



Operation Iron Swords Updated to 1 p.m., December 21, 2023

Northern Arena

- 286 attacks
- 118 Hezbollah operatives killed
- 17 other terrorist-organization operatives killed
- One Lebanese army soldier killed

Israeli Casualties

- Approximately 1,300 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:** The IDF forces expanded their activities in the northern Gaza Strip and are now operating in the neighborhoods of Daraj and Tufah to the north of Shejaiya. In Gaza City, the IDF took control of the "senior Hamas terrorist quarter," exposing tunnels used by the Hamas leadership. In Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip IDF forces raided the homes of senior Hamas terrorists and exposed an extensive underground infrastructure. After a day without rocket attacks, a barrage of about 30 rockets was launched at south and central Israel.

► **According to an unofficial estimate, since October 7 approximately 1,300 Israeli civilians and security personnel have been killed, 469 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.**

The issue of the hostages: Egyptian officials reported that Hamas rejected the Israeli proposal for a hostage deal. Hamas refused to discuss the issue until a comprehensive

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

ceasefire had been reached. According to reports, the Hamas delegation, led by Isma'il Haniyeh, left Cairo.

► **The Gaza Strip:** Palestinian, Arab and international sources reported the situation of the residents was deteriorating, especially of the displaced persons.

► **The northern arena:** Hezbollah attacks continued, including launching rockets at the northern cities, towns and villages. Four rockets were launched from Syria. In response, the IDF attacked with artillery fire. Sources in Lebanon reported IDF attacks near the city of Sidon.

► **Judea and Samaria:** The Israeli security forces continued their counterterrorism activities.

► **Yemen:** The Houthis announced they were recruiting operatives to "help" the Palestinians and were erecting camps to train them.

► **The United States:** The Secretary of State said that they heard many countries urging an end to the war, but he had heard almost none demanding that Hamas stop hiding behind civilians, lay down its weapons and surrender.

► **The UN Security Council:** The debate on a ceasefire was postponed once again because of differences of opinion between the UAE, which had submitted the proposal, and the US.

The Combat Arena

► **The northern Gaza Strip:** IDF forces also expanded their activities to the area of Daraj and Tufah, neighborhoods located to the north of Shejaiya. A network of strategic tunnels was discovered which had been used by senior Hamas terrorists, including Isma'il Haniyeh, Muhammad Deif and Ahmed al-Sinwar (IDF spokesperson, December 20, 2023).

► **Jabalia:** IDF forces located a truck carrying long-range rockets; they destroyed both the truck and the rockets (IDF spokesperson, December 20, 2023). Due to the broad military activity, the forces arranged for the orderly evacuation to the southern Gaza Strip of displaced persons who were sheltering in a school. The soldiers searched the school and found large quantities of weapons (IDF spokesperson, December 21, 2023)



Right: The rockets found in a truck (IDF spokesperson, December 20, 2023). Left: Weapons found in a school in the Jabaliya area (IDF spokesperson, December 21, 2023)

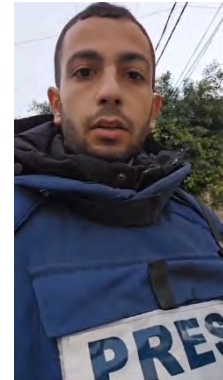


IDF forces in the Gaza Strip (IDF spokesperson, December 20, 2023)

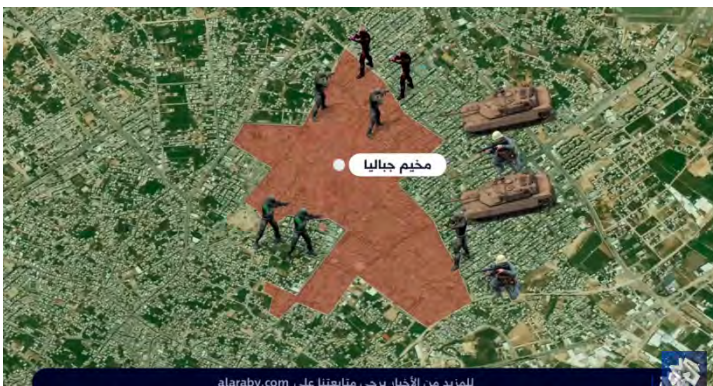
► **Correspondent Anas al-Sharif** reported that throughout the night IDF forces continued attacking in the Jabaliya refugee camp and city, and that movement between the areas was impossible. Meanwhile, heavy exchanges of fire continued in the area between the IDF forces and "resistance" fighters [terrorist operatives] (QudsN X account, 21 December 2023). Local residents uploaded videos to social networks recording exchanges of fire in eastern Jabaliya and Tel al-Za'atar, located in the refugee camp (QudsN X account, December 21, 2023).

