

Iran Update, April 2, 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. 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.

A prominent Iranian-backed Iraqi militia threatened to create and arm a new Iranian proxy in Jordan, which may reflect a greater, more confrontational, shift in the Iranian strategy vis-a-vis Jordan. Kataib Hezbollah military spokesperson Hussein Moanes, also known as Abu Ali al Askari, said on April 1 that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, which is a coalition of Iranian-backed militias, has prepared to “equip” 12,000 “Islamic Resistance in Jordan” fighters with a significant supply of weapons.[1] The mention of an Islamic resistance network in Jordan is a notable inflection, as Iranian and Iranian-backed actors have not previously mentioned the existence of such an entity. Moanes said that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq seeks to equip Jordanian fighters, so that Iraq and Jordan can jointly attack Israel to “defend” the Palestinian cause. Kataib Hezbollah released the statement in response to an Israeli airstrike in Damascus on April 1, which killed seven Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) members.[2] Moanes’ statement is likely aspirational given the current strength of the Jordanian armed forces and the operational costs and time required to create a pro-Iran network in Jordan.

Kataib Hezbollah’s choice to publicize its desire to set up a large armed militia indicates a growing Iranian interest in using Jordan in its anti-Israel campaign, however. Jordan offers a direct front from which Iranian-backed fighters could more easily conduct and direct attacks into Israel. The Islamic

Resistance in Iraq already utilizes Jordanian airspace for its drone attacks into Israel.[3] An active and well-armed Iranian-backed militia based out of Jordan would dramatically advance Iran's military encirclement of Israel.

An expanding Axis of Resistance network in Jordan would also facilitate Iranian efforts in the West Bank. Jordanian territory also offers multiple ground routes through which Iran could move military materiel into the West Bank. Tehran has sought to develop the capabilities and infrastructure of its militia network in the West Bank in recent years, but the Israel-Hamas war has highlighted the shortcomings of the networks there.[4] Palestinian militias in the West Bank remain relatively disorganized and still use rudimentary capabilities to attack Israel and Israeli forces compared to the militias in the Gaza Strip. Iranian leaders could conclude that they need to invest further in building their networks into Jordan to develop their militia infrastructure in the West Bank more effectively.

Moanes' separately declared that Kataib Hezbollah would "cut off" land routes that "reach" Israel.[5] Kataib Hezbollah may be referring to the transportation line connecting ports in the Persian Gulf to Israel via Saudi Arabia and Jordan.[6] A likely Iranian-backed militia drone exploded on the Jordan-Israel border near Eilat on April 2, near where trucks carrying Israeli goods from the Gulf States enter Israel via Jordan.[7] CTP-ISW is unable to confirm the drone's target. However, the location is notable because Israel has increasingly relied on this land route to compensate for reduced trade activity through Eilat due to the Houthi's anti-shipping campaign.[8] The Houthi movement has emphasized that its drone and missile campaign seeks to create a blockade that will destroy the Israeli economy and analogized ongoing Houthi operations to the 1973 Yom Kippur War, in which Egypt seized Israeli shipping near the Bab al Mandeb.[9] Kataib Hezbollah attacks targeting this land route would support the Houthis' efforts.

Recent domestic unrest and large sustained demonstrations in Jordan against the Jordanian government's Israel policy may be driving Iran and the Islamic Resistance in Iraq to approach Jordanian infiltration differently and more overtly. Thousands of Jordanians have demonstrated in front of the Israeli embassy in Amman since March 24.[10] The protestors have called for the Jordanian government to cut diplomatic ties with Israel, withdraw from the 1994 peace treaty, and cut off the trade route between the Persian Gulf and Israel that cuts through Jordanian territory.[11] Protestors have repeatedly clashed with Jordanian security services, and the government has accused groups of stirring up "strife." [12] Protestors have also expressed support for Hamas and called for armed resistance against Israel.[13] Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad's leaders have praised the Jordanian protest movement as an important part of resistance against Israel.[14] The Jordanian state's strong security apparatus, high degree of domestic control, and close relationship with the US military are significant obstacles for Kataib Hezbollah or other Iranian-backed actors if they choose to develop a network in Jordan.

The Iranian regime may target US forces or Israeli diplomatic facilities in retaliation for the April 1 Israeli airstrike in Damascus that killed seven Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) officials.[15] Israel struck a building directly adjacent to the Iranian embassy in Damascus, killing senior IRGC commanders Brig. Gen. Mohammad Reza Zahedi and Brig. Gen. Mohammad Hadi Haj Rahimi.[16] The commanders were discussing the Israel-Hamas war with Palestinian militia leaders, including PIJ leaders, at the time of the Israeli airstrike.[17] Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei warned on April 2 following the attack that Israel will "be punished by the hands of our brave men." [18] The Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), which is the Iranian regime's highest defense and foreign policy body, separately held an emergency meeting on April 1 to discuss the airstrike.[19] Iranian state media reported that the SNSC "adopted appropriate decisions" regarding

the airstrike.[20] The SNSC’s members are senior Iranian political and security figures, including the president, parliament speaker, judiciary chief, and the commanding officers responsible for the Armed Forces General Staff, IRGC, Artesh, and Law Enforcement Command.[21]

