

Iran Update



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Information Cutoff: July 19, 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.

The Houthis launched a one-way attack drone into Tel Aviv for the first time on July 18, killing one individual and injuring at least another 10.[1] The Houthis appear to have flown the drone from Yemen to the Mediterranean Sea before turning it eastward into Tel Aviv.[2] The drone then struck an apartment building about 100 meters from a US consulate.[3] The Houthis have claimed responsibility for the attack and vowed to continue attacking deep into Israel.[4] The Houthis said that the attack used their new “Yafa” drone, which appears to be a modified variant of the Iranian-designed Samad-3 drone.[5] The Yafa drone carried around 10 kilograms of explosives, according to an Israeli military correspondent.[6]

The Houthis have conducted reconnaissance in force against the Israeli air defense network in recent months, which may have enabled the attack into Tel Aviv. The US Army defines reconnaissance in force as “a deliberate combat operation designed to discover or test the enemy’s strength, dispositions, and reactions or to obtain other information.”[7] The Houthis have conducted regular drone and missile attacks targeting Israel since October 2023 to this end.[8] These attacks could have provided the Houthis with the information needed to evade Israeli air defenses and strike targets in Tel Aviv. The almost daily Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi militia attacks targeting Israel could be meant to similarly gather information on Israeli air defenses and vulnerabilities.

The Houthi reconnaissance-in-force effort against Israeli air defenses reflects more broadly how Iran and its Axis of Resistance are learning from the Israel-Hamas war and accordingly developing new ways of fighting Israel. Senior Iranian military officials have discussed, for instance, how Hamas’ attack into Israel in October 2023 demonstrated how effective and valuable ground incursions into Israel could be.[9] Iran and the Axis of Resistance have similarly experimented throughout the war with how to disrupt the Israeli economy by attacking critical Israeli infrastructure and international shipping.[10]

Iranian-sponsored Attacks in the Middle East As of July 19, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced on July 19 that there are “increasing indications” that Hamas’ top military commander, Mohammad Deif, is dead.[11] The IDF targeted Deif and Hamas Khan Younis Brigade Commander Rafe Salameh on July 13 by dropping eight 2,000-pound precision munitions on their location in the southern Gaza Strip. The IDF confirmed on July 14 that the strike killed Salameh. The IDF statement on July 19 confirmed that Mohammad Deif was “sitting next to” Salamah at the time of the strike.[12] Hamas has denied that Deif is dead.[13] The IDF has in turn accused Hamas of trying to hide what happened to Deif.[14]

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated on July 19 that Iran has reduced its nuclear breakout time to one to two weeks.[15] Senior US officials have previously estimated that the Iranian nuclear breakout time was between 12 days and several months. Blinken’s statement comes as Iran has in recent months expanded its nuclear program and run computer simulations that could

support the production of a nuclear weapon.[16] Senior Iranian officials have threatened repeatedly in recent months to pursue a nuclear weapon.[17]

The IDF conducted airstrikes into southern Lebanon on July 18, killing two officers from Lebanese Hezbollah’s Radwan unit.[18] The Radwan unit is Hezbollah’s elite commando force and is designed to conduct ground operations into Israel.[19] The IDF airstrike killed two operations officers in the Radwan unit—Ali Jafar Matouq and Mohammad Hassan Mustafa. Both officers were involved in Hezbollah attacks into northern Israel.[20] Matouq had reportedly replaced another Radwan officer, named Ali Ahmed Hussein, whom the IDF killed in April 2024.[21]

Hezbollah launched around 65 rockets into northern Israel in retaliation for the IDF killing the two Radwan officers.[22] The IDF intercepted some of the rockets, while the rest fell in open areas. Hezbollah claimed that it attacked three Israeli towns—Abirim, Neve Ziv, and Manot—for the first time as part of its retaliation.[23] These attacks come after Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah threatened on July 17 to expand the geographic scope of attacks into northern Israel.[24]

Key Takeaways:

- **Yemen:** The Houthis launched a one-way attack drone into Tel Aviv for the first time. The Houthis have conducted reconnaissance in force against Israeli air defenses in recent months, which may have enabled the attack.
- **Gaza Strip:** Israel announced that there are “increasing indications” that Hamas’ top military commander, Mohammad Deif, is dead. The IDF conducted an airstrike targeting Deif in the southern Gaza Strip on July 13.
- **Iran:** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated that Iran has reduced its nuclear breakout time to one to two weeks. His comments come as Iran has in recent months expanded its nuclear program and run computer simulations that could help build a nuclear weapon.
- **Lebanon:** The IDF conducted airstrikes into southern Lebanon, killing two officers from Lebanese Hezbollah’s Radwan unit. The Radwan unit is Hezbollah’s elite commando force and is designed to conduct ground attacks into Israel.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of July 19, 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 IDF Air Force killed two high-value Palestinian militia commanders in the Gaza Strip on July 18. The IDF struck and killed Hamas Gaza City Brigade's intelligence chief, Adil Hamdiya, at UN-affiliated al Falah school in Zaytoun, southern Gaza City.[25] The IDF said that al Falah school served as the Hamas Gaza City Brigade headquarters.[26] Hamdiya had worked as the brigade's intelligence chief since 2019 and was responsible for gathering and disseminating intelligence to Hamas

commanders.[27] Hamdiya collected intelligence on Israel to plan for the October 7th attack and assisted Hamas' targeting of Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip throughout the war.[28]

The IDF Air Force also struck and killed the Nasser Salah al Din Brigades Central Governorate Brigade commander, Iyad Abdul Rahim Abu Hasna, in Bureij.[29] The Nasser Salah al Din Brigades is the military wing of the Popular Resistance Committees, a group fighting with Hamas in the war.[30] The IDF did not confirm that it killed Abu Hasna. The absence of IDF confirmation is not particularly surprising, however, given that the IDF infrequently publicizes its strikes against smaller militias. The IDF, in contrast, more regularly announces its activities related to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ).

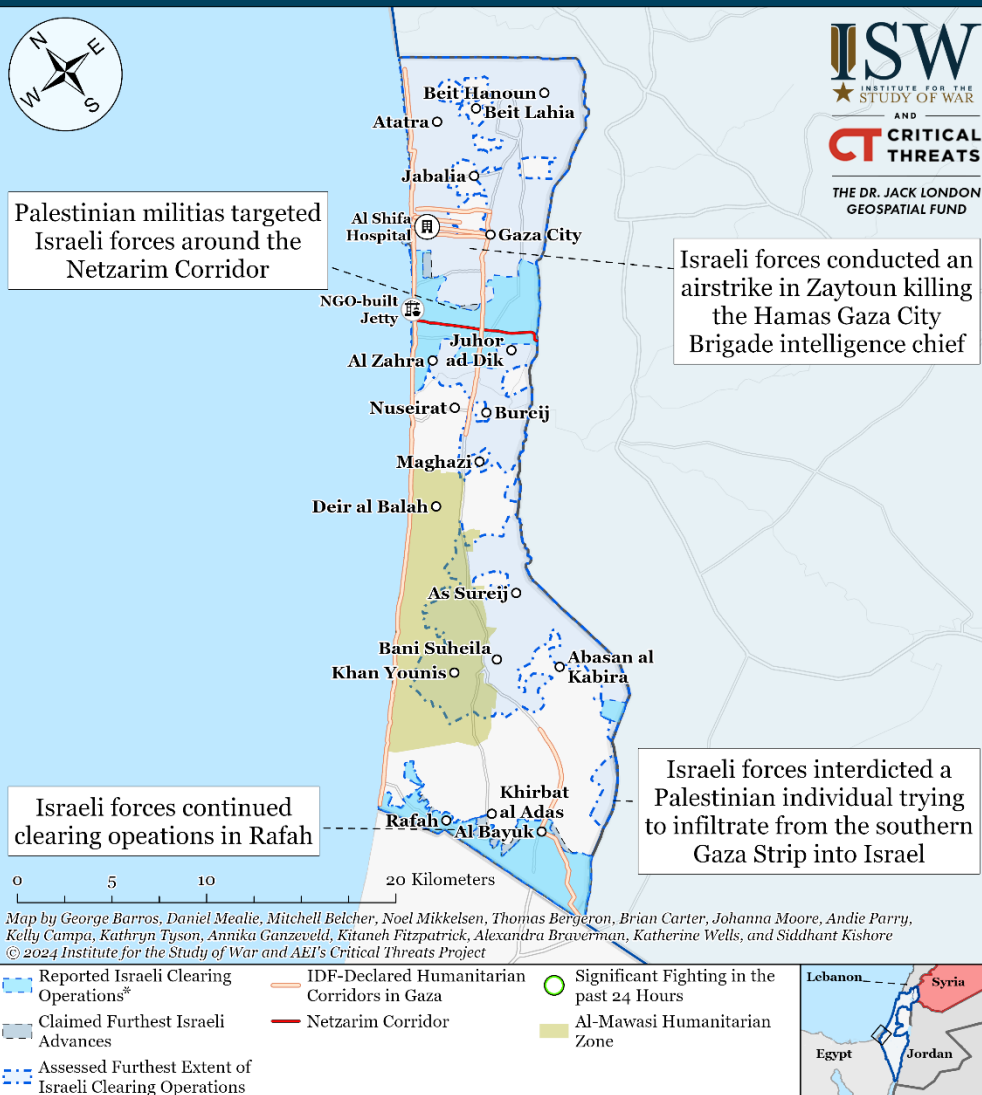
The IDF 143rd Division interdicted a Palestinian individual trying to infiltrate into Israel from the southern Gaza Strip on July 18.[31] Israeli reconnaissance forces identified an individual approaching the second layer of the border fence separating the Gaza Strip from Israel after the individual breached the first "old fence." [32] The individual did not cross into Israeli territory.[33] Israeli forces responded to the site and conducted an airstrike killing the individual.[34] It remains unclear whether the individual was armed or attempted to conduct an attack. Israeli forces have worked to create an additional buffer zone between inhabited areas of the Gaza Strip and Israeli territory since beginning ground operations in the Gaza Strip in late October 2023.[35] Israeli forces have continued to demolish militia infrastructure along the Gaza Strip-Israel border, including in the northern Gaza Strip on July 18.[36]

