

Iran Update



**Ria Reddy, Katherine Wells, Kelly Campa, Johanna Moore, Carolyn Moorman,
Alexandra Braverman, and Annika Ganzeveld**

April 3, 2025

Information Cutoff 2:00pm ET

Iran is continuing to try to bolster its air defenses in preparation for a potential US or Israeli strike on Iran. Iran has built a new Ghadir phased-array radar in West Azerbaijan Province in northwestern Iran in recent months, according to commercially available satellite imagery.[1] An open-source analyst reported on April 2 that Iran also recently built two Ghadir radars in southern Iran near the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. The October 2024 Israel Defense Forces (IDF) strikes on Iran damaged two Ghadir radars in southwestern Iran.[2] The operational status of these radars is unclear. Iran has conducted several air defense exercises in recent months, particularly around Iranian nuclear facilities.[3] The construction of new radars and recent exercises reflect Iran's efforts to strengthen its air defense capabilities amid the Iranian regime's concerns about a potential conventional conflict with the United States or Israel.

Iranian Ghadir Radars April 3, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Russia remains an unviable mediator between the United States and Iran given Russian support for the Iranian nuclear program and Axis of Resistance activity in the Middle East. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov stated on April 1 that Russia is willing to mediate talks between Iran and the United States about the Iranian nuclear program.[4] Iranian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for Political Affairs Majid Takht Ravanchi, who serves as the chief Iranian nuclear negotiator, met with Ryabkov in Moscow on April 2 to discuss Iranian nuclear negotiations.[5] Ravanchi and Ryabkov emphasized the importance of "resolving misunderstandings about the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear activities." A senior Russian official similarly downplayed the threat of the Iranian nuclear program in early March 2025, claiming that Iran's production of 60 percent enriched uranium has "no weapons risk." [6] Iran currently has enough 60 percent enriched uranium, if enriched further, to produce six nuclear weapons.[7] Senior Russian officials have also previously criticized the

US "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran and called US threats to strike Iranian nuclear facilities "unacceptable." [8]

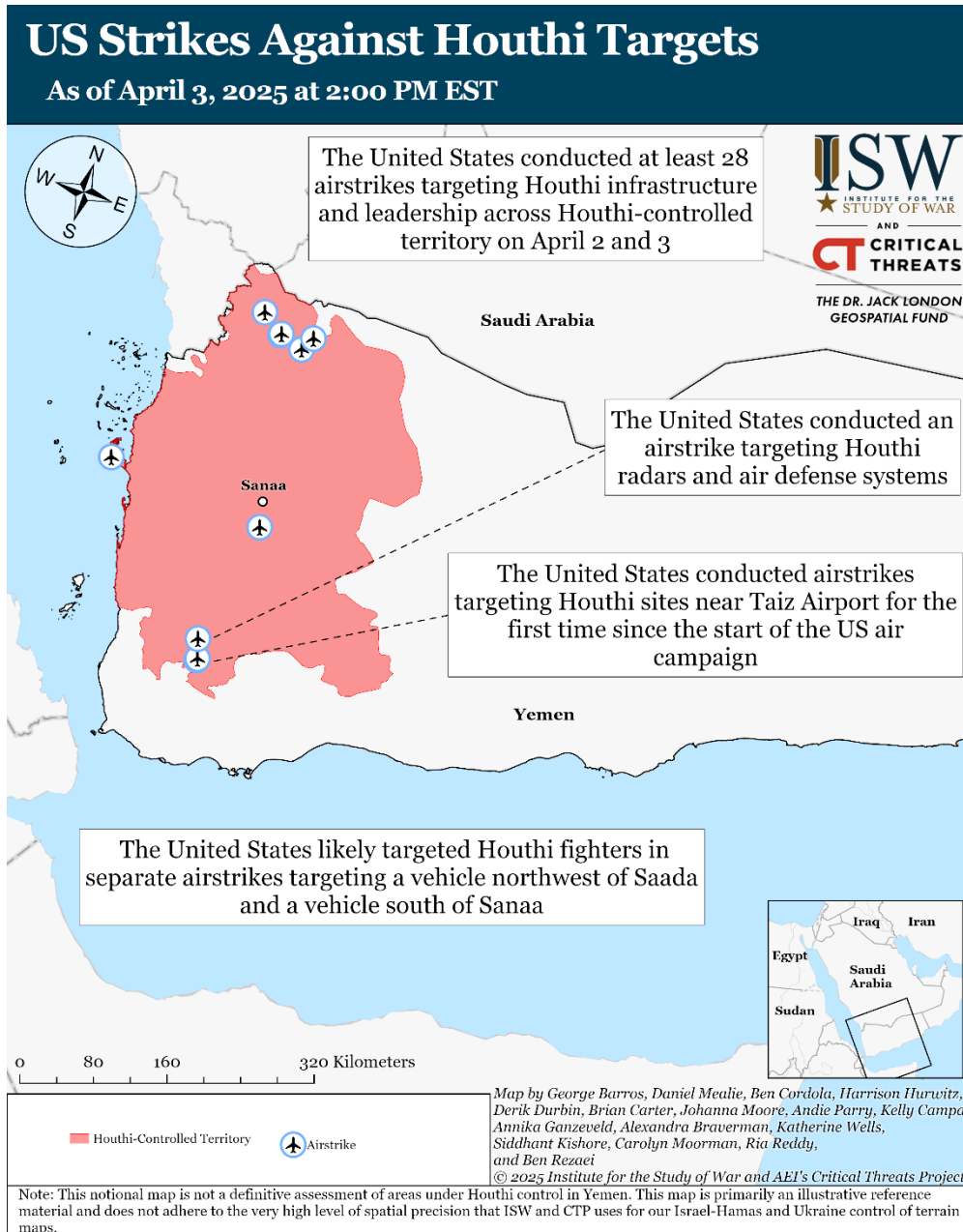
Russia has also supported the Axis of Resistance against Israel and the United States. Russia has provided the Houthis with targeting data to support Houthi attacks on commercial shipping and US vessels in the Red Sea, according to Western media. [9] The Telegraph reported on April 3 that there is currently a Russian military expert in Yemen who is advising the Houthis on how to conduct attacks. [10] Russian support for the Iranian nuclear program and Axis of Resistance activities in the region make it extremely unlikely that Russia would be able to help the United States secure its interests in the Middle East.

