

Iran Update



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Information Cutoff: September 23, 2024, 2:00pm 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.

Israel set new war objectives for Lebanon on September 16. Accomplishing these objectives would require the IDF to undertake a second major military campaign in Lebanon as part of the October 7 War. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced on September 16 that returning Israeli citizens to their homes in northern Israel would be a new Israeli war aim as part of the October 7 War.[1] Netanyahu’s new war aims are a response to the 11-month-long Lebanese Hezbollah military campaign that has sought to accomplish Hezbollah’s own military and political objectives vis-a-vis Israel and in support of Hamas.[2]

Israel's ongoing military campaign in Lebanon is part of an Israeli effort to prevent Hezbollah from accomplishing its war aim, which is to enable Hamas' survival and ability to rebuild itself in the Gaza Strip. Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah has repeatedly tied an end to rocket fire into northern Israel to an Israeli ceasefire in the Gaza Strip on terms dictated by Hamas.[3] Hamas' proposed ceasefire agreement, however, is tantamount to an Israeli defeat because it would enable Hamas to rebuild over time.[4] Agreeing to Hamas' terms would also fail to ensure Israeli security over the long term because it would demonstrate to Nasrallah that Israel could be cowed and defeated by relatively inexpensive indirect fire targeting civilians in Israel. This would encourage Nasrallah to undertake similar campaigns again in the future.

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, as CTP-ISW has previously noted.[5] 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 Israeli aim is not possible unless Hezbollah's rocket fire ceases. Nasrallah is unlikely to abandon his Axis of Resistance partners in the end 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 Iranian-backed militias in Syria to sustain ground lines of communication between Iran and Hezbollah. Losing influence with these groups could have detrimental impacts on Hezbollah's long-term strength in the region and Lebanon.

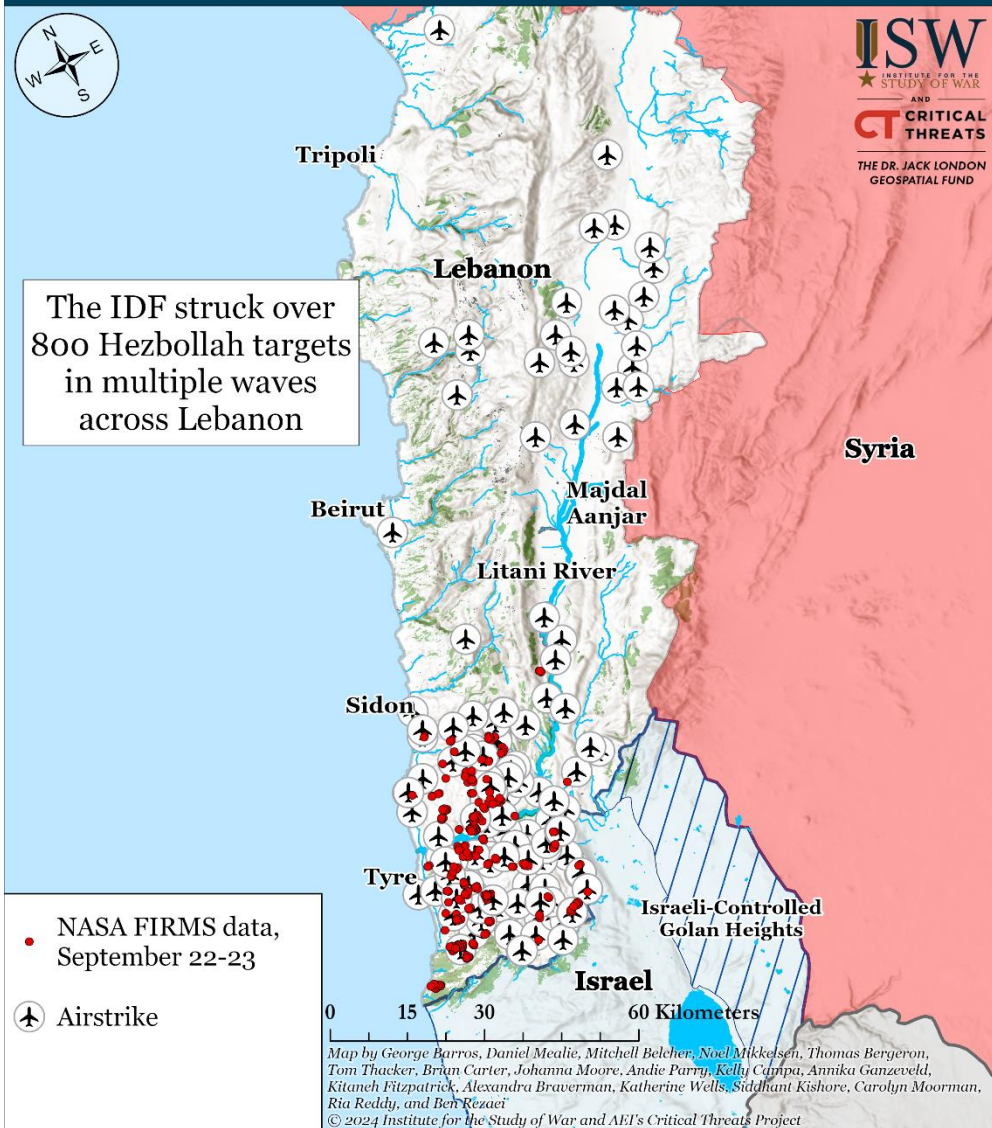
Hezbollah will therefore probably continue its indirect fire into northern Israel despite the ongoing Israeli air campaign. This will increase the risk of a ground campaign, given that the Israeli war aims of returning Israeli residents to northern Israel will require the IDF to physically prevent Hezbollah from firing into Israel. Israel is conducting a major air campaign in Lebanon, primarily targeting rocket launch sites to degrade Hezbollah's capabilities and destroy threats to Israel.[6] The IDF reported that it struck approximately 800 Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon on the morning of September 23.[7] Targeting the relatively mobile and extremely well-hidden Hezbollah rocket, missile, and drone array is a very difficult undertaking, even for an air force as tactically proficient as the IDF Air Force. The 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War taught the IDF the lesson that airstrikes alone cannot stop Hezbollah rocket barrages, even when such an air campaign is very effectively designed and executed on a tactical level.[8]

