

# Iran Update



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**April 1, 2025, Information Cutoff 2:00 pm ET**

**The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) thwarted a Hezbollah, Hamas, and Iranian plan on April 1 to conduct a “major” attack targeting Israelis abroad.**[1] The IDF killed Hassan Ali Mahmoud Badir, who was a member of Hezbollah Unit 3900 and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force, in an airstrike in Beirut on April 1.[2] A Lebanese security source told Reuters that Badir was a mid-ranking commander whose responsibilities included the "Palestinian file." [3] Israeli media reported that Badir, in collaboration with Hamas, had planned an “imminent, large-scale attack abroad” that could have killed “hundreds of Israelis.”[4]

It is not immediately clear what Hezbollah, Hamas, and Iran sought to achieve by conducting such an attack. Hezbollah and Iran may have planned the attack to impose a heavy cost on Israel to try to increase pressure on the IDF to withdraw from the five remaining IDF positions in southern Lebanon.[5] It is also possible that hardline Hezbollah elements who disagree with Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem’s position of inaction vis-a-vis Israel independently planned this attack.[6] Qassem has repeatedly stated that the Lebanese state, rather than Hezbollah, is responsible for responding to Israeli operations in Lebanon.[7] It is unclear if Hezbollah's central leadership approved the attack plan. It is further possible that Hezbollah and Iran calculated, after suffering significant losses throughout the past year, that they must change their strategy and conduct external terror attacks. The Israeli National Security Council warned on April 1, ahead of the Jewish Passover holiday, that Iran, either directly or through its proxies, may try to attack Israeli and Jewish targets abroad against the backdrop of renewed fighting in the Gaza Strip.[8]

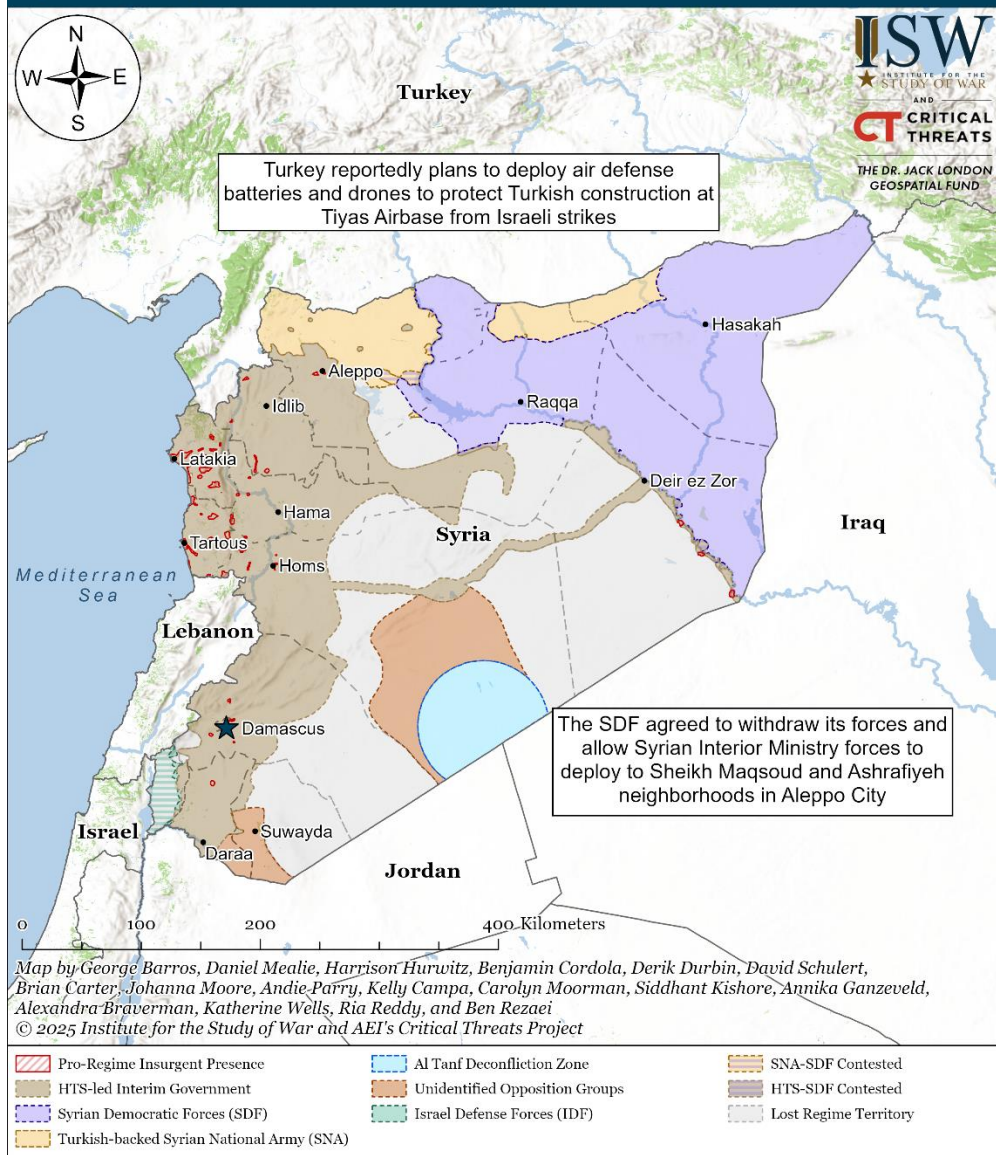
**Senior Iranian officials are continuing to threaten nuclear weaponization, likely to try to deter a potential US or Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear facilities amid new US threats to strike these facilities.** Senior Supreme Leader Adviser Ali Larijani stated on March 31 that a US or Israeli strike on Iran would “force” Iran to develop a nuclear weapon to “defend its security.”[9] Western media reported in January 2025 that Larijani had made secret trips to Russia to gain Russian assistance on Iran’s nuclear program.[10] Hardline Iranian Parliamentarian Ahmad Naderi separately stated on March 31 that the United States “wouldn't dare threaten to bomb” Iran if Iran “had an atomic bomb.”[11] Naderi previously made similar statements in November and December 2024.[12] Larijani and Naderi's comments echo recent calls from Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) officials for the Supreme Leader to allow the development of a nuclear weapon.[13] The recent Iranian threats come after US President Donald Trump stated on March 30 that “there will be a bombing” if Iran does not agree to a new nuclear deal.[14]

