

Iran Update



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March 24, 2025, Information Cutoff 2:00pm 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.

Iranian officials are open to indirect nuclear negotiations with the United States but reportedly remain unwilling to make any concessions on Iran's missile program or its role in leading the Axis of Resistance. US President Donald Trump sent a letter to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on March 5 that proposed negotiations on Iran's nuclear program. [1] Top Trump Administration Envoy Steve Witkoff said that the proposal sought to put in place verification mechanisms and prevent weaponization of Iran's nuclear material.[2] Witkoff added that Iran did express interest in the proposal by reaching back out via multiple intermediaries, and Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi said on March 24 that Iran is open to indirect talks "through various channels," though it rejects direct negotiations.[3]

Other Iranian sources added that the Trump letter also included demands that Iran curtail its missile program and its role in supporting its proxies and partners in the Axis of Resistance, which Iranian sources called "unacceptable" or unrealistic.[4] An Iranian expert close to the regime and an Iranian media outlet close to a former Iranian Supreme National Security Council secretary both said that Iran would not negotiate over its missile program.[5] The Iranian expert also added that Iranian officials could not negotiate over its role in the Axis of Resistance because its proxy and partner militias "are not proxies." [6] This is a continuation of a long-running Iranian information operation that seeks to obfuscate Tehran's role as the leader of the Axis of Resistance. These positions echo previous statements

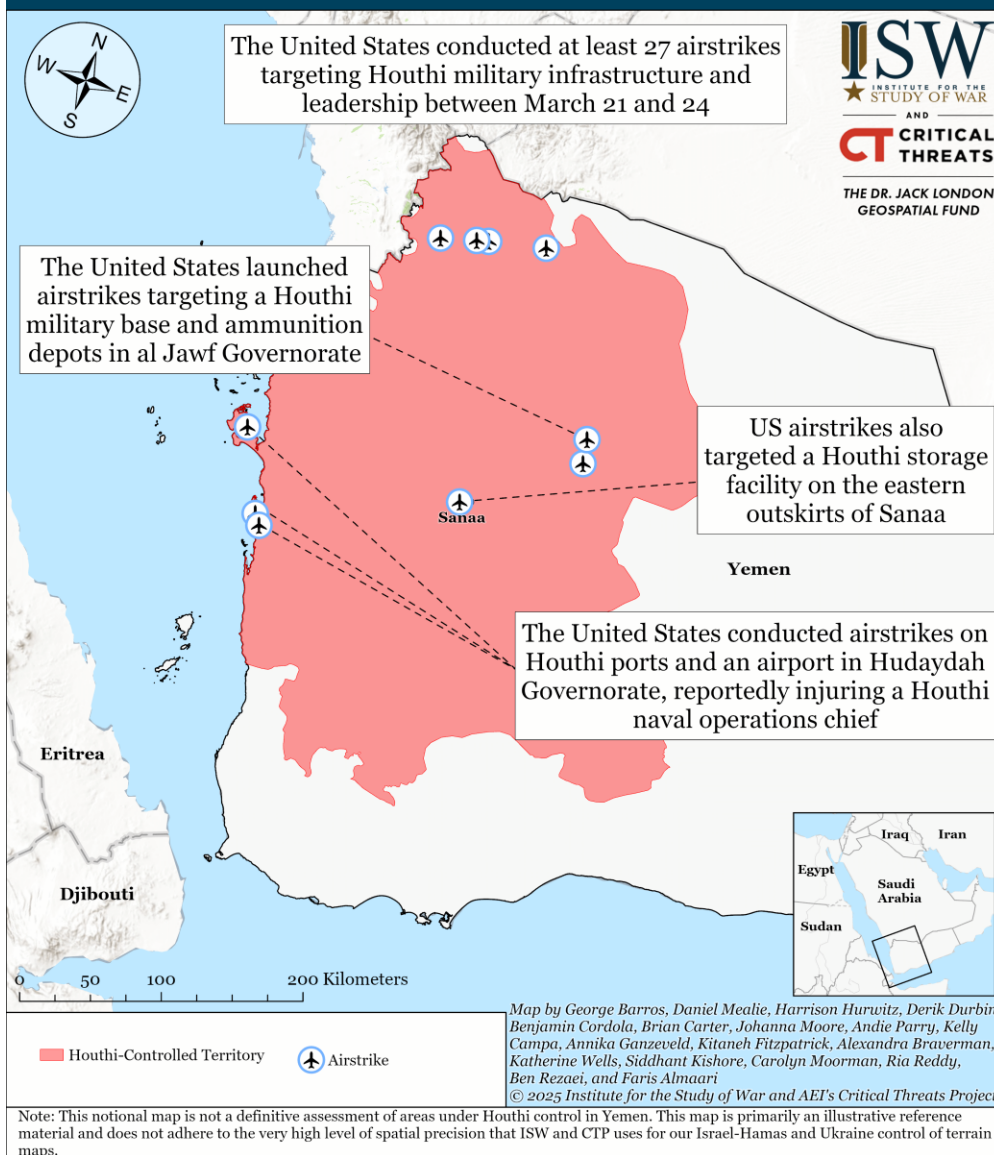
from senior Iranian leaders including Khamenei rejecting any measures to "set new expectations" for Iran's missile range.[7]

