

Iran Update



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Information Cutoff: May 31, 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.

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.

US President Joe Biden urged Hamas to agree to the latest Israeli ceasefire and hostage-release proposal on May 31.[1] Ceasefire talks have been largely stalled since Egypt unilaterally altered an Israeli proposal without notifying international mediators and then sent the altered text to Hamas in early May 2024. Israel submitted the most recent proposal to international mediators on May 27.[2] Biden said that Qatar sent the proposal to Hamas on May 29.[3] Hamas stated on May 30 that it refused to return to indirect negotiations until there is an end to the war.[4] Biden said he has urged Israeli leaders “to stand behind this deal despite any political pressure,” emphasizing that Israel’s pursuit of “an unidentified notion of total victory will. . . only bog down Israel in Gaza.”[5] Biden also appealed to the Israeli people, saying that Hamas “no longer is capable” of conducting another attack like the one on October 7, 2023.[6]

Biden outlined the three phases of the Israeli proposal:[7]

1. 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.[8] Negotiations for a permanent ceasefire would continue during this phase.
2. 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 ensure that negotiations continue during this phase.
3. 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.

Biden did not offer specific details on the number of Israeli hostages or Palestinian prisoners that would be released in this proposal, nor did he specify the length of phases two and three. The intent of each phase largely resembles the proposal that Israel made in early May 2024.[9] The Israeli proposal offers flexibility on the number of living hostages released in phase one, according to anonymous sources speaking to *Axios*. [10] The proposal also includes “a willingness” to discuss a “sustainable calm” in the Gaza Strip—a phrase that both Israel and Hamas included in recent ceasefire proposals.[11]

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) confirmed on May 31 that its units withdrew completely from Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip.[12] This confirmation comes after local Palestinian sources reported that some IDF units were leaving Jabalia on May 30.[13] The IDF reentered Jabalia on May 11 after assessing that Hamas and other Palestinian militias were rebuilding their capabilities and networks there.[14] The IDF published a summary of its activities in Jabalia, which included destroying over 10 kilometers of tunnels, some of which were 500 meters from the Israel-Gaza Strip border.[15] Israeli forces also recovered the bodies of seven Hamas-held hostages and killed several militia commanders, including the commander of Hamas’ Beit Hanoun Battalion.[16] CTP-ISW previously observed Hamas has organized its military wing like a conventional military and has developed a deep bench of experienced military commanders to run it.

The IDF withdrawal from Jabalia follows some of the most intense fighting between Israeli forces and Palestinian fighters during the war. The IDF stated that Hamas turned civilian infrastructure in Jabalia into a “fortified combat complex.”[17] This description is consistent with previous reports that Palestinian fighters have established “fighting compounds” that enable them to rapidly traverse through buildings rather than exposing themselves in the streets to Israeli forces.[18] Israeli Army Radio reported that 341 “operational incidents” occurred in the first week of fighting in Jabalia. These incidents involved Palestinian fighters firing upon Israeli forces or attacking them with explosives.[19] This count of 341 is significantly higher than the roughly 100 engagements that occurred between Israeli forces and Palestinian fighters during the first week of Israeli operations in Khan Younis in December 2023.[20] Palestinian militias sustained an unusually high rate of attacks targeting Israeli forces throughout IDF clearing operations in Jabalia.[21] IDF officers described the fighting there as

some of the most intense of the war.[22] These points taken together reflect the degree to which Hamas and other Palestinian militias remain combat effective in and around Jabalia. Hamas and the other militias will almost certainly resume their efforts to reconstitute there as the IDF units have left.

Candidates have continued registering for the upcoming Iranian presidential election.[23] Among the candidates who registered on May 31 are two prominent moderate politicians: Ali Larijani and Abdol Nasser Hemmati. Presidential candidates have until June 3 to register, after which the Guardian Council will vet and approve candidates. The Guardian Council has historically disqualified moderate and reformist figures during this period to advantage hardliners in the race.

The following individuals registered on May 31:

- **Ali Larijani.** Larijani is a prominent moderate politician who served as the Iranian parliament speaker from 2008 to 2020.[24] Larijani also served as both the secretary of the Iranian Supreme National Security Council and lead nuclear negotiator from 2005 to 2007.[25] Larijani previously ran for president in 2005 and 2021. The Guardian Council allowed him to run in 2005 but barred him in 2021 on unclear grounds.[26] Ali is part of the influential and well-connected Larijani family in Iran. Ali's brother, Sadegh Amoli Larijani, is the current head of the Expediency Discernment Council, which is an advisory board to the supreme leader. Sadegh Amoli Larijani also served as the judiciary chief from 2009 to 2019.
- **Abdol Nasser Hemmati.** Hemmati is a moderate politician who served as the governor of the US-sanctioned Central Bank of Iran from 2018 to 2021 under then-President Hassan Rouhani.[27] Former President Hassan Rouhani appointed Hemmati to the Central Bank Governor position. Hemmati ran for president in 2021.[28] He received the third most votes after Ebrahim Raisi and former IRGC Commander Mohsen Rezaei.[29]
- **Mahmoud Ahmadi Bighosh.** Bighosh is a hardline politician who represented Markazi Province in Parliament from 2009 to 2012 and additionally from 2020 to 2024.[30] Bighosh was part of the Parliamentary National Security and Foreign Policy Committee while in Parliament. Bighosh also served as the governor of North Khorasan Province from 2012 to 2013.[31]
- **Mohammad Khoshchereh.** Khoshchereh is a hardline politician who represented Tehran Province in Parliament from 2004 to 2008.[32] Khoshchereh previously supported President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad but became an outspoken critic of Ahmadinejad three months into his presidency.[33] Khoshchereh is a well-known economist and urban planner.

