

Iran Update



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April 7, 2025

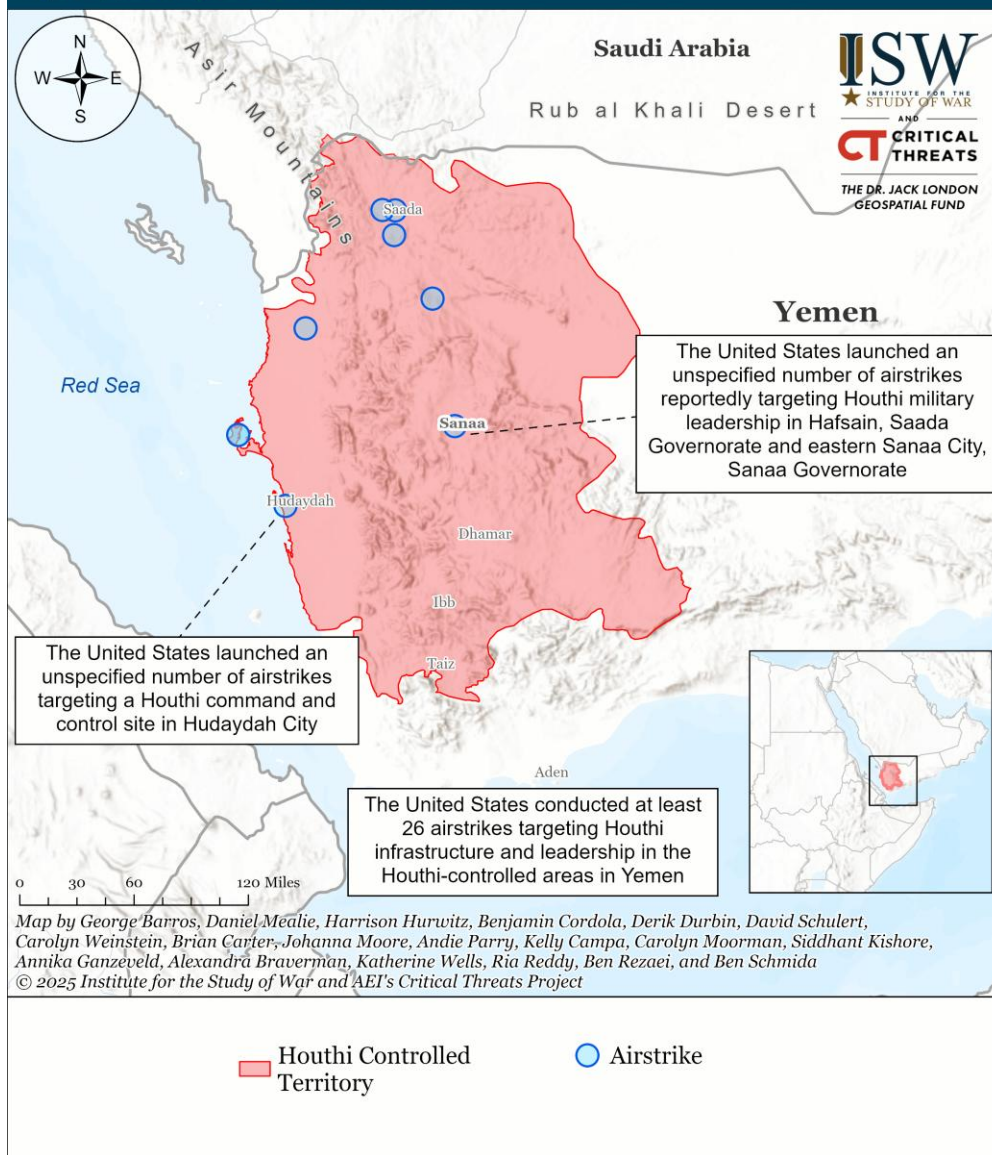
Information Cutoff: 2:00pm ET

Regional diplomatic sources told CNN on April 6 that the Yemeni government is preparing for a ground offensive against the Houthis. The offensive would reportedly consist of advances from the south and east and along the western Yemeni coast to take Hudaydah.[1] The Yemeni government is led by the Presidential Leadership Council, which is an eight-person council consisting of all major anti-Houthi factions in Yemen and led by President Rashad al Alimi.[2] An operation of this scale would require significant political coordination between multiple anti-Houthi factions with disparate political goals. Yemeni President Rashad al Alimi and Information Minister Muammar al Eryani both called for unity on April 7 and April 5, respectively.[3]

