

Iran Update



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February 1, 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.

Click [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations, and [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of the ongoing opposition offensive in Syria. These maps are updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

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.

Hamas released three living male hostages, including one Israeli-American hostage, on February 1.[1] Hamas released two hostages in Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip, and one hostage at the Gaza Port, in the northern Gaza Strip.[2] This marked the first hostage release at the Gaza Port. Israel released 183 Palestinian prisoners into the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and Egypt.[3] Eighteen of the 183 prisoners whom Israel released were serving life sentences and 100 were being held without trial in Israel following Hamas' October 7 attack. The IDF dropped leaflets and warned Palestinians against marches and demonstrations in favor of Hamas in the West Bank following the release of prisoners.[4]

The Rafah border crossing resumed operations on February 1 in compliance with the Israel-Hamas ceasefire agreement.[5] The Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry reported 50 sick or wounded Palestinians exited via the crossing to Egypt for treatment on February 1.[6] The Israeli Shin Bet and Egypt review and approve each person in advance.[7] The IDF withdrew from the Rafah crossing to the neighboring Philadelphi corridor on January 31 and will maintain a presence around the crossing.[8] Staffers from the Palestinian Authority and the European Union assumed responsibility for the administrative affairs associated with the crossing.[9] Axios reported this marked the first Palestinian Authority activity in the Gaza Strip since the Hamas takeover of the strip in 2007.

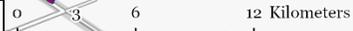
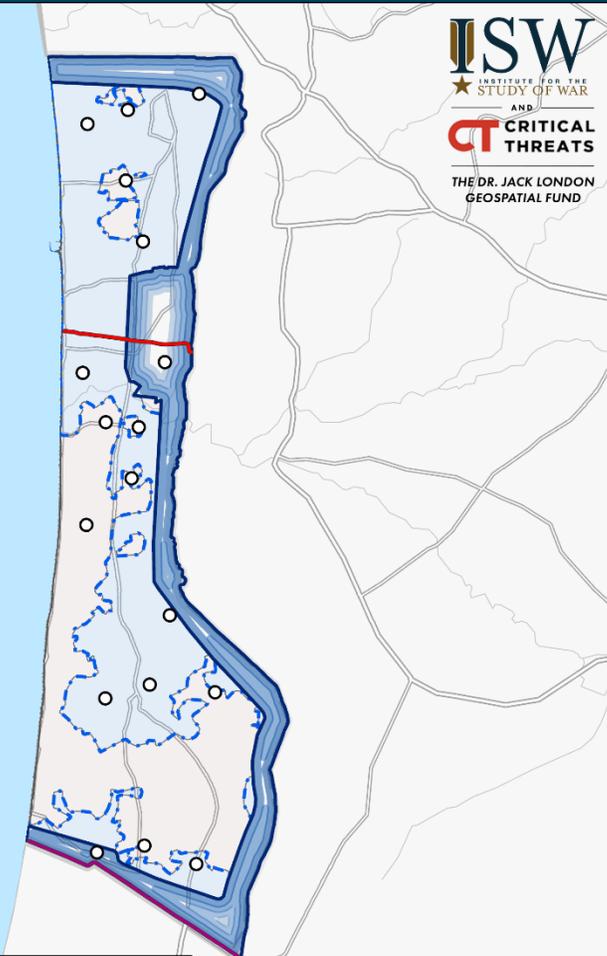
CTP-ISW has recorded no verifiable reports of kinetic activity in the Gaza Strip or attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel since the last data cutoff on January 31.

Israel-Hamas Ceasefire Lines

As of February 1, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Hamas released three total living Israeli hostages, including two in Khan Younis and a third at the Gaza Port

