

Iran Update, March 17, 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.

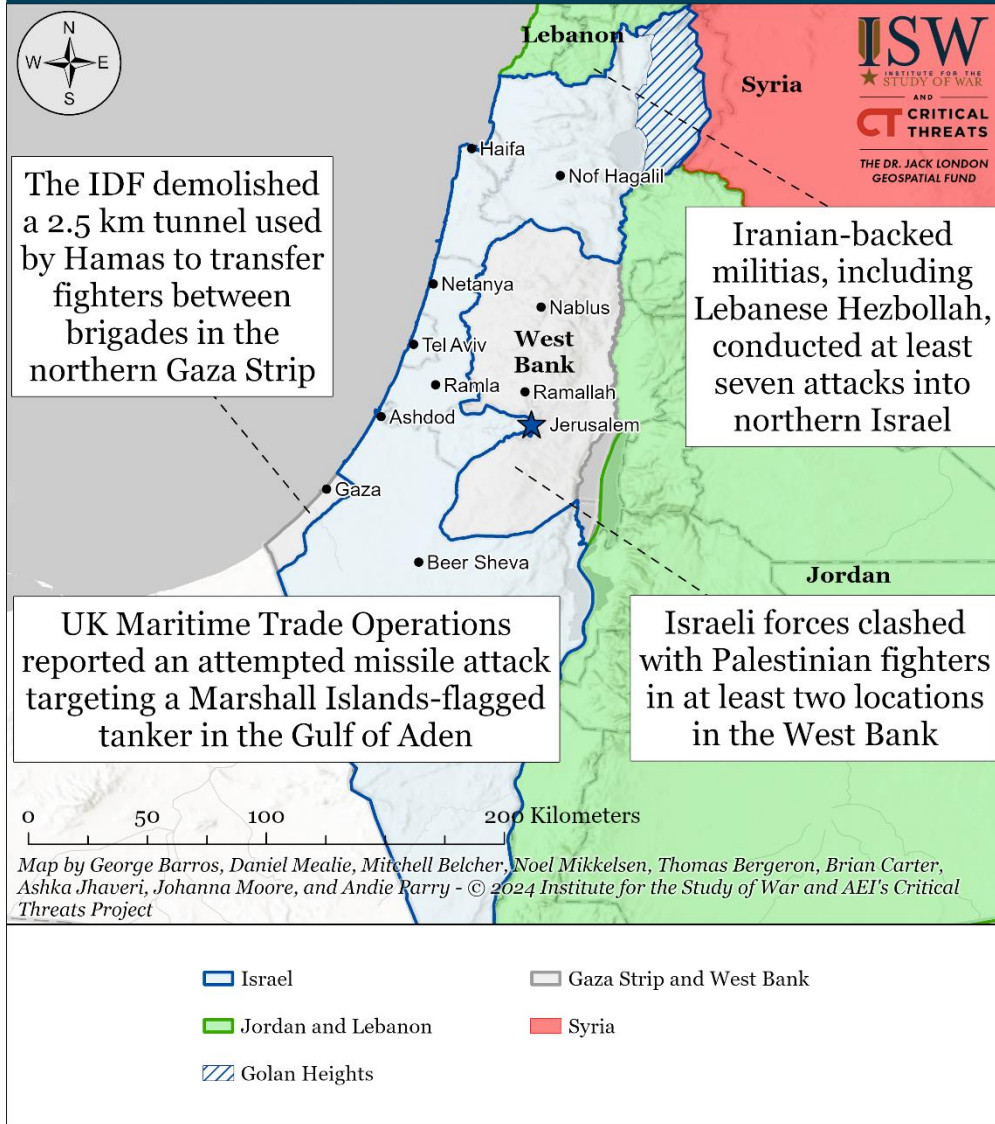
Click [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report. Click [here](#) to subscribe to the Iran Update.

CTP-ISW will publish abbreviated updates on March 16 and 17, 2024. Detailed coverage will resume Monday, March 18, 2024

Key Takeaways:

- **Northern Gaza Strip:** The IDF Nahal Brigade (162nd Division) conducted clearing operations in the northern and central Gaza Strip on March 17.
- **West Bank:** The IDF arrested seven wanted individuals across the West Bank on March 17. The IDF also confiscated materials needed for manufacturing improvised explosive devices during an operation in Hebron.
- **Northern Israel:** Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, have conducted at least seven attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on March 16.
- **The Red Sea:** The Houthis likely fired at least one unspecified missile targeting the Marshall Islands-flagged LPG tanker *MADO* in the Gulf of Aden on March 16. This incident marks the second time the Houthis have targeted this vessel in two days.
- **Syria:** The Israeli Air Force likely conducted air strikes targeting a Hezbollah ammunitions depot and other Syrian army positions along the Damascus-Homs highway on March 17.

