

Iran Update, September 12, 2024

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Information Cutoff: 2:00pm ET

Israeli special operations forces conducted a highly unusual raid into Syria on September 8 to destroy a major Iranian-backed precision missile factory and recover intelligence from the site.[1] The mission targeted the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC) site in Masyaf in northwestern Syria, which has been long involved in the production of advanced weapons, including precision munitions.[2] The Israeli raid began with several airstrikes targeting nearby roads in order to isolate the facility and prevent Iranian-backed or Syrian reinforcements from arriving. Israeli SOF entered the facility, some of which was underground, and engaged Syrian guards. The Israeli SOF then planted explosives before leaving the facility and detonating them.[3] The explosives were needed to destroy the facility because it was underground and thus protected from airstrikes.[4] Israeli SOF sustained no reports casualties during the raid. Iran built the targeted site in 2018, and Lebanese Hezbollah has used it since then to produce weapons.[5]

The raid was part of a concerted Israeli effort to disrupt Iranian weapons supply networks in the Levant.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have conducted numerous airstrikes across Syria to this end in recent months, including the strike that killed several senior IRGC officers in Damascus in April 2024.

A Hamas delegation met Egyptian and Qatari mediators in Doha on September 11 to discuss the ceasefire-hostage negotiations with Israel, specifically the release of Palestinian prisoners.[6] Khalil al Hayya led the Hamas delegation that met with Egyptian General Intelligence Services Director Abbas Kamel and Qatari Prime Minister Mohammad bin Abdulrahman al Thani.[7] Kamel and Thani reportedly encouraged Hayya to “lessen” Hamas’ demand for the release of 100 Palestinian prisoners serving life sentences in Israeli prisons.[8] This meeting comes after US officials said that this Hamas demand is the “main impediment” to negotiations.[9] Hamas released a statement after the meeting, reiterating its maximalist demands and stating that it would reject any new conditions in negotiations.[10] Axios reported that Egyptian and Qatari mediators feel that there may be an opportunity to present a new US-Egyptian-Qatari bridging proposal next week.[11]

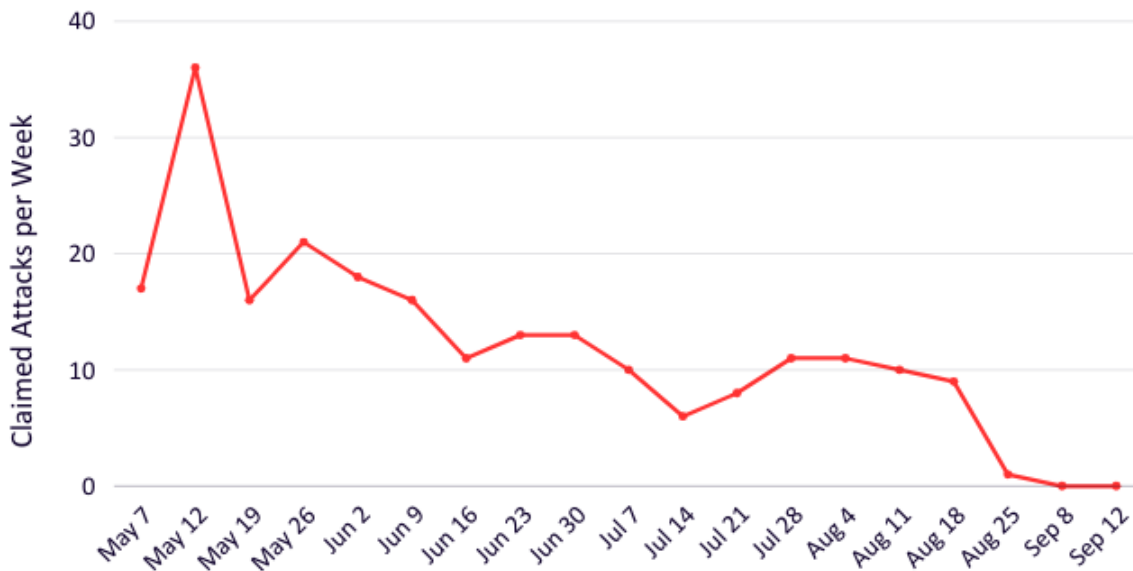
The commander of the IDF 162nd Division, Brigadier General Itzhak Cohen, announced on September 12 that the IDF has “dismantled” Hamas’ Rafah Brigade and secured control of the urban Rafah City area after four months of operations there.[12] Cohen told reporters that the IDF had “destroyed” the Rafah Brigade’s four battalions.[13] The IDF stated that it has also killed at least 2,308 Hamas fighters in the Rafah Brigade and destroyed 13 kilometers of tunnels

since beginning clearing operations in Rafah in May 2024.[14] An Israeli military correspondent reported that the IDF can destroy the remaining tunnels under Rafah in three weeks.[15]

