

# Iran Update



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**Information Cutoff 2:00pm, May 19, 2024**

*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.*

*CTP-ISW will publish abbreviated updates on May 18 and 19, 2024. Detailed coverage will resume on Monday, May 20, 2024.*

**A helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian crashed near Uzi, East Azerbaijan Province, Iran, on May 19.[1]** It remains unclear at the time of this writing whether Raisi and Abdollahian survived the crash. First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber would temporarily serve as president if Raisi died in the crash, according to the Iranian constitution.[2] Mokhber, Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, and Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei would then have 50 days to organize a presidential election.[3] Mokhber previously served as the head of the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order (EIKO)—a parastatal organization directly controlled by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei—between 2007 and 2021.[4] The US Treasury Department sanctioned Mokhber and the EIKO in January 2021.[5] Mokhber also previously served as the chairman of the US-sanctioned Sina Bank and

as the Mostazafan Foundation’s vice president for commerce and transportation.[6] The US Treasury Department sanctioned Sina Bank in October 2018 for financially supporting the Basij—a paramilitary organization responsible for civil defense and social control in Iran—and sanctioned the Mostazafan Foundation in November 2020.[7]

**Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei wields ultimate decision-making authority in Iran, but Raisi still holds significant power within the regime.** Raisi is the deputy chairman of the Assembly of Experts, a regime entity constitutionally responsible for monitoring the supreme leader and selecting his successor.[8] Iranians re-elected Raisi to serve as a representative of South Khorasan Province in the Assembly of Experts during the recent March 2024 Assembly of Experts elections.[9] Raisi also holds numerous ex officio positions. He is a member of the Expediency Discernment Council and the chairman of the Supreme National Security Council, Supreme Cultural Revolution Council, and Supreme Cyber Space Council.

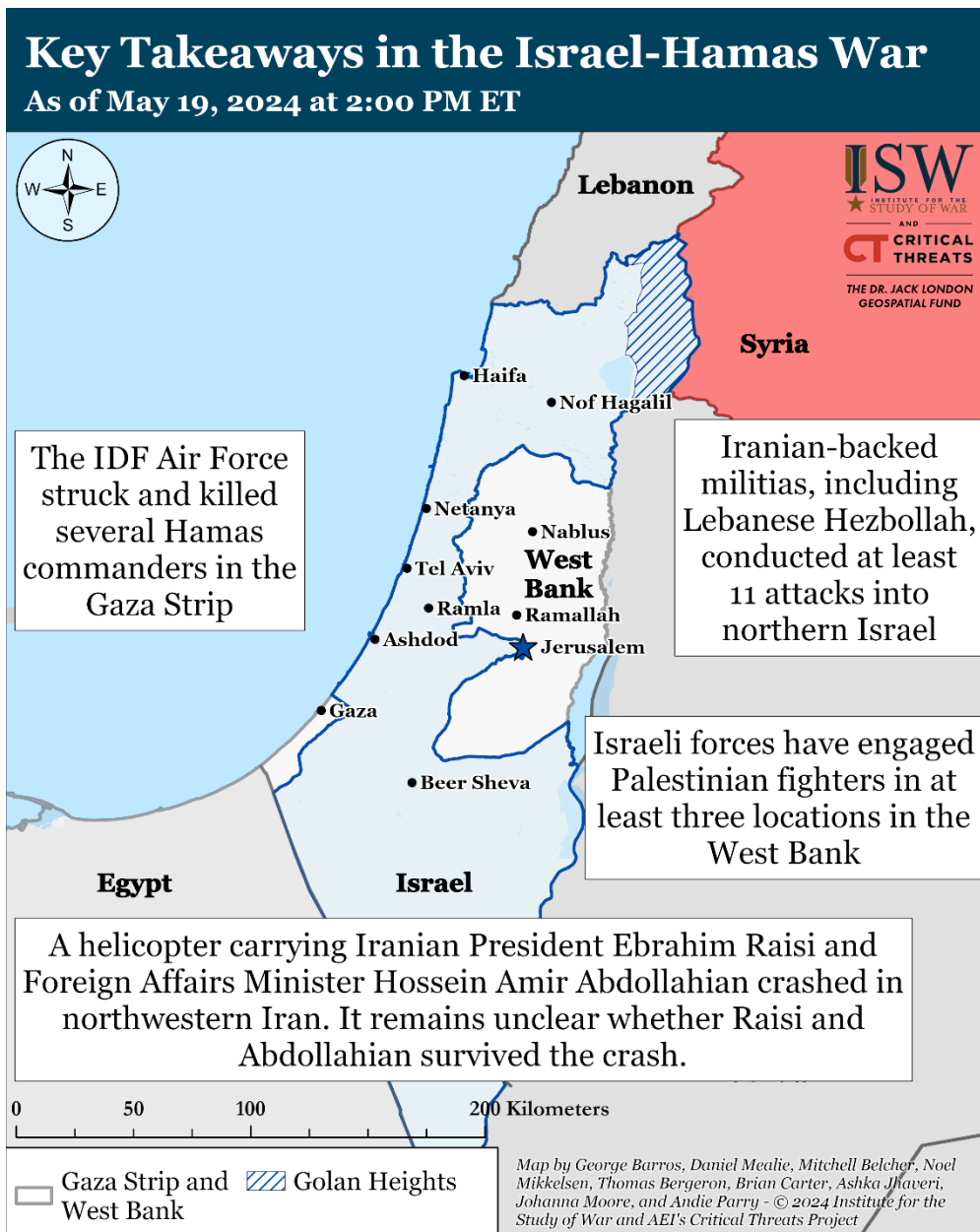
**Raisi’s death would have serious implications for supreme leader succession.** Raisi is considered one of the top contenders—along with Khamenei’s son, Mojtaba Khamenei—to succeed Khamenei as supreme leader. Khamenei appointed Raisi to the position of judiciary chief in 2019 and endorsed Raisi during the August 2021 presidential elections.[10] The next several days have the potential to reshape the immediate and long-term dynamics of the regime, including supreme leader succession. Raisi’s death would ultimately not change the regime’s current trajectory toward more hardline and conservative domestic policies and more aggressive regional policies, however.

