



Iran Update, February 2, 2024

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Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm EST

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.

The United States struck over 85 Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force and Iranian-backed militia targets in Iraq and Syria on February 2.^[1] The strike involved “numerous aircraft to include long-range bombers flown from [the] United States” using “more than 125 precision munitions.”^[2] The strikes targeted operations and intelligence centers, rockets, missiles, drone storage facilities, and “logistics and munition supply chain facilities” of the IRGC and Iranian-backed militia groups.^[3]

US President Joe Biden called these strikes the beginning of the US response to the January 28 Iranian-backed attack in Jordan that killed three US servicemembers but vowed that the response will “continue at times and places of our choosing.”^[4] US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin stated that the strikes are

the “start of the response” and that Biden has already “directed additional actions to hold the IRGC and affiliated militias accountable for their attacks on US and Coalition forces.[5]

Iranian-backed Iraqi militias said that they will continue attacks targeting US forces until US forces are expelled from Iraq. Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba Secretary General Akram al Kaabi said on February 2 that Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba will continue attacks targeting US forces until they are removed from Iraq and until Israel stops operations in the Gaza Strip.[6] He also said that he respected Kataib Hezbollah’s decision to pause its attacks targeting US forces and “looked forward” to Kataib Hezbollah resuming attacks targeting US forces. The IRGC Quds Force supports Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba.[7] Ashab al Kahf, a militia close to Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba, announced on February 1 that it would continue attacks until US forces left Iraq.[8] The group claimed that Iraqi militias make their own “independent decisions,” which is a reference to Kataib Hezbollah’s decision to pause attacks targeting US forces.[9]

Western media reported on February 1 that unspecified elements in the Iranian regime are concerned by Iranian-backed militia attacks against US forces.[10] This framing inaccurately assumes the regime is a monolith rather than a government comprised of multiple political factions with a relatively diverse set of foreign policy views. Western media suggested that some Iranian authorities are concerned that the combined Iranian and Houthi attack campaign targeting international shipping could adversely affect the economic interests of Iranian partners, such as China and India.[11] This notion is unsurprising given the relatively diverse stances across the Iranian political establishment. The reports do not, however, indicate conclusively that the senior Iranian leadership responsible for national security policy and the Iran-led regional escalation are reconsidering their current approach. Prominent Iranian officials, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, have celebrated the attacks on commercial vessels in recent weeks.[12]

Western media also reported on February 1 that US intelligence officials assess that Iran does not exercise full control over the proxy and partner militia groups that are attacking US service members in the Middle East.[13] This assessment is consistent with how Iran has led and influenced its so-called “Axis of Resistance” for decades. Tehran has long provided financial, military, and political support to like-minded actors across the region in exchange for some degree of control and influence over their activities.[14] Iran uses its proxy and partner militias, in part, to obfuscate Iranian responsibility for their actions. Iran has demonstrated on many occasions the ability to stop militia attacks on US positions, however, which highlights that Iran can restrain its militias in Iraq and Syria.[15]

Key Takeaways:

- **Iraq and Syria:** The United States struck over 85 Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force and Iranian-backed militia targets in Iraq and Syria on February 2. Iranian-backed Iraqi militias said that they will continue attacks targeting US forces until US forces are expelled from Iraq.
- **Northern Gaza Strip:** Palestinian militias, including Hamas, attempted to disrupt Israeli operations in the “Passport area,” northwest of the Gaza Interior Ministry in Tel al Hawa neighborhood, Gaza City on February 2.
- **Central Gaza Strip:** The IDF reported that the 99th Division’s operations in the central Strip aim to prevent Hamas fighters from infiltrating Gaza City from the southern Gaza Strip.
- **Southern Gaza Strip:** Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant reported that the IDF has “dismantled” Hamas’ Khan Younis Brigade and that the IDF will “continue to Rafah.”

- **Political Negotiations:** Hamas rejected a proposed ceasefire deal that would include “prolonged” pauses in fighting in the Gaza Strip and swaps of Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners.
- **Iran:** Western media reported on February 1 that unspecified elements in the Iranian regime are concerned by Iranian-backed militia attacks against US forces. This framing inaccurately presents the regime as a monolith rather than a government comprised of multiple political factions with a relatively diverse set of foreign policy views.



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.

