

Iran Update, February 29, 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.

Iranian-backed Iraqi militia attacks targeting US forces has impeded the US-led international campaign to defeat ISIS in recent months, according to the Lead Inspector General's quarterly report.[1] US advisory forces are deployed to Iraq under Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) at the request of the Iraqi federal government to advise and assist partner forces to “independently maintain the enduring defeat of ISIS.”[2] The Iranian-backed attack campaign targeting US forces has required OIR to divert resources from supporting Iraqi partners to instead address “increased” and “immediate” threats.[3] OIR reported that the redirected resources “hindered momentum” in pursuing OIR's objectives.[4] The previous OIR quarterly report at the end of 2023 said that Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) already faces deficiencies in fire support, intelligence, logistics, and planning that prevent it from defeating ISIS alone.[5]

The escalation cycle fueled by Iranian-backed Iraqi militia attacks negatively affected the relationship between US advisers and their Iraqi partners, according to the report.[6] The increased security threat from militia attacks to US forces required OIR to “cancel or delay engagements” with Iraqi officials.[7] The United States also evacuated and redeployed personnel that then reduced base operations and equipment and facility maintenance.[8] OIR reported that it has furthermore “scaled back Coalition engagements” and logistical support for NATO Mission-Iraq and other supporting entities.[9]

Key Takeaways:

- **Iraq:** Iranian-backed Iraqi militia attacks targeting US forces has impeded the US-led international campaign to defeat ISIS in recent months, according to the Lead Inspector General's quarterly report.
- **Northern Gaza Strip:** The IDF 162nd Division continued to conduct clearing operations in Zaytoun neighborhood, southeastern Gaza City. Hamas fighters resumed contact with their command and returned from areas of fighting to report several attacks targeting Israeli forces in Zaytoun.
- **Southern Gaza Strip:** Israeli forces continued to conduct clearing operations in western and eastern Khan Younis.
- **Political Negotiations:** Dozens of individuals died in a crowd near a humanitarian aid convoy in the northern Gaza Strip. The incident may disrupt negotiations between Israel and Hamas.
- **West Bank:** Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters at least seven times in the West Bank.
- **Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights:** US officials are increasingly concerned that Israel will launch a ground incursion into Lebanon in early spring or summer 2024, according to unnamed Biden administration officials.
- **Syria:** Israeli airstrike hit a Lebanese Hezbollah truck on the Lebanon-Syria border, according to Reuters, killing one Hezbollah fighter.
- **Yemen:** Houthi-controlled media claimed that the United States and United Kingdom conducted airstrikes on four sites in Hudayduh Governorate, Yemen.
- **Iran:** Iran and Russia are continuing to deepen security and economic cooperation.
- The United Kingdom sanctioned three Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force units, two Houthi members, and the IRGC Quds Force deputy commander.

Israel-Hamas War as of February 29, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Dozens of people died in a crowd near a humanitarian aid convoy in the northern Gaza Strip

Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted at least nine attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel

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

Iranian-backed Iraqi militia attacks targeting US forces have impeded counter-ISIS efforts in recent months



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) reported that it has killed over 450 Palestinian fighters in the past 10 days across the Gaza Strip.[10] Israeli forces have concentrated their clearing operations around Zaytoun in the northern Gaza Strip as well as around western and eastern Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip.[11] The IDF added that it has killed over 13,000 Palestinian fighters since the beginning of fighting in the Gaza Strip.[12] Hamas' military force had approximately 40,000 members prior to the war—not including the forces of other Palestinian militias aligned with Hamas in the war.[13]

The IDF 162nd Division continued to conduct clearing operations in Zaytoun neighborhood, southeastern Gaza City, on February 29.[14] The IDF Nahal Brigade (assigned to the 162nd Division) located a small arms lathe and weapons storage facility in Zaytoun.[15] Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) published footage of its fighters firing rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) targeting Israeli armor and special operations forces in Zaytoun.[16] The footage also shows Palestinian fighters detonating a house-borne improvised explosive device (HBIED).

Hamas fighters resumed contact with their command and returned from areas of fighting to report several attacks targeting Israeli forces in Zaytoun.[17] The Hamas fighters reported that they had detonated an HBIED and two explosive-rigged tunnels targeting Israeli forces. Hamas also fired an anti-tank RPG and detonated an explosively formed penetrator (EFP) targeting an IDF tank south of Zaytoun. A Palestinian activist reported on February 28 that Israeli vehicles operated in Mughraqa, south of Zaytoun, amid sounds of artillery fire.[18] These fighters' inability to communicate with higher headquarters until returning to rear areas indicates a breakdown of command and control and probably means that Hamas commanders cannot transmit orders to some of their fighters presently engaged with the IDF.