Iran is unlikely to agree to curtail its missile program or the Axis of Resistance because to do so would cause it to lose the primary means with which it seeks to achieve its strategic objectives. Iran seeks to expel the United States from the region to exert itself as the regional hegemon and shape the region in its image. Its missile program forms one part of this effort. Iran uses its ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and drones to coerce its adversaries and provide new capabilities to its allies. Expelling the United States and emerging as a regional hegemon also requires like-minded partners and proxies that can actualize Iran's vision in regional countries, including Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen. An Iranian decision to curtail its proxy and partner network would be akin to an Iranian surrender and would require top Iranian leaders to give up on key ideological positions they have held for their entire adult lives.

The United States Central Command (CENTCOM) conducted at least 27 airstrikes targeting Houthi military infrastructure and leadership in several locations across Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen since March 21.[8] CENTCOM reportedly targeted a Houthi military base and ammunition depots in al Jawf Governorate in northern Yemen on March 22 and a Houthi storage facility in western Sanaa suburbs on March 23.[9] CENTCOM also struck Houthi ports and an airport in Hudaydah on March 22, reportedly injuring Houthi naval operations chief Mansour al Saadi, also known as Abu Sajjad.[10] US National Security Advisor Mike Waltz told CBS on March 23 that CENTCOM eliminated the Houthis' missile unit chief.[11] Local media also reported that US airstrikes killed three Houthi commanders in Majzar, Maarib Governorate, on March 22.[12] The Houthis launched a retaliatory drone attack and a separate combined missile and drone attack targeting the USS *Harry S. Truman* aircraft carrier on March 21 and 23, respectively.[13]

US Strikes Against Houthi Targets

As of March 24, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



The Houthis modified their military communication encryption codes and enhanced personal security measures for Houthi leadership in response to CENTCOM airstrikes targeting Houthi officials, according to a March 22 report in Yemeni media.[14] The Houthis have also reportedly increased security around military sites and imposed further censorship restrictions on the Yemeni population in Houthi-controlled territory, to prevent leaks showing Houthi military activities, sites, and leaders. Waltz also confirmed that CENTCOM will continue to target Houthi military infrastructure, weapons production sites, and communication lines, alongside Houthi leadership, to deter and weaken the Houthis' capabilities to conduct attacks on Israel and international shipping.[15] Regional sources reported that CENTCOM struck the Houthis' Communications Ministry and Postal Authority in the capital city Sanaa on March 19.[16]

Houthi Supreme Leader Abdulmalik al Houthi falsely claimed on March 22 that the United States ordered the USS *Carl Vinson* carrier strike group to sail to the Red Sea because the USS *Harry S. Truman* carrier strike group failed to confront the Houthis.[17] US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth ordered the *Vinson* to deploy to the Red Sea and extended *Truman*'s deployment by one month to maintain a continuous carrier presence in the region.[18]

The Houthis separately launched two ballistic missiles targeting Ben Gurion Airport in central Israel on March 21 and 23, respectively.[19] The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) intercepted both Houthi missiles before they entered Israeli airspace.[20] An Israeli war correspondent, citing an anonymous defense source, reported that the Houthis also launched a missile on March 22. The March 22 missile fell short of Israel and landed in an unidentified location in Saudi Arabia.[21]

The Houthis may calculate that they can compel Saudi Arabia and the UAE to pressure the United States to stop its air campaign by conducting attacks targeting Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The Houthi-controlled Yemeni Central Bank in Sanaa accused Saudi Arabia and the UAE of breaching the Yemeni ceasefire by pressuring Sanaa-based banks to relocate to Aden, which is outside of Houthi control after the United States designated the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organization in January.[22] The Central Bank added that this move will impact the Houthis' economy. The Houthis previously threatened to attack Saudi Arabia and the UAE after the Yemeni government attempted to remove the Houthi-controlled wing of the Yemeni Central Bank in Sanaa from the SWIFT system in July 2024.[23] The Saudis and Emiratis promptly and successfully pressured the Yemeni government to cease its plan to remove the Houthi-controlled Yemeni Central Bank from SWIFT.

The Houthis evacuated their headquarters in Baghdad and are considering closing their other two offices in Iraq after Iran warned the United States may strike Houthi targets, according to a Saudi news report on March 22.[24] Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)-Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani reportedly warned Iraqi militia leaders that US airstrikes against Houthi facilities could "quickly backfire on Baghdad." Ghaani called for "avoiding any military activity during this sensitive period."

