

Iran Update, February 27, 2024

Andie Parry, Amin Soltani, Peter Mills, Alexandra Braverman, Kathryn Tyson, and Brian Carter

Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm ET

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. For more on developments in Iran and the region, see our [interactive map of Iran and the Middle East](#).

Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. 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.

Click [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report. Click [here](#) to subscribe to the Iran Update.

Two Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-affiliated sources told the *New York Times* that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias “fiercely resisted” IRGC Quds Force commander Esmail Ghaani’s orders in late January to halt attacks targeting US forces in the region.^[1] The two IRGC-affiliated sources claimed that Kataib Hezbollah and Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba commanders refused to stop attacking US forces during a meeting with Ghaani in Baghdad, which Reuters reported occurred on January 29.^[2] Iranian and Iraqi sources added that senior Iraqi Shia clerics in Najaf and influential Iraqi politicians, including the Iraqi prime minister, convinced Kataib Hezbollah and Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba to halt the attacks.

The timeline of events indicates that Ghaani was instrumental in convincing Kataib Hezbollah to pause attacks, not Iraqi leaders. Kataib Hezbollah responded to Iranian directives from Ghaani by announcing that it would “suspend attacks” on January 30—roughly 24 hours after the meeting with Ghaani on January 29. Reuters reported that Ghaani directed Iranian-backed Iraqi groups to “pause” attacks on US forces during the January 29 meeting. A senior Iranian-backed Iraqi militia commander told Reuters that Ghaani’s influence was essential in convincing Kataib Hezbollah to pause attacks. Reuters added that one group, presumably Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba, did not “initially agree” to Ghaani’s directive.^[3] Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba said on February 2 that it would continue attacks targeting US forces.^[4] The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed three attacks targeting US forces after Ghaani’s visit.^[5]

Iraqi Shia clerics in Najaf may also lack the influence to convince Kataib Hezbollah to cease attacks. Kataib Hezbollah and Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba are loyal to the Iranian supreme leader, not Iraqi

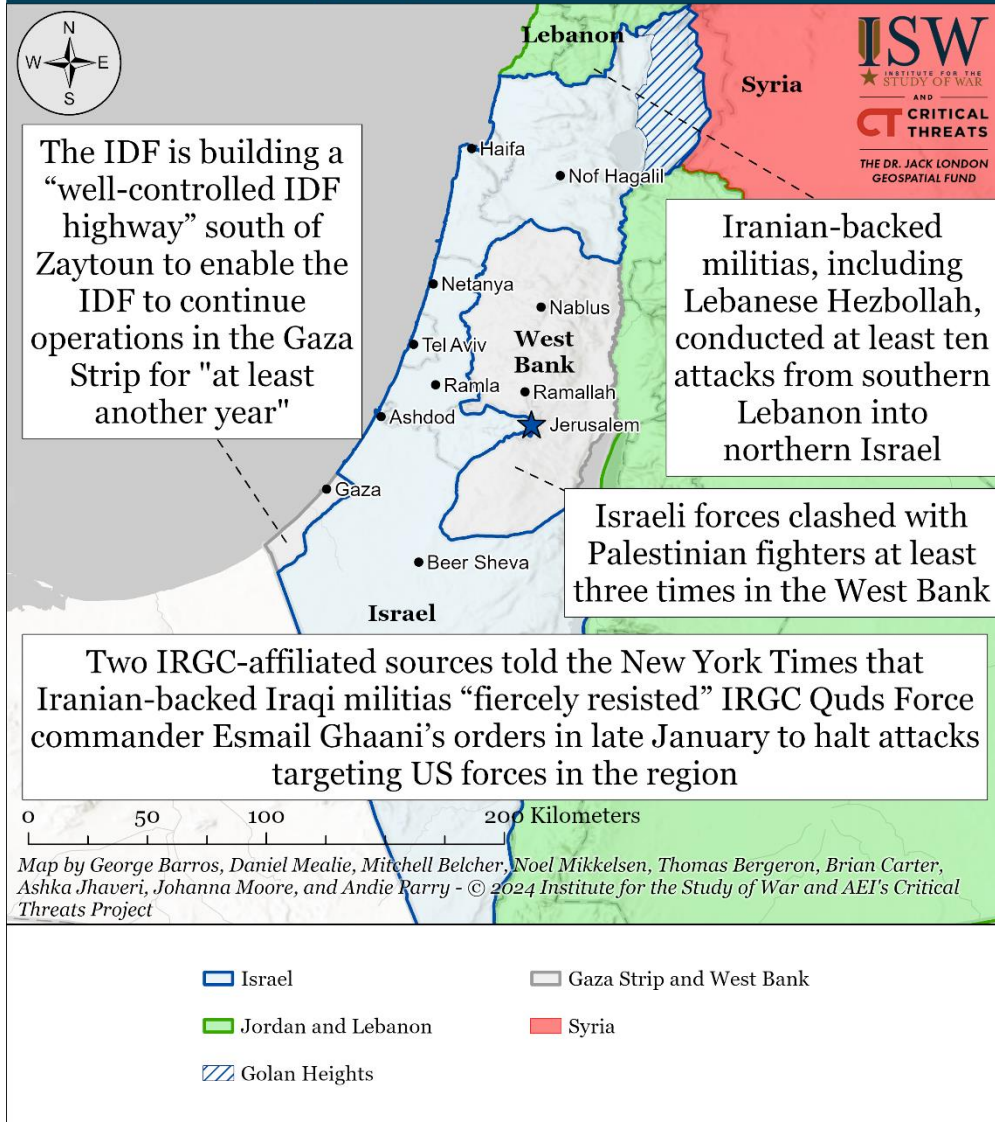
Shia clerics in Najaf.[6] It is not clear why Kataib Hezbollah and Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba would follow orders from Iraqi Shia clerics over Ghaani, who speaks for the Iranian supreme leader.[7]

