

Iran Update



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Information Cutoff: September 5, 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.

The Biden administration is reportedly reevaluating its approach to ceasefire-hostage negotiations after Hamas killed six hostages, according to unspecified US officials cited by Axios on September 5.[1] US officials reported that the Biden administration is considering applying pressure and implementing unspecified accountability measures against Hamas instead of pushing Israel to agree to a ceasefire-hostage deal that would give the group additional concessions. Hamas' decision to increase the number of Palestinian prisoners to be released in a ceasefire-hostage deal has lowered the administration's confidence that Hamas is willing to reach a deal. Officials are concerned that if the United States pressures Israel to withdraw its forces from the Philadelphi Corridor, as Hamas has demanded, that Hamas will reject a different part of the proposal.

Hamas is using its execution of the six hostages to conduct a series of information operations that are designed to degrade Israeli will and force Israel to end the war on terms favorable to Hamas, which would ultimately lead to an Israeli defeat.[2] Hamas

released a fourth video September 4 depicting two of the six recently killed hostages.[3] This video—like the others—featured scripted statements calling for a ceasefire-hostage agreement.[4] The two hostages in the September 4 video, who were under duress, accused the Israeli government of failing to rescue the hostages from the Gaza Strip and failing to reach a ceasefire-hostage proposal that would bring hostages home alive.[5] Both hostages called on Israeli civilians to protest in favor of a ceasefire-hostage deal. Hamas is intentionally releasing these videos at this time to capitalize on Israeli outrage towards Netanyahu and to coerce the Israeli state into softening its demands. The softening of the current Israeli demands—which include a presence on the Philadelphi Corridor and the exile of many Palestinian prisoners released under any deal—would threaten to cause an Israeli defeat by enabling Hamas to rebuild itself. Hamas would very likely reconstruct smuggling tunnels under the Philadelphi Corridor if it regained control over that area. Those tunnels would enable Hamas to rebuild its military wing with new weapons and supplies, including concrete to repair tunnels. Returning Palestinian prisoners—if they are allowed to return to the Palestinian territories—could serve as key commanders, replacing commanders Israel has killed in the ongoing war. Hamas has previously released hostage propaganda during periods of unrest and during ceasefire negotiations.[6]

Israel, Hamas, and international mediators have not resolved opposing demands relating to the hostage-prisoner release and the presence of Israeli forces along the Philadelphi Corridor. An anonymous White House official cited by the *Washington Post* reported that negotiations still have not determined who will be released in a hostage-prisoner release or when.[7] Hostage-prisoner release negotiations have become more “complicated” since Hamas killed six hostages, “some” of whom were reportedly listed to be released in the first phase of the ceasefire-hostage deal.[8] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has also stated that Israel will maintain at least a reduced presence along the Philadelphi Corridor, which is a demand that is in direct opposition to Hamas’ demands for a full Israeli withdrawal from the Strip.[9] Netanyahu has argued that Israeli disengagement from the Philadelphi Corridor in 2005 enabled Hamas to become a serious threat in the first place by allowing Hamas to smuggle engineering equipment and weapons into the Gaza Strip.[10] Netanyahu said that he would only consider a full withdrawal in the second stage of ceasefire-hostage negotiations if another entity demonstrated that it could interdict Hamas smuggling through the corridor.[11]

Unspecified US and regional officials cited by *The New York Times* claimed that international mediators are “finalizing” a new ceasefire-hostage proposal to “narrow” remaining gaps between Israel and Hamas.[12] Two Israeli officials and a senior official from an unspecified mediating country reported that the United States, Qatar, and Egypt are reviewing a series of Egyptian- and Qatari-drafted proposals.[13] Netanyahu stated during a TV segment on September 5 that “there is not a deal in the making.”[14]

Senior Iranian military officials have continued to signal that Iran will attack Israel directly in response to Israel killing several senior Axis of Resistance leaders, including Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh, in recent weeks. Khatam ol Anbia

