

Iran Update



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January 29, 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.

The Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS)-led interim Syrian government held a “victory conference” on January 29, during which it formalized much of its consolidation of power since the fall of Bashar al Assad.[1] The conference announced the appointment of HTS leader Ahmed al Shara as the transitional president, though has informally been the de-factor of the interim government for months. Shara is now responsible for forming an interim legislative council until a new constitution is drafted and approved, according to the conference.[2] Shara, at the conference, identified his priorities as “filling the power vacuum, preserving civil peace, building state institutions, working to build a developmental economic infrastructure, and restoring Syria's international and regional standing” in his speech.[3] Shara has previously described the interim government overseeing a three-to-four transition period, during which he would presumably rule and exert heavy influence over the allocation of political power.[4]

The victory conference separately announced the disbanding of all Assad regime institutions and its constitution.[5] The interim government has proposed previously holding a representative Syrian national dialogue to write a new Syrian constitution, though it is unclear whether a date or any participants have yet been identified.[6]

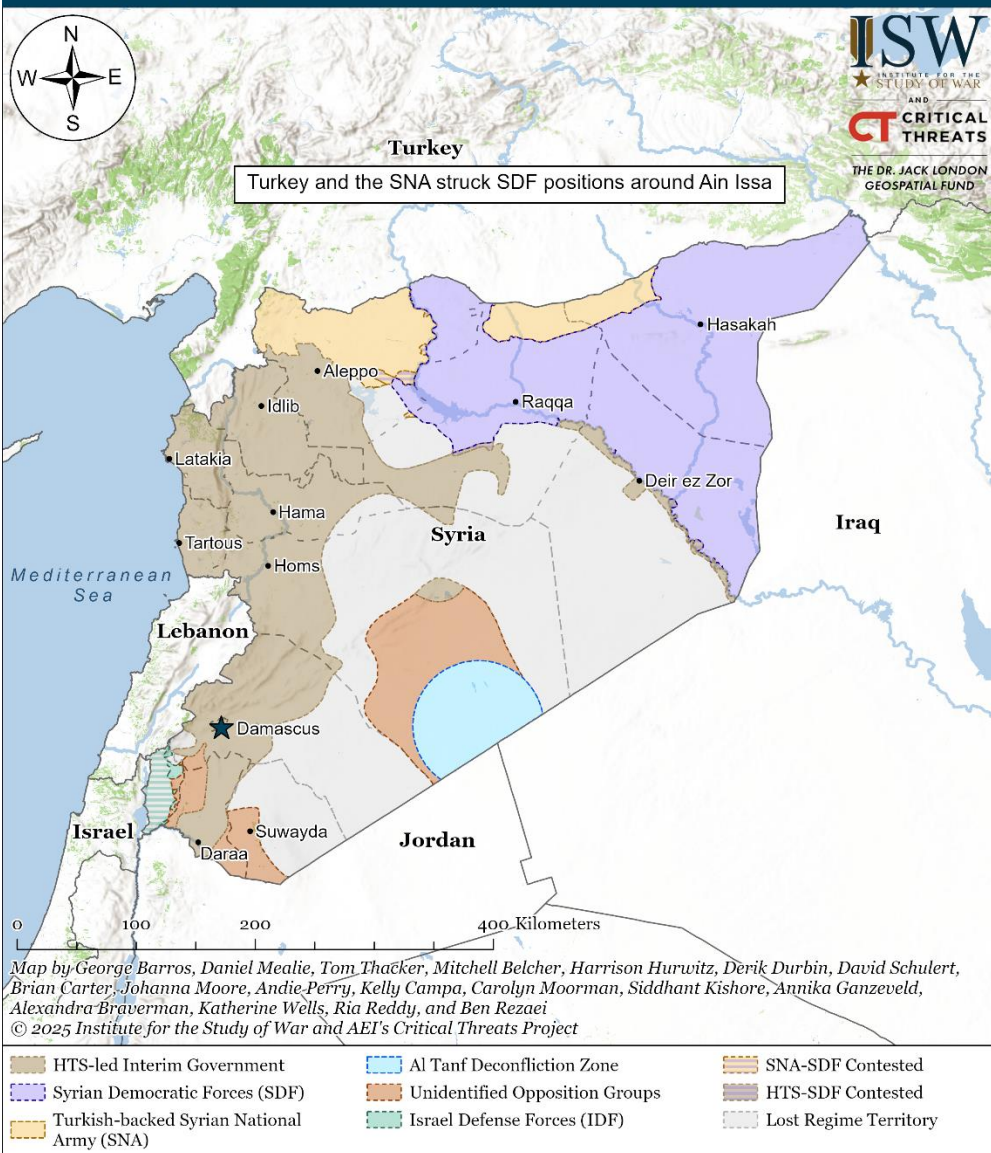
The victory conference also announced the planned dissolution of all former opposition parties in Syria. The conference specifically stated that “all military factions, political, and civil revolutionary bodies will be dissolved and integrated into state institutions.”[7] This decree follows months of talks between HTS and armed groups.[8] The interim Defense Ministry announced on January 19 that over 60 military factions agreed to join the new Syrian armed forces.[9]

