

Iran Update, January 6, 2025

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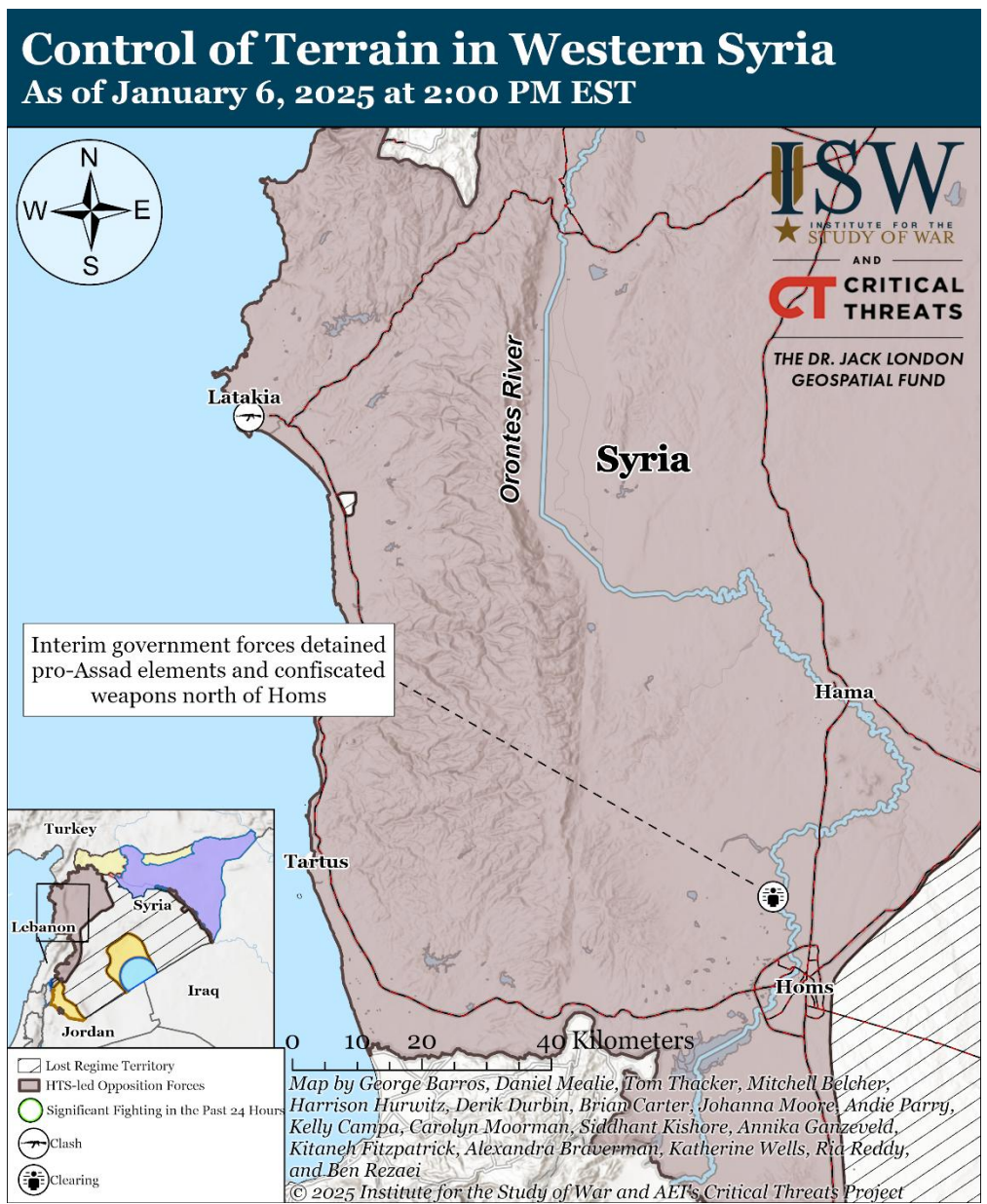
Information Cutoff: 2:00pm ET

Iran appears to be feeling more vulnerable after the fall of the Assad regime, Israeli military action against Iranian air defenses and missile production, and the defeats suffered by Hamas and Hezbollah. Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Spokesperson Brigadier General Ali Mohammad Naeini told the *Financial Times* that Iran has doubled the number of military drills this year “in response to the evolving threat landscape” and they have “expanded participation of brigades engaged in realistic operations.”[1] These increases in the scope and quantity of Iranian military exercises indicate that Iran feels increasingly vulnerable after the setbacks it suffered in the October 7 War and after the fall of the Assad regime. Naeini also announced that the IRGC and Artesh will conduct 30 joint land, air, and naval exercises in six western and southern provinces until the end of the Iranian year in mid-March. Naeini specified that maritime exercises will start at the end of this week with a large naval parade in the Strait of Hormuz at the end of February, to unveil new equipment.[2] Khatam ol Anbia Joint Air Defense Headquarters Commander Brigadier General Ghadir Rahimzadeh separately stated that there will be a nationwide joint air defense exercise in the vicinity of sensitive centers “with new and unknown systems” in the next few days.[3]

