

Iran Update



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Information Cutoff: September 11, 2024, 2:00pm 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.

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 IDF Southern Command’s fire control commander said that Hamas no longer functions as a conventional military organization but added that the IDF requires another year to fully destroy Hamas’ military and governance capabilities.^[1] Destruction is doctrinally defined as physically rendering an enemy force unable to fight until reconstituted.^[2] An Israeli Army Radio correspondent interviewed the outgoing Southern Command fire control commander on September 11.^[3] The commander said that all of Hamas brigades are “damaged to the point of disbandment” and that Hamas fighters almost exclusively conduct guerilla-style attacks targeting Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip.^[4] He said that within a year he expects that the IDF would have “complete freedom of action” in the Gaza Strip.^[5] The commander also said he believes it is possible to degrade Hamas to an extent it can never recover from. The commander’s assessment aligns with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant’s assertion on September 9 that Hamas is no longer an organized military force in the Gaza Strip.^[6] The fire control commander and Gallant’s comments

suggest that IDF operations have disrupted Hamas' ability to operate as a conventional military under structured command hierarchies.

Hamas information captured by the IDF and released by Israel supports the assertion that the IDF has severely degraded Hamas' military capabilities. Gallant released a captured Hamas letter on September 11 authored by Hamas Khan Younis Brigade Commander Rafe Salamah in which Salamah told Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar informing him of the damage sustained by the Khan Younis Brigade.[7] Salamah wrote the letter at an unspecified point before his death in July 2024.[8] The IDF withdrew from Khan Younis in April 2024 and has conducted intermittent raids since then that have encountered scattered resistance.[9] Salamah told Sinwar that his brigade had lost 50% of its fighters and that another 25% of the remaining fighters were mentally or physically unfit to fight.[10] Salamah also said that the brigade had depleted or lost control over 60% of its small arms and at least 65-70% of its anti-tank weapons.[11] The degradation of Hamas' military structure and capabilities is not limited to Khan Younis—Israeli military sources said in late August 2024 that IDF operations in Rafah caused the “collapse” of Hamas' Rafah Brigade, for example.[12] An Israeli military correspondent reported that Hamas fighters have increasingly attempted to flee Rafah via tunnels north to the al Mawasi humanitarian zone, indicating a lack of unit cohesion or adherence to a command structure.[13] CTP-ISW continues to observe Hamas attacking Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip although at a significantly diminished rate in recent months.[14] Hamas likely continues to operate in small, decentralized cells of fighters throughout the Gaza Strip.

Degradation is a temporary military effect and must be sustained by further military action or policy options to, at minimum, disrupt or prevent reconstitution. Reconstitution requires space and time for a degraded force to disengage, rest its forces, and train new personnel. IDF operations, including airstrikes, deny Hamas this space and time. Interdiction of Hamas resupply efforts under the Philadelphi Corridor is equally important to preventing reconstitution, given that new personal weapons and anti-tank systems would presumably enter the Strip from under the Philadelphi Corridor.

Possible Iranian-backed Iraqi militants attacked a US diplomatic compound near Baghdad International Airport on September 10.[15] The militants appear to have conducted the attack without approval from the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, which is a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias. The US Embassy in Baghdad announced that an attack took place at the Baghdad Diplomatic Services Compound, which is a US diplomatic facility.[16] The attack notably took place hours before Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian arrived in Baghdad.[17] No group has claimed responsibility for the attack at the time of this writing.[18] It is more likely, however, that an Iranian-backed Iraqi militia—rather than the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)—conducted the attack. An unspecified military official told AFP that the fighters launched two Katyusha rockets targeting the facility.[19] The official stated that one of the rockets fell on the wall of an Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service compound while the other rocket landed inside an international coalition base. Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have frequently used Katyusha rockets to target US forces in Iraq.[20] ISIS does not frequently directly target US forces in Iraq, opting instead to target Iraqi Security Forces, which are a comparably “softer” target. Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah claimed on September 11 that “suspicious hands” conducted the attack with the aim of “disrupting” Pezeshkian's visit to Baghdad, indicating that Kataib Hezbollah--and the Islamic Resistance in Iraq more broadly--did not order or sanction the attack.[21] Unspecified fighters previously conducted a rocket attack targeting US forces stationed at Baghdad International Airport in October 2023.[22]

