

Iran Update



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June 26, 2024

Information Cutoff: 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.

Hardline candidate Amir Hossein Ghazi Zadeh Hashemi withdrew from the Iranian presidential election on June 26.[1] Hashemi did not appear to have a serious chance at winning and withdrew to avoid splitting votes across too many hardline candidates.[2] It is unclear, however, whether his withdrawal will meaningfully benefit the two hardline frontrunners, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and Saeed Jalili. An unspecified hardline Iranian source told the Middle East Eye on June 25 that Hashemi supports Jalili and hopes to receive a political appointment if Jalili becomes president.[3] Hashemi's withdrawal follows repeated calls from senior hardline officials in recent weeks for the hardline faction to coalesce behind a single candidate.[4] These calls are driven by concerns that splitting the hardline vote across numerous candidates could inadvertently advantage the sole reformist candidate, Masoud Pezeshkian.

Iranian presidential candidates reiterated their economic policies during the final debate of the upcoming election.^[5] This debate occurred on June 25 and focused on the economy. Below are the key takeaways from what the three presumed frontrunners said.

- **Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf (pragmatic hardliner):** Ghalibaf again framed his candidacy as a continuation of the Ebrahim Raisi administration.^[6] Ghalibaf claimed that he would increase workers' salaries to match rising inflation and criticized other candidates' lack of managerial experience.
- **Saeed Jalili (ultraconservative hardliner):** Jalili identified employment rates and inflation as the greatest issues facing the Iranian economy.^[7] Jalili notably did not mention the role of international sanctions in this context. Jalili also called for deepening economic ties with China and increasing non-oil exports.
- **Masoud Pezeshkian (reformist):** Pezeshkian vowed to implement the seventh five-year development plan, which is a Raisi-era agenda aimed at increasing economic growth, minimizing government debt, and optimizing the state budget.^[8] Pezeshkian also said that he would focus on external economic engagement and secure sanctions relief.

Upon reviewing Iranian polling data, CTP-ISW has concluded that recently published polls cannot accurately or meaningfully predict who will win the upcoming Iranian presidential election. Most of the polls include large percentages of voters who have not yet decided for which candidate they will vote. A June 24 Iranian Students Polling Agency poll, for example, showed that 30.6 percent of respondents had not decided for which candidate they would vote.^[9] A June 26 Parliamentary Research Center poll similarly showed that 28.5 percent of respondents had not decided which candidate they will support.^[10] The large percentage of undecided voters makes it extremely difficult for these polls to accurately predict the election outcome given that candidates need to win the majority vote to win the race.

Iraqi Popular Mobilization Commission Chairman Faleh al Fayyadh appointed an Iranian-backed militia member as deputy chief of staff of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) on June 26.^[11] The PMF is an Iraqi state security service comprised of various militias that in theory report to the Iraqi prime minister but in practice answer to Iran.^[12] Fayyadh appointed Hussein Faleh Aziz (also known as Abu Zaynab al Lami), who is a member of Iranian-backed militia Kataib Hezbollah (KH), as PMF deputy chief of staff. Aziz previously served as chairman of the PMF Central Security Directorate, which “provides internal security mechanisms and aims to prevent violations or criminal activities by PMF members.”^[13] The United States sanctioned Aziz in December 2019 for cooperating with Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force to violently suppress popular protests in Iraq.^[14] The US Treasury Department noted at the time that Aziz “directed militia fighters who shot protesters in early October 2019.”^[15] US government-owned, Arabic-language outlet al Hurra reported in October 2019 that Aziz had a direct line of communication with then-IRGC Quds Force Commander Major General Qassem Soleimani.^[16] PMF Chief of Staff Abdul Aziz (Abu Fadak) al Mohammadawi is—like Aziz—a senior member of KH.^[17] That KH members occupy such prominent positions within the PMF reflect the significant control and influence that a loyal Iranian proxy has in the Iraqi security apparatus.

