

# Iran Update



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**Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm ET**

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

*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.*

*A variety of Syrian armed groups, including those associated with the new transitional government, the Assad regime, and hardline Islamic groups, have committed a series of extrajudicial killings since the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024. CTP-ISW absolutely condemns these extrajudicial killings.*

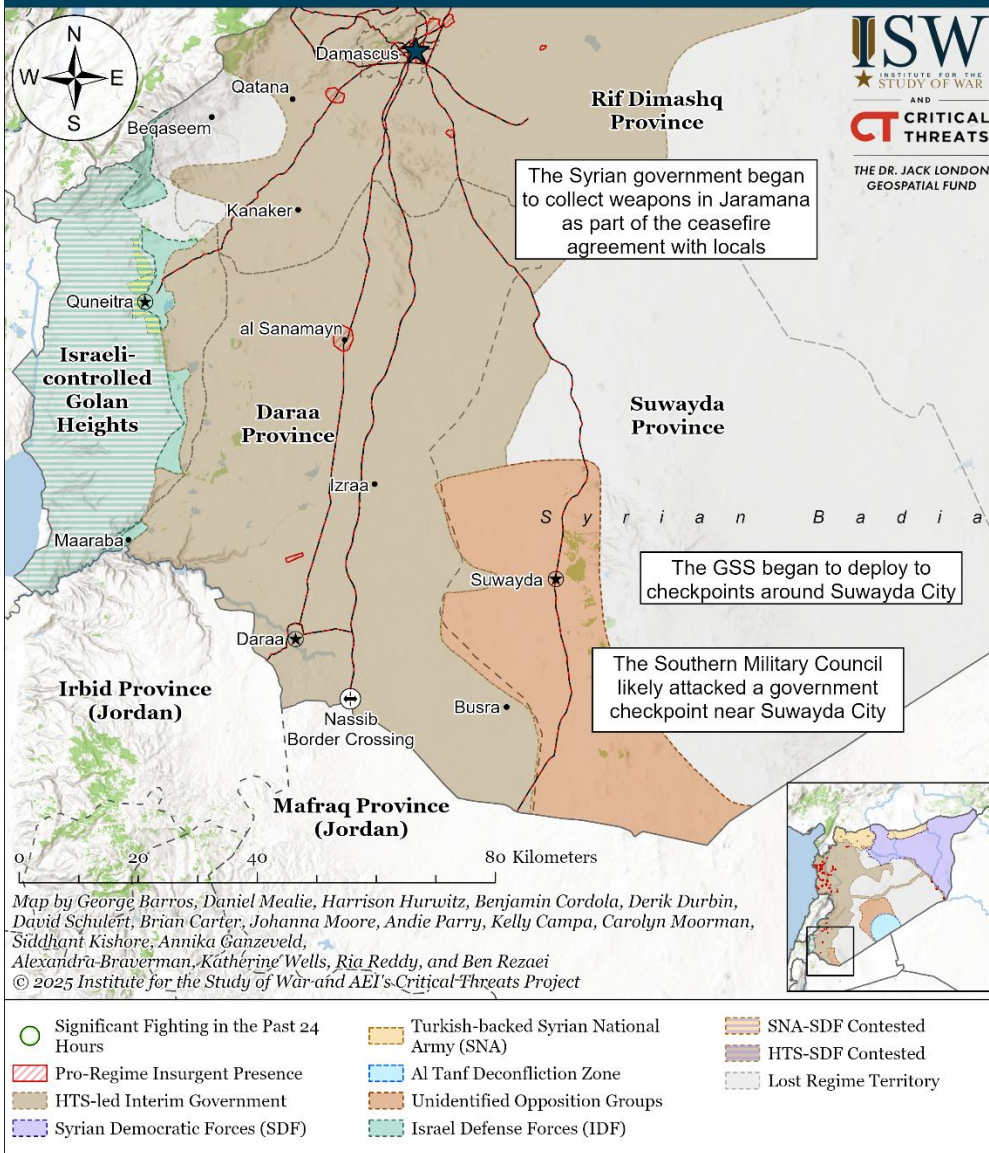
**Druze armed faction leaders agreed on May 1 to deploy Druze and Syrian transitional government security forces over key areas in Suwayda Province.** Prominent Druze sheikhs announced that locals from Suwayda Province will join the Ministry of Interior's General Security Services (GSS) during a meeting with religious and military leaders in Suwayda City.[1] Syrian media reported on May 2 that 700 Suwaydawi fighters have quickly joined the GSS's ranks, and over 1,500 Suwaydawi fighters applied to join the GSS.[2] An unannounced local militia leader will supervise these Suwaydawi GSS forces.[3] This agreement is similar to a deal that Druze militias negotiated with the transitional government in early March, which established Suwaydawi-led security forces in the province with logistical support from the Interior Ministry.[4] It is not clear how effectively this early deal was implemented, and it did not attempt to integrate Druze fighters directly into the GSS. The GSS is the government's primary force tasked with addressing security threats throughout western Syria. The GSS is dominated by Sunnis in some provinces, though the makeup of the GSS in Suwayda is unclear. Some of the GSS units deployed to Suwayda have protected Suwaydawi Druze from attacks by Sunni Bedouin.[5]