Iran and the Iraqi federal government continue to pressure Iranian-backed Iraqi militias to "avoid all provocations" with Israel or US forces in Iraq and Syria in response to US airstrikes targeting the Houthis and Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip.[25] An unspecified source told Saudi media on March 21 that Ghaani, during his visit to Baghdad on March 19, told Iranian-backed militia and Iran-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) leaders to avoid provoking the United States or Israel.[26] Iraqi Foreign Minister Faud Hussein separately acknowledged in a recent interview that the federal government's failure to reach an agreement with Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, purportedly to avoid striking Israel or US forces in Iraq and Syria, could lead to US or Israeli attacks in Iraq.[27] A Shia Coordination Framework-affiliated politician told Iraqi media on March 19 that the militias may resume unspecified activities due to regional developments, likely in reference to Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip and US airstrikes targeting the Houthis.[28] The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Shia political parties, including some parties with Iranian-backed armed wings. Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have recently taken precautions to avoid Israeli strikes in

Iraq, including via the transfer of weapons and personnel from militia positions to new positions throughout Iraq and at night.[29]

The draft PMF law currently in discussion in the Iraqi Parliament does not address the threat that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias pose to the United States and its partners in the Middle East. The PMF is an Iraqi state security service that includes many Iranian-backed Iraqi militias.[30] The Iraqi parliament first read through the draft law, titled the “Popular Mobilization Authority Law,” in a session on March 24 and Parliament will reportedly vote on the law on April 1.[31] Iranian-backed Iraqi parliamentarians have debated the Popular Mobilization Authority Law’s components for weeks.[32] Iraqi media reported on March 12 that the Iraqi federal government sought to replace the PMF Service and Retirement Law, which has been debated in parliament several times in recent months, with a rewritten law--presumably the new Popular Mobilization Authority Law--that would integrate the PMF into the Iraqi armed forces.[33] This effort to restructure the PMF occurred as the United States pressured the Iraqi federal government to dissolve and disarm the PMF and has reportedly threatened to sanction PMF leaders.[34]

Kurdish media reported on March 24 that the draft Popular Mobilization Authority law will replace the 2016 PMF Commission Law that formalized the PMF as an independent entity reporting directly to the Iraqi prime minister.[35] The current form of the PMF law clarifies the PMF’s structure and administrative functions, including the Popular Mobilization Commission Chairman’s authorities and the number of departments and directorates associated with the PMF.[36] The Popular Mobilization Commission (PMC) is formally responsible for ensuring that the militias in the PMF answer to the Iraqi federal government.[37] The draft law adds that the PMF will have a military academy like other Iraqi security institutions.[38] The draft law also prohibits PMF members from associating with any political parties, as did the 2016 version.[39]

The draft law in its current form will not seriously impede Iran’s efforts to capture the Iraqi security sector because most commanders of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias within the PMF do not officially lead individual militia formations in the PMF, nor do they officially hold public office as a member or leader of their political parties. Most Iraqi political leaders instead control their parties from outside government, unlike in most parliamentary systems. This means that Iranian-backed Iraqi figures like Qais al Khazali or Hadi al Ameri—leaders of Asaib Ahl al Haq and the Badr Organization respectively—could easily continue to control both their military organizations and their political organizations without technically violating this law. The law also does not make any changes that would impede Iran’s ability to command and control the PMF, which does not listen to its official commander-in-chief, the Iraqi prime minister. Many elements of the PMF instead take their orders from Iran or Iranian-backed commanders.

Tensions between Iranian Kurds and Azeris in northwestern Iran have flared up in recent days. Shia Azeris held a ceremony in Urumiyeh, West Azerbaijan Province, on March 22 to mourn the death of Ali bin Abi Talib, the first Shia Imam.[40] The ceremony devolved into protests against Kurdish residents in Urumiyeh for holding Nowruz celebrations and displaying Kurdish symbols during these celebrations.[41] Some demonstrators chanted slogans such as “Urumiyeh is Turkic and will remain Turkic.”[42] An Iranian professor told Iranian media on March 23 that Azerbaijan and Turkey seek to “create divergences between different Iranian groups” and “create chaos”

in Iran, likely in response to the recent demonstrations in Urumiyeh.[43] This statement reflects a broader, long-standing belief among Iranian officials that Azerbaijan and Turkey seek to promote Azeri separatism in northwestern Iran.[44] The incident in Urumiyeh comes amid heightened tensions between Iran and Turkey over Turkish support for the fall of the Assad regime and growing Turkish influence in Syria.[45] Iranian police arrested 22 demonstrators in Urumiyeh for “promoting hatred and ethnic sedition.”[46] The Iranian culture and Islamic guidance minister warned on March 23 that “ethnic and religious faults in Iran should not be provoked [because] they can quickly turn into a melting and destructive flame.”[47]

The Iranian regime has intensified hijab enforcement through mass policing, surveillance technology, and state-backed vigilantism, aiming to control public behavior and suppress dissent. The United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran presented new evidence on March 14 that demonstrates ongoing and systematic human rights violations by the Iranian regime in response to the protests that sparked in September 2022.[48] The report states that women are increasingly summoned to court for alleged non-compliance with mandatory Hijab laws. Penalties include fines, flogging, and bank account closure and are often based on photos or reports submitted by police or loyalist groups. The report states that Iranian authorities also rely heavily on advanced surveillance tools to monitor hijab violations. These include facial recognition systems, aerial drones, and mobile apps such as Nazer, which allows approved users to report women not wearing the hijab—even in private vehicles or ambulances. These developments reflect the Iranian regime’s broader effort to tighten control over the population by expanding surveillance and leveraging informal enforcement networks.

