

Iran Update, July 15, 2024

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and Nicholas Carl

Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm ET

The Axis of Resistance is continuing to try to coerce Gulf states into reducing their economic cooperation with Israel. Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah warned Saudi Arabia on July 13 that it will “pay the price” for allowing Israel to conduct trade through Saudi territory.[1] Kataib Hezbollah accused Saudi Arabia of allowing Israel to use overland trade routes through Saudi territory “as an alternative to sea lanes.”[2] Kataib Hezbollah was likely referring to the trade corridor that connects Israel to the Persian Gulf via the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Jordan.[3] Israel has increasingly relied on this land route to mitigate the impact of Houthi attacks on international shipping around the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea.[4] The Houthis conducted around 190 attacks targeting commercial vessels in the Red Sea between November 2023 and mid-June 2024, causing trade activity at the Port of Eilat to decrease by approximately 85 percent.[5] Kataib Hezbollah previously vowed in April 2024 to sever the Israeli “land bridge” that passes through Jordan.[6]

Kataib Hezbollah’s desire to disrupt the Israeli economic cooperation with the Gulf states is part of a larger Axis of Resistance effort to economically isolate Israel. Iranian leaders, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, have repeatedly called on Muslim countries to impose an embargo on Israel.[7] Iranian officials and media have also criticized Gulf states for allowing Israel to conduct trade through their territory and argued that the “land bridge” connecting Israel to the Persian Gulf renders Houthi attacks in the Red Sea “ineffective.”[8] An Iranian-backed Bahraini militia began conducting attacks targeting Israel in April 2024 as part of the Axis of Resistance effort to impose an unofficial blockade on Israel.[9] Iran and its allies appear to be operating on the theory that severe economic disruption would compel Israel to accept defeat in the Gaza Strip and that such economic pressure could ultimately collapse the Israeli state. Iranian leaders have repeatedly said in recent months that part of their theory on how to destroy Israel revolves around stoking instability and terror in Israel to catalyze reverse migration away from Israel.[10]

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has not yet confirmed whether it killed Hamas’ top military commander, Mohammad Deif. The IDF conducted an airstrike in the al Mawasi humanitarian zone on July 13 targeting Deif and Hamas Khan Younis Brigade Commander Rafe Salamah.[11] The IDF confirmed on July 14 that the strike killed Salamah.[12] Hamas officials maintain that Deif is alive but have not provided evidence to back their assertion.[13]

Key Takeaways:

- **Iraq:** The Axis of Resistance is continuing to try to coerce the Gulf states into reducing their economic cooperation with Israel. The Axis of Resistance has sought to isolate Israel economically throughout the Israel-Hamas war.
- **Gaza Strip:** Israel has not yet confirmed whether it killed Hamas’ top military commander, Mohammad Deif. Hamas has asserted that Deif is alive but has provided no evidence.
- **Syria:** Israel conducted several airstrikes into Syria, including one targeting a high-profile Syrian businessman involved in moving military material across the Levant.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of July 15, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Israel has not yet confirmed whether it killed Hamas' top military commander, Mohammad Deif

A Lebanese Hezbollah-affiliated militia announced its readiness to defend against any major Israeli military offensive into Lebanon

Israeli forces have engaged Palestinian fighters in three locations around Jenin

The Axis of Resistance is continuing to try to coerce Gulf states to reduce their economic cooperation with Israel

0 35 70 140 Kilometers

□ Gaza Strip and West Bank ▨ Golan Heights

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Tom Thacker, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Kathryn Tyson, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Bravenman, Siddhant Kishore and Katherine Wells
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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 struck and killed the Gaza Brigade commander of the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades in al Shati refugee camp, northern Gaza City, on July 13.[14] The al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade is the self-proclaimed militant wing of Fatah. The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades mourned Izz al Din Akila "Abu Muhammad" and stated that he was a member of the group's Military Council.[15] The IDF did not confirm that it killed Akila on July 13. But the absence of IDF confirmation is not especially surprising given that the IDF publicizes its strikes against smaller militias infrequently—as opposed to the more regular IDF announcements of activity related to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). The Palestinian Red Crescent reported that the IDF strike killed at least six people.[16] The Gazan civil defense authority contrastingly reported that the strike on al Shati refugee camp killed at least 20 Palestinians.[17] The IDF announced on July 10 that Gaza City would "remain a dangerous combat zone" and issued evacuation orders.[18]

