



## Iran Update, February 23, 2024

Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, Amin Soltani, Kathryn Tyson, and Brian Carter  
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.*

**The Houthis claimed that Saudi Arabia and the United States conducted combined airstrikes in Houthi-controlled territory on February 23, likely to pressure Saudi Arabia to exert its influence on the United States to decrease US strikes targeting Houthi military assets.**[1] A Houthi-controlled media outlet claimed that the alleged US-Saudi strikes hit unspecified targets in Amran, Marib, Saada, Hajjah, Taiz, Dhamar, Sanaa, Bayda, and Hudaydah provinces. The Houthi outlet also claimed that the strikes resulted in civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure. A Saudi strike on Houthi-controlled territory would constitute a violation of the Yemeni ceasefire that went into effect in April 2022.[2] Saudi Arabia seeks to maintain its truce with the Houthis and has discouraged US attacks against the Houthis during the current escalation in the Red Sea.[3] CTP-ISW has not recorded any indications that Saudi Arabia conducted an airstrike into

Houthi-controlled territory on February 23. Saudi Arabia, the Yemeni government, and the Houthis have maintained the ceasefire past its official expiration in October 2022.[4]

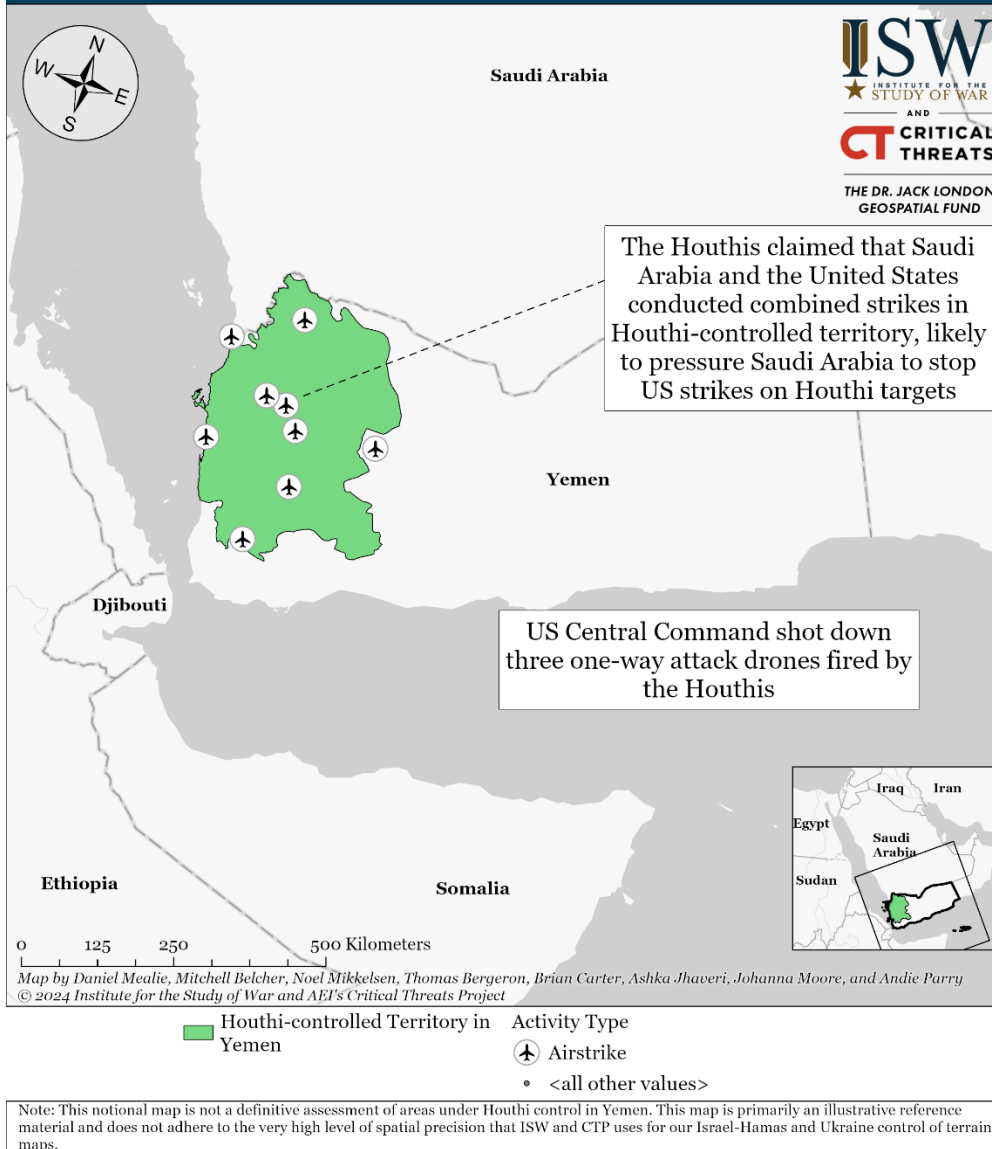
**The Houthis are "fortifying" missile launch sites according to individuals "with knowledge of the situation" cited by Bloomberg on February 22, which will enable the Houthis to continue offensive attacks on military and civilian vessels in the Red Sea.**[5] The sources claimed the Houthis are "fortifying" missile launch positions in the mountains and increasing one-way surface naval attack drone and one-way subsurface naval attack drone tests. This is consistent with CTP-ISW's assessment on February 22 that Iran and the Houthis are likely using their attacks in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden to test and refine their approach to striking naval targets.[6] Houthi attacks provide Iran and the Houthis opportunities to evaluate the effectiveness of different strike packages to understand how they can evade and overwhelm US air and maritime defenses more effectively. The Houthi effort to better defend its launch sites enables the Houthis to continue offensive operations—namely, cruise and ballistic missile fire—that test US defense capabilities.