Palestinian militias conducted at least six indirect fire attacks targeting Israeli forces along the Netzarim Corridor on July 19.[37]

Israeli forces likely continued clearing operations in Rafah on July 19. The IDF did not publish information about its operations in Rafah, and Palestinian militias similarly did not claim attacks targeting Israeli forces in Rafah. Local reports and video published by Israeli soldiers on social media indicate that Israeli forces continued to operate in Rafah along the Philadelphi Corridor, however.[38] The IDF has deployed combat engineers to demolish buildings within 800 meters of the Philadelphi Corridor.[39] An Israeli combat engineer published a video of him demolishing a school near the corridor in southern Rafah on July 19.[40]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

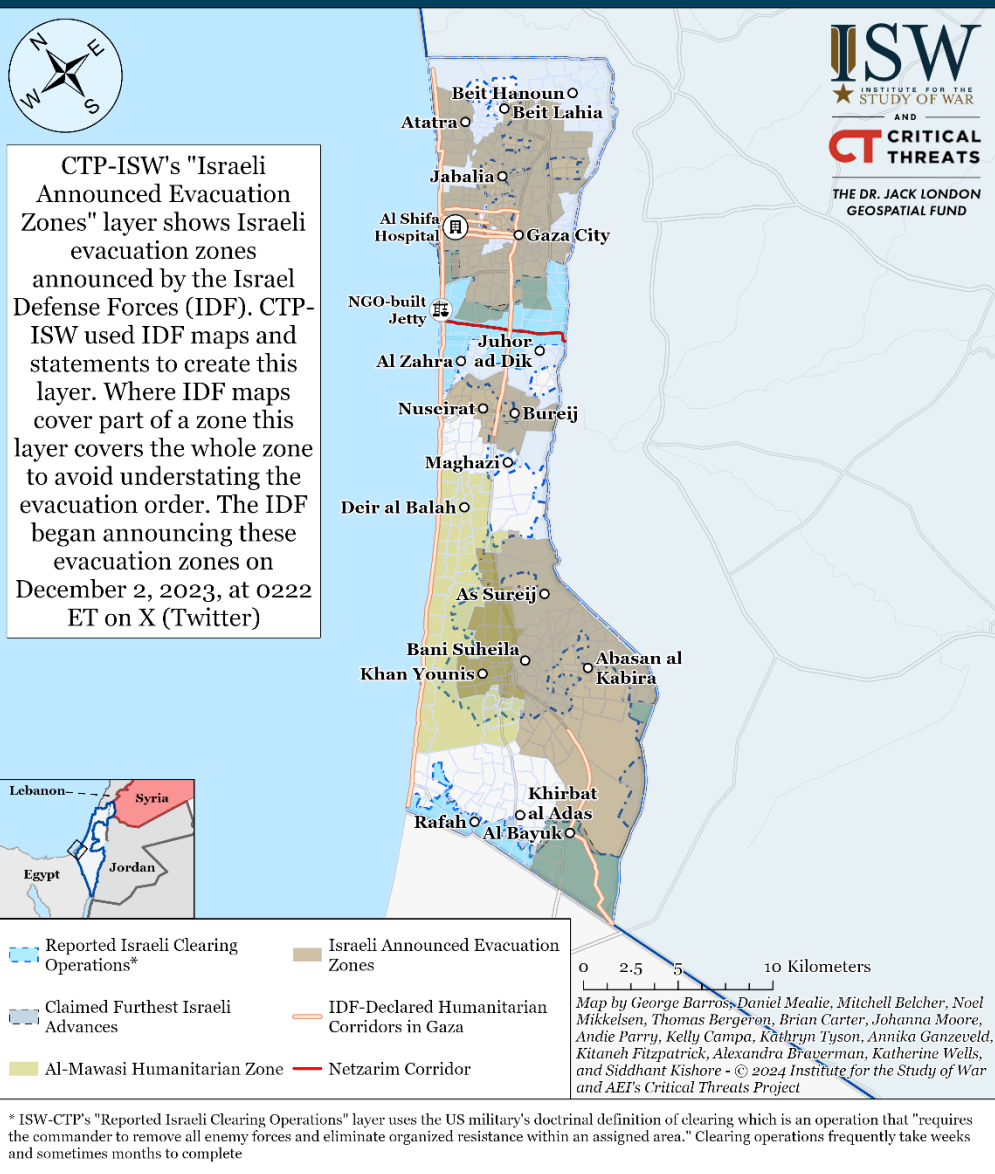
As of July 19, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Kathryn Tyson, Annika Ganzefeld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, and Siddhant Kishore
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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

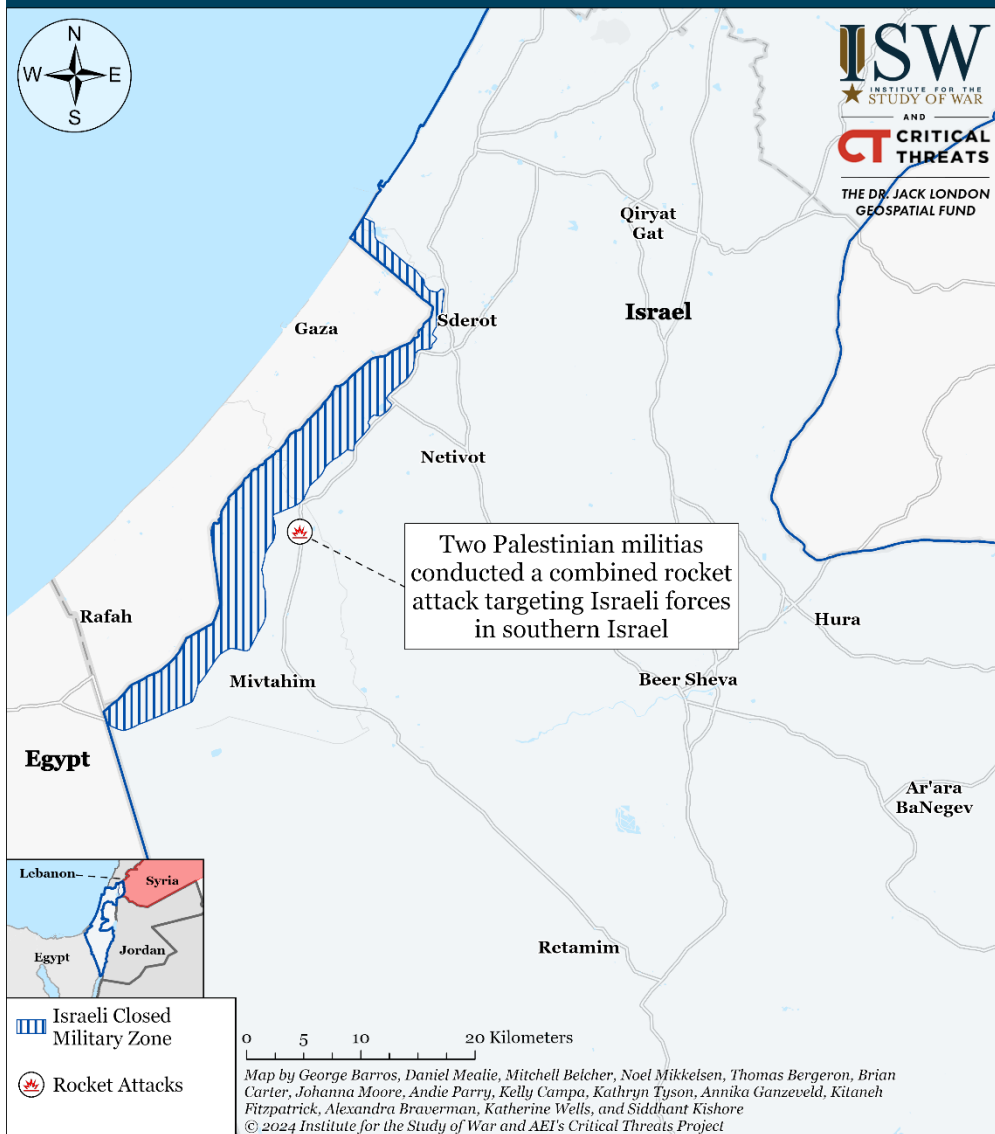
Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip As of July 19, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Two Palestinian militias conducted a single rocket attack targeting an IDF site in southern Israel on July 19.[41]

