

Iran Update



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July 25, 2024, 6:30pm 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.

US President Joe Biden met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on July 25.^[1] Biden and Netanyahu discussed Biden’s “ironclad commitment” to Israeli security, as well as “developments in Gaza, including efforts to reach a ceasefire.” An unspecified US official said that the administration believes that the deal “is in the closing stages.”

US Vice President Kamala Harris said that she told Netanyahu that it is “time for this war to end” and that “it is time to get this [ceasefire] deal done.”^[2] **Harris met with Netanyahu on July 25 following Netanyahu’s meeting with Joe Biden.** Harris added that the war must “end in a way that ensures Israel’s security.” Harris called her conversation with Netanyahu “frank and constructive,” and added that she will continue to support Israel against Iran and its partners. US officials emphasized that Harris has been involved in “every call” with Netanyahu since October 7.^[3]

US, Israeli, and Arab officials are reportedly considering former Fatah leader Mohammad Dahlan as an interim leader of Palestinian security forces in the post-war Gaza Strip. Dahlan is a former Fatah official who was a close advisor to former Palestinian Authority (PA) leader Yasser Arafat. The *Wall Street Journal* reported on July 25 that under the plan, Dahlan would oversee an interim security force of 2,500 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip after Israeli troops withdraw, citing Arab officials.[4] The United States, Israel, and Egypt would vet the Palestinian personnel, who would work in coordination with unspecified international forces and even private Western security firms. The Palestinian security force would not be directly affiliated with the PA. International mediators have recently considered multiple alternative proposals that have recommended sending non-Israeli, non-Hamas, and UAE-supported security forces to maintain security in the Gaza Strip.[5] The Arab officials also said that the Palestinian force could assist with the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip if it operates successfully.

Dahlan could be a “palatable figure” to Israel, the United States, Gulf states, and potentially Hamas who may be capable of leading post-war Palestinian security forces.[6] Dahlan organized Fatah-led PA forces against Hamas’ 2007 takeover in the Gaza Strip.[7] Hamas destroyed the Fatah-led PA forces in the Gaza Strip during that takeover. Dahlan left the Palestinian territories for the UAE after Fatah party leadership expelled him in 2011.[8] Dahlan maintains an active political party in the West Bank and he has connections to armed Palestinian networks on the ground, however.[9] Dahlan has publicly argued in recent months that a lasting solution requires a new Palestinian leader within a transitional government until parliamentary elections can be held.[10] Dahlan stated that this cannot be reached without Hamas’ consent.[11] Notably, Hamas has reportedly indicated to mediators in recent weeks that it has “softened” its hostility towards Dahlan and could accept him as an interim security leader.[12] Dahlan has repeatedly met with top Hamas officials since the beginning of the war, initially to coordinate aid distribution.[13] Arab and Hamas officials said that Dahlan has presented himself in recent conversations with Hamas as someone who could oversee aid distribution within a new Palestinian system in Gaza.[14]

The proposed 2,500-strong Palestinian security force is probably insufficient to counter Hamas’ future attempts to reassert control in the Gaza Strip, regardless of who leads the force. Hamas would need to agree to Dahlan or any other leader unless Hamas is militarily defeated and unable to resist a transitional force. Failing to defeat Hamas militarily will risk a resumption of de-facto or de-jure Hamas control in the Gaza Strip. Hamas would almost certainly act to suppress the authority of any non-Hamas security force attempting to assume Hamas’ former security responsibilities in the Gaza Strip. Hamas has a long history of violently countering attempts from other Palestinian factions to assert authority in the Gaza Strip, including defeating Dahlan’s PA forces in the Gaza Strip in 2007.[15] A 2,500-strong interim security force would likely be insufficient to challenge Hamas’ long-standing monopoly on violence in the Gaza Strip. Dahlan, who is currently based in the UAE, has not expressed explicit public interest in assuming the position.[16] Hamas’ reported acceptance of Dahlan also indicates that Hamas assesses it could maintain significant influence under his rule.

Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) head Mohammad Eslami claimed that Iran had exported nuclear materials and expertise to various unspecified countries in an interview with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei’s website on July 22.[17] Eslami stated that Iranian nuclear experts had “exported services” to unnamed countries during an unspecified

timeframe. Eslami added that an AEOI technical group had travelled to an unspecified Latin American country within the past four months for “consultations” and that Iran was “continuously receiving” similar requests from other countries. Eslami also stated that Iran had exported domestically-produced heavy water—a substance that serves as a moderator and coolant in nuclear reactors—without providing further details. Eslami’s statements focused on the development and export of Iranian pharmaceutical nuclear capabilities. Khamenei publicly called on the AEOI in June 2023 to commercialize nuclear products—specifically heavy water and nuclear isotopes—and services.[18] Khamenei.ir published Eslami’s interview on a new page titled “A Strong Iran with an Advanced Nuclear Industry,” underscoring the extent to which the supreme leader seeks to promote Iranian indigenous nuclear capabilities.[19]

It is unclear to what extent Iran has previously provided nuclear expertise to other actors, although Iranian officials have previously expressed their readiness to do so. Eslami stressed Iran’s willingness to help Saudi Arabia develop its nuclear program in May 2024.[20] Iran sold heavy water to the US in 2016 as part of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.[21] Iranian officials have since claimed that the US purchased and requested the purchase of Iranian heavy water in recent years.[22] One Iranian official stated that Iran discussed heavy waters sales with Russia in 2016, although it is unclear if these discussions resulted in the purchase of such materials.[23]

Key Takeaways:

- **Netanyahu Visits Washington, DC:** US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris met separately with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on July 25. Harris told Netanyahu that it is “time for this war to end” and that “it is time to get this [ceasefire] deal done.
- **Gaza Strip:** US, Israeli, and Arab officials are reportedly considering former Fatah leader Mohammad Dahlan, who could be palatable to all parties, as an interim leader of Palestinian security forces in the post-war Gaza Strip. The proposed 2,500-strong Palestinian security force is probably insufficient to counter Hamas’ future attempts to reassert control in the Gaza Strip, regardless of who leads the force. Hamas would need to agree to Dahlan or any other leader unless it is militarily defeated and unable to resist that force. Failing to defeat Hamas militarily will risk a resumption of de-facto or de-jure Hamas control in the Gaza Strip.
- **Iraq:** Two unspecified security officials cited by Reuters reported that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias launched four rockets at Ain al Asad Airbase, Anbar, on July 25.
- **Iran:** Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) head Mohammad Eslami claimed that Iran had exported nuclear materials and expertise to various unspecified countries in an interview with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei’s website on July 22.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of July 25, 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

Israeli forces recovered the bodies of five hostages in Khan Younis on July 24.[24] Hamas fighters killed the hostages during the October 7, 2023, attack before taking the bodies into the Gaza Strip.[25] The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) 89th Commando Brigade (98th Division), Egoz Unit, Yahalam special operations engineers, and Shin Bet forces located the hostages in a 200-meter-long, 20-meter-deep tunnel in Bani Suheila.[26] The tunnel was located within an area that the IDF ordered

civilians to evacuate on July 22 prior to beginning operations in Khan Younis.[27] Palestinian fighters did not engage Israeli forces inside the tunnel.[28]

The IDF 98th Division continued clearing operations in eastern Khan Younis on July 25. The IDF 7th, 89th Commando, and 35th Paratroopers brigades engaged and killed Palestinian fighters and destroyed over 50 militia sites over the past days.[29] An Israeli military correspondent reported that the IDF killed 30 Palestinian fighters in Bani Suheila.[30] Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades engaged Israeli forces in several sectors of Khan Younis with mortars, sniper fire, and rocket propelled grenades (RPG).[31] Hamas fighters targeted an Israeli tank with an explosively formed penetrator.[32] Hamas and PIJ claimed two combined attacks targeting Israeli personnel and armor in Sheikh Nasser, Khan Younis City, and east of Khan Younis.[33]

The IDF said that Hamas attempted to fire several rockets into Israeli territory from the humanitarian zone in Khan Younis.[34] The rockets fell near the UNRWA-run al Qarara school in Khan Younis.[35] The rocket strike injured several civilians and killed two near the school.[36] The IDF transferred the injured civilians to a field hospital established in the Deir al Balah region.[37]