US Central Command (CENTCOM) has conducted at least 26 airstrikes targeting Houthi infrastructure and leadership in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen since April 4.[4] CENTCOM conducted an unspecified number of airstrikes, reportedly targeting a Houthi command and control site on 50th Street in Hudaydah City, Hudaydah Governorate.[5] CENTCOM conducted at least two airstrikes targeting a Houthi military base in Kahlan, east of Sadaa City, Sadaa Governorate, on April 4 and at least three airstrikes targeting the Houthi underground facilities at al Sabaha military complex on Jabal Awsad, north of Sanaa City, Sanaa Governorate, on April 6.[6] CENTCOM has previously targeted both Houthi military bases on March 27, April 2, and April 3.[7] CENTCOM also conducted at least nine airstrikes in two separate sorties targeting likely Houthi naval sites on Kamran Island, Hudaydah Governorate, on April 5 and 6.[8]

US Strikes Against Houthi Targets

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Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are likely running an information operation to dissuade the United States from striking militia targets in Iraq as part of a broader Iranian information campaign targeting the West. Iranian-backed Iraqi militia commanders from Kataib Hezbollah, Harkat Hezbollah al Nujaba, and Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada told Reuters on April 7 that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are prepared to disarm to “make whatever decisions necessary” to avoid conflict with the United States and Israel.[9] The militia commanders said that the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) supports this decision. These statements are very similar to other articles quoting Iranian officials in recent days that seek to alter US decision-making ahead of a possible strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities. Iranian officials on April 3 told Western media that Iran is “abandoning” the Houthis without providing any evidence.

Iranian officials and Iranian partners are not making any claims about disarmament or decreases in Iranian support in Persian or Arabic language media, suggesting that these reports are part of a concerted information effort targeting a Western audience. Kataib Hezbollah, for example, denied that it is prepared to disarm in an April 7 statement in Arabic.[10] Iranian officials similarly gave statements in Persian highlighting Iranian support to the Houthis on April 3, the same day unspecified Iranian officials told Western media that Iran is “abandoning the Houthis.”[11]

Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are unlikely to abandon their decade-long objective to expel the US from Iraq and the region unless they suffer serious political setbacks in Iraq due to their military activities. Iranian-backed Iraqi militias frequently conducted attacks targeting US forces in Iraq and Syria between October 2023 and January 2024 in pursuit of the removal of US forces from Iraq and Syria.[12] The militias have previously conducted these attacks to both encourage a US withdrawal and to fulfill other strategic objectives. CTP-ISW assessed on April 4 that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have increasingly threatened to target US forces in Iraq and Syria recently, likely to both deter a US strike on Iran and to ensure that US forces withdraw from Iraq and Syria.[13] Such threats are directly at odds with an effort by the militias to “disarm.”

Iran continued to push for indirect negotiations with the United States while rejecting direct negotiations prior to US President Donald Trump’s April 7 announcement that Iran and the United States would hold direct talks on April 12.[14] Reuters reported on April 6 that Iran is pushing back on US demands to engage in direct nuclear talks, citing an unspecified senior Iranian official.[15] Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Mohammad Bagheri similarly stated on April 7 that indirect talks with the United States are “acceptable,” but “there will be no direct negotiations.”[16] This is the first time a senior Iranian military official has echoed Iran’s official line on nuclear negotiations by expressing openness to indirect negotiations, though rejecting direct talks.[17] Iran reportedly seeks a “secret” two-step process that starts with indirect talks and “potentially moves” to direct talks.[18] The senior Iranian official told Reuters that indirect talks give Iran a chance to “evaluate Washington’s seriousness.”[19] Iran may use reported US demands for Iran to curtail its missile program and its role in leading the Axis of Resistance to claim that the United States is not “serious.”[20] Senior Iranian officials have repeatedly and explicitly rejected any concessions on issues beyond its nuclear program.[21] Iranian officials also stated on April 7 that Iran wants Oman to mediate talks between the United States and Iran.[22] CTP-ISW has not observed any official Iranian responses to Trump’s announcement. CTP-ISW will provide more details and analysis in the April 8 Iran Update.

