

Iran Update, February 6, 2024

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Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm EST

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.

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said on February 5 that Israeli operations have dismantled 18 of 24 Hamas battalions, rendering them “no longer [functional] as fighting military” organizations.[1] Gallant and the IDF have not identified a precise definition for “dismantle.” The IDF previously announced Israeli forces had “dismantled” all of Hamas’ battalions in the northern Gaza Strip on January 6.[2] Hamas cells have continued attacks in the northern Gaza Strip after the IDF withdrew most of its forces on December 31.[3] The continued Palestinian militia attacks in the northern Strip demonstrate the risk posed by small, networked military cells in the northern Gaza Strip. The size of the cells and the degree of organization and coordination between them is not clear. Palestinian militia activity in the northern Gaza Strip spurred a division-sized IDF clearing operation in western Gaza City over the last week, however.[4] These cells remain capable of reorganizing into an embryonic military structure.[5] The Hamas Gaza City Brigade commander will continue to support this reorganization.[6]

A top UN official in Iraq claimed that both US self-defense strikes and Iranian-backed Iraqi militia attacks targeting US forces “recklessly heighten tensions,” which ignores Iran’s role in driving escalation in Iraq. The head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq stated on February 6 that “messaging by strikes only serves to recklessly heighten tension,” in reference to both Iranian-backed attacks and US self-defense strikes responding to these attacks.[7] Beginning on October 22, Iranian-backed Iraqi militias conducted 33 attacks targeting US forces in Iraq without triggering a US response inside Iraq.[8] US forces first responded in Iraq to attacks targeting US forces after Kataib Hezbollah fired a ballistic missile targeting a US position in late November 2023.[9] The United States has the right to protect and defend its personnel in Iraq, who are deployed

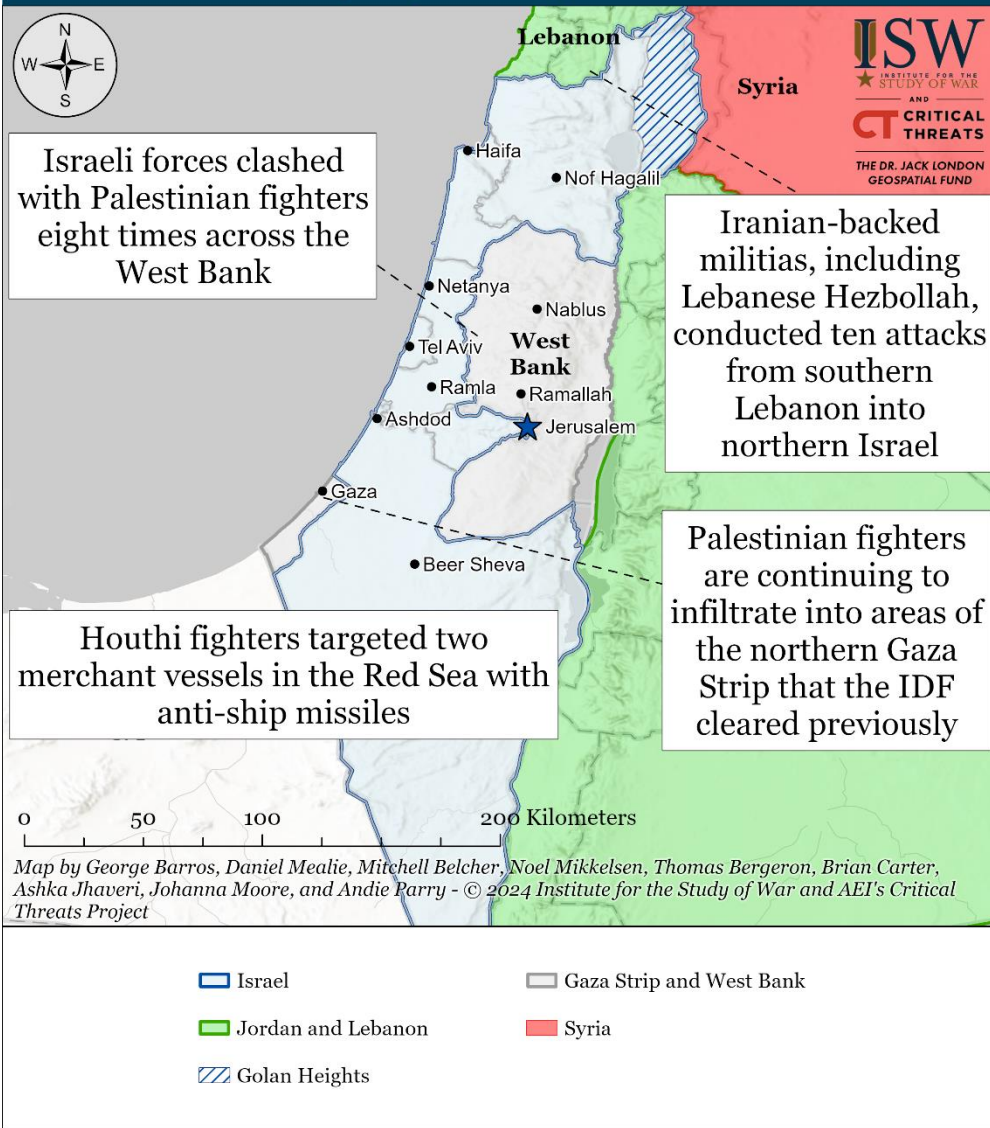
at the invitation of the Iraqi federal government to fight ISIS. The Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are themselves escalating tensions in Iraq and the region and violating Iraqi sovereignty by continuing to attack US forces unilaterally and without provocation.