Hamás' recent attack rate and type in Rafah indicate that the Rafah Brigade is severely degraded and is no longer operating as an effective military unit. The weekly rate of Hamas attacks in Rafah has steadily declined since the IDF went into Rafah on May 2024. The attacks do not appear to have clear tactical or operational objectives, moreover, suggesting a breakdown in command and control.[16] Hamas has also stopped using advanced tactics and weaponry in Rafah in July 2024.[17] The last Hamas attack in Rafah that CTP-ISW observed was on August 31, in which Hamas claimed to fire a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) at an Israeli bulldozer in coordination with the al Nasser Salah ad Din Brigades.[18] This was the first claimed Hamas attack in Rafah in eight days.[19] Israeli forces have continued clearing operations in Tal al Sultan, where the attack occurred, since August 31 without any more claims of Hamas attacks.[20] The IDF has stated that it has killed over 250 Hamas fighters in Tal al Sultan in recent weeks, including the commander of the Tal al Sultan Battalion.[21]

Smaller Palestinian militias allied with Hamas have continued to target Israeli forces in the area, however, and can continue to threaten Israeli forces along the Philadelphi Corridor, even if Hamas is severely degraded. Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), for example, targeted Israeli armor with RPG fire in central Rafah on September 12.[22]

Hamás' Weekly Claimed Attack Rate in Rafah Governorate
May 7 to September 12, 2024



This data represents Hamas' claimed attacks targeting Israeli forces in Rafah Governorate between May 7 and September 12, 2024. This data does not include indirect rocket fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory. CTP-ISW measures claimed militia attacks and cannot verify whether these attacks occurred. This data does not include attacks in Rafah that Hamas has conducted but not claimed. This data also does not include attacks conducted by other Palestinian militias in the Gaza Strip.

The IDF stated that it has located and destroyed most of the underground tunnels below the Philadelphi Corridor.[23] Cohen said that Israeli engineering forces recently located 203 interconnected tunnels near or under the Philadelphi Corridor.[24] The IDF stated it has already destroyed 80 percent of the tunnels and intends to scan and demolish the remaining 20 percent.[25] An Israeli military correspondent reported that the IDF could destroy all remaining underground routes beneath the Philadelphi Corridor in 48 hours if approved to do so.[26] Locating and destroying remaining underground infrastructure helps consolidate Israeli control of the Philadelphi Corridor and has been a focus of IDF operations since the IDF took the corridor in May 2024. Maintaining Israeli control of the Philadelphi Corridor would help prevent Hamas and other Palestinian militias from rebuilding their capabilities quickly by interdicting major smuggling operations into the Gaza Strip that would accelerate Hamas' ability to resupply itself, as CTP-ISW has previously argued.

IDF sources told Israeli media that Hamas did not primarily use underground tunnels for smuggling weapons into the Gaza Strip from Egypt. The IDF identified nine tunnels that crossed into Egyptian territory from Rafah.[27] Cohen confirmed that all nine tunnels were inactive and had been previously blocked by Egyptian authorities or Hamas.[28] IDF sources told the Jerusalem Post that most weapons in Hamas' stockpiles are believed to have been smuggled aboveground through the Rafah border crossing, which is controlled by Egypt. The IDF assesses that most of Hamas' aboveground and underground smuggling operations occurred during Mohammad Morsi's one-year term as president of Egypt from 2012 to 2013.[29] These operations enabled Hamas to develop its extensive weapons manufacturing infrastructure, much of which the IDF has destroyed throughout the war.[30] The IDF sources also said that cross-border weapons smuggling continued to some degree until the IDF took the Philadelphi Corridor in May 2024.

The IDF sources said that Hamas' main goal along the Philadelphi Corridor was to store and fire long-range rockets.[31] The sources said that Rafah, and the Philadelphi Corridor in particular, contained one of Hamas' largest long-range rocket arsenals found by the IDF during the war.[32] Hamas reportedly stored rockets near the Egyptian border to discourage Israeli strikes on the stockpile.[33] The lack of IDF operations in Rafah in the last few decades also reportedly gave Hamas' rocket units a sense of "immunity" from Israeli targeting.[34]

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian continued his official visit to Iraq on September 11 and 12. Pezeshkian called for "unity and cohesion" among Muslim countries during a meeting with members of the Shia Coordination Framework—a loose coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi political parties—in Baghdad on September 12.[35] Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani, Iranian-backed Badr Organization Secretary General Hadi al Ameri, and Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Asaib Ahl al Haq leader Qais al Khazali attended the meeting. Iranian state media reported that two individuals named Abu Ala and Abu Karar also attended the meeting.[36] Iranian media may have been referring to Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada Secretary General Abu Ala al Walai. Pezeshkian also attended a "government forming coalition" meeting in Baghdad on September 11.[37] Iranian media did not specify what Pezeshkian discussed with Iraqi officials at this meeting. The following prominent Iraqi politicians attended[38]:

- Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani
- Parliament Speaker Mohsen al Madalawi