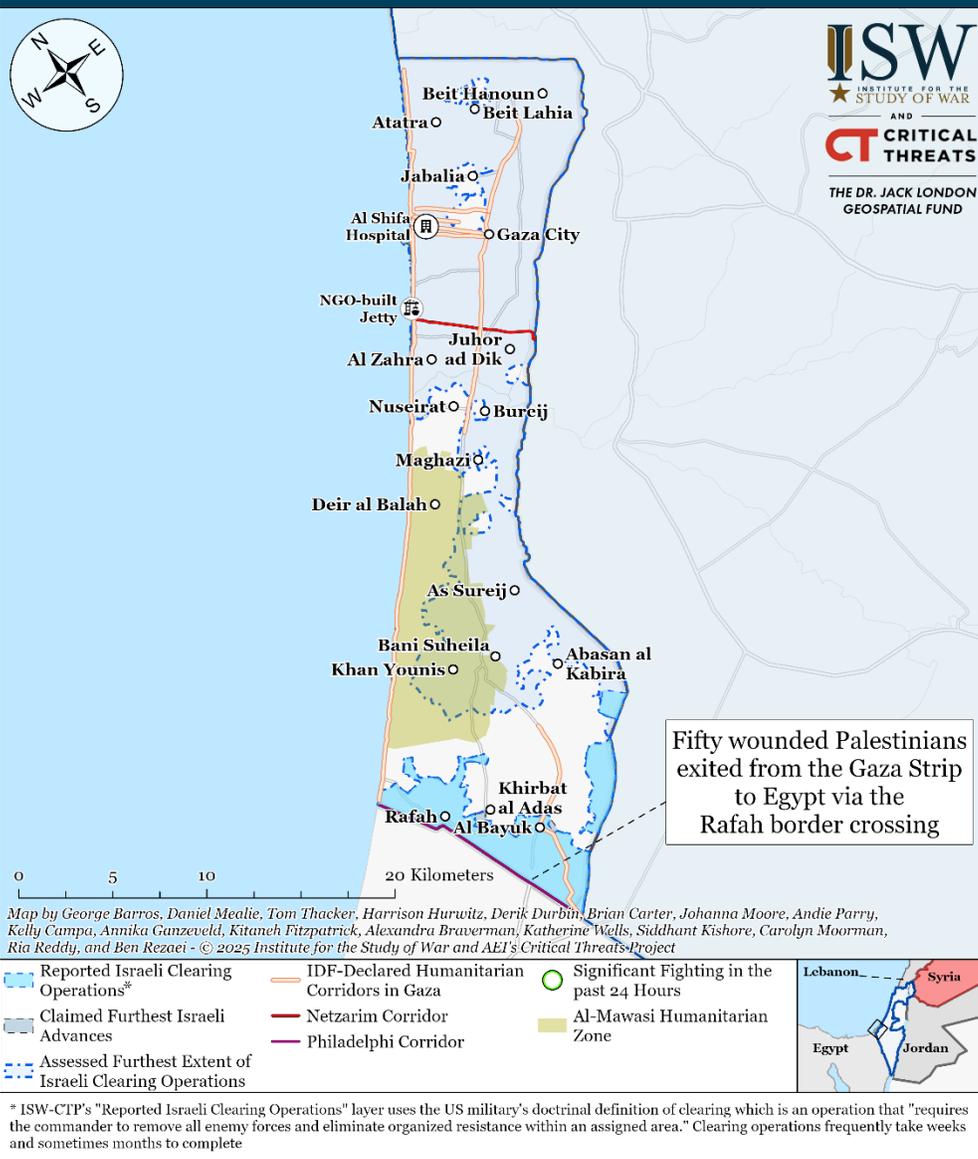


- Israeli-Hamas Ceasefire Buffer Zone
- Assessed Furthest Extent of Israeli Clearing Operations
- Philadelphi Corridor
- Netzarim Corridor

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Tom Thacker, Harrison Hurwitz, Derek Durbin, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Camp, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandros Braverman, Katherine Wells, Siddhant Kishore, Carolyn Moorman, Ria Reddy, and Ben Rezaei - © 2025 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of February 1, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Iranian-backed Iraqi State of Law Coalition head Nouri al Maliki made anti-Sunni sectarian statements after Sunni politicians recently raised long-held Sunni political demands. Maliki warned of attempts by ISIS, Baath party members, “and some of those who have other purposes” to circumvent the Iraqi political process in a speech on February 1.[10] Maliki said that Iraq must defend against “sectarians” and “Baathists” trying to overthrow the Iraqi government. Maliki specifically likened these supposed efforts to the recent overthrow of Syrian President Bashar al Assad. Maliki added that unspecified actors would not pressure his coalition to dissolve the Accountability and Justice Commission or allow “terrorists” to leave prison. Shia political parties have long manipulated the Accountability and Justice Commission to target political opponents, including Sunnis, and Maliki himself has used “terrorists” to describe his Sunni political opponents to discredit legitimate political

opposition as members of al Qaeda in Iraq or ISIS.[11] Maliki’s statements will almost certainly cause many Sunni political figures—most of whom have been active since the 2000s when Maliki led Iraq—to harden their opposition against the Iraqi Shia parties. The newly formed Iraqi United Sunni Leadership Coalition called on the Iraqi federal government to implement nine long-standing Sunni demands on January 18 that included dissolving the Accountability and Justice Commission and amending the General Amnesty Law.[12] The amendment to the General Amnesty law that passed Parliament on January 21 grants amnesty to many Iraqis, including some who were arrested under Article 4 of the Anti-Terrorism Law.[13]

Key Takeaways:

- **Gaza Strip:** Hamas released three living male hostages, including one Israeli-American hostage, on February 1. The Rafah border crossing also resumed operations on February 1 in compliance with the Israel-Hamas ceasefire agreement.
- **Iraq:** Iranian-backed Iraqi State of Law Coalition head Nouri al Maliki made anti-Sunni sectarian statements after Sunni politicians recently raised long-held Sunni political demands. Shia political parties have long manipulated the Accountability and Justice Commission to target political opponents, including Sunnis, and Maliki himself has used “terrorists” to describe his Sunni political opponents to discredit legitimate political opposition as members of al Qaeda in Iraq or ISIS.

