

# Iran Update



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**Information Cutoff: April 18, 2025, 2:00 pm ET**

*The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) publish the Iran Update, which provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests. CTP-ISW publishes the Iran Update every weekday.*

*Click [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of the ongoing opposition offensive in Syria, and [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations. The Syria map is updated daily alongside the static Syria maps in this report. CTP-ISW ended daily maps of Israeli ground operations in February 2025.*

*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.*

**Iran proposed a three-stage nuclear deal proposal that caps Iranian uranium enrichment but would leave the necessary infrastructure in place to enable Iran to rapidly rebuild its nuclear program if the deal collapsed.** Anti-regime Iranian media reported that Iran proposed a three-stage nuclear deal proposal that capped Iranian uranium enrichment but preserved Iranian nuclear infrastructure, such as advanced centrifuges.[1] The reported plan does not include a timeline for the phases of the deal. This proposal would likely preserve Iran's ability to rapidly rebuild its nuclear program. Former UN weapons inspector David Albright warned on April 18 that Iran could make enough weapons-grade uranium in 25 days, even with a small low-enriched uranium (LEU) stock, if it maintains all of its current centrifuges.[2] Iran is also developing new advanced centrifuges, such as the IR-8, which Iranian officials have claimed is "sixteen times" more capable than the IR-1 centrifuge.[3] Iran has increased the number of its operational centrifuges since it signed the JCPOA in 2015.[4]

# Reported Iranian Proposal for Three-Stage Iran-US Nuclear Agreement

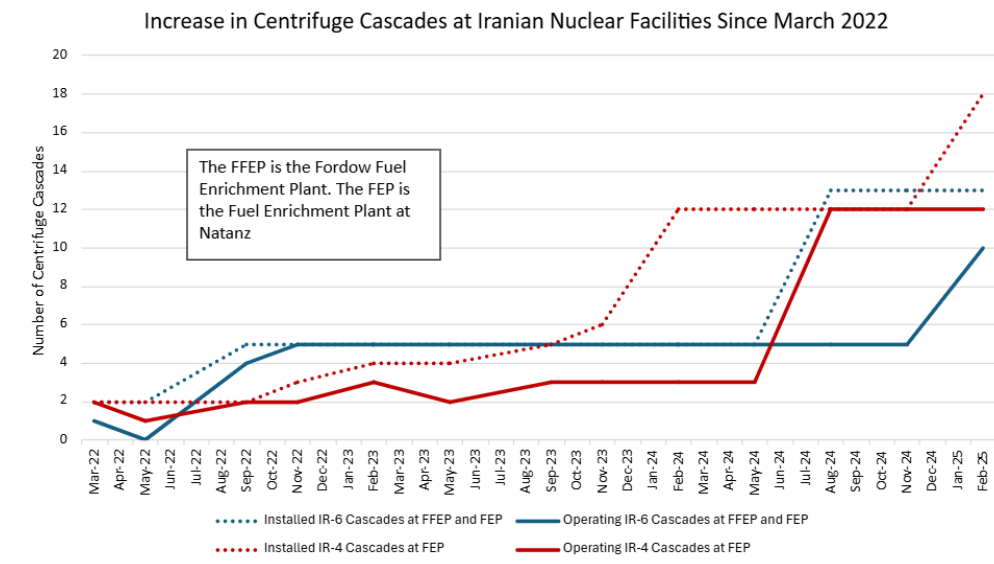
As Reported by Iran International on April 17, 2025



	Reported Iranian Commitments	Reported American Commitments
Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Halt uranium enrichment to levels above 3.67% temporarily</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Give Iran access to frozen assets</li> <li>Allow Iran to sell its oil</li> </ul>
Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>End high-level uranium enrichment</li> <li>Restore all International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections</li> <li>Implement the Additional Protocol</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prevent Europe from triggering snapback of UN sanctions on Iran</li> <li>Lift some Iran sanctions</li> </ul>
Phase 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Move highly-enriched uranium stockpile to a third country</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>US Congress must approve the Comprehensive Iran-US Agreement</li> <li>Lift all primary and secondary sanctions on Iran</li> </ul>

An unspecified senior Iranian official told Reuters on April 18 that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei will refuse any deal that requires Iran to dismantle centrifuges, halt uranium enrichment, and reduce its stockpile below Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) levels.[5] The reported Iranian proposal lacks sunset clauses, but leaves Iran’s centrifuge infrastructure intact, which would allow Iran to rapidly rebuild its stockpile of enriched uranium.[6] US Secretary of State Marco Rubio separately stated on April 18 that the United States seeks a durable deal that will prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon both now and in the future.[7] The Iranian proposal does not achieve the stated US government

objective of preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon now and in the future because it leaves the necessary infrastructure in place to rapidly build a weapon if the deal collapses.



