



Iran Summary

December 2023

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December 2023 Summary: Iran and its proxies continued to engage in and support Hamas's war against Israel, following the brutal attacks it carried out on October 7. After several months of slowed production, Iran tripled the pace at which its nuclear program was enriching 60% uranium. Iran-backed groups have carried out at least 115 attacks on U.S. forces in the region, according to [JINSA's Iran Projectile Tracker](#), since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas War. These groups conducted at least 38 attacks against U.S. personnel in Iraq and Syria during December. The Iran-backed Houthis escalated their maritime attacks, indiscriminately targeting commercial vessels and military ships operating in the region on at least 32 occasions during December. At home, the Islamic Republic continues to carry out executions at a staggering rate, likely taking advantage of the world media's diverted attention to crack down on dissent at home. View JINSA's [Israel at War](#) webpage for the latest analysis, commentary, webinars, and media coverage about the 10/7 attacks and the ensuing Israel-Hamas conflict.

Nuclear:

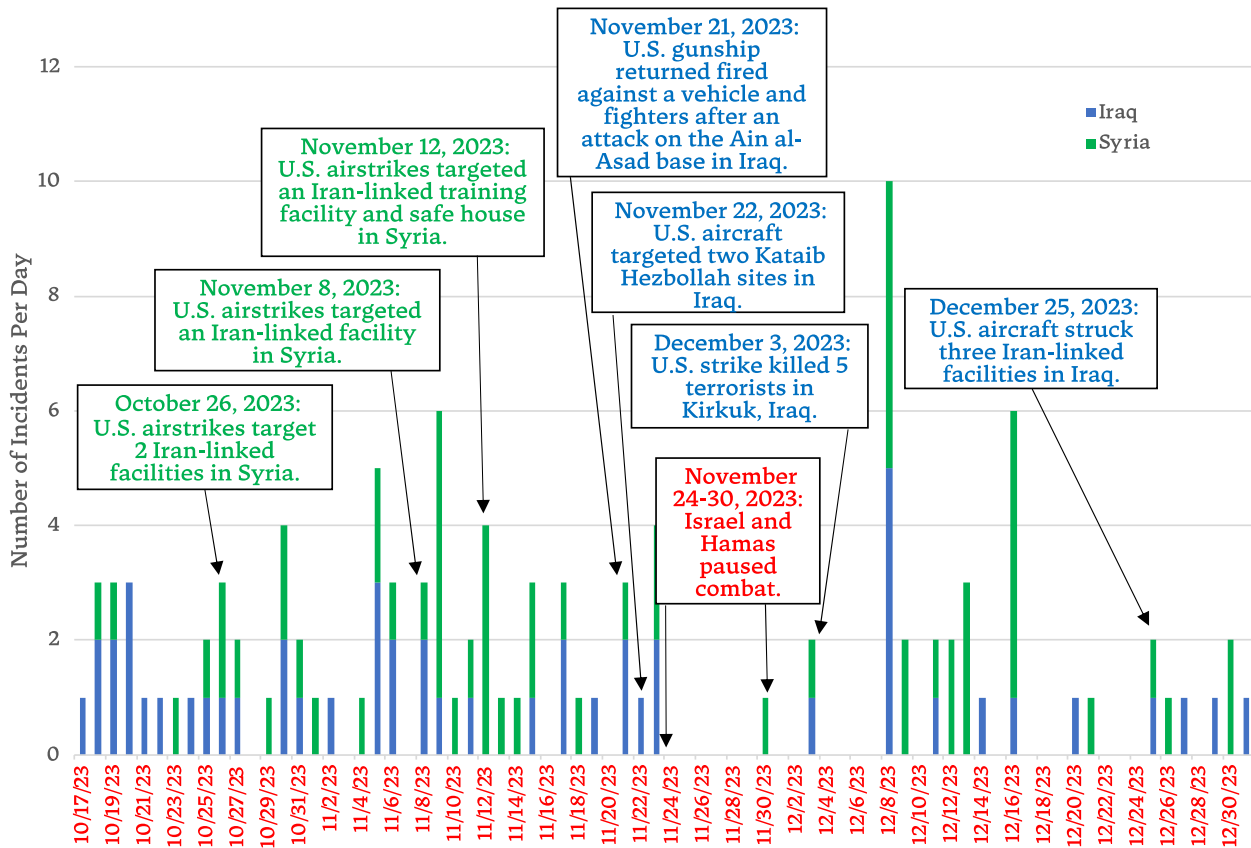
- On December 26, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) [said](#) that Iran had reversed course after a months-long slowdown of its nuclear program, increasing the pace at which it was producing 60% enriched uranium from 3kg a month the past several months to 9kg a month since the end of November.
 - » IAEA inspectors [noted](#) an increase in production at Iran's Fordow nuclear facility on November 25, and Natanz nuclear facility on November 27.
 - Iran told IAEA inspectors this increase in production began on November 22.
 - The IAEA, however, only formally notified its member states on December 26.
 - » In response to this report, a State Department spokesperson [told Fox News](#) on December 26, that they were "greatly concerned" by the report, and that Iran has "no credible civilian justification for enrichment up to 60%."
 - They added, "Iran's nuclear escalation is all the more concerning at a time when Iran as well as Iran-backed militant groups and Iran's proxies continue their dangerous and destabilizing activities in the region... This includes the latest drone attack against U.S. personnel in Iraq, Houthi attacks against commercial shipping vessels in the Red Sea as well as Iran's latest armed-drone attack against a chemical tanker in the Indian ocean."

