

Iran Update, March 27, 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 forces continued operating in and around al Shifa Hospital in Gaza City. Palestinian militias have conducted nearly 70 attacks targeting Israeli forces in and around the hospital since Israeli forces returned to the area on March 18.
- **Southern Gaza Strip:** Israeli forces discovered a “significant” tunnel network in al Amal neighborhood in western Khan Younis.
- Unspecified US and Israeli officials told Axios that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is planning to send two top officials to Washington to discuss a possible Israeli clearing operation into Rafah.
- **Political Negotiations:** Three unspecified people familiar with the Israel-Hamas negotiations told CNN that ceasefire talks have reached another stalemate but are continuing.
- **West Bank:** The IDF said that it conducted a “counterterrorism” operation around Jenin, highlighting the enduring militia network that exists there.
- **Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights:** The IDF Air Force conducted an airstrike in southern Lebanon, killing at least seven fighters associated with the military wing of a Lebanese Islamist political party Jamaa al Islamiyya.
- **Iraq:** Faylaq al Waad al Sadiq Secretary General Mohammad al Tamimi threatened to resume attacks targeting US forces if they do not leave Iraq.

- The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed two attacks targeting Israeli military infrastructure.
- **Yemen:** Senior IRGC Quds Force officer Brig. Gen. Abdol Reza Shahlai directed the initial Houthi attacks targeting vessels around the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea in October 2023, according to Bloomberg, further underscoring the Iranian role in these attacks.
- **Iran:** Senior Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) leaders continued their visit to Tehran.



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

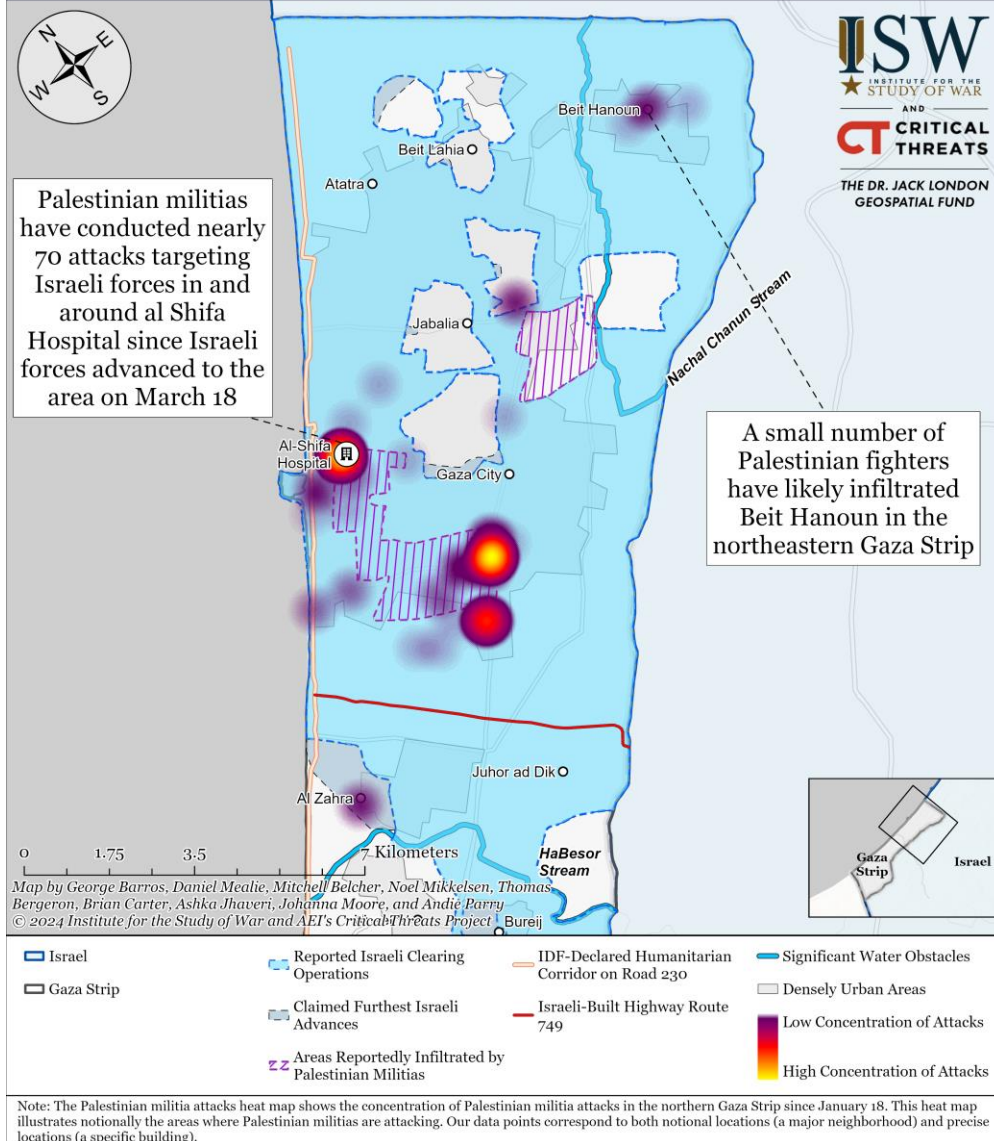
- Degrade IDF material and morale around the Gaza Strip.