Source: IAEA Verification and Monitoring Reports[8]

*This graphic shows the increase in centrifuge cascades at Iranian nuclear facilities since March 2022. The FFEP is the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant.[9] The FEP is the Fuel Enrichment Plant at Natanz.[10] The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) defines an operating cascade as cascades that “have been fed with UF<sub>6</sub> for enrichment of collected product.”[11] The JCPOA limited Iran’s enrichment capacity at the Natanz FEP to no more than 5,060 IR-1 centrifuges in no more than 30 cascades.[12] IR-4 and IR-6 centrifuges are more advanced than IR-1 centrifuges, enabling Iran to enrich uranium at a faster rate.[13]*

**Unspecified Israeli sources told Axios on April 18 that US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff met with Israeli Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer and Mossad Director David Barnea in Paris to discuss the upcoming US-Iran nuclear talks in Rome on April 19.[14] Iran and the United States will continue the second round of negotiations in Rome, Italy, on April 19.[15]**

**An analysis of available satellite imagery from a Chinese military-affiliated satellite company shows that the vast majority of Houthi attacks took place in areas imaged by the Chinese company.** An open-source analyst posted a map on X on April 17 that shows the available satellite imagery overlaid with Houthi attacks on vessels transiting the Red Sea.[16] It is unsurprising that a commercial satellite company would take images of a highly trafficked maritime route like the Red Sea, but the Houthi access to the imagery could improve Houthi targeting capabilities when used in conjunction with other Houthi targeting methods. This map comes after reports that this Chinese military-linked satellite company, Chang Guang Satellite Technology Co., Ltd, provided intelligence to the Houthis, according to US officials speaking to the *Financial Times* on April 17.[17]

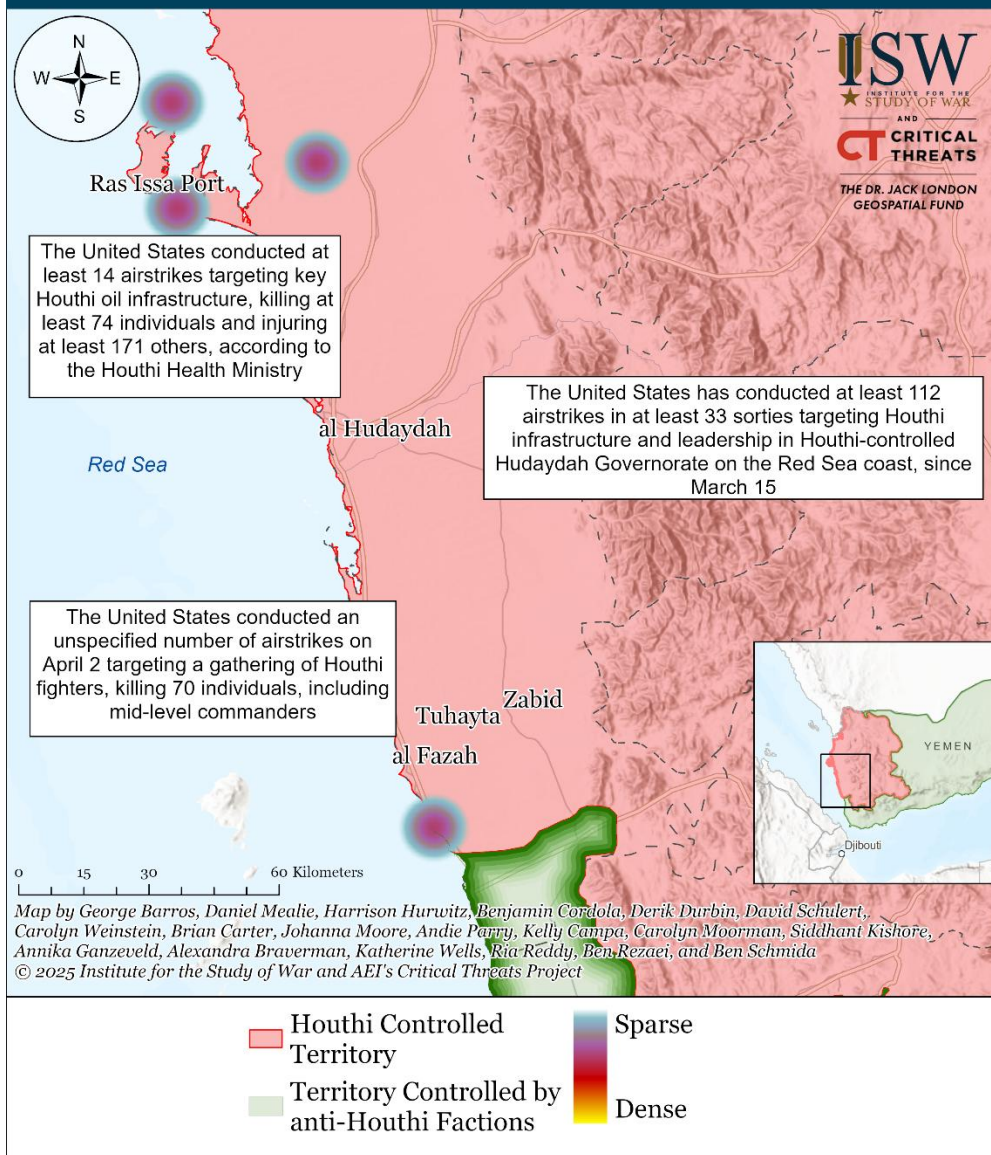
**US Central Command (CENTCOM) struck Houthi fuel stockpiles and oil export and import facilities at Ras Issa Port, Hudaydah Governorate, on April 17.[18] CENTCOM**

stated that they conducted these airstrikes to "eliminate" the Houthis' fuel source and isolate the Houthis economically.[19] The strikes damaged vessels at the port, three oil depots, oil transporters, and pipelines.[20] This satellite imagery also showed possible oil leaks into the Red Sea.[21] A Yemeni economic analyst estimated that CENTCOM airstrikes on Ras Issa Port, which the Houthis have controlled since 2016, resulted in approximately \$700 million worth of losses for the Houthis.[22] A Saudi news outlet noted that the Houthis received millions of dollars' worth of Iranian oil and gas exports, among other Houthi energy imports, through Ras Issa Port.[23] The Houthi-run Health Ministry reported that these CENTCOM airstrikes killed at least 74 people and injured 171 others.[24] Many of the casualties were workers at the port.

