

Iran Update



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Information Cutoff: February 9, 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.

NOTE: CTP and ISW publish abbreviated updates on Saturdays and Sundays as of February 8, 2025. We may publish full updates as events warrant, however.

Senior Iranian military leaders have urged Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in recent months to approve the construction of a nuclear weapon, according to an unspecified Iranian official speaking to the *Telegraph*.^[1] The article reported that the military leaders have previously supported Khamenei's policy against nuclear weapons but now feel that they are faced with an "existential threat" since US President Donald Trump entered office. The unspecified Iranian official said that "we have never been this vulnerable, and it may be our last change to obtain [a nuclear weapon] before its too late." The official added that the Khamenei's decisions to forbid nuclear weapons and negotiations with the United States is "driving the regime toward collapse."^[2] The official claimed that Iran has been "just a few button presses away from building a nuclear weapon for some time now."^[3] This article follows the *New York Times* reporting that Iranian scientists are exploring how to build a crude nuclear weapon quickly.^[4] These reports are consistent with CTP-ISW assessment that Iran has restarted its nuclear weapons research but has not yet made a deliberate effort to build a weapon.

Khamenei's Foreign Affairs Advisor Kamal Kharrazi previously told the *Financial Times* in July 2024 that Iran was open to pursuing nuclear weaponization if faced with "an existential threat."^[5] Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi alluded to the "heated debate" on whether to build a nuclear weapon on January 28, when Araghchi threatened pursuing one if the E3 triggered snapback sanctions before October 2025.^[6]

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) completed its withdrawal from the Netzarim Corridor in the Gaza Strip on February 9 as part of its obligations under the ceasefire agreement with Hamas.[7] An Israeli military correspondent reported that the IDF withdrew from the eastern sector of the Netzarim Corridor to the buffer zone along the Israel-Gaza Strip border.[8] The IDF began withdrawing from the corridor on January 27 to allow Gazans to return via established routes to the northern Gaza Strip.[9] Hamas released three Israeli hostages on February 8 as part of its own ceasefire obligations.[10]



Key Takeaways:

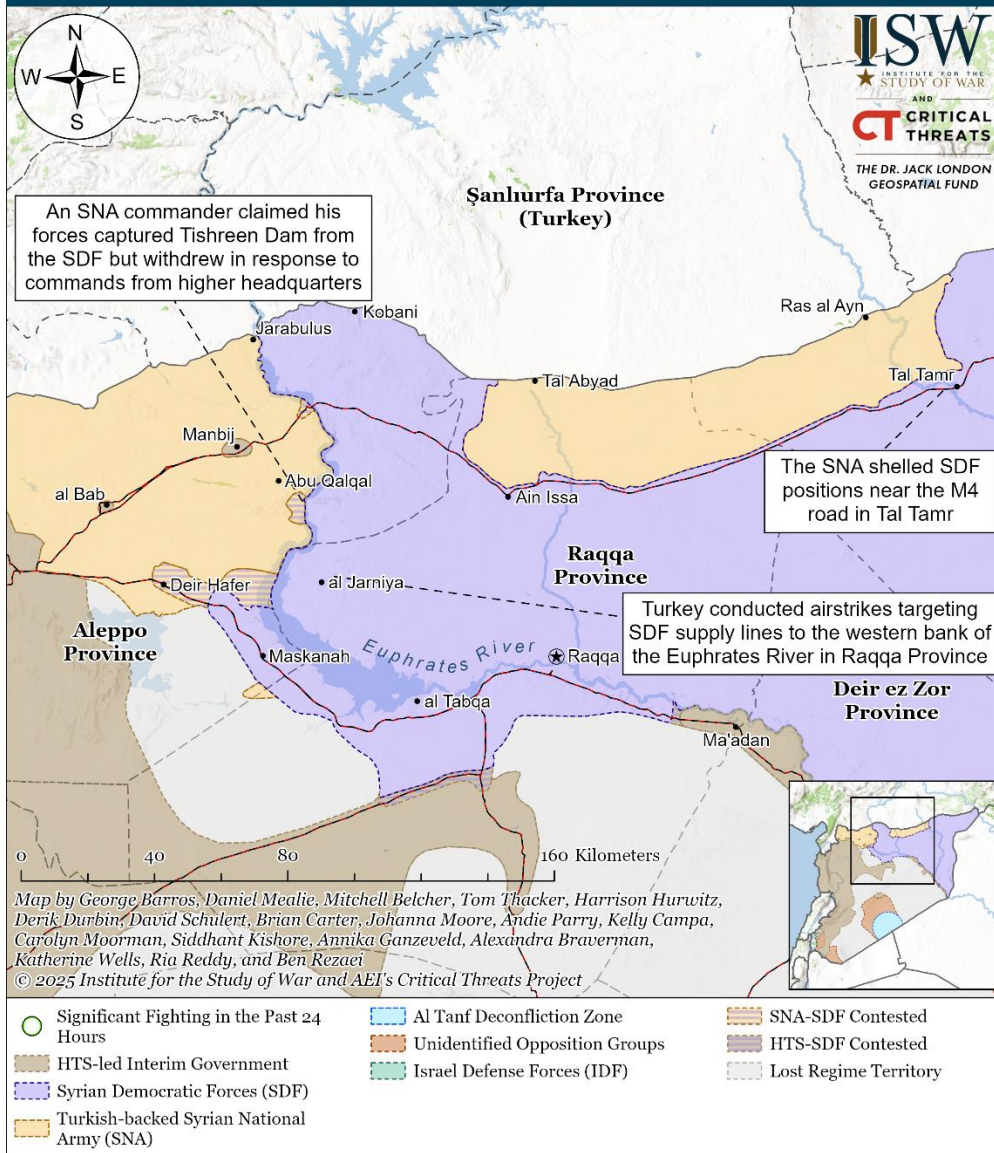
- **Iran:** Senior Iranian military leaders have urged Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in recent months to approve the construction of a nuclear weapon, according to an unspecified Iranian official.
- **Gaza Strip:** The IDF completed its withdrawal from the Netzarim Corridor in the Gaza Strip as part of its obligations under the ceasefire agreement with Hamas.
- **Syria:** An SNA commander claimed that his forces captured Tishreen Dam but withdrew in response to commands from higher headquarters.

