



# IRAN

## Rogue nation



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## Iran: History, Religion, Politics and War.

Highly recommended video:

Iran: Yesterday and Today TV Special | Rick Steves' Europe  
<https://www.ricksteves.com/watch-read-listen/video/tv-show/tv-specials/iran/iran-pledge-special>

### Iran, names and terminology:

Kahjoo Bridge  
Rabor, Iran  
Kerman, Iran  
Nuri al-Maliki  
Popular Mobilization Units (PMU)  
Zaidi (Fiver) Islam  
Ibadi Islam  
Ansar Allah  
Hussein al-Houthi  
Abdul-Malik al-Houthi  
Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi  
Al-Jazeera  
Mohammad bin Salman  
Abqaiq refinery  
Khurais oil field  
Xi Jinping  
Mahsa Amini  
Nawres Waleed Hamid  
Abdul Reza Shahla  
Esmail Gha'ani  
Mustafa al-Kadhimi



## Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Search for a Durable, Less Militarized Consensus

*Kristian Coates Ulrichsen*

*Published as part of debate #4 of the SALAM project, Fall 2024*

The March 2023 declaration in Beijing that Saudi Arabia and Iran had agreed to resume diplomatic relations, more than seven years after they were cut in January 2016, has proven unexpectedly durable and resilient in the face of Israel's brutal, indiscriminate war on Gaza following Hamas' violent attack on Israeli territory on 7 October 2023. While the ongoing crisis is the longest and deadliest episode in the Arab-Israeli conflict since 1948, the risks of a broader regional conflagration have been somewhat mitigated by a convergence of interests across the Middle East that few would have predicted prior to 2020. As the wider region stands on the precipice of a broader conflict, the rapid warming of Saudi-Iran ties offers a rare point of optimism. This memo explores the degree to which the rapprochement can become the basis for a meaningful new relationship between Riyadh and Tehran and whether the coming together over Gaza may contribute to decentering arms in at least some aspects of regional security dynamics.

### Lack of a security community

Contrary to claims from both sides of the Saudi-Iran divide, bilateral relations did not abruptly freeze after the Shah was toppled in January 1979 and replaced by Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary clerical regime. Senior Saudi princes, including two future kings, initially responded with cautious optimism to the Islamic nature of the new political order in Tehran. In January 1980, Crown Prince Fahd stated, "the new regime in Iran is working under the banner of Islam, which is our motto in Saudi Arabia," while Prince Abdullah told the Gulf News Agency, "The Holy Quran is the constitution of our two countries, and thus links between us are no longer determined by material interests or geopolitics."<sup>1</sup> Over time, however, political, more than religious, factors led leaders in Tehran and Riyadh to construct 'the other' as a threat to national security and regional stability, especially after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>2</sup> Even in these circumstances, bilateral ties waxed and waned and were far from static.<sup>3</sup>

Neither a workable regional order nor a viable security community emerged in the Gulf despite a period of optimism in the late 1990s and early 2000s which saw Saudi and Iranian leaders reach a wide-ranging economic agreement in May 1998 and a security

- 1 Dilip Hiro, *Cold War in the Islamic World: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Struggle for Supremacy* (London: Hurst & Co., 2018), 66-67.
- 2 Talal Mohammad, *Iranian-Saudi Rivalry since 1979: In the Words of Kings and Clerics* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2023), 54-55.
- 3 Nader Entessar, "A Regional Great Game? Iran-Saudi Relations in Flux," in Kristian Coates Ulrichsen (ed.), *The Changing Security Dynamics of the Persian Gulf* (London: Hurst & Co., 2017), 130-31.

# Questions







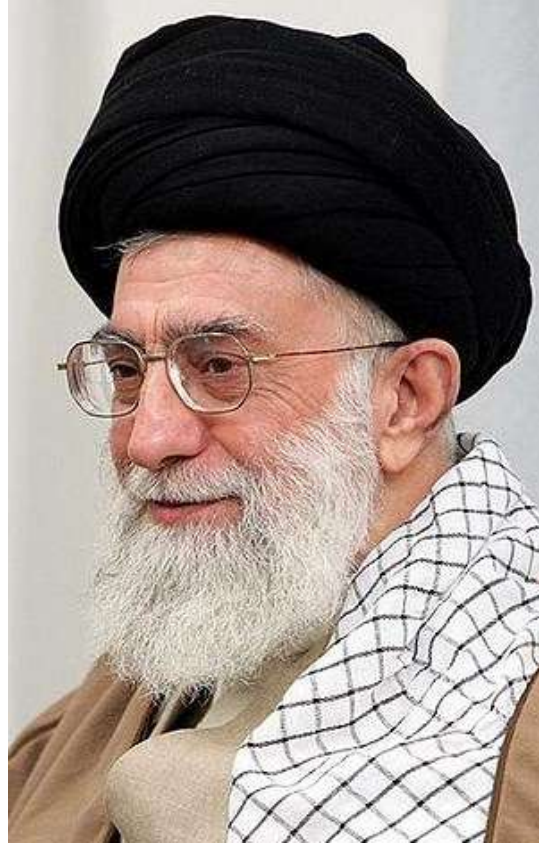












(Not really) Grand Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Khamenei,  
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

## Today:

- Iran's international relations
- Rapprochement with Saudi Arabia
- Confronting Israel
- Israeli retaliation
- The new regime in Iran
- What's next?

Review



# Iran

## Iranian dynasties

Cyrus the Great  
550 BC – 330 BC

The Parthians and Sassanids  
63 BC – 651 AD

The Safavids, Ashfars and Qajars  
1501 - 1925

Reza and Mohammad Pahlavi  
1925 - 1941

The Islamic Republic  
1979 – present

## Invaded by:

Alexander and the Greeks  
330 BC – 63 BC

Arabs, Mongols and Tamerlane  
651 AD – 1405 AD

Russians and British  
1722 – 1736, 1826 - 1925

Russians and British  
1941 - 1946

Iraq  
1980 -1988





1981, Bashir al-Assad's Syria becomes Iran's ally in the war with Iraq.





1982, founded Hassan Nasrallah's Hezbollah to help Lebanon fight Israel.



2003, Qasem Soleimani organizes Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units to fight Americans and Sunnis.



