

Iran Update



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May 18, 2024, 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 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.

Key Takeaways:

- **Northern Gaza Strip:** The IDF 98th Division continued to conduct clearing operations in Jabalia.
- **Southern Gaza Strip:** Israeli forces expanded clearing operations in eastern Rafah.
- **Political Negotiations:** US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said that the United States believes Hamas withdrew from the latest ceasefire negotiations in the hopes of increasing pressure on Israel to end the war.
- **West Bank:** The IDF Air Force killed a PIJ Jenin Battalion Commander in an airstrike on a PIJ “operations room” in the Jenin refugee camp.

- **Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights:** Lebanese Hezbollah conducted at least 14 attacks into northern Israel.
- **Yemen:** US CENTCOM reported that the Houthis struck the Wind, a Panamanian-flagged, Greek-owned oil tanker, with one anti-ship ballistic missile in the Red Sea.
- **Iraq:** The Iraqi Council of Representatives failed to elect a new speaker.



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 18. Israeli forces engaged Palestinian fighters and located tunnel shafts, explosives, and rocket launchers.[1] The IDF 460th Brigade located and destroyed a lathe for producing weapons, including long-range rockets, grenades, and bombs.[2] Several Palestinian militias defended against Israeli advances into Jabalia with rocket-propelled grenades (RPG), anti-tank fire, improvised explosive devices, and mortars.[3] Hamas claimed to fire a SAM-7 missile targeting an Israeli helicopter over the Jabalia refugee camp.[4]

The IDF issued evacuation orders for the Atatra and Karama areas in the northern Gaza Strip on May 18.[5] The IDF previously issued evacuation orders around Jabalia on May 11 ahead of a clearing operation there.[6] The IDF has since then expanded the orders twice, which now extend to the Gazan coast.[7]

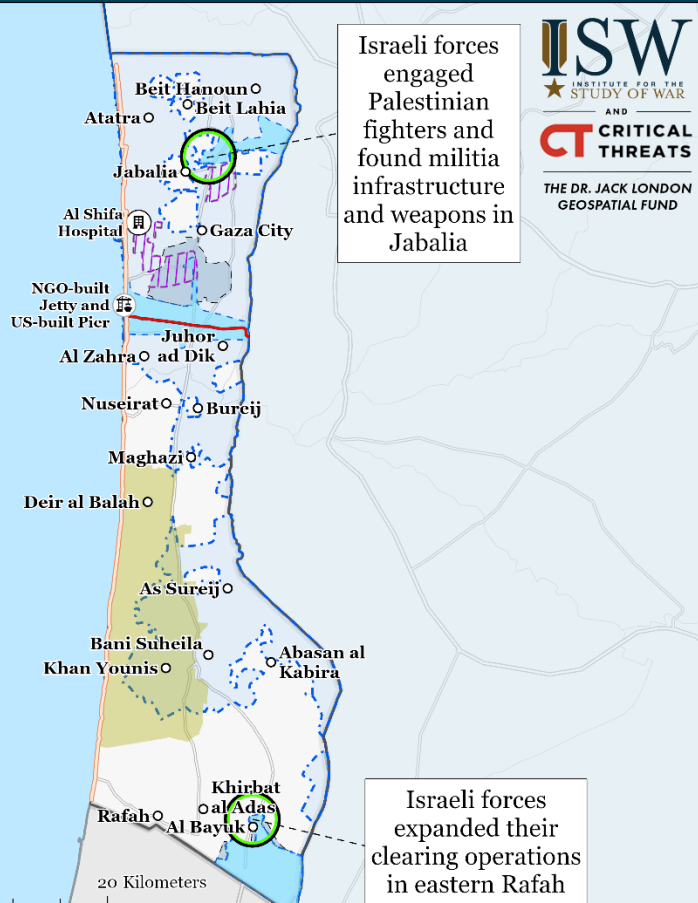
Israeli forces engaged Palestinian fighters and directed airstrikes in the central Gaza Strip on May 18.[8] The IDF Unit 414 killed several Palestinian fighters, who had fired RPGs at Israeli forces.[9] The IDF did not specify where in the central Gaza Strip it is operating.

