

# Iran Update, February 7, 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. Click [here](#) to subscribe to the Iran Update.*

**US Central Command (CENTCOM) killed a senior Kataib Hezbollah commander on February 7 who planned and participated in attacks targeting US forces in the region.**<sup>[1]</sup> CENTCOM said the strike was in response to the Islamic Resistance in Iraq's drone attack on January 28 that killed three US servicemembers in Jordan.<sup>[2]</sup> Local Iraqi media reported that the US airstrike hit a vehicle and killed three of its occupants in Mashtal, eastern Baghdad.<sup>[3]</sup> Two Kataib Hezbollah commanders, Wissam Mohammed Saber al Saadi and Arkan Aleaoui, were in the vehicle.<sup>[4]</sup> The Associated Press cited "two officials with Iranian-backed militias in Iraq" who claimed that Saadi oversaw KH operations in Syria.<sup>[5]</sup> An Iraqi journalist identified Aleaoui as a KH field commander.<sup>[6]</sup> Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba said on February 7 that it will retaliate for the US strike in Baghdad if the Iraqi government does not immediately remove US forces from Iraq.<sup>[7]</sup>

**Iraqis demonstrated outside the US Embassy in Baghdad following Iranian-backed social media calls to storm the embassy on social media.**<sup>[8]</sup> Pro-Iranian-backed Iraqi militia social media channels issued calls after the US drone strike for demonstrators to gather in Jadiriya and march towards the embassy.<sup>[9]</sup>

**Sudani said that the Iraqi Federal government has not had direct contact with the United States since the US airstrikes in Iraq on February 1.**<sup>[10]</sup> Sudani also said that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) will be involved in future bilateral negotiations on the status of US and International Coalition forces in Iraq. It is unclear what role the KRG will play in the bilateral negotiations.

**The Microsoft Threat Analysis Center reported that Iran accelerated its cyberattacks and influence operations after October 7 to support Hamas and weaken Israel and its allies and business partners.**<sup>[11]</sup> Microsoft assessed that Iran's operations immediately after October 7 were "hasty and chaotic," but that these efforts have "achieved growing success."<sup>[12]</sup> Microsoft said that traffic to Iranian state media websites increased 42 percent between October 7 and October 14 and that the traffic "was still 28 percent above pre-war levels" in early November.<sup>[13]</sup> Microsoft said that the "hasty and chaotic" operations targeting Israel shifted to an "all hands on attack threat environment" in late October.<sup>[14]</sup> It reported that the cyberattacks were increasingly "destructive" and Iran began employing "networks of social media 'sockpuppet' accounts."<sup>[15]</sup> Microsoft also said that Iran gradually expanded its operation to target countries other than Israel, including Albania, Bahrain, and the United States.<sup>[16]</sup> Iran also used artificial intelligence for the first time in a cyber or influence operation to replace "streaming television services...with a fake news video featuring an apparently AI-generated news anchor."<sup>[17]</sup> This AI-enabled operation targeted audiences in Canada, the UAE, and the United Kingdom.<sup>[18]</sup>

**Israel rejected a Hamas three-stage proposal for a ceasefire on February 7.**<sup>[19]</sup> Hamas' proposed the February 7 deal after Egypt, the United States, and Israel proposed a separate three-stage agreement on January 31 after talks in Paris.<sup>[20]</sup> The January 31 Paris proposal did not include an end to the war.<sup>[21]</sup> Hamas offered a three-stage ceasefire deal that would release all Israeli hostages over a four-month period in exchange for the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip and discussions on the end of the war.<sup>[22]</sup> Each phase would last 45 days. The deal includes a "comprehensive reconstruction" of the Gaza Strip. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected the Hamas counterproposal in a national address, but he did not rule out the possibility of further negotiations.<sup>[23]</sup>

**Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced on February 7 that the IDF would prepare to operate in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.**<sup>[24]</sup> Israeli officials have said repeatedly that the IDF will clear Rafah.<sup>[25]</sup> Netanyahu's announcement follows weeks of talks between Israel and Egypt