A senior Iranian military official told *The Telegraph* on April 3 that Iran is “abandoning” the Houthis. [11] This statement is very likely part of an Iranian information operation to try to obfuscate Iran’s leading role in the Axis of Resistance and absolve Iran of responsibility for proxy attacks against the United States and Israel. The official told *The Telegraph* that the Iranian regime has pivoted its focus to a potential US or Israeli strike on Iranian territory. [12] Iran is almost certainly concerned about a potential strike, but that concern has not precluded continued Iranian support for the Houthis. Iranian officials have continued to express support for the Houthis in Persian- and Arabic-language media, including in Houthi media, in recent days. [13] The official also claimed that the Iranian regime ordered Iranian military personnel to leave Yemen because Iran is concerned that the death of an Iranian military official in a US airstrike in Yemen could lead to a “direct confrontation” with the United States. [14] The deaths of Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force personnel in other Axis of Resistance theaters, such as Iraq and Syria, has not previously caused Iran to leave those theaters. [15] It is therefore unlikely that Iran would leave Yemen and abandon its decades-old strategy of building up proxies across the region to confront the United States and Israel out of concern that a US airstrike could kill Iranian personnel.

The official also claimed that Iran is abandoning the Houthis because it believes that the Houthis are “living their final months.” [16] This statement contradicts Iran’s approach to other Iranian proxies that have been severely degraded since October 2023. [17] The IDF severely degraded Hamas in the Gaza Strip and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, but Iran continues to support both groups. [18] Iran has attempted in recent months to transfer funds to Hezbollah to aid Hezbollah’s reconstitution in Lebanon, for example. [19] Iran is also attempting to stoke sectarian tensions and rebuild Iranian networks in Syria after the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024. [20] The Houthis’ ability to disrupt international trade and attack Israel makes them a strategic and valuable partner for Iran, which Iran is unlikely to abandon.