- National Wisdom Movement Head Ammar al Hakim
- State of Law Coalition head Nouri al Maliki
- Former Prime Minister Haider al Abadi
- Azm Alliance leader Muthanna al Samarrai
- Azm Alliance member Mohammad al Mashhadani[39]
- Sovereignty Alliance head Khamis al Khanjar[40]
- Former Parliament Speaker Salim al Jubouri[41]
- Foreign Affairs Minister Fuad Hussein
- Kurdish Democratic Party member Shakhawan Abdulla
- Babylon Movement leader Rayan al Kildani

Pezeshkian separately met with senior Kurdish leaders in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan, on September 12. Pezeshkian met with Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Nechirvan Barzani, KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) President Masoud Barzani.[42] Nechirvan Barzani stated that Iraqi Kurdistan “should not be used against Iran.”[43] Iran has historically accused Kurdish opposition groups and Israel of using Iraqi Kurdistan to conduct operations into Iran.[44] Iran and Iraq signed a security agreement in March 2023 that requires Iraqi authorities to disarm and relocate Kurdish opposition groups based in Iraq away from the border with Iran.[45] Pezeshkian will also meet with Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) leaders in Sulaymaniyah, Iraqi Kurdistan, during his visit.[46]

Iran and Russia are downplaying their disagreement over the Zangezur Corridor project in the Caucasus. Tension has erupted between Moscow and Tehran since Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Lavrov announced on August 19 that Russia supports the Zangezur Corridor, which would connect Azerbaijan proper to its Nakhchivan Autonomous Region through southern Armenia.[47] Iran has long opposed the development of the Zangezur corridor, arguing that it would sever Iranian land access to Europe and Russia.[48] Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Akbar Ahmadian met Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu in St. Petersburg, Russia, on September 10, during which Shoigu insisted that the Russian position vis-a-vis the Zangezur Corridor has not recently changed.[49] Ahmadian similarly said that nothing has changed in the Iran-Russia relationship during a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on September 12.[50] Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova likewise said on September 11 that Russia “provided all the necessary clarifications,” which Tehran has accepted.[51] Neither Iran nor Russia likely seeks to antagonize the other, despite their differing positions, especially as they implemented their agreement to provide Iranian missiles to support the Russian invasion of Ukraine.[52]

Russia is continuing to balance its relationships with Iran and the Gulf states. Ahmadian and Shoigu also discussed the dispute between Iran and the United Arab Emirates over ownership of three islands in the Persian Gulf.[53] Tehran has claimed the three islands as Iranian territory since

1971.[54] Iranian state media reported that Shoigu confirmed expressed Russian support for Iranian sovereignty over the three islands, though this report should be treated with skepticism.[55] Russia has historically indicated support for the Emirati claim to the islands, which has been a consistent point of tension between Moscow and Tehran.[56]

Key Takeaways:

- **Syria:** Israeli special operations forces conducted a highly unusual raid into Syria to destroy a major Iranian-backed precision missile factory and recover intelligence from it. The raid is part of a concerted Israeli effort to disrupt Iranian-backed weapons supply networks in the Levant.
- **Israel-Hamas ceasefire-hostage negotiations:** A Hamas delegation met with Egyptian and Qatari mediators to discuss the number of Palestinian prisoners freed in a potential agreement. Egyptian and Qatari mediators pressed Hamas to lessen its demands.
- **Gaza Strip:** The IDF 162nd Division commander announced that Hamas' Rafah Brigade is "dismantled" and that the IDF has secured control of the urban Rafah area. Recent Hamas attacks in Rafah indicate that the brigade is severely degraded.
- **Iraq:** Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian continued his official visit to Iraq. Pezeshkian met with Iranian-backed politicians and militia leaders in Baghdad. Pezeshkian has traveled to Iraqi Kurdistan to meet with local officials there.
- **Caucasus:** Iran and Russia are downplaying their disagreement over the Zangezur Corridor project that would connect Azerbaijan to its Nakhchivan exclave. Neither Iran nor Russia likely seek to antagonize the other, especially as they pursue bilateral arms deals.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of September 12, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET





The IDF announced that it dismantled Hamas' Rafah Brigade and secured control of the urban Rafah City area

The IDF Northern Command established a new reconnaissance unit in the Golan Heights

Israeli forces conducted a drone strike killing three senior PIJ members in the West Bank

Israeli forces conducted a highly unusual raid into Syria to destroy a major Iranian-backed precision missile factory

0 50 100 200 Kilometers

 Gaza Strip and West Bank  Golan Heights

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Tom Thacker, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Kathryn Tyson, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, and Siddhant Kishore
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Gaza Strip