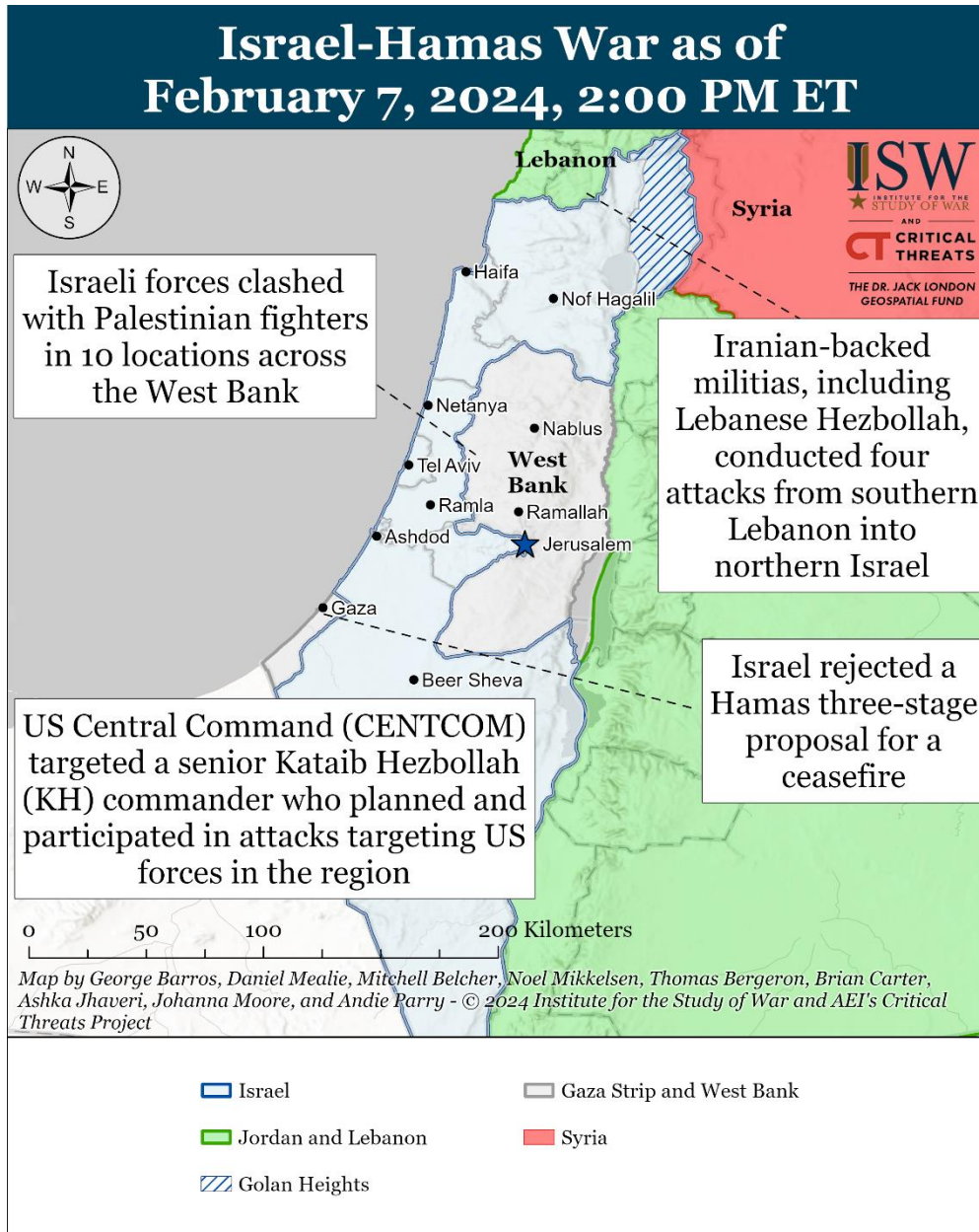
discussing an Israeli operation into Rafah.[26] The Israel-Hamas war has displaced over 50 percent of the Gaza Strip's two million residents to Rafah.[27] Egypt is concerned that an Israeli military operation in Rafah could force displaced Gazans to flee into the Sinai Peninsula.[28] Western media reported on February 6 that unspecified Egyptian officials said that Israel told Cairo in private that the IDF would allow people in Rafah to evacuate north before beginning operations in Rafah.[29]