**Israeli War Cabinet Minister Benny Gantz threatened to leave Israel’s coalition government if the three-member war cabinet does not approve a new strategy for the war in the Gaza Strip by June 8.**[11] Gantz appealed for a strategy that prioritizes the release of hostages over the destruction of Hamas and allows residents in northern Israel to return home by September 1.[12] Gantz also called for Israeli security control of the Gaza Strip alongside the formation of a US-European-Arab-Palestinian group to take charge of civilian administration in the Gaza Strip. This civil administration would exclude both Hamas and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.[13] Gantz also called for an Israel-Saudi Arabia normalization deal.[14] The normalization deal currently calls for Palestinian statehood.[15] Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office responded to Gantz’s ultimatum saying that Netanyahu is “determined to eliminate the Hamas battalions [and he] opposes the introduction of the Palestinian Authority into Gaza and the establishment of a Palestinian state.”[16] Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant—the third member of the war cabinet—also publicly called on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to define a political end state in the Gaza Strip on May 15.[17]

### Key Takeaways:

- **Iran:** A helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian crashed in East Azerbaijan Province, Iran.
- **Northern Gaza Strip:** Three IDF brigades continued operations in Jabalia.
- **Southern Gaza Strip:** The IDF deployed an additional reservist brigade to Rafah.

- **Gaza Strip Post War:** Israeli War Cabinet Minister Benny Gantz threatened to leave Israel’s coalition government if the three-member war cabinet does not approve a new strategy for the war in the Gaza Strip by June 8. Gantz appealed for a strategy that prioritizes the release of hostages over the destruction of Hamas and allows residents in northern Israel to return home by September 1.
- **West Bank:** Israel’s Central Command conducted a previously unannounced training exercise to prepare Israeli forces in the West Bank for “extreme scenarios.”
- **Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights:** Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanese Hezbollah, have conducted at least 11 attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on May 18.



