

Iran Update



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Information Cutoff: January 31, 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.

Iran is financially supporting the military reconstitution of Lebanese Hezbollah. Israel submitted a complaint to the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire committee, claiming that Iranian envoys are delivering "tens of millions of dollars in cash" to Rafic Hariri International Airport in Beirut to fund the revival of Hezbollah, according to an unspecified US defense official representing the ceasefire committee and people familiar with the content of the complaint.[1] Western media reported in December 2024 that Iran may seek to establish a new "hub" in the Beirut airport for military shipments to Hezbollah.[2] Lebanese airport security forces searched an Iranian Mahan Air flight in Beirut on suspicion of transporting funds to Hezbollah in early January.[3] The *Wall Street Journal* also reported that 28 branches of al Qard al Hassan—one of Hezbollah's main banking and financial arms—have resumed operations.[4] The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has frequently struck al Qard al Hassan branches in Lebanon in recent months to isolate Hezbollah's financial networks. Unspecified sources familiar with Israel's complaint to the ceasefire committee stated that Israel accused Turkish citizens of moving money for Hezbollah from Istanbul to Beirut by air.

Israeli media reported in December 2024 that Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) leader Ahmad al Shara decided to prevent Iranian civilian and military flights from transiting Syrian airspace, possibly explaining why Iran may now rely on access from Turkey.[5] Iran has historically moved materiel via Syria. CTP-ISW previously assessed that loss of access to Syrian airspace would severely limit Iran's ability to rearm Hezbollah and require Iran to establish other access routes.[6] Iranian cash deliveries alone will likely not be enough to reconstitute the group militarily without additional arms supplies,

however. Shara's decision—if true—to cut off Iran's supply route to Hezbollah via Syria will still make it difficult for Iran to help Hezbollah reconstitute militarily.

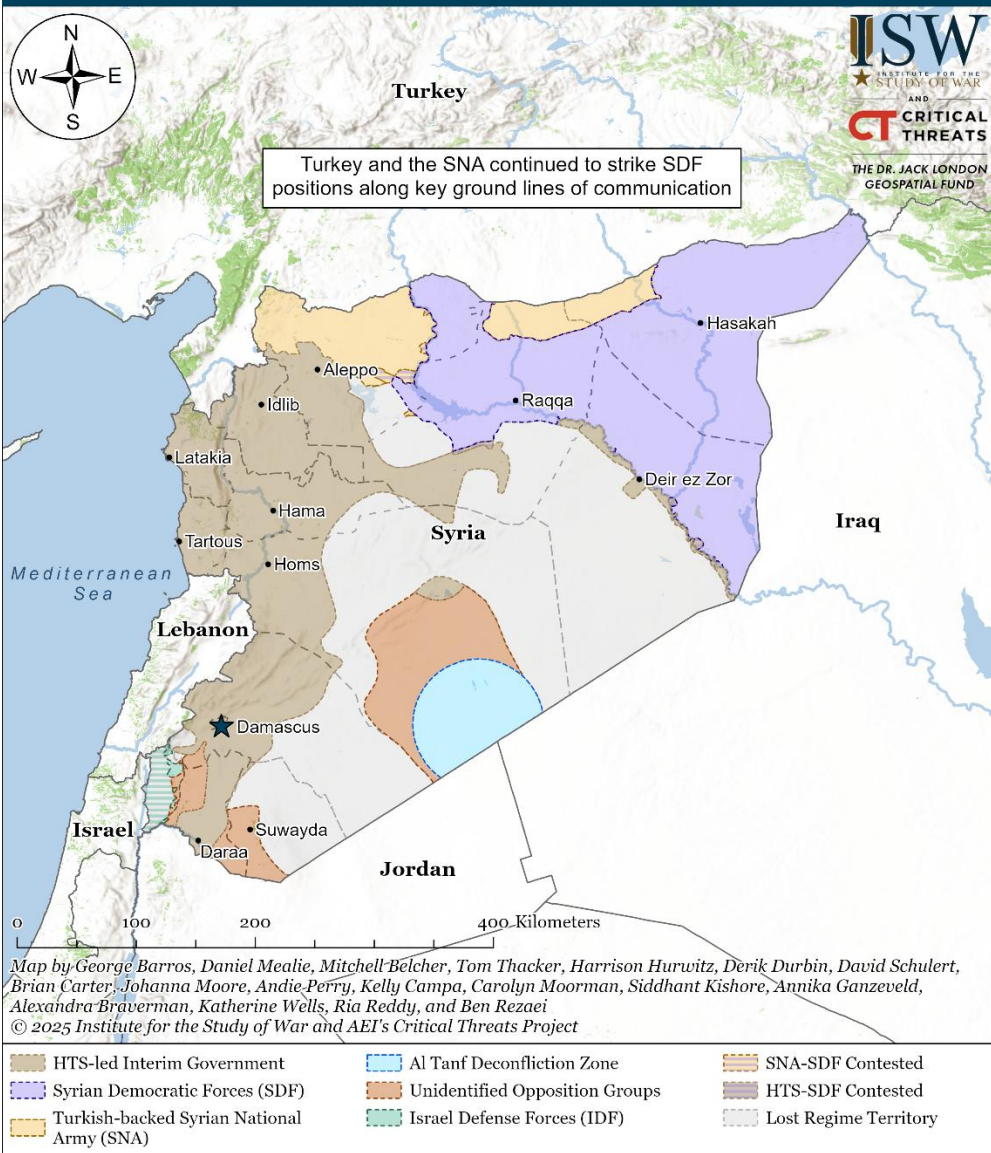
Hamas leadership is privately debating what role the group should play in the post-war Gaza Strip, according to *The Economist*.[7] Hardliners in the group reportedly seek to prioritize the reconstitution of Hamas' military while selecting a group of technocrats to govern the strip. *The Economist* reported that other options that Hamas faces include trying to return to the pre-war status quo in the strip or pursuing a more pragmatic political reconciliation with Fatah, which governs the West Bank. Hamas and Fatah split from one another in 2007.[8]

