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**Analyst Notes:** Data Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET.

## Toplines

**A senior US official told Axios on February 22 that the United States and Iran may discuss the possibility of an interim deal during the third round of negotiations in Geneva on February 26.[1] An interim deal that only addresses Iran’s nuclear program would enable Iran to drag out the current negotiations and likely not meet the United States’ core nuclear demands.** An Iranian official told Reuters on February 22 that the “possibility of reaching an interim deal exists.”[2] The Iranian Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesperson rejected the possibility of an interim deal, however.[3] Israeli media separately reported on February 22 that the United States is pursuing an agreement with multiple “stages” in which the United States will address Iran’s nuclear program in the first stage and Iran’s ballistic missile program and support for the Axis of Resistance in later stages.[4] An interim agreement that only addresses the nuclear issue would enable Iran to drag out the current talks. ISW-CTP previously assessed that Iranian officials may be floating the possibility of talks about non-nuclear issues, including Iran’s ballistic missile program, to try to drag out the talks and thereby delay potential US military action.[5] Dragging out the talks would also give Iran more time to prepare for potential military conflict.[6]

An interim deal focused on the nuclear issue would also unlikely meet the United States’ stated demand for zero enrichment. Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani will reportedly travel to Oman on February 24 to deliver Iran’s official response to the United States’ demands through Omani mediators.[7] Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi emphasized in an interview with Face the Nation on February 22 that Iran has “every right to enjoy a peaceful nuclear program, including enrichment.”[8] An Iranian official speaking to Reuters on February 22 said that Iran would “seriously consider” sending half of its highly enriched uranium stockpile abroad, diluting the rest of its stockpile, and creating a regional enrichment consortium in exchange for the United States recognizing Iran’s “right” to enrich uranium and lifting its economic sanctions on Iran.[9] These proposed terms would not meet the stated US demand for zero enrichment. US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff confirmed to Fox News on February 21 that US President Donald Trump’s “red lines” include zero enrichment.[10]

There are some conflicting reports about the United States’ position on enrichment. Axios reported on February 22 that Witkoff and Jared Kushner told Araghchi during the second round of talks that the United States would be willing to consider an Iranian proposal that includes “token enrichment” if Iran

can prove that its proposal would block Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.[11] The *New York Times* similarly reported that the United States and Iran are considering a proposal in which Iran would have a “very limited nuclear enrichment program” that Iran could only use for medical research and treatments.[12] These reports contradict Witkoff’s statement that Trump’s red lines include zero enrichment.

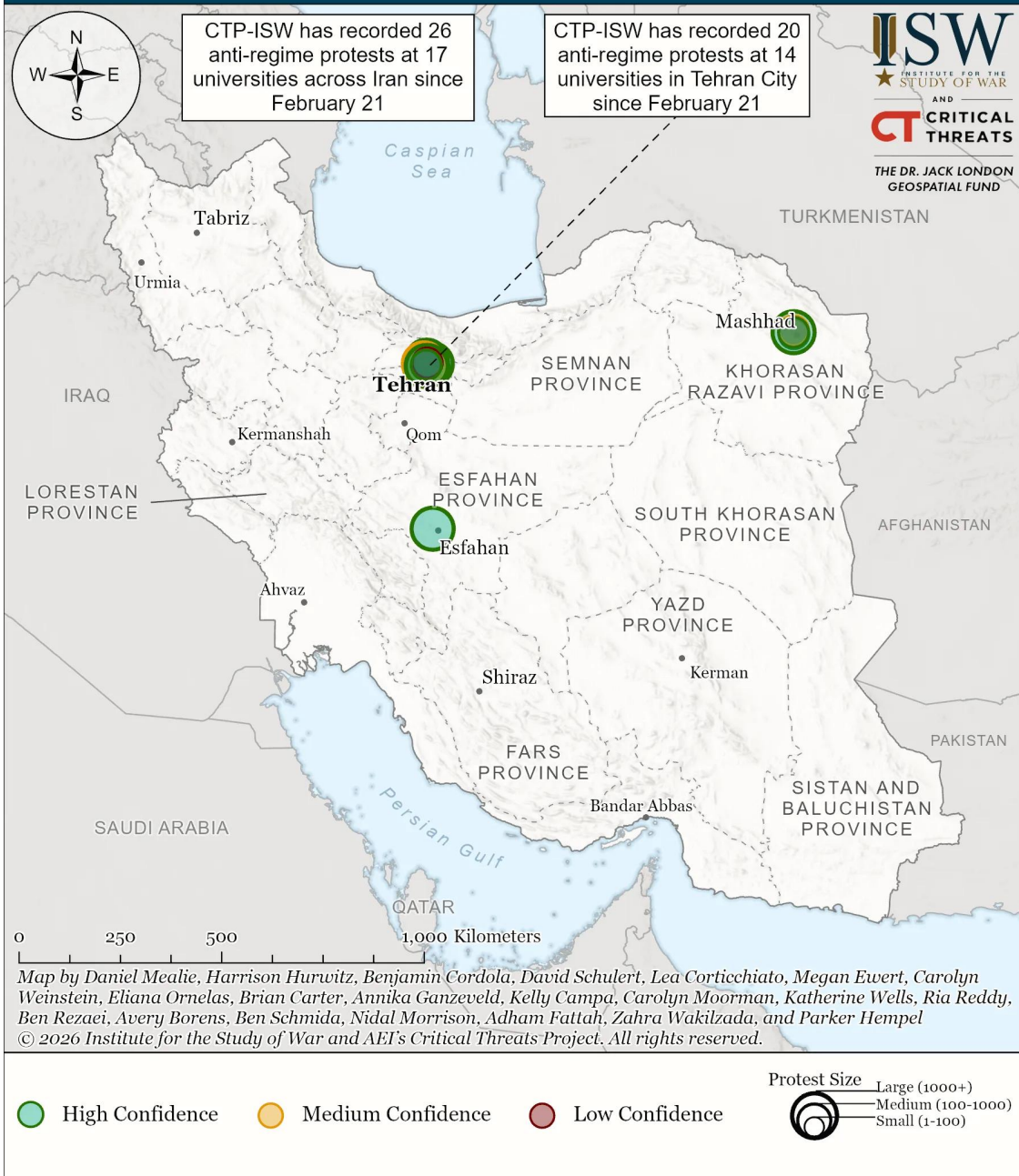
**Some Iranian regime officials may calculate that capitulating to the United States in negotiations would harm the regime more than potential military conflict.** A Middle Eastern source with knowledge of the US-Iran negotiations told Fox News on February 20 that Iranian negotiators are not authorized to cross Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei’s red line on ballistic missiles because any Iranian concessions on its missile program would be viewed internally as the equivalent of losing a war.[13] This report is consistent with Iranian officials’ previous statements that ruled out any negotiations on Iran’s ballistic missiles.[14] Iran’s ballistic missiles are an integral part of its defense and deterrence strategies. Any changes to these strategies would require a strategic rethink that would take months, if not years.[15] Former Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Commander Mohammad Ali Jafari argued in October 2025 that Iran deliberately prioritized developing its missile and drone programs over its air and ground forces to counter the superior capabilities of the United States and Israel.[16]

**US President Donald Trump is reportedly leaning toward conducting a limited strike against Iran that would aim to pressure Iran to make concessions on its nuclear program, according to sources familiar with the Trump administration’s deliberations speaking to the *New York Times* on February 22.[17]** The sources said that Trump told his advisers that he would consider a more comprehensive air campaign aimed at toppling the regime if Iran did not give into US demands after diplomacy or a limited US attack.[18] A senior adviser to Trump told Axios on February 20 that the US Department of Defense has presented Trump with several options, including a plan to kill Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and his son, Mojtaba Khamenei, who is widely considered a top contender to succeed his father.[19] The *New York Times* report is consistent with a February 19 *Wall Street Journal* report that Trump is considering a limited strike on Iran to pressure the regime to reach a nuclear agreement.[20] The Trump administration’s deliberations come amid a large number of US military deployments to the region, including the imminent arrival of the USS *Gerald R. Ford* carrier strike group.[21]

**Iranians have held at least 32 protests — the majority of which were student-led anti-regime protests — since February 21, which highlights the Iranian population’s continued anger and frustration with the regime for its refusal to address its people’s grievances.** ISW-CTP has recorded 26 anti-regime protests at 17 universities across Iran since February 21.[22] Twenty of these protests occurred at 14 universities in Tehran City.[23] ISW-CTP also recorded three instances of clashes between pro- and anti-regime students at three different universities in Tehran City on February 22 and 23.[24] BBC Persian reported on February 23 that the regime has highly securitized university campuses.[25] Iranian media also reported that universities have warned students against protesting amid the 40-day mourning ceremonies.[26] The Iranian regime almost certainly views university students as a threat to the regime, given that university students played a key role in sustaining the 2022-2023 Mahsa Amini protest movement.[27] ISW-CTP observed multiple protests at university campuses in December 2025 and January 2026, but students were not at the forefront of the recent protests.[28]

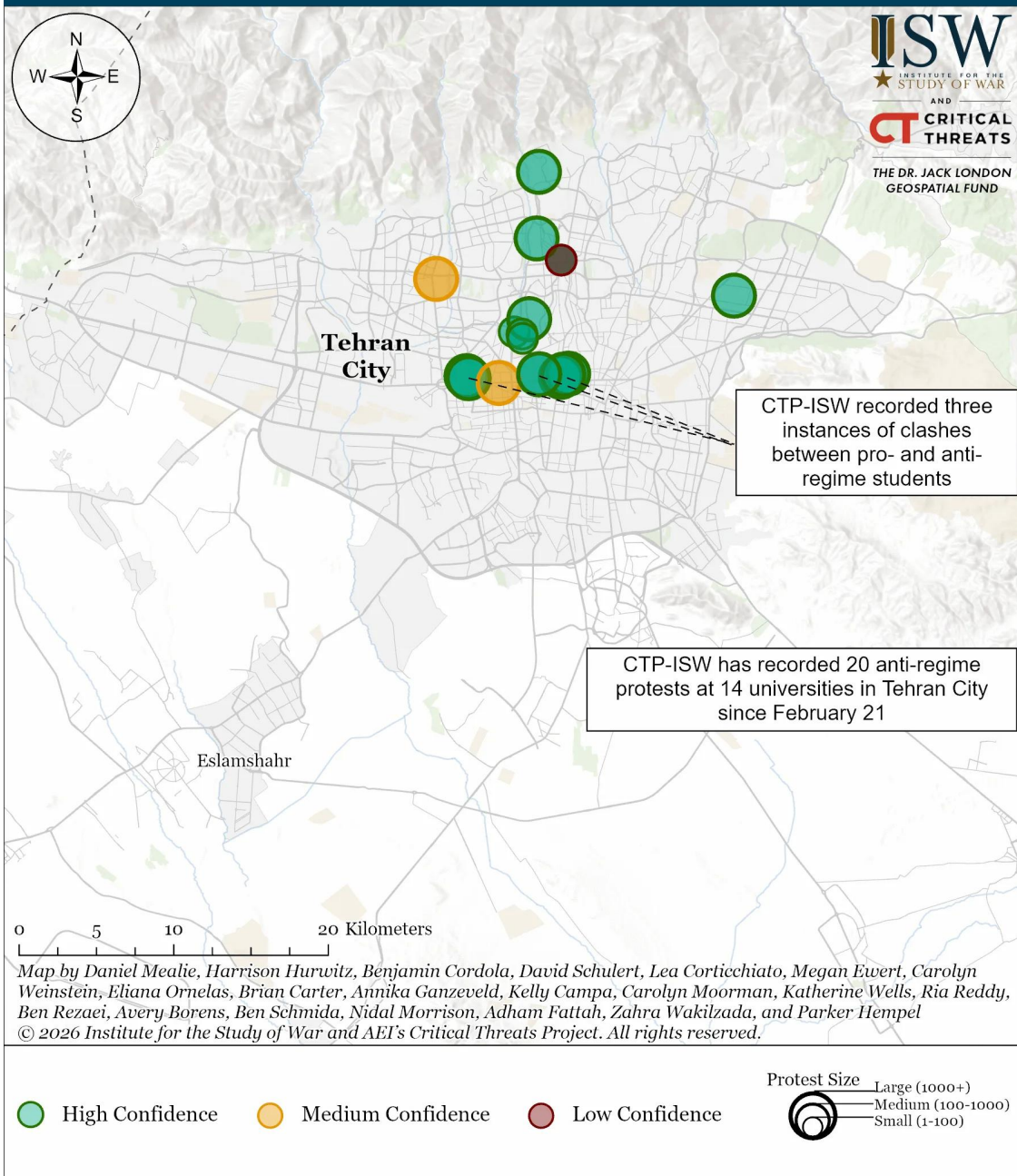
# Protests at Universities in Iran

Between 3:30 PM ET on February 20 and 3:30 PM ET on February 23, 2026



# Protests at Universities in Tehran City

From 3:30 PM ET on February 20 to 3:30 PM ET on February 23, 2026



ISW-CTP separately recorded six anti-regime protests in Fars, Esfahan, and Gilan provinces between February 20 and 23.[29] These protests took place at memorials marking the end of the 40-day mourning period for protesters killed by Iranian security forces during the December 2025 and January 2026 protests.[30] Iranian security forces shot at protesters outside a Law Enforcement Command station in Abdanan, Ilam Province.[31]

# Protests in Iran

Between 3:30 PM ET on February 20 and 3:30 PM ET on February 23, 2026



Various Western media outlets have reported that senior Iranian regime officials are competing for influence following the Israel-Iran War and ahead of potential renewed conflict with the United States and Israel. Some of the claims in these reports are consistent across Western media outlets, while others are not.

The following claims are consistent across Western media reports:

- **SNSC Secretary Ali Larijani has assumed a prominent decision-making role within the Iranian regime in recent months.** The *New York Times* reported on February 22 that Khamenei tasked Larijani with “steering the country” during the recent protests and that Larijani has “effectively been running the country” since then.[32] The report cited six senior Iranian officials, including one affiliated with Khamenei’s office, and three IRGC members. An English-language diaspora outlet, IranWire, citing a former regime official, reported on January 18 that Larijani

oversaw the regime's crackdown on the recent protests.[33] The *New York Times* report's claim about Larijani's influential role within the regime is also consistent with ISW-CTP's assessment that moderate and pragmatic hardliners, including Larijani, have driven the regime's restructuring efforts since the June 2025 Israel-Iran War.[34] Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian appointed Larijani as the secretary of Iran's highest national security and foreign policy decision-making body, the SNSC, after the war, for example.[35] The January 18 IranWire article added that Larijani is preparing to "lead the system after Khamenei's death." [36] IranWire, citing an Iranian diplomat, similarly reported in September 2025 that Larijani and former First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber are maneuvering to secure their influence in the regime after Khamenei dies.[37] Larijani has also played an important role in developing Iran's relations with Russia, the People's Republic of China, and the Axis of Resistance, in addition to engaging in diplomacy with Western officials.[38] Larijani, alongside Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi, has played a central role in the recent US-Iran talks.[39]

- **Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf reportedly played a central role in commanding Iranian forces during the Israel-Iran War and has shaped Iran's restructuring efforts after the war.** The February 22 *New York Times* report stated that Ghalibaf is part of Khamenei's trusted inner circle.[40] The report added that Khamenei designated Ghalibaf as a "de facto deputy" to command the Iranian armed forces if the United States attacks Iran. Ghalibaf previously commanded the IRGC Air Force but has held a senior civilian political post since September 2005.[41] An Iranian official claimed in October 2025 that Ghalibaf assumed a very senior military command during the June 2025 Israel-Iran War after Israel killed several senior Iranian commanders.[42] Ghalibaf has also played a significant role in the regime's restructuring efforts after the Israel-Iran War. Ghalibaf reportedly advocated for the establishment of the Defense Council and for the Defense Council to operate independently of the SNSC, for example.[43] ISW-CTP previously assessed that Ghalibaf's prominent role within the regime, similar to Larijani, is part of a broader trend of pragmatic regime elements leading the restructuring of Iran's decision-making apparatus following the 12-day war.[44]
- **President Masoud Pezeshkian has limited influence within the regime.** The *New York Times* reported on February 22 that Pezeshkian appears to have deferred his authority to Larijani and that Larijani has assumed greater influence over the negotiations between the United States and Iran.[45] The *Guardian* similarly reported on February 22 that US officials believe that Pezeshkian has become increasingly sidelined in negotiations, although the officials did not provide evidence for this assessment.[46] UK-based Amwaj Media reported on February 3 that Araghchi and Larijani have exerted greater influence in negotiations than Pezeshkian despite the president's formal authority over the Foreign Affairs Ministry and the SNSC.[47]

The following claims are inconsistent across Western media reports:

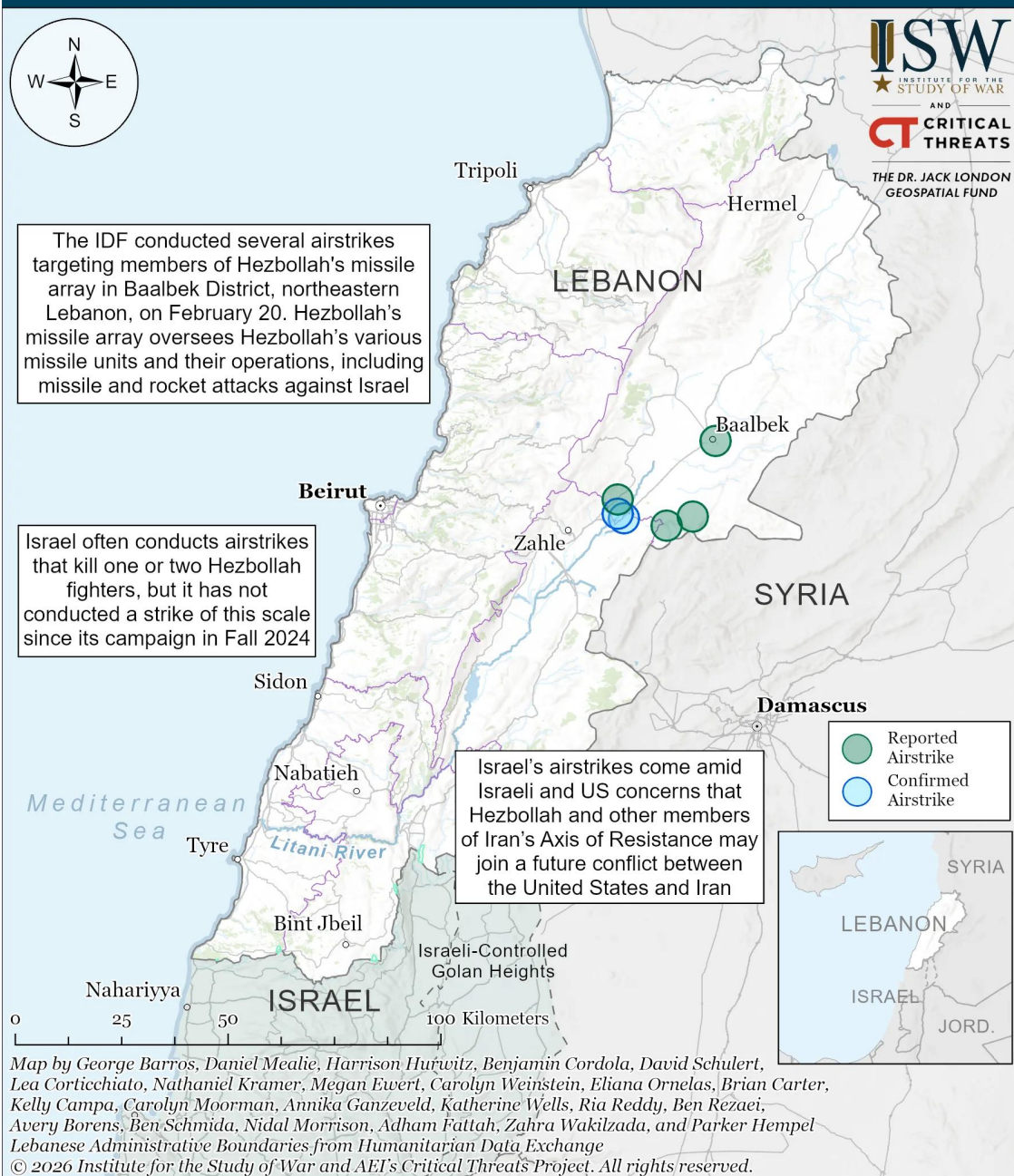
- **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has reportedly been sidelined.** The February 22 *Guardian* report claimed that Khamenei, like Pezeshkian, has been sidelined in the US-Iran negotiations.[48] Some reports after the June 2025 Israel-Iran War similarly suggested that Khamenei was sidelined during and after the war.[49] An X account attributed to Israel's Mossad claimed in October 2025 that Khamenei's Deputy Chief of Staff for Political and Security Affairs, Ali Asghar Hejazi, and IRGC Commander Major General Mohammad Pakpour had sidelined Khamenei and were "making decisions independently," for example.[50] The account did not provide evidence for this claim. The February 22 *New York Times* report identified Hejazi as a member of Khamenei's inner circle.[51] The *New York Times* report suggests that Khamenei has played a central role in preparing for a possible renewed conflict with the United States, such as by appointing successors

for key regime positions.

- **The regime is considering choosing former Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to lead Iran if the United States or Israel kills Khamenei and other senior leaders in a future conflict.** The February 22 *New York Times* report claimed that “the Iranian leadership,” presumably referring to Khamenei, selected Rouhani as a possible option to govern Iran if the United States or Israel kills Khamenei.[52] Khamenei’s reported support for Rouhani is inconsistent with reports that Rouhani has attempted to sideline Khamenei. A French outlet, citing unspecified sources, reported on February 22 that Rouhani led an effort during the recent protests to remove Khamenei.[53] The source added that Larijani blocked the effort, which further highlights Larijani’s influential role in the regime and close relationship with Khamenei. Rouhani has repeatedly criticized the regime’s approach to its relations with the West and domestic unrest.[54] Iranian media outlets have accused Rouhani of fueling division.[55] The French media report, if true, may reflect Rouhani’s efforts since the June 2025 Israel-Iran War to reassert his political influence.[56] Rouhani met with senior clerics in Qom during the war to urge them to persuade Khamenei to adjust the regime’s policy regarding the war.[57]

**The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conducted several airstrikes targeting members of Hezbollah’s missile array in the Baalbek District, northeastern Lebanon, on February 20.[58] Israel often conducts airstrikes that kill one or two Hezbollah fighters, but it has not conducted a strike of this scale since its campaign in Fall 2024.[59]** Hezbollah’s missile array oversees Hezbollah’s various missile units and their operations, including missile and rocket attacks against Israel.[60] The IDF conducted at least six strikes on three different Hezbollah headquarters in Baalbek on February 20, killing at least eight Hezbollah fighters and wounding at least 50 others.[61] Some of the fighters were reportedly commanders. The IDF stated that the fighters sought to conduct attacks into Israel and were “centers of knowledge in launching and operating long-range missiles.”[62] Israeli media, citing Israeli officials, reported on February 22 that Israel conducted the strikes in preparation for renewed conflict with Iran and to disrupt Hezbollah’s readiness and force build-up.[63] Hezbollah would almost certainly activate its missile units if it decided to join any conflict between the United States, Israel, and Iran. Hezbollah responded to the Israeli strikes, warning that it would have “no choice but to fight on” after the strikes.[64] Hezbollah Political Council Deputy Head Mahmoud Qamati said on February 22 that Hezbollah’s only option is resistance.[65]

# Israeli Airstrikes in Lebanon As of February 23, 2026 at 2:00 PM ET



**Israel's airstrikes come amid Israeli and US concerns that Hezbollah and other members of Iran's Axis of Resistance may join a future conflict between the United States and Iran.** The IDF reportedly assesses that Hezbollah would launch missiles and drones at northern and central Israel if the United States or Israel attacks Iran.[66] ISW-CTP previously assessed that Hezbollah may decide to participate in a future conflict if it perceives that the United States or Israel seeks to topple the Iranian regime and identified missile and drone attacks on civilian areas across Israel as Hezbollah's most dangerous course of action.[67] US and Western security officials told the *New York Times* on February 22 that there are "increasingly worrisome" signs that Iran may use its proxies to conduct retaliatory attacks against US targets in Europe and the Middle East if the United States attacks Iran.[68] The officials noted that there is heightened "chatter" indicating some level of attack planning and coordination among Iran's Axis of Resistance.[69]

These concerns come amid reports that Iran has taken steps to prepare and pressure Hezbollah and its

regional partners to participate in any upcoming conflict. Iranian officials, including Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for Legal and International Affairs Kazem Gharibabadi, have warned that a US or Israeli attack against Iran could cause regional escalation.[70] Israeli media reported on February 18 that Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi traveled to Beirut in January 2026 to ensure that Hezbollah would intervene in a new conflict.[71] Sources close to Hezbollah said on February 21 that Iranian IRGC officers have effectively “taken over” Hezbollah and are working to rebuild Hezbollah’s military capabilities to prepare for an upcoming conflict.[72] Israeli media also reported on February 22 that Iran and Lebanon have been working to rebuild Hezbollah’s drone stockpile at a rapid rate.[73] The IDF estimates that Hezbollah possesses a significant number of short- and long-range ballistic missiles.[74]

Israel and the United States are preparing for potential Axis of Resistance attacks. The US Embassy in Beirut evacuated dozens of non-essential personnel on February 23 due to “anticipated regional developments.”[75] An Israeli source told Saudi media that Israel may similarly evacuate some of its embassies and consulates and has asked some senior employees to return to Israel because there is a significant threat that Iranian-backed groups will attack Israeli “interests.”[76] Israel previously announced a state of alert on its northern border on February 18 over concerns of an escalation with Hezbollah and reportedly instructed the Israeli Home Front Command and Israeli rescue services to prepare for war.[77] Israeli officials and media have continued to warn that the IDF is preparing to both defend against and attack Hezbollah, noting that the IDF has forces deployed along the Israel-Lebanon border and deep inside Lebanese territory.[78] The IDF has also emphasized that any Hezbollah or Hezbollah-affiliated attack against Israel would cause a broad IDF attack on Hezbollah targets throughout Lebanon.[79]

**Lebanese officials appear divided over whether they believe Hezbollah will join a renewed conflict.** Unspecified sources told Saudi media on February 23 that Lebanese Parliament Speaker and long-time Hezbollah ally Nabih Berri does not seem “concerned” about Hezbollah becoming involved in a US-Iran conflict.[80] Berri has reportedly held intense political and security talks with Hezbollah in an attempt to prevent Hezbollah from militarily backing Iran.[81] The sources said that they understood, based on “Berri’s attitude,” that Hezbollah would not take any action in the event of a US or Israeli strike on Iran.[82] Lebanese government officials have not received any guarantees that Lebanon would not be dragged into a wider conflict, however.[83] Hezbollah previously assured Lebanese officials in June 2025 that it would not join the Israel-Iran War.[84] Hezbollah may act and respond differently than it did in the June 2025 Israel-Iran War if it assesses that US or Israeli objectives against Iran in a new conflict are different and pose an existential threat to the Iranian regime.

