

Iran Update



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June 2020, 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 Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee issued a statement suggesting a consensus among Iranian-backed Iraqi militias to resume attacks targeting US forces. This is its first coordinated statement since attacks on US forces paused in January 2024 that suggests such a consensus. The committee said on June 19 that its militia members would use “all available means” to achieve “full” Iraqi sovereignty.[1] The Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee is a coordinating body comprised of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, including those that comprise the Islamic Resistance of Iraq.[2] The committee agreed during the meeting that it must continue efforts to achieve Iraqi sovereignty, namely by achieving a withdrawal of US forces from Iraq. The committee

stated that it had provided the Iraqi government with an opportunity to establish a timeline for a US troop withdrawal from Iraq during a pause in attacks and that the United States has "procrastinated."

Kataib Hezbollah has been driving efforts to resume attacks on US forces since at least April 2024 after its resistance to Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani's original order to stop attacks in January.[3] Emirati state media reported in April 2024 that Islamic Resistance in Iraq militia leaders disagreed with Kataib Hezbollah's calls to resume attacks targeting US forces in Iraq.[4] Iraqi and Axis of Resistance-affiliated media outlets have suggested that KH had some success in building support among Iranian-backed Iraqi militias to resume attacks targeting US forces. Iraqi Kurdish news outlet Shafaaq reported on June 5 that unspecified Iranian-backed Iraqi militias threatened to resume attacks targeting US forces if Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani fails to set a deadline for a US troop withdrawal within 40-days of the ultimatum.[5] This deadline would fall somewhere around July 15, assuming that the Shafaaq reported the message close to the time that the militias issued the threat.

Iran and Hamas are continuing to coordinate politically to maintain alignment across the Axis of Resistance during the Israel-Hamas War. Acting Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Ali Bagheri Kani met with Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh in Doha, Qatar, on June 20.[6] Bagheri Kani emphasized that the Axis of Resistance should pursue alternative methods of "resistance" against Israel including through legal and political forums as well as public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is the practice of advancing national goals and objectives through informing and influencing foreign publics.[7] Iran and Hamas have both used information operations to inform and influence foreign publics during the current war. Bagheri Kani appears to be continuing to pursue political coordination with Haniyeh in line with the precedent set by his predecessor, Hossein Amir Abdollahian.[8]

Bagheri Kani further encouraged members of the Axis of Resistance to use "all capacities" to exact a heavier cost on Israel for its actions in the Israel-Hamas war.[9] Haniyeh stated the actions of the Axis of Resistance have made it impossible to return to a pre-October 7 world. Haniyeh said that Hamas "welcomes any [ceasefire] that will meet the demands of the Palestinian people. Haniyeh presumably is referring to Hamas' maximalist ceasefire demands that will leave Hamas in control of the Gaza Strip.[10]

Recent US and Israeli reports have emphasized the Hezbollah rocket, drone, and missile threat that Israel could face in the event of a major war between Israel and Hezbollah. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said on June 19 that Hezbollah is well-positioned to target Israel in a potential war, and that "no place in Israel" would be safe.[11] He also implied that the short distance between Israel and Lebanon would enable Hezbollah to more effectively target Israel compared to Iran's April 13 drone and missile attack targeting Israel.[12] US and Israeli officials have highlighted this threat. Biden administration officials told CNN on June 19 that they assess Hezbollah will overwhelm some Iron Dome batteries in the event of a war between Israel and Hezbollah, and that Israeli officials believe that the Iron Dome could be vulnerable to Hezbollah attacks using precision guided munitions.[13] These Israeli officials also said that Israel has been "surprised" by the sophisticated nature of Hezbollah attacks. The IDF has recently highlighted the challenges it has faced in intercepting Hezbollah drones because of their short flight time from Lebanon to Israel.[14]

