

Iran Update



**Ashka Jhaveri, Kelly Campa, Annika Ganzeveld,
Alexandra Braverman, and Nicholas Carl**

May 29, 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.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced on May 29 that it established “operational control” of the Philadelphi Corridor on the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip.[1] Israeli officials have described Israeli operations along the corridor as meant to disrupt some of Hamas’ primary smuggling routes into the Gaza Strip.[2] Israeli forces have uncovered around 20 tunnels that connect Egypt to the Gaza Strip in recent days.[3] Israel was aware of some of these tunnels beforehand but not all of them.[4] The IDF said that it has communicated with Egypt regarding the tunnels, however, an unspecified Egyptian official speaking to Egyptian media disputed this assertion.[5]

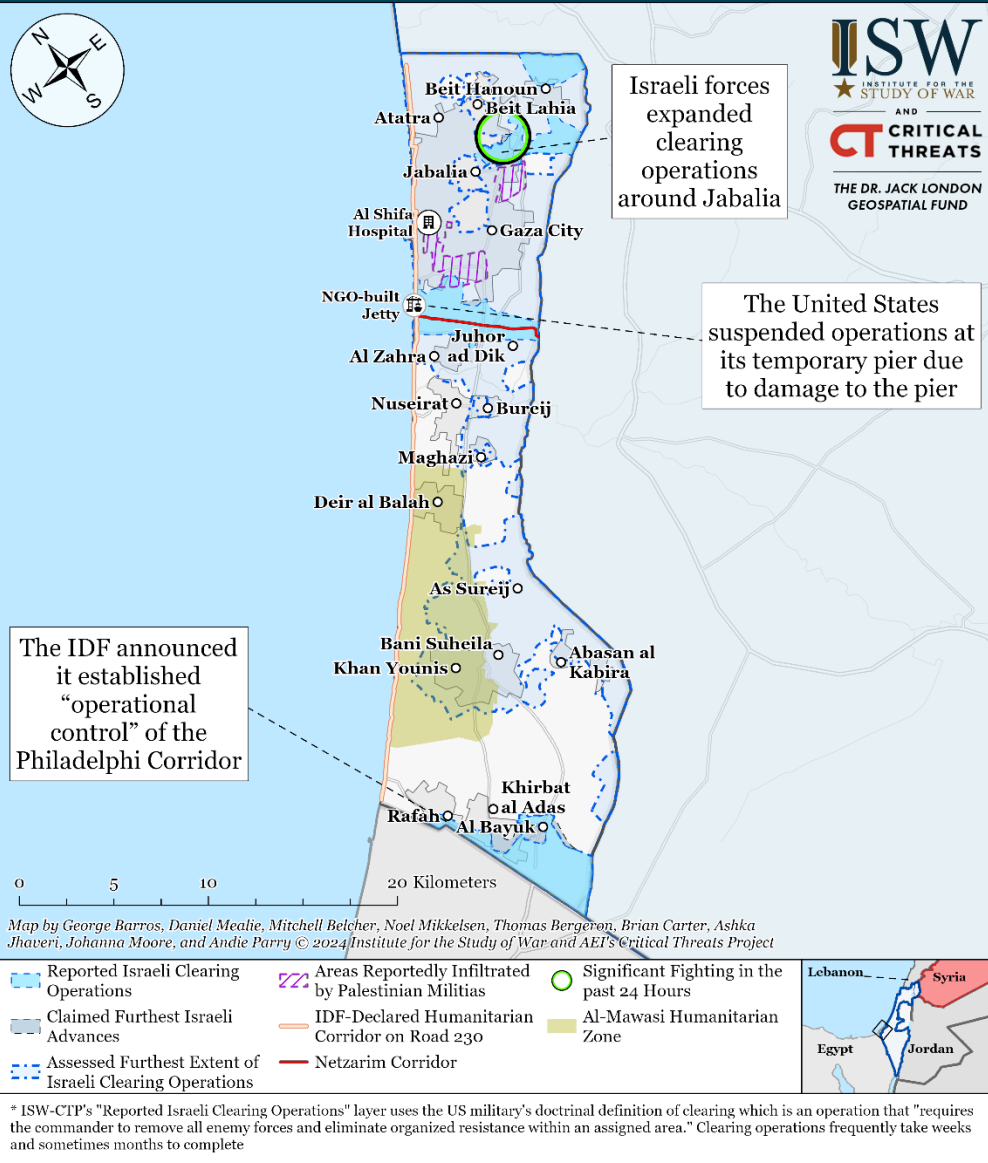
Israeli forces are currently operating along most of the corridor, excluding a small area near the Gazan coast. The IDF said that it controls the corridor with “surveillance and fire power.”[6] The IDF previously controlled about 70 percent of the corridor on May 22—two weeks after first advancing into Rafah on May 7.[7] The IDF said that Hamas has used the corridor to launch rocket attacks in recent weeks because Hamas assumed that the IDF would avoid the corridor so as to not inadvertently hit Egyptian territory.[8]