Israeli forces expanded clearing operations in eastern Rafah on May 18. The IDF 401st Brigade is “deepening the raid” in eastern Rafah, according to the IDF.[10] Israeli forces destroyed militia infrastructure and killed about 50 Palestinian fighters in the area. Israeli forces also destroyed a weapons production site. An IDF lieutenant colonel said that the IDF has begun attacking Hamas’ Rafah Brigade.[11] Several Palestinian militias claimed attacks targeting Israeli forces in the al Tanour neighborhood, indicating that Israeli forces have advanced to the area.[12] A Palestinian journalist reported that Israeli forces advanced and engaged Palestinian fighters in the Jninah and Brazil neighborhoods in eastern Rafah.[13] Israeli forces have so far killed over 80 Palestinian fighters since advancing into eastern Rafah on May 7.[14] Palestinian militias fired mortars and rockets at the Rafah crossing area, where Israeli forces have set up a military position.[15]

The IDF Air Force killed a Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fighter, who oversaw logistics for PIJ’s Rafah Brigade.[16] The fighter was responsible for preparing fighters for Israeli operations in Rafah.

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of May 18, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



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



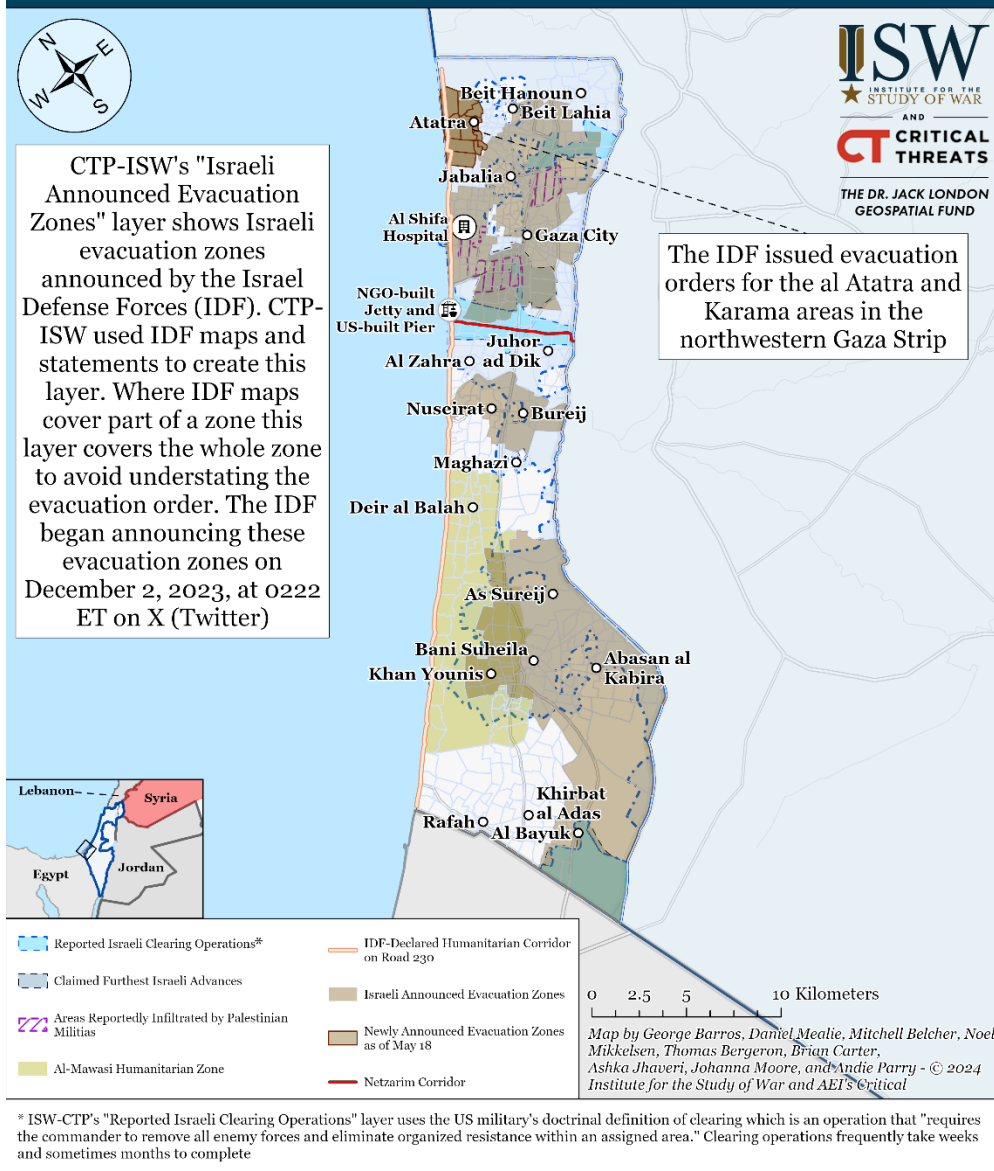
Israeli forces expanded their clearing operations in eastern Rafah