Several Iranian-backed Iraqi militias reiterated their plans to continue attacking US forces on February 6. The leader of Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba said that the “resistance” will expel the United States.[10] A field commander for Ashab al Kahf, a militia close to Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba, also warned that Ashab al Kahf will apply “extreme force” until the United States withdraws from Iraq and ends support for Israel’s operation in the Gaza Strip.[11] Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba and Ashab al Kahf both vowed to continue attacking US forces after Kataib Hezbollah announced on January 30 that it suspended “military and security” operations targeting US forces.[12]

Key Takeaways:

- **Gaza Strip:** Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said on February 5 that Israeli operations have dismantled 18 of 24 Hamas battalions, rendering them “no longer function as fighting military organizations.” Gallant and the IDF have not identified a precise definition for “dismantle.”
- Palestinian fighters are using more sophisticated weapons to attack Israeli forces in the areas Palestinian militias have infiltrated in the northern Gaza Strip.
- **Iraq and Syria:** A top UN official in Iraq claimed that both US self-defense strikes and Iranian-backed Iraqi militia attacks targeting US forces “recklessly heighten tensions,” which ignores Iran’s role in driving escalation in Iraq. Several Iranian-backed Iraqi militias reiterated their plans to continue attacking US forces on February 6.
- **Yemen:** Houthi fighters targeted two merchant vessels in the Red Sea with anti-ship missiles on February 6.

Israel-Hamas War as of February 6, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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.

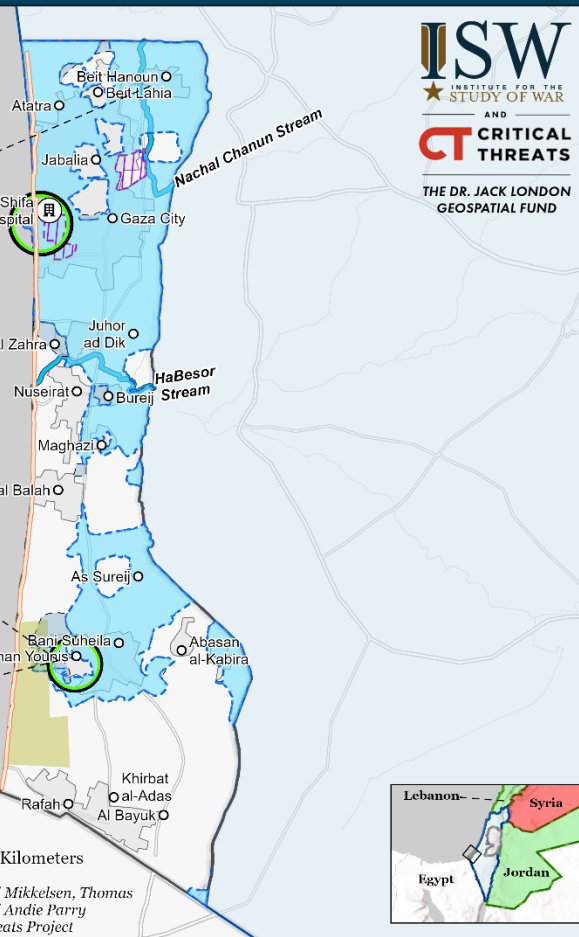
Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of February 6, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Israeli forces struck a Hamas squad setting up intelligence equipment in Beit Hanoun

