

Iran Update, September 30, 2024

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Information Cutoff: 6:55pm ET

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced that it began a "targeted and delimited ground operation in southern Lebanon" on September 30.^[1] The IDF said that ground forces will operate to target Hezbollah fighters and infrastructure in villages along the Israel-Lebanon border.^[2] The IDF said that Hezbollah infrastructure in these villages represents an "immediate and real" threat to Israeli communities in the north.^[3] Israeli military and political officials formally approved the "next steps" of Israel's operation in Lebanon on September 30.^[4] The IDF said it will act to achieve its stated war aim of returning the residents of the north to their homes.^[5]

It is unclear where or if the IDF has entered southern Lebanon in force at the time of writing. Western media reported on September 30 that the IDF conducted several smaller incursions in the past week (for detailed coverage of these incursions, see below), but CTP-ISW has not yet observed large Israeli forces in southern Lebanon.^[6] Hezbollah-affiliated Al Mayadeen reported on September 30 that Israeli units are concentrated at several positions along the Israel-Lebanon border.^[7] This report is consistent with information reported by Western media.^[8] Hezbollah claimed cross-border attacks targeting Israeli forces concentrated near the border on September 30.^[9] Hezbollah mortared Israeli forces gathered in the border town Shtula.^[10] Hezbollah also claimed that it attacked Israeli soldiers in groves near the Lebanese towns Kfar Kila and Addasiya.^[11] It is not clear if this attack took place in Israel or Lebanon. Saudi-owned outlets reported that Israeli tanks entered Ramish in southern Lebanon, but later deleted the reports.^[12] There has been no corroboration of these now-deleted reports.

The IDF said that Israeli ground forces will coordinate with the IDF Air Force and artillery units to attack military targets during this stage of the campaign. Local Lebanese sources and Arabic-language media reported that the IDF conducted several hours of artillery shelling and fired illumination rounds over several Lebanese border towns on September 30.^[13] Arabic-language media also reported that the IDF called upon residents in Lebanese border towns to evacuate.^[14] A Lebanese security source told CNN that the Lebanese army evacuated its observation posts along the Israel-Lebanon border and moved into barracks in border villages.^[15]

The IDF conducted several preparatory measures to prepare for its ground incursion into Lebanon in recent days. The IDF Northern Command issued a closed military zone over the northern Israeli towns Metula, Misgav Am, and Kfar Giladi, along the Israel-Lebanon border.[16] The IDF prohibited civilian entry to the area.[17] The IDF has been preparing for the possibility of a ground incursion into Lebanon by calling up reservist units and deploying the 98th Division to the Israel-Lebanon border in recent weeks.[18] IDF commanders from the Northern Command and IDF 36th, 98th, and 91st divisions recently approved plans for the "coming days" along the northern front.[19] These formations have conducted several training exercises in recent days to prepare for the operation, including exercises that simulated a ground offensive into Lebanon.[20] Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant visited the 188th Armored Brigade (36th Division) on the border on September 30 and said that the IDF will use all its capabilities, including ground forces, to return residents to the north.[21]

Western media reported on September 30 that Israeli special operations forces have already been conducting cross-border raids "to gather intelligence" ahead of the operation since last week, citing unspecified sources.[22] The raids reportedly included entering Hezbollah tunnels along the border.[23] One such Israeli cross-border raid occurred near the Lebanese town of Alma al Shaab on an unspecified date last week.[24] The IDF's ground operation will take place as the IDF continues its air campaign to degrade Hezbollah's capabilities with the objective of returning residents to the north.

Unspecified US officials said that the objective of Israel's "limited" ground operation is to clear Hezbollah infrastructure near the border that Hezbollah uses to threaten northern Israel.[25] US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said that Israel had informed the US about "a series of limited ground operations" it was planning into Lebanon that would focus on Hezbollah infrastructure near the Israel-Lebanon border.[26] The term "limited" presumably refers only to the specific IDF operations to clear border infrastructure and is not necessarily applicable to the entirety of a potential Israeli ground campaign. IDF Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Herzi Halevi recently told Israeli soldiers that the IDF is preparing for maneuver operations that would involve Israeli forces engaging Hezbollah militants and advancing into Lebanese towns and villages that are Hezbollah "military outposts." [27]