**Turkey reportedly plans to deploy air defense batteries and drones to protect Turkish construction at Tiyas Airbase in central Syria from Israeli airstrikes.** Two unspecified sources told the Middle East Eye on April 1 that Turkey has “begun efforts to take control” of Tiyas Airbase in Homs Province and has developed construction plans for the site.[15] This report follows rumors that Turkey seeks to establish airbases at Tiyas Airbase and Palmyra Military Airport as part of a potential defense pact with the Syrian interim government.[16] Middle East Eye reported that negotiations for the defense pact have “quietly” continued since December 2024.[17] One of the sources said that Turkey plans to deploy Hisar air defense systems and surveillance and attack drones to provide air cover for the base while construction is underway. The Hisar-A and Hisar-O systems are Turkish short- and medium-range surface-to-air missile systems, respectively.[18] A second unspecified source claimed that the presence of Turkish drones and air defense systems at the base would “likely deter Israel” from conducting strikes in the area.[19] The IDF recently struck “strategic military infrastructure” at Tiyas Airbase on March 21 and 25.[20] The strikes destroyed at least one Su-24 fighter jet and rendered the airstrip unusable.[21] An unspecified Israeli defense official told Israeli media that the IDF conducted these strikes to send a message to Syrian Interim President Ahmed al Shara that Israel will not tolerate any reduction of its “freedom of action” in Syrian airspace.[22] An unspecified Israeli security official stated on March 31 that a Turkish airbase in Syria would undermine Israel’s freedom to operate in Syria and that Israel would view such a base as a “potential threat.”[23] The location of Tiyas Airbase in the central Syrian desert would allow Turkey to establish “aerial control” over the area and support Turkish counter-ISIS efforts, according to one of the sources speaking to Middle East Eye.[24]

Turkey and the Syrian interim government have begun construction efforts at the Menagh Airbase, near the Syria-Turkey border in Aleppo Province, in recent weeks.[25] Turkey may deploy air defense systems and fighter jets to the Menagh Airbase once renovations are complete, according to Syrian media.[26]

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria

April 1, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



## Key Takeaways:

- Thwarted Hezbollah, Hamas, and Iranian Attack:** The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) thwarted a Hezbollah, Hamas, and Iranian plan on April 1 to conduct a “major” attack targeting Israelis abroad. The IDF killed Hassan Ali Mahmoud Badir, who was a member of Hezbollah Unit 3900 and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force, in an airstrike in Beirut on April 1. Israeli media reported that Badir, in collaboration with Hamas, had planned an “imminent, large-scale attack abroad” that could have killed “hundreds of Israelis.” It is not immediately clear what Hezbollah, Hamas, and Iran sought to achieve by conducting such an attack.