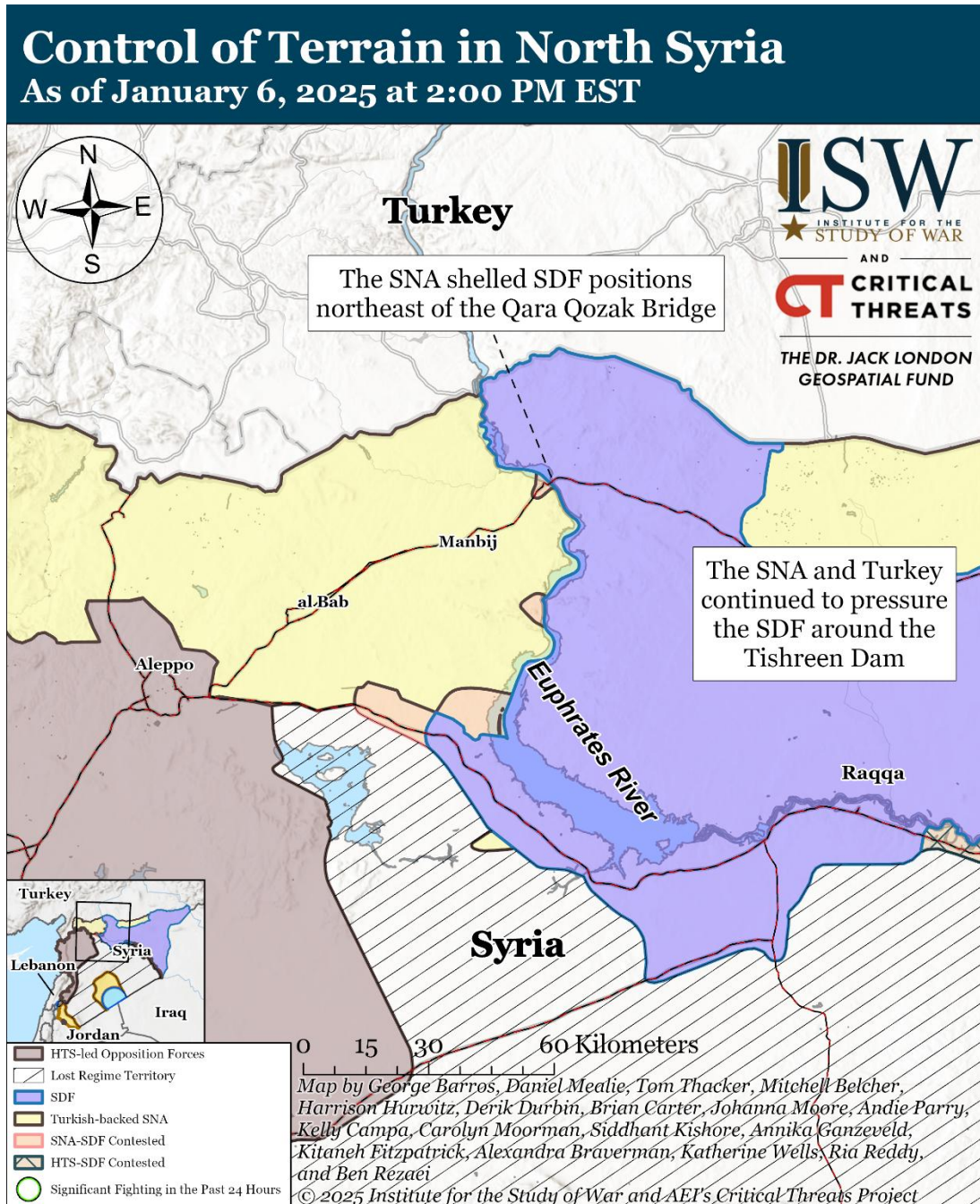
The Syrian Resistance Movement, which announced its existence in December 2024, is likely a pro-Assad armed group and has begun to frame its operations in Assadist language. The Syrian Resistance Movement acknowledged that Sunni fighters conducted an attack on January 5 (see below for details), and added that it is a multi-sectarian movement.[4] It also framed itself as a protector of the “Syrian people” against “terrorist gangs” and “foreign mercenaries,” which is similar to the language employed by Assadist propaganda outlets before the fall of the regime.[5] The group also uses the flag of the Assad regime. The group has employed sectarian narratives in an attempt to undermine the HTS-led coalition, but this is also consistent with the Assad regime’s propaganda strategy, which sought to portray the HTS and other majority Sunni opposition forces as inherently sectarian.[6] CTP-ISW previously noted that growing conflict between HTS and minority and opposition groups would fuel sectarian tensions, drive an escalation cycle, and risk destabilizing Syria further.[7]

The Syrian Resistance Movement also claimed its first attack targeting HTS-led interim government forces in coastal Syria on January 5, marking the first time that an organized group has claimed an attack against the HTS-led government.[8] The Syria Resistance Movement claimed that it ambushed interim government forces conducting security patrols in al

Awaina, Latakia City.[9] This is the first attack claimed by the Syrian Resistance Movement since the group announced its armed opposition to the interim government on December 29.[10] Interim government forces have clashed with pro-Assad remnants in other parts of the country, but this is the first attack claimed by an organized opposition group.[11] Local sources reported that former pro-regime militias recruited and armed by the Assad regime (also known as Shabiha) targeted the forces with an improvised explosive device.[12] The attack killed two interim government forces, including a Jaysh al Izza battalion commander.[13] Jaysh al Izza is subordinated to HTS as part of the Fateh Mubin operations room that overthrew the Assad regime.[14] The Syrian Resistance Movement said its attack was a response to the interim government’s clearing operations in Homs City, which have gone on for four days.[15] The interim government announced that the Homs operations had ended after achieving their goals on January 6.[16] The Syrian Resistance Movement had accused HTS-led forces of sectarian targeting during the operations in Homs and in other cities.[17]



The SNA and Turkey continued offensive operations against the SDF in northern Syria on January 6. The SDF conducted a series of drone strikes targeting SNA vehicles and positions along the frontline northeast of the Tishreen Dam on January 5 and January 6.[18] The drone strikes likely supported the SDF Manbij Military Council as it engaged SNA forces north of the Tishreen Dam. The head of the SDF media center reported that Turkish forces supported the SNA with artillery shelling and drone strikes.[19] SNA artillery also shelled SDF positions on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River near Jaada, which is approximately 4km north of the eastern side of the Qara Qozak Bridge.[20] Local Arab anti-SDF social media accounts said that the SDF still controlled the Tishreen Dam on the Euphrates River, and Maskanah, in Aleppo Province, on January 6.[21]



Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan reiterated that the “eradication” of the “Kurdish YPG militia” is “imminent” during a joint press conference with Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi on January 6.[22] Turkish officials have repeatedly emphasized that it will destroy the “YPG” militia, which is a euphemism for the SDF.[23] Turkey has been shelling SDF positions throughout northeastern Syria since the fall of the regime.[24] Turkey more recently increased airstrikes and artillery shelling targeting likely SDF supply lines closer to the battlefields along the Euphrates River.[25] Turkish drones struck SDF positions near the Tishreen Dam on January 6, for example.[26]

Key Takeaways:

- **Armed Pro-Assad Opposition to the HTS-led Government:** The Syrian Resistance Movement, which announced its existence in December 2024, is likely a pro-Assad armed group and has begun to frame its operations in Assadist language. The group also claimed its first attack targeting HTS-led interim government forces in coastal Syria on January 5, marking the first time that an organized group has claimed an attack against the HTS-led government.
- **Iranian Regional Policy:** Iran appears to be feeling more vulnerable after the fall of the Assad regime, Israeli military action against Iranian air defenses and missile production, and the defeats suffered by Hamas and Hezbollah. An IRGC spokesperson said that Iran doubled the number of military drills this year “in response to the evolving threat landscape” and they have “expanded participation of brigades engaged in realistic operations.”
- **Northern Syria:** The SNA and Turkey continued offensive operations against the SDF in northern Syria on January 6. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan reiterated that the “eradication” of the “Kurdish YPG militia” is “imminent” amid increasing Turkish interdiction strikes against the SDF.

Reported Control of Terrain in Syria

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

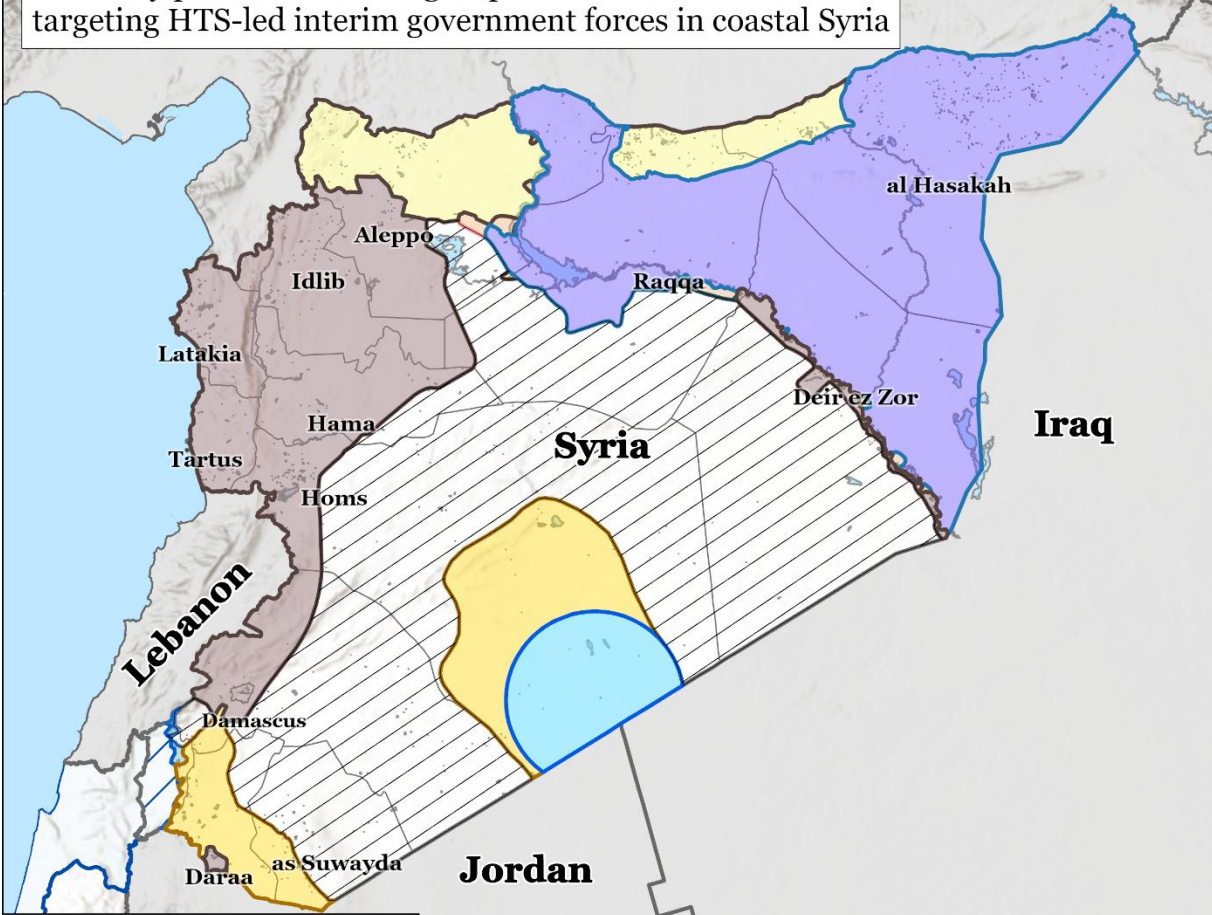


Turkey



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A likely pro-Assad armed group conducted its first attack targeting HTS-led interim government forces in coastal Syria



- HTS-led Opposition Forces
- Lost Regime Territory
- Turkish-backed SNA
- SDF
- Al Tanf Deconfliction Zone
- Unidentified Opposition Groups
- SNA-SDF Contested
- HTS-SDF Contested
- Israel Defense Forces

0 50 100 200 Kilometers

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Tom Thacker, Mitchell Belcher, Harrison Hurwitz, Derik Durbin, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Carolyn Moorman, Siddhant Kishore, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, Ria Reddy, and Ben Rezaei
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The Unidentified Opposition Group layer displays areas previously assigned as Regime-controlled where ISW now assesses that local opposition groups have established control beyond mere presence. Inclusion of a town under this layer does not imply that ISW assesses that the town is part of any organized frontline. ISW cannot assess with confidence that these opposition groups control areas between these towns, however.