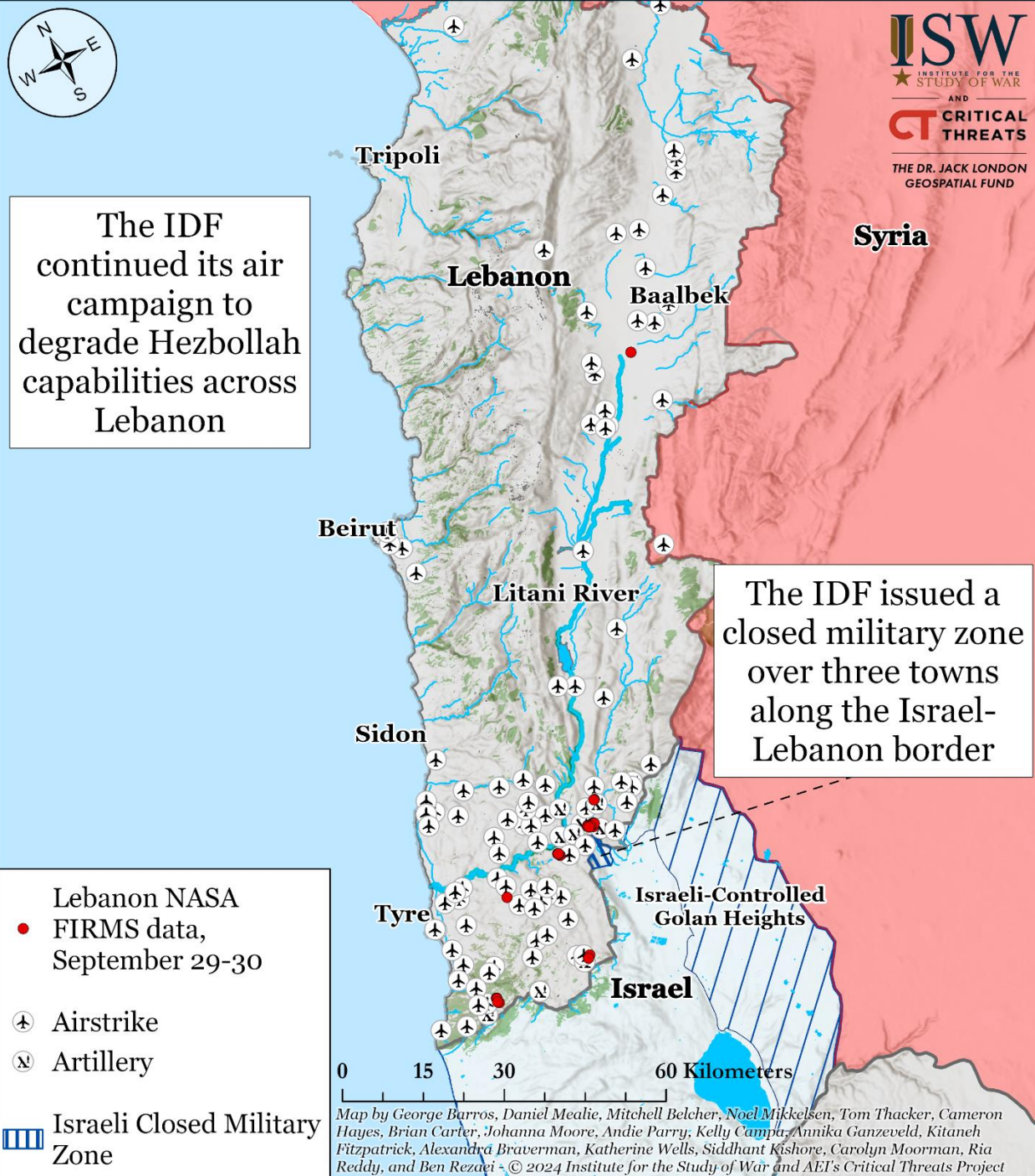
The IDF Air Force continued its air campaign to degrade Hezbollah's weapons capabilities on September 30 ahead of a potential ground offensive. The IDF struck dozens of targets throughout Lebanon, including Hezbollah air defense systems.[28] The IDF destroyed a warehouse of surface-to-air missile launchers near the Beirut International Airport.[29] Israel's air campaign also continued to eliminate Hezbollah missile and rocket system commanders.[30] An IDF airstrike in Beirut killed the commander of Hezbollah's medium-range rocket forces on September 28.[31] The IDF Arabic-language spokesperson also said on September 30 that the IDF had also killed the commander of Hezbollah's precision missile unit in southern Lebanon, his deputy, and other commanders of the unit in southern Lebanon.[32] The IDF's degradation of Hezbollah's weapons capabilities and the commanders with knowledge of these systems fit into Israeli war objectives for Lebanon, which would require the disruption or degradation of Hezbollah's ability to fire rockets into northern Israel. Syrian sources also reported Israeli drones and explosions near Qudsaya, outside west

