

# Iran Update



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**Information Cutoff: June 17, 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.*

**The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said on June 17 that it has dismantled about half of Hamas' forces in Rafah.**<sup>[1]</sup> The IDF 162nd Division advanced into Rafah on May 7 and the IDF said that it now controls approximately 60 to 70 percent of the governorate, including the Egypt-Gaza Strip border.<sup>[2]</sup> The IDF assesses that it has almost completely “dismantled” two of four battalions in Hamas' Rafah Brigade and that IDF units have “somewhat degraded” the other two battalions.<sup>[3]</sup> An Israeli media correspondent estimated that Israel will take “several more weeks” to completely “dismantle” Hamas' Rafah Brigade. Israeli forces have also located 200 tunnel openings, 25 of which led to tunnels that reach the border with Egypt.<sup>[4]</sup> The IDF said that its forces have killed at least 550 Palestinian fighters in Rafah since the start of ground operations.<sup>[5]</sup> Twenty-two 162nd Division soldiers have died during fighting in Rafah.<sup>[6]</sup> An Israeli Army Radio correspondent said that the IDF will shift to a “targeted raid” approach in the whole of the Gaza Strip after the end of the Rafah operation.<sup>[7]</sup> Israeli

forces in the northern Gaza Strip have already shifted to this approach to target reconstituting Hamas units.

**Hamas' Rafah Brigade will likely survive with sufficient assets to reconstitute itself, given the time and space to reconstitute.** Successful reconstitution requires a commander to disengage their force from combat. An Israeli war correspondent said that an unspecified number of Hamas fighters left the Rafah area when Israeli forces first entered Rafah.[8] This cadre of surviving Hamas fighters assigned to the Rafah Brigade could provide Hamas commanders in Rafah sufficient human capital to rebuild the Rafah Brigade over time absent sustained Israeli military pressure against the Rafah Brigade.[9] The IDF has discovered large numbers of Hamas fighters in previously uncleared areas during other operations. Israeli forces found that three battalions—not the expected one battalion—had withdrawn into a previously uncleared area of Jabalia prior to early May, for example.[10]

**The Houthis conducted four attacks that caused physical damage to commercial vessels between June 9 and June 13, possibly indicating an increase in the effectiveness of Houthi attacks.** A British maritime security firm said on June 14 that recent Houthi attacks on commercial vessels demonstrated a “significant increase in effectiveness” in Houthi attacks in the Red Sea.[11] CTP-ISW has observed that Houthi attacks have struck commercial vessels at a rate of about 0.4 impacts per week since the beginning of the Houthi attack campaign in November 2023. Separate Houthi attacks on two ships on June 9 caused fires aboard both vessels.[12] The Houthis then launched a remote-controlled, one-way attack naval surface drone targeting the Liberian-flagged, Greek-owned *Tutor* on June 12.[13] A British maritime security firm said that one crewmember died in the attack, marking the second crew fatality in the Houthi attack campaign.[14] The Houthis struck the Palauan-flagged, Ukrainian-owned, Polish-operated M/V *Verbena* with ballistic missiles on June 13, causing the vessel to catch fire and the crew to abandon ship.[15]

**Western and Houthi officials told the *Wall Street Journal* on June 16 that the Houthis used routes through Djibouti and Lebanon to import Iranian weapons and equipment and Chinese-manufactured weapons parts.**[16] Anonymous Western and Houthi officials said that Iranian arms arrive in Djibouti and that unspecified actors transfer the weapons to civilian ships. The Houthis use an established corridor between Djibouti and Houthi-controlled ports along the Yemeni Red Sea coast to smuggle “illicit cargo.”[17] The officials also noted that the Houthis are using Lebanon as a base through which to purchase spare drone parts from China.[18] The UN Panel of Experts on Yemen found in two 2023 Panel of Experts reports that the Houthis smuggled weapons that were manufactured or partially manufactured in China.[19]

**Iranian reformist presidential Masoud Pezeshkian appears to be struggling to consolidate support among Iranian youth, a key voter demographic.**[20] Pezeshkian promoted reformist ideals such as increased international engagement and looser social restrictions during a discussion with Tehran University students on June 16.[21] Pezeshkian also stressed his subordination to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, discouraging students from criticizing Khamenei or his role within the regime. A group of Sharif University students read a statement that questioned the utility of the Iranian presidency and called Pezeshkian’s campaign a “colorful deception” after Pezeshkian’s talk.[22] The students stressed that Iranian presidents do “not have the ability to influence the decisions of” the supreme leader and that “there is no guarantee that [Iranian presidents have] authority in internal decisions.” The students called on Pezeshkian to withdraw from the election unless he could guarantee meaningful change within the regime, saying that failing to withdraw would

contribute to “the illusion of democracy.” Pezeshkian is currently attempting to balance his subordination to Khamenei with his reformist agenda, as CTP-ISW has previously noted.[23]