Attacks on U.S. Troops and Personnel in the Region: Iran-backed attacks against U.S. troops and personnel in the region escalated as regional tensions soar amidst the war between Israel and the Iran-backed Hamas terror group.

- Since October 17, there have been 115 attacks against U.S. troops and personnel in Iraq and Syria, including 38 in December.
 - » At least 73 American troops have been injured, about half of whom sustained traumatic brain injuries during the Iran-backed attacks since October 17.
- In December alone, Iranian-backed groups carried out at least 38 such attacks: 24 in Syria, and 14 in Iraq.
 - » On December 31, aerial defense systems [shot down](#) an armed drone targeting U.S. and Coalition forces at Erbil Airport in northern Iraq.
 - » On December 30, two drones were [shot down](#) near U.S. forces at al-Harir airbase in Iraq.
 - » On December 30, Iran-backed militias [carried out](#) attacks targeting U.S. troops at two bases in Syria; they fired 14 rockets at U.S. troops at Green Village, and 12 rockets and 3 one-way attack drones at Euphrates Mission Support Base.
 - » On December 28, Iran-backed militias in Iraq [claimed](#) responsibility for an attempted drone attack against U.S. personnel at Erbil International Airport; the drone reportedly fell short in a nearby village.
 - » On December 26, multiple rockets were [fired](#) at the U.S.-led coalition base at Shaddadi, Syria.
 - » On December 25, Iran-backed groups [launched](#) a one-way attack drone at the Erbil Air Base in Iraq. The attack left one U.S. service member critically injured and two other U.S. personnel wounded.
 - » On December 20, a rocket [targeted](#) U.S. personnel at Al-Asad Air Base in Iraq.
 - » On December 16, U.S. and coalition forces at Mission Support Site Euphrates were [targeted](#) in three separate attacks; two one-way drones targeted the base and multiple rockets were fired by Iran-backed militias.
 - » On December 14, multiple one-way attack drones [targeted](#) U.S. and Coalition forces at Al-Asad Airbase in Iraq, during a visit from CENTCOM commander, General Erik Kurilla.
 - » On December 13, a one-way attack drone [targeted](#) U.S. and Coalition forces at Al-Tanf Garrison in Syria.
 - » On December 13, a one-way attack drone [targeted](#) U.S. and Coalition forces at Patrol Base Shaddadi in Syria.
 - » On December 13, multiple rockets were [fired](#) targeting U.S. and coalition forces at Mission Support Site Euphrates.
 - » On December 12, multiple rockets were [launched](#) targeting U.S. forces at Mission Support Site Green Village in Syria.
 - » On December 11, Iran-backed militias [fired](#) multiple rockets targeting U.S. personnel at Patrol Base Shaddadi, in Iraq.
 - » On December 11, Iran-backed militias [launched](#) a one-way attack drone targeting U.S. personnel at Al-Asad Airbase in Iraq.