## 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 Israel Defense Forces (IDF) 98th Division continued to conduct clearing operations in Jabalia on May 19.** Three IDF brigades are currently operating in Jabalia under the 98th Division.<sup>[18]</sup> The IDF 7th Brigade engaged Palestinian fighters and located explosives, rocket launchers, anti-tank missiles, grenades, and small arms.<sup>[19]</sup> Israeli forces also seized a lathe for producing rockets.<sup>[20]</sup> The IDF 636th Reconnaissance Unit directed dozens of airstrikes on Palestinian cells and additional targets to support ground operations in Jabalia.<sup>[21]</sup> Several Palestinian militias defended against Israeli advances into Jabalia using rocket-propelled grenades (RPG), anti-tank fire, improvised explosive devices, rockets, and mortars in at least 20 attacks.<sup>[22]</sup>

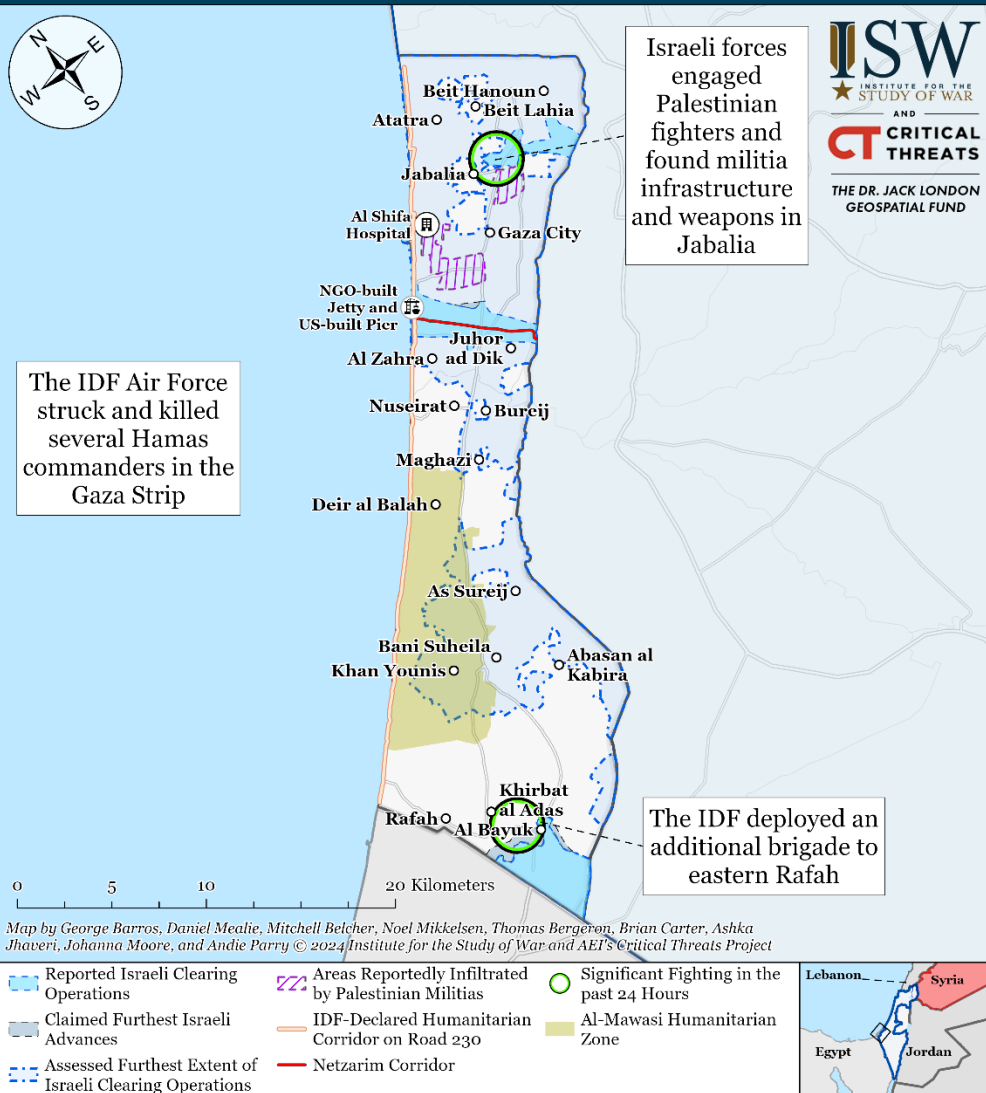
Two IDF brigades continued operations along the Netzarim corridor and near the US-built humanitarian aid pier.<sup>[23]</sup> Two Palestinian militias targeted Israeli forces with small arms and mortar fire along the corridor on May 19.<sup>[24]</sup> Palestinian fighters have reduced their rate of attack on the Netzarim corridor since early May, when the IDF began clearing operations in the southern and northern Gaza Strip.

