

Iran Update



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Information Cutoff: August 6, 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.

Correction: This assessment has been updated to reflect that US Central Command intercepted three Houthi drones over the Gulf of Aden and one Houthi drone over the Red Sea on August 5.

Unspecified US officials told Axios on August 5 that the US intelligence community expects Iran and its Axis of Resistance to conduct two waves of attacks in its retaliation against Israel for the death of Haniyeh in Tehran on July 31.[1] US intelligence officials reportedly briefed a potential scenario to US President Joe Biden and US Vice President Kamala Harris in which Hezbollah would conduct an attack on Israel in a wave separate from another Iranian and Axis attack. Intelligence officials noted that it is not clear whether Iran and the Axis or Hezbollah would launch the first attack. One unspecified US official cited by Axios said that intelligence reports suggest Iranian and Hezbollah planning is a “work in progress.”

Iran and its Axis of Resistance would likely use the first wave of the attack on Israel to assess Israeli air defenses in preparation for the second wave of the attack. The April 2024 attack consisted of only one large volley of drones and missiles fired from Iran.[2] CTP-ISW noted on August 4 that Iran and its allies could use multiple attacks targeting Israel to learn and adjust their attacks as they observe how successful they are.[3] Iran and the Axis could adjust the volume or type of projectiles fired at Israel, targets, and launch locations.

Unspecified US officials cited by the *Wall Street Journal* on August 5 reported that Iran has begun moving missile launchers and conducting military drills, possibly in preparation for the attack.[4] These drills may be intended to move forces and missile batteries into position for Iran’s retaliatory strike on Israel. Military drills are meant to practice and evaluate prescribed tasks and prepare forces for combat. Military drills may also be used as cover for moving forces and munitions into position for a real military operation. Iran has issued eight “missile, gun, or rocket firing” notices to airmen (NOTAM) since July 31.[5] Two of the NOTAMs cover areas near civilian flight paths in western Iran that Iran would presumably need to clear prior to conducting a retaliatory attack on Israel. These NOTAMs only specify risks up to 12,000ft in altitude, well below the cruising altitude of civilian airliners. These civilian airlines appear to already be avoiding the areas identified by Iranian authorities, however. The decision to avoid these areas is presumably out of an abundance of caution. These two NOTAMs are collectively in effect from August 6 through August 8.[6] US intelligence officials reported that it is unclear when Iran and its Axis of Resistance will conduct retaliatory strikes against Israel according to three unspecified US officials speaking to Axios.[7]

Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah claimed that Hezbollah is fighting to prevent Israel from “eliminating the Palestinian cause,” which obfuscates Hezbollah’s goals and Iran’s theory for destroying the Israeli state.[8] Nasrallah claimed that Hezbollah is fighting to prevent Israel from “winning and eliminating the Palestinian cause.” Hezbollah immediately launched attacks into Israel after October 7 that sought in part to support Hamas’ war effort.[9] Hamas’ war and its ground offensive on October 7 is part of a theory articulated by Iran to destroy the state of Israel by launching successive ground operations.[10] Hezbollah has designed similar ground operations into Israeli territory, such as the “Conquer the Galilee” plan.[11] The IDF captured this plan in 2012. Hezbollah opposes Israel and seeks to assist Palestinian groups like Hamas in destroying Israel.[12]

Hamas selected Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip and October 7 architect Yahya Sinwar as the next leader of Hamas’ Political Bureau on August 6.[13] Hamas media released an official statement on August 6 announcing Hamas’ selection of Sinwar as the new political leader, replacing Ismail Haniyeh.[14] Sinwar has served as Hamas’ political leader in the Gaza Strip since his election in 2017, and he represents some of the most hardline elements within Hamas.[15] Sinwar, together with now-deceased Mohammad Deif and other senior Hamas commanders, planned and executed the October 7 attacks.[16] Sinwar and his immediate circle likely launched these attacks as part of an effort to destroy the Israeli state. Sinwar organized a conference in 2021 that sought to develop plans for Hamas to govern current Israeli territory after Israel’s destruction.[17] Other Palestinian political figures told Israeli outlet Haaretz that Hamas attempted to recruit them as part of this effort, indicating some level of serious planning. Sinwar has a deep understanding of Israeli society that he intentionally developed during his time in Israeli prison.[18]