Hezbollah is targeting Israeli air defense assets and surveillance equipment, probably to create temporary and local advantages vis-a-vis Israel and prepare for possible escalation. Hezbollah has repeatedly attacked these targets since October 2023, but Nasrallah emphasized that Hezbollah has worked since February 2024 to “blind Israel” and “shut down its ears.”[15] Nasrallah claimed that this effort has enabled Hezbollah to target the IDF base at Mount Meron at “any time.”[16] Hezbollah targeted Mount Meron four times in May 2024 and twice in June 2024.[17] Targeting these installations creates only temporary effects, given that Israel would quickly repair damage to sensitive intelligence assets. The temporary effects could enable Hezbollah to undertake certain movements with a lower risk of detection and Israeli targeting, however. Hezbollah is also presumably learning lessons from its attacks, allowing it to optimize its strike packages and tactics to beat Israeli air defenses. This learning process may explain why Hezbollah has begun using more sophisticated tactics, as noted by Israeli officials.[18]

Key Takeaways:

- **Iraq:** The Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee issued a statement suggesting a consensus among Iranian-backed Iraqi militias to resume attacks targeting US forces. This is its first coordinated statement since attacks on US forces paused in January 2024 that suggests such a consensus.
- **Iran and Hamas:** Iran and Hamas are continuing to coordinate politically to maintain alignment across the Axis of Resistance during the Israel-Hamas War.
- **Northern Israel Border:** Recent US and Israeli reports have emphasized the Hezbollah rocket, drone, and missile threat that Israel could face in the event of a major war between Israel and Hezbollah. Hezbollah is targeting Israeli air defense assets and surveillance equipment, probably to create temporary and local advantages vis-a-vis Israel and prepare for possible escalation.
- **Rafah:** The tactically sophisticated nature of two Hamas attacks targeting IDF units in Rafah on June 20 underscores that two Hamas battalions in Rafah remain cohesive fighting units that have not been defeated or seriously degraded. This is consistent with the IDF’s report that it has “somewhat degraded” two of the four Hamas battalions in Rafah.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of June 20, 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 Forces (IDF) killed a Hamas Nukhba squad leader in Beit Hanoun on June 20.[19] The IDF struck and killed Ahmed Hassan Salameh al Swarkeh in a school in Beit Hanoun.[20] Swarkeh led a Nukhba squad into Israel during the October 7 attacks and more recently

killed Israeli soldiers in Beit Hanoun with sniper fire.[21] The Nukhba units are Hamas' special operations forces that participated in Hamas' October 7th attacks.[22]

The IDF 99th Division continued to operate along the Netzarim Corridor south of Gaza City on June 20. The 99th Division directed airstrikes on Palestinian fighters and a mortar position that posed a threat to operations along the corridor.[23] Two Palestinian militias mortared Israeli forces gathered east of Zaytoun, south of Gaza City, on June 20.[24] Israeli forces in eastern Zaytoun are presumably operating from IDF positions along the Netzarim Corridor.

Hamas conducted two tactically sophisticated attacks targeting the IDF 162nd Division in central and western Rafah on June 20.[25] The IDF said that two soldiers were seriously injured in Rafah on June 20.[26] Hamas fighters detonated a buried improvised explosive device (IED) under an Israeli tank in Tal al Sultan in western Rafah.[27] Hamas said that its fighters surveilled Israeli forces to determine Israeli standard operating procedure in the area for days before the attack.[28] Hamas fighters also conducted a complex multistage attack targeting Israeli armor and dismounted infantry in Shaboura camp, central Rafah.[29] Hamas fighters targeted four Israeli armored vehicles with rocket-propelled grenades before pursuing dismounted soldiers into the camp's narrow alleys.[30] The sophisticated nature of these attacks required planning, coordination, and organization, further underscoring that the two Hamas battalions in Shaboura and western Rafah remain cohesive fighting units that have not been fully defeated or seriously degraded. The IDF assessed on June 17 that it had almost completely "dismantled" two of four battalions in Hamas' Rafah Brigade and that IDF units have "somewhat degraded" the other two battalions where the sophisticated attack occurred.[31] Several other militias continued to target Israeli forces in Shaboura camp, central Rafah.[32]