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other senior Israeli officials on February 7 to discuss negotiations to reach a ceasefire that would release remaining hostages in the Gaza Strip and allow more aid to reach Palestinians.[30] Israeli officials told CNN that the IDF briefed Blinken on the upcoming expansion of Israeli ground operations and that Blinken raised concerns regarding the densely populated area, particularly related to the measures the IDF would take to mitigate harm to civilians.[31]

### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Iraq:** US Central Command (CENTCOM) killed a senior Kataib Hezbollah commander responsible for Syria on February 7 who planned and participated in attacks targeting US forces in the region. The strike also killed a Kataib Hezbollah field commander.
- Iraqis demonstrated outside the US Embassy in Baghdad following Iranian-backed social media calls to storm the embassy on social media.
- **Iran:** The Microsoft Threat Analysis Center reported that Iran accelerated its cyberattacks and influence operations after October 7 to support Hamas and weaken Israel and its allies and business partners.
- **Negotiations:** Israel rejected a Hamas three-stage proposal for a ceasefire on February 7.
- Hamas offered a three-stage ceasefire deal that would release all Israeli hostages over a four-month period in exchange for the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip and discussions on the end of the war.[32] Each phase would last 45 days.
- **Southern Gaza Strip:** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced on February 7 that the IDF would prepare to operate in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.
- Israeli officials told CNN that the IDF briefed US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on the upcoming expansion of Israeli ground operations and that Blinken raised

concerns regarding the densely populated area, particularly related to the measures the IDF would take to mitigate harm to civilians.



### **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.

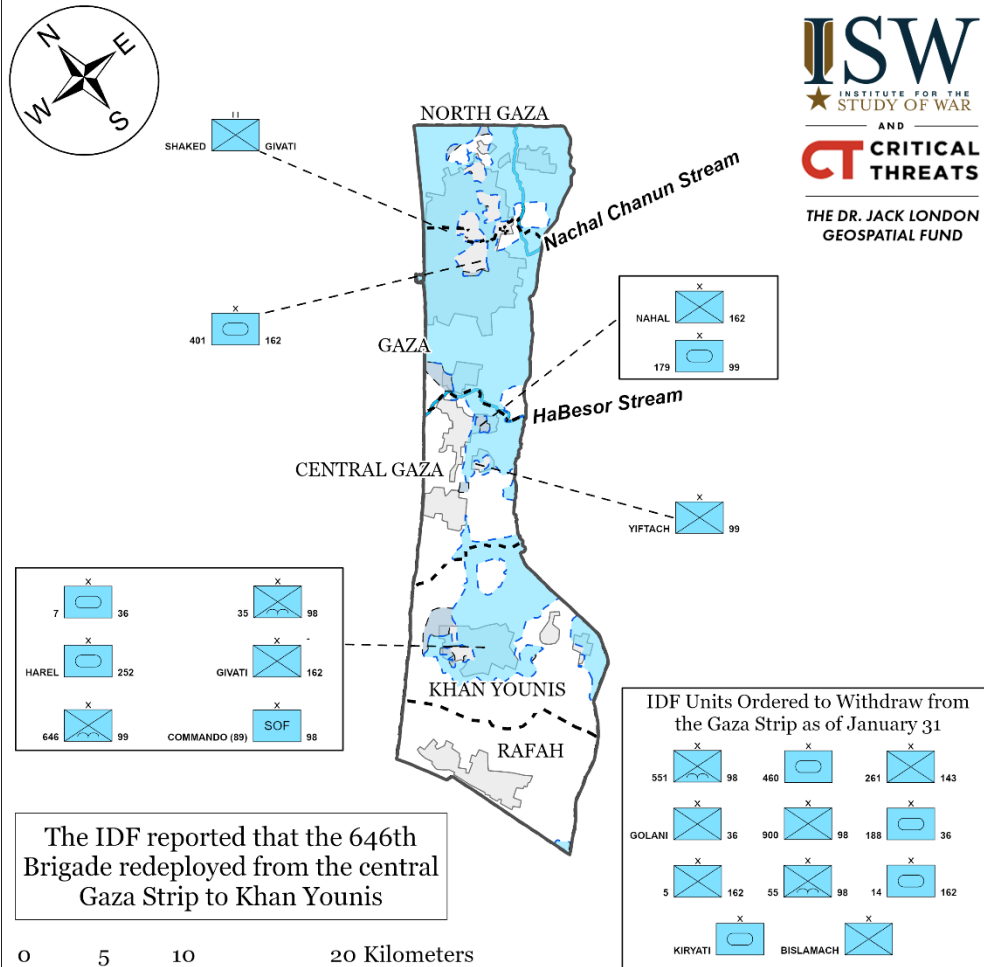
**Palestinian fighters continued to infiltrate western Gaza City, where they are attacking Israeli forces.** The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi met with division commanders in the northern Gaza Strip on February 6.[33] Halevi said that Israeli forces in the northern Gaza Strip are killing Palestinian fighters, commanders, and destroying infrastructure. Palestinian militias claimed most of their attacks in the Gaza Strip on February 7 in western Gaza City.[34] The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) launched one-way attack drones targeting Israeli forces western Gaza City in one such attack.[35] A Palestinian activist reported clashes between Palestinian fighters and Israeli forces in several neighborhoods of western Gaza City, including al Shati Camp, Sheikh Ijlin, and Tal al Hawa.[36]

