

Iran Update, March 13, 2024

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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](#).

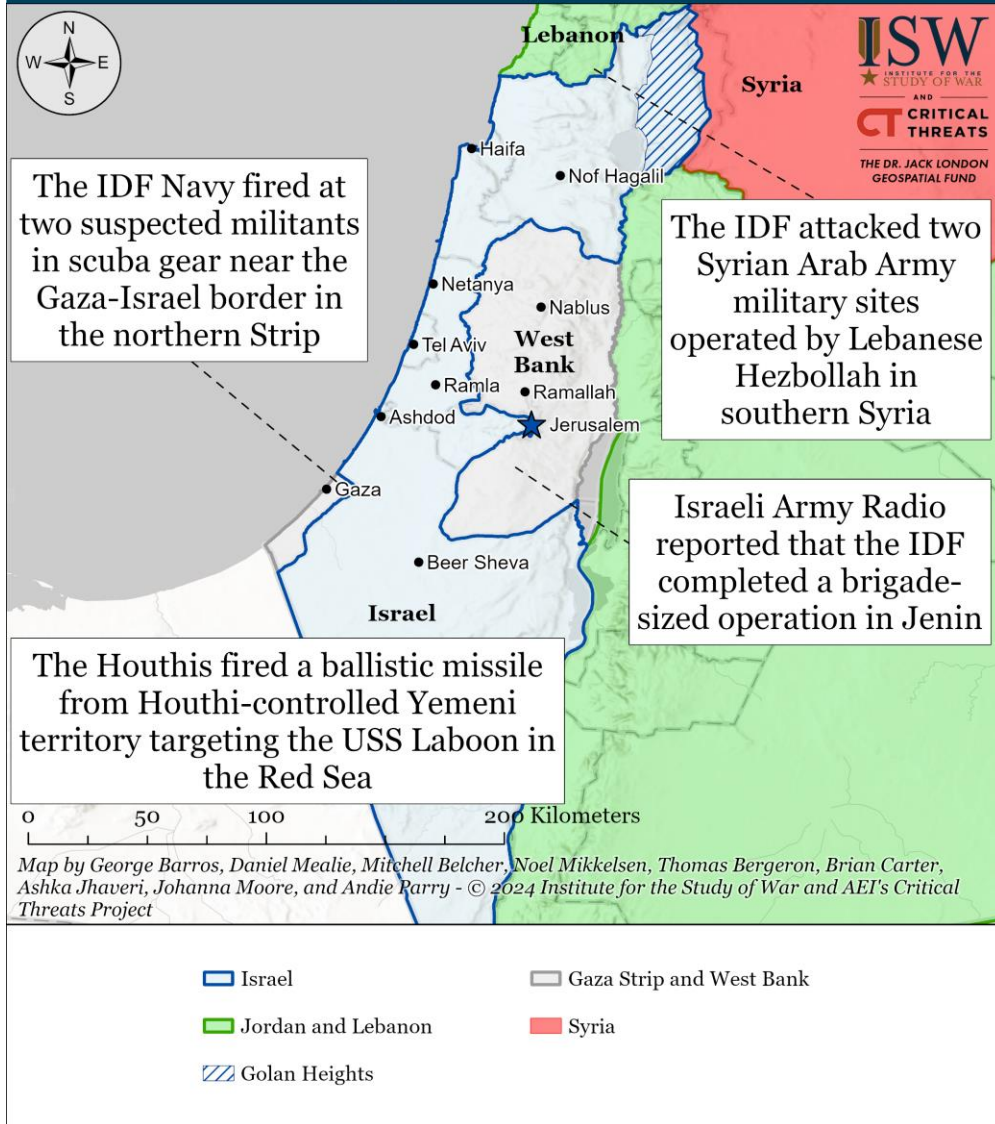
Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are well-covered 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.