Palestinian militias, including Hamas, attempted to disrupt Israeli operations in the “Passport area,” northwest of the Gaza Interior Ministry in Tel al Hawa neighborhood, Gaza City on February 2. Hamas’ military wing claimed two attacks targeting Israeli forces operating in the area.[16] The IDF conducted an airstrike targeting the Gazan Interior Ministry on January 31.[17] Hamas controls the Gazan Interior Ministry. The ministry’s Internal Security Forces are comprised of Hamas al Majd operatives who target supposed “collaborators” with the Israeli state.[18] Turkish state-controlled media reported that the Internal Security Forces continued to operate in the northern Gaza Strip during Israeli ground operations.[19] The al Majd has continued to warn Gazans against accidentally engaging with Israeli security officials and issued periodic reminders about operational security during the ground operation.[20]

The IDF reported that the 99th Division’s operations in the central Strip aim to prevent Hamas fighters from infiltrating Gaza City from the southern Gaza Strip.[21] The IDF 99th and 162nd Divisions continued to conduct clearing operations in the central Gaza Strip on February 2.[22] The IDF 646th Paratroopers Brigade (assigned to the IDF 99th Division) captured a Palestinian militia rocket manufacturing facility in Nuseirat on February 2.[23] The IDF also said that the 179th Armored Brigade (assigned to the IDF 99th Division) killed “hundreds” of Hamas fighters.[24]

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant reported that the IDF has “dismantled” Hamas’ Khan Younis Brigade and that the IDF will “continue to Rafah.”[25] Gallant did not explain how the IDF would conduct an operation into Rafah. The war displaced over 50 percent of Gaza’s population of two million to Rafah.[26] CTP-ISW assesses that the IDF has degraded but neither defeated nor destroyed Hamas’ Khan Younis Brigade. Other Palestinian militias also support Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Hamas operates as the leader of a 12-militia coalition defending against the Israeli ground operation.[27]

Hamas and its partner militias continued to defend against Israeli clearing operations in western Khan Younis on February 2. Hamas claimed two attacks targeting Israeli forces in western Khan Younis.[28] Both Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, the self-affiliated military wing of Fatah, mortared Israeli forces in western Khan Younis.[29] PIJ also fired a thermobaric rocket at Israeli forces in western Khan Younis.[30]

The IDF continued clearing operations in Khan Younis on February 2. The 89th Commando Brigade, 35th Paratrooper Brigade, and the 84th Givati Brigade (all assigned to the IDF 98th Division) continued operations aimed at destroying Hamas’ military infrastructure.[31] An IDF special operations forces (SOF) unit also raided a mosque that Hamas had repurposed as a military position.[32] The SOF unit discovered small arms, communication devices, explosives, and a tunnel entrance.[33] This is notable, given Hamas’ repeated claims that it does not use civilian infrastructure for military operations.

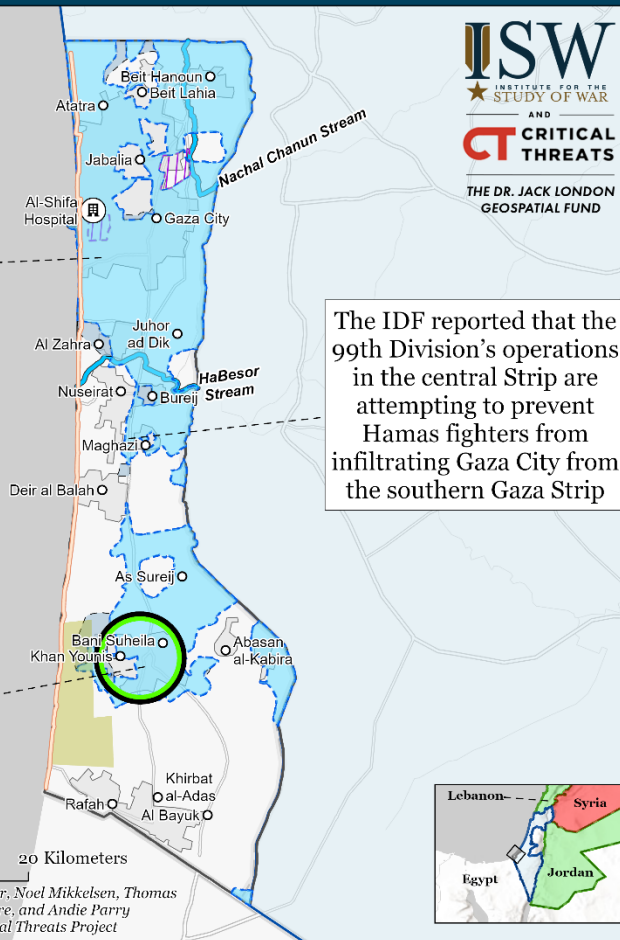
Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of February 2, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Palestinian militias, including Hamas, attempted to disrupt Israeli operations in the "Passport area," northwest of the Gaza Interior Ministry in Tel al Hawa neighborhood, Gaza City

