

Iran Update



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December 7, 2024, Information Cutoff: 3:00 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.

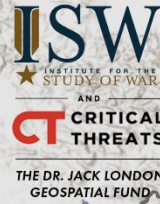
We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We utterly condemn violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even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

The Bashar al Assad regime faces imminent collapse. The Syrian Arab Army (SAA) appears to have already collapsed itself, as its units have fled repeatedly from advancing opposition forces across the country. The SAA is combat ineffective and has yet to present a meaningful defense against the advancing opposition. The opposition forces led by Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) have exploited the collapse of the SAA by advancing further southward and taking control of Homs City, which is the last major obstacle before Damascus. Various opposition groups have similarly taken control of large swaths of central and southern Syria and begun advancing into the southern and eastern outskirts of Damascus. The Assad regime appears to only control parts of Damascus and the western Syrian coast at the time of this writing. Syrian President Bashar al Assad has been entirely absent through the crisis and has refrained from making any public address.[1] Some unverified reports have suggested that Assad has fled, possibly to Iran.[2]

Iran appears unwilling to intervene militarily at any meaningful scale to support the Assad regime at this time. Iranian-backed forces have avoided engaging opposition forces almost entirely. The *New York Times* reported that an internal Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) memo acknowledged the growing likelihood that the Assad regime will collapse.[3] It is far from clear, moreover, that Iran could mobilize the forces necessary to save Assad at this point anyway. Iran has launched an emergency evacuation of its diplomatic staff and military officers from Damascus.[4] Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi called for political dialogue with the opposition, reflecting heightened Iranian concerns about the longevity of the Assad regime.[5] This Iranian concern and inaction come amid reports that Russia is similarly unwilling to intervene in support of Assad.[6]

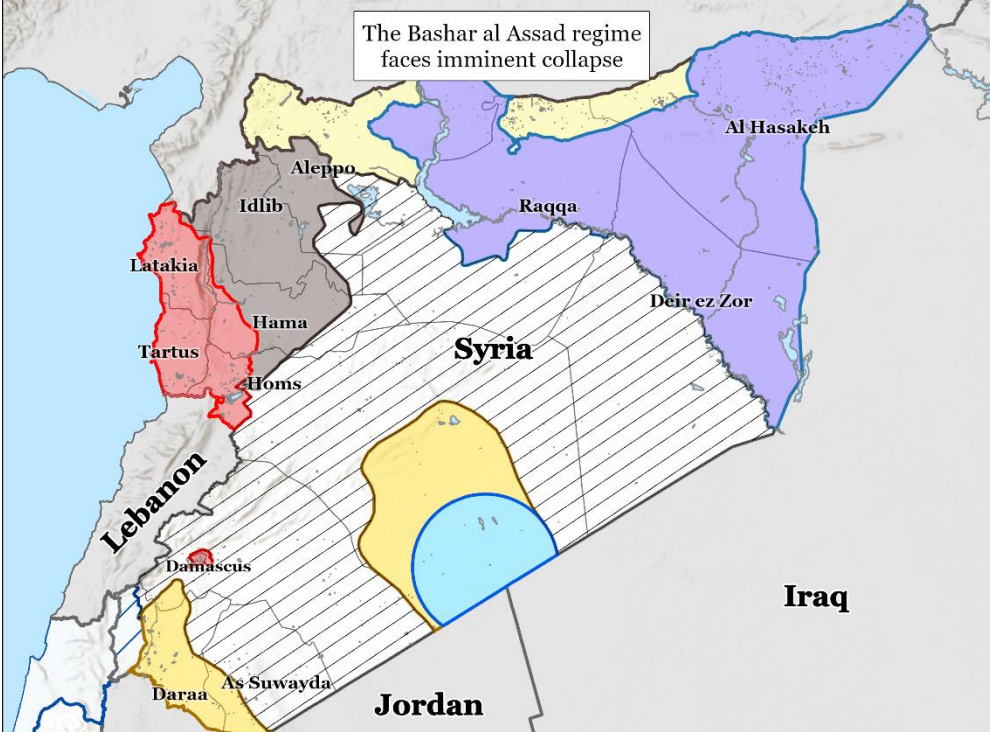
Reported Control of Terrain in Syria

As of December 7, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Turkey

The Bashar al Assad regime faces imminent collapse



- Pro-Regime Forces
- HTS-led Opposition Forces
- Turkish-backed SNA
- SDF
- Al Tanf Deconfliction Zone
- Unidentified Opposition Groups
- Lost Regime Territory

