

Iran Update



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April 23, 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. Click [here](#) to subscribe to the Iran Update.

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 military spokesperson Abu Obeida called on April 23 for the anti-Israel protest movement in Jordan to escalate.[1] Abu Obeida called on the “Jordanian masses” to escalate their actions and “raise their voice” against Israel.[2] Jordanian demonstrators in Amman chanted references to Abu Obeida shortly after Hamas released his speech.[3] Pro-Palestinian protests in Jordan and around the Middle East have frequently celebrated Obeida and have sometimes responded to his calls for demonstrations. Some demonstrators have ascribed special significance to his words, especially in the first months of the Israel-Hamas war.[4] Jordanian protests had decreased in frequency, size, and scope in recent days—until Obeida’s speech—due to arrests and protester fatigue.[5] Abu Obeida’s praise for the Jordanian protest movement as “the most important” masses

against Israel mirrors the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) military spokesperson's statement of support for the Jordan protest movement on April 4.[6]

Abu Obeida's call for Jordanians to take a more active role against Israel is consistent with the Iranian desire to expand its militia networks into Jordan. A prominent Iranian-backed Iraqi militia threatened to create and arm a new 12,000-man Iranian proxy in Jordan on April 1, which CTP-ISW assessed may reflect a greater, more confrontational, shift in the Iranian strategy vis-a-vis Jordan.[7] Such a militia is likely aspirational and not currently a feasible undertaking, but Abu Obeida's speech could be meant to spur participation and organization along these lines. Tehran and its regional allies seek to expand their position in Jordan because Jordanian territory could grant them land routes through which to transfer materiel into the West Bank as well as a possible opportunity to disrupt Israeli overland trade through the kingdom. An active and well-armed Iranian-backed militia based out of Jordan would also significantly advance Iran's military encirclement of Israel.

Abu Obeida's praise of Jordan notably focused on the "Jordanian masses" not the Jordanian state, which is consistent with Iran and its Axis of Resistance increasingly criticizing and threatening Jordanian political leadership for its Israel policy in recent months. Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah specifically criticized Jordanian leaders on April 15 for supporting the US and Israeli interception of the recent Iranian drone and missile attack on Israel.[8] IRGC-affiliated media separately warned Jordan that it would be Iran's "next target" if it supported an Israeli strike into Iran.[9] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have also called for the dismantlement of Israel's "land bridge" through Jordan, on which Israel has increasingly relied to compensate for reduced trade activity at the Port of Eilat due to the Houthis' anti-shipping campaign in the Red Sea.[10]

Key Takeaways:

- **Jordan:** Hamas military spokesperson Abu Obeida called for the anti-Israel protest movement in Jordan to escalate.
- **Gaza Strip:** An unspecified Israeli security official reiterated to the *Wall Street Journal* the Israeli intent to conduct a clearing operation in Rafah.
- **West Bank:** Israeli forces engaged Palestinian fighters in three locations across the West Bank.
- **Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights:** Lebanese Hezbollah conducted at least six attacks into northern Israel.
- **Iraq:** US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller confirmed that an Iranian-backed Iraqi militia recently attacked US forces in Syria.
- **Iran:** Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Akbar Ahmadian traveled to St. Petersburg, Russia, to attend the 12th Russian International Security Summit.

Israel-Hamas War as of April 23, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Gaza Strip

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Erode the will of the Israeli political establishment and the public to sustain clearing operations in the Gaza Strip
- Reestablish Hamas as the governing authority in the Gaza Strip

Israeli forces continued to conduct targeted raids in the northern Gaza Strip. Elements of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Kfir Brigade (99th Infantry Division) launched a raid targeting military infrastructure and tunnel shafts in Beit Hanoun on April 22.[11] A Palestinian journalist furthermore claimed that Israeli forces advanced toward the center of Beit Hanoun.[12] The al Aqsa Martyrs'

Brigades—the self-proclaimed military wing of Fatah—separately fired “machine guns” and rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) at Israeli forces in Beit Hanoun on April 22.[13]

The IDF has conducted multiple raids targeting Palestinian militias in Beit Hanoun in recent weeks.[14] CTP-ISW previously assessed that Palestinian militia cells remain present in Beit Hanoun.[15] This assessment is consistent with the *Wall Street Journal* citing an unidentified Israeli defense official on April 22 saying that there are “several thousand” Palestinian fighters remaining in the northern Gaza Strip.[16] The IDF Southern commander met with forces in Beit Hanoun to discuss fighting in the area on April 23.[17]