- **Iranian Weaponization Threats:** Senior Iranian officials are continuing to threaten nuclear weaponization, likely to try to deter a potential US or Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear facilities amid new US threats to strike these facilities. Senior Supreme Leader Adviser Ali Larijani stated on March 31 that a US or Israeli strike on Iran would "force" Iran to develop a nuclear weapon to "defend its security." Western media reported in January 2025 that Larijani had made secret trips to Russia to gain Russian assistance on Iran's nuclear program.
- **Turkish Military Bases in Syria:** Turkey reportedly plans to deploy air defense batteries and drones to protect Turkish construction at Tiyas Airbase in central Syria from Israeli airstrikes. Two unspecified sources told the Middle East Eye on April 1 that Turkey has "begun efforts to take control" of Tiyas Airbase in Homs Province and has developed construction plans for the site. This report follows rumors that Turkey seeks to establish airbases at Tiyas Airbase and Palmyra Military Airport as part of a potential defense pact with the Syrian interim government.

## Syria

**The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) agreed to withdraw its forces and allow Syrian Interim Interior Ministry forces to deploy to Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh neighborhoods in Aleppo City on April 1.**[27] The SDF has maintained control over these two Kurdish neighborhoods since the fall of the regime. Three representatives from Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh's Civil Council met with the director of the Aleppo Security Directorate on April 1 and agreed that the SDF will withdraw its fighters from the city to areas east of the Euphrates River.[28] The Syrian Interim Interior Ministry will take over security responsibilities in the two neighborhoods and set up two checkpoints in each neighborhood.[29] Kurdish media reported that members of the SDF's Internal Security Forces (also known as Asayish) from Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh will integrate into local police forces under the Interior Ministry.[30] A Kurdish journalist argued that the integration of Asayish members into local police forces will keep the two Kurdish neighborhoods effectively "under Kurdish control." It is unclear if the Asayish members will command the police units in these neighborhoods. The agreement also stipulates that both the SDF and the Syrian interim government will exchange prisoners who were detained after Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) forces took over Aleppo in December 2024.[31]