Israeli officials reportedly expect that controlling the Philadelphi corridor will prevent Hamas from importing weapons into the Gaza Strip.[9] Hamas will continue its efforts to reconstitute throughout the Gaza Strip, despite these efforts.

Israeli National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi said on May 29 that he expects fighting in the Gaza Strip to last for the remainder of 2024.[10] Hanegbi said that Israel needs that time to destroy the military and governmental capabilities of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). PIJ is one of several Iranian-backed Palestinian militias that has fought alongside Hamas in the war.[11]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

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Iraqi Interior Minister Abdul Amir al Shammari traveled to Tehran on May 29 to discuss internal security cooperation with senior Iranian military officials. Shammari met with Iranian Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Mohammad Bagheri, Law Enforcement Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan, and Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi.[12] These Iranian officials are responsible for overseeing significant portions of the Iranian internal security apparatus and domestic repression. They are all involved to varying degrees, for instance, in controlling the Law Enforcement Command (LEC), which is the premier Iranian internal security service and heavily involved in suppressing political dissent. Radan emphasized in his meeting with Shammari that Iran is ready to share law enforcement experiences with Iraq.[13] Radan also called for greater cooperation between the LEC anti-riot and cyber units and the Iraqi federal police, which Shammari oversees.[14]

Shammari will also meet with Supreme National Defense University President Brigadier General Esmail Ahmadi Moghaddam during his visit to discuss the SNDU training Iraqi officers.[15] Moghaddam—like Radan—has a long history of leading crackdowns in Iran, as Moghaddam served as Iranian law enforcement commander from 2005 to 2015.[16] He was instrumental in the crackdown on the Green Movement in 2009. The United States sanctioned Moghaddam in 2011 for human rights abuses.[17] Shammari previously met Moghaddam when the latter visited Baghdad in December 2023.[18] CTP-ISW assessed at the time that Moghaddam may have discussed his experience suppressing civil unrest during his meetings with Iraqi officials.[19]

Mohammad Bagheri separately called on the Iraqi federal government to fully implement the March 2023 security agreement between Iran and Iraq during his meeting with Shammari.[20] This agreement requires Iraqi authorities to disarm and relocate Kurdish opposition groups away from the border with Iran.[21]

