Iran Update, February 3, 2024

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Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm EST

CTP-ISW will publish abbreviated updates on February 3 and 4, 2024.
Detailed coverage will resume Monday, February 5, 2024.

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. Click here to subscribe to the Iran Update.

The February 2 US airstrikes in Iraq and Syria targeted Iranian-backed militia positions along the Euphrates River in Syria, the Iraq-Syria border, and south of Baghdad, Iraq. An anonymous US official told Politico that the United States struck all of its planned targets and several "dynamic targets that popped up as the mission unfolded," including surface-to-air missile systems and drone launch sites.[1] Two unspecified US officials also told the *New York Times* that the United States conducted unspecified cyber attacks targeting Iran on February 2.[2]

The Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) reported that the strikes hit the al Qaim district, Anbar province, targeting the PMF Anbar Operations "mobile" headquarters, an element of the 13th PMF Brigade, and two 45th PMF Brigade positions.[3] The strikes also hit an artillery position, and multiple "armor" sites. The 13th Brigade is Liwa al Tufuf, an Iranian-backed militia controlled by Kataib Hezbollah.[4] Liwa al Tufuf has facilitated Iranian supply lines through al Qaim border crossing with Syria.[5] The 45th Brigade is one arm of Kataib Hezbollah, an Iranian proxy militia. Iranian-backed Badr Organization leader Hadi al Ameri added that the strikes targeted Jurf al Sakhr, a previously Sunni town south of Baghdad that Kataib Hezbollah occupied after committing acts of sectarian cleansing against the previous residents.[6]

The Iraqi prime minister formally commands the PMF, but "power and political realities" mean that large portions of the PMF, including Liwa al Tufuf and Kataib Hezbollah, answer to the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).[7] The PMF's leader, Popular Mobilization Commission Chairman Faleh al Fayyadh, has operated alongside IRGC Quds Force operatives to implement Iranian directives in Iraq.[8] The Popular Mobilization Commission is technically responsible for ensuring that the militias that make up the PMF answer to the Iraqi government.[9] Fayyadh's installation as the chairman and his relationship with the IRGC safeguards the PMF from actual central government control.
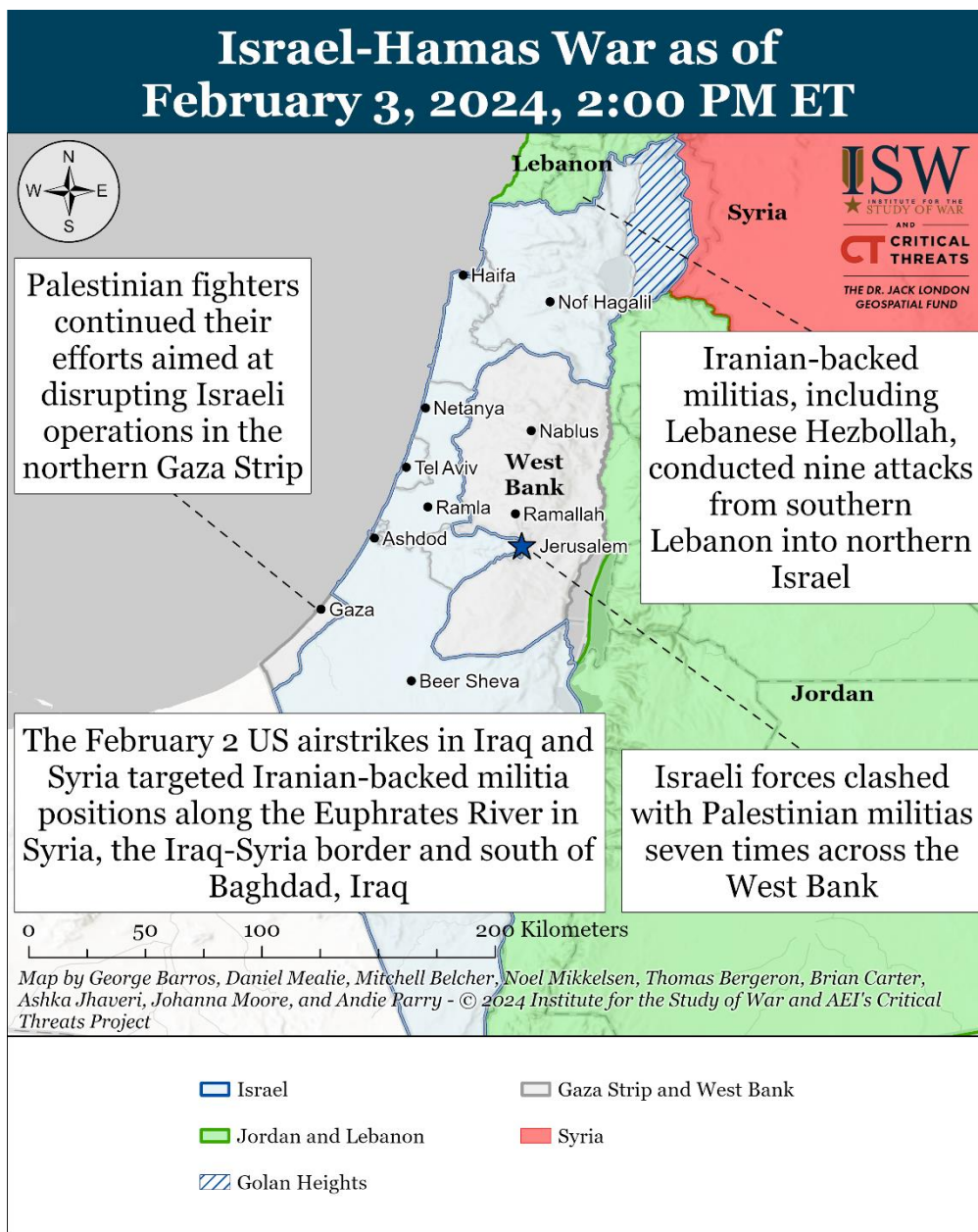
A local Syrian source reported that the US strikes targeted Iranian-backed positions in Albu Kamal, a railway crossing west of Albu Kamal, the outskirts of Mayadeen, Deir ez Zor City, Ayyash (west of Deir ez Zor), and Tabani (west of Deir ez Zor).[10] Iranian-backed militias are active in Albu Kamal, Deir ez Zor City, and Mayadeen. The railway crossing west of Albu Kamal runs along the edge of Imam Ali military base, which is a key Iranian military base in Syria.[11]

