



Operation Iron Swords Updated to 1 p.m., December 17, 2023

Northern Arena

- 467 attacks
- 108 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)
- 129 abducted remain in the Gaza Strip

Rocket Fire

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

Overview¹

► **The combat arena:** IDF forces continued their integrated ground maneuver in the Gaza Strip, focusing mainly in Jabalia, Shejaiya and Gaza City in the northern Gaza Strip, and Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. An aerial attack was carried out in Rafah to prevent the smuggling of weapons into the Gaza Strip. Senior Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) terrorists claimed they had the upper hand, and recently they may have even been performing better than at the beginning of the war. Meanwhile, protests were heard regarding the IDF's activities, particularly at Kamal Adwan Hospital in the northern Gaza Strip and the killing of an al-Jazeera photographer near a school in Khan Yunis.

► **According to an unofficial estimate, since October 7 approximately 1,200 Israeli civilians and security personnel have been killed, 453 of them soldiers and officers; 129 civilian and military hostages are still being held by the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip, 16 of them women and children; 121 hostages have been returned to Israel.**

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 issue of the hostages:** On December 15, 2023, during the fighting in Shejaiya, IDF forces accidentally killed three hostages. The IDF is investigating the incident, which occurred in a combat zone where there were many encounters with terrorists. The Palestinians repeatedly emphasize that there will be no hostage negotiations without a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire and according to the conditions determined by the terrorist organizations.

► **The Gaza Strip:** The situation in the Gaza Strip remains serious. Due to hardships in hospitals and the large number of wounded, a school in Deir al-Balah was converted into a field hospital.

► **The northern arena:** Hezbollah continued attacking IDF posts, concentrations of forces on the northern border and civilian targets, using mainly UAVs. On December 16, 2023, two UAVs with explosive warheads crossed the border; one was intercepted by IDF forces and the other crashed into Margaliot, a moshav, killing a reserve soldier.

► **Judea and Samaria:** On December 15, 2023, a stabbing attack of IDF soldiers near Nablus was prevented. After a three-day operation in Jenin, IDF forces carried out counterterrorism activities in the Nur al-Shams refugee camp in Tulkarm. Senior Palestinian Authority (PA) figures held a series of meetings with foreign officials including Jake Sullivan, the United States national security advisor.

► **Yemen:** There has recently been a significant increase in the activities of the Houthis against ships in the Red Sea. As a result, a number of international shipping and transport companies announced they would no longer sail that route. "United States officials" said the possibility of attacking the Houthis was being seriously considered and the United States was trying to organize international activity to deal with the issue. A senior Iranian official stated the Americans would be acting foolishly if they responded to the Houthi attacks because they could not open a new front in addition to their joint front with Israel in Gaza.

► **Europe:** Seven people, including four suspected Hamas terrorist operatives, were detained in several countries on suspicion of planning to attack Jewish institutions in Europe.

The Combat Arena

► **Ground activity:** The IDF integrated ground maneuver in the Gaza Strip continues. Recently, the fighting has been focused mainly on Jabalia, Shejaiya and Gaza City in the northern Gaza Strip, and on Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip.



IDF activity in the Gaza Strip (IDF spokesperson, December 17, 2023)

►Northern Gaza Strip:

◆ **Jabalia:** The forces operated in the area of Kamal Adwan Hospital, used by operatives of Hamas' military-terrorist, and detained several dozen terrorists, some of whom participated in the October 7 attack and massacre. The forces destroyed terrorist facilities and located a large number of weapons, including Kalashnikov assault rifles, RPG launchers and IEDs, military equipment of the nukhba forces, technological equipment and intelligence documents (IDF spokesperson, December 16, 2023). An attempt was made to trick the forces and lead them to the [booby-trapped] shaft of a nearby tunnel, using speakers connected to dolls and children's backpacks. The route of the tunnel was found to pass between civilian buildings, including a school, a clinic and a mosque, in the center of which was a war room used by Hamas operatives. The room had a network of cameras that surveilled IDF forces and was connected to the clinic's electrical grid (IDF spokesperson, December 15, 2023). On December 17, 2023, the Palestinians reported an Israeli Air Force attack on the residential compound of the Shehab family, resulting in 24 deaths and considerable damage (QudsN X Account, 17 December 2023).



Some of the weapons found near the hospital (IDF spokesperson, December 16, 2023)



Dolls, children's school bags and loudspeakers that played children's songs in Hebrew to trick the forces into thinking there were hostages in the area, as well as UNRWA sacks in which explosives were found (IDF spokesperson, December 15, 2023)



Kamal Adwan Hospital in the northern Gaza Strip after the activity of the IDF forces (QudsN X account, December 16, 2023)



Right: Israeli Air Force attack in Jabalia (Shehab X account, December 17, 2023). Left: IDF artillery fire attack the Zeitoun neighborhood (QudsN X account, December 17, 2023)

◆ **Shejaiya:** IDF forces completed the takeover of the Shejaiya Battalion headquarters of Hamas' military-terrorist wing, killing terrorists and destroying a tunnel shaft (IDF spokesperson, December 15, 2023).

◆ **Gaza City:** Informed that Hamas operatives were hiding inside schools, IDF fighters raided two schools in the Rimal neighborhood of Gaza City, killing a number of

terrorists. Terrorists who were hiding inside the schools surrendered and were detained (IDF spokesperson, December 16, 2023).

◆ **Southern Gaza Strip:** IDF forces raided a number of sites in the Khan Yunis area used by terrorists for operational purposes, where they found large quantities of weapons and underground terrorist facilities. In the heart of the city, IDF fighters raided terrorist facilities, killed a large number of terrorists and located tunnel shafts used by operatives of Hamas' military-terrorist wing. The fighters destroyed a weapons warehouse and located a tunnel shaft where they found motorcycles used by Hamas terrorists in the October 7 attack and massacre (IDF spokesperson, December 15, 2023).

