

Iran Update



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June 13, 2024, 2:00 pm 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. Click [here](#) to subscribe to the Iran Update.

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.

Hamas is requiring Israel to meet its maximalist demands sooner than stipulated in the latest Israeli ceasefire proposal. Hamas has seemingly not shortened the timeline on which it would release Israeli hostages, however. Hamas issued new demands on June 11 in response to the latest Israeli ceasefire proposal.[1] US Secretary of State Antony Blinken described the new demands as going beyond Hamas' previous negotiating position and questioned whether Hamas is acting in good faith in the talks.[2] The new demands involve Israel committing immediately to a permanent ceasefire, accelerating the timeline for reconstruction in the Gaza Strip, and making greater concessions on the release of Palestinian prisoners.[3] Hamas also reportedly requested that Israeli forces withdraw sooner from the Gaza Strip.[4] These changes would help Hamas secure most of its maximalist demands in the first phase of the proposed ceasefire deal and dilutes the second and third phases.[5] An anonymous Hamas official speaking to Reuters downplayed the significant changes that Hamas made to the ceasefire proposal by framing the changes as insignificant and unobjectionable.”[6]

Hamas' changes are meant to force Israel to either accept the new demands or risk being perceived as the party that ended ceasefire negotiations. Israeli officials have indicated repeatedly that the latest proposal is the last one.[7] Senior US officials, including President Joe Biden, have stated in recent weeks that Hamas remains the primary obstacle to a ceasefire agreement.[8]

Hamas feels that it can manipulate the ceasefire negotiations in this manner because it is confident that it is winning in the Gaza Strip. Senior Hamas officials have repeatedly expressed confidence that Hamas will survive the war, despite Israeli military pressure.[9] Hamas forces throughout the Gaza Strip remain combat effective and are trying to reconstitute. Hamas has also begun trying to reassert its political authority in some parts of the strip.[10] Hamas has achieved this success by exploiting the fact that Israeli forces withdraw from areas in the Gaza Strip after clearing them rather than conducting follow-on holding operations.

The Houthis claimed on June 12 that they conducted a combined attack with Iranian-backed Iraqi militias targeting two locations in Israel.[11] The Houthis stated that they launched drones and missiles targeting Ashdod and Haifa in cooperation with the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, which is a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias.[12] The attack marks the second time that the Houthis have claimed a combined operation with the Islamic Resistance in Iraq targeting Israel. The Houthis claimed the first combined operation on June 6.[13] This Houthi-Iraqi militia cooperation comes shortly after a series of coordination calls and meetings across the Axis of Resistance. The Houthis and Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have conducted the two combined attacks as part of their larger effort to impose an unofficial blockade on Israel. The growing cooperation between the Houthis and Iranian-backed Iraqi militias furthermore reflects the desire of the Axis of Resistance to present itself as an interoperable coalition.[14]

Iran is continuing to expand its nuclear program. Anonymous diplomats told Reuters on June 12 that Iran is installing new centrifuges at its nuclear facilities at Natanz and Fordow, increasing the Iranian capacity to enrich uranium.[15] The diplomats said that Iran is responding to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors censuring Iran on June 5 for failing to cooperate sufficiently with the IAEA.[16] The diplomats noted that the Iranian retaliation to the IAEA Board of Governors censure “is not as big as many had feared.”

This report comes amid other indications of Iran advancing its nuclear program. The Iranian stockpile of 60-percent-enriched uranium increased by over 15 percent from February to May 2024, according to the IAEA, bringing the stockpile to around 6,201 kilograms.[17] Tehran has separately sought to acquire materials for its nuclear program from Niger in recent months. Iran and Niger began negotiating in late 2023 to trade Iranian drones and surface-to-air missiles for 300 tons of uranium yellowcake from Niger.[18] An Iranian opposition outlet reported on June 1 that Iran and Niger finalized the deal, though CTP-ISW cannot verify that report.[19]

Senior Iranian officials, including a top foreign policy adviser to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, have repeatedly threatened in recent months to pursue nuclear weapons, as CTP-ISW has reported extensively.[20] IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi stated in May 2024 that Iranian officials “must stop” normalizing such discussions.[21] He also called on Iran to “meaningfully engage” with the IAEA so that the IAEA can guarantee that the Iranian nuclear program is exclusively peaceful.[22]

