

Iran Update



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Information Cutoff: January 24, 2025, 2:00 pm ET

The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) publish the Iran Update, which provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests.

Click [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations, and [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of the ongoing opposition offensive in Syria. These maps are updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

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.

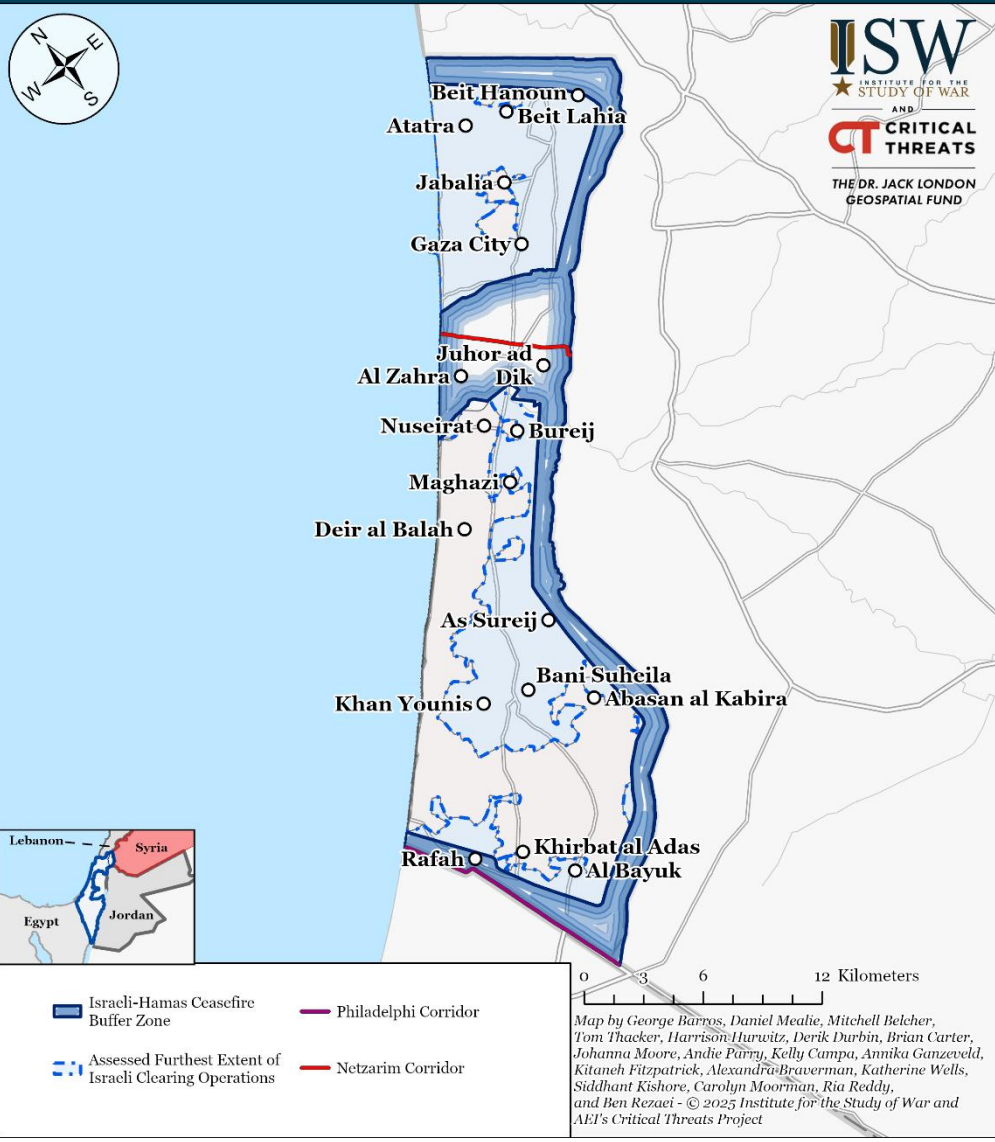
Israel stated that the list of four female soldier hostages whom Hamas will release on January 25 would violate the ceasefire agreement.[1] Hamas provided a list of four female soldiers to be released on January 25, though the Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal stipulated that Hamas would release female civilians before soldiers.[2] The *Wall Street Journal* reported that two female civilian hostages expected to be released in phase one of the deal remain in the Gaza Strip.[3]

CTP-ISW has recorded no verifiable reports of kinetic activity in the Gaza Strip or attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel since the last data cut-off on January 23.

