

Iran Update, February 21, 2024

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Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm ET

The Iran Update provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities abroad that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests. It also covers events and trends that affect the stability and decision-making of the Iranian regime. The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) provides these updates regularly based on regional events. For more on developments in Iran and the region, see our [interactive map of Iran and the Middle East](#).

Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We utterly condemn violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

Click [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report. Click [here](#) to subscribe to the Iran Update.

Iranian sources told Reuters on February 21 that Iran provided hundreds of short-range ballistic missiles (SRBM) to Russia in early January.[1] The three unspecified Iranian sources said that Iran provided roughly 400 SRBMs to Russia, including the Fateh-110 and the Zolfaghar. The sources said that Iran has sent at least four SRBM shipments to Russia since Iran and Russia concluded a missile sale agreement in late 2023. One Iranian official said that Iran will continue to ship missiles to Russia because Iran is “allowed to export weapons to any country” it wishes, given the October 2023 expiration of UN missile restrictions on Iran under UNSC Resolution 2231. UNSC Resolution 2231 suspended nuclear-related UN sanctions and established sunset dates for missile and other arms-related sanctions on Iran. A Kremlin-affiliated Russian milblogger said on February 21 that Iran began missile shipments to Russia in early January, following the UN missile restrictions expiration.[2]

Iran's arms sales to Russia are part of Iran's efforts to generate revenue to support its deteriorating economy.[3] CTP-ISW previously assessed that Iran could seek to acquire cash from Russia in return for supplying Russia with missiles.[4] The Prana Network hacker group published documents on February 4 alleging that Russia is paying Iran roughly \$4.5 billion per year to import the Iranian Shahed series drones.[5]

Iran's provision of these missile systems could improve Russia's ability to penetrate Ukrainian air defenses. Kremlin-affiliated milblogger Rybar claimed on February 21 that the acquisition of Iranian missile systems enables Russian forces to hit "remote Ukrainian targets." [6] The Ukrainian Air Force spokesperson said on February 21 that possible Russian acquisition of the ballistic missiles is a "serious threat for Ukraine." [7] This Russo-Iranian military exchange is part of the deepening military and security relationship between the two states that CTP has covered extensively. [8] The expansion of these ties accelerated especially after Iran began providing military support to Russia for its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. [9]

CTP-ISW assessed in September 2023 that Iran and Russia would conclude a drone and missile sale agreement after UNSC Resolution 2231's missile restrictions expired in October 2023. [10] The expiration of UNSC Resolution 2231 in October provided an opportunity for Iran to meet Russian military needs without being violating sanctions or requiring Russia to do so. Iranian Defense Ministry and IRGC officials also showcased these SRBM and close-range ballistic missile (CRBM) variants to Russian officials in August and September 2023 in Moscow and Tehran, respectively. [11] This showcasing illustrates Iran's efforts to conclude a sales agreement in advance of the expiration of UNSC Resolution 2231 in October. [12]

The United States, United Kingdom, and Ukraine have previously warned that Iran would supply ballistic missiles to Russia to support the Russian invasion of Ukraine. [13] US officials said in November that Iran "may be" preparing to supply short-range ballistic missiles to Russia, and the US National Security Council spokesperson said in January 2024 that Russia was attempting to acquire missiles from Iran. [14]

The table below shows the specifications for some of Iranian missile systems, including the *Fateh-110* and *Zolfaghar*:

Name	Type	Maximum Range	Payload	Accuracy
<i>Ababil</i>	CRBM	86 km	45 kg	Optical seeker guidance system; CEP unknown ¹⁵
<i>Zolfaqhar*</i>	SRBM	700 km	350-500 kg	GNSS guidance system; 10-100 m CEP ¹⁶
<i>Raad-500 (aka Zuhair or Zohair)*</i>	SRBM	500 km	350 kg	GNSS and INS guidance; 30-100 m CEP ¹⁷
<i>Fateh-110*</i>	SRBM	200-350 km	450-650 kg	GPS and INS guidance; 100 m CEP ¹⁸

*Russia would violate its Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) obligations were it to acquire these missile systems. Iran would violate UNSCR 2231 if it had exported these systems prior to the October 18, 2023 expiration. Iran is not an MTCR member-state even though UNSCR 2231 references the MTCR’s banned Category I “complete delivery systems,” systems with a 300 or more-kilometer range and a 500 or more-kilogram payload.[19]

Key: CEP: Circular error probable; SRBM: Short-range ballistic missile; CRBM: Close-range ballistic missile; MaRV: Maneuverable re-entry vehicle; INS: Inertial Navigation System; GNSS: Global Navigation Satellite System; GPS: Global Positioning System.

Russian and Iraqi officials discussed deepening judicial and economic ties on February 21. Russian Ambassador to Iraq Elbrus Kutrashev has discussed security cooperation with a number of senior Iraqi political and military officials in a series of meetings since late January 2024. CTP-ISW assessed on February 20 that Russia may be setting conditions to supplant the United States as a security partner in Iraq in anticipation of the United States possibly reducing its military presence there.