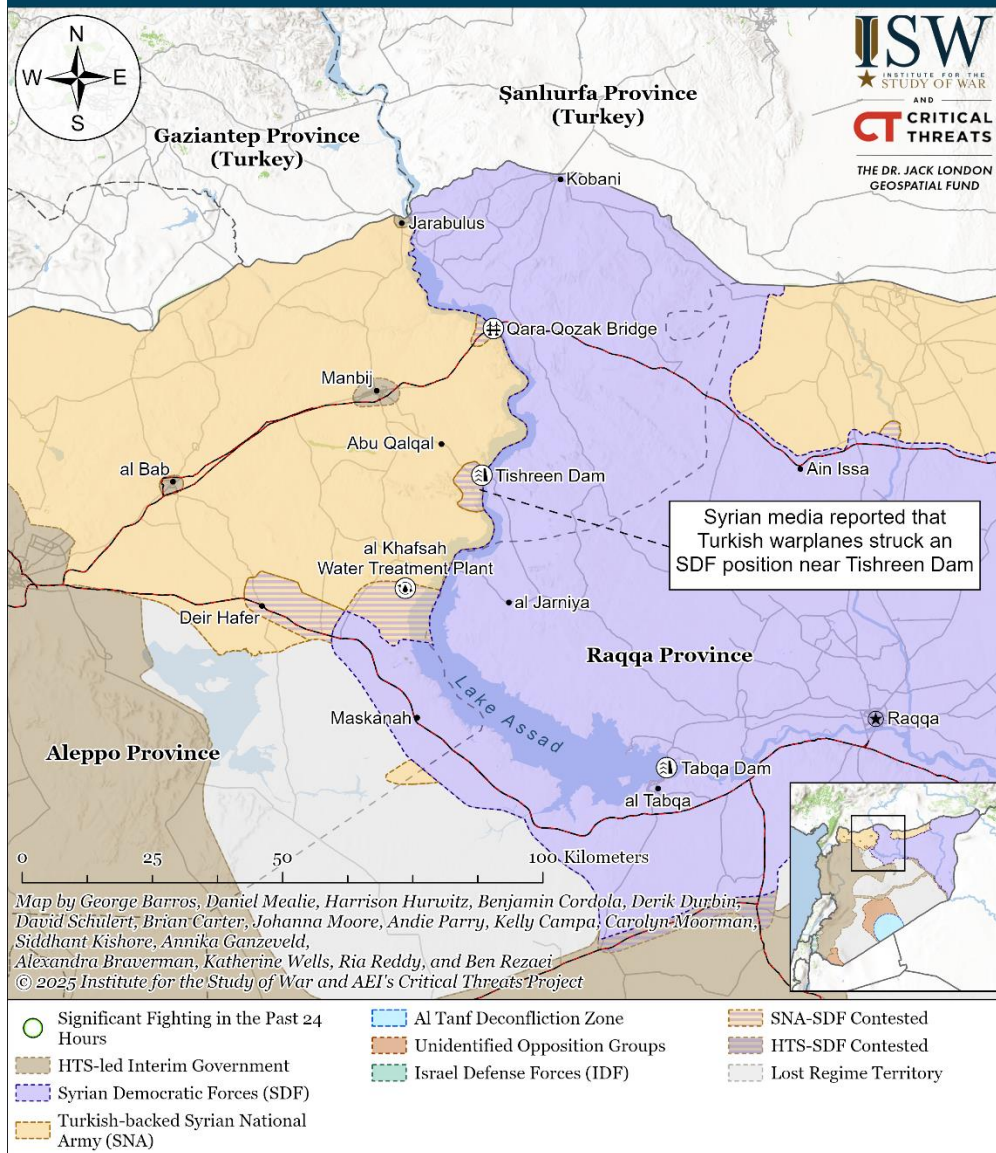
Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh's integration into Aleppo City marks the first instance in which the SDF has ceded territory to the Syrian interim government since signing an integration agreement on March 10.[32] The integration process in Aleppo City will likely inform future integration efforts. The April 1 agreement allows Kurdish residents from Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh to move freely throughout Aleppo City and stipulates that Kurdish institutions cannot be discriminated against in municipal organizations.[33] There have been numerous security incidents between residents, government forces, and SDF fighters in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh in recent months, and lingering tensions among the population could contribute to instances of friction as the integration unfolds.[34]

**Syrian media reported that Turkish aircraft struck an SDF position near Tishreen Dam on March 31.**[35] This attack marks the first reported Turkish strike on an SDF position since March 23.[36]