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 18, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Israeli forces recovered the body of a hostage in the Gaza Strip.[17] The IDF spokesperson made the announcement on May 18.[18] Hamas fighters killed the hostage during the October 7 attack and took the body into the Gaza Strip.[19] Israeli forces recovered the body along with the bodies of three other hostages on May 17.[20] Israeli forces located the bodies using information from detained Palestinian fighters.[21] 128 hostages remain in the Gaza Strip, of whom 39 Israel has declared dead.[22]

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said that the United States believes Hamas withdrew from the latest ceasefire negotiations in the hopes of increasing pressure on Israel to end the war, according to two sources speaking to Axios.[23] Sullivan said that Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip Yahya Sinwar does not want a deal during a meeting with foreign

ambassadors. The latest round of talks concluded in Cairo on May 8 with both Israel and Hamas messaging that negotiations had stalled.[24] Hamas claimed that it left the talks because of Israel's military operation in the Rafah crossing.[25]

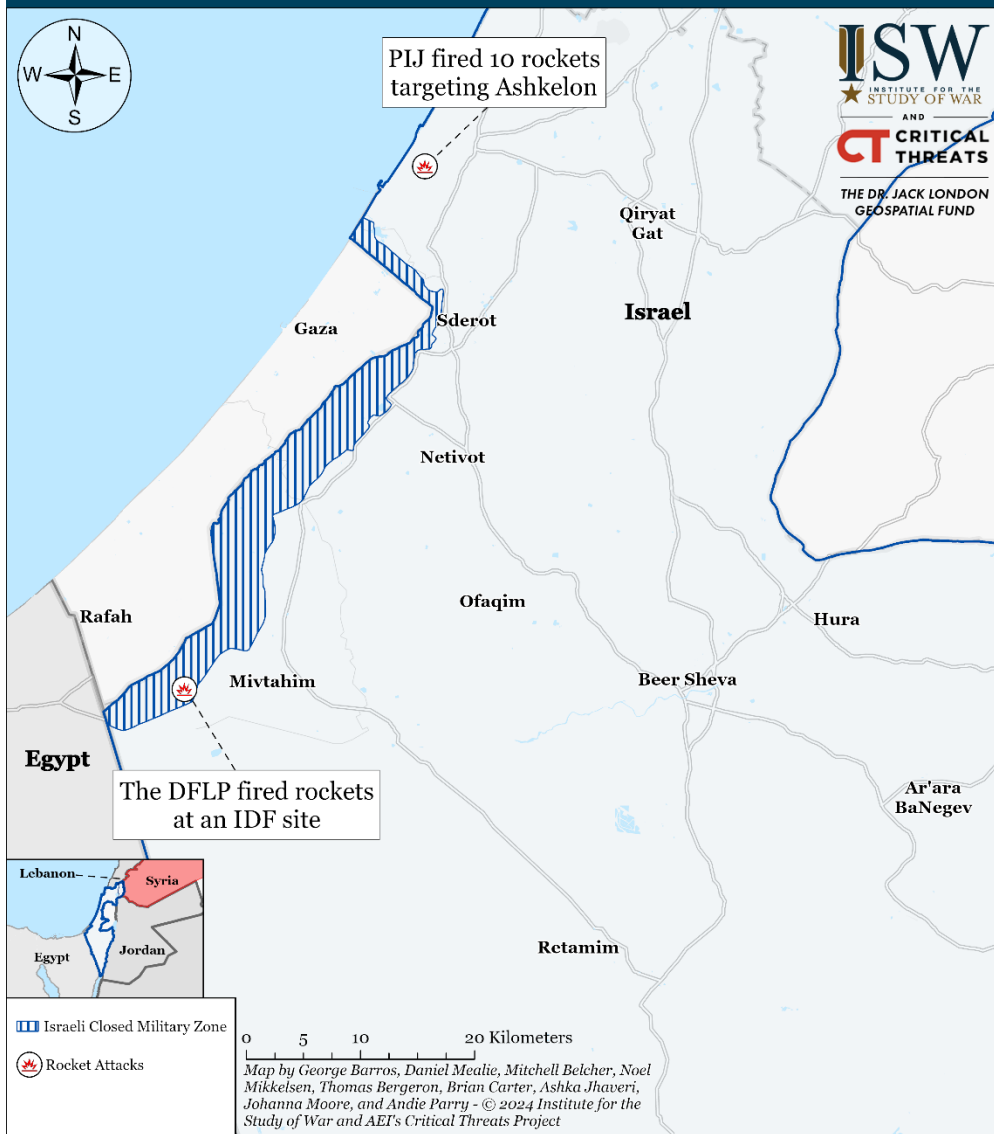
Palestinian militias condemned the US-constructed pier, which is facilitating humanitarian aid shipments into the Gaza Strip. Hamas said that the pier is not an alternative to opening all land crossings under Palestinian supervision.[26] The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine warned against using the pier for actions unrelated to transporting aid.[27] The Palestinian Mujahideen Movement said that it views the pier with “suspicion and concern” due to US financial and military support for Israel.[28] The group also called for Palestinian supervision of all ports and border crossings into the Gaza Strip.