Hamas claimed a single attack targeting Israeli forces in western Gaza City on July 15.[19] Hamas reported that its fighters targeted two Israeli tanks using an unexploded Israeli missile in western Tal al Hawa along the Rashid coastal road.[20] Hamas claimed that the explosion injured and killed IDF members.[21]

The IDF 8th Brigade engaged Palestinian fighters along the Netzarim Corridor on July 15. Israeli forces fired tank artillery at a Palestinian fighter handling explosive charges.[22] PIJ separately mortared Israeli forces along the Netzarim Corridor.[23]

The IDF 162nd Division continued clearing operations in Rafah on July 15. The IDF Nahal Brigade targeted Palestinian fighters armed with rocket-propelled grenades in unspecified areas of Rafah.[24] PIJ and the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades targeted Israeli forces with mortars, rocket propelled grenades, and thermobaric shells near Yabna refugee camp.[25]

The IDF Air Force stated on July 15 that it struck dozens of targets across the Gaza Strip in the past day, including a Palestinian squad that was observing Israeli forces. [26]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

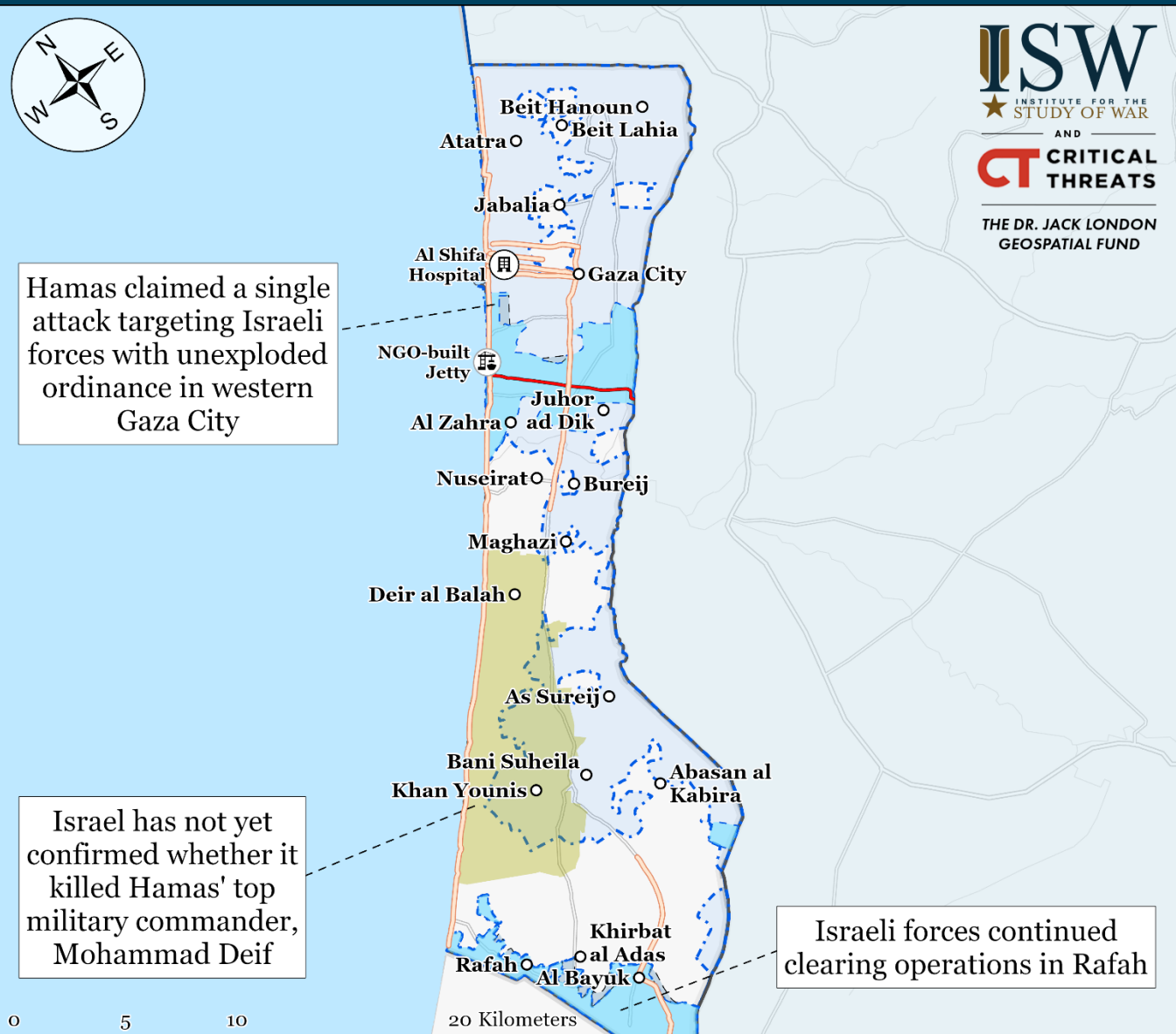
As of July 15, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Hamas claimed a single attack targeting Israeli forces with unexploded ordnance in western Gaza City

