



Operation Iron Swords Updated to 1 p.m., December 14, 2023

Northern Arena

- 448 attacks
- 104 Hezbollah operatives killed
- 16 other terrorist-organization operatives killed
- One Lebanese army soldier killed

Israeli Casualties

- Approximately 1,200 military and civilian dead (unofficial estimate)
- 135 abducted remain in the Gaza Strip

Rocket Fire

- About 10,600 rockets and mortar shells
- About 10% failed launches

Overview¹

► **The combat arena:** The IDF integrated maneuver continued in the northern and southern Gaza Strip, focusing on the Shejaiya and Jabalia neighborhoods in the northern Gaza Strip and Khan Yunis in the south. A Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) spokesman claimed the "resistance" [terrorist operatives] had gone from halting the IDF forces, to drawing them in and eliminating them.

► **According to an unofficial estimate, since October 7 approximately 1,200 Israeli civilians and security personnel have been killed, 445 of them soldiers and officers; 135 civilian and military hostages are still being held by the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip, 16 of them women and children; 115 hostages have been returned to Israel.**

► **The issue of the hostages:** IDF forces identified two more hostages who were killed by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Hamas officials reiterate that at the moment no negotiations are taking place on the issue.

¹ Click <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en> to subscribe and receive the ITIC's daily updates as well as its other publications.

► **The Gaza Strip:** The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip worsened due to the rains. Residents of East Khan Yunis were reportedly asked to leave their homes. Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, claimed Hamas was open to any discussion that could lead to the cessation of the "aggression," to a settlement and reaching a "political path".

► **The northern arena:** Hezbollah continued to attack IDF posts, groups of soldiers and cities, towns and villages on the northern border. In response the Israeli Air Force attacked Hamas targets in south Lebanon.

► **Judea and Samaria:** For the past three days, the Israeli security forces have been conducting intensive activities against terrorist operatives in Jenin and the Jenin refugee camp. The Palestinians reported 11 deaths and hundreds of detentions.

► **Public opinion survey:** On December 13, 2023, the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, headed by Dr. Khalil Shikaki, published the findings of its quarterly survey. The results indicated a fundamental difference between the attitudes of the residents of Judea and Samaria and those of the residents of the Gaza Strip. While in Judea and Samaria there were clear signs of an "aura of victory" and "rallying around the banner of resistance," survey respondents in the Gaza Strip were divided between those who expressed satisfaction over the events and a high proportion, sometimes reaching tens of percents, who related negatively to Hamas, the decision-making system of its leaders and its activities.

The Combat Arena

► **IDF activity on the ground:** The IDF integrated maneuver continued in the northern and southern Gaza Strip, focusing on the neighborhoods of Shejaiya and Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip and Khan Yunis in the south. They continued engaging in face-to-face battles with terrorist squads, some of which were located in public buildings such as schools, and destroyed weapons and terrorist facilities.

► **Senior terrorist Musab al-Breem, a PIJ spokesman,** claimed that the "resistance" [terrorist operatives] in the Gaza Strip had gone from halting the enemy to drawing in and eliminating IDF fighters. He claimed Israel would achieve nothing unless it stopped the aggression and the [alleged] "massacres" (Filastin al-Yawm Telegram channel, December 13, 2023; the Tunisian al-Shorouk, December 13, 2023).



IDF forces in the Gaza Strip (IDF spokesperson, December 14, 2023)

► **Northern Gaza Strip:** IDF forces killed a large number of terrorists in the northern Gaza Strip. Operating in a school compound which served as a central combat center for the Shejaiya Battalion, the fighters killed terrorists and destroyed terrorist facilities (IDF spokesperson, December 14, 2023). The forces also operated in Beit Lahia, in the area of Kamal Adwan Hospital², killing terrorists and locating weapons. Over 70 terrorist operatives exited the hospital, surrendered and laid down their weapons, and were detained and taken for questioning (IDF spokesperson, December 14, 2023).



Detention of terrorist operatives near Kamal Adwan hospital (IDF spokesperson, December 14, 2023)

► **Correspondent Anas al-Sharif** reported from Jabalia that the IDF ground force and Israeli Air Force attacks continued throughout the night and morning without a pause. He said that during the night the Air Force had attacked a residential complex in the Jabalia area and extracting the victims continued into the morning. He also reported substantial damage had been caused (QudsN X account, December 14, 2023).