Israel-Hamas War as of March 17, 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.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) 162nd Division and combat engineers demolished a 2.5-kilometer-long tunnel in the northern Gaza Strip during the week of March 10.^[1] The IDF called the tunnel the “longest underground route” in the northern Gaza Strip that it has discovered during the war. The tunnel network allowed Hamas units to move between the northern and southern Gaza Strip.^[2]

The IDF Nahal Brigade (162nd Division) conducted clearing operations in the northern and central Gaza Strip on March 17.^[3] The Nahal Brigade killed 18 Palestinian fighters operating near IDF positions using airstrikes, tank fire, and sniper fire.^[4] The IDF Nahal Brigade has been operating in the area between the northern and central Gaza Strip for two weeks.^[5] The IDF has been constructing a highway in this area, which the IDF has dubbed the “Netzarim corridor.”^[6] This corridor divides the northern and southern parts of the Gaza Strip. The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), which is a leftist Palestinian militia aligned with Hamas in the war, mortared Israeli forces at the “Netzarim site” near the Israeli-built road.^[7] Palestinian militias also claimed rocket and small arms attacks near the corridor.^[8] Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, which is the self-proclaimed military wing of Fatah and aligned with Hamas in the war, mortared Israeli positions in the eastern part of the Gaza Strip’s Central governorate in three separate attacks.^[9]

Israeli forces continued to conduct clearing operations in Khan Younis on March 17. The IDF said that the IDF Givati Brigade (162nd Division) is still conducting clearing operations in Hamad.^[10] The IDF 7th Brigade (36th Division) fought Palestinian fighters and seized weapons in Khan Younis.^[11] The al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades also engaged Israeli forces operating in Khan Younis.^[12]

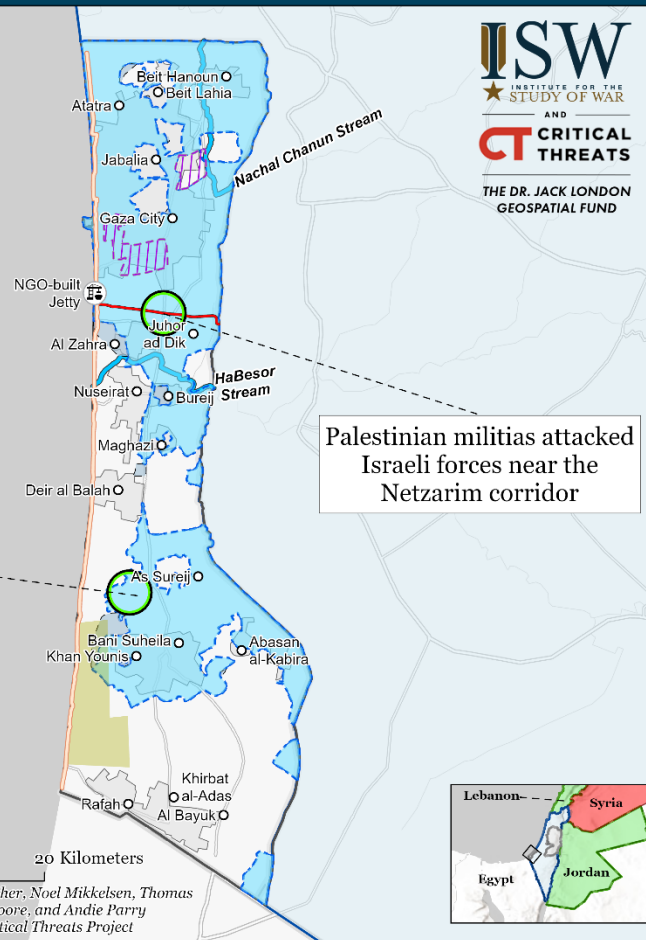
Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of March 17, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



The IDF 162nd Division and combat engineers demolished a 2.5-kilometer-long tunnel in the northern Gaza Strip

