

# Iran Update



**Ashka Jhaveri, Alexandra Braverman, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Kathryn Tyson, Johanna Moore, and Thomas Bergeron**

**May 22, 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.*

**Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei presided over the funeral for Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian, and others in Tehran on May 22.**<sup>[1]</sup> Ebrahim Raisi, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, and six other passengers and crew members died in a helicopter crash in northwestern Iran on May 19.<sup>[2]</sup> Heads of state and senior leaders from dozens of countries attended the funeral.<sup>[3]</sup> Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Chairman of the Russian Duma Vyacheslav Volodin, and Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing, among others, attended the funeral in Tehran.<sup>[4]</sup> Senior Axis of Resistance leaders—including Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh, Lebanese Hezbollah Deputy Secretary General Naim Qassem, member of Hamas Political Bureau Osama Hamdan, and two Popular Mobilization Forces officials—also attended the funeral.<sup>[5]</sup> Many senior Iranian officials attended the ceremony. Chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council Sadegh

Larijani, hardline cleric and Raisi's father-in-law Ahmad Alam ol Hoda, Assembly of Experts First Deputy Chairman Hashem Hosseini Bushehri, and Assembly of Experts member Mohsen Qomi sat in the front row next to Khamenei during the ceremony.[6] Notable individuals who CTP-ISW did not observe attending the funeral include former Iranian president Hassan Rouhani, former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and member of the Iranian Assembly of Experts Ahmad Khatami. IRGC-affiliated media published images of thousands of citizens in the streets of Tehran in mourning.[7]

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei led the prayers over the bodies of President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian at Tehran University.[8] Khamenei recited a Quranic mourning prayer over the bodies of the deceased.[9] Ismail Haniyeh gave a speech as part of the funeral ceremony. Haniyeh praised Raisi's support for the Palestinian resistance and claimed that Hamas' October 7, 2023 attack on Israel created a "global transformation." [10] Iran will hold two additional funeral ceremonies in other cities on May 23.[11] Raisi will be buried in Mashad on May 23.

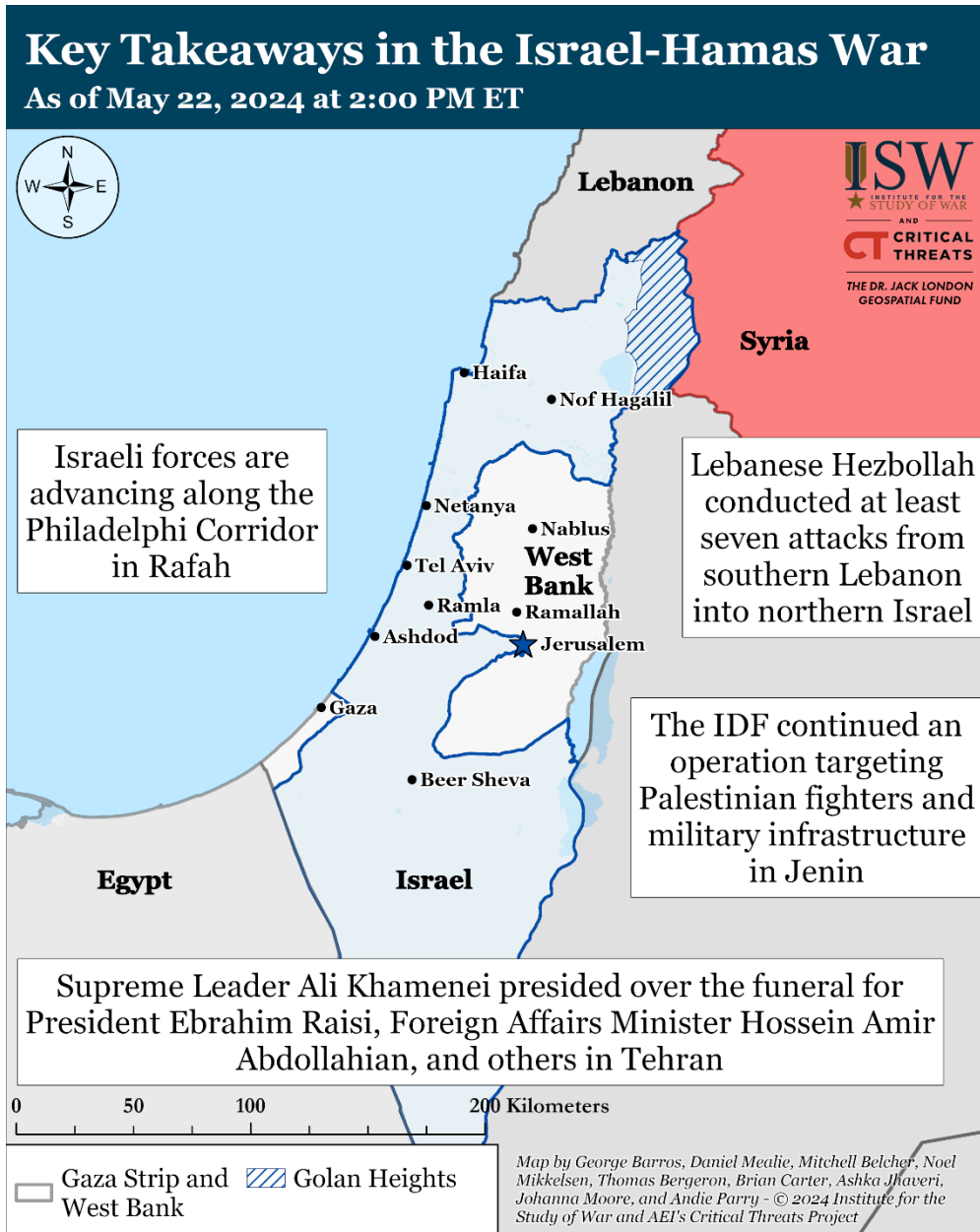
**Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei stressed the continuity of Iranian foreign policy in meetings with several foreign dignitaries who attended Raisi's funeral.** Khamenei held separate meetings with senior officials from Armenia, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Tunisia, and Qatar as well as Hamas officials to emphasize Iran's commitment to preserving ties with these actors.[12] Iranian media claimed that officials from over 90 countries attended Raisi's funeral procession, making Khamenei's meeting with these seven actors particularly noteworthy.[13] Interim President Mohammad Mokhber and Interim Foreign Affairs Minister Ali Bagheri Kani attended the meetings that Khamenei held with Iraqi, Hamas, and Pakistani officials, suggesting that Khamenei is particularly concerned about projecting continuity to these actors.[14] It is possible that Mokhber and Bagheri Kani attended other meetings as well. Khamenei emphasized Mokhber's presidential powers and Iran's uninterrupted commitment to its partnerships in several of these meetings.[15] Iran may delay some diplomatic processes, such as negotiations, however, until it elects its next president.