**US Central Command (CENTCOM) conducted six preemptive strikes targeting Houthi one-way attack drones and mobile anti-ship ballistic missiles and intercepted three one-way attack drones since CTP-ISW's last data cut-off on February 22.**[7] CENTCOM stated that it intercepted two mobile anti-ship cruise missiles and conducted four preemptive strikes targeting "Iranian-backed Houthi [drones]" on February 22. CENTCOM intercepted three one-way attack drones operating near commercial vessels in the Red Sea on February 23.

**Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu proposed a post-war plan for the Gaza Strip.**[8] The proposal is the first time Netanyahu has presented a written position on his post-war plans. A senior aid to Netanyahu said the goal of the plan was to present principles that would get the "broadest consensus possible." [9] Israeli media reported that Israel will continue its military operations in the Gaza Strip with the aim of destroying the military capabilities and governance infrastructure of Hamas and PIJ, securing the return of hostages, and preventing further threats from the Gaza Strip.[10]

The proposal covers long-term plans related to security, governance, and reconstruction. The IDF will maintain "operational freedom" in the Gaza Strip and establish a buffer zone along the Israeli border under the proposal.[11] Israel will also control the Gaza-Egypt border and monitor demilitarization efforts in the Gaza Strip. Unspecified "local elements with management experience" will be responsible for civilian management and public order in the strip.[12] Axios reported that the plan does not rule out a role for the Palestinian Authority in the Gaza Strip, although it does not specifically mention the PA either.[13] Lastly, the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip will only be possible after the completion of the demilitarization process and the beginning of a "de-radicalization process." [14]