► The Palestinian media reported on heavy exchanges of fire in eastern Khan Yunis and IDF artillery fire targeting "resistance" fighters [terrorist operatives]; Palestinians reported hearing gunfire in Khan Yunis during the night (QudsN account X, December 17, 2023). **Ahmed al-Bata, a correspondent for al-Arabi TV**, reported heavy exchanges of fire in eastern and central Khan Yunis (al-Arabi YouTube channel, December 17, 2023). Two dead and dozens of wounded were reported (al-Ghad TV, December 17, 2023).



Right: IDF flares light the sky of Khan Yunis (QudsN X account, December 17, 2023. Left: An al-Ghad TV correspondent reporting from Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis described smoke rising in the east following IDF attacks (al-Ghad TV, December 17, 2023)

► **Aerial activity:** Israeli Air Force aircraft operating in the Rafah area destroyed military sites, guard posts, observation posts, weapons warehouses and command and control rooms belonging to Hamas' general security mechanism, located on the Gaza Strip-Egypt border. The attacks impaired Hamas' ability to smuggle more weapons into the Strip. In Khan Yunis, a fighter jet attacked a building used as a terrorist hiding place and killed three terrorists who tried to attack IDF forces (IDF spokesperson, December 15, 2023).



IDF attack on Hamas terrorist facilities on the Gaza Strip-Egypt border
(IDF spokesperson, December 15, 2023)



Right: The Israeli Air Force attacks the Ma'an neighborhood in eastern Khan Yunis. Left: The Israeli Air Force attacks Khan Yunis (QudsN X account, December 16, 2023)



IDF attacks in Rafah (Wafa, December 16, 2023)

Reactions to the fighting

► **Senior terrorist Abu Obeida, spokesman for Hamas' military-terrorist wing**, claimed that in the past five days, military wing operatives had attacked more than a hundred IDF military vehicles in the areas of Jabaliya, Shejaiya, al-Sheikh Radwan and Zeitoun, in the central of the Gaza Strip and in Khan Yunis. He claimed they had prepared a large number of ambushes for IDF infantry and either drew them in or ambushed them in places where they expected the IDF

forces to enter. They detonated explosives and attacked them at close range with machine gun fire. He also claimed that in several instances the operatives used armor-piercing missiles and collapsed houses on top of the soldiers, causing a large number of Israeli dead and wounded. He emphasized that the operatives' fingers were still on the trigger, and they were ambushing IDF soldiers in every neighborhood, street and alley, [allegedly] watching the "disintegration of the IDF after the fighting had revealed how weak, cowardly and immoral" the IDF was, relying not on its fighters but on technology (Facebook page of the al-Jazeera TV channel dedicated to "Palestine," December 15, 2023).

► **Senior Hamas terrorist Osama Hamdan** said that the Israeli "aggression" against the Gaza Strip had continued for 71 days with support from the United States, Britain and some European countries. He claimed that so far Israel had committed about 1,700 "massacres" of civilians, and that due to the war, about 19,000 Palestinians had been killed and about 52,000 injured, and nearly 8,000 were missing, 70% of them "children and women." He added that more than 289 Palestinians had been killed in Judea and Samaria since October 7. According to Hamdan, 45% of those killed in attacks in the southern Gaza Strip, including in Rafah, were displaced persons, which again "refuted Israel's claims about safe areas and its calls for Palestinian civilians to move south." He claimed there were no safe places or crossings in the Gaza Strip, and the entire Gaza Strip from north to south was being attacked with Zionist-American weapons. He praised the Palestinians' firm stand, the "resistance" [terrorist organizations] and the victories achieved on the ground by its operatives, and claimed it forced many countries to reverse their positions and convince politicians not to adopt the Zionist narrative (Palinfo December 16, 2023).

► **Musab al-Breem, a Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) spokesman**, said that as long as the "aggression" continued, the funerals of IDF officers and soldiers would continue, as happened in Shejaiya, eastern Khan Yunis and Beit Hanoun. He added that the "resistance" [terrorist organizations] still had the upper hand, and claimed Gaza would be a graveyard for Israel and its army, and it would pay the price for its "crimes" with the lives of its officers and soldiers (Hezbollah-affiliated al-Mayadeen TV X account, December 16, 2023).

► **Senior terrorist Ali Abu Shahin, a member of the PIJ's political bureau and head of the PIJ's media information department**, said that during the first round of fighting, before the temporary ceasefire, Israel had not been able to achieve its objectives and this time around it would also not be able to achieve them. He claimed it had recently been possible to see that

the "resistance" was performing better than at the beginning of the war, and it prevented the IDF from achieving its objectives on the ground. He also said that if Israel wanted to threaten them with extending the "aggression," it had to know that it would cost it additional losses (al-Jazeera Mubasher YouTube channel, December 15, 2023) On another occasion, he said that the spirit of the "resistance" [terrorist operatives] was strong, its morale was higher than ever and its performance in the field was "exceptional" (al-Ghad, December 15, 2023).

► Hamas, the PIJ and others responded to a series of specific events that occurred in the last few days in the Gaza Strip:

- ◆ **Injury to journalists:** Samer Abu Daqqa, a photographer for al-Jazeera TV, was injured on December 15, 2023, in an unmanned aerial vehicle attack near UNRWA's Farhana school in Khan Yunis, and later died of his wounds. Al-Jazeera TV condemned the Israeli attack on a school in Khan Yunis and the "assassination" of Samer Abu Daqqa, stating Israel was fully responsible for the "heinous crime." The network announced it intended to submit the "assassination file" of the network's photographer to the International Criminal Court in The Hague as soon as possible, adding it had assembled a team of legal experts (al-Jazeera, December 16, 2023).

