

Iran Update



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August 22, 2024, Information Cutoff: 2:00pm 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.

Iranian interest in the progress of Gaza Strip ceasefire-hostage negotiations suggests that elements of the Iranian regime are likely delaying a retaliatory strike on Israel until ceasefire talks conclude. Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps-affiliated Tasnim News Agency reported that newly appointed Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi is scheduled to meet Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani in Tehran "in the coming days."^[1] Thani kept Iranian officials apprised of negotiation progress during the August 15-16 ceasefire talks. The timing of Thani's visit, combined with his role as a liaison between Iran and the other negotiators, suggests that Thani is likely to discuss the ceasefire with Iranian officials during his visit.^[2] Talks between Israel and international mediators, including Qatar,

restarted in Cairo on August 22 immediately before Thani's visit to Iran.[3] Statements from Hamas and Israel suggest that disagreements over Israeli force presence in the Strip continue to be a barrier to a ceasefire agreement, however.[4] Unspecified Iranian officials told Western media on August 13 that Iran will "delay" its attack on Israel if Israel and Hamas conclude a ceasefire-hostage agreement.[5] The Iranian UN mission similarly claimed on August 20 that Iran seeks to "avoid any possible adverse impact" on the ongoing ceasefire-hostage negotiations.[6]

The Iranian security establishment may calculate that a continued delay will generate operational surprise while forgoing strategic surprise, though the continued Iranian delay has also enabled the United States to move more assets into the theater to defend against an attack. Iran has likely not retaliated against Israel up to this point because Iran very likely seeks to ensure that its next attack restores deterrence with Israel while simultaneously avoiding a large-scale war.[7] Iranian leaders are therefore incentivized to carefully and slowly calculate their next attack to ensure that the attack inflicts serious damage on Israel but does not cause mass civilian casualties. Establishing deterrence would, however, require any retaliation to be successful. Iranian and Axis of Resistance officials have repeatedly emphasized that an attack targeting Israel will occur but have sought to counteract strategic clarity with operational ambiguity on the attack's precise timing. US officials have warned, for example, that Iran could launch a strike with "little or no warning." The operational surprise that Iran is trying to build is meant to increase the likelihood that an Iranian retaliation on Israel would inflict serious damage, as CTP-ISW has previously noted.[8]

Iranian decisionmaker's delay has also enabled Israel and its allies to ready defenses and move additional military assets to the region, however. The *Nimitz*-Class carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln* arrived in the Middle East on August 21, enabling US forces to operate two carrier strike groups in the event of an Iranian attack on Israel.[9]

Houthi supreme leader Abdulmalik al Houthi highlighted the psychological effects of delaying the retaliatory strike, which is consistent with Iranian efforts to use the delay to generate psychological effects.[10] Abdulmalik said that planning is one reason for the delay but added that the delay is also creating "anxiety" among Israeli civilians as they wait the "inevitable response" of Hezbollah to avenge the death of Fuad Shukur, a senior Hezbollah official whom Israel killed on July 30. Abdulmalik explicitly noted that "anxiety and anticipation" is part of the response. This is consistent with previous Iranian efforts to use the delay to generate psychological effects within Israel. Iranian armed forces-run outlet Defa Press claimed on August 11 that Iran is conducting a "flawless psychological war" against Israel by drawing out its retaliation.[11] Defa Press claimed that Iran's psychological war on Israel has disrupted Israelis' daily routines and stagnated the Israeli economy. This effort mirrors Iran's attempt to exploit uncertainty surrounding its "imminent" attack in April 2024 to stoke terror in Israel, as CTP-ISW previously reported on April 11, 2024--two days before Iran attacked Israel in a major drone and missile attack on April 13.[12]

Egyptian officials cited by the *Wall Street Journal* on August 22 said that Egypt has refused any Israeli presence on the Philadelphi Corridor, which runs along the Egypt-Gaza Strip border.[13] The officials argued that Israel's presence would violate the 1979 Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty and claimed that Egypt does not want to appear complicit in allowing Israeli

