

Iran Update, February 22, 2024

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Information Cutoff: 2:00pm 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.

Iran and the Houthis are likely using their attacks in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden to test and refine their approach to striking naval targets. Houthi leader Abdulmalik al Houthi stated on February 22 that the group will “escalate” its operations targeting shipping around the Red Sea.[1] Abdulmalik added that the group would introduce “submarine weapons,” likely referring to unmanned underwater vehicles (UUV), but gave no further details.[2] CENTCOM reported that the Houthis used a UUV for the first time to threaten shipping around the Red Sea on February 17.[3] The Houthis — enabled directly by Iran — have used combinations of cruise and ballistic missiles as well as aerial, surface, and underwater drones to attack civilian and military vessels around the Red Sea since November 2023. Iranian military advisers are providing targeting intelligence to support the Houthis’ attacks targeting US naval vessels.[4] US naval vessels have regularly intercepted Houthi munitions targeting civilian and military vessels off the coast of Yemen. These Houthi attacks provide Iran and the Houthis opportunities to evaluate the effectiveness of different strike packages to understand how they can evade and overwhelm US defenses more effectively.

Key Takeaways:

- **Yemen:** Iran and the Houthis are likely using their attacks in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden to test and refine their approach to striking naval targets.
- **Northern Gaza Strip:** The Israel Defense Forces 162nd Division continued to conduct clearing operations in Zaytoun, eastern Gaza City.
- **Southern Gaza Strip:** Israeli forces continued to conduct clearing operations in western Khan Younis.
- **Political Negotiations:** Hamas said that there may be progress in negotiations with Israel over a prisoner-for-hostage deal.
- **Iraq:** Former Iraqi Parliament Speaker Mohammad al Halbousi discussed the US military presence in Iraq with US Senate Foreign Relations Committee member Chris Coons and US Ambassador to Iraq Alina Romanowski.
- **Iran:** Iranian Strategic Foreign Relations Council Chairman Kamal Kharazi met with senior Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad officials in Tehran.

