

Iran Update, February 8, 2026



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Analyst Notes: Data Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

Toplines

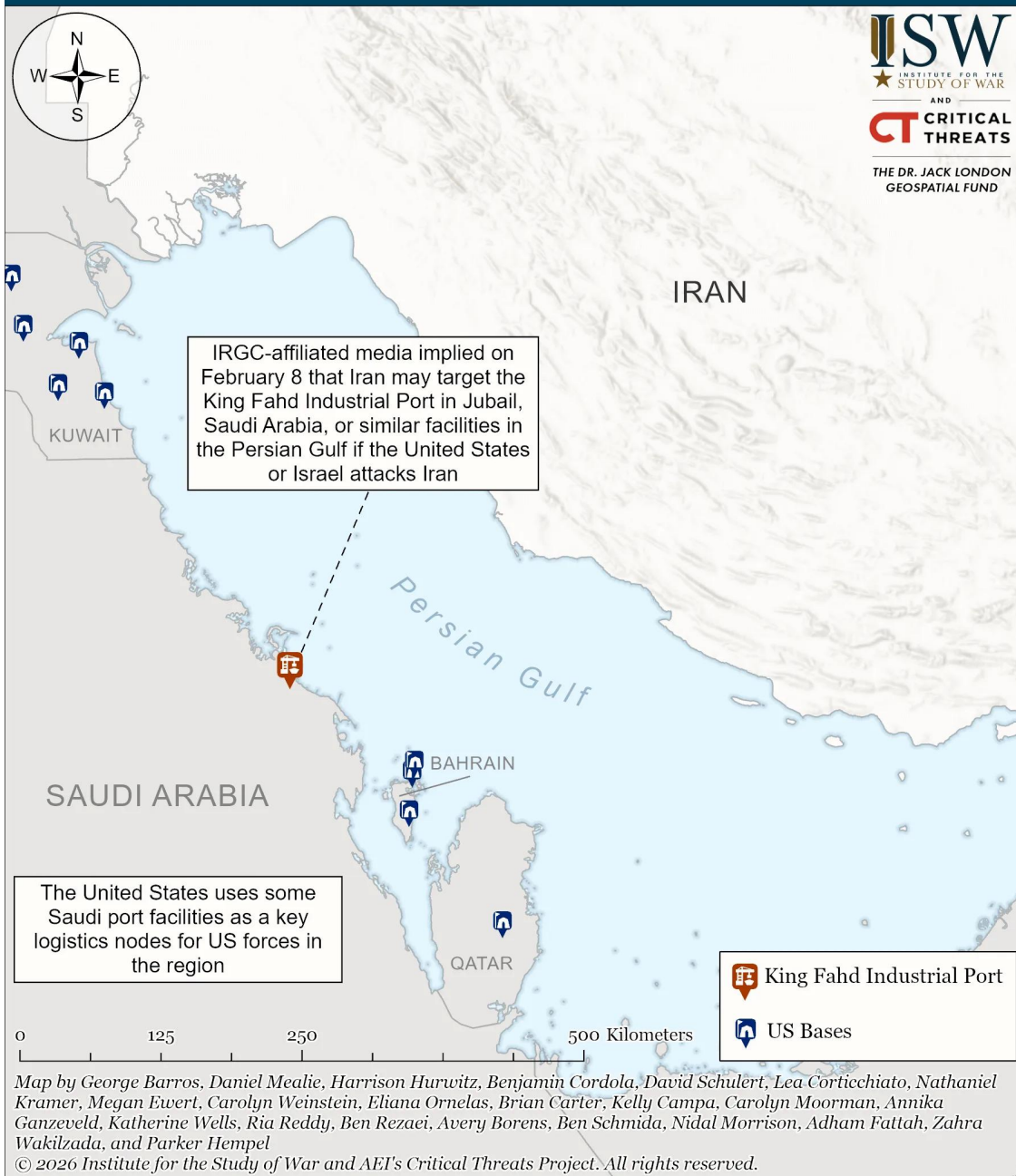
US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will meet in Washington, DC, on February 11 to discuss Iran. Israeli media and officials stated on February 7 that Trump and Netanyahu will discuss the United States' negotiations with Iran.[1] Israeli media reported on February 8 that Israeli defense officials told US officials that Iran's ballistic missile program poses an existential threat to Israel.[2] The Israeli officials noted that Israel is prepared to launch a unilateral attack against Iran to destroy its missile stockpiles and production facilities if Iran crosses an unspecified "red line." [3] Israeli officials have also consistently said that negotiations must include limitations on Iran's ballistic missile program.[4] The Israeli Prime Minister's office publicly announced that Netanyahu will travel to the United States at 1350 ET, hours after Trump said that a deal with Iran that "only covers nuclear [issues]" would be acceptable to him.[5] No other US officials have repeated Trump's purported position that a narrower deal focused only on the nuclear issue would be acceptable.

Iran has not changed its negotiating position, which makes a diplomatic breakthrough in future talks unlikely unless the United States alters its negotiating position. Iran and the United States held talks in Muscat, Oman, on February 6 to establish a framework for future negotiations.[6] The United States has reportedly told Iran that it expects Iran to make tangible concessions on its nuclear program, according to two sources familiar with the matter who spoke to Israeli media.[7] Iran remains unlikely to compromise on limits to its ballistic missile program, support for its proxies and partners in the region, and enrichment levels. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi stated on February 8 that the issue of missiles and "the region" are off the negotiating table.[8] Araghchi added that Iran would never accept zero enrichment and reiterated that Iran has the "right" to enrich uranium.[9] The United States and Iran will hold a new round of talks sometime early in the week of February 8.[10]

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-affiliated Fars News reported on February 8 that Iran may target supply centers and ports in the region if the United States or Israel attacks Iran.[11] Fars News implied that Iran may specifically target the King Fahd Industrial Port in Jubail, Saudi Arabia, or similar facilities in the Persian Gulf.[12] The King Fahd Industrial Port in Jubail is one of the largest industrial ports in the Middle East, and it handles approximately 20 percent of Saudi trade throughput and approximately one-fifth of Saudi total transits.[13] The United States uses Saudi port facilities as a key logistics and prepositioning point for US forces in the region.[14] Fars News warned that an Iranian attack targeting a Persian Gulf port facilities such as the King Fahd Industrial Port, could cause the port to close, which would have significant economic impacts on oil exports and the global

market.[15]

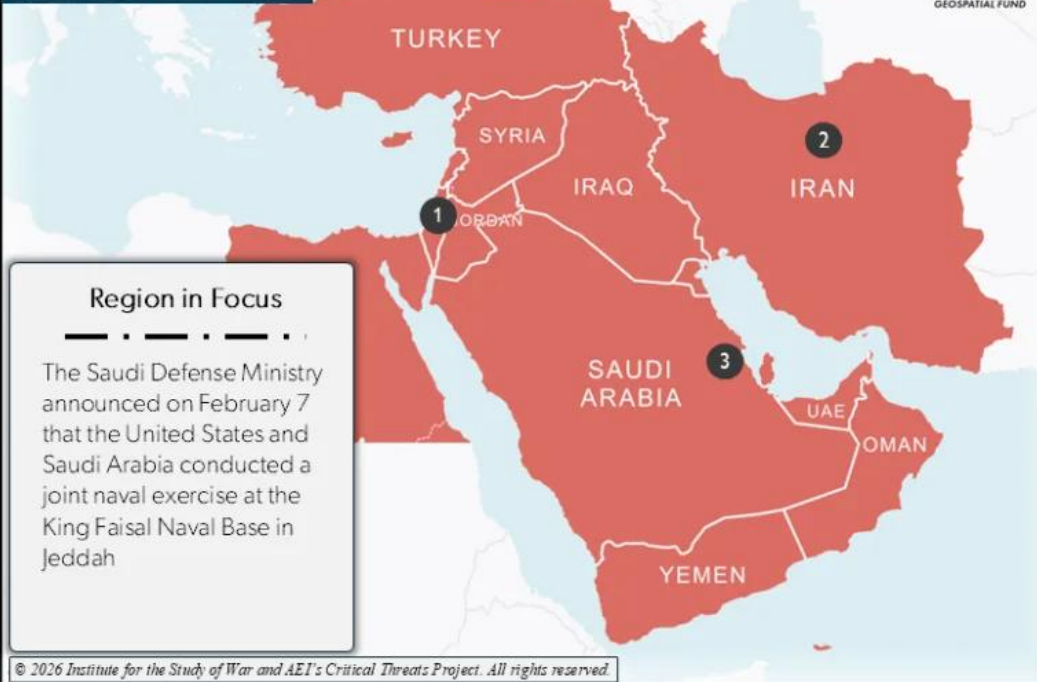
Iran Threatens Saudi Port Facilities February 8, 2026 at 2:00 PM ET



The Saudi Defense Ministry announced on February 7 that the United States and Saudi Arabia conducted a joint naval exercise at the King Faisal Naval Base in Jeddah.[16] US and Saudi naval forces conducted a series of field and tactical scenarios designed to simulate realistic maritime threats in the Red Sea as part of the exercise.[17] The exercise sought to enhance military cooperation and exchange expertise between the two navies.[18]

Iran Update

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- 1 Tel Aviv, Israel.** US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will meet in Washington, DC, on February 11 to discuss Iran. Israeli officials have consistently said that US-Iran negotiations must include limitations on Iran's ballistic missile program.
- 2 Tehran, Iran.** Iran has not changed its negotiating position, which makes a diplomatic breakthrough in future talks unlikely unless the United States alters its negotiating position.
- 3 Jubail, Saudi Arabia.** Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-affiliated Fars News reported on February 8 that Iran may target supply centers and ports in the region if the United States or Israel attacks Iran.

Key Takeaways

- US-Israel Talks:** US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will meet in Washington, DC, on February 11 to discuss Iran. Israeli officials have consistently said that US-Iran negotiations must include limitations on Iran's ballistic missile program.
- US-Iran Negotiations:** Iran has not changed its negotiating position, which makes a diplomatic breakthrough in future talks unlikely unless the United States alters its negotiating position.
- A Potential Iranian Retaliatory Attack:** Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-affiliated Fars News reported on February 8 that Iran may target supply centers and ports in the region if the United States or Israel attacks Iran.
- US-Saudi Naval Cooperation:** The Saudi Defense Ministry announced on February 7 that the United States and Saudi Arabia conducted a joint naval exercise at the King Faisal Naval Base in

Jeddah.

Iran

Iranian security forces seized weapons and arrested Kurdish militants in northwestern Iran on February 7. Kurdistan Province Border Guards arrested a weapon smuggler and seized five Kalashnikov rifles, 36 handguns, 729 rounds of ammunition, and seven smuggled handheld wireless devices in Sarvabad, Kurdistan Province, on February 8.[19] IRGC Ground Forces at the Najaf Ashraf base arrested 11 Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) leaders in a separate incident on February 7 in Kermanshah Province.[20] IRGC Ground Forces reported that the PJAK leaders operated in two cells and were planning to carry out attacks in Iran.[21] PJAK seeks to establish an “autonomous Kurdish region within a federal political structure in Iran” and has previously targeted Iranian security forces.[22] Iran has previously accused Kurdish opposition groups of inciting protests in western Iran and cooperating with Israel to facilitate attacks in Iran.[23]

Iran reportedly deployed and tested the Khorramshahr-4 ballistic missile over the last week, likely to demonstrate and practice its capabilities ahead of a potential conflict with the United States. Regime-owned media reported on February 5 that the IRGC deployed the Khorramshahr-4 ballistic missile at an underground missile facility.[24] Iranian Armed Forces General Staff-affiliated media reported on February 8 that Iran recently conducted a launch test of the Khorramshahr-4 ballistic missile during the recent US-Iran negotiations.[25] Regime-affiliated media reported that the Khorramshahr-4 ballistic missile has a 1500-kilogram payload, a top speed of Mach 8 within the atmosphere, a 2,000-kilometer range, and a circular error probability of 30 meters.[26] Iranian defense officials view ballistic missiles as a critical piece of their defense strategy.[27]

Iraq

Nothing significant to report.

Syria

The Syrian government and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) began to take steps on February 8 to transfer control of Qamishli Airport from the SDF to Syrian forces as part of the Syrian government and SDF’s January 30 agreement.[28] The 14-point January 30 agreement stipulates that the SDF will hand over Qamishli Airport and border crossings and oil fields in northeastern Syria.[29] Hasakah Province Internal Security Commander Brigadier General Marwan al Ali and other Syrian officials met with the SDF-proposed Hasakah Province Deputy Internal Security Director Siamand Afrin and SDF officials at the Qamishli airport on February 8 to begin the process.[30] Syrian government technical teams will arrive at the airport on February 9 to conduct readiness tests and emergency maintenance on the airport’s infrastructure. SDF internal security forces (known as Asayish) that have integrated into the General Security Services (GSS) will oversee the airport handover.[31] Kurdish sources reported that the airport will resume domestic flights in the next 20 days.[32] Syrian forces and the SDF are also working to prepare for the SDF to hand over border crossings and oil fields to the Syrian government.[33] Kurdish sources reported that a Syrian government delegation, with an Asayish escort, will visit the Rumaylan oil field, Hasakah Province, on February 9.[34]

The Syrian government and SDF continued to negotiate over the GSS’s deployment to

Kobani, Aleppo Province, and measures to end the siege on Kobani on February 8.[35] An Asayish delegation met with Aleppo Province GSS Commander Colonel Mohammad Abdul Ghani in Aleppo City on February 8 to discuss implementing the Syrian government-SDF January 30 agreement and lifting the government's siege on Kobani.[36] Residents in Kobani have been without water or electricity since January 20.[37] The officials agreed to take steps "in the coming hours" to implement the January 30 agreement and end the siege.[38] The January 30 agreement stipulates that SDF forces in Kobani will integrate into a single brigade under an unspecified Aleppo-based division, but does not specify GSS deployments to Kobani, unlike in Hasakah City and Qamishli.[39] The Syrian government presumably seeks to deploy GSS forces to Kobani to integrate Asayish forces into the GSS as part of the agreement. SDF officials have recently rejected any GSS deployment to Kobani, however. An SDF commander said in a February 4 interview that no GSS forces would enter Kobani under the January 30 agreement because the Asayish already operates there.[40]

Arabian Peninsula

CTP-ISW has temporarily suspended its coverage of Yemen beginning on January 9.

Palestinian Territories & Lebanon

Nothing significant to report.

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Endnotes

- [1] <https://www.facebook.com/IsraeliPM/posts/prime-minister-benjamin-netanyahu-is-expected-to-meet-with-us-president-donald-t/1430140458476079/> ; <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/8657f5aee>
- [2] <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/defense-news/article-885948>
- [3] <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/defense-news/article-885948>
- [4] <https://www.facebook.com/IsraeliPM/posts/prime-minister-benjamin-netanyahu-is-expected-to-meet-with-us-president-donald-t/1430140458476079/>
- [5] <https://x.com/margbrennan/status/2020140896293892606>
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- [7] https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/nuclear-talks-said-to-include-in-person-meeting-between-trumps-aides-and-iran-fm/
- [8] https://x.com/RadioFarda_/status/2020456776345219580
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Toplines

Some Iranian regime elements are signaling that Iran may offer relatively insignificant, nuclear-only concessions, but only if the United States offers complete sanctions relief.[1]

The concessions under discussion in the Iranian policy and media space are less significant than the concessions Iran offered in the 2015 nuclear deal, when it was relatively stronger compared to its position today. Iranian officials have not indicated any willingness to offer concessions beyond the nuclear program. The Iranian regime's official policy continues to assert that uranium enrichment is an inherent right and that Iran will not negotiate over its missile program. Some regime officials are now suggesting that Iran may be willing to dilute its enriched uranium from 60 percent to 20 percent, but only if the United States provides substantial, reciprocal concessions such as complete sanctions relief.[2] The 2015 nuclear deal forced Iran to cap its enrichment at 3 percent for a period of 15 years.

Iranian officials have floated these concessions publicly after US President Donald Trump said that he would be open to a deal limited to the nuclear program, although no other US official has said the same.[3] US Vice President JD Vance stated on February 9 that Trump will decide if the United States will allow limited uranium enrichment and where the United States will draw any "red line" in the negotiations with Iran.[4] Recent statements by Iranian officials nonetheless suggest that Iran is attempting to test whether it can trade limited nuclear steps for maximal sanctions relief without constraining its missile or regional activities.

Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani will visit Oman on February 10, possibly to convey details about potential nuclear concessions to Omani interlocutors.[5] Iran has commonly used Oman as an interlocutor with the United States and Gulf countries.[6] Larijani has reportedly been attempting to shape Iran's negotiating position. He is officially meeting with Omani officials to discuss "regional developments." [7] Larijani previously tried to convince Iranian leaders in August 2025 to reduce enrichment from 60 percent to 20 percent to avoid snapback sanctions and further US and Israeli strikes, according to a senior Iranian official speaking to the Telegraph. Larijani's past efforts suggest that his Oman visit could be designed to float possible nuclear concessions to the United States.[8]

An agreement that lifts sanctions on Iran without seriously decreasing Iran's ability to expand its ballistic missile and drone program or its proxy networks would pose a long-term

threat to US interests in the region by enabling Iran to reinvest in these capabilities and its proxy networks. Iran has repeatedly used its missiles and regional partners to threaten and attack the United States and its allies.[9] Iran has ordered or conducted attacks against US forces and interests in the region that have killed hundreds of Americans. More recently, Iran and its regional partners have previously targeted US forces in the region in response to perceived and real Israeli activity. Iranian-backed militias in Iraq began their attack campaign against US forces in Iraq and Syria during the October 7 War after a Palestinian militia rocket fell short and exploded at al Ahli Hospital in the Gaza Strip, an incident that the militias blamed on Israel. This escalation ultimately led to an attack by Iranian-backed proxy group Kataib Hezbollah on a US position in Jordan, which killed three US servicemembers.[10] Iran has also used ballistic and cruise missiles, either directly or via its partners, to strike US regional partners, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.[11] Iran's ballistic missile program and its proxies and partners have long posed a threat to US assets and personnel in the region, not just Israel.

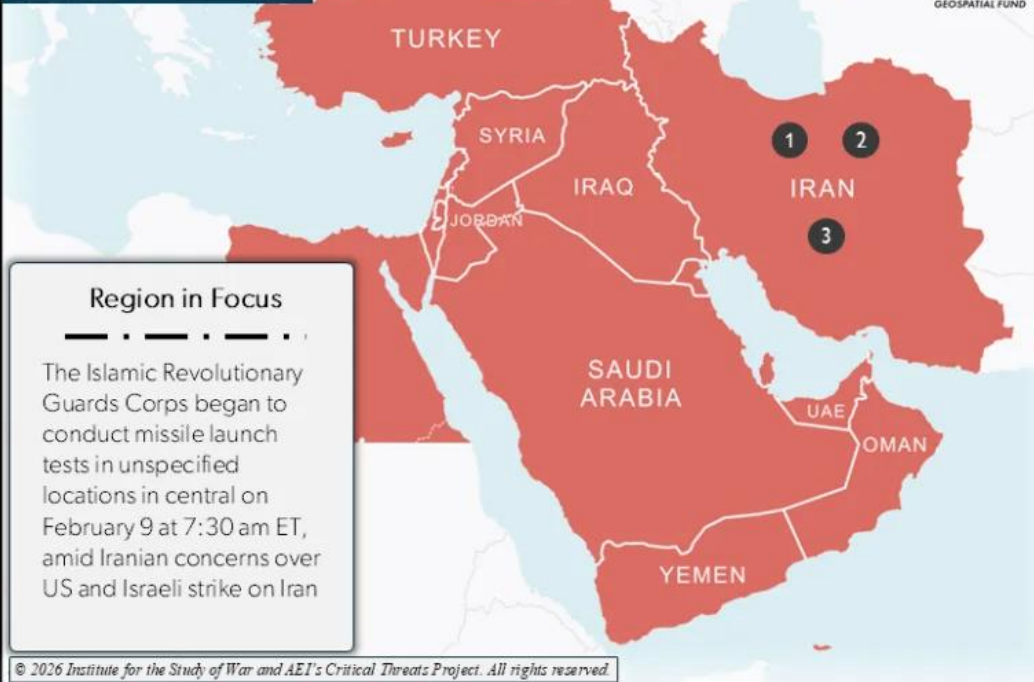
Russia is also engaging Oman to discuss mediation efforts and appears broadly supportive of an agreement that benefits Iran by lifting sanctions while limiting Iranian enrichment and having no effect on Iran's ballistic missile program and the Axis of Resistance. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov held a phone call with Omani Foreign Minister Badr al Busaidi on February 9. Lavrov told Busaidi that Russia welcomes Oman's mediation efforts and noted that Russia is in "constant contact" with Iran.[12] Lavrov's phone call is almost certainly related to Larijani's visit to Oman (see above). Larijani met with Russian President Vladimir Putin on January 30 as part of a flurry of diplomatic efforts by Iranian officials to avert US military action against Iran.[13] Russia seeks a "broadly acceptable agreement that supports regional security," which indicates that Russia seeks to head off a potential US strike by promoting a negotiated outcome that reduces the risk of military escalation against Iran.

The Iranian regime is cracking down on Iranian reformists, which may be part of the regime's efforts to control the narrative about the recent Iranian protests. The regime has arrested several critical figures within the Iranian reformist front, including the head of the reformist front, Azar Mansouri, former Deputy Foreign Minister for American Affairs Mohsen Aminzadeh, and National Unity Party Central Council member Ali Shakouri Rad.[14] The regime also summoned several other reformists, including former Iranian diplomat Mohsen Armin and former Association of Iranian Journalists secretary Badrolsadat Mofidi. Several of these summoned and arrested figures made statements criticizing the regime's recent crackdown on protests.[15] Mansouri, for example, issued a statement on January 26, stating that the Reformist Front is disgusted and angry at those who "ruthlessly and recklessly" killed the young people of Iran, likely referring to Iranian security forces.[16] The arrest of these reformists suggests that the Iranian regime could be temporarily escalating against these reformists in response to their inflammatory criticisms of the regime.

The regime's crackdown could be the beginning of a new level of censorship to silence any regime critics within Iran, however. These recent arrests, if broadened to include more Iranian reformists or moderates, could indicate that the regime is severely cracking down against any criticism of its response to the recent protests. The arrest also indicates that the regime is not receptive to any feedback or reform to address the public grievances that triggered the recent protest movement. The regime's refusal to address these underlying grievances could cause protests to resume.

Iran Update

February 9, 2026



- 1 Tehran, Iran.** Some Iranian regime elements are signaling that Iran may offer relatively insignificant, nuclear-only concessions, but only if the United States offers complete sanctions relief. An agreement that lifts sanctions on Iran without seriously decreasing Iran's ability to expand its ballistic missile and drone program or its proxy networks would pose a long-term threat to US interests in the region by enabling Iran to reinvest in these capabilities and its proxy networks.
- 2 Tehran, Iran.** Russia is also engaging Oman to discuss mediation efforts and appears broadly supportive of an agreement that benefits Iran by lifting sanctions while limiting Iranian enrichment and having no effect on Iran's ballistic missile program and the Axis of Resistance.
- 3 Tehran, Iran.** The Iranian regime is cracking down on Iranian reformists, which may be part of the regime's efforts to control the narrative about the recent Iranian protests. The regime's crackdown could be the beginning of a new level of censorship to silence any regime critics within Iran, however.

Key Takeaways

- 1. US-Iran Negotiations:** Some Iranian regime elements are signaling that Iran may offer relatively insignificant, nuclear-only concessions, but only if the United States offers complete sanctions relief. An agreement that lifts sanctions on Iran without seriously decreasing Iran's ability to expand its ballistic missile and drone program or its proxy networks would pose a long-term threat to US interests in the region by enabling Iran to reinvest in these capabilities and its proxy networks.
- 2. Russian-Iranian Relations:** Russia is also engaging Oman to discuss mediation efforts and appears broadly supportive of an agreement that benefits Iran by lifting sanctions while limiting Iranian enrichment and having no effect on Iran's ballistic missile program and the Axis of Resistance.

- 3. The Iranian Regime's Crackdown on Reformists:** The Iranian regime is cracking down on Iranian reformists, which may be part of the regime's efforts to control the narrative about the recent Iranian protests. The regime's crackdown could be the beginning of a new level of censorship to silence any regime critics within Iran, however.

Iran

Anti-regime militant activity has continued in southeastern Iran, which creates additional security challenges for the Iranian regime. Mobarizoun Popular Front (MPF), which is a coalition of Baloch organizations, fighters shot at a vehicle transporting a local judiciary official in Khash City, Sistan and Baluchistan Province, on February 9.[17] The attack injured two armed Law Enforcement Command (LEC) officers.[18] The Sistan and Baluchistan Province LEC Information Center announced that the LEC is conducting security operations in the surrounding area to find the perpetrators.[19] MPF later claimed responsibility for the attack on February 9 and claimed that the judiciary official played a role in repression efforts by the regime in Khash County.[20] The MPF, which was formed in December 2025, and Jaysh al Adl, the principal MPF predecessor organization, have also historically operated in Khash County.[21] MPF fighters conducted two other similar attacks against LEC personnel in Iranshahr and Dashtiari County, Sistan and Baluchistan Province, on January 7 and 11.[22]

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) began to conduct missile launch tests in unspecified locations in central Iran (see map below) on February 9 at 7:30 am ET, amid Iranian concerns over a US and Israeli strike on Iran.[23] These tests will end on February 10 at 11:30 am ET. Iran issued a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) on February 8 for an unspecified number of missile launches across Semnan, Esfahan, Yazd, and South Khorasan provinces.[24] An IRGC-attributed Telegram channel reposted the NOTAM on February 8, reporting that the IRGC Aerospace Force is conducting the launches on February 9.[25] Iranian regime-affiliated media confirmed that the IRGC deployed and conducted a launch test of the Khorramshahr-4 ballistic missile in an unspecified location on February 5 and 8.[26] The Khorramshahr-4 ballistic missile has a top speed of Mach 8 within the atmosphere, a 2,000-kilometer range, and a circular error probability of 30 meters.[27]

Missile Tests in Central Iran February 9, 2026 at 2:00 pm ET



Iraq

The Shia Coordination Framework continues to debate its selection of the next Iraqi prime minister amid the main Iraqi Kurdish political parties' continued lack of progress towards agreeing on a president. The framework announced its nomination of State of Law Coalition head and former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki as prime minister-designate on January 24, but Maliki continues to face domestic and US opposition.[28] Iraqi media reported on February 9 that unidentified framework members met privately to discuss Maliki's nomination ahead of the State Administration Alliance meeting on February 8.[29] The State Administration Alliance, which contains the parties that compose the government and includes the framework and the main Sunni and Kurdish parties, meets periodically under the prime minister's purview.[30] Unidentified framework parties, almost certainly those opposed to Maliki, reportedly suggested nominating a consensus candidate for the premiership, such as Badr

Organization-affiliated Iraqi intelligence chief Hamid al Shatri or current Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani's Chief of Staff Ihsan al Awadi.[31] Iraqi media separately reported on February 9 that two unspecified framework parties recently proposed expanding the powers of Sudani's government via parliament.[32] Sudani currently leads a caretaker government with limited powers.[33] Asaib Ahl al Haq head Qais al Khazali and National State Forces Alliance head Ammar al Hakim have been leading the intra-framework opposition to Maliki, but Iraqi media noted Khazali's absence at the framework meeting, at which the unidentified framework members proposed expanding Sudani's powers.[34] Khazali and several other framework leaders have opposed granting Sudani another term as prime minister.[35]

The State of Law Coalition reiterated its support for Maliki on February 9.[36] A Badr Organization parliamentarian disregarded the United States' recent threats to sanction Iraq if Maliki becomes prime minister again in an interview on February 9.[37] The Iraqi Parliament did not discuss the presidency during its session on February 9 as the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan continue to negotiate which party will hold the position.[38] Parliament must elect a president before the prime minister designate can attempt to form a government.[39]

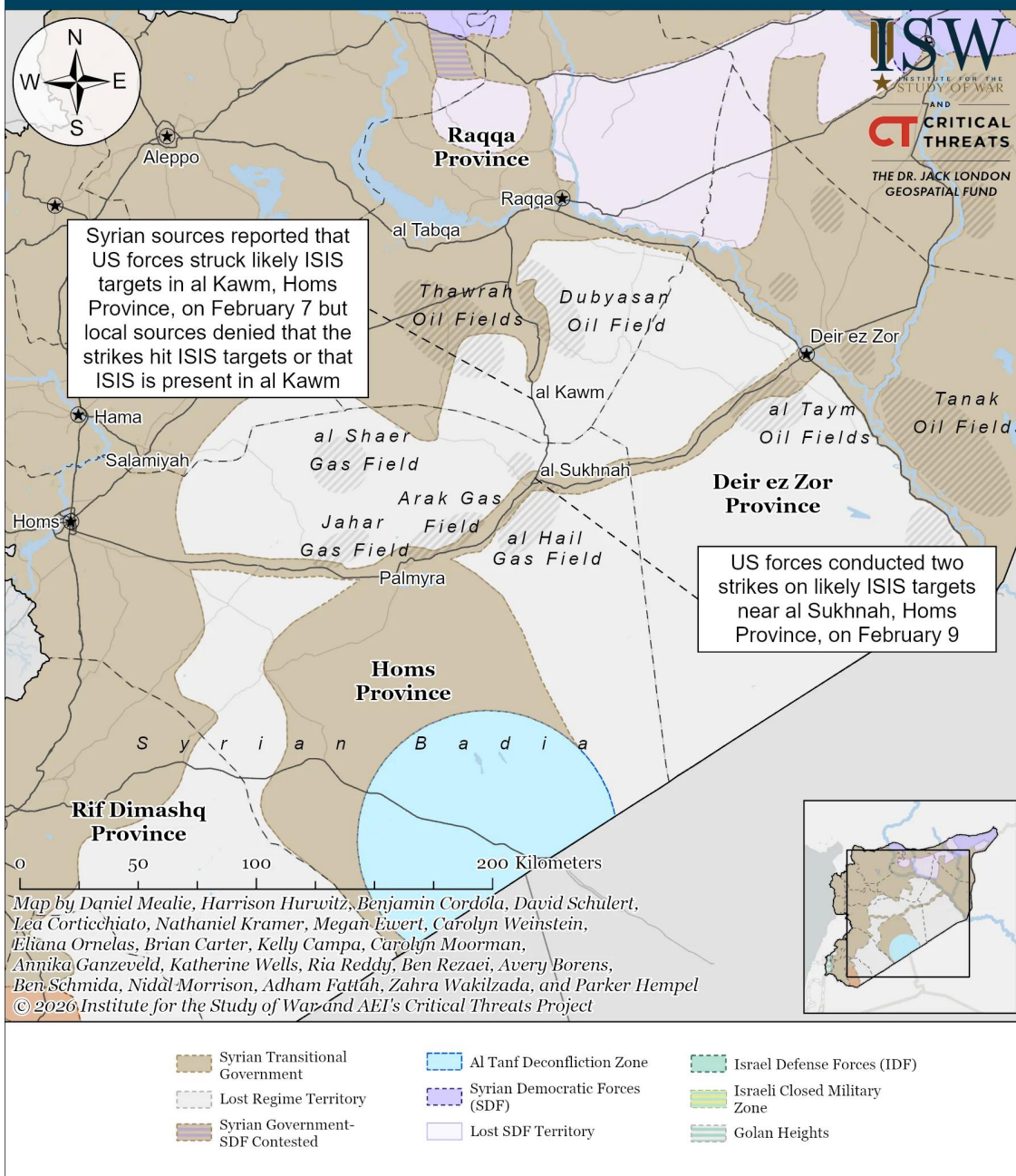
Syria

The Syrian Government and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) began preparations on February 9 for the SDF to hand over SDF-controlled oil infrastructure to the Syrian government as part of the Syrian government and SDF's January 30 agreement.[40] The 14-point January 30 agreement stipulates that the SDF will hand over airports, border crossings, and oil fields in northeastern Syria to the Syrian government.[41] Syrian and SDF officials visited the Rumaylan and al Suwaydiyah oil fields in Hasakah Province on February 9.[42] The state-owned Syrian Petroleum Company (SPC) also participated in the visit and conducted an exploratory tour of the SDF-controlled oil fields to assess the operational and technical status of the fields in preparation for the government's takeover.[43] The SPC vice president told Syrian media after the visit that the fields' infrastructure and oil wells are in "good condition." [44] The SCP has recently signed several agreements with international oil companies, including Chevron, Conoco, and Adis, to develop Syria's energy infrastructure soon.[45]

US forces conducted airstrikes on likely Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) targets in the central Syrian desert on February 7 and 9. Local Syrian sources denied that the strikes hit ISIS targets, however. Syrian sources reported that US forces struck likely ISIS targets in al Kawm, Homs Province, on February 7, destroying six abandoned homes.[46] Local sources denied that the strikes hit ISIS targets or that ISIS was present in al Kawm, although ISIS has frequently operated in and around al Kawm.[47] Syrian sources separately reported that US forces conducted two strikes on likely ISIS targets near al Sukhnah, Homs Province, on February 9.[48] A local source commenting on the strike said that recent US airstrikes in the central Syrian desert have only hit empty sites, such as abandoned ISIS hideouts.[49]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Central Syria

February 9, 2026 at 2:00 PM ET



Arabian Peninsula

CTP-ISW has temporarily suspended its coverage of Yemen beginning on January 9.