Israeli forces continued clearing operations in Khan Younis neighborhoods

Palestinian militias attacked Israeli forces near the Netzarim corridor



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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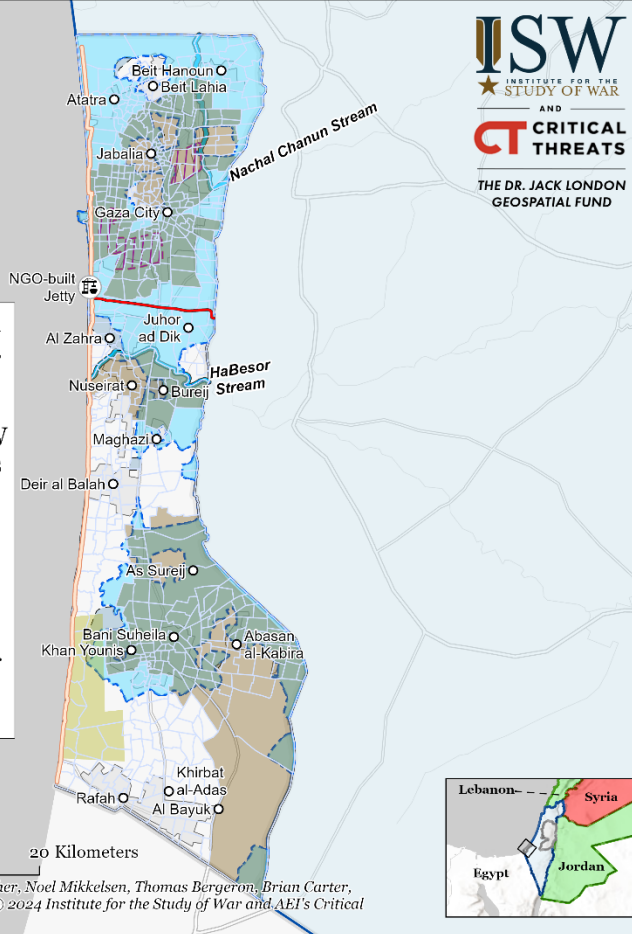
- Israel
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Gaza Strip
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230
- Israeli-Built Highway Route 749
- Significant 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 March 17, 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

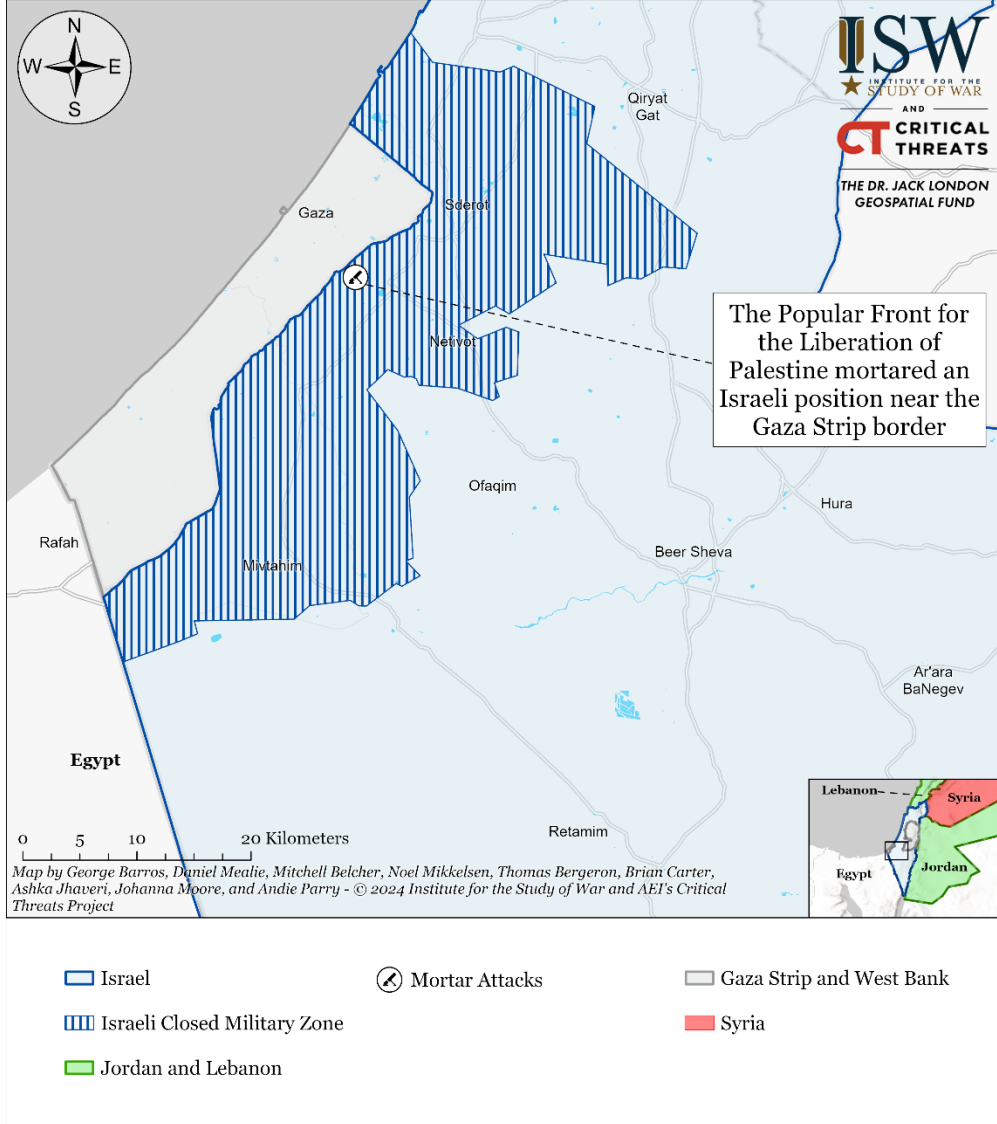
Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