# Assessed Control of Terrain around Manbij

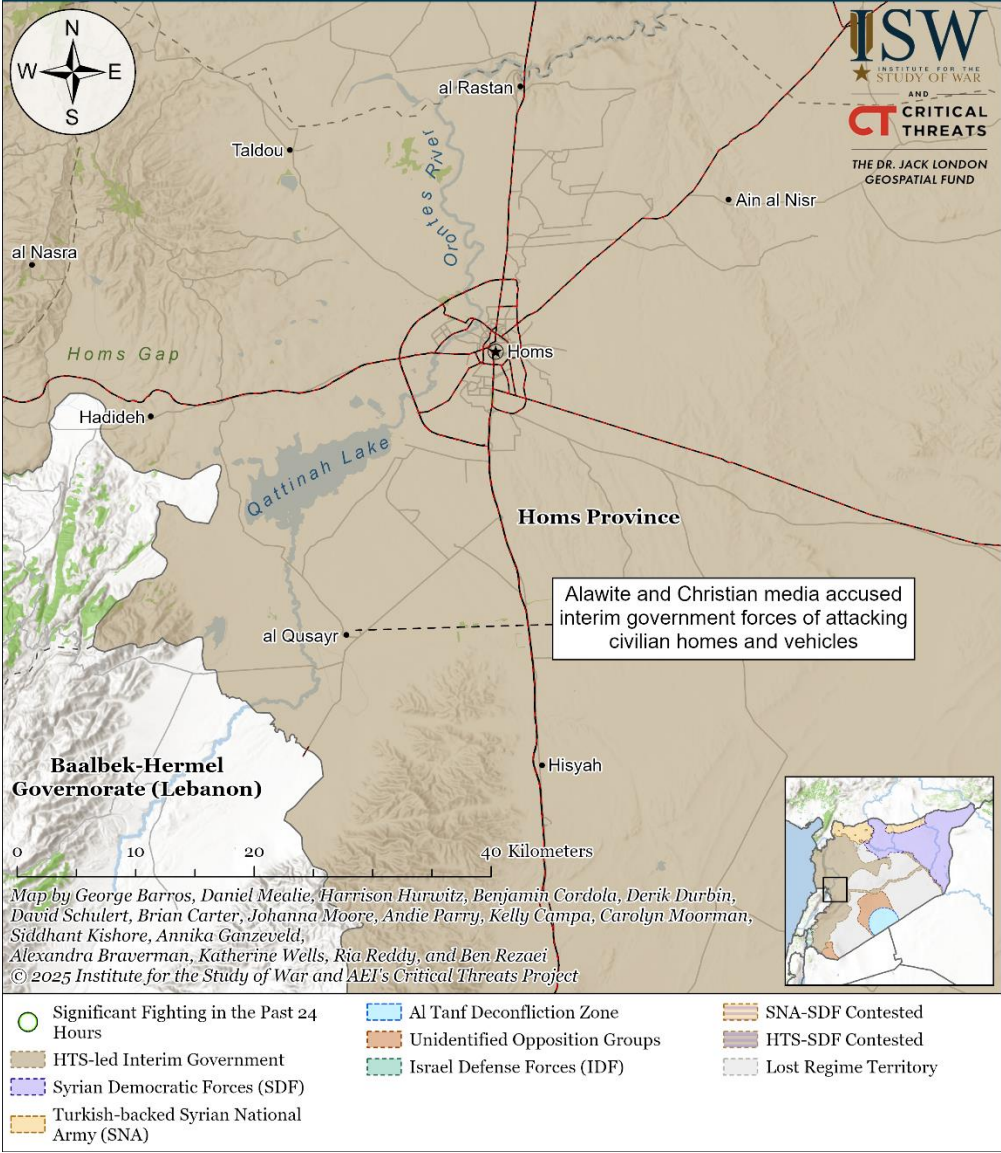
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**Alawite and Christian media are circulating reports of attacks that interim government forces have allegedly committed in Christian neighborhoods across Syria.** Several social media accounts claimed that unspecified gunmen fired on homes and vehicles in al Qusayr, Homs Province, on March 29.[37] Social media accounts accused interim government forces of conducting a campaign to drive Christians out of the town.[38] CTP-ISW cannot independently verify the claims that government forces conducted these attacks. Interim government forces have conducted counter-smuggling operations in al Qusayr since January 2025. Alawite media circulated footage on April 31 that appears to show a convoy of interim government forces driving through al Qassaa, Damascus.[39] Alawite media claimed that the convoy was intended to intimidate civilians in the area.[40] The informational effect generated by these reports supports pro-Assad insurgency efforts to undermine confidence in the Syrian interim government.