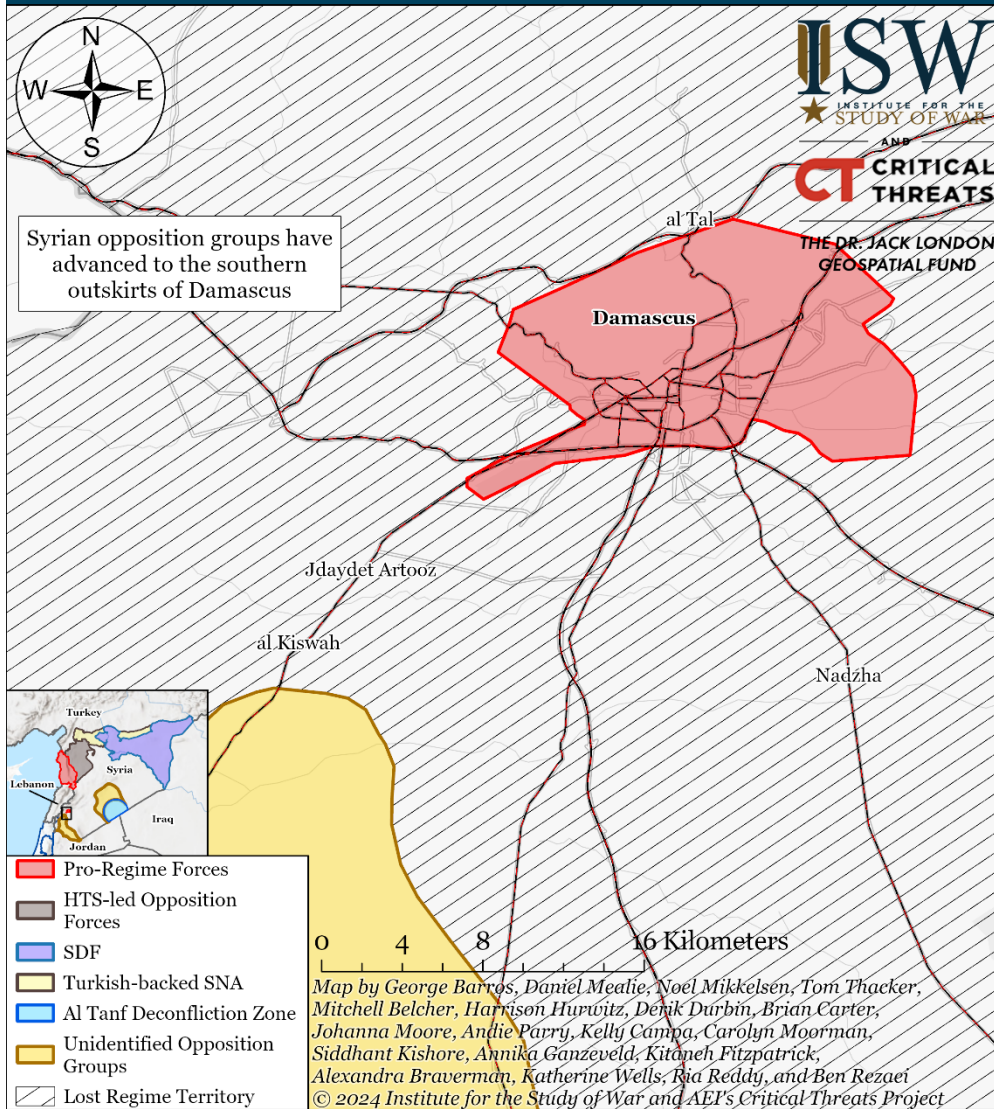
0 50 100 200 Kilometers

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Noel Mikkelsen, Tom Thacker, Mitchell Belcher, Harrison Hurwitz, Derik Durbin, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Carolyn Moorman, Siddhant Kishore, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, Ria Reddy, and Ben Rezaei
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Note: Unidentified Opposition Group layer displays areas previously assigned as Regime-controlled where ISW now assesses that local opposition groups have established control beyond mere presence. Inclusion of a town under this layer does not imply that ISW assesses that the town is part of any organized frontline. ISW cannot assess with confidence that these opposition groups control areas between these towns, however. This does not imply that regime forces retain a strong presence in the countryside.

