

# Iran Update



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**Information Cutoff: July 12, 2024, 2:00 pm ET**

*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. Click [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.*

*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.*

*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.*

**Hamas continued to promote its postwar plan for a technocratic government to jointly rule the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Hamas is content with this plan because it expects to maintain a monopoly on violence in the Gaza Strip, thereby controlling the government or evading its rule.** Hamas official Hossam Badran said on July 12 that Hamas proposes that a national, non-partisan group assumes administration of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank after the war.[1] Hamas has previously agreed to “technocratic” governments as part of a possible post-war Gaza Strip.[2] Hamas approves of a “technocratic government” because Hamas understands that it would be able to exert influence over such a government given that Hamas expects to maintain a military arm in the Gaza Strip after the war.

**The ceasefire text currently under consideration does not contain a clause ensuring Hamas’ disarmament in the Gaza Strip, enabling Hamas to maintain control by force in the event of an Israeli withdrawal.**[3] Israel and Hamas do not currently have a framework to discuss Hamas’ disarmament under the current ceasefire proposals. Hamas official Hossam Badran called disbanding Hamas’ military wing a nonstarter.[4] Hamas’ current demands regarding the phased ceasefire could also enable Hamas to drag on negotiations indefinitely with no mechanism to compel it to release the remaining hostages or commit to disarmament. Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip Yahya Sinwar would very likely fail to disarm in any event because to do so would result in Sinwar and Hamas losing a key element of their power in the Gaza Strip. Hamas forces throughout the Strip remain combat-effective and are attempting to reconstitute, with some success. Sinwar has noted that he believes Hamas has Israel “right where [Hamas] wants [Israel].”[5]

**Hamas would continue to shape, intimidate, and control a technocratic government if the group retains a monopoly on violence in the Gaza Strip.** Hamas has previously undermined Israeli attempts to set up alternative governance structures in the Gaza Strip and will likely continue to suppress political alternatives. Hamas could use its functioning military and internal security wings to coerce technocratic government employees at every level, thus providing Hamas with significant influence over the Gazan government even if Hamas officials were not officially controlling it. Hamas has a long history of killing and suppressing dissidents and political alternatives, including members of local Gazan clans who Israel has approached to form a non-Hamas authority after the war.[6] Hamas would almost certainly act quickly to constrain and co-opt the activities of a technocratic government in the Strip in order to prevent it from seriously challenging Hamas’ military or governance activities. The latest proposal for a 2,500-strong US-trained interim security force would be insufficient to provide order and challenge Hamas’ monopoly on violence in the Gaza Strip.[7]

**Iranian President-elect Masoud Pezeshkian appointed former Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif as the chairman of his Steering Council to lead Pezeshkian’s transition into the presidency on July 12.**[8] **This appointment is emblematic of Pezeshkian’s intent to seriously pursue negotiations with the West.** Zarif’s appointment follows reports that Pezeshkian may appoint former deputy foreign affairs minister for policy and deputy nuclear negotiator Abbas Araghchi as his foreign minister.[9] The appointment of Zarif to lead Pezeshkian’s transition, combined with a possible appointment of Araghchi as foreign minister, illustrates Pezeshkian’s intent to seriously pursue negotiations with the West.

**Zarif’s appointment in the transition team illustrates how previously marginalized, moderate political elements are seeking to capitalize on Pezeshkian’s victory to re-enter the political conversations.** Zarif—a moderate who served under moderate President Hassan Rouhani—had previously been sidelined in Iranian politics under the Raisi Administration after the collapse of the JCPOA.[10] Zarif will likely remain influential during the transition period by informing Pezeshkian’s decision-making regarding the composition of his cabinet.

