

Iran Update



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Information Cutoff: February 16, 2025, 2:00pm 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.

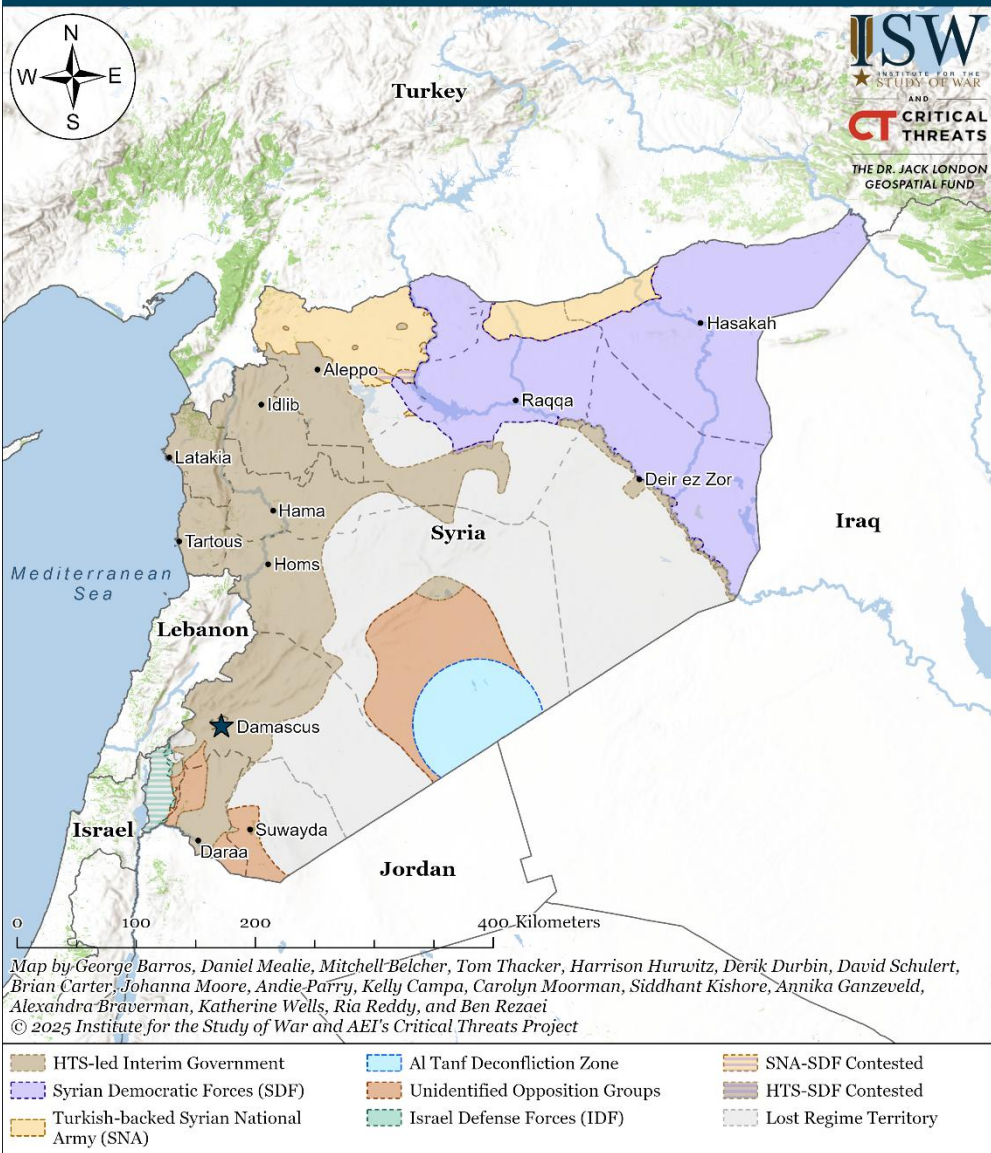
We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We utterly condemn violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

NOTE: CTP and ISW will publish abbreviated updates on Saturdays and Sundays after February 8, 2025. We may publish full updates as events warrant, however.