Syria

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Reestablish ground lines of communication from Syria to Lebanon
- Reestablish Iranian influence in Syria

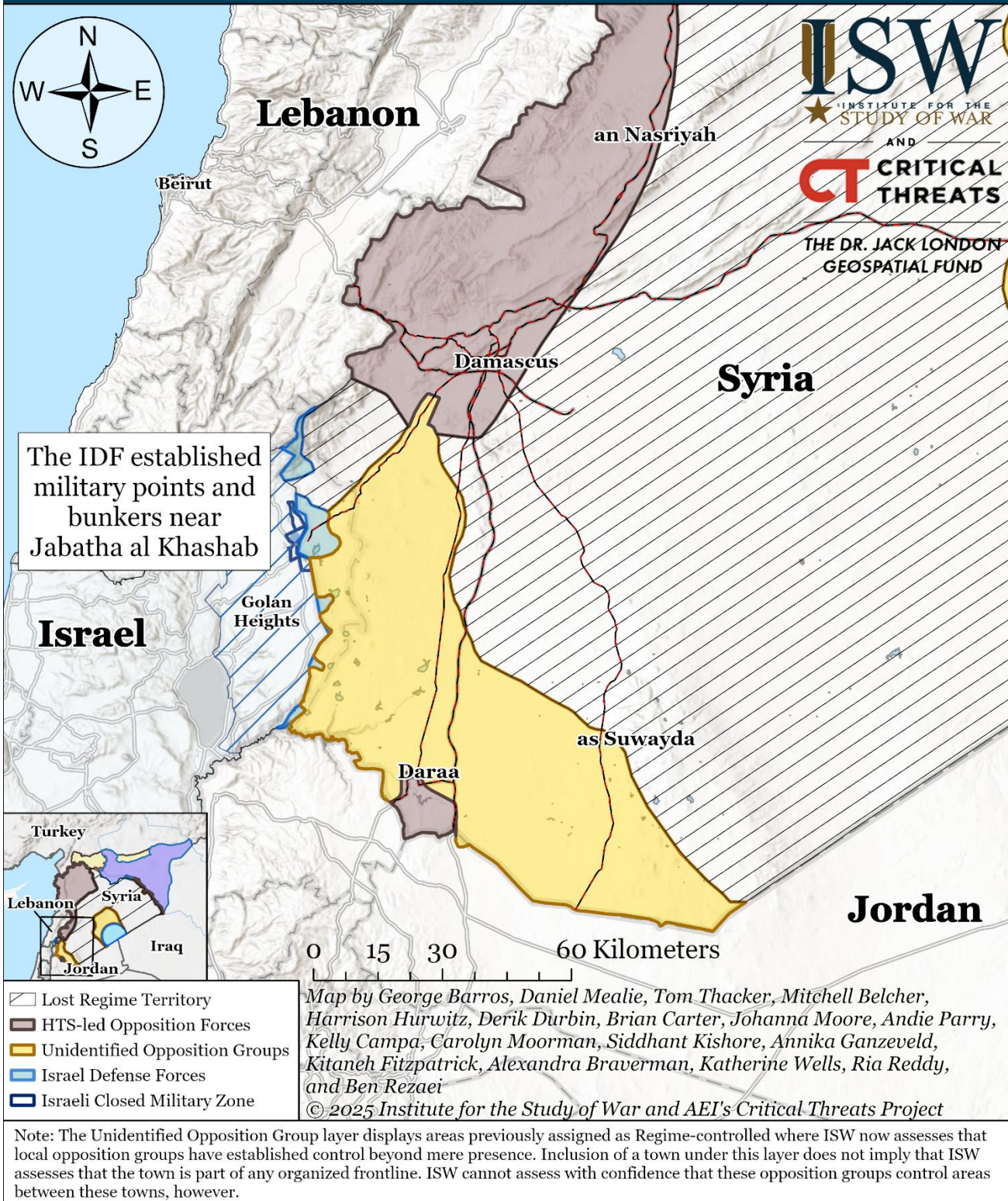
Syrian interim government officials continued their second regional tour and traveled to Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on January 6.^[27] Syrian Interim Foreign Affairs Minister Asad al Shaibani, Interim Defense Minister Marhaf Abu Qasra, and Interim Intelligence head Anas Khattab met with Emirati Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed. Zayed expressed support for Syria during the meeting.^[28]

Iranian media recirculated Iraqi reports that the HTS-led government took action against misconduct by pro-HTS forces near Sayyida Zeinab shrine in southern Damascus. Iraqi media outlet Baghdad Today reported on January 6 that HTS withdrew 90 international fighters from the Sayyida Zeinab shrine due to misconduct and an increase in complaints against the fighters.^[29] A regime-affiliated Iranian outlet recirculated the report. The Syrian sources stated that HTS withdrew these forces following a published video with “sectarian content.” The sources added that HTS has “strictly ordered that no images or videos from inside the holy sites be published” because of their negative impact on sectarian tensions.

Local Syrian media posted the footage to X (Twitter) on January 6 purportedly showed Syrians in al Sanamayn City, northern Daraa Province, calling for the HTS-led government to hold a local group led by Mohsen al Haymad “accountable for committing violations against them” during a protest.^[30] A reportedly former regime-affiliated militia led by Mohsen al Haymad clashed with other unspecified local factions in al Sanamayn City between January 2 and 4.^[31] Haymad’s group and the other unspecified local factions agreed to a ceasefire and to hand over heavy weapons to HTS forces, following the HTS-led Department of Military Operations deployment to the area on January 5.^[32] HTS-controlled forces will remain in al Sanamayn to set up checkpoints and maintain security within the city following this agreed-upon ceasefire.^[33]