The regime may seek to leverage perceived international sympathy for Raisi's death to forge ties with new strategic partners. Iranian media and regime-affiliated social media users boasted that some Egyptian and Tunisian officials traveled to Iran for the first time to attend Raisi's funeral and celebrated international turnout.[16]

### **Key Takeaways:**

- **Iran:** Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei presided over the funeral for Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian, and others in Tehran.
- Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei stressed the continuity of Iranian foreign policy in meetings with several foreign dignitaries who attended Raisi's funeral.
- **Northern Gaza Strip:** Israeli forces continued clearing operations in Jabalia.
- **Southern Gaza Strip:** Israeli forces are advancing along the Philadelphi Corridor in Rafah.

- **West Bank:** The IDF continued an operation targeting Palestinian fighters and military infrastructure in Jenin.
- **Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights:** IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi discussed Israel's military readiness on its northern border with several senior IDF commanders.
- **Yemen:** Houthi media claimed that the United States and the United Kingdom conducted airstrikes targeting the Hudaydah International Airport in Yemen.



## 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

**Israeli forces continued clearing operations in Jabalia on May 22.** The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) 7th Brigade raided dozens of Hamas military sites and located weapons, including explosive belts and grenades.<sup>[17]</sup> Israeli forces directed an airstrike that killed eight Hamas fighters in a weapons storage facility.<sup>[18]</sup>

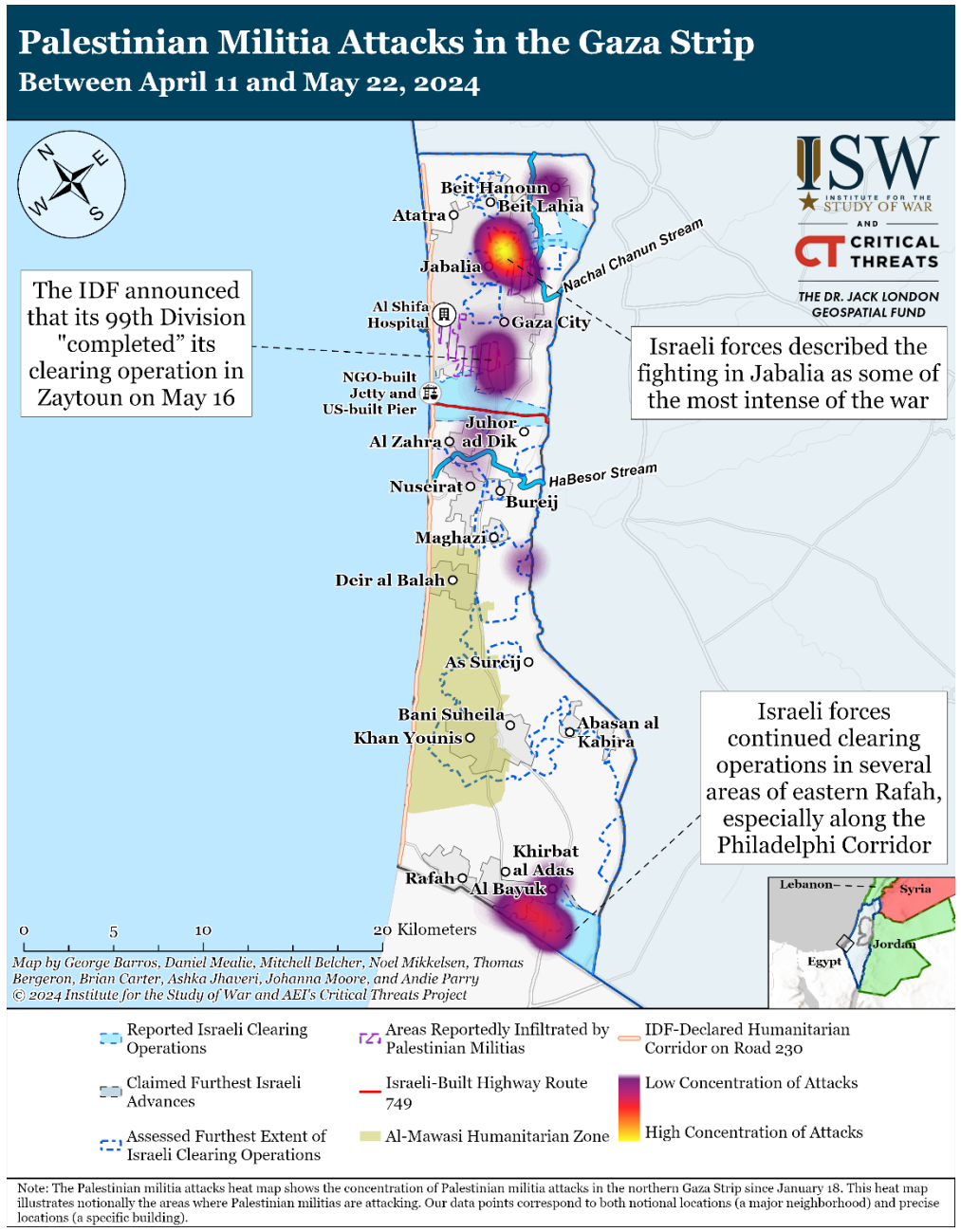
**The IDF 679th Reservist Armored Brigade (attached to the 99th Division) engaged several Palestinian fighters on May 22 in the central Gaza Strip.**<sup>[19]</sup> The brigade began an operation on May 20 to destroy militia infrastructure, such as tunnels, in Gaza City's Sabra neighborhood.<sup>[20]</sup>