► **Islam Bader, a correspondent for al-Arabi TV in Jabalia**, reported that IDF forces were trying to take control of the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades' al-Adara² post, apparently to look for documents and relevant material (al-Arabi YouTube channel, December 21, 2023).

² Apparently named for the region where the civilian administration headquarters were located in eastern Jabalia before the Oslo Accords in 1993 and before the IDF disengaged from the Gaza Strip.

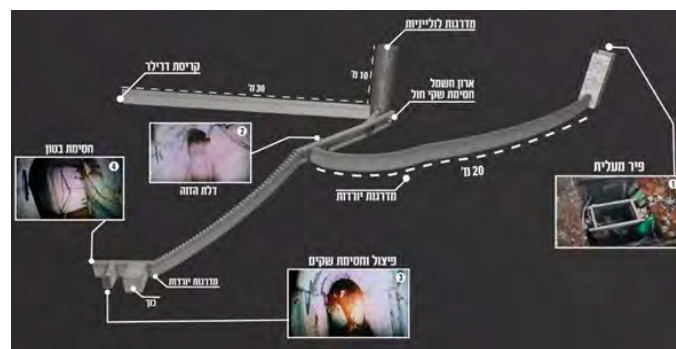


Right: Anas al-Sharif reports from Jabaliya (QudsN X account, December 21, 2023). Left: IDF attacks in the Jabaliya refugee camp (al-Arabi YouTube channel, December 21, 2023)



Al-Arabi TV explains the IDF the ground maneuvers in the Jabaliya refugee camp (al-Arabi YouTube channel, December 21, 2023)

► **Gaza City:** IDF forces completed the takeover of the "senior Hamas terrorist quarter" surrounding Palestine Square in the Rimal neighborhood in the center of Gaza City, the area where Hamas' governmental and military-terrorist leadership conducted its activity. The forces found a branching network of tunnels which connected apartments used as hideouts, offices and residences of senior Hamas political and military terrorists. Food, water and electricity facilities were found at some of the sites, allowing for a prolonged underground stay. Nearby, a workshop for digging and constructing tunnels was found, containing [pre-cast] concrete walls and arches. Large quantities of weapons and technological equipment were also found at the site (IDF spokesperson , December 20, 2023).



The route of the underground network in the "senior Hamas terrorist quarter" (IDF spokesperson, December 20, 2023)

► **Southern Gaza Strip:** IDF forces raided the homes of senior Hamas terrorists in Khan Yunis, where they exposed extensive underground facilities equipped with water and electricity (IDF spokesperson, December 20, 2023).

► **Ibrahim Qanan, a correspondent for al-Ghad TV in Khan Yunis,** reported ongoing exchanges of fire between the IDF forces and "resistance" fighters [terrorist operatives] in the neighborhoods of al-Katiba and al-Mahta, in northern Khan Yunis. He said Palestinian rescue forces could not enter the areas because of the danger of being harmed (al-Ghad TV, December 19, 2023).



IDF attacks in the Ma'an neighborhood in northeastern Khan Yunis (QudsN X Account, December 21, 2023)

► **Aerial activity:** Over the past day, Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked approximately 230 Hamas terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip (IDF spokesperson, December 21, 2023). Since the beginning of the war, the Israeli Air Force eliminated senior and rank-and-file Hamas terrorists and significantly damaged the organization's military capabilities. In addition, terrorist squads about to launch short-range surface-to-air missile, UAVs and quadcopters were eliminated before they could attack IDF forces. During the first days of the war the IDF destroyed an aircraft-detection system developed by Hamas and hidden inside solar water

heaters on the roofs of civilian homes in the Gaza Strip (IDF spokesperson, December 20, 2023).



Attacks on Hamas targets (IDF website, December 21, 2023)



Israeli Air Force strikes in Rafah (QudsN X account, (Wafa YouTube channel, December 20, 2023)



Residents of Rafah help evacuate casualties following the Israeli Air Force attack (Wafa YouTube channel, December 20, 2023)

► **Naval activity:** On the night of December 20, 2023, Israeli Navy forces attacked vessels used by the terrorist organizations (IDF spokesperson, December 21, 2023).