**A senior Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee source told al Araby al Jadeed on February 22 that four of the seven Iranian-backed Iraqi militias in the committee have decided to provide military support to Iran and “open fronts” in a potential conflict between Iran and the United States.**[85] The source added that the militias’ participation would depend on “developments on the ground, the nature of the confrontation, and its scope.”[86] The Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee includes Kataib Hezbollah, Asaib Ahl al Haq, Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba, Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada, a Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada front group, and Harakat Ansar Awfiya, according to the committee’s last statement on January 4.[87] It is unclear which militia is the seventh militia that the source referred to. The source added that some militias have started to recruit and train new fighters in preparation for a US-Iran conflict.[88] Kataib Hezbollah posted images on January 27 and 28 of individuals who have reportedly volunteered to “defend the people of Islam,” referring to Iranians.[89] Kurdish media reported on February 7 that nearly 5,000 individuals in Diyala Province have signed a pledge to serve as a “reserve force” to support the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and Iran in a potential conflict with the United States.[90] A Badr Organization member reportedly organized the

pledge.[91] The Badr Organization is notably not a member of the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee. Saudi media also reported on February 17 that Iran continues to equip Iranian-backed Iraqi militias for a potential conflict with the United States and Israel.[92] Iran has long equipped Iranian-backed Iraqi militias with a variety of missiles and drones.[93]

**Most Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have not publicly issued threats to target US forces or interests in the region if the United States or Israel attacks Iran. Shia Coordination Framework leaders may be pressuring the militias not to increase tensions with the United States amid ongoing government formation.** Kataib Sarqhat al Quds, which is commonly considered a front group for Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba or Asaib Ahl al Haq, threatened on February 22 to target US “sovereign, military, and security” sites in Iraq and the region if the United States attacks Iran.[94] ISW-CTP has not observed any other threats from Iranian-backed Iraqi militias to respond to a US-Iran conflict. Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have previously threatened to target US forces and interests in the region to try to deter US action against Iran, such as during the June 2025 Israel-Iran War. Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada threatened in June 2025 to attack the United States and its regional allies if the United States supported Israel’s air campaign against Iran.[95] The framework could be pressuring the militias to refrain from threatening the United States in order to avoid further complicating government formation. The United States has threatened to impose large-scale sanctions on Iraq, including the Iraqi financial sector, if the framework maintains its nomination of State of Law Coalition head and former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki as prime minister designate or if figures with ties to Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are included in the next Iraqi government.[96] Most of the militias in the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee are either represented within the framework or likely have strong ties to individuals in the framework.[97] Iraqi political developments have previously limited militia action. ISW-CTP previously assessed that the militias’ restraint in June 2025 was probably partially a response to concerns that attacking the United States would have negative political ramifications for the militias’ political wings in the November 2025 parliamentary elections.[98] The Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee source implied that committee members with political wings that performed well in the recent elections would not get involved in a conflict between the United States and Iran.[99]

**Iranian-backed Iraqi militias would probably participate in a potential conflict between Iran and the United States or Israel if the militias perceived that the conflict posed an existential threat to the Iranian regime’s survival.** Many Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, most notably Kataib Hezbollah, share close ideological ties to Iran.[100] The Iranian regime also provides military, financial, and political support to the militias.[101] The militias would probably intervene in a conflict that posed an existential threat to their benefactor because the collapse of the Iranian regime would weaken Iranian-backed Iraqi militias’ influence and ability to operate.

**ISW-CTP has identified several courses of action that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias may take in the event of a US or Israeli attack on Iran.**

- **The militias fire munitions targeting US forces in Iraqi Kurdistan.** Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have long attacked US forces in Iraq in response to US or Israeli actions. Iranian-backed Iraqi militias conducted multiple unclaimed attacks targeting US forces in Iraq after the United States struck Iran during the June 2025 Israel-Iran War.[102] The militias also conducted over 100 attacks targeting US forces in Iraq and Syria between October 2023 and January 2024 in response to Israel’s operations in the Gaza Strip.[103] US-led international coalition forces redeployed from federal Iraq to Iraqi Kurdistan in late 2025 as part of the first phase of the planned US withdrawal from Iraq.[104] The militias would likely be more willing to target US forces in Iraqi Kurdistan than other US interests, such as the US Embassy in Baghdad, given that a strike on the latter could hurt the militias’ economic interests by deterring economic investment in Baghdad.

- **The militias fire munitions targeting US forces in Syria:** US forces are currently withdrawing from Syria and have withdrawn from several US bases in Syria at the time of this writing.[105] [106] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias frequently targeted US forces in Syria between October 2023 and January 2024 in response to Israel’s operations in the Gaza Strip and US self-defense strikes on militia targets in Iraq.[107]
- **The militias fire munitions targeting Israel:** The militias frequently conducted drone attacks targeting Israel during the October 7 War and launched approximately 40 drones into Israeli territory during the June 2025 Israel-Iran War.[108] The militias could attack Israel if Israel participated in or supported a conflict against Iran.[109]
- **The militias’ political counterparts conduct anti-US political activity:** Iranian-backed Iraqi politicians have pressured the Iraqi federal government to take action against the United States and Israel following previous periods of US or Israeli action against Iran. Iranian-backed Iraqi actors called for Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani to adopt policies that would restrict the United States and Israel’s freedom to operate in Iraqi airspace during the June 2025 Israel-Iran War.[110] The Iraqi parliament also passed a non-binding resolution to force US forces to withdraw from Iraq following the killing of former IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Qassam Soleimani and Kataib Hezbollah head Abu Mahdi al Muhandis in January 2020.[111] The militias could pursue this course of action to avoid negative repercussions on government formation. Any resumed conflict in Iraq that could be blamed on the militias could have negative repercussions on the militias’ political efforts and the government formation process, which is crucial for determining Iranian-backed actors’ ability to dominate Iraq.

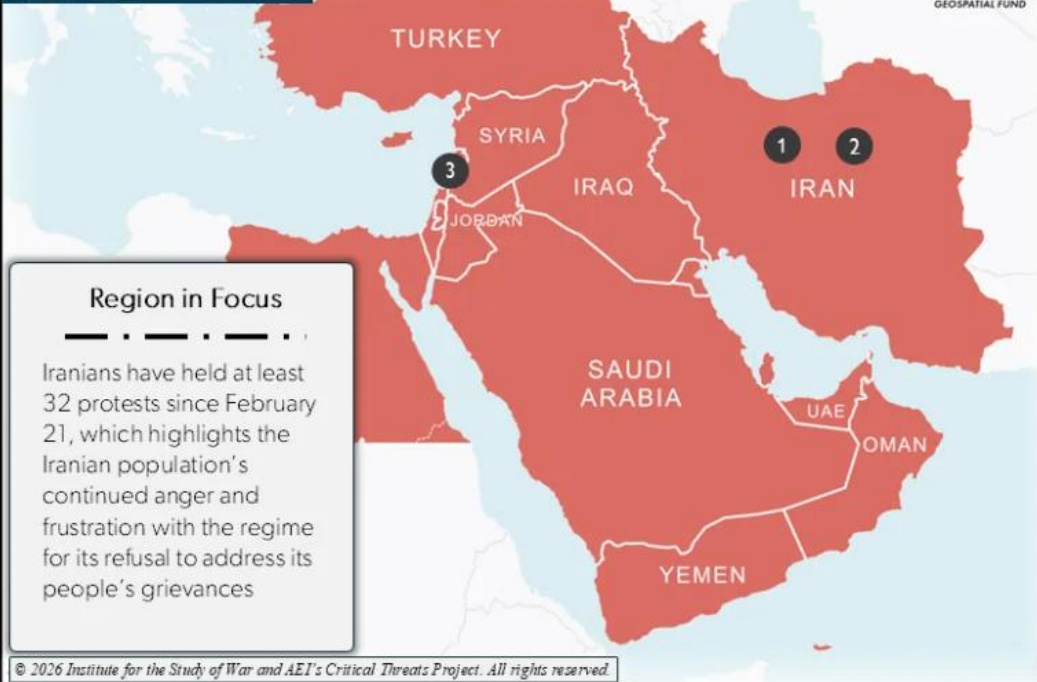
**The Houthis are reportedly preparing to potentially resume attacks against US and Israeli targets if the United States or Israel attacks Iran.** Yemeni media reported on February 23 that Oman-based Houthi spokesperson Mohammad Abdulsalam told Iranian SNSC Secretary Ali Larijani during a meeting in Oman on February 10 that the Houthis are ready to participate in any conflict targeting Iran.[112] Senior Houthi officials, including Defense Minister Mohammad al Atifi and acting Prime Minister Mohammad Muftah, warned on February 17 that the Houthis may target US interests or Israel if the United States or Israel strikes Iran and threatened that the Houthis would attack any foreign or domestic actors that attack Houthi territory.[113] Israeli and Hezbollah-affiliated media reported that the Houthis have conducted military exercises and repositioned their weapons, including missiles and drones, in preparation to launch offensive attacks against US interests and Israel.[114]

The Houthis have also taken steps to try to mitigate the impact of potential US or Israeli strikes on Houthi positions in Yemen. Muftah chaired a Houthi Emergency Committee meeting on February 21 to discuss increasing preparedness and enhancing the group’s emergency response capabilities to address emergencies “in the coming period.”[115] The committee approved several measures to ensure effective responses, including requiring medical staff to sign pledges to remain on call and report to medical facilities when summoned and designating government facilities and schools as civilian bomb shelters.[116] Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese media reported on February 23 that the Houthis have acquired unspecified shoulder-mounted surface-to-air missile systems to improve the group’s low-altitude air defense capabilities.[117]

The Houthis’ efforts to increase their preparedness and military capabilities underscore the enduring security threat that the Houthis pose to the United States and its allies. The Houthis will continue to pose a threat to international shipping and US interests and allies in the region so long as the group retains the ability and willingness to attack these targets.[118]

## Iran Update

February 23, 2026



- 1 Tehran, Iran.** A senior US official told Axios on February 22 that the United States and Iran may discuss the possibility of an interim deal during the third round of negotiations in Geneva on February 26. An interim deal that only addresses Iran's nuclear program would enable Iran to drag out the current negotiations and likely not meet the United States' core nuclear demands.
- 2 Tehran, Iran.** US President Donald Trump is reportedly leaning toward conducting a limited strike against Iran that would aim to pressure Iran to make concessions on its nuclear program, according to sources familiar with the Trump administration's deliberations speaking to the *New York Times* on February 22.
- 3 Baalbek, Lebanon.** The IDF conducted several airstrikes targeting members of Hezbollah's missile array in Baalbek District, northeastern Lebanon, on February 20. Israel often conducts airstrikes that kill one or two Hezbollah fighters, but it has not conducted a strike of this scale since its campaign in Fall 2024. Israel's airstrikes come amid Israeli and US concerns that Hezbollah and other members of Iran's Axis of Resistance may join a future conflict between the United States and Iran.

## Key Takeaways

- 1. US-Iran Negotiations:** A senior US official told Axios on February 22 that the United States and Iran may discuss the possibility of an interim deal during the third round of negotiations in Geneva on February 26. An interim deal that only addresses Iran's nuclear program would enable Iran to drag out the current negotiations and likely not meet the United States' core nuclear demands. Some Iranian regime officials may calculate that capitulating to the United States in negotiations would harm the regime more than potential military conflict.
- 2. Potential US Military Action Against Iran:** US President Donald Trump is reportedly leaning toward conducting a limited strike against Iran that would aim to pressure Iran to make concessions on its nuclear program, according to sources familiar with the Trump administration's deliberations speaking to the *New York Times* on February 22.

3. **Anti-Regime Protests in Iran:** Iranians have held at least 32 protests — the majority of which were student-led anti-regime protests — since February 21, which highlights the Iranian population’s continued anger and frustration with the regime for its refusal to address its people’s grievances.
4. **Western Media Reports About Internal Iranian Regime Divisions:** Various Western media outlets have reported that senior Iranian regime officials are competing for influence following the Israel-Iran War and ahead of potential renewed conflict with the United States and Israel. Some of the claims in these reports are consistent across Western media outlets, while others are not.
5. **Hezbollah’s Participation in a Future US-Israel-Iran Conflict:** The IDF conducted several airstrikes targeting members of Hezbollah’s missile array in Baalbek District, northeastern Lebanon, on February 20. Israel often conducts airstrikes that kill one or two Hezbollah fighters, but it has not conducted a strike of this scale since its campaign in Fall 2024. Israel’s airstrikes come amid Israeli and US concerns that Hezbollah and other members of Iran’s Axis of Resistance may join a future conflict between the United States and Iran.
6. **Iraqi Militias’ Participation in a Future US-Israel-Iran Conflict:** A senior Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee source told al Araby al Jadeed on February 22 that four of the seven Iranian-backed Iraqi militias in the committee have decided to provide military support to Iran and “open fronts” in a potential conflict between Iran and the United States. Most Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have not publicly issued threats to target US forces or interests in the region if the United States or Israel attacks Iran. Shia Coordination Framework leaders may be pressuring the militias not to increase tensions with the United States amid ongoing government formation. Iranian-backed Iraqi militias would probably participate in a potential conflict between Iran and the United States or Israel if the militias perceived that the conflict posed an existential threat to the Iranian regime’s survival.
7. **The Houthis’ Participation in a Future US-Israel-Iran Conflict:** The Houthis are reportedly preparing to potentially resume attacks against US and Israeli targets if the United States or Israel attacks Iran. The Houthis have also taken steps to try to mitigate the impact of potential US or Israeli strikes on Houthi positions in Yemen.

## Iran

*See topline section.*

## Iraq

*See topline section.*

## Syria

*Nothing significant to report.*

## Arabian Peninsula

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

# Palestinian Territories & Lebanon

See topline section.

POWERED BY:  BABEL STREET

## Endnotes

[1] <https://www.axios.com/2026/02/22/iran-us-talks-friday-nuclear-deal>

[2]

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-us-diverge-views-sanctions-relief-senior-iranian-official-reuters-2026-02-22/>

[3] <https://en.mehrnews dot com/news/242062/iran-rules-out-speculations-about-temporary-deal-with-US>

[4] [https://www.timesofisrael dot com/liveblog\\_entry/security-cabinet-told-that-trump-is-pushing-for-iran-deal-in-stages-report/](https://www.timesofisrael dot com/liveblog_entry/security-cabinet-told-that-trump-is-pushing-for-iran-deal-in-stages-report/)

[5] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-11-2026>

[6] <https://understandingwar.org/research/middle-east/iran-update-february-20-2026/>

[7] <https://wanaen dot com/omani-sources-claim-larijani-to-arrive-in-muscat-on-tuesday/>

[8]

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/iranian-foreign-minister-abbas-araghchi-nuclear-enrichment-us-geneva/>

[9]

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-us-diverge-views-sanctions-relief-senior-iranian-official-reuters-2026-02-22/>

[10] <https://x.com/mdubowitz/status/2025581454403449233>

[11] <https://www.axios.com/2026/02/22/iran-us-talks-friday-nuclear-deal>

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**Kelly Campa, Katherine Wells, Ben Rezaei, Adham Fattah, Parker Hempel, Avery Borens,  
Nidal Morrison, Ria Reddy, Brian Carter**

**Analyst Notes:** Data Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

## Toplines

**Iran is continuing to prepare for a potential military conflict with the United States.** Several unspecified Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Forces units held an exercise on February 24 at the Madinah ol Munawarah Operational Base in Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province, and on unspecified Persian Gulf islands.[1] Madinah ol Munawarah is located near the coast of the Strait of Hormuz. The unspecified islands are presumably the Nazeat Islands, which lie just west of the strait and host IRGC facilities.[2] Several senior Iranian military officials have threatened in recent weeks to attack vessels in the Strait of Hormuz in retaliation for a US attack on Iran.[3] The IRGC could use the Nazeat Islands to stage operations. AFGS-affiliated media stated that the exercise focused on “shore-to-sea fire” to target enemies that try to approach the coastline.[4] IRGC Ground Forces units practiced using roaming drones to identify targets and Shahed attack drones to hit the targets.[5] Iranian military officials stated that the forces used new missile systems and simulated “offensive” and “defensive” electronic warfare (EW) scenarios.[6] A Turkish outlet reported on February 21 that the IRGC Navy launched a naval version of its “Seyed-3” surface-to-air missile during its recent “Smart Control of the Strait of Hormuz” exercise on February 16.[7] The missile is designed to provide a “regional air defense umbrella” for the IRGC Navy’s most advanced vessels, like the Shahid Soleimani class.[8]

Iranian military officials have continued to visit air defense bases to inspect their defensive capabilities. Khatam ol Anbiya Air Defense Headquarters Commander Brigadier General Alireza Elhami visited the Khatam ol Anbiya Northern Air Defense Zone Base in Tehran on February 24, which is his fourth visit to an air defense base in two weeks.[9]

# Iranian Military Preparations

February 24, 2026 at 2:00 PM ET



IRGC Ground Forces Base  
in Bandar Abbas



Northern Khatam ol Anbiya  
Air Defense Zone Base

**Iran is seeking support from US adversaries Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) to prepare for war against the United States.** The *Financial Times*, citing leaked Russian documents and several people familiar with the deal, reported on February 22 that Iran signed an arms deal with Russia in December 2025 to acquire 500 Verba shoulder-fired Man-Portable Air-Defense Systems (MANPADS) with 2,500 9M336 infrared homing missiles for targeting drones and an unspecified number of cruise missiles and low-flying aircraft.[10] Iran reportedly requested these systems from Russia “days after” the June 2025 Israel-Iran War.[11] Reuters separately reported on February 24 that Iran is also “close” to buying CM-302 anti-ship cruise missiles from the PRC, according to six people with knowledge of the negotiations.[12] The six people added that Iran is also in discussions with the PRC to acquire MANPADS, anti-ballistic weapons, and anti-satellite weapons.”[13] These negotiations began two years ago but “accelerated sharply” after the Israeli-Iran War, according to these sources.[14] The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs told Reuters that it was not aware of these potential arms deals with Iran, and

the Chinese defense ministry did not respond to comment.[15] It remains unclear whether the PRC would currently sell weapons to Iran and explicitly violate the reimposed UN arms embargo on Iran.[16]

**Iran is attempting to address its air defense vulnerabilities by requesting alternative air defense components from Russia and the PRC, but the Verba cannot replace S-300s or aircraft within Iran's integrated air defense network.** An integrated air defense system is a system of systems that works together to limit the threats posed by aerial targets. An IADS commonly uses multiple different systems to fill different roles. The Verba MANPADS or any other MANPADS cannot replace the S-300s Israel destroyed in April and October 2024.[17] Russia has since appeared unwilling to provide Iran with its more advanced S-400 systems, despite Iranian requests.[18] Russia presumably needs them in its war against Ukraine. Iran's domestically produced ground air defense system, the Bavar 373, did not intercept US and Israeli targets and defend Iran during the Israel-Iran War.[19] Iran's ongoing push to acquire air defense components abroad suggests that Iran recognizes that its indigenous air defense systems are not effective against US and Israeli attacks.

**Iran may be learning lessons from Russia's experience in Ukraine and creating temporary and extremely suboptimal solutions to address its air defense vulnerabilities.** Russia's Verba MANPADs can only launch 9M336 infrared homing missiles to a maximum altitude of 4,500 meters.[20] Russia has attached loaded Verba MANPADs, along with cameras and radios, on top of Iranian-designed, Russian-produced Shahed drones since at least January 2026.[21] Russia's adaptation increases the altitude at which the missile can engage targets and gives the Shahed drone the capacity to target adversary aircraft attempting to intercept it.[22] Russia may have shared this air defense adaptation with Iran. Iran operates several Shahed drones in operation, including the long-range Shahed 149 Gaza with a reported maximum altitude of around 10,500 meters and a payload capacity of 500 kilograms.[23] Russia uses these adapted Shaheds to work alongside and not as a replacement for its ground-based S-300 and S-400 systems in its integrated air defense system, however.[24]

**The Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) is likely attempting to exploit the conditions created by the Syrian government's recent offensive to recruit fighters and expand ISIS networks in Syria.** The Islamic State's (IS) spokesperson Abu Hudhayfa al Ansari declared on February 21 that IS has begun a "new chapter of resistance" in Syria targeting the Syrian government.[25] Abu Hudhayfa made these remarks in his first recorded statement in two years.[26] Abu Hudhayfa reiterated IS's long-standing opposition to Syrian President Ahmed al Shara and his transitional government on the basis that it is an "apostate" government.[27] IS has vehemently opposed Shara since he came to power in December 2024, due in part to his cooperation with the West and relatively moderate stances.[28] Abu Hudhayfa said that there is "no obligation greater than fighting" the Syrian government, which ISIS or IS-aligned groups in Syria will likely interpret as a call to action.[29] Abu Hudhayfa's call for a new campaign targeting the government likely immediately inspired a series of ISIS attacks targeting Syrian government forces in Raqqa and Deir ez Zor provinces (described in more detail below).

ISIS likely views the recent security conditions created by the Syrian government's offensive as an opportunity to recruit and rebuild its networks in Syria. The Syrian government's January 2026 offensive in northern and eastern Syria created chaotic conditions on the ground in northern and eastern Syria that created immediate opportunities for ISIS to exploit.[30] The rapid offensive and quick collapse of the SDF prevented the orderly handover of SDF positions in the Euphrates River Valley, for example.[31] The Syrian army and Interior Ministry commanders deploying to these areas in Deir ez Zor Province are therefore not familiar with the current tactical situation, which includes the areas they will occupy, the way that the enemy is arrayed, and the disposition of the unit currently occupying the area.[32] ISIS remains a viable insurgency in this area despite setbacks in recent years and has already conducted several attacks targeting government forces deployed to new positions.[33]

The chaotic closure of al Hol internally displaced persons (IDP) camp also presents ISIS and other Salafi-jihadi groups with another opportunity to increase recruitment among escapees and residents who may be released in the future. The lack of any coordination over the camp's handover enabled between 15,000 and 20,000 people to leave al Hol without any organized system to determine where they went, according to a recent US intelligence estimate.[34] Many of these residents have ties to ISIS, and many reportedly escaped from the camp with support from ISIS-affiliated networks.[35] The Syrian government officially closed al Hol camp on February 23 after transferring the remaining few remaining families to a vacant camp in Aleppo Province.[36] CTP-ISW assessed on February 16 that ISIS and other Salafi-jihadi groups will likely capitalize on al Hol's closure to attempt to recruit escapees or released and reintegrated al Hol residents.[37]

Abu Hudhayfa also called upon hardline jihadists to defect from the Syrian government's ranks and join ISIS, which is part of an IS effort to leverage discontent with the Syrian transitional government among Sunni hardliners to undermine the government and expand recruitment.[38] Government fighters sympathetic to IS, including foreign fighters, have been widely accused of facilitating the escape of IS wives and children from al Hol over the past few weeks.[39] These fighters may be susceptible to ISIS recruitment.

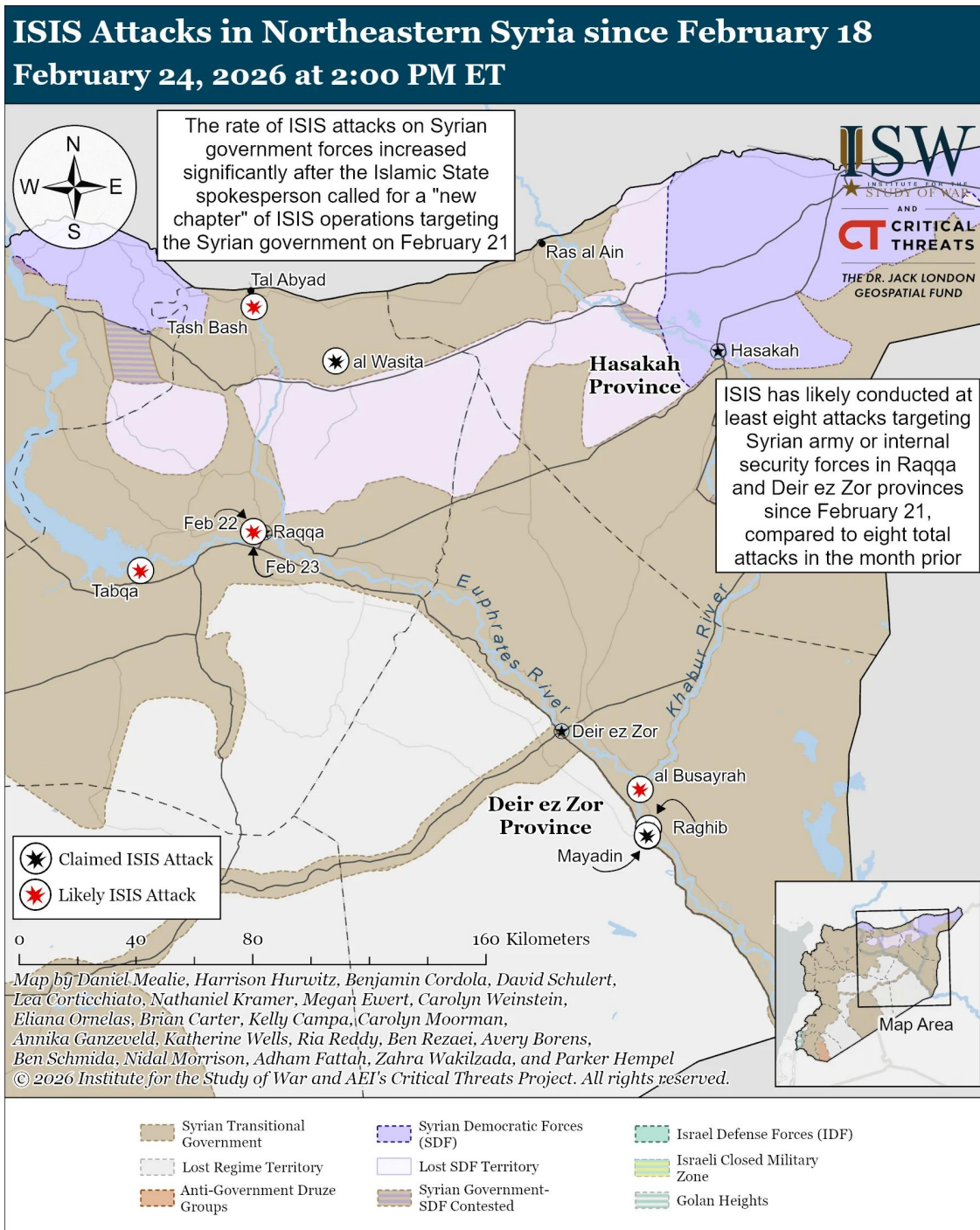
It is unclear at this time if Abu Hudhayfa's declaration of a "new chapter" against the Syrian transitional government indicates a practical shift in IS's strategy in Syria. IS has praised and encouraged attacks targeting the Syrian government, particularly since Syria joined the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS in November 2025, and ISIS conducted at least three failed assassination attempts against Shara and other senior Syrian government officials in 2025.[40] Abu Hudhayfa's explicit call for attacks against the government as part of a "new chapter" of resistance in Syria suggests that ISIS may seek to adopt a new strategy to achieve its aims in Syria. The United Nations and Syrian security forces have contended in recent weeks that ISIS cells have moved out of the Central Syrian Desert and established a stronger presence in major Syrian cities, which is a departure from ISIS's prior operational approach, under which it sought to infiltrate populated areas from rural support zones.[41]

**Abu Hudhayfa's call for a new ISIS campaign against the Syrian government likely encouraged a series of ISIS attacks targeting Syrian government forces in Raqqa and Deir ez Zor provinces.** The rate of ISIS attacks on Syrian government forces increased significantly in the days immediately following the release of Abu Hudhayfa's statement on February 21. ISIS fighters or likely ISIS fighters conducted eight attacks targeting Syrian government targets, including army and internal security forces positions, between February 21 and 24.[42] ISIS or likely ISIS fighters had conducted about only about eight attacks in the month prior to February 21, suggesting that the sudden increase in the rate of attacks is tied to Abu Hudayfa's announcement of "a new chapter of resistance" against the Syrian transitional government.[43]

ISIS fighters targeted static Syrian army or internal security positions in both rural and urban areas. ISIS fighters launched several attacks targeting positions in areas where ISIS has maintained a strong insurgent presence in recent years, such as along the eastern bank of the Euphrates River in Deir ez Zor and in the Tal Abyad countryside in northern Raqqa.[44] ISIS cells attacked newly established internal security positions in Tabqa and Raqqa City on February 21, 22, and 23.[45] The same cell attacked the same former Asayish checkpoint in western Raqqa City twice and attempted to detonate a suicide vest during one of the attempts.[46]

These fighters are likely attempting to operationalize Abu Hudhayfa's announcement of a "new chapter" of ISIS targeting the Syrian government. It is unclear at this time whether cells are coordinating these attacks and what tactical and operational objectives ISIS is attempting to pursue as part of any new

campaign against the Syrian government. ISIS attacks in the wake of Abu Hudhayfa's statement have killed at least nine government personnel since February 21.[47]



**ISIS and ISIS-inspired fighters will likely attempt to conduct further attacks against Syrian government targets in the coming days and weeks.** Reuters reported that IS-affiliated social media accounts and Telegram channels called on February 22 for intensified attacks against the government using motorcycles and firearms.[48] Abu Hudhayfa or IS supporters' calls to attack the government may not only motivate ISIS fighters or sleeper cells but also other ISIS-inspired or Salafi-jihadi groups operating in Syria. Saraya Ansar al Sunnah, for example, is a Salafi-jihadi group ideologically aligned with ISIS that opposes the Syrian transitional government and has conducted several attacks targeting Syrian minorities in 2025.[49] Saraya Ansar al Sunnah has, along with ISIS, attempted to assassinate Syrian President Ahmed al Shara.[50]

**The Syrian government has the tools to effectively respond to a possible ISIS attack campaign, but will face temporary constraints caused by the nature of the handover of northern and eastern Syria.** Government forces have responded to the recent series of ISIS attacks with a series of reactive measures, including launching immediate operations to arrest and dismantle the responsible cells in both Tabqa and Raqqa City.[51] The government also banned the use of motorcycles in the central areas of Tabqa and Raqqa cities on February 23 after ISIS attacks in both cities.[52] A northern Syria-based source observed that the SDF's previous ban on motorcycles in Raqqa significantly curbed ISIS attacks in the city.[53] The motorcycle ban illustrates how the Syrian government is re-learning lessons that the SDF previously learned.[54] The Syrian government will need to familiarize itself with the tactical situation that the SDF was intimately familiar with, given its decade of experience fighting ISIS in the area, to successfully operate in the newly-seized ISIS support zones and other regions of northern Syria. The rapid increase of ISIS attacks on government forces comes at a time when Syrian government forces are still consolidating control over newly-seized areas, however. Syrian government forces may have limited bandwidth in these areas as a result.

