

Iran Update

April 5, 2024

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Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm ET

The Iran Update provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities abroad that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests. It also covers events and trends that affect the stability and decision-making of the Iranian regime. The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) provides these updates regularly based on regional events. Click here to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report. Click here to subscribe to the Iran Update.

CTP-ISW defines the “Axis of Resistance” as the unconventional alliance that Iran has cultivated in the Middle East since the Islamic Republic came to power in 1979. This transnational coalition is comprised of state, semi-state, and non-state actors that cooperate with one another 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.

Some clerics close to the Office of the Supreme Leader suggested that Tehran will calibrate its response to Israel killing senior IRGC commanders in Syria in order to avoid a direct war with Israel.[1] Several Friday prayer leaders endorsed “strategic patience”—a long-standing regime policy that involves not conducting a full response to Israeli attacks immediately—in their weekly sermon on April 5.[2] The Office of the Supreme Leader issues guidance to Friday prayer leaders for the content of their sermons, which suggests that their promotions of strategic patience are part of a broader messaging effort from Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.[3] Khamenei previously ordered his military commanders to exercise strategic patience following an Israeli airstrike that killed senior IRGC Quds Force officer Brig. Gen. Razi Mousavi in Syria in December 2023, according to the New York Times.[4] The public endorsements of a calibrated retaliation on April 5 are consistent with recent Western reporting.[5] Two unspecified Iranian officials told Reuters on April 4 that the immediate Iranian response would be “limited and aimed at deterrence.”[6] Such reports support CTP-ISW's

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assessment that Iran seeks to avoid a direct military confrontation against the United States and Israel.[7]

Tehran is also signaling that it wants to avoid involving the United States in its retaliation against Israel. An official in Raisi’s Presidential office claimed that Iran has warned the United States to “step aside, so you don’t get hit,” suggesting that Iran seeks to retaliate against Israeli targets.[8] Western media has similarly suggested that Iran will target Israel directly, moreover. An unnamed US, Israeli, and other unspecified Western officials told the Washington Post that they expected Iran to retaliate with drones or missile attacks on Israeli targets that would be “calibrated to avoid an even bigger response from Israel.”[9] CBS separately reported that US intelligence indicates that Iran’s response will include “a swarm of Shahed loitering drones and cruise missiles,” likely before the end of Ramadan on April 10.[10] Israel has reportedly evacuated several of its diplomatic facilities around the region in anticipation of a possible Iranian retaliation, although the Israeli Foreign Affairs Ministry has denied such reports.[11]

Kataib Seyyed al Shuhada (KSS) Secretary General Abu Alaa al Walai threatened on April 5 to increase attacks targeting Israel if the IDF conducts a clearing operation into Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.[12] Walai’s statement suggests that KSS may be at least one of the Iranian-backed Iraqi militias that has conducted attacks into Israel in recent weeks. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq has conducted regular attacks into Israel since pausing its near-daily attacks on US forces in February 2024. Walai also called for Arab and Islamic countries to sever all diplomatic ties with Israel and stop all normalization efforts.

Key Takeaways

- **Iran:** Iranian officials have signaled that they want to avoid involving the United States in their retaliation against Israel for killing senior IRGC commanders in Syria.
 - **Iraq:** An Iranian-backed Iraqi militia leader threatened to increase attacks into Israel if the IDF conducted a clearing operation into Rafah.
 - **Gaza Strip:** Israeli leaders approved a series of measures to increase the volume of humanitarian aid entering the Gaza Strip.
 - **West Bank:** Israeli forces engaged Palestinian fighters in at least four locations in the West Bank.
 - **Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights:** Lebanese Hezbollah conducted at least seven attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel.
 - **Yemen:** US CENTCOM conducted a preemptive strike targeting a Houthi-operated, anti-ship missile in Yemen.
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Israel-Hamas War as of April 5, 2024, 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