The IDF conducted an airstrike on September 23 targeting the commander of Hezbollah's southern front Ali Karaki in Dahiya neighborhood, Beirut, according to sources in the IDF.[9] An Israeli military correspondent reported that Karaki became the most senior Hezbollah military commander after the IDF killed Ibrahim Aqil on September 20.[10] Karaki is the Southern Front commander and controls Hezbollah's Badr, Nasser, and Aziz Units.[11] Hezbollah rejected reports that Karaki was killed in the Israeli airstrike and claimed that he was moved to a safe location.[12] The IDF has not commented on the airstrike at the time of this writing.

The IDF reported on September 23 that it struck over 800 Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon and is preparing to strike targets in the Bekaa Valley.[13] An Israeli military correspondent reported that the IDF was primarily targeting rocket launchers aimed toward Israel to preempt threats.[14] The IDF stated that Hezbollah stores its weapons in populated areas and civilian structures and warned civilians to avoid those areas.[15]

Israeli Air Campaign in Lebanon

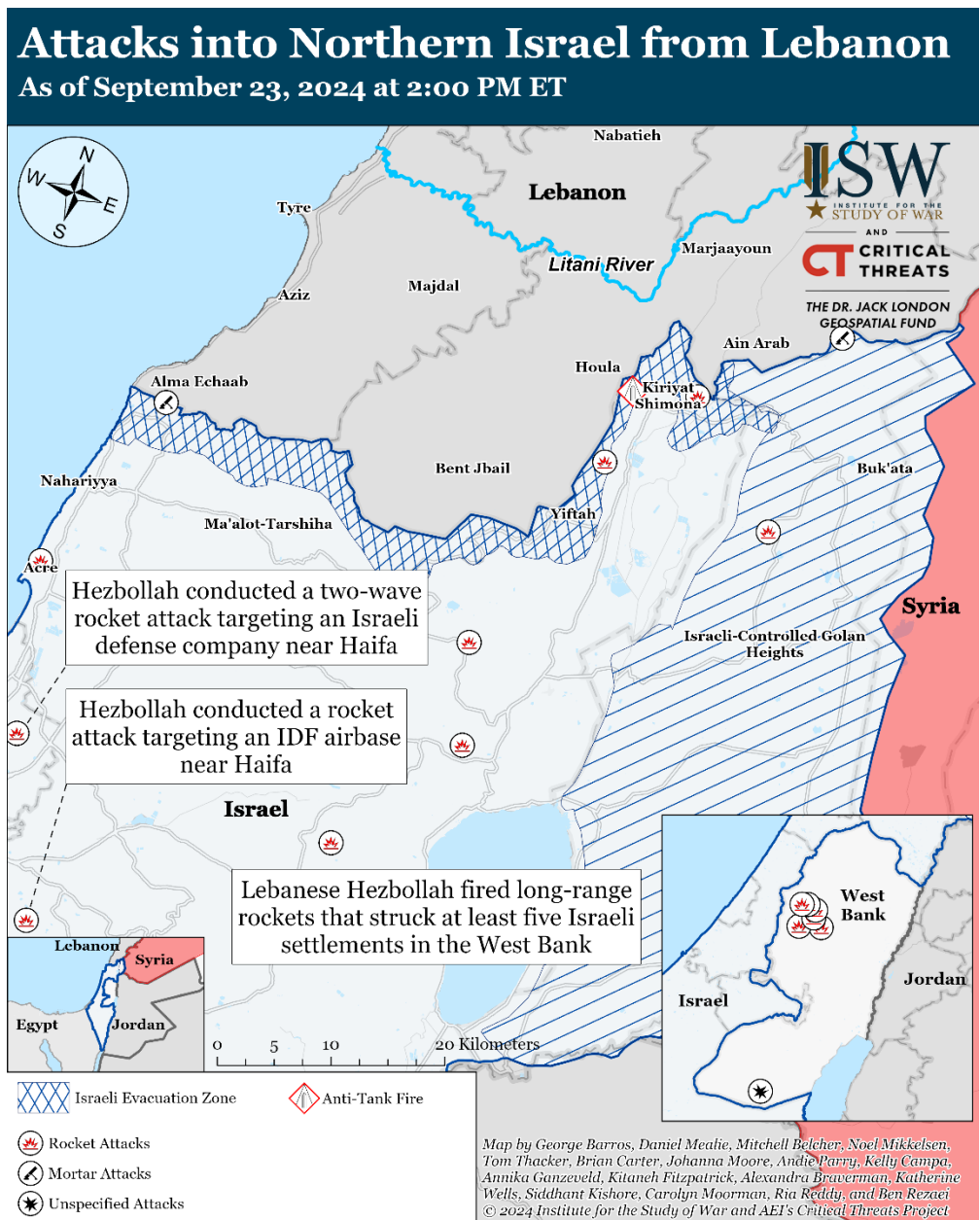
As of September 23, 2024 at 14:00 PM ET



This map illustrates the locations of Israeli air and artillery strikes based on local Lebanese reporting. This map depicts strikes reported from 12:00pm ET on September 21 to 12:00pm ET on September 22. This map is not exhaustive. CTP-ISW cannot independently verify the locations of Israeli strikes.

