

# Iran Update



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**April 8, 2025, Information Cutoff: 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 agreed to “high-level” talks with the United States in Oman on April 12, but it is very unlikely to agree to some of the reported US demands.[1] Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi and US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff will lead the negotiations.[2]** US President Donald Trump stated on April 7 that the US and Iran will hold “direct” talks on April 12, while Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei rejected direct negotiations multiple times in recent months.[3] Araghchi published an English-language op-ed in Western media on April 8 that emphasized that talks will be “indirect” and compared the proposed format to the indirect Russia-Ukraine talks mediated by the United States and the indirect US-Iran nuclear talks mediated by the European Union in 2021.[4] Some reported US demands include significant limits to Iran’s uranium enrichment, a decrease in support to Iran’s proxies and partners in the Axis of Resistance, and limits to Iran’s drone and missile program.[5] Some senior US officials also indicated that the United States seeks a deal that would fully dismantle Iran’s nuclear program, something that Iranian officials have stated is unacceptable.[6] To accept these demands would require Iran to abandon key components of its regional strategy and severely limit Iran’s deterrence against the United States and Israel. Iran has long anchored its regional strategy on the development of proxies and partners, and it has only abandoned key partners like Bashar al Assad in the face of military defeat.

**Iran may be conducting an information campaign to prepare to argue that it is already adhering to some US demands in the negotiations.** Iranian officials have recently told Western media outlets that Iran is distancing itself from various proxies in the Axis of Resistance, namely the

Houthis and Iranian-backed Iraqi militias.[7] Iranian officials could calculate that launching this information campaign will enable them to successfully argue that Iran is stepping back its support for its proxies. This campaign is a continuation of a long-running Iranian campaign in which Iran denies its support for many of its proxies. Iran, for example, denies that it violates the UN arms embargo to Yemen despite clear evidence that Iran ships weapons to the Houthis.[8] Iran similarly obfuscates its role in the Axis of Resistance despite its clear leadership role — including its ability to direct some groups to do Tehran’s bidding. Iran and its partners and proxies have continued to state publicly in Arabic and Farsi that they will support one another while simultaneously denying their close relationships in English to Western outlets.[9]

**Iran continues to coordinate with China and Russia on nuclear issues ahead of talks with the United States, further illustrating the interaction between major US adversaries.**

Iranian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for Legal and International Affairs Kazem Gharibabadi met with his Chinese and Russian counterparts in Moscow on April 8 to discuss the Iranian nuclear issue and lifting sanctions.[10] Iran, China, and Russia issued similar statements following the meeting, emphasizing the importance of ongoing cooperation on these issues.[11] Iran, China, and Russia previously issued a joint statement in mid-March condemning the US "maximum pressure" strategy vis-a-vis Iran following a meeting of the Iranian, Chinese, and Russian deputy foreign ministers in Beijing.[12] It remains unclear what Iran hopes to gain from this coordination or how Russia or China plan to support Tehran amid growing US pressure. Russia and China, both UN Security Council members, may help block the passage of resolutions against Iran. China also remains the largest importer of Iranian oil. China’s Iranian oil imports help Iran circumvent US sanctions.[13]

**Turkey and Israel have reportedly held talks to discuss opening a deconfliction line to avoid potential conflict over Israeli strikes in Syria, according to two unspecified Western officials.[14]**

Another unspecified source "familiar with Turkish-Israeli tensions" told Middle East Eye on April 7 that the talks between Turkey and Israel began after Israel struck Tiyas Airbase in Homs Province.[15] Israel has struck Tiyas Airbase on March 21, March 24, and April 2.[16] Israeli officials called the strikes a “warning” to Turkey.[17] Reuters reported on April 7 that Turkey has evaluated establishing airbases at Tiyas and at least two other Syrian bases.[18] The unspecified Western officials said that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told his Turkish counterparts that Israel had a “limited window” to strike Tiyas before Turkey positioned assets there, which would make the base “off-limits” to Israeli strikes.[19] The Turkish Defense Ministry denied that it held talks with Israel on April 8.[20] An open line of communication between Turkey and Israel could possibly prevent a potential stand-off between the two parties, particularly one that may be triggered if Israel continues to strike Syrian bases and Turkey continues to develop plans to base its forces in Syria. One of the unspecified sources said that Netanyahu maintained that Israel insists on a fully demilitarized southern Syria, which would preclude Turkey from forming a presence there.[21] The Turkish government is unlikely to halt plans to establish Turkish presence at Syrian bases like Tiyas or Palmyra. Turkish officials have maintained that doing so is critical to Turkey’s counter-ISIS efforts.[22]