The IDF said that the IDF 98th Division has killed dozens of fighters and detained over 80 others in recent days

The IDF uncovered documents in the Gaza Strip suggesting Iran gave Hamas at least 150 million dollars in funding



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
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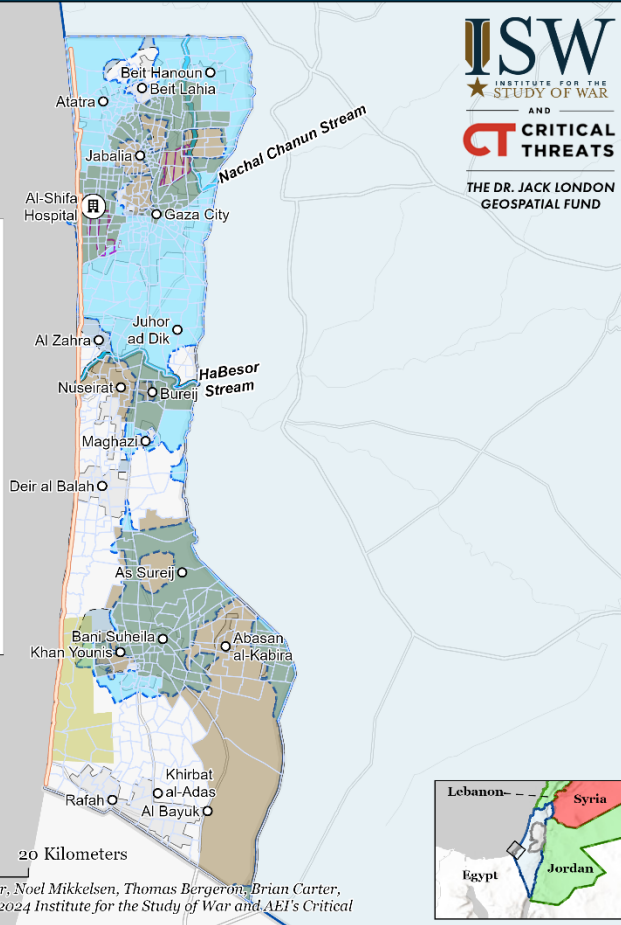
- Israel
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- Significant Water Obstacles
- Gaza Strip
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230
- Densely Urban Areas
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias
- 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 6, 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
- Gaza Strip
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias
- Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230
- Densely Urban Areas
- Significant Water Obstacles

* 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

Palestinian fighters are continuing to infiltrate previously cleared areas of the northern Gaza Strip. CTP-ISW assessed on February 3 that Palestinian fighters infiltrated southwestern Gaza City.[13]

The IDF said that Hamas is attempting to restore its “intelligence collection” capacity in the northern Gaza Strip, likely to aid its attacks on Israeli forces and reestablish control over the local population. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Unit 414 Intelligence Battalion (assigned to the 143rd Division) directed airstrikes targeting four Palestinian fighters in Beit Hanoun who attempted to establish a Hamas reconnaissance position in the area.[14] Palestinian militants last conducted attacks from Beit Hanoun on January 25.[15]

Palestinian militias have conducted several combined attacks in the areas that they have infiltrated in the northern Gaza Strip since mid-January.[16] This trend indicates several militias have infiltrated into the previously cleared zones and that they are closely collaborating against Israeli forces. The Palestinian militias arrayed against the IDF in the Gaza Strip organized themselves into a "Joint Operations Room" in 2018 to fight the IDF.[17] This force is led by Hamas' military wing.