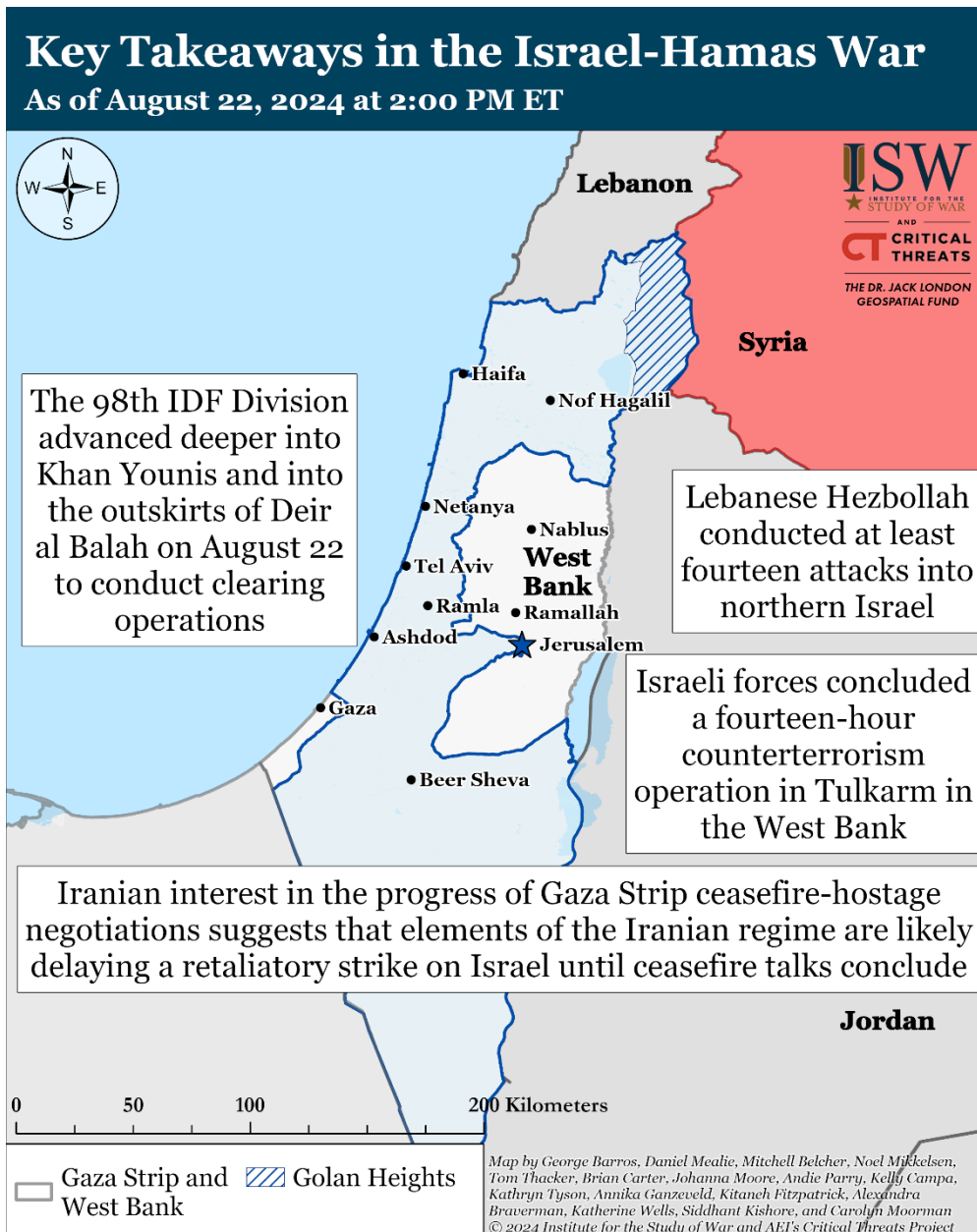
forces to remain in the Gaza Strip. Israel has insisted that Israeli forces will remain on the Philadelphi Corridor to prevent Hamas' weapons smuggling across the Egypt-Gaza Strip border. The United States proposed that the IDF control two observation towers instead of eight towers. Egyptian negotiators rejected the proposal. Unspecified current and former Israeli military officials speaking to the *Wall Street Journal* suggested that Israel could monitor the Philadelphi Corridor without a physical troop presence. The officials said that the IDF could use sensors to alert Israeli forces of possible tunnel building. Israeli forces would then conduct a targeted raid on the location in this scenario.[14] Maintaining Israeli control of the Philadelphi Corridor would help prevent Hamas and other Palestinian militias from rebuilding their capabilities quickly by interdicting major smuggling operations into the Gaza Strip that would accelerate Hamas' ability to resupply itself, as CTP-ISW has argued previously.[15]