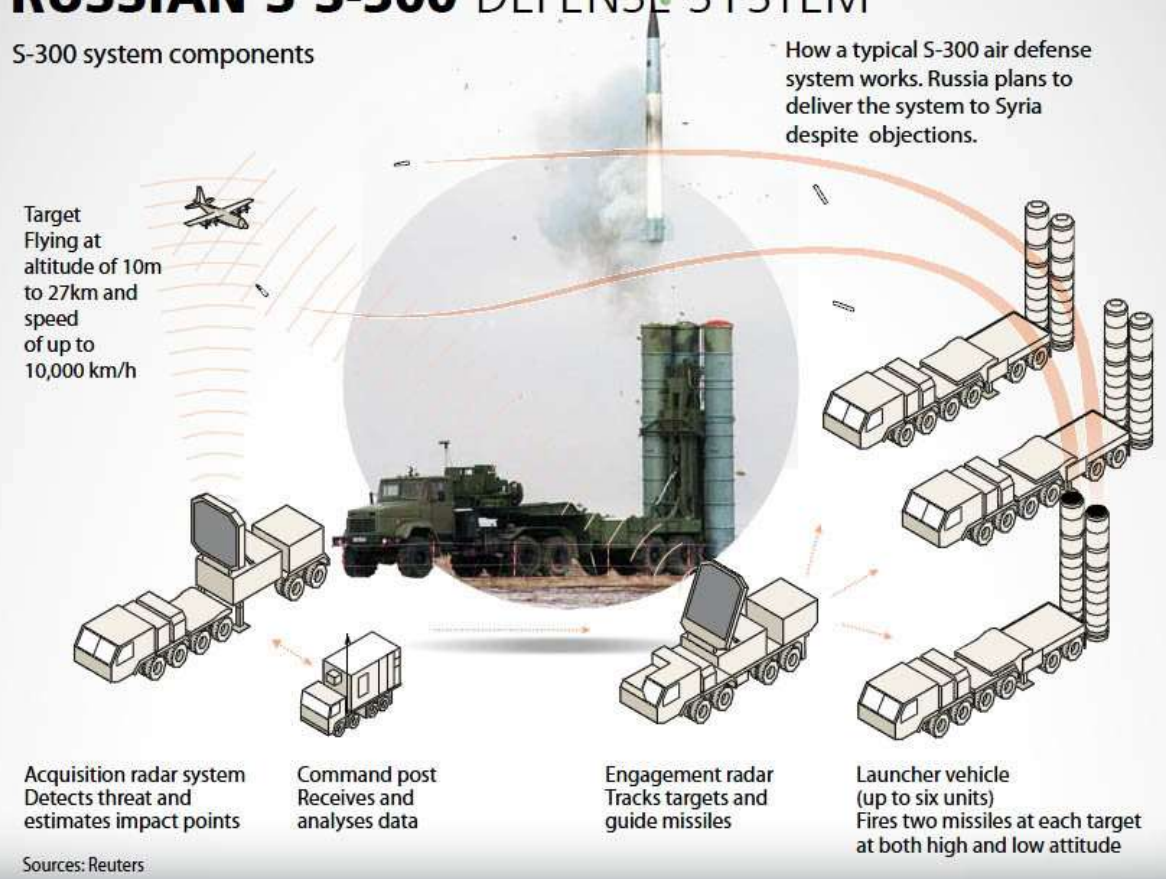
About 2006-8, Islamic Jihad and Hamas begin receiving Iranian weapons and financial support.



# RUSSIAN'S S-300 DEFENSE SYSTEM

S-300 system components

How a typical S-300 air defense system works. Russia plans to deliver the system to Syria despite objections.



2007, Ahmadinejad orders Russian S-300 Air Defense System.



2010, Qassem Soleimani helps make Nouri al-Maliki Prime Minister of Iraq.



Iran → Iraq → Syria → Hezbollah "Shi'a Corridor."



About 2009-14, the Houthis in Yemen begin to receive Iranian weapons during the Yemen Civil War. Missiles in the hands of the Houthis could hit many of Saudi Arabia's major cities.





July 14, 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) (Iran Nuclear Deal) signed in Vienna.





May 18, 2018, US President Donald Trump withdrew from the agreement and re-imposed sanctions. In the elections of 2020 and 2021, Iranian “Hard-liners” completely took over the government.



Emab intermediate-range precision-guided missile.

# Relations with Saudi Arabia





2015—Saudis and UAE begin fighting the Houthis in Yemen to restore President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi.



Prince Mohammad and Donald Trump envision a Middle East Defense Pact.





The Abraham Accords



9/14/19—Iran attacks Saudi Aramco oil facilities.



2022—Saudi and Iranian diplomats meet in Iraq, Oman and Europe.



3/10/23—Saudi Arabia and Iran establish diplomatic relations, in a deal brokered by China.