Israeli forces continued to conduct clearing operations around Khan Younis on April 5.^[13] The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) 7th Brigade (36th Division), which has been operating in eastern Khan Younis, directed artillery to destroy a house that Palestinian fighters had rigged to explode.^[14] The IDF Air Force similarly destroyed over 30 explosively rigged buildings across the Gaza Strip in support of Israeli infantry operations.^[15] These reports are consistent with the fact that Hamas and other Palestinian militias have claimed house-borne IED attacks throughout the war.^[16] The IDF Givati Brigade located grenades and IEDs while re-clearing al Amal neighborhood in western Khan Younis.^[17]

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) reported that it mortared Israeli forces in central Khan Younis.^[18] The group claimed that the attack supported the al Qassem Brigades, which is Hamas' military wing, in some unspecified fashion. PIJ has been aligned with Hamas throughout the war.

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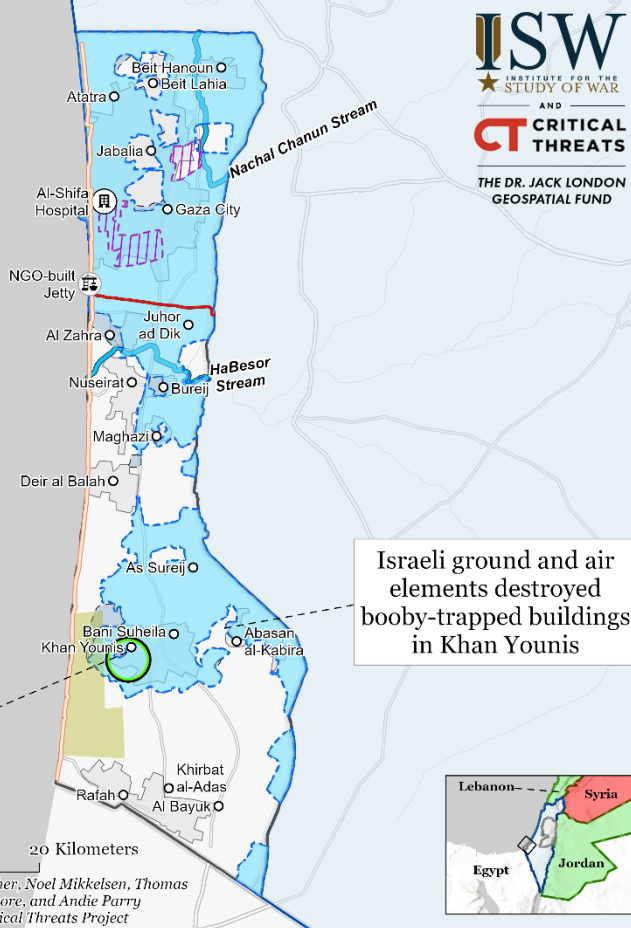
Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of April 5, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Israeli air and artillery elements struck rocket launchers in the northern Gaza Strip that Palestinian militias recently used for attacks into Israel