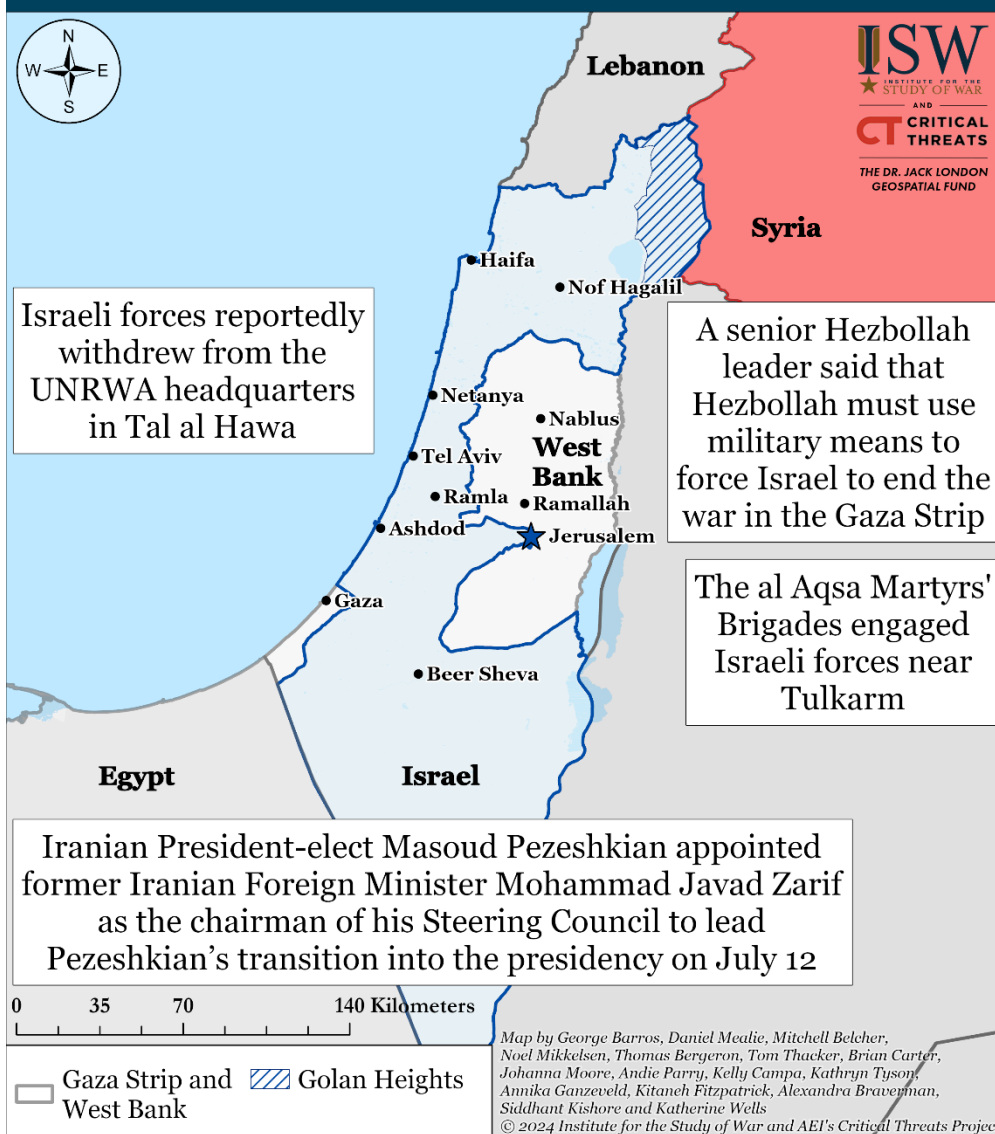
Zarif denied, however, that he is seeking a permanent position in Pezeshkian’s government. Zarif separately tweeted on July 12 that the Pezeshkian transition team has “just begun” to make decisions about the appointment of government ministers.[11] Zarif urged Iranians to ignore the rumors circulating that Pezeshkian has already decided who will be nominated for cabinet positions.

