

Iran Update



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Information Cutoff: 2:00pm ET

Members of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei’s inner circle told Western Media that Khamenei sought to promote the candidacy of Masoud Pezeshkian due to Pezeshkian’s ability to “foster unity.”^[1] Individuals close to the supreme leader told Western media that Khamenei received intelligence reports in May 2024 revealing that only 13 percent of Iranians would participate in the snap presidential election following former President Ebrahim Raisi’s death. Unnamed regime insiders stated that Khamenei subsequently “orchestrated” the election to result in the victory of moderate candidate Masoud Pezeshkian due to Khamenei’s fear that low voter turnout would “damage the clerical establishment’s credibility.” Regime insiders told Western media that Khamenei stated Iran needed a president who could “appeal to different layers of society” while “foster[ing] unity among those in power” and without challenging Iran’s ruling theocracy. This may be part of an effort to emphasize the regime’s stability and message to the West that attempts to undermine the regime will fail and that negotiations will prove the only successful way to curb Iran’s nuclear ambitions. Iranian officials believe that the United States and the West have used and are using media and other non-military means to fight a “soft war” against Iran to subvert the regime and eventually overthrow it. These Iranian officials, by presenting the facade of stability, appear to be attempting to discourage these efforts.

The Western media report is inconsistent with the regime’s previous stances vis-a-vis Pezeshkian throughout the election campaign period. Khamenei’s statements and IRGC meetings suggest that Pezeshkian’s rise to the presidency was unplanned. Khamenei and the Iranian regime writ large did not appear to publicly rally around Masoud Pezeshkian prior to Pezeshkian winning the presidential election. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei implicitly criticized Pezeshkian’s support for increasing Iranian engagement with the West in a speech on June 25, stating that politicians who are “attached to America” cannot be “good managers.” Khamenei’s statement came after Pezeshkian’s expression of support for improving relations with the West during the June 24 foreign policy debate.^[2] Senior leaders of the IRGC similarly expressed support for hardline candidates over Pezeshkian throughout the 2024 campaign season. The IRGC tried to unite the hardline camp against Pezeshkian, according to unverified social media rumors. IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani reportedly met with hardline candidates Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and Saeed Jalili in Mashhad on June 26 to form a consensus between them.^[3] Two unspecified Iranian officials later confirmed to the New York Times on June 28 that Ghaani called on Jalili to withdraw from the race during an emergency meeting with Jalili and Ghalibaf in Mashhad, Iran, on June 26.^[4] The New York Times later deleted its report. *The Telegraph* reported in early June 2024 that some senior IRGC commanders, including former IRGC Air Force Commander Hossein Dehghan, supported Ghalibaf instead of Pezeshkian.^[5] The reports of IRGC support for hardline candidates call into question to what extent the supreme leader fully engineered the election beginning from the start of the campaign in May, as Western media report suggests.

Key Takeaways:

- **Iran:** Members of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei’s inner circle told Western Media that Khamenei sought to promote the candidacy of Masoud Pezeshkian due to Pezeshkian’s ability to “foster unity.”
- **Gaza Strip:** The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Air Force killed two Hamas commanders and one PIJ commander in the Gaza Strip on July 18.
- **Lebanon:** The IDF Air Force conducted airstrikes that killed one Hamas leader and one Hezbollah member in southern Lebanon on July 18.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

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



The IDF Air Force killed two Hamas commanders and one PIJ commander in the Gaza Strip

Lebanese Hezbollah conducted at least eight attacks into northern Israel

Israeli forces engaged Palestinian fighters in four locations in the West Bank

Individuals close to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei spoke to Reuters on July 18 about Khamenei's role in election engineering possibly in an attempt to portray the Iranian regime as stable

0 50 100 200 Kilometers

Legend: Golan Heights West Bank

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, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, and Siddhant Kishore
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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 Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Air Force killed two Hamas commanders and one PIJ commander in the Gaza Strip on July 18. The IDF Air Force killed a platoon commander from Hamas' Shati Battalion.[6] The commander had conducted multiple sniper attacks targeting Israeli forces, including one attack that killed an IDF non-commissioned officer during the IDF raid on UNRWA headquarters in Tal al Hawa, Gaza City.[7] IDF airstrikes also killed a member of Hamas' Nukhba Forces who participated in Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel.[8] The Nukhba Forces is Hamas' special operations unit responsible for ground operations into Israel. It was responsible for the October 7 attack. The IDF also killed the commander of Palestinian Islamic Jihad's (PIJ) naval forces for the Gaza City area.[9]