The IDF reported that the 99th Division's operations in the central Strip are attempting to prevent Hamas fighters from infiltrating Gaza City from the southern Gaza Strip

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant reported that the IDF has "dismantled" Hamas' Khan Younis Brigade, and that the IDF will "continue to Rafah"



Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry
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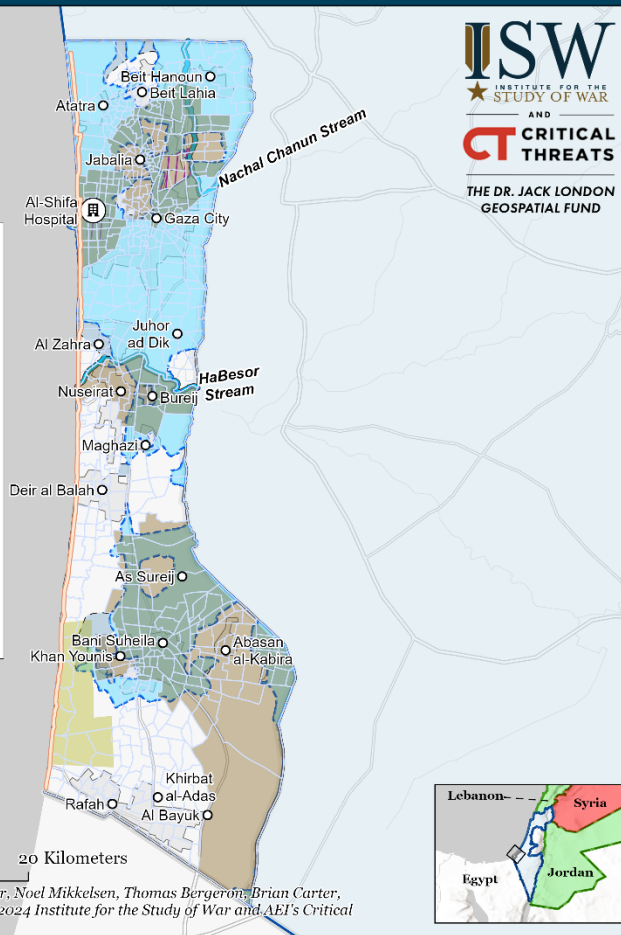
- Israel
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- Significant Water Obstacles
- Gaza Strip
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230
- Densely Urban Areas
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias
- Syria
- 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 2, 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