Israel-Hamas War as of February 22, 2024, 2:00 PM ET

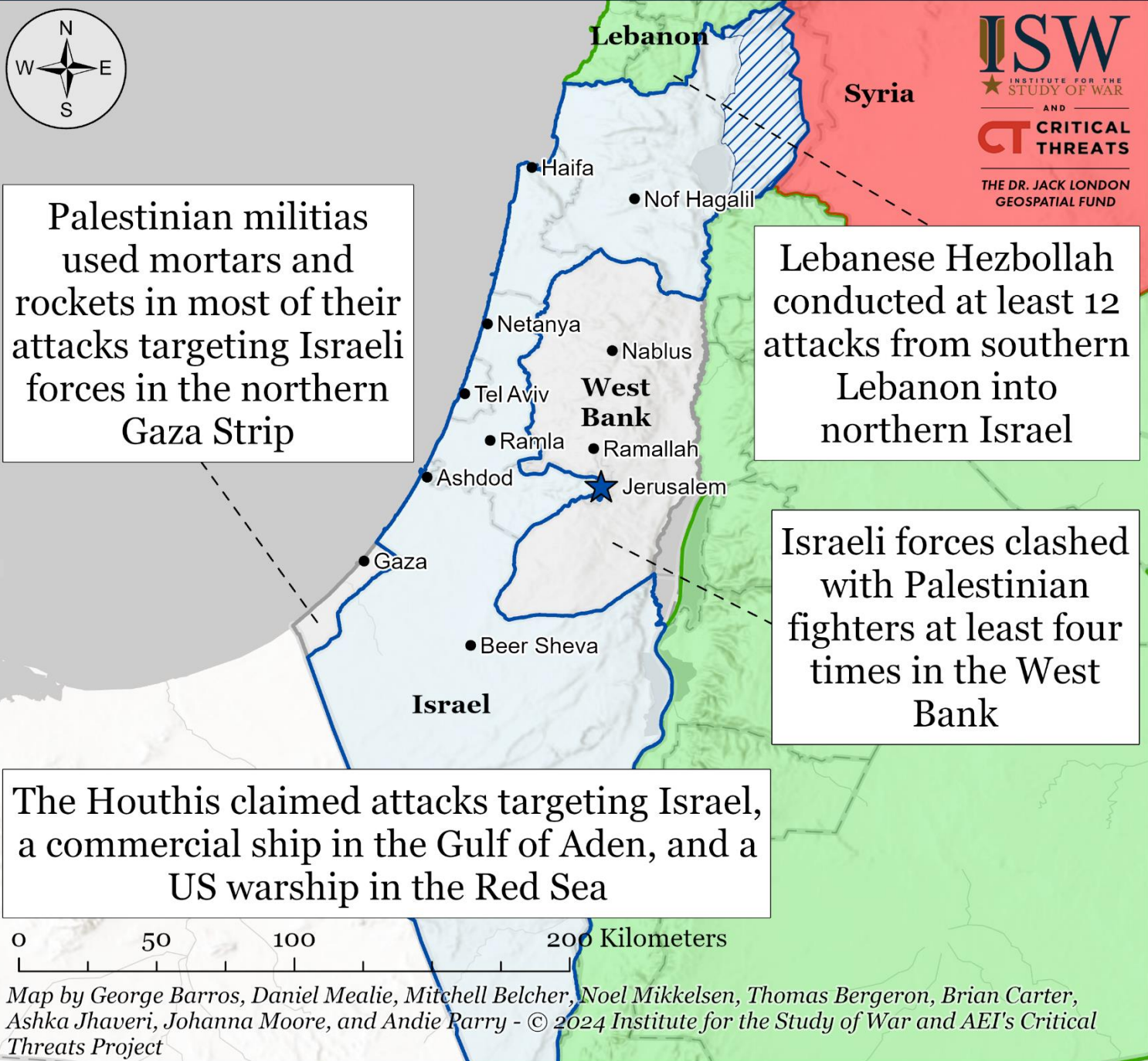


Palestinian militias used mortars and rockets in most of their attacks targeting Israeli forces in the northern Gaza Strip

Lebanese Hezbollah conducted at least 12 attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel

Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters at least four times in the West Bank

The Houthis claimed attacks targeting Israel, a commercial ship in the Gulf of Aden, and a US warship in the Red Sea



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
- Gaza Strip and West Bank
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Golan Heights

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) 162nd Division continued to conduct clearing operations in Zaytoun, eastern Gaza City, on February 22.^[5] Israeli forces launched new, “division-wide” clearing operation in Zaytoun on February 20.^[6] Israeli forces killed approximately 20 fighters and directed airstrikes to attack over 10 unspecified targets. Palestinian militias, including Hamas, clashed with Israeli forces in Zaytoun using small arms and anti-tank rocket-propelled grenades (RPG).^[7]

Palestinian militias used mortars and rockets in most of their attacks targeting Israeli forces in the northern Gaza Strip on February 22.^[8] CTP-ISW cannot determine the point of origin of any of the indirect fire attacks. The militias targeted Israeli positions in Zaytoun as well as in the northeastern Gaza Strip.^[9] The Palestinian Mujahideen Movement mortared an IDF “dispatch site” east of Beit Hanoun.^[10] The Palestinian Mujahideen Movement is a Palestinian faction aligned with Hamas that has expressed close ties with Iran.

The IDF Nahal Brigade (assigned to the 162nd Division) located and destroyed rocket launchers during clearing operations in the central Gaza Strip on February 22.^[11] Palestinian fighters had rigged the launchers to explode, according to the IDF.

Israeli forces continued to conduct clearing operations in western Khan Younis on February 22. The IDF Givati Brigade (assigned to the 162nd Division) used sniper fire to ambush a Palestinian fighter cell in western Khan Younis.^[12] The IDF 89th Commando Brigade (assigned to the 98th Division) located weapons and documents affiliated with Hamas during clearing operations in the area.^[13] The Hamas-run Gazan Health Ministry reported on February 22 that Israeli forces raided Nasser Hospital in western Khan Younis shortly after withdrawing from it.^[14] Nasser Hospital had been the largest functioning hospital in the Gaza Strip until Israeli forces raided it on February 15.^[15] Israel received “credible intelligence” that Hamas-held hostages were in the hospital and detained “hundreds” of Hamas fighters there.^[16]