Israel has not yet confirmed whether it killed Hamas' top military commander, Mohammad Deif

Israeli forces continued clearing operations in Rafah



Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Tom Thacker, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Kathryn Tyson, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Braverman, Siddhant Kishore and Katherine Wells
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- 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 July 15, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET

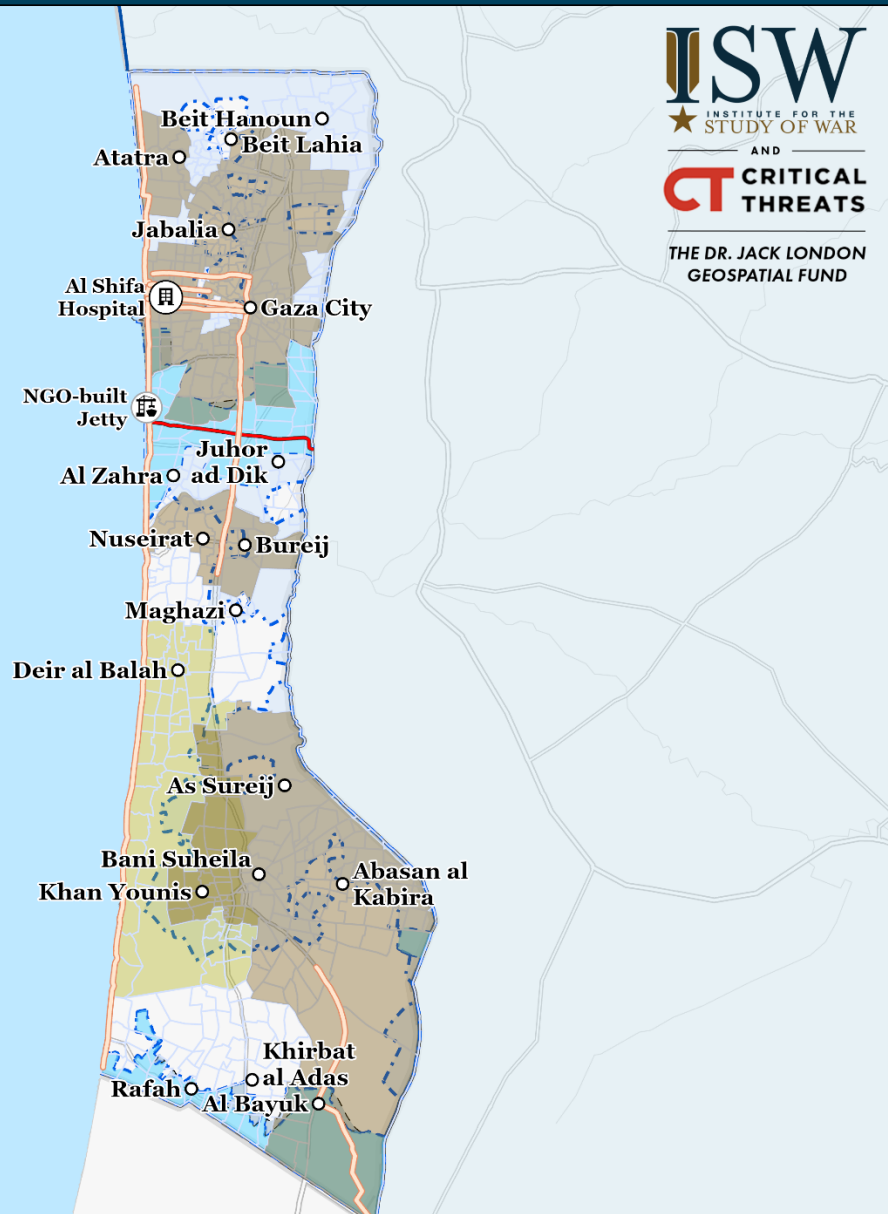


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CTP-ISW's "Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones" layer shows Israeli evacuation zones announced by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). CTP-ISW used IDF maps and statements to create this layer. Where IDF maps cover part of a zone