

Iran Update, April 22, 2024

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and Brian Carter

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 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.

Iranian-backed Iraqi militias may have resumed their attack campaign targeting US forces in Iraq and Syria. Unspecified Iranian-backed Iraqi militia fighters launched at least five rockets from Zummar, Ninewa Province, Iraq, targeting US forces at the Rumaylan Landing Zone in Hasakah Province, Syria, on April 21.[1] The Iraqi government confirmed that unspecified fighters fired rockets at an international coalition base in Syria.[2] The Iraqi government reported that Iraqi security forces burned a vehicle in western Ninewa Province that the fighters had used to launch rockets toward Syria.[3] An unspecified US official separately told Reuters on April 22 that unspecified Iranian-backed Iraqi militants launched at least two drones targeting US forces at Ain al Asad airbase in Anbar Province, Iraq, which is south of the Euphrates River.[4] Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah typically conducts attacks targeting US forces south of the Euphrates River, such as at Ain al Asad airbase in western Iraq and al Tanf Garrison in southeastern Syria.[5] Other militias, including Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba and Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada, typically conduct attacks targeting US forces north of the Euphrates River.[6] Syrian media reported that the US-led international coalition separately conducted an airstrike targeting a missile launch site in Zummar.[7]

Kataib Hezbollah-affiliated social media channels reportedly announced on April 21 that Kataib Hezbollah had resumed attacks targeting US forces in the region.[8] These channels said that Kataib Hezbollah chose to resume attacks due to Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani's lack of

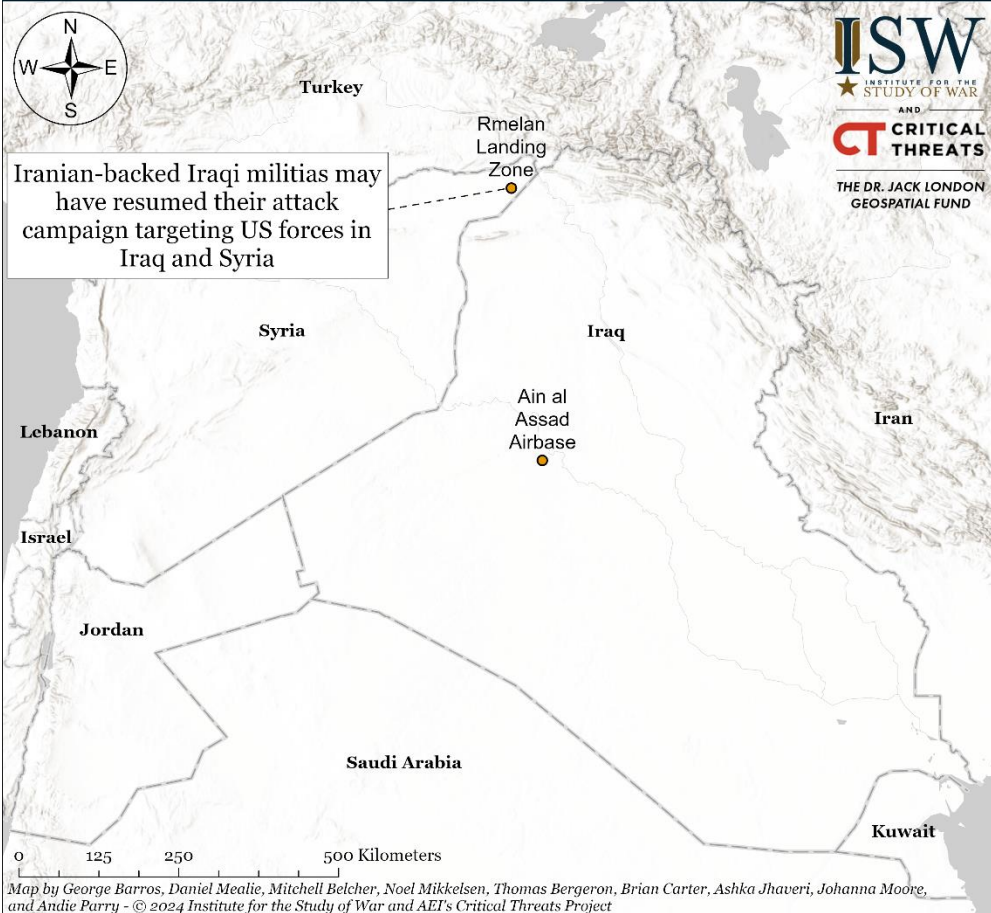
progress in negotiations to remove US forces from Iraq during Sudani's recent visit to the United States. Kataib Hezbollah denied on April 21 that it had released such an announcement. The two attacks in Syria and Iraq notably came one day after Sudani returned to Iraq from his visit to the United States.[9]