Iranian hardliners are debating and negotiating amongst themselves to unite their faction behind a single candidate in the Iranian presidential election. The faction is concerned that the five hardline candidates risk splitting the vote and inadvertently advantaging the sole reformist candidate, Masoud Pezeshkian. Some hardliners are urging Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf or Saeed Jalili to withdraw in support of the other.[23] Other hardline officials and media outlets are expressing concerns that that the faction is too divided to win the race.[24] Ali Reza Zakani, who is a hardline candidate and the Tehran City mayor, stated on June 13 that candidates who are behind in electoral polls should withdraw in favor of more popular contenders.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- **Gaza Strip:** Hamas is requiring Israel to meet its maximalist demands sooner than stipulated in the latest Israeli ceasefire proposal. Hamas has not seemingly shortened the timeline on which it would release Israeli hostages, however.
- **Yemen:** The Houthis claimed for the second time that they conducted a combined attack with Iranian-backed Iraqi militias targeting Israel. They have conducted these attacks as part of a larger effort to impose an unofficial blockade on Israel.
- **Iran:** Iran is continuing to expand its nuclear program. Iran is installing new centrifuges to increase its uranium enrichment capacity. Iran has also negotiated with Niger to receive 300 tons of uranium yellowcake.
- **Iran:** Iranian hardliners are debating and negotiating amongst themselves to unite their faction behind a single candidate in the Iranian presidential election. The faction is concerned that the five hardline candidates will split the vote and advantage the sole reformist candidate.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of June 13, 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 Israel Defense Force (IDF) reported on June 13 that the IDF 99th Division concluded an operation in Zaytoun and Sabra neighborhoods of southern Gaza City over the past week.[26] The IDF said that the operation “deepened” Israeli control over the Netzarim Corridor and surrounding areas.[27] The IDF and Israeli military correspondents similarly reported on June 4 that Israeli forces concluded a raid in Zaytoun and Sabra.[28] Palestinian militias have continued claiming

attacks targeting Israeli armor and dismounted infantry in Zaytoun since then, however.[29] Israeli forces killed dozens of Palestinian fighters and destroyed over 50 militia sites during the most recent Zaytoun operation.[30] Israeli forces have conducted at least five distinct clearing operations in Zaytoun since the war began.[31]

The IDF Alexandroni Reserve Infantry Brigade and 8th Reserve Armored Brigade deployed to the Netzarim Corridor, south of Gaza City, over the past week.[32] The two brigades are operating under the 99th Division. The 99th Division killed over 10 Palestinian fighters, including a fighter that participated in the October 7 attacks on the Otef settlement.[33] Palestinian militias conducted several mortar and rocket attacks targeting Israeli forces along the Netzarim Corridor.[34]

The IDF 99th Division and Yahalom combat engineering unit destroyed an 800-meter-long tunnel in Juhor ad Dik, adjacent to the northern side of the Netzarim Corridor.[35] The IDF said that Hamas dug the tunnel 30 meters underground and included military rooms and side hatches.[36] It is notable that the IDF continues to uncover and demolish Hamas underground infrastructure months after holding operational control over the Netzarim Corridor, underscoring how widely Hamas has proliferated tunnels across the strip.

The IDF 162nd Division continued clearing operations in Rafah on June 13.[37] Israeli forces continued targeted operations to locate weapons. The IDF Givati Brigade engaged and killed several Palestinian fighters in Shaboura neighborhood in Rafah, where the brigade has operated in recent days.[38][39] The IDF Agoz Commando unit directed a strike on a Palestinian fighter and military building in Rafah.[39] A Palestinian militia mortared Israeli forces in Shaboura neighborhood. [40]