this layer covers the whole zone to avoid understating the evacuation order. The IDF began announcing these evacuation zones on December 2, 2023, at 0222 ET on X (Twitter)



- - - Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridors in Gaza
- Netzarim Corridor

0 2.5 5 10 Kilometers

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Tom Thacker, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Kathryn Tyson, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Braverman, Siddhant Kishore and Katherine Wells
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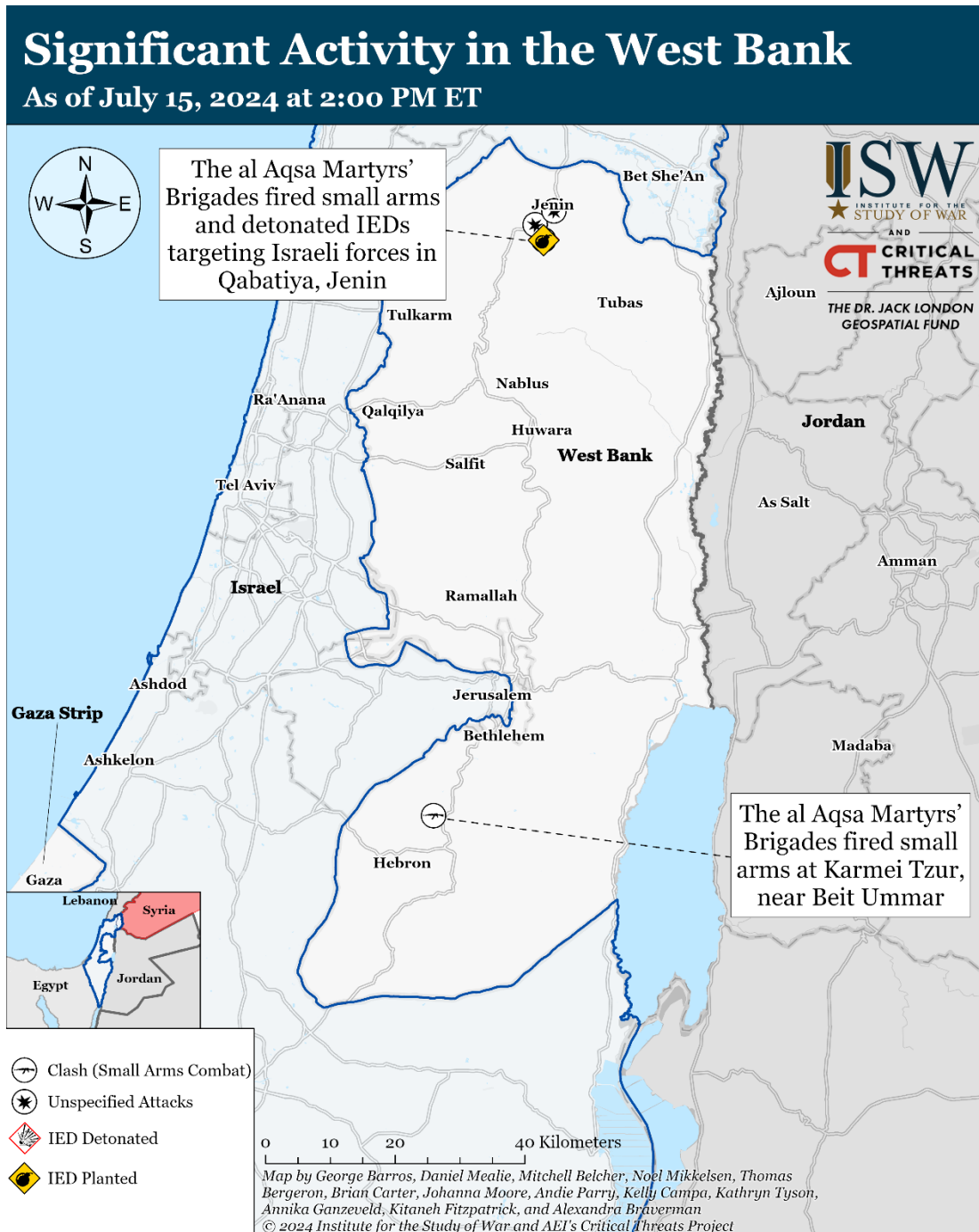
* ISW-CTP's "Reported Israeli Clearing Operations" layer uses the US military's doctrinal definition of clearing which is an operation that "requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance within an assigned area." Clearing operations frequently take weeks and sometimes months to complete