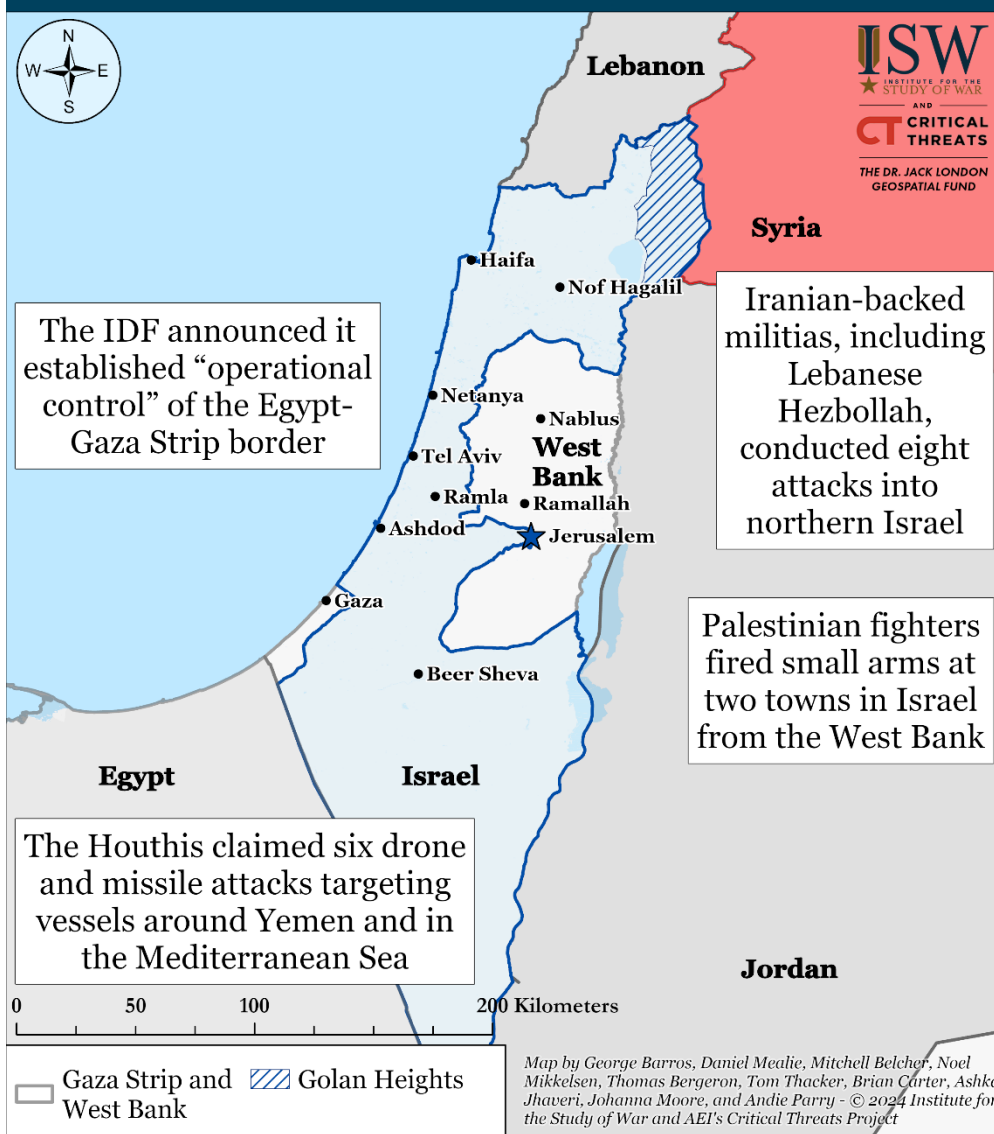
Iran is broadcasting that it has helped the Houthis develop anti-ship ballistic missile capabilities. IRGC-affiliated Tasnim News Agency published English-language and Persian-language articles on May 29 discussing how Iran has provided technical knowledge and materials to the Houthis to help them build anti-ship ballistic missiles.[22] Tasnim News Agency specifically touted that the Houthis have based their Muhit missiles on the Iranian Ghadr anti-ship ballistic missile.[23] Tasnim News Agency added that the Houthis present serious challenges to the United States and Israel because of these capabilities. The publication of these articles is unusual in that Iran rarely acknowledges its provision of material support to the Houthis. The IRGC almost certainly published these articles in order to broadcast the Iranian role in empowering the Houthis and the so-called “Axis of Resistance” more broadly.

Key Takeaways:

- **Southern Gaza Strip:** The IDF announced that it established “operational control” of the Philadelphi Corridor on the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip.
- **Iraq:** Iraqi Interior Minister Abdul Amir al Shammari traveled to Tehran to discuss internal security cooperation with senior Iranian military officials.
- **Yemen:** Iran is broadcasting that it has helped the Houthis develop anti-ship ballistic missile capabilities.
- **Northern Gaza Strip:** Israeli forces have expanded their clearing operations in Jabalia in recent days.
- **Humanitarian Aid:** The United States suspended operations at its temporary pier in the Gaza Strip due to damage sustained at sea.
- **West Bank:** Palestinian fighters fired small arms at two towns in Israel from the West Bank.
- **Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights:** Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted at least eight attacks into northern Israel.
- **Iran:** Policy adviser to the Iranian supreme leader, Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani, appears to be re-entering public Iranian discourse ahead of the Iranian presidential election in June 2024.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