² For further information about terrorist activities in the hospitals in the Gaza Strip, see the January 2017 ITIC report, "Information received from a Hamas operative who crossed the border to Israel indicates once again that Hamas uses Gaza Strip hospitals for military purposes."



Right: A residential area in Jabaliya attacked by the Israel Air Force at night (QudsN X account, December 14, 2023). Left: Evacuating casualties in Jabaliya (QudsN X account, December 14, 2023)

► **The southern Gaza Strip:** IDF activity continued to focus on the Khan Yunis area. The forces raided several focal points, finding guns, grenades and Kalashnikov rifles. In one of the compounds, the forces destroyed two shafts, a rocket launch pit and a weapons storehouse (IDF spokesperson, December 14, 2023). IDF forces raided a school building, eliminated a terrorist squad and located an underground combat facility. In Bani Suheila, in the Khan Yunis area, the forces killed a large number of terrorists in close encounters, with the help of tanks and airstrikes. They destroyed terrorist facilities, a Hamas communications center and terrorist meeting points (IDF spokesperson, December 13, 2023).

► **Mahmoud al-Loh, a correspondent for al-Ghad TV,** reporting from Shuhadaa al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir al-Balah, said nighttime IDF attacks had killed about 15 people in the Deir al-Balah and al-Nuseirat areas. He reported that throughout the morning there had intense fighting between the IDF forces and the "resistance fighters" [terrorist operatives] (al-Ghad TV, December 14, 2023).



Mahmoud al-Loh, a correspondent for al-Ghad TV, reporting from Shuhadaa al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir al-Balah (al-Ghad TV, December 14, 2023)

►Ibrahim Qanan, a correspondent for al-Ghad TV, reporting from Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis, said the IDF had carried out attacks in central and eastern Khan Yunis and in the al-Amal neighborhood in the west of the city. He said the IDF forces had distributed leaflets to the residents at the eastern entrance to the city asking them to evacuate their homes immediately. He noted that during the night, exchanges of fire continued between the IDF forces and the "resistance" [terrorist operatives] in Khan Yunis (al-Ghad TV, December 14, 2023).

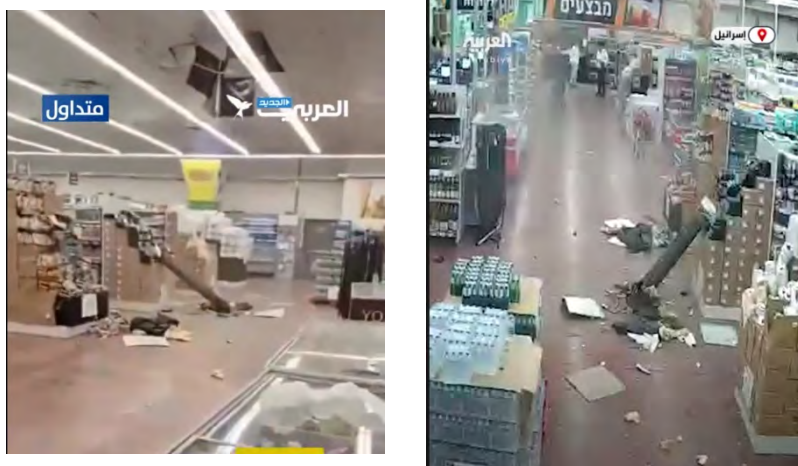
►The Palestinian media reported that during the night the Israeli Air Force had attacked two houses in the center of Rafah; 27 deaths were reported. In the morning, the funerals of the dead were held in Rafah (QUDSN account X, December 14, 2023).



**Evacuating casualties to the hospital in Rafah following the Israeli Air Force attack
(Wafa YouTube channel, December 14, 2023)**

Rocket fire from the Gaza Strip

►The Palestinian terrorist organizations continued firing rockets at Israel, for the most part targeting the cities, towns and villages surrounding the Gaza Strip. In the afternoon a barrage was fired at Ashdod. The Iron Dome aerial defense system intercepted six rockets. Debris from a rocket fell on a crowded supermarket. There were no casualties; the supermarket was damaged.