Attacks against US Bases in the Middle East

As of September 11, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian traveled to Baghdad on September 11, marking his first visit abroad since becoming president in July 2024.[23] Iranian and Iraqi officials signed 14 cooperation agreements covering a variety of topics, including free trade zones, media, commerce, and transportation.[24] Iran, Iraq, and Syria have increasingly discussed establishing a free trade zone since former Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi traveled to Syria in May 2023.[25] CTP-ISW previously assessed that a free trade zone through Iran, Iraq, and Syria would allow Iran to move materials across borders with less oversight.[26]

Pezeshkian met with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani, President Abdul Latif al Rashid, and Supreme Judicial Council President Faiq Zaidan on September 11.[27] Pezeshkian called for implementing existing security agreements between Iran and Iraq during a joint press conference with Sudani, likely in reference to the March 2023 security agreement between Tehran and Baghdad.[28] This agreement requires Iraqi authorities to disarm and relocate members of Kurdish opposition groups away from the Iran-Iraq border.[29] Iranian media recently reported on September 8 that the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan evacuated its headquarters in Iraq near the Iranian border as part of this agreement.[30] Sudani emphasized that Iraq will not allow “any group to commit transnational aggression against Iran.”[31] Pezeshkian separately called for “removing the borders of Islamic countries...similar to the experience of the European Union” during a meeting with Rashid.[32] This statement may reflect Iran’s desire to facilitate greater economic cooperation and integration with its regional partners, particularly Iraq and Syria.

Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNCS) Secretary Ali Akbar Ahmadian called for a BRICS security commission and “Joint economic mechanisms” to address a number of security issues during a BRICS security meeting on September 11.[33] The meeting, hosted in St. Petersburg, Russia, gathered high-ranking security officials from BRICS countries. Ahmadian proposed forming a “BRICS Security Commission” and “joint economic mechanisms,” to address issues related to terrorism, border security, maritime security, and cyber security.[34] Ahmadian emphasized that BRICS members have the potential to be “the founders of a new [global] security system.”[35] Ahmadian expressed his support for a peaceful resolution to the war in Ukraine and referenced peace initiatives proposed by China and Brazil.[36] High-ranking security officials from Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan, Sri Lanka, and Ethiopia attended the summit.[37] Ahmadian will hold further meetings with some of his counterparts on the summit's sidelines on September 11 and 12.[38]

Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar will almost certainly reject a deal for his safety in exchange for Hamas surrender. Israeli hostage coordinator Gal Hirsch told Bloomberg News that he extended an offer to Hamas on September 8 that would give Sinwar free passage from the Gaza Strip in exchange for the return of the hostages, demilitarization, de-radicalization and a new political system in the Gaza Strip.[39] These stipulations would achieve all Israeli war aims in the Gaza Strip, thus resulting in a Hamas surrender. There have been no indications that Sinwar would moderate his stance to protect his own life or benefit himself, either in this war or during previous negotiations with Israel. Sinwar has maintained his hardline stance in negotiations and has repeatedly resisted pressure to moderate Hamas’ ceasefire position from both his former superiors and his military subordinates in the Gaza Strip during this war.[40] Sinwar has previously rejected conciliation or cooperation with Israel, and he is willing to absorb significant personal sacrifice to advance his objectives.[41] Sinwar opposed the 2011 prisoner deal in which Israel released Sinwar and other top Hamas leaders in exchange for Hamas-held IDF soldier Gilad Shalit, for example.[42] Sinwar was reportedly insistent on freeing Hamas fighters serving multiple life sentences and was willing to remain in prison and “pay a heavy price for principle,” according to a former Israeli prison official.[43] Sinwar also appears to be deeply committed to his belief that he and Hamas can destroy the Israeli state, suggesting he would not trade his personal safety for the collapse of the movement.

