

Iran Update



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The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) publish the Iran Update, which provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests. CTP-ISW publishes the Iran Update every weekday.

Click [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of the ongoing opposition offensive in Syria, and [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations. The Syria map is updated daily alongside the static Syria maps in this report. CTP-ISW ended daily maps of Israeli ground operations in February 2025.

We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We utterly condemn violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity, even though we do not describe them in these reports.

Unspecified Iranian sources told a Qatari-owned, London-based outlet on April 22 that the US-Iran nuclear talks are progressing “beyond belief.”[1] **Iran could calculate that by framing the talks as positive, even if the reality does not match, Iran could delay a US or Israeli strike on Iran’s nuclear program or the imposition of snapback sanctions on Iran.** The Iranian sources claimed that the United States, which was represented by US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff, did not demand complete dismantlement of the Iranian nuclear program and expressed approval to the principle of Iran’s right to enrich uranium during the nuclear talks. Unspecified Iranian officials told the *Wall Street Journal* on April 12 that Iran would be willing to reduce its uranium enrichment to 3.67 percent, which is the same level agreed upon in the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).[2] The sources stated that they believe Iran and the United States will reach an agreement within the next two months.[3] Iran’s negotiating team could calculate that presenting the talks as positive could enable them to continue the talks and thereby avoid negative consequences while still failing to make any serious concessions.

Former Iranian diplomat Abdolreza Faraji Rad also told the Qatari-owned outlet on April 22 that the upcoming US-Iran technical talks will focus on “enrichment levels and centrifuges.”[4] Iranian Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei confirmed on April 22 that the US and Iran agreed to reschedule the technical talks from April 23 to April 26 at the suggestion of Oman.[5] Rad stated that the outcome of the technical talks would be presented to US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff and Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi on April 26.[6] The head of a Tehran-

based think tank stated that the technical talks will focus on what to do about Iran's reserves of 60 percent enriched uranium.

Syrian authorities arrested two senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) officials in Damascus after the United States requested that the transitional government expel Palestinian militants in exchange for partial sanctions relief. The General Security Services (GSS) arrested PIJ's Syria Operations Commander Khaled Khaled and PIJ's Organizing Committee head Yasser al Zafari in Damascus on April 19 and 17, respectively.[7] PIJ released a statement on April 22 in which it asked "our brothers in the Syrian government" to release the two men.[8] The Syrian Interior Ministry acknowledged the arrests but did not clarify why it arrested the pair.[9] The United States reportedly asked the Syrian transitional government in mid-March to "[crack] down on extremist groups" and end Palestinian political and militia activity in Syria in exchange for partial sanctions relief.[10] It is unclear if the PIJ arrests are tied to this request, but Shara may view the pursuit of Palestinian groups with long-standing ties to Iran and the Assad regime as a compromise that would be favorable to the United States but also palatable to his Syrian constituents. The Assad regime has hosted Syria-based PIJ fighters over the years and allowed PIJ to base its headquarters in Damascus.[11] It is unclear how many Palestinian militias currently operate in Syria, given that the Syrian government has largely expelled other Axis of Resistance militias, such as Lebanese Hezbollah, from Syria since the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024.[12]

The new Syrian People's Assembly may more closely resemble previous Shura councils used by HTS and other Syrian Islamist factions, rather than a Western-style legislative branch. Syrian constitutional committee member Ahmed al Qabri told Qatari-owned, London-based media on April 18 that the Syrian transitional government, which is led by Syrian Transitional President Ahmed al Shara has begun "consultations" to select committee members that will select two-thirds of the People's Assembly.[13] The People's Assembly is a transitional legislative body that will propose, adopt, and amend Syrian laws, according to the Syrian Constitutional Declaration.[14] Shara's direct hand in forming the People's Assembly enables him to wield significant influence over who and which groups will be represented in the body. The constitution declaration allows Shara to directly appoint one-third of the body's members.[15] Electoral sub-committees will choose the other two-thirds of the Assembly's members.[16] A supreme committee, which is directly appointed by Shara, will "oversee" these electoral sub-committees, suggesting the Shara-appointed Supreme Committee could veto any actions taken by the electoral sub-committees.[17]

The methods through which Shara will form the People's Assembly imitate how HTS elected the members of its Shura Council. The HTS General Shura Council effectively served as the HTS-led Syrian Salvation Government's legislature from 2017 to 2024.[18] The majority of Idlib residents did not participate in electing the council's members, however. HTS tasked a small number of representatives with nominating and "electing" members of the council.[19] Representatives were chosen from "diverse" northern Syrian regions, tribes, camps, and unions, but the methods of their selection allowed HTS to wield influence over the council appointments.[20] Syrian opposition media reported in 2021 that the majority of the council's candidates were "pre-determined" and approved by HTS.[21] Other Syrian groups, like Ahrar al Sham, previously used Shura Councils to grant representation to the different armed groups that fought under their banner.