Iran continued to threaten to attack US allies or any country that may support a US strike on Iran, likely to deter a potential US or Israeli strike on Iran. Western media reported in recent days that Iran has warned Persian Gulf countries hosting US military bases, including Iraq, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Turkey, and Bahrain, not to support any potential strike on Iran.[23] An unspecified Iranian official told *The Times* that Iran would view such support as an “act of hostility.”[24] Reuters reported on April 6 that neighboring countries with US bases “may be in the firing line,” according to an unspecified senior Iranian official.[25] An unspecified senior Iranian military official previously told *the Telegraph* in late March that Iran would attack any base “used by Americans” to attack Iran.[26] Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has held several calls with his counterparts in the region in recent days, likely to encourage these states to dissuade the United States

from attacking Iran.[27] CTP-ISW previously assessed that Iranian threats to attack US allies in the region may aim to discourage allies from allowing the United States to use their facilities out of fear of Iranian retaliation. Iran previously employed this strategy in October 2024 to dissuade states in the Middle East from providing Israel with assistance to launch an attack on Iran.[28]

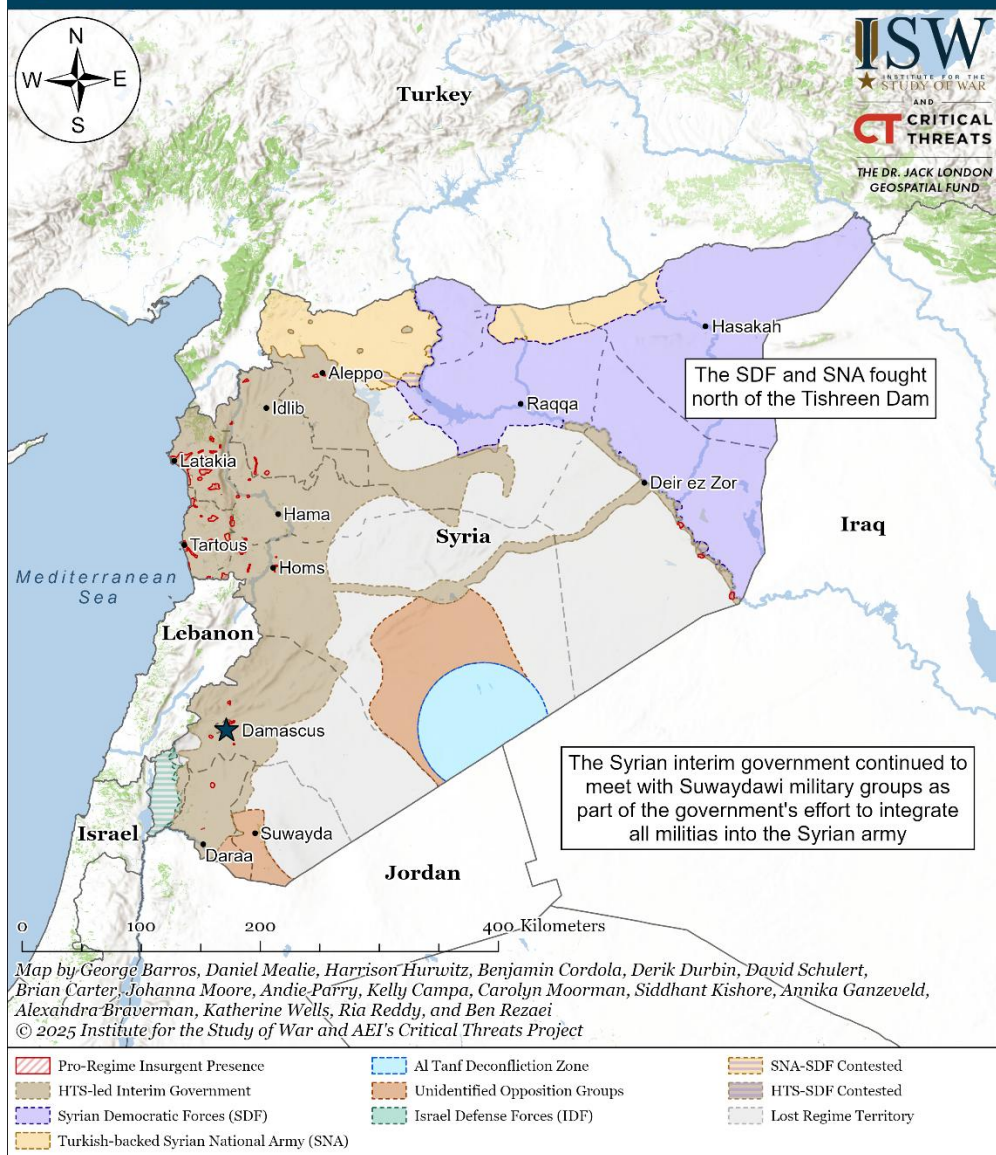
Senior Iranian military officials appear to be preparing for possible US or Israeli strikes on Iran. Khatam ol Anbia Air Defense Headquarters Commander Brigadier General Alireza Sabahi Fard and IRGC Aerospace Force Commander Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh visited Iran's Southern Air Defense Zone based in Bushehr Province on April 6 to conduct an operational assessment of military units and defense capabilities in the zone.[29] The visit follows a similar inspection at the Southeastern Air Defense Zone based in Bandar-e Abbas, Hormozgan Province, on April 4.[30] These ongoing inspections likely reflect Iranian efforts to ensure air defense readiness and prepare for a possible strike on its nuclear facilities. An unspecified senior Israeli official told Axios on April 4 that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump planned to discuss a potential strike on nuclear facilities—if diplomatic efforts fail—during their meeting on April 7.[31] US President Donald Trump has previously warned on March 30 that ‘there will be a bombing’ if Iran does not agree to a new nuclear deal.[32]

