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Iran Update, September 19, 2024

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Information Cutoff: 2:00pm ET

Israeli sources reported on September 19 that Israeli officials are deciding whether the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) will conduct an offensive into Lebanon.^[1] Hezbollah will almost certainly not cease rocket fire into northern Israel, which will necessitate an Israeli operation if Israel hopes to achieve its stated objectives in northern Israel. The Israeli security cabinet approved "returning the residents of the north securely to their homes" as an official war objective on September 16.[2] Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on September 12 that a political settlement alone will not return displaced citizens to northern Israel and that Israel is "preparing for a broad campaign" to accomplish Israeli objectives.[3] Netanyahu chaired a security meeting with military and political leaders at the HaKirya in Tel Aviv on September 19 to discuss the IDF's possible courses of action against Hezbollah in Lebanon, according to Israeli Army Radio.[4] The meeting follows Israel's multi-stage attack that detonated explosives in Hezbollah communications devices that killed 32 Hezbollah fighters and injured over 3,000 on September 17 and 18.[5] Israel also conducted pre-emptive strikes targeting over 150 Hezbollah rocket launchers ready to fire at Israel on September 19.[6] Israel has deployed additional IDF units to the northern sector since September 18.[7] Israeli media reported that the IDF does not have "imminent" plans to undertake a new major operation against Hezbollah in Lebanon, however, and that the Israeli security cabinet instructed the IDF to wait to see Hezbollah's chosen course of action.[8]

Lebanese Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah declared in a September 19 speech that Hezbollah would continue to conduct attacks targeting Israel. Nasrallah said that Hezbollah would not stop its cross-border attacks in support of Gaza and that Israel would face a "severe reckoning" in response to the explosive device attacks.[9] Nasrallah did not specify when Hezbollah would conduct this retaliatory attack, however. Nasrallah has frequently delivered direct threats against Israel but seldom follows through upon these threats. There have been a few occasions on which Hezbollah has carried out Nasrallah's threats by conducting attacks that Nasrallah deemed to be appropriate, however.[10] Nasrallah did retaliate as promised after Israel killed top Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukr, for example. Hezbollah fired between 200 and 300 projectiles, including around 20 one-way attack drones, on August 24, a month after Israel killed Shukr.[11] Nasrallah is

currently facing competing priorities that highlight Hezbollah's constraints and impact his decisionmaking as he calculates Hezbollah's response to Israel's actions.

Nasrallah is extremely unlikely to give the order to cease Hezbollah rocket attacks into northern Israel because he must continue to support his partners in the Axis of **Resistance.** Continuing to fire rockets into Israel increases the risk of war, given the stated Israeli aim to return its civilians to their homes in northern Israel. This aim is not possible unless Hezbollah rocket fire ceases. This objective is in tension with other Hezbollah priorities, which include avoiding a major war with Israel to prevent jeopardizing Hezbollah's preeminent political position in Lebanon. Nasrallah ex post facto recognized that his decision initiating the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War by kidnapping three Israeli soldiers was a strategic mistake, likely due in part to the negative impact the war had on Hezbollah's political position in Lebanon.^[12] Nasrallah is unlikely to abandon his Axis of Resistance partners in the end, however, because to do so would severely diminish Hezbollah's regional position as a leader of the Axis of Resistance. Hezbollah trainers, for example, routinely work with Iranianbacked militias in Syria to sustain ground lines of communication between Iran and Hezbollah. Losing influence with these groups could have detrimental impacts for Hezbollah's long-term strength in the region and in Lebanon. It could also undermine Hezbollah's unity, as Nasrallah's relative caution is likely not reflective of the attitudes of all Hezbollah rank-and-file. Hezbollah's rank-and-file is presumably more in favor of continuing operations against Israel, given the recent Israeli communications attacks and ongoing Israeli airstrikes targeting mid-level Hezbollah commanders.

