

Iran Update



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August 27, 2024, Information Cutoff: 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.

Iran has tried to insert itself into the ceasefire-hostage negotiations between Israel and Hamas since Israel killed Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, according to regional sources speaking to Emirati media.[1] An anonymous source told the outlet that Iran has become a “key behind-the-scenes player” in the negotiations.[2] Senior Iranian officials, including President Masoud Pezeshkian and Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi, have repeatedly engaged Egyptian and Qatari mediators in recent weeks, as CTP-ISW has reported.[3] Iran trying to insert itself into the negotiations is consistent with CTP-ISW's assessment that some elements of the Iranian regime, possibly from the Pezeshkian administration, are likely trying to delay an Iranian attack on Israel until the negotiations conclude.[4]Pezeshkian seeks to avoid a direct strike

on Israel and has instead reportedly advocated for targeting “secret Israeli bases” in Iraqi Kurdistan and Azerbaijan.[5]

An anonymous political source in Lebanon separately told Emirati media that Iran has used the threat of an attack on Israel to obtain a “bigger role in the Palestinian file.”[6] It is unclear what this role would entail. The source added that Egypt sought to postpone an Iranian attack on Israel, which Iran may have done in exchange for this expanded influence.[7]

CTP-ISW continues to assess that an Iranian attack on Israel is the most likely Iranian course of action. US White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby said on August 27 that Iran is “still postured and poised” to attack Israel.[8] Kirby added that the United States will maintain its deterrent military posture in the Middle East “as long as we feel we need to keep it in place to defend Israel and defend our own troops and facilities in the region.”[9] Iranian Deputy Defense Minister Brigadier General Hojatollah Qureishi separately warned on August 27 that Iran’s response to Israel will be “unpredictable.”[10] The Iranian ambassador to Lebanon similarly claimed on August 26 that Iran will “certain[ly]” retaliate against Israel.[11] Qureishi and the Iranian ambassador to Lebanon would not be responsible for planning an Iranian attack on Israel, however.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and Shin Bet rescued Israeli hostage Qaid Farhan al Qadi from an underground tunnel in the southern Gaza Strip on August 27.[12] The IDF 401st Brigade, Shayetet 13 naval commandos, Yahalom combat engineers, and Shin Bet forces conducted the operation under the IDF 162nd Division.[13] Israeli forces did not encounter resistance from Palestinian fighters during the operation and located al Qadi alone in the tunnel complex where Hamas held him captive.[14] Two security sources told Israeli Army Radio that al Qadi escaped from his captors and reached Israeli forces in the tunnel.[15] The IDF did not specify where in the southern Gaza Strip Israeli forces found Qadi, but two Israeli brigades have been conducting daily raids in Tal al Sultan since August 19.[16] IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi and the commanders approved Israeli forces’ “continuation of activity” on the ground after the rescue operation ended.[17] Al Qadi is the first living hostage whom the IDF has recovered from an underground tunnel in the war.

Israel’s hostage negotiations envoy described in a recent interview a period around July 2024 when Israeli negotiators felt optimistic about securing a ceasefire-hostage deal with Hamas.[18] Brigadier General (ret.) Gal Hirsch, who is Benjamin Netanyahu’s appointed hostage envoy, spoke with former Israeli reporter and television host Nadav Perry on August 25.[19] Hirsch is a close associate of Netanyahu and has been involved in high-level meetings with Israeli diplomats throughout the negotiations with Hamas.[20] Hirsch pointed to a period in mid-to-late July 2024 in which Netanyahu and Israeli negotiators felt that they were “advancing” and making progress in talks with Hamas.[21] This period began after Hamas rejected an Israeli-accepted, US-drafted proposal on June 11 in a formal response that reiterated that Hamas’ maximalist demands be met.[22] The proposal that Hamas rejected reportedly included unspecified Israeli provisions to meet Hamas’ maximalist demands but did not guarantee them.[23] Hirsch said that Israel decided to “stand firm” in its position and refused to compromise following Hamas’ rejection of the proposal.[24] Israel’s adopted uncompromising stance, as described by Hirsch, was a departure from Israel’s previous reported willingness to compromise to meet Hamas’ demands in the US-drafted

proposal. Netanyahu publicly embraced this uncompromising posture and said on July 13 that he would be “not budge a millimeter from the outline that President Biden welcomed.”[25]