# Assessed Control of Terrain around Homs

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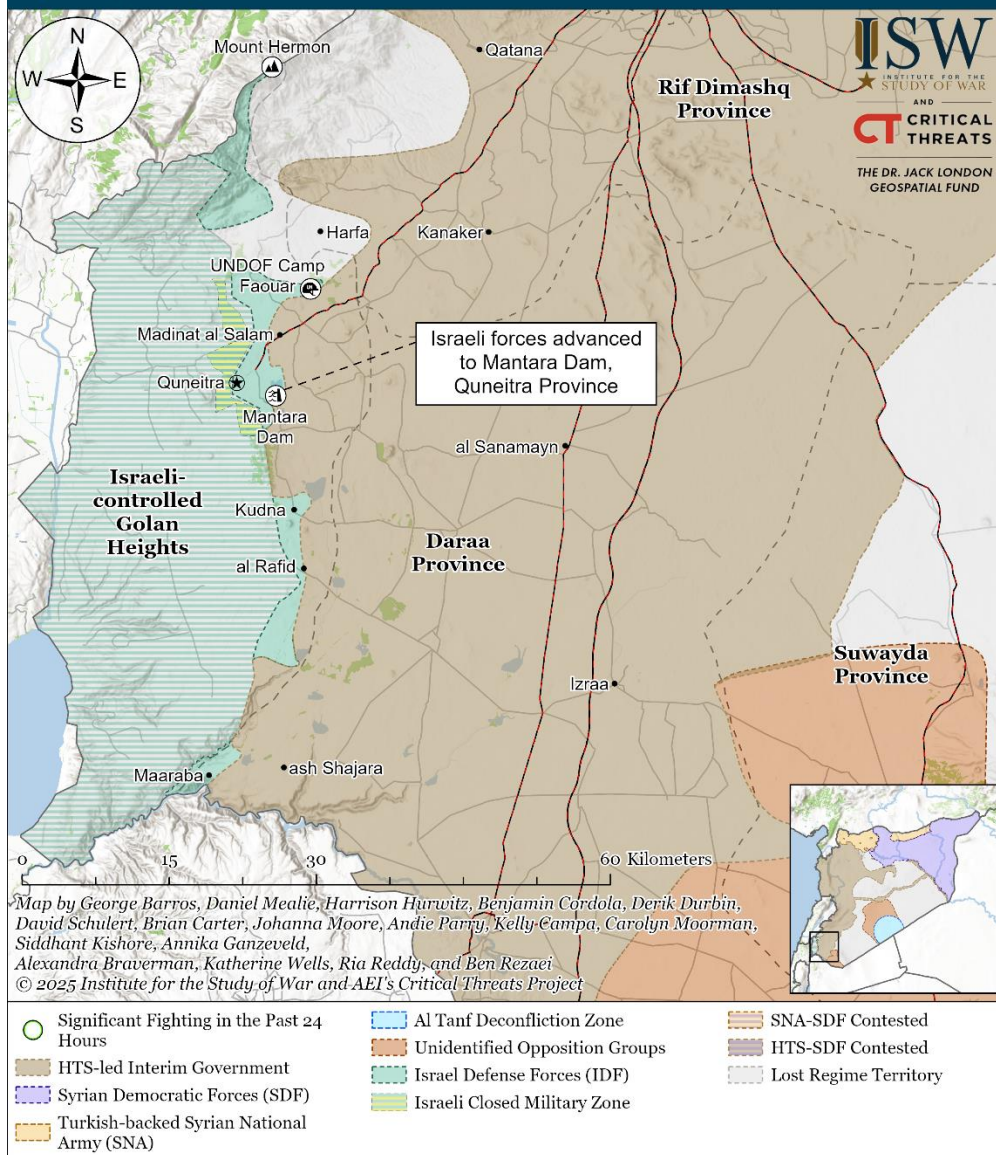


**Southern Syrian media reported that Israeli forces advanced to Mantara Dam, Quneitra Province, on April 1.[41]** Israeli forces established several military outposts at the dam. Israel has operated in southern Syria since December 2024 to confront perceived threats to the Israeli state.[42]



## Assessed Control of Terrain around Quneitra

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**US State Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce reiterated on March 31 the United States' conditions for granting Syria partial sanctions relief.**[43] Bruce stated that the Syrian interim government must bar “foreign terrorist fighters” from holding government positions.[44] Bruce added that the interim government must “renounce and suppress terrorism,” prevent Iranian efforts to exploit Syrian territory, destroy any remaining chemical weapons stockpiles, and assist efforts to find missing US citizens in Syria.[45] This list of conditions is consistent with the conditions US Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Levant and Syria Natasha Franceschi reportedly gave to Syrian Interim Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani in Brussels on March 18.[46] CTP-ISW previously noted that Syrian Interim President Ahmed al Shara will likely oppose the condition to bar foreign fighters from senior government positions given that this condition would require him to sideline individuals who are deeply loyal to him.[47]

## 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

**An Iraqi parliamentarian who reportedly has ties to Iranian-backed Iraqi militias submitted a draft proposal to the Iraqi Parliament on April 1 to amend the Iraqi electoral law in a way that would advantage smaller political parties.**[48] The Iraqi Parliament has frequently modified the Iraqi electoral law before parliamentary elections.[49] The draft proposal would alter how the Saint Lague system, which is the electoral system Iraq uses in parliamentary elections, allocates seats to Iraqi political parties.[50] The draft proposal would also divide Basra, Mosul, and Baghdad into two districts but would otherwise maintain the number of electoral districts that Iraq currently has.[51] The Saint Lague system that Iraq used during elections between 2014 and 2020 allocated seats to Iraqi political parties in a way that often disadvantaged smaller parties.[52] Iraq adopted a majoritarian system in 2021 that enabled smaller parties to win more seats in parliament.[53] Parliament passed an amendment to the electoral law in 2023 to return Iraq to the previous Saint Lague system, likely to favor larger Shia Coordination Framework parties in the November 2025 elections.[54] The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Shia political parties, some of which are backed by Iran. State of Law Coalition head Nouri al Maliki has called for changing the Iraqi electoral system to a “hybrid” system that would combine multiple electoral districts with the Saint Lague system.[55] The submission of the draft proposal comes after nationalist Shia cleric Muqtada al Sadr announced on March 27 that his Shia Nationalist Movement would not participate in the November 2025 parliamentary elections.[56]

**Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani and Syrian Interim President Ahmed al Shara emphasized the need to enhance Iraq-Syria border security during a phone call on April 1.**[57] Sudani affirmed Iraq’s support for Syria’s stability and the formation of a new Syrian government, while Shara said that Syria is committed to developing stronger bilateral relations with Iraq.

**Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani emphasized that Iraq rejects any threats to Iran during a phone call with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on April 1.**[58] This phone call follows US President Donald Trump’s warning on March 30 that “there will be a bombing” if Iran does not agree to a new nuclear deal.[59] This phone call also follows reports that Trump’s recent letter to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei demanded that Iran dissolve the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).[60] The PMF is an Iraqi security service that includes many Iranian-backed Iraqi militias. Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Mohammad Kazem al Sadiq said on March 27 that Trump’s demand to dissolve the PMF is “unacceptable” to both Iran and Iraq.[61]

## 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

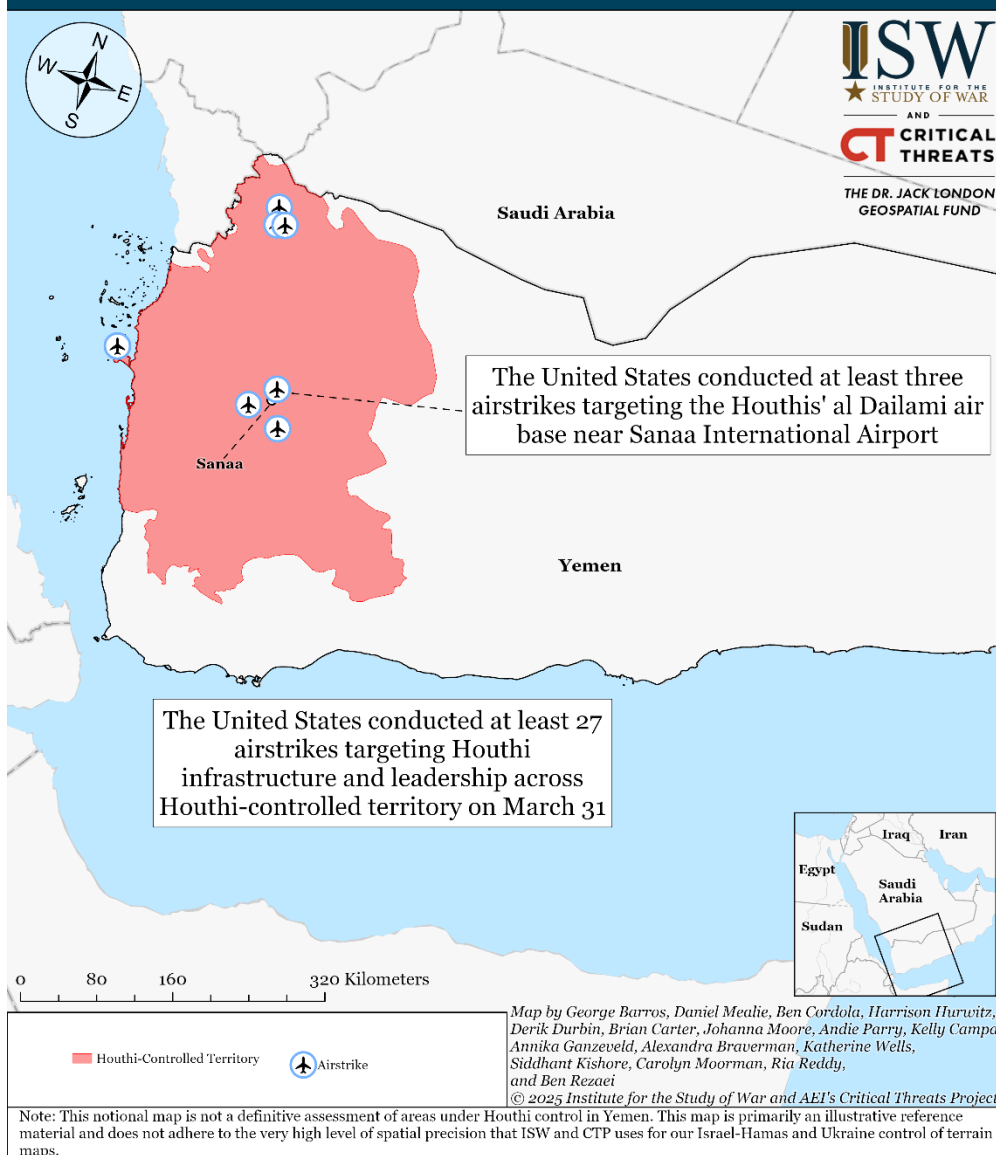
**The Yemeni Media Minister in Aden, Muammar al Eryani, claimed on March 26 that hundreds of Houthi fighters have formed the “Nasrallah Battalion” in Iraq.[62]** Eryani claimed that the battalion is comprised of around 700-1,200 Houthi fighters who fled from Syria to Iraq after the fall of the Assad regime. The director of the Canada-based Iraqi Observatory for Rights and Freedom similarly stated on April 1 that the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) is integrating Houthi fighters from the “Nasrallah Battalion” and Houthi drone and missile experts into PMF units in Diyala, Baghdad, and Jurf al Sakhr.[63] The director was likely referring to Iranian-backed Iraqi militias that are part of the PMF. Jurf al Sakhr is a previously Sunni town south of Baghdad that Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah occupied after committing acts of sectarian cleansing against the previous residents. A CENTCOM airstrike in Jurf al Sakhr in July 2024 killed a Houthi drone expert.[64]

