

Iran Update



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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.

There are early indications that some Iraqi Sunni and Kurdish politicians are trying to build an alliance ahead of the Iraqi parliamentary elections in October 2025. Such an alliance would challenge the Iranian-backed Shia parties in these elections. A prominent Sunni politician, Khamis al Khanjar, met with Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Masoud Barzani on January 9 to discuss the upcoming parliamentary elections and “the formation of alliances that can guarantee the rights of their people and regions.”[1] This meeting comes as Khanjar helped form a political coalition—the United Sunni Leadership Coalition—with other prominent Sunni leaders on January 7.[2] The leader of the Shammari tribe in northwestern Iraq separately praised Barzani and emphasized the need for Arab-Kurdish unity in a statement on January 8, suggesting that the Shammari tribe is aligned with Barzani’s Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP).[3]

Khanjar has been vocal about the need to address Sunni grievances in recent weeks. Khanjar said in an interview with Kurdish media in December 2024 that Sunnis in western Iraq are upset about the injustices they face.[4] Khanjar added that Sunnis would turn to “other parties” that oppose dialogue and negotiation if the federal government fails to defend them.[5] Khanjar’s remarks are consistent with a recent statement from Sunni politicians calling for a “comprehensive national dialogue” to address political and economic grievances.[6] The KRG similarly threatened to boycott the Iraqi federal government if the latter failed to regularly pay public sector salaries.[7] The payment of public sector salaries is a common point of tension between the Iraqi federal government and the KRG, but the KRG threat is still notable given the current discussions between Barzani and the newly formed Sunni political alliance.[8]

The newly formed Sunni political coalition could align with national Iraqi Shia cleric Moqtada al Sadr as well. Sadr emphasized in early December 2024 that the Iraqi federal government and Iranian-backed Iraqi militias must avoid interfering in Syria.[9] Khanjar subsequently called on Iraqi political parties to “adopt” Sadr’s position of non-interference.[10] The alignment of Sadr’s and the Sunni positions here could provide a foundation for political collaboration in the upcoming parliamentary elections. The United Sunni Leadership Coalition’s outreach to the KDP and possible alignment with Sadr is noteworthy given that these factions previously allied following the 2021 Iraqi Parliamentary elections.[11]

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei reportedly rejected plans to postpone the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq during his meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani in Tehran on January 8.[12] Khamenei told Sudani that there is “no justification” for postponing the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq, according to an unspecified source close to the Iranian presidency speaking to Iraqi media on January 9.[13] An Iraqi official told the *Washington Post* in December 2024 that the Iraqi federal government was reconsidering its request for US forces to withdraw from Iraq by the end of 2026 because it is concerned that the fall of Bashar al Assad in Syria threatens Iraqi security.[14] The United States and Iraq agreed in September 2024 that hundreds of US-led international coalition forces would withdraw from Iraq by September 2025 and that the remaining troops would withdraw by the end of 2026.[15]

Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Hakan Fidan said on January 10 that the HTS-led interim Syrian government should be given the opportunity to address Kurdish militants' presence within the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) before Turkey takes military action.[16] Fidan said that the HTS-led interim government has an “agenda” to address the “PKK/YPG” but promised that “Turkey will” take action if others—presumably HTS—fail to do so.[17] HTS and Turkey have coordinated in recent weeks to coerce the SDF into disarming and integrating into the HTS-led defense apparatus. HTS leader Ahmed al Shara recently met with the SDF but there have been no specific reports of tangible progress toward an agreement, despite SDF commander Mazloum Abdi’s claim on January 9 that the SDF came to an unspecified agreement on Syrian unity.[18] It remains unclear if Turkey would be satisfied by the SDF merely being re-flagged under the new Syrian Defense Ministry.

Turkish officials have repeatedly threatened to launch a military operation to “destroy” the SDF if it fails to disarm.[19] Fidan said on January 10 that Turkey has the objective of “cleans[ing]” Syria of “terrorism” in 2025.[20] Turkey rejected on January 10 a proposal to deploy US and French troops to secure the Syria-Turkey border.[21] The deployment of US and French forces would likely preclude Turkey from conducting its offensive. Local Syrian media reported on January 10 that Turkey sent reinforcements to the Syrian border and posted footage of a convoy of heavy equipment transporters carrying 155-mm self-propelled howitzers.[22]

The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) reportedly shelled SDF positions along the eastern Peace Spring frontlines on January 10 amid a possible SNA offensive against the SDF. Local, anti-SDF media reported that the SNA shelled several SDF positions in the Tal Tamr countryside and east of Ras al Ain.[23] The reported SNA shelling comes amid possible SNA

deployments and preparations for an offensive into SDF-controlled territory. CTP-ISW cannot verify the local reporting about shelling along the frontline, however.

