

# Iran Update



**Ria Reddy, Katherine Wells, Alexandra Braverman, Andie Parry, Ben Rezaei, Carolyn Moorman, George Ekmekjian, Faris Almaari, and Brian Carter**

**April 2, 2025, Information Cutoff: 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. CTP-ISW publishes the Iran Update every weekday.*

*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.*

## **Iran continued to threaten US bases and forces, likely to try to discourage a potential US or Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear facilities amid US threats to strike these facilities.**

Iranian armed forces-run Defa Press published a piece on April 2 claiming that Iran "certainly has sufficient weapons" to attack Diego Garcia Island.[1] The United States has recently increased its military presence at Diego Garcia Island.[2] The piece stated that US Air Force and Navy "strategic assets" and "4000 US soldiers" at Diego Garcia would be "at risk of complete destruction" if the United States attacked Iran.[3] There are normally roughly 400 US military personnel and 2,000 civilian contractors at Diego Garcia.[4] The article outlined the following options for an Iranian attack on US assets at Diego Garcia.

- **Missile and drone attack:** Defa Press stated that Iran could conduct a drone attack "using advanced Shahed 136 drones." [5] Iran unveiled the Shahed-136B drone in September 2024 and claimed it has a range of 4000 kilometers (km). [6] The original Shahed-136 drone has a maximum speed of 185 km per hour, which means it would take about 20 hours to reach Diego Garcia from the southernmost city in Iran. Iran previously launched about 170 drones in their April 2024 attack on Israel, none of which entered Israeli airspace, in part because the drone's slow speed enabled allied aircraft to intercept and destroy the drones. [7] The drones launched from Iran would have taken roughly nine hours to reach Israel, though Israel had the benefit of a plethora of Israeli and allied land-based aircraft available to intercept drones. [8] Defa Press also stated that Iran could use ballistic and cruise missiles, including Khorramshahr ballistic missiles, at "close range" to Diego Garcia. [9] Iran's stockpile of medium-range missiles and ability to manufacture some advanced ballistic missiles have been severely depleted following the April and October 2024 Israeli airstrikes on Iran, but Iran would presumably expend a large proportion of its remaining stockpile in the event of a strike on its nuclear facilities. [10] Iran would need to significantly decrease the payload of its drones and missiles or otherwise alter the

weight of the drones and missiles themselves to launch a land-based attack with sufficient range to hit Diego Garcia.

- **Naval drone and missile attack launched from surface vessels:** Defa Press also threatened that Iran could hit targets in the Indian Ocean using surface vessels, presumably its drone carriers and others, to launch cruise missiles and drones.[11] This would—in theory—allow Iranian ships to get closer to Diego Garcia. Such vessels lack the necessary countermeasures to seriously defend themselves against US naval action, however.

