

Iran Update, June 18, 2024

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Information Cutoff: 2:00pm ET

Iranian presidential candidates discussed the economy in the first debate for the upcoming election.^[1] The debate occurred on June 17. Below are the key takeaways from what the three presumed frontrunners said in the debate.

- **Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf (hardliner):** Ghalibaf expressed openness to nuclear negotiations with the West in order to remove sanctions from the economy.^[2] Ghalibaf suggested that a phased agreement could work to secure sanctions relief. Ghalibaf's comments are consistent with reports from Iranian opposition outlets saying that advisers to Ghalibaf have approached Western diplomats in recent weeks. CTP-ISW noted at the time that the outreach is possibly meant to set conditions for the resumption of nuclear negotiations if Ghalibaf becomes president.^[3] Ghalibaf also lamented that economic agreements that Iran has signed with China and Russia have not yet been operationalized.^[4] Ghalibaf separately identified inflation as one of the most pressing economic issues.
- **Saeed Jalili (hardliner).** Jalili contrastingly downplayed the importance of nuclear negotiations with the West.^[5] Jalili criticized past Iranian presidents, specifically Hassan Rouhani, for relying on international agreements to solve economic issues. Jalili instead promoted an agenda focused on autarkic policies and self-sufficiency. Jalili attributed issues, such as inflation and the struggling private sector, to resource mismanagement.
- **Masoud Pezeshkian (reformist).** Pezeshkian advocated for expanding economic diplomacy with regional and extra-regional countries.^[6] Pezeshkian asserted that Iran needs economic interaction with other countries in order to grow its economy. He specifically called for Iran to increase its exports and foreign investment. Pezeshkian separately stated that international sanctions have been a “disaster” for Iran, which is consistent with his historic support for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.^[7]

The dates and topics of the upcoming Iranian presidential debates are as follows:^[8]

June 20	justice-oriented services to the government
June 21	Culture and social cohesion
June 24	Iran's role in the world
June 25	The economy

Iran has begun running computer models that could support the research and development of nuclear weapons.[9] The purpose of the models is unclear. US and Israeli intelligence services have learned of the models and are investigating further, according to Axios.

The use of these models comes as Iran has expanded its nuclear program in recent months.[10] Anonymous diplomats told Reuters on June 12 that Iran is installing new centrifuges at its nuclear facilities at Natanz and Fordow, increasing the Iranian capacity to enrich uranium.[11] The Iranian stockpile of 60 percent enriched uranium separately increased by over 15 percent from February to May 2024, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), bringing the stockpile to around 6,201 kilograms.[12] The expansion of the Iranian nuclear program is especially noteworthy given that senior Iranian officials have threatened repeatedly to pursue nuclear weapons in recent months.[13]

Key Takeaways:

- **Iran:** Iranian presidential candidates discussed the economy in the first debate for the upcoming election.
- Iran has begun running computer models that could support the research and development of nuclear weapons.
- **Gaza Strip:** A senior Israeli negotiator told Agence France-Presse that Hamas still holds “dozens” of living hostages in the Gaza Strip.
- An Israeli Army Radio correspondent reported on June 18 details from an IDF Southern Command discussion on Hamas’ military capabilities in the Gaza Strip.
- **West Bank:** Israeli forces engaged Palestinian fighters in at least two locations in the West Bank.
- **Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights:** Lebanese Hezbollah conducted three attacks into northern Israel.
- **Iraq:** The US State Department designated Harakat Ansar Allah al Awfiya (HAAA) as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist.
- **Yemen:** US CENTCOM said that it has destroyed four Houthi radars and one Houthi unmanned surface vessel in Yemen.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of June 18, 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

