

# Iran Update, February 1, 2024

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**Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm ET**

*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](#).*

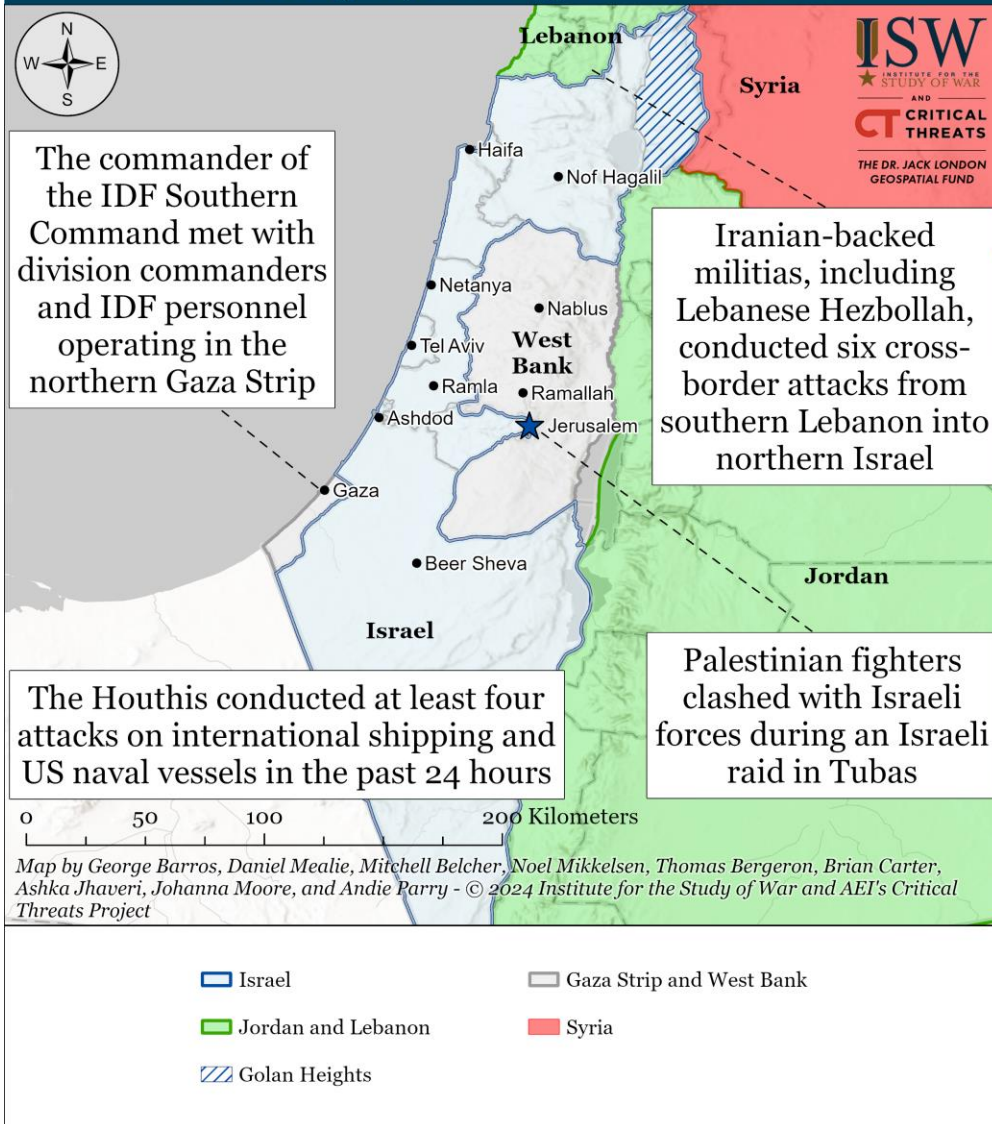
*Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are 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.*

## **Key Takeaways:**

- **Northern Gaza Strip:** A spokesperson for the Israeli prime minister's office said that the IDF "shifted into a new phase of the fighting" and will "target pockets of resistance" in the northern Gaza Strip.
- **Political Negotiations:** Two Israeli sources told Axios that Shin Bet Director Ronen Bar and Egyptian Intelligence Minister Abbas Kamel discussed future Israeli operations in the southern Gaza Strip during a meeting in Cairo.
- **West Bank:** US President Joe Biden signed an executive order that enables the United States to place financial and visa sanctions on foreign nationals involved in attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank.
- **Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights:** IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi said on February 1 that northern Israelis will only return when it is safe for them to do so during a meeting with the IDF Northern Command and 91st Division commanders.
- **Iraq:** US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby emphasized the role that all of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed militias—plays in attacks on US forces in Iraq.
- **Syria:** Reuters reported on February 1 that the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) withdrew several of its senior and mid-ranking officers from Syria ahead of possible US strikes, according to unspecified regional sources "familiar with the matter."

