

Iran Update



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Information Cutoff: January 27, 2025 2:00pm 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.

Click [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations, and [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of the ongoing opposition offensive in Syria. These maps are updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

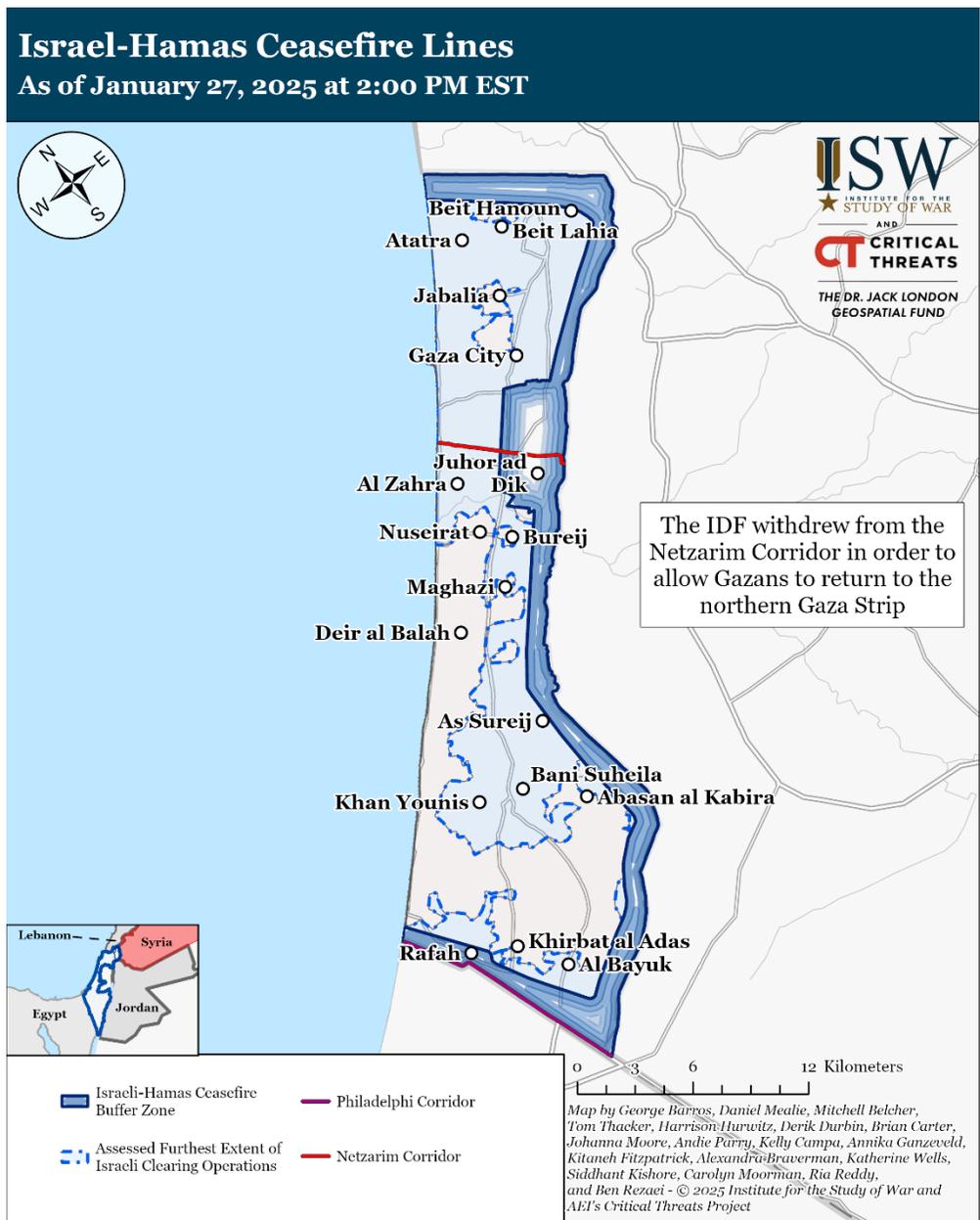
We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We utterly condemn violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

Gazan civilians began to return to the northern Gaza Strip on January 27 after Hamas fulfilled outstanding obligations under the ceasefire agreement.[1] Hamas agreed to release a female civilian hostage held by Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) after the IDF prevented Palestinians from returning to the northern Gaza Strip on January 25 and 26.[2] The Israeli Prime Minister's Office (PMO) announced that Hamas would release the hostage and two additional Israeli hostages on January 30.[3] This is in addition to the three hostages Hamas will release on February 1.[4] Hamas also provided Israel with a list that confirmed 18 of the 26 remaining hostages scheduled for release during the first phase of the ceasefire are alive.[5] The list did not specify which specific individuals were and were not alive, however.