The Israeli Prime Minister's Office announced on January 24 that the IDF will refrain from withdrawing from southern Lebanon by January 26.[4] **The Israel-Lebanon ceasefire agreement stipulates that the IDF would withdraw by then and that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) would backfill.**[5] *Axios* reported that Israel maintains that the LAF failed to destroy Hezbollah weapons and military infrastructure south of the Litani River, which it is required to do according to the ceasefire agreement.[6] The Lebanese government stated that it considers the continued IDF presence a "violation" of the ceasefire agreement and called for the United States to intervene.[7] US National Security Council spokesperson Brian Hughes said on January 24 that a "short, temporary ceasefire extension is urgently needed." [8]

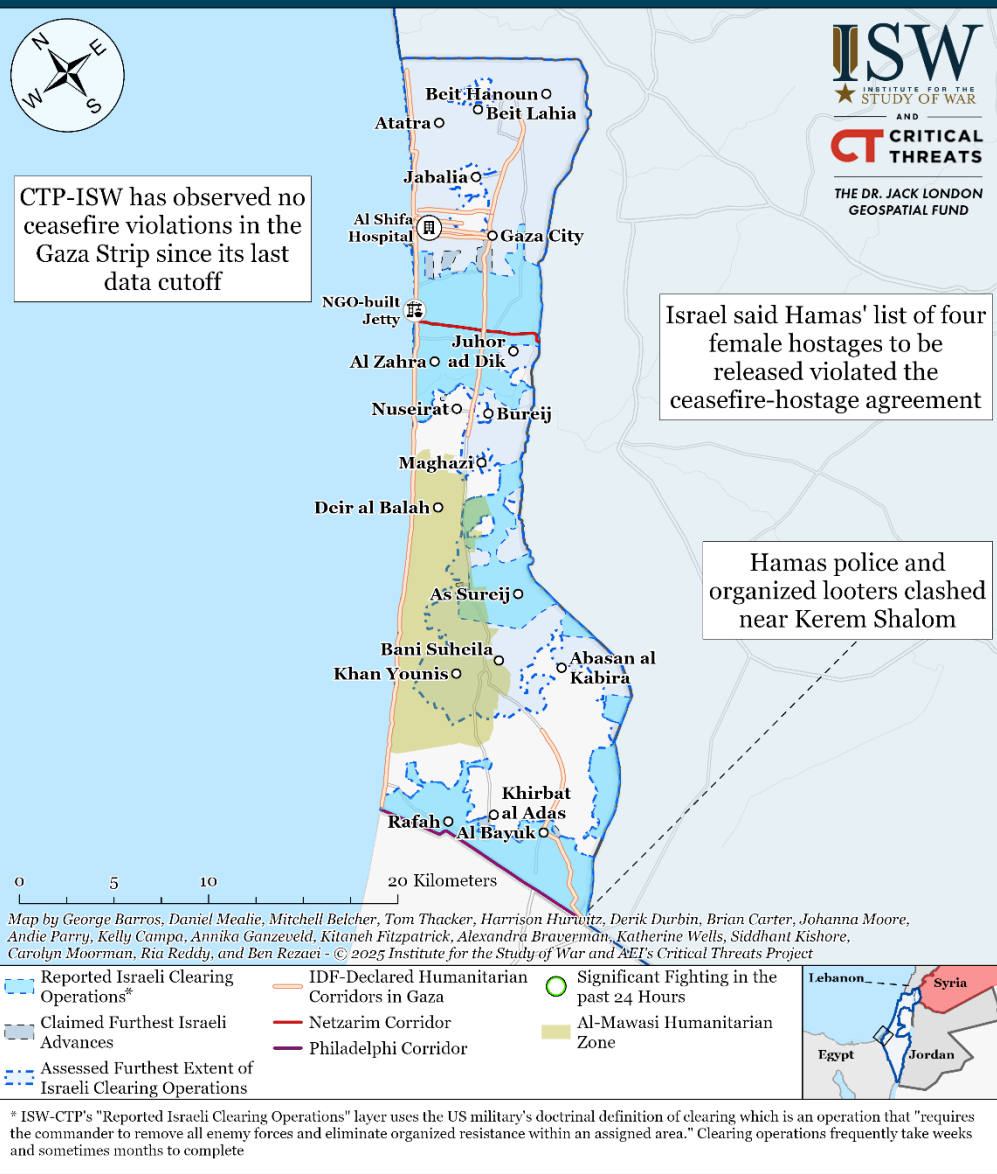
Israel-Hamas Ceasefire Lines

As of January 24, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of January 24, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