Israeli forces continued operating in and around al Shifa Hospital in Gaza City on March 27.^[1] Israeli forces killed dozens of Palestinian fighters and located unspecified military infrastructure and weapons in the hospital area.^[2] Israeli Army Radio reported that the IDF surrounded three buildings in the hospital compound, where approximately 30 senior Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) personnel are located.^[3] The IDF published footage on March 26 of its forces questioning a PIJ fighter, who said that Hamas and PIJ personnel are “scattered in the buildings” at al Shifa Hospital.^[4] The IDF published an infographic of three Hamas and PIJ officials detained at the hospital, including a leader in Hamas’ Security and Protection Department.^[5]

Most of the Palestinian militia attacks on March 27 targeted Israeli forces in and around al Shifa Hospital.^[6] Palestinian militias have conducted nearly 70 attacks targeting Israeli forces in and around the hospital since Israeli forces returned to the area on March 18. This high rate of attack indicates that Palestinian militias retain a significant degree of combat effectiveness in the area, despite continued Israeli clearing efforts around Gaza City. At least six Palestinian militias have participated in the recent attacks targeting Israeli forces in and around al Shifa Hospital.

A Palestinian journalist reported on March 27 that Israeli forces advanced into parts of Zaytoun neighborhood in southwestern Gaza City.^[7] The IDF concluded a two-week-long re-clearing of Zaytoun on March 3.^[8] The return of Israeli forces to the neighborhood suggests that Palestinian militias continue to operate there similar to how these militias still have a presence in other portions of the northern Gaza Strip.

Palestinian Militia Attacks in the Northern Gaza Strip between February 15 and March 27, 2024