The IDF issued new evacuation orders for Beit Lahia on April 23 ahead of Israeli operations there.[18] IDF spokesperson Avichay Adraee reported that the IDF will target Palestinian military infrastructure and “subversive elements” in the area.[19] A Palestinian journalist reported on April 23 that Israeli forces began shelling north of Beit Lahia.[20]

Israeli forces continued to conduct clearing operations around the Netzarim corridor on April 23. The IDF Nahal Brigade (162nd Division) ambushed and killed several Palestinian fighters with sniper fire.[21] The Nahal Brigade also directed airstrikes targeting Palestinian fighters and military infrastructure.[22] The IDF reported that multiple secondary explosions occurred while destroying Palestinian military infrastructure, suggesting weapons storage facilities were present.[23]

The IDF 215th Artillery Brigade (162nd Division) and Air Force targeted Palestinian fighters near a civilian shelter near al Bureij in the central Gaza Strip on April 23.[24]

Palestinian militias have mortared Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip at least four times in the northern and central Gaza Strip since CTP-ISW's last data cut off on April 22. The al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades mortared Israeli forces in and around Jabalia.[25] Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) mortared Israeli forces west and southwest of Gaza City.[26]

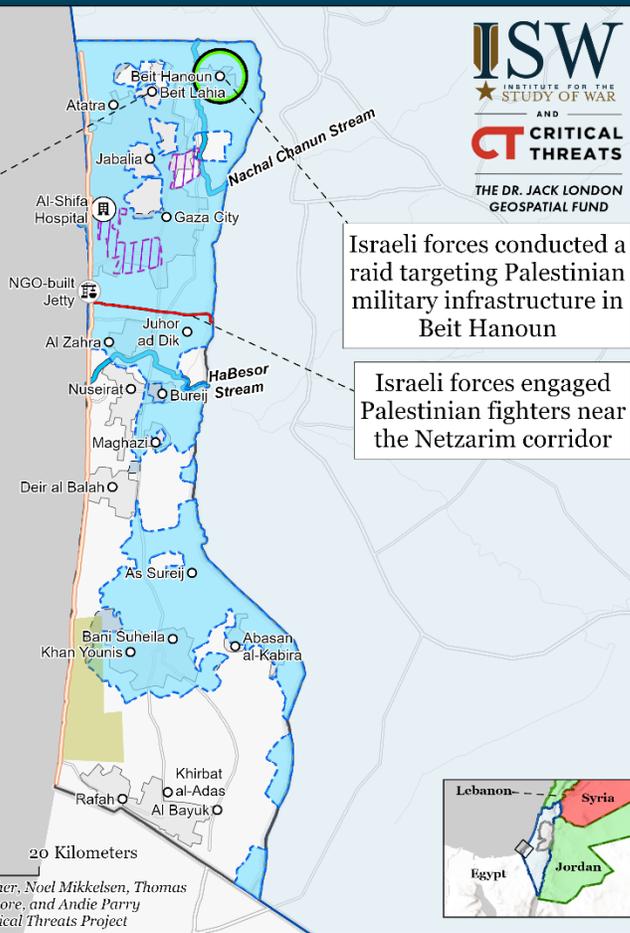
Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of April 23, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



The IDF issued new evacuation orders for Beit Lahia ahead of an Israeli military operation there

Israeli forces conducted a raid targeting Palestinian military infrastructure in Beit Hanoun