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 around Jenin since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on July 14.[27] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired small arms and detonated IEDs targeting Israeli forces in Qabatiya, Jenin.[28] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades separately fired small arms at Karmeit Tzur, near Beit Ummar.[29] Palestinian militant media reported that the IDF "blew up" a vehicle in Jenin.[30] The IDF has not commented on whether the explosion occurred nor its nature, at the time of this writing.



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

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

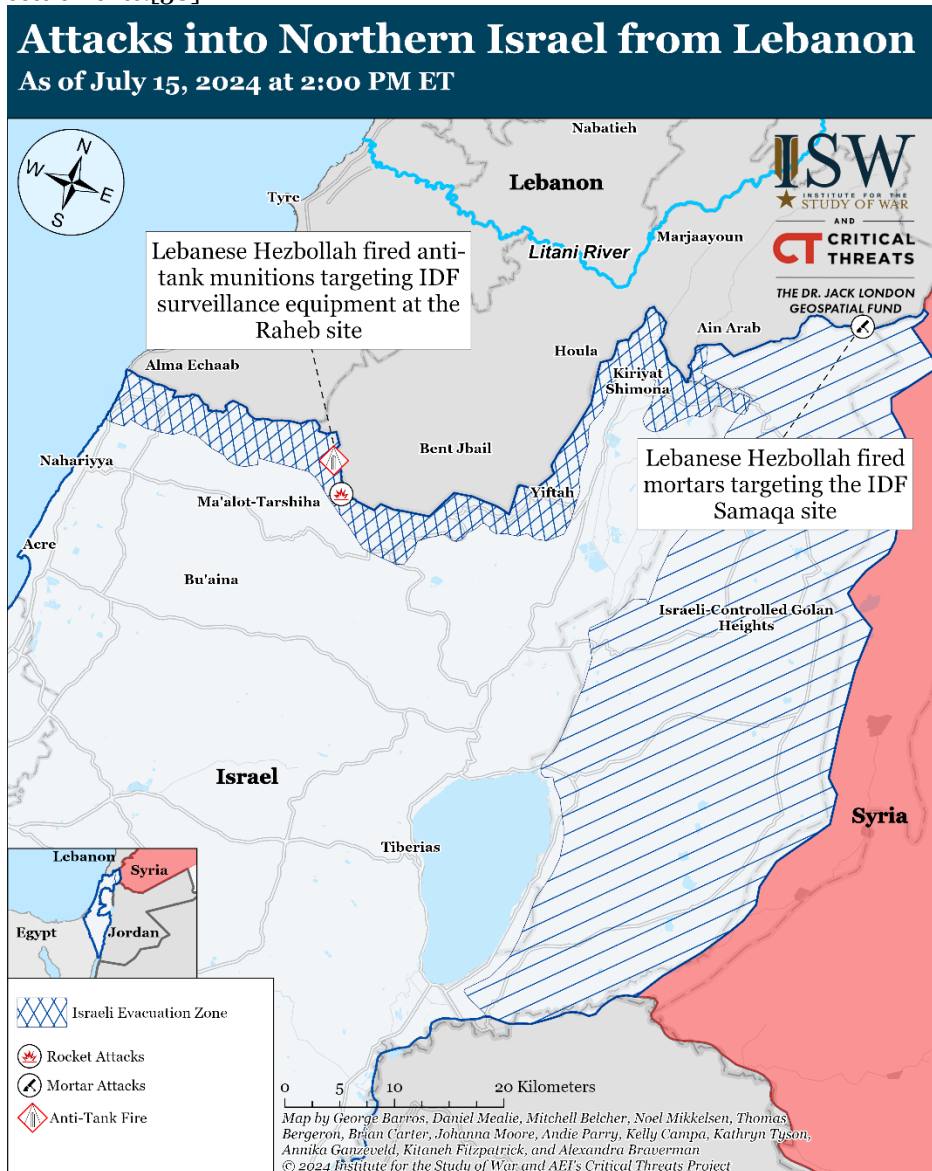
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- 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 conducted at least three attacks into northern Israel on July 15.[31]

A Hezbollah-affiliated militia stated on July 15 that it is prepared to defend against a potential major Israeli military offensive into Lebanon.[32] The Lebanese Resistance Brigades added that it has provided logistical support to Hezbollah since the Israel-Hamas war began in October 2023.[33] The group claimed its first attack into northern Israel on July 13 since the war began.[34] Lebanese media reported that two Lebanese Resistance Brigades fighters were killed presumably by Israeli strikes in Lebanon in October 2023.[35]

The IDF Northern Command has conducted several military exercises simulating a potential offensive into Lebanon over the past week.[36] The IDF 5th Brigade practiced maneuvering and engaging enemy fighters in difficult terrain.[37] The IDF 920th Reserve Battalion (769th Brigade) conducted exercises simulating a defense of northern Israeli settlements.[38]



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

Iran and Axis of Resistance

The IDF conducted an airstrike targeting Syrian Arab Army (SAA) personnel and infrastructure near Damascus on June 13.[39] The IDF said that it struck central SAA infrastructure in response to two drones launched from Syria that targeted northern Eilat.[40] Syrian media reported that the IDF struck a SAA military site near Mount Qasioun, west of Damascus, and Syrian air defense systems in Sanamayn, Daraa.[41] At least two SAA soldiers were killed in the strike, according to Syrian sources.[42] The IDF also struck a residential building in Kafr Sousa, southwestern Damascus.[43] Israeli Army Radio noted that Kafr Sousa is a "center of Iranian activity" in Damascus.[44] Israel has previously targeted IRGC and Iranian-backed militia personnel in Kafr Sousa.[45]

The IDF intercepted two Shahed drones launched from Syria toward northern Eilat on July 13.[46] No group has claimed the attack as of this writing. The IDF said that the Syrian regime bears responsibility for "any terrorist activity" targeting Israel from Syrian territory.[47]