**Israeli forces are advancing along the Philadelphi Corridor in Rafah.** The Philadelphi Corridor is a 14-kilometer-long strip of land between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. The IDF said that the IDF 401st Brigade, which initially captured the Rafah crossing on May 7, has been operating along the corridor in recent days. Israeli forces located and destroyed rocket launchers in the corridor.<sup>[21]</sup> Israeli forces began operating in certain neighborhoods west of the Salah al Din Road in eastern Rafah following intelligence guidance about Palestinian militia targets there.<sup>[22]</sup> The IDF Air Force struck several targets in the area to shape the terrain for follow-on ground operations. The IDF currently has five brigades operating in Rafah, and ten across the Gaza Strip.<sup>[23]</sup>

The *Wall Street Journal* reported on May 22 that the IDF controls at least half of the Gaza Strip's nine-mile border with Egypt.<sup>[24]</sup> This figure is largely consistent with ISW-CTP's current control of terrain assessment of reported Israeli clearing operations. Analysts can employ several methods to calculate control of terrain with varying results depending on the cartographical projection used and other factors. An estimate using ISW-CTP's reported Israeli clearing operations data and the Israeli Transverse Mercator projection indicates that Israeli forces have advanced to an extent of 5.6 kilometers (~3.5 miles) as of May 22. Israeli forces have advanced at a rate of 0.16 square kilometers (~0.1 miles) a day over a 14-day period along the Gaza-Egypt Border in Rafah. As of May 8, Israeli forces previously advanced to an extent of 3.43 kilometers in clearing operations in late 2023–early 2024. Egyptian officials said that the IDF controls 70 percent of the Philadelphi corridor and intends to “dominate” the corridor by the end of May 2024.<sup>[25]</sup>

**The IDF Air Force struck several military targets across the Gaza Strip on May 22, including Hamas infrastructure and fighters.** The IDF Gaza Division directed airstrikes targeting Hamas fighters, including Hamas' elite Nukhba fighters, inside a military compound located in a UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) school in Nuseirat.<sup>[26]</sup> The IDF said it detected secondary explosions at the compound, indicating the presence of weapons. The IDF

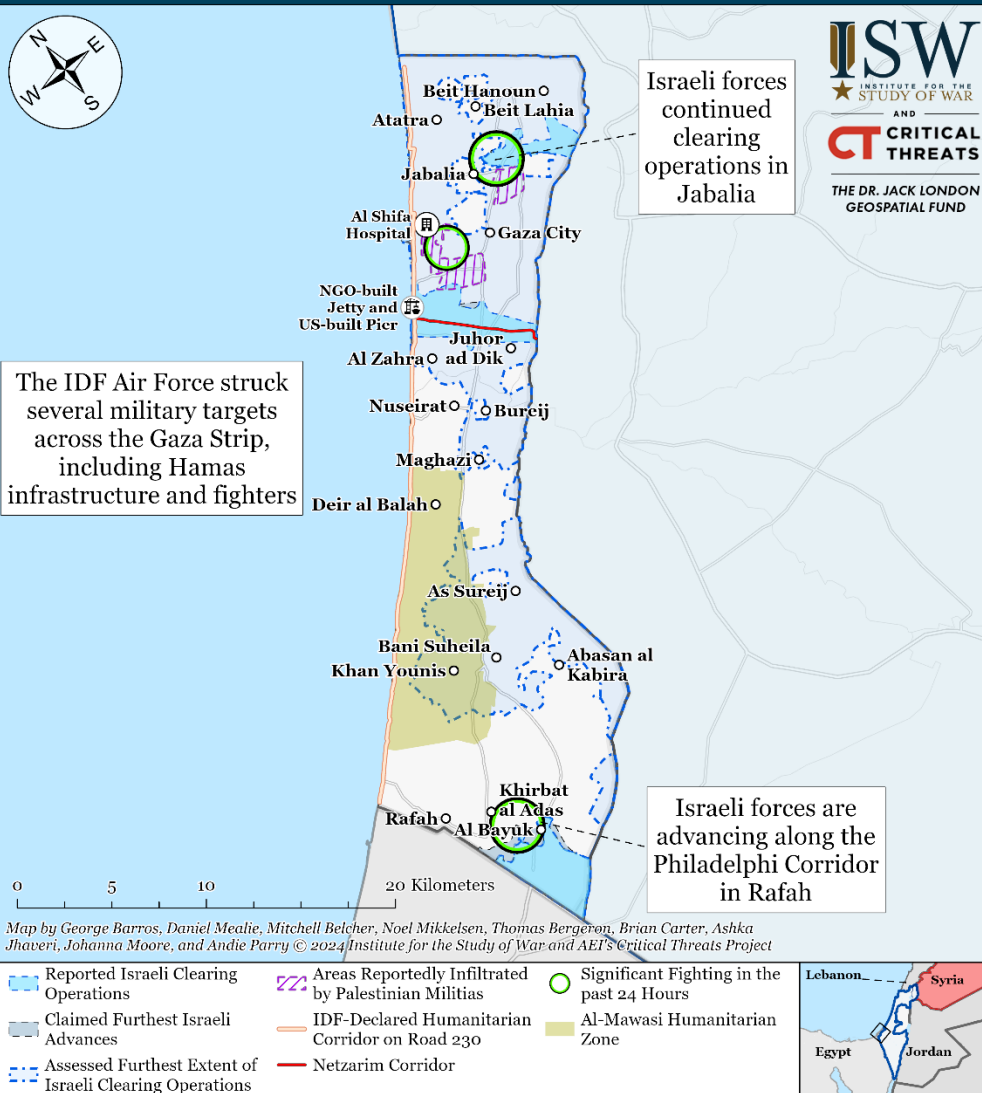
Gaza Division additionally directed an airstrike targeting a Hamas fighter, Ahmed Yasser al Qura, who took part in Hamas' October 7, 2023, attack and directed attacks targeting Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip.[27] The IDF attack also killed a Nukhba and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fighter. The IDF Southern Command directed an airstrike targeting five Hamas fighters inside a school compound near Daraj and Tuffah neighborhoods in Gaza City.[28]