Attacks into Israel from the Gaza Strip

As of July 19, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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

West Bank

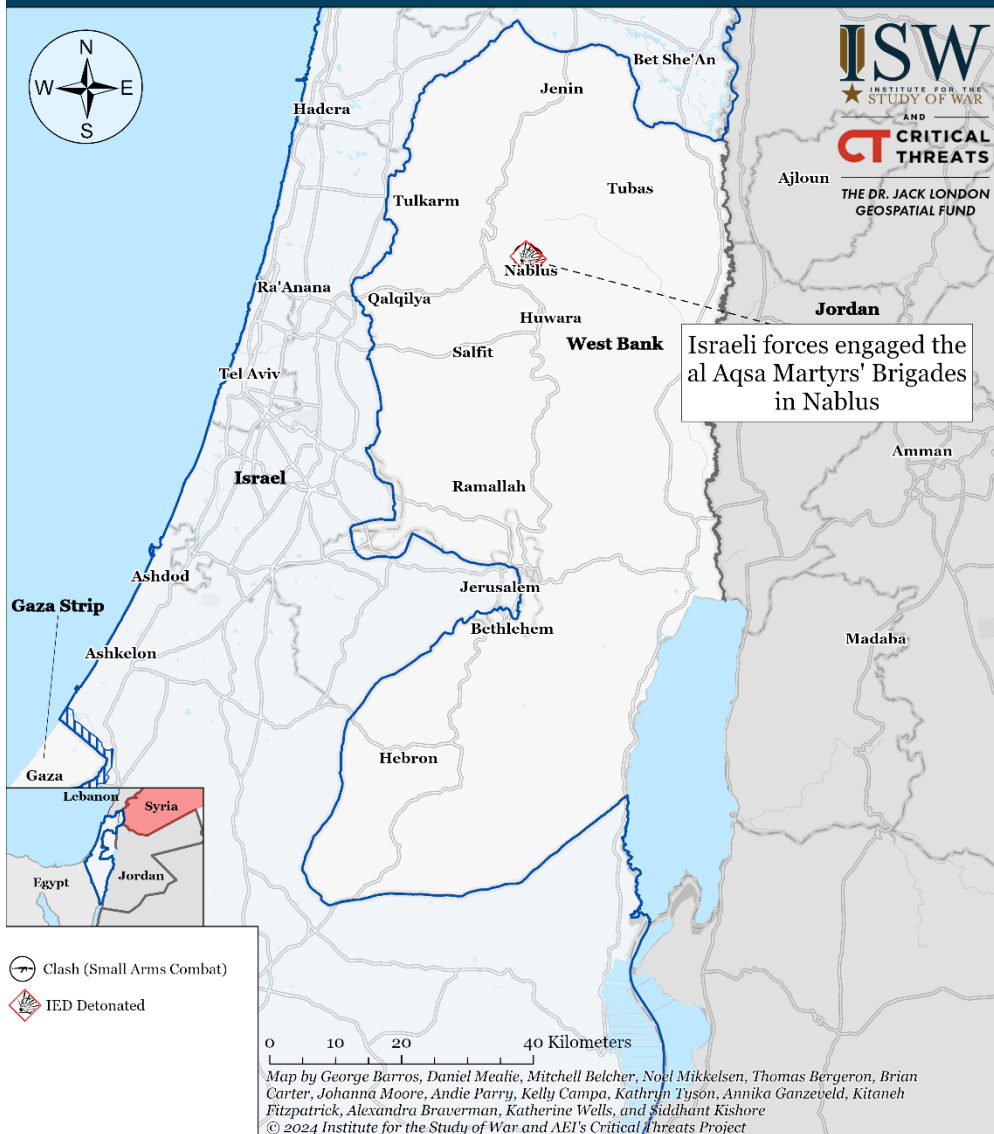
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

