

Iran Update



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September 25, 2024, Information Cutoff: 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.

Israel Defense Forces (IDF) leadership is signaling to its forces that it will conduct a major ground operation into Lebanon imminently. IDF Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Herzi Halevi told Israeli forces on September 25 that the Israeli air campaign into Lebanon is “prepar[ing] the area for the possibility of [Israeli forces’] entry.”^[1] Halevi said that the IDF is preparing in particular for maneuver operations that would involve Israeli forces engaging Hezbollah militants and advancing into Lebanese towns and villages that are Hezbollah “military outposts.” Halevi made these remarks to the IDF 7th Armored Brigade during a training exercise on the Israel-Lebanon border.^[2] The 7th Armored Brigade is one of several IDF units that have deployed to the northern border in recent weeks.^[3] Major General Ori Gordin—the commander of the IDF Northern Command—similarly remarked that the Israeli forces must be “strongly prepared” for a ground offensive against Hezbollah in Lebanon, while observing the 7th Armored Brigade simulate a ground operation in Lebanon on September 24.^[4] Gordin said that the IDF campaign into Lebanon began with degrading Hezbollah

rocket capabilities and command-and-control. The IDF has now entered a new phase of this campaign, according to Gordin.[5]

Halevi and Gordin made these remarks directly to Israeli service members, as the IDF called up reservist units to deploy to the northern border.[6] The IDF announced on September 25 that it activated two reservist brigades—the 6th Infantry Brigade (36th Division) and 228th Infantry Brigade (146th Division)—so that the units would “allow the continuation of the fighting effort” against Hezbollah.[7] These two reservist brigades join several other IDF units, including the 98th Division, that have been called up or deployed from other areas of responsibility to the Israel-Lebanon border in recent days.[8] The commander of the 7th Brigade recently published a letter in which he said his unit is prepared to “lead the IDF in the northern arena.”[9]