Hamas' Gaza Strip-based leadership will likely lean toward prioritizing military reconstitution. Mohammad Sinwar—the brother of Yahya Sinwar—has taken control of Hamas forces in recent months and ignored the Hamas decision to lead the group through a leadership council in early January.[9] Sinwar, who is among Hamas' most hardline elements, thus appears unlikely to respond positively to any decision from external Hamas leadership to pursue a strategy that he opposes.

Israel and the European Union are preparing to reopen the Rafah border crossing to facilitate the exit of sick and wounded Palestinians from the Gaza Strip.[10] The Rafah crossing has been closed since May 2024. An Israeli security source said that the Rafah crossing will only be used for Palestinians to exit the Gaza Strip and will not support entries at this time.[11] Palestinians must undergo a security check by Israel's Shin Bet before exiting via the Rafah crossing.[12] The IDF withdrew from the Rafah crossing to the neighboring Philadelphi corridor on January 31 and will maintain a presence around the crossing.[13] An Israeli security source said that the IDF passed control of the Rafah crossing onto "foreign forces." The European Union redeployed the multinational EU Border Assistance Mission—an unarmed civilian force—to facilitate the movement of Palestinians via the Rafah crossing.[14] Israel will allow 50 wounded Palestinians, each escorted by three Israel-approved people, to exit through the crossing each day.[15] The Israeli Shin Bet and Egypt review and approve each person in advance.[16] Israel will allow wounded Hamas fighters who did not participate in the October 7 attack on Israel to exit into Egypt. The first group of wounded Palestinians will exit via the Rafah crossing on February 1.[17]