Sinwar exercised significant influence within Hamas after October 7 given his command of forces and control of hostages on the ground. He repeatedly resisted pressure to moderate Hamas' ceasefire position from both his superiors, such as Haniyeh and others, and his military subordinates in the Gaza Strip. There is no indication that Sinwar will moderate this stance after assuming control of Hamas. Sinwar's control of the hostages and his command over military forces on the ground as the top Hamas political leader in the Gaza Strip meant that his practical influence outstripped that of Haniyeh, because Sinwar could simply refuse to release the hostages or to cease military operations. Sinwar resisted pressure both from his superiors—such as Haniyeh—and his subordinates—such as his military commanders—to agree to a ceasefire.[19] Sinwar has repeatedly expressed confidence in Hamas' survival as a political and military entity in the Gaza Strip, suggesting that he does not believe a ceasefire is necessary.[20]

Sinwar's appointment also marks the continued ascendance of pro-Iran elements within Hamas, and it will likely accelerate Hamas' descent deeper into Iran's orbit. Sinwar has a substantially stronger relationship with Iran than other top contenders for Hamas' leadership, such as Khaled Meshaal.[21] Sinwar himself reportedly rejected Meshaal as Hamas' leader, instead calling for a leader with a "stronger relation with the Iranian leadership." [22] Meshaal supported the anti-Assad protests in Syria in 2011, causing his relationship with Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah to collapse.[23] Hezbollah officials, for example, refused to meet with Meshaal during Meshaal's visit to Lebanon in 2021.[24] Sinwar and those with whom he planned the October 7 attacks, including Deif and now-deceased Hamas military wing second-in-command Marwan Issa, maintained a relationship with Iran even after Iran cut its financial aid to Hamas' political institutions.[25] Meshaal does have better relations with other regional countries, such as Turkey and Qatar, but Hamas' exiled leadership has reportedly hedged against losing its presence in Qatar by preparing for a move to Iraq.[26]

Iranian-backed Iraqi militia al Thawriyyun claimed responsibility for the rocket attack that injured at least five US personnel at Ain al Assad Airbase in Anbar Province, Iraq, on August 5.[27] This attack marks the third time al Thawriyyun has claimed an attack targeting US forces in Iraq and Syria since July 26.[28] Two Iraqi security sources told Reuters that the militia fired two "Katyusha" rockets at Ain al Asad.[29] An Iraqi OSINT account reported on August 5 that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias fired 122mm rockets at Ain al Asad.[30] This attack is part of the long-standing Iranian-backed campaign to remove US forces from Iraq. Al Thawriyyun, and the Islamic Resistance in Iraq more broadly, may also seize on the July 30 US self-defense strike in Baghdad and the recent Israeli strikes that killed senior Axis of Resistance leaders to justify renewed attacks against US forces. CTP-ISW previously assessed that Iran could order simultaneous attacks on US forces as part of its retaliatory attack against Israel.[31] Iranian-backed militia attacks targeting US positions could, in some circumstances, pull US attention and resources away from identifying and intercepting projectiles bound for Israel. Iranian leaders may calculate that their projectiles have a higher likelihood of penetrating Israeli air defenses if the United States must focus on defending its own forces.