Israeli forces located grenades and IEDs while re-clearing al Amal neighborhood

Israeli ground and air elements destroyed booby-trapped buildings in Khan Younis



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Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry
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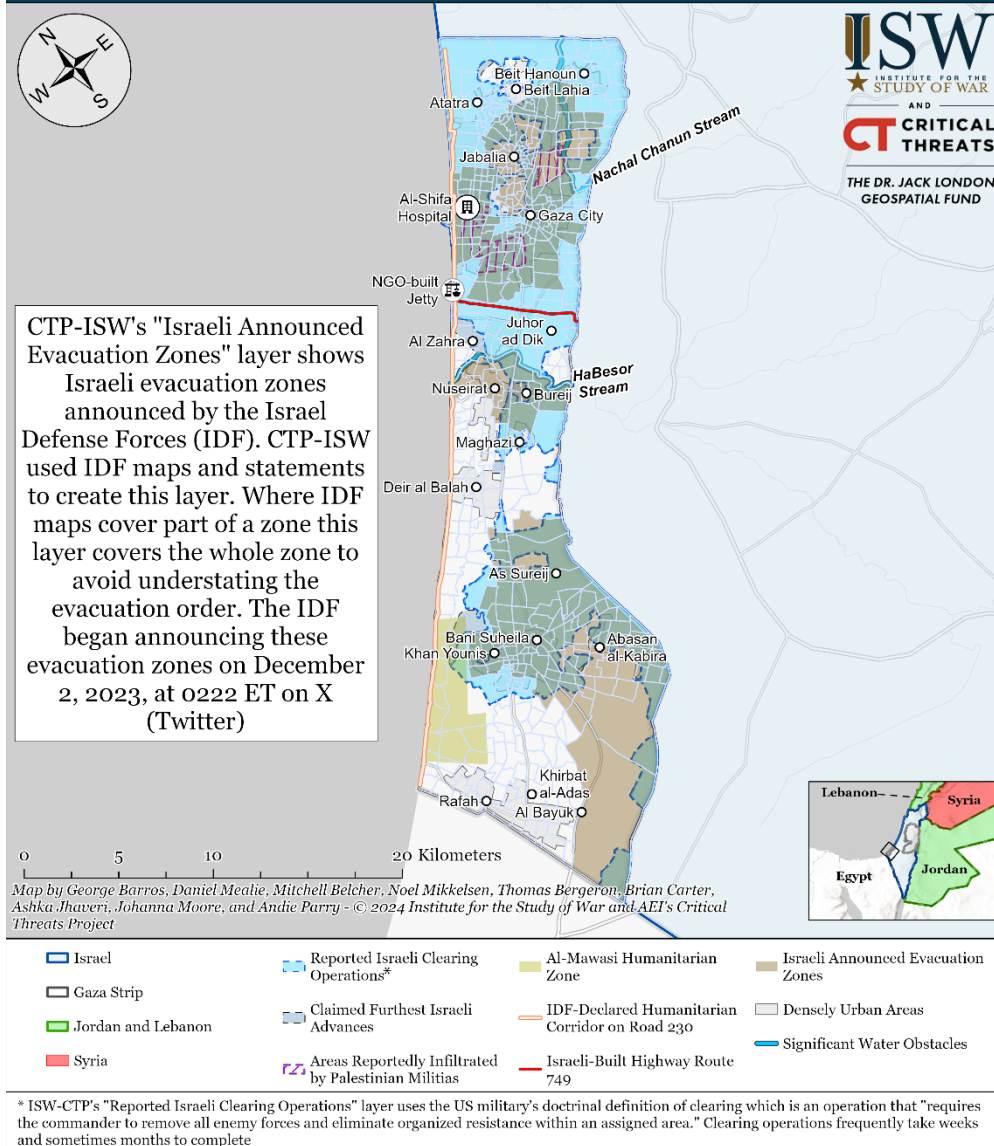
- Israel
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- Significant Water Obstacles
- Gaza Strip
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230
- Densely Urban Areas
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias
- Israeli-Built Highway Route 749
- Syria
- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours

* 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

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Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip as of April 5, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



Israel approved on April 5 a series of measures to increase the humanitarian aid entering the Gaza Strip. The Israeli War Cabinet approved the reopening of its Erez crossing with the northern Gaza Strip, which has been closed since the beginning of the war.[19] The Israeli War Cabinet separately approved the use of the Port of Ashdod in Israel to facilitate the movement of aid into the Gaza Strip. Israeli officials told CNN that the crossing and port would open on April 7.[20]

Israel released on April 5 its internal inquiry into the IDF strikes that killed seven World Central Kitchen aid workers in the central Gaza Strip.[21] The investigation found that the strike on three vehicles was conducted in "serious violation" of its rules and operating procedures. Israel

dismissed several officers who bore responsibility for the attack. The World Central Kitchen called on April 4 for the creation of an independent commission to investigate the killings of its staff.[22] US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated he is reviewing the report and that the United States will discuss its conclusions “in the days to come.”[23]