**US Central Command (CENTCOM) has targeted several mid-ranking commanders responsible for the frontline in Hudaydah Governorate, which could impact the Houthis’ ability to coordinate attacks on international shipping and react to major ground attacks.**

CENTCOM conducted an airstrike on April 2 targeting al Fazah, Hudaydah Governorate, southwest of

Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen near the Red Sea, reportedly killing at least 70 Houthi fighters.[23] Several mid-ranking Houthi military and intelligence officials reportedly died in the airstrike, including the al Tuhayta Axis Commander Najib Kashri.[24] The Tuhayta area is south of Hudaydah and close to the frontline between Houthi and pro-Yemeni government forces. CENTCOM strikes eliminating mid-level commanders along this frontline could create opportunities for pro-government forces to exploit if the CENTCOM strikes were to be coordinated with pro-government forces. These strikes and their possible impacts on the frontline are notable in the context of CNN reporting on April 6 that the Yemeni Government is preparing for a ground offensive against the Houthis, citing unspecified regional diplomatic sources.[25] These mid-level commanders will be quickly replaced, however. The Tuhayta area is also probably important for Houthi smuggling efforts and drone and missile operations.[26] CENTCOM reportedly targeted the Houthis' Red Sea Coastal Region Commander Abu Taleb in this airstrike as well.[27] Abu Taleb's status remains unknown.

CENTCOM also reportedly conducted an unspecified number of airstrikes targeting 13 Houthi military officials meeting at Sheikh Saleh al Suhaili's house in the eastern suburbs of Sanaa City, according to local sources.[28] Houthi media reported that the airstrikes killed at least four people and injured 25, but did not name the casualties.[29] Suhaili's brother is close to the founder of the Houthi movement, Hussein al Houthi, and is himself reportedly affiliated with the Houthis internal security apparatus and the Houthis' smuggling operations.[30] Suhaili has also previously hosted former Iranian Ambassador to the Houthis and Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force member Hassan Irloo in the same house when Irloo was ambassador between 2019 and 2021.[31]

**A Saudi news outlet reported that the Houthis arrested Houthi Security and Intelligence Services Deputy Chief Major General Abdulqader al Shami for leaking Houthi military sites' locations, citing unspecified sources.[32]** Shami previously served in intelligence roles under President Ali Abdullah Saleh and continued to work under the Houthis after the Houthis took over Sanaa in 2014.[33] Shami's superior, Abdulhakim al Khaywani, does not trust Shami because of Shami's connections to the pre-Houthi government, according to local media reports from 2022.[34] Shami presents an easy scapegoat for intelligence failures. Shami could have motivations for leaking information if he has been increasingly marginalized, though CTP-ISW has not observed reports suggesting that Shami leaked any possible military locations.

US Ambassador to Yemen Steven Fagin met with PLC President Rashad al Alimi on April 8 in Riyadh to discuss US efforts to end the Houthi blockade and restore freedom of navigation.[35] This meeting is notable after unspecified regional diplomatic sources told CNN on April 6 that the Yemeni government is preparing a ground offensive against the Houthis with US and Saudi naval support to retake Hudaydah Port, though as US ambassador, Fagin regularly meets with Alimi.[36]

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan arrived in the United States on April 8 for an official visit and is set to meet US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on April 9.[37] Faisal will reportedly discuss developments with the Houthis and in the Gaza Strip, according to unspecified US government officials.[38] Saudi Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman separately held a phone call on April 7 with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to discuss defense cooperation and CENTCOM's airstrike campaign targeting the Houthis.[39]

### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Iranian Nuclear Negotiations:** Iran agreed to “high-level” talks with the United States in Oman on April 12, but it is very unlikely to agree to some of the reported US demands. Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi and US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff will lead the negotiations. Iran may be conducting an information campaign to prepare to argue that it is already adhering to some US demands in the negotiations.
- **Iran, Russia, and China Cooperation:** Iran continues to coordinate with China and Russia on nuclear issues ahead of talks with the United States, further illustrating the interaction between major US adversaries.
- **Turkey and Israel in Syria:** Turkey and Israel have reportedly held talks to discuss opening a deconfliction line to avoid potential conflict over Israeli strikes in Syria, according to two unspecified Western officials.
- **US Air Campaign in Yemen:** US Central Command (CENTCOM) has targeted several mid-ranking commanders responsible for the frontline in Hudaydah governorate, which could impact the Houthis’ ability to coordinate attacks on international shipping and react to major ground attacks.