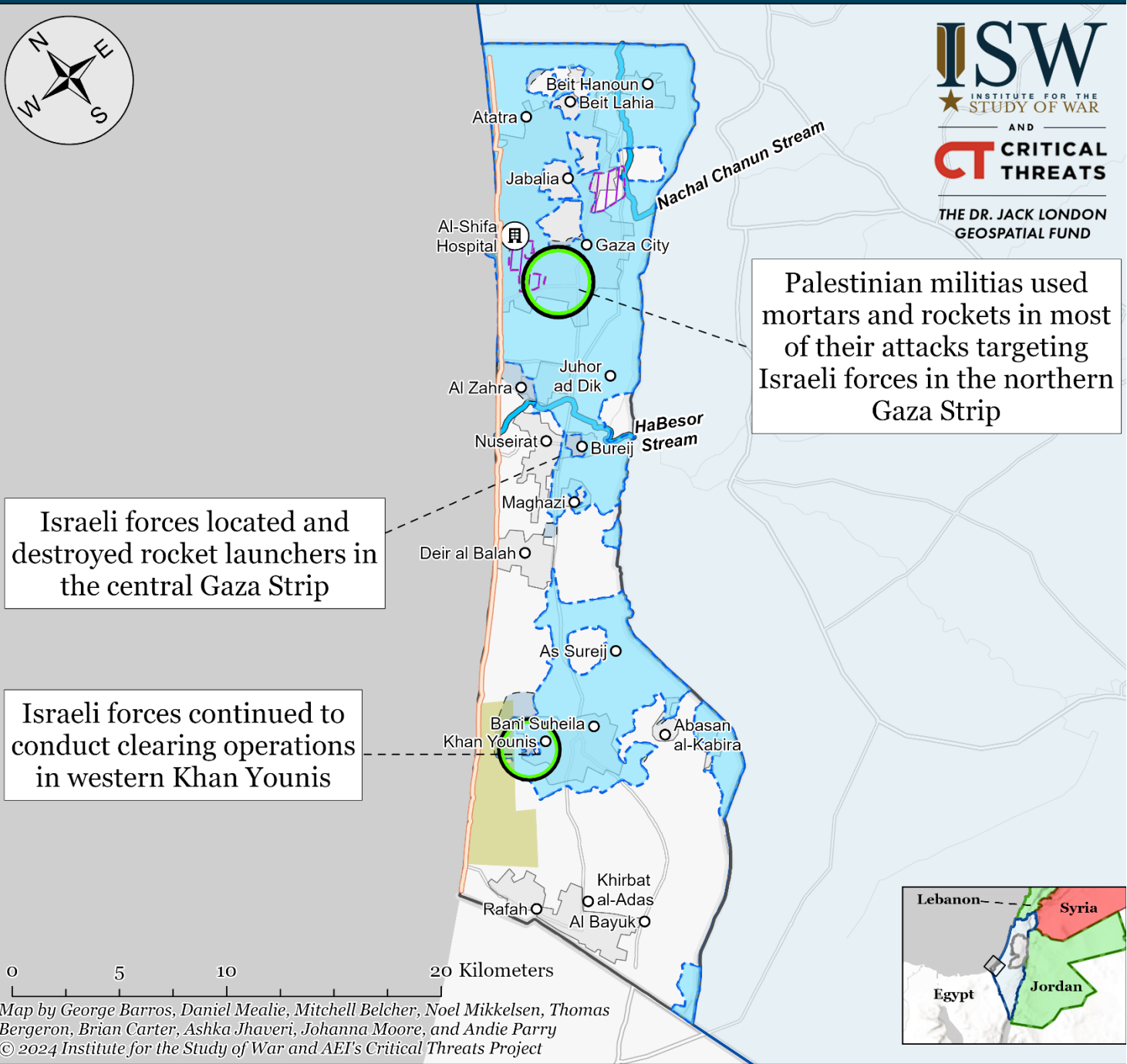
Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of February 22, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Palestinian militias used mortars and rockets in most of their attacks targeting Israeli forces in the northern Gaza Strip