Iraqi Federal Integrity Commission Chairman Haider Hanoun, who is affiliated with the Badr Organization, and Russian Prosecutor General Igor Krasnov signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for anti-corruption coordination and training on February 21.[20] The Iraqi Federal Integrity Commission is the judicial body responsible for investigating corruption cases and drafting appropriate legislation. Integrity Commission staff will participate in trainings and lectures held by the Russian Public Prosecution office under the MOU.[21] Hanoun said that the two organizations

will hold workshops, meetings, and trainings over the next two years to address anti-corruption efforts, recovering stolen funds, establishing national committees, and coordinating positions in international anti-corruption bodies.[22] He added that the Federal Integrity Commission and Russian General Prosecutor's office will hold a roundtable discussion covering technologies that combat corruption.[23]

Iranian-aligned Iraqi actors have previously used Iraq's judicial system to target political opposition. Under its current chairman, the Federal Integrity Commission weaponized legislation that barred candidates with corruption charges from running for office in Iraqi provincial elections in December 2023.[24]

The Russian Prosecutor General's Office oversees subordinate prosecutor's offices responsible for supervising adherence to the Russian constitution and implementing laws accordingly.[25] ISW previously reported on the Kremlin's use of the Russian Prosecutor General's Office to seize and nationalize assets from Russians and to widely apply administrative law to stifle any perceived source of opposition.[26] Russian Prosecutor General Igor Krasnov is currently sanctioned by the United States Treasury Department in connection with Russia's invasion of Ukraine.[27]

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani met with the Chairman of the Russian Federation of Manufacturers and Entrepreneurs Committee and founder of the Russian oil company Lukoil Vagit Alekperov to discuss Russian development of the West Qurna and Eridu Iraqi oil fields.[28] ExxonMobile transferred its operations at West Qurna oil field to PetroChina on January 1, giving PetroChina a majority share in the oil field.[29] The West Qurna oil field is one of the largest oil fields in the world.[30]

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani separately met with the US ambassador to Iraq Alina Romanowski on February 21 to discuss the status of International Coalition forces in Iraq.[31] Sudani denied on February 6 that the Iraqi government had directly discussed bilateral negotiations with the United States since the US airstrikes on February 2.[32]

US Central Command (CENTCOM) reported on February 21 that Houthi fighters fired two anti-ship ballistic missiles targeting the *MV Sea Champion*, which was transporting humanitarian aid to Yemen, on February 19. CENTCOM reported that one missile detonated near the ship and caused minor damage. The missile struck the US-owned, Greek-flagged *MV Sea Champion* while it was transporting grain to the port of Aden, which is controlled by anti-Houthi forces. The *MV Sea Champion* has delivered aid to Yemen 11 times in the past five years, according to CENTCOM.

Key Takeaways:

- **Iran:** Iranian sources told Reuters on February 21 that Iran provided hundreds of short-range ballistic missiles (SRBM) to Russia in early January. Iran's arms sales to Russia are part of Iran's efforts to generate revenue to support its deteriorating economy.
- Iran's provision of these missile systems could improve Russia's ability to penetrate Ukrainian air defenses.
- **Iraq-Russia:** Russian and Iraqi officials discussed deepening judicial and economic ties on February 21.

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- Iranian-aligned Iraqi actors have previously used Iraq's judicial system to target political opposition.
- ISW previously reported on the Kremlin's use of the Russian Prosecutor General's Office to seize and nationalize assets from Russians and to widely apply administrative law to stifle any perceived source of opposition.
- **Yemen:** US Central Command (CENTCOM) reported on February 21 that Houthi fighters fired two anti-ship ballistic missiles targeting the *MV Sea Champion*, which was transporting humanitarian aid to Yemen, on February 19.
- **Gaza Strip:** The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said that two brigades launched a new clearing operation in Zaytoun, southern Gaza City.

Israel-Hamas War as of February 21, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Gaza Strip

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Erode the will of the Israeli political establishment and public to launch and sustain a major ground operation into the Gaza Strip
- Degrade IDF material and morale around the Gaza Strip.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said that two brigades launched a new clearing operation in Zaytoun, southern Gaza City.[33] The 401st and the Nahal Brigades (both assigned to the 162nd Division) conducted clearing operations targeting Palestinian militia infrastructure and fighters.[34] The 401st Brigade recently completed a similar clearing operation targeting Hamas forces in western Gaza.[35] The two brigades engaged Palestinian fighters at close

range and targeted "dozens" of Palestinian fighters with airstrikes.[36] An Israeli Army Radio correspondent said that the 162nd Division's operation in Zaytoun captured ammunition manufacturing sites and a tunnel that connects Gaza City to the central Gaza Strip.[37] Such a tunnel may have enabled Palestinian fighters to infiltrate previously cleared areas of the northern Gaza Strip. The Israeli defense minister said that the IDF has not defeated all four Hamas battalions in the central Gaza Strip and intends to dismantle the two remaining battalions in the next phase of operations.[38] The IDF will also target the Rafah Brigade in the next phase, according to the defense minister.

