

Iran Update



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Information Cutoff: February 6, 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.

Many of the most prominent Iraqi Sunni political parties have emphasized the need for political action to achieve long-standing Sunni political demands ahead of the Iraqi parliamentary elections in October 2025. A member of the Progress Party, which is led by former Parliament Speaker and key Sunni politician Mohammad al Halbousi, warned on February 5 that the Progress Party could boycott parliament in response to the recent Iraqi Federal Supreme Court decision to temporarily suspend the implementation of the General Amnesty Law.^[1] The Federal Supreme Court, which is responsible for interpreting the constitution and determining the constitutionality of laws and regulations, temporarily suspended the implementation of the General Amnesty Law on February 3. This law would grant amnesty to many Iraqis, including many Sunnis who were arrested under Article 4 of the Anti-Terrorism Law. The Progress Party holds 39 seats in parliament, which is far below the number of seats needed to block a quorum.^[2] A Progress Party-affiliated adviser to the Anbar Provincial Council similarly called on Sunni parliamentarians to boycott the political process and start “large” demonstrations in response to the Federal Supreme Court decision.^[3]

These statements come after the Sunni Azm Alliance called on February 5 for a “comprehensive national dialogue” to amend the Iraqi constitution.^[4] Azm Alliance head Muthanna al Samarrai is a member of the newly-formed United Sunni Leadership Coalition.^[5] Halbousi is not a member of this new Sunni political coalition, and the United Sunni Leadership Coalition appears to be an alternative Sunni political party to Halbousi’s Progress Party. It is therefore notable that both the Progress Party and parts of the United Sunni Leadership Coalition have called for political action to protest the Federal Supreme Court decision. Some Sunni politicians have accused State of Law Coalition head Nouri al

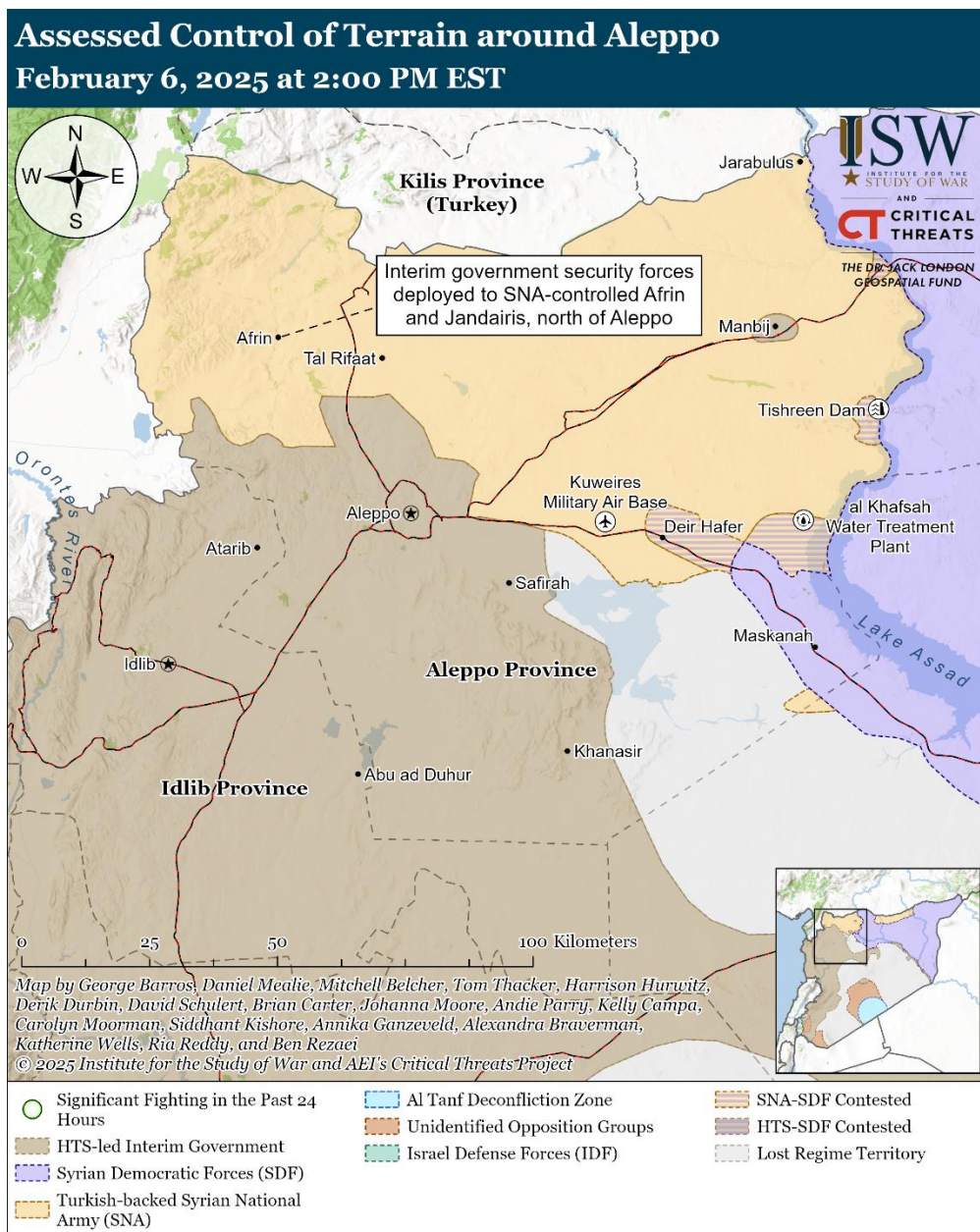
Maliki of pushing the Federal Supreme Court to suspend the implementation of the General Amnesty Law.[6] Maliki previously used the court to target political opposition, particularly Sunnis, during his term as prime minister between May 2006 and September 2014.[7] Maliki's rumored involvement in the Federal Supreme Court decision is consistent with recent sectarian, anti-Sunni statements he has made.[8] Maliki stated on February 1 that "we will not allow terrorists to leave prisons," about the individuals who would be released from prison under the General Amnesty Law. Iranian-backed actors have claimed that the General Amnesty Law would release "terrorists" and "murderers" into society to try to prevent the approval and implementation of this law. [9]