- ◆ Hamas condemned the attack on the school in Khan Yunis, which houses displaced Palestinians, and the [alleged] attacks on several media correspondents. Hamas claimed it was an attempt to scare correspondents from documenting the "massacres" in the Gaza Strip, but they would not be deterred (Hamas Telegram channel, December 15, 2023). **Senior Hamas terrorist Osama Hamdan** claimed injury to the press teams covering the war, and the deaths of 91 journalists, the last of whom was Samer Abu Daqqa, were "terrorism" that would not hide Israel's "crimes" (Palinfo, December 16, 2023).

- ◆ The **PIJ** condemned the death of photographer Samer Abu Daqqa, who allegedly died after the IDF denied access to ambulances to treat him (PIJ media information bureau Telegram channel, December 16, 2023). On a different occasion, the PIJ claimed that nearly 90 journalists had been killed and many had been wounded. The PIJ claimed "correspondents were [allegedly] attacked to hide the IDF's crimes from the world, and [allegedly] to murder the eyewitnesses who documented the [alleged] Palestinian genocide in Gaza" (PIJ media information bureau Telegram channel, December 15, 2023).

◆ The **Jordanian foreign ministry** condemned the attack "against" photographer Samer Abu Daqqa [which led to his death], and injury of the network's reporter Wael Dahdouh. The spokesman for the ministry said that Jordan condemned the continued Israeli raids on the Strip, especially those [allegedly] aimed at journalists, and emphasized that attacking journalists was "an attack on the truth [sic] and an attempt to obscure the terrible situation that Israeli aggression leaves behind." The ministry renewed its call to the international community "to mobilize efforts to stop the [alleged] ongoing Israeli violations of international law and to provide protection to the Palestinian people and the medical teams and journalists" (Jordanian foreign ministry X Account, December 15, 2023).

◆ **IDF activity at Kamal Adwan Hospital in the northern Gaza Strip:** following the al-Jazeera report according to which Israel [allegedly] buried the wounded from Kamal Adwan Hospital in the northern Gaza Strip while they were still alive, Hamas said that it considered the United States and Israel responsible for the "crime" at Kamal Adwan Hospital which led to the deaths of civilians and demanded accountability. Hamas claimed it was a "crime against humanity" committed by Israel to frighten the Palestinians and make them flee their land (Hamas Telegram channel, December 16, 2023). Senior Hamas terrorist Osama Hamdan claimed it was a "new massacre," revealing the extent of Israel's "sadism and cruelty, which far exceeded the crimes of the Nazis [sic]" (Palinfo, December 16, 2023).

◆ The PIJ claimed this was part of the crimes against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, while there was a deliberate media blackout and cut off of communications. The PIJ added it would not dissuade the Palestinians from continuing their "resistance" [terrorist attacks], or kill the unquenchable spirit of "resistance" (PIJ media information bureau Telegram channel, December 16, 2023).

Rocket fire from the Gaza Strip

► The Palestinian terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip continued firing rockets at Israel, most of them targeting the cities, towns and villages surrounding the Gaza Strip. On the afternoon of December 15, 2023, a barrage of rockets was launched towards the Jerusalem area. One of the rockets exploded near Istishari Hospital in Ramallah.



Rocket hit near Istishari Hospital in Ramallah (al-Mayadeen TV X account, December 15, 2023)

Israeli casualties

►According to an unofficial estimate, since October 7 approximately 1,200 Israeli people have been killed. According to the IDF spokesperson, 453 of them are soldiers and officers (of whom 117 have been killed since the start of the ground maneuver on 27 October, 2023.); 129 civilian and military hostages are still being held by the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip, 16 of them women and children; 121 hostages have been returned.

The issue of the hostages

►On December 15, 2023, during the fighting in Shejaiya, IDF forces identified several figures that seemed suspicious. The forces shot and killed them. During a search and examination of the area of the incident, a suspicion arose regarding their identity. The bodies were taken to Israel for examination, and they were in fact Israeli hostages. The IDF initiated an investigation of the incident, which occurred in a combat zone where there had been many clashes in recent days (IDF spokesperson, December 15, 2023).

► Hamas emphasized they would not negotiate the issue of the hostages unless the aggression against the Palestinian people stopped, and stated they had conveyed the same message to all the negotiators (Hamas Telegram channel, December 16, 2023).

►Two senior Hamas terrorists who do not live in the Gaza Strip and asked to remain anonymous, said that the movement had received several proposals from the Egyptian and Qatari mediators regarding the resumption of negotiations for a prisoner exchange deal, and that Hamas responded to the proposals by emphasizing its preconditions for a ceasefire. They

said matters were still in their infancy, nothing had been achieved so far, and currently they were building a foundation for negotiations. One of the senior terrorists said the talks with the mediators had been "accelerated" and there had been some small progress on some of the issues, but it was too early to talk about an agreed basis for negotiations. The other senior terrorist added that Hamas had not closed the door on negotiations to split the overall deal, as the mediators were now requesting, and was examining all the ideas presented, but there could be no repeat exchange with the same mechanisms and under the same conditions. He said Israel had proposed a temporary ceasefire based on the previous deal, and Hamas rejected the proposal, insisting on a comprehensive, permanent ceasefire. He added that the only deal would be the one the [terrorist] organizations in the Gaza Strip agreed to. Regarding the announcement by the IDF spokesperson on December 15, about the accidental killing of three Israeli prisoners in the Shejaiya area, the source said that they had no information about the circumstances of the hostages' release from captivity (Arab World News Agency (AWP), December 17, 2023).