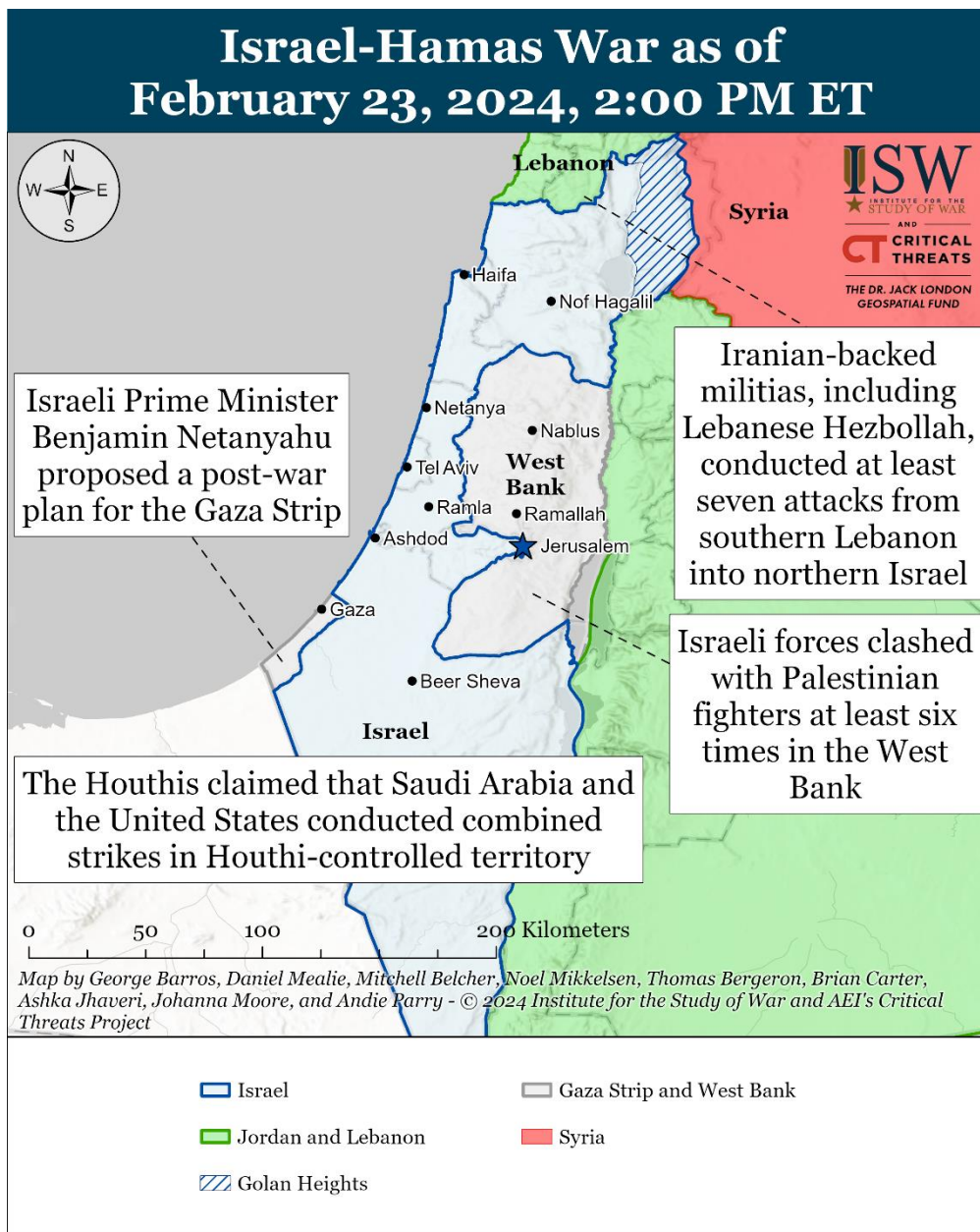
# Houthi-controlled Territory in Yemen as of February 23, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



## Key Takeaways:

- **Yemen:** The Houthis claimed that Saudi Arabia and the United States conducted combined airstrikes in Houthi-controlled territory on February 23, likely to pressure Saudi Arabia to exert its influence on the United States to decrease US strikes targeting Houthi military assets.
- **Northern Gaza Strip:** Palestinian militias continued to disrupt Israeli operations in Zaytoun neighborhood, southeastern Gaza City.
- **Southern Gaza Strip:** Israeli forces continued to conduct clearing operations in western Khan Younis.