Key Takeaways:

- **US Air Campaign in Yemen:** Regional diplomatic sources told CNN on April 6 that the Yemeni government is preparing for a ground offensive against the Houthis. The offensive would reportedly consist of advances from the south and east and along the western Yemeni coast to take Hudaydah. US Central Command (CENTCOM) has conducted at least 26 airstrikes targeting Houthi infrastructure and leadership in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen since April 4.
- **Iranian Information Operations:** Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are likely running an information operation to dissuade the United States from striking militia targets in Iraq as part of a broader Iranian information campaign targeting the West. Iranian officials and Iranian partners are not making any claims about disarmament or decreases in Iranian support in Persian or Arabic language media, suggesting that these reports are part of a concerted information effort targeting a Western audience.
- **Iranian Nuclear Program:** Iran continued to push for indirect negotiations with the United States while rejecting direct negotiations prior to US President Donald Trump’s April 7 announcement that Iran and the United States would hold direct talks on April 12. Iran continued to threaten to attack US allies or any country that may support a US strike on Iran, likely to deter a potential US or Israeli strike on Iran.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria

April 7, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Syria

The Syrian interim government continued to meet with Suwaydawi military groups as part of the government's effort to integrate all militias into the Syrian army. Former Men of Dignity member Laith al Balous met with Syrian Defense Minister Major General Marhaf Abu Qasra in Damascus on April 6, possibly to discuss Israeli presence in southern Syria.[33] Balous praised the Syrians who “defended” southern Syria from Israel as martyrs who fought against Israel in a “battle of existence and dignity” after Israeli forces killed nine Syrians on April 3. [34] Qasra also met with other Suwayda military veterans on April 5.[35] A Syrian interior ministry committee separately visited the Suwayda police headquarters to coordinate police unit deployments across Suwayda on April 7.[36]

The separatist Druze-majority Suwayda Military Council (SMC) opened a "military council center" in al Ghariya, southwestern Suwayda Province, on April 7.[37] It is not clear what the purpose of this center is. The group previously announced its formation in February 2025.[38] The SMC is a group of Druze fighters who were previously aligned with the Assad regime.[39] A Western analyst recently reported that it is "well known" within the Druze community that the SMC has connections to Israel through members of the Israeli Druze community.[40] The SMC likely does not represent a majority of the Syrian Druze population.

Syrian President Ahmed al Shara appointed his brother Maher al Shara as secretary-general of the presidency.[41] The Secretary-General of the Presidency oversees the presidency's internal operations, including supervising staff and departments under the presidency, managing the president's schedule, and arranging official meetings and visits.[42] Maher's appointment is a further sign of Shara's consolidation of power and that he is surrounding himself with close relations and loyalists. Maher replaced Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS)-affiliated Abdul Rahman Salama, who was already likely extremely loyal to Shara.[43]

The Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) confirmed on April 4 that it will hand over the control of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh neighborhoods in Aleppo City to the Syrian interim government.[44] The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) partially withdrew from the two historically Kurdish neighborhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh in Aleppo City on April 4 as part of a recent agreement with the Syrian interim government.[45]

