

Iran Update, October 24, 2023

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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. For more on developments and in Iran and the region, see our [interactive map of Iran and the Middle East](#).

Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. 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, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

Key Takeaways:

1. Hamas and its allies are preparing the information environment to blame Israel for the possible deaths of hostages in the Gaza Strip, especially if Hamas begins killing hostages. Palestinian militias continued attacks at their usual rate from the Gaza Strip into Israel.
2. Clashes between Palestinian militants and Israeli forces have decreased significantly in the West Bank. Hamas has repeatedly tried to incite violence against Israel in the West Bank since the war began.
3. Iranian-backed militants, including Lebanese Hezbollah (LH), conducted six attacks as part of an ongoing attack campaign targeting IDF radar and sensor sites and military targets. These attacks are consistent with Western and Israeli reports that LH is trying to “keep Israeli forces busy.”
4. The Islamic Resistance of Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—has claimed daily attacks on US bases in Iraq and Syria since October 18. These attacks are part of the Iranian-led effort to deter the United States from providing meaningful support to Israel.
5. Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Alwiya Waad al Haq (the Righteous Promise Brigades) threatened to attack US forces in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.
6. Iran is setting informational conditions to blame the United States and Israel for any further escalation of the war and deflect any responsibility from itself. This narrative that Iran is pushing ignores the fact that Iran has already facilitated the expansion of this war to Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen by directing its proxy and partner militias in these countries to attack US and Israeli targets.

Israel-Hamas War as of October 24, 3:00 PM ET



Hamas and its allies are preparing the information environment to blame Israel for Hamas's execution of hostages

Militants fired two rockets into the Golan Heights from Syria

Iran's Axis of Resistance may have expanded the locations of its attacks against US forces in Syria

Clashes between Palestinian militias and the IDF decreased by over half from October 23

0 50 100 200 Kilometers

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

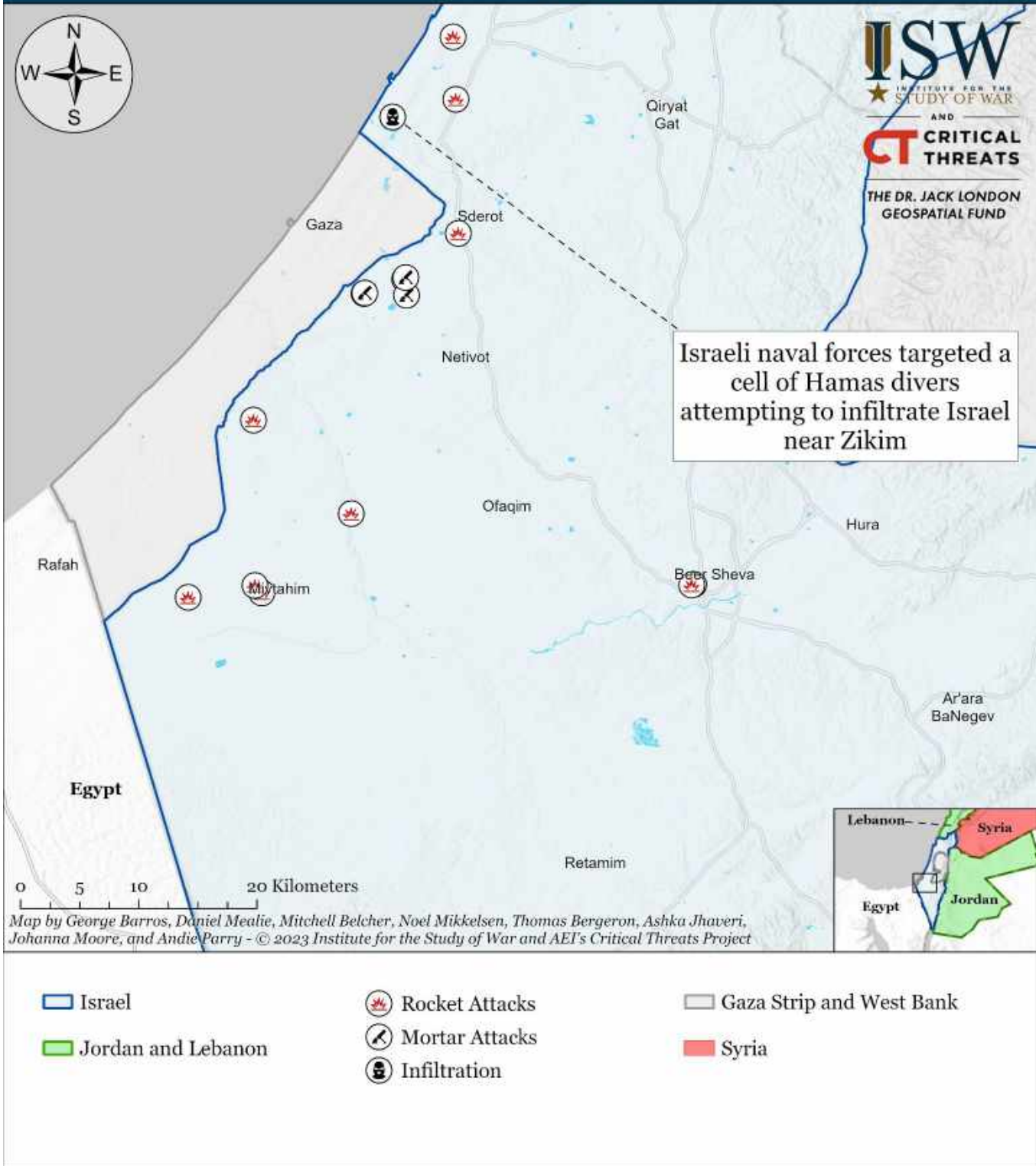
- Israel
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Golan Heights
- Syria
- Gaza Strip and West Bank

Gaza Strip

Hamas and its allies are preparing the information environment to blame Israel for the possible deaths of hostages in the Gaza Strip, especially if Hamas begins killing hostages. Hamas military spokesperson Abu Ubaida said on October 9 that Hamas would kill hostages in response to Israeli airstrikes, indicating Hamas’ willingness to do so for perceived military and/or political gains.[1] Tasnim News Agency—an Iranian outlet affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)—reported on October 22 that Israel’s “clandestine goal” is to “cause the killing of captive Israelis,” according to “informed sources.[2] Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) spokesperson Abu Hamza said on October 24 that Israel does not “pay attention” to the lives of hostages.[3]

Hamas and allied Palestinian militias took hostages during the October 7 attack likely to discourage an Israeli ground operation into the Gaza Strip and/or to secure concessions of some kind. Israeli actions and rhetoric suggest that Hamas and allied militias will fail to generate those desired effects, however. Israel is continuing to prepare for a possible ground operation into the Gaza Strip, and the Wall Street Journal reported that Israel-Hamas hostage negotiations collapsed after Hamas demanded that Israel allow fuel deliveries into the Gaza Strip.[4] The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) spokesperson said that fuel will not enter the strip because Hamas uses fuel for its military infrastructure.[5] Israeli sources said that Israel estimates that Hamas and allied militias are low on fuel and will need to leave their tunnel networks underneath the Gaza Strip once their fuel is depleted.[6]

Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of October 24, 3:00 PM ET

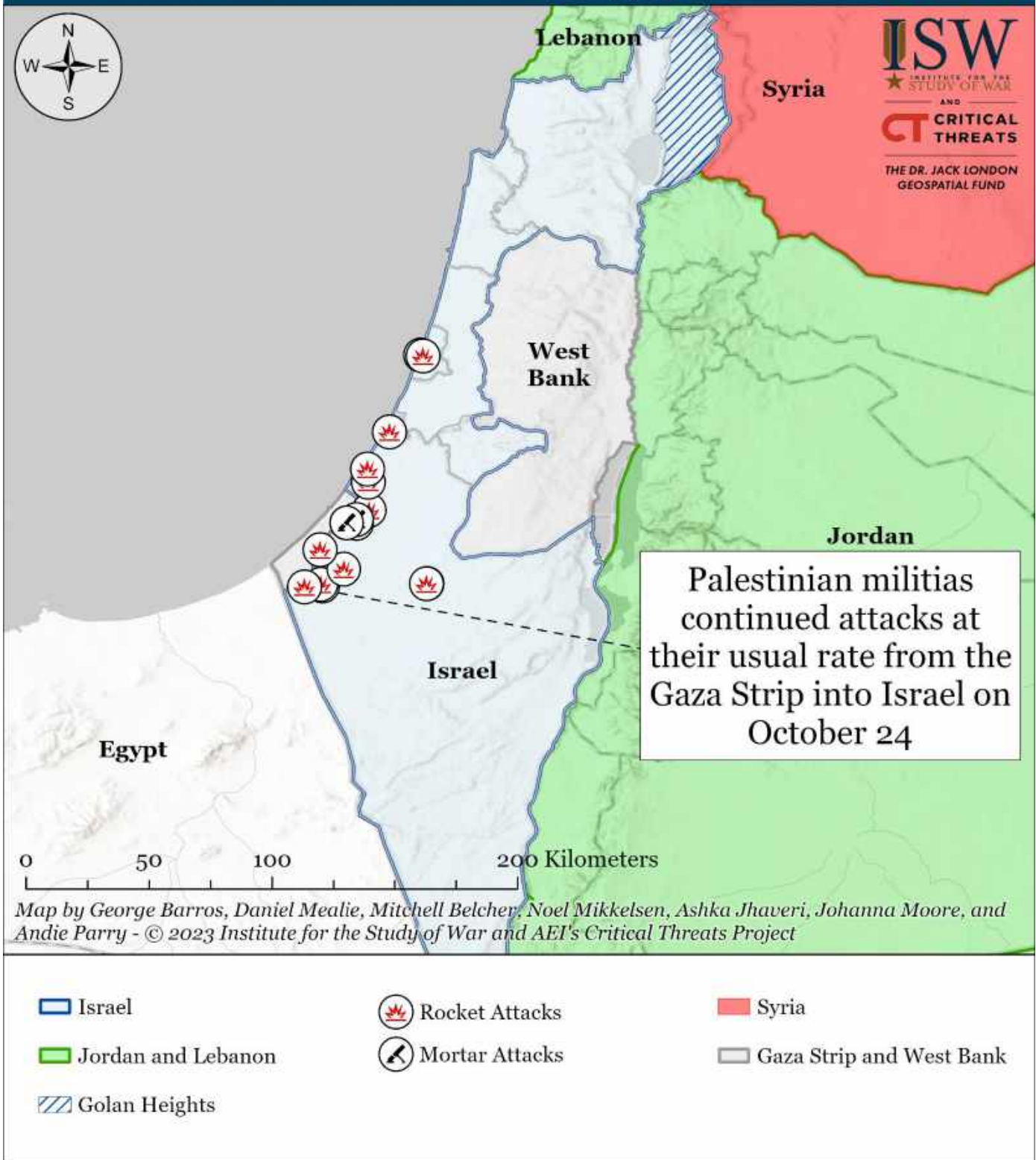


Recorded reports of rocket attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

Palestinian militias continued attacks at their usual rate from the Gaza Strip into Israel on October 24. The al Qassem Brigades— Hamas’ militant wing—claimed responsibility for 11 indirect fire attacks.^[7] Saraya al Quds—the militant wing of PIJ—claimed responsibility for six mortar and rocket attacks.^[8] The al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigade—the militant wing of Fatah—claimed responsibility for two rocket attacks.^[9] The Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades—the militant wing of Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)—claimed responsibility for three mortar attacks.^[10] Axis of Resistance-affiliated media and IDF outlets reported two other unclaimed rocket attacks.^[11] This rate of attacks is consistent with the rate that CTP-ISW has observed in recent days.

CTP-ISW recorded one infiltration attempt from the Gaza Strip into Israel on October 24. IDF naval elements targeted a cell of Hamas divers attempting to infiltrate Israel near Zikim.^[12] The al Qassem Brigades claimed that its forces clashed with the IDF near Zikim after the attempted infiltration.^[13] Other Palestinian sources said that fifteen Hamas fighters infiltrated into the Zikim naval base, where they clashed with the IDF.^[14] The IDF wounded six Hamas fighters, according to Palestinian media.^[15]

Indirect Fire Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of October 24, 3:00 PM ET



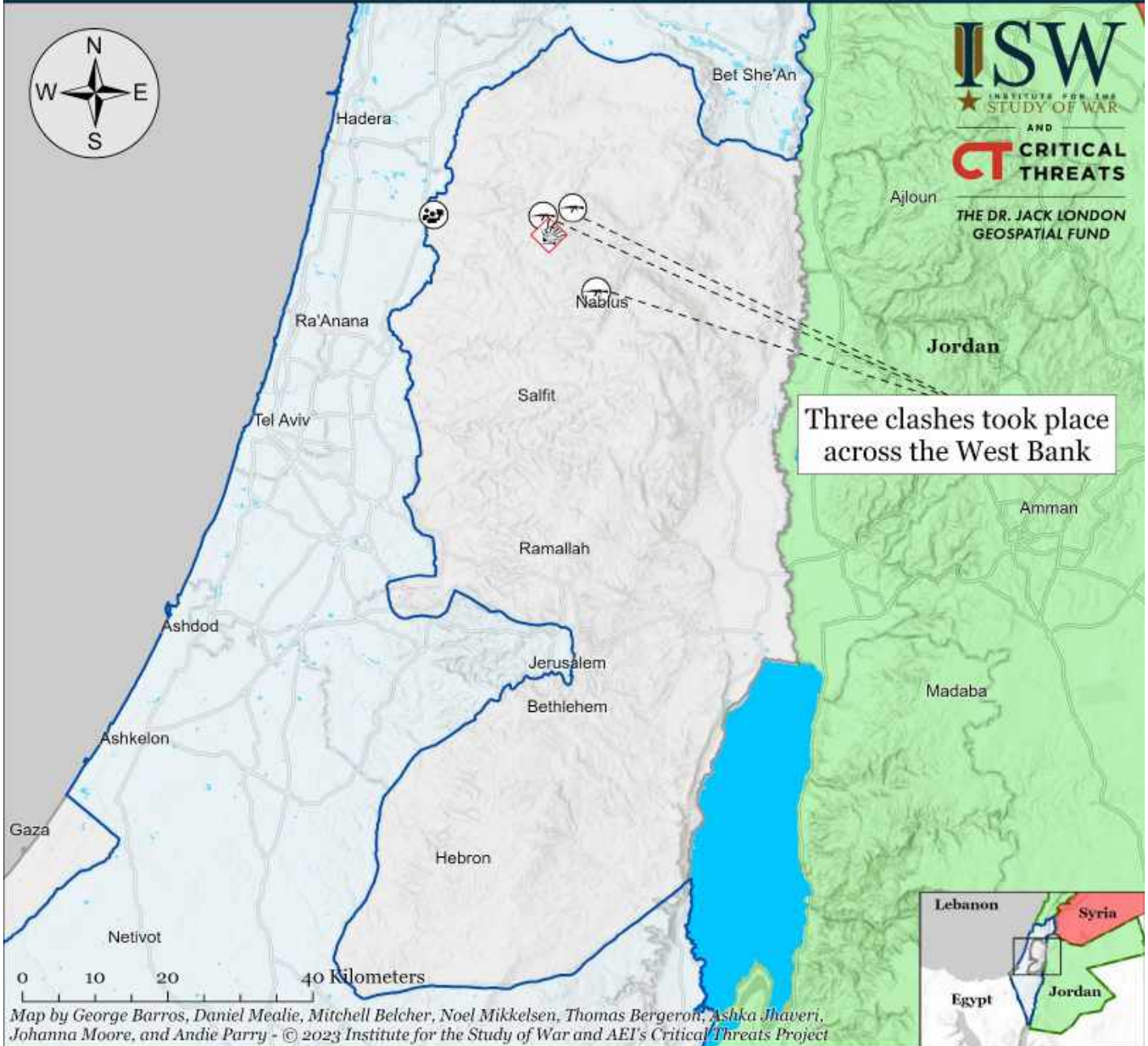
Recorded reports of rocket attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

West Bank

Clashes between Palestinian militants and Israeli forces have decreased significantly in the West Bank on October 24. CTP-ISW recorded three clashes on October 24 compared to nine on October 23.^[16] CTP-ISW also recorded one demonstration in Tulkram in solidarity with the Gaza Strip.^[17] Hamas has repeatedly tried to incite violence against Israel in the West Bank since the war began.^[18]

- The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade claimed responsibility for an ambush targeting the IDF in Burqa, Nablus.^[19] Militants lured the IDF before throwing an IED and opening fire at them. Israeli media reported that one IDF soldier was wounded in the fighting.^[20]
- The Jabaa Battalion—a component of PIJ's al Quds Brigades—claimed responsibility for shooting down an Israeli drone in Jaba, Jerusalem. LH-controlled al Manar reported that Jabaa Battalion militants shot down the drone while engaging IDF soldiers in small arms combat.^[21]
- The Nablus Brigade—a unit of PIJ's al Quds Brigades—reported that it attacked at least one IDF patrol in Nablus.^[22]

Clashes in the West Bank as of October 24, 3:00 PM ET



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|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Israel | Clash (Small Arms Combat) | Gaza Strip and West Bank |
| Jordan and Lebanon | March | Syria |
| | IED Detonated | |

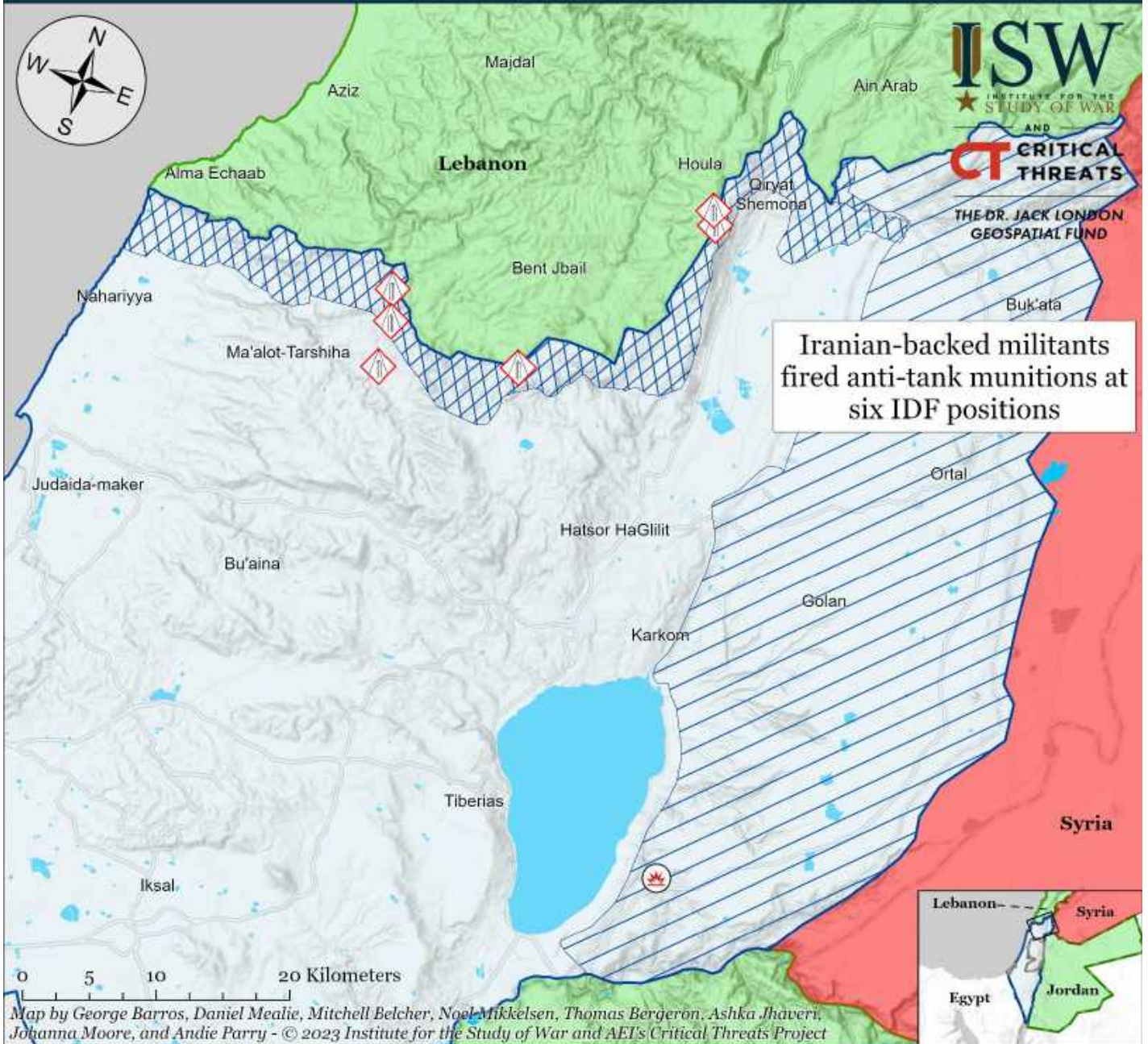
This map is not an exhaustive depiction of clashes and demonstrations in the West Bank.