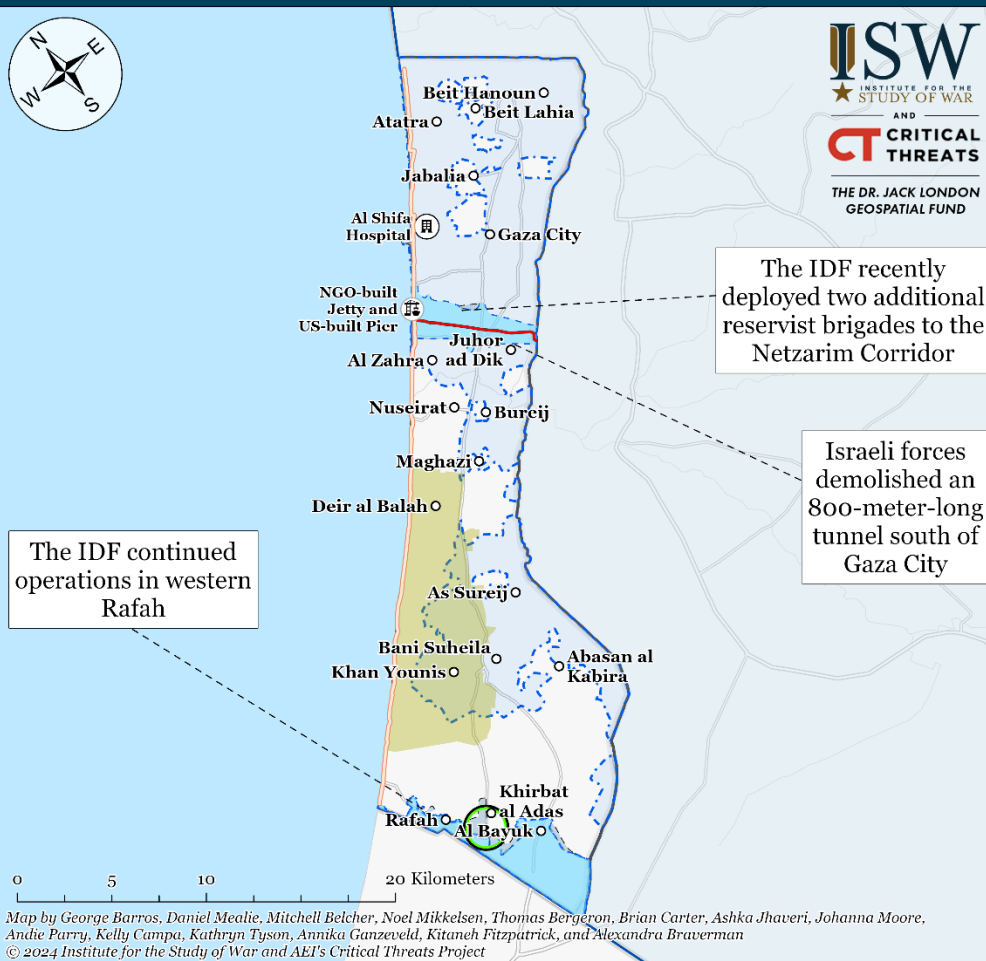
The IDF denied on June 13 that it expanded operations into the al Mawasi humanitarian zone northwest of Rafah.[41] Palestinian sources, including the Palestinian Authority's official media arm, reported that Israeli airstrikes, artillery, and small arms fire targeted areas within the al Mawasi humanitarian zone.[42]

Palestinian reports indicate that the IDF is operating in the westernmost part of Rafah. A Palestinian journalist posted footage of Israeli forces establishing security operation points as well as Israeli bulldozers moving earth along the westernmost part of the Philadelphi Corridor.[43] A Palestinian militia mortared Israeli forces operating in al Alam, western Rafah, on June 13.[44]

These reports are consistent with other indications that the IDF was preparing to enter parts of western Rafah. A Palestinian activist reported on June 12 that the IDF issued warnings to people in al Alam of a military operation in the next 24 hours.[45] The al Alam area is roughly one mile south of the al Mawasi humanitarian zone. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Rafah said on June 12 that Israel informed it that fighting will continue in western Rafah but did not have specific information regarding the area.[46] The IDF had not issued any new evacuation orders in Rafah at the time of this writing.

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of June 13, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



The IDF continued operations in western Rafah

The IDF recently deployed two additional reservist brigades to the Netzarim Corridor