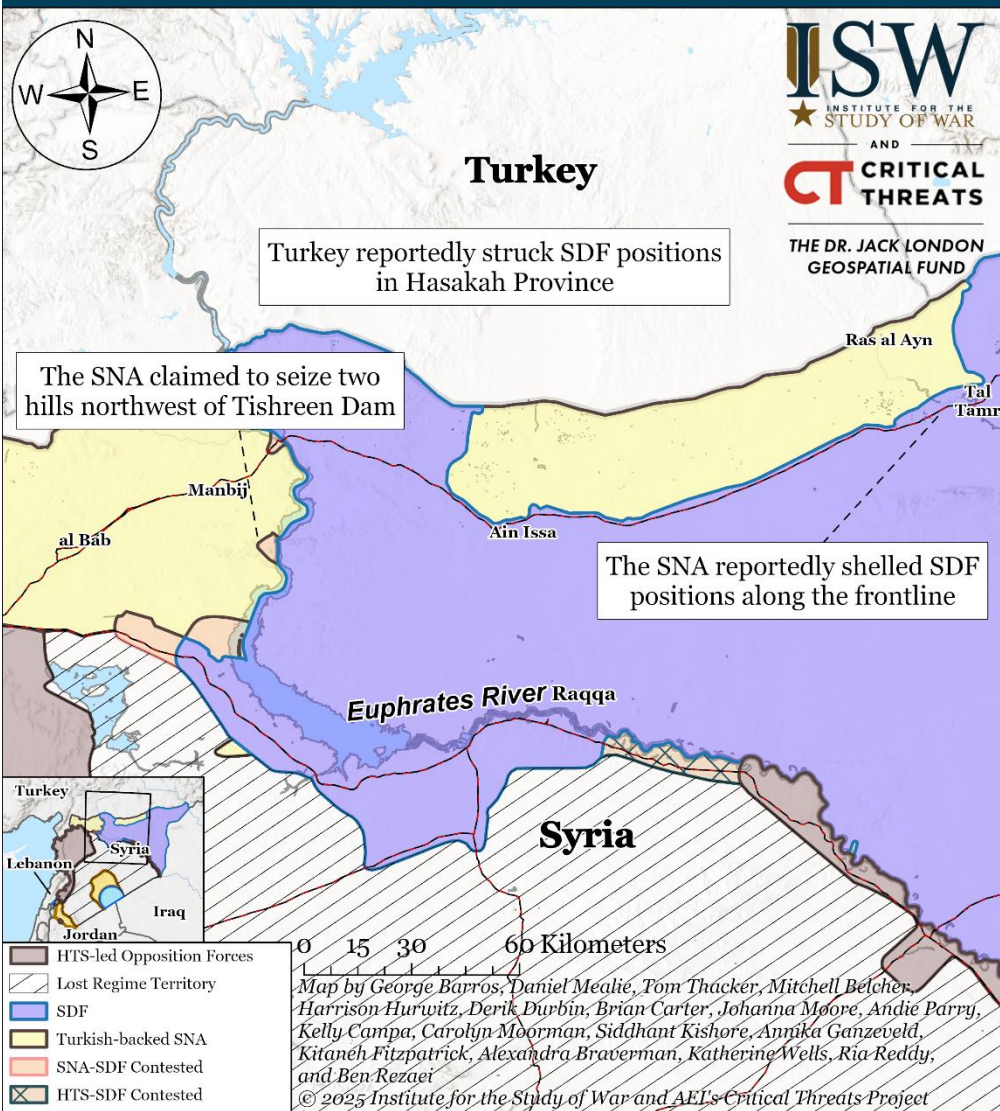
Turkey continued to support SNA operations to isolate SDF elements along the Euphrates River ahead of the possible offensive. Turkey conducted several airstrikes targeting SDF positions in several villages near Sarrin and along the eastern bank of the Euphrates River, according to local media.[24] The SDF accuses Turkey of striking Sarrin's grain silos.[25] Turkey also reportedly struck at least three SDF targets in northern Hasakah Province along the Qamishli-Faysh Khabur road.[26] Local media reported that one of the strikes killed an SDF commander with two others in a vehicle in Khan Jabal.[27] These strikes are likely meant to undermine SDF defenses against the SNA along the Euphrates River and the SDF's ability to defend against a potential SNA offensive from Peace Spring territory.

The SNA continued to engage the SDF northwest of Tishreen Dam on January 10. Commander of the Suleiman Shah Brigades—a faction affiliated with the SNA—Abu Amsha claimed on January 10 that the SNA seized two hills northwest of the Tishreen Dam.[28] Geolocated footage posted on January 10 showed SNA and SDF drone strikes about three kilometers northwest of Tishreen Dam.[29] Geolocated footage showed the SDF conducting a drone strike targeting SNA fighters north of Deir Hafer, east of Aleppo City.[30]

The HTS-led interim government located and dismantled a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) in the Aleppo countryside on January 10.[31] Syrian state media reported that the VBIED was headed to Aleppo from SDF-controlled territory, citing a source in the Interior Ministry.[32] Unspecified fighters have detonated three other car bombs or VBIEDs in SNA-controlled territory since December 24.[33]

Control of Terrain in Northern Syria

As of January 10, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Key Takeaways:

- Iraq:** There are early indications that some Iraqi Sunni and Kurdish politicians are trying to build an alliance ahead of the Iraqi parliamentary elections in October 2025. Such an alliance would challenge the political influence of the Iranian-backed Shia parties.
- Iraq:** Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei reportedly rejected any plans to postpone the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq during his meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani in Tehran.
- Syria:** Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Hakan Fidan said that the HTS-led interim government in Syria should have the opportunity to address Turkish concerns vis-a-vis the SDF before Turkey launches a major military operation into northern Syria.