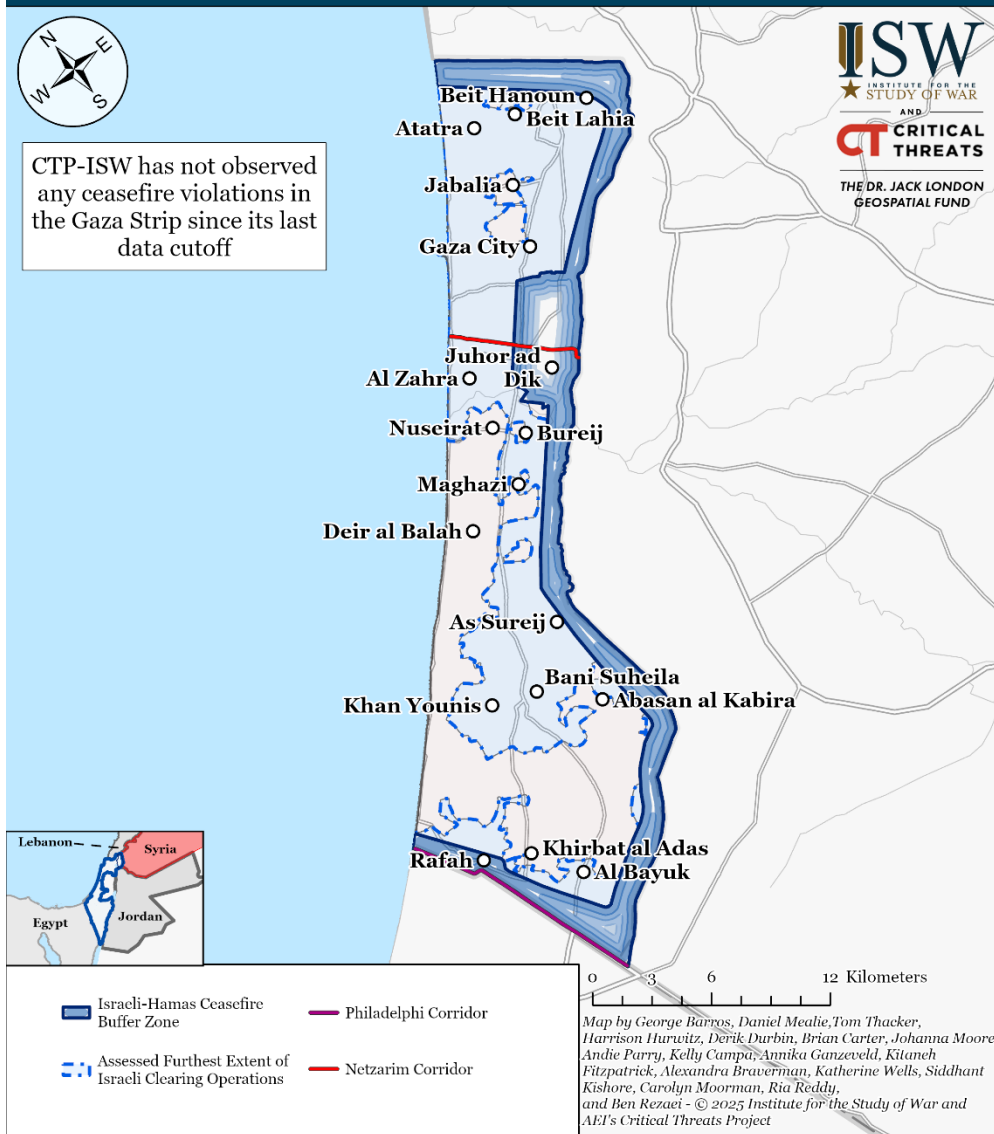
Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria

January 31, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



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 30.

Israel-Hamas Ceasefire Lines As of January 31, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Key Takeaways:

- **Lebanon:** Iran is financially supporting the military reconstitution of Lebanese Hezbollah. Israel claimed that Iran has sent tens of millions of US dollars to Beirut via commercial flights.
- **Gaza Strip:** Hamas leadership is privately debating what role the group should play in the post-war Gaza Strip.
- **Gaza Strip:** Israel and the European Union are preparing to reopen the Rafah border crossing to allow sick and wounded Palestinians to leave the Gaza Strip.