Israeli forces engaged Palestinian fighters in at least two locations in the West Bank on July 19.[42] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired small arms and detonated improvised explosive devices (IED) targeting Israeli forces in Nablus.[43]

Significant Activity in the West Bank

As of July 19, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



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

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

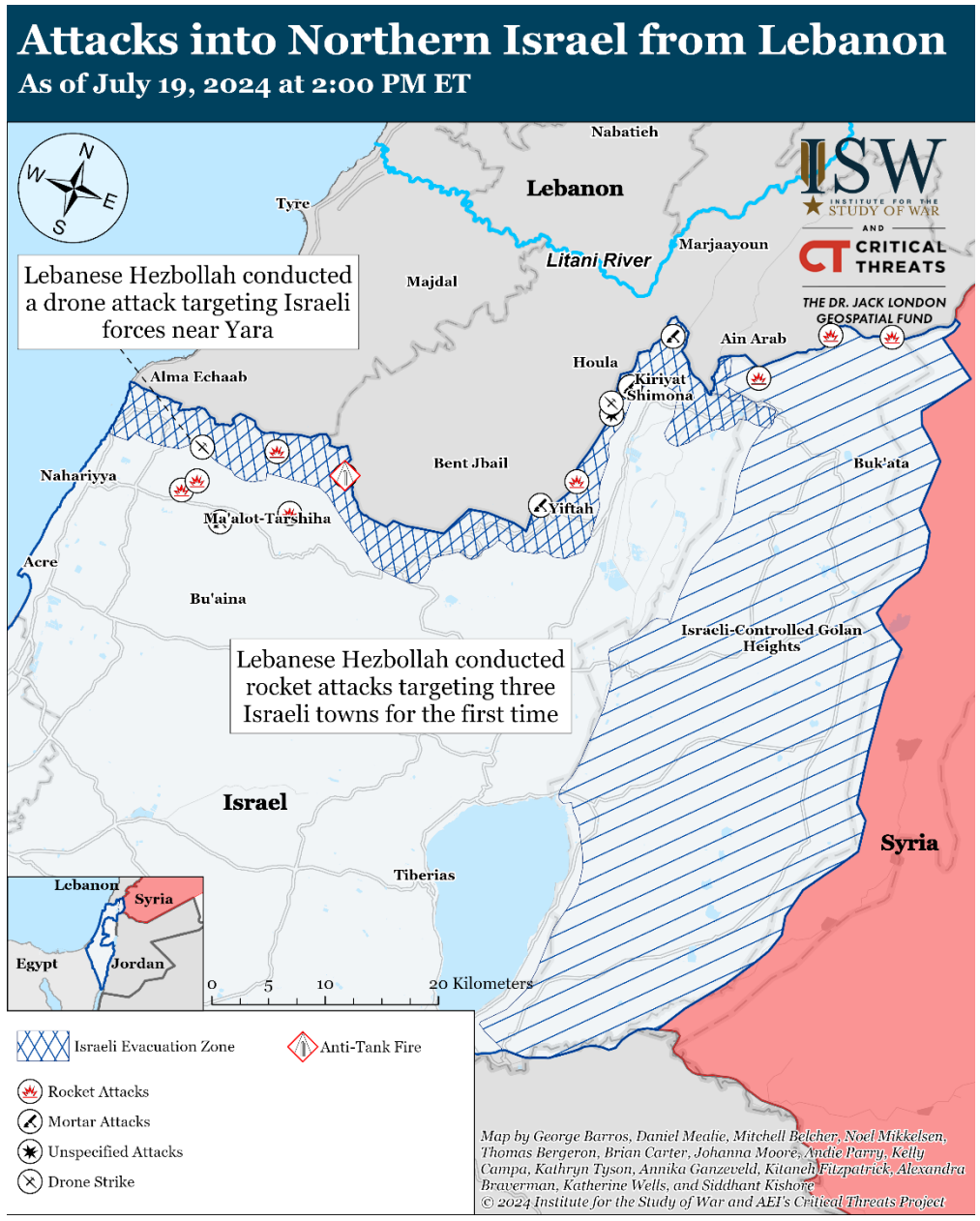
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- 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 17 attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on July 18.[44] The Hezbollah-