Syria

Axis of Resistance objectives:

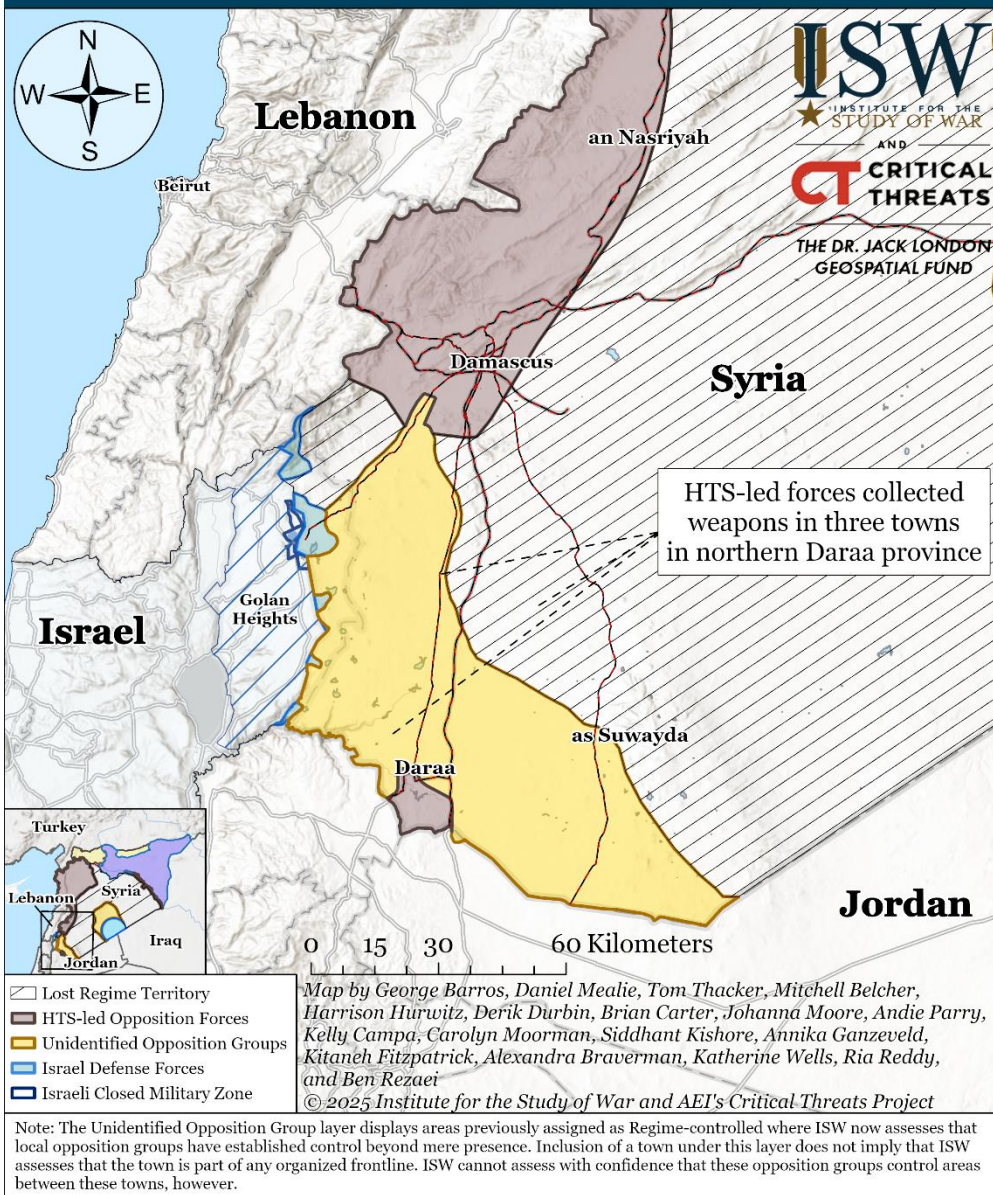
- Reestablish ground lines of communication through Syria to Lebanon
- Reestablish Iranian influence in Syria

The HTS-led interim government has continued its campaign to destroy Assad regime remnants across Syria since January 9. HTS-led forces conducted clearing operations in al Salihin, Aleppo City, on January 10.[34] The interim government established positions and collected weapons in Tafas and Lajat, Daraa Province on January 10, after negotiating with local leaders.[35] HTS-led forces began searching homes and military sites for weapons in northern Daraa Province on January 9.[36] HTS-led forces also searched for regime remnants in Jaba, northern Quneitra, on January 10.[37]

Unknown actors executed former regime official Mazen Kneneh in Dummar, Damascus, on January 10.[38] Kneneh was reportedly affiliated with former regime military intelligence.[39] A pro-Assad social media account blamed HTS for Kneneh's death.[40]