Central Headquarters Inspection Deputy Brigadier General Mohammad Jafar Asadi claimed that Iran must inflict “the largest blow” on Israel for Haniyeh’s death in an interview with Iranian armed forces-run media on September 5.[15] The Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters is the highest Iranian operational headquarters and is responsible for joint and wartime operations.[16] Several senior Iranian military officials, including Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Operations Deputy Brigadier General Mohsen Chizari, have made similar statements to Iranian armed forces-run media in recent days.[17] The coordination deputy of the Supreme Leader’s representative to the IRGC, Brigadier General Saeed Farjian Zadeh, separately warned on September 3 that Iran will respond to Israel “in a precise and calculated manner at the right time and under the right conditions.”[18]

The Iranian foreign minister called regional stability a pillar of Iranian national security on September 5, stressing that any attempts to redraw borders will be a “red line” for Iran. Araghchi’s comments were in reference to an earlier statement by the Russian foreign minister that supported the Turkish-Azerbaijani Zangezur Corridor project.[19]

Araghchi’s warning follows a meeting between Iranian Foreign Affairs Ministry Eurasia Department Director General Mojtaba Demirchi Lou and Russian Ambassador to Tehran Alexey Dedov on September 2 in which Demirchi Lou expressed the need respecting internationally recognized borders.[20] Both the meeting and Araghchi’s comments were likely triggered by a statement by Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Lavrov in which Lavrov stated his support of Azerbaijan and Turkey’s Zangezur corridor project.[21] The Iranian regime has historically opposed Azerbaijani and Turkish efforts to establish the Zangezur corridor between Azerbaijan proper and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic because such a corridor would sever Iranian land access to Russia and Europe via Armenia.[22]

Key Takeaways:

- **Iran:** Senior Iranian military officials have continued messaging that they will retaliate for Israel killing Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran.
- **Ceasefire Negotiations:** The Biden administration is reportedly reevaluating its approach to ceasefire-hostage negotiations after Hamas killed six hostages, according to an unspecified US official cited by Axios on September 5. Hamas is using its execution of the six hostages to conduct a series of information operations that are designed to degrade Israeli will and force Israel end the war on terms favorable to Hamas, which would ultimately lead to an Israeli defeat.
- **Caucasus:** Iranian and Russian officials met to discuss the Caucasus amid growing differences between Moscow and Tehran.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of September 5, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Gaza Strip