Kataib Hezbollah previously suspended its attacks targeting US forces in January 2024 following a one-way drone attack that killed three US personnel in northeastern Jordan.[10] US media reported in February 2024 that Kataib Hezbollah "fiercely resisted" IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani's orders to suspend its attacks.[11] CTP-ISW previously assessed on April 10 that some Iranian-backed Iraqi militias could decide to resume attacks targeting US forces if Sudani's visit to the United States failed to result in tangible steps toward removing US forces from Iraq.[12]

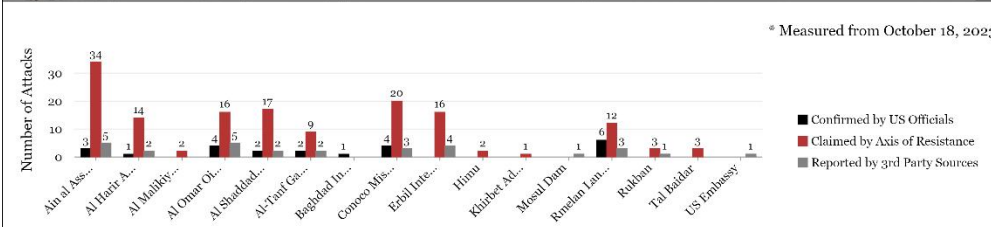
Asaib Ahl al Haq Secretary General Qais Khazali warned on April 10, for example, that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias would use force to expel US forces from Iraq "if diplomatic efforts fail." [13] Asaib Ahl al Haq has been less responsive to Iranian direction relative to other Iranian backed militias during this war.[14] Some Western analysts have assessed that Asaib Ahl al Haq attack cells operate both north and south of Euphrates River.[15]

Unspecified fighters also launched at least one drone targeting US forces at the al Tanf Garrison on April 1.[16] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias did not continue attacks between April 1 and April 21. CTP-ISW has not observed Iranian-backed Iraqi militias acknowledge the April 21 attacks, nor have these militias announced that they have resumed their campaign against US forces.

Attacks against US Bases in the Middle East as of April 22, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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



Note: The color of the dot indicates the total number of attacks against a specific target via an orange color scale. Locations with multiple attacks will receive a darker hue.

Hardline Iranian parliamentarian and member of Parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Javad Karimi Ghodousi tweeted on April 22 implying that if granted permission, Iran could test its first nuclear weapon within one week.[17] Parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Deputy Chairman Shahriar Heydari stated on April 22 in response to Karimi Ghodousi’s tweet that Iran has no “intention” to build or use nuclear weapons.[18] Heydari cited Khamenei’s 2003 fatwa as the reason Iran is not seeking to acquire or use nuclear weapons. Heydari stated that Karimi Ghodousi's tweet may have been taken out of context.

Some Iranian regime hardliners have similarly begun openly discussing Iran’s ability to procure a nuclear weapon. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Nuclear Security and Protection Corps Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Haghtalab announced on April 18 that Iran will change

its “nuclear doctrine and policies” if an Israeli strike targeted Iran’s nuclear facilities.[19] Haghtalab made these comments prior to the Israeli strike on April 19 that targeted a TOMB STONE radar at an Artesh base in Esfahan, 112 km south of Natanz Nuclear Complex. A former head of Iran’s nuclear agency, Ali Akbar Salehi, implied during a televised interview in February 2024 that Iran could develop a nuclear bomb.[20] Unspecified officials and experts told the Washington Post on April 10 that Iran is closer to nuclear weapons capability now than at any prior time in Iranian history.[21] CTP-ISW noted in December 2023 that Iran’s decision to increase its enrichment rate of 60 percent purity uranium was consistent with the long-standing CTP-ISW assessment that Iran has developed a nuclear program that it intends to use to produce a nuclear arsenal.[22]