# Israel-Hamas War as of February 1, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



## 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.

**The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) continued to operate in the northern Gaza Strip.** The commander of the IDF Southern Command met with division commanders and IDF personnel in the northern Gaza Strip on February 1.<sup>[1]</sup> He said that the IDF can operate and attack Palestinian fighters in "the heart of" Gaza City despite the IDF's withdrawal. A spokesperson for the Israeli prime minister's office said that the IDF "shifted into a new phase of the fighting" and will "target pockets of resistance" in the northern Gaza Strip.<sup>[2]</sup> The IDF 401st Brigade (assigned to the 162nd Division) raided

unspecified Hamas-affiliated military buildings and killed fighters in the northern Gaza Strip on February 1.<sup>[3]</sup>

Palestinian militias, including Hamas, attempted to disrupt Israeli raids in Gaza City on February 1. Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fighters claimed that they fired a thermobaric rocket targeting Israeli infantry inside a building in western Gaza City.<sup>[4]</sup> Hamas published footage that showed its fighters firing small arms and rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) targeting Israeli forces in Tal al Hawa in southwestern Gaza City and Sheikh Radwan in northwestern Gaza City.<sup>[5]</sup> Hamas claimed two attacks targeting Israeli forces in Sheikh Radwan on February 1.<sup>[6]</sup> CTP-ISW previously reported on January 16 that Palestinian militias had renewed attacks in Sheikh Radwan during January.<sup>[7]</sup>

**The IDF Nahal Brigade (assigned to the 162nd Division) continued to conduct clearing operations in the central Gaza Strip on February 1.<sup>[8]</sup>** Israeli forces directed an airstrike targeting a Palestinian militia cell in an unspecified location in the central Strip. Hamas fighters fired RPGs at Israeli armor in Bureij and Maghazi.<sup>[9]</sup> The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, which is the self-proclaimed military wing of Fatah and aligned with Hamas in the current war, also clashed with Israeli forces east of Bureij.<sup>[10]</sup>

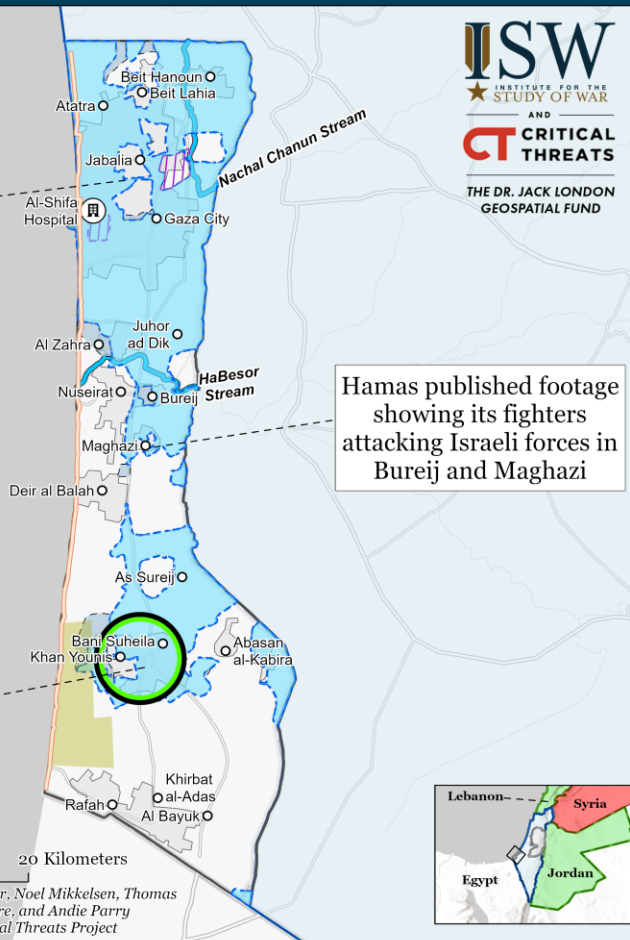
**The IDF continued to conduct clearing operations in western Khan Younis on February 1.** The IDF 35th Paratrooper Brigade (assigned to the IDF 98th Division) killed fighters in western Khan Younis City in "close-range incidents."<sup>[11]</sup> The 98th Division destroyed a long-range rocket launcher in western Khan Younis.<sup>[12]</sup>

Palestinian militias continued to attempt to defend against Israeli operations in the southern Gaza Strip. Hamas' military wing fired a thermobaric rocket and a tandem rocket targeting Israeli forces in western Khan Younis City.<sup>[13]</sup> The military wing of PIJ engaged Israeli forces in small arms clashes southwest and west of Khan Younis.<sup>[14]</sup> The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades clashed with and mortared Israeli forces in separate engagements in Khan Younis.<sup>[15]</sup>

# Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of February 1, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



The IDF 401st Brigade raided Hamas-affiliated military infrastructure in the northern Gaza Strip



Hamas published footage showing its fighters attacking Israeli forces in Bureij and Maghazi

The IDF 98th Division continued clearing operations in western 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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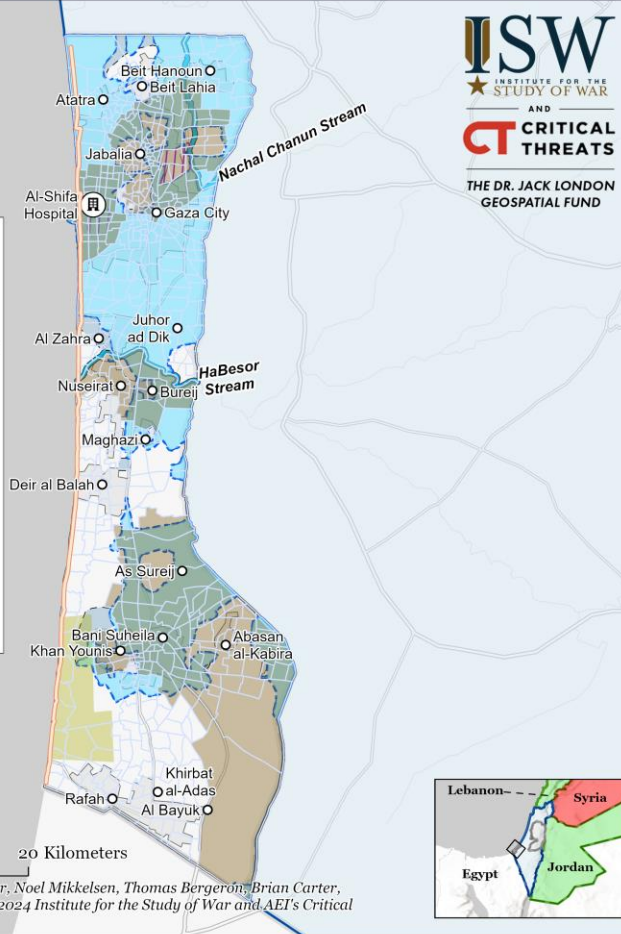
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|--------------------|--|--|---|
| Israel             | Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*                | Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone                    | Significant Water Obstacles               |
| Gaza Strip         | Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances                    | IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230 | Densely Urban Areas                       |
| Jordan and Lebanon | Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias |  | Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours |
| Syria              |  |  |   |

\* 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 1, 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	Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*	Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones	Densely Urban Areas
Gaza Strip	Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances	Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone	Significant Water Obstacles
Jordan and Lebanon	Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias	IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230	
Syria			