Hamas began to more constructively engage Israeli negotiators in response to Israel’s refusal to compromise and its ongoing operations in the Gaza Strip, according to Hirsch.[26] Hirsch said that Hamas stopped demanding the end of the war in Gaza Strip as a condition for negotiations and began to make new demands that allowed actual negotiations to take place.[27] Israeli negotiators were internally optimistic about Hamas’ slightly positive movement at this time.[28] Israeli and US officials said on July 11 that Hamas had “softened” some of its positions, allowing the talks to make progress.[29] Netanyahu said on July 22 that the deal was “ripening” while US President Biden said that negotiators were “on the verge” of achieving a deal.[30] It is notable that Biden and Netanyahu were slightly less optimistic, though both leaders clearly saw a way to progress the talks. It was within this context that Israel submitted an updated ceasefire proposal to the United States on July 27.[31] Senior US, Egyptian, and Qatari officials convened in Rome on July 28 to discuss the updated proposal.[32] Israeli negotiators said that they emerged from the Rome summit pessimistic about the future of the deal, however.[33] This Israeli proposal reportedly included several new stipulations, including establishing a “foreign mechanism” to prevent weapons from moving from the southern Gaza Strip to the northern Gaza Strip and insisting on an Israeli presence in the Gaza Strip during the ceasefire.[34] These two sticking points are still some of the principal obstacles to negotiators working towards a deal at the time of this writing.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei met with President Masoud Pezeshkian and his newly formed cabinet on August 27.[35] Khamenei focused the meeting largely on addressing economic issues. He cautioned Pezeshkian against relying overly on technocrats in his government. He also gave Pezeshkian 13 recommendations for his presidency, which are:[36]

- serving the Iranian people and striving for progress;
- recognizing Iranian capabilities, including geographic advantages and human capital;
- bringing young Iranians into government service and training them;
- avoiding the prioritization of expertise over character in government service;
- promoting socio-economic equality and justice in domestic programs;
- fixing economic issues by investing in infrastructure;
- regulating cyberspace and implementing relevant laws;
- Increasing domestic production to improve inflation and unemployment rates;
- Countering negative demographic trends;
- Confronting and overcoming obstacles;
- Being open to engaging Iranian adversaries but not trusting them; and
- paying attention to enemy behavior as statesman and serving Islam.

- Pursue trips to all the provinces, engage with the public, and base your decisions on your observations.

Khamenei's remark on engaging adversaries without trusting them is consistent with his previous statements in recent months. Khamenei has expressed on several occasions his openness to nuclear negotiations with the West in order to remove international sanctions on Iran.[37] But Khamenei has also emphasized that building domestic capacities and resilience should be a higher priority for the Pezeshkian administration.

Key Takeaways:

- **Israel-Hamas ceasefire-hostage negotiations:** Iran has reportedly tried to insert itself into the ceasefire-hostage negotiations between Israel and Hamas. Iran has reportedly used the threat of its attack on Israel to obtain a greater role in the "Palestinian file."
- **Gaza Strip:** Israeli forces rescued an Israeli hostage in an underground tunnel in the southern Gaza Strip. The individual is the first living hostage whom Israeli forces have recovered from an underground tunnel in the war.
- **Iran:** Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei met with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and his newly formed cabinet. Khamenei focused the meeting on addressing economic issues. Khamenei also expressed openness to nuclear negotiations with the West.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of August 27, 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 252nd Division has likely continued clearing operations to expand the Netzarim Corridor in Zaytoun, southern Gaza City, since August 25. Commercially available satellite imagery captured on August 26 shows flattened terrain and tire tracks northwest of Salah ad Din Road in central Zaytoun, indicating that Israeli tanks or bulldozers operated in central

Zaytoun. A Palestinian journalist reported that Israeli forces killed three Palestinians with small arms fire near al Imam al Shafi Mosque on August 26, suggesting that Israeli forces continued to operate in the area even though the IDF did not confirm that it did.[38] The IDF 252nd Division has been operating in Zaytoun since at least August 23 to expand IDF control over territory near the Netzarim Corridor, which divides the northern Gaza Strip from the south.[39] Hamas and other Palestinian militia have targeted Israeli forces with pre-planted improvised explosive devices (IED), mortars, and rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) since the 252nd Division began operations in Zaytoun.[40] Five IDF reservists from the IDF 16th Brigade were killed in combat in Zaytoun on August 24 and 25.[41]