There are early indications of fissures between Iran-backed Shia political parties and figures ahead of the parliamentary elections in October 2025. Iraqi media reported on February 6 that the Iranian-backed Shia Coordination Framework appears "divided" due to an ongoing dispute between Maliki and National Wisdom Movement head Ammar al Hakim.[10] The dispute is reportedly over Maliki's outsized influence in the Shia Coordination Framework and the removal of the Dhi Qar governor, who is a member of Hakim's party. Iraqi media reported on January 30 that Hakim has boycotted several Shia Coordination Framework meetings because Maliki orchestrated the removal of the Dhi Qar governor.[11] Unidentified sources told Iraqi media on February 6 that Shia Coordination Framework members discussed unifying Shia factions and resolving tensions with Hakim on February 5.[12] Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani reportedly convinced Hakim to resume his participation in Shia Coordination Framework meetings in return for the appointment of Hakim-backed figures to government positions.

Syrian interim government forces have deployed to areas previously controlled by the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) as armed factions have started to integrate into the new Syrian army and security apparatus. Interim government security forces deployed to Afrin and Jandairis, north of Aleppo, on February 6.[13] The SNA has controlled and administered these areas since 2018.[14] Kurdish media claimed that the interim government would take control of SNA territory and dismantle barracks and other military infrastructure in the area.[15] Interim government-affiliated Public Security forces deployed to checkpoints near the entrances to Manbij, Aleppo Province, on February 5, demonstrating that the deployment of interim government forces extends across SNA-controlled territory.[16]

These interim government deployments will likely continue as former opposition groups integrate into the Syrian Defense Ministry. It is unclear how extensive the integration of armed groups across Syria will be or the pace at which this integration will occur. It is also unclear to what extent groups that integrate into the Defense Ministry will subordinate themselves to largely HTS-dominated command structures. Syrian media circulated reports on February 3 that the Syrian Defense Ministry appointed two SNA leaders as division commanders within the new Syrian armed forces.[17] It is unclear if these commanders will recruit their divisions directly from their militias. The Syrian interim government said that it dissolved all former rebel and armed groups, including factions of the SNA, on January 29, but the fact that SNA groups continue to fight against the SDF along the Euphrates River suggests that the SNA groups have been dissolved in name only.[18] The interim government deployments come after Syrian Interim President Ahmed al Shara discussed Syrian-Turkish defense coordination with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara, Turkey, on

February 4.[19] Turkey closely coordinates with and provides air support to the SNA. Shara and Erdogan may have discussed the integration of SNA factions into the new Syrian armed forces.



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.[20] Katz said that the plan will include “special arrangements” for Gazans to relocate to “any country willing to receive them” via air, sea, or land. Katz discussed the plan with senior Israeli defense officials, including IDF Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Herzi Halevi.[21] Katz’s statement comes after US President Donald Trump suggested that Gazans should relocate to Egypt and Jordan.[22]

US President Donald Trump said on February 6 that the Gaza Strip should be “turned over” to the United States by Israel after the “conclusion of fighting.”[23] Trump suggested that Gazans could relocate to other areas in the Middle East while the United States rebuilds the Gaza Strip. Trump said that no US troops would participate in this plan.