Lebanese Hezbollah expanded the depth of its attack campaign against Israeli civilians by targeting Israeli settlements in the West Bank on September 23.^[16] Hezbollah fired an unspecified number of long-range rockets that struck at least five Israeli settlements in the West Bank.^[17] These settlements are located approximately 100 kilometers south of the Israel-Lebanon border. The IDF stated that the rockets fell in open areas.^[18] A Palestinian journalist reported that

Hezbollah rockets injured two Palestinians in Deir Istiya, which is about 15km southwest of Nablus and in Salafit Governorate.^[19] Hezbollah may intend for these rocket attacks deep into the West Bank attempting to strain Israeli air defenses by forcing Israeli air defense systems to intercept rockets over the West Bank, where Israel very infrequently intercepts rocket fire. Most of the rocket fire that Israel has historically intercepted close to the West Bank has come from the Gaza Strip to the west, rather than from the north. Hezbollah’s rocket attacks into the West Bank demonstrate its capabilities to strike new targets deeper into Israel and pose an imminent threat to major Israeli cities, including Tel Aviv. Tel Aviv is also located approximately 100 kilometers south of the Israel-Lebanon border. This is the first time that Lebanese Hezbollah has struck targets in the West Bank since launching its indirect fire campaign targeting northern Israel on October 8, 2023.^[20]