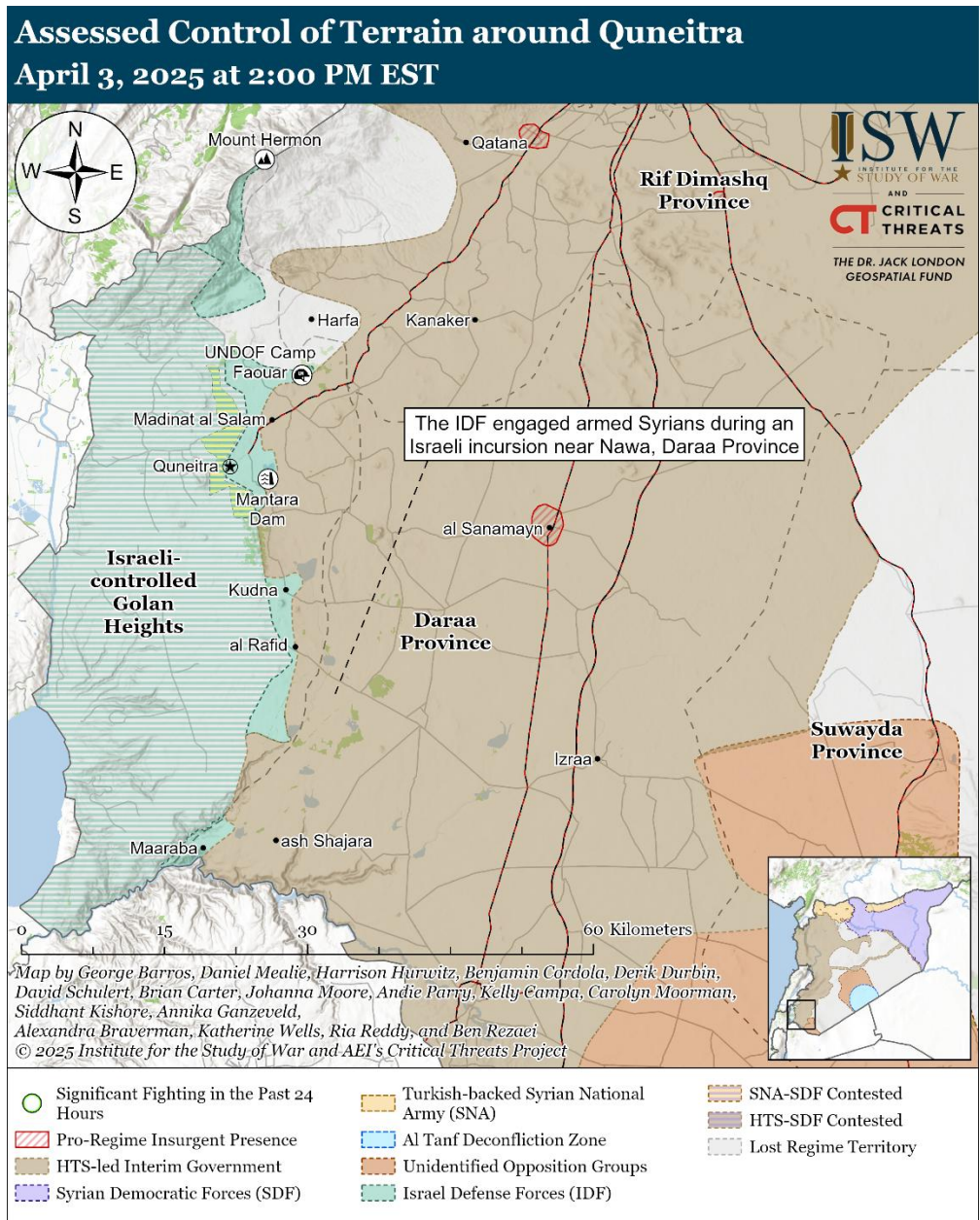
US Central Command (CENTCOM) has conducted at least 28 airstrikes targeting Houthi infrastructure and leadership in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on April 2. [21] CENTCOM conducted an unspecified number of airstrikes targeting Houthi sites near Taiz Airport for the first time since the start of the US air campaign on March 15. [22] CENTCOM also targeted a Yemeni-Omani telecommunications site in Jablah District, Ibb Governorate, that reportedly contained Houthi radars and air defense systems. [23] CENTCOM conducted an airstrike targeting a vehicle south of Sanaa. The strike reportedly killed the personal assistant of Houthi Interior Minister Abdulkarim al Houthi, who is Houthi Supreme Leader Abdulmalik al Houthi’s

uncle.[24] CTP-ISW cannot verify this claim. CENTCOM also likely targeted Houthi fighters in a separate airstrike targeting a vehicle northwest of Saada.[25]



The IDF engaged armed Syrians during an Israeli incursion 13 kilometers into Syrian territory near Nawa, Daraa Province, on April 2. Syrian media reported that an Israeli convoy of tanks and vehicles entered a forest near al Jabaliya Dam, approximately 13 kilometers from the disengagement zone.[26] The IDF said that several “terrorists” fired at IDF 210th Division forces while they were confiscating weapons and destroying infrastructure in the area.[27] The IDF killed several of the gunmen from the ground and air.[28] Syrian media reported that unspecified Syrian gunmen fired heavy machine guns at Israeli aircraft and that Israeli forces shelled numerous targets near Tal al Jamou.[29] The Islamic Resistance Front in Syria, which is an anti-Israel militia, claimed that its

fighters engaged the IDF with "appropriate weapons" near Nawa and Tasil.[30] The fighting killed nine Syrian men and reportedly injured over 20 others.[31] The Syrian Interim Foreign Ministry accused Israel of deliberately attempting to "destabilize Syria." [32] This incident marks the second time that Syrians have attacked Israeli forces advancing into southern Syrian territory since the IDF killed at least four armed Syrians in Kuwaya, Daraa Province, on March 25.[33]