Iranian officials and media are accusing the United States of enabling the Israeli airstrike, possibly to set conditions to target US forces in the Middle East. Political advisor to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and former SNSC Secretary Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani claimed on April 2 that the United States “holds direct responsibility” for the Israeli airstrike “and its consequences.”[22] Iranian Armed Forces General Staff-controlled media separately claimed on April 2 that the United States gave Israel the “green light” to conduct the airstrike and that Israel “would not dare” conduct such a strike without US “permission.”[23] Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian attributed the Israeli airstrike to the United States and announced that the regime sent an “important message” to the US government following the airstrike via the Swiss ambassador to Iran.[24] Iran has historically held the United States accountable for Israeli military activity against Iran and its proxies. Iranian-backed militants conducted a drone attack in northeastern Syria that killed an American in March 2023 following Israeli airstrikes on Iranian-backed targets in Syria, for example.[25]

Some Iranian officials and media have suggested that Iran may attack Israeli diplomatic facilities in response to the Israeli airstrike. An Iranian parliamentarian called for “openly and directly” targeting the Israeli embassy in Azerbaijan in a post on X (Twitter) on April 1.[26] The Iranian regime has historically accused Baku of allowing Israel to use Azerbaijani territory to launch operations against Iran. Armed Forces General Staff-controlled media separately argued that Israeli embassies are “exposed to retaliatory operations.”[27] Iranian regime institutions and media have emphasized that the April 1 Israeli airstrike “crossed a red line” by targeting “diplomatic persons and places” and may therefore regard a retaliatory strike on an Israeli embassy or diplomatic facility as a proportional and reasonable response.[28]

The IDF conducted a drone strike on April 1 in the central Gaza Strip that killed seven aid workers from the World Central Kitchen (WCK).[29] WCK reported that its workers were traveling in a “deconflicted” zone in two armored cars branded with the WCK logo and a third soft skin vehicle.[30] The convoy was traveling on the al Rashid coastal road, which Israel has designated as a humanitarian corridor.[31] Unspecified Israeli defense sources told Israeli media that Israel targeted the convoy because of “suspicion” that a Palestinian fighter was traveling with the convoy.[32] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu acknowledged that the IDF “unintentionally targeted” the aid workers.[33] The United States, United Kingdom, and Australia have called on Israel to investigate the attack.[34] The IDF said that the Fact Finding and Assessment Mechanism, a military body tasked with investigating accusations, will investigate the incident.[35]

The IDF said in the aftermath of the World Central Kitchen strike that it will establish a joint command between the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT)—a department within the Israeli Defense Ministry—and the IDF Southern Command to improve the coordination between Israeli military headquarters and the management of humanitarian aid.[36] Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant instructed Israeli forces to “maintain an open and transparent line of communication” with international organizations.[37]

The Israeli drone strike has disrupted other aid operations in the Gaza Strip. The WCK has paused its activities “in the region.”[38] Emirati government sources told Axios on March 2 that the UAE has suspended its participation in the maritime aid corridor to the Gaza Strip. This decision will remain in effect until Israel provides assurances the safety of aid workers and completes an investigation into the

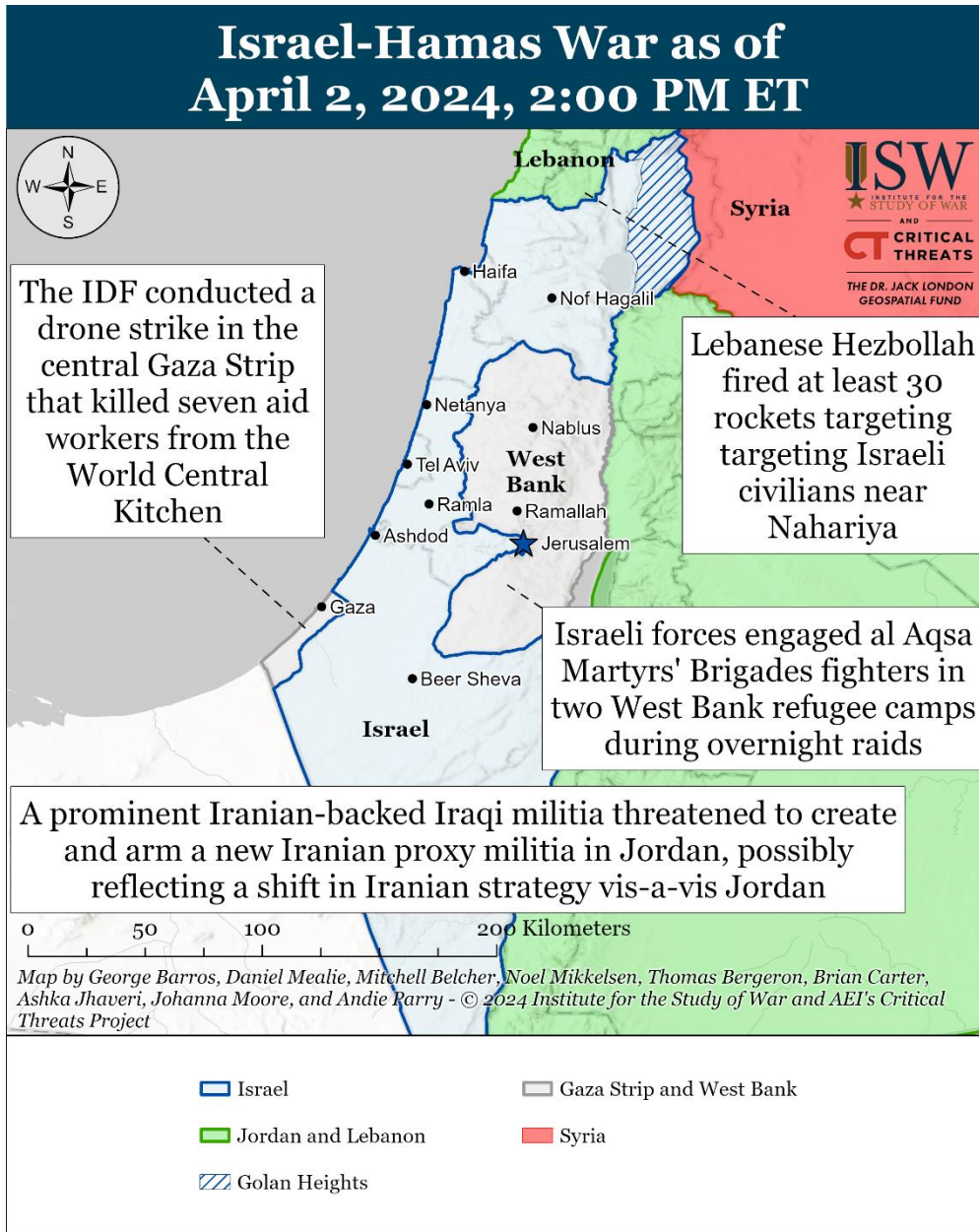
drone strike, according to the Emirati officials.[39] The UAE plays a significant role in coordinating with the Israeli government for humanitarian efforts via the maritime corridor.[40] The UAE also provided significant funding for the maritime corridor.[41]