Key Takeaways:

- **Iraqi Politics:** Many of the most prominent Iraqi Sunni political parties have emphasized the need for political action to achieve long-standing Sunni political demands ahead of the Iraqi parliamentary elections in October 2025. Former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki is attempting

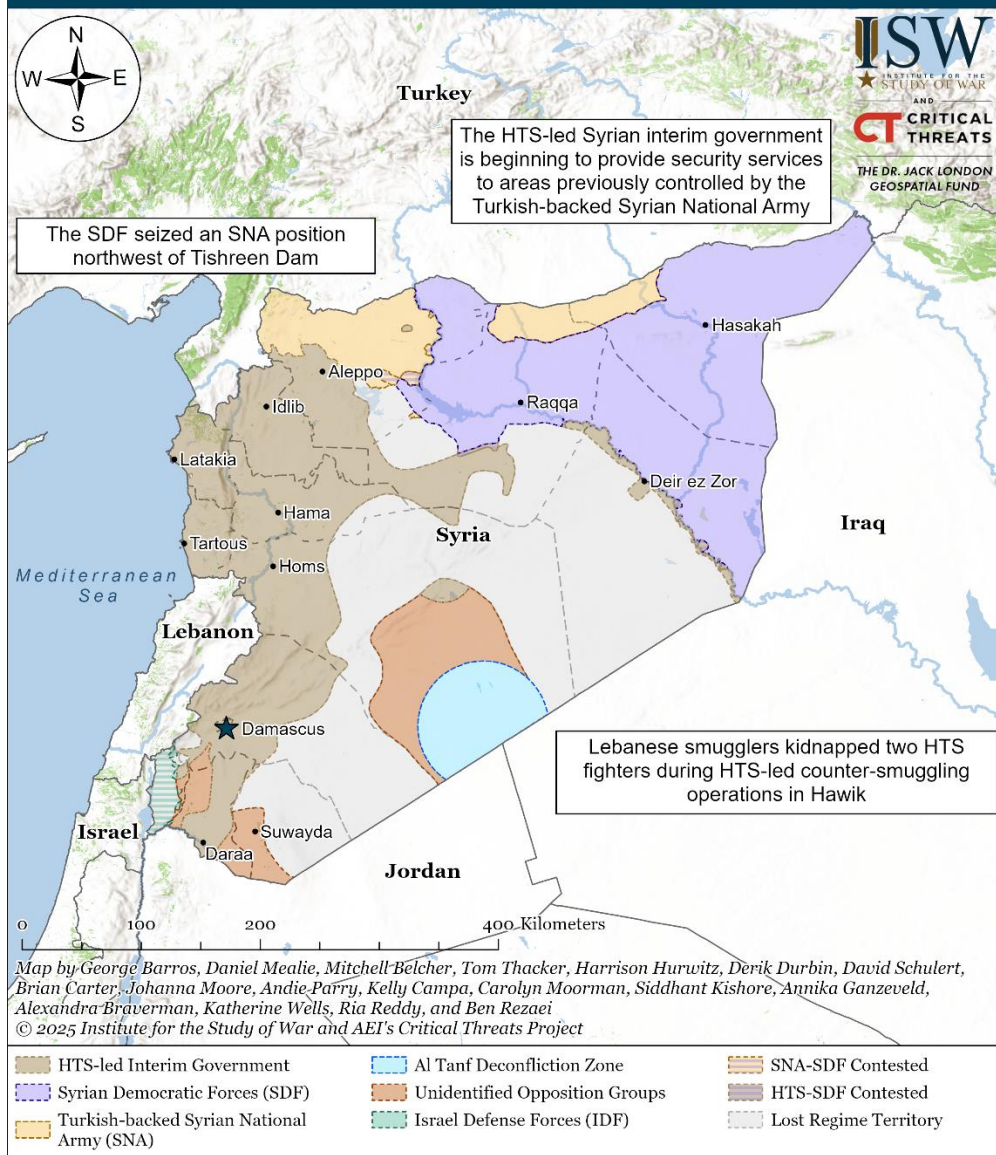
to block Sunni political action, which has caused some Sunni political parties to threaten additional political moves, including demonstrations.

