

Iran Update, August 28, 2024

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Information Cutoff: 2:00pm ET

Israeli forces conducted a large-scale counterterrorism operation in the West Bank on August 27 in order to degrade Palestinian militia networks there.[1] The operation is responding to Hamas’ attempted suicide bombing in Tel Aviv on August 18 and is meant at least partly to prevent future suicide bombings in Israel. Israeli forces launched raids into Nablus, Qabatiya, Silat al Khartia, al Fara refugee camp, Jenin refugee camp, and Nour al Shams refugee camp as part of the counterterrorism operation.[2] Israeli forces also conducted drone strikes around Jenin and al Fara refugee camp, killing several Palestinian fighters.[3] The Israeli security establishment assessed that previous Israeli raids into the West Bank in recent months have failed to sufficiently degrade militia networks there and that the militias, including Hamas, would be capable of conducting additional suicide bombings targeting Israeli civilians in the coming weeks.[4]

Hamas planning suicide bombings in Israel marks a tactical shift in how Hamas tries to impose costs on the Israeli population. Hamas has primarily used rocket attacks to this end in recent years. But the Hamas rocket stockpile in the Gaza Strip is dwindling, making this option decreasingly viable.[5] Hamas claimed responsibility for the attempted suicide bombing in Tel Aviv on August 18, marking the first such claim since 2008.[6] Israeli authorities said that the attacker was from the West Bank and assessed that his explosive device was manufactured there, reflecting the threat that the militias there pose to Israel.[7] Senior Hamas official Khaled Meshal responded to the Israeli counterterrorism operation in the West Bank by threatening future suicide bombings in Israel.[8]

The United Kingdom-based Jewish Chronicle reported on August 28 of worsening internal fissures among Palestinian militias in the Gaza Strip.[9] The outlet reported that several militias have considered in recent months conducting a “coup” against Hamas. These militias include Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Mujahidin Brigades, the al Nasser Salah al Din Brigades, and the al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades.[10] These Palestinian militias have actively supported Hamas throughout the war but have come to disagree with Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar over the identities and numbers of Palestinian prisoners from the smaller militias to be released in a hostage-prisoner exchange with Israel.[11] Sinwar has, according to the Jewish Chronicle, demanded that Israel prioritize releasing Hamas members—rather than members of the other militias—in negotiations. Emirati media reported that Sinwar told Egyptian mediators shortly after his selection as Hamas’ new political leader that he wanted to prioritize the release of Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti and PFLP leader Ahmed Saadat, possibly to placate the militias.[12] CTP-ISW

cannot verify either report. US White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on August 26 that negotiations are continuing in Cairo and that international mediators will discuss more detailed and granular issues than previously, including which Palestinian prisoners would be released by Israel in exchange for Israeli hostages.[13]

Iranian Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Mohammad Bagheri restated on August 28 the Iranian intent to attack Israel in retaliation for killing Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran.[14] Bagheri said that Iran will conduct a “calculated” retaliation against Israel. Bagheri and other senior Iranian military officials have repeatedly said in recent weeks that Iran would conduct such an attack.[15] These statements are especially noteworthy given that these officials would be involved in the planning and execution of an attack CTP-ISW continues to assess that Iran will likely attack Israel directly. Iran has likely delayed its attack until now in part to stoke anxiety and fear among the Israeli public.[16]

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has begun paving an asphalt road along the Philadelphi Corridor between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. Commercially available satellite imagery captured on August 26 showed that the IDF paved an asphalt road along a section of the corridor that begins near the Swedish Village along the Mediterranean Sea and extends approximately 300 to 400 meters east. An Israeli journalist posted a photo on August 25 of the newly paved road.[17] The IDF paving of the road is consistent with a report by Lebanese outlet al Akhbar on August 26 that claimed that international mediators discussed possible Israeli concessions during ceasefire-hostage talks in Cairo on August 25.[18] One reported amendment included a gradual—rather than immediate—Israeli withdrawal from the Philadelphi Corridor and allowed the IDF to pave an asphalt road along the corridor as long as it did not conduct further construction that would change the “current status quo” of Israeli control over the corridor.[19] Paving the Philadelphi Corridor will make it harder for Palestinian militias to plant improvised explosive devices (IED) along it.