Military factions allied with HTS that participated in the overthrow the Assad regime attended the conference, including Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) leaders, who are sanctioned by the United States for abuses against Kurds.[10] An anti-Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) source reported that the SDF was not invited to the conference.[11] It remains unclear if the interim government's decree dissolving all military factions will apply to the SDF or if the SDF has agreed to such terms. SDF commander Mazloum Abdi said January 14 that he wants the SDF to integrate into the Defense Ministry as a "bloc," which the interim defense minister reportedly rejected.[12]

Russia and the HTS-led interim Syrian government failed to reach an agreement on January 28 on Russian basing in Syria. A Russian delegation that included Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Mikhail Bogdanov and Special Presidential Representative to Syria Alexander Lavrentyev traveled to Syria on January 28 to discuss Russian access to its military bases at Latakia and Tartus.[13] An unspecified Syrian source told Reuters that Russia and HTS only agreed to continue discussions.[14] An unspecified Russian source similarly told Bloomberg on January 28 that talks on Russian basing are "stuck." [15] The stalled negotiations come as Russia continues to evacuate military assets from its bases at Latakia and Tartus.[16]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria

January 29, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Some members of the Shia Coordination Framework, which is a loose coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi political parties, are reportedly trying to remove Popular Mobilization Committee (PMC) Chairman Falih al Fayyadh.[17] The PMC is responsible for ensuring that militias in the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)—an Iraqi security service that includes a large number of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—answer to the Iraqi federal government.[18] An unspecified source told Iraqi media that State of Law Coalition head Nouri al Maliki is “vigorously” working to ensure that someone close to him replaces Fayyadh.[19] It is unclear which other members of the Shia Coordination Framework besides Maliki may be pushing to remove Fayyadh. Iranian-backed Badr Organization Secretary General Hadi al Ameri denied reports that the Shia Coordination Framework is trying to remove Fayyadh.[20] These reports come as the United States has increased pressure on Iraq in recent weeks to dissolve and disarm the PMF.[21]

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 cutoff on January 28.

Key Takeaways:

- **Syria:** The HTS-led interim Syrian government held a “victory conference,” during which it formalized much of its consolidation of power since the fall of Bashar al Assad.
- **Syria:** Russia and the HTS-led interim Syrian government failed to reach an agreement on Russian military basing in Syria.
- **Iraq:** Some members of the Shia Coordination Framework, such as Nouri al Maliki, are reportedly trying to remove Falih al Fayyadh as PMF chairman.

Syria

The SDF has continued to engage the SNA along the western bank of the Euphrates River since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on January 28. Geolocated footage posted by the SDF on January 28 showed the SDF striking two Turkish T-155 Firtina self-propelled howitzers along the western bank of the Euphrates River, northeast of Manbij.[22] Turkish or SNA artillery units have likely used this position to shell SDF positions on the other side of the river in recent weeks.[23] The SDF also conducted drone strikes targeting Turkish or SNA positions near Qara Qozak Bridge.[24]

Turkey continued to attack SDF positions along key supply and logistical routes on January 29. Anti-SDF media reported that Turkey struck SDF targets in at least four locations near Sarrin on the east bank of the Euphrates River.[25] Turkey has conducted numerous airstrikes on SDF positions near Sarrin in recent days in order to weaken the SDF's ability to sustain defensive operations at Qara Qozak bridge.[26] Turkish drones also struck an SDF “intelligence site” in al Karameh, east of Raqqa, and an unspecified SDF position near Tabqa, west of Raqqa.[27]

The SDF also stated that Turkish drones allegedly struck civilian homes in Kobani City, Aleppo Province, on January 29.[28] Turkey has not commented nor confirmed the strike at the timing of this writing.