## Syria

**Syrian transitional government forces killed a possible pro-Assad insurgent during an arrest attempt in Nahr al Bared, western Hama Province, on April 7.[40]** Local residents alerted security forces that two armed men were present in Nahr al Bared, near Salhab.[41] Syrian media reported that the two men were affiliated with the Assad regime.[42] Security forces engaged the two insurgents while attempting to arrest them and killed one insurgent.[43] The other insurgent fled.[44]

**Sunni sectarian militia Saraya Ansar al Sunnah claimed that its members assassinated a Syrian man in an Alawite neighborhood of Homs City on April 7.[45]** An Alawite anti-government social media account said that a group of gunmen drove up and shot a Syrian man named Mahmoud Ismail outside of a barbershop in Wadi al Dahab, Homs City.[46] Wadi al Dahab is an Alawite neighborhood. The gunmen fled the scene before security forces deployed to the area.[47] Saraya Ansar al Sunnah claimed the assassination and justified it on the grounds Ismail was a “criminal,” presumably a reference to a previous affiliation with the Assad Regime.[48] Saraya Ansar al Sunnah is a Sunni militia that has made repeated sectarian statements that warned it would target Alawites for crimes committed under Assad and that the group would continue its attacks until the Alawites and Shia were “eliminated” or displaced from the region.[49]

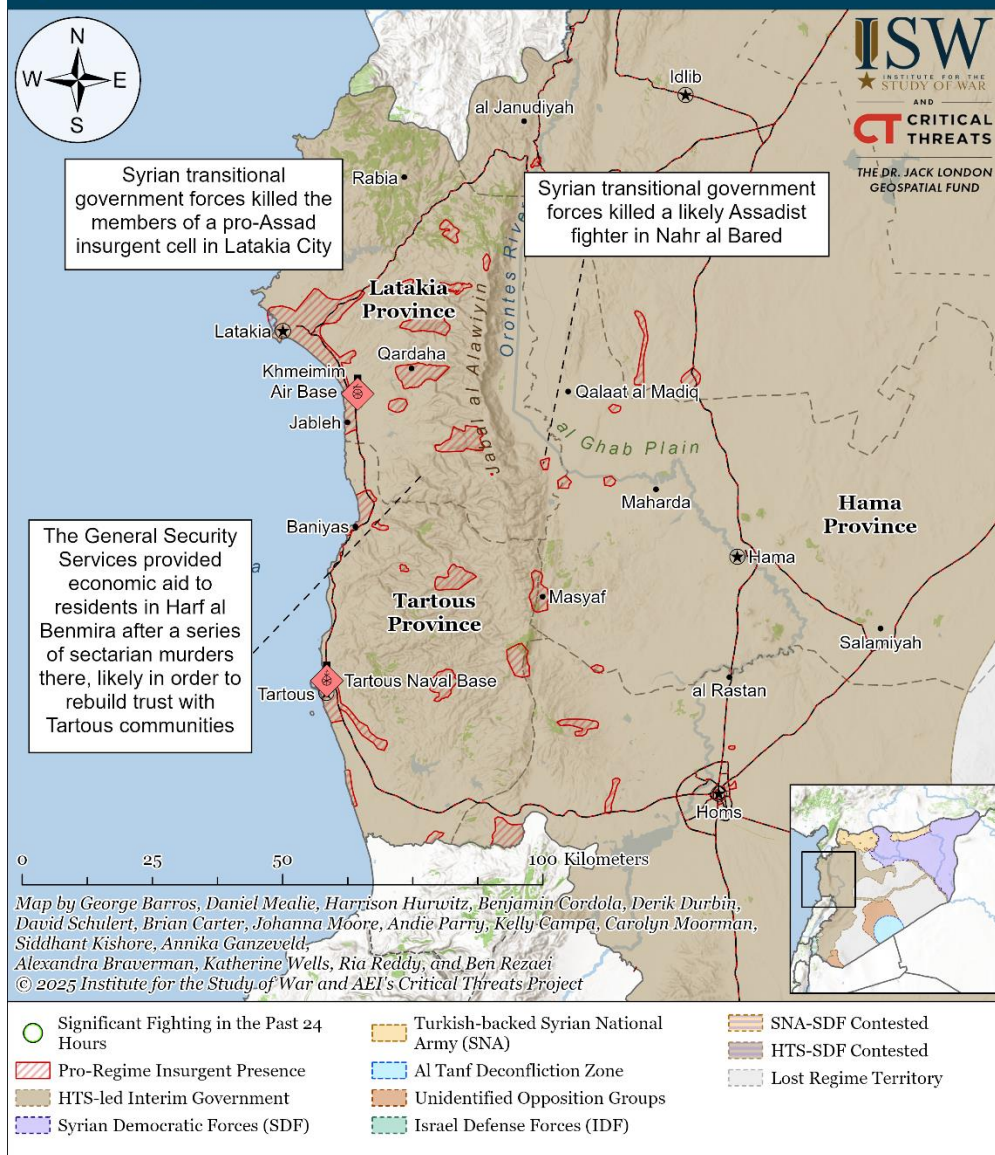
**Syrian transitional government forces provided economic aid to residents in Harf al Benmira, Tartous Province, after a series of murders as part of a government program likely intended to rebuild trust with coastal communities.** Photos posted on social media on April 7 showed members of Baniyas’ General Security Services, including the director, handing out bundles of cash to residents in Harf al Benmira.[50] The effort is part of a Syrian Civil Peace Committee program that follows a recent incident in which Syrian soldiers killed six men in the town on March 31.[51] Syrian Transitional President Ahmed al Shara created the Syrian Civil Peace Committee after the spate of sectarian violence on the Syrian coast in early March.[52] The assistance program in Harf