Russian Ambassador to Iraq Elbrus Kutrashv claimed that the United States would resort to “blackmailing” the Iraqi government to maintain its presence in Iraq. Kutrashv’s comments are likely part of the Russian effort to supplant the United States as a security partner in Iraq.[42] Kutrashv made this comment during an interview with Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Asaib Ahl al Haq-controlled outlet al Ahad on April 1. Kutrashv claimed that the presence of foreign forces in Iraq negatively affects Iraqi and regional security and stability. Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have made similar statements, calling the US presence in Iraq “destabilizing.”[43] Kutrashv further claimed that the Iraqi Army is “strong and capable” enough to “fill the void of foreign forces.”[44] This claim ignores the fact that the Iraqi Security Forces, of which the Iraqi Army is apart, faces deficiencies in fire support, intelligence, logistics, and planning that decrease the ISF’s ability to confront some internal threats, such as ISIS, alone.[45] Kutrashv has met with at least six Iraqi officials, including senior security leaders, since January 2024.[46] CTP-ISW previously assessed in February 2024 that Russia may be setting conditions to try to supplant the United States as Iraq’s security partner in anticipation of the United States possibly reducing its military presence there.[47]

Key Takeaways:

- **Jordan:** A prominent Iranian-backed Iraqi militia threatened to create and arm a new Iranian proxy militia in Jordan, which may reflect a greater, more confrontational, shift in the Iranian strategy vis-a-vis Jordan.
- Recent domestic unrest and large sustained demonstrations against Jordan’s Israel policy may be causing Iran and the Islamic Resistance in Iraq to approach Jordanian infiltration differently and more overtly.
- **Iran:** The Iranian regime may target US forces or Israeli diplomatic facilities in retaliation for the Israeli airstrike in Damascus that killed seven IRGC officials.
- **Central Gaza Strip:** The IDF conducted a drone strike in the central Gaza Strip that killed seven aid workers from the World Central Kitchen.
- **Iraq:** Russian Ambassador to Iraq Elbrus Kutrashv claimed that the United States would resort to “blackmailing” the Iraqi government to maintain its presence in Iraq. Kutrashv’s comments are likely part of the Russian effort to supplant the United States as a security partner in Iraq.
- **West Bank:** Israeli forces conducted raids in the West Bank and engaged Palestinian fighters in at least two locations.
- **Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights:** Lebanese Hezbollah threatened that it would retaliate in an unspecified manner against Israel in retaliation for the Israeli airstrike in Damascus that killed seven IRGC officials.
- **Syria:** An unspecified Iranian-backed militia conducted a drone attack targeting US forces stationed at al Tanf Garrison in Homs Province, Syria. This attack marks the first Iranian-backed militia attack targeting US forces in the Middle East since February 4.

- **Yemen:** US CENTCOM reported that it destroyed a Houthi unmanned surface vessel that posed a threat to US ships and merchant vessels in the Red Sea.