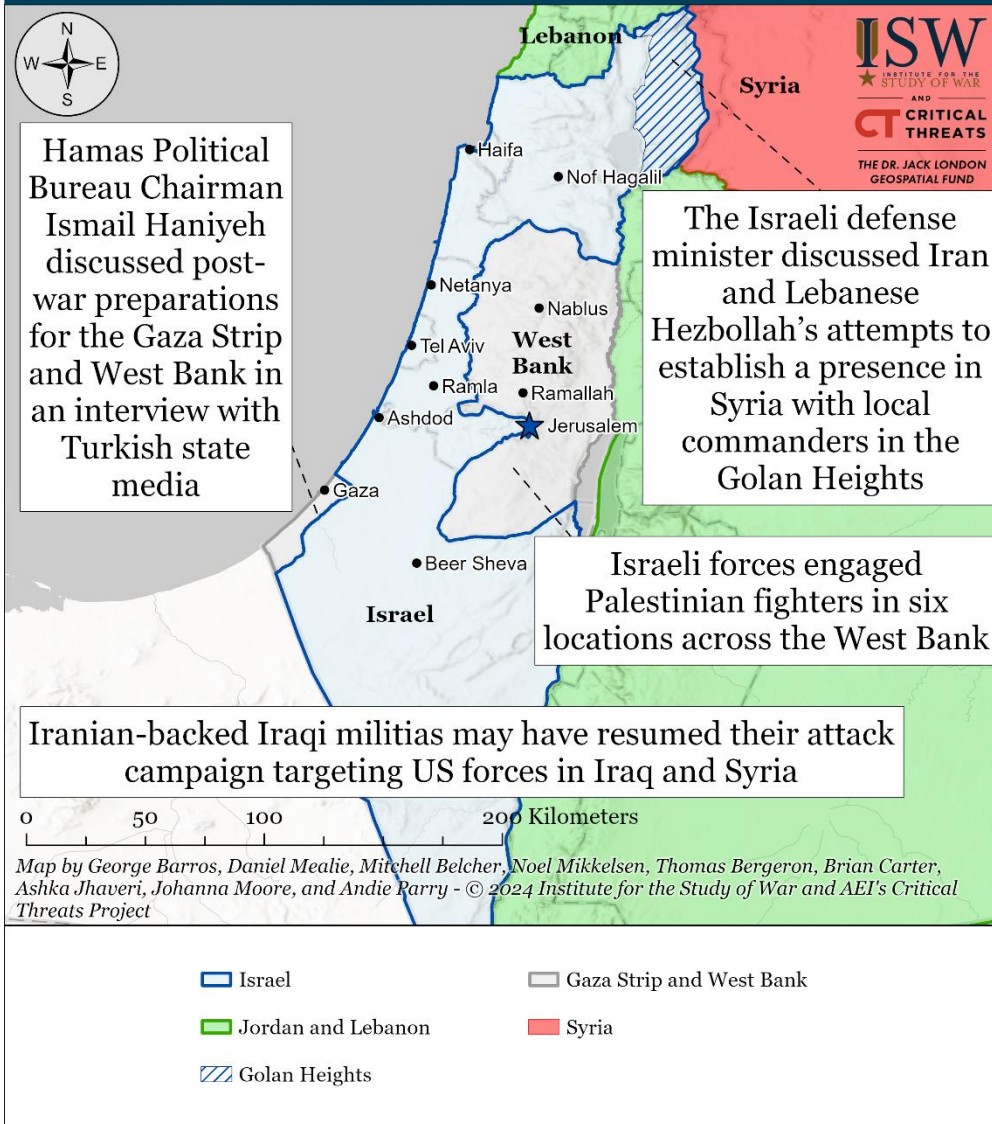
The Iranian hardliners' statements contradict Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei’s 2003 fatwa against the acquisition, development, and use of nuclear weapons.[23]

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei praised senior military commanders for their role in the April 13 drone and missile strike against Israel on April 21.[24] Khamenei made this statement during a meeting with senior commanders from the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Artesh, Armed Forces General Staff, and Law Enforcement Command (LEC). Khamenei stated that “the willpower of the Iranian nation and armed forces” matters more than how many munitions Iran launched or how many munitions hit their target. Khamenei’s statement suggests that the Iranian attack sought to inflict damage on the state of Israel, given that Khamenei is implying the number of munitions that did hit their target was lower than expected. CTP-ISW previously assessed that the Iranian April 13 missile-drone attack on Israel very likely intended to cause significant damage in Israel.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- **Iraq and Syria:** Iranian-backed Iraqi militias may have resumed their attack campaign targeting US forces in Iraq and Syria.
- **Iran:** Hardline Iranian parliamentarian and member of Parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Javad Karimi Ghodousi implied that if granted the permission, Iran could test its first nuclear weapon within one week.
- **Northern Gaza Strip:** Palestinian militias conducted several attacks targeting the IDF in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip.
- **West Bank:** Israeli forces engaged Palestinian fighters in six locations across the West Bank.
- **Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights:** Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights: Lebanese Hezbollah conducted at least seven attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel.