Key Takeaways:

- **Syria:** The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) continued to shell Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) positions along the M4 highway north of Raqqa on February 14 and 15.
- **Syrian Constitution:** The National Dialogue Conference Preparatory Committee held its first “dialogue session” in Homs Province on February 16.
- **Iraq:** Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leader Masoud Barzani met with a Turkish parliamentary delegation in Erbil on February 16 to discuss an expected deal between Turkey and imprisoned Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan.
- **Iranian Nuclear Program:** US National Security Adviser Michael Waltz stated that US President Donald Trump is “deadly serious” about Iran “never” having a nuclear weapon during an interview with Fox News on February 16.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria
February 16, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST

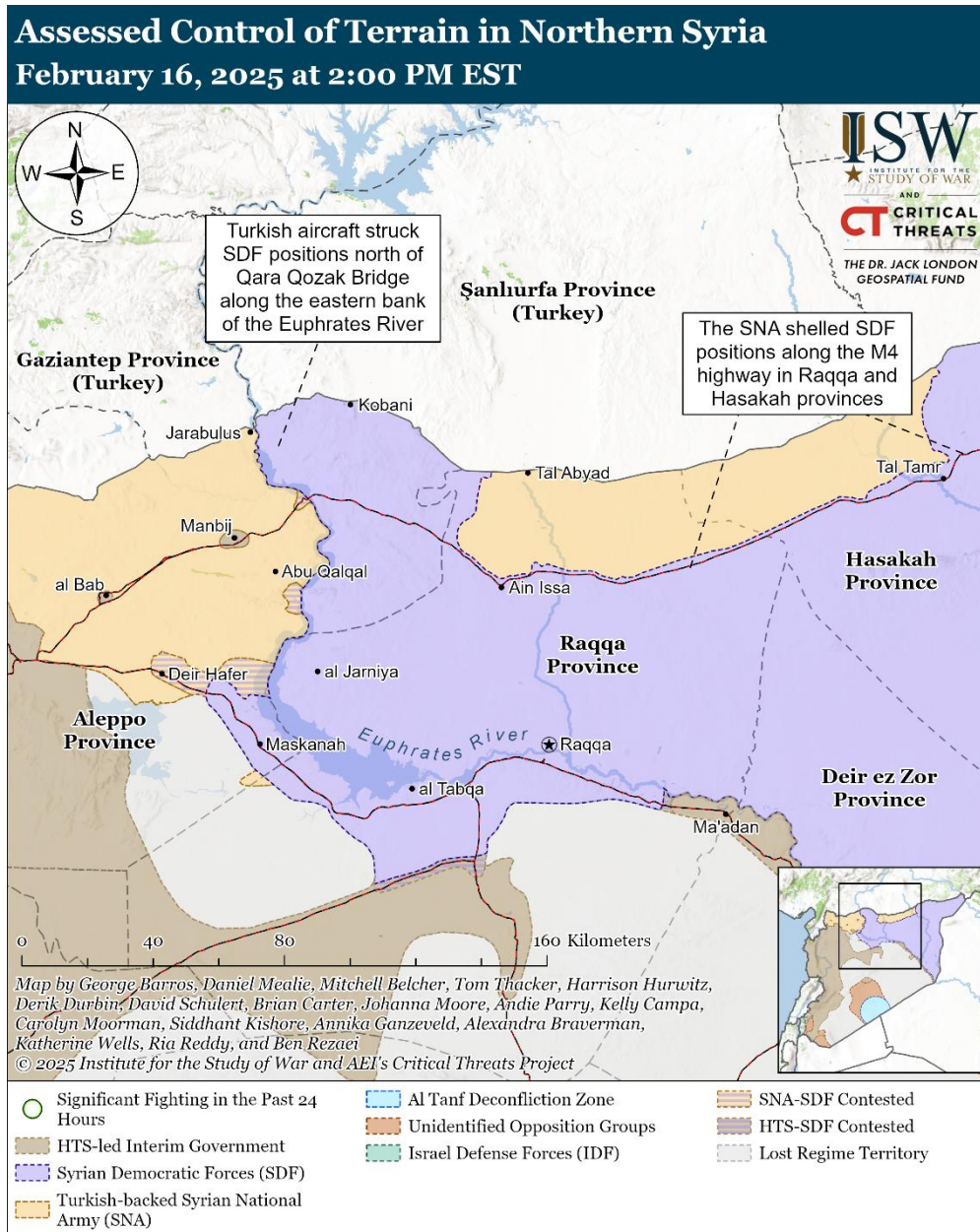


Syria

The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) continued to shell Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) positions along the M4 highway north of Raqqa on February 14 and 15. Anti-SDF media reported that the SNA shelled SDF positions in Tarwazia and Ain Fawar along the M4 highway.[1] The SNA and SDF have exchanged artillery fire near Tarwazia since February 14.[2] The SNA also reportedly shelled SDF positions in Dardara, near Tal Tamr.[3] The SDF and SNA have exchanged artillery fire along the SDF-SNA frontlines in Raqqa and Hasakah Provinces since the SNA began mobilizing forces at these frontlines on January 8.[4]

Anti-SDF media reported that Turkey struck SDF positions north of Qara Qozak Bridge along the eastern bank of the Euphrates on February 16.[5] Turkey has repeatedly targeted

SDF positions across the Euphrates River from Jarabulus, including Zor Maghar and al Shuyoukh, since February 12.[6]