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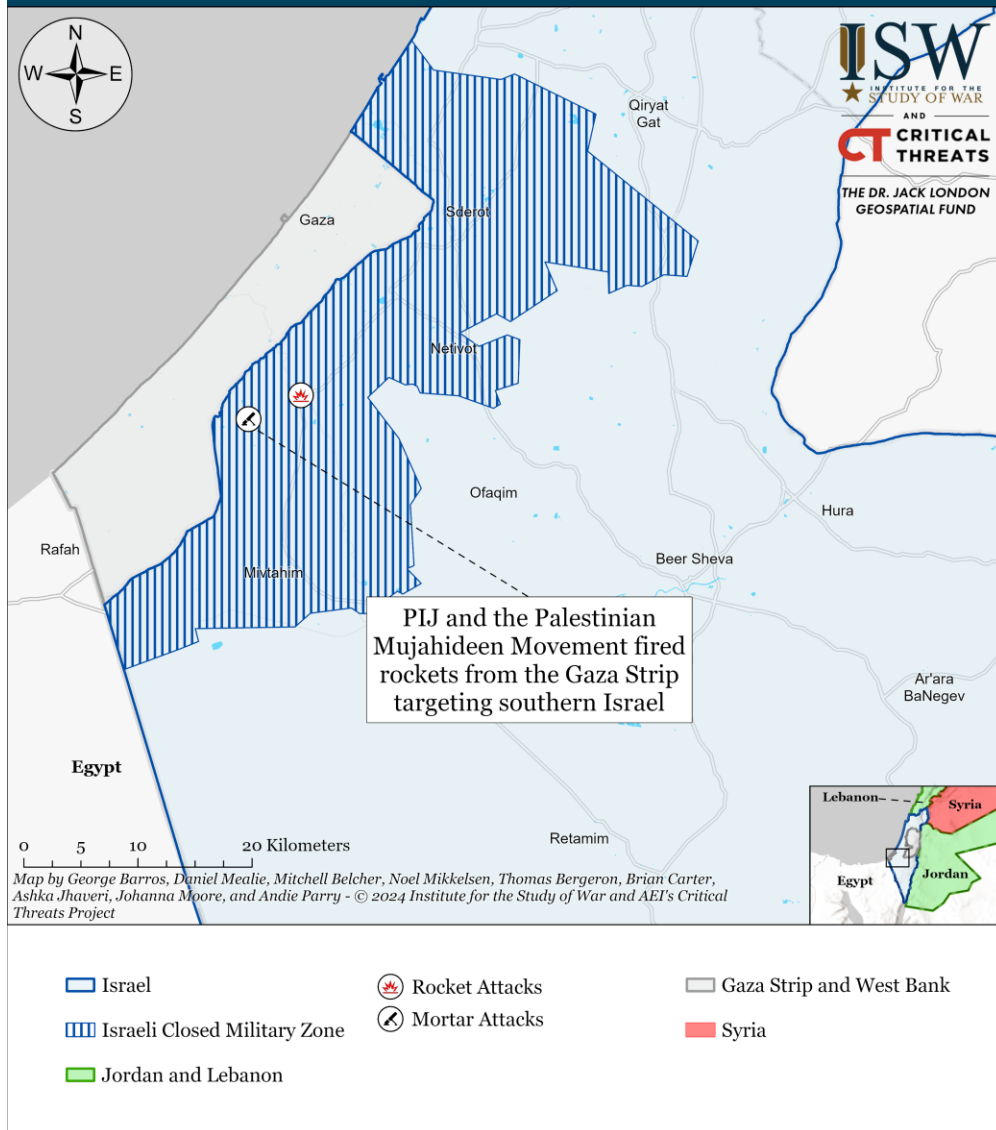
**Israel told Egypt that it would not operate in Rafah until it allowed civilians to evacuate the area.** Two Israeli sources told Axios that Shin Bet Director Ronen Bar and Egyptian Intelligence Minister Abbas Kamel discussed future Israeli operations in the southern Gaza Strip during a meeting in Cairo.<sup>[16]</sup> Egypt has expressed concern that an operation could create a flow of Palestinian refugees into the Sinai Peninsula.<sup>[17]</sup> Unspecified sources familiar with the details of the negotiations told an Israeli Army Radio correspondent on February 1 that Egypt and Israel are “on the way to finding solutions [to the issues over Rafah and Philadelphi].” The correspondent added that Israel has not decided where it will evacuate the civilian population.<sup>[18]</sup> The correspondent reported that in the Israeli-Egyptian agreement over the Philadelphi Corridor, Israel will have “some influence” along the border but there will not be a permanent Israeli force presence.<sup>[19]</sup> The Philadelphi Corridor is a 14-kilometer-long strip of land between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. An unspecified Arab Gulf country will finance the construction of an underground wall to prevent smuggling via tunnels if Egypt agrees to the plan.<sup>[20]</sup>



**The IDF's Home Front Command eased restrictions on civilian activities in southern Israel on February 1.**<sup>[21]</sup> IDF Spokesperson Daniel Hagari said that Israel will allow educational activities in schools near “protected” areas in the Gaza Envelope. The Gaza Envelope describes populated areas in southern Israel that are within seven kilometers of the Israel-Gaza border. Hagari also said that the IDF is allowing gatherings of 100 people in open-air settings and 300 in indoor settings in the envelope. Hagari said that gathering size limits are lower in some areas, including Kissufim and Nahal Oz. Palestinian militias have repeatedly targeted some of these areas, including Kissufim and Nahal Oz, with rocket and mortar fire in January.<sup>[22]</sup>

**Palestinian militias conducted two indirect fire attacks into southern Israel on February 1.** The military wing of PIJ fired mortars targeting Israeli forces in Kissufim.<sup>[23]</sup> The Mujahideen Brigades fired rockets at an Israeli military base and “airstrip” in Reim.<sup>[24]</sup> The Palestinian Mujahideen Movement is a Palestinian faction aligned with Hamas and has expressed close ties with Iran.

# Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of February 1, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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

