

Iran Update



Kelly Campa, Annika Ganzeveld, Kathryn Tyson, Ben Rezaei, Ria Reddy, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, Andie Parry, Siddhant Kishore, and Brian Carter

Information Cutoff: September 18, 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 continued to destroy Lebanese Hezbollah tactical communications devices on September 18. Israel detonated thousands of handheld two-way radios (or walkie talkies) across Lebanon.[1] The detonated devices killed at least 20 people and injured over 450.[2] Israel simultaneously detonated thousands of pagers in a previous attack wave on September 17, injuring over 2800 people, including Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon Mojtaba Amani.[3] Social media videos of the most recent attack showed that some of the radios detonated at the funerals of Hezbollah members killed in the September 17 pager detonations.[4] Unspecified US officials said that Israel conducted the first pager attack because of an imminent concern that Hezbollah might discover the rigged devices.[5] Israel reportedly decided to conduct the second attack due to the likelihood that Hezbollah would discover the remaining rigged devices after investigating the causes of the pager explosions, according to unspecified sources with knowledge of the operation.[6]

About 5,000 pagers were brought into Lebanon about five months ago as part of a yearslong effort to replace older devices.[7] Two sources with knowledge of the operation told Axios that Israel planted explosive materials in the devices in advance.[8] US and other officials speaking to the *Wall Street Journal* assessed that Israel intercepted the pagers and two-way radios at some point in the supply chain.[9] Western media reported that the walkie talkies may have contained more explosives than the pagers. The pagers contained one-to-two-ounces of explosive material.[10]

Israel's multi-stage attack on Hezbollah communications will force Hezbollah to urgently reestablish reliable tactical communications in case of an Israeli offensive campaign into Lebanon. Hezbollah had recently ordered the pagers to communicate across its ranks after Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah warned group members in February 2024 to limit cellphone usage to avoid Israeli surveillance and detection.[11] The walkie talkies were reportedly a back-up communication method intended to only be used during a war with Israel.[12] Hezbollah has limited options to rapidly reestablish long-range communications to reestablish effective command and control over its members in Lebanon and neighboring countries. Some of these options are:

- **Couriers.** Hezbollah has relied on couriers in the past but usually in combination with modern communications devices, such as the pagers or the two-way radios that Israel has destroyed.[13] Relying solely on couriers would significantly slow the speed at which Hezbollah commanders could communicate orders to their subordinates to respond to Israeli operations, given the wide geographic distribution of Hezbollah fighters across Lebanon. Couriers could still remain effective within lower Hezbollah echelons operating within one relatively small sector.
- **Landlines phones.** Hezbollah has reportedly relied upon an Iranian-financed, private telecommunications network that involves fiber optic cables running from Beirut to southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley.[14] Hezbollah may rely upon this network more heavily following Israel's attacks. Landlines can be relatively easily tapped or intercepted, however, and Israel has tapped Hezbollah landlines in the past.[15] Hezbollah may no longer trust landlines following the recent massive security breaches into systems previously thought to be impervious to Israeli hacking. It is unlikely that the fiber optic cable network extends to every tactically significant site inhabited by Hezbollah fighters, making this communication method suboptimal.
- **Satellite phones.** Hezbollah members, particularly high-level commanders, likely own satellite phones for use in an emergency. Satellite phone networks are not necessarily secure, however. Hezbollah fighters may be hesitant to use electronic devices such as satellite phones because of fears that Israel has compromised other supply chains outside of the pagers and radios. Satellite phones are also very expensive.
- **Tactical radio relay systems:** Hezbollah could decide to revert to older tactical communications systems. These systems are relatively easy to set up and use compared to landlines and couriers, both of which require substantial infrastructure or personnel. These systems can be jammed or intercepted, however. The IDF's ability to intercept these systems and

listen in on Hezbollah communications would make using these radio systems substantially less desirable for Hezbollah.

- **Cell phones:** Hezbollah previously advised its members to stop using cell phones to avoid Israeli detection and subsequent Israeli targeting, including by banning cell phone usage on the battlefield.[16] It is easy to track cell phone movements, which can be used to target Hezbollah fighters.[17] However, the lack of more accessible and rapid options to re-establish communications could force Hezbollah to return to cell phone use, even briefly, in order to effectively respond to a potential Israeli campaign. Hezbollah would risk Israeli surveillance and hacking in this scenario, therefore putting Hezbollah fighters at greater risk of targeted strikes or advertising Hezbollah movements. Hezbollah may calculate this is an acceptable risk to assume given the circumstances.