Syrian Interim Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani called on countries to lift sanctions on the new Syrian administration to aid the Syrian reconstruction process at the Munich Security Conference on February 15.[7] Shaibani separately signaled that the next Syrian government will be based on “competence” and not on “sectarian quotas.” Shaibani also called on Israel to adhere to the 1974 disengagement agreement and called the Golan Heights Syrian territory. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan confirmed that Turkey has already started talks with the United States about lifting sanctions on Syria.

The National Dialogue Conference Preparatory Committee held its first “dialogue session” in Homs Province on February 16.[8] Syrian President Ahmed al Shara ordered the committee to facilitate “deliberations” and “consultations” with citizens about the National Dialogue Conference.[9]

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

Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leader Masoud Barzani met with a Turkish parliamentary delegation in Erbil on February 16 to discuss an expected deal between Turkey and imprisoned Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan. The delegation included pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy (DEM) Party members Pervin Buldan and Sureyya Onder and Democratic Regions Party (DBP) co-chair Keski Bayindir.[10] Buldan and Onder have met with Ocalan twice since December 2024.[11] The delegation briefed Barzani on their recent meetings with Ocalan and conveyed a message to Barzani from Ocalan, according to Barzani’s office.[12] Ocalan is expected to make an upcoming public call on the PKK to lay down its arm in exchange for his release from prison in Turkey.[13] Senior PKK leaders have suggested that the PKK would refuse to disarm without a national conference or further dialogue, however.[14] Barzani called on all parties to “intensify their efforts to reach a conclusion” and offered his support for the process.[15]

The Turkish delegation is scheduled to meet with senior KDP leader and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Nechirvan Barzani and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) leader Bafel Talabani on February 17.[16] Turkish media reported that Ocalan may make the call on the PKK after the Turkish delegation concludes its meetings in Erbil.[17]

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

Nothing significant to report.

The Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

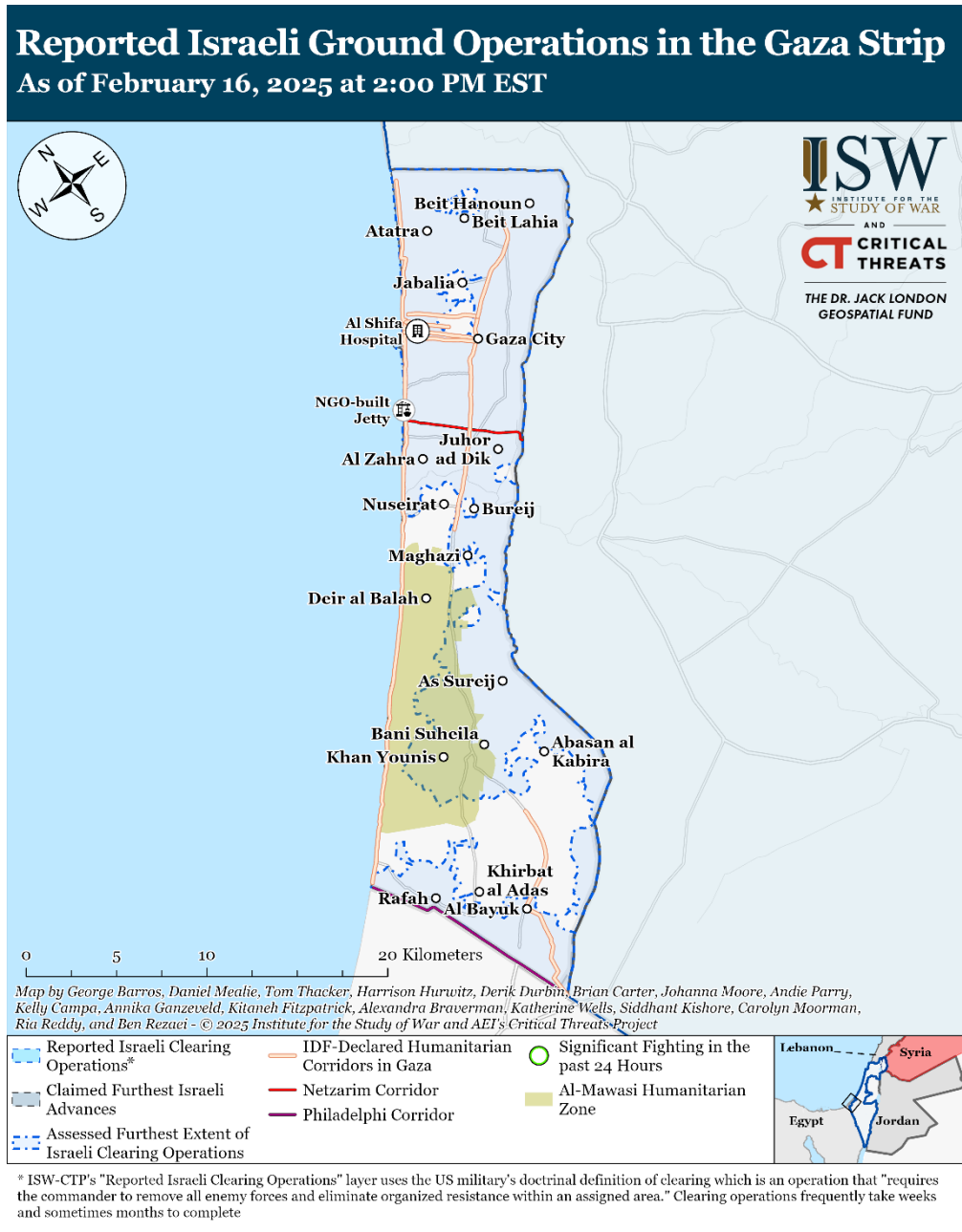
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- 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