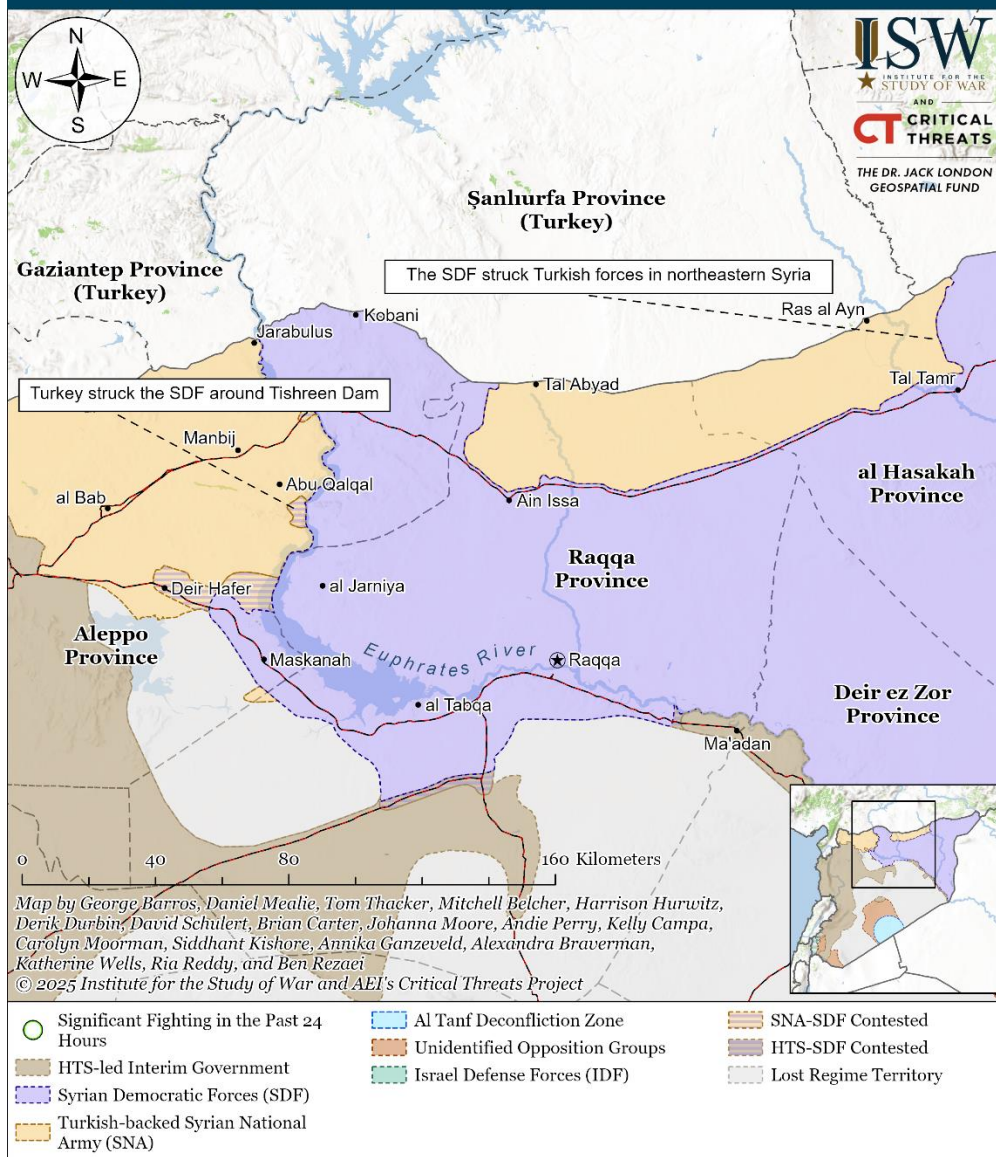
The SNA has targeted SDF positions near eastern SDF-SNA frontlines in Raqqa Province since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on January 28. The SNA shelled SDF positions in at least five towns north of Raqqa and near Ain Issa, which CTP-ISW assessed may be in preparation for a three-pronged assault to collapse SDF defenses along the eastern bank of the Euphrates River.[29]

The SDF struck a Turkish position along SDF-SNA lines of control in Hasakah Province on January 29.[30] The SDF said it struck the Turkish position in Zarkan in response to Turkish attacks on Tishreen Dam and Qara Qozak bridge.[31] Anti-SDF media claimed that the Turkish position is located near Abu Raseen, southeast of Ras al Ain.[32]