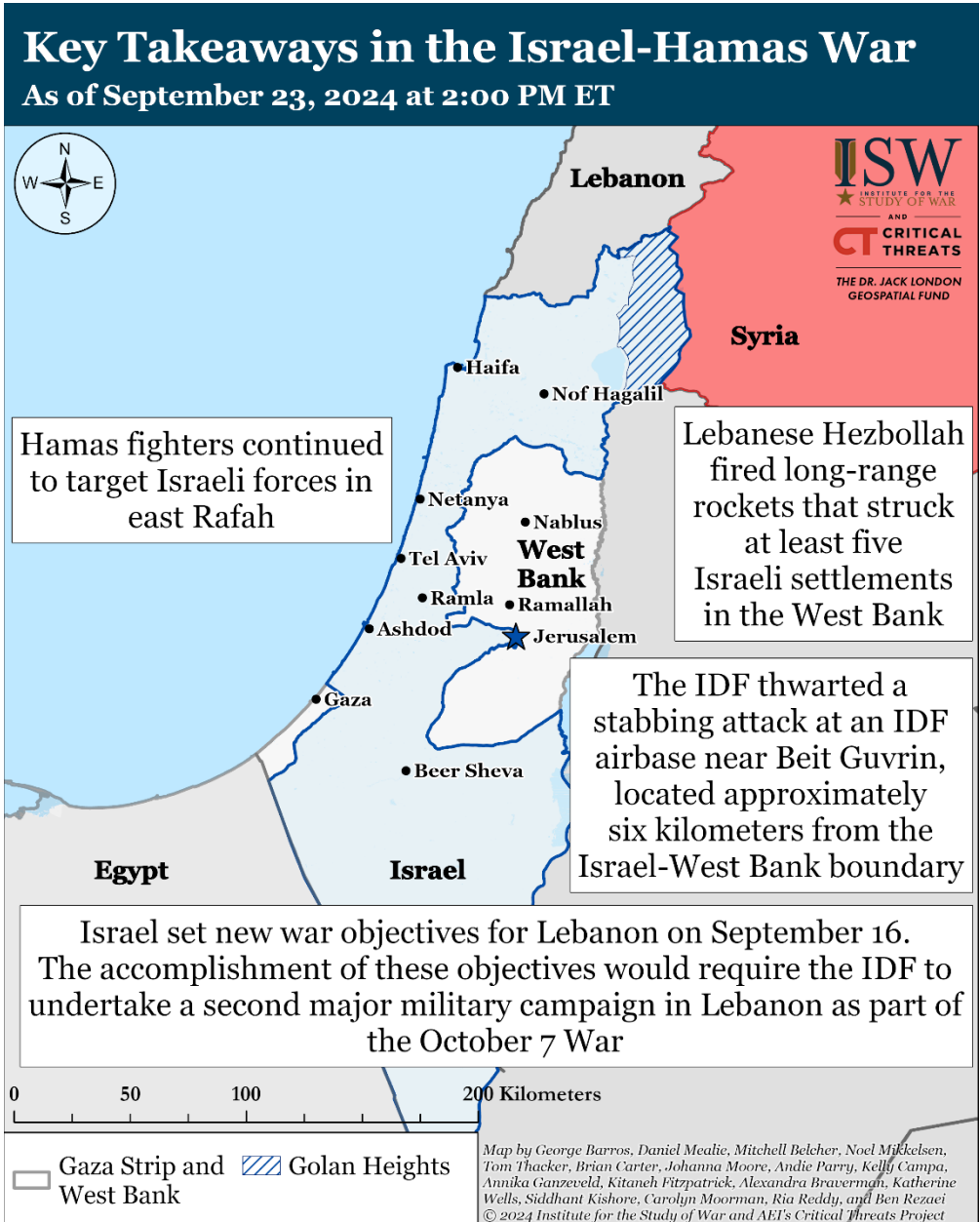
Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi said on September 23 that the Masoud Pezeshkian administration is willing to resume nuclear negotiations.[21] Araghchi made this statement on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York City. Araghchi and President Pezeshkian traveled to New York on September 20 and 22, respectively, to attend the UNGA.[22] Araghchi stated that Iran is willing to resume nuclear negotiations in New York City if “the other parties are ready.”[23] Araghchi added that he will remain in New York longer than Pezeshkian to meet with various unspecified foreign diplomats. Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for Political Affairs Majid Takht Ravanchi, Vice President for Strategic Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif, and lead Iranian nuclear negotiator Kazem Gharib Abadi accompanied Araghchi and Pezeshkian to New York.[24] Ravanchi and Zarif were both part of the Iranian nuclear negotiating team under former President Hassan Rouhani that helped conclude the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).[25] Gharib Abadi was the Iranian representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) from 2018 to 2021, during which time he played a key role in engaging Western diplomats and negotiating teams.[26]

Araghchi also met with several foreign counterparts in New York on September 22 and 23. Araghchi met with the foreign affairs ministers of Bahrain, Bulgaria, Cuba, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Uzbekistan.[27] Araghchi emphasized Iran’s support for Lebanese Hezbollah during his meeting with Lebanese Foreign Affairs Minister Abdallah Bouhabib.[28]

Key Takeaways:

- **Lebanon:** Israel set new war objectives for Lebanon on September 16. Accomplishing these objectives would require the IDF to undertake a second major military campaign in Lebanon as part of the October 7 War. Israel’s ongoing military campaign in Lebanon is part of an Israeli effort to prevent Hezbollah from accomplishing its war aim, which is to enable Hamas’ survival and ability to rebuild itself in the Gaza Strip. 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, as CTP-ISW has previously noted.
- **Israeli Air Campaign in Lebanon:** The IDF reported on September 23 that it struck over 800 Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon and is preparing to strike targets in the Bekaa Valley. The IDF conducted an airstrike on September 23 targeting the commander of Hezbollah’s southern front Ali Karaki in Dahiya neighborhood, Beirut, according to sources in the IDF.
- **Hezbollah Attack Campaign in Israel:** Lebanese Hezbollah expanded the depth of its attack campaign against Israeli civilians by targeting Israeli settlements in the West Bank on September 23.
- **Nuclear Negotiations:** Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi stated on September 23 that the Masoud Pezeshkian administration is willing to resume nuclear negotiations.
- **Gaza Strip:** Hamas has published and attributed several messages to Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar in recent weeks. Israeli intelligence officials assess that Sinwar did not write the messages himself.

- **Iraq:** An Iranian-backed Iraqi militia member told Lebanese outlet al Akhbar on September 23 that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias’ “scope of [Israeli] targets” has expanded due to recent Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon.



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

Multiple Palestinian militias conducted attacks targeting Israeli forces near the Netzarim Corridor on September 23.[29] Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) mortared Israeli forces along the Netzarim Corridor.[30] The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) mortared Israeli forces operating in the northern Central Governorate.[31]

The IDF Air Force struck a Hamas command-and-control center in a former school in Nuseirat, central Gaza Strip, on September 22.[32] The IDF said that Hamas fighters used the compound in Khaled bin al Walid school to plan and conduct attacks targeting Israeli forces.[33] The IDF added that it took steps to minimize civilian casualties in the airstrike, including using certain munitions and aerial surveillance.[34]

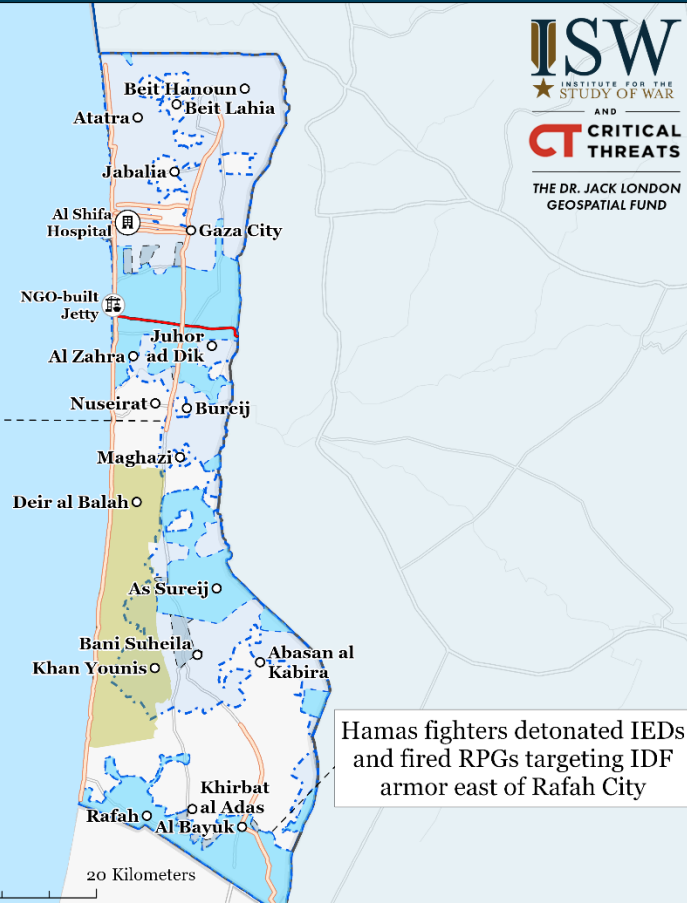
Hamas fighters detonated improvised explosive devices (IED) and fired rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) targeting IDF armor east of Rafah City on September 23.[35] Hamas fighters have conducted multiple attacks against Israeli forces operating east of Rafah since September 21.[36] CTP-ISW previously assessed that even severely degraded military formations, such as Hamas' Rafah Brigade, can continue to conduct simple opportunistic attacks.[37]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of September 23, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