Aid trucks began transporting supplies from the US-constructed offshore pier into the Gaza Strip on May 17.[29] The United Kingdom supplied the aid and has been coordinating logistics in Cyprus, where the aid is inspected.[30] The World Food Programme will deliver the aid to other agencies or distribute it directly.[31]

Palestinian militias conducted at least two indirect fire attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel on May 18.[32] PIJ fired 10 rockets targeting Ashkelon, five of which Israeli forces intercepted.[33] The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) fired rockets at an IDF site east of Rafah.[34]

Attacks into Israel from Gaza

As of May 18, 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 four locations in the West Bank since CTP-ISW's data cut off on May 17.[35] Palestinian fighters targeted Israeli forces with improvised explosive devices in three towns near Nablus.[36]

The IDF Air Force killed PIJ Jenin Battalion Commander Islam Khamaysa in an airstrike on a PIJ “operations room” in Jenin refugee camp on May 17.^[37] The IDF said that Khamaysa was responsible for several attacks that killed one Israeli and injured others in the West Bank in 2023.^[38] Local Palestinian media said that the airstrike killed an additional PIJ fighter.^[39] Hamas, PIJ, and the al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades mourned Khamaysa.^[40] PIJ fighters from Jenin, Tulkarm, Tubas, and Nablus participated in Khamaysa’s funeral in Jenin.^[41]