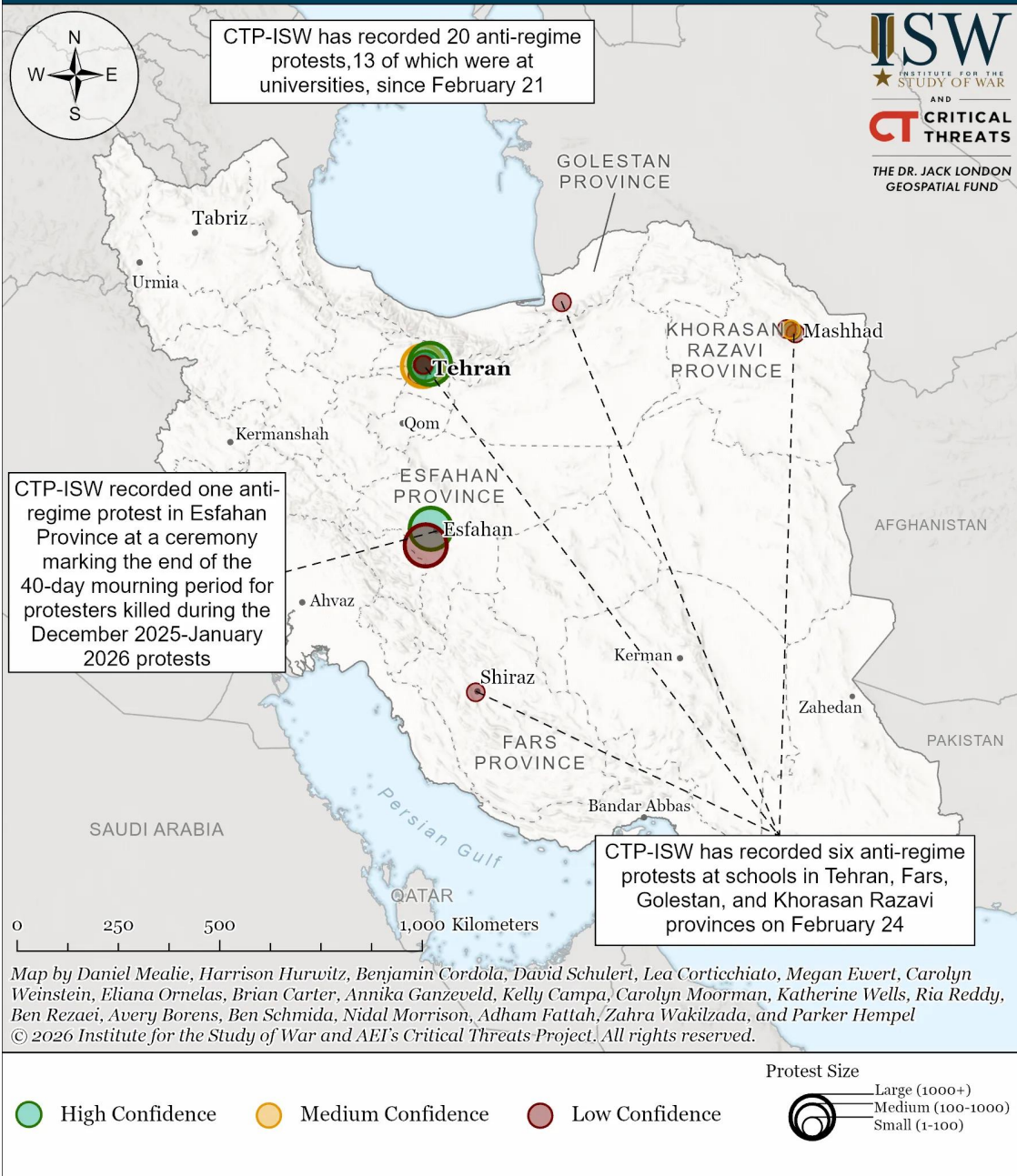
**The United States is continuing to withdraw US forces from bases in northeastern Syria.** Three Syrian security sources told Reuters on February 23 that US forces have begun to withdraw from the US Northern Landing Zone base in Qasrak, Hasakah Province.[55] A Syrian military source briefed on US plans said that the US withdrawal from Qasrak would take around one month.[56] Multiple Syrian sources circulated footage on February 23 showing a US military convoy, reportedly consisting of over 100 trucks, leaving Qasrak and heading toward Iraqi Kurdistan.[57] Syrian government forces have backfilled US positions at al Tanf Garrison and al Shaddadi base after US forces withdrew on February 11 and February 15, respectively.[58]

**Iranian students have spearheaded the renewed protest activity in universities and high schools in Iran, which highlights the Iranian youth's deep frustration and disillusionment with the regime.** Iranians have held at least 20 protests since February 23, 13 of which were at universities across Iran.[59] CTP-ISW recorded three instances of clashes between pro- and anti-regime students at three different universities in Tehran.[60] The regime deployed drones at at least one university in Esfahan Province, presumably to monitor the campus. Senior Iranian officials have also threatened student protesters with disciplinary and judicial actions in an effort to try to deter protests.[61] The Iranian regime previously poisoned primary schoolgirls during the Mahsa Amini Movement in 2022 in order to try to intimidate the youth and broader Iranian population and suppress protests.[62]

Anti-regime student protests have expanded beyond universities to elementary and secondary schools on February 24, which signals an increase in youth participation across different age groups. CTP-ISW has recorded six small protests at schools across four different provinces.[63] The expansion of protests to include younger students represents the growing threat that the regime perceives the Iranian youth poses to the regime's stability. The youth have grown increasingly disillusioned with the regime in recent years. Iranian youth, and specifically university students, have led anti-regime protest movements in recent years.[64] These protest movements have openly criticized the regime's core principles, including Velayat-e Faqih, and in some cases called for the regime's collapse.[65] Senior Iranian regime officials, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, have previously called for the regime to indoctrinate Iranian youth in order to resolve the challenges the regime faces from Iranian youth.[66]

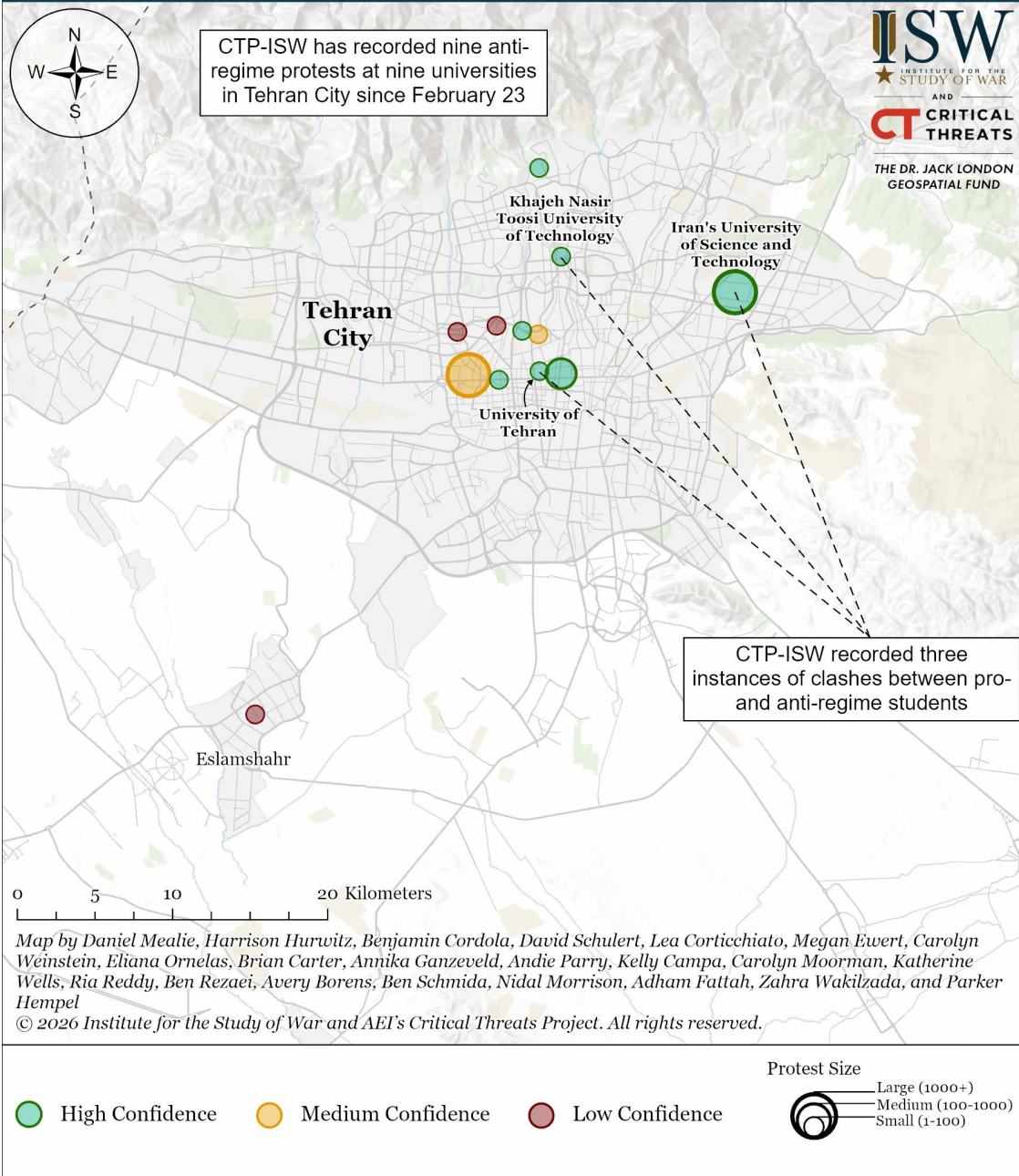
# Protests in Iran

From 3:30 PM ET on February 23 to 3:30 PM ET on February 24, 2026



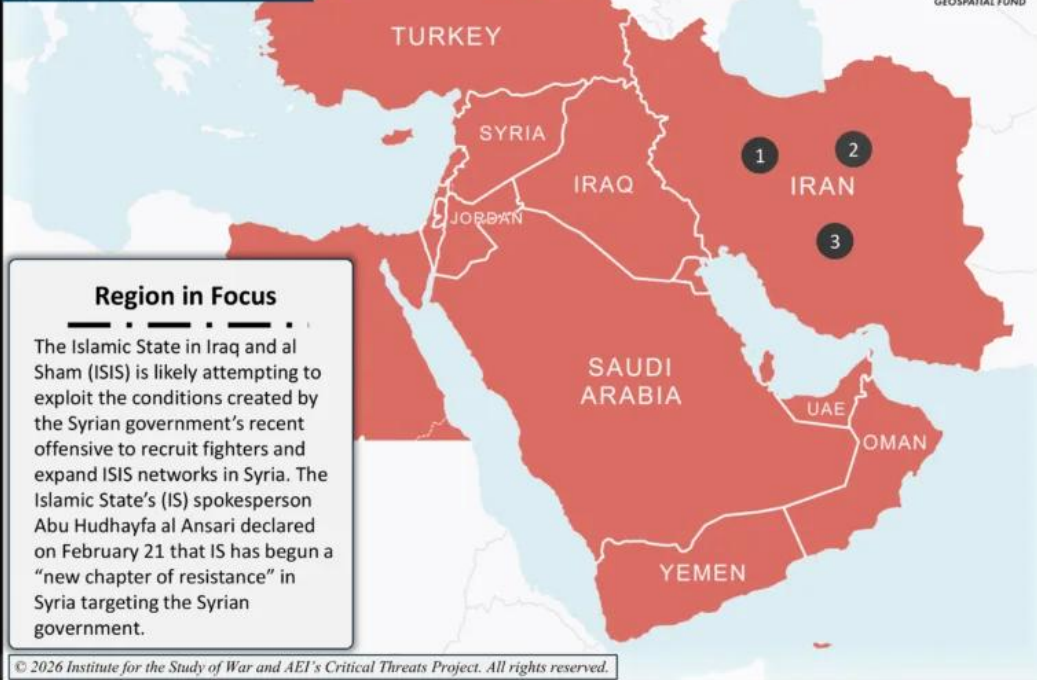
# Protests in Tehran Province

From 3:30 PM ET on February 23 to 3:30 PM ET on February 24, 2026



## Iran Update

February 24, 2026



- 1 IRAN.** Iran is seeking support from US adversaries Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) to prepare for war against the United States. Iran is attempting to address its air defense vulnerabilities by requesting alternative air defense components from Russia and the PRC, but these components cannot replace S-300s or aircraft within Iran's integrated air defense network.
- 2 IRAN.** Iran is continuing to prepare for a potential military conflict with the United States. Several unspecified Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Ground Forces units held an exercise on February 24 at the Madinah ol Munawarah Operational Base near the Strait of Hormuz in Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province, and on unspecified Persian Gulf islands, presumably the Nazeat Islands. The IRGC could use the Nazeat Islands to stage operations.
- 3 IRAN.** Iranian students have spearheaded the renewed protest activity in universities and high schools in Iran, which highlights the Iranian youth's deep frustration and disillusionment with the regime. Anti-regime student protests have expanded beyond universities to elementary and secondary schools, which represents the growing threat that the regime perceives the Iranian youth pose to the regime's stability.

## Key Takeaways

- 1. Iranian Preparations for a Potential Conflict:** Iran is continuing to prepare for a potential military conflict with the United States. Several unspecified Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Ground Forces units held an exercise on February 24 at the Madinah ol Munawarah Operational Base near the Strait of Hormuz in Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province, and on unspecified Persian Gulf islands, presumably the Nazeat Islands. The IRGC could use the Nazeat Islands to stage operations.
- 2. Iranian Cooperation with US Adversaries:** Iran is seeking support from US adversaries Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) to prepare for war against the United States. Iran is attempting to address its air defense vulnerabilities by requesting alternative air defense components from Russia and the PRC, but these components cannot replace S-300s or aircraft

within Iran's integrated air defense network.

3. **ISIS Activity in Syria:** The Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) is likely attempting to exploit the conditions created by the Syrian government's recent offensive to recruit fighters and expand ISIS networks in Syria. The Islamic State's (IS) spokesperson Abu Hudhayfa al Ansari declared on February 21 that IS has begun a "new chapter of resistance" in Syria targeting the Syrian government. Abu Hudhayfa's call for a new ISIS campaign likely encouraged a series of ISIS attacks targeting Syrian government forces in Raqqa and Deir ez Zor provinces. ISIS and ISIS-inspired fighters will likely attempt to conduct further attacks against Syrian government targets in the coming days and weeks.
4. **Student Protests in Iran:** Iranian students have spearheaded the renewed protest activity in universities and high schools in Iran, which highlights the Iranian youth's deep frustration and disillusionment with the regime. Anti-regime student protests have expanded beyond universities to elementary and secondary schools, which represents the growing threat that the regime perceives the Iranian youth pose to the regime's stability.

## Iran

**Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Commander Major General Mohammad Pakpour appointed Brigadier General Mohammad Hosseini as commander of the Saber Special Forces Brigade on February 24.[67] The Saber Special Forces Brigade has previously played a role in protest suppression and expeditionary operations in Syria.[68]** Hosseini previously commanded the 110th Salman Farsi Independent Special Forces Brigade in Sistan and Baluchistan Province from October 2023 to February 2026, which indicates that he likely has experience with counter-insurgency operations in southeastern Iran.[69] Pakpour appointed Hosseini based on IRGC Ground Forces Commander Brigadier General Mohammad Karami's recommendation.[70] Karami has held prior senior military positions in Sistan and Baluchistan, including IRGC Ground Forces Quds Operational Base commander from February 2020 to January 2023 and Special Representative of the President for Executive Affairs from July 2023 to October 2024, which suggests that Hosseini may have operated alongside, or under, Karami during his time in southeastern Iran.[71] Hosseini may have been selected, at least partly, due to his experience with internal security and counter-insurgency operations.

**The Mobarizoun Popular Front (MPF), a Baloch anti-regime militant coalition, claimed on February 24 that a regime-affiliated group supported by the IRGC killed six MPF members in Saravan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province, on February 23.[72]** The MPF stated that the group, operating under the name "Eastern Baluchistan Citizens' Rights," attacked MPF fighters near the Saravan border area in eastern Sistan and Baluchistan Province.[73] The MPF accused the group of previously conducting assassinations, ambushes, and arrests of Baloch militants and transferring detainees to Iranian security forces.[74] The MPF has conducted several attacks against Iranian security forces since the group formed in early December 2025.

**The United States has continued to target Iran's illicit oil exports as part of its maximum pressure campaign to drive Iranian oil exports to zero.** The United States seized a US-sanctioned oil tanker, *Bertha*, in the Indian Ocean on February 24 as the tanker was transporting oil.[75] The seizure comes amid Iran's continued efforts to evade US sanctions and export oil. Oil data tracker Kpler reported on February 24 that Iran's crude oil loadings per day have almost tripled since February 15.[76] Crude oil loadings have increased to 2.3 million barrels a day in February, compared to 1.51 million barrels in January.[77]

# Iraq

**The Shia Coordination Framework continues to debate State of Law Coalition leader and former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki's selection as prime minister-designate amid US and internal framework opposition.** Maliki told Agence France-Presse on February 23 that he will continue to seek the premiership despite US pressure on the Iraqi federal government to withdraw his candidacy.[78] US President Donald Trump warned on January 27 that the United States will “no longer help Iraq” if Maliki becomes prime minister.[79] The framework has recently been divided over whether to rescind Maliki's nomination.[80] Some framework members met on February 23 but did not reach a final decision on Maliki's nomination.[81] Unidentified framework officials told Iraqi media on February 24 that National State Forces Alliance leader Ammar al Hakim and Asaib Ahl al Haq leader Qais al Khazali did not attend the February 23 meeting.[82] Hakim and Khazali have led intra-framework opposition to Maliki since his nomination in January 2026.[83]

**Some members of the framework are reportedly considering forming a “four-way alliance,” which could delay or block Maliki from becoming prime minister.**[84] Iraqi media, citing unspecified leaks, reported on February 23 that Prime Minister and Reconstruction and Development Coalition leader Mohammad al Sudani, Badr Organization leader Hadi al Ameri, Khazali, and Hakim discussed forming a “four-way alliance” consisting of 120 parliamentarians to reject Maliki's nomination.[85] Ameri previously supported Maliki's nomination.[86] Only 109 parliamentarians are required to block a presidential election. 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.[87]

Sudani's participation in this alliance suggests that he continues to seek the premiership despite withdrawing his candidacy on January 13.[88] This is consistent with CTP-ISW's assessment that Sudani still likely aims to obtain the premiership amid US and domestic opposition to Maliki.[89] Iraqi media, citing unspecified leaks, reported on February 24 that Khazali and Hakim support Sudani on the condition that he would not “rebel” against the framework.[90] Many framework leaders, including Maliki, Khazali, and Ameri, have previously opposed Sudani serving a second term as prime minister due to his perceived unwillingness to follow framework direction.[91] Iraqi media reported that this alliance has considered other candidates for prime minister, including Maliki-affiliated Health Minister Saleh al Hasnawi and Badr Organization-aligned National Intelligence Service head Hamid al Shatri.[92]

**AI Monitor reported on February 19 that the United States sent a letter to the Iraqi federal government outlining recommended steps for the next Iraqi prime minister to take to curb Iranian influence in Iraq.**[93] **These recommendations include:**

- “Disarm” and “reintegrate” all Iranian-backed Iraqi militias within six to twelve months.[94]
- “Define and institutionalize” the role of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and “place” the PMF “strictly under” the Iraqi armed forces.[95] 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.[96]
- Combat “corruption and money laundering.”[97]
- “Reform the judiciary to curb political and factional influence.”[98]
- “Form a cabinet of competent and professional officials loyal to the Iraqi state.”[99]
- Remove “all Iranian advisers, operatives, and agents from Iraqi territory and institutions.”[100]

This letter comes amid a US effort to prevent the formation of a pro-Iranian Iraqi government following the November 2025 elections.[101] The United States recently threatened to limit the Iraqi federal government's access to its oil revenue if Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are included in the next Iraqi

government.[102] The 2026 National Defense Authorization Act conditions some US funding for the Iraqi Security Forces on the Iraqi government taking concrete steps to disarm Iranian-backed Iraqi militias.[103]

## Syria

*See topline section.*

## Arabian Peninsula

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

## Palestinian Territories & Lebanon

**The Lebanese government is attempting to pressure Hezbollah not to participate in a potential conflict between Iran and the United States or Israel.** Two senior Lebanese officials told Reuters on February 24 that Israel warned the Lebanese government that Israel would conduct “hard” strikes against Lebanon if Hezbollah participates in a potential conflict between Iran and the United States.[104] The officials stated that Israel threatened to strike civilian infrastructure in Lebanon, including the Beirut airport.[105] Lebanese Foreign Minister Youssef Rajji confirmed on February 24 that the Lebanese government received this Israeli message and stated that the government is working by “all means” to prevent Hezbollah’s participation.[106] Lebanese Parliament Speaker and long-time Hezbollah ally Nabih Berri has reportedly led intense political and security talks with Hezbollah in an attempt to prevent Hezbollah from militarily backing Iran in a possible future conflict with the United States or Israel.[107]

**Hezbollah is likely weighing the threat of Israeli strikes in Lebanon as it decides whether to enter the conflict, but these threats alone will not convince Hezbollah to eschew a potential conflict.** Israeli strikes in Lebanon since the November 2024 Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire agreement have further degraded Hezbollah’s capabilities and have impeded the group’s reconstitution efforts.[108] Hezbollah has not responded to these strikes presumably because of its weaker position and the inherent unpredictability of military escalation, which could rapidly spiral out of Hezbollah’s control.[109] Hezbollah’s close relationship with and financial reliance on Iran may mean that Hezbollah can overcome any reticence to enter a regional war despite the risk of Israeli airstrikes on Lebanon. Hezbollah remains deeply ideologically aligned with Iran and relies on Tehran for substantial financial support.[110] Hezbollah has previously struggled to acquire Iranian funds following the June 2025 Israel-Iran War that constrained Iran’s resources, which caused Hezbollah to be unable to maintain its financial commitments to its fighters.[111] The financial challenges ultimately generated unprecedented discontent among its Shia support base.[112] Hezbollah may calculate that the loss of Iran may be existential to the group’s survival.

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**Parker Hempel, Zahra Wakilzada, Katherine Wells, Benjamin Schmida, Ria Reddy, Nidal Morrison, Ben Rezaei, Carolyn Moorman, Annika Ganzeveld**

**Analyst Notes:** Data Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

## Toplines

**A newly established coalition of anti-regime Kurdish organizations outlined its vision for administering Kurdish-majority areas of Iran if the Iranian regime collapses, which reflects the potential for Iran to fracture if the regime were to collapse.** Anti-regime Kurdish groups established the “Coalition of Political Forces in Iranian Kurdistan” on February 22 with the stated objective of achieving self-determination.[1] The coalition includes the Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK), the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI), the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), the Organization of Iranian Kurdistan Struggle, and the Komala of the Toilers of Kurdistan.[2] PDKI leader Mostafa Hejri told Iranian diaspora media on February 23 that the coalition created a “joint plan for administering” Kurdish-majority areas of Iran during the “transition period,” in reference to the period between the collapse of the current Iranian regime and the establishment of a new central government.[3] This statement highlights how Kurdish opposition groups are considering and planning for the potential collapse of the regime. Hejri added that citizens in Kurdish-majority areas would elect “the governing bodies of Kurdistan” to “take over the administration of the region” after the establishment of a new Iranian central government.[4] The coalition issued a joint statement on February 22 in which it similarly outlined its objective to establish a “democratic administrative system in Kurdistan.”[5] Various separatist and anti-regime militant groups operate within Iran, including in northwestern and southeastern Iran.[6] The collapse of the Iranian regime could create conditions for Iran to fracture if these groups tried to fill the power vacuum left behind by the regime.

**Turkey is concerned about the impact that the Iranian regime’s collapse would have on Turkish internal security.** Bloomberg, citing “people familiar with the matter,” reported on February 24 that the focus of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) air surveillance in Turkey has shifted from Russia to Iran.[7] The sources stated that Turkey is concerned about the possibility of an influx of refugees from Iran to Turkey in the event of a “major conflict.”[8] The sources added that Turkey is considering setting up camps to house refugees near the Iran-Turkey border and deploying forces into Iran to prevent refugees from entering Turkey “in the case of a power vacuum in Iran.”