Key Takeaways:

- **Hamas' Military Effectiveness:** An IDF officer said that Hamas no longer functions as a conventional military organization but added that the IDF requires another year to fully destroy Hamas' military and governance capabilities. Hamas information captured by the IDF and released by Israel supports the assertion that the IDF has severely degraded Hamas' military capabilities. Degradation is a temporary military effect and must be sustained by further military action or policy options to, at minimum, disrupt or prevent reconstitution.
- **Iraq:** Possible Iranian-backed Iraqi militants attacked a US diplomatic compound near Baghdad International Airport on September 10. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack at the time of this writing. It is more likely, however, that an Iranian-backed Iraqi militia—rather than the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)—conducted the attack. An unspecified military official told AFP that the fighters launched two Katyusha rockets targeting the facility.
- **Iran and BRICS:** Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNCS) Secretary Ali Akbar Ahmadian called for a BRICS security commission and “Joint economic mechanisms” to address a number of security issues during a BRICS security meeting on September 11.
- **Ceasefire Negotiations:** Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar will almost certainly reject a deal for his safety in exchange for Hamas surrender. There have been no indications that Sinwar would moderate his stance to protect his own life or benefit himself, either in this war or during previous negotiations with Israel. Sinwar has maintained his hardline stance in negotiations throughout the war and he previously opposed the prisoner-hostage exchange deal in 2011 that freed him. Sinwar opposed the 2011 deal on the grounds that other Hamas fighters serving multiple life sentences were not freed alongside him.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of September 11, 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

