

# Iran Update



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**Information Cutoff: February 7, 2025, 2:00 pm 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.*

**Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei categorically rejected nuclear negotiations with the United States during a speech to Iranian military personnel in Tehran on February 7.[1] This marks the first time Khamenei has so explicitly opposed negotiations with the United States since the inauguration of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian.** Khamenei stated that negotiations with the United States are "unwise, unintelligent, and dishonorable" and "no one should negotiate" with them.[2] Khamenei stated that Iran is not opposed to negotiations with any state "except" the United States.[3] Several Friday prayer leaders echoed Khamenei's statements and criticized negotiations with the United States as "futile." [4] Friday prayer leaders receive guidance for the content of their Friday sermons from the Office of the Supreme Leader, which suggests that their comments are likely a coordinated messaging campaign. Khamenei also stated that negotiating with the United States "will not solve any problems [in Iran], including economic and livelihood difficulties." [5] CTP-ISW previously assessed that US "maximum pressure" sanctions would likely further deteriorate the Iranian economy, which is already facing underlying economic issues.[6]

**Khamenei's opposition to negotiations with the United States appears inconsistent with the hypothesis that Iran is expanding its nuclear program to gain leverage in future negotiations.** Iran is conducting nuclear research and expanding its stockpile of enriched uranium, which are both steps that could enable it to build a nuclear weapon in a period of months.[7] One plausible reason for Iran's continued development of its nuclear program is to strengthen its position and increase leverage for future nuclear talks in order to secure more favorable terms. This would, in theory, enable Iran to extract concessions (such as sanctions relief) during negotiations by offering to

decrease its stockpile of enriched uranium. Khamenei's recent statements are inconsistent with this hypothesis, however, because Iran has no reason to increase its leverage with the West if it does not intend to negotiate with the United States. Some senior Iranian officials have recently signaled a willingness to engage in nuclear negotiations with the West, but Khamenei ultimately will decide whether Iran will negotiate, try to build a nuclear weapon, or retain a rapid nuclear breakout capability.[8]

**The Egyptian government continues to oppose US President Donald Trump's suggestion to relocate Gazans to Egypt and Jordan.** An unidentified Cairo-based Western diplomat told the Associated Press on February 6 that Egypt views Trump's idea as a threat to Egypt's national security.[9] Egypt officials have warned that Trump's proposal is a "blatant violation" of international law and could undermine the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty.[10] Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz instructed the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) on February 6 to prepare a plan for the "voluntary departure" of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip.[11]

**Some Sunni political parties have continued to collaborate with more sectarian Iranian-backed Iraqi political parties on a local level, despite national-level disagreements over the General Amnesty Law.** Members of former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki's State of Law Coalition and former Parliament Speaker Mohammad al Halbousi's Sunni Progress Party in the Baghdad Provincial Council voted on February 6 to dismiss Baghdad Provincial Council Chairman Ammar al Qaisi.[12] Qaisi is a member of the Sunni Azm Alliance, which is led by Muthanna al Samarra'i.[13] Samarra'i is a longtime political rival of Halbousi and a competitor for political influence among Sunni Iraqis. The Baghdad Provincial Council dismissed Qaisi because he recently dismissed the governor of Baghdad, Abdul Muttalib al Alawi.[14] Alawi is a member of the State of Law Coalition.[15] A member of the State of Law coalition stated on February 2 that this coalition is "entitled" to the Baghdad governor position and will "certainly have a candidate" to replace Alawi.[16] Sunni members of the Baghdad Provincial Council have reportedly agreed to elect Ammar al Hamdani, who is a member of the Progress Party, to replace Qaisi.[17]

Maliki and Halbousi probably reached a quid-pro-quo in which the State of Law and the Progress Party would remove the Azm Alliance's Provincial Council head to restore State of Law's control of Baghdad's governorship and give control of the Provincial Council to Halbousi. Halbousi is one of the only top Sunni Iraqi politicians who is not included in the new United Sunni Leadership Coalition, which was formed by Halbousi's rivals.

**Interim Syrian Defense Minister Murhaf Abu Qasra stated in an interview with the *Washington Post* that Syria is open to Russia retaining its air and naval bases in Syria if there are "benefits" for Syria.**[18] Qasra is very likely referencing some form of economic relief to help improve Syria's dire economic situation. The interim Syrian government has lobbied for economic relief from various sources since the fall of the Assad regime.[19] Cooperation with Russia could hinder European Union plans to lift sanctions on Syria, which are contingent on the new Syrian government pursuing a peaceful political future without extremism or involvement from Russia and Iran.[20] An unspecified Russian source told Bloomberg on January 28 that talks on Russian basing are "stuck." [21] Russia has continued to evacuate military assets from the Port of Tartus amid ongoing negotiations with the interim Syrian government.[22]