Larijani could be a particularly strong contender for the presidency given his deep connections in the Iranian political and security establishment. Those connections could prove useful, given that the Iranian regime manipulates elections to install favored candidates. Larijani has framed his candidacy in recent days around bolstering Iranian defense and national security, improving the economy, and managing US sanctions.[34] An anonymous Iranian official told Reuters that the Guardian Council would allow Larijani to run despite disqualifying him during the 2021 race.[35] Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the Guardian Council could permit Larijani to run to diversify the field of candidates

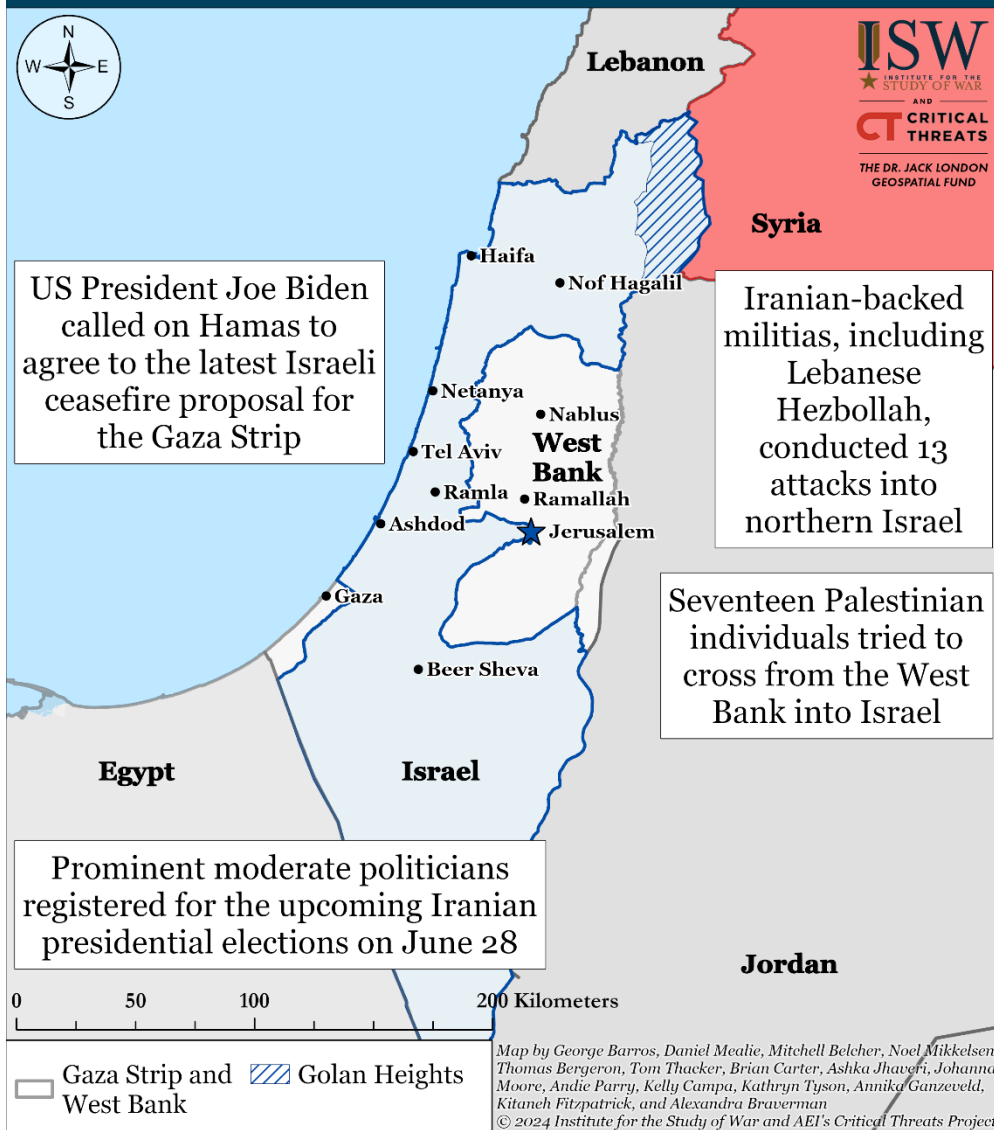
beyond just hardliners and encourage voter participation, which has hit record lows repeatedly in recent years.