A Palestinian journalist reported that the IDF partially withdrew from southern Zaytoun on September 11.[44] IDF last confirmed its forces operated in Zaytoun on September 9 to raid militia targets, kill dozens of Palestinian fighters, and destroy tunnel shafts and machinery for

manufacturing weapons.[45] IDF operations in southern Zaytoun are connected to the IDF's presence on the Netzarim Corridor.

Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) targeted Israeli armor with a previously planted improvised explosive device (IED) on the northeastern end of the Netzarim Corridor.[46] PIJ said it posted the claim on September 11 after it “restored contact” with its fighters from the Shujaiya neighborhood. PIJ planted the IED on the outskirts of the Netzarim Corridor zone.

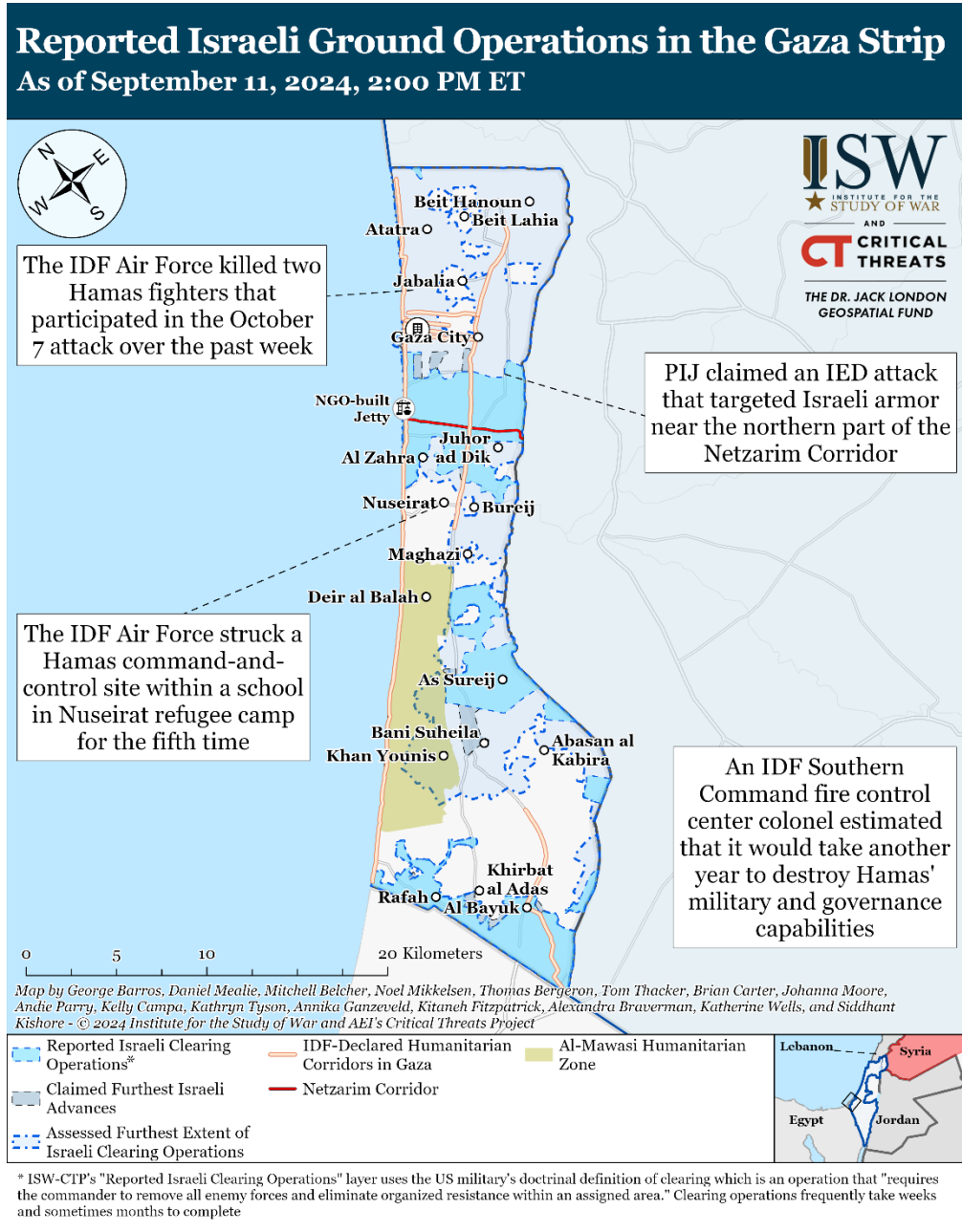
The IDF Air Force struck and killed Hamas fighters in a command-and-control complex within a former school in Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip on September 11.[47] The IDF Air Force struck the al Jaouni school complex that it said Hamas had built into a command center.[48] The IDF stated that Hamas used the compound to support attacks against Israeli forces and Israel.[49] The IDF added that it took steps to reduce civilian harm, including through the use of specific munitions and aerial surveillance.[50] The Gaza Strip Civil Defense Spokesperson said that the IDF has struck al Jaouni school five times since February 2024.[51] Palestinian sources said that the strike killed at least 16 Palestinians and wounded 18 others.[52]