Such a consultative body differs from Western expectations of representative democracy, as it does not derive its authority from the people in the form of popular elections. It is unlikely that the similarities between HTS's former General Shura Council's and the People's Assembly's elections are a coincidence. Current Syrian Justice Minister and close Shara adviser Mazhar al Wais noted in December 2024 that Shara, when asked about parliamentary-style rule, spoke instead of "advisory and consultative councils" and specifically compared a possible Syrian parliament to a Shura Council.[22] This does not necessarily suggest that Shara will renege on his commitment to eventually hold "free and fair elections" to elect a permanent representative legislature.[23] The People's Assembly is only designed to be a transitional mechanism, but the Constitutional Declaration notes that the transition will last for five years.[24] Council members are only permitted to serve for 30 months or until a permanent constitution is drafted and proper elections are held.[25] Shara could theoretically plan to introduce a consultative-style body in the short term as a precursor to a Western model of parliament in the coming years as Syria stabilizes. He has not made explicit promises about doing so, however.

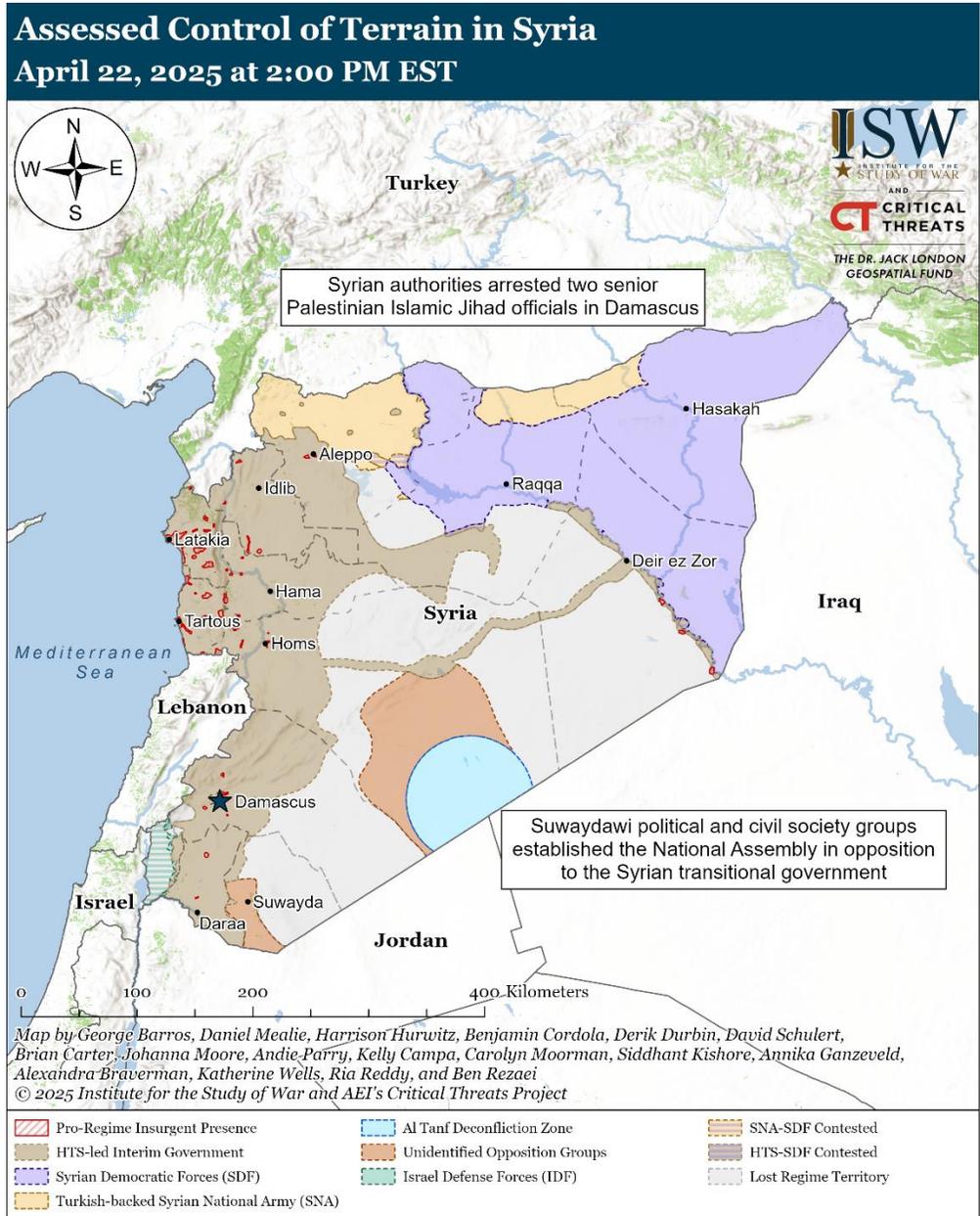
Suwaydawi political and civil society factions established the "National Assembly" in Suwayda on April 19 in opposition to the Syrian transitional government.[26] The National Assembly interim leader Omar al Aysami stated that the organization opposes the Syrian National Dialogue Conference and subsequent transitional Constitutional Declaration, which centralized power under transitional Syrian President Ahmed al Shara.[27] Aysami added that the National Assembly seeks to establish a unified, representative, political institution that derives legitimacy from the people. The National Assembly also seeks to organize armed factions and weapons under a single command within the province. The Druze community, which is predominantly located in Daraa and Suwayda provinces, has been fractured into distinct armed factions, but many have held similar reservations about joining the transitional government.[28] These factions appear to be coalescing into a unified coalition. CTP-ISW warned on March 17 that widespread Suwaydawi rejection of the constitution could impact ongoing governance and military integration agreements.[29]