Palestinian fighters are using more sophisticated weapons to attack Israeli forces in the areas Palestinian militias have infiltrated in the northern Gaza Strip. PIJ fighters detonated an explosively-formed penetrator (EFP) targeting an Israeli military vehicle in western Gaza City, where the 162nd Division launched a new, division-size clearing operation last week.[18] Local Palestinian journalists reported that Israeli forces pulled a "charred" military vehicle from the attack site, corroborating PIJ's attack claim.[19]

Elements of the IDF 143rd Division directed an airstrike targeting a PIJ fighter in the Deir al Balah area on February 6.[20] The IDF said that the PIJ fighter participated in the attack in Nir Oz on October 7.[21] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade said separately that an Israeli airstrike killed one of its senior commanders in Deir al Balah between February 3 and 4.[22] Palestinian militias did not claim any attacks on Israeli forces in the central Gaza Strip on February 6.

Israeli forces continued clearing operations in western Khan Younis on February 6. The IDF said that the IDF 98th Division killed "dozens" of Palestinian fighters and detained over 80 others on February 5 and 6 in western Khan Younis, including fighters that the IDF suspects participated in Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel.[23] The Givati Brigade (assigned to the 162nd Division) killed over 15 fighters in multiple engagements with Palestinian militias in the same area.[24] The IDF 646th Brigade (assigned to the 99th Division) killed a Palestinian fighter hiding in a building in western Khan Younis.[25] The IDF 646th Brigade and the Egoz Unit located small arms, rocket-propelled grenades, and EFPs during raids in the area.[26]

Palestinian militias continued to attempt to defend against Israeli clearing operations in western Khan Younis on February 6. Hamas' military wing detonated EFPs and fired thermobaric and anti-tank rockets at IDF forces in several areas of western Khan Younis.[27] PIJ's military wing fired rocket-propelled grenades at Israeli armor and fired small arms targeting Israeli forces in western Khan Younis.[28] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades also detonated EFPs and fired anti-tank weapons and small arms at Israeli forces in the same area.[29]

The Qatari prime minister said during a press conference with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on February 6 that Qatar had received a "positive response" from Hamas on the framework of a hostage exchange agreement.[30] Blinken said that the United States is reviewing Hamas' response to the deal and that he will discuss Hamas' response with Israeli officials during his visit to Israel on February 7. Hamas said on February 6 that the group dealt with the proposal with a "positive spirit," including by reiterating Hamas' demands for a "comprehensive and complete ceasefire." [31] Netanyahu said on January 21 that Israel will not accept a comprehensive ceasefire, which has been an obstacle for several weeks during the negotiations.[32] The Israeli Prime Minister's Office released a statement acknowledging that it received Hamas' response.[33]

IDF published captured Hamas documents showing that Iran supplied Hamas and Yahya Sinwar with millions of dollars of operational funding. Israeli forces found six years

of financial documents outlining 150 million dollars of funding to Hamas and Sinwar.[34] The IDF also uncovered about 5.5 million dollars in cash during the raid.