al Benmira is consistent with official government attempts in Tartous to reconcile with local communities. The Tartous provincial government recently distributed a financial grant among 2,000 families in Tartous that were impacted by insurgent attacks or government counter-insurgency tactics.[53] The Syrian government must rebuild trust within Alawite communities after numerous recent bouts of violence that have targeted Alawites. It is also important that the government address the Alawites' economic grievances in order to confront the root causes of the pro-Assad insurgent campaign. Limited financial grants will not be enough to address these long-standing grievances, however. A Lebanese newspaper reported that the government in Tartous only provided \$100 to each of the families impacted by the March 6 and 7 attacks.[54]

**Syrian transitional government forces killed a pro-Assad insurgent cell commander in Latakia City on April 8.[55]** The General Security Service raided a building after identifying and locating Hassan Ibrahim, the leader of a local Assadist insurgent cell. Ibrahim and the members of his cell attempted to resist arrest, and general security forces killed them.[56] The cell previously killed two security forces members with grenades in Latakia City on March 3.[57] The director of Latakia's General Security forces said that Hassan has led other attacks targeting security forces.[58]

## Assessed Control of Terrain in Western Syria

April 8, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST

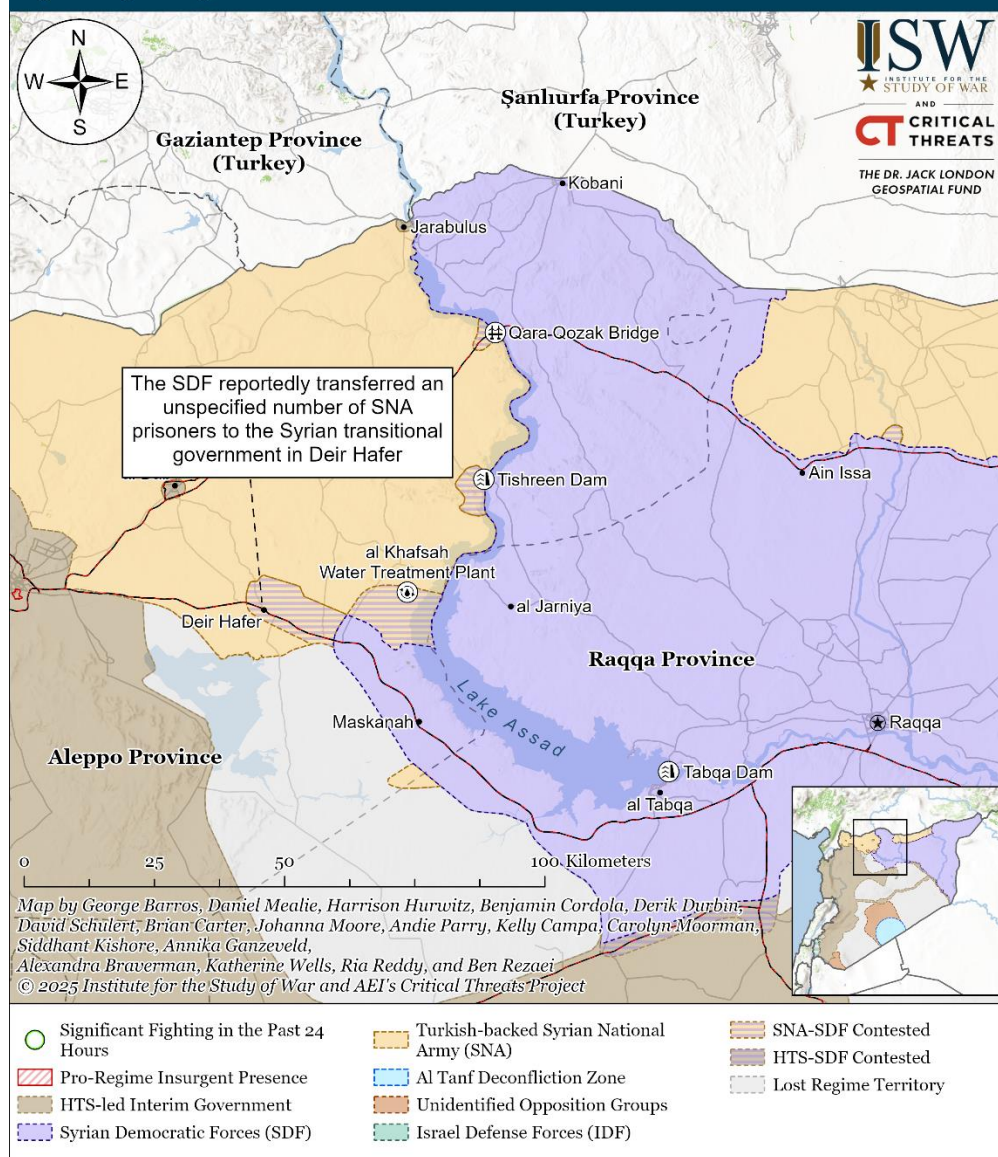


**The SDF and the Syrian transitional government continued to implement the March 10 ceasefire agreement.**[59] The SDF reportedly transferred an unspecified number of Syrian National Army (SNA) prisoners to the Syrian transitional government in Deir Hafer, Aleppo Province, on April 8.[60] The SDF transferred the prisoners after a three-day delay, according to Syrian media reports.[61] Anti-SDF media reported that the SDF withdrew some of its forces from the Tishreen Dam on April 8.[62] The SDF-transitional government ceasefire agreement calls for making the dam a demilitarized zone.[63]



