

# Iran Update



**Ria Reddy, Annika Ganzeveld, Johanna Moore, Siddhant Kishore, Carolyn Moorman, Ben Rezaei, Katherine Wells, and Brian Carter**

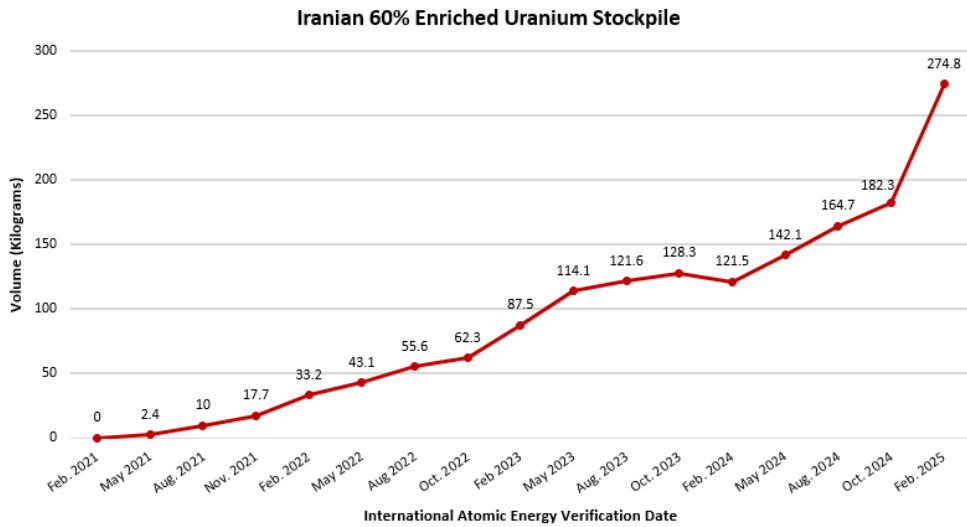
**Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm ET**

*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 increased its stockpile of 60 percent enriched uranium by 92.5 kilograms (kg), or 2.2 significant quantities, according to an unreleased International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report.[1]** A significant quantity is the “approximate amount of nuclear material for which the possibility of manufacturing a nuclear explosive device cannot be excluded.”[2] The Associated Press reported on February 26 that Iran possesses 274.8 kilograms (kg) of uranium enriched up to 60 percent, or 6.6 significant quantities, as of February 8, citing an unreleased IAEA report. This amount marks a 92.5 kg increase in Iran's stockpile of 60 percent enriched uranium and a 2.2 increase in significant quantities since the IAEA published its last report in November 2024.[3] The IAEA report stated that Iran’s total stockpile of enriched uranium is at 8,294.4 kgs, marking a 1,690 kg increase since November 2024.[4] The IAEA report also noted that Iranian officials continued to prevent four additional experienced IAEA inspectors from monitoring the Iranian nuclear program.