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- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
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The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) mortared Israeli forces at Nahal Oz, which is close to the Israel-Gaza Strip border, on March 17.^[13] The PFLP is a secular, leftist Palestinian group fighting alongside Hamas in the war.

Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of March 17, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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

West Bank

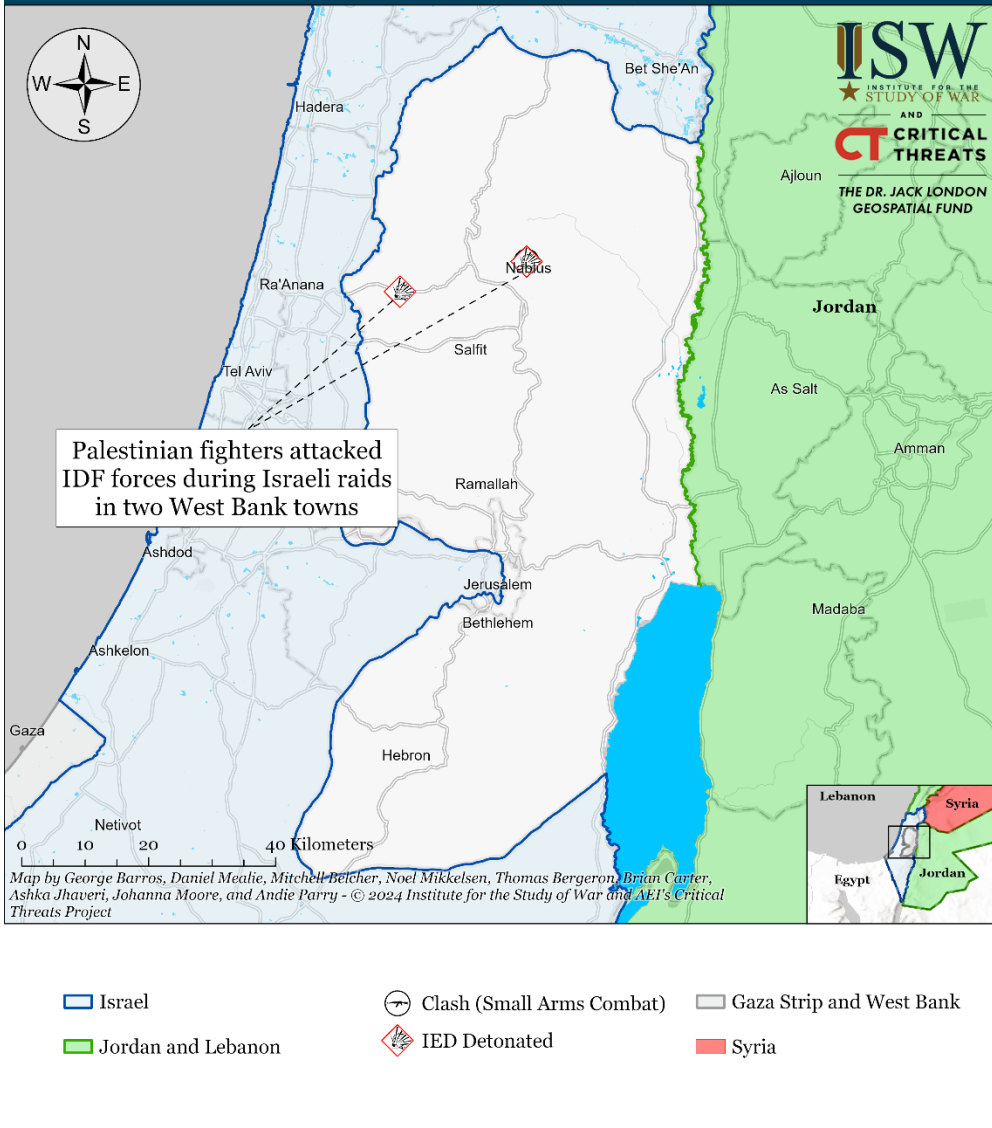
Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