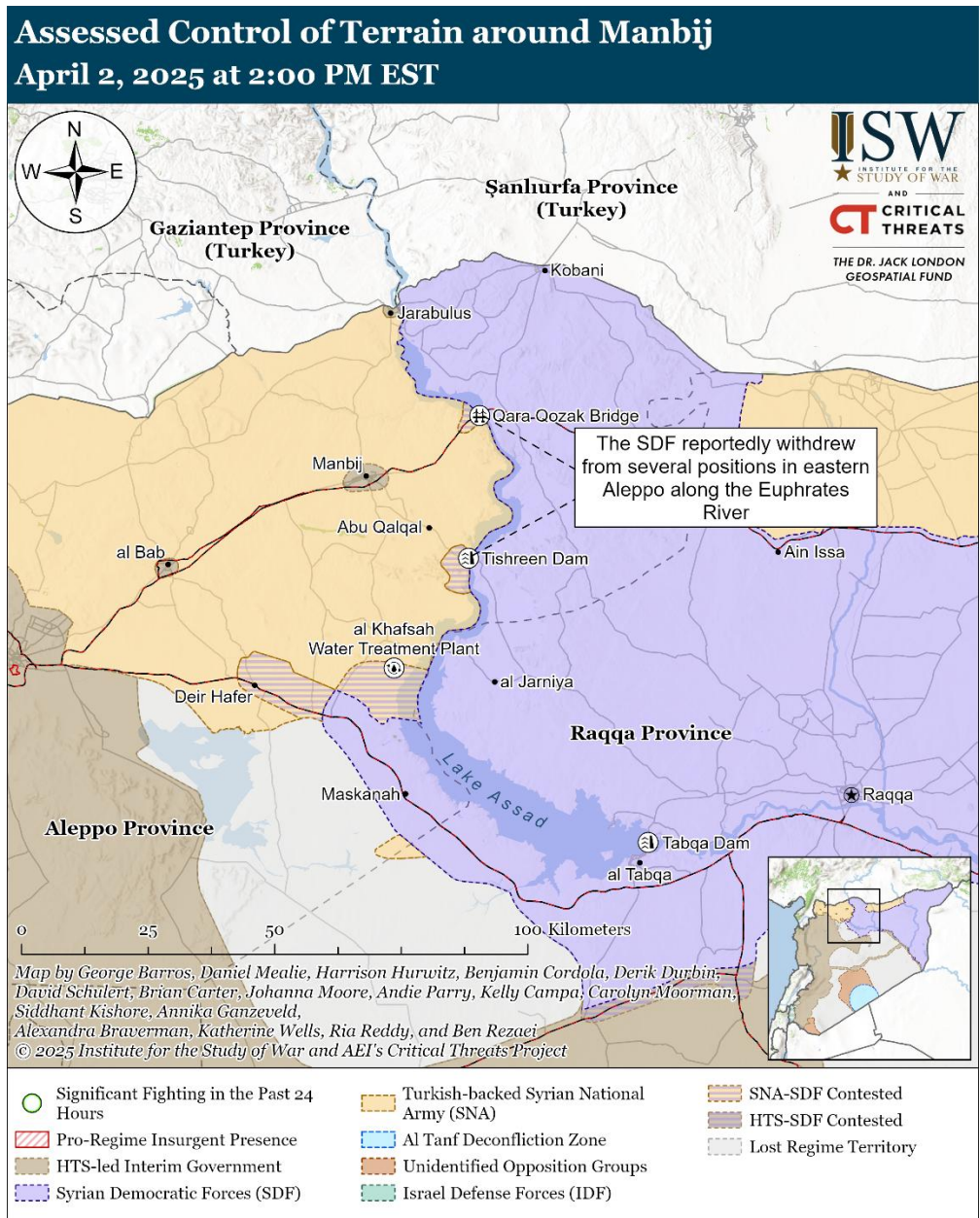
**Iran still retains a large number of short-range ballistic missiles that it could use to strike other US bases in the Middle East, however.** Senior Iranian officials have repeatedly threatened in recent weeks to attack US bases and forces in the Gulf countries.[12] An unspecified Iranian official told the *Wall Street Journal* that "each American soldier will be an individual target" if the United States attacks Iran.[13] Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Aerospace Commander Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh similarly stated that the United States has "at least 10 bases and over 50,000 troops" near Iran that Iran could target.[14] Iran has previously attacked US bases in Iraq, Syria, and Jordan, and the Houthis have previously targeted al Dhafra Airbase in Abu Dhabi, which hosts US and French personnel.[15]

**Hezbollah may be using networks abroad to help it reconstitute its military capabilities in Lebanon.** Spanish security forces detained three individuals residing in Barcelona, Spain, on April 1 on suspicion of purchasing drone components on behalf of Hezbollah.[16] Hezbollah has probably long used its international networks to procure some weapons and drone components, though it could decide to prioritize these efforts after the collapse of Assad and the setbacks caused by Israel.[17]

These individuals are likely part of a larger, Spain-based Hezbollah cell that has been procuring drone parts through European front companies for Hezbollah since at least 2015.[18] Spanish media reported that the three individuals arrested on April 1 resided on the same street as another group of Hezbollah-affiliated individuals that Spanish police detained in 2024 for producing over 1,000 drones for Hezbollah.[19] Spanish media noted that the investigation that led to the arrest of the three individuals on April 1 has also led to the arrests of an unspecified number of individuals in France and the United Kingdom.[20]