**The Sharif University students’ statements—while not emblematic of all individuals in this demographic—are demonstrative of the increased disillusionment of Iranian youth in recent years.** The Sharif University students’ criticisms of Pezeshkian’s campaign is indicative of a widening gap between the Iranian reformist party—who are dedicated to preserving the Islamic Republic and serving its Supreme Leader—and a key voter demographic. Iranians between ages 10 and 24 encompassed roughly 20 percent of the country’s population in 2021 and Iranian youth has historically favored candidates pursuing moderate or reformist agendas.[24] Iranian youth and specifically university students have led anti-regime protest movements in recent years. These protest movements have openly criticized the regime’s core principles, including Velayat-e Faqih, and in some cases called for the regime’s collapse.[25] The response of this group of university students highlights the widening gap between Iranian youth and students and Pezeshkian and other Iranian reformists.

**A hardline Iranian cleric and parliamentarian claimed on June 17 that unspecified hardline presidential candidates have agreed to withdraw from the election if they perform poorly in upcoming presidential debates.[26]** Iran will hold five televised debates beginning on June 17.[27] Reza Taghavi claimed that four unspecified “trusted institutions” will rate the hardline candidates based on their performance in the debates and that “some candidates” have agreed to withdraw in support of the candidate with the best performance.[28]

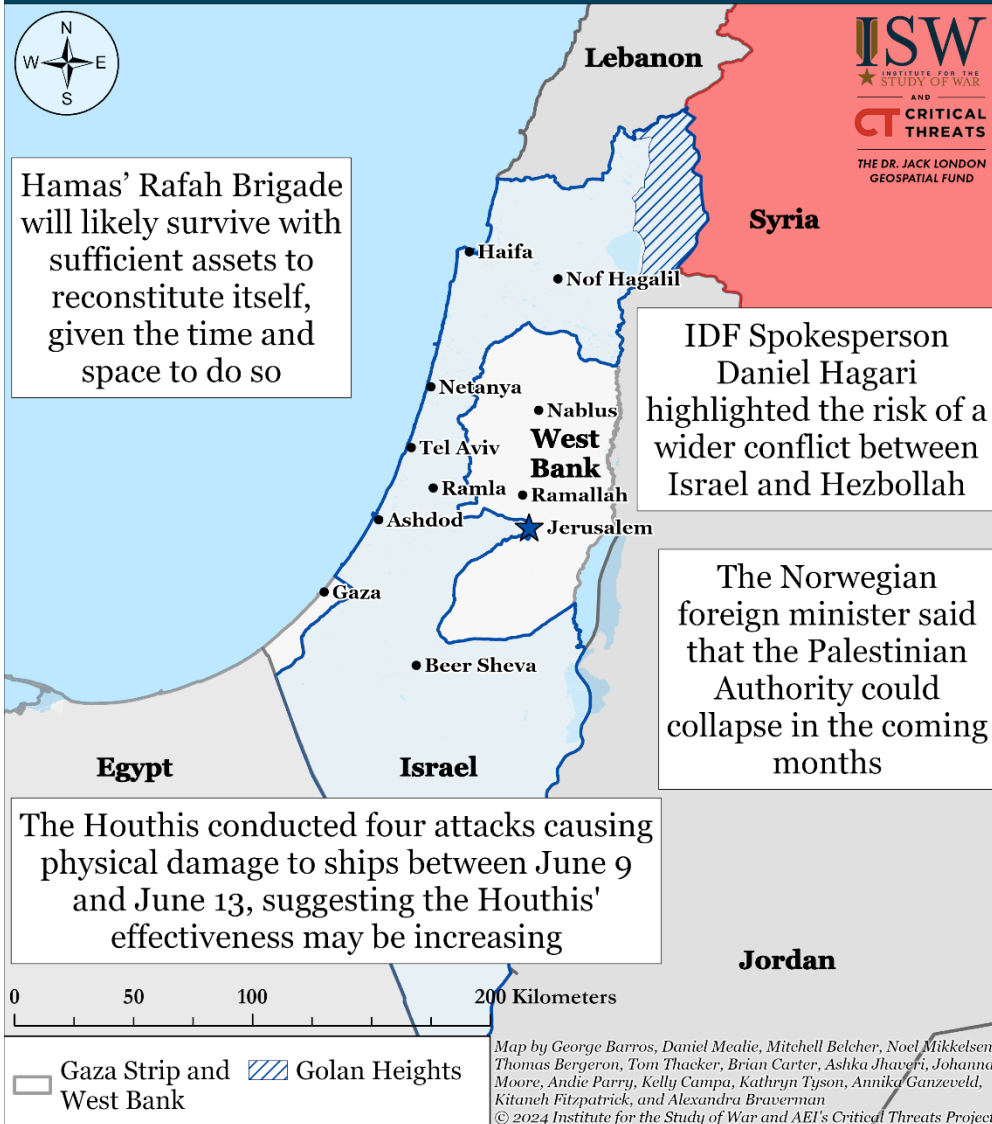
**Taghavi’s claim follows repeated statements from hardline officials calling on the hardline camp to reach a “consensus” ahead of the June 28 election.[29]** These calls are driven by concerns that the five hardline candidates risk splitting the vote and inadvertently advantaging the sole reformist candidate, Masoud Pezeshkian.

### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Gaza Strip:** Hamas’ Rafah Brigade will likely survive with sufficient assets to reconstitute itself, given the time and space to reconstitute. An Israeli war correspondent said that an unspecified number of Hamas fighters left the Rafah area when Israeli forces first entered Rafah.
- **Israeli Operations in Rafah:** The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said on June 17 that it has dismantled about half of Hamas’ forces in Rafah.
- **Iranian Presidential Election:** Iranian reformist presidential Masoud Pezeshkian appears to be struggling to consolidate support among Iranian youth, a key voter demographic. The Sharif University students’ statements—while not emblematic of all individuals in this demographic—are demonstrative of the increased disillusionment of Iranian youth in recent years.
- **Yemen:** The Houthis conducted four attacks that caused physical damage to commercial vessels between June 9 and June 13, possibly indicating an increase in the effectiveness of Houthi attacks.

# Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of June 17, 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 IDF 99th Division continued to operate along the Netzarim Corridor south of Gaza City on June 17.[30]** Israeli forces destroyed militia infrastructure and engaged Palestinian fighters in the area at close range.

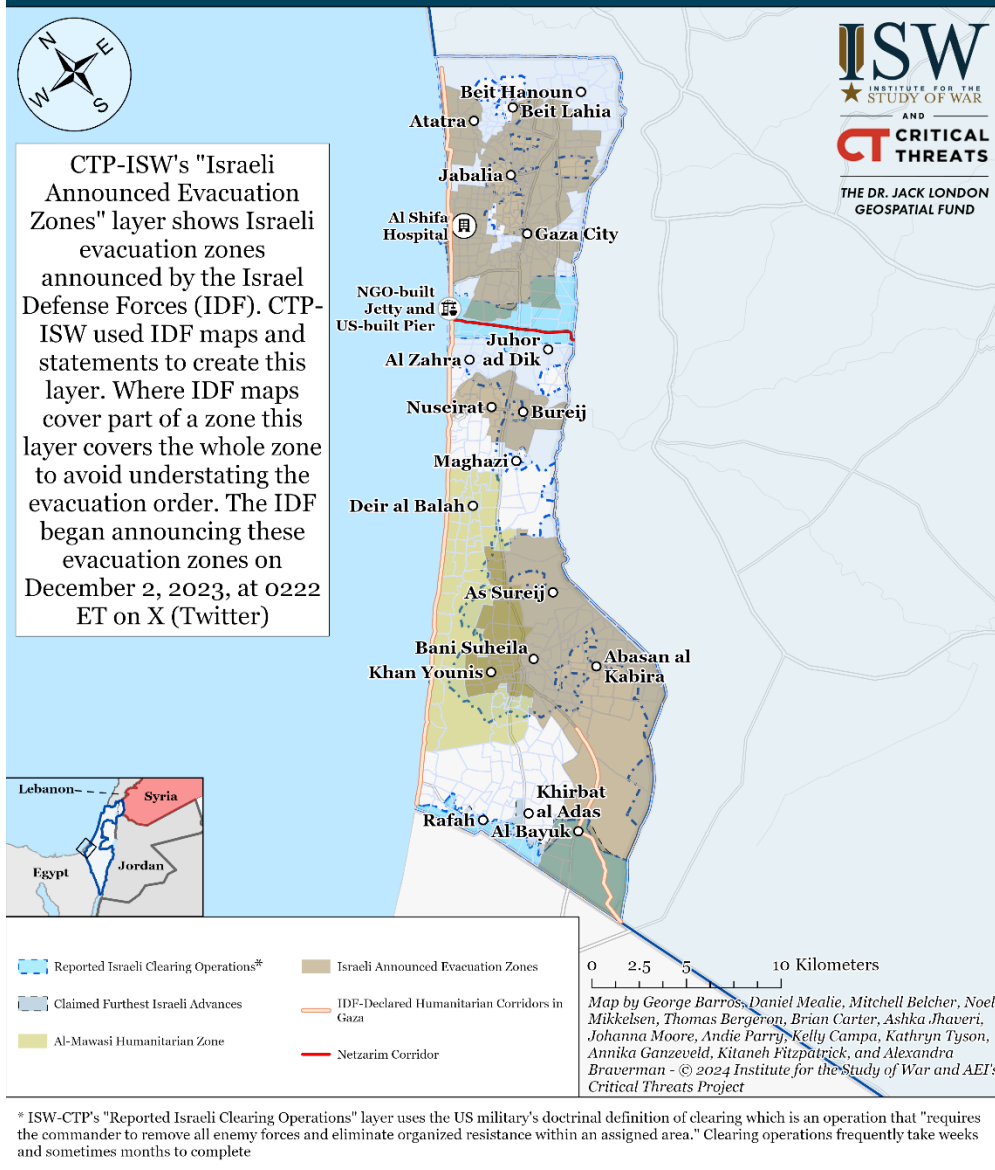
**Israeli forces continued clearing operations in two areas of Rafah on June 17.** The IDF 162nd Division is destroying militia infrastructure and engaging Palestinian fighters in Tal al Sultan