## Assessed Control of Terrain around Manbij

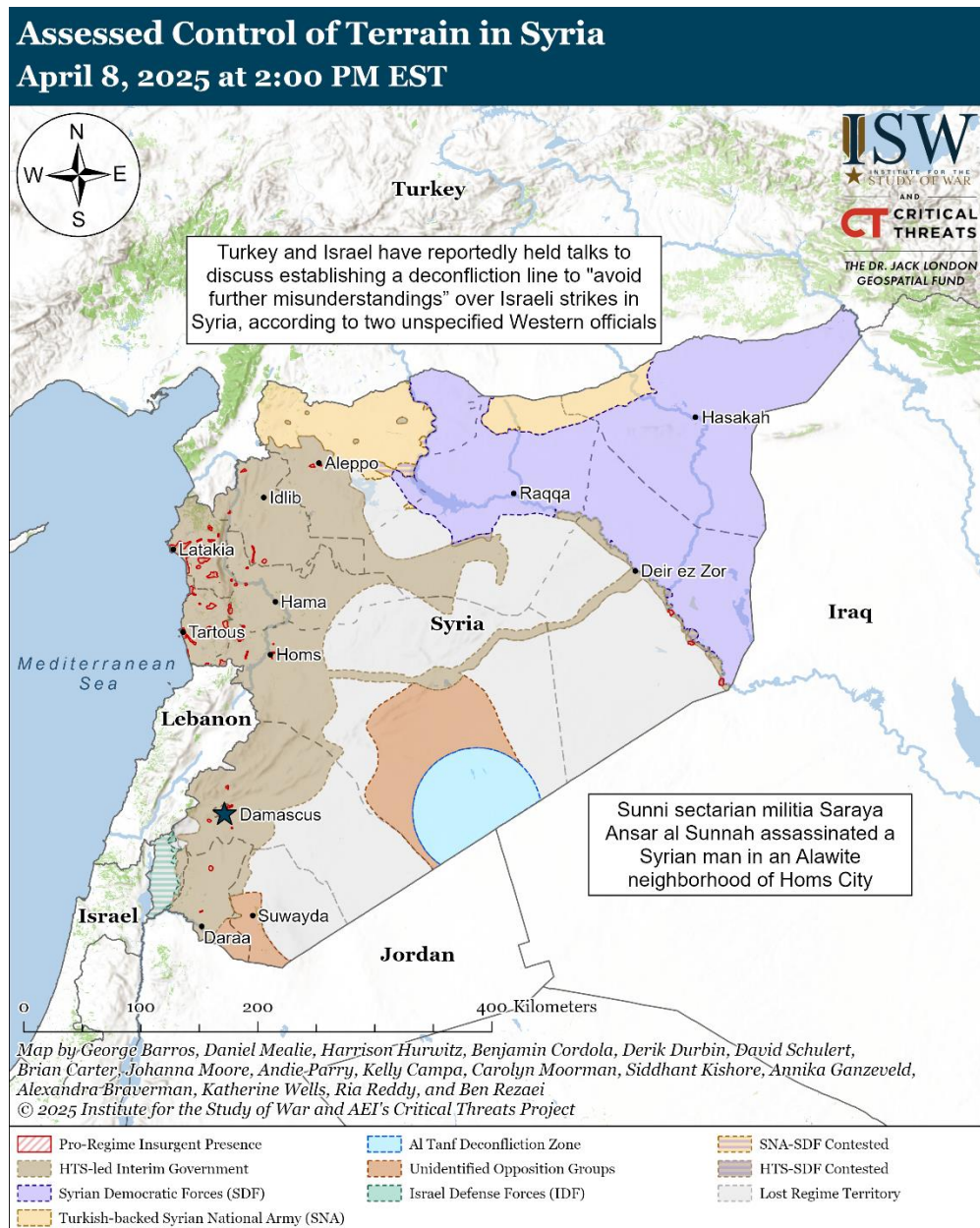
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**Syrian Transitional President Ahmed al Shara chaired the first cabinet meeting of the new transitional government on April 7 and discussed efforts to consolidate power in areas not under full government control.**[64] Shara outlined the transitional government's priorities in civil administration, economic development, foreign policy, and security during discussions with the 23 newly appointed ministers.[65] Shara emphasized the need to rebuild the new Syrian army by integrating Suwaydawi militias and the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) into the transitional government.[66] The transitional government continues to negotiate over how the SDF and Suwaydawi militias will integrate into the transitional government and the degree of autonomy the SDF and Druze militias will retain in their respective territories.