Damascus, on September 30.[33] Israel has previously conducted airstrikes in Rif Dimashq and near the Lebanon-Syria border to disrupt Hezbollah's ability to receive weapons.[34]

The IDF Air Force also continued to target Palestinian militia members operating in southern Lebanon. The IDF struck and killed Hamas commander in Lebanon Fatah Abu al Amin in a refugee camp in Tyre on September 29.[35] Amin coordinated Hamas' activities in Lebanon and helped to recruit Hamas operatives in Lebanon and purchase weapons.[36] The IDF also struck and killed two members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in southern Lebanon on September 29.[37] Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine acknowledged the death of their members in Lebanon on September 30.[38] Hezbollah commonly allows Palestinian groups to launch attacks on Israel from Hezbollah-controlled territory in Lebanon.[39] Previous IDF strikes in southern Lebanon throughout the war have killed fighters from multiple Palestinian militias, including Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Resistance Committees.[40]

Israeli Air Campaign in Lebanon

As of September 30, 2024 at 14:00 PM ET



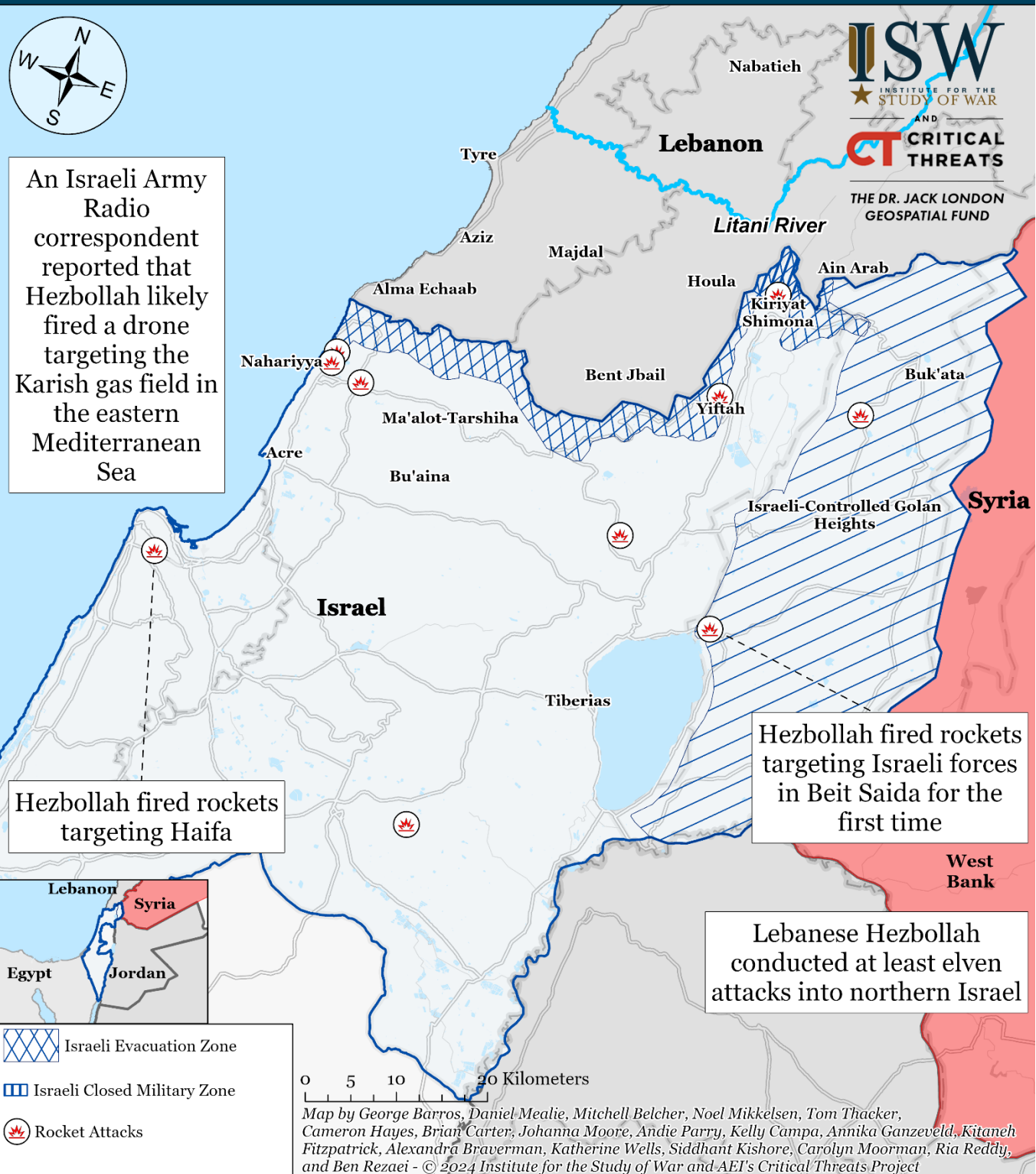
This map illustrates individual Israeli air and artillery strikes based on local Lebanese reporting. This map depicts strikes reported from 2:00pm ET on September 29 to 2:00pm ET on September 30. This map is not exhaustive. CTP-ISW cannot independently verify the locations of Israeli strikes.