► **Senior Hamas terrorist Osama Hamdan** falsely claimed Israel used all kinds of prohibited weapons and attacked indiscriminately, but if it wanted the return of its kidnapped soldiers, it had to stop the aggression completely and agree to a deal in accordance with the "conditions of the resistance" (Hamas Telegram channel, December 16, 2023).

► **Senior terrorist Muhammad al-Hindi, deputy PIJ secretary general**, said that the Palestinian "resistance" organizations coordinated with one another, especially the Hamas and PIJ military[-terrorist] wings. He claimed that the "Zionist consensus" had begun to be undermined by the hostages held by the "resistance" and added Israel had been forced to declare a "truce" [temporary ceasefire] because it had been unable to release a single hostage. He claimed no real negotiations were taking place and what happened on the ground would determine the future of the negotiations. He emphasized that the "resistance" still controlled the ground in a way that "amazed" Israel, and that keeping the IDF in the Gaza Strip was a difficult option for Israel (al-'Ahed website, December 14, 2023; Filastin al-Yawm Telegram channel, December 14, 2023).

The Gaza Strip

Palestinian casualties

► **The ministry of health in Ramallah** reported that as of 7 p.m., December 16, 2023, the number of dead since the beginning of the war stood at more than 18,800 and the number of wounded at more than 51,000 (Ma'an, December 16, 2023).

► **Dr. Iyad Jaber, the deputy director of al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir al-Balah**, said that the hospital was at full occupancy and the heavy load had forced them to convert the Khadijah school in Deir al-Balah into a field hospital. The classrooms were converted into dormitories and wards primarily for patients who were not seriously injured but needed medical supervision (al-Arabi YouTube channel, December 17, 2023).



Conversion of the Khadijah school in Deir al-Balah to a field hospital for the superficially wounded (al-Arabi YouTube channel, December 17, 2023)

The situation in the Gaza Strip

► On December 15, 2023, correspondent **Aslam Bader** reported on the lively movement of residents in the center of the Jabaliya refugee camp, despite the ongoing fighting, and IDF attacks in the northern Gaza Strip. He said many goods were lacking, especially clothing and footwear (QudsN X account, December 15, 2023).



Right: Crowding in the center of the Jabalia refugee camp (QudsN X account, December 15, 2023). Left: Civilian activity the Jabaliya refugee camp (Wafa YouTube channel, December 15, 2023)



The Palestinian Red Crescent distributes food to evacuees in Khan Yunis (Wafa YouTube channel, December 15, 2023)

►Hisham Zaqout, an al-Jazeera TV correspondent in Deir al-Balah, reported a truck bearing humanitarian aid had entered the Gaza Strip through the Rafah Crossing. He said that within a few minutes, the distribution of aid to the evacuees in Rafah began, and crowds climbed onto the truck to receive the aid packages (al-Jazeera TV, December 17, 2023). In practice it appears that the truck was looted by the residents.



The truck bringing humanitarian aid to evacuees in Rafah (al-Jazeera TV, December 17, 2023)

Hamas

► Hamas called on the masses of the Arab and Islamic nation and people around the world to demonstrate in support of the Gaza Strip and "Palestine" on December 15 through 17, 2023. Hamas claimed the demonstrations would protest the [alleged] "crimes of the occupation" against children and women and show their condemnation of American and Western support for the "Palestinian genocide." Hamas added they hoped that in the coming days popular demonstrations and support for the Palestinian people would increase in all the cities and capitals of the world (Hamas Telegram channel, December 14, 2023).

► Hamas issued a statement on the occasion of the 36th anniversary of its founding, claiming Hamas was "an inseparable part of the Palestinian people and expressed their desire for freedom and independence." The statement also claimed Hamas would continue to "protect the national rights of the Palestinian people" and would not accept any arrangement that tried to circumvent the Palestinians' right to self-determination. According to Hamas, Israel and the United States rejected all UN efforts to stop the "aggression" and bore full responsibility for the continuation of the "massacres" of the Palestinian people. Hamas claimed it was open to any effort leading to the cessation of aggression, the release of the Palestinian [terrorist] prisoners from Israeli jails and suggestions for a future solution. It also expressed its appreciation for all the parties that supported the Palestinians, and called for increasing the support and the "pursuit of freedom" (Hamas Telegram channel, December 14, 2023).

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The Northern Arena

Hezbollah attacks

► Hezbollah continued attacking IDF positions, concentrations of forces on the northern border and civilian targets. Between December 14 and 17, 2023, Hezbollah claimed responsibility for 19 attacks including the use of anti-tank missiles and rockets, artillery fire, Burkan rocket and especially UAVs (Hezbollah combat information wing Telegram channel, December 14-17, 2023). On December 16, 2023, two UAVs with explosive warheads crossed the border. One was intercepted by IDF forces and the other crashed in Margalioth, a moshav, killing a reserve IDF soldier.

►In response, IDF warplanes and tanks attacked and destroyed Hezbollah military targets in Lebanese territory, including terrorist facilities, headquarters and military sites. The forces also attacked the positions from which the attacks originated. In addition, IDF fighters attacked terrorist squads about to launch anti-tank missiles at several locations along the border (IDF spokesperson, December 14-17, 2023). On the evening of December 16, 2023, the IDF intercepted a surface-to-air missile launched at an Israeli Air Force UAV in Lebanese territory. The vehicle was not damaged and continued its mission, and the missile did not cross into Israeli territory (IDF spokesperson, December 16, 2023).