Reactions to the fighting

► **Senior terrorist Abu Obeida, spokesman for Hamas' military-terrorist wing**, published a list of the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades' [alleged] "achievements" during the last 72 hours (Abu Obeida's Telegram channel, December 20, 2023):

- ◆ 42 military vehicles were completely or partially destroyed.
- ◆ 25 soldiers were killed and dozens of soldiers were wounded.
- ◆ IDF forces were attacked with mortar shells, missiles and anti-tank missiles "at point-blank range" and rescue teams were attacked.
- ◆ Two tunnels and a building where there were injured "occupation forces" were blown up.
- ◆ Snipers hit a soldier.
- ◆ Posts and field operations rooms were hit by mortar shells and short-range rockets.
- ◆ A barrage of rockets was launched at Tel Aviv.
- ◆ A barrage of rockets was launched at Kiryat Shmona.



Abu Obeida's infographic (Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades Telegram channel, December 21, 2023)

► A "source" in the Palestinian military-terrorist wings stated that the fighters [terrorist operatives] had discovered important changes in the IDF's means of warfare and tactics. He said the IDF had begun using remotely controlled weapons, including AI-operated tanks, and had converted drones intended for spying missions or dropping teargas canisters into aircraft mounted with machine guns. In addition, the IDF had begun to rely more on UAVs, trained

dogs and robots, especially when operating in tunnels. "The source" said that after a long period of fighting, [the terrorists] had noticed changes which forced them to change how they fought. They switched to "hit-and-run" combat, turned the destroyed houses into rallying points, and moved without weapons, collecting them shortly before attacks from specific points (al-Sharq al-Awsat, December 19, 2023).

► **American Secretary of State Anthony Blinken** said that they wanted and expected to see Israel transition to more targeted operations with a smaller number of forces and greater focus on the Hamas leadership, the tunnel network and other critical targets to significantly reduce the damage to the civilians. He noted that they heard many countries urging an end to the war, but he heard almost no one demanding that Hamas stop hiding behind civilians, lay down its arms and surrender. He said Israel should not choose between removing the Hamas threat and reducing the number of casualties, it should do both (Reuters, December 20 2023).

Israeli casualties

► **According to an unofficial estimate, since October 7 approximately 1,300 Israeli people have been killed. According to the IDF spokesperson, 469 of them are soldiers and officers (of whom 137 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.**

Rocket fire from the Gaza Strip

► For the first time since the beginning of the war, over the past day no rockets or mortar shells were fired from the Gaza Strip at Israel. On December 21, 2023, the attacks on the cities, towns and villages surrounding the Gaza Strip were resumed, and in the afternoon a barrage of about 30 rockets was launched at Ashdod and the center of the country.

The issue of the hostages

► Egyptian officials reported that Hamas rejected the Israeli proposal for a prisoner exchange deal, and stated it would not discuss the release of the Israeli prisoners until a ceasefire went into effect (The Wall Street Journal, December 21, 2023). An "Egyptian source" involved in the mediation claimed the dispute was over the duration of the ceasefire during which negotiations would be conducted. He pointed out that [senior terrorist] Yahya al-Sinwar, head of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip, told the mediators that it was time to end

attempts to reach a temporary ceasefire, and that Hamas and the "resistance" [terrorist organizations] offered only one option, "everyone in return for everyone" (al-Araby al-Jadeed, December 21 2023).

►A "source" in Hamas in Lebanon stated that the Hamas delegation, led by Isma'il Haniyeh, had left Cairo without making progress on the issue of the hostages, according to him because of "Israel's evasion" and its refusal to accept Hamas' condition of a [comprehensive] ceasefire before any negotiations. According to the source, during the meeting Egypt's chief intelligence officer had not presented a new solution for stopping the "aggression" and the meeting dealt mainly with monitoring the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, the need for more humanitarian aid and enabling the wounded to leave through the Rafah Crossing for medical treatment abroad (Ultra Palestine website, December 21, 2023).