Israeli forces have clashed with Palestinian fighters in at least two locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on March 16.[14]

The IDF arrested seven wanted individuals across the West Bank on March 17.[15] The IDF confiscated materials needed for manufacturing improvised explosive devices during an operation in Hebron.

Clashes in the West Bank as of March 17, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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

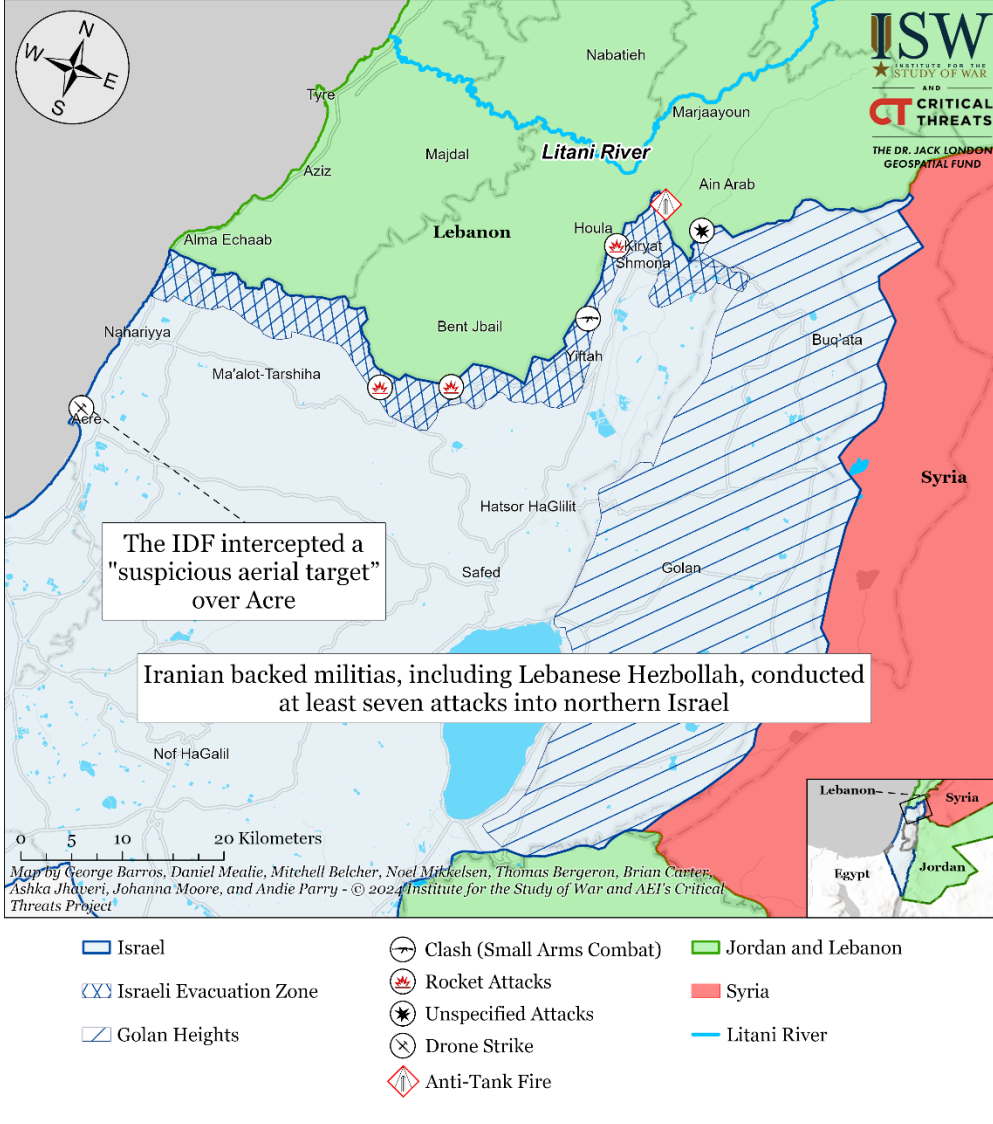
Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