The IDF 162nd Division continued clearing operations in Rafah on June 20.[33] The Nahal Brigade found a weapons cache, tunnel shaft, and passageways between houses during operations in Rafah.[34] The Nahal Brigade directed strikes on a weapons warehouse that caused many secondary explosions.[35] Israeli forces also engaged Palestinian fighters in close-range combat in Rafah.[36]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

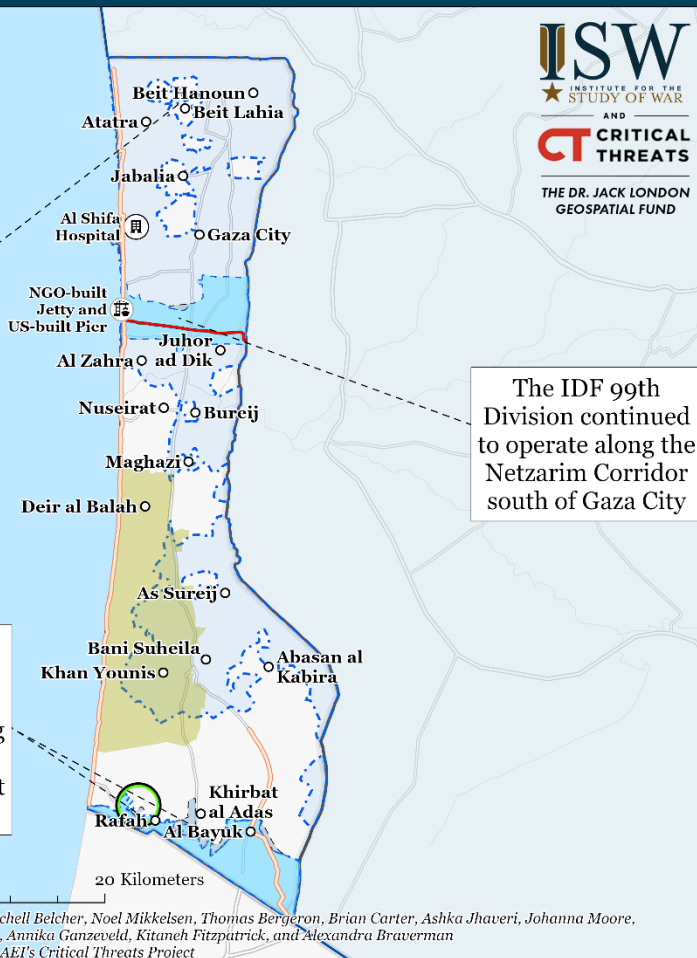
As of June 20, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



The IDF killed a Hamas Nukhba squad leader in Beit Hanoun who participated in the October 7 attack

The IDF 99th Division continued to operate along the Netzarim Corridor south of Gaza City

Hamas conducted two tactically sophisticated attacks in central and western Rafah, indicating that two Hamas Rafah battalions remain combat effective



