

Iran Update



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January 25, 2025, Information Cutoff: 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.

Israel announced on January 25 that it will prevent Palestinians from returning to the northern Gaza Strip because Hamas violated the ceasefire agreement.[1] Hamas released four female Israeli soldiers as part of the second hostage release on January 25.[2] Israel accused Hamas of violating the ceasefire agreement by releasing female soldiers before female civilians.[3] Israel announced that it will only fulfill its requirement to allow Palestinians to move to the northern part of the strip once Hamas releases female civilian hostage Arbel Yehud, whom Israel expected to be released on January 25.[4] An Israeli Army Radio correspondent reported that Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) is holding Yehud in the Gaza Strip.[5] A Hamas official said that Yehud is alive and will be released during the next hostage release on February 1.[6] Israeli media reported that talks are underway to expedite Yehud's release.[7] A US National Security Council official told Axios that the United States is "continuing to push" for Yehud's release "through negotiation channels."[8] Israel released 200 Palestinian prisoners, including 120 who were serving life sentences for killing Israelis, into the West Bank, Egypt, and the Gaza Strip as part of the hostage-prisoner release on January 25.[9]

CTP-ISW has recorded no verifiable reports of kinetic activity in the Gaza Strip or attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel since the last data cut off on January 24.

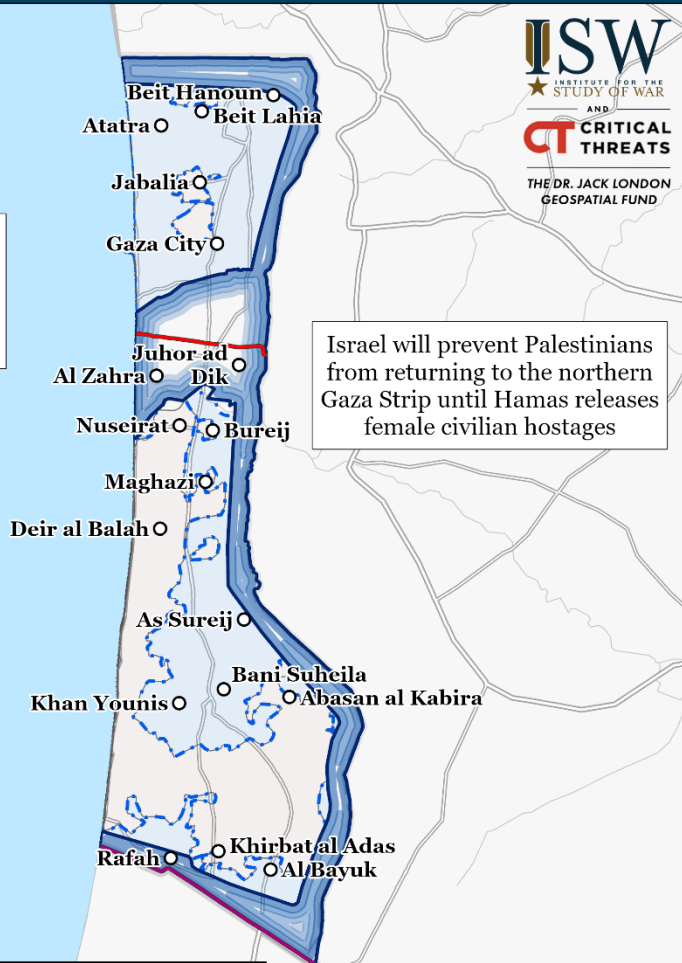
Israel-Hamas Ceasefire Lines

As of January 25, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST

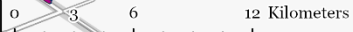


Israel accused Hamas of violating the ceasefire agreement by releasing female soldiers before female civilians

Israel will prevent Palestinians from returning to the northern Gaza Strip until Hamas releases female civilian hostages