These reports, if accurate, would be consistent with the growing Houthi cooperation with Iranian-backed Iraqi militias in recent months. The Houthis reportedly operate three offices across Iraq and a training camp in a town controlled by Kataib Hezbollah in Diyala Province, according to the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI).[65] RUSI noted on March 19 that PMF fighters have reportedly deployed to Yemen in recent months to train Houthi fighters in combat technology. Iraqi politicians have claimed that the Iraqi federal government seeks to limit Houthi military activity in Iraq out of concern for potential US action against the Houthis in Iraq.[66]

**US Central Command (CENTCOM) has conducted at least 27 airstrikes targeting Houthi infrastructure and leadership in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on March 31.[67]** CENTCOM conducted at least three airstrikes targeting the Houthis' al Dailami Airbase near Sanaa International Airport.[68] CENTCOM also targeted Houthi sites near Jabal al Nabi Shuyab in Bani Matar District, Sanaa Governorate, and on Kamran Island, Hudaydah Governorate.[69]

# US Strikes Against Houthi Targets

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**The Houthis claimed on March 31 that they shot down a US MQ-9 Reaper drone between Majzar District, Marib Governorate, and al Hazm City, al Jawf Governorate, in northeastern Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen.[70]** The Houthis claimed that they have shot down 16 US drones since the start of the October 7 War.[71] The Houthis published footage that purportedly shows the debris of the intercepted drone.[72] CTP-ISW cannot verify the Houthis' claim.

## 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

*CTP-ISW will not be covering the new Israeli operation in the Gaza Strip. We have reprioritized our Middle East coverage to focus on Iran's nuclear program, Iranian domestic security, and Iranian efforts to rebuild its networks into the Levant, including the Palestinian Territories. Given that Israel and its partners have destroyed Hamas' military organization and severed the group's ability to resupply itself, we are now focused on how Iran seeks to rebuild its lines of communication with Hezbollah and Hamas through Syria.*

### **Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy**

**The Iranian rial depreciated from 1,033,000 rials to one US dollar on March 31 to 1,035,000 rials to one US dollar on April 1.[73]**

**The United States sanctioned six entities and two individuals based in Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and China on April 1 as part of the US “maximum pressure” campaign against Iran.[74]** The United States sanctioned these entities and individuals for procuring components for Iranian companies involved in the Iranian drone and missile programs, including Qods Aviation Industries and Shahid Bagheri Industrial Group.

*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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