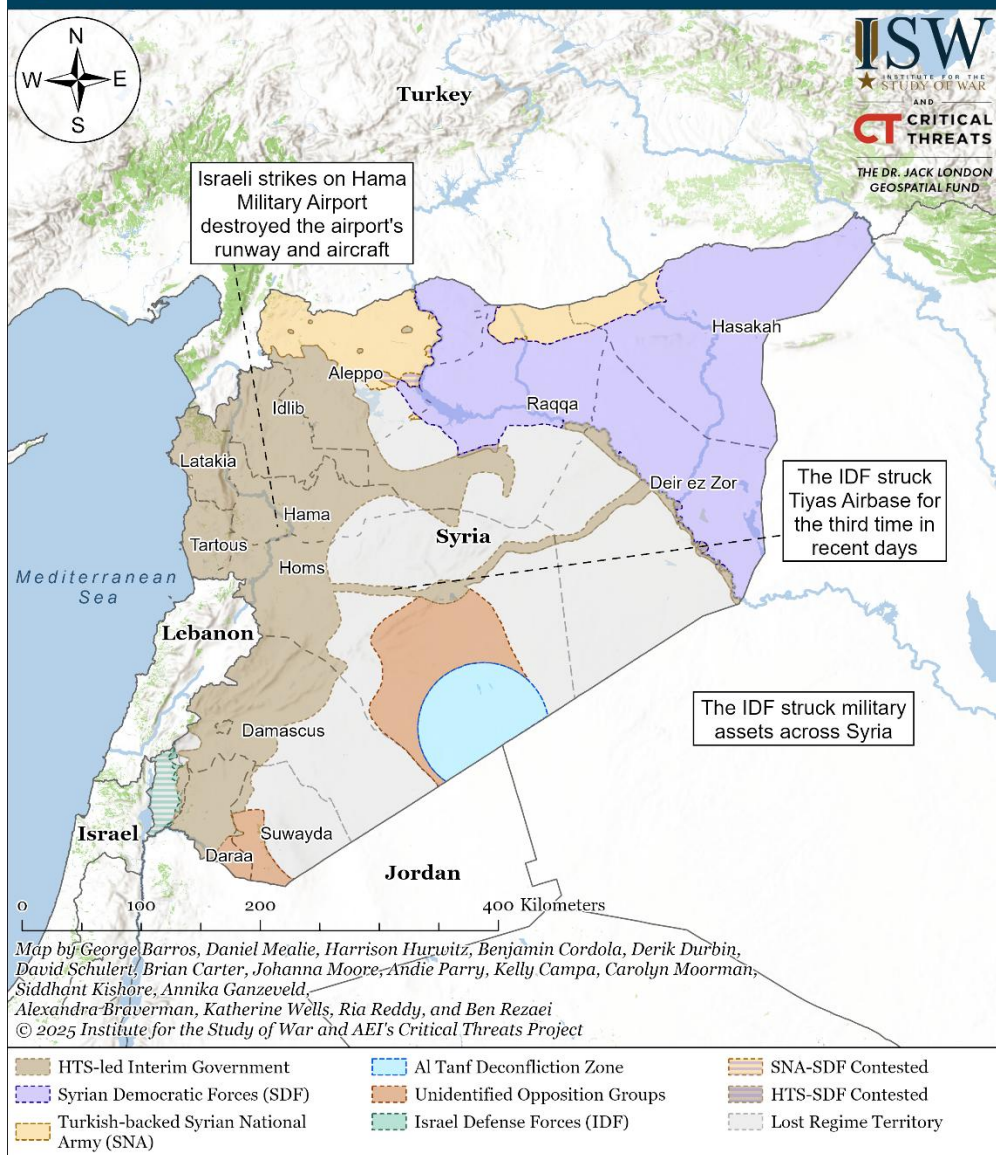
This incident may present anti-Israel and anti-interim government armed groups with an opportunity to gain support and recruit new fighters. The leader of the prominent Suwayda-based Druze militia Mudafa al Karama, Leith al Balous, praised the Syrians who "defended" southern Syria from Israel as martyrs who fought against Israel in a "battle of existence and dignity." [34] Over a thousand Syrians participated in a funeral in Nawa on April 3 for the men who died during the fighting.[35] The Islamic Resistance Front in Syria, which claimed that its fighters engaged Israeli forces, amplified calls to attend