Iranian officials stated that there will be a response to the Israeli operation that detonated pagers belonging to Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon on September 17. Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Commander Hossein Salami vowed a "crushing response" from the Axis of Resistance in a message to Lebanese Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah on September 19.[13] Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian reiterated his condemnation for the attack in Lebanon and stated on X (Twitter) that "God...takes revenge and [Israel] will definitely be punished justly" on September 19.[14] Salami separately visited Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon Mojtaba Amani, who had been injured in the attack, after Amani had been transferred to a hospital in Tehran on September 19.[15] The Iranian Ambassador to the UN Saeed Iravani said in a letter to the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres on September 18 that Iran will follow up the attack and Iran has the right to respond to Israel's attack in Lebanon.[16]

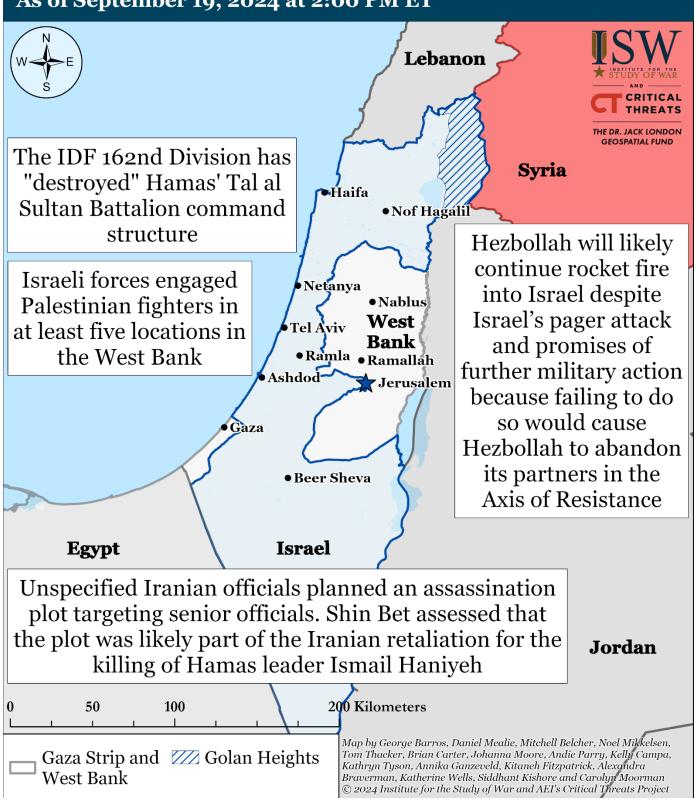
Unspecified Iranian officials planned an assassination plot targeting the Israeli prime minister, defense minister, or other senior officials. The Israeli Shin Bet assessed that the plot was likely part of an effort to retaliate against Israel for the operation that killed Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran in July 2024. It is not clear which specific Iranian officials had knowledge of or approved this plan. It is also unclear whether multiple government agencies were aware of the plan. The Shin Bet and Israel Police announced that Iran allegedly recruited an Israeli civilian in a failed plot to assassinate a senior Israeli political or defense officials viewed the assassination plans as "revenge" for Israel killing Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran in July 2024.[18] The

Israeli civilian traveled to Iran and Turkey several times and met with an Iranian businessman there who presented himself as a member of the Iranian intelligence apparatus.[19] The Israeli civilian met with the "businessman" and his associates abroad on numerous occasions beginning in April 2024.[20] The fact that Iran cultivated this asset in April 2024 suggests that Iranian intelligence did not initially recruit this asset for an assassination operation directly related to the Haniyeh killing, given that Israel killed Haniyeh in July 2024. The Shin Bet did not provide indications as to whether the Israeli civilian made significant progress in carrying out any these assassination plots.[21] Israel Police arrested the civilian in August 2024.[22]

Key Takeaways:

- **Lebanon:** Israeli sources reported on September 19 that Israeli officials are deciding whether the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) will conduct an offensive into Lebanon. Hezbollah will almost certainly not cease rocket fire into northern Israel, which will necessitate an Israeli operation if Israel hopes to achieve its stated objectives in northern Israel. Nasrallah is extremely unlikely to give the order to cease Hezbollah rocket attacks into northern Israel because he must continue to support his partners in the Axis of Resistance.
- **Iran and Israel:** Unspecified Iranian officials planned an assassination plot targeting the Israeli prime minister, defense minister, or other senior officials. The Israeli Shin Bet assessed that the plot was likely part of an effort to retaliate against Israel for the operation that killed Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran in July 2024.
- **Gaza Strip:** Senior Hamas official Hossam Badran said on September 19 that the group is not optimistic that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to Cairo will produce a ceasefire agreement.
- **Iraq:** An Iraqi politician said that the IRGC Quds Force Commander met with Iranian-backed Iraqi militia leaders in Baghdad and ordered the militias to "calm the political and military situation in Iraq" due to current regional developments, which is consistent with prior CTP-ISW assessments.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War As of September 19, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