Key Takeaways:

- **Ceasefire Negotiations:** US President Joe Biden urged Hamas to accept the latest Israeli ceasefire and hostage-release proposal. The proposal includes three phases to end the war, release Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners, and begin reconstruction in the Gaza Strip.
- **Gaza Strip:** The IDF withdrew completely from Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip after weeks of intense fighting there. Hamas and the other Palestinian militias will almost certainly begin reconstituting their forces there as Israeli forces leave.
- **Iran:** Candidates have continued registering for the Iranian presidential election in June 2024. Among the candidates are prominent moderate politicians, some of whom could be particularly strong contenders for the presidency.
- **Iraq:** The UN Security Council voted unanimously to end the UN Assistance Mission to Iraq at the end of 2025.
- **Yemen:** The United States and the United Kingdom struck 21 Houthi targets in Yemen and over the Red Sea.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of May 31, 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

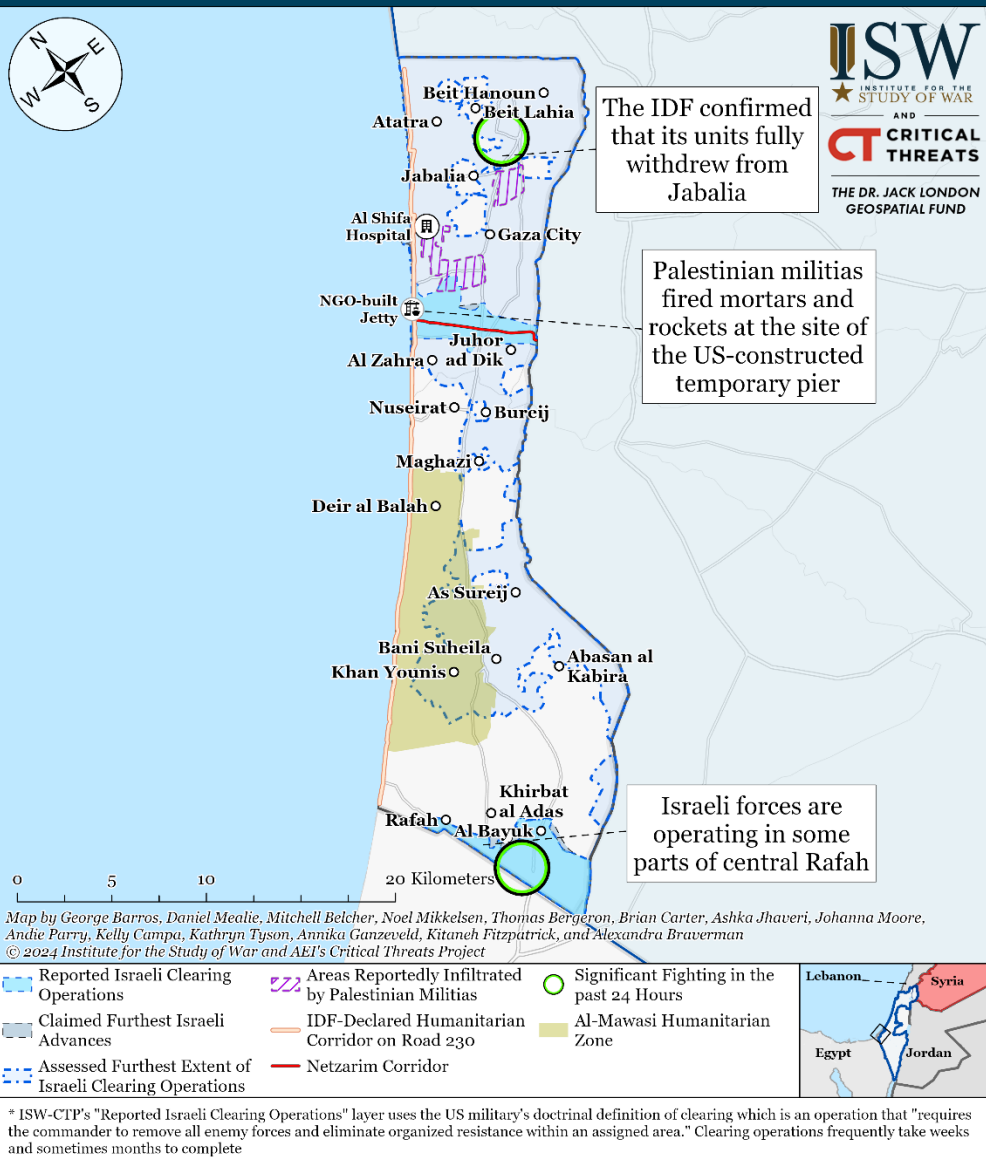
Israeli forces engaged Palestinian fighters and destroyed militia infrastructure in Jabalia on May 31 prior to the IDF withdrawing completely. Israeli forces destroyed “hundreds of meters” of a tunnel system in eastern Jabalia.[36] The al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades mortared Israeli forces in Jabalia refugee camp.[37]

Palestinian militias fired mortars and rockets targeting Israeli forces at the US-constructed temporary pier site on May 31.[38] The United States suspended operations at the pier due to damage sustained from rough seas on May 28.[39] The IDF 99th Reserve Division has continued operations along the Netzarim Corridor, which intersects with the pier site.[40] Israeli forces directed airstrikes targeting Palestinian fighters in the area.[41]