Hezbollah vowed to retaliate against the Israeli attacks in a statement on September 17.[18] The speed with which Hezbollah can bring up and organize these communication systems will determine how effectively and orderly it can respond to the Israeli attacks or a potential Israeli campaign.

Iran and its Axis of Resistance may decide to defend Hezbollah or help it reestablish deterrence vis-a-vis Israel during Hezbollah's short period of vulnerability created by the communications crisis. Iran, and its proxies by extension, rely on Hezbollah to establish deterrence vis-a-vis Israel and to project force and influence throughout the region. Hezbollah has also adopted an increasingly prominent role in helping Iran manage the Axis of Resistance in recent years. Iran and its Axis of Resistance may seek to defend Hezbollah against any potential Israeli operation in Lebanon while Hezbollah lacks the tactical communications required to effectively coordinate its own defenses. Iranian-backed groups could attempt to restore deterrence with Israel by increasing attacks against Israeli targets or moving personnel and arms along the Iranian ground line of communication to support Hezbollah in Lebanon. CTP-ISW has not independently observed confirmation of any of these indicators. Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah pledged on September 17 to send fighters, arms and equipment to defend Hezbollah, however.[19] Iran and Iranian-backed groups are likely to attempt to establish deterrence with Israel within the next few days if they choose this course of action, given that the pager attack only generates a temporary effect against Hezbollah's communications and therefore a relatively short period in which Hezbollah is at highest risk.

Iranian officials condemned Israel for the pager attack that blew up Lebanese Hezbollah fighters' pagers' batteries in Lebanon on September 17. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian condemned the attack and called for unity among Islamic countries in a government cabinet meeting on September 18.[20] The Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon, who was wounded in the attack, said on X (Twitter) that it was a "matter of pride that my blood is mixed with the blood of the wounded people of the honorable Lebanese nation." [21] The Iranian Embassy in Lebanon also dismissed rumors that Amani was seriously injured in the pager attack.[22] The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) spokesperson Ali Mohammad Naini claimed that the pager attack in Lebanon killed no IRGC personnel.[23] Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi condemned the attack and stated that Iran would be ready to provide assistance in a phone call with his Lebanese counterpart Abdullah Bouhabib on September 17.[24] Iranian Parliamentary National Security Committee member Alladin Boroujerdi said that Lebanon and Iran should respond firmly as soon as possible.[25] The Red Crescent

Society confirmed that some of the more seriously injured in Lebanon have been sent to Tehran for treatment and that 12 doctors and 12 nurses have been sent from Iran to Lebanon to help.[26]

Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani traveled to Baghdad on September 17 to meet with Iranian-backed Iraqi militia leaders, according to Iraqi media.[27] Ghaani met with Asaib Ahl al Haq Secretary General Qais al Khazali, Badr Organization Secretary General Hadi al Ameri, and Kataib Hezbollah Secretary General Abu Hussein al Hamidawi, among other militia leaders.[28] Iraqi media did not provide details about what Ghaani and the militia leaders discussed, although Ghaani typically travels to Baghdad to coordinate or mediate among Iraqi militias or to give the militias new orders and instructions. Ghaani's visit comes shortly after Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada leader Abu Ala al Walai claimed on September 13 that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias will soon launch a new phase of military operations against Israel.[29] Walai claimed that the new phase will include joint military operations and coordinated actions between Iranian-backed Iraqi groups and other Axis of Resistance members across multiple fronts. Ghaani's visit also follows an Iranian-backed Iraqi militia attack targeting a US diplomatic compound near Baghdad International Airport on September 10.[30] CTP-ISW previously noted that Iranian-backed Iraqi militants seem to have conducted the attack against the wishes of Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah and the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, which is a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias.[31] Ghaani may thus have traveled to Baghdad to ensure that Iraqi militias do not conduct attacks without informing and receiving approval from Iran.