Key Takeaways:

- **Iran-US Nuclear Negotiations:** Unspecified Iranian sources told a Qatari-owned, London-based outlet on April 22 that the US-Iran nuclear talks are progressing "beyond belief." Iran could calculate that by framing the talks as positive, even if the reality does not match, Iran could delay a US or Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear program or the imposition of snapback sanctions on Iran.
- **Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Damascus:** Syrian authorities arrested two senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) officials in Damascus after the United States requested that the transitional government expel Palestinian militants in exchange for partial sanctions relief.
- **Syria's Legislative Branch:** The new Syrian People's Assembly may more closely resemble previous consultative or advisory councils used by HTS and other Syrian Islamist factions, rather than a Western-style legislative branch. The methods through which Shara will form the People's Assembly imitate how HTS elected the members of its Shura Council, and senior former HTS officials have explicitly compared a future Syrian parliament to a Shura Council.

- Political Opposition to the Syrian Transitional Government:** Suwaydawi political and civil society factions established the “National Assembly” in Suwayda on April 19 in opposition to the Syrian transitional government.

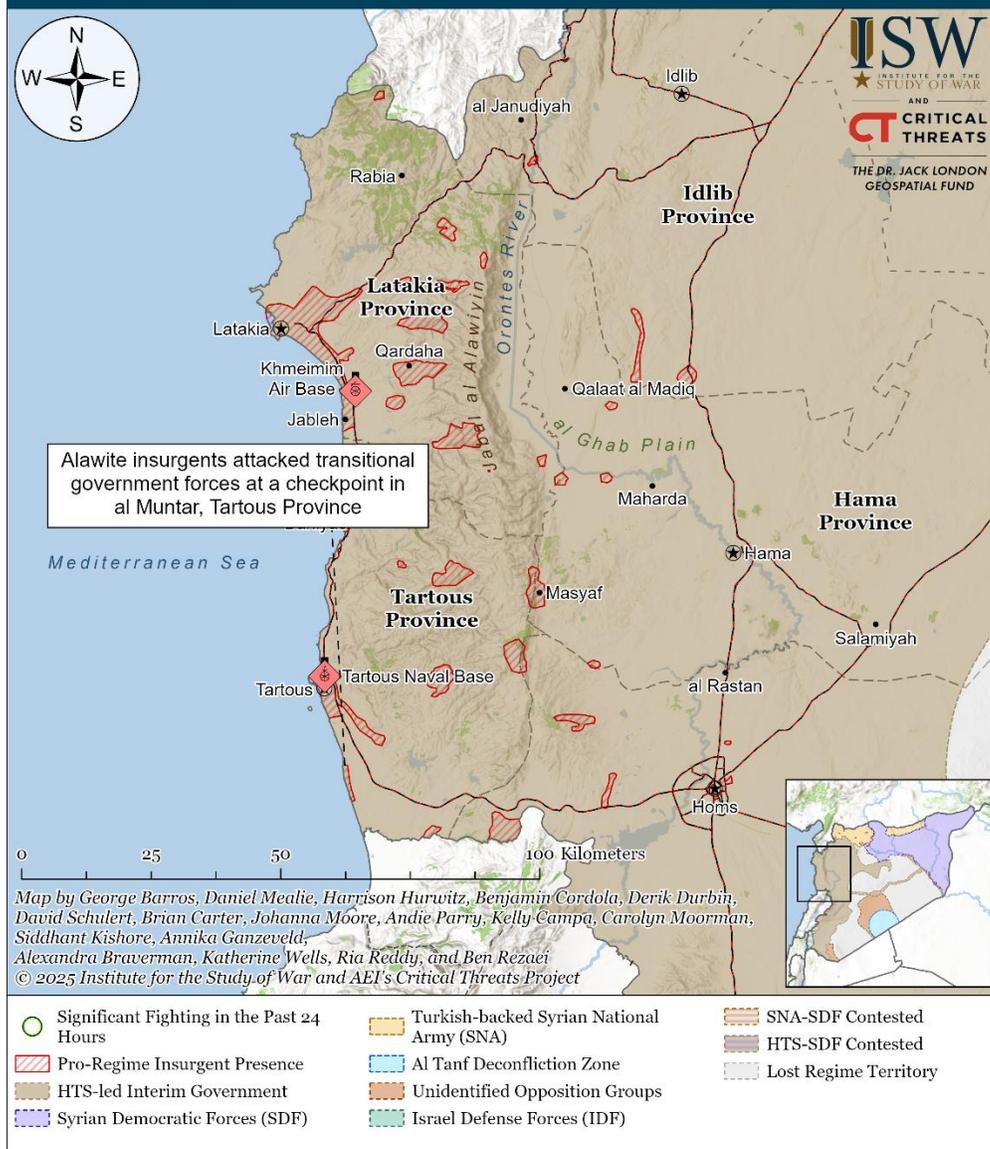
Syria



Likely Alawite insurgents attacked transitional government forces at a checkpoint in al Muntar, Tartous Province, on April 21.[30] This marks the first insurgent attack in Tartous Province in three weeks.[31] Insurgents previously killed two Syrian MoD personnel on March 27.[32] The Syrian transitional government has established checkpoints across western Syria to strengthen security and restrict insurgent movement.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Western Syria