Iran







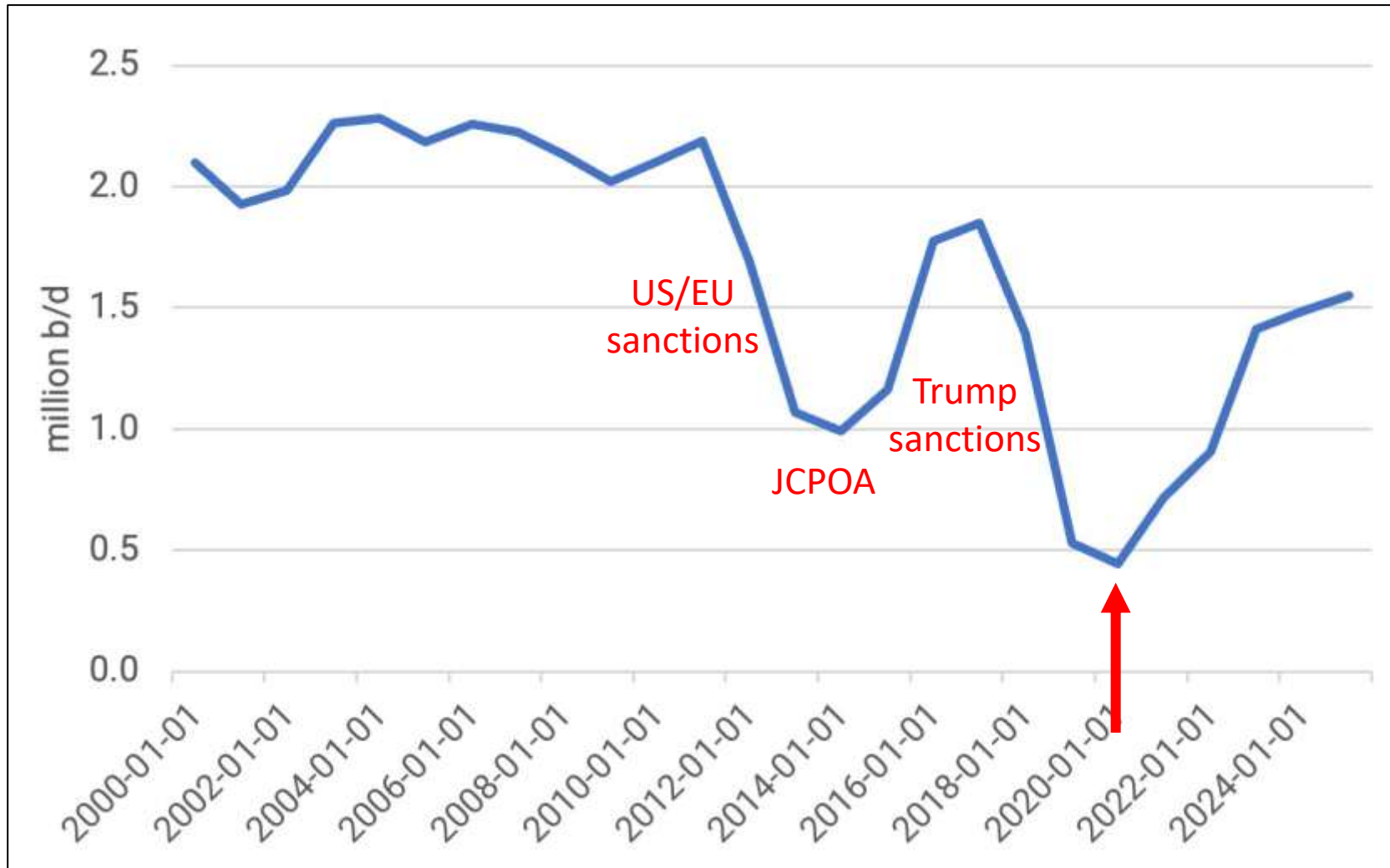


Sept. 19, 2022



Oct. 1, 2022—Rioting in the death of 22-year old Mahsa Amini, killed in January after being arrested for not wearing a headscarf. Credit: Middle East Image / AP

# Iran oil exports since 2000:



Baker Institute.

# Confronting Israel



5/29/21, Hamas and Hezbollah set up a “joint war room” in Beirut.



# Hamas:



Ismail Haniyeh,  
Political Leader  
Damascus/Qatar.



Kahled Meshal,  
Foreign Affairs  
Damascus/Qatar.

## The Plan:

1. Breach the border fences.
2. Storm Israeli military positions.
3. Murder as many civilians as possible.
4. Capture hostages to bring back to Gaza.
5. Destroy Israeli towns by burning.
6. Bargain for release of Palestinian prisoners being held by Israel in exchange for the hostages.



Yahya Sinwar,  
Political Leader  
Gaza



Ben Gvir moves security from Gaza to the West Bank.



Automated guard tower, with camera and automatic weapon.



Itamar Ben-Gvir,  
Minister of Security



Impenetrable steel fence.



Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attacks.



Yahya Sinwar,  
Hamas Political  
Leader in Gaza

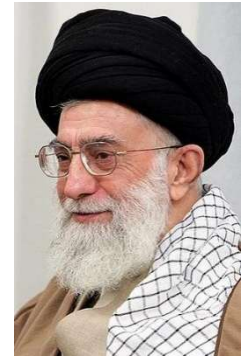
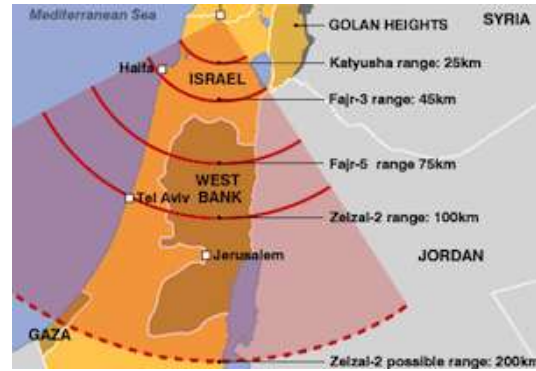


Palestinians break down the border  
fence with Israel in the southern  
Gaza Strip.



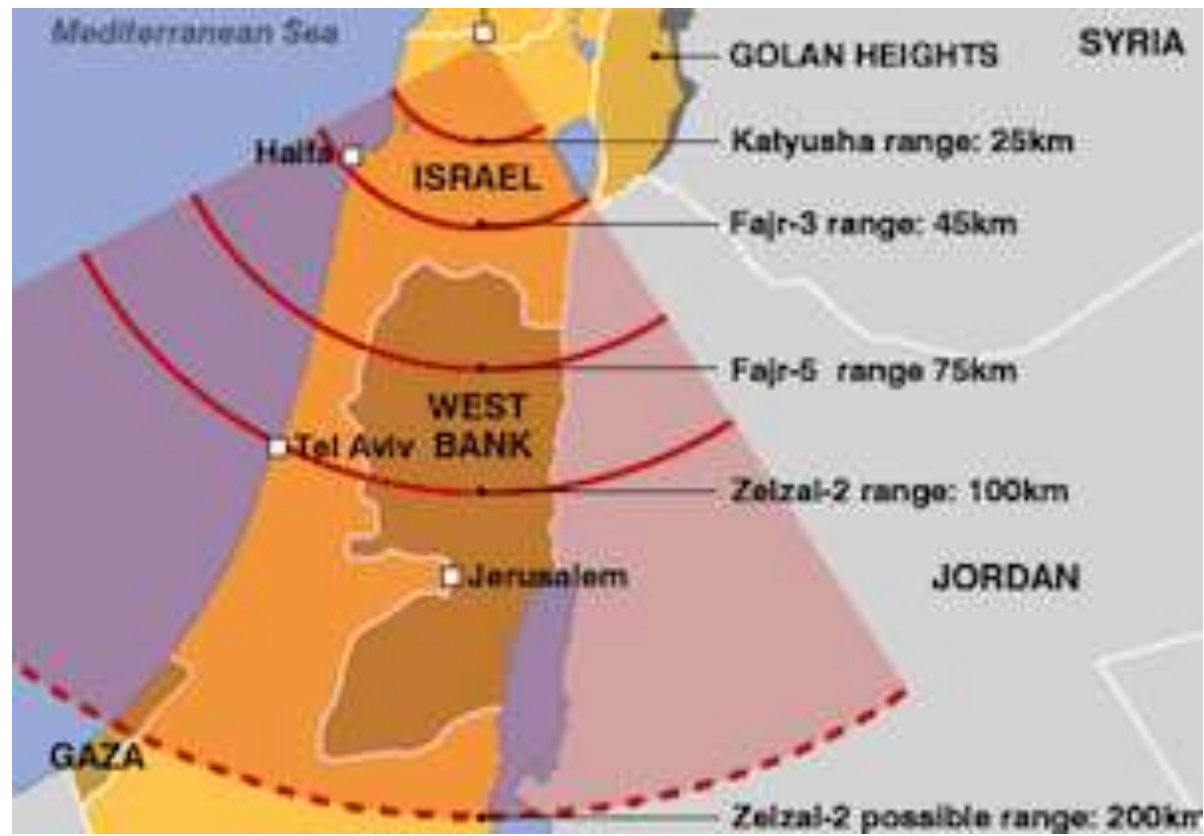
Civilians killed by Palestinian militants in  
Sderot, Israel, on Saturday, Oct. 7, 2023.