Iran, its partners in Iraq, and the Iraqi government falsely claimed that the strikes were violations of Iraqi sovereignty.[12] Western media outlets reported that Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah launched the attack from Rutba, Anbar province, western Iraq.[13] The United States has the right to respond and defend itself against these attacks from Iranian-backed groups in Iraq. Iranian-backed groups in Iraq are themselves violating Iraqi sovereignty by launching attacks from Iraqi territory targeting US forces in Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi government and American assets elsewhere in the region.

Key Takeaways:

- **Iraq and Syria:** The February 2 US airstrikes in Iraq and Syria targeted Iranian-backed militia positions along the Euphrates River in Syria, the Iraq-Syria border, and south of Baghdad, Iraq.
- The Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) reported that the strikes hit al Qaim district, Anbar province, targeting the PMF Anbar Operations "mobile" headquarters, an element of the 13th PMF Brigade (Liwa al Tufuf), and two 45th PMF Brigade (Kataib Hezbollah) positions.[14]
- The Iraqi prime minister formally commands the PMF, but "power and political realities" mean that large portions of the PMF, including Liwa al Tufuf and Kataib Hezbollah, answer to the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)
- A local Syrian source reported that the US strikes targeted Iranian-backed positions in Albu Kamal, a railway crossing west of Albu Kamal, the outskirts of Mayadeen, Deir ez Zor City, Ayyash (west of Deir ez Zor), and Tabani (west of Deir ez Zor).
- Iran, its partners in Iraq, and the Iraqi government falsely claimed that the strikes were violations of Iraqi sovereignty.
- **Northern Gaza Strip:** Palestinian militias are continuing to infiltrate southwestern Gaza City. The militias, including Hamas, have conducted ten attacks targeting Israeli forces in Tel al Hawa since January 31.
- **The Red Sea:** US Central Command (CENTCOM) forces shot down eight Houthi drones over the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea on February 2. CENTCOM also conducted preemptive strikes targeting four drones that the Houthis had prepared to launch towards the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea on February 2.