Palestinian militias attempted to defend against Israeli clearing operations in Zaytoun. An Israeli Army Radio correspondent said that Israeli forces sustained casualties in at least three attacks in the Zaytoun area on February 21.[39] The same correspondent noted that Israeli forces encountered significant militia "resistance" in Zaytoun but not en route to Zaytoun.[40] Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad fighters detonated four explosively-formed penetrators (EFP) targeting Israeli armor in Zaytoun.[41] Other militias targeted Israeli infantry and armor with mortars, rocket propelled grenades, and small arms in Zaytoun.[42]

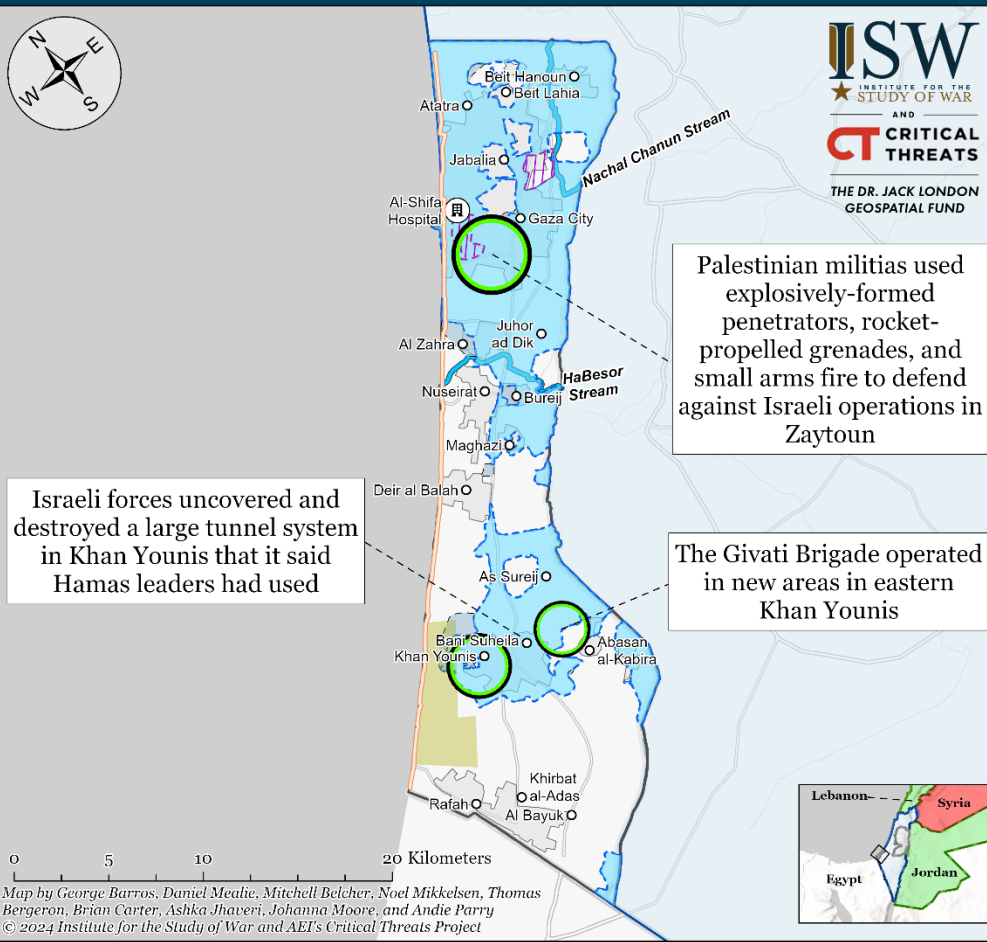
Israeli forces expanded clearing operations to "new areas" east and west of Khan Younis on February 21. The Givati Brigade killed "many" fighters in new areas of eastern Khan Younis over the past day.[43] ISW-CTP assesses that Israeli forces have not cleared suburban and agricultural land east of Khan Younis. The 35th Paratrooper Brigade (assigned to the 98th Division) expanded operations targeting Palestinian fighters and infrastructure to new areas west of Khan Younis on February 21.[44]

Palestinian fighters conducted several attacks targeting Israeli forces operating in Khan Younis. The Popular Resistance Committees and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—both militias aligned with Hamas in the current war—targeted an Israeli military vehicle in Khan Younis with an EFP.[45] Hamas separately targeted an Israeli tank with an EFP in al Hawuz, western Khan Younis.[46] Hamas fighters also ambushed Israeli SOF and infantry in buildings in the al Hawuz and al Amal areas with rocket-propelled grenades, thermobaric rockets and small arms.[47]