Right: Attack on Hezbollah targets (IDF spokesperson, December 16, 2023). Left: Attack on a Hezbollah terrorist facility (IDF spokesperson, December 17, 2023)

►According to reports, the IDF distributed leaflets warning the residents of south Lebanon that Hezbollah operatives were infiltrating their homes, lands and workplaces to attack Israel. The residents were asked to stop "the terrorism" for their own safety (Ali Khalil's X account, 15 in December 2023).



The IDF warning distributed to the residents of south Lebanon (Ali Khalil's X account, 15 in December 2023)

Hezbollah fatalities

►Hezbollah reported the deaths of four terrorist operatives, all residents of south Lebanon (Hezbollah combat information wing Telegram channel, December 14-16, 2023):

- ◆ Mehdi Khalil Zaatar, aka Haidar, from Markaba.
- ◆ Hussein Ali Issa, aka Abu Saleh, from Meiss al-Jabal
- ◆ Hamed Ahmed Yosef, aka Abu Yosef, from Ayn Bael and a resident of al-Qleileh.
- ◆ Radwab Ali Hamoudi, aka Bakr, from Tyre.



Hezbollah fatalities
(Hezbollah combat information wing Telegram channel, December 14-16, 2023)

Weapons used by Hezbollah against Israel

►Hezbollah's combat information arm published an infographic summarizing the organization's activities since the beginning of Operation Iron Swords (between October 8 and December 14, 2023). According to the infographic, the organization's operatives carried out a total of 509 attacks on 58 IDF posts and bases using guided missiles (209 attacks), mortar shells and artillery (131 attacks), sniper fire (48 attacks), rockets (43 attacks), Barkan rockets with warheads of between 300 and 500 kilograms (660 and 1,100 pounds) (35 attacks), anti-aircraft missiles (20 attacks), direct-fire weapons (14 attacks) and airstrikes using offensive-suicide UAVs (9 attacks) (Hezbollah combat information wing Telegram channel, December 15, 2023).



The infographic of Hezbollah's activities and weapons (Hezbollah combat information wing Telegram channel, December 15, 2023)

Al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyah

► **Muhammad Taqoush, secretary general of al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyah in Lebanon**, a Salafi-jihad organization operating in Lebanon, claimed it was not part of any axis, but that did not rule out the possibility of the organization's cooperating with those who agreed with its view on any issue. He noted that the al-Fajr Forces, the organization's military-terrorist wing, had attacked Israel several times but did not publicly announce it (Arab 21, December 14, 2023).

The Lebanese army

► The Lebanese parliament gave a one-year extension to Joseph Aoun as commander of the Lebanese army, and to the heads of the security mechanisms, (al-Nashra, December 15, 2023).

UNIFIL

► According to a report, UNIFIL is preparing to receive senior French political and security officials to discuss ways to implement the French plan to create a buffer zone south of the Litani River and force Hezbollah to withdraw north of it. Le Drian, the French envoy to Lebanon and the head of French intelligence who visited Lebanon about two weeks ago presented the Lebanese officials with a road map on the matter. The suggestion was made to Lebanese officials to deploy French forces on both sides of the border to ensure the removal of Hezbollah and the protection of the Israeli residents (al-Akhbar, December 15, 2023).

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Judea and Samaria

Terrorist attacks

► On the evening of December 15, 2023, the Israeli security forces thwarted an attempted stabbing attack against IDF soldiers operating at a military post near the city of Nablus in the Samaria Brigade area. A Palestinian approaching the fighters was shot and killed (IDF spokesperson, December 15, 2023)



The knife used by the terrorist (IDF spokesperson, December 15, 2023)

Counterterrorism activities

►On the evening of December 14, 2023, after 60 hours, the Israeli security forces completed an extensive counterterrorism operation in Jenin and the Jenin refugee camp. During the activity, 60 wanted Palestinians were detained and taken for interrogation by security officials, hundreds of buildings were searched, 50 weapons and hundreds of IEDs were seized, as well as 100,000 shekels intended to finance terrorist activity. The forces located more than ten underground shafts, seven IED laboratories and five observation centers to monitor the forces. Some of the terrorist infrastructure was destroyed by the forces (IDF spokesperson's Telegram channel, December 14, 2023).

►During the security forces' activity in Jenin, a video was posted on social media showing two IDF reserve soldiers who entered a mosque chanting "Shema Yisrael" and playing Hanukkah songs on the mosque's public address system. They were immediately removed from service. The IDF said the soldiers' behavior was grave and completely contrary to IDF values (IDF spokesperson, December 14, 2023).



Some of the weapons found in the operation in Jenin (IDF website, December 14, 2023)

► **The Jordanian foreign ministry** condemned the "massacre" in Jenin and the invasion of the mosque. The ministry stated it was a provocative act contradicting all human values and noted it was necessary to condemn and prevent the repetition of such acts and to protect civilians and holy places (Jordanian foreign ministry X account, December 14, 2023).

► **Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman for Mahmoud Abbas' office**, also condemned the "massacre" in Jenin, which led to the deaths of 12 people, and noted that Israel continued to attack and "massacre" the Palestinian people. He said the aggressive policy would not succeed in bringing them down and that the American administration should intervene immediately to stop that madness (Wafa, December 14, 2023).

► On the night of December 17, 2023, IDF forces operated in the Nur al-Shams refugee camp (in Tulkarm). During the activity, the forces exposed and neutralized IEDs planted under and on the sides of the roads. They also located an IED hidden inside a clinic. During the activity, terrorists fired and threw IEDs and Molotov cocktails at IDF forces. The forces returned fire and directed an aircraft that attacked several armed squads. At least four terrorists were killed in the attacks and several others were wounded (IDF spokesperson's X account, December 17, 2023).