**The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and interim government appear to be reaching a series of agreements to redistribute territory after signing a comprehensive ceasefire on March 10.**[21] The SDF agreed to withdraw from two historically Kurdish neighborhoods in Aleppo City on April 1.[22] An interim government official said that the withdrawal agreement is the first step toward the comprehensive agreement between the SDF and interim government.[23] Local sources subsequently reported that the SDF withdrew from the Tishreen Dam and Qara Qozak Bridge on April 2, where they have fought the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) since December 2024.[24]

An anti-SDF source also claimed that the SDF would withdraw from Deir Hafer, Nasiriyah, and Maskanah south of the dam along Highway 4 after leaving Tishreen Dam and Qara Qozak Bridge.[25] Syrian sources, including those close to the interim government, claimed that the SDF's withdrawal was the result of "a preliminary agreement" to create a demilitarized zone around frequent engagement sites.[26] A "special administration," possibly consisting of dam employees, will be in control of the Tishreen Dam area.[27] Dam employees were allowed to remain in the area to permit the electrical plant to continue its regular functions during the last ceasefire agreement between the SDF and the SNA in December 2024.[28] Syrian Kurdish sources have refuted the reports that the SDF withdrew from its positions on the western bank of the Euphrates River.[29] Official SDF and interim government sources have not commented on the rumored SDF withdrawal or agreement at the time of this writing.



## **Key Takeaways:**

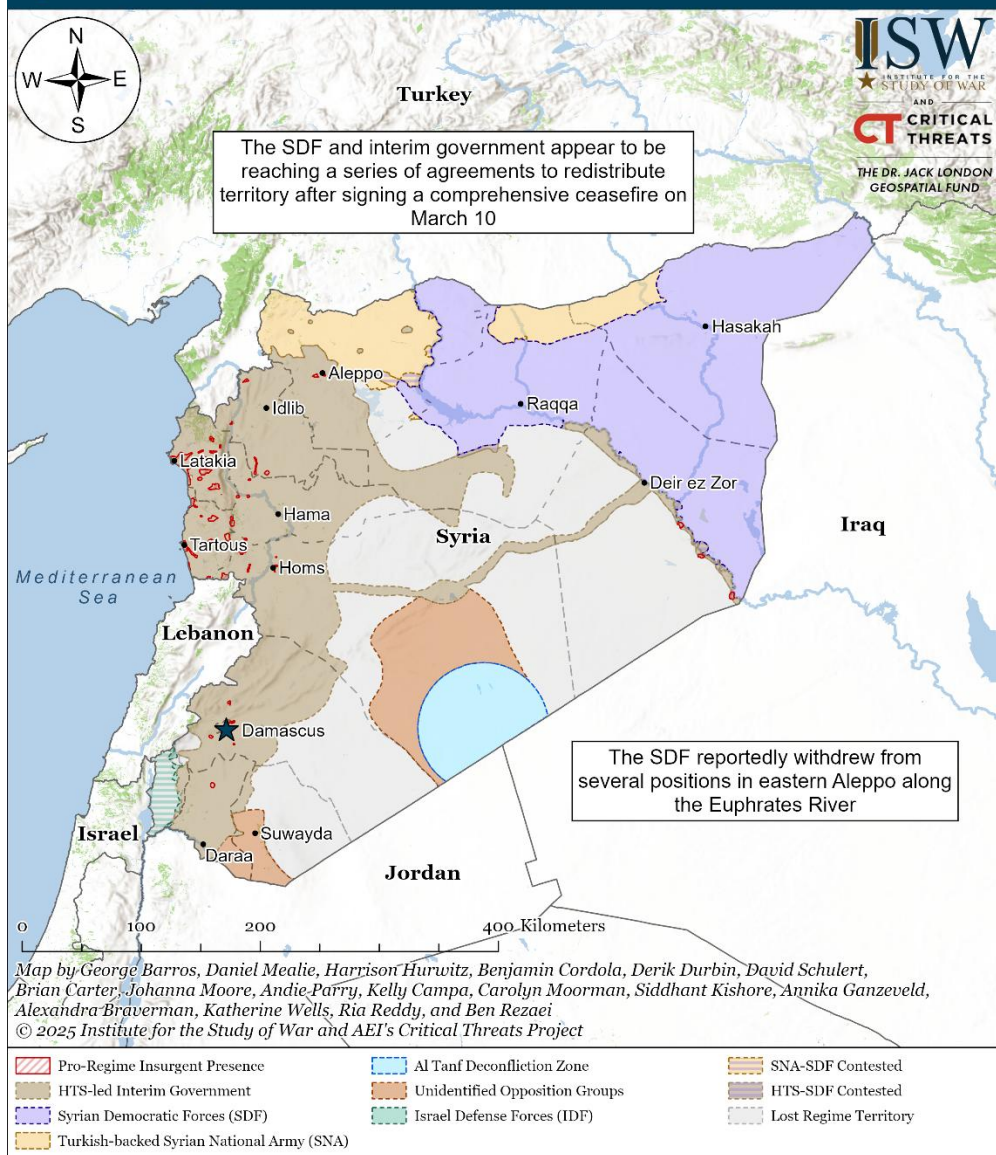
- **Iranian Nuclear Program:** Iran continued to threaten US bases and forces, likely to try to discourage a potential US or Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear facilities amid US threats to strike these facilities. Iranian media said that Iran could attack Diego Garcia using very long-range one-way attack drones or by using a naval surface combatant to launch drones and cruise missiles.
- **Hezbollah Reconstitution:** Hezbollah may be using networks abroad to help it reconstitute its military capabilities in Lebanon. Spanish security forces detained three individuals residing in Barcelona, Spain, on April 1 on suspicion of purchasing drone components on behalf of Hezbollah. These individuals are likely part of a larger, Spain-based Hezbollah cell that has been procuring drone parts through European front companies for Hezbollah since at least 2015.
- **SDF-Syrian Interim Government Agreement:** The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and interim government appear to be reaching a series of agreements to redistribute territory after signing a comprehensive ceasefire on March 10.