The Autonomous Administration of North and Eastern Syria (AANES), the de-facto governing authority of northeastern Syria, announced on January 23 that it has “open[ed] the door” for Syrian internally displaced persons (IDP) in al Hol to return to their place of residence.[9] Al Hol is a refugee camp for ISIS family members and persons displaced by ISIS in Hasakah, northeastern Syria. Al Hol camp director Jihan Hanan stated on January 24 that the camp has begun preparations to return 66 volunteer families to areas in Syria.[10] Hanan did not comment on whether the families’ return is being coordinated with the HTS-led interim Syrian government.

Al Hol camp continues to constitute a serious risk to Syrian stability and US national security due to the presence of ISIS supporters in the camp. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) faces bandwidth and

resource constraints as it contends with separate possibly existential fights with Arab tribal forces and a potential Turkish offensive.[11] The SDF has almost certainly redirected resources away from al Hol and counter-ISIS operations to support other lines of effort already.[12] The SDF has previously announced large-scale releases of IDPs, however, the SDF very likely lacks the capacity to ensure thorough repatriation, rehabilitation, and reintegration efforts.[13] Al Hol contains over 40,000 IDPs, many of whom have ties to ISIS and support ISIS recruitment.[14] The mass release of displaced persons risks providing new opportunities to ISIS by dispersing a vulnerable population into areas where ISIS is active.[15] ISIS would likely capitalize on the mass release of Syrians to increase recruitment efforts among these returnees.[16] The SDF, HTS, and Turkey almost certainly lack the ability to adequately integrate the camp's occupants into Syrian society.

Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid claimed on January 24 that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have stopped military activities due to the Iraqi federal government's insistence.[17] Rashid added that there is “no threat to any party in Iraq,” in an interview with Sky News Arabia.[18] Rashid's remarks follow multiple Iraqi officials saying that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are integrating into the Iraqi armed forces or the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).[19] The United States has reportedly pressured the Iraqi federal government to dissolve the PMF and warned that the United States could strike Iranian-backed Iraqi militias.[20] CTP-ISW has previously assessed that the integration of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias into the Iraqi armed forces must be predicated on a commitment by the militias to stop abiding by Iranian orders and a commitment by the Iraqi federal government to respond to any militia attack on US or partner interests in the Middle East.[21] The integration of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias into the armed forces in a way that does not meet these criteria would harm US interests in the region.

Key Takeaways:

