and Israeli capabilities. This is especially the case given that Israel neutralized Iran’s S-300s—its most advanced air defense platform—in October 2024.

Iran could use part of its exercises to prepare for an attack on US or Israeli targets, though CTP-ISW assesses that this possibility is relatively unlikely at this time. Iran previously conducted exercises ahead of its Operation True Promise and Operation True Promise II attacks on Israel in April and October 2024 respectively.[14] And Iranian officials have yet to fulfill their vow to conduct a third missile attack on Israel.

Fatah released a statement on January 11 affirming that the PA will prevent any Hamas effort to stoke conflict in the West Bank.[15] Fatah stated that Hamas is responsible for the destruction of the Gaza Strip because Hamas “gambled with the interests and resources of the Palestinian people for Iran’s benefit.” PA forces have been operating in Jenin Governorate, northern West Bank, since early December 2024 to degrade Palestinian militias networks there.

Key Takeaways:

- **Iran:** Iran conducted an air defense exercise for the second time in recent days. This activity reflects Iranian concerns about a possible US or Israeli airstrike on Iranian nuclear facilities.
- **West Bank:** Fatah released a statement affirming that it will prevent any Hamas effort to stoke conflict against Israel in the West Bank.

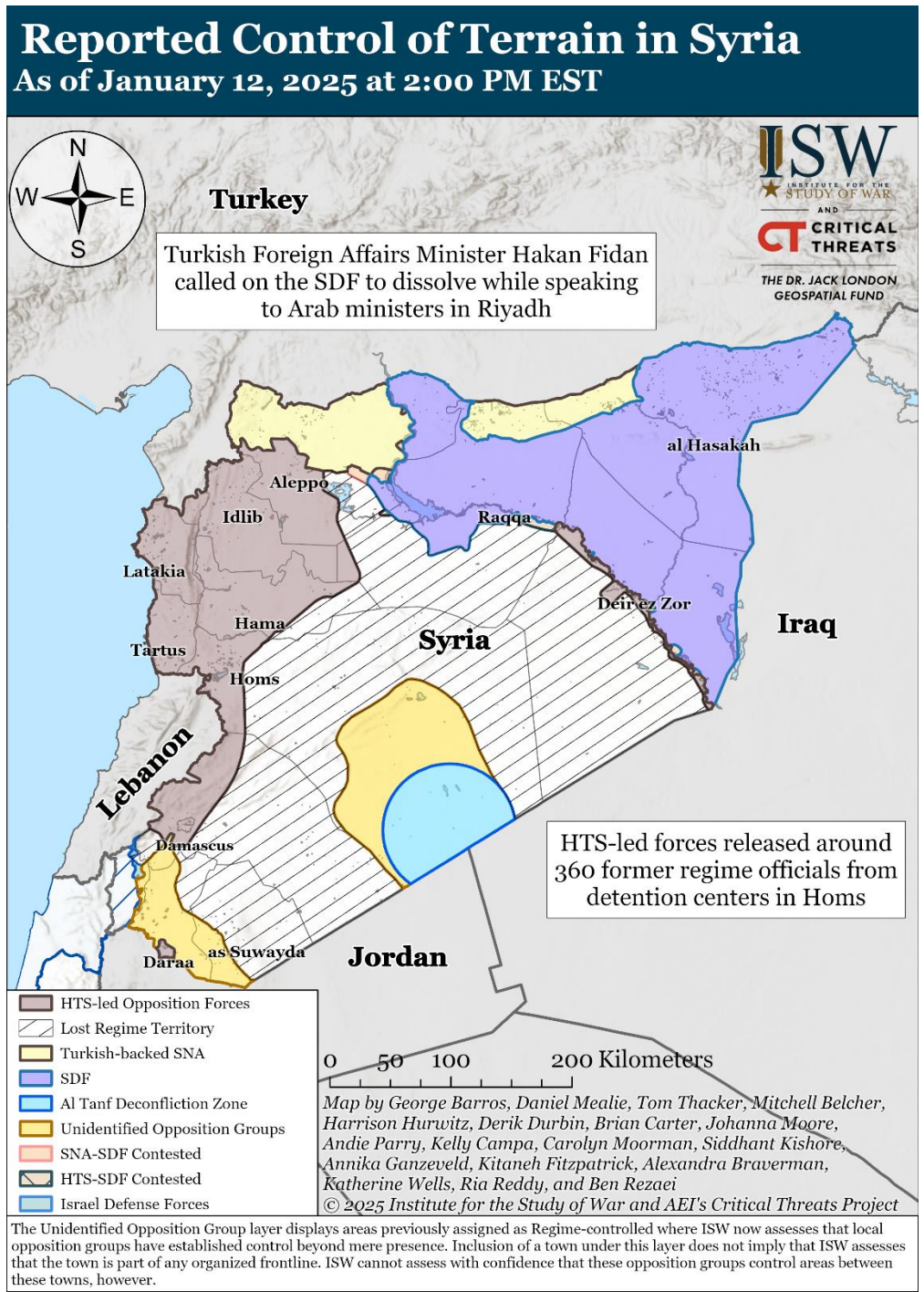
Syria

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Reestablish ground lines of communication through Syria to Lebanon
- Reestablish Iranian influence in Syria

Interim Syrian Foreign Affairs Minister Asaad al Shaibani met with Arab and Western foreign ministers in Riyadh on January 12.[16] Saudi Foreign Affairs Minister Faisal bin Farhan promised aid to Syria and emphasized the importance of lifting sanctions in his meeting with Shaibani.[17] Shaibani held separate meetings with Bahraini Foreign Affairs Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid al Zayani, British Foreign Affairs Minister David Lamy, and UN envoy to Syria Geir Pedersen.[18] Shaibani also met with Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Hakan Fidan.

Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Hakan Fidan called on the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to dissolve while speaking at the Riyadh summit on January 12.[19] Fidan said that the SDF must declare its dissolution if it is "sincere" in its efforts to integrate into the Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS)-led interim government.[20] Fidan emphasized that Turkey is prepared to take "more responsibility" in managing the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-controlled camps in SDF-held territory in northeastern Syria.[21] Fidan's remarks come amid recent Turkish and HTS coordination to coerce the SDF into disarming and integrating into the HTS-led defense apparatus. Turkish officials have repeatedly threatened to launch a military operation to "destroy" the SDF if it fails to disarm.[22]



Turkey attacked SDF elements along the eastern frontline amid indications of a possible Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) offensive against the SDF. Local, anti-SDF media reported on January 12 that Turkey conducted a drone strike targeting an SDF position on Mount Abdulaziz, south of Tal Tamr.[23]

Turkey has continued to support SNA efforts to isolate SDF elements along the Euphrates River since CTP-ISW's last data cut off on January 11. Local media reported that Turkish fighter jets struck several SDF positions near Sarrin, east of Qara Qozak bridge.[24] The SDF stated that one of the Turkish airstrikes killed three civilians.[25]

The SDF has continued to engage the SNA west of Tishreen Dam since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on January 11.[26] Geolocated footage posted by the SDF on January 11 showed the SDF engaging SNA fighters in Mahshiyat al Tawahin about 3.5 kilometers northwest of the dam.[27] The SDF also launched drones targeting SNA fighters along the frontlines.[28] Syrian media reported that seven SDF members were killed in clashes with the SNA.[29] Local, anti-SDF media reported that the SNA sent reinforcements to the Tishreen Dam frontlines.[30]