The IDF said on May 31 that its units are operating in central Rafah.[42] The IDF 89th Commando Brigade and Givati Brigade (162nd Division) engaged Palestinian fighters in central Rafah and destroyed a Hamas weapons depot. Local Palestinian sources reported that Israeli forces were present in several sectors of Rafah, including central Rafah.[43] Palestinian militias targeted Israeli forces in western, central, and eastern Rafah with mortar attacks.[44] Israeli forces continued to operate along the Philadelphi Corridor to destroy Palestinian military infrastructure, such as tunnels and rocket launchers.[45]

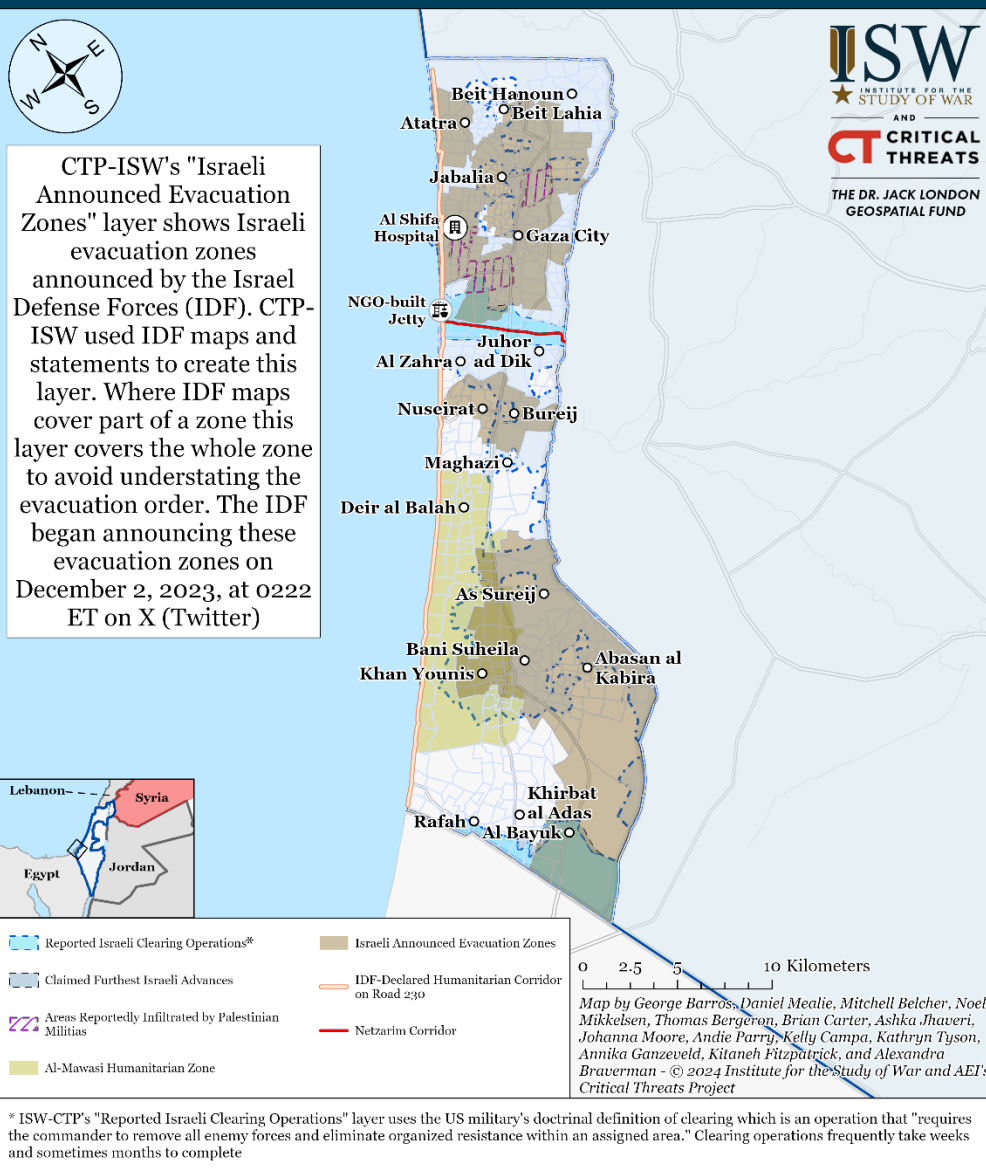
Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

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Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip

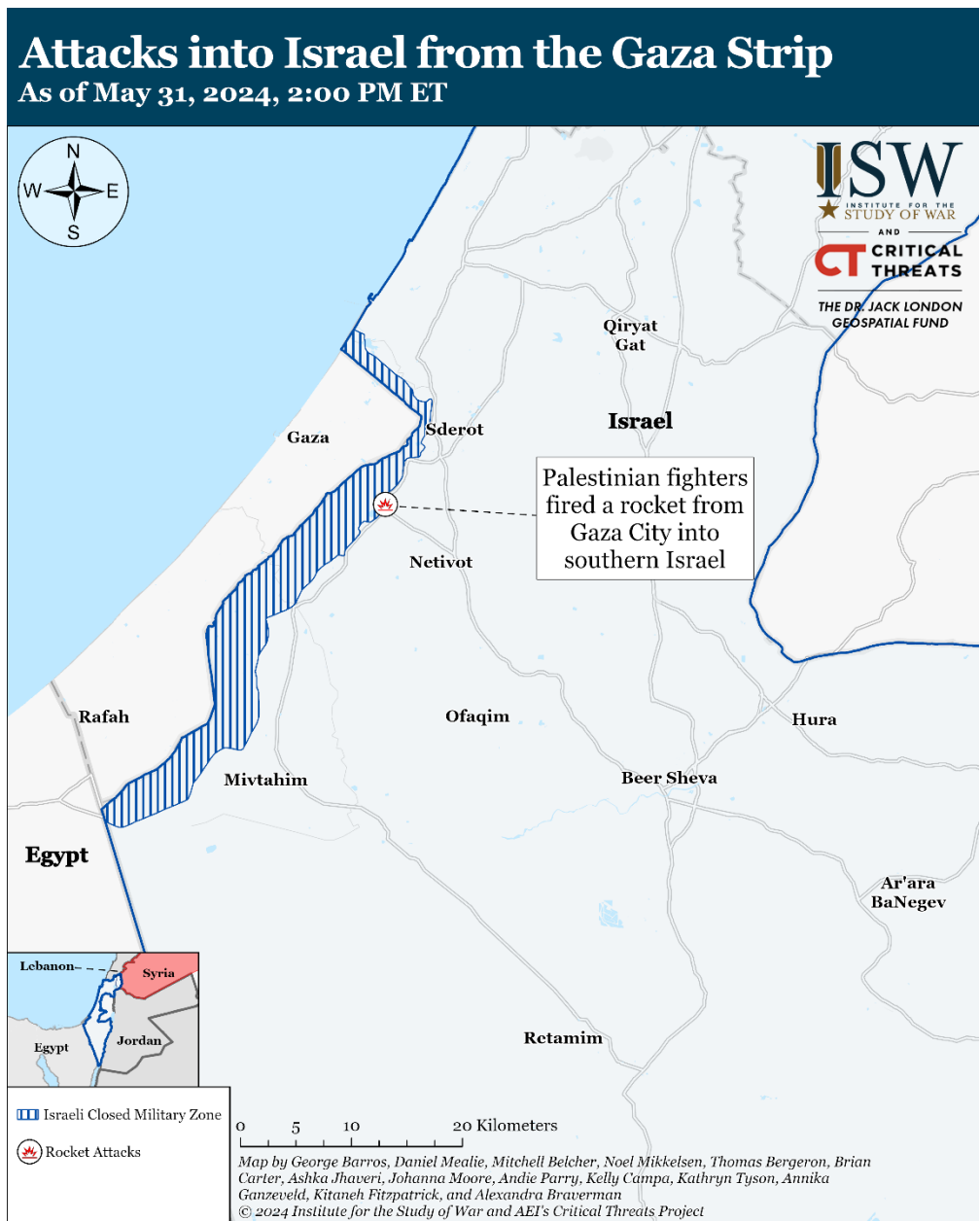
As of May 31, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



The United States, Israel, and Egypt will meet next week to discuss the Rafah border crossing and a plan for securing the southern Gaza Strip border, according to unspecified US and Israeli officials.[46] The sources said that the United States will prioritize reopening the Rafah border crossing for aid deliveries, preventing Hamas from smuggling weapons from Egypt into the Gaza Strip, and "maintaining a tenuous peace between Israel and Egypt." US President Joe Biden discussed the upcoming meeting with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi on May 24 during a call to reopen the Kerem Shalom crossing in Rafah.[47] Egypt and Israel have disagreed on how to move forward with opening the Rafah crossing.[48] The three countries will discuss ways to open the crossing that does not involve an Israeli military presence on the Gazan

side.[49] Israel has previously presented options for opening the crossing under the jurisdiction of the United Nations and the Palestinian Authority.[50]

Palestinian militias have conducted one indirect fire attack from the Gaza Strip into Israel since CTP-ISW's last information cutoff on May 30. An unspecified militia fired a rocket from Gaza City into southern Israel, which landed in an open area.[51]



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

Seventeen Palestinian individuals tried to cross from the West Bank into Israel on May 31.[52] An Israeli Army Radio correspondent reported that the individuals tried to cross from Zeita, northeast of Tulkarm.[53] Israeli forces arrested all the Palestinian “infiltrators” near the Israel-West Bank border wall. This incident follows a similar one on May 27 in which around 30 unarmed Palestinians tried to cross into Bat Hefer, Israel, from Tulkarm.[54]