PIJ's failure to release the hostage is unlikely to be a result of friction between PIJ and Hamas. PIJ has previously released hostages as part of the November 2023 ceasefire agreement and it has not engaged Israeli forces in the strip during the ceasefire, which indicates that PIJ continues to cooperate with Hamas.[6] Hamas released four female Israeli soldiers as part of the second hostage release on January 25 before PIJ agreed to release the fifth hostage.[7] Hamas leads a 12-member coalition of Palestinian militias that allows Hamas to coordinate operations between various Palestinian militias in the Gaza Strip.[8] The breakdown surrounding the release of the fifth hostage on January 25 could be the result of a breakdown in the coordination mechanisms within this coalition, rather than a disagreement between the two factions. IDF operations have probably weakened the institutional coordination mechanisms between the two factions on the ground in the strip.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) withdrew from the Netzarim Corridor on January 27 to allow Gazans to return to the northern Gaza Strip via established routes.[9] The IDF

withdrew from the corridor two days later than mandated under the ceasefire because Hamas violated the ceasefire agreement on January 25 by failing to release a hostage.[10] Gazans began returning to the northern Gaza Strip on foot via al Rashid Road, which is the coastal road that connects the northern and southern Gaza Strip.[11] US and Egyptian private security contractors started operating a checkpoint on the Netzarim Corridor along the Salah al Din Road where they will inspect Palestinian vehicles returning to the northern Gaza Strip.[12] The IDF Arabic-language spokesperson issued instructions to Gazans as they returned to the northern strip and prohibited returnees from carrying weapons.[13] The spokesperson reiterated the IDF’s warnings that asked Gazans to avoid Israeli forces. Social media footage showed a large number of Palestinians moving to the northern Gaza Strip uninspected as several Hamas fighters greeted them along al Rashid Road.[14]



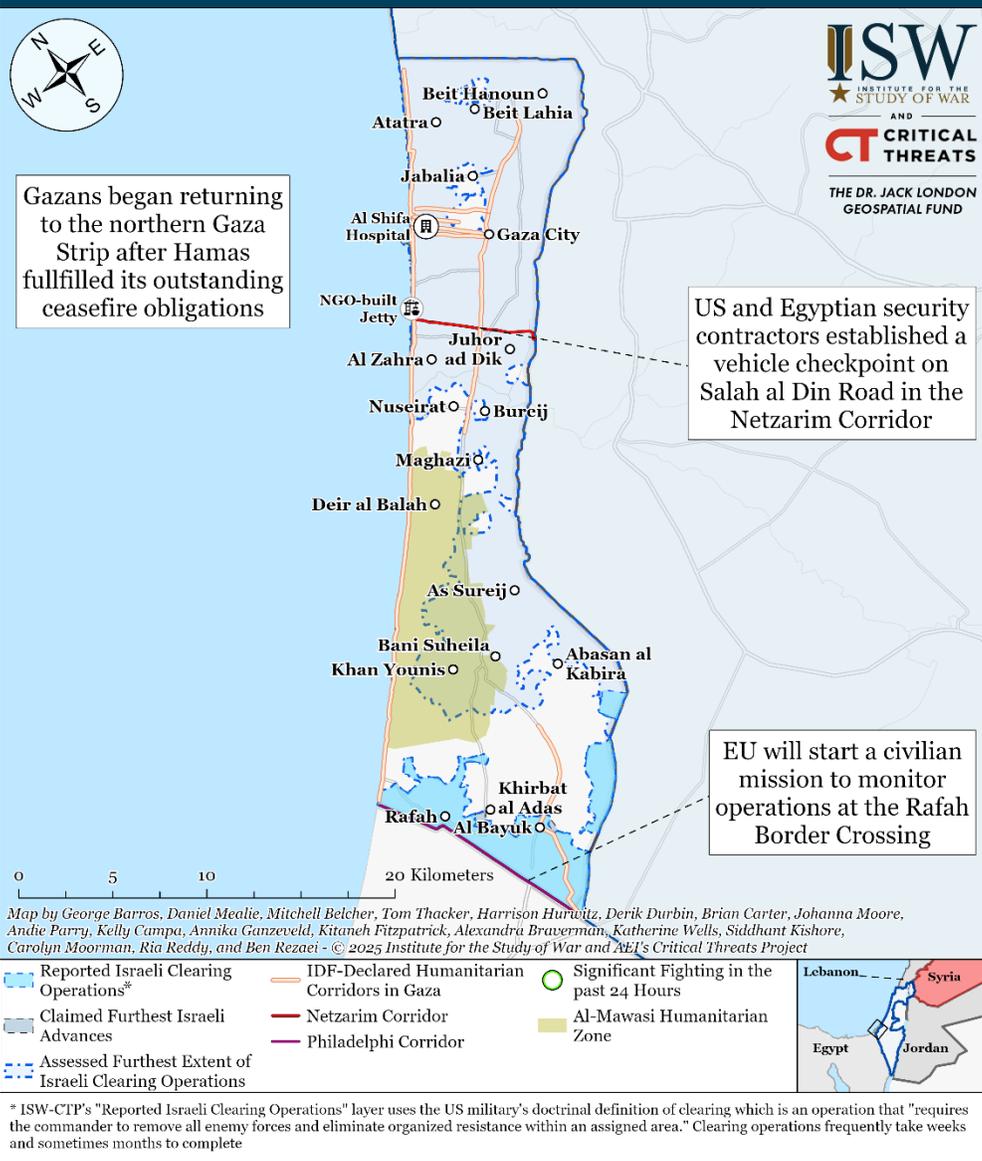
The return of Gazans to the northern Gaza Strip will make it difficult for the IDF to conduct operations with the same intensity as it did before the ceasefire if Israel and Hamas fail to agree on a second-phase ceasefire.[15] Relatively few Gazans remained in the northern Gaza Strip after months of intense Israeli combat operations.[16] The lack of civilians enabled Israeli forces to operate more freely with a decreased risk that Israeli troops would encounter civilians. The return of approximately 650,000 Gazans will significantly increase the number of civilians in the northern strip, which will complicate the execution and planning of IDF operations.[17] New major Israeli combat operations would necessitate the evacuation of Gazan civilians, for example.