The IDF uncovered and destroyed a 1 km long tunnel used by Hamas leaders in central Khan Younis.[48] Yahalom combat engineers and the 98th Division raided the tunnel to locate intelligence and kill the fighters inside. The IDF destroyed the tunnel after raiding it. Hamas equipped the tunnel with several blast doors, fortifications, electricity, and water infrastructure. The IDF said that the tunnel's defenses and infrastructure likely cost "millions of shekels." The IDF also published a map of Hamas' tunnel infrastructure that it has located throughout the Gaza Strip.[49]

The IDF Arabic-language spokesperson warned that all members of "the Hamas apparatus," including Hamas police officers, are legitimate targets during IDF operations in the Gaza Strip.[50] The spokesperson stated that the IDF would not allow any type of military activity in the Gaza Strip. The UNRWA communications director stated that the Civil Police in Gaza, which is run by Hamas, had stopped providing escorts for aid convoys into the Gaza Strip after Israeli strikes killed eight officers who were accompanying the trucks.[51]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of February 21, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Palestinian militias used explosively-formed penetrators, rocket-propelled grenades, and small arms fire to defend against Israeli operations in Zaytoun

Israeli forces uncovered and destroyed a large tunnel system in Khan Younis that it said Hamas leaders had used

The Givati Brigade operated in new areas in eastern Khan Younis

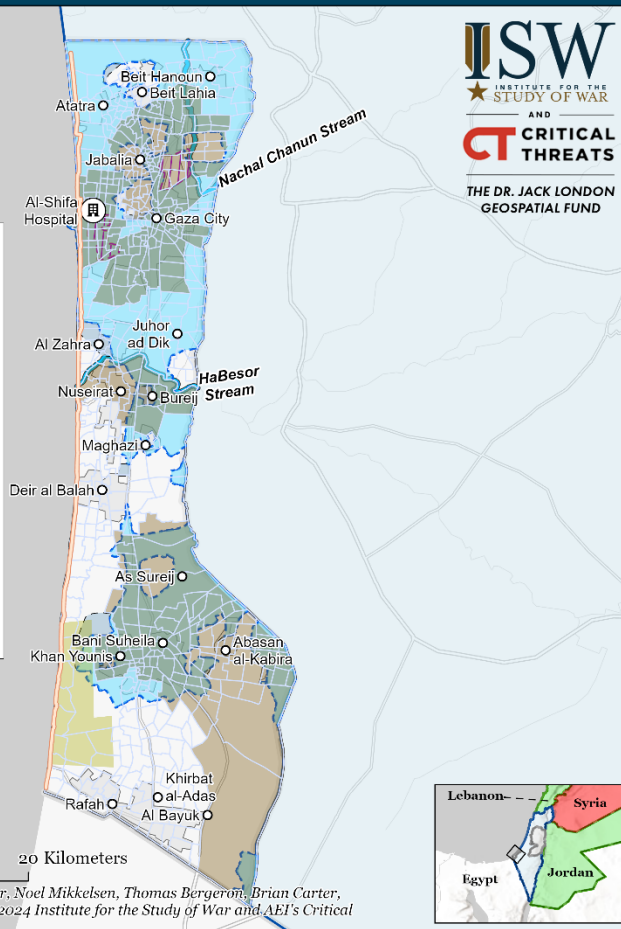
- Israel
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230
- Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias
- Significant Water Obstacles
- Densely Urban Areas
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours

* ISW-CTP's "Reported Israeli Clearing Operations" layer uses the US military's doctrinal definition of clearing which is an operation that "requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance within an assigned area." Clearing operations frequently take weeks and sometimes months to complete

Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip as of February 21, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



CTP-ISW's "Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones" layer shows Israeli evacuation zones announced by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). CTP-ISW used IDF maps and statements to create this layer. Where IDF maps cover part of a zone this layer covers the whole zone to avoid understating the evacuation order. The IDF began announcing these evacuation zones on December 2, 2023, at 0222 ET on X (Twitter)



0 5 10 20 Kilometers

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project



- Israel
- Gaza Strip
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias
- Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230
- Densely Urban Areas
- Significant Water Obstacles