►In a recent interview that apparently took place in Istanbul,³ **senior terrorist Saleh al-'Arouri, deputy head of Hamas' political bureau**, said Hamas was prepared to release all the Israeli hostages in exchange for Israel's releasing all the Palestinian prisoners. He claimed that the most recent talks to extend the ceasefire had failed due to Israel's refusal to accept Hamas' "proposal" [demand] of "everyone in return for everyone." He claimed that under no circumstances would Israel would be able to eradicate Hamas, adding that their ability to continue fighting until the "defeat of the IDF" was absolutely certain. He praised Iran's support for the Palestinian issue and said that all Muslim countries should follow Iran's lead and take concrete actions to help the Palestinians "liberate their lands" [destroy Israel] (PRESS TV website, December 20, 2023).

►**Senior terrorist Musa Abu Marzouq, a member of the Hamas political bureau**, claimed that Netanyahu's call for a temporary ceasefire and the exchange of all or some of the hostages was to appease the hostages' families, especially after the three hostages had been killed while waving white flags. He added that Hamas was not interested in such "games," and that only after a complete ceasefire and withdrawal from the Gaza Strip would they discuss the issue of the exchange of hostages, or any other issue, such as security, reconstruction or the future of the Palestinian issue after the "October 7 victory" (Musa Abu Marzouq's X account, December 20, 2023).

► **Senior terrorist Ghazi Hamad, a member of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip**, said that their position was clear: they wanted a stop of the "aggression" and the war in

³ He was interviewed by Rahshan Saglam, a Press TV presenter who lives in Istanbul.

the Gaza Strip. He said there were those who wanted a hiatus in the fighting of a few days or weeks, but Hamas' position was clear. They want the "aggression" to stop because they think Israel will play the "hostage card" and resume fighting after the deal. He said they would not play the game and wanted the war stopped, after which Hamas would be ready to negotiate, including, according to him, a big compromise [said in English] on the issue of the Palestinian prisoners and the hostages in the Gaza Strip (al-Jazeera YouTube channel in English, December 20, 2023).

► **Senior Hamas terrorist Bassam Na'im** reiterated Hamas' stated position, which was also conveyed behind closed doors to all the mediators, that negotiations would not take place under fire and that first there had to be a comprehensive and immediate ceasefire, and then it would be possible to start talking about all the issues, including a hostage exchange deal. He added that Hamas' priorities were to stop the aggression, open the crossings, bring in aid and provide shelter for the Gazans, and then they would be prepared to discuss other issues, such as the exchange deal and the campaign's "political horizon [sic]" (al-Araby al-Jadeed, December 21, 2023).

► **Senior terrorist Muhammad al-Hindi, deputy Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) secretary general**, said the organization's position was clear: there would be no exchange of prisoners before the end of the "aggression" and the withdrawal of the IDF from the Gaza Strip. He added that when the negotiations began it would be necessary to talk about the effects of the "aggression" on Gaza, i.e., the lifting of the "blockade" and reconstruction, as well as the general Palestinian political situation, because the cessation of "aggression" in the Gaza Strip would include the cessation of "aggression" in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem and the "violations" in al-Aqsa Mosque. He rejected the Israeli ideas about groups or categories of hostages, claiming that the Israelis held by the "resistance" [terrorist organizations] were either military men and women in the regular army or "reservists" (al-Arabi TV X channel, December 20, 2023).

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The Gaza Strip

Palestinian casualties

►The Hamas-controlled media information bureau in the Gaza Strip reported that as of 8:15 p.m., December 20, 2023, the number of dead since the beginning of the war stood at more than 20,000 and the number of wounded at 52,600 (al-Quds, November 27, 2023).

►On December 21, 2023, Palestinian media reported dozens of deaths following IDF attacks throughout the Strip (QudsN X account, December 21, 2023). According to medical sources in Gaza, in the past day there were 55 deaths from IDF attacks in Jabalia, Khan Yunis and Rafah (al-Quds, December 21, 2023).

The situation in the Gaza Strip

►The Palestinian, Arab and international media publish reports about the ever-increasing hardships of Gazan civilians. For example, Imad al-Din al-Atal wrote that he had been staying at Shifa Hospital for two weeks when the building where he and his family were living was bombed. He claimed there was no drinking water or food in the hospital, and diseases were common among the sick and displaced (X account of Imad al-Din al-Atal's X account, December 18, 2023). On December 21, he reported that a number of the wounded had died from infection and the lack of means to treat them. He claimed Shifa Hospital had no electricity, water, medical equipment or painkillers and no surgeries were being performed, and the wounded lay on the ground until they died (Imad al-Din al-Atal's X account, December 21, 2023).