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<u>Gaza Strip</u>

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 162nd Division said it killed over 300 fighters and destroyed most of Hamas' chain of command in Tal al Sultan, Rafah, during operations over the past month.[23] The IDF destroyed Hamas long-range rocket and ammunition depots in Tal al Sultan.[24]

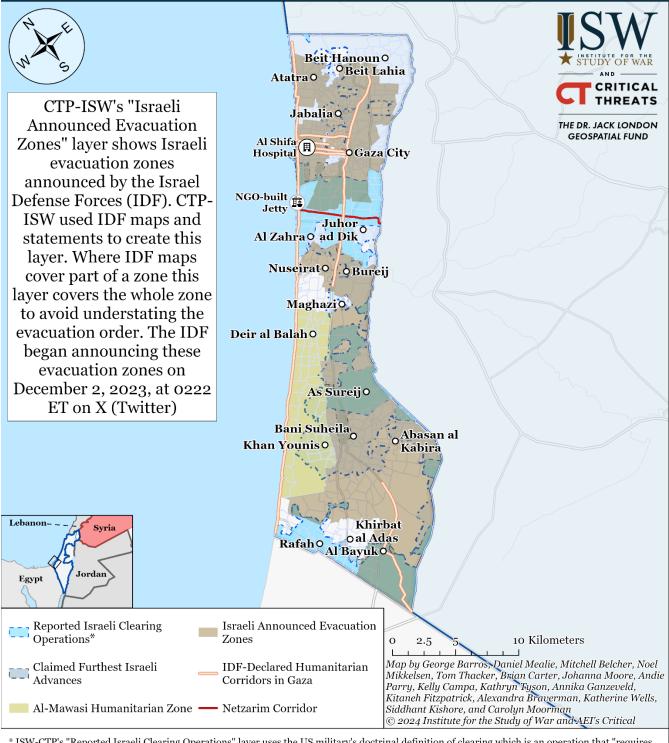
Hamas fired rocket-propelled grenades and detonated explosively formed penetrators targeting Israeli forces in Rafah City on September 19.[25]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip As of September 19, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



* 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 September 19, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



* 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 Senior Hamas official Hossam Badran said on September 19 that the group is not optimistic that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to Cairo will produce a ceasefire agreement.[26] Blinken traveled to Cairo from September 17 to September 19 to meet with Egyptian officials and discuss an Israel-Hamas ceasefire-hostage deal.[27] Badran claimed that reaching an agreement requires substantial US pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and that Netanyahu is setting impossible conditions on Hamas to obstruct negotiations.[28] Hamas has relaxed its negotiating position very little since December 2023, opting instead to play for time and hope that Hamas' information operations, including the exploitation and execution of hostages for propaganda purposes, can degrade Israeli will to continue the war. Badran said that Hamas will continue operations in the Gaza Strip and West Bank and expressed appreciation for the Hezbollah's support for Hamas in Gaza.