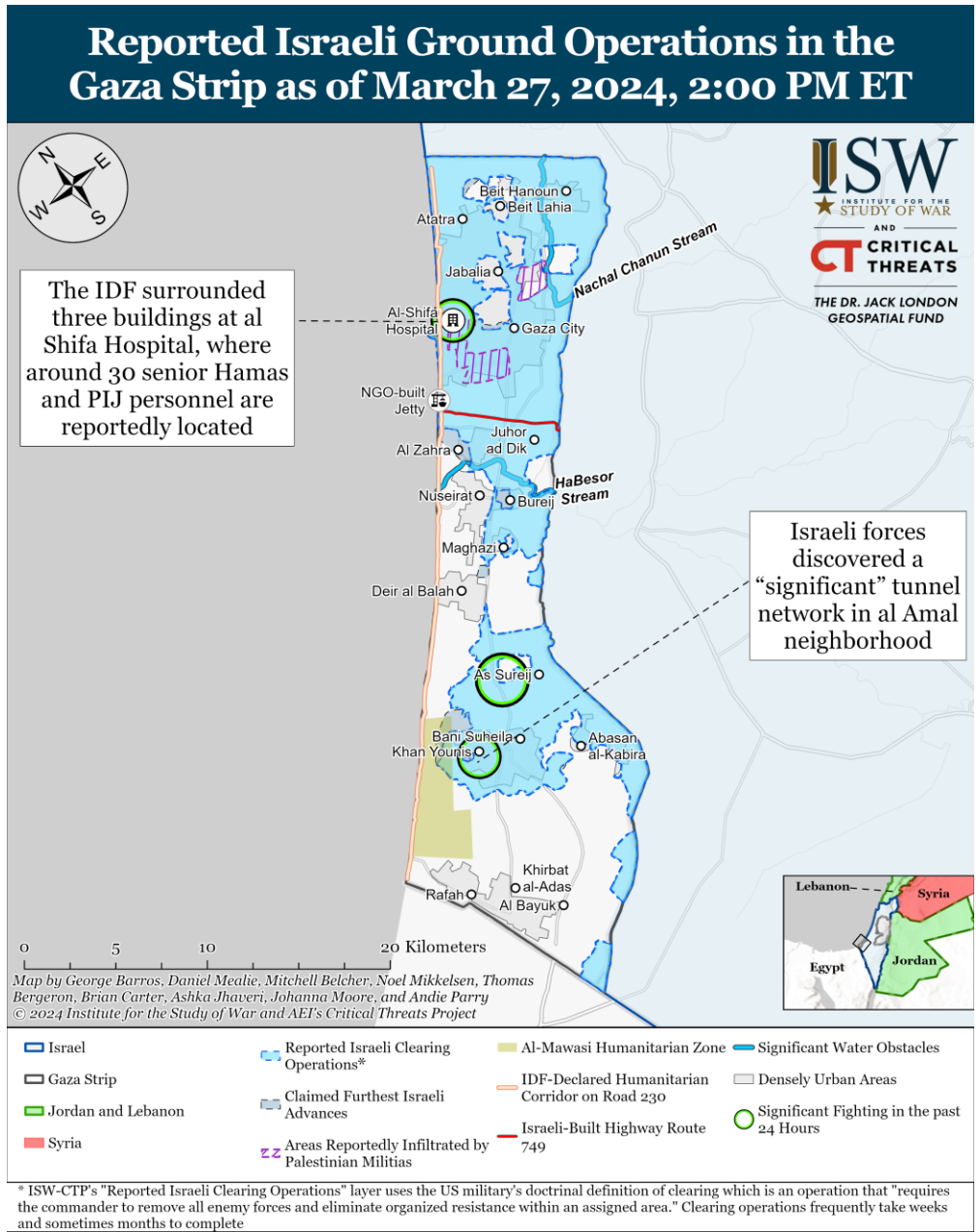


The IDF Nahal Brigade (162nd Division) continued clearing operations in the central Gaza Strip on March 27.^[9] A Palestinian journalist reported that Israeli forces advanced into unspecified areas east of Bureij.^[10] Hamas claimed that its fighters mortared Israeli forces in the area.^[11]

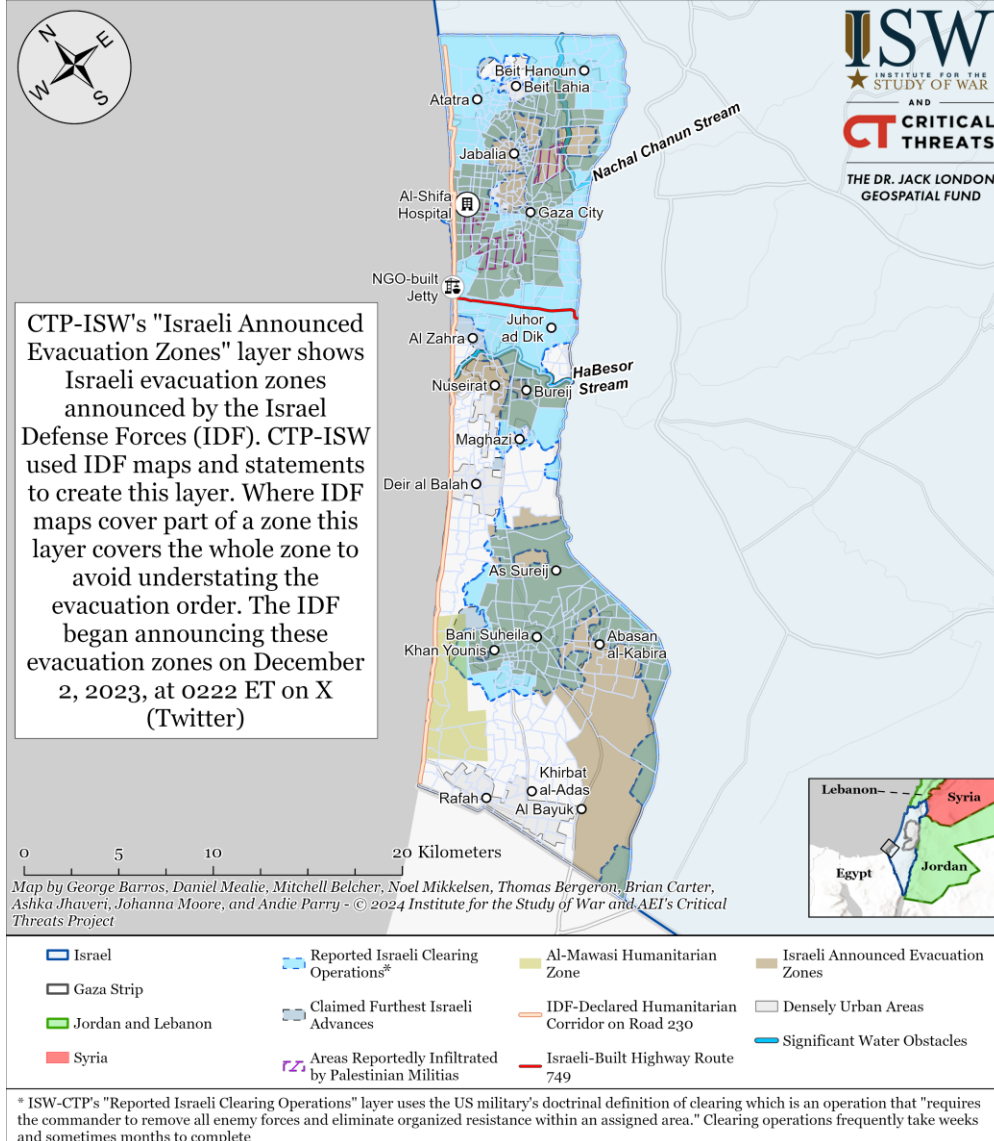
The IDF reported on March 27 that Israeli forces discovered a “significant” tunnel network in al Amal neighborhood in western Khan Younis.^[12] The IDF said that it used intelligence from questioning detained Palestinian fighters to find three tunnel shafts. The IDF has been conducting a second round of clearing operations in al Amal neighborhood, western Khan Younis, since March 24.^[13]