The Turkish Armed Forces killed fourteen "PKK/YPG" fighters in the Peace Spring region on January 29.[33] Turkey regularly conducts these strikes targeting alleged “PKK” fighters in Peace Spring territory and northern Iraq.[34]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Northern Syria

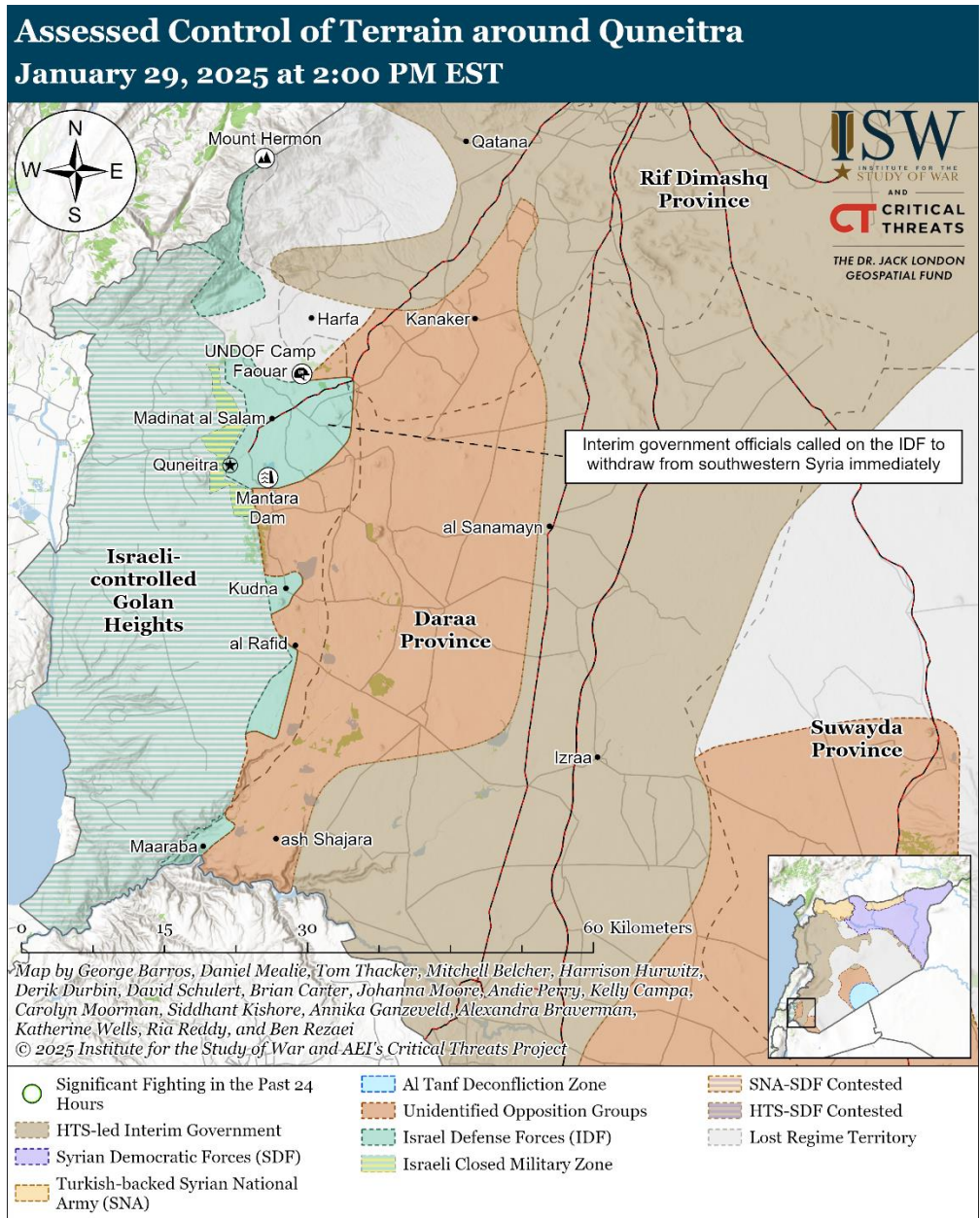
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Interim government officials called on Israel to immediately withdraw from southwestern Syria during a meeting with the head of the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on January 29.[35] The Syrian interim defense and foreign ministers emphasized Syria’s readiness to “cover” UNDOF positions along the Syria-Golan Heights border in line with the 1974 disengagement agreement.[36] This meeting comes after Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said on January 28 that Israel intends to remain on Mount Hermon in Syria “indefinitely.”[37] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu previously said in December 2024 that the 1974 disengagement agreement “collapsed” with the fall of the Assad regime, enabling Israel to operate in southern Syria to “take action against possible threats.”[38]