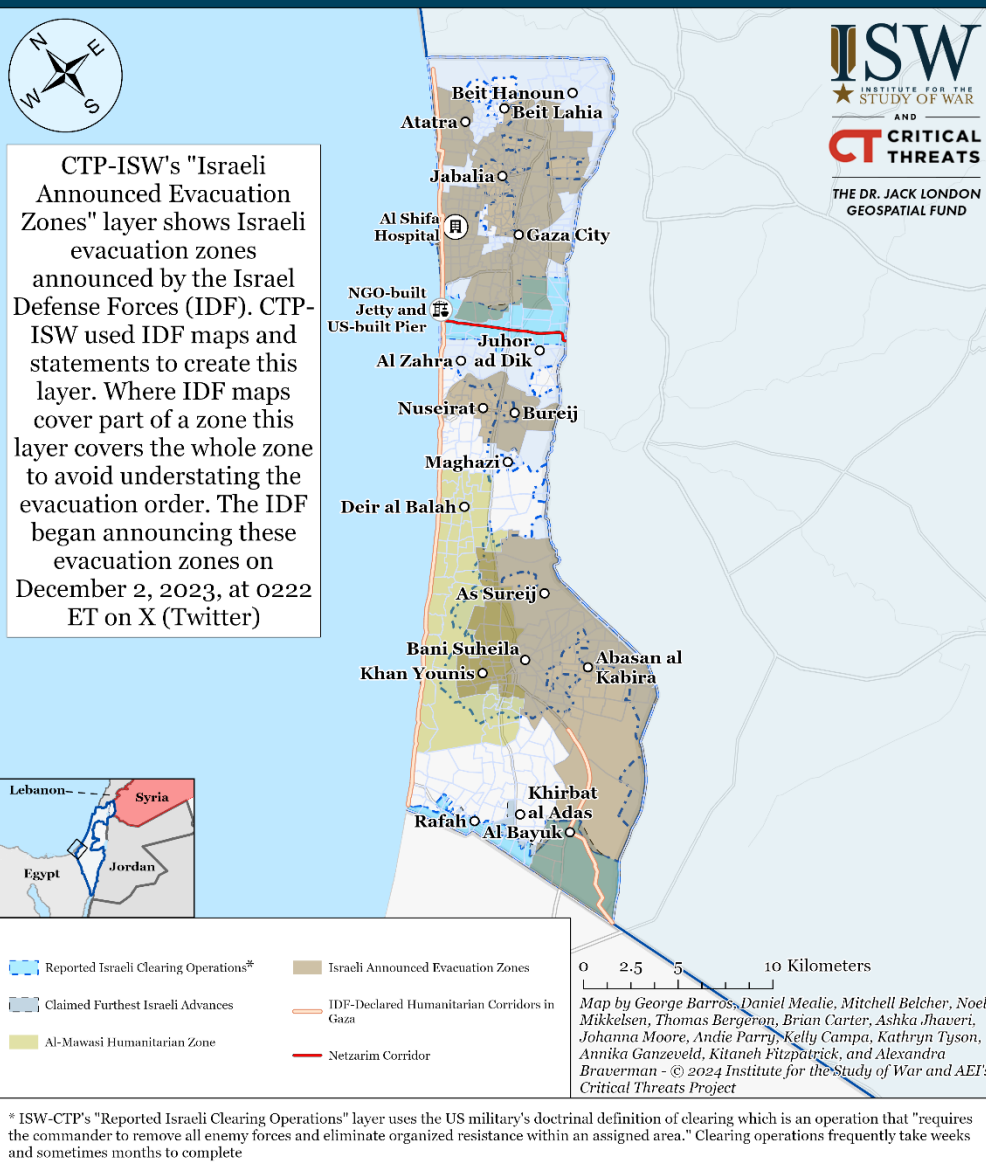
Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Kathryn Tyson, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, and Alexandra Braverman
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Reported Israeli Clearing Operations	IDF-Declared Humanitarian 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 June 20, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



The Israeli prime minister and IDF spokesperson clarified their definitions of “destroying” Hamas on June 19. IDF Spokesperson Daniel Hagari said in an interview with Israeli media that “the idea that we can destroy Hamas or make Hamas disappear is misleading to the public,” because “Hamas is an idea, Hamas is a party. [Hamas is] rooted in the hearts of the people—anyone who thinks we can eliminate Hamas is wrong.”[37] The Israeli Prime Minister’s Office responded to Hagari to clarify that the Israeli security cabinet “defined the destruction of Hamas’ military and governing capabilities as one of the goals of the war.”[38] The IDF later released a statement clarifying it aims to destroy Hamas’ “military capabilities” as well as its “governmental and organizational infrastructure” in the Gaza Strip.”[39]

The US-built pier resumed operations on the shore of the Gaza Strip on June 20, according to US defense officials.[40] The pier was taken out of service on June 14 due to high seas.[41] Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said on June 18 that he expected the pier to become operational again sometime “this week.”[42] The pier has reportedly been in service for only 10 days since it began operations on May 17.[43]

Palestinian fighters did not conduct indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel on June 20.