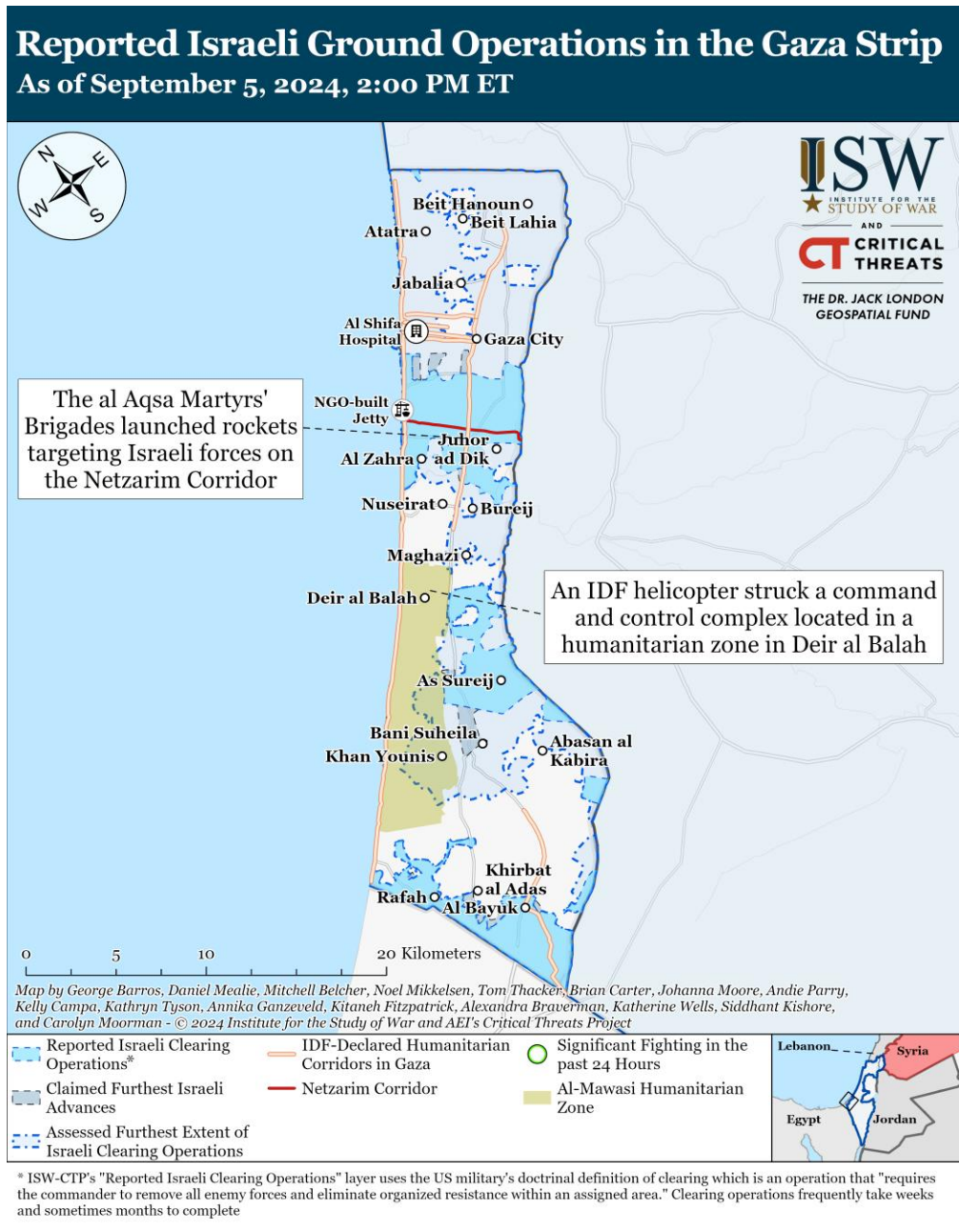
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- 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

Hamas detonated an explosively formed penetrator (EFP) targeting an Israeli Merkava tank in Zaytoun, southern Gaza City, on September 4.[23]