Palestinian Territories & Lebanon

Lebanon's international partners, including the United States and France, are continuing to pressure the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to take steps to disarm Hezbollah across Lebanon. Several US officials have recently stated that the LAF needs to implement its disarmament plan at a "faster pace" and noted that the United States has "higher expectations" for the LAF's next disarmament phase.[50] French Foreign Affairs Minister Jean Noel Barrot echoed a similar sentiment on

February 6, stating that the LAF must begin its next phase and present its operational plan in the “coming days.”[51] The LAF has not finalized its operational plan or taken steps to disarm Hezbollah between the Litani and Awali River despite being “ready,” according to the Lebanese deputy prime minister, since December 2025.[52] The LAF has noted that it is cautiously approaching the issue of disarmament north of the Litani River, likely because Hezbollah has framed its disarmament north of the Litani as an existential issue.[53]

The Lebanese government’s tepid progress in taking meaningful steps to disarm Hezbollah north of the Litani River may undermine efforts to prevent a renewed conflict in Lebanon. Israeli, US, and European officials have warned since October 2025 that Israel will launch an expanded operation in Lebanon if the Lebanese government does not take action to disarm Hezbollah.[54] Israel previously delayed an operation in December 2025 to allow for greater dialogue with the Lebanese government and to allow the Lebanese government time to implement its plan.[55] Israeli media noted on January 19, however, that the United States is intensifying pressure on the Lebanese government and may “grant” Israel “greater freedom of action” north of the Litani River if the Lebanese government does not demonstrate “a genuine willingness” to disarm Hezbollah.[56]

The LAF, enabled by US intelligence, raided a Hezbollah weapons depot and seized 348,000 rounds of ammunition in Halousiyeh, Tyre District, on February 4, according to a US official speaking to Saudi media.[57] The US official told Saudi media on February 9 that the LAF’s raid is part of its efforts to investigate Hezbollah sites that the ceasefire monitoring committee has identified.[58] The United States has previously provided the LAF with intelligence on at least two other Hezbollah sites in southern Lebanon.[59]

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Avery Borens, Carolyn Moorman, Parker Hempel, Katherine Wells, Adham Fattah, Ben Rezaei, Annika Ganzeveld

Analyst Notes: Data Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

Toplines

Any US-Iran deal that does not limit Iran’s ability to develop its ballistic missile program and support the Axis of Resistance would harm US interests in the Middle East. Iranian officials have continued to insist that Iran will not negotiate on its ballistic missile program and support for the Axis of Resistance, which are key pillars of the Iranian regime’s defense and deterrence strategies.[1] Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani, who reportedly manages Iran’s nuclear file and traveled to Oman on February 10, told Omani media on February 10 that Iran would consider expanding the scope of negotiations with the United States to include “other areas” if the current US-Iran talks are successful, but he did not specify which “areas” he was referring to.[2] Larijani claimed that the United States previously tied “missile and military issues” to the nuclear issue and that “military issues have nothing to do with the nuclear issue.”[3] Larijani separately met with the Oman-based Houthi spokesperson, Mohammad Abdulsalam, on February 10, likely to discuss regional events, such as developments in the Gaza Strip and potential US or Israeli military action against Iran.[4] Iranian regime media highlighted how Larijani’s meeting with Abdulsalam reflects Iran’s continued support for its regional proxies and partners.[5] Iran possesses the capability to strike US interests in the Middle East using ballistic missiles and the Axis of Resistance, and it has previously demonstrated a willingness to do so even in the absence of direct US action against Iran.[6]

Iran’s insistence on continuing to develop its ballistic missile program and support the Axis of Resistance comes as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will meet with US President Donald Trump on February 11, reportedly to urge Trump not to accept a deal with Iran that only addresses the nuclear issue.[7] Netanyahu will present Trump with Israeli intelligence about Iran’s military capabilities, including an assessment that Iran could have 1,800-2,000 ballistic missiles within weeks or months, according to an Israeli source speaking to CNN on February 10.[8] This estimate differs from Israeli media reporting in December 2025 that Iran had already reconstituted its ballistic missile stockpile to 2,000 missiles.[9] Israeli media reported on February 9 that Jared Kushner and US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff seek to quickly reach a deal with Iran “with or without an Iranian commitment on the issue of ballistic missiles.”[10] Israeli media added that Netanyahu seeks to urge Trump to “act against the recommendation of” Kushner and Witkoff. Netanyahu’s meeting with Trump comes after Trump suggested on February 7 that he could accept a deal that only addresses the nuclear issue.[11] Trump later told Israeli journalist Barak Ravid on February 10 that any deal with Iran must address Iran’s ballistic missile program in addition to its nuclear program, however.[12]

The Iranian regime's exacerbation of its population's economic and sociocultural grievances increases the likelihood that protests will break out again. The regime is continuing to securitize Iranian society at the expense of Iranians' economic well-being. Al Jazeera reported on February 10 that Iranian authorities have closed dozens of small- and medium-sized businesses, mostly in Tehran, in recent days that supported the protests by striking in December 2025.[13] Workers at one of Iran's largest gas refineries went on strike for the sixth consecutive day on February 10 due to poor employment and livelihood conditions.[14] The regime has also sustained its internet shutdown, which costs the Iranian economy about \$37 million USD per day.[15] Internet monitor Filterwatch reported on February 3 that the regime plans to grant access to the international internet only to certain individuals, rather than all Iranians.[16] A system that only allows some Iranians to access the international internet may exacerbate Iranians' frustration with the regime and create conditions for further unrest.[17]

The regime's ongoing securitization measures come as some Iranian university students have held demonstrations in recent days to protest Iranian security forces' killing of university students during the recent protests and arrest of medical personnel who treated injured protesters. Iranian university students at a university in Fars Province and two universities in Khorasan Razavi Province held protests between February 2 and 9.[18] Students at Islamic Azad University in Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi Province, protested on February 3 the death of a student during the protests, while students at Ferdowsi University in Mashhad protested on February 9 against security forces' killing of two students and the arrest of another student.[19] Medical students at Shiraz University in Fars Province held sit-ins between February 2 and at least February 7 to protest the killing of protesters and arrest of medical staff who treated protesters.[20] These limited protests highlight how the regime's repression of its population creates greater disaffection and anger toward the regime, which can in turn set conditions for further anti-regime activity, including protests.

Protests in Iran

Between 3:30 PM ET on February 2 and 3:30 PM ET on February 9, 2026



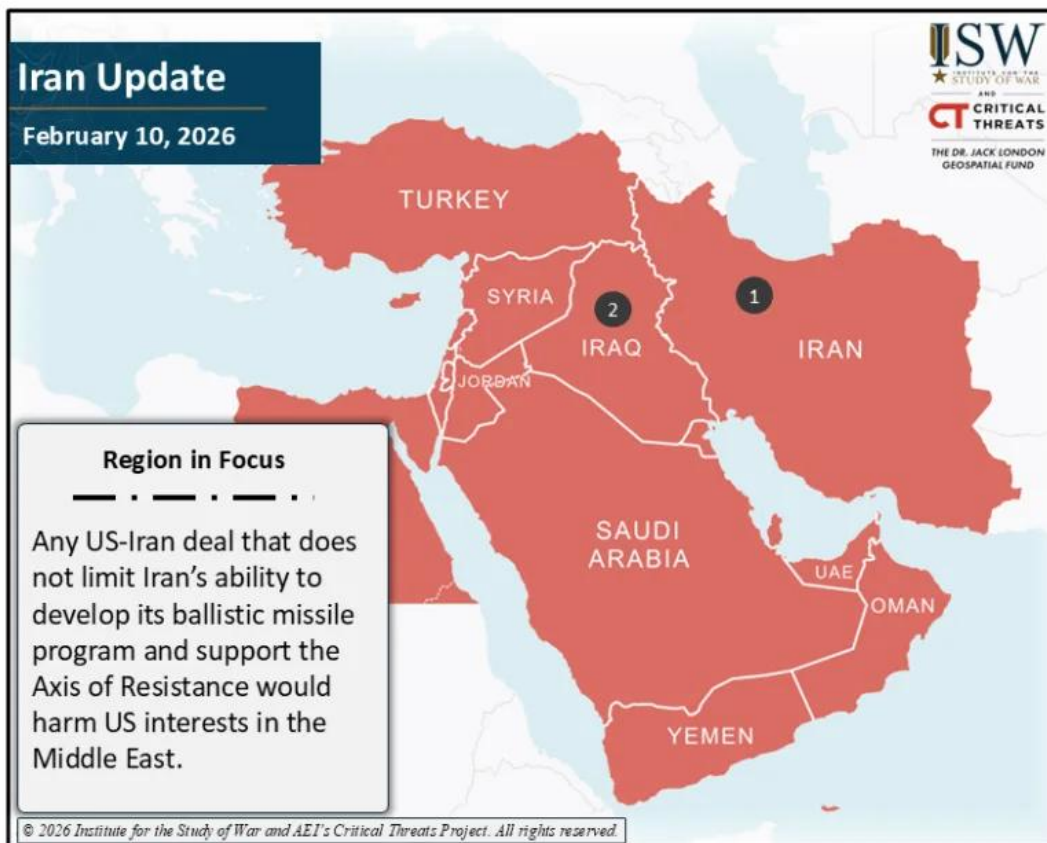
Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Asaib Ahl al Haq head Qais al Khazali reportedly failed on February 10 to convince unspecified Iranian officials to abandon their support for State of Law Coalition head and former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki's nomination as Iraqi prime minister designate.[21] Unspecified sources told Iraqi media on February 10 that Khazali discussed the importance of Shia Coordination Framework cohesion and questioned Iran's "blessing" for Maliki's nomination during meetings with unspecified Iranian officials close to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in Tehran.[22] The sources added that Iran continues to support Maliki's nomination despite US objections. Khazali met with National State Forces Alliance head Ammar al Hakim after he returned to Iraq to discuss his meetings with Iranian officials.[23] Khazali and Hakim have led the intra-framework opposition to Maliki.[24] Iraq analyst Sajad Jiyad reported on January 28 that Iran told the framework to select either Maliki or current Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani for the premiership.[25] Khazali's emphasis on framework unity indicates that he favors nominating a compromise candidate

instead of Maliki or Sudani. Khazali has previously expressed opposition to Sudani serving another term.[26]

Framework leaders who oppose Maliki, including Khazali and Hakim, likely sought for Iran to withdraw its support for Maliki after US and domestic opposition to Maliki failed to pressure the framework to nominate a new prime minister designate. Iran has historically exerted major influence in Iraqi government formation, including in the selection of prime ministers.[27] The United States has threatened to sanction Iraq if Maliki becomes prime minister, but the framework has insisted on Maliki's nomination.[28] An Iranian-backed Badr Organization member dismissed the US threats to sanction Iraq during an Iraqi media interview on February 9.[29] Several Sunni parties, including the Progress Party, have also expressed opposition to Maliki.[30] Maliki pursued authoritarian and sectarian policies while in office between the US withdrawal in 2011 and 2014, which contributed to the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) in Iraq.[31] The United States ultimately conditioned its support for Iraq against ISIS in 2014 on Maliki's removal from power due to his direct role in destabilizing Iraq.[32] CTP-ISW continues to assess that parties opposed to Maliki could attempt to block the presidential election to delay or prevent Maliki from becoming prime minister. Parliament must elect a President via a simple majority with a two-thirds quorum in order for the prime minister designate to attempt to form a government.[33] The two main Kurdish blocs, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, reportedly told a framework delegation on February 2 that the parties will not agree on a presidential candidate until the framework finalizes its nominee for the premiership.[34]

An unspecified "influential" framework member reportedly proposed a one-year extension of Sudani's premiership in which Sudani would have "specific and conditional powers" due to the current political deadlock.[35] It is unclear which framework party proposed this extension given that many framework leaders oppose Sudani remaining in power. A framework source told Iraqi media on February 9 that Sudani will discuss this proposal with the framework in upcoming framework meetings.[36] Iraqi media separately reported on February 9 that two unspecified framework members recently proposed expanding Sudani's authority via parliament.[37] Sudani currently leads a caretaker government with limited powers.[38] Many framework leaders, including Maliki, Khazali, and Badr Organization head Hadi al Ameri, oppose Sudani remaining in power due to his perceived unwillingness to follow framework direction.[39] Hakim has not indicated his position on Sudani remaining in power and opposes Maliki, which makes it possible that he supports extending Sudani's premiership.

Sudani almost certainly supports the reported proposal to extend his premiership. Iraqi media leaked a letter from the Iraqi Parliament to the Iraqi electoral commission on February 2 in which Sudani refused to assume his parliament seat, which would force him to relinquish his position as caretaker prime minister.[40] Sudani withdrew from the premiership race on January 13, but CTP-ISW assesses that Sudani still likely aims to obtain the premiership amid US and domestic opposition to Maliki.[41] Sudani could seek to obtain the premiership if parties opposed to Maliki block the presidential election and thereby delay or prevent the election of Maliki as prime minister. CTP-ISW assessed on February 3 that Sudani appears to be maneuvering himself to receive other positions in the Iraqi government if Maliki becomes prime minister, but that Sudani's consistent pursuit of a second term as prime minister demonstrates that he would prefer the premiership over other government positions.[42]



- 1 **TEHRAN, IRAN.** The Iranian regime's unwillingness to address its population's economic and sociocultural grievances increases the likelihood that protests will break out again. The regime's ongoing securitization measures come as some Iranian university students have held demonstrations in recent days to protest Iranian security forces' killing of university students during the recent protests and arrest of medical personnel who treated injured protesters.
- 2 **BAGHDAD, IRAQ.** Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Asaib Ahl al Haq head Qais al Khazali reportedly failed on February 10 to convince unspecified Iranian officials to abandon their support for State of Law Coalition head and former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki's nomination as Iraqi prime minister designate. Shia Coordination Framework leaders who oppose Maliki, including Khazali and National State Forces Alliance head Ammar al Hakim, likely sought for Iran to withdraw its support for Maliki after US and domestic opposition to Maliki failed to pressure the framework to nominate a new prime minister designate.

Key Takeaways

1. **US-Iran Negotiations:** Any US-Iran deal that does not limit Iran's ability to develop its ballistic missile program and support the Axis of Resistance would harm US interests in the Middle East. Iran's insistence on continuing to develop its ballistic missile program and support the Axis of Resistance comes as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will meet with US President Donald Trump on February 11, reportedly to urge Trump not to accept a deal with Iran that only addresses the nuclear issue.
2. **The Iranian Regime's Ongoing Securitization Efforts:** The Iranian regime's exacerbation of its population's economic and sociocultural grievances increases the likelihood that protests will break out again. The regime's ongoing securitization measures come as some Iranian university students have held demonstrations in recent days to protest Iranian security forces' killing of university

- students during the recent protests and arrest of medical personnel who treated injured protesters.
3. **Iranian Support for Nouri al Maliki as Iraqi Prime Minister Designate:** Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Asaib Ahl al Haq head Qais al Khazali reportedly failed on February 10 to convince unspecified Iranian officials to abandon their support for State of Law Coalition head and former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki's nomination as Iraqi prime minister designate. Shia Coordination Framework leaders who oppose Maliki, including Khazali and National State Forces Alliance head Ammar al Hakim, likely sought for Iran to withdraw its support for Maliki after US and domestic opposition to Maliki failed to pressure the framework to nominate a new prime minister designate.

Iran

Iran continues to reinforce and harden the Esfahan Nuclear Technology Center (ENTC)'s underground complex entrances against potential US or Israeli military action. The Institute for Science and International Security reported on February 9 that Iran has completely covered the ENTC's middle and southern tunnel entrances with soil, according to satellite imagery from early February 2026.[43] The Institute added that Iran has backfilled the northern ENTC tunnel entrance.[44] Western media previously reported in June 2025 that US strikes during the Israel-Iran War blocked the tunnel entrances to the underground complex at the ENTC that reportedly stores part of Iran's enriched uranium stockpile.[45] The Institute assessed that Iran's efforts to protect the ENTC's tunnel entrances would "help dampen" potential airstrikes and complicate any ground raid intended to seize or destroy any uranium at the complex.

Iraq

See the topline section.

Syria

The Syrian government and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have continued to take steps to implement the January 30 agreement. The SDF is reportedly preparing to withdraw from the frontlines in Hasakah City and redeploy its forces to military positions "away from urban areas." [46] Pro-SDF media reported on February 10 that the Syrian army withdrew its forces positioned near Hasakah City toward al Shadaddi, Hasakah Province.[47] Syrian government forces and SDF internal security forces, known as Asayish, backfilled these positions.[48] The January 30 agreement stipulates the Syrian army and SDF's withdrawal from Hasakah City.[49] The Syrian government and the SDF have also taken steps to integrate SDF institutions into the Syrian state as part of the agreement. SDF Commander Mazloum Abdi told Kurdish media on February 9 that the Syrian government and the SDF formed a committee to negotiate the integration of the SDF's "existing bodies" into "directorates." [50] Abdi was likely referring to the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), which will integrate into the Syrian state under the agreement, given that the newly-formed committee includes the AANES regional co-chair.[51]

Recent statements by SDF and Women's Protection Units (YPJ) officials suggest that there may be some opposition and uncertainty within the SDF and the YPJ regarding certain terms of the January 30 agreement, however. Abdi told Kurdish media on February 9 that the SDF's control over the Semalka border crossing will "remain as is." [52] Abdi noted that a Syrian government delegation will oversee "some state-related matters" at the crossing, such as passport checks.[53] Abdi's

statements, which mirror those of other SDF officials, contrast Syrian government officials' statements regarding the future of SDF-controlled border crossings. Syrian government officials have consistently stated that the Syrian government will control all border crossings as part of the agreement.[54] There also appears to be uncertainty about the future of the YPJ. SDF Media Center Director Farhad Shami told Kurdish media on February 9 that the YPJ will maintain "its identity" and that some female comrades will command a brigade within the Syrian Ministry of Defense (MoD).[55] The YPJ has consistently refused to disarm and stated that it will join newly-formed SDF brigades.[56] The January 30 agreement did not explicitly address YPJ integration, but the Syrian government has reportedly rejected the formation of a women's brigade.[57] These statements underscore the need for Syrian government and SDF negotiators to clarify the agreement's terms.