## **Syria**

**The Syrian interim government is attempting to address local concerns amid continued murders and violence committed by government-backed forces.** Two interim Syrian government soldiers assassinated the mukhtar, or village head, of Harf al Benmira and five other men present in his home on March 31.<sup>[30]</sup> The local Syrian security force commander reported that the perpetrators were from a police unit in the al Dinsa area of Tartous and that the perpetrators had been arrested on March 31.<sup>[31]</sup> The interim government removed all those associated with the violence in Harf al Benmira from al Dinsa on March 31.<sup>[32]</sup> The group based in al Dinsa was also reportedly firing their weapons into the air and the sea, which caused fear among local residents and a breakdown in relations between the residents and local security forces.<sup>[33]</sup> The Syrian Civil Peace Committee, which Syrian President Ahmed al Shara created after the spate of sectarian violence on the Syrian coast in early March, visited Harf al Benmira to update the community on the government's efforts to seek justice.<sup>[34]</sup> Committee member Dr. Anas Ayrouth, who Shara recently appointed to the Supreme Fatwa Council, told the community that the assailants have been "referred to the judiciary."<sup>[35]</sup> Ayrouth's statement is a positive step, but it will need to be backed by public, transparent trials that demonstrate to the local population that suspects are being held accountable.

## Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria

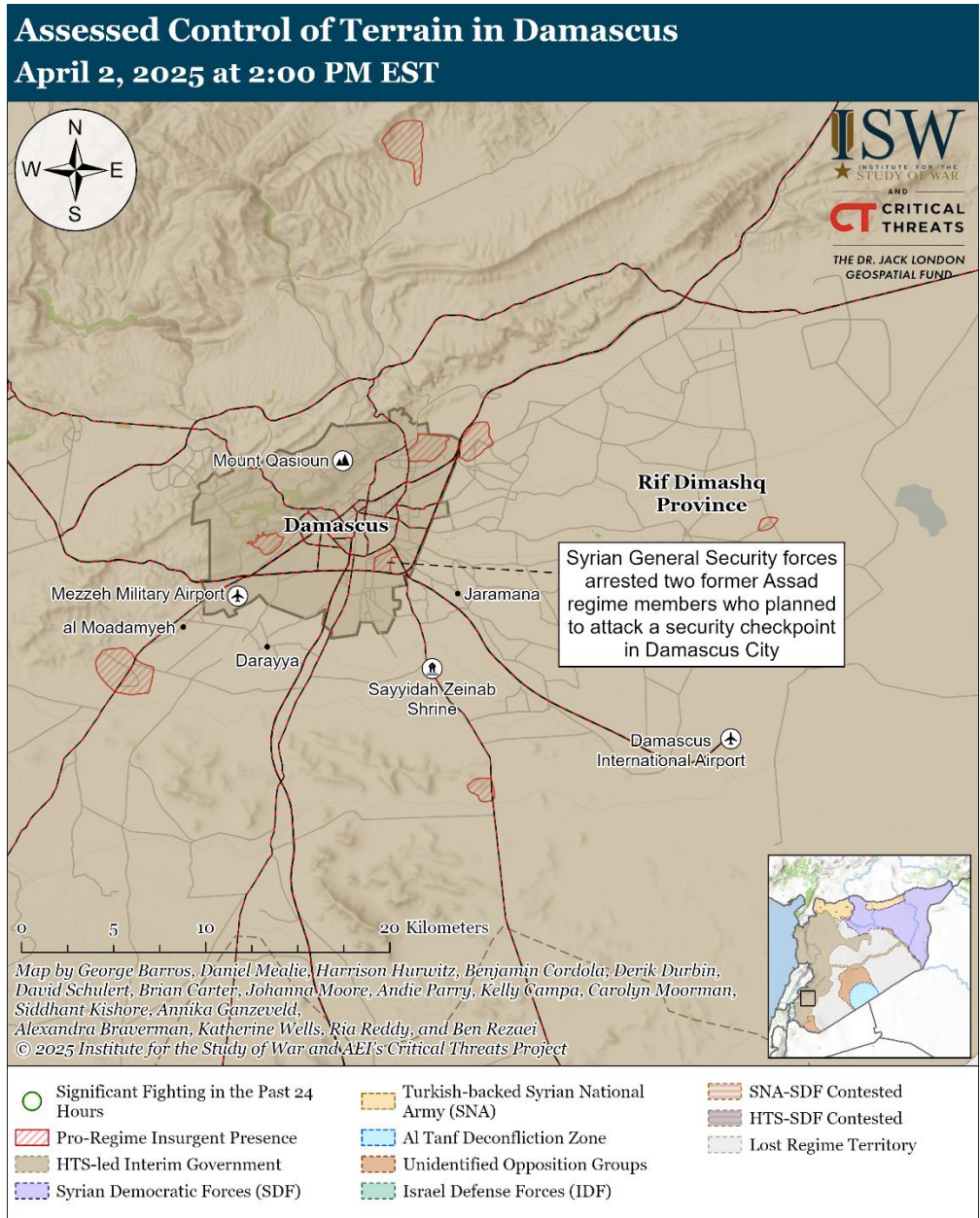
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**Israel reneged on its promise on April 2 to provide Israeli work visas to Syrian Druze agricultural workers.**<sup>[36]</sup> Israel previously announced it would provide work visas to "dozens" of Syrian Druze to work on various agricultural and construction projects in the Golan Heights.