- **Control of Syria:** Syrian interim government forces have deployed to areas previously controlled by the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) as armed factions have started to integrate into the new Syrian army and security apparatus. These interim government deployments will likely continue as former opposition groups integrate into the Syrian Defense Ministry.
- **Gaza Strip:** 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. US President Donald Trump said on February 6 that the Gaza Strip should be “turned over” to the United States by Israel after the “conclusion of fighting.”

Syria

The HTS-led interim government is attempting to secure sanctions relief. Syrian Interim President Ahmed al Shara discussed sanctions relief in a phone call with French President Emmanuel Macron on February 5, which is part of a broader effort by Shara and his government to secure sanctions relief for Syria.^[24] Macron invited Shara to visit France in the coming weeks.^[25] French shipping company CGM-CMA signed an agreement with the interim government on February 5 to manage container operations at Latakia Port.^[26] The European Union previously approved a “road map” to lift select sanctions on Syria for one year on January 27.^[27]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria February 6, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



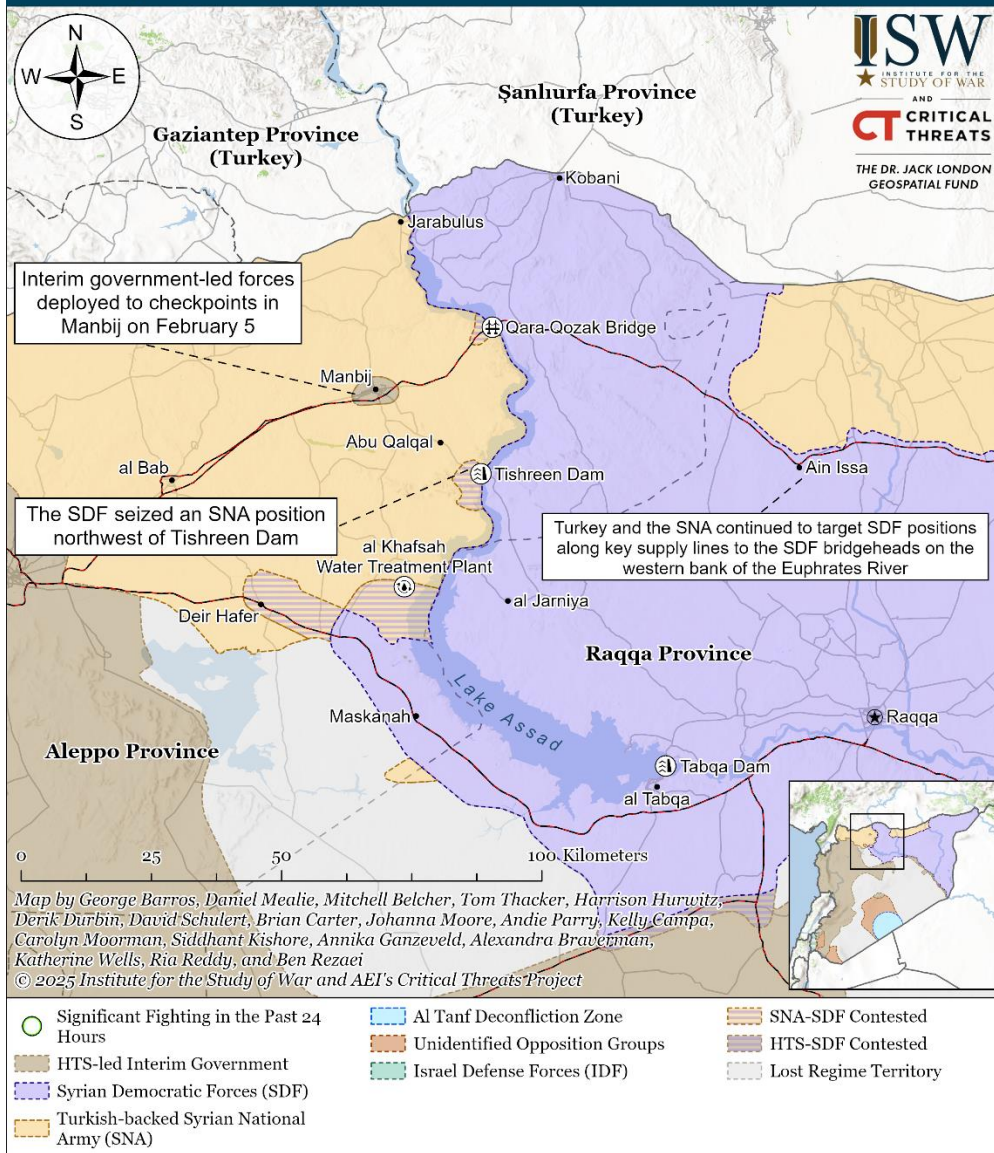
The SDF has engaged SNA forces and positions near the Tishreen Dam since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on February 5. The SDF seized an SNA position at Tal Syriatel, northwest of Tishreen Dam, on February 5.[28] The SNA previously seized Tal Syriatel from the SDF on January 10.[29] The SNA used its position on the hill to fire at SDF positions near the dam.[30] The SDF also reported that its forces targeted a gathering of SNA fighters north of the dam.[31] The SDF fired rockets and mortars targeting likely SNA positions in the SNA-controlled villages of Aloush, al Saideen, al Balasha, and al Kadro, near the Tishreen Dam.[32]