and Shaboura.[31] Israeli forces destroyed a weapons storage facility in Tal al Sultan and executed controlled detonations of explosives that Palestinian fighters had previously planted.[32] Israeli forces established “operational control” over the “NPK” neighborhood in central Rafah in the past week.[33] The IDF called NPK neighborhood a “ Hamas stronghold.”



# Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip

As of June 17, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



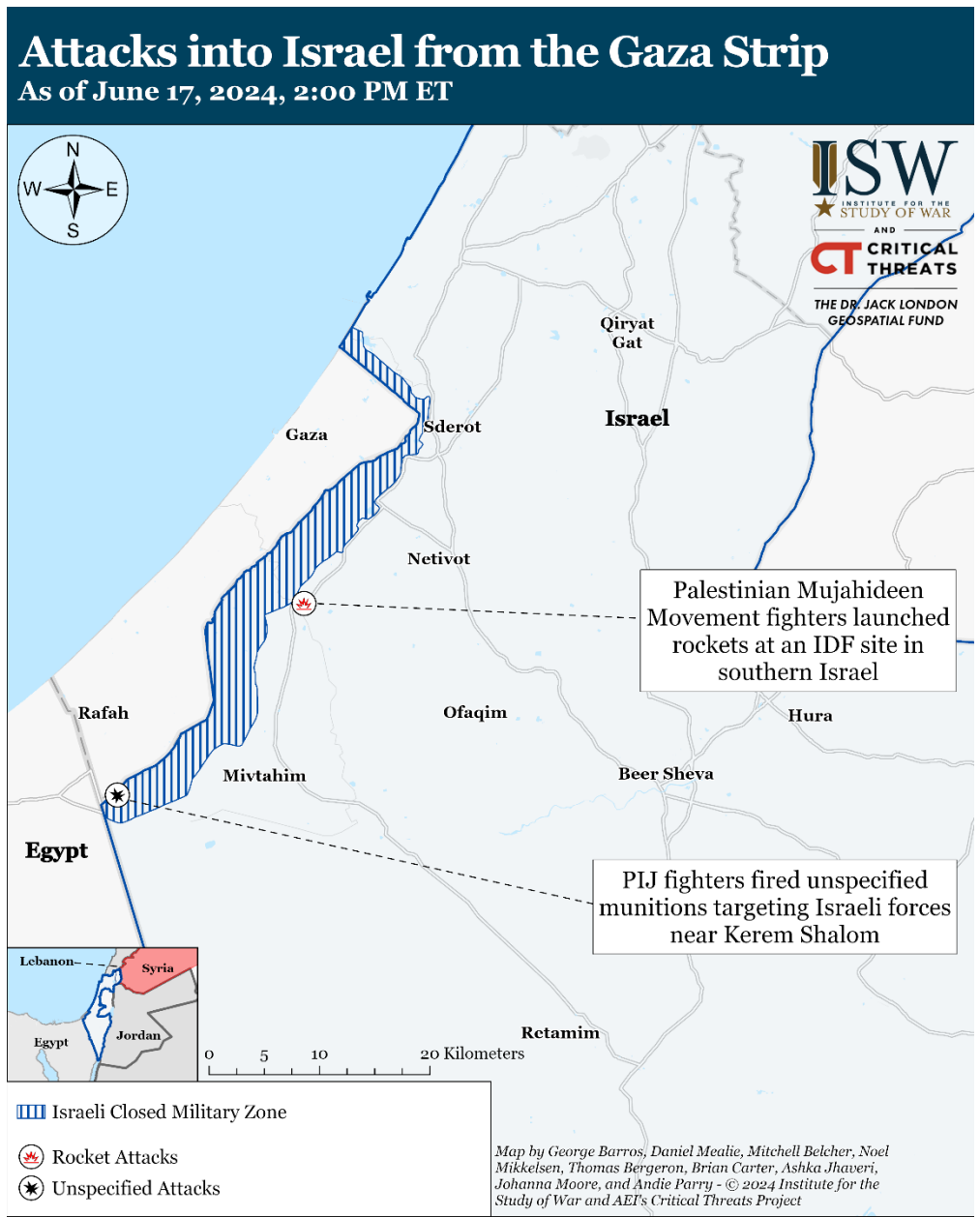
## Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dissolved his War Cabinet on June 17.[34]