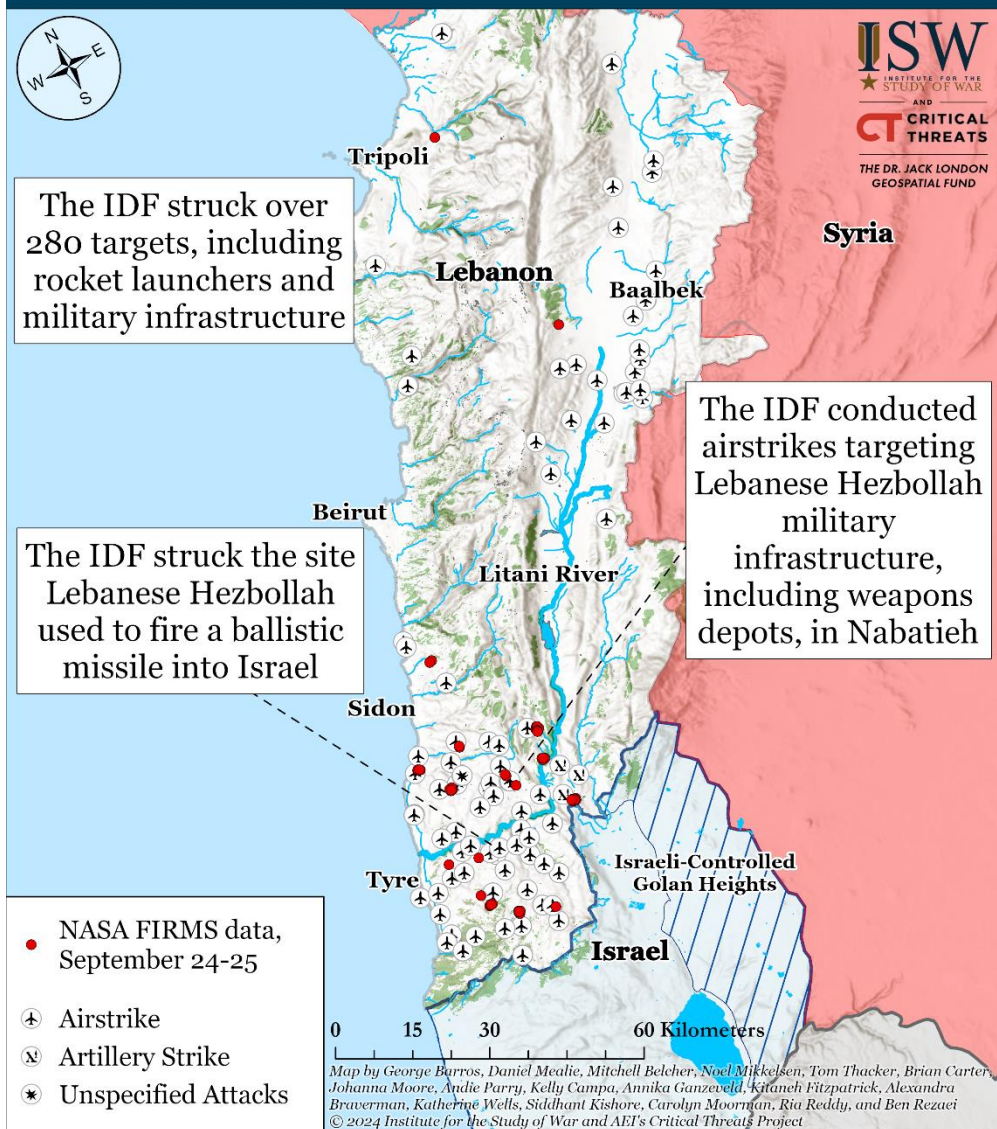
Iran, Hezbollah, and the rest of the Axis of Resistance appear to be preparing for an Israeli ground operation into Lebanon. The IDF has observed around 40,000 Iranian-backed Iraqi, Syrian, and Houthi militants concentrate around the Syrian border with the Golan Heights, according to Israeli media.[10] It is unclear why and when the Axis of Resistance deployed these militants or whether they were already in the area. It is also unclear whether Hezbollah is able or willing to integrate these foreign fighters into its already well-organized and trained force structure. Syrian opposition media separately reported on September 24 that IRGC officers and Iranian-backed Iraqi militia leaders recently met in Deir ez Zor Province and discussed how to “ease pressure” on Hezbollah.[11] The meeting participants reportedly considered attacking international coalition targets in eastern Syria.[12] CTP-ISW previously noted that Iran is trying to balance its support for the Axis of Resistance while trying to avoid an all-out war against Israel.[13]

The IDF Air Force continued to strike Hezbollah targets across Lebanon on September 25. The IDF announced that it struck over 280 targets across Lebanon, including rocket launchers and military infrastructure, such as weapons depots.[14] Numerous sites struck by the IDF produced secondary explosions, indicating the presence of explosive munitions.[15] The IDF also stated that it struck 60 targets connected to the Hezbollah intelligence apparatus, including collection sites and headquarters.[16]

Some of the IDF airstrikes targeted weapons depot and other military infrastructure in Nabatieh, which is one of the largest population centers in southern Lebanon.[17] Geolocated footage and local reports indicate that IDF struck targets within relatively densely populated areas near Nabatieh city center.[18] Israeli Army Radio reported that the IDF airstrikes in the city are “relatively unusual.”[19]