**A large proportion of US airstrikes have targeted Hudaydah Governorate, likely in an effort to degrade Houthi targeting capabilities and degrade other Houthi infrastructure.** CENTCOM has conducted at least 112 airstrikes in at least 33 sorties targeting Houthi infrastructure and leadership in Houthi-controlled Hudaydah Governorate on the Red Sea coast, since the start of its airstrike campaign on March 15.[25] Hudaydah Governorate is important because it hosts Hudaydah Port, Yemen's largest port, and Ras Issa and al Salif ports. The coastal radar systems in Hudaydah allow the Houthis to track maritime traffic through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, facilitating their drone and missile attacks on international shipping.[26] CENTCOM airstrikes in Hudaydah have reportedly targeted and killed mid-level commanders who coordinate logistics in Houthi-controlled areas, and Houthi attacks on vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.[27]

An air campaign can only achieve temporary effects. The temporal effects of this air campaign could be significant, however, and could deter the Houthis from continuing attacks if the United States renders the Houthis unwilling to continue. A campaign to permanently prevent the Houthis from using Hudaydah Governorate to launch attacks targeting international shipping would require a ground operation to take and hold ground.

## US Strikes Targeting Houthi Infrastructure in Hudaydah Governorate Since March 15, 2025



**The United States will withdraw from three bases in northeastern Syria, including two positions designed to support counter-ISIS operations along the Euphrates River in Deir ez Zor Province.**[28] Two senior US officials told *The New York Times* on April 17 that the US will close three bases: Mission Support Site Green Village, Mission Support Site Euphrates, and an unspecified smaller third facility.[29] Both mission support sites are located east of the Euphrates River in Deir ez Zor Province.[30] These bases have enabled US forces to support Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) operations along the Euphrates River in zones where ISIS cells operate and collect zakat from locals.[31] *The New York Times* reported that the US withdrawal began on April 17, which locally based Syrian media also confirmed.[32] The officials also said that the United States will withdraw about 600 of the 2,000 US troops currently deployed and that the remaining 1,400 US troops will remain stationed

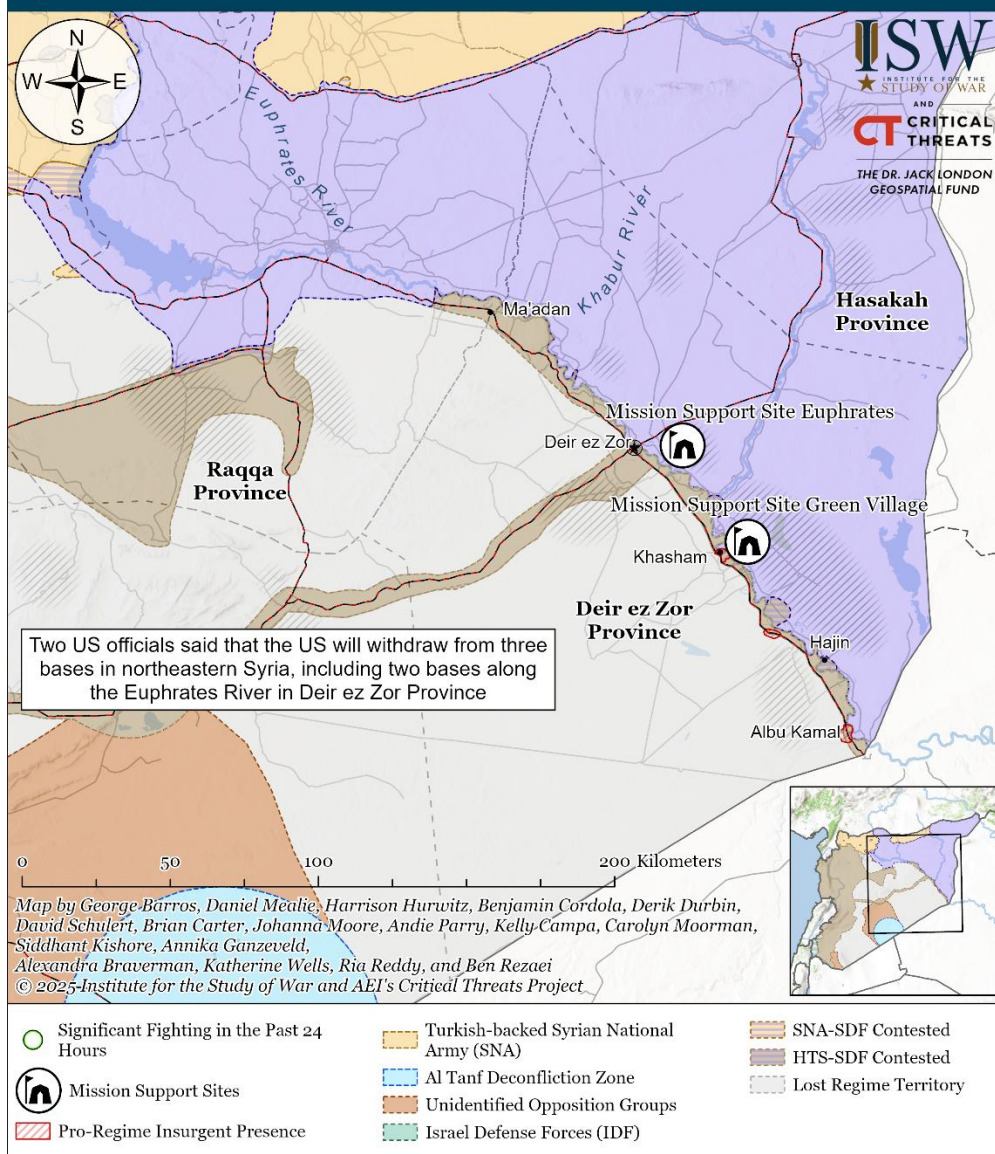
in Syria.[33] The United States maintained roughly 900 US personnel in Syria between 2019 and 2024.[34]