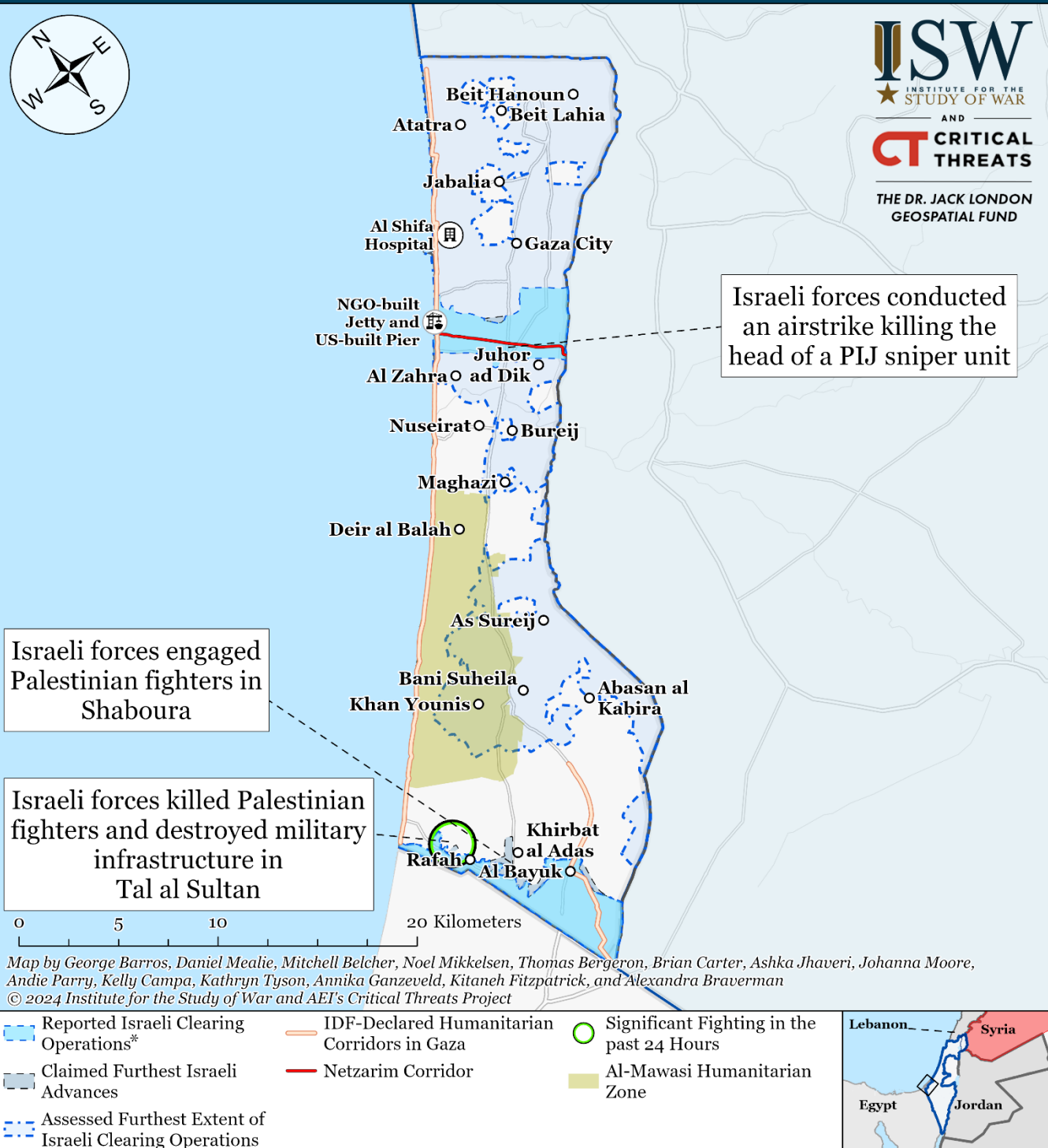
The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) 99th Division continued to operate along the Netzarim Corridor south of Gaza City on June 18. The IDF 99th Division directed an airstrike killing the head of a Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) sniper unit in the area.^[14] The IDF 8th Brigade killed a group of Palestinian fighters approaching nearby Israeli forces.^[15] Three Palestinian militias separately launched mortars and rockets targeting Israeli forces along the Netzarim Corridor.^[16]

The IDF Air Force conducted dozens of airstrikes in several unspecified areas in the Gaza Strip on June 18.^[17] Israeli airstrikes killed two fighters, who fired anti-tank munitions at Israeli forces.^[18] The IDF Navy also struck several fighters in support of Israeli ground forces.

