

## Iran Update, March 26, 2024

Ashka Jhaveri, Alexandra Braverman, Amin Soltani, Johanna Moore,  
Kathryn Tyson, and Nicholas Carl

**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. For more on developments in Iran and the region, see our [interactive map of Iran and the Middle East](#).*

*Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran’s Axis of Resistance. 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.*

*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.*

**Senior Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) officials have traveled to Iran likely to coordinate their ongoing efforts against Israel in the Gaza Strip and across the Middle East.** Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh and PIJ Secretary General Ziyad al Nakhalah both arrived in Tehran on March 26.[1] Haniyeh met with Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian to discuss the war. Nakhalah spoke at a religious rally at Azadi Stadium in Tehran and will likely meet with senior Iranian officials thereafter.[2] The simultaneous visits of both Haniyeh and Nakhalah are noteworthy, as Iranian leaders have repeatedly emphasized the need for greater cohesion among Palestinian militias fighting Israel. Their visits are also noteworthy given that Iran and its so-called “Axis of Resistance” will celebrate Quds Day—an annual anti-Israel holiday—on April 5 and will almost certainly use the occasion to broadcast the strength and unity of the Axis of Resistance.

**Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei emphasized the importance of using information operations, especially in the context of the Israel-Hamas war, on March 26.** Khamenei asserted that influencing the information space and using it against adversaries can be just as effective as military strength during a meeting with Iranian poets in Tehran.[3] Khamenei further stated that all “war is a media war” and that whichever actor has greater media influence will achieve their goals. Khamenei especially praised Palestinian militias’ media efforts in shaping public attitudes and narratives in the Muslim world during his meeting with Haniyeh.[4] Khamenei boasted that Palestinian militias’ media outlets have outperformed the Israeli media throughout the Israel-Hamas war. This emphasis on achieving informational effects to win wars is not entirely new;

Khamenei has long stressed the need for Iran to fight a “soft war” against its adversaries. This soft war concept involves the use of information operations and psychological warfare to influence public perceptions.[5] Khamenei’s recent statements are, nevertheless, significant, as they are consistent with CTP-ISW’s assessment that the Iranian regime is trying to exploit the Israel-Hamas war to try to isolate Israel in the Middle East.

### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Iran:** Senior Hamas and PIJ officials have traveled to Iran likely to coordinate their ongoing efforts against Israel in the Gaza Strip and across the Middle East.
- Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei emphasized the importance of using information operations, especially in the context of the Israel-Hamas war.
- **Northern Gaza Strip:** Palestinian militias continued to defend against Israeli clearing operations around Beit Hanoun, northeastern Gaza Strip.
- Palestinian militias have launched most of their indirect fire attacks into Israel from the northern and central Gaza Strip since January 2024.
- **Southern Gaza Strip:** Israeli forces continued clearing operations in western and northern Khan Younis.
- **West Bank:** Israeli forces have engaged Palestinian fighters in at least three locations in the West Bank.
- **Northern Israel and Golan Heights:** Lebanese Hezbollah fired unspecified weapons targeting the IDF Mount Meron air traffic control base in northern Israel. The IDF Air Force conducted airstrikes targeting Hezbollah military infrastructure in Zboud, Bekaa Valley.
- **Iraq:** Iraqi Foreign Affairs Minister Fuad Hussein said that the United States and Iraq will remain partners in the fight against ISIS,
- **Syria:** Israel was likely responsible for a series of airstrikes targeting Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and IRGC-affiliated positions in eastern Syria.
- **Yemen:** The Houthis claimed that they conducted five drone and missile attacks targeting civilian and military vessels in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea over the previous 72 hours.

# Israel-Hamas War as of March 26, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



## Gaza Strip

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

- Erode the will of the Israeli political establishment and public to launch and sustain a major ground operation into the Gaza Strip
- Degrade IDF material and morale around the Gaza Strip.

**Palestinian militias continued to defend against Israeli clearing operations around Beit Hanoun, northeastern Gaza Strip, on March 26.** CTP-ISW previously assessed on March 25 that a small number of Palestinian fighters have likely infiltrated Beit Hanoun.[6] Hamas then published on March 26 footage of its fighters firing an anti-tank rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) targeting Israeli armor in Beit Hanoun.[7] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, which is the self-proclaimed

military wing of Fatah and aligned with Hamas in the war, claimed that its fighters around Beit Hanoun intercepted an Israeli reconnaissance drone and mortared Israeli forces east of the area.[8] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades may have targeted IDF units involved in establishing the buffer zone between Israel and the Gaza Strip. The IDF has moved its forces to a buffer zone along the Israeli border as part of its third phase of military operations in the Gaza Strip.[9]

Hamas mortared Israeli forces advancing on the outskirts of Tuffah neighborhood, eastern Gaza City.[10] Tuffah is south of Beit Hanoun.