# Hezbollah:



Hezbollah's Iranian missiles, supposedly, can hit most of Israel from southern Lebanon.







Smoke billows from fires ignited by Israeli shelling on the forested areas of the southern Lebanese village of Deir Mimas. Credit: Photo by Rabih DAHER / AFP



Two men stand by a truck as they watch smoke plumes rising from a fire in a field after rockets launched from southern Lebanon landed near Katzrin in the Golan Heights. Credit: AFP





January 14, 2024, Gaza after 100 days



April 1, 2024 Israel bombs the Iranian embassy in Damascus, Syria. Hits the consular section killing sixteen persons, including two IRGC generals.



## ISRAEL'S WAR ON GAZA

# Iran launches drones, missiles at Israel

Israel says nearly all incoming drones and missiles - numbering more than 300 - from Iran, Iraq and Yemen have been intercepted. Iran says the attack is in response to an Israeli strike on its consulate in Syria on April 1 and that the matter can now "be deemed concluded".

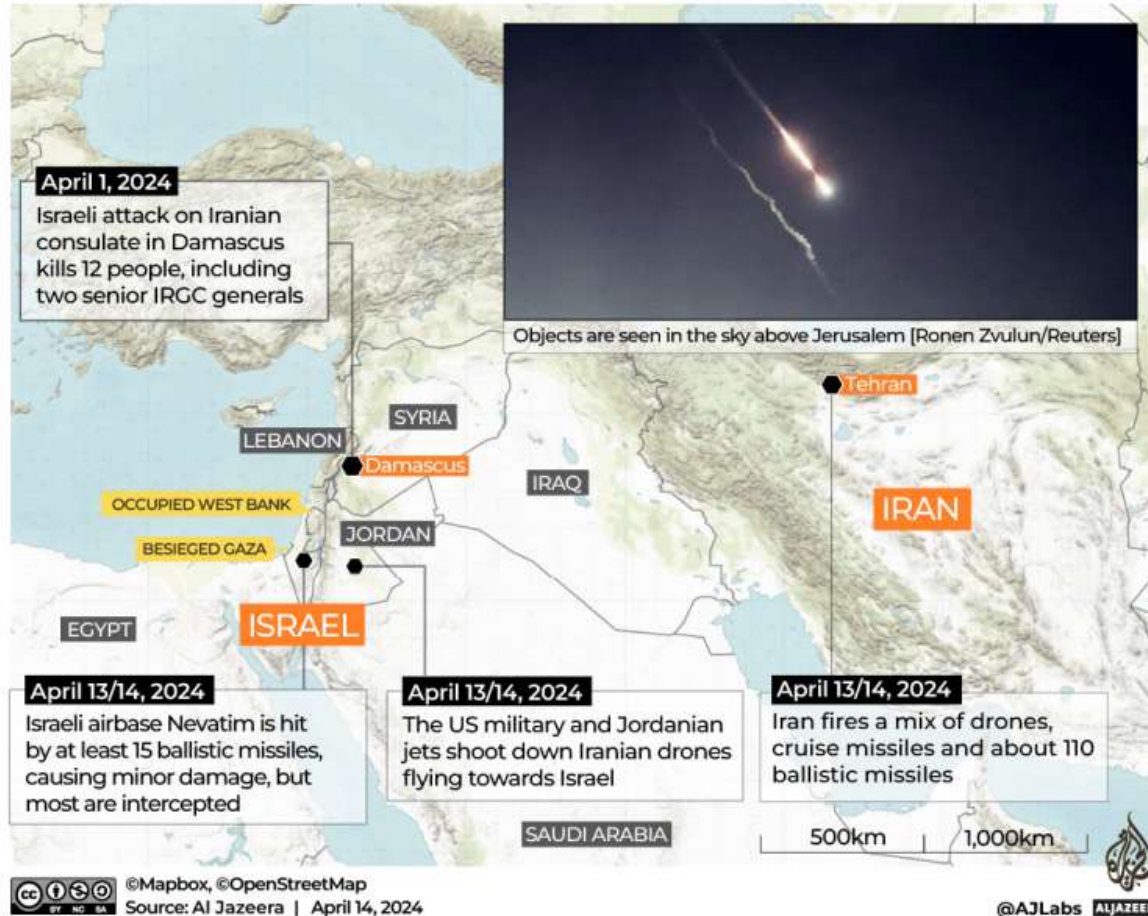
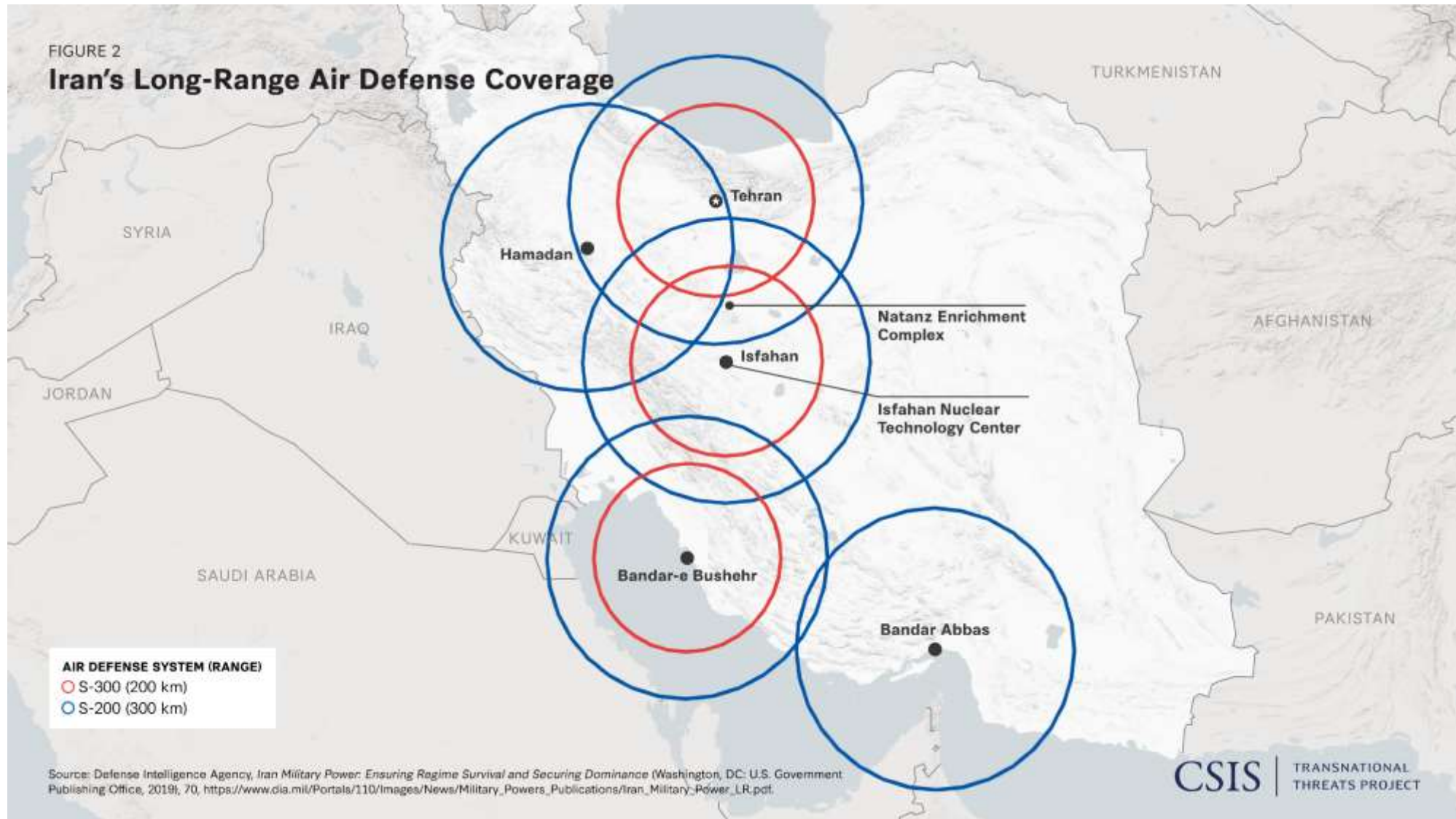