Israeli forces continued to conduct clearing operations in western and eastern Khan Younis on February 29. The IDF 7th Brigade (assigned to the 36th Division) killed four Palestinian fighters who attempted to plant a roadside IED in western Khan Younis.[19] The IDF Givati Brigade (assigned to the 162nd Division), which is operating in eastern Khan Younis, directed an airstrike to kill five Palestinian fighters.[20] PIJ fighters mortared an Israeli supply line in eastern Khan Younis.[21] Israeli forces expanded clearing operations in eastern Khan Younis on February 21, where CTP-ISW assesses that Israeli forces have not yet cleared agricultural and suburban terrain.[22] PIJ and another Palestinian militia aligned with Hamas in the war claimed that their fighters clashed with Israeli forces in eastern Khan Younis on February 29.[23]

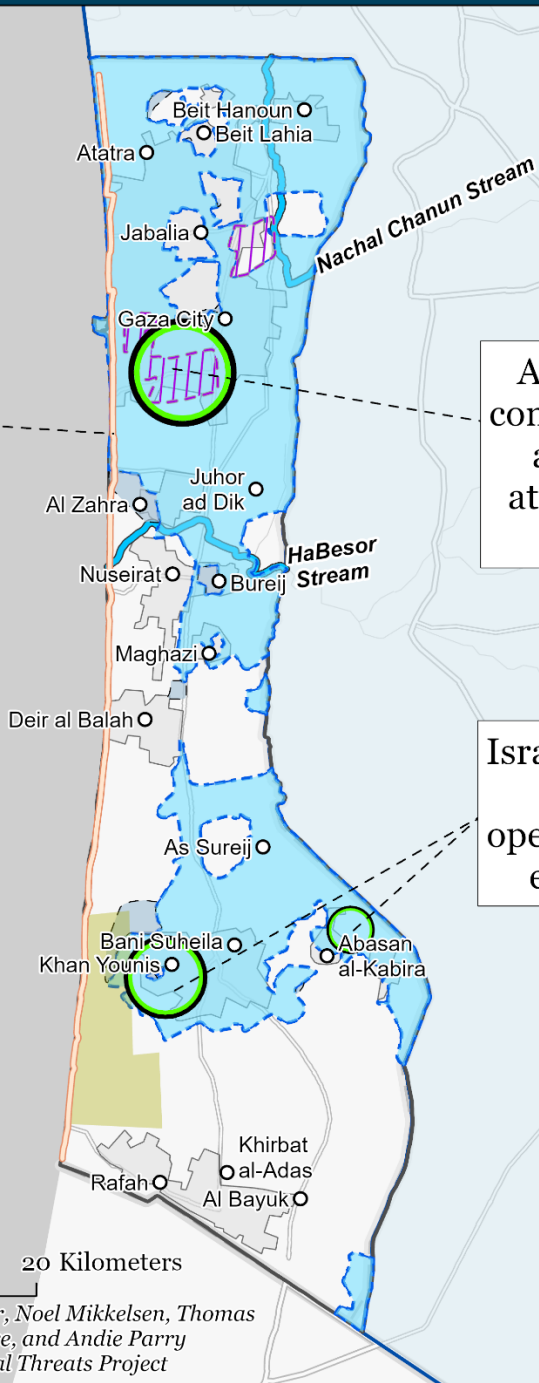
Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of February 29, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Dozens of people died in a crowd near a humanitarian aid convoy in the northern Gaza Strip

A Hamas cell resumed contact with its command and reported several attacks targeting Israeli forces in Zaytoun

Israeli forces continued to conduct clearing operations in western and eastern Khan Younis