- **Iraq:** IRGC-controlled and local Syrian media claimed that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq conducted four drone and rocket attacks targeting US forces in Iraq and Syria on February 3. Three "security sources" told Reuters that there was no attack targeting the al Harir airbase.

Israel-Hamas War as of February 3, 2024, 2:00 PM ET

Palestinian fighters continued their efforts aimed at disrupting Israeli operations in the northern Gaza Strip

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

The February 2 US airstrikes in Iraq and Syria targeted Iranian-backed militia positions along the Euphrates River in Syria, the Iraq-Syria border and south of Baghdad, Iraq

Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian militias seven times across the West Bank

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

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.

Palestinian fighters continued their efforts aimed at disrupting Israeli operations in the northern Gaza Strip on February 3.[15] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, the self-proclaimed militant wing of Fatah, fired small arms and mortars targeting Israeli forces in central and western Gaza City.[16] The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a leftist militia aligned with Hamas in the current war, targeted Israeli forces in western Gaza City.[17] Hamas fighters mortared Israeli forces in the al Jamia area, in southwestern Gaza City.[18]

Palestinian militias are continuing to infiltrate southwestern Gaza City. The militias, including Hamas, have conducted ten attacks targeting Israeli forces in Tel al Hawa since January 31.[19]

Palestinian fighters targeted Israeli forces with small arms fire and mortar rounds in Khan Younis City on February 3.[20]

Israeli forces continued clearing operations in western Khan Younis on February 3.[21] Israeli forces raided a building used by Palestinian fighters and captured weapons and tunnel shafts inside.[22]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of February 3, 2024, 2:00 PM ET

Palestinian fighters continued infiltration of Tel al Hawa

Palestinian fighters continued their efforts aimed at disrupting Israeli operations in the northern Gaza Strip

Palestinian fighters targeted Israeli forces with small arms fire and mortars in Khan Younis City

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry
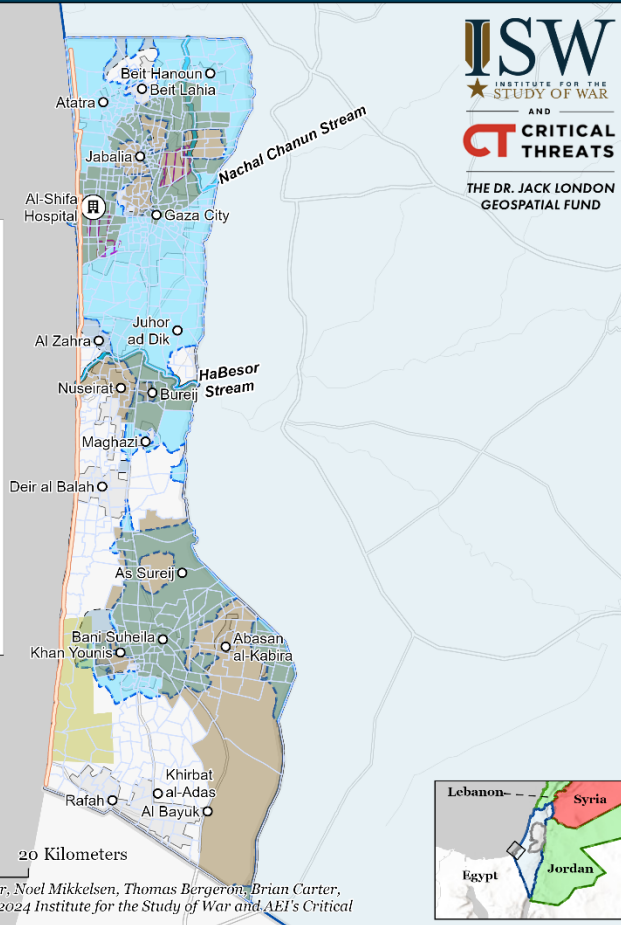© 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