The officials said that the United States will assess after 60 days whether to withdraw additional troops from Syria.[35] A full US withdrawal from Syria would severely undermine the counter-ISIS mission in Iraq and Syria and would create a vacuum that ISIS could exploit to reconstitute. US forces provide critical intelligence and logistical support to the SDF and assist SDF units in managing and securing detention camps in northern Syria. The Syrian Defense Ministry (MoD) is expected to soon deploy to northeastern Syria in order to backfill the SDF as part of a recent integration agreement, but MoD forces are unlikely to provide any suitable replacement for US forces, at least in the short term. Syrian transitional government forces deployed for the first time in former SDF-controlled territory will need time to organize their forces and understand their new areas of operation. The international coalition reportedly conducted a joint patrol with the SDF and MoD forces along the M4 highway between Ain Issa and Tal Tamr on April 18, likely in preparation for MoD deployments in the region. [36]



## Reported US Withdrawal from Deir ez Zor Province

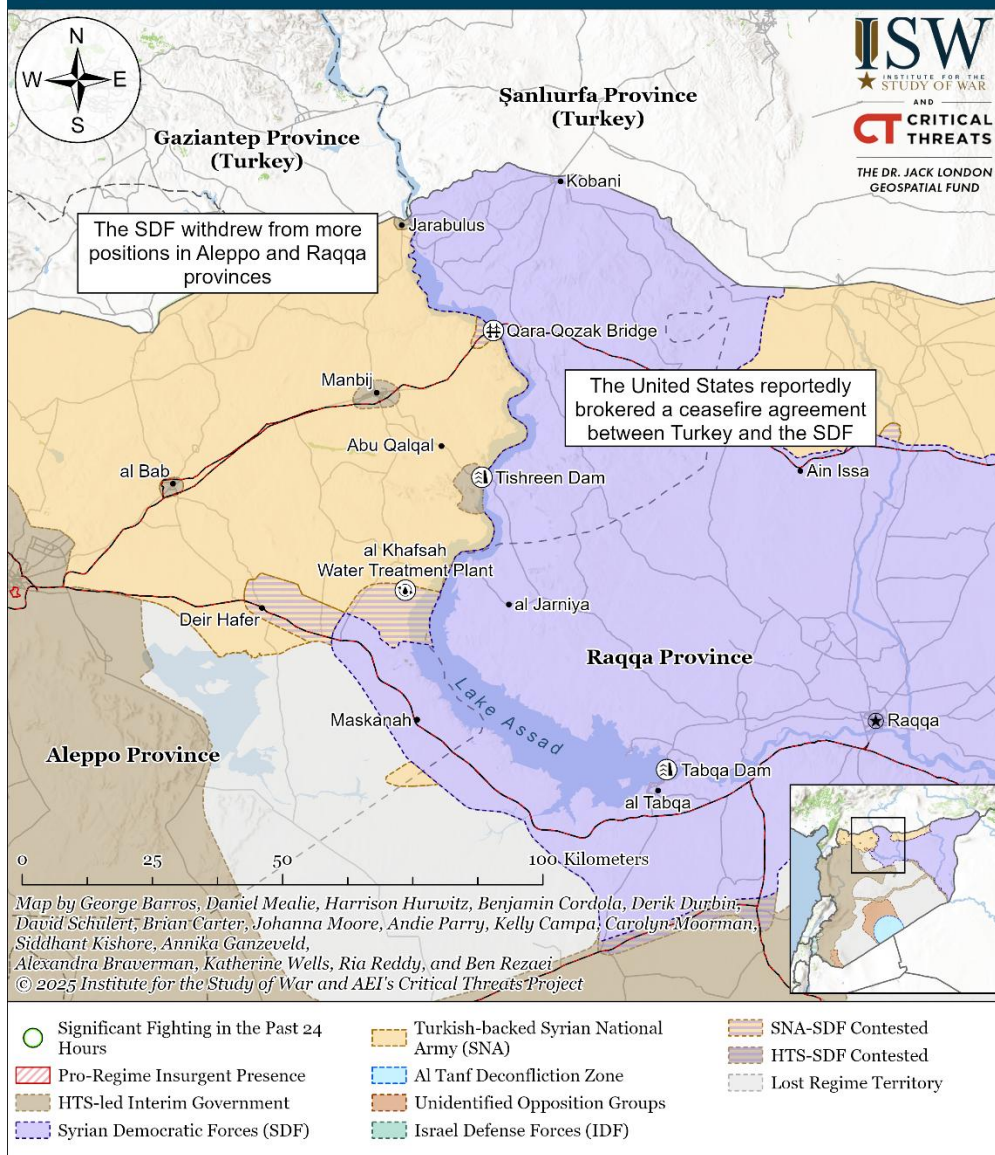
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**The United States reportedly brokered a ceasefire agreement between Turkey and the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on April 17.**[37] SDF Commander Mazloum Abdi led an SDF delegation to meet with Turkish officials at the Tishreen Dam, which marked the first direct meeting between the two sides.[38] Turkey and Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) launched near-daily attacks on SDF positions across northeastern Syria from November 2024 through late March 2025.[39] Turkish officials have consistently demanded that the SDF fully disarm and integrate into the Syrian MoD before reaching a ceasefire agreement.[40] It is unclear what the terms of this ceasefire agreement are and to what degree the SDF has fulfilled previous Turkish demands.