Attacks against US Bases in the Middle East

As of August 6, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



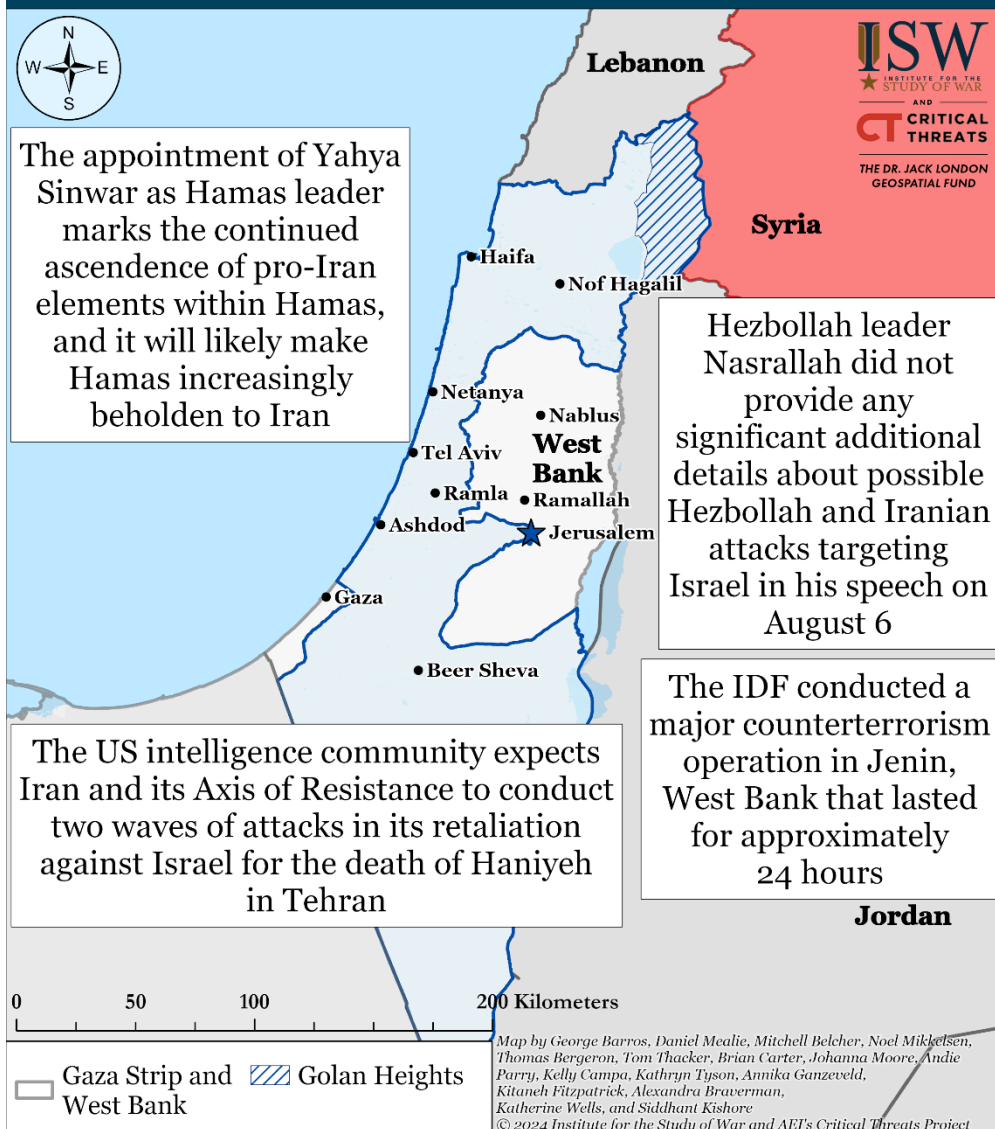
Key Takeaways:

- **Iranian Retaliation:** Unspecified US officials told Axios on August 5 that the US intelligence community expects Iran and its Axis of Resistance to conduct two waves of attacks in its retaliation against Israel for the death of Haniyeh in Tehran on July 31. Iran and its Axis of Resistance would likely use the first wave of the attack on Israel to assess Israeli air defenses in preparation for the second wave of the attack.
- **Iranian Attack Preparation:** Unspecified US officials cited by the *Wall Street Journal* on August 5 reported that Iran has begun moving missile launchers and conducting military drills, possibly in preparation for the attack. These drills may be intended to move forces and missile batteries into position for Iran's retaliatory strike on Israel.

- **Nasrallah Speech:** Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah claimed that Hezbollah is fighting to prevent Israel from “eliminating the Palestinian cause,” which obfuscates Hezbollah’s goals and Iran’s theory for destroying the Israeli state.
- **Hamas Succession:** Hamas selected Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip and October 7 architect Yahya Sinwar as the next leader of Hamas’ Political Bureau on August 6. Sinwar exercised significant influence within Hamas after October 7 given his command of forces and control of hostages on the ground. He repeatedly resisted pressure to moderate Hamas’ ceasefire position from both his superiors, such as Haniyeh and others, and his military subordinates in the Gaza Strip. Sinwar’s appointment also marks the continued ascendance of pro-Iran elements within Hamas, and it will likely accelerate Hamas’ descent deeper into Iran’s orbit.
- **Iraq:** Iranian-backed Iraqi militia al Thawriyyun claimed responsibility for the rocket attack that injured at least five US personnel at Ain al Assad Airbase in Anbar Province, Iraq, on August 5.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of August 6, 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 IDF Air Force struck and killed a Hamas smuggling operations officer in the Gaza Strip on August 5.[32] The IDF said that it killed Hamas officer Muhammad Mahasna in an unspecified location in the Gaza Strip.[33] Mahasna coordinated smuggling operations to bring materiel and weapons in the Gaza Strip for Hamas.[34] The IDF said that Mahasna primarily operated in the maritime smuggling sector but was also involved underground and cross-border smuggling

operations.[35] The IDF said that Mahasna's death will degrade Hamas' ability to smuggle weapons and equipment into the Gaza Strip.[36]