Opposition Advances in Southwest Syria

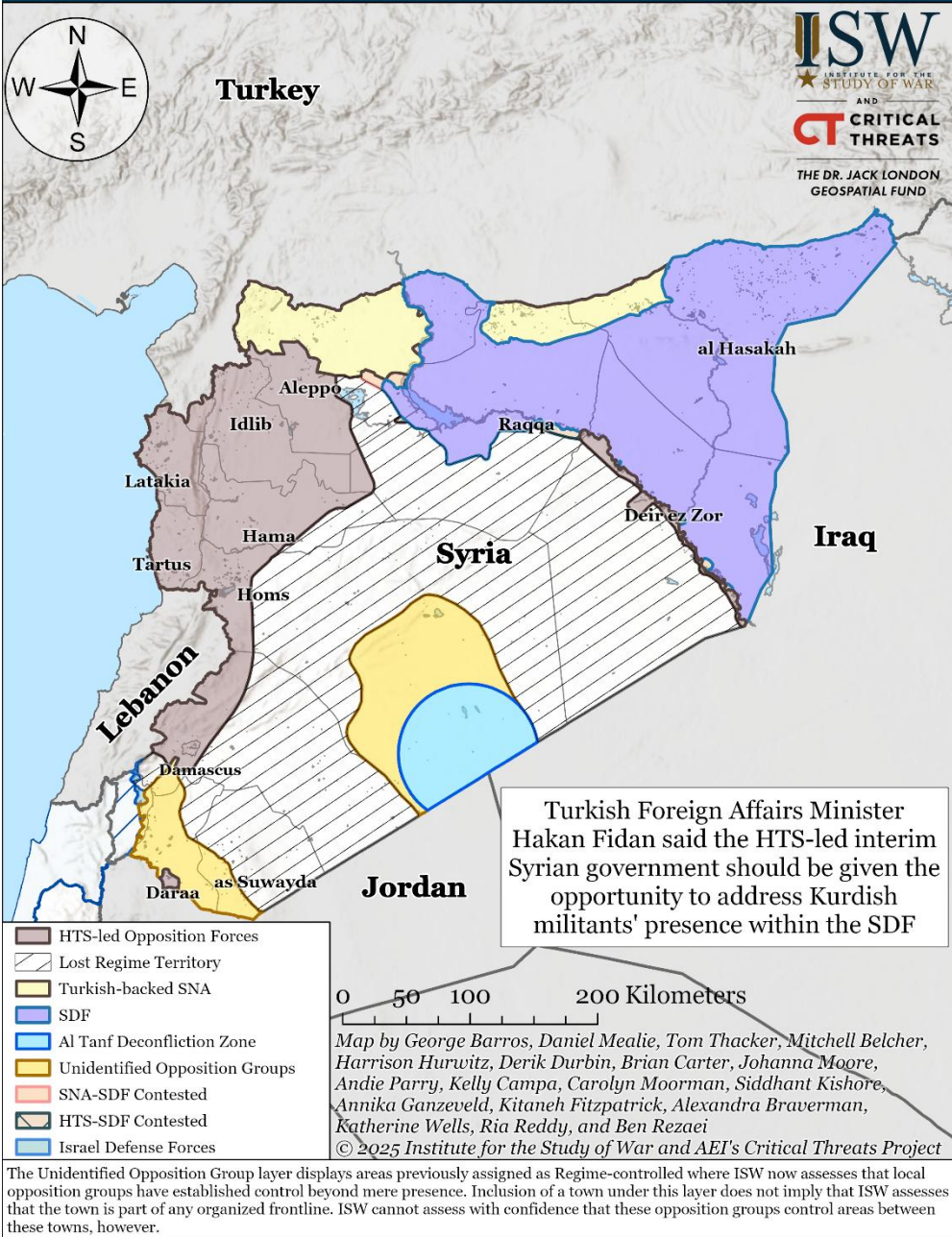
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Several European countries are discussing lifting sanctions on Syria.^[41] The Italian foreign minister said that he is “optimistic” about discussions with the United States and other European countries to lift sanctions on Syria during a visit to Damascus on January 10.^[42] The EU high representative for foreign affairs separately said on January 10 that the European Union could lift sanctions on Syria if “tangible progress is made.”^[43]

Reported Control of Terrain in Syria

As of January 10, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



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

One hundred and ninety-one families of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) members relocated from the SDF-controlled al Hol camp in Hasakah Province, northeastern Syria, to the al Jadaa camp in Ninewa Province, Iraq, on January 9.[44] The families entered Iraq via the Rabia border crossing and will undergo a “security check” at al Jadaa camp.[45] The relocation marked the 18th time that Iraqi families in al Hol have returned to Iraq. A member of the Iraqi Parliamentary Migration and Displacement Committee claimed on January 9 that Iraqis returning from al Hol are “saturated with extremist, barbaric, and terrorist ideas” and called for rehabilitating them in “special institutions.”[46]