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

Iranian-backed militants, including Lebanese Hezbollah (LH), conducted six attacks as part of an ongoing attack campaign targeting IDF radar and sensor sites and military targets.^[23] LH claimed two anti-tank guided munition (ATGM) attacks on IDF positions along the northern Israeli border.^[24] LH also released a compilation video of previous attacks on IDF radar and sensor sites.^[25] LH has continued to suffer casualties in the fighting around the border as the IDF targets ATGM squads preparing to fire into Israel.^[26] An LH-affiliated journalist claimed that the group intends to destroy the IDF's "espionage capacity" and limit all mechanical and personnel movement along the border through these attacks.^[27] These attacks are consistent with Western and Israeli reports that LH is trying to "keep Israeli forces busy."^[28] This campaign also creates opportunities for further LH attacks into Israel and increases the risk of further escalation, as CTP-ISW previously noted.^[29]

Unidentified militants in southwestern Syria launched two rockets into the Golan Heights on October 24.^[30] CTP-ISW has recorded five attacks into the Golan Heights from Syria since the war began.^[31] This most recent attack is inconsistent with the attack pattern that CTP-ISW has observed during the war so far. Unidentified militants have only fired into the Golan Heights from Syria after Israeli airstrikes on Syrian airports up until this point.^[32] The IDF has conducted five airstrikes on the Damascus and Aleppo international airports since October 7 to disrupt possible Iranian efforts to transfer military equipment and personnel to Syria.^[33]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Syria and Lebanon as of October 24, 3:00 PM ET



- Israel
- Israeli Evacuation Zone
- Golan Heights
- ☀ Rocket Attacks
- ⬆ Anti-Tank Fire
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria

LH and Lebanese government officials have opposing messages about the possibility of the war expanding to Lebanon. The Lebanese prime minister and Lebanese army commander visited southern Lebanon on October 24 to discuss de-escalating and restoring stability with United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFL) leaders.[34] The Lebanese Army commander stated the Lebanese army is following developments and maintaining readiness at the southern border, while the Lebanese prime minister called Lebanon a peace-loving country. The Lebanese prime minister and the army commander do not control LH forces in southern Lebanon and cannot meaningfully enforce de-escalation, however. LH Deputy Secretary General Naim Qassem warned on October 24 that LH is at the heart of the battle to defend the Gaza Strip and that the group’s “hand is on the trigger.”[35]

Iran and Axis of Resistance

The Islamic Resistance of Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—has claimed daily attacks on US bases in Iraq and Syria since October 18. The group has claimed 15 drone and rocket attacks in this time. The group continues to expand the location of its attacks against US forces in Syria. These attacks are part of the Iranian-led effort to deter the United States from providing meaningful support to Israel, as CTP-ISW previously assessed.[36]

- The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed that it used drones to attack US forces at al Omar and al Shaddadi in eastern and northeastern Syria respectively on October 23.[37] The group claimed the drones “hit their target”. The group has not previously claimed attacks on US forces in al Omar and al Shaddadi.
- The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed that it fired two rockets at US forces in Ain al Asad airbase in Iraq on October 24.[38] The group released a video showing the rocket launch but did not include footage of any impact.[39] The Islamic Resistance in Iraq has claimed five attacks on US forces at Ain al Asad airbase since October 18. The leader of the Iranian-backed militia Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba condemned the Iraqi government over its refusal to expel US forces from Iraq on October 24.[40] Nujaba previously threatened to attack US forces in Iraq in May 2023.[41] London-based, Qatar-funded al Araby al Jadeed reported that Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani met with the heads of Iranian-backed proxies in Iraq in an effort to deescalate with US forces in Iraq.[42] Nujaba and another Iranian-backed Iraqi militia, Kataib Hezbollah, refused to meet with Sudani and rejected calls for de-escalation.[43]

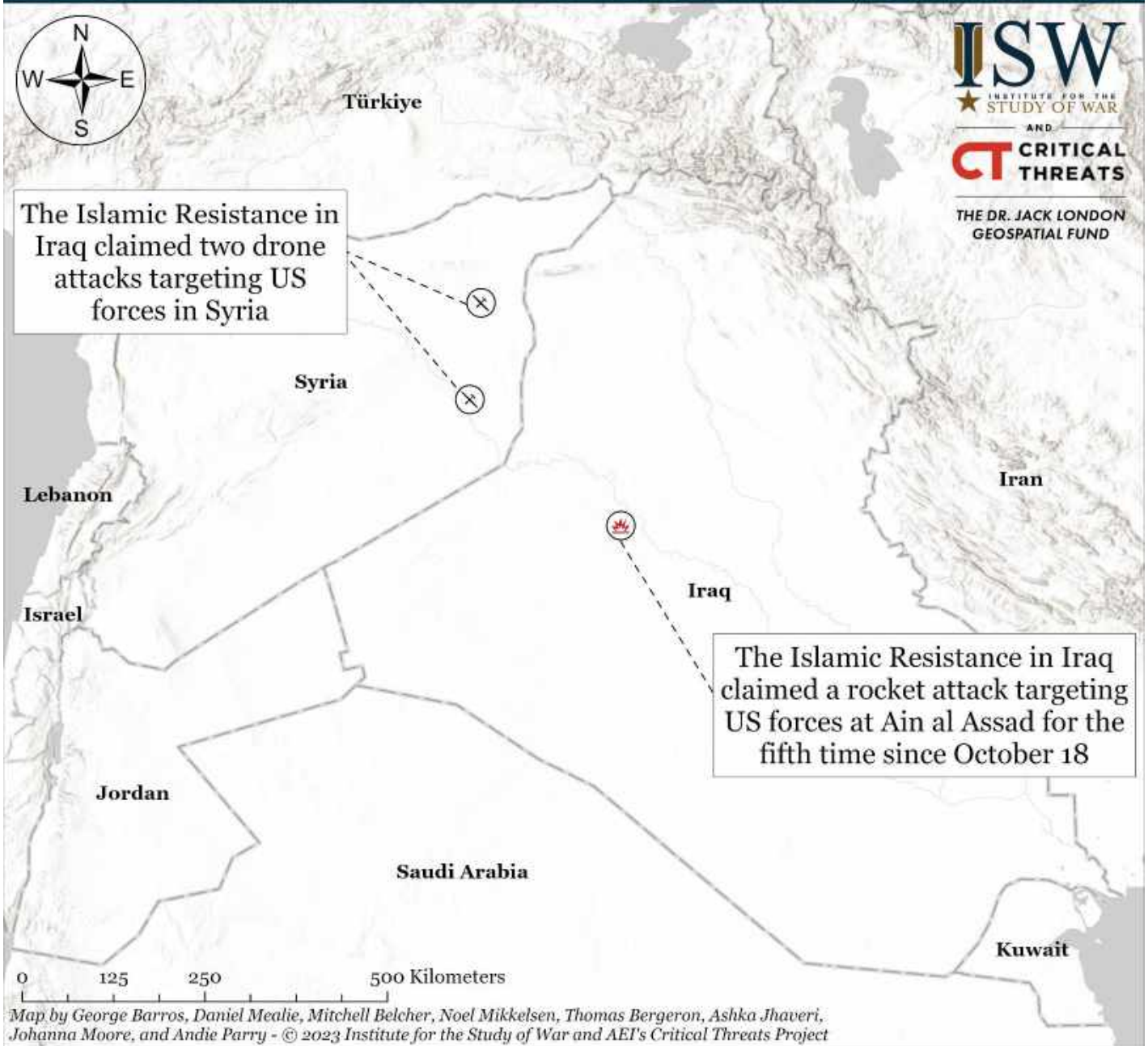
Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Alwiya Waad al Haq (the Righteous Promise Brigades) threatened to attack US forces in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates on October 24.[44] Alwiya Waad al Haq previously claimed drone attacks targeting the Saudi royal palace in January 2021 and “vital facilities” in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates in February 2022.[45] CTP-ISW previously assessed that this group was likely a front for Kataib Hezbollah.[46] Pro-Iran Telegram channels affiliated with Iraqi proxy groups echoed the group’s threat to attack US forces in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.[47] This threat and its amplification in pro-Iran channels suggest that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are willing to escalate regionally beyond Iraq and Syria.

Iran is setting informational conditions to blame the United States and Israel for any further escalation of the war and deflect any responsibility from itself. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei’s official website accused Israel of trying to ignite “a direct war against Iran with US support.”[48] Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanani stated on October 24 that Iran is

seeking to preserve regional “stability and security” despite “war-mongering” from the United States and its allies.[49] IRGC-affiliated Fars News Agency argued on October 24 that Axis of Resistance attacks on American bases in Iraq and Syria are only meant to deter further American involvement in the Israel-Hamas war.[50] Nine unspecified Iranian officials told the Qatari-owned, London-based al Araby al Jadeed that Iran only supports “limited” and “small-scale” militia attacks on Israel and US positions in the region but would not seek to open a “major new front in the war” on October 24.[51] Iran’s Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali lastly stated that the responsibility for “any escalation” of the conflict would fall on the United States and Israel during an interview with Russian state media on October 24.

This information operation that the Iranian regime is conducting is meant to frame the United States and Israel as the antagonists in the war and especially in the event that it escalates further. This information operation also frames the regime as responsible and non-escalatory to its population. This narrative that Iran is pushing ignores the fact that Iran has already facilitated the expansion of this war to Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen by directing its proxy and partner militias in these countries to attack US and Israeli targets.

Attacks on US Bases in the Middle East as of October 24, 3:00 PM ET



Iranian state media is seizing on Israeli and Western reports of divisions between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and IDF generals and between Israel and the United States to revive pre-war narratives about Netanyahu’s and Israel’s isolation and weakness. State-run outlet IRNA recirculated Israeli reporting on October 23 about “disagreements” between Netanyahu and the IDF and about Israel’s “inability to decide” on a ground operation into the Gaza Strip.[52] IRNA’s framing of the disagreements differs from the original Israeli reporting that noted that the Israeli war cabinet and senior Israeli military officials disagree on the “timing and scope” of a ground operation—not on whether to conduct such an operation in the first place.[53] Iranian officials and media repeatedly claimed throughout 2023 that Israel was at its “weakest point” due to protests over Netanyahu’s proposed judicial reforms and internal political fissures.[54] Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei stated in April 2023, for example, that Israel was in its worst position and “in a hurry” to collapse.[55]

IRNA separately recirculated Israeli and American reporting on October 24 that some US officials doubt the IDF’s readiness to conduct a ground operation into the Gaza Strip.[56] The regime’s emphasis on disharmony between Israel and the United States contrasts with its emphasis on Muslim unity against Israel. Tehran has historically—and particularly since the start of the war on October 7—sought to rally Muslim countries against Israel and frame itself as a champion of the Palestinian cause, as CTP-ISW previously reported.[57]

Iranian media exaggerated the scope and losses of the IDF’s October 22 raid on Khan Younis as part of its ongoing efforts to deter an Israeli ground operation into the Gaza Strip. Israel conducted a limited raid on Khan Younis to gather information about Israeli hostages and to prepare for a ground operation into the Gaza Strip.[58] The IDF announced that one Israeli soldier was killed during the raid but did not acknowledge Hamas’ claim that it had destroyed Israeli military equipment.[59] State-controlled, English-language Press TV claimed on October 23 that Hamas forced 20 Israeli tanks to retreat during the clashes at Khan Younis.[60] Press TV also claimed that Israeli forces were “caught in an ambush” near Rafah on October 22, which forced them to abandon 10 tanks. IRGC Deputy Commander Brigadier General Ali Fadavi similarly referred to the Khan Younis raid when warning Israel on October 23 that a ground operation into the Gaza Strip would precipitate a “regrettable answer from” the Axis of Resistance. Iranian media and officials’ framing of the Khan Younis raid as a defeat for Israel is consistent with previous Iranian rhetoric that the IDF will face “significant challenges” if it launches a ground operation.[61]

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[54] <https://www.tasnimnews> dot com/fa/news/1402/05/06/2932636

[55] <https://www.leader> dot ir/fa/content/26409

[56] <https://www.irna> dot ir/news/85268968 ;

<https://www.irna> dot ir/news/85269009

[57] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-12-2023>

[58] <https://news.sky.com/story/israel-agrees-to-continued-flow-of-gaza-aid-a...>

[59] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-mounts-limited-gaza-gro...>

[60] <https://www.presstv> dot ir/Detail/2023/10/23/713299/Israel-ground-invasion-Gaza-failed-

[61] <https://www.tasnimnews> dot com/fa/news/1402/08/01/2973041

Iran Update, October 23, 2023

**Amin Soltani, Peter Mills, Kathryn Tyson, Ashka Jhaveri,
Brian Carter, and Johanna Moore**

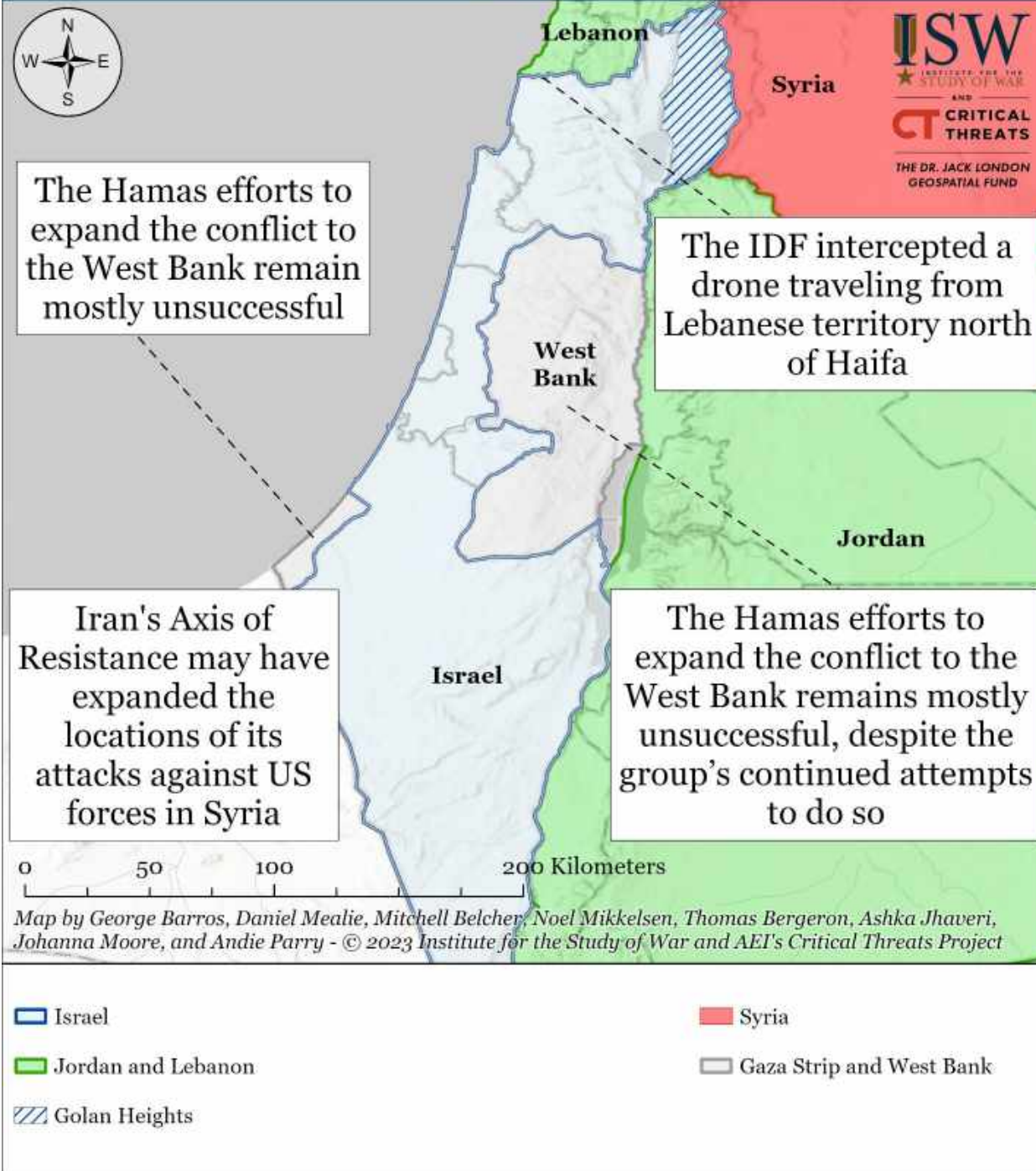
The Iran Update provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities abroad that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests. It also covers events and trends that affect the stability and decision-making of the Iranian regime. The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) provides these updates regularly based on regional events. For more on developments in Iran and the region, see our [interactive map of Iran and the Middle East](#).

Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. 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, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

Key Takeaways:

1. Palestinian militias continued attacks at their usual rate from the Gaza Strip into Israel while IDF airstrikes targeted Palestinian militant groups affiliated with Hamas in Gaza.
2. Militants in southern Lebanon and Iranian-backed militants, including Lebanese Hezbollah LH, conducted nine attacks as part of an ongoing attack campaign targeting IDF radar and sensor sites and military targets. The IDF also intercepted two drones traveling from Lebanese territory north of Haifa.
3. The Islamic Resistance of Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—may have expanded the locations of its attacks against US forces in Syria.