Israeli Air Campaign in Lebanon

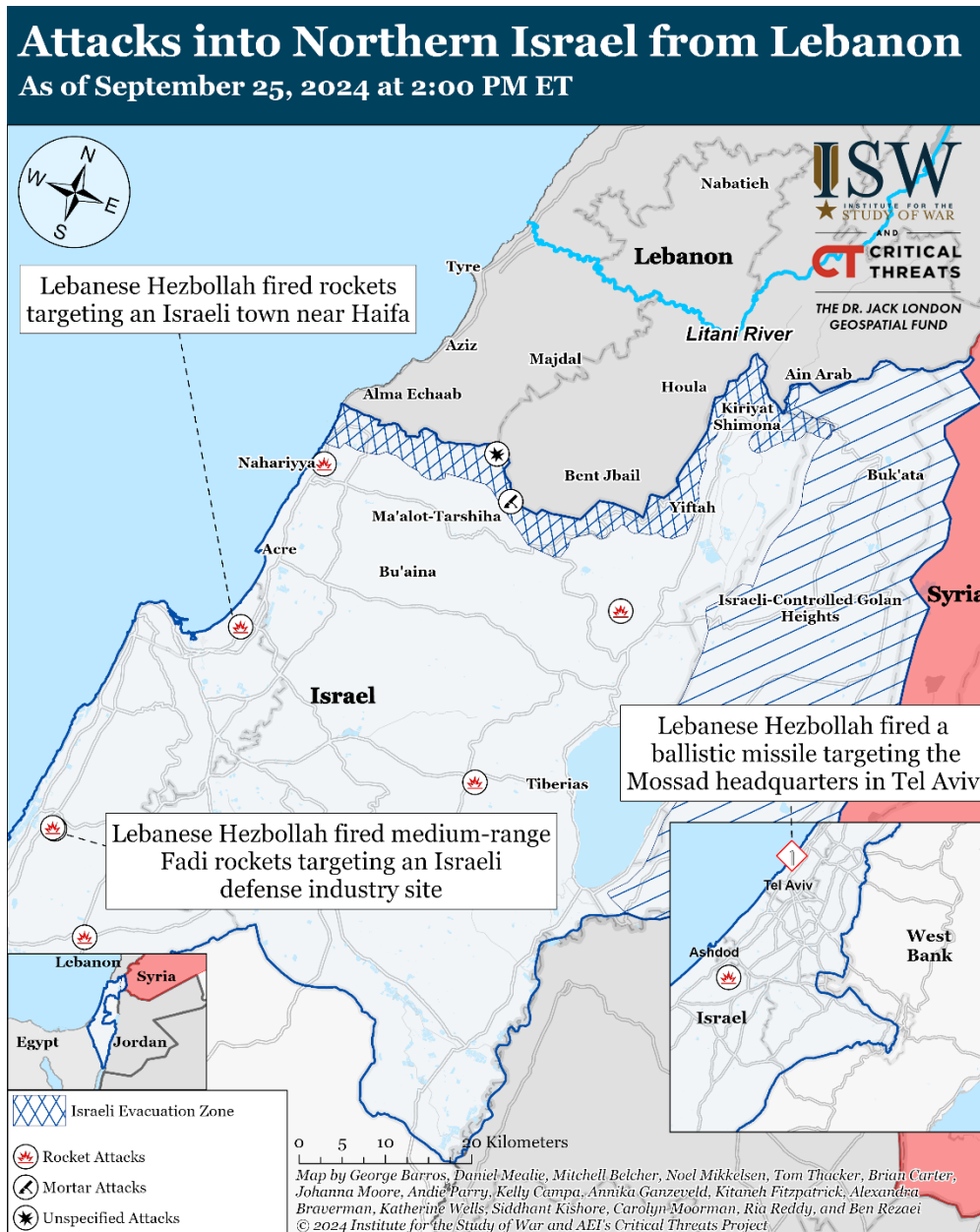
As of September 25, 2024 at 14:00 PM ET



This map illustrates individual Israeli air and artillery strikes based on local Lebanese reporting. This map depicts strikes reported from 2:00pm ET on September 24 to 2:00pm ET on September 25. This map is not exhaustive. CTP-ISW cannot independently verify the locations of Israeli strikes.

Hezbollah fired a ballistic missile targeting the Mossad headquarters in Tel Aviv on September 25.[20] Hezbollah has never before fired a ballistic missile at Tel Aviv.[21] Hezbollah used a Qadr-1 missile, which is a variant of the Iranian Shahab-3 medium-range ballistic missile.[22] An Israeli David's Sling air defense system intercepted the missile over central Israel.[23] The Hezbollah attack was at least partly a reconnaissance-in-force operation, which the US Army defines as "a deliberate combat operation designed to discover or test the enemy's strength, dispositions, and reactions or to obtain other information." [24] Hezbollah could use this attack to better understand Israeli air defense capabilities and how to more effectively defeat them in the future. Hezbollah also likely sought to demonstrate its willingness to fire ballistic missiles into Israel.