**The IDF Air Force struck and killed several Hamas commanders in the Gaza Strip on May 19.** The IDF Air Force killed two tactical-level Hamas commanders in Rafah who were preparing to attack Israeli forces.<sup>[25]</sup> The IDF Air Force also killed senior Hamas logistics commander Azmi Abu Daqa in an unspecified area of the Gaza Strip. The IDF said that Daqa facilitated weapons and money transfers to the Gaza Strip.<sup>[26]</sup> An IDF drone strike also reportedly killed Palestinian police investigations chief Zahar al Kholi in the central Gaza Strip.<sup>[27]</sup>

**The IDF deployed an additional brigade to eastern Rafah.** An Israeli Army Radio correspondent reported that the IDF 12th Reservist Infantry Brigade entered Rafah.<sup>[28]</sup> The IDF said that it “deepened” operations in Rafah on May 18.<sup>[29]</sup> A Palestinian journalist reported on May 19 that Israeli armor advanced westward deeper into the Jninah, Salam, and Brazil neighborhoods of eastern Rafah.<sup>[30]</sup> Three Palestinian militias claimed attacks on Israeli forces advancing in the al Salam neighborhood.<sup>[31]</sup> Hamas fighters continued to mortar the Rafah crossing area, where Israeli forces have set up a military position.<sup>[32]</sup> An Israeli Army Radio correspondent reported that the IDF assesses that about 800,000 Palestinians have already evacuated eastern Rafah into Khan Younis, al Mawasi, Deir al Balah, and western Rafah.<sup>[33]</sup>

# Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of May 19, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Israeli forces engaged Palestinian fighters and found militia infrastructure and weapons in Jabalia



The IDF Air Force struck and killed several Hamas commanders in the Gaza Strip

The IDF deployed an additional brigade to eastern 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