## Key Takeaways:

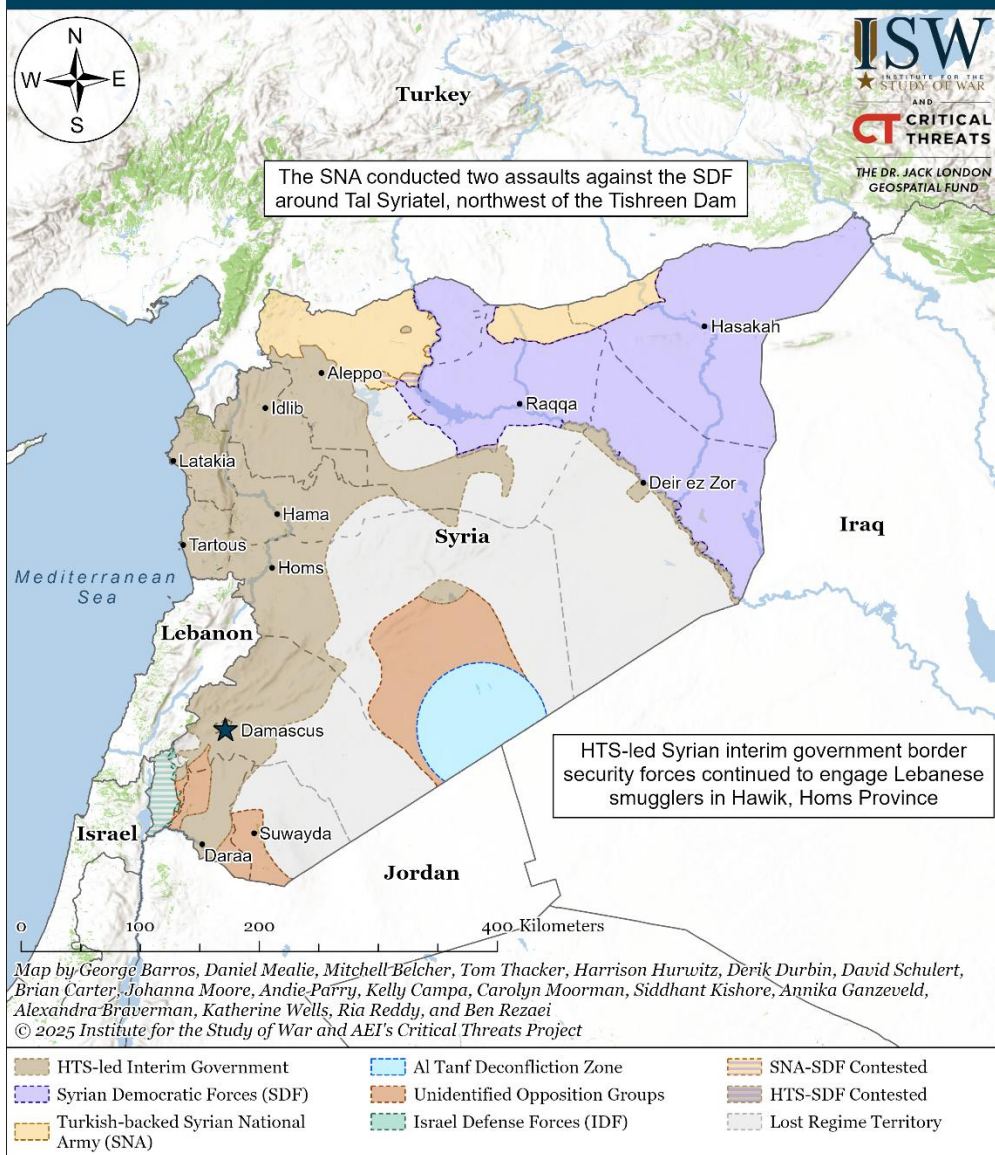
- **Iranian Nuclear Policy:** Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei categorically rejected nuclear negotiations with the United States during a speech to Iranian military personnel in Tehran on February 7. This marks the first time Khamenei has so explicitly opposed negotiations with the United States since the inauguration of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. Khamenei's opposition to negotiations with the United States appears inconsistent with the hypothesis that Iran is expanding its nuclear program to gain leverage in future negotiations.
- **Egyptian Response to US Gaza Plan:** The Egyptian government continues to oppose US President Donald Trump's suggestion to relocate Gazans to Egypt and Jordan.
- **Iraqi Politics:** Some Sunni political parties have continued to collaborate with more sectarian Iranian-backed Iraqi political parties on a local level, despite national-level disagreements over the General Amnesty Law. Former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki and former Parliament Speaker Halbousi probably reached a quid-pro-quo to benefit both political parties in Baghdad.
- **Russia in Syria:** Interim Syrian Defense Minister Murhaf Abu Qasra stated in an interview with the *Washington Post* that Syria is open to Russia retaining its air and naval bases in Syria if there are "benefits" for Syria. Qasra is very likely referencing some form of economic relief to help improve Syria's dire economic situation.