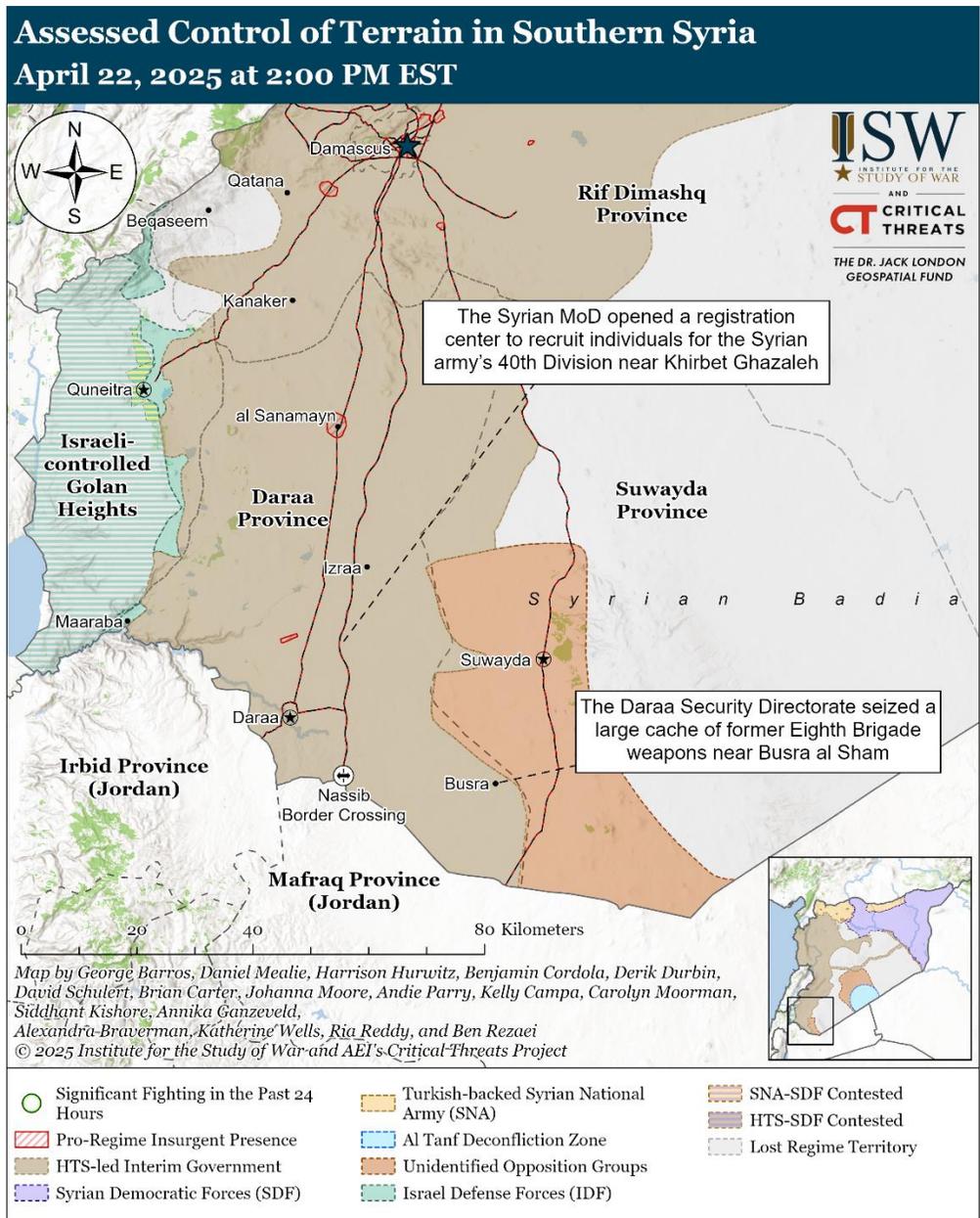
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The Syrian Ministry of Defense (MoD) opened a registration center to recruit individuals for the Syrian army’s 40th Division near Khirbet Ghazaleh, Daraa Province, on April 22.[33] The registration center will be open for one day and will accept applications from residents of various towns in Daraa Province.[34] The MoD began recruiting and registering individuals in Daraa Province to join the 40th Division in early March and opened a recruitment center in nearby Busra al Sham, which is an Eighth Brigade stronghold, on April 21.[35] The Eighth Brigade is a faction of former opposition fighters led by Ahmed al Awda that recently dissolved itself.[36] The 40th Division is expected to begin training within the next two weeks.[37]

The Daraa Security Directorate seized a large number of weapons, including mortar shells and ammunition, near Busra al Sham, Daraa Province, on April 22.[38] A Syrian source reported that the weapons belonged to the Eighth Brigade, which recently announced it would

dissolve and surrender weapons to the transitional government on April 13.[39] GSS forces previously confiscated the group’s military equipment in the city and called on all residents in the area to hand over their weapons.[40]