FIGURE 2

## Iran's Long-Range Air Defense Coverage



Source: Defense Intelligence Agency, *Iran Military Power: Ensuring Regime Survival and Securing Dominance* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2019), 70, [https://www.dia.mil/Portals/110/Images/News/Military\\_Powers\\_Publications/Iran\\_Military\\_Power\\_LR.pdf](https://www.dia.mil/Portals/110/Images/News/Military_Powers_Publications/Iran_Military_Power_LR.pdf).





Funeral of President Ebrahim Raisi, May 2024. Credit: Arash Khamooshi/The New York Times.



Masoud Pezeshkian, ninth President of Iran





Funeral in Tehran of Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas political leader and Chief Negotiator.

Hezbollah




Remnants of a [Hezbollah](#) pager that exploded on 17 September 2024. By AFP/Getty Images



Message received at 15.30 local time on Tuesday appearing to be from leadership



 Pager buzzes with message alert

Seconds later thousands of devices detonate



Hassan Nasrallah assassinated at Hezbollah Headquarters in Dahieh, by an IDF airstrike on September 27, 2024.

An [IAF F-15I](#) loaded with guided bombs as it is taking-off for the airstrike on 27 September 2024





People gather at a site damaged by Israeli airstrike that killed Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah during a commemoration ceremony in Beirut southern suburbs, November 30, 2024. REUTERS/Thaier Al-Sudani



Mourners at the funeral of Hassan Nasrallah, Beirut, February 23, 2025. Credit: Sharif Abdel Kouddous



The Iranian air attack was an extensive air operation against Israel on the evening of 1 October 2024, and included 181 projectiles. The result was at least 8 Israelis killed. This photo was taken in the Lower Galilee from a settlement towards the east.





Parchin Military Complex. Credit: Satellite Image © Maxar Technologies.





# Lebanon and Syria

# Reported Israeli Operations in Lebanon

As of October 3, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET







2/21/25 Kfarkela village in Lebanon, on Israeli border, destroyed by Israeli forces during the ceasefire. IDF withdrew 2/18/24. Photo by Sharif Abdel Kouddous.

# Fall of Syria





Smoke billows in the distance as damaged cars are seen at the site of Syrian regime airstrikes targeting anti-regime fighters in Aleppo, northern Syria.

Credit: Aaref Watad/AF



A rebel fighter poses with a poster of Syrian President Bashar Assad, in Aleppo, on Saturday. Credit: Ghaith Alsayed/AP







Anti government fighters pose for a selfie in Hama Dec 6 2024.

Credit: BAKR AL KASSEM AFP via Getty Images





Celebration at a border crossing from Lebanon into Syria, December 2024. Credit: Daniel Berehulak/The New York Times.



A Syrian opposition fighter tears up a painting depicting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his late father Hafez al-Assad at the Aleppo international airport. Credit: Ghaith Alsayed/AP





Banner featuring Turkish President Recep Erdogan and anti-Assad rebels' flag as Syrian refugees and supporters in Istanbul celebrate the fall of Syrian President Assad.