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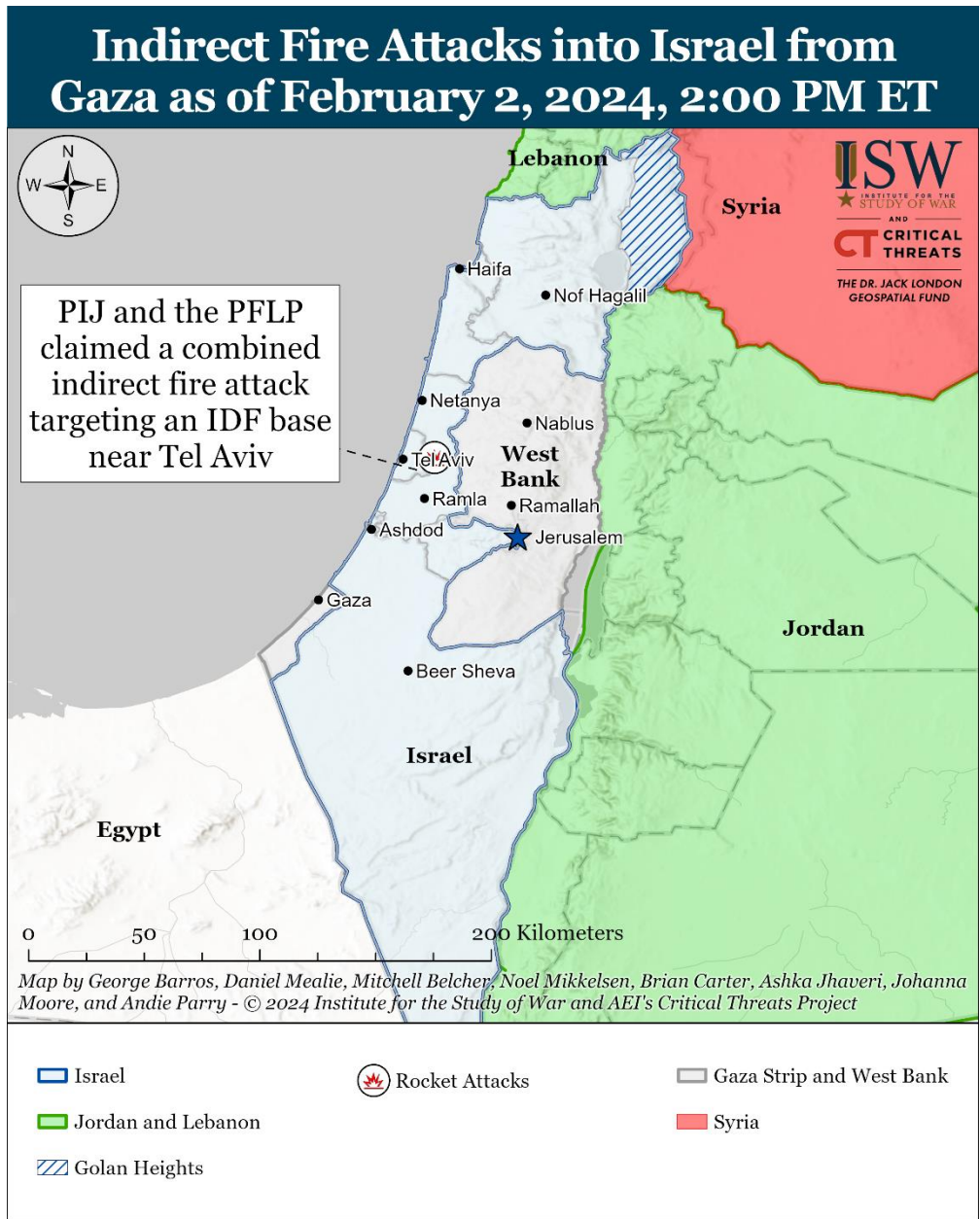
- Israel
- Gaza Strip
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- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
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Hamas rejected a proposed ceasefire deal that would include “prolonged” pauses in fighting in the Gaza Strip and swaps of Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners.[34] The deal was not fundamentally different from any of the preceding three-stage deals.[35] The *Wall Street Journal* reported on February 1 that Israel and Hamas were considering a three-part agreement for a six-week ceasefire. The deal included a six-week ceasefire and resumption of aid in the Gaza Strip, which would be followed by Hamas releasing female Israeli soldiers. Hamas would release male Israeli soldiers and the bodies of dead hostages in the final phase of the deal. Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh rejected the deal because it did not include “a complete end to [the Israeli operation],” and a full Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.[36] This has been Hamas’ long-held negotiating position after the collapse of the pause in fighting in early December.[37]

Senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan said that Hamas seeks to release “thousands of Palestinian prisoners,” including top Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) leader Ahmed Saadat.[38] Hamas’ ability to secure the release of these two leaders would help it cement its role as the leader of the Palestinian factions by demonstrating its laurels as a leader of the alliance of Palestinian militias prosecuting the war.

PIJ and the PFLP claimed a combined indirect fire attack targeting an IDF base near Tel Aviv on February 2.[39]