Russia has continued to send economic resources to Syria in an incentives-based economic relationship that is likely designed to foster goodwill with the Syrian transitional government. Russia delivered 6,600 tons of wheat to the port of Latakia on April 20.[41] Syrian transitional government officials told Western media that financing challenges have discouraged global wheat providers from selling to Syria.[42] TankerTrackers reported on April 20 that Russia recently sent its fourth shipment of crude oil to Syria.[43] Russia began to deliver oil to the Baniyas port in late March 2025.[44] These and previous Russian shipments appear to be part of an incentives-based economic relationship that Russia is developing with Syria. Russia likely seeks to

foster goodwill with the Syrian government in order to influence months-long talks over the future of Russian bases in Syria. This economic cooperation between Russia and the Syrian government has been defined by Russian exports to Syria thus far, but this may not always remain the case. The Syrian General Ports Authority said that a ship left Tartous Port on April 22 loaded with 10,000 tons of Syrian phosphate in the first shipment of its kind since the fall of the regime.[45] The recipient of the shipment is unclear at this time.[46] Russia has reportedly expressed interest in re-negotiating Russian investment contracts for Syrian phosphate mines, however.[47]

Iraq

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Strengthen Iranian and Axis of Resistance influence over the Iraqi state and society
- Harden the Iraqi government against internal dissent

Nothing significant to report.