Israel-Hamas War as of April 22, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



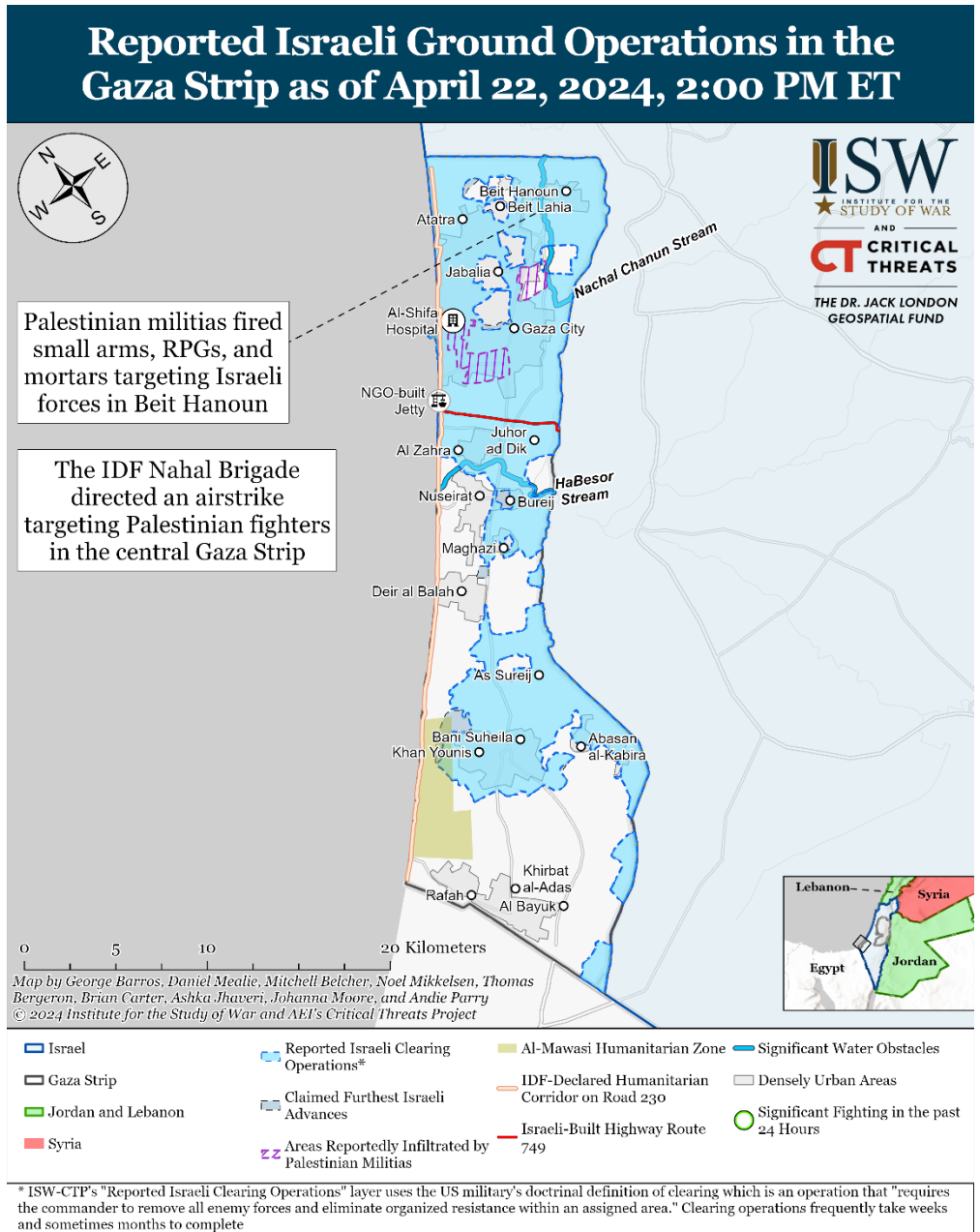
Gaza Strip

Axis of Resistance objectives:

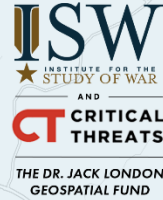
- Erode the will of the Israeli political establishment and public to sustain clearing operations in the Gaza Strip
- Reestablish Hamas as the governing authority in the Gaza Strip

Palestinian militias conducted several attacks targeting the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip on April 22. Hamas fighters fired sniper rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and mortars targeting Israeli forces near Beit Hanoun.[26] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, which is the self-proclaimed military wing of Fatah and aligned with Hamas in the current war, mortared Israeli forces east of Beit Hanoun.[27] The IDF has conducted multiple raids targeting Palestinian militias in Beit Hanoun in recent weeks.[28] These attacks and the IDF's raids indicate that Palestinian militia cells remain in Beit Hanoun, as CTP-ISW has previously assessed.