Israeli forces located and destroyed rocket launchers in the central Gaza Strip

Israeli forces continued to conduct clearing operations in western Khan Younis



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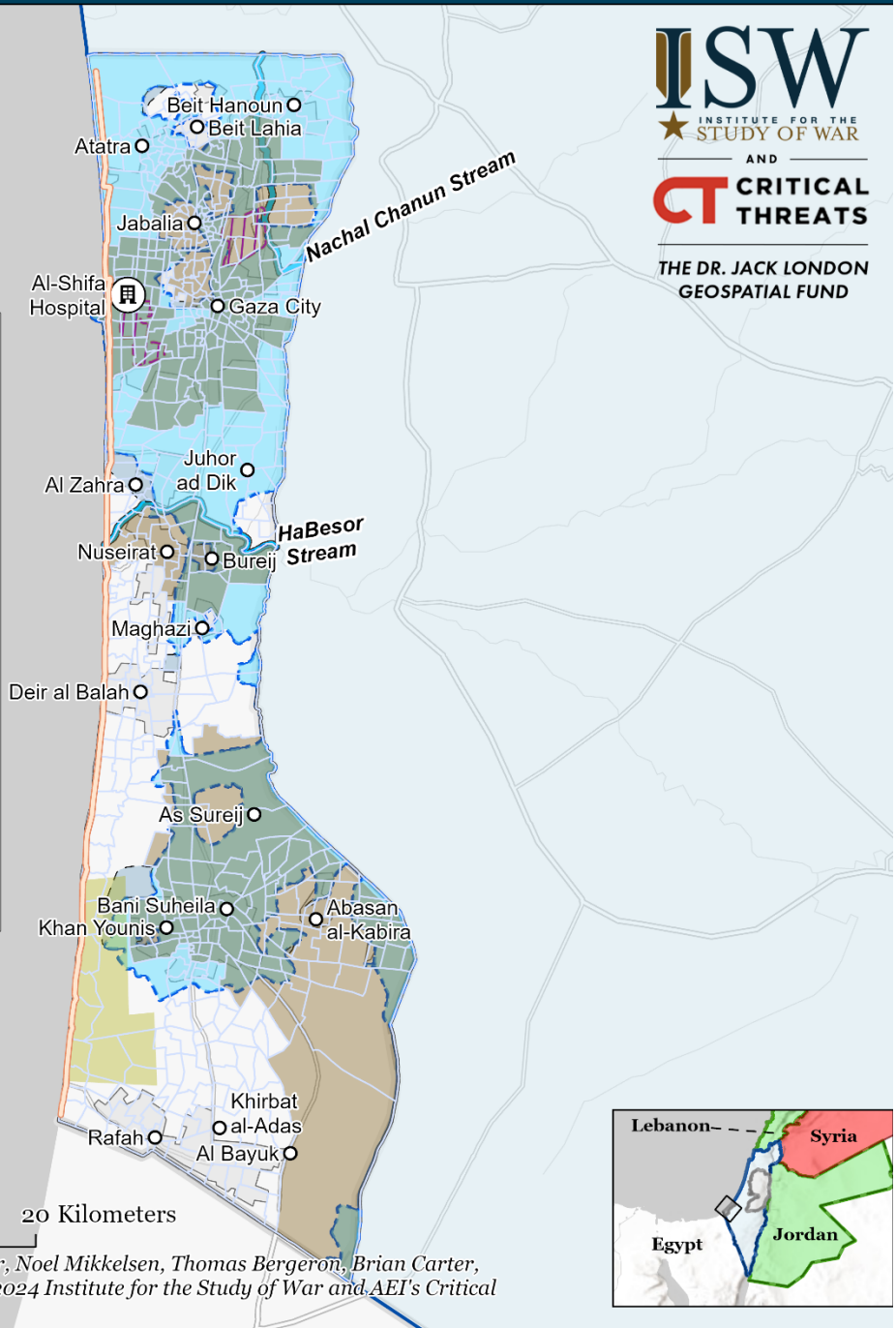
- Israel
- Gaza Strip
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230
- Significant Water Obstacles
- Densely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

* 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 22, 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

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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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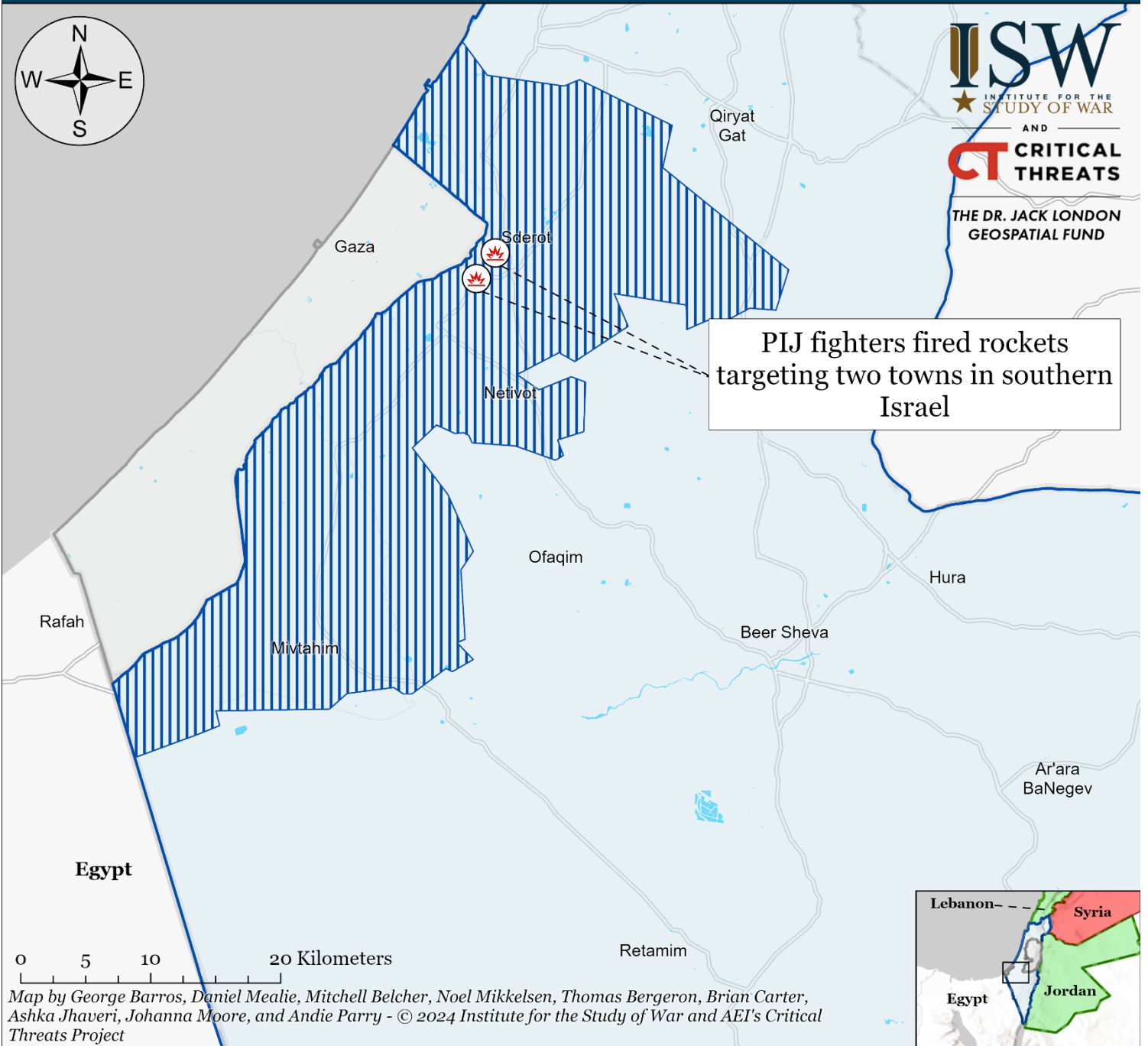
Hamas said that there may be progress in negotiations with Israel over a prisoner-for-hostage deal. Hamas International Relations head Musa Abu Marzouk said on February 22, “there may be progress in the negotiations of a prisoner swap in the near future.”^[17] *The Wall Street Journal* reported on February 22 that Egyptian officials said that Hamas is ready to lower the number of Palestinian fighters it wants released as part of a deal.^[18] Israel previously refused to further engage in hostage talks because Hamas demanded that Israel release thousands of Palestinian prisoners as part of the deal.^[19] The Egyptian officials also stated that Hamas will not release Israeli soldiers until there is a permanent ceasefire and a full Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Hamas wants a plan where more hostages are released only if progress is made in ending the war during a ceasefire. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly emphasized that Israeli forces will continue the ground offensive until Hamas is defeated.^[20]