Israel-Hamas War as of October 23, 3:00 PM ET

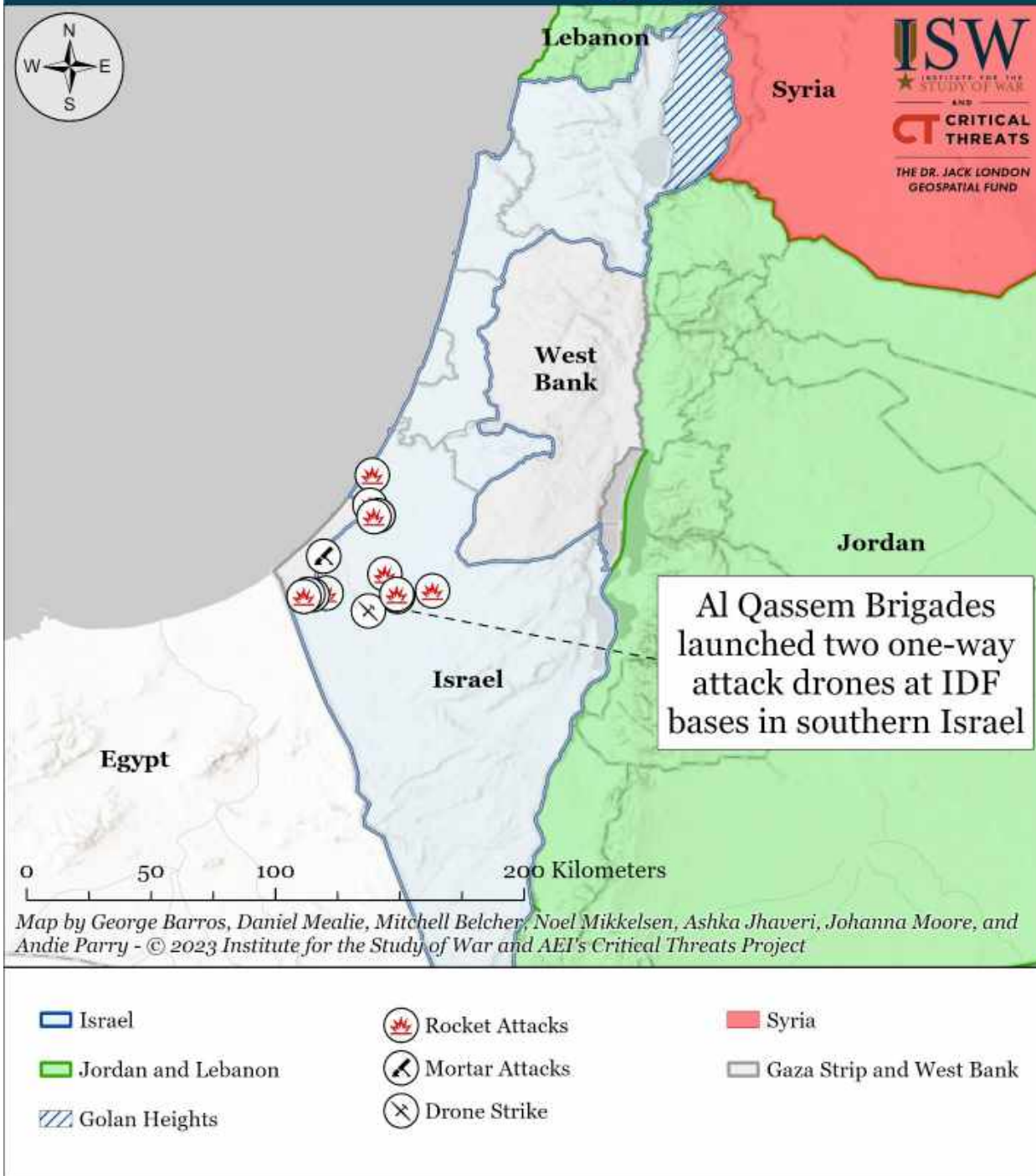


Gaza Strip

Palestinian militias continued attacks at their usual rate from the Gaza Strip into Israel on October 23. The al Qassem Brigades— Hamas’ militant wing—claimed responsibility for six direct and indirect fire attacks, including two drone attacks, on IDF military positions in southern Israel.¹ Saraya al Quds—the militant wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)—claimed responsibility for another five mortar and rocket attacks.² The Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades—the militant wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—claimed mortar fire targeting IDF units.³

Hamas is trying to use hostages as leverage to allow humanitarian aid and fuel into the Gaza Strip. Hamas claimed that it released two elderly hostages for humanitarian reasons after mediation from Egypt on October 23.⁴ Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal said Hamas would release civilian hostages if Israel reduced its airstrikes into the Gaza Strip.⁵ *The Wall Street Journal* reported that negotiations over releasing a group of 50 hostages broke down after Israel demanded that Hamas release all hostages as a prerequisite for permitting fuel to enter the Gaza Strip.⁶ Hamas could use fuel and other aid supplies to support its efforts to defend against an IDF ground operation. Hamas still holds more than 200 hostages.⁷ Hamas spokesmen Abdul Latif al Qanou framed a possible IDF ground invasion into the Gaza Strip as an opportunity to kill and capture IDF soldiers on October 23.⁸

Indirect Fire Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of October 23, 3:00 PM ET

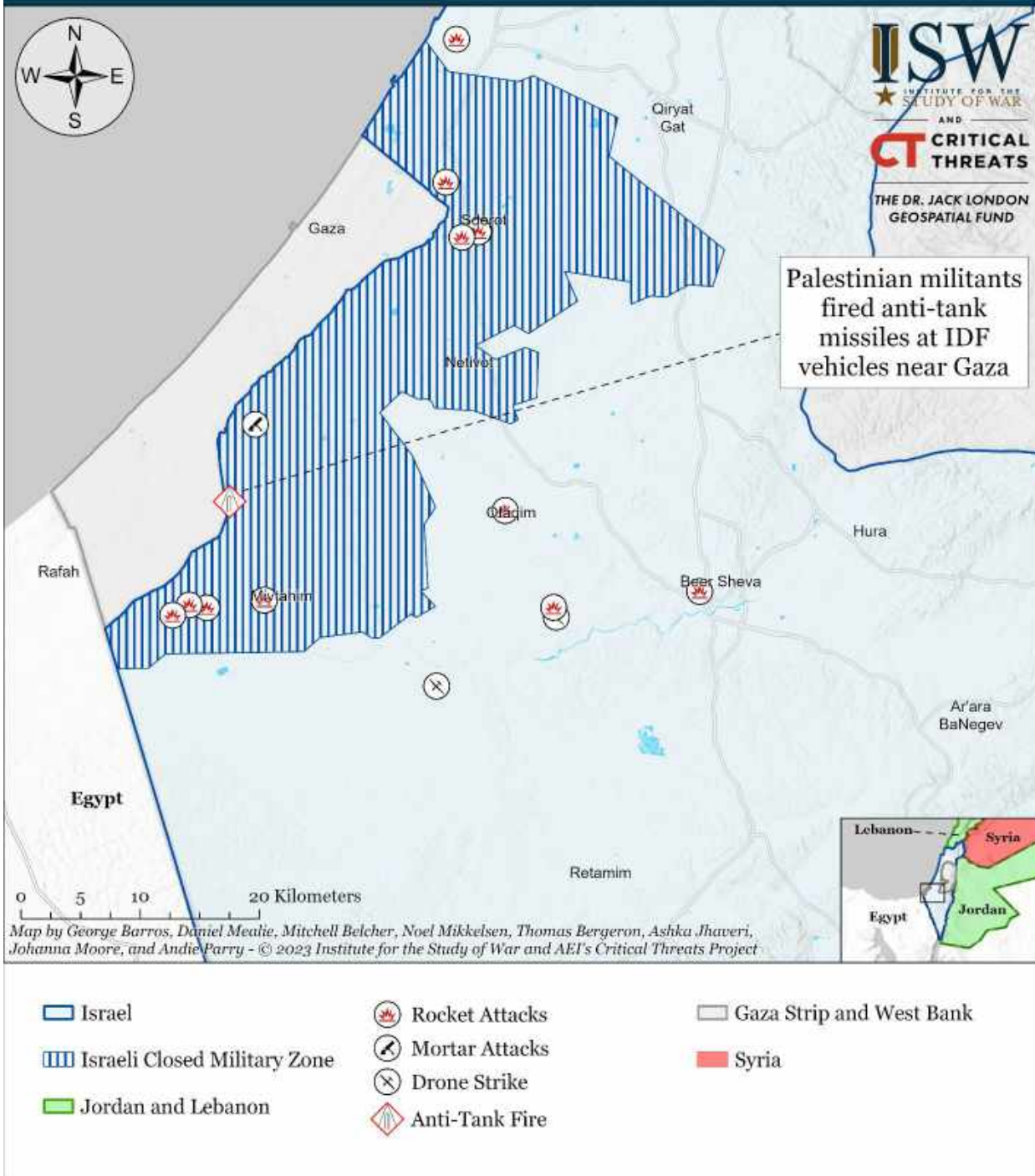


Recorded reports of rocket attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

IDF Major General Michael Edelstein stated that Israel has evidence of Iranian involvement in Hamas' October 7 attack.⁹ Edelstein stated that Iran assisted Hamas with training in the Gaza Strip but refused to elaborate further.¹⁰ Iranian officials have invited Hamas militants to training camps in Iran in addition to assisting the group in manufacturing missiles and rockets.¹¹ Iran has developed smuggling routes across the Levant to transfer weapons and rocket manufacturing material to Hamas and evade Israeli interdiction. CTP-ISW previously assessed that Iran would likely provide material and financial support to its proxies to fight Israel rather than get directly involved in the Israel-Hamas war.¹²

IDF airstrikes continue to target Palestinian militias allied with Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade announced on October 23 that the commander of its Rafah Brigade died during the ongoing war with Israel.¹³ IDF airstrikes previously killed a commander affiliated with Saraya al Quds and the head of the military wing of the Popular Resistance Committee in Rafah on October 12 and 19, respectively.¹⁴ CTP-ISW previously reported on October 21 that the IDF faces a loose coalition of Palestinian militant groups in the Gaza Strip—rather than just Hamas.¹⁵

Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of October 23, 3:00 PM ET



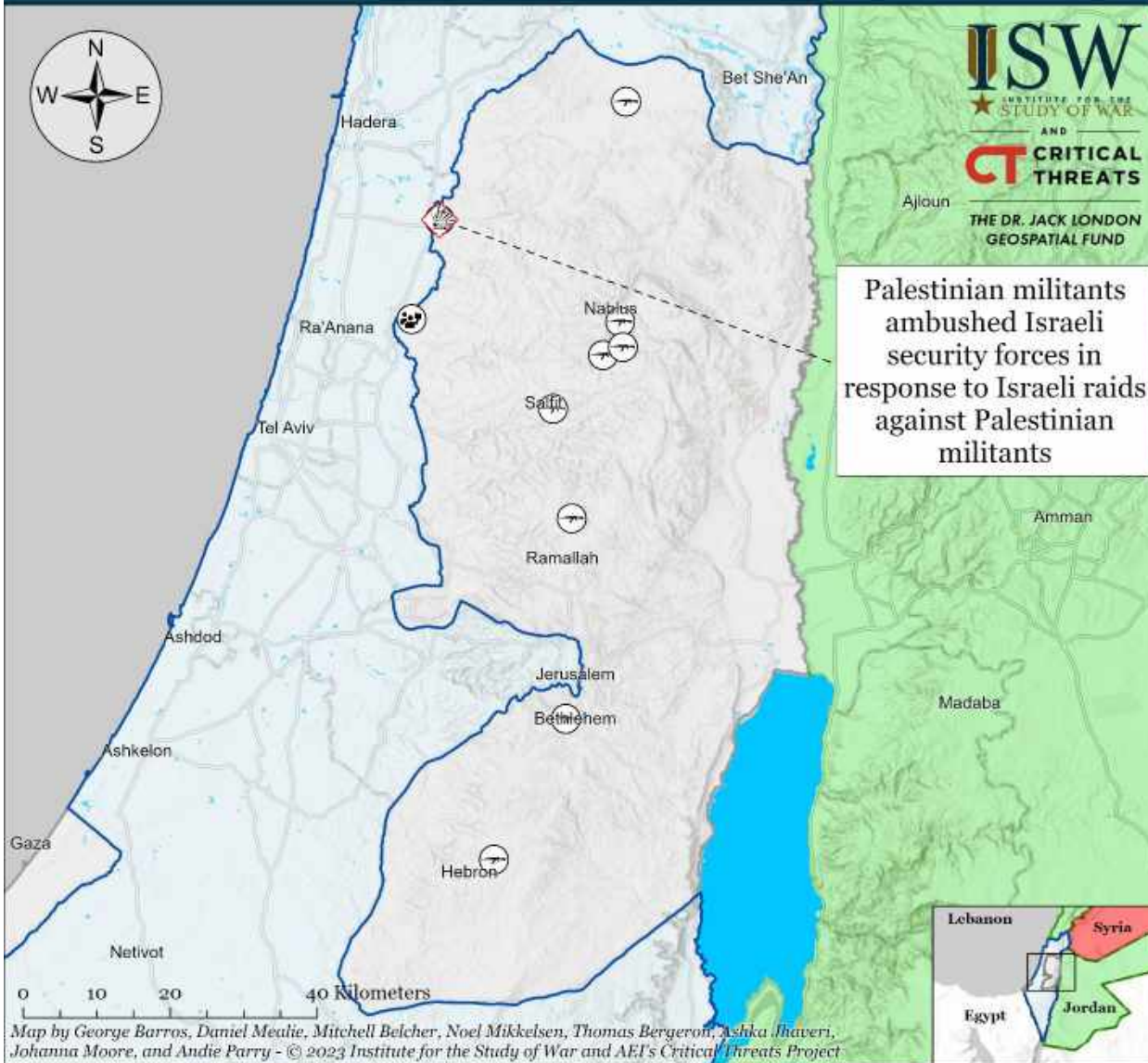
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West Bank

Hamas's efforts to expand the war to the West Bank remain mostly unsuccessful. CTP-ISW only recorded one demonstration on October 23 after a high of 11 demonstrations on October 20.¹⁶ The rate of clashes between Palestinian militants and Israeli forces in the West Bank is consistent with the number of clashes on October 22, after the rate dropped by half from October 21 to 22.¹⁷ CTP-ISW recorded nine distinct clashes.¹⁸

Palestinian militants ambushed Israeli forces in response to Israeli raids against Palestinian militants. Tulkarm Brigades fighters used improvised explosive devices (IED) and small arms to attack Israeli forces in Tulkarm during an Israeli ground operation.¹⁹ Other Palestinian militants fired small arms targeting Israeli forces during raids in Bethlehem and Jazloun IDP camp.²⁰

Clashes in the West Bank as of October 23, 3:00 PM ET



Palestinian militants ambushed Israeli security forces in response to Israeli raids against Palestinian militants

- Israel
- Jordan and Lebanon
- ⊖ Clash (Small Arms Combat)
- ⊕ Demonstration
- ⊖ IED Detonated
- Gaza Strip and West Bank
- Syria

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

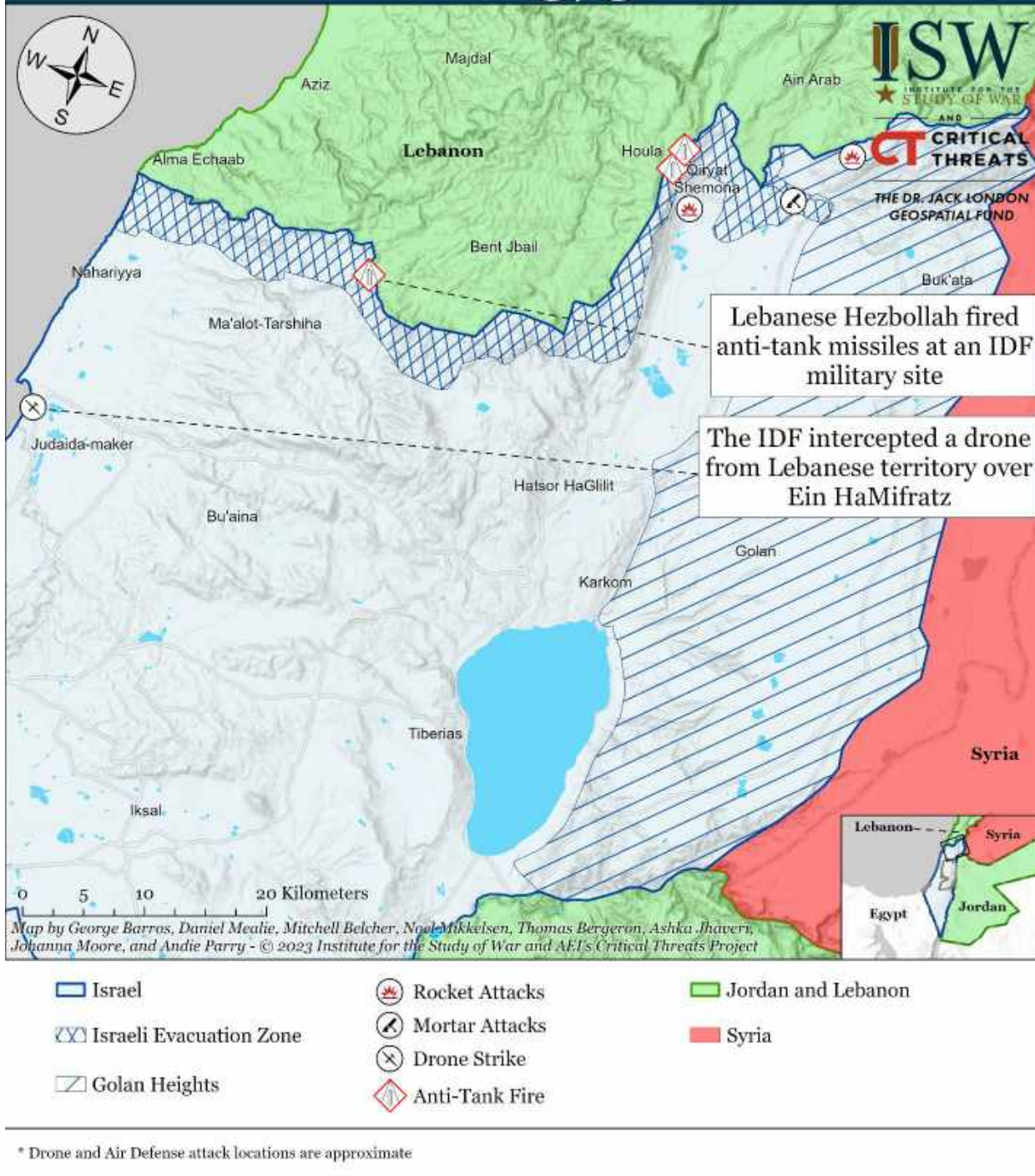
Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

Iranian-backed militants, including Lebanese Hezbollah (LH), conducted nine attacks as part of an ongoing attack campaign targeting IDF radar and sensor sites and military targets. LH claimed responsibility for attacking four IDF positions along the northern Israeli border.²¹ Attacks on Israeli towns and military positions continued along the entire border and into the disputed Sheeba Farms.