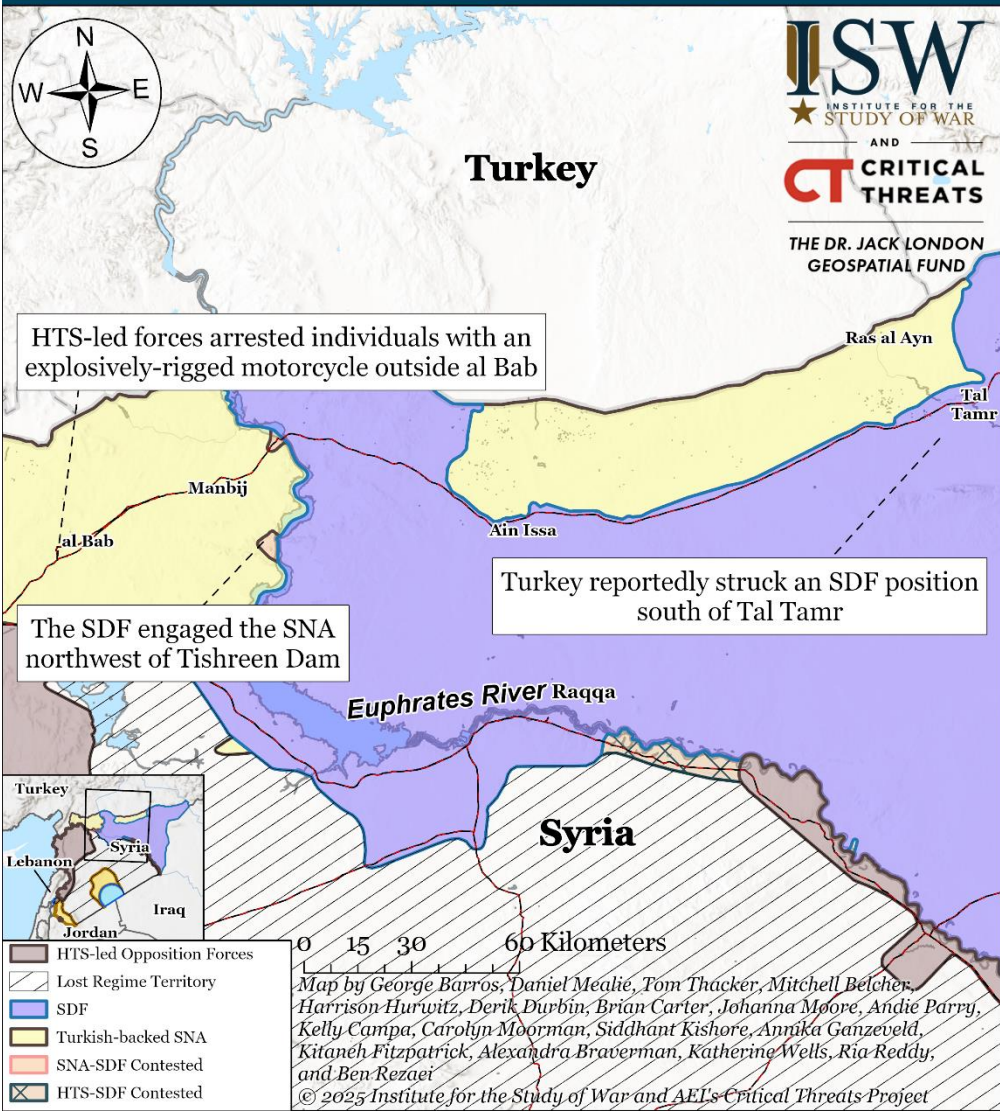
HTS-led forces arrested unspecified fighters with an explosively rigged motorcycle outside of al Bab City, northeast of Aleppo, on January 12.[31] Geolocated photos posted by local media on January 12 showed the seized motorcycle and explosives.[32] This incident is the second attempted motorcycle attack in SNA-controlled territory since January 1.[33]

HTS-led forces released around 360 former regime members from detention centers in Homs Province on January 12.[34] The HTS-led General Security Department stated that its initial investigation confirmed that the detainees had no weapons nor intend to "carry out any action" against the HTS-led interim government.[35] The HTS-led forces previously arrested the former regime members during "combing operations" in Homs Province between January 2 and 6.[36]

The Jordanian armed forces stated that it engaged several armed smugglers who were trying to enter Jordan from Syria on January 12.[37] The Jordanian forces killed one of the smugglers and confiscated two Kalashnikov rifles, a pistol, and "large quantities" of narcotics.[38] One Jordanian border guard was injured.[39] This incident is the second that CTP-ISW has observed on the Jordan-Syria border since the fall of the Bashar al Assad regime.[40] Jordan and the HTS-led Syrian interim government agreed on January 7 to form a joint security committee to combat drug and weapons smuggling on their border.[41]

Control of Terrain in Northern Syria

As of January 12, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Iraq

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Strengthen Iranian and Axis of Resistance influence over the Iraqi state and society
- Harden the Iraqi government against internal dissent

Nothing significant to report.