Houthi spokesperson Yahya Sarea claimed responsibility on August 22 for the August 21 attack targeting the Greek-flagged *Sounion* oil tanker and Panama-flagged *SW North Wind I* cargo ship in the Red Sea.[16] Houthi Supreme Leader Abdulmalik al Houthi claimed that a Houthi operation conducted in the past week damaged a ship, causing it to be "swept away by the waves." [17] The European Union's military mission in the Red Sea, Operation Aspides, destroyed an unmanned surface vessel (USV) that posed an imminent threat to the *Sounion* while responding to the vessel's call for help. Operation Aspides reported that its forces anchored the *Sounion* oil tanker and transported the crew to Djibouti.[18] Operation Aspides stated that the *Sounion* is still floating but it is carrying 150,000 metric tons of crude oil and could become a "navigational and environmental hazard." [19]

Key Takeaways:

- **Iranian Retaliation:** Iranian interest in the progress of Gaza Strip ceasefire-hostage negotiations suggests that elements of the Iranian regime are likely delaying a retaliatory strike on Israel until ceasefire talks conclude. The Iranian security establishment may calculate that a continued delay will generate operational surprise while forgoing strategic surprise, though the continued Iranian delay has also enabled the United States to move more assets into the theater to defend against an attack.
- **Axis of Resistance Information Efforts:** Houthi supreme leader Abdulmalik al Houthi highlighted the psychological effects of delaying the retaliatory strike, which is consistent with Iranian efforts to use the delay to generate psychological effects.
- **Philadelphi Corridor:** Egyptian officials cited by the *Wall Street Journal* on August 22 said that Egypt has refused any Israeli presence on the Philadelphi Corridor, which runs along the Egypt-Gaza Strip border. The officials argued that Israel's presence would violate the 1979 Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty and claimed that Egypt does not want to appear complicit in allowing Israeli forces to remain in the Gaza Strip.
- **Red Sea:** Houthi spokesperson Yahya Sarea claimed responsibility on August 22 for the August 21 attack targeting the Greek-flagged *Sounion* oil tanker and Panama-flagged *SW North Wind I* cargo ship in the Red Sea. The EU military mission in the Red Sea evacuated

the *Sounion's* crew and added that the *Sounion* is still floating but it is carrying 150,000 metric tons of crude oil and could become a “navigational and environmental hazard.”