## West Bank

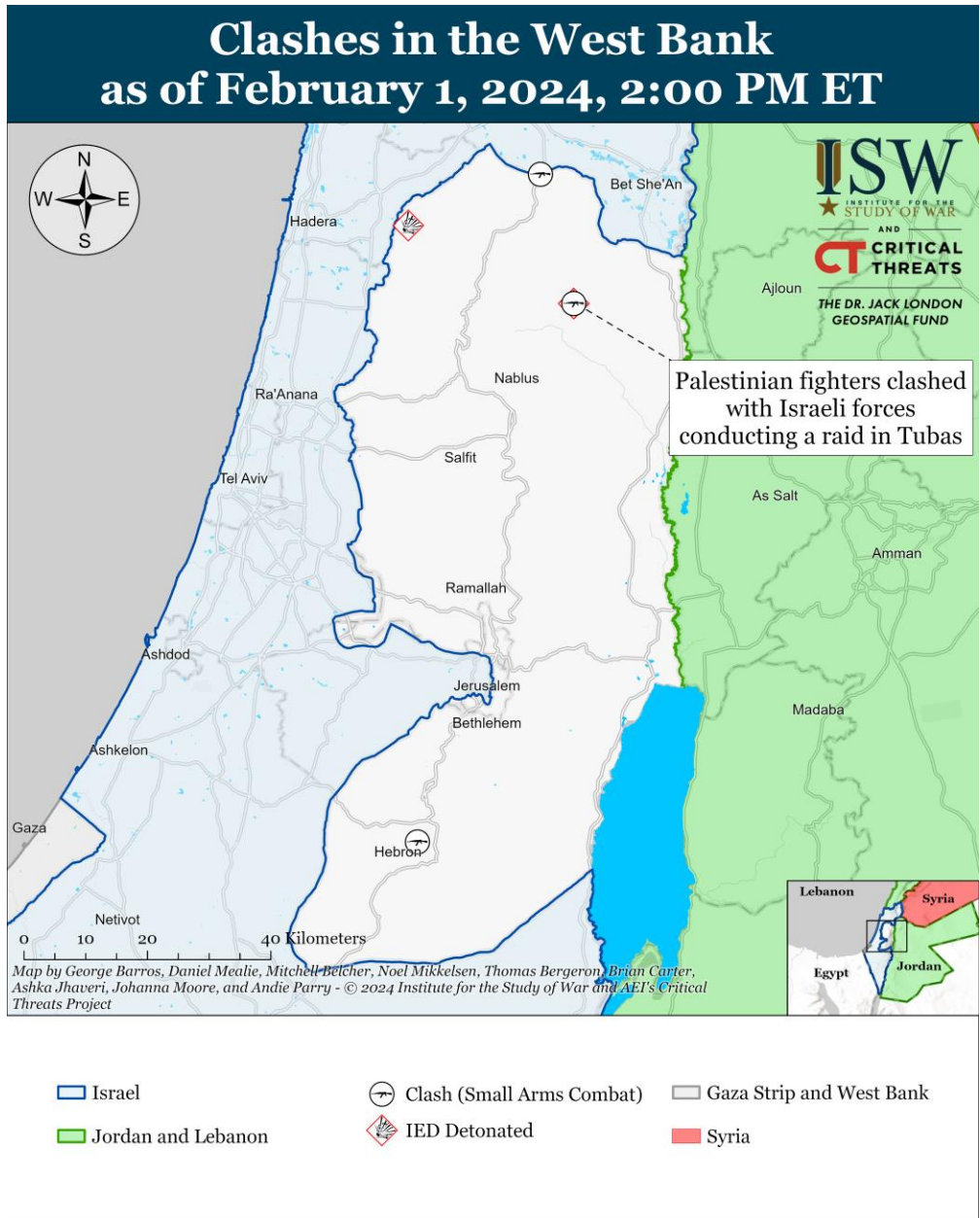
### Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

**Palestinian fighters and Israeli forces clashed in four locations across the West Bank on February 1.[25]** The Tubas Battalion of Hamas and the Tubas Battalion of the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades conducted multiple attacks on Israeli forces during an Israeli raid in Tubas.[26]

**US President Joe Biden signed an executive order that enables the United States to place financial and visa sanctions on foreign nationals involved in attacks on Palestinians in**

**the West Bank.**[27] The US State Department sanctioned four Israeli West Bank settlers after the executive order went into effect.[28] The order also allows the United States to sanction individuals who direct, order, or fail to enforce policies that lead to acts of violence against Palestinian civilians.[29] Axios reported that the Biden “administration had considered including ultranationalist Ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich on the list of sanctioned individuals, but it ultimately decided to leave them off for now and focus on those who perpetrated attacks.”[30]