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, have conducted at least seven attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on March 16.[16] The IDF reported that it shot down a “suspicious aerial target” over Acre on March 16.[17] The IDF often uses this language to refer to suspected drones

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon as of March 17, 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

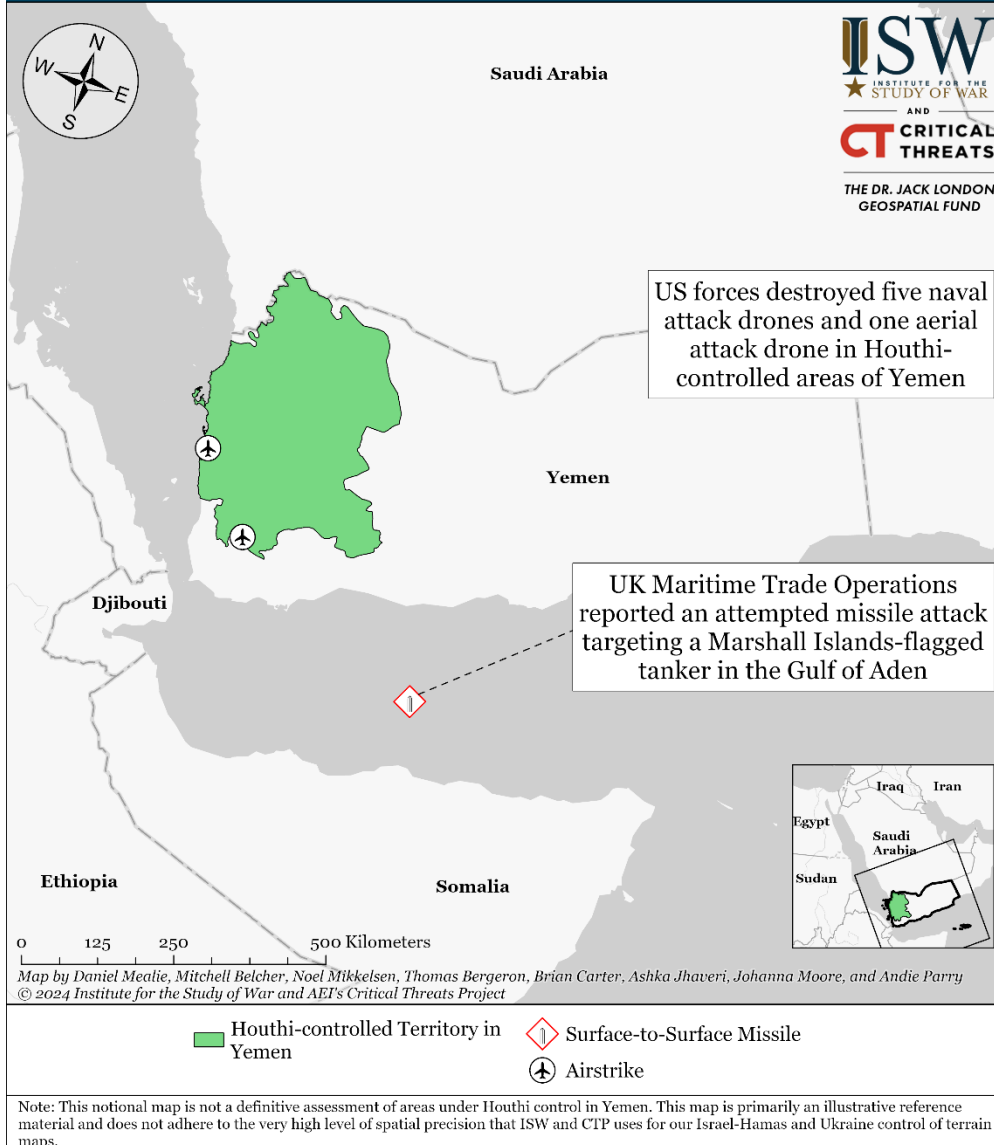
US Central Command (CENTCOM) reported that US forces destroyed five naval attack drones and one aerial drone in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen on March 16.[18] CENTCOM assessed that these weapons presented an “imminent threat” to commercial vessels and US Navy ships in the Red Sea.[19] Houthi-controlled and pro-Axis of Resistance media claimed that the United States and the United Kingdom conducted airstrikes in al Durayhimi, Hudaydah governorate