Axios reported on April 5, citing unspecified sources, that the US, Israeli, and Egyptian intelligence chiefs and Qatari prime minister will meet in Cairo in the coming days in an effort to secure the release of Hamas-held hostages in the Gaza Strip.[24] The meeting follows US President Joe Biden urging Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a phone call on April 4 “to empower his negotiators to conclude a deal without delay to bring the hostages home.” Israel and Hamas have been negotiating a proposal that includes a six-week ceasefire and the release of 40 hostages in return for approximately 700 Palestinian prisoners. A senior Hamas official said on April 4 that the latest round of negotiations in Cairo did not yield progress.[25] CNN reported on April 5, citing an unspecified diplomatic official, that Hamas believes “that Israeli proposal includes nothing new, so they see no need to change their proposal.”[26] The Israeli proposal did not accept Hamas’s demands for the unrestricted return of Gazans to the northern Gaza Strip and the withdrawal of Israeli forces.[27]

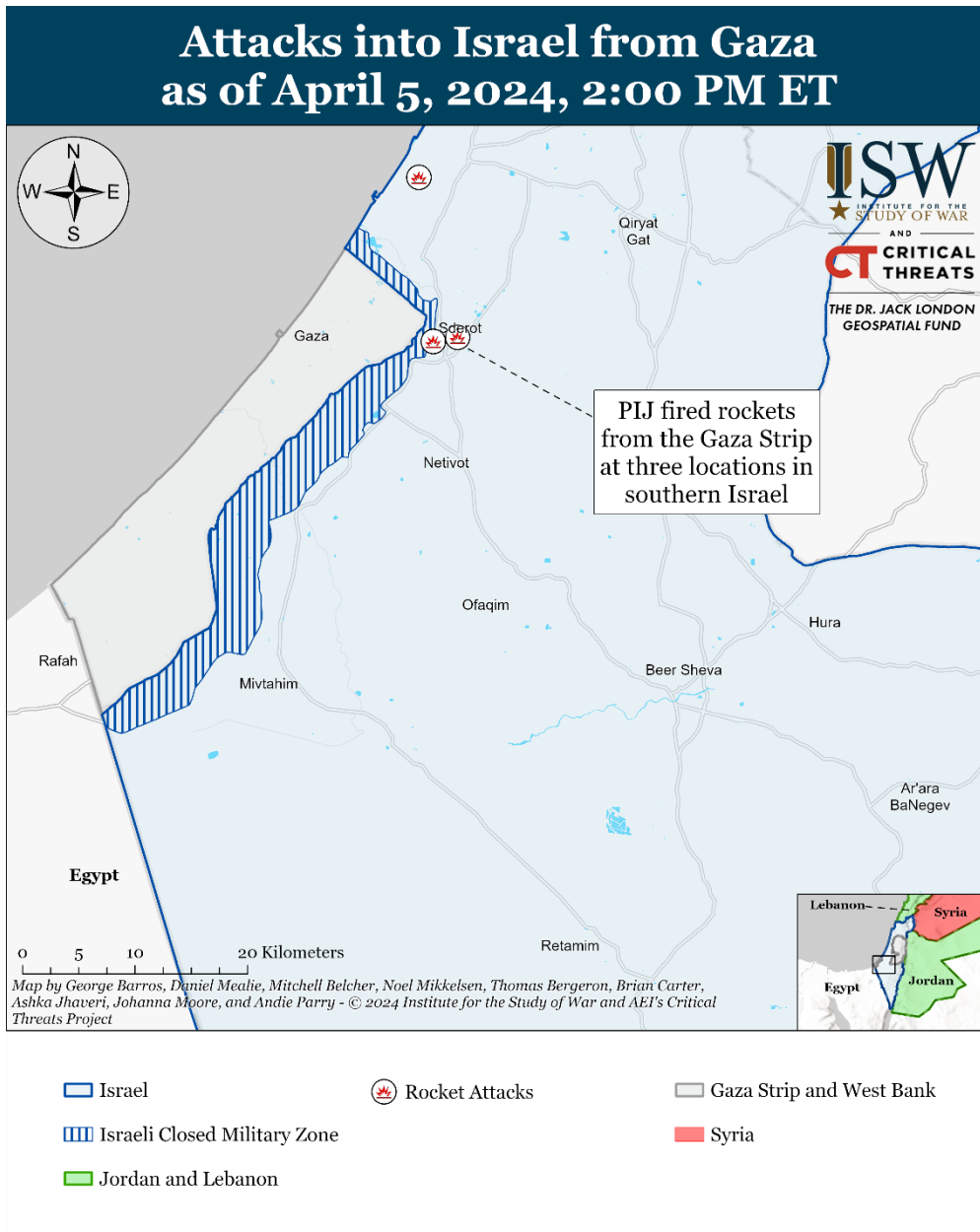
The Israeli Justice Ministry is investigating a cyberattack claimed by the group, “Anonymous for Justice,” that breached its servers.[28] The group claimed on April 4 that it had taken over 300 gigabytes of data and that it would continue attacking Israel until the war ends.[29]