Lebanese Hezbollah has continued to fire medium-range rockets targeting Israeli civilian and military targets in northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on September 24.[25] Hezbollah fired multiple barrages of Fadi rockets targeting civilian and military sites near Haifa on September 25.[26] Hezbollah began launching Fadi rockets on September 21 and has fired multiple barrages into Israel since then.[27] The IDF detected five rockets that crossed from Lebanon and fell in open areas near Mount Carmel and Wadi Ara, south of Haifa.[28]



Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei acknowledged on September 25 that the Israeli operations targeting Hezbollah leadership has caused “losses” for Hezbollah.[29] Khamenei made this statement during a meeting with Iran-Iraq War veterans and senior military officials in Tehran. Khamenei claimed that Hezbollah can recover from the losses to its leadership

because of its “organizational and military strength.” Khamenei claimed that Hezbollah and the Axis of Resistance will be the “final winner” in the current conflict.

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—has claimed five attacks targeting Israeli targets since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on September 24.[30] The claims include the following:

- A drone attack targeting an unspecified “military target” in northern Israel[31]
- A drone attack targeting an unspecified location in the Golan Heights[32]
- A drone attack targeting an unspecified location near the Jordan Valley[33]
- A drone attack targeting an unspecified “vital target” in Eilat[34]
- An Arqab cruise missile attack targeting an unspecified “vital target” in northern Israel[35]

The IDF reported on September 24 that a drone heading toward Israel from the east crashed near the Arava Desert in southern Israel.[36] The IDF separately reported on September 25 that it intercepted a drone that was launched from Syria south of the Sea of Galilee.[37]

The United States is reportedly pursuing a diplomatic initiative to both pause fighting between Israel and Lebanese Hezbollah and to resume negotiations on a ceasefire-hostage deal for the Gaza Strip.[38] US officials, according to Axios, aim for a pause in fighting between Israel and Hezbollah to allow Israeli and Lebanese civilians to return to their homes on both sides of the border while creating momentum toward a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.[39] The United States has discussed this initiative with French, Lebanese, and other unspecified Middle East officials and gotten an endorsement from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. One of the anonymous sources speaking to Axios suggested that a deal between Israel and Hezbollah could encourage Hamas to pursue one more seriously.