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

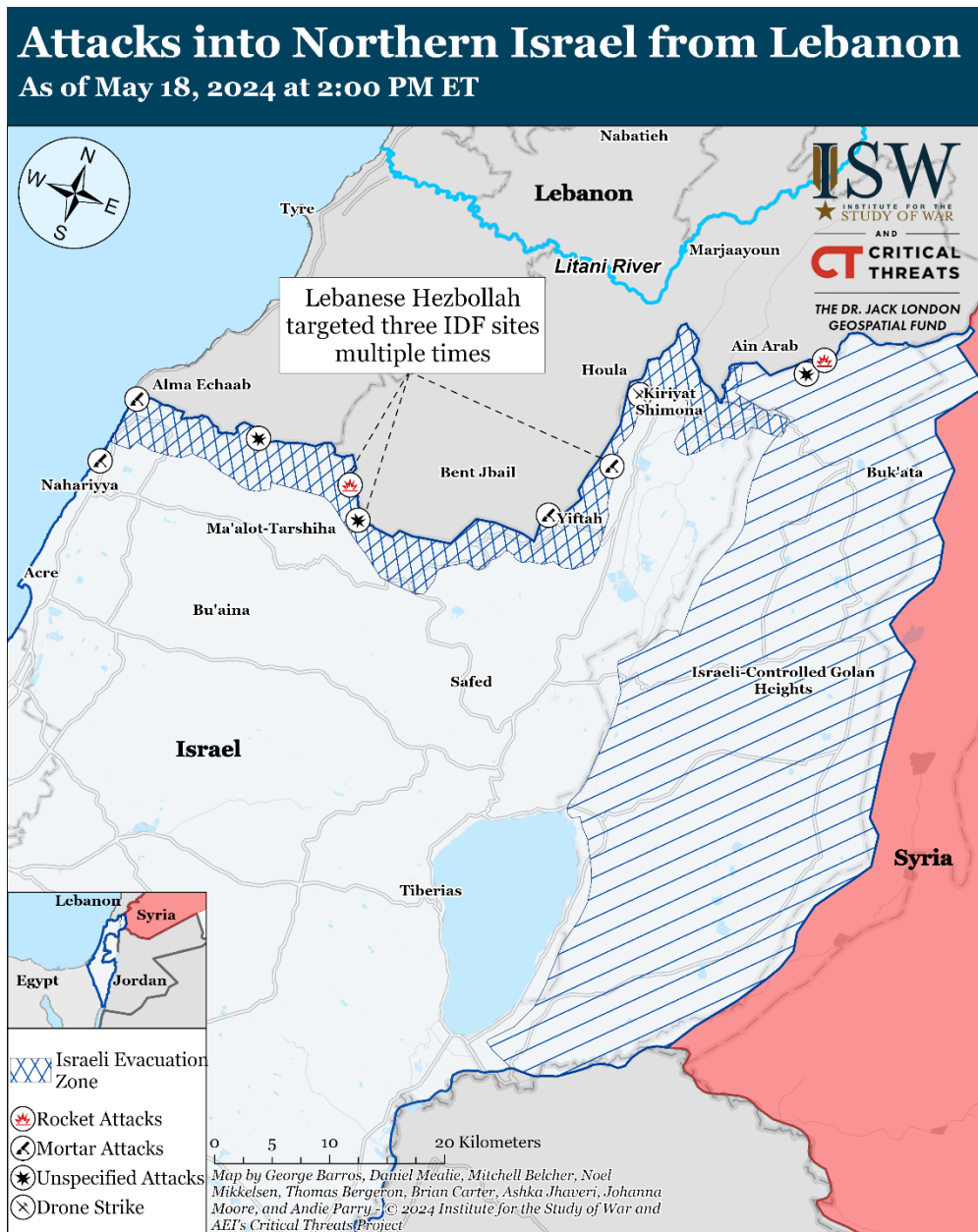
Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