## **Key Takeaways:**

- **Gaza Strip:** Hamas continued to promote its postwar plan for a technocratic government to jointly rule the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Hamas is content with this plan because it expects to maintain a monopoly on violence in the Gaza Strip thereby controlling the government or evading its rule. Hamas would continue to shape, intimidate, and control a technocratic government if the group retains a monopoly on violence in the Gaza Strip.
- **Iran:** Iranian President-elect Masoud Pezeshkian appointed former Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif as the chairman of his Steering Council to lead Pezeshkian's transition into the presidency on July 12. This appointment is emblematic of Pezeshkian's intent to seriously pursue negotiations with the West. Zarif's appointment in the transition team illustrates how previously marginalized, moderate political elements are seeking to capitalize on Pezeshkian's victory to re-enter the political conversations.
- **Iran in Russia:** Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf conducted bilateral meetings with his counterparts from Russia, Ethiopia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Tajikistan on the sidelines of the BRICS parliamentary forum in St. Petersburg, Russia, on July 11 and July 12.
- **Lebanon:** A senior Hezbollah leader said in a speech on July 12 that Hezbollah must use military force, rather than diplomatic talks, to force Israel to end the war in the Gaza Strip.

# Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of July 12, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



## Gaza Strip

### 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

**The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) 99th Division reportedly completed clearing operations in Tal al Hawa, southwest Gaza City, on July 12.** The Gaza Civil Defense Agency and local journalists reported that Israeli armor withdrew from the UNRWA headquarters and the surrounding area at dawn on July 12.[12] Hamas similarly reported that the IDF withdrew from Tal al Hawa on July 12.[13] Local reports indicate Israeli forces remain along the coastal road and south of Gaza

City.[14] Hamas targeted Israeli armor with an explosively formed penetrator and rocket-propelled grenades near the coastal road in western Tal al Hawa on July 12.[15] The IDF called all of Gaza City a "dangerous combat zone" on July 10, suggesting clearing operations may shift into other sectors of Gaza City.[16]

Israeli forces located attack drones, an improvised explosive device (IED) assembly site, and a Hamas observation post in and around the UNRWA headquarters.[17] The IDF said it launched the re-clearing of the UNRWA site on July 8 because it received intelligence that Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) used the facility to[18]. The IDF 89th Commando Brigade located attack drones, IEDs , rockets, rocket-propelled grenades, grenades, mortar shells, sniper rifles, and other unspecified weapons in areas near the UNRWA headquarters on July 11. [19]

**The IDF said on July 12 that it struck and killed Hamas Shujaiya Battalion Deputy Commander Ayman Showedeh.**[20] The IDF said that Showedeh helped direct the October 7th attack and was actively involved in combat throughout the war.[21] Israeli aircraft also struck and killed Hamas Shujaiya Battalion company commander Ubadah Abu Heen who the IDF said "took a major part in fighting" in Shujaiya.[22] The IDF said that its most recent re-clearing operation in Shujaiya from June 27 to July 10 killed over 150 Palestinian fighters.[23] CTP-ISW previously assessed that the Hamas Shujaiya Battalion reconstituted itself between December and July, undertaking both reorganization and regeneration activities.[24]