Syrian media reported on January 28 that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) warned residents of Jubata al Khashab, Quneitra Province, not to enter the towns’ surrounding

forests.[39] Syrian media reported that the IDF is building "long-term residence" structures inside the forests. A Syrian journalist reported on January 29 that Israeli bulldozers cleared "thousands" of trees in the forests near Jubata al Khashab.[40]



Syrian media reported that HTS-led forces continued clearing operations targeting former regime elements in northern and western Syria on January 29.[41] Public Security Forces discovered a former regime arms depot near Beit Jinn, Rif Damascus Province, and raided a former Syrian Arab Army fighters' headquarters in Jableh, Latakia Province.[42] The HTS-led Department of Military Operations confiscated weapons and arrested former regime members in Idlib.[43] Unspecified actors handed over several rocket launchers and rifles, including an Iranian AM-50, to the Public Security Forces in Bishanin village, Hama Province.[44]

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

Unspecified political sources told Iraqi media on January 29 that some Iranian-backed Iraqi militias seek to obtain “sensitive government positions that influence political decisions” in return for their integration into the Iraqi security establishment.[45] CTP-ISW previously assessed that the integration of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias into the Iraqi security establishment would facilitate Iranian capture of the Iraqi security sector by further entrenching Iranian-backed groups into the Iraqi state.[46] The appointment of Iranian-backed militia members to “sensitive government positions,” which likely refers to ministerial or senior defense and security positions, would further facilitate Iranian capture of the Iraqi security and political sectors.

Iraqi media reported on January 28 that Turkey shelled Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) sites in Amedi District, Dohuk Province, near the Turkey-Iraqi Kurdistan border.[47] Iraqi media reported that Turkey also conducted airstrikes in the Gara Mountain area in northern Dohuk Province.

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

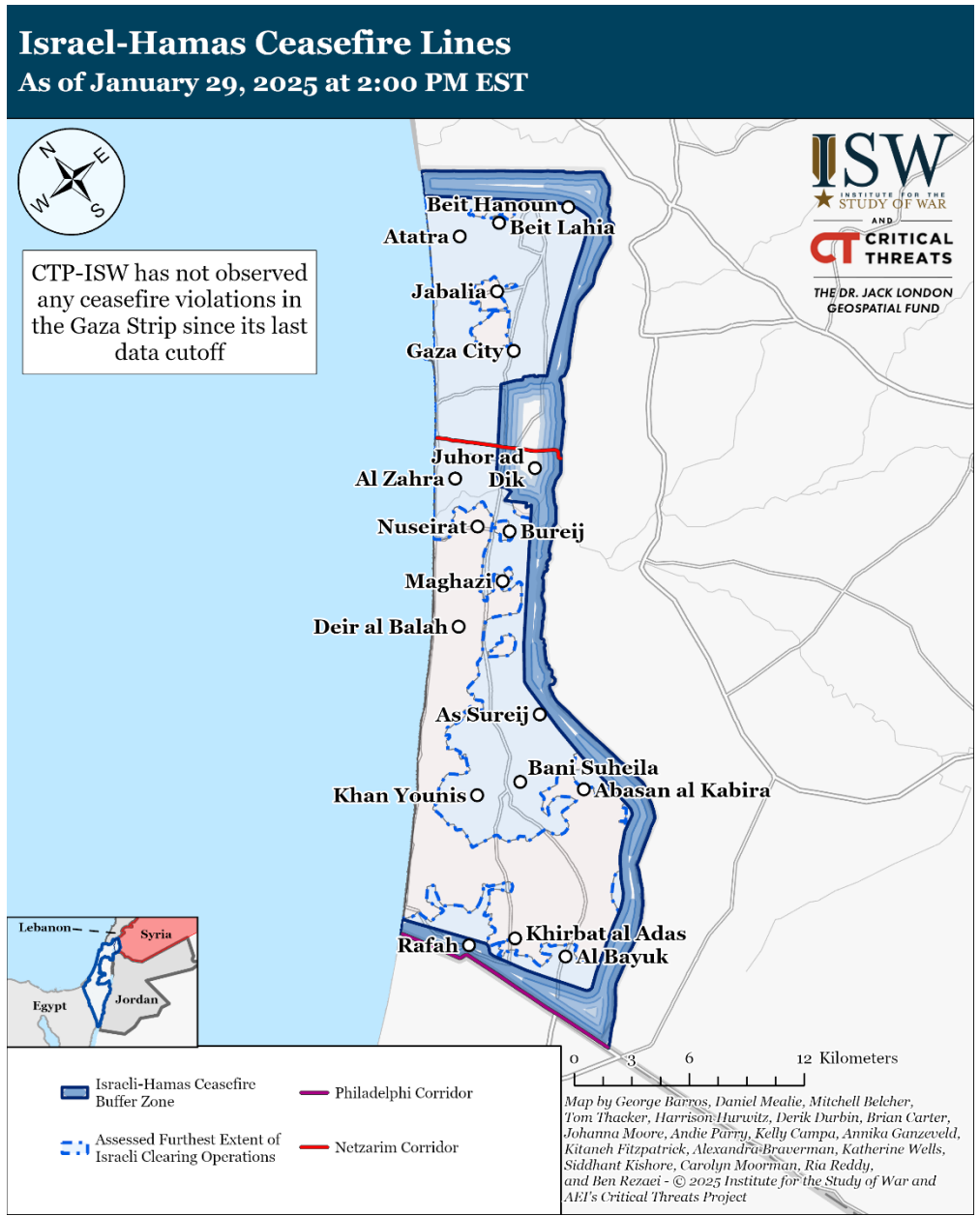
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- 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