*This map displays engagements between Israeli and Palestinian ground forces across the Gaza Strip. To compile this map data, you must clean the data and ensure that the coordinates are standardized.*

# Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of May 22, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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The IDF Air Force struck several military targets across the Gaza Strip, including Hamas infrastructure and fighters

Israeli forces continued clearing operations in Jabalia

Israeli forces are advancing along the Philadelphi Corridor in Rafah

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations
- Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- - - Assessed Furthest Extent of Israeli Clearing Operations
- Netzarim Corridor

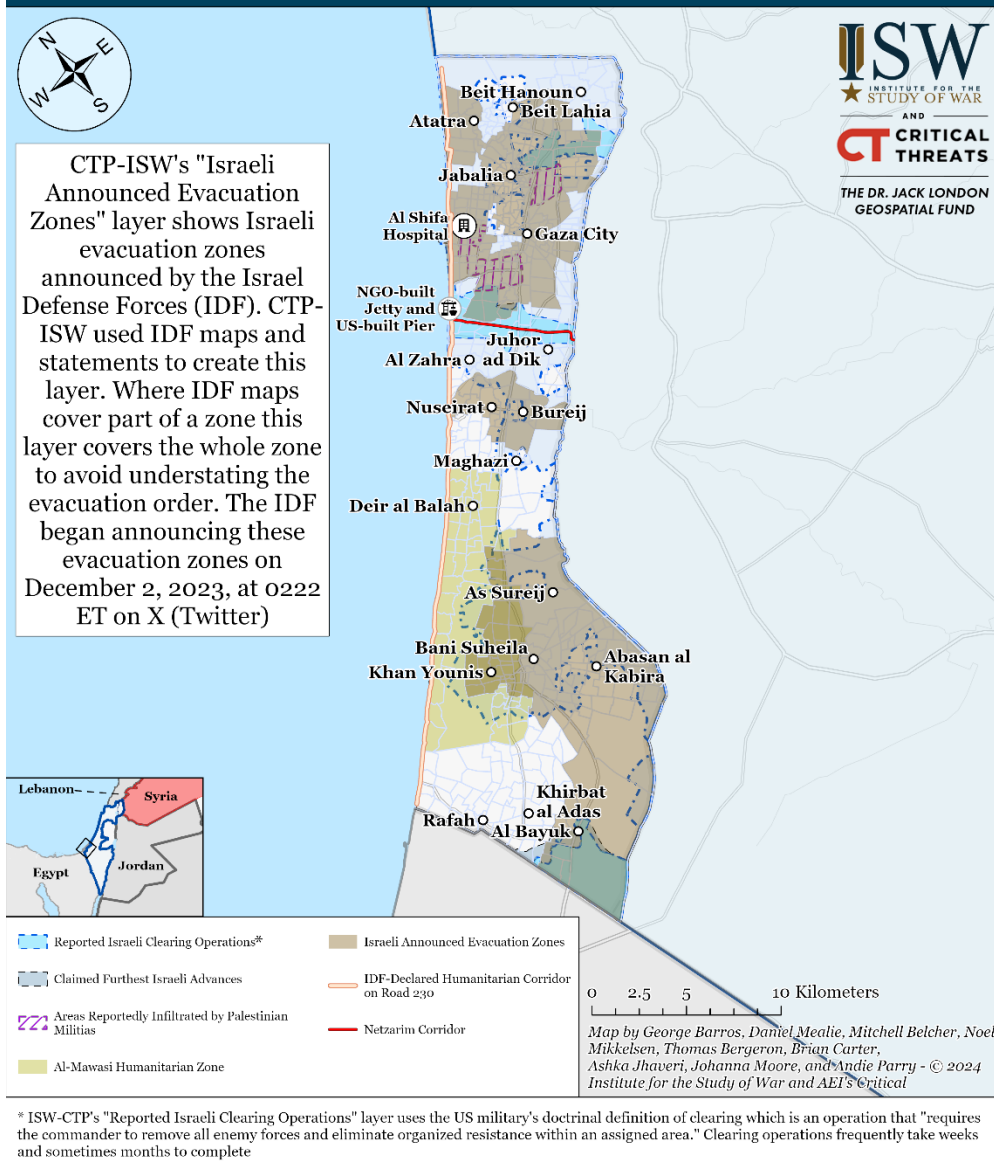


\* ISW-CTP's "Reported Israeli Clearing Operations" layer uses the US military's doctrinal definition of clearing which is an operation that "requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance within an assigned area." Clearing operations frequently take weeks and sometimes months to complete



# Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip

As of May 22, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



**Politico** reported on May 21 that US intelligence indicates that Israel has killed 30-35% of Hamas fighters who were part of the group before October 7, 2023.[29] *Politico* cited a report that quotes an unspecified person familiar with US intelligence. The report stated that Hamas has been able to withstand Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip by recruiting “thousands over the last several months.” Senior US officials have recently indicated concerns that Hamas will survive in the Gaza Strip. The reporting is consistent with CTP-ISW’s assessment that Hamas retains combat-effective units in several areas of the Gaza Strip, despite continued Israeli clearing efforts. *Politico* also reported citing US intelligence that 65% of Hamas’ tunnels are “intact.”