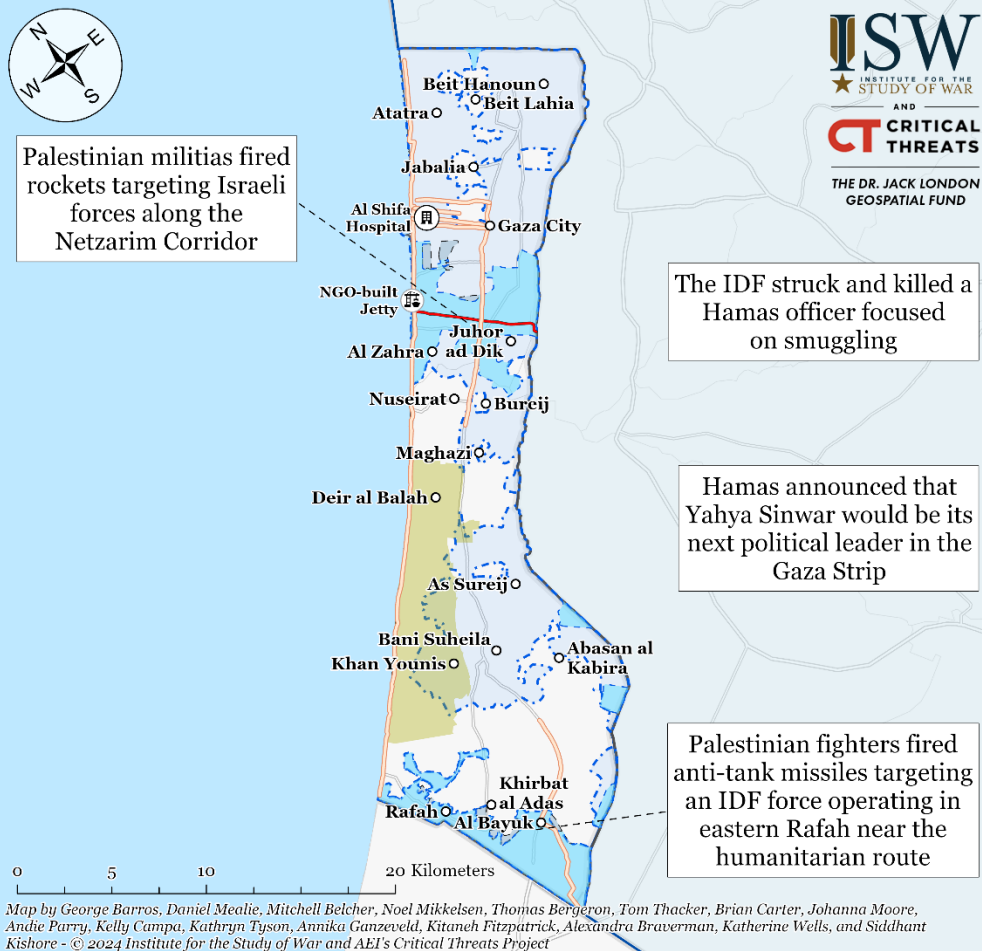
The IDF 252nd Division continued clearing operations along the Netzarim Corridor on August 6.[37] The IDF 6th Infantry Brigade (Res.) and 10th Infantry Brigade (Res.) killed 20 Palestinian fighters in close quarters combat and via airstrikes over the past day.[38] Hamas and the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired rockets targeting Israeli forces along the corridor.[39]

The IDF 162nd Division continued clearing operations in Rafah on August 6.[40] Israeli forces killed 25 Palestinian fighters over the past day.[41] The IDF Nahal Brigade killed approximately 10 fighters who posed a threat to Israeli forces in the area.[42] The IDF Air Force destroyed militia infrastructure in the Rafah area.[43] A Palestinian fighter targeted Israeli forces with anti-tank fire.[44] IDF Air Force aircraft quickly attacked the building from which the fire originated and killed the fighter who fired at the IDF unit.[45] Hamas and the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades targeted Israeli personnel and armor east of Rafah with rocket propelled grenades, detonated IEDs, and mortars on August 6.[46]

The IDF temporarily halted humanitarian aid convoys' travel along a designated aid route in eastern Rafah on August 6.[47] The IDF said that Palestinian fighters fired anti-tank guided missiles targeting an IDF unit operating in eastern Rafah near the IDF-designated aid route.[48] Several IDF soldiers were injured in the incident.[49] Israeli forces attempted to locate and kill the Palestinian fighters.[50] The IDF announced that it temporarily halted travel and coordination along the designated aid route because the area is an "active combat zone." [51] The IDF said that the Kerem Shalom crossing and other aid entry points would continue to operate as usual.[52] It is not immediately clear how the aid will be delivered, however, while this route is closed. CTP-ISW previously reported on July 22 that Hamas fighters attempted to take control of the aid route.[53] The United Nations and international aid groups have alleged that the IDF has not protected its designated aid route, creating a corridor that is unstable and vulnerable to frequent hijacking by militias.[54]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