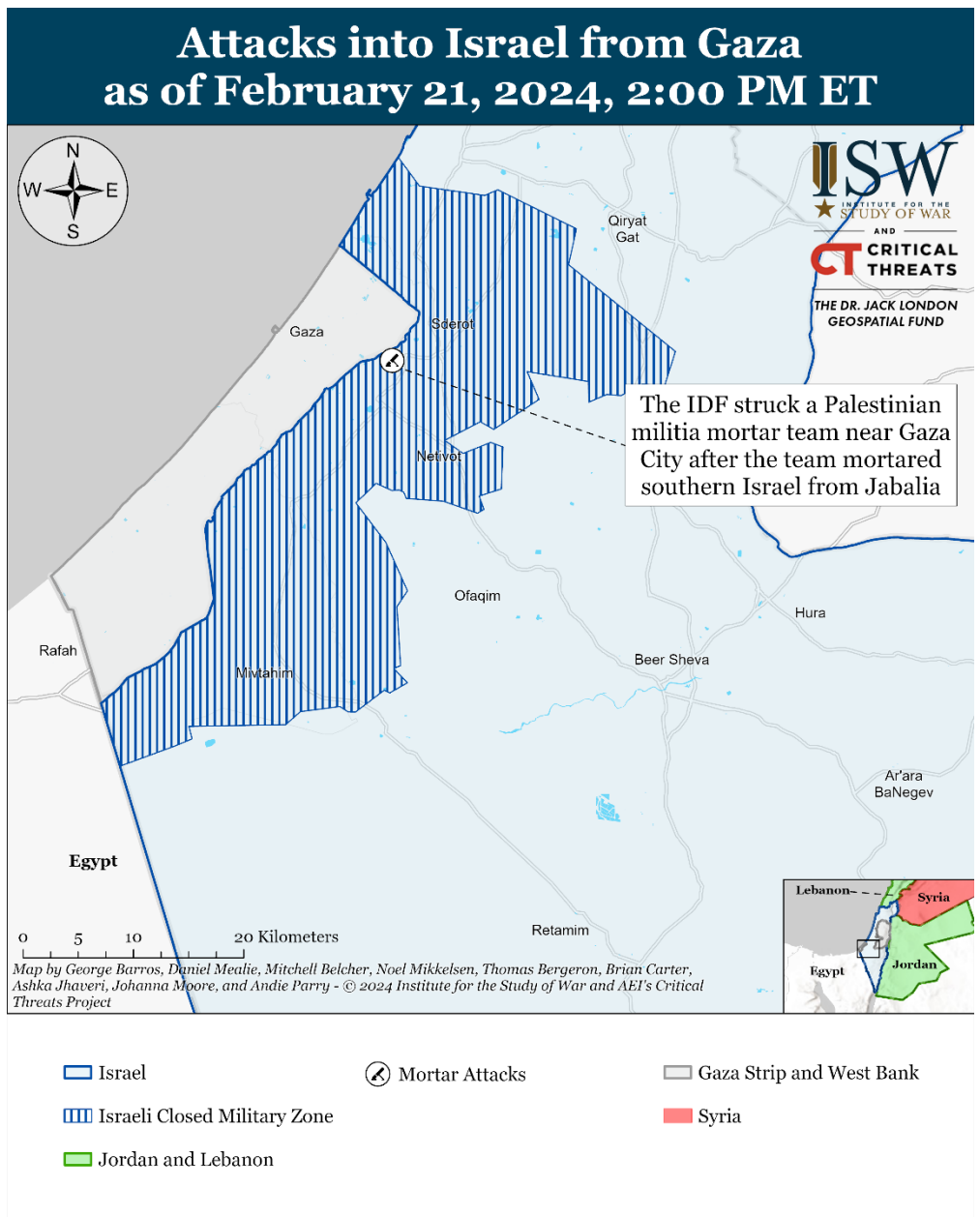
* ISW-CTP's "Reported Israeli Clearing Operations" layer uses the US military's doctrinal definition of clearing which is an operation that "requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance within an assigned area." Clearing operations frequently take weeks and sometimes months to complete

Israel is preparing to attend a high-level ceasefire talks in Paris on February 23, according to Israeli media.[52] Israeli officials are reportedly waiting for progress in the ongoing talks between Hamas and Egyptian officials before confirming their participation. Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh arrived in Cairo on February 20 to discuss a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war with Egyptian officials.[53]

A journalist working with IDF-operated Israeli Army Radio claimed that Lebanese Hezbollah and ceasefire mediators are pressuring Hamas to drop some of their “high” demands in ceasefire and hostage negotiations.[54] Hezbollah is reportedly pressuring Hamas to drop its demand that Israeli release all its Palestinian prisoners, especially those who have been convicted of severe crimes.[55] Hamas Deputy Chairman in Gaza Khalil al Hayya provided

Hamas' three priorities in negotiations in a February 19 interview with al Jazeera. These priorities were the providing relief to Gazans to enable them to return to their normal lives, ending the war, and concluding a prisoner exchange that frees 10,000 prisoners in Israeli custody.[56]

PIJ and Popular Resistance Committee fighters mortared Israeli armor and infantry positions east of Jabalia in a combined operation on February 21.[57] The IDF said that mortars fired from Jabalia entered Israeli territory.[58] The 143rd Division identified the mortar launch site and conducted an airstrike minutes after the launch.[59]