<sup>[37]</sup> Israel has increased diplomatic outreach to the Druze community in Syria since the fall of the Assad regime, such as by facilitating the visit of clerics from Syria to a religious shrine in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights.<sup>[38]</sup> Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Israel Katz directed the IDF on March 3 to "prepare to defend the Druze community" in response to fighting in Syria.<sup>[39]</sup> The Druze community is highly diverse, and loyalty to a particular leader within the community varies across Israel, Lebanon, and Syria.<sup>[40]</sup>

**Syrian General Security forces arrested two former Assad regime members who attempted to carry out an attack on a security checkpoint in Bustan al Dour, Damascus**

**City.**[41] Syrian security forces seized at least two handguns, several grenades, and forged military IDs from the two attackers.[42] A Syrian source reported that the two individuals were former members of the "National Defense Forces" and another Baathist anti-Israel militia.[43] The "National Defense Forces" was a Baathist paramilitary organization trained by Iran and Hezbollah that functionally became part of the Assad regime in 2014.[44]



## 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

**A Syrian Kurd militant attacked an Assyrian festival with an axe in Duhok City on April 1, injuring at least two people.**[45] A video of the militant's arrest shows that the militant shouted "dawlat al Islam' (state of Islam), which is distinct from al Dawliya al Islamiya (the Islamic State, or ISIS).[46] A security source told Kurdish media on April 1 that the preliminary investigation indicated that the militant belongs to an unidentified armed group.[47] The militant may have been inspired by ISIS or another armed Salafi jihadi group. An organized group would very likely use small arms or a suicide bomb in an attack of this kind.