National Unity minister Benny Gantz withdrew from the coalition government and war cabinet on June 9. Gantz said that disagreements with Netanyahu's conduct of the war in the Gaza Strip caused him to withdraw from the government.[35] Israeli sources indicated that Netanyahu would continue to hold "smaller forums" with key national security ministers and military officials on sensitive issues related to the war.[36] The war cabinet was responsible for day-to-day war related decisions.[37]

## Palestinian militias conducted two indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel on June 17.[38]

Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fighters fired unspecified munitions targeting Israeli forces near Kerem Shalom.[39] Palestinian Mujahideen Movement fighters launched rockets at an IDF





## West Bank

### **Axis of Resistance objectives:**

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

**CTP-ISW did not record any clashes in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on June 16.**

**Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide said on June 17 that unspecified Palestinian Authority officials are concerned that the Palestinian Authority could**

**collapse in the coming months.**<sup>[41]</sup> Eide said that a lack of funding, continued violence in the West Bank, and the inability of half a million Palestinians to work in Israel is contributing to a potential collapse. The PA is currently in a financial crisis in part due to Israel’s refusal to release Palestinian tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority.<sup>[42]</sup> Israel froze tax revenue transfers to the Palestinian Authority following Hamas’ attack on Israel in October 2023.<sup>[43]</sup> Norway agreed to act as an intermediary in February 2024 to transfer funds between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.<sup>[44]</sup> Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich re-froze the funds in May 2024.<sup>[45]</sup> Axios cited unspecified officials on June 12 who said that the Biden Administration is concerned that the Palestinian Authority could collapse if the tax revenues are not transferred soon.<sup>[46]</sup>

## **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 intercepted a drone off the coast of Acre, northern Israel, on June 17.**<sup>[47]</sup> CTP-ISW did not record any claimed attacks by Lebanese Hezbollah since CTP-ISW’s last data cut off on June 16.