Gaza Strip

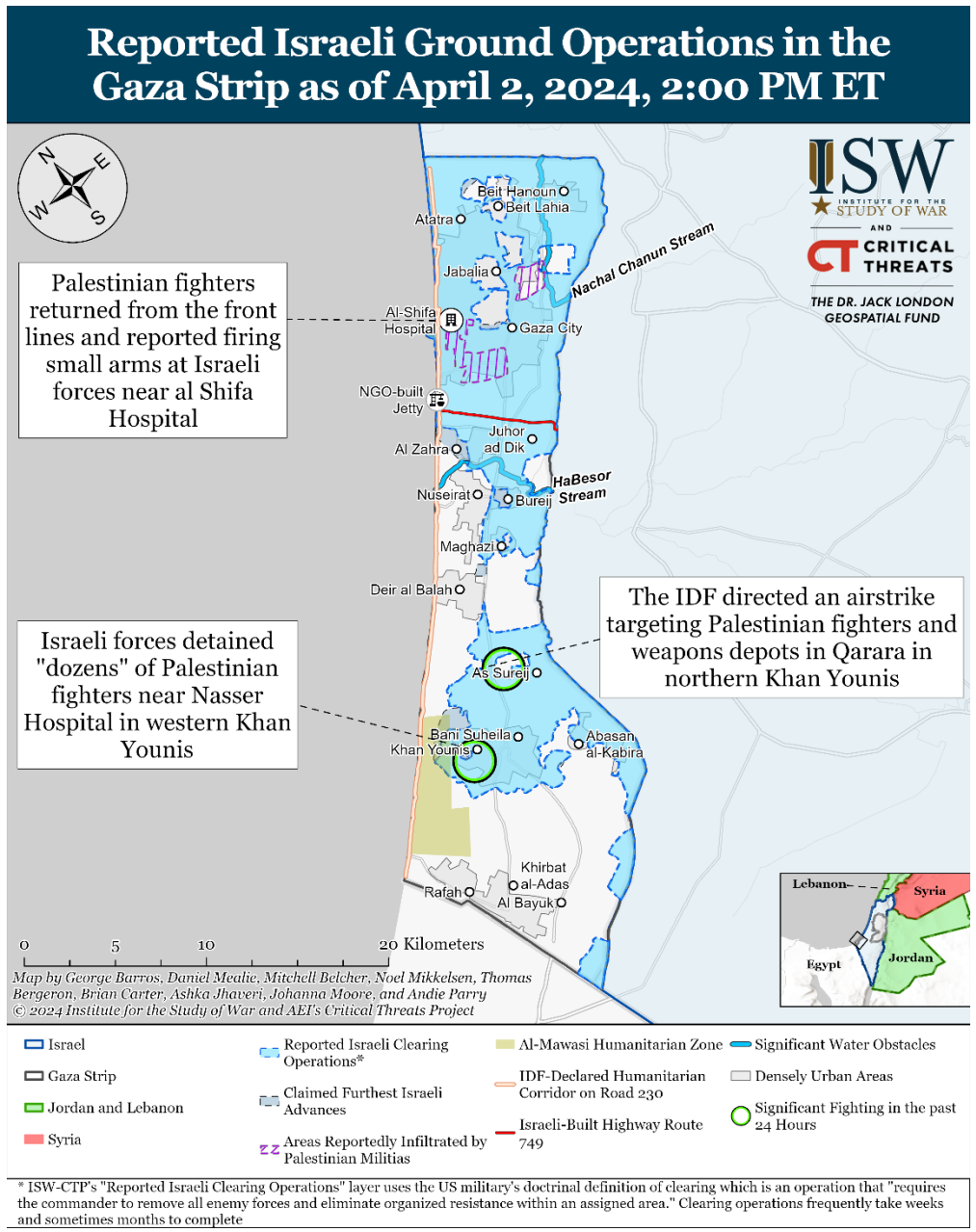
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- 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

Palestinian militias continued attacks targeting Israeli forces near Gaza City on April 2. The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, which is the self-proclaimed military wing of Fatah and aligned with Hamas in the war, said that its fighters fired small arms targeting an Israeli soldier in a house near al Shifa Hospital after returning "from the battle lines." [48] The IDF withdrew from al Shifa Hospital on

April 1 after concluding a two-week long operation in the area.[49] Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fighters mortared Israeli forces in an unspecified area southwest of Gaza City.[50]

Israeli forces continued clearing operations in western and northern Khan Younis on April 2. The IDF 7th Brigade (36th Division) directed an airstrike targeting Palestinian fighters and weapons depots in Qarara, northern Khan Younis.[51] The IDF 89th Commando Brigade (98th Division) killed Palestinian fighters and confiscated weapons during "raids" in al Amal neighborhood, western Khan Younis.[52] The IDF Egoz Unit detained "dozens" of Palestinian fighters near Nasser Hospital in western Khan Younis.[53] Israeli forces also conducted searches near the Nasser Hospital and al Amal Hospital to "ensure Hamas has not established infrastructure there again." [54]