Aid to the Gaza Strip

►Reports continue about trucks carrying humanitarian aid from Egypt entering through the Rafah Crossing (Wafa YouTube channel, December 20, 2023).



Right: Trucks entering the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing (Wafa YouTube channel, December 20, 2023). Left: Israel exerts pressure on the Gaza Strip through the Rafah Crossing (Alaa' al-Laqta's Facebook page, December 21, 2023)

► **Antonio Guterres, UN secretary general**, said that the intense fighting, the lack of electricity, limited fuel and disrupted communications severely limited the UN's efforts to provide life-saving aid to the residents of the Gaza Strip. He called for the immediate authorization of large-scale humanitarian operations (UN secretary general X, December 21, 2023).

► **Ahmed Majdalani, Palestinian Authority (PA) minister of social development**, speaking at a meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers for Social Affairs in Cairo, called for the establishment of an Arab social fund to aid more than 350,000 families affected by the war in the Gaza Strip. He noted that it would require the assistance of all the parties concerned, including governmental and non-governmental bodies. He emphasized the need for aid, especially for the elderly and the disabled, including the provision of tents, blankets, mattresses, food, fuel and the entry of additional aid trucks into the Strip (Wafa, December 20, 2023).

Hamas

► Regarding the visit of the Hamas delegation to Cairo, **senior Hamas terrorist Bassem Na'im**, said it was part of the "activities of the Hamas leadership" since the beginning of the war. He reported it had not been the first visit to Egypt nor outside of Doha, and that there had been many visits to the region, some public and some not (al-Araby al-Jadeed, December 21, 2023).

► **Senior terrorist Muhammad Nizal, a member of the Hamas political bureau**, said that the Hamas delegation, led by Haniya, had already met with **General Abbas Kamal, the head of Egyptian General Intelligence**. He said the objective of the meeting in Egypt had been to discuss the ceasefire and possible negotiations, as well as the need to bring aid into the Strip,

but Israel continued prevaricating and talking about a temporary humanitarian ceasefire. He claimed Hamas had made it clear to the Egyptians that it would only negotiate if there were a comprehensive ceasefire in place. He said that after the Hamas delegation returned from Cairo and after they had met with the Qatari officials who met with the head of the Mossad, the situation would be clearer and Hamas would present its position (al-Jazeera Mubasher TV website, December 21, 2023).

►A "high-ranking Hamas official," who wished to remain anonymous, emphasized the existence of absolute harmony between the political and military leaderships of Hamas, and noted that the coordination between them was excellent. He claimed the Hamas leadership believed that victory was "inevitable," and that Israel would be defeated and forced to surrender to their demands, primarily the end of the "occupation" and the emptying of Israeli prisons [of Hamas terrorist operatives]. He also claimed there was an agreement in place not to surrender to pressure for a humanitarian truce or a temporary ceasefire for a new hostage deal. He emphasized that the position of the movement's delegation in Cairo was consistent with the statements of the "resistance," which in essence was not to release the Israeli hostages until after the war had stopped and its terms had been met. He claimed Qatar played a very important role, supported the complete cessation of "aggression," and asked the Hamas leadership for every new detail it wanted information about, and the movement appreciated it. He also claimed that at the beginning of the "aggression," the American government had been in contact with Hamas through Qatar, but the exchanges of messages had recently stopped. He claimed Hamas had no problem exchanging messages with the United States' leadership again, but would not make any concessions (Quds Peres, December 20, 2023).

►**Senior terrorist Ghazi Hamad, a member of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip,** referring to the future of the Gaza Strip after the war, said Hamas had called on Fatah many times and other Palestinian organizations to meet with them, discuss matters and make decisions together. He claimed the problem was still Mahmoud Abbas' rejection of them, and noted that so far Fatah had made no overtures for a rapprochement with Hamas. They were open, he claimed to meeting with Mahmoud Abbas, Fatah and all the Palestinian [terrorist] organizations, first and foremost to stop the aggression and then to think about how to deal with the situation in order to reorganize the "Palestinian home." He also expressed hope and

the expectation that Fatah would be more positive towards them (al-Jazeera TV in English YouTube channel, December 20, 2023).

