

Iran Update



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July 7, 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 is continuing to resist Israeli and US efforts to create a phased ceasefire deal that would secure the release of Israeli hostages, end the war, and begin major reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip. The remaining gap in ceasefire negotiations is significant because agreeing to the most recent Hamas language would effectively commit Israel to the permanent ceasefire Hamas has been demanding before Hamas had released all remaining hostages. Hamas' current demands could also enable Hamas to drag on negotiations indefinitely with no mechanism to compel it to release the remaining hostages. Hamas remains unlikely to accept a proposal that does not meet its maximalist demands, including a permanent ceasefire, the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip, and a hostage-for-prisoner exchange. The May 31 ceasefire proposal announced by US President Joe Biden continues to serve as the basis for negotiations.[1] The phases of the May 31 proposal were:[2]

- Phase one involves a six-week ceasefire and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from densely populated areas in the Gaza Strip. Hamas would release an unspecified number of hostages, including Americans, women, and elderly and sick individuals, in exchange for “hundreds” of Palestinian prisoners in this phase. Displaced Palestinian civilians would return to their homes, including those in the northern Gaza Strip. Humanitarian aid would “surge with 600 trucks [entering the Gaza Strip] per day,” which is a notable increase from the 500 trucks in an earlier Israeli proposal. Negotiations for a permanent ceasefire would continue during this phase.

- Phase two involves Hamas and other Palestinian militias releasing all remaining living hostages, and the IDF withdrawing from the Gaza Strip completely. Biden said that the United States, Egypt, and Qatar would facilitate continued negotiations during this phase.
- Phase three involves major reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip. It also involves Hamas and the other militias returning the bodies of all hostages to Israel.

Hamas attempted in early June to undermine the phasing of the May 31 proposal by demanding the beginning of reconstruction in phase one and a complete halt to the war regardless of whether negotiations to transition to the second phase succeeded.[3] The May 31 proposal notably did not guarantee a transition from the first to the second phase of the ceasefire. This would enable Israel to resume military operations if Hamas proved unwilling to compromise on the specifics for a permanent ceasefire beginning after phase two and three. Undermining the phasing would have enabled Hamas to continue to extract concessions from Israel indefinitely without transitioning to phase two, because Israel could not impose military pressure on Hamas to encourage Hamas to compromise to release hostages without breaking the agreement. Hamas' attempt to undermine the phasing of the proposal also did not make clear how Israel would secure the release of the remaining hostages that would have been released under phase two of the May 31 proposal.

Hamas' most recent ceasefire position demonstrates that the group has not meaningfully shifted its position since negotiations last stalled in June and that it still seeks to undermine the agreement's phasing. Axios reported on July 6 that the outstanding gaps between Israel and Hamas center on the language regarding and time-delimitation of negotiations to transition from the first phase of the ceasefire deal to the second phase.[4] The current proposal says that the United States, Egypt, and Qatar will "make every effort" to ensure negotiations during the first phase end in a transition to the second phase and a sustainable calm. Hamas is attempting to remove "make every effort," replacing it with "ensure" and dropping the original six-week time limit for the first phase.[5] This change would make the initial ceasefire effectively permanent from the start and would commit the United States, Qatar, and Egypt to securing a ceasefire and enable Hamas to draw out negotiations for the transition to the second phase indefinitely, if needed.[6] The language and removal of the time-delimited first phase makes it more difficult for Israel to resume operations to pressure Hamas and extract concessions without breaking the agreement entirely or appearing to scuttle negotiations over the transition to phase two. This could allow Hamas to secure a complete ceasefire without adhering to commitments under phases two and three, which include the release of Israeli hostages. The categories of hostages in phase two and three include Israeli soldiers, whom Hamas is reticent to release.