the funeral.[36] The Islamic Resistance Front in Syria uses iconography widely associated with Iranian-backed actors and has referred to the current government as an “internal enemy,” suggesting that the group is opposed to the current government and may hold Assadist views.[37] The growth of anti-Israel, anti-government activity may provide an opportunity for external actors, such as Iranian-backed actors, to exploit anti-Israel grievances in southern Syria.

The IDF has continued to strike military assets in Syria, including a site where Turkey reportedly seeks to establish an airbase. The IDF struck Hama Military Airport in Hama Province, Tiyas Airbase in the central Syrian desert, and the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC) in Barzeh, Damascus, on April 2.[38] The Syrian interim government said that the strikes injured several Syrians and “destroyed” Hama Military Airport.[39] Several local Syrian sources reported that the strikes destroyed the airport’s aircraft, hangars, arms depots, and runway.[40] The new Syrian Air Force has used aircraft at the Hama Airport in recent days, according to local media.[41] Local media reported that the strike on the airport killed a Syrian Jaysh al Izza soldier.[42] The new Syrian 74th Division, which is reportedly comprised of mostly Jaysh al Izza soldiers, is based in Hama Province.[43] Syrian media also reported that the IDF struck former Syrian Arab Army (SAA) positions near Damascus on April 3.[44] Local sources reported that the IDF targeted a former SAA air defense battalion.[45]

Israel previously attacked Hama Military Airport and former SAA positions near Damascus in December 2024 to destroy equipment and weapons left over from the Assad regime.[46] Israel recently struck Tiyas Airbase on March 21 and March 24.[47] Turkey reportedly seeks to establish an airbase at Tiyas as part of a potential defense pact with the Syrian interim government.[48] Unspecified Israeli sources told Israeli media on April 2 that the IDF conducted the strikes to send a message to Turkey that Israel will not allow Turkey to establish military bases in Syria.[49] Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz called the strikes “a warning for the future.”[50]

Significant Activity in Syria April 3, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Key Takeaways:

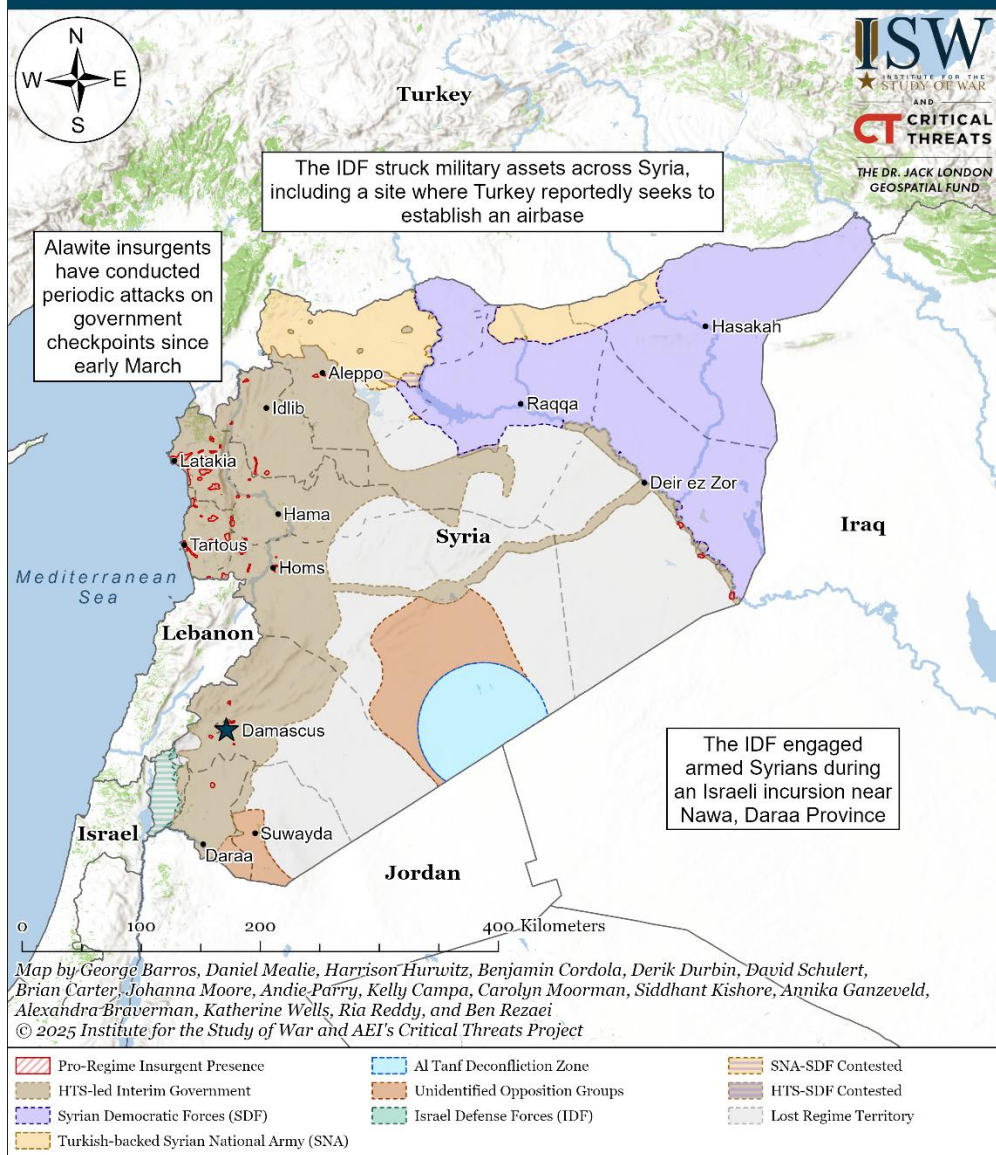
- Iranian Air Defenses:** Iran is continuing to try to bolster its air defenses in preparation for a potential US or Israeli strike on Iran. Iran has built a new Ghadir phased-array radar in West Azerbaijan Province in northwestern Iran in recent months, according to commercially available satellite imagery. Iran has conducted several air defense exercises in recent months, particularly around Iranian nuclear facilities. The construction of new radars and recent exercises reflect Iran's efforts to strengthen its air defense capabilities amid the Iranian regime's concerns about a potential conventional conflict with the United States or Israel.
- Russo-Iranian Cooperation:** Russia remains an unviable mediator between the United States and Iran given Russian support for the Iranian nuclear program and Axis of Resistance