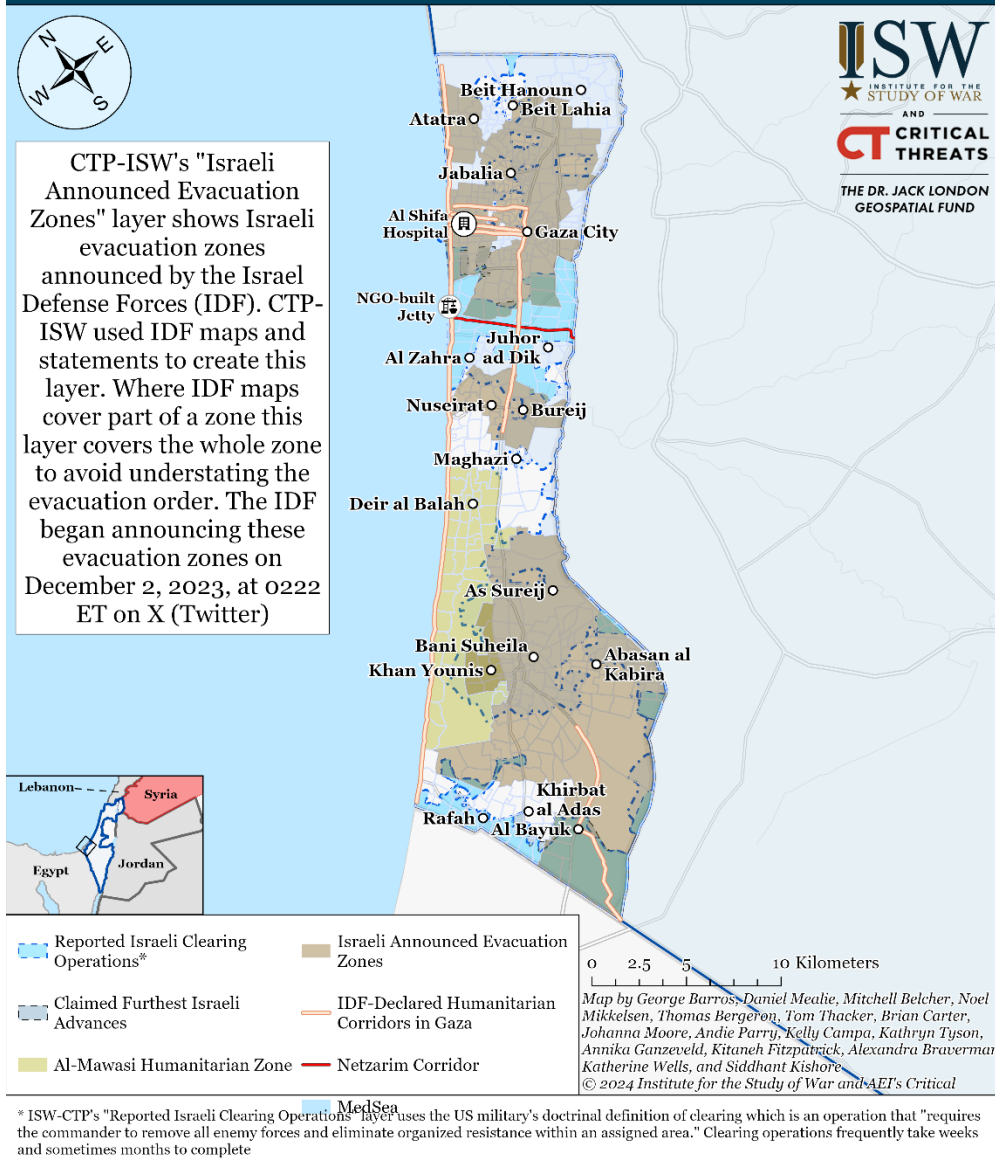
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* ISW-CTP's "Reported Israeli Clearing Operations" layer uses the US military's doctrinal definition of clearing which is an operation that "requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance within an assigned area."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

Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip

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Israeli Army Radio reported on August 6 that Israel and Egypt failed to reach an agreement for securing of the Philadelphi Corridor.[55] Israel demanded that it retain control over the corridor, which is contrary to Hamas' demands. An enduring IDF presence along the Philadelphi Corridor provides a better guarantee against Hamas rearming. Hamas has demanded repeatedly that Israeli forces withdraw from the Philadelphi Corridor in a ceasefire and hostage exchange deal.[56] Israel reportedly agreed to pass control of the Rafah crossing to a Palestinian "element" on the condition that it is not Hamas.[57]

West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

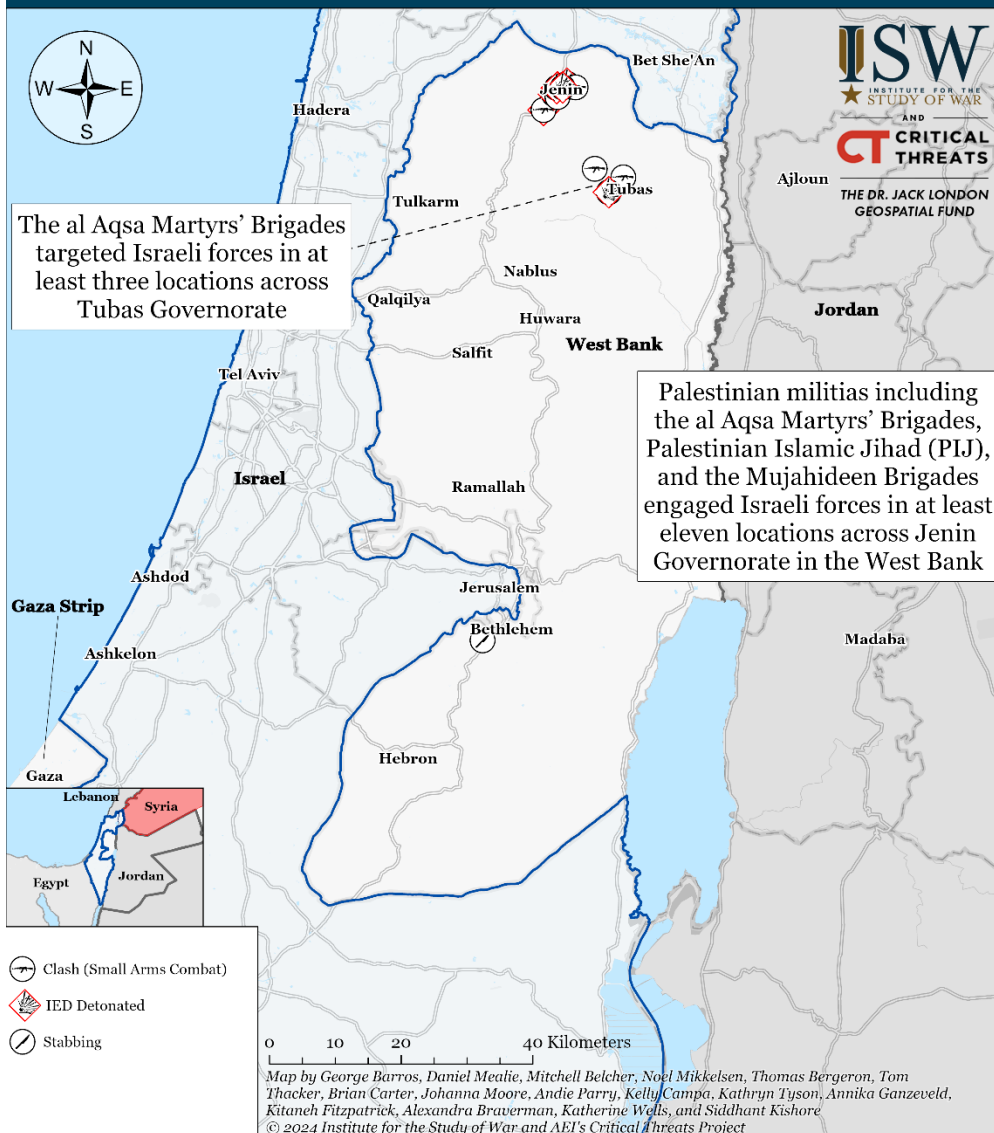
The IDF conducted a major counterterrorism operation in Jenin, West Bank, on August 5 and 6 that lasted for approximately 24 hours.[58] Israeli forces killed a total of eleven fighters in Jenin during the counterterrorism operation.[59] The IDF Air Force conducted two drone strikes as a part of the operation that killed at least five Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) members in Jenin on August 6.[60] The IDF also killed at least five Palestinian fighters belonging to the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and Hamas, in Aqaba, Tubas Governorate.[61] An Israeli military correspondent reported that the IDF isolated and then reduced the five-man cell, which was inside a building.[62] The Israeli Border Police separately killed two Palestinian fighters in Jenin during the operation.[63]