## Syria

**The pro-Assad Syrian Popular Resistance claimed on February 6 that it killed several HTS fighters and HTS-led security force members.[23]** The Syrian Popular Resistance claimed its fighters killed nine fighters, including an HTS and East Turkestan Movement commander, an HTS official, and a Deir ez Zor militia commander.[24] The Syrian Popular Resistance has claimed attacks over the past several weeks targeting HTS forces.[25] It remains unclear whether the group has had any real involvement in these attacks beyond the claims on social media, however.

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria

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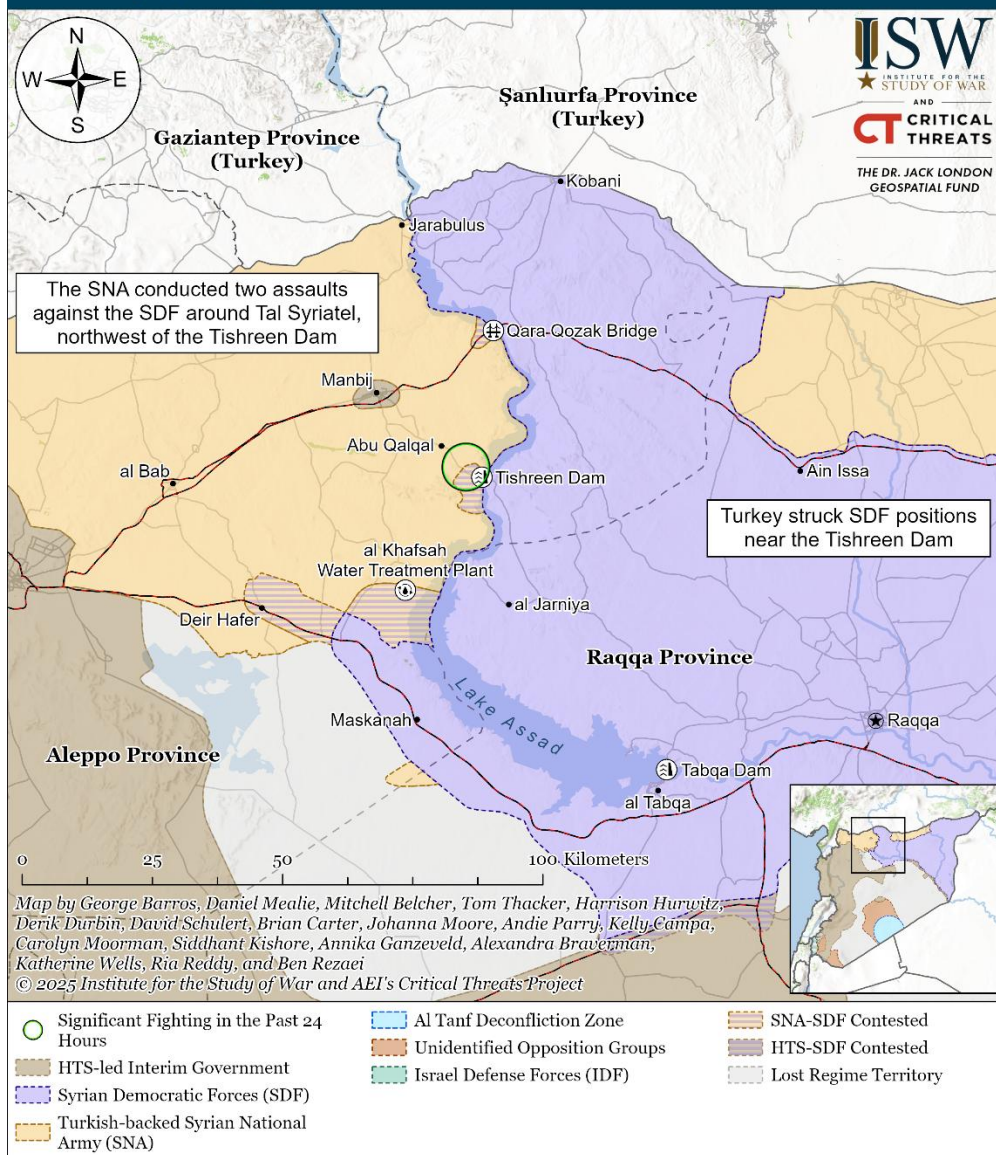
**The Syrian National Army (SNA) conducted two assaults against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) around Tal Syriatel, northwest of the Tishreen Dam since CTP-ISW's last data cut off on February 7.** The SDF posted footage showing its fighters firing on an SNA position near Tal Syriatel. The SDF claimed that the SNA fighters fled their position.[26] An SDF-linked spokesperson said that the SNA attempted to assault the position twice and failed.[27] Anti-SDF reporting contradicted SDF claims about the two assaults and asserted that its forces conducted a counter-attack against SDF fighters attempting to take the position and defended against three infiltration attempts.[28]