Key Takeaways:

- **Northern Gaza Strip:** Israeli media reported that the IDF Navy fired at two suspected Palestinian fighters in scuba gear approaching the border between the northern Gaza Strip and Israel.
- **Southern Gaza Strip:** The IDF 98th Division expanded clearing operations in the northern and eastern Khan Younis.
- **Political Negotiations:** Saudi state-affiliated media claimed that Hamas agreed to a modified US ceasefire proposal on March 12, which Hamas later denied.
- **Iran:** Iranian Defense Minister Brig. Gen. Mohammad Reza Ashtiani claimed on March 13 that Iranian defense exports have increased by five times since 2022.
- **Yemen:** The Houthi movement launched a close-range ballistic missile targeting the USS Laboon in the Red Sea.
- **West Bank:** IDF Army Radio reported that the IDF completed a brigade-sized operation in Jenin.
- **Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights:** The IDF conducted an airstrike targeting an official in Hamas' military wing, Hadi Ali Mustafa, near Tyre, Lebanon.

Israel-Hamas War as of March 13, 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.

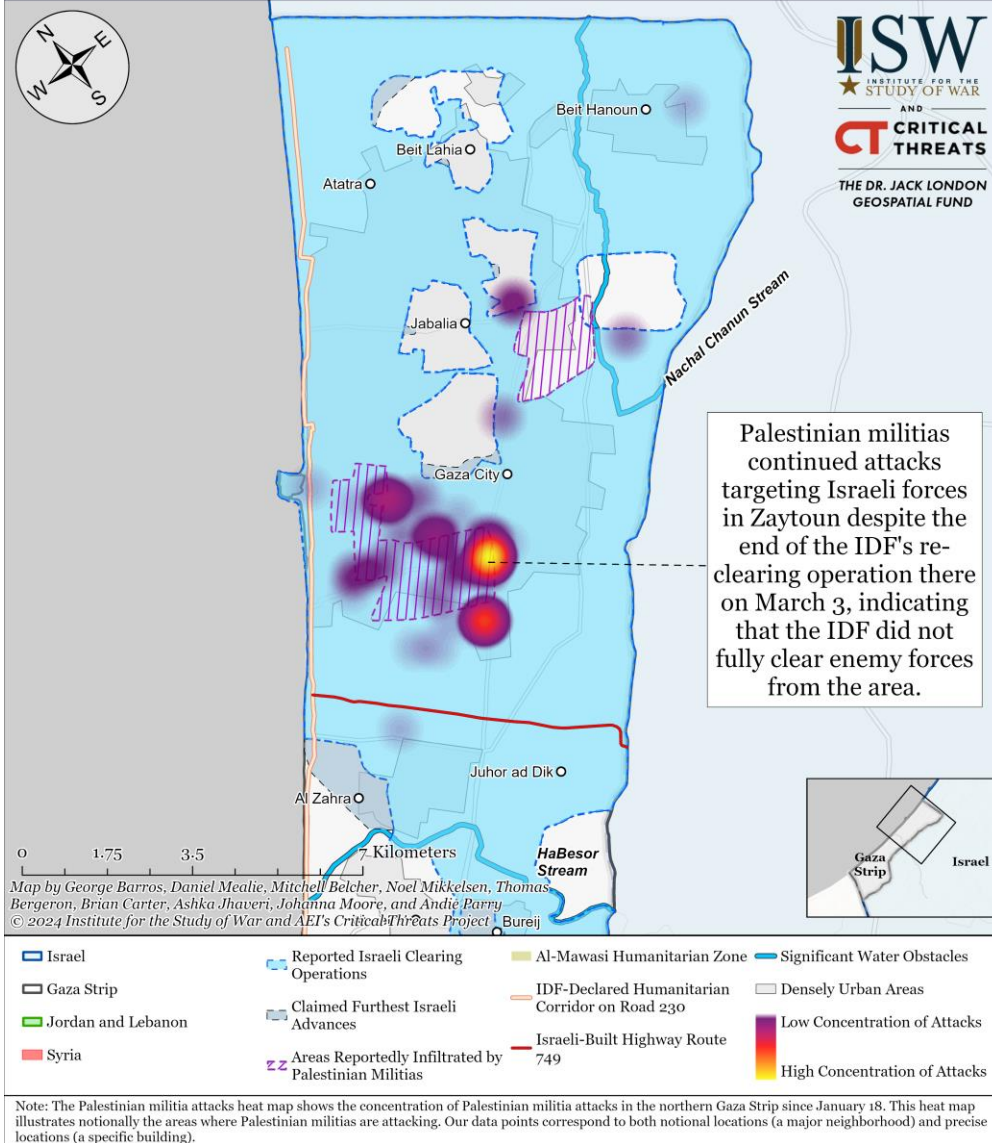
Israeli media reported on March 13 that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Navy fired at two suspected Palestinian fighters in scuba gear approaching the border between the northern Gaza Strip and Israel.^[1] CTP-ISW has not recorded Palestinian fighters attempting to infiltrate into Israel from the Gaza Strip since early November 2023.^[2] An IDF Navy helicopter destroyed an unspecified Palestinian vessel near Gaza City on March 11.^[3]