The SDF conducted two separate operations targeting SNA fighters on Qara Qozak Hill and Nawruz Hill on February 6.[33] The operations wounded three SNA fighters.[34]

The SDF reported that Turkey continued to conduct air and drone strikes targeting SDF positions near the Tishreen Dam on February 6.^[35] Turkish drones targeted an SDF position near Khirbet Tueni, likely in support of SNA operations in the area.^[36] The strike killed an SDF fighter.^[37]

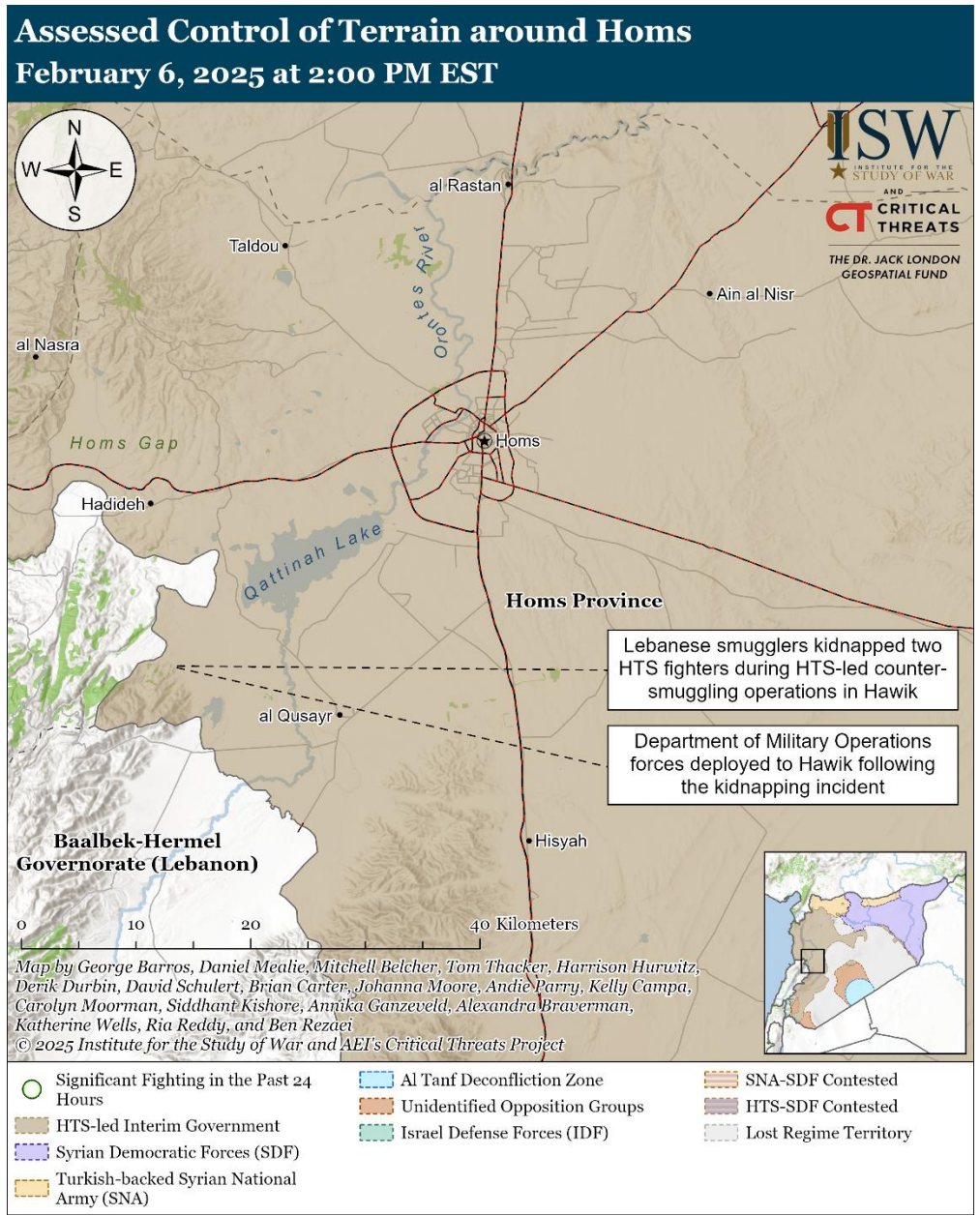
Turkey and the SNA have continued to target SDF positions along key supply lines to the western bank of the Euphrates River since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on February 5. Turkish drones struck an SDF position near Ain Issa on February 6.^[38] Turkey and the SNA conducted airstrikes and fired artillery targeting SDF positions along the eastern bank of the Euphrates River.^[39] CTP-ISW previously assessed that Turkish and SNA attacks on SDF ground lines of communication are meant to interdict supplies and reinforcements from eastern Syria and isolate SDF forces at Qara Qozak Bridge and Tishreen Dam.^[40]