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi held a phone call with Hamas head negotiator Khalil al Hayya on August 28 to discuss the status of ongoing ceasefire-hostage negotiations and the situation in the Gaza strip.[20] Araghchi claimed that Iran will accept any ceasefire agreement that is accepted by Hamas and the Palestinian people. Araghchi and Hayya also discussed Israeli efforts to “change the situation in the al Aqsa mosque”, referring to Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir’s recent comment about wanting to construct a synagogue in the al Aqsa Mosque complex.[21]

Russian state-run newswire TASS plans to open an office in Iran, supporting Moscow’s efforts to deepen its partnership with Tehran.[22] TASS Director General Andrei Kondrashov announced on August 28 that TASS will open a correspondent office in Iran, adding to the 62 offices that TASS has in 57 other countries.[23] Iran and Russia have deepened their strategic partnership, including economic, military, and political cooperation, over the backdrop of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. TASS’s expansion into Iran indicates growing media cooperation between Moscow and Tehran as well.[24]

Key Takeaways:

- **West Bank:** Israeli forces launched a large-scale counterterrorism operation into the West Bank to degrade militia networks there. The operation is partly a response to the Palestinian militias there building the capability to conduct suicide bombing attacks in Israel.
- **Gaza Strip:** There are reportedly worsening internal fissures among Palestinian militias in the Gaza Strip. Some militias have reportedly considered conducting a “coup” against Hamas in response to disagreements over the ceasefire-hostage negotiations with Israel.
- **Iran:** Iranian AFGS Chief Mohammad Bagheri restated the Iranian intent to retaliate for Israel killing Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran. Iran has delayed its attack at least partly to stoke anxiety and fear among the Israeli public.
- **Israel-Hamas ceasefire-hostage negotiations:** The IDF has begun paving an asphalt road along the Philadelphi Corridor between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. Paving the route will make it harder for Palestinian militias to plant IEDs along it.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of August 28, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



A UK-based outlet reported of worsening internal fissures between Palestinian militias in the Gaza Strip

Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted five attacks into northern Israel

Israeli forces launched a large-scale "counterterrorism" operation in the West Bank to prevent future suicide bombings in Israel

Iranian Major General Mohammad Bagheri restated the Iranian intent to retaliate for Israel killing Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran

0 50 100 200 Kilometers

Gaza Strip and West Bank Golan Heights

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Tom Thacker, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Kathryn Tyson, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, Siddhant Kishore, and Carolyn Moorman
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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 IDF continued clearing operations around the Netzarim Corridor on August 28.[25]

The IDF stated that the IDF 16th Brigade (Res.) has killed dozens of Palestinian fighters and destroyed dozens of Palestinian infrastructure sites around the Netzarim Corridor since beginning operations in the area in early August.[26] The IDF also stated on August 28 that its 16th Brigade, Southern Command engineering forces, and the Yahalom combat engineering unit destroyed a three-kilometer-long offensive tunnel in the area. IDF footage and commercially available satellite imagery indicates that the tunnel extended to Juhor ad Dik near the Israel-Gaza Strip border.[27] Five Palestinian militias attacked Israeli forces around the Netzarim Corridor with IEDs, mortars, rockets, and small arms on August 28.[28]

The IDF has likely continued clearing operations south of al Musaddar in the central Gaza Strip since August 27.

Commercially available satellite imagery captured on August 28 showed flattened terrain and destroyed buildings south and southwest of al Musaddar, indicating that Israeli tanks or bulldozers operated there. This activity is consistent with previous Israeli clearing east of Deir al Balah since August 19.[29] The IDF has not previously operated on the ground in this area during the war. Satellite imagery shows that Israeli clearing operations have shifted west of previous clearing observed on August 26 and in the direction of eastern Deir al Balah, for which the IDF issued evacuation orders on August 25.[30]

Palestinian sources reported that the IDF conducted a raid in Qizan al Najjar, south of Khan Younis, on August 27.