Syria

A Syrian National Army (SNA) commander claimed that his forces captured Tishreen Dam but withdrew after commands from higher headquarters.^[11] The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and SNA have fought at Tishreen Dam in eastern Aleppo Province since mid December 2024.^[12] Suleiman Shah Brigades Commander “Abu Amsha” posted a video showing five of his fighters at the dam claiming that they captured it.^[13] CTP-ISW cannot independently confirm the veracity of the video. Hamza Division Commander Saif Abu Bakr expressed congratulations on February 2 to Abu Amsha for his promotion to brigadier general and assuming command of the “25th Division” in the new Syrian army on February 2.^[14] The SNA has begun to integrate its forces under the HTS-led interim government over the past several weeks and Syrian interim government forces have deployed to areas previously controlled by the SNA.^[15] Abu Amsha said that his forces would resume their operations “when the leadership issues a decision.”^[16] The SNA continued to shell SDF positions near the dam on February 9.^[17] Turkey separately conducted airstrikes targeting SDF supply lines to the western bank of the Euphrates River in Raqqa Province on February 8.^[18]

Turkey and the SNA continued to engage the SDF near Peace Spring territory. Turkey conducted drone strikes targeting the SDF near Tal Tamr.^[19] The Turkish Defense Ministry stated that it killed four “PKK/YPG” fighters in the Peace Spring region on February 9.^[20] The SNA shelled SDF positions near the M4 road in Tal Tamr, Hasakah Province.^[21] The SNA and SDF exchanged artillery fire near Ain Issa, Raqqa Province.^[22]