West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

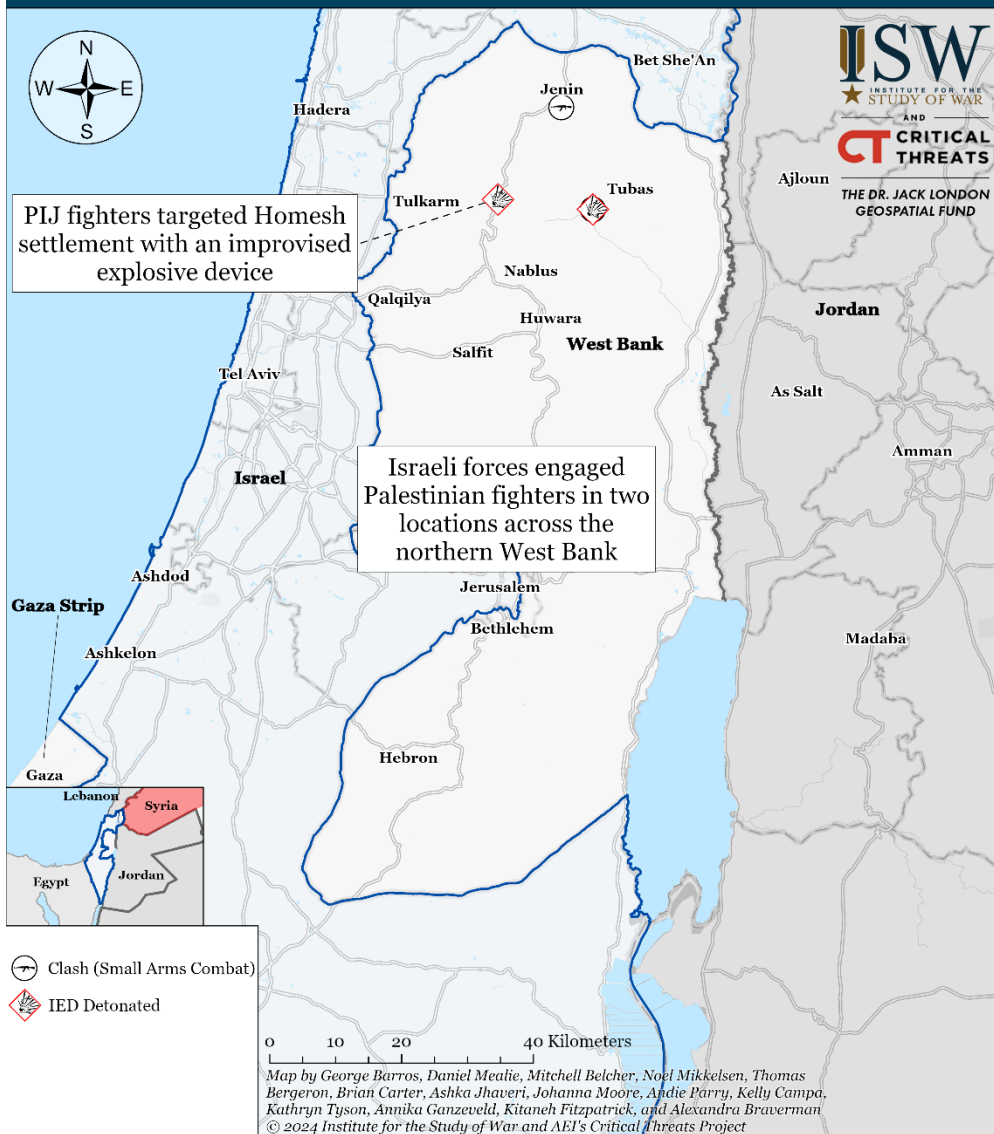
- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