## Assessed Control of Terrain around Manbij

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**The Houthis claimed on April 18 that the group shot down a US MQ-9 Reaper drone with a locally produced missile over Sanaa Governorate.[41]** The Houthis have claimed that they have shot down 20 drones since the beginning of the October 7 War.[42] A Yemen analyst reported that the Houthis likely used relatively makeshift air defenses to quickly fire before moving to avoid strikes in response.[43] The same analyst noted that many of these systems are repurposed radar and optical systems from the former Yemeni Armed Forces or supplied by Iran and built with Chinese technology.[44] These air defense systems can intercept slow, relatively low-flying drones, but cannot destroy cruise missiles or advanced fighter aircraft.[45]

**Iraqi media reported on April 17 that the Iraqi federal government replaced Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) brigades controlled by Iranian-backed Iraqi militias with PMF brigades close to Grand Ayatollah Ali al Sistani along the Iraq-Syria**



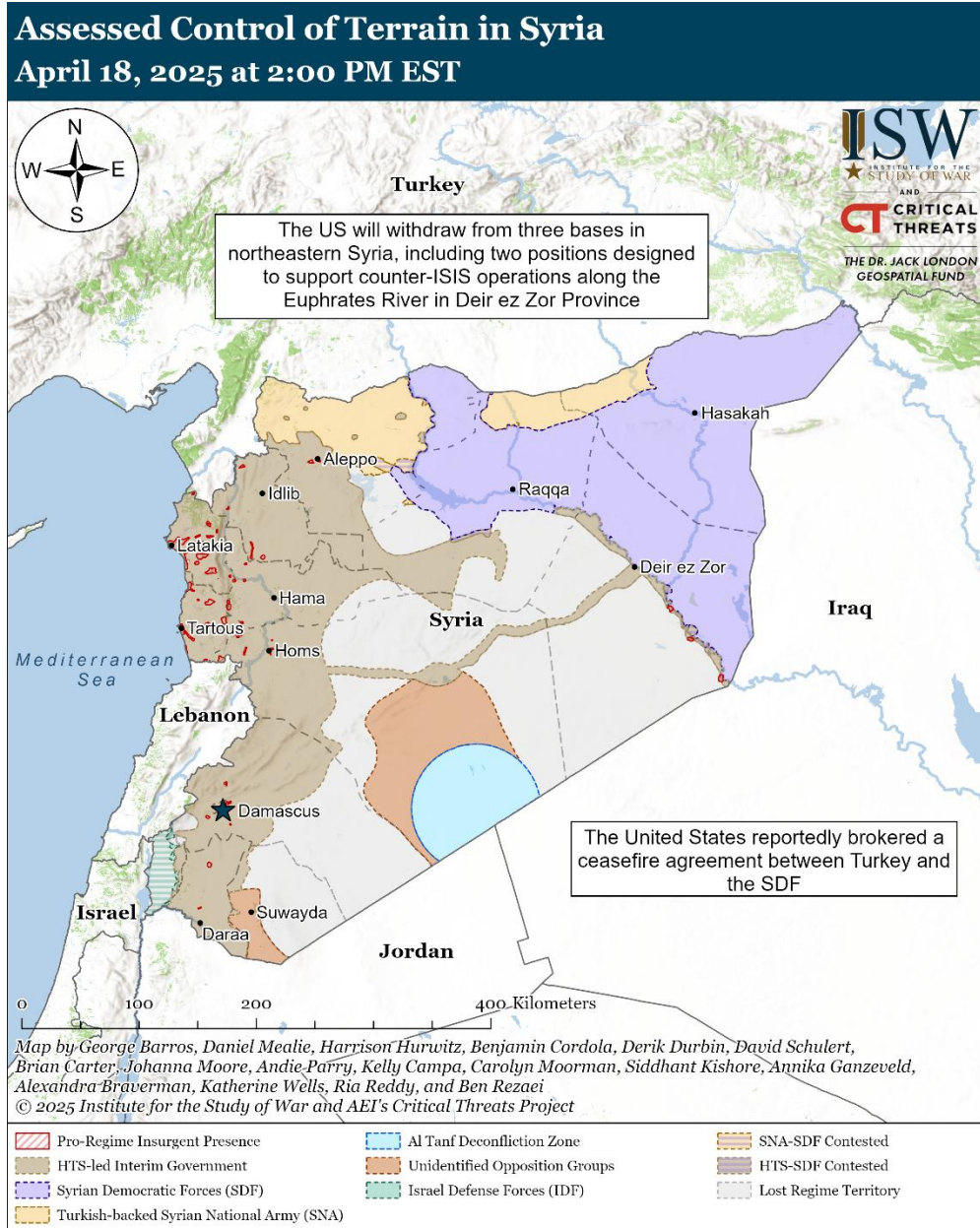
**border.[46]** “Official sources” told al Aalem that the PMF 44th and 72nd Brigades had deployed near Sinjar and al Qaim, respectively, following the withdrawal of PMF units affiliated with Iranian-backed Iraqi militias Kataib Hezbollah, Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba, and Liwa al Taluf from near al Qaim. The PMF 44th and 72nd Brigades are known as “shrine militias” that are loyal to Grand Ayatollah Ali al Sistani and the Iraqi Defense Ministry.[47] The “official sources” and a “prominent” Iranian-backed Iraqi militia member added that these deployments are part of an Iraqi federal government plan to “reduce international and tribal pressure” on the government to remove the militias from the border.[48] An advisor to the Anbar Provincial Council told al Aalem that the incoming PMF brigades are “more disciplined and have an excellent relationship with the Anbar tribes.”[49]