- » From December 8 to 9, Iran-backed militias [carried out](#) at least 12 attacks against U.S. personnel in Iraq and Syria, including against the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad for the first time since 2021.
- » On December 3, Iran-backed militias [launched](#) several rockets at U.S. Coalition Forces near Rumalyn Landing Zone in Syria.
- » On December 3, Iran-backed militias [launched](#) drones targeting U.S. Coalition Forces at the Harir Airbase in Iraq.

Iran-backed Attacks Against U.S. Personnel in Iraq and Syria Since the Start of the Israel-Hamas War



Maritime Aggression: In an effort to limit Israel’s access to supplies and resources, such as oil, the Iranian regime and the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen have escalated their maritime attacks, indiscriminately targeting commercial vessels and military ships operating in the region.

- On December 24, Iran [launched](#) a one-way attack drone from its territory that struck the MV *Chem Pluto* off the coast of India.
 - » The MV *Chem Pluto* is Liberian-flagged, Japanese-owned, and Dutch-operated, but has reported ties to Israel.
- On December 2, CENTCOM [said](#) it intercepted an Iranian drone “operating in an unsafe and unprofessional manner” in the Persian Gulf.

- The Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen carried out numerous maritime attacks over the course of the month, including:
 - » On December 31, U.S. Naval forces [responded](#) to a distress call from the commercial container ship, *Maersk Hangzhou*, which was under attack by four Houthi small boats. The Houthis opened fire at a responding U.S. Navy helicopter, which returned fire in self-defense, sinking three of the four Houthi ships—the fourth fled. No U.S. personnel was injured.
 - » On December 30, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) organization [received](#) reports of an incident 55 miles of the coast of Yemen's Port of Hodeida, in the Red Sea; an unidentified ship reported several explosions and "a loud bang accompanied by a flash on the port bow of the vessel."
 - » On December 28, the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen [fired](#) a drone and ballistic missile over the Red Sea in the vicinity of 18 ships.
 - » On December 26, the Houthis [fired](#) 12 one-way attack drones, three anti-ship ballistic missiles, and two land attack cruise missiles over the Red Sea; no damage or injuries were reported.
 - The Houthis also launched missiles at the *MSC United* in the Red Sea: no injuries were reported.
 - » On December 23, the Houthis [fired](#) numerous drones and missiles at commercial ships in the Red Sea, including;
 - Firing two anti-ship ballistic missiles into international shipping lanes, which did not hit any ships;
 - Launching four drones that were intercepted by the *USS Laboon*;
 - Launching a one-way attack drone that nearly missed the *MV Blaaman*, a Norwegian-flagged chemical/oil tanker; and
 - Launching a one-way attack drone that struck the *MV Saibaba*, a Gabon-owned and Indian-flagged crude oil tanker.
 - » On December 18, the Houthis [attacked](#) two commercial shipping vessels in the Red Sea: the *MV Swan Atlantic*, a Cayman Islands-flagged chemical and oil tanker, and the *MSC Clara*, a Panamanian-flagged ship.
 - » On December 16, the Houthis [launched](#) 14 drones over the Red Sea, which were intercepted by the *USS Carney*, a U.S. Navy warship, and a drone which targeted a commercial vessel that was intercepted by a British naval warship, the *HMS Diamond*.
 - » On December 15, two Liberian-flagged cargo ships were [targeted](#) by attacks launched from Houthi territory; a projectile struck the *Al Jasrah*, causing a fire, and two ballistic missiles were fired at the *MSC Palatium III*, one of which impacted the ship.
 - » On December 14, a missile [launched](#) from Houthi-controlled territory missed the *MV Maersk Gibraltar*, a Hong Kong-flagged container ship, as it sailed through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.
 - » On December 13, two missiles [fired](#) from Houthi-controlled territory missed a Marshall Islands-flagged commercial tanker, the *Ardmore Encounter*, near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.
 - » On December 13, a U.S. official [said](#) an American warship shot down a suspected Houthi drone flying towards it.