0 5 10 20 Kilometers

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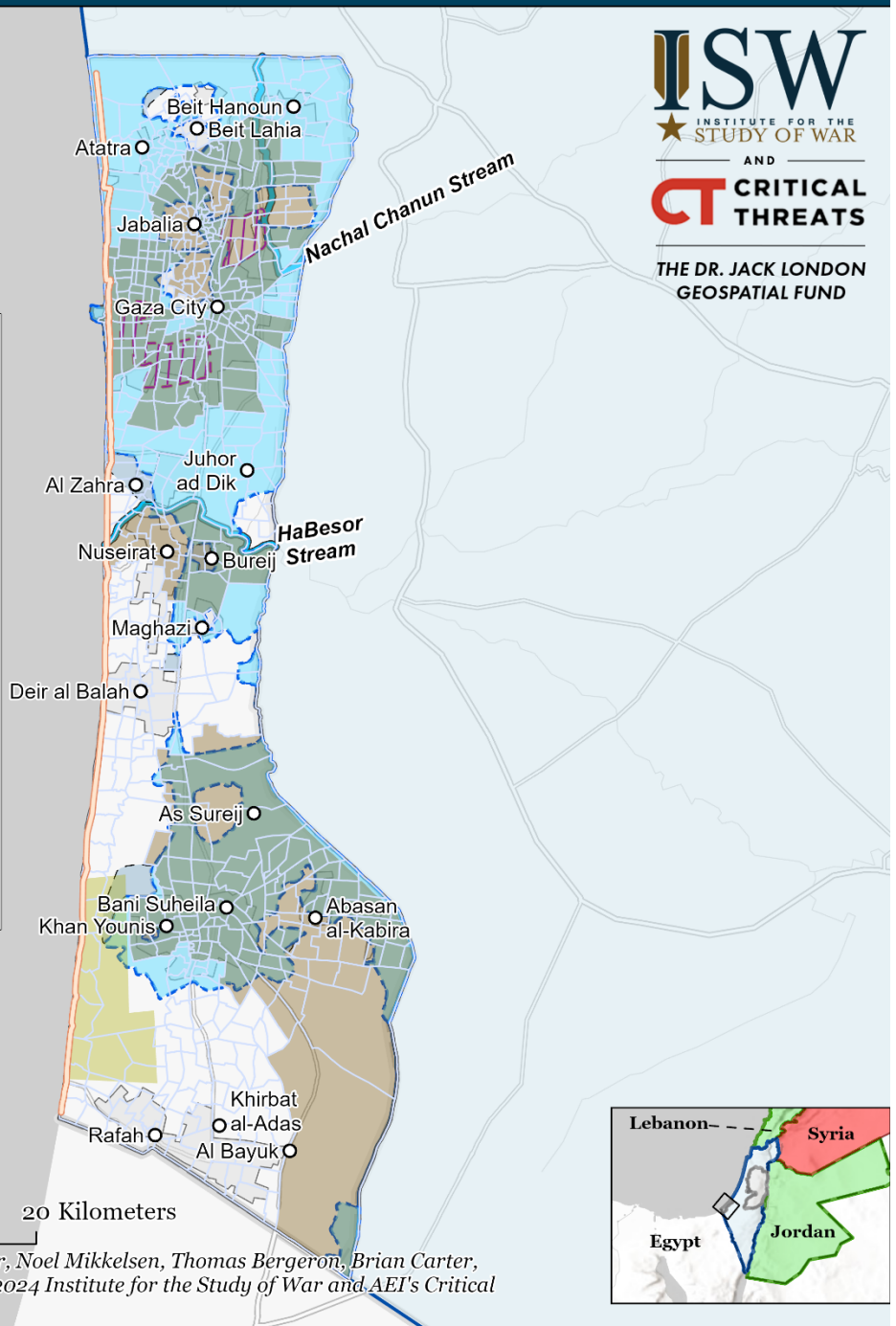
- Israel
- Gaza Strip
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230
- Significant Water Obstacles
- Densely 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 29, 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)



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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			

* 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

Several Palestinian factions, including Fatah, met in Moscow on February 29 to discuss the formation of a new Palestinian government.[24] Hamas' political wing published a statement confirming the meeting and emphasized that the various factions agree on the need to form a Palestinian state.[25] Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Lavrov said during the opening remarks that violence will continue in the region until certain things are addressed, namely the issue of creating a Palestinian state.[26] Lavrov claimed that Russia has repeatedly advocated for the resumption of direct dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Lavrov's statement is consistent with how Russia has framed itself as a possible mediator between Israel and Hamas throughout the war.

The Israeli security establishment believes that the spokesperson for the Hamas police left the Gaza Strip with Egypt's permission.[27] Unspecified Palestinian sources within the strip reported that the spokesperson's name was on a list of people set to evacuate through the Rafah crossing.[28] The IDF claimed that Egypt never forwarded his name to Israel as part of the list.[29] The IDF has targeted Hamas' police and internal security apparatus to disrupt Hamas' attempts to rebuild its governing authority in the strip.[30] The Civil Police and the Hamas-controlled Interior Ministry's Internal Security Forces in the Gaza Strip both employ fighters from the Hamas military wing.[31]