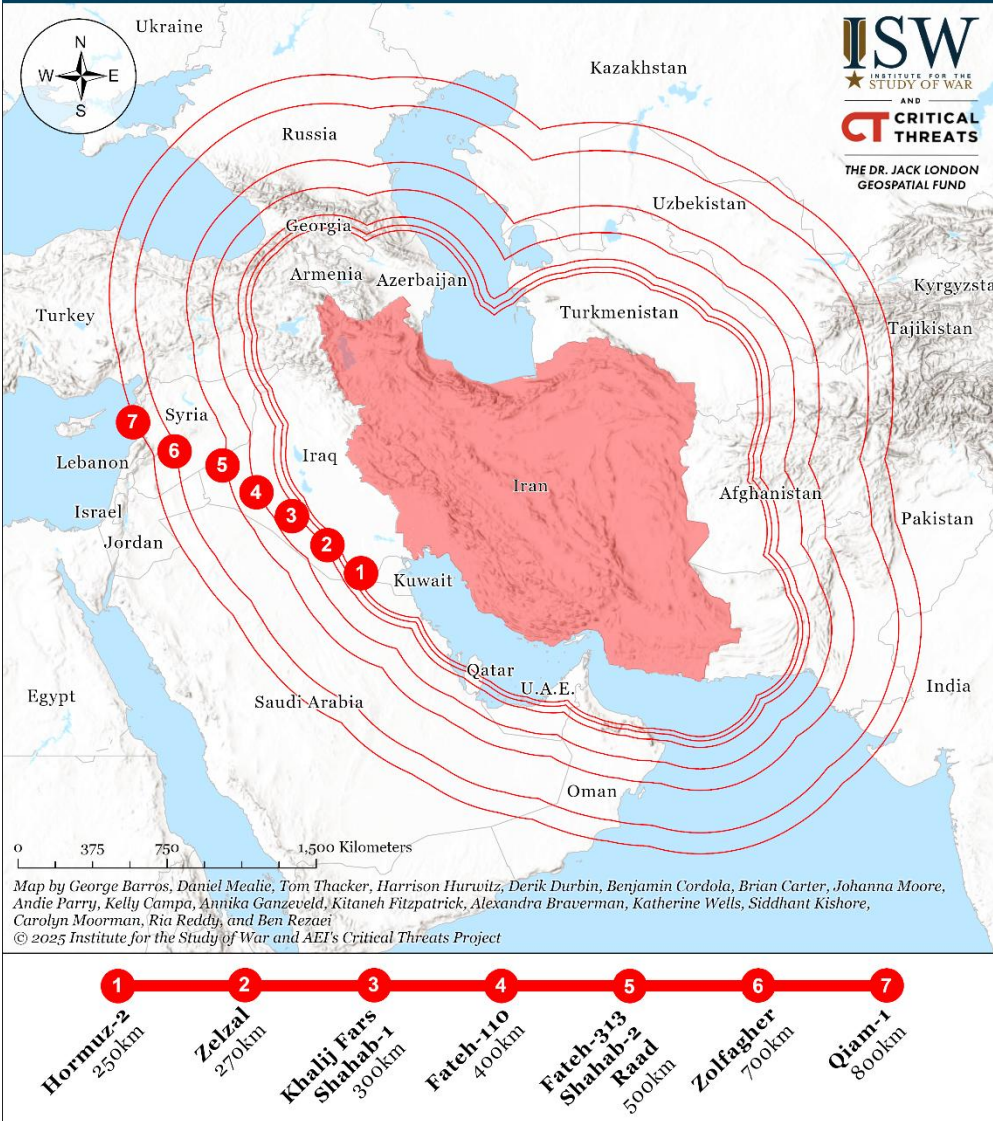
The significant expansion in Iran's enriched uranium stockpile coupled with Iran’s categorical rejection of nuclear negotiations with the United States makes it very unlikely that Iran will conclude a deal with the E3 and the United States ahead of June 2025. The E3 reportedly gave Iran a June 2025 deadline to conclude a nuclear deal before the E3 imposes snapback sanctions.[5] The JCPOA snapback mechanism allows JCPOA signatories to reimpose UN Security Council sanctions on Iran in the event of “significant non-performance by Iran of JCPOA commitments.”[6]



**Iran is continuing its preparations for a potential Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear facilities.** Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Head Mohammad Eslami stated that Iran will hold nuclear defense exercises at nuclear facilities in Iran on February 26 and 27.<sup>[7]</sup> The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Aerospace Force and the Artesh previously conducted air defense exercises around Iranian nuclear facilities in Fordow, Natanz, and Arak in January 2025.<sup>[8]</sup> Two unspecified senior Iranian officials recently stated that Iran is bolstering its air defenses ahead of a potential Israeli strike on Iran.<sup>[9]</sup>

**Senior Iranian military commanders continued to threaten on February 26 that Iran could attack the United States and Israel in response to a potential Israeli attack on Iran.** IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami stated that the United States and Israel should "expect humiliation."<sup>[10]</sup> Artesh Commander Major General Abdol Rahim Mousavi similarly stated that Iran will "attack [US and Israeli] security without hesitation" if the United States and Israel attack Iran.<sup>[11]</sup> These statements come after senior Iranian military commanders have resurfaced threats to conduct direct attacks on US and Israeli interests in the region, likely to deter a potential Israeli strike on Iran.<sup>[12]</sup> Iran still retains a large number of short-range ballistic missiles that it could use to strike US bases in the Middle East if it chooses to do so. IRGC Aerospace Force Commander Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajji Zadeh recently warned that Iran could attack US bases with short-range missiles in response to an Israeli attack.<sup>[13]</sup>