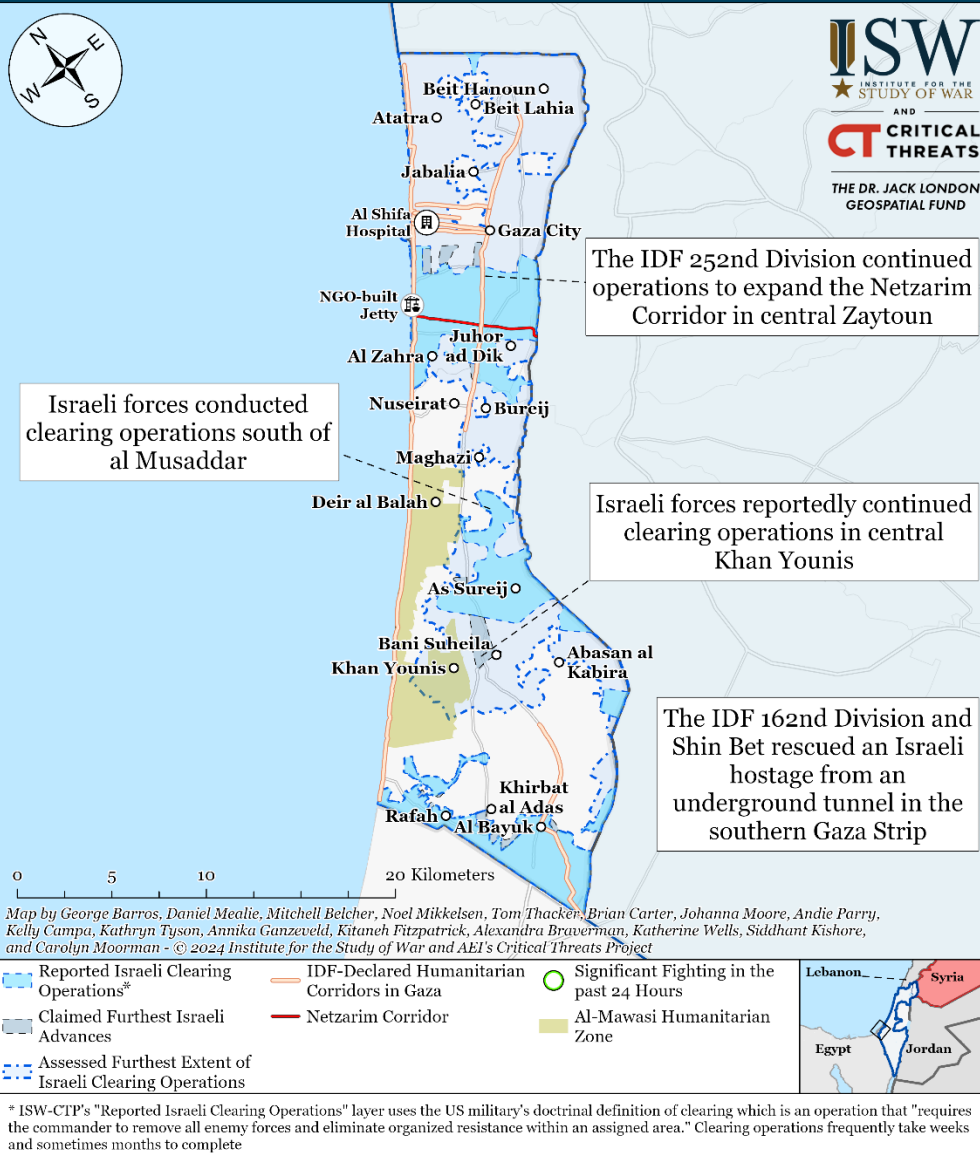
The IDF has advanced north from Wadi Salqa to south of al Musaddar, central Gaza Strip, since August 22.[42] Commercially available satellite imagery captured on August 26 shows flattened terrain and destroyed buildings on both sides of Street 13 south of al Musaddar, indicating that Israeli tanks or bulldozers operated south of al Musaddar. Local Palestinian journalists reported an IDF presence in the area on August 26.[43] The IDF has not previously operated on the ground in this area during the war. Three Palestinian militias fired rockets and mortars targeting Israeli forces east of Deir al Balah on August 27.[44]