The deployment of Suwaydawi forces alongside non-local government forces could secure Druze locals from Sunni extremists and build trust between the Druze community and the Syrian government. The agreement is part of an effort to address the recent violence between Sunni militants, Druze militias and civilians, and government forces in Druze-majority towns and regions in southern Syria. Syrian state media reported that the GSS began to deploy to positions in the western Suwayda countryside and

around Suwayda city on May 1 and 2.[6] It remains unclear whether GSS units in Suwayda Province moving forward will be fully comprised of Suwaydawi fighters. Suwaydawi and non-Suwaydawi GSS units will likely operate side-by-side in the short term, given that GSS forces from outside the province had already begun deploying to positions there.[7]

This agreement does not explicitly require the main Druze factions in Suwayda Province to disarm yet. Men of Dignity leader Laith al Balous confirmed that he and his faction agreed to activate Interior Ministry forces comprised of locals on May 2, but he did not address whether the Men of Dignity planned on turning in their weapons to the state in the near term.[8] Suwayda Governor Mustafa Bakour declared that the Syrian government will not allow any armed elements outside of the state to operate in Suwayda province, however.[9] Syrian media reported that an army brigade is expected to be formed soon in Suwayda Province, and the brigade will also be comprised of local fighters.[10] The Syrian government will probably expect Suwaydawi factions to dissolve before integrating into security services like the GSS or MoD.

## Assessed Control of Terrain in Southwestern Syria May 2, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



**The Syrian government will likely work with pro-government Druze factions, like the Men of Dignity, while sidelining Druze groups with former regime networks in order to dilute their influence within the Druze community.** This is similar to the strategy the government employed against the Eighth Brigade in Daraa Province in April 2025, when the government politically undermined Eighth Brigade commander Ahmed al Awda before disarming his force.<sup>[11]</sup> The Syrian government employed a firmer strategy to address security in Jaramana, Rif Dimashq, than in Ashrafiyeh Sahnaya or Suwayda Province. Jaramana is a former Assad regime stronghold that is likely anti-government due to the privileges it lost after the collapse of Assad's regime.<sup>[12]</sup> A May 1 agreement between the Syrian government officials and Jaramana notables called on Druze militias to immediately surrender their heavy weapons to the state and ordered a larger GSS presence within the city.<sup>[13]</sup> Syria's security forces also began the process of collecting all unlicensed