**A US official told Bloomberg that the United States softened its position on a broader Israeli ground operation in Rafah.**[30] The official cited Israeli efforts to reduce the number of civilians in the area as an explanation. US President Joe Biden has said in recent weeks that a full-scale

Israeli military operation would prompt the United States to suspend the transfer of certain weapons to Israel. The official said that Israel presented a plan to US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan that incorporated US humanitarian concerns. The UN estimated on May 18 that about 800,000 people have left Rafah since Israel launched a military operation in the area on May 7.[31]

**The United Nations reported on May 21 that it suspended food distribution in Rafah due to a lack of supplies and security issues.[32]** UNRWA said that its distribution center and the World Food Programme are inaccessible as a result of the ongoing military operation in eastern Rafah.[33] The IDF issued evacuation orders for eastern Rafah ahead of Israeli forces advancing into the area on May 6.[34] There is a UNRWA warehouse located in the evacuated areas, where CTP-ISW have observed Israeli forces operating.[35]

**Norway, Spain, and Ireland announced on May 22 that they will recognize a Palestinian state.[36]** Norway said that the territorial demarcation between Palestine and Israel should be based on the pre-1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states.[37] All three countries said that their formal recognition of Palestine will enter into force on May 28, 2024.[38]

Hamas and the Palestinian Authority welcomed the three countries' announcements.[39] US President Joe Biden said that Palestinian statehood should come through negotiations rather than "unilateral recognition." [40] Israel recalled its ambassadors from Norway and Ireland.[41]

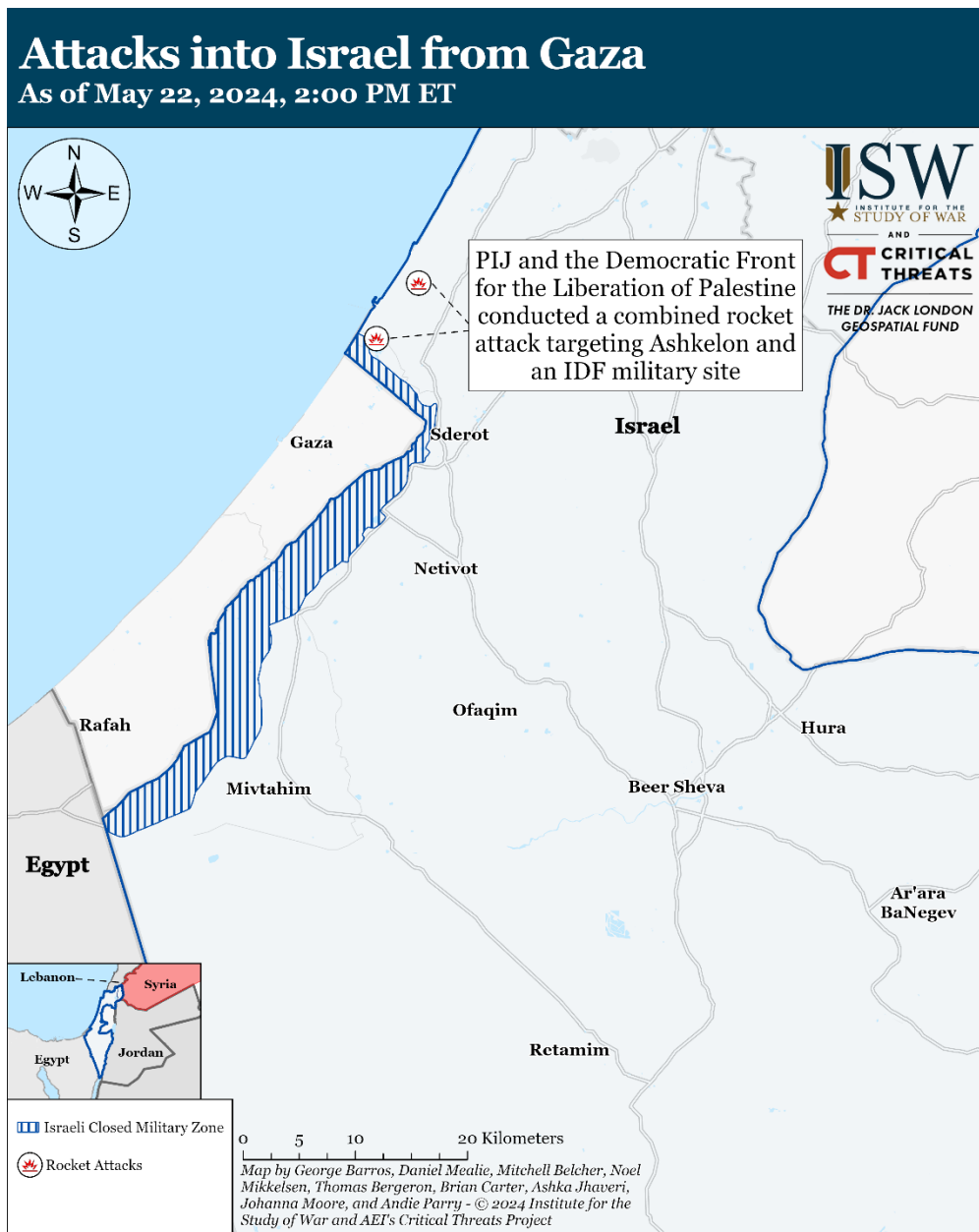
**An Egyptian intelligence official modified the latest Israeli-approved ceasefire proposal without informing others involved in negotiations, according to three people familiar with the information who spoke to CNN on May 22.[42]** The sources said the ceasefire agreement that Hamas announced it approved on May 6 was not what the Qataris or the United States believed had been submitted to Hamas for a potential final review. "We were all duped," one of those sources told CNN. The Egyptian intelligence official modified the proposal by inserting more of Hamas' demands to secure Hamas' approval. Egypt said that CNN's report is baseless and lacks factual information.[43]