The IDF continued clearing operations in Qarara in northern Khan Younis on March 27.[14]

The IDF published on March 27 footage of an airstrike targeting a Palestinian fighter, who was surveilling Israeli forces in Hamad neighborhood, northern Khan Younis.[15] The IDF said that the fighter was passing information on Israeli troop locations to other Palestinian fighters over a phone.



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



Unspecified US and Israeli officials told Axios that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is planning to send two top officials to Washington to discuss a possible Israeli clearing operation into Rafah.[16] The Israeli officials are expected to arrive as early as next week. Netanyahu canceled a planned visit of two top Israeli security officials to Washington, DC, on March 25 in response to the United States' abstention from the UN Security Council resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire. Netanyahu said in a statement on March 27 that his reasoning for canceling the Israeli visit was "a message to Hamas: Don't bet on this pressure, it's not going to work."^[17] The White House said on March 27 that the Israeli Prime Minister's Office had agreed to reschedule the meeting.^[18] Axios reported that Netanyahu is expected to send the Israeli Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer and National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi.

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant discussed a possible Israeli clearing operation into Rafah in a meeting with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on March 26.[19] Gallant

arrived in Washington, DC, on March 25 to meet with top US diplomatic and military officials. An unnamed senior US Department of Defense official stated that Austin presented to Gallant the broad outlines of the Biden administration's "alternative approach" to an Israeli operation into Rafah.^[20] This approach included Israel targeting Hamas leadership, creating a plan to evacuate civilians, increasing humanitarian aid into the area, and securing the Gazan-Egyptian border.^[21] The official also stated that the Israelis were receptive to these outlines. Gallant told reporters after the meeting that Israel needs "to destroy Hamas as a military and governing organization in Gaza."^[22] He also said that they discussed the issue of aid distribution in the Gaza Strip and noted that Hamas is "sabotag[ing] the delivery of aid."^[23] Unspecified US officials said the two discussed the United States selling F-15 and F-35 fighter jets and Apache helicopter gunships to Israel.^[24]