CTP-ISW has not observed photo evidence of these redeployments. It is unlikely that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias would withdraw from their positions on the Syria-Iraq border because the militias derive significant economic benefit from controlling these border crossings.[50] UK-based media reported in late December 2024 that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias that had recently withdrawn from Syria to Iraq after the collapse of the Assad regime would soon begin moving from the al Qaim area due to unspecified regional and international pressure on the Iraqi federal government to remove militias from the Syrian border.[51]

### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Iran-Proposed Nuclear Deal:** Iran proposed a three-stage nuclear deal proposal that caps Iranian uranium enrichment but would leave the necessary infrastructure in place to enable Iran to rapidly rebuild its nuclear program if the deal collapsed.
- **China-Houthi Connections:** An analysis of available satellite imagery from a Chinese military-affiliated satellite company shows that the vast majority of Houthi attacks took place in areas imaged by the Chinese company. An open-source analyst posted a map on X on April 17 that shows the available satellite imagery overlaid with Houthi attacks on vessels transiting the Red Sea.
- **CENTCOM Airstrikes in Ras Issa, Yemen:** US Central Command (CENTCOM) struck Houthi fuel stockpiles and oil export and import facilities at Ras Issa Port, Hudaydah Governorate, on April 17.
- **US Air Campaign in Yemen:** A large proportion of US airstrikes have targeted Hudaydah Governorate, likely in an effort to degrade Houthi targeting capabilities and degrade other Houthi infrastructure. An air campaign can only achieve temporary effects. A campaign to permanently prevent the Houthis from using Hudaydah Governorate to launch attacks targeting international shipping would require a ground operation to take and hold ground.
- **US Withdrawal from Syria:** The United States will withdraw from three bases in northeastern Syria, including two positions designed to support counter-ISIS operations along the Euphrates River in Deir ez Zor Province. The US troop presence in Syria will drop from 2,000 to 1,400 under the current drawdown plan.
- **Turkey-SDF Ceasefire Agreement:** The United States reportedly brokered a ceasefire agreement between Turkey and the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on April 17.

## Syria



**Syrian President Ahmed al Shara met with Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas in Damascus on April 18 to discuss enhancing bilateral relations.**[52] Shara and Abbas agreed to form a joint committee to enhance bilateral relations between Syria and the PA.[53] Shara and Abbas's meeting comes amid recent reports that the United States has asked Syria to end Palestinian political and militia activity in Syria as a condition for partial sanction relief.[54]

**The General Security Services launched a "large-scale" search operation to seize weapons and arrest suspected "criminals" in Latakia City on April 18.**[55] Latakia authorities stated that the operation targeted drug dealers and aimed to dismantle "criminal"