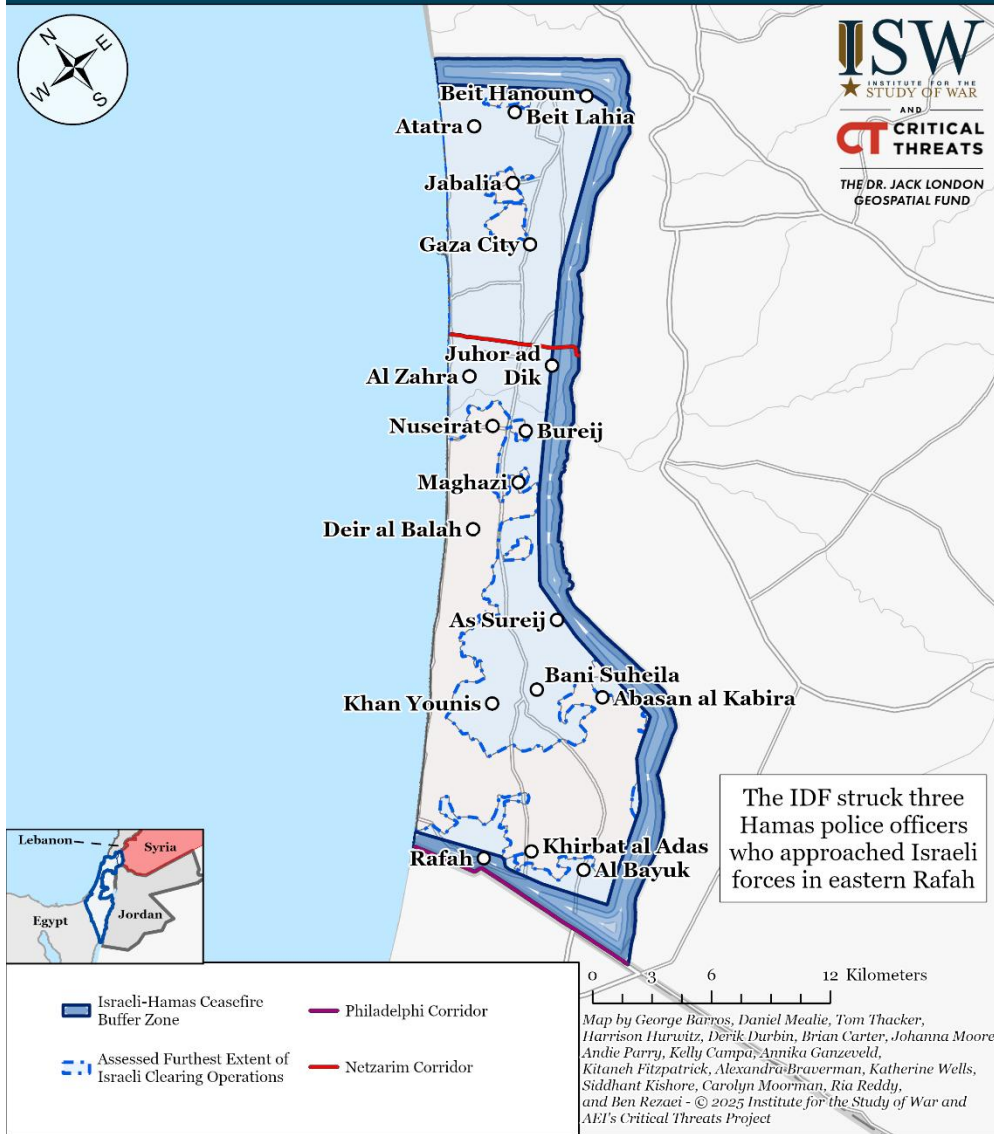
The Gaza Strip

The IDF Air Force struck and killed at least three Hamas police officers moving toward Israeli forces in eastern Rafah on February 16.[18] Hamas condemned the strike and accused Israeli forces of violating the ceasefire.[19] The IDF Air Force also fired warning shots at a vehicle in al Mughraqa, central Gaza Strip, after suspects tried to drive into the northern Gaza Strip through an unapproved route.[20]