IDF 98th Division forces have continued to advance north from northeast Khan Younis toward Deir al Balah since August 17.[45] The IDF confirmed that the IDF 7th Brigade and 35th Paratroopers Brigade (98th Division) continued to operate on the outskirts of Deir al Balah on August 26.[46] The IDF issued evacuation orders for eastern parts of Deir al Balah on August 25, warning that the area would become a "dangerous combat zone." [47] A local Palestinian journalist claimed that IDF snipers targeted Palestinians on al Shuhada Street, within the evacuated zone, on August 27, suggesting that the IDF may advance west into the area.[48]

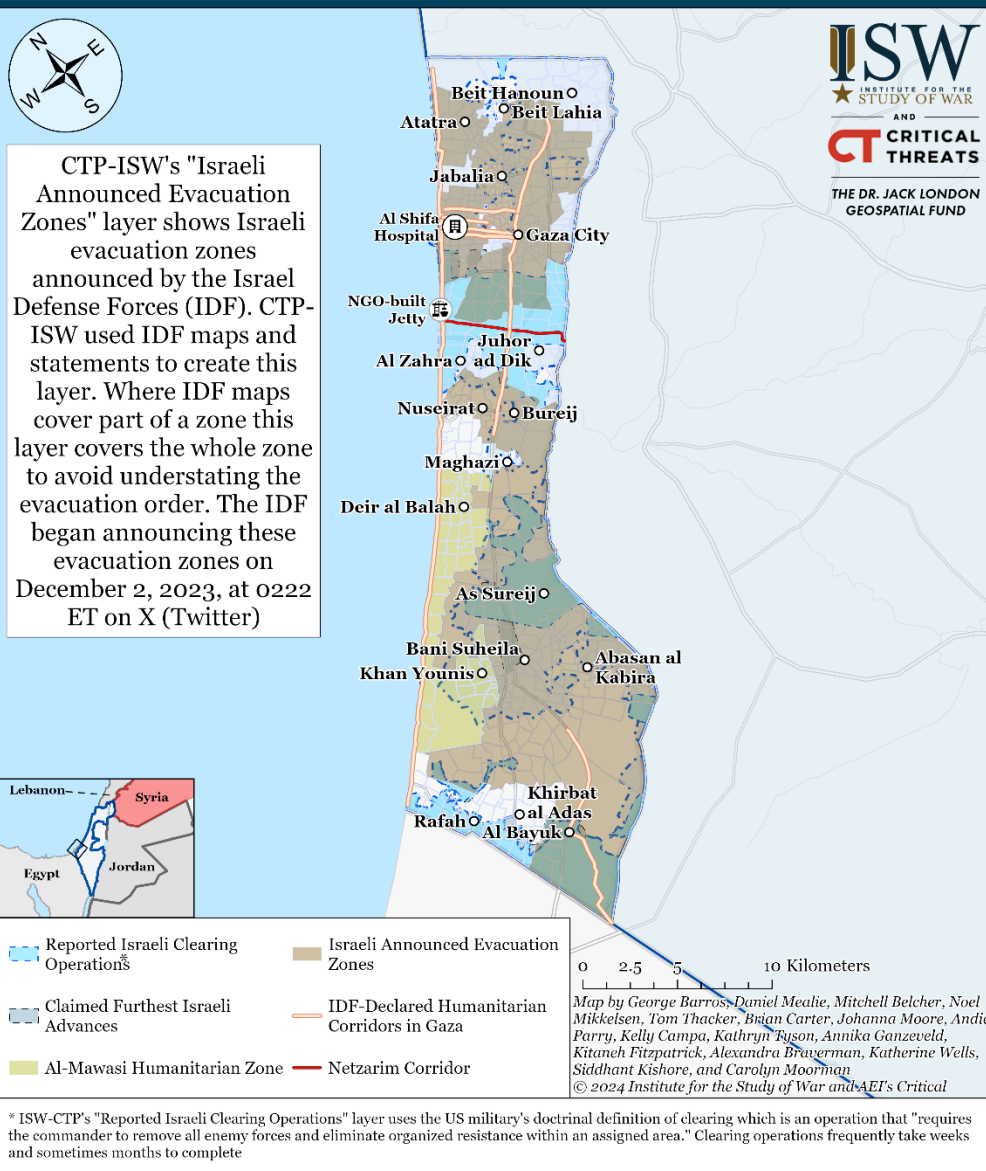
Palestinian sources reported that the IDF continued to operate in central Khan Younis on August 27. The IDF 98th Division continued to conduct clearing operations in Khan Younis on August 26.[49] Palestinian sources reported on August 27 that Israeli armor advanced east of al Mahta neighborhood after entering al Mahta on August 26.[50] Palestinian sources reported IDF vehicle fire in multiple locations in central Khan Younis, including east of al Katiba and al Mahta neighborhoods.[51]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of August 27, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