The IDF likely conducted an airstrike that killed a high-profile Syrian businessman near the Lebanon-Syria border on July 15.[48] Syrian media reported that Israel struck a vehicle on the Beirut-Damascus road outside of Mezzeh, Damascus.[49] Reuters reported that Mohammad Baraa Qaterji was killed in the airstrike, citing three security sources.[50] Qaterji—a prominent Syrian businessman with strong ties to the Bashar al Assad regime—worked with the Syrian General Intelligence Directorate to transport weapons and ammunition into Syria under the guise of importing and exporting food products.[51] Qaterji owned and operated the Syria-based Qaterji Company—a trucking company that the United States says has transported weapons from Iraq to Syria.[52] Qaterji and his brothers, Hussam and Zahed, also established and funded the Qaterji militia to protect their business interests throughout Syria.[53] The US Treasury sanctioned Qaterji and the Qaterji Company in 2018 for facilitating petroleum shipments and financing to the Syrian regime and ISIS.[54] Western and Israeli media reported that Qaterji has ties to Lebanese Hezbollah.[55] Syrian sources noted that Qaterji's vehicle had just crossed into Syrian territory from Lebanon when Israel attacked it.[56] Syrian and Israeli officials have previously stated that Israel aims to halt Iranian-backed efforts to transfer materiel through Syria to Hezbollah before a potential full-scale conflict.[57]