Hezbollah Deputy Secretary-General Naim Qassem re-emphasized Hezbollah’s organizational resilience and its ability to resist an Israeli assault ahead of a potential Israeli ground operation.[41] Israeli strikes have severely degraded Hezbollah leadership in recent weeks, killing Nasrallah and numerous strategic- and operational-level leaders.[42] Qassem said in his speech that Hezbollah is structured to enable it to continue operations against Israel despite the loss of leadership, and deputy commanders are prepared to step forward to take up their units’ command.[43] Qassem said that Hezbollah’s “resistance forces are ready” to engage an Israeli ground invasion and will not “budge an inch from [Hezbollah’s] positions] regardless of the destruction to Hezbollah’s leadership.[44] Qassem’s comments likely seek to assuage concerns among Hezbollah’s rank-and-file that Hezbollah leadership remains strong and able to survive ahead of potential ground engagements with Israel. Qassem lastly said that Hezbollah will choose a new secretary-general as soon as possible and according to the approved party mechanisms.[45] Hezbollah will likely rapidly promote lower-ranking commanders to take the place of those Israel has killed, but the loss of long-serving strategic- and operational-level commanders will create temporary disruption in Hezbollah’s command-and-control.

Hezbollah continued its attack campaign targeting Israeli civilian and military sites in Israel on September 30. Israeli Army Radio reported that Hezbollah likely launched a drone targeting the Karish gas field in the eastern Mediterranean Sea.[46] The IDF Navy intercepted the drone before the drone came close to the gas field.[47] Hezbollah has not claimed the attack as of the time of writing. Hezbollah fired at least 10 rockets targeting the Haifa area, as it has done repeatedly in recent days.[48] The IDF intercepted some of the rockets targeting Haifa and others fell in open areas.[49] Hezbollah fired barrages of rockets targeting Israeli forces in Beit Saida for the first time since the beginning of the war.[50]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon

As of September 30, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Iran will likely not be able to intervene in the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in a way that meaningfully impacts the outcome of the conflict. The Iranian regime has thus far indicated that it does not seek to intervene directly in the Israel-Hezbollah conflict.[51] However, the regime could decide to intervene if it assesses that Israel’s objective in Lebanon is to significantly degrade, defeat, or destroy Hezbollah, one of its principal regional allies. The Israeli Security Cabinet altered an earlier directive on September 26 by changing the directive from avoiding a “broad campaign involving Iran” to “reducing the possibility ... [of] an all-out war.”[52] The revision of this directive suggests that Israel has accepted the risk that Iran might directly intervene in the conflict. Iran has few military capabilities that could shape the outcome of the conflict, even if it were to intervene directly.