Israeli forces demolished an 800-meter-long tunnel south of Gaza City

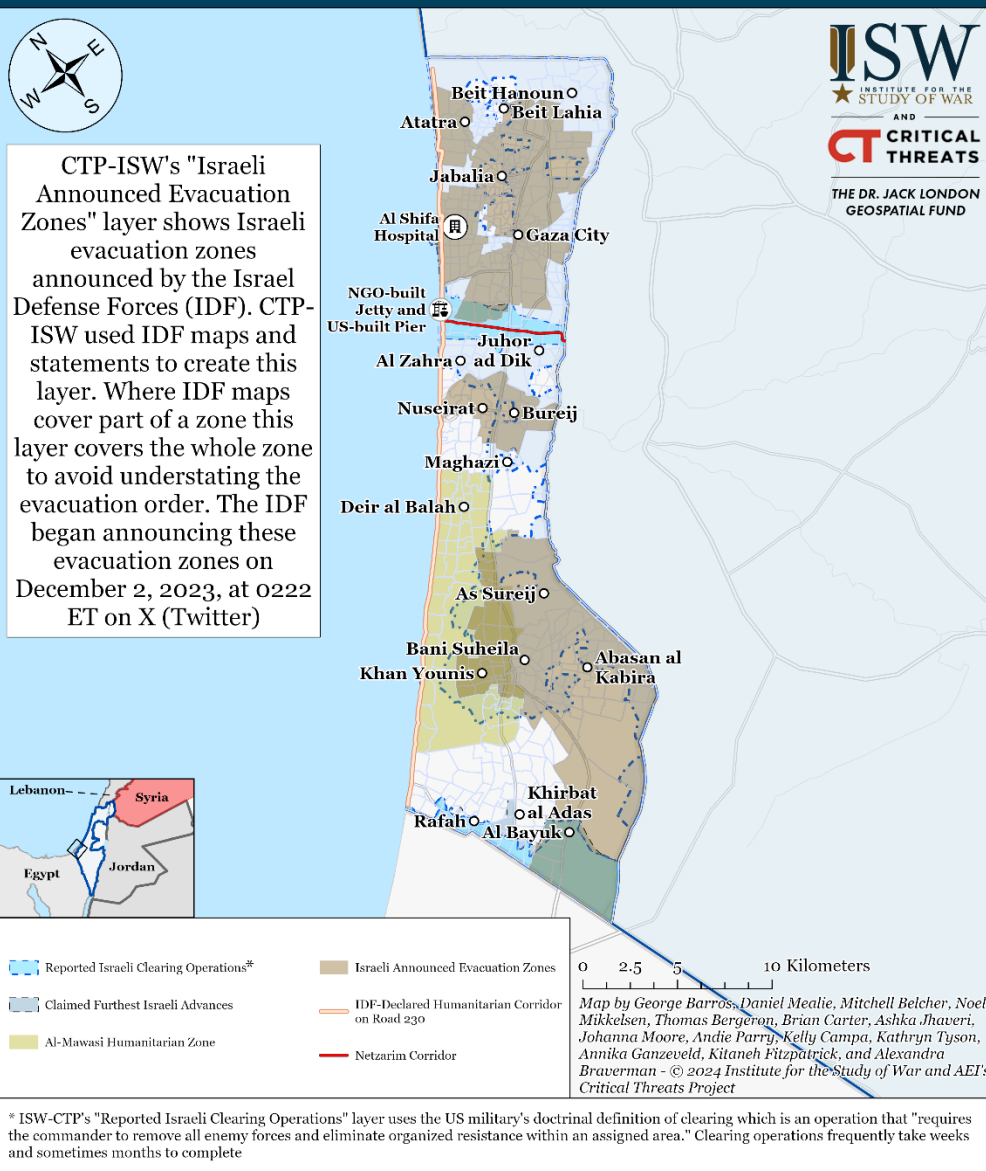
Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Kathryn Tyson, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, and Alexandra Braverman
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Reported Israeli Clearing Operations	IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230	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

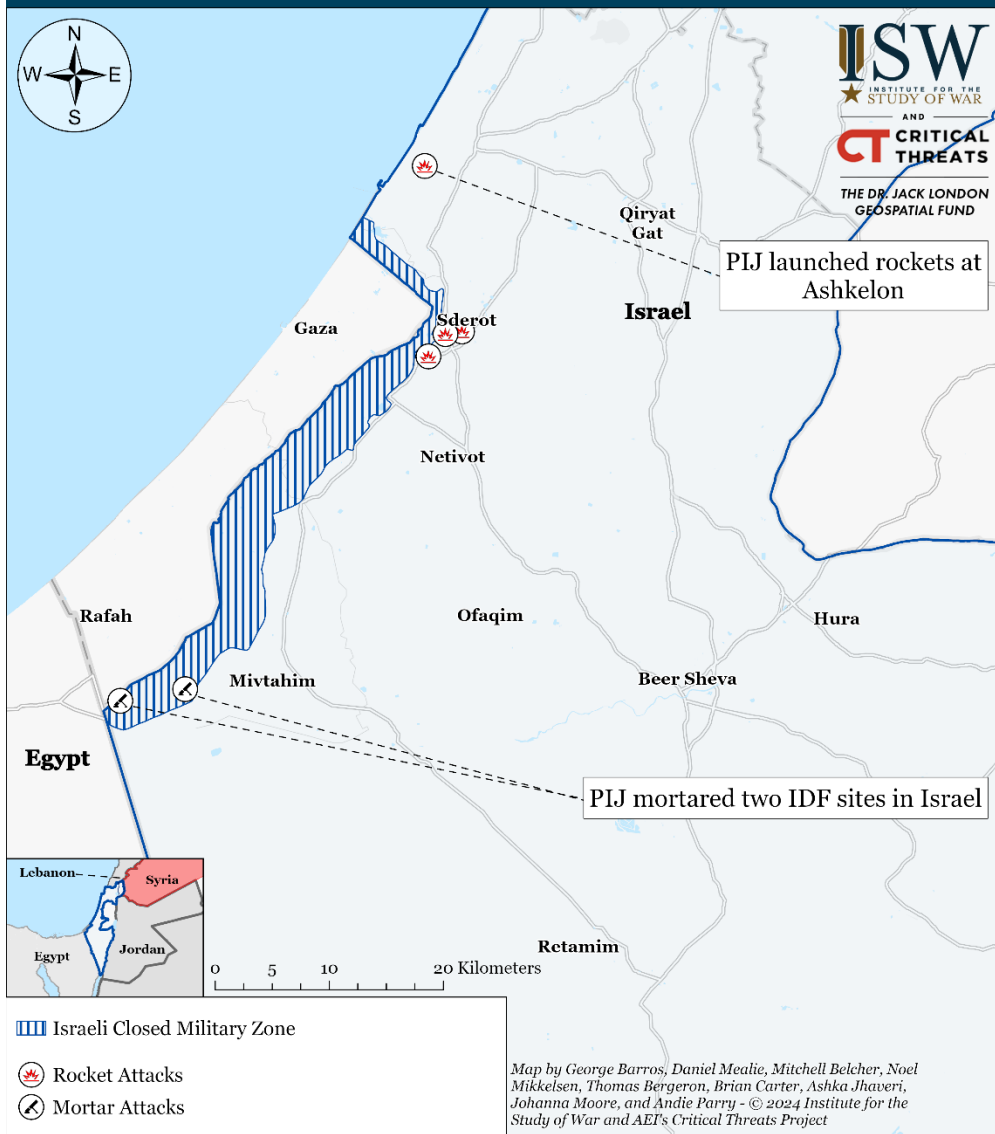
Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip As of June 13, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) conducted seven indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel on June 13.[47] PIJ fired rockets at the major Israeli cities of Ashdod and Ashkelon, along with several smaller towns closer to the Gaza Strip.[48] PIJ also mortared IDF sites near the Kerem Shalom crossing into Rafah.[49]