The IDF 162nd Division continued clearing operations targeting fighters and military infrastructure in Rafah on June 18. The IDF Givati Brigade (162nd Division) engaged and killed several fighters in Rafah.^[19] The IDF 401st Brigade (162nd Division) killed fighters and destroyed military infrastructure above and below ground in the Tal al Sultan area in Rafah in recent days.^[20] Israeli forces also located weapons in Tal al Sultan.^[21] Three Palestinian militias separately engaged Israeli forces and fired mortars in Shaboura and Tal al Sultan, where Israeli forces are currently operating.^[22]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

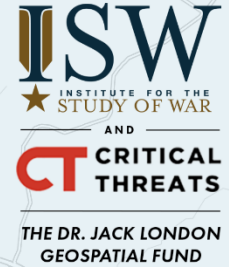
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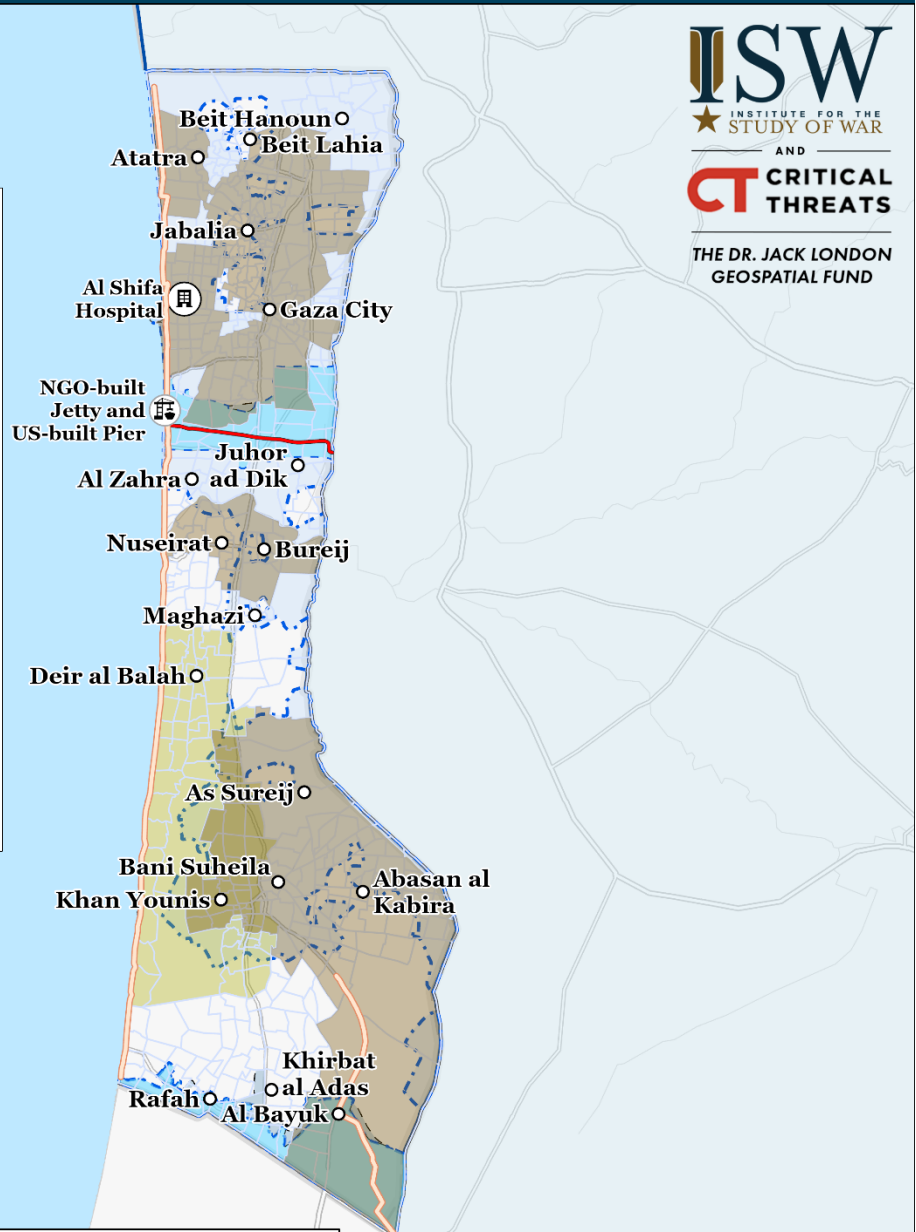
* ISW-CTP's "Reported Israeli Clearing Operations" layer uses the US military's doctrinal definition of clearing which is an operation that "requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance within an assigned area." Clearing operations frequently take weeks and sometimes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

Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip

As of June 18, 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*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridors in Gaza
- Netzarim Corridor

0 2.5 5 10 Kilometers

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Kathryn Tyson, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, and Alexandra Braverman - © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

* 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

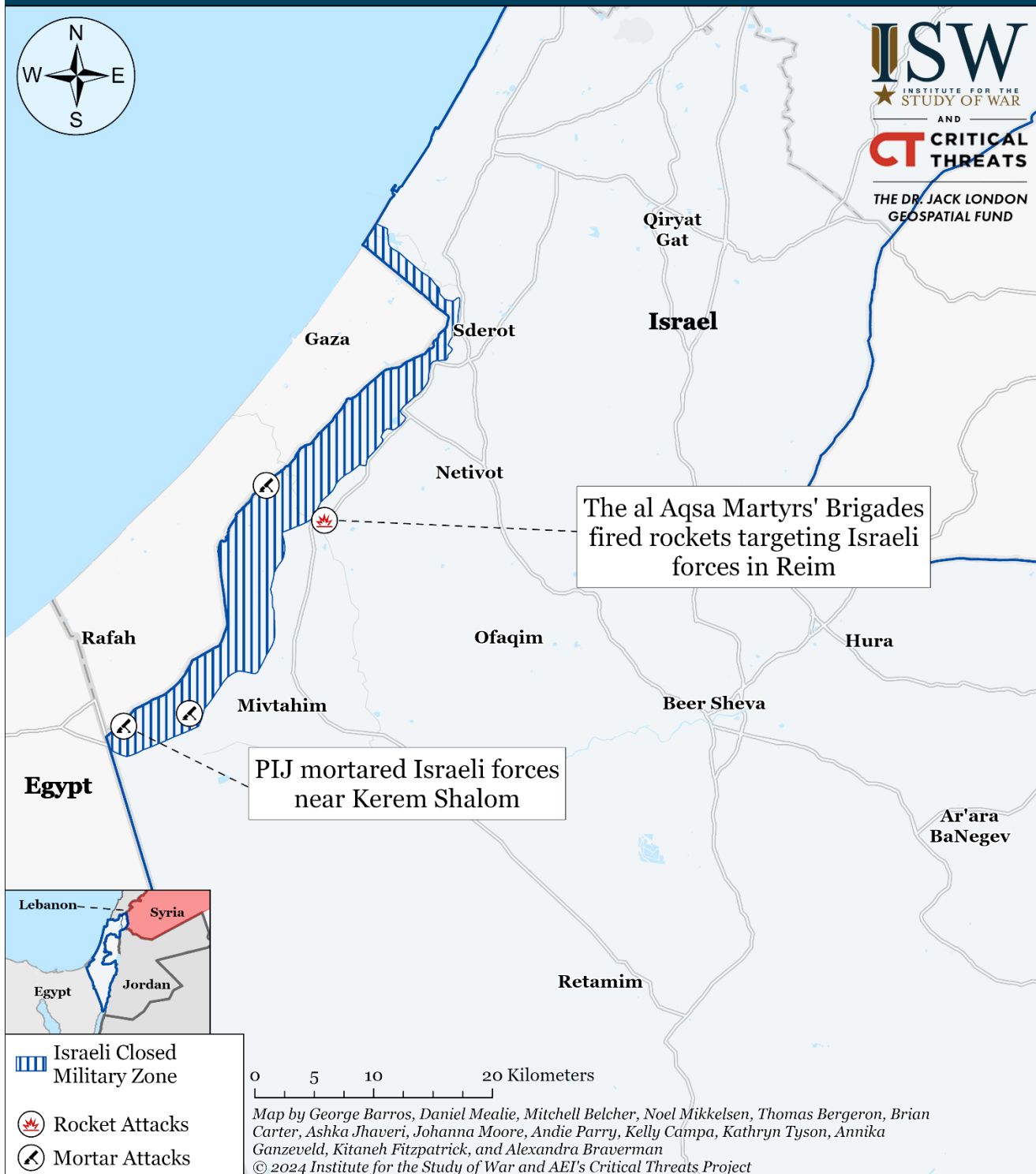
A senior Israeli negotiator told Agence France-Presse on June 17 that Hamas still holds “dozens” of living hostages in the Gaza Strip.[23] The official said that Hamas—rather than other militias—is holding most of the hostages. The official added that Hamas may not release the remaining hostages if Israel ends the war before the release of Palestinian prisoners. The report is inconsistent with Hamas’ recent claims that “no one has [any] idea” how many hostages are currently alive in the Gaza Strip.[24]