Hamas and its leader in the Gaza Strip, Yahya Sinwar, feel that they can manipulate ceasefire negotiations in this manner because they remain confident that they are winning in the Gaza Strip. Hamas forces throughout the Strip remain combat effective and are attempting to reconstitute, with some success. Sinwar has noted that he believes Hamas has Israel "right where [Hamas] wants [Israel]."[7]

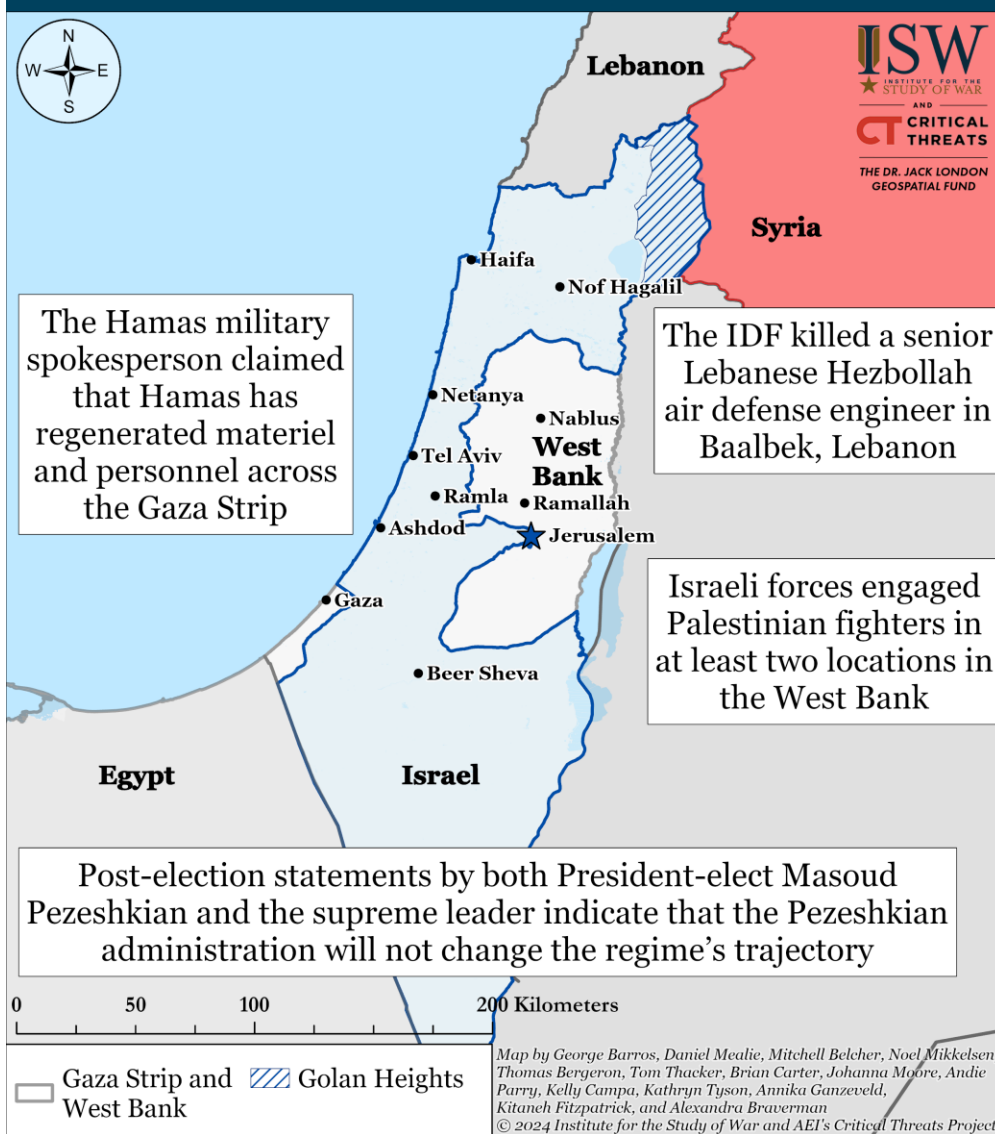
Post-election statements by both President-elect Masoud Pezeshkian and the supreme leader indicate that the Pezeshkian administration will not change the regime's trajectory. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei stated his desire for Pezeshkian to continue the policies of former president Ebrahim Raisi in a message on July 6 following the presidential election.[8] Pezeshkian issued a statement to the people of Iran on July 6 following the election thanking Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei for opening the field for "participation and competition." [9] Pezeshkian has repeatedly reiterated his commitment to enforcing Khamenei's policies throughout his campaign. Pezeshkian also prayed at the tomb of first Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini on July 6 after the election to "renew his allegiance to Khomeini's ideals." [10] Masoud Pezeshkian will be sworn in as the ninth president of the Islamic Republic of Iran on August 4 or 5, according to a member of Iran's parliament presiding board.[11]