# Range of Iranian Short Range Ballistic Missiles



## Key Takeaways:

- Iranian Nuclear Program:** Iran increased its stockpile of 60 percent enriched uranium by 92.5 kilograms (kg), or 2.2 significant quantities, according to an unreleased International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report. A significant quantity is the “approximate amount of nuclear material for which the possibility of manufacturing a nuclear explosive device cannot be excluded.
- Nuclear Negotiations:** The significant expansion in Iran's enriched uranium stockpile coupled with Iran’s categorical rejection of nuclear negotiations with the United States makes it

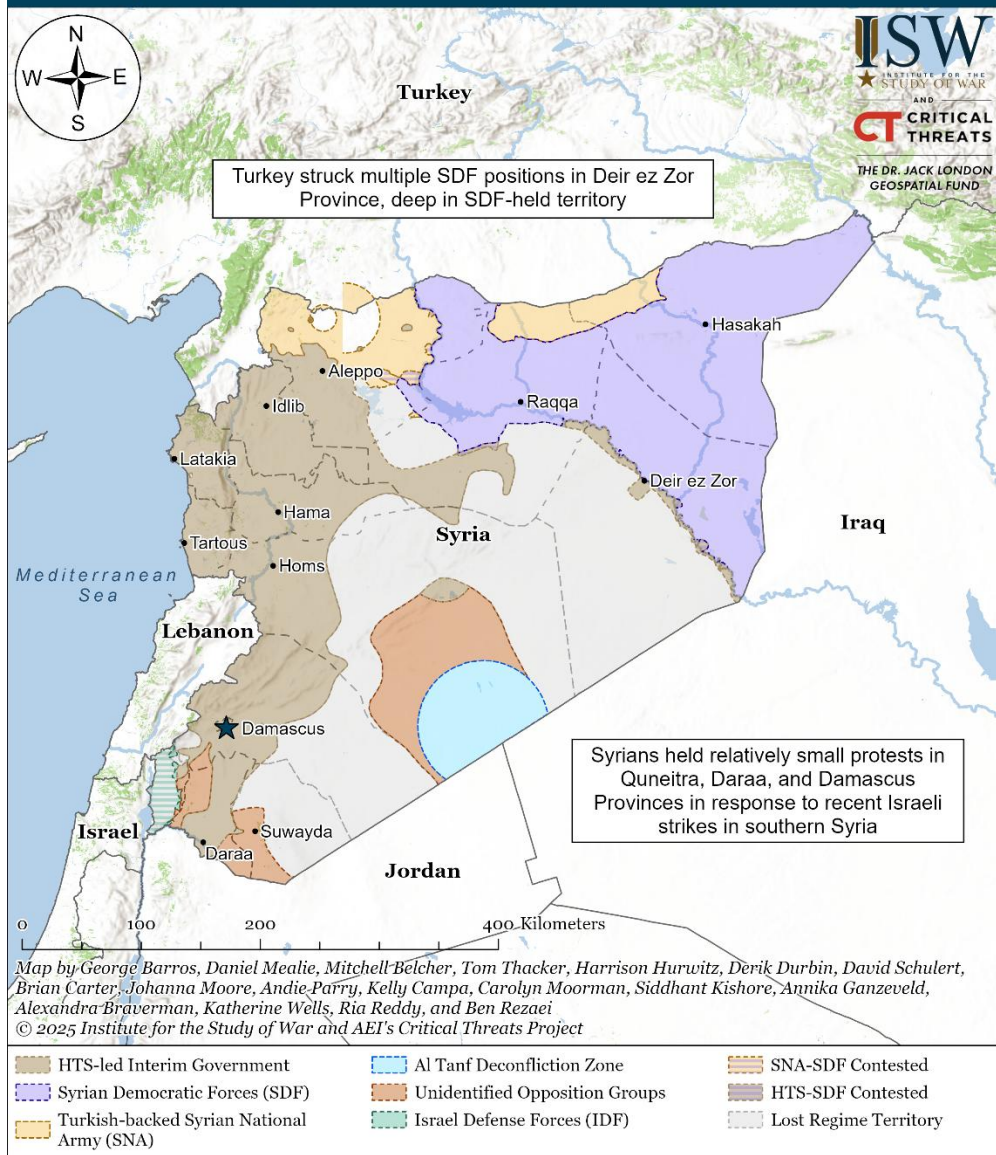
very unlikely that Iran will conclude a deal with the E3 and the United States ahead of June 2025. The E3 reportedly gave Iran a June 2025 deadline to conclude a nuclear deal before the E3 imposes snapback sanctions.