West Bank

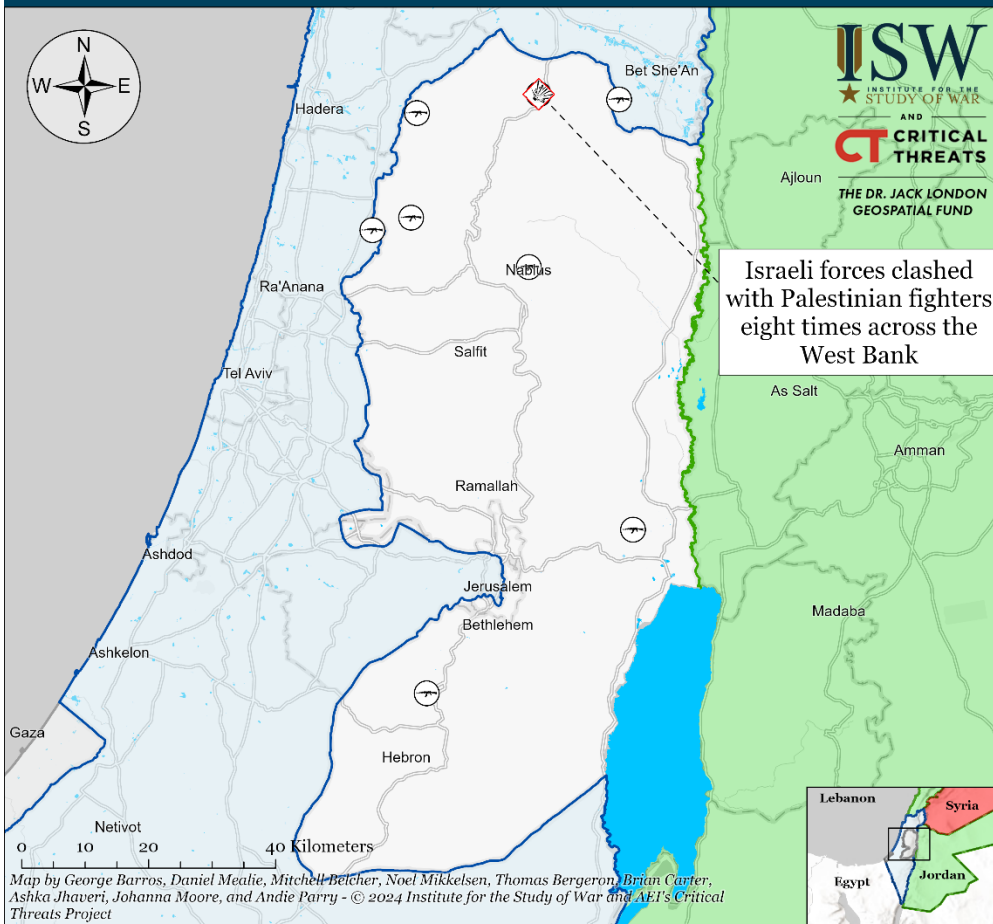
Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters eight times across the West

Bank.[35] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades in Jenin, Tulkarm, and Beit Ummar detonated improvised explosive devices and fired small arms targeting Israeli forces during Israeli raids in the West Bank.[36] The IDF said unidentified Palestinian fighters shot at an Israeli settlement in Merav, east of Jenin.[37]

Clashes in the West Bank as of February 6, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

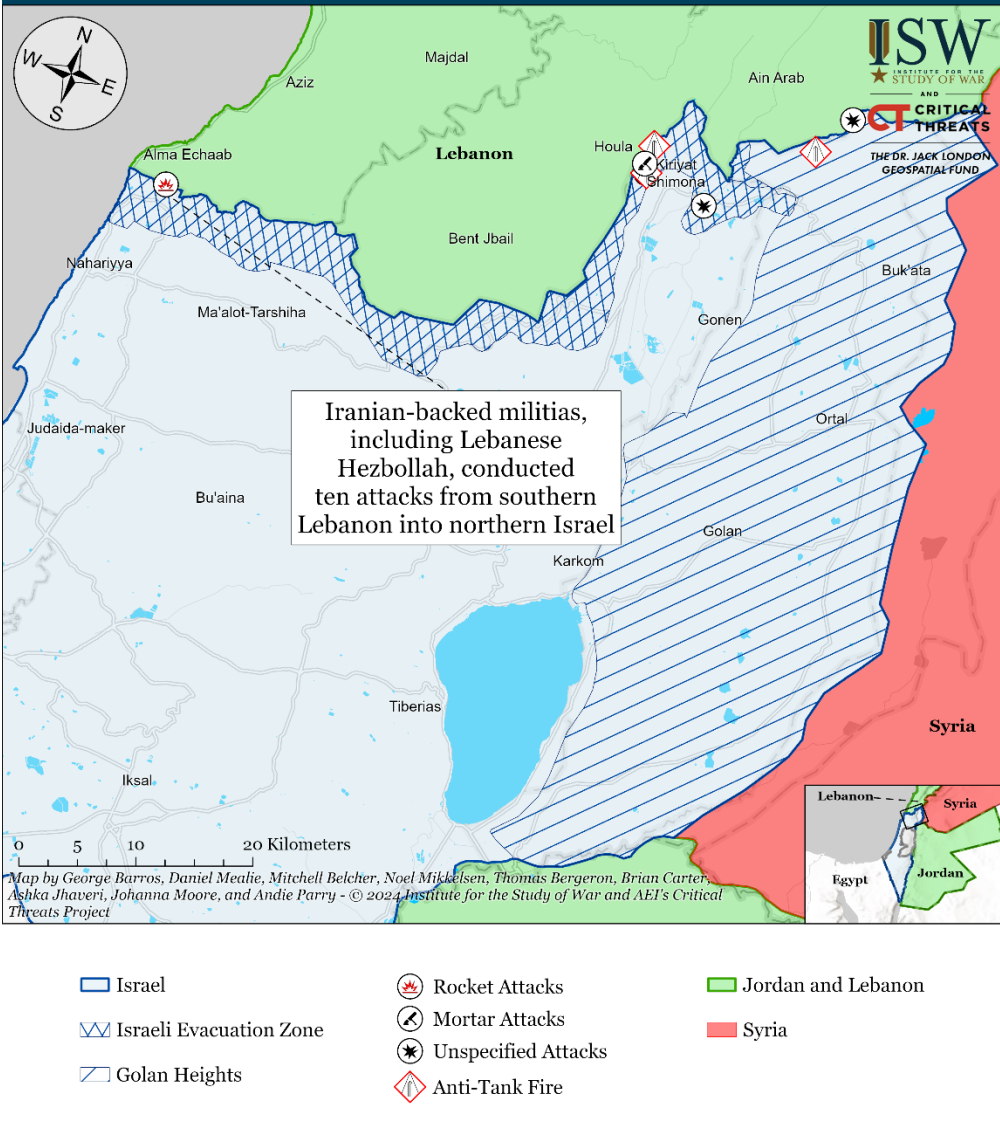
Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- 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 ten attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel on February 6.[38] Hezbollah claimed nine of the attacks.[39]