Israeli forces engaged Palestinian fighters near the Netzarim corridor



Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry
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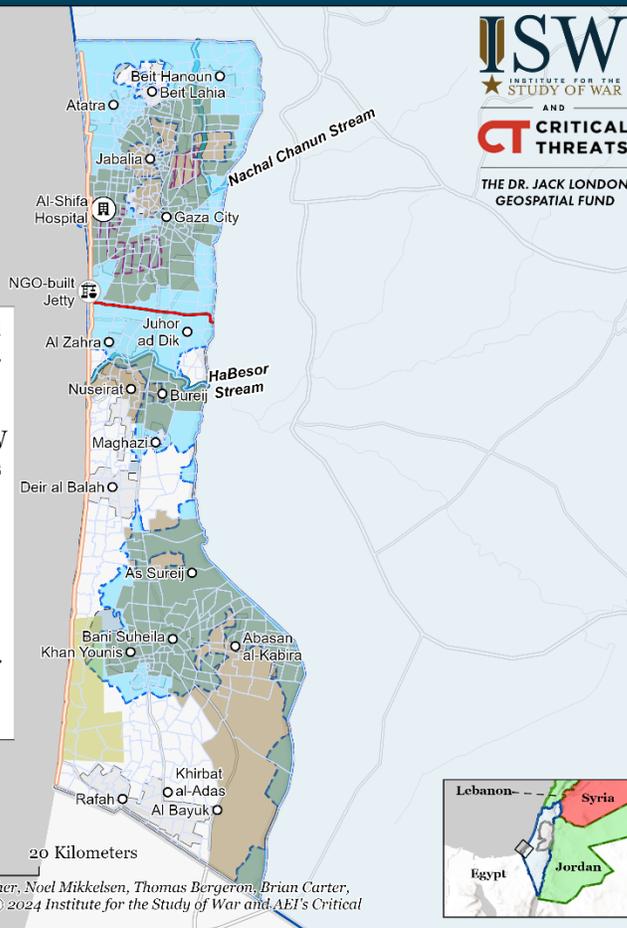
- Israel
- Gaza Strip
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230
- Israeli-Built Highway Route 749
- Significant Water Obstacles
- Densely Urban Areas
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours

* 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 April 23, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



CTP-ISW's "Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones" layer shows Israeli evacuation zones announced by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). CTP-ISW used IDF maps and statements to create this layer. Where IDF maps cover part of a zone this layer covers the whole zone to avoid understating the evacuation order. The IDF began announcing these evacuation zones on December 2, 2023, at 0222 ET on X (Twitter)



0 5 10 20 Kilometers

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Israel
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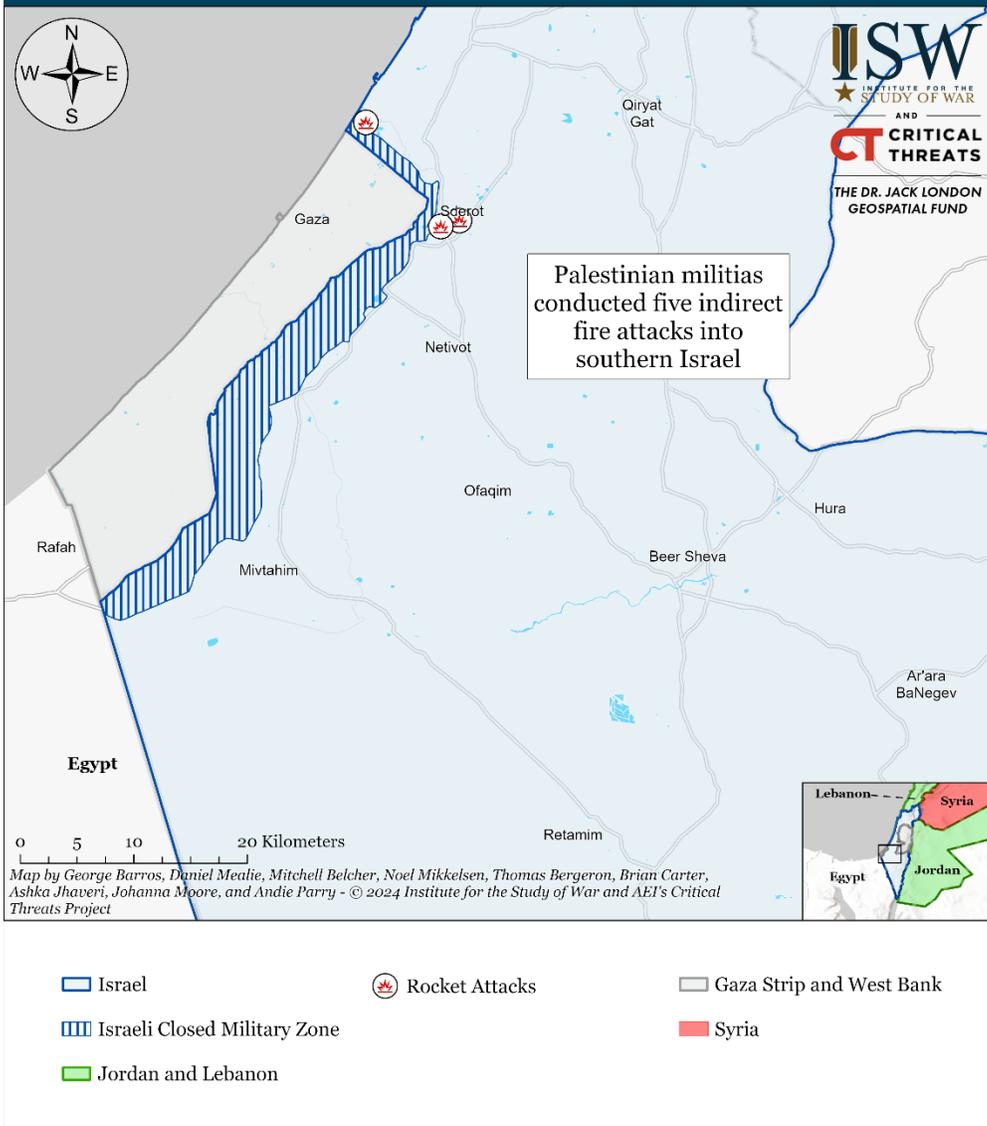
An unidentified Israeli security official reiterated to the *Wall Street Journal* the Israeli intent to conduct a clearing operation in Rafah.[27] The Israeli official stated that the IDF has a “tight operational plan” but did not elaborate further. The official added that Israel is preparing to implement a “humanitarian response” for its clearing operations into Rafah.[28] Egyptian officials briefed on the Israeli plans claimed that Israel will establish food-distribution centers, medical facilities, and tent shelters in Khan Younis and relocate Palestinian civilians from Rafah to Khan Younis and other unspecified areas of the Gaza Strip. The Associated Press (AP) published on April 23 an analysis of satellite imagery showing an enclave of newly constructed tents in Khan Younis.[29] AP cited a Palestinian health official who claimed that the tents are meant for Palestinian civilians currently sheltering in a hospital and are “not related to any impending military operation.”[30] The same