Dozens of individuals died in a crowd near a humanitarian aid convoy in the northern Gaza Strip on February 28.[32] The IDF reported that thousands of Palestinians swarmed 30 aid trucks south of Gaza City.[33] An eyewitness reported that the trucks attempted to escape the area and accidentally rammed people, causing deaths and injuries.[34] The Hamas-run Health Ministry reported that 104 people died and hundreds were injured after Israeli forces opened fire on them.[35] The IDF said that its forces did not fire at the crowd approaching the primary aid convoy.[36] Israeli forces did, however, fire at Palestinians who moved toward Israeli soldiers and a tank, as the Israeli forces concluded that they were "endangering [their] soldiers." [37] The United States has warned Israel that a "total breakdown of law and order" is exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the strip.[38] Aid officials have reported several incidents of unspecified personnel looting aid trucks.[39]

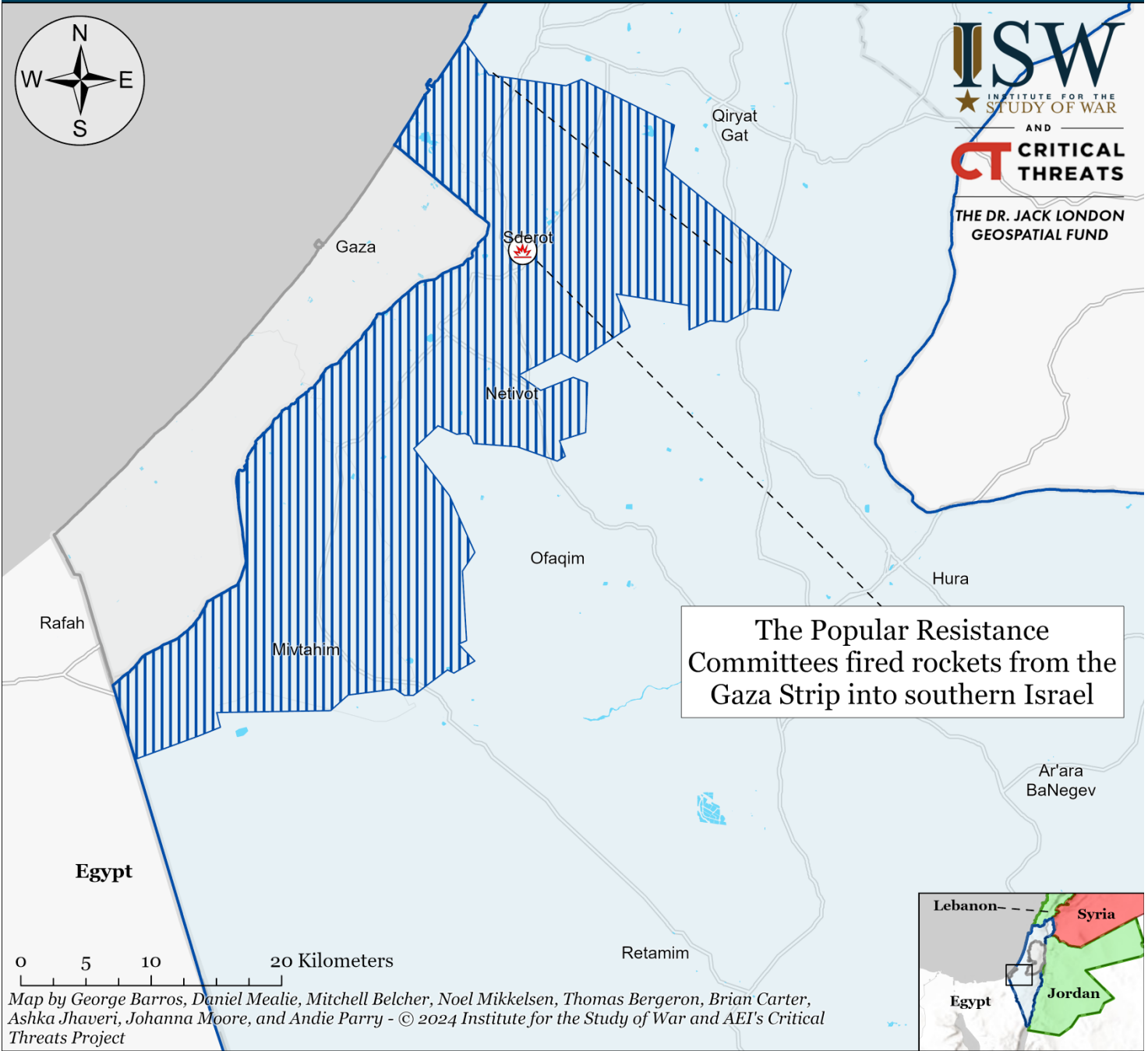
The humanitarian aid convoy incident in the northern Gaza Strip may disrupt negotiations between Israel and Hamas. US President Joe Biden stated that the humanitarian aid incident will likely complicate the hostage release deal and talks on a temporary truce.[40] Hamas released a statement warning that it could stop participating in negotiations following the incident.[41]