Opposition Advances in Southwest Syria

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



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 media reported on January 6 that the Iraqi government redeployed unidentified Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) brigades from the Syria-Iraq border.[34] An "informed source" told an Iraqi media outlet that the PMF brigades and Iranian-backed Iraqi militias will be "fully redeployed" to the border following the "tactical measure," which could refer to any number of military activities, including reorganization or military activity elsewhere in Iraq. This reported PMF redeployment follows Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Commander Esmail Ghaani's meetings with senior Iraqi officials and militia commanders to discuss "restructuring" the PMF on January 5.[35] An informed source based in Anbar Province separately told Iraqi media that unidentified Iraqi police backfilled the PMF units and took control of security checkpoints in al Qaim, along the Syria-Iraq border, after the Kataib Hezbollah-affiliated PMF 13th Brigade (Liwa al Tufuf) withdrew.[36] The Kataib Hezbollah-affiliated PMF 19th Brigade (Ansar Allah al Awfiya) remains in al Qaim.[37]

Ghaani told the Iraqi prime minister that Iran does not want Iraq to become involved in any conflict with Syria, according to an "informed source" speaking to Iraqi media. Ghaani's position is unsurprising due to the reality that many of the Iranian-backed Iraqi militia formations that were in Syria will need to reorganize and re-equip after a very rapid and presumably hectic withdrawal from Syria.[38] [39] This reorganization and re-equipping process may take significant time to accomplish, and it cannot be undertaken if Iraqi militias engage in even low-level border skirmishes with HTS-led units. Iran is presently concerned with the threat of instability in Iraq, and Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are key to Iranian efforts to maintain stability in Iraq.[40][41] It is nonetheless notable that Iranian officials appear willing to stoke instability in Syria to weaken the HTS-led interim government. This suggests that Iran's desire to prevent Iraqi militias from antagonizing the new HTS-led government is not necessarily permanent.[42]

Arabian Peninsula

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Harden the Houthi regime against internal dissent in Houthi-controlled areas
- Destroy the anti-Houthi opposition to control all of Yemen
- Erode Israeli will to continue the war in the Gaza Strip

Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Sarea claimed on January 6 that the Houthis tried to preempt alleged US airstrikes by firing four drones and two cruise missiles at the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier in the northern Red Sea.[43] US Central Command (CENTCOM) has not confirmed the attack at the time of this writing.

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 conducted clearing operations in the northern Gaza Strip on January 6. A video posted by a Palestinian journalist showed an Israeli bulldozer demolishing infrastructure in Jabalia refugee camp.[44]

Hamas claimed that it detonated an improvised explosive device (IED) and an explosively formed penetrator (EFP) targeting two Israeli tanks in western Jabalia refugee camp on January 6.[45] The IDF said that Palestinian militias separately injured two Israeli soldiers from the 933rd Infantry Brigade (162nd Division) in the northern Gaza Strip on January 6.[46]

The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired rockets targeting the IDF along the Netzarim Corridor on January 6.[47]

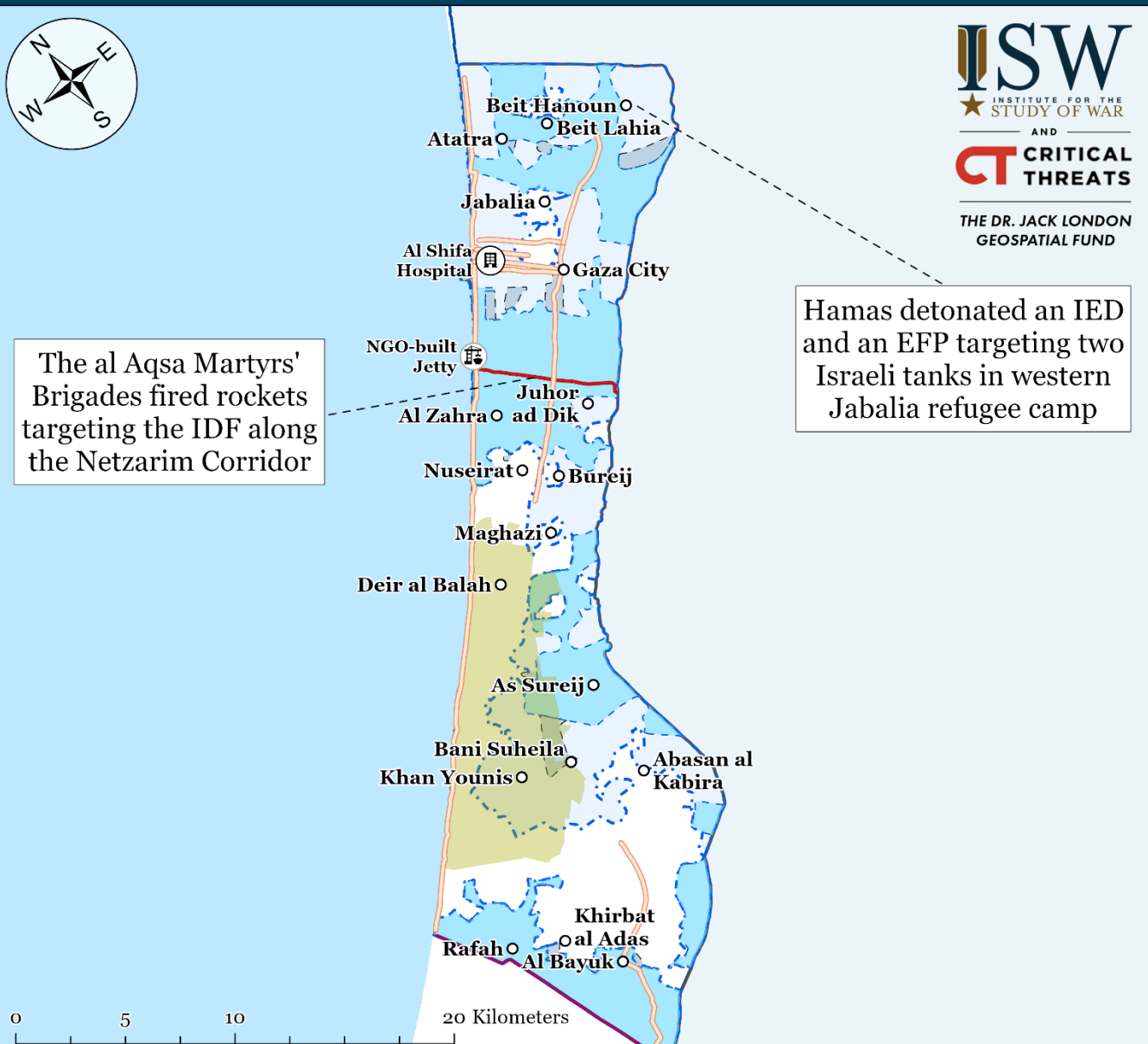
Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