Members of the US-led, anti-ISIS coalition met in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on February 9 to discuss the coalition's ongoing counter-ISIS efforts.[58] Senior diplomatic and defense officials, including US Special Envoy to Syria Tom Barrack and Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani, discussed US Central Command's (CENTCOM) operation to transfer ISIS detainees from Syria to Iraq.[59] US forces have transferred 4,583 ISIS detainees from Syria to Iraq since January 21.[60] The officials also discussed coordination with Iraqi and Syrian forces and the "reintegration" of individuals from al Hol and Roj internally displaced persons camps.[61] These camps currently house more than 25,000 individuals, some of whom are ISIS supporters.[62] The coalition members affirmed their readiness to work closely with the Syrian government and provide direct support to Syrian and Iraqi forces.[63] This meeting was the coalition's first meeting since the SDF and the Syrian government reached the January 30 agreement.[64] The SDF has historically been the coalition's main partner in Syria.[65] The Syrian government joined the coalition in November 2025.[66]

Hezbollah reportedly provided support for a Syrian militia cell operating in Mezzeh, Rif Dimashq Province, that has links to the former Assad regime.[67] Syrian forces arrested two members of the cell and seized several Grad rockets and launch platforms in Mezzeh, Rif Dimashq Province, on February 10.[68] The Syrian Ministry of Interior (MoI) stated that the arrested individuals were the remaining members of the Hezbollah-linked militia cell that Syrian forces previously arrested on February 1.[69] Hezbollah provided the cell with rockets, launch platforms, and other weapons that the cell had used to conduct multiple attacks in Mezzeh since November 2025.[70] One of the members who was arrested on February 2 reportedly has ties to the Assad regime and previously served as a Municipal Council leader in al Mayadin, Deir ez Zor Province, prior to the regime's collapse in December 2024.[71] Iranian forces and Iranian-backed groups had a strong presence in Deir ez Zor Province, including in al Mayadin, during the Assad regime.[72]

Hezbollah could be attempting to rebuild its networks in Syria. These arrests come amid frequent Hezbollah activity along the Syria-Lebanon border in recent months, largely in areas that Iranian-backed militants controlled before the Assad regime's collapse. Syrian forces previously arrested a Hezbollah cell and seized weapons in Sasa and Kanaker, Rif Dimashq Province, in September 2025.[73] Syrian forces have also thwarted numerous smuggling attempts in the province in recent months, which suggests that Assad-era smuggling routes remain active.[74] Syrian forces, for example, interdicted a "gang" that was attempting to smuggle Konkur anti-tank guided missiles and Iranian-made rockets from Jarajir, Rif Dimashq Province, into Lebanon on January 26.[75] Hezbollah-affiliated fighters and Iranian forces that operated in Rif Dimashq Province before the Assad regime fell used the area as a strategic position to store weapons before smuggling them to Hezbollah.[76] This activity suggests that Hezbollah may be attempting to rebuild its Assad-era networks in Rif Dimashq Province.

Arabian Peninsula

CTP-ISW has temporarily suspended its coverage of Yemen beginning on January 9 to prioritize coverage of the protests in Iran.

Palestinian Territories & Lebanon

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) uncovered two separate Hezbollah- and Hamas-linked militia cells operating in the northern West Bank in October 2025.[77] The IDF announced on February 10 that Hezbollah recruited an individual to form militant cells and conduct terrorist operations in the northern West Bank.[78] The individual recruited several other individuals and remained in constant correspondence with Hezbollah via social media and gaming applications until his arrest in October 2025.[79] The IDF also uncovered in October 2025 a separate cell comprised of two militants operating in the northern West Bank.[80] A Hamas-linked individual recruited these two militants with the assistance of several Hezbollah fighters.[81] All five of the arrested militants operated under Hezbollah's instructions.[82] Hezbollah has historically provided support to and recruited Palestinian operatives to conduct attacks in the West Bank on its behalf.[83] The IDF's arrests highlight how Iran's Axis of Resistance will attempt to rebuild its militia networks in the aftermath of the October 7 War.

The United States and the Lebanese government are continuing to take steps to reduce Hezbollah's access to illicit funding, including via Lebanon's cash-based economy. The US Treasury Department sanctioned a senior member of al Qard al Hassan, which is Hezbollah's main financial institution, and an al Qard al Hassan-affiliated gold exchange company, Jood SARL, on February 10.[84] Senior al Qard al Hassan members reportedly established multiple Jood SARL branches in the majority Shia areas, including southern Beirut, southern Lebanon, and the Bekaa Valley, in order to ease Hezbollah's liquidity pressures by laundering funds and obfuscating Hezbollah's financial activities.[85] The US Treasury Department also sanctioned a Russian individual as well as two Turkish shipping companies and two vessels involved in a sanctions evasion network to facilitate the export of Iranian fertilizer.[86] The US Treasury Department reported in November 2025 that Iran had smuggled at least \$1 billion USD to Hezbollah in 2025, mostly through Lebanese money exchange companies.[87]

The Lebanese government may have increased pressure on Lebanon's financial institutions to regulate Lebanon's cash economy following meetings with US Treasury Department officials in November 2025.[88] The Lebanese Central Bank has issued multiple circulars since November 2025 to strengthen reporting requirements for Lebanese financial institutions in order to counter money laundering and terrorist financing.[89] A US Treasury Department delegation reportedly called on the Lebanese government in November 2025 to further economically degrade Hezbollah by shutting down al Qard al Hassan branches and increasing the government's regulation of Lebanon's cash economy.[90] The Lebanese government may have also taken steps to regulate Lebanon's economy in order to receive funding from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Gulf countries. The IMF has called on the Lebanese government to increase its efforts to combat money laundering and terrorist financing, such as by increasing financial due diligence, particularly with high-risk customers and organizations, and seizing illicit funds entering Lebanon.[91]

The IDF captured a senior Jumaa Islamiya member during a raid in southern Lebanon on February 9.[92] IDF 210th Division forces captured senior Jumaa Islamiya member Atwi Atwi in Habbariyeh, Hasbaya District.[93] The IDF said that Atwi promoted "terrorist activities" in northern Israel.[94] The IDF reported on February 10 that it seized and destroyed a Jumaa Islamiya weapons cache

in Beit Jinn, Rif Dimashq Province, Syria, within the past week.[95] Jumaa Islamiya is a Lebanese Muslim Brotherhood splinter group, and the group's military wing, the Fajr Forces, has previously engaged Israeli forces in southern Lebanon and fired rockets from Lebanon into northern Israel during the October 7 War.[96] Hezbollah almost certainly permitted Fajr Forces to conduct attacks from southern Lebanon on Israeli targets, given the extent to which Hezbollah controlled the area during the war.[97]

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Adham Fattah, Katherine Wells, Benjamin Schmida, Zahra Wakilzada, Avery Borens, Kelly Campa, Annika Ganzeveld

Analyst Notes: Data Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

Toplines

Iran may be floating the possibility of talks about Iran's ballistic missile program in an effort to delay possible US military action and extract concessions from the United States in nuclear negotiations. Israeli media, citing unspecified sources, reported on February 10 that Iran communicated to regional mediators that it is not willing to make any compromises on its ballistic missile program at this time but may be willing to discuss its ballistic missiles "in the future." [1] Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani separately told Omani media on February 10 that Iran could agree to expand the scope of its talks with the United States "to other areas" if the current nuclear negotiations are successful. [2] Iran's suggestion that it could discuss its ballistic missile program at an unspecified point in the future is consistent with Iranian officials' statements that Iran will not negotiate on its ballistic missiles in the current talks. This signaling may also be intended to drag out the current talks by leaving open the possibility for discussions about other issues apart from the nuclear issue. Iran may calculate that continuing to reject any possibility of discussing its ballistic missile program with the United States could increase the risk of US or Israeli military action against Iran.

Iran appears to be conditioning the possibility of talks about its ballistic missile program on US concessions in the current nuclear talks. Larijani's statement to Omani media suggests that Iran would only be willing to entertain the possibility of talks on its ballistic missiles in the event that the United States and Iran reach a nuclear agreement. Iran's nuclear-related demands include the United States recognizing Iran's "right" to enrich uranium and lifting sanctions in return for any Iranian concessions on its nuclear program. [3] Iran has thus far only offered limited concessions on its nuclear program. Some regime officials have suggested that Iran may be willing to dilute its enriched uranium from 60 percent to 20 percent, but only if the United States provides full sanctions relief. [4] This hypothetical deal would require a less significant concession from Iran than it agreed to in the 2015 deal, when Iran was relatively stronger compared to its position today. The 2015 nuclear deal made Iran cap its enrichment at 3.67 percent for a period of 15 years. [5] The deal also prompted the UN Security Council to impose an eight-year ban on Iran's long-range ballistic missiles and a five-year ban on conventional arms transfers, including missile systems, to Iran. [6]

Iran may calculate that prolonging the talks with the United States provides Iran with additional time to reconstitute its ballistic missile program, which Iran may calculate would raise the costs of US or Israeli military action against Iran. Two unspecified Israeli sources told

CNN on February 10 that Israeli officials are concerned about Iran's rapid progress in restoring its ballistic missile stockpile and capabilities to their pre-Israel-Iran War levels.[7] The sources added that Iran could possess between 1,800 and 2,000 missiles "within weeks or months." [8] CNN's report comes after other Israeli sources reported in December 2025 that the Iranian regime may only need one to two years to produce enough ballistic missiles to overwhelm Israeli air defenses, which is an estimate calculated based on Iran's ability to produce about 300 ballistic missiles per month.[9] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with US President Donald Trump in Washington, DC, on February 11 to urge Trump to force Iran to agree to limit its ballistic missile program, according to Israeli and US officials.[10] The officials said that Netanyahu sought to convince Trump to launch a strike against Iran's ballistic missile production facilities if he cannot secure a diplomatic agreement that includes restrictions on Iran's missile program.[11] Iran's prolongment of the negotiations may be part of an attempt to buy more time to replenish its ballistic missile stockpile before another possible round of fighting between Iran and the United States or Israel. Iran launched multiple barrages of missiles at Israel during the Israel-Iran War and Iranian officials have repeatedly threatened to fire missiles at US bases in the region if the United States attacks Iran.[12]

Iran is also pursuing multiple diplomatic tracks to try to prevent a US strike. A *Wall Street Journal* journalist reported on February 11 that Larijani discussed Iran's highly enriched uranium with Omani officials during his February 10 trip to Moscow.[13] CTP-ISW assessed on February 9 that Larijani may have conveyed details about potential nuclear concessions during his visit to Oman.[14] Larijani's trip to Oman followed his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on January 30 in which Larijani and Putin likely discussed the US-Iran talks and ways to prevent US military action against Iran.[15] Russia recently offered to store Iranian enriched uranium on February 4.[16] Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Lavrov called his Omani counterpart on February 9 to express support for Oman's mediation efforts, almost certainly in relation to Larijani's visit to Oman.[17] Larijani is Iran's principal negotiator with Russia.[18] Larijani also met with Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani and Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman al Thani on February 11 to discuss regional developments.[19] The Qatari Emir also held a phone call with Trump on February 11 to discuss "efforts for regional de-escalation." [20] Larijani's diplomatic efforts are taking place alongside Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi's diplomatic efforts. Araghchi is Iran's principal negotiator with the United States and led the Iranian delegation to Oman on February 6, after which he traveled to Qatar.[21]

US government officials have discussed seizing tankers involved in transporting Iranian oil but refrained from doing so due to concerns over Iran's "near-certain" retaliation and the impact that tanker seizures would have on international oil markets, according to unspecified US officials speaking to the *Wall Street Journal* on February 10. [22] Iranian officials, including Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy Commander Brigadier General Alireza Tangsiri, have previously threatened to target shipping transiting the Strait of Hormuz if the United States disrupts Iran's oil trade.[23] Iran has demonstrated its willingness and ability to disrupt regional maritime and energy security, such as by attacking oil tankers in the Persian Gulf and Saudi energy facilities in 2019 during US President Donald Trump's first term.[24] The US government previously considered seizing and inspecting tankers carrying Iranian oil in March 2025 in order to disrupt Iran's illicit oil trade, according to unspecified sources speaking to Reuters.[25] The US government ultimately did not adopt this strategy. The United States and Iran later started nuclear negotiations in April 2025.[26]

Iran Update

February 11, 2026

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- 1 TEHRAN, IRAN.** Iran appears to be conditioning the possibility of talks about its ballistic missile program on US concessions in the current nuclear talks. Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani suggested to Omani media that Iran would only be willing to entertain the possibility of talks on its ballistic missiles in the event that the United States and Iran reach a nuclear agreement.
- 2 TEHRAN, IRAN.** Iran may calculate that prolonging the talks with the United States provides Iran with additional time to reconstitute its ballistic missile program, which Iran may calculate would raise the costs of US or Israeli military action against Iran. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with US President Donald Trump on February 11 to urge Trump to force Iran to agree to limit its ballistic missile program.
- 3 TEHRAN, IRAN.** US government officials have discussed seizing tankers involved in transporting Iranian oil but refrained from doing so due to concerns over Iran's "near-certain" retaliation and the impact that tanker seizures would have on international oil markets.

Key Takeaways

- 1. Iranian Efforts to Delay Potential US Military Action:** Iran may be floating the possibility of talks about Iran's ballistic missile program in an effort to delay possible US military action and extract concessions from the United States in nuclear negotiations. This signaling may be intended to drag out the current talks by leaving open the possibility for discussions about other issues apart from the nuclear issue. Iran may calculate that continuing to reject any possibility of discussing its ballistic missile program with the United States could increase the risk of US or Israeli military action against Iran.
- 2. Iranian Efforts to Extract US Concessions:** Iran appears to be conditioning the possibility of talks about its ballistic missile program on US concessions in the current nuclear talks. Iranian

Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani suggested to Omani media that Iran would only be willing to entertain the possibility of talks on its ballistic missiles in the event that the United States and Iran reach a nuclear agreement. Iran has thus far only offered limited concessions on its nuclear program that are far less significant concessions than Iran agreed to in the 2015 nuclear deal.

3. **Iranian Ballistic Missile Program Reconstitution:** Iran may calculate that prolonging the talks with the United States provides Iran with additional time to reconstitute its ballistic missile program, which Iran may calculate would raise the costs of US or Israeli military action against Iran. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with US President Donald Trump on February 11 to urge Trump to force Iran to agree to limit its ballistic missile program, according to Israeli and US officials. Two unspecified Israeli sources told CNN on February 10 that Israeli officials are concerned about Iran's rapid progress in restoring its ballistic missile stockpile and capabilities to their pre-Israel-Iran War levels.
4. **Illicit Iranian Oil Trade:** US government officials have discussed seizing tankers involved in transporting Iranian oil but refrained from doing so due to concerns over Iran's "near-certain" retaliation and the impact that tanker seizures would have on international oil markets, according to unspecified US officials speaking to the *Wall Street Journal* on February 10. Iranian officials have repeatedly threatened to target shipping transiting the Strait of Hormuz if the United States disrupts Iran's oil trade.

Iran

The IRGC, Law Enforcement Command (LEC), and intelligence agents dismantled a "terrorist cell" in Khash and Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province, on February 10, likely in response to a Mobarizoun Popular Front attack that injured two LEC officers on February 9.[27]

Iranian Armed Forces General Staff (AFGS)-affiliated Defa Press reported that security forces killed four "terrorists," arrested several individuals affiliated with the cell, and seized several firearms.[28] Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib stated on February 11 that counterterrorism forces, in cooperation with the IRGC and the LEC, also arrested and killed some "terrorists" in Kerman Province.[29] The Mobarizoun Popular Front is a coalition of anti-regime Baloch groups that formed in December 2025.[30] The Mobarizoun Popular Front conducted an attack in Khash on February 9 that injured two LEC officers. The Mobarizoun Popular Front also claimed that it attacked and destroyed vehicles belonging to a special forces unit in Iranshahr on February 11.[31]

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi spoke with Pakistani Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar on February 10, likely to discuss anti-regime militancy in Sistan and Baluchistan Province[32] Iranian officials often discuss cross-border issues, including anti-regime militant activity, with Pakistani officials because anti-regime militant groups operate in the Iran-Pakistan border area..[33] Anti-regime militancy in Sistan and Baluchistan Province has long posed an internal security challenge for the Iranian regime. Jaish al Adl, which is part of the Mobarizoun Popular Front, and other Baloch groups frequently attack Iranian regime security forces and institutions in Sistan and Baluchistan Province.[34]

Iraq

Nothing significant to report.