Individual Hamas fighters disguised as civilians who move north on foot could also be able to bring small numbers of weapons and small amounts of ammunition to Hamas forces in the north. Such an effort to move supplies by foot is likely insufficient to resupply Hamas forces to a point that would seriously challenge Israeli forces if the IDF resumes operations.

CTP-ISW has recorded no verifiable reports of kinetic activity in the Gaza Strip or attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel since the last data cut-off on January 26.

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of January 27, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



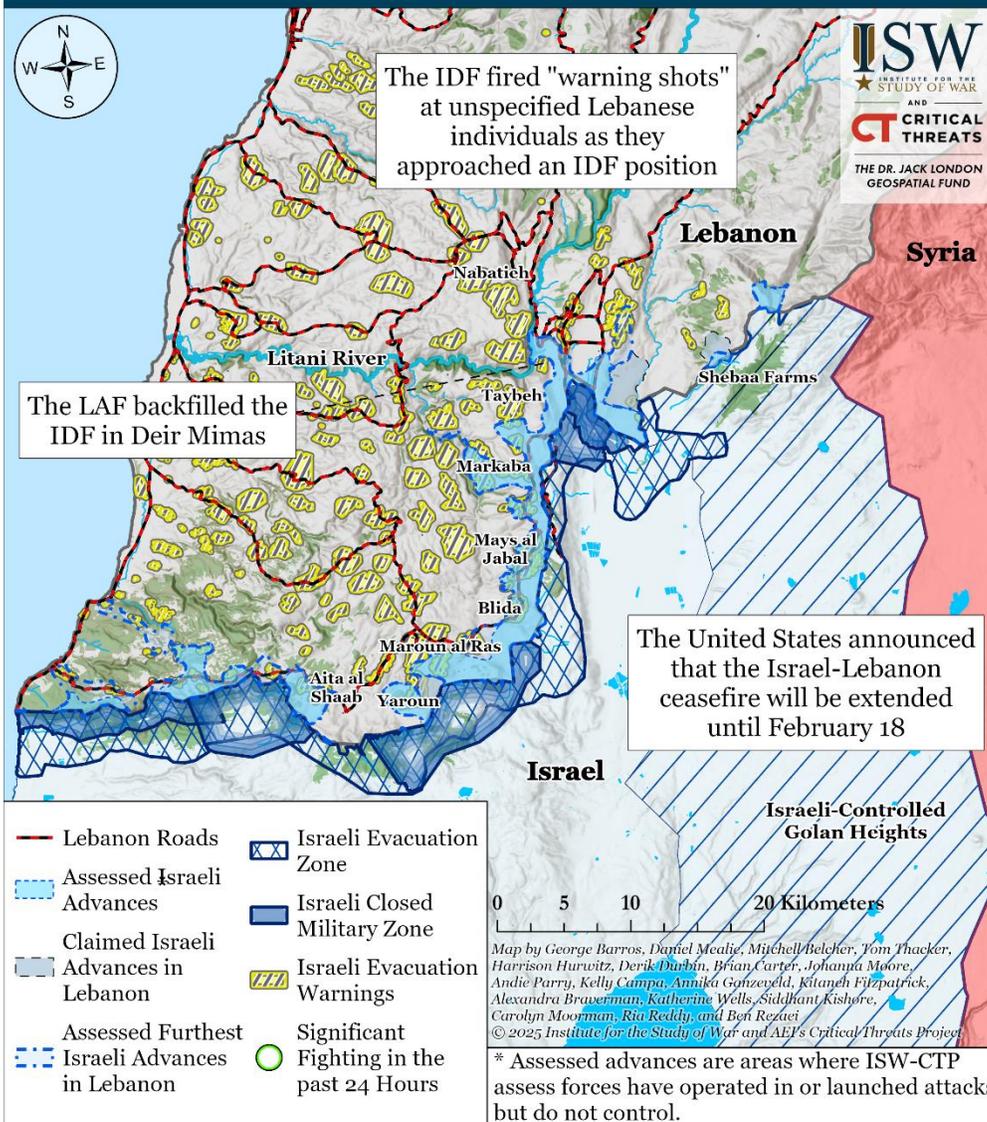
The United States announced on January 26 that Israel and Lebanon had extended the ceasefire in Lebanon for an additional 23 days.[18] The ceasefire will now be in effect until February 18. *Axios* reported that the Trump administration negotiated the extension with Israel and Lebanon over the past few days.[19] The ceasefire will presumably require the IDF to withdraw from Lebanon by February 18. The LAF is also expected to backfill the IDF by this date. Israel has withdrawn from about three positions in southern Lebanon thus far and remains active in at least 12 border towns, according to local Lebanese media.[20] An IDF spokesperson announced on January 27 that the IDF had recently "re-deployed" to several unspecified locations in southern Lebanon in order to dismantle Hezbollah infrastructure.[21] The IDF spokesperson said that the implementation of the ceasefire "is

postponed” in some areas of Lebanon as the IDF needs more time to ensure that Hezbollah cannot use those areas to rebuild itself.[22]