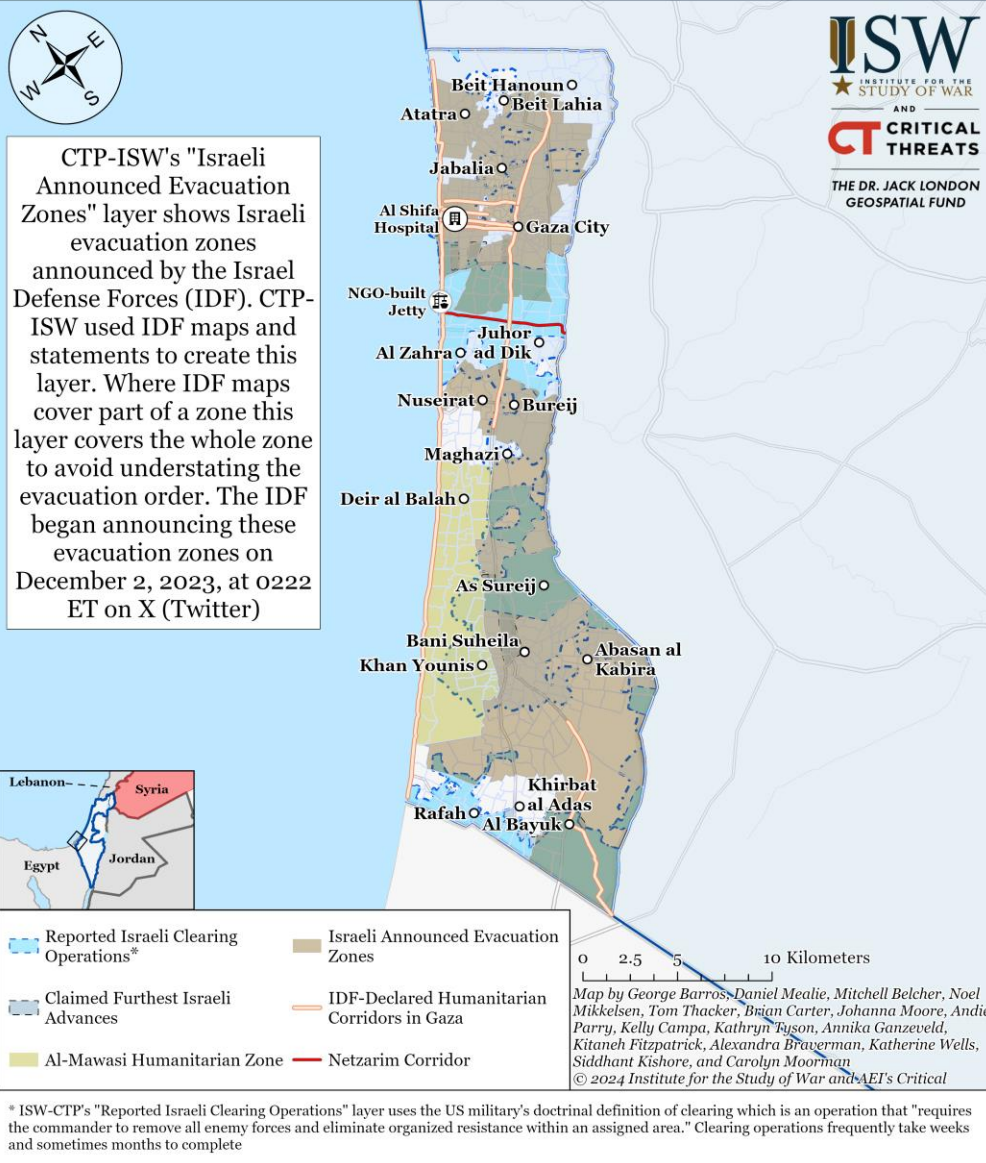
The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades—the self-proclaimed militant wing of Fatah—has conducted two rocket attacks targeting Israeli forces on the Netzarim Corridor since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on September 4.[24]

The IDF Air Force struck a Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) command and control center located in the Deir al Balah area in the humanitarian zone on September 5.[25] The IDF reported that Hamas and PIJ used the center to plan and launch attacks targeting Israeli forces and territory.[26] Israeli forces used precision weapons, surveillance, and intelligence to reduce civilian casualties.[27]



Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip

As of September 5, 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 12 locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on September 4.[28] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fired small arms and detonated improvised explosive devices (IED) targeting Israeli forces in several locations in Tulkarm and Jenin.[29]

The IDF conducted three drone strikes that killed at least five PIJ fighters in Tubas on September 4.[30] The IDF said that it targeted a militia cell in a vehicle in Tubas that posed a threat to Israeli forces in the area.[31] The IDF said that the strike killed Mohammed Zakaria Zubeidi, who it described as a “significant terrorist” from Jenin.[32] Several Palestinian militias acknowledged the deaths of the PIJ fighters.[33]