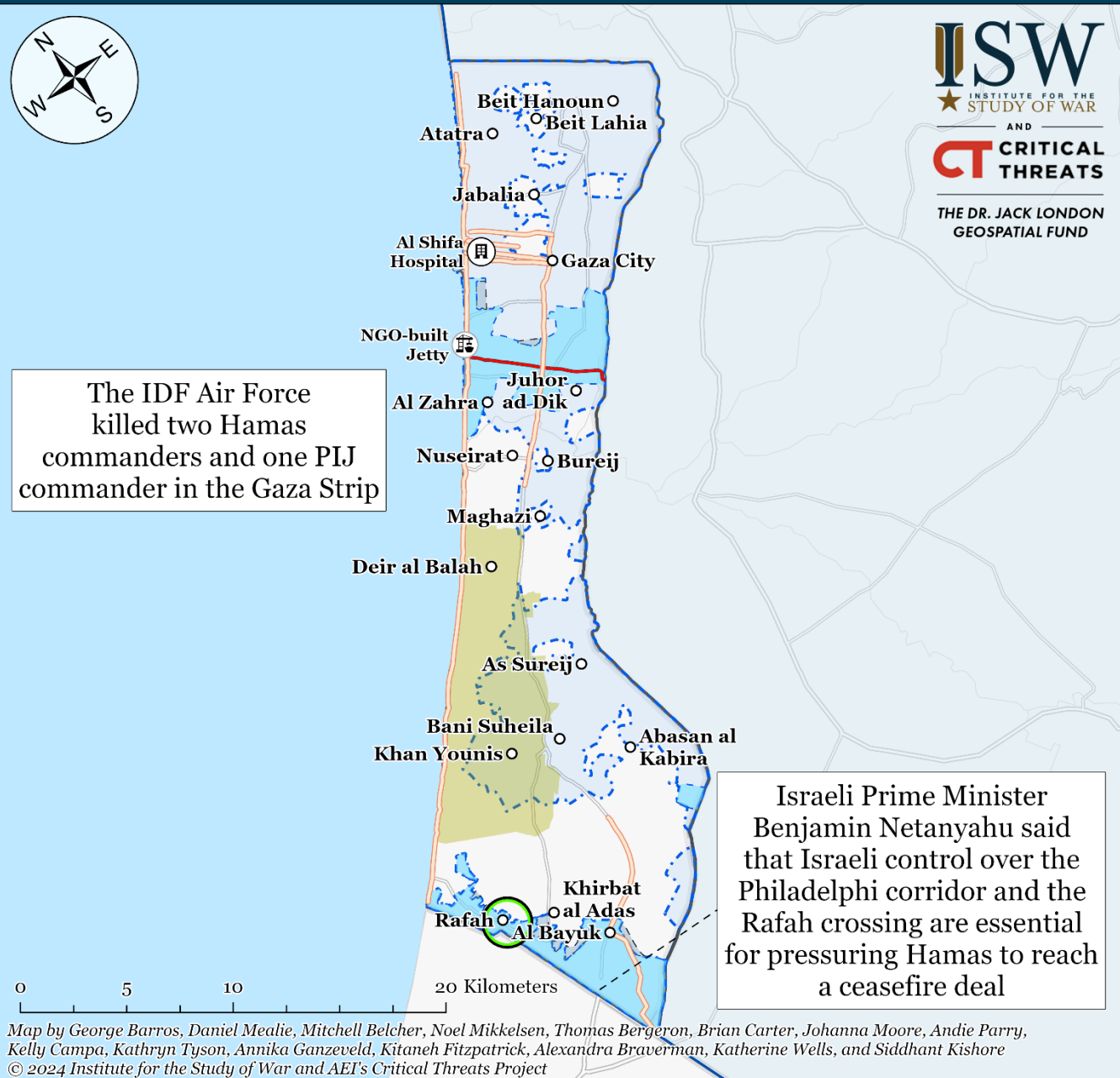
Palestinian militias conducted at least three indirect fire attacks targeting Israeli forces and command centers along the Netzarim Corridor on July 18.[10]