Iranian authorities arrested dozens of Iranians across at least three provinces to suppress public gatherings and anti-regime expressions. A large crowd gathered at Iranian poet Ferdowsi’s tomb near Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi on March 20 and chanted anti-regime slogans.[49] The governor of Mashhad confirmed that 15 individuals were arrested for what he described as “subversive slogans,” and stated they would face legal consequences.[50] Citizens in Fars Province gathered at Hafezieh in Shiraz on March 20, where many women appeared without the mandatory hijab, some participants danced in celebration and chanted pro-monarchy slogans.[51] Kurdistan Province Chief Prosecutor separately reported the arrest of seven individuals on March 23, accusing them of organizing anti-state activities under the guise of Nowruz events in the province.[52] The Prosecutor claimed that the suspects had “organizational ties” and aimed to spread propaganda and insult religious sentiments. Independent human rights group Hengaw confirmed three of the arrests but noted the exact charges remain unclear.[53] The arrests during Nowruz celebrations highlight the regime’s deepening fear of public gatherings that could evolve into anti-regime protests.

Likely Hezbollah fighters launched six rockets at Metula, northern Israel, on March 21.[54] This marked the first rocket attack from Lebanon into Israel since early December 2024.[55] The IDF intercepted three rockets, and the other three landed in Lebanese territory.[56] The IDF conducted counterbattery fire against the rocket launch site and later conducted two waves of airstrikes targeting Hezbollah weapons depots, headquarters, fighters, and rocket launchers across Lebanon on March 22 and 23.[57] The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) destroyed three rudimentary rocket launchers that consisted of simple wood and metal launch rails in two towns in Nabatieh District, southern Lebanon, on March 22.[58]

Hezbollah denied "any connection" to the rocket attack on March 21.[59] Hezbollah previously claimed nearly all of its rocket attacks targeting Israel before the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire agreement. Hezbollah has not claimed attacks in the past that go against its overall objectives, however. This could suggest that Hezbollah either did not conduct the attack or that central leadership did not approve the attack and it feels that the attack is not in Hezbollah's own interest right now. Hezbollah released a statement on March 18 condemning the renewed Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip. Hezbollah has not said that it would resume attacks against Israel.[60]

The Alawite insurgency in Syria appears to be adopting new tactics that were originally outlined by the head of the pro-Assad Coastal Shield Brigade.[61] Likely anti-government insurgents killed a Hayat Tahrir al Sham commander and two other pro-government fighters in separate areas of Idlib province on March 22 and March 24 respectively.[62] These attacks come after Coastal Shield Brigade commander Miqdad Fatiha stated on March 12 that the insurgency would begin to target interim government forces with improvised explosive devices and assassinations as part of the insurgency's second phase.[63] Insurgent leaders can use public statements as a way to signal intent to their followers.[64] These attacks, combined with the discovery of two rudimentary IEDs on the Jableh-Latakia road on March 19 suggest that the insurgency may be adopting new tactics that are consistent with Fatiha's second phase of operations.[65]

Syrian interim government forces conducted search operations on March 23 and 24 in towns with known insurgent presence. Interim government forces launched a search operation in Khan Sheikhoun, Idlib Province, on March 23 targeting former regime members who failed to register with the interim government and arrested individuals who refused to disarm.[66] It is unclear if government forces cordoned off the area before conducting its search. Former Assad regime members previously ambushed interim government forces on February 19 along the Maarat al Numan-Khan Sheikhoun road.[67] Government forces also arrested approximately 15 individuals in Jisr al Shughur, Idlib Province, on March 24 charged with collaboration under the former Assad regime.[68] Pro-Assad insurgents killed approximately 25 individuals, primarily interim government forces, in Jisr al Shughur in the coordinated attack in early March.[69]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Western Syria

March 24, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Thirty-four diverse Syrian parties and organizations formed an alliance to unify political efforts to demand a new Syrian constitution and promote a decentralized and democratic Syrian state.[70] The “Syrian Equal Citizenship Alliance,” or “Tamasuk,” identified itself as an alliance that transcends “ethnic, sectarian, tribal, and even political and ideological” affiliations that seek to encourage a “civil, democratic, and pluralistic state” during its first press conference in Damascus on March 22.[71] The Tamasuk alliance comprises at least 34 political and civil groups, including the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) and other Kurdish, Christian, and Druze-affiliated groups.[72] The SDC is the SDF’s political wing. A leader from the leftist “People’s Will Party” said that Tamasuk does not see itself as an “opposition” group but a group that is willing to engage “all forces,” including the Shara government, in dialogue.[73] The alliances’ founding statement confirmed that it seeks to work towards a “unified Syria” under a single state and single army and called for a “just,

democratic solution to the Kurdish issue.”[74] The coalition, while relatively small, is the first organized political alliance in Syria outside of the government itself since the fall of the regime.