The presence of Palestinian fighters and infrastructure in the northern Gaza Strip demonstrates that Palestinian militias retain some capacity to operate there, despite Israeli clearing operations. Israeli forces began clearing operations in the northern Gaza Strip in late October 2023 and began withdrawing from the area in early 2024.[4] International governments and non-government organizations are beginning to build temporary infrastructure on the coast of the northern Gaza Strip to enable the distribution of aid from the sea.[5]

Israeli forces continued to operate in the central and northern Gaza Strip on March 13.

The IDF Nahal Brigade (162nd Division) directed airstrikes targeting a Palestinian fighter entering a Hamas-affiliated building in the central Gaza Strip.[6] The IDF 143rd Division conducted several airstrikes targeting Palestinian militia infrastructure in Deir al Balah, including tunnel shafts and anti-tank guided missile positions.[7] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, which is the self-proclaimed military wing of Fatah and is aligned with Hamas in the war, claimed the only attack targeting Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip on March 13. Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fighters mortared Israeli forces in southern Zaytoun in this attack.[8]

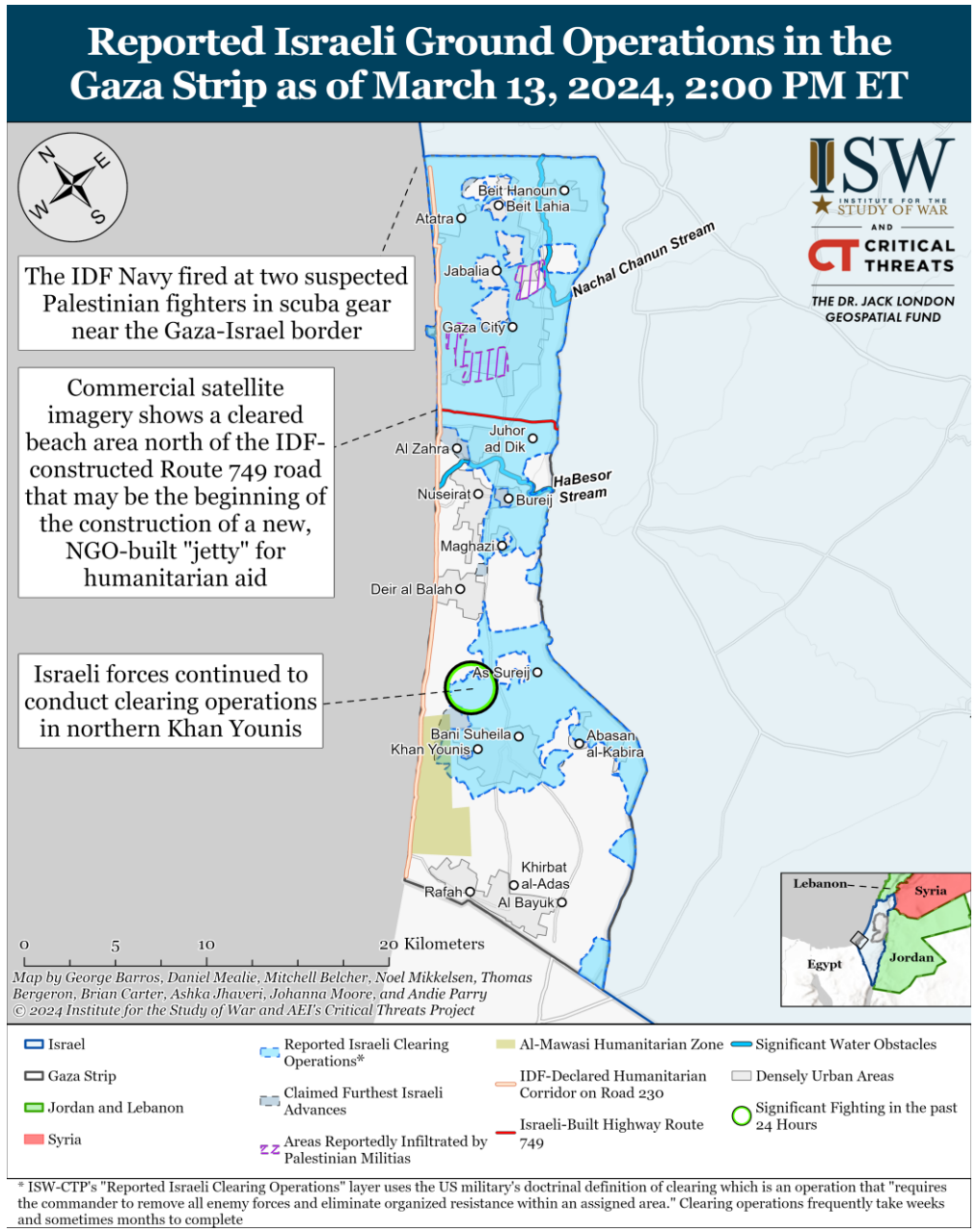
Palestinian Militia Attacks in the Northern Gaza Strip between February 1, 2024 and March 13, 2024