- **Political Negotiations:** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu proposed a post-war plan for the Gaza Strip.
- Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh completed a three-day trip to Cairo to discuss a hostage deal.
- **Iran:** US National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby said on February 23 that the United States has not yet confirmed that Iran transferred ballistic missiles to Russia.
- The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated two Iranian and Iran-linked entities on February 23 for facilitating the transfer of Iranian drones to Russia.



## **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 continued to disrupt Israeli operations in Zaytoun neighborhood, southeastern Gaza City on February 23.** Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fighters ambushed Israeli armor in Zaytoun using unspecified munitions.[15] Hamas published footage on February 23 that shows its fighters firing mortars and rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) targeting Israeli forces in Zaytoun.[16] Several other Hamas-aligned militias clashed with Israeli forces in Zaytoun.[17] [18] Israeli forces located weapons and military equipment in the area.

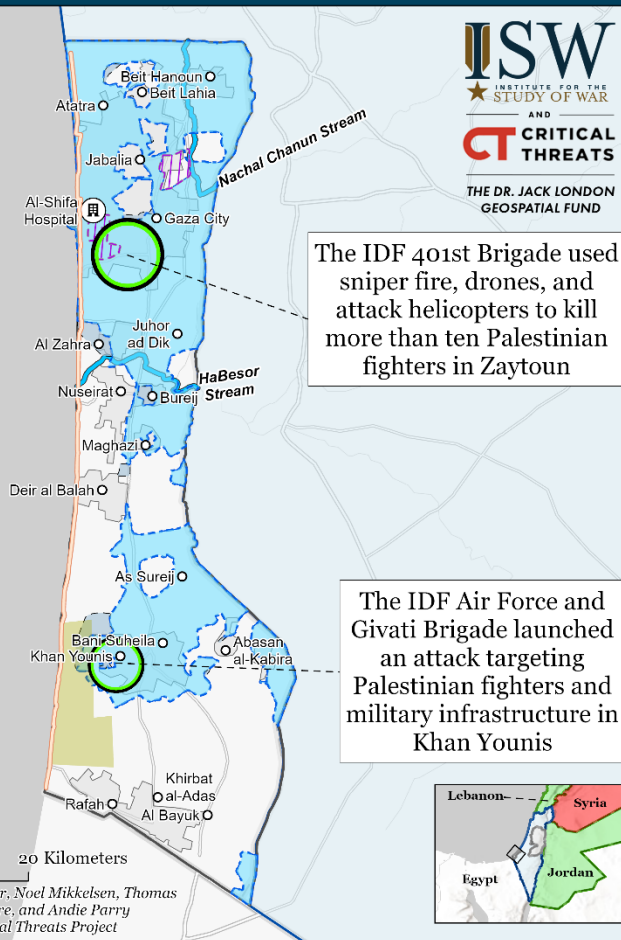
**The IDF Nahal Brigade (assigned to the 162nd Division) killed several Palestinian fighters in the central Gaza Strip on February 23.**[19] PIJ fighters mortared Israeli forces east of the central Gaza Strip.[20]

**Israeli forces continued to conduct clearing operations in western Khan Younis on February 23.** The 89th Commando Brigade (assigned to the 98th Division) continued to direct airstrikes, ambush Palestinian fighters with sniper fire, and clash with Palestinian fighters in western Khan Younis.[21] Israeli forces raided military infrastructure and located improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and other weapons. The IDF Air Force destroyed a weapons depot in western Khan Younis.[22] PIJ and Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine fighters detonated explosive devices in two separate attacks targeting Israeli forces in al Amal neighborhood in western Khan Younis.[23] The DFLP is a leftist Palestinian militia aligned with Hamas in the war.