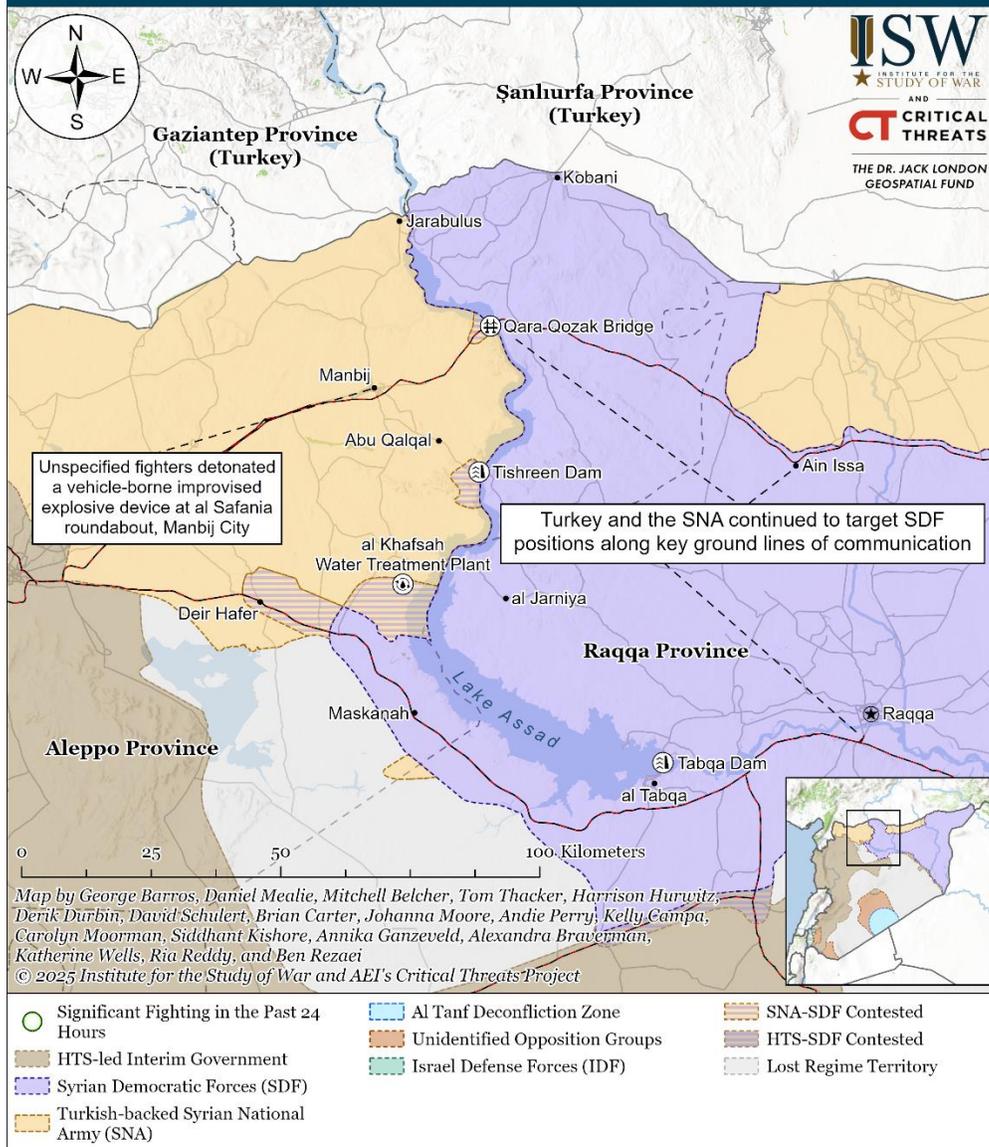
Syria

Turkey and the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) continued to target Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) positions along key ground lines of communication, isolating SDF forces at the Tishreen Dam and Qara Qozak Bridge. Turkey conducted multiple drone strikes on SDF positions in Bir Hassou, approximately 3 kilometers east of the Qara Qozak Bridge on the M4 highway.[14] Turkey also conducted four airstrikes targeting SDF positions in Kharous, approximately 3.8 kilometers north of Bir Hassou.[15] The SNA shelled SDF forces and positions near al Abd al Juma, east of Ain Issa.[16] Turkey also struck an SDF headquarters at al Ittihad University, al Kasrat, Raqqa Province.[17]