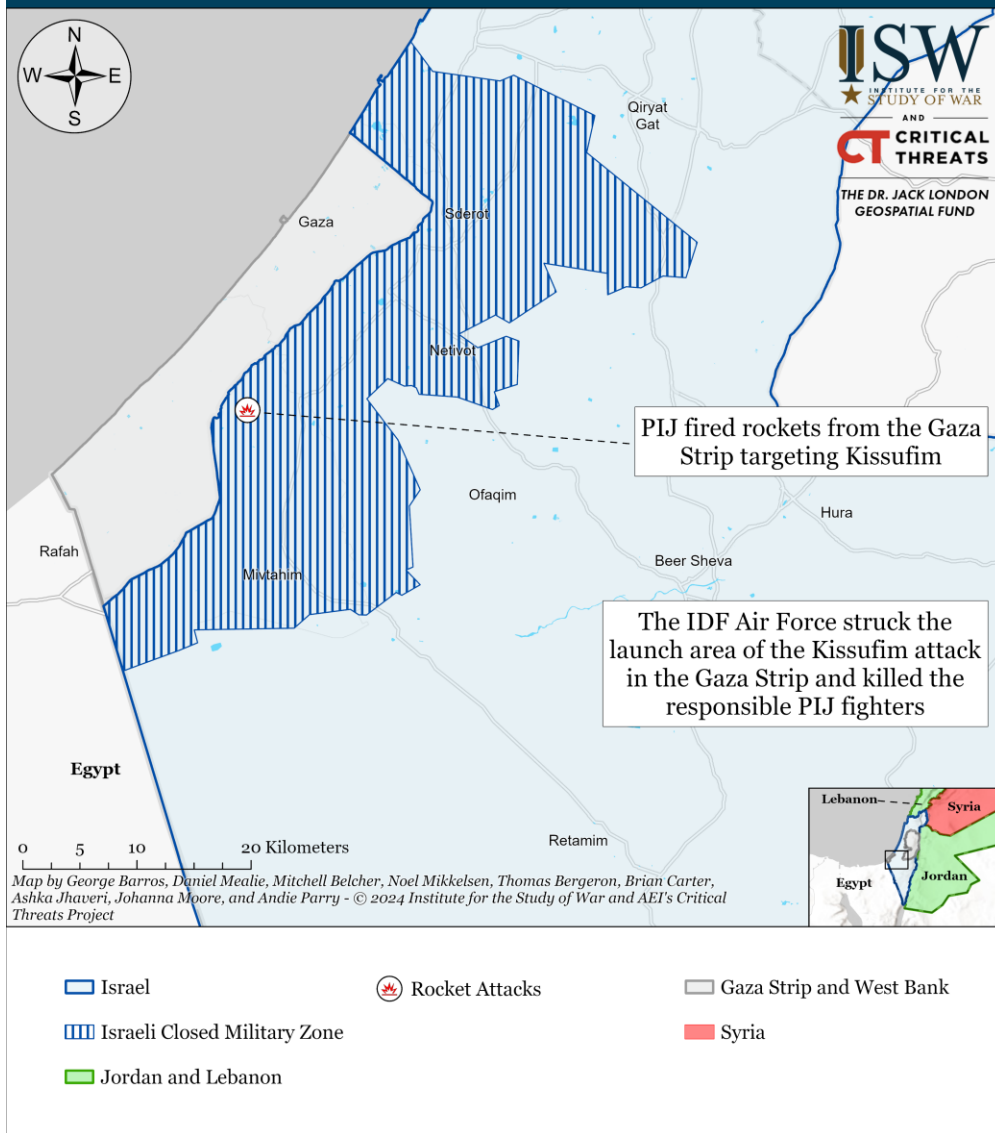
Three unspecified people familiar with the Israel-Hamas negotiations told CNN that ceasefire talks have reached another stalemate but are continuing.^[25] An unnamed senior Israeli official familiar with the negotiations in Doha told Israeli media said that Hamas' response to the latest hostage deal offer was "ridiculous" and that Hamas' leader in the Gaza Strip, Yahya Sinwar, "does not want to move forward with a deal at the moment."^[26] Lebanese media cited unnamed Egyptian sources, who have been in contact with IDF officials, saying that, following the failure of the latest round of negotiations, Israel is unwilling to make any further concessions to Hamas and is preparing for a clearing operation into Rafah after Eid al Fitr or in early May at the latest.^[27]

Hamas published on March 27 a video statement of its military commander Mohammad Deif calling for popular marches toward Israel and the Palestinian Territories.^[28] Deif stated: "Begin marching now, not tomorrow, toward Palestine, and do not let restrictions, borders, or regulations deprive you of the honor of participating in the liberation of al Aqsa Mosque."

Israeli media reported on March 27, citing an unspecified Israeli official, that 25 aid trucks reached the northern Gaza Strip without incident.^[29] The trucks entered the Gaza Strip through Gate 96, which Israel reportedly opened in early March 2024.^[30]

PIJ conducted an indirect fire attack from the Gaza Strip targeting Kissufim in southern Israel on March 27.^[31] The IDF acknowledged that the rocket fell in an open area.^[32] The IDF Air Force struck the area from which the Palestinian fighters launched the rockets and killed those responsible.