Israeli forces have engaged Palestinian fighters in at least fifteen locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cut-off on August 5.[64]

A Hamas fighter conducted a stabbing attack that injured an Israeli Border Police personnel at a checkpoint near Jerusalem on August 6.[65] Israeli media reported that the attacker stabbed the Israeli Border Police official during a routine check at a checkpoint near Jerusalem.[66] Israeli security forces reportedly shot and killed the Hamas fighter following the attack.[67]

Significant Activity in the West Bank

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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

An IDF airstrike killed a commander in Lebanese Hezbollah's Radwan Forces unit, Ali Jamal al Din Jawad in Southern Lebanon on August 5.[68] The IDF added that Jawad's death will damage Hezbollah's ability to conduct operations from southern Lebanon into Israel.[69] Hezbollah confirmed Jawad's death but did not identify him as a commander.[70] The

Radwan unit is Hezbollah's elite special forces unit and receives training by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force to conduct ground operations into Israel.[71]

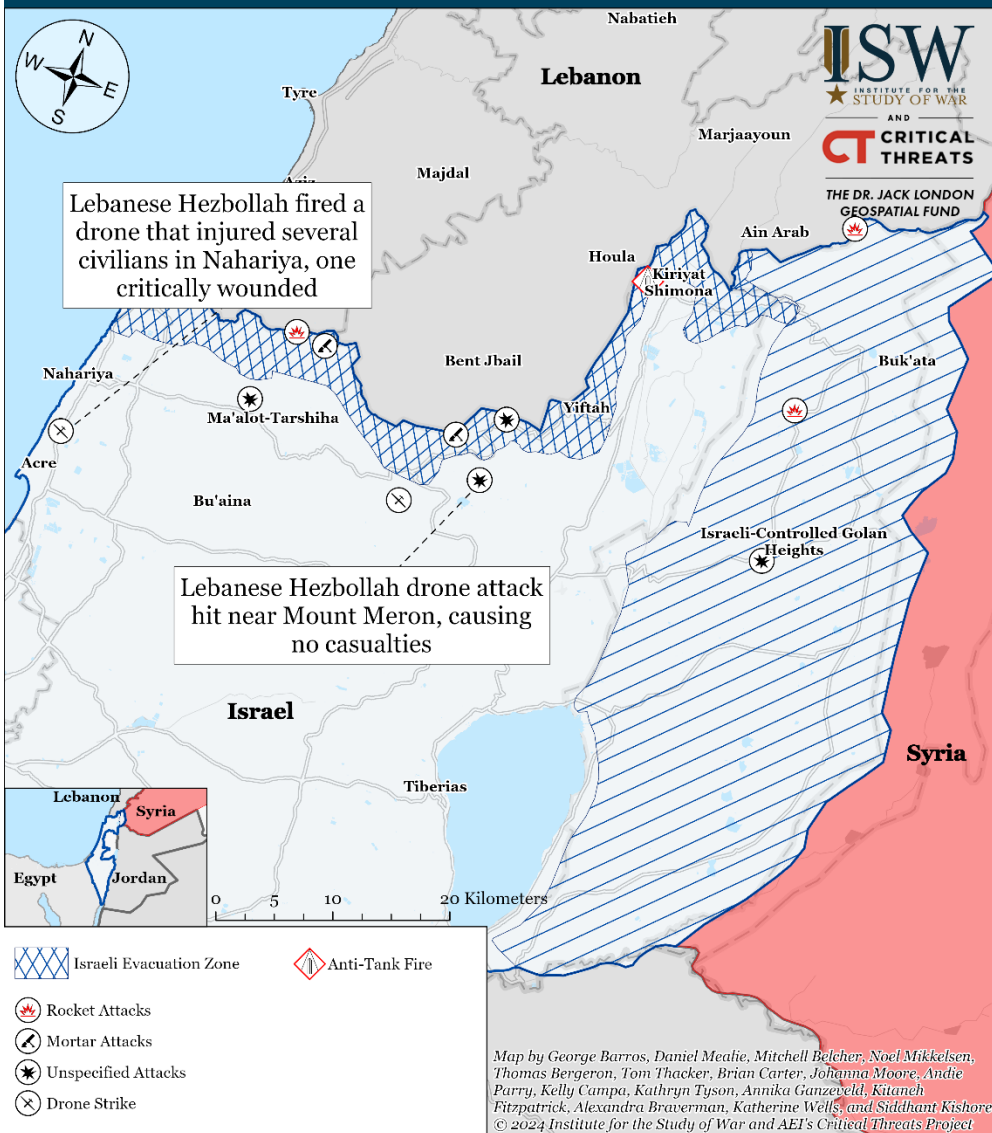
Iranian-backed militias, including Hezbollah, have conducted at least 13 attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cut-off on August 5.[72] Hezbollah launched drones targeting the headquarters of two Israeli units near Sharaga Barracks on August 6.[73] The IDF detected several drones crossing from Lebanon and said that it intercepted one drone near Nahariya.[74] Several drones impacted near Nahariya, injuring several civilians. An Israeli interceptor missile malfunctioned south of Nahariya, falling near a highway and injuring 19 Israelis, including one critically injured.[75] An Israeli military correspondent reported that the drones flew in Israeli territory for about 12 miles and over 10 minutes before striking Nahariya.[76] The IDF announced it will investigate this incident.[77] Hezbollah said it targeted the barracks near Nahariya in response to the IDF's August 5 attack in southern Lebanon that killed a Radwan Force commander (see above).[78] Hezbollah separately launched drones targeting the IDF Golani Brigade's headquarters near Mount Meron on August 5.[79] The IDF detected the drones crossing from Lebanon and intercepted one.[80] Several drones landed near Mount Meron, causing no casualties.[81]