Syria

The reported planned withdrawal of all non-Syrian Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) fighters from Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)-controlled territory to Iraq would reduce the risk that these fighters could launch or participate in an anti-government insurgent campaign in northeastern Syria. Three unspecified sources told *Al Monitor* on February 10 that at least 100 non-Syrian PKK fighters have withdrawn from Syria to Iraqi Kurdistan.[35] UK-based, Saudi-funded outlet *Al Majalla* separately reported on February 10 that Syrian PKK commander Bahoz Erdal has left Syria for Iraqi Kurdistan.[36] The Syrian army said that the PKK deployed Erdal to Tabqa, Raqqqa Province, on January 16 after he arrived from the Qandil Mountains in Iraq, which is the PKK's stronghold.[37] Syrian President Ahmed al Shara suggested that Erdal may have commanded Asayish fighters in Kurdish-majority neighborhoods in Aleppo City during the December 2025 and January 2026 fighting between government forces and the SDF.[38] It is unclear if the sources speaking to *Al Monitor* were referring to 100 PKK leaders, fighters, or a mix of the two, but Erdal's reported withdrawal suggests that some commanders may have been among the fighters who withdrew from Syria.[39] The withdrawal of 100 senior PKK leaders from Syria would be much more significant than the withdrawal of relatively low-level fighters.

Non-Syrian PKK fighters will also reportedly continue to withdraw from Syria in the coming days and weeks. A Western official told *Al Majalla* that around 1,000 non-Syrian PKK fighters will withdraw from Syria in total.[40] SDF Commander Mazloun Abdi acknowledged in December 2024 that foreign PKK fighters came to Syria to support the SDF during the civil war.[41] Turkey has long demanded the withdrawal of non-Syrian PKK fighters from Syria.[42] The January 30 SDF-Syrian government agreement does not explicitly require foreign PKK fighters to withdraw from Syria, but previous SDF-government agreements have called for the SDF to remove all non-Syrian PKK fighters from Syria.[43] The January 30 SDF-government agreement stipulates that the Syrian government will send workers to SDF-held border crossings to prevent smuggling and the entrance of foreign fighters.[44]

The removal of non-Syrian PKK fighters from Syria reduces the risk that these fighters could lead or participate in an anti-government, Kurdish-led insurgency in northern Syria. The actions of foreign-based PKK commanders and foreign fighters were probably a determining factor in the Syrian government's decision to launch a military operation in Deir Hafer on January 13.[45] Fighters taking orders from PKK leadership in the Iraqi Qandil Mountains continued to fight against Syrian government forces in Aleppo City even after SDF leadership ordered a ceasefire on January 9.[46] These fighters later withdrew to Deir Hafer, and the Syrian army used the presence of "PKK fighters" in the area to justify its operation.[47] CTP-ISW continues to assess that some individual hardline Kurdish fighters may organize a low-grade, relatively unorganized insurgency that does not involve senior People's Protection Units (YPG) or Kurdish leaders.[48] The fighters who participate in such an insurgency could be Syrian fighters affiliated with the PKK or YPG, however.

The Turkish Armed Forces' continued presence in Syria indicates that Turkey still perceives the SDF as a threat to Turkish security, even following the January 30 SDF-Syrian government agreement. Turkish Defense Minister Yasar Guler told Turkish media on February 9 that Turkey has "no plans to withdraw" from Syria "for now." [49] Guler said that the Turkish military will prepare for "all possible scenarios" despite the SDF's integration into the Syrian army.[50] Guler added that the risk of terrorism from Syria may not always remain at its current low level.[51] Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan similarly told Turkish media that the YPG, which dominates the SDF, should sever its ties from the PKK.[52] Turkey maintains at least 10,000 troops in Syria, according to a February 2026 estimate.[53] Turkey also maintains over 60 military bases and outposts in former SDF-held territory in Raqqqa and Hasakah provinces that Turkey built after its 2019 offensive in Syria.[54] The Turkish military

largely avoided direct involvement in the Syrian government's January offensive against the SDF, although the SDF reported multiple Turkish drone strikes.[55] It is unclear whether the Turkish or Syrian military operated those drones, however.[56]

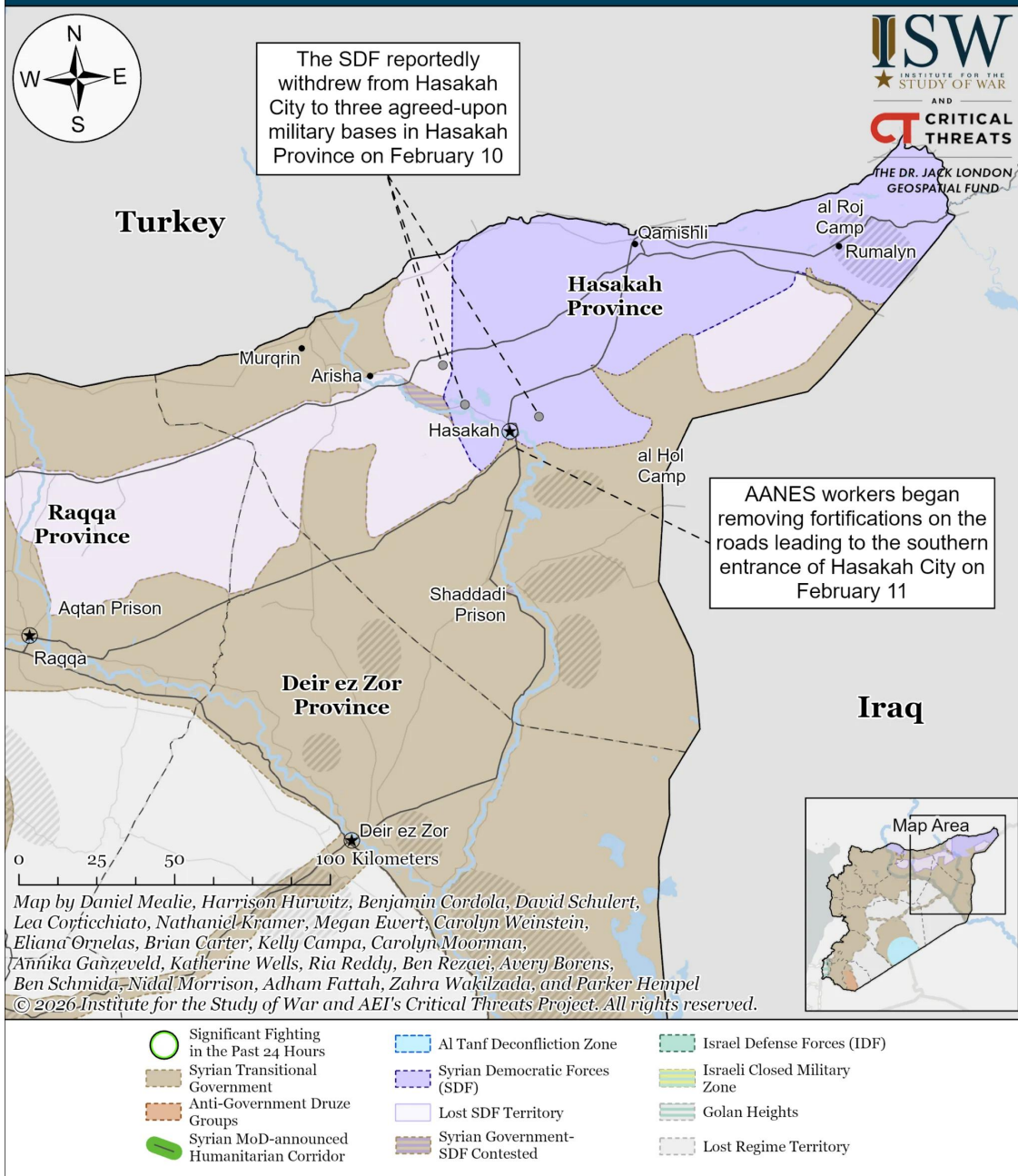
The Syrian government and the SDF implemented steps of the third phase of the January 30 agreement on February 10 and 11. Local Syrian sources reported on February 10 that the SDF withdrew from Hasakah City to three agreed-upon military bases in Hasakah Province: Tal Baydar base, Jabal Kowkab base, and a former US base near Shamouka.[57] Syrian sources also reported on February 10 that SDF internal security forces (known as Asayish) and Syrian General Security Service (GSS) forces backfilled positions after the Syrian army withdrew from Hasakah City toward al Shadaddi.[58] The January 30 agreement stipulates that SDF forces in Hasakah City and Qamishli must withdraw to agreed-upon bases, while the Syrian army must withdraw its forces near Hasakah City to al Shadaddi.[59]

Multiple Syrian sources reported that Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) workers began removing fortifications on the roads leading to the southern entrance of Hasakah City on February 11 to reopen the Hasakah-Deir ez Zor and Hasakah-Raqqa roads for civilian use.[60] A source separately told Syrian media that the SDF transferred prisoners from Hasakah prisons to Qamishli in preparation for a prisoner exchange with the Syrian government.[61] A pro-SDF source reported on February 11 that the SDF and the Syrian government will conduct a prisoner exchange "within the next 24 hours." [62]

SDF-proposed Hasakah Province Deputy Internal Security Director Siamand Afrin previously told Kurdish media on February 4 that the withdrawal of SDF and government forces, a government-SDF prisoner exchange, and the end of the government's "siege" on Kobani, Aleppo Province, are part of the third phase of the January 30 agreement.[63] Kurdish media reported that the government continued its siege on Kobani on February 11, however.[64] The 14-point January 30 agreement outlines four implementation phases before the end of February, followed by a fifth phase to establish permanent commitments between the SDF and the Syrian government.[65]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Eastern Syria

February 11, 2026 at 2:00 PM ET



Arabian Peninsula

CTP-ISW has temporarily suspended its coverage of Yemen beginning on January 9 to prioritize coverage of the protests in Iran.

Palestinian Territories & Lebanon

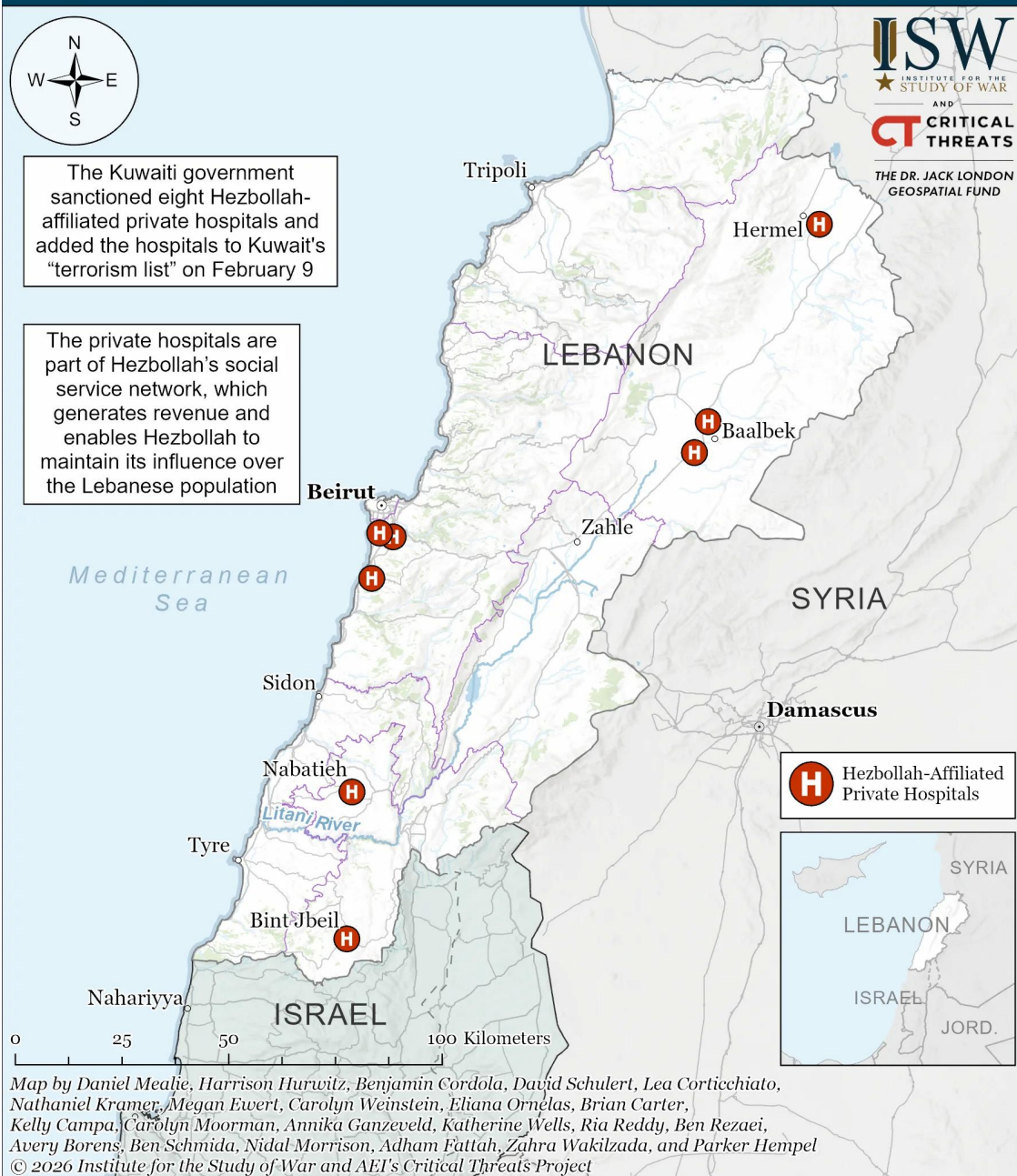
Senior Iranian diplomats have reportedly transported large sums of cash to Hezbollah during their visits to Beirut in recent months.[66] Anti-regime Iranian media reported on February 11 that at least seven Iranian diplomats, including Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani and diplomats traveling with Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi, used their diplomatic passports

and immunity to transport cash in suitcases to Hezbollah.[67] Larijani and Araghchi visited Beirut in September 2025 and January 2026, respectively.[68] These officials have reportedly transported hundreds of millions of dollars to Hezbollah.[69] Iran has used diplomatic visits and civilian flights into the Beirut Airport to smuggle cash to Hezbollah, particularly since the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024. Israel accused Iranian diplomats in January 2025 of smuggling cash to Hezbollah in suitcases after an Iranian diplomat refused to be searched and entered Lebanon with bags of cash for “embassy operations,” according to Iran.[70] Lebanese authorities at the Beirut Airport have also thwarted multiple cash smuggling attempts from Iran to Hezbollah via civilian flights since February 2025.[71] Iranian attempts to smuggle funds to Hezbollah likely aim to alleviate Hezbollah’s financial struggles and support its reconstitution.