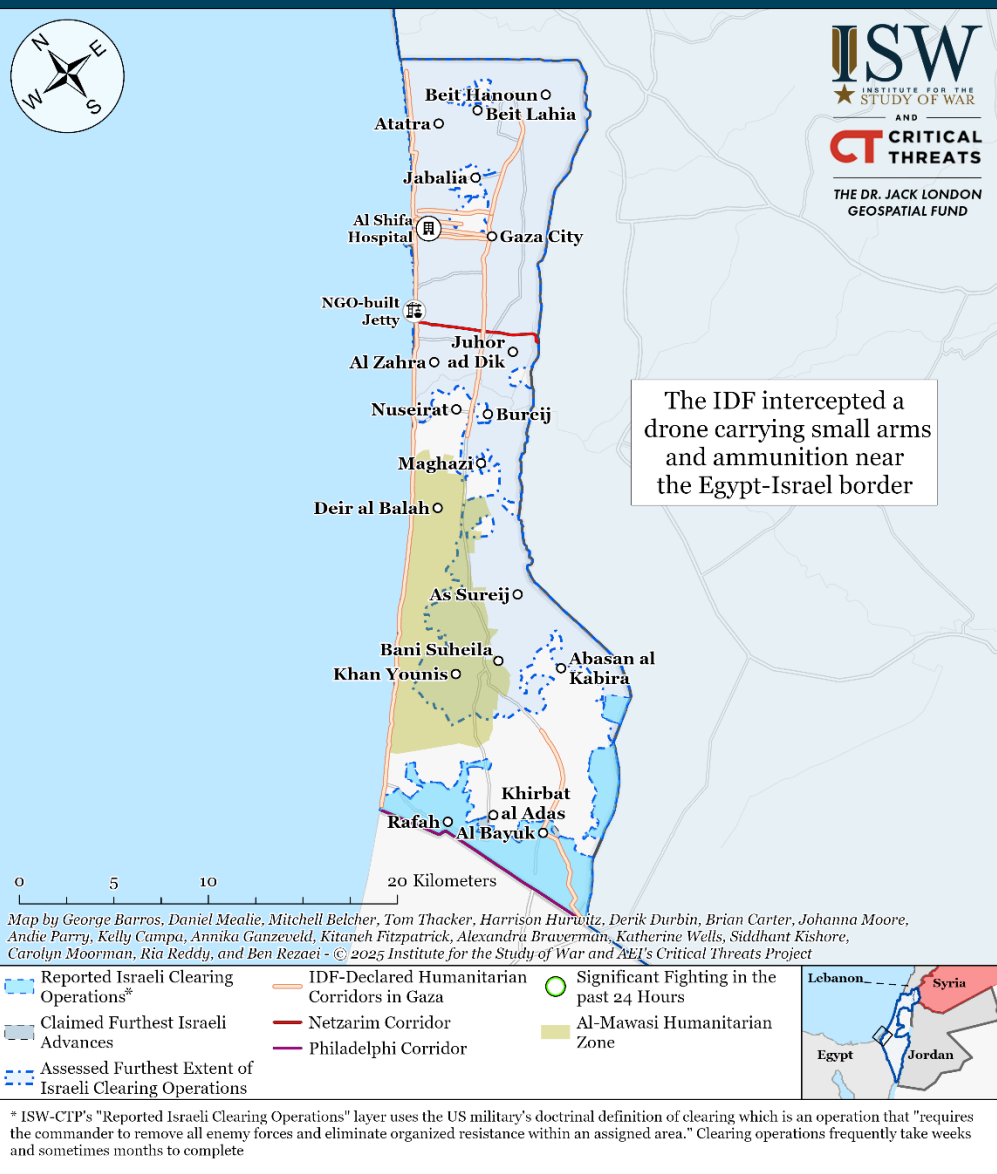
Two senior Hamas officials said on January 29 that continued delays in the Israeli aid delivery to the Gaza Strip will affect progression of the ceasefire-hostage agreement, including with the release of hostages.[48] The officials added to French media that Israel has