The Popular Resistance Committees, a Palestinian militia aligned with Hamas in the war, fired rockets from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel in response to the humanitarian aid convoy incident.[42]

Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of February 29, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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The Popular Resistance Committees fired rockets from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel

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

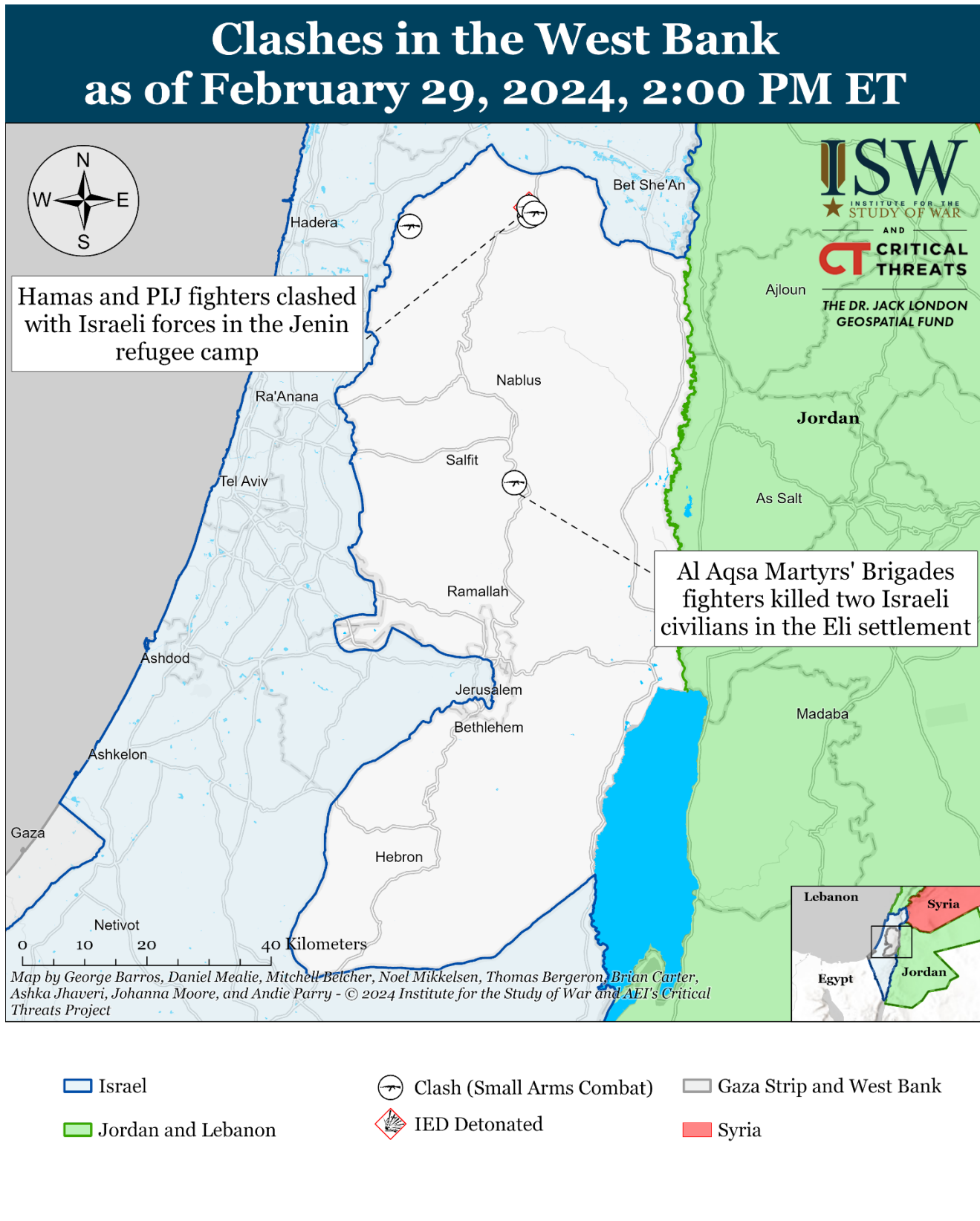
Recorded reports of attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