IDF Intelligence Directorate head Major General Aharon Haliva visited the Central and Northern District Intelligence Directorates on August 6.[82] Haliva reviewed the IDF's intelligence efforts focused on Iran and attacks from Southern Lebanon.

Lebanese Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah discussed the Israeli targeted killing of senior Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukr during his August 6 speech.[83] Nasrallah elaborated upon Shukr's background, calling him a "founding leader" of Hezbollah and noting that Shukr was instrumental in the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 and the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War. Nasrallah said that Shukr commanded the "main battlefield" during the 2006 war and helped improve Hezbollah's capabilities after the 2006 war in preparation for future rounds of conflict with Israel.[84] Previous reporting noted that Shukr served on Hezbollah's top military body, the Jihad Council, since the council's founding.[85] Shukr's removal is significant but not insurmountable for Hezbollah, which has almost certainly developed a deep bench of combat-experienced military commanders during fighting in the 2006 war and in Syria during the Syrian Civil War. Shukr was killed in an Israeli airstrike on July 30, in response to a Hezbollah attack that killed 12 Israeli children in the Golan Heights on July 27.[86]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon

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Iran and the Axis of Resistance

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian expressed Iran's readiness for "all-around cooperation" with Venezuela in a phone call with Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.[87] Pezeshkian condemned any foreign interference in Venezuelan internal affairs and Maduro labeled the unrest in Iran as a "Zionist conspiracy with the cooperation of the United States." This conversation comes after Iranian officials congratulated Maduro on his reelection as the president of Venezuela on July 29, despite local and international claims that the regime likely rigged the election to ensure Maduro's victory.[88] These exchanges indicate that Iran and its revisionist partners are continuing to try to legitimize and bolster one another.

Acting Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani visited the Hamas office in Tehran on August 5.[89] Bagheri Kani stressed that the assassination of Haniyeh is a violation of international law and added that Iran will respond to "assassination of its guest." Bagheri Kani added that Iran has

begun diplomatic consultations at the United Nations Security Council level to “affirm its right to defend itself.”

Local Syrian opposition media reported on August 5 that Houthi fighters arrived in Syria from Iraq and were distributed to positions across eastern and southern Syria.[90] Syrian opposition outlet *Eye of Euphrates* reported that approximately 50 Houthi fighters entered Albu Kamal, Syria, from al Qaim, Iraq in Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) vehicles.[91] Iranian-backed militias reportedly deployed the Houthi fighters across sites in the Albu Kamal countryside and in Quneitra Province and Homs Province, including Shayrat Air Base.[92] Shayrat Air Base is the second largest Iranian base in Homs Province.[93] **CTP-ISW cannot verify this local reporting.**

US Central Command (CENTCOM) intercepted three Houthi drones over the Gulf of Aden and one Houthi drone over the Red Sea on August 5.[94] CENTCOM destroyed one Houthi drone in a Houthi-controlled area of Yemen.[95] US CENTCOM separately destroyed one Houthi unmanned surface vessel and one Houthi anti-ship ballistic missile in the Red Sea.[96] CENTCOM determined that these Houthi systems presented a clear and imminent threat to US and coalition forces and merchant vessels in the region.

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