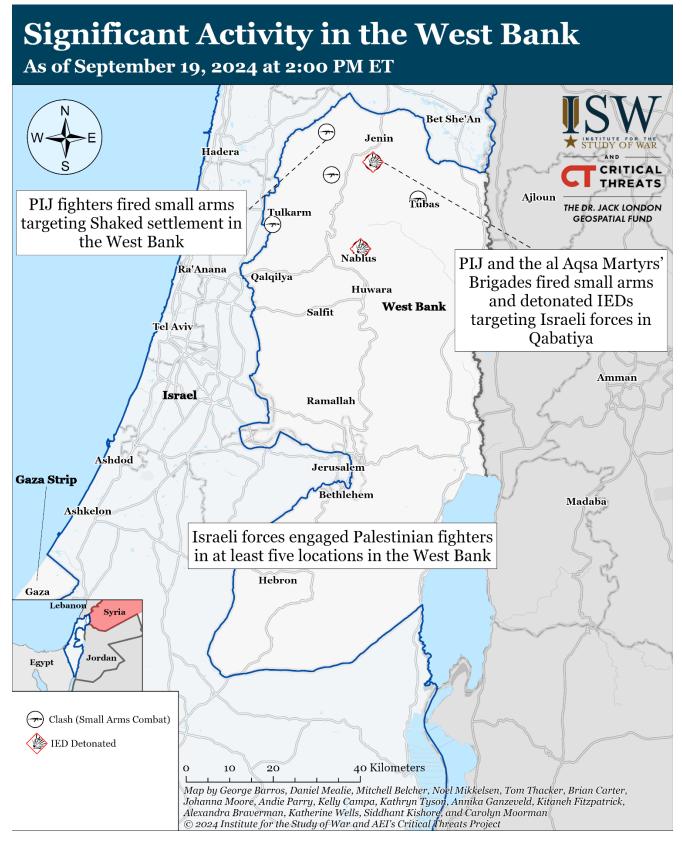
<u>West Bank</u>

Axis of Resistance objectives:

• Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

Israeli forces operated in Jenin Governorate on September 19 as part of a major IDF operation designed to degrade Palestinian militia networks in the northern West Bank.[29] The IDF killed a total of eight Palestinian fighters during the operation.[30] The Israeli Army Radio reported that the IDF Duvdevan Unit operated in Qabatiya, where it engaged Palestinian militias and killed four Palestinian fighters.[31] The IDF also conducted an airstrike killing four more Palestinian fighters in Qabatiya.[32] The IDF detained 58 wanted persons across the West Bank in the past seven days.[33] These activities are part of Operation Summer Camp, which began in Jenin on August 27.[34]

Israeli forces engaged Palestinian fighters in at least five locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on September 18.[35] Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fighters fired small arms targeting the Shaked settlement in the West Bank, which is located approximately 3.5 kilometers from the Israel-West Bank boundary.[36] Palestinian militias, including PIJ and the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, fired small arms and detonated improvised explosive devices (IEDs) targeting Israeli forces in Qabatiya, Jenin Governorate.[37] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades separately clashed with Israeli forces in Tubas, Nablus, and Tulkarm.[38]



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

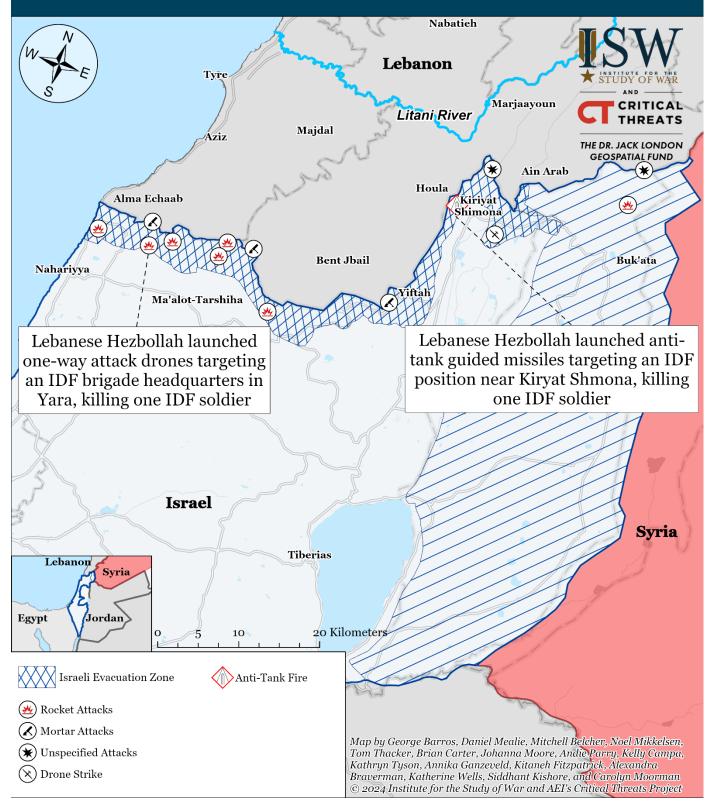
Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