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

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

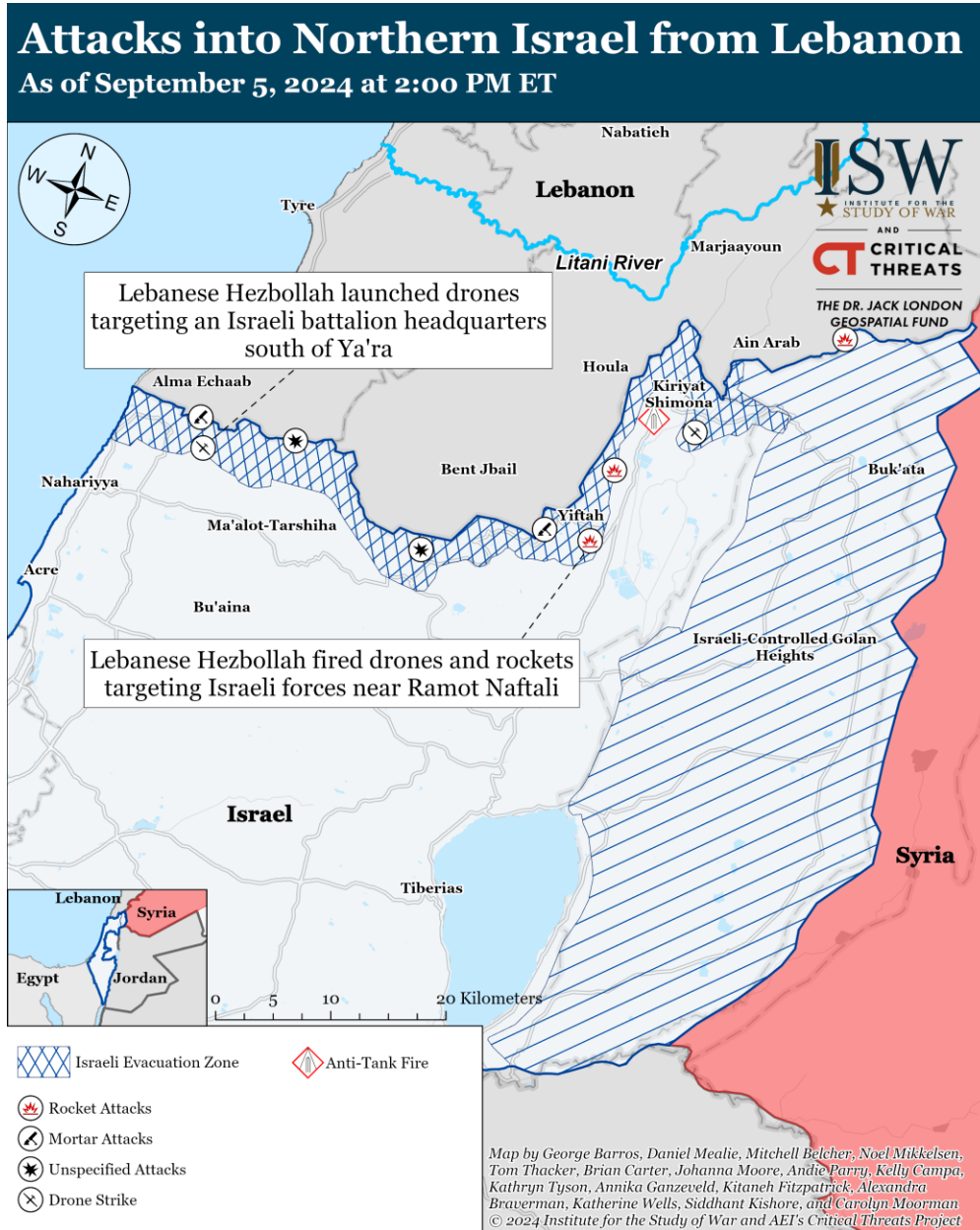
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- 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 12 attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on September 4.[34]

Shin Bet released a report on September 5 that documents a steady increase in Hezbollah rocket attacks into northern Israel since January 2024.[35] The Shin Bet data shows that Hezbollah more than tripled the number of rockets that it launched into Israel over the past nine months, from approximately 334 total rockets in January 2024 to 1,307 rockets in August 2024.