**Israeli forces continued clearing operations in and around al Shifa Hospital in Gaza City on March 26.** Two IDF brigades as well as Israeli special operations forces engaged several Palestinian fighters in the hospital area.[11] Palestinian militias similarly attacked Israeli forces in the vicinity of al Shifa Hospital.[12] The IDF published footage of its forces questioning a PIJ fighter, who said he had been staying at al Shifa Hospital for three months.[13] Israeli forces initially expanded clearing operations to al Shifa Hospital in November 2023, targeting a sophisticated Hamas tunnel network underneath the hospital.[14] The IDF withdrew from the hospital area on November 24 but resumed clearing operations there on March 18.[15]

A Palestinian journalist reported that the IDF is moving northwestward from al Shifa Hospital toward al Shati refugee camp.[16] Hamas published footage on March 25 of its fighters firing RPGs targeting Israeli forces northwest of al Shifa Hospital.[17] The IDF concluded a two-week re-clearing of al Shati camp on February 15.[18]

Hamas claimed two attacks targeting Israeli forces in Tal al Hawa neighborhood, southwestern Gaza City, on March 26.[19] A Palestinian journalist reported that Israeli forces were operating in Zahra neighborhood, which is southwest of Tal al Hawa.[20]

**Israeli forces continued clearing operations in western and northern Khan Younis on March 26.[21]** The IDF have been conducting a second round of clearing operations in al Amal neighborhood, western Khan Younis, since March 24.[22] Israeli forces are also operating in Qarara, northern Khan Younis.[23] Israeli forces located IEDs, grenades, unspecified vests, and ammunition during the operations. Several Palestinian militias engaged Israeli forces in western and northern Khan Younis on March 26.[24]

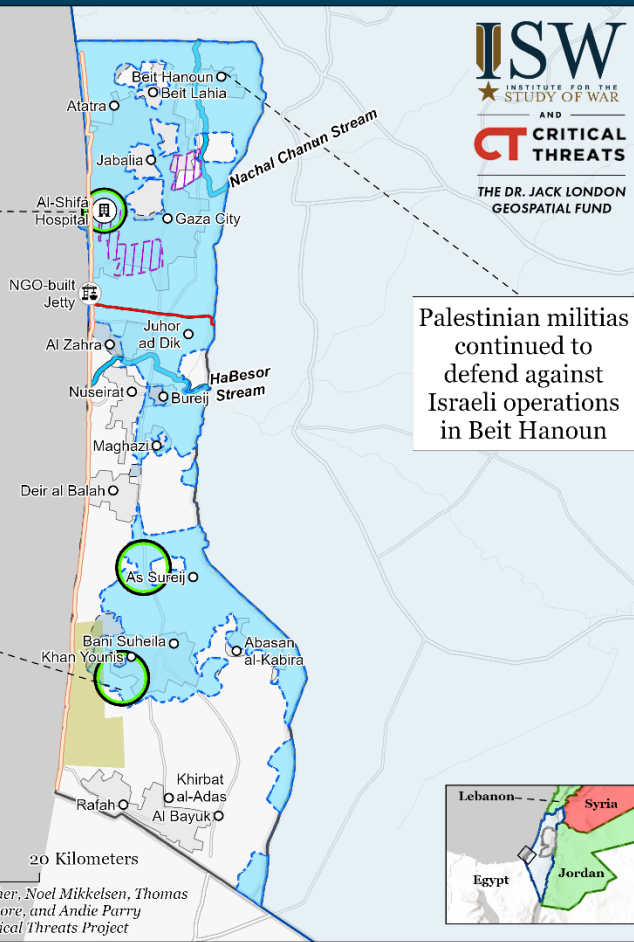
# Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of March 26, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Israeli forces continued clearing operations in and around al Shifa Hospital

Palestinian militias continued to defend against Israeli operations in Beit Hanoun

Israeli forces are conducting a second round of clearing operations in al Amal neighborhood in western Khan Younis



0 5 10 20 Kilometers

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry  
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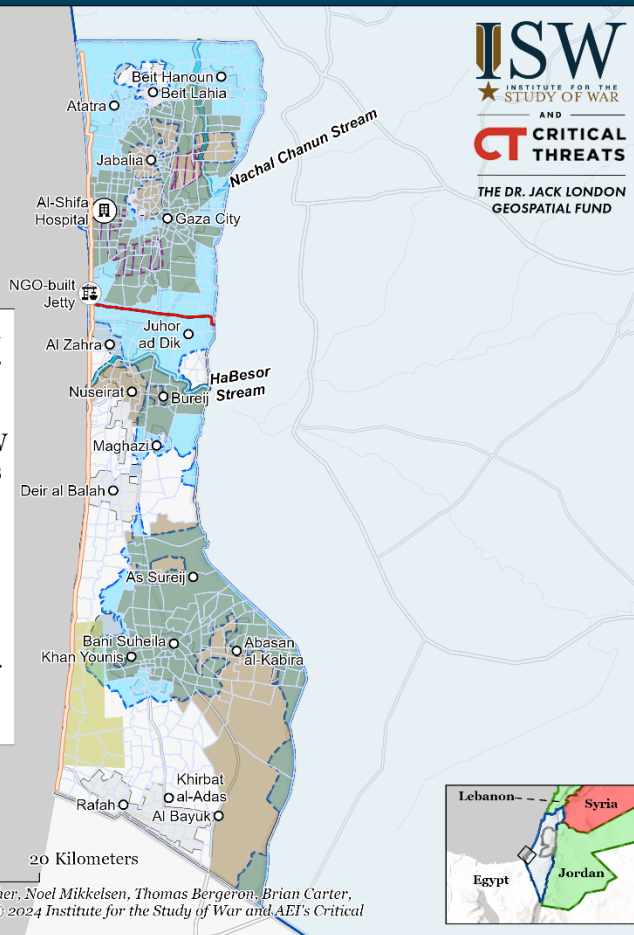
- Israel
- Gaza Strip
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations\*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230
- Israeli-Built Highway Route 749
- Significant Water Obstacles
- Densely Urban Areas
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours

\* 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

# Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip as of March 26, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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
- Gaza Strip
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations\*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
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**An unspecified informed source told Reuters on March 26 that ceasefire negotiations have continued between Israel and Hamas and that senior Mossad officials remain in Qatar for related discussions.[25]** The source noted that a small team of Israeli personnel are returning to Israel for consultations. The report follows speculation that Israel withdrew its delegation from Qatar.[26]

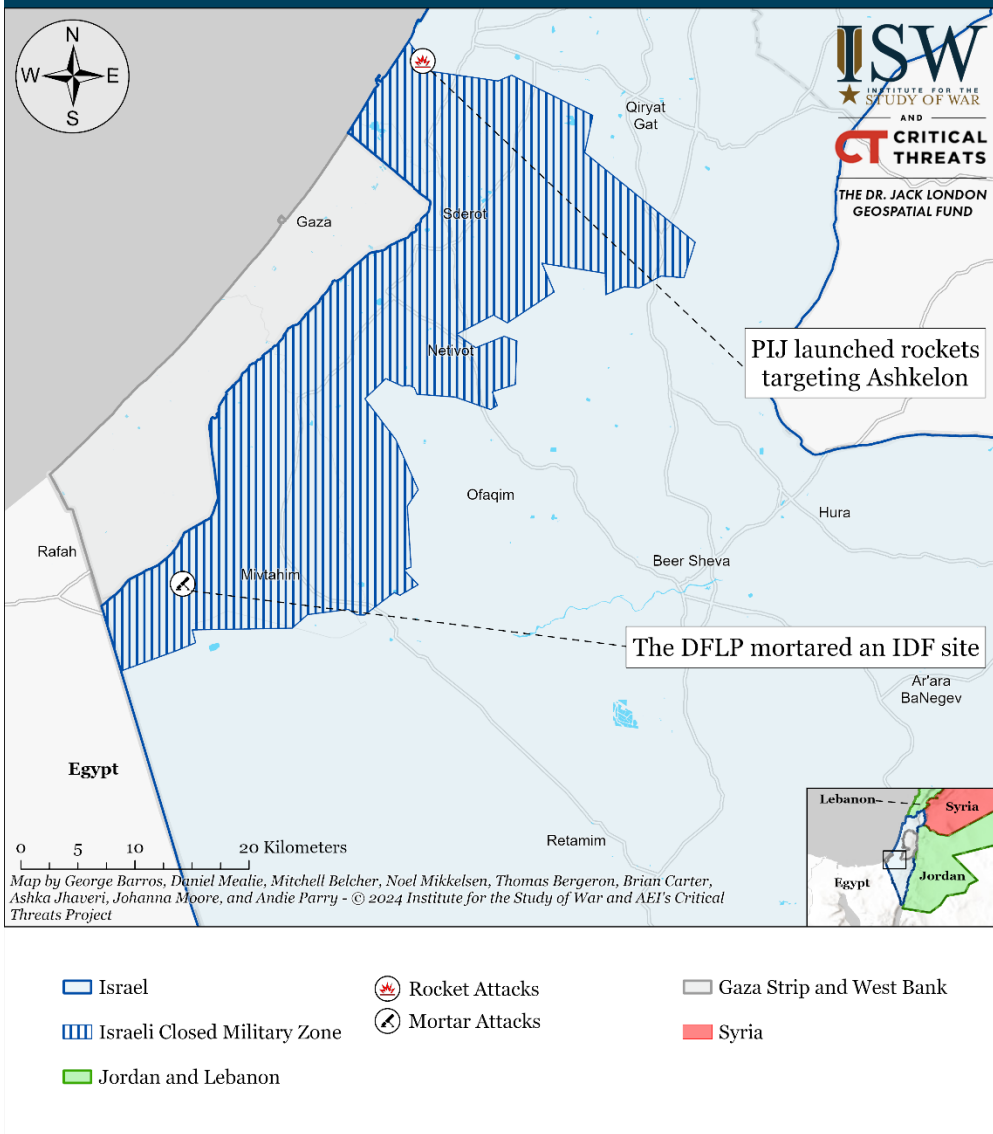
**Palestinian militias have launched most of their indirect fire attacks into Israel from the northern and central Gaza Strip since January 2024.** An Israeli Army Radio correspondent reported on March 26 a summary of indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip.[27] The correspondent noted a general decrease in the number of attacks since January, which is consistent with CTP-ISW's tracking of indirect fire. Palestinian militias launched nearly half of all attacks from

the northern Gaza Strip in January and nearly half of all attacks from the central Gaza Strip in March 2024.[28] The correspondent hypothesized why there have not been attacks from the southern Gaza Strip, highlighting the intense fighting in Khan Younis and the continued rocket capabilities of Hamas in the south, where Israeli forces have not concentrated their operations.[29] Palestinian militias continued ability to launch attacks from the northern Gaza Strip is consistent with the infiltration of fighters into the area and Hamas' intentions to reassert itself following Israeli withdrawals. Israeli forces have not expanded clearing operations to the entirety of the central Gaza Strip, where Hamas maintains four local battalions.[30]

**Palestinian fighters have conducted at least two indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on March 25.[31]** PIJ launched rockets targeting Ashkelon. The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), which is a leftist Palestinian militia aligned with Hamas in the war, mortared an Israeli military site in southern Israel.