Israeli forces have engaged Palestinian fighters in at least two locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on June 19.[44] Israeli forces arrested nine wanted individuals and seized various small arms during overnight raids in the West Bank.[45] PIJ fighters also targeted the Homesh settlement with an unspecified large IED.[46]

Israeli forces arrested Hamas official Aziz Dweik in Hebron on June 20.[47] Dweik has served as the speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council since 2006 as part of Hamas’ political wing.[48] Dweik was previously arrested in October 2023.[49] Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine issued statements condemning the arrest and calling for Dweik’s immediate release.[50]

Significant Activity in the West Bank

As of June 20, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



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

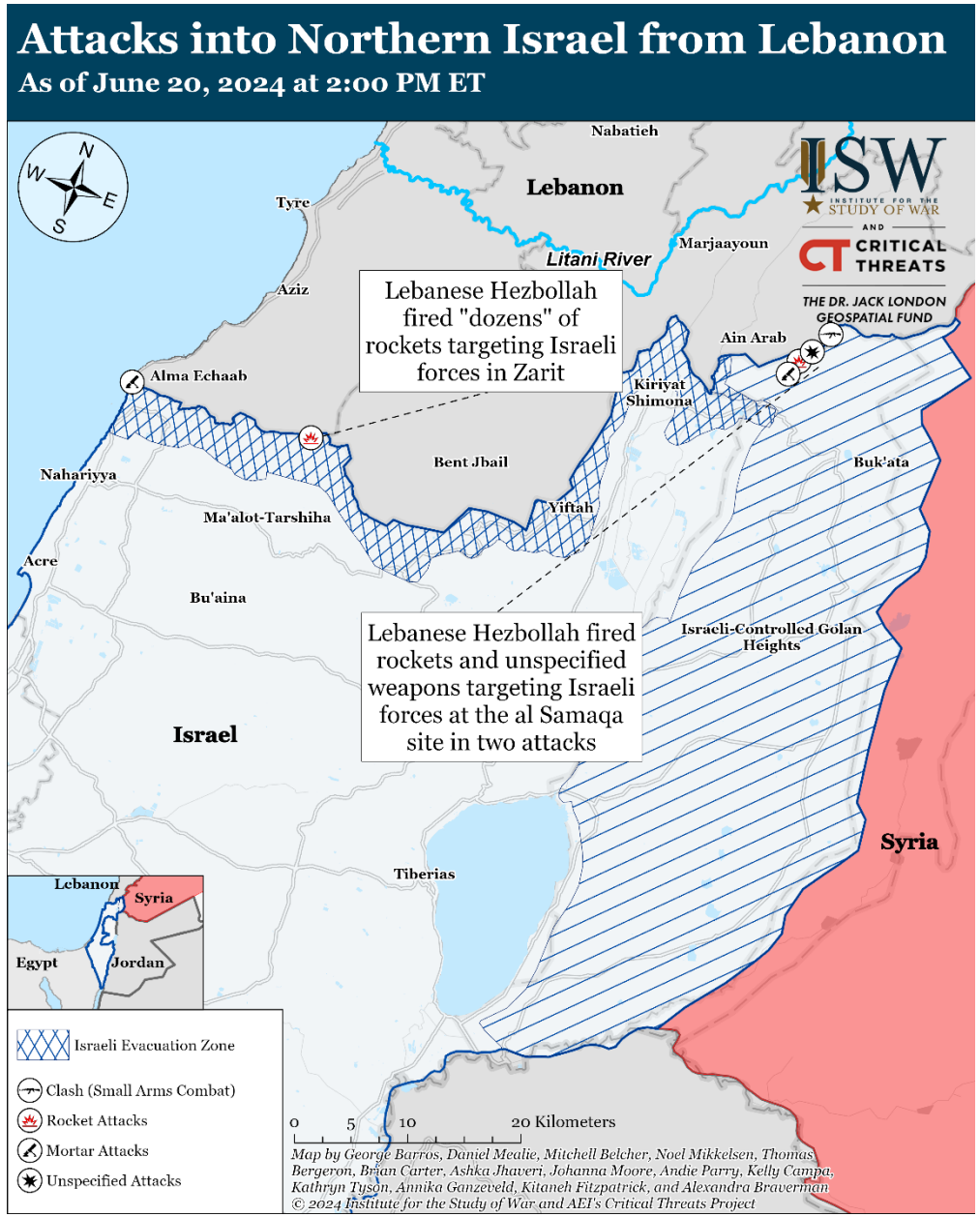
Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