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



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

West Bank

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

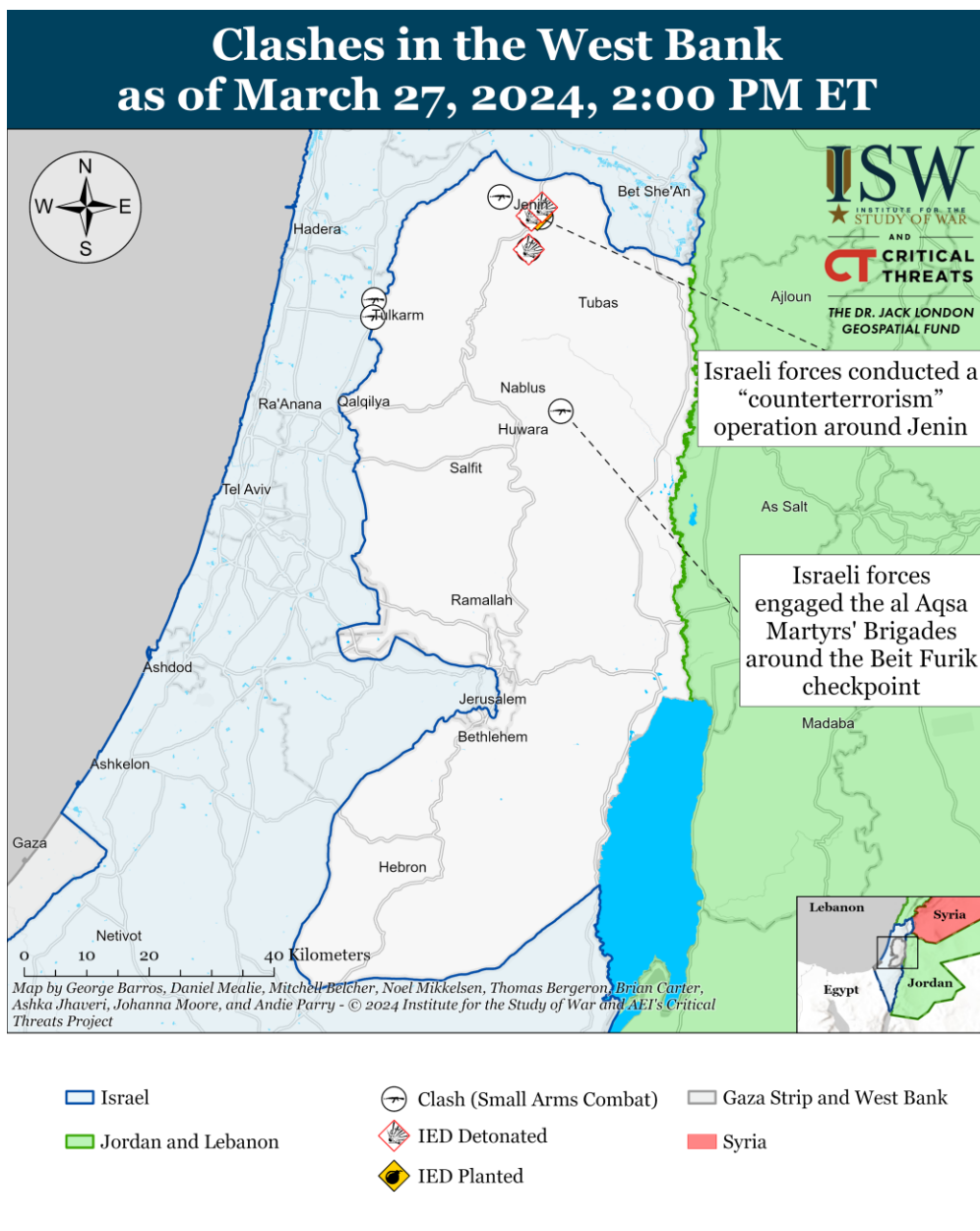
- Draw IDF assets and resources toward the West Bank and fix them there

Israeli forces have engaged Palestinian fighters in at least nine locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on March 26.[33]

The IDF said that it conducted a “counterterrorism” operation around Jenin on March 27, highlighting the enduring militia network that exists there.[34] The IDF conducted a drone strike during the operation, killing two Palestinian fighters.[35] Israeli forces killed a third Palestinian fighter, who threw IEDs targeting Israeli forces.[36] The IDF also said that it detained two Palestinians, who were driving a vehicle carrying “ready-to-use explosives.”[37] CTP-ISW previously

assessed that PIJ and possibly other Palestinian militias have a cell in Jenin for targeting Israeli civilians outside the West Bank.[38]

An Israeli Army Radio journalist reported on March 27 that the IDF will turn the Netzah Yehuda Battalion into a maneuver infantry battalion.[39] The Netzah Yehuda Battalion is an ultra-Orthodox military unit that operates primarily in the West Bank.[40] The journalist said that the battalion will train to conduct maneuver in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon.[41] Israeli media reported that some soldiers from the Netzah Yehuda Battalion began operating in the Gaza Strip in January 2024.[42] The Israeli government must present legislation aimed at increasing recruitment among the religious community by the end of March, but it has disagreed over drafting ultra-Orthodox Israelis.[43]