Arabian Peninsula

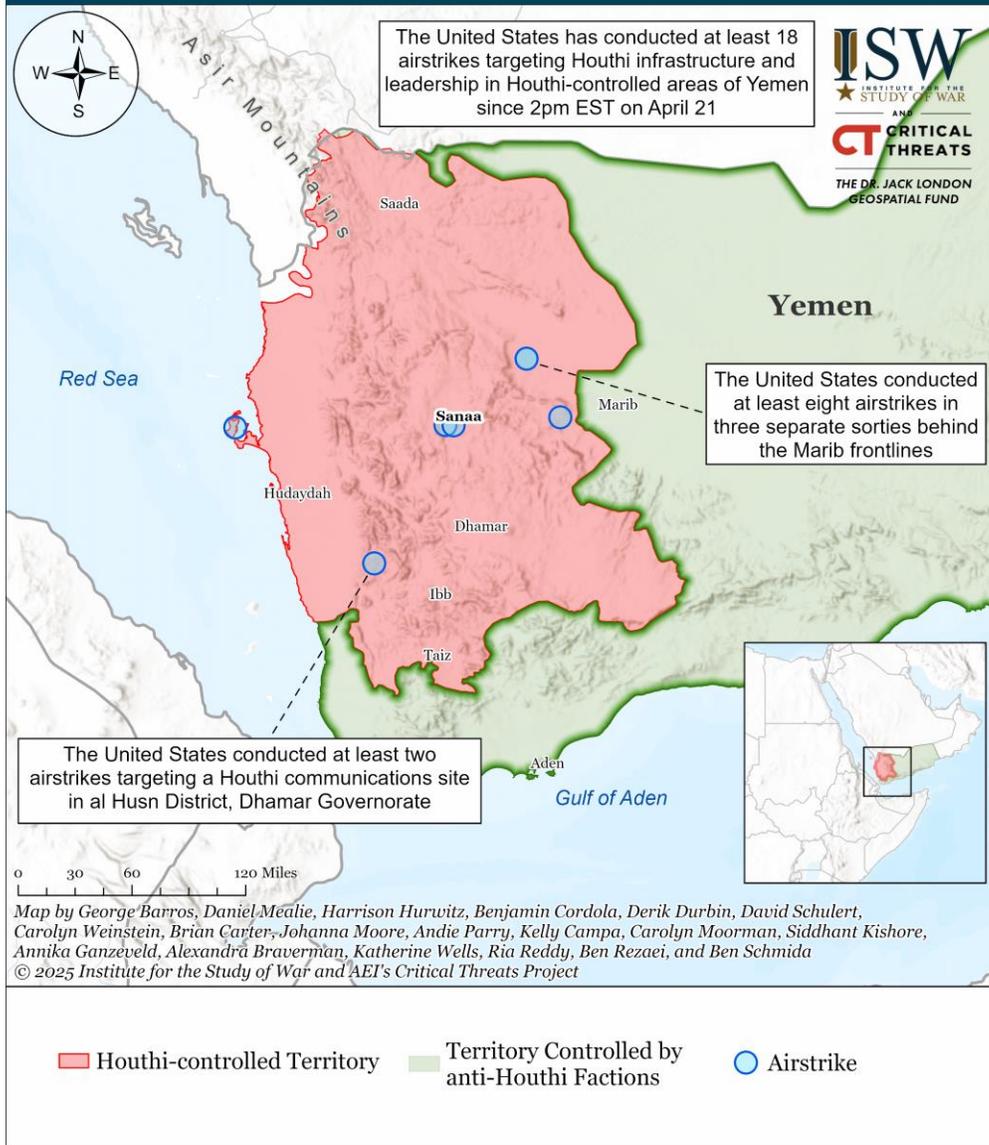
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Harden the Houthi regime against internal dissent in Houthi-controlled areas
- Destroy the anti-Houthi opposition in order to control all of Yemen
- Erode Israeli will to continue the war in the Gaza Strip