Israel agreed to send negotiators to Paris for hostage talks on February 23 after the United States urged Israel to do so.^[21] Israeli media reported on February 22 that the Israeli war cabinet approved sending negotiators to Paris.^[22] US National Security Council Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa Brett McGurk met with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant during a meeting in Israel on February 22.^[23] McGurk told Gallant that there has been progress in the negotiations between Egyptians and Qatari mediators and Hamas, according to three sources with knowledge on the issue who spoke to Axios.^[24] CIA director Bill Burns is expected to travel to Paris on February 23 to hold talks with Qatari and Egyptian officials.^[25]

Gallant told McGurk that the Israeli government “will expand the authority given to our hostage negotiators” while simultaneously “preparing [for] the continuation of intense ground operations” in the Gaza Strip.^[26] Netanyahu previously ordered Israeli negotiators exclusively to listen during the most recent meeting between US, Israeli, Egyptian, and Qatari officials on February 13 in Cairo.^[27] Gallant emphasized to McGurk that the IDF must “dismantle” the remaining Hamas battalions in the central and southern Gaza Strip.^[28]

Palestinian militias conducted two indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel on February 22.^[29]

Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of February 22, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



- Israel
- Israeli Closed Military Zone
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Rocket Attacks
- Gaza Strip and West Bank
- Syria