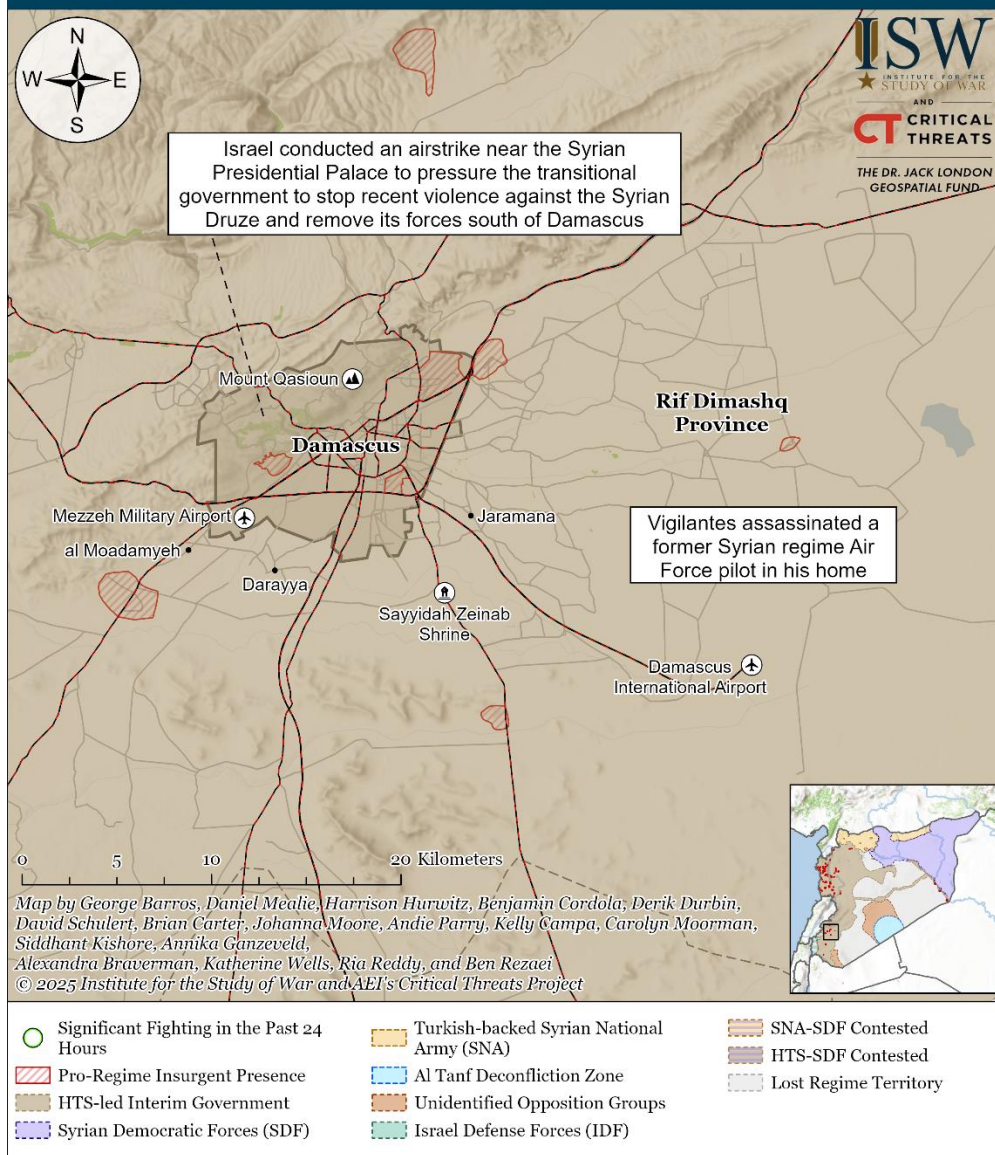
weapons within the town.[14] This is very similar to Damascus's early efforts to rein in Awda, when Damascus initially demanded Awda turn in his heavy weapons in January 2024.[15] The government did not make similar efforts to disarm the communities in Ashrafiyeh Sahnaya or Suwayda Province.[16] The government likely attempted to disarm Jaramana more aggressively because of its regime networks and affiliations.

Some Druze armed groups have continued to denounce the Syrian government as illegitimate. Unknown armed groups attacked several security checkpoints staffed by GSS units around Suwayda City on March 2.[17] The Suwayda governor suggested that the Suwayda Military Council (SMC), a Druze armed faction with reported ties to Assad-era generals, conducted the attacks.[18] The group widely rejected government forces' deployments to Suwayda Province in a statement and accused the Syrian government of spreading "takfiri" ideology.[19] The statement announced that the SMC aligns itself with Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri, a prominent Druze leader who has consistently rejected integration into the Syrian government.[20] The SMC's statement illuminates key differences between elements of the Druze community that support gradual integration into the Syrian state and those that seek to maintain regional autonomy.

**The Israeli prime minister and foreign minister said that Israel used an airstrike near the Syrian Presidential Palace to send a "clear warning message" to Syrian President Ahmed al Shara on May 1.**[21] The Israeli leaders are attempting to pressure the Syrian government into stopping recent violence against the Syrian Druze and removing transitional government forces south of Damascus.[22] The airstrike struck an open area near the Presidential Palace and did not cause any major damage.[23] The Israeli leaders threatened additional airstrikes if the violence against Druze did not stop on April 30.[24] Syrian President Ahmed al Shara condemned the attack on the Presidential Palace and said that Israel was attempting to "destabilize the country and exacerbate security crises." [25] Shara remains very unlikely to respond to Israel in a hostile or direct fashion due to his lack of military capacity and instead focuses on unifying Syria under his control. Shara has also taken concrete steps to contain the violence against the Druze south of Damascus. Local Sunnis from the nearby town of Meliha, not the Syrian government, initially attacked the Druze communities south of Damascus. Some reports said government forces looted local homes and harassed locals, however.