Key Takeaways:

- **Iran:** Hardline candidate Amir Hossein Ghazi Zadeh withdrew from the Iranian presidential election. Ghazi Zadeh did not appear to have a serious chance at winning and withdrew to avoid splitting votes across too many hardline candidates.
- **Iraq:** A member of an Iranian-backed militia became the deputy chief of staff of the Iraqi PMF. The appointment reflects the significant control and influence that the loyal Iranian-backed militia has in the Iraqi security apparatus.
- **Gaza Strip:** Israeli forces conducted airstrikes killing two Palestinian militia members involved in manufacturing and smuggling weapons in the Gaza Strip.
- **Yemen:** The Houthis claimed that they conducted a combined drone attack with the Islamic Resistance in Iraq into Israel for the fourth time.



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 said on June 25 that it conducted airstrikes killing two Palestinian militia members involved in manufacturing and smuggling weapons.^[18] The IDF Air Force killed a Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fighter, Fadi al Wadiya, who developed the militia's rocket systems.^[19] Doctors Without Borders (MSF) expressed outrage at Fadi's killing, as he joined MSF in 2018 as a physical therapist.^[20] An IDF spokesperson published photos of al Wadiya wearing a PIJ uniform and said that al Wadiya worked in PIJ's rocket manufacturing unit for over 15 years.^[21] Al Wadiya attempted to leave the Gaza Strip for Iran to undergo training there in 2018.^[22] The IDF Air Force also killed Hamas arms smuggler Wissam Abu Ishaq in Khan Younis.^[23] Abu Ishaq reportedly smuggled weapons using underground tunnels and the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip.

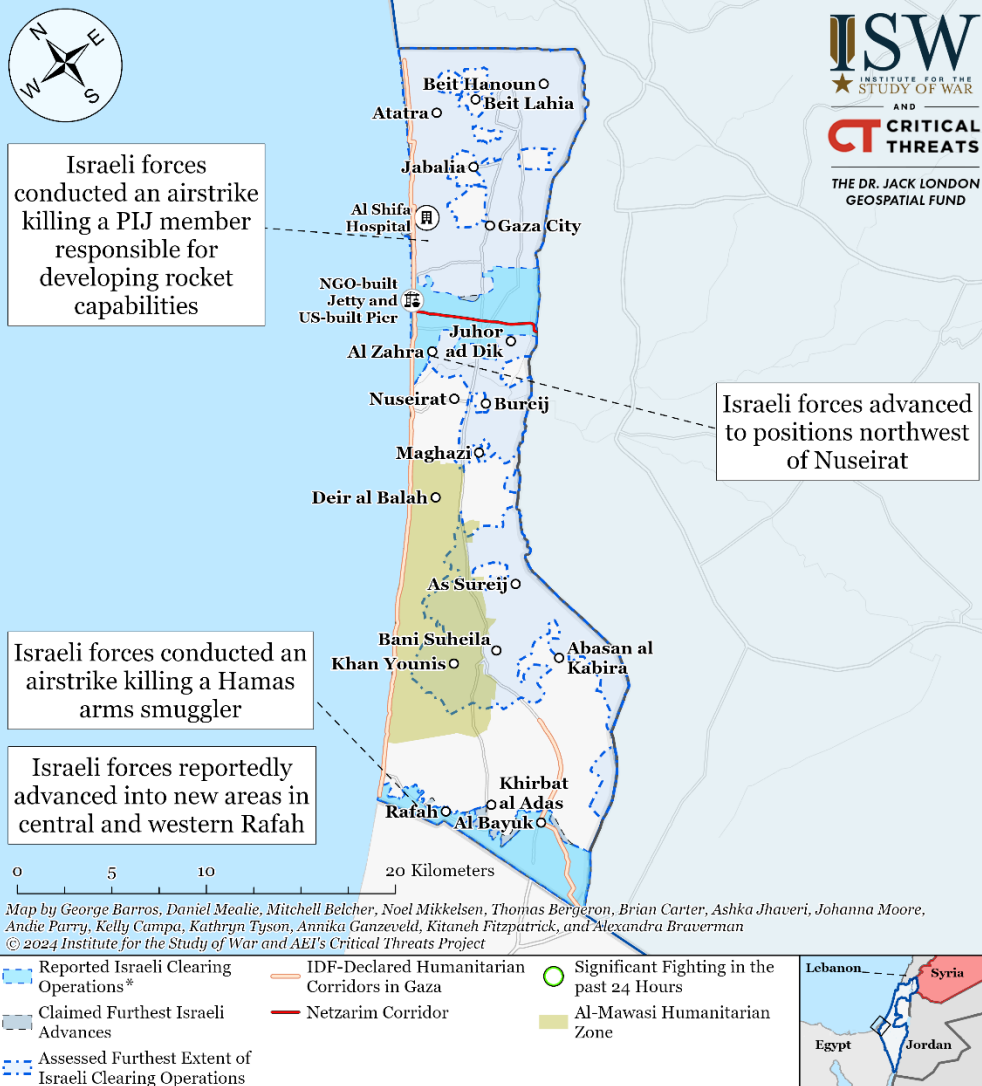
Israeli forces advanced to positions northwest of Nuseirat in the central Gaza Strip on June 26. Geolocated footage posted on June 26 shows Israeli vehicles along Road 230 north of Nuseirat.^[24] A Palestinian journalist reported that Israeli forces advanced to positions northwest of Nuseirat.^[25] Israeli forces are operating in southern Gaza City along the Netzarim corridor.