activity in the Middle East. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov stated on April 1 that Russia is willing to mediate talks between Iran and the United States about the Iranian nuclear program. Iranian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for Political Affairs Majid Takht Ravanchi, who serves as the chief Iranian nuclear negotiator, met with Ryabkov in Moscow on April 2 to discuss Iranian nuclear negotiations. Russian support for the Iranian nuclear program and Axis of Resistance activities in the region make it extremely unlikely that Russia would be able to help the United States secure its interests in the Middle East.

- **Iranian Support for the Houthis:** A senior Iranian military official told *The Telegraph* on April 3 that Iran is “abandoning” the Houthis. This statement is very likely part of an Iranian information operation to try to obfuscate Iran’s leading role in the Axis of Resistance and absolve Iran of responsibility for proxy attacks against the United States and Israel. The Houthis’ ability to disrupt international trade and attack Israel makes them a strategic and valuable partner for Iran, which Iran is unlikely to abandon.
- **Israeli Activity in Syria:** The IDF engaged armed Syrians during an Israeli incursion 13 kilometers into Syrian territory near Nawa, Daraa Province, on April 2. This incident marks the second time that Syrians have attacked Israeli forces advancing into southern Syrian territory since the IDF killed at least four armed Syrians in Kuwaya, Daraa Province, on March 25. This incident may present anti-Israel and anti-interim government armed groups with an opportunity to gain support and recruit new fighters.
- **Israeli Activity in Syria:** The IDF has continued to strike military assets in Syria, including a site where Turkey reportedly seeks to establish an airbase. The IDF struck Hama Military Airport in Hama Province, Tiyas Airbase in the central Syrian desert, and the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC) in Barzeh, Damascus, on April 2. Unspecified Israeli sources told Israeli media on April 2 that the IDF conducted the strikes to send a message to Turkey that Israel will not allow Turkey to establish military bases in Syria.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria

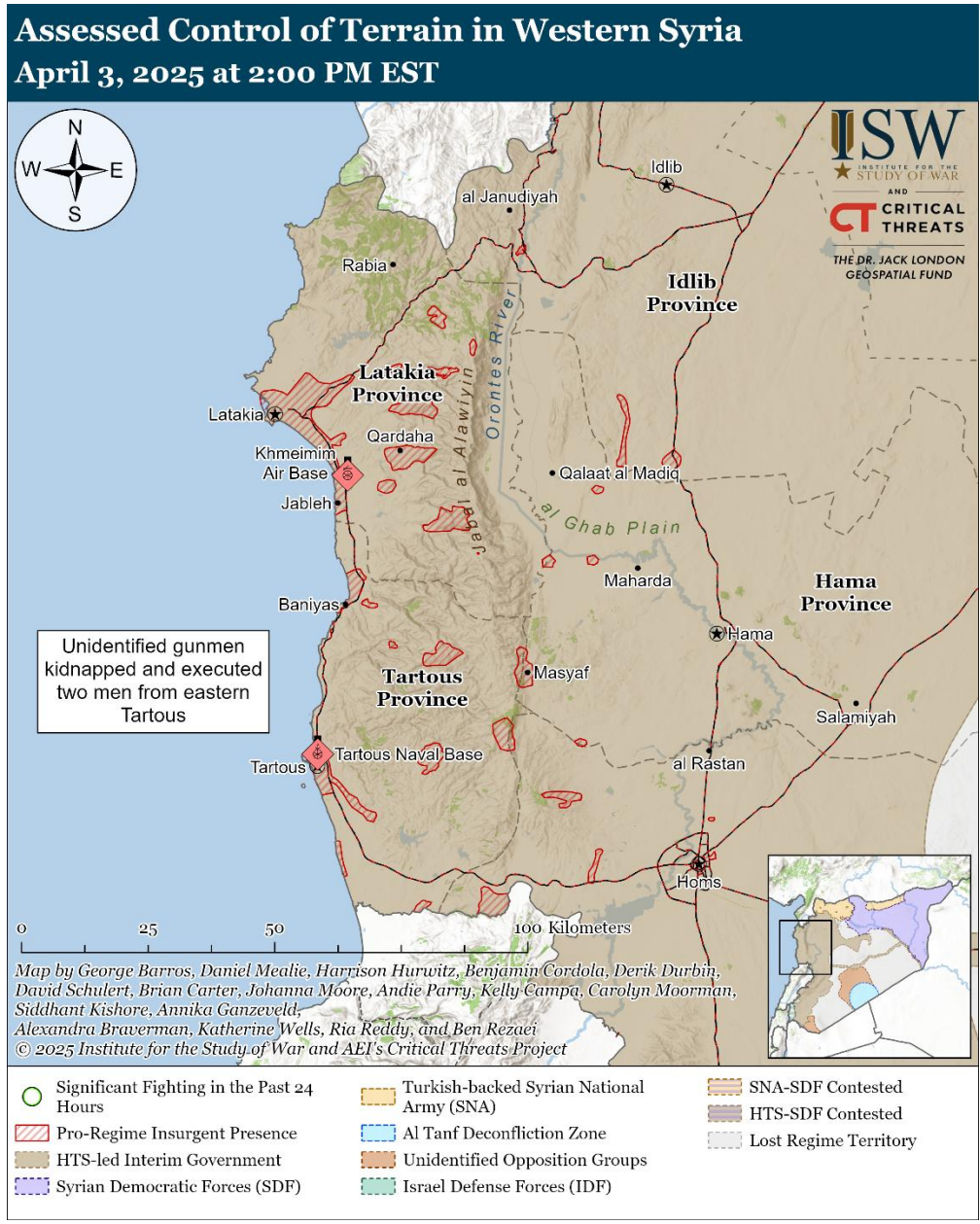
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Syria

The poor behavior of Syrian government forces at checkpoints in western Syria risks further weakening the relationship between security forces and local Alawite civilians, which will benefit the insurgency. The Syrian interim government has established checkpoints across western Syria to improve security and limit insurgent freedom of movement. The fighters manning these checkpoints have killed civilians—both in extrajudicial killings and accidentally—on several occasions, which risks damaging the relationship between security forces and the local population and providing opportunities for insurgents to exploit. Security forces near Harf al Masaytarah, Latakia, killed two individuals after they failed to stop at a checkpoint on March 27.[51] It is unclear why the vehicle failed to stop or if the men manning the checkpoint fired warning shots. Separately, locals discovered the body of an executed Alawite man near a checkpoint on March 31.[52]

These events provide the insurgents an opportunity to present themselves as defenders of the local population by attacking the checkpoints and attempting to force government forces out of Alawite areas. Alawite insurgents have conducted periodic attacks on government checkpoints since early March.[53] Insurgents can force government units to remove outlying checkpoints by making them untenable to maintain.