Turkey would also presumably oppose the possible administration of Kurdish-majority areas in northwestern Iran by Kurdish opposition groups, some of which have ties to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party. The newly formed “Coalition of Political Forces in Iranian Kurdistan” includes the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), which is the Iranian branch of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).[9] The PKK announced in May

2025 that it would dissolve itself and “end its armed struggle,” but PJAK announced that it would not adhere to the PKK’s decision.[10] The PKK is designated as a terrorist organization by both Turkey and the United States.[11]

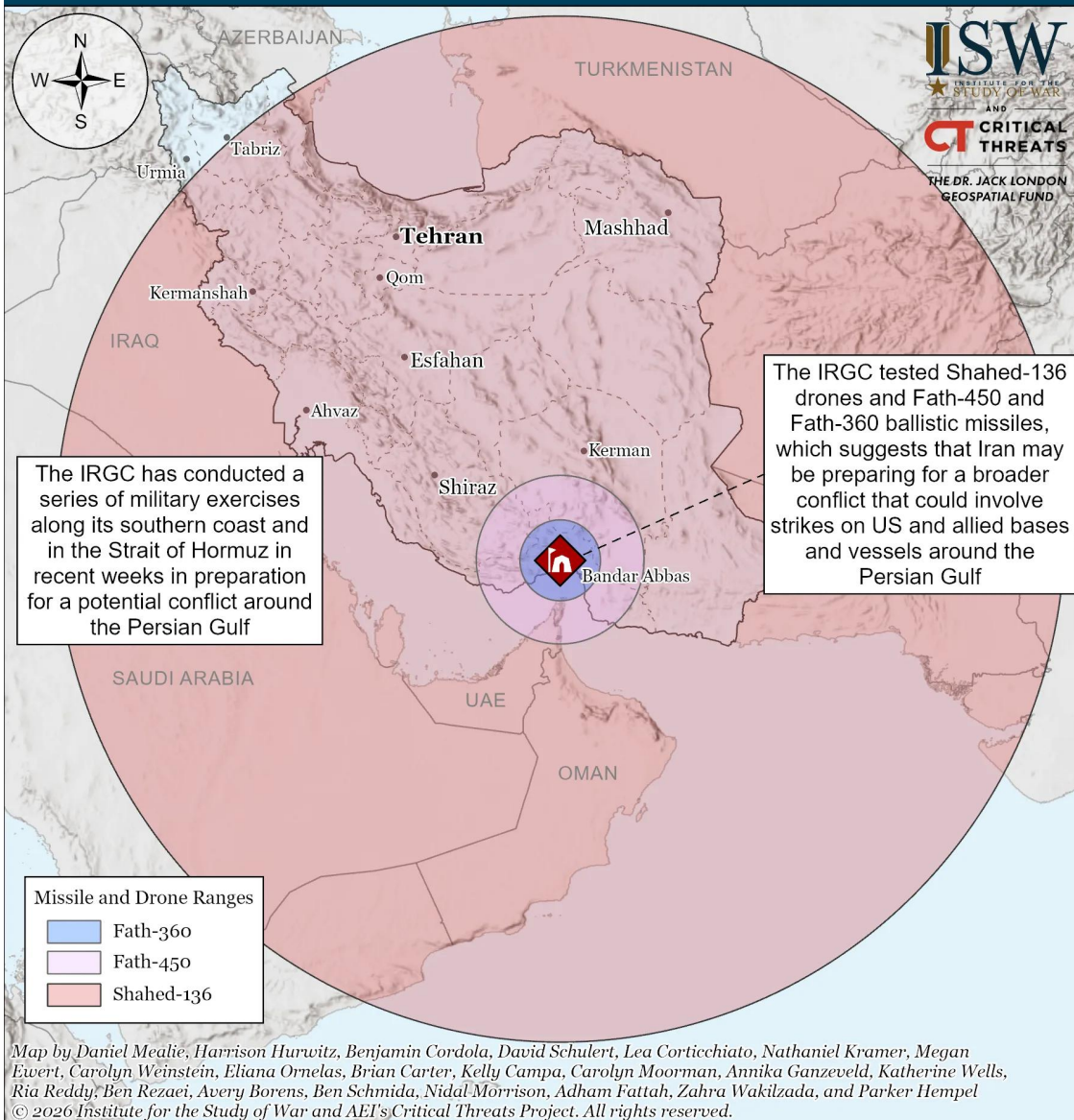
**Iran reportedly offered Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)-like concessions in its nuclear proposal to the United States.** An unspecified Arab diplomat told Israeli media on February 25 that Iran is willing to reduce its uranium enrichment level from 60 percent to 3.6 percent, which is close to the 2015 JCPOA’s 3.67 percent uranium enrichment limit.[12] The diplomat added that Iran offered to suspend uranium enrichment for seven years but that the United States has demanded that Iran suspend enrichment for 10 years.[13] Diplomatic sources familiar with the US-Iran negotiations told a separate Israeli media outlet on February 25 that Iran “offered no flexibility on the central US demand for a complete halt to uranium enrichment on Iranian soil.”[14] Iran also rejected the United States’ demand to transfer its highly enriched uranium stockpile abroad, according to the Arab diplomat.[15] US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff suggested on February 22 that the transfer of Iran’s highly enriched uranium stockpile, in addition to zero enrichment, is US President Donald Trump’s “red line.”[16] Iran previously transferred 11,000 kilograms of enriched uranium to Russia under the 2015 nuclear deal.[17] The 11,000 kilograms included uranium enriched to 20 percent—Iran’s most highly enriched uranium at the time.[18] Iran has since produced over 400 kilograms of uranium enriched to 60 percent, which is enough uranium, if enriched further, to produce at least 10 nuclear weapons.[19]

**US President Donald Trump highlighted the threat of Iran’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs in his State of the Union address on February 24.** Trump stated that the United States warned Iran after the June 2025 Israel-Iran War not to attempt to “rebuild [its] weapons program, and in particular nuclear weapons,” but that Iran “want[s] to start it all over again and is at this moment again pursuing their sinister ambitions.”[20] Trump separately stated that Iran is developing missiles “that will soon reach the United States.”[21]

**The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has recently conducted a series of military exercises in the Strait of Hormuz and along Iran’s southern coast in preparation for a potential conflict with the United States or Israel around the Persian Gulf.**[22] The IRGC Ground Forces concluded a two-day exercise under the command of the Madinah ol Munawarah Operational Base in Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province, on February 25.[23] The Madinah ol Munawarah Operational Base is the IRGC Ground Forces’ closest regional headquarters to the Strait of Hormuz and oversees IRGC Ground Forces units in Fars, Bushehr, and Hormozgan provinces.[24] The exercise took place on unspecified Persian Gulf islands and along Iran’s southern coast.[25] The IRGC Ground Forces reportedly used Rezvan loitering drones for reconnaissance and target acquisition and Shahed-136 drones to strike pre-designated targets during the exercise.[26] Rezvan loitering drones have a range of 20 kilometers, and Shahed-136 drones have a range of 1,500 kilometers.[27] Iranian media highlighted the IRGC Ground Forces’ use of Fath-450 ballistic missiles, which have a range of between 150 and 250 kilometers, and Fath-360 ballistic missiles, which have a range of between 30 and 120 kilometers.[28] Iranian media claimed that these systems have high strike accuracy, can resist electronic warfare, and can carry warheads capable of penetrating fortified positions.[29] Iranian media described the Fath-360 as capable of carrying a “bunker-busting” warhead.[30] This exercise comes after the IRGC Navy conducted an exercise in the Strait of Hormuz on February 16.[31] The recent exercises indicate that Iran is preparing for both a possible maritime conflict near the Strait of Hormuz as well as a possible broader conflict that could involve strikes on US and allied bases and vessels around the Persian Gulf. Four unspecified IRGC members and three senior Iranian officials told the *New York Times* on February 22 that Iran has positioned ballistic missile launchers along its southern shores within range of US bases and other targets in the region.[32]

## Ranges of Iranian Missiles and Drones Tested by the IRGC in Southern Iran

February 25, 2026 at 2:00 PM ET



**Belgium-based outlet Army Recognition assessed that Iran's use of indigenous radars in its S-300 air defense systems would reduce the effectiveness of these systems.[33]** Israel destroyed the engagement radar of an Iranian S-300 in April 2024 and rendered Iran's three remaining S-300 systems inoperable in October 2024.[34] An S-300 battery requires engagement radars, command-and-control centers, fire-control units, and launchers to operate as a functional surface-to-air missile system.[35] Army Recognition reported on February 23 that Iran has deployed at least one of its four S-300 systems near Tehran City and potentially deployed an indigenous Bavar-373 air defense system near Esfahan City, citing commercially available satellite imagery on February 16 and 19.[36] Iran previously displayed an S-300 with a "new, Iranian-designed" radar in February 2025.[37] Army Recognition noted that Iran's use of indigenous radars in its S-300 air defense systems would create "interoperability constraints and potential gaps in data link compatibility." [38]

**The Iranian regime is trying to limit disruptions to command-and-control and governance in**

**the event of a potential US or Israeli decapitation campaign against senior Iranian leadership.** The *New York Times*, citing six senior Iranian officials and three IRGC members, reported on February 22 that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has named four potential successors for each military and government post that he appoints.[39] Khamenei has also reportedly directed other officials to choose up to four successors and delegated authority to a trusted circle to make decisions if he cannot be reached or is killed. This report highlights Iranian officials' immense paranoia about potential US or Israeli strikes targeting senior leadership. Israeli strikes targeting senior commanders during the June 2025 Israel-Iran War temporarily disrupted Iran's chain of command and delayed its initial retaliation.[40] Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Naghdi, who served as the IRGC Coordination Deputy during the war and currently serves as an adviser to IRGC Commander Mohammad Pakpour, stated in October 2025 that IRGC units requested authorization to strike Israel early on June 13, but that Khamenei delayed approval of the strikes until he had appointed new commanders to replace those whom Israel had killed earlier that day.[41]

**Iranian university students held anti-regime protests for the fifth consecutive day on February 25.[42]** CTP-ISW recorded 10 protests, including four large protests, at nine universities in three provinces on February 25. CTP-ISW defines large protests as protests with over 1,000 individuals.[43] CTP-ISW also recorded a protest at a school in Tehran City and a protest at a 40-day mourning period ceremony in Gorgan, Golestan Province.[44] Universities have summoned at least 180 students to disciplinary hearings and suspended numerous others for participating in the protests in Tehran City.[45] Plainclothes security personnel arrested three protesters at the University of Art in Tehran City on February 25.[46] Security forces deployed to Shiraz University in Fars Province on February 25. Iranian authorities have also confiscated the student identification cards of student protesters at Shiraz University.[47] Basij members and pro-regime students clashed with protesters at Shiraz University on February 23 and 24.[48] Two Iranian universities in Kurdistan and Zanjan provinces moved classes online, and another in Mazandaran Province is considering doing so in an effort to curb student protests.[49]

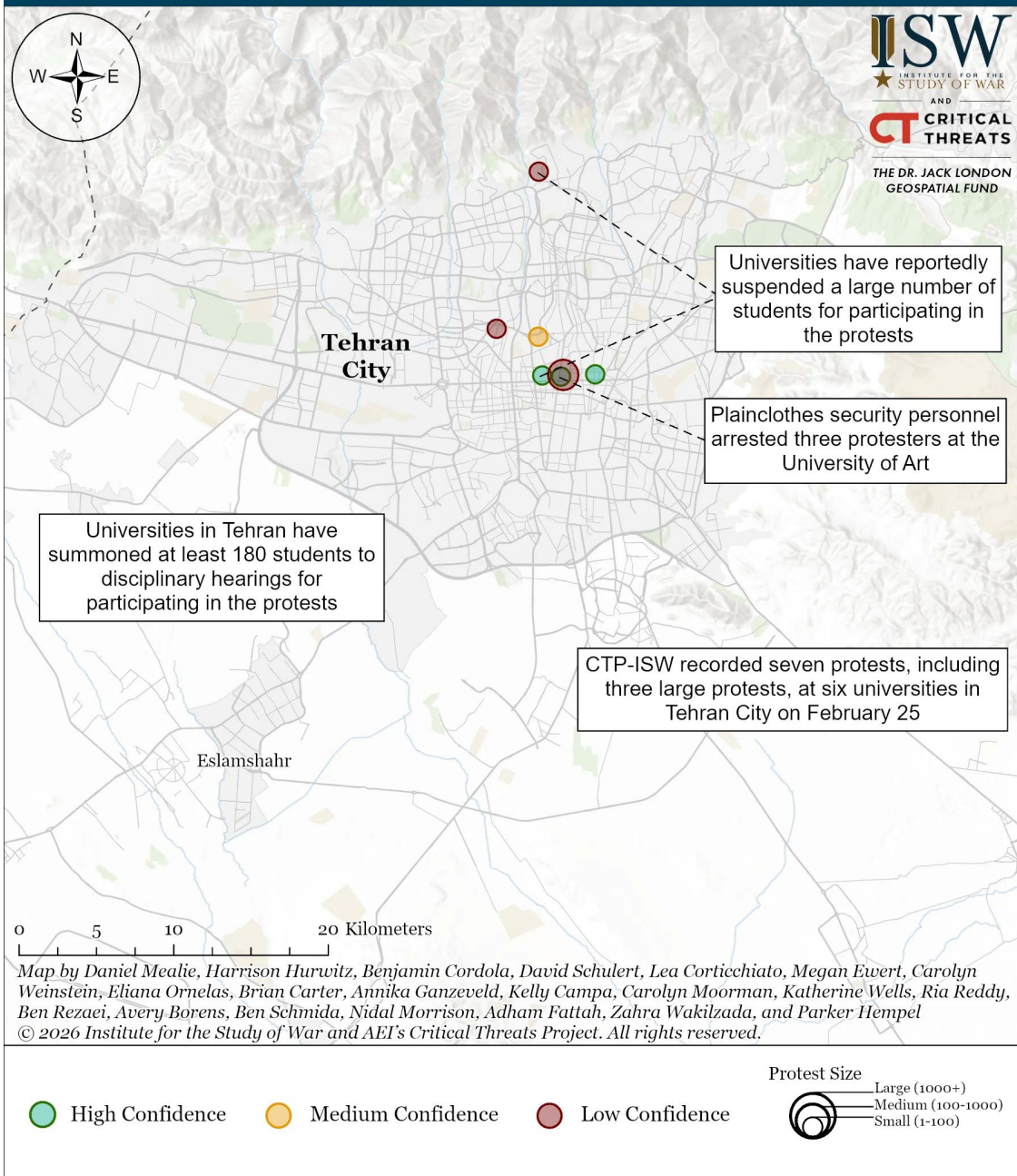
# Protests at Universities in Iran

Between 3:30 PM ET on February 24 and 3:30 PM ET on February 25, 2026



# Protests at Universities in Tehran City

From 3:30 PM ET on February 24 to 3:30 PM ET on February 25, 2026



**The economic conditions that triggered anti-regime protests in December 2025 continue to worsen.** The Iranian currency has suffered a steep collapse since November 2025, which exacerbates economic instability. Iranian business owners have told Western media that they have experienced a substantial decline in sales following the regime’s internet shutdown to suppress protests in early January 2026.[50] Both the Iranian public and parts of the regime itself have demonstrated a deep lack of trust in the regime’s ability to reform or stabilize the economy. Iranian media reported on February 23 that investors are rapidly shifting their assets away from equities and into hard currency and gold, which indicates a widespread belief that the government cannot restore predictable market conditions.[51] US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Israeli media previously reported that regime officials have transferred hundreds of millions of US dollars out of Iran in recent months, which likely reflects intra-regime concerns about economic stability.[52]

## Iranian Rial Value per One US Dollar Since January 2025 January 1, 2025 to February 25, 2026

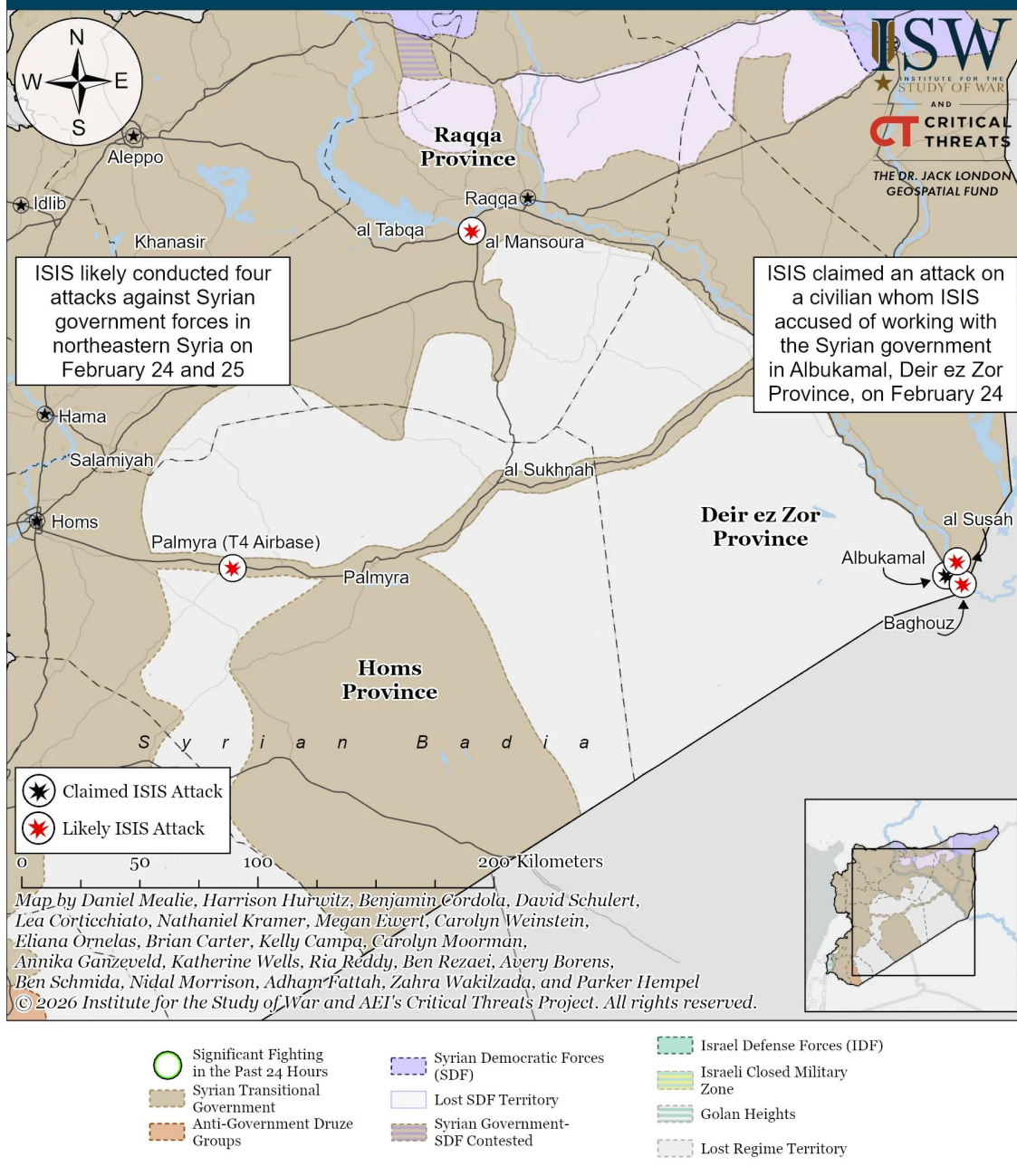


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Source for Rial Value: www.bonbast.com

**Islamic State (IS)-run media explicitly linked ISIS's recently claimed attacks in northeastern Syria to the Islamic State's February 21 call to action, which likely seeks to exploit conditions created by the Syrian government's recent offensive to recruit fighters and expand ISIS networks.**[53] IS-run media outlet Amaq News confirmed on February 24 that recent ISIS attacks against Syrian government forces were in direct response to IS spokesperson Abu Hudhayfa al Ansari's February 21 call for a "new chapter of resistance" in Syria against the Syrian government.[54] ISIS claimed an attack on a civilian in Albukamal, Deir ez Zor Province, on February 24.[55]The group accused the individual of working with the Syrian government.[56] ISIS also likely conducted four additional attacks against Syrian government forces in northeastern Syria on February 24 and 25. The attacks did not cause any casualties.[57] Syrian government forces have continued to respond to ISIS activity, such as by arresting an ISIS fighter in al Mayadin, Deir ez Zor Province, who killed a Syrian soldier in the town on February 23.[58] A Syria analyst assessed that ISIS's attack rate against Syrian government forces in northeastern Syria since February 21 remains lower than its attack rate in the second half of 2025, despite the recent increase in ISIS attacks.[59] The recent attacks continue to demonstrate that ISIS's primary target in Syria has shifted from the SDF to the Syrian government since December 2025.[60] Syria joined the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS in November 2025.[61]

# ISIS attacks in Northeastern Syria since February 24

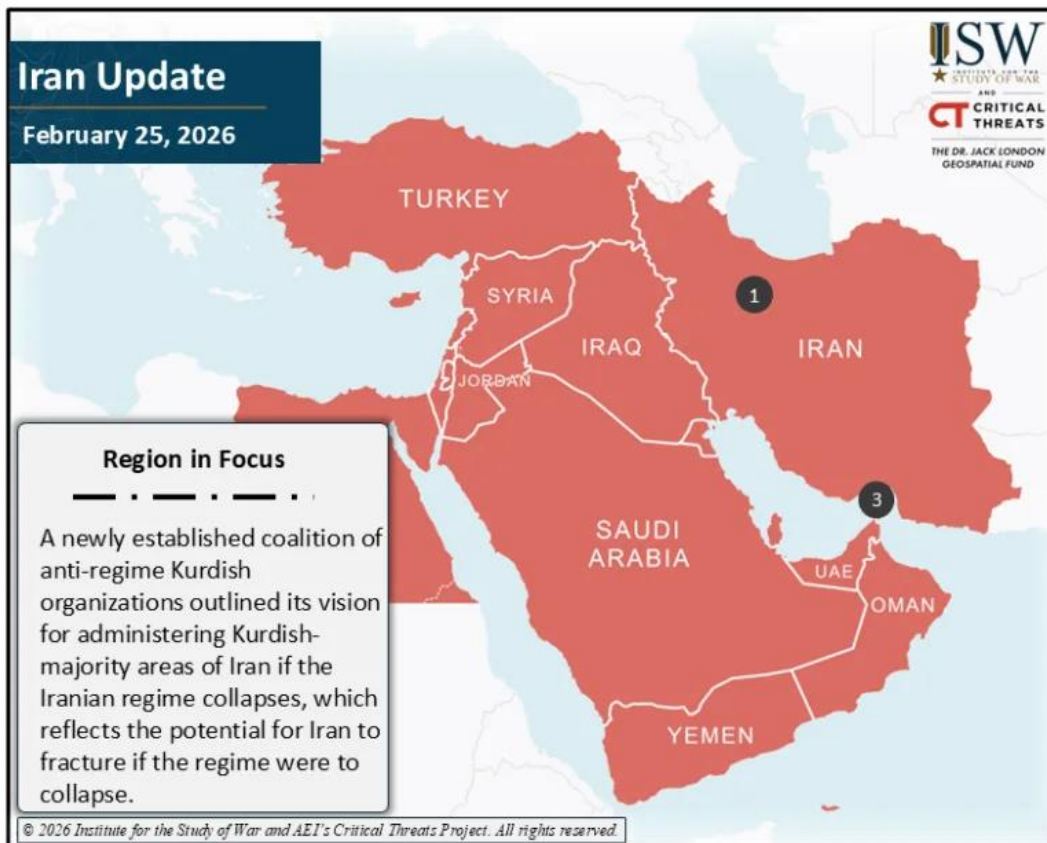
## February 25, 2026 at 2:00 PM ET



**An ISIS prisoner whom the Syrian government recently released from prison reportedly attacked Syrian government forces, which highlights the need for the Syrian government to thoroughly vet individuals who were previously imprisoned by the SDF.[62]** A northeast Syria-based news outlet reported on February 23 that Syrian General Security Service (GSS) forces raided the home of an ISIS fighter who attacked government forces in Dhiban, Deir ez Zor Province, after the government released him from Aqtan prison on February 23.[63] Other media outlets and local sources have not corroborated this report. The Aqtan prison in Raqqa Province was previously an SDF-administered ISIS detention facility that the SDF handed over to the Syrian government in January 2025.[64] The Syrian Justice Ministry has released hundreds of SDF political prisoners from Aqtan prison after taking over the facility.[65] Aqtan prison likely held many SDF political prisoners, but the report that the government released an ISIS fighter who later attacked government forces highlights the need for the Syrian government to properly vet individuals it releases.

**IS media has continued to leverage the Syrian government’s membership in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and cooperation with the United States to try to boost ISIS recruitment among Syrians sympathetic to ISIS.**[66]

Amaq News’ February 24 report on recent ISIS attacks against Syrian government forces in northeastern Syria used an image of Syrian President Ahmed al Shara’s September 2025 meeting with US Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Admiral Brad Cooper in Damascus rather than an image of the attacks.[67] Multiple Syria analysts remarked that Amaq typically includes a photo of an attack, but that Amaq used the photo of Cooper and Shara in this instance to highlight the Syrian government’s “apostasy” and “subservience” to the United States.[68] IS media has consistently criticized the Syrian government’s counter-ISIS cooperation and relationship with the United States to drive recruitment among Syrian Islamists who are dissatisfied with the Syrian government.[69]



- 1 TEHRAN, IRAN.** Iran reportedly offered Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)-like concessions in its nuclear proposal to the United States. An unspecified Arab diplomat told Israeli media on February 25 that Iran is willing to reduce its uranium enrichment level from 60 percent to 3.6 percent, which is close to the 2015 JCPOA’s 3.67 percent uranium enrichment limit.
- 2 WASHINGTON, D.C.** US President Donald Trump highlighted the threat of Iran’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs in his State of the Union address on February 24. Trump stated that the United States warned Iran after the June 2025 Israel-Iran War not to attempt to “rebuild [its] weapons program, and in particular nuclear weapons” but that Iran “want[s] to start it all over again and are at this moment again pursuing their sinister ambitions.”
- 3 STRAIT OF HORMUZ.** The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has recently conducted a series of military exercises in the Strait of Hormuz and along Iran’s southern coast in preparation for a potential conflict with the United States or Israel around the Persian Gulf. The IRGC Ground Forces concluded a two-day exercise under the command of the Madinah ol Munawarah Operational Base in Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province, on February 25.

# Key Takeaways

1. **Planning for a Post-Iranian Regime Reality:** A newly established coalition of anti-regime Kurdish organizations outlined its vision for administering Kurdish-majority areas of Iran if the Iranian regime collapses, which reflects the potential for Iran to fracture if the regime were to collapse. Anti-regime Kurdish groups established the “Coalition of Political Forces in Iranian Kurdistan” on February 22 with the stated objective of achieving self-determination.
2. **Iranian Nuclear Proposal:** Iran reportedly offered Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)-like concessions in its nuclear proposal to the United States. An unspecified Arab diplomat told Israeli media on February 25 that Iran is willing to reduce its uranium enrichment level from 60 percent to 3.6 percent, which is close to the 2015 JCPOA’s 3.67 percent uranium enrichment limit.
3. **Trump State of the Union Address:** US President Donald Trump highlighted the threat of Iran’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs in his State of the Union address on February 24. Trump stated that the United States warned Iran after the June 2025 Israel-Iran War not to attempt to “rebuild [its] weapons program, and in particular nuclear weapons,” but that Iran “want[s] to start it all over again and is at this moment again pursuing their sinister ambitions.”
4. **Iranian Military Exercises:** The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has recently conducted a series of military exercises in the Strait of Hormuz and along Iran’s southern coast in preparation for a potential conflict with the United States or Israel around the Persian Gulf. The IRGC Ground Forces concluded a two-day exercise under the command of the Madinah ol Munawarah Operational Base in Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province, on February 25.
5. **Iranian Air Defense Systems:** Belgium-based outlet Army Recognition assessed that Iran’s use of indigenous radars in its S-300 air defense systems would reduce the effectiveness of these systems. Israel destroyed the engagement radar of an Iranian S-300 in April 2024 and rendered Iran’s three remaining S-300 systems inoperable in October 2024.
6. **Iranian Steps to Avoid a Decapitation Campaign:** The Iranian regime is trying to limit disruptions to command-and-control and governance in the event of a potential US or Israeli decapitation campaign against senior Iranian leadership. The *New York Times*, citing six senior Iranian officials and three IRGC members, reported on February 22 that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has named four potential successors for each military and government post that he appoints.
7. **Protests in Iran:** Iranian university students held anti-regime protests for the fifth consecutive day on February 25. The economic conditions that triggered anti-regime protests in December 2025 continue to worsen.
8. **ISIS Attacks in Northeast Syria:** Islamic State (IS)-run media explicitly linked ISIS’s recently claimed attacks in northeastern Syria to the Islamic State’s February 21 call to action, which likely seeks to exploit conditions created by the Syrian government’s recent offensive to recruit fighters and expand ISIS networks. IS media has continued to leverage the Syrian government’s membership in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and cooperation with the United States to try to boost ISIS recruitment among Syrians sympathetic to ISIS.

