

Iran Update, March 31, 2024

Ashka Jhaveri, Peter Mills and Nicholas Carl

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. 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.

The Axis of Resistance is 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 with one another 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 militias over which Iran exerts more limited influence. Members of 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.

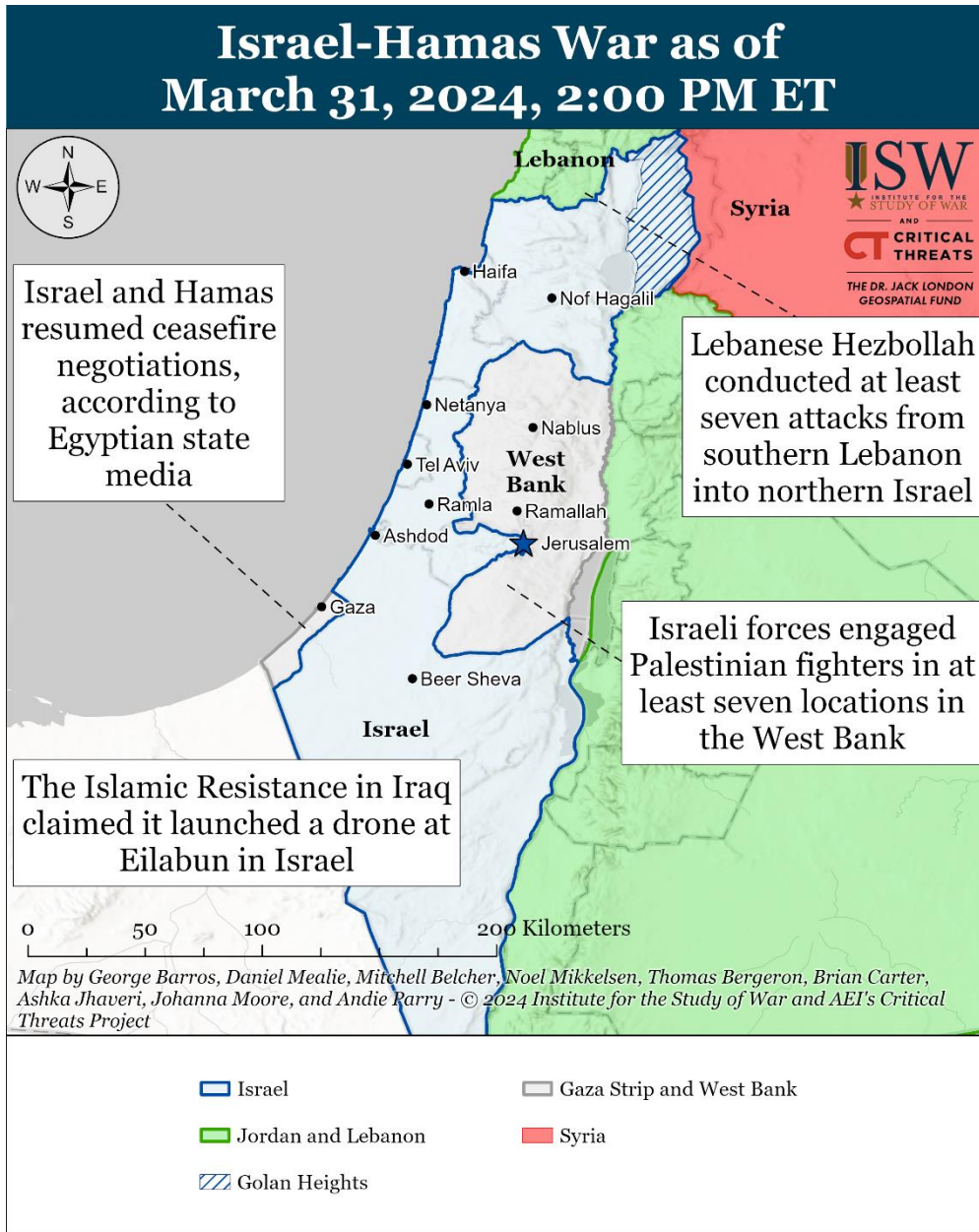
We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We utterly condemn violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

CTP-ISW will publish abbreviated updates on March 30 and 31, 2024. Detailed coverage will resume Monday, April 1, 2024

Key Takeaways:

- **Northern Gaza Strip:** The IDF continued to conduct clearing operations in and around al Shifa Hospital in Gaza City.
- **Central Gaza Strip:** The IDF said that its Air Force conducted a drone strike targeting a PIJ command-and-control center in the al Aqsa Hospital complex in Deir al Balah.
- **Southern Gaza Strip:** Israeli forces continued to conduct clearing operations in Khan Younis.
- **Political Negotiations:** Egyptian state media reported, citing an unspecified security source, that Israel and Hamas have resumed ceasefire negotiations.
- **West Bank:** Israeli forces engaged Palestinian fighters in at least seven locations in the West Bank.
- **Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights:** Lebanese Hezbollah conducted at least seven attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel.