Egyptian officials claimed that the civilian evacuations to Khan Younis would take two to three weeks to complete.

Hamas rejected US Secretary of State Antony Blinken recent assertion that Hamas is preventing a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.[31] Blinken said on April 19 that Hamas rejected a “generous proposal” from Israel and asserted that Hamas is more interested in a regional war than a ceasefire.[32] Hamas rejected the latest Israeli ceasefire proposal on April 13, just hours before Iran’s large-scale drone and missile attack on Israel.[33] Blinken added that Hamas is “the only thing” preventing a ceasefire in Gaza.[34] Hamas responded to Blinken on April 23, claiming that it has “offered flexibility” but added that it has not changed its demands since December 2023.[35]

Palestinian militias conducted at least five indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel on April 23. PIJ conducted two rocket attacks, including a combined attack with the Ansar Brigades, targeting Sderot.[36] The al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades and National Resistance Brigades conducted a combined rocket attack targeting the IDF Zikim base.[37] Israeli forces targeted and destroyed indirect fire launch sites Beit Lahia and Gaza City in Beit Lahia and Gaza City.[38] The IDF Air Force also destroyed two indirect fire launch sites in the southern Gaza Strip that the IDF says were prepared to launch further attacks into Israel.[39] PIJ and the National Resistance Brigades conducted separate rocket attacks targeting Nir Am.[40]

Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of April 23, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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