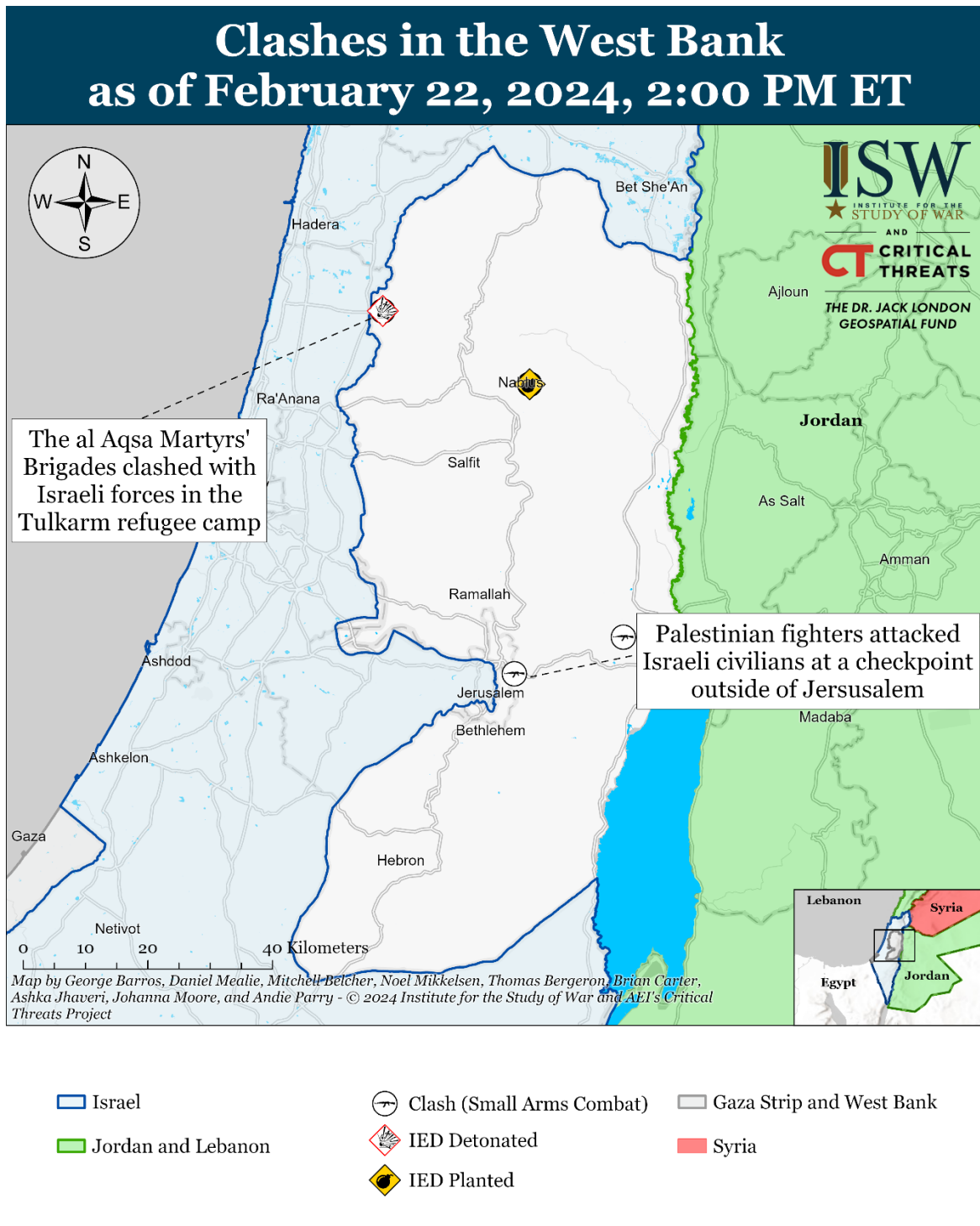
West Bank

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

Israeli forces have clashed with Palestinian fighters at least four times in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on February 21.[30]

Three Palestinian attackers fired small arms at Israeli civilian vehicles at an Israeli checkpoint outside of Jerusalem on February 22.[31] The attackers killed one Israeli civilian and injured at least eleven others before Israeli police killed all three attackers at the checkpoint.[32] Several Palestinian militia groups, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, praised the attack.[33]



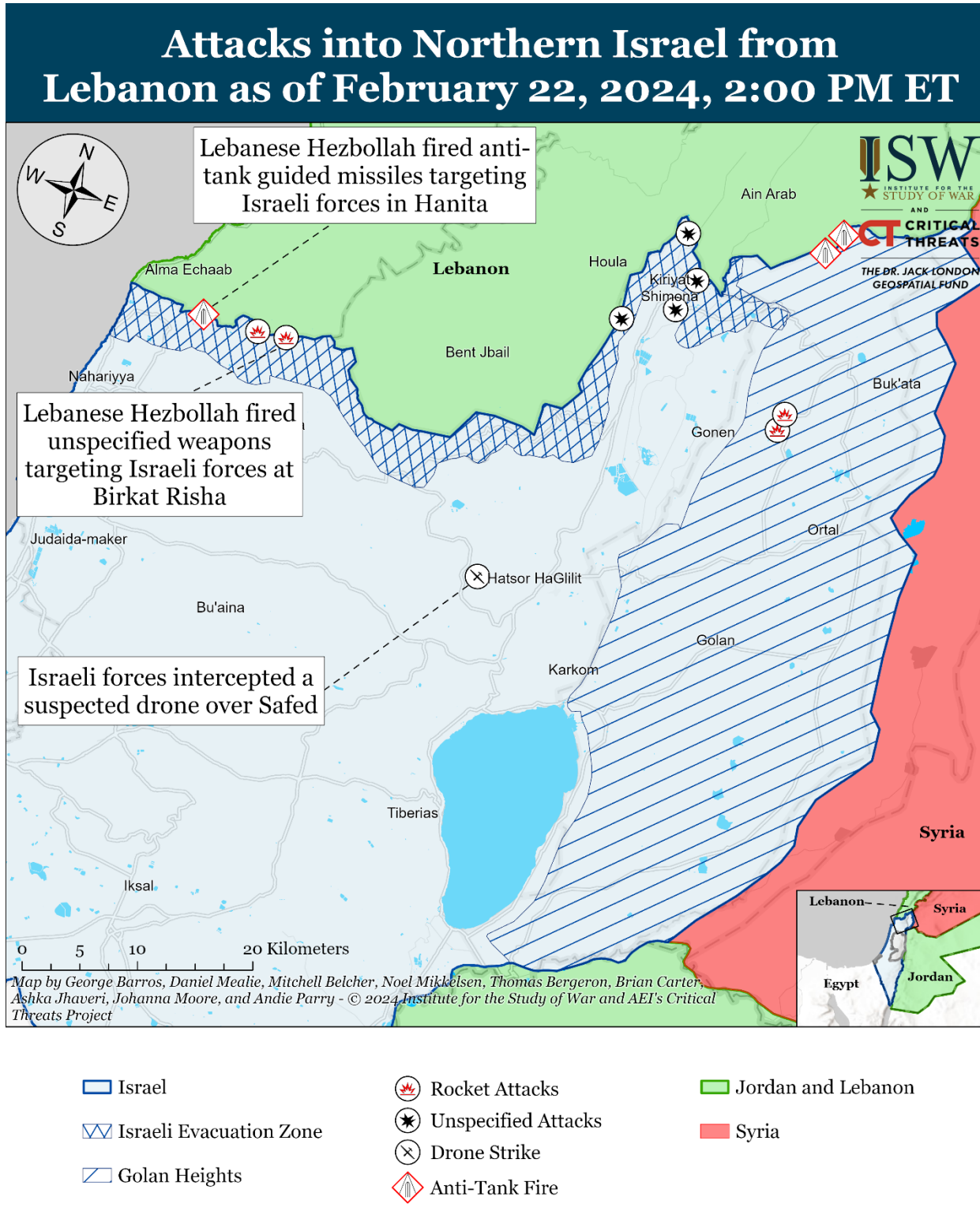
This map is not an exhaustive depiction of clashes and demonstrations in the West Bank.