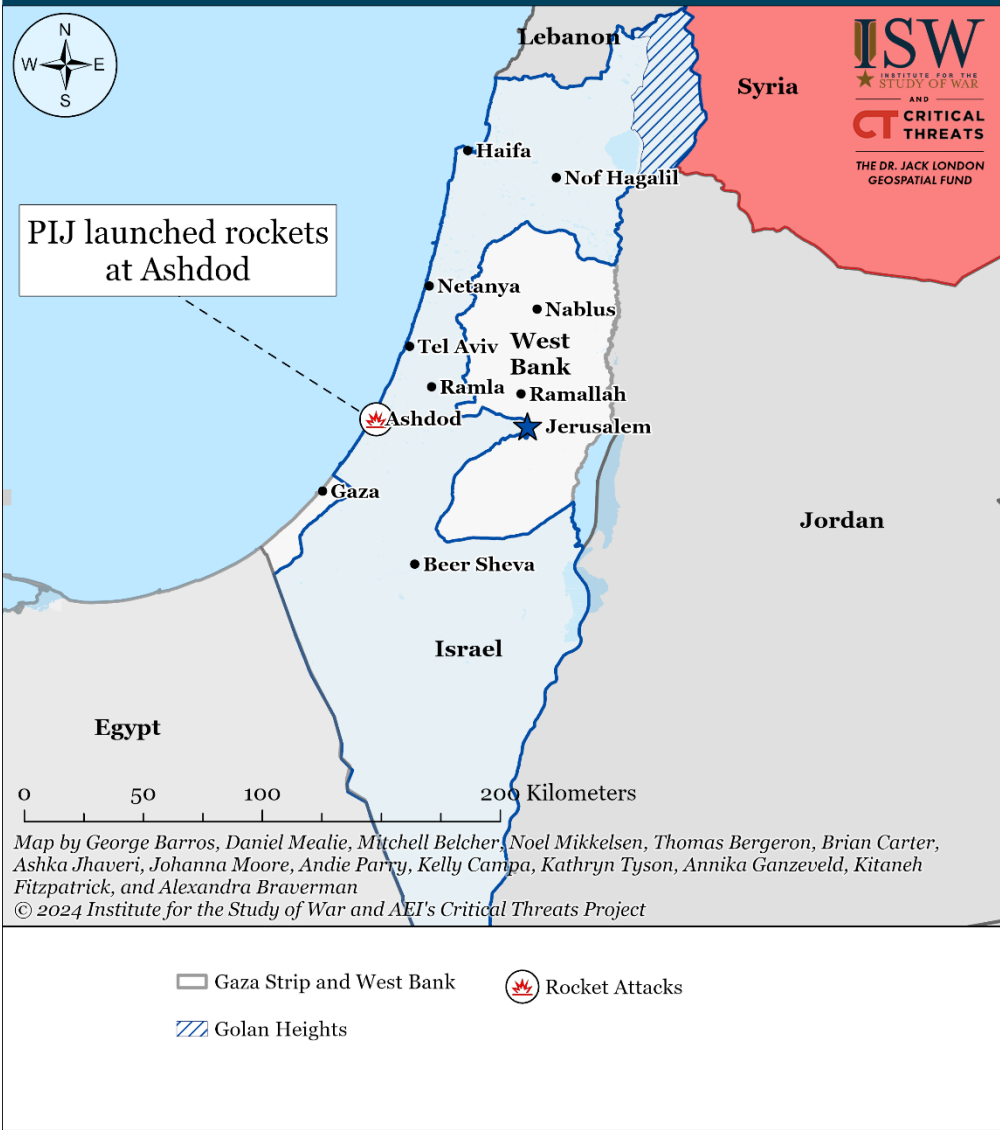
Attacks into Israel from the Gaza Strip

As of June 13, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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

Indirect Fire Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of June 13, 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

Israeli forces have engaged Palestinian fighters in at least three locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on June 12.[50] All three locations are in Jenin Governorate. The IDF conducted a raid near Jenin (see below) that probably triggered the kinetic activity in the West Bank on June 12 to 13.