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Gaza Strip

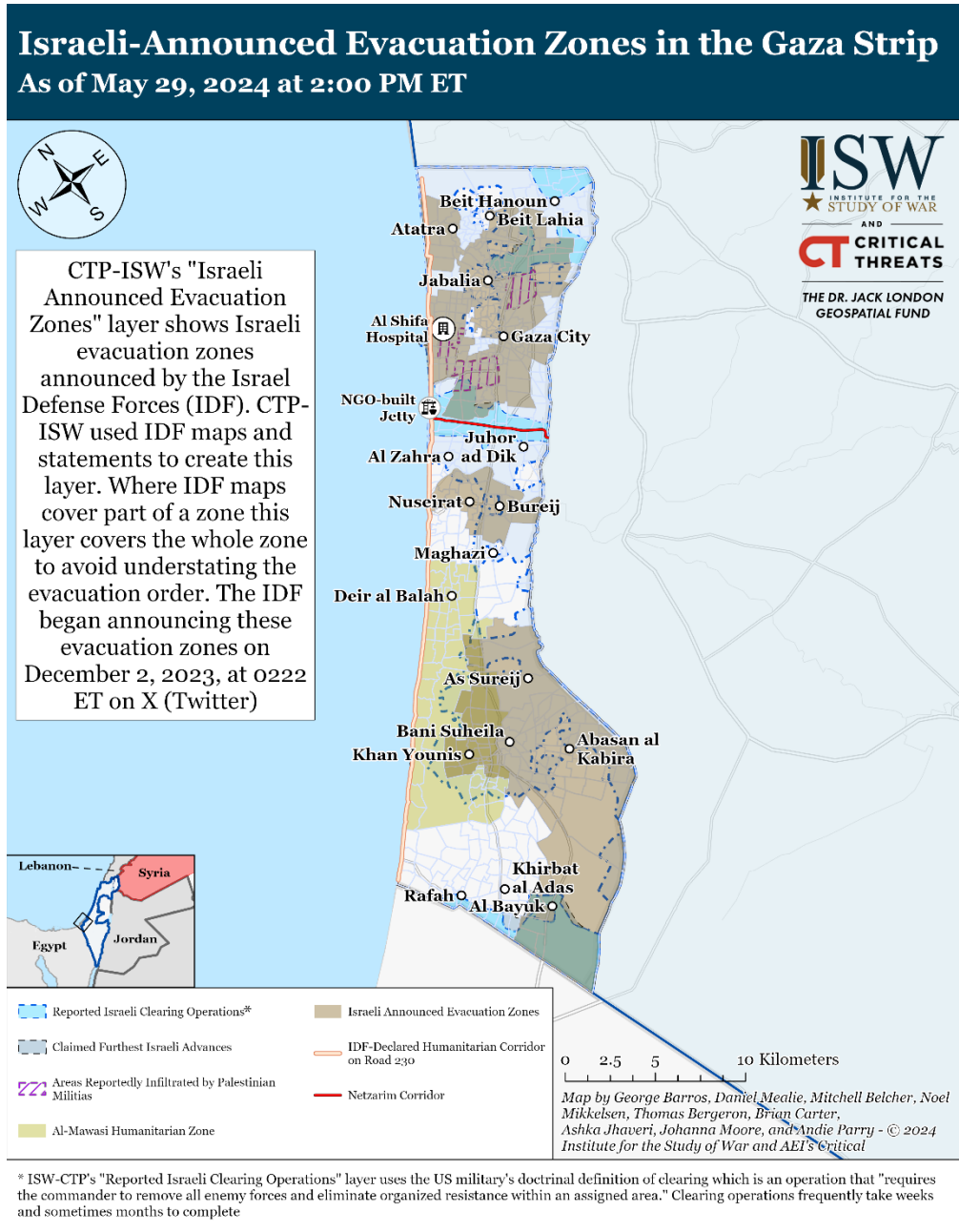
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Erode the will of the Israeli political establishment and the public to sustain clearing operations in the Gaza Strip
- Reestablish Hamas as the governing authority in the Gaza Strip

Israeli forces have expanded their clearing operations in Jabalia in recent days. The IDF said on May 29 that its 7th Brigade had gone into new and dense parts of Jabalia.[24] Commercially available satellite imagery captured on May 29 shows destroyed buildings and flattened terrain in western Jabalia, indicating that Israeli tanks and/or bulldozers operated there. Israeli forces raided

militia sites, destroyed rocket launchers, and located weapons. Palestinian militias claimed attacks targeting the IDF in Jabalia refugee camp and near Beit Lahia, north of Jabalia.[25]