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

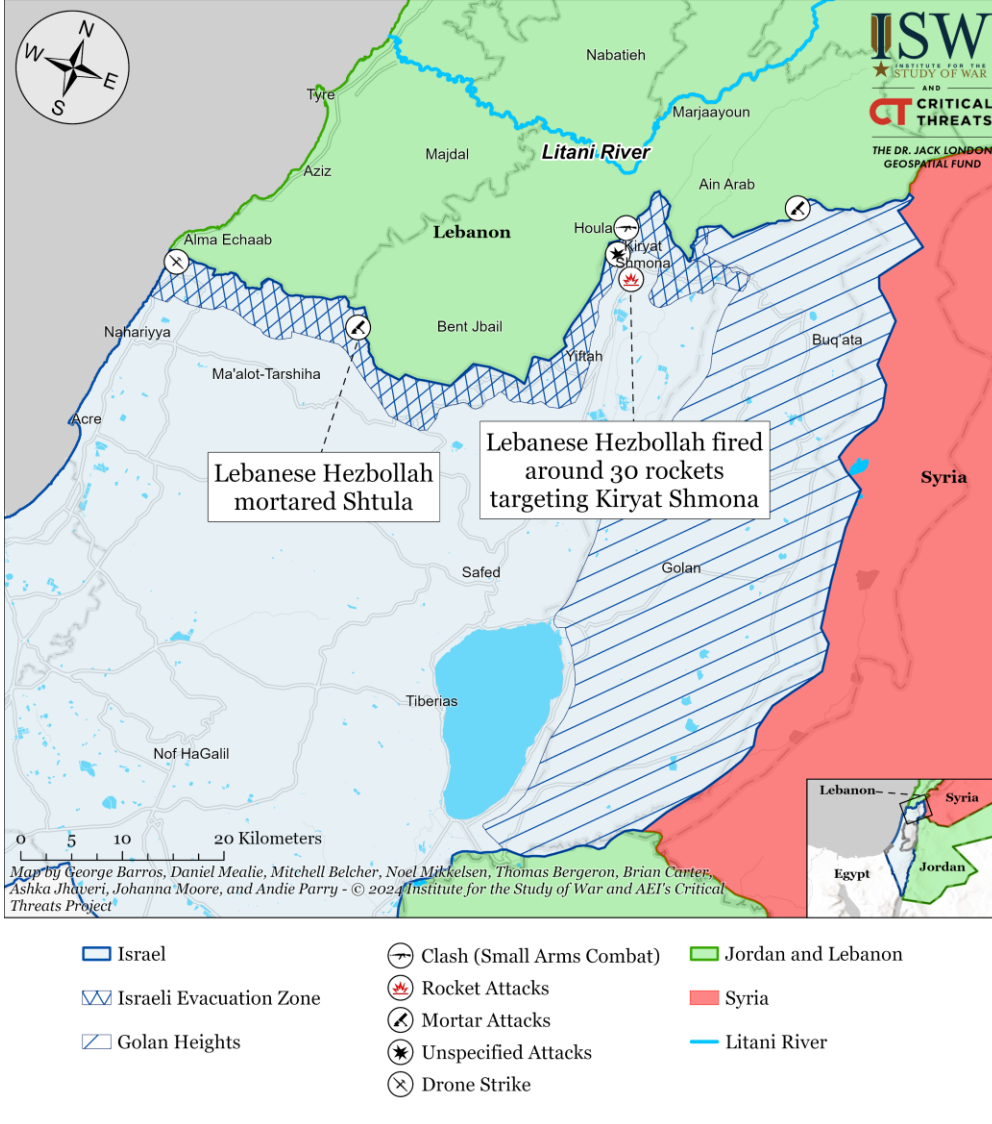
Lebanese Hezbollah has conducted at least six attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on March 26.^[44] Hezbollah fired approximately 30 rockets targeting IDF forces in Kiryat Shmona in northern Israel, killing one Israeli civilian and damaging buildings.^[45]

The IDF Air Force conducted an airstrike in southern Lebanon on March 27, killing at least seven fighters associated with the military wing of a Lebanese Islamist political party Jamaa al Islamiyya .^[46] The IDF and Israeli media reported that the fighters had plotted to infiltrate Shebaa Farms.^[47]

Senior Hezbollah official Nawaf al Mousawi said that Hezbollah has increased the rate at which it can stockpile new weapons during an interview with Hezbollah-affiliated media on March 26.^[48] Mousawi, who serves as the head of Hezbollah's Borders and Natural Resources Department, said that the group is now capable of receiving as many weapons in a month as it previously received in six months.^[49] Mousawi added that Hezbollah has created new storage facilities and has acquired more accurate missiles for "naval, ground, and aerial use." Israel has conducted an air campaign into Syria in recent months to disrupt Iranian efforts to transfer military materiel to Hezbollah. Mousawi also said that Israel is facing logistical challenges and would not be able to strike Lebanon or the Gaza Strip if not for US weapons shipments.^[50]

The IDF approved a new training program to increase the Air Force's readiness around northern Israel.^[51] The IDF said that the Air Force has conducted military training exercises over recent weeks.^[52] The exercises include "massive, long-range strikes, flights deep in enemy territory, decision-making in war conditions. . . and surprise exercises will be held for the various units."^[53] The IDF said that the training will not interrupt the Air Forces' operations in the Gaza Strip or other areas.

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon as of March 27, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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

Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Faylaq al Waad al Sadiq claimed on March 26 that unidentified actors conducted a drone attack targeting US forces at Conoco Mission Support Site in eastern Syria.[54] The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights similarly reported that US forces intercepted a drone in the area on March 26.[55] CTP-ISW cannot verify whether any attack occurred, however.