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

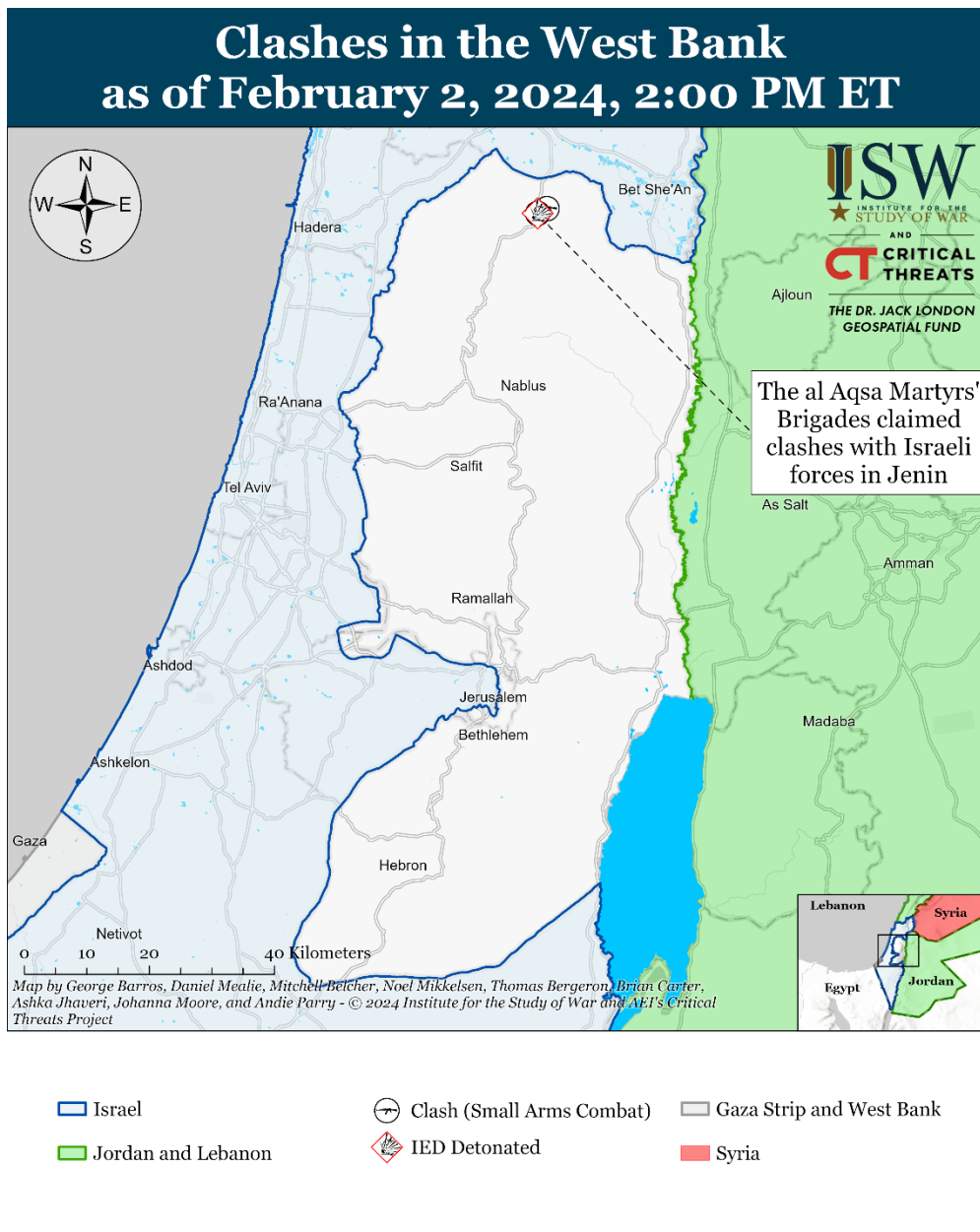
West Bank

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired small arms and detonated IEDs targeting Israeli forces in Jenin on February 2.[40] Israeli forces arrested 15 individuals across the West Bank on February 2.[41]

Hamas' military wing in Jenin called on supporters in the Middle East and Europe to send money to support the group in a Telegram post.[42]