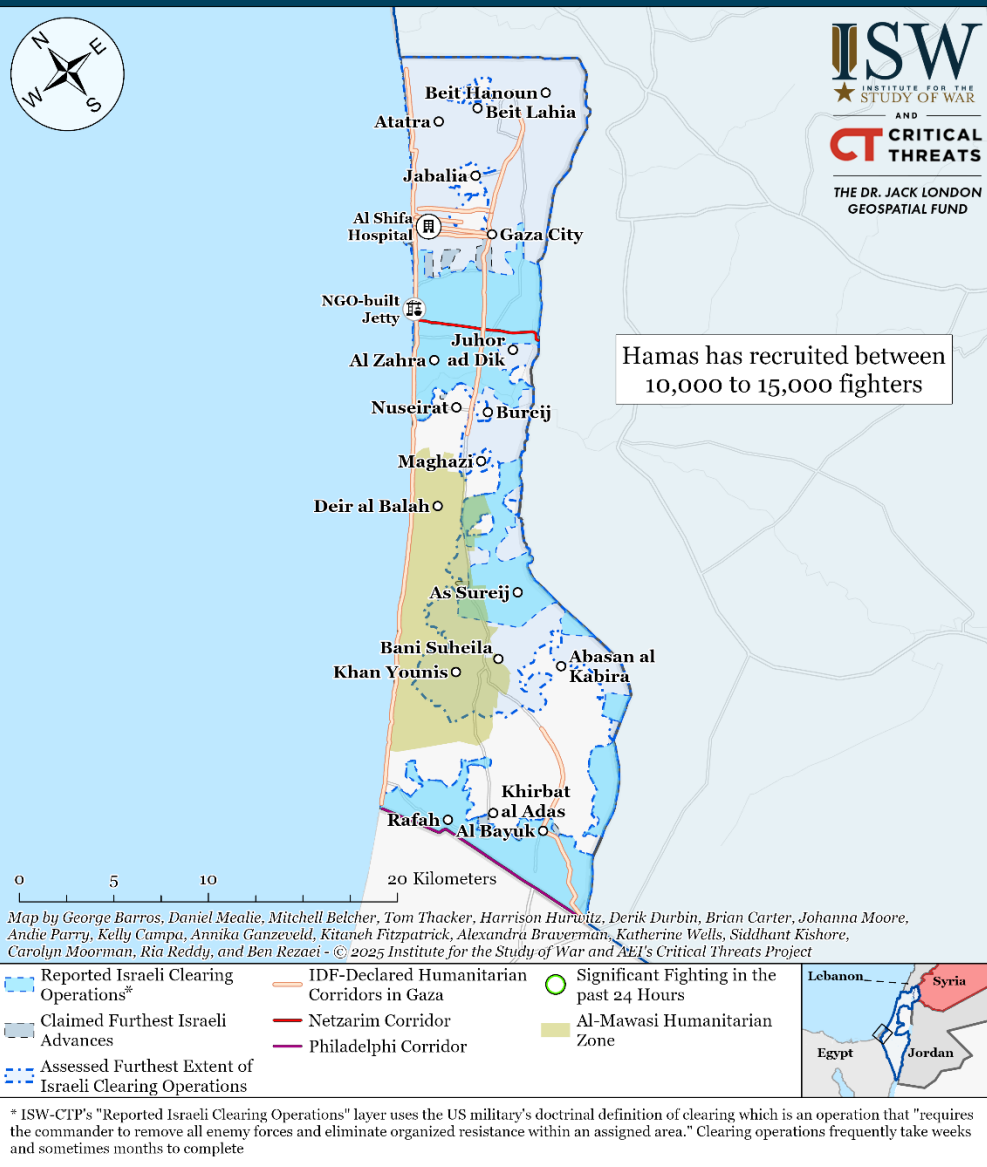
Israeli-Hamas Ceasefire Buffer Zone	Philadelphi Corridor
Assessed Furthest Extent of Israeli Clearing Operations	Netzarim Corridor



Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Tom Thacker, Harrison Hurwitz, Derik Durbin, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Annika Gunzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexander 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