The formation of the alliance, which brings together diverse groups from various Syrian communities and ideologies, demonstrates the degree to which many in Syria are frustrated with the direction of the Shara government. Many of these parties and groups have previously criticized the Shara government for its exclusionary organization of the National Dialogue Conference.[75] Many groups, like the SDC, have rejected Shara’s constitution for granting the executive branch “absolute powers.”[76] Tamasuk called for the writing of a new constitution that better defines the dispersion of decentralized powers in order to allow the people to exercise direct authority within their regions while centralizing affairs like foreign affairs, defense, and the economy under the central government.[77] The Shara government has so far ignored local calls from Syria’s various communities demanding decentralized powers.[78]

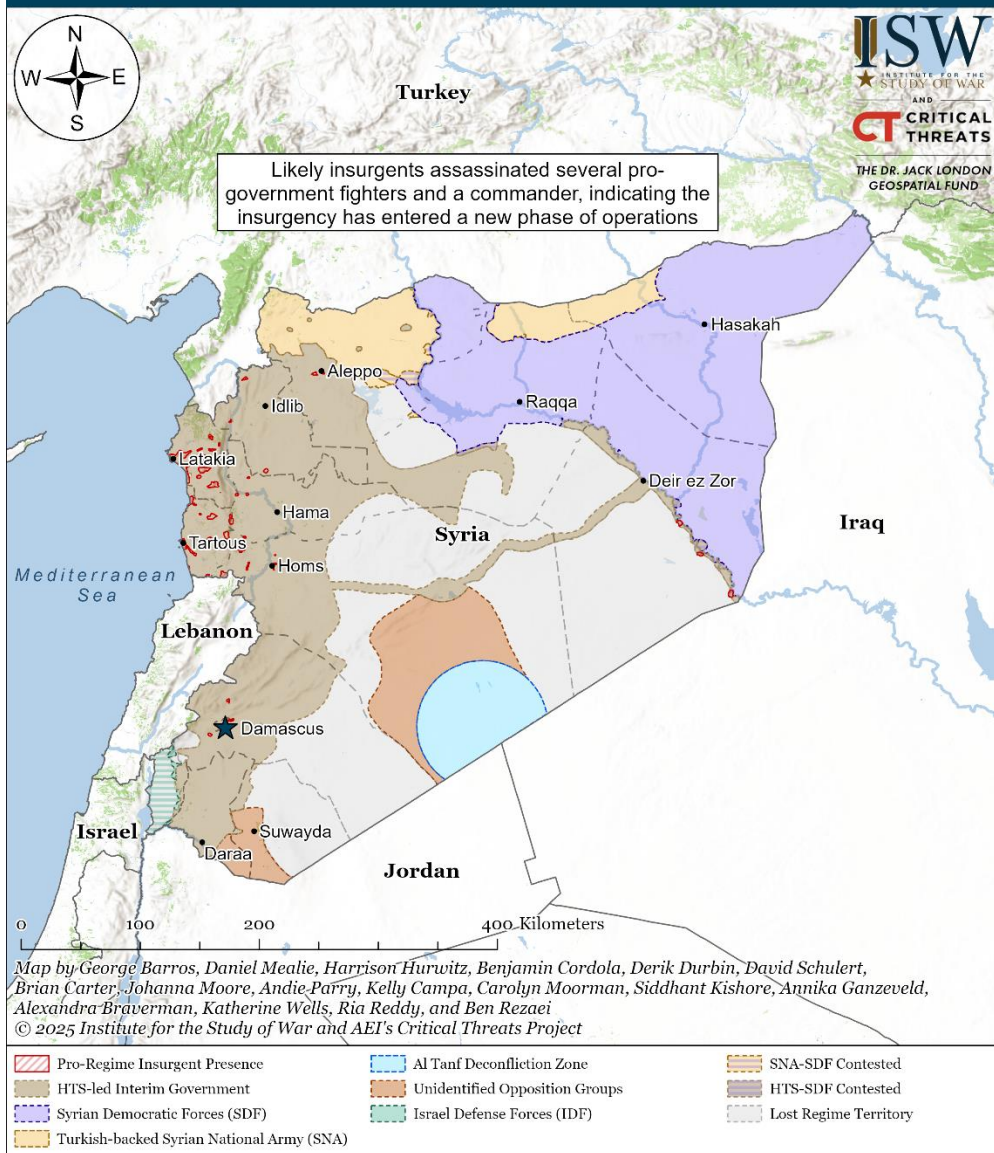
Key Takeaways:

- **Iranian Nuclear Negotiations:** Iranian officials are open to indirect nuclear negotiations with the United States but reportedly remain unwilling to make any concessions on Iran’s missile program or its role in leading the Axis of Resistance. Other Iranian sources added that the Trump letter also included demands that Iran curtail its missile program and its role in supporting its proxies and partners in the Axis of Resistance, which Iranian sources called “unacceptable” or unrealistic. Iran is unlikely to agree to curtail its missile program or the Axis of Resistance because to do so would cause it to lose the primary means with which it seeks to achieve its strategic objectives.
- **US Air Campaign against the Houthis:** The United States Central Command (CENTCOM) conducted at least 27 airstrikes targeting Houthi military infrastructure and leadership in several locations across Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen since March 21.
- **Houthi-Gulf Relations:** The Houthis may calculate that they can compel Saudi Arabia and the UAE to pressure the United States to stop its air campaign by conducting attacks targeting Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The Houthi-controlled Yemeni Central Bank in Sanaa accused Saudi Arabia and the UAE of breaching the Yemeni ceasefire by pressuring Sanaa-based banks to relocate to Aden, which is outside of Houthi control after the United States designated the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organization in January.
- **Iranian-backed Iraqi Militias:** The draft PMF law currently in discussion in the Iraqi Parliament does not address the threat that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias pose to the United States and its partners in the Middle East. The draft law in its current form will not seriously impede Iran’s efforts to capture the Iraqi security sector because most commanders of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias within the PMF do not officially lead individual militia formations in the PMF, nor do they officially hold public office as a member or leader of their political parties.
- **Ethnic Tension in Iran:** Tensions between Iranian Kurds and Azeris in northwestern Iran have flared up in recent days. Shia Azeris held a ceremony in Urumiyeh, West Azerbaijan Province, on March 22 to mourn the death of Ali bin Abi Talib, the first Shia Imam. The ceremony devolved into protests against Kurdish residents in Urumiyeh for holding Nowruz celebrations and displaying Kurdish symbols during these celebrations.