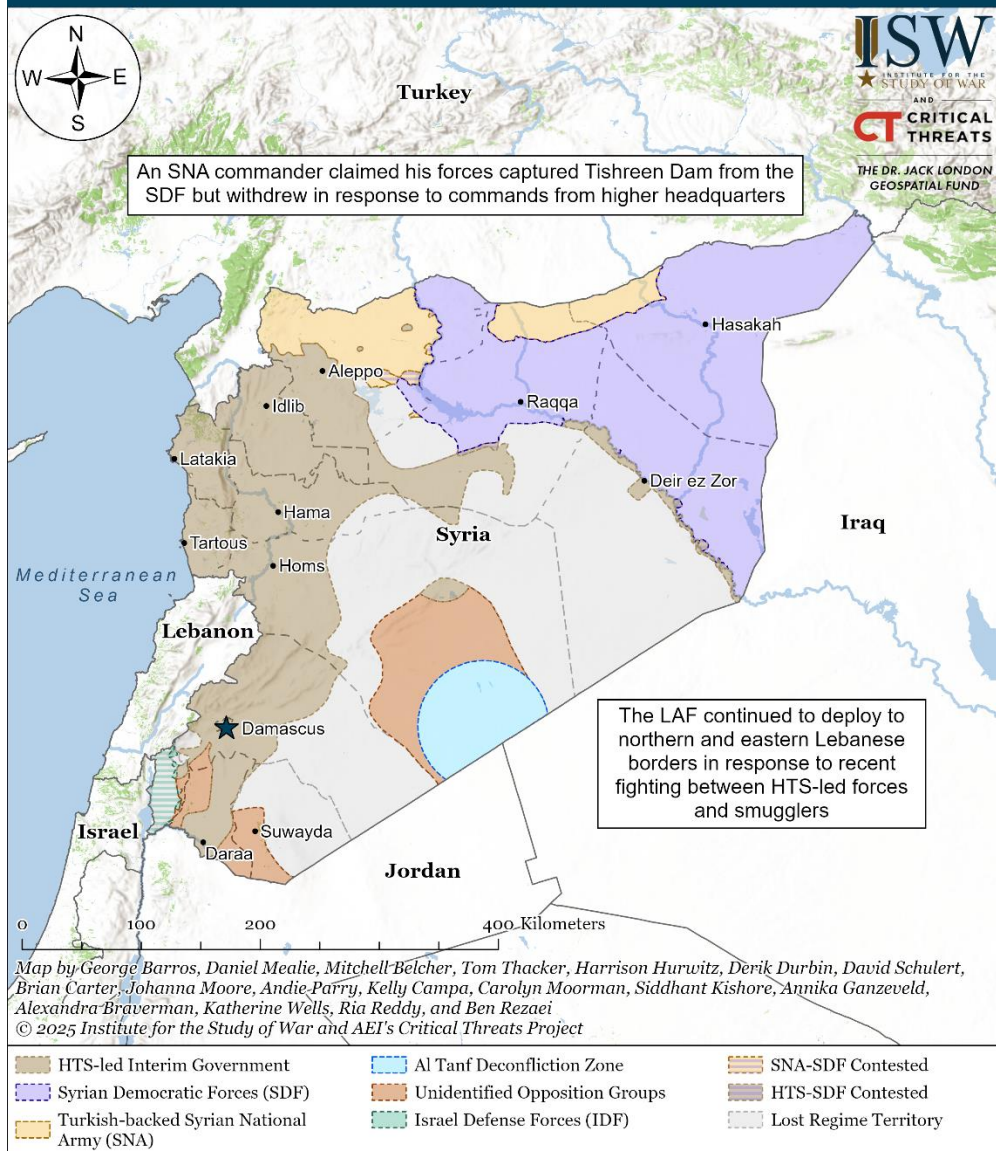
Assessed Control of Terrain in Northern Syria February 9, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) continued to deploy to the northern and eastern Lebanese borders on February 9 in response to recent fighting between smugglers and HTS-led forces.[23] The LAF stated that it responded to gunfire and shelling into Lebanese territory.[24] The LAF added that it would implement "exceptional security measures" along the border, including building new observation points and temporary barriers.[25] The Syrian Department of Military Operations deployed to Hawik, northeast of Qusayr, on February 6 after smugglers kidnapped HTS fighters during a counter-smuggling operation.[26] Syrian media reported ongoing engagements between smugglers and Syrian Department of Military Operations forces on February 9.[27]