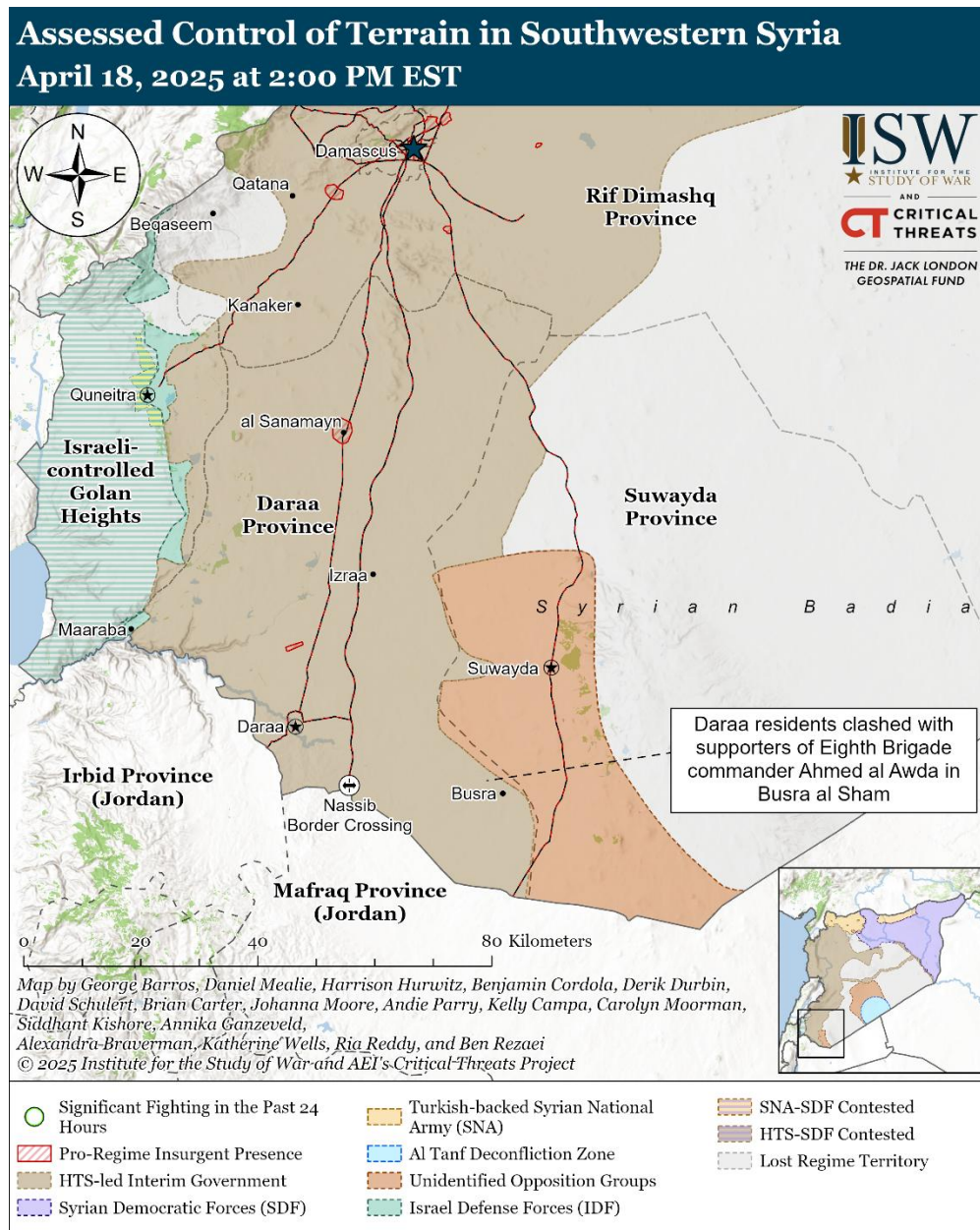
networks.[56] GSS forces also seized weapons, including hand and rocket-propelled grenades, linked to Assadist insurgent cells in Qardaha, which is a likely insurgent support zone.[57] A Syrian source noted that this is the largest search operation since the pro-Assad Alawite began in early March in coastal Syria.[58] The GSS initiated the operation after Latakia residents complained about rising criminal activity in the province.[59]



**Daraa residents clashed with supporters of Eighth Brigade commander Ahmed al Awda in Busra al Sham on April 17 and demanded Awda's arrest.[60]** The General Security Services (GSS) reportedly imposed a curfew after the clashes injured one person in Busra al Sham.[61] The Eighth Brigade is a Daraa-based faction comprised of former opposition fighters who reconciled with the Assad regime.[62] The transitional government deployed significant forces to Busra al Sham after Eighth Brigade members in the Busra al Sham GSS killed an MoD official on April 10.[63] The group



later announced its full dissolution on April 13.[64] Protests against Awda increase pressure on the transitional government to enforce the full dissolution of the Eighth Brigade in Busra al Sham.



**The SDF and the Syrian transitional government continued to implement the March 10 ceasefire agreement.[65]** Anti-SDF media reported that the SDF began withdrawing its forces from Deir Hafer and Maskana, Aleppo Province, and Debsi Afnan, Debsi Faraj, and Tabqa City, Raqqa Province, towards Raqqa City on April 18.[66]



## **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

**Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani discussed regional security with Syrian Interim President Ahmed al Shara in Qatar on April 17.**[67] Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Jordan agreed in February 2025 to form a strategic alliance to counter the Islamic State.[68] Iraqi officials remain very concerned about the ISIS threat in Iraq.[69] Sudani confirmed on April 17 that he had invited Shara to attend the Arab Summit in Baghdad in May.[70] Iranian-aligned Iraqi political figures have continuously opposed normalization between Iraq and Syria due to Shara's AQI roots.[71] A Telegram channel affiliated with Iranian-backed Iraqi militias posted Iraqi judicial documents on April 16 that detailed Shara's imprisonment in Iraq from 2005-2011.[72]