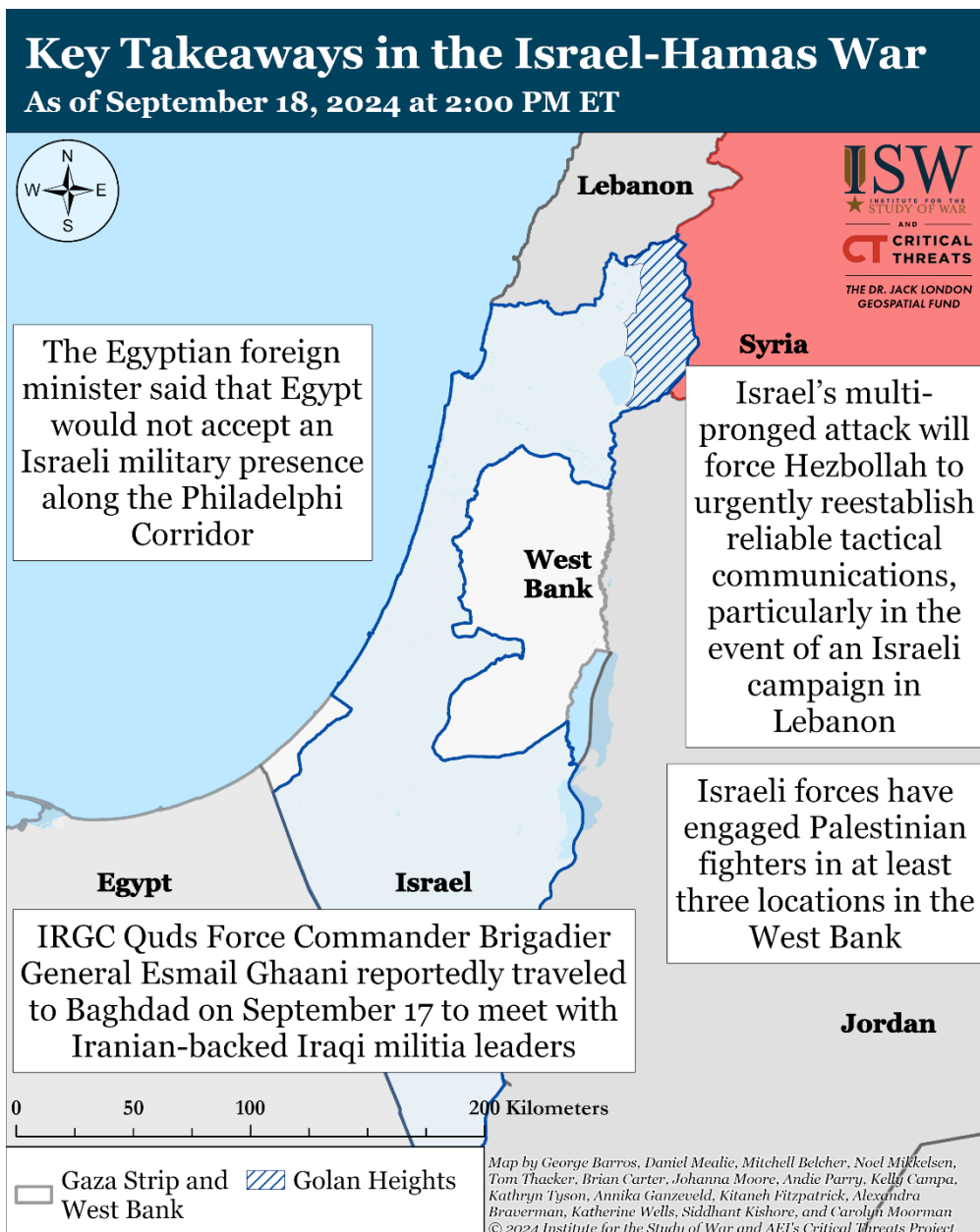
The Egyptian foreign minister said that Egypt would not accept an Israeli military presence along the Philadelphi Corridor on September 18.[32] Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty said during a press conference with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken that Egypt would reject any changes to the security arrangements along the corridor that were in place before the Israel-Hamas war began. Blinken traveled to Cairo on September 17 to meet with Egyptian officials and discuss an Israel-Hamas ceasefire-hostage deal.[33] An anonymous official in the region told Western media that the trip is meant to assuage Israeli concerns that Hamas can smuggle weapons and other military materials through the Philadelphi Corridor into the Gaza Strip.[34]

Key Takeaways:

- **Lebanon:** Israel continued to destroy Lebanese Hezbollah tactical communications devices on September 18. Israel's multi-stage attack on Hezbollah communications will force Hezbollah to urgently reestablish reliable tactical communications, particularly in the event of an Israeli offensive campaign into Lebanon. Iran and its Axis of Resistance may decide to defend Hezbollah or help it reestablish deterrence vis-a-vis Israel during Hezbollah's short period of vulnerability created by the communications crisis.
- **Iranian Response to the Pager Attack:** Iranian officials condemned Israel for the pager attack that blew up Lebanese Hezbollah fighters' pagers' batteries in Lebanon on September 17.
- **Iraq:** Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani traveled to Baghdad on September 17 to meet with Iranian-backed Iraqi militia leaders, according to Iraqi media. Ghaani met with Asaib Ahl al Haq Secretary General Qais al Khazali, Badr Organization Secretary General Hadi al Ameri, and Kataib Hezbollah Secretary General Abu Hussein al Hamidawi, among other militia leaders. Iraqi media did not provide

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- **Gaza Strip:** The Egyptian foreign minister said that Egypt would not accept an Israeli military presence along the Philadelphi Corridor on September 18. An anonymous official in the region told Western media that the trip is meant to assuage Israeli concerns that Hamas can smuggle weapons and other military materials through the Philadelphi Corridor into the Gaza Strip.



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 (IAF) conducted airstrikes targeting Hamas fighters in a school in Shujaiya, Gaza City, on September 18.^[35] The IDF said that Hamas used the school as a headquarters to plan and conduct attacks against Israel.^[36]

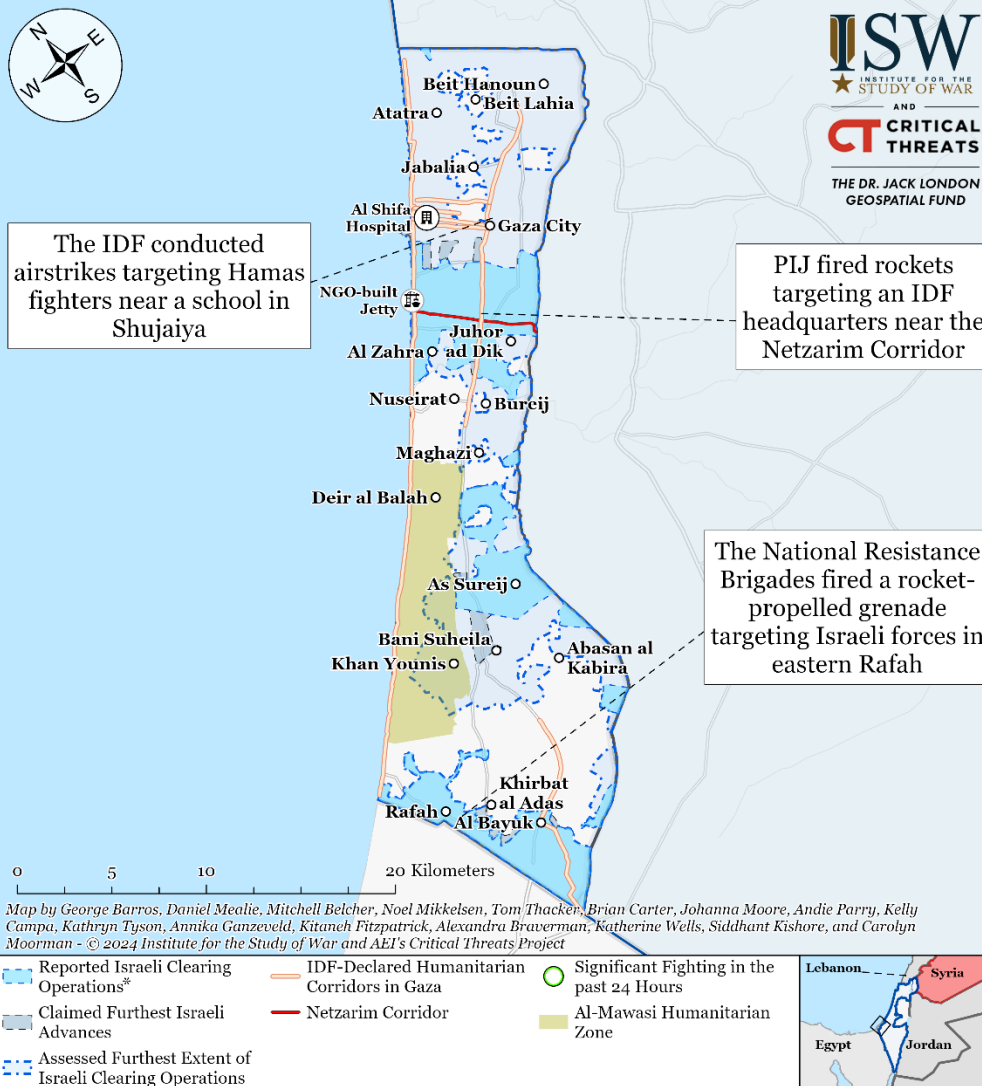
Palestinian Islamic Jihad fired rockets targeting an IDF headquarters along the Netzarim Corridor on September 18.^[37]