The lack of full integration of Suwaydawi militias and the SDF continues to prevent the transitional government from consolidating power in southern and northeastern Syria. The Syrian transitional

government signed an agreement with prominent Druze militias in early March 2025 to integrate Suwaydawi fighters under the interior ministry.[67] The transitional government has offered significant concessions to Suwaydawis, including the creation of a Suwaydawi-led provincial security force and salaries for Suwaydawi cadres that are four times higher than those under the Assad regime.[68] The transitional government has similarly signed a series of agreements with the SDF to redistribute territory in the Autonomous Administration of North and Eastern Syria (AANES), the de-facto governing authority of northeastern Syria, and integrate SDF fighters into the Syrian defense ministry.[69] The SDF and the transitional government began implementing some provisions of the agreement last week.[70]



## 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

**Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Asaib Ahl al Haq (AAH) released an op-ed on April 8 that justified Iranian retaliation against US forces in Iraq.**<sup>[71]</sup> AAH news outlet Al Ahad released a copy of an Iranian complaint filed against the Iraqi government in January 2025 protesting the Iraqi government's failure to prevent Israeli airstrikes on Iranian facilities in October 2024. Iran reiterated its right to take "countermeasures" against foreign military forces in Iraq—referring to the United States—that enable Israeli violations of Iraqi airspace. Al Ahad claimed that the United States has prevented Iraq from developing air defense capabilities that would enable it to exert control over its airspace. Al Ahad argued that Iraqi politicians' failure to address these violations "force Iran to exercise its legal right" to attack foreign forces in Iraq. The United States also has a legal right to target forces in Iraq—including AAH—that violate Iraq's sovereignty and attack US forces. AAH and other Iranian-backed Iraqi groups have previously disputed this right in the past. This is consistent with CTP-ISW's assessment that Iran and its proxies are likely shaping an information operation directed at the West.<sup>[72]</sup> This information operation attempts to obfuscate Iran's role within the Axis of Resistance while also highlighting potential military action in response to an attack on Iran's nuclear program. The Trump administration's stated maximum pressure policy seeks to combat malign Iranian activity and threats to US strategic interests in the region. This information campaign is designed to influence and inject uncertainty into US political and military decision-making processes within this maximum pressure campaign.