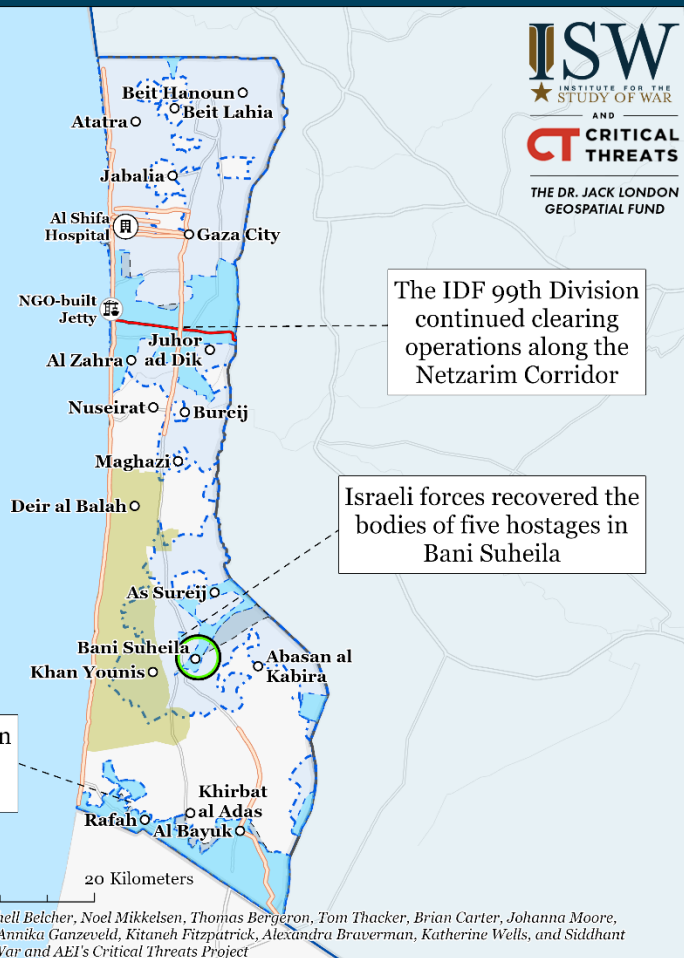
The 3rd "Alexandroni" Infantry Brigade (Res.) (99th Division) continued clearing operations along the Netzarim Corridor on July 25.[38] The Alexandroni Brigade cooperated with the IDF Air Force to destroy militia sites near the corridor.[39]

The IDF 162nd Division continued clearing operations in Rafah on July 25.[40] The IDF Givati and 401st Brigades continue to operate in the area.[41] The Givati Brigade directed an airstrike on two Palestinian fighters.[42] Hamas fighters detonated IEDs targeting Israeli forces in two tunnels in Yabna refugee camp.[43] Hamas fighters also targeted an IDF bulldozer with RPGs in al Salam, eastern Rafah.[44]

The IDF Air Force struck over 60 militia targets in the Gaza Strip in the past 24 hours.[45]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of July 25, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