Israeli media reported on February 7 that Israeli forces located a large Hamas underground tunnel underneath a UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) headquarters in Rimal neighborhood, Gaza City.[37]

**The IDF 98th Division located two interconnected tunnel complexes in Khan Younis that Hamas used to hold hostages.**[38] The IDF reported that senior Hamas officials used the complex before Hamas repurposed it to hold hostages. Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters in the tunnels and found a cell for holding hostages. The tunnel system is under central Khan Younis City. The IDF estimates that Hamas invested millions of shekels into its construction.

**Israeli forces continued to conduct clearing operations in Khan Younis on February 7.** The 35th Paratroopers Brigade and the 89th Commando Brigade (both assigned to the 98th Division) clashed with Palestinian fighters in western Khan Younis and raided military infrastructure.[39] The IDF reported that the 646th Brigade (assigned to the 99th Division) redeployed to Khan Younis after the brigade conducted clearing operations in the central Gaza Strip.[40] Hamas and several Palestinian militias allied with Hamas attempted to disrupt Israeli operations in Khan Younis.[41] The militia fighters targeted Israeli forces with small arms, rocket-propelled grenades (RPG), thermobaric rockets, and unspecified explosive devices.[42]

# Israel Defense Forces Order of Battle as of February 7, 2024



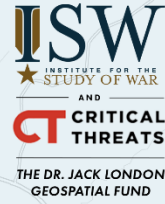
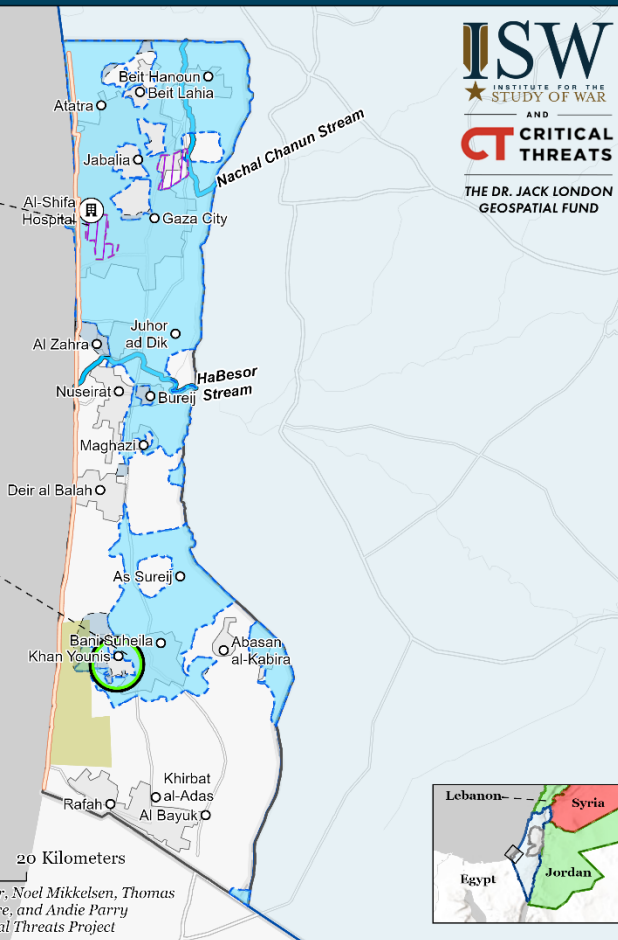
Note: CTP-ISW's map of IDF dispositions is based on Israel Defense Forces public announcements and reports from Israeli military correspondents who have travelled with the IDF into Gaza. We do not use information that has not been released by the IDF in these maps. The unit locations on this map are notional, and the map does not attempt to depict any unit's precise location.

# Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of February 7, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Palestinian fighters continued to infiltrate western Gaza City, where they are attacking Israeli forces

The IDF 98th Division located two interconnected tunnel complexes that Hamas used to hold hostages in 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

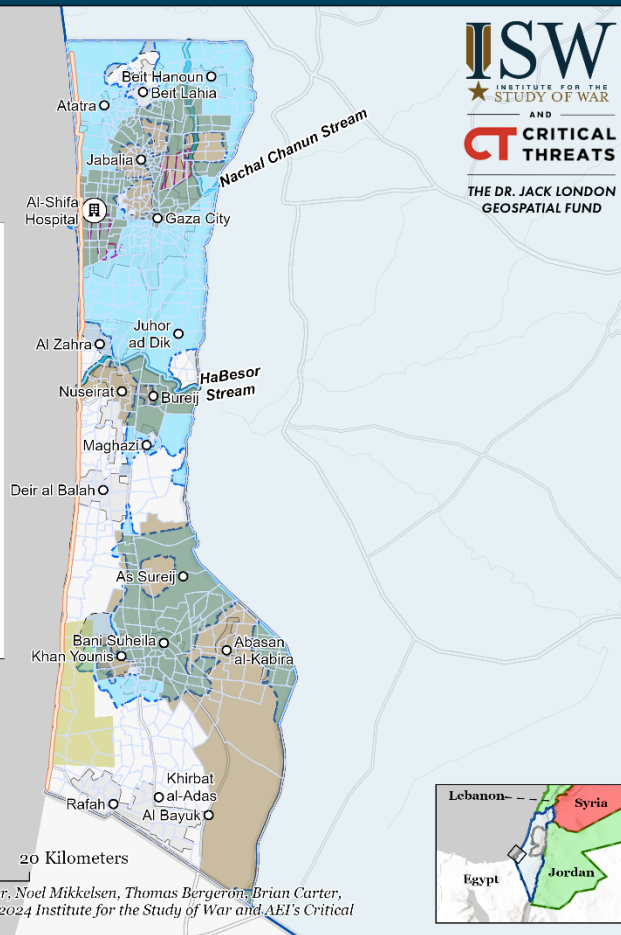
\* ISW-CTP's "Reported Israeli Clearing Operations" layer uses the US military's doctrinal definition of clearing which is an operation that "requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance within an assigned area." Clearing operations frequently take weeks and sometimes months to complete



# Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip as of February 7, 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

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

**Saudi Arabia told the United States that it will not normalize relations with Israel “unless an independent Palestinian state is recognized.”[43]** The Saudi Arabian Foreign Ministry called on permanent members of the UN Security Council to recognize a Palestinian state “on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.” US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on January 10 that normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel is still possible.[44]



**The IDF published details of a law that would increase the amount of time conscripts and reservists serve in the military.[45]** The law will increase the age at which reservists become exempt from reserve duty. The IDF will also call upon reservists more frequently and increase regular service to three years. Israeli Army Radio reported on February 7 that due to "the war and the large number of casualties...the number of combat forces in the IDF" declined.[46] The IDF published on January 15 that 188 Israeli troops have died in the ground offensive and that 1,113 IDF soldiers have sustained injuries.[47]