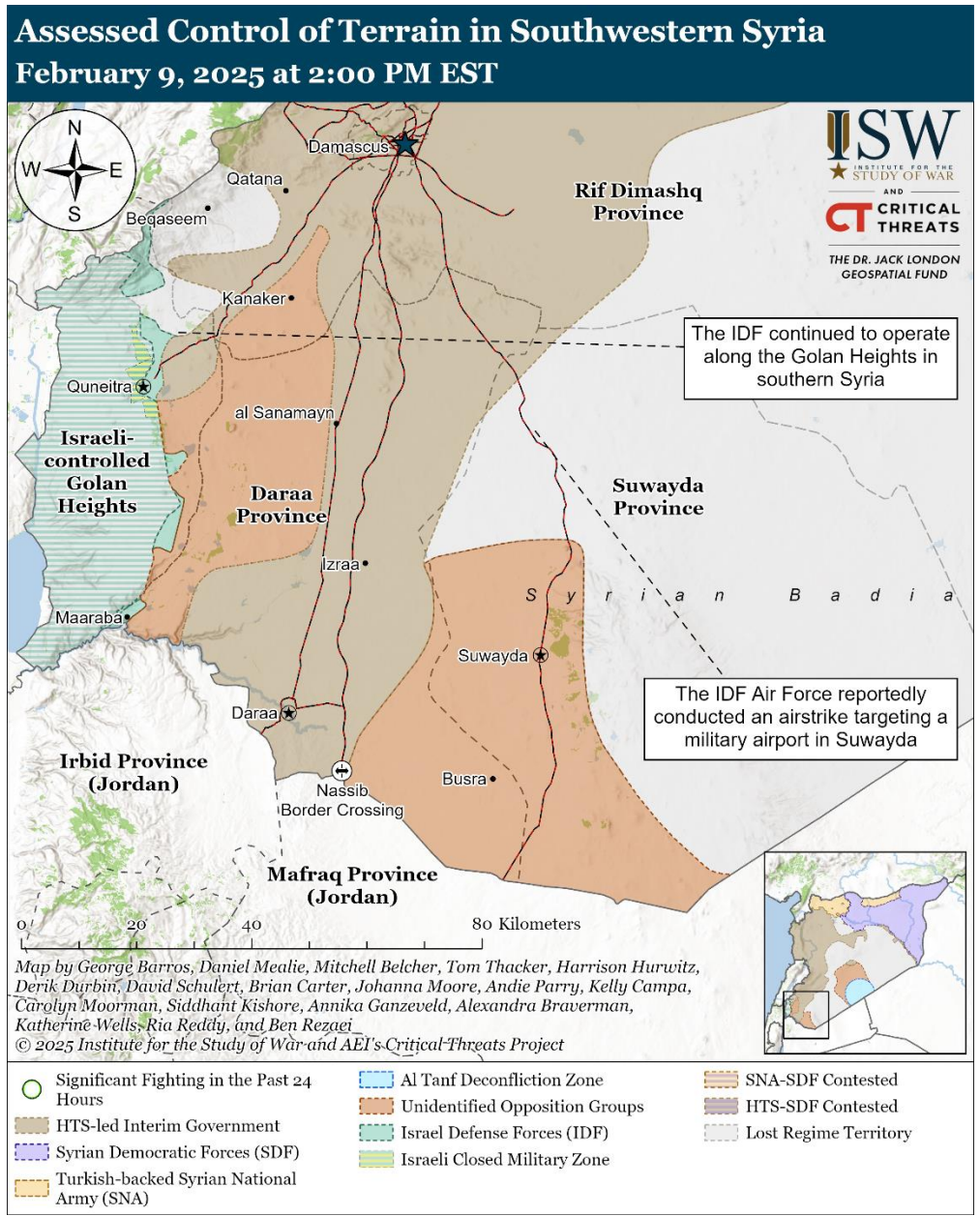
Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria

February 9, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Local sources reported that the IDF Air Force conducted an airstrike targeting Khalkhala military airport in Suwayda Province, southern Syria.^[28] The IDF did not comment on the strike. The IDF acknowledged that it conducted an airstrike targeting a Hamas weapons depot in Deir Ali in southern Syria on February 8.^[29]

The IDF continued to operate along the Golan Heights in southern Syria. Local media reported that the IDF destroyed a former Assad military post in Ain al Nouriya, northeast of Khan Arnabeh in the Quneitra Province.[30] The IDF withdrew after destroying the site. The IDF also operated in Saysoun village around Yarmouk Basin, west of Daraa, on February 8.[31]



Syrian Interim President Ahmed al Shara met with Greek Foreign Affairs Minister Giorgos Gerapetritis in Damascus on February 9.[32] Syrian Interim Foreign Affairs Minister Asaad Shaibani also met with the Greek delegation.[33]

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

Nothing significant to report.