*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

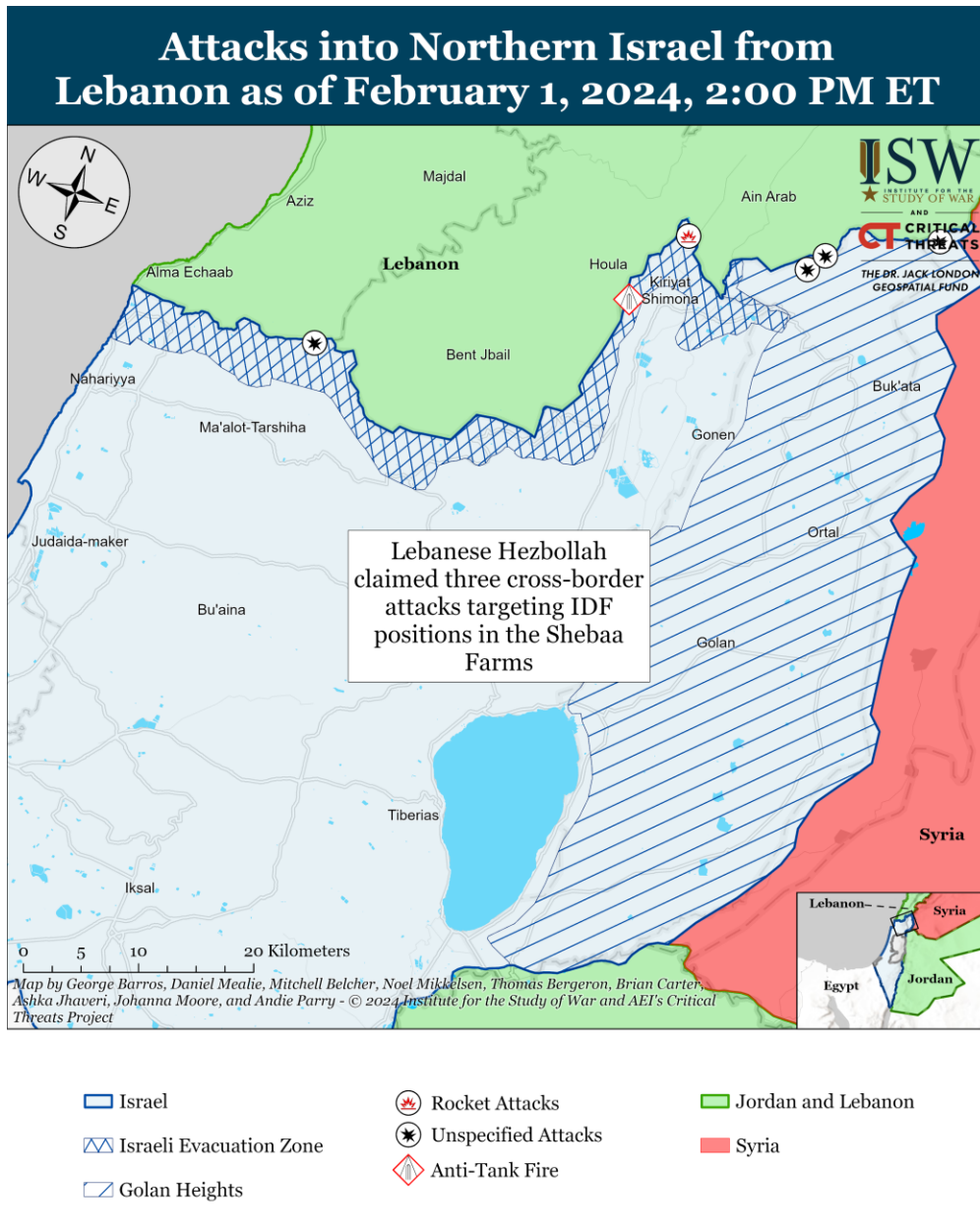


- Set conditions for successive campaigns into northern Israel

**Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted six cross-border attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel on February 1.[31]**

IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi said on February 1 that northern Israelis will only return when it is safe for them to do so during a meeting with the IDF Northern Command and 91st Division commanders.[32] Israeli media reported separately that local residents will not return until mid-2024.[33]

**The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed a drone attack targeting the port of Haifa, Israel on February 1.[34] CTP-ISW has not observed any evidence that this attack took place.** The Islamic Resistance in Iraq later deleted the claim on its Telegram channel after posting the claim.



*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

**Iraqi Popular Mobilization Committee Chairman Faleh al Fayyadh discussed security and counterterrorism cooperation with Russian Ambassador to Iraq Elbrus Kutrashv in Baghdad on February 1.**<sup>[35]</sup> Fayyadh and Kutrashv discussed “exchanging experiences” between the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and Russia. The PMF is an Iraqi security service that contains several Iranian-backed Shia militias. Kutrashv told Russian media on January 25 that Russia seeks to expand its “presence” in Iraq and “invest additional resources in areas related to security.”<sup>[36]</sup> Kutrashv met with Iraqi President Abdul Latif al Rashid and Iraqi Shia cleric and politician Ammar al Hakim on January 23 and 31, respectively.<sup>[37]</sup>

**Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein discussed the “repercussions” of the January 28 attack that killed three US servicemembers in northeastern Jordan in a phone call with his Saudi counterpart Faisal bin Farhan on February 1.**<sup>[38]</sup> Western media previously reported that Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah conducted the one-way drone attack targeting US forces in Jordan.<sup>[39]</sup> The Iraqi federal government condemned the attack and called for an end to “the cycle of violence” on January 29.<sup>[40]</sup> Hussein and Farhan emphasized the need for continued cooperation and communication between Baghdad and Riyadh to prevent an “all-out war” in the Middle East and to safeguard the security of Iraq and Saudi Arabia.<sup>[41]</sup>