Palestinian fighters have conducted at least three indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on April 4.[30] PIJ fired rockets targeting Ashkelon, Sderot, and Nir Aam in southern Israel on April 4, meaning that Palestinian militias conducted six total that day.[31]

The IDF reported on April 5 that its 215th Artillery Brigade attacked the launch sites from which Palestinian fighters launched rockets into southern Israel [32]. The IDF Air Force also struck targets in the area, including rocket launchers and a tunnel shaft. Palestinian militias have launched most of their indirect fire attacks into Israel from the northern and central Gaza Strip since January 2024. [33]

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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 four locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last data cut-off on April 4.[35] The IDF said that it conducted raids in

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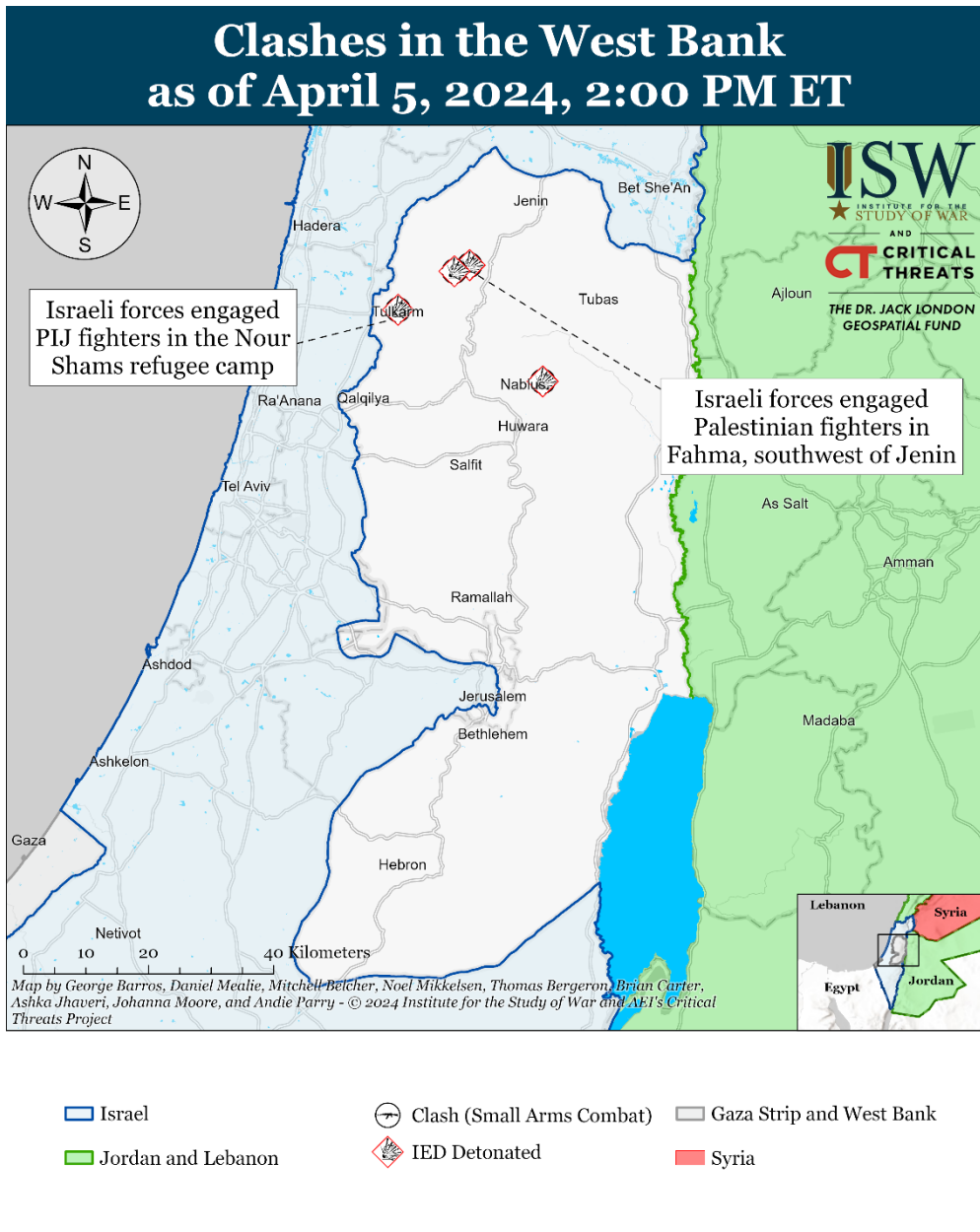
six locations and detained thirteen wanted Palestinians across the West Bank.[36] The IDF reported that Palestinian fighters threw an IED at Israeli forces in Tulkarm.[37] PIJ and the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades engaged Israeli forces in the Nour Shams refugee camp in Tulkarm.[38] Israeli forces also encountered armed Palestinian fighters in Fahma, southwest of Jenin, where the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades claimed an attack.[39] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades also claimed an attack in Kafr Rai, which neighbors Fahma.[40]