A Palestinian journalist reported that IDF armor advanced into southern Qizan al Najjar from Miraj Street.[31] The journalist reported that the IDF simultaneously attacked targets with artillery and drone fire.[32] The Palestinian journalist posted footage of Palestinians evacuating from the neighborhood.[33] The IDF reportedly withdrew from the area after five hours.[34] CTP-ISW has not observed the IDF conducting operations in Qizan al Najjar during the war. The IDF has not confirmed an operation in Qizan al Najjar as of this writing, and CTP-ISW cannot verify local Palestinian reporting. The IDF 98th Division has operated in Khan Younis since August 9.[35]

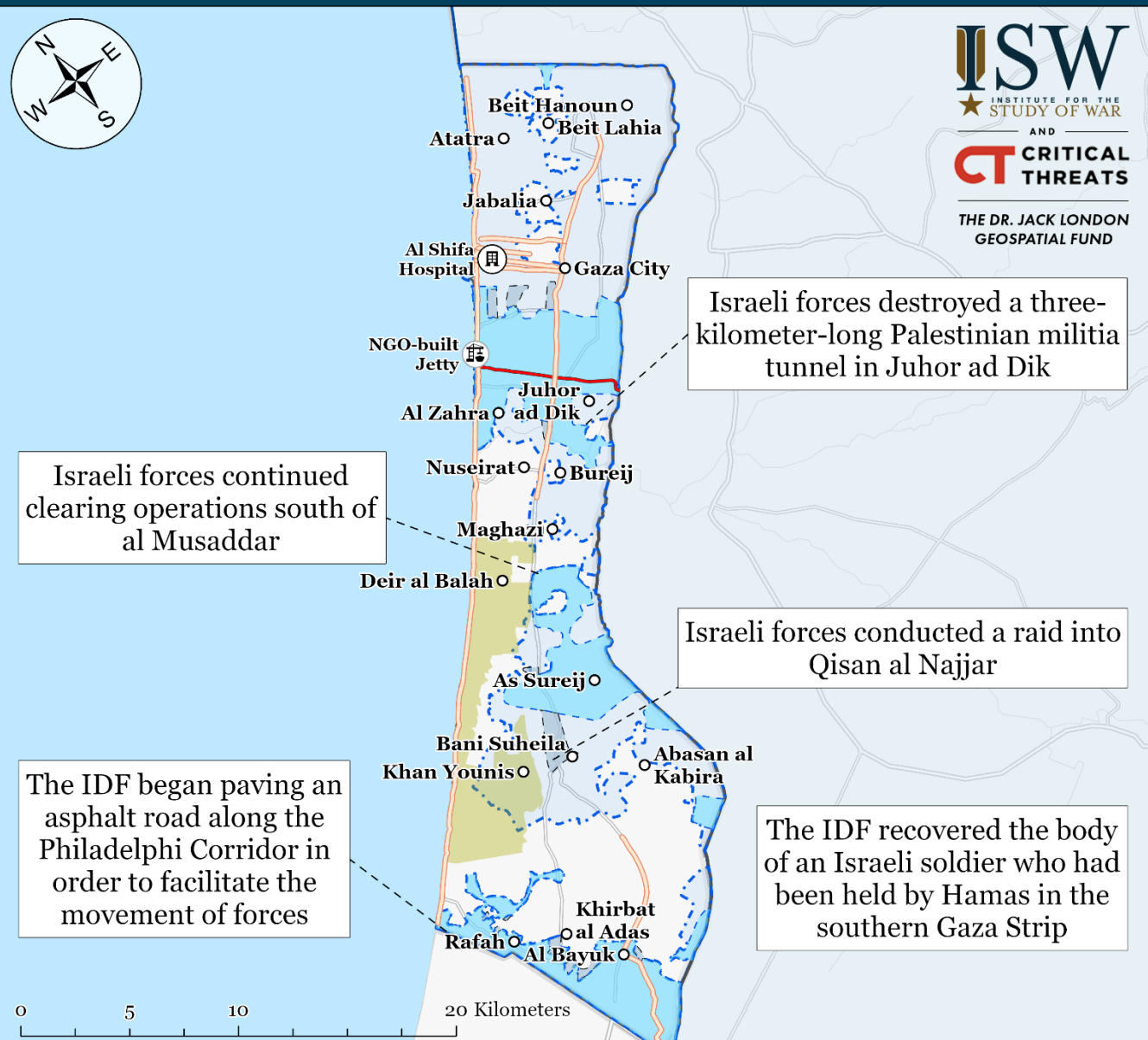
The IDF recovered the body of an Israeli soldier who had been held by Hamas since October 2023 on August 28.[36]