The SDF continued to target Turkish and SNA positions west of the Tishreen Dam and Qara Qozak Bridge. Geolocated footage posted on January 31 showed the SDF conducting multiple one-way drone attacks that targeted SNA vehicles west of Qishla Youssef Pasha village, northwest of the Tishreen Dam.[18] The People’s Defense Units (YPG), a component of the SDF, reported that its Women’s Protection Units (YPJ) conducted an attack on a Turkish base west of the Qara Qozak Bridge and destroyed a Turkish tank and radar system.[19] The YPG reported that its Martyr Haroun drone unit also conducted an attack on the base, destroying a second tank.[20] The Martyr Haroun drone unit conducted a separate attack on a Turkish and SNA drone launch site.[21]

Unspecified fighters detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) at the al Safania roundabout, Manbij City on February 1.[22] At least seven civilians were killed in the explosion. This is the fourth car bomb or VBIED attack in SNA-controlled territory since December 24.[23]

Assessed Control of Terrain around Manbij February 1, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Syrian media reported on February 1 that the SDF launched raids in Kishkiya, Abu Hamam, and Gharanij, Deir ez Zor Province, and arrested ten people.[24] Kurdish media reported that the SDF arrested 20 people “dealing with the former regime” in Gharanij.[25] Anti-SDF media claimed that the SDF also targeted members of local tribes.[26] The SDF has conducted raids in Deir ez Zor Province targeting SDF defectors and Arab tribal members in recent weeks.

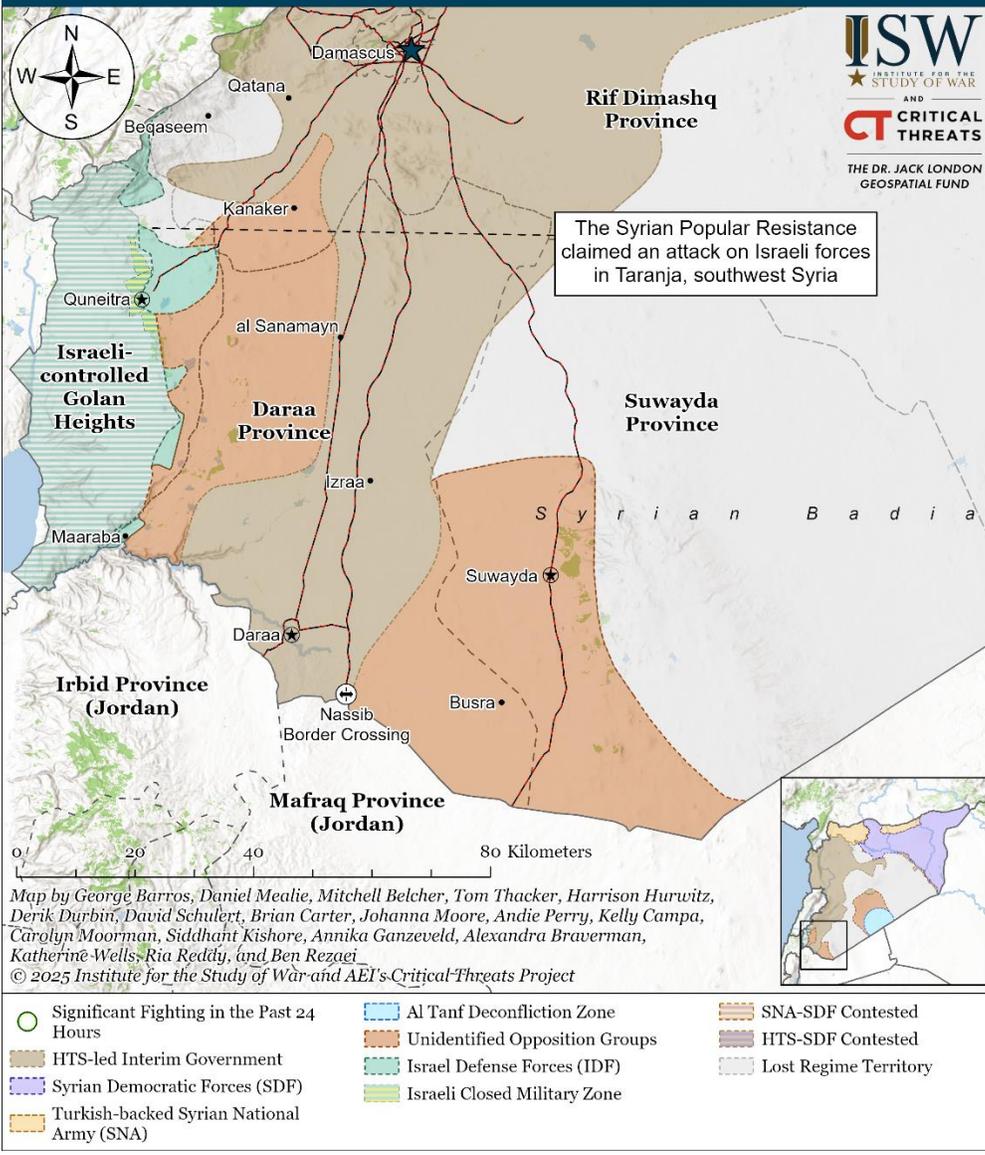
Former regime elements conducted two separate attacks on HTS-led interim Syrian security forces on February 1.[27] Syrian media reported on February 1 that former Assad regime members ambushed an HTS-led Department of Military Operations patrol on the M4 highway near Mukhtariyya, north of Latakia.[28] The attack reportedly killed at least one Department of Military Operations fighter and injured multiple other fighters. The Department of Military Operations has conducted raids targeting former regime elements in Latakia, an Assad regime stronghold, since the

