

Iran Update



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Information Cutoff: January 26, 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.

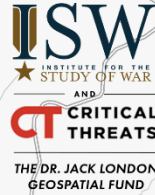
We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We utterly condemn violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even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

Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) agreed to release a female civilian hostage after the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) prevented Palestinians from returning to the northern Gaza Strip on January 25 and 26.[1] PIJ confirmed that hostage, Arbel Yehud, is “alive and in good health” and stated it will release Yehud after reaching an agreement with the mediators.[2] Israel accused Hamas of violating the ceasefire agreement on January 25 by releasing female soldiers before female civilians.[3] In response, the IDF maintained its position in the Netzarim Corridor along al Rashid Road—the coastal road that connects the northern and southern Gaza Strip—preventing Gazans from returning to the northern Gaza Strip.[4] The IDF reiterated on January 26 that it will only fulfill its requirement to allow Palestinians to move to the northern part of the strip once PIJ releases Yehud.[5] The Palestinian Resistance Committee (PRC) and PIJ jointly took Yehud hostage on October 7, 2023.[6]

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 25.

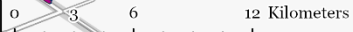
Israel-Hamas Ceasefire Lines

As of January 26, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Beit Hanoun
Atatra
Beit Lahia
Jabalia
Gaza City
Juhor ad
Al Zahra
Dik
Nuseirat
Bureij
Maghazi
Deir al Balah
As Sureij
Khan Younis
Bani Suheila
Abasan al Kabira
Rafah
Khirbat al Adas
Al Bayuk

PIJ agreed to release a female civilian after the IDF prevented Palestinians from returning to the northern Gaza Strip