The IDF reportedly advanced into new areas in Rafah on June 26. A Palestinian journalist said that Israeli armored vehicles operated in central and western Rafah.^[26] The IDF currently assesses that it will soon destroy Hamas' Rafah Brigade.^[27] The IDF is still fighting Hamas battalions in Shaboura and Tal al Sultan, where Israeli forces are encountering significant resistance during above ground engagements.^[28] Several Palestinian militias conducted indirect fire attacks targeting Israeli forces in several sectors of Rafah, including in Shaboura and Tal al Sultan.^[29]

Hamas published footage of its fighters conducting an improvised explosive device (IED) attack that the militia claimed on June 20.^[30] Hamas claimed to detonate a buried IED under an Israeli tank in Tal al Sultan in western Rafah.^[31] Hamas said that its fighters surveilled Israeli forces to determine Israeli standard operating procedures in the area for days before the attack.^[32] The footage shows Hamas fighters constructing a tunnel, transferring an IED through it, and includes surveillance footage of an IDF tank moving down a street before an explosion as well as a large crater the next day.^[33] This sophisticated attack highlights that the Hamas battalion in Tal al Sultan remains cohesive and effective. It also consistent with the IDF's assertion that it has only "somewhat degraded" two of the four Hamas battalions in Rafah.^[34]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of June 26, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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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 Ganzeweld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, and Alexandra Braverman
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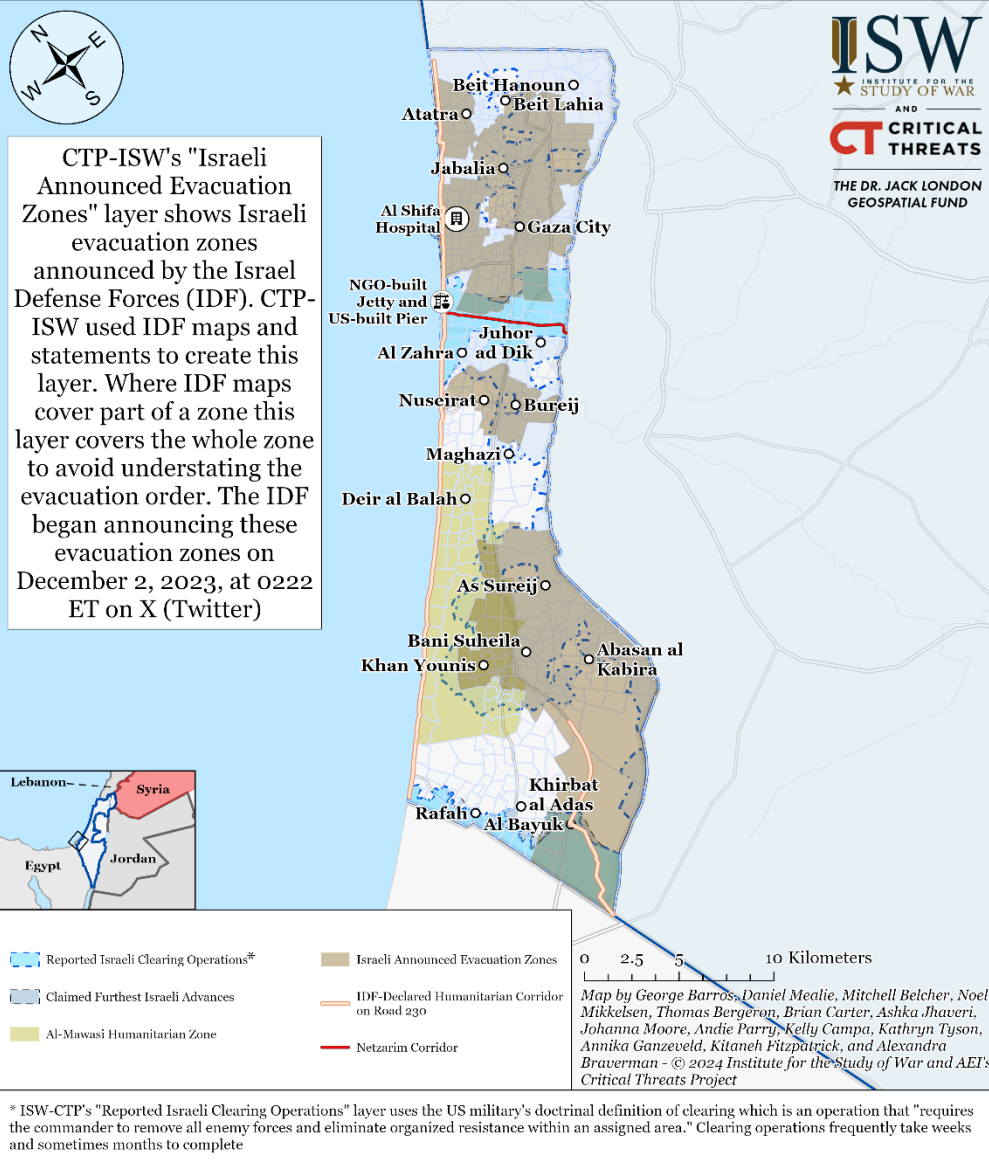
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridors in Gaza
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Netzarim Corridor
- Assessed Furthest Extent of Israeli Clearing Operations
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone



* 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 26, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant traveled to Washington, DC, on June 24 to meet with several US officials. Gallant met with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and CIA Director Bill Burns on June 24.[35] Gallant discussed the war with Hamas and the escalating conflict with Lebanese Hezbollah on Israel's northern border with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on June 25.[36] Austin affirmed that the United States would support Israel and give it what it needs to defend itself. Gallant discussed efforts to finalize a ceasefire deal and the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip with US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan on June 26.[37] Sullivan raised the importance in de-escalating tensions in the West Bank and transferring revenues to the Palestinian Authority.

The Jordanian foreign affairs minister said on June 26 that Jordan will not send military forces into the Gaza Strip to replace Israeli forces.[38] The United States and Israel have spoken with regional partners about their potential participation in a multinational Arab peacekeeping

mission operating under a UN Security Council resolution in the Gaza Strip.[39]

Palestinian militias conducted three indirect fire attacks into southern Israel on June 26.[40] The Popular Resistance Committees and Palestinian Mujahideen Movement separately fired rockets at IDF sites.[41] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine conducted a combined rocket attack targeting an IDF site near Zikim.[42] Israeli Army Radio reported that Palestinian fighters fired rockets from the central Gaza Strip where Israeli forces are not operating.[43] Palestinian militias, including Hamas, have exploited the withdrawal of Israeli forces across the Gaza Strip to create safe areas and reconstitute military capabilities.