- **Iranian Preparations for Israeli Strike:** Iran is continuing its preparations for a potential Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear facilities. Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Head Mohammad Eslami stated that Iran will hold nuclear defense exercises at nuclear facilities in Iran on February 26 and 27.
- **Iranian Threats Against United States and Israel:** Senior Iranian military commanders continued to threaten on February 26 that Iran could attack the United States and Israel in response to a potential Israeli attack on Iran.

## Syria

**Turkey struck multiple SDF positions in Deir ez Zor Province, deep in SDF-held territory, on February 26.**<sup>[14]</sup> The SDF said that multiple Turkish airstrikes struck an SDF position and civilian infrastructure in Ruwayshid, Deir ez Zor Province, and killed four SDF members and eight civilians.<sup>[15]</sup> Syrian media reported that the SDF targets included an SDF military academy, intelligence headquarters, and a military checkpoint.<sup>[16]</sup> This is the first Turkish strike deep into Deir ez Zor Province during the current round of escalation between Turkey and the SDF. Turkey separately struck SDF positions near al Jawf train station, north of Deir ez Zor.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria February 26, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST

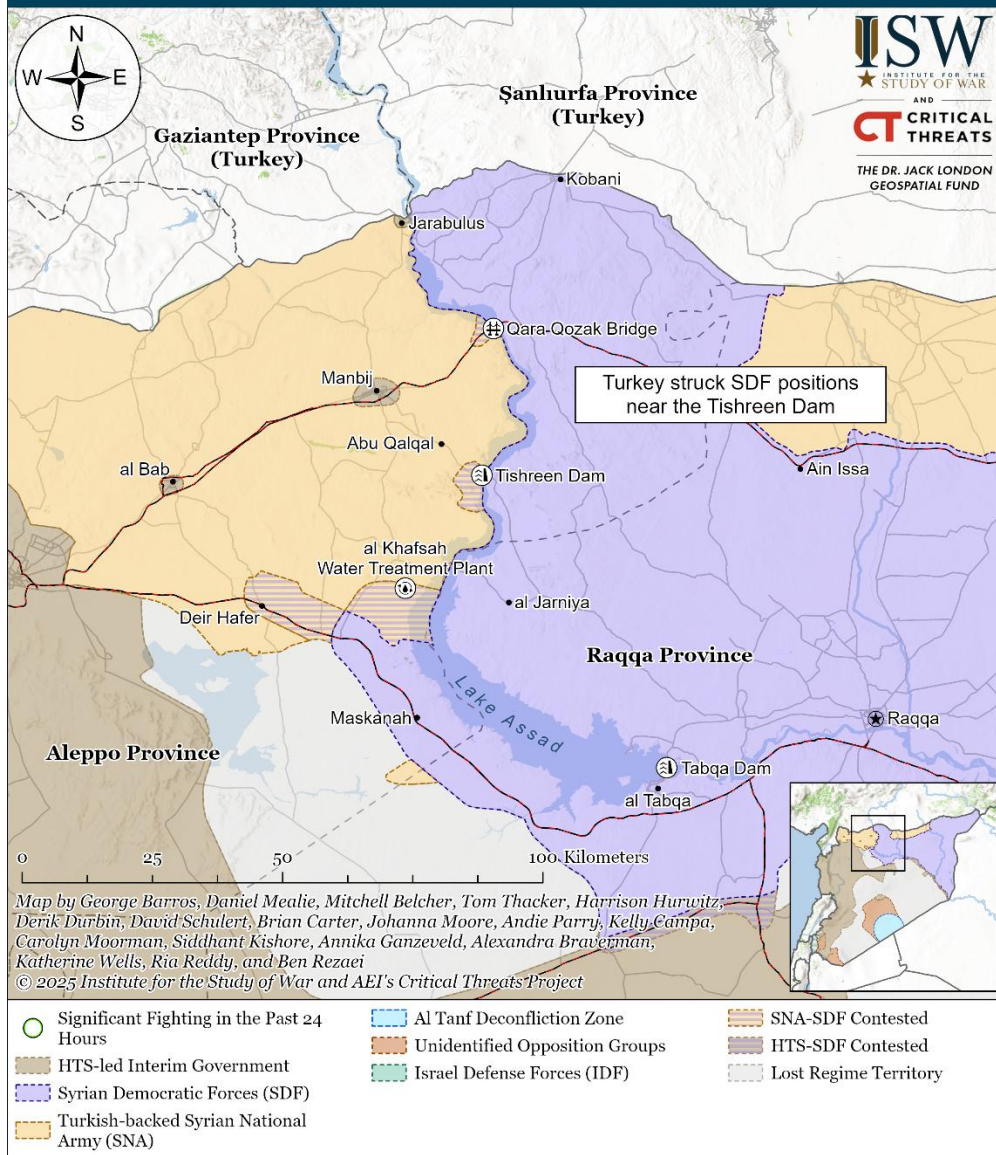


**Turkey struck SDF positions near Abu Rasin, north of Qamishli, on February 26.[18]**

**Turkey and the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) continued to attack SDF positions near the Tishreen Dam east of Aleppo on February 26.** Turkish aircraft struck SDF positions near the dam.[19] Anti-SDF media reported that the SNA engaged the SDF on Tal Syriatel, east of the dam.[20]