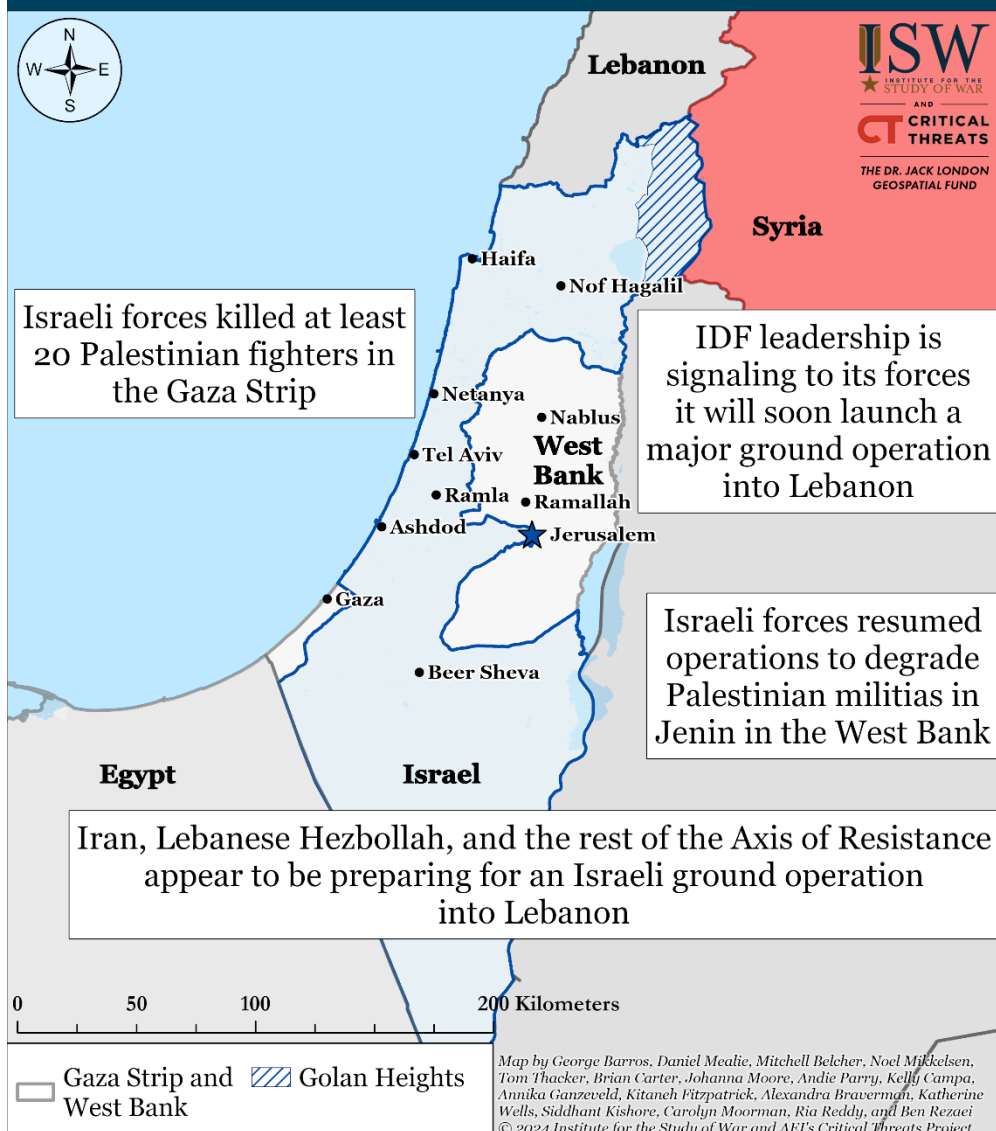
Iran and its Axis of Resistance continue to pursue expanding cooperation with Russia. Reuters reported that Iran has brokered “secret talks” to transfer Yakhont (P-800 Oniks) anti-ship cruise missiles to the Houthis.[40] Russia has not yet decided whether to send the missiles to the Houthis, according to anonymous Western and regional sources speaking to Reuters. CNN reported in August 2024 that the Kremlin had planned to send missiles to the Houthis but reneged due to international pressure.[41] Yakhont missiles could improve the Houthis’ ability to conduct precision strikes targeting maritime traffic around Yemen. The Houthis could also conceivably learn from Russia’s extensive experience using Yakhont missiles against Ukrainian targets.[42] CTP-ISW has reported extensively on the deepening strategic partnership between Iran and Russia since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.[43]

Key Takeaways:

- **Lebanon:** The IDF is signaling to its forces that it will conduct a major ground operation into Lebanon imminently. Iran, Hezbollah, and the rest of the Axis of Resistance appear to be preparing for a potential Israeli ground operation.
- **Lebanon:** The IDF continued its air campaign targeting rocket launchers and military infrastructure. Hezbollah continued firing rockets into northern Israel and fired a ballistic missile at Tel Aviv for the first time.
- **Iraq:** The Islamic Resistance in Iraq continued to fire drones and missiles toward Israel and the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights. CTP-ISW cannot verify all these attacks occurred, though the IDF intercepted at least some of the projectiles.
- **Gaza Strip:** The United States is reportedly trying both to pause fighting between Israel and Hezbollah and to resume ceasefire-hostage negotiations in the Gaza Strip. The United States has discussed this initiative with French, Israeli, and Lebanese officials, among others.
- **Iran-Russia partnership:** Iran and its Axis of Resistance continue to pursue expanding cooperation with Russia. Iran has brokered “secret talks” to transfer Russian anti-ship cruise missiles to the Houthis.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of September 25, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Gaza Strip

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Erode the will of the Israeli political establishment and public to sustain clearing operations in the Gaza Strip
- Reestablish Hamas as the governing authority in the Gaza Strip

The IDF 143rd Gaza Division launched a precision operation near Beit Lahiya in the northern Gaza Strip on September 25 in order to destroy Hamas infrastructure.[44]