**US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby emphasized the role that all of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed militias—plays in attacks on US forces in Iraq.** Kirby said that the United States does not take Kataib Hezbollah’s announcement that it will suspend its attacks targeting US forces “at face value,” and added that Kataib Hezbollah is not the only Iranian-backed militia attacking US forces.<sup>[42]</sup> Kataib Hezbollah suspended attacks on US forces on January 30 following the January 28 attack that killed three US servicemembers in northeastern Jordan.<sup>[43]</sup> Western media previously reported that Kataib Hezbollah launched the January 28 one-way drone attack from southwestern Iraq.<sup>[44]</sup> Kataib Hezbollah’s announcement also followed Iraqi media reports that IRGC Quds Force Commander Esmail Ghaani traveled to Baghdad on January 29 to “stop [the Iranian-backed Iraqi militias’] military escalation” against US forces.<sup>[45]</sup>

Kirby’s statement is consistent with CTP-ISW’s assessment that Iran and Kataib Hezbollah are conducting an information operation to distance Iran from the January 28 attack.<sup>[46]</sup> Iranian officials denied Iran’s involvement in the attack and Kataib Hezbollah claimed in its January 30 announcement that Iran opposes “pressure and escalation” against US forces in Iraq and Syria.<sup>[47]</sup>

**US Central Command (CENTCOM) said that it conducted strikes targeting a Houthi drone ground control station and 10 one-way attack drones on January 31.**<sup>[48]</sup> A senior US defense official in Bahrain told a CBS reporter that F-18 aircraft struck the targets in western Yemen as the Houthis prepared to launch the drones.<sup>[49]</sup> Local Yemeni sources reported the strikes hit Hudaydah city.<sup>[50]</sup>

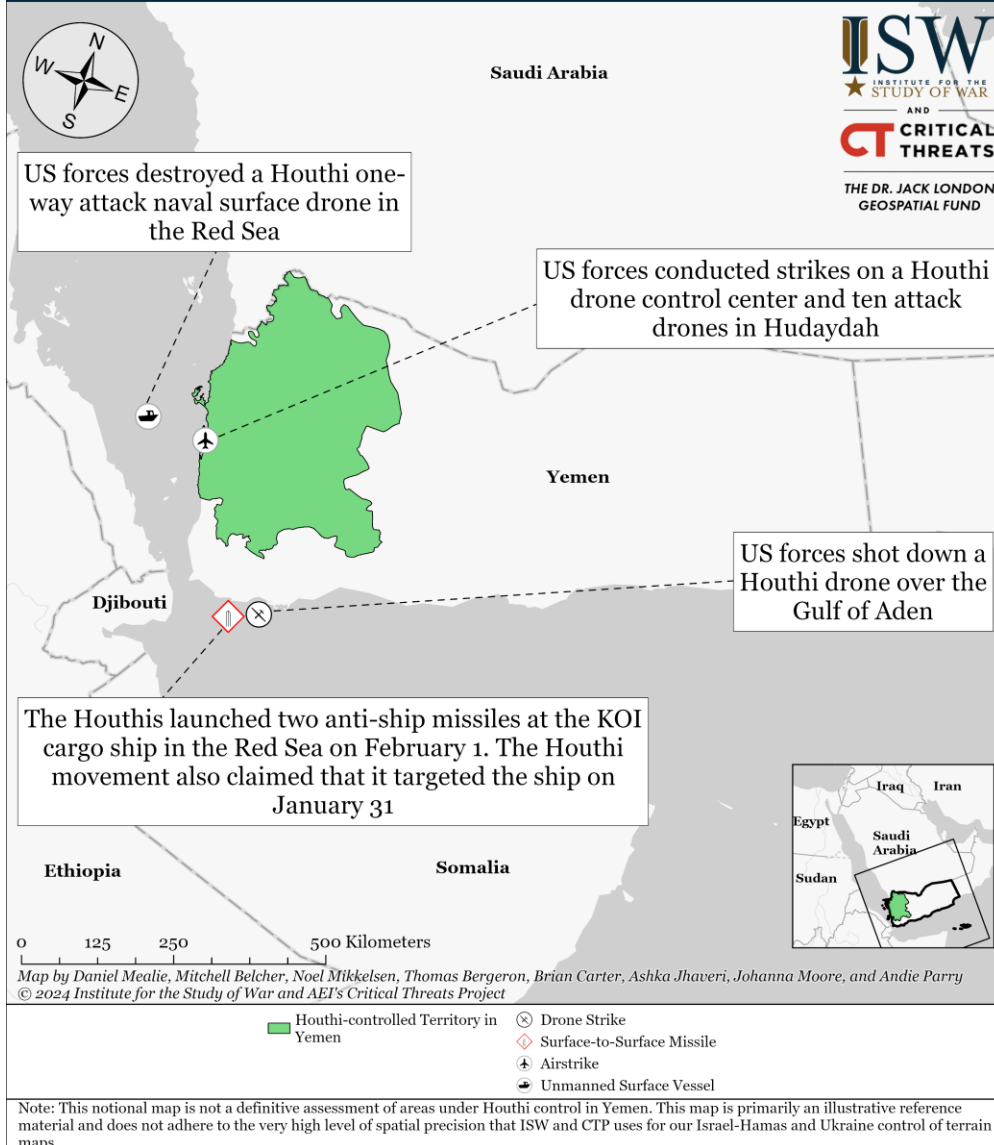
**CENTCOM said that it intercepted two Houthi attacks on international shipping on February 1.**<sup>[51]</sup> US forces shot down one drone over the Gulf of Aden. US forces also destroyed a Houthi one-way attack naval surface drone maneuvering towards international shipping lanes in the Red Sea. CENTCOM said that the naval surface drone “presented an imminent threat to merchant vessels and the US Navy ships in the area.”<sup>[52]</sup> The Houthis first used a naval surface drone during the Israel-Hamas war to attack international shipping lanes on January 4.<sup>[53]</sup>