Legend:
- Israel
- Gaza Strip
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias
- 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 3, 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)

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	▭ 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
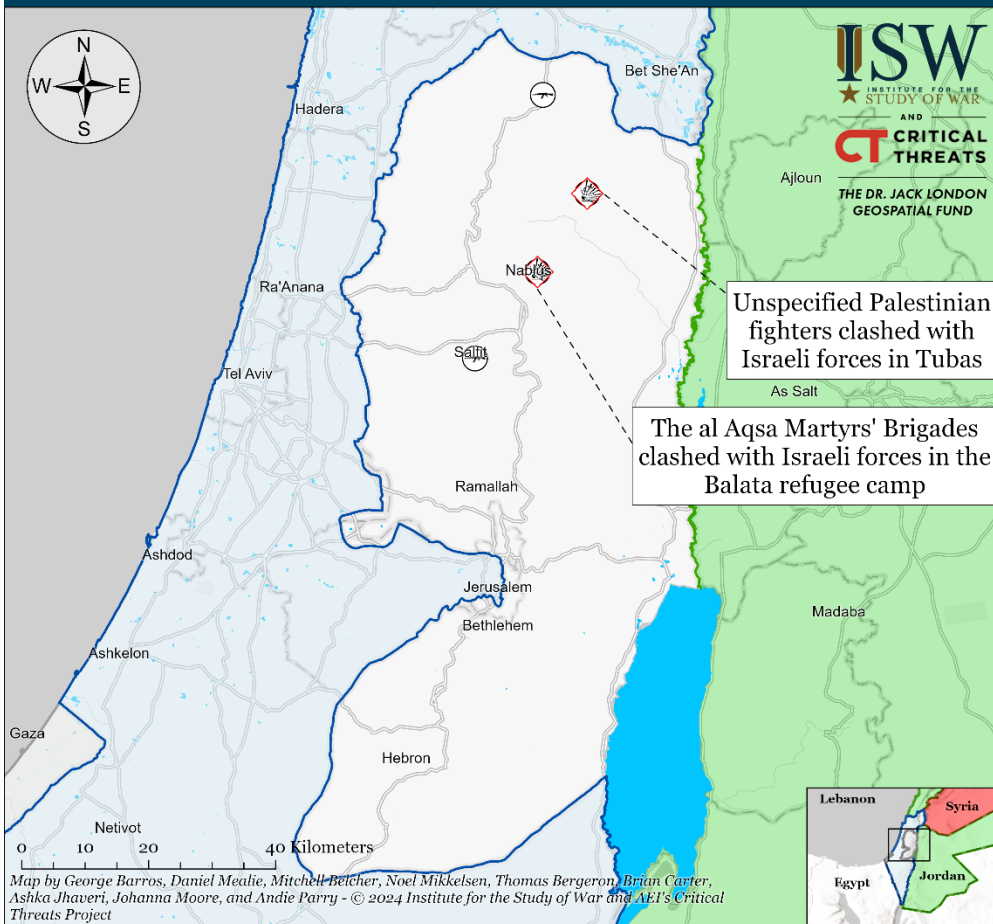
West Bank

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:
- Draw IDF assets and resources toward the West Bank and fix them there

Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian militias seven times across the West Bank on February 3.[23] Israeli forces detained seven wanted individuals and confiscated weapons in the West Bank on February 3.[24]

Clashes in the West Bank as of February 3, 2024, 2:00 PM ET

Unspecified Palestinian fighters clashed with Israeli forces in Tubas

The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades clashed with Israeli forces in the Balata refugee camp

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

Legend:
- Israel
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Clash (Small Arms Combat)
- IED Detonated
- Gaza Strip and West Bank
- Syria