**The SNA shelled SDF artillery positions in the Ain Issa and Tal Abyad areas, north of Raqqa on February 25.[21]**

## Assessed Control of Terrain around Manbij February 26, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST

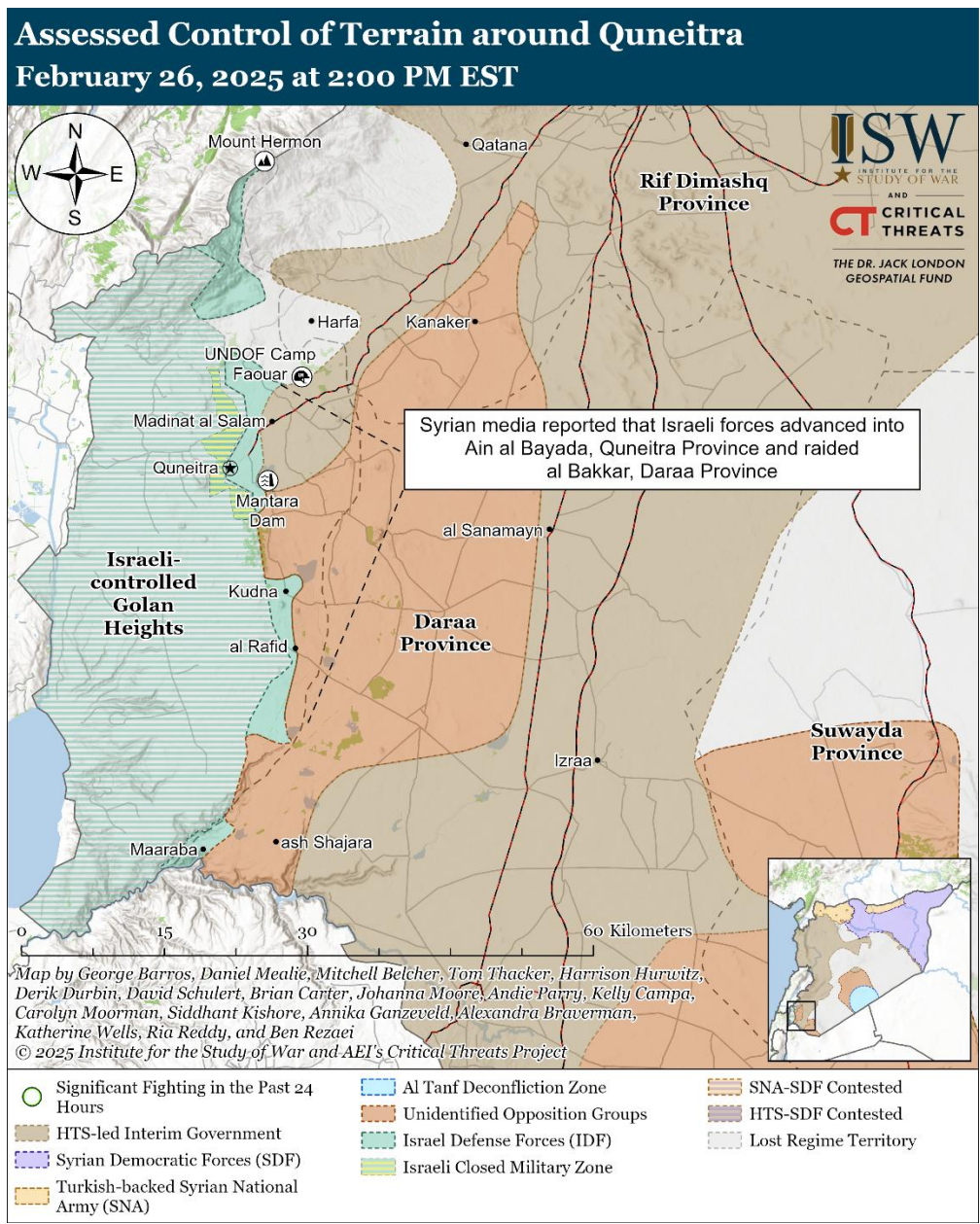


**Israeli officials said Israel will prohibit the interim Syrian government from establishing control over southern Syria.** Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz warned on February 25 that any attempt by the interim Syrian government or “terrorist organizations” to establish themselves in southern Syria would be attacked.