Sectarian Violence and Insurgent Presence in Western Syria Between March 13, 2025, and April 2, 2025



A northern Syria-based source reported that the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) maintains a presence on Tishreen Dam and west of the dam as of April 3.[54] The source said that neither Syrian interim government forces nor the Syrian National Army (SNA) have entered the dam.[55] The source added that the SDF remains in Khirbet Tueni and Mahshiyat al Sheikh, west of the dam.[56] This report follows reports from several Syrian sources on April 2 that the SDF withdrew from the Tishreen Dam and Qara Qozak Bridge as part of “a preliminary agreement” with the interim government to create demilitarized zones.[57]

The Syrian interim government and the SDF exchanged over 200 prisoners in Aleppo Province on April 3.[58] Syrian media reported that the SDF handed over 97 prisoners to the interim government in exchange for 110 SDF prisoners.[59] The SDF and interim government plan to exchange a total of 600 prisoners.[60] This prisoner exchange is part of the recent agreement that the SDF and

the interim government signed on April 1. The agreement stipulates that the SDF and interim government will exchange prisoners who were detained after Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) forces took over Aleppo in November 2024.[61] The agreement also includes the deployment of Syrian Interim Interior Ministry forces to two Kurdish neighborhoods in Aleppo City.[62]

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

A “well-placed” Iraqi source told UK-based outlet Amwaj Media that former Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhimi is trying to form a political party to compete in the November 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections.[63] Unspecified Iraqi officials reportedly invited Kadhimi to return to Iraq in late February 2025 to use his foreign connections, purportedly with the United States and Saudi Arabia, to aid Iraq economically. His return to Iraq came amid reports that the United States was planning to sanction Iranian-backed Iraqi officials.[64] Kadhimi worked to curtail the influence of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias and had a positive, working relationship with the United States during his tenure.[65] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias Kataib Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl al Haq attempted to assassinate Kadhimi in November 2021.[66]

The leader of Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada, Abu Alaa al Walai, said on April 2 that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias will support Iran “in blood, sacrifice, and conscience whenever necessary.”[67] Walai is likely mirroring Iranian efforts to discourage a potential US or Israeli strike on Iran by implying that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias would respond to such a strike.[68]

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 conducted a combined cruise missile and drone attack targeting the USS *Harry S. Truman* aircraft carrier and US destroyers in the Red Sea on April 3.[69] CENTCOM did not confirm the attack.

The Houthis separately claimed on April 3 that they shot down a US MQ-9 Reaper drone over Hudaydah Governorate.[70] The Houthis claimed that they have shot down 17 US drones since the start of the October 7 War.

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

Lebanese airport authorities have taken new steps to prevent money transfers to Hezbollah via Beirut International Airport. Lebanese airport authorities fired 30 Hezbollah-affiliated employees who reportedly served as Hezbollah’s “eyes and ears” in the airport, according to an unspecified source speaking to Saudi media on April 3.[71] Iran has sought to financially support the reconstitution of Hezbollah by tasking Iranian envoys and Turkish citizens with transferring large sums of cash to Hezbollah via Beirut International Airport.[72]

CTP-ISW will not be covering the new Israeli operation in the Gaza Strip. We have reprioritized our Middle East coverage to focus on Iran's nuclear program, Iranian domestic security, and Iranian efforts to rebuild its networks into the Levant, including the Palestinian Territories. Given that Israel and its partners have destroyed Hamas' military organization and severed the group's ability to resupply itself, we are now focused on how Iran seeks to rebuild its lines of communication with Hezbollah and Hamas through Syria.

Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

The Iranian rial depreciated from 1,029,000 rials to one US dollar on April 2 to 1,042,000 rials to one US dollar on April 3.[73]

Iranian media has continued to threaten nuclear weaponization, likely to try to dissuade a potential US or Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear facilities amid new US threats to strike these facilities. Hardline outlet Mashregh News published an article on April 2 titled “Will Iran Unveil an Atomic Bomb” that summarized recent threats from senior Iranian officials to pursue a nuclear weapon.[74] Mashregh News is reportedly close to Iranian security and intelligence organizations.[75] Mashregh News claimed that “many” people believe it is “harder for Tehran not to build a nuclear weapon than it is [for Tehran] to build one.” The article highlighted Iran’s growing stockpile of highly enriched uranium and warned that the “regional situation in recent months” could affect Iranian policy. This article comes after senior Iranian officials have repeatedly threatened to pursue a nuclear weapon and lobbied Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to revoke his 2003 fatwa that bans the production and use of nuclear weapons.[76]

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[1] <https://x.com/obretix/status/1907478109928001657>

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