The IDF Givati Brigade (162nd Division) continued clearing operations in Rafah on July 18. Israeli forces identified tunnel networks and directed airstrikes on Palestinian fighters in the area.[11] The IDF reported that a Hamas fighter fired a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) at Israeli forces from a humanitarian corridor while aid trucks were traveling along the route.[12] Israeli forces closed the route for "several hours" to pursue the fighter before reopening the road for aid to travel along.[13] The National Resistance Brigades targeted an Israeli armored personnel carrier with an improvised explosive device (IED) in Kaf al Mashrou, east of Rafah City, and claimed that the explosion destroyed the vehicle.[14] Hamas and the Popular Resistance Committees mortared Israeli forces in al Izba, southwest of Tal al Sultan.[15]

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on July 18 that Israeli control over the Philadelphi corridor and the Rafah crossing are essential for pressuring Hamas to reach a ceasefire deal.[16] Netanyahu made the statements during a meeting with IDF soldiers in Rafah. Netanyahu said that Israeli control over the areas helps Israel advance the ceasefire deal, including Israel's demand to release the "maximum" number of Israeli hostages held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Netanyahu previously dismissed reports on July 12 that Israeli troops may withdraw from the Philadelphi Corridor as part of a ceasefire and hostage deal.[17]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

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



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 18, 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*
- Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridors in Gaza
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- Netzarim Corridor

0 2.5 5 10 Kilometers

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, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, and Siddhant Kishore - © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

* 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

The US military ended its mission to deliver aid via a US-built aid pier in Gaza. US CENTCOM Deputy Commander Vice Admiral Brad Cooper stated on July 17 that the US-built aid pier has been shut down.[18] CENTCOM assessed that the pier achieved the intended effect to “surge a very high volume of aid” into Gaza.[19] The US-built pier was reportedly in service for only 20 days since it began operations on May 17.[20] Cooper said that aid will now be sent through the port of Ashdod in Israel. [21]

The al Quds Brigades launched a barrage of rockets targeted Mefalsim and Nir Am in southern Israel on July 18.[22]



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

Israeli forces have engaged Palestinian fighters in four locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cut off on July 17.[23] Unspecified fighters detonated an IED near Hermesh, an Israeli settlement west of Jenin, on July 18.[24] The attack wounded two off-duty IDF soldiers and two Israeli civilians.[25]

The IDF detained seven wanted individuals and confiscated weapons and funds in operations across the West Bank on July 18.[26]

Palestinian security forces destroyed a planted IED in Tubas.[27]