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

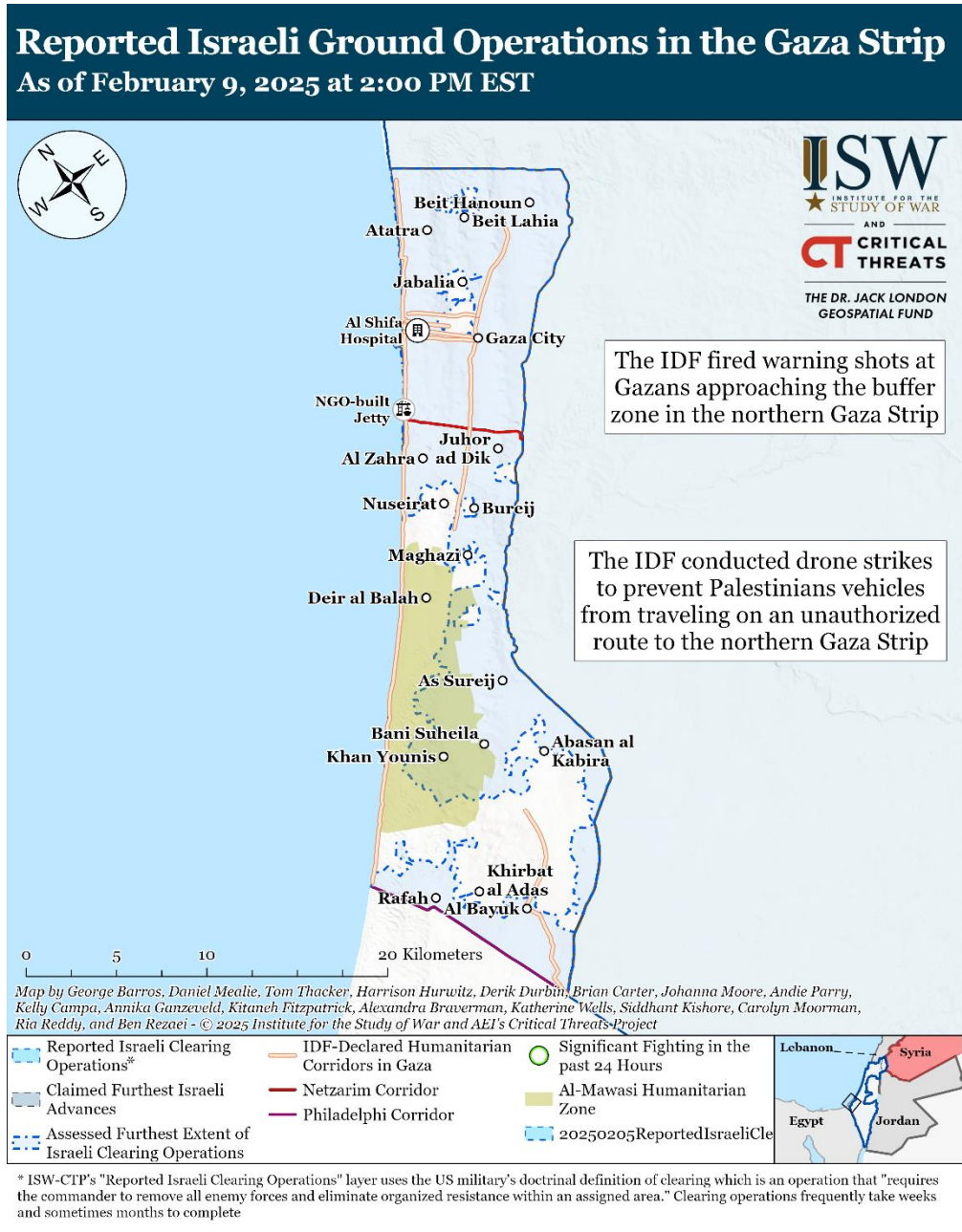
The Gaza Strip

The IDF fired warning shots at approaching Gazans near the buffer zone along the northern Gaza Strip on February 9, killing at least three Gazans.[34] Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz warned Gazans after this incident, saying that the IDF will “kill anyone” who enters the buffer zone.[35]

The IDF conducted drone strikes on February 8 to prevent Palestinians vehicles from traveling on an unauthorized route to the northern Gaza Strip.[36] Palestinian vehicles can only travel to the northern Gaza Strip on the Salah al Din Road after inspection at the Netzarim Corridor.[37] US and Egyptian private security contractors have operated a checkpoint at the Netzarim