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



The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired rockets targeting the IDF along the Netzarim Corridor

Hamas detonated an IED and an EFP targeting two Israeli tanks in western Jabalia refugee camp



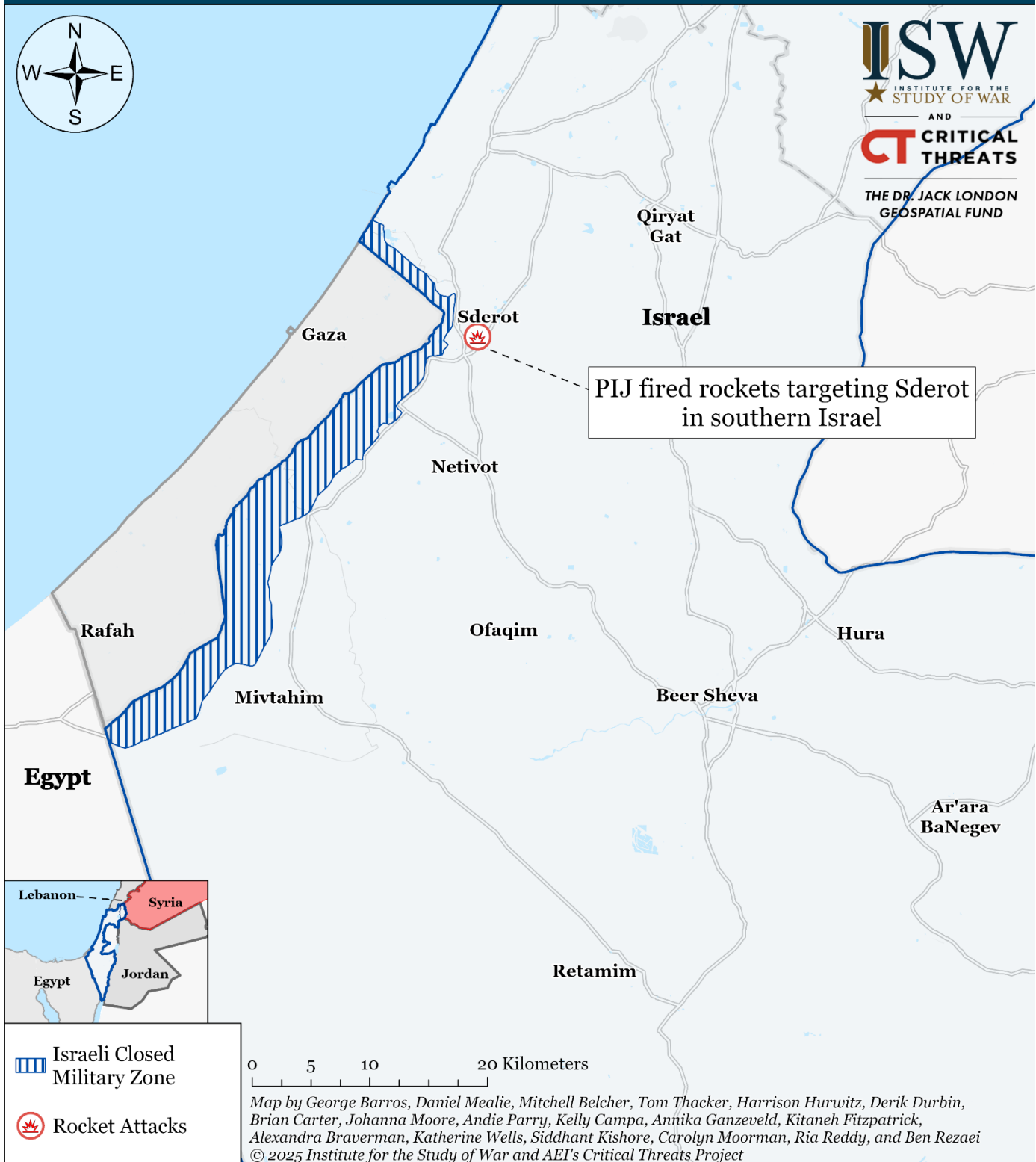
Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Tom Thacker, Harrison Hurwitz, Derik Durbin, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, Siddhant Kishore, Carolyn Moorman, Ria Reddy, and Ben Rezaei - © 2025 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		