The IDF 99th Division continued clearing operations along the Netzarim Corridor

Israeli forces recovered the bodies of five hostages in Bani Suheila

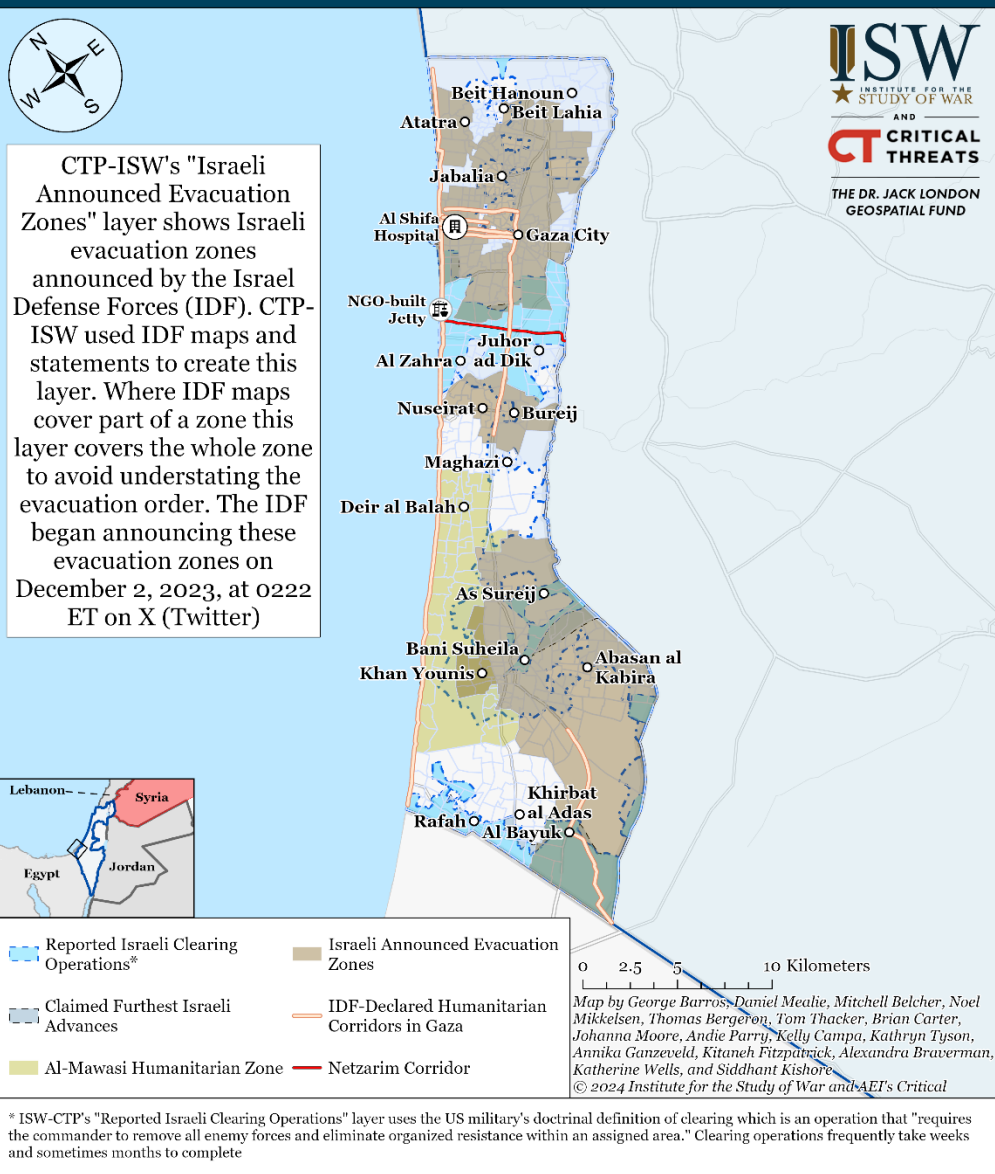
The IDF 162nd Division continued clearing operations in Rafah

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, Katherine Wells, and Siddhant Kishore - © 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