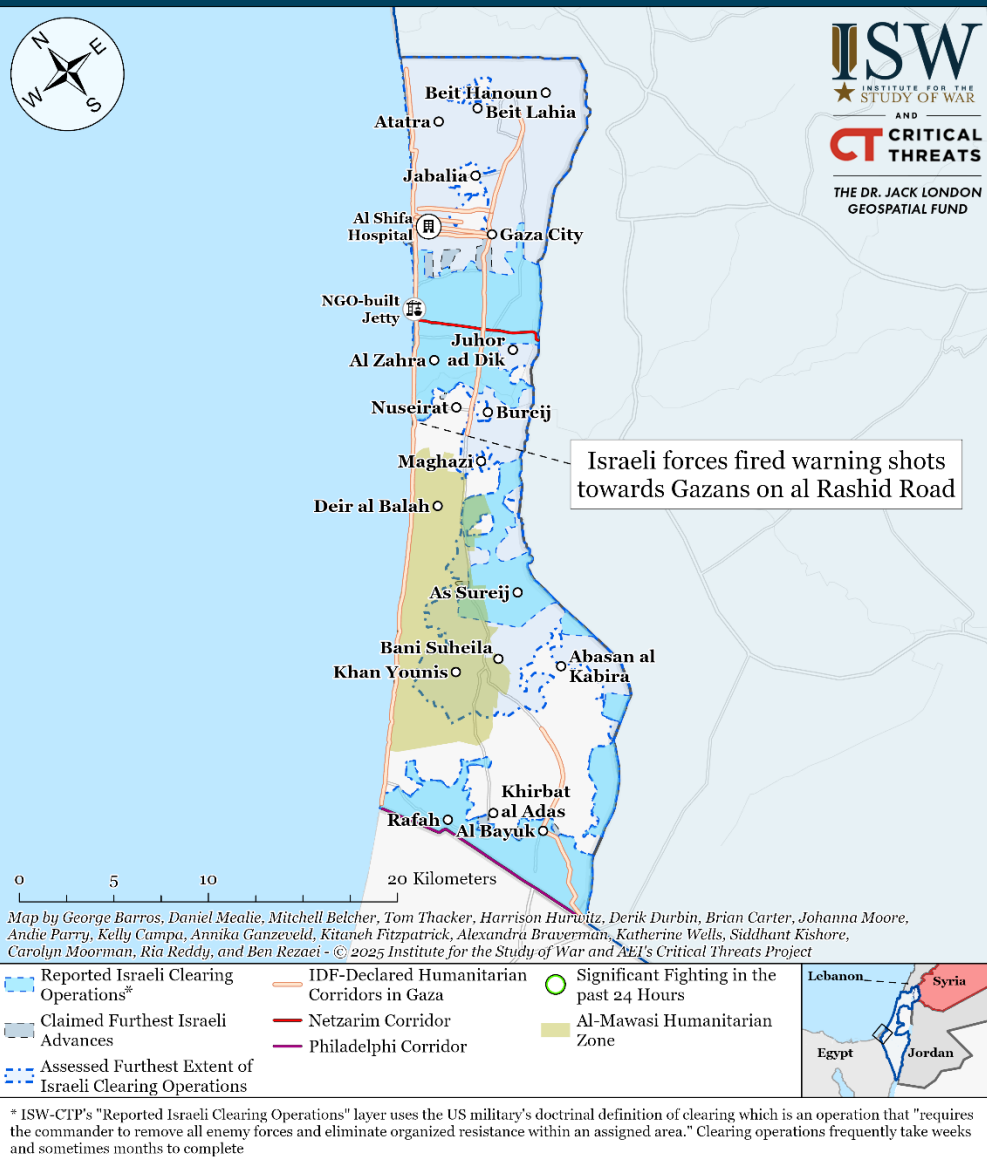


- Israeli-Hamas Ceasefire Buffer Zone
- Philadelphi Corridor
- ⋮ Assessed Furthest Extent of Israeli Clearing Operations
- Netzarim Corridor

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

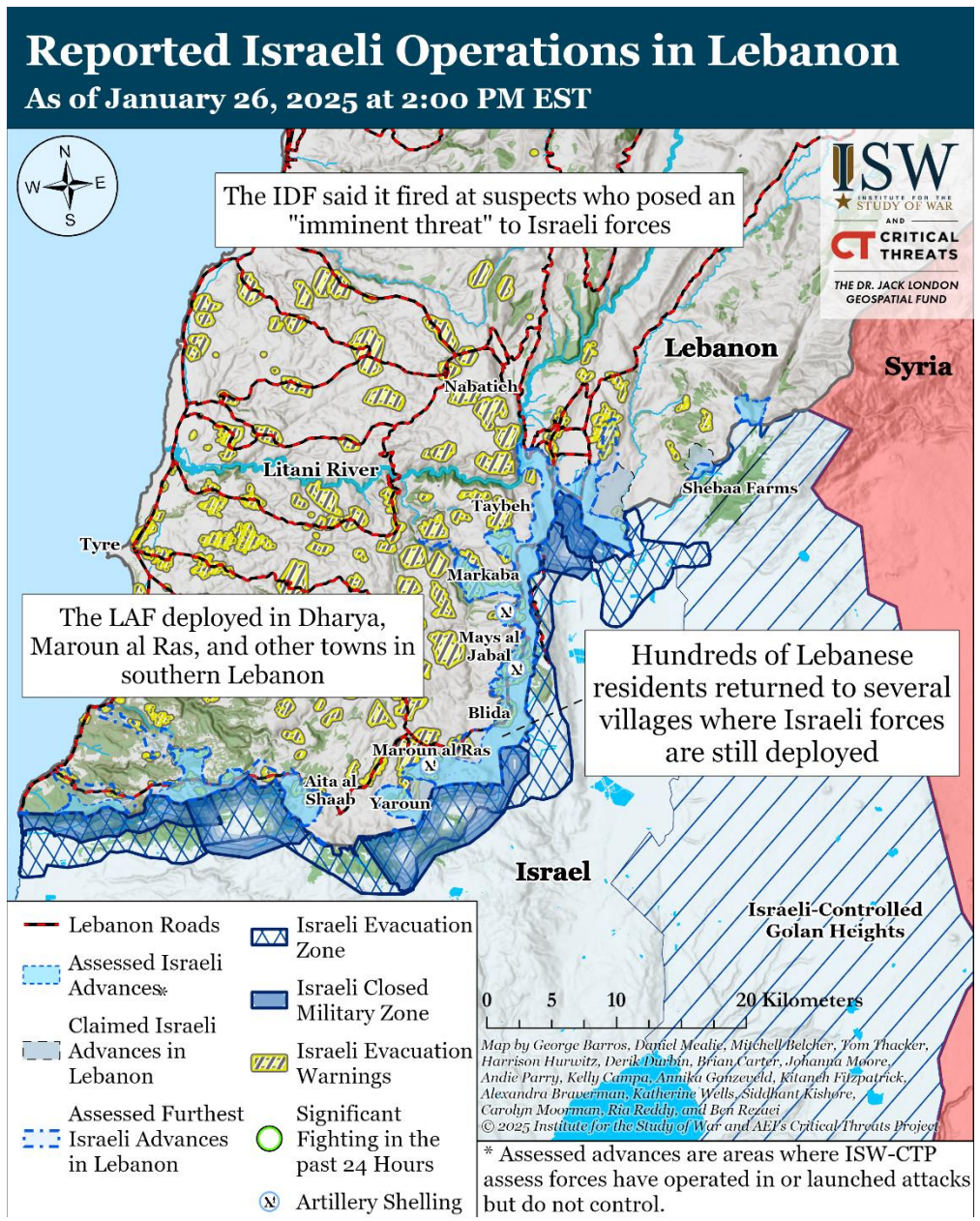
Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of January 26, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