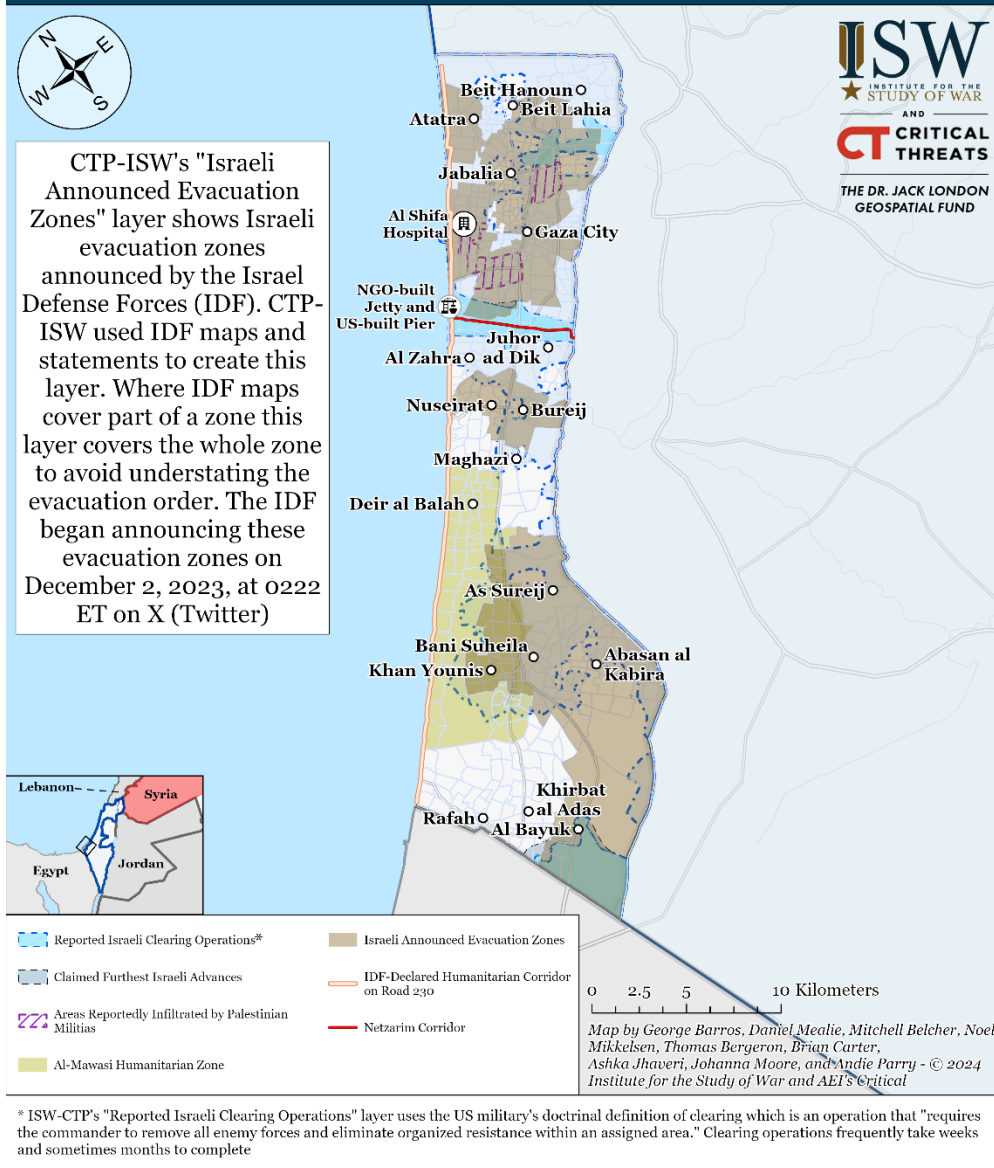
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations
- Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- Assessed Furthest Extent of Israeli Clearing Operations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