The IDF conducted a 13-hour raid near Jenin.[51] IDF special operations forces (SOF) engaged Palestinian fighters and detained suspected fighters during the operation. PIJ and the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades defended against the Israeli raid. PIJ's Jenin Battalion claimed 11 separate attacks targeting the IDF in Qabatiya, south of Jenin.[52] The IDF killed two high-value targets in Qabatiya during the raid.[53] The IDF killed both individuals by isolating the target building, ensuring that no civilians were inside, and then demolishing the target building, thus killing the two high-value targets inside it.[54] PIJ fighters detonated unspecified explosives and fired small arms at the Israeli SOF elements that were conducting the raid.[55] Qabatiya is a "stronghold" for Palestinian Islamic Jihad.[56]



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

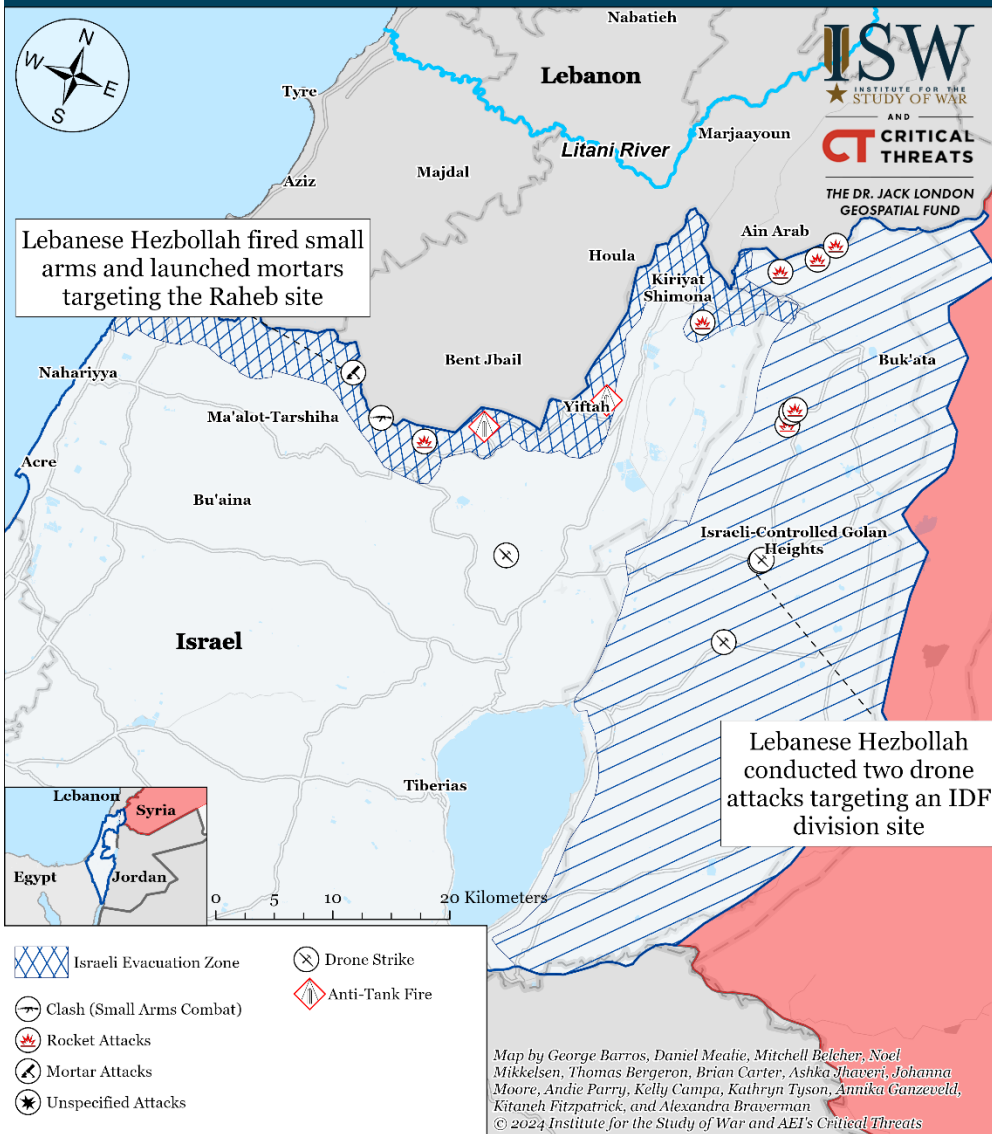
Lebanese Hezbollah has conducted at least 19 attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on June 12.[57] Hezbollah attacked eight IDF sites in the Golan Heights, using one-way attack drones in three of the attacks.[58] Hezbollah also fired around 40 rockets into northern Israel in response. Israeli air defenses intercepted most of the rockets with some landing in Israeli territory and causing fires.[59] Shrapnel from the attacks wounded two Israeli civilians. Hezbollah said that the attacks are in response to the IDF airstrike that killed senior Hezbollah field commander Taleb Sami Abdullah in southern Lebanon on June 11.[60]