Iran could take other measures to harm Israeli and US interests in an effort to stop Israeli operations against Hezbollah. These actions would likely also fail to meaningfully disrupt current Israeli operations in Lebanon. Iran could take the following actions:

1) **Iran could conduct a large-scale drone and missile attack targeting Israel.** The Iranian regime currently appears unwilling to conduct a direct attack targeting Israel, and thus risk a large Israeli retaliatory attack on Iranian territory. Iran recently dismissed a request by Hezbollah to conduct a direct attack on Israel, stating that the “timing [wasn’t] right” for such an attack.[53] The Biden administration recently warned Iran via an unspecified third country that it would likely not be able to “restrain” Israel if Iran conducts a direct attack on Israel, according to an unspecified Western official.[54] The official added that the Biden administration warned Iran that Israel would conduct a “broader and greater” attack on Iran than it did in April 2024 if Iran directly attacks Israel.[55] Israel conducted retaliatory airstrikes targeting an Artesh Air Force base in Esfahan Province, Iran, on April 18 in response to Iran’s April 13 drone and missile attack targeting Israel.[56] It is also not clear that a major drone and missile attack would impact Israeli calculations, given that the vast majority of Israelis support the war in Lebanon and the Israeli cabinet appears willing to retaliate heavily against Iran in an attempt to deter any hypothetical Iranian attack.

2) **Iran could increase assassination attempts targeting senior Israeli officials.** The Shin Bet announced on September 30 that Iran has “significantly” increased its efforts to conduct assassinations in Israel.[57] The Shin Bet stated that it recently thwarted several Iranian assassination plots, including some that were in the “advanced stages” of planning.[58] The Shin Bet previously announced on September 19 that unspecified Iranian officials planned an assassination plot targeting the Israeli prime minister, defense minister, or other senior officials.[59] An assassination of a senior Israeli official would have no serious impact on military operations in Lebanon.

3) **Iran could order attacks targeting US forces in Iraq and Syria to try to coerce the United States to pressure Israel to halt its operations in Lebanon.** The Iranian regime has previously operated under the theory that it can coerce the United States to alter Israel’s behavior if Iran hurts US interests in response to Israeli actions.[60] Israel acts independently of the United States, and therefore Iranian-backed attacks targeting US forces in the Middle East would likely fail to disrupt Israeli operations in Lebanon.

4) **Iran could further expand its nuclear program.** An Iranian parliamentarian stated on September 29 that Iran should expand its nuclear program, including increasing production of 90% enriched uranium, in response to Israel killing Nasrallah.[61] An Iranian decision to significantly expand its nuclear program, or even pursue weaponization, risks an Israeli or US military or economic response but would likely not cause Israel to suspend its campaign in Lebanon. Expanding the nuclear program also runs contrary to recent Iranian efforts to pursue negotiations.

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed four attacks on Israel on September 30. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed the following:

- An Arqab cruise missile attack targeting an unspecified “vital target” in Israel[62]
- A drone attack targeting an unspecified “vital target” in Haifa[63]
- A drone attack targeting an unspecified “vital target” at the port of Haifa[64]
- A drone attack targeting an unspecified “vital target” in central Israel[65]

Key Takeaways:

- **Israeli Ground Operations in Lebanon:** The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced that it began a "targeted and delimited ground operation in southern Lebanon" on September 30. It is unclear where or if the IDF has entered southern Lebanon in force at the time of writing. Western media reported on September 30 that Israeli special operations forces have already been conducting cross-border raids “to gather intelligence” ahead of the operation since last week, citing unspecified sources.
- **Iranian Response to Israeli Operations in Lebanon:** Iran will likely not be able to intervene in the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in a way that meaningfully impacts the outcome of the conflict. Iran could take other measures to harm Israeli and US interests in an effort to stop Israeli operations against Hezbollah. These actions would likely also fail to meaningfully disrupt current Israeli operations in Lebanon.
- **Iraq:** The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed four attacks on Israel on September 30.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of September 30, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET

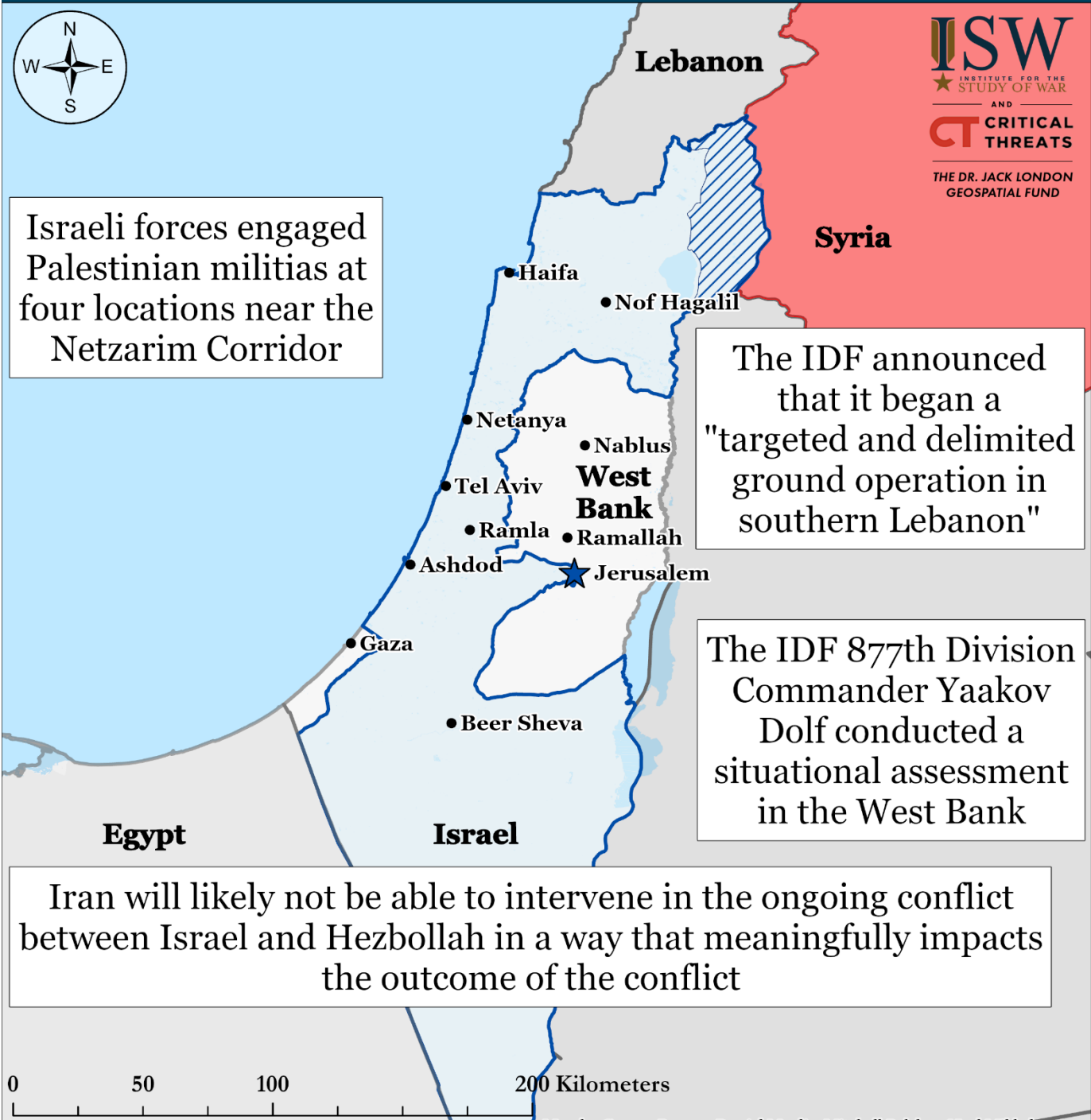


Israeli forces engaged Palestinian militias at four locations near the Netzarim Corridor

The IDF announced that it began a "targeted and delimited ground operation in southern Lebanon"

The IDF 877th Division Commander Yaakov Dolf conducted a situational assessment in the West Bank

Iran will likely not be able to intervene in the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in a way that meaningfully impacts the outcome of the conflict