Ghaani's visit to Baghdad illustrates both the extent of and limits to Iran's control of its proxy network in the Middle East. Most of Iran's proxies and partners in Iraq immediately ceased attacks following Ghaani's directive, though it is possible additional pressure from the Iraqi government further reinforced Ghaani's orders. Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba initially did not agree to stop attacks, but Iranian-backed Iraqi groups have not resumed attacks targeting US forces since February 4. The Iraqi prime minister has ample reason to attempt to stop Iranian-backed attacks against US forces to avoid additional US airstrikes targeting Iranian-backed groups in Iraq. The attacks—and the ensuing US airstrikes—undermine the prime minister's ability to retain even a small international coalition presence to support Iraqi forces against ISIS.[8] Ghaani and Iran can pressure their partners and proxies to pause or resume these attacks as needed, however. Ghaani represents the Iranian supreme leader, to whom groups like Kataib Hezbollah and Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba proclaim loyalty, meaning that many Iranian-backed groups will respond as Ghaani directs.[9]

Key Takeaways:

- **Iraq:** Two Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-affiliated sources told the *New York Times* that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias “fiercely resisted” IRGC Quds Force commander Esmail Ghaani's orders in late January to halt attacks targeting US forces in the region.
- The timeline of events indicates that Ghaani—not Iraqi leaders—was instrumental in convincing Kataib Hezbollah to pause attacks. Kataib Hezbollah responded to Iranian directives from Ghaani by announcing that it would “suspend attacks” on January 30—roughly 24 hours after the meeting with Ghaani on January 29.
- Iraqi Shia clerics in Najaf may also lack the influence to convince Kataib Hezbollah to cease attacks. Kataib Hezbollah and Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba are loyal to the Iranian supreme leader, not Iraqi Shia clerics in Najaf.
- Ghaani's visit to Baghdad illustrates both the extent of and limits to Iran's control of its proxy network in the Middle East. Most of Iran's proxies and partners in Iraq immediately ceased attacks following Ghaani's directive, though it is possible additional pressure from the Iraqi government further reinforced Ghaani's orders.
- **Gaza City:** The IDF 162nd Division continued its clearing operation in Zaytoun neighborhood, southeastern Gaza City, on February 27. Palestinian militias claimed at least 16 attacks targeting Israeli forces in Zaytoun, southeastern Gaza City on February 27.
- **Iran and Yemen:** The United States and the United Kingdom sanctioned Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force and Houthi members on February 27.