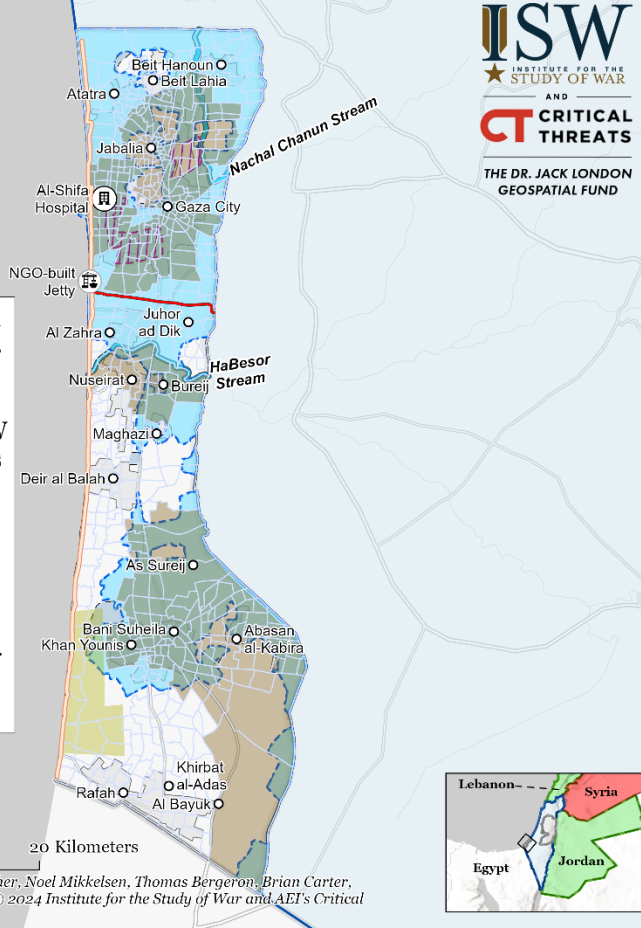
Israeli forces continued to conduct clearing operations in the central Gaza Strip on April 22. The IDF Nahal Brigade (162nd Division) directed an airstrike targeting Palestinian fighters in an unspecified area of the central Gaza Strip.[29] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades mortared Israeli forces east of Bureij in the central Gaza Strip on April 22.[30]



Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip as of April 22, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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)



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

- Israel
- Gaza Strip
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Areas Reportedly Infiltrated by Palestinian Militias
- Al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Road 230
- Israeli-Built Highway Route 749
- Israeli Announced Evacuation Zones
- Densely Urban Areas
- Significant Water Obstacles

* 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

Unspecified Arab officials told the *Wall Street Journal* on April 20 that Hamas is considering removing its political leadership from Qatar.[31] Hamas denied reports on April 20 that it was moving its leadership out of Qatar.[32] Hamas leaders have lived in Doha, the capital of Qatar, since 2012.[33] Qatar has served as a mediator for ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas during the current war. Unspecified Arab officials told the *Wall Street Journal* that Hamas has recently contacted at least two countries in the region, including Oman, to ask about the possibility of Hamas political leaders relocating to the two countries.[34]

The Israeli War Cabinet met on April 21 to discuss Israeli hostages in the Gaza Strip and ceasefire negotiations.[35] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that members of the negotiating team were conducting "false briefings" to the media and "seeding desperation among" hostage families, adding that these briefings harm the effort to return Israeli hostages.[36] Netanyahu also alleged during a recent security cabinet meeting that Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant was leaking information from sensitive meetings.[37]

A flotilla of ships is preparing to sail from Turkey to the Gaza Strip in an attempt to breach Israel’s naval blockade on the Gaza Strip, according to Freedom Flotilla Coalition organizers.[38] An organizer said that the flotilla would include a cargo ship carrying food, water, ambulances and medical supplies. The same organizer said that Turkish port authorities are still discussing the ships’ point of departure. The Freedom Flotilla Coalition has participated in similar missions for the Gaza Strip. Israeli naval forces raided a Turkish-dispatched coalition flotilla in 2010 in international waters in the Mediterranean Sea.[39] Israeli forces killed at least nine, mostly Turkish, pro-Palestinian activists during the raid and suffered seven Israeli soldiers wounded[40] Turkey responded to the incident by recalling its ambassador and cancelling military exercises with Israel.[41]