## Iran

**Senior Iranian officials met with Armenian Defense Minister Suren Papikyan in Tehran on February 24 and 25.** Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Minister Brigadier General Aziz Nasir Zadeh and Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Abdol Rahim Mousavi held separate meetings with Papikyan and emphasized that the presence of extra-regional powers in the region will cause instability, likely referring to the United States and Israel.[70] Nasir Zadeh previously met with Papikyan

in May 2025, which CTP-ISW assessed was likely part of a broader Iranian strategy to counter Israeli, Turkish, and Western influence in the South Caucasus.[71] President Masoud Pezeshkian and Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani also held separate meetings with Papikyan on February 24 and 25 to discuss expanding bilateral cooperation.[72]

## Iraq

**The Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee claimed in a statement on February 25 that the United States has not fulfilled its commitment to withdraw its forces from Iraq, likely to justify the continued existence of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias.**[73] The Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee is a coordinating body for Iranian-backed Iraqi militias that includes Kataib Hezbollah, Asaib Ahl al Haq, Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba, Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada, a Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada front group, and Harakat Ansar Awfiya.[74] The United States and Iraq agreed in September 2024 that US-led international coalition forces would withdraw from federal Iraq by September 2025 and that the remaining forces would withdraw by the end of 2026.[75] US-led international coalition forces redeployed from federal Iraq to Iraqi Kurdistan in late 2025 as part of the first phase of the planned US withdrawal.[76] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have historically used the presence of US and foreign forces in Iraq to justify their continued existence.[77] This statement comes amid US pressure on the Iraqi federal government to disarm Iranian-backed Iraqi militias.[78]

The Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee's statement also condemned US "interfer[ence] in Iraq's internal affairs," which almost certainly refers to ongoing US efforts to pressure the Shia Coordination Framework to rescind State of Law Coalition head and former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki's nomination as prime minister designate.[79] The United States recently threatened to sanction "Iraq's oil lifeline and financial core," including the State Organization for the Marketing of Oil, the Iraqi Central Bank, the Oil Ministry, and senior Shia officials linked to Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, if the framework continues to support Maliki's nomination.[80]

**The Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee may have also released its statement on February 25 to set information conditions for Iranian-backed Iraqi militia attacks on US forces in Iraqi Kurdistan if the United States or Israel attacks Iran.** A senior Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee source recently told al Araby al Jadeed on February 22 that several Iranian-backed Iraqi militias in the committee have decided to provide military support to Iran and "open fronts" in a potential conflict between Iran and the United States.[81] CTP-ISW assessed on February 23 that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias would probably participate in a potential conflict between Iran and the United States or Israel if the militias perceived that the conflict posed an existential threat to the Iranian regime's survival.[82] CTP-ISW also assessed that one course of action that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias may take in response to a US or Israeli attack on Iran would be to attack US forces in Iraqi Kurdistan.[83]

## Syria

**Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) Commander Mazloum Abdi has continued to advocate for decentralization as the SDF integrates into the Syrian state.**[84] Abdi stated on February 15 that Syrian Kurds' core demand is "decentralized local rule." [85] Abdi later stated in an interview with PBS on February 23 that the SDF seeks to preserve Kurdish "local" governance over Kurdish-majority areas.[86] Kurdish and SDF officials have consistently called for decentralization since the SDF and Syrian government began negotiations over the SDF's integration in early 2025.[87] The SDF views decentralization as a way to ensure local authority over regional affairs and views the government's push

to concentrate power in Damascus as an attempt to impose autocratic rule.[88] The SDF agreed to integrate into state structures under the January 30 agreement, and SDF officials and Kurdish political parties have indicated that they seek to secure rights for the Kurdish population from the central government through political advocacy after integrating into the state.[89] The Syrian government transferred some authorities from the central government to governors and local officials throughout Syria on February 15 through the Syrian Ministry of Local Administration's Decision No. 13, which may satisfy some of the SDF's demands regarding decentralization.[90]

The Syrian government and SDF's disagreements over decentralization do not appear likely to collapse the January 30 agreement at this time, given the progress on the agreement (described in more detail below) and both parties' commitment to the agreement. Abdi told PBS on February 23 that he accepts the January 30 agreement and that he does not want a Kurdish insurgency in northeastern Syria.[91] CTP-ISW reported on February 3 that a low-grade Kurdish insurgency could still threaten the implementation of the January 30 agreement and the SDF's integration into the Syrian state.[92] Abdi acknowledged that the SDF "will persist in our fight until the very end" if the deal collapses.[93]

**The Syrian government and SDF have taken several steps since February 21 to integrate former SDF territory and institutions into the Syrian state.**[94] The Syrian government took control of Qamishli Airport on February 22 and deployed alongside Asayish forces, according to Syrian media.[95] The 14-point January 30 agreement stipulates that the SDF would hand over Qamishli Airport as well as border crossings and oil fields in northeastern Syria to the Syrian government.[96] The 14-point January 30 agreement outlines four phases of implementation to be completed before the end of February 2026. The fifth phase of the agreement aims to establish "permanent commitments" between the SDF and the Syrian government.[97]

Both the SDF and Syrian government have taken several steps to improve coordination ahead of implementing certain terms of the January 30 agreement. Syrian President Ahmed al Shara appointed Brigadier General Ziyad al Ayesh on February 21 as a presidential envoy to oversee the implementation of the January 30 agreement.[98] Ayesh, who is from Qamishli, Hasakah Province, previously served as the Civil Affairs Director in the Syrian Salvation Government in Idlib Province and has reportedly been involved in Syrian government-SDF negotiations.[99] Ayesh met with Hasakah Province Internal Security Commander Brigadier General Marwan al Ali and Hasakah Governor Nouredine Issa Ahmed in Hasakah City on February 24 to discuss accelerating the integration of Hasakah Province's institutions into the Syrian transitional government and activating new government services.[100] The Syrian government and the SDF also formed a joint committee following a meeting between SDF internal security forces (known as Asayish) Commander Siamand Afrin, Raqqa Governor Abdul Rahman Salameh, and Hasakah Province Internal Security Commander Brigadier General Marwan al Ali to coordinate the return of Kurdish internally displaced persons (IDP) to Raqqa Province.[101] Afrin also reportedly met with Syrian officials in Aleppo Province on February 22 to discuss the return of Kurdish IDPs to Afrin as well as the Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh neighborhoods in Aleppo City.[102] The last point of the January 30 agreement calls for the return of displaced persons to Afrin, Sheikh Maqsoud, and Ras al Ain.[103]

The Syrian government and the SDF have also continued to discuss the integration of the SDF into the Syrian security services.[104] Syrian Chief of General Staff Major General Ali al Nassan met with SDF General Command members in Damascus on February 22 to discuss steps for integrating the SDF into several brigades of the Syrian army.[105] A northern Syria-based source reported on February 25 that the Syrian government has transferred SDF fighters from Hasakah City to their hometown of Kobani in preparation for their deployment as local security forces.[106] The agreement specifies that a Syrian army brigade comprised of local forces will operate in Kobani.[107] Syrian Interior Ministry Spokesperson Nouredine al Baba said on February 25 that the ministry is enhancing its security expertise in the

Jazeera region through integrating the Asayish into Syrian Interior Ministry forces that operate in the area.[108]

**Syrian General Security Service (GSS) forces killed on February 24 the leader of an Assadist insurgent group that has operated in coastal Syria since August 2025.[109]** The Syrian Interior Ministry said that GSS forces killed the leader of the Men of Light (Saraya al Jawad) during a raid on the group's safehouse in the Jableh countryside, Latakia Province.[110] The GSS commander of Latakia Province, Brigadier General Abdul Aziz al Ahmad, stated that the GSS also killed two other commanders, arrested six fighters, and seized the group's weapons cache during a "dual operation" in Jableh.[111] Men of Light is an Assadist insurgent group associated with former Tiger Forces Commander Suhail al Hassan that has conducted low-level improvised explosive device (IED) attacks targeting Syrian government vehicles in Latakia Province since at least August 2025.[112] These IED attacks have failed to inflict casualties on government forces, and only one attack in October 2025 destroyed a GSS vehicle.[113] Likely Assadist insurgents conducted a grenade attack against a GSS checkpoint in Qardaha, Latakia Province, on February 25, which similarly failed to inflict casualties.[114] The leader of the Men of Light (Saraya al Jawad) previously declared in November 2025 that his group sought to remove government control in coastal Syria and declare an independent region for Alawites.[115] The GSS previously killed three Men of Light (Saraya al Jawaad) insurgents and arrested one other in Latakia Province in December 2025.[116] The Men of Light members were reportedly planning to conduct unspecified attacks during New Year's celebrations.[117]

## Arabian Peninsula

*CTP-ISW has temporarily suspended its Yemen coverage starting on January 9.*

## Palestinian Territories & Lebanon

**A Hezbollah official told Western media on February 25 that Hezbollah would not militarily respond to a "limited" US or Israeli strike on Iran.[118]** A Hezbollah official told Agence France-Presse (AFP) on February 25 that Hezbollah would "not intervene militarily" if the US conducts "limited strikes" on Iran.[119] Lebanese ministerial sources told Saudi media on February 25 that Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri gave President Joseph Aoun "assurances" that Hezbollah would not intervene in a potential conflict.[120] It is unclear what Hezbollah considers "limited strikes." Hezbollah previously did not defend Iran or retaliate against US or Israeli targets during the Israel-Iran War in June 2025.[121] Iranian officials have reportedly pressured Hezbollah in recent weeks to intervene in a future conflict and have supported efforts to bolster Hezbollah's drone capabilities.[122]

CTP-ISW continues to assess that Hezbollah may participate in a future conflict between Iran and the United States or Israel if Hezbollah perceives that the United States and Israel aim to topple the Iranian regime.[123] The Hezbollah official also told AFP that any US attack that targeted Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei is a "red line," which further supports CTP-ISW's assessment.[124] Hezbollah adheres to the principle of Velayat-e Faqih and takes its orders from the supreme leader.[125] A war that causes the collapse of the Iranian regime would be a major setback for Hezbollah and its regional goals since Hezbollah remains deeply ideologically aligned with Iran and relies on the regime for substantial financial support.[126]

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**Adham Fattah, Benjamin Schmida, Carolyn Moorman, Ben Rezaei, Katherine Wells, Avery Borens, Kelly Campa, Brian Carter**

**Analyst Notes:** Data Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET.

## Toplines

**Iran is unlikely to accept reported US demands to destroy its nuclear facilities, send its highly enriched uranium to the US, and commit to a permanent deal. US officials have previously stated that the US would strike Iran if the two sides cannot reach a deal.**[1] The United States and Iran held a third round of nuclear talks on February 26 in Geneva, Switzerland.[2] Omani Foreign Affairs Minister Badr al Busaidi stated that there was “significant progress” during the talks and that both sides will hold technical-level discussions in Vienna next week.[3] US officials’ accounts of the talks suggest that Iran is unlikely to accept reported US demands, however. US officials told the *Wall Street Journal* on February 26 that US negotiators demanded that Iran dismantle its Fordow, Natanz, and Esfahan nuclear facilities, deliver all of its enriched uranium to the United States, and agree to a permanent deal without sunset clauses.[4] The officials also said that US negotiators reiterated their zero-enrichment demand but “could be open” to a scenario in which Iran can enrich a very low level of uranium “for medical purposes.”[5] These accounts are consistent with previous reporting that the US negotiators would consider a proposal that includes “token enrichment” if Iran credibly proved that it could not support building a nuclear weapon.[6] US negotiators reportedly offered only “minimal sanctions relief,” which contradicts Iranian demands for a more substantial relief package.[7] An unspecified Iranian source with knowledge of the discussions told CNN on February 26 that ending all US and UNSC sanctions is “key” in order to reach any deal.[8] The source added that Iran is not willing to destroy its nuclear facilities, enrich uranium in compliance with the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) verification process, or ship enriched uranium out of the country.[9] US President Donald Trump warned Iran of “bad things” on February 24 if the two sides fail to reach a deal.[10]

The Iranian proposal does not meet core US demands. US officials told the *Wall Street Journal* that Iran’s proposal would force Iran to reduce enrichment to as low as 1.5 percent, pause enrichment for a number of years, and process its enriched uranium through an Iran-based regional consortium.[11] Four unspecified Iranian officials told the *New York Times* on February 26 that Iran would also offer to dilute its 400 kg of 60 percent-enriched uranium in phases and allow IAEA inspectors to oversee all steps.[12] Diluting enriched uranium in Iran does not meet the stated US demand that Iran transfer all of its nuclear material to the United States. Iran has also previously refused to cooperate with IAEA inspections, which the United States supports to verify Iranian compliance with nuclear enrichment.[13] US Vice President JD Vance stated on February 25 that the Trump administration has “seen evidence” that Iran is trying to rebuild its nuclear weapons program.[14] US Secretary of State Marco Rubio separately stated on

February 25 that Iran is “trying to rebuild elements” of its nuclear program.[15]

**Iran is also trying to offer economic incentives that are unrelated to US demands in order to extract concessions from the United States.** Unspecified sources told the *Financial Times* on February 26 that Iran will offer the United States investments in Iranian oil and gas reserves, mining rights, and critical minerals in an effort to convince US President Donald Trump to agree to a nuclear deal.[16] One of the sources added that Iran is examining Venezuela as a case study.[17] Iranian officials have publicly stated that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei granted permission for Iranian negotiators to propose allowing American companies to enter Iran and that Iran’s proposal to the United States would include a pledge to buy American goods.[18] These reports are consistent with a member of the Iranian negotiating team’s description of US-Iran discussions on economic cooperation in the fields of oil, gas, and minerals at the first round of US-Iran nuclear talks on February 6.[19] Iran appears to calculate that the United States is more willing to focus solely on Iran’s nuclear program or concede on its enrichment demand in the ongoing talks if Iran offers economic incentives.

**Iran likely remains unwilling to discuss its ballistic missile program and support for its partners and proxies in the region with the United States.** US officials told the *Wall Street Journal* on February 26 that the United States wants Iran to limit its ballistic missile program and support for proxies, but that the talks in Geneva will focus on the nuclear issue.[20] US Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated on February 25 that Iran’s unwillingness to discuss ballistic missiles with the United States is a “big problem” and that talks would eventually need to expand beyond the nuclear program.[21] Iranian officials have repeatedly ruled out any negotiations on Iran’s ballistic missile program.[22] Iran’s ballistic missile program constitutes a fundamental part of Iran’s defense and deterrence strategy. A Middle Eastern source with knowledge of the US-Iran negotiations told Fox News on February 20 that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has refused to allow Iranian negotiators to discuss any concessions on the ballistic missile program because any Iranian concessions on its missile program would be viewed within the regime as “equivalent to losing a war.”[23]

**US Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated on February 25 that Iran is “trying to achieve intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).”**[24] The US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) released a public assessment in 2025 that Iran has the capability to develop an ICBM by 2035.[25] Rubio added that Iran has tried to launch satellites into space.[26] ISW-CTP assessed in July 2025 that Iran’s efforts to develop its space program could support the development of ICBMs.[27]

Iran continues to undergo efforts to rebuild other aspects of its ballistic missile program.[28] Bloomberg identified on February 25 protective structures surrounding the Khojir Missile Production Complex in Hajarabad, Tehran Province, to prevent chain reactions from explosions.[29] Iran is also encasing a newly-built facility at Taleghan 2 at the Parchin Military Complex with a concrete “sarcophagus” to harden the facility against potential airstrikes, according to the Institute for Science and International Security.[30] Israel struck Taleghan 2 in October 2024 and Khojir during the June 2025 Israel-Iran War.[31]

**Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah threatened Iraqi Kurdistan’s “security and future” if the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) supports a US or Israeli attack on Iran.**[32] Kataib Hezbollah called on its members on February 26 to prepare for a “war of attrition that may be protracted” and threatened the United States with “irreparable” loss if it strikes Iran.[33] Kataib Hezbollah Spokesperson Abu Ali al Askari separately said on February 23 that the United States is preparing to attack Iran, which would include passing through Iraqi Kurdistan, and called on Iraqi Kurds to act “rationally.”[34] Askari’s statements are implied threats to attack the Kurdistan Region in the event of a war between the United States and Iran. The KRG issued a statement on February 23 that Iraqi

Kurdistan will not be used as a “launchpad” to attack neighboring countries, in reference to Iran.[35] Iran and Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have both previously conducted attacks targeting Iraqi Kurdistan, including during the 2023-2025 Gaza War.[36] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias operating under the Islamic Resistance in Iraq moniker launched multiple drones and rockets targeting US forces based in Erbil from October 2023 to January 2024 in response to Israel’s operations in the Gaza Strip.[37] Iran conducted a ballistic missile attack in Erbil in January 2024 in retaliation for an Israeli strike in Syria that killed three Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps members in December 2023.[38] Iran claimed that the January 2024 strike targeted a Mossad facility. The KRG denied Iran’s allegations.[39]

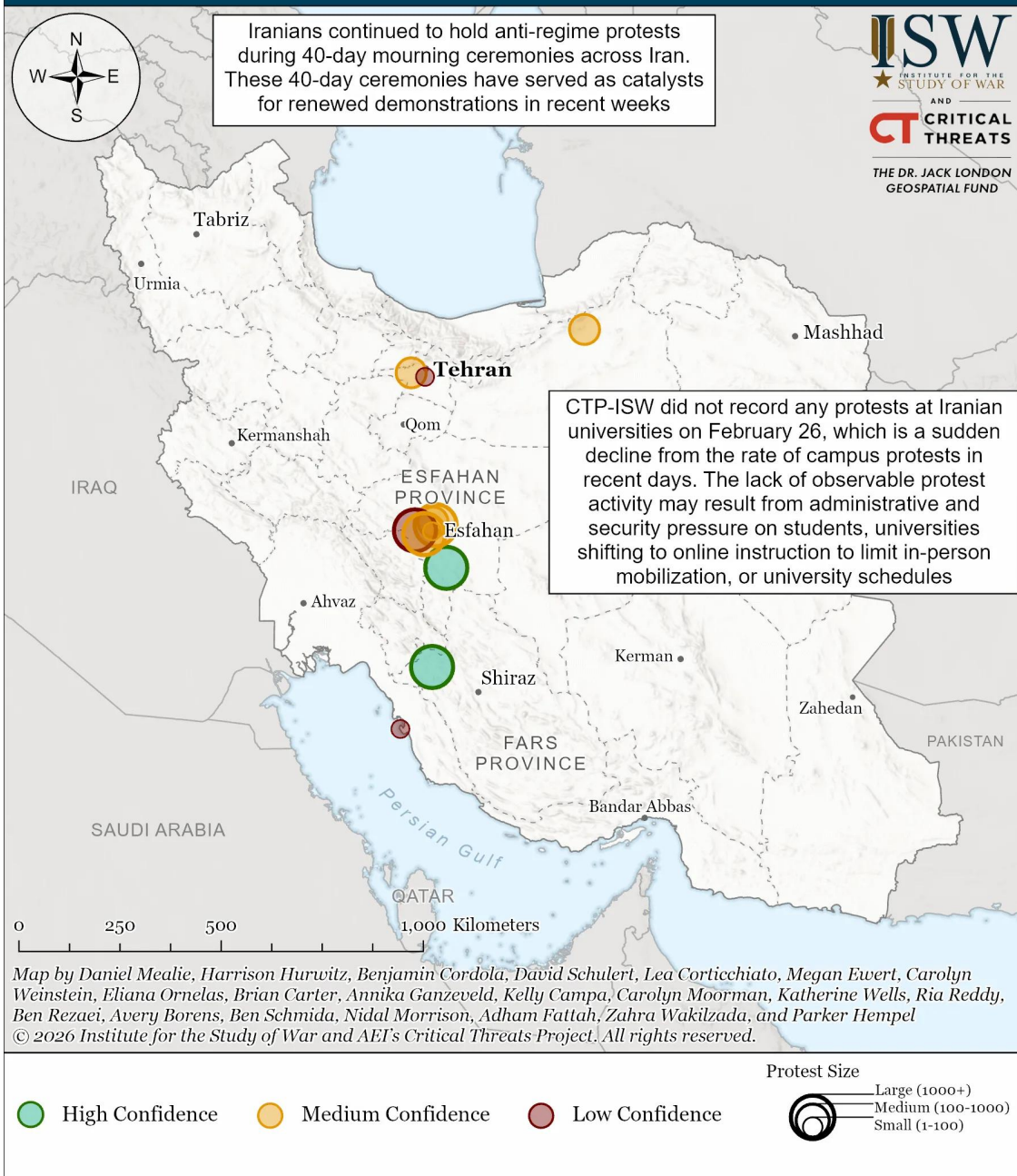
**Kataib Hezbollah is the first major Iranian-backed Iraqi militia to threaten the United States over possible US strikes on Iran. Kataib Hezbollah is almost certainly one of the four Iranian-backed Iraqi militias in the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee that has reportedly decided to provide military support to Iran and “open fronts” in a potential conflict between Iran and the United States.** A senior Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee source told al Araby al Jadeed on February 22 that the militias’ participation would depend on “developments on the ground, the nature of the confrontation, and its scope.”[40] The Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee includes Kataib Hezbollah, Asaib Ahl al Haq, Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba, Harakat Ansar Awfiya, and Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada and an affiliated front group, according to the committee’s last statement on January 4.[41] Kataib Hezbollah, unlike some other groups in the Shia Coordination Framework and the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee, is a member of both the framework and the coordination committee. Kataib Hezbollah appears to be prioritizing its relationship with Iran and its role in the broader Axis of Resistance over domestic political and economic considerations in Iraq. Kataib Hezbollah, unlike many of the Shia Coordination Framework factions, takes a much more transnational view of regional affairs, given its close relationship with Iran.

**Kataib Hezbollah’s threat supports ISW-CTP’s February 23 assessment that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias could target US forces in Iraqi Kurdistan in the event of a US or Israeli attack on Iran.**[42] US-led international coalition forces redeployed from federal Iraq to Iraqi Kurdistan in late 2025 as part of the first phase of the planned US withdrawal from Iraq.[43] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have long attacked US forces in Iraq in response to US or Israeli actions.[44] The militias would likely be more willing to target US forces in Iraqi Kurdistan than other US interests, such as the US Embassy in Baghdad, given that a strike on the latter could hurt the militias’ economic interests by deterring economic investment in Baghdad. This demonstrates that even some of the most ideologically motivated Iraqi militias still value their domestic economic and business dealings.

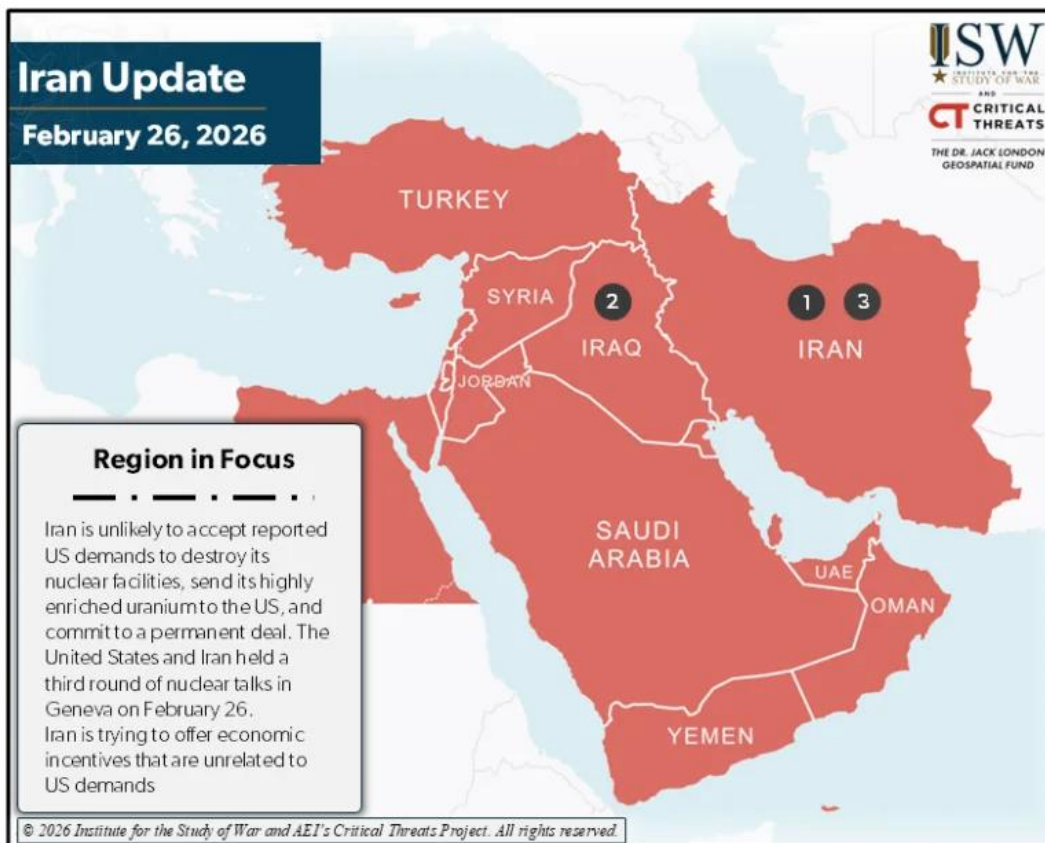
**Iranians continued to hold anti-regime protests during the 40-day mourning ceremonies across the country.** ISW-CTP recorded 11 protests at 40-day ceremonies across five provinces, including five large protests on February 26.[45] ISW-CTP defines large protests as protests that it estimates have over 1,000 individuals. The 40th day of mourning marks the end of the initial mourning period and is often observed with public commemorations and gatherings in Shia Islam. These 40-day ceremonies have served as catalysts for renewed demonstrations in recent weeks.[46]

# Protests in Iran

From 3:30 PM ET on February 25 to 3:30 PM ET on February 26, 2026



**ISW-CTP did not record any protests at Iranian universities on February 26, which is a sudden decline from the rate of campus protests in recent days.[47] ISW-CTP is considering several reasons that could explain the lack of observable university protest activity.** Both Iranian security forces and university administrations have increased legal and academic pressure on students in recent days by conducting arrests, summoning students before disciplinary bodies, and issuing temporary suspensions.[48] Iran's academic schedule may also have contributed to a decline in campus protest activity on a Thursday, which is a weekend in Iran. Many students live in university dormitories and would therefore presumably still be able to organize protests on the weekend, however. Multiple Iranian universities have also moved instruction online until late March 2026, likely in an effort to reduce in-person participation and opportunities for protests.[49] Any of these individual factors or a combination of the above could explain the lack of campus protest activity on February 26, particularly given that protests continue at 40-day mourning ceremonies.



- 1 **TEHRAN, IRAN.** US Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated on February 25 that Iran is “trying to achieve intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).” The US Defense Intelligence Agency released a public assessment in 2025 that Iran has the capability to develop an ICBM by 2035. Iran continues to undergo efforts to rebuild other aspects of its ballistic missile program.
- 2 **BAGHDAD, IRAQ.** Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah threatened Iraqi Kurdistan’s “security and future” if the Kurdistan Regional Government supports a US or Israeli attack on Iran. Kataib Hezbollah is the first major Iranian-backed Iraqi militia to threaten the United States over possible US strikes on Iran.
- 3 **TEHRAN, IRAN.** Iranians continued to hold anti-regime protests during 40-day mourning ceremonies across the country. These 40-day ceremonies have served as catalysts for renewed demonstrations in recent weeks. CTP-ISW did not record any protests at Iranian universities on February 26, which is a sudden decline from the rate of campus protests in recent days.

## Key Takeaways

1. **US-Iran Nuclear Talks:** Iran is unlikely to accept reported US demands to destroy its nuclear facilities, send its highly enriched uranium to the US, and commit to a permanent deal. The United States and Iran held a third round of nuclear talks in Geneva on February 26. The Iranian proposal does not meet core US demands, and Iran is trying to offer economic incentives that are unrelated to US demands in order to extract concessions from the United States. US officials have previously stated that the US would strike Iran if the two sides cannot reach a deal.
2. **Iranian Missile Program:** US Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated on February 25 that Iran is “trying to achieve intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).” The US Defense Intelligence Agency released a public assessment in 2025 that Iran has the capability to develop an ICBM by 2035. Iran continues to undergo efforts to rebuild other aspects of its ballistic missile program.