**Palestinian militias did not conduct indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel on February 7.**

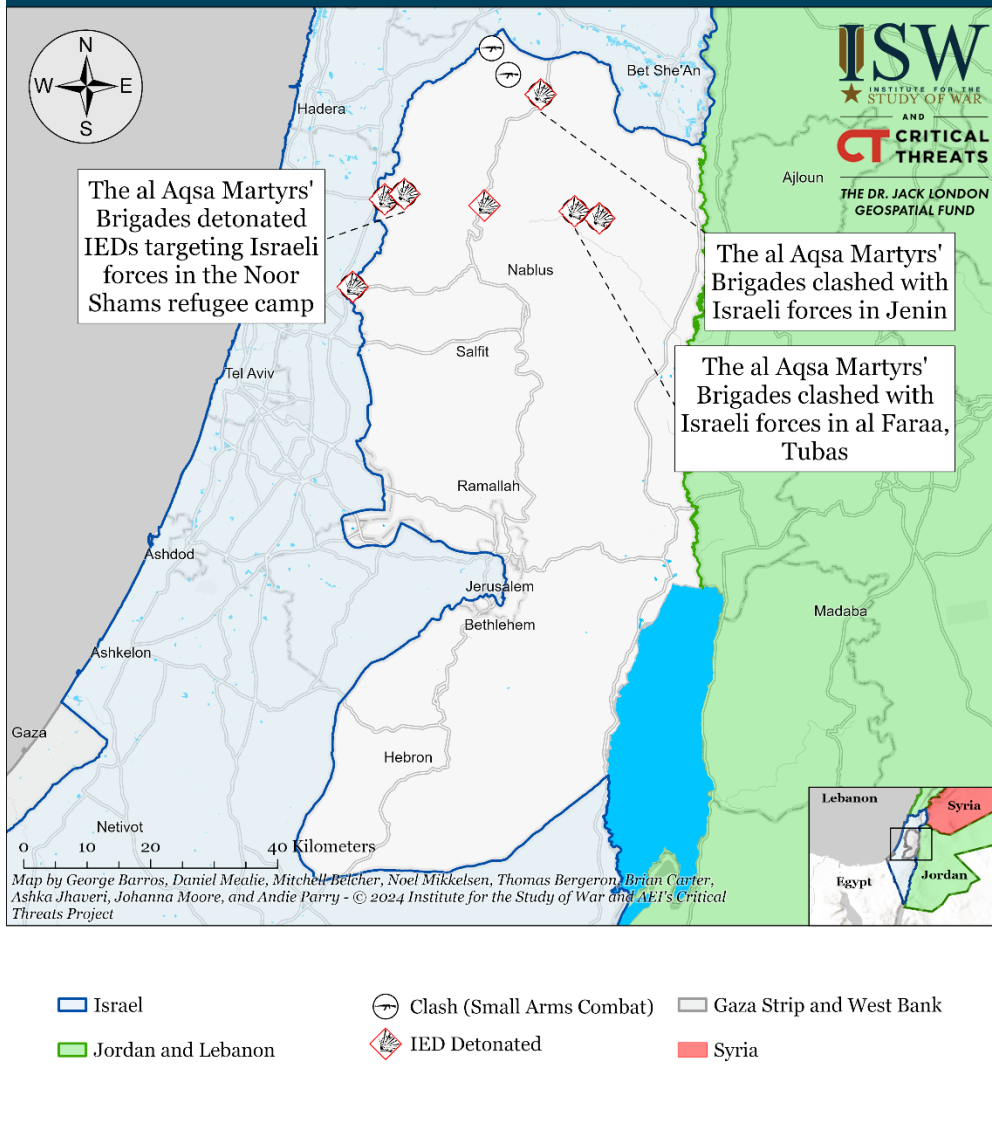
### **West Bank**

#### **Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:**

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

**Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters in 10 locations across the West Bank on February 7.[48]** Israeli forces conducted raids in the Noor Shams and Jenin refugee camps.[49] The IDF detained 21 wanted individuals across the West Bank.[50]

# Clashes in the West Bank as of February 7, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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