Damage in a supermarket in Ashdod from rocket debris (al-Arabiya YouTube channel, al-Araby al-Jadeed X account, December 13, 2023)

Israeli casualties

►According to an unofficial estimate, since October 7 approximately 1,200 Israelis have been killed. According to the IDF spokesperson, 445 of them were soldiers and officers (117 of whom have been killed since the start of the ground maneuver on 27 October, 2023); 135 civilian and military hostages are still being held by the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip, 16 of them women and children; 115 hostages have been returned.

The issue of the hostages

►IDF forces have identified two additional hostages who were killed by Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

►CNN reported from its "sources" that Hamas did not respond to the latest proposals for negotiating a hostage deal. According to the report, Qatar forwarded new proposals to Hamas that included a potential deal which would include not only the remaining women, but also men. According to Hamas, no negotiations were currently taking place, but attempts were being made to hold them (CNN, December 13, 2023).

►Senior terrorist Musa Abu Marzouk, a member of Hamas' political bureau, interviewed by a Japanese media outlet, claimed Hamas was ready to release more hostages but only through negotiations that included the release of Palestinians in Israeli prisons. He claimed that Hamas was seeking a ceasefire, but the Israelis refused, adding that Hamas was open to renewing negotiations, and that one of its main objectives was a ceasefire. He denied the reports that large numbers of Hamas operatives had surrendered, or that Israel had damaged the movement's ability to continue fighting. He said Hamas would not surrender but would

continue to fight. He claimed they had been "winning" since the first day of the war. Asked if the Hamas attacks on civilians and the kidnapping of hundreds of civilian hostages constituted terrorism, he [falsely] replied that Hamas had not targeted civilians, and that children, adults and foreigners had been kidnapped "by mistake." He also [falsely] claimed that Hamas fighters had not raped women (Nikkei Asia website, December 14, 2023).

► **Senior terrorist Mahmoud Mardawi**,³ represented as the head of Hamas' political bureau in Judea and Samaria, stated that Hamas's position was, first of all, a ceasefire; second, an Israeli withdrawal, and finally negotiations regarding the hostages (al-Masaa, December 13, 2023). In another interview, he claimed the contacts of the mediators with Hamas had not stopped, adding that the movement's position was clear: before contacts and other issues there had to be a ceasefire and the Israeli forces had to withdraw (QudsN Telegram channel, December 13, 2023).

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The Gaza Strip

Palestinian casualties

► **The Hamas-controlled ministry of health in Gaza** reported that as of 3:15 p.m., December 14, 2023, the number of dead since the beginning of the war stood at more than 18,787 and the number of wounded at more than 50,897 (ministry of health in Gaza Telegram channel, November 27, 2023).

The situation in the Gaza Strip

► Following the recent rains, flooding was reported in the Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip. Palestinian rescue forces worked to evacuate residents from the flooded areas (Shehab X account, December 13, 2023).

³ A Hamas terrorist operative who was expelled to the Gaza Strip in the Gilad Shalit exchange deal.



Rainwater floods the Jabaliya refugee camp (Shehab X account, December 13, 2023; al-Arabs YouTube channel, December 13, 2023)

Hamas

► Noting the anniversary of Hamas' founding, **senior terrorist Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, said that any wager on arrangements in the Gaza Strip without Hamas and the other [terrorist] organizations was an "illusion and a mirage." He claimed they were certain that "the brutal aggression will end and the 'resistance' will remain a loyal guard of Palestinian aspirations." He claimed Operation al-Aqsa Storm had dealt a painful blow to Israel, shaking it and its social structure, and that the "heroic acts of the resistance" [terrorist attacks and operations] continued, including the joint actions of the military[-terrorist] wings of Hamas and the PIJ, which were inflicting heavy losses on Israel, the latest of which were in Shejaiya and Jabaliya (arabi21 website, December 13, 2023):

- ◆ He said the Hamas leadership was making intensive efforts, "together with everyone," including international institutions, to provide aid to the Palestinians and ease their suffering. He pledged the movement would remain loyal to its people, the orphans, the bereaved and the families of the dead.
- ◆ He claimed that Israel was not content with the Gaza Strip, but also attacked the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria, Jerusalem, the territories of Israel and the dispersal, which meant Palestinians in all locations were still being targeted by Israel.
- ◆ He called on the peoples of the Arab and Islamic nations to increase their activity. He expressed his appreciation for the support the Palestinians were receiving from, around the world, and for all those "who support the campaign in their own way." He praised the diplomatic efforts of the Saudi Arabian-led Arab-Islamic [government] ministers. He also welcomed the decision of the UN General Assembly calling for a ceasefire, and expressed Hamas' appreciation for the UN secretary general's positions, especially the

communiqué he sent to the Security Council in which he claimed the war in Gaza was a threat to international peace and security.