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

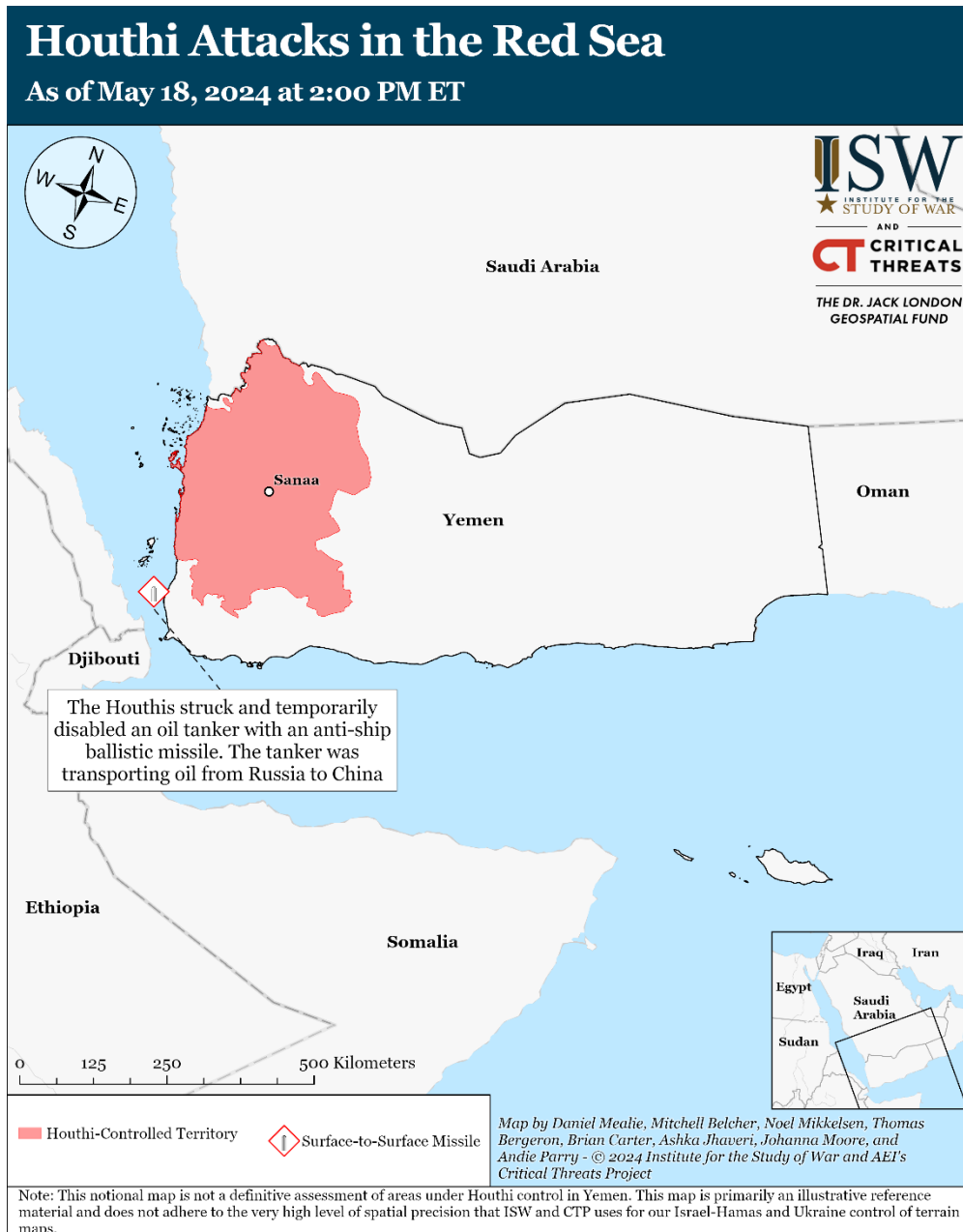
Lebanese Hezbollah has conducted at least 14 attacks into northern Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on May 17.[42]



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

Iran and the Axis of Resistance

CENTCOM reported that the Houthis struck the *Wind*, a Panamanian-flagged, Greek-owned oil tanker, with one anti-ship ballistic missile in the Red Sea on May 18.^[43] The anti-ship ballistic missile impact flooded the tanker, which caused the crew to briefly lose propulsion and steering. CENTCOM added that the tanker “was most recently docked in Russia and was bound for China.” A British maritime security company said that the missile strike also caused a fire on the oil tanker, which was 10 nautical miles off the coast of Mokha.^[44] The Houthis have not claimed the attack on the *Wind* at the time of this writing.