Key Takeaways:

- **Ceasefire Negotiations:** Hamas is continuing to resist Israeli and US efforts to create a phased ceasefire deal that would secure the release of Israeli hostages, end the war, and begin major reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip. The remaining gap in ceasefire negotiations is significant because agreeing to the most recent Hamas language would effectively commit Israel to the permanent ceasefire Hamas has been demanding before Hamas had released all remaining hostages. Hamas' current demands could also enable Hamas to drag on negotiations indefinitely with no mechanism to compel it to release the remaining hostages.
- **Gaza Strip:** Hamas military spokesperson Abu Obeida claimed on July 7 that Hamas has regenerated materiel and personnel across the Gaza Strip.
- **Iran:** Post-election statements by both President-elect Masoud Pezeshkian and the supreme leader indicate that the Pezeshkian administration will not change the regime's trajectory.
- **Northern Israel:** Lebanese Hezbollah also launched a heavy barrage of rockets targeting IDF air defense assets and surveillance equipment in response to the Israeli strike that killed Attar. Hezbollah aims to degrade Israel's integrated air defense system by targeting Mount Meron, which hosts air surveillance and battle management functions.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of July 7, 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

Hamas military spokesperson Abu Obeida claimed on July 7 that Hamas has regenerated materiel and personnel across the Gaza Strip.[12] The Hamas spokesperson said that Hamas has recruited thousands of fighters during the war and thousands of other potential recruits are ready to join if necessary.[13] He also claimed that Hamas fighters have “rehabilitated and restored important capabilities,” including weapons production.[14] Abu Obeida said that Hamas “recycles” Israeli bombs, explosives and missiles as part of its rebuilt weapons production.[15] Abu Obeida is claiming that after nine months of war,

Hamas is accomplishing the complex, resource-intensive, and time-intensive process of regeneration by replacing thousands of troops and spent weapons. The Hamas spokesperson's statement is consistent with CTP-ISW's previous assessment that Hamas is rebuilding its weapons production capacity in the Gaza Strip as part of a larger effort to reconstitute its military forces.[16] Israeli journalists and the IDF have observed indicators that support Abu Obeida's claims, such as new recruitment and training of 18-year-old fighters, and the establishment of small weapons manufacturing sites across the Gaza Strip.[17]

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) 98th Division continued operations in Shujaiya on July 7.[18] Israeli forces engaged several Palestinian fighters, destroyed militia infrastructure, and located several types of small arms.[19] The IDF 35th Paratrooper Brigade has destroyed dozens of rigged-to-detonate buildings in Shujaiya over the past week.[20] The forces have also engaged several Palestinian cells operating in Shujaiya and located several weapons caches.[21] Four Palestinian militias targeted Israeli forces in Shujaiya with mortars and rocket-propelled grenades.[22]

The IDF issued evacuation orders for Tuffah, Darraj and central Gaza City neighborhoods on July 7.[23] The IDF Arabic-language spokesperson ordered residents to evacuate to shelters in western Gaza City.[24] The evacuation order covers blocks adjacent to the ongoing IDF operation in Shujaiya, suggesting the order is linked to the raid there.[25] The IDF assessed in late June that some Palestinian fighters had fled Shujaiya for the surrounding areas of Gaza City as the IDF began operations.[26]

The IDF Air Force has struck three public infrastructure sites that it said Hamas used as control centers, weapons warehouses, and factories since CTP-ISW's last data cut-off on July 6.[27] The IDF struck a school in central Gaza City on July 7 that Hamas used to manufacture weapons.[28] Palestinian sources reported that Hamas-affiliated Ministry of Labor Undersecretary Ihab al Ghusein died in the central Gaza City strike.[29] Israeli forces separately struck a UNRWA school that Hamas reportedly used as a command-and-control center in Nuseirat, central Gaza Strip on July 6.[30] The Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry reported that 16 people were killed in the Nuseirat strike.[31] Israeli forces also struck the Khan Younis Municipality building, which it said Hamas used for militia activities.[32] The municipality building housed a tunnel shaft that connected to an underground tunnel network.[33] The IDF said that it took several steps to reduce the likelihood of civilian casualties in the strikes, including calling for evacuations and dropping precision guided munitions.[34]