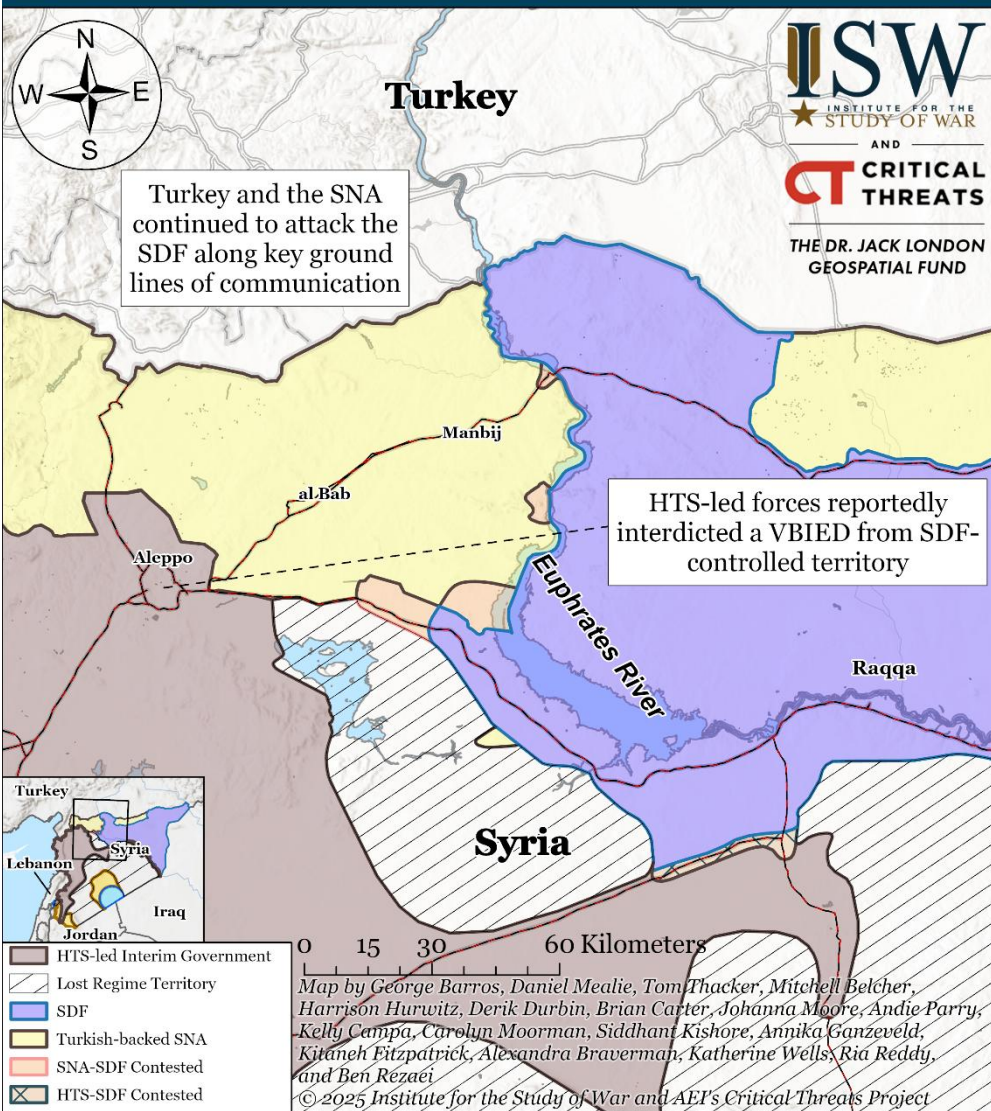
- **Gaza Strip:** Israel stated that the list of four female soldier hostages whom Hamas will release would violate the ceasefire agreement.
- **Lebanon:** Israel announced that the IDF will refrain from withdrawing from southern Lebanon by January 26.
- **Syria:** The governing authority in northeastern Syria announced plans to release IDPs from the heavily ISIS-penetrated al Hol refugee camp.
- **Iraq:** Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid claimed that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have stopped military activities after insistence from the Iraqi federal government.

Syria

Turkey and the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) continued to attack SDF positions along key ground lines of communication to interdict supplies and reinforcements from the east, which would isolate the SDF forces along the river.[22] Anti-SDF media posted footage on January 24 appearing to show the SNA and SDF exchanging artillery fire across the M4 highway near al Tarwazia.[23] Anti-SDF media also claimed that the SNA fired artillery at SDF positions in Abu Rasin, Hasakah.[24]

Control of Terrain in North Syria

As of January 24, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Syrian media reported that HTS-led forces continued clearing operations targeting former regime elements in northern and western Syria on January 24.[25] Public Security Forces searched near Jabourin-Kafrnan, northern Homs countryside, and Baniyas, Tartous Province.[26] The HTS-led Department of Military Operations has operated in northwestern Homs and Baniyas in recent days.[27]

Syrian media reported that the HTS-led Department of Military Operations began a raid targeting drug dealers and former regime elements in Sabikhan, Deir ez Zor Province, since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on January 23.[28] The Department of Military Operations deployed forces to al Quriyah, north of Sabikhan, earlier on January 23.[29]