Credit: AFP/KEMAL ASLAN



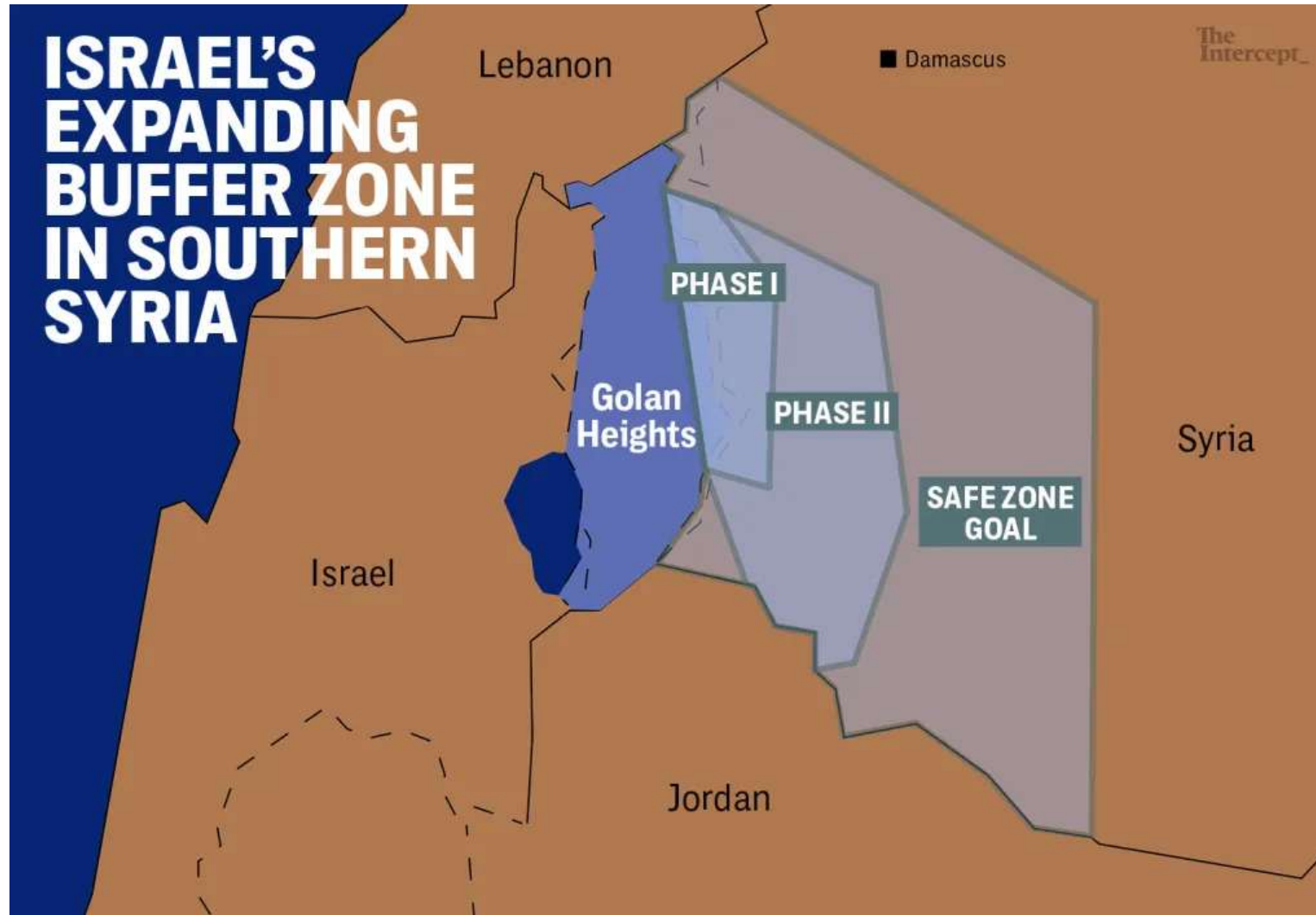
Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visits Mount Hermon, alongside IDF Chief of Staff Herzl Halevy. Credit: Maayan Toaf / GPO





Israeli military vehicles cross the fence as they return from the buffer zone with Syria, near the Druze village of Majdal Shams in the Israeli Golan Heights, Tuesday. Credit: Jalaa Marey/ AFP





Israeli is expanding its buffer zone out of concern for what may develop in the new Islamic Syria, with Turkish support. Map: The Intercept

# Gaza Ceasefire



Palestinians make their way as they inspect the damages after Israeli forces withdrew from a part of Jabalia refugee camp, following a raid, in the northern Gaza Strip. Credit: REUTERS/Mahmoud Issa



Palestinians transport wounded people into the Al-Ahli Arab hospital, also known as the Baptist hospital, in Gaza City on December 19, 2024. Credit: AFP/OMAR AL-QATTAA





Hamas fighters claim victory in Khan Yunis, Gaza.



# The New Balance of Power

### Iran's weakened state:

- Most of Hezbollah's capabilities are destroyed
- Assad's Syria is replaced by a Sunni Islamist state
- Hamas is largely disabled
- Iran's ballistic missile production interrupted
- Iran's air defense system is badly damaged and ineffective
- Iran's regional influence at its lowest ebb in 30 years



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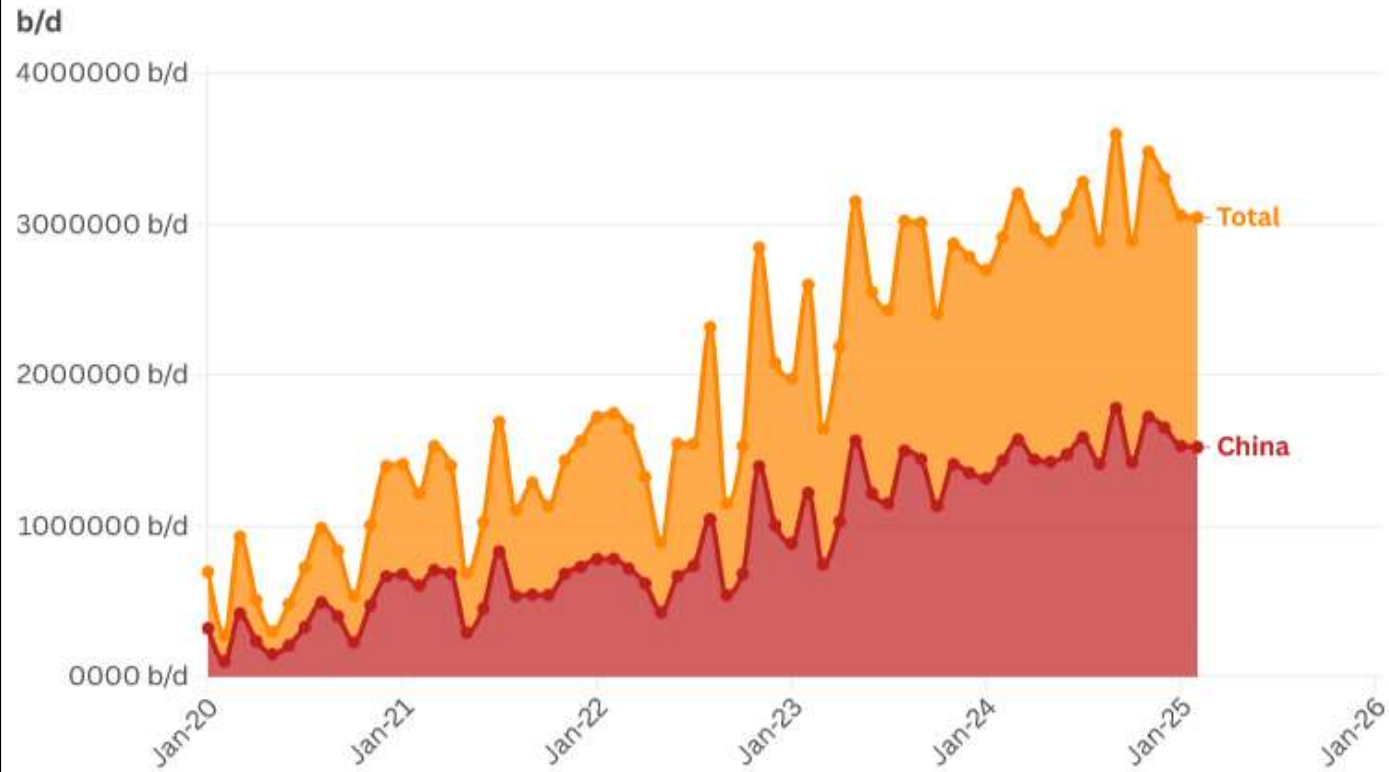
Time to build a nuclear weapon?