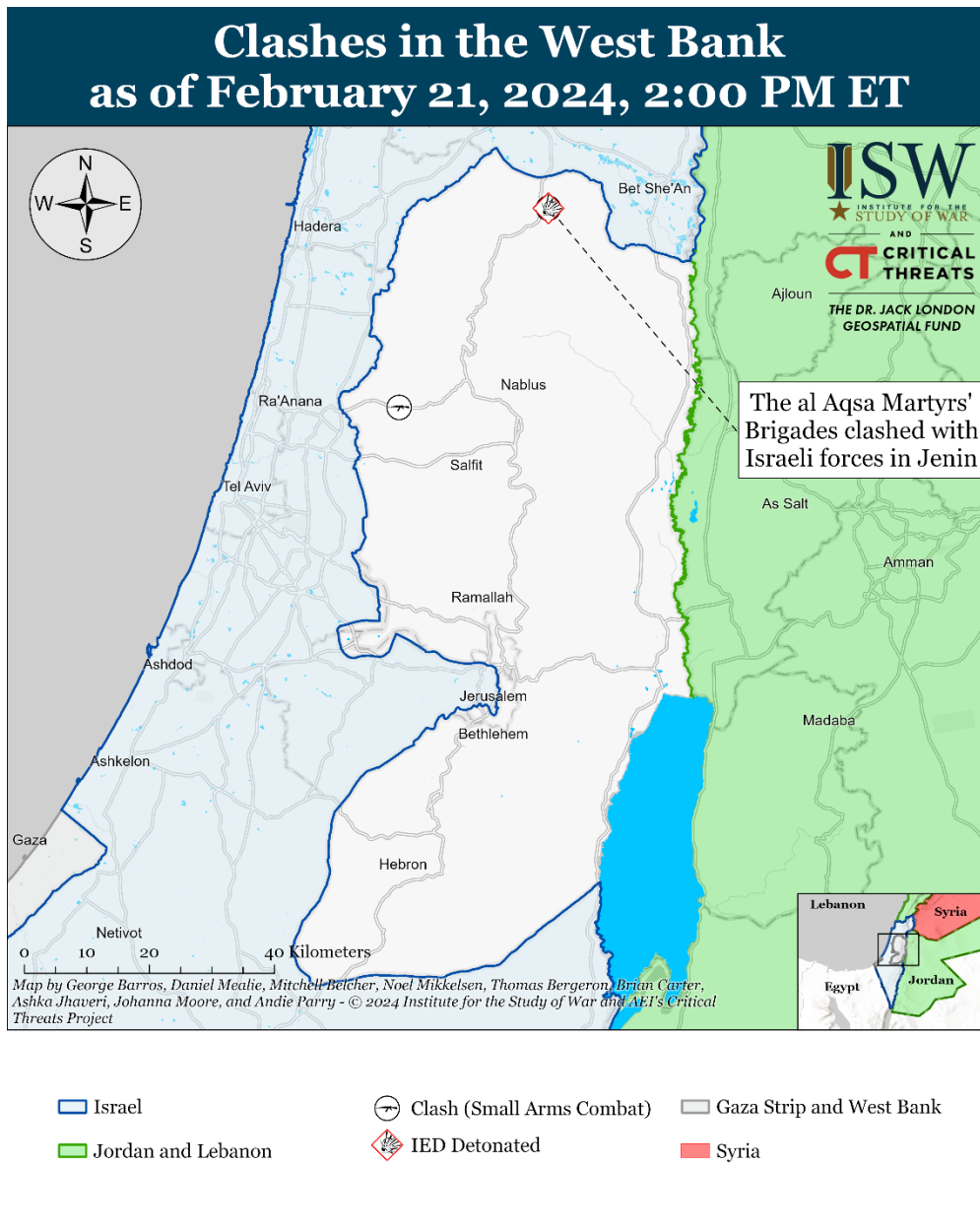
Recorded reports of attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

West Bank

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Draw IDF assets and resources toward the West Bank and fix them there

Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters at least three times in the West Bank after CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on February 20.[60] Israeli forces detained 40 wanted individuals and confiscated weapons across the West Bank on February 21.[61]