The IDF said that Palestinian fighters launched rockets targeting Ashdod from a civilian area of Deir al Balah on March 25.[32] The IDF Air Force conducted airstrikes targeting the launch areas in Deir al Balah in response to the attack. Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack.[33]

# Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of March 26, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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

## West Bank

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

- Draw IDF assets and resources toward the West Bank and fix them there

**Israeli forces have engaged Palestinian fighters in at least three locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on March 25.[34]** Israeli forces detained two wanted individuals in Jenin.[35] PIJ and the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades claimed that they conducted separate IED and small arms attacks targeting Israeli forces operating in Jenin.[36] Israeli forces conducted a "brigade operation" and located and destroyed unspecified explosives in Balata refugee camp in Nablus.[37] The IDF reported that an Israeli soldier shot a Palestinian fighter, who attempted to take

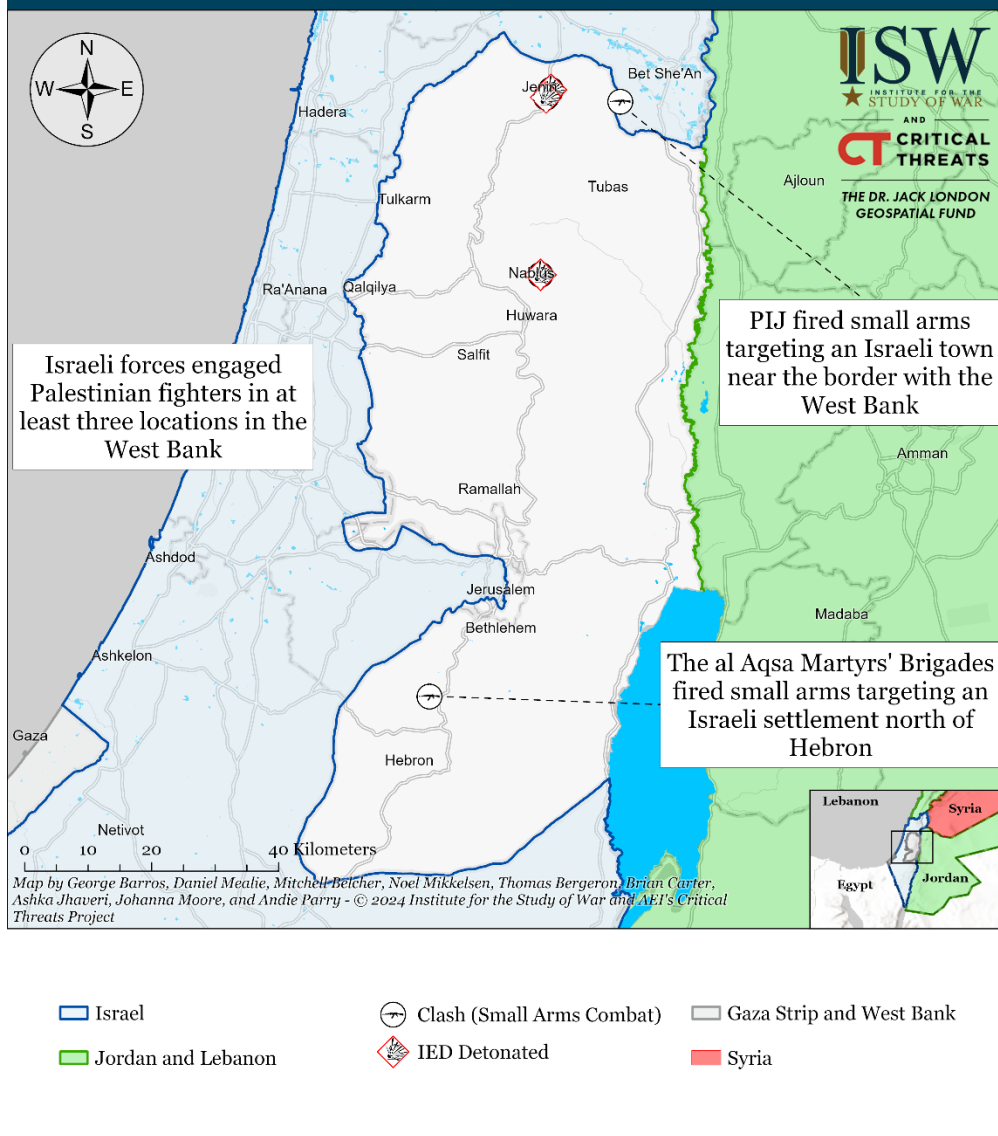


the soldier's weapon in Balata.[38] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and Mujahideen Brigades conducted multiple IED and small arms attacks targeting Israeli forces operating in Balata.[39]