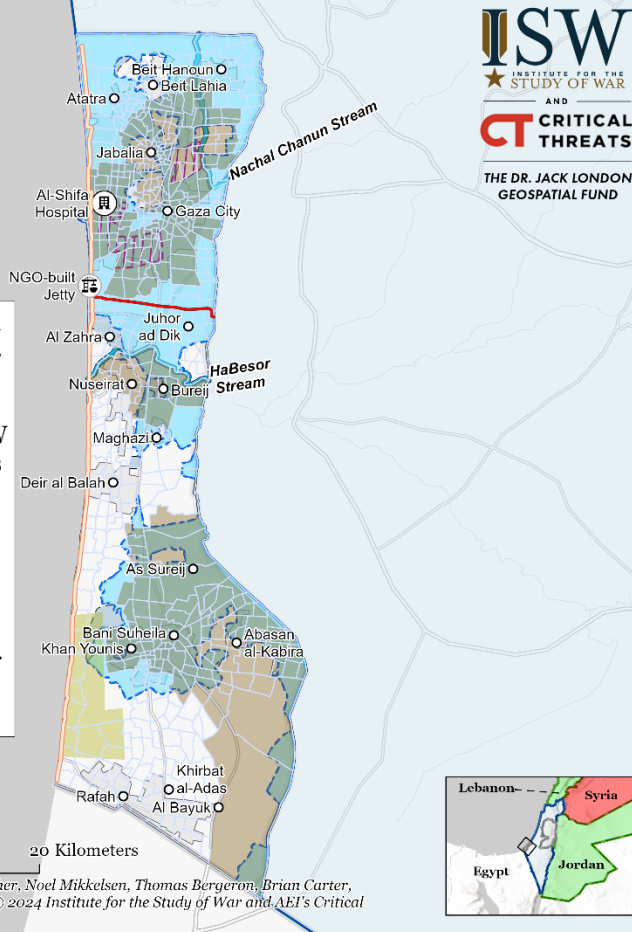


Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip as of April 2, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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

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

The Israeli Prime Minister's Office reported on April 2 that Israel has created an "updated" ceasefire proposal for Hamas to review.[55] The office confirmed that an Israeli delegation will return from Cairo on April 2 as it concluded an "additional intensive round of negotiations."

Palestinian militias did not conduct any indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel on April 2.

West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

Israeli forces conducted raids in the West Bank and engaged Palestinian fighters in at least two locations on April 2.[56] Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fighters engaged Israeli forces with small arms during an Israeli "counterterrorism" raid in Qalandia refugee camp to detain and question unspecified "suspects." [57] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade Nablus Battalion said that it targeted Israeli special operations forces with small arms and improvised explosive devices in Balata refugee camp. The Israeli forces were conducting a raid in Balata.[58] Israeli forces detained a total of 22 wanted people during raids in the West Bank.[59] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades separately targeted two Israeli checkpoints and an Israeli settlement near Tulkarm where Israeli forces are permanently stationed.[60]



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

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

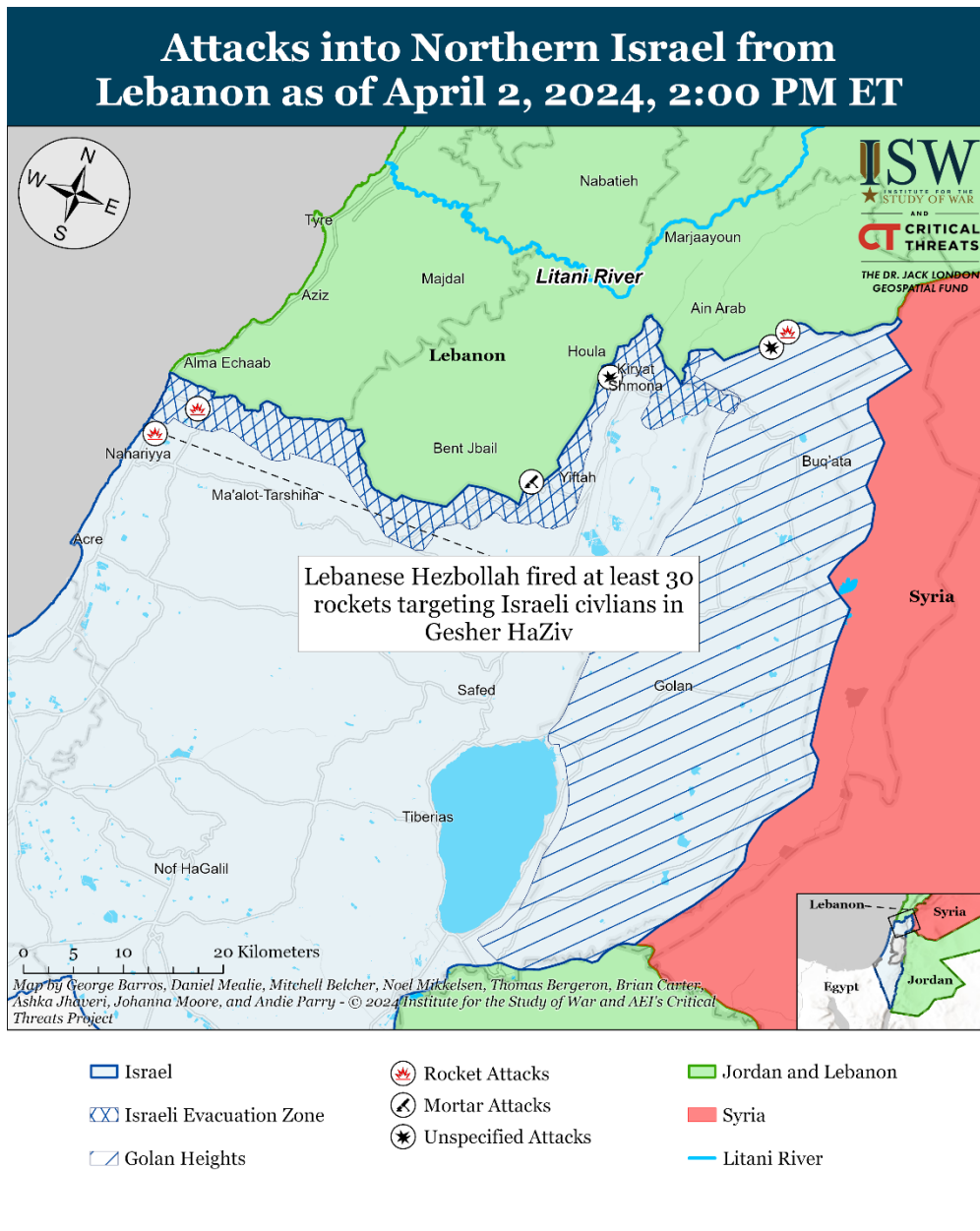
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- 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 six attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on April 1.[61] Hezbollah that reportedly fired at least 30 rockets targeting Israeli civilians in Gesher HaZiv, near Nahariya.[62]