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

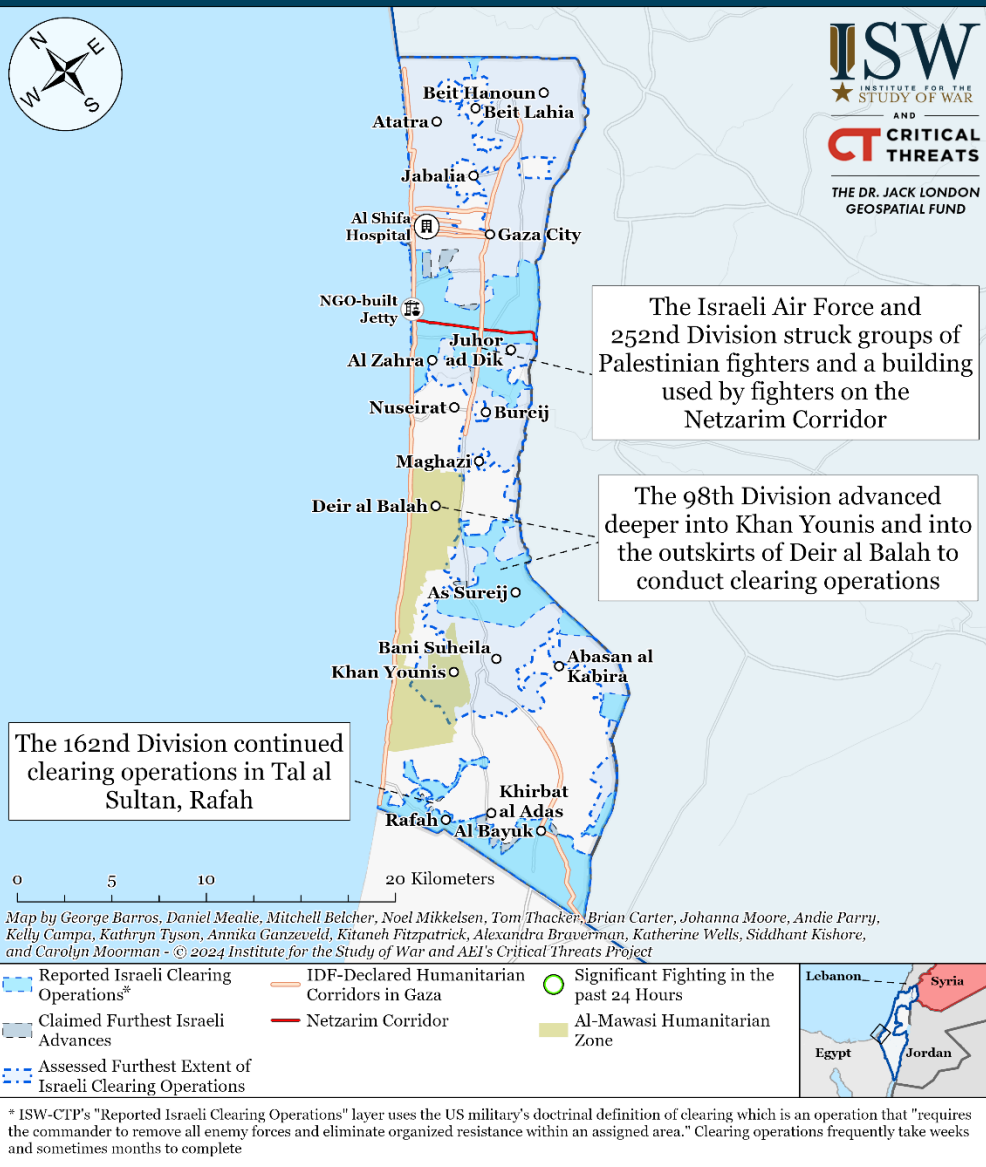
The IAF and IDF 252nd Division struck groups of Palestinian fighters and a building used by fighters on the Netzarim Corridor on August 22.[20] Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) mortared an IDF headquarters on the Netzarim Corridor.[21]

The IDF 98th Division advanced deeper into Khan Younis and into the outskirts of Deir al Balah on August 22 to conduct clearing operations.[22] Israeli forces destroyed militia infrastructure, located rockets and killed Palestinian fighters. Hamas fired rocket-propelled grenades at two Merkava tanks operating near Hamad neighborhood, north of Khan Younis.[23] The National Resistance Brigades fighters mortared Israeli armored vehicles and infantry advancing east of Deir al Balah.[24]