The IDF intercepted a drone traveling from Lebanese territory north of Haifa.²² CTP-ISW has observed nine instances of drones flying into northern Israeli territory and three in Haifa Province since October 7. It is unclear whether any of the drones are armed or meant for surveillance. Haifa is one of the most critical business centers of Israel and the port handles nearly 50 percent of Israel's freight volume.²³ Independent analysts have noted that Iran is especially interested in threatening the petrochemical facilities in Haifa given that the spread of fumes could maximize casualties.²⁴ The IDF furthermore maintains several military sites in the vicinity of Haifa.²⁵

The LH-affiliated Lebanese Resistance Brigades announced the death of two of its members during unspecified duties for the first time since October 7.²⁶ The Lebanese Army, in coordination with the UNIFIL, retrieved the bodies from the outskirts of Kfarshouba north of Shebaa Farms.²⁷ LH Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah proclaimed the creation of the brigade in 1997. The group enlisted primarily non-Shia Lebanese with a shared commitment to Lebanon and its unity and national defense.²⁸ Several Iranian-backed militias, including Hamas and PIJ, are participating in the attack campaign against Israeli forces from southern Lebanon. LH almost certainly permits attacks from southern Lebanon given the extent to which LH controls southern Lebanon and coordinates with the other Iranian-backed groups operating there.

Attacks into Israel from Lebanon as of October 23, 3:00 PM ET



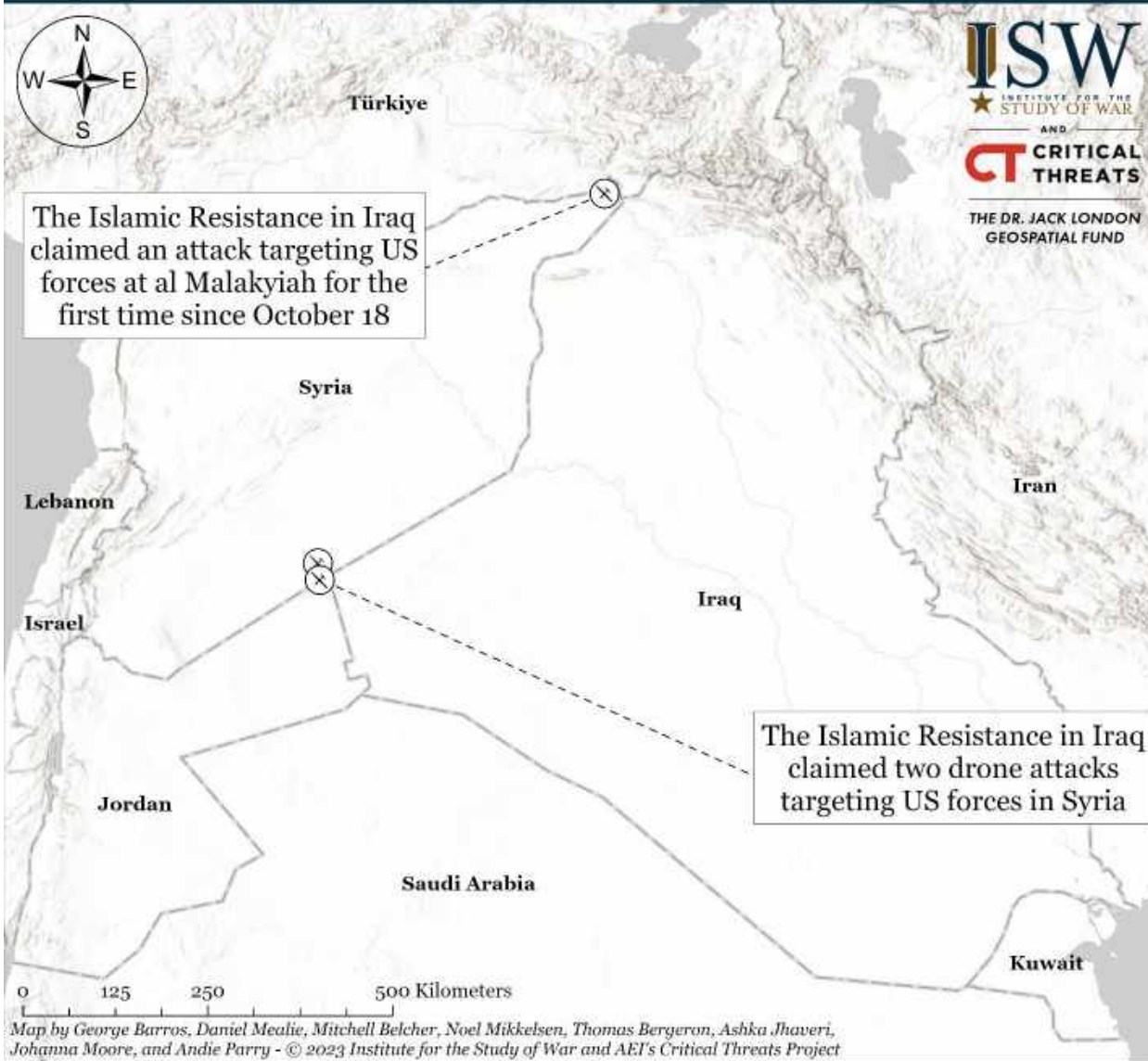
Recorded reports of rocket attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

Iran and Axis of Resistance

The Islamic Resistance of Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—expanded the locations of its attacks against US forces in Syria on October 23. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed two one-way drone attacks targeting US forces in Syria, marking the sixth consecutive day of attacks targeting US forces in the Middle East. The Islamic Resistance of Iraq has claimed 11 drone and rocket attacks on US forces in Iraq and Syria since October 18. These attacks are part of the Iranian-led effort to deter the United States from providing meaningful support to Israel, as CTP-ISW previously assessed.²⁹

- The Islamic Resistance of Iraq claimed that it fired two drones targeting US forces at the al Tanf Garrison and al Rukban camp in eastern Syria on October 23.³⁰ The Islamic Resistance of Iraq last targeted al Tanf Garrison on October 19.³¹ The group said that the drones “hit their targets” and released a video of the attack.³² US Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder confirmed that there was an attempted drone attack on al Tanf Garrison that did not cause any injuries to US personnel.³³ Ryder said that US defense systems at al Tanf Garrison intercepted two drones, possibly referring to the attack on al Rukban.³⁴ Al Tanf Garrison is approximately 18 kilometers from al Rukban.
- The Islamic Resistance of Iraq claimed a one-way drone attack targeting US forces at al Malikiyah military base in northeastern Syria on October 23.³⁵ This attack marks the first time the Islamic Resistance of Iraq claimed that it targeted US forces at al Malikiyah. The group said that the drones “hit their targets.” US Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder did not confirm the attack on Malikiyah but said that the United States is still conducting a “comprehensive overview” of the October 23 drone attacks.³⁶

Attacks on US Bases in the Middle East as of October 23, 3:00 PM ET



⊗ Drone Strike

Hundreds of Iranian-backed foreign fighters have deployed to border areas with Israel, according to a report from the anti-Syrian regime outlet Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) on October 23. Unspecified SOHR sources said that hundreds of Iranian-backed

fighters from Iraq, Syria, and the Afghan Fatemiyoun Division have deployed to the border areas near the Golan Heights along the southwestern Syrian border since October 21.³⁷ CTP-ISW has tracked the movement of Iranian-backed militants to southwestern Syria since the war began on October 7.³⁸

Iranian officials and media are continuing their attempts to deter an Israeli ground operation into the Gaza Strip while also attempting to reassure their domestic and Axis of Resistance audiences that such an operation will fail. IRGC-affiliated Tasnim News Agency outlined the “significant challenges” that Israel will face in conducting a ground operation into the Gaza Strip, highlighting Hamas’ anti-tank capabilities.³⁹ Iranian state media similarly argued that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s senior advisers fear Hamas and further outlined several “challenges” facing Israeli ground operations into the strip, including declining public support, weakened relations with the Arab world, a high military death toll, and the potential for a geographic expansion of the conflict.⁴⁰ IRGC Deputy Commander Brigadier General Ali Fadavi similarly warned that Israel would suffer a “disgraceful” defeat at the hands of the Palestinian resistance were it to enter the Gaza Strip during an interview IRGC-affiliated Fars News Agency.⁴¹

- Israeli, anti-regime, and Axis of Resistance-affiliated media reported that Fadavi warned that Iran would conduct missile strikes on Haifa “if necessary.”⁴² Iranian state media did not report this aspect of Fadavi’s statements, concealing the direct Iranian threat to Israel. This is consistent with CTP-ISW’s previous assessment that Iran seeks to avoid a direct confrontation with Israel and would likely provide material and financial support to its proxies rather than get directly involved in the Israel-Hamas war.⁴³
- Iranian officials have repeatedly threatened to strike Haifa and Tel Aviv during previous periods of tension with Israel. President Ebrahim Raisi, for example, threatened in April 2023 to “destroy” the two Israeli cities were Israel to provoke Iran.⁴⁴

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian is continuing to engage in political coordination with Palestinian militia leaders. Abdollahian held separate telephone conversations with Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh and PIJ Secretary General Ziyad al Nakhalah on October 22.⁴⁵ Abdollahian discussed Iranian efforts to support Palestine and halt Israeli “crimes” in the Gaza Strip—consistent with previous Iranian official rhetoric since October 13.⁴⁶ Both Abdollahian and the Palestinian militia leaders condemned US support for Israel—also consistent with their previous rhetoric since October 13. Abdollahian met with senior Hamas officials, including Haniyeh, in Doha between October 14 and 15.⁴⁷ Abdollahian visited Qatar after concluding a diplomatic tour of Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria.⁴⁸ CTP-ISW assessed that the tour was part of an Iranian effort to coordinate politically with senior leaders of Axis of Resistance vis-à-vis the Israel-Hamas war.⁴⁹

Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani discussed the October 22 Israeli strikes on the Damascus and Aleppo international airports with his Syrian counterpart Lieutenant General Ali Mahmoud Abbas on October 23.⁵⁰ Ashtiani argued that Israel seeks to send a message that it is capable of delivering serious military responses on all fronts to cover up its actual “fragility.” Ashtiani also argued

that Israel is committing “political suicide” by conducting its attacks on the Gaza Strip—consistent with previous Iranian rhetoric since October 13.⁵¹

¹ Sources available on request.

² <https://t.me/sarayaps/16427>; <https://t.me/sarayaps/16426>

³ <https://t.me/kataebabuali/10434>

⁴ <https://t.me/qassambrigades/28717> ; <https://twitter.com/AmichaiStein1/status/1716531385828086178> ; <https://twitter.com/YWNReporter/status/1716518102551175344>

⁵ <https://twitter.com/AmichaiStein1/status/1716510024363606471>

⁶ <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/talks-to-release-hostages-held-up-over-amas-demand-for-fuel-fcc29267>

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/23/efforts-to-free-gaza-hostages-intensify-amid-reports-some-may-soon-be-released>

⁸ Source available on request.

⁹ <https://news.sky.com/story/israel-says-it-has-evidence-of-iranian-involvement-in-amas-attack-but-cannot-elaborate-12991025> ;

<https://twitter.com/dpatrikarakos/status/1716450830356721842?s=20>

¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/dpatrikarakos/status/1716450830356721842?s=20> ; <https://news.sky.com/story/israel-says-it-has-evidence-of-iranian-involvement-in-amas-attack-but-cannot-elaborate-12991025>

¹¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/investigations/us-investigating-whether-iran-gave-advanced-training-amas-militants-rcna119824>

¹² <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-october-16-2023>

¹³ <https://t.me/AymanGouda/5788>

¹⁴ <https://twitter.com/AuroraIntel/status/1712384534992548247> ; https://twitter.com/no_itsmyturn/status/1714898999184879848

¹⁵ https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-21-2023?mkt_tok=NDc1LVBCUS05NzEAAAGO88MVohzy59x3p9nnkgI0gRNxG9Ry5Qcp79laYQZ5Ylm3Rzp8HeHK_P-_jtMfmDLbYPwCIPaowCCK1WXqGfII2zN96l_zdAViUEF4UfkV8aZqswXk

¹⁶ https://twitter.com/Qudsn_Brk/status/1716471128187703800

¹⁷ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-22-2023>; Sources available upon request.

¹⁸ Sources available upon request.

¹⁹ <https://t.me/almanarnews/132397>; <https://t.me/almanarnews/132389>; <https://t.me/almanarnews/132384>

²⁰ <https://t.me/newpress1/55439>; <https://twitter.com/qudsn/status/1716349461604016622>;

<https://twitter.com/qudsn/status/1716329834001907810>

²¹ <https://t.me/almanarnews/132338>; <https://twitter.com/alishoeib1970/status/1716458408176398336>

²² <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1716439617723895846>

²³ <https://www.cruisemapper.com/ports/haifa-port-182?month=2023-10#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20Port%20Haifa%20handled%20nearly%2050%25%20of,Adani%20Ports%20and%20the%20remaining%20~30%25%20with%20Gadot.>

²⁴ <https://english.alarabiya.net/features/2020/11/30/Why-is-Iran-targeting-Israel-s-Haifa-Experts-explain>

²⁵ <https://israel-alma.org/2023/09/20/the-evolving-role-of-the-israeli-navy-from-classic-sea-combat-to-a-strategic-pillar-of-defense-against-the-iran-led-axis/>

²⁶ <https://www.naharnet dot com/stories/en/301126-two-resistance-brigades-members-killed-by-israeli-shelling>

²⁷ <https://www.naharnet dot com/stories/en/301126-two-resistance-brigades-members-killed-by-israeli-shelling>

²⁸ <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/hizb-allahs-lebanese-resistance-brigades/>

²⁹ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-22-2023>

³⁰ https://twitter.com/war_noir/status/1716482131948372098; <https://twitter.com/ScharoMaroof/status/1716427665953931510>

³¹ <https://t.me/maymun5/53731>

³² https://twitter.com/bedou_int/status/1716479239703162990

³³ <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3566081/pentagon-press-secretary-brig-gen-pat-ryder-holds-an-off-camera-on-the-record-p/>

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- ³⁴ <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3566081/pentagon-press-secretary-brig-gen-pat-ryder-holds-an-off-camera-on-the-record-p/>
- ³⁵ https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1716446999791206461
- ³⁶ <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3566081/pentagon-press-secretary-brig-gen-pat-ryder-holds-an-off-camera-on-the-record-p/>
- ³⁷ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/314883/>
- ³⁸ [https://deirezzor24 dot net/%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84-%D8%A3%D9%81/;](https://deirezzor24 dot net/%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84-%D8%A3%D9%81/)
- ³⁹ <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1402/08/01/2973041>
- ⁴⁰ <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85266625> ; <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85268344>
- ⁴¹ <https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14020801000177>
- ⁴² https://t dot me/mihwar_almuqawama/36373 ; <https://www.almayadeen dot net/news/politics/-إذنا-اجتاحت-إسرائيل-غزة-حرس-الثورة> ; <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-769720> ; <https://www.iranintl dot com/en/202310231347>
- ⁴³ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/iran-update-october-16-2023> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-18-2023>
- ⁴⁴ <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-739527>
- ⁴⁵ <https://mfa dot ir/portal/NewsView/732315> ; <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1402/08/01/2976689> ; <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/en/news/2023/10/23/2976726>
- ⁴⁶ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/iran-update-october-13-2023> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/iran-update-october-14-2023> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/iran-update-october-15-2023> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/iran-update-october-16-2023> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/iran-update-october-17-2023> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-18-2023> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-19-2023>
- ⁴⁷ www.mfa dot ir/portal/NewsView/731493
- ⁴⁸ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-12-2023> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-15-2023>
- ⁴⁹ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-12-2023> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-15-2023>
- ⁵⁰ <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/en/news/2023/10/23/2976624> ; <https://www.farsnews dot ir/en/news/14020801000626>
- ⁵¹ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/iran-update-october-13-2023> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/iran-update-october-14-2023> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/iran-update-october-15-2023> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/iran-update-october-16-2023> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/iran-update-october-17-2023> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-18-2023> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-19-2023>

Iran Update, October 22, 2023

Brian Carter, Andie Parry, Amin Soltani, and Nicholas Carl

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. For more on developments in Iran and the region, see our [interactive map of Iran and the Middle East](#).

Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. 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, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

Key Takeaways:

1. Palestinian militias continued attacks at their usual rate from the Gaza Strip into Israel. Palestinian militias increased their targeting of the Israel Defense Forces in these attacks, likely as part of their preparations to defend against a possible Israeli ground operation.
2. Clashes between Palestinian militants and Israeli forces in the West Bank dropped by roughly half.
3. Iranian-backed militants, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted 17 attacks as part of an ongoing attack campaign against Israeli forces and assets.
4. Iranian leaders have reached a consensus approving limited cross-border Lebanese Hezbollah attacks into Israel, according to Reuters. This report and others indicate that Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah are coordinating a carefully calibrated escalation to draw Israeli attention away from the Gaza Strip.
5. The Israel Defense Forces Air Force conducted airstrikes on the Damascus and Aleppo international airport runways. The Israeli Foreign Affairs Ministry indicated that the airstrikes in Syria are part of an Israeli effort to prevent Iran from moving weapons into Syria and/or opening a front against Israel from there.

6. Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani arrived in Syria to monitor Iranian-backed militias on the Israel-Syria border, according to Israeli media. Ghaani previously warned Syrian President Bashar al Assad that Iran intends to use Syria as a second front if the war expands.
7. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—conducted a one-way drone attack on US forces at Ain al Asad air base in Iraq, marking the fifth consecutive day of attacks targeting US force in the Middle East. These attacks are part of the Iranian-led effort to deter the United States from providing meaningful support to Israel.
8. The Houthi prime minister said that the Houthis will target Israeli ships in the Red Sea if Israel continues operations in the Gaza Strip after meeting with Palestinian militia officials in Sanaa, Yemen.