Iran and Axis of Resistance

The Iraqi government arrested several senior officials in the Iraqi Prime Minister's Office in late August 2024 for conducting a surveillance campaign targeting a large number of senior Iraqi government officials and politicians.^[36] The surveillance network began operating in late 2023 and spied on senior Iraqi officials for political extortion purposes, according to multiple Arab media outlets.^[37] The network targeted Supreme Judicial Council President Faiq Zaidan and several Iranian-backed Shia Coordination Framework leaders, including former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki and Badr Organization head Hadi al Ameri. Iraqi authorities have arrested seven suspects, including the deputy director general for administrative affairs in Sudani's office, after Sudani opened an investigation on August 20.^[38] Sudani has expressed support for the judiciary's investigation into the allegations, which will reportedly determine Sudani's complicity in the surveillance campaign.^[39] Maliki warned on September 5 that the "transgression against the [Iraqi] judiciary, government, and Parliament" represents a threat to Iraq.^[40] The Supreme Judicial Council's Media Center previously denied on August 29 reports that a surveillance network had targeted Zaidan.^[41]

Local Syrian media reported that Israel likely conducted a drone strike targeting an Iranian-backed militia vehicle in Deir ez Zor Province, Syria, on September 5.^[42] Syrian opposition media reported that the airstrike destroyed a truck transporting weapons in Sukariyah, Albu Kamal District.^[43] The truck had entered Syria from Iraqi territory through an Iranian-backed militia-controlled crossing.^[44] The strike killed the occupants of the vehicle and reportedly killed or injured several civilians in the vicinity of the truck.^[45] CTP-ISW cannot verify the local Syrian reporting. The IDF has conducted an air campaign in Syria since December 2023 to disrupt Iranian and Iranian-backed efforts to transfer military materiel to Syria and Lebanon.^[46] The IDF rarely acknowledges its air campaign in Syria.

The Iranian regime paid \$3 million to an anonymous hacking group following a cyberattack targeting the Central Bank of Iran and several other Iranian banks in mid-August 2024.^[47] The hacking group, named IRLeaks, stole millions of Iranians' personal data and threatened to release the data on the dark web. Unspecified sources told Politico on September 4 that the regime paid IRLeaks's ransom demand out of fear that publicity about the cyberattack would destabilize the already fragile Iranian economy.^[48] CTP-ISW reported on IRLeaks's cyberattack targeting the Iranian banking system on August 14.^[49]

Houthi supreme leader Abdulmalik al Houthi vowed to continue attacks targeting the United States, Israel, and the United Kingdom in support of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip in a speech on September 5.^[50] Abdulmalik criticized unspecified Arab nations for failing to "take a stand" against Israel and denounced countries that "appease" or "offer concessions" to Israel. Abdulmalik lamented that the use of "martyrdom" and "suicide bombers," to confront Israel has "vanished." Abdulmalik said that the Houthi movement continues to support Palestinian resistance through its naval operations and warned of further attacks targeting vessels transiting the Red Sea.

Abdulmalik also claimed that Israel and its allies will be "surprised" by Houthi land and sea attacks using new technologies.

The Houthi movement may be attempting to impersonate the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) in order to target coalition and merchant vessels in the Red Sea. UKMTO reported on September 4 that there is an entity in the Red Sea claiming to be from the UKMTO and requesting vessels to turn on their automatic identification system (AIS) and provide position updates.^[51] The AIS and position updates could enable the Houthis to target these vessels. UKMTO recommended that vessels verify any calls they receive from UKMTO.^[52] UKMTO has previously reported numerous similar incidents in which entities claiming to be Yemeni authorities or the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (UNVIM) ordered vessels to change their course to the port of Hudaydah, Yemen, or other destinations.^[53] The Houthi movement has conducted attacks targeting commercial vessels to disrupt international shipping in the Red Sea since November 2023, and impersonating the UKTMO to target vessels would be consistent with that effort. CTP-ISW cannot verify whether the Houthi movement impersonated UKMTO, however.

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