## Assessed Control of Terrain in Damascus

May 2, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



**The Israeli airstrikes are unlikely to pressure Shara into “allowing the Druze...to protect themselves” or because Shara has already begun to form the joint Druze-transitional government forces needed to secure Druze communities on his own accord.** The airstrikes are similarly unlikely to prevent the government from sending its forces into Druze communities, especially if these forces become more integrated with Druze militias (see below). Some of these forces have unilaterally protected Druze communities, while others have worked side-by-side with Druze militias to protect Druze communities. Some of government forces harassed locals, looted homes, and were accused of extrajudicial killings. The GSS has mixed reliability as a security organization that often depends on whether its units are comprised of local fighters, disciplined HTS outfits, or unaffiliated individuals.[26] The Syrian government must hold poorly disciplined units, individuals, and commanders responsible for their crimes. Syrian President Ahmed al Shara also lacks influence over

local attackers targeting Druze who are unaffiliated with the GSS, owing to the Syrian government's limited number of available forces to deploy to maintain security across Syrian territory.

**Government efforts to build joint Druze militia-government units will make it increasingly complicated for Israel to demand demilitarization in southern Syria.** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu demanded in February 2025 that the Syrian transitional government fully demilitarize southern Syria and reiterated that goal on May 1.[27] He called for transitional government forces to withdraw from 11,241 square kilometers of territory in Daraa, Suwayda, and Quneitra Provinces or face consequences like airstrikes on government positions.[28] Israel conducted airstrikes killing two GSS members in Quintera Province in January 2025 and has repeatedly struck government military sites in southern Syria.[29] Transitional government forces deployed to southern Syria on May 1 to control clashes between Bedouin and Druze communities in Daraa and Suwayda.[30] Many Druze militias will now presumably assume security tasks for the government (see above), as Israel has demanded, while other Druze will join government security institutions, such as the GSS. Local media reported that an Israeli drone strike in Suwayda Province killed four Syrians on May 2 after GSS forces deployed into the province and after Druze fighters agreed to integrate into those formations.[31] The integration of Druze militiamen into transitional government forces will risk Israeli airstrikes that strike Druze individuals or even units if Israel continues its demand of a demilitarized southern Syria.

**Iran is reportedly weighing a compromise to dilute part of its enriched uranium stockpile domestically while exporting the remainder—potentially to Russia—as part of ongoing nuclear talks with the United States.**[32] Unspecified sources told Reuters on May 2 that Iranian officials proposed to cap uranium enrichment at 3.67 percent, expand International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) access to nuclear sites, and limit stockpile size and centrifuge types. Iran also reportedly offered to reduce its enrichment infrastructure to around 5,000 centrifuges—down from 15,000 centrifuges that are currently operational—dilute and export its 60 percent enriched uranium under IAEA scrutiny. The proposed cap for uranium enrichment at 3.67 percent is the same as the cap under the 2015 nuclear deal. Iran also reportedly floated the possibility of selling enriched uranium to the United States. An unspecified regional source told Reuters on May 2 that Iran plans to retain a diluted portion of its stockpile domestically while exporting the rest, likely to Russia.[33] Russia has positioned itself to mediate and store Iranian enriched uranium since March 2025.[34] Russia's role in mediating US-Iran talks is unlikely to secure US interests, given Russia's alignment with Iran. Russian Permanent Representative to the UN in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov, for example, downplayed concerns by claiming that Iranian production of 60 percent enriched uranium poses “no weapons risk.”[35]

Iran also suggested that it would not build a nuclear-capable missile as a “gesture of goodwill” but rejected halting its broader missile program.[36] Iranian officials repeatedly reaffirmed that Iranian missile program remains off the table in the ongoing nuclear talks with the United States.[37] Iran's stance reflects that the missile program is essential to its defense strategy, especially due to the weakness of Iran's conventional armed forces. The missile program's centrality to Iran's defense strategy makes it unlikely that Iran would agree to include missile restrictions in the ongoing negotiations.[38] Iran's refusal to compromise on its missile program could jeopardize the talks or force negotiations toward a less expansive agreement than the deal US President Donald Trump reportedly seeks.