Syria

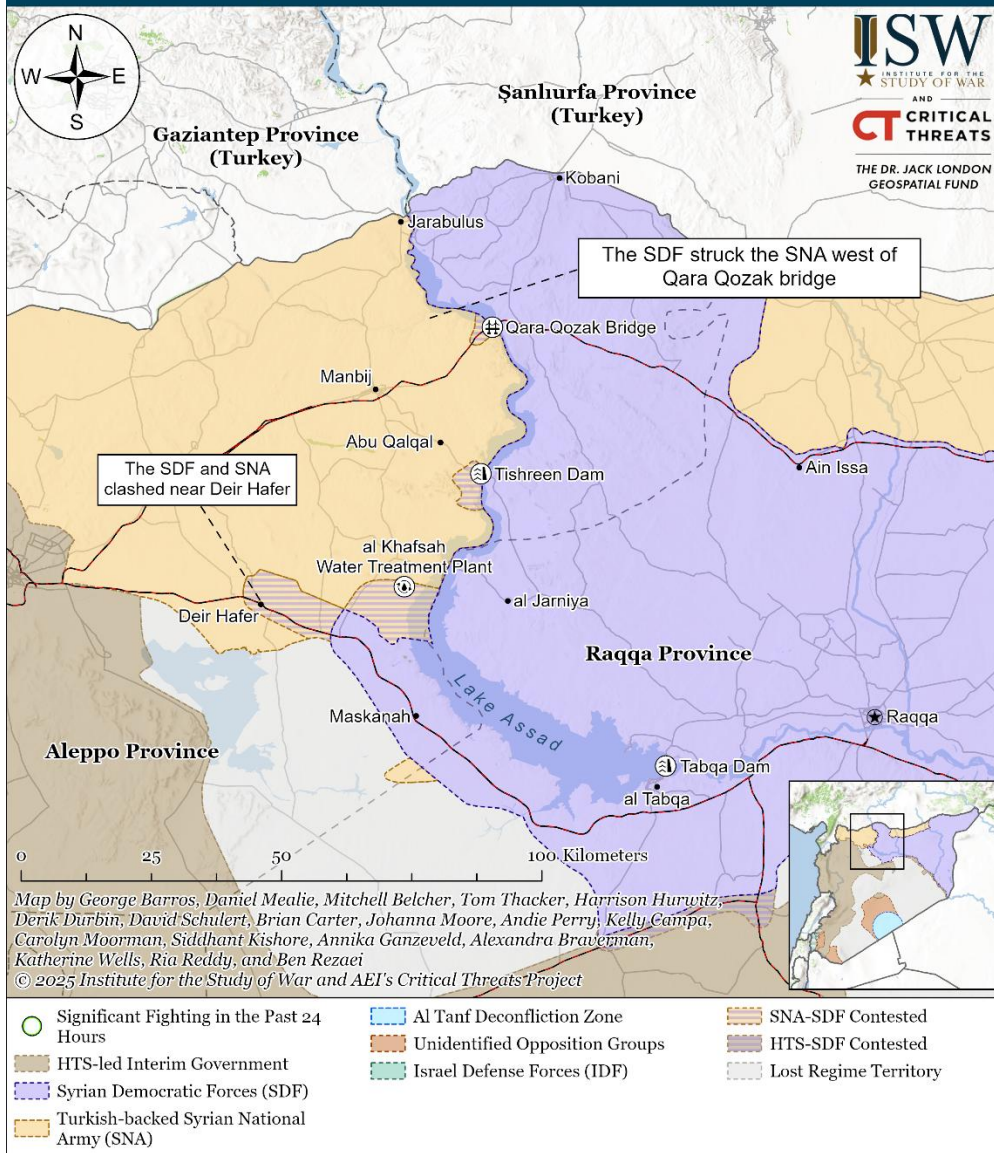
Turkey and the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) continued to strike Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) positions along key ground lines of communication on January 31. Anti-SDF media reported that Turkey and the SNA struck multiple SDF positions near Abu Rasin, north of Hasakah.[18] Turkey also reportedly struck SDF positions in the Tal Tamr countryside.[19] Anti-SDF media reported that the SNA struck SDF positions south of Tal Abyad.[20] CTP-ISW has previously assessed that Turkish and SNA attacks on SDF ground lines of communication are meant to interdict supplies and reinforcements from eastern Syria and isolate SDF forces at Qara Qozak bridge and Tishreen Dam.[21]

The SDF continued to engage the SNA and Turkey near the Qara Qozak bridge and Tishreen Dam since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on January 30. The SDF Martyr Haroun drone unit conducted at least three attacks targeting SNA fighters and equipment.[22] The SDF also attacked an SNA position in al Hawshriya, injuring three SNA fighters and damaging an armored vehicle.[23] The SDF reported that Turkey struck unspecified targets near Tishreen Dam on January 30.[24] Anti-SDF media claimed the SDF and the SNA engaged in small-arms combat near Deir Hafer on January 30.[25]

Syrian media reported on January 31 that the SDF began raids in several towns in Deir ez Zor Province, west of the Euphrates River.[26] The SDF has arrested defectors in recent weeks.[27]

The pro-Assad Syrian Popular Resistance claimed that its fighters have conducted five attacks targeting HTS over the past week.[28] The group claimed attacks in Lattakia, Aleppo, Deir ez Zor, and Damascus. CTP-ISW cannot independently verify these claims. The Syrian Popular Resistance announced in late December 2024 the launch of armed resistance against the HTS-led interim government.[29] The group has since claimed on multiple occasions that its fighters have attacked and killed interim government forces.[30] It remains unclear whether the group has had any real involvement in these attacks, however.