Israeli forces engaged Palestinian fighters in several parts of Rafah on May 29.[26] The IDF reported that Palestinian fighters detonated a house near the Rafah crossing, killing three IDF Nahal Brigade soldiers and injuring five others.[27] Hamas has used several house-borne improvised explosive device (IED) attacks throughout the war, including in Rafah on May 28.[28]



The *New York Times* reported on May 29 that the IDF used GBU-39 bombs in an airstrike to kill Hamas senior officials in Tel al Sultan, Rafah, on May 26.[29] The Tel al Sultan strike caused a fire that killed 45 Palestinian civilians, according to local officials.[30] The *New York Times* said that the United States has pushed Israel to use the bombs as they are precise and suited for urban environments.[31] Israeli officers said after leaving Rafah that the IDF is using “less airpower and artillery, and fewer, smaller bombs” in Rafah.[32] The IDF has not confirmed what munition it used for the attack.

The United States said that the IDF attack in Tel al Sultan, Rafah, did not cross US President Joe Biden’s “red line” for a “major military operation” in Rafah.[33] US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said that the IDF deploying tens of thousands of troops against a “wide variety of targets on the ground in a massive way” would constitute a major military operation but that Israel has not done such an operation at this time.[34] US President Biden said on May 8 that the United States will stop supplying Israel with certain weapons if Israel conducts a major military operation into Rafah.[35]

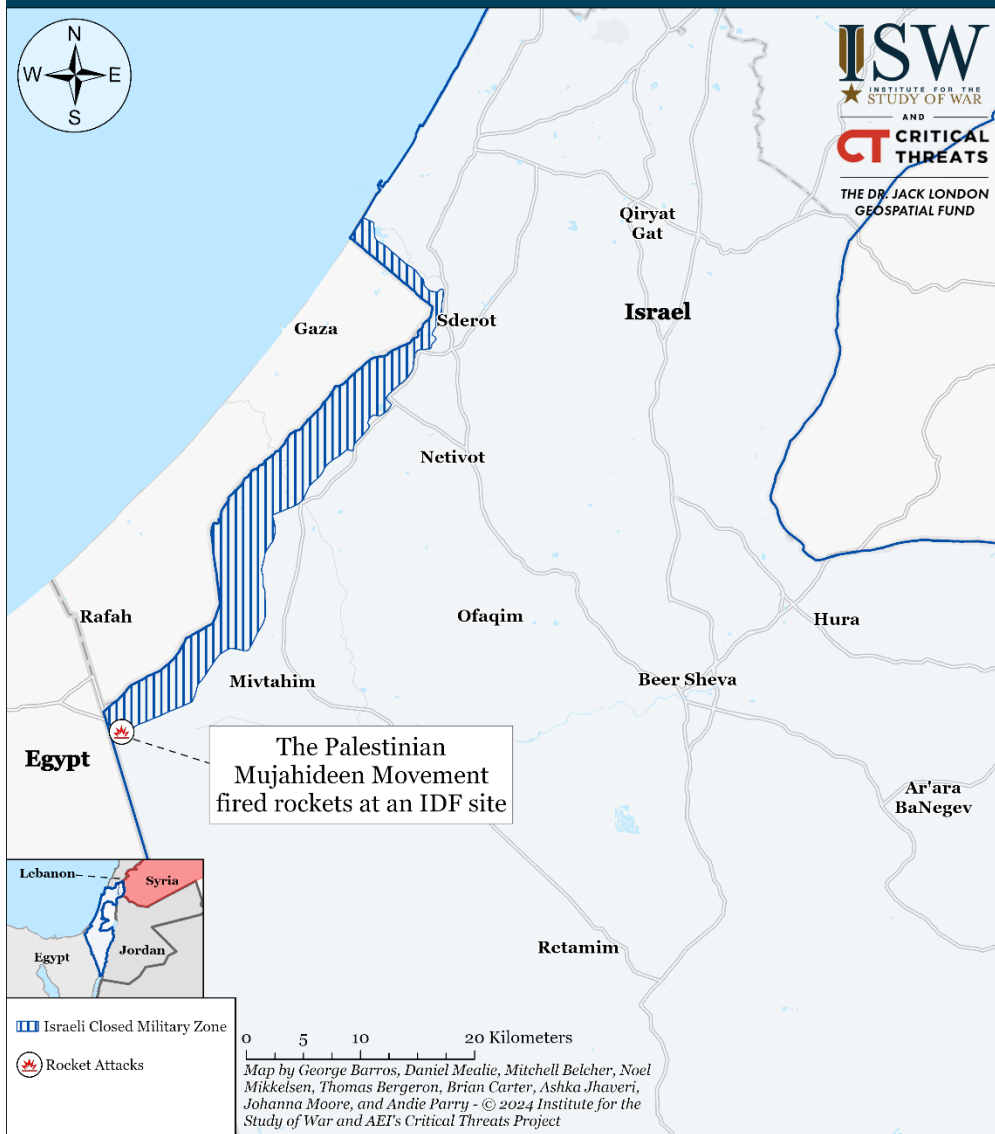
The World Central Kitchen (WCK) paused operations at its main location in Rafah on May 28 for security reasons.[36] WCK said that it would relocate its community kitchens “further north” in response to “ongoing attacks” around Rafah.