The IDF fired at individuals in southern Lebanon on January 26 in order to eliminate “imminent threats” to Israeli forces. The 60-day Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire period ended on January 26.[7] The ceasefire agreement stipulates a full IDF withdrawal from Lebanon by January 26.[8] Israel announced on January 24 that the IDF will refrain from withdrawing from southern Lebanon by January 26 because the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) purportedly failed to destroy Hezbollah weapons and military infrastructure south of the Litani River, which it is required to do, according to the ceasefire agreement.[9] The IDF Arabic-language spokesperson re-issued warnings to residents against returning to 62 towns in southern Lebanon on January 25.[10] Lebanese media claimed that returning residents entered 22 towns in southeastern Lebanon and 13 towns in southwestern Lebanon on January 26.[11] The LAF “accompanied” some residents as they returned to

several towns.[12] The IDF stated that it used "dispersal fire" to eliminate threats posed to Israeli forces, including at "rioters" and at a vehicle flagged with a Hezbollah flag that approached Israeli forces.[13] Lebanese media claimed that the IDF fired artillery and small arms at Lebanese residents and LAF soldiers in several towns in southeastern Lebanon.[14] The Lebanese Health Ministry reported that Israeli operations killed at least 23 people, including an LAF soldier, and injured 124 additional people in southern Lebanon.[15] The IDF Arabic-language spokesperson accused Hezbollah of exploiting residents to cover up the repercussions of its "irresponsible decisions." [16]



The Iraqi Progress Party, which is a Sunni political party headed by former Parliament Speaker Mahmoud al Mashhadani, signaled its openness to forming an alliance with the Sadrist Movement ahead of the October 2025 parliamentary elections. Progress Party spokesperson Yahya al Mohammadi stated on January 26 that the Sadrist Movement's withdrawal

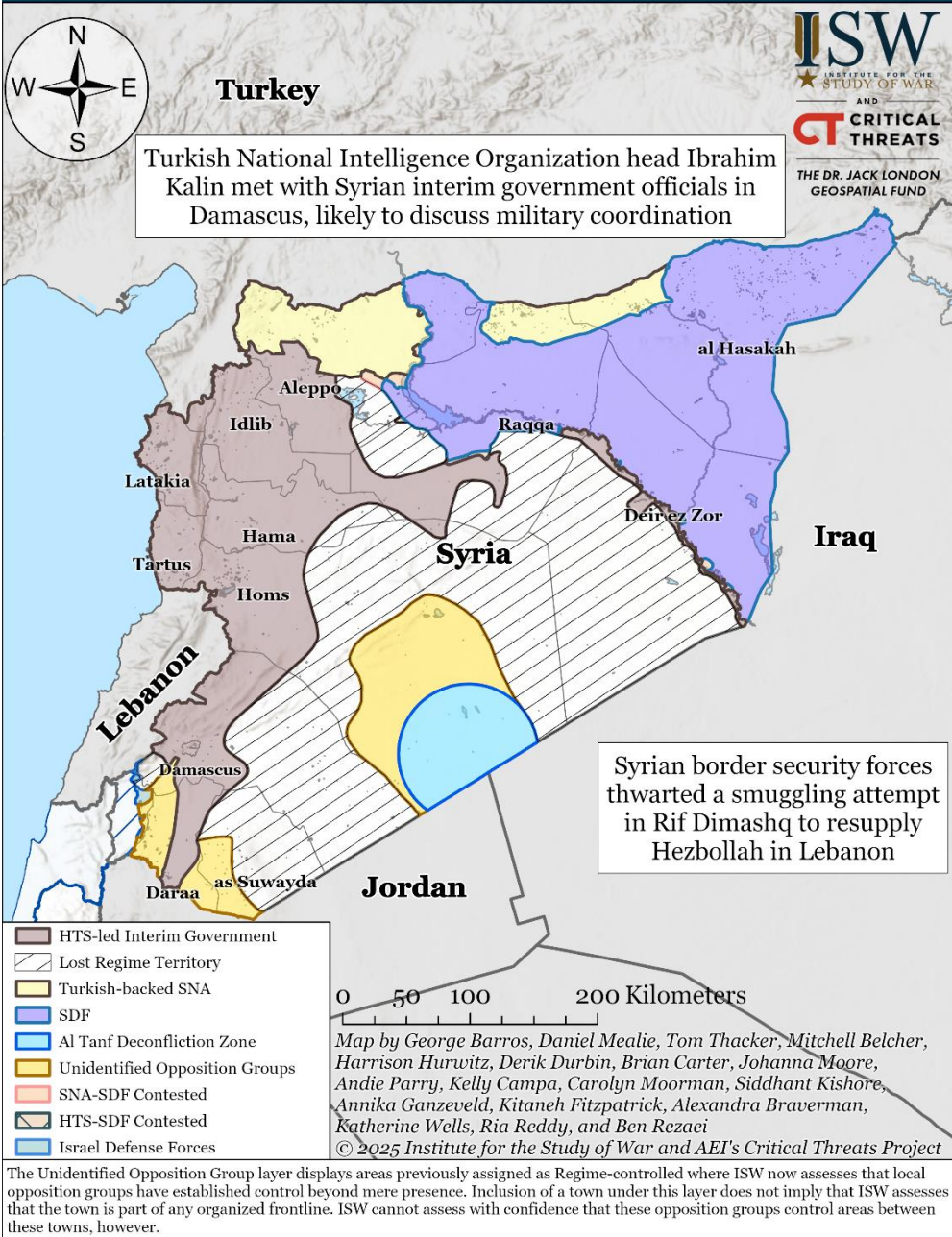
from politics after the October 2021 parliamentary elections created a “defect” in the Iraqi political system.[17] Mohammadi stated that “political balances” and “future visions for the formation of the next government” will determine whether the Progress Party allies with the Sadrist Movement. Mohammadi’s statements come after the newly formed United Sunni Leadership Coalition has aligned with Sadr on several issues in recent weeks.[18] Prominent Sunni politician Khamis al Khanjar, who helped establish the United Sunni Leadership Coalition, recently called on Iraqi political parties to adopt Sadr’s position of “non-interference” in Syria, for example.[19]