◆ He claimed that Hamas was open to any discussion that could lead to the cessation of "aggression," to settlement and to reaching a political path that believed in the right of the Palestinians to build their independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. He called on the Arab and Islamic countries to support the Palestinians in dealing with the current "aggression," whose objective was to attack Arab national security. He addressed the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and claimed that in light of their firm stand, the "courageous resistance," the developments and Hamas' political activity, their heroic campaign was nearing its end.

► Interviewed in Doha and asked to clarify Hamas' position on Israel, **senior terrorist Musa Abu Marzouq, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, spoke of recognizing Israel as a step to end the internal Palestinian disputes. He claimed action should be taken according to the official position of the PLO, which recognized the State of Israel. Since they wanted to join the PLO, they would respect its obligations. He added that Israel should have rights, but not at the expense of others. He also defended the October 7 massacre by claiming the kidnapping of women and children was a "mistake," and when asked why they had not been not released immediately, he pointed out that Israel was constantly attacking the Gaza Strip. When the interviewer pressed him about the atrocities committed during the attack, Abu Marzouq claimed that "only Gazan civilians and other Palestinian organizations" were to blame. He rejected the [unequivocal] evidence that Hamas operatives had committed acts of sexual violence, stating it "was all lies." Asked what the October 7 attack had achieved for the Gazans, he claimed that it had achieved "many goals," including returning the Palestinian cause to the international agenda. Everyone, he claimed was "talking about a Palestinian state" (al-Monitor website, December 13, 2023).

► Later, Musa Abu Marzouq claimed he had been misquoted and misunderstood about recognition of the State of Israel. He emphasized that Hamas did not recognize the legitimacy of "the Zionist occupation" and did not agree to cede any Palestinian rights. He added that the "resistance" [organized anti-Israel terrorism] would continue until "liberation and return" (Hamas Telegram channel, December 14, 2023)

The Northern Arena

Hezbollah attacks

►Hezbollah continues attacking IDF positions, concentrations of IDF forces on the northern border and civilian targets. Several rockets were launched at Israel, some of which fell inside Lebanon. Hezbollah claimed responsibility for seven attacks carried out with "appropriate weapons" [artillery fire and guided missiles] and a Burkan rocket (Hezbollah combat information wing Telegram channel, December 13-14, 2023).

►IDF fighter jets and tanks attacked a number of Hezbollah targets. IDF fighters attacked terrorist squads on the Lebanese border in several locations (IDF spokesperson, December 13, 2023).



The IDF attacks Hezbollah targets in south Lebanon (IDF spokesperson, December 14, 2023)

Hezbollah fatalities

►Hezbollah reported the deaths of three operatives, all from south Lebanon (Hezbollah combat information wing, December 13-14, 2023):

- ◆ Saleh Mustafa Mustafa, aka Abu Ali Fallah, from Beit Lif.
- ◆ Ali Musa Barakat, aka Jawad, from Zibqin.
- ◆ Ahmed Hassan Mekahal, aka Kazem, from Jouaiyya



Hezbollah fatalities (Hezbollah combat information wing, December 13, 2023)

►According to reports, a house in the town of Yater in south Lebanon, about six kilometers northeast of Zarit, was attacked from the air. Two people were killed, one person was wounded, and the house was destroyed (Lebanon News Agency, December 13, 2023). Hezbollah announced the death of Saleh Mustafa, from the town of Beit Lif (Safwan's X account, December 13, 2023). In ITIC assessment, Ali Musa Barakat, aka Jawad, was also killed in the attack, due to the close timing of the two Hezbollah announcements.



Right: Saleh Mustafa Mustafa, a Hezbollah terrorist operative who was killed in Yater (Safwan's X account, December 13, 2023). Left: The house that was completely destroyed in the attack (Jamal Chaiito's X account, December 13, 2023)

The Lebanese Army

► Joseph Aoun, commander of the Lebanese Army, met in his office with Azzam al-Ahmed, a member of the PLO Executive Committee (Lebanon Army X account, December 13, 2023).