**The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades in Hebron reported on March 26 that its fighters fired small arms targeting an Israeli settlement north of Hebron.[40]** The militia reported that its forces were able to leave the Karmeit Tzur settlement following the attack. The IDF reported that the Palestinian militia fighters shot at the settlement from Beit Ummer. Israeli forces conducted an operation in Beit Ummer after the attack and found small arms and ammunition.[41]

**PIJ's Jenin battalion reported on March 25 that its fighters fired small arms targeting Meirav, which is an Israeli town near the border of the West Bank.[42]** Israeli media reported on March 24 that unidentified Palestinian fighters shot at Meirav from the adjacent Palestinian village of Jalbun.[43]

# Clashes in the West Bank as of March 26, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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

## Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

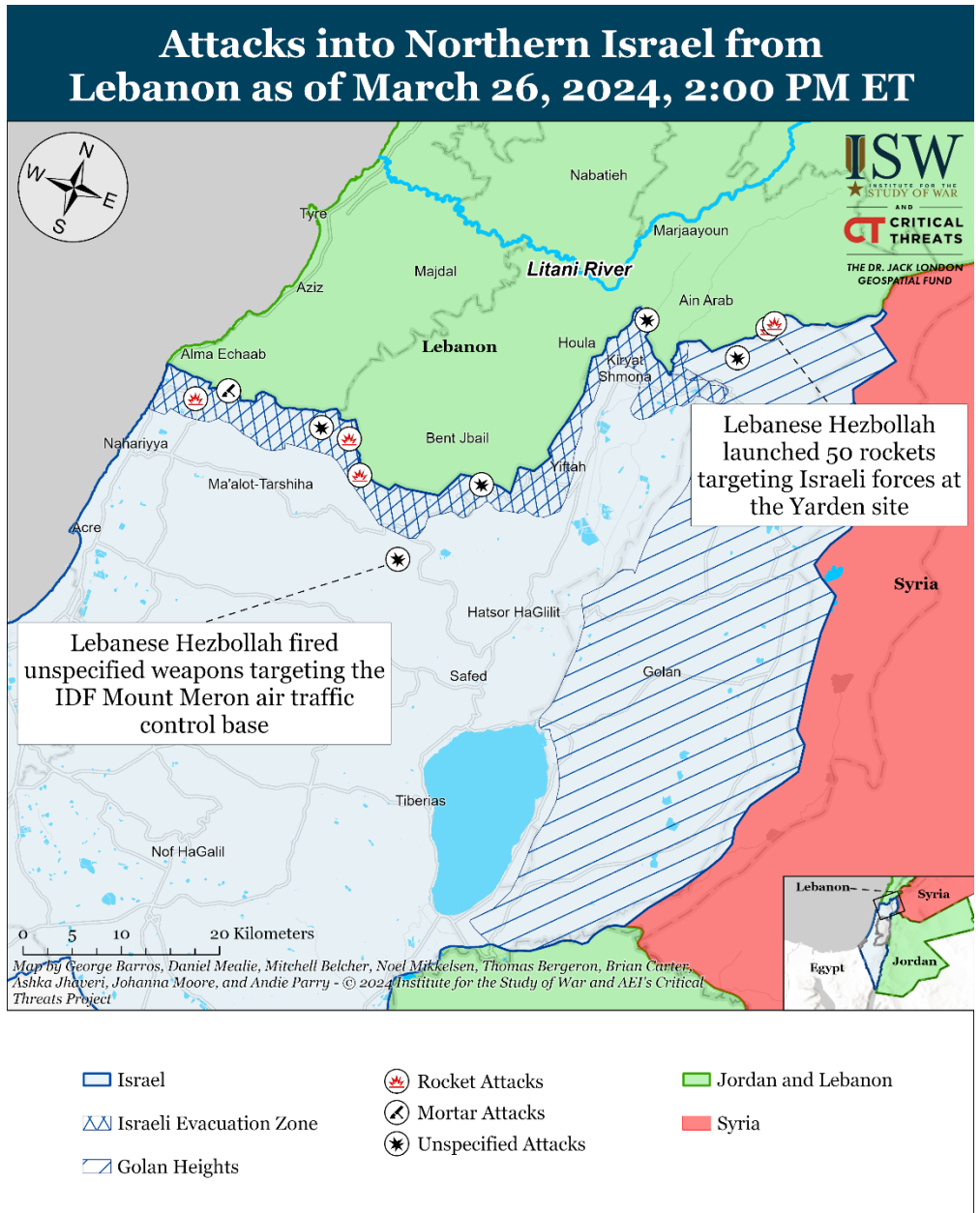
### **Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:**

- Draw IDF assets and resources toward northern Israel and fix them there
- Set conditions for successive campaigns into northern Israel

**Lebanese Hezbollah has conducted at least 12 attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on March 25.[44]** Hezbollah fired unspecified weapons targeting the IDF Mount Meron air traffic control base, which has radar, surveillance, communication, and jamming facilities.[45] The IDF reported that the attack caused no damage to the base or injuries to Israeli personnel stationed there.[46] Hezbollah separately fired 50

rockets targeting an Israeli barracks in Yarden.[47] The IDF said that it intercepted several of the rockets and that the remaining rockets landed in open areas.[48] Hezbollah also fired unspecified weapons targeting Avivim, causing a fire in the area.[49]