Iranian-backed militias fired one rocket salvo into the Golan Heights from southwestern Syria on February 5.[40]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon as of February 6, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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 Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed responsibility for a drone attack targeting Eilat, Israel, on February 5.[41] CTP-ISW cannot verify this claim.

The Iranian Law Enforcement Command (LEC) Border Guards arrested several unspecified individuals attempting to smuggle weapons from Iraq into Ilam Province, Iran on February 6.[42] The LEC Border Guards commander said that the LEC identified and arrested the smugglers with support from the Iranian Intelligence and Security Ministry and unspecified Iraqi forces. Iranian security forces interdicted anti-regime Kurdish separatist weapon shipments from Iraq into Kurdistan Province and Ilam Province, Iran in September 2023.[43] Iranian officials have long expressed concerns that Israel and anti-regime Kurdish militant groups are using Iraqi Kurdistan to facilitate operations targeting Iran.[44] Iranian forces conducted airstrikes into Iraqi Kurdistan in March, September, October, and November 2022 and in January 2024 in response to these perceived threats.[45]

The LEC arrested several likely Salafi-Jihadi insurgents throughout southeastern Iran on February 5 and 6. LEC officers arrested one suspected ISIS fighter and one suspected Ansar ul Furqan fighter in two separate incidents in Sistan and Baluchistan Province.[46] Ansar ul Furqan is a Balochi Salafi-jihadi group linked to al Qaeda.[47] LEC officers arrested one individual suspected of killing a senior LEC officer in Fars Province.[48] Balochi Salafi-jihadi militant group Jaish al Adl has conducted at least five attacks targeting Iranian security personnel since December 2023, including one assassination targeting an LEC officer.[49] The Afghan branch of the Islamic State separately detonated two suicide vests in Kerman Province on January 3, killing over 90 individuals.[50]