Assessed Control of Terrain around Manbij February 6, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



HTS-led Syrian interim government border security forces engaged Lebanese smugglers roughly 16 kilometers northeast of Qusayr, Homs Province, during a counter-smuggling operation on February 6.^[41] The smugglers kidnapped two HTS fighters during the operation in Hawik, Homs Province. Lebanese smugglers are reportedly part of a Lebanese Hezbollah-affiliated smuggling network run by internationally sanctioned drug lord Nouh Zaiter.^[42] Zaiter's smuggling network cooperated on the Lebanon-Syria border with the Assad regime to smuggle Captagon.^[43] The Syrian Department of Military Operations deployed to Hawik, northeast of Qusayr, following the kidnapping incident.^[44] Geolocated footage posted on February 6 appears to show Department of Military Operations vehicles and a tank entering Lebanese territory.^[45] Unverified reports claimed that Department of Military Operations forces engaged Lebanese smugglers near Hermel,

Lebanon.[46] Hermel is 10 kilometers south of the Syria-Lebanon border and 16 kilometers south of Hawik. Syrian media reported that the Department of Military Operations forces also launched clearing operations in Syrian border towns to target drug smugglers.[47] Syrian forces arrested around 18 Lebanese smugglers during the operations.[48]



A former Republican Guard commander, Muqdad Fatiha (also known as Abu Jaafar), announced the formation of a new anti-HTS armed group named the Shield of the Coast Brigade on February 6.[49] The group threatened to conduct attacks on Syrian government forces in retaliation for alleged attacks on members of the Alawite community. The Assad regime attempted

to establish a Shield of the Coast Brigade under the Republican Guard in 2015 to guard Alawite communities against Syrian opposition attacks.[50] The Republican Guard was an elite force that was responsible for protecting the Assad regime against internal threats.[51] Muqdad Fatiha likely established the Shield of the Coast Brigade using resources and human networks developed under the Assad regime.

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 multiple airstrikes targeting Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) positions in Sulaymaniyah Province, northern Iraq, on February 6. The Kurdistan Regional Government reported that Turkish drones struck two vehicles and a PKK site near Galala village, killing an unspecified military official and two PKK fighters.[52] Kurdish and Iraqi media reported that Turkish drones also struck several areas near Sharbazar, causing damage and casualties.[53]

Russian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Mikhail Bogdanov met with senior Iraqi and Kurdish officials on February 5 and 6. Bogdanov met with Iranian-backed Badr Organization Secretary General Hadi al Ameri in Baghdad on February 5 and Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government President Nechirvan Barzani in Erbil on February 6.[54] Bogdanov and Ameri discussed recent developments in Syria and strengthening relations between Iraq and Russia.[55] Bogdanov and Barzani separately discussed strengthening relations between Russia and Iraqi Kurdistan, including Russian investment in Iraqi Kurdistan's energy sector.[56]

Iranian Vice President for Strategic Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif met with senior Iraqi officials in Baghdad on February 5 and 6. Zarif discussed strengthening coordination between Iran and Iraq to strengthen international security and stability in a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani.[57] Zarif separately discussed regional developments and opportunities to improve regional stability in meetings with National Wisdom Movement head Ammar al Hakim, Iraqi President Abdul Latif al Rashid, and UN Special Representative for Iraq Mohammad al Hassan.[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

Nothing significant to report.

The Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

Axis of Resistance objectives:

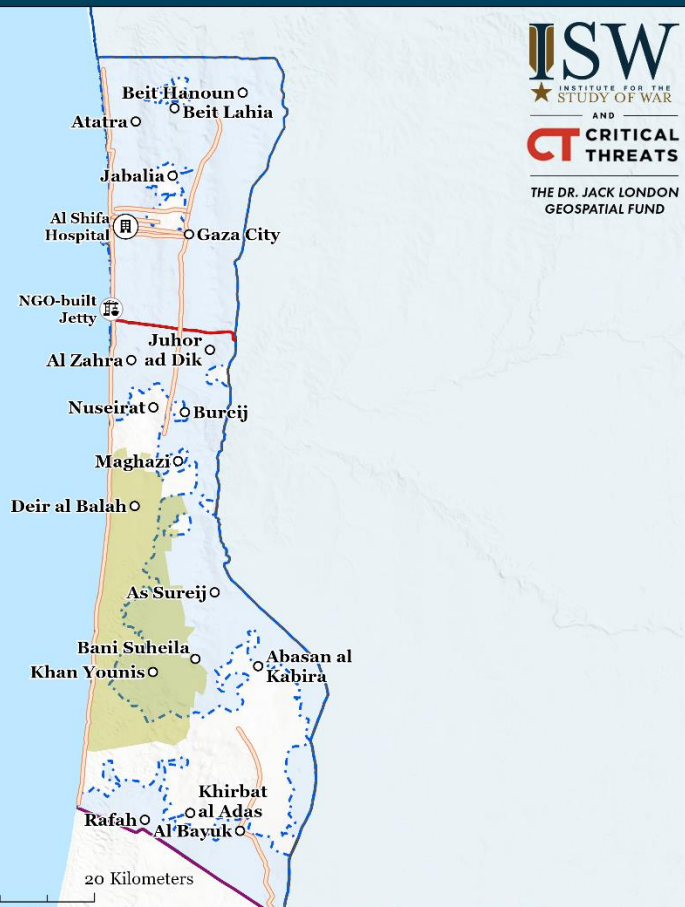
- Erode the will of the Israeli political establishment and the public to sustain clearing operations in the Gaza Strip
- Reestablish Hamas as the governing authority in the Gaza Strip
- Rebuild and reestablish Hezbollah in southern Lebanon
- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

The Gaza Strip

US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth stated during a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that the United States will continue to deliver munitions to Israel to help it confront adversaries.^[59] Hegseth previously approved the delivery of 1,800 2,000-pound bombs to Israel on January 25.^[60]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of February 6, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Tom Thacker, Harrison Hurwitz, Derik Durbin, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra 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 Clearing Operations*	IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridors in Gaza	Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours	
Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances	Netzarim Corridor	Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone	
Assessed Furthest Extent of Israeli Clearing Operations	Philadelphi Corridor	20250205ReportedIsraeliCle	