The IDF Air Force conducted airstrikes targeting Hezbollah military infrastructure in Zboud, Bekaa Valley, on March 26 following the Hezbollah attack targeting Mount Meron.[50] This strike represents the northernmost Israeli attack into Lebanon since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war.[51] The Bekaa Valley contains significant Hezbollah military infrastructure, including training centers, weapons storage sites, and ballistic missile production facilities.[52]



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

**Iran and Axis of Resistance**

**Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:**

- Demonstrate the capability and willingness of Iran and the Axis of Resistance to escalate against the United States and Israel on multiple fronts
- Set conditions to fight a regional war on multiple fronts

**Iraqi Foreign Affairs Minister Fuad Hussein said on March 26 that the United States and Iraq will remain partners in the fight against ISIS.[53]** Hussein made the remark during a joint press conference with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Hussein and Blinken said that the United States and Iraq are preparing for an upcoming Higher Coordinating Committee meeting. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced on January 25 that the US-Iraq Higher Military Commission (HMC), which is comprised of US and Iraqi federal government officials, will soon hold “working group meetings” to evaluate the status of the US-led Global Coalition’s mission to defeat ISIS. The HMC is part of the United States and Iraq’s transition to a bilateral security partnership as described under the 2021 US-Iraqi Joint Security Cooperation Dialogue.[54] Hussein’s meeting with Blinken precedes Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani’s meeting with US President Joe Biden on April 15.[55]

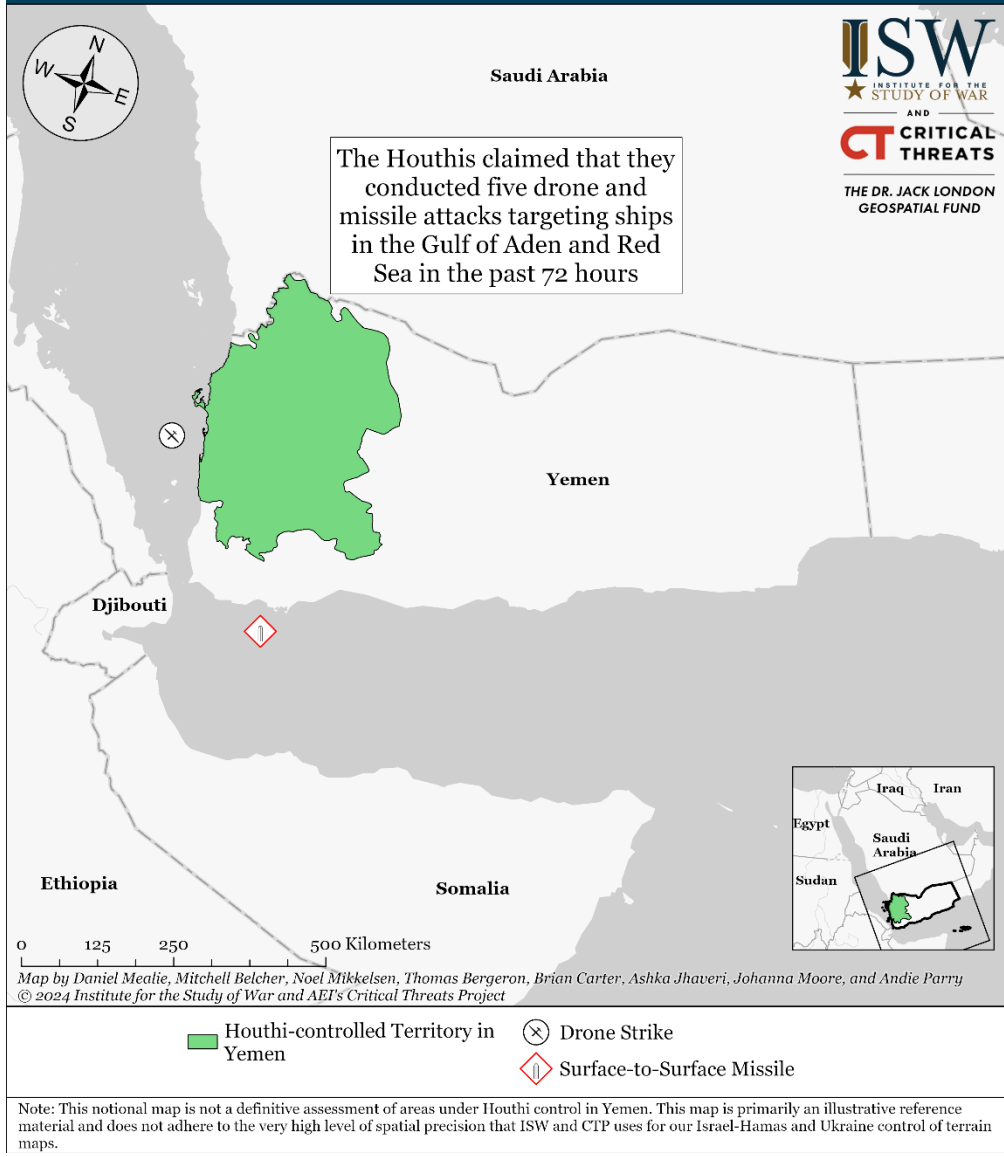
**Israel was likely responsible for a series of airstrikes on March 25 targeting Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and IRGC-affiliated positions in eastern Syria.[56]** Israeli and Syrian media claimed the strikes resulted in around 30 casualties, including IRGC Quds Force, Lebanese Hezbollah, and unspecified Iranian-backed militia commanders in eastern Syria.[57] There are several unverified Syrian reports claiming that the Israeli attacks injured or killed Hajj Askar, who is the IRGC commander in eastern Syria.[58] The IRGC announced that Israeli strikes killed an IRGC Quds Force and Basij member in eastern Syria.[59]