- **Iranian Social Control:** The Iranian regime has intensified hijab enforcement through mass policing, surveillance technology, and state-backed vigilantism, aiming to control public behavior and suppress dissent. Iran is using mobile applications, drones, and other tactics and technologies as part of this effort.
- **Protests in Iran:** Iranian authorities arrested dozens of Iranians across at least three provinces to suppress public gatherings and anti-regime expressions.
- **Lebanon-Israel Ceasefire:** Likely Hezbollah fighters launched six rockets at Metula, northern Israel, on March 21. Hezbollah denied "any connection" to the rocket attack on March 21.[79] Hezbollah previously claimed nearly all of its rocket attacks targeting Israel before the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire agreement. Hezbollah has not claimed attacks in the past that go against its overall objectives, however. This could suggest that Hezbollah either did not conduct the attack or that central leadership did not approve the attack and it feels that the attack is not in Hezbollah's own interest right now.
- **Alawite Insurgency in Syria:** The Alawite insurgency in Syria appears to be adopting new tactics that were originally outlined by the head of the pro-Assad Coastal Shield Brigade. Syrian interim government forces conducted search operations on March 23 and 24 in towns with known insurgent presence.
- **Syrian Politics:** Thirty-four diverse Syrian parties and organizations formed an alliance to unify political efforts to demand a new Syrian constitution and promote a decentralized and democratic Syrian state. The formation of the alliance, which brings together diverse groups from various Syrian communities and ideologies, demonstrates the degree to which many in Syria are frustrated with the direction of the Shara government.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria

March 24, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Syria

The Suwayda Military Council (SMC) and other unsupported independent military bodies will almost certainly struggle with recruitment and retention. The SMC is a group of Druze fighters who were previously aligned with the Assad regime.[80] Members of the SMC attacked the home of Military Council leader Colonel Tariq al Shoufi in Suwayda Province due to delayed salary payments on March 21.[81] Shoufi claimed that he had not agreed to pay salaries and said that the SMC has not fully formalized into a structure that would require him to compensate its members.[82] This suggests that the SMC has no foreign backers and lacks a revenue stream inside Syria that would enable it to sustain itself. The interim government later began recruiting local Suwaydawi police and security personnel and paid employees four times the standard salary that existed under the Assad regime.[83] The interim government reached an initial agreement on March 6 with prominent Suwayda-based

Druze militias, including the Men of Dignity Movement, Mudafa al Karama, and Ahrar Jabal al-Arab Gathering to establish locally-led provincial security forces under interim Syrian government control.[84] Unsupported independent militias will similarly struggle with recruitment and retention unless they receive external support or find ways to generate their revenue streams.

The Syrian interim government will reportedly establish committees to assume control of the oil fields in SDF-held territories of northeastern Syria.[85] The Syrian interim oil ministry announced on March 23 that these committees will survey the fields and assess their production capacity.[86] The interim government will reportedly allow the SDF to retain one-third of the total oil production.[87] SDF commander Mazloun Abdi agreed in January to transfer the oil resources from SDF-controlled areas to the interim government, provided it allocates the income fairly across Syria.[88] The interim government will also export a portion of the oil to foreign countries to generate income.[89] The interim government-SDF ceasefire agreement stipulates that the SDF must relinquish control of all border crossings, airports, and oil and gas fields in its territories.[90]

The Syrian Defense Ministry appointed the US-sanctioned commander of the Turkish-backed Hamza Division to lead the new Syrian army's 76th Division.[91] Saif al Din Boulad, also known as "Saif Abu Bakr," commands the Hamza Division, a Turkish-backed faction that operates under the Syrian National Army (SNA). The United States sanctioned Abu Bakr in 2023 for committing serious human rights abuses against Kurds in Afrin, northern Syria.[92] The Hamza Division has been active near Tishreen Dam and Qara Qozak bridgeheads in operations targeting the SDF.[93] The Defense Ministry has not acknowledged Abu Bakr's appointment, but Suleiman Shah Brigades commander Abu Amsha congratulated Abu Bakr on his appointment on social media on March 23.[94] The Syrian Defense Ministry has not acknowledged any prior division-level appointments. The Defense Ministry also promoted Abu Bakr to the rank of brigadier general.[95] The 76th Division will reportedly operate in Aleppo Province, according to Syrian media.[96]