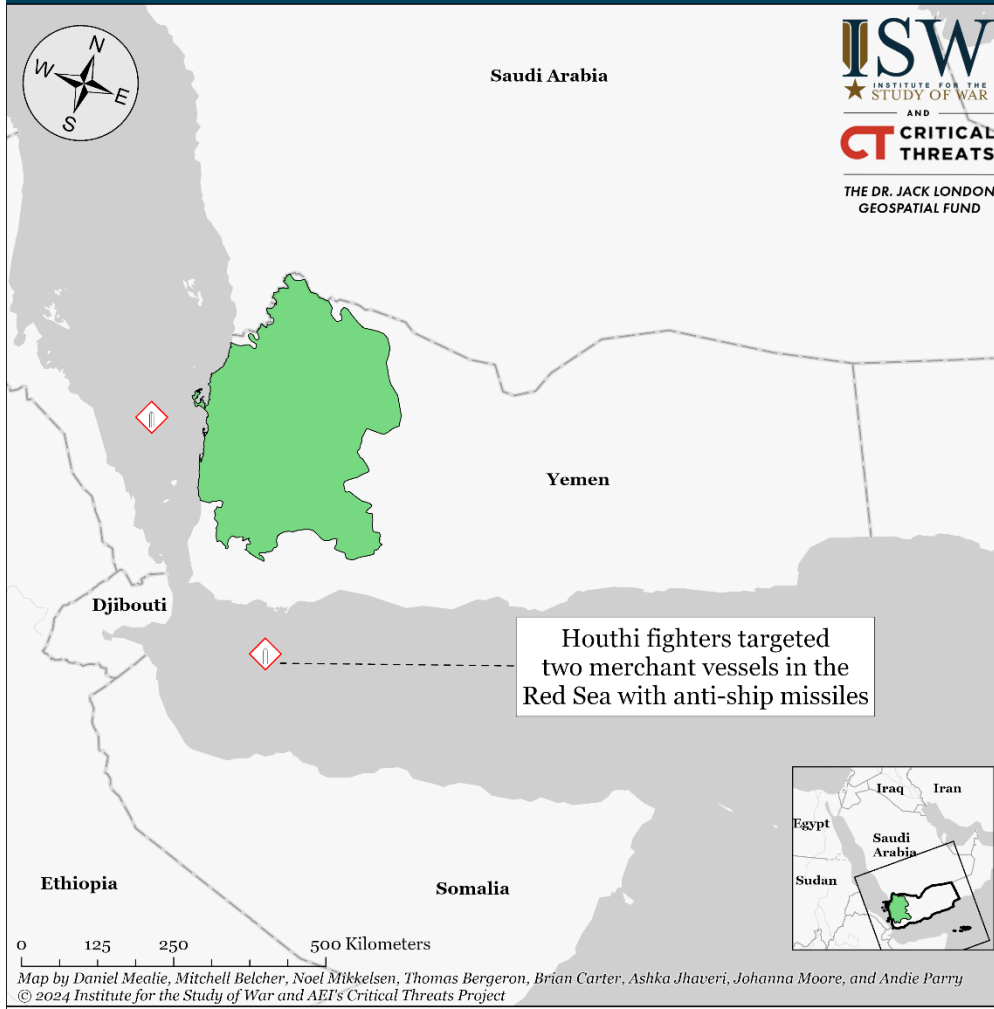
Houthi fighters targeted two merchant vessels in the Red Sea with anti-ship missiles on February 6.[51] Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Sarea claimed that Houthi fighters successfully hit the Greek-owned and Marshall Islands-flagged *Star Nasia* and the UK-owned *Morning Tide* merchant vessels.[52] An unidentified Greek official said that the attack damaged the *Star Nasia* but that the attack did not harm any crewmembers.[53] The *Morning Tide*'s owners reported that a separate attack caused an explosion near the *Morning Tide*, but that the explosion did not damage the ship.[54] Sarea falsely claimed that the *Star Nasia* was US-owned.[55] Houthi supreme leader Abdulmalik al Houthi alleged that the United States is attempting to camouflage its vessels by operating its ships under different flags.[56] Sarea stated that the Houthis will continue attacks on US and UK targets in the Red Sea in response to US and UK strikes.[57] He also said the Houthis will continue attacks targeting Israeli vessels and vessels en route to Israel.[58]

Iranian-sponsored Attacks in the Middle East as of February 6, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



US Central Command (CENTCOM) conducted two self-defense strikes targeting Houthi one-way naval surface attack drones in Houthi-controlled Yemeni territory.[59] CENTCOM said that the drones presented an imminent threat to US Navy ships and merchant vessels in the region.[60]

Houthi-controlled Territory in Yemen as of February 6, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



■ Houthi-controlled Territory in Yemen ◆ Surface-to-Surface Missile

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.

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