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 has conducted at least 16 attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on September 18.[39] Hezbollah fired two anti-tank guided missiles targeting an IDF position near Kiryat Shmona.[40] The attack killed one IDF soldier and injured eight other soldiers.[41] Hezbollah separately launched several one-way attack drones targeting the IDF Western Brigade headquarters in Yara.[42] One drone exploded in Yara, killing one IDF soldier and wounding another soldier.[43]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon As of September 19, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



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Iran and Axis of Resistance

State of Law Coalition member Rasoud Radi told Iraqi media that Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Commander Esmail Ghaani met with Iranian-backed Iraqi militia leaders in Baghdad on September 17 and ordered them to "calm the political and military situation in Iraq" due to current regional developments, which is consistent with prior CTP-ISW assessments.[44] CTP-ISW previously assessed that Ghaani may have met with the Iraqi militia leaders to ensure that the militias do not conduct attacks without informing and receiving approval from Iran.[45] Ghaani met with several militia leaders including Asaib Ahl al Haq Secretary General Qais al Khazali, Badr Organization Secretary General Hadi al Ameri, and Kataib Hezbollah Secretary General Abu Hussein al Hamidawi.[46] Ghaani's visit follows an Iranian-backed Iraqi militia attack targeting a US diplomatic compound near Baghdad International Airport on September 10.[47] CTP-ISW previously noted the attack likely occurred without the approval of Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah and the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, which is a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias.[48]

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed the drone attack that targeted Haifa, Israel on September 18.[49] The IDF said on September 18 that Israeli fighter jets intercepted a drone launched from Iraq following siren alerts near the Sea of Galilee.[50] The Islamic Resistance in Iraq also claimed a drone attack targeting Haifa, Israel on September 17.[51]

The Iranian Armed Forces General Staff issued a statement on September 19 warning the United States and Israel that "the passage of time will not erode the will" of Iran to take revenge for Israel's killing Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran.[52] The statement said Israel "must pay" for its "mistake." The statement was issued to commemorate the start of holy defense week in Iran.[53]

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appointed Seyyed Abolhasan Fatemi as Shahr-e Kord Friday Prayer Leader and the representative of the Supreme Leader in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province on September 19.[54] The representative of the Supreme Leader is given significant authority to issue orders, and if these orders stay within the powers given by the Supreme Leader, these orders must be followed.[55] Fatemi previously taught at various levels in the seminary of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province and managed the seminary in Shahr-e Kord for 15 years.[56]

Iranian Defense Minister Amir Nasir Zadeh and Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi met separately with Venezuelan Minister of Transportation Ramon Velasquez in Tehran on September 18 to discuss opportunities for bilateral cooperation.[57] Nasir Zadeh emphasized the need for cooperation "against common enemies" during his meeting with Velasquez.[58] Nasir Zadeh stated that Iran supports Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro "with all its strength." Velazquez indicated that Venezuela is "ready" to host the 10th meeting of the Iran-Venezuela Joint Economic Cooperation Commission in Caracas.[59] Nasir Zadeh proposed holding a 10th Iran-Venezuela Joint Economic Commission meeting during a call with Velasquez on September 11.[60] Araghchi met with Velasquez to discuss expanding "economic and energy" ties between Tehran and Caracas.[61]

Iranian Artesh Navy Commander Admiral Shahram Irani visited Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf on September 19.[62] Irani stated that Kharg Island is one of the most important Iranian oil export centers and that naval presence in the Persian Gulf is a priority for Iran. Kharg Island is located opposite the disputed al Durra (Arash) oil and gas field in the northern Persian Gulf. Iran has claimed ownership rights over the oil and gas field, but the other Gulf countries support Kuwaiti and Saudi sovereignty over the field.[63]

Iran and Burkina Faso signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in "peaceful nuclear activities" on the sidelines of the International Atomic Energy Agency's **68**th General Conference in Austria, Vienna, on September 19.[64] Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Director Mohammad Eslami met with Burkinabe Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research, and Innovation Adjima Thiombiano on September 19 to discuss cooperation "in the fields of nuclear medicine, nuclear agriculture" and the construction of "radiopharmaceutical production laboratories" in Burkina Faso.[65] Burkina Faso has become a new partner of Iran since the country's current military junta took control in September 2022.[66] Burkinabe officials signed several agreements on energy, mining, pharmaceuticals, and vocational training in Tehran in October 2023.[67]

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