The 162nd Division continued clearing operations in Tal al Sultan, Rafah on August 22.[25] Israeli forces destroyed militia infrastructure and killed approximately 50 Palestinian fighters since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on August 21. The Nahal Brigade directed an airstrike targeting a group of Palestinian fighters moving to attack Israeli forces operating in the area. The Nahal Brigade also located weapons in the area surrounding the Tel al Sultan School in southern Rafah.[26]

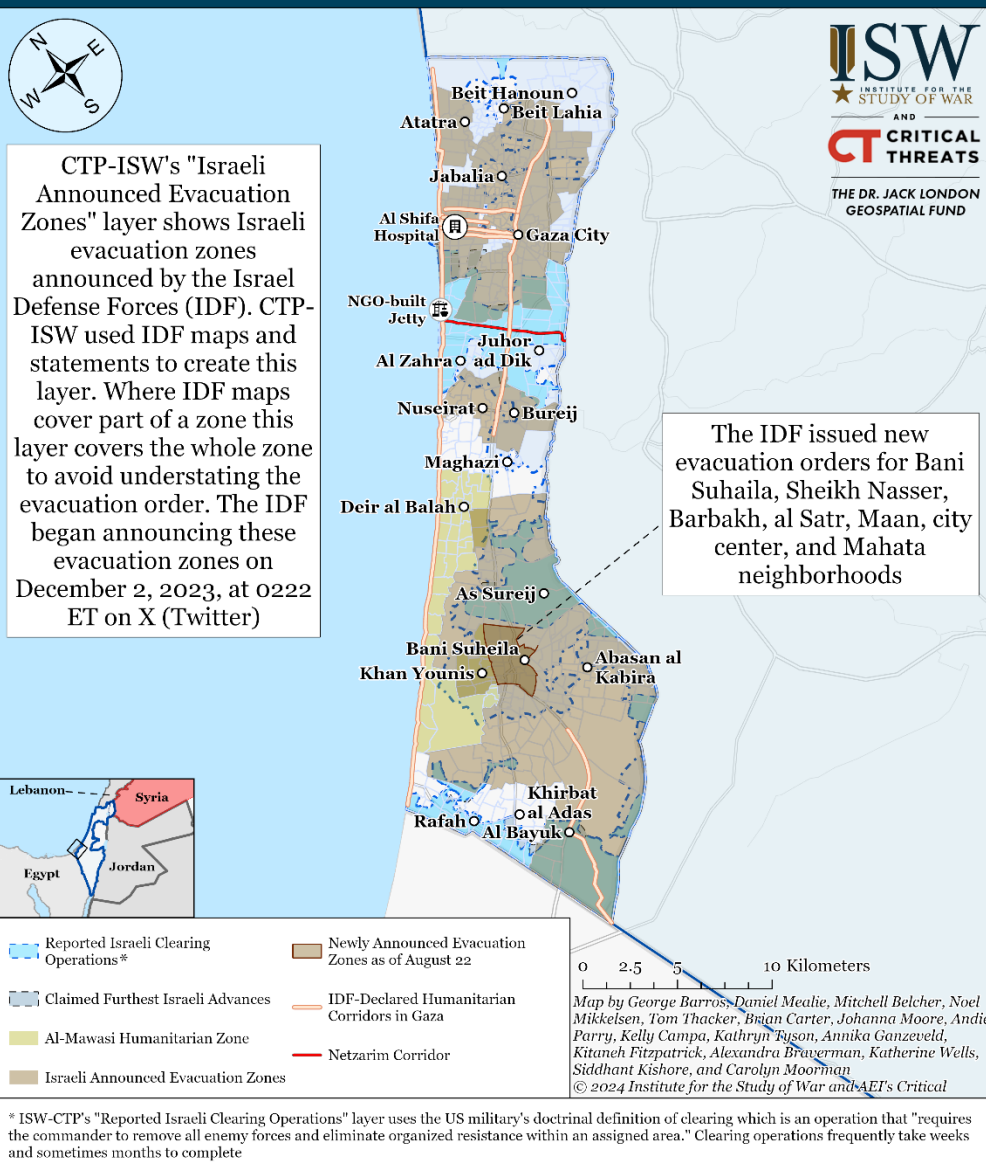
Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of August 22, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