and in al Taiziyah, Taiz governorate, on March 16.[20]

CENTCOM also reported that the Houthis launched two drones toward the Red Sea on March 16.[21] CENTCOM intercepted one of the drones. CENTCOM assessed that the second drone likely crashed into the Red Sea.[22] Neither drone caused any casualties aboard or damage to nearby vessels.

The Houthis likely fired at least one unspecified missile targeting the Marshall Islands-flagged tanker *MADO* in the Gulf of Aden on March 16.[23] UK Maritime Trade Operations reported that an unspecified actor fired at least one missile targeting the *MADO*. This incident marks the second time the Houthis have targeted this vessel in two days. The UKMTO previously reported that an explosion occurred near the *MADO* in the Red Sea approximately 65 nautical miles west of Hudaydah on March 15.[24]

Houthi-controlled Territory in Yemen as of March 17, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



The Israeli Air Force likely conducted air strikes targeting a Hezbollah ammunitions depot and other Syrian army positions along the Damascus-Homs highway on March 17.^[25] The Syrian Defense Ministry said that the strikes targeted several sites in southern Syria, damaging property and injuring one Syrian soldier.^[26] Israeli Army Radio reported that the strikes targeted Syrian army positions and Hezbollah ammunition depots.^[27] A Syria-focused analyst noted that the area has a large Hezbollah presence.^[28] CTP-ISW has previously reported that the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) may have previously used this highway as a weapons transportation route.^[29] The airstrikes caused significant secondary explosions, potentially confirming that the strike targeted an ammunitions

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[1] [www dot idf.il/186581](http://www.idf.il/186581)

[2] [www dot idf.il/186581](http://www.idf.il/186581)

[3]

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[5] [https://www.idf dot il/186268](https://www.idf.il/186268)

[6] [https://www.idf dot il/186268](https://www.idf.il/186268) ;
<https://twitter.com/wesleysmorgan/status/1759333045524402287?s=46&t=Pd9EQ5ncm-TX8rDDEiGN2Q>

[7] https://t.me/kataeb_moqawma/4173

[8] <https://t.me/sarayaps/17568> ; <https://t.me/nedalps/4039> ; https://t.me/kataeb_moqawma/4172
; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1766>

<https://t.me/mojahdeenpal/4372>

[9] https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6029 ; <https://t.me/sarayaps/17567> ; <https://t.me/nedalps/4042>

[10] [www dot idf.il/186393](http://www.idf.il/186393);

<https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1769250283865972830>

[11] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1769250286424543300>

[12] https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6030

[13] <https://t.me/pflpgaza1/13909>

[14] <https://t.me/QudsN/382661> ; https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6028 ; <https://t.me/QudsN/382742>

[15] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1769295543254077624>

[16] <https://t.me/mmirleb/2693> ;

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- [19] <https://twitter.com/CENTCOM/status/1769152861366006228>
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- [21] <https://twitter.com/CENTCOM/status/1769152861366006228>
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- [27] <https://twitter.com/GLZRadio/status/1769133685029109995>
- [28] <https://twitter.com/QalaatM/status/1769307215125483933> ;
<https://twitter.com/QalaatM/status/1769313128989233324>
- [29] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-24-2023> ;
<https://www.understandingwar.org/background/iran-update-may-1-2023> ;
<https://www.understandingwar.org/background/iran-update-february-13-2023>