* 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

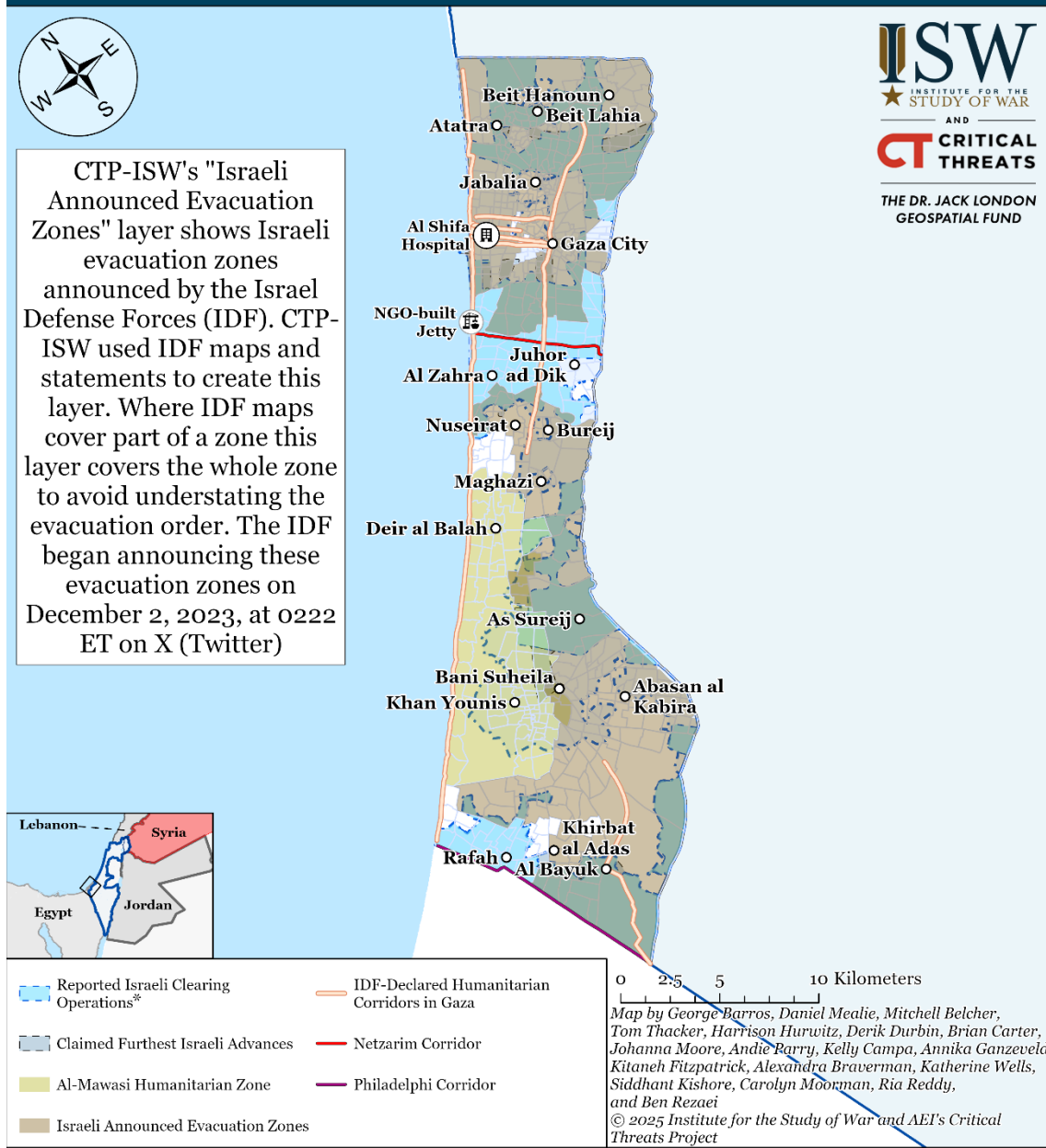
Attacks into Israel from the Gaza Strip

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



Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fired rockets targeting Sderot in southern Israel on January 6.[48] The IDF detected three rockets and intercepted one. The other two rockets struck Sderot and caused minor damage to a house.[49] PIJ fired the rockets from Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip, according to an Israeli Army Radio correspondent.[50] Palestinian militias have conducted almost daily indirect fire attacks targeting southern Israel from the Gaza Strip over the past two weeks.[51]

Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip As of January 6, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



CTP-ISW's "Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones" layer shows Israeli evacuation zones announced by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). CTP-ISW used IDF maps and statements to create this layer. Where IDF maps cover part of a zone this layer covers the whole zone to avoid understating the evacuation order. The IDF began announcing these evacuation zones on December 2, 2023, at 0222 ET on X (Twitter)



- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridors in Gaza
- Netzarim Corridor
- Philadelphi Corridor

0 2.5 5 10 Kilometers
 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, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, Siddhant Kishore, Carolyn Moomman, Ria Reddy, and Ben Rezaei
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* 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

Hamas leaked the names of 34 Israeli hostages that Israel demanded as part of a ceasefire agreement but has not yet shared the status of these hostages with Israeli officials.[52] A senior Hamas official leaked the list, which includes women, elderly men, and young children.[53] Hamas indicated that it would release these 34 hostages as part of the ceasefire agreement, according to a Hamas representative speaking to *The New York Times*. [54] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office reported on January 6 that Israeli officials sent an updated list of 34 hostages to the mediators and demanded that Hamas disclose their status.[55] Hamas refused to provide any status updates on the hostages, saying it would not do so “without getting something in return.”[56] It remains unclear whether all 34 hostages on the leaked list are alive.

Lebanon

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and UNIFIL (the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) continued deploying to southeastern Lebanon on January 6. Lebanese media reported on January 5 that a UNIFIL patrol removed an earthy berm placed by the IDF at the southern entrance to Burj al Muluk.[57] The LAF reported on January 5 that an LAF patrol re-opened roads that the IDF had closed near Taybeh.[58]