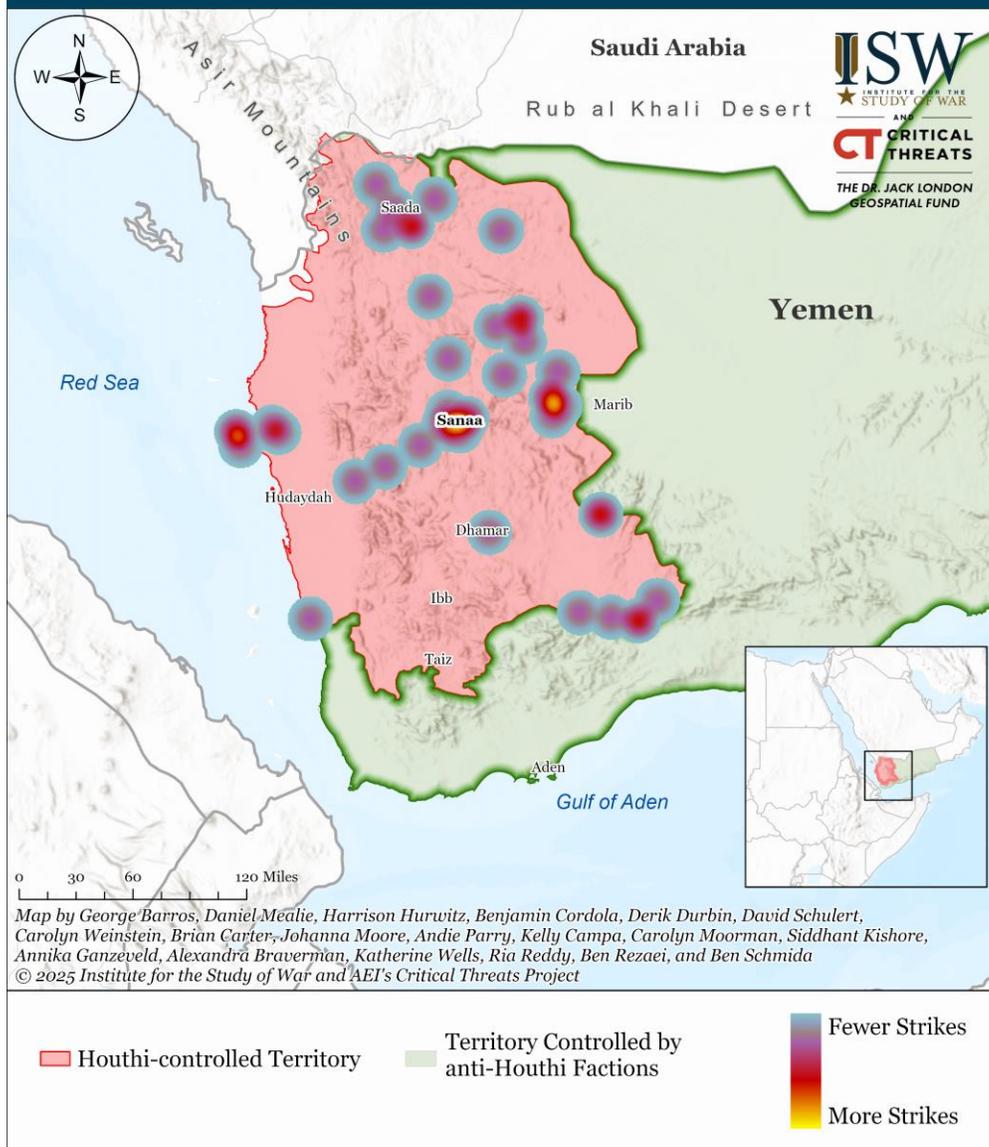
US Central Command (CENTCOM) has conducted at least 18 airstrikes targeting Houthi infrastructure and leadership in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen since 2:00 pm ET on April 21.[48] CENTCOM conducted at least four airstrikes in two sorties targeting reported Houthi barracks in Majzar District and at least four airstrikes targeting Houthi facilities in Sirwah District, both in Marib Governorate on the eastern front of Houthi-controlled areas.[49] CENTCOM also conducted at least four airstrikes targeting Houthi facilities on Kamaran Island, Hudaydah Governorate, on April 21.[50] CENTCOM conducted an unspecified number of airstrikes in Sanaa City and in Barash Camp on the eastern outskirts of Sanaa City on April 21, likely targeting Houthi leadership, command and control sites, and weapons depots.[51] CENTCOM conducted at least two airstrikes targeting a Houthi communications site in al Husn District, Dhamar Governorate.[52]