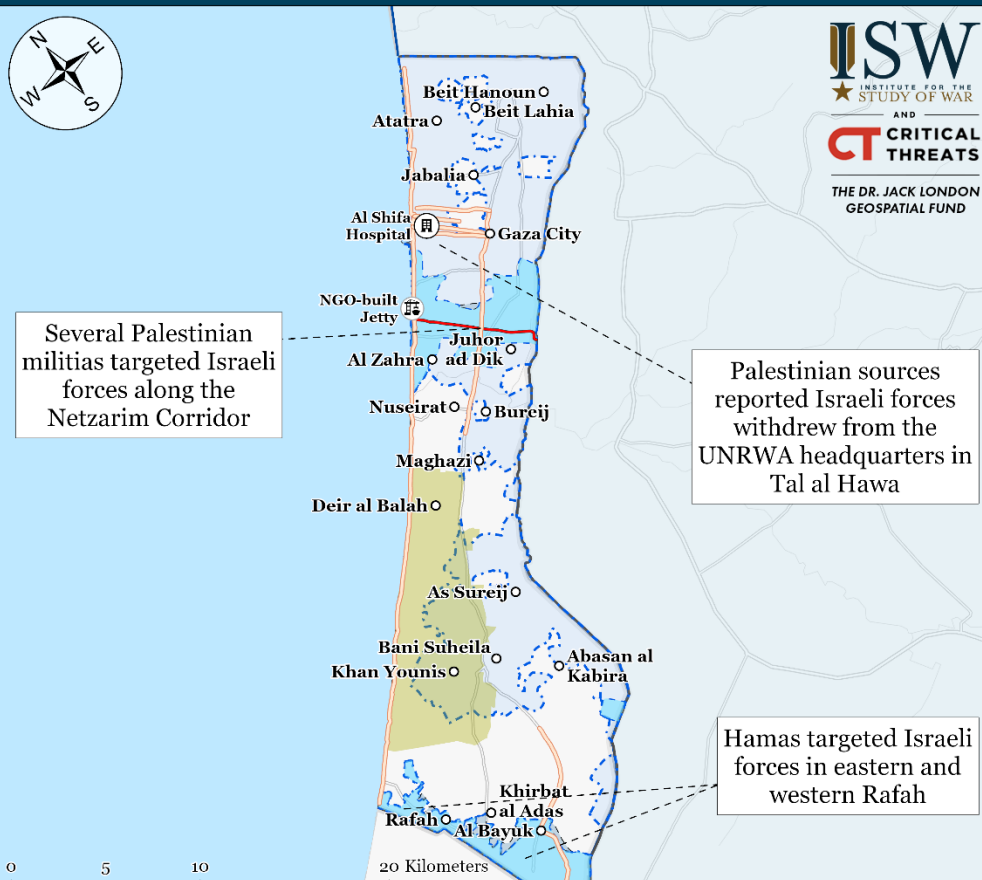
**The IDF Air Force struck a rocket launch site in Beit Hanoun used to target sites near Ashkelon on July 11.**[25] Israeli Army Radio reported that a red alert was issued in Nir Yisrael, near Ashkelon, for the first time since January 2024 as a result of the attack.[26] Israeli forces have carried out several small-scale targeted raids in Beit Hanoun over the course of 2024.[27]

**Several Palestinian militias fired rockets and mortars targeting Israeli forces along the Netzarim Corridor on July 12.**[28]

**The IDF 162nd Division continued clearing operations in Rafah on July 12.** Israeli forces directed airstrikes against Palestinian fighters and militia infrastructure in the area.[29] Hamas mortared Israeli forces in southwestern Rafah.[30] Hamas separately targeted Israeli armor with rocket-propelled grenades in southeastern Rafah.[31]

# Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of July 12, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Several Palestinian militias targeted Israeli forces along the Netzarim Corridor

Palestinian sources reported Israeli forces withdrew from the UNRWA headquarters in Tal al Hawa

Hamas targeted Israeli forces in eastern and western Rafah

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Tom Thacker, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Kathryn Tyson, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Braverman, Siddhant Kishore and Katherine Wells