The World Health Organization (WHO) director general said on April 22 that WHO aid missions to hospitals in northern Gaza have been only “partly successful” due to delays at checkpoints and ongoing fighting in the Gaza Strip.[42] The director general said that humanitarian aid missions need “safe and sustained passage” into the Gaza Strip to deliver aid to people in critical condition. Palestinian militias have continued to mortar Israeli forces in the central Gaza Strip’s Netzarim Corridor. Netzarim Corridor is where Israeli forces have established forward operating bases and outposts to facilitate future raids into the northern Gaza Strip. The IDF also has checkpoints in the corridor to control the flow of aid to the north.[43]

West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

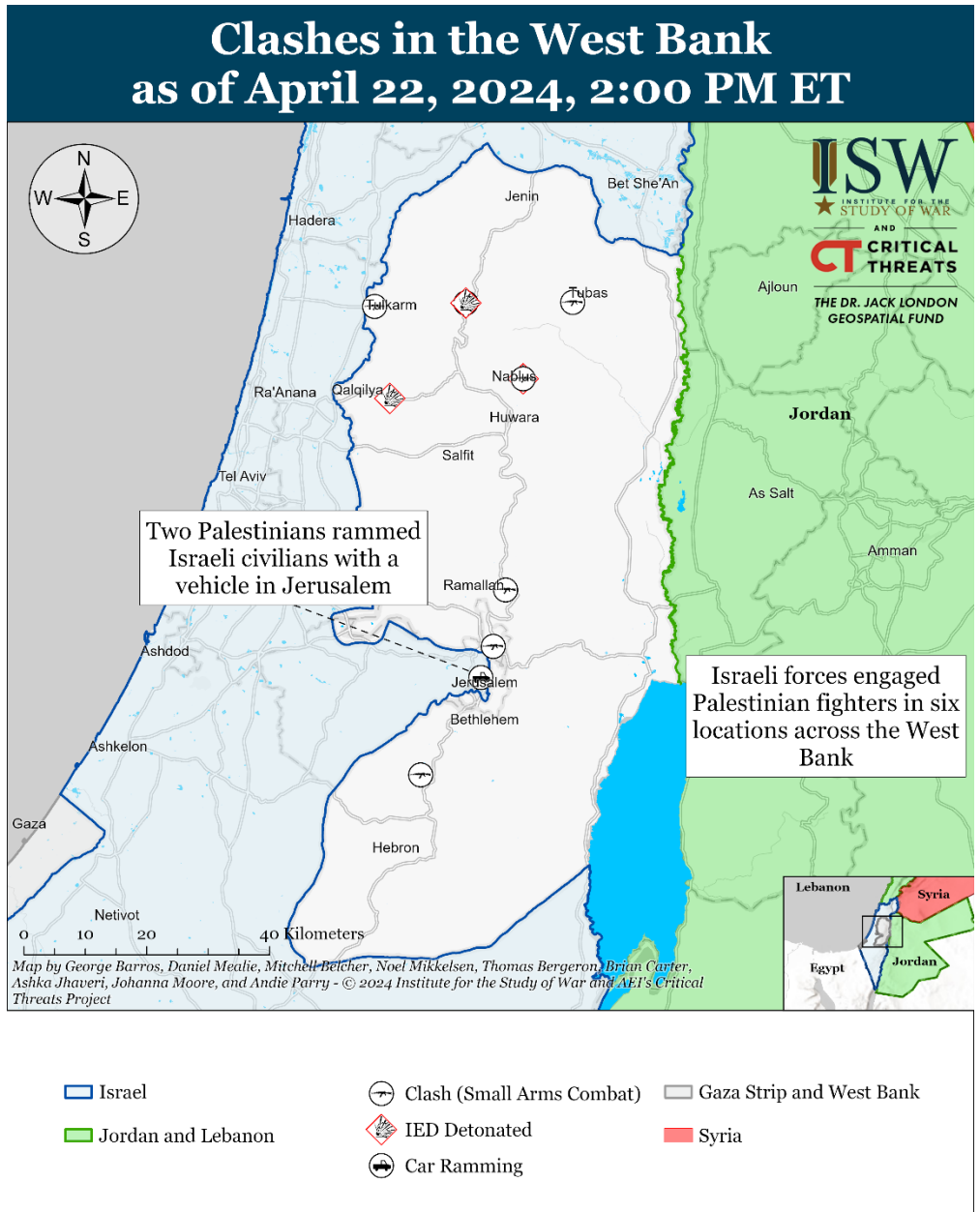
Israeli forces have engaged Palestinian fighters in six locations across the West Bank since CTP-ISW's last information cutoff on April 21.[44] The al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades fired small arms and detonated improvised explosive devices (IED) targeting Israeli forces in the Balata refugee camp and Silat al Dhahr refugee camp in the northern West Bank.[45] Unspecified Palestinian fighters clashed with Israeli forces during a raid near Tubas, Hebron, and Jerusalem.[46] Palestinian media reported that unspecified Palestinian fighters detonated an IED near an Israeli settlement east of Qalqilya.[47]