The National Resistance Brigades fired a rocket-propelled grenade targeting Israeli forces in eastern Rafah on September 18.^[38]

The IDF said that four IDF soldiers died from an explosion in an explosively-rigged building in Tal al Sultan, Rafah, on September 17.^[39] Five other soldiers were wounded in the explosion.^[40] An Israeli Army Radio correspondent reported that Palestinian fighters rig all the buildings in an area—sometimes up to 30 to 40 buildings—with explosives and can control the explosives with a remote detonator.^[41] The correspondent added that the IDF has destroyed 14,000 explosively rigged buildings in Rafah and 96,500 explosively rigged buildings in the entire Gaza Strip since the Israel-Hamas war began in October 2023.

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of September 18, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



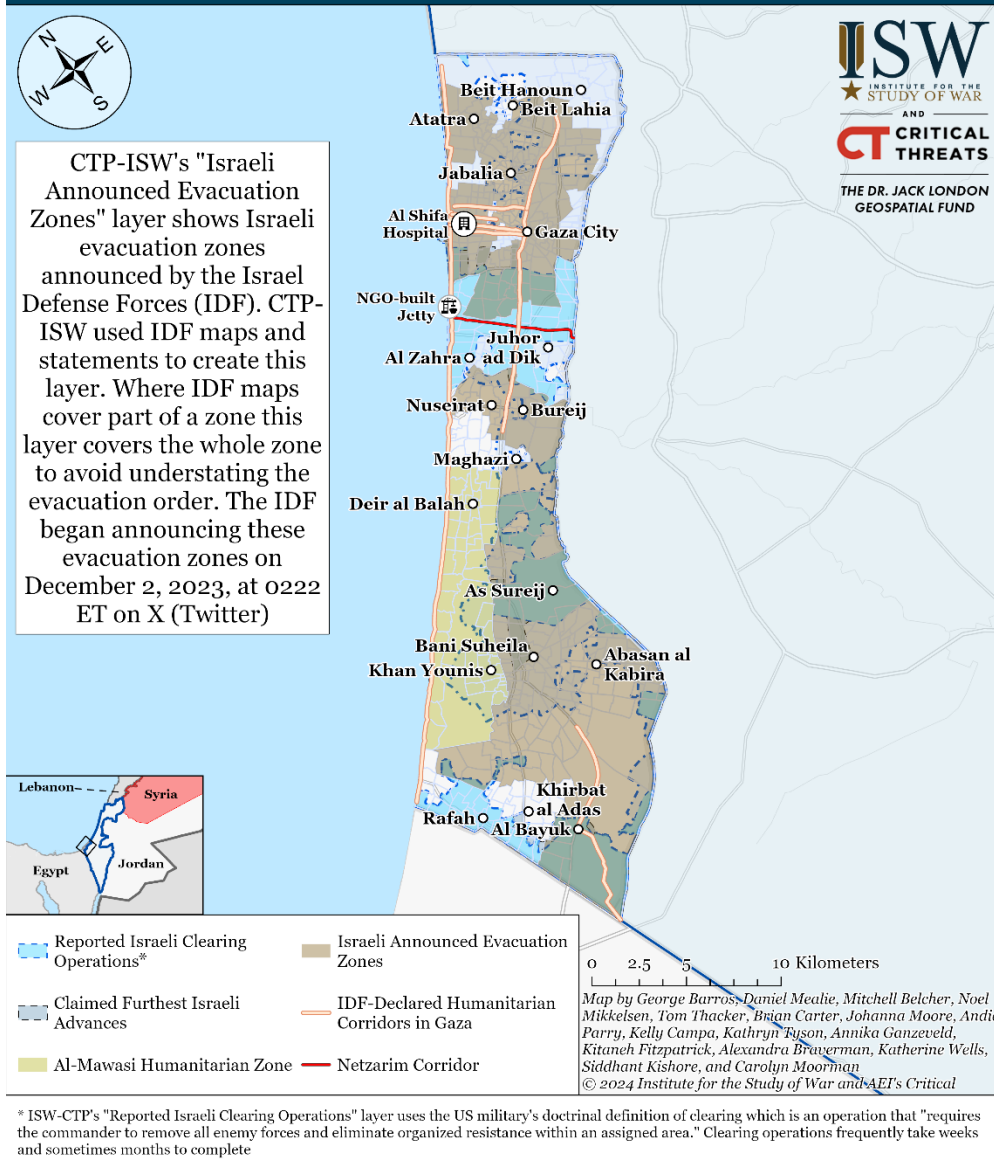
Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Tom Thacker, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Kathryn Tyson, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, Siddhant Kishore, and Carolyn Moorman - © 2024 Institute for the Study 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 18, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