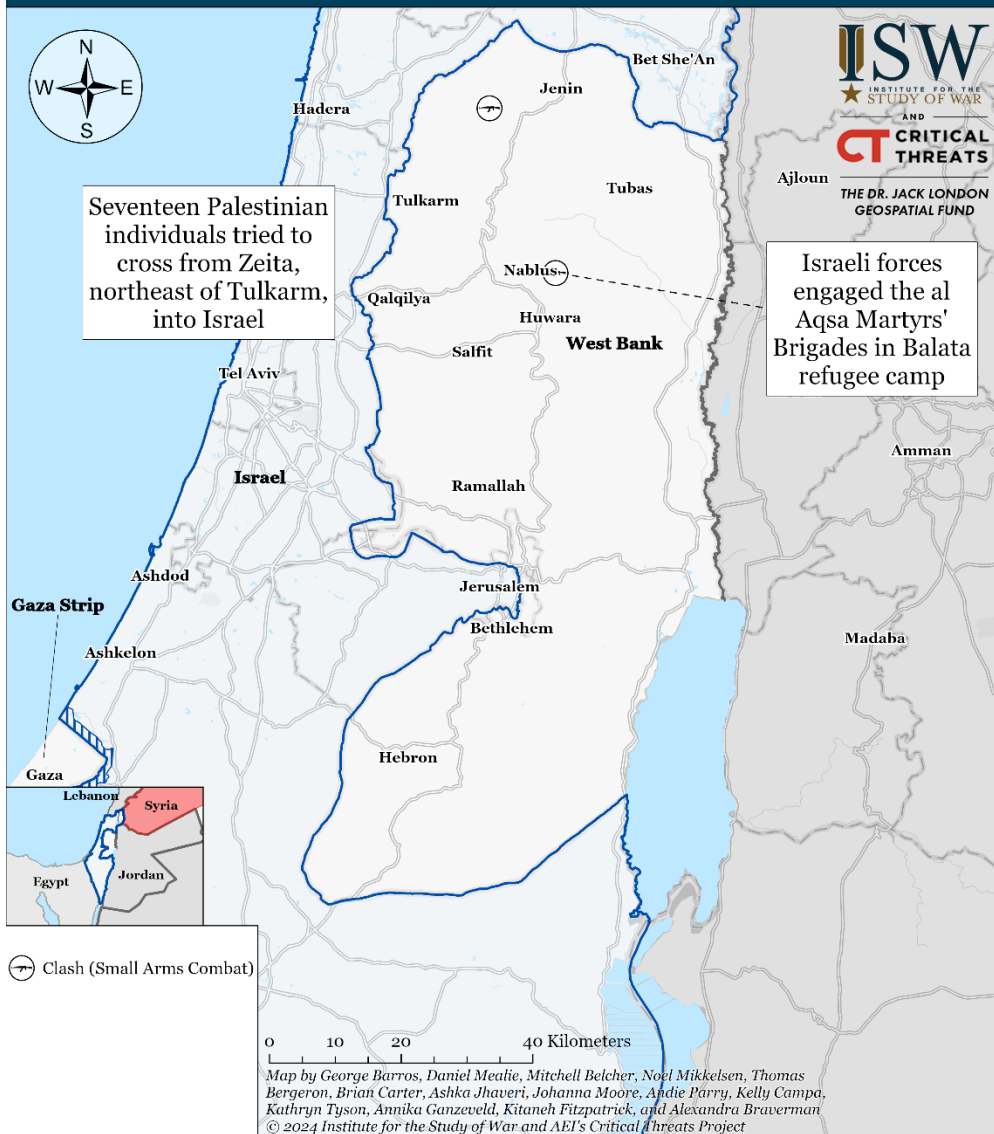
The al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades claimed that it fired small arms targeting the Israeli town of Bat Hefer on May 31.[55] The militia previously claimed that its fighters entered Bat Hefer on May 29 to kill an IDF officer there.[56] Hamas fighters similarly fired small arms from the West Bank targeting Bat Hefer on May 27 and May 29.[57] The IDF said on May 30 that it is increasing operations along the border with Tulkarm in response to attacks targeting Bat Hefer.[58]

The Israeli Shin Bet said on May 31 that Israeli forces have killed Palestinian fighters from a unit based in the Gaza Strip that directs attacks in the West Bank.[59] Israeli forces have killed at least 18 Palestinian fighters from the “West Bank Headquarters” unit since the Israel-Hamas war began. The Shin Bet said that the unit recruits Palestinians to conduct attacks in the West Bank and Israel.[60] The Shin Bet added that an Israeli airstrike killed the head of the unit, Yassin Rabia, in Rafah on May 26.[61] The Shin Bet also said that the unit is primarily composed of Hamas fighters who were exiled to the Gaza Strip in a deal with Israel in 2011.[62] The Shin Bet said that the unit has been involved in at least 20 small arms attacks in the West Bank over the past year.[63]

Israeli forces have engaged Palestinian fighters in at least two locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cut-off on May 30.[64] The al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades fired small arms at Israeli forces in Balata refugee camp in Nablus.[65]