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

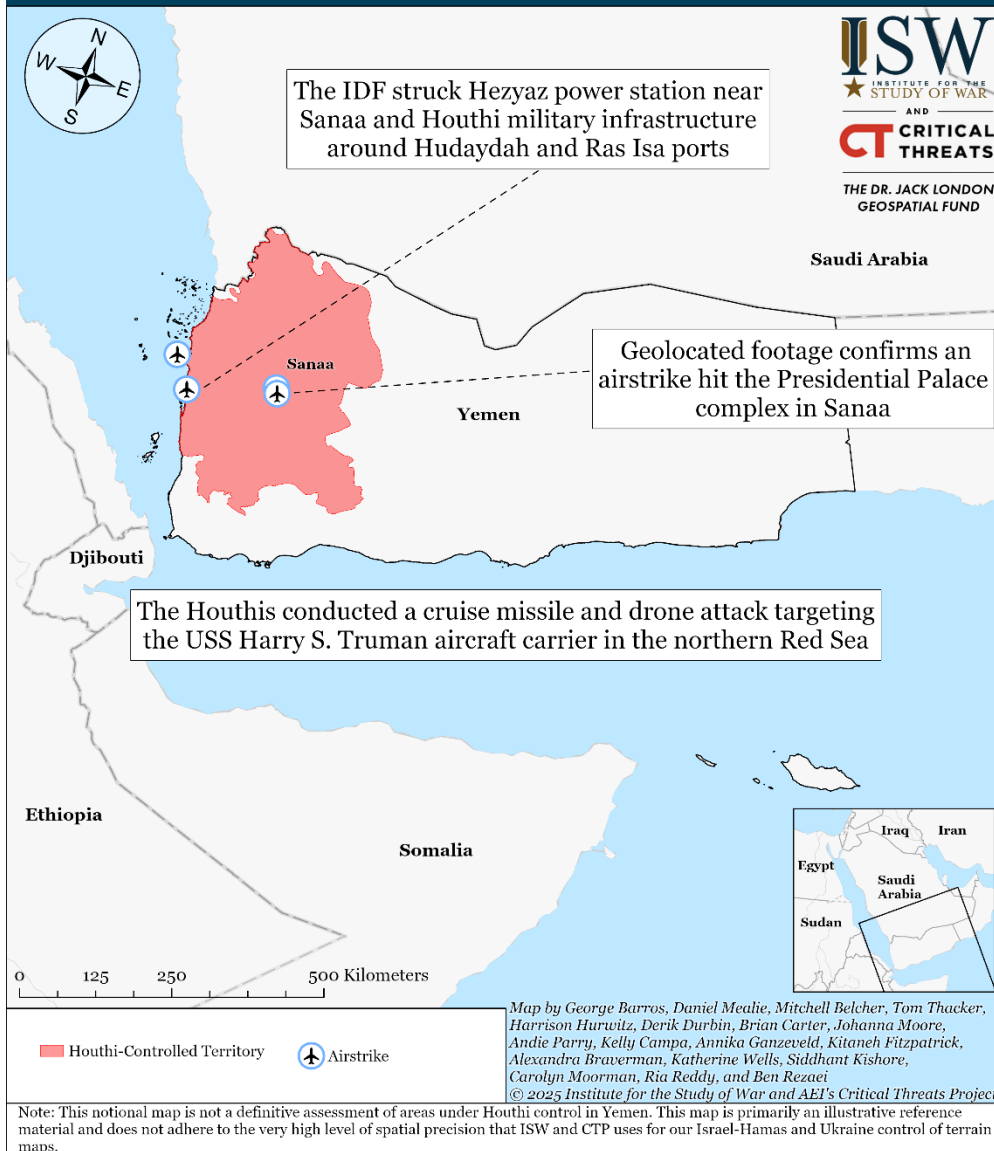
The IDF Air Force and the US-UK coalition conducted strikes targeting Houthi sites in Yemen on January 10 in response to repeated Houthi attacks on Israel and commercial ships in the Red Sea.[47] Targets included infrastructure at Hezyaz power station near Sanaa and military infrastructure around Hudaydah and Ras Isa ports.[48]

The Houthis conducted a drone attack targeting the Tel Aviv-Jaffa area on January 9.[49] The IDF intercepted a drone launched from Yemen over the Mediterranean Sea.[50]

The Houthis claimed that they conducted a cruise missile and drone attack targeting the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier in the northern Red Sea on January 9.[51] The Houthis claimed that they targeted the carrier and its accompanying naval vessels.[52]