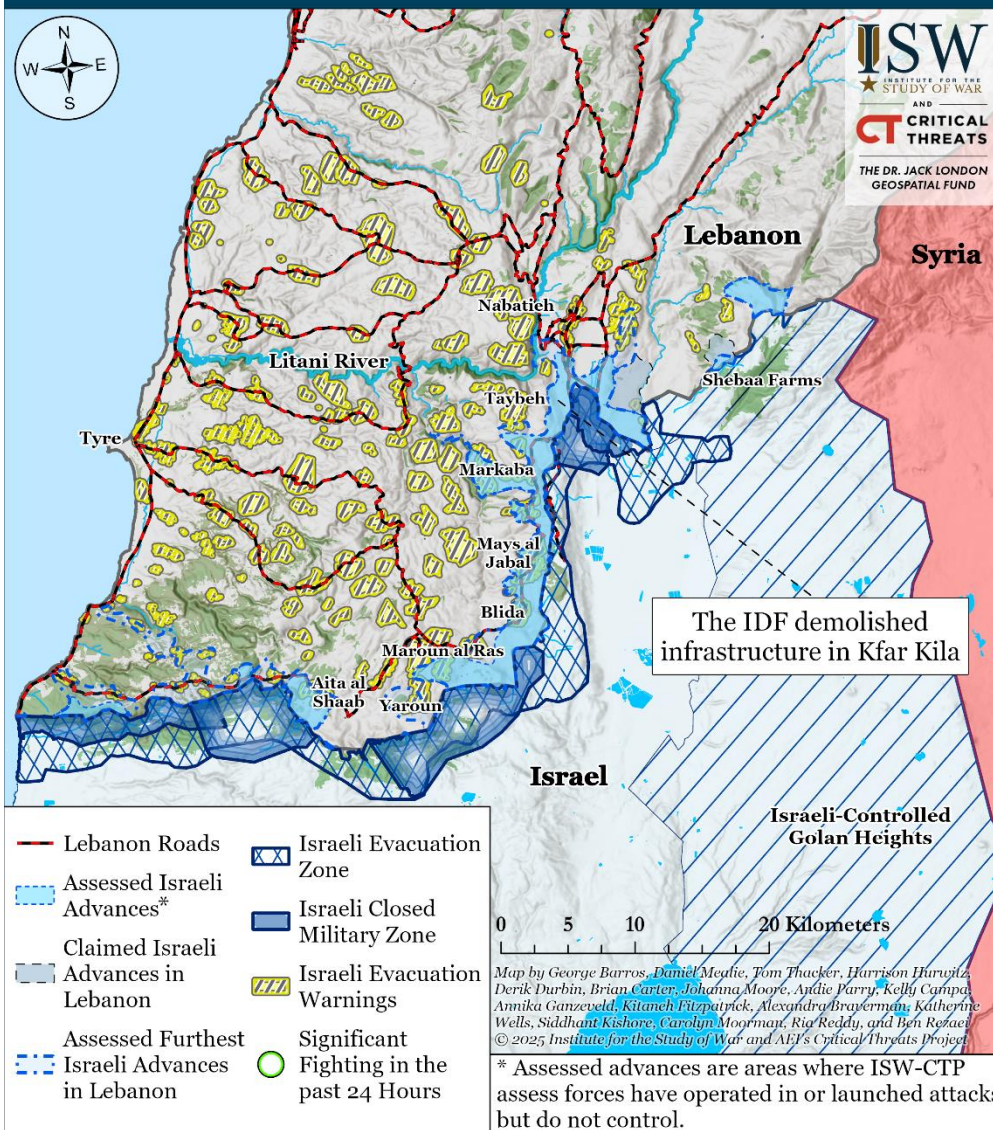
* ISW-CTP's "Reported Israeli Clearing Operations" layer uses the US military's doctrinal definition of clearing which is an operation that "requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance within an assigned area." Clearing operations frequently take weeks and sometimes months to complete

Lebanon

Lebanese media reported on February 6 that the IDF demolished infrastructure in Kfar Kila, southeastern Lebanon.[61]

Reported Israeli Operations in Lebanon

As of February 6, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



West

Bank

The IDF continued its counterterrorism operation in Nablus and Tubas governorates in the northern West Bank on February 6.^[62] The IDF destroyed an explosives manufacturing site and detained two Palestinian militia fighters in Nablus.^[63] The IDF detained at least 25 fighters and located weapons, weapons laboratories, and explosives in Tammun and Fara, Tubas Governorate.^[64]

The Shin Bet announced on February 6 that it previously arrested a cell of Hamas and Fatah fighters who planned to conduct a “bomb attack” targeting a bus in Jerusalem in November and December 2024.[65] An Israeli Army Radio correspondent reported that the cell of five operatives was based in the Ramallah area.[66] Ramallah is located around 10 kilometers north of Jerusalem. The Shin Bet confiscated a makeshift automatic weapon and an explosive device that the fighters planned to detonate remotely.[67]

Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy unveiled the *Shahid Bahman Bagheri* drone carrier in Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province, on February 6.[68] The drone carrier is a modified commercial vessel, and it can reportedly support long-range drone operations. The IRGC Navy also unveiled the Ghaher drone, which looks visually similar to the Ghaher-313 fighter jet that Iran unveiled in February 2013.[69] The IRGC Navy did not prove that the drone was operable. The *Shahid Bahman Bagheri* can host drones and helicopters. The vessel carries eight anti-ship cruise missiles and Kowsar air defense missiles. IRGC Navy Commander Rear Admiral Ali Reza Tangsiri claimed that the drone carrier has a 22,000-mile operational range and can remain at sea for up to a year without refueling. IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami stated that Iran developed the *Shahid Bahman Bagheri* drone carrier to extend Iran’s defense capabilities far beyond its borders.[70]

The US Treasury Department Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned an international shipping network on February 6 that has facilitated “hundreds of millions of dollars” worth of Iranian crude oil exports to China.[71] OFAC sanctioned seven Hong Kong, China, India, and Seychelles-based companies, five Iranian nationals, one Indian national, and five multinational vessels. All of the sanctioned entities and members of the network falsified maritime documents on behalf of the Iranian Armed Forces General Staff’s front company, Sepehr Energy. OFAC previously sanctioned Sepehr Energy in November 2023 for supporting the Iranian Defense Ministry.[72]

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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