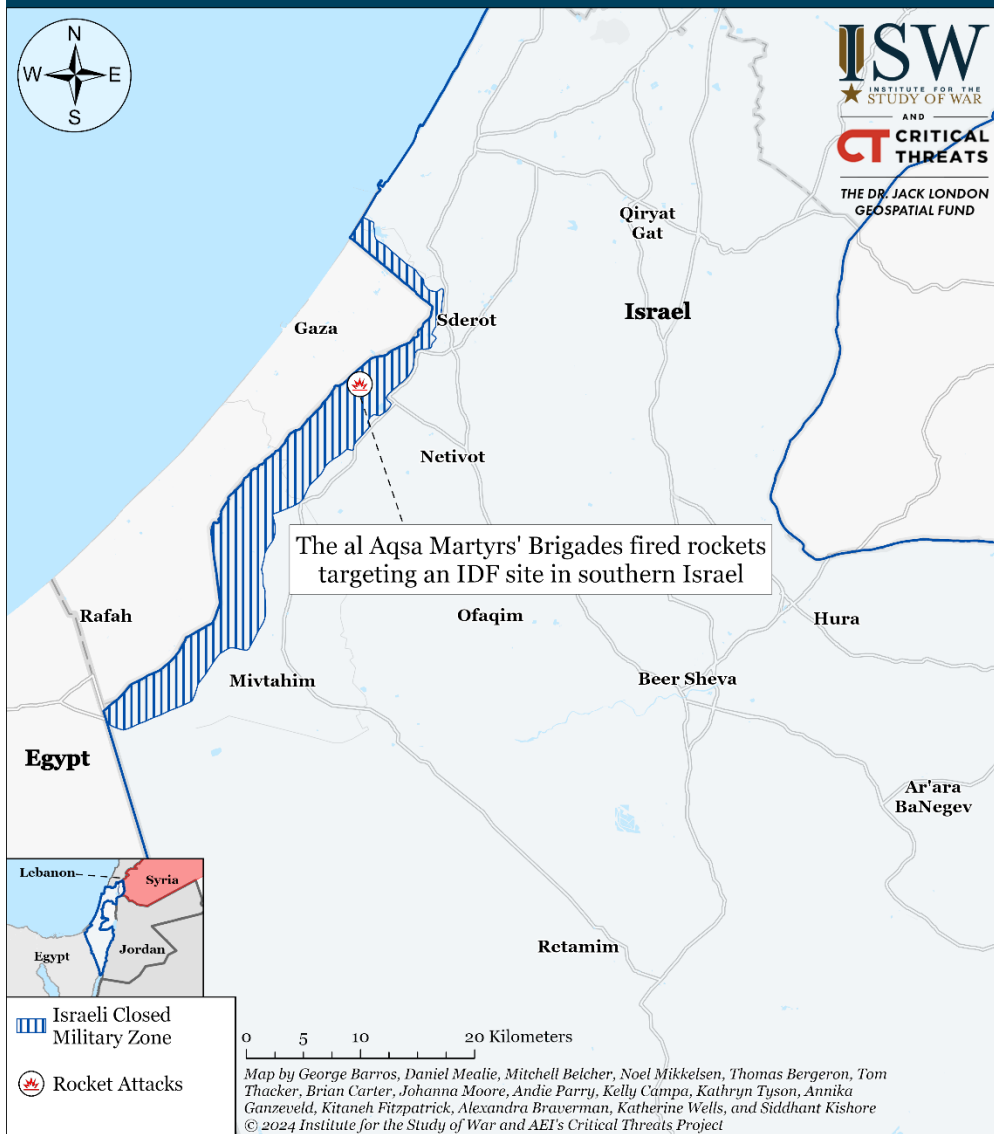
Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip As of July 25, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades conducted a single rocket attack targeting an IDF site in southern Israel on July 25.[46]

Attacks into Israel from the Gaza Strip

As of July 25, 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

Palestinian fighters attacked Israeli forces in seven locations across the West Bank since CTP-ISW's data cut off on July 24.[47] The Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired small arms targeting Israeli forces at three locations in Nablus.[48] PIJ's Balata Battalion also fired small arms targeting Israeli forces at Mount Gerizim, Nablus.[49] The Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades also fired small arms at

Karmeit Zsur settlement, north of Hebron.[50] Unspecified Palestinian fighters detonated an IED targeting an IDF checkpoint in Qalandiya, West Bank.[51]

Unspecified Palestinian fighters fired small arms targeting an IDF vehicle on Highway 55 in Qalqilya on July 25.[52] The IDF claimed that the fighters opened fire from a moving vehicle and escaped after conducting the attack.[53] Israeli forces imposed a blockade around Qalqilya city in search of the perpetrators. Israeli forces also raided three locations in Qalqilya governorate in search of the perpetrators.[54] Hamas praised the attack and called it a "natural response" against ongoing Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip and the settler violence in West Bank.[55]

Australia imposed sanctions on seven individual Israeli settlers and one settler group for their involvement in settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank.[56] The Australian government levied the sanctions on the individuals and group for perpetrating violence against Palestinian communities in the West Bank.