An Israeli Army Radio correspondent reported on June 18 details from an IDF Southern Command discussion on Hamas’ military capabilities in the Gaza Strip.[25] The correspondent reported that the IDF believes Hamas has turned into a “guerilla army” that lacks organized and uniform command and control in the strip.[26] An IDF officer recently said that Palestinian militias are embracing a more–guerilla-style “tactical concept” to defend against Israeli advances in the Gaza Strip.[27] The correspondent also said that the IDF estimates that Hamas maintains approximately 310 miles of tunnel systems in the Gaza Strip.[28] Unspecified senior IDF officials estimated in January 2024 that Hamas maintained tunnel networks between 350 and 450 miles in length.[29] The correspondent added that the IDF estimates that 15,000 Hamas fighters remain in the strip, including 2,000 fighters in the northern Gaza Strip.[30] The IDF said that this number is not sufficient for Hamas to govern the northern Gaza Strip. The remaining Hamas fighters in the area also prevents Israel from establishing an alternative government there, however.[31]

Palestinian fighters have conducted at least four indirect fire attacks into southern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cut off on June 17.[32] PIJ launched mortars targeting Israeli forces near Kerem Shalom and the IDF Sufa site.[33] The al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, which is the self-proclaimed military wing of Fatah, conducted a combined mortar attack with PIJ and the Popular Resistance Committees targeting Israeli forces at the Abu Mutaybaq site.[34] The Mujahedeen Brigades fired rockets targeting an IDF site near Re’im.[35]

Attacks into Israel from the Gaza Strip

As of June 18, 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 have engaged Palestinian fighters in at least two locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on June 17.[36]

The IDF, Shin Bet, and Israeli Border Police detained 14 Palestinians in the West Bank on June 18.[37] Israeli forces detained a Palestinian and seized small arms and approximately 27,000 US dollars in Kharbatha Bani Harith, west of Ramallah. Israeli forces also confiscated small arms, destroyed improved explosive device (IED) manufacturing materials, and identified and destroyed a planted IED in the Nablus area. The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired small arms and detonated IEDs targeting Israeli forces in Nablus.[38]