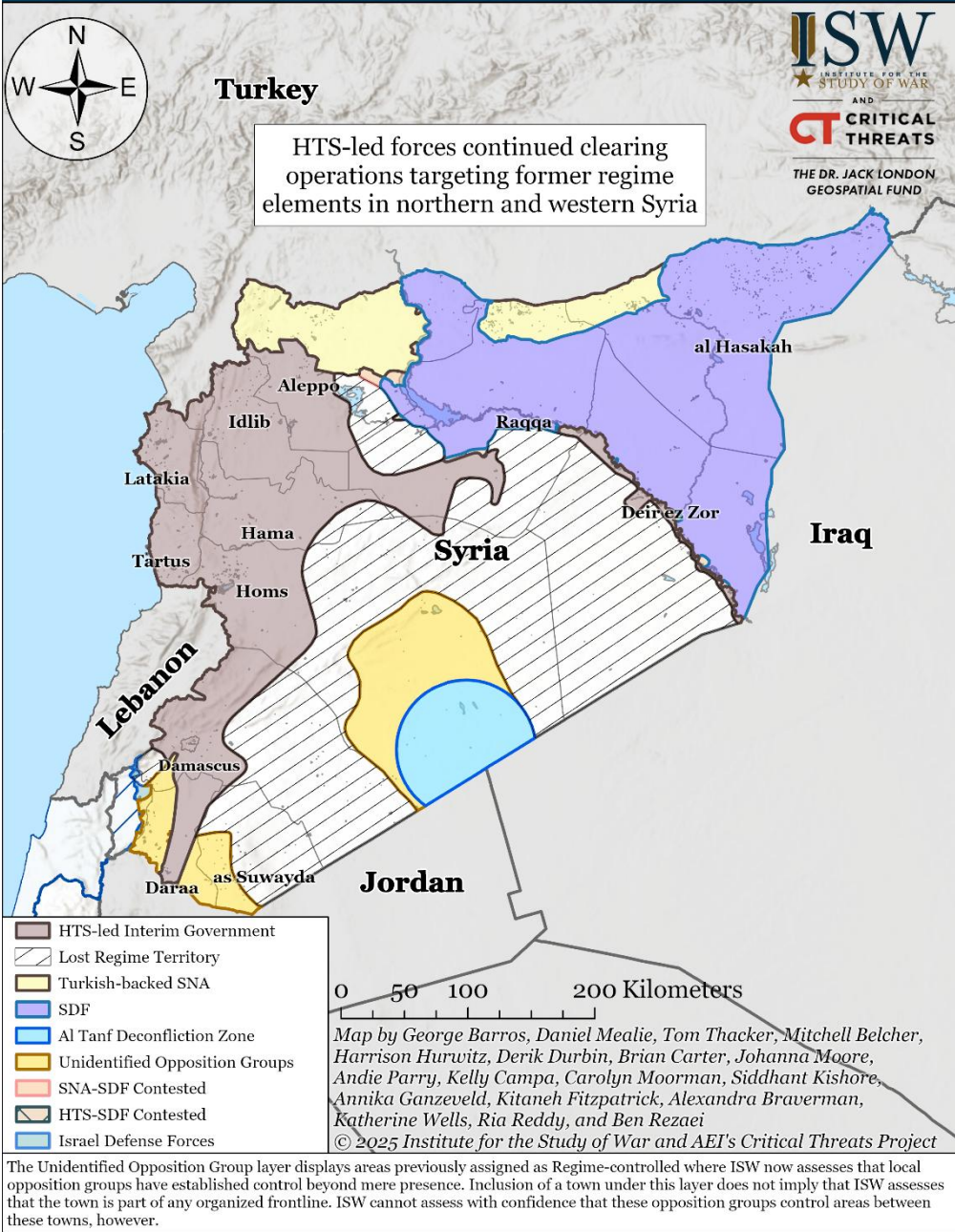
The IDF continued to operate in Quneitra Province, southern Syria, on January 24. Syrian media reported that the IDF entered al Salam in the Israel-Syria disengagement zone and withdrew

after a few hours.[30] Syrian media also reported that the IDF fired small arms and operated bulldozers in Kudna, which is approximately one kilometer from the disengagement zone.[31] Syrian media also reported that the IDF began constructing helicopter landing pads in Jubata al Khashab and Hadar.[32] Satellite imagery captured on January 21 shows an IDF base in the disengagement zone in the Golan Heights.[33]

Syrian media reported on January 24 that former regime elements committed sabotage to “destabilize security and stability throughout Syria.”[34] Syrian media reported that former regime elements cut off “light paths” on the Damascus-Homs road, which interrupted internet connectivity to Damascus and the surrounding countryside.