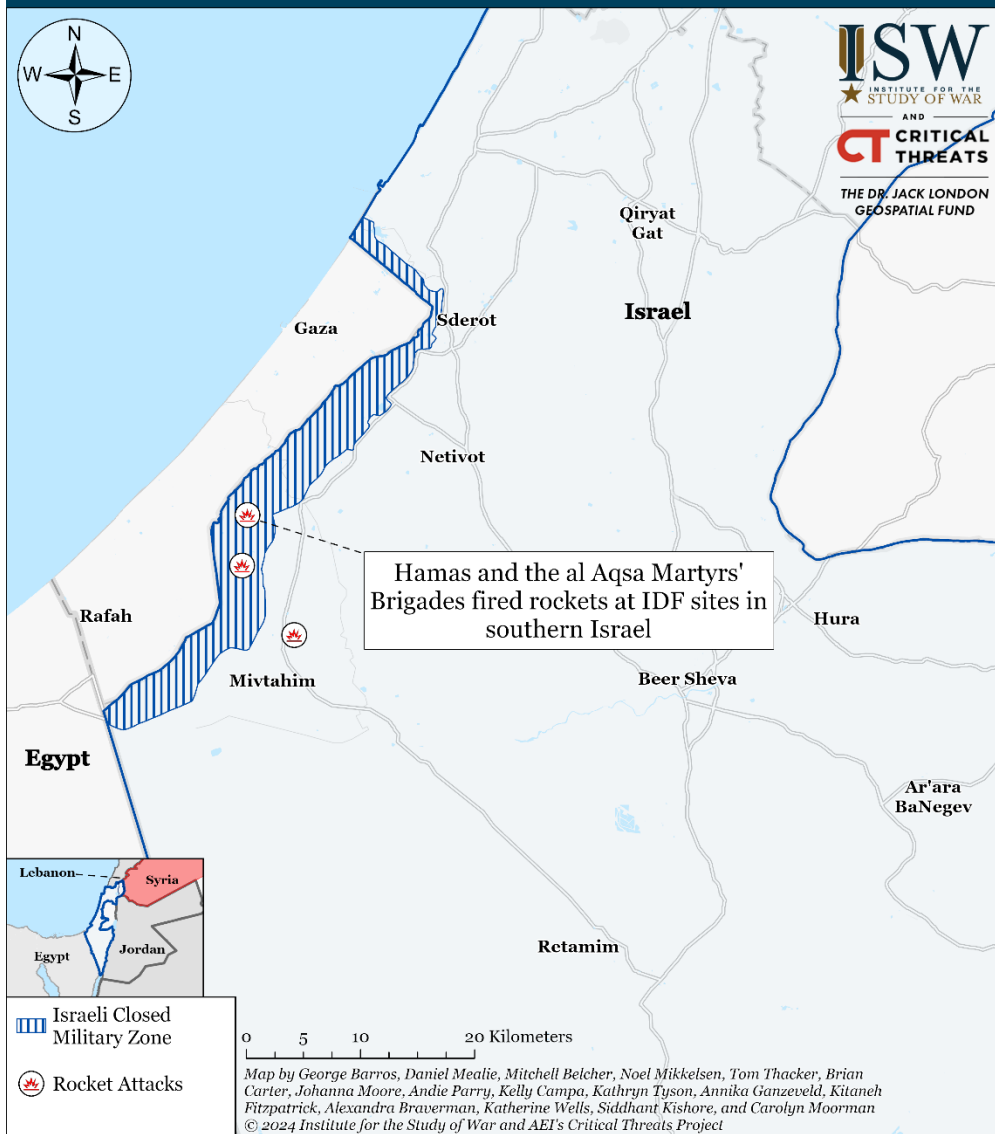
Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip As of August 27, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Hamas and the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired rockets targeting three IDF sites east of Khan Younis in southern Israel on August 27.[52]