The United States will deliver a shipment of 1,800 MK-84 general purpose aircraft munitions to Israel in the “coming days.”[20] US President Donald Trump said that the United States has been holding these bombs in storage since May 2024.[21]

Syrian border forces thwarted a smuggling attempt to resupply Hezbollah in Lebanon from Rif Dimashq on January 25.[22] The General Directorate of Border Security announced that it seized a shipment of rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and ammunition in Serghaya, Rif Dimashq, before the shipment reached Lebanon.[23] The General Directorate specified that the weapons were intended for Hezbollah.[24] Syrian government forces recently interdicted a drone shipment in Tartus likely intended to resupply Hezbollah.[25] The General Directorate did not specify the identities of the smugglers but noted that the shipment traveled through existing smuggling routes. It is unlikely that these networks fully collapsed when the Assad regime fell, despite the flight of numerous Iranian-backed elements from Syria.

Reported Control of Terrain in Syria

As of January 26, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Key Takeaways:

- **Gaza Strip:** PIJ agreed to release a female civilian hostage after the IDF prevented Palestinians from returning to the northern Gaza Strip.
- **Lebanon:** The IDF fired at individuals in southern Lebanon on January 26 in order to eliminate “imminent threats” to Israeli forces.

- **Iraq:** The Iraqi Progress Party signaled its openness to forming an alliance with the Sadrist Movement ahead of the October 2025 parliamentary elections.
- **Syria:** Syrian border forces thwarted a smuggling attempt to resupply Hezbollah in Lebanon from Rif Dimashq.

Syria

Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Hakan Fidan met with senior Iraqi officials in Baghdad on January 26, likely to discuss Turkish and Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) operations against the SDF in northern Syria. Fidan met with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani, President Abdul Latif al Rashid, and Foreign Affairs Minister Fuad Hussein.[26] Fidan stated that Turkey, Iraq, and Syria must “combine all [their] resources” to “destroy” the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).[27] Turkey often conflates the SDF and the PKK-linked Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) with the PKK and uses “PKK” to refer to the entire SDF. Fidan called on the Iraqi federal government to label the PKK as a terrorist organization.[28] Fidan’s visit to Baghdad comes after PKK fighters killed two Iraqi border police officers in Batufa, Dohuk Province, near the Turkey-Iraq border, on January 24.[29] His visit also comes as Turkey has reportedly reached an agreement with PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan to disarm the PKK.[30] Turkey frequently conducts airstrikes targeting PKK fighters in northern Iraq.[31]