Arabian Peninsula

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Harden the Houthi regime against internal dissent in Houthi-controlled areas

- Destroy the anti-Houthi opposition in order to control all of Yemen
- Erode Israeli will to continue the war in the Gaza Strip

The Houthis claimed that they conducted a drone and missile attack targeting the USS *Harry S. Truman* aircraft carrier in the northern Red Sea on January 11.[42] The Houthis claimed that they attacked the carrier and its accompanying naval vessels for over nine hours.[43] The Houthis last claimed to attack the carrier on January 9.[44]

The Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

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
- Rebuild and reestablish Hezbollah in southern Lebanon
- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

The Gaza Strip

Senior Israel Defense Forces (IDF) officials said that the IDF clearing operations in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip are aimed at preventing Palestinian militias from conducting indirect fire attacks toward southern Israel.[45] An Israeli Army Radio correspondent, citing senior IDF southern command officials, reported on January 12 that IDF ground operations in Beit Hanoun are meant to destroy militia infrastructure along the ridge line that overlooks civilian centers in southern Israel.[46] The officials added that preventing Gazans from returning to these areas in Beit Hanoun will remove the threat of indirect fire attacks toward southern Israel given that Palestinian militias use civilian infrastructure and residential areas to position rocket launchers. The IDF has so far cleared 40 percent of militia infrastructure in Beit Hanoun, according to the correspondent, and will require a “few more weeks” to fully clear the area.[47] Palestinian militias have claimed almost daily indirect fire attacks toward southern Israel in the past two weeks.[48]

Senior IDF officials assessed that Palestinian militias avoid direct engagements in the northern Gaza Strip and prefer other approaches to attacking the IDF there.[49] Palestinian militias capture houses and rig them with explosives to use against the IDF. The IDF has so far located around 30 such explosively rigged buildings in the northern Gaza Strip.

The IDF reported on January 12 that its 933rd Infantry Brigade (143rd Division) has destroyed Palestinian militia infrastructure in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip in recent weeks.[50] The IDF located weapons, including explosives and rocket propelled grenades (RPG), during raids there. The IDF also destroyed Hamas militia sites using artillery fire. Israeli Army Radio reported on January 12 that Palestinian militias detonated an improvised explosive device (IED) targeting an IDF armored personnel carrier, killing four Israeli soldiers and injuring two others in Beit Hanoun.[51] Palestinian militias killed 10 Israeli soldiers in Beit Hanoun last week, according to an Israeli Army Radio correspondent.[52]