<sup>[22]</sup> Katz added that Israel will not allow southern Syria to be used as a front to threaten Israel.<sup>[23]</sup> Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu demanded on February 23 that Syria fully demilitarize southern Syria.<sup>[24]</sup>

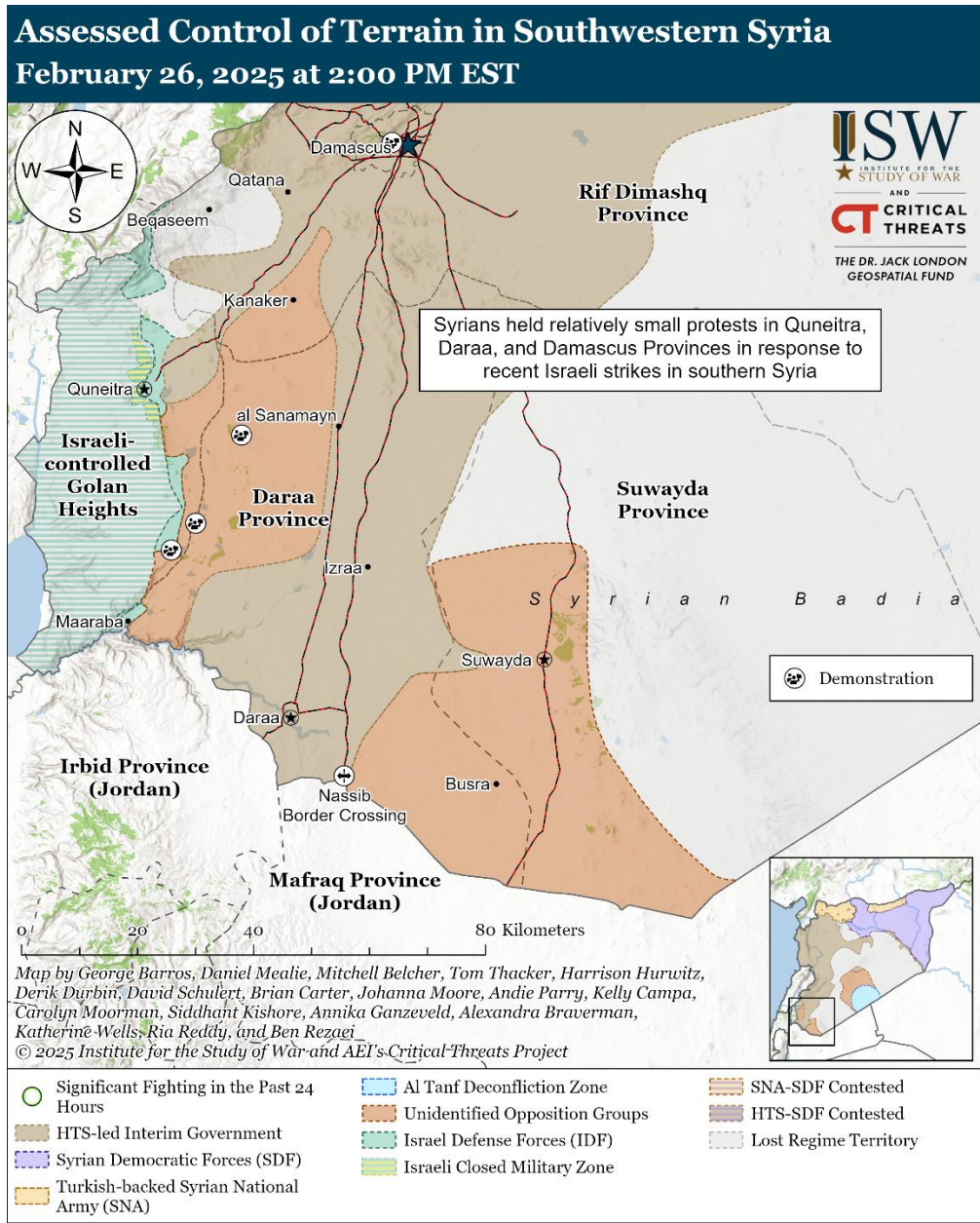
The IDF Air Force launched a series of airstrikes on February 25 against various military targets in southern Syria.<sup>[25]</sup> The IDF struck the former Syrian Arab Army (SAA) 1st Division base in al Kiswah,