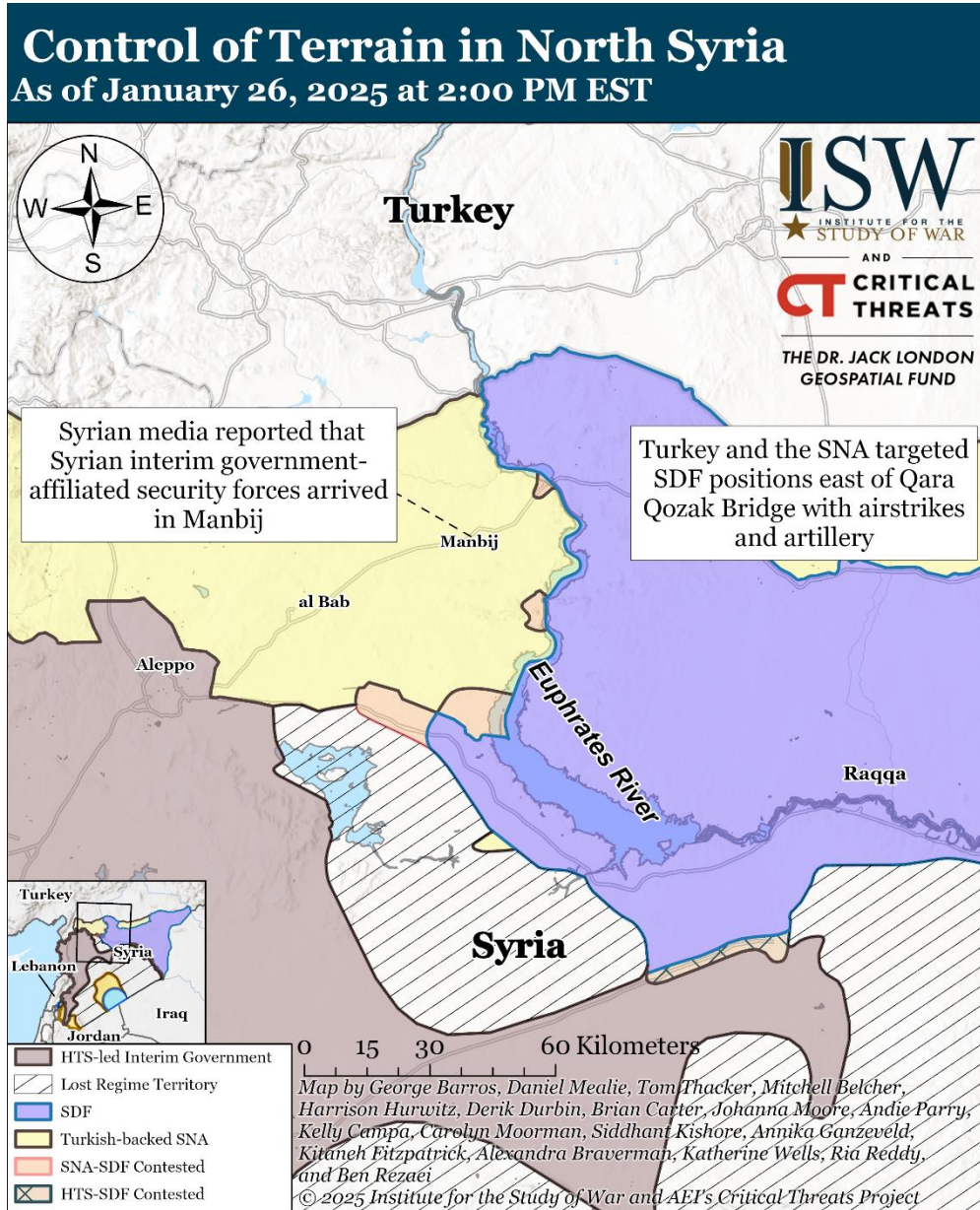
Turkish National Intelligence Organization head Ibrahim Kalin met with Syrian interim government officials in Damascus on January 26, likely to discuss military coordination.[32] Kalin met with HTS leader Ahmed al Shara, Interim Foreign Affairs Minister Asaad al Shaibani, and Interim Intelligence Chief Anas Khattab.[33] Kalin previously met with Shara in Damascus on December 12.[34] Shaibani and Khattab met with Kalin, among other senior Turkish political and defense officials, in Ankara on January 15.[35] These meetings come as Turkish aircraft and drones are supporting the Turkish-backed SNA against the SDF in northern Syria. CTP-ISW previously assessed that HTS and Turkey are coordinating to disarm and integrate the SDF into the HTS-led defense apparatus.[36] Turkish officials have repeatedly threatened to “destroy” the SDF in a military operation if it does not disarm.[37] Syrian Interim Defense Minister Marhaf Abu Qasra recently warned that the Syrian interim government is “ready” to use force against the SDF if needed.

Anti-SDF media reported that Syrian interim government-affiliated forces arrived in Manbij, Aleppo Province, on January 26.[38] Several Syrian sources posted photos of Public Security officers purportedly in Manbij.[39] A Deir ez Zor-based source reported that a Public Security Forces convoy traveled to Manbij to conduct a security assessment of the city following several incidents of unknown actors detonating IEDs in and near the city.[40] Anti-SDF media also posted footage on January 24 of a Public Security Forces vehicle driving in al Bab.[41] The Syrian interim government has not confirmed the visit as of this writing.