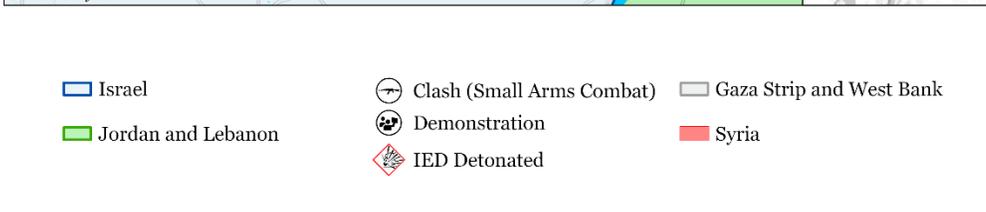
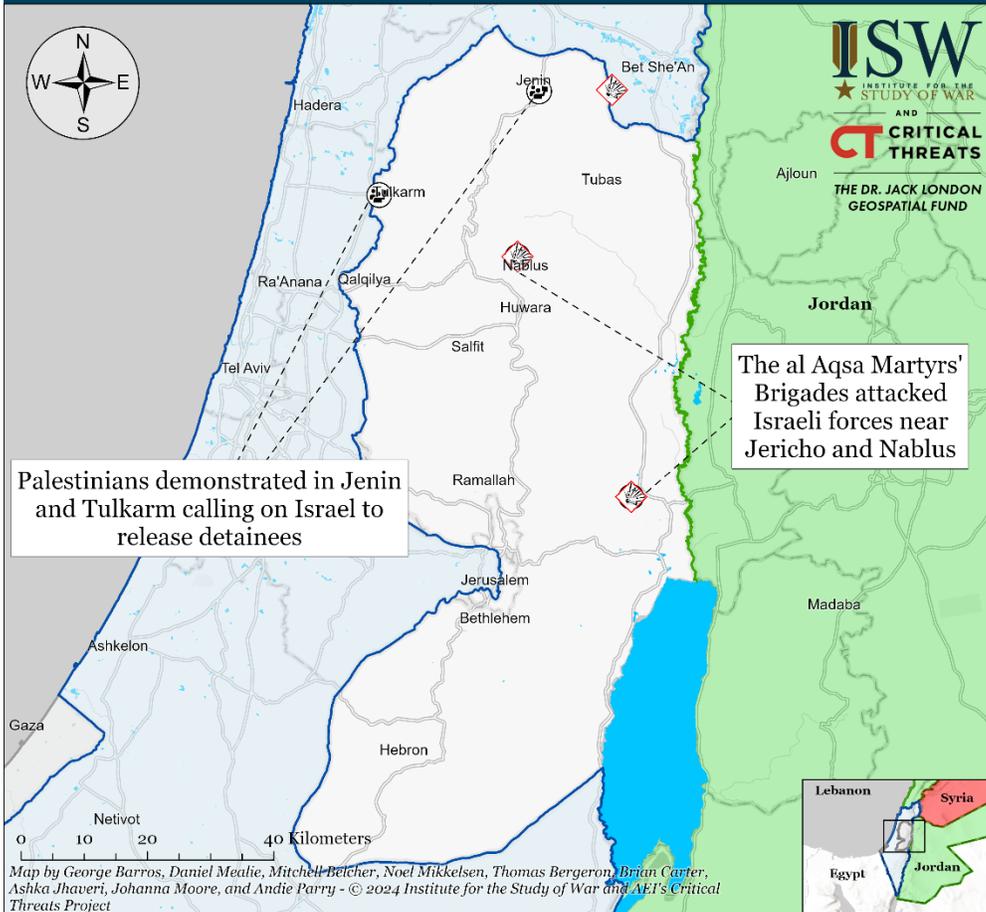
West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

Israeli forces have engaged Palestinian fighters in three locations across the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last information cutoff on April 22.[41] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired small arms and detonated improvised explosive devices (IED) targeting Israeli forces in separate attacks in Jericho and Nablus.[42] Israeli forces separately engaged Palestinian fighters during a raid near Jenin.[43]

Clashes in the West Bank as of April 23, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