Israeli media reported that violence broke out between Palestinians and Israeli settlers in Burka, east of Ramallah on April 21. Israeli media said that Palestinian and Israeli civilians threw rocks at each other and set a car and building on fire.[48] Palestinian Authority-affiliated media cited local officials who said that Israeli settlers attacked the Palestinian village of Burka from the north and the west, setting fire to a sheep barn and attempting to ignite a house.[49] Israeli media reported that that there were six casualties and that Israeli forces arrived on the scene.[50]

Two Palestinians rammed Israeli civilians with a car in Jerusalem. The suspects attempted to fire a rudimentary submachine gun at the civilians before fleeing the scene.[51] The Israeli police detained the two Palestinians, who the Israeli Police said were originally from Hebron.[52] Israeli media reported that the two have familial relations with known members of Hamas’ military wing in the West Bank.[53] Palestinian Authority-affiliated media reported that the IDF closed checkpoints northeast of Jerusalem following the attack.[54]

Israeli officials criticized US plans to block military aid to an IDF unit due to alleged human rights abuses in the West Bank. Three US sources with knowledge of the issue told Axios that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is expected to announce that the United States will ban US

military assistance or training providing for the Netzah Yehuda Battalion, which is an ultra-orthodox IDF unit that operate mostly in the West Bank.[55] Blinken is ordering an end to these provisions under the 1997 Leahy Law, which makes it illegal for the US government to fund assistance for units of foreign security forces in which there is credible information implicating a unit in the gross human rights violation.[56] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the decision targeting an IDF unit “the height of absurdity and a moral low” and said that he will act against the US plans.[57] Israeli War Cabinet member Benny Gantz told US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a phone call that the decision would be a “mistake” and “harm Israel’s international legitimacy.”[58]



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

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

Axis of Resistance objectives:

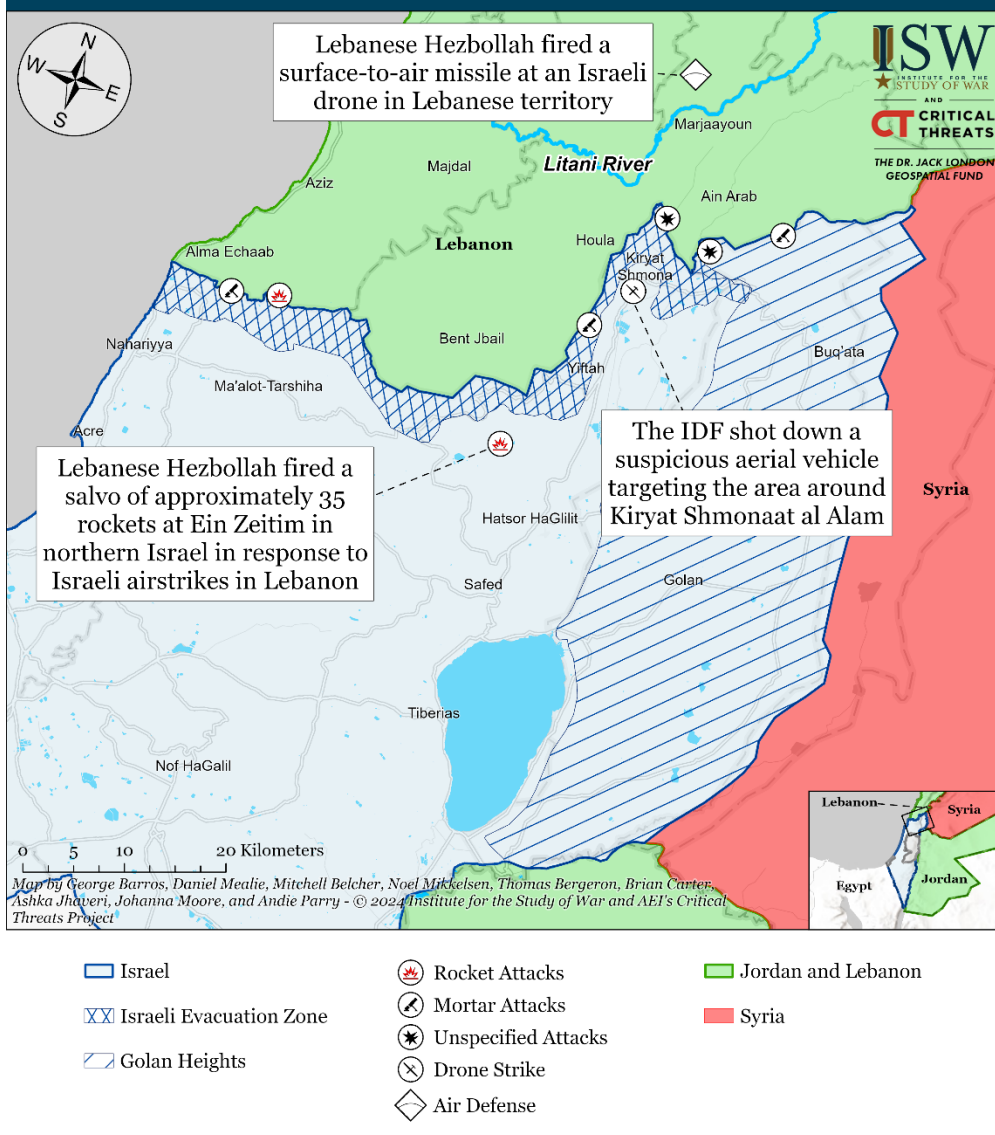
- Deter Israel from conducting a ground operation into Lebanon