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed two separate attacks targeting Eilat and Haifa on July 15.[58] The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed that it used drones and Arqab cruise missiles in the attacks. Israeli officials and media have not commented on the claimed attacks at the time of this writing.

The Houthis claimed two attacks targeting Eilat, Israel, and a container ship in the Gulf of Aden on July 14.[59] The Houthis said that its fighters fired drones targeting Eilat. The Houthis also said that its fighters fired drones and missiles targeting the Liberian-flagged MSC UNIFIC VI container ship in the Gulf of Aden. CTP-ISW cannot verify the attacks at the time of this writing.

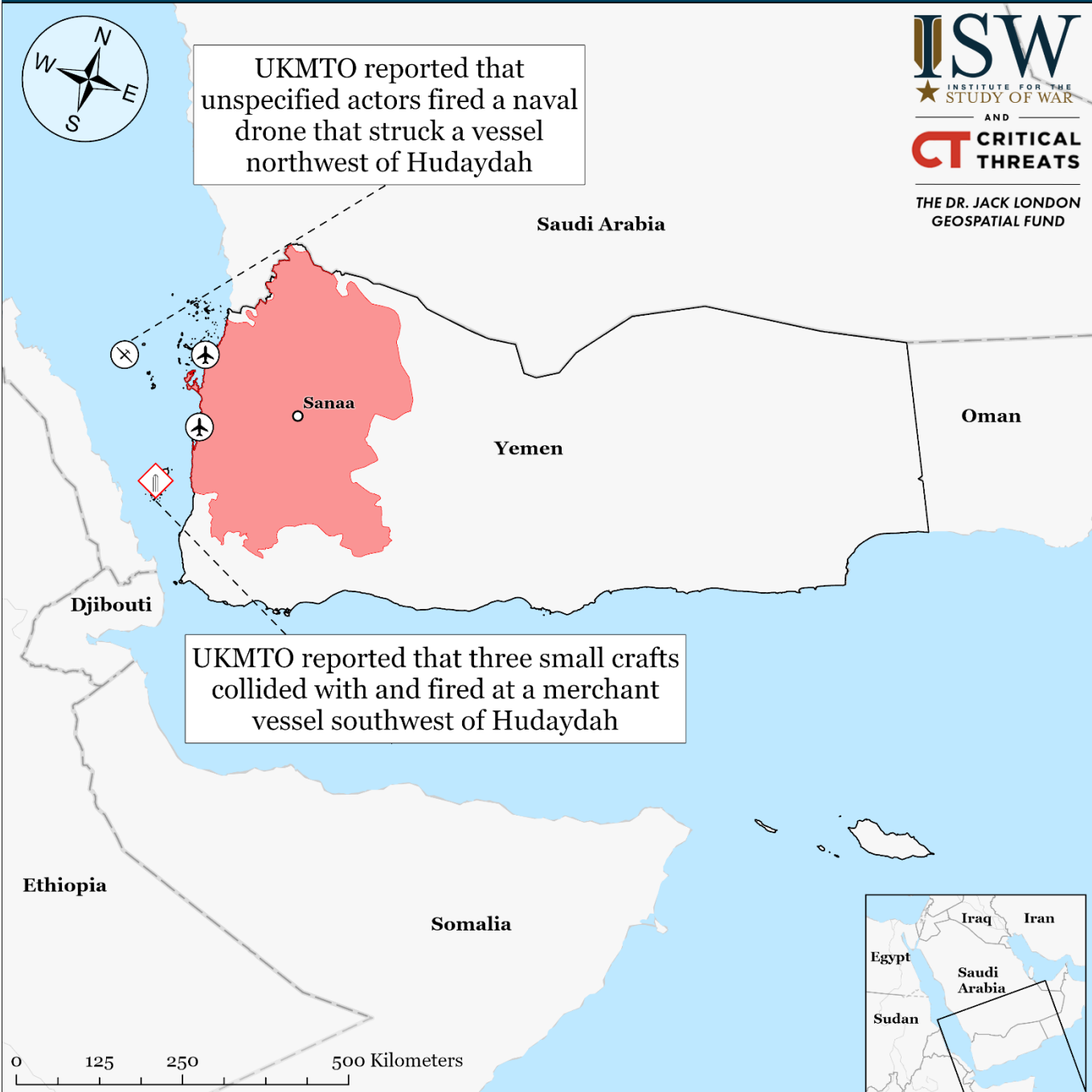
The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) reported two likely Houthi attacks targeting vessels in the Red Sea on July 15.[60] UKMTO reported that three small crafts collided with and fired at a merchant vessel 70 nautical miles southwest of Hudaydah.[61] UKMTO added that the vessel saw three missiles exploding close to it. UKMTO also reported that unspecified actors fired a naval drone that struck a vessel 97 nautical miles northwest of Hudaydah.[62] Both vessels are safe and proceeding to their next ports of call.[63]