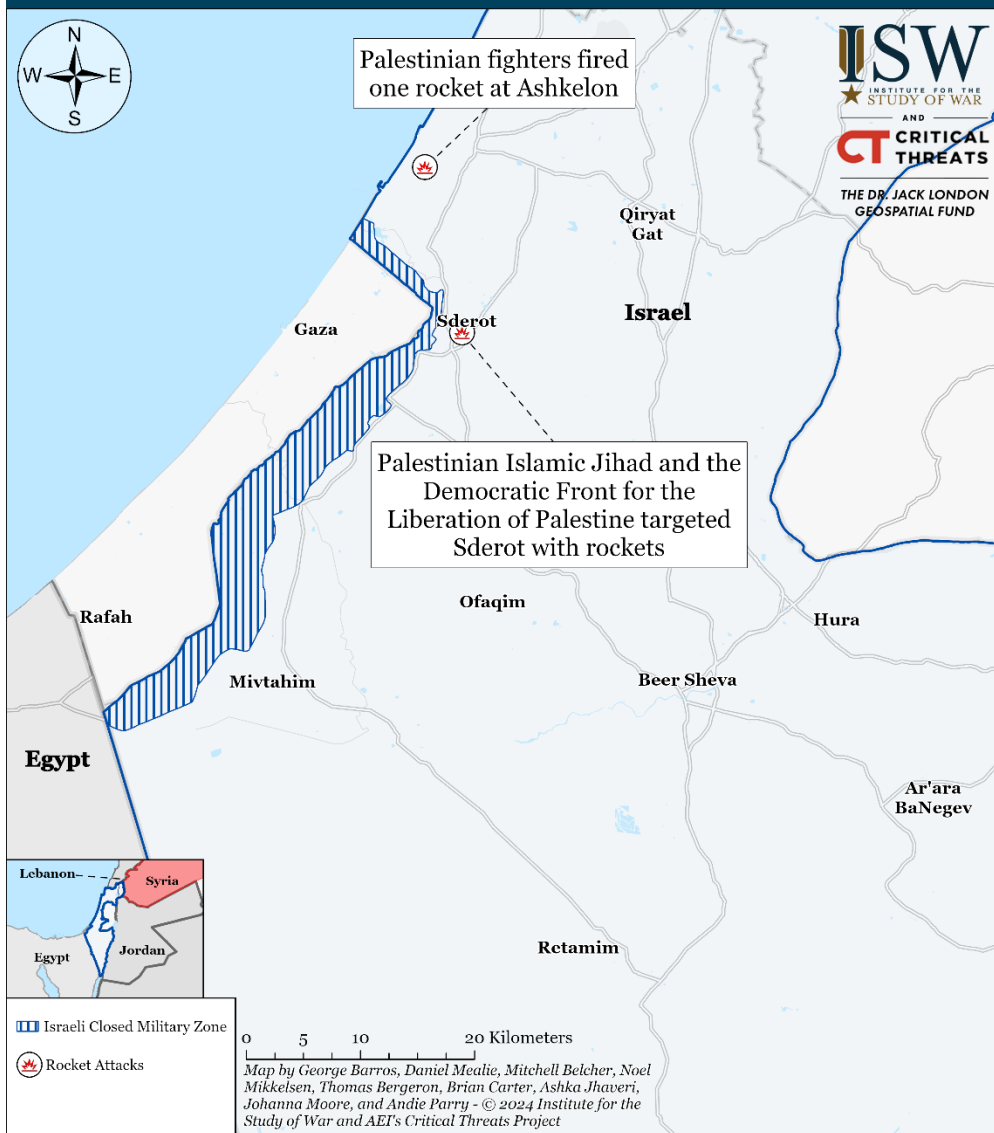
As of May 19, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



**Palestinian militias have conducted at least two indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel since CTP-ISW's data cut off on May 18.[34]** The IDF said one rocket fired from the central Gaza Strip landed in the Mediterranean Sea near Ashkelon on May 18.[35] PIJ and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which is a leftist Palestinian militia aligned with Hamas in the war, fired at least one rocket at Sderot in a combined attack on May 19.[36]

# Attacks into Israel from Gaza

As of May 19, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



*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

**Israeli forces have engaged Palestinian fighters in at least three locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's data cut off on May 18.[37]** The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades targeted Israeli forces with improvised explosive devices and small arms fire in Qalqilya and Nablus.[38]

**Israel's Central Command conducted a previously unannounced training exercise to prepare Israeli forces in the West Bank for "extreme scenarios." [39]** Israeli forces trained

alongside the Israeli Air Force and Special Units to simulate mobilization for offensive and defensive operations in “complex terrorist incidents” and other scenarios.[40]