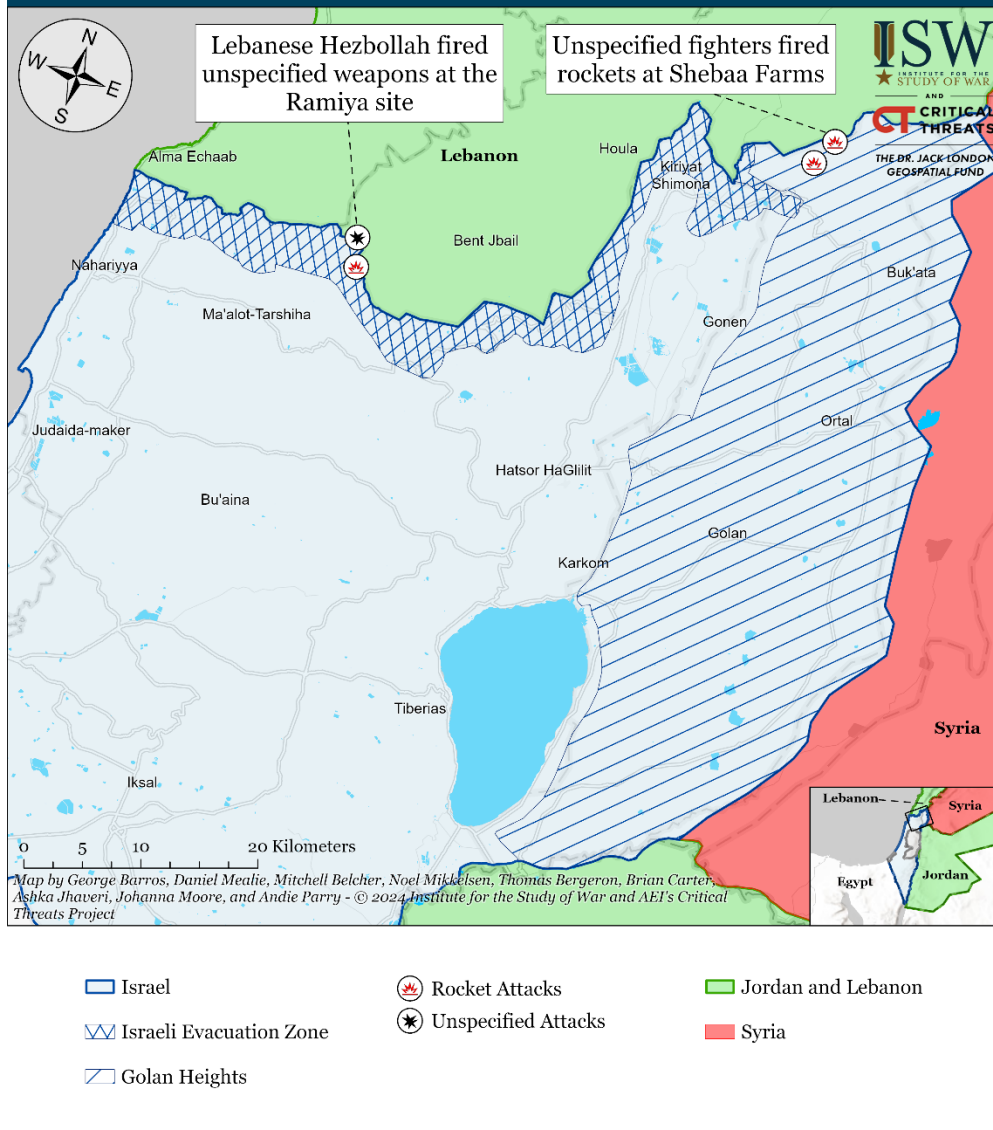
## **Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights**

### **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 four attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel on February 7.[51]**

## Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon as of February 7, 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

**The Jordanian Armed Forces clashed with Iranian-backed drug smugglers on the Jordan-Syria border on February 7.**<sup>[52]</sup> Western media reported that the Jordanian armed forces killed three of the smugglers.<sup>[53]</sup> Local Syrian media said that the smugglers belonged to Lebanese Hezbollah.<sup>[54]</sup>