The IDF issued new evacuation orders for Bani Suhaila, Sheikh Nasser, Barbakh, al Satr, Maan, city center, and Mahata neighborhoods.[27]

Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip As of August 22, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

Israeli forces concluded a fourteen-hour-long counterterrorism operation in Tulkarm in the West Bank on August 21 and 22.[28] The IDF reported that it conducted a drone strike that killed three Hamas fighters in Tulkarm refugee camp.[29] Israeli forces arrested one wanted person and destroyed two IED manufacturing sites in Tulkarm during the operation.[30] Israeli forces also destroyed an IED planted under a road in an unspecified location in Tulkarm.[31]

Israeli forces have clashed with Palestinian fighters in multiple locations around Tulkarm City and Tulkarm Refugee Camp in West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on August 21.[32] Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fired small arms and detonated improvised explosive devices (IEDs) targeting Israeli forces in Tulkarm city and Tulkarm Refugee Camp.[33] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and the al Qassem Brigades also fired small arms and detonated IEDs targeting Israeli forces in Tulkarm Refugee Camp.[34]



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

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

Axis of Resistance objectives:

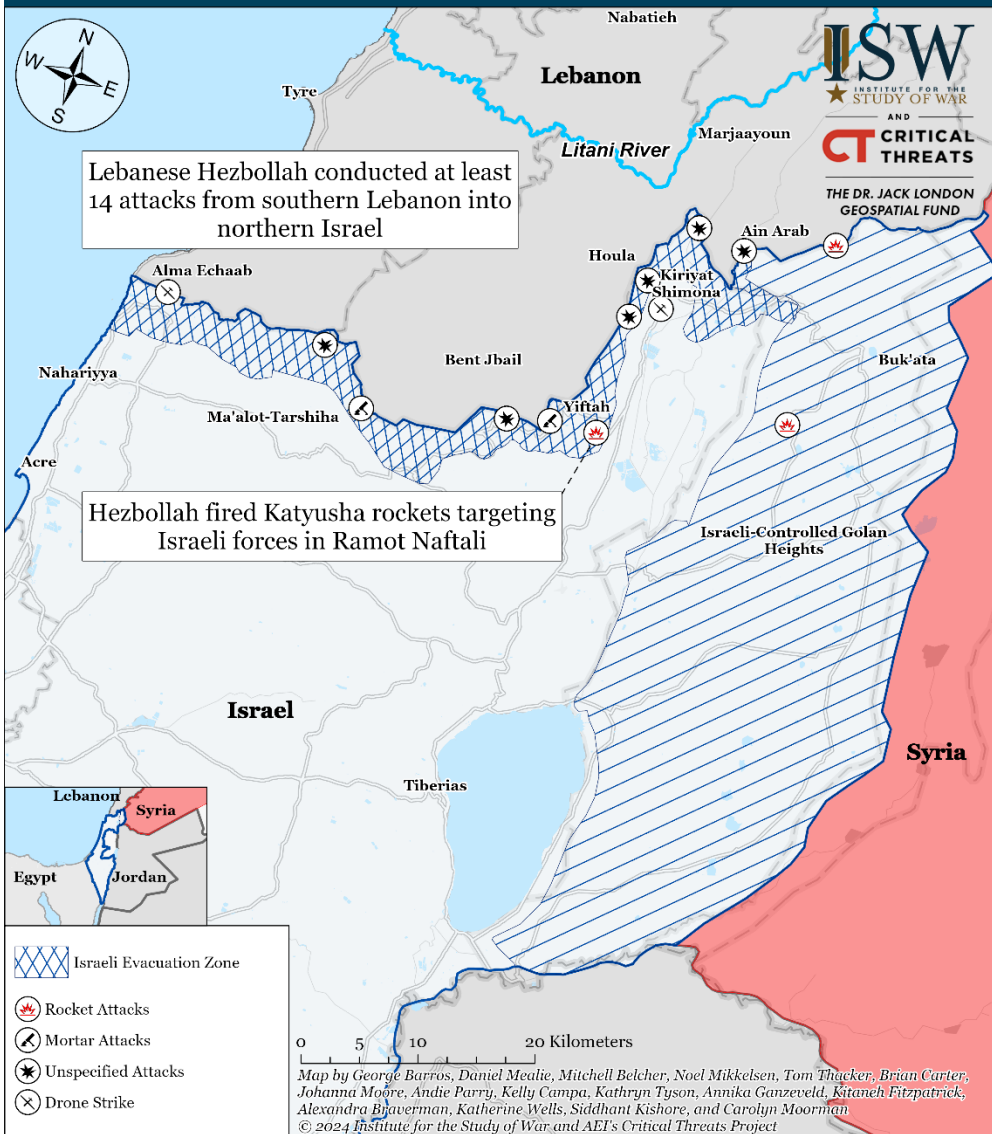
- Deter Israel from conducting a ground operation into Lebanon
- Prepare for an expanded and protracted conflict with Israel in the near term
- Expel the United States from Syria