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

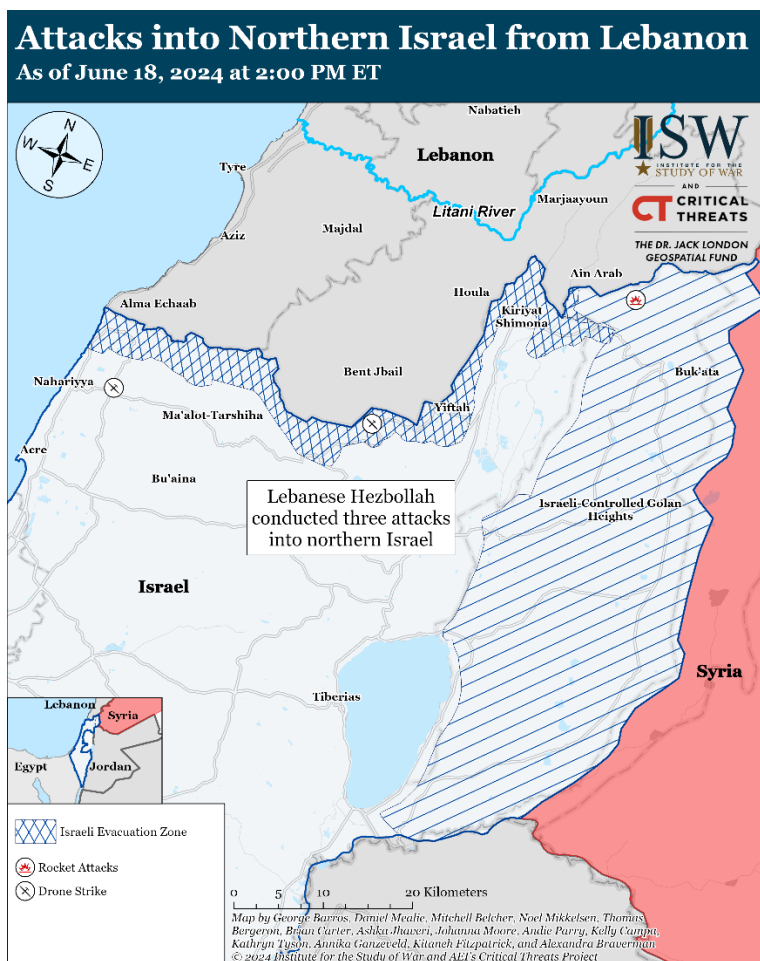
Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

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 conducted three attacks into northern Israel on June 18.[39] Hezbollah launched a "squadron" of one-way attack drones targeting artillery elements of the IDF 411th Artillery Battalion in Neve Ziv.[40] Israeli Army Radio reported that the IDF intercepted three drones over Kibbutz Kabri.[41] Hezbollah also targeted a Merkava tank near Yiron with a one-way attack drone.[42]

Hezbollah posted footage on June 18 reportedly showing a Hezbollah reconnaissance drone flight over northern Israel, including near Haifa.[43] Hezbollah claimed that the footage included shots of an IDF naval base, Iron Dome batteries, and a David's Sling air defense system.[44]



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

Iran and Axis of Resistance

The US State Department designated Harakat Ansar Allah al Awfiya (HAAA) as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist on June 17.^[45] The State Department reported that HAAA is a member of the Islamic Resistance of Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—and was involved in the January 2024 drone attack on Tower 22 that killed three US servicemembers. HAAA has also threatened to continue attacks targeting US interests in the Middle East, according to the State Department. Ansar Allah al Awfiya was established as the 19th Popular Mobilization Forces Brigade in 2014.^[46]

Deputy Commander of Iraqi Joint Operations Qais Mohammadawi met with the French Armed Forces Inspector Marc Ouellet on June 18 to discuss French and Iraqi military cooperation.^[47] Mohammadawi and Ouellet discussed progress toward signing a memorandum of understanding between Iraq and France centered on advancing Iraqi Security Forces' capabilities, particularly Iraq's Air Force.

US CENTCOM said on June 17 that it has destroyed four Houthi radars and one Houthi unmanned surface vessel in Yemen since June 16.^[48] The CENTCOM report follows Houthi claims on June 17 that the United States and United Kingdom conducted airstrikes targeting two areas in Yemen.^[49] CENTCOM also intercepted one Houthi drone over the Red Sea.

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[2] <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1403/03/28/3105975/>

[3] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-june-10-2024>

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[9] <https://www.axios.com/2024/06/18/iran-nuclear-model-us-israel-assessing-intelligence>

[10] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-june-13-2024>

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