Unspecified senior IDF officials told Israeli media on June 13 that Israeli strikes on Hezbollah commanders in Lebanon will not achieve Israel's desired end state in Lebanon.[61] The officials are presumably referring to the IDF airstrike that killed Taleb Sami Abdullah on June 11.[62] They said that Hezbollah attacks have increased over the past month and that Israel must make a political decision on restoring Israeli security in northern Israel.[63] Several senior Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former War Cabinet member Benny Gantz, have indicated that Israel will respond to Hezbollah through diplomatic or military action.[64] Israel aims to stop Hezbollah attacks into northern Israel and return displaced Israeli civilians to their homes.[65] Israel also seeks to push Hezbollah forces away from the Israel-Lebanon border in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which ended the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War.[66]

The IDF said on June 13 that the IDF Kiryati Reserve Armored Brigade and 226th Reserve Paratroopers Brigade concluded a two-week-long military exercise simulating a potential conflict in Lebanon.[67] The exercises included maneuvering in complex terrain and providing logistical support and communications in enemy territory.

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon

As of June 13, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



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

Iran and Axis of Resistance

Hamas opened a political office in Iraq on June 11.[68] Members of Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Imam Ali visited the office and met with a member of Hamas' Office for Arab and Islamic Relations, Mohammad al Hafi.[69] Kataib Imam Ali is one of the Iranian-backed Iraqi militias that comprise the Islamic Movement in Iraq.[70] Hafi and the Kataib Imam Ali officials discussed the need to coordinate Arab and international efforts to stop Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip and to deliver humanitarian aid to Palestinians.[71]

The leader of Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba, Akram al Kaabi, warned on June 12 that Israel will pay a “heavy price” for killing senior Lebanese Hezbollah commander Taleb Sami Abdullah.[72] Israel killed Abdullah in an airstrike in southern Lebanon on June 12.[73] Kaabi added that the Axis of Resistance will not stop fighting Israel until the "liberation of Jerusalem.”[74]