Israeli forces located three rocket launchers in Beit Lahiya.[45] Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) detonated an IED targeting an Israeli military vehicle northwest of Beit Lahiya.[46] An Israeli Army Radio correspondent said in June 2024 that the IDF would shift to a “targeted raid” approach in the

whole Gaza Strip after the end of the Rafah operation.[47] Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said during a visit to Rafah on August 21 that the IDF 162nd Division had defeated Hamas' Rafah Brigade.[48]

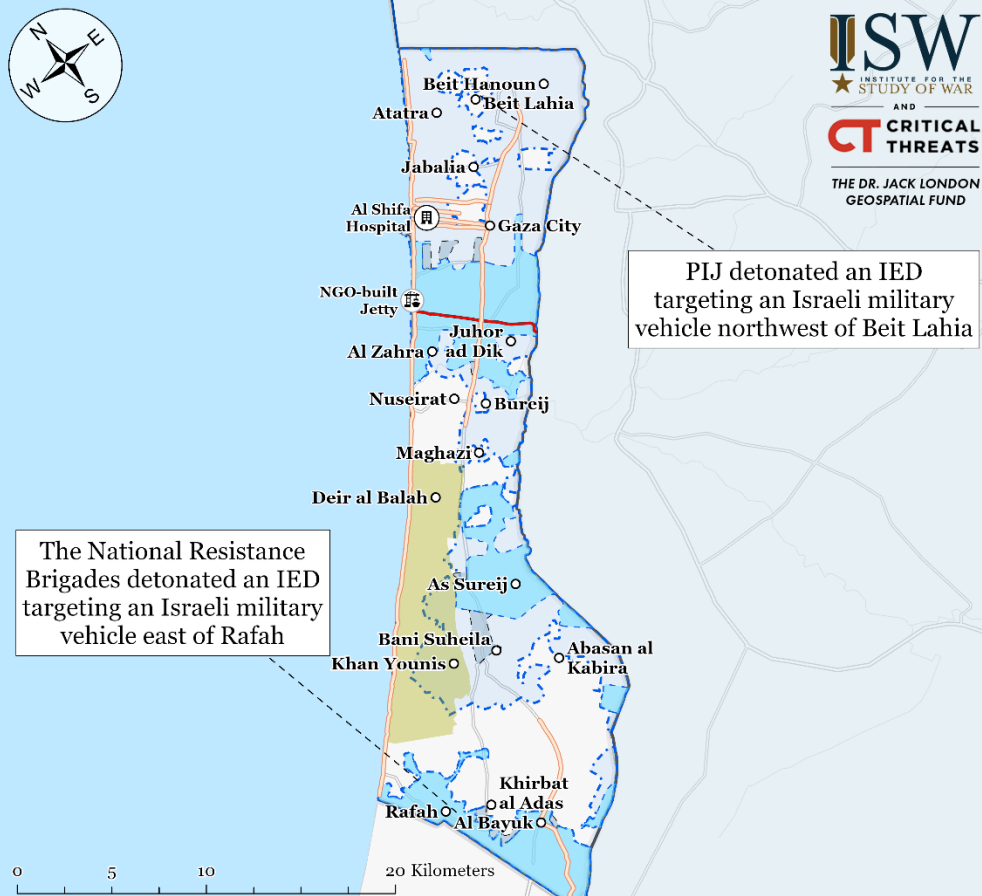
The IDF 252nd Division continued clearing operations near the Netzarim Corridor on September 25.[49] The IDF told the Times of Israel that Israeli forces conducted raids in Sabra and Zaytoun near Gaza City and the outskirts of Nuseirat, locating and destroying several tunnels.[50] Commercially available satellite imagery captured on September 25 shows flattened terrain and destroyed buildings in Tel al Hawa, further indicating continued Israeli operations near Gaza City.[51]

Palestinian militias conducted two IED attacks targeting Israeli military vehicles east of Rafah City on September 25.[52]

The IDF said that the IDF 162th and 252th divisions collectively killed 20 Palestinian fighters on September 24.[53] The 162nd and 252nd divisions are currently deployed to Rafah and along the Netzarim Corridor, respectively.[54]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of September 25, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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PIJ detonated an IED targeting an Israeli military vehicle northwest of Beit Lahia