The sources named Ahmed Abdel Khaleq as the Egyptian intelligence official. Khalek is a senior deputy to the Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel and has been CIA Director Bill Burns' counterpart in leading Egypt's mediation in the ceasefire talks.[44] Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel appointed Khalek as the head of the Palestinian file in Egyptian General Intelligence in 2018 and has since met with Hamas, Fatah, and several other Palestinian militias.[45] Khaleq was the first in his position to participate in a Hamas-organized event in 2018.[46] Khaleq previously participated in a 2011 deal that resulted in the release of over 1,000 Palestinian prisoners, including the leader of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Yahya Sinwar.[47]



It is unclear from the CNN report if Khalek consulted Hamas on the changes he reportedly made to the proposal before the group claimed it “agreed” to the proposal. CTP-ISW previously reported that Hamas altered and then approved the Egyptian-proposed ceasefire agreement on May 6.[48] The CNN report supports the observation that the proposal that Hamas approved was not the original agreement, but rather one that favored Hamas’ maximalist demands in negotiations.

**Palestinian militias conducted two indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel on May 22.[49]** PIJ and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine conducted a combined rocket attack targeting Ashkelon and the IDF Zikim military site.



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

## West Bank

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

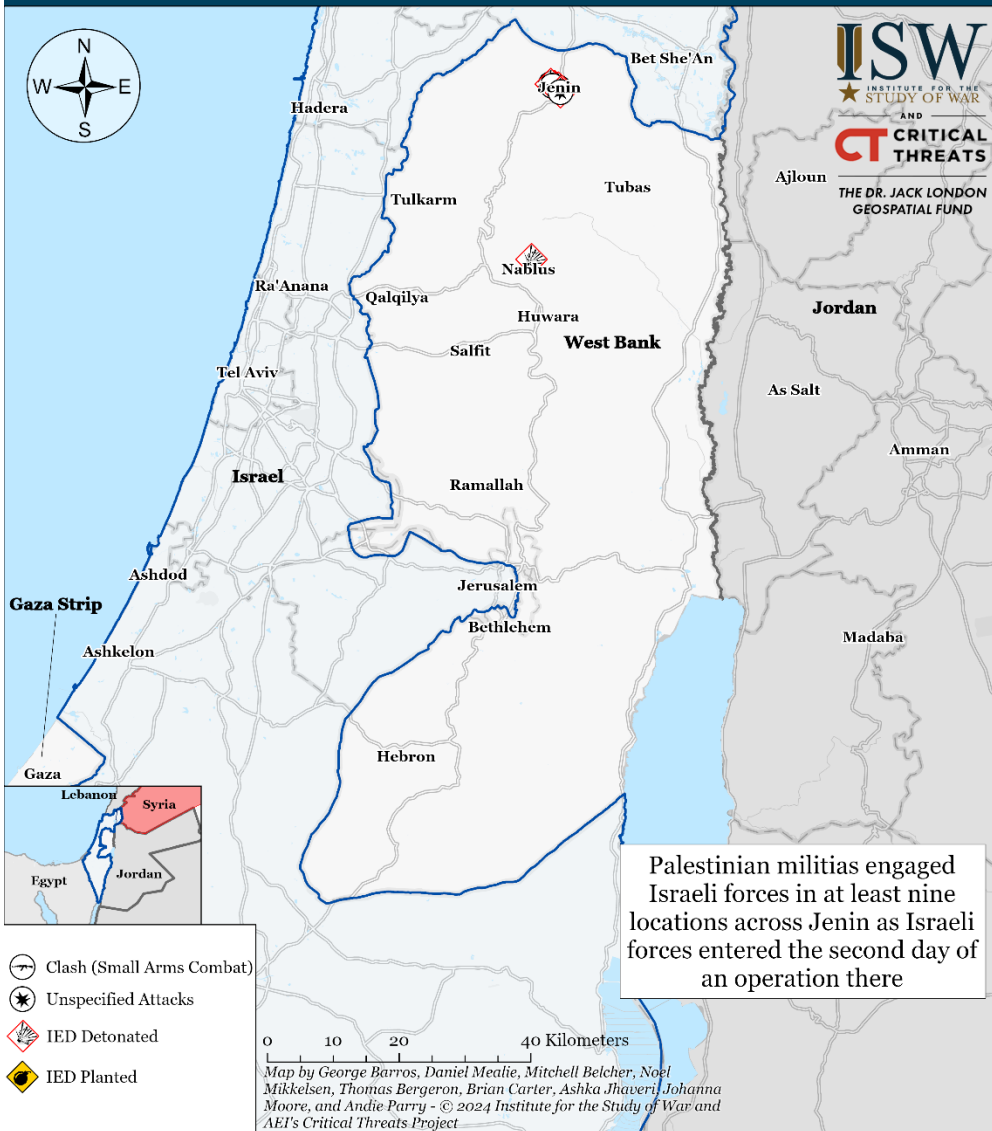
- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

**The IDF continued an operation targeting Palestinian fighters and military infrastructure in Jenin on May 22.[50]** The IDF launched the operation on May 21 and has since killed several Palestinian fighters.[51] Palestinian militias, including Hamas, PIJ, and the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, engaged Israeli forces in small arms clashes and detonated IEDs in at least nine locations across Jenin City.[52] Palestinian media reported on May 22 that Palestinian militias have used over 34 explosive devices since the operation in Jenin began.[53] An Israeli military correspondent reported recently that Palestinian militias have started using larger and higher quality explosives to target Israeli forces "in recent months." [54]

**Israel Defense Minister Yoav Gallant on May 22 expanded the scope of a law allowing Israeli settlers to return to settlements that Israel previously dismantled in the West Bank.[55]** Gallant said that Israeli settlers will be able to return the settlements of Sha Nur, Ganin, and Kadim in the Jenin Governorate of the northern West Bank.[56] The law, which was enacted in 2005, stipulated that Israel evacuate the settlements in the West Bank and unilaterally pull out of the Gaza Strip.[57] Gallant cited March 2023 Israeli legislation that repealed the 2005 act and said that an Israeli presence in the additional settlements would "bring security to the area." [58] The IDF declared the area a closed military zone and will establish outposts and bases, according to an unspecified security official.[59] The official added that it will take months to secure the area before settlers return.