**Iran has continued to resupply the Houthis and provide intelligence on ship movements to improve Houthi targeting in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, according to unspecified US officials speaking to Saudi news outlets on May 2.[39]** US forces intercepted a likely Iranian weapons shipment to the Houthis a few days prior to May 2, according to a US official speaking to Saudi news outlets on May 2.[40] US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth’s statement on X on April 30, which called out Iran for providing “lethal support to the Houthis.”[41] Other sources told the same Saudi news outlet that Iranian vessels in the Bab el Mandeb Strait and the Gulf of Aden provided intelligence on ship movements to the Houthis.[42] Iran has previously deployed commercial vessels off the coast of Yemen to provide targeting intelligence for the Houthis’ attacks on commercial shipping and US military vessels transiting the Red Sea.[43] Former US National Security Advisor Mike Waltz also told ABC News on March 16 that the United States is prepared to target Iranian ships providing targeting intelligence to the Houthis.[44]

### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Druze Integration into the Syrian Security Sector:** Druze armed faction leaders agreed on May 1 to deploy Druze and Syrian transitional government security forces over key areas in Suwayda Province. The Syrian government will likely work with pro-government Druze factions, like the Men of Dignity, while sidelining Druze groups with former regime ties in order to dilute the influence of former Assad supporters within the Druze community.
- **Israeli Air Campaign in Syria:** The Israeli prime minister and foreign minister said that Israel used an airstrike near the Syrian Presidential Palace to send a “clear warning message” to Syrian President Ahmed al Shara on May 1. The Israeli airstrikes are unlikely to pressure Shara into “allowing the Druze...to protect themselves,” or because Shara has already begun to form the joint Druze-transitional government forces needed to secure Druze communities on his own accord.
- **Iran-US Talks:** Iran is reportedly weighing a compromise to dilute part of its enriched uranium stockpile domestically while exporting the remainder—potentially to Russia—as part of ongoing nuclear talks with the United States. Iran also suggested that it would not build a nuclear-capable missile as a “gesture of goodwill” but rejected halting its broader missile program.
- **Houthis and Iran:** Iran has continued to resupply the Houthis and provide intelligence on ship movements to improve Houthi targeting in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, according to unspecified US officials speaking to Saudi news outlets on May 2.

### **Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy**

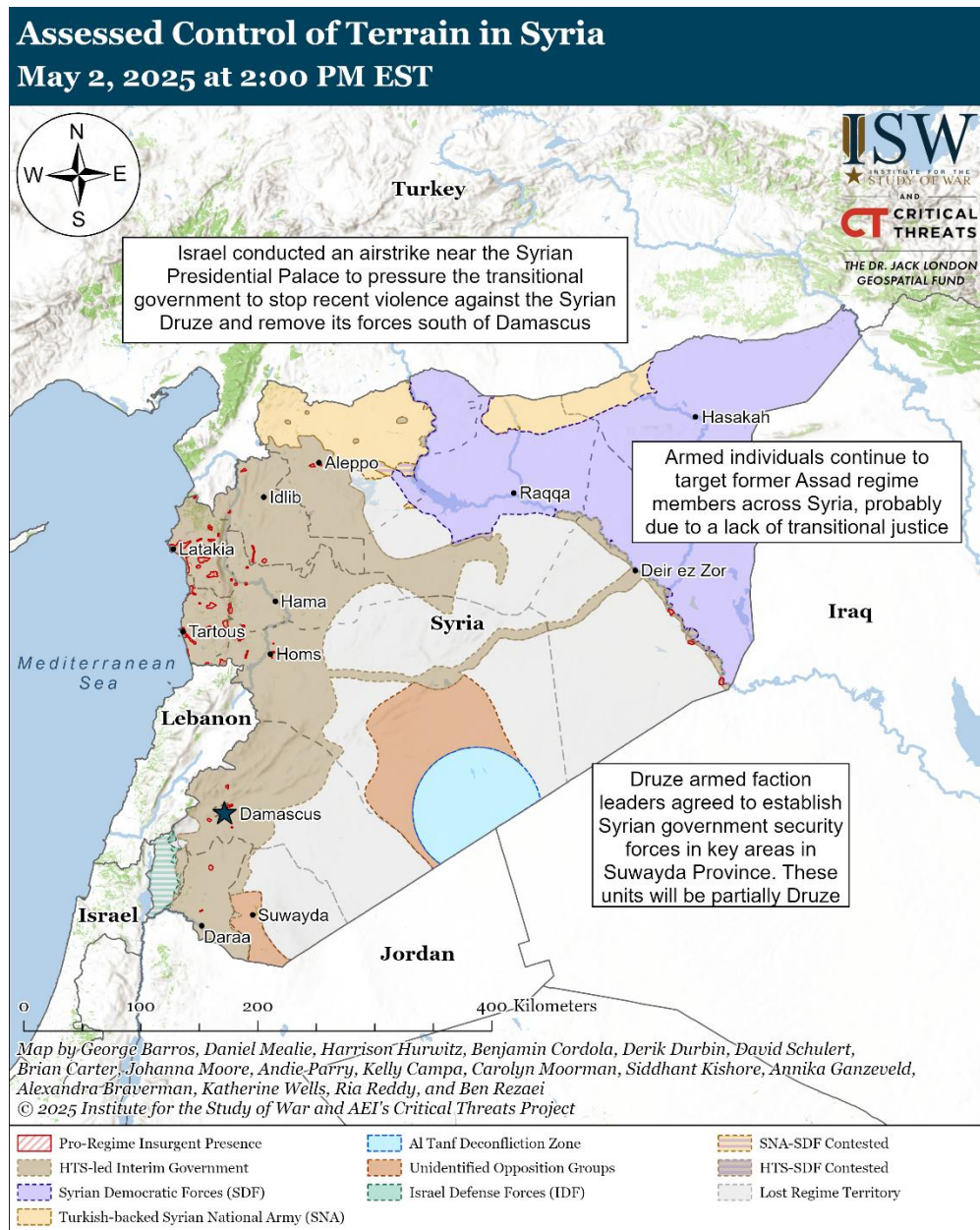
**The Iranian rial depreciated from 820,000 rials to one US dollar on May 1 to 849,000 rials to one US dollar on May 2.[45]**