Houthi Attacks in the Red Sea

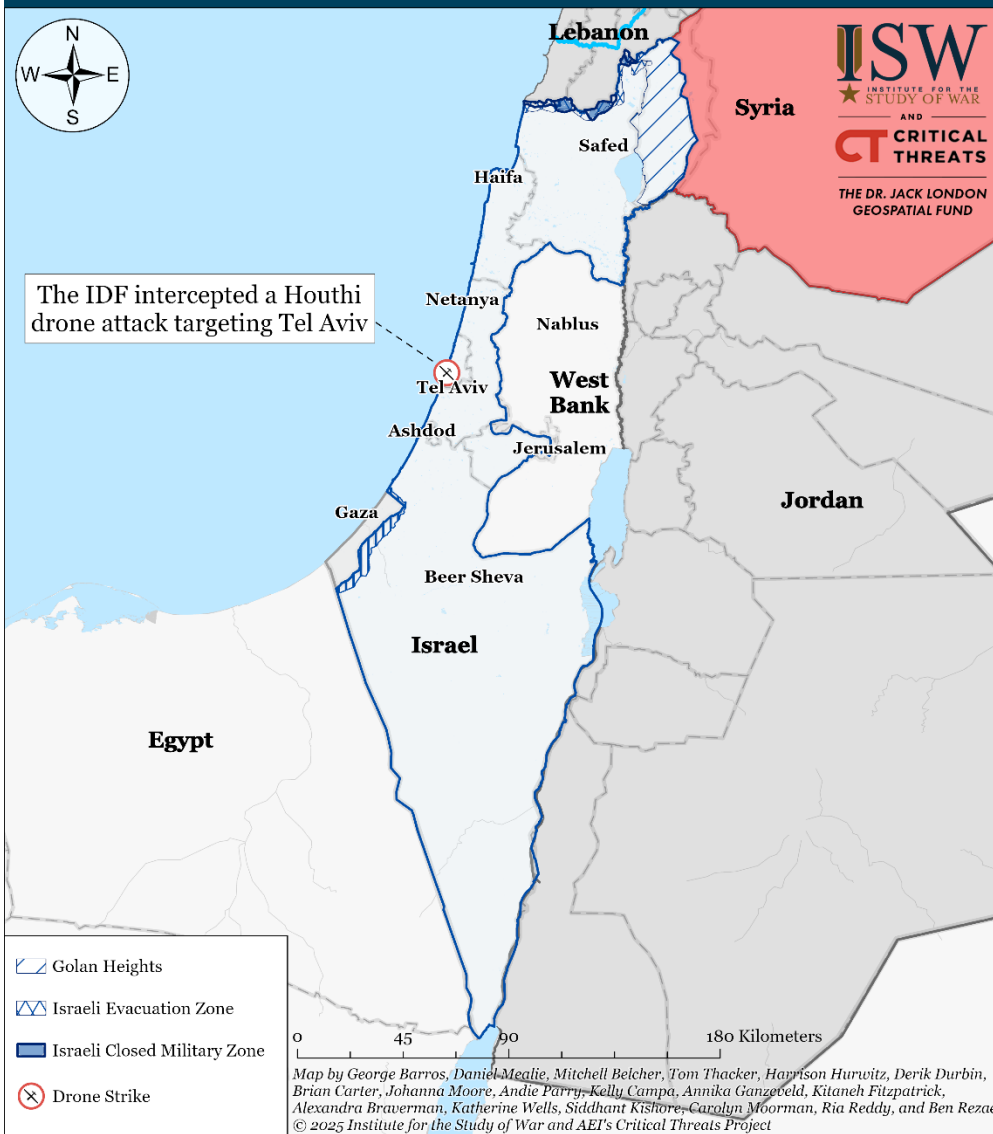
As of January 10, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



An Israeli Army Radio correspondent reported that the IDF Air Force destroyed a Houthi ballistic missile seconds before its launch toward Israeli territory on January 10.[53] The IDF intercepted the missile on its launcher during a strike, preventing the Houthis from immediately responding to ongoing Israeli operations in Yemen.[54]

Indirect Fire Attacks into Israel

As of January 10, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



The Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

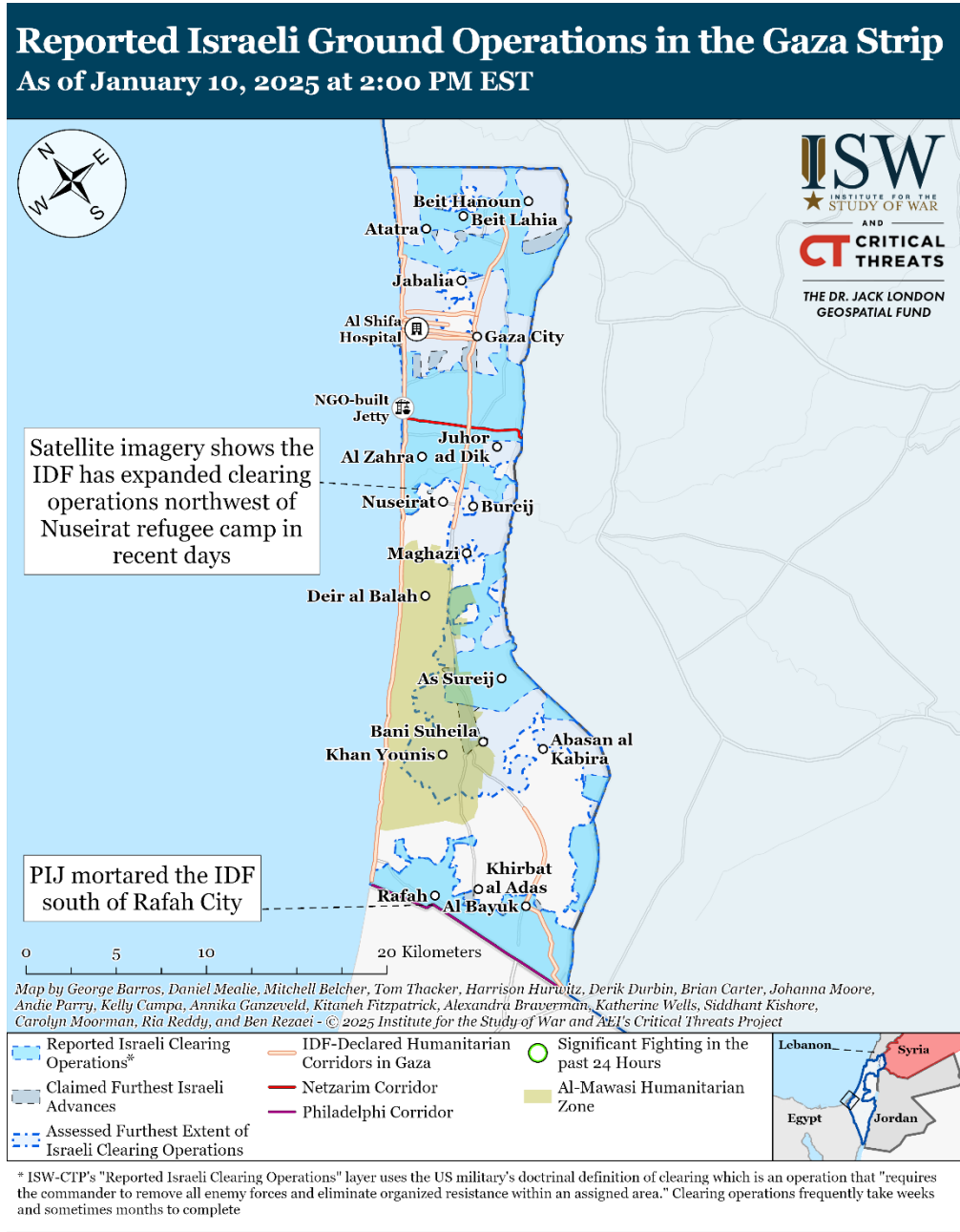
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Erode the will of the Israeli political establishment and 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