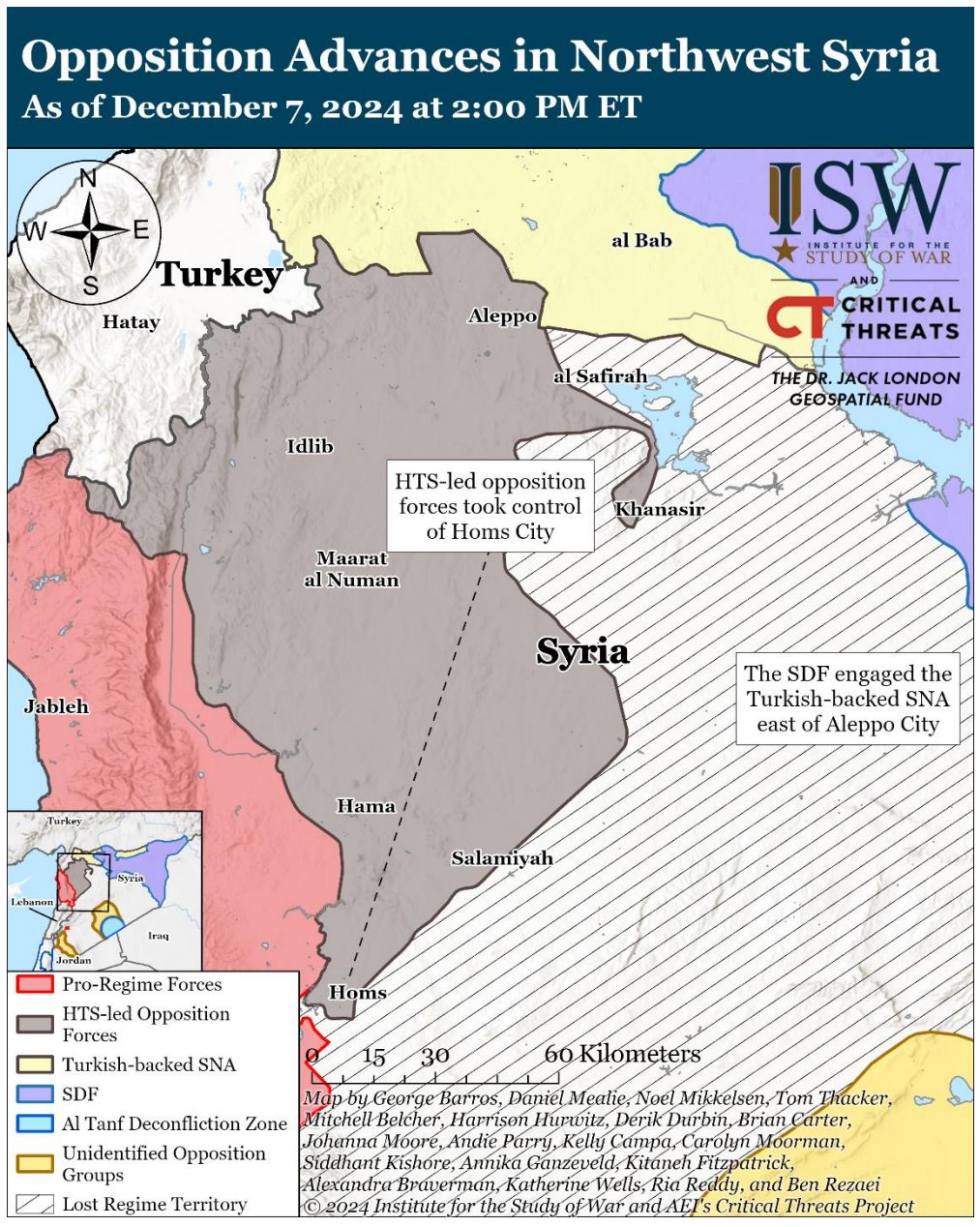
Opposition Advances near Damascus

As of December 7, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



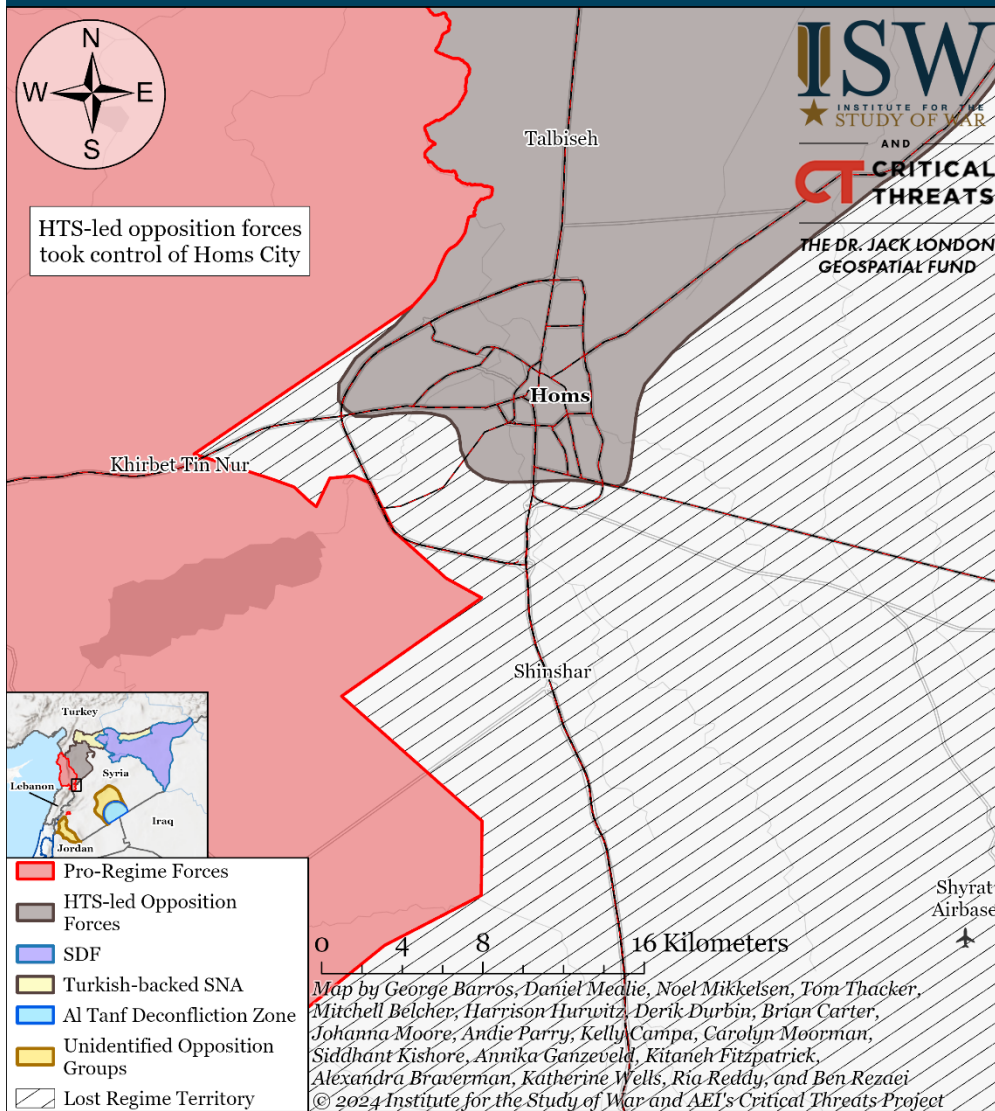
HTS-led opposition forces seized Homs City.[7] Opposition forces stated that they had full control of Homs City approximately an hour after announcing that they entered the city.[8] Opposition forces previously advanced to the city outskirts on December 6.[9] Western media and the HTS spokesperson reported that the SAA withdrew from Homs City and the surrounding neighborhoods before the opposition advance.[10] An SAA officer told Reuters that dozens of Hezbollah fighters retreated from Homs City after the SAA decided that it could not defend the city.[11] SAA commanders withdrew from Homs City via helicopter, while ground forces withdrew overland toward the Syrian coast.[12] HTS-led forces captured and freed 3,500 prisoners from the military prison in southern Homs City.[13] Retaining Homs City was key for regime survival because it connects Damascus to the western coast, which is a majority Alawaite area.[14] Assad is an Alawite and has significant support

among the Alawite community in Syria..[15] Opposition forces took Hama City on December 5, only two days prior to their capture of Homs City.[16]