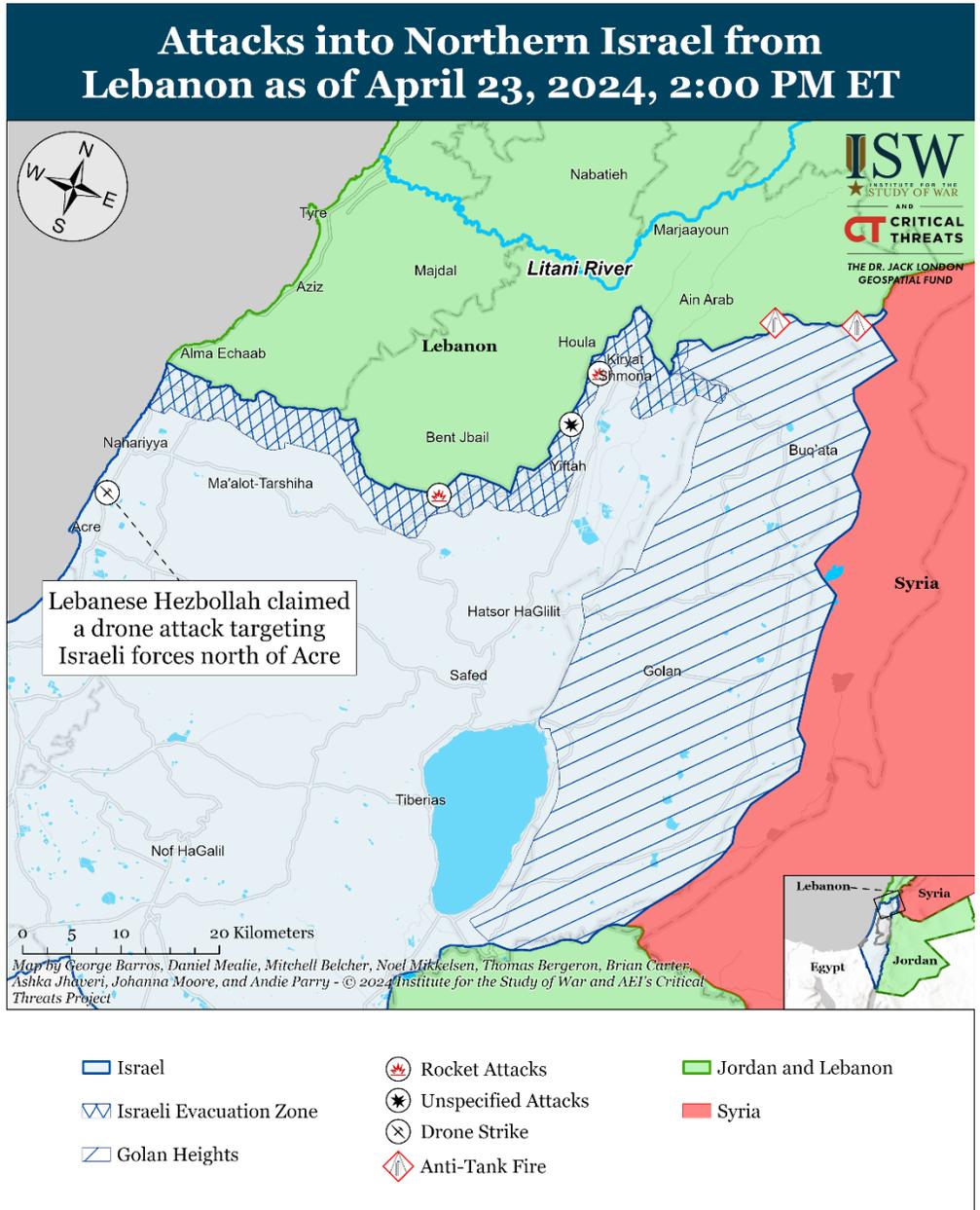
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- 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

Lebanese Hezbollah has conducted at least six attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on April 22.[44] The IDF intercepted a

Hezbollah drone near Acre on April 23.[45] Hezbollah said that the drone was targeting the IDF Golani Brigade's headquarters north of Acre.[46] Israeli Army Radio said that this drone interception near Acre was the first since December 2023.[47] The IDF conducted airstrikes targeting unspecified Hezbollah "military infrastructure" in Yaron, Aita al Shaab, and Blida.[48]

The IDF reported separately on April 23 that it killed three Hezbollah officers involved in air defense and the drone unit in Hezbollah's Radwan forces.[49]



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

Iran and the Axis of Resistance

US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller confirmed on April 22 that an Iranian-backed Iraqi militia recently attacked US forces in Syria.[50] Unspecified Iranian-backed Iraqi militia fighters launched at least five rockets targeting US forces at the Rumaylan Landing Zone in northeastern Syria on April 21.[51] Miller described the attack as “especially troubling” given that it occurred hours after Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani returned from the United States to Iraq.[52] Kataib Hezbollah reportedly announced on April 21 that it had resumed its attack campaign targeting US forces in Iraq and Syria, although it later denied making such a claim.[53] CTP-ISW assessed on April 22 that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias may have resumed their attack campaign targeting US forces in the Middle East.[54]