Significant Activity in the West Bank

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

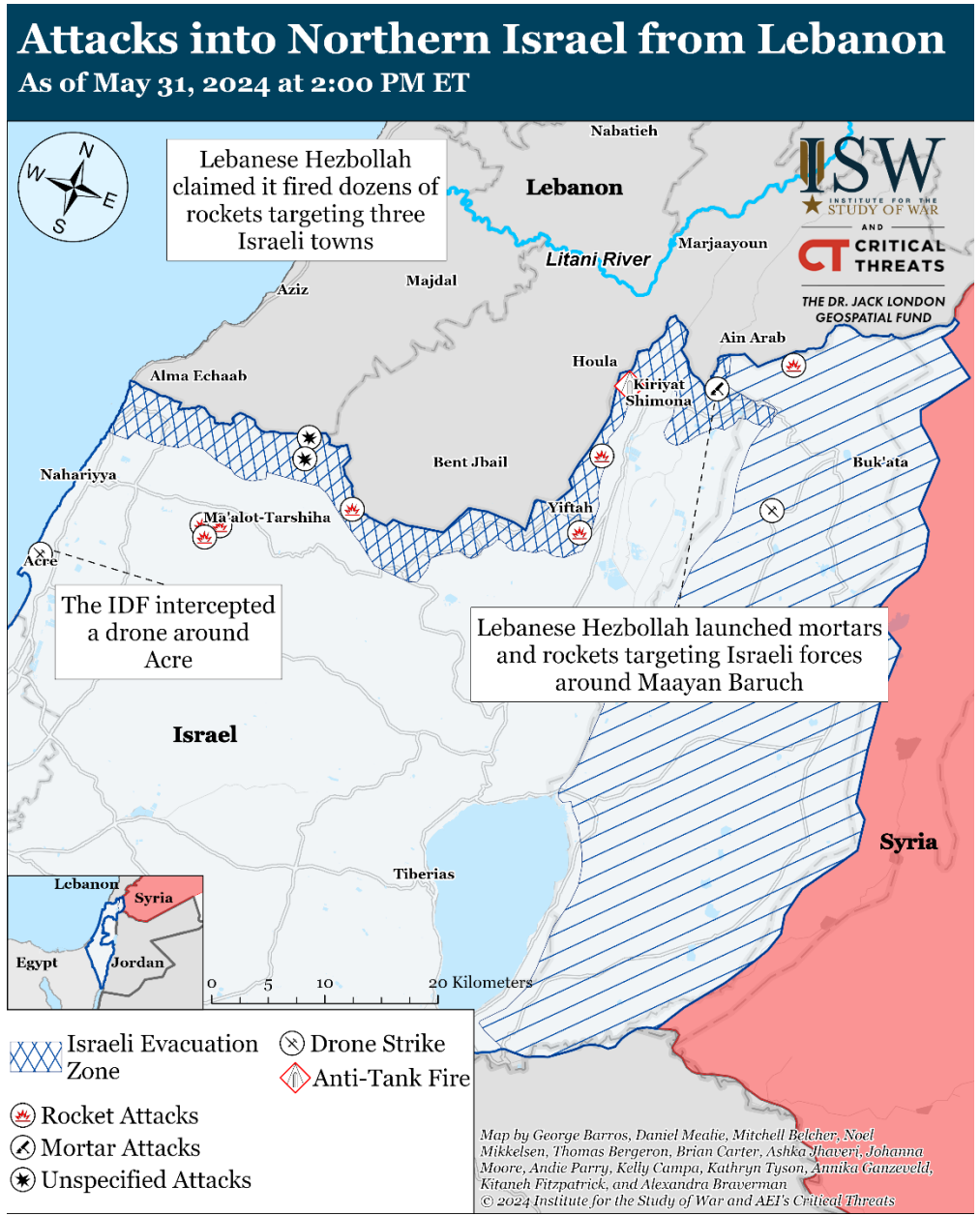
Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

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 13 attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on May 30.[66]

Anonymous Lebanese sources told Reuters that an Israeli airstrike killed a Hezbollah-affiliated medic in Naqoura in southern Lebanon on May 31.[67] The sources added that the strike targeted an ambulance belonging to the Islamic Health Commission, which is a rescue force affiliated with Hezbollah. The IDF has not confirmed the strike at the time of this writing. Hezbollah mourned the death of the medic on May 31.[68]



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

Iran and Axis of Resistance

The Council of the European Union reported on May 31 that the IRGC Navy facilitates the delivery of Iranian arms to militias in the Middle East and around the Red Sea.[69] The