Rif Dimashq, and destroyed military equipment.[26] Al Kiswah is roughly 16km south of Umayyad Square in central Damascus City. Southern Syria-based news outlets reported that several individuals were wounded in the strike.[27] A Daraa-based outlet reported that the IDF also struck the former SAA 12th Brigade, 5th Division base in Izraa, Daraa Province.[28] Syrian media reported that the IDF struck an unspecified target in Tal al Hara, Daraa Province.[29]

Syrian media claimed that Israeli forces advanced into Ain al Bayda, Quneitra Province, and raided al Bakkar, Daraa Province.[30]



**Protesters demonstrated against Israeli operations in southwestern Syria since CTP-ISW’s last data cut-off on February 25.** Relatively small-scale protests took place in Quneitra, Daraa, and Damascus provinces in response to recent Israeli strikes in southern Syria.[31] Wide-spread protests took place on February 25 in response to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s recent demand to demilitarize southern Syria.[32] Shara lacks the capacity to seriously counter Israeli operations militarily and risks destabilizing the government transition even if he could respond militarily to Israeli operations.



**A delegation of Druze leaders met with Syrian Interim President Ahmad al Sharaa in Damascus on February 24 to discuss cooperation between local Druze factions in**



**Suwayda with Syrian government forces.**<sup>[33]</sup> The delegation included Ahrar al Arab Gathering leader Sheikh Suleiman, former Men of Dignity member Sheikh Laith al Balous, and other prominent Druze militia leadership.<sup>[34]</sup> The Druze leaders expressed their interest in cooperating with the interim Syrian government and coordinating security efforts.<sup>[35]</sup> The delegation discussed establishing a military division in southern Suwayda composed of local Druze fighters. **A Syrian army division comprised of local fighters would very likely report to local leadership instead of a formal chain of command.**

The Druze delegation also very likely discussed the recent formation of the Suwayda Military Council.<sup>[36]</sup> A group of Druze fighters in Suwayda who were previously aligned with the Assad regime established the Suwayda Military Council on February 23.<sup>[37]</sup> The council now seeks to organize local armed factions under a single command. Suwayda National Council Commander Tareq al-Shoufi said that the council seeks to integrate into the “national army of the new Syrian state.”<sup>[38]</sup> The council has prioritized interdicting weapons and drug smuggling in the province.<sup>[39]</sup> A key leader in the Syrian Druze community, Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri, rejected the formation of the council and called its members “separatists” who do not represent the Druze community.<sup>[40]</sup>