West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

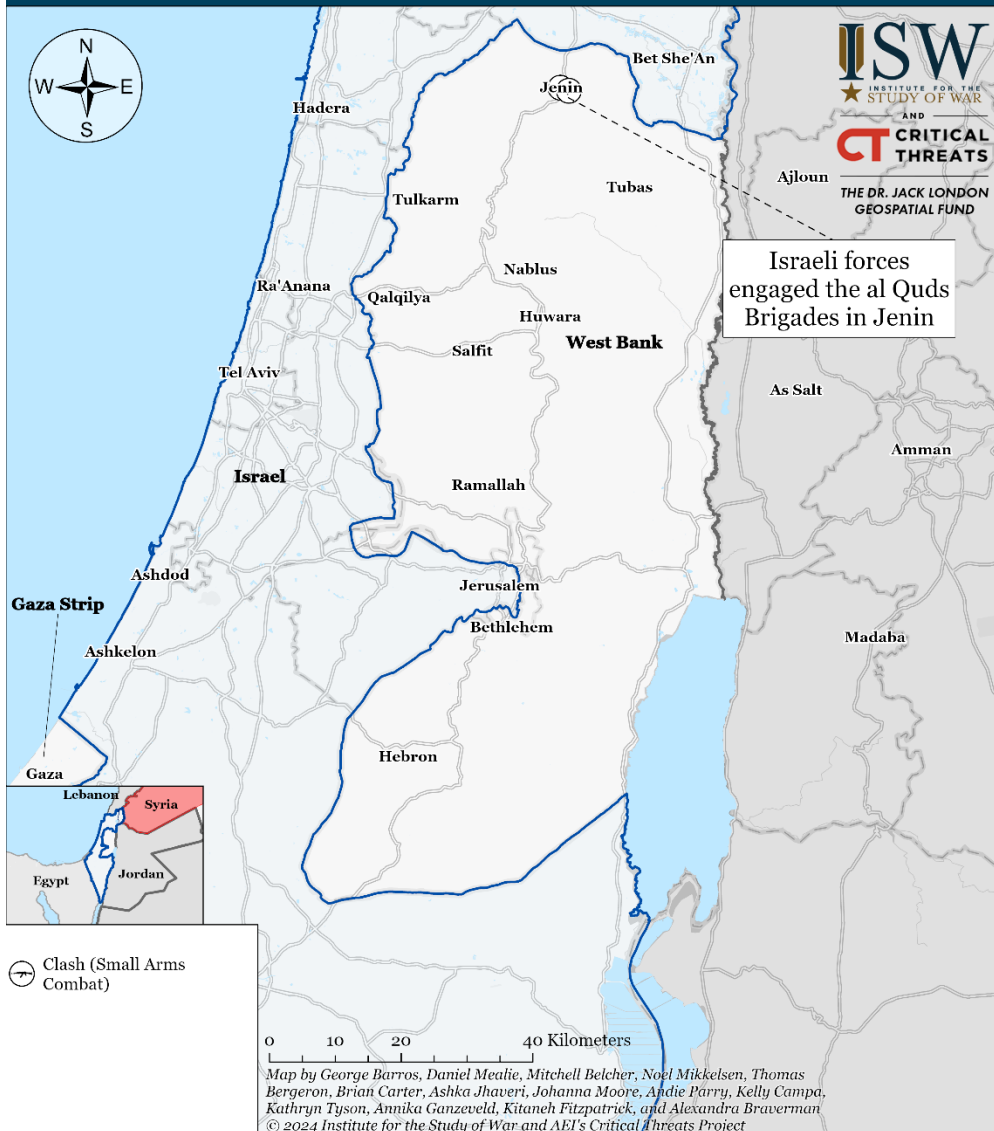
- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

Israeli forces have engaged PIJ and other unspecified Palestinian fighters in Jenin since CTP-ISW's last data cut-off on June 25.[44]

Israeli forces detained a Palestinian fighter on June 5 responsible for small arms attacks from the West Bank into Bat Hefer, Israel.[45] The IDF said on June 26 that the fighter is from Tulkarm, which is directly adjacent to Bat Hefer. The detainment comes amid an uptick in Palestinian militia attacks targeting Bat Hefer in recent weeks.[46] The IDF said on May 30 that it is increasing operations around Tulkarm in response to attacks targeting Bat Hefer.[47]