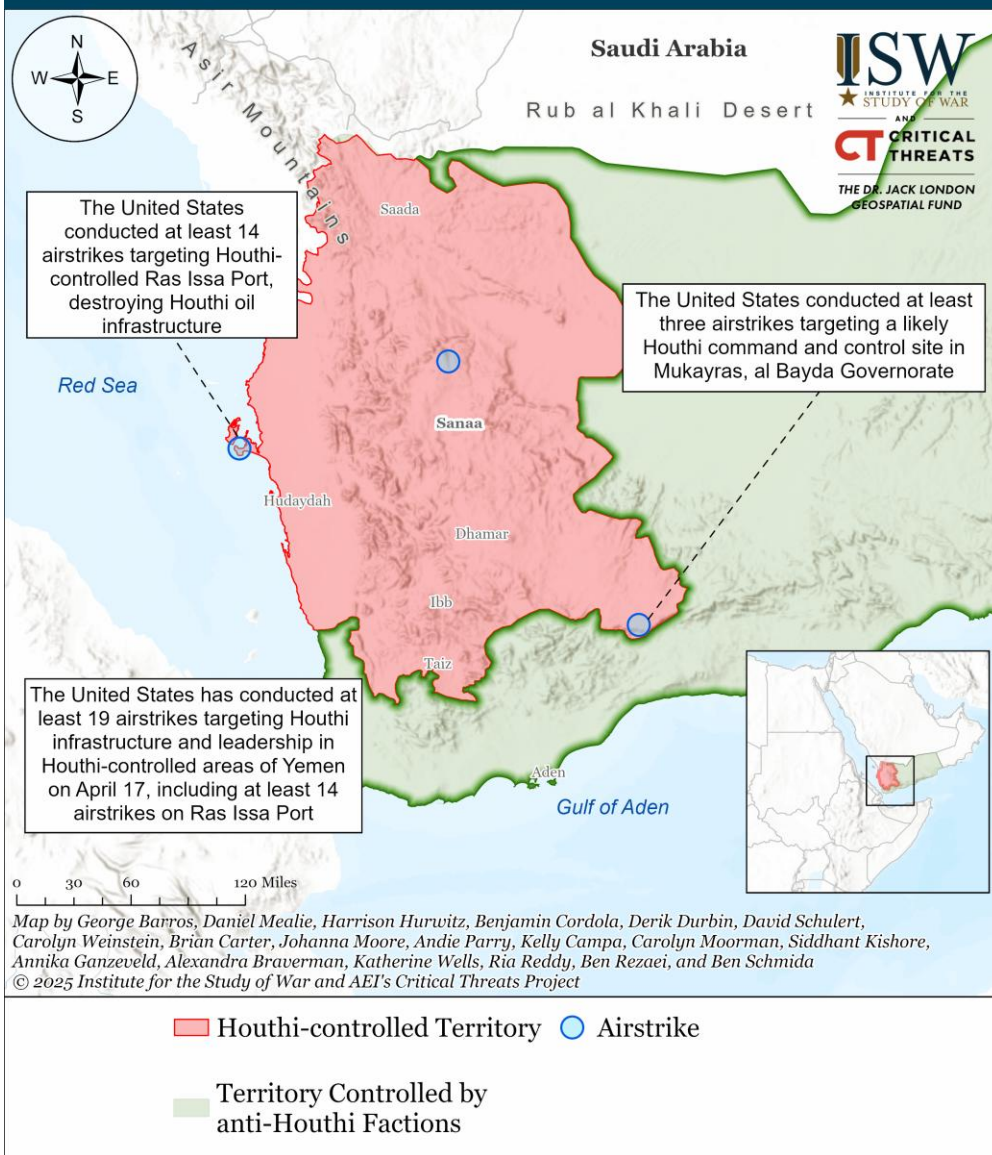
## **Arabian Peninsula**

### **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

**US Central Command (CENTCOM) has conducted at least 19 airstrikes targeting Houthi infrastructure and leadership in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen since April 17, including at least 14 airstrikes targeting Ras Issa Port.**[73] **See Topline Section for reporting on Ras Issa Port.** CENTCOM also conducted at least three airstrikes targeting a likely Houthi command and control site in Mukayras District, al Bayda.[74] CENTCOM separately conducted at least two airstrikes likely targeting Houthi infrastructure in the al Sama area in Arhab District, north of Sanaa City, Sanaa Governorate.[75]

## US Strikes Against Houthi Targets April 18, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



**The Houthis claimed on April 18 that they launched a ballistic missile at an unspecified military target near Ben Gurion Airport in central Israel.[76]** The IDF intercepted a missile outside Israeli airspace on April 17.[77]

**The Houthis claimed on April 18 that they conducted a drone and missile attack targeting the USS *Harry S Truman* and the USS *Carl Vinson* in the Red Sea and Arabian Sea.[78]** The Houthis claimed this was the first attack targeting the Vinson since its arrival in the Arabian Sea. CENTCOM has not confirmed either attack.

## **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

*Nothing significant to report.*

*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 in 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 appreciated from 856,000 rials to one US dollar on April 17 to 853,000 on April 18.[79]**

**Iranian security forces, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Forces Quds Operational Base and Law Enforcement Command (LEC) forces, killed one Jaish al Adl cell leader on April 18.[80]** Iranian security forces arrested an unspecified number of Jaish al Adl fighters. Jaish al Adl killed one Iranian soldier during the operation. Jaish al Adl is a Baloch Salafi-jihadi militant group that regularly attacks Iranian security forces in southeastern Iran.[81]

**Iranian forces displayed an S-300 transporter erector launcher (TEL) during an Artesh Day Parade on April 18.[82]** The TEL is distinct from the Tombstone target acquisition radars (TAR) that Israeli airstrikes destroyed in April and October 2024. A TAR is necessary to enable the S-300 to engage targets. Israeli airstrikes into Iran in April and October 2024 rendered Iran's four S-300 air defense systems inoperable, and it is very unlikely that Russia supplied Iran with an additional S-300 system.[83]

*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.*

*CTP-ISW defines the “Axis of Resistance” as 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 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 partners over which Iran exerts more limited influence. Members of the 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.*

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