**The Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP)-dominated Kurdish National Council (KNC) announced on February 7 that it is interested in forming a united delegation with its political rival, the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), to negotiate with the interim**

**Syrian government.[29]** The KNC is a political coalition of Syrian Kurdish parties that is dominated by the KDP, which is one of two major parties that control Iraq’s Kurdistan Regional Government. The PYD is the political wing of the People’s Protection Units (YPG), which forms the core of the SDF. The KDP-backed KNC and Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK)-affiliated PYD both seek to achieve some sort of Kurdish administration for Syrian Kurds in the wake of the Assad regime but differ in their approach.[30] The KNC seeks a ”federal system” similar to the Kurdistan Regional Government and the PYD has historically sought an autonomous zone.[31] The KNC has historically cooperated with other Syrian opposition groups while the PYD has sought to establish itself as a third, neutral force in Syria. The PYD never seriously engaged the broader Syrian opposition to Assad, which has caused many Syrians to oppose the PYD.[32] The KNC and PYD aim to create a unified negotiating position but may find it difficult to do so.[33] The KNC and PYD have long been rivals in northeastern Syria, with the PYD controlling northeastern Syria due to their much larger military forces.[34]

**The head of the SDF Media Center Farhad Shami reported that Kurdish parties are still engaged in negotiations with the interim Syrian government.[35]** Shami claimed that the Kurdish parties had reached several agreements with the interim government, but he claimed that Turkey had intervened before the agreement could be signed. Shami claimed that the SDF can govern itself in northern and eastern Syria. The SDF has so far refused to disarm and integrate into the Syrian Defense Ministry and has instead called for a “decentralized” system that would allow the SDF to join the new Syrian armed forces as a “bloc” and remain deployed in northeastern Syria.[36] Syrian Interim President Ahmed al Shara said that Syrian sovereignty “under one authority and on one land” is a priority of the HTS-led interim government on January 30.[37] Shara recently told Western media that he is not very optimistic about the possibility of an agreement with the SDF, but negotiations continue.[38]