The SNA has continued to engage the SDF west of Tishreen Dam since CTP-ISW's last data cut off on January 25. The SNA shelled SDF positions in Khirbet Zamala, south of the dam.[42] An anti-SDF outlet reported on January 26 that the SNA reinforcements deployed to the Tishreen Dam frontlines.[43]

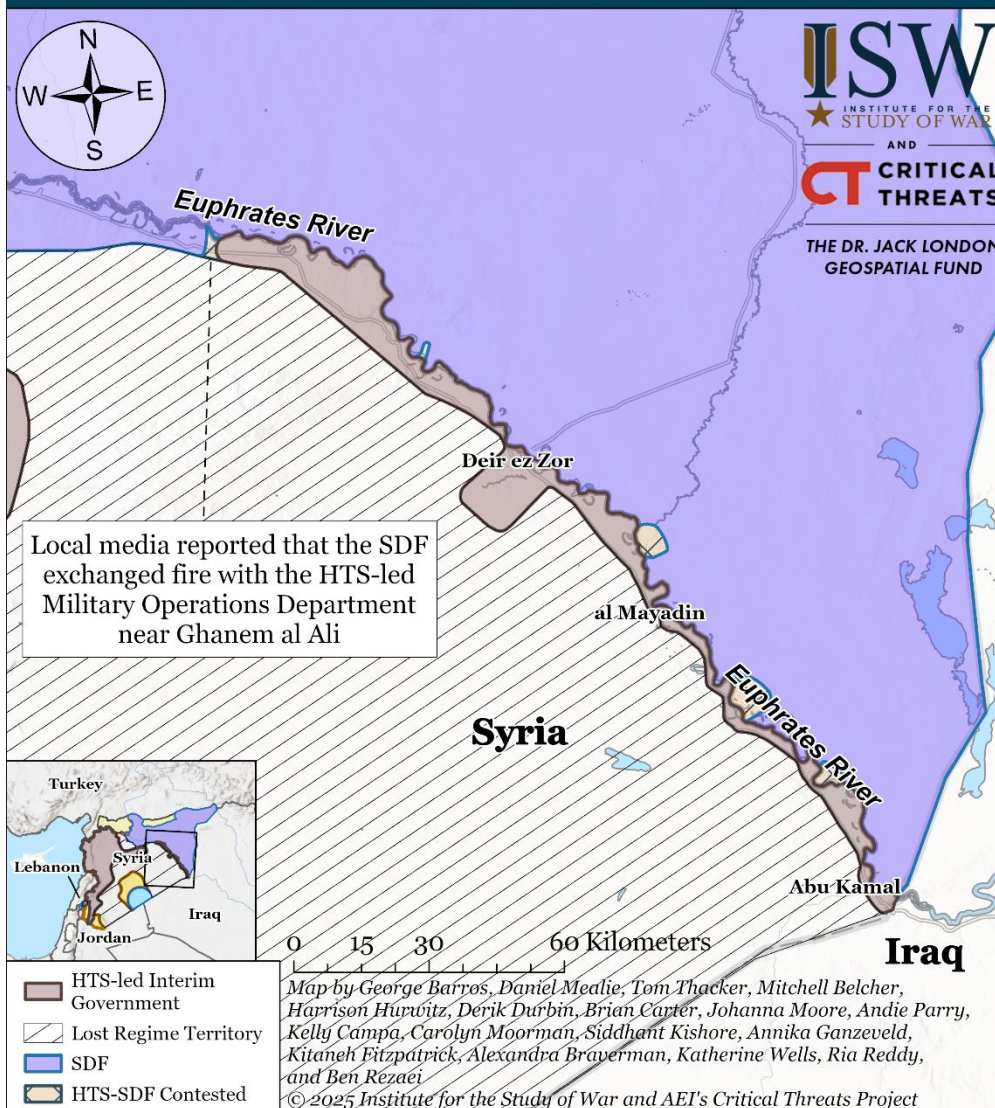
Turkey and the SNA continued to attack SDF positions east of Qara Qozak Bridge with airstrikes and artillery on January 26.[44]

The SNA shelled the eastern outskirts of Ain Issa on January 26.[45] The SDF said that the SNA shelling killed a child and injured two civilians in Jamas, east of Ain Issa.[46]



Anti-SDF media reported that the SDF exchanged fire with the HTS-led Military Operations Department along contact lines east of Raqqa on January 25.[47] A Deir ez Zor-based source said that SDF members stationed on the eastern outskirts Ghanem al Ali fired at an unknown target.[48] Military Operations Department personnel stationed outside of Albu Hamad reportedly responded to the source of the fire.[49] Several anti-SDF outlets reported that the SDF and Military Operations Department exchanged fire near the area.[50] CTP-ISW cannot confirm local reporting.