Gaza Strip

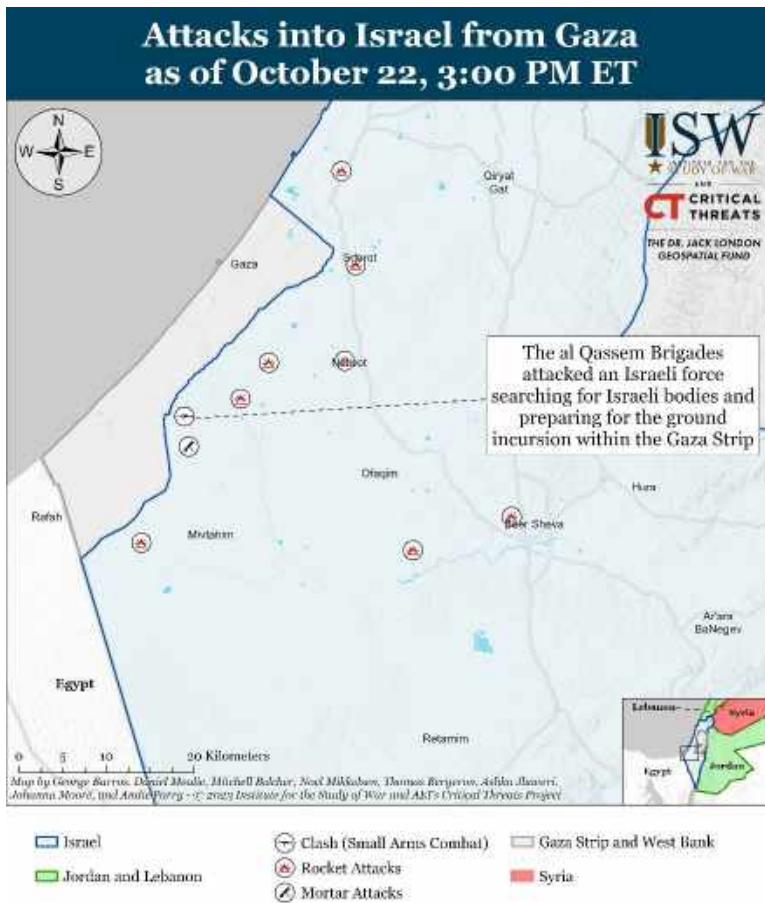
Palestinian militias continued attacks at their usual rate from the Gaza Strip into Israel on October 22. The al Qassem Brigades— Hamas’ militant wing—claimed responsibility for 12 direct and indirect fire attacks.¹ Saraya al Quds—the militant wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)—claimed

responsibility for another three rocket attacks.² This rate of attacks is consistent with the rate that CTP-ISW has observed in recent days.

Palestinian militias in the Gaza Strip increased their targeting of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), likely as part of their preparations to defend against a possible Israeli ground operation. Palestinian militias targeted a greater proportion of military targets relative to their overall attacks than at any point since October 18, when the militias targeted IDF positions near the Gaza Strip 15 times.³ Palestinian militias launched eight direct and indirect fire attacks targeting the IDF on October 22.⁴ They also fired mortars and rockets targeting Israeli cities and towns seven times. Al Qassem Brigades fighters separately killed one Israeli soldier and wounded three others during a firefight within the Gaza Strip.⁵ The IDF said that the Israeli forces were searching for the bodies of missing Israelis and preparing for Israel’s ground operation.⁶



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



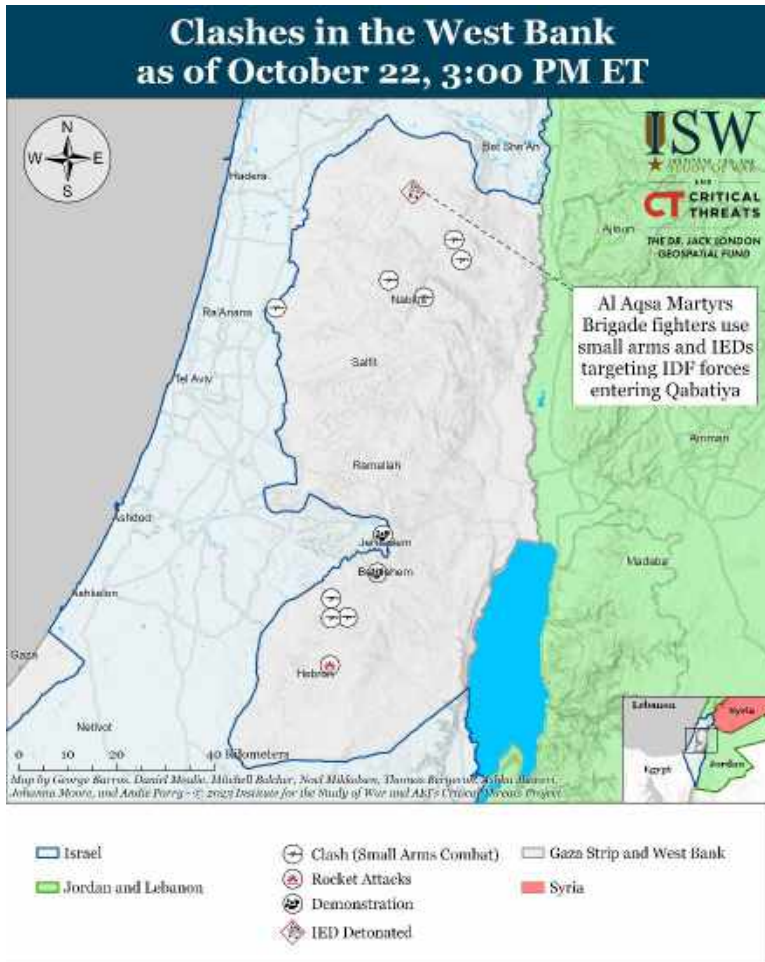
Recorded reports of rocket attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

West Bank

Clashes between Palestinian militants and Israeli forces in the West Bank dropped by roughly half on October 22.⁷ CTP-ISW recorded nine distinct clashes.⁸ Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade fighters clashed with Israeli forces in Qabatiya, close to Jenin, on October 22. The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade fighters used small arms and improvised explosive devices (IED) against Israeli forces.⁹

CTP-ISW recorded only two demonstrations in the West Bank on October 22, which is consistent with the number of demonstrations on October 21.¹⁰ Hamas' calls for protests in support of the Gaza Strip across the world did not generate increased protests in the West Bank.¹¹

Israeli forces continued raids and arrests in the West Bank, arresting at least 46 Palestinians, including 27 active Hamas members and two PIJ military leaders, south of Jenin on October 22.¹²



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

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

Iranian-backed militants, including Lebanese Hezbollah (LH), conducted 17 attacks as part of an ongoing attack campaign against IDF forces and assets on October 22.¹³ These attacks are consistent with the increased rate of Iranian-backed attacks into Israel since October 15. This campaign creates opportunities for additional Iranian-backed ground attacks into Israel and increases the risk of further escalation, as CTP-ISW previously noted.¹⁴ LH militants fired surface-to-air missiles at an IDF helicopter, marking the first use of air defense in Lebanon against the IDF since the start of the war.¹⁵ The IDF intercepted a drone crossing from Lebanon into Israel—the first attempted drone infiltration from Lebanon since October 20.¹⁶ The majority of attacks from Lebanon used anti-tank guided missiles against IDF forces and positions.¹⁷ Israeli forces struck five ATGM squads in southern Lebanon on October 22.¹⁸

The Israeli Defense Ministry expanded the civilian evacuation zone along the Israel-Lebanon border to encompass 14 additional towns.¹⁹ Israel previously evacuated towns within two kilometers of the border.²⁰

Several Iranian-backed militias are participating in the attack campaign against Israeli forces from southern Lebanon. The al Qassem Brigades fired multiple barrages of rockets at northern Israeli towns on October 15 and 19.²¹ Saraya al Quds claimed four of its fighters have died in southern Lebanon since October 7.²² LH has almost certainly approved these attacks given the extent to which LH controls southern Lebanon and coordinates with the other Iranian-backed groups operating there.

Iranian leaders have reached a consensus approving limited cross-border LH attacks into Israel, according to Reuters.²³ Two LH-affiliated individuals also told Reuters that the LH military activity around northern Israel is meant to “keep Israeli forces busy but not open a major new front.” CTP-ISW cannot verify the accuracy of this report. It is consistent, however, with the IDF spokesperson stating that Iran has instructed LH to escalate against Israel and thereby impose pressure on the IDF while it prepares for ground operations into the Gaza Strip.²⁴ These reports indicate that Iran and LH are coordinating a carefully calibrated escalation to draw Israeli attention away from the Gaza Strip.

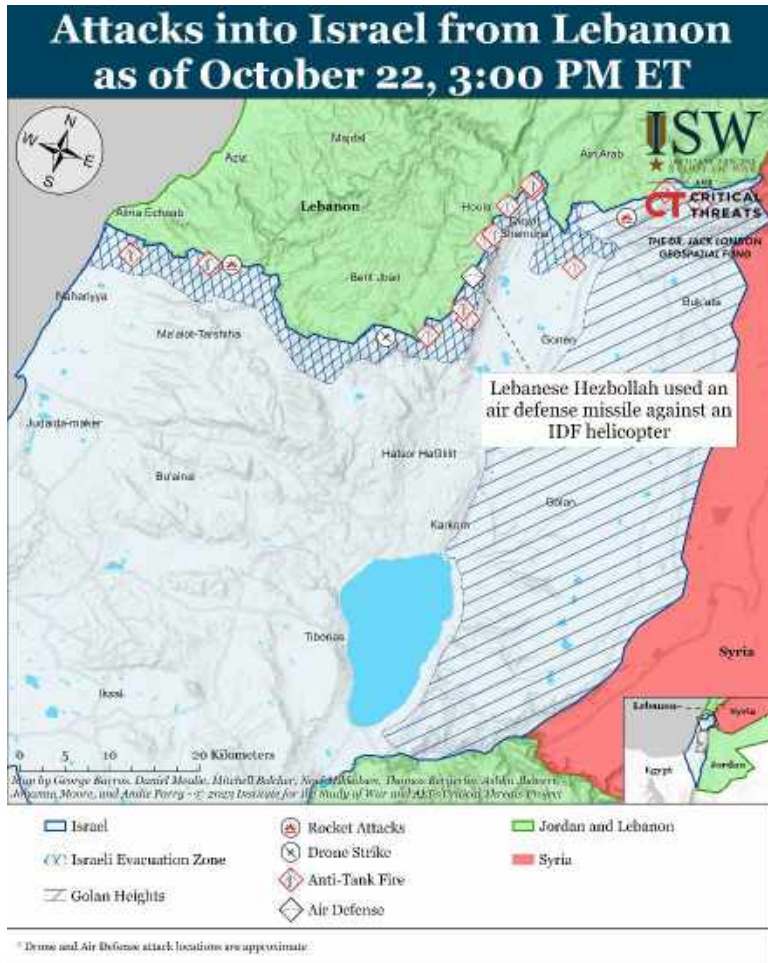
The IDF Air Force conducted airstrikes on the Damascus and Aleppo international airport runways on October 22.²⁵ Israel previously conducted multiple airstrikes on Damascus and Aleppo international airports on October 12 and 14, disrupting critical nodes through which Iran funnels military equipment and personnel into the Levant.²⁶ A senior official at the Israeli Foreign Affairs Ministry indicated that the airstrikes in Syria are part of an Israeli effort to prevent Iran from moving weapons into Syria and/or opening a front against Israel from there.²⁷ The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has long used commercial airliners affiliated with the Iranian regime for military transports to Syria throughout the civil war there.

Unidentified militants conducted an indirect fire attack into the Golan Heights following the IDF airstrikes on the Damascus and Aleppo international airports, possibly as symbolic retaliation. Israeli forces intercepted the fire.²⁸ This is a consistent response pattern to Israeli airstrikes into Syria since the war began. Unidentified militants launched indirect fire into the Golan Heights following the previous airstrikes.²⁹

IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani arrived in Syria on October 21 to monitor Iranian-backed militias on the Israel-Syria border, according to Israeli media.³⁰ CTP-ISW cannot independently verify this report. Iranian-backed militias have concentrated in southern Lebanon and southwestern Syria in recent days as part of Iran-led preparations for the war to expand into a regional conflict.³¹ An Iranian state-affiliated journalist previously claimed that Ghaani warned Syrian President Bashar al Assad on October 15 that Iran intends to use Syria as a second front if the Israel-Hamas war expands.³² An unspecified Iranian intelligence official claimed that Iran would start a “limited” ground operation from Syria into the Golan Heights and notably not from Lebanon if the situation escalates to protect LH.³³

The rhetoric of the Lebanese prime minister and foreign minister diverged on the issue of Lebanon’s possible future involvement in the Israel-Hamas war. Prime Minister Najib

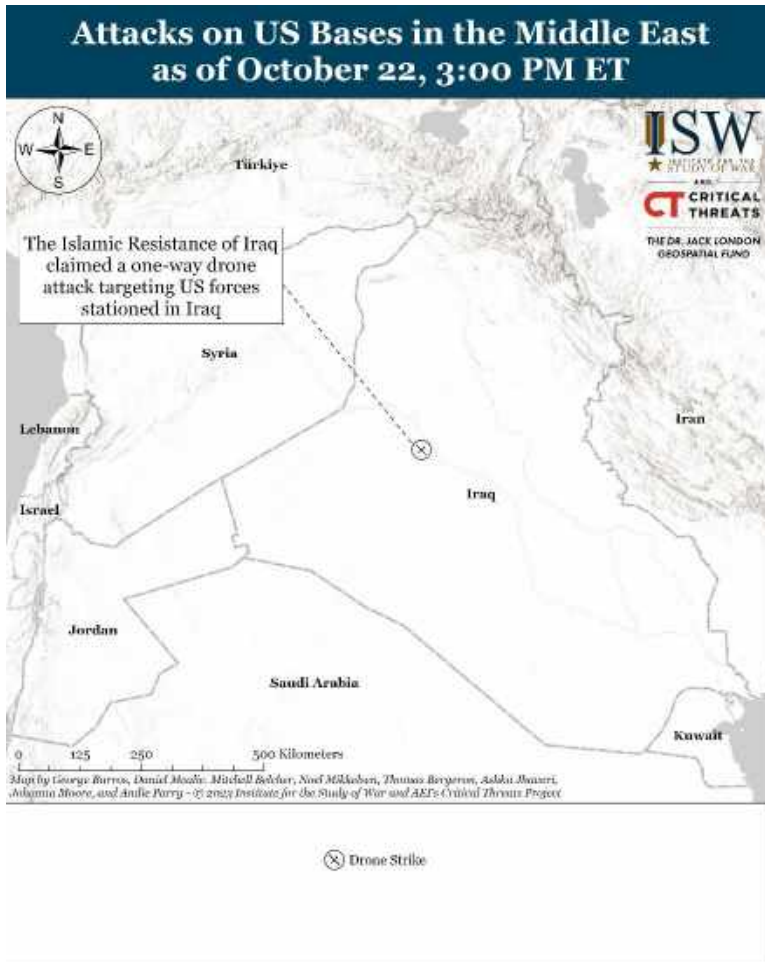
Mikati expressed concern but indicated that the situation is returning to normal and that the Lebanese government is making every effort to keep harm away from Lebanon.³⁴ Lebanese Foreign Affairs Minister Abdallah Bou Habib contrastingly expressed concern about the outbreak of war in southern Lebanon based on Israeli actions in the Gaza Strip during an interview with al Jazeera.³⁵ Bou Habib called for a ceasefire but warned that Israel will in the event of a larger war erupting suffer far more losses than it did in the 2006 Lebanon-Israel war.



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

Iran and Axis of Resistance

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—conducted a one-way drone attack on US forces at Ain al Asad air base in Iraq on October 22, marking the fifth consecutive day of attacks targeting US force in the Middle East.³⁶ The Islamic Resistance in Iraq has claimed nine drone and rocket attacks targeting US forces in Iraq and Syria since October 18.³⁷ Four of those attacks targeted the Ain al Asad air base.³⁸ These attacks are part of the Iranian-led effort to deter the United States from providing meaningful support to Israel, as CTP-ISW previously assessed.³⁹ Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah threatened additional attacks against US positions on October 20.⁴⁰



The Houthi prime minister said on October 22 that the Houthis will target Israeli ships in the Red Sea if Israel continues operations in the Gaza Strip after meeting with Palestinian militia officials in Sanaa, Yemen on October 21.⁴¹ The Houthi prime minister also acknowledged on October 22 that the United States intercepted Houthi drones and missiles headed toward Israel over the Red Sea on October 19.⁴² He claimed that some of the missiles and drones still hit their targets.⁴³ CTP-ISW has not observed any indications of a Houthi drone or missile strike within Israel, however. The Houthi prime minister is a southern Yemeni.⁴⁴ He is not part of the Houthi Movement's inner circle, which is almost exclusively made up of northern Yemenis.⁴⁵

Axis of Resistance Red Lines

Members of Iran’s Axis of Resistance have articulated their thresholds for intervening in support of Hamas’ war in Israel



■ New red line

| Actor | Threat | Stated Red Line |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| Iran | Conduct missile attacks into Israel from Iran, Lebanon, and Yemen and send fighters from Syria into Israel | Israel attacks Iran |
| | Direct its proxies to attack US positions in Iraq and Syria | United States refreezes \$6 billion to Iran |
| Lebanese Hezbollah | Enter the war | Israel conducts a ground operation into Gaza |
| Badr Organization | Attack US military positions | The United States intervenes in the war |
| Kataib Hezbollah | Attack US military positions | The United States intervenes in the war |
| Kataib Seyeed al Shohada | Intervene in the war | The United States intervenes in the war |
| Houthi Movement | Conduct drone and missile strikes | The United States intervenes in the war |
| | Target Israeli ships | Israeli operations in Gaza continue |

IRGC-affiliated media is conducting an information operation asserting that Israel does not care about Israeli hostages in the Gaza Strip. *Tasnim News Agency* recirculated a Hamas claim that Hamas sought to transfer two hostages to Israel but that Israeli officials refused to accept their delivery on October 22.⁴⁶ *Tasnim* similarly claimed on October 21 that Israel’s “clandestine goal” is to “cause the killing of captive Israelis,” according to “informed sources.”⁴⁷ *Tasnim* published the article in both Persian and English, which suggests that the messaging is intended for both domestic and global audiences.

¹ Sources available on request.

² <https://t.me/sarayaps/16427>; <https://t.me/sarayaps/16426>

³ Sources available on request.

⁴ Sources available on request.

⁵ Sources available on request.

⁶ <https://x.com/manniefabian/status/1716143649363210452?s=20>;

<https://x.com/manniefabian/status/1716142893704855971?s=20>

⁷ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-october-18-2023> ; Sources available upon request.

⁸ Sources available upon request.

⁹ <https://t.me/AymanGouda/5782>; <https://t.me/maymun5/54352>; <https://t.me/maymun5/54354>; <https://t.me/maymun5/54350>

¹⁰ www.wafa dot ps/Pages/Details/82475; <https://www.wafa dot ps/Pages/Details/82451>

¹¹ <https://hamas dot ps/ar/p/18346>

¹² <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1715997053317194153>; <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1715997065195520206>

¹³ Sources available upon request.

¹⁴ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-october-20-2023>

¹⁵ <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1715840128604574173>; <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1715840131809132864>

¹⁶ <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1716012728773468550>

¹⁷ Sources available upon request.