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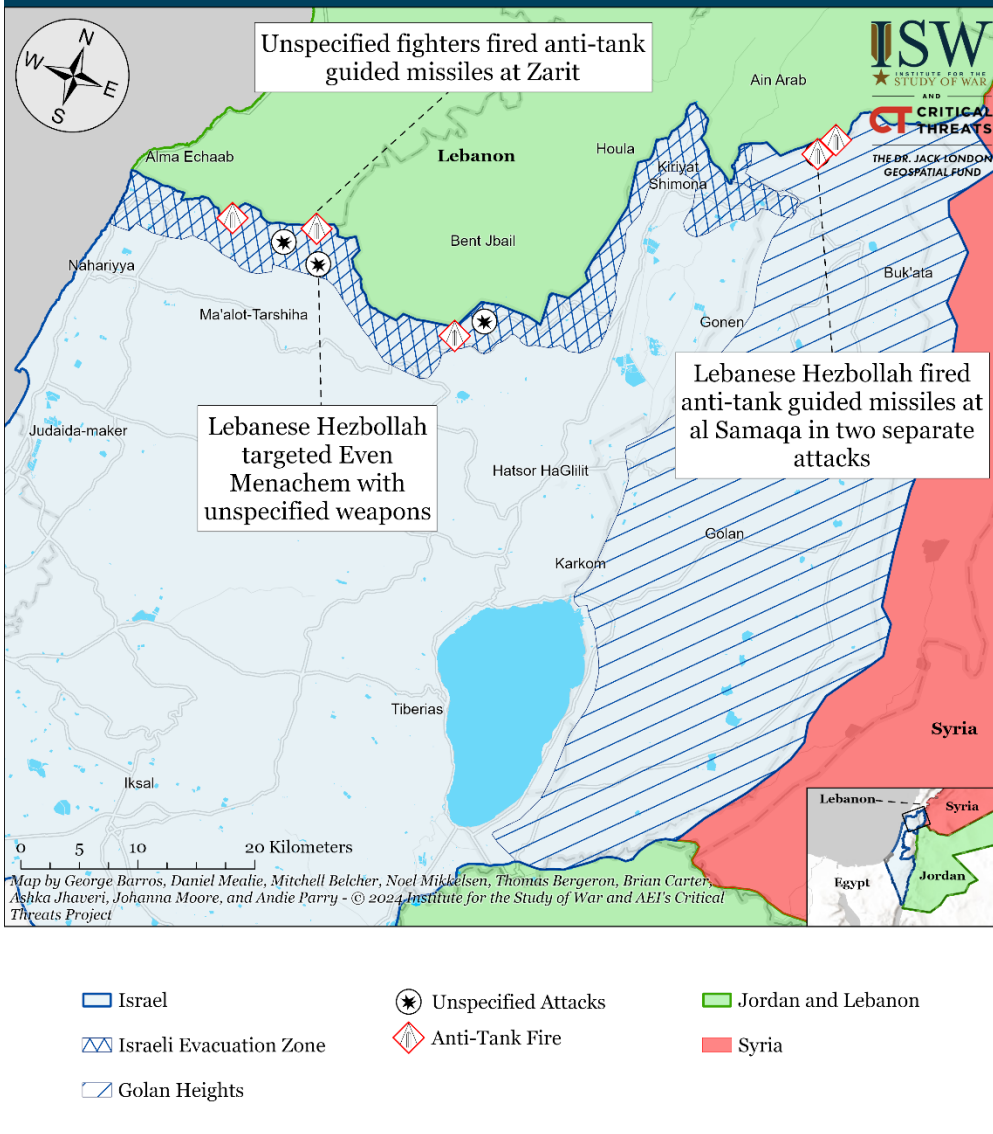
Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

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, conducted nine attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel on February 3.[25]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon as of February 3, 2024, 2:00 PM ET