Lebanese Hezbollah has conducted at least 14 attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on August 21.[35] Hezbollah launched two separate one-way attack drone attacks targeting IDF surveillance infrastructure Jal al Alam and Israeli forces at Kiryat Shmona.[36] Hezbollah also launched Katyusha rockets targeting Israeli forces in Ramot Naftali, northern Israel.[37]

IDF Home Front Command Commander Major General Aluf Rafi Milo toured Israel's northern border and held a situation assessment with the 146th Division Commander Major Heneral Yiftah Norkin.[38] The 146th Division is headquartered near Haifa.

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon

As of August 22, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Iran and Axis of Resistance

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian announced two new appointments in his government on August 22.[39] Pezeshkian appointed the following individuals:

- **Vice President for Legal Affairs: Majid Ansari.[40]** Ansari is a Shia cleric who previously served as Iran's vice president for legal affairs under former President Hassan Rouhani between July 2016 and August 2017.[41] Ansari also served as Iran's vice president for parliamentary affairs under former President Mohammad Khatami between 2004 and 2005 and under Rouhani between September 2013 and July 2016.[42] Ansari has been a member of the Expediency Discernment Council since 2002.[43]

- **Environmental Protection Organization Head: Shina Ansari.**[44] Ansari has held previous positions in the Tehran Municipality related to environmental security.[45] Ansari has an academic background in environmental science.[46]

Newly appointed Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Aziz Nasir Zadeh praised former Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani in a speech on August 22.[47] Nasir Zadeh reiterated his intention to pursue a policy of “active deterrence.” Iran’s active deterrence doctrine involves building strategic depth and regional influence to establish control over the operational environment, which in turn facilitates taking the initiative when necessary to suppress any nascent threat from endangering the homeland.[48]

Newly appointed Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi discussed Iran’s desire to increase oil and energy cooperation with Japan in an interview with Japanese media on August 22.[49] Araghchi stated that Japan could play a “more important” role in Iran’s oil and energy sectors and stressed the importance of overcoming “obstacles” hindering economic and trade cooperation between Japan and Iran, likely referring to US sanctions on Iran.[50] Prior to 2018, Japan was one of the largest consumers of Iranian oil.[51] Japan stopped importing crude oil from Iran following the US withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal and the reimposition of sanctions on Iran in November 2018.[52] Araghchi previously served as Iran’s ambassador to Japan from 2008 to 2011.[53] Araghchi also reiterated his goal to “manage tensions” with the United States and mend ties with European countries “if these countries abandon their hostile approach [toward Iran].”[54]

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