The Lebanese government

► Najib Mikati, prime minister of the interim government in Lebanon, met in Geneva with Palestinian foreign minister Riyad al-Maliki to discuss the situation in the Strip and efforts to stop Israeli "aggression." Mikati also met with the Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman al-Safadi (Lebanese prime minister's office X account, December 13 (2023)).

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Judea and Samaria

Counterterrorism activities

► The Israeli security forces continued their counterterrorism activities throughout Judea and Samaria. The Palestinian media reported that 17 Palestinians had been detained during the past day. Apart from the extensive activity in Jenin, Palestinians were also detained in Bethlehem, Hebron, Nablus, Tubas and east Jerusalem (al-Quds, December 14, 2023).

► The Palestinian media reported extensively on the activity of the Israeli security forces in Jenin for the third consecutive day. Since the beginning of the activity, 11 Palestinians have been killed. In the early hours of the morning, Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked several Palestinians in the eastern neighborhood of Jenin, killing two. According to the Palestinians, the security forces partially or completely demolished ten houses and detained 900 residents, taking 80 of them for further questioning (Ma'an, December 14, 2023).

► In the afternoon, **correspondent Hisham Abu Shaqra** reported heavy exchanges of fire between armed operatives and Israeli security forces (Hisham Abu Shaqra's X account, December 14, 2023). **Al-Ghad TV correspondent Ahmed al-Badiri** reported it was a very extensive Israeli activity, possibly the largest since Operation Defensive Shield in 2002 (al-Ghad TV, December 14, 2023).



Right: Israeli security forces activity in Jenin (Jenin refugee camp 24 hours Telegram channel, December 14, 2023). Left: Israeli security force activity in the early morning hours in Jenin (QudsN X account, December 14, 2023)

► **The PA foreign ministry** condemned the IDF activity in Jenin and warned of its consequences. According to the foreign ministry, Israel ignored all international appeals and calls for protecting Palestinian residents. It called on the American administration to put an end to the actions against the Palestinian people.

► **Hamas** said in a statement that the IDF's actions in Jenin were an extension of the war against the Palestinian people and would not stop the "resistance." It called on the Palestinian public in Judea and Samaria to escalate the "resistance" in all the cities (Hamas Telegram channel, December 13, 2023).

► **The PIJ** issued a statement stressing that the "crimes" committed by Israel in the refugee camps and cities in Judea and Samaria, and the continued "massacres," especially in the Jenin refugee camp, were a desperate attempt to compensate for Israel's losses in the Gaza Strip, which had become hell for it. The PIJ expressed its confidence that victory was

imminent, and signs had begun to appear on the horizon, with the dissolution of the Zionist-American alliance and the inability of the "aggression" to achieve its goals. It further stated that jihad fighters in the Gaza Strip and heroes of the Jenin Battalion continued the open confrontation against Israel, alongside the other "resistance organizations," and called on the Palestinians to escalate the confrontation everywhere (PIJ's information office Telegram channel, December 13, 2023).

► In another statement, the PIJ called for a public awakening throughout Judea and Samaria, saying that "resistance" was the only option available to them. It once again condemned the continuation of the "brutal massacre" in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, saying that the unfortunate policy would not destabilize the Palestinian people (PIJ Telegram channel, December 14, 2023).

Solidarity demonstrations

► Hamas in Judea and Samaria called for popular marches in all the cities on December 15, 2023, to support the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and mark the anniversary of the founding of Hamas (Hurriya News, December 13, 2023).

► On the afternoon of December 14, 2023, Birzeit University held a solidarity event with the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and Jenin, initiated by the university's student council (Islamic Bloc at Birzeit University Telegram channel, December 13, 2023).



The Event at Birzeit University (QudsN X account, December 14, 2023)

Palestinian Authority (PA)

► **Hussein al-Sheikh, secretary general of the PLO's Executive Committee**, expressed his appreciation for the Arab countries that stood by them in the recent vote in the UN General Assembly. He said there was an Israeli decision to uproot the Palestinians and destroy them. As for Hamas, he claimed that since October 7, 2023, there was no contact or dialogue between them and Hamas. That, he said, was because Hamas had refused all their demands

to create a unified Palestinian consensus and, according to him, they were paying a heavy price for that. He called on Hamas to recognize the PLO's plan to defend the Palestinian project (Sky News in Arabic, December 13, 2023).