Regional countries are continuing to take steps to limit Hezbollah’s ability to provide social services to Lebanese citizens. The Kuwaiti government sanctioned and added eight Hezbollah-affiliated private hospitals to its national “terrorism list” on February 9.[72] The designation will immediately freeze all funds and economic resources that the hospitals own or control.[73] The designation also bars any Kuwaiti citizen, including those abroad, from providing funds or financial services to the hospitals.[74] The sanctioned hospitals are located in Hezbollah’s Shia-majority strongholds, including in southern Lebanon, Beirut’s southern suburbs, and the Bekaa Valley.[75] The eight private hospitals are part of Hezbollah’s robust social service network, which generates revenue for the group and enables it to maintain its influence among the Lebanese Shia population.[76] Some of the sanctioned hospitals have previously reportedly been subject to US and international scrutiny, but no country has sanctioned them before Kuwait.[77] The Lebanese Health Ministry expressed “great surprise” in response to the sanctions and stated that the move is “inconsistent” with Kuwait’s previous support for the Lebanese health system.[78] Kuwait recently sanctioned al Qard al Hassan, Hezbollah’s main financial institution, in June 2025.[79]

Sanctioned Hezbollah-Affiliated Private Hospitals

February 11, 2026 at 2:00 PM ET



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Benjamin Schmida, Parker Hempel, Katherine Wells, Zahra Wakilzada, Nidal Morrison, Avery Borens, Kelly Campa, Annika Ganzeveld

Analyst Notes: Data Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

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US Central Command's (CENTCOM) withdrawal from key bases in Syria illustrates that the United States is gradually shifting its counter-Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) framework to engage with the Syrian government rather than the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).[1] CENTCOM confirmed on February 11 that US forces completed their withdrawal from al Tanf Garrison in the central Syrian desert as part of a “deliberate and conditions-based transition.”[2] US forces have maintained a presence at the al Tanf Garrison since 2015 alongside a Syrian opposition group known as the Syrian Free Army (formerly known as Maghawhir al Thawra).[3] US forces and the Syrian Free Army established the al Tanf Garrison to prevent ISIS from taking over the entire Iraq-Syria border in 2015, and US forces maintained their presence there to monitor the expansion of Iran’s military activity in Syria in coordination with Israel and Jordan.[4]

The Syrian government assumed control of al Tanf Garrison in a coordinated and “orderly” handover.[5] Syrian Defense Minister Major General Marhaf Abu Qasra and Operation Inherent Resolve Commander Major General Kevin Lambert coordinated the Syrian army’s takeover of al Tanf on February 11.[6] The US-trained Syrian Free Army reportedly remained at the base after US forces withdrew.[7] The Syrian Free Army integrated into the Interior Ministry’s Badia Security Directorate in October 2025 and has continued to conduct counter-ISIS operations within the al Tanf Deconfliction Zone and in southern Syria since then.[8] The unit has about 600 fighters.[9] Badia-based Syrian media reported that the Homs Province-based 54th Division also deployed to al Tanf.[10] The 54th Division, which is commanded by former Ahrar al Sham commander Brigadier General Hussein al Obaid, is comprised of former Ahrar al Sham fighters and new recruits.[11] The division participated in the government’s recent offensive in Hasakah Province.[12] The Ministry of Defense (MoD) said that it will deploy border guards along the Jordan-Iraq-Syria border in the coming days.[13]

The US withdrawal and the Syrian government’s backfill of US forces at al Tanf Garrison are representative of how the United States is changing its framework for sustaining success against ISIS in Syria. The United States has relied on the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) as its primary counter-ISIS partner on the ground since 2014.[14] The SDF agreed to integrate into the Syrian army and internal security services on January 30.[15] A US State Department press release on February 9, following the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS meeting in Saudi Arabia, stated that the Syrian government intends to assume national leadership over counter-ISIS efforts.[16] The United States and the Syrian government

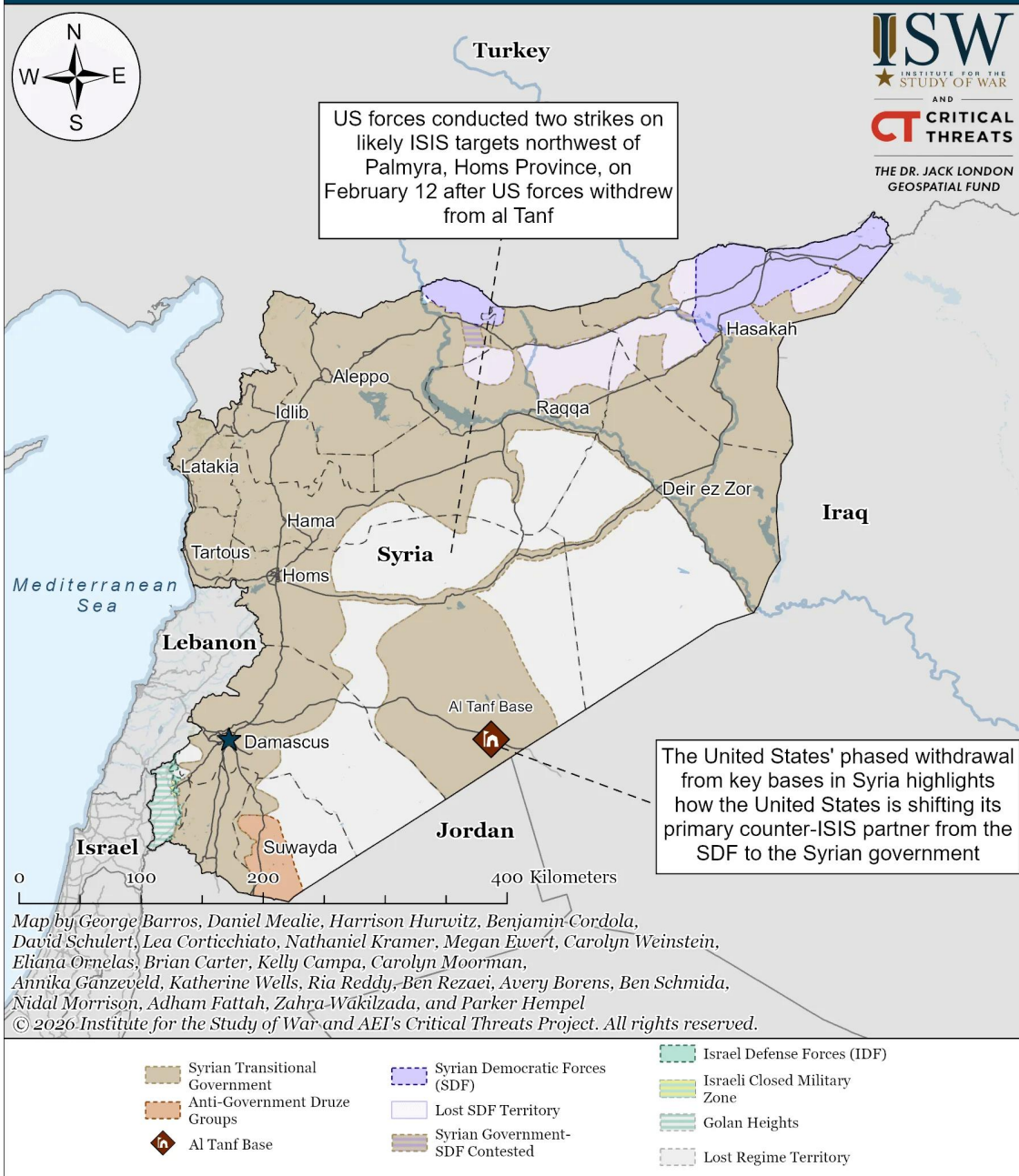
have collaborated on counter-ISIS operations since July 2025, and the Syrian government joined the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS in November 2025.[17]

CENTCOM's withdrawal from al Tanf Garrison comes amid speculation from sources in Syria that the United States plans to withdraw from its remaining positions in northeastern Syria.[18] US forces began a phased withdrawal from northeastern Syria in April 2025.[19] Unspecified US officials previously told the *Wall Street Journal* on January 22 that the United States would withdraw its forces from Syria following the Syrian government's defeat of the SDF in January.[20] US forces are reportedly finishing or have finished their mission to transfer ISIS detainees from Syria to Iraq. An unspecified Iraqi security official told UAE-based media that the coalition transferred the last group of detainees to Iraq on February 12 and that the total number of transferred detainees is "close" to 7,000.[21] A spokesperson for the Iraqi prime minister said on February 12 that Iraq has received 4,500 detainees in total, however.[22]

US forces will continue the US mission to combat ISIS even without a force presence at positions such as al Tanf. CENTCOM Commander Admiral Brad Cooper commented on CENTCOM's withdrawal from al Tanf and said that US forces remain "poised" to address and respond to threats from ISIS.[23] An unspecified US official told Al Jazeera on February 12 that the United States will continue to conduct counter-ISIS airstrikes in Syria from outside Syrian territory.[24] Syrian sources reported that US aircraft struck likely ISIS targets in the central Syrian desert on February 12.[25] CENTCOM reported on February 12 that it has struck more than 100 ISIS targets and captured or killed 50 ISIS fighters since December 2025.[26]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria

February 12, 2026 at 2:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Harrison Hurwitz, Benjamin Cordola, David Schulert, Lea Corticchiato, Nathaniel Kramer, Megan Ewert, Carolyn Weinstein, Eliana Ornelas, Brian Carter, Kelly Campa, Carolyn Moorman, Annika Gänzeveld, Katherine Wells, Ria Reddy, Ben Rezaei, Avery Borens, Ben Schmida, Nidal Morrison, Adham Fattah, Zahra Wakilzada, and Parker Hempel
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The Syrian government has the tools to be an effective US counter-ISIS partner in Syria, but will face temporary constraints as it integrates the SDF and northeastern Syria into the state.

Hayat Tahrir al Sham leaders and security services leveraged connections formed with local Arab communities as part of a counter-ISIS strategy in Idlib Province prior to the collapse of the Assad regime.[27] The Syrian government, and specifically the Syrian Ministry of Interior (MoI), therefore presumably have the same capability and can pursue a similar strategy, particularly given the government's highly effective tribal outreach strategy prior to its recent offensive.[28] The Syrian government will likely contend with several constraints that may limit its capability to fully assume counter-ISIS responsibilities in the northeast in the coming days and weeks.[29] The nature of the SDF's collapse and chaotic withdrawal in Raqqa and Deir ez Zor provinces prevented any organized handover of SDF security responsibilities and counter-ISIS efforts in these areas.[30] Government forces will need to effectively communicate and coordinate with the SDF in order to gain an understanding of their new

areas of operation.[31] The MoI will also need time to establish security and intelligence networks in recently captured SDF territory, where the Syrian government has not operated before.[32] The Syrian government should be able to overcome these challenges with time and US support, however.

The SDF, which is the best-trained force in northeastern Syria to counter ISIS, will also likely face constraints on its counter-ISIS operations after it integrates into the Syrian army's chain of command. The Syrian government relies primarily on its internal security forces, rather than the Syrian army, for counter-ISIS operations.[33] The January 30 agreement does not specify whether SDF counterterrorism units will integrate into the MoI or the MoD.[34] The United States has previously urged that the Syrian government and SDF coordinate on future counter-ISIS operations.[35]

European media reported on February 12 that the third-country national annex at al Hol internally displaced persons (IDP) camp is nearly empty.[36] ISIS-affiliated families have reportedly escaped from al Hol camp to other Syrian provinces and Lebanon.[37] The third-country national annex is a heavily guarded, separate section of al Hol camp that previously housed around 6,000 third-country nationals.[38] Third-country nationals are more likely than other IDPs at al Hol to be ISIS-affiliated because many of them traveled from abroad to join the group in Syria.[39] Multiple local sources told European media on February 12 that fewer than 20 families remain at the third-country national annex at al Hol camp in Hasakah Province.[40] An unspecified analyst told UK-based media on February 12 that unspecified actors removed the third-country nationals from al Hol overnight on February 11.[41] The United Nations has not confirmed that most third-country nationals have left al Hol.[42] Local sources have circulated conflicting reports about whether the Syrian government moved third-country nationals to a new location or whether the third-country nationals escaped al Hol.[43] Local Syrian sources reported that some camp residents have made multiple escape attempts from the camp since Syrian government forces took control of the camp from the SDF on January 20.[44] Third-country nationals from al Hol have reportedly escaped to other Syrian provinces and Lebanon.[45] A humanitarian source told French media on February 12 that unspecified actors have smuggled families to Idlib and other provinces.[46] Several Salafi-jihadi-aligned foreign fighter groups have remained in Idlib since the collapse of the Assad regime.[47] A Lebanese source told French media on February 12 that four members of his family and other ISIS-affiliated families have recently returned to Lebanon.[48] Syrian authorities are in the process of learning lessons that the United States and the SDF previously learned at al Hol. Syrian authorities have taken steps in recent weeks to improve Syrian government control over al Hol, including by starting a census and monitoring the area with drones.[49] The SDF spent years developing counter-ISIS operations in al Hol, and the United States provided the SDF with intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets to monitor the camp, capabilities that the MoI currently lacks.[50]

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reported that ISIS and an ISIS-aligned Salafi-jihadi group conducted five failed assassination attempts against Syrian President Ahmed al Shara and other senior Syrian government officials in 2025.[51] A successful assassination of Shara would have profound implications for the future trajectory of Syrian stability because of the role that Shara plays as the central figure leading Syria's transition.[52] The UNSC observed in a February 2 report that ISIS attempted to conduct three unspecified assassination attempts on Shara, Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani, and Interior Minister Anas Khattab. The UNSC assessed that Shara is a "priority" target for ISIS.[53] A successful assassination of Shara or senior Syrian officials such as Shaibani or Khattab could have possibly devastating effects on Syria's stability and recovery. Shara is irreplaceable for a stable Syrian transition at this time. There is no other leader capable of uniting the ruling coalition, and there is no alternative Syrian opposition figure who commands the degree of moral authority Shara does.[54] Shara also does not have a clear successor if he or members of his leadership circle were assassinated, which could potentially cause a destabilizing power vacuum in Syria. Syria's

vice president is supposed to assume the presidency in the event of a vacancy, according to the Syrian Constitutional Declaration, but Shara has not appointed a vice president yet.[55]

The UNSC also observed that Saraya Ansar al Sunnah attempted to assassinate President Shara in Aleppo and Daraa provinces on unspecified dates in 2025.[56] Saraya Ansar al Sunnah is a Salafi-jihadi group ideologically aligned with ISIS that opposes the Syrian transitional government and seeks to establish an Islamic State in Syria that excludes Alawites, Druze, Christians, Kurds, and Shia.[57] The UNSC identified Saraya Ansar al Sunnah as a front group for ISIS and noted that the group provides ISIS with “plausible deniability and improved operational capacity.”[58] Saraya Ansar al Sunnah referred to itself as an “administratively independent group” from ISIS in December 2025 but noted that it shares ISIS’s creed and methodology. The group added that it sought to pledge allegiance to ISIS.[59] Saraya Ansar al Sunnah most recently claimed responsibility for detonating an improvised explosive device (IED) targeting an Alawite mosque in Homs City in December 2025.[60]

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented US President Donald Trump with evidence that the Iranian regime continued to kill protesters even after it told the United States that it would stop harming civilians and that Iran has never intended to discuss non-nuclear issues with the United States, according to Israeli media.[61] Netanyahu and Trump met at the White House on February 11.[62] AUS-based human rights organization has recorded a total of 7,002 deaths and over 52,000 arrests in the recent protests as of February 11.[63] Unspecified Iranian lawyers defending detained protesters in Iran separately told Western media on February 6 that the Iranian regime plans to execute “thousands” of Iranians who participated in the recent protests.[64] CTP-ISW cannot verify the reliability of this report. The Iranian judiciary conducted its first execution of a protester from the 2022-2023 Mahsa Amini protest movement in December 2022, two months after the start of the protest movement.[65]

Trump and Netanyahu also discussed the Iranian nuclear and ballistic missile programs.[66] Trump stated that he insisted that “negotiations with Iran continue” during his meeting with Netanyahu.[67] Netanyahu’s office stated that Netanyahu emphasized Israel’s security needs during the meeting.[68] Israeli media previously reported that Netanyahu sought to urge Trump not to accept a deal with Iran that does not address Iran’s ballistic missile program.[69]

The Iranian regime is unlikely to make any concessions on its ballistic missile program because it views its missile capabilities as an essential component of its defensive and deterrence strategies. Iranian Armed Forces General Staff (AFGS)-affiliated outlet Defa Press published an op-ed on February 12 in which it suggested that strengthening Iran’s defense readiness and missile capabilities could increase Iran’s leverage in negotiations with the United States.[70] Defa Press added that Iran can use its “military winning card,” likely referring to its ballistic missiles, to respond to any US actions.[71] Iranian officials have continued to insist that Iran will not negotiate on its ballistic missile program and support for the Axis of Resistance during the current US-Iran talks.[72] Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani told Omani media on February 10 that Iran could agree to expand the scope of its talks with the United States “to other areas” if the current nuclear negotiations are successful. Larijani likely made this comment in an attempt to float the possibility that Iran may be willing to negotiate on its ballistic missile program to drag out the current talks and prevent US or Israeli military action against Iran.[73] Larijani did not state that Iran would be willing to make concessions on its ballistic missile program even if it agreed to “discuss” the issue with the United States, however. The Iranian regime is unlikely to make any concessions that would limit its ability to produce and maintain its ballistic missile stockpile due to the centrality of the missile program in Iranian defensive and deterrence strategies. Former Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Commander Mohammad Ali Jafari argued in October 2025 that Iran’s missile program is its main form of deterrence and that Iran

deliberately prioritized developing its missile and drone capabilities over its air and ground forces to counter the superior capabilities of the United States and Israel.[74]

Some Shia Coordination Framework members may be using State of Law Coalition leader and former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki's recent remarks to portray him as hostile to the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in order to try to reduce support for Maliki's premiership nomination among other framework members.[75] Maliki stated on February 11 that building a "stable state" requires restricting weapons to the state and "having a single army" that is subordinate to Iraq's prime minister.[76] Maliki's statement follows a February 3 interview in which Maliki said that he could use his "close ties with the groups" to disarm Iranian-backed Iraqi militias.[77] CTP-ISW assessed on February 3 that Maliki likely claimed that he could disarm Iranian-backed Iraqi militias while in office because he believed such a statement could garner him US support for another term.[78] The United States has continuously pressured the Iraqi federal government to disarm Iranian-backed Iraqi militias since early 2025.[79] The Shia Coordination Framework has maintained its nomination of Maliki despite US and domestic opposition.[80]