fall of the Assad regime in December 2024.[29] Former regime elements separately fired small arms targeting Syrian interim government Public Security Department forces in a village on the eastern banks of the Euphrates River, Deir ez Zor Province.[30]

Pro-Assad Syrian Popular Resistance fighters claimed an attack on IDF soldiers in Taranja, Quneitra Province, on February 1. The Syrian Popular Resistance claimed that its fighters observed Israeli forces operating in the area and conducted an opportunistic attack.[31] The Syrian Popular Resistance claimed the attack resulted in several IDF casualties. The IDF confirmed that unspecified fighters attacked its forces and that the IDF returned fire.[32] The IDF denied that its forces suffered any casualties in the attack. This is the first Syrian Popular Resistance-claimed attack targeting Israeli forces since it announced its existence on December 31, 2024.[33] The Syrian Popular Resistance has claimed attacks over the past several weeks targeting HTS forces.[34] It remains unclear whether the group has had any real involvement in these attacks beyond claiming the attacks on social media, however.[35]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Southwestern Syria

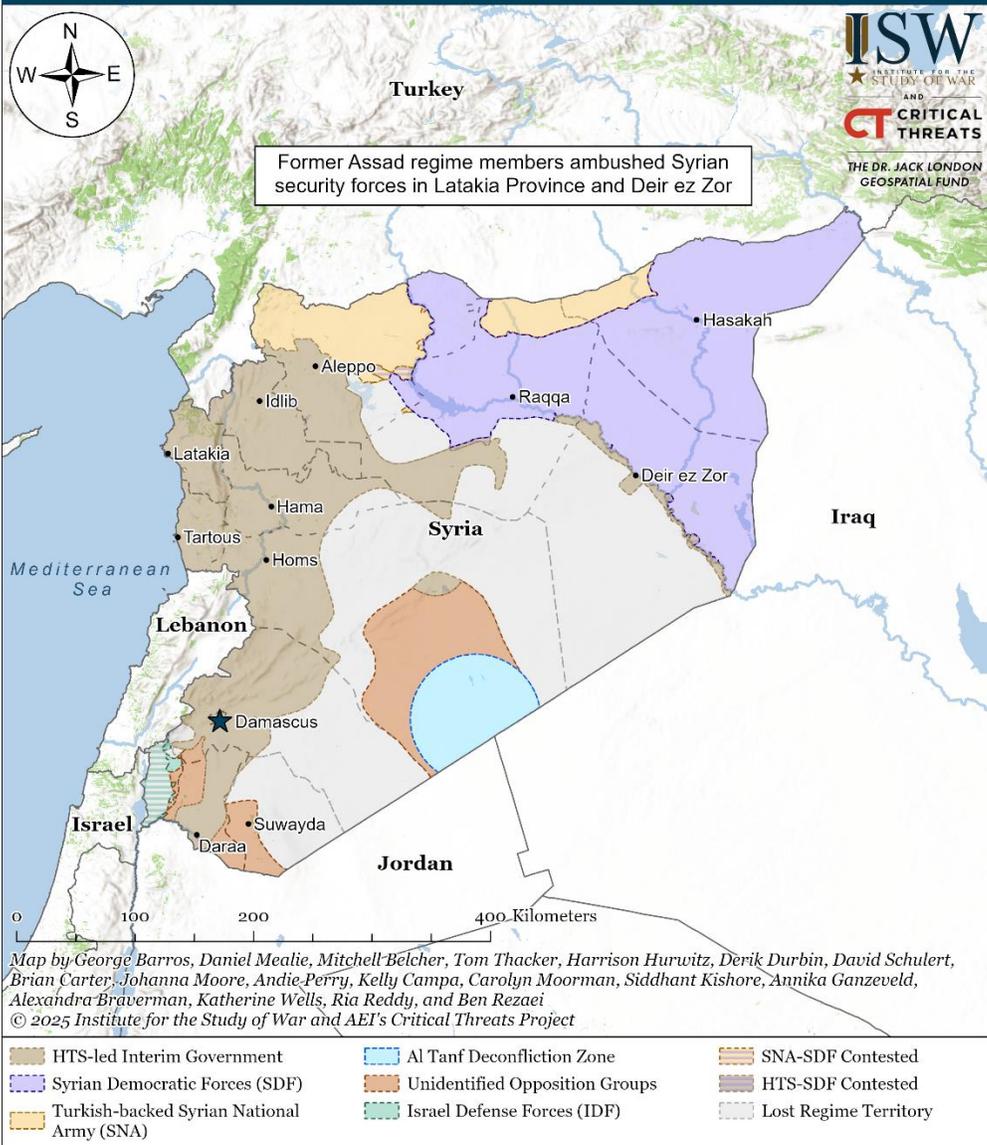
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The Director of the General Security Department in Homs reported that former Assad regime member Louay Talal Tayara died while in custody due to “violations” by the security forces that transported him.[36] Tayara previously worked in the National Defense Forces in Homs, and the General Security Department arrested him because he failed to settle his status with the interim government.[37] The Director of the General Security Department reported that the incident is under investigation and the perpetrators will be held accountable under the law regardless of group affiliation.[38] The HTS-led interim Syrian government’s ability to hold members of its security forces accountable for crimes is critical to ensuring its control over the various armed factions and maintaining public confidence in the government.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria

February 1, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



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

See the topline section.

Arabian Peninsula

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Harden the Houthi regime against internal dissent in Houthi-controlled areas
- Destroy the anti-Houthi opposition to control all of Yemen
- Erode Israeli will to continue the war in the Gaza Strip

Nothing significant to report.

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

The Gaza Strip

Israeli Prime Minister nominated Israeli Defense Ministry Director General Major General (res.) Eyal Zamir to serve as the next IDF Chief of Staff.[39] Zamir would replace Lieutenant General Herzi Halevi as IDF Chief of Staff in March 2025 after the Israeli cabinet approves the nomination.[40] Halevi announced his resignation on January 21 citing the IDF's failure to prevent Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel.[41] Zamir previously served as IDF deputy chief of staff and Southern Command commander.[42] Israeli media reported Zamir was a "close second" to Herzi Halevi in the previous race for IDF chief of staff in January 2023.

The IDF acknowledged on February 1 that it did not kill the Hamas Shati Battalion commander Haitham Khawajari in December 2023.[43] The IDF previously announced that it killed Khawajari in an airstrike in the Shati refugee camp.[44] Khawajari oversaw the release of American-Israeli hostage Keith Seigel at the Gaza Port on February 1.[45] The Shati Battalion was part of the Hamas Gaza City Brigade, which was responsible for Gaza City Governorate.[46] The IDF previously acknowledged on January 22 that it did not kill Hamas Beit Hanoun Battalion commander Hussein Fayyad, though the IDF claimed that it killed Fayyad in May 2024.[47] The Hamas Beit Hanoun Battalion was subordinate to the Hamas North Gaza Brigade, which was responsible for North Gaza Governorate.[48]