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 eight attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on June 19.[51]

An IDF airstrike killed a Hezbollah commander in Deir Kifa in southern Lebanon on June 20.[52] The IDF said that Fadl Ibrahim planned and carried out attacks against Israeli territory. The IDF added that Ibrahim commanded Hezbollah ground forces in Jouaiyya, southern Lebanon. Hezbollah acknowledged Fadl's death on June 20.[53]



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

Iran and Axis of Resistance

Acting Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Ali Bagheri Kani stated that all regional countries must help the people of the Gaza Strip during a meeting Qatari Prime Minister Mohammad al Thani in Doha, Qatar, on June 19.[54] Bagheri Kani reiterated his support for former President Ebrahim Raisi's "neighborhood" foreign policy strategy. This strategy focuses on

maintaining strong relations with other countries in the region. Thani stated that Iran and Qatar should continue to discuss the Gaza Strip in the future.

Iran is holding its second televised presidential debate on June 20 with a focus on economics and judicial governance.[55] All six Guardian Council-approved presidential candidates, including five hardliners and one moderate, are participating in the debate. The candidates will provide potential solutions to the country’s problems.[56] The Iranian Students Polling Agency (ISPA) published a survey that illustrated 73% of those polled did not watch the first presidential debate on June 17.[57] The survey added that 35.9% of those polled do not follow the elections. IRGC-affiliated media reported that the first presidential debate failed to “sway the audience in any direction.”[58] The debate is still ongoing at the time of writing. CTP-ISW will provide complete analysis of the second televised debate in our June 21 update.

Interim Iranian President Mohammad Mokhber inaugurated the Rasht-Caspian railway in Gilan Province on June 20.[59] Russian Presidential Aide Igor Levitin and Azerbaijani Deputy Prime Minister Shahin Mustafayev attended the event. The 37-kilometer railway will complete the Ghazvin-Rasht railway—connecting the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea—and serves as a link to the International North-South Corridor. India, Iran, and Russia established the International North-South Corridor in 2000 to facilitate trade between these countries.[60] The Corridor now includes the membership of eleven other member states, including Azerbaijan, Belarus, Syria, and Turkey.

US Central Command (CENTCOM) destroyed one Houthi ground control station and one command and control node in a Houthi-controlled area of Yemen on June 19.[61] CENTCOM separately destroyed two Houthi drones in the Red Sea.

Houthi Supreme Leader Abdulmalik al Houthi claimed that Houthi attacks are having greater impact on international shipping during a televised speech on June 20.[62] Abdulmalik called the sinking of the *Tutor* one of the “most prominent developments” in the Houthi campaign.[63] Abdulmalik noted that there is a second ship that is about to sink in the Gulf of Aden.[64] Abdulmalik is likely referring to the M/V *Verbena*. The Houthis struck the *Verbena* with ballistic missiles on June 13, resulting in a fire and the evacuation of the crew.[65] The M/V *Verbena* reportedly is drifting in the Gulf of Aden and is in danger of sinking.[66] Abdulmalik claimed that the Houthis conducted 10 operations targeting eight vessels over the past week. Abdulmalik further claimed that the Houthis have targeted 153 ships in total since the start of its operations in October 2023.

Houthi media reported combined US-UK airstrikes in the vicinity of Salif district, Hudaydah Governorate, western Yemen, on June 20.[67]

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