An Israeli Army Radio correspondent reported that the IDF recovered the body in the southern Gaza Strip.[37] The IDF 162nd Division led the operation with support from the Nahal Brigade and 401st Brigade.[38] The IDF stated that a Palestinian detainee gave Shin Bet the information necessary to locate the body and that the effort to recover the body occurred "over a long period of time." [39]

The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired mortars and rockets targeting Israeli forces near the Rafah border crossing on August 28.[40]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of August 28, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Tom Thacker, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Kathryn Tyson, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, Siddhant Kishore, and Carolyn Moorman - © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

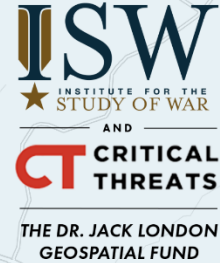
Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*	IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridors in Gaza	Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances	Netzarim Corridor	Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
Assessed Furthest Extent of Israeli Clearing Operations		



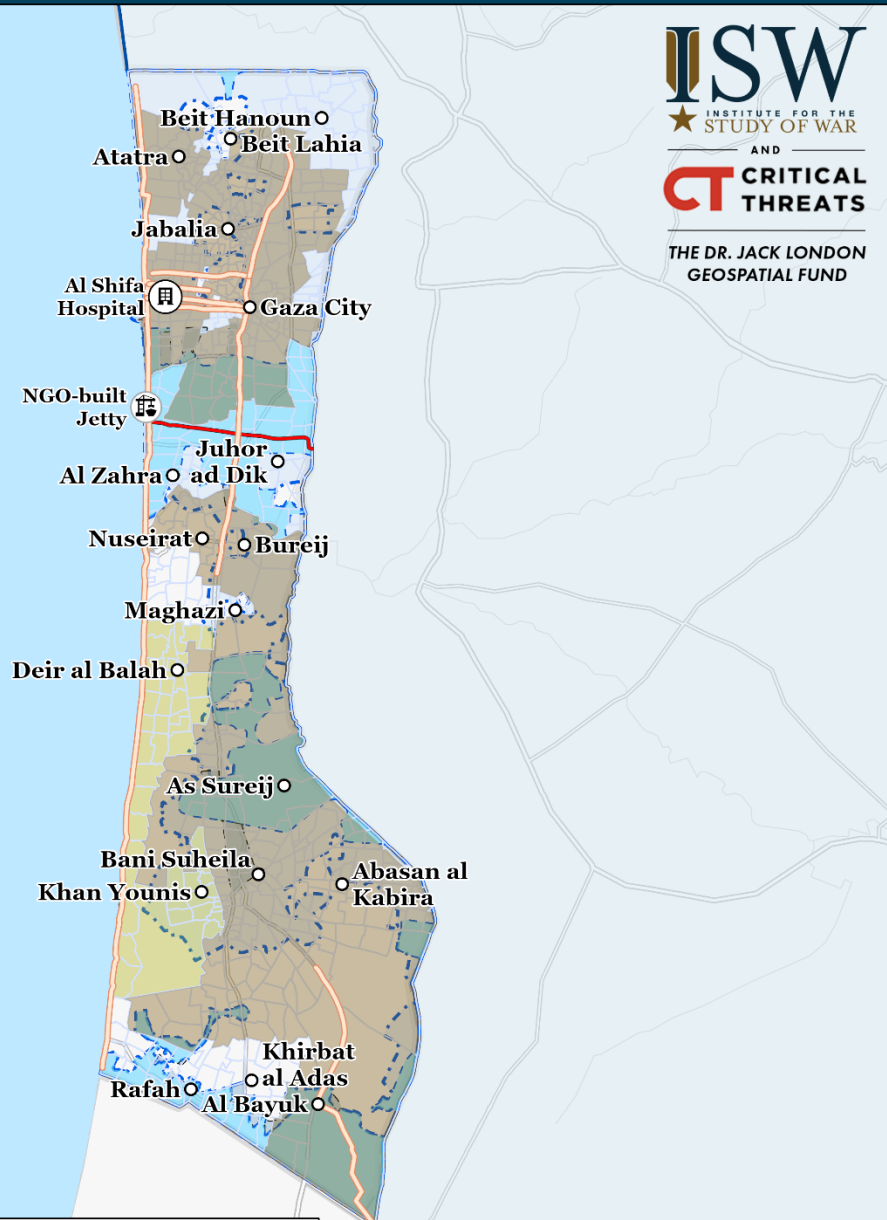
* ISW-CTP's "Reported Israeli Clearing Operations" layer uses the US military's doctrinal definition of clearing which is an operation that "requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance within an assigned area." Clearing operations frequently take weeks and sometimes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

Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip

As of August 28, 2024 at 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)



- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridors in Gaza
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- Netzarim Corridor

0 2.5 5 10 Kilometers

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

West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

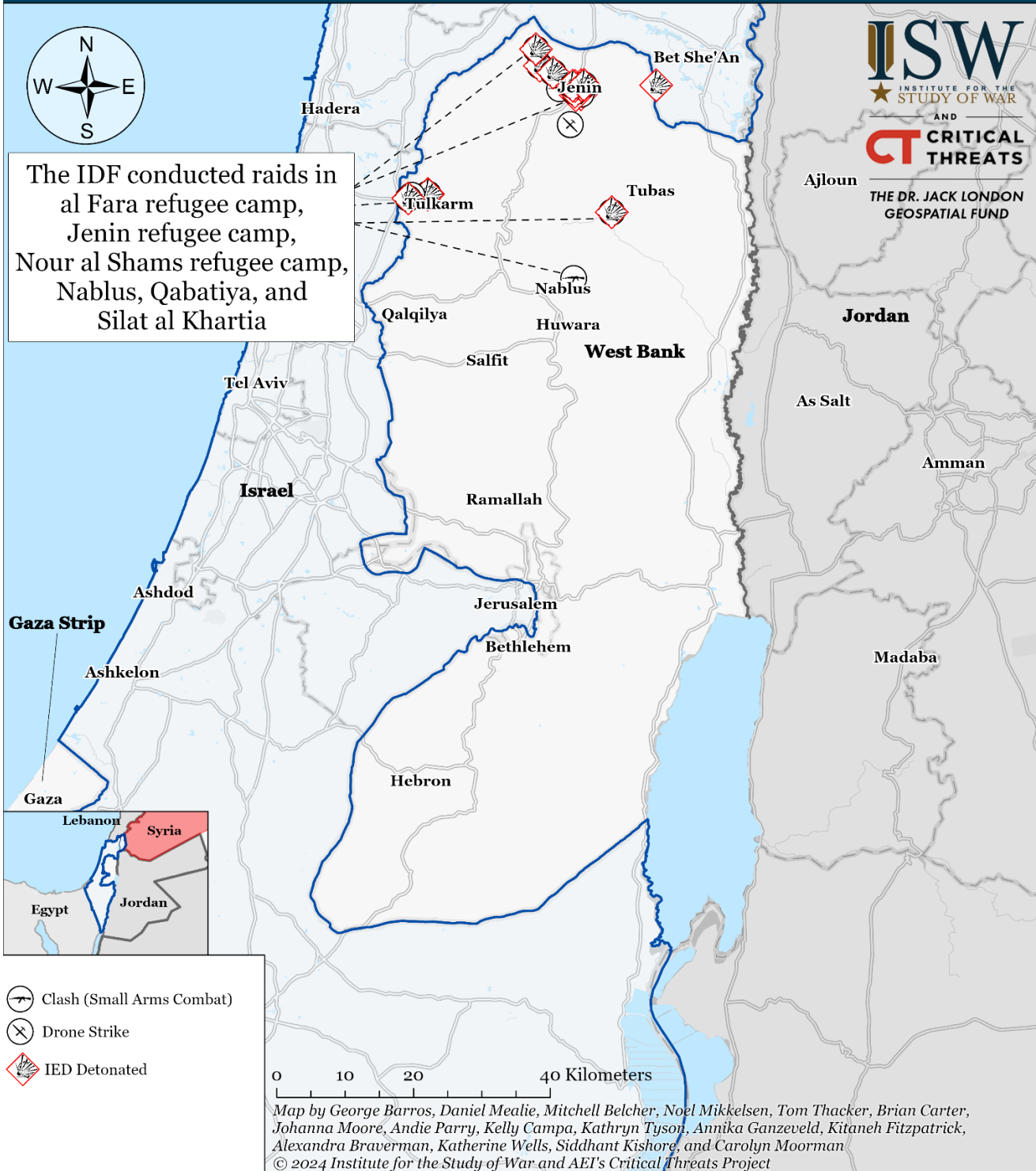
- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