Hezbollah condemned the Israeli airstrike in Syria on April 1 that killed a senior Iranian military commander and some of his top subordinates.[63] Hezbollah said that the commander, Brig. Gen. Mohammad Reza Zahedi, "developed and advanced the work of the resistance in Lebanon." [64] Zahedi most recently commanded the IRGC Quds Force unit responsible for overseeing operations in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and the Palestinian Territories.[65] Hezbollah threatened that it would retaliate in an unspecified manner against Israel for conducting the strike.



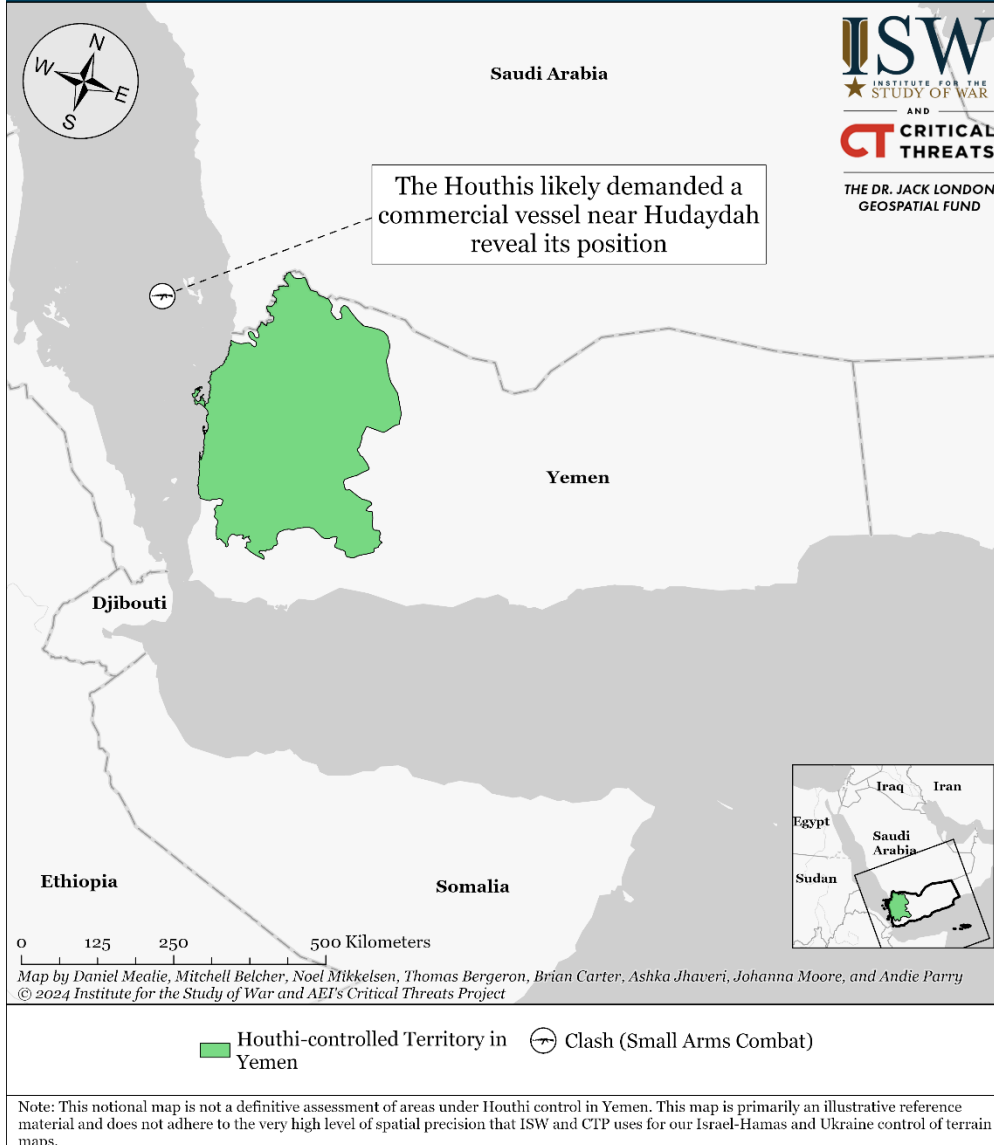
Recorded reports of attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

Israeli air defenses shot down several projectiles that likely Iranian-backed militias fired from Syria on April 1. An Israeli military correspondent said that Israel shot down a cruise missile approaching the Golan Heights from Syria.[66] No group has taken responsibility for the attack at the time of writing. Syrian sources reported that the IDF conducted an airstrike in Daraa, southern Syria, in response to the attack.[67] Axios also reported on April 2 that Israeli air defenses shot down several drones fired from Syria targeting Israel on April 1.[68]

US CENTCOM reported that it destroyed a Houthi unmanned surface vessel on April 1 that posed a threat to US ships and merchant vessels in the Red Sea.[69] CENTCOM did not provide details on the location of the attack.