An IDF helicopter crashed while landing in Rafah and killed two IDF soldiers on September 11.[53] The IDF 123rd Helicopter Squadron flew a UH-60 Blackhawk to Rafah in order to evacuate a soldier injured in combat in the Gaza Strip.[54] The helicopter crashed from a low altitude at the landing zone. Two IDF soldiers were killed, and seven others were injured in the accident.[55] The IDF Southern Command and IDF Air Force evacuated the wounded to hospitals in Israel. The IDF is investigating the incident but confirmed that the incident was not caused by “enemy fire.”[56]

IDF killed two Hamas fighters in airstrikes over the past week who participated in the October 7 attacks on Israel.[57] One of the fighters was from the Hamas al Shati Battalion and helped guard an IDF hostage at al Shifa Hospital.[58] The other fighter was a member of Hamas' special operations force that attacked the Erez crossing area on October 7.[59]

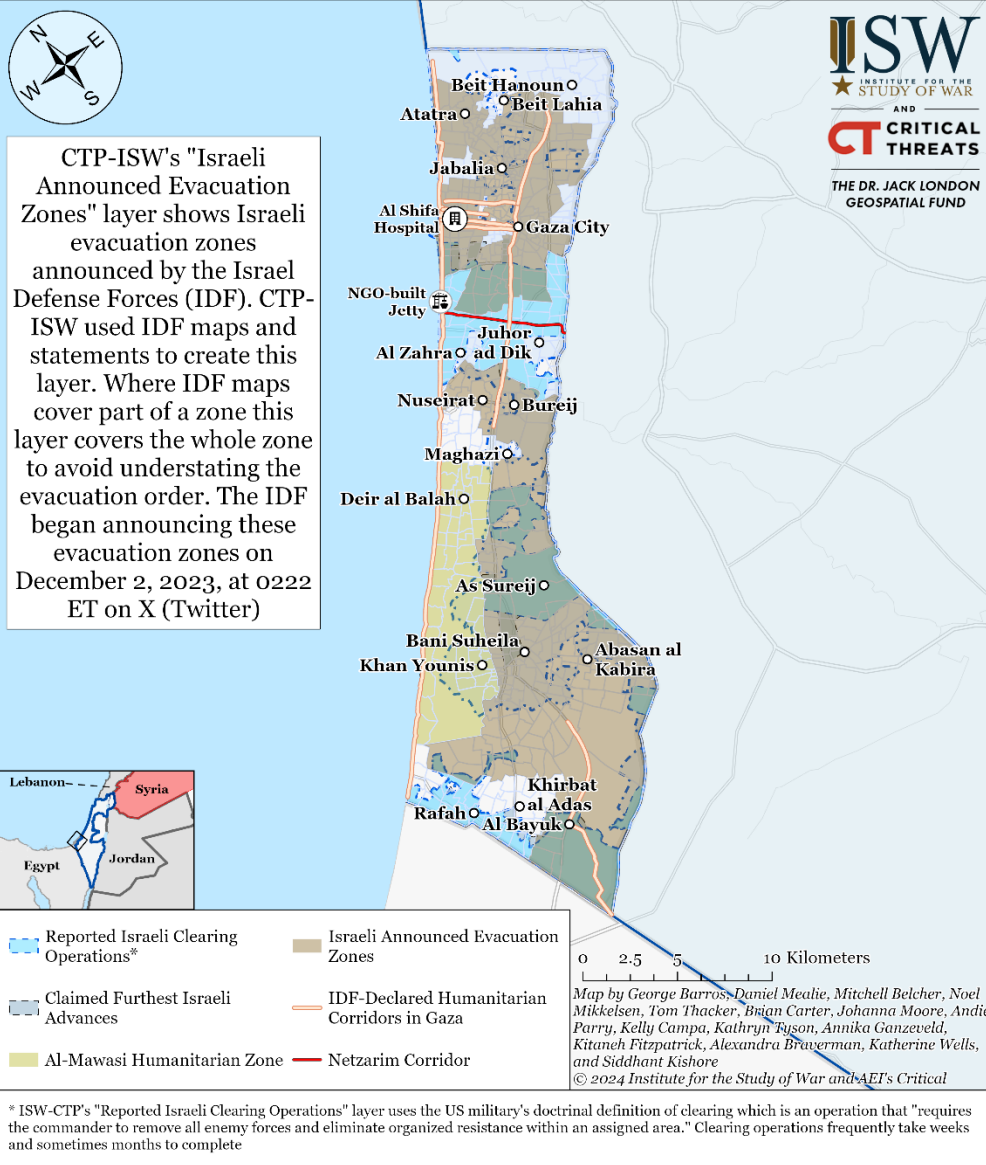
Hamas met with the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) in the Gaza Strip to discuss ceasefire-hostage negotiation and post-war governance.[60] The DFLP has actively supported Hamas operations in the Gaza Strip since October 2023.[61] Hamas and DFLP emphasized in a joint statement on September 11 that there will not be a ceasefire until Israel agrees to Hamas' often-reiterated maximalist demands, which include implementation of a ceasefire, a complete Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, the entry of humanitarian aid, the reconstruction of the strip, and a “serious” deal to exchange Palestinian prisoners for Israeli hostages.[62] The statement added that the “day after the war” would be decided by Palestinians and called for implementing the resolutions of Hamas' July 2024 Beijing Agreement with Fatah.[63] The statement called for Palestinians to mobilize against Israeli “aggression” in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Israel.[64]

Humanitarian aid groups continued a second day of polio vaccinations in the northern Gaza Strip in the final phase of the UN polio vaccination campaign in the Gaza Strip.[65] UN and Israeli sources said that health teams have vaccinated almost 530,000 children across the Gaza Strip.[66] Israel and Palestinian militias continue to observe limited humanitarian pauses in the Gaza Strip for the polio vaccination campaign.[67]



Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip

As of September 11, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

Israeli forces engaged Palestinian fighters in five locations across the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on September 10.[68]

Israeli forces continued operations in Tulkarm, Tammun, and Tubas on September 11 as part of a major IDF operation designed to degrade Palestinian militia networks in the