- 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 seven attacks from southern Lebanon into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on April 21.[59] Hezbollah fired a salvo of approximately 35 rockets at Ein Zeitim in northern Israel in response to recent Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon.[60] The IDF shot down a "suspicious aerial vehicle" near Kiryat Shmona.[61]

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant discussed Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah's attempts to establish a presence in Syria with local IDF commanders during a visit in the Golan Heights on April 21 .[62] Gallant stated that the IDF is "actively preventing" Hezbollah and Iranian-backed militias from establishing positions along the Golan Heights-Syria border.[63] The IDF Air Force and ground forces have repeatedly targeted Iranian-backed militia positions near the Golan Heights-Syria border.[64] The IDF said on April 9 that it will not allow Hezbollah to establish a presence in southern Syria and will hold the Syrian Arab Army responsible for Hezbollah activity in Syria.[65] The IDF said on April 7 that Iranian-backed fighters have fired at least 35 rockets into the Golan Heights from southern Syria since the start of the Israel-Hamas war.[66]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon as of April 22, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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

Iran and Axis of Resistance

Iranian media claimed on April 21 that the IRGC attacked a “secret American base” in Israel’s Negev Desert during Iran’s April 13 missile and drone attack on Israel.[67] IRGC-affiliated media claimed that the US base, named “Position 512,” maintains radar facilities that monitor missile attacks on Israel.[68]

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi emphasized the importance of friendly relations during his first trip to Pakistan on April 22 since Iran and Pakistan exchanged cross-border strikes against each other in January 2024.[69] Raisi emphasized the strong relations and “deep religious and historical bonds“ between Iran and Pakistan during separate meetings with the Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on April 22.[70] Iran and Pakistan signed eight memoranda of understanding (MOU) aimed at increasing cooperation in areas such as security, free trade, judicial proceedings, and the media.[71] Iranian

Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian separately called Raisi's visit a "turning point" in Iran-Pakistan relations during a phone call with his Pakistani counterpart on April 22.[72]

The Iranian regime emphasized the need to strengthen Iran's defense capabilities following Israel's April 18 airstrike that damaged Iranian military infrastructure. The Israeli airstrike damaged an S-300 air defense system's TOMB STONE radar at the Eighth Shekari Artesh Air Force base northeast of Esfahan City, Esfahan Province.[73] Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Mohammad Bagheri chaired a meeting with the Passive Defense Organization on April 20 to discuss "maintaining and improving preparations" to confront unspecified threats.[74] The Passive Defense Organization is an Iranian regime institution responsible for defending Iran's civilian, military, cyber, and nuclear infrastructure from attacks.[75] The Iranian Parliament separately approved parts of a plan to strengthen and develop the Defense Innovation and Research Organization's "scientific research and defense innovations." [76] The Defense Innovation and Research Organization operates under the Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry. The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control sanctioned the Defense Innovation and Research Organization in August 2014 for "for engaging in or attempting to engage in activities that have materially contributed to...the proliferation of WMD." [77]

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