Unspecified actors shot from Jordan at an IDF vehicle near the Israel-Jordan border on April 5.[41] The IDF said that the suspects did not cross the border fence and that there were no Israeli casualties.

PIJ military spokesperson for the West Bank Abu Ahmed published a statement to celebrate Quds Day on April 5.[42] Ahmed said that PIJ fighters in the West Bank are “preparing” for an unspecified event and that Israeli forces are not expecting “what awaits” them.[43] Ahmed also affirmed PIJ’s support for the Axis of Resistance leadership in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen.[44]

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

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Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

Axis of Resistance objectives:

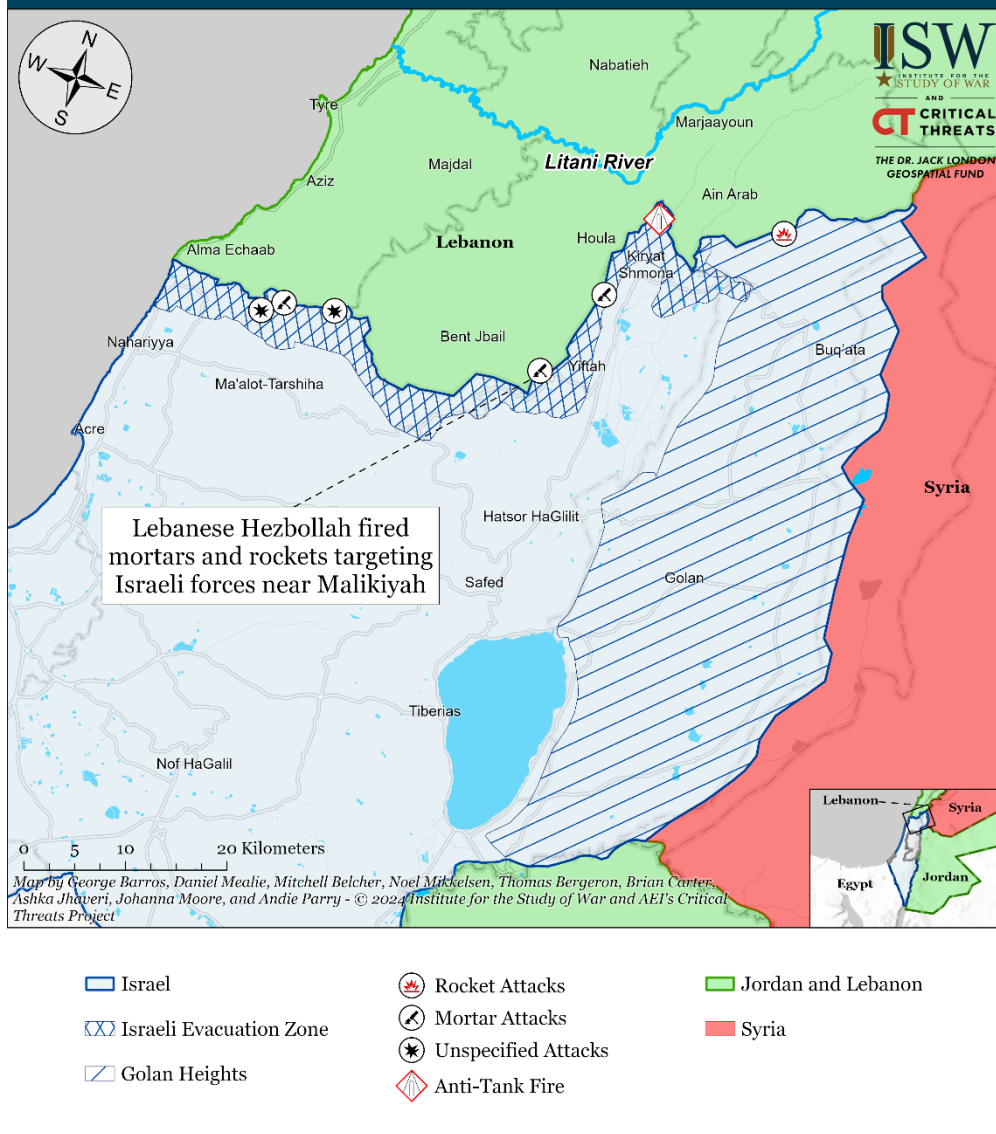
- Deter Israel from conducting a ground operation into Lebanon
- Prepare for an expanded and protracted conflict with Israel in the near term
- Expel the United States from Syria

Lebanese Hezbollah has conducted at least seven attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on April 4.[45]

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Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon as of April 5, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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

Iran and Axis of Resistance

US CENTCOM conducted a preemptive strike targeting an anti-ship missile in Houthi-controlled Yemen on April 4.[46] CENTCOM reported that the missile presented an imminent threat to US Navy, coalition, and merchant ships in the region.