US Strikes Against Houthi Targets

April 22, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



US Strikes Against Houthi Targets April 13 to April 19, 2025



A Saudi news outlet reported on April 22 that CENTCOM airstrikes have killed at least 500 Houthi fighters, including senior operatives, since March 15, according to officials and sources familiar with intelligence assessments.[53] One unspecified official told the outlet that CENTCOM airstrikes have killed between 500 to 600 Houthi fighters, including missile system operators and drone experts.[54] These killed in action statistics are significantly higher than the 200 Houthi fighters killed in CENTCOM airstrikes as reported by anti-Houthi Yemeni media on April 21.[55] Other unspecified sources told the Saudi outlet that CENTCOM airstrikes have targeted and destroyed Houthi training camps, leaving "no survivors." [56] Unspecified officials also confirmed that CENTCOM airstrikes have "significantly weakened" Houthi air defense and other unspecified military capabilities.[57]

A Yemeni journalist confirmed on April 22 that a Houthi missile launched from an airbase on Adhran Mountain near Sanaa City malfunctioned and crashed into Furwa Market, Shuab District, on April 21.[58] Houthi media falsely reported this as a CENTCOM airstrike.[59] The Houthi missile misfire resulted in more than 40 casualties. A Yemeni analyst also reported that the Houthis continue to claim that a CENTCOM airstrike caused the explosion. The Houthis have arrested approximately 30 people in Sanaa City for publishing footage of the incident.[60]

The Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Erode the will of the Israeli political establishment and public to sustain clearing operations in the Gaza Strip
- Reestablish Hamas as the governing authority in the Gaza Strip
- Rebuild and reestablish Hezbollah in southern Lebanon
- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

Nothing significant to report.

CTP-ISW will not be covering the new Israeli operation in the Gaza Strip. We have reprioritized our Middle East coverage to focus on Iran's nuclear program, Iranian domestic security, and Iranian efforts to rebuild its networks in the Levant, including the Palestinian Territories. Given that Israel and its partners have destroyed Hamas' military organization and severed the group's ability to resupply itself, we are now focused on how Iran seeks to rebuild its lines of communication with Hezbollah and Hamas through Syria.

Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

The Iranian rial appreciated from 828,000 rials to one US dollar on April 21 to 802,000 rials to one US dollar on April 22.[61]

Iranian Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni and Tajik Interior Minister Colonel General Rahimzoda Ramazon Hamro signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on April 22.[62] Momeni announced that the MoU covers cooperation to combat terrorism, organized crime, and human trafficking. The agreement adds to the 22 MoUs and a joint statement signed during Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's visit to Tajikistan in January 2025.[63] Iran has strengthened its defense ties with Tajikistan in recent years, including the opening of a drone manufacturing facility in Dushanbe in 2022.[64]

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi and Qatari Foreign Affairs Minister Mohamad bin Abdulrahman al Thani discussed US-Iran nuclear talks, bilateral ties, and regional developments in a phone call on April 21.[65] Thani expressed Qatar's support for a nuclear agreement and emphasized the need for a "fair, enduring, and binding" deal. The phone call followed Araghchi and Thani's meeting in Moscow on April 18.[66] Thani is scheduled to visit Washington, DC, to meet US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on April 22.[67] Iran likely seeks to use

nuclear talks with the United States to gain access to billions of dollars in frozen assets, including six billion US dollars held in Qatari banks. Iranian negotiators listed this among their core demands during the first round of US-Iran nuclear talks in Muscat on April 12.[68]

The United States sanctioned an Iranian national and a liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) shipping network on April 22 for exporting “hundreds of millions of dollars” worth of Iranian LPG and crude oil.[69] The US Treasury stated that the revenue supports Iran’s nuclear and missile programs and its proxy groups. These new sanctions are part of the US “maximum pressure” sanctions against Iran.

The Iran Update provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities abroad that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests. It also covers events and trends that affect the stability and decision-making of the Iranian regime. The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) provides these updates regularly based on regional events.

CTP-ISW defines the “Axis of Resistance” as the unconventional alliance that Iran has cultivated in the Middle East since the Islamic Republic came to power in 1979. This transnational coalition is comprised of state, semi-state, and non-state actors that cooperate to secure their collective interests. Tehran considers itself to be both part of the alliance and its leader. Iran furnishes these groups with varying levels of financial, military, and political support in exchange for some degree of influence or control over their actions. Some are traditional proxies that are highly responsive to Iranian direction, while others are partners over which Iran exerts more limited influence. Members of the Axis of Resistance are united by their grand strategic objectives, which include eroding and eventually expelling American influence from the Middle East, destroying the Israeli state, or both. Pursuing these objectives and supporting the Axis of Resistance to those ends have become cornerstones of Iranian regional strategy.

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