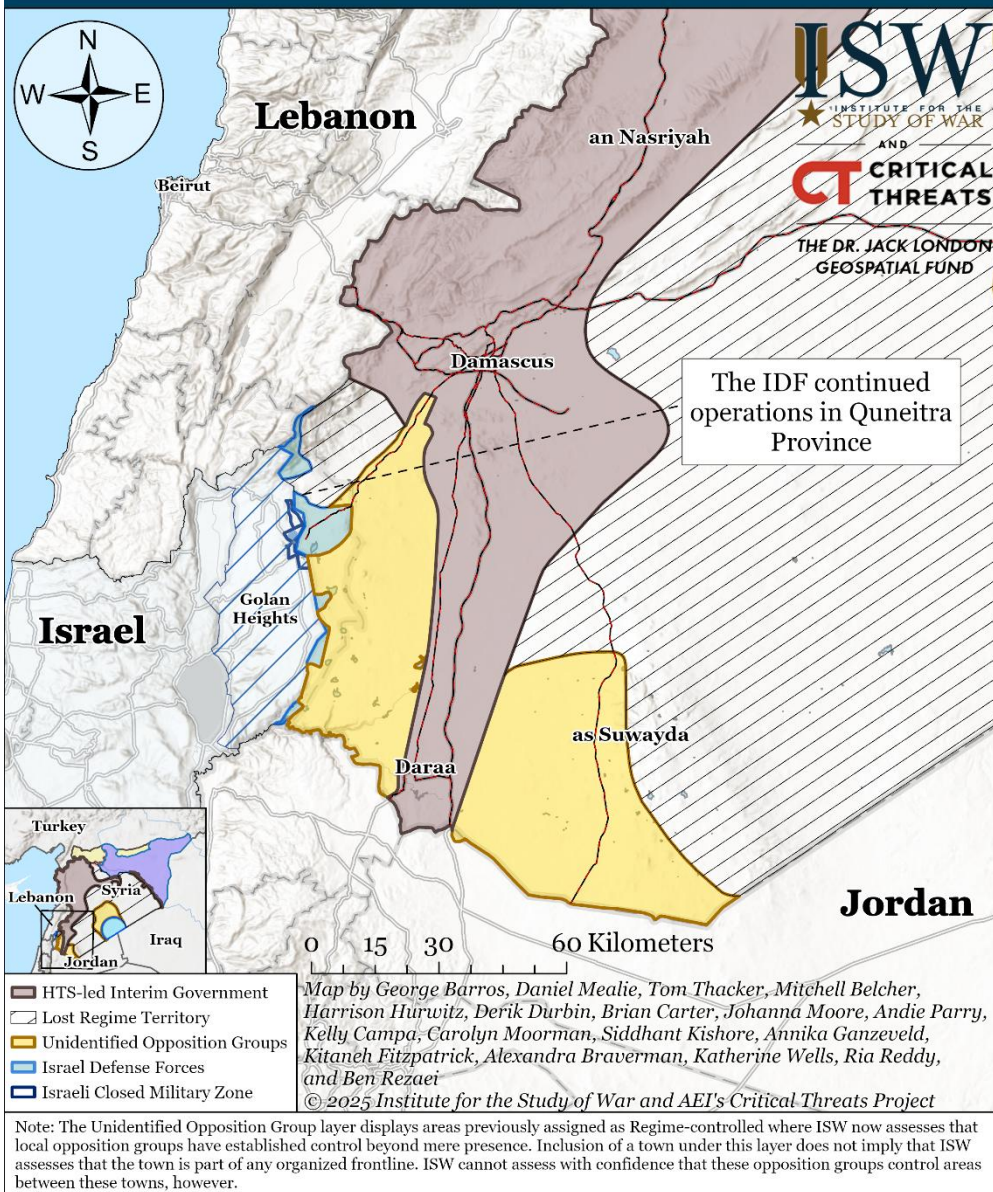
Reported Control of Terrain in Syria

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Opposition Advances in Southwest Syria

As of January 24, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Civil society in Damascus appears engaged in a debate over the role of Islamic principles in society. Unspecified individuals placed posters around Damascus calling on women to veil in public.[35] Other unspecified individuals responded by placing posters rejecting this standard. It is unclear who placed any of these posters and whether they were affiliated with the HTS-led interim Syrian government.

Iraq

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Strengthen Iranian and Axis of Resistance influence over the Iraqi state and society
- Harden the Iraqi government against internal dissent

People’s Protection Units (PKK) fighters killed two Iraqi Border police officers in a clash in Batufa, near the Turkey-Iraq border, on January 24.[36] Iraqi Kurdish media reported that the police officers were Kurds affiliated with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).[37] It is notable that this attack occurred following a report on January 23 that Turkey and PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan agreed to disarm the PKK.[38] The KDP shares a vested interest with Turkey in decreasing the influence and power of the PKK across Iraq and Syria.