Israeli forces have engaged Palestinian fighters in at least three locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on September 17.[42] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades detonated improvised explosive devices (IED) targeting Israeli forces in Balata refugee camp in Nablus.[43] Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) detonated an IED targeting an Israeli armored personnel carrier in Qabatiya, Jenin Governorate.[44]

Significant Activity in the West Bank

As of September 18, 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 four attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on September 17.^[45] Hezbollah fired Katyusha rockets targeting two IDF sites in northern Israel in retaliation for Israeli strikes in southern Lebanon.^[46] The IDF detected 20

rockets fired from southern Lebanon targeting Kiryat Shmona.[47] The IDF intercepted some of the rockets and reported no casualties from the rockets.

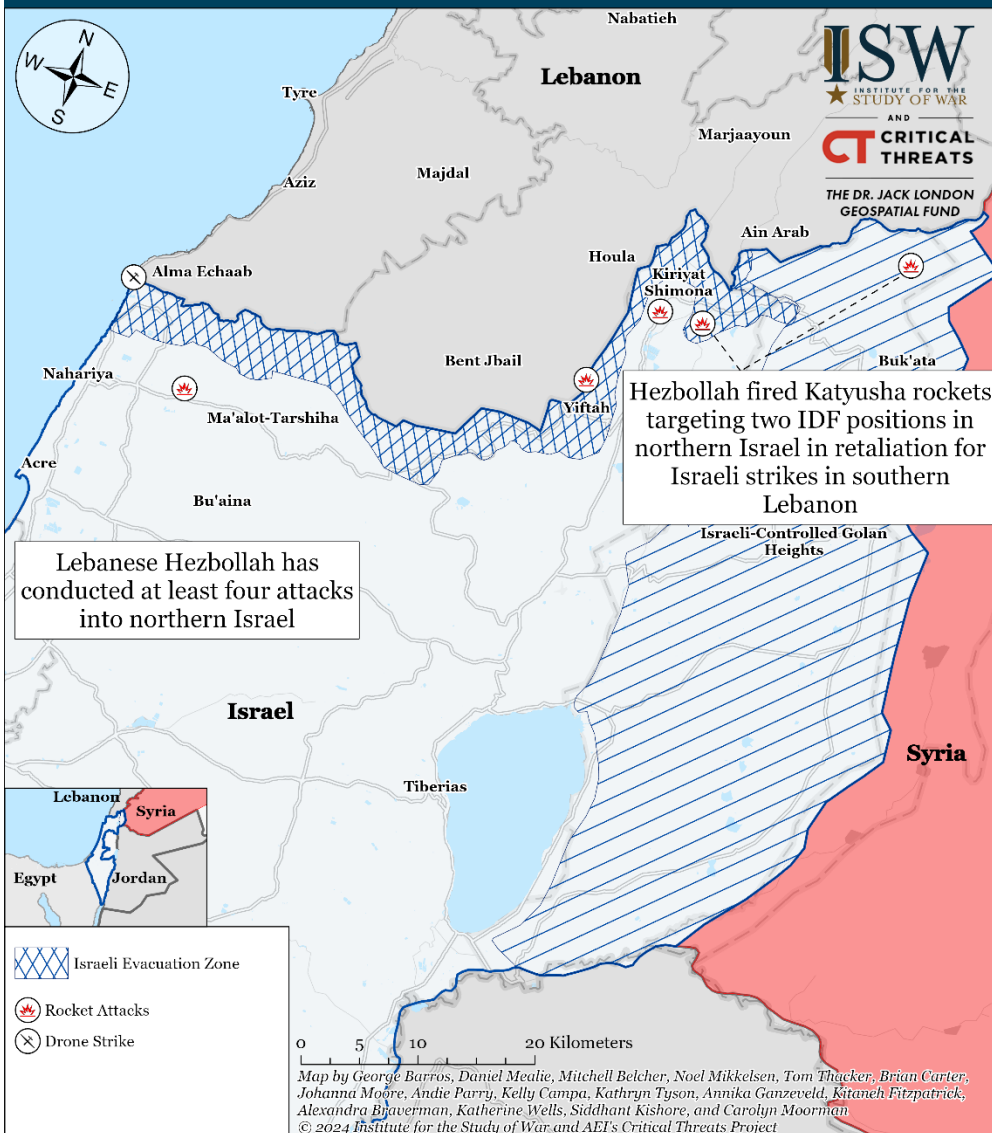
Israel deployed the IDF 98th Division to northern Israel on September 18.[48] The 35th Paratroopers and 89th Commando brigades also deployed north, but it is unclear if they did so as part of the 98th Division or if they will be subordinate to the 36th Division in Israel's Northern Command.[49] The 98th Division fought for months in intense combat in the Gaza Strip, last operating there in late August.[50]