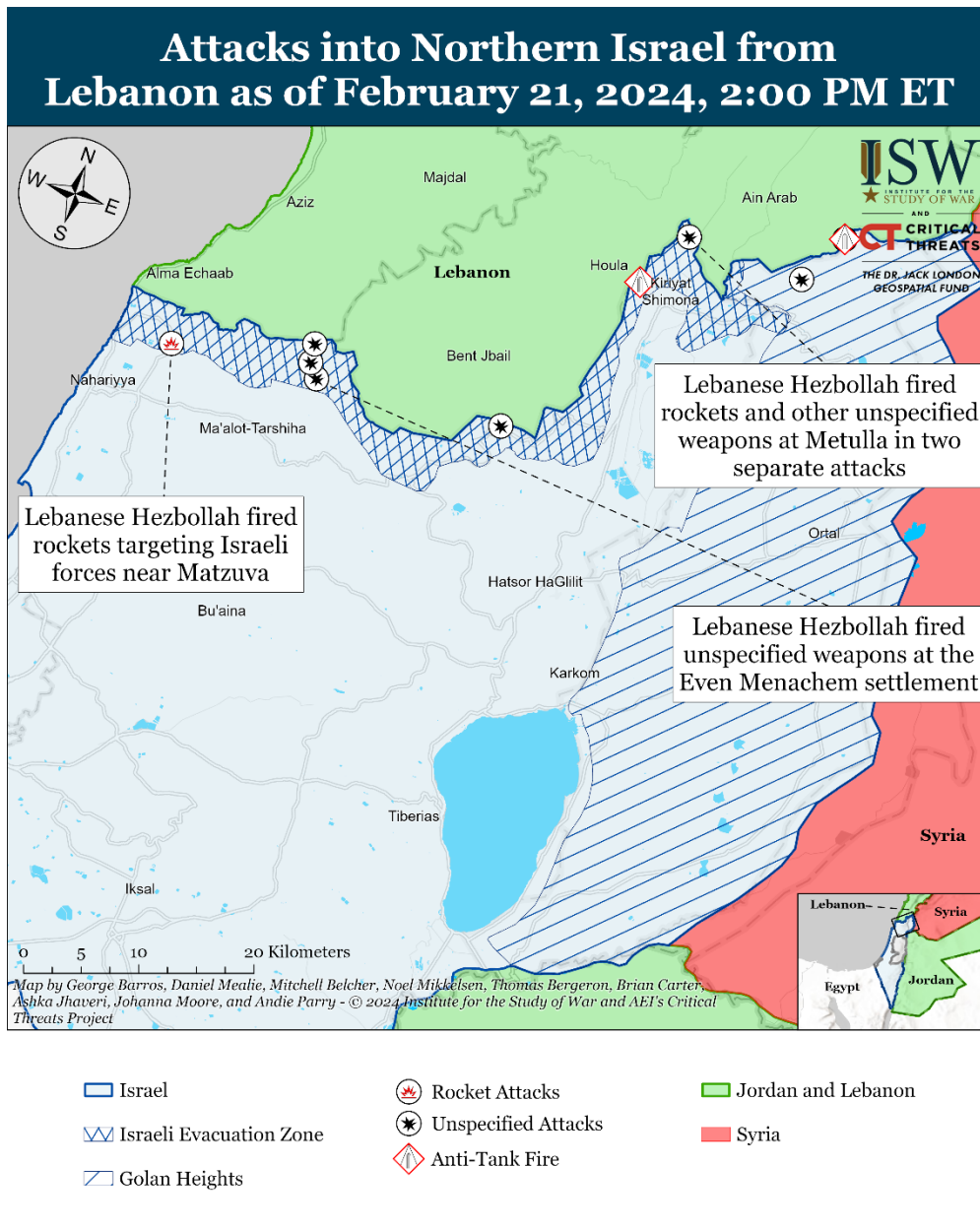
This map is not an exhaustive depiction of clashes and demonstrations in the West Bank.

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Draw IDF assets and resources toward northern Israel and fix them there
- Set conditions for successive campaigns into northern Israel

Lebanese Hezbollah conducted at least twelve attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel after CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on February 20.[62]