Arabian Peninsula

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Harden the Houthi regime against internal dissent in Houthi-controlled areas
- Destroy the anti-Houthi opposition in order to control all of Yemen
- Erode Israeli will to continue the war in the Gaza Strip

The United Nations halted all travel into Houthi-controlled areas after the Houthis detained additional UN staff on January 24.[39] The Houthis have already detained 16 UN personnel, along with individuals linked to the former US Embassy in Sanaa and various aid groups.

The Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Erode the will of the Israeli political establishment and public to sustain clearing operations in the Gaza Strip
- Reestablish Hamas as the governing authority in the Gaza Strip
- Rebuild and reestablish Hezbollah in southern Lebanon
- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

The Gaza Strip

The *Washington Post* reported that clashes between Hamas and organized looters temporarily halted the flow of aid into the Gaza Strip near Kerem Shalom on January 23.[40] The *Washington Post* reported that Hamas police have begun guarding the aid trucks since the start of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire on January 19. The United Nations reported that over 3,800 trucks of aid and fuel have entered the Gaza Strip since January 19. The presence of organized looters illustrates that Hamas controls only some parts of the southern Gaza Strip at this time.

Lebanon

The IDF 769th Infantry Brigade (91st Division) has destroyed underground Hezbollah bunkers around Wadi al Saluki in recent days.[41] The IDF destroyed a weapons cache that included hundreds of mortars, explosives, rockets, and other military equipment in an unspecified area in southern Lebanon.

The IDF 1st Golani Brigade (36th Division) has seized rocket launchers loaded onto trucks in an unspecified area in southern Lebanon in recent days.[42] The IDF also destroyed several weapons depots holding rockets, shoulder-fired missiles, launchers, and mortars.

The IDF Northern Command has attacked Hezbollah observation posts and weapons depots in southern Lebanon in recent days.[43]

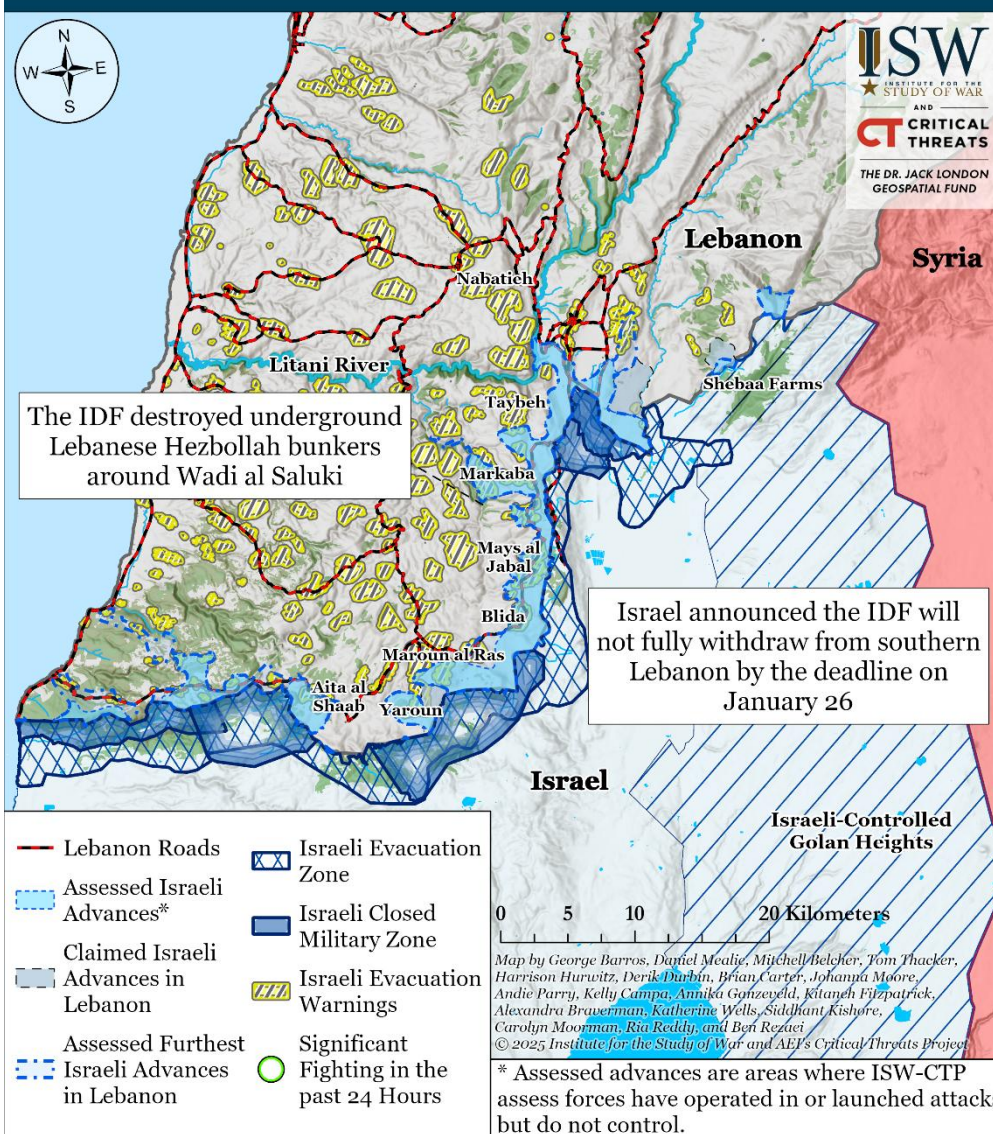
Lebanese media reported on January 24 that the IDF established a “fortified military site” on Awida hill, between Taybeh and Odaisseh, near the Israel-Lebanon border.[44] Lebanese media also reported that the IDF installed “electronic equipment” at the site.