The Iraqi federal government concluded on April 23 that the recent explosion at a Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) headquarters originated from the headquarters' “ammunition and explosives storage area.”[55] The explosion occurred at the PMF Kalsu Headquarters in Babil Province on April 19.[56] The Iraqi federal government emphasized that the explosion was not caused by a missile attack and that no drones or fighter jets were in Babil Province's airspace “before, during, or after” the explosion.[57]

Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Akbar Ahmadian traveled to St. Petersburg, Russia, on April 23 to attend the 12th Russian International Security Summit.[58] Ahmadian met with Iraqi National Security Adviser, Qasem Araji, on the sidelines of the summit on April 23.[59] Araji emphasized the importance of expelling US and international coalition forces from Iraq. Ahmadian and Araji also discussed the March 2023 security agreement between Iran and Iraq that requires Iraqi authorities to disarm and relocate members of Iranian Kurdish opposition groups away from Iran's borders.[60] Ahmadian will also meet with his Brazilian, Chinese, Indian, Russian, and South African counterparts during his visit to Russia.[61]

The Chechen Republic appears to be trying to align itself more closely with Iran over the backdrop of intensifying bilateral security cooperation between Russia and Iran. Russian State Duma Deputy and head of the Chechen Rosgvardia branch Adam Delimkhanov stated on April 22 that he met with Ahmadian during a visit to Iran on Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov's orders.[62] Delimkhanov reported that he and Ahmadian discussed security issues in Central Asia and the Middle East and the prospects of Russo-Iranian cooperation in countering national security threats to both states. Iran is pursuing its own interests in the North Caucasus, especially Muslim-majority regions, and is likely interested in strengthening bonds with Chechen officials to expand its influence in the region. Representatives of Iranian airline Mahan Air met with Chechen Prime Minister Muslim Huchiev in December 2023 to discuss the prospect of opening regular flights between Chechnya and Iran to strengthen trade, economic, and cultural ties between the two.[63]

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi met with Pakistani Chief of Army Staff Gen. Asim Munir in Islamabad on April 22.[64] The two discussed regional stability and increasing cooperation between the Iranian and Pakistani armed forces. Raisi is conducting a three-day visit to Pakistan, marking his first visit there since Iran and Pakistan exchanged fire across their border in January 2024.[65] Raisi's visit follows a dramatic uptick in anti-regime militancy and terrorist activity in southeastern Iran near its border with Pakistan.[66] Jaish al Adl—a Baloch, Salafi-jihadi militia—conducted unprecedentedly complex and sophisticated attacks targeting the Iranian security services in Sistan and Balochistan Province, Iran, on April 4.[67]

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi discussed recent anti-Israel protests on Western college campuses during a speech in Lahore, Pakistan, on April 23.[68] Raisi criticized the “lack of free thought” in Western college campuses due to the expulsion of university students involved in anti-Israel protests.[69] IRGC-affiliated media published multiple articles praising the anti-Israel protests on US college campuses on April 23.[70]

Hardline Iranian parliamentarian Javad Karimi Ghodousi tweeted on April 23 that Iran would test a 12,000 km-range missile within one week if Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei grants permission.[71] This tweet followed Ghodousi’s previous tweet on April 22 that implied that Iran could test a nuclear bomb, rather than a missile, within one week.[72] International Atomic Energy Agency Director Rafael Grossi stated on April 23 that the normalization of talk about nuclear weapons is “absolutely deplorable.”[73]

The Iranian regime has reemphasized its commitment to enforcing its mandatory hijab law domestically. The Iranian Law Enforcement Command (LEC) unveiled a new plan on April 13 that would further compel Iranian women to adhere to the hijab requirement.[74] The plan, called *Tarah-e Nour*, includes the activation of a “new enforcement body” to confront unveiled women in public in “a more serious manner.”[75] The plan also further enables Iranian authorities to fine and arrest unveiled women.[76] Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei instructed the judiciary to “help” the LEC implement *Tarah-e Nour* on April 22.[77] Law Enforcement Commander Brig. Gen. Ahmad Reza Radan affirmed on April 23 that the LEC will continue to implement *Tarah-e Nour* with “strength, precision, and intelligence” and with support from the Iranian parliament, judiciary, and the Raisi administration.[78] Radan also stated that *Tarah-e Nour* is moving towards “intelligentization,” referring to the Iranian regime’s efforts to use advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence and facial recognition, for enforcement activities.[79] Iranian social media users recently reported that some Iranian universities are using facial recognition technology to identify unveiled female students.[80]

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