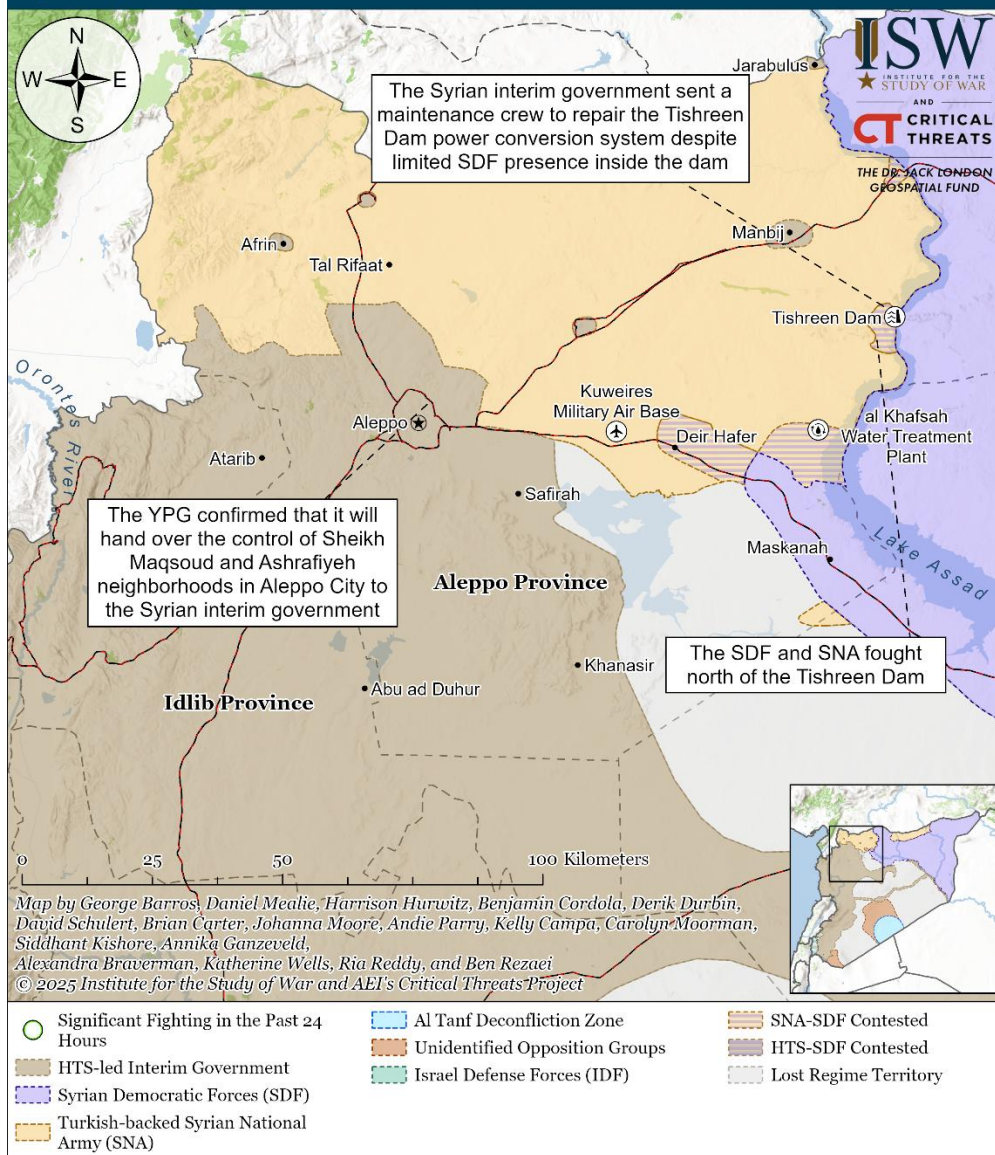
The SDF's refusal to release Syrian National Army (SNA) prisoners reportedly delayed the final round of prisoner exchanges between the two parties on April 5.[46] The Aleppo City Media Directorate, which is affiliated with the Syrian government, said that the exchange was not delayed and clarified that it would take place on schedule.[47] This prisoner exchange is part of the recent agreement that the SDF and the interim government signed on April 1 that stipulates the release of a total of 600 prisoners.[48] The Syrian interim government and the SDF previously exchanged over 200 prisoners in the Aleppo Province on April 3.[49]