Palestinian militias clashed with Israeli forces in eastern Khan Younis on February 23. PIJ fighters detonated an explosively formed penetrator (EFP) targeting Israeli engineers in an ambush in eastern Khan Younis.[24] The militia also reported that its fighters fired a tandem-charge anti-tank rocket targeting Israeli forces in the same area.[25]

The IDF Givati Brigade (assigned to the 162nd Division) launched an attack targeting Palestinian fighters and military infrastructure in an unspecified area of Khan Younis.[26] The IDF Air Force struck Palestinian militia sniper positions and weapons storage facilities prior to the attack.[27]

# Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of February 23, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



The IDF 401st Brigade used sniper fire, drones, and attack helicopters to kill more than ten Palestinian fighters in Zaytoun

The IDF Air Force and Givati Brigade launched an attack targeting Palestinian fighters and military infrastructure in Khan Younis



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  
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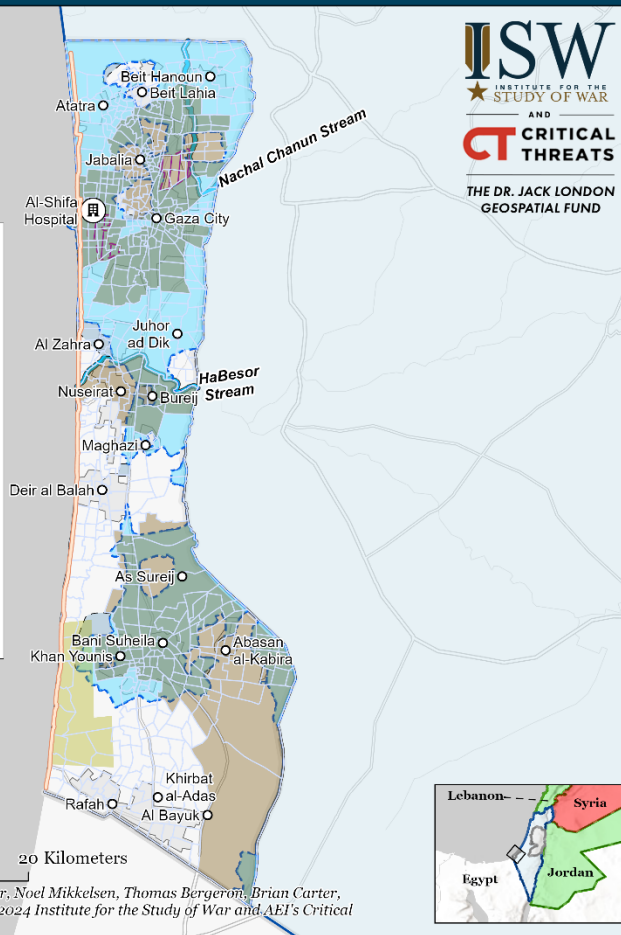
- Israel
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations\*
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230
- Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias
- Significant Water Obstacles
- Densely Urban Areas
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 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 23, 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
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**Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh completed a three-day trip to Cairo to discuss a hostage deal.[28]** An unspecified Hamas official reported on February 23 that Hamas did not offer a new proposal to Egyptian mediators.[29] Hamas is waiting to see what US, Egyptian, and Qatari mediators can accomplish during talks in Paris, according to the Hamas official. The same official said that Israeli negotiators arrived in Paris on February 23.[30]