3. **Iranian-backed Iraqi Militia Warnings:** Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah threatened Iraqi Kurdistan’s “security and future” if the Kurdistan Regional Government supports a US or Israeli attack on Iran. Iran and Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have both previously conducted attacks targeting Iraqi Kurdistan, including during the 2023-2025 Gaza War. Kataib Hezbollah is the first major Iranian-backed Iraqi militia to threaten the United States over possible US strikes on Iran. Kataib Hezbollah appears to be prioritizing its relationship with Iran and its role in the broader Axis of Resistance over domestic political and economic considerations in Iraq.
4. **Iranian Protest Activity:** Iranians continued to hold anti-regime protests during the 40-day mourning ceremonies across the country. These 40-day ceremonies have served as catalysts for renewed demonstrations in recent weeks. ISW-CTP did not record any protests at Iranian universities on February 26, which is a sudden decline from the rate of campus protests in recent days. ISW-CTP is considering several reasons that could explain the lack of observable university protest activity.
5. **Syrian Government’s Southern Strategy:** The Syrian government is pursuing negotiations with the current authorities in Suwayda as it simultaneously employs a strategy that is likely designed to politically weaken and then subordinate Druze Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri’s coalition to the government over time. The United States is reportedly mediating back-channel negotiations between the Syrian government and unspecified Druze leaders to integrate Suwayda Province under Syrian government control, which is likely a government attempt to reduce support for Hijri and his followers.

## Iran

**Iran security forces conducted counterterrorism operations against anti-regime Baloch militias in southeastern Iran between February 23 and 26.** The Mobarizoun Popular Front (MPF)—a coalition of anti-regime Baloch militias formed in December 2025—announced on February 24 that Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) forces killed six of its members the day prior in the vicinity of Saravan City, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.[50] The MPF has conducted several attacks against security personnel in Sistan and Baluchistan Province since the protests started in late December 2025.[51] The IRGC separately reported on February 25 that IRGC, provincial intelligence, and Law Enforcement Command (LEC) Border Guard forces engaged unspecified fighters along Iran’s southeastern border, killing three fighters and arresting eight others.[52] Regime-affiliated media accused the involved fighters of killing security personnel at a checkpoint in Fahraj, Kerman Province, in December 2025.[53] Ansar al Furqan – an anti-regime Baloch that is not a member of the MPF – claimed responsibility for the December 2025 attack on a checkpoint in Fahraj as the group’s second attack of 2025 as part of Ansar al Furqan’s ongoing operation targeting regime personnel.[54] LEC Border Guard forces also raided an unspecified “terrorist” hideout in Zabol, Sistan and Baluchistan Province, near the Iran-Pakistan border, on February 26 and discovered suicide vests and materials for improvised explosive devices.[55] The LEC Border Guard units are still searching for the fighters, who fled the scene of the raid.[56]

**The United States sanctioned more than 30 individuals, entities, and vessels on February 25 for enabling illicit Iranian oil exports and supporting Iran’s ballistic missile and drone programs.[57]** The US Treasury sanctioned 12 vessels and multiple shipping companies linked to Iran’s “shadow fleet” that generates revenue for the Iranian regime’s domestic repression, regional proxy activities, and weapons programs, which include Iran’s missile and drone procurement networks.[58] The US Treasury also sanctioned three Turkey-based firms for supporting “sensitive machinery” procurement worth “hundreds of thousands” of US dollars.[59] The US Treasury also sanctioned an Iran-based firm, a United Arab Emirates-based firm, and four individuals that are tied to Qods Aviation Industries, for the

procurement of sodium perchlorate. Qods Aviation Industries is part of the Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry, and sodium perchlorate is a key precursor for solid propellant for missiles.[60]

## Iraq

*See topline section.*

## Syria

**US efforts to mediate between the Syrian government and the Suwayda National Guard are yielding limited cooperation between the two parties.** The Syrian government and Suwayda National Guard exchanged 86 detainees on February 26, which marks the first time since the July 2025 Suwayda violence that the two sides have exchanged detainees.[61] The United States mediated the exchange.[62] The Syrian government exchanged 61 Suwaydawi detainees for 25 Syrian army and Interior Ministry detainees that the National Guard captured in July 2025.[63] The Syrian government Suwayda Governor Mustafa al Bakour and pro-government Druze notables Laith al Balous and Hassan al Atrash oversaw the exchange.[64] Atrash's appearance at the exchange is notable given that he recently fled from Suwayda Province to the Syrian government on February 16 in order to avoid a "plot" to kill his family.[65]

**The Syrian government is pursuing negotiations with the current authorities in Suwayda as it simultaneously employs a strategy that is likely designed to politically weaken and then subordinate Druze Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri's coalition to the government over time.** The Syrian government likely views reported divisions in Suwayda as an opportunity to gradually weaken and subordinate Druze factions through political actions that ultimately weaken Druze factions in both negotiations or ahead of a possible military operation. The Syrian government has co-opted several Suwaydawi Druze notables to undermine Hijri's authority, including Suwayda internal security commander Sulieman Abd al Baqi, Laith al Balous, and Hassan al Atrash, as noted above.[66] A Druze source told UK-based Saudi media that many in Suwayda Province oppose Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri or his son, Salman, taking control, but fear voicing dissent.[67] Hijri's National Guard has previously conducted politically motivated killings in Suwayda Province in December 2025 against dissenting Druze figures.[68]

The Syrian government is also attempting to reduce support for Hijri and his followers through US-backed dialogue with other Druze leaders. The United States is reportedly mediating back-channel negotiations between the Syrian government and unspecified Druze leaders to integrate Suwayda Province under Syrian government control.[69] Israeli and Arab media that reported on the negotiations did not clarify whether the Druze leaders were affiliated with prominent Druze Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri, who has led the efforts from within the province to establish a "independent Druze region" that remains independent from the Syrian government.[70] A Syrian security source said that the dialogue aims to "reduc[e] the influence" of Hijri and his followers, which suggests that the US and Syrian government are engaging other prominent Druze leaders within Suwayda Province that are not affiliated with Hijri.[71]

The Syrian government appears to be attempting to achieve its own objectives for re-integrating Suwayda Province through these back-channel talks with Druze leaders. The "basis of the talks" is to grant local Suwaydawi authorities broad security and administrative powers in exchange for some Druze parties abandoning their demands for autonomy and integrating Suwayda Province under government control, according to Israeli media on February 24.[72] The negotiations' stated goal of integrating all territory under state control aligns with the Syrian government's objective but is unlikely to satisfy the

Suwayda Supreme Legal Committee's demand for full autonomy.[73] The Supreme Legal Committee is the autonomous governing authority currently providing administrative services to Suwayda Province.[74] Druze Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri, who formed the committee in August 2025 and retains wide influence over certain armed groups in Suwayda Province, has called for "not only self-administration but an independent Druze region." [75]

The Syrian government may seek to exploit divisions within Suwayda Province in order to encourage dissatisfied Druze factions to turn on Hijri if negotiations to integrate Suwayda Province fail and conflict erupts. The Syrian government's media relations director for Suwayda Province told UK-based Saudi media on February 25 that the government will integrate Suwayda Province by "implementing the scenario used in northeastern Syria within the next two months." [76] He added that Damascus aims to peacefully integrate Suwayda Province into the state and does not want to repeat the violence seen in July 2025, however. [77] The "northeastern Syria scenario" refers to the Syrian government's efforts to integrate the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which began with negotiations but turned to military action when those negotiations failed to produce results. [78] The Syrian government may seek to pursue the same strategy in Suwayda Province by employing a combination of diplomatic engagement, political undermining, and military pressure. The Internal Security commander for Suwayda City, Suleiman Abdul Baqi, said on February 16 that the government would enter the province "soon" after he spoke with Suwaydawi civilians. [79]

**The Syrian army disarmed a car bomb or vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) in the historically Kurdish Sheikh Maqoud neighborhood of Aleppo City on February 25.** [80] The Syrian army and Syrian media have not named a perpetrator or group responsible for the IED at the time of this writing. The unidentified perpetrators likely aimed to undermine the January 30 agreement between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Syrian government by targeting a sensitive Kurdish neighborhood in government-held territory. [81] The Syrian army took control of Sheikh Maqoud from SDF-affiliated internal security forces on January 10. [82] ISW-CTP cannot confirm from the available evidence whether the IED was a car bomb or a VBIED. The Syrian army seized at least two IED-laden vehicles, presumably planted by SDF-affiliated security forces, during government operations in Sheikh Maqoud and neighboring Ashrafieh in January 2026. [83] A VBIED cell was previously active between December 2024 and February 2025 in SDF-held areas of the northeastern Aleppo countryside before the fall of the regime. [84]

## Arabian Peninsula

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

## Palestinian Territories & Lebanon

**The Lebanese government is continuing to pressure Hezbollah not intervene in a potential conflict between Iran and the United States or Israel.** Saudi media reported on February 26 that Lebanese President Joseph Aoun informed Hezbollah that it will face "decisive action from the state" if it participates in any future conflict between Iran and the United States or Israel. [85] Aoun's message follows Israeli warnings to the Lebanese government that Israel would conduct "hard" strikes against Lebanon if Hezbollah participates in a potential conflict. [86] The Lebanese government and its officials, including Aoun and Lebanese Parliament Speaker and Hezbollah ally Nabih Berri, have been working by "all means" to prevent Hezbollah's participation. [87] Hezbollah reportedly has told the Lebanese state that it will abide by "combat neutrality" and will not confront the United States or Israel. [88] Hezbollah

officials, including the group's secretary general, have recently defined an attack targeting Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei as Hezbollah's "red line," however.[89] A war that causes the collapse of the Iranian regime would be a major setback for Hezbollah and its regional goals since Hezbollah still relies on the regime for substantial financial support and explicitly subordinates itself to the supreme leader.[90]

**Israel did not send any representatives to the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire monitoring committee's February 25 meeting, which marked the first time that any party has not sent a representative to a meeting since the committee was created in November 2024.**[91] The ceasefire monitoring committee held a meeting on February 25 that reportedly did not lead to any new decisions or results.[92] The ceasefire monitoring committee has recently halted its frequent meetings, reportedly due to disagreements among its members over the mechanism's role and Hezbollah's disarmament.[93] A Lebanese official source told Saudi media that Israel's absence aimed to signal its "clear unease with the Lebanese army's movements in [southern Lebanon] and its decisive decision to establish new observation posts." [94] The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) ordered soldiers on February 24 to "respond" to an Israeli drone after the drone fired upon soldiers establishing a post in Marjaayoun, southeastern Lebanon.[95] The LAF has recently established a new position along the Israel-Lebanon border to maintain security.[96] The LAF's establishment of border positions suggests that it is attempting to improve border security, though the LAF did not elaborate on or specify the exact purpose of the border positions.

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## Endnotes

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**Benjamin Schmida, Adham Fattah, Parker Hempel, Kelly Campa, Zahra Wakilzada, Katherine Wells, Annika Ganzeveld**

**Analyst Notes:** Data Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

## Toplines

**The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) cannot verify whether Iran has suspended “all enrichment-related activities,” according to a confidential IAEA report seen by the Associated Press on February 27.**[1] The report states that the IAEA does not know the location, size, or composition of Iran’s enriched uranium stockpile.[2] Iran had over 400 kilograms of uranium enriched up to 60 percent before the June 2025 Israel-Iran War.[3] The IAEA has observed “regular vehicular activity” around the entrance to the Esfahan Nuclear Technology Center (ENTC), where at least part of Iran’s enriched uranium is reportedly stored.[4] The United States and Israel struck the ENTC during the Israel-Iran War.[5] The Institute for Science and International Security reported on February 9 that Iran has covered the ENTC’s middle and southern tunnel entrances with soil to protect them from potential US or Israeli airstrikes.[6] The IAEA has also observed activity at Natanz and Fordow but cannot verify the purpose or nature of this activity, according to the February 27 IAEA report.[7] Iran has covered the anti-drone cage at the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant (PFEP) at Natanz with panels.[8] The Institute assessed in December 2025 that the panels indicate that Iran is attempting to explore the rubble at the site discreetly.[9] Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi announced on February 26 that Iranian and IAEA officials will meet in Vienna on March 2 and that both sides are preparing documents for the meeting.[10] The upcoming Iran-IAEA meeting coincides with the start of the IAEA Board of Governors meeting on March 2.[11]

The IAEA report comes amid US officials’ concerns about Iran’s nuclear ambitions. US Vice President JD Vance stated on February 25 that the United States has “seen evidence” that Iran is trying to rebuild its nuclear weapons program.[12] Vance met with Omani Foreign Affairs Minister Badr al Busaidi in Washington, DC, on February 27 to discuss the US-Iran nuclear negotiations.[13] Busaidi stated after the meeting that Iran has agreed to dilute its enriched uranium stockpile to the “lowest level possible” and convert it into fuel.[14] US Secretary of State Marco Rubio separately stated on February 25 that Iran is “not enriching now” but is trying “to get to the point where [it] ultimately can.”[15]

**Iranians continued to hold anti-regime protests during the 40-day mourning ceremonies across Iran. CTP-ISW recorded four protests, including two large protests, at 40-day mourning ceremonies across four provinces on February 27.**[16] CTP-ISW defines large protests as protests with over 1,000 participants. The 40th day of mourning marks the end of the initial mourning period and is often observed with public commemorations and gatherings in Shia Islam. Numerous anti-

regime protests have taken place at 40-day mourning ceremonies in recent weeks.[17]

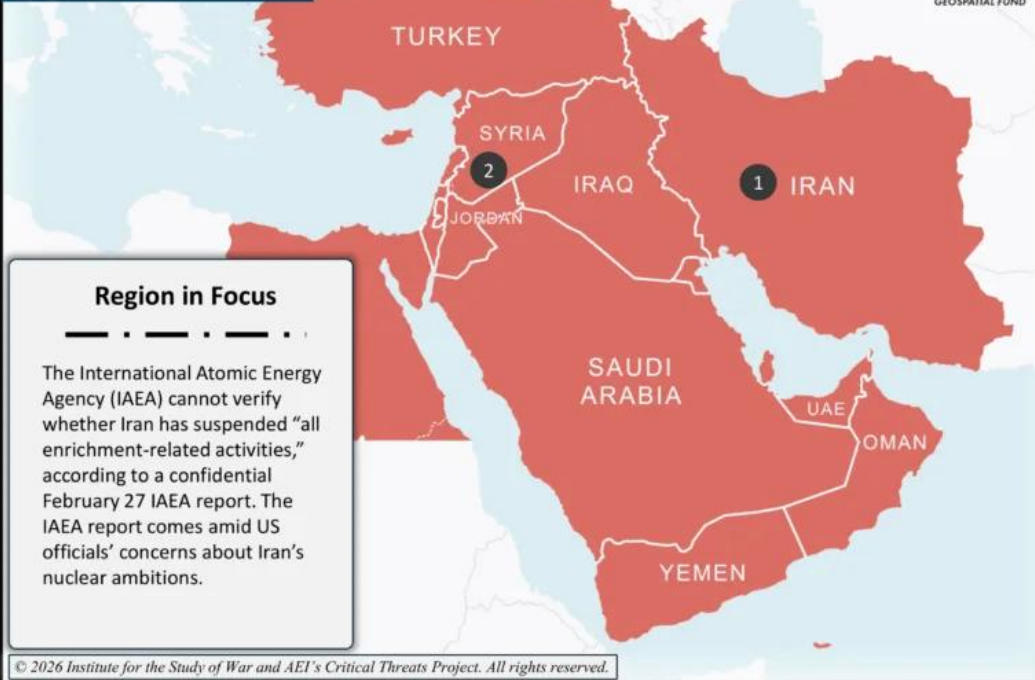
**CTP-ISW did not record any protests at Iranian universities or schools on February 27.[18]**

There are no classes at universities and schools on Fridays since Friday is part of the Iranian weekend, which may have contributed to the lack of protest activity on February 27. Many students live in university dormitories and would therefore presumably still be able to organize protests on the weekend, however. Multiple Iranian universities have also moved instruction online until late March 2026, likely in an effort to reduce opportunities for protests.[19]



## Iran Update

February 27, 2026



- 1 IRAN.** Iranians held at least four anti-regime protests at 40-day mourning ceremonies across four provinces on February 27. CTP-ISW did not record any protests at Iranian universities on February 26, which marks the second consecutive day that CTP-ISW has not observed protest activity at universities.
- 2 SYRIA.** The Syrian government is reportedly planning to lessen Syrian President Ahmed al Shara’s executive authority by delegating some of his responsibilities to other government officials in the coming weeks. The Syrian government will likely remain highly centralized and under Shara’s control despite these reported changes.

## Key Takeaways

- 1. Iranian Nuclear Program:** The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) cannot verify whether Iran has suspended “all enrichment-related activities,” according to a confidential February 27 IAEA report. The IAEA report comes amid US officials’ concerns about Iran’s nuclear ambitions.
- 2. Iranian Protest Activity:** Iranians held at least four anti-regime protests at 40-day mourning ceremonies across four provinces on February 27. CTP-ISW did not record any protests at Iranian universities on February 26, which marks the second consecutive day that CTP-ISW has not observed protest activity at universities.

## Iran

*See topline section.*

## Iraq

*Nothing significant to report.*

## Syria

**The Syrian government is reportedly planning to lessen Syrian President Ahmed al Shara's executive authority by delegating some of his responsibilities to other government officials in the coming weeks.[20] The Syrian government will likely remain highly centralized and under Shara's control despite these reported changes.** Shara will reportedly appoint a prime minister to head the transitional government, according to New Lines Magazine on February 27.[21] Shara has been serving as the "de facto" prime minister since coming to power. One of the front-runners for the premiership is current Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani, who is one of Shara's closest advisers.[22] Shaibani has wielded enormous influence within the Syrian transitional government as Foreign Minister and supervisor to the General Secretariat of Political Affairs, which oversees government institutions and bureaucracy.[23] Shara will also reportedly transfer his role as chair of the National Security Council to current Interior Minister Anas Khattab, another close Shara ally.[24] Shara's reported "reshuffle" does not constitute a meaningful devolution of Shara's central authority, given that his closest advisers would assume positions in his place. Shara would therefore be able to continue to exert close personal control over key Syrian government and security structures.

**The Syrian government and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continue to take steps to implement the January 30 agreement, but some of the agreement's clauses remain unfulfilled ahead of the agreement's February 28 deadline.** The 14-point January 30 agreement outlines four phases of implementation to be completed before the end of February 2026.[25] The Syrian Interior Ministry assumed control over the SDF internal security directorate in Kobani, Aleppo Province, on February 27.[26] An Interior Ministry delegation met with the SDF internal security forces (known as Asayish) commander for Kobani to discuss integrating SDF internal security forces into the Interior Ministry.[27] Syrian government internal security forces will reportedly jointly deploy with Asayish forces to checkpoints at the entrance of Kobani on February 28 after Syrian army and SDF units withdraw from them, according to a source.[28] The source added that the Syrian government will likely open the roads to Kobani on March 2.[29] This step would effectively end the government's "siege" on Kobani, which has faced food, water, and electricity shortages since January 20.[30] The Syrian General Security Service (GSS) and Asayish also jointly deployed to checkpoints in Jalabiya, Aleppo Province, on February 27.[31] The GSS and Asayish first deployed joint checkpoints in al Shouyoukh, Aleppo Province, southwest of Kobani, on February 4.[32]

The SDF appears to be taking steps to integrate four brigades into the Ministry of Defense (MoD). These brigades include three in Hasakah Province and one in Kobani, as stipulated by the January 30 agreement.[33] A Kurdish journalist published photos of SDF commander Mazloum Abdi with four commanders.[34] These commanders may be the commanders who will lead the SDF brigades in the MoD.[35] Neither the SDF nor the Syrian government has commented on the four brigade commanders at the time of this writing, however.

Hasakah Province Internal Security Commander Brigadier General Marwan al Ali and proposed Deputy Internal Security Director Siamand Afrin continued to hold meetings with local leaders in northeastern Syria. Ali and Afrin met with Shammar tribe leader Sheikh Maan Hamidi al Daham and the Sanadid Forces Bandar al Daham commander in Tall Kojer, Hasakah Province.[36] The Shammar Tribe and Sanadid Forces defected from the SDF to the Syrian government on January 20 during the MoD's offensive against the SDF.[37]

The SDF and Syrian government still disagree on certain clauses of the January 30 agreement, however. These disputes include disagreements over Kurdish language policy and the SDF's handover of energy infrastructure to the government. The January 30 agreement stipulates that the Education Ministry and the SDF will discuss the educational curriculum for Kurdish communities.[38] The SDF reportedly demanded that the Education Ministry provide full Kurdish translations of the Syrian curriculum and that the curriculum be taught in Kurdish in predominantly Kurdish areas.[39] President Ahmed al Shara declared on January 22 that the Kurdish language would only be taught as an elective class twice a week in predominantly Kurdish areas, however. The January 30 agreement also stipulates that the SDF must hand over its oil fields to the government.[40] The director of the Syrian Petroleum Company told Syrian state media on February 26 that the SDF has not handed over the Rumaylan oil field to the Syrian government.[41]

The January 30 agreement requires the Syrian government and the SDF to conduct a prisoner swap in the third phase of the agreement.[42] The government and the SDF have not conducted a prisoner swap as of February 27. The continued cooperation between the Syrian government and the SDF on all the other requirements of the third phase suggests that the January 30 agreement's February 28 deadline will not prevent both parties from fulfilling this phase, however.

**The SDF continues to pursue Kurdish political representation within the Syrian government to secure Kurdish rights and maintain its political influence.** A delegation from the SDF's political wing, the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), met with Syrian Foreign Affairs Ministry representatives on February 26, including American Affairs Director Qutaiba Idlibi and Latin American Affairs Director Ali Qara.[43] The SDC stated that these meetings aimed to enhance communication between the two sides and explore prospects for political dialogue and joint coordination.[44] Idlibi emphasized the importance of increasing the SDC's communication with the Foreign Affairs Ministry's General Secretariat for Political Affairs.[45] Shara established the General Secretariat for Political Affairs under the Syrian Foreign Affairs Ministry in March 2025 to "oversee domestic political activities." [46] Each province in Syria has a General Secretariat for Political Affairs director who serves as a direct line of communication to Shara and enables Shara to monitor political activities at a local level.[47]

AANES Foreign Affairs Co-Chair Ilham Ahmed separately told Kurdish media on February 26 that Syrian Kurdish groups are considering forming a unified political bloc to coordinate efforts before re-engaging with the Syrian government.[48] SDF commander Mazloun Abdi similarly announced on February 16 that the Democratic Union Party (PYD), Kurdish National Council (KNC), and other smaller parties had come together to create a "Kurdish political body." [49] Ahmed likely calculates that a unified Kurdish party in Syria would help advance Kurdish policy and rights in Damascus ahead of the planned Syrian constitutional referendum in 2030.[50] Ahmed may also consider Kurdish political unity as a necessary defensive measure against Syrian government attempts to divide Kurdish parties. KNC officials reportedly traveled to Damascus to meet with Syrian President Ahmed al Shara on February 3 without the support or foreknowledge of the PYD, which possibly reflected an effort by Shara to divide Kurdish political parties.[51]

**A pro-government Suwaydawi Druze commander met with Trump administration officials and**

**US congressional members in Washington, DC, on February 26, likely to rally US political support for the Syrian government's campaign to re-integrate Suwayda Province into the state.**[52] Suleiman Abdel Baqi held “high-level security meetings” to discuss Suwayda Province with officials close to US Vice President JD Vance, other unspecified White House officials, and US congressional members in Washington, DC, on February 26.[53] Abdel Baqi is a Druze militia leader who currently serves as the Interior Ministry’s commander for Suwayda City, even though Suwayda City is currently outside of government control.[54] The United States is currently mediating negotiations between the Syrian government, the anti-government Druze coalition that controls Suwayda Province, and other Druze leaders within the province.[55] Abdel Baqi likely seeks US support for the re-integration of Suwayda Province into the Syrian state because he appears to be one of several officials overseeing these efforts in Suwayda.[56] The Syrian government likely seeks to leverage its current relationship with the Trump administration to advocate and build support for the Syrian state’s objectives regarding Suwayda Province.**The Syrian GSS thwarted an attempted Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) attack targeting a GSS checkpoint in Deir ez Zor Province on February 27. This attack follows the Islamic State’s (IS) recent call for increased attacks against Syrian government targets.**[57] ISIS fighters on a motorcycle attempted to attack a GSS checkpoint near al Kasrah, Deir ez Zor Province, on February 27.[58] GSS forces killed one of the ISIS fighters, while the other fighter fled the scene.[59] IS-affiliated social media accounts recently called on fighters to intensify attacks against the government using motorcycles and firearms on February 22.[60] The Syrian government banned motorcycles in Tabqa and Raqqa cities, Raqqa Province, on February 23 after ISIS attacks in both cities but has not yet implemented a similar ban in Deir ez Zor Province.[61] The GSS separately arrested an alleged ISIS fighter in Jarablus, Aleppo Province, on February 27, who has conducted three improvised explosive device (IED) attacks against military and civilian targets since 2022.[62]

## Arabian Peninsula

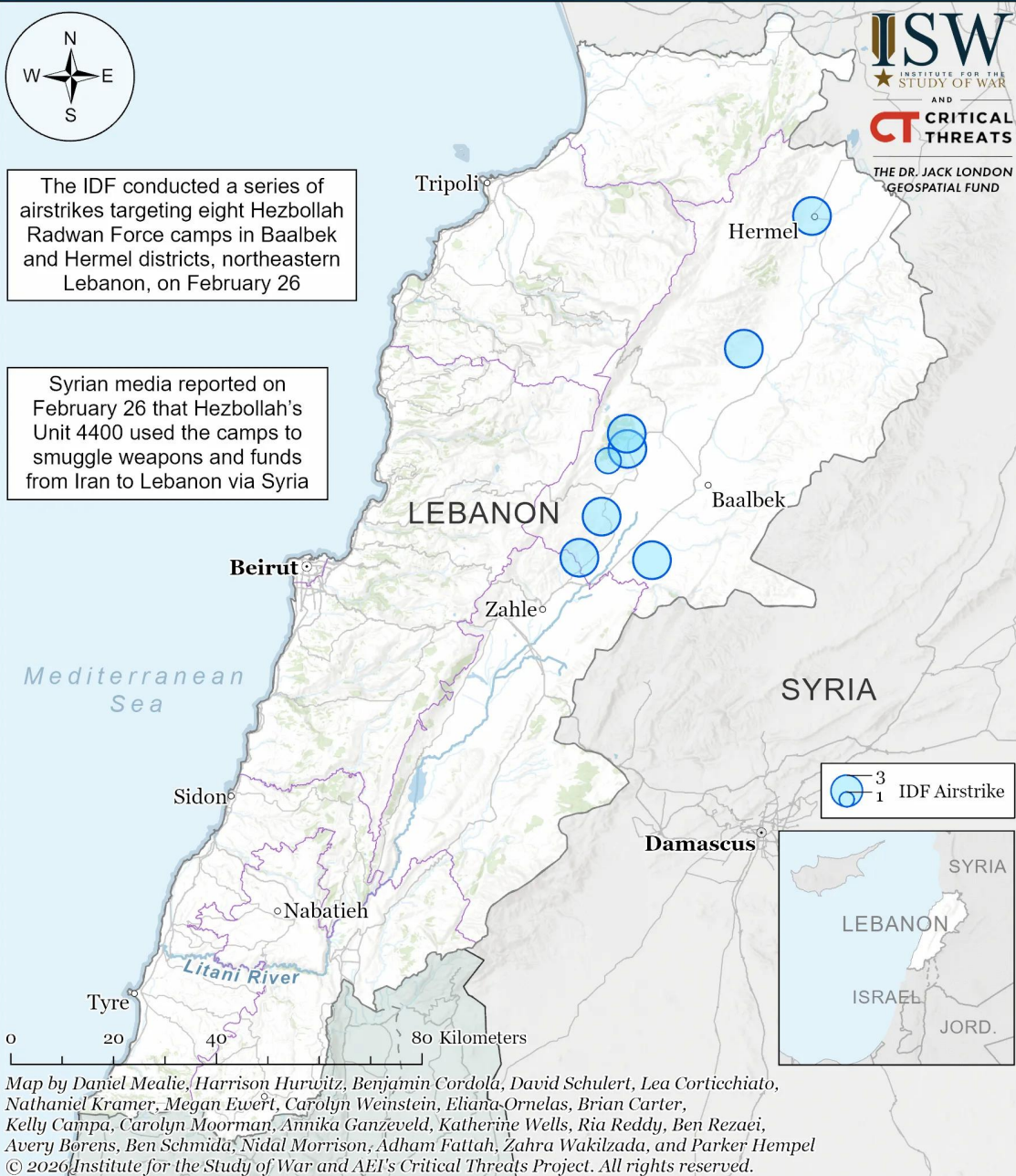
*CTP-ISW has temporarily suspended its Yemen coverage starting on January 9.*