- » On December 13, a speed boat carrying armed men [approached](#) two commercial vessels in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, firing upon a Marshall Islands-flagged commercial tanker and a Malta-flagged bulk carrier. No injuries were reported.
- » On December 11, the Houthis [launched](#) an anti-ship cruise missile that struck the MT *Strinda*, a Norwegian-flagged tanker, in the Red Sea. The Houthis also launched a drone at the ship, but a French frigate, *Languedoc*, intercepted it. No injuries were reported in the attack.
- » On December 9, the Houthis [launched](#) at least two drones over the Red Sea, which were intercepted by the French frigate, *Languedoc*.
- » On December 6, the USS *Mason* [shot down](#) a drone launched towards it from Houthi-controlled territory. No injuries or damage were reported.
- » On December 3, CENTCOM [said](#) three commercial ships in the Red Sea were targeted in attacks by the Iran-backed Houthis; the *Unity Explorer*, a Bahamian-flagged bulk cargo ship owned by Israeli businessman Danny Unger, the MV *Number 9*, a Panama-flagged bulk carrier, and the *MV Sophie II*, a Panamanian-flagged bulk carrier.
 - CENTCOM [released](#) a statement that said, “we also have every reason to believe that these attacks, while launched by the Houthis in Yemen, are fully enabled by Iran.”

Other Malign Activity and Involvement in Israel-Hamas War:

Iranian regime officials and their proxies called upon Muslim countries to prevent supplies from reaching Israel and [threatened](#) that if the United States, or any other country, continues to support Israel, there would be a “possibility of an uncontrollable explosion in the situation of the region.”

- On December 28, 11 senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) officers were [killed](#) in an alleged Israeli air strike on Damascus airport. Iran has long cultivated a military presence in Syria it uses to fund and arm its proxy terror groups.
- On December 27, the IRGC [released](#) a statement claiming that Hamas’ October 7 attack was in response to the January 2020 U.S. killing of former IRGC-Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani.
 - » Hamas [refuted](#) this statement, saying, “Hamas denies the validity of the remarks given by the spokesperson of the Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Brigadier General Ramadan Sharif, regarding the operation of the Flood of al-Aqsa and its motives. We have repeatedly confirmed the motives and reasons for the operation of the Flood of al-Aqsa, and foremost are the dangers that threaten al-Aqsa Mosque.”
- On December 25, an alleged Israeli airstrike in Damascus, Syria, [killed](#) senior IRGC officer Razi Mousavi. Mousavi was responsible for coordinating a military alliance between Iran and Syria and was involved with the regime’s efforts to arm its proxies in the region.
 - » On December 28, thousands [gathered](#) to mourn Mousavi in Tehran and chanted “Death to Israel” and “Death to America.”
 - » The commander of the IRGC, Hossein Salami, [said](#), “our revenge for the martyrdom of Sayyed Razi will be nothing less than the removal of the Zionist regime.”
- On December 23, Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei [called](#) upon Muslim countries to prevent the delivery of fuel and other goods to Israel.

- On December 22, UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron [summoned](#) Iranian Chargé d'Affaires in London Mahdi Hosseini Matin in response to reports that Iranian spies had planned to assassinate two journalists at the London-based *Iran International*.
- On December 19, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian [met](#) with Hamas politburo chief Ismail Haniyeh in Doha, Qatar.
- On December 10, Israel [confirmed](#) it had foiled an Iranian terror plot targeting Israeli and Jewish targets in Cyprus.
- On December 9, in a phone call with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian [warned](#), “as long as America supports the crimes of the Zionist regime [Israel] and the continuation of the war... there is a possibility of an uncontrollable explosion in the situation of the region.”
- On December 1, Iran’s foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani [said](#) in post on X, “after killing more than 15,000 Palestinians, the Zionist criminals have started a new round of killing under the continued support of the American government.”
 - » He added, “the political and legal responsibility for the continuation of the aggression and massacre” rests with Israel, the United States, and “a few governments that support this apartheid regime.”