**The Houthi movement claimed that it fired anti-ship ballistic missiles at the Liberian flagged, Bermuda-owned *KOI* cargo ship in the Red Sea on January 31.**<sup>[54]</sup> CENTCOM said that it monitored two anti-ship ballistic missiles fired toward the *KOI* in the Red Sea on February 1.<sup>[55]</sup> CTP-ISW cannot confirm whether the Houthis conducted more than one attack on the *KOI*. The Houthis claimed that the *KOI* was bound for an Israeli port.<sup>[56]</sup> Marine Traffic, a maritime analytics provider, reported that the *KOI* is bound for Djibouti in eastern Africa, not Israel.<sup>[57]</sup>

The Houthi military spokesperson claimed that the group targeted an unspecified British commercial vessel with anti-ship missiles in the Red Sea on February 1.<sup>[58]</sup> The spokesperson did not name the vessel or clarify when the attack occurred. He said that the attack was in retaliation for US-UK strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen. He also claimed that the vessel was headed to an Israeli port.

**Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian discussed the West Bank, the Israel-Hamas war, Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, and other unspecified regional developments with the Saudi Foreign Affairs Minister Faisal bin Farhan by phone on January 31.**<sup>[59]</sup> The Saudi Foreign Affairs Ministry said that the two officials discussed the latest developments in the Gaza Strip, focusing on security and humanitarian concerns. The Iranian Foreign Affairs Ministry reported that the two ministers discussed ending the war and the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. It added that they discussed restoring peace in the region. Abdollahian invited Farhan to visit Iran in the future, according to the Iranian Foreign Affairs Ministry.

# Houthi-controlled Territory in Yemen as of February 1, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



**CBS News reported on February 1 that the United States will conduct multiple strikes targeting Iranian personnel and facilities in Iraq and Syria over the coming days, according to unspecified US officials.**<sup>[60]</sup> CBS News reported that the strikes will be in retaliation for the January 28 Iran-backed militia drone attack targeting US forces in Jordan, which killed three US servicemembers and injured at least 30 others.<sup>[61]</sup>

Reuters reported on February 1 that the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) withdrew several of its senior and mid-ranking officers from Syria ahead of possible US strikes, according to unspecified regional sources “familiar with the matter.”<sup>[62]</sup> Local Syrian media also claimed on January 31 that the IRGC withdrew a senior officer from Syria.<sup>[63]</sup> Reuters caveated that the Iranian commanders would continue to remotely oversee Iranian efforts inside Syria with support from

Lebanese Hezbollah and other Iranian-backed Shia militias in Iraq. This caveat illustrates that Iran remains committed to its long-term project in Syria, even if it has temporarily recalled some of its officers to prevent further losses.[64] Israel already conducted a series of strikes in December 2023 and January 2024 that killed multiple senior IRGC officers in Syria.[65]

**The Iranian interior minister discussed the Israel-Hamas war with the Saudi ambassador to Iran in a meeting in Tehran on January 30.[66]** The Iranian minister called the situation in the Gaza Strip “the most important issue of the Islamic world,” before also highlighting the importance of distributing humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip. The Saudi ambassador said that the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia are on the “natural and correct path,” according to the Iranian readout. The Iranian interior minister previously served as Iranian defense minister and Quds Force commander. The Saudi Foreign Ministry did not publish a readout.

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[7] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-january-16-2024>

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