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The Northern Arena

Hezbollah's activity

- ▶ Hezbollah continued attacking IDF posts, concentrations of forces on the northern border and civilian targets. Over the past day, Hezbollah claimed responsibility for seven attacks, including Burkan rockets (with warhead weighing 300-500 kg) at the Israeli Nurit post, rockets fired at Kiryat Shmona, and (apparently for the first time) incendiary rockets fired at Biranit Grove (Hezbollah's combat information Telegram channel, December 20-21, 2023).
- ▶ Hamas' military-terrorist wing claimed responsibility for the barrage of rockets at Kiryat Shmona on December 19, 2023 (12 rockets at the Kiryat Shmona airport), claiming it was in response to the “massacres against civilians in the Gaza Strip” (Anadolu News, December 19, 2023).
- ▶ In response, the IDF fired artillery and tank fire at several locations in Lebanese territory (IDF spokesperson, December 20, 2023). On the night of December 20, 2023, Israeli Air Force fighter jets attacked a Hezbollah operational headquarters in Lebanese territory. The IDF fired at a squad of terrorists who approached the border fence from Lebanese territory in the Metula area (IDF spokesperson, December 20, 2023). During the day, two surface-to-air missiles were fired at Israeli Air Force aircraft (IDF spokesperson, December 20, 2023).



Right: Attack on a Hezbollah launcher. Left: Attack on a Hezbollah terrorist facility (IDF spokesperson, December 21, 2023)

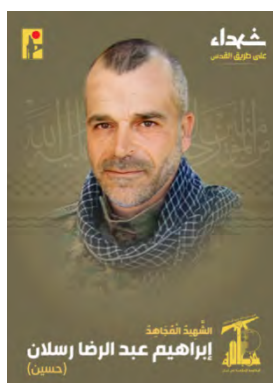
►The Lebanese media reported airstrikes deep in Lebanon, including an attack in the Bouslaya area, about 25 kilometers north of Metula, and in the Sanya area of al-Tuffah-Jezzine-the suburbs of eastern Sidon (Lebanese News Agency, December 20, 2023).



Explosion following an airstrike attributed to Israel in Jabal Safi, south Lebanon (al-Liwaa X account, December 20, 2023)

Casualties in Lebanon

► Hezbollah reported the death of Ibrahim Abd al-Rida Raslan, aka Hussein, from Markaba in south Lebanon (Hezbollah's combat information Telegram channel, December 20, 2023).



Hezbollah fatality (Telegram's combat information Telegram channel, December 20, 2023)

►The Lebanese news website al-Ahed reported that a woman had been killed and her husband wounded in an Israeli airstrike in Maroun al-Ras (al-Ahed, December 21, 2023).

The Lebanese government

► **Hadi Hashem, Lebanon's representative to the UN**, said at the General Assembly meeting on the Palestinian territories that Lebanon was committed to "all clauses" of Resolution 1701. He said the Lebanese government and its president had invested efforts to prevent the war from spreading into Lebanese territory, but the Lebanese, like the Palestinians, would not give

up a piece of their occupied land, and the crisis and the Arab-Israeli conflict would not end unless the Palestinian issue was resolved (NBN, December 20, 2023).

► **Liwa (Maj. Gen.) Abbas Ibrahim, former head of the Lebanese General Security Directorate**, said the purpose of using violence was force and control. He claimed that Israel's violence against the Palestinians and Lebanese was in vain since it would not lead Israel into a position of control. He noted that Israeli violence could not be contained and that the world had to restrain it morally and politically (Liwa Abbas Ibrahim's X account, December 21, 2023).

Syria

► On the evening of December 20, 2023, four rocket launches were identified from Syrian territory into Israel. In response, IDF forces attacked the sources of fire as well as a Syrian army position (IDF spokesperson, December 20, 2023).



Attack on a Syrian army post (IDF website, December 20, 2023)

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Judea and Samaria

Counterterrorism activities

► The Israeli security forces continued their counterterrorism activities throughout Judea and Samaria, detaining 20 wanted Palestinians, eight of them Hamas operatives. Since the beginning of the war in the Gaza Strip, about 2,420 wanted Palestinians have been detained, including about 1,210 Hamas operatives (IDF spokesman's X account, December 21, 2023).

► The Israeli forces operated in the village of Saida (southwest of Jenin), locating and destroying IEDs and materials for making IEDs. Operating in Deir al-Ghusun (north of

Tulkarm), the forces seized weapon parts and ammunition. In Rujeib (southeast of Nablus), they detained two wanted Palestinians, and located and seized two pistols, an M-16 rifle, ammunition and weapon parts. In **Hebron**, the forces located and seized ammunition (IDF spokesperson's X account, December 21, 2023).