The IDF 179th and 769th brigades completed training exercises under the IDF Northern Command to increase combat readiness this week.[51] IDF Northern Command commander Major General Uri Gordin said on September 18 that the IDF is "determined to change the security situation as soon as possible" in northern Israel.[52]

The IDF Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Herzi Halevi approved "attack and defense plans" for northern Israel on September 18.[53] Halevi noted that Israel has "many capabilities that we have not activated" against Hezbollah during a situation assessment with Northern Command.

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon

As of September 18, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Iran and Axis of Resistance

Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Sarkhat al Quds, formerly known as Ashab al Kahf, published a video on September 16 threatening to attack an Israeli military industrial site near Tel Aviv.[54] The video shows satellite imagery of a military industrial site that includes workshops for rehabilitating government and military vehicles and developing quadcopter aircraft. Kataib Sarkhat al Quds previously published a video on August 27 threatening to attack the Israeli Soreq Nuclear Research Center.[55] Kataib Sarkhat al Quds has not claimed any attacks targeting the nuclear research center or military industrial site at the time of this writing.

Iranian-backed Iraqi militias reiterated their support for Lebanese Hezbollah following the Israeli pager attack targeting Hezbollah members on September 17. Kataib Hezbollah asserted on September 17 that it is “fully prepared to go with [Lebanese Hezbollah] to the end.”[56] The

militia added that it is ready to provide fighters, military equipment, and technical and logistical support to Lebanese Hezbollah. Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba separately reiterated its “complete support” for Lebanese Hezbollah in a statement on September 17.[57]

Israeli fighter jets intercepted a drone launched from Iraq following siren alerts near the Sea of Galilee on September 18.[58] The Islamic Resistance in Iraq--a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias--has not claimed an attack targeting Israel at the time of this writing.

Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Director Mohammad Eslami met separately with senior officials from Iraq, Kenya, Armenia, and Burkina Faso to discuss opportunities for nuclear cooperation on September 18.[59] The meetings occurred on the sidelines of the International Atomic Energy Agency’s 68th General Conference in Vienna, Austria. Eslami discussed developing nuclear cooperation "in the fields of radiopharmaceuticals, nuclear agriculture and industry" with Iraqi Higher Education and Scientific Research Minister Naim al Aboudi. Eslami met with the Kenyan education, science, and technology minister to discuss "Iran's readiness to transfer its experiences in the nuclear industry" to Kenya. The Armenian deputy energy and infrastructure minister expressed interest in creating a "joint working group" to facilitate "cooperation in the field of peaceful nuclear energy" during his meeting with Eslami.