Commercially available satellite imagery showed that the IDF has expanded clearing operations northwest of the Nuseirat refugee camp in recent days.

Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) mortared the IDF south of Rafah City on January 10.[55]



The IDF announced on January 10 that it recovered the remnants of a second dead Israeli hostage from a tunnel in Rafah City, southern Gaza Strip, on January 7.[56] The IDF recovered a body in the tunnel but could not confirm the status of the second hostage until now.[57]

A senior Hamas official told al Jazeera on January 10 that most Israeli hostages held in the northern Gaza Strip are “now missing.”[58] This claim follows Hamas denying Israel’s request for the status of Israeli hostages held in the Gaza Strip during recent ceasefire-hostage negotiations.[59]

Lebanon

Lebanese media, including Lebanese Hezbollah media, reported that the IDF continued operations in the Marjaayoun district, southern Lebanon, on January 10. The IDF reportedly detonated explosives in Bani Hayyan and Kfar Kila.[60] The IDF also reportedly moved between two towns northeast of Kfar Kila.[61] Hezbollah media reported that the IDF advanced into Taybeh before detonating explosives and conducting intensive searches in the area.[62] The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) stated that an LAF patrol entered Taybeh to reopen roads that the IDF had closed on January 6.[63] The IDF reportedly detonated explosives in Taybeh on January 8.[64]

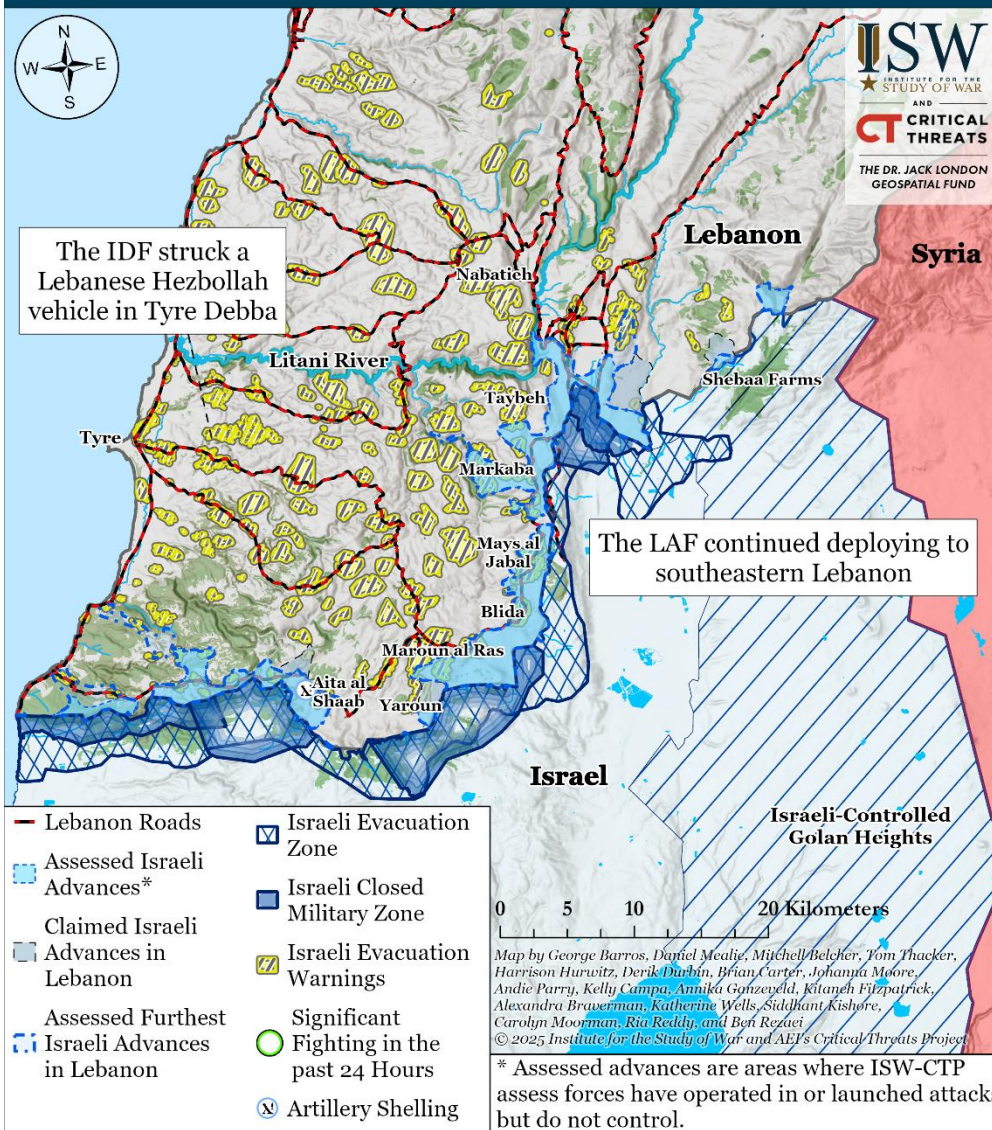
Lebanese media reported that the IDF detonated explosives in Yaroun, southeastern Lebanon, on January 10.[65]