## Assessed Control of Terrain around Manbij February 7, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST

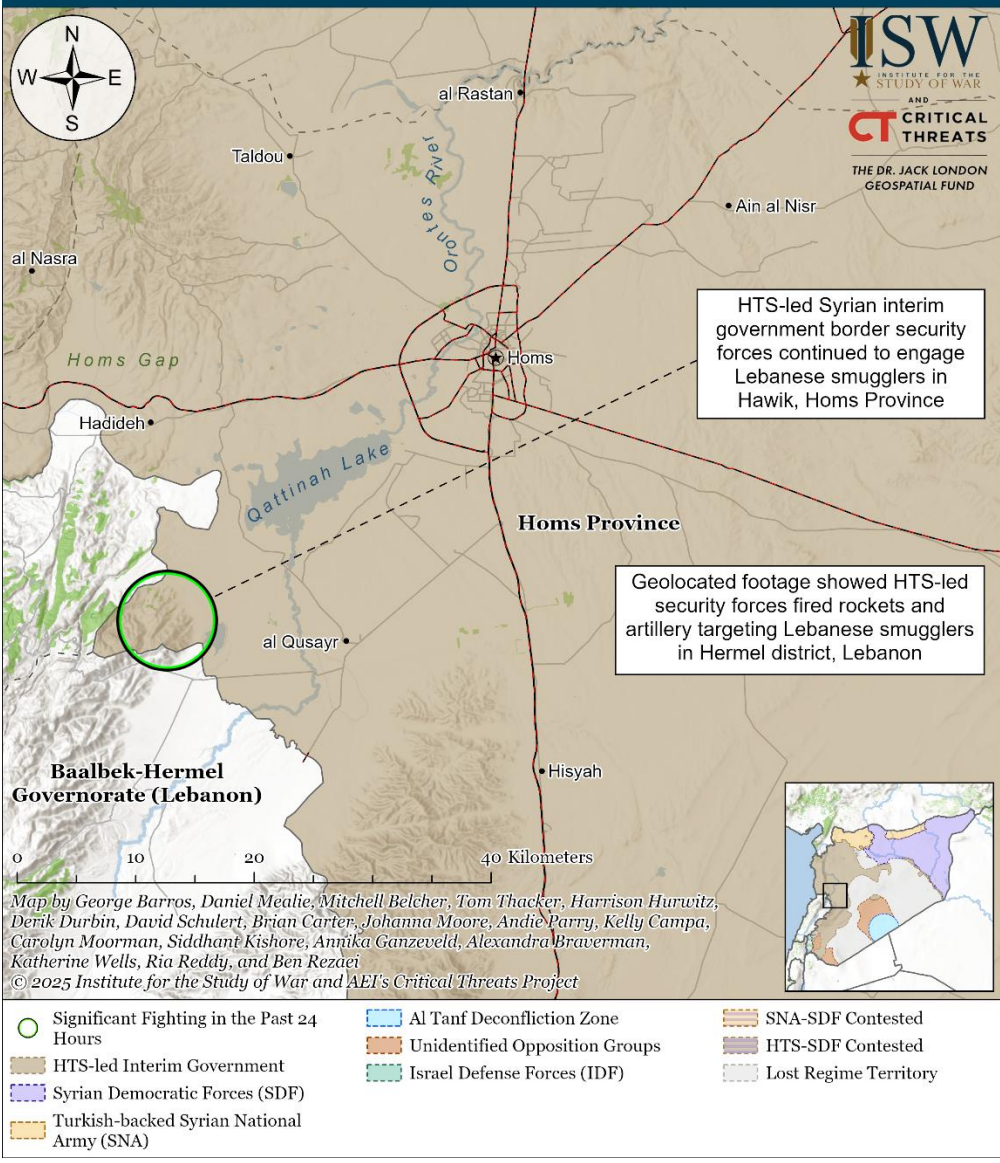


**HTS-led Syrian interim government border security forces continued to engage Lebanese smugglers in Hawik, Homs Province, since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on February 6.** Hezbollah-affiliated media reported on February 7 that interim government forces “launched an attack” on Hawik, a predominantly Lebanese village in Syria, on February 6.[39] There is no evidence of this “attack” other than the Syrian interim government’s response to illegal smuggling along the border. A Syrian journalist reported on February 7 that interim government security forces reinforced their position south of Hawik, northeast of Qusayr.[40] The Syrian Department of Military Operations deployed to Hawik, northeast of Qusayr after smugglers kidnapped HTS fighters during a counter-smuggling operation on February 6.[41] Lebanese media reported that the Lebanese “clans” that were holding three HTS fighters captive reached an agreement and returned the HTS fighters to Syrian forces at the Jusiya border crossing on February 6.[42]

A Syrian journalist reported that Syrian interim government security forces later advanced on the border with Lebanon during operations against Hezbollah-affiliated smuggling groups.[43] Geolocated footage posted to X (Twitter) showed Syrian interim government forces firing an anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) from a rooftop in western Hawik on February 6.[44] Lebanese media reported that interim government rockets and artillery fire from Syria hit three locations in Lebanese territory on the Syria-Lebanon border.[45] A Syrian Arab media outlet posted footage on February 7 that reportedly showed HTS fighters in Jarmash, Lebanon.[46] CTP-ISW cannot confirm the presence of HTS fighters in Lebanon at the time of this writing. A Syrian journalist reported that four Lebanese nationals belonging to the Jaafar clan were killed in clashes with interim government forces on the Syria-Lebanon border.[47] The Jaafar clan is active in drug and weapons smuggling in the Bekaa region.[48] Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and Syrian interim President Ahmed al Shara agreed to coordinate to control the situation on the Lebanon-Syria border in a phone call on February 7.[49]

# Assessed Control of Terrain around Homs

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## 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

**Some Iraqi courts have begun implementing the General Amnesty Law despite the recent Federal Supreme Court decision to temporarily suspend the implementation of this law.[50]** The Federal Supreme Court temporarily suspended the implementation of the General Amnesty Law on February 4 to determine the constitutionality of the parliament session in which parliament approved the law.[51] This law would grant amnesty to many Iraqis, including many Sunnis



who were arrested under Article 4 of the Anti-Terrorism Law.[52] Courts in Najaf and Qadisiyah provinces in southern Iraq announced on February 6 that they had begun implementing the General Amnesty Law.[53] These announcements are noteworthy given that the Iraqi Federal Supreme Court is the highest judicial authority in Iraq and, according to the Iraqi constitution, the Federal Supreme Court's decisions are "final and binding for all authorities." [54]

**Russian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Mikhail Bogdanov continued his visit to Iraq on February 6 and 7.** Bogdanov met with Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Masrour Barzani on February 6.[55] Bogdanov and Barzani discussed the agreement between the Iraqi federal government and the KRG for the KRG to resume oil exports. Bogdanov traveled to Najaf in southern Iraq on February 7 and met with Najaf Governor Yousef Kanawi.[56] Kanawi is a member of Ammar al Hakim's National Wisdom Movement.[57] Russian media reported that the Russian delegation headed by Bogdanov included officials from the Russian foreign affairs and defense ministries, as well as representatives of unspecified oil and energy companies.[58]

**Turkey conducted airstrikes on February 7 that targeted Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) positions in northern Dohuk Province, Iraqi Kurdistan, killing eight PKK fighters.**[59] Turkey claimed that it killed a member of the PKK's special forces unit in Iraqi Kurdistan.[60]

### 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

Nothing significant to report.