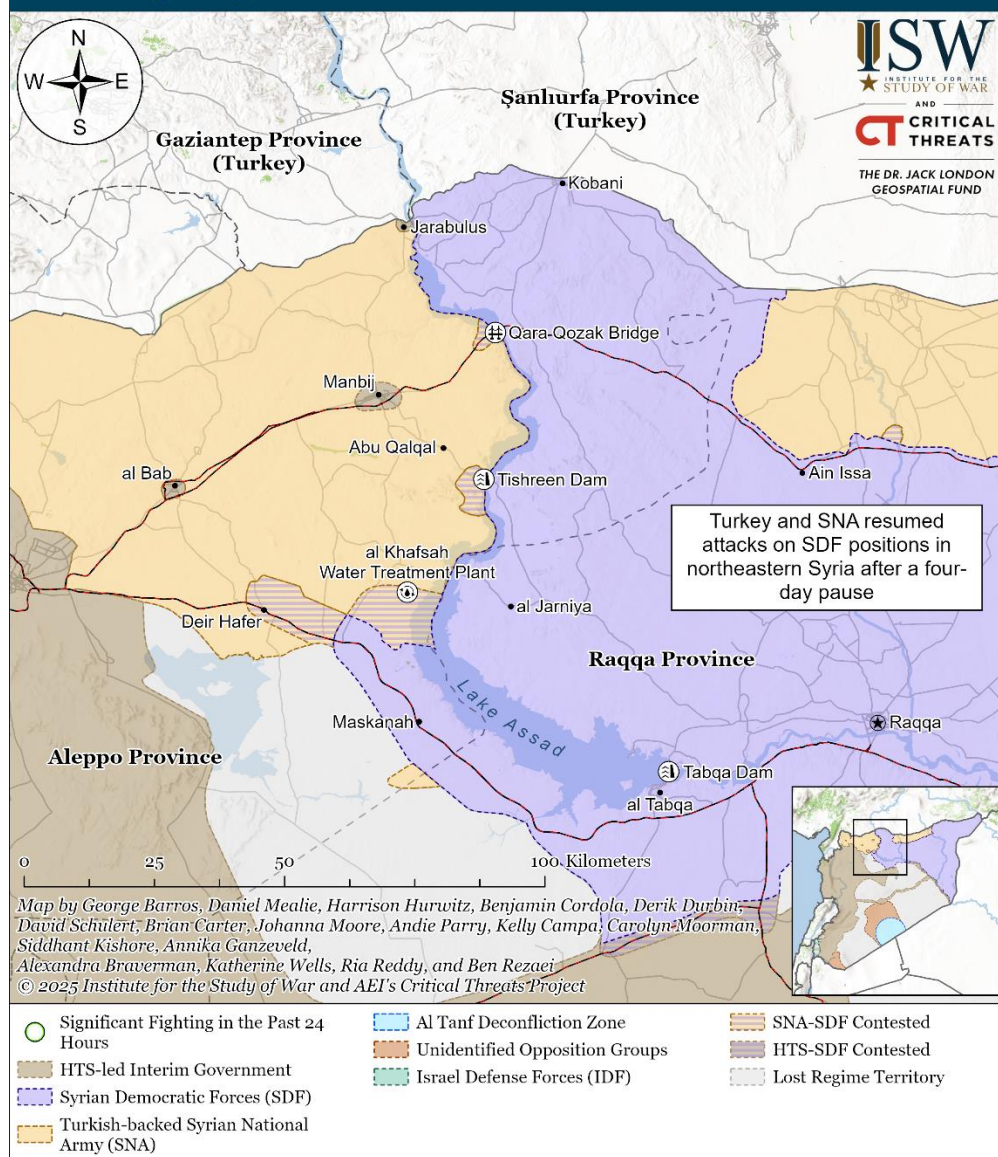
The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) and Turkey resumed attacks on US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) positions in northeastern Syria after a four-day pause on March 22.[97] SNA forces clashed with SDF fighters along the Tishreen Dam frontlines in Aleppo Province, resulting in the deaths of six SNA fighters on March 22.[98] The SNA also launched mortar and artillery strikes on SDF positions near the dam.[99] The SDF repelled an SNA attack on March 23 along the Tishreen Dam frontlines and killed three SNA fighters.[100] A Turkish drone strike killed one SDF fighter near the dam on March 22.[101] SNA and Turkey also shelled two villages near Qara Qozak Bridge with mortar and artillery fire on March 23 and 24 that damaged civilian infrastructure.[102]

An SDF first-person view (FPV) drone struck an SNA vehicle in an unspecified location in SNA-held territory of northeastern Syria on March 22.[103] SDF claimed that the drone strike was in response to a Turkish drone strike that killed an SDF fighter near Tishreen Dam on March 22.