Hezbollah requires time to rebuild and is unlikely to resume significant operations against Israeli forces in Lebanon over the next three weeks. Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem rejected the ceasefire’s extension in a January 27 speech and called on Israel to withdraw immediately.[23] Hezbollah had previously threatened to resume attacks on Israel if Israel stayed in Lebanon past the January 26 deadline.[24] Qassem said that Hezbollah ”has the right to act as it sees fit” against Israel and that any ”repercussions” from the IDF’s delayed withdrawal are the responsibility of Israel and the monitors of the ceasefire, which includes the US, France, and the UN.[25] Qassem did not directly promise to resume attacks against Israeli troops operating in Lebanon, however. Qassem's restrained response to the ceasefire extension is likely a result of the severe degradation that Israeli operations had inflicted on Hezbollah prior to the ceasefire. Hezbollah likely aims to avoid engaging Israeli forces or attacking Israel as it helps rebuild Lebanon and reconstitute its forces. It is doubtful that Hezbollah has been able to reconstitute a significant portion of its military capabilities during the 60-day ceasefire period.

Reported Israeli Operations in Lebanon

As of January 27, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



The SDF reportedly rejected a concessionary proposal from the HTS-led Syrian government that would require it to integrate into the interim Defense Ministry.

Unspecified sources close to the new administration told Al Jazeera on January 26 that the SDF rejected a recent proposal from the Syrian government that would allow for a “decentralized” management system that provides local councils with “broad” unspecified powers, recognition of Kurdish rights and inclusion in the new Syrian constitution, and a pathway for Kurdish fighters to join Syrian military and security institutions.[26] The SDF reportedly insisted that it join the new Syrian army as an integrated unit, remain deployed in northeastern Syria, and receive portions of future oil revenue.[27] The SDF has not strayed far from its position since it began negotiations with the HTS-led government on December 30.[28] It is notable that the government’s offer does not provide any meaningful, irreversible protection for Syrian Kurds. HTS and its predecessor organizations have a long history of

co-opting groups and then steadily eroding their power. The SDF is also extremely unlikely to willingly disarm while its units are actively repelling SNA attacks along the Euphrates River and Peace Spring frontlines.

Turkey’s encouragement of Turkish-backed factions to join the Syrian army is likely part of a Turkish effort to coerce the SDF to concede to the Syrian government in negotiations.