The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned 12 individuals based inside and outside Iran in "connection with Iran’s violent and coercive tactics" on September 18.[60] OFAC said that it issued these sanctions in coordination with Australia and Canada. Both Australia and Canada also imposed new sanctions on Iran related to human rights abuses this week. OFAC sanctioned the following individuals in the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and its Basij paramilitary force:

- **Hamid Khorramdel.** Khorramdel is the commander of the IRGC's Fatah Corps in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad Province. He was involved in suppressing protests and activists in 2019 and 2022.
- **Mustafa Bazvand.** Bazvand is the commander of the IRGC and Basij Resistance Force in Mazandaran Province’s Babolsar County. Bazvand led the regime’s crackdown in Babolsar during the Mahsa Amini protests in 2022.
- **Ali Malek Shahkoui.** Malek Shahkoui is the commander of the IRGC’s Golestan Corps in Golestan Province. He organized the IRGC’s response to the Mahsa Amini protests in Golestan in 2022.
- **Saeed Beheshti Rad.** Beheshti Rad is the deputy coordinator of the IRGC’s Hazrat Nabi Akram Corps in Kermanshah Province. He was responsible for the violent crackdown on protesters in 2019 and 2022.

OFAC sanctioned the following individuals for "serious human rights abuses in Iranian prisons":

- **Ali Abdi.** Abdi has served as the South Khorasan Province Prisons director general since July 2022. Iran wrongfully executed several prisoners during his tenure, and several other prisoners died due to lack of medical care.

- **Alireza Babaei Farsani.** Farsani is the Isfahan Province Prisons acting director general. Iranian prison guards subjected prisoners to torture, harassment, sexual violence, and other poor treatment during his tenure.
- **Ahmad Reza Azadeh.** Azadeh is the head of Sepidar Prison and previously served as the head of Shibani Prison from 2019 to 2023. Iranian prison guards subjected prisoners to torture and inadequate conditions.
- **Gholamreza Roshan.** Roshan is the Khuzestan Province Prisons acting director general. Iranian prison guards subjected political prisoners to torture and poor treatment under his tenure.

OFAC sanctioned the following individuals for "external plotting":

- **Yahya Hosseini Panjaki.** Panjaki is the Iranian deputy intelligence and security minister for internal security affairs and oversees the regime’s efforts to assassinate Iranian dissidents abroad.
- **Javad Ghaffarhaddadi.** Ghaffarhaddadi is head of the IRGC Intelligence Organization’s Special Operations division. He is responsible for the targeting of Iranian dissidents in and outside Iran.
- **Hamid Zareikajosangi.** Zareikajosangi is a field operative and a part of the IRGC Quds force. He is responsible for recruiting Quds Force members.
- **Mahmud Baghlani.** Baghlani is an IRGC affiliate responsible for acting on behalf of the IRGC.

The Iranian Guardian Council approved the controversial draft law known as the “Hijab and Chastity” bill, which imposes stricter regulations on women’s appearance in public.

The law will now return to Parliament for final approval. [61] This law, originally proposed by President Ebrahim Raisi’s government in May 2024, enforces severe penalties for women who fail to comply with mandatory hijab rules, including fines, job loss, and social media bans. [62] Reformist media criticized the bill for focusing on punitive measures rather than addressing personal freedoms.[63] The controversial law follows the nationwide protests sparked by Mahsa Amini’s death in 2022, which called for greater women’s rights and freedoms in Iran. [64]



[1] <https://www.axios.com/2024/09/18/israel-detonates-hezbollah-walkie-talkies-second-wave-after-pager-attack>

[2] <https://x.com/manniefabian/status/1836463804269437164>; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/09/18/hezbollah-israel-pager-attack-lebanon-explosions/>

[3] https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/hundreds-of-hezbollah-operatives-pagers-explode-in-apparent-attack-across-lebanon-cf31cad4?mod=middle-east_news_article_pos1 ;
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[7] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-planted-explosives-hezbollahs-taiwan-made-pagers-say-sources-2024-09-18> ; <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/hezbollah-pager-attack-puts-spotlight-israels-cyber-warfare-unit-8200-2024-09-18>;
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[10] <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/18/world/middleeast/hezbollah-israel-walkie-talkie-explosives.html>

[11] https://t.me/C_Military1/45733 ; <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/pagers-drones-how-hezbollah-aims-counter-israels-high-tech-surveillance-2024-07-09/> ;
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[12] <https://www.axios.com/2024/09/18/israel-detonates-hezbollah-walkie-talkies-second-wave-after-pager-attack>

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[15] <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2024-07-26/israel-is-spying-on-hezbollah-commanders-and-killing-them-one-by-one>

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