The IDF Air Force struck a Hamas command-and-control center in a former school in Nuseirat



Hamas fighters detonated IEDs and fired RPGs targeting IDF armor east of Rafah City

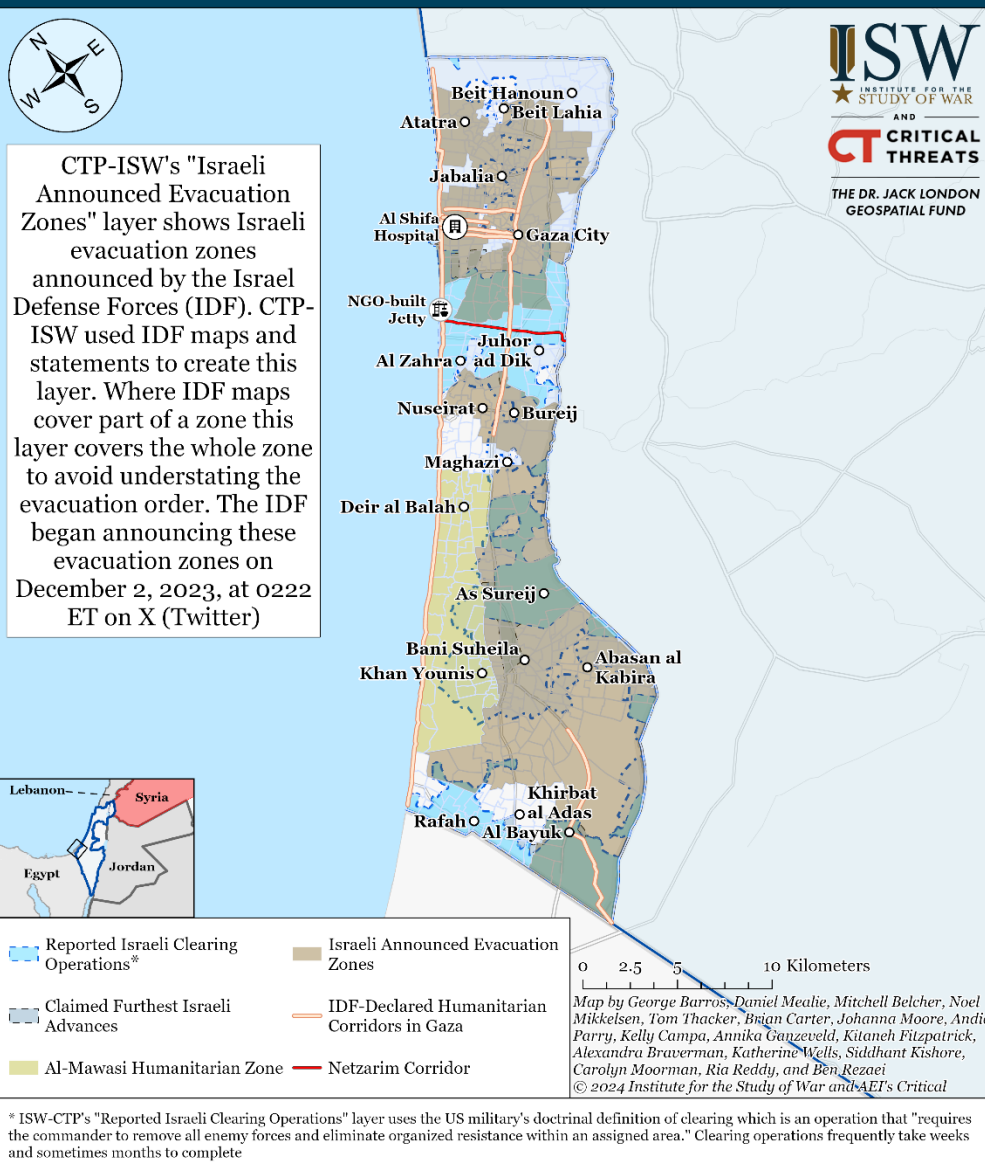
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Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Tom Thacker, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, Siddhant Kishore, Carolyn Moorman, Ria Reddy, and Ben Rezaei - © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*	IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridors in Gaza	Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours	
Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances	Netzarim Corridor	Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone	
Assessed Furthest Extent of Israeli Clearing Operations			

* 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 23, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Hamas has published and attributed several messages to Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar in recent weeks. Israeli intelligence officials assess that Sinwar did not write the messages himself.[38] The messages include Sinwar’s congratulatory message to the president of Algeria and a message addressed to the Houthis.[39] Israeli Army Radio reported that Israeli officials believe that another Hamas official wrote the messages on Sinwar’s behalf.[40]

West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

The IDF thwarted a stabbing attack at an IDF airbase near Beit Guvrin on September 23.[41] A likely Palestinian contractor working at the airbase attempted to attack an unspecified individual with an iron rod.[42] Israeli forces at the airbase shot and killed the contractor.[43] The IDF reported that the attempted attack did not cause any injuries.[44] The IDF airbase is located approximately six kilometers from the Israel-West Bank boundary.