**Turkey continued to target Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) positions in Duhok Province, Iraqi Kurdistan, on April 1 and 2.**[48] Kurdish media reported on April 1 that Turkish forces clashed with PKK fighters near Matin Mountain, Amedi district.[49] The Turkish military reportedly shelled PKK positions near Miwin Valley on April 2.[50]

## Arabian Peninsula

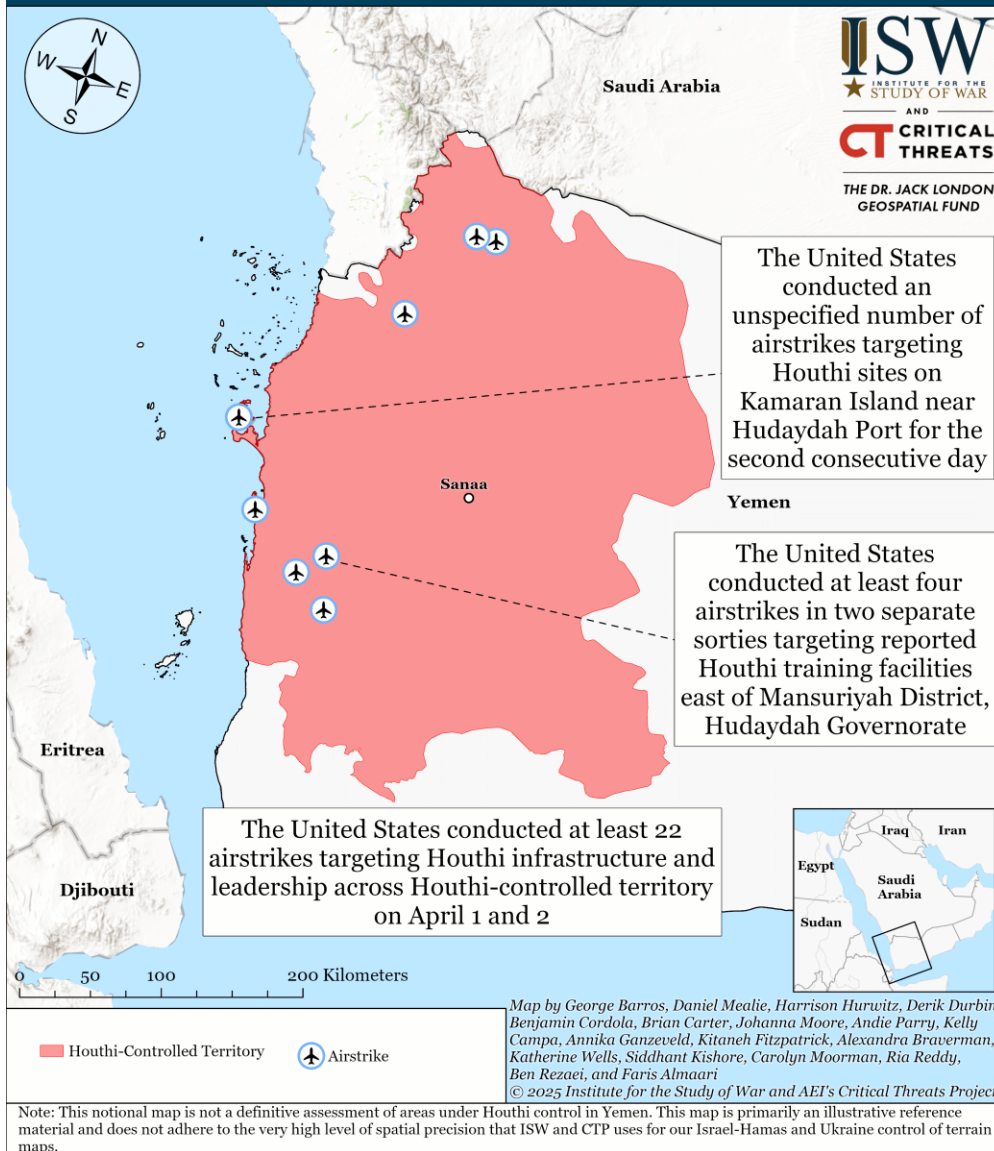
### **Axis of Resistance objectives:**

- 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

**US Central Command (CENTCOM) has conducted at least 22 airstrikes targeting Houthi infrastructure and leadership in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on April 1.**[51] CENTCOM conducted at least four airstrikes in two separate sorties targeting reported Houthi training facilities east of Mansuriyah District, Hudaydah Governorate.[52] CENTCOM also targeted Houthi sites near Hudaydah Port, including Kamaran Island, for the second consecutive day.[53] A Yemeni journalist circulated a Houthi directive on X, warning civilians in Houthi areas not to document or share information on US airstrikes.[54]

# US Strikes Against Houthi Targets

As of April 2, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



**The Houthis conducted three combined cruise missile and drone attacks targeting the USS *Harry S. Truman* aircraft carrier and US destroyers in the Red Sea between March 31 and April 1.[55]** The attack did not succeed, and CENTCOM did not acknowledge the attacks. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) separately reported that vessels in the Red Sea experienced global positioning system (GPS) interference for several hours on April 2.[56] USS *Carl Vinson* carrier strike group also departed Guam on March 28 and is set to replace the USS *Harry S. Truman* in the Red Sea in the next two weeks.[57]

**Houthi spokesperson Mohammad Abdulsalam reportedly visited an unspecified location in Saudi Arabia in the final days of Ramadan at the end of March 2025, according to an**



**unspecified source speaking to a Yemeni human rights activist.**<sup>[58]</sup> CTP-ISW cannot confirm this report.

**The United States sanctioned four Russian-based individuals, one Turkey-based individual, and four Russian entities for facilitating arms procurement for the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps-Quds Force-backed Houthi financier Said al Jamal's network on April 2.