# Significant Activity in the West Bank

As of May 22, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



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

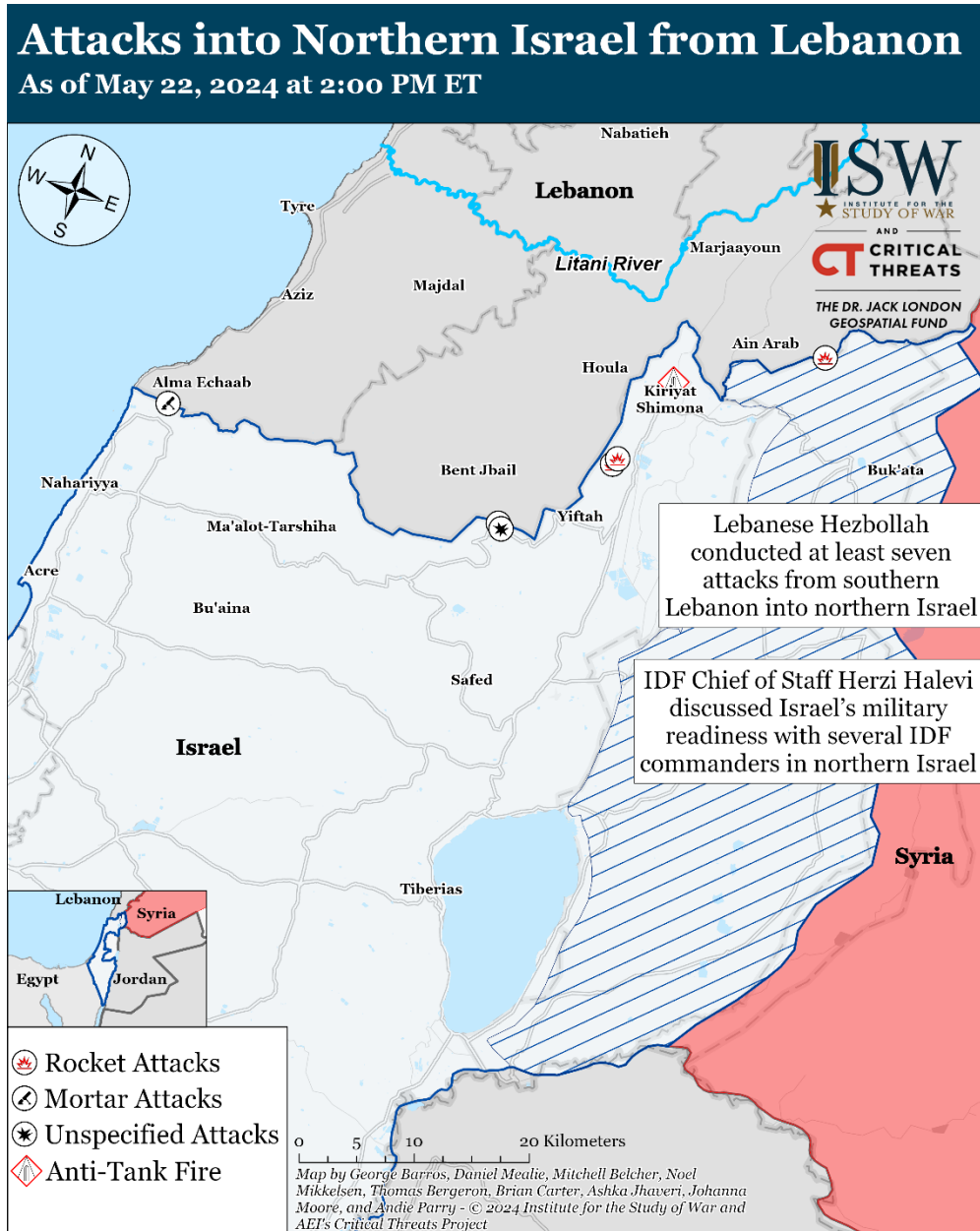
## Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

### 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 conducted at least seven attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel on May 22.[60]**