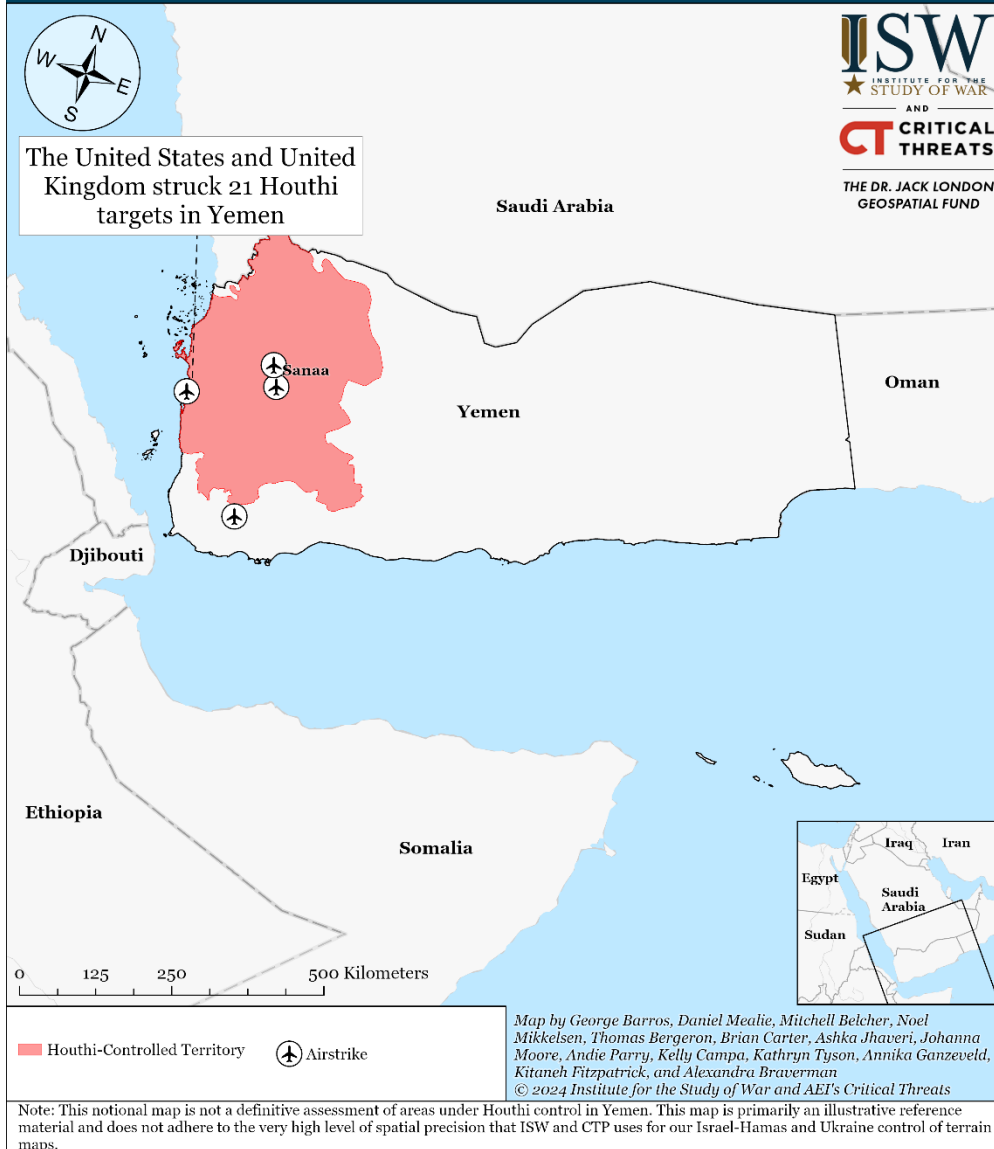
European Union sanctioned the IRGC Navy for supporting weapons distribution to militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah and the Houthis. The IRGC Navy provided weapons, including drones and missiles. The European Union also sanctioned other Iranian military entities and affiliated individuals responsible for the transfer of drones to Russia and/or militias in the Middle East.

The UN Security Council (UNSC) voted unanimously on May 31 to conclude the UN Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI) at the end of 2025.[70] The UNSC voted to renew UNAMI’s mandate for a final 19-month period and directed the secretary general to “streamline” UNAMI tasks as the mission reduces personnel and assets and transfers its responsibilities to the Iraqi federal government. UNAMI will focus on providing “technical” electoral assistance, resolving outstanding issues between Iraq and Kuwait, supporting various humanitarian and development tasks, and promoting the protection of human rights. The United Nations established UNAMI in 2003 to promote political dialogue, judicial and legal reforms, human rights, and transparent and credible elections in Iraq.[71] UNAMI advises and helps the Iraqi Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) conduct elections.[72] Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani requested on May 8 that UNAMI permanently end its mission by the end of 2025.[73] Sudani claimed in his letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres that there is “no need” for UNAMI and asked UNAMI to focus solely on “economic reform, service provision, sustainable development, and climate change” for the remainder of its mission.[74]

The United States and the United Kingdom struck 21 Houthi targets in Yemen and over the Red Sea on May 30.[75] US CENTCOM destroyed eight drones in Houthi-controlled Yemen and over the Red Sea. US CENTCOM and the British Armed Forces conducted combined preemptive airstrikes targeting 13 unspecified Houthi targets. Houthi spokesperson Yahya Saree claimed that the United States and the United Kingdom conducted four strikes in the capital, Sanaa; two strikes in Sanaa Governorate; one strike in Haifan, Taiz Governorate; six strikes targeting the Hudaydah Radio building and Port Salif Coast Guard; and two strikes targeting the homes of former Yemeni President Ali Mohsen and Vice President Ali Abdullah Saleh’s homes.[76] Saree also claimed that 58 individuals were injured or killed in the strikes. Saree said that the Houthis launched an unspecified number of missiles targeting the USS Eisenhower in retaliation for the US and UK strikes.

Houthi Attacks in the Red Sea

As of May 31, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



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- [2] <https://www.axios.com/2024/05/28/israel-new-gaza-hostage-ceasefire-proposal>
- [3] <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2024/05/31/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-middle-east-2/>
- [4] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/hamas-ready-reach-complete-agreement-including-hostages-prisoners-exchange-deal-2024-05-30/>
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