Opposition Advances near Homs

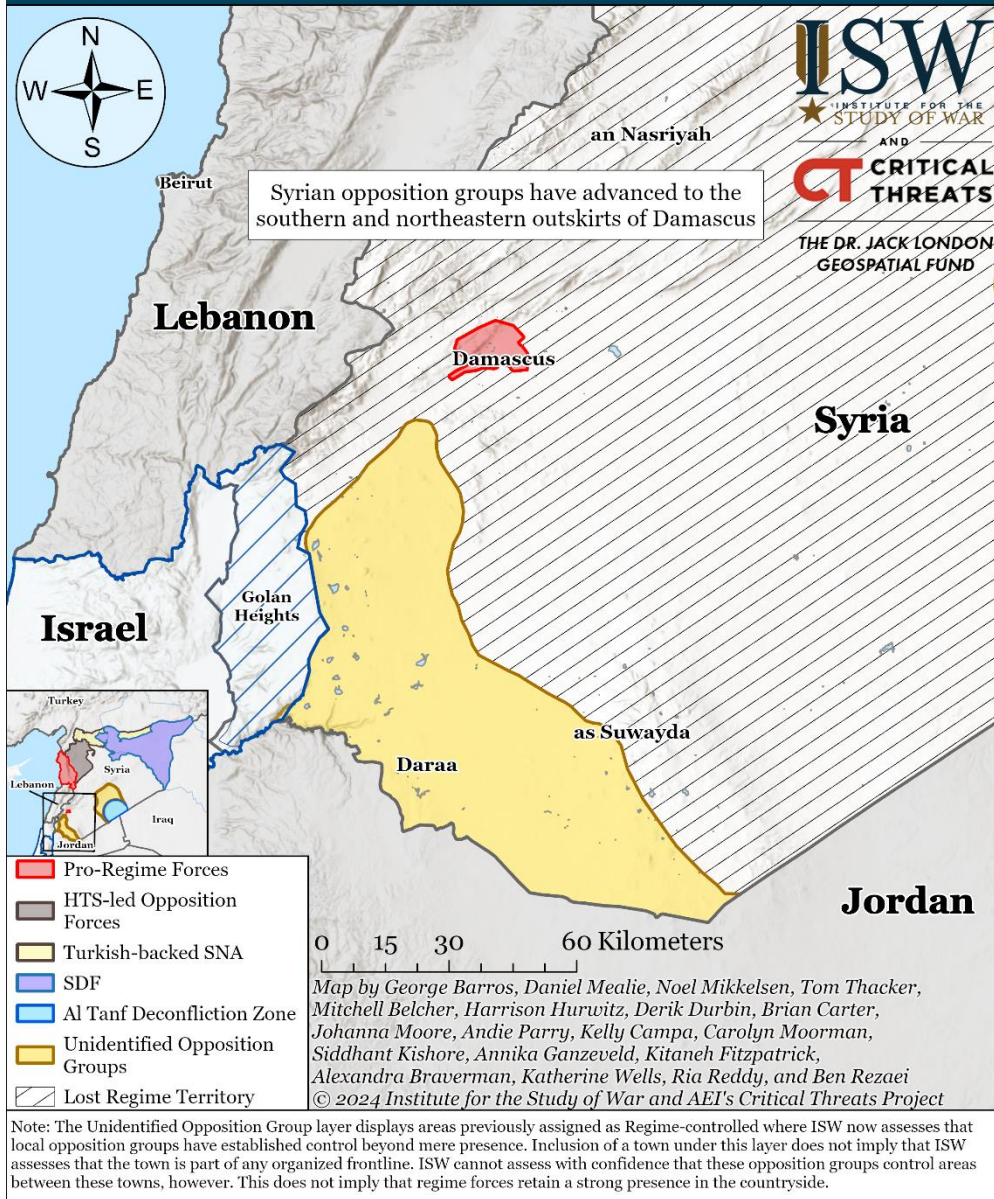
As of December 7, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Local opposition forces took control of large swaths of Daraa, Quneitra, and Suwayda provinces in southwestern Syria and began advancing toward Damascus.[17] Areas seized include Daraa, Quneitra, and Suwayda cities, as well as dozens of other towns and villages.[18] It is unclear to what extent—if any—these other opposition groups are coordinating with the HTS-led forces advancing southward from Idlib Province.