**IEDs and a shotgun that the forces located and seized during the operation
(IDF spokesperson's X account, December 17, 2023)**

► The Palestinian media reported that five people had been killed in the Nur al-Shams refugee camp and heavy damage was caused to infrastructure. The national and Islamic forces in Tulkarm declared a general strike in the district today as a sign of mourning for their deaths (Wafa, December 17, 2023). Hamas issued a death notice for every fatality, calling each of them "the shaheed jihad fighter" (Hamas website, December 17, 2023).

► Since the beginning of the war in the Gaza Strip, about 2,400 wanted Palestinians have been detained, of whom about 1,200 are Hamas operatives (IDF spokesman's X account, December 17, 2023).

Solidarity demonstrations

► On December 15, 2023, after Friday prayers, marches were held throughout Judea and Samaria to support the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and mark the anniversary of the founding of Hamas. At the march in Ramallah, participants waved Hamas flags and pictures of the Houthi leader. At the end of the march, in Ramallah's al-Manara Square, **Hussam Badran, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, gave a recorded speech, calling for expanding the scope of resistance, of all kinds and in all ways, in Judea and Samaria because Israel was most afraid of an uprising and an escalation of resistance activity (Hurriya News, December 15, 2023; al-Araby al-Jadeed, December 15, 2023).

► In Nablus, Amir Shalhoub, the former representative of Hamas' Islamic Bloc at al-Najah University, who had been detained by Israel and the PA security services in the past, claimed that a PA security service operative had tried to detain him before the march, and that after the march, he was chased and Palestinian preventive security operatives fired at the wheels of his car (QudsN, December 15, 2023; QudsN Telegram channel, December 15, 2023).



Right: March in Hebron (QudsN X account, December 15, 2023). Left: March in Nablus



Right: March in Ramallah (SND X account, October 15, 2023). Left: March in Tulkarm (QudsN X account, December 15, 2023)

► In Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem there were calls for declaring a general strike on December 18, 2023, in support of the Gaza Strip and to protest the continuation of the war (Hurriya News, December 16, 2023). The national and Islamic forces in the Ramallah and al-Bireh district announced that on December 18, 2023, support activity would be held in Ramallah's al-Manara Square (Wafa, December 16, 2023). Issam Bakr, the coordinator of national and Islamic forces in Ramallah and al-Bireh district, said there would be no strike on December 18, and the Fatah branch in Ramallah and al-Bireh district also said no notice of a strike had been issued, and therefore December 18 would be a normal working day (Sada News, December 16, 2023).

Palestinian Authority (PA)

► **Mahmoud Abbas, chairman of the Palestinian Authority**, met in Ramallah with **Jake Sullivan, the American national security adviser**. Abbas stressed the need to stop the ongoing Israeli aggression against the Palestinians and the importance of bringing humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. He said the American administration had to intervene and exert pressure on Israel, stressing that the Gaza Strip was an integral part of the Palestinian state (Wafa, December 15, 2023).

► Mahmoud Abbas spoke with **King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain** and discussed bilateral relations and the war in the Gaza Strip. Both said efforts had to be made to stop the Israeli aggression and bring humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip (Wafa, December 16, 2023).

◀ **Mahmoud Abbas was quoted** as saying that he was willing to improve the Palestinian Authority, bring in new leaders, and hold elections, provided there was a binding national agreement leading to the establishment of a Palestinian state. He noted that the main problem was not the renewal of the government, but Israel's policy. In this context, it was

reported that the United States proposed a "behind closed doors" outline, including relinquishing powers, appointing a deputy and introducing new figures into the Palestinian leadership (Reuters, December 17, 2023).

► **Azzam al-Ahmad, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee**, said that PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas had instructed him to contact Hamas, and that the PLO had not set conditions for reaching an agreement with other Palestinian elements and was willing to meet in Cairo. Al-Ahmad said he had contacted **Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, and senior Hamas leader Musa Abu Marzuq**, and expressed hope that he would contact Haniyeh again. He also stressed the need for all the organizations to be under the PLO. He added that there was currently no communication with the PIJ, but not because it had been interrupted, and that Hamas' statement regarding the unification of the Palestinian elements was positive (al-Arabiya, December 15, 2023).

► The PA foreign ministry condemned the "genocide" perpetrated by Israel (the "occupation forces") against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. The ministry called for an end to such acts and for the international agreement regarding the protection of the residents to be translated into acts that would force Israel to commit itself to the principles of international law by imposing deterrent sanctions against senior Israeli officials and the Israeli government (PA foreign ministry Telegram channel, December 16, 2023).

► **May al-Kayla, PA minister of health**, met with **Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross**, and updated her on the latest developments in the medical and humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. She said Gaza's health system was in dire straits because only 11 out of 36 hospitals were currently operating, and even those were only operating partially. She warned of the spread of disease in the shelters due to the unsanitary conditions. She reported that the ministry of health had agreed with UNICEF that vaccines would be supplied through the Rafah Crossing to complete the national vaccination system. She also called on the Red Cross to exert pressure on Israel to provide a safe passage for the entry of doctors and exit of the wounded and sick, and stressed the need to bring all possible medical aid into the Gaza Strip (Palestinian ministry of health Facebook page, December 15, 2023).

► **Mahmoud al-Habbash, Mahmoud Abbas' advisor on religious affairs**, condemned the American support for Israel's war in the Gaza Strip. He said the Palestinian leadership was working to stop the war. He called for international prosecution of Israel's leaders for "war

crimes" (PA Supreme Sharia Judge Facebook page, December 14, 2023). In another interview, al-Habbash claimed that Israel was waging a religious war against the Palestinian people. He said the entire world would pay the price for its silence about "Israel's crimes." He noted the United States was not a mediator and bore full responsibility for Israel's actions (PA Supreme Sharia Judge Facebook page, December 14, 2023).