### **Arabian Peninsula**

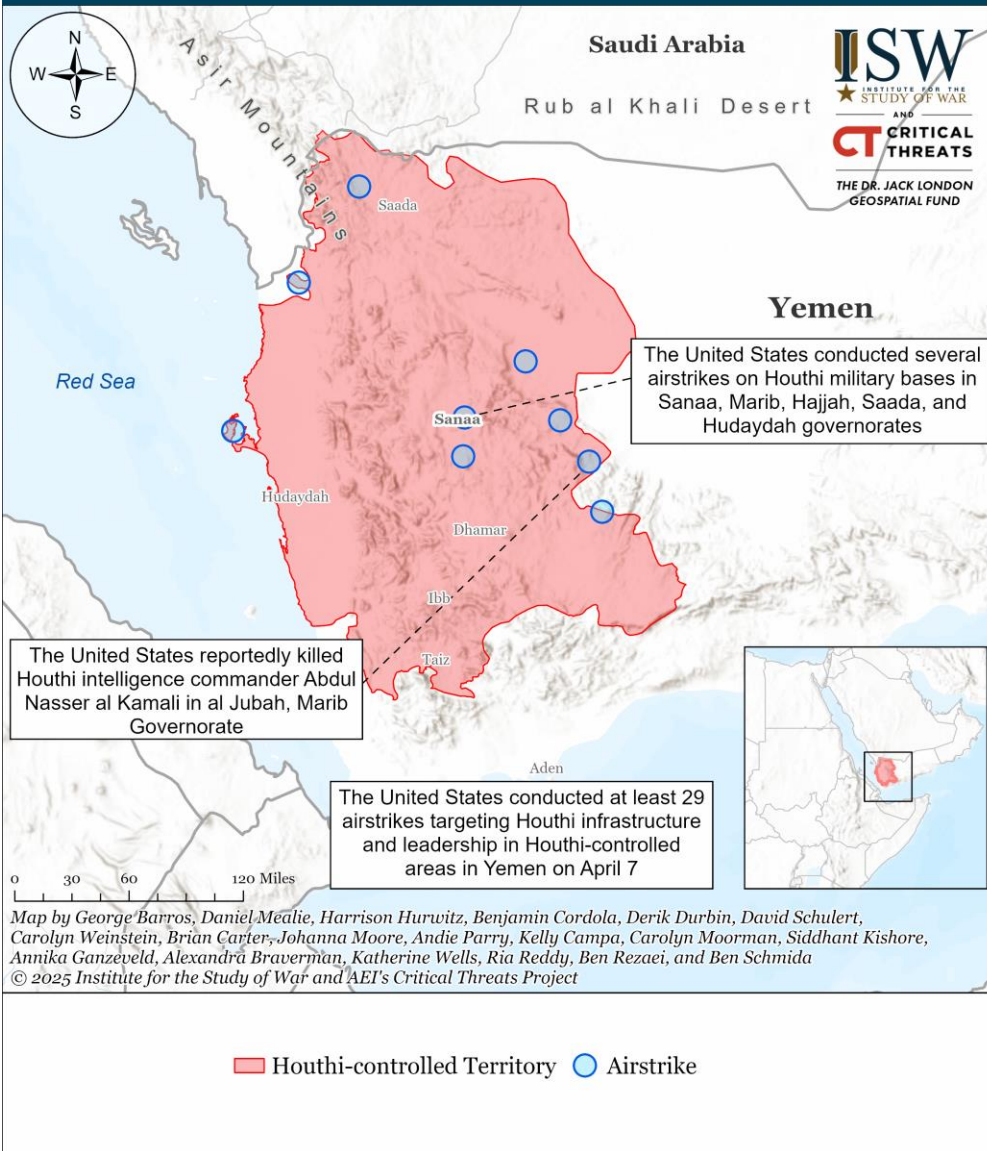
#### **Axis of Resistance objectives:**

- 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) conducted at least 29 airstrikes targeting Houthi infrastructure and leadership in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen on April 7.**<sup>[73]</sup> CENTCOM conducted at least 9 airstrikes targeting three separate reported Houthi military bases in Marib Governorate on the eastern front of Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen.<sup>[74]</sup> CENTCOM also launched at least 11 airstrikes targeting two separate Houthi sites in Sanaa Governorate.<sup>[75]</sup> CENTCOM conducted at least two airstrikes on a Houthi weapons depot on Kamaran Island, Hudaydah Governorate, for a third consecutive day.<sup>[76]</sup> CENTCOM reportedly killed Houthi intelligence official Abdulnaser al Kamali in a targeted airstrike on a vehicle near a Houthi command and control center in southern al Jubah, Marib Governorate.<sup>[77]</sup>

## US Strikes Against Houthi Targets

April 8, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



## 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

**Unspecified Western security sources told Saudi and Lebanese media on April 8 that Hezbollah is using maritime routes to smuggle weapons into Lebanon.[78]** A Western security source told Saudi media that the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Units 190 and 700 are supplying Hezbollah with weapons, equipment, and money through maritime routes.[79] Both Units 190 and 700 are involved in Iranian smuggling networks.[80] The source further claimed that Hezbollah "operates freely" in the Port of Beirut using its human network.[81] Lebanese media reported that Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam asked "relevant authorities to tighten security procedures" at the Beirut Port.