### 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

**The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) deployed elements of the 162nd, 143rd, and 99th Divisions to unidentified areas in the Gaza Strip, presumably in the buffer zone, on February 7 to better defend Israelis in the Gaza Envelope.**[61] The IDF 162nd Division withdrew from the northern Gaza Strip and deployed to the IDF-designated buffer zone along the Gaza

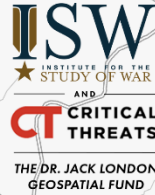
Strip's northeastern boundary on January 18.[62] The IDF reported that the three divisions moved into new locations to "strengthen the layer of defense for [Israelis] in the western Negev," which suggests that the IDF deployed these divisions in the buffer zone. The western Negev describes the area along the Gaza Strip-Israel border that includes the Israeli towns in the Gaza Envelope that Hamas attacked on October 7, 2023. A Palestinian journalist reported that the IDF 143rd Division withdrew from some areas of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on January 18.[63] The IDF 99th Division withdrew from the northern Gaza Strip on January 5.[64] Several Southern Command commanders held situational assessments with the soldiers prior to the release of the next set of hostages.[65] The next release will take place on February 8, according to the ceasefire agreement.

**Israeli media reported on February 7 that Hamas gave Israel the names of the three male hostages expected to be released on February 8.[66]** Unidentified Israeli officials told Israeli media on February 7 that Hamas would likely delay sharing the names of the hostages due to Hamas' dissatisfaction with Israel's implementation of humanitarian aid.[67] Hamas officials have previously accused Israel of delays in aid delivery to the Gaza Strip.[68] A UN humanitarian aid official said on February 6 that over 10,000 aid trucks have entered the Gaza Strip since the ceasefire went into effect on January 19.[69] The official did not provide an exact number of trucks that have entered the strip since January 19, though 10,800 trucks in total would be required to meet the 600-truck daily quota under the ceasefire agreement. Over 10,000 trucks in the eighteen days between January 19 and February 6 means Israel has allowed more than 555 aid trucks on average every day of the ceasefire.

**Geolocated footage posted on February 7 shows purportedly over 50 Hamas fighters standing in formation in an empty lot on al Jalaa Street, Zaytoun neighborhood, Gaza City.[70]** The presence of Hamas fighters in Gaza City does not by itself indicate that Hamas has reconstituted itself as a military organization in the Gaza Strip. The existence of these groups of fighters does not inherently imply that these fighters are part of an organized military force with a clear chain of command, nor does it imply that these fighters can conduct effective military operations.[71] This is consistent with the CTP-ISW assessment that Hamas fighters are now operating as small fighting cells and not organized military units that Hamas had in the early days of the war.

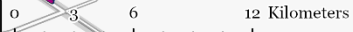
# Israel-Hamas Ceasefire Lines

As of February 7, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Hamas provided Israel with the names of three male hostages expected to be released on February 8

Beit Hanoun  
Atatra  
Beit Lahia  
Jabalial  
Gaza City  
Juhorad  
Al Zahra  
Dik  
Nuscirat  
Bureij  
Maghazi  
Deir al Balah  
As Sureij  
Khan Younis  
Bani Suheila  
Abasan al Kabira  
Rafah  
Khirbat al Adas  
Al Bayuk