- **Iraq:** The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed that it launched a drone targeting an unspecified target in Eilabun, Israel.



Gaza Strip

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

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) continued to conduct clearing operations in and around al Shifa Hospital in Gaza City on March 31.[1] These operations hit their two-week mark, as Israeli forces returned to re-clear the area on March 18. Israeli forces killed Palestinian fighters, who

had barricaded themselves inside the hospital. The IDF Nahal Brigade (162nd Division) is operating in the maternity complex, where it has engaged Palestinian fighters and located weapons.[2] The IDF 215th Artillery Brigade and IDF Air Force struck several buildings in the vicinity of al Shifa Hospital that Palestinian fighters recently used to fire anti-tank munitions and small arms targeting Israeli forces.[3] Four Palestinian militias launched mortars and rockets targeting Israeli forces near al Shifa Hospital on March 31.[4] Hamas fighters separately targeted an Israeli soldier with sniper fire near al Shifa Hospital.[5]

Hamas reported that its fighters fired an anti-tank rocket-propelled grenade targeting Israeli armor west of Tal al Hawa in southwestern Gaza City.[6]

The IDF Nahal Brigade (162 Division) continued to conduct clearing operations in the central Gaza Strip on March 31.[7] Israeli forces directed an airstrike targeting a Palestinian fighter squad that emerged from a tunnel shaft in the area.[8] Israeli snipers separately destroyed a Palestinian fighter squad moving toward Israeli infantry.

The IDF said on March 31 that its Air Force conducted a drone strike targeting a PIJ command-and-control center in the al Aqsa Hospital complex in Deir al Balah.[9] PIJ fighters were present at the center, according to the IDF.[10] A spokesperson for the hospital said that the drone strike killed at least two people and wounded over a dozen.[11] The IDF said that the hospital is still functioning and that the drone strike hit the area precisely to reduce harm to civilians.[12] The al Aqsa Hospital is the last functioning hospital in Deir al Balah.

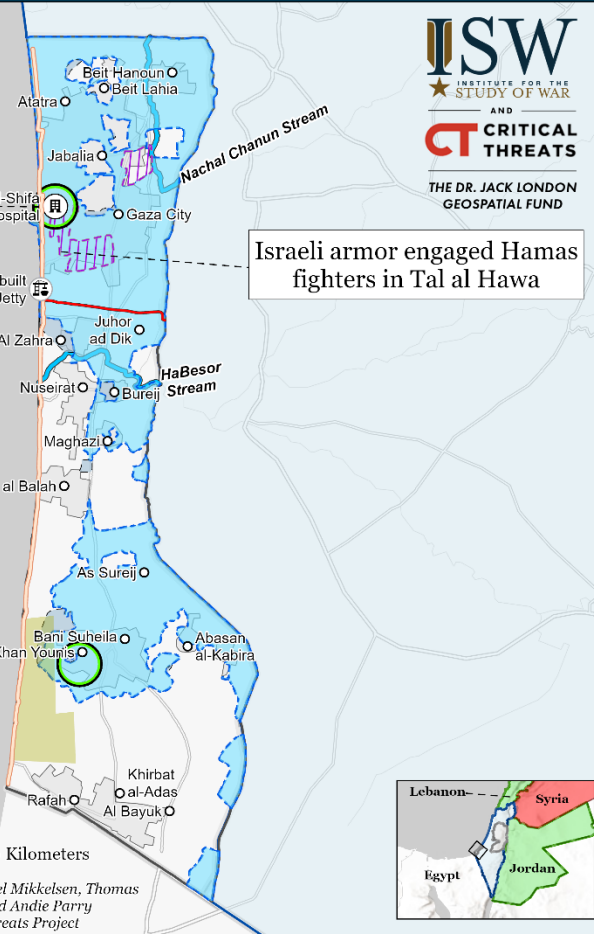
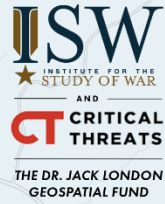
Israeli forces continued to conduct clearing operations in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip on March 31.[13] The IDF 89th Commando Brigade (98th Division) and Givati Brigade (162nd Division) are operating in al Amal neighborhood in western Khan Younis.[14] A Palestinian journalist reported that Israeli forces advanced to southwestern Deir al Balah and toward the Khan Younis port.[15] Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) reported that its fighters engaged Israeli special operations forces with small arms south of Deir al Balah.[16]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of March 31, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Israeli aircraft and artillery struck buildings that Palestinian fighters used to fire on Israeli forces around Rimal