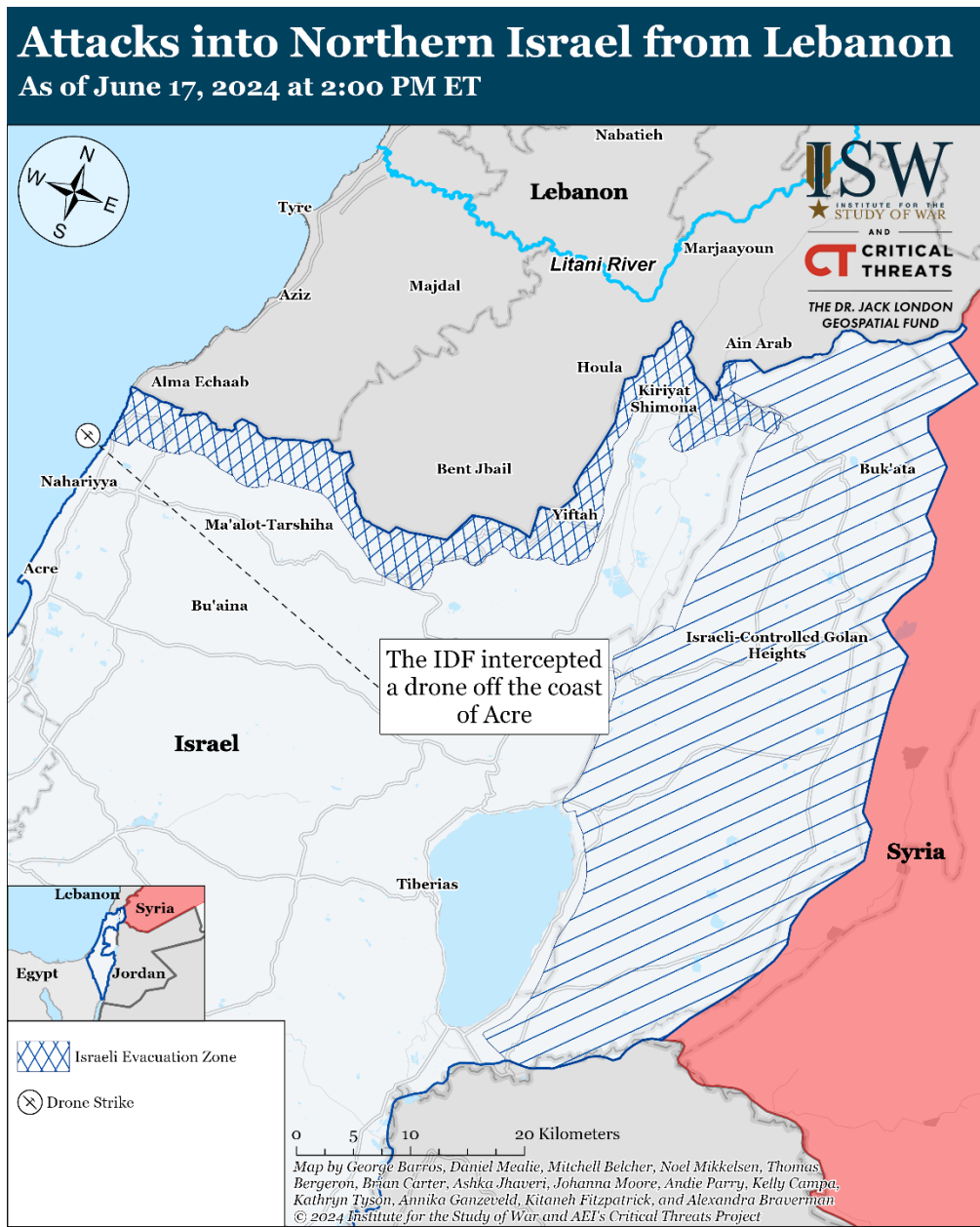
**An IDF drone strike killed a senior Hezbollah fighter in Sela, southern Lebanon, on June 17.**<sup>[48]</sup> The IDF said that Mohammed Ayoub was the head of the Rocket and Missile Department in Hezbollah’s Nasr Unit. Hezbollah acknowledged Ayoub’s death on June 17.<sup>[49]</sup> The Nasr Unit is one of three regional commands in southern Lebanon along the border with Israel.<sup>[50]</sup> The IDF added that Ayoub had planned rocket attacks from southern Lebanon into Israel.<sup>[51]</sup> The IDF killed the Nasr Unit commander Taleb Sami Abdullah in an airstrike in southern Lebanon on June 11.<sup>[52]</sup> <sup>[53]</sup>

**IDF Spokesperson Daniel Hagari highlighted the increased risk of a wider conflict between Israel and Hezbollah amid a heightened rate of Hezbollah attacks into northern Israel.** Hezbollah launched its largest attack into northern Israel on June 12 in response to the IDF airstrike that killed the commander of Hezbollah’s Nasr Unit on June 11.<sup>[54]</sup> IDF Spokesperson Daniel Hagari said on June 16 that the increase in Hezbollah attacks is bringing Israel to the brink of a “wider escalation” and that the IDF will “fulfill its duty” to defend Israel.<sup>[55]</sup> Hagari added that Israel would “take all necessary measures” to restore security and would not allow another October 7-style attack to occur in northern Israel.<sup>[56]</sup> Hezbollah has previously planned attacks like the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks.<sup>[57]</sup> Hezbollah has also established an elite commando arm—the Radwan Force—that is designed to conduct ground operations into Israeli territory.<sup>[58]</sup>