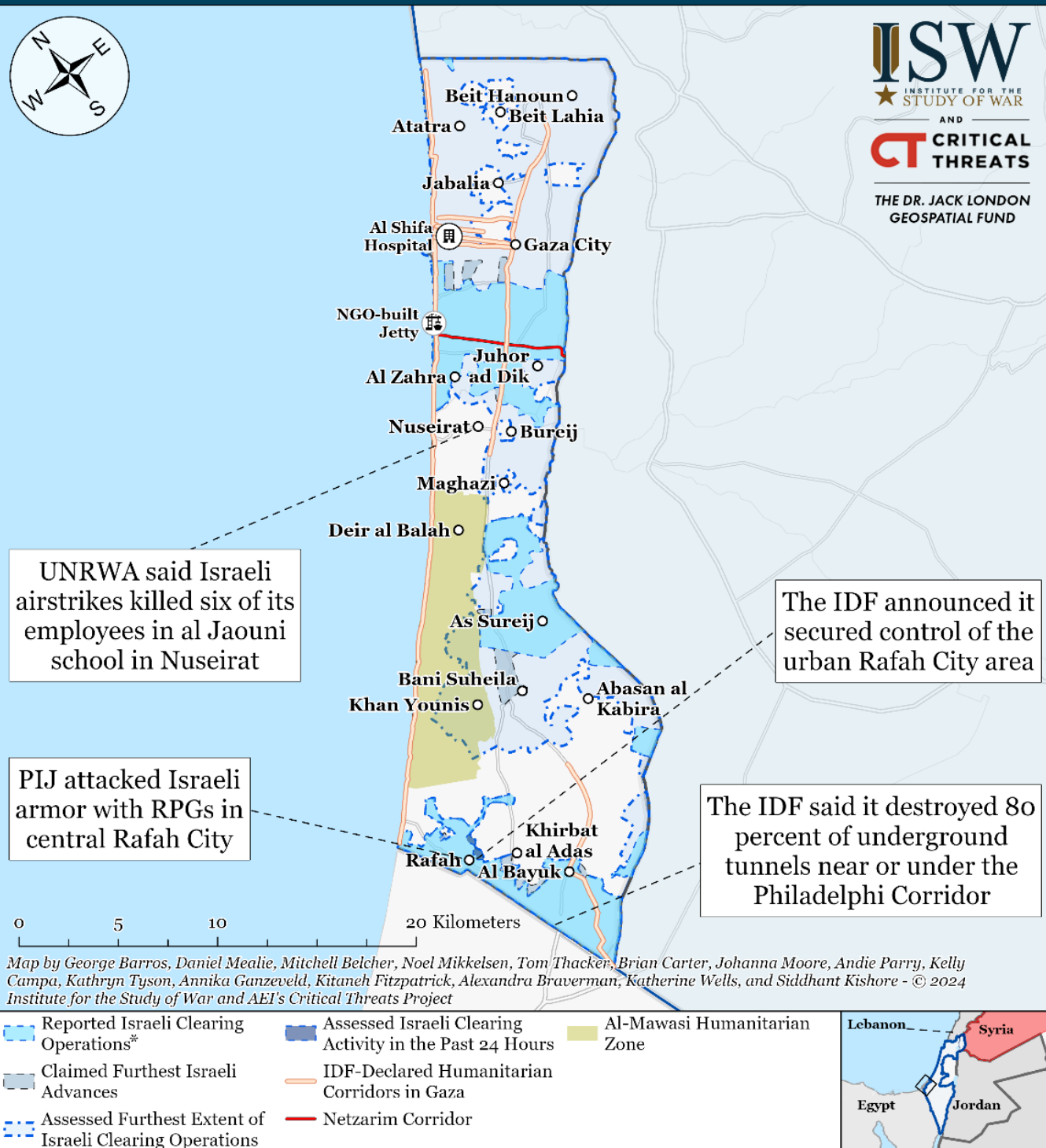
Axis of Resistance objectives:

- 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 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) stated that Israeli airstrikes killed six UNRWA employees in the central Gaza Strip on September 11.[57] The IDF conducted two airstrikes on September 11 targeting a Hamas headquarters in al Jaouni school in the Nuseirat refugee camp.[58] UNRWA stated on September 12 that the airstrikes caused the “highest death toll among our staff in a single incident.”[59] The IDF released a list of names of the Hamas fighters that the IDF killed in the airstrikes.[60] The IDF stated that it has received reports that the individuals killed were associated with UNRWA. The IDF added that it has contacted UNRWA for the names of the individuals but that UNRWA has not yet responded.[61] The IDF reported that it killed nine Hamas fighters, three of whom the IDF said worked for UNRWA while they were members of Hamas.[62]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of September 12, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