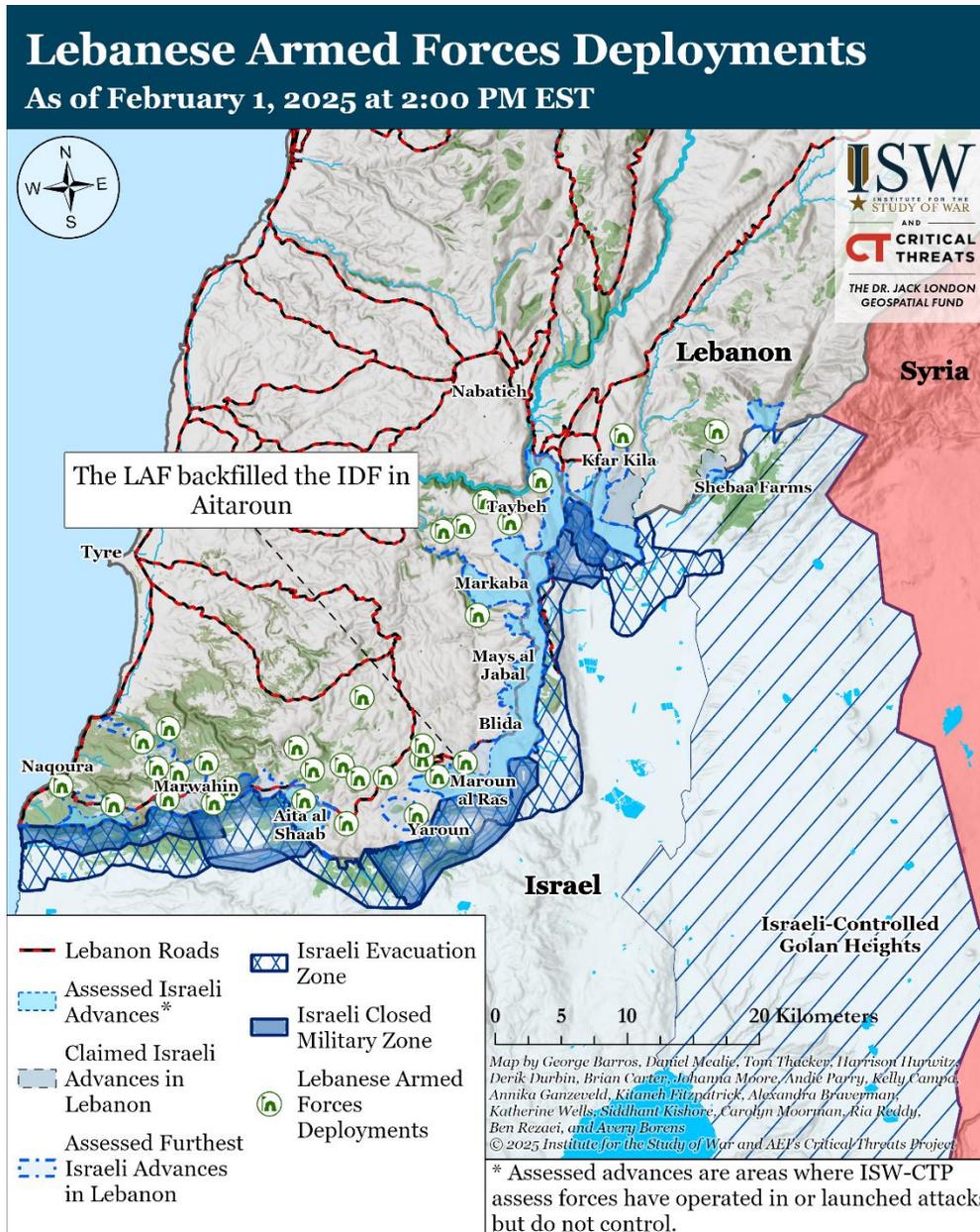
Israeli media, citing unspecified Israeli officials, reported Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly held meetings on January 31 to discuss the possibility that the IDF will resume operations in the Gaza Strip.[49] The Israeli officials reportedly stated Netanyahu asked the IDF to present operational plans for what these resumed operations could look like.

US President Donald Trump discussed the relocation of Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip to Egypt in a phone call with Egyptian President Abdel Fateh al Sisi on February 1.[50] Various Arab countries including Egypt rejected Trump's idea on February 1. The

phone call follows an Egyptian state-sponsored protest against the relocation of Palestinians to Egypt by hundreds of Egyptians at the Rafah border crossing on January 31.[51]