Israeli media reported that Israel targeted IRGC Quds Force special operation units in eastern Syria in response to recent Iranian attempts to smuggle advanced weapons into the West Bank.[60] The Israeli media cited an unspecified Israeli defense official.[61] Shin Bet announced on March 25 that the IDF seized a “significant amount of advanced arms from Iran” that the IRGC Quds Force had helped smuggle into the West Bank to support Palestinian militia attacks targeting Israel.[62] The Israeli strike in Syria follows several other Israeli strikes on facilities affiliated with Iran and its so-called “Axis of Resistance” in Syria in recent weeks.[63] The IDF has previously acknowledged that it conducted a series of airstrikes in Syria to interdict Iranian weapons shipments to Hezbollah through Syria after the Israel-Hamas war began.[64]

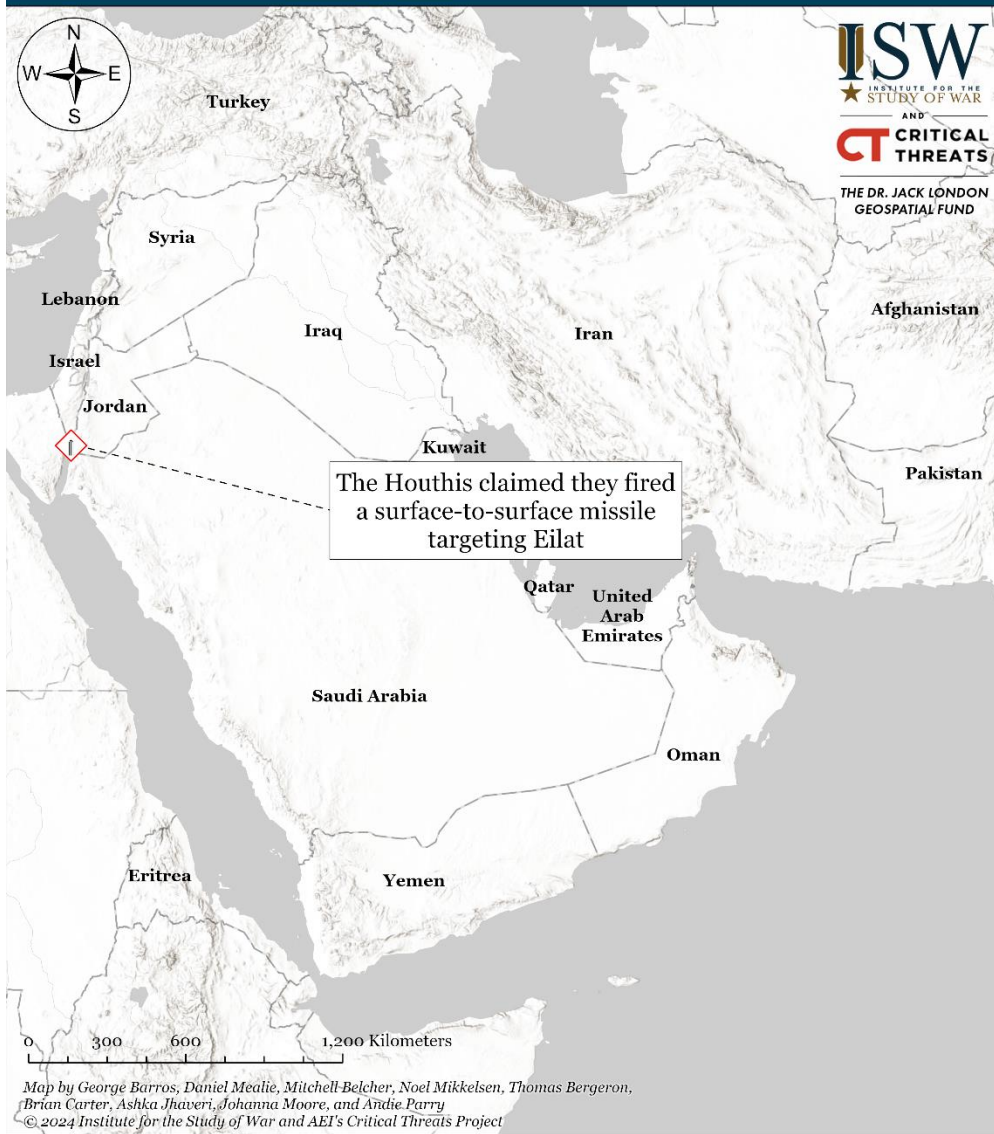
**The Houthis claimed on March 26 that they conducted five drone and missile attacks targeting civilian and military vessels in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea over the previous 72 hours.[65]** The Houthis said that they targeted separate commercial vessels flagged by Malta, Panama, Singapore, and the United States. Maersk denied the attack on the US-flagged vessel.[66] The Houthis also claimed that they attacked two unspecified US surface combatants in the Red Sea.[67]