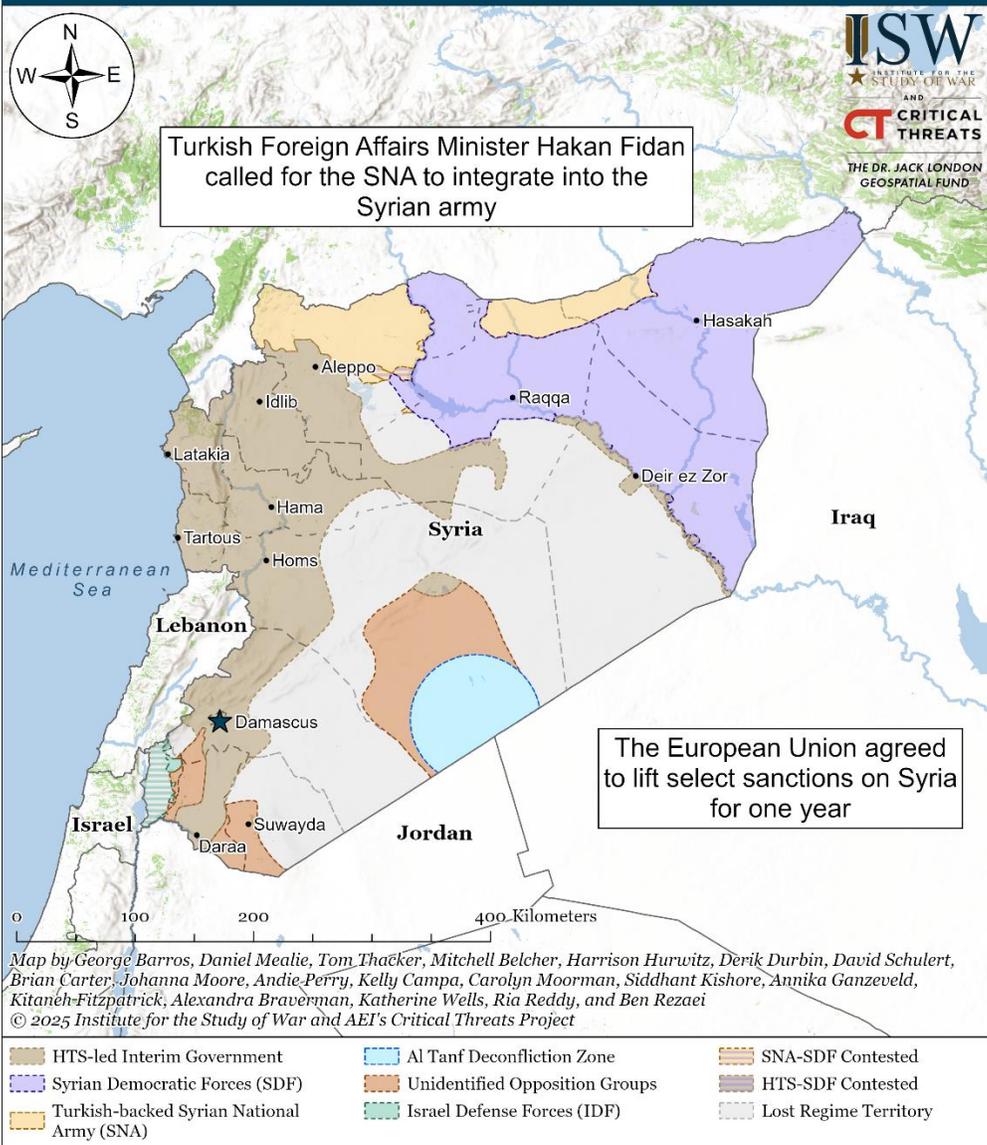
Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Hakan Fidan said on January 27 that Ankara has told Turkish-backed Syrian armed factions to integrate into the Syrian army.[29] Fidan said there are over 80,000 members of factions “loyal” to Turkey in northern Syria.[30] Fidan also encouraged armed groups in southern Syria to do the same.[31] The integration of Turkish-backed groups, including groups currently operating within the Syrian National Army (SNA), would enable Turkey to wield significant influence within Syria’s armed forces. Turkey’s direct influence on Turkish-backed Syrian factions varies by group and some factions would be more responsive to Turkish direction than others. The HTS-led Defense Ministry has already promoted several fighters from these groups to high ranks within the Defense Ministry, however.[32] Turkey is likely encouraging these factions to join the Syrian army because it believes it will retain some influence over these groups. Turkey could then use their integration into the Syrian Defense Ministry and the Turkish influence that the integration would generate for Turkey to demonstrate to the SDF that it can encourage both the SNA and HTS-aligned forces to unite against SDF interests. The SDF has so far been unwilling to compromise on its demands as it contends with attacks from the SNA and Turkey. HTS, for its part, has been reticent to threaten the SDF with military force, though this reticence could change as the SDF maintains its position.

Key Takeaways:

- **Gaza Strip Ceasefire:** Gazan civilians began to return to the northern Gaza Strip on January 27 after Hamas and PIJ fulfilled outstanding obligations under the ceasefire agreement. PIJ’s failure to release the hostage is unlikely to be a result of friction between PIJ and Hamas. PIJ has previously released hostages as part of the November 2023 ceasefire agreement and it has not engaged Israeli forces in the strip during the ceasefire, which indicates that PIJ continues to cooperate with Hamas.
- **Israel-Lebanon Ceasefire:** The United States announced on January 26 that Israel and Lebanon had extended the ceasefire in Lebanon for an additional 23 days. Hezbollah requires time to rebuild and is unlikely to resume significant operations against Israeli forces in Lebanon over the next three weeks.
- **Syrian Army Formation:** The SDF reportedly rejected a concessionary proposal from the HTS-led Syrian government that would require it to integrate into the interim Defense Ministry. Turkey’s encouragement of Turkish-backed factions to join the Syrian army is likely part of a Turkish effort to coerce the SDF to concede to the Syrian government in negotiations.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria

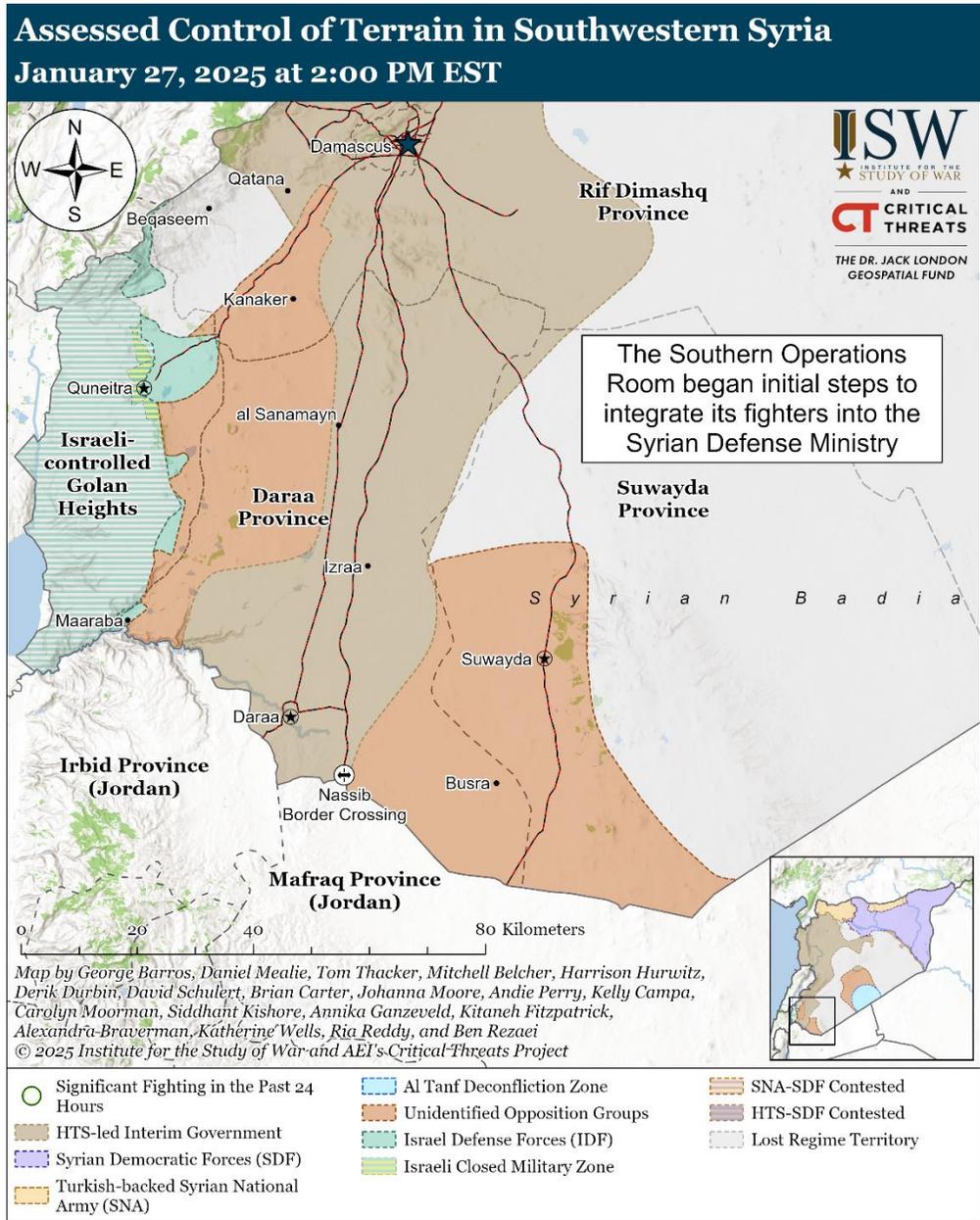
January 27, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Syria

The Southern Operations Room has taken initial steps to assimilate into the interim Defense Ministry. SOR factions in Daraa Province will receive official identification cards and vehicle registration that identifies them as members of the “General Command of the Army and Armed Forces - Southern Operations.”[33] It remains unclear how the interim government will structure the new “Southern Operations” under the General Command of the Army and Armed Forces. The new name suggests that the interim Defense Ministry merely reflagged the Southern Operations Room, however. The SOR, which had previously indicated that it sought to integrate into the army as a “pre-organized entity,” reached an “initial” agreement and has begun “extensive” preparations to integrate into the Defense Ministry, according to sources close to the “Eighth Brigade.”[34] This formalization is likely part of the interim Defense Ministry’s order to compile data on military assets and human resources of