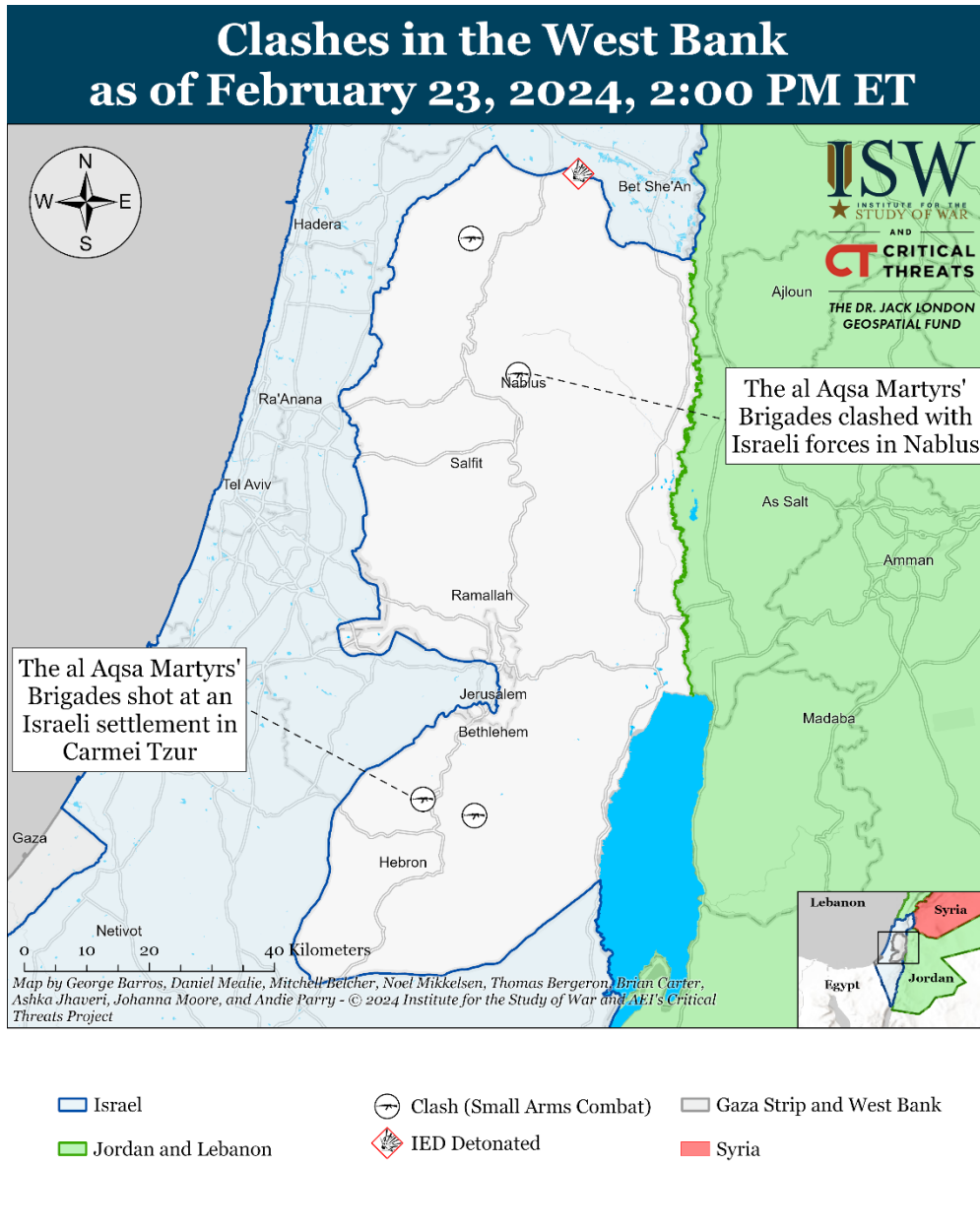
**Palestinian militias did not conduct indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel on February 23.**

## West Bank

### Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

**Israeli forces have clashed with Palestinian fighters at least six times in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on February 22.[31]** Israeli forces conducted a drone strike that killed a PIJ commander in Jenin.[32]