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

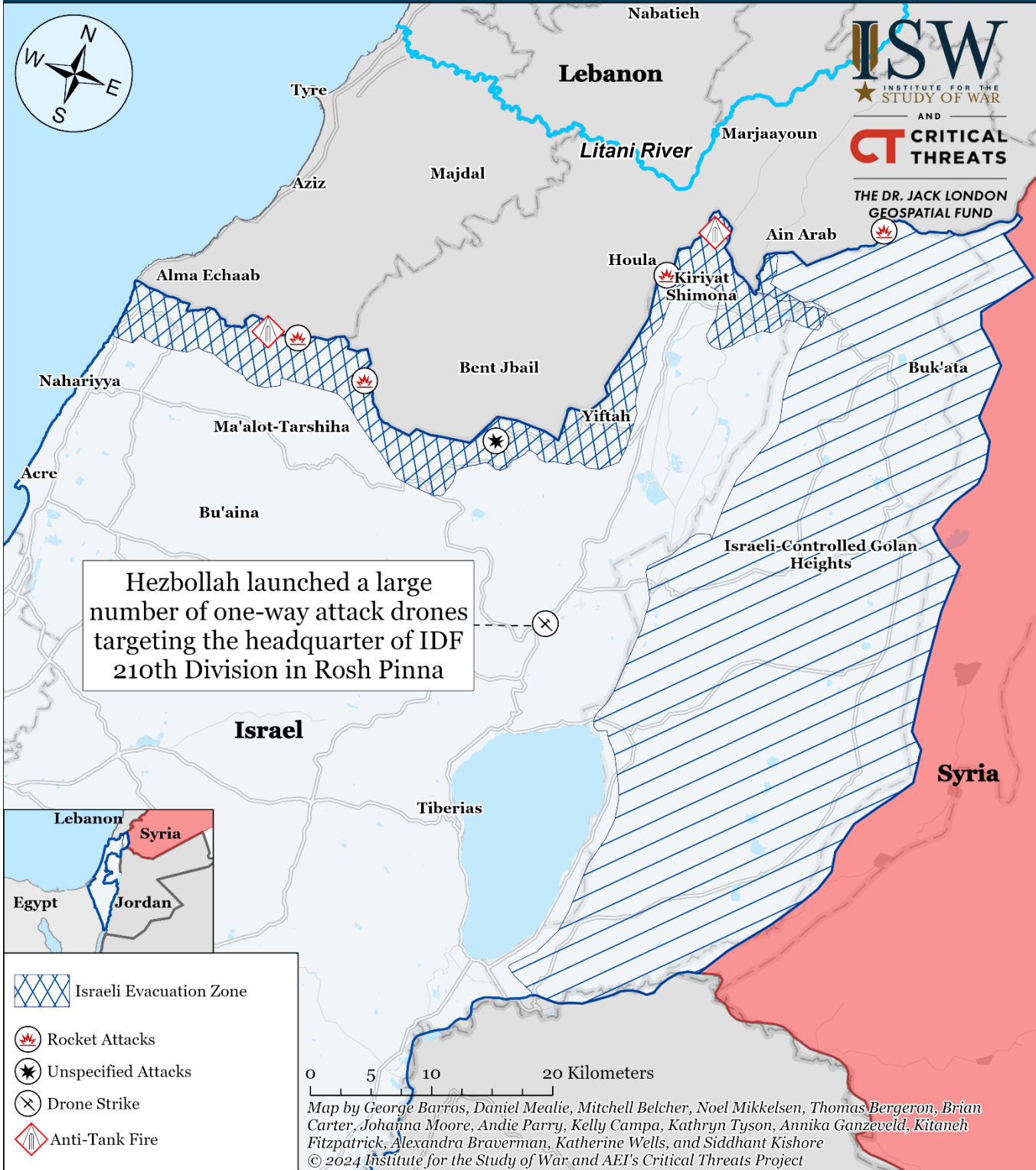
The IDF Air Force conducted airstrikes that killed one Hamas leader and one Hezbollah member in southern Lebanon on July 18.[28] Israeli aircraft struck and killed senior Hamas leader Mohammed Jabara in Ghazze, Bekaa Valley.[29] The IDF stated Jabara supported Hezbollah indirect fire attacks from southern Lebanon into Israel and coordinated several attacks with al Jamaa al Islamiyah in Lebanon.[30] An Israeli open source social media account claimed Jabara previously led the Khaled Ali unit under the Hamas Construction Bureau, which the social media account said is responsible for manufacturing rockets in southern Lebanon.[31] Hamas and al Jamaa al Islamiyah both claimed Jabara was a commander in both militias.[32] Hamas and al Jamaa al Islamiyah are both Muslim Brotherhood organizations, so cross-pollination between the two organization is possible.[33] Jabara's participation in both groups underscores Hamas' close relationship with al Jamaa al Islamiyah, which has closely cooperated with Hezbollah during the current war. The IAF separately conducted an airstrike that killed a member of Hezbollah's engineering unit, Hassan Ali Muhanna, in Qana.[34] The IDF reported that Muhanna was responsible for "planning and implementing various terrorist operations" against Israel.[35]

Hezbollah launched an unspecified large number of one-way attack drones targeting the headquarters of IDF 210th Division in Rosh Pinna.[36] Hezbollah claimed that the attack was a response to Israeli airstrikes that killed a Jabara and Muhanna on July 18.[37]

Lebanese Hezbollah has conducted at least eight attacks into northern Israel, including the Rosh Pinna attack, since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on July 18.[38] Hezbollah claimed that it targeted Israeli "espionage equipment" established in Yiron and Metulla using an anti-tank missile and "appropriate weapons" on July 18. [39]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon

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



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

Iran and Axis of Resistance

Iraqi Ambassador to Russia Haider Mansour al Adhari discussed Russo-Iraqi defense cooperation with Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin in Moscow on July 17.^[40] Adhari and Fomin discussed Russian support for Iraqi counterterrorism campaigns and the conflicts in Ukraine and the Gaza Strip.^[41] Adhari and Fomin's meeting in Moscow follows a series of meetings between senior Russian and Iraqi military and political officials to discuss increasing Russo-Iraqi security cooperation since January 2024.^[42] CTP-ISW previously assessed that Russia may be setting conditions to supplant the United States as a security partner in Iraq in anticipation of the United States possibly reducing its military presence there.^[43]