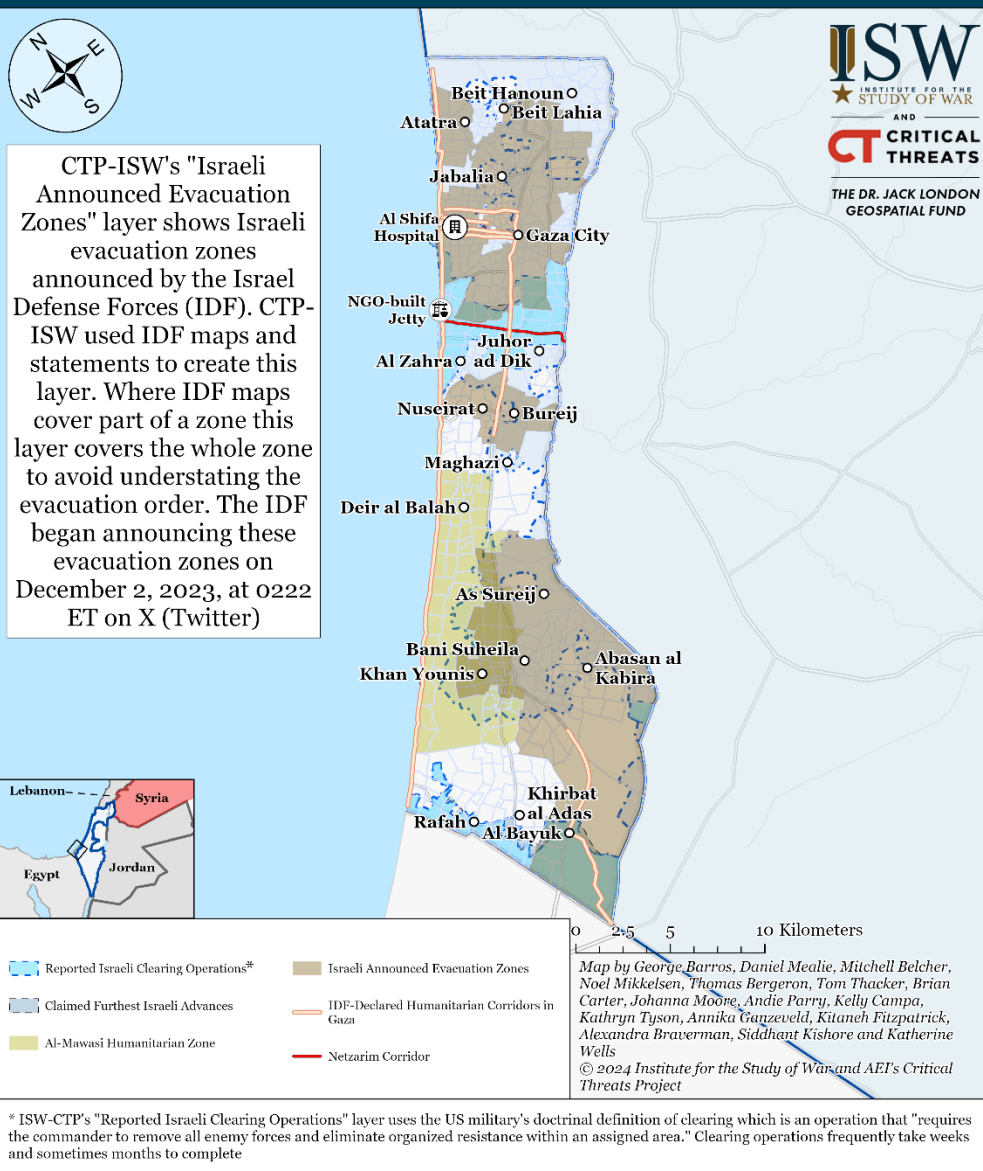
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Reported Israeli Clearing Operations	IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridors in Gaza	Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances	Netzarim Corridor	Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
Assessed Furthest Extent of Israeli Clearing Operations		



\* ISW-CTP's "Reported Israeli Clearing Operations" layer uses the US military's doctrinal definition of clearing which is an operation that "requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance within an assigned area." Clearing operations frequently take weeks and sometimes months to complete

# Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip As of July 12, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET

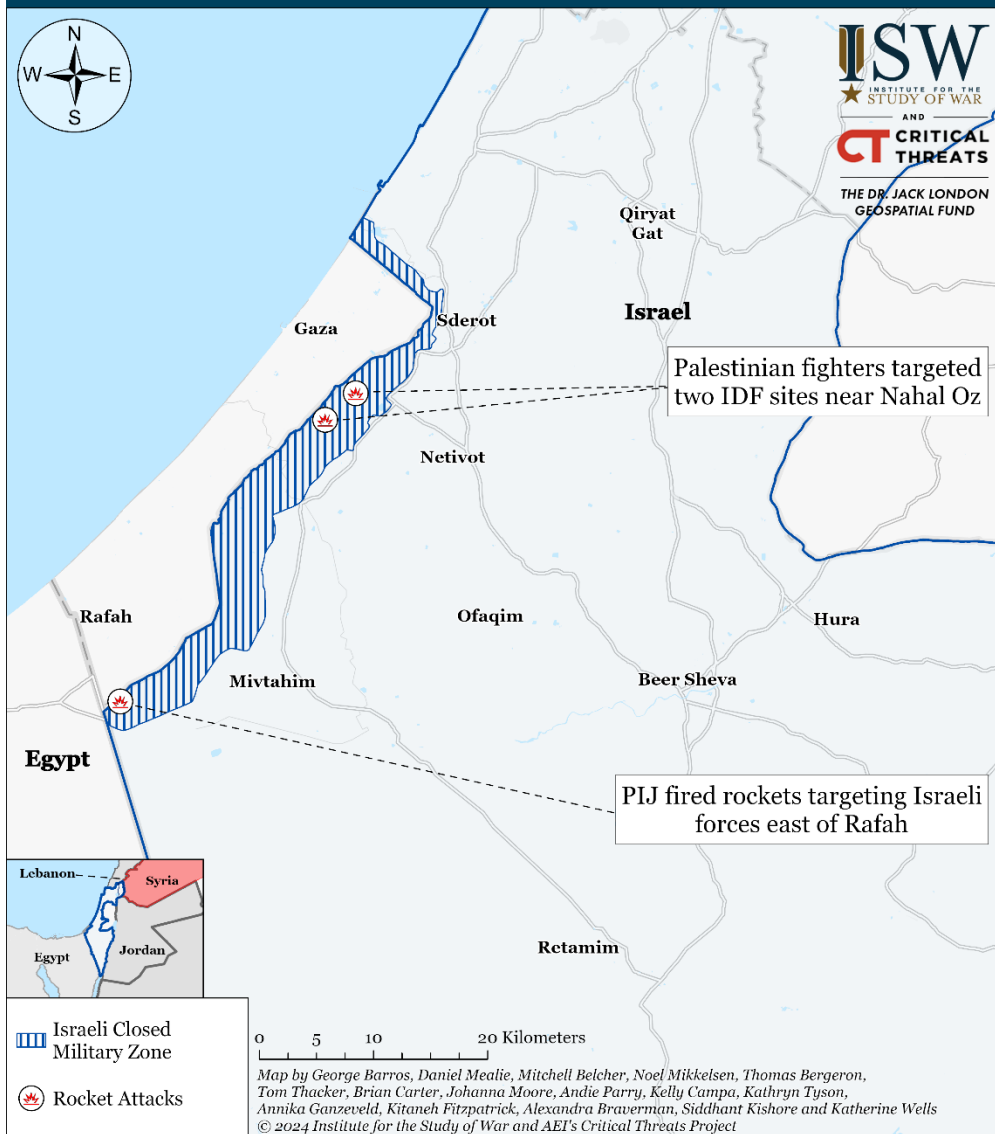


**Palestinian militias in the Gaza Strip conducted at least three indirect fire attacks targeting IDF sites in southern Israel on July 12.**[32] PIJ targeted Israeli forces with rockets and mortars at a site near Rafah.[33] PIJ and the Palestinian Mujahideen Movement targeted two IDF sites near Nahal Oz.[34]



# Attacks into Israel from the Gaza Strip

As of July 12, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



*Recorded reports of attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.*

## West Bank

### **Axis of Resistance objectives:**

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

**Israeli forces engaged Palestinian fighters near Tulkarm on July 11.[35]** The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired small arms targeting a military checkpoint along the Israel-West Bank boundary.