* 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

Palestinian Militia Attacks in the Gaza Strip

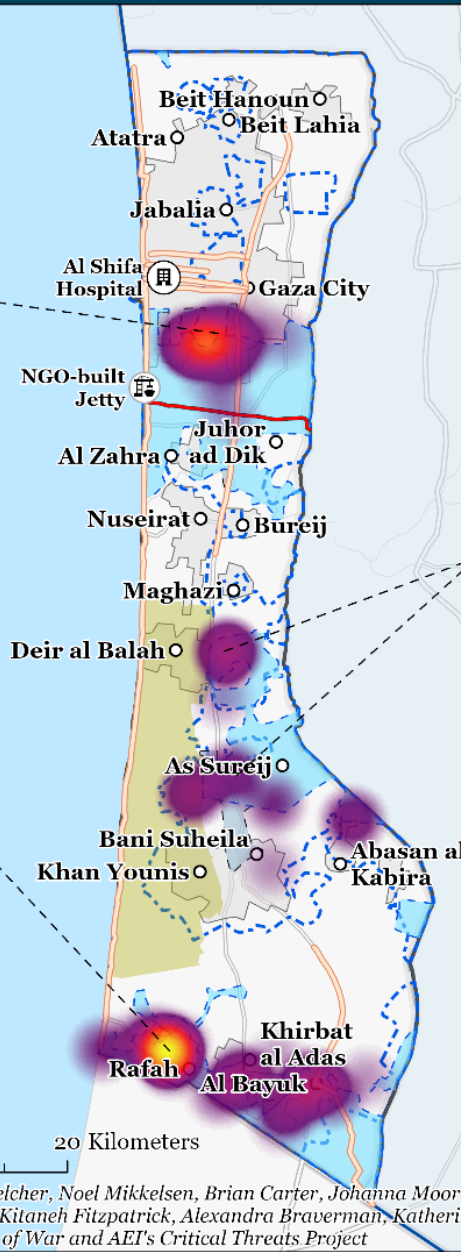
Between July 31 and September 11, 2024



Palestinian militias engaged Israeli forces expanding control over the area around the Netzarim Corridor

The IDF said it secured "operational control" of Rafah after operating in Tal al Sultan for nearly a month

Israeli forces launched a new clearing operation in northeastern Khan Younis and east of Deir al Balah on August 8



Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Kathryn Tyson, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, and Siddhant Kishore - © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project



- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations
- Israeli-Built Highway Route 749
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- Assessed Furthest Extent of Israeli Clearing Operations
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230
- Low Concentration of Attacks (purple) to High Concentration of Attacks (yellow)

Note: The Palestinian militia attacks heat map shows the concentration of Palestinian militia attacks in the northern Gaza Strip since January 18. This heat map illustrates notionally the areas where Palestinian militias are attacking. Our data points correspond to both notional locations (a major neighborhood) and precise locations (a specific building).

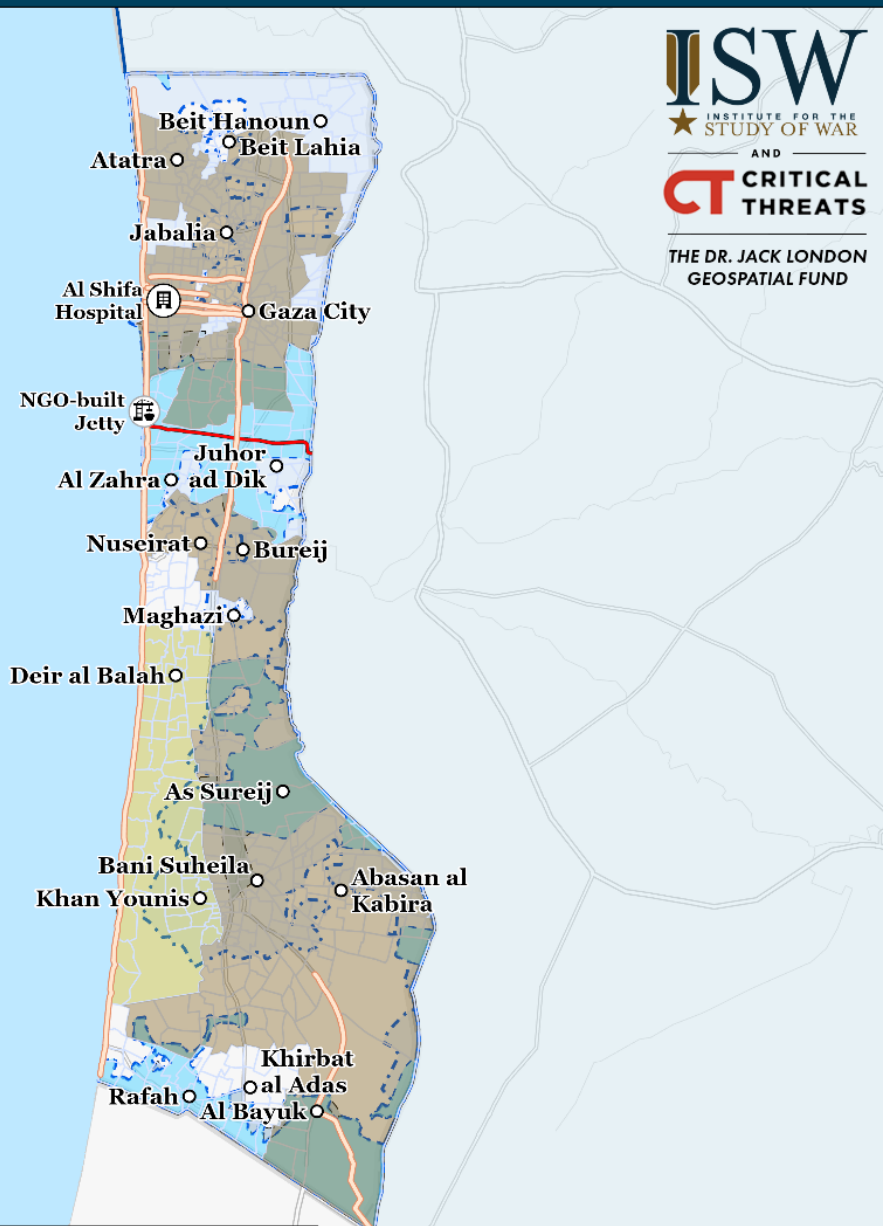
Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip

As of September 12, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



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CTP-ISW's "Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones" layer shows Israeli evacuation zones announced by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). CTP-ISW used IDF maps and statements to create this layer. Where IDF maps cover part of a zone this layer covers the whole zone to avoid understating the evacuation order. The IDF began announcing these evacuation zones on December 2, 2023, at 0222 ET on X (Twitter)



- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridors in Gaza
- Netzarim Corridor

0 2.5 5 10 Kilometers

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Tom Thacker, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Kathryn Tyson, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, and Siddhant Kishore
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* 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

West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

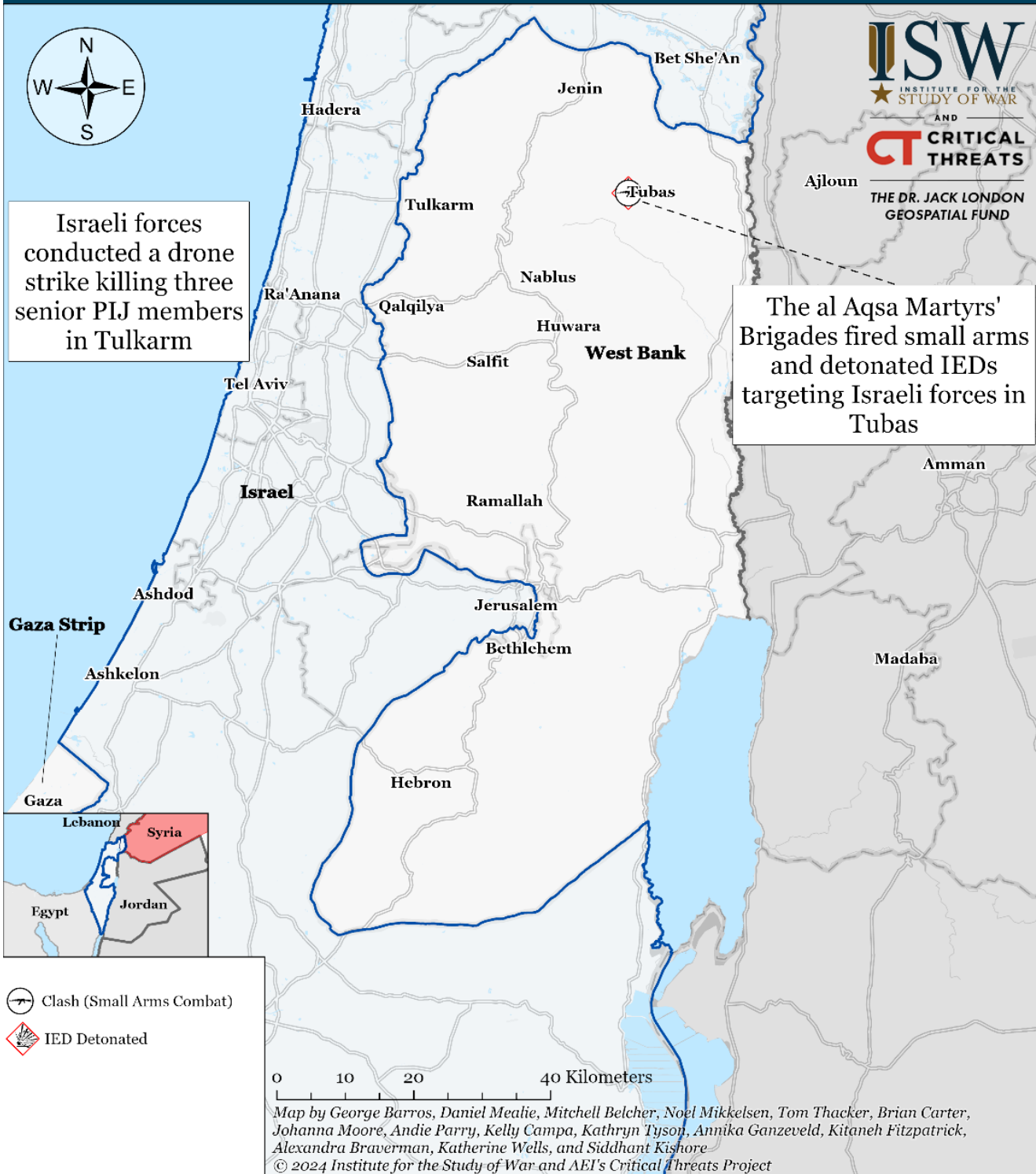
- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