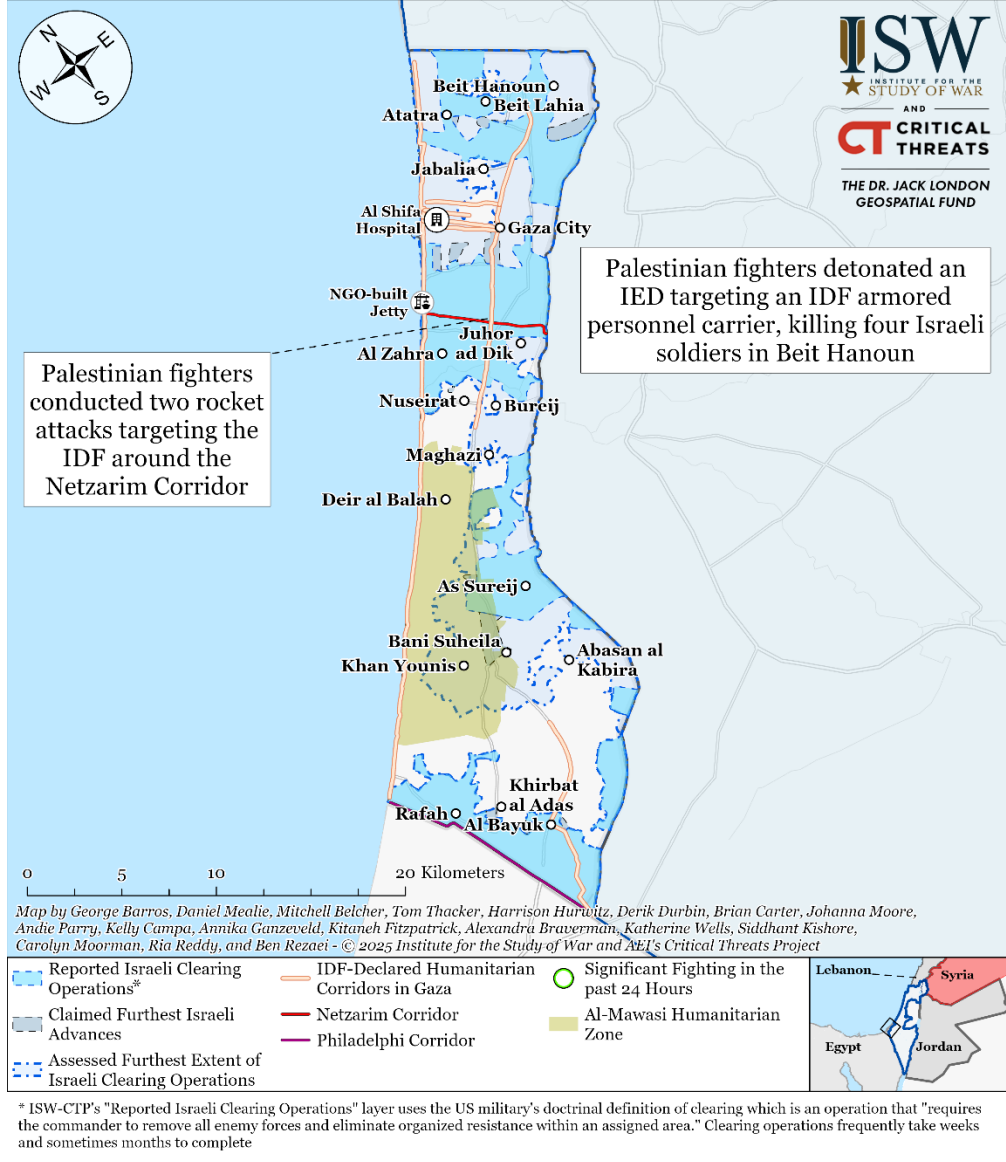
Palestinian militias claimed two rocket attacks targeting the IDF around the Netzarim Corridor since CTP-ISW's last data cut off on January 11.[53]

The IDF Arabic-language spokesperson issued an evacuation order for part of Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip on January 12.[54] The IDF reported that Palestinian militias are using

this area to fire rockets toward southern Israel and instructed Gazans to immediately relocate to the IDF-designated humanitarian zone.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu discussed the ongoing ceasefire-hostage negotiations with Hamas in Doha during a phone call with US President Joe Biden on January 12.[55] Biden and Netanyahu also discussed "the fundamentally changed" developments in the Middle East following the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire and the fall of Bashar al Assad regime in Syria.[56]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip As of January 12, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Lebanon

The IDF Air Force struck three "suspects" in the Mount Dov area along the Israel-Lebanon border on January 11.[57] Lebanese media separately reported that the IDF conducted an airstrike around Jabal al Batm, Tyre district in southwestern Lebanon on January 12.[58]