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

Lebanese Hezbollah has conducted at least 12 attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on February 21.[34]



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

Iran and Axis of Resistance

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

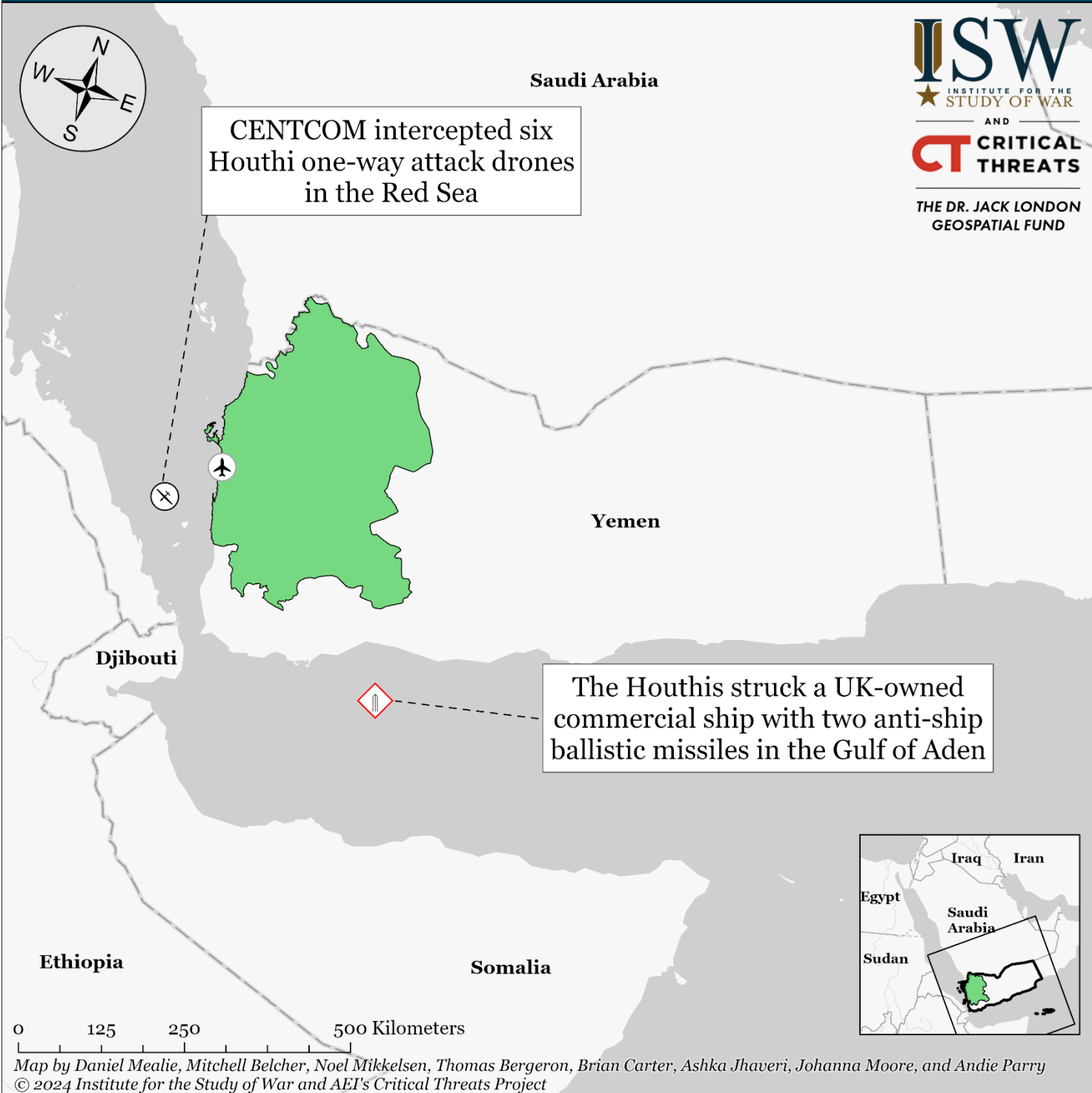
- Demonstrate the capability and willingness of Iran and the Axis of Resistance to escalate against the United States and Israel on multiple fronts
- Set conditions to fight a regional war on multiple fronts