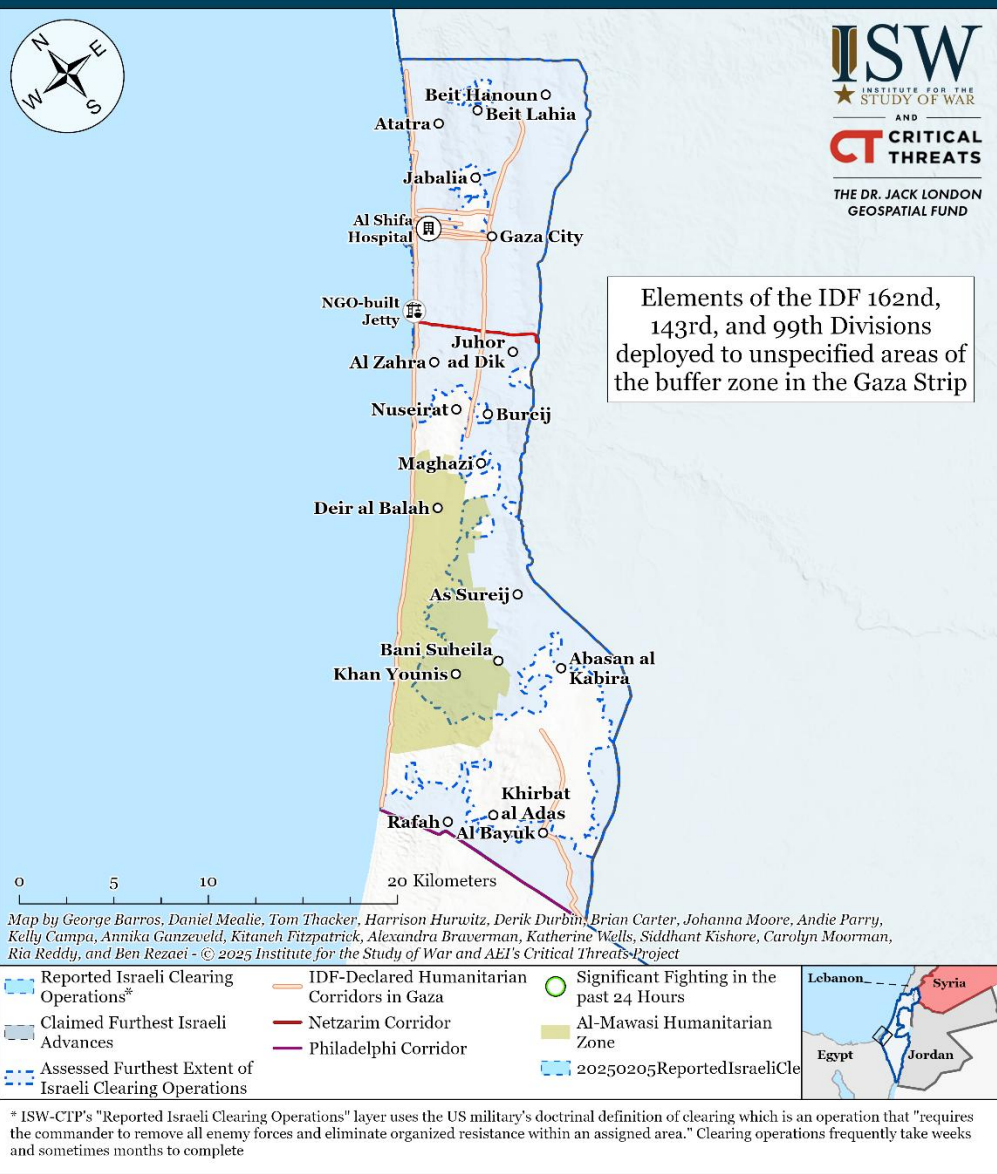


- Israeli-Hamas Ceasefire Buffer Zone
- Philadelphi Corridor
- ⋮ Assessed Furthest Extent of Israeli Clearing Operations
- Netzarim Corridor

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Tom Thacker, Harrison Hurwitz, Derek Durbin, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Annika Gunzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandr Braverman, Katherine Wells, Siddhant Kishore, Carolyn Moorman, Ria Reddy, and Ben Rezaei - © 2025 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

# Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

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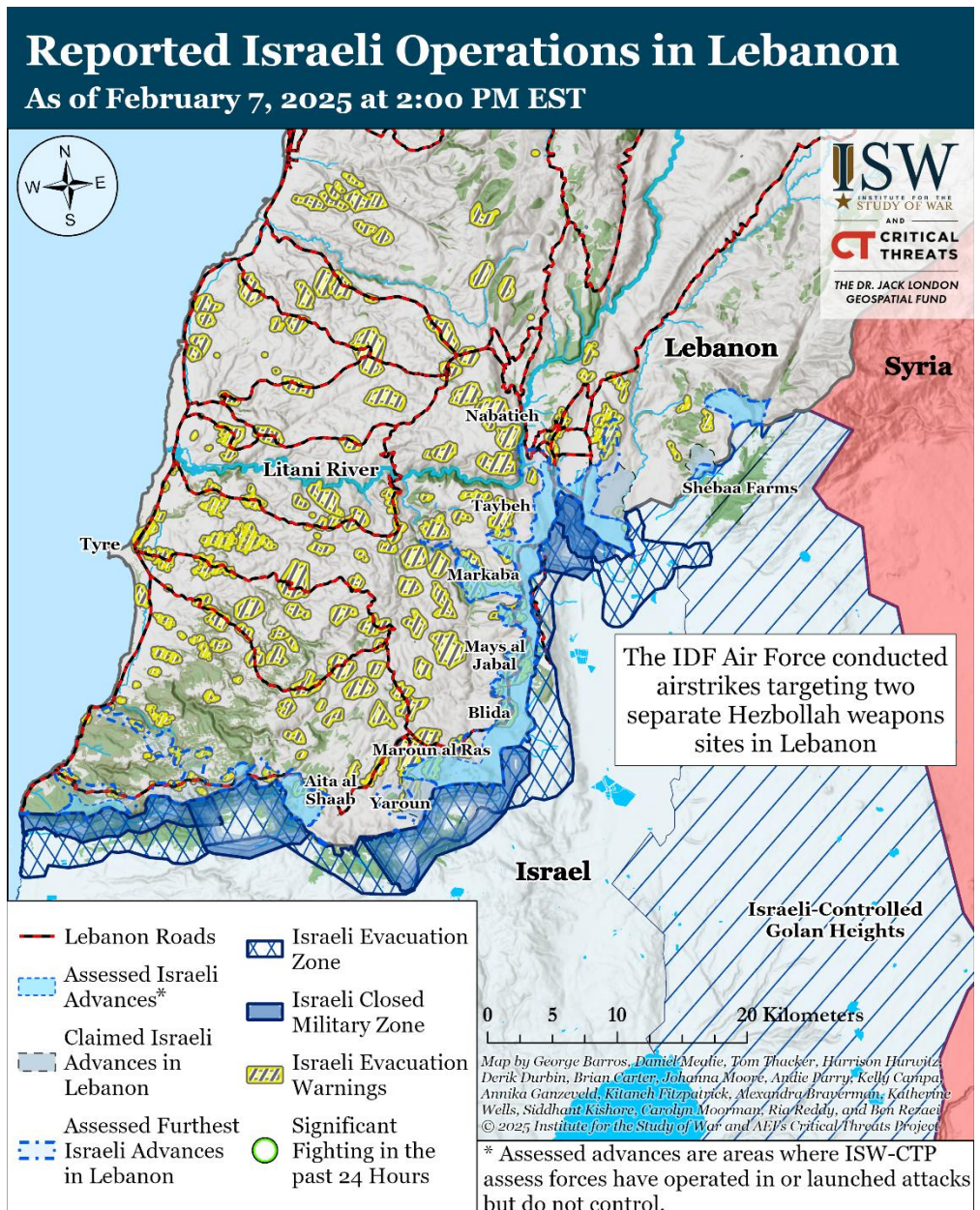
## Lebanon