West Bank.^[69] These operations are continuation of Operation Summer Camp, which began on August 27 in Jenin.^[70] The IDF conducted an airstrike targeting a Palestinian militia cell in Tubas that killed five fighters.^[71] The IDF also located a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) during the raid in Tubas that Palestinian fighters had connected to a remote-control detonator.^[72] Israeli forces disarmed the VBIED and arrested several suspects in the area. The IDF separately conducted raids in Tulkarm and destroyed an IED and weapons production facility.^[73] Palestinian militias including Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired small arms and detonated IEDs targeting Israeli forces in Tulkarm.^[74]

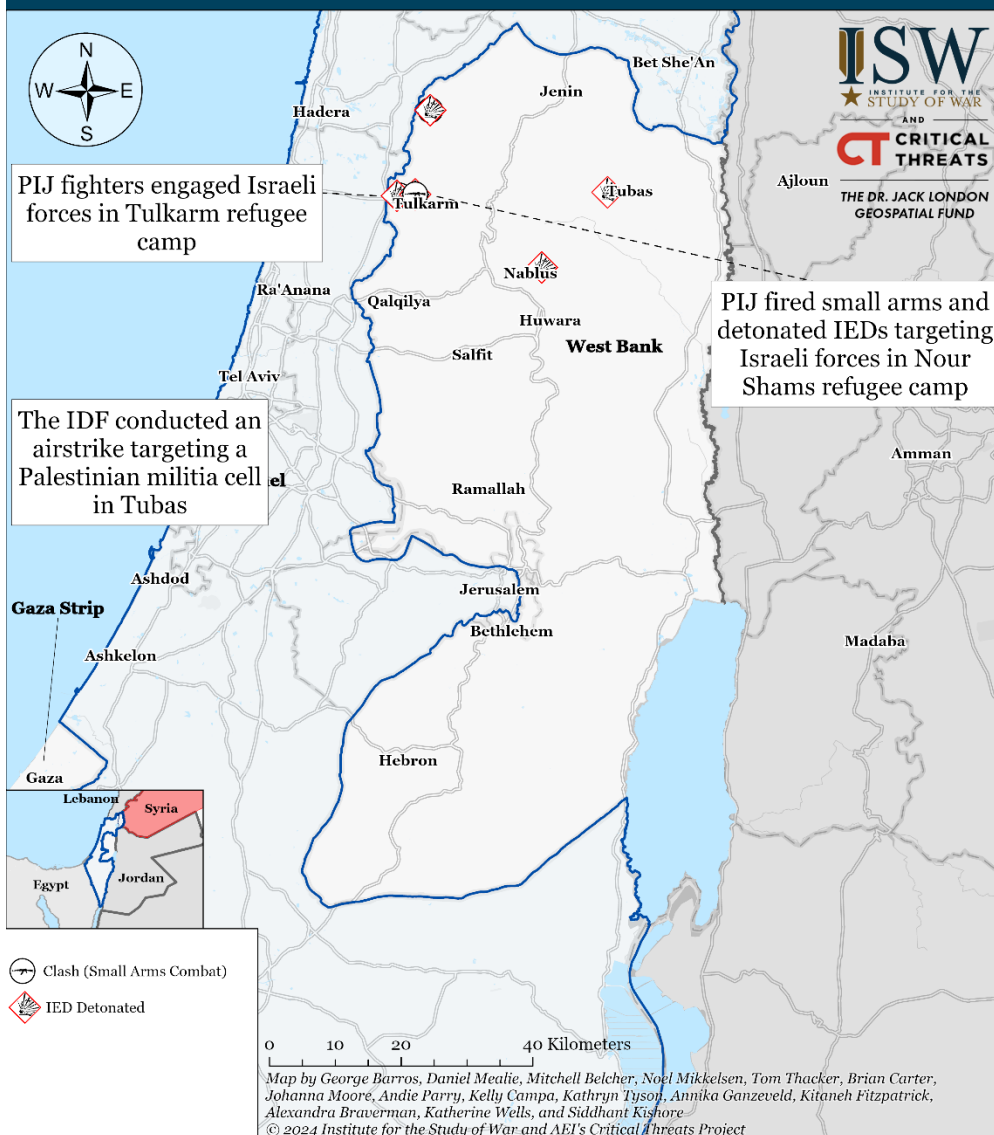
The IDF detained 23 wanted persons across the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on September 10.^[75] The IDF conducted raids in Beit Ummar in Hebron Governorate in which the IDF detained five wanted persons and confiscated a drone.^[76]