Israeli forces conducted raids in Askar and Balata refugee camps in Nablus in the West Bank on August 28.[41] The IDF separately detained approximately 30 wanted individuals in Arura, north of Ramallah.

The US State Department sanctioned Israeli nongovernmental organization Hashomer Yesh for aiding US-designated entities in the West Bank.[42] The US State Department stated that Hashomer Yesh provided “material support” to US-designated Israeli settler outpost Meitarim Farm and other US-designated individuals affiliated with the outpost.[43] The US State Department also sanctioned the civilian security coordinator of Yitzhar settlement, Yitzhak Levi Filant.[44]

Significant Activity in the West Bank

As of August 28, 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:

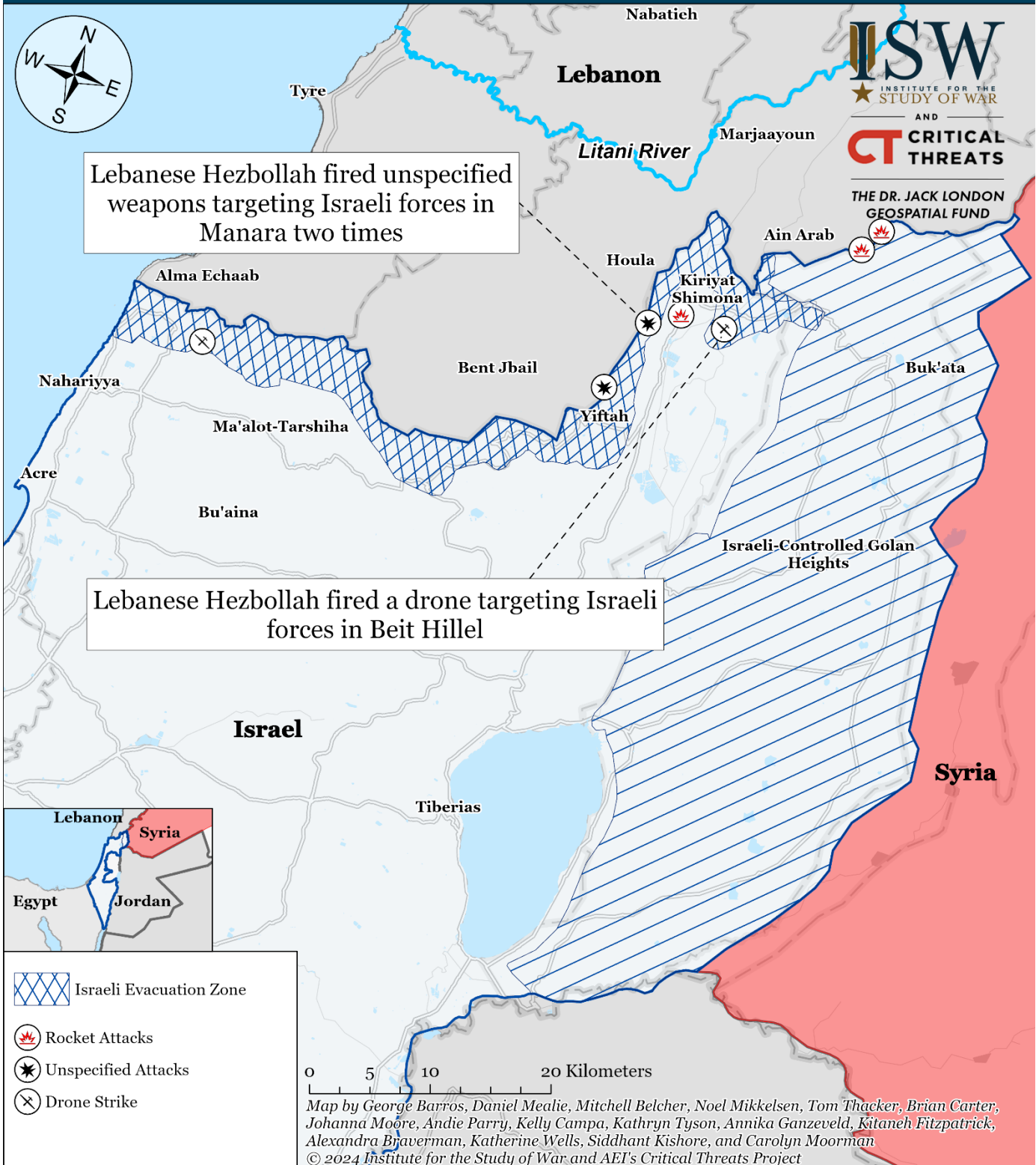
- Deter Israel from conducting a ground operation into Lebanon
- Prepare for an expanded and protracted conflict with Israel in the near term
- Expel the United States from Syria

Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, have conducted at least eight attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on August 26.[45]

The IDF Air Force conducted a drone strike that killed a senior PIJ fighter on the Beirut-Damascus highway near the Lebanon-Syria border on August 28.[46] The IDF stated that Faras Qassem was responsible for PIJ "operational plans" in Lebanon and Syria and recruited Palestinian fighters for Hezbollah.[47] The IDF also stated that Hezbollah has recruited Palestinian fighters to attack Israel from Lebanon under Iranian direction.[48] The IDF drone strike killed two other PIJ fighters and one Hezbollah member.[49] PIJ has not acknowledged the strike at this time of writing. IDF strikes have killed multiple PIJ fighters in southern Lebanon throughout the war.[50]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon

As of August 28, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Iran and Axis of Resistance

Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Sarkhat al Quds, formally known as Ashab al Kahf, threatened in a video message to attack Israel’s Soreq Nuclear Research Center.[51] The video included satellite imagery of the facility. Kataib Sarkhat al Quds announced on August 25 that it had resumed its attacks targeting Israel after the six-day pause it announced for the Shia Islamic Arbreen pilgrimage.[52] Kataib Sarkhat al Quds is affiliated with the Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—which has recently conducted multiple drone attacks targeting the Israeli cities of Eilat and Haifa.[53]