## **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

**Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani held a phone call with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on February 25.**<sup>[41]</sup> The US State Department reported that Sudani and Rubio discussed Iran’s negative influence in the Middle East as well as the need for Iraq to become energy independent and resume oil exports to the port of Ceyhan in Turkey. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) halted oil exports to the port of Ceyhan in March 2023 but the Iraqi federal government and KRG recently reached an agreement on February 24 for the KRG to resume oil exports.<sup>[42]</sup> A member of the Fatah Alliance, which is led by Iranian-backed Badr Organization Secretary General Hadi al Ameri, stated on February 26 that the Shia Coordination Framework will likely hold an “emergency meeting” in the coming days to discuss the phone call between Sudani and Rubio.<sup>[43]</sup> The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Shia political parties, some of which Iran backs. The phone call follows reports that the United States reportedly threatened to sanction the Iraqi federal government if it prevented the KRG from resuming oil exports.<sup>[44]</sup> The phone call also comes amid reports that the United States may sanction Iranian-aligned actors in Iraq.<sup>[45]</sup>

**The political wings of some Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are planning a new political alliance ahead of the October 2025 parliamentary elections.**<sup>[46]</sup> Iraqi media reported that the militias’ political wings are considering “joining alliances” and forming a political bloc “inspired by the Iraqi resistance,” which could refer to the Islamic Resistance in Iraq. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq

is a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias that frequently targeted Israel and US forces in Iraq and Syria during the October 7 War.[47] A political bloc based on the Islamic Resistance in Iraq would include the political wings of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, such as Kataib Hezbollah, that comprise the Islamic Resistance in Iraq. Such a political bloc would likely not be completely unified, given that the militias that comprise the Islamic Resistance in Iraq disagreed with one another on multiple occasions during the October 7 War.[48] A well-organized political alliance could increase the militias' representation in parliament and therefore increase Iran's influence in the Iraqi political sphere, however.

**Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leader Masoud Barzani met with members of a Turkish Kurdish political party in Salah al Din, Iraq, on February 26.[49]** Barzani met with a delegation from the Free Cause (Huda) Party, which is aligned with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.[50] Barzani and Huda Party leader Zekeriya Yapicioglu discussed the “ongoing peace process” in Turkey, likely referring to negotiations between the Turkish government and Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) Leader Abdullah Ocalan.[51] Ocalan is expected to call on the PKK to “lay down arms” this week, according to two unspecified Turkish officials.[52] An unspecified Turkish source told regional media on February 26 that the Turkish government expects that most PKK members would comply with Ocalan's call to disarm but acknowledges that some PKK factions may reject his call. Turkish officials have previously signaled that they believe that a call from Ocalan for the PKK to disarm would pressure the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to disarm and integrate into the HTS-led Syrian interim government.[53]

## **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

*Nothing significant to report.*

## Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

**The United States sanctioned six Hong Kong and China-based entities that supply the Iranian drone and ballistic missile program. These sanctions are part of the US "maximum pressure" policy.[54]** Iranian supply firm Pishtazan Kavosh Gostar Boshra (PKGB) and its subsidiary Narin Sepehr Mobin Isatis (NSMI) have used the following six front companies to procure the following items after the United States sanctioned a Hong Kong-based PKGB network last year:[55]

- **Dingtai Industrial Technology Co Limited** supplies US-made items that can be used in drones for PKGB. These items include valve assemblies, radio frequency connectors, and engines for PKGB.
- **Yonghongan Trade Limited** supplies Western-made aircraft and drone components, including vane turbines, vane compressors, blade turbines, and blade compressors for PKGB.
- **Hong Kong Tianle International Co Limited** supplies US-made electronic components for IRGC engineering company Rastafann and supplies micro-servers and facilitates price quotes for PKGB.
- **DDC Development Industry Hong Kong Limited supplies** unspecified engines for NSMI.
- **Shenzhen Zhiyu International Trade Co. Ltd supplies** unspecified production and testing equipment for NSMI.
- **JP Oriental International Holdings Limited** is involved in unspecified shipments for NSMI.

**Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi and Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf discussed regional developments with Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem in Beirut on February 23.[56]** Iranian Supreme Leader representative Mohammad Hassan Akhtari separately emphasized Iran's support for Lebanon and Hezbollah during a meeting with Deputy Head of the Supreme Islamic Shia Council Sheikh Ali al Khatib in Hazmieh, Lebanon, on February 26.[57]

**The Iranian rial depreciated from 918,300 rials to one US dollar on February 25 to 926,900 rials to one US dollar on February 26.[58]**

*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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%D9%83%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%B3-  
%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%88-  
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