The National Resistance Brigades detonated an IED targeting an Israeli military vehicle east of Rafah

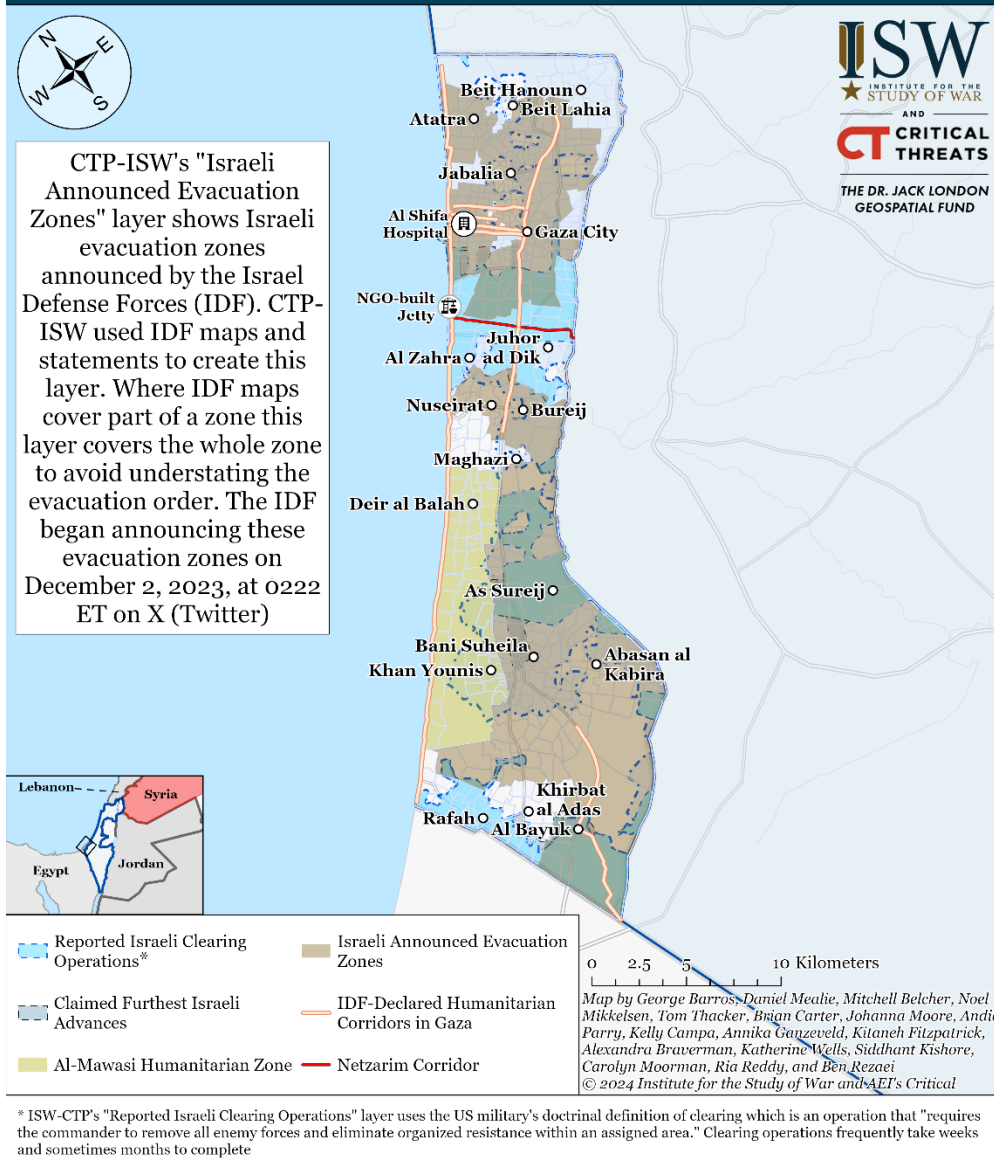
Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Tom Thacker, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Braverman, Katherine Wells, Siddhant Kishore, Carolyn Moorman, Ria Reddy, and Ben Rezaei - © 2024 Institute for the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