slowed the speed of aid deliveries expected in the first week of the ceasefire that were to include fuel, tents, heavy machinery, and other equipment. A spokesperson for the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT)—a department within the Israeli Defense Ministry—refuted Hamas’ claim and said that 3,000 aid trucks have entered the Gaza Strip in the past four days alone.[49] The ceasefire-hostage deal stipulates that 4,200 aid trucks must enter the strip weekly during the first phase of the agreement.[50]



Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

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US envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff discussed the implementation of the hostage-ceasefire with Israeli officials in Israel on January 29.[51] Witkoff visited the Gaza Strip and Netzarim Corridor with Israeli Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer. Witkoff's visit to Israel follows his visit to Saudi Arabia on January 28 where he reportedly worked on a "broad Middle East agreement" that includes the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and eventual normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia.[52]

The IDF intercepted a drone carrying small arms and ammunition that had entered Israeli airspace from Egypt on January 29.[53] The IDF provided no further details about the smuggling attempt. An IDF official said on January 22 that the smuggling via drones from Egypt could

develop into a "much more serious threat." [54] The IDF intercepted several drug and weapons smuggling attempts from Egypt in 2024. [55]

Lebanon

Saudi-owned outlet al Arabiya published a video on January 29 that showed the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) inside the underground Lebanese Hezbollah "Imad-4" missile facility near Wadi Jilou, southeast of Tyre. [56] The facility contained vehicles and living quarters. [57] Hezbollah released footage in August 2024 that showed underground tunnels and missile launch sites at the facility. [58] This operation is noteworthy given the historic inability and reluctance of the LAF to confront Hezbollah. [59]

Lebanese media reported on January 29 the IDF moved northwestward from Houla, southeastern Lebanon, toward Wadi Saluki, Majdal Selm, Bani Hayyan, Tallouseh, and Qabrikha. [60] Hezbollah-affiliated media separately reported that the IDF moved toward an LAF position in Mays al Jabal. [61] Lebanese media reported Israel vehicles moved from Taybeh towards Qantara. [62]