Significant Activity in the West Bank

As of June 26, 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

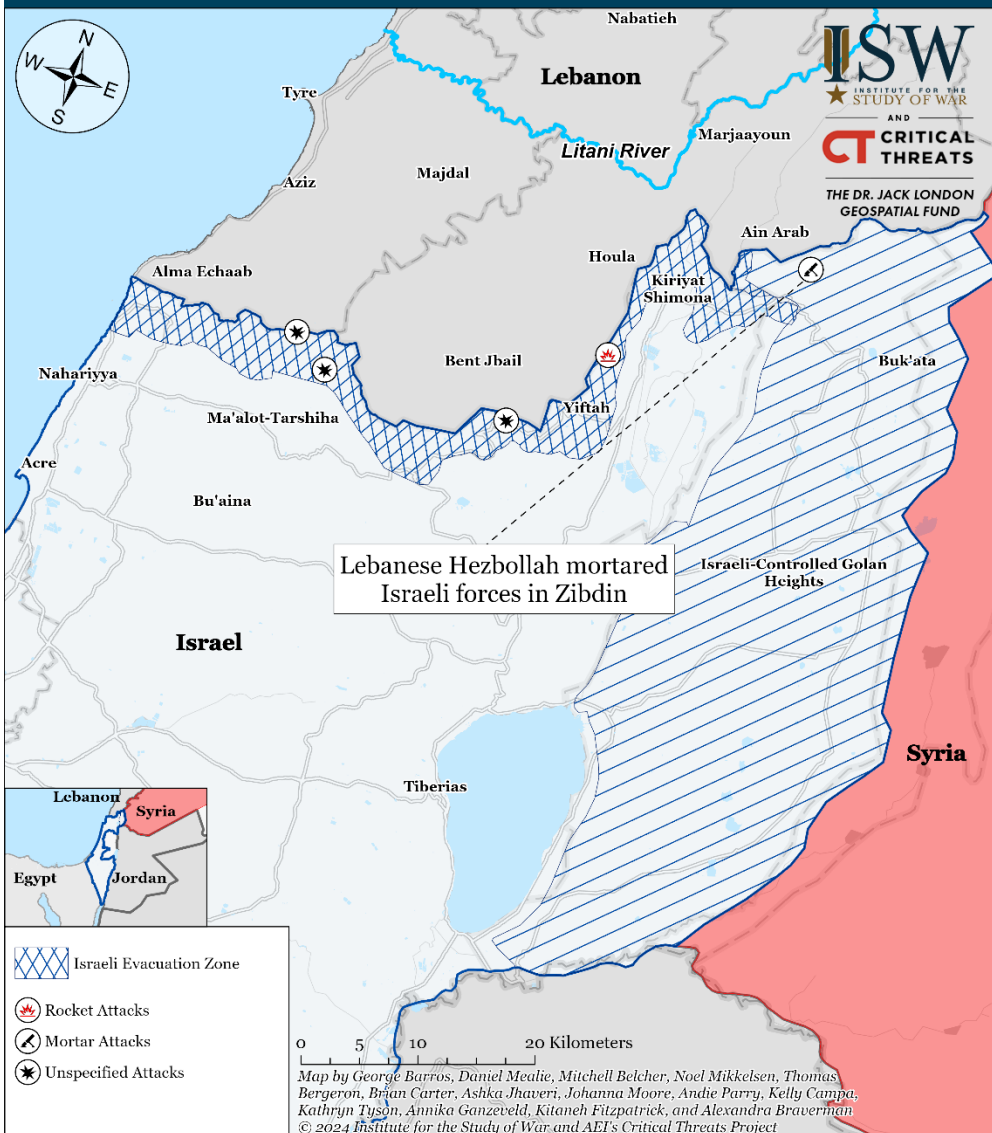
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- 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 six attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on June 25.[48]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon

As of June 26, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



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

Iran and Axis of Resistance

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed a drone attack targeting an unspecified “vital target” in Eilat, Israel, on June 26.[49] The IDF reported on June 26 that a drone crashed into the Red Sea near Eilat.[50] The IDF added that it launched an interceptor toward the drone.[51]

US Ambassador to Iraq Alina Romanowski held separate meetings with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani and Iraqi Defense Minister Thabet al Abbasi on June