As of January 25, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) tried to attack the Sayyidah Zeynab shrine in Damascus, which is a prominent Shia religious site, likely in order to stoke sectarian tensions in Syria. The *Washington Post*, citing informed officials, reported that the United States has shared intelligence with Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) to thwart recent ISIS attacks, including one targeting the Sayyidah Zeynab shrine, southeast of Damascus.[10] Syrian state media reported on January 11 that the General Security Department and General Intelligence Service stopped four ISIS suicide bombers from attacking the shrine.[11] ISIS attacks targeting Shia sites could delegitimize HTS as the primary governing authority in Syria. Iran has similarly leveraged the shrine's religious significance to drive a sectarian information operation against HTS.[12] Attacks on the shrine resonate

with other Syrian minority groups outside of the Twelver Shia sect who also appear increasingly distrustful of the HTS-led interim Syrian government.

Key Takeaways:

- **Gaza Strip:** Israel announced that it will prevent Palestinians from returning to the northern Gaza Strip because Hamas violated the ceasefire agreement.
- **Syria:** ISIS tried to attack the Sayyidah Zeynab shrine in Damascus, which is a prominent Shia religious site, likely in order to stoke sectarian tensions in Syria.

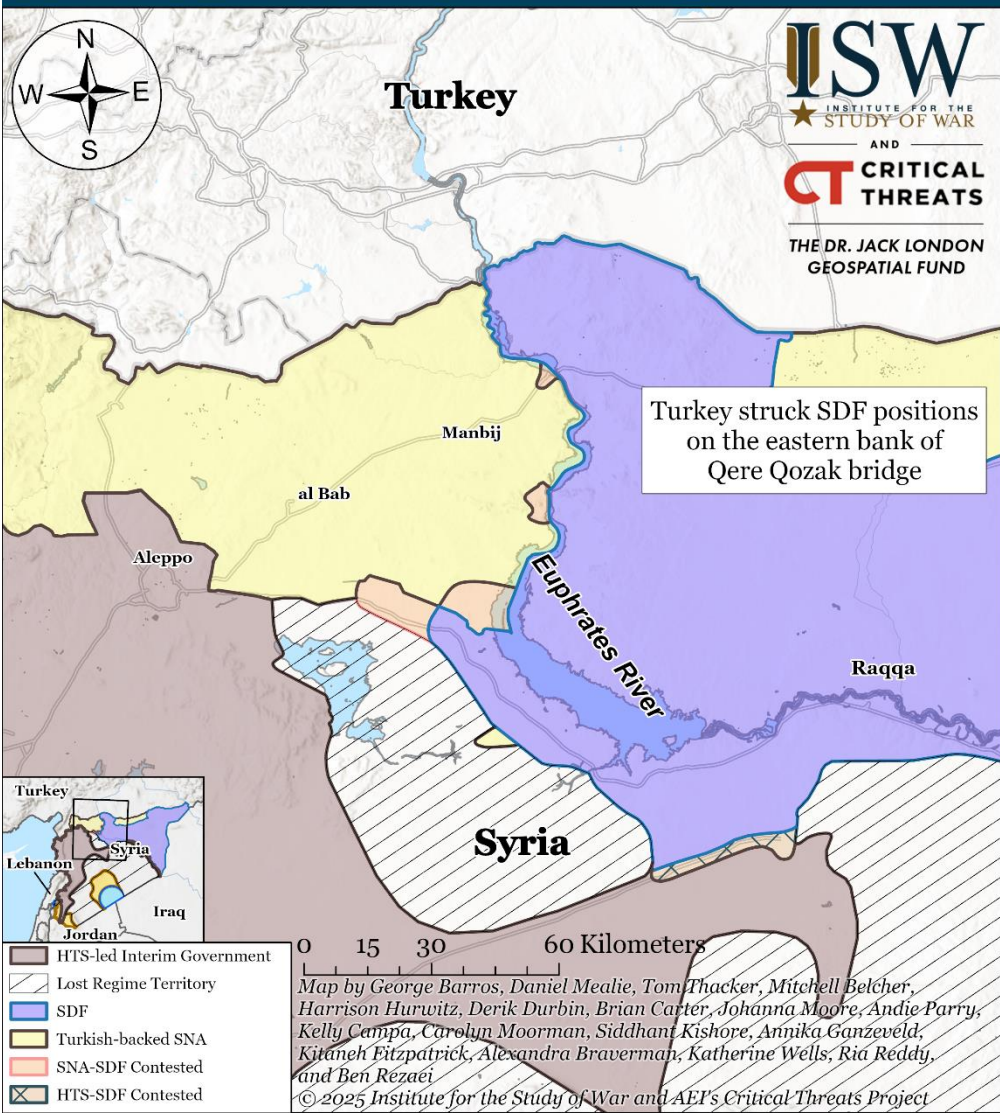
Syria

Turkey and the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) continued to attack SDF positions surrounding the Qara Qozak bridge and Tishreen Dam on January 25. The SDF repelled two separate SNA attacks in Deir Hafer and Syriatel Hill killing and wounding an unspecified number of SNA fighters. Turkey conducted at least four airstrikes on SDF positions east of the Qara Qozak Bridge.[13] Turkey and the SNA conducted air and artillery strikes targeting SDF positions near the Tishreen Dam.[14] Geolocated footage posted on January 25 shows the SDF striking SNA fighters and vehicles west of the Tishreen Dam.[15] Anti-SDF media claimed that a Turkish drone strike targeted an SDF convoy traveling to the Tishreen Dam, causing it to retreat.[16] The SNA and SDF reportedly exchanged artillery fire near the M4 highway, north of Raqqa.[17] Anti-SDF media reported that the SNA separately shelled SDF positions in Bin Hasu, south of Kobani.[18]

The SDF also said that it conducted multiple attacks west of Qara Qokak bridge in retaliation for SNA and Turkish attacks, killing six SNA fighters and wounding eight.[19] Anti-SDF media claimed that an SDF strike targeting an SNA position in Qalat al Najm caused civilian casualties.[20]