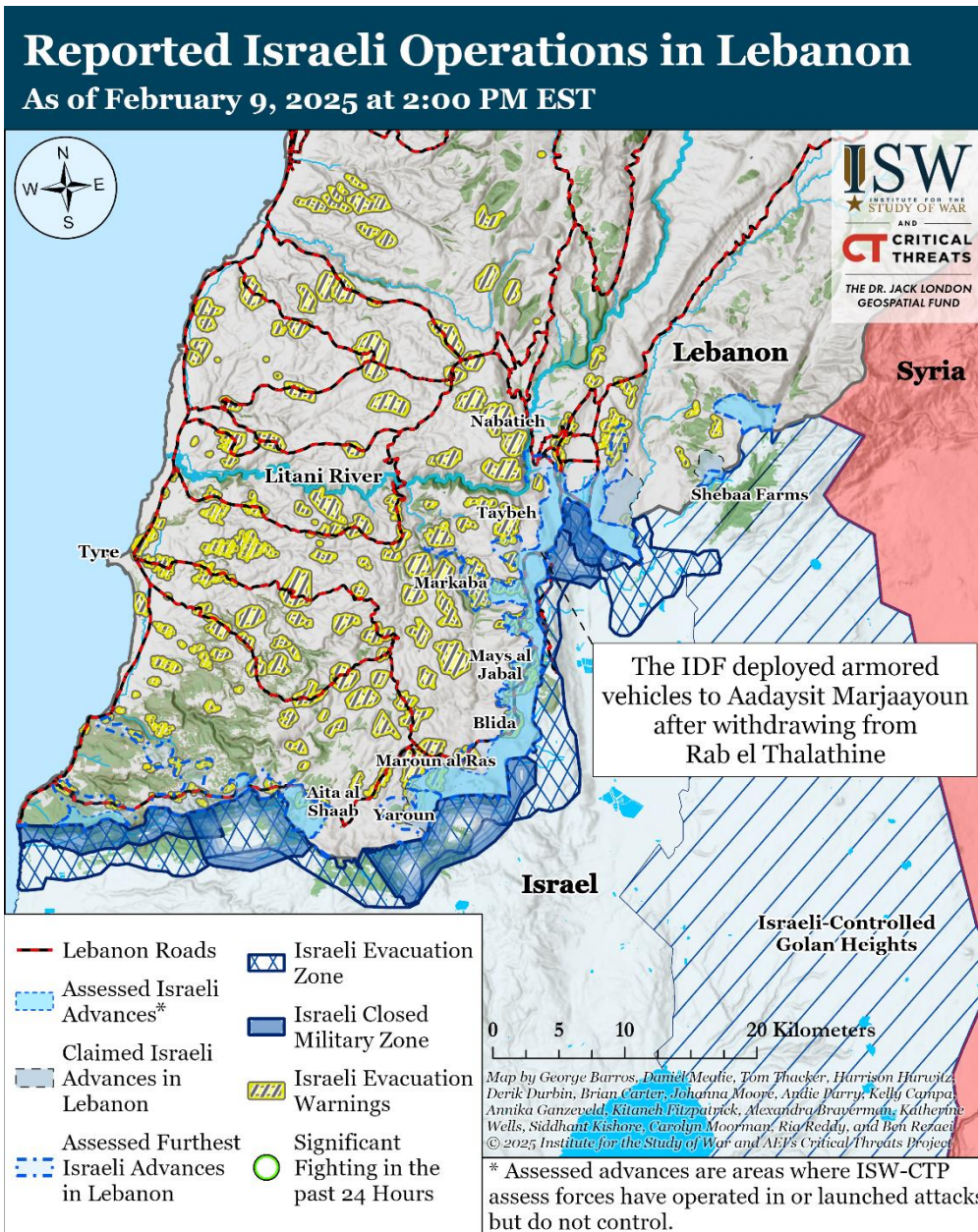
Corridor to inspect vehicles since January 27.[38]

The IDF intercepted a drone that was carrying small arms and ammunition and had entered Israeli airspace from Egypt on February 9.[39] The IDF previously intercepted a drone carrying weapons from Egypt into Israel on January 29.[40]