*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

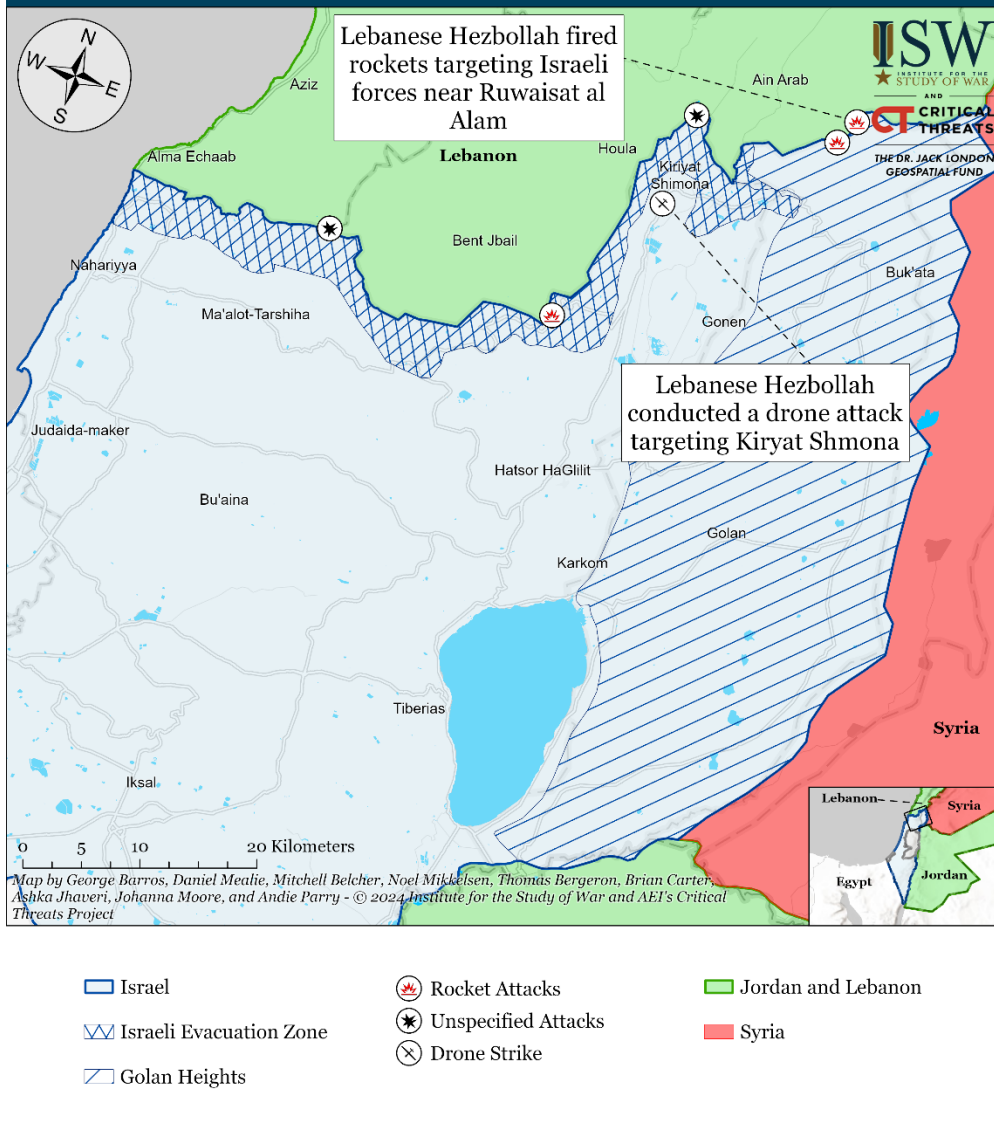
**Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted at least seven attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on February 22.[33]**

**Israel conducted an airstrike that killed a senior Lebanese Hezbollah member in the group's elite Radwan Force in southern Lebanon on February 22.[34]** Israeli and Lebanese sources reported that the Hezbollah member specialized in operating anti-tank systems and that he had operated in Shebaa Farms during the Israeli-Hamas war.[35]

**The Israeli Navy concluded a week-long military exercise in northern Israel on February 23.[36]** The Israeli Navy held drills to simulate countering drones, conducting aerial rescue operations, and refueling vessels.[37] Israeli media reported that Israel's naval exercises are preparations for a potential war with Hezbollah.[38] Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said on February 23 that Israel will not wait "much longer for a diplomatic solution in the north." [39]

**Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said on February 22 that Iran accelerated the pace of its weapon shipments to Lebanese Hezbollah after the beginning of the Israel-Hamas War.[40]** Katz said in a letter to the UN Security Council that Iran's shipments included "components for air defense systems, drones, and several different missiles." [41] 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.[42]

## Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon as of February 23, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