The LAF began to deploy to Aitaroun and Aita al Shaab, southern Lebanon, on January 10. Lebanese media reported that LAF armor entered Aitaroun.[66] The IDF last reportedly operated in Aitaroun on January 6.[67] Lebanese media also reported that the LAF approached the outskirts of Aita al Shaab after the IDF fired artillery around Aita al Shaab and detonated multiple explosives in the area earlier in the day.[68]

The IDF Air Force struck unspecified weaponry in a Hezbollah vehicle in Tayr Dibba, southwestern Lebanon, on January 10.[69] Lebanese media reported that the Israeli airstrike killed at least five individuals and wounded four.[70]

Reported Israeli Operations in Lebanon

As of January 10, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Israeli officials told Axios on January 9 that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Israel Katz want to keep the IDF in three unspecified locations in southern Lebanon beyond the ceasefire's required withdrawal date.[71] A US official told *Axios* that Lebanese President Joseph Aoun's victory on January 9 will add more pressure from the United States and other Western and Arab countries on Israel to withdraw from Lebanon by the deadline, which is January 26.[72] This report follows senior Israeli officials indicating on January 5 that the IDF will likely extend its deployment in southern Lebanon if the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire agreements are not implemented fully by the time that the IDF must withdraw.[73]

West Bank

Israeli settlers set fire to a building and vandalized other buildings near Ramallah in the West Bank on January 9.[74] Israeli settlers also set fire to a Palestinian vehicle near Bethlehem overnight.[75] CTP-ISW previously reported that Israeli settlers set fire to cars and damaged homes in Hajjah and Immatain, Qalqilya Governorate, on January 6.[76] Palestinian militia fighters killed three Israelis and wounded eight others in a shooting attack targeting vehicles on Route 55 in Qalqilya Governorate on January 6, which caused the recent uptick in settler violence.[77]

The IDF conducted a counterterrorism operation near Jenin in the West Bank on January 10.[78] The IDF reported that it arrested eight suspects and plans to continue efforts to locate the fighters who are responsible for the shooting attack that killed three Israelis in Qalqilya Governorate on January 6.[79]

Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Rear Admiral Ali Akbar Ahmadian met with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in Yerevan, Armenia, on January 9.[80] Ahmadian said that Iran is ready to share expertise in industrial, agricultural, and technological fields. Pashinyan expressed interest in collaborating on the International North-South Transport Corridor and reaffirmed the goal of achieving three billion US dollars in trade between Armenia and Iran.[81]

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) unveiled a new underground missile depot on January 10, as IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami and IRGC Aerospace Force Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajji Zadeh visited the site.[82] The facility reportedly played a role in the Iranian missile attacks against Israel in April and October 2024.[83] The IRGC claimed that the facility contains medium-range Emad and Ghadr ballistic missiles and short-range Qiam ballistic missiles.[84]

The IRGC held the Rahiyan-eh Ghods exercise in Tehran on January 10, likely as a show of force aimed at deterring both internal dissent and external threats.[85] The Fatehin, Imam Ali, and Imam Hossein battalions, which are the Basij's most elite and loyal units, participated in the exercise. These units are notably responsible for protest suppression and have previously been deployed abroad to deal with external security threats.[86] Commander of the IRGC Tehran Provincial Corps Brigadier General Hassan Hassan Zadeh said that the exercise was meant to showcase the Basij's readiness to counter threats.[87] Iranian state media claimed that 110,000 Basij members participated and displayed military equipment, likely to signal that Iran has a large force to deal with any threats.

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.



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<https://t.me/AbomosaabSharkea/132547>; <https://t.me/sohebb1993/21065>

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