Israel-Hamas Ceasefire Lines

As of February 16, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST

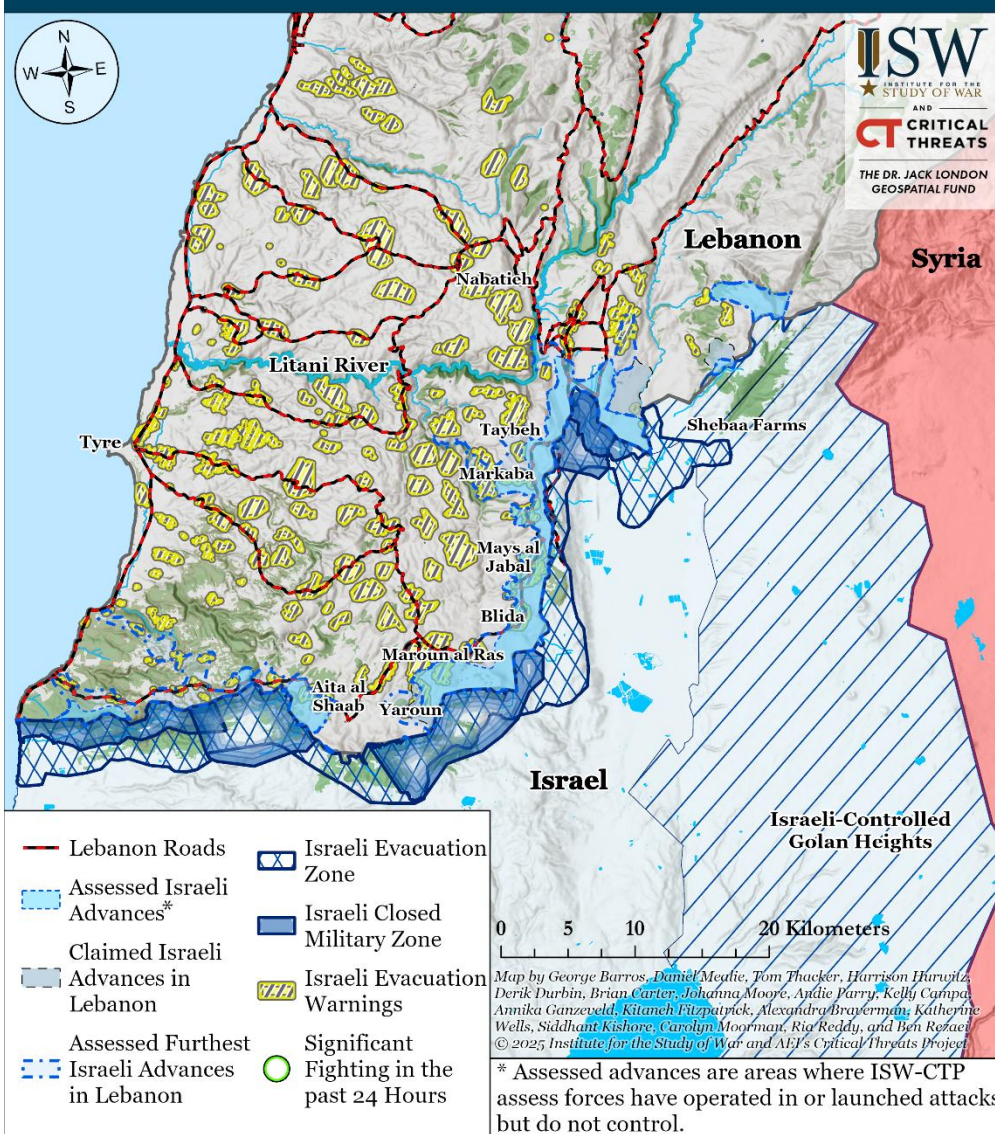


Lebanon

Hezbollah media reported that the IDF destroyed infrastructure north of Kfar Chouba in southeastern Lebanon on February 16.[21] The source claimed that Israeli tanks and a bulldozer advanced into the forested area earlier in the day.[22] Geolocated footage published on February 16 shows Israeli forces detonating a hillside near a water tower in Kfar Chouba.[23]

Reported Israeli Operations in Lebanon

As of February 16, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



West Bank

Nothing Significant to Report.

Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

US National Security Adviser Michael Waltz stated that US President Donald Trump is “deadly serious” about Iran “never” having a nuclear weapon during an interview with Fox News on February 16.[24] Waltz stressed that Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon is an “existential” threat to Israel and could ignite a “nuclear arms race” in the Middle East. Waltz added that Trump is willing to take “whatever action is necessary” to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon but is still willing to negotiate with Iran “if they want to give up their entire [nuclear] program and not play games” as Iran has done in past negotiations.

Iranian Civil Aviation Organization confirmed on February 16 that Iran had halted all flights from Iran to Lebanon until February 18 at the request of Lebanese authorities.[25]

This comes after recent pro-Hezbollah protests outside Beirut's Rafic Hariri International Airport after Lebanese authorities prevented the landing of an Iranian Mahar Air flight, which was likely smuggling cash to Hezbollah, from landing in Beirut.[26]

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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BABELSTREET

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[7] [www dot sana.sy/?p=2190142](http://www.dot.sana.sy/?p=2190142)

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