**The IDF Air Force conducted airstrikes on February 6 that targeted Hezbollah weapons caches in Nabatieh District and Baalbek District, Lebanon.[72]** An Israeli source told Israel Army Radio that the strike followed Hezbollah ceasefire violations and attempts to smuggle weapons from the Syria border area.[73] Lebanese and Hezbollah-affiliated media reported that IDF airstrikes targeted two locations in Nabatieh District, approximately 20 km north of Israel.[74] The IDF previously conducted an airstrike that targeted a vehicle transporting Hezbollah weapons in Nabatieh District on January 28.[75] Geolocated footage posted to X (Twitter), Lebanese, and Hezbollah-affiliated media reported that the IDF struck five locations near Janta, Baalbek District, on the

Lebanon-Syria border.[76] The IDF has repeatedly struck Hezbollah military sites near the Lebanon-Syria border in recent months.[77]

**The IDF Arabic language spokesperson said on February 7 that a Hezbollah field commander accidentally killed himself when he detonated a Hezbollah explosive device in Tayr Harfa, southwestern Lebanon.[78]** The spokesperson reported that the field commander intended to use the device to conduct an attack but inadvertently detonated the device. The explosion killed the field commander and his family. Hezbollah-owned media reported on February 7 that unexploded IDF ordnance killed unspecified individuals in Tyre Harfa.[79]

**Lebanese and Hezbollah-affiliated media reported on February 7 that the IDF demolished infrastructure in Kfar Kila.[80]**



**US Deputy Special Envoy to the Middle East Morgan Ortagus met with Lebanese President Joseph Aoun in Beirut on February 7.**[81] Ortagus conveyed a US “red line” to Aoun that Hezbollah should not be a member of the next Lebanese government. Ortagus reiterated that Hezbollah has been “defeated militarily.”[82] Ortagus separately stated that the IDF must complete its withdrawal from Lebanon by February 18. The United States previously announced the extension of the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire agreement to February 18.[83]

### West Bank

Nothing significant to report.

### **Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy**

**The Iranian Artesh Navy participated in the ninth multinational AMAN-25 naval exercise in Karachi, Pakistan, on February 7 alongside 60 other countries.**[84] Pakistan holds the AMAN naval exercise every two years to display its naval and military capabilities. The exercise runs until February 11. This marks the first participation in the AMAN exercise for an Iranian naval vessel. The Iranian Artesh Navy delegation will also attend the AMAN Dialogue Conference on maritime cooperation and meet with Pakistani military officials. Iran and Pakistan last conducted a joint naval exercise in January 2024.[85]

*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://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hy8ktup8hHg> ; <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-hamas-war-egypt-trump-displacement-bc1c43f80655190824a5de4eb1d310cc>
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- [13] <https://shafaq dot com/en/Iraq/Baghdad-Council-ousts-Chairman-Al-Qaisi>
- [14] <https://shafaq dot com/en/Iraq/Baghdad-s-Council-agrees-to-replace-Chairman>
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