Domestic/Human Rights: Iran continued to carry out [executions](#) at a staggering rate—at least 750 this year, including [229](#) since the Israel-Hamas war began

- On December 29, the Islamic Republic [executed](#) four people whom it accused of sabotage and of having links with Israel’s Mossad intelligence service.
- As of December 28, the Islamic Republic [executed](#) at least 746 people in 2023, six of whom were executed in public, according to a report by Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRA).
- On December 24, *Iran International* [reported](#) that the Supreme Court of Iran officially confirmed the death sentence for Mohajed Kourkour, who was arrested last year during the anti-regime protests sparked by the murder of Mahsa Amini.
 - » Kourkour was [accused](#) of being involved in the murder of a young boy, Kian Pirfalak, in what the Iranian regime described as an ISIS attack. However, many Iranians, including Pirfalak’s family, believe the regime was responsible for the boy’s death.
- On December 23, the Hengaw Organization for Human Rights [reported](#) that the number of Kurds executed by the Islamic Republic in 2023 has nearly tripled from the previous year.
- On December 16, the Islamic Republic [claimed](#) it had caught and executed an Israeli spy. Tehran often makes similar claims without offering evidence to substantiate. The truthfulness of these claims is highly doubtful.

Cyber: Iran continued to use cyberwarfare to undermine its adversaries, and an Israel-linked cyber group targeted Iranian gas stations.

- On December 25, an Iran-affiliated hacker group, “Homeland Justice,” [carried out](#) a cyberattack against Albania’s parliament. The group also claimed responsibility for cyberattacks against the One Albania phone company, Air Albania, and Eagle Mobile.
- On December 21, *Iran International* [reported](#) that hackers affiliated with Iran’s cyber-espionage group “MuddyWater” had begun targeting telecommunications companies in Egypt, Sudan, and Tanzania.

- On December 18, an Israel-linked hacking group known as “Gonjeshke Darande” or “predatory sparrow” [claimed responsibility](#) for a cyberattack that shut down 70% of Iran’s gas stations.
- On December 18, Israel’s National Cyber directorate [said](#) Iran and Hezbollah were behind an attempted cyberattack against the Ziv Medical Center in Safed, Israel, in November 2023.
- On December 2, the FBI, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), and Israel’s National Cyber Directorate [released](#) a joint statement saying that Iran-linked hackers had targeted U.S. infrastructure and industry across several states.
 - » On November 25, the Municipal Water Authority of Aliquippa, Pennsylvania was [targeted](#) in one such attack when hackers took control of one of the municipal water stations and displayed a message, “you have been hacked. Down with Israel. Every equipment ‘made in Israel’ is Cyber Av3ngers legal target.”
 - » The chairman of the Municipal Water Authority of Aliquippa, Matthew Mottes, [said](#) officials told him that the same group breached four other utilities and an aquarium.
 - » The hacker group responsible for these attacks, “Cyber Av3ngers,” is affiliated with the IRGC.

Recent JINSA Publications on Iran:

- December 28: [“To Deter Houthi Strikes in Red Sea, US Must Turn From Defense to Offense,” *Breaking Defense*, VADM Mark Fox, USN \(ret.\), VADM John W. Miller, USN \(ret.\) and Ari Cicurel](#)
- December 27: [“Seventh U.S. Strike Amid Over 100 Iran-backed Attacks in Iraq and Syria,” Ari Cicurel](#)
- December 23: [“The US Must Help Israel Deal with Hezbollah Before It’s Too Late,” *The Hill*, Ari Cicurel and Lt Gen Thomas Bergeson, USAF \(ret.\)](#)
- December 19: [“New Maritime Task Force Needs Credible Military Force for Successful Deterrence,” Ari Cicurel and Yoni Tobin](#)
- December 14: [“Deterrence Is More Than Deployments: The Effects, and Limitations, of the Administration’s Naval Movements in the Middle East,” VADM John M. Bird, USN \(ret.\), Jacob Olidort, and Ari Cicurel](#)
- December 5: [“The United States Must Re-Designate the Houthis as Terrorists,” Yoni Tobin](#)
- December 4: [“First Preemptive U.S. Strike Since 10/7,” Ari Cicurel](#)
- December 1: [“10/7 Attack Highlights Need to Sanction Iran-Backed Terrorists,” Zac Schildcrout](#)