The IDF killed a Hamas commander in the Hamas “operations department” at a UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) food distribution center in Rafah on March 13. The IDF assessed that the commanders’ death will “significantly harm the functioning” of Hamas’ forces in Rafah.[9] The IDF said that the commander, Muhammad Abu Hasna, directed Hamas forces engaged with Israeli forces elsewhere in the Strip from an intelligence command center in Rafah.[10] The IDF reported that Abu Hasna had seized humanitarian aid equipment and distributing it to Hamas fighters.[11]

The IDF 98th Division expanded clearing operations in the northern and eastern Khan Younis on March 13.[12] The IDF 89th Commando Brigade detained several Palestinian militia fighters, including a Hamas Nukhba commander in Hamad.[13] The IDF Egoz Unit (89th Commando Brigade) airstrikes and indirect fire targeting seven Palestinian fighters barricaded in a building in

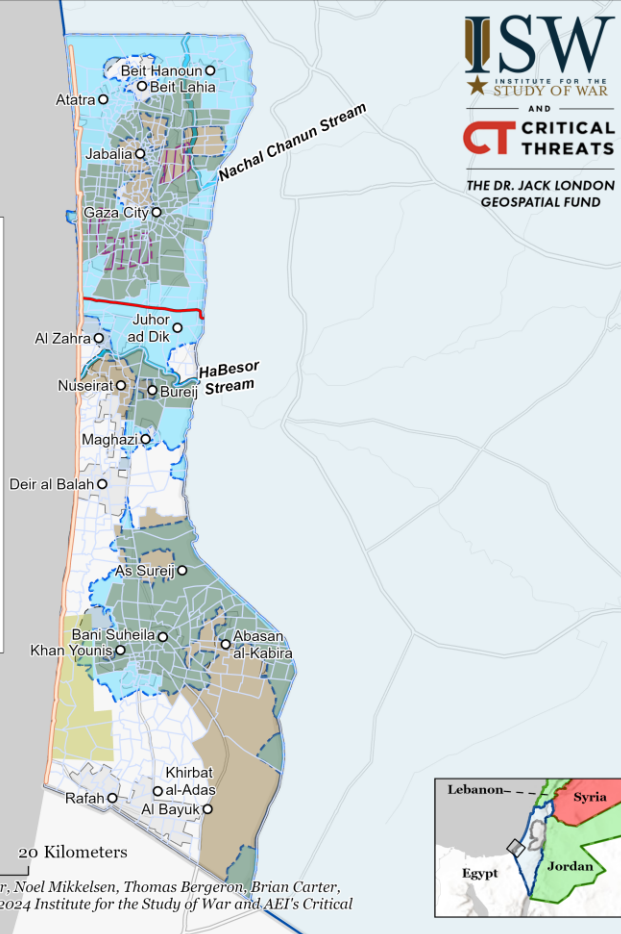
Hamad.[14] The IDF Maglan Unit (89th Commando Brigade) seized weapons in Hamad.[15] Palestinian militias did not claim attacks targeting Israeli forces in Khan Younis on March 13.



Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip as of March 13, 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)



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

Israel	Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*	Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone	Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones
Gaza Strip	Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances	IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230	Densely Urban Areas
Jordan and Lebanon	Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias	Israeli-Built Highway Route 749	Significant Water Obstacles
Syria			

* 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

Saudi state-affiliated media claimed that Hamas agreed to a modified US ceasefire proposal on March 12, which Hamas later denied.^[16] Saudi state-affiliated media cited an unspecified "senior Hamas official" who said that Hamas representatives would travel to Cairo in the coming days to discuss final details and the modified proposal's implementation.^[17] Hamas denied the report and implored the media to "ensure accuracy and credibility in reporting the news and not to manipulate the feelings of [the Palestinian] people."^[18] Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh issued five maximalist demands for a hostage-for-prisoner exchange on March 10 and stated that the Hamas leadership would reject any agreement that called for a temporary ceasefire.^[19] The United States' proposal directly conflicts with Haniyeh's recent demands because it does not explicitly call for a path to a lasting ceasefire.^[20]

The IDF announced that it conducted a pilot shipment to supply aid directly to the northern Gaza Strip.^[21] Israel inspected six World Food Program aid trucks at the Kerem Shalom crossing before allowing the trucks to enter the northern Gaza Strip via "Crossing 96."^[22] The IDF Arabic-language spokesperson said that the Israeli political establishment would decide whether to open "Crossing 96" based on the results of the pilot shipment.^[23] The trucks reached southern Gaza City without incident.^[24] Israeli officials have expressed concern that Hamas is seizing aid from convoys in the Gaza Strip.^[25] CTP-ISW reported that the Israeli War Cabinet approved a measure allowing the direct flow of humanitarian aid into northern Gaza Strip on February 25.^[26]

Palestinian militias did not conduct indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel on March 13.

West Bank

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

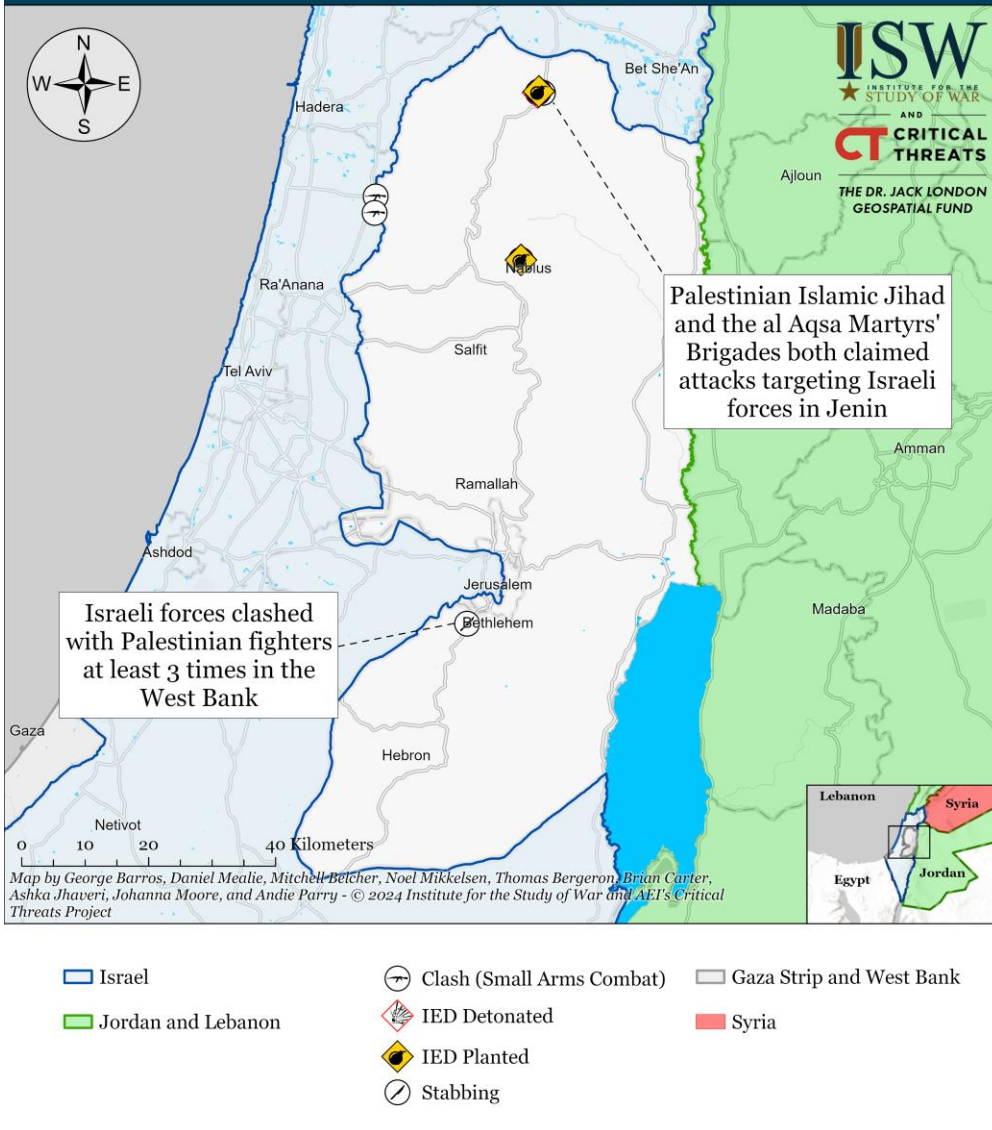
- Draw IDF assets and resources toward the West Bank and fix them there