¹⁸ <https://twitter.com/manniefabian/status/1716147039766024264>

¹⁹ <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1715953385336135983>

²⁰ <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1713796865815134364>

²¹ <https://alqassam dot ps/arabic/%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%85/5928/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%B7%D9%84%D9%82-%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AE%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%BA%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%BA%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%81%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86 ; https://alqassam dot ps/arabic/%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%85/5873/%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B5%D9%81-%D9%85%D8%BA%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D8%B4%D9%84%D9%88%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%88-%D9%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%B7%D9%87%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%81%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A820-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AE%D8%A7>

²² <https://twitter.com/Artanis04/status/1716098704388575460> ; <https://t.me/sarayaps/16425> ; <https://t.me/sarayaps/16428> ; <https://twitter.com/QalaatM/status/1715802192181858578>

²³ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/irans-quandary-how-stay-out-israels-war-hamas-2023-10-22/>

²⁴ <https://x.com/nadavpollak/status/1713608988804157912?s=46&t=TMbDQtrFur-HDVAEVR7Byg>

²⁵

[https://www.facebook.com/mod.gov.sy/posts/pfbid02mS42mCaDNtDWfuuP6ZkQvWTdSXRfzBVGty4f2MVgrYbE4Xi3XG6cR5AEac7iTMgml?_cft__\[0\]=AZUuW7OLUgAMgNAGtuRtrR6_yjWtA0OKCSENUuhmC0I9IUAFZr9LdmFUG77SFXH9KLoEaJ7WP1SM71HcyXRVWBJbHPe wuglwS26RZ4rFXEVQw31hrisGo1zR9VbR2kx3Zxj173rTudBbd3XPBNTtZDlGfyZqnYZA5rGN6ulR62Zt3ZH8I75CoHJQBN4MTjdwQ&__tn__=%2CO%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/mod.gov.sy/posts/pfbid02mS42mCaDNtDWfuuP6ZkQvWTdSXRfzBVGty4f2MVgrYbE4Xi3XG6cR5AEac7iTMgml?_cft__[0]=AZUuW7OLUgAMgNAGtuRtrR6_yjWtA0OKCSENUuhmC0I9IUAFZr9LdmFUG77SFXH9KLoEaJ7WP1SM71HcyXRVWBJbHPe wuglwS26RZ4rFXEVQw31hrisGo1zR9VbR2kx3Zxj173rTudBbd3XPBNTtZDlGfyZqnYZA5rGN6ulR62Zt3ZH8I75CoHJQBN4MTjdwQ&__tn__=%2CO%2CP-R)

²⁶ [https://www.facebook.com/mod.gov.sy/posts/pfbid028npYUAg4kHFsU6uMkNikXc3xftBApKFyJngXxYNUp86hdJv37Ma8PRv3BB8zAzhl?_cft__\[0\]=AZWfzW7z1-fFtKjqzTJ2u9sld5I8Ybv1dJ-G649mvevHdzRjDj0tL51nIstFaLkkgZnNID1Lp_LJ-xI-oZP5HUK1yWau-WdoO6g_vc3YBhZl2veCiKnRrCICBEJTJVn6qFagKCrV2tgcbGI97d9SocqQNH-leUWx7orpcSi-HGFeYju7RI3tWO7jhDCw3Jyl&__tn__=%2CO%2CP-R ; https://www.facebook.com/mod.gov.sy/posts/pfbid02aVkrWzKGrGcHd7RmLah1PJkc9yjHLHDgRVyziSwPdhtyVKW8ZWctjvT5JfLiph2KI?_cft__\[0\]=AZUfNw5-Nkcc3G7_zVem7iWQA62rq44FcmPFgVh8IOjmuHmVXH9oW4uNMJ6uGVqxcxtFwcoGcBsL5Aa7j0MutMb2Sgyeef6_EEo4-uuqjN8NroCXwOH-mrhyOif6zK7A9-n5S8ORHmjHQBsybWF_QeQ&__tn__=%2CO%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/mod.gov.sy/posts/pfbid028npYUAg4kHFsU6uMkNikXc3xftBApKFyJngXxYNUp86hdJv37Ma8PRv3BB8zAzhl?_cft__[0]=AZWfzW7z1-fFtKjqzTJ2u9sld5I8Ybv1dJ-G649mvevHdzRjDj0tL51nIstFaLkkgZnNID1Lp_LJ-xI-oZP5HUK1yWau-WdoO6g_vc3YBhZl2veCiKnRrCICBEJTJVn6qFagKCrV2tgcbGI97d9SocqQNH-leUWx7orpcSi-HGFeYju7RI3tWO7jhDCw3Jyl&__tn__=%2CO%2CP-R ; https://www.facebook.com/mod.gov.sy/posts/pfbid02aVkrWzKGrGcHd7RmLah1PJkc9yjHLHDgRVyziSwPdhtyVKW8ZWctjvT5JfLiph2KI?_cft__[0]=AZUfNw5-Nkcc3G7_zVem7iWQA62rq44FcmPFgVh8IOjmuHmVXH9oW4uNMJ6uGVqxcxtFwcoGcBsL5Aa7j0MutMb2Sgyeef6_EEo4-uuqjN8NroCXwOH-mrhyOif6zK7A9-n5S8ORHmjHQBsybWF_QeQ&__tn__=%2CO%2CP-R)

²⁷ <https://twitter.com/yzarka/status/1713403385947316411>

²⁸ <https://t.me/damascusv011/18930>

²⁹ <https://twitter.com/nourabohn/status/1712511236187857080> ; <https://t.me/almanarnews/130686>

³⁰ <https://twitter.com/DBalazada/status/1715835442136756477>

³¹ <https://www dot syria.tv/%D8%A8%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%8B-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AC%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%AD%D9%84%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%A4%D9%87%D8%A7>

¹⁰

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³² https://twitter.com/Mostafa_Najafii/status/1713509987538923983; <https://damascusv dot com/archives/54562>
³³ <https://damascusv dot com/archives/54562>
³⁴ <https://www dot nna-leb.gov.lb/en/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/649173/mikati-i-will-not-hesitate-to-exert-every-effort-t>
³⁵ <https://www.aljazeera dot net/programs/2023/10/22/%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D9%87%D9%84-%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8>
³⁶ <https://t.me/elamharbi/24>; <https://t.me/TuthiatAlshiyeh/53559> ; <https://t.me/maymun5/54234> ; <https://www dot almanar.com.lb/11100234?s=sg>
³⁷ Sources available upon request
³⁸ Sources available upon request
³⁹ <https://www.aei.org/foreign-and-defense-policy/irans-hand-in-attacks-targeting-us-israel/>
⁴⁰ <https://www.almanar dot com.lb/11095053>
⁴¹ <https://www.saba dot ye/ar/news3273935.htm>; [https://www.almayadeen dot net/latestnews/2023/10/22/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86--%D8%A8%D9%86-%D8%AC%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1--%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%B6%D9%88%D8%A7-%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%AC%D9%87](https://www.almayadeen dot net/news/politics/%D8%B5%D9%86%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B6%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D8%B3%D9%81%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84---%D9%88%D8%A5%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%8A--%D9%8A%D8%AC%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84)
⁴² <https://www.almayadeen dot net/latestnews/2023/10/22/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86--%D8%A8%D9%86-%D8%AC%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1--%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%B6%D9%88%D8%A7-%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%AC%D9%87>
⁴³ <https://www.almayadeen dot net/latestnews/2023/10/22/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86--%D8%A8%D9%86-%D8%AC%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1--%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%B6%D9%88%D8%A7-%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%AC%D9%87>
⁴⁴
⁴⁵ <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-houthi-jihad-council-command-and-control-in-the-other-hezbollah/>
⁴⁶ <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1402/07/29/2975756>
⁴⁷ <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1402/07/29/2975409> ; <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/en/news/2023/10/21/2975548>

Iran Update, October 21, 2023

Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Amin Soltani, and Nicholas Carl

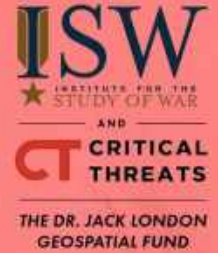
The Iran Update provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities abroad that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests. It also covers events and trends that affect the stability and decision-making of the Iranian regime. The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) provides these updates regularly based on regional events. For more on developments and in Iran and the region, see our [interactive map of Iran and the Middle East](#).

Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. 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, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

Key Takeaways:

1. Palestinian militias continued indirect fire at their usual rate into Israel. These attacks and those throughout the war underscore the reality that the IDF is facing a loose coalition of several Palestinian militias rather than just Hamas.
2. Palestinian militants and Israeli forces continued to clash in the West Bank. Palestinian militants have increasingly used IEDs against Israeli forces since October 18.
3. Iranian-backed militants, including LH, conducted 11 attacks as part of its ongoing attack campaign targeting IDF radar and sensor sites and military targets, especially tanks. This campaign creates opportunities for further LH attacks into Israel and increases the risk of further escalation.
4. Israeli and LH officials and media suggested that fighting could intensify around the Israel-Lebanon border in the coming days, especially if the IDF conducts ground operations into the Gaza Strip.
5. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—conducted two separate one-way drone attacks on US positions in Iraq, marking the fourth consecutive day of attacks targeting US forces in the Middle East. Iranian-backed KH spokesperson Jaafar al Hussein announced that attacks on US forces will continue and at a higher pace. These attacks are part of the Iranian-led effort to deter the United States from providing meaningful support to Israel.
6. Iranian state media is continuing to push counter-narratives in response to the present Western and Israeli discourse.

Israel-Hamas War as of October 21, 3:00 PM ET



Palestinian militias continued indirect fire into Israel from Gaza

Lebanese Hezbollah continued its campaign of striking Israeli positions and communication equipment along the border

Iran's Axis of Resistance targeted US forces stationed in the Middle East for the fourth consecutive day

Clashes between Palestinian militants and the IDF increased while demonstrations decreased

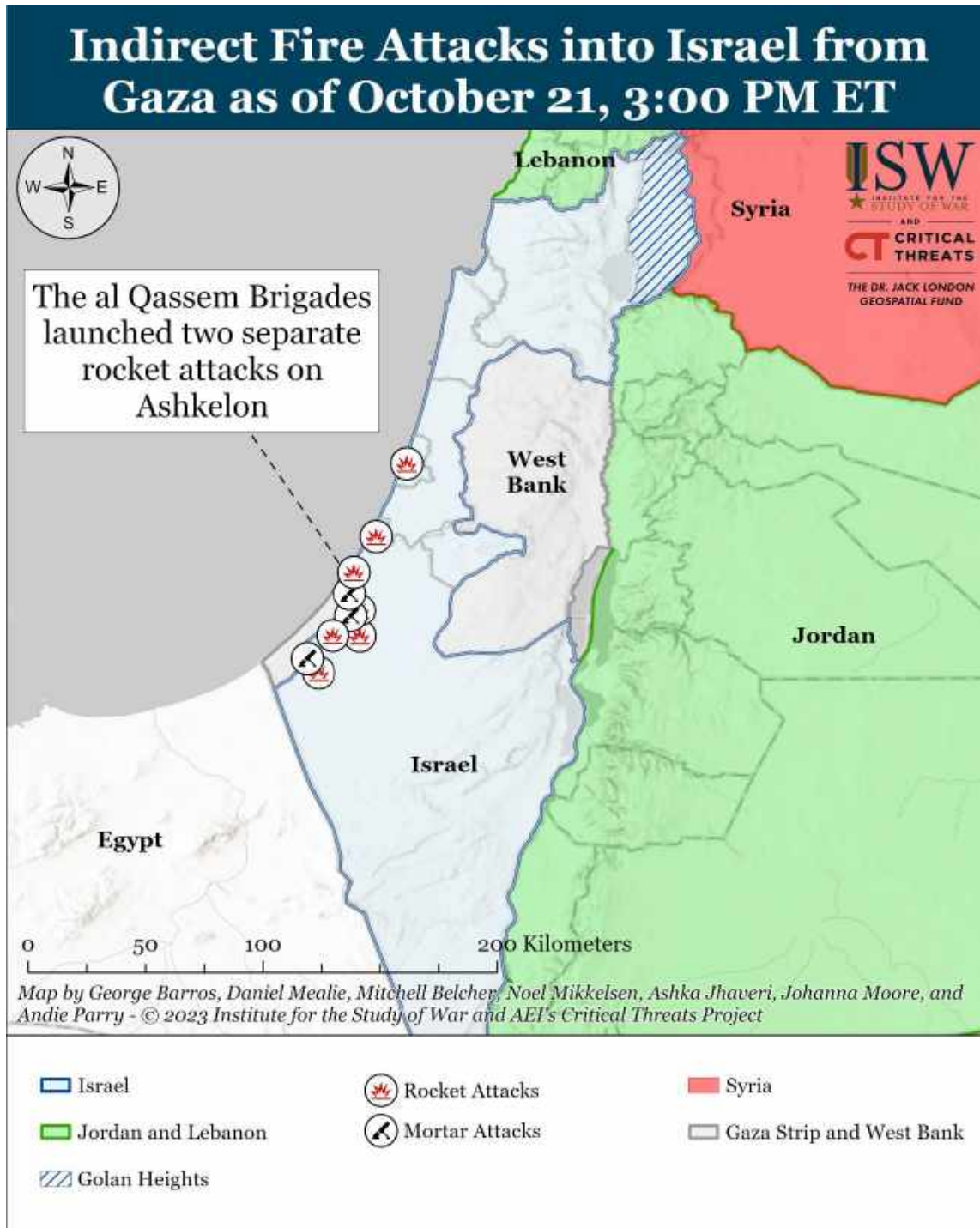


Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Israel
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Golan Heights
- Syria
- Gaza Strip and West Bank

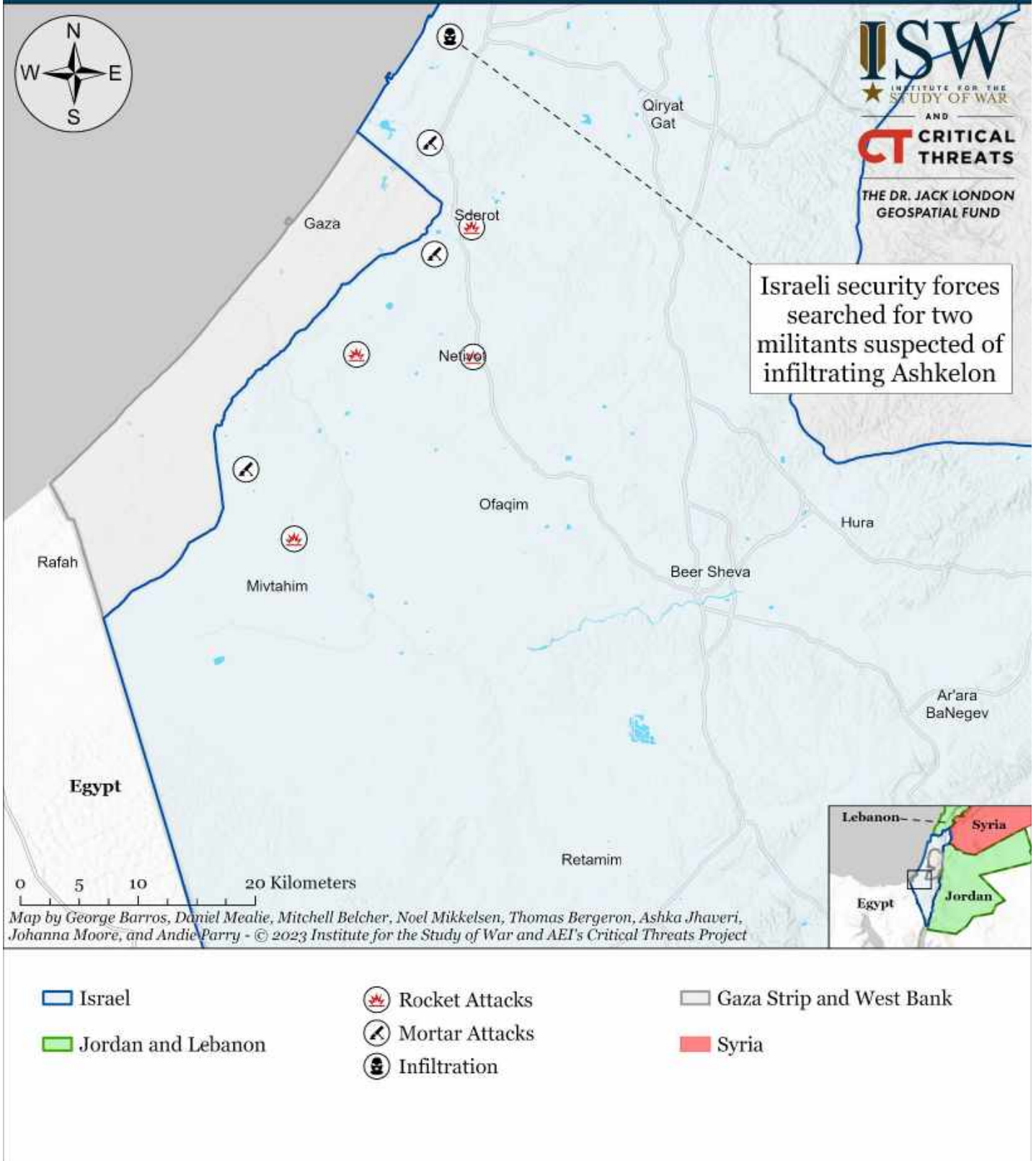
Gaza Strip

Palestinian militias continued indirect fire at their usual rate into Israel on October 21. These attacks continued to strike civilian and military targets. The al Qassem Brigades—the militant wing of Hamas—claimed ten rocket attacks[1] The National Resistance Brigades—the militant wing of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine—claimed two rocket attacks.[2] The al Quds Brigades—the militant wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)—conducted one rocket attack.[3] The Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades—the militant wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—claimed two mortar attacks, marking the second time that CTP-ISW has recorded them launching attacks into Israeli territory since the war began.[4] The Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades claimed one mortar attack into Israeli territory on October 12.[5] The attacks recorded on October 21 and throughout the war underscore the reality that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is facing a loose coalition of several Palestinian militias rather than just Hamas.