Opposition Advances in Southwest Syria

As of December 7, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET

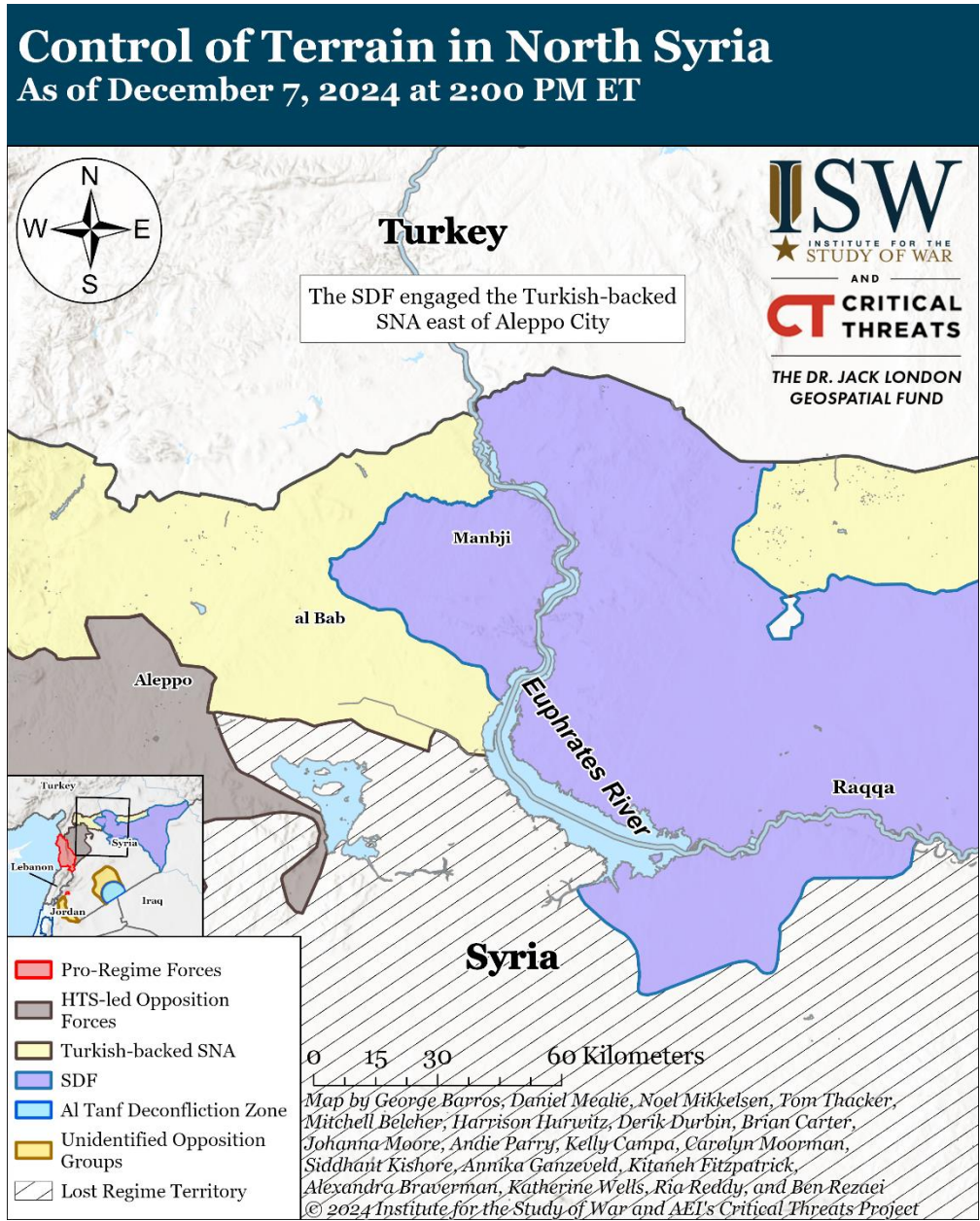


Syrian opposition forces captured Palmyra, Homs Province, after regime forces rapidly withdrew from positions throughout the central Syrian desert. The Syrian opposition forces likely advanced northwards from the Al Tanf Deconfliction Zone and seized Palmyra.[19] These forces may continue to advance and capture other key points, including oil and gas infrastructure, in the central Syrian desert.[20] The United States backs the Syrian opposition forces based in the Al Tanf Deconfliction Zone.

Opposition forces reportedly seized the towns of Darayya and al Moadamyeh immediately southwest of Damascus.[21] Al Moadamyeh is near the Mezzeah Military Airport. It is unclear whether opposition

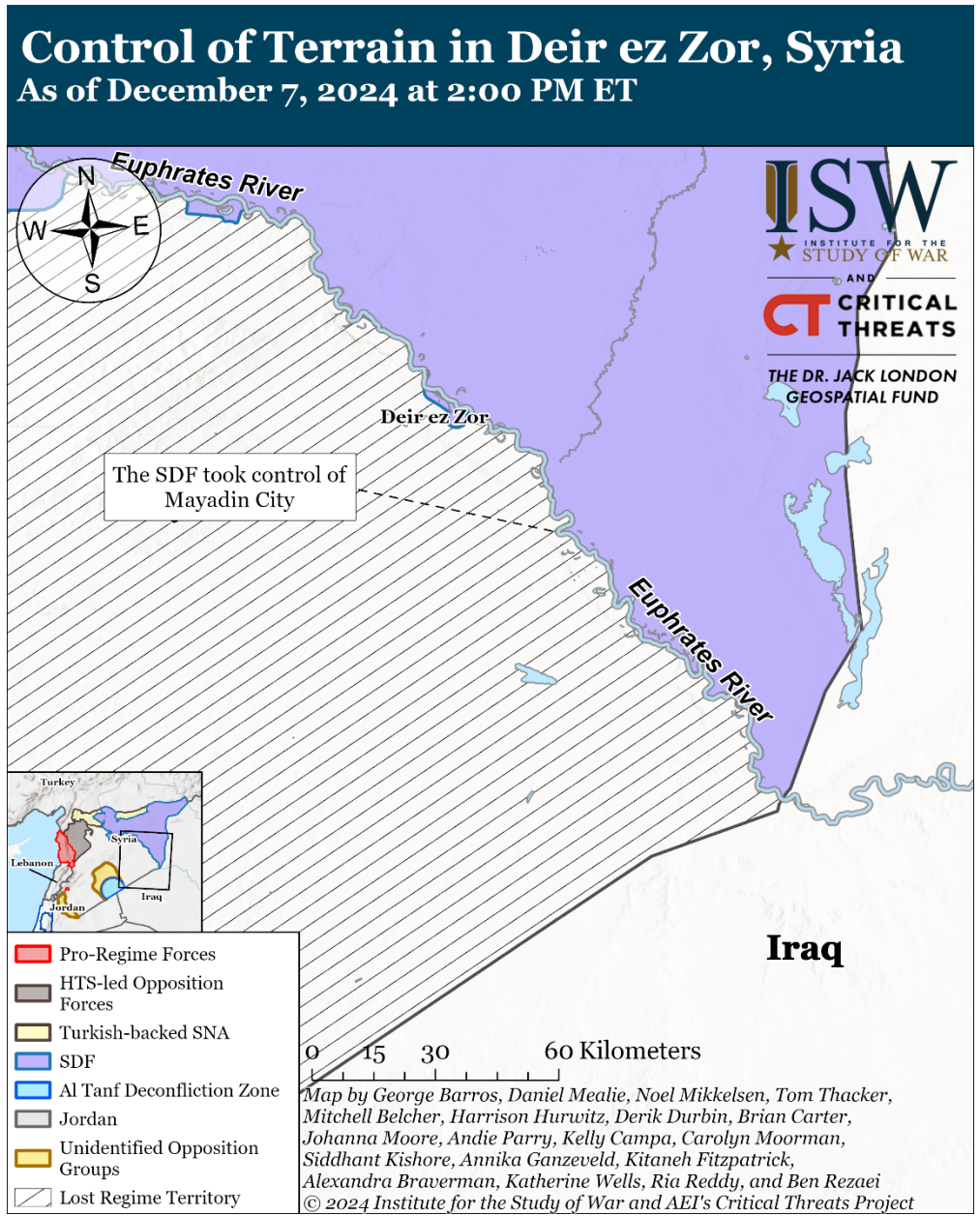
forces have taken control of the airport at the time of this writing. Opposition forces also reportedly seized Janarama, which is in the southeastern outskirts of Damascus.[22]

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) clashed with the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) east of Aleppo City, northeastern Syria, on December 7. An SNA operations room claimed that its forces clashed with the SDF in Manjib, northeast of Aleppo City.[23] An SNA operations room also claimed that the SNA seized Tal Aswad, south of Majib, from SDF and regime forces.[24] The SDF reported that it engaged the SNA forces Tal Aswad.[25] The SDF also engaged Turkish-backed forces in four separate villages northeast of Aleppo City on December 7.[26]