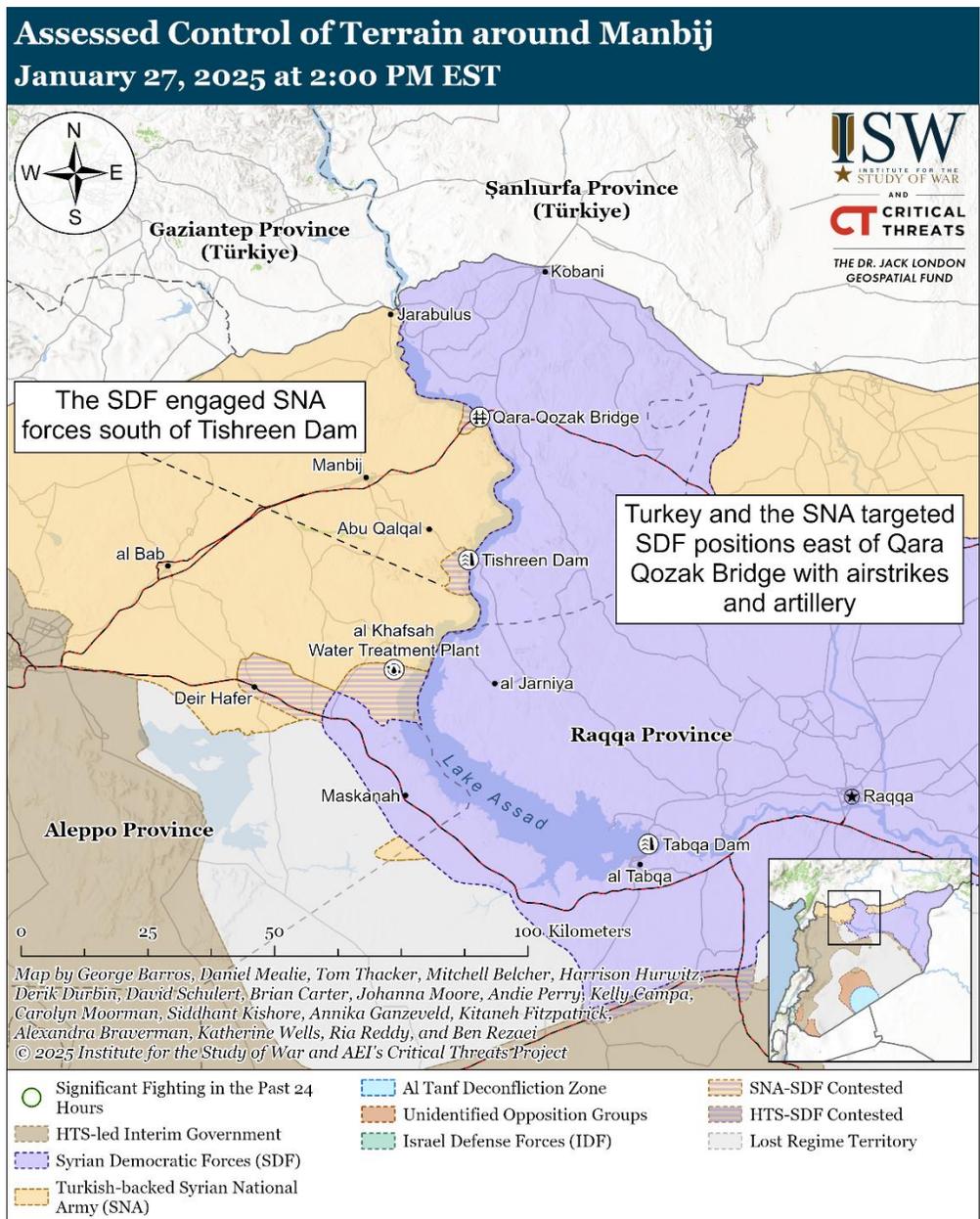
armed factions.[35] The opposition group Southern Clans Gathering in Suwayda Province also announced its full support and willingness to join the new Syrian leadership on January 26.[36] Local forces are also conducting security operations in coordination with the HTS-affiliated General Security Directorate.[37] Forces from Jidour, Daraa Province, detained an ISIS leader in northern Daraa on January 26 before transferring him to the authority of interim government forces.[38]



The SNA and Turkey have continued to engage the SDF west of Tishreen Dam since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on January 26. The SNA and SDF engaged in mutual shelling in Shash al Bubna, south of the dam.[39] Anti-SDF sources reported that Turkish airstrikes targeted SDF tunnels in the mountains near the main engagement lines in Shash al Bubna.[40]

Turkey and the SNA continued to attack SDF positions east of Qara Qozak Bridge with airstrikes and artillery since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on January 26. Turkish airstrikes struck SDF targets in at least three villages on the east bank of the Euphrates.[41] The SDF targeted SNA positions with drones and "heavy weapons" near Qara Qozak Bridge.[42]

Kurdish sources reported that Turkish forces shelled a fuel station north of Tal Tamr along the Peace Spring frontlines in Hasakah Province on January 27.[43] The SNA also fired artillery at an SDF position north of Tal Tamr.[44]



The European Union (EU) agreed to lift select sanctions on Syria for one year on January 27.[45] French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot announced that the EU would lift sanctions on the Syrian energy, financial, and transportation sectors.[46] The EU will implement the "roadmap" to lift

sanctions as long as the interim Syrian government will sponsor an “inclusive political transition.”[47] EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said that EU foreign ministers agreed to suspend restrictions but noted that sanctions could be put back on if the HTS-led governments take the “wrong steps.”[48] The United States Treasury Department issued a general license for energy sales and personal remittances to Syria on January 6.[49] The general license will last for six months and does not lift existing sanctions on Syria.[50]

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

Turkey conducted at least two strikes in Iraqi Kurdistan on January 27, likely targeting Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) leaders and fighters.[51] Turkey frequently conducts drone and airstrikes targeting PKK fighters in Iraqi Kurdistan. Iraqi and Kurdish media reported that Turkey conducted a drone strike targeting a vehicle in the Raperin area in Sulaymaniyah Province, killing at least four individuals.[52] The strike likely targeted a local commander, given that the strike targeted only one vehicle. Kurdish media reported that Turkey also conducted an airstrike in Akre District, Dohuk Province, killing two individuals.[53]

Iraqi National Security Adviser Qassem al Araji met with Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Mohammad Kazem al Sadegh in Baghdad on January 27 to discuss security cooperation.[54] Araji and Sadegh discussed counterterrorism efforts, border security, and intelligence sharing.[55] Araji is a member of the Iranian-backed Badr Organization and Sadegh is a member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force.[56]

Iraqi Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Abdul Amir Rashid Yarallah inspected the Iraqi Army 20th Infantry Brigade and defensive lines in Wadi Hauran, western Anbar Province, on January 25.[57] The Iraqi Army Ground Forces commander and the deputy director of military intelligence accompanied Yarallah.[58]

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

The Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Erode the will of the Israeli political establishment and the 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

The Gaza Strip

US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth discussed bilateral relations and mutual security interests with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on January 26.[59] The call follows the Pentagon’s approval of the delivery of 1,800 2,000lb bombs to Israel on January 25.[60]

The European Union (EU) will re-deploy a civilian mission to monitor operations at the Rafah Border Crossing in the southern Gaza Strip.[61] EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas said on January 27 that the EU mission will allow injured Palestinians to leave the Gaza Strip to receive medical care. The EU previously maintained a mission to Rafah Border Crossing in 2005 and suspended the mission due to Hamas’ takeover of the Gaza Strip in 2007.