**The Houthis claimed that they conducted a missile attack targeting Eilat in southern Israel.[68]**

# Houthi-controlled Territory in Yemen as of March 26, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



## Iranian-sponsored Attacks in the Middle East as of March 26, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



**The US Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated six entities, one individual, and two commercial tankers for facilitating commodity shipments and financial transactions for the IRGC Quds Force, the Houthis, and [69]** This is the sixth round of sanctions targeting the Iran-based Said al Jamal network since December 2023. This is a network of front companies and vessels headed by Iran-based, IRGC-backed Houthi financier Said al Jamal.[70] The US Treasury Department previously sanctioned Said al Jamal in June 2021.[71] The sanctions target entities and an individual across five countries. OFAC sanctioned the following commercial vessels:

- The registered owner of the Panama-flagged Dawn II
- The Palau-flagged Abyss

OFAC sanctioned the following entities:

- Liberia-based Hassaleh International Company
- India-based KNH Shipping Private Limited
- India-based Melody Shipmanagement Pvt Ltd
- Kuwait-based Orchidia Regional for General Trading and Contracting Company
- Kuwait-based Mass Com Group General Trading and Contracting Company WLL
- Vietnam-based Quoc Viet Marine Transport JSC

OFAC sanctioned the following individual:

- Lebanon-based Syrian money exchanger Tawfiq Muhammad Said al Law



[1] <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1403/01/07/3059533/> ; <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1403/01/07/3059743/> ;

[2] <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1403/01/07/3059731/>

[3] <https://farsi dot khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=55841>; <https://www.leader dot ir/fa/content/27087>

[4] <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1403/01/07/3059743/>; <https://www.javanonline dot ir/fa/news/1221853>

[5] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/the-soft-war-understanding-irans-domestic-ideological-crisis>

[6] <https://isw.pub/IranUpdate032524>

[7] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1819>

[8] [https://t.me/elaqsa\\_1965/6123](https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6123); [https://t.me/elaqsa\\_1965/6128](https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6128)

[9] <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/israel-gaza-hamas-war-buffer-zone-explained-2a7347af>; [https://twitter.com/Doron\\_Kadosh/status/1743717767386222615](https://twitter.com/Doron_Kadosh/status/1743717767386222615) ; <https://twitter.com/ytirawi/status/1744859177887973846>

[10] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1817>

[11] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1772518326477963475>

[12] <https://t.me/sarayaps/17602>; <https://t.me/sarayaps/17603>; [https://t.me/elaqsa\\_1965/6135](https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6135); <https://t.me/AymanGouda/6103>; <https://t.me/AymanGouda/6102>; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1820>; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1816>; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1824>

- [13] <https://twitter.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1772641717574922476>
- [14] <https://twitter.com/IDF/status/1727409278636478519>
- [15] [https://edition.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-11-24-23/h\\_28d18b43cdf277fcd21953177c3db194](https://edition.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-11-24-23/h_28d18b43cdf277fcd21953177c3db194)
- [16] <https://twitter.com/ytirawi/status/1772634524800721285>
- [17] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1816>;  
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- [18] <https://www.idf dot il/180657>
- [19] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1823>; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1825>
- [20] <https://twitter.com/ytirawi/status/1772379898973131086>
- [21] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1772518334493249971>
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- [25] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/gaza-ceasefire-talks-continue-mossad-officials-remain-doha-source-says-2024-03-26/>
- [26] [https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-03-26-24/h\\_2c2fbdef1dofa569b9a2f179132f9f36](https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-03-26-24/h_2c2fbdef1dofa569b9a2f179132f9f36)
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- [28] [https://twitter.com/Doron\\_Kadosh/status/1772545327171563629](https://twitter.com/Doron_Kadosh/status/1772545327171563629);  
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- [29] [https://twitter.com/Doron\\_Kadosh/status/1772545331076399294](https://twitter.com/Doron_Kadosh/status/1772545331076399294)
- [30] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounders/order-battle-hamas%E2%80%99-izz-al-din-al-qassem-brigades-part-2>
- [31] <https://t.me/sarayaps/17598>; [https://t.me/kataeb\\_moqawma/4184](https://t.me/kataeb_moqawma/4184)
- [32] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1772350254739865980>
- [33] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/1809>



- [34] <https://t.me/sarayajneen/1221> ; <https://t.me/jeninqassamm/5247> ;  
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- [41] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1772540555987231221>
- [42] <https://t.me/sarayajneen/1220>
- [43] <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-793523>.
- [44] <https://t.me/mmirleb/2849>; <https://t.me/mmirleb/2852>; <https://t.me/mmirleb/2853>; <https://t.me/mmirleb/2857>; <https://t.me/mmirleb/2858>; <https://t.me/mmirleb/2859>; <https://t.me/mmirleb/2862>; <https://t.me/mmirleb/2864>; <https://t.me/QudsN/386242>; <https://t.me/mmirleb/2870>; <https://t.me/mmirleb/2872>; <https://t.me/mmirleb/2873>
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- [46] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1772562757994295475>
- [47] <https://t.me/mmirleb/2870>
- [48] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1772672374782984293>
- [49] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1772562760536080585>; <https://t.me/mmirleb/2857>
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