## Palestinian Territories & Lebanon

**The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conducted a series of airstrikes targeting eight Hezbollah Radwan Force camps in Baalbek and Hermel districts, northeastern Lebanon, on February 26 as part of the IDF’s campaign to curb Hezbollah’s reconstitution efforts.**[63] The IDF reported that it struck a “large quantity” of Hezbollah weapons, including rockets, stored at the camps.[64] The IDF published a video of secondary explosions at one of the camps, indicating the presence of ammunition at the site.[65] The IDF said that Hezbollah used the camps to train fighters to increase “emergency preparedness” and conduct attacks against the IDF and Israel.[66] The Radwan Force is Hezbollah’s special operations forces unit created to conduct offensive operations into Israeli territory.[67] Syrian media reported on February 26 that Hezbollah’s Unit 4400, which is responsible for transferring weapons from Iran to Hezbollah, also used the camps to smuggle weapons and funds from Iran to Lebanon via Syria.[68] Israel previously targeted members of Hezbollah’s missile array, including at least three commanders, in the Baalbek District on February 20.[69] Israel has prioritized striking Hezbollah infrastructure, including multiple Radwan sites, north of the Litani River in recent months.[70]

# Israeli Airstrikes in Lebanon

## February 27, 2026 at 2:00 PM ET



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### Endnotes

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# Iran Update Special Report: US and Israeli Strikes, February 28, 2026



**Annika Ganzeveld, Nicholas Carl**

**Analyst Notes:** Data Cutoff: 08:00 AM ET

*The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) and the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute will publish multiple updates over the next 24 hours to provide analysis about the ongoing strikes on Iran. We will continue to produce Iran Update special reports until the strikes conclude. We will cover Iranian and Axis of Resistance responses to the strikes that threaten US forces and interests.*

## Key Takeaways

1. The United States and Israel have launched a strike campaign into Iran in order to topple the Islamic Republic, among other objectives. US President Donald Trump announced the launch of combat operations in a video statement and called on the Iranian people to rise up against their regime.
2. Israel has launched decapitation strikes against Iranian leaders. Israeli officials told Axios that Israel is targeting the “entire Iranian leadership,” including current and former officials. Israel conducted numerous airstrikes targeting Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, according to Israeli and US officials speaking to Axios. Khamenei’s condition remains unclear at the time of this writing. Israeli officials assess that the IDF killed Defense Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani, Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Commander Major General Mohammad Pakpour, Defense Minister Brigadier General Aziz Nasir Zadeh, and the Iranian “intelligence chief.”
3. Israel and the United States have also attacked Iranian military targets. Some of these attacks are probably meant to disrupt Iran’s ability to immediately retaliate. The IDF announced that it has targeted “hundreds of military targets,” including missile launchers, in western Iran. The IDF previously attacked Iranian missile launchers at the outset of the June 2025 Israel-Iran war to disrupt Iran’s ability to retaliate.
4. There are unconfirmed reports of strikes on Iranian naval assets. An Israeli OSINT account reported strikes on the IRGC Navy frigate *Jamaran*. There are also unverified reports of strikes on the IRGC Navy Imam Ali Navy Base in Chabahar, Sistan and Balochistan Province.
5. Iran has responded immediately to the US and Israeli strikes. Iran has launched multiple barrages at Israel in recent hours. An Israeli media correspondent reported that Iran had launched around 35 missiles at Israel as of 5:42 AM ET. Iran has also attacked numerous US bases across the region. Iran has attacked US bases in Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

# Toplines

**This update is the first of multiple Iran Updates that ISW-CTP will publish over the next 24 hours. The US and Israeli strikes are a rapidly evolving situation, and no single individual or organization will have complete information at this time, including the states involved.** Some of the information that is available in the open-source will be contradictory or inaccurate. ISW-CTP will continually refine its assessments over the coming days and weeks as we work to understand the situation. ISW-CTP will issue corrections and clearly articulate when we refine an earlier understanding of events.

Many sources will misinterpret information in the coming hours. Social media users posted footage that showed dozens of bright streaks in the sky during the October 2024 Iranian ballistic missile attack on Israel and claimed that all of the streaks were ballistic missiles, for example. It later emerged that some of the streaks were ballistic missile interceptors, not missiles.

ISW-CTP will only publish high-confidence information. Our maps and the update below include information such as air defense activity, reported explosions with and without footage, and reported and confirmed airstrikes. Some users online may misinterpret anti-aircraft fire as evidence of an airstrike. Some air defense systems have long ranges that make it difficult to assess if the air defense fire's point of origin is the actual target or if the air defense system is protecting a more distant site. Likewise, the sound of explosions may not denote an airstrike because some sources may misinterpret the sound of missile launches or other kinetic activity.

**The United States and Israel have launched a strike campaign into Iran in order to topple the Islamic Republic, among other objectives.** US President Donald Trump announced the launch of combat operations in a video statement and called on the Iranian people to rise up against their regime. Trump separately said that his main concern is the freedom of the Iranian people. The stated US objectives are to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, "raze" the Iranian missile program to the ground, "annihilate" Iranian naval forces, and prevent the Axis of Resistance from harming US forces in the Middle East.[1] The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has similarly stated that it seeks to "remove existential threats" to Israel, including the Iranian nuclear and missile programs and Axis of Resistance.[2]

**Israel has launched decapitation strikes against Iranian leaders.** Israeli officials told Axios that Israel is targeting the "entire Iranian leadership," including current and former officials.[3] Israel conducted numerous airstrikes targeting Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, according to Israeli and US officials speaking to Axios.[4] The *New York Times* published satellite imagery of several destroyed buildings in Khamenei's compound in Tehran.[5] Khamenei's condition remains unclear at the time of this writing. A senior official told Israeli media that Israel assesses that the IDF killed Khamenei but is still waiting for "final confirmation." [6] A source "with knowledge of the matter" told Reuters that Khamenei was not in Tehran at the time of the strikes and had moved to a secure location, however.[7]

Israel has also targeted senior regime officials close to Khamenei. Israeli officials assess that the IDF killed Defense Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani, Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Commander Major General Mohammad Pakpour, Defense Minister Brigadier General Aziz Nasir Zadeh, and the Iranian "intelligence chief." [8] The "intelligence chief" likely refers to either Intelligence and Security Minister Esmail Khatib or IRGC Intelligence Organization Chief Brigadier General Majid Khademi. Pakpour replaced former IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami, and Khademi replaced former IRGC Intelligence Organization Chief Brigadier General Mohammad Kazemi after Israel killed Salami and Kazemi in the June 2025 Israel-Iran War.[9] Israel has also reportedly targeted President Masoud Pezeshkian and former

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, although the condition of these officials remains unclear.[10]

## Defense Council

As of 8:00 AM ET on February 28, 2026



President  
(Chairman)  
Masoud Pezeshkian



Supreme Leader  
Representative  
(Secretary)  
Ali Shamkhani



Minister of Intelligence  
Esmail Khatib



AFGS Chief  
Abdol Rahim Mousavi



IRGC Commander  
Mohammad Pakpour



Khatam ol Anbia Central  
Headquarters Commander  
Ali Abdollahi Ali Abadi



Artesh Commander  
Amir Hatami



Speaker of the Parliament  
Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf



Supreme Leader  
Representative  
Ali Akbar Ahmadian



Judiciary Chief  
Gholam Hossein  
Mohseni Ejei

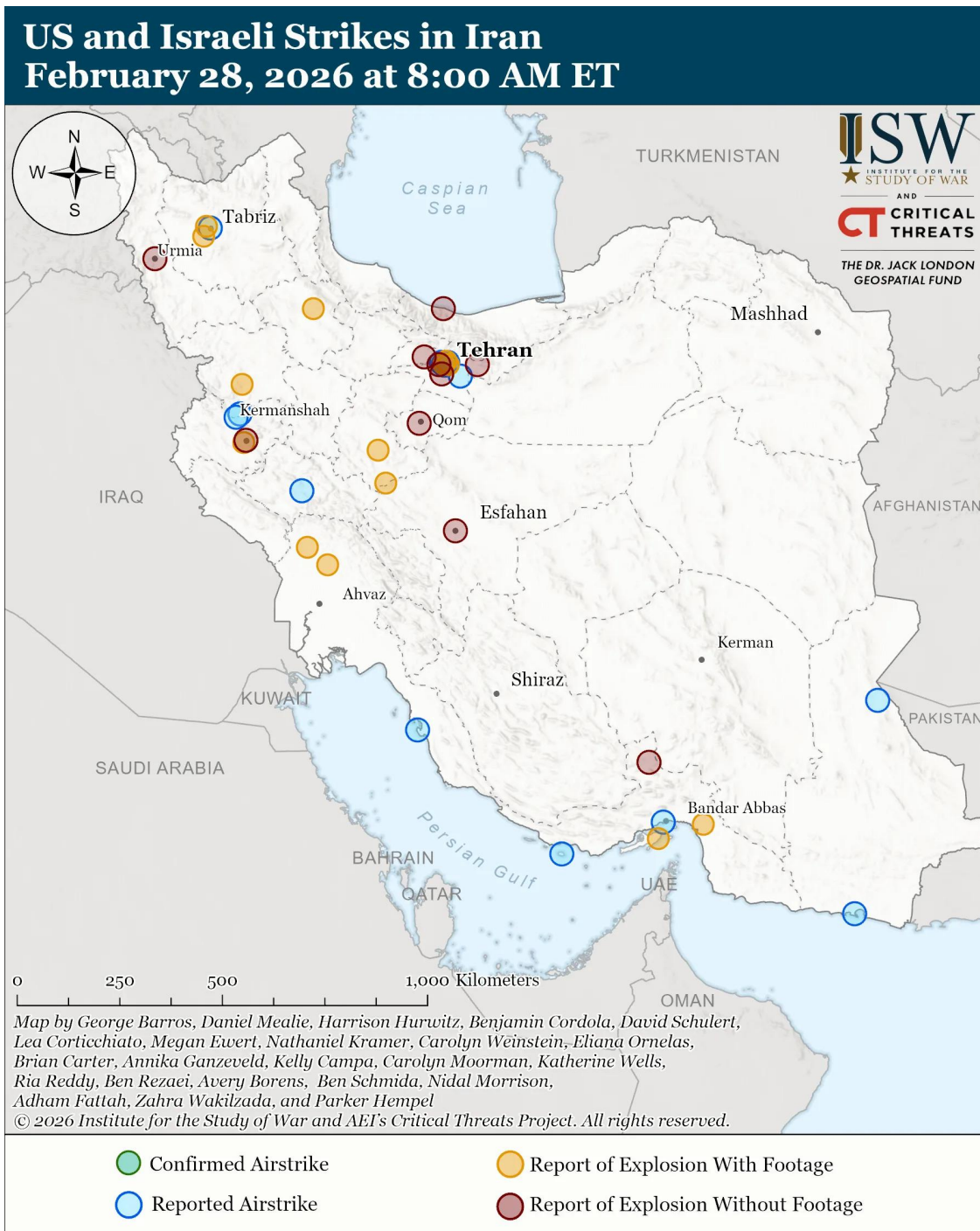
© 2026 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project. All rights reserved.



**Israel and the United States have also attacked Iranian military targets. Some of these attacks are probably meant to disrupt Iran's ability to immediately retaliate.** The IDF announced that it has targeted "hundreds of military targets," including missile launchers, in western Iran.[11] The IDF previously attacked Iranian missile launchers at the outset of the June 2025 Israel-Iran war to disrupt Iran's ability to retaliate.[12] Israel destroyed at least one-third of Iran's ballistic missile launchers during the Israel-Iran war, according to the IDF.[13] Israel also destroyed at least 35 percent of Iran's ballistic missile stockpile during the June war, but Iran has reportedly reconstituted its stockpile in recent months.[14]

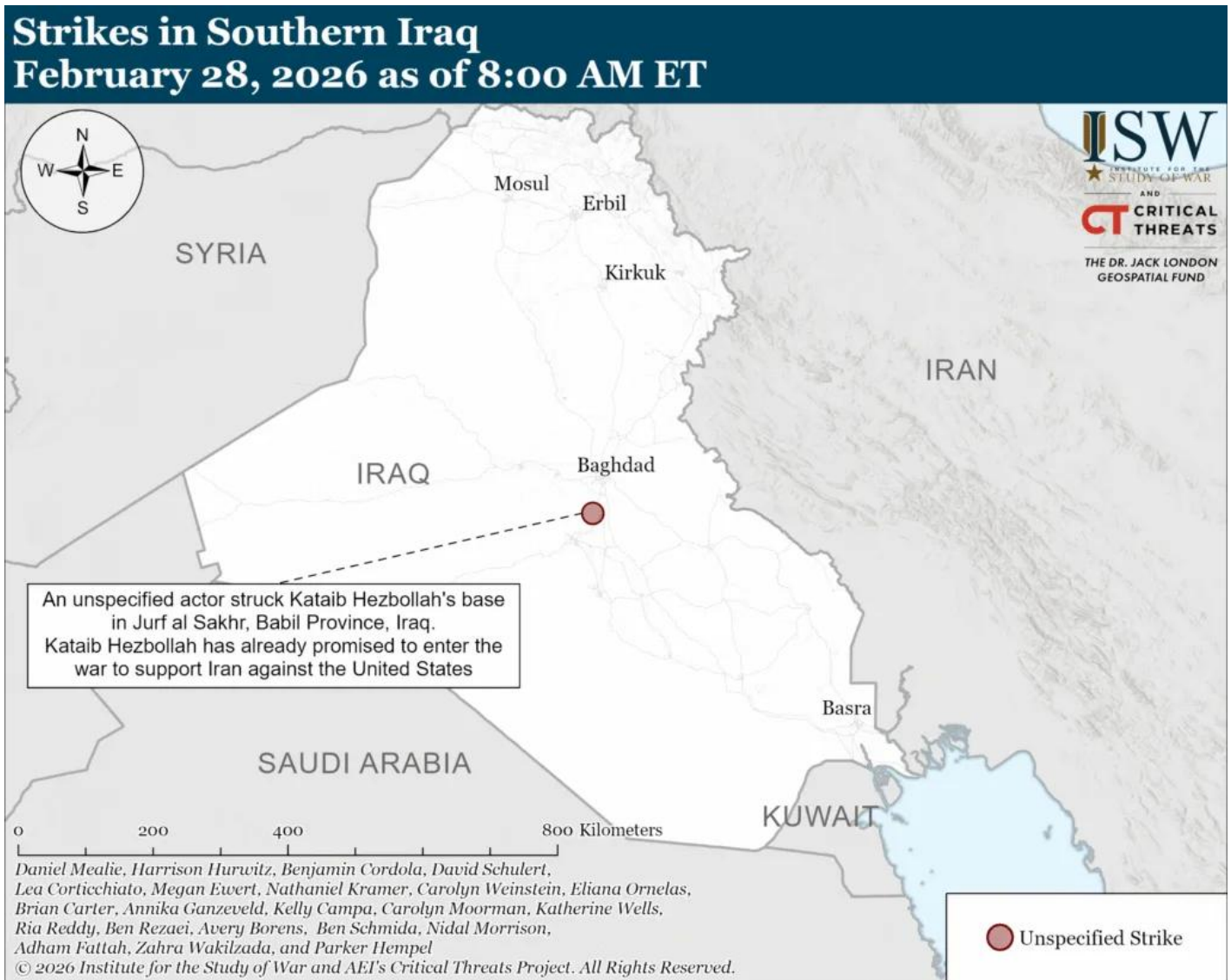
There are unconfirmed reports of strikes on Iranian naval assets. An Israeli OSINT account reported strikes on the IRGC Navy frigate *Jamaran*. [15] The *Jamaran* previously operated in the Red Sea during at

least parts of the Houthis' attack campaign against international shipping during the October 7 war.[16] US Central Command (CENTCOM) noted in June 2024 that the Jamaran failed to respond to a distress call issued by a commercial vessel attacked by the Houthis despite being several nautical miles from the vessel.[17] There are also unverified reports of strikes on the IRGC Navy Imam Ali Navy Base in Chabahar, Sistan and Balochistan Province.[18]



**The Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) announced airstrikes in Jurf al Sakhr, which is an Iranian-backed Kataib Hezbollah stronghold.** The PMF announced that airstrikes killed two PMF members in al Mayadin and injured three PMF members in Sanidij.[19] An unspecified security source told Iraqi media that Israel targeted the Kataib Hezbollah headquarters in Jurf al Sakhr.[20] The United States previously attacked the 46th and 47th PMF brigades, which are controlled by Kataib Hezbollah, in Jurf al Sakhr in January 2024.[21] Jurf al Sakhr is a previously Sunni town south of Baghdad that Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah occupied after committing acts of sectarian cleansing against the

previous residents.[22]



**Iran has responded immediately to the US and Israeli strikes.** Iran has launched multiple barrages at Israel in recent hours. An Israeli media correspondent reported that Iran had launched around 35 missiles at Israel as of 5:42 AM ET.[23] Iran has reportedly launched Emad and Ghadr missiles at Israel.[24] Iran has used Emad and Ghadr missiles to attack Israel during previous conflicts, including in June 2025.[25] A ballistic missile expert also reported that Iran may have used Kheybar Shekan or Fatah-1 missiles to attack Israel in the current conflict.[26] An OSINT account based in Bahrain claimed that Iran has launched between two to four missiles per barrage.[27] Iran previously struggled to coordinate large-scale missile barrages during the Israel-Iran war and may again be struggling due to the disruption imposed by US and Israeli strikes.

**Iran has also attacked numerous US bases across the region.** Iran has attacked US bases in Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.[28] Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters Commander Major General Ali Abdollahi Ali Abadi confirmed that Iranian forces have conducted missile strikes against Israel and US bases in the region and stated that Iran will continue to retaliate until the United States and Israel are “definitively defeated,” signaling the Iranian intention to sustain military action rather than conduct a limited retaliatory strike.[29] IRGC-affiliated media claimed that Iran has targeted 14 US bases thus far.[30]

The following map shows US positions in the Middle East. This map does NOT reflect the US bases that Iran has attacked.



#### Endnotes

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[2] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/2027671053477056848>

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# Iran Update Evening Special Report, February 28, 2026



**Kelly Campa, Benjamin Schmida, Adham Fattah, Parker Hempel, Carolyn Moorman, Annika Ganzeveld**

**Analyst Notes:** Data Cutoff: 4:00 PM ET.

*The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) and the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute are publishing two updates daily to provide analysis on the war with Iran. The morning update will focus on US and Israeli strikes on Iran and the Axis of Resistance's response to the strikes. The evening update will be more comprehensive, covering events over the past 24-hour period and refining items discussed in the morning update.*

## Key Takeaways

1. The combined US-Israeli force killed Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, and it is unclear who is currently ruling Iran. US President Donald Trump confirmed on February 28 that Khamenei was killed. The Iranian constitution stipulates that the President, the Judiciary Chief, and a member of the Guardian Council will take over the responsibilities of the Supreme Leader until Iran's Assembly of Experts convenes to select a new leader. Khamenei was reportedly making plans prior to the current conflict for who he wanted to rule Iran in the event of his death, however.
2. The combined force conducted nearly 900 strikes on Iranian targets in the first 12 hours of its campaign, according to an unspecified US official speaking to Fox News. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) stated that it struck 500 Iranian targets. The regime's internet shutdown has almost certainly limited the amount of information about US and Israeli strikes coming out of Iran. ISW-CTP's strike data, therefore, only reflects a portion of the total amount of US and Israeli strikes.
3. The United States and Israel are pursuing several lines of effort to achieve their stated campaign objectives: 1) suppressing Iranian air defenses, 2) degrading Iranian retaliatory capabilities, and 3) disrupting Iranian command-and-control.
4. US Central Command (CENTCOM) stated that Iran's retaliation in response to the joint US-Israeli air campaign has not inflicted US casualties or caused meaningful damage to US military installations used to conduct offensive operations against Iran. CENTCOM said that US forces have successfully defended against hundreds of Iranian missile and drone attacks.
5. Iran has not attacked vessels in the Strait of Hormuz at the time of this writing, despite warning vessels against transiting through the strait. A European Union official told Reuters on February 28 that the IRGC warned vessels transiting through the strait that "no ship is allowed to pass the Strait of Hormuz." ISW-CTP has not observed any reports of Iranian naval forces taking kinetic measures to harass or attack vessels in the Strait of Hormuz.
6. Several members of Iran's Axis of Resistance, including Hezbollah and the Houthis, have

condemned the US and Israeli strikes in Iran but have not conducted retaliatory attacks as of ISW-CTP's 04:00 PM ET data cutoff. These Axis of Resistance members could decide at any time to attack the United States or Israel in response to the killing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, however.

7. The Islamic Resistance of Iraq, which is a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, claimed on February 24 that it conducted 16 unspecified "operations" with "dozens" of drones targeting "enemy" bases in Iraq and the region. The Iraqi Joint Operations Command also reported on February 28 that Iraqi air defenses intercepted nine drones that unspecified actors launched at Iraqi military sites in Dhi Qar and Basra provinces. No group has claimed responsibility for these attacks at the time of this writing.

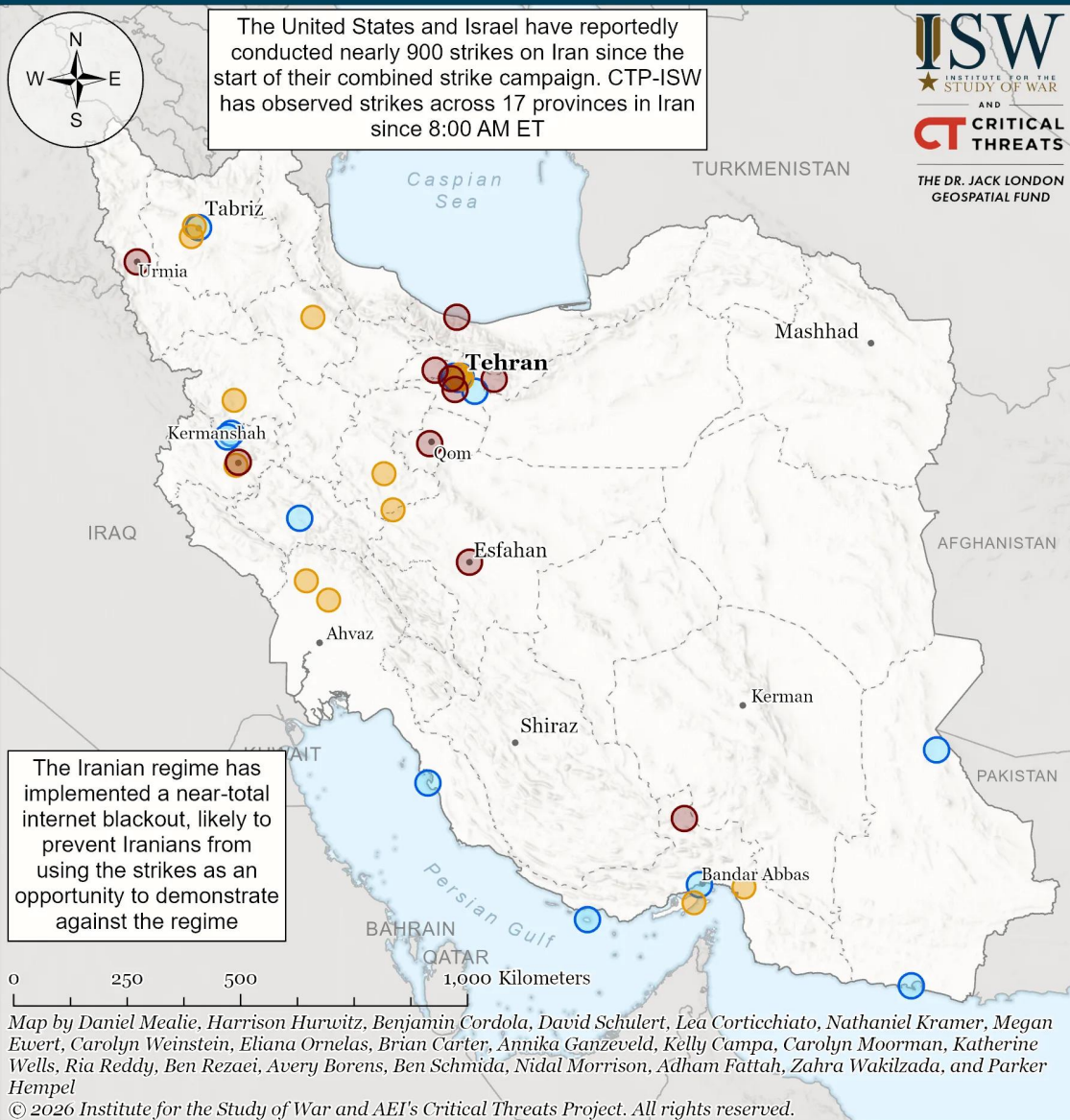
## Toplines

**The combined US-Israeli force killed Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, and it is unclear who is currently ruling Iran.** US President Donald Trump confirmed on February 28 that Khamenei was killed.[1] Four Israeli security officials who were briefed on the matter told the *Washington Post* that Israeli airstrikes killed Khamenei in his Tehran compound on February 28.[2] A Fox News correspondent reported on February 28 that the combined force made the decision to take advantage of a meeting between Khamenei and multiple senior Iranian officials to strike Khamenei, according to US officials.[3] It is unclear at the time of this writing who is leading Iran. The Iranian constitution stipulates that the President, the Judiciary Chief, and a member of the Guardian Council will take over the responsibilities of the Supreme Leader until Iran's Assembly of Experts convenes to select a new leader.[4] Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei, and one of the six jurists on the Guardian Council are therefore constitutionally mandated to rule Iran. Khamenei was reportedly making plans prior to the current conflict for who he wanted to rule Iran in the event of his death, however. The *New York Times* reported on February 22 that Khamenei and top Iranian officials made plans for who would "manage the country" if Khamenei were killed.[5] The list of possible leaders included Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani and Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf.[6]

**The combined force conducted nearly 900 strikes on Iranian targets in the first 12 hours of its campaign, according to an unspecified US official speaking to Fox News.[7]** The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) stated that it struck 500 Iranian targets.[8] ISW-CTP has observed strikes across 17 provinces.[9] The regime's internet shutdown (read more below) has almost certainly limited the amount of information about US and Israeli strikes coming out of Iran. ISW-CTP's strike data, therefore, only reflects a portion of the total amount of US and Israeli strikes. A senior US official told Axios on February 28 that US strikes are focused on Iran's missile program and missile launchers, while Israeli strikes are focused both on senior Iranian officials and the missile program.[10]

# US and Israeli Strikes in Iran

## As of February 28, 2026 at 4:00 PM ET



- Confirmed Airstrike
- Reported Airstrike
- Report of Explosion With Footage
- Report of Explosion Without Footage

# US and Israeli Strikes in Tehran City

## As of February 28, 2026 at 4:00 PM ET



- Confirmed Airstrike
- Reported Airstrike
- Report of Explosion With Footage
- Report of Explosion Without Footage

# US and Israeli Strikes in Tehran and Alborz Provinces

## As of February 28, 2026 at 4:00 PM ET



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INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR  
 AND  
**CT** **CRITICAL THREATS**  
THE DR. JACK LONDON GEOSPATIAL FUND