West Bank

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters at least seven times in the West Bank on February 29.[43]



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:

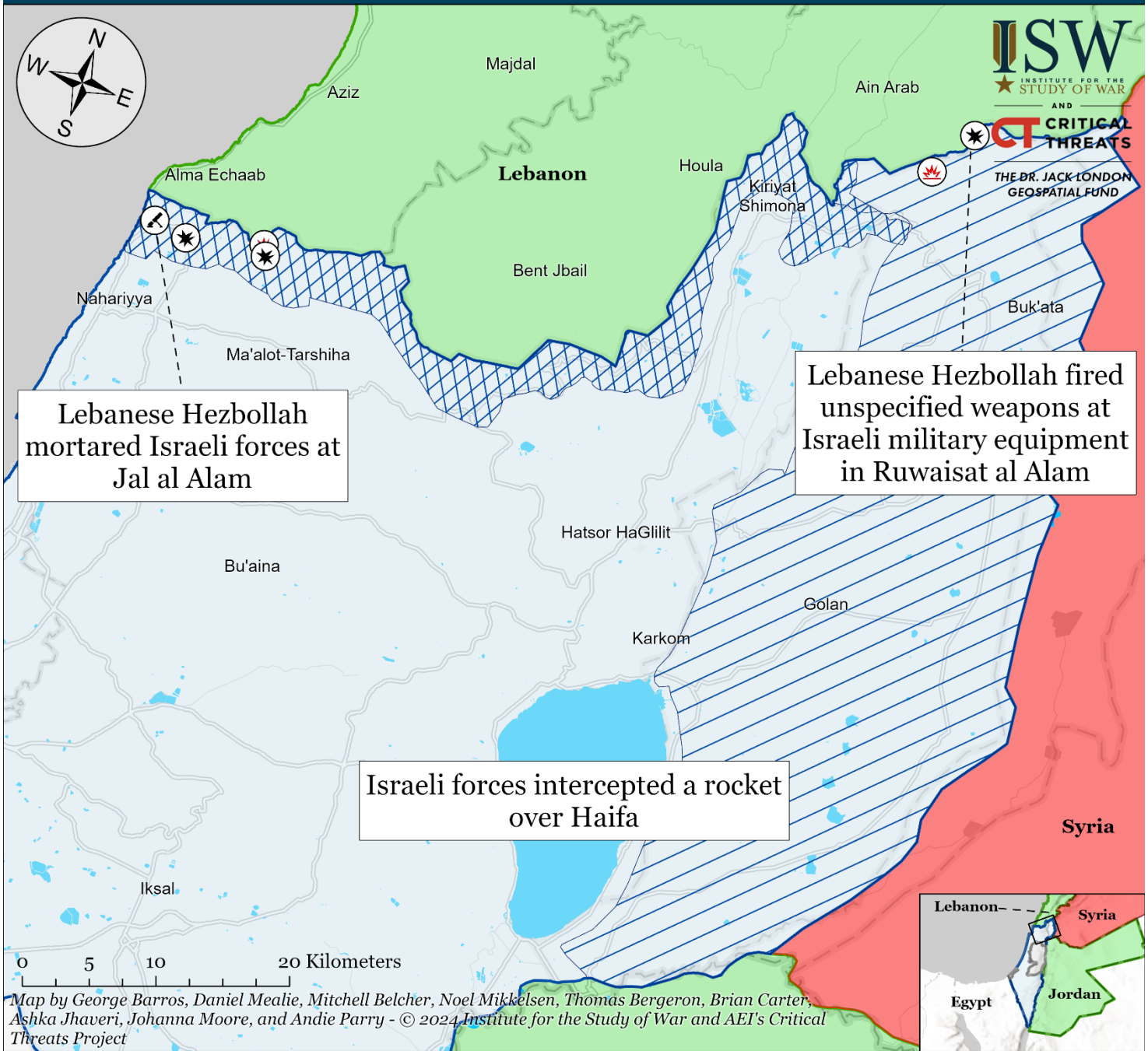
- Draw IDF assets and resources toward northern Israel and fix them there
- Set conditions for successive campaigns into northern Israel

Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, have conducted at least nine attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on February 28.[44]

US officials are increasingly concerned that Israel will launch a ground incursion into Lebanon in early spring or summer 2024, according to unnamed Biden administration officials.[45] One senior US official said that an Israeli campaign in Lebanon is a “distinct possibility” in the next several months. The *New York Times* previously reported in December 2023 that the United States held talks with Israel, Lebanon, and intermediaries for Lebanese Hezbollah to “reduce tensions” on the Israel-Lebanon border.[46]