**<sup>[59]</sup> The Russia-based Afghan brothers Hushang Ghairat and Sohrab Ghairat procured weapons and diverted stolen Ukrainian grain from Crimea to Yemen in 2024 aboard a vessel from a Hong Kong-based shipping company. Two of the sanctioned individuals are the captains of this vessel, Russian nationals Vyacheslav Vladimirovich Vidanov and Vladimirovich Belyakov. The United States also sanctioned Sohrab's three Russia-based companies, namely LLC Sky Frame, LLC Edison, and LLC Kolibri Group, and a Turkey-based Iranian national for laundering American dollars and facilitating payments worth millions of dollars for Jamal. The United States sanctioned Jamal in June 2021 for arms procurement for the Houthis and sanctioned his associate, Houthi operative Khaled Hussein Saleh Gaber, in March 2025.<sup>[60]</sup>

## **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 appreciated from 1,035,000 rials to one US dollar on April 1 to 1,029,000 rials to one US dollar on April 2.**<sup>[61]</sup>

**The Iranian Defense Ministry showcased new missile, drone, and air defense systems at the Latin America Aerospace and Defense (LAAD) 2025 exhibition in Sao Paulo, Brazil,**

**on April 2.**<sup>[62]</sup> This marked Iran’s first participation in the event, joining 41 countries.<sup>[63]</sup> Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Minister Brigadier General Aziz Nasir Zadeh also attended the exhibition.<sup>[64]</sup> Iran showcased systems across multiple defense sectors, including cruise missiles, drones, air defense systems, and short-range ballistic missiles.<sup>[65]</sup> Iran’s participation aligns with its broader aim to increase defense export revenue amid worsening economic conditions.<sup>[66]</sup> Iran’s military exports were 276 percent higher between 2019 and 2023 compared to the period between 2014 and 2018.<sup>[67]</sup> Senior Iranian officials, including Armed Force General Staff Chief Major General Bagheri, have repeatedly stated that Iran aims to export military capabilities to “friendly” countries.<sup>[68]</sup> Iran’s push for military exports comes as the United States steps up its “maximum pressure” sanctions, including new efforts to target Iranian oil revenues.<sup>[69]</sup>

*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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