The Iraqi Council of Representatives failed to elect a new speaker on May 18. The Shia Coordination Framework-backed candidate Mahmoud al Mashhadani came in second place with 137 votes.^[45] The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Iranian-aligned Shia political

parties. The opposing candidate Salem al Issawi received 158 votes.[46] No candidate secured the 165 votes required to become parliament speaker. The Iraqi parliament has been without an elected speaker since November 2023, when the Iraqi Federal Supreme Court dismissed former speaker Mohammad al Halbousi.[47]

POWERED BY:



BABEL STREET

[1] <https://www.idf dot il/201461>

[2] <https://www.idf dot il/201494>

[3] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/2202>; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/2201>; https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6449; <https://t.me/mojahdeenpal/4524>; <https://t.me/mojahdeenpal/4526>; <https://t.me/sarayaps/17877>

[4] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/2198> ; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/2205>

[5] <https://x.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1791870827484328420>

[6] <https://x.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1789171670105636971>

[7] <https://x.com/manniefabian/status/1791871771429216624>; <https://x.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1790711897941049590/photo/1>;

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[8] <https://www.idf dot il/201461>

[9] <https://www.idf dot il/201461>

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

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

[12] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/2195>; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/2196>; <https://t.me/sarayaps/17879>; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/2203>; https://t.me/elaqsa_1965/6454

[13] <https://x.com/ytirawi/status/1791866838504157473>

[14] <https://www.idf dot il/201498>

[15] https://t.me/kataeb_moqawma/4249; <https://x.com/ytirawi/status/1789620688350785979> ;

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[16] <https://www.idf dot il/201461>

[17] <https://x.com/IDFSpokesperson/status/1791877006767837355>

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[19] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1791877090708508683>

[20] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1791877093522813368>;

<https://x.com/idfonline/status/1791493419816108352%C2%A0>

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[22] <https://x.com/GLZRadio/status/1791876974761111617>

[23] <https://www.axios.com/2024/05/17/sullivan-hostage-talks-israel-hakas-ambassadors>

[24] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-may-8-2024>

[25] <https://www.axios.com/2024/05/17/sullivan-hostage-talks-israel-hakas-ambassadors>

[26] <https://t.me/hamaswestbank/51649>

[27] <https://t.me/pflpgaza1/14189>

[28] https://t.me/khalaya_almujahidin/14660

[29] <https://x.com/CENTCOM/status/1791351088597086672>; <https://x.com/CENTCOM/status/1791504142986342607>

- [30] https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-05-17-24/h_046eadd1a979678eac741a2dd4a2d8c7 ;
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- [33] <https://t.me/sarayaps/17881>; <https://x.com/GLZRadio/status/1791825710023127072>
- [34] https://t.me/kataeb_moqawma/4249
- [35] <https://t.me/QudsN/407281> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/407259> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/407232> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/407208> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/407206>
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- [37] <https://t.me/jeninqassamm/7166> ; <https://t.me/jeninqassamm/7171> ; <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1791565138652188967>
- [38] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1791565138652188967> ; <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1791584917219856475>
- [39] <https://t.me/jeninqassamm/7174> ; <https://t.me/jeninqassamm/7176> ;
- [40] <https://t.me/kataebaqsapalestine/3138> ; <https://t.me/hamaswestbank/51651> ; <https://t.me/sarayajneen/1263>
- [41] <https://t.me/jeninqassamm/7199>
- [42] <https://t.me/mmirleb/3981> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/3983> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/3990> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/3992> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/3994> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/3996> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/3998> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/4000> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/4002> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/4004> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/4009> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/4011> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/4012> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/4013>
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- [44] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/ukmto-reports-incident-76nm-northwest-yemens-hodeidah-2024-05-18/>
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