Israeli airstrike hit a Lebanese Hezbollah truck on the Lebanon-Syria border on February 29, according to Reuters, killing one Hezbollah fighter.[47] Pro-Syrian regime media reported that the airstrike occurred around al Nahariyya, which is on the outskirts of Qusayr.[48] The IDF Air force has increased its strikes into Syria since December 2023 to disrupt the IRGC Quds Force and Hezbollah’s efforts to bring personnel and weapons into Lebanon from Syria[49] previously reported that the Israeli airstrikes are responding to Iranian efforts to accelerate the supply of military equipment to Lebanese Hezbollah.[50]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon as of February 29, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



- Israel
- Israeli Evacuation Zone
- Golan Heights
- ✂ Rocket Attacks
- ☄ Mortar Attacks
- ★ Unspecified Attacks
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria

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

Iran and Axis of Resistance

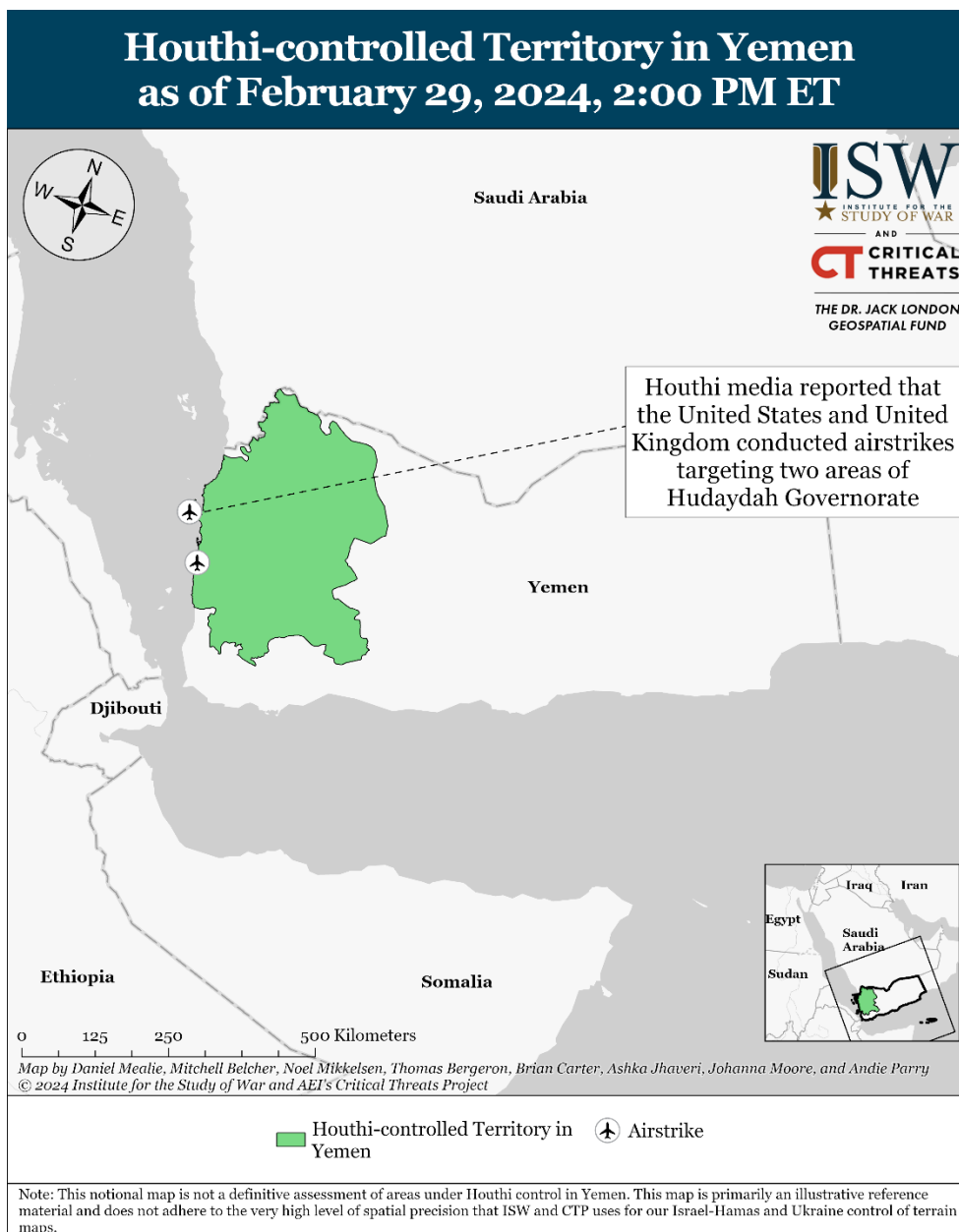
Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- 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