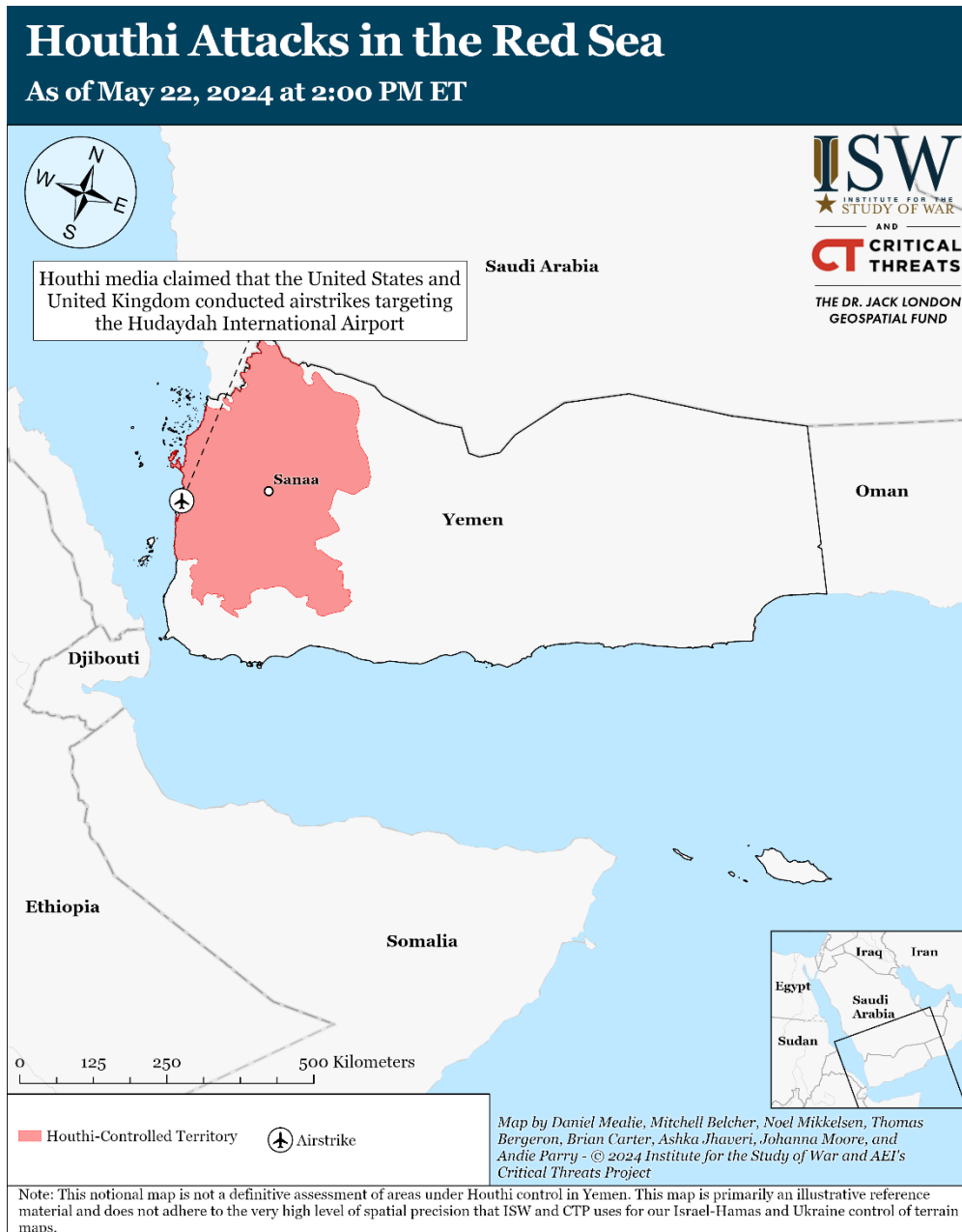
**IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi discussed Israel's military readiness on its northern border with several senior IDF commanders on May 22.**<sup>[61]</sup> Halevi met with IDF Northern Commander Major General Ori Gordin among others during a training exercise. Halevi said that the IDF is prepared for "challenges" in the north and south of Israel.<sup>[62]</sup>



**Iran and Axis of Resistance**

**Houthi media claimed on May 22 that the United States and the United Kingdom conducted airstrikes targeting the Hudaydah International Airport in**

Yemen.[63] Neither the United States nor the United Kingdom have confirmed the strikes at the time of writing.



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[1] <https://www.leader dot ir/fa/content/27247>

[2] <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/iranian-president-ebrahim-raisi-killed-helicopter-crash/> ; <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/hopes-fade-wreckage-found-helicopter-carrying-iranian-president-raisi-2024-05-20/>

[3] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1403/03/02/3090749/>

[4] [https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/iran-israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-05-22-24/h\\_db5a65e18d23920a8df61a3dfc428a89](https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/iran-israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-05-22-24/h_db5a65e18d23920a8df61a3dfc428a89) ; <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1403/03/02/3090902/> ; <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1403/03/02/3090749/>

[5] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1403/03/02/3090749/> ; <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1403/03/02/3090678/> ; <https://x.com/teamsmediawar/status/1793290655067779482>

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[7] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1403/03/02/3090678/>

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[9] <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/iran-funeral-tehran-president-raisi-killed-helicopter-crash-rcna153426>

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[13] [https://x.com/Tasnimnews\\_Fa/status/1793347570997121291](https://x.com/Tasnimnews_Fa/status/1793347570997121291)

[14] [https://x.com/ar\\_khamenei/status/1793274869175419381](https://x.com/ar_khamenei/status/1793274869175419381) ; [https://x.com/site\\_khamenei/status/1793291715299651828](https://x.com/site_khamenei/status/1793291715299651828) ; [https://x.com/Khamenei\\_fa/status/1793206466456727972](https://x.com/Khamenei_fa/status/1793206466456727972)

[15] [https://x.com/ar\\_khamenei/status/1793326230579597738](https://x.com/ar_khamenei/status/1793326230579597738) ; [https://x.com/ar\\_khamenei/status/1793329967020810579](https://x.com/ar_khamenei/status/1793329967020810579) ; [https://x.com/ar\\_khamenei/status/1793282838181126498](https://x.com/ar_khamenei/status/1793282838181126498)

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[21] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1793253575545573826>

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[23] [https://x.com/Doron\\_Kadosh/status/1793162677642006883](https://x.com/Doron_Kadosh/status/1793162677642006883)

[24] [https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/israeli-troops-in-rafah-seize-half-of-gazas-border-with-egypt-b41646c8?mod=middle-east\\_news\\_article\\_pos1](https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/israeli-troops-in-rafah-seize-half-of-gazas-border-with-egypt-b41646c8?mod=middle-east_news_article_pos1)

[25] [https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/israeli-troops-in-rafah-seize-half-of-gazas-border-with-egypt-b41646c8?mod=middle-east\\_news\\_article\\_pos1](https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/israeli-troops-in-rafah-seize-half-of-gazas-border-with-egypt-b41646c8?mod=middle-east_news_article_pos1)

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[30] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-05-21/us-encouraged-by-israeli-changes-to-plans-for-rafah-operation?srnd=middle-east-politics>

[31] <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/05/1149951>

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[39] <https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/22/middleeast/palestinian-statehood-spain-norway-ireland-intl/index.html>

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[42] <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/05/21/politics/sources-say-they-were-duped-by-egypt-changing-ceasefire-terms-for-hamas/index.html>

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