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov meets with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian in Tehran.

## Iran's oil exports 2020-2025

Volumes to China, Syria, Venezuela & others



Source: Kpler

AL-MONITOR 





IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi says no one has ever enriched to 60% without moving ahead to a nuclear weapon. Credit: Roland Schlager/APA/dpa/picture alliance



Jan 2025, New *Zargos* electronic intelligence-gathering destroyer.



Jan 2025 Shahed 171 drone.



Feb 2025, Iran's *Shahid Bagheri* drone-carrier joins the IRGC navy.



Man writes slogan on Trump poster during anniversary celebration of the 1979 Islamic revolution. Vahid Salem/AP photo.



President Masoud Pezeshkian speaks during the rally.. Vahid Salem/AP photo.



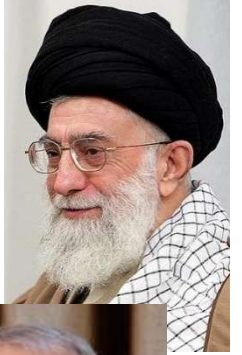
Iraq:



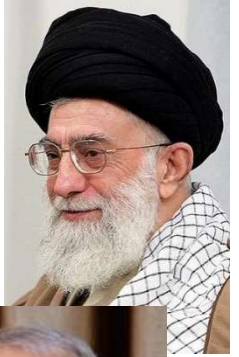
Mohammed Shia'  
Al Sudani,  
Prime Minister of Iraq.



Iran-backed Shi'a Popular Mobilization Units at Ayn al-Hisan, near Tel Afar,  
west of Mosul.



Yemen:

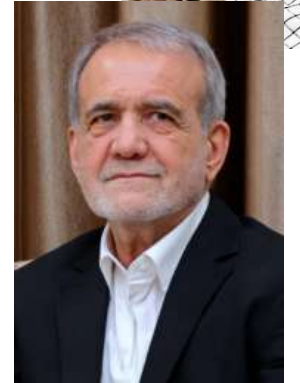
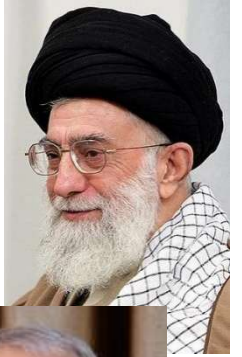


The Houthis in Yemen have been effective in limiting ocean trade in the Red Sea and Suez Canal, and have even hit Israel with long-range rockets and drones.

# Afghanistan:

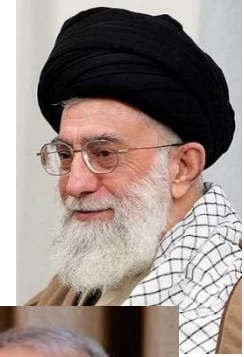
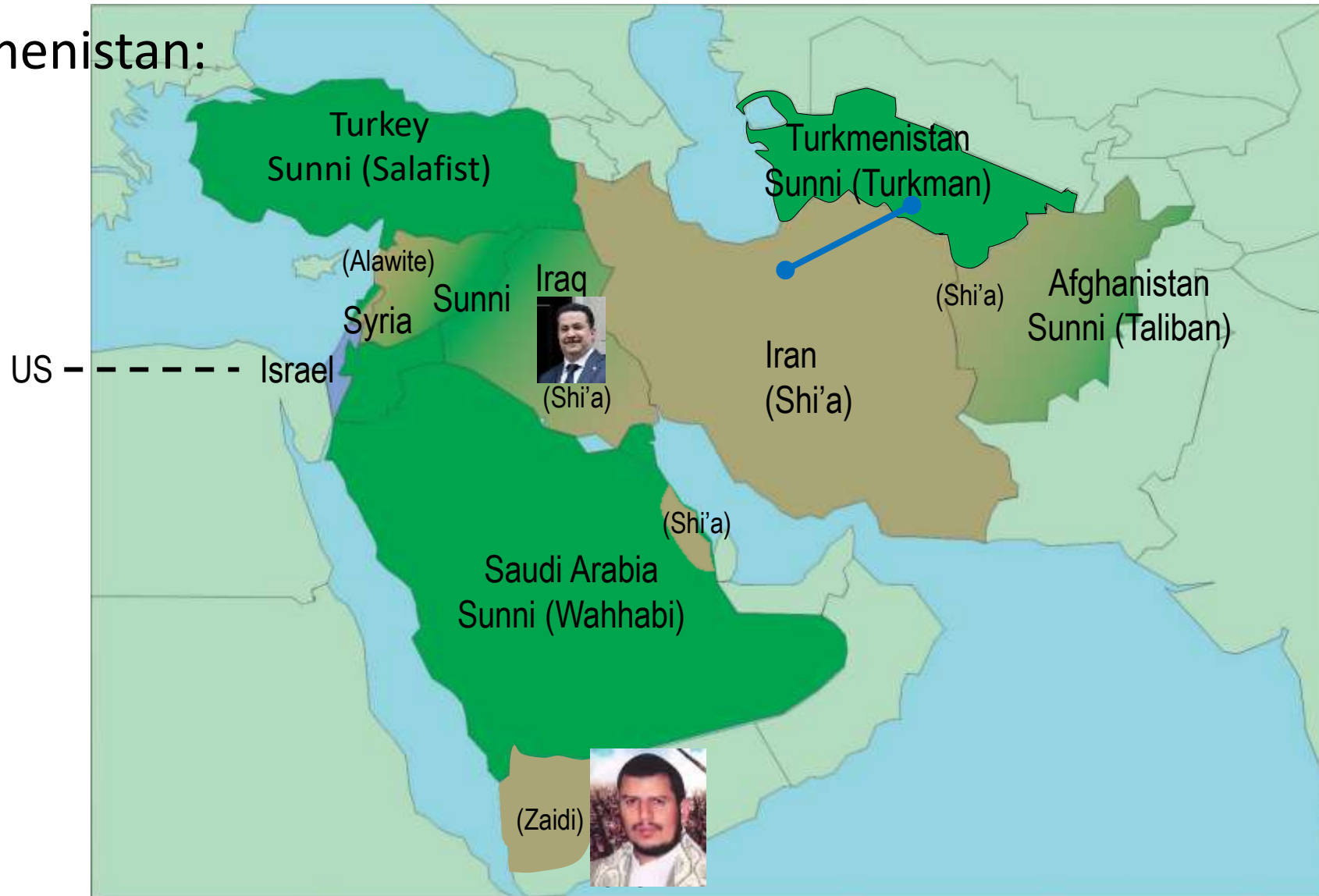


Afghan refugees are seen crossing the border into Iran at Islam Qala, Herat Province in western Afghanistan.