# Significant Activity in the West Bank

As of July 12, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



*This map is not an exhaustive depiction of clashes and demonstrations in the West Bank.*

## Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

### **Axis of Resistance objectives:**

- Deter Israel from conducting a ground operation into Lebanon
- Prepare for an expanded and protracted conflict with Israel in the near term
- Expel the United States from Syria

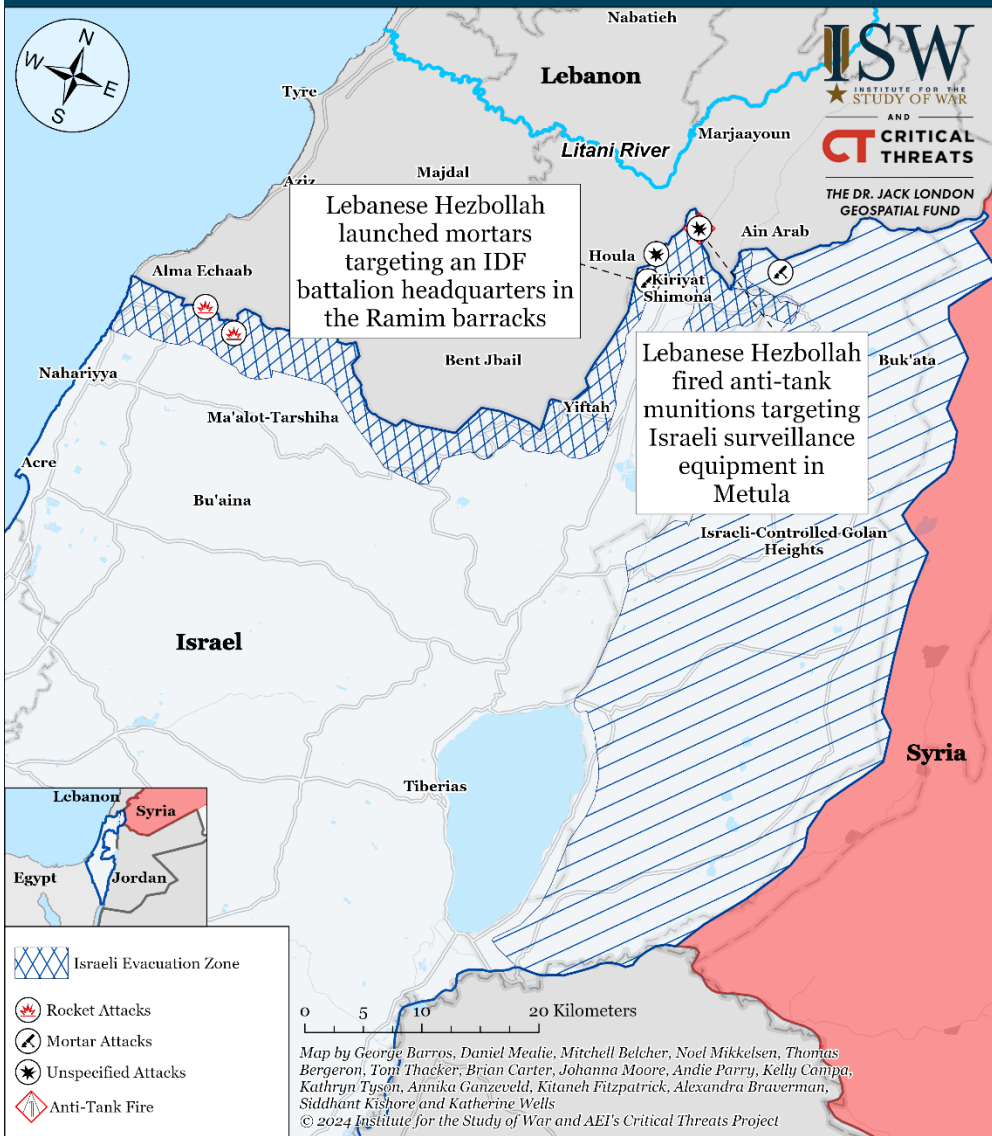
**Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, have conducted nine attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cut-off on July 11.[36]**