Hussein al-Sheikh, secretary general of the PLO's Executive Committee, in an interview (Sky News in Arabic, December 13, 2023)

► **Mahmoud al-Aloul, Fatah deputy chairman**, said they would not continue to adhere to agreements that neither side complied with. He noted that the first priority was ending the war in the Gaza Strip and Israel's actions in Jenin and the PA territories. He said the Palestinian people were one and Palestinian blood was one, so they had to stand together to defend them (Mahmoud al-Aloul's X account, December 14, 2023).

► **Riyadh al-Maliki, Palestinian foreign minister**, met in Geneva with **UNRWA Commissioner General Philippe Lazzarini** on the sidelines of a global conference on refugees. Al-Maliki said they opposed all attempts to undermine the agency by cutting off its funding and making false accusations against it to put an end to the Palestinian refugee issue. Lazzarini said UNRWA fulfilled and would fulfill all its obligations toward the Palestinian refugees (Palestinian foreign ministry Telegram channel, December 13, 2023).



Palestinian foreign minister meets with UNRWA Commissioner General Lazzarini in Geneva (Palestinian foreign ministry Telegram channel, December 13, 2023)

Public opinion poll

► On December 13, 2023, the Palestine Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR), headed by Dr. Khalil Shikaki, published the findings of its quarterly survey conducted in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip between November 22 and December 2, 2023, at the height of the war. The survey included 1,231 adult respondents, of whom 750 were interviewed face-to-face in Judea and Samaria and 481 in the Gaza Strip at 121 randomly selected sites. The survey conductors detailed the limitations of coverage in the Gaza Strip, even though the survey was conducted during the lull. They noted that due to the situation, they were unable to conduct a survey with a representative demographic pool. Moreover, of the 481 respondents in the Gaza Strip, 250 were not in their homes but in shelters, 20 with UNRWA and four with government institutions.

◀ The survey data indicate that there is a substantial difference between the positions of residents of Judea and Samaria and those of residents of the Gaza Strip regarding their perception of reality. Judea and Samaria are characterized by clear signs of an "aura of victory" and "rallying around the banner of resistance," while in the Gaza Strip respondents are divided between those expressing satisfaction with the events, and a high rate, sometimes tens of percent, of those having a negative view of Hamas, its leaders' decision-making system and its activities (PCPSR website, December 13, 2023).

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Iran

◀ **Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Iranian foreign minister**, met in Geneva with **Lebanese interim prime minister Najib Mikati** to discuss developments in the region, the Gaza Strip and south Lebanon. He said that without the support of the United States, the "Zionist regime" could not continue the war for even one hour. Abdollahian also met with the foreign ministers of Jordan and Kuwait (Iranian foreign ministry website, December 13, 2023).

► **Mohammad Reza Ashtiani, Iranian minister of defense**, referred to the intention of the United States to establish an international maritime task force to protect the trade routes in the Red Sea and warned that if the Americans decided to do such a stupid thing, they would face "extraordinary problems." He noted that all the countries were in this region, but "it

belongs to us and is under our control and no one can maneuver in it" (ISNA, December 14, 2023).

► **Hossein Salami, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)**, speaking at a ceremony commemorating the fallen soldiers of East Azerbaijan Province, referred to Israel's attacks in the Gaza Strip, saying that Israel had turned hospitals into battlefields and that Israel's victory was killing women, the elderly and children. He noted that hatred for the "Zionists" (Israel) was no longer limited to Muslims, but was also evident in the streets of Western countries. He declared that victory belonged to the Palestinian people and was close (Tasnim, December 14, 2023).

► **Mohsen Rezaei, a member of the Expediency Discernment Council and former commander of the IRGC**, told a conference in Tehran that during the war in the Gaza Strip, Israel tried to portray Iran as having commanded the Hamas attack on October 7, but that was not how Iran operated. He noted that Iran "does not fish for its friends but teaches them how to fish." He said Iran supported the "resistance" in Palestine and the Gaza Strip for both Islamic and humane reasons, but another motive was Israel's hostility toward Iran since the Islamic Revolution, including the assassination of Iranian scientists, Israel's efforts to incite Iraq and Azerbaijan against Iran, and its efforts to bring about the revocation of the nuclear agreement. Referring to the war in the Gaza Strip, he said Israel had achieved nothing but the killing of children (ISNA, December 13, 2023).