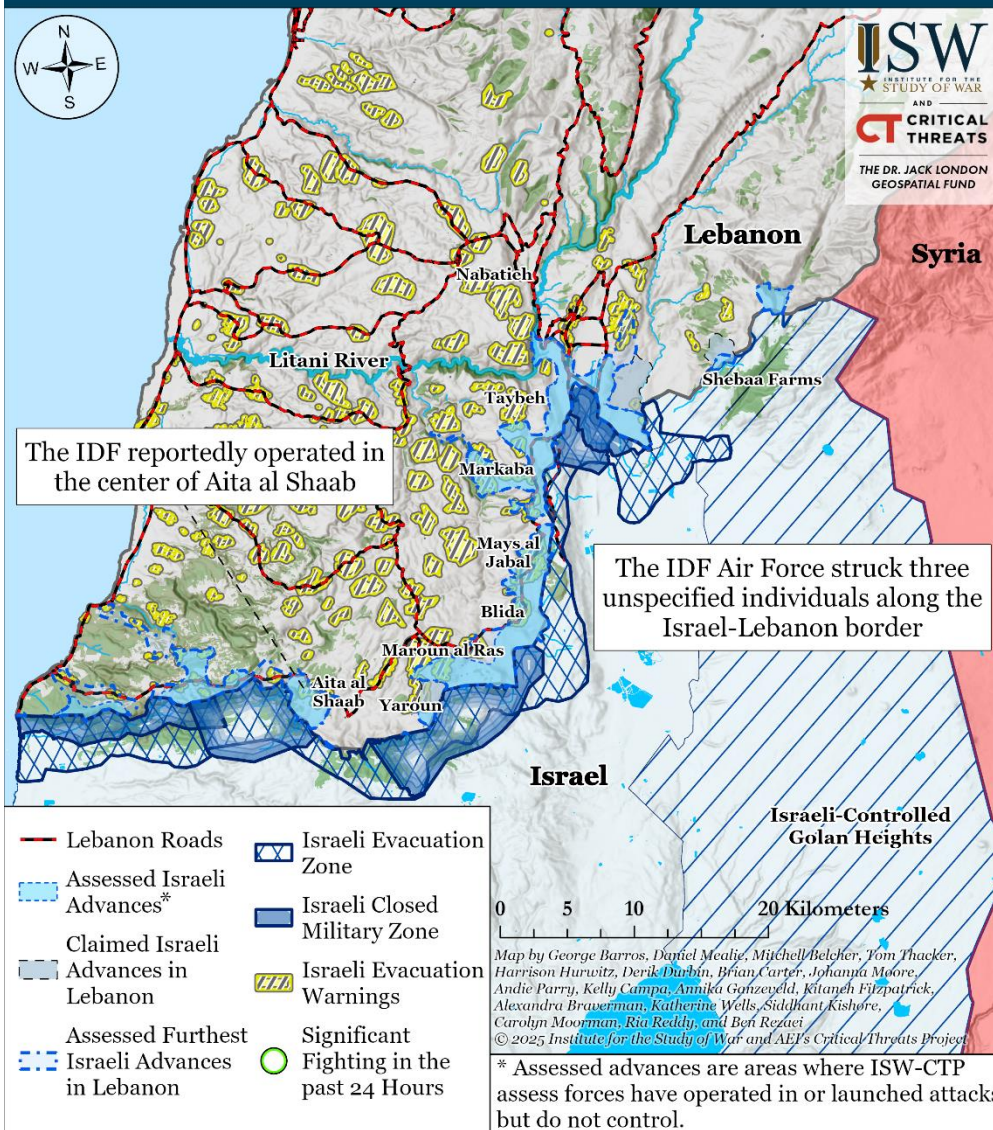
The IDF Arabic-language spokesperson re-issued warnings for residents of 61 villages in southern Lebanon on January 12.[59] The IDF instructed residents of these villages to avoid the area until further notice.

Lebanese Hezbollah-affiliated media reported that the IDF operated around Aita al Shaab in southeastern Lebanon on January 12.[60] Hezbollah-affiliated media reported that an Israeli bulldozer, two IDF tanks, and an armored personnel carrier entered the town of Aita al Shaab.[61] Lebanese media separately reported the detonation of buildings in Aita al Shaab.[62]

Lebanese media reported that the IDF operated around Bint Jbeil district in southern Lebanon on January 12. Lebanese media reported Israeli tank fire in Aitaroun.[63] These Israeli operations coincided with the Lebanese Armed Forces' (LAF) deployment to several towns in Bint Jbeil district, including Aitaroun.[64]

Reported Israeli Operations in Lebanon

As of January 12, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



West Bank

Israeli forces foiled an “imminent” shooting attack near Nablus, northern West Bank, on January 12.[65] Israeli forces arrested two Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fighters who were driving from Jenin to Nablus to conduct a shooting attack with M16 assault rifles and a “large amount” of ammunition.[66]

The PIJ Tulkarm Battalion published a statement on January 12 claiming that Palestinian Authority (PA) forces ambushed PIJ fighters in Tulkarm.[67] PA forces have been operating against Palestinian militias in Jenin since early December 2024.[68] The PA has not commented on the alleged ambush at the time of this writing.

Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

See topline section.

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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