Control of Terrain in North Syria

As of January 25, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST

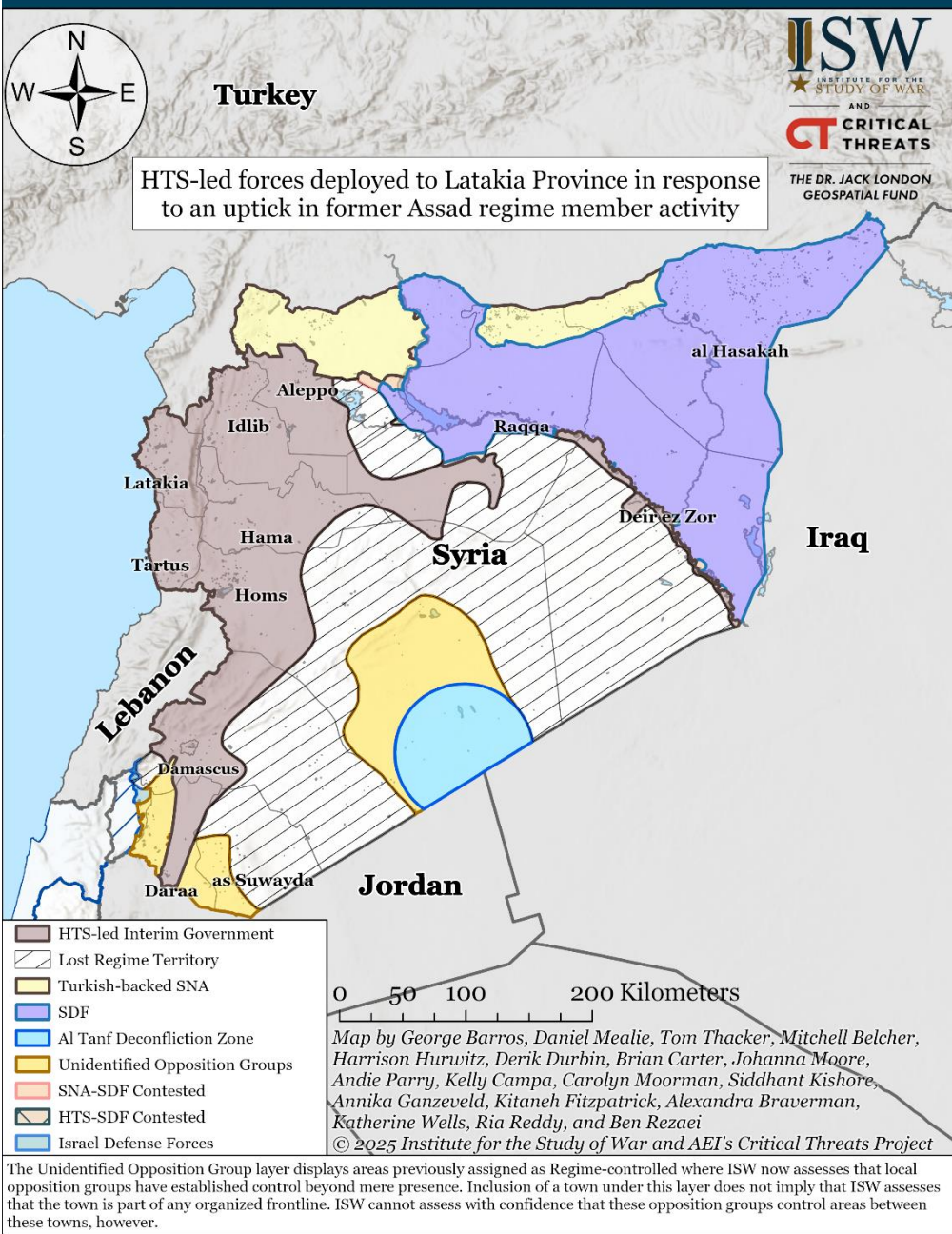


HTS-led forces deployed to Latakia Province in response to an uptick in former Assad regime member activity.[21] Syrian security forces killed former Assad regime members who attempted to conduct two separate attacks on HTS checkpoints in Latakia Province.”[22] Syrian Public Security forces also arrested at least seven former Assad regime members during clearing operations in Jableh.[23] Former Assad regime member activity appears to be an uncoordinated, low-level threat to HTS control in Latakia. HTS has concentrated its clearing operations in Latakia Province, a former regime stronghold, since the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024.[24]

The IDF continued to operate in southern Syria on January 25. Syrian media reported that the IDF installed electricity poles in Marbah, Daraa Province, less than a kilometer from the disengagement zone.[25]

Reported Control of Terrain in Syria

As of January 25, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



The HTS-led Department of Military Operations continued clearing operations targeting former regime elements in northern and western Syria on January 25. Syrian media reported that two Department of Military Operations members, including a field commander, were killed in attacks in Baniyas, Tartous Province, and Talkalekh, western Homs countryside, on January 24.[26] It is not clear if former regime elements perpetrated these attacks. The Department of Military Operations has operated in western Homs and Baniyas in recent days.[27] Syrian media reported on

December 25 that the Department of Military Operations Forces seized warehouses of sarin and toxic chlorine gas in a neighborhood of Homs City.[28] The Department of Military Operations also reportedly withdrew heavy machinery from Inkhil, northern Daraa Province..[29] Department of Military Operations forces deployed to Inkhil on January 23.[30]

Syrian Foreign Affairs Minister Assad al Shaibani, Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Hakan Fidan, and SDF commander Mazloum Abdi will reportedly hold talks in Baghdad in the next two weeks.[31] Iraqi Prime Minister Fuad Hussein, Iraqi National Intelligence Service Hamid al Shatri, and a prominent Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leader will also join the meetings, according to informed sources speaking to Iraqi media on January 25. The talks reportedly will cover a variety of issues including the SDF-controlled prisons in northeastern Syria, and Turkish imports of Iraqi oil. It is likely that Shaibani, Fidan, and Abdi will also discuss the disarmament of the SDF and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Turkey and HTS are continuing to coordinate their efforts to coerce the SDF into disarming and integrating into the HTS-led defense apparatus.[32] Turkey has also reportedly made an agreement with the imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan to disarm the PKK.[33]