26, possibly to discuss recent threats by Iranian-backed Iraqi militias to resume attacks targeting US forces in Iraq.^[52] Romanowski and Sudani discussed ongoing negotiations between the United States and Iraq over the status of the US-led international coalition's mission in Iraq.^[53] The Iraqi Defense Ministry did not specify what Romanowski and Abbasi discussed but noted that the Iraqi Army chief of staff, deputy commander of joint operations, Counter Terrorism Service head, and chairman of the Military Intelligence Directorate attended the meeting.^[54] Unspecified Iranian-backed Iraqi militias issued a 40-day deadline in early June 2024 for Sudani to set a date for a US troop withdrawal from Iraq.^[55] The Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee recently issued a statement on June 20 suggesting a consensus among Iranian-backed Iraqi militias to resume attacks targeting US forces.^[56]

The Houthis claimed on June 26 that they conducted a combined drone attack with Iranian-backed Iraqi militias targeting one vessel at Haifa port.^[57] The Houthi military spokesperson and Islamic Resistance in Iraq issued separate but complimentary statements claiming to target the Madeira-flagged *MSC Manzanillo*.^[58] This attack marks the fourth time that the Houthis have claimed a combined operation targeting Israel with the Islamic Resistance in Iraq since June 6.^[59] The IDF has not acknowledged any such attack, and CTP-ISW cannot verify the claim at the time of this writing. The groups' combined attacks have most frequently targeted Haifa, while the Houthis' individual attacks have most frequently targeted Eilat in southern Israel.^[60] The growing cooperation between the Houthis and Iranian-backed Iraqi militias reflects the desire of the Axis of Resistance to present itself as an interoperable coalition.

The Houthis claimed to use a new locally manufactured "hypersonic missile" to attack a ship in the Arabian Sea on June 24.^[61] UKMTO said on June 24 that Liberian-flagged container ship *MSC Sarah V* reported an explosion near it but that no projectile hit the vessel.^[62] The Houthi military spokesperson said that the ballistic missile used in the attack featured "advanced" technology and could be used in long-range scenarios with accuracy. The failed attack occurred 246 nautical miles southeast of Nishtun, Yemen, which is a considerable distance from Houthi-controlled territory.^[63]

Russia and Iran signed a memorandum on June 26 regarding the supply of Russian gas to Iran, following reported disagreements between Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) on Russian supply gas to the PRC. Russian state-owned energy company Gazprom Head Alexey Miller signed the memorandum with the National Iranian Gas Company in Iran at a ceremony attended by Acting Iranian President Mohammad Mokhber.^[64] Miller also met with Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji about implementing the new memorandum and other areas of energy cooperation. Neither Russia nor Iran provided details about the new memorandum, but Gazprom and the National Iranian Gas Company were negotiating unspecified deals worth about \$40 billion as of October 2023.^[65] Miller's visit to Iran and agreement with the National Iranian Gas Company follows a recent Financial Times (FT) report that Russia and the PRC are reportedly in disagreement about economic issues including the Power of Siberia 2 (PS-2) gas pipeline, resulting in Miller not travelling with Russian President Vladimir Putin to Beijing in May 2024 -- likely aimed at extracting concessions from Russia given Gazprom's recent economic struggles and the PRC's upper hand in the energy sphere.^[66] Iran may benefit from this new deal with Russia to reduce its reliance on existing gas swap deals it has with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan to mitigate summer electricity shortages that could fuel domestic unrest.^[67]

The United States designated around 50 entities and individuals as Specially Designated Nationals for helping Iran circumvent US sanctions.[68] Iran’s Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry and IRGC used these entities and individuals to obfuscate their financial activity. The Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry’s Supply Division uses Iran-based exchange houses to preside over shell companies that are registered in “permissive jurisdictions,” such as Hong Kong, the Marshall Islands, and the United Arab Emirates. These shell companies laundered the revenue through “foreign commercial activity” into “clean foreign currency.”[69] These shell companies also used the laundered foreign currency to buy weapons components and materiel on the international market.[70] Iran uses these arms to support their Iranian-backed militias across the Middle East and supply drones to Russia.

The Office of Interim Iranian President Mohammad Mokhber announced that it will hold a commemoration service on June 27 to commemorate 40 days since President Ebrahim Raisi died.[71] Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah will make a virtual address during the ceremony.[72] Foreign diplomats will attend the ceremony as well.

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[1] <https://x.com/GhazizadehSA/status/1806045623042572601>

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