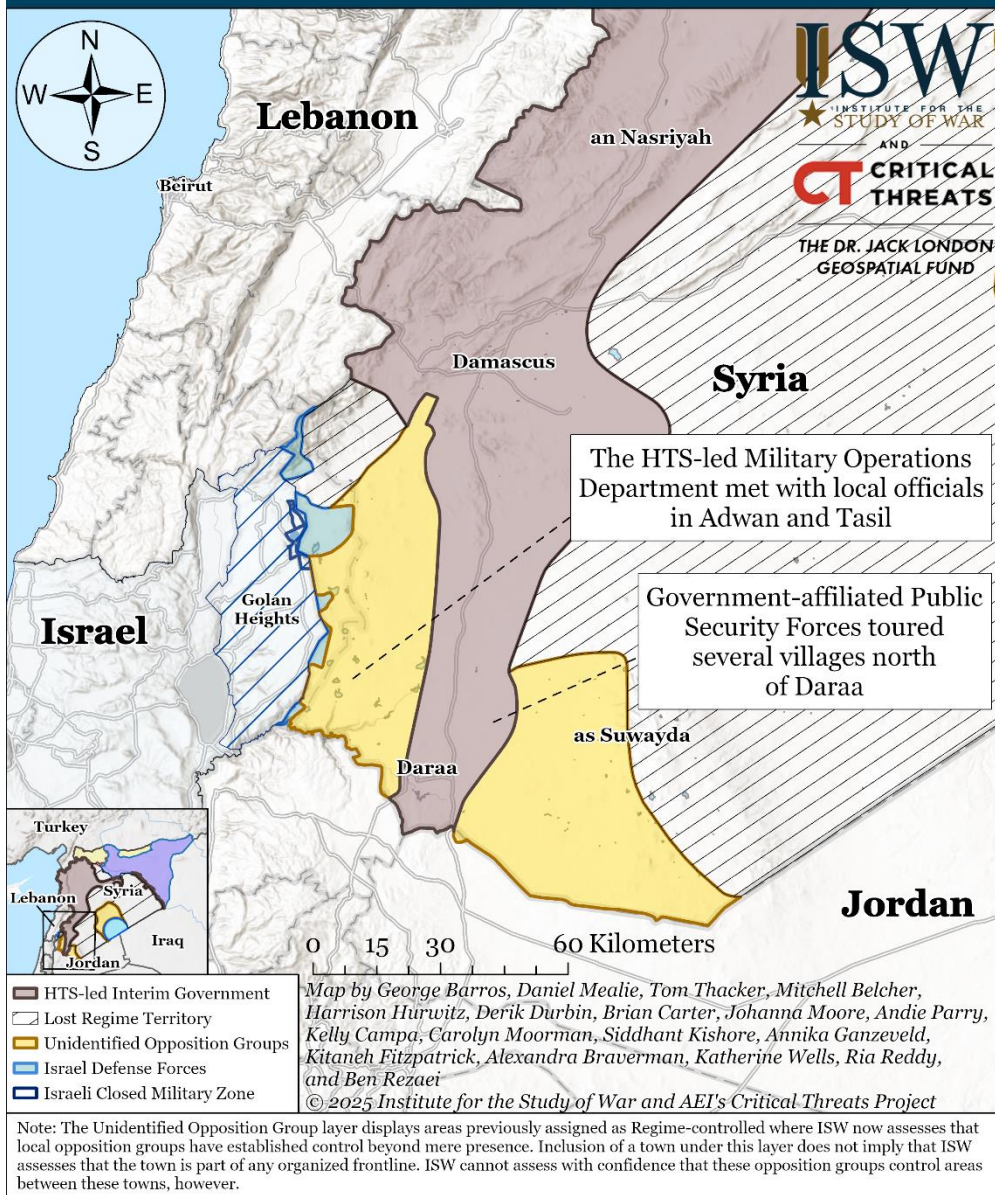
Control of Terrain in Deir ez Zor and Raqqa Provinces As of January 26, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Syrian interim government-affiliated forces toured several villages in Daraa Province on January 26. A Department of Military Operations convoy visited Adwan and Tasil in the western Daraa countryside to discuss weapons collections and the pursuit of wanted individuals with local notables.[51] A convoy of Public Security Forces also toured several towns north of Daraa City to discuss enhancing security with residents.[52]

Opposition Advances in Southwest Syria

As of January 26, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



The European Union is considering lifting sanctions on the Syrian energy and transportation sectors, according to three unspecified diplomats speaking to Reuters on January 26.[53] Unspecified EU diplomats argued that lifting sanctions on the Syrian energy and transportation sectors is necessary for promoting economic stability and reconstruction in Syria. The diplomats also called for “assessing options for reopening banking and investment relations with Syria.” The diplomats noted that the European Union would lift sanctions in a gradual and “reversible” manner so that it could reimpose sanctions on Syria if the HTS-led interim government failed to protect basic freedoms or form an inclusive government. The European Union is scheduled to discuss the possibility of lifting sanctions on the Syrian energy and transportation sectors at a meeting in Brussels on January 27.