Assessed Control of Terrain around Manbij January 31, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Syrian media reported that the HTS-led Department of Military Operations began raids targeting drug and arms dealers in Qaytah and Jadiyah, Daraa Province, on January 31.[31] Daraa Province is a hub for drugs, particularly Captagon, and arms smuggling into Jordan and the Gulf states.[32]

The HTS-led Public Security Directorate arrested Atef Naguib, a key figure in the Assad regime, in Haffah on January 31.[33] Naguib was reportedly the head of the Political Security Branch during the Assad regime and a cousin of Bashar al Assad.[34] Syrian media reported that Naguib was caught hiding in Haffah, Latakia Governorate, after HTS-led forces conducted a two-week manhunt.[35] Syrian media reported that Naguib previously fled from Damascus and was attempting to be smuggled out of Syria prior to his arrest.[36] Director of the Public Security Directorate in Lattakia Mustafa Knefati reported that Naguib has been transferred to the interim government authorities.[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

An Iranian-backed Iraqi parliamentarian said that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias attacking US forces in Iraq is not “in the interest of the Iraqi people” on January 31.[38] Fatah Coalition parliamentarian Muktar al Moussawi added that the United States has no intention of withdrawing from Iraq. Iranian-backed militias and politicians have threatened to resume attacks targeting US forces in Iraq if the United States extends its presence past the September 2025 withdrawal date.[39] The United States and Iraq agreed in September 2024 that hundreds of US-led international coalition forces would withdraw from Iraq by September 2025 and that the remaining troops would withdraw by the end of 2026.[40] The Fatah Coalition is tied to the Iranian-backed Badr Organization.[41]

An Iraqi Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) official announced that the commission is unaware of whether the Sadrist movement will participate in the October 2025 parliamentary elections.[42] A source close to Iraqi Shia cleric Muqtada al Sadr claimed on January 13 that Sadr opposes the return of his political bloc—the Shia National Movement—to politics.[43] The Sadrist bloc’s withdrawal from Parliament in 2022 enabled the Iranian-backed Shia Coordination Framework to gain a majority in Parliament.[44]