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

Iran and Axis of Resistance

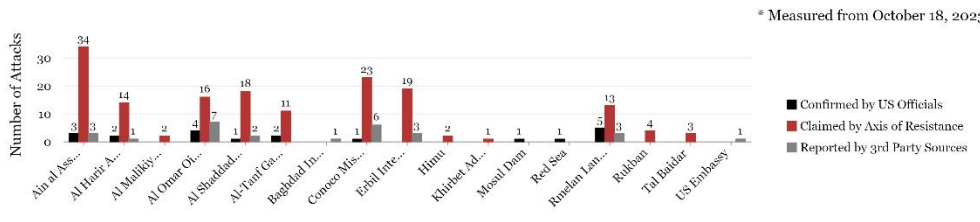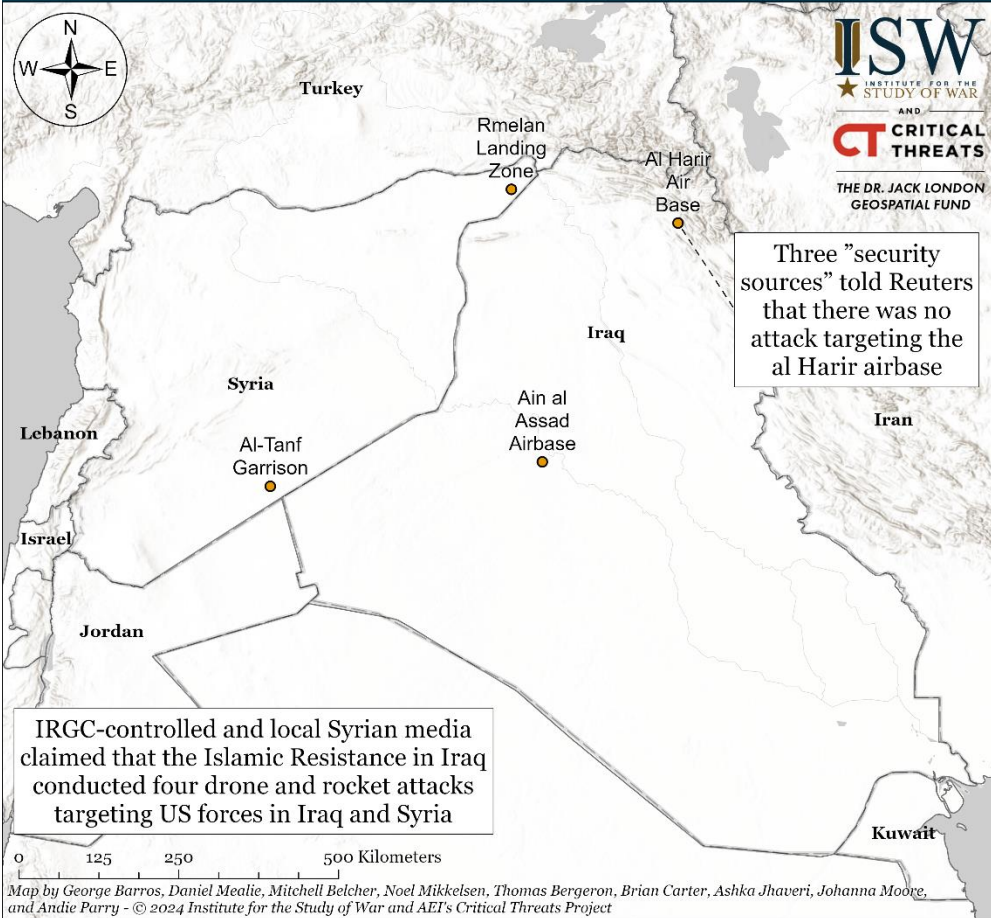**Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:**
- Demonstrate the capability and willingness of Iran and the Axis of Resistance to escalate against the United States and Israel on multiple fronts
- Set conditions to fight a regional war on multiple fronts

US Central Command (CENTCOM) forces shot down eight Houthi drones over the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea on February 2. CENTCOM also conducted preemptive strikes targeting four drones that the Houthis had prepared to launch towards the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea on February 2.[26] CENTCOM conducted the preemptive self-defense strikes

after determining that the drones presented an "imminent threat" to merchant vessels and US Navy ships.