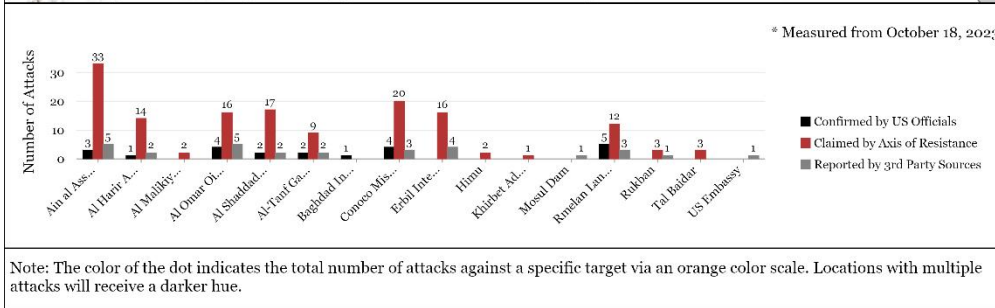
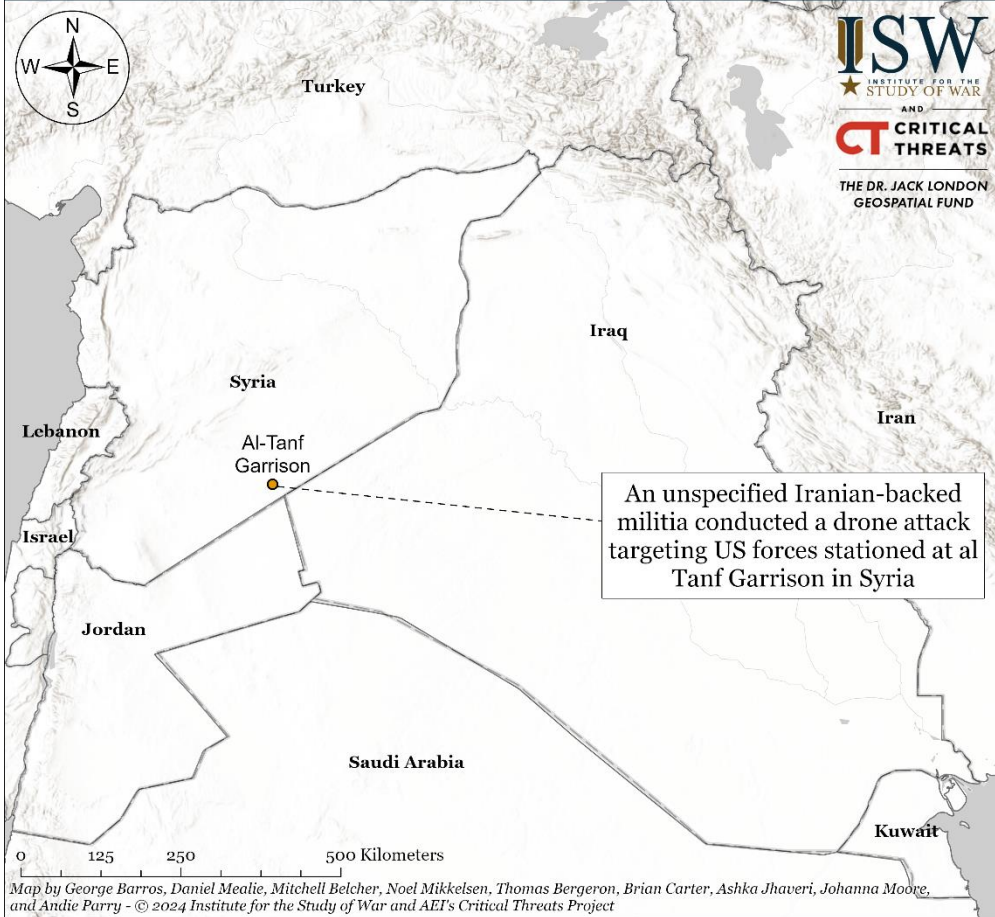
The Houthis likely demanded on April 1 that a commercial vessel near Hudaydah reveal its position by turning on its automatic identification system (AIS). The UK Maritime Trade Operations reported that an unspecified entity claiming to be the “Yemeni Navy” threatened a commercial vessel to turn on its AIS.[70] The commercial vessel reported hearing “suspected gunshots” after it declined to reveal its location.[71] The Houthi naval arm often refers to itself as the “Yemeni Navy,” but the Houthis are not the internationally recognized Yemeni government and do not control the Yemeni navy.

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



An unspecified Iranian-backed militia conducted a drone attack targeting US forces stationed at al Tanf Garrison in Homs Province, Syria, on April 1.^[72] Unspecified US Defense Department officials confirmed that US forces shot down a one-way attack drone targeting al Tanf.^[73] US defense officials did not provide the time of the attack, nor did they confirm whether the attack occurred before or after the Israeli airstrike that killed Zahedi. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a coalition of Iranian-backed militias that has claimed over 190 attacks targeting US forces in Iraq and Syria since the Israel-Hamas war began, has not claimed responsibility for the attack at the time of this writing. This attack marks the first Iranian-backed militia attack targeting US forces in the Middle East since February 4.

Attacks against US Bases in the Middle East as of April 2, 2024, 2:00 PM ET

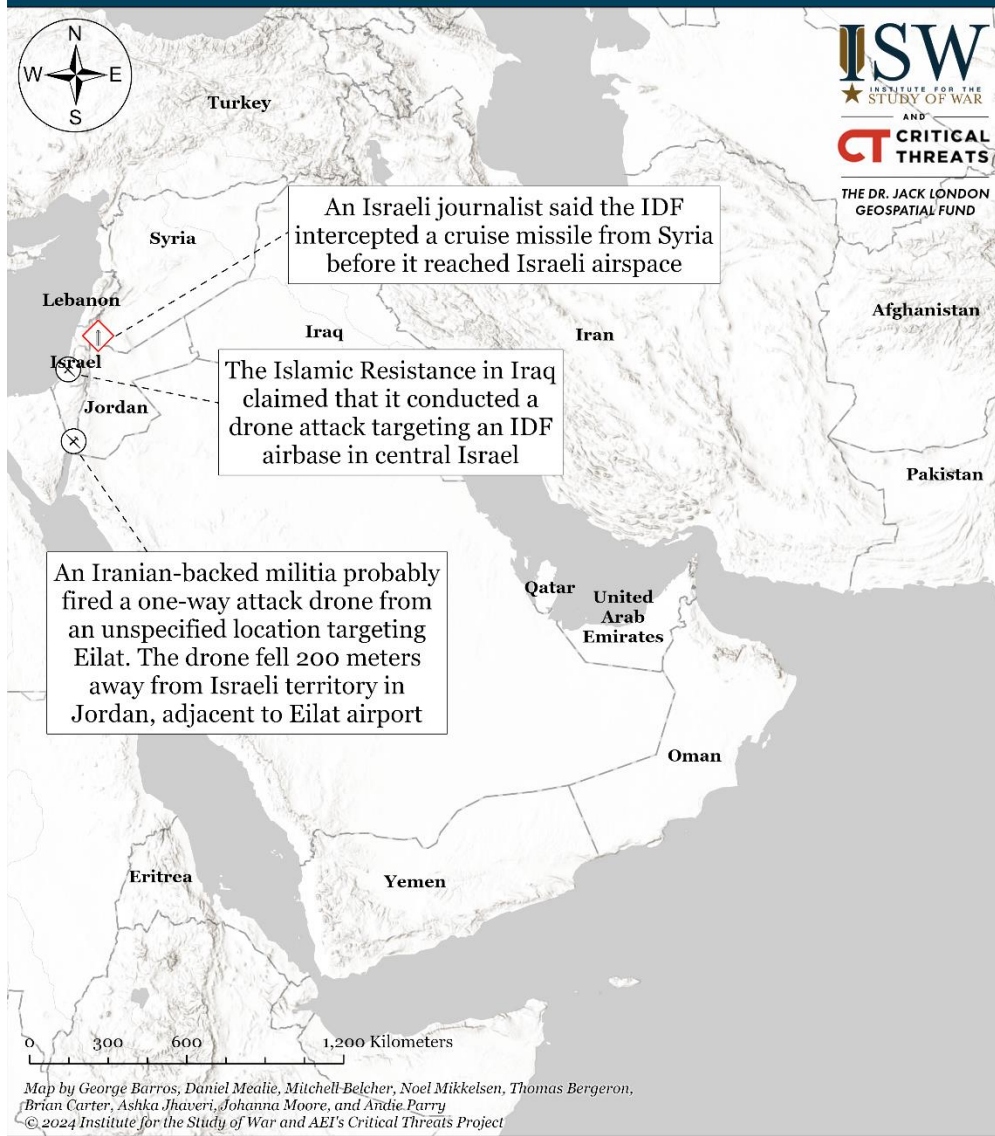


Faylaq al Waad al Sadiq Secretary General Mohammad al Tamimi repeated calls to remove US forces from Iraq during an interview with Russian state-controlled media on April 2.[74] Tamimi claimed that the US government “only understands the language of force.” Tamimi said during an interview with US media on March 27 that Faylaq al Waad al Sadiq would resume attacks targeting US forces if the United States does not leave Iraq.[75] Faylaq al Waad al Sadiq has reported ties to Iranian-backed Iraqi militias Asaib Ahl al Haq and Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba.[76]

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed a drone attack targeting the Tel Nof Airbase in central Israel on April 2.[77] Israeli officials

and media have not confirmed the attack at the time of this writing. CTP-ISW cannot verify the Islamic Resistance in Iraq claim.

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



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[1] <https://t.me/abualaskary/118> ; <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2037>

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- [4] <https://www.stimson.org/2023/hamas-is-only-one-of-four-iranian-fronts-against-israel/>
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