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

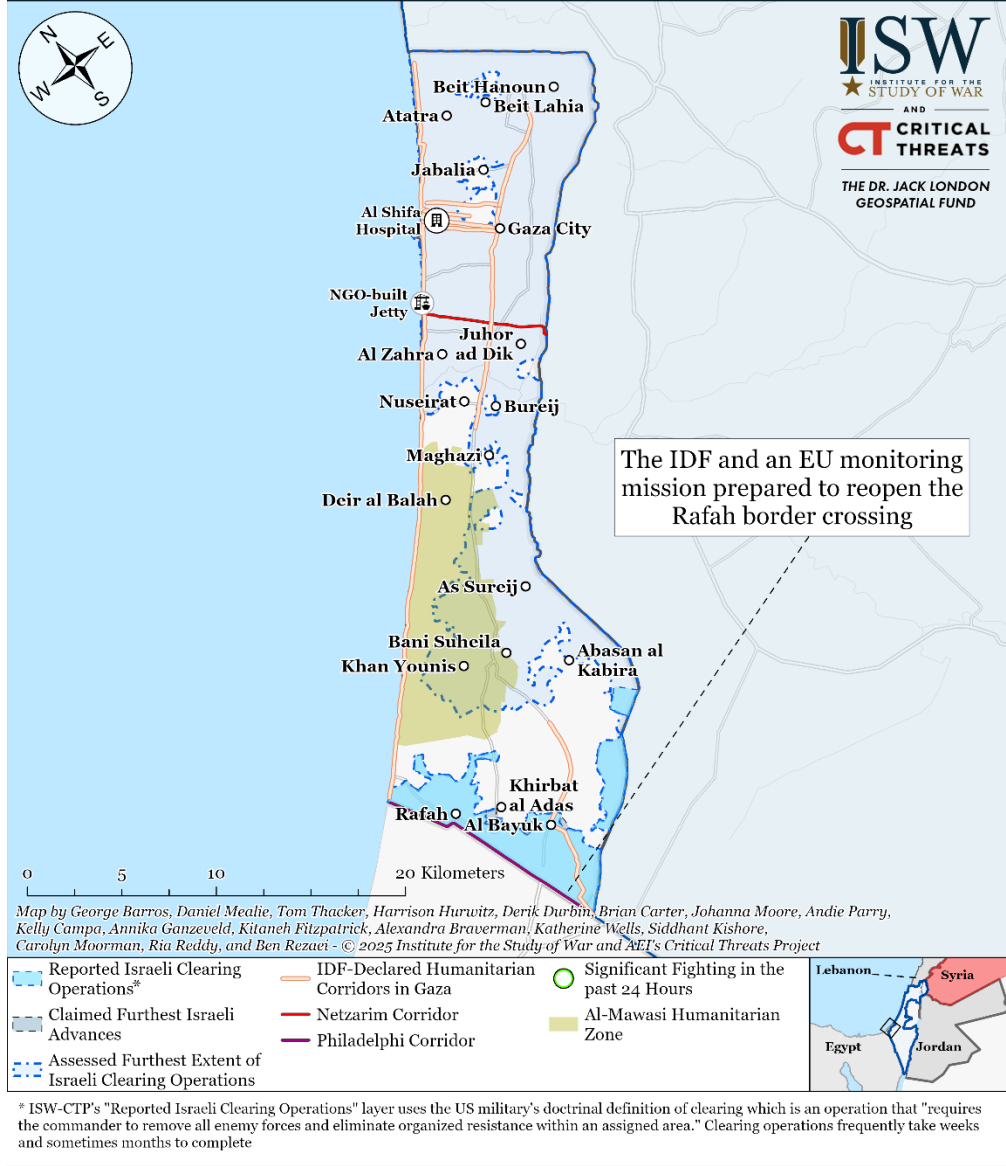
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- 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

Hundreds of Egyptians protested at the Rafah border crossing against US President Donald Trump’s recent call on Egypt and Jordan to accept Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip.[45] Reuters reported that Egyptian authorities approved the protest. Sources close to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi told Reuters that the government provided buses to facilitate the participation of people in this protest. Protesters waved Egyptian and Palestinian flags. Trump reiterated that Egypt and Jordan will accept Palestinian refugees on January 31.[46]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip
As of January 31, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Lebanon