The United States suspended operations at its temporary pier in the Gaza Strip due to damage sustained at sea.[37] Four US Army landing crafts and part of the US-constructed pier in the Gaza Strip were swept away by waves on May 25.[38] The US Defense Department said on May 28 that Israel is assisting in recovering the vessels.[39] US CENTCOM will conduct repairs on the pier, which will take at least a week before the pier can be re-anchored to the Gazan coast.[40]

The Palestinian Mujahideen Movement fired rockets from the Gaza Strip at an IDF site in southern Israel.[41] The group is a Palestinian faction aligned with Hamas and has expressed close ties with Iran.[42]

Attacks into Israel from Gaza

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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 five locations across the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cut off on May 28.[43] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades detonated IEDs targeting Israeli forces in two areas near Tulkarm.[44]

Palestinian fighters fired small arms at two towns in Israel from the West Bank on May 29.[45] Hamas fighters fired small arms at Bat Hefer, Israel, from Tulkarm.[46] Hamas previously fired small arms in the general direction of Bat Hefer on May 27.[47] Palestinian fighters separately fired small arms at Gan Ner, Israel, from Jenin.[48]



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

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

Axis of Resistance objectives:

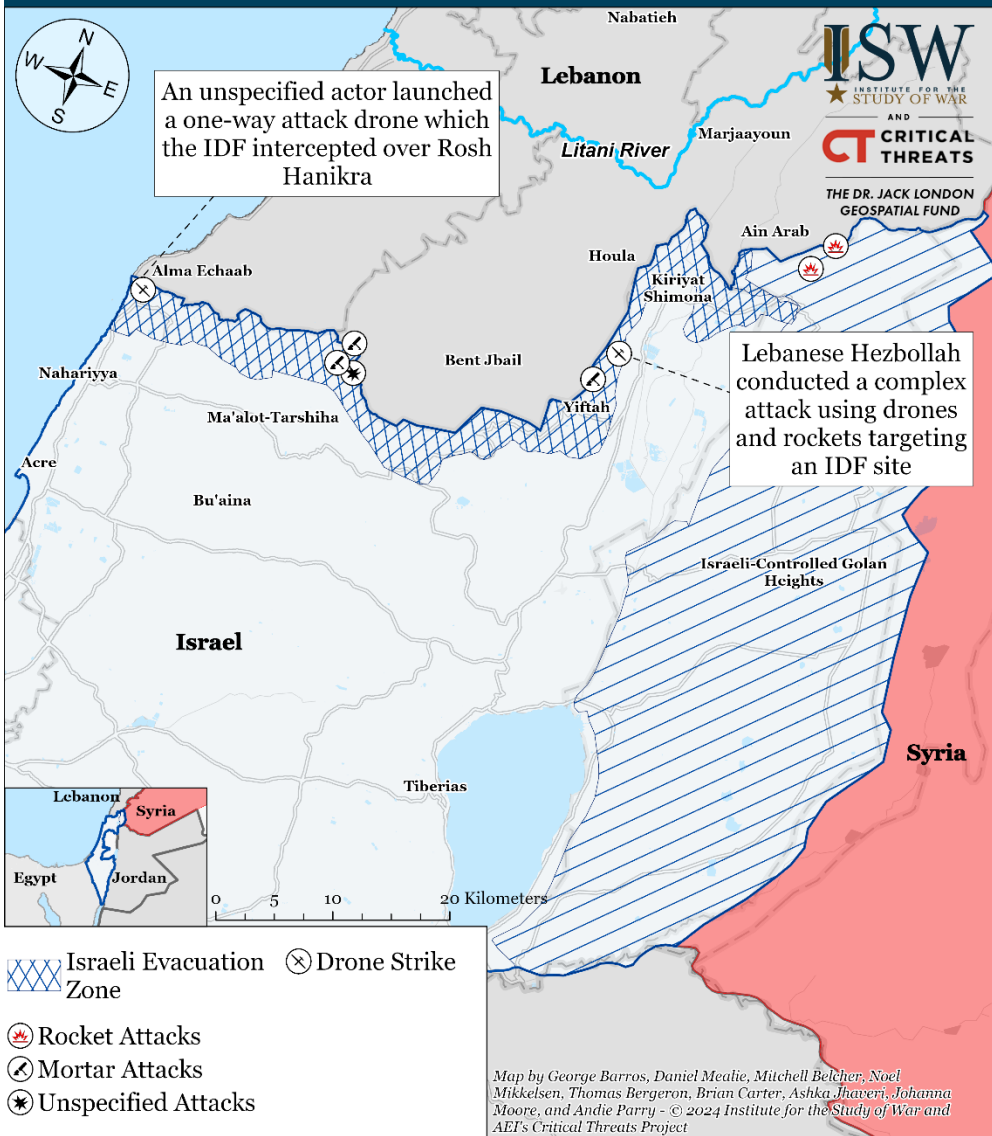
- Deter Israel from conducting a ground operation into Lebanon
- Prepare for an expanded and protracted conflict with Israel in the near term
- Expel the United States from Syria

Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, have conducted at least eight attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on May 28.[49] The IDF intercepted a one-way attack drone over Rosh Hanikra in northern Israel.[50] Neither Hezbollah nor any Palestinian militias have claimed responsibility for the attack at the time of this writing.

The IDF Golani Brigade has conducted military exercises in northern Israel in recent weeks to simulate combat in Lebanon.[51] Israeli forces trained to capture objectives in Lebanese territory. The IDF incorporated lessons from fighting in the Gaza Strip into the exercises. The IDF Golani Brigade has been in a “defensive battle” on the northern Israel border since February 2024.

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon

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Iran and Axis of Resistance

Policy adviser to the Iranian supreme leader, Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani, appears to be re-entering public Iranian discourse ahead of the Iranian presidential election in June 2024. Shamkhani, who is the former secretary of the Iranian Supreme National Security Council, posted on X (Twitter) on May 29 that the next Iranian president must prioritize improving Iran's economic, political, and security position in the Middle East.[52] Shamkhani's remarks on the presidency come after Iranian journalists reported on May 27 that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appointed Shamkhani to lead nuclear negotiations on behalf of Iran with the United States.[53] CTP-

ISW previously hypothesized that Shamkhani is positioning himself to either run for president or receive a high-level appointment in the next administration.

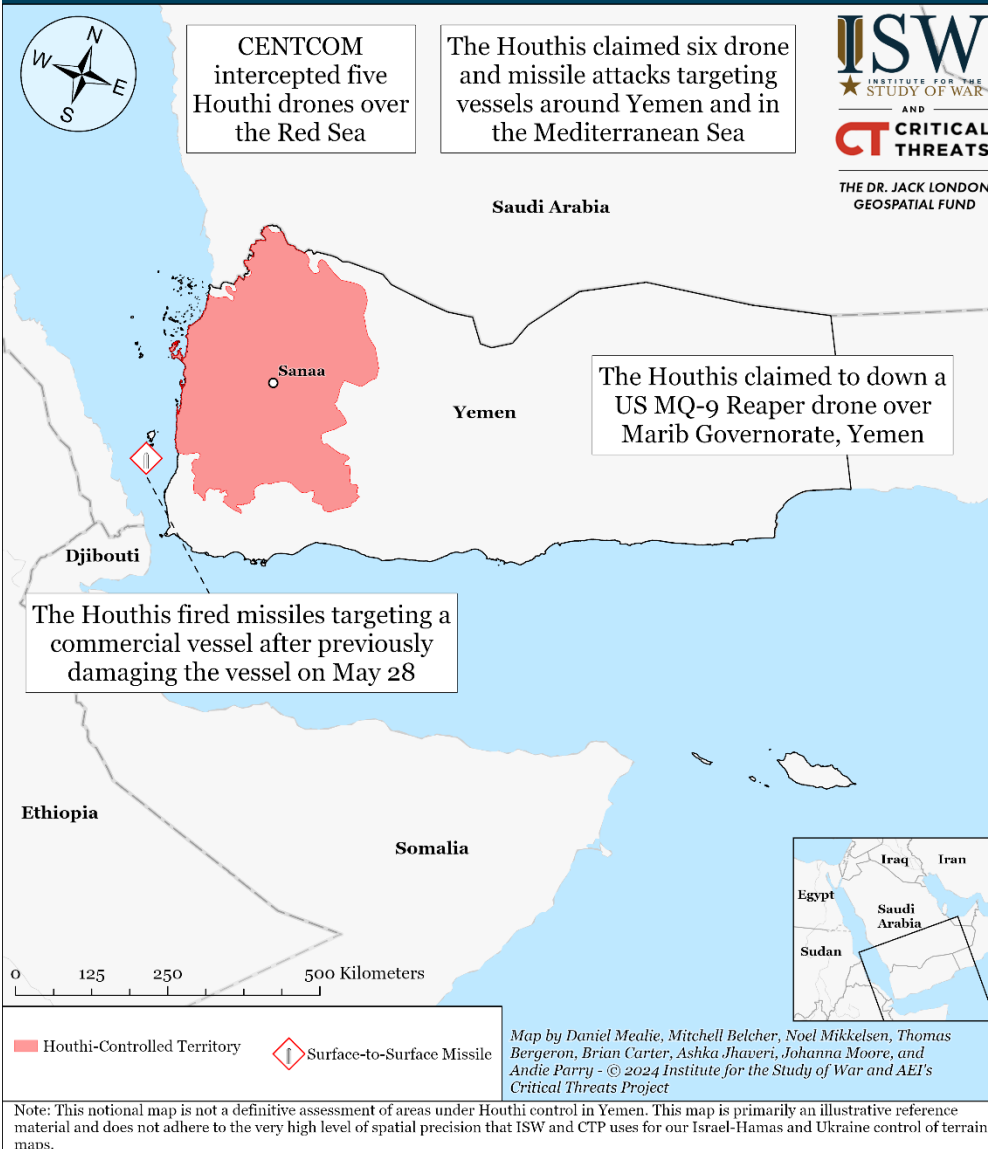