IRGC-controlled and local Syrian media claimed that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq conducted four drone and rocket attacks targeting US forces in Iraq and Syria on February 3.[27] IRGC-controlled media claimed that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq conducted drone and rocket attacks targeting US forces at al Harir Airbase, Erbil Province and Ain al Assad Airbase, Anbar Province, Iraq.[28] Three "security sources" told Reuters that there was no attack targeting the al Harir airbase.[29] IRGC-controlled and local Syrian media also claimed that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq conducted drone and rocket attacks targeting US forces stationed at the al Tanf garrison, Homs Province, and Rumaylan Landing Zone, Hasakah Province, Syria.[30] The Islamic Resistance in Iraq did not claim either of the attacks in Iraq and Syria on its Telegram account.

Attacks against US Bases in the Middle East as of February 3, 2024, 2:00 PM ET

Three "security sources" told Reuters that there was no attack targeting the al Harir airbase

IRGC-controlled and local Syrian media claimed that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq conducted four drone and rocket attacks targeting US forces in Iraq and Syria

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* Measured from October 18, 2023

Note: The color of the dot indicates the total number of attacks against a specific target via an orange color scale. Locations with multiple attacks will receive a darker hue.

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[1] https://www.politico.com/news/2024/02/03/an-iranian-backed-militia-official-downplays-the-us-strikes-in-iraq-hints-at-deescalation-00139458#:~:text=Politico%20Logo&text=Hussein%20al%2DMosawi%2C%20spokesperson%20for,every%20action%20elicits%20a%20reaction.%E2%80%9D

[2] https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/02/us/politics/us-iran-sanctions-charges.html

[3] https://t.me/teamsmediawar_1/98240

[4] https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-liwa-al-tafuf-13th-pmf-brigade

[5] https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-liwa-al-tafuf-13th-pmf-brigade

[6] https://t.me/platformB/2534

[7] https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Iraq%20-%20ISF%20PMF%20Orders%20of%20Battle_0_0.pdf

[8] https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1231

[9] https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1231

[10] https://twitter.com/DeirEzzore/status/1753714182795538773

[11] https://sethfrantzman.com/2019/12/12/everything-you-need-to-know-about-irans-imam-ali-base-at-albukamal-syria/

[12] https://twitter.com/IraqiPMO/status/1753721427176399008; https://twitter.com/IraqiPresidency/status/1753739809925861832; https://t.me/platformB/2534; https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1402/11/14/3033416

[13] https://twitter.com/SkyNewsArabia_B/status/1751707831579902225

[14] https://t.me/teamsmediawar_1/98240

[15] https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/5614 ; https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/5615 ; https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/5616 ; https://t.me/kataeb_moqawma/4121

[16] https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/5614 ; https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/5615

[17] https://t.me/kataeb_moqawma/4121

[18] https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1536

[19] https://t.me/kataeb_moqawma/4121; https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1529; https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1523; https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1508; https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1509; https://t.me/kataeb_moqawma/4113; ☐HYPERLINK "https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1506"https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1506; https://t.me/sarayaps/17355; https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1505; https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1504

[20] https://t.me/sarayaps/17368 ; https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1535 ; https://t.me/kataeb_moqawma/4119 ; https://t.me/sarayaps/17372 ; https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/5619

[21] https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1753672883849613345 ; https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1753672885825114277 ; https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1753672888077390166 ; https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1753672890321420707

[22] https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1753672885825114277; https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1753672888077390166

[23] https://t.me/QudsN/365888; https://t.me/QudsN/365918; https://t.me/QudsN/365923; https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/5613; https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/5618; https://t.me/newpress1/66637

[24] https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1753785960758665636

[25] https://t.me/C_Military1/45174; https://t.me/C_Military1/45176; https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1753759302211236031; https://t.me/C_Military1/45191; https://t.me/C_Military1/45193; https://t.me/C_Military1/45196; https://t.me/C_Military1/45198; https://t.me/C_Military1/45200; https://t.me/C_Military1/45201

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[28] https://www.tasnimnews dot com/en/news/2024/02/03/3033208; https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14021114000447

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[30] https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1402/11/14/3033610; https://www.tasnimnews dot com/en/news/2024/02/03/3033208; https://x.com/OALD24/status/1753776523314622525?s=20