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

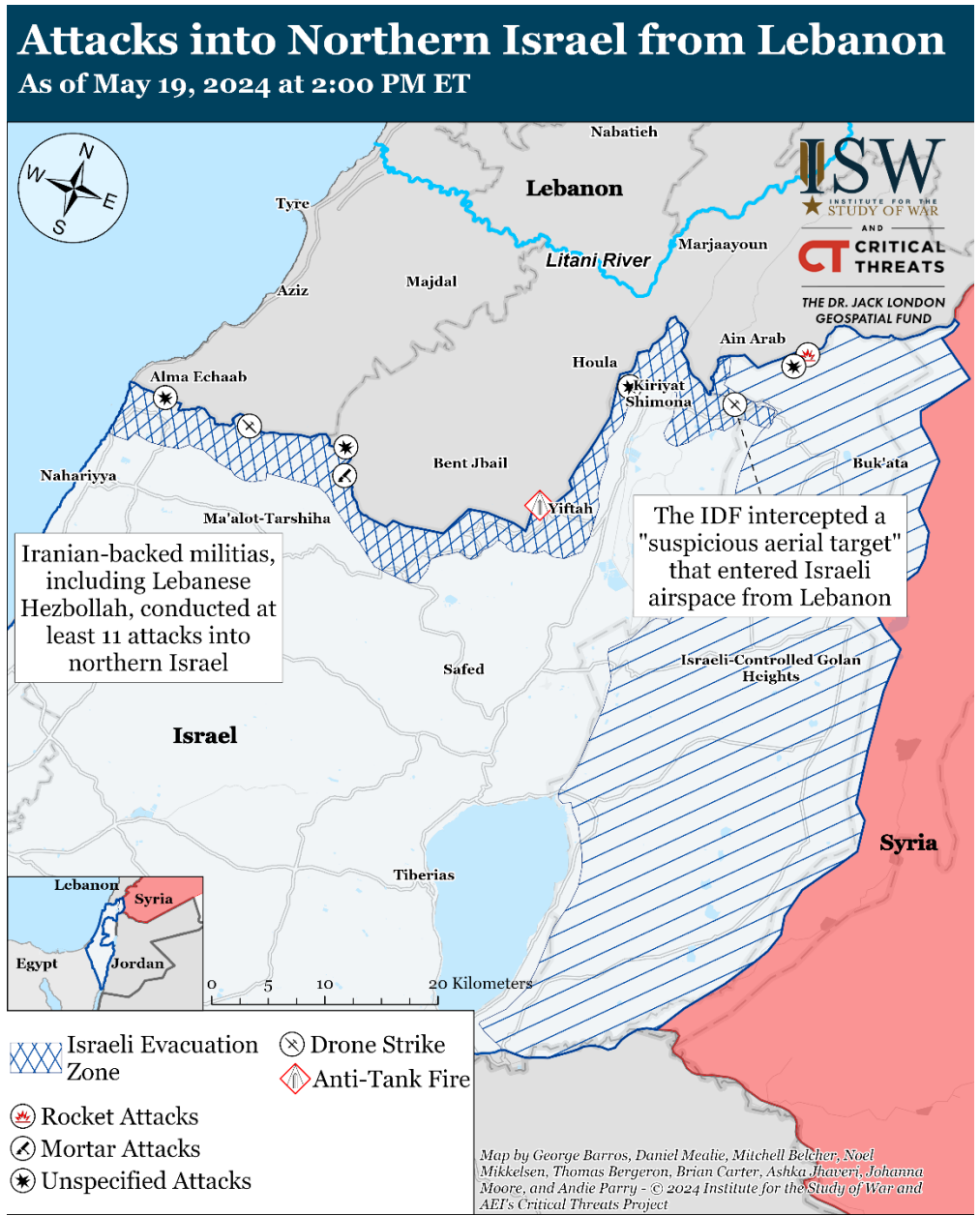
## **Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights**

### **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 11 attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on May 18.[41]** The IDF intercepted a "suspicious aerial target" that entered Israeli airspace from Lebanon.[42] The IDF Air Force bombed Hezbollah fighters operating near a military building in Maroun al Ras, southern Lebanon.[43]



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

## Iran and Axis of Resistance

**The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed a drone attack targeting Eilat, Israel, on May 18.[44]** Israeli officials and media have not commented on the claimed attack at the time of this writing.