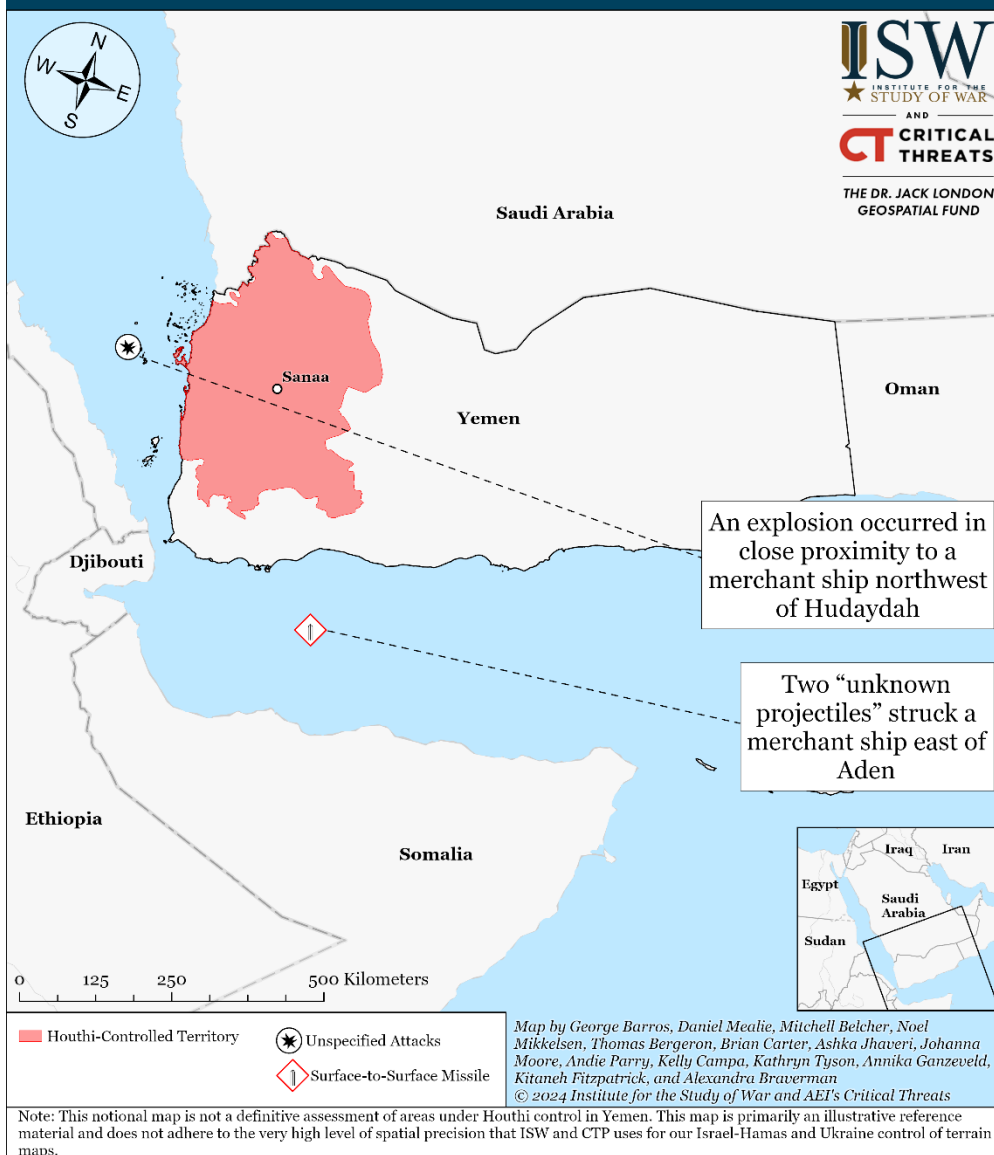
Acting Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Ali Bagheri Kani met with senior Iraqi officials in Baghdad on June 13. Iraqi Foreign Affairs Minister Fuad Hossein called for a permanent ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war and warned that an Israeli attack on Lebanon would have repercussions across the Middle East during a joint press conference with Bagheri Kani.[75] Bagheri Kani separately stated that Iran is willing to contribute to Iraq’s Development Road Project during a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani.[76] The Development Road Project is a 20 billion dollar project aimed at connecting Iraq’s al Faw port to Europe via Turkey. [77] Bagheri Kani also met with Iraqi President Abdul Latif al Rashid.[78]

The Houthis were likely responsible for at least two attacks on commercial vessels in Gulf of Aden and Red Sea on June 13.[79] The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKTMO) reported that two “unknown projectiles” struck a merchant ship 98 nautical miles east of Aden, Yemen, and caused a fire.[80] British maritime security firm Ambrey separately said on June 13 that a ship was struck by a missile 129 nautical miles east of Aden. It is unclear whether the UKTMO and Ambrey reports are referencing the same attack.[81] UKTMO also reported an explosion near a merchant ship 82 nautical miles northwest of Hudaydah, Yemen.[82] The explosion did not cause any damage to the ship. The Houthis have not claimed the attacks at this time of this writing.

US CENTCOM stated on June 12 that its forces destroyed three Houthi anti-ship cruise missile launchers in Houthi-controlled Yemen and intercepted a Houthi drone in the Red Sea.[83] CENTCOM also reported that the Houthis launched two anti-ship ballistic missiles from Yemen into the Red Sea. CENTCOM said that the missiles did not cause any injuries or damage to US, coalition, or commercial ships in the Red Sea. CENTCOM confirmed a Houthi attack on June 12 in which the group disabled a commercial vessel in the Red Sea.[84]

Houthi Attacks in the Red Sea

As of June 13, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Interim Iranian President Mohammad Mokhber discussed energy and transportation cooperation in a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on June 13.[85] Mokhber and Putin emphasized their commitment to the long-term Russo-Iranian cooperation agreement.[86] Russian state media recently reported on June 11 that Iran and Russia temporarily suspended working on the agreement due to unspecified issues raised by Iran.[87]

The Artesh Ground Forces conducted a military exercise with Azerbaijani forces in northwestern Iran on June 13.[88] Artesh Ground Forces Deputy Commander Brigadier General Karim Cheshak claimed on June 13 that the Aras Dam, which is located on the Aras River on the Iran-Azerbaijan border, is “threatened by terrorist groups.”[89] Cheshak stated that special forces and rapid response units participated in the exercise to confront any terrorist threat. Cheshak emphasized that

the goal of the exercise was to “maintain peace, safeguard mutual interests, and boost sustainable security” in the southern Caucasus.[90]



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