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

Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of October 21, 3:00 PM ET



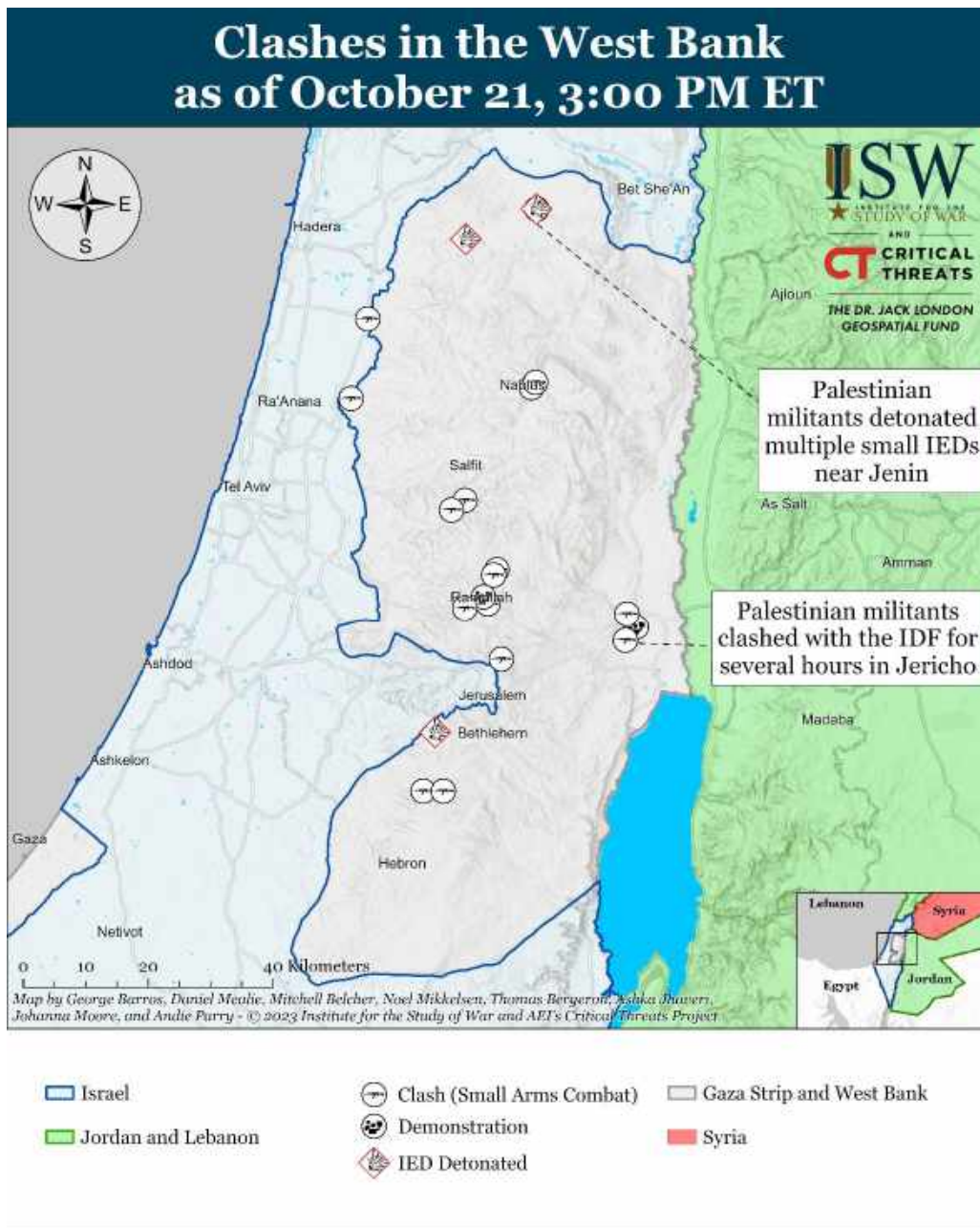
Recorded reports of rocket attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

The IDF published data on October 21 detailing the scale of Palestinian militia rocket attacks into Israel since the war began. The IDF reported that the militias have fired over 6,900 rockets from the Gaza Strip since October 7.[6] The IDF also reported that around 25 percent of the rockets fired on October 20-21 failed and fell short of Israeli territory—landing instead inside the Gaza Strip.[7]

West Bank

Palestinian militants and Israeli forces continued to clash in the West Bank on October 21.[8] CTP-ISW recorded 21 distinct clashes compared to 17 the previous day.[9] Unspecified militants detonated three IEDs targeting IDF checkpoints and vehicles throughout the West Bank.[10] Palestinian militants used IEDs in the West Bank on October 18 for the first time since the war began[11] Palestinian militants have long used IEDs in the West Bank to attack Israeli forces and disrupt Israeli raids[12]

CTP-ISW recorded three anti-Israel demonstrations in the West Bank on October 21—a significant decline from the previous day.[13] CTP-ISW recorded 12 demonstrations on October 20.[14] Hamas called for protests in support of the Gaza Strip across the world on October 22, which could facilitate civil unrest in the West Bank as well.[15]



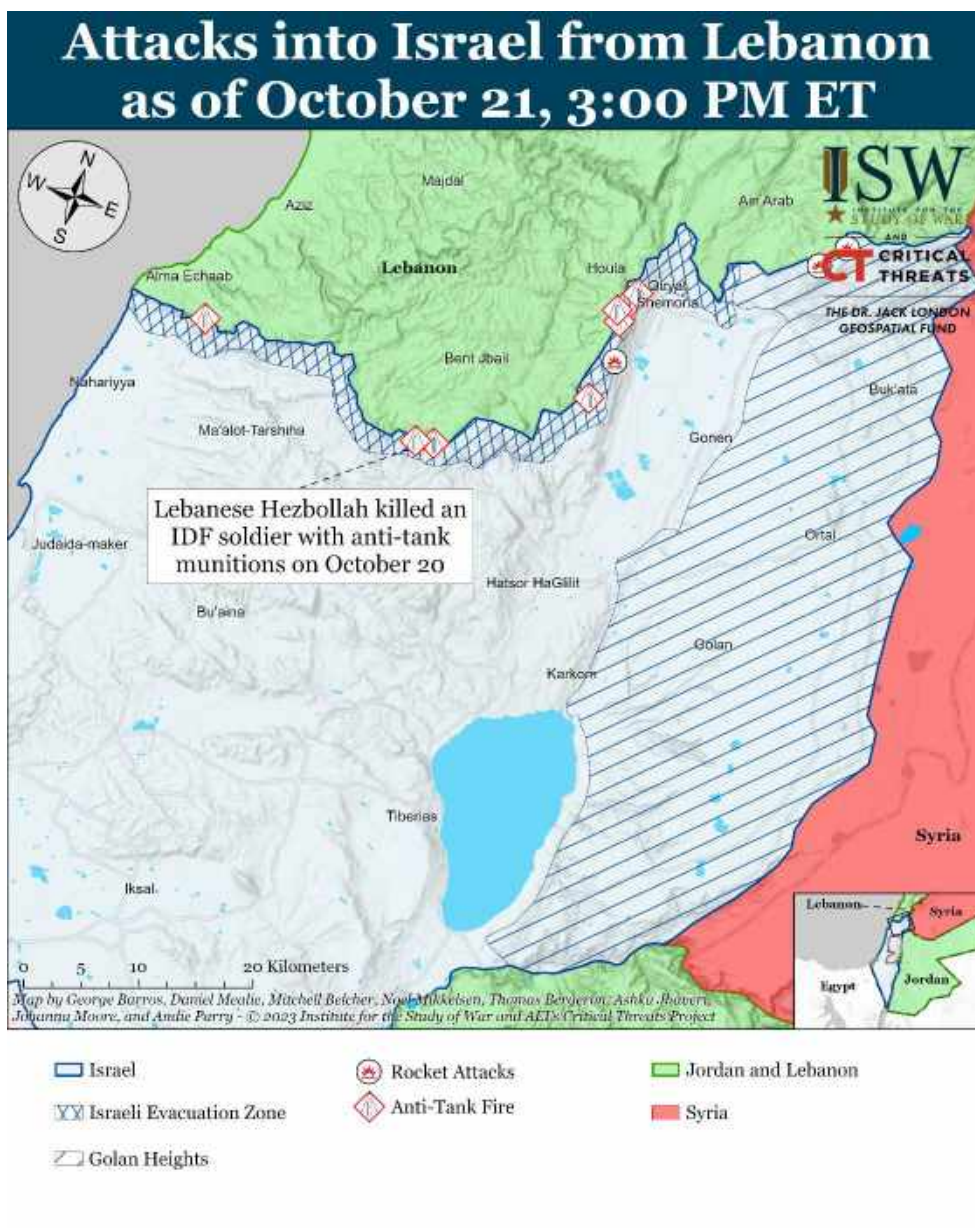
This map is not an exhaustive depiction of clashes and marches in the West Bank.

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

Iranian-backed militants, including Lebanese Hezbollah (LH), conducted 11 attacks as part of its ongoing attack campaign targeting IDF radar and sensor sites and military targets, especially tanks.[16] The attacks targeted locations across the entire length of the Israel-Lebanon border and into the disputed Sheeba Farms. These attacks are consistent with the increased rate of LH attacks into Israel since October 15.[17] This campaign creates opportunities for further LH attacks into Israel and increases the risk of further escalation, as CTP-ISW previously noted.[18]

LH claimed five of the eleven attacks reported above, although the group is also likely responsible for three unclaimed anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) attacks into Israel. Israel responded to the attacks by striking several LH positions along the border as well as LH militants firing ATGMs into Israel.[19]

Israeli and LH officials and media suggested that fighting could intensify around the Israel-Lebanon border in the coming days, especially if the IDF conducts ground operations into the Gaza Strip. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant stated on October 21 that he “assume[s] that the challenge [there] will become greater [than it is now].”[20] Israeli media similarly suggested on LH could increase the scope and range of its attacks in the coming days.[21] LH Deputy Secretary General Naim Qassem separately warned on October 21 that the war could expand if “the enemy interferes further.”[22]

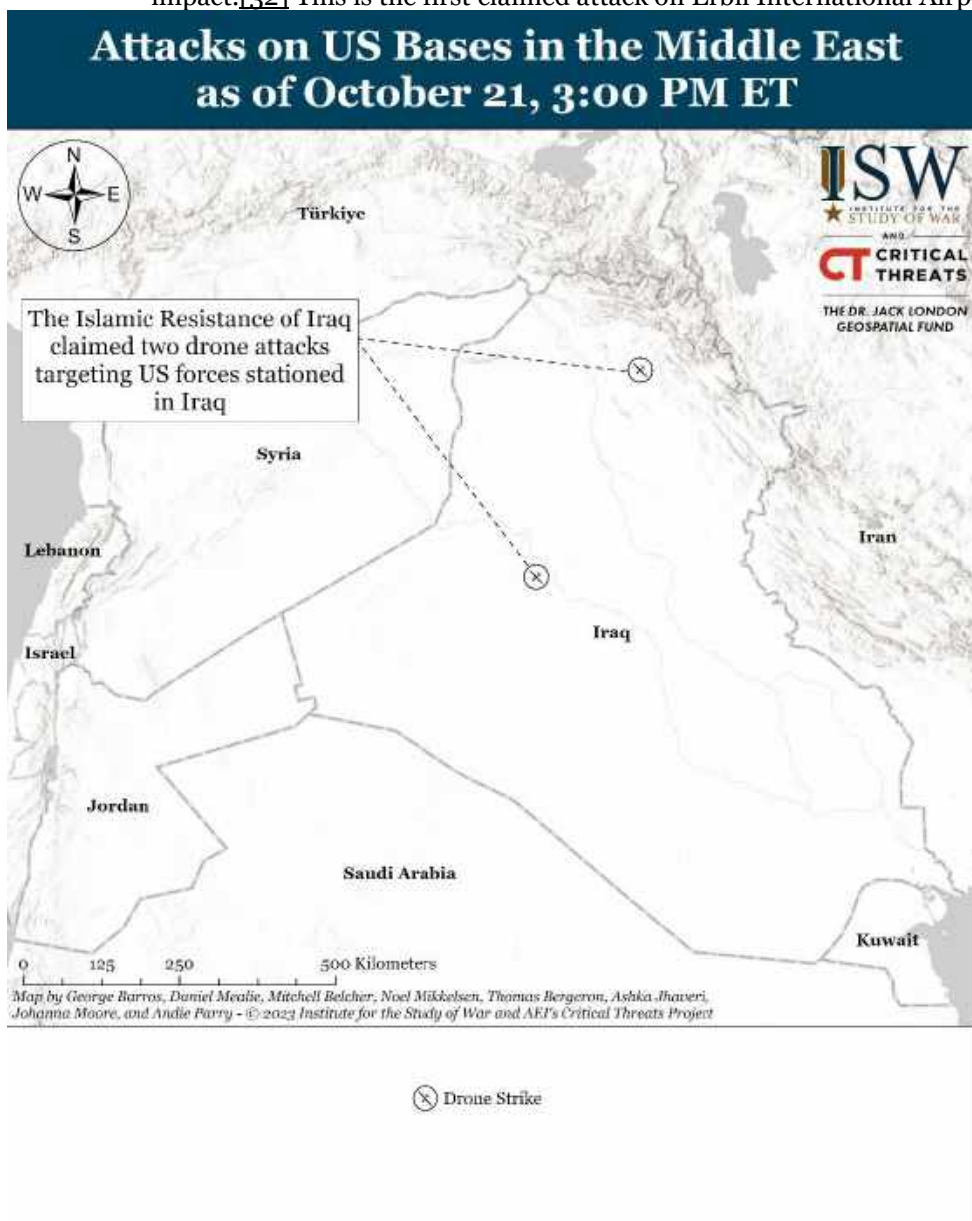


Recorded reports of rocket attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

Iran and Axis of Resistance

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—conducted two separate one-way drone attacks on US positions in Iraq on October 21, marking the fourth consecutive day of attacks targeting US forces in the Middle East.[23] The Islamic Resistance in Iraq has claimed eight attacks targeting US forces in Iraq and Syria since October 18.[24] These attacks are part of the Iranian-led effort to deter the United States from providing meaningful support to Israel, as CTP-ISW previously assessed.[25] LH-affiliated media later published an article asserting that the recent Iranian-sponsored attacks on US positions are meant to prevent the United States from supporting Israel, confirming that assessment.[26]

- The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed a drone attack targeting US forces stationed at the Ain al Asad Airbase and reported that the drone “hit its target.”[27] The group released a video showing the drone launch but did not include footage of any impact. [28] The video has since been circulated on Axis of Resistance-affiliated media.[29] This is the third attack claimed by the Islamic Resistance in Iraq on the Ain al Asad airbase since October 18.[30]
- The Islamic Resistance in Iraq also conducted a one-way drone attack targeting US forces stationed at Erbil International Airport on October 21 and claimed the attack hit its intended target.[31] The group released footage of the drone launched toward the airport but again did not include footage showing any impact.[32] This is the first claimed attack on Erbil International Airport since the war began.



Iranian-backed Kataib Hezbollah (KH) spokesperson Jaafar al Hussein announced on October 20 that attacks on US forces will continue and at a higher pace.[33] Hussein placed full responsibility for Israeli airstrikes into the Gaza Strip on the United States and argued that the United States will bear the consequences. KH has been one of the more vocal Iranian-backed Iraqi proxies to threaten attacks on US forces in the Middle East since October 7. KH is also a member of the Islamic Resistance of Iraq.[34]

Iranian state media is continuing to push counter-narratives in response to the present Western and Israeli discourse. IRGC-affiliated media published an article envisioning the “world after Israel” on October 21.[35] This reporting comes as Western and Israeli discourse have focused on what governance structure in the Gaza Strip would follow the removal of Hamas. CTP-ISW previously reported on how Iranian officials have begun associating Israel with Adolf Hitler and ISIS in response to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu labeling Hamas as “the new Nazis” and “ISIS.”

[1] Sources available upon request

[2] <https://t.me/QudsN/316038> ; <https://www.almayadeen dot net/news/politics/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B7%D8%B1-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AE%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89>

[3] <https://t.me/TuthiatAlshiyea/53553>

[4] https://t.me/mihwar_almuqawama/36162 ; https://t.me/mihwar_almuqawama/36160 ; <https://t.me/QudsN/316078>

[5] <https://t.me/QudsN/316078>

[6] <https://twitter.com/IDF/status/1715501756753367333>

[7] <https://twitter.com/IDF/status/1715715126127468730>

[8] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-october-18-2023> ; Sources available upon request.

[9] Sources available upon request.

[10] <https://twitter.com/qudsn/status/1715788297526481088> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/315819> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/315785>

[11] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-october-19-2023>

[12] <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2023/07/06/israel-launched-its-biggest-raid-on-the-west-bank-in-over-20-years>

[13] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-october-20-2023> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/316074> ; <https://twitter.com/qudsn/status/1715782896244474022> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/315875>

[14] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-20-2023>

[15] <https://hamas dot ps/ar/p/18346>

[16] <https://central-media dot org/36395/600/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%81-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%A9-%D8%B5%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9> ; <https://central-media dot org/36396/600/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%81-%D8%A2%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86%D9%8A> ; <https://www.almayadeen dot net/news/politics/%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86:-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B4%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B8%D9%85-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89> ; <https://central-media dot org/36393/600/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%81-%D9%85%D9%88%D9%82%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86%D9%8A> ; <https://www.almayadeen dot net/news/politics/%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86:-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B4%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B8%D9%85-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89> ; <https://www.almayadeen dot net/news/politics/%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86:-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B4%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B8%D9%85-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89>

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<https://twitter.com/alishoeib1970/status/1715741464209056236> ; <https://central-media.org/36394/600/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%81-%D9%85%D9%88%D9%82%D8%B9-%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%A7>
[17] Sources available on request.
[18] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-october-20-2023>
[19] <https://twitter.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1715599664517455946> ;
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<https://twitter.com/IDFSpokesperson/status/1715720631973470605>
[20] https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/on-northern-border-gallant-says-hezbollah-paying-heavy-price-for-attacks-on-israel/
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[24] Sources available upon request
[25] <https://www.aei.org/foreign-and-defense-policy/irans-hand-in-attacks-targeting-us-israel/>
[26] <https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=60517&cid=185>
[27] <https://t.me/elamharbi/16>
[28] <https://t.me/elamharbi/18>
[29] <https://t.me/elamharbi/18> ; <https://www.almanar.com.lb/11100234?s=tg> ;
[30] sources available upon request
[31] <https://t.me/elamharbi/20>
[32] <https://t.me/elamharbi/22>
[33] <https://www.almanar.com.lb/11095053>
[34] <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-islamic-resistance-iraq>
[35] <https://www.farsnews.ir/news/14020729000278>

Iran Update, October 20, 2023

Johanna Moore, Ashka Jhaveri, Annika Ganzeveld, Kathryn Tyson, Amin Soltani and Brian Carter

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. For more on developments and in Iran and the region, see our [interactive map of Iran and the Middle East](#).

Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. 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, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

Israel-Hamas War as of October 20, 3:00 PM ET



Palestinian militias continued indirect fire into Israel from Gaza

Attacks from Lebanon into northern Israel risk further escalation between Israel and Lebanese Hezbollah

Iran's Axis of Resistance targeted US forces stationed in the Middle East for the third consecutive day

The Israel-Hamas War may be driving Palestinian militia coordination in the West Bank

0 50 100 200 Kilometers

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Israel
- Syria
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Gaza Strip and West Bank
- Golan Heights

Key Takeaways:

1. Palestinian militias continued indirect fire from the Gaza Strip into Israel on October 20. Hamas also released two American hostages held in Gaza, marking the first time Hamas has released any hostages since its October 7 attack into Israel.
2. Clashes between Palestinian militants and Israeli security forces in the West Bank increased following Hamas calls for protests on October 18. The Israel-Hamas War may be driving Palestinian militia coordination in the West Bank.
3. Iranian-backed militants targeted US forces stationed at Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) and al Harir Air Base on October 20, marking the third consecutive day of attacks against US forces in the Middle East. Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have threatened to continue attacks on US forces in the Middle East.

Gaza Strip

Palestinian militias continued indirect fire from the Gaza Strip into Israel on October 20. The al Qassem Brigades—Hamas' militant wing—claimed ten rocket, mortar, and drone attacks. Saraya al Quds—the militant wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad—claimed responsibility for another seven rocket attacks. This rate of attacks is consistent with the rates that CTP-ISW has observed in recent days. Both groups continue to frame these attacks as being in response to Israeli “massacres” against civilians.