►The Palestinian media reported a "work accident" in Jenin after an IED exploded while two young Palestinians were riding a motorcycle, killing them. The dead were Ahmed Ararawi, 13, and Ali Turkman, 17, from Jenin (QudsN X account, December 21, 2023).

Palestinian Authority (PA)

►**Ziad Hab al-Reeh, PA minister of the interior**, paid a visit to Palestinian police headquarters in Ramallah and met with the police chief and senior officials. He conveyed the congratulations of Mahmoud Abbas and Muhammad Shtayyeh for their work in light of the current security circumstances and stressed that maintaining the security of the "homeland" and its citizens were top priorities that required them to be more vigilant in law enforcement. He warned of various parties interested in damaging Palestinian interests (Palestinian police Facebook page, December 20, 2023).



Palestinian Interior Minister Hab al-Reeh visits Palestinian police headquarters
(Palestinian police Facebook page, December 20, 2023)

►**Mahmoud al-Aloul, deputy chairman of Fatah and in charge of the bureau of mobilization and organization (Tanzim)**, met with Fatah activists from the movement's offices and expressed his appreciation for their involvement in the various activities and events and their role in promoting the national struggle during the current period. He referred to Mahmoud Abbas' political activity regarding the war in the Gaza Strip, stressing that for 17 years they had warned that Israel's actions would eventually lead to an "explosion" (Shafa News, December 20, 2023).

Iran

◀ **Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi** spoke with **Pakistani President Arif-ur-Rehman Alvi** and discussed the need for coordinated action by Muslim countries to pressure Israel to "stop the killing machine and crimes in the Gaza Strip" (Fars, December 20, 2023).

▶ **Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian** spoke with **South African Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor** to discuss the situation in the Gaza Strip and efforts in the international arena to end the war in Gaza (Fars, December 20, 2023). He also met with his **Omani counterpart, Seyyed Badr al-Busaidi**, and discussed developments in the Palestinian arena. He condemned the "war crimes of the Zionist regime against the residents of the Gaza Strip and Palestine" and said the United States bore international responsibility for its unwavering support for the "genocide of the Zionist regime in Gaza" (al-Alam, December 21, 2023).

▶ **Hossein Salami, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)**, said at a meeting in Khuzestan Province that the Palestinian "resistance" was in its early stages and that the residents of the Gaza Strip were currently practicing the formula of defeating Israel. He said Israel was in rapid decline and could not manage the Gaza Strip with a tired, exhausted, incompetent army. He claimed the Israeli authorities lacked a strategic and mental balance, while the residents of the Gaza Strip were full of "faith" (Tasnim, December 20, 2023).

▶ **Ali-Reza Tangsiri, commander of the IRGC's Navy**, said at a press conference in Bushehr that the IRGC's fleet monitored "enemy movements in the Persian Gulf" using its systems, and that once the American aircraft carrier Eisenhower entered the area, it was under continuous surveillance by the navy until its departure from the Persian Gulf (Tasnim, December 20, 2023).

Pro-Iranian militias

Iraq

▶ The American Army Central Command (CENTCOM) reported that on the morning of December 20, a rocket was fired at the Ain al-Assad base in western Iraq. According to the report, American forces located the launching point and reported it to the Iraqi security forces, which arrived at the scene and located a truck used to launch rockets (CENTCOM X account, December 21, 2023).

► **Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia' al-Sudani** met in Baghdad with **Victoria Nuland, the American undersecretary of state**, and an accompanying delegation. He stressed the responsibility of the Iraqi government to maintain security in its territory and the government's seriousness in protecting diplomatic missions, embassies, and places where international coalition advisers in Iraq were present. Al-Sudani also said that his government refused any action taken by any external element in Iraq. Regarding the war in the Gaza Strip, he said the international community had lost most of its credibility because of its positions on what was happening in the Gaza Strip. Nuland stressed her desire to maintain the bilateral cooperative relationship between the two countries, noting that the United States was working to end the military operation in the Gaza Strip as soon as possible (Iraqi News Agency, December 20, 2023).

Yemen

► **Josep Borrell, EU foreign policy chief**, said that at a meeting of the EU's National Security Committee, member states had agreed to contribute to the multinational naval force established by the United States through the EU naval force. He said they would expand their information sharing and presence in the region. He noted that the Houthis' irresponsible actions threatened freedom of navigation in the Red Sea (Josep Borrell's X account, December 20, 2023). **The commander of the European Union Naval Force** announced that the Naval Force had already begun cooperating with the American multinational naval force in the Red Sea and that it expected to provide more support with appropriate capabilities (Naval Force commander's X account, December 20, 2023).