The SDF reported on March 24 that its Martyr Haroun drone units intercepted six Turkish and SNA drones that attempted to attack SDF positions in an unspecified location.[104]

Assessed Control of Terrain around Manbij

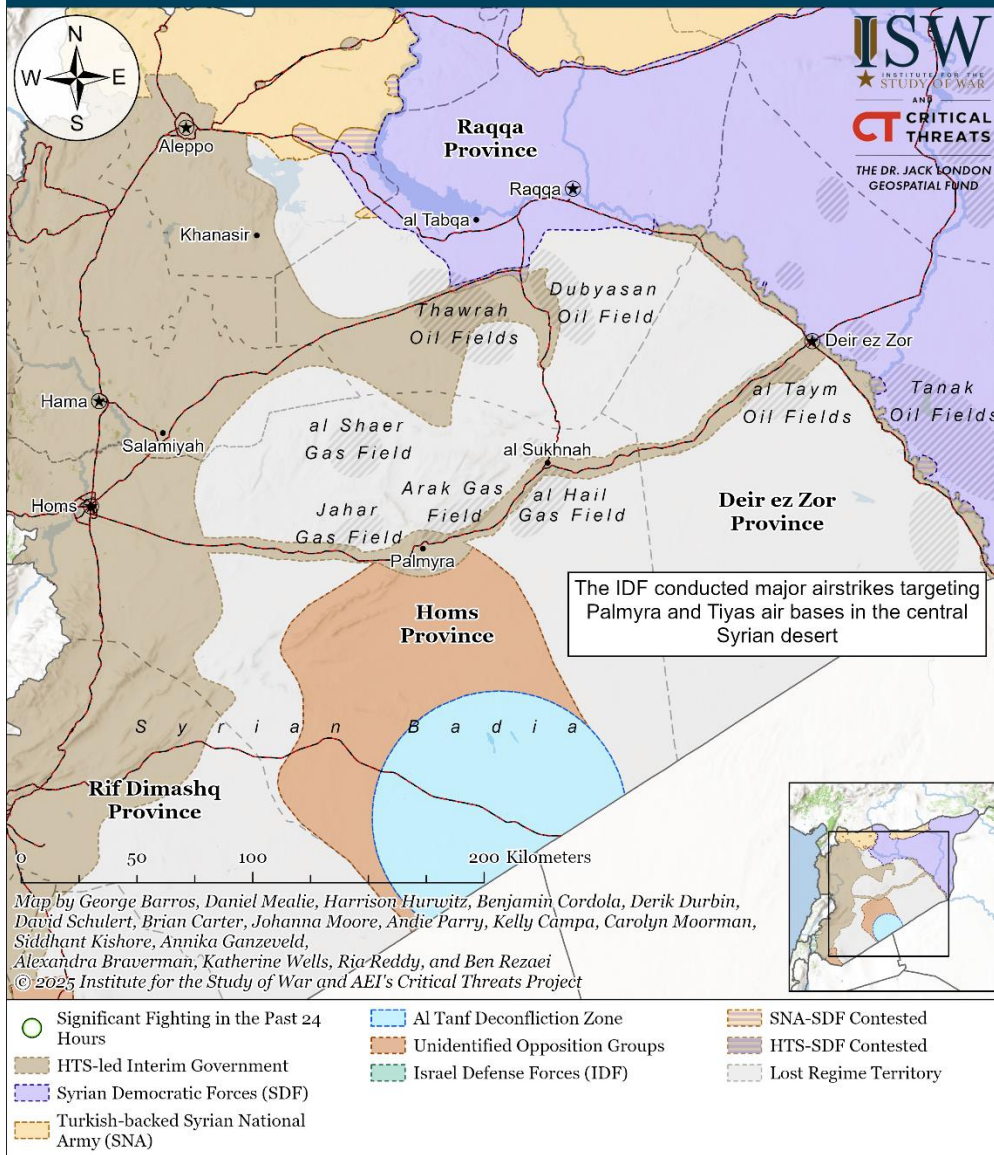
March 24, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Israeli airstrikes struck approximately 20 aircraft hangars at Palmyra and Tiyas air bases, eastern Homs Province, on March 21. The IDF stated that it struck “strategic military capabilities” in the bases.[105] Satellite imagery from the aftermath of the strike indicates that the strikes hit approximately 20 aircraft hangars at both bases.[106] The strike destroyed at least one Russian-built Syrian Su-24 fighter jet at Tiyas airbase.[107] The airstrikes also hit an ammunition warehouse near Palmyra airbase and reportedly injured four Syrian army soldiers.[108] The IDF previously struck Syrian military positions in Homs Province on March 18.[109] Homs Province is outside the IDF-declared “demilitarized” zone in southern Syria.[110]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Central 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

See topline section.

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

See topline section.

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

Newly appointed Lebanese Finance Minister Yassine Jaber told the *New York Times* on March 24 that Hezbollah “cannot” finance reconstruction efforts in southern Lebanon, likely because Hezbollah is prioritizing rebuilding its military forces over reconstruction efforts after the October 7 war.[111] The *New York Times* noted that Hezbollah has not yet fulfilled all its financial assistance promises to families in southern Lebanon as promised by Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem. Economic problems in Iran and the fall of the Assad regime in Syria have almost certainly disrupted Iranian financial and materiel support to 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

See topline section.

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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[1] <https://www.axios.com/2025/03/07/trump-iran-nuclear-deal-letter>

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