[1] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1403/02/30/3088772>

[2] [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran\\_1989](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989)

[3] [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran\\_1989](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989)

[4] <https://www.president.ir/en/130489> ;

<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-march-22-2023>

[5] <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1234>

[6] <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm524> ;

<https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/mohammad-mokhber-first-vice-president-of-iran>

[7] <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1185> ;

<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm524>

[8] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-november-30-2023> ;

<https://parsi.euronews.com/2024/03/07/a-look-at-iran-assembly-of-experts-elections-who-will-be-the-leader>

[9] <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202403020274>

[10] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/irans-sole-moderate-presidential-candidate-congratulates-raisi-his-victory-state-2021-06-19/>

[11] <https://www.axios.com/2024/05/18/benny-gantz-israel-netanyahu-gaza-war>

[12] [https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/gantz-sets-out-the-6-strategic-goals-the-coalition-must-adopt-or-his-party-will-bolt/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/gantz-sets-out-the-6-strategic-goals-the-coalition-must-adopt-or-his-party-will-bolt/)

[13] [https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/gantz-sets-out-the-6-strategic-goals-the-coalition-must-adopt-or-his-party-will-bolt/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/gantz-sets-out-the-6-strategic-goals-the-coalition-must-adopt-or-his-party-will-bolt/)

[14] [https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/gantz-sets-out-the-6-strategic-goals-the-coalition-must-adopt-or-his-party-will-bolt/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/gantz-sets-out-the-6-strategic-goals-the-coalition-must-adopt-or-his-party-will-bolt/) ; <https://www.axios.com/2024/05/18/benny-gantz-israel-netanyahu-gaza-war>

[15] <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/17/us/politics/israel-saudi-arabia-gaza.html>

[16] <https://t.me/moriahdoron/10289>

[17] <https://www.timesofisrael.com/gallant-to-pm-reject-israeli-military-civil-rule-of-gaza-after-amas-i-wont-allow-it/>

[18] <https://t.me/moriahdoron/10288>

[19] [www dot idf.il/201866](http://www.idf.il/201866)

[20] [www dot idf.il/201866](http://www.idf.il/201866)

[21] [www dot idf.il/201866](http://www.idf.il/201866)

[22] <https://t.me/AymanGouda/6148> ; <https://t.me/AymanGouda/6150> ;  
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<https://t.me/sarayaps/17909> ; <https://t.me/darebmojahden/4758>

[23] <https://t.me/moriahdoron/10288>

[24] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/2211> ; [https://t.me/elaqsa\\_1965/6462](https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6462)

[25] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1792156387809657121>

[26] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1792156384793903363>

[27] <https://t.me/moriahdoron/10300>

[28] <https://t.me/moriahdoron/10288>

[29] <https://www.idf.il/201523>

[30] <https://twitter.com/ytirawi/status/1792183300435435539>

[31] [https://t.me/kataeb\\_moqawma/4252](https://t.me/kataeb_moqawma/4252) ; <https://t.me/sarayaps/17897> ;  
<https://t.me/sarayaps/17899> ; [https://t.me/elaqsa\\_1965/6463](https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6463)

[32] □HYPERLINK  
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[33] <https://t.me/moriahdoron/10301>

[34] <https://twitter.com/manniefabian/status/1791908676397060511> ; <https://t.me/sarayaps/17892> ;  
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[36] <https://t.me/sarayaps/17892> ; [https://t.me/kataeb\\_moqawma/4251](https://t.me/kataeb_moqawma/4251)

[37] <https://t.me/jeninqassamm/7224> ; [https://t.me/elaqsa\\_1965/6460](https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6460) ;  
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[38] [https://t.me/elaqsa\\_1965/6456](https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6456) ;

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[https://t.me/elaqsa\\_1965/6460](https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6460) ;

[39] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1792228456521941088>

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[41] <https://t.me/mmirleb/4016> ; [https://t.me/C\\_Military1/51080](https://t.me/C_Military1/51080) ; [https://t.me/C\\_Military1/51081](https://t.me/C_Military1/51081) ;  
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<https://t.me/mmirleb/4028> ; <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1792241777119723616>

[42] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1792241777119723616>

[43] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1792188282643849374>

[44] <https://t.me/ElamAlmoqawama/1133>