*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

**US National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby said on February 23 that the United States has not yet confirmed that Iran transferred ballistic missiles to Russia.[43]** Kirby added that the United States plans to impose additional sanctions on Iran for its

support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine and that the United States is “prepared to go further” if Iran supplies ballistic missiles to Russia. Kirby noted that Iran seeks a significant amount of Russian military equipment in return for its material support to Russia. Iranian sources told Reuters on February 21 that Iran provided hundreds of short-range ballistic missiles to Russia in early January.[44]

**The US Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated two Iranian and Iran-linked entities on February 23 for facilitating the transfer of Iranian drones to Russia.**[45] OFAC designated the following Iranian and Iran-linked entities:

- The Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry for helping to finance and produce Iranian drones at the Alabuga facility in Tatarstan, Russia.
- The Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry-affiliated and UAE-based Generation Trading FZE for facilitating the sale of Iranian drone samples, parts, and ground stations that enable the Russian production of Iranian drones at the Alabuga facility.

Iran’s arms sales to Russia are part of Iran’s efforts to generate revenue to support its deteriorating economy.[46] CTP-ISW previously assessed that Iran could seek to acquire cash from Russia in return for supplying Russia with missiles.[47] 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.[48]



[1] <https://www.saba.ye/ar/news3307218.htm>

[2] <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-houthis-after-the-yemeni-cease-fire/>

[3] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/edge-over-red-sea-attacks-riyadh-seeks-contain-fall-out-2023-12-06/>

[4] <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15258.doc.htm>

[5] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-02-22/iran-backed-houthis-boost-military-power-to-battle-us-in-red-sea>

[6] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-february-22-2024>

[7] <https://twitter.com/CENTCOM/status/1761041332091384273?s=20>

[8] <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/385675>

[9] <https://www.axios.com/2024/02/23/netanyahu-gaza-war-palestinian-authority-reconstruction>

- [10] <https://www.israelnationalnews dot com/news/385675>
- [11] <https://www.israelnationalnews dot com/news/385675>
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- [14] <https://www.israelnationalnews dot com/news/385675>
- [15] <https://t.me/sarayaps/17460>
- [16] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1659>
- [17] <https://t.me/mojahdeenpal/4245>; [https://t.me/elaqsa\\_1965/5802](https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/5802); [https://t.me/kataeb\\_moqawma/4146](https://t.me/kataeb_moqawma/4146)
- [18] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1760923695432835412>
- [19] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1760923695432835412>
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- [22] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1760923675962818738>
- [23] <https://t.me/sarayaps/17471>; [https://t.me/kataeb\\_moqawma/4146](https://t.me/kataeb_moqawma/4146)
- [24] <https://t.me/sarayaps/17469>
- [25] <https://t.me/sarayaps/17470>
- [26] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1760923684166885557>
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- [31] [https://t.me/elaqsa\\_1965/5797](https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/5797); [https://t.me/elaqsa\\_1965/5798](https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/5798); [https://t.me/elaqsa\\_1965/5801](https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/5801); <https://t.me/hamza20300/216927>; <https://t.me/QudsN/374318>; <https://t.me/QudsN/374348>

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- [35] <https://twitter.com/GLZRadio/status/1760740492470571099>; [https://twitter.com/Israel\\_Alma\\_org/status/1761001460320399761](https://twitter.com/Israel_Alma_org/status/1761001460320399761); [https://www.timesofisrael dot com/liveblog\\_entry/hezbollah-names-operative-killed-in-reported-israeli-strike/](https://www.timesofisrael dot com/liveblog_entry/hezbollah-names-operative-killed-in-reported-israeli-strike/); <https://waradana dot com/article/65952->
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- [43] [https://www.timesofisrael dot com/liveblog\\_entry/us-to-impose-new-sanctions-on-iran-for-backing-russian-invasion-of-ukraine/](https://www.timesofisrael dot com/liveblog_entry/us-to-impose-new-sanctions-on-iran-for-backing-russian-invasion-of-ukraine/) ; <https://apnews.com/article/russia-iran-missiles-biden-sanctions-7dfb927a055de1734108df8b8148ab9f>
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- [46] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-june-21-2023>
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[48] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-6-2024>