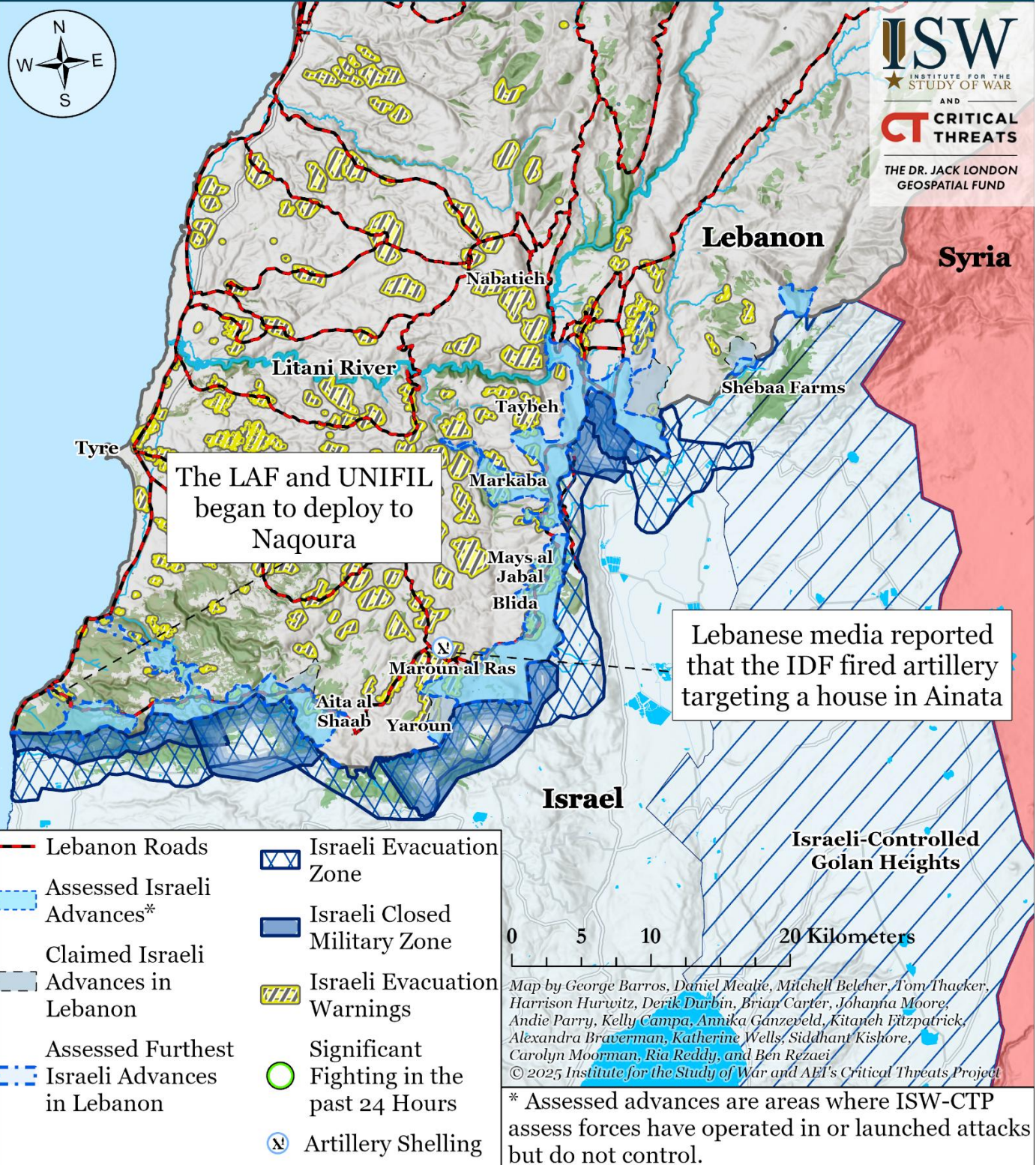
Lebanese media reported that the IDF shelled a house in Ainata and demolished unidentified buildings in Aitaroun, southeastern Lebanon on January 6.[59]

Lebanese media reported that the IDF demolished infrastructure east of Tyre Harfa, southwestern Lebanon, on January 6.[60] Israeli forces demolished infrastructure in Tayr Harfa on January 5.[61]

The LAF and UNIFIL backfilled IDF forces in Naqoura, southwestern Lebanon, on January 6.[62] Lebanese media reported that the LAF backfilled the IDF in Naqoura and nearby Hamoul following the IDF’s withdrawal.[63] Lebanese media reported that the IDF demolished unidentified buildings in Naqoura on January 6 before the LAF-UNIFIL deployment.[64] Israeli media reported on January 5 that the IDF would soon withdraw from Naqoura in advance of an LAF deployment.[65]

Reported Israeli Operations in Lebanon

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



US special envoy Amos Hochstein discussed ceasefire implementation mechanisms with LAF Army Commander General Joseph Aoun and ceasefire supervisory committee head US Army Major General Jasper Jeffers in Lebanon on January 6.[66] An Israeli Army Radio correspondent reported that Hochstein aimed to extend the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire by 30 more days to enable the LAF to fully backfill departing Israeli forces.[67] Hochstein said on January 6 that the IDF will continue to withdraw from southern Lebanon until the IDF completely withdraws from Lebanon.[68] Senior Israeli officials indicated on January 5 that the IDF will extend its deployment in southern Lebanon if the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire agreement conditions are not met by January 26.[69]

West Bank

Three unspecified Palestinian fighters from Jenin killed three Israelis and wounded eight others in a shooting attack targeting vehicles on Route 55 in Qalqilya Governorate, northern West Bank, on January 6.[70] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu approved new, unspecified "offensive and defensive" security measures in the West Bank following a security assessment after the attack with senior Israeli defense officials.[71] Netanyahu also approved operations to "apprehend" the three fighters involved in the attack. Israeli media reported that Israeli security forces sought to detain two of the fighters on suspicion of involvement in previous terrorist activity, but the third fighter was not known to Israeli authorities.[72] No Palestinian militia has claimed responsibility for the attack at this time of writing.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces continued their operation to regain security control of the Jenin refugee camp from Palestinian militias on January 6. This operation has lasted for over one month.[73] Palestinian Islamic Jihad's (PIJ) Jenin Battalion fired small arms and detonated an IED targeting "enemy forces" withdrawing from the entrance of Jenin city on January 6.[74] The IDF operated in Meithulan, approximately 12 kilometers south of Jenin refugee camp, on January 5.[75] Barrons reported on January 6 that militia fighters put up metal barricades to block PA forces from entering the camp. PA forces are stationed outside the entrance to Jenin camp.[76]

Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

Iranian Parliament's Internal Affairs and Councils Committee member Ali Asghar Nakhairad announced on January 6 that Parliament has halted its impeachment of the oil minister Mohsen Paknejad.[77] Parliament began Paknejad's impeachment process on January 4.[78] Nakhairad stated that Parliament's Energy Commission is still conducting an interagency investigation over violations regarding power plant fuel shortages and will present its findings to Parliament.[79] President Masoud Pezeshkian separately issued an order on January 4 to establish an Energy Optimization and Strategic Management Organization to accelerate the implementation of the National Plan to Improve Energy Imbalance.[80] Pezeshkian's government continues to prioritize fuel shortages.[81]

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