Pro-Iranian militias

Iraq

► The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for drone attacks on two American bases in Syria, the al-Tanf base and a base in the Rukban refugee camp area (Islamic Resistance Telegram channel, December 13, 2023).

► "Government sources" in Iraq reported that **American Secretary of State Antony Blinken** had warned **Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia' al-Sudani** in their telephone conversation against continued attacks by pro-Iranian militias against American targets and interests in Iraq and Syria. The sources said Blinken had conveyed a message that the United States intended to respond to the attacks, especially the attack on its embassy in Baghdad (al-Araby al-Jadeed, December 13, 2023).

► **Yahya Rasool, spokesman for the Iraqi armed forces**, said that after intensive intelligence efforts, they managed to locate the attackers of the American embassy in Baghdad and that a

comprehensive investigation had been opened against the perpetrators and they would reach everyone related to the incident. Rasul stressed that such attacks could not be ignored, as they posed a serious threat to the country's security and stability, as well as damage to the credibility of the Iraqi government as a government capable of meeting its obligations (Iraqi News Agency, December 14, 2023).

Yemen

► The American Army Central Command (CENTCOM) announced that on December 13, 2023, the tanker *Ardmore Encounter*, which flew the Marshall Islands flag, was attacked by Houthi forces. The forces initially tried to board the tanker, but after they failed, two missiles were fired at the tanker from areas under their control in Yemen. The two missiles did not hit the target. The US destroyer *USS Mason* responded to an SOS call from the tanker and intercepted a drone launched from the Houthi-controlled area. There were no casualties or property damage to the vessel because of the attack (CENTCOM X account, December 14, 2023).

► The European Union issued a statement condemning the missile attacks of the Houthis in Yemen that threatened international navigation and maritime security, in violation of international law. According to the statement, the Houthis' interference with navigation rights and freedom of navigation around the Arabian Peninsula, especially in the Red Sea, was unacceptable. The EU reiterated its call on the Houthis to refrain from further threats and attacks on international shipping lanes and called for the immediate release of the *Galaxy Leader* and its crew (EU website, December 13, 2023).

► In light of the Houthis' ongoing attacks on merchant ships, the United States asked Australia to allocate a warship to an international task force in the Red Sea, which includes 39 countries (The Guardian, December 14, 2023).

The Arab Arena

Saudi Arabia

► **American National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan** met in Riyadh with **Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman**. The two discussed the conflict in the Gaza Strip and other regional issues. According to a "senior American official," Sullivan spoke with the Saudis to increase diplomatic efforts to maintain stability throughout the region and prevent the conflict between Israel and Hamas from spreading (Reuters, October 13, 2023).

The International Arena

Imposing sanctions on Hamas and PIJ elements

► Britain and the United States imposed sanctions on Hamas and PIJ elements, including freezing their assets and imposing a travel ban on them. Among those sanctioned **were senior terrorist Mahmoud al-Zahar, a member of Hamas' political bureau, Ali Baraka, Hamas representative in Lebanon, and senior PIJ terrorist Akram al-Ajouri** (British government website, December 13, 2023).

► Hamas condemned the decision of the United States and Britain, saying it was a collaboration with the "Zionist entity" in its aggression against the Palestinian people. It also noted that the decision would not deter Hamas from continuing its duty to defend the rights of the Palestinians and called on the United States and Britain to examine their policies and end their bias in favor of Israel (Hamas Telegram channel, December 13, 2023).

Russia

► **Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov** said Russia would not agree to any arrangement in the Middle East concerning Israel's security that did not include the establishment of a Palestinian state. He noted that according to the position of Western countries, they had no intention of establishing a Palestinian state and did not want to unite the Gaza Strip with the West Bank. Lavrov said the Israeli actions against Hamas, which caused the suffering of the residents, was unacceptable, and that Russia was investing efforts to release its hostages held by Hamas, to assist Russian civilians who wanted to leave the Gaza Strip, and that it was providing aid to the Gaza Strip (RT, December 14, 2023).