A 58-year-old Palestinian used a vehicle to ram an IDF checkpoint at Givat Assaf junction in the West Bank on September 11.^[77] The driver rammed the checkpoint with a fuel tanker and killed one soldier.^[78] Israeli security forces shot and killed the driver and blocked the area.^[79] An Israeli military correspondent identified the attacker as a resident of Rafat, West Bank.^[80] Palestinian militias including Hamas praised the attack, calling the attack a “natural response” to Israel’s military operations in Gaza and the West Bank.^[81]

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited the West Bank-Jordan border on September 11.^[82] Netanyahu’s visit follows the September 8 attack in which a Jordanian truck driver shot and killed three Israeli civilians at the Allenby Bridge border crossing.^[83] Netanyahu pledged to strengthen the West Bank’s border with Jordan and continue to thwart attempts to smuggle fighters and weapons through Jordan into the West Bank and Israel.^[84] Netanyahu said that Israel would work closely with Jordan to maintain a peaceful border.^[85]

Significant Activity in the West Bank

As of September 11, 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

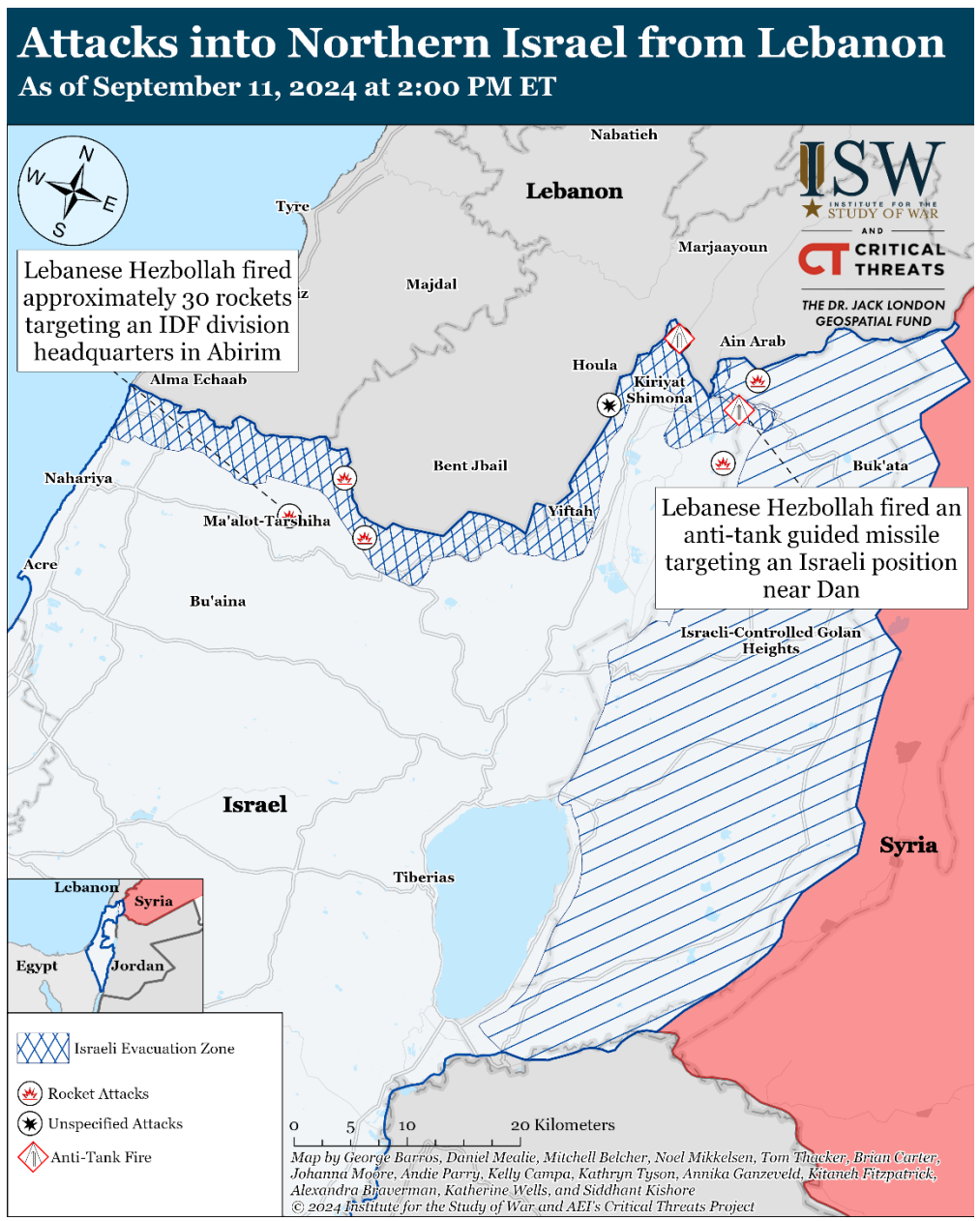
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- 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

Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, have conducted at least ten attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on September 10.[86] Hezbollah fired anti-tank guided missiles targeting an Israeli position near Dan.[87] The attack injured one IDF soldier.

The IDF Air Force conducted airstrikes targeting 30 Hezbollah rocket launchers and other Hezbollah military infrastructure in four areas in southern Lebanon on September 10.[88]

The US Treasury Department sanctioned a Hezbollah oil and liquefied petroleum gas smuggling network on September 11.[89] The Treasury Department sanctioned three individuals, five companies, and two vessels responsible for facilitating illicit oil and liquefied petroleum gas shipments to the Syrian government and channeling the profits to Hezbollah.



Iran and Axis of Resistance

Senior Iranian military officials opened a new IRGC Ground Forces aviation base in West Azerbaijan Province, Iran that could help the IRGC Ground Forces address perceived threats from external Kurdish opposition groups and respond to internal security issues

in Kurdish areas of Iran.^[90] This new base, which is in Oroumiyeh, West Azerbaijan Province, close to the border with Turkey, will operate under the Hamzeh Seyyed ol Shohada Operational Base responsible for West Azerbaijan and Kurdistan Provinces.^[91] Both of these provinces are home to sizable Kurdish populations. Hamzeh Seyyed ol Shohada Operational Base Commander Brigadier General Ali Akbar Pour Jamshidian stated that the IRGC Ground Forces are "fighting against counter-revolutionaries and enemies" in the northwest region, which is likely a reference to Kurdish opposition groups.^[92] The new base hosts helicopters that could be used to support asymmetric military operations against opposition groups or to respond to internal unrest in the northwest.^[93] Varying forms of civil unrest have occurred in northwestern Iran and this area was widely impacted by the 2022-2023 Mahsa Amini protests.^[94]

IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami pledged to "pursue and punish" all of Iran's enemies during the opening of the aviation base in Oroumiyeh on September 11.^[95] Salami implied that enemies of Iran and the Axis of Resistance will "taste the painful revenge" of their actions.

Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters Inspection Deputy Brigadier General Mohammad Jafar Asadi claimed that Israel's recent airstrikes in Syria "will not go unanswered" during an interview with Iranian media on September 11.^[96] Asadi claimed that Israel will "definitely receive a strong slap at the right time and place." CTP-ISW reported that the IDF conducted several airstrikes into Syria on September 8, including one targeting a Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC) site in Masyaf, Hama Governorate, that is used to produce advanced weapons.^[97] Iran reportedly uses the SSRC site in Masyaf to develop weapons for the members of the Axis of Resistance, including the Lebanese Hezbollah.^[98] The Iranian Foreign Ministry condemned the airstrikes but denied the presence of any Iran-operated military site in the area.^[99] Asadi also condemned the Israeli airstrikes in the al Mawasi humanitarian zone on September 9.^[100]

Iranian Defense Minister Amir Nasir Zadeh proposed holding a 10th Iran-Venezuela Joint Economic Commission meeting during a call with Venezuelan Minister of Transportation Ramon Velasquez on September 11.^[101] Nasir Zadeh said the meeting would serve as a "symbol" of Iran and Venezuela's "strategic support" for each other. Velasquez also expressed Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's commitment to expanding "strategic relations" with Iran. The 9th meeting of the Iran-Venezuela Joint Economic Commission took place in Tehran in November 2022.^[102]

US Central Command destroyed five Houthi drones and two Houthi missiles in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen on September 10.^[103] CENTCOM determined that these weapons presented an imminent threat to US and coalition forces, as well as merchant vessels in the region.

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