Israeli armor engaged Hamas fighters in Tal al Hawa



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
- Gaza Strip
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230
- Israeli-Built Highway Route 749
- Significant Water Obstacles
- Densely Urban Areas
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours

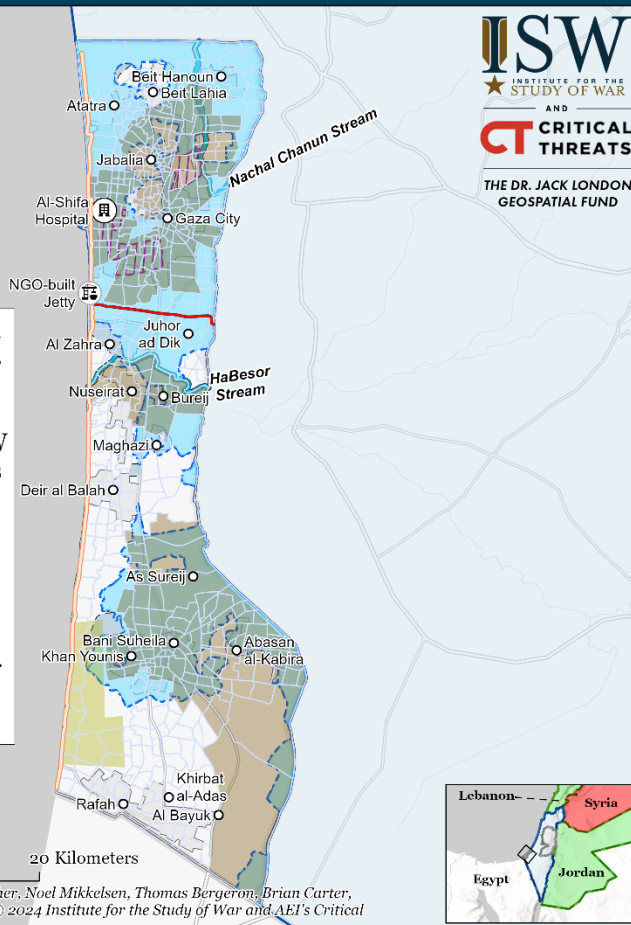
* ISW-CTP's "Reported Israeli Clearing Operations" layer uses the US military's doctrinal definition of clearing which is an operation that "requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance within an assigned area." Clearing operations frequently take weeks and sometimes months to complete

Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip as of March 31, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



THE DR. JACK LONDON GEOSPATIAL FUND

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

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Egyptian state media reported on March 31, citing an unspecified security source, that Israel and Hamas have resumed ceasefire negotiations.[17] Hamas rejected the most recent US proposal for a ceasefire on March 26, after which several people familiar with negotiations noted that the talks had reached another stalemate.[18] Hamas' representative to Lebanon said during an interview on March 31 that Israel is not interested in reaching a deal.[19]

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said that senior Hamas operatives described Hamas as "collapsing from within" during questioning.[20] Gallant made the comment at the IDF 98th Division headquarters on March 31. Israeli forces have detained hundreds of Palestinian fighters in recent weeks who have helped the IDF kill those who were involved in the October 7 attack.