The Syrian interim government sent a maintenance crew to repair the Tishreen Dam power conversion system on April 5 despite a limited SDF presence inside the dam.[50] Civilian administration will reportedly oversee the operations of the dam after the conclusion of the repair work.[51] The SDF and the SNA have clashed nearly daily along the Tishreen Dam frontlines since December 2024.[52] The SDF partially withdrew from the Tishreen Dam on April 2 as part of a recent agreement with the Syrian interim government that calls for the demilitarization of the dam.[53]

Anti-SDF media reported that the SDF and SNA fought north of the Tishreen Dam on April 6 after a five-day pause.[54]

Assessed Control of Terrain around Aleppo

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Attacks by Sunni sectarian militias and abusive behavior of government forces within close proximity of one another risk further decreasing trust between Alawites and government forces. Saraya Ansar al Sunnah claimed it kidnapped three Alawite civilians from Saqoubin, Latakia Province, on April 5.[55] Syrian media reported that Syrian government forces separately stopped a vehicle at a checkpoint in Saqoubin, Latakia Province, and asked the driver a series of questions regarding his background, likely to deduce his affiliation with the former Assad regime.[56] The forces directed the driver to move on before shooting and killing him. Questioning to determine an individual's relationship with the Assad Regime to apprehend former regime officials is probably commonplace at Syrian government checkpoints, but extrajudicial killings are unacceptable and will alienate Alawites in particular. Alawite civilians will likely view any extrajudicial killings through a sectarian lens in the current climate, especially if the Syrian government begins conflating all Alawites

with the Assad Regime and the pro-Assad leadership of the Alawite insurgency. The Syrian interim government has established checkpoints across western Syria to improve security and limit insurgent freedom of movement. The fighters manning these checkpoints have killed civilians—both in extrajudicial killings and accidentally—on several occasions, which risks damaging the relationship between security forces and the local population and providing opportunities for insurgents to exploit.[57]

Saraya Ansar al Sunnah has claimed two attacks on Alawite and former Assad regime members since April 4. Saraya Ansar al Sunnah claimed on April 4 that it killed an Alawite man and his relative in Safita, Tartous Province.[58] The group claimed a separate attack on April 5, which killed a former National Defense Force member in western Homs Province.[59]

Damascus-based media reported that pro-Alawite insurgents attacked the Qaboun neighborhood police station in Damascus on April 4.[60]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Western Syria

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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

A Sadrism source told Iraqi media on April 6 that unspecified “changes in the coming months” could cause Iraqi Shia nationalist cleric Muqtada al Sadr to participate “directly or indirectly” in the November 2025 elections.[61] Sadr announced on March 27 that his Shia

National Movement would not participate in the elections.[62] The source added that various Sunni, Kurdish, and Shia Coordination Framework parties have attempted to persuade Sadr to participate in the elections.[63] The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Shia political parties, some of which are backed by Iran. CTP-ISW previously assessed that Iraqi politicians may be concerned that Sadr could call for protests against government corruption if he chose not to participate in elections.[64] Sadr has periodically called for protests, including after the 2021 elections.[65]

Iraqi media reported on April 5 that Turkish aircraft struck Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) positions near Amedi District, Duhok Province, Iraqi Kurdistan.[66]

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

The Houthis conducted two separate combined cruise missile and drone attacks targeting the USS *Harry S. Truman* aircraft carrier and US destroyers in the Red Sea on April 5 and 7.[67] CENTCOM did not confirm these attacks.

The Houthis launched two drones in separate attacks targeting unspecified Israeli military targets in the Tel Aviv-Jaffa area on April 4 and April 7.[68] The IDF intercepted both drones before they entered Israeli territory.[69]

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

US Deputy Special Envoy to the Middle East Morgan Ortagus discussed the Lebanon-Syria border in a meeting with Lebanese President Joseph Aoun on April 5.[70] Ortagus separately emphasized that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) must disarm Hezbollah and all other militias in Lebanon “as quickly as possible.”[71] Ortagus stated there is no set “timetable” for the LAF to disarm Hezbollah.

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 into 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 depreciated from 1,050,000 rials to one US dollar on April 4 to 1,057,000 rials to one US dollar on April 7.[72]

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian dismissed Vice President for Parliamentary Affairs Shahram Dabiri on April 5 following public outrage regarding Dabiri's costly vacation during the Nowruz holiday at the end of March 2025.[73] Pezeshkian noted that it is unacceptable for Dabiri to embark on a vacation while “economic pressures on the [Iranian] people are still high.” Senior Iranian leaders, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, have recently highlighted Iran's worsening economic conditions.[74]

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