**The IDF Air Force conducted several strikes targeting Hezbollah military infrastructure and fighters in southern Lebanon on July 12.[37]** An Israeli airstrike killed a Hezbollah fighter responsible for rocket fire targeting the Golan Heights over the past week.[38]

**A senior Hezbollah leader said in a speech on July 12 that Hezbollah must use military force, rather than diplomatic talks, to force Israel to end the war in the Gaza Strip.[39]** Hezbollah Central Council member Nabil Qawooq said in a speech during an Ashura Council meeting that “the field is the only way to force the Israeli enemy to stop the aggression on Gaza, not political contacts or statements.”[40] Qawooq praised Hezbollah rocket and drone attacks targeting Israel’s Iron Dome and said that Israel is unable to defend itself against Hezbollah attacks. Qawooq added that Hezbollah would not accept a ceasefire with Israel unless there is a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and that Palestinian fighters must coordinate to prevent Israel from “isolating” the Gaza Strip.[41] Qawooq said that Hezbollah is continuing to prepare to defend itself from a potential Israeli offensive into Lebanon.

# Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon

As of July 12, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



*Recorded reports of attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.*

## Iran and Axis of Resistance

**Iranian-backed militias launched a rocket from al Jamou, Syria, towards IDF positions in the Golan Heights on July 12.**[42] Anonymous Israeli security sources cited by an Israeli military correspondent reported that Palestinian militia fighters launched the rocket from a Syrian Arab Army (SAA) position.[43] The IDF reported that the rockets landed in an open area in the southern Golan Heights.[44] The IDF struck an SAA site in Tahsil, Daraa Province, in retaliation for the militia strike.[45]

**US Central Command (CENTCOM) intercepted five Houthi naval attack drones and two drones in the Red Sea on July 11.[46]** CENTCOM also conducted a preemptive strike targeting a Houthi drone in a Houthi-controlled area of Yemen.

**Reuters, citing British security firm Ambrey, reported that a merchant vessel reported two explosions 21 nautical miles west of Mokha, Yemen, on July 11.[47]** Ambrey reported that one missile exploded in the air and the other impacted the water. Both explosions occurred within 0.5 nautical miles of the vessel. The report did not specify whether the vessel was damaged.

**Houthi media reported combined US-UK airstrikes on the Hudaydah International Airport, Hudaydah Governorate, Yemen, on July 12.[48]**



**Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf conducted bilateral meetings with his counterparts from Russia, Ethiopia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Tajikistan on the sidelines of the BRICS parliamentary forum in St. Petersburg, Russia, on July 11 and July 12.**[49] Ghalibaf emphasized Iran's interest in increasing economic relations during his meeting with Armenian deputy speaker Rubin Rubinian.[50]

Ghalibaf also met with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian State Duma President Viacheslav Valodin separately on July 11.[51] Ghalibaf invited the Russian Duma Chairman Vyacheslav Valodin to the President-elect Masoud Pezeshkian's inauguration next month.[52] Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali announced at the forum that Russia and Iran have finalized the comprehensive cooperation agreement after two and half years of negotiations.[53]

**A Chevron-chartered and Marshall Islands-flagged oil tanker seized by Iran in 2023 is en route to Sohar Port, Oman, as of July 12.**[54] The Artesh Navy seized the Chevron-chartered, Marshall Islands-flagged *Advantage Sweet* in the Gulf of Oman in April 2023 as the vessel was transporting oil from the UAE to the United States.[55] American oil company Chevron had chartered the *Advantage Sweet* at the time of the seizure.[56] Iran initially seized the *Advantage Sweet* in retaliation for US sanctions enforcement efforts, which included confiscating and unloading Iranian oil from the Suez Rajan.[57]

**US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) added Iranian firm Hakimian Shargh Research Company to its Specially Designated Nationals List for its involvement in Iran's chemical weapons research and development.**[58] These sanctions are under Executive Order 13382, which targets proliferators of weapons of mass destruction and their supporters.[59]

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