*See the topline section.*

### **Syria**

**Unidentified armed individuals continue to conduct revenge killings targeting former Assad regime members across Syria.** These unspecified vigilantes killed three former regime

members in separate attacks in Damascus, Homs, and Hama province on May 1.[46] There has been no transitional justice in Syria after the fall of Assad, which has increasingly frustrated Syrians as they watch infamous Assadists walk free. These revenge killings are probably a byproduct of this lack of reconciliation and justice.



## Iraq

*Nothing Significant to Report*

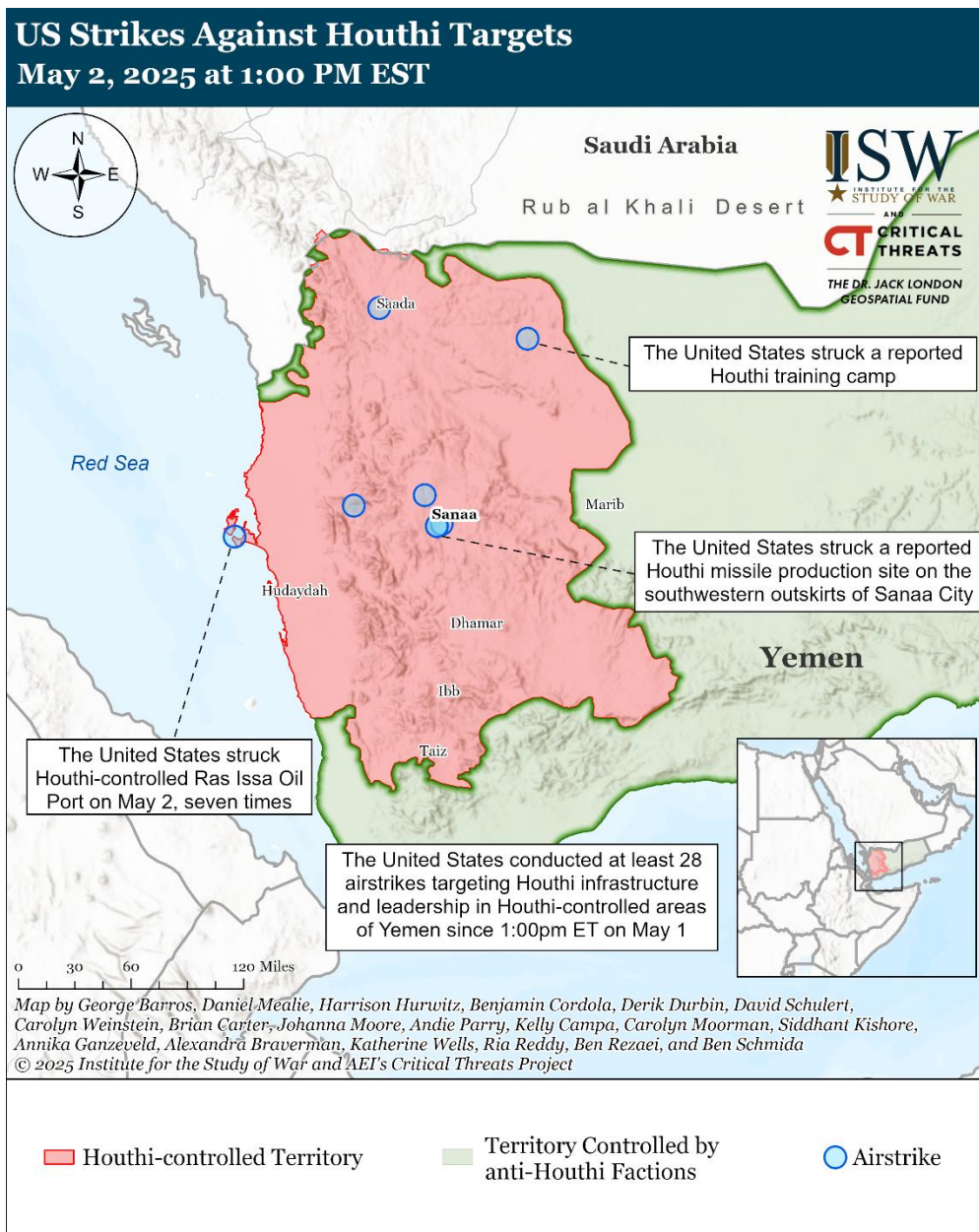
## Arabian Peninsula

**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) conducted at least 28 airstrikes targeting Houthi infrastructure and leadership in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen since 1:00pm ET on May 1.**<sup>[47]</sup> CENTCOM conducted at least five airstrikes targeting Houthi military facilities on the outskirts of Saada City on May 1.<sup>[48]</sup> CENTCOM also conducted at least four airstrikes targeting Houthi infrastructure in al Khab al Shaaf District, al Jawf Governorate, on May 1 for the second consecutive day.<sup>[49]</sup> A Yemeni analyst reported on April 13 that the Houthis had a training camp in Khab al Shaaf District.<sup>[50]</sup> CENTCOM struck Houthi targets in Sanaa City and Hamdan District, northwest of Sanaa City, on May 1.<sup>[51]</sup> A Saudi news outlet also reported on May 1 that an unspecified number of CENTCOM airstrikes targeted Houthi infrastructure in al Mahwit Governorate.<sup>[52]</sup> CENTCOM also struck underground Houthi drone and missile production sites and weapon depots in Asr and Mount Attan areas, southwest of Sanaa City, at least three times.