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Iran

► **Hossein Salami, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)**, said at the burial ceremony of fallen soldiers from the Iran-Iraq War that the United States and Israel were the future losers of the war in the Gaza Strip and that Iran would support Palestine until the end. He noted that turning hospitals into battlefields was not an art, but a crime, and that no nation could survive without martyrdom. He said the United States, which was defeated in Iraq and Afghanistan, was abandoning the region. He added that the United States was repeating the mistakes it had made over the past 45 years and believed it would win by occupying territories (Tasnim, December 17, 2023).

► **Nasser Kanani, spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry**, condemned the sanctions imposed by the United States and Britain on Iranian officials including Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani and representatives of Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Iran. He said the United States and Britain, which had not succeeded in blocking the path of resistance in the region by killing Qassem Soleimani and those who accompanied him, had not learned a lesson from the past and were continuing their "evil policy" (Fars, December 15, 2023).

► **Mohammad Kazem Aal Sadeq, Iranian ambassador to Iraq**, said that the Western world, especially the United States, was complicit in the "crimes" Israel was committing in the Gaza Strip. Interviewed by an Iranian radio station, the ambassador said that Israel had not achieved any military or political victory since the outbreak of the war and that the main victors were Hamas and the Palestinian people. He added that the government, political factions and "resistance forces" in Iraq supported the Palestinians and were ready to help them in any way possible. He said the "axis of resistance" in the various arenas supported the

Palestinians' struggle against the Zionists, and victory was imminent (ISNA, December 16, 2023).

► **Mohsen Rezaei, a member of the Expediency Discernment Council and former IRGC commander**, warned that if the United States and Israel did not end the war in the Gaza Strip, it could turn into a supra-regional crisis. He noted that the war provided the United States with one last chance to regain its power in the region. Rezaei stressed that Iran had not been involved in the Hamas attack on October 7, and that it was not giving orders to its friends. Referring to the Houthi attacks on the Red Sea, Rezaei said the behavior of the United States and Israel was the reason for the expansion of the war to Yemen. He said the Americans would be foolish to respond to Houthi attacks in Yemen, and that they could not open a new front in addition to their joint front with Israel in the Gaza Strip (ISNA, December 17, 2023).

Pro-Iranian militias

Iraq

► The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for several drone attacks against American bases in Syria and Iraq: American Army base in al-Shadadi; the Ain al-Assad base in western Iraq; two American bases in Syria, in the Al-Omar and Koniko oil fields; and al-Malikiya base in Syria (Islamic Resistance Telegram channel, December 14-17, 2023)

► **Michael Kurilla, commander of the American Army Central Command (CENTCOM)**, visited Iraq and Syria and met with senior administration officials. Among others, he met with Prime Minister Mohammad Shia' al-Sudani and the Iraqi chief of staff and discussed security issues, including the attacks against the American forces. Kurilla also visited the Ain al-Assad base and the American base near the Erbil airport. In Syria, he visited several bases in the region and met with senior officials with whom he discussed the forces' defense measures (CENTCOM commander's X account, December 15, 2023).

► Sources described as "close to the armed groups in Iraq" reported disagreements between the armed groups and Iraqi Prime Minister al-Sudani, which reached the point where he threatened that any future American attack on the groups would not be under his responsibility. According to one of the "sources," in the American airstrike in the Kirkuk area, in which six operatives were killed, al-Sudani refused to express his position on the issue because he had warned them in advance of possible American responses (al-Araby al-Jadeed, December 15, 2023).

Yemen

►Over the past few days, Houthi activity against vessels in the Red Sea has increased. The American Army Central Command (CENTCOM) reported that several attacks by drones and ballistic missiles against vessels had been thwarted. The vessels included a German ship and ships flying the flags of Liberia and Hong Kong (CENTCOM X account, December 16, 2023). Some of the ships sustained minor damage. Following the attacks, several maritime transportation companies announced they would stop sailing in the Red Sea (Denmark, Germany and Switzerland, among others).

►Against that background, "senior American officials" said that the possibility of carrying out attacks against the Houthis in Yemen was being seriously considered. According to the report, the United States moved the USS Dwight Eisenhower aircraft carrier from the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Aden, and the commanders were presented with plans to attack Houthi forces (Politico, December 17, 2023).

►**Yahya Saria, spokesman for the Houthi armed forces**, claimed responsibility for attacking vessels bound for Israel. He said they would continue to prevent ships bound for Israel from navigating the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea, as long as the residents of the Gaza Strip did not receive the food and medicine they needed (Yahya Saria's Telegram channel, December 15, 2023).

►**Ali al-Qahum, a member of the Houthis' political bureau**, said the international maritime navigation in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Red Sea was threatened by the military presence of the United States, Israel and the West, and it was that presence that was forcing control over important and strategic international sea routes. He noted Yemen was a partner and was interested in protecting international maritime navigation in accordance with international laws and norms. He said the Houthis would not give up on the Palestinian cause, regardless of American, Israeli and Western threats and insinuations, and anyone who defended Israel would suffer blows. He also threatened that any hostile action against Yemen would lead to severe consequences (al-Mayadeen, December 16, 2023).

►**Houthi spokesman Mohamed Abdel-Salam** said Oman-sponsored discussions were continuing with several international bodies regarding activities in the Red and Arabian Seas. He added that they had stressed to everyone that Yemen's actions were in support of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip because they could not stand idly by in the face of the

aggression in the Gaza Strip and the humanitarian situation there. He noted that in various meetings it was emphasized that Yemen's position vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip was non-negotiable, and that Israeli ships or those sailing there would remain targets until the aggression stopped, the siege was lifted, and humanitarian aid continued. He stressed that any real step to improve the humanitarian situation in Palestine and the Gaza Strip by bringing in food and medicine would help de-escalate the situation (Houthi spokesman's Telegram channel, December 16, 2023).