Syrian media, including SDF-affiliated media, reported on January 25 that over 500 family members of 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 25.[34] Iraqi media sources have not confirmed these reports as of the time of this writing. Iraq last repatriated Iraqi citizens from al Hol camp on January 9.[35] The SDF continues to face bandwidth and resource constraints in Syria and has almost certainly redirected resources away from al Hol camp.[36] Iraqi government officials have repeatedly expressed concern over al Hol camp's ISIS population.[37]

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

The Houthis released 153 prisoners of war on January 25.[38] The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) acknowledged the release and stated that its staff visited the detainees beforehand and provided medical checks. Houthis Committee for Prisoners Affairs Head Abdul Qader

al Murtada stated that the released individuals were "humanitarian cases," including the sick, wounded, and elderly.

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 killed a Palestinian individual whom it deemed posed a threat to IDF fighters in an unspecified location in the central Gaza Strip on January 24.[39] The IDF separately fired shots to disperse individuals in several areas across the Gaza Strip on January 24 and 25.[40] The IDF added that it acted in accordance with the ceasefire agreement. The IDF warned Gazans on January 24 to avoid approaching Israeli forces in deployed in the Gaza Strip.[41]

Reuters reported, citing two US congressional sources, that Hamas has recruited between 10,000 to 15,000 fighters since the start of the Israel-Hamas war.[42] The sources revealed that the new Hamas recruits are mainly comprised of young, untrained fighters who are performing basic security tasks. Former US Secretary of State Antony Blinken previously stated on January 14 that Hamas has recruited "almost as many new militants as it has lost." [43] Current Israeli military operations are designed to prevent the regeneration of Hamas by denying Hamas the sanctuary to conduct training programs, particularly in the northern Gaza Strip. The IDF is preventing the reconstitution of Hamas units by isolating Hamas' forces in the north and denying them safe areas there by conducting repeated raids.[44] 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.[45]