Israel-Hamas War as of February 27, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Gaza Strip

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Erode the will of the Israeli political establishment and public to launch and sustain a major ground operation into the Gaza Strip
- Degrade IDF material and morale around the Gaza Strip.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is building a “well-controlled IDF highway” south of Zaytoun to enable “at least another year” of operations in the Gaza Strip.^[10] CTP-ISW previously reported the IDF’s east-to-west road construction on February 19.^[11] The IDF has not officially commented on the construction, but two journalists embedded with Israel forces operating in Gaza have published accounts of the construction project.^[12] A correspondent from Israel Army Radio, a media organization run by the IDF, said Israeli forces are also building three forward operating bases near the east-west road for future raids and operations in the Gaza Strip.^[13]

The IDF 162nd Division continued its clearing operation in Zaytoun neighborhood, southeastern Gaza City, on February 27.^[14] The 932nd Battalion (assigned to the Nahal Brigade) has operated in Zaytoun for a week to “destroy the enemy” in the area.^[15] The battalion has raided Hamas buildings, weapons warehouses and observation posts to find intelligence on Hamas operations. The IDF Nahal Brigade (assigned to the 162nd Division) killed a Palestinian militia squad with tank fire and destroyed Hamas buildings as part of the division-sized clearing operation.^[16] The 401st Brigade (assigned to the 162nd Division) killed Palestinian fighters at close range, directed airstrikes targeting Palestinian fighters, and uncovered a weapons factory in Zaytoun.^[17]

Palestinian militias claimed at least 16 attacks targeting Israeli forces in Zaytoun, southeastern Gaza City on February 27.^[18] The groups used rocket propelled grenades, mortars, explosively-formed penetrators (EFPs), improvised explosive devices, and small arms in their attacks.^[19] Palestinian Islamic Jihad engineers targeted Israeli infantry by detonating a missile from an F16 that they had rigged as an improvised explosive device in a house near al Dawla roundabout in Zaytoun.^[20] The high number of attacks and the use of more sophisticated capabilities — such as EFPs — is inconsistent with an Israeli Army Radio journalist’s characterization of the fighting on January 27 as “relatively [small in] scale.”^[21] Palestinian militias conducted over triple the number of attacks on Israeli forces in southern Gaza City as they did in Khan Younis Governorate on February 27.

The IDF has continued to conduct clearing operations in western Khan Younis. The IDF 7th Brigade and 35th Paratrooper Brigade detained Palestinian fighters who tried to hide among evacuating civilians to escape Khan Younis.^[22] The 7th Brigade detained Palestinian fighters attempting a similar escape on February 25.^[23] The IDF Maglan and Egoz special operations forces continued clearing operations in western Khan Younis over the last week.^[24] The special operations forces raided a Hamas compound and seized a large amount of weapons in western Khan Younis on February 27.^[25] The special operations forces have killed and detained dozens of fighters per day for the last week.^[26] Palestinian militias conducted at least five attacks on Israeli forces operating in central and western Khan Younis on February 27.^[27]

The IDF Givati Brigade (assigned to the 162nd Division) conducted clearing operations in the Gaza Strip along the Israel-Gaza border in eastern Khan Younis Governorate.^[28] PIJ claimed mortar attacks targeting Israeli forces operating in the border area in Abasan al Kabira.^[29]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of February 27, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



The IDF is building a “well-controlled IDF highway” south of Zaytoun to enable the IDF to continue operations in the Gaza Strip for “at least another year”

Palestinian militias claimed 16 attacks on Israeli forces operating near the Zaytoun neighborhood

Israeli forces detained Palestinian fighters who were attempting to evacuate from Khan Younis by hiding among civilians

The IDF Givati Brigade conducted clearing operations along the Israel-Gaza Strip border in eastern Khan Younis