Lebanon

The LAF announced on January 27 that it deployed forces to Deir Mimas after Israeli forces withdrew.[62] The LAF also deployed forces and accompanied Lebanese residents to several villages along the Israel-Lebanon border.[63] Israeli forces have operated in Deir Mimas since early January 2025, according to local reports.[64]

Israeli forces fired on Lebanese individuals in southern Lebanese villages for a second day. Israeli forces fired small arms and mortars as a ”warning“ to returning Lebanese residents in several border towns.[65] At least two people were killed and seventeen injured.[66] The IDF spokesperson has warned residents that they should not return to their villages in southern Lebanon until further notice.[67] The Lebanese Health Ministry said that Israeli gunfire killed at least 22 people, including an LAF soldier, on January 26.[68]

Lebanese and Hezbollah-affiliated media reported on January 27 that Israeli forces continued ground operations along the Lebanon-Israel border. Lebanese and Hezbollah-affiliated media reported that Israeli forces detonated explosives in Kfar Kila and Mays al Jabal, Marjaayoun District.[69]

Lebanese media reported on January 27 that Israeli forces advanced from Majidiye towards Ain Arab, Rashaya District.[70] Lebanese media has reported Israeli ground activity in Majidiye, Hasbaya District, since January 19.[71]

Lebanese and Hezbollah-affiliated media reported on January 27 that Israeli forces advanced towards the area between Rab al Thalathine, Taybeh, and Qantara, Marjaayoun District.[72] The LAF recently deployed its forces to Taybeh and Qantara on January 26.[73] Israeli forces have operated in the area since October 2024.[74]

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun met Iranian Ambassador Mojtaba Amani at the Presidential Palace in Beirut on January 27.[75] Neither Lebanon nor Iran have officially reported what Amani and Aoun discussed.

West Bank

Israeli forces expanded the “Iron Wall” counterterrorism operation to Tulkarm Governorate on January 27.[76] The IDF Air Force struck and killed Hamas leader in Tulkarm Ihab Atwi and another Hamas fighter as part of the expanded operation in Nour Shams refugee camp.[77] The IDF said that Atwi was associated with several small arms attacks on Israeli civilians.[78] Hamas condemned the strike on Atwi.[79] Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fighters engaged Israeli forces with improvised explosive devices and small arms in Tulkarm on January 27.[80]

The IDF also continued to operate in Jenin Governorate for the seventh consecutive day.[81] The IDF has killed at least 15 fighters and detained 40 suspected fighters since the start of the IDF operation in Jenin on January 21. Israeli forces have seized and disarmed several improvised explosive devices in Jenin.[82] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and PIJ engaged Israeli forces in Jenin on January 27.[83]

Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

Reuters cited a Student News Network interview on January 27 in which Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Khatam ol Anbiya Central Headquarters Deputy Coordinator Ali Shamdani stated that Iran had purchased Su-35 fighter jets from Russia.[84] Shamdani did not elaborate on how many Su-35 fighter jets or whether they had arrived in Iran, according to Reuters. CTP-ISW has not seen the original interview at this time. An Iranian Armed Forces chief of staff-affiliated news outlet published the same interview on January 27. The outlet cut the interview into three parts and may have omitted parts of the interview. Shamdani discussed Iran’s domestic military equipment production and “foreign” purchases in the interview clips but did not include that Iran had purchased Su-35s from Russia.[85] The outlet did tag the altered interview’s webpage with “Su-35,” however. Iran likely reached an agreement with Russia in late 2022 to acquire Su-35 fighter jets, potentially as part of a trade that included Iranian military support for Russia's actions in Ukraine.[86] Iran and Russia likely confirmed the Su-35 fighter jets sale, when they signed their comprehensive strategic agreement this month, which covered military and defense industry cooperation.[87] The acquisition of Su-35s could enable Iran to more readily and independently project air power relative to Iran’s current capabilities.[88]

The Iranian Artesh conducted two military exercises in western Iran on January 26 and 27.[89] The Artesh Air Force carried out the “100-helicopter Air Force” exercise at the First Air Force Combat base near Naftshahr city in Kermanshah Province. The exercise tested more than ten helicopter models, including Bell 205, 206, 209, and 214 helicopters. Artesh Ground Forces and Artesh Ground Forces Aviation Air Force Commanders Kiomars Heydari and Ghasem Khamoshi watched the exercise. The Artesh Ground Forces’ 35th Commando Brigade also conducted airborne and night counterterrorism exercises in Kermanshah Province.

The IRGC unveiled a new Iranian-made heavy-weight drone called the “Gaza” on January 26.[90] The “Gaza” drone has a range of up to 7,000 kilometers (km) and an operational radius of

4,000 km. The drone can carry up to at least 500 kilograms (kgs) for up to 35 hours with a maximum speed of 35 km per hour.

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.

POWERED BY:



BABELSTREET

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