affiliated Lebanese Resistance Brigades conducted two attacks targeting Israeli forces in northern Israel.[45]

The IDF conducted airstrikes targeting Hezbollah military infrastructure, including weapons depots, in multiple locations in southern Lebanon on July 18 and 19.[46]



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

Iran and Axis of Resistance

US Department of Defense spokesperson Sabrina Singh confirmed on July 18 that an unspecified Iranian-backed Iraqi militia conducted a drone attack targeting US forces at

Ain al Asad Airbase in Anbar Province, Iraq, on July 16.[47] Singh stated that US forces intercepted one drone while a second drone impacted the base, causing “minimal damage.” Singh added that US forces also intercepted a drone near the al Omar oil field in northeastern Syria on an unspecified date.[48] The July 16 attack marks the first Iranian-backed Iraqi militia attack targeting US forces in Iraq or Syria since April 2024.[49] Singh noted that it is unclear whether the July 16 attack was a one-off or marked the resumption of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias’ attack campaign against US forces in Iraq and Syria.[50] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias previously threatened around June 5 to resume attacking US forces if the Iraqi prime minister failed to set a date for the withdrawal of US troops within 40 days.[51] That 40-day period would have ended around July 15.

The Houthis claimed a drone and missile attack targeting the Singaporean-flagged commercial vessel *Lobivia* in the Gulf of Aden on July 19.[52] The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations received a report of an attack 83 nautical miles southeast of Aden, Yemen.[53]

Houthi Attacks in the Red Sea

As of July 19, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



US Central Command (CENTCOM) conducted preemptive strikes destroying two surface-to-air missiles and four drones in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen on July 18.[54]

Iranian President-elect Masoud Pezeshkian has finished assembling his transition team. The head of the transition team, Mohammad Javad Zarif, announced the members of the council overseeing the transition on July 19.[55] The council has 31 members, at least nine of whom served under former moderate President Hassan Rouhani.[56] Zarif himself was Rouhani's foreign affairs minister. The council also includes individuals affiliated with prominent reformists Mohammad Khatami and Mir Hossein Mousavi.[57] The council includes three women and a representative for

Kurdish and Sunni affairs.[58] Pezeshkian previously vowed that his cabinet would represent all genders, religions, and ethnicities.[59]

Unidentified assailants shot and killed an Iranian police officer in a drive-by shooting in Saravan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province, on July 18.[60] Two other police officers were injured in the attack.[61] The attack comes amid an uptick in anti-regime militancy in Sistan and Baluchistan Province since December 2023.

The Iranian Artesh Navy is conducting a military exercise with Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan in the Caspian Sea between July 19 and 21.[62] Artesh Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Erani previously called for increasing combined exercises between the Artesh and Azerbaijani navies during a visit to Baku, Azerbaijan, in December 2023.[63]



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