Former Iraqi Parliament Speaker Mohammad al Halbousi discussed the US military presence in Iraq with US Senate Foreign Relations Committee member Chris Coons and US Ambassador to Iraq Alina Romanowski on February 22.^[35] Halbousi, Coons, and Romanowski discussed the ongoing negotiations between Washington and Baghdad about the status of the US-led coalition mission to defeat ISIS. The United States and Iraq began these negotiations in late January 2024.^[36] Halbousi described the negotiations as important for creating a “sustainable bilateral partnership” between the United States and Iraq.^[37] Halbousi, Coons, and Romanowski also emphasized the need to “maintain security cooperation” between the United States and Baghdad to root out the “remnants of terrorism.” Iran and its Iraqi proxy and partner militias have intensified their campaign to expel the United States from Iraq since October 2023.^[38] Halbousi previously released a statement on February 14 warning “war merchants and secessionists from the Islamist parties” against “tampering with the stability of Anbar [Province],” implying that Halbousi might oppose Iranian-backed efforts to expel the United States from Iraq.^[39]

Unspecified individuals unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate State of Law Coalition parliamentarian Bagher Kadhim Naser al Saadi in al Jadriyah, Baghdad, on February 22.^[40] Former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki heads the State of Law Coalition. This assassination attempt comes amid an uptick in likely politically motivated killings between competing Shia factions in Baghdad and southern Iraq in recent weeks.^[41]

The Houthis claimed attacks targeting Israel, a commercial ship, and a US warship on February 22. The group launched two anti-ship ballistic missiles that hit the UK-owned, Palau-flagged MV *Islander* in the Gulf of Aden.^[42] The Houthis separately claimed an attack targeting an unspecified US destroyer in the Red Sea.^[43] US CENTCOM stated that it intercepted six Houthi one-way attack drones in the Red Sea.^[44] The Houthi military spokesperson claimed the group launched drones and missiles targeting unspecified targets in Eilat, Israel.^[45] Israel intercepted a surface-to-surface missile south of Eilat on February 21.^[46]

Houthi-controlled Territory in Yemen as of February 22, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



CENTCOM intercepted six Houthi one-way attack drones in the Red Sea

The Houthis struck a UK-owned commercial ship with two anti-ship ballistic missiles in the Gulf of Aden

- Houthi-controlled Territory in Yemen
- Surface-to-Surface Missile
- Drone Strike
- Airstrike

Note: This notional map is not a definitive assessment of areas under Houthi control in Yemen. This map is primarily an illustrative reference material and does not adhere to the very high level of spatial precision that ISW and CTP uses for our Israel-Hamas and Ukraine control of terrain maps.

Iranian-sponsored Attacks in the Middle East as of February 22, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Iranian Strategic Foreign Relations Council Chairman Kamal Kharazi met with senior Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad officials in Tehran on February 22.[47] Kharazi claimed that “resistance” is the only way for Palestinians to achieve their goals and confront Israel during a meeting with senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan and PIJ Political Bureau member Ali Abu Shahin.[48] Hamdan and Shahin explained the “latest state” of the war in the Gaza Strip and thanked the Iranian regime for supporting Palestinian militias. Hamdan and Shahin are both based in Lebanon. Kharazi is a senior foreign policy adviser to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.[49]
Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei repeated his criticism of unspecified Muslim countries for failing to sever political and economic ties with Israel during a meeting with Quran reciters on February 22.[50] Khamenei has, even before the Israel-Hamas war began, repeatedly called on Muslim countries to isolate Israel.[51]

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[1] <https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1760684578203935132>

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[7] https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/5793; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1651>

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