Lebanon

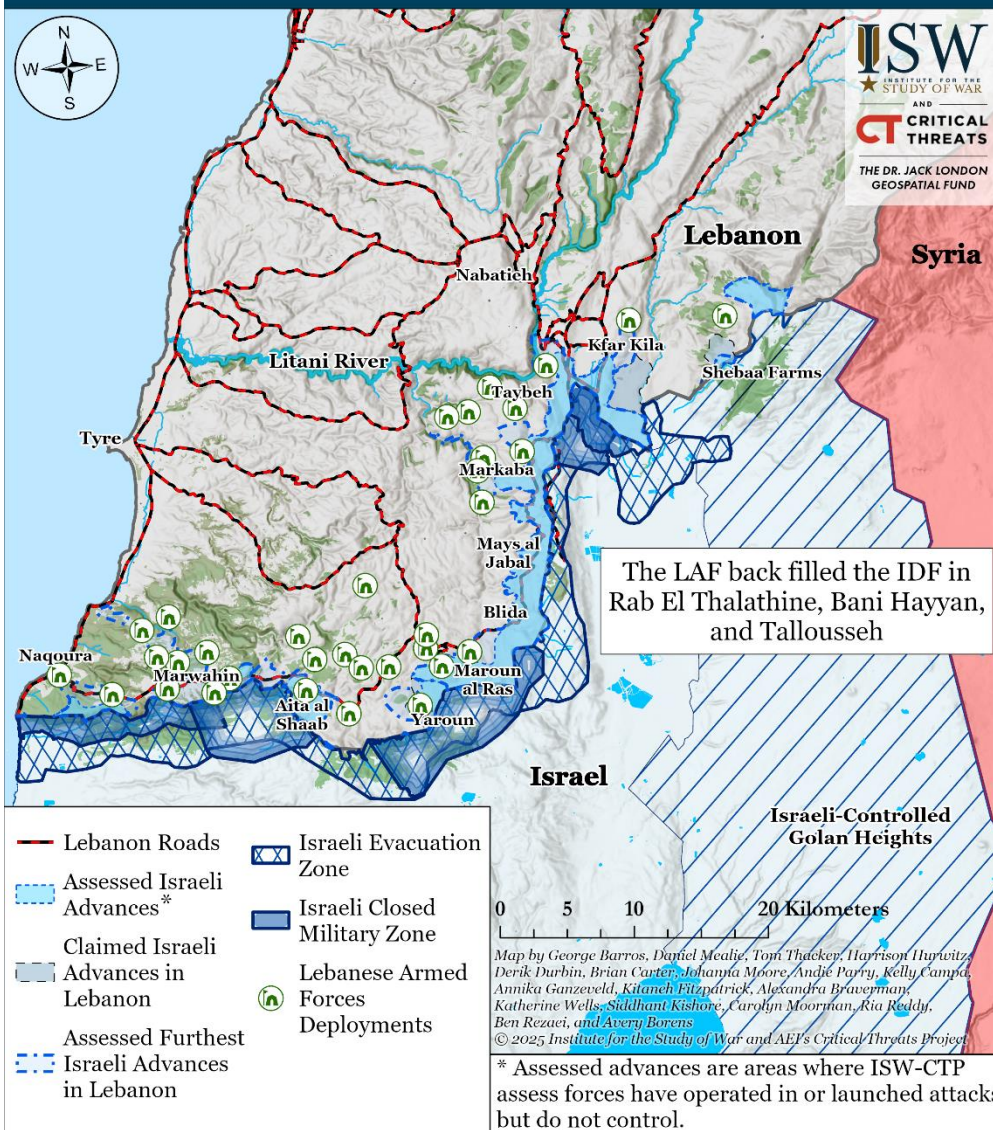
Lebanese Hezbollah media reported that the IDF established checkpoints and deployed armored vehicles to Aadaysit Marjaayoun after withdrawing from Rab el Thalathine in southeastern Lebanon on February 9.[41]



The LAF back filled the IDF in Rab el Thalathine, Bani Hayyan, and Tallousseh in southeastern Lebanon on February 9.[42]

Lebanese Armed Forces Deployments

As of February 9, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



West

Bank

The IDF expanded its counterterrorism operation into Nour Shams refugee camp, Tulkarm, in the northern West Bank on February 8 and 9.[43] The IDF engaged Palestinian fighters and detained an unspecified number of wanted persons in Nour Shams refugee camp.[44] Palestinian militias, including Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, fired small arms and detonated improvised explosive devices (IED) targeting Israeli forces in Nour Shams refugee camp.[45]

The IDF launched a “surprise” military exercise in the northern West Bank on February 9 in order to improve readiness to counter Palestinian militia activities.[46] The IDF Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Herzi Halevi stated that this military exercise is in response to unspecified “challenges” in the West Bank.[47] This military exercise corresponds with the recent expansion of its IDF operations to destroy Palestinian militia infrastructure in the northern West Bank.[48]

Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

See topline section.

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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BABELSTREET

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