The *Sounion* oil tanker in the Red Sea continues to burn after the Houthis attacked the Greek-flagged vessel 77 nautical miles west of al Hudaydah, Yemen, on August 21.[54] *Sounion*’s manager Delta Tankers stated that they are doing everything they can to move the tanker and its cargo.[55] The US Defense Department stated that the Houthi threatened to attack again if the vessel moved.[56] The Houthis’ persistent attacks and the looming threat of future strikes have not only hindered maritime traffic through the Red Sea but also increased shipping costs, consequently inflating the prices of goods worldwide.[57] The cost of insurance for ships crossing the Red Sea has almost doubled since the Houthis attacked the *Sounion*, according to Reuters, citing industry sources.[58] Shipping risk insurance premiums for Red Sea transits have increased as well since the Houthis launched their campaign against international shipping in November 2023.[59]

Iranian and Turkmen officials signed four cooperation agreements covering customs, diplomatic, gas, and maritime port cooperation in Tehran on August 28.[60] Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and Turkmen People’s Council Chairman Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov oversaw the signing of the agreements.[61] Pezeshkian stated during a meeting with Berdymukhamedov that gas agreements between Iran and Turkmenistan are helping transform Iran into a “regional gas hub.”[62] Iran, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan previously signed a gas swap agreement in November 2021, wherein Iran transports Turkmen gas to Azerbaijan via the Iranian city of Astarra.[63] This agreement allows Iran to supply some of the imported Turkmen gas to the northern Iranian provinces. Iran and Turkmenistan also signed a gas swap agreement in July 2024, wherein Iran transports 10 billion cubic meters of Turkmen gas to Iraq annually.[64] Iranian companies will construct a 125-kilometer gas pipeline between Iran and Turkmenistan to increase Turkmenistan’s gas transmission capacity as part of the July 2024 agreement.[65]

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi discussed Iranian-Japanese relations in a phone call with his Japanese counterpart, Yoko Kamikawa, on August 28.[66] Araghchi reiterated that he will prioritize developing ties with East Asian countries, including Japan, as foreign minister. Araghchi also claimed that Iran seeks to avoid expanding tension and conflict in the Middle East. Araghchi’s phone call with Kamikawa follows his interview with Japanese media on August 22, during which Araghchi stated that Japan could play a “more important” role in Iran’s energy sector.[67] Prior to 2018, Japan was one of the largest consumers of Iranian oil.[68] Japan stopped importing crude oil from Iran following the US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and the reimposition of international sanctions on Iran in the following months and years.[69] Araghchi previously served as Iran’s ambassador to Japan from 2008 to 2011.[70]

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi held a phone call with his Emirati counterpart, Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed al Nahyan, on August 27.[71] Araghchi and al Nahyan invited each other to travel to Tehran and Abu Dhabi, respectively.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appointed Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni as deputy commander-in-chief of the Law Enforcement Command (LEC).[72] Khamenei has a long history of appointing each interior minister to this position, granting them greater operational control over the LEC.[73]

Iranian Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani became the new Armed Forces General Staff (AFGS) deputy chief on August 28.[74] Ashtiani replaced Brigadier General Aziz Nasir Zadeh, who became the defense minister under the newly assembled Masoud Pezeshkian administration. Ashtiani was previously AFGS deputy chief before Nasir Zadeh from 2019 to 2021.[75] Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei is typically responsible for appointing individuals to this position and therefore likely approved Ashtiani returning to his old position.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian announced two new appointments in his government on August 28.[76] Pezeshkian made the following appointments:

- Fatemeh Mohajerani became the Pezeshkian administration spokesperson.[77] Fatemeh is the first female government spokesperson in the history of the Islamic Republic. She previously served as the president of Shariati Technical and Professional College under former President Hassan Rouhani.[78]
- Elias Hazrati became chairman of the Government Information Council.[79] Hazrati is currently the editor-in-chief of reformist-affiliated newspaper *Etemad*. He previously served as a parliamentarian representing parts of Tehran.[80]

POWERED BY:



BABEL STREET

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