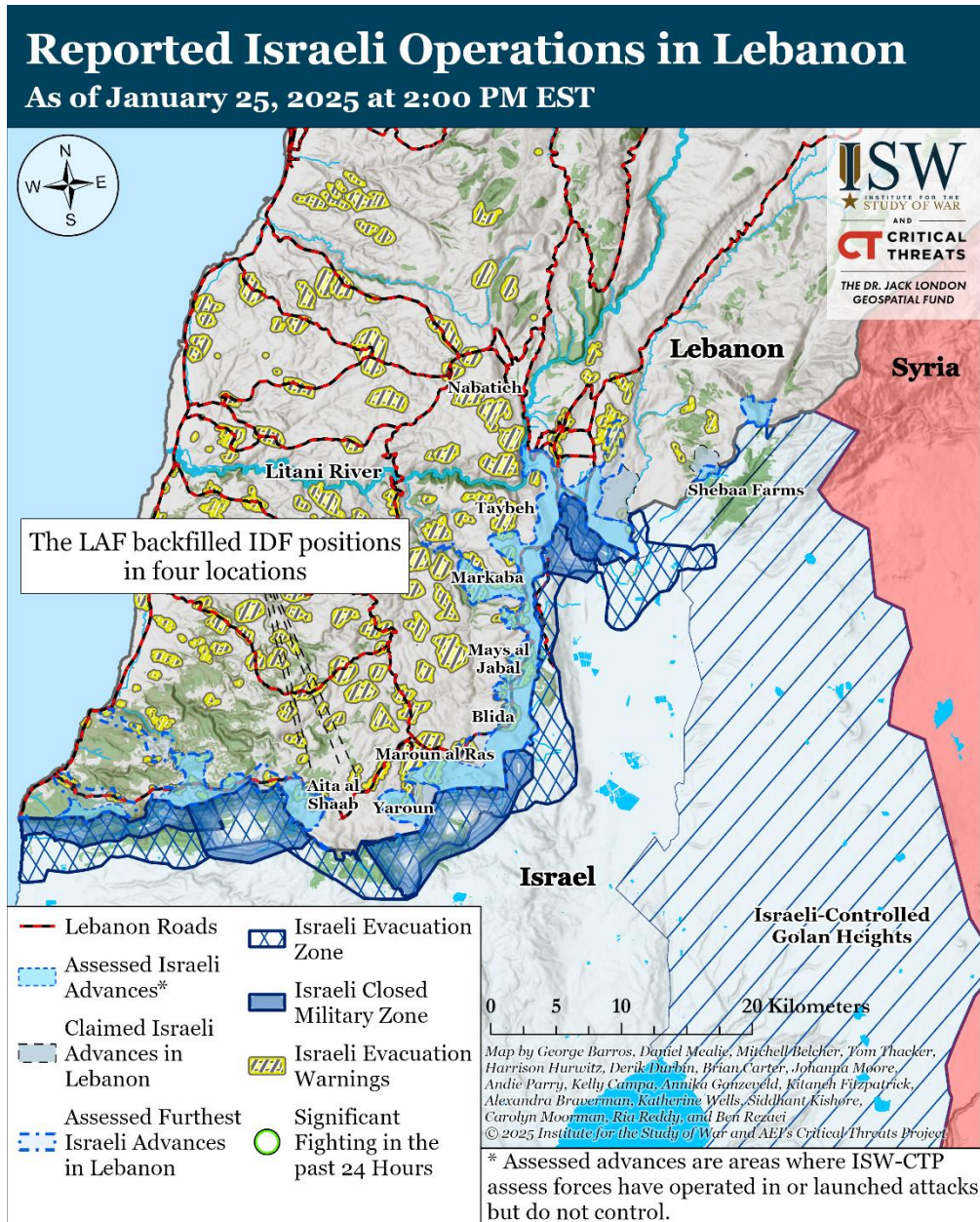
Lebanon

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) assumed control of three former Palestinian militia centers near Tripoli, northwestern Lebanon, on January 25.[46] The LAF took over one former Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) center and two Fatah al Intifada centers. The LAF confiscated weapons and surveillance devices.

The LAF backfilled IDF positions in four locations in Bint Jbeil Governorate, southeastern Lebanon, on January 25.[47]

The IDF and LAF warned Lebanese civilians against returning to their homes in southern Lebanon on January 25.[48] Lebanese media reported on January 25 that residents attempted to return to their homes in at least two locations in southwestern Lebanon.[49] Lebanese media reported

on January 25 that IDF vehicles blocked roads from Wadi al Saluki to Aitaroun, Blida and Houla to prevent the premature return of residents.[50]



West Bank

Israeli forces continued the “Iron Wall” counterterrorism operation in Jenin Governorate for the fifth consecutive day on January 25.[51] Three Israeli soldiers from the Egoz Unit were injured during IDF operations on January 25. The al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Hamas targeted Israeli forces in Jenin with improvised explosive devices (IED) and small arms on January 25.[52] CTP-ISW did not observe any combined attacks by the newly-

created joint operations room, which is comprised of PIJ, Hamas, and the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, on January 25.[53]

Israeli settlers set fire to a car and damaged a home in Tubas, northern West Bank, on January 25.[54] US President Donald Trump signed an executive order on January 20 to lift sanctions on Israeli settlers accused of committing violence against Palestinians in the West Bank.[55]

Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy continued the “Great Prophet 19” exercise in the Persian Gulf on January 25.[56] The IRGC Navy launched "Ghaem" and "Almas" missiles, which it claims are AI-guided, from Mohajer-6 and Ababil-5 drones. The exercise included the Navab air defense missile launches, ballistic missile tests, and IRGC commandos conducting land and sea operations. The IRGC Navy also unveiled the Kowsar-222 air defense missile, which reportedly has a 17 km range and operates on "Ashura" and "Zolfaghar" vessels.[57]

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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