Israeli forces have clashed with Palestinian fighters at least 14 times in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on March 12.^[27] Nine of the clashes occurred in Jenin.^[28] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and PIJ separately claimed small arms fire targeting IDF positions near Tulkarm on March 13.^[29]

IDF Army Radio reported that the IDF completed a brigade-sized operation in Jenin on March 13.^[30] The IDF killed two Palestinian fighters and destroyed planted IEDs during the operation.^[31] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and PIJ detonated IEDs and fired small arms at Israeli forces conducting operations in Jenin on March 12.^[32]

An individual stabbed and wounded an IDF soldier and an Israeli guard near Bethlehem on March 13.^[33] No group has claimed the attack, and the IDF did not specify whether the attacker was affiliated with an armed group. Hamas celebrated the stabbing attack and reiterated its call for Palestinians march towards the al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.^[34]

Clashes in the West Bank as of March 11, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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

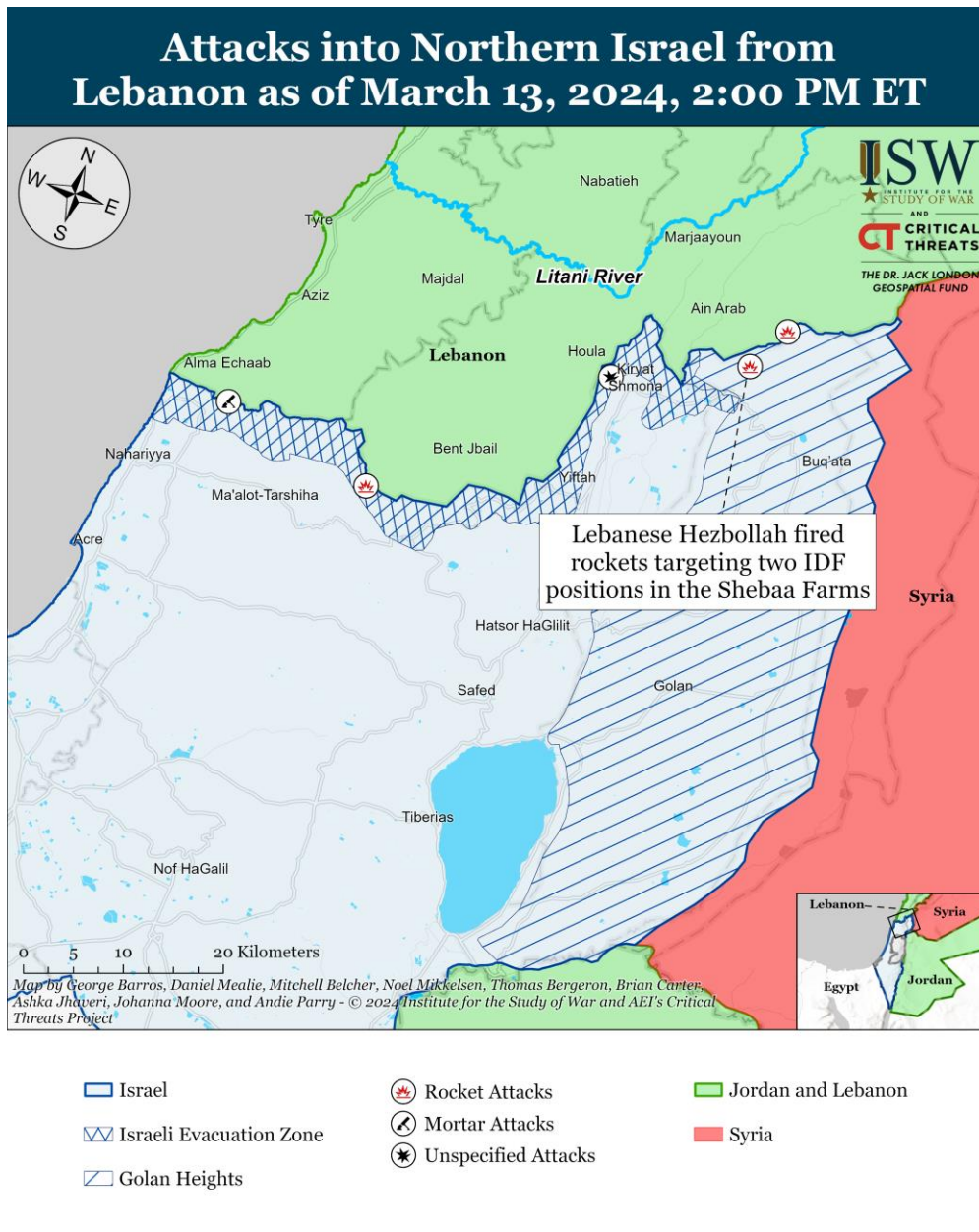
Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