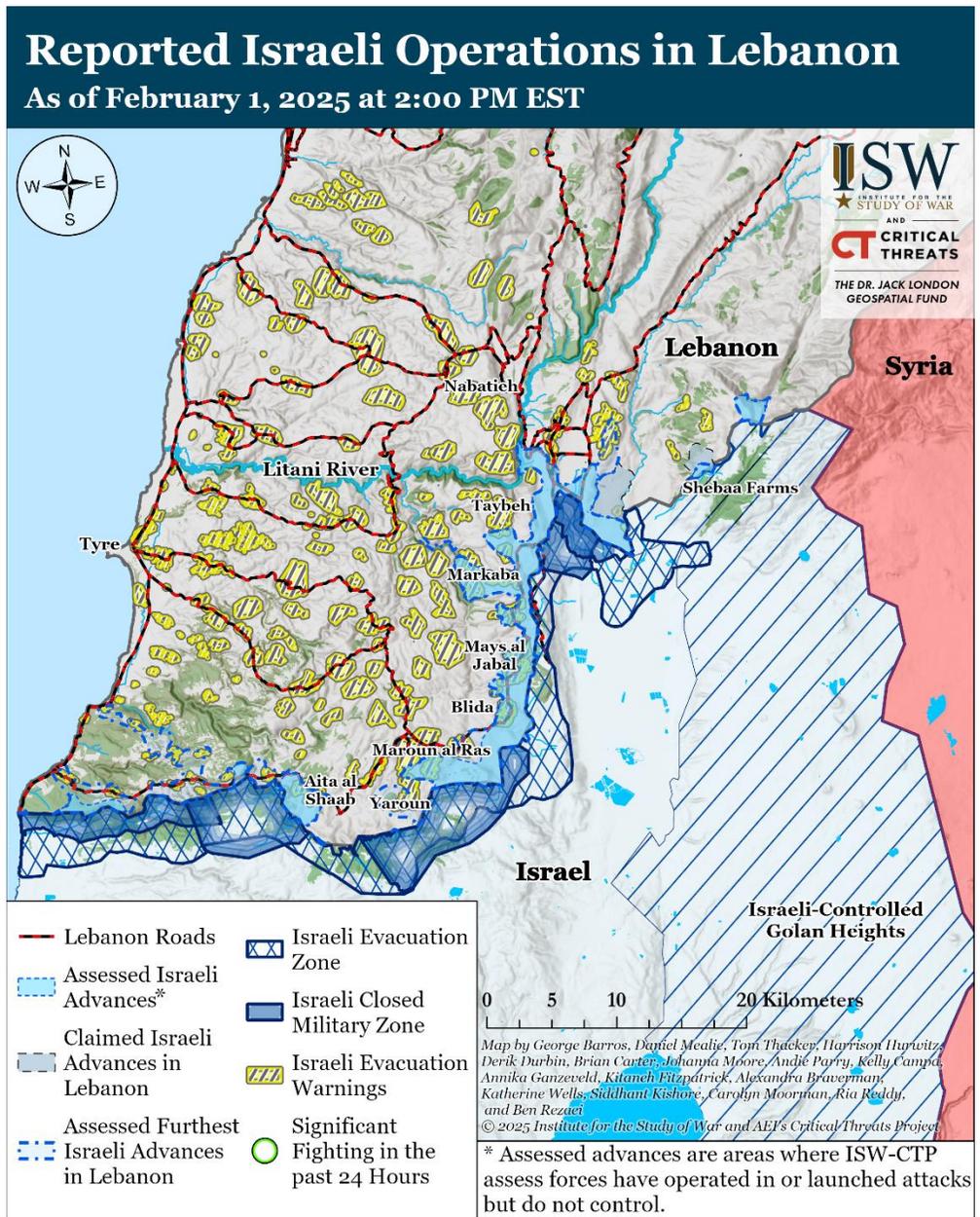
Lebanon

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) backfilled an IDF position in Aitaroun town on February 1.[52] The LAF acknowledged IDF presence in neighboring towns including Odaisseh, Bint Jbeil, and Rab al Thalatheen. The LAF previously acknowledged its deployment to Aitaroun on January 11.[53]



Acting LAF commander Major General Hassan Awde inspected troops on February 1 at the Fifth Intervention Regiment in Kfardounin, Bint Jbeil District, and at the Second

Intervention Regiment in Shawakir, Tyre District.[54] Awde discussed returning residents to southern Lebanon and the LAF mission in a meeting with LAF leadership in Sarbin, Bint Jbeil District.



West Bank

The IDF continued its counterterrorism operation in the West Bank on February 1. The IDF conducted two drone strikes in the Jenin area that targeted a group of armed fighters in Jenin city and a vehicle with terror operatives in Qabatiya, Jenin Governorate.[55] Israeli media reported, citing the Palestinian Authority-run Health Ministry, that the drone strikes killed four Palestinians. Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fighters fired small arms targeting Israeli soldiers and vehicles in Jenin on February 1.[56] The PIJ, Hamas, and al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades joint operations room claimed that it trapped 10 Israeli soldiers in a building and fired small arms at them.[57]

The Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades separately fired small arms and detonated improvised explosive devices (IEDs) targeting the IDF in Nablus.[58]

Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy unveiled a new underground missile depot in southern Iran on February 1. IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami and IRGC Navy Commander Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri visited the site.[59]

The IRGC claimed that the facility contains medium-range Ghadr-380 anti-ship cruise missiles with a range of 1000 km, reportedly with anti-jamming technology, smart guidance, and rapid launch capability. The IRGC previously unveiled an underground missile depot containing Emad, Ghadr, and Qiam ballistic missiles on January 10, which reportedly supported Iran's missile attacks against Israel in April and October 2024.[60]

Iranian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Vahid Jalalzadeh met with senior Lebanese officials in Beirut on February 1.[61] Jalalzadeh met with Lebanese Foreign Affairs Minister Abdallah Bou Habib and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and stressed Iran's support for the Axis of Resistance.

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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