Three unspecified US and Israeli officials told Axios that the Biden Administration had sent a private warning to Iran “several weeks ago” regarding Iran’s suspicious nuclear activities.^[44] The Biden administration communicated its message through a third country and direct channels. Iran stated that it had not changed its nuclear policy and provided explanations for its nuclear activities. Iranian nuclear policy is centered on Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's 2003 fatwa against nuclear weapons.^[45] The unspecified US and Israeli sources said that the US and Israeli intelligence communities still assess that Iran is not actively pursuing a nuclear weapon.^[46] An unspecified US official reiterated that the United States remains concerned about Iran’s nuclear program. US and Israeli intelligence services collected information on Iranian scientists interacting with computer models and metallurgical research in March that could be used for the development of nuclear weapons, but the purpose of the computer modeling was unclear.

Law Enforcement Command Commander (LEC) Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan replaced Sistan and Baluchistan Provincial LEC Commander Brigadier General Doust Ali Jalilian with LEC Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Eshagi on July 18.^[47] LEC spokesperson General Saeed Montazerul Mahdi made the announcement on July 18 but did not provide an explanation for the leadership change. Radan had appointed General Doust Ali Jalilian on February 26, 2023.^[48] Anti-regime militants, including those affiliated with Salafi-jihadi groups, have conducted several attacks in Sistan and Baluchistan since December 2023. These attacks and the local security forces' inability to stop them may have triggered the change.^[49] Eshagi was previously the LEC commander of Kerman province between 2006 and 2010, the LEC commander of Khuzestan province between 2010 and 2016, and LEC commander of Gilan province between 2018 and 2024.^[50] Anti-regime media observed that Eshagi had led previous crackdowns on provincial protests, particularly the April 2011 Khuzestan protests led by Arab Iranian citizens and 2018 protests against the mandatory veiling laws in Gilan province.^[51]

Interim Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Ali Bagheri Kani met with Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib on the sidelines of the United Nations Security Council meetings in New York on July 17.^[52] Bagheri Kani reiterated Iran’s support for Lebanon’s “stability and security.” Bagheri Kani declared that Iran is trying to prevent Israeli military operations from spreading into Lebanese territory. Bagheri Kani also called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the establishment of a single sovereign Palestinian state. Bou Habib concurred with the need to prevent a regional expansion of Israel–Hammas war.

The US Treasury Department Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned two individuals, five entities, and five vessels for facilitating commodity shipments and financial transactions for the Houthis and the IRGC Quds Force on June 18.^[53] This is the ninth round of sanctions targeting the Iran-based, IRGC-backed Houthi financier Said al Jamal network of front companies and vessels since October 2023.^[54] The US Treasury Department last sanctioned the Said al Jamal network on June 17.^[55]

OFAC sanctioned the following entities, individuals, and vessels connected to the Said al Jamal network:^[56]

- Indonesia-based illicit shipment facilitator and dual Malaysian-Singaporean national Mohammad Roslan bin Ahmad
- China-based businessman Zhuang Liang (Zhuang)
- Seychelles-registered, Thailand- and Singapore-based Ascent General Insurance Company
- UAE-based Fornacis Energy Trading Co. LLC
- UAE-based Alpha Shine Marine Services LLC
- Marshall Islands-registered and UAE-based Barco Ship Management Inc (Barco)
- Marshall Islands-registered Sea Knot Shipping Inc.
- Panama-flagged vessel *Oceanic II*
- Panama-flagged vessel *Tirex*

- Panama-flagged vessel *Mirova Dynamic*
- Panama-flagged vessel *Kasper*

Houthi-controlled media claimed that the United States and United Kingdom conducted an airstrike targeting Hudaydah International Airport on July 18.^[57]



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- [3] <https://x.com/aqolizadeh/status/1806279199537430614> ; <https://x.com/Mostafa Najafii/status/1806254866370555926> ; <https://x.com/Mostafa Najafii/status/1806360418342097190>
- [4] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-june-27-2024>
- [5] <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2024/06/03/mohammad-bagher-ghalibaf-president-election-ebrahim-raisi/> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-june-25-2024>
- [6] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1813892215682514978>
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