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

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani discussed efforts to secure the Iraq-Syria border during a meeting with Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve Commander Major General Kevin Leahy on January 26.[54] Sudani and Leahy discussed cooperation between Iraqi security forces and the US-led international coalition to pursue ISIS remnants. Leahy recently met with US Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander General Michael Kurilla in Baghdad on January 15 to discuss the US-led, anti-ISIS mission and recent developments in Syria.[55] These meetings come as Iraq is continuing to repatriate families of ISIS members from the SDF-controlled al Hol camp in northeastern Syria to Iraq.[56]

Iraqi Army Chief of Staff Abdul Amir Rashid Yarallah inspected the Iraqi Army 74th Infantry Brigade (5th Infantry Division) at the al Waleed border crossing in western Anbar Province on January 26.[57] Yarallah met with 74th Infantry Brigade Commander Zaid Hazem al Zalzali.[58] The Second Region Border Command, which is under the Iraqi Interior Ministry, also operates in al Waleed.[59] Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces Chief of Staff Abdul Aziz al Muhammadawi recently inspected the Second Region Border Commander in late December 2024.[60]

An unspecified Iraqi diplomat told a Kurdish journalist on January 26 that the United States informed the Iraqi federal government that it plans to sanction prominent Iranian-backed Iraqi actors in Iraq.[61] The diplomat claimed that the United States plans to sanction Iranian-backed Badr Organization Secretary General Hadi al Ameri. A separate unspecified senior Iraqi official claimed that the United States plans to sanction State of Law Coalition head Nouri al Maliki.[62] CTP-ISW cannot verify this report, although the report comes as the United States has increased pressure on the Iraqi federal government to rein in and disarm Iranian-backed Iraqi militias.[63]

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 killed a fighter from PIJ’s rocket unit who threatened Israeli forces in the southern Gaza Strip on January 26.[64] The IDF also fired warning shots toward “dozens” of approaching Gazans in the central Gaza Strip and reiterated its instructions to Gazans to avoid approaching Israeli forces in designated areas.[65] Israeli gunfire killed one Gazan civilian and injured 18 others at al Rashid Road in the central Gaza Strip on January 26.[66] The ceasefire agreement required the IDF to withdraw from al Rashid Road — the coastal road that connects the northern and southern Gaza Strip, by January 25, in order to allow Gazans to return to the northern Gaza Strip.[67] The IDF did not withdraw from al Rashid Road because Hamas violated the ceasefire agreement on January 25, leaving several Gazans stranded there.[68]

Lebanon

Several actors have publicly condemned the IDF’s extended stay of the ceasefire agreement in Lebanon on January 26. Hezbollah called on the Lebanese people to stand with the southern Lebanese residents returning home and on the international community to hold Israel accountable for ceasefire violations. [69] Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Houthi spokesperson Mohammad Abdulsalam echoed this sentiment.[70] Lebanese President Joseph Aoun also stressed that “Lebanon’s sovereignty and the unity of its territory are not subject to compromise.”[71] Aoun added that he is closely monitoring the ceasefire withdrawal. French President Emmanuel Macron also urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to withdraw remaining forces from Lebanon in a phone call.[72]

The LAF announced that it deployed forces to Dhayra, Maroun al Ras, and other towns in southern Lebanon on January 26.[73]

West Bank

Israeli forces continued the “Iron Wall” counterterrorism operation in Jenin Governorate for the sixth consecutive day on January 26. The IDF has killed at least 15 fighters and arrested 30 additional fighters since the start of the IDF operation in Jenin on January 21.[74] The IDF conducted an airstrike targeting an improvised explosive device (IED) manufacturing lab in Jenin City.[75] The IDF also targeted militia fighters in a building in Muthalath al Shuhada with small arms.[76] The IDF is investigating claims of “uninvolved people” injured during the operation.[77] The al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades targeted Israeli forces on January 26 in Jenin with IEDs.[78]

The IDF conducted an airstrike targeting militia fighters in Balata refugee camp, Nablus, on January 26.[79] The IDF last operated in Balata refugee camp on January 6.[80]

Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi met with his Afghan counterpart Amir Khan Muttaqi and Taliban government’s Prime Minister Hassan Akhund in Kabul on January 26.[81] The officials discussed economic and transportation cooperation as well as other issues such as migration, border issues, and water rights.[82]

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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[1] <https://t.me/sarayaps/19107> ; <https://t.me/sarayaps/19105> ;
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