Gaza Strip and West Bank Golan Heights

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Tom Thacker, Cameron Hayes, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, Siddhant Kishore, Carolyn Moorman, Ria Reddy, and Ben Rezaei
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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 IDF Air Force struck a Hamas command-and-control site in the northern Gaza Strip on September 29.[66] The IDF reported that the site was based in the former Abu Jafar Mansour school in Beit Lahiya and that Hamas fighters used the site to plan and conduct attacks targeting Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip and into Israeli territory.[67] The IDF added that it took steps to minimize civilian casualties in the airstrike.[68]

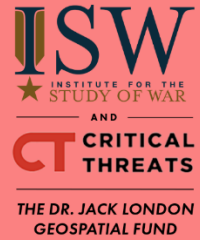
Palestinian militias including the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) conducted four attacks targeting Israeli forces along the Netzarim Corridor on September 29 and 30.[69] PIJ fired rockets and mortars targeting Israeli forces near a hospital along the Netzarim Corridor.[70]

Israeli forces reportedly operated in Zaytoun and Tal al Hawa neighborhoods of Gaza City on September 30.[71] A Palestinian journalist reported that Israeli forces clashed with Palestinian militias south of Zaytoun, and near University College in Tel al Hawa neighborhood.[72]

Hamas fired rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and mortars targeting Israeli forces east of Khan Younis on September 30.[73]

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of September 30, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET





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0 50 100 200 Kilometers

 Gaza Strip and West Bank  Golan Heights

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Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

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West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

The IDF conducted overnight raids in several locations across the West Bank on September 29 and 30 and detained more than 20 wanted persons.[74] The IDF also confiscated a firearm during the raids.[75]

The IDF 877th Division Commander Yaakov Dolf conducted a situational assessment in the West Bank on September 30, following the launch of Operation Summer Camp in late August.[76] The 877th Division is responsible for the West Bank. Dolf met with regional Israeli military and civilian officials to review the security situation in the West Bank. Dolf said that Israeli forces have not operated in the West Bank at the same pace at which Israeli forces are operating now.[77] The IDF launched Operation Summer Camp on August 27. Operation Summer Camp is a large-scale counter-terrorism operation to degrade Palestinian militia networks in the West Bank.[78]

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 at least 11 attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on September 29.[79] *See the topline section for more information.*

Iran and the Axis of Resistance

Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin arrived in Tehran on September 30 to meet with various Iranian officials and highlight Russo-Iranian economic cooperation.[80]

Mishustin met Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and stated that he expects that Russia and Iran will sign the anticipated comprehensive strategic cooperation agreement at the upcoming October 22-24 BRICS summit in Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan.[81] Mishustin also discussed Russian investment opportunities in “various fields“ in Iran with Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref.[82] Mishustin also met with Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad.[83] Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali reported that Mishustin's visit to Iran will focus particularly on developing trade and economic ties between the two countries.[84] Russian and Iranian officials likely view expanded economic and financial cooperation as a necessary component of generally intensified Russo-Iranian relations.

Iranian Artesh Navy Commander Admiral Shahram Irani met with his Chinese counterpart Admiral Hu Zhongming in China on September 29 to discuss developing

maritime cooperation between Iran and China.[85] Irani and Zhongming discussed holding joint navy exercises and maritime patrols to ensure the security of shipping lines and address organized crime. Irani arrived in Beijing on September 26 at the invitation of Zhongming.[86]

Iranian Central Bank Governor Mohammad Reza Farzin traveled to Turkey on September 30 to discuss banking and monetary cooperation with Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member countries on the sidelines of the 6th OIC Central Banks Conference.[87] Farzin stated he is focused on discussing the creation of a "common financial channel." [88] Farzin presented a proposal to use local currencies in transactions between Iran and Turkey during his meeting with his Turkish counterpart Fatih Karahan.[89] Karahan "welcomed" the proposal.[90] Farzin will engage in further meetings and negotiations during his visit.[91]

Houthi spokesperson Yahya Sarea claimed on September 27 that Houthi air defenses shot down a US MQ-9 drone "carrying out hostile missions" in the Saada Governorate in northwest Yemen.[92] Houthi media posted video footage of what it claimed was the wreckage of the MQ-9, but CTP-ISW could not verify these claims.[93]

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