The SDF has expanded its control over former regime-held territory in eastern Syria since CTP-ISW's last data cut off on December 6. Footage posted on December 7 shows a convoy

of SDF fighters entering Mayadin City.[27] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias reportedly withdrew from unspecified areas of Syria toward al Qaim, Iraq, amid reports that the SDF took control of the Albu Kamal border crossing.[28] Iranian-backed Afghan Fatemiyoun Division fighters also reportedly withdrew from Mayadin City on December 6.[29]



Unspecified US officials said that Turkey approved HTS launching its surprise offensive on November 27.[30] Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has expressed support for the HTS-led drive toward Damascus from the north.[31]

A prominent Iranian-backed Iraqi militia leader called on Iraqi militias to intervene in Syria to defend Bashar al Assad.[32] Badr Organization Secretary General Hadi al Ameri claimed on December 7 that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias cannot “wait for [the Iraqi federal government] to

escalate” against opposition forces.[33] Hundreds of Iranian-backed Iraqi fighters have reportedly deployed already to Syria to fight opposition forces.[34] CTP-ISW has yet to observe any engagements involving Iraqi militias, however. Reversing the advances of the opposition forces would be a major undertaking, moreover, and it is unlikely that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias can gather enough strength to do so.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) sent troops to assist UN forces under fire by gunmen around Hadera on the Syria-Golan Heights border on December 7.[35] The IDF reported that “armed individuals” shot at UN forces at the UN post near Hadera.[36] The IDF previously reinforced its positions in the Golan Heights on December 6 in response to the rapid gains by Syrian opposition forces.[37] The gunmen attacking the UN position came as opposition forces took control of much of the southern Daraa and Quneitra provinces.[38]

CTP-ISW is scaling back in today’s update its regular coverage of activity in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and the broader Middle East to focus on the rapidly evolving situation in Syria. We will resume regular coverage of these areas in the coming days.

Key Takeaways:

- **Syria:** The Bashar al Assad regime faces imminent collapse. The SAA already appears to have collapsed itself. Iran and Russia appear unwilling to intervene militarily at a meaningful scale in support of Assad.
- **Syria:** Opposition groups took control of large swaths of Daraa, Homs, Quneitra, and Suwayda provinces. These forces then began advancing toward Damascus from its southern and northeastern flanks.
- **Syria:** The US-backed SDF clashed with the Turkish-backed SNA east of Aleppo City. The SDF separately expanded its control of formerly regime-held territory around the Euphrates River in eastern Syria.

Gaza Strip:

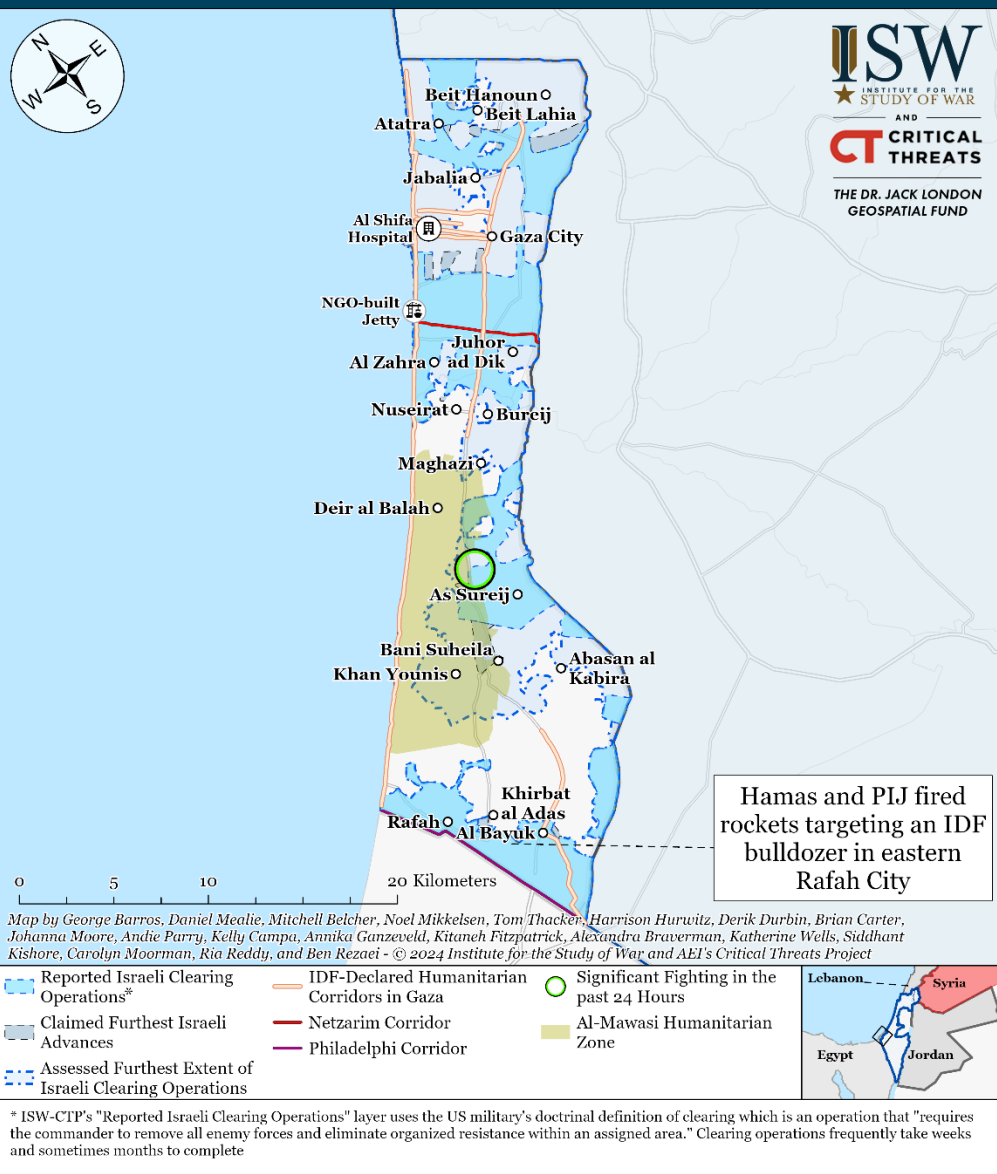
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- 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

Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fired a rocket targeting an IDF bulldozer in eastern Rafah City on December 6.[39]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of December 7, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

Nothing significant to report

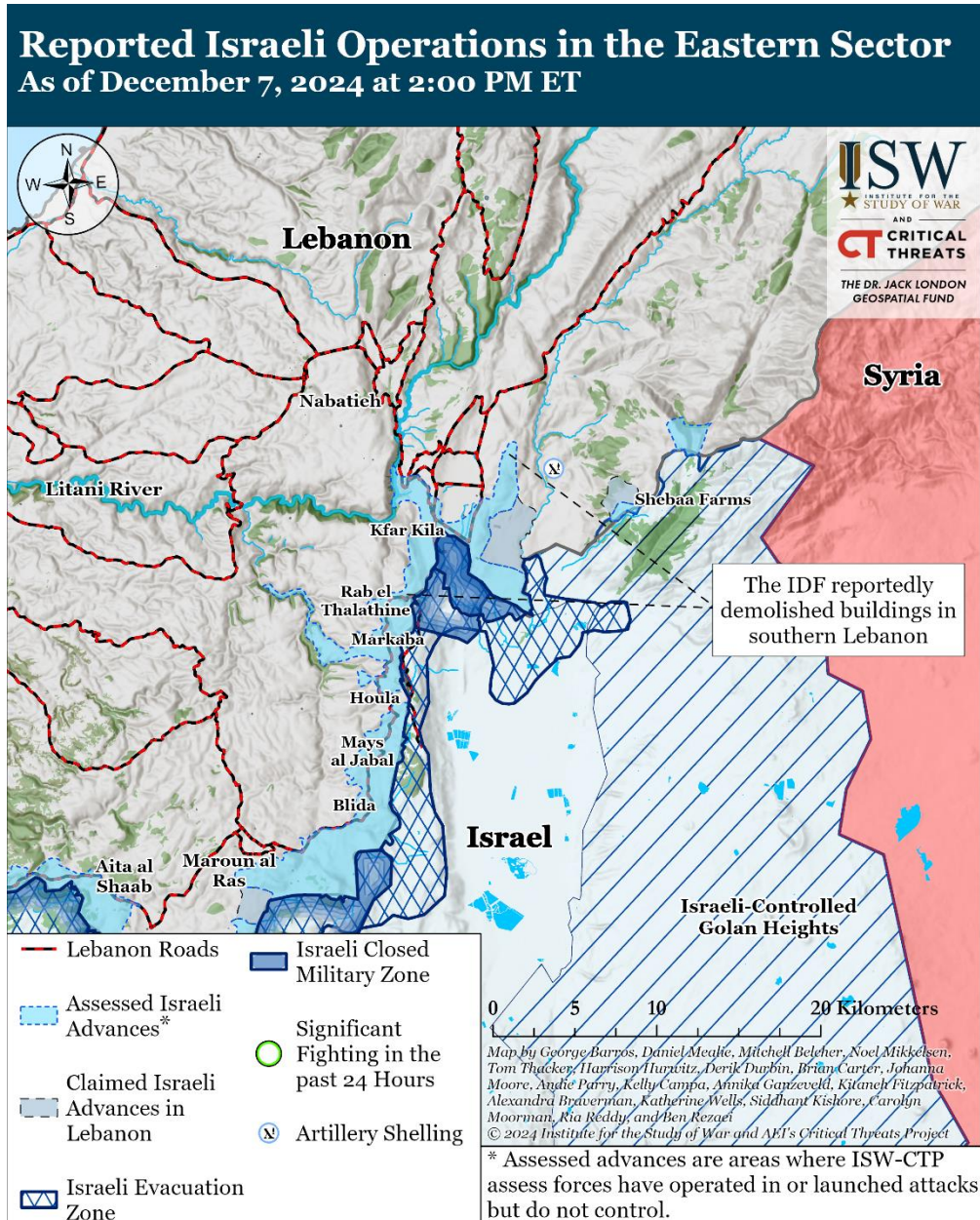
Northern Israel and Lebanon

Lebanese Hezbollah objectives:

- End Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip

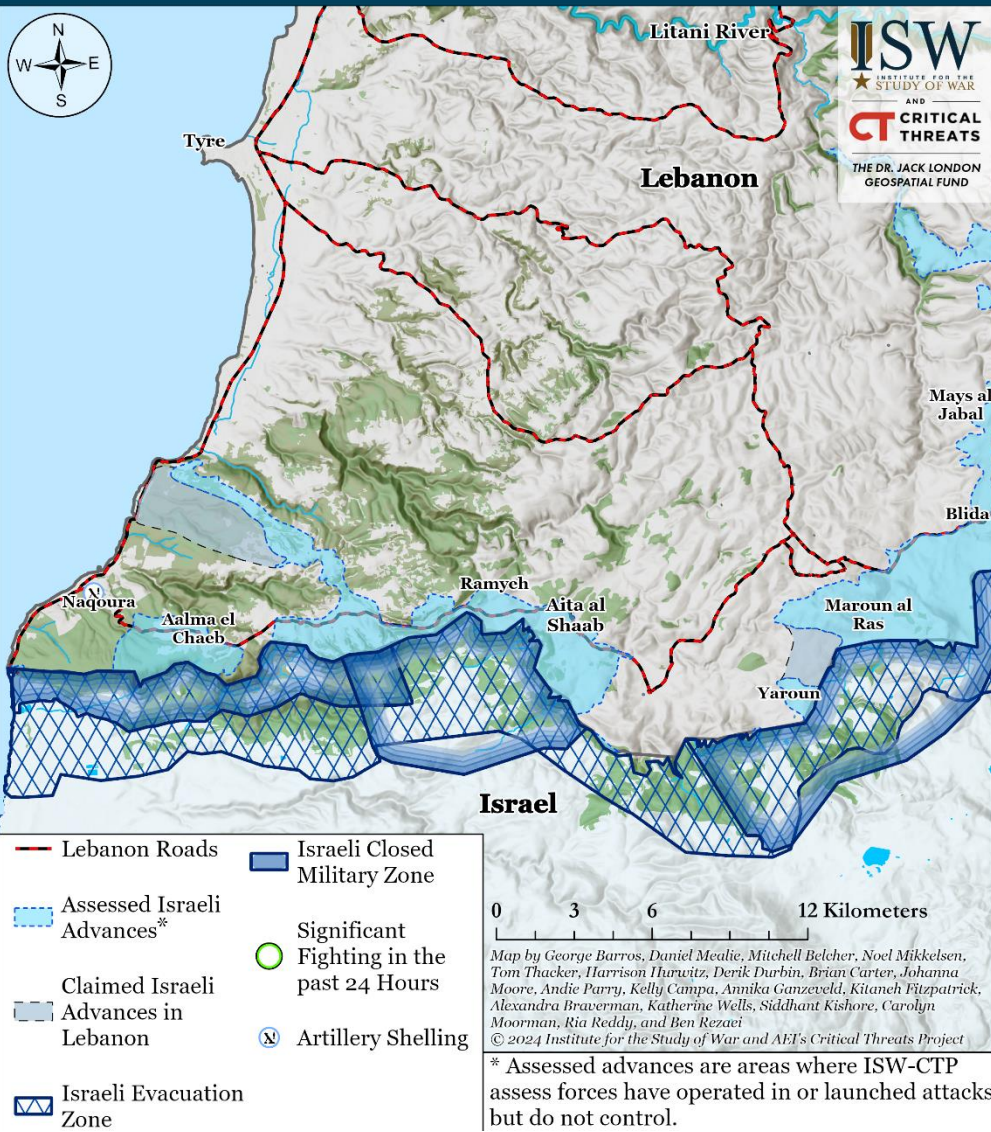
- Survive the October 7 War as a capable political and military organization with control over Lebanon

The IDF conducted an airstrike on December 7 targeting a Lebanese Hezbollah fighter in Deir Seryan, southern Lebanon.[40] The IDF reported that the fighter posed a threat to Israeli forces in the area.[41] The IDF reiterated its commitment to the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire agreement.[42]



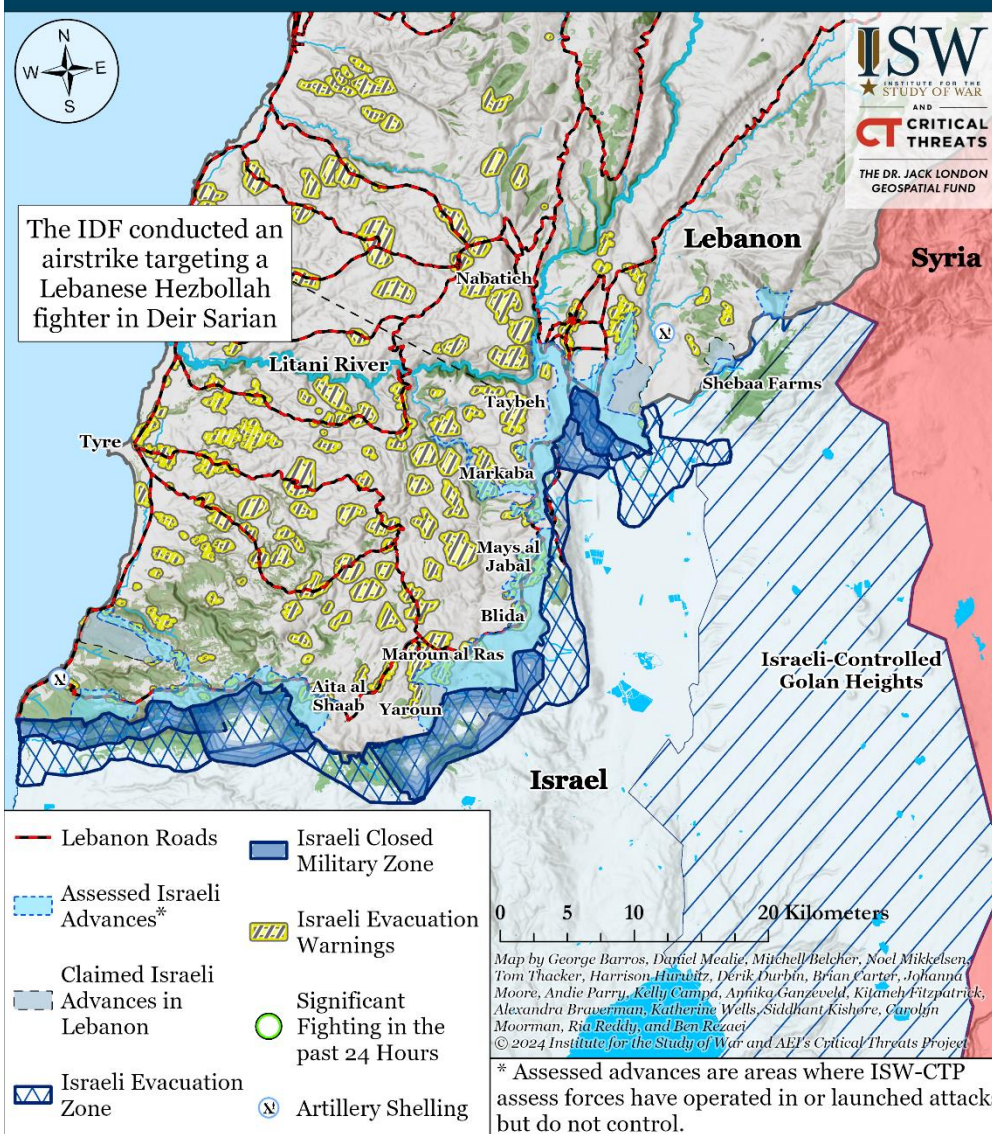
Reported Israeli Operations in the Western Sector

As of December 7, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Reported Israeli Operations in Lebanon

As of December 7, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Iran and the Axis of Resistance

Nothing significant to report

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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