The IDF detained nine wanted persons across the West Bank on September 23.[45] The IDF conducted raids in Hebron Governorate in which the IDF confiscated four lathes used to produce weapons and seized a rifle.[46] The IDF separately conducted a raid near Jerusalem and seized raw materials used to manufacture improvised explosive devices (IEDs).[47] The IDF also confiscated 100,000 Israeli shekels in “terrorist funds.”[48]

Hamas called on Palestinians in the West Bank to “defend” the al Aqsa Mosque against Israeli settler “incursions” in the coming days.[49] Hamas Political Bureau member Haroun Nasser al Din said that Israeli settlers plan to enter the al Aqsa Mosque during the upcoming Jewish holidays.[50] Nasser al Din added that all Palestinians must prioritize defending the mosque.[51]

Israeli forces have engaged Palestinian fighters in at least two locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on September 22.[52] The al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades fired small arms targeting the Kochav Yaakov and Karmi Tzur settlements.[53] The al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades also claimed responsibility for two shooting attacks targeting IDF checkpoints in Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim that occurred on September 19 and 21, respectively.[54]

Significant Activity in the West Bank

As of September 23, 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

Lebanese Hezbollah has conducted at least 13 attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on September 22.[55] Hezbollah conducted a two-wave rocket attack targeting Rafael Advanced Defense Systems near Haifa on September 23.[56] Hezbollah separately launched medium-range rockets targeting IDF Ramat David airbase in northern Israel.[57] Hezbollah struck both targets for the second consecutive day on September 23.[58]

Iran and the Axis of Resistance

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed a drone attack targeting an IDF Golani Brigade observation post on September 22.[59] The Golani Brigade is assigned to the 36th Division and operates under the IDF Northern Command.[60] The IDF intercepted a drone launched from Iraq near the Golan Heights, causing no casualties. [61]

An Iranian-backed Iraqi militia member told Lebanese outlet al Akhbar on September 23 that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias’ “scope of [Israeli] targets” has expanded due to recent Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon.[62] The militia member claimed that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias can attack US and Israeli interests across the Middle East. The militia member added that the Axis of Resistance has “one operations room from Iraq all the way to Yemen.”[63] The militia member was likely referencing the joint operations room that senior Axis of Resistance officials established in the summer of 2023 to coordinate attacks against Israel.[64] CTP-ISW has reported on increased coordination and cooperation between Axis of Resistance groups in recent months.[65] A US self-defense strike in Baghdad in July 2024 killed a Houthi drone expert who had traveled to Iraq to train Iranian-backed Iraqi militias in drone tactics, highlighting the deepening relationship between Iraqi groups and the Houthis.[66]

Likely Iranian-backed Iraqi militants conducted an attack targeting US forces at Shaddadi in Hasakah Province, Syria, on September 22.[67] A Syrian regime-affiliated outlet reported that Iranian-backed militias conducted a rocket attack targeting the base.[68] A Syrian opposition outlet contrastingly reported that Iranian-backed militants fired mortar shells at the base from a nearby village.[69] CTP-ISW cannot independently verify that this attack occurred. Iranian-backed militants last reportedly attacked US forces in Syria on September 15.[70] CTP-ISW assessed in July 2024 that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias appear to have resumed their attack campaign targeting US forces in the Middle East.[71]

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian traveled to New York on September 22 to attend the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).[72] Supreme Leader Office International Relations Deputy Mohsen Qomi, First Vice President Mohammad Reza Araf, and presidential adviser

Ali Tayebnia, among others, accompanied Pezeshkian to New York.[73] Pezeshkian is scheduled to meet with the presidents of France, Finland, Switzerland, Tajikistan, and Turkey on the sidelines of the UNGA.[74] Pezeshkian will also meet with the king of Jordan.[75] Pezeshkian's visit to New York marks his second foreign trip since becoming president in July 2024. Pezeshkian previously traveled to Iraq between September 11 and 13.[76]