Israeli forces reportedly withdrew from Tulkarm on September 12 after operating there for three days as part of a major IDF operation designed to degrade Palestinian militia networks in the northern West Bank.[63] Israeli forces conducted a drone strike killing three senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) members in Tulkarm on September 11.[64] An Israeli military correspondent stated that the three PIJ members conducted shooting and IED attacks targeting Israeli forces in the West Bank.[65] The IDF also operated in Tubas City, where it engaged Palestinian militias in several locations.[66] This activity is part of Operation Summer Camp, which began in Jenin on August 27.[67]

Israeli forces detained a wanted individual, who was under investigation for an attempted bombing attack, from a hospital in Hebron Governorate on September 12.[68] Israeli media reported in August 2024 that the individual sustained injuries after accidentally detonating an explosive device in a vehicle while transferring the “bomb” from “one location to another.”[69]

Significant Activity in the West Bank

As of September 12, 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:

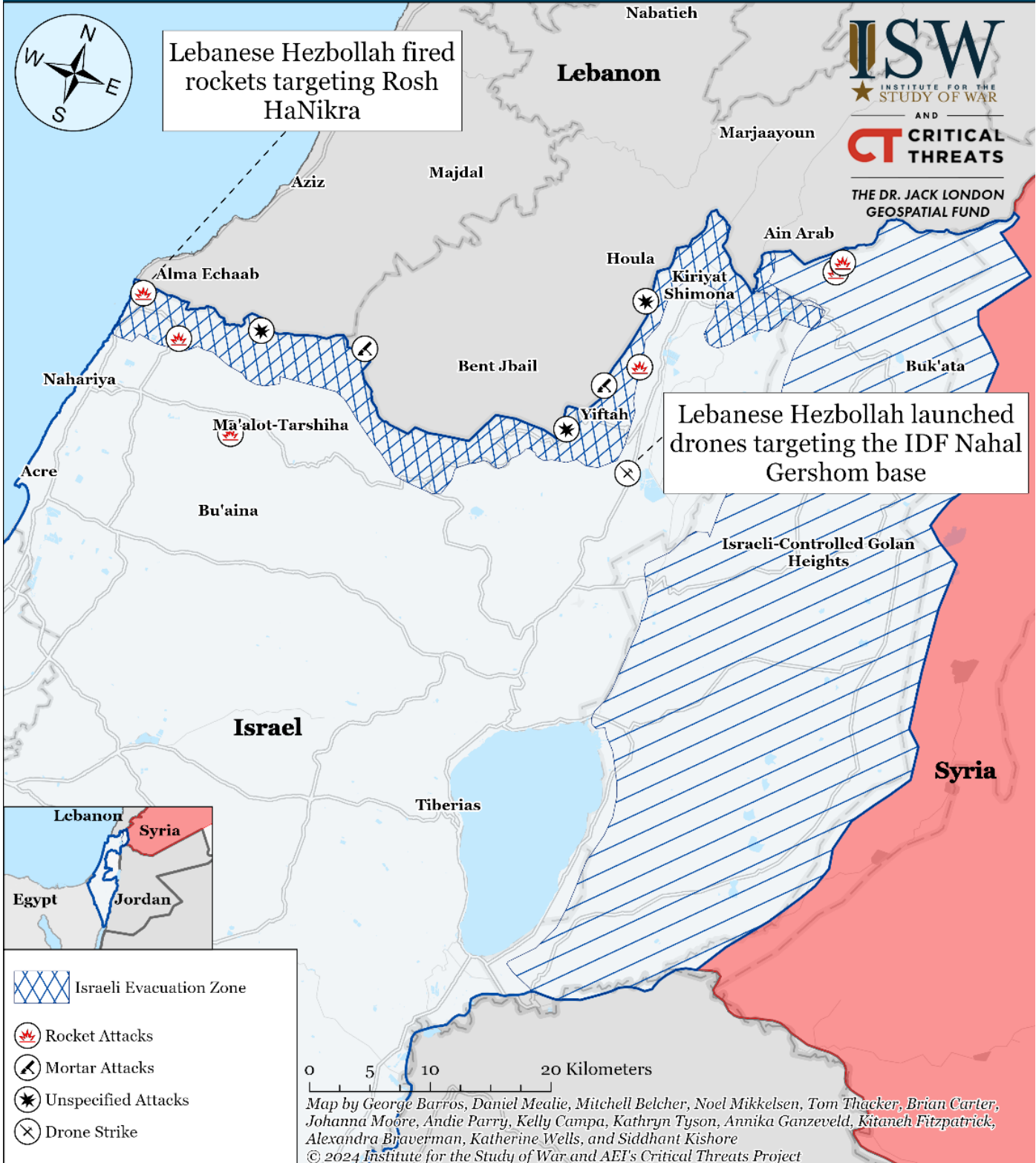
- Deter Israel from conducting a ground operation into Lebanon
- Prepare for an expanded and protracted conflict with Israel in the near term
- Expel the United States from Syria

Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, have conducted at least 12 attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on September 11.[70] Hezbollah claimed on September 12 that it fired rockets targeting Rosh HaNikra for the first time.[71] Hezbollah has claimed several attacks against Israeli targets in the area, including Israeli forces at a "naval site" approximately two kilometers from Rosh Hanikra.[72] Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah said in a speech in July 2024 that Hezbollah would attack new Israeli targets if Israel "continues to target civilians" in Lebanon.[73]

The IDF Northern Command announced on September 12 that it deployed a new reconnaissance unit to the Golan Heights.[74] The IDF stated that it relocated the unit from the West Bank.[75] The IDF added that the new Golan Patrol Company completed its first military exercises in the area, including patrolling the Golan Heights and Israeli border. The IDF stated that the Golan Patrol Company is responsible for surveilling the Syrian Arab Army, Lebanese Hezbollah, and other Iranian-backed militias in the region. The unit is also responsible for providing an "immediate response" to threats in the area by gathering intelligence and preventing infiltration attempts.[76]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon

As of September 12, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



The IDF conducted an airstrike targeting at least two actors tied to Lebanese Hezbollah and Iran in southern Syria on September 12.[77] The IDF struck and killed Lebanese Hezbollah fighter Ahmed al Jaber in a car near the town of Khan Arnabah in Quneitra Province.[78] Jaber was a member of Hezbollah’s Golan File unit, which focuses on building military infrastructure and gathering intelligence on Israel from southern Syria.[79] Hezbollah and Iran have taken several steps, such as the creation of the Golan File unit, to entrench themselves within the Golan Heights and the surrounding area to threaten Israel.[80] Local Syrian media reported that one person, Khattab al Khader, was injured in the attack and that he had financial connections to the Golan File unit.[81] Syrian media also reported that Israeli aircrafts dropped leaflets in several areas along the Israel-Syria border that read “today we [Israel] worked against Khattab al Khader, who worked for the Iranian axis.”[82] The IDF separately struck an unidentified militia fighter near Rafid on the Israel-Syria border.[83] The IDF claimed that the fighter had promoted attacks against Israel and acted with “Iranian cooperation and guidance.”

Iran and Axis of Resistance

An anonymous Iranian-backed source claimed that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias were not responsible for the attack on a US diplomatic compound near Baghdad International Airport on September 10.[84] The US Embassy in Baghdad announced that an attack targeted the US Baghdad Diplomatic Services Compound.[85] An unspecified military official told AFP on September 11 that militants fired two Katyusha-type rockets in the attack—with one falling on the wall of an Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service building and the other landing inside an international coalition base.[86] CTP–ISW previously noted that Iranian-backed Iraqi militants seem to have conducted the attack against the orders of Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah and the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, which is a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias.[87] An unidentified source told *Baghdad Today* that a “suspicious third party” conducted the attack to serve “a known agenda,” as the attack occurred hours before Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian arrived in Baghdad and that the militias are currently investigating the perpetrators of the attack.[88]

US Central Command (CENTCOM) destroyed a Houthi drone in a Houthi-controlled area of Yemen on September 11.[89] CENTCOM determined that the drone presented an imminent threat to US and coalition forces as well as merchant vessels in the area.

Iranian Supreme National Security Secretary Rear Admiral Ali Akbar Ahmadian separately met with Chinese Foreign Affairs Minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in St. Petersburg, Russia, on September 12.[90] Wang stated that China supports Iran in safeguarding its national sovereignty and ensuring its security.[91] Wang also expressed support for a permanent ceasefire between Israel and Hamas and the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip. Ahmadian emphasized that the Masoud Pezeshkian administration will continue developing relations with China.[92] Ahmadian thanked Wang for China’s role in facilitating dialogue between Iran and Saudi Arabia.[93]

Iranian Artesh Coordination Deputy Brigadier General Habibollah Sayyari met the Saudi deputy defense minister at the Xiangshan security forum in China on September 12.[94] They discussed the importance of implementing the cooperation document that Iran and Saudi Arabia signed in China in March 2023 and developing bilateral military cooperation. Sayyari

called the presence of foreigners in the Middle East "an obstacle to establishing security." Sayyari told Iranian state media on September 11 that there is "no need" for external interference in the region.[95] He stated that Iran is focused on the "issue of securing maritime security in the northern Indian Ocean, Strait of Hormuz, and Bab al Mandeb" at the forum. The Xiangshan Forum is China's annual security forum to cover issues including "regional hotspots, emerging technologies, arms control" and "achieving a balanced and orderly multipolar world." [96] Over 90 countries, including the United States, Russia, and Iran, sent delegates to the forum this year.[97]

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