Iran and its Axis of Resistance remains committed to expelling the United States from the Middle East—by force is necessary—regardless of whether the reported attack on March 26 occurred. CTP-ISW has previously warned that the current lull in Iranian-backed Iraqi militia attacks does not indicate a change in the long-term Iranian and Iranian-backed effort to force the United States from the region.^[56] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias retain the capability to resume attacks targeting US forces at any time and for any reason of their choosing.

Faylaq al Waad al Sadiq Secretary General Mohammad al Tamimi threatened during a Newsweek interview published on March 27 to resume attacks targeting US forces if they do not leave Iraq.^[57] Tamimi threatened that Faylaq al Waad al Sadiq will target and kill US service members “if an agreement is not achieved” between Baghdad and Washington. Tamimi was referring to ongoing discussions between the United States and Iraq to transition to a bilateral security partnership.^[58] Faylaq al Waad al Sadiq has reported ties to Iranian-backed Iraqi militias Asaib Ahl al Haq and Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba.^[59] Faylaq al Waad al Sadiq also proclaims to adhere to *Velayat-e Faqih*, which is a core tenet of Iranian governance that enshrines the position of a senior cleric at the head of the regime.^[60]

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed two attacks targeting Israeli military infrastructure on March 26.^[61] The group claimed to target the Sapir military facility on the Sea of Galilee, northern Israel, with one-way attack drones and Ovda Airbase in Eilat, southern Israel, with unspecified munitions. CTP-ISW has previously observed that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq has transitioned to conducting regular attacks targeting Israel in March 2024 rather than US forces in Iraq and Syria.^[62] The group has not claimed any attacks targeting US forces since February 4.^[63]

US Department of Defense Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh confirmed that the United States was not responsible for a series of airstrikes on March 25 that targeted Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and IRGC-affiliated positions in eastern Syria.^[64] CTP-ISW previously noted that Israel was likely responsible for the strike.^[65]

Senior IRGC Quds Force officer Brig. Gen. Abdol Reza Shahlai directed the initial Houthi attacks targeting vessels around the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea in October 2023, according to Bloomberg, further underscoring the Iranian role in these attacks.^[66] Bloomberg cited informed sources. Shahlai’s involvement reflects the prominent role that Iran has had in directing and supporting the Houthi attack campaign targeting commercial and military vessels off the coast of Yemen. CTP-ISW has previously noted the Iranian role in providing targeting intelligence to the Houthis.^[67]

Shahlai is the seniormost IRGC Quds Force responsible for the Yemen portfolio but also has an extensive background coordinating other clandestine Iranian activities globally.^[68] Shahlai has helped arm and fund Iranian-backed Iraqi militias and supported their attacks targeting US and coalition

forces in Iraq. Shahlai planned, for instance, an attack that killed five US services members and wounded three others in Karbala in 2007.[69] He also directed and funded the attempted assassination of the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States in Washington, DC, in 2011.[70] The United States attempted to kill Shahlai the same evening as the US airstrike that killed IRGC Quds Force Commander Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani in January 2020.[71] The US Treasury Department designated Shahlai as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist in 2011.[72]

Senior Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) leaders continued their visit to Tehran on March 27. Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh and PIJ Secretary General Ziyad al Nakhalah separately traveled to Tehran on March 26.[73] Haniyeh met with Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian on March 26.[74] Haniyeh also presented a report on “current events and prospects” in the Gaza Strip during a meeting with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on March 27.[75] The Hamas readout of Haniyeh and Raisi’s meeting noted that the two officials discussed the “conditions” facing Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank.[76] Haniyeh’s visit to Tehran marks his second trip to Iran since the Israel-Hamas war began.[77]

Iranian media has notably published no reports about meetings between Nakhalah and Iranian officials. Nakhalah has almost certainly engaged Iranian officials since arriving in Tehran or will do so before he leaves. The lack of relevant media coverage is bizarre, especially given the opportunity for the Iranian regime to broadcast publicly its support for the Palestinian militias by having state media cover Nakhalah’s visit. The media silence could indicate that Nakhalah is holding meetings with officials that the Iranian regime does not wish to publicize.

IRGC Ground Forces Commander Brig. Gen. Mohammad Pak Pour visited IRGC Ground Forces units in southeastern Iran on March 27.[78] It is unclear which units Pak Pour visited, although the IRGC Ground Forces has at least four brigades in the southeastern region.[79] Pak Pour’s visit comes amid an uptick in anti-regime militancy in southeastern Iran since December 2023. Jaish al Adl—a Balochi, Salafi-jihadi group operating around the Iran-Pakistan border—has conducted at least five attacks targeting Iranian security personnel since December 2023.[80] The Afghan branch of the Islamic State separately conducted a terrorist attack in Kerman Province in early January 2024, killing over 90 individuals.[81]

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[1] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1772882307612803335>

[2] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1772882310066552914>

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