0 5 10 20 Kilometers

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry
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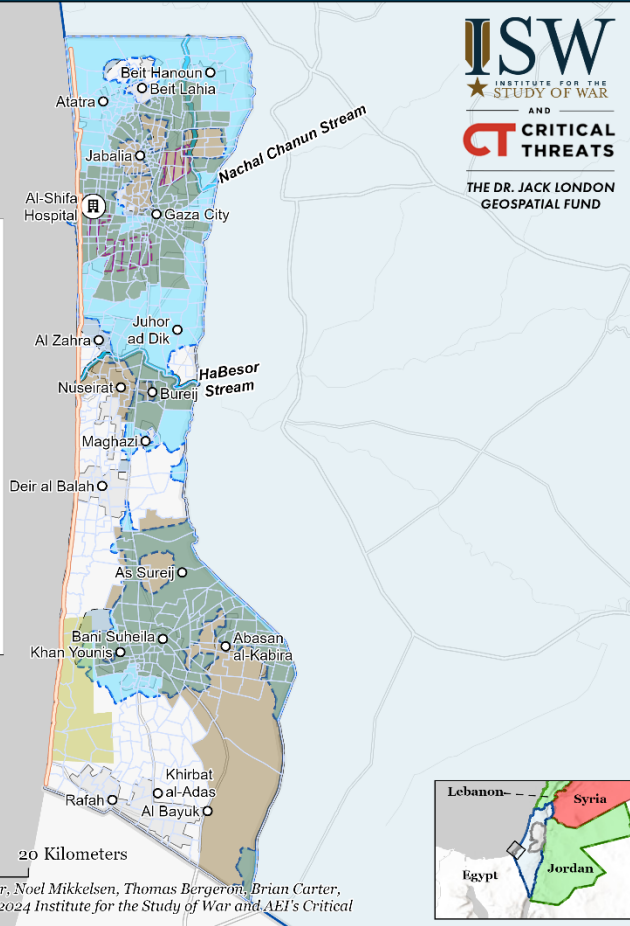
- Israel
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- Significant Water Obstacles
- Gaza Strip
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230
- Densely Urban Areas
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours

* 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

Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip as of February 27, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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)



0 5 10 20 Kilometers

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project



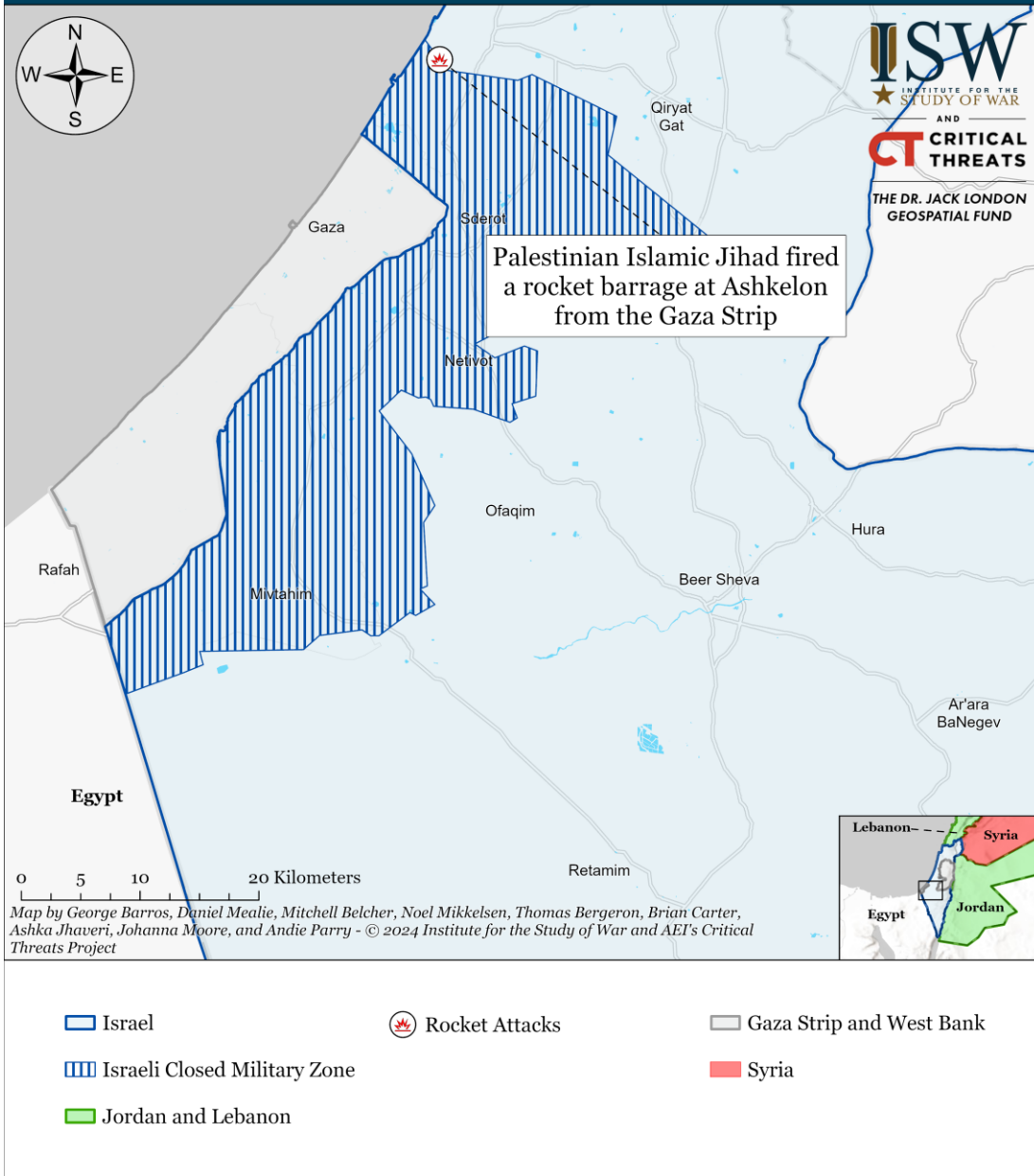
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PIJ fired a rocket barrage from the Gaza Strip targeting Ashkelon on February 27.^[30] The rocket barrage caused damage to civilian infrastructure. ^[31]