**US envoy Amos Hochstein met with senior Israeli officials on June 17 to deescalate rising tensions between Israel and Hezbollah on the Israel-Lebanon border.**<sup>[59]</sup> Hochstein met separately with several leaders including with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, and Israeli President Isaac Herzog. Hochstein and the officials



discussed the security situation on the border and the need to return displaced Israeli civilians to northern Israel.[60] Hochstein has overseen previous talks between Israel and Lebanon in recent months aimed at negotiating a diplomatic solution between Israel and Hezbollah.[61]



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

## **Iran and Axis of Resistance**

**Senior Iranian and Russian officials discussed economic cooperation and Caucasus issues during meetings in Tehran on June 16.** Interim Iranian President Mohammad Mokhber called for finalizing the Russo-Iranian long-term cooperation agreement and accelerating the construction of the Rasht-Astara railway during a meeting with Russian State Duma International Affairs Committee Chairman Leonid Slutsky.[62] Russian presidential aide Igor Levitin and Iranian

Roads and Urban Development Minister Mehrdad Bazrpash also attended the meeting.[63] Russian state media recently reported that Iran and Russia suspended work on the cooperation agreement due to unspecified "problems on the Iranian side." [64] Acting Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Ali Bagheri Kani separately met with Igor Khovayev, the Russian foreign minister's special representative for settling disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan, on June 16.[65] Bagheri Kani and Khovayev emphasized the need to use dialogue and diplomacy to resolve conflicts in the Caucasus

**Iran and Sweden completed a prisoner exchange on June 15.**[66] Iran released Swedish national Johan Floderus and Swedish and Iranian dual national Saeed Azizi in exchange for the release of Swedish-held, Iranian national Hamid Nouri. Iranian authorities detained Floderus on an unspecified date and Azizi in November 2023.[67] News of Floderus' arrest first emerged in September 2023.[68] Sweden arrested and convicted Nouri in September 2019 for his role in the 1988 mass execution of Iranian political prisoners.[69] Oman mediated the exchange.[70]

**The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned three individuals and five entities from the People's Republic of China and Oman on June 17 to target Houthi weapons procurement and funding networks.**[71] These actors facilitated the Houthis' ability to generate revenue and acquire advanced weapons manufacturing materials that enabled the Houthis to build the systems required to conduct attacks against the United States and its allies. OFAC also targeted one individual, one entity, and one vessel for facilitating commodity shipments in association with Iran-based, IRGC-backed Houthi financier Said al Jamal's network of front companies and vessels.

OFAC sanctioned the following entities and individuals that have facilitated weapons procurement for the Houthis: [72]

- People's Republic of China (PRC)-based, Houthi-affiliated Ali Abdulwahhab Muhammad al Wazir and his shipping company, Guangzhou Tasneem Trading Company Limited
- Hong Kong-based Tasneem Trading Company Limited, which owns Guangzhou Tasneem
- Oman-based International Smart Digital Interface Limited Liability Company and its operator, Yemen national Muaadh Ahmed Mohammed al Haifi
- PRC-based Ningbo Beilun Saige Machine Co., Limited
- PRC-based Dongguan Yuze Machining Tools Company Limited