Significant Activity in the West Bank

As of July 25, 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:

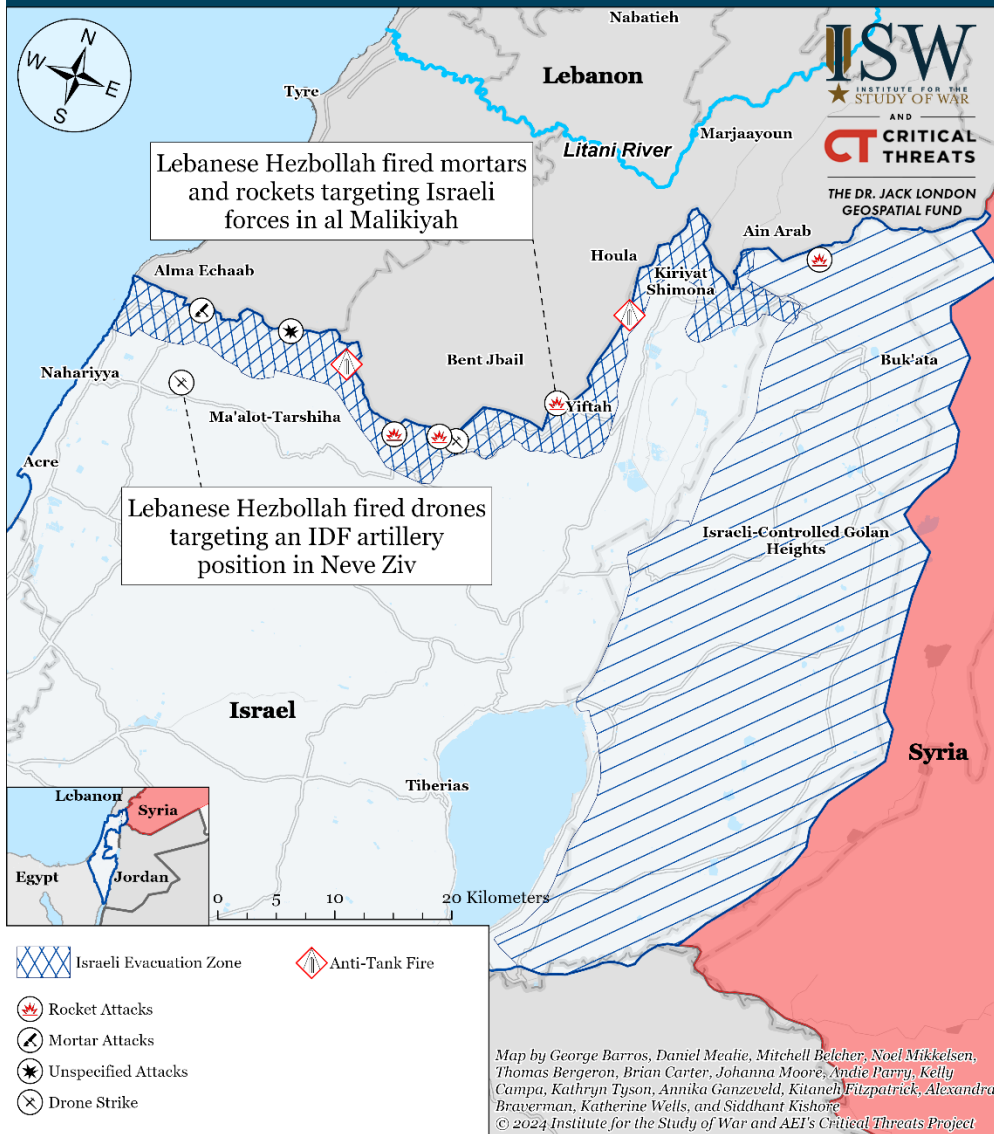
- Deter Israel from conducting a ground operation into Lebanon
- Prepare for an expanded and protracted conflict with Israel in the near term
- Expel the United States from Syria

Lebanese Hezbollah has conducted at least 12 attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on July 24.[57]

IDF Air Force Commander Major General Tomer Bar discussed a potential Israeli offensive in Lebanon during a meeting with Air Force and Northern Command commanders at the Ramat David airbase on July 25.[58] Bar said that Israel is "ready for war" and added that the Israeli strike on Hudaydah port in Yemen on July 20 targeted not only on the Houthis but "the entire Middle East," including Hezbollah and Iran.[59] The meeting comes after Hezbollah published drone footage of the Ramat David airbase on July 24 with details of the base, such as the locations of air defenses, aircraft shelters, and fuel storage units.[60] This video marked the third time in recent months that Hezbollah has published drone footage of critical Israeli sites.[61]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon

As of July 25, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



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

Iran and the Axis of Resistance

Two unspecified security officials cited by Reuters reported that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias launched four rockets at Ain al Asad Airbase, Anbar, on July 25.[62] No group has claimed the attack at the time of this writing. Unidentified Iranian-backed Iraqi militias previously launched two one-way attack drones at Ain al Asad Airbase on July 16.[63]

Asaib Ahl al Haq-run news outlet al Ahad reported on July 25 that Iraqi Defense Minister Thabet al Abbasi outlined some general information about the development of a US-Iraqi bilateral security relationship.[64] Abbasi stated that the United States and Iraq will continue discussions to develop a framework and mechanism to “ensure the enduring defeat” of ISIS. The United

States and Iraq discussed ways to continue developing the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) through military cooperation programs, foreign military sales, and foreign military financing. US-Iraq foreign military sales are likely meant to support maintenance of US systems used by the ISF for counter-ISIS missions. The United States has historically supported maintenance for some systems. Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have sometimes targeted US contractors responsible for maintaining some ISF equipment, such as F16, forcing US maintainers to withdraw and limiting the US ability to provide maintenance, however.[65] Abbasi added that during the Joint Security Cooperation Dialogue, the United States and Iraq discussed “opportunities” to expand Iraq’s participation in regional CENTCOM exercises and to strengthen Iraq’s military relations with CENTCOM component commands.[66]

Asaib Ahl al Haq-run Al Ahad news outlet claimed on July 24 that the United States is pressuring the Syrian Democratic Forces to release displaced persons from al Hol refugee camp.[67] Al Ahad asserted that the United States released 400 “Iraqi ISIS” members from al Hol refugee camp under the General Amnesty program to create “chaos.” Al Ahad claimed that the United States is attempting to exacerbate the threat posed by ISIS as it negotiates a withdrawal of International Coalition forces from Iraq based on the threat that ISIS poses.[68] CTP-ISW has not observed reports verifying al Ahad’s claims nor reports that suggest any displaced persons were repatriated from al Hol to Iraq.

Iranian President-elect Masoud Pezeshkian met with Foreign Affairs Adviser to the Supreme Leader and Expediency Council member Ali Akbar Velayati on July 25.[69] Velayati congratulated Pezeshkian on his win in the meeting. The senior officials also discussed regional security and the current state of global politics.

Reuters reported that Iran has released the oil cargo from the *Saint Nikolas* tanker, citing an unnamed source on July 25.[70] The *Saint Nikolas* is a Greek-owned and Marshall Islands-flagged vessel that the Iranian Artesh Navy seized in the Gulf of Oman on January 11, 2024.[71] The vessel was carrying one million barrels of Iraqi crude oil, and it was on its way to Turkey, according to Reuters. The article’s source added that “the cargo was released earlier this week after negotiations,” but Iran was still holding the vessel and the source did not disclose whether Iran released all of the oil.[72] The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)-controlled media, citing the Iranian Artesh Navy, explained that the Artesh seized the vessel in retaliation for the US Navy’s seizure of the same tanker and then offloaded the tanker’s Iranian oil in April and August 2023.[73] The *Saint Nikolas* was formerly known as the *Suez Rajan*. The United States seized the *Suez Rajan* in April 2023 and offloaded its oil in August 2023 to enforce US unilateral sanctions on Iranian oil exports.[74] Senior Iranian military officials vowed in July and September 2023 that Iran would retaliate against the United States after the US Navy seized and offloaded Iranian oil from the tanker in April and August 2023.[75]

Syrian President Bashar al Assad met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on July 24.[76] Assad and Putin discussed escalating tensions in the Middle East, including in Syria.[77] The leaders also discussed improving bilateral economic relations.[78] Assad last met with Putin in Russia in March 2023 and reached over 40 agreements promoting economic cooperation.[79] It remains unclear if Syria and Russia have advanced the 2023 agreements since then.

US Central Command (CENTCOM) destroyed two loaded Houthi missile launchers in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen on July 24.^[80] US CENTCOM determined that the loaded Houthi missile launchers presented an imminent threat to US, coalition forces, and merchant vessels in the region.

POWERED BY:



BABEL STREET

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