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Aerospace Force unveiled the “Jihad” ballistic missile during an annual military parade in Tehran on September 21.[77] Iranian media claimed that the “Jihad” ballistic missile is an upgraded version of Iran's Qiam-1 missile and has a range of 1,000 kilometers.[78] The IRGC Aerospace Force displayed a total of 23 ballistic missiles during the military parade.[79] The IRGC Aerospace Force also displayed a Shahed-136B drone, which reportedly has a range of over 4,000 kilometers and can carry a payload of up to 200 kilograms.[80]

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's son, Mojtaba Khamenei, canceled his seminary course on September 22.[81] Mojtaba is considered one of the top contenders to succeed his father as supreme leader. Mojtaba claimed that the decision to cancel his course had "nothing to do with political matters," although some individuals have speculated that Mojtaba canceled the course in order to assume new political responsibilities.[82] IRGC-affiliated media notably referred to Mojtaba as an "Ayatollah" in its report about the cancellation of Mojtaba's seminary course.[83] Holding the rank of Ayatollah is a prerequisite to becoming supreme leader in Iran.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei emphasized the need for Islamic countries to unite against Israel during a meeting with ambassadors from unspecified Islamic countries on September 21.[84] Khamenei urged Islamic countries to sever economic and political ties with Israel and emphasized that Islamic unity is necessary to confront external threats.[85] Khamenei has repeatedly called for an international embargo on Israel since the Israel-Hamas War began in October 2023.

An explosion occurred at the Tabas coal mine in South Khorasan Province, Iran, on September 21, killing over 50 miners. Efforts to rescue 17 trapped miners are ongoing.[86] Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni visited Tabas on September 22 and President Masoud Pezeshkian ordered an investigation into the incident.[87] Rescue teams are facing difficulties reaching the trapped miners due to high gas levels in the mine.[88]

Iranian Foreign Affairs Ministry Senior Adviser for Policy Ali Asghar Khaji met with Chinese Special Envoy to the Middle East Zhai Jun in Tehran on September 23 to discuss regional developments.[89] Khaji condemned US and British airstrikes on Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen. Khaji also emphasized Iran's support for peace negotiations and "a Yemeni-led political dialogue." [90] Khaji separately called on China to support Syria's "humanitarian goals and reconstruction." Zhai Jun expressed China's readiness to participate in solving the "humanitarian and political crisis" in Syria.[91] Khaji has previously met with senior Syrian officials and advocated for "normalizing ties" between Syria and Turkey.[92]



- [1] <https://x.com/IsraeliPM/status/1835890307763757535>
- [2] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-october-25-2023>
- [3] www.almanar dot com.lb/12317659 ; <https://www.jpost dot com/israel-hamas-war/article-809828>
- [4] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-september-5-2024>
- [5] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-september-19-2024>
- [6] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1838059965858062706> ;
<https://x.com/idfonline/status/1838221448877420877> ;
<https://x.com/idfonline/status/1838221453046534547>
- [7] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1838221448877420877> ;
<https://x.com/idfonline/status/1838221453046534547>
- [8] <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1469&context=nwc-review>
- [9] <https://t.me/moriahdoron/14281> ; <https://t.me/moriahdoron/14282> ;
<https://t.me/moriahdoron/14283> ; <https://www.axios.com/2024/09/23/israel-hezbollah-southern-front-commander-beirut-airstrike>
- [10] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-september-20-2024>
- [11] <https://t.me/moriahdoron/14281>
- [12] <https://t.me/mmirleb/7232>
- [13] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1838189860181496140> ;
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- [16] <https://t.me/moriahdoron/14265> ; www dot timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/footage-shows-hezbollah-rocket-impact-in-west-bank-palestinian-town/
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- [19] <https://x.com/ytirawi/status/1838239333809115159>
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- [21] <https://english.alarabiya dot net/News/middle-east/2024/09/23/iran-says-willing-to-restart-nuclear-talks-at-un-general-assembly> ;
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[36] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/iran-update-september-22-2024>

[37] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/iran-update-september-15-2024> ;
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[38] <https://t.me/moriahdoron/14212>

[39] [www dot hamasinfo.info/?p=3801](http://www.hamasinfo.info/?p=3801); [www dot hamasinfo.info/?p=3861](http://www.hamasinfo.info/?p=3861)

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[41] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1838111604396712156> ; <https://t.me/moriahdoron/14216>

[42] <https://t.me/moriahdoron/14217>

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[46] <https://www.idf dot il/232812>

[47] <https://www.idf dot il/232812>

[48] <https://www.idf dot il/232812>

[49] <https://hamasinfo dot info/2024/09/23/3927/>

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