Some Shia Coordination Framework members who oppose Maliki responded to his February 11 statement by emphasizing that any candidate for the premiership must support the continued existence of the PMF. These framework members, particularly the ones that control armed wings, likely oppose Maliki consolidating control over the PMF and the Iranian-backed Iraqi militias within it.[81] The PMF is an Iraqi state security service that includes a large number of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, many of which answer to Iran instead of the Iraqi prime minister.[82] A member of the National State Forces Alliance, which opposes Maliki's nomination, declared on February 11 that his party will not accept anyone "dissolving or merging" the PMF.[83] Several members of Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Asaib Ahl al Haq's Sadiqoun political wing similarly stated on February 11 and 12 that their parliamentary bloc will reject any candidate who does not support the continued existence of the PMF.[84] The leaders of the National State Forces Alliance and Asaib Ahl al Haq have led intra-framework efforts to oppose Maliki's nomination.[85] Maliki later clarified on February 11 that he would not seek to dissolve the PMF and emphasized that his priority is to consolidate state authority.[86]

Portraying Maliki as an opponent of the PMF may lead other framework members to oppose Maliki's nomination. Services Alliance head Shibl al Zaydi said on February 11 that any candidate for the premiership must "unequivocally" support the PMF.[87] The Services Alliance has not publicly supported nor opposed Maliki's nomination. Several framework members, like Asaib Ahl al Haq leader Qais al Khazali and Zaydi, control militias that are part of the PMF.[88] CTP-ISW assessed in December 2025 that Maliki would likely attempt to transform elements of the Iraqi security establishment into a force that he could use to enhance his personal power as prime minister.[89]

Iran Update

February 12, 2026

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- 1 NORTHEASTERN SYRIA.** European media reported on February 12 that the third-country national annex at al Hol internally displaced persons (IDP) camp is nearly empty. ISIS-affiliated families have reportedly escaped from al Hol camp to other Syrian provinces and Lebanon.
- 2 DAMASCUS, SYRIA.** The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reported that ISIS and an ISIS-aligned Salafi-jihadi group conducted five failed assassination attempts against Syrian President Ahmed al Shara and other senior Syrian government officials in 2025. A successful assassination of Shara would have profound implications for the future trajectory of Syrian stability because of the role that Shara plays as the central figure leading Syria's transition.
- 3 WASHINGTON, DC.** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented US President Donald Trump with evidence that the Iranian regime continued to kill protesters even after it told the United States that it would stop harming civilians and that Iran has never intended to discuss non-nuclear issues with the United States. Trump and Netanyahu also discussed the Iranian nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

Key Takeaways

- 1. US Withdrawal from al Tanf:** US Central Command's (CENTCOM) withdrawal from key bases in Syria illustrates that the United States is gradually shifting its counter-Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) framework to engage with the Syrian government rather than the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). CENTCOM confirmed on February 11 that US forces completed their withdrawal from al Tanf Garrison in the central Syrian desert as part of a "deliberate and conditions-based transition." Syrian government forces backfilled the United States at the base.
- 2. Al Hol IDP Camp:** European media reported on February 12 that the third-country national annex at al Hol internally displaced persons (IDP) camp is nearly empty. ISIS-affiliated families have reportedly escaped from al Hol camp to other Syrian provinces and Lebanon.

3. **ISIS and ISIS-Aligned Assassination Attempts:** The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reported that ISIS and an ISIS-aligned Salafi-jihadi group conducted five failed assassination attempts against Syrian President Ahmed al Shara and other senior Syrian government officials in 2025. A successful assassination of Shara would have profound implications for the future trajectory of Syrian stability because of the role that Shara plays as the central figure leading Syria's transition.
4. **Trump-Netanyahu Meeting:** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented US President Donald Trump with evidence that the Iranian regime continued to kill protesters even after it told the United States that it would stop harming civilians and that Iran has never intended to discuss non-nuclear issues with the United States. Trump and Netanyahu also discussed the Iranian nuclear and ballistic missile programs.
5. **Iranian Ballistic Missile Program:** The Iranian regime is unlikely to make any concessions that would limit its ability to produce and maintain its ballistic missile stockpile due to the centrality of the missile program in Iranian defensive and deterrence strategies. Iranian Armed Forces General Staff (AFGS)-affiliated outlet Defa Press published an op-ed on February 12 in which it suggested that strengthening Iran's defense readiness and missile capabilities could increase Iran's leverage in negotiations with the United States.
6. **Shia Coordination Framework Maneuvering:** Some Shia Coordination Framework members may be using State of Law Coalition leader and former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki's recent remarks to portray him as hostile to the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in order to try to reduce support for Maliki's premiership nomination among other framework members. Some framework members, particularly the ones that control armed wings, likely oppose Maliki consolidating control over the PMF and the Iranian-backed Iraqi militias within it.

Iran

The Institute for Science and International Security assessed on February 11 that Iran is likely fortifying entrances at its Kolang Gaz La Mountain nuclear facility in Esfahan Province to protect the facility from future US or Israeli strikes.[90] The Institute published imagery that shows concrete-reinforced headworks, additional dirt overburdens, and heavy construction machinery at multiple tunnel portals.[91] The Institute reported that construction materials and heavy machinery suggest that the site is likely still not operational.[92] The Institute previously assessed that Iran could use the Kolang Gaz La facility to house an advanced centrifuge assembly plant or potentially a small undeclared enrichment plant.[93] The Institute has assessed in recent weeks that Iran is also hardening infrastructure at the Esfahan Nuclear Technology Center and Parchin Military Complex's Taleghan 2 facility in preparation for possible future strikes.[94]

Iraq

See topline section.

Syria

See topline section.

Arabian Peninsula

CTP-ISW has temporarily suspended its coverage of Yemen beginning on January 9.

Palestinian Territories & Lebanon

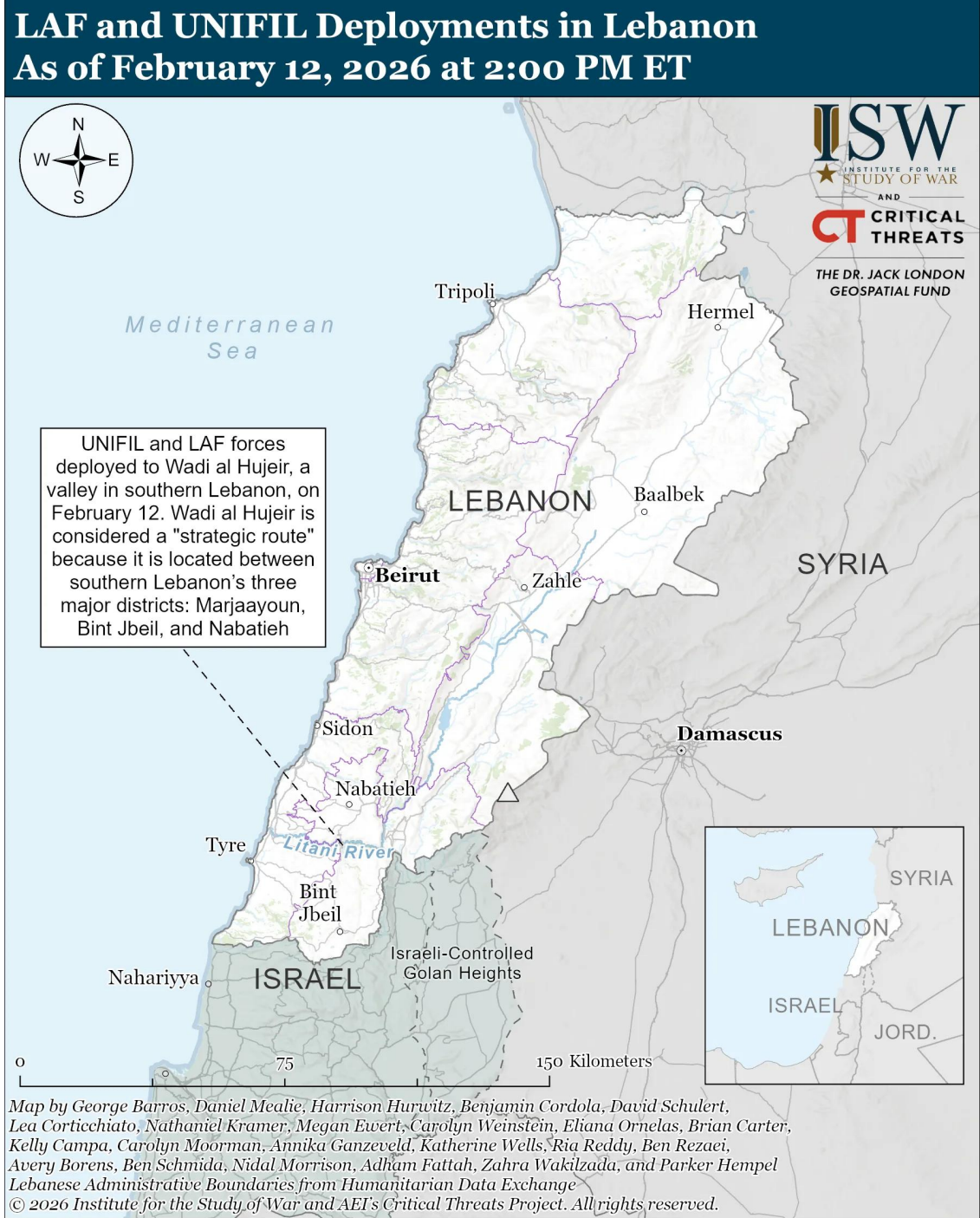
The Lebanese cabinet will reportedly determine on February 16 how the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) will disarm Hezbollah north of the Litani River.[95] The Lebanese cabinet will meet on February 16 to discuss the LAF's proposed plan for the next phase of the state's disarmament plan, which details Hezbollah's disarmament between the Litani and Awali rivers.[96] The Lebanese cabinet and the LAF will almost certainly adopt a cautious approach toward disarming Hezbollah north of the Litani River given that Hezbollah has framed its disarmament in the north as an existential issue.[97] Lebanese officials have become increasingly sensitive to the potential risk of trying to disarm Hezbollah outside southern Lebanon since October 2025, likely due to Hezbollah's extreme opposition to its disarmament and threats. Lebanese officials told Reuters in October 2025 that the LAF seeks to avoid inflaming tensions and buy time for Lebanese politicians, including Hezbollah politicians, to reach a consensus on the state's approach toward confiscating Hezbollah's weapons north of the Litani River.[98] LAF Commander Rodolphe Haykal similarly stated in December 2025 that the LAF is approaching Hezbollah's disarmament north of the Litani River "carefully." [99]

Lebanon's regional and Western partners are continuing to prepare to hold an LAF support conference in March 2026.[100] The conference will only take place if the Lebanese government meets certain conditions, however. French, US, Saudi, Qatari, and Egyptian officials will participate in a preparatory meeting in Doha on February 15.[101] The preparatory meeting aims to gain an understanding of the LAF's needs and develop mechanisms for financial and military support.[102] Invitations to the conference will reportedly be sent out after the meeting.[103] There are conflicting media reports about whether the preparatory meeting will take place on February 15, however. Informed diplomatic sources told Lebanese media on February 12 that the meeting has been postponed due to "technical reasons." [104] The conference participants have postponed the conference several times due to the Lebanese government's slow progress in meeting certain conditions.[105] These conditions include the Lebanese government clarifying "how any financial or military assistance would be spent, reinforcing mechanisms for institutional transparency, and clearing links between aid and measurable reform steps." [106]

Lebanese Defense Minister Michel Menassa and Interior Minister Ahmed Hajjar affirmed on February 11 that the Lebanese government is working to improve military salaries, which is crucial to strengthen Lebanese security institutions.[107] Menassa and Hajjar met on February 11 to discuss possible options to address the difficult living conditions of Lebanese military personnel.[108] The officials stated that they will submit a proposal to increase salaries and pensions to the Lebanese cabinet in an upcoming session.[109] The average monthly salary for about 70,000 LAF soldiers is roughly \$30 to \$50 USD as of December 2025, compared to about \$800 USD per month prior to the 2019 Lebanese economic crisis.[110] These salaries are insufficient to cover the average cost of living for one person in Lebanon, which is approximately \$1,100 USD per month.[111] The LAF and Lebanese Internal Security Forces' effective strength is severely limited because many soldiers work a second job to augment their salaries.[112] Menassa and Hajjar stated that these living conditions directly impact Lebanese security forces' morale and stability.[113]

United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and LAF forces deployed to Wadi al Hujeir,

a valley in southern Lebanon, on February 12.[114] Wadi al Hujeir is considered to be a “strategic route” because it is located between southern Lebanon’s three major districts: Marjaayoun, Bint Jbeil, and Nabatieh.[115] The valley was a hotspot for Israel-Hezbollah fighting during the 2006 War.[116] The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) reportedly attempted to deploy to Wadi al Hujeir during its Fall 2024 ground offensive but was unsuccessful.[117] The IDF conducted limited searches in the valley in December 2024.[118] Lebanese media reported on February 12 that the LAF has frequently deployed to southern Lebanese valleys in recent months as part of its disarmament plan.[119] The LAF has conducted inspections in these valleys, including in Wadi al Hujeir, occasionally at Israel’s request.[120]



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Kelly Campa, Ben Rezaei, Adham Fattah, Parker Hempel, Carolyn Moorman, Brian Carter

Analyst Notes: Data Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

Toplines

Iranian officials are rejecting US offers to engage in negotiations over Iran’s ballistic missile program amid increasing US threats. Iranian Defense Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani told al Jazeera on February 13 that Iran’s missile capability is a “firmly established” element of Iran’s defense doctrine and part of its deterrence mechanism.[1] Shamkhani argued that Iran’s missile capabilities are thus included within Iran’s “defense red lines,” and are not open for negotiation.[2] Shamkhani added that it is “natural” for the “fundamental defense components of states” to be outside the scope of political negotiations.[3] Iran has also not offered concessions on its nuclear program that are close to the US demand of zero enrichment or even close to the restrictions placed on the program under the 2015 nuclear deal.

Iranian officials are refusing to negotiate limits to Iran’s ballistic missile program because the ballistic missile program forms an integral part of Iranian defense strategy. Any changes to this strategy would require a strategic rethink that would take months, if not years.

Shamkhani’s remarks indicate that Iran is differentiating between negotiable issues related to the nuclear program and non-negotiable issues related to deterrence and Iran’s military capabilities, rather than signaling future flexibility on missiles after a possible nuclear deal. Iran considers its missile program as its main form of deterrence because it allows Iran to impose costs on its adversaries and compensates for Iran’s weak conventional air capabilities.[4] Former Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Commander Mohammad Ali Jafari argued in October 2025 that Iran deliberately prioritized missile and drone development over its air and ground forces to counter the superior capabilities of the United States and Israel, which underscores the reality that if Iran chose to limit its missiles, it would be agreeing to defang itself.[5]

Iran’s continued refusal to negotiate over its ballistic missile program comes after US President Donald Trump warned on February 12 that Iran has roughly one month to reach a deal.[6] Trump added that the United States “ha[s] to make a deal with Iran” or it will be “very traumatic,” adding that Iran will face “a very difficult time” if the deal is not fair.[7] Trump told Fox Business on February 10 that an acceptable deal with Iran would mean “no nuclear weapons, no missiles.”[8] Trump also decided to deploy the USS *Gerald R. Ford* carrier strike group to the Middle East after he met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on February 11, according to Axios.[9]

The United States smuggled 6,000 Starlink terminals into Iran during the recent protest wave

in order to help protesters “circumvent internet shut-offs” and overthrow the regime, according to US officials speaking to the *Wall Street Journal*.[10] The regime imposed a nationwide internet shutdown on January 8, likely to inhibit protesters’ ability to coordinate gatherings and conceal the regime’s brutal crackdown.[11] Starlink terminals allowed Iranian protesters to maintain internet access in order to communicate with each other and the international community. Iranian doctors used Starlink, for example, to tell *The Times* on January 17 that the regime’s crackdown had killed 16,500 protesters and injured around 330,000 protesters.[12] Iranian security forces launched a massive operation on January 12, 2026, to search homes in several cities across Iran and seize Starlink terminal dishes, which indicates the degree of concern the regime has about the use of Starlink.[13]

The regime has taken extreme steps to stop protesters’ use of Starlink, including prior to this recent protest wave. Starlink enabled protesters to connect to the outside world when used during the Masha Amini protests, and protesters during the Mahsa Amini protest wave also demonstrated a significant degree of organization.[14] The Iranian parliament passed a law in late June 2025—after the Israel-Iran War—that criminalized the possession, use, and distribution of Starlink devices.[15] The regime’s threats and efforts to hinder Starlink use indicate that the regime is greatly concerned with the ability of Iranians to coordinate protests and expose regime brutality, as well as the regime’s desire to maintain the capability of imposing similar nationwide internet shutdowns in the future.