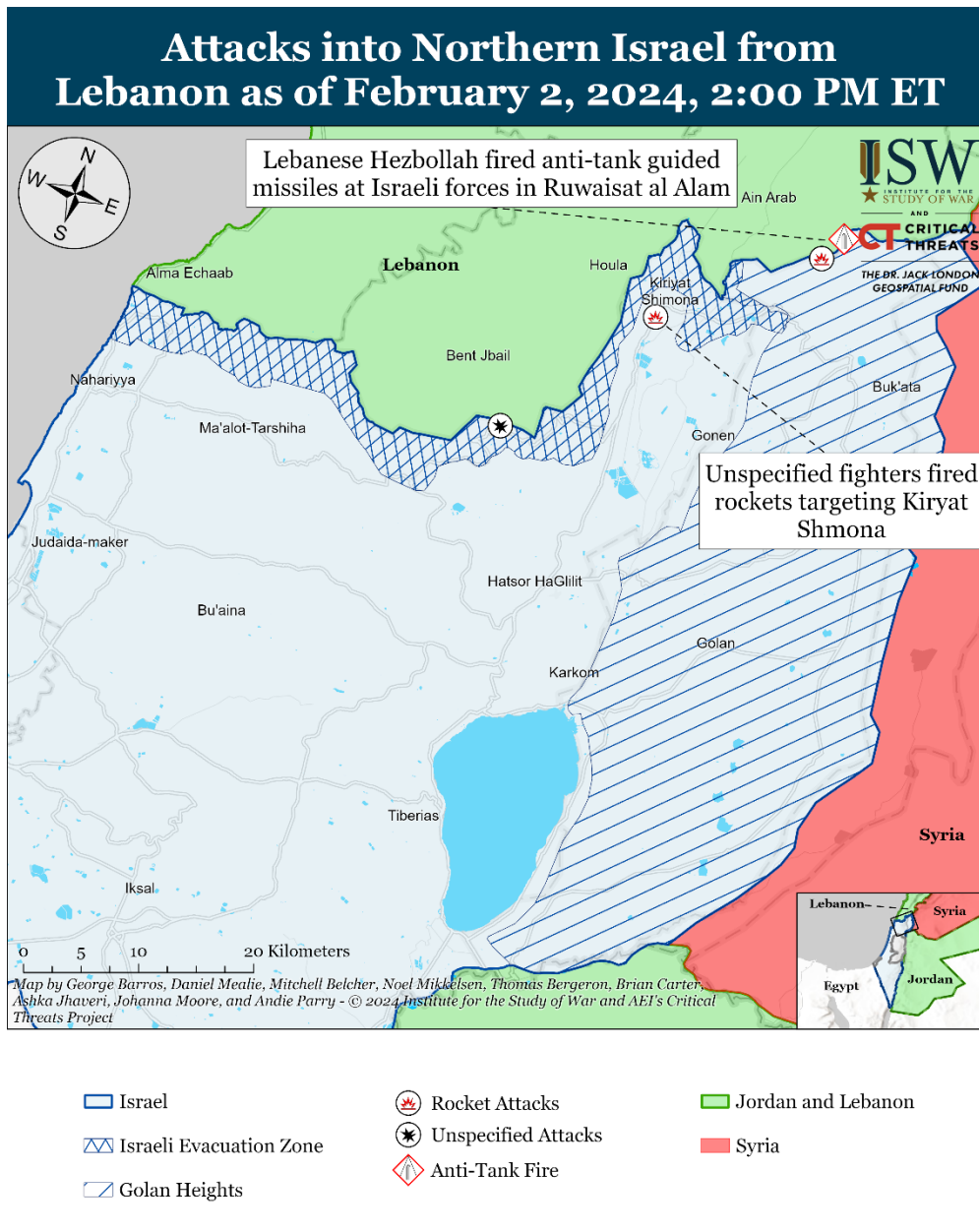
This map is not an exhaustive depiction of clashes and demonstrations in the West Bank.

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

Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted five attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel on February 2.[43]



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

International Atomic Energy Agency Director Rafael Grossi told Western media on February 1 that Iran has slowed its production rate of 60 percent enriched uranium.^[44] The *New York Times* noted that it is not clear when exactly Iran began to slow its production rate of highly enriched uranium (HEU).

The United States and the E3 (the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) confirmed in a joint statement on December 28 that Iran had increased its enrichment rate of highly enriched uranium.^[45] Iran decreased its enrichment rate and highly enriched uranium stockpile after it reached an informal nuclear agreement with the United States in August 2023.^[46] Iran has no use for 60 percent HEU other than for use in a compact nuclear explosive or to further enrich it to 90 percent weapons-grade uranium.

The IDF Air Force likely conducted airstrikes targeting an IRGC weapons storage facility and the IRGC military headquarters at Sayyida Zeinab, Syria on February 1.^[47] IRGC-controlled media reported that the IDF Air Force strikes killed an IRGC military adviser.^[48] Since early December 2023, Israel has targeted IRGC Quds Force weapons shipments and personnel responsible for supplying Lebanese Hezbollah through Syria.^[49] Israeli media said on December 29 that Israel's strikes are responding to Iranian efforts to accelerate the supply of military equipment to Lebanese Hezbollah. Lebanese Hezbollah is using the Iranian-provided equipment to support attacks into northern Israel.^[50]

The Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security also announced on February 2 that it identified Israeli military facilities and personnel in 28 unspecified countries.^[51]

The Houthis launched one surface-to-surface missile targeting Eilat, Israel on February 2.^[52] Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Sarea claimed that the attack was part of the Houthi movement's "moral and humanitarian duties" to support Palestinians in Gaza.^[53] Israel's Arrow air defense system intercepted the surface-to-surface missile over the Red Sea.^[54]

Iranian-sponsored Attacks in the Middle East as of February 2, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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