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, have conducted at least six attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on March 12.[35] Hezbollah claimed that it fired unspecified weapons targeting an Israeli drone and "forced it to retreat" to Israeli territory on March 13.[36] The IDF has not commented on the incident at the time of writing. Hezbollah has claimed three attacks targeting Israeli drones since March 11.[37] Hezbollah shot down an Israeli drone on February 26.[38]

The IDF conducted an airstrike targeting an official in Hamas' military wing, Hadi Ali Mustafa, near Tyre, Lebanon, on March 13.^[39] Mustafa reported to a close aide to Hamas Political Bureau Deputy Chairman Saleh Arouri, who Israel killed in Beirut on January 2.^[40] The IDF stated that Mustafa was involved in “directing terror cells in Lebanon” and that Mustafa supported terror attacks targeting Israelis and Jews around the world.^[41] Hamas' military wing acknowledged Mustafa's death on March 13.^[42]



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

The IDF conducted airstrikes targeting two Syrian Arab Army (SAA) military sites operated by Lebanese Hezbollah in southern Syria on March 12.^[43] The IDF stated that it will not allow Hezbollah to establish itself along Syria's border with the Israel-controlled Golan Heights and that the IDF will hold the SAA responsible for Hezbollah activity in Syria.^[44] Local Syrian sources reported that the Israeli strikes targeted Hezbollah positions in Tal Ahmar and Ain al Nouriyah, Quneitra Province, Syria, near the Israel-controlled Golan Heights.^[45] Israeli media reported in 2020

that the SAA's 1st Corps, which is responsible for areas of southern Syria near the Golan Heights, is closely affiliated with Hezbollah.[46]