► **Al-Malik al-Houthi, leader of the Houthis in Yemen**, said that their actions were not directed at international ships but at Israel and those connected to it, and that European ships that were not bound for Israeli ports were not in danger. He also said they had asked the countries separating them from "Palestine" to open the crossings so that their fighters could reach "Palestine." Al-Houthi noted that four countries in the region, including Arab countries, were confronting the missiles and drones they were launching at Israel, and that so far, they had been patient despite the interception of the missiles and had hit only Israel. He also noted that the United States was trying to encourage other parties to cooperate with it to protect Israeli ships and that the American move sought to militarize the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and Bab al-Mandeb. He recommended that all countries reject the move, saying that if the

United States attacked them, they would also make American ships targets for missiles (al-Jazeera, December 20, 2023).

► **Hizam al-Assad, a member of the Houthis' political bureau**, stated that they had announced a general mobilization to prepare operatives to take part in the fighting alongside the "Palestinian resistance" in the Gaza Strip. He said the mobilization campaign was underway in all provinces, training camps were opened, and "tens of thousands" of young people who volunteered had been recruited. He noted that several groups had already completed their training (RIA, December 20, 2023).

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The Arab Arena

Jordan

► **King Abdullah II of Jordan** met in Amman with **British Foreign Secretary David Cameron** to discuss the need to reach an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and expand cooperation between the countries. King Abdullah reiterated his opposition to any attempt to uproot the residents of the Gaza Strip from their lands, saying it would broaden the conflict in the region (Petra, December 20, 2023).

Egypt

► In Cairo, **David Cameron** met with **Sameh Shoukry, the Egyptian foreign minister**. They discussed efforts to reach a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the need to stop the Israeli "violations" and hold a political process based on the two-state solution (Egyptian foreign ministry X account, December 21, 2023).

► Speaking at the Arab-Russian Cooperation Forum held in Morocco in the presence of Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, **Sameh Shoukry** called for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and ensuring full access to humanitarian aid. He also made it clear that the displacement of Palestinians was a red line that should not be allowed to take place. He called for action to return to the negotiating table and reach a two-state solution (al-Qahera, December 20, 2023).

The International Arena

International institutions

- ▶ The president of the UN Security Council said that the planned vote on the UAE draft resolution had been postponed again after the council members did not agree on the wording of the resolution (Agence France-Presse, December 20, 2023). Earlier, it was reported that the negotiations between the United States and the UAE regarding an agreement on the wording of the resolution had failed (al-Hadath, December 20, 2023).
- ▶ **Izzat al-Rishq, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, said in response that the hint of an American veto was once again delaying the UN decision to bring aid into the Gaza Strip. He claimed the American administration was killing them twice, once with its bombs, and the second time through starvation and deprivation of food and medicine (Izzat al-Rishq's Telegram channel, December 21, 2023).
- ▶ In response to the call by **Karim Khan, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court** (ICC) in The Hague, to present him with information relevant to the ongoing investigation into violations in Palestine of the Rome Statute, including the war in the Gaza Strip. Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN), an organization founded by the late Saudi journalist Jamal Ahmad Khashoggi, submitted a list of 40 Israeli military commanders who allegedly took part in operations that included indiscriminate attacks on residents, including [allegedly] blocking humanitarian aid and blockading Gaza. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant is reportedly at the top of the list (DAWN website, December 21, 2023).
- ◀ **Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman al-Safadi** said at a meeting between King Abdullah and the crown prince with religious leaders from Jerusalem and Jordan that they had filed a comprehensive lawsuit with the International Court of Justice (ICJ), not limited only to Judea and Samaria, but also for violating the status quo in Jerusalem and attempting to uproot residents. He noted that it was probably the most comprehensive lawsuit filed and that it was carried out in coordination with the Palestinian Authority. **King Abdullah** said a truce had to lead to a ceasefire and the return of the two sides to negotiations to find a solution to the Palestinian issue based on the two-state solution (Petra, December 20, 2023).

Turkey

► **Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan** spoke with **Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi** about the Israeli attacks against "Palestine" and the efforts to provide humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. Erdoğan stressed the importance of Islamic countries continuing their efforts to ensure a permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip (Anadolu News, December 20, 2023).