Senior Iranian and Axis of Resistance leaders gave speeches for their annual, anti-Israel Quds Day celebration on April 5.[47] Quds Day is an Iranian-established celebration that occurs on the last Friday of Ramadan.[48] Senior Iranian military and political leaders repeated their standard anti-Israel rhetoric and boasted that Israel has failed to achieve its objectives in the Israel-Hamas war.[49] Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) Secretary General Ziad al Nakhalah and Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) Chief of Staff Abdul Aziz al Mohammadawi visited Tehran for the holiday commemorations.[50] Lebanese Hezbollah Secretary General separately gave a televised speech for the holiday and affirmed that Iran will retaliate against Israel for killing senior IRGC officers in Syria on April 1.[51]

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi will reportedly meet with Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif in Islamabad in the near future, likely to discuss the recent Jaish al Adl attack in Iran.[52] A Jaish al Adl—a Baloch, Salafi-jihadi militia—conducted unprecedentedly complex and sophisticated attacks targeting Iranian security forces in multiple locations in southeastern Iran on April 4.[53] At least 11 Iranian security personnel and 18 Jaish al Adl militants died during the attacks, which lasted over 13 hours.[54] CTP-ISW previously assessed that the attacks risked straining the Iranian relationship with Pakistan, which Iran has long accused of harboring Jaish al Adl militants.[55]

The Iranian rial depreciated to a record low of 640,000 to one US dollar on April 4.[56]

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