The IDF Gaza Division and Southern Command directed airstrikes targeting a Palestinian militia command center in the central Gaza Strip that Palestinian fighters used to direct rocket fire into Israel on February 26.^[32] PIJ and the Palestinian Mujahideen Movement both conducted rocket attacks on February 26.^[33]

Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of February 27, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



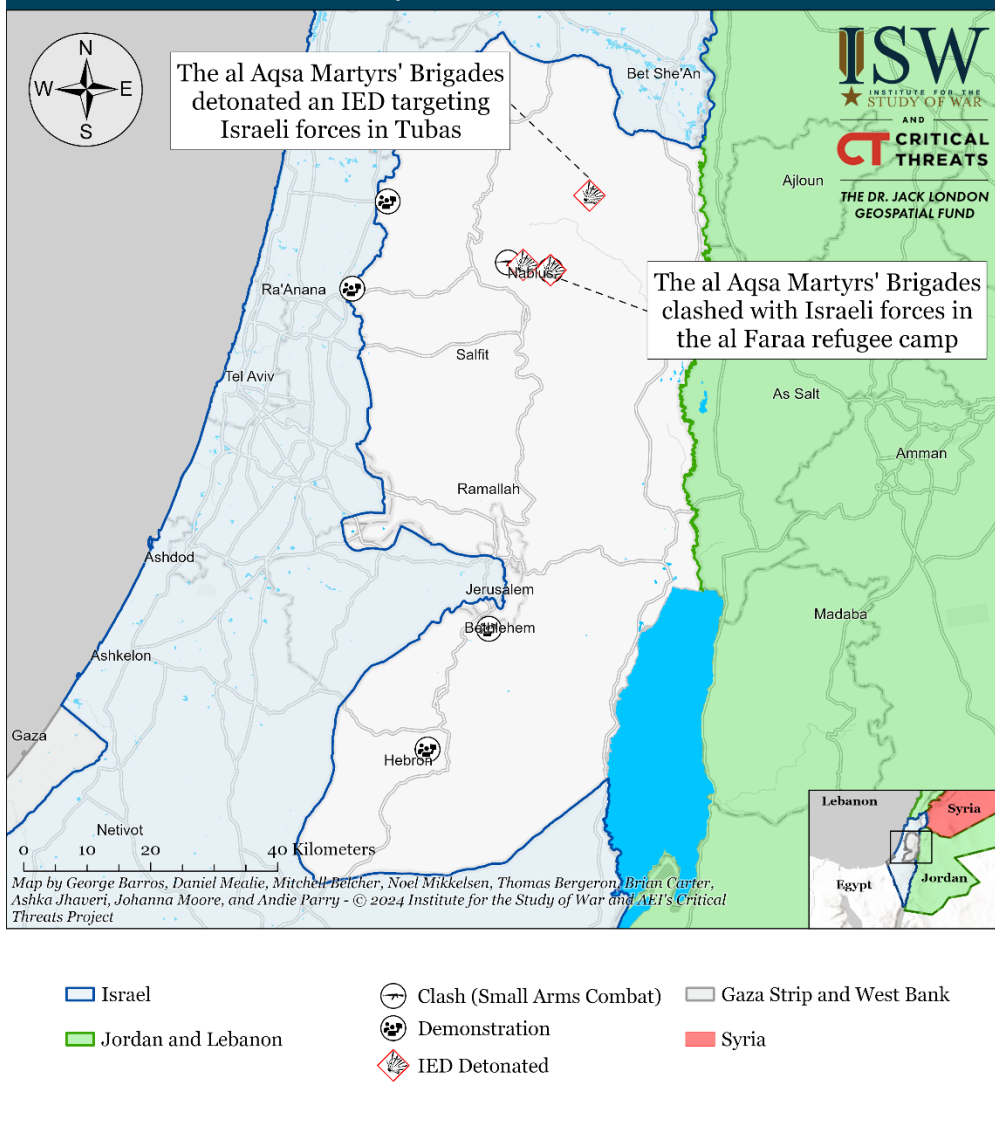
West Bank

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Draw IDF assets and resources toward the West Bank and fix them there

Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian fighters at least three times in the West Bank on February 27.^[34] Israeli forces killed a senior member in Palestinian Islamic Jihad's Tubas Battalion south of Tubas on February 27.^[35]

Clashes in the West Bank as of February 27, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



This map is not an exhaustive depiction of clashes and demonstrations in the West Bank.

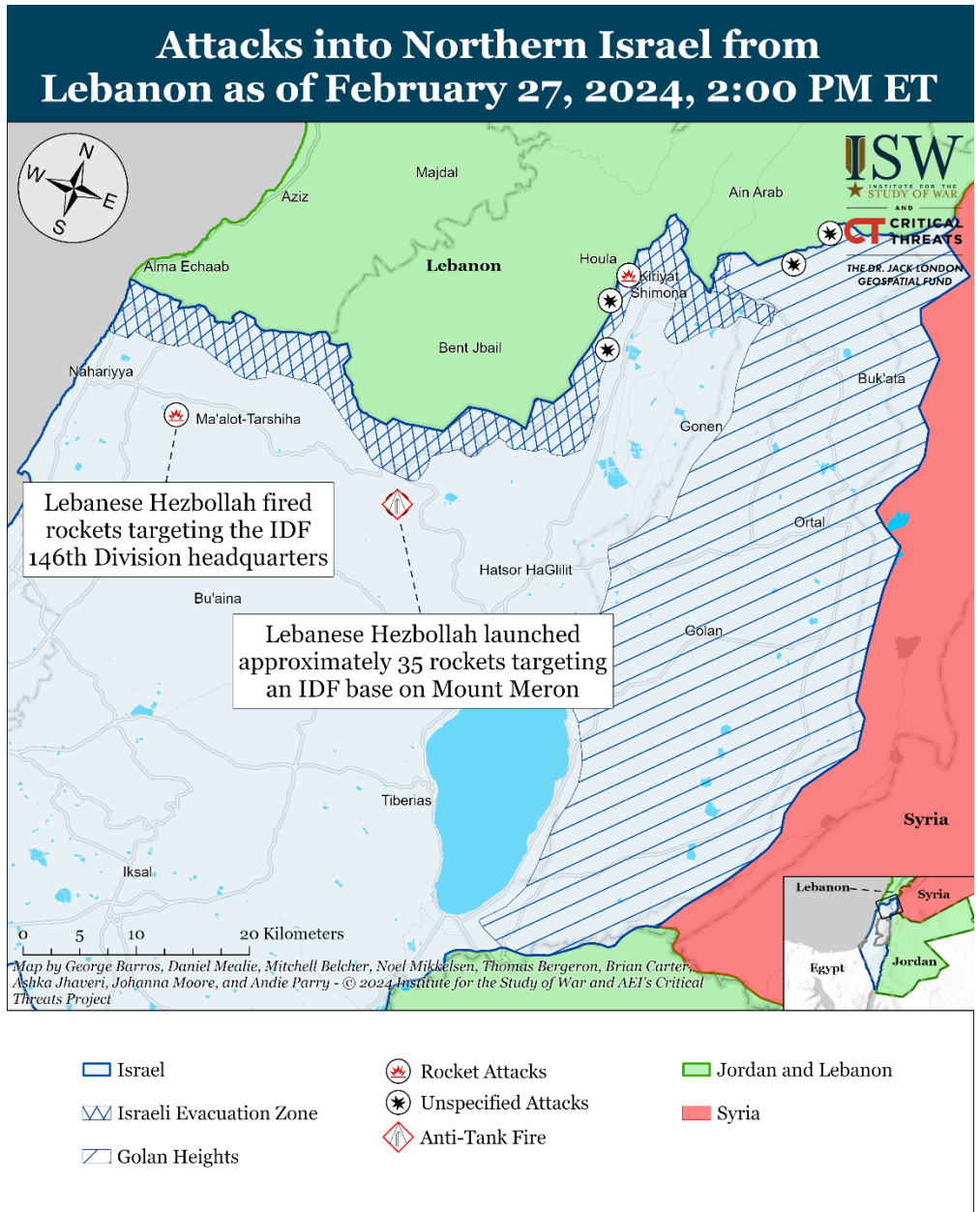
Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Draw IDF assets and resources toward northern Israel and fix them there
- Set conditions for successive campaigns into northern Israel

Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted at least ten attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on February 26.[36] Lebanese Hezbollah launched approximately 35 rockets targeting an IDF base on Mount Meron that hosts air traffic control, radar, surveillance, communications, and jamming facilities.[37] The IDF said that the attacks did not cause any casualties or damage to the area.[38]

IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi said that Lebanese Hezbollah will "pay a very high price" for its continued attacks targeting northern Israel during a speech at the IDF 146th Division headquarters on February 27.[39] Lebanese Hezbollah said that it fired dozens of rockets targeting the headquarters on the same day.[40]



Recorded reports of attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

Iran and Axis of Resistance

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Demonstrate the capability and willingness of Iran and the Axis of Resistance to escalate against the United States and Israel on multiple fronts
- Set conditions to fight a regional war on multiple fronts

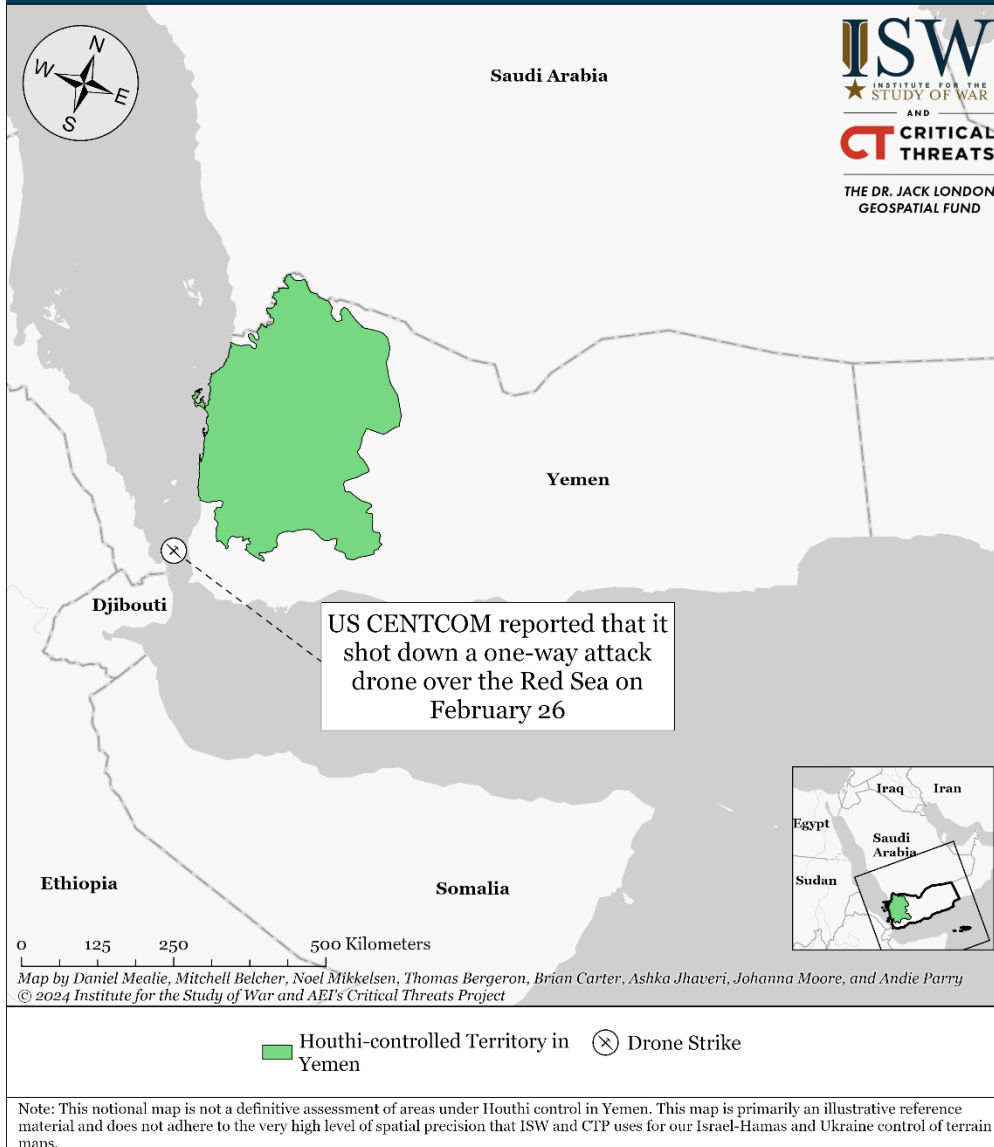
The United States and the United Kingdom sanctioned Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force and Houthi members on February 27.^[41] The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) and the United Kingdom designated the following individuals and organizations:

- IRGC Quds Force Deputy Commander Mohammad Reza Falahzadeh for generating revenue to fund Houthi operations
- Houthi member Ibrahim al Nashiri
- A Hong Kong-based shipping company that was responsible for facilitating the transport of Iranian commodities sold in China by the Said Jamal network. Said Jamal is a Houthi and IRGC Quds Force financial facilitator sanctioned by the United States on January 12.^[42]

Falahzadeh has played a key role in supporting and financing Houthi, Hamas, and Hezbollah operations.^[43] OFAC stated that the IRGC Quds Force and the Houthis sell Iranian commodities to foreign buyers to generate funds to support the Houthis. The US State Department designated the Houthis as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist Group in January 2024.^[44] The US State Department designated the entire IRGC—including the Quds Force—as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in April 2019.^[45]

US CENTCOM stated that it destroyed three surface naval attack drones and two mobile anti-ship cruise missiles in Houthi-controlled Yemeni territory on February 26 that were ready-to-launch in Houthi-controlled Yemen.^[46] Houthi-affiliated media outlets reported on February 26 that the United States conducted airstrikes targeting Houthi positions north of Hudaydah.^[47]

Houthi-controlled Territory in Yemen as of February 27, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



[1] <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/27/world/middleeast/us-iran-militias.html>

[2] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iraqi-armed-groups-dial-down-us-attacks-request-iran-commander-2024-02-18/>

[3] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iraqi-armed-groups-dial-down-us-attacks-request-iran-commander-2024-02-18/>

[4] https://twitter.com/Akram_Alkabee/status/1753337265772736687

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- [6] <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/kataib-hezbollah>;
<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/02/networks-power/03-pmf-set-networks>;
<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-harakat-hezbollah-al-nujaba>
- [7] <https://etc.westpoint.edu/iraqs-new-regime-change-how-tehran-backed-terrorist-organizations-and-militias-captured-the-iraqi-state/>;
- [8] <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/01/09/iraq-us-troops-removal-00134564>
- [9] <https://etc.westpoint.edu/iraqs-new-regime-change-how-tehran-backed-terrorist-organizations-and-militias-captured-the-iraqi-state/>; <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-harakat-hezbollah-al-nujaba> ; <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/kataib-hezbollah>; <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/02/networks-power/03-pmf-set-networks>
- [10] https://twitter.com/Doron_Kadosh/status/1762434310831796618 ;
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- [11] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-february-19-2024>
- [12] https://twitter.com/Doron_Kadosh/status/1762434310831796618;
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- [13] https://twitter.com/Doron_Kadosh/status/1762434462996987975
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[28] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1762383402693534040>
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[30] <https://t.me/sarayaps/17500>; <https://t.me/sarayaps/17501>
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[35] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1762432125104517426>;
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[37] <https://t.me/mmirleb/2296>; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-8-2024>

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