US Central Command (CENTCOM) completed its mission to transfer over 5,700 Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) detainees from Syria to Iraq on February 12.[16] ISIS detention facilities in northeastern Syria held an estimated 8,500 ISIS fighters in total prior to CENTCOM’s transfer mission.[17] US forces began to transfer ISIS detainees to Iraq on January 21 after several chaotic and uncoordinated handovers of ISIS detention centers from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to the Syrian government resulted in the escape of detainees.[18] A US-mediated ceasefire between the Syrian government and SDF enabled CENTCOM and coalition forces to transfer the detainees to Iraq, which required coalition forces to use Hasakah Province highways to transfer detainees from detention facilities to a US airbase or the Iraqi border.[19] The transfer operation sought to decrease the risk that ISIS fighters could escape and help ISIS resurge.[20] Al Qaeda in Iraq fighters freed from prison in Iraq in the early 2010s helped accelerate al Qaeda in Iraq’s resurgence, which ultimately led to the rise of ISIS.[21]

Iraq is currently beginning its efforts to prosecute the newly transferred detainees.[22] The Iraqi government is holding the detainees at al Karkh Central Prison (formerly known as Camp Cropper), a detention facility in western Baghdad where US forces housed detainees after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.[23] The Iraqi government transferred over 4,000 detainees from al Karkh to facilities in Babil and Dhi Qar provinces to make room for the transferred detainees from Syria.[24] Iraqi authorities said that the detainees transferred from Syria included about 3,000 Syrian nationals.[25] The other detainees are third-party nationals from about 60 countries.[26] Iraq is continuing to discuss repatriation with the governments of these third-party countries.[27] The Iraqi judge who is leading the interrogations of the ISIS detainees told Western media on February 12 that detainees who committed crimes in Iraq will stand public trial in Iraq.[28]

Syrian forces have assumed control over some but not all ISIS detention facilities and internally displaced person (IDP) camps that the SDF formally oversaw in northeastern Syria.[29] Less than 2,000 Syrian ISIS detainees remain in SDF-run detention centers that are apparently expected to be transferred over to government forces as part of the understandings under the SDF-government integration agreement.[30] People’s Protection Units (YPG) fighters reportedly still control al Sinaa Prison in Ghawayran neighborhood, Hasakah City, at the time of this writing.[31] SDF-affiliated units also control the al Roj IDP camp, which houses about 2,500 people.[32]

The United States will reportedly withdraw US forces from bases in northeastern Syria “in the coming days and weeks.” US forces completed their withdrawal from al Tanf Garrison in the central Syrian desert as part of a “deliberate and conditions-based transition” on February 11.[33] Syrian government forces took over the base.[34] A US official told Al Monitor on February 13 that the United States is expected to withdraw further troops now that CENTCOM’s detainee transfer mission is complete.[35] Two unspecified US officials told the Washington Post on February 13 that other US bases in northeastern Syria could be transferred to the Syrian government “in the coming days or weeks.”[36] Al Monitor reported on February 13 that “several hundred” US troops have withdrawn from al Tanf Garrison and al Shaddadi base, south of Hasakah City.[37] The US withdrawal from key bases in Syria that it once used to support SDF operations illustrates that the United States is gradually shifting its counter-ISIS framework to engage with the Syrian government rather than the SDF, which will soon integrate into Syrian government forces.[38]

ISIS-affiliated residents of al Hol IDP camp have reportedly continued to escape from the camp on February 13, likely due in part to Syrian government forces’ lack of discipline and training. Several pro-government Syrian sources alleged on February 13 that al Hol is “almost empty” of its residents and accused some of the camp’s guards, who are now government forces, of facilitating some residents’ escapes.[39] A Syria-based journalist who cited a locally-based non-governmental organization reported that an unspecified number of Iraqi camp residents escaped through the camp’s main gate on February 13 after Syrian security forces opened the gate.[40] Camp residents later cut through other parts of the camp’s fence, and security forces reportedly did not prevent residents from departing for a nearby village with their belongings.[41] The journalist noted that the Iraqi residents fled the camp after hearing rumors that the SDF-affiliated internal security forces (known as the Asayish) would return to the camp.[42] The Asayish deployed along the road leading to the nearby town of al Hol on February 12 as part of the integration agreement.[43] Pro-SDF media alleged that Syrian government forces either “smuggled” or “allowed [camp residents] to leave” before the Asayish deployed to the area.[44] The Syria-based journalist reported that “very few” Iraqi families remain in al Hol.[45] The residents of al Hol camp are technically IDPs, not ISIS detainees, and none of the camp residents would have been included in the detainee transfers to Iraq. Some significant proportion of the camp residents—particularly the third country nationals—are affiliated with or supportive of ISIS because many are ISIS family members who left the last ISIS territorial possession at Baghouz when it was captured by the SDF in 2019.[46]

Other ISIS-affiliated families have reportedly escaped from al Hol to other Syrian provinces and Lebanon in recent days, possibly with support from ISIS-affiliated networks.[47] A northern Syria-based source reported on February 13 that ISIS-affiliated networks have transported female camp residents to safehouses in Aleppo, Raqqa, and Deir ez Zor provinces.[48] A BBC Salafi-jihadi analyst noted on January 20 that IS supporters had reportedly urged online for sympathizers to travel to the al Hol area to provide shelter and transportation for escaped ISIS detainees.[49]

Insufficient training and the lack of discipline among Syrian government forces have likely contributed to these forces’ inability to maintain order in al Hol camp since assuming control over the camp on January 21.[50] Syrian Interior Ministry forces deployed to the camp after “many” detainees escaped from the camp as the Syrian army initially took control of the camp in an uncoordinated, chaotic transfer following the SDF’s withdrawal from the area.[51] Syrian Interior Ministry forces are a relatively effective and well-disciplined force that has performed well in counterinsurgency efforts against Assadist insurgents in western Syria after the Defense Ministry’s forces massacred Alawites there in March 2025.[52] Interior Ministry forces have also prevented several escape attempts from al Hol since assuming responsibility over the camp.[53] There is no open source evidence that these forces received any training in managing large and violent IDP camps before taking over al Hol, however. The lack of an organized handover

means that these units are re-learning lessons that the coalition and SDF had to learn over multiple years with substantial surveillance support from US aircraft.

It is possible that certain government-affiliated fighters are facilitating the departures of the ISIS-affiliated al Hol residents due to a lack of discipline or, in some isolated cases, sympathy with camp residents. Interior Ministry forces may be relatively well-disciplined, but the Syrian government has rapidly expanded its security forces to meet the state's security needs since the fall of the Assad regime. This approach means that the Syrian government has recruited fighters who formerly fought with al Qaeda or ISIS-affiliated groups during the civil war.[54] An Egyptian member of the 82nd Division, which contains foreign fighters from the al Qaeda-affiliated Ansar al Tawhid, successfully smuggled Egyptian and Chechen ISIS families from the camp on January 25, for example.[55] A senior US official told the Washington Post on February 13 that the United States warned the Iraqi government in Fall 2025 that it was "entirely likely" that ISIS-affiliated detainees or camp residents would be freed or break free if the Syrian government assumed control over the camps and detention facilities.[56] The lack of appropriately trained or disciplined security forces to oversee IDP camps such as al Hol presents a serious threat to counter-ISIS efforts in northern Syria.

Iran Update

February 13, 2026



- 1 TEHRAN, IRAN.** The United States smuggled 6,000 Starlink terminals into Iran during the recent protest wave in order to help protesters “circumvent internet shut-offs” and overthrow the regime, according to US officials speaking to the *Wall Street Journal*. The regime has taken extreme steps to stop protesters’ use of Starlink, including prior to this recent protest wave.
- 2 BAGHDAD, IRAQ.** US Central Command (CENTCOM) completed its mission to transfer over 5,700 Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) detainees from Syria to Iraq on February 12. The United States will reportedly withdraw US forces from bases in northeastern Syria “in the coming days and weeks.”
- 3 NORTHEASTERN SYRIA.** ISIS-affiliated residents of al Hol IDP camp have reportedly continued to escape from the camp on February 13, likely due in part to Syrian government forces’ lack of discipline and training. Other ISIS-affiliated families have reportedly escaped from al Hol to other Syrian provinces and Lebanon in recent days, possibly with support from ISIS-affiliated networks.

Key Takeaways

- 1. US-Iran Negotiations:** Iranian officials are refusing to negotiate limits to Iran’s ballistic missile program because the ballistic missile program forms an integral part of Iranian defense strategy. Any changes to this strategy would require a strategic rethink that would take months, if not years.
- 2. US Support for Iranian Protests:** The United States smuggled 6,000 Starlink terminals into Iran during the recent protest wave in order to help protesters “circumvent internet shut-offs” and overthrow the regime, according to US officials speaking to the *Wall Street Journal*. The regime has taken extreme steps to stop protesters’ use of Starlink, including prior to this recent protest wave.
- 3. US Transfer of ISIS Detainees from Syria to Iraq:** US Central Command (CENTCOM) completed its mission to transfer over 5,700 Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) detainees from Syria to Iraq on February 12. The United States will reportedly withdraw US forces from bases in

northeastern Syria “in the coming days and weeks.”

4. **Escapes from al Hol Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camp:** ISIS-affiliated residents of al Hol IDP camp have reportedly continued to escape from the camp on February 13, likely due in part to Syrian government forces’ lack of discipline and training. Other ISIS-affiliated families have reportedly escaped from al Hol to other Syrian provinces and Lebanon in recent days, possibly with support from ISIS-affiliated networks.

Iran

See topline section.

Iraq

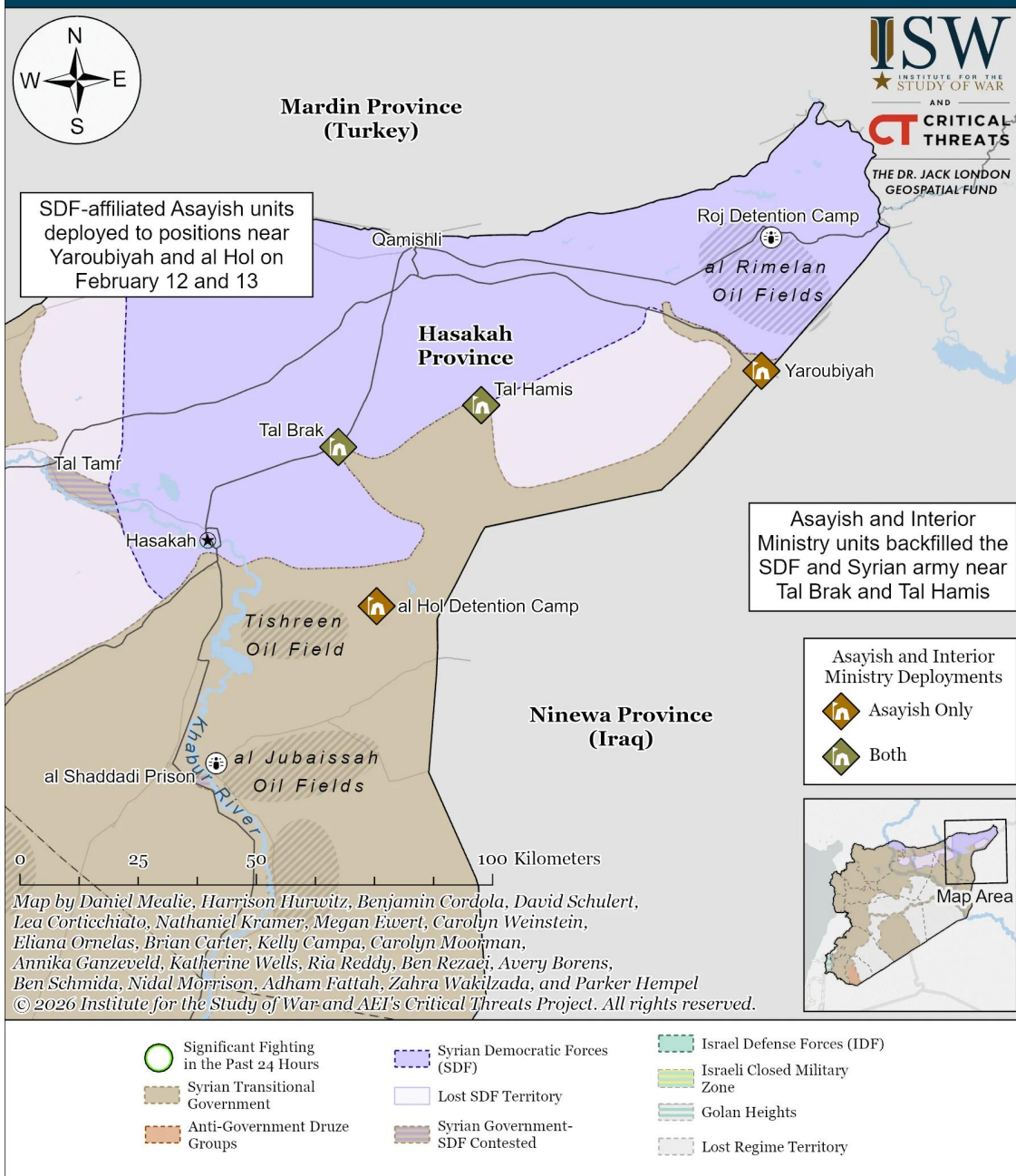
Nothing significant to report.

Syria

High-ranking Syrian government and SDF officials met with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Munich, Germany, on February 13.[57] Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani, SDF Commander Mazloum Abdi, and Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria Foreign Affairs Co-Chair Ilham Ahmed met with Rubio on the sidelines of the 2026 Munich Security Conference.[58] Abdi described the meeting with Rubio as “positive” and said that all parties will “try to solve” ongoing problems with the ceasefire.[59]

Syrian government and SDF-affiliated internal security forces deployed to positions in Hasakah Province on February 12 and 13 as part of the SDF-Syrian government ceasefire. The January 30 agreement requires Syrian army and SDF units to withdraw from frontlines and their respective internal security units to backfill these positions.[60] SDF-affiliated Asayish units backfilled the SDF in Yaroubiyah, near the Iraq-Syria border, and in Tal Hamis and Tal Brak, north of Hasakah City, on February 12 and 13.[61] Syrian Interior Ministry forces also backfilled the Syrian army in positions near Tal Hamis and Tal Brak on February 12.[62] A northern Syria-based source reported on February 13 that “large groups” of tribal fighters arrived at the entrances to Tal Brak and Tal Hamis.[63]

Syrian Government and SDF Internal Security Deployments Since February 12, 2026



Syrian President Ahmed al Shara issued a decree that formally appointed Nouredine Issa Ahmed as the governor of Hasakah Province on February 13.^[64] Ahmed, who is the SDF's nominee for governor, began his duties on February 7.^[65] SDF spokesperson Farhad Shami criticized the government in an interview with Kurdish media on February 12 for not issuing an official decision to appoint Ahmed.^[66]

Syrian President Ahmed al Shara's tribal affairs adviser met with the Raqqa governor and multiple tribal leaders in Raqqa Province on February 12.^[67] Shara's Tribal Affairs Adviser, Jihad Issa al Sheikh, discussed opening an Office of Tribes and Clans Directorate in Raqqa Province with Raqqa Governor Abdul Rahman Salameh and Syrian Tribal Council Chairman Sheikh Abdel Moneim al Nassif.^[68] The parties also discussed improving communication between the Syrian government and local Raqqa communities.^[69] Shara appointed Sheikh in September 2025 to strengthen the Syrian government's relationship with Syrian tribes.^[70] The mobilization of Raqqa Province tribal fighters during the

government's offensive on SDF-held territory in January 2026 was instrumental to the SDF's collapse in the province.[71] The government's ability to build and maintain existing positive relationships with tribal leaders and communities in northern Syria will be one of the decisive factors in determining the success of Raqqa's full integration into the state and the government's ability to govern successfully.

Arabian Peninsula

CTP-ISW suspended its coverage of Yemen beginning on January 9.

Palestinian Territories & Lebanon

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) is continuing its efforts to counter Hezbollah smuggling amid preparations for the LAF to begin the second phase of Hezbollah's disarmament.

Lebanese media reported on February 12 that Lebanese officials have recently acknowledged the LAF's progress toward preventing Hezbollah from smuggling weapons into or within Lebanon.[72] The LAF has seized multiple weapons shipments in recent months from weapons traffickers in the Bekaa Valley's Baalbek and Hemel districts.[73] CTP-ISW cannot confirm from open sources whether this represents all or only a small portion of LAF counter-smuggling activity, however. The LAF has continued to close illegal border crossings along the Lebanon-Syria border in recent months, including in the northern Bekaa Valley on February 12.[74] The Lebanese government estimated in July 2025 that about 136 illegal crossing points exist on the Lebanon-Syria border.[75] Hezbollah has previously worked with prominent Bekaa Valley clans who control illegal border crossings in the area to smuggle weaponry into Lebanon.[76] The LAF's efforts come amid the LAF's preparations to present its plan to disarm Hezbollah between the Litani and Awali rivers to the Lebanese government on February 16.[77]

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