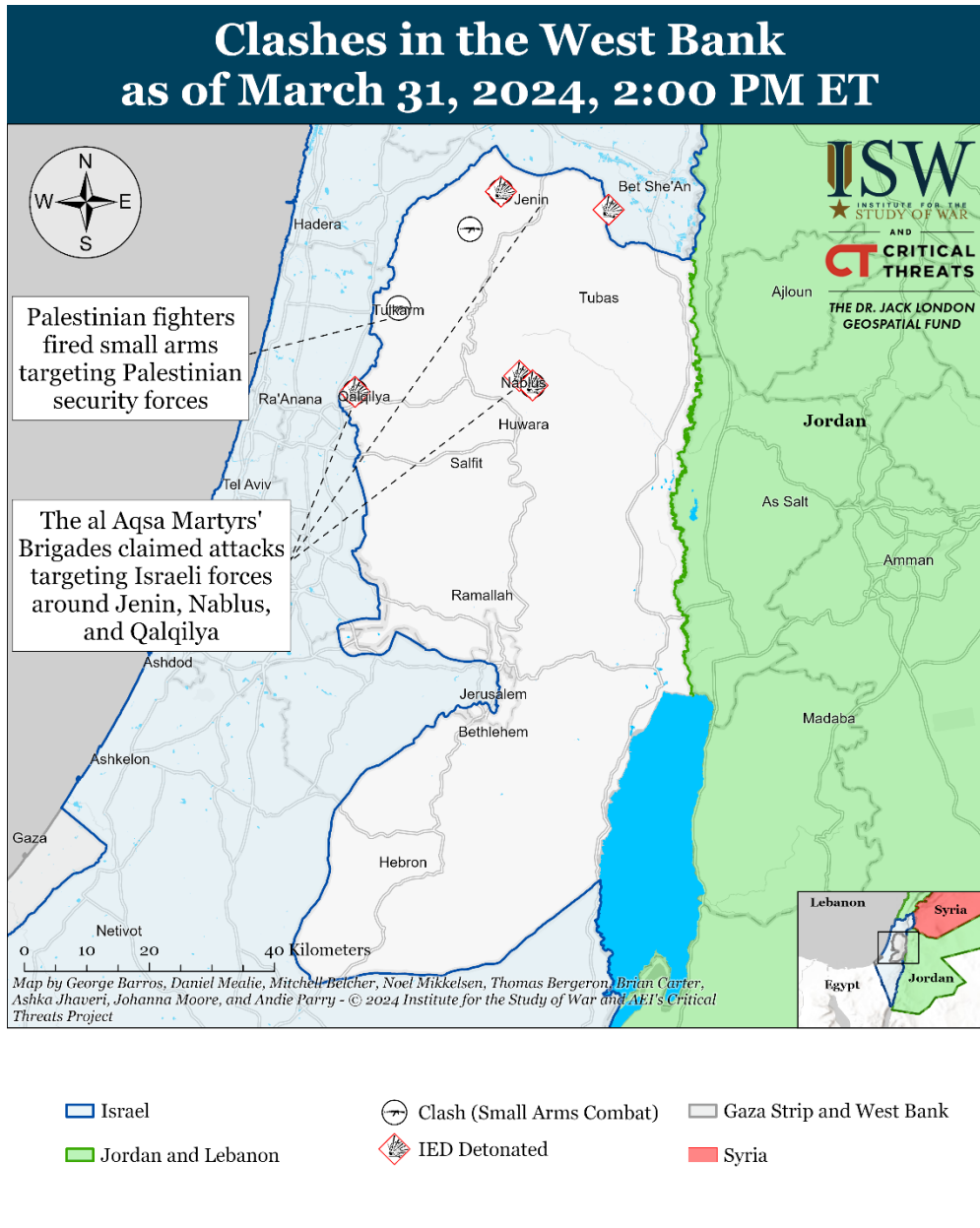
Palestinian militias did not conduct any indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel on March 31.

West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

Israeli forces have engaged Palestinian fighters in at least seven locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on March 30.[21]