Map by Daniel Mealie, Harrison Hurwitz, Benjamin Cordola, David Schulert, Lea Corticchiato, Megan Ewert, Nathaniel Kramer, Carolyn Weinstein, Eliana Ornelas, Brian Carter, Annika Ganzeveld, Kelly Campa, Carolyn Moorman, Katherine Wells, Ria Reddy, Ben Rezaei, Avery Borens, Ben Schmida, Nidal Morrison, Adham Fattah, Zahra Wakilzada, and Parker Hempel  
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- Confirmed Airstrike
- Reported Airstrike
- Report of Explosion With Footage
- Report of Explosion Without Footage

# US and Israeli Strikes in Kermanshah City

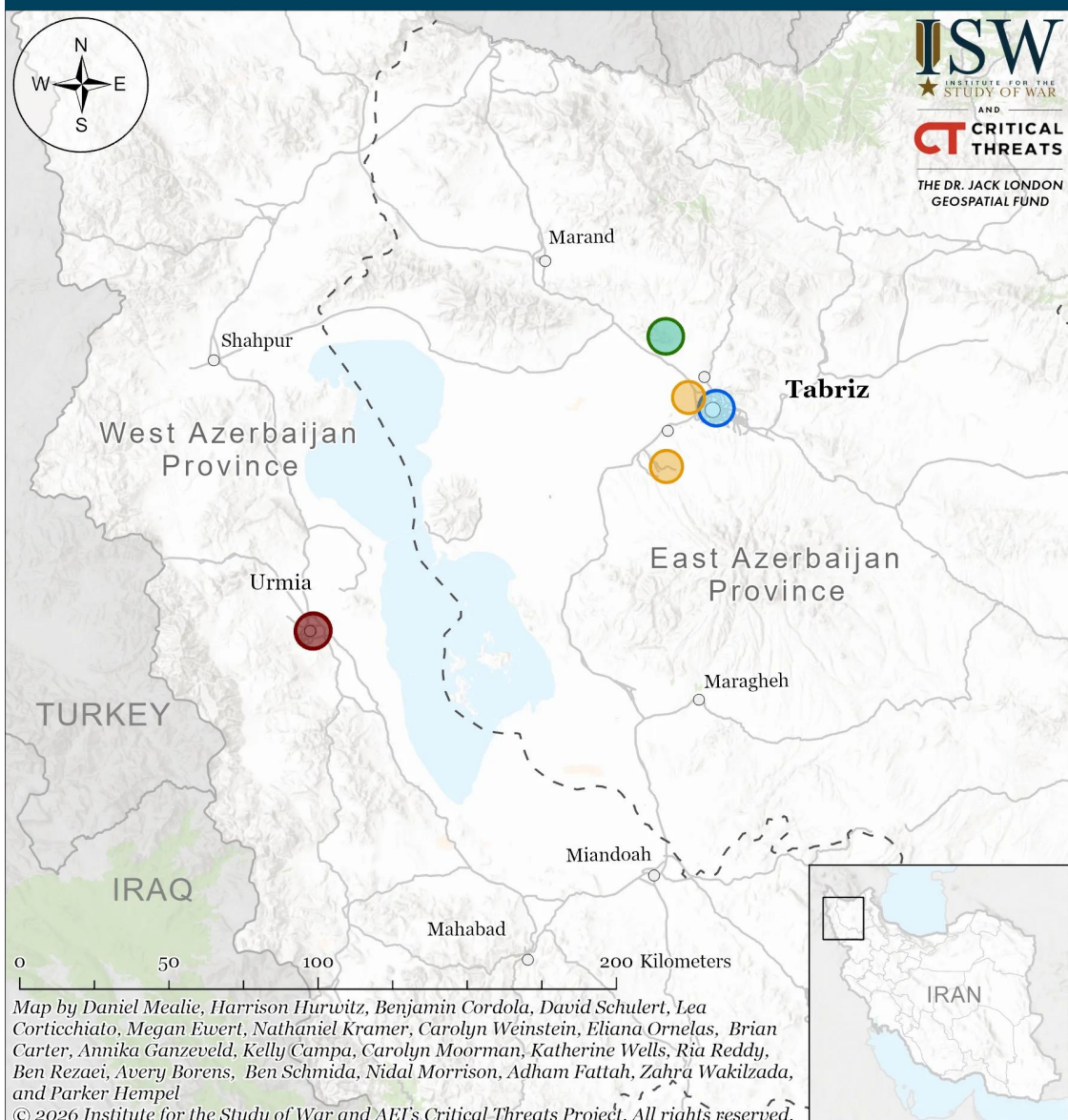
As of February 28, 2026 at 4:00 PM ET



- Confirmed Airstrike
- Reported Airstrike
- Report of Explosion With Footage
- Report of Explosion Without Footage

# US and Israeli Strikes in Northwestern Iran

As of February 28, 2026 at 4:00 PM ET



- Confirmed Airstrike
- Reported Airstrike
- Report of Explosion With Footage
- Report of Explosion Without Footage

# US and Israeli Strikes in Hormozgan Province

As of February 28, 2026 at 4:00 PM ET



**The regime is taking steps to maintain internal security.** Internet monitor Netblocks reported on February 28 that the regime has implemented a near-total internet blackout.[11] The regime likely shut down the internet to prevent Iranians from coordinating efforts to organize demonstrations against the regime amid the US and Israeli strikes. Restoring access to the internet is crucial to achieving the United States' stated objective of toppling the Iranian regime. The regime is also trying to intimidate Iranians from providing information to the United States or Israel. The SNSC released a statement on February 28 warning Iranians not to provide "targeting information to the enemy," or else face harsh punishment from the judiciary.[12]

**The United States and Israel are pursuing several lines of effort to achieve their stated campaign objectives.** The United States and Israel seek to topple the Islamic Republic, among other objectives.[13] The United States also seeks to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, "raze" the Iranian missile program "to the ground," "annihilate" Iranian naval forces, and prevent the Axis of

Resistance from harming US forces in the Middle East.[14] The IDF has similarly stated that it seeks to “remove existential threats” to Israel, including the Iranian nuclear and missile programs and Axis of Resistance.[15] The United States and Israel have pursued the following three lines of effort thus far:

**1. Suppressing Iranian air defenses.** The combined force has “effectively suppressed” Iranian air defenses, according to an unspecified US official speaking to a Fox News correspondent.[16] The IDF previously targeted Iranian air defenses at the outset of the 12-day war, which enabled the IDF to quickly establish and maintain air superiority over large parts of Iran.[17] The scale and intensity of the combined force’s air defense suppression efforts appear to be less than that of the IDF’s efforts in June 2025, possibly because Iranian air defenses have remained significantly degraded since the June 2025 Israel-Iran War. The IDF struck at least 11 air defense systems in western Iran, including an “advanced SA-65 air defense system” at the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Ground Forces 29th Nabi Akram Operational Division base in Kermanshah Province.[18] The combined force also reportedly struck a radar on Kish Island in the Persian Gulf.[19] An Israeli X account also posted footage of a US Reaper drone flying over Shiraz, Fars Province.[20] The presence of a Reaper drone over a large Iranian city suggests that Iranian air defenses are badly degraded, given that the Reaper is susceptible to relatively rudimentary air defense systems.

# US and Israeli Strikes Targeting Iranian Air Defense and Retaliatory Capabilities

From 8:00 AM ET to 4:00 PM ET on February 28, 2026



**2. Degrading Iranian retaliatory capabilities.** The combined force appears to have limited the scope of Iranian retaliatory attacks targeting US bases, Israel, and other targets by striking Iranian missile launchers and missile bases. The combined force's effort to limit Iran's ability to immediately retaliate resembles Israel's highly effective strategy in June 2025. The IDF limited Iran's ability to respond to Israel at the start of its campaign and continued to destroy Iranian missile launchers and stockpiles throughout its air campaign.[21] The combined force's efforts to limit Iran's response appear to be effective, given Iran's relatively ineffective response thus far (see below).

The IDF struck dozens of ballistic missile launchers at the IRGC Amand Missile Base, north of Tabriz, East Azerbaijan Province.[22] The IDF struck the Amand Base twice during the Israel-Iran War.[23] The base reportedly stores Ghadr medium-range ballistic missiles, which Iran previously used in its April and October 2024 attacks on Israel.[24] Iran has also reportedly used Ghadr missiles to attack Israel in the current conflict.[25] The IDF struck Iranian personnel as they attempted to load surface-to-surface

missiles into a launcher at an unspecified location in western Iran.[26] The IDF also struck a missile launcher in Zanjan Province following launches from the site.[27]

The combined force also struck numerous Iranian missile bases across the country that likely store missile stockpiles.[28] Destroying Iran's ballistic missile and drone stockpiles would degrade Iran's retaliatory capabilities both in the immediate term and throughout the campaign. The IDF destroyed around 40 percent of Iran's ballistic missiles during the 12-day war.[29] Iran prioritized reconstituting its ballistic missile program as an immediate strategic priority in the months following the war, and an Israeli journalist reported in December 2025 that Iran had reconstituted its "heavy" missile stockpile to around 2,000 missiles.[30] "Heavy" ballistic missiles presumably refer to medium-range ballistic missiles that can reach Israel. The combined force struck several missile bases that the IDF struck in June 2025, which suggests that Iran may have replenished some of its missile stockpile or repaired infrastructure at these facilities since the June war. Iranian media reported that the combined force struck the Khomein Missile Base in Markazi Province.[31] The IDF struck this base at least twice during the 12-Day War.[32]

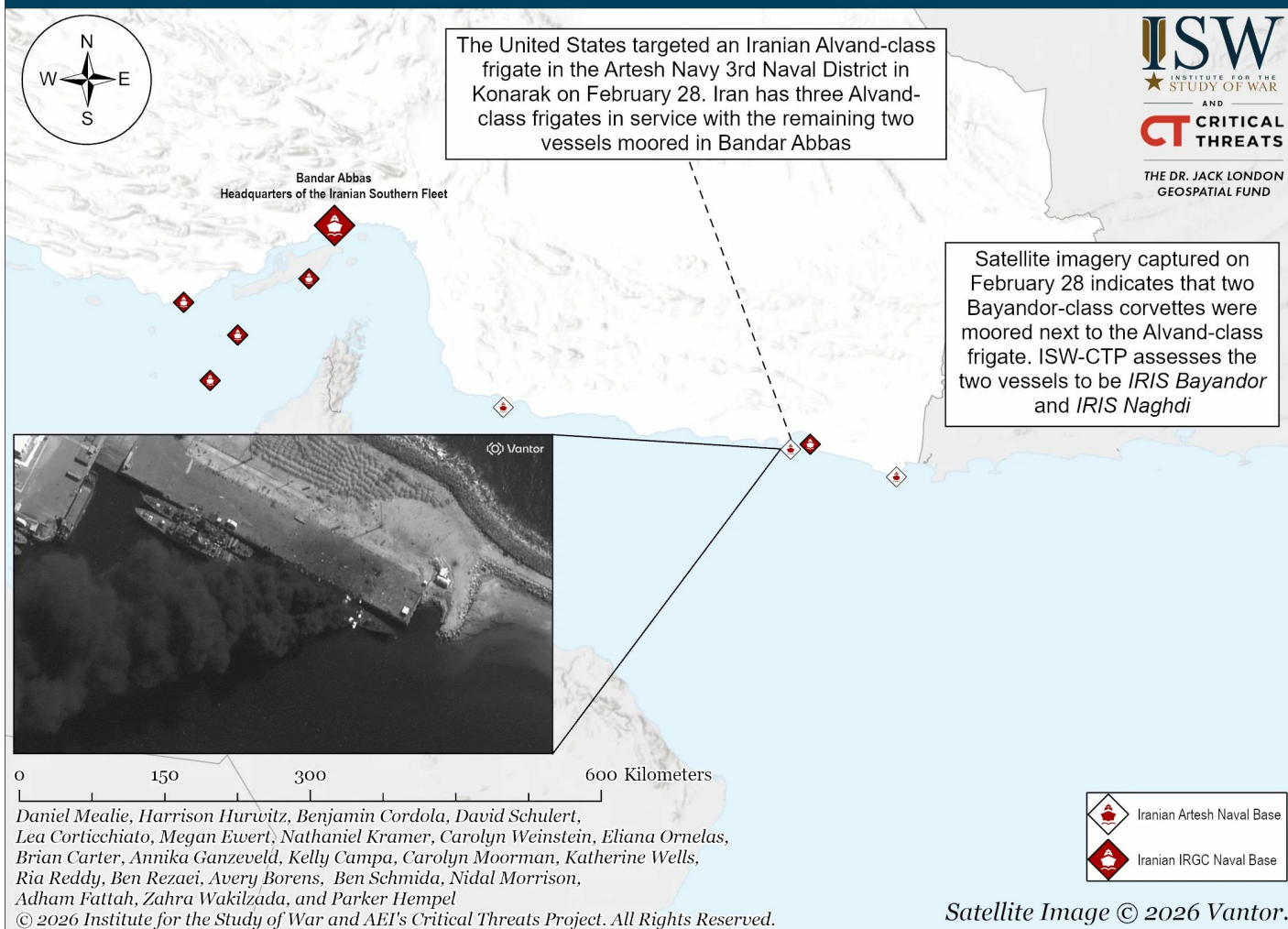
Iranian media also reported that the combined force struck IRGC missile bases in Haji Abad, Hormozgan Province, and in Jam, Bushehr Province.[33] Iran recently positioned missile launchers along its southern coast in preparation for a conflict with the United States and Israel.[34] The combined force also reportedly struck an IRGC missile depot stored at Mehrabad Airport in Tehran.[35] The Artesh Air Force 1st Tactical Airbase is co-located at Mehrabad Airport.[36]

ISW-CTP has not observed reports that the combined force has targeted Iranian ballistic missile production capabilities as of this writing. The combined force has struck several defense industrial sites that may produce ballistic missile components or other materials, however (described in more detail below). The IDF struck Iranian missile production sites and equipment throughout the June 2025 war, including the Parchin Military Complex east of Tehran.[37] These strikes contributed to Israel's degradation of Iran's ballistic missile program.[38]

### **The combined strike force is disrupting the Iranian navies' ability to attack international shipping and US Navy vessels as part of the effort to degrade Iran's retaliatory capabilities.**

An Israeli OSINT account reported strikes on the IRGC Navy frigate *Jamaran*, as ISW-CTP reported in its February 28 Morning Update.[39] The *Jamaran* is a Moudge-class frigate.[40] The *Jamaran* previously seized two US unmanned surface vessels in September 2022 and operated around the Red Sea during at least parts of the Houthis' campaign against international shipping during the October 7 war.[41] Vantor separately captured satellite imagery of what appears to be an Alvand-class frigate on fire in Konarak, Sistan and Baluchistan Province (see below). Alvand-class frigates are the largest surface combatants that Iran has.[42] Iran had three Alvand-class frigates prior to the current conflict.[43] The remaining two Alvand-class frigates are moored in Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province.[44] The imagery shows that two Bayandor-class corvettes were moored next to the Alvand-class frigate. ISW-CTP assesses that the two Bayandor-class corvettes are the IRIS *Bayandor* and IRIS *Naghdi*.

# US and Israeli Strikes Against the Iranian Navies February 28, 2026 as of 8:00 AM ET



The *New York Times* separately verified a video of a strike on an IRGC Navy base in Minab, Hormozgan Province.[45] The base contains the 16th Assef Coastal Missile Group, which operates under the 1st Saheb ol Zaman IRGC Naval District.[46] The 16th Assef Coastal Missile Group is equipped with surface-to-sea missiles and is reportedly considered “the most important missile brigade” in the IRGC Navy.[47] An elementary school located close to the naval base was also reportedly struck.[48] Iranian officials and media have reported that the strike killed dozens of individuals.[49] CENTCOM said that it is investigating the reports of civilian casualties.[50]The combined force also struck the IRGC Navy Imam Ali Base in Chabahar, Sistan and Baluchistan Province, on February 28.[51]

**3. Disrupting Iranian command-and-control.** The combined force has conducted a decapitation campaign targeting the Iranian military and political leadership.[52] An IDF official told Axios that the combined force struck three unspecified sites simultaneously, killing multiple senior Iranian officials “essential to the management of the campaign and the regime’s governance.”[53] CENTCOM reported that the combined force targeted IRGC command-and-control facilities.[54] Various sources have circulated footage of explosions at IRGC headquarters and bases in Tehran, East Azerbaijan, and Kurdistan provinces.[55] The combined force’s targeting of IRGC headquarters and bases could be part of an effort to disrupt Iranian command-and-control, but these strikes could also seek to achieve other effects, such as suppressing and degrading Iranian air defense and retaliatory capabilities.

Israeli officials told Axios on February 28 that Israel is targeting the entire “political and military” and

“past, present, and future” Iranian leadership.[56] The combined force killed the following individuals:

- Iranian Defense Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani[57]
- Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Commander Major General Mohammad Pakpour[58]
- Defense Minister Brigadier General Aziz Nasir Zadeh[59]
- Khatam ol Anbia Intelligence Chief Saleh Asadi[60]
- Supreme Leader Military Office Chief Mohammad Shirazi[61]
- Organization of Defensive Innovation and Research (SPND) Chairman Hossein Jabal Amelian[62]
- Former SPND Chairman Reza Mozafari Nia[63]

The combined force also targeted Khamenei’s son and potential successor, Mojtaba Khamenei, but his status is unknown.[64] CBS reported that US and Israeli strikes killed at least 40 Iranian leaders.[65]

**The combined force struck several targets linked to Iran’s internal security apparatus.** Multiple sources posted geolocated footage showing smoke coming from the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) headquarters in Tehran.[66] Multiple sources also published geolocated footage of smoke near the Law Enforcement Command (LEC) headquarters in central Tehran.[67] ISW-CTP cannot confirm whether the LEC headquarters was struck, however. The LEC is the regime’s premier internal security service.[68] The LEC has many subordinate units, including the Prevention and Operations Police, which commands law enforcement stations across Iran, and Special Units, a highly trained, anti-riot force that deploys when regular police units cannot contain civil disorder.[69] Israel previously struck both the MOIS and the LEC headquarters during the 12-day war.[70] Multiple sources circulated footage of explosions at the Heydar Karar IRGC Base in Damavand, Tehran Province.[71] The Heydar Karar IRGC Base houses a training center for the Fatehin Battalions, according to Iranian media.[72] The Fatehin Battalions are special forces for the Basij Organization.[73] The Basij Organization is a paramilitary organization responsible for civil defense and social control.[74] The Fatehin have cracked down on Iranian protests, including in January 2026.[75] The Heydar Karar IRGC Base houses other assets, however, and it is not clear if the combined force targeted the Fatehin Battalions. The degradation of Iran’s internal security apparatus could reduce the regime’s ability to maintain internal security and social control.

**The combined force targeted multiple industrial sites likely tied to Iran’s defense industrial base.** The IDF issued an evacuation order for an industrial park near Esfahan City.[76] The IDF said that it planned to strike the site shortly thereafter.[77] Kimia Part Sivan Company, which is the drone production arm of the IRGC Quds Force, is located at the industrial park.[78] Kimia Part Sivan Company has reportedly worked with the Shahed Aviation Industries Research Center to produce engine and navigation components for Iranian drones.[79] The United States sanctioned Kimia Part Sivan Company in 2021 and also sanctioned several individuals and entities tied to the company in 2025.[80] Iranian media also reported that the combined force targeted an unspecified defense industrial site in Shiraz, Fars Province.[81] Israel previously struck the Iranian Defense Ministry-affiliated Shiraz Electronics Industries in Shiraz during the 12-day war.[82] The combined force also reportedly struck the Khairabad Industrial Town near Arak, Markazi Province.[83] The industrial town houses multiple metal manufacturing companies.[84]

**The combined force struck several other sites on February 28. ISW-CTP is unable to confirm the targets or intended effects of these strikes.** The combined force struck the Sahand University of Technology in Tabriz, East Azerbaijan Province.[85] The combined force also struck an unspecified IRGC base in Qasr-e Firouzeh, eastern Tehran City.[86] The Qasr-e Firouzeh neighborhood is located near many Iranian military and security sites, such as the Tehran Province Law Enforcement Command Special Units Headquarters.[87]

# Iranian Retaliation

**US Central Command (CENTCOM) stated that Iran’s retaliation in response to the joint US-Israeli air campaign has not inflicted US casualties or caused meaningful damage to US military installations used to conduct offensive operations against Iran.[88]** CENTCOM said that US forces have successfully defended against hundreds of Iranian missile and drone attacks.[89] CENTCOM reported no US casualties or combat-related injuries and assessed that the minimal damage to US installations caused by Iranian retaliatory attacks has not affected US operations against Iran.[90] Iran launched ballistic missiles and drones at US bases in Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Qatar, and Jordan on February 28.[91] The IRGC announced that the strikes against US bases were part of Operation “True Promise 4,” which targeted the headquarters of the US Navy’s Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, US bases in Qatar and the UAE, and military and security sites in Israel.[92] An Iranian ballistic missile strike reportedly damaged a clinic at al Udeid Airbase in Qatar, the largest US military base in the Middle East.[93] Iranian ballistic missiles also struck the Ali al Salem Airbase in Kuwait and the Muwaffaq al Salti Airbase in Jordan, where US forces maintain a presence.[94] Iranian ballistic missile strikes caused “significant damage” to the runway at the Ali al Salem Airbase in Kuwait, according to the Italian foreign minister.[95] It remains unclear whether a ballistic missile interception, rather than a direct strike, caused the damage to the runway, however.[96] Iran also launched ballistic missiles and drones at the US Consulate in Erbil, a US base at the Erbil Airport, and the United States’ Harir Airbase in Erbil Province, but US air defense systems intercepted the munitions.[97] Iran previously launched 14 short- and medium-range ballistic missiles at al Udeid Airbase at the end of the 12-Day war.[98]

## Iranian and Axis Retaliatory Strikes in the Middle East As of February 28, 2026 at 4:00 PM ET



**Iran has not attacked vessels in the Strait of Hormuz at the time of this writing, despite warning vessels against transiting through the strait.**[99] A European Union official told Reuters on February 28 that the IRGC warned vessels transiting through the strait that “no ship is allowed to pass the Strait of Hormuz.”[100] ISW-CTP has not observed any reports of Iranian naval forces taking kinetic measures to harass or attack vessels in the Strait of Hormuz. An unspecified US official told the *New York Times* that there is “no evidence Iran was attempting a military blockade of the waterway.”[101] It is unlikely that Iranian naval forces could successfully impose a blockade on the Strait of Hormuz, given that such a blockade would require a continuous military presence, according to a risk and compliance analyst.[102] Commercial ship traffic dropped by 70 percent in the Strait of Hormuz in response to the United States and Israel’s combined strike campaign on Iran, according to ship tracking platform MarineTraffic.[103] Twenty percent of the global oil supply passes through the Strait of Hormuz.[104]

**The rate and scale of Iranian ballistic missile strikes targeting Israel suggest that US and**

**Israeli efforts to degrade Iran’s retaliatory capabilities are succeeding.** Iran launched 20 separate ballistic missile barrages at Israel on February 28.[105] Iran reportedly launched 170 ballistic missiles at Israel and US military bases in the Middle East on February 28, according to an Israeli military correspondent.[106] Iran reportedly only launched between two and four ballistic missiles per barrage, according to an OSINT account based in Lebanon.[107] At least two Iranian ballistic missiles struck Israel, one in Bnei Brak and the other in Tel Aviv.[108] The strike in Tel Aviv reportedly killed one person and wounded 21 others, while the strike in Bnei Brak wounded several people, according to Israeli media.[109] The IDF said that it has shot down over 10 Iranian drones that targeted Israel.[110] The rate and scale of Iran’s retaliatory attacks on February 28 are significantly less than the rate and scale of Iranian retaliatory attacks during the 12-day war. The first two Iranian ballistic missile barrages during the 12-day war included fewer than 100 missiles but caused at least seven impacts on Israel.[111] The lower rate and scale of Iranian ballistic missile strikes targeting Israel may indicate that the United States and Israel are successfully disrupting Iran’s retaliatory capabilities.

**Multiple Iranian drone strikes on civilian infrastructure in Gulf countries wounded civilians on February 28.** Iranian drones struck civilian infrastructure in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, and Bahrain.[112] Iranian drones struck the Kuwait International Airport, reportedly causing minor injuries to several workers, the Fairmont Hotel in Dubai, the UAE, reportedly injuring four individuals, and residential buildings in Dubai and Bahrain.[113] The UAE, Kuwait, and Bahrain all condemned Iran for its attacks against their territory.[114]

**Several members of Iran’s Axis of Resistance, including Hezbollah and the Houthis, have condemned the US and Israeli strikes in Iran but have not conducted retaliatory attacks as of ISW-CTP’s 04:00 PM ET data cutoff.[115] These Axis of Resistance members could decide at any time to attack the United States or Israel in response to the killing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, however.** The Houthis and Hezbollah both issued statements on February 28 confirming their solidarity with Iran. Neither group threatened to enter the conflict.[116]

**ISW-CTP assesses that Hezbollah will likely intervene in the current war because the United States and Israel explicitly seek regime collapse and have thus crossed Hezbollah’s red lines.[117]** Hezbollah officials, including the secretary general, have stated that an attack targeting Khamenei is Hezbollah’s “red line.”[118] Hezbollah remains deeply ideologically aligned with Iran, adheres to the principle of Velayat-e Faqih (the ruling principle of the Iranian regime that entrusts both spiritual and temporal power to the Iranian supreme leader), and took its orders from Khamenei.[119] Hezbollah could take one of many courses of action, such as conducting a symbolic attack against Israeli forces in Israel or Lebanon, launching large missile and drone salvos targeting civilian areas in Israel, or conducting terrorist attacks against US and Israeli assets across the region and the world.[120]

**The Islamic Resistance of Iraq, which is a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, claimed on February 24 that it conducted 16 unspecified “operations” with “dozens” of drones targeting “enemy” bases in Iraq and the region.[121]** The group’s announcement follows attacks by the combined force against Kataib Hezbollah in Jurf al Sakhar, south of Baghdad, on February 28.[122] Kataib Hezbollah posted photos on February 28 commemorating two of its members who were killed in the strikes.[123] Kataib Hezbollah is a member of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq.[124] Kataib Hezbollah had announced prior to the attack on Jurf al Sakhr that it would soon begin attacking US bases in response to the attack on Iran.[125] Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba and Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada, which are both members of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, also issued statements on February 28 calling for conflict.[126] A Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba official called for its members to prepare for the “holy battle,” while Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada’s spokesperson told Iraqi media that the group had entered the war after the strikes in Jurf al Sakhr.[127] The Iraqi Joint Operations Command stated on February 28 that

a second wave of airstrikes targeted Jurf al Sakhr, but no other news outlets have reported the strikes at the time of this writing.[128]

**The Iraqi Joint Operations Command also reported on February 28 that Iraqi air defenses intercepted nine drones that unspecified actors launched at Iraqi military sites in Dhi Qar and Basra provinces.[129] No group has claimed responsibility for these attacks at the time of this writing.**

Unspecified actors launched four drones targeting the Imam Ali Airbase in Dhi Qar Province.[130] Unspecified actors also launched five drones at several unspecified military sites in Basra Province.[131] The Iraqi Security Media Cell separately reported on February 28 that unspecified actors fired drones at an unspecified military site in Basra City, wounding an Iraqi soldier.[132] An unspecified security source told Iraqi media on February 28 that unidentified actors launched a drone targeting a radar at the Basra Operations Command headquarters in Basra City.[133] The security source said that the drone did not cause any damage.[134] Unidentified actors similarly conducted drone attacks targeting the Imam Ali Airbase in Dhi Qar Province and Camp Taji in Baghdad Province in late June 2025. These attacks “severely damaged” Iraqi radars at those sites.[135] Those attacks came after Iranian-backed Iraqi figures repeatedly condemned Israel’s use of Iraqi airspace to attack Iran during the Israel-Iran War.[136]

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