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

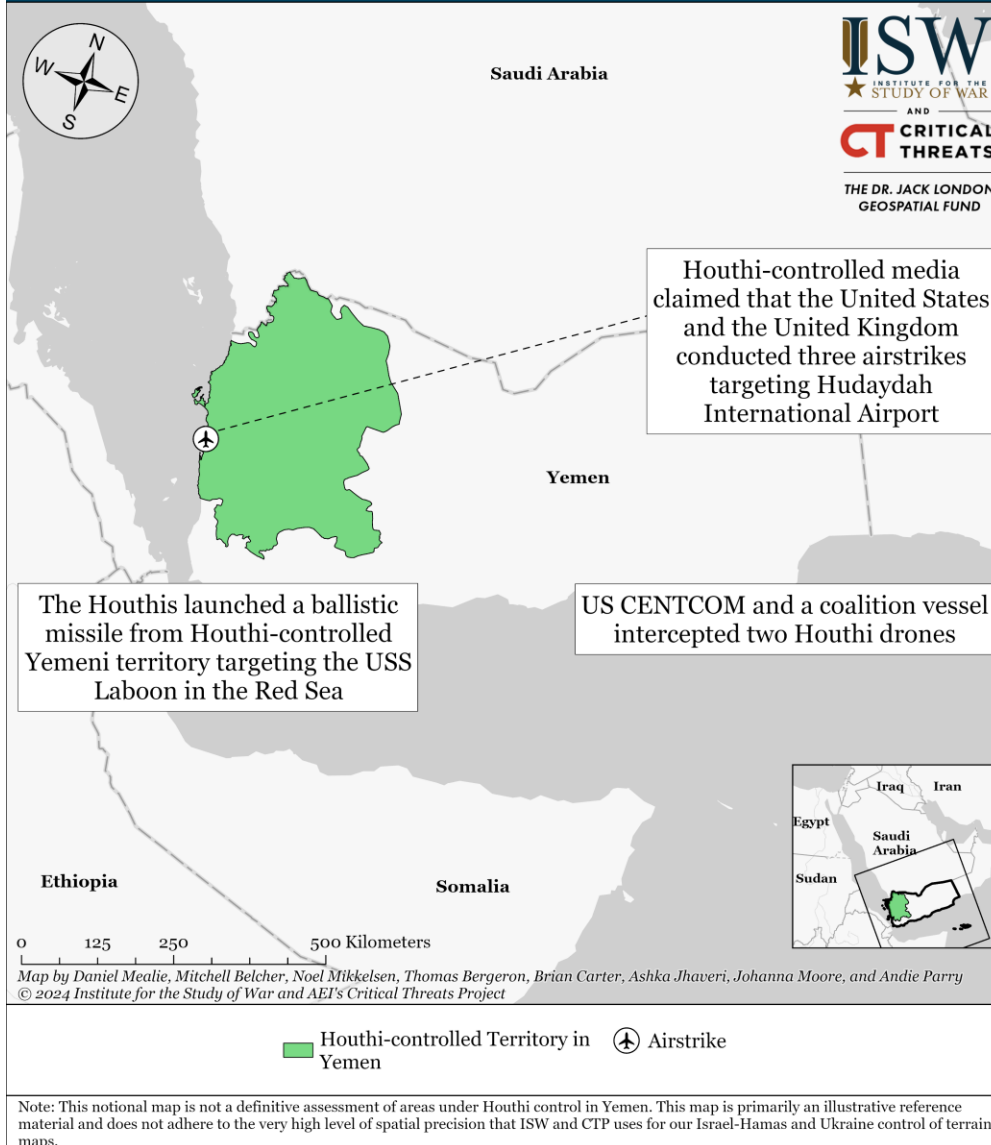
Iranian Defense Minister Brig. Gen. Mohammad Reza Ashtiani claimed on March 13 that Iranian defense exports have increased by five times since 2022.[47] Iran uses its defense exports to expand its military influence abroad and to generate revenue for the Iranian economy.[48] Ashtiani separately stated that Iran seeks to develop greater defense cooperation with Armenia, Qatar, Russia, and Turkey.[49] Ashtiani recently held separate meetings with the Qatari and Armenian defense ministers in Doha on March 4 and in Tehran on March 6, respectively.[50] Ashtiani attended the Doha International Maritime Defense Exhibition and Conference during his visit to Qatar.[51] Iran displayed its drones, anti-ship cruise missiles, and air defense systems, among other military equipment, in the exhibition. Iran has also reportedly supplied drones to Armenia since at least July 2023.[52]

The Houthi movement launched a close-range ballistic missile targeting the USS Laboon in the Red Sea on March 12 .[53] US CENTCOM reported that the missile did not impact the ship or cause any damage or injuries.

CENTCOM reported on March 12 that a US and coalition vessel intercepted two drones launched from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen.[54]

Houthi-controlled media claimed that the United States and United Kingdom conducted three airstrikes targeting Hudaydah International Airport on March 13.[55]

Houthi-controlled Territory in Yemen as of March 13, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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[3] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1767081191214071930>

- [4] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-october-28-2023>
- [5] <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3702071/dod-to-construct-pier-to-deliver-humanitarian-aid-to-gaza/> ;
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- [6] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1767812133725548685>
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- [8] https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6004
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