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

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

Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip

As of September 25, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

Israeli forces have engaged Palestinian fighters in at least four locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on September 24.[55]

Israeli forces returned to Jenin on September 25 to continue the large-scale counterterrorism operation the IDF launched in late August 2024 in order to degrade Palestinian militias in the West Bank.[56] An Israeli military correspondent reported that the current objectives of the IDF in Jenin are to “attack wanted persons” and militia

infrastructure.[57] Israeli forces withdrew from Jenin on September 6, but anonymous Israeli security officials told Israeli Army Radio that Israeli forces would return to Jenin “soon” and that the IDF’s Operation Summer Camps was not over.[58] The IDF, Shin Bet, and Border Police have killed 14 fighters, detained 30 wanted individuals, destroyed 30 IEDs planted under roads, and conducted four airstrikes during the ten days that they conducted Operation Summer Camps from August 27 to September 6.[59] The IDF also announced on September 6 that it had killed Hamas’ Jenin commander, Wassem Hazem.[60]



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 14 attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on September 24.[61] *See the topline for further information.*

PIJ and the Popular Resistance Committees—a coalition of armed Palestinian militias—announced the death of their fighters in southern Lebanon on September 24.[62] PIJ announced the death of two fighters who were a part of its Syria-based Martyr Ali al Aswad Brigade.[63] CTP-ISW previously reported that Hezbollah has used Palestinian fighters, including some from PIJ, to attack Israel from Lebanon.[64] IDF strikes have killed multiple PIJ fighters in southern Lebanon throughout the war.[65] The Popular Resistance Committees similarly announced the death of a fighter who died in an Israeli airstrike.[66]

Iran and the Axis of Resistance

US Central Command (CENTCOM) intercepted a Houthi drone over the Red Sea on September 24.[67] CENTCOM determined that this drone presented an imminent threat to US and coalition forces as well as merchant vessels in the area.

Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Akbar Ahmadian met with Gazprom CEO Alexey Miller in Tehran on September 24.[68] Miller traveled to Tehran to discuss energy cooperation. Iranian Energy Minister Abbas Ali Abadi meanwhile went to Russia to meet with representatives of BRICS member states on September 25.[69] Ali Abadi emphasized Iranian readiness to cooperate with the BRICS members in the energy sector.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian continued to meet with foreign officials on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly on September 24 and 25.[70] Pezeshkian described the role that China could play as an international mediator in the Middle East during a meeting with Chinese Foreign Affairs Minister Wang Yi.[71] Pezeshkian also expressed his intent to expanding Chinese-Iranian relations. Pezeshkian also discussed deescalating regional tensions with French President Emmanuel Macron. Macron warned Pezeshkian against supporting the Russian invasion of Ukraine and pressed for the release of three French nationals imprisoned in Iran.[72]

Iranian foreign affairs ministry officials met with European officials on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York on September 25 to discuss nuclear issues.[73] Iranian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for Policy Majid Takht Ravanchi emphasized the importance of "dialogue and cooperation" to address "sanctions lifting and nuclear issues" during a meeting with French, German, and UK officials. International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Grossi

told Western media that Iran "expressed willingness to re-engage" on nuclear issues in a "meaningful way." [74] Iranian Vice President for Strategic Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif accompanied the Iranian delegation to New York but was notably absent from these meetings. [75] Zarif was a leading member of the Iranian nuclear negotiating team under former President Hassan Rouhani that helped conclude the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. [76]

Iranian Law Enforcement Command Border Guard Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Ali Goudarzi attended the 18th Border Conference in Qatar on September 23, meeting with Major General Nasser Jabor Al Naimi, head of Qatari Coasts and Borders Security. [77] Both commanders emphasized the importance of strengthening cooperation between Iranian and Qatari border guards in order to ensure maritime security. Both sides highlighted joint patrols, intelligence sharing, and the use of advanced technology, such as artificial intelligence, to combat smuggling and unauthorized crossings. Goudarzi discussed further cooperation through joint meetings, training, and combating drug trafficking. [78]

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