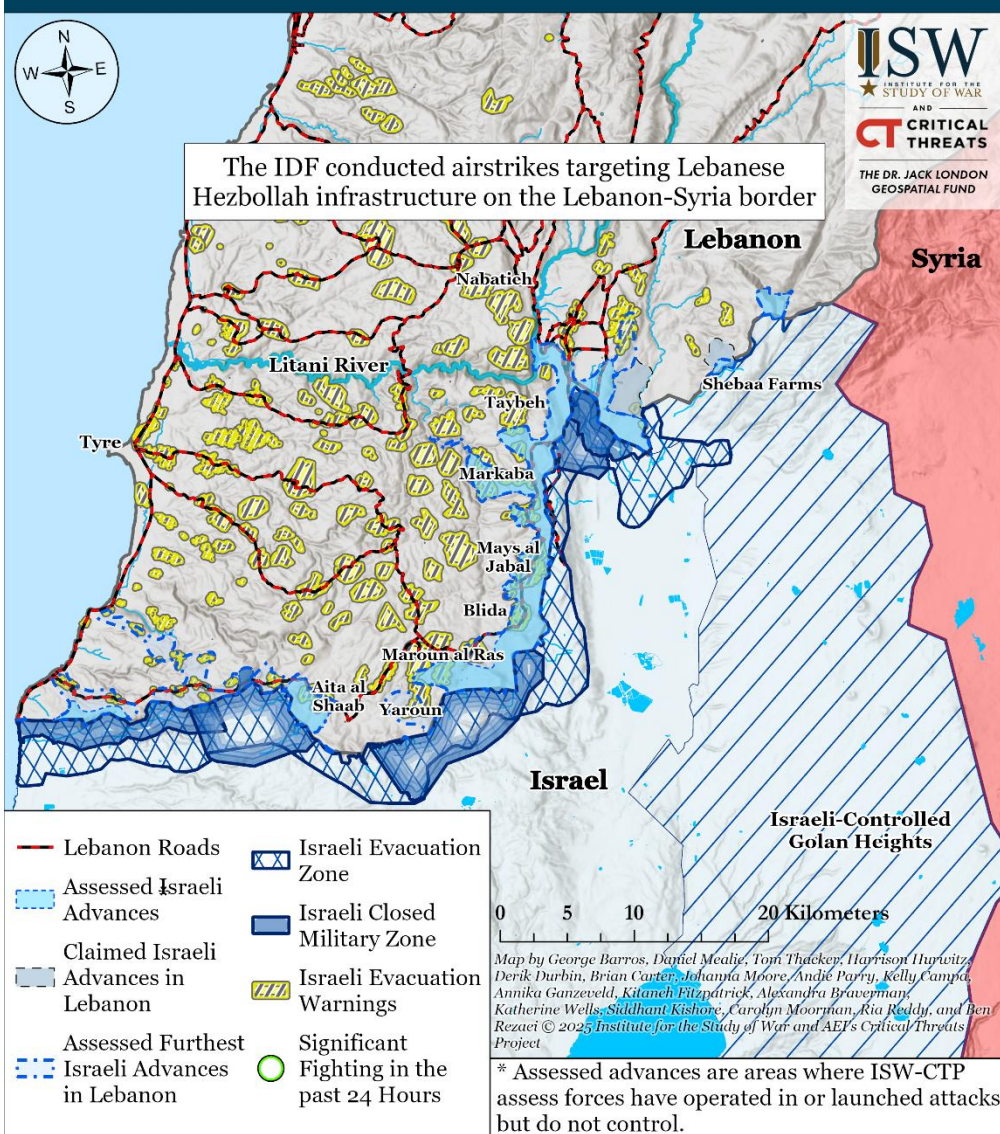
The IDF Air Force conducted airstrikes targeting Hezbollah infrastructure in Lebanon on January 31.[47] The IDF struck a Hezbollah military site with underground infrastructure for producing and developing weapons and Hezbollah weapons smuggling infrastructure on the Syria-Lebanon border.[48] Lebanese media reported the IDF struck Janta near the Lebanon-Syria border.[49] The IDF previously struck Hezbollah's largest precision missile production facility at the underground facility in Janta in November 2024.[50] Hezbollah used this facility to manufacture surface-to-surface missiles and weapons components and to store precision missiles.[51] Lebanese and Hezbollah-affiliated media separately reported an IDF airstrike targeting al Qasr on the Lebanon-Syria border and Jab al Ward border crossing near Hnaider.[52]

Lebanese media reported on January 31 that an individual conducted a vehicle ramming attack targeting a mourning procession in Sidon District.[53] Lebanese media identified the suspect in the ramming attack as Mohammad Kamil al Aqla. Lebanese authorities previously arrested and sentenced al Aqla in 2015 for his alleged affiliation with Fatah al Islam and al Nusra Front in Syria.[54] Mourners carried Hezbollah flags, indicating that the procession belonged to the Shiite community.[55] The last known ISIS-linked threat in Sidon District occurred in February 2015.[56]

Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) mourned a fighter on January 31 who died in Lebanon during clashes with the IDF.[57]

Reported Israeli Operations in Lebanon

As of January 31, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



West Bank

The IDF continued its counterterrorism operation in the West Bank on January 31. The IDF killed two Palestinian fighters, including a PIJ commander who killed an IDF soldier and injured five additional soldiers in the Jenin refugee camp on January 30.[58] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and PIJ attacked Israeli forces with small arms and improvised explosive devices (IED) in Jenin and Tulkarm governorates on January 30 and 31.[59]

Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref met with Kyrgyz Prime Minister Adylbek Kasymaliev on the sidelines of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) meeting in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on January 31.[60] Kasymaliev reaffirmed Kyrgyzstan's commitment to

closer ties with Iran and noted Iran’s increasing engagement within the EAEU. Aref emphasized Iran’s commitment to stronger relations with Kyrgyzstan and highlighted economic and transportation cooperation between the two countries.

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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