Attacks into Israel from the Gaza Strip

As of August 27, 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

The IDF conducted a drone strike targeting a Hamas command-and-control site in Nour Shams refugee camp in Tulkarm on August 26.[53] Five Hamas fighters reportedly died in the strike.[54] An Israeli military correspondent said that Israel had released one of the Hamas fighters who died in the strike as part of the temporary truce agreement between Israel and Hamas in November 2023.[55] The IDF has killed three Hamas fighters whom Israel released under

the November 2023 temporary truce agreement in recent weeks after assessing that they rejoined Hamas and resumed targeting Israeli forces and civilians.[56]

Israeli forces and settlers clashed with Palestinian civilians in Bethlehem Governorate in the West Bank on August 26.[57] Israeli media reported that Palestinian civilians threw stones at Israeli vehicles near the village of Wadi Rahal.[58] IDF reservists fired small arms in response, killing one Arab Israeli and injuring four Palestinians.[59] An Israeli Army Radio correspondent reported that Israeli settlers entered Wadi Rahal along with the IDF reservists and vandalized Palestinian property.[60] The IDF launched an investigation to determine whether the reservists exercised the standard rules of engagement and operating procedures in response to the stone pelting incident.[61] The IDF is also investigating why the IDF reservists allowed Israeli settlers to enter the village and vandalize Palestinian property.[62]

Palestinian militias, including Hamas, called on Palestinians across the West Bank to demonstrate and attack Israeli forces and civilians in response to the killing of the Arab Israeli civilian in Wadi Rahal.[63]

Significant Activity in the West Bank

As of August 27, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



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

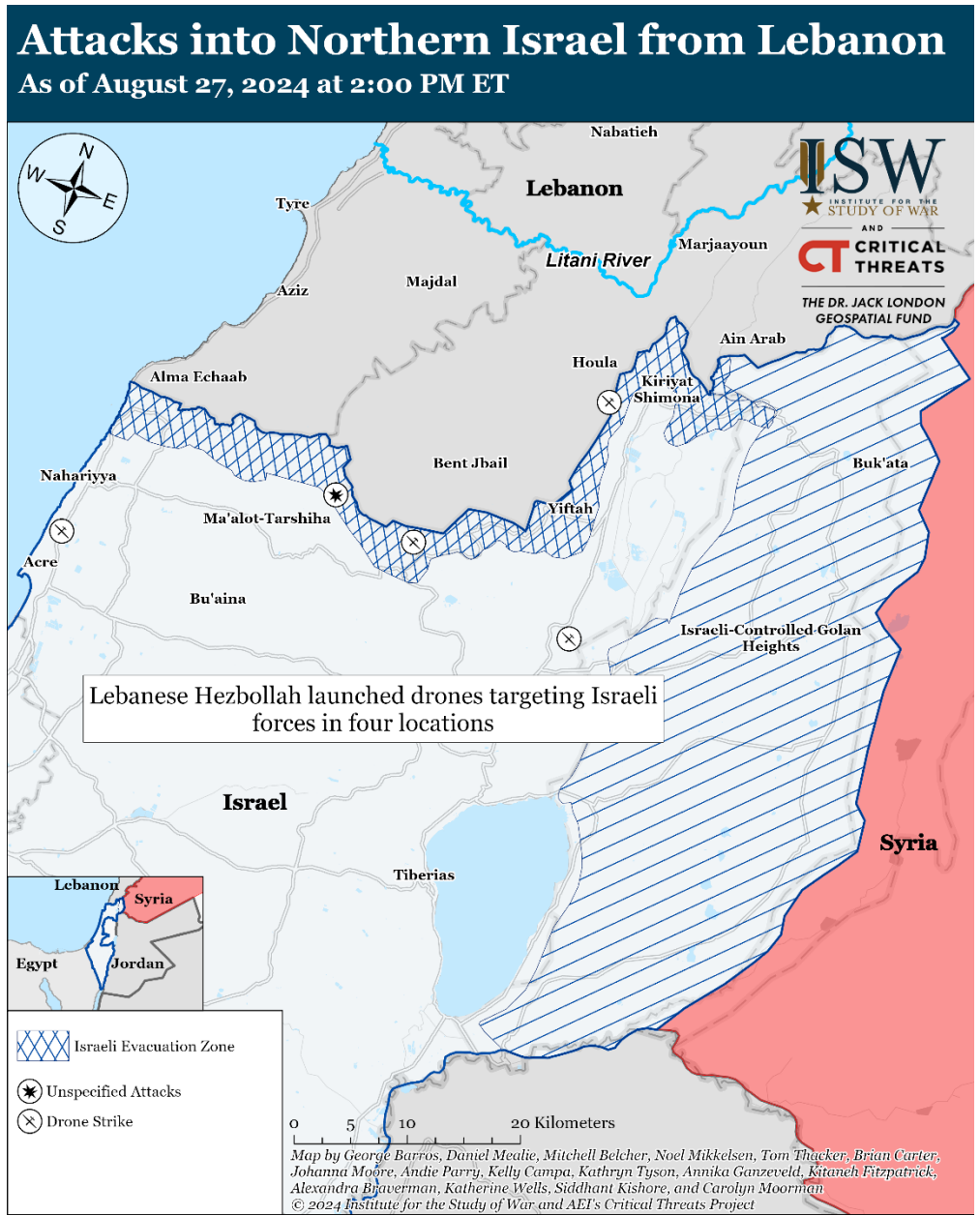
Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