This clash is part of increasing Jordanian operations against smuggling networks in southwestern Syria. Jordanian forces have clashed with Iranian-backed smugglers along the Jordan-Syria border three other times since December 2023, including once on February 5.<sup>[55]</sup> The Jordanian Royal Air Force has also struck Iranian-backed drug smugglers three times since December 2023. Western media reported in January that Western and Jordanian officials said that Lebanese Hezbollah and other Iranian-backed groups are driving the increase in drug smuggling into Jordan.<sup>[56]</sup> The Syrian regime, Lebanese Hezbollah, and other Iranian-backed militias mass produce Captagon in Syria and smuggle it through Jordan to the Gulf Arab states. This smuggling and distribution cartel generates billions of dollars in revenue for Iran and its Axis of Resistance.<sup>[57]</sup>

**Raisi administration officials held several meetings with Sudanese Armed Forces-affiliated Foreign Affairs Minister Ali al Sadiq Ali to discuss Israel and bilateral relations.** Ali claimed that Israel is driving the continuation of the Sudanese civil war in retaliation for Sudan's support of the Palestinian people in a meeting with Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian.<sup>[58]</sup> Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said that isolating Israel is one of Iran's "basic policies" and added that he supported the establishment of a strong government in Sudan.<sup>[59]</sup> Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian separately expressed his desire to resume full diplomatic relations between Sudan and Iran.<sup>[60]</sup> Iran and Sudan maintained a strong relationship from the 1980s until the mid-2010s, when Sudan began improving its relationship with Saudi Arabia.<sup>[61]</sup>

Iran likely seeks to increase economic investment in Sudan to generate revenue for the Iranian economy, including by selling Sudan combat drones. Western media reported on January 24 that Iran had supplied the Sudanese Armed Forces with combat drones.<sup>[62]</sup> French media previously reported on January 23, 2023 that Iran had likely supplied Sudan with Mohajer-6 drones as early as 2019.<sup>[63]</sup> The IRGC and regime-affiliated outlets have repeatedly encouraged increased investment in Africa to obtain gold payments that Iran can use to evade sanctions.<sup>[64]</sup> Iranian economic investment in Africa has increased during the Raisi administration.<sup>[65]</sup> CTP-ISW previously assessed in June 2023 that Iran's increased economic investment in Africa is part of the Raisi's effort to generate revenue through economic trade with non-Western countries.<sup>[66]</sup>

**Iranian Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi discussed the Israel-Hamas war during a meeting with Iraqi Interior Minister Abdul Amir al Shammari on**

**February 7.**[67] Vahidi thanked the Iraqi government for supporting the Palestinian people. Vahidi said that Iraq "took good positions" in the United Nations Security Council by condemning the February 2 US strikes that targeted Iranian-backed militia positions in Iraq and Syria.[68]

**Iranian media reported that Iranian security forces arrested several unspecified individuals across Iran for espionage and terrorism "directed by a center in Azerbaijan."** Iranian media reported that the suspects were planning to conduct "sabotage operations" in Iran.[69] The Iranian Intelligence Ministry said on February 2 that it identified "a significant number of [Israeli] spies and terrorists" working in Iran.[70] Iran frequently arrests individuals in Iran's East Azerbaijan and West Azerbaijan provinces that it accuses of spying for Israel.[71]

**An Artesh-controlled social media account warned that Iran would respond to any "terrorist action" targeting IRGC spy ship *Behshad* in the Red Sea.**[72] The *Behshad* assists Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden by providing the Houthis with real time intelligence on ships operating in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.[73] The *Behshad* held a position near the Dahlak archipelago in the Red Sea prior to entering the Gulf of Aden on January 11.[74] An online shipping tracker reported that Houthi attacks targeting ships in the Gulf of Aden increased after January 11.[75] The *Behshad* is currently anchored off the coast of Djibouti City.[76] Iran claims that the *Behshad* is participating in a counterpiracy mission in the Red Sea.[77] AP noted that Iran has not publicly participated in any recent operations countering Somali piracy.[78]

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[1] <https://twitter.com/CENTCOM/status/1755335984093282723?s=20>

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[3] <https://shafaq.com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D8%B3%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%8A-> dot

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[22] <https://al-akhbar dot com/Palestine/376267/النص-الحرفي-لرد-حماس-على-اتفاقية-الإطار>

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