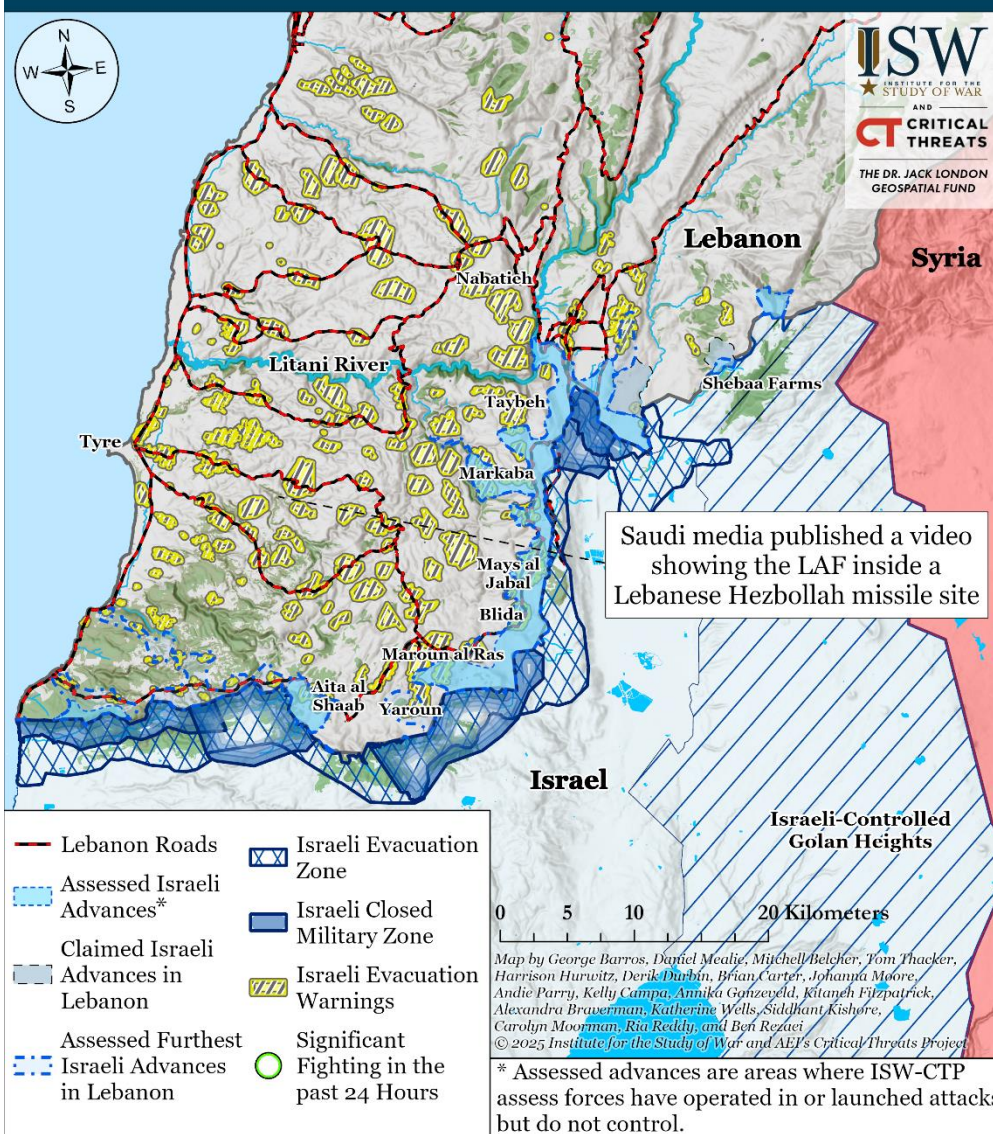
Lebanese media reported that the IDF detonated explosives in Kfar Kila, Odaisseh, Mays al Jabal, Markaba, and between Taybeh and Odaisseh. [63]

Lebanese media reported on January 29 that the IDF Air Force conducted drone strikes around Bani Hayan, Majdal Salem, and Yohmor, southeastern Lebanon. [64] Lebanese media separately reported two Israeli airstrikes around Wadi Saluki and Tallouseh, southern Lebanon. [65]

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) mourned a fighter killed in an engagement with the IDF in southern Lebanon. [66] The LAF took over a former PFLP center near Tripoli on January 25. [67]

Reported Israeli Operations in Lebanon

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West Bank

The IDF continued its counterterrorism operation in Jenin and Tulkarm governorates on January 28. The IDF has killed 18 fighters and arrested 60 additional fighters since January 21.[68] Israeli forces have also destroyed over 150 improvised explosive devices (IED).[69] The IDF arrested nine suspects for their participation in pro-Hamas celebrations for the released Palestinian prisoners.[70] Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades attacked Israeli forces in Jenin and Tulkarm with IEDs and small arms.[71]

PIJ, Hamas, and the “Youth of Revenge and Liberation” claimed that they fired small arms and detonated IEDs in a combined operation targeting Israeli forces in Jenin on January 28.[72] PIJ announced the formation of a joint operation room with Hamas and the al Aqsa

Martyrs' Brigades in the West Bank on January 22.[73] The joint operations room has claimed five attacks targeting the IDF thus far.[74]

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said on January 29 that the IDF will remain in Jenin refugee camp after “Operation Iron Wall” is done to “ensure the terror will not return” during his visit to Jenin refugee camp.[75]

Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

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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