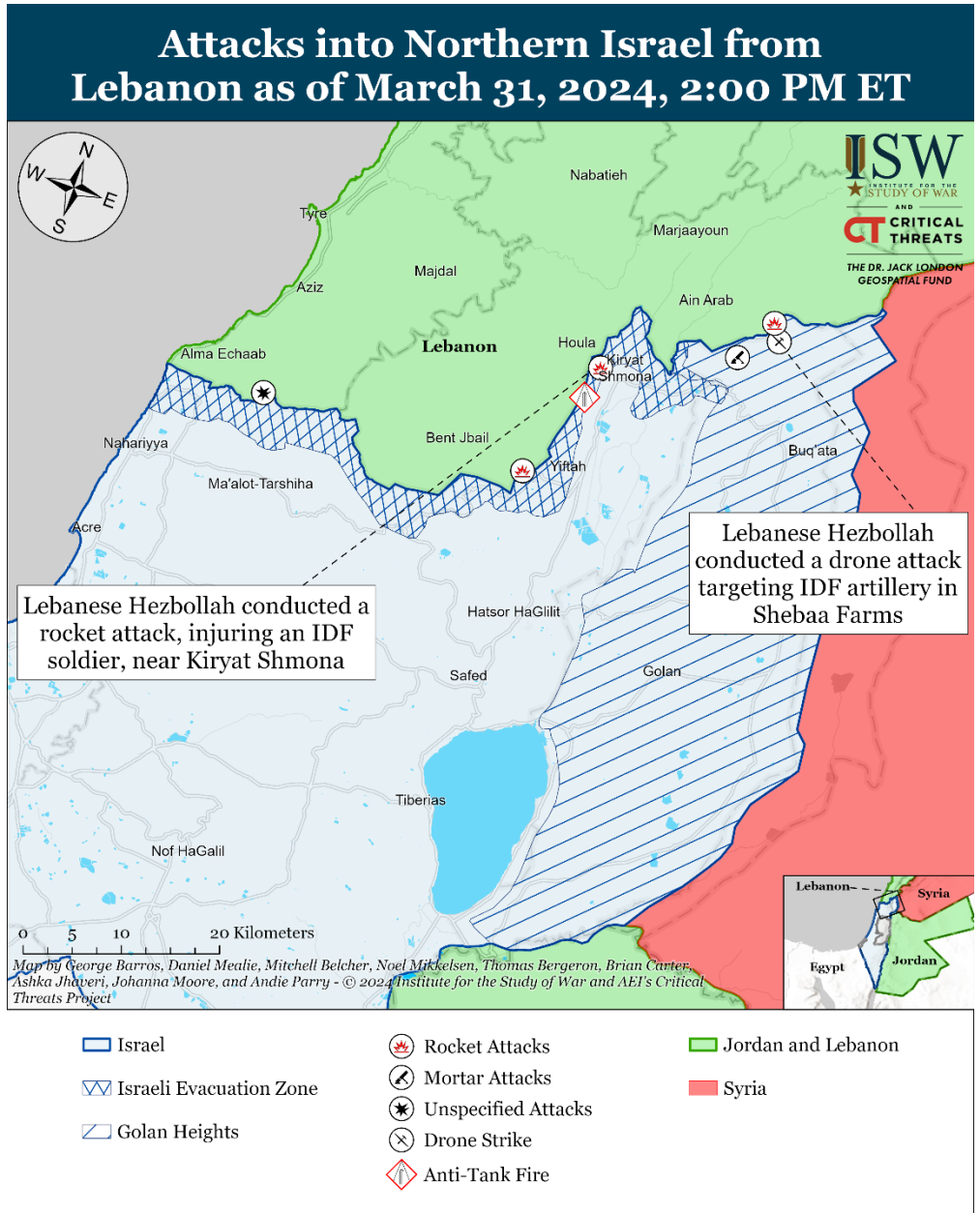
This map is not an exhaustive depiction of clashes and demonstrations in the West Bank.

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Deter Israel from conducting a ground operation into Lebanon
- Prepare for an expanded and protracted conflict with Israel in the near term
- Expel the United States from Syria

Lebanese Hezbollah has conducted at least seven attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on March 30.[22]



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

Iran and Axis of Resistance

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed that it launched a drone targeting an unspecified target in Eilabun, Israel, on March 30.[23] The IDF Air Force intercepted a drone entering Israel from Syria on March 30.[24] This drone was presumably the same one that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq launched.

Iranian-sponsored Attacks in the Middle East as of March 31, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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[1] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1774319459383078984>

[2] <https://www.idf dot il/188952>

[3] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1774319462486786368>

[4] https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6175; <https://t.me/mojahdeenpal/4396>;
<https://t.me/mojahdeenpal/4397>; <https://t.me/sarayaps/17623>; https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6177;
<https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1851>

[5] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1850>

- [6] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1849>
- [7] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1774319466316243388>
- [8] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1774319466316243388>
- [9] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1774407910786748456>
- [10] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1774407910786748456>
- [11] https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-03-31-24/h_eeccd7a709a950068bcd9b800951ee3b
- [12] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1774407910786748456>
- [13] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1774319470028136515>
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- [15] <https://twitter.com/ytirawi/status/1774218691489521773>
- [16] <https://t.me/sarayaps/17624>
- [17] https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-03-31-24/h_ob26a5c663f6c26c81acd477c122da2b
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- [19] <https://nournews dot ir/en/news/168932>
- [20] https://www.timesofisrael dot com/liveblog_entry/gallant-captured-hamas-operatives-told-interrogators-that-group-is-collapsing-from-within/
- [21] https://t.me/alqassam_jenin/639 ; <https://t.me/QudsN/388077> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/388151> ;
https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6172 ; https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6173 ; https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6174 ;
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- [22] <https://t.me/mmirleb/2988> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/2989> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/2991> ;
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- [24] <https://twitter.com/ItayBlumental/status/1774185636192256013> ;
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