Palestinian fighters conducted at least two attacks targeting Israeli forces along the Netzarim Corridor on July 7.[35]

The 162nd Division continued clearing operations in Rafah on July 7.[36] Israeli forces killed over 30 Palestinian fighters in strikes and close-range engagements in Rafah over the past day.[37] The IDF Air Force struck a loaded rocket launcher in Rafah.[38] Palestinian fighters claimed five attacks targeting Israeli forces in western Rafah on July 7.[39] Hamas targeted an Israeli tank with an explosively formed penetrator in one of the five attacks in southwest Rafah.[40] Palestinian fighters also mortared Israeli forces near the Rafah border crossing with Egypt in eastern Rafah.[41]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of July 7, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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The IDF 162nd Division killed over 30 Palestinian fighters in Rafah over the past day

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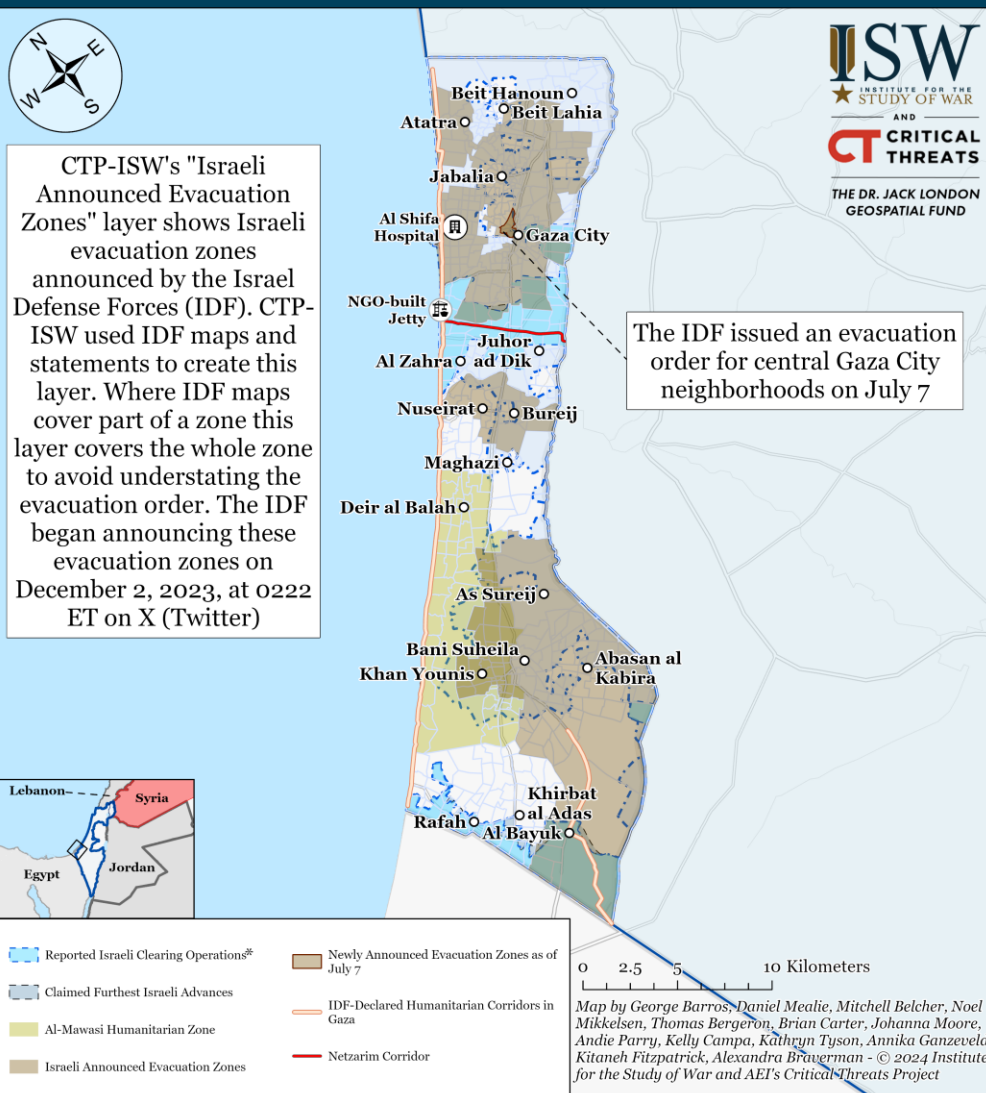
Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Kathryn Tyson, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, and Alexandra Braverman
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- Reported Israeli Clearing 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 7, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET

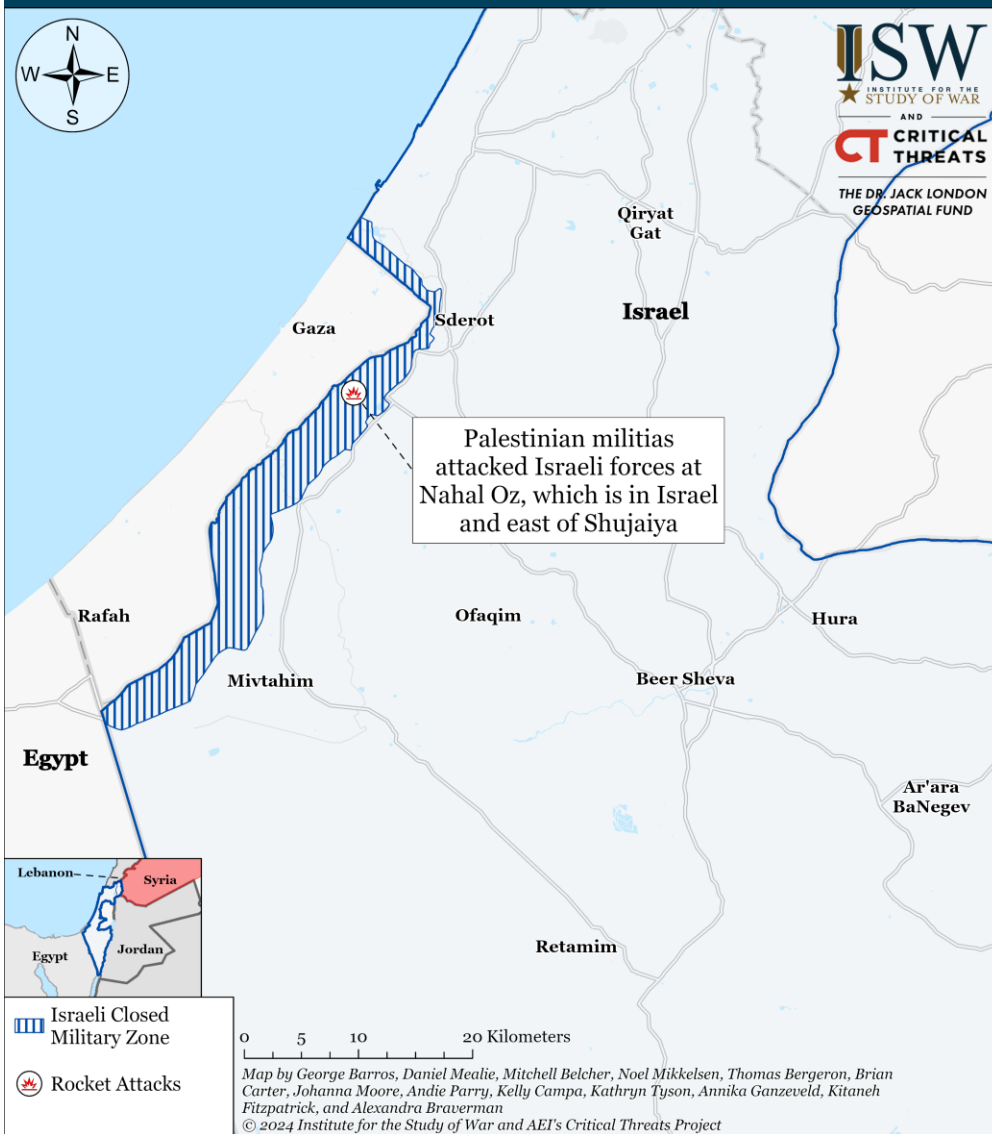


⁸⁶ ISW-CTP's "Reported Israeli Clearing Operations" layer uses the US military's doctrinal definition of clearing which is an operation that "requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance within an assigned area." Clearing operations frequently take weeks and sometimes months to complete

Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Popular Resistance Committees launched rockets targeting an Israeli military site at Nahal Oz, which is in Israel east of Shujaiya, on July 7.[42] The IDF said that Palestinian fighters also targeted Nahal Oz from Shujaiya on July 6.[43] Israeli forces struck the launch site and Palestinian fighter responsible for the July 6 launch.[44] Palestinian militias have accelerated the rate at which they target Nahal Oz since the IDF began an operation into Shujaiya on June 27.[45]

Attacks into Israel from the Gaza Strip

As of July 7, 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 engaged Palestinian fighters in at least two locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cut-off on July 6.[46]

Significant Activity in the West Bank

As of July 7, 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

The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) killed a senior Lebanese Hezbollah air defense engineer in Baalbek, Lebanon, on July 6.[47] The IDF said that the air defense engineer, Maitham Mustafa al Attar, planned and executed several attacks against Israel.[48] The IDF also said that Attar trained in Iran and “strengthened” Hezbollah’s knowledge of Iranian weapons.[49] The IDF noted that the killing inflicted further damage to Hezbollah’s air defense capabilities.[50] Hezbollah posted a tribute mourning Attar.[51]

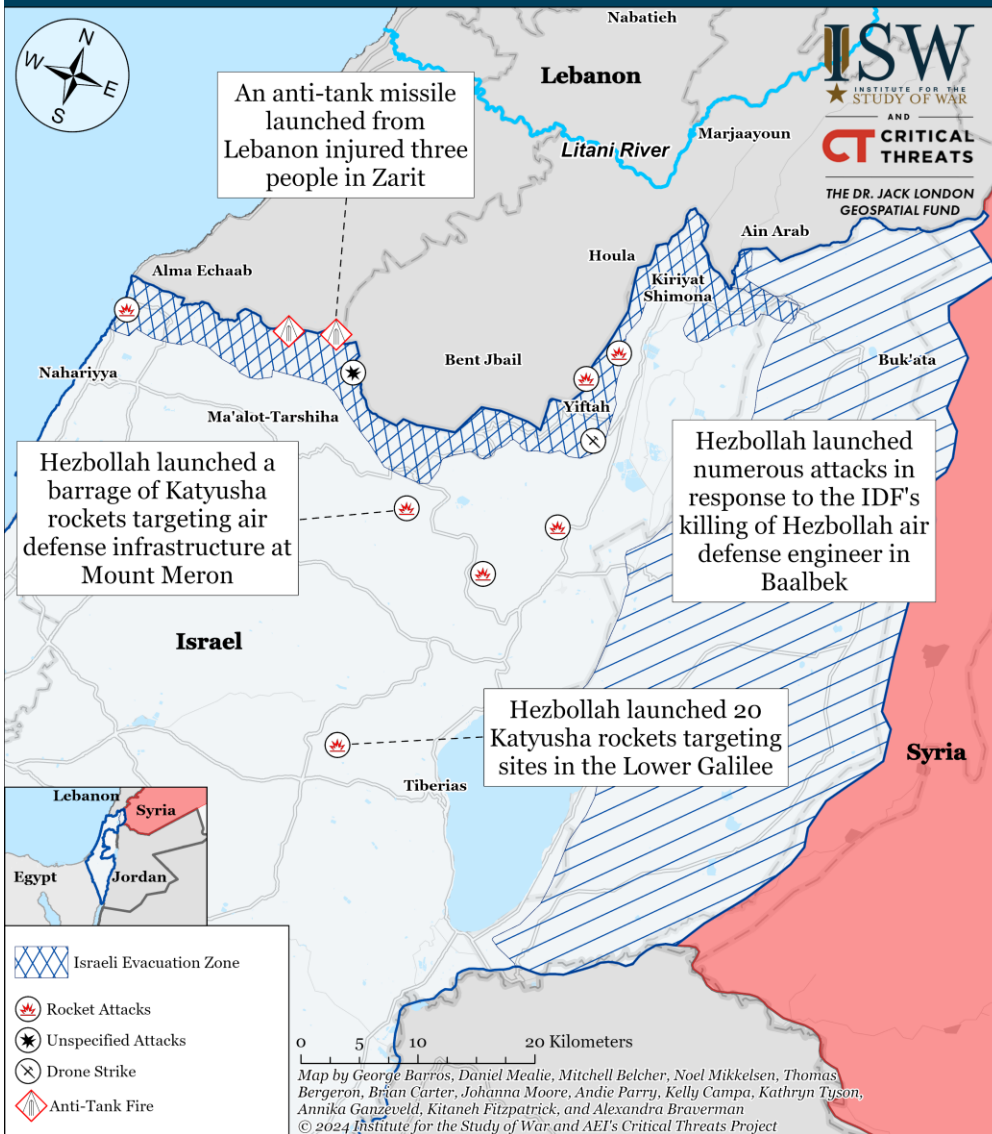
Lebanese Hezbollah launched a barrage of rockets into the Lower Galilee on July 7 in response to the Israeli strike targeting Attar. Hezbollah launched a barrage of 20 Katyusha rockets targeting an IDF site in the Lower Galilee.[52] The IDF intercepted some of the rockets.[53] An Israeli Army Radio correspondent noted that Hezbollah's targeting of sites in Lower Galilee marks an expansion of Hezbollah's firing range.[54] An Israeli man was injured by a falling rocket in Kfar Zeitim, approximately 18 miles from the Israel-Lebanon border.[55] Hezbollah's attacks after the strike that killed Attar activated alarms in towns that had not been targeted since October 2023.[56]