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 five attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on August 26.[64]

IDF Northern Command Commander Major General Uri Gordin met with local authorities in northern Israel on August 26.[65] Gordin stressed the importance of returning displaced Israeli civilians to northern Israel. Gordin also discussed the IDF preemptive strikes targeting Hezbollah in southern Lebanon on August 26. Israeli media reported that several local leaders boycotted the meeting with Gordin because they allege that the Israeli government has failed to improve security in northern Israel.



Iran and Axis of Resistance

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed a drone attack targeting an unspecified target in Haifa, Israel, on August 26.[66]

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi held separate phone calls with his Kuwaiti and Omani counterparts on August 26 and 27, respectively, to discuss bilateral cooperation.[67] Araghchi emphasized the need for Iran and Kuwait to continually discuss "developments in the West Asian region," likely in reference to the Israel-Hamas war and heightened tensions between Iran and Israel.[68] Araghchi separately discussed expanding bilateral ties and securing "common interests" with his Omani counterpart.[69]

Iranian Central Bank Governor Mohammad Reza Farzin traveled to Bangalore, India, to participate in the Global Conference on Digital Public Infrastructure and Emerging Technologies on August 26 and 27.[70] Farzin and his delegation will discuss banking and monetary cooperation with other BRICS members.

Iranian moderate politician Mohammad Javad Zarif announced on August 27 that he will return to the position of vice president of strategic affairs.[71] President Masoud Pezeshkian appointed Zarif to this position on August 1. Zarif resigned on August 11 over his reported opposition to Pezeshkian's proposed cabinet.[72]

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian appointed Abdul Karim Hossein Zadeh as his vice president for rural affairs on August 27.[73] Hossein Zadeh is a Sunni politician who previously served as a parliamentarian representing parts of West Azerbaijan P[74] Hossein Zadeh is the first Sunni to hold a cabinet position in Iran since 1979, according to some reports.[75] Pezeshkian's nomination of Hossein Zadeh comes after Sunni politicians criticized Pezeshkian for not nominating any Sunnis for ministerial positions. .[76]

Tehran City Council Chairman Mehdi Chamran, Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalili, and the mayor of Rasht, Gilan Province, attended a BRICS conference in Moscow on August 27.[77] Chamran called for strengthening economic and political relations and increasing city-level interaction among BRICS member states.[78]

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