Recorded reports of attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

Iran and Axis of Resistance

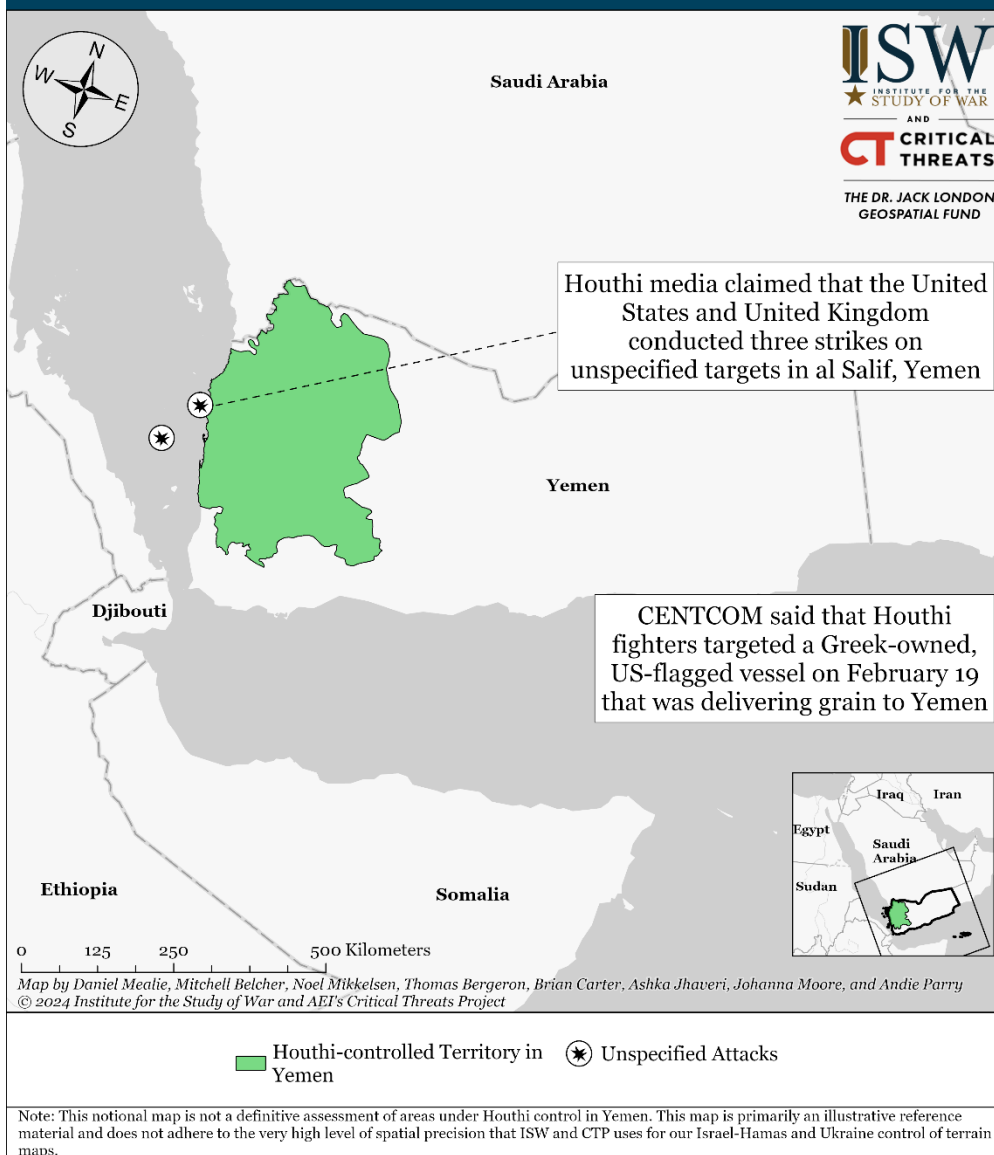
Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Demonstrate the capability and willingness of Iran and the Axis of Resistance to escalate against the United States and Israel on multiple fronts
- Set conditions to fight a regional war on multiple fronts

The Houthis likely conducted a missile attack targeting an unspecified commercial vessel in the Red Sea on February 21. The vessel's crew reported an explosion and flash of light approximately 40 nautical miles west of Houthi-controlled Hudaydah, Yemen.[63] The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) reported that the vessel and crew were unharmed.[64]

Houthi-controlled media claimed that the United States and United Kingdom conducted three strikes on unspecified targets near Houthi-controlled al Salif on February 21.[65]

Houthi-controlled Territory in Yemen as of February 21, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Israel likely conducted drone and missile strikes targeting Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Lebanese Hezbollah-affiliated targets in Syria on February 21. These targets included multiple IRGC and Lebanese Hezbollah military headquarters and weapons storage facilities in southwest Damascus and Albu Kamal.[66] The IDF Air Force said on February 3 and 19 that it has struck many Iranian, Lebanese Hezbollah, and Syrian targets in Syria since the start of the Israel-Hamas war.[67]

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian discussed the Israel-Hamas war with senior Sri Lankan officials on February 20 and 21 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.[68] Abdollahian called for an end to the Israel-Hamas war. He also called Israel a “threat to regional security” during separate meetings with the Sri Lankan president and foreign minister.



[1] <https://www.reuters.com/world/iran-sends-russia-hundreds-ballistic-missiles-sources-say-2024-02-21/>

[2] <https://t.me/rybar/57388>

[3] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-june-21-2023>

[4] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-june-21-2023>

[5] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounders/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-6-2024>

[6] <https://t.me/rybar/57388>

[7] <https://armyinform.com.ua/2024/02/21/yurij-ignat-prokomentuvav-informaciyu-properedachu-iranom-400-balistychnyh-raket-rosiyi/>

[8] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-september-27-2023> ; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounders/iran-update-september-5-2023> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/irans-drone-inventory-and-potential-sales-to-russia> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-15-2024> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/technical-specifications-and-historic-usage-of-iranian-drones-possibly-provided-to-russia> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-august-1-2023>

[9] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounders/iran-update-september-5-2023>

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[11] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-september-27-2023> ; <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1402/05/23/2940692>

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[14] <https://www.wsj.com/world/u-s-warns-iran-is-weighing-sending-short-range-missiles-to-russia-60f2c992> ; <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/01/04/kirby-russia-used-north-korean-missiles-in-ukraine-00133879>

[15] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85198896/> موشک-بالستیک-ابابیل-در-روسیه-به-نمایش-گذاشته-شد

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