Lebanese Hezbollah also launched a heavy barrage of rockets targeting IDF air defense assets and surveillance equipment in response to the Israeli strike that killed Attar. Hezbollah launched approximately 20 Katyusha rockets targeting Israeli Air Force personnel and equipment at Mount Meron on July 7.[57] Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said on June 19 that Hezbollah has worked since February 2024 to "blind" Israel and shut down the IDF's operations at Mount Meron.[58] Mount Meron's facilities track targets and pass "control and action instructions" to Israeli forces.[59] Hezbollah aims to degrade Israel's integrated air defense system by targeting Mount Meron, which hosts air surveillance and battle management functions.[60] Hezbollah previously targeted Mount Meron four times in May 2024 and twice in June 2024.[61] An Israeli Army Radio correspondent also noted that Hezbollah's targeting of the Golani Junction in the Lower Galilee on July 7 could signal that Hezbollah is attacking Israel's air detection systems in response to an attack on a senior member of its air defense unit.[62] The correspondent reported that the Golani Junction is home to Sky Dew, an IDF high-altitude threat detection system responsible for air surveillance.[63]

Lebanese Hezbollah conducted at least eleven attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cut-off on July 6.[64] The IDF reported that anti-tank missiles fired from Lebanon injured one IDF soldier and two civilians, including an American citizen, at an IDF outpost at Zarit.[65]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon

As of July 7, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



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

Iran and Axis of Resistance

The Iranian Law Enforcement Command (LEC) arrested “eight members of a terrorist group” who tried to disrupt the Iranian presidential election in Sistan and Baluchistan province on July 4.[66] Sistan and Baluchistan province election headquarters chief Reza Sharifi stated the individuals crossed the border into Iran to carry out attacks throughout the province. Sharifi stated the LEC confiscated weapons and explosives from the eight arrested individuals. Afghanistan and Pakistan border Sistan and Baluchistan province. CTP-ISW has previously noted the uptick in anti-regime militancy in Sistan and Baluchistan province over the past six months.[67]

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei expressed satisfaction over increased voter turnout in the runoff election, which indicates Khamenei’s relative prioritization of maintaining the regime’s facade

of religious democratic legitimacy.[68] Khamenei’s vocal satisfaction with the increased voter turnout may indicate that Khamenei allowed Pezeshkian to win the election to preserve the appearance of Iran as a “religious democracy.” Election Headquarters Spokesperson Mohsen Eslami stated that voter participation in the July 5 runoff presidential election was more than 49 percent.[69] The Iranian Interior Ministry published the official voter turnout at 49.8 percent.[70] Khamenei has repeatedly expressed concern about low voter turnout rates in recent years and views participation in Iran’s presidential elections as a demonstration of Iran’s democratic legitimacy.[71] Iran’s first presidential election on June 28 recorded an unprecedented low voter turnout of 40 percent.[72] Khamenei emphasized Iran’s ability to hold “free and transparent” elections in the 50 days following the death of former president Ebrahim Raisi.[73]

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