<sup>[53]</sup>

CENTCOM launched at least seven airstrikes targeting Houthi-controlled Ras Issa Port on the Red Sea coastline on May 2.<sup>[54]</sup> A Yemen analyst reported on May 2 that US airstrikes damaged the Houthis' remaining docking stations and unloading infrastructure. This follows CENTCOM airstrikes targeting Ras Issa Port on April 17 that damaged vessels at the port, three oil depots, oil transporters, and pipelines.<sup>[55]</sup> The Houthi Health Ministry reported that at least 74 people died in the April 17 CENTCOM airstrikes.<sup>[56]</sup>



**US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth extended the USS *Harry S. Truman* carrier strike group's deployment to the Red Sea by at least one week on May 2.[57]**

**The Houthis claimed on May 2 that they launched two separate ballistic missile attacks targeting Ramat David Airbase and Haifa, northern Israel.[58]** The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) intercepted two missiles from Yemen on May 1 and 2.[59] Local sources also reported on May 1 that the Houthis launched a missile from an unspecified launch site in Hajjah Governorate.[60]

### **The Palestinian Territories and Lebanon**

*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 into the Levant, including the Palestinian Territories. Given that Israel and its partners have destroyed Hamas' military organization and severed the group's ability to resupply itself, we are now focused on how Iran seeks to rebuild its lines of communication with Hezbollah and Hamas through Syria.*

*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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