US CENTCOM intercepted several Houthi drones in Yemen and the Red Sea on July 14.[64] CENTCOM said that it intercepted one Houthi naval attack drone and two Houthi aerial drones in the Red Sea. CENTCOM also destroyed one Houthi aerial drone in Yemen.

Houthi media reported that the United States and United Kingdom conducted airstrikes in the Hudaydah Governorate, Yemen, on July 14.[65] The strikes reportedly targeted Hudaydah International Airport and the al Luhayyah District.

Houthi Attacks in the Red Sea

As of July 15, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



UKMTO reported that unspecified actors fired a naval drone that struck a vessel northwest of Hudaydah

UKMTO reported that three small crafts collided with and fired at a merchant vessel southwest of Hudaydah

- Houthi-Controlled Territory
- Airstrike
- Drone Strike
- Surface-to-Surface Missile

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Kathryn Tyson, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, and Alexandra Braverman
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Note: This notional map is not a definitive assessment of areas under Houthi control in Yemen. This map is primarily an illustrative reference material and does not adhere to the very high level of spatial precision that ISW and CTP uses for our Israel-Hamas and Ukraine control of terrain maps.

Iranian President-elect Masoud Pezeshkian met with senior Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) commanders in Tehran on July 14.[66] Senior IRGC commanders in attendance included IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami, IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani, and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's representative to the IRGC Abdullah Haji Sadeghi, among others. This meeting follows statements by various senior IRGC commanders in recent days emphasizing the need for the Iranian political establishment, particularly hardliners, to accept and support Pezeshkian to preserve political stability.[67]

Iranian officials are continuing to promote greater cooperation with Russia. Iranian Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanani traveled to Moscow on July 12 to attend a BRICS conference.[68] Kanani called for increasing media and public diplomacy cooperation during a meeting with Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova on the sidelines of the conference on July 13.[69] Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf separately conducted an interview with Russia Today (RT) on July 13 in which he called for greater political, security, financial, and defense cooperation between Iran and Russia.[70] Ghalibaf recently attended a BRICS parliamentary forum in St. Petersburg on July 11 and 12.[71]

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