US Central Command (CENTCOM) intercepted five Houthi one-way attack drones over the Red Sea on May 28.[54] CENTCOM assessed that the drones presented an imminent threat to merchant vessels in the area.

The Houthis claimed six drone and missile attacks targeting vessels in the Red Sea, Arabian Sea, and Mediterranean Sea on May 29.[55] The Houthis damaged the Marshall-Islands flagged, Greek-owned and operated *Laax* on May 28.[56] United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) and CENTCOM reported that Houthis attacked the *Laax* a second time with five anti-ship ballistic missiles 33 nautical miles northwest of al Mukha, Yemen, on May 29.[57] Three of the missiles impacted the vessel. Reuters reported that the vessel proceeded to its scheduled port of call in the United Arab Emirates following the attack.[58] Houthi spokesperson Brigadier General Yahya Sarea said that the Houthi attacks were part of the "fourth phase of escalation" that the Houthis launched in response to Israeli military activity in Rafah.[59] Houthi supreme leader Abdul Malik al Houthi declared during a speech on May 9 that the Houthis would launch the fourth phase and escalate attacks following the limited Israeli operation into Rafah.[60]

Houthi Spokesperson Brigadier General Yahya Sarea claimed that the Houthis downed a US MQ-9 Reaper drone over a Houthi-controlled area of Marib Governorate, Yemen, on May 29.[61] Sarea claimed the Houthis used a surface-to-air missile to down the drone. Yemeni sources circulated videos on social media of a downed drone in the desert.[62] CENTCOM acknowledged that there were reports about the downed drone but did not confirm the incident.[63]

Houthi Attacks in the Red Sea

As of May 29, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



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