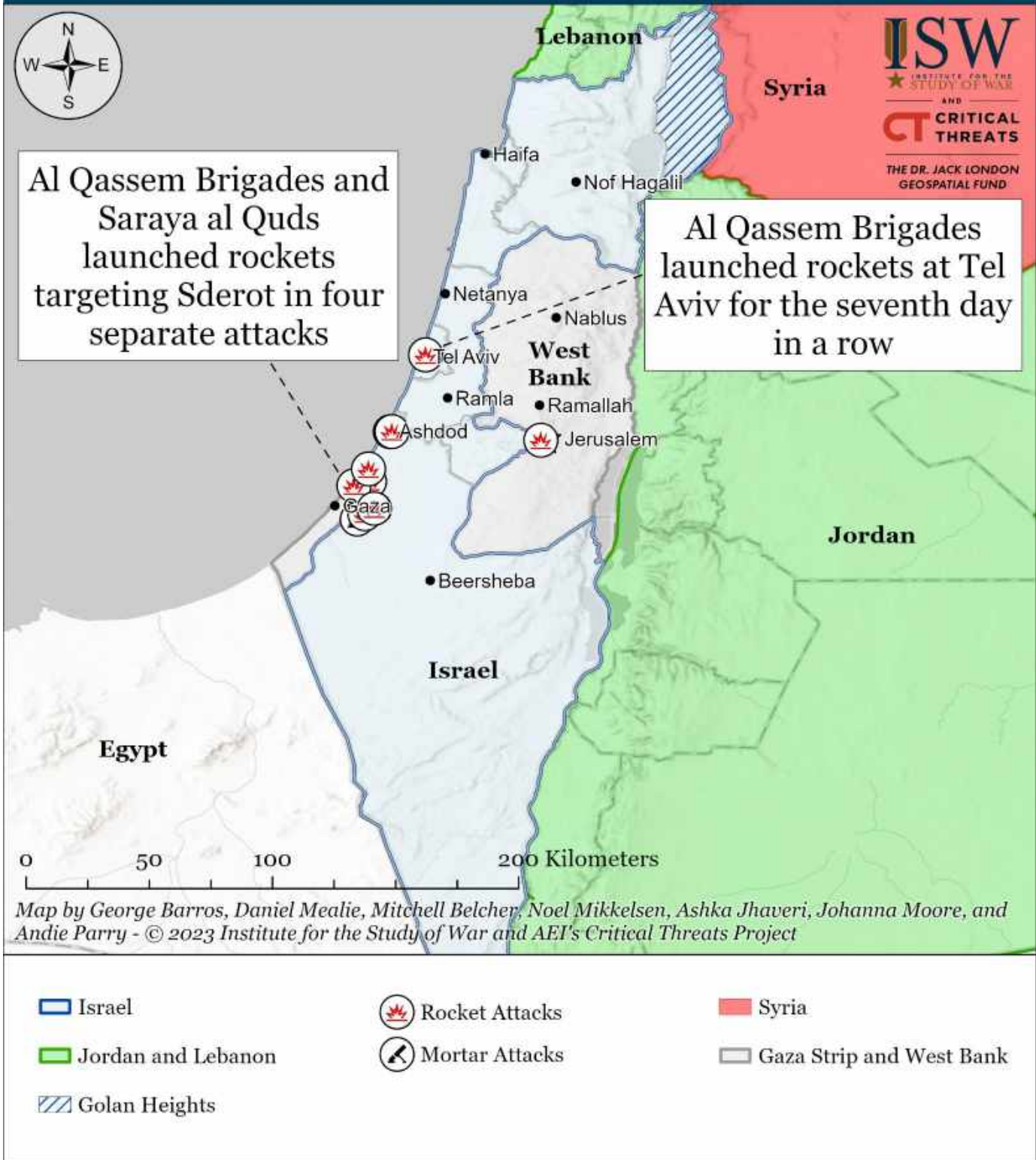
The al Qassem Brigades claimed responsibility for the first armed drone attack since October 15, which destroyed an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) tank.[1] The al Qassem Brigades released a propaganda video and two photographs on October 20 of its drones and drone attacks and threatened further attacks.[2] The al Qassem Brigades has used these drones to strike IDF soldiers and infrastructure in attacks since October 7.[3]

Hamas released two American hostages held in Gaza, marking the first time Hamas has released any hostages since its October 7 attack into Israel. Hamas military spokesperson Abu Ubaida released a statement on October 20 claiming that it had released the hostages after Qatari mediation efforts.[4] Ubaida also said that the hostage release was in response to US President Joe Biden’s “false allegations” about the group during Biden’s address on October 19.[5] Hamas continues to hold over 200 other hostages.

IDF airstrikes continue to kill Hamas leadership and operatives in Gaza. The IDF killed senior Hamas engineer Mahmoud Zavih on October 20.[6] The IDF reported that Zavih was responsible for weapons production for Hamas' military wing, the al Qassem Brigades.[7] The IDF said the leader “exchanged knowledge with other terrorists in the Middle East,” suggesting the leader supported the weapons production effort of other Axis of Resistance groups in the region.

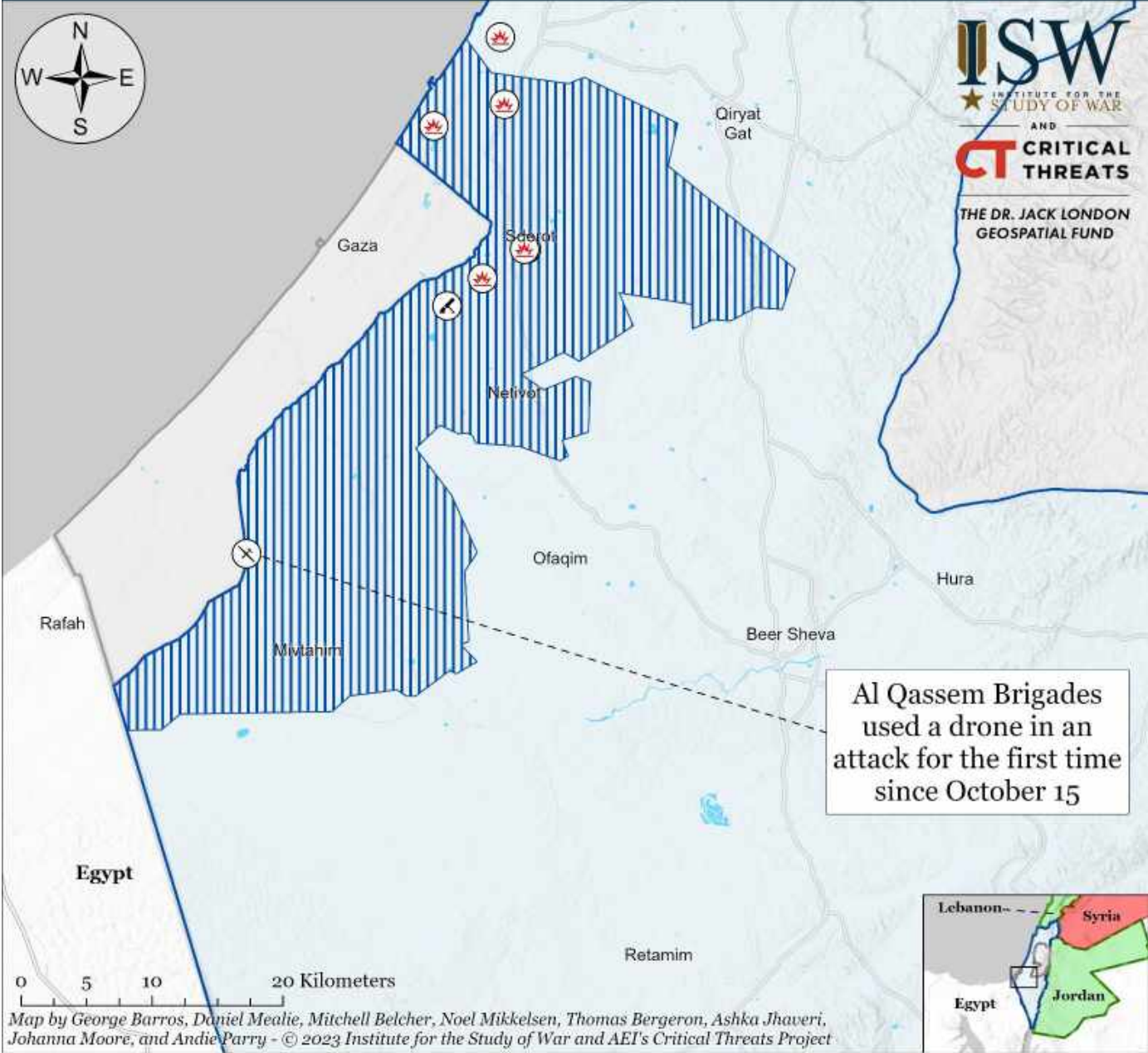
The IDF is degrading Hamas’ naval capabilities which Hamas could use to target Israeli gas rigs and other infrastructure, according to an Israeli journalist.[8] An IDF airstrike on October 19 killed a member of Hamas’ naval branch in Gaza who the IDF claimed was plotting maritime attacks.[9] The IDF also killed another member of Hamas’ naval branch in Gaza who participated in Hamas’ attack into Israel on October 7.[10] Hamas has worked to develop its naval capabilities in recent years. The IDF reported in 2021 that Hamas for the first time developed unmanned sea vessels to launch attacks in Israel.[11]

Indirect Fire Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of October 20, 3:00 PM ET



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

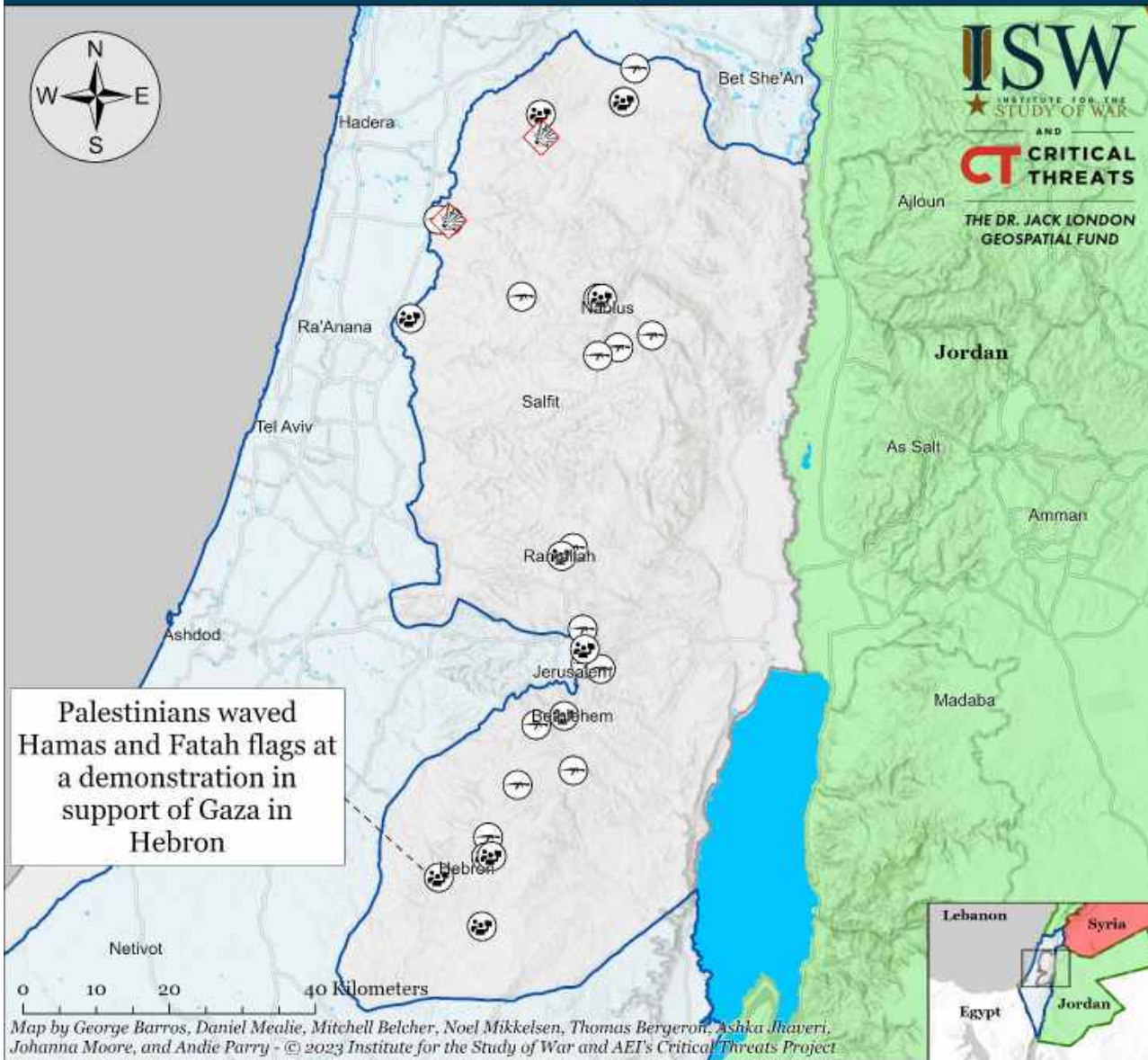
Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of October 20, 3:00 PM ET



- | | | |
|------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| Israel | Rocket Attacks | Gaza Strip and West Bank |
| Israeli Closed Military Zone | Mortar Attacks | Syria |
| Jordan and Lebanon | Drone Strike | |

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

Clashes in the West Bank as of October 20, 3:00 PM ET



Palestinians waved Hamas and Fatah flags at a demonstration in support of Gaza in Hebron

- Israel
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Clash (Small Arms Combat)
- Demonstration
- IED Detonated
- Gaza Strip and West Bank
- Syria

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

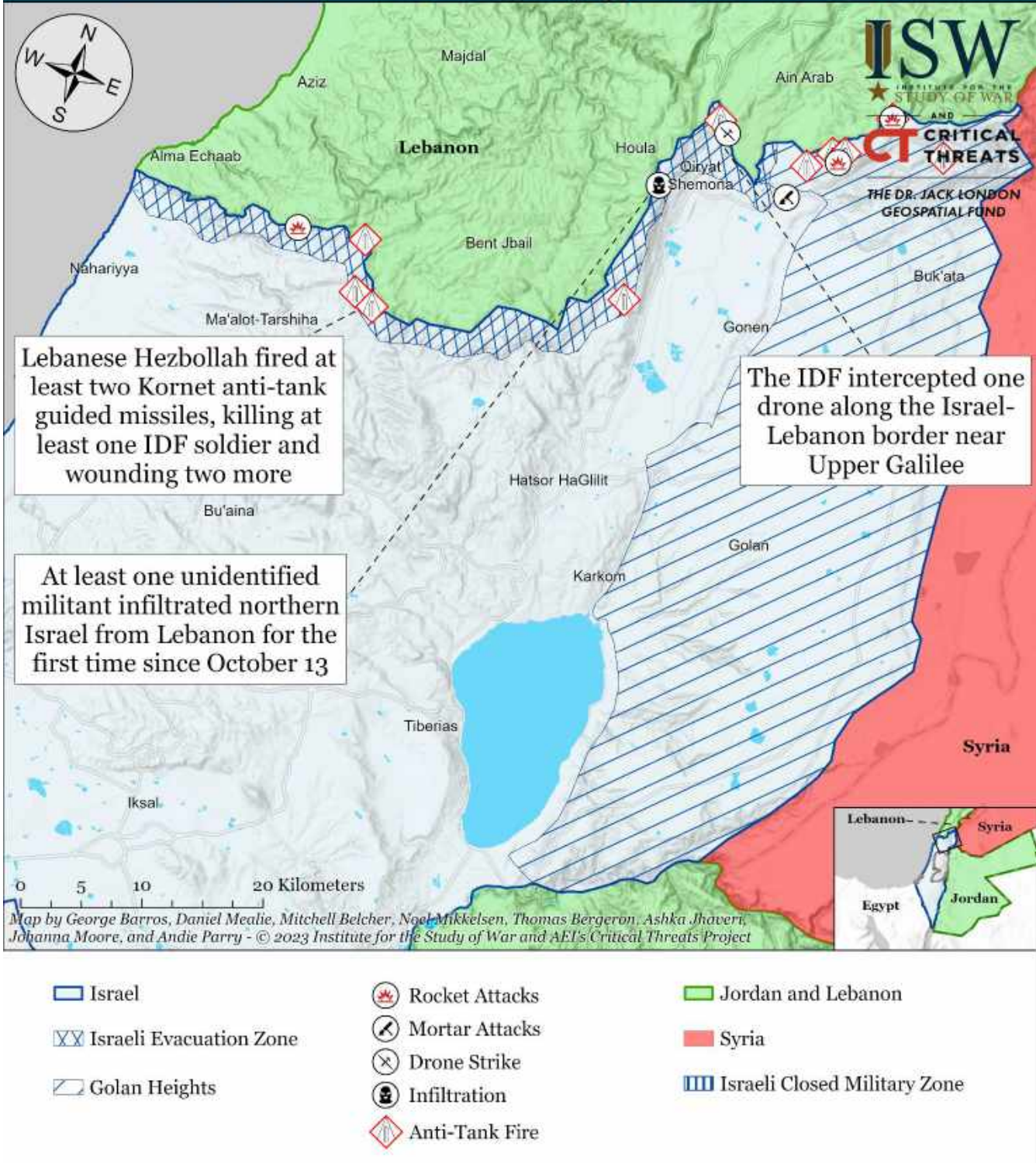
Clashes between Palestinian militants and Israeli security forces in the West Bank increased following Hamas calls for protests the day before. CTP-ISW recorded 17 distinct clashes and 12 demonstrations in the West Bank on October 20. Many demonstrators condemned the Israeli raid on the Nour Shams refugee camp on October 19 where six Palestinians and one Israeli officer died.^[12] Unspecified militants detonated an IED targeting an IDF convoy at the camp overnight.^[13] Hamas called for protests in support of the Gaza Strip across all cities and towns in the West Bank on October 20, as part of Hamas' effort to expand fighting against Israel to the West Bank.

The Israel-Hamas War may be driving Palestinian militia coordination in the West Bank. The IDF said on October 17 that it arrested 440 wanted for arrest Palestinians in the West Bank—including 220 Hamas-affiliated Palestinians individuals—since the war began on October 7.^[14] The Palestinian Authority Health Ministry noted that Israeli security forces killed 41 West Bank Palestinians between October 7 and October 17.^[15] The UN added on October 14 that the week following October 7 was the deadliest week for Palestinians in the territory since at least 2005.^[16] CTP-ISW is closely monitoring the risk of conflict expanding in the West Bank.

- Palestinians held Hamas and Fatah flags at a demonstration in Hebron and Yatta condemning Israeli attacks and in support of Gaza. The IDF dropped leaflets in Hebron warning it will find and catch anyone who identifies themselves as a member of Hamas.^[17] Hamas chairman Khaled Mashaal called on Fatah to defeat Israel together.^[18] The Hamas and Fatah signed a reconciliation deal on October 13 after having been at odds for more than a decade.^[19]
- Hamas