The IDF Air Force likely conducted a series of airstrikes targeting three Iranian-affiliated targets in the Sayyidah Zainab area of southern Damascus on February 28.[51] Iranian and Iranian-backed forces maintain a headquarters in Sayyidah Zainab and use it to manage Iranian operations throughout Syria.[52]

Houthi-controlled media claimed that the United States and United Kingdom conducted airstrikes on four sites in Hudayduh Governorate, Yemen, on February 29.[53] *Al Masirah* stated the strikes targeted Ras Issa and al Kuwayzi areas of coastal Yemen. Neither the United States nor the United Kingdom have confirmed the strikes at the time of this writing.

Houthi Supreme Leader Abdulmalik al Houthi claimed the Houthis have attacked 54 vessels since the start of their anti-shipping campaign in November 2023.[54] Abdulmalik said that Houthi forces have used 384 drones and missiles in those attacks. CTP-ISW has recorded at least 97 instances of the Houthis threatening ships around the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden in this timeframe, however. The Houthi military spokesperson has only issued statements about Houthi attacks on approximately 36 vessels.[55]



Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian discussed ongoing efforts to reach a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war during a meeting with Omani Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Khalifa al Harthi in Tehran on February 28.[56] Abdollahian thanked the Omani government for supporting Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.[57]

The United Kingdom sanctioned three Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force units, two Houthi members, and the IRGC Quds Force deputy commander on February 27.[58] The sanctions targeted individuals and groups that support, enable, or contribute to the Houthis monetarily or militarily. The United Kingdom designated:

- Ali Hussein Badr al Din al Houthi (the undersecretary in the Houthi-controlled Interior Ministry and the commander of the security and police forces)
- IRGC Quds Force Units 190, 6000, and 340;
- Sa'id al-Jamal (An Iran-based Houthi financier whom the United States previously sanctioned in January 2023); and[59]
- Mohammad Reza Fallah Zadeh (the IRGC Quds Force deputy commander whom the United States similarly sanctioned on February 27).[60]

Iran and Russia are continuing to deepen security and economic cooperation. Russia launched the Iranian *Pars-1* satellite into a low earth orbit using a Soyuz rocket on February 29.[61] Iranian state media reported that the *Pars-1* satellite has three cameras and will scan Iran's topography from an orbit of 500 kilometers.[62] Iranian Communications and Information Technology Minister Issa Zareh Pour claimed on February 29 that the *Pars-1* satellite's launch into orbit marks Iran's 12th satellite launch in the past 25 months.[63] The Russian launch of this Iranian satellite is part of a larger trend in which Moscow has increasingly supported the Iranian space program. Russia previously launched a *Kanopus-V* satellite—alternatively referred to as the *Khayyam* in Iran—into orbit in August 2022 on Iran's behalf.[64] Iran can use satellites capable of collecting imagery to improve its targeting for attacks abroad.[65] IRGC-affiliated media reported in July 2020 that the IRGC used its satellites to collect intelligence on US military positions in the Middle East.[66]

Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji separately announced on February 28 that Iranian and Russian officials signed 11 memorandums of understanding during the 17th annual Iran-Russia Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation in Tehran between February 26-28.[67] The agreements cover business, energy, political, and transportation cooperation. Owji stated that Iranian and Russian officials also discussed “peaceful space and nuclear cooperation,” banking and financial cooperation, the Rasht-Astara and Garmsar-Inchek Borun railways, and the Sirik Power Plant during the economic conference.[68]

Iranian Assembly of Experts member Mahmoud Mohammadi Eraghi claimed that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei opposes hereditary succession during an interview with state-affiliated media on February 29.[69] The Assembly of Experts is an Iranian regime entity constitutionally responsible for monitoring the supreme leader and selecting his successor.[70] Eraghi's statement is noteworthy because Khamenei's son, Mojtaba Khamenei, is considered a top contender to become the next supreme leader. Eraghi has served as the head of the supreme leader's office in Qom since 2019.[71] He represents Kermanshah Province in the Assembly of Experts and is also a member of the Expediency Discernment Council, which is an advisory entity for the supreme leader.[72] Eraghi served as the supreme leader's representative to the IRGC during the Iran-Iraq War, after which he served as the head of the Islamic Propaganda Organization, the head of the Islamic Culture and Communications Organization, and a member of the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council.[73]

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