► **According to Mohammad al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthi political bureau,** following the steps they recently took in the Red Sea, they decided to prevent American goods from reaching Yemen (Aljazeera Mubasher, December 16, 2023).

► At the same time, **Houthi forces spokesman Yahya Saria** announced that the forces had carried out a military operation against sensitive targets in the Eilat area using many drones, and that the operation was carried out following the calls of the Yemeni people and for the victory of the Palestinian people. Saria added that they would continue their military operations against Israel until its aggression in the Gaza Strip stopped. He called on the Arab and Islamic nation to take a respectful stance towards the Palestinian cause and support its resistance (Yahya Saria's Telegram channel, December 16, 2023).

► "High-level Egyptian sources" reported that Egyptian air defense systems had detected a flying object and shot it down. They added that "Egyptian investigative teams arrived at the site of the fall off the coast of the city of Dahab [in eastern Sinai]" (al-Qahera network, December 16, 2023).

The Arab Arena

Saudi Arabia

► **Faisal bin Farhan, Saudi foreign minister,** speaking at a press conference of a delegation of the Arab and Islamic foreign ministers held in Oslo, said that the PA had the ability to control the Gaza Strip and could bear responsibility if a Palestinian state was established. Referring to the Houthi attacks on the Red Sea, bin Farhan said they did not need any new escalation in the region, and they hoped they could avoid it (al-Arabiya, December 15, 2023).

► The Saudi foreign minister met with his British counterpart, David Cameron, to discuss developments in the situation in the Gaza Strip. He stressed that civilians in the Gaza Strip had to be protected and the expansion of the conflict had to be prevented. He also stressed that

all efforts had to be made to reach a ceasefire. He called on the member states of the Security Council to ensure that the aid reached the Palestinians (Saudi foreign ministry X account, December 14, 2023).

Qatar

► **Mohammed bin Abdulrahman, Qatar's prime minister and foreign minister**, said that they did not accept what happened on October 7, and that those events should not be justified or taken out of context. According to him, hostages, especially innocent civilians, bear no blame whatsoever and should not be punished (Le point, December 15, 2023).

Jordan

► "Government sources" in Jordan denied reports in the Israeli media that as an alternative to the Red Sea, a land bridge was operating for the passage of goods between Israel and Jordan. According to the sources, those were false claims whose objective was to cast doubt on the Jordanian government's position on what was happening in the Gaza Strip. They said they stood by the Palestinians with all the necessary means (Jordanian al-Mamlaka Network, December 16, 2023).

The International Arena

United States

► **White House spokesman John Kirby** said the United States agreed with Israel that the ongoing war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip could last for months, but the United States was discussing more precise operations in terms of scope and size. He noted that he believed there was a consensus to switch to less intensive operations. Regarding Houthi activity in Yemen, he said the passage of commercial cargo in the Red Sea had become more dangerous due to Houthi attacks, and the White House would have more details in the coming days about the naval defense force being set up in response (Reuters, December 16, 2023).

Turkey

► **Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan** spoke by phone with **American President Joe Biden** to discuss the war in the Gaza Strip. Erdoğan said the United States had a responsibility to achieve a permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip as soon as possible, and that it could do so if it withdrew its unconditional support for Israel. He stressed that Israel's prolonged attacks in the Gaza Strip could have negative consequences (Reuters, December 14, 2023).

► The Turkish president spoke with his UAE counterpart and discussed Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip and efforts to achieve a permanent ceasefire in the region. He stressed that attention had to be paid to the "precise implementation" of the resolutions of the joint Arab-Islamic summit and to the continuation of initiatives aimed at expanding international support for Palestine (Turkish president's X account, December 15, 2023).

United Kingdom

► As part of the new sanctions policy against Iran, announced by Britain on July 6, and effective December 14, 2023, Britain announced the imposition of sanctions on Esmail Qaani, commander of the Qods Force, on the Palestine branch of the Qods Force and its head, Mohammad Saeed Izadi, who heads the Palestinian Office of the IRGC's Qods Force in Lebanon, as well as five other people connected to that branch, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. It was also reported that the new policy included new trade restrictions intended to harm Iran's drone program (British government website, December 14, 2023).

Hamas operatives detained in Europe

► Seven people, including four suspected Hamas operatives, were detained in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands on suspicion of planning to carry out attacks on Jewish institutions in Europe. German prosecutors said that three of the suspects had been detained in Berlin and another in the Netherlands, and that they were all longtime members of Hamas and had close ties to the leadership of its military wing. Danish police said the three men detained in Denmark would be charged under the terrorism charge of criminal procedure and would appear before a judge for preliminary questioning. The German prosecutors said Rotterdam police had detained Nazih R., a Dutch citizen, while Berlin police detained Abdel Hamid A. and Ibrahim R., natives of Lebanon, and Mohammed B., an Egyptian citizen. The prosecutors added that senior Hamas figures in Lebanon had tasked Abdel Hamid with finding sources of weapons, and they were supposed to be taken to Berlin and be ready to carry out potential terrorist attacks against Jewish institutions. Dutch police said they had detained a 57-year-old man in Rotterdam on December 14, 2023, at the request of the German authorities as part of a Danish-German investigation.

► **Sami Abu Zuhri, a senior Hamas terrorist**, denied the information about Hamas operatives being detained in Denmark, Germany or any other European country, saying that the publication of the accusations was intended to influence the mass marches being held in Europe in support of Palestine (Reuters, December 14, 2023).