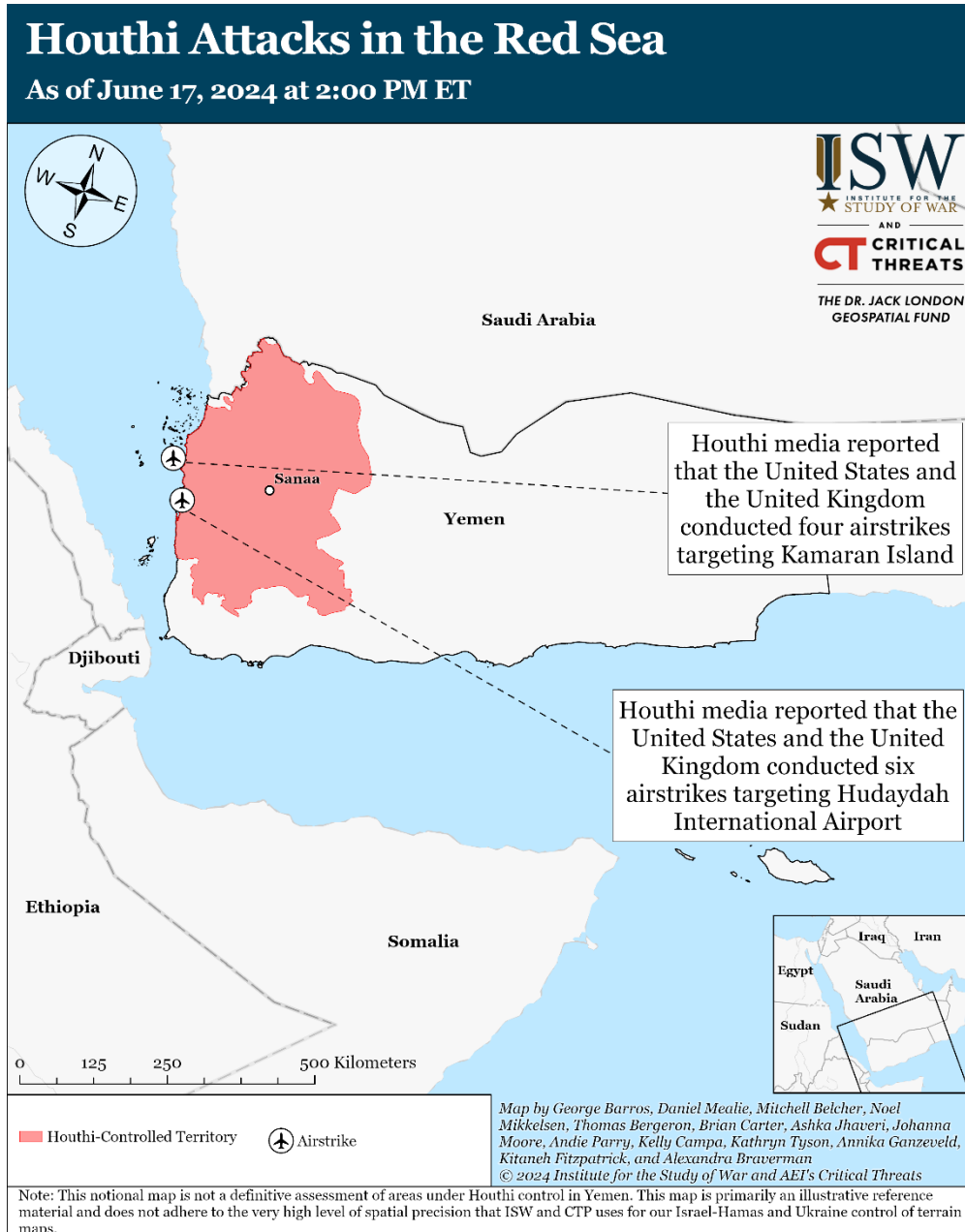
OFAC sanctioned the following entities, vessels, and individuals that are connected to the Said al Jamal network: [73]

- The Cameroon-flagged ship *Otaria*
- UAE-based Stellar Wave Marine LLC, the *Otaria's* management company
- Ukrainian national Vyacheslav Salyga, the *Otaria's* captain

**The Houthis claimed to attack three vessels in the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea on June 16.**[74] The Houthi movement reported that it launched ballistic missiles targeting a US Navy destroyer in the Red Sea. CENTCOM has not commented on the incident as of this writing. The Houthi movement also stated that it launched unspecified naval missiles targeting the Malta-flagged crude oil

tanker *Captain Paris* in the Red Sea and launched a drone attack targeting the Denmark-flagged LPG tanker *Happy Condor* in the Arabian Sea. Both vessels violated the Houthis' ban on entry to Israeli ports.

**Houthi media claimed on June 17 that the United States and the United Kingdom conducted six airstrikes targeting Hudaydah International Airport and three airstrikes targeting Kamaran Island, west of Hudaydah.[75]**



- [1] [https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/idf-says-it-has-dismantled-half-of-hamass-forces-in-rafah-killed-at-least-550-gunmen/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/idf-says-it-has-dismantled-half-of-hamass-forces-in-rafah-killed-at-least-550-gunmen/); <https://t.me/moriahdoron/11176>
- [2] <https://t.me/moriahdoron/11176>; <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1787724613595586696>
- [3] <https://x.com/manniefabian/status/1802702725609668791>
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[23] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-june-11-2024>

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[25] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/05/iran-protests-students-mahsa-amini/> ; <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/mahsa-amini-access-now-iranian-archive-human-rights/> ; <https://iranwire.com/en/society/107735-guide-to-the-slogans-heard-at-protests-in-iran/> ; <https://old.iranintl.com/en/iran/six-most-popular-slogans-iranian-protesters-2018>

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