# Turkmenistan:



Iran and Turkmenistan have recently begun to cooperate on electricity, natural gas, transportation and Caspian Sea trade.

# Saudi Arabia:



Iran's diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia continue, and trade is growing with the UAE.

What's next?





2/4/25 at the White House.

**What Iran wants:**

- Security for Iran
- Security for Shi'a in general
- Removal of sanctions against their country
- Regional political leadership

**Iran's bargaining chips:**

- Nuclear program
- Peace

### **What Israel wants:**

- US strike on Iran's nuclear facilities
- Deal with SA, UAE, Egypt and Jordan
  - To replace Iran as the regional military power
  - To offset Turkey and the new regime in Syria
- Displace Palestinians in Gaza and West Bank

### **Israel's bargaining chips:**

- Military strength
- Support in the US





Iran's Natanz nuclear facility.



Iran's Fordow nuclear facility.

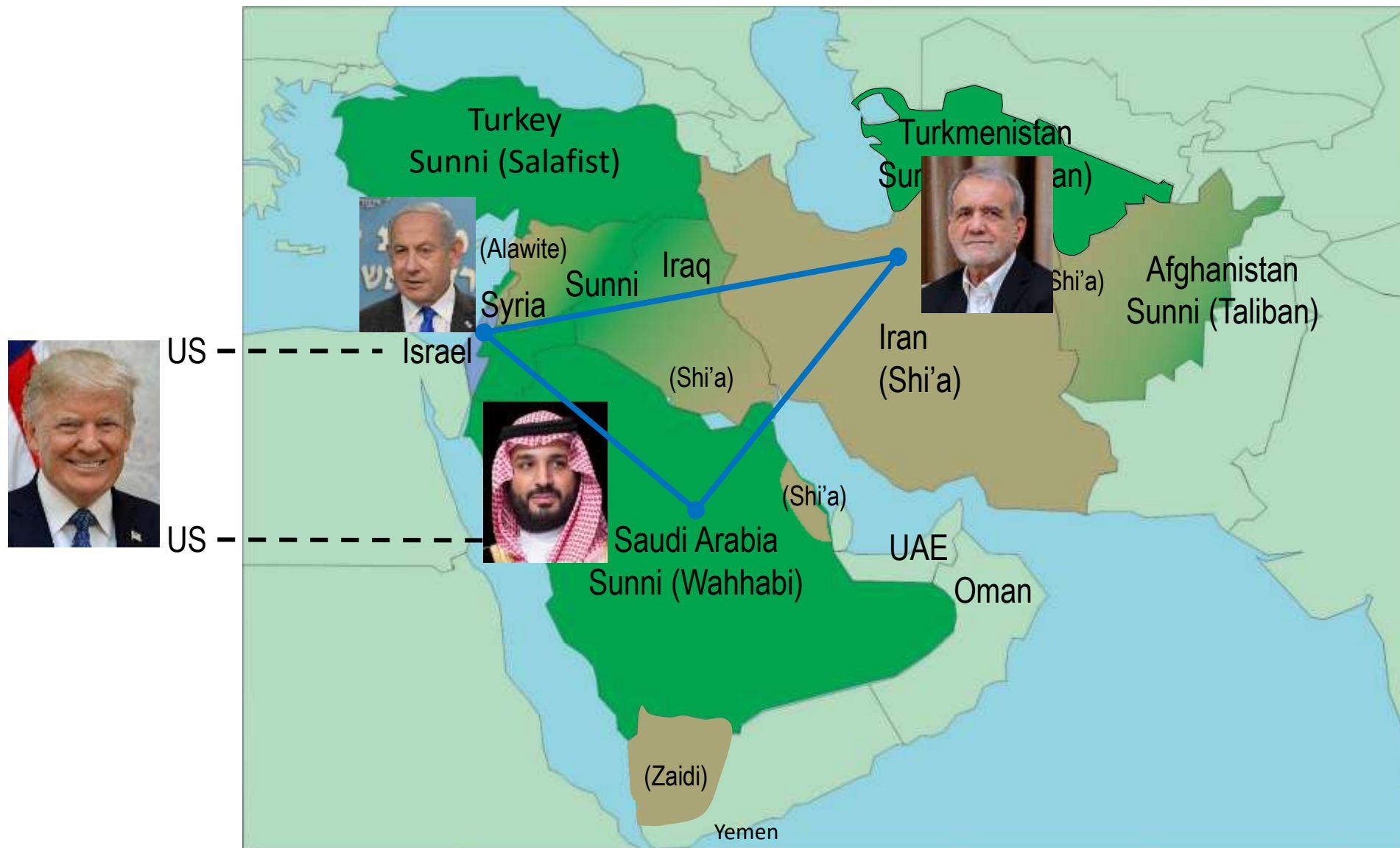
**What Trump wants:**

- 20-year disarmament deal with Iran
- Middle East Peace
- Nobel Peace Prize?

**Trump's bargaining chips:**

- Economic sanctions





Donald Trump envisions 1) a solution to the Israel/Palestine problem, 2) a Saudi/Israel defense agreement, and 3) a new Iranian arms imitation deal.

### **U.S./Iran areas of mutual interest:**

- **Sunni extremists.** Sunni extremists like al Qaeda, the Taliban and ISIS are major threats to the lives of Shi'a throughout the region, particularly in Syria and Iraq. Iran, India, Russia and the U.S. all see extremism as a major problem.
- **Drug trafficking.** Afghanistan under the Taliban is the world's largest source of illegally produced opioids. Cooperative counter narcotics efforts would contribute to Iran's security and to world-wide drug control.
- **Water.** Water resources in the shared border area between Iran and Afghanistan are a major source of tension. Afghan agriculture is expanding and is upstream from Iran's eastern provinces. The U.S. could be a mediator and provider of technology.
- **Refugees.** Iran houses the second largest number of Afghan refugees after Pakistan. As economic conditions have worsened in Iran due to U.S. sanctions, providing for the refugees has become an economic burden. U.N. help is limited.



# IRAN



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