Lebanese media reported on January 24 that the IDF moved to Aitaroun, on the Israel-Lebanon border.[45]

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) backfilled an IDF position in Jibbain and Chihine, Tyre District.[46]

Reported Israeli Operations in Lebanon

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West Bank

Israeli forces continued the “Iron Wall” counterterrorism operation in Jenin Governorate for the fourth consecutive day on January 24.[47] The IDF has killed at least 10 fighters and arrested 20 additional fighters since the start of the IDF operation in Jenin on January 21.[48] The IDF Air Force conducted an airstrike targeting fighters in a vehicle in Qabatiya, Jenin Governorate, on January 24.[49] Palestinian media reported that the IDF airstrike killed two people.[50] The IDF also located and destroyed an explosives manufacturing site in Jenin on January 24.[51] Israeli forces seized weapons and ammunition.[52] Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades attacked Israeli forces in Jenin and Qabatiya with improvised explosive devices (IED) and small arms on January 24.[53]

PIJ, Hamas, and the “Youth of Revenge and Liberation” claimed to fire small arms and detonate IEDs in a combined operation targeting the IDF in Jenin on January 24.[54] PIJ announced the formation of joint operation rooms with Hamas and al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades’ fighters in the West Bank on January 22.[55]

Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy continued the "Great Prophet 19" military exercise in the Persian Gulf near the shores of Bushehr and Khuzestan Provinces on January 24.[56] IRGC Navy Commander Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri said that the exercise demonstrates "peace and security" for regional neighbors while warning "transregional forces" against destabilizing actions. The exercise reportedly features high-speed missile boats, deployable naval mines, and precision-strike drones. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) reported Very High Frequency (VHF) radio challenges to vessels in the northern Persian Gulf, likely linked to the exercise, and warned mariners near Iranian waters about possible course change demands.[57] The IRGC Navy likely aims to showcase its ability to disrupt maritime traffic near the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf, an approach Iran has previously used in response to international sanctions.[58]

Iran and Oman signed an economic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) during the 21st Joint Cooperation Meeting in Muscat which includes preferential trade, tariff reductions, and customs cooperation.[59] Iranian Industry Minister Mohammad Atabak emphasized investment support, shipping routes, and expanded flights as key priorities. Iranian officials visited Armenia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Russia, and Oman in January 2025 primarily to strengthen economic ties as part of Iran’s broader neighborhood policy.[60]

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.

CTP-ISW defines the “Axis of Resistance” as the unconventional alliance that Iran has cultivated in the Middle East since the Islamic Republic came to power in 1979. This transnational coalition is comprised of state, semi-state, and non-state actors that cooperate to secure their collective interests. Tehran considers itself to be both part of the alliance and its leader. Iran furnishes these groups with varying levels of financial, military, and political support in exchange for some degree of influence or control over their actions. Some are traditional proxies that are highly responsive to Iranian direction, while others are partners over which Iran exerts more limited influence. Members of the Axis of Resistance are united by their grand strategic objectives, which include eroding and eventually expelling American influence from the Middle East, destroying the Israeli state, or both. Pursuing these objectives and supporting the Axis of Resistance to those ends have become cornerstones of Iranian regional strategy.



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