[82] The Lebanese government banned Iranian flights from landing in Beirut in February 2025, likely to curtail Hezbollah reconstitution efforts.[83]

*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 appreciated from 1,057,000 rials to one US dollar on April 7 to 999,000 rials to one US dollar on April 8.[84]** This appreciation may be partially related to the US-Iran nuclear negotiations process.

**The IRGC Ground Forces Hamzeh Seyyed ol Shohada Operational Base announced on April 7 that Law Enforcement Command (LEC) forces foiled an ISIS-linked terror plot in Kurdistan Province in late March.[85]** Alleged ISIS-trained foreign fighters reportedly planned suicide attacks during Nowruz. The IRGC reported that the LEC forces neutralized the fighters before the attack and seized their suicide vests, handguns, and grenades.

**Iran continues to expand and showcase long-range strike capabilities as part of its deterrence posture, likely to prepare for retaliation scenarios in the event of a potential Israeli or US attack.** The IRGC Aerospace Force has reportedly equipped Iranian drones with anti-jamming systems, Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) receivers, and long-range antennas for image and data transmission.[86] IRGC-affiliated Tasnim News Agency claimed that the Lebanese Hezbollah used Iranian drones with these upgrades during the conflict with Israel in 2023 to evade tracking.[87] Iranian military media previously threatened to use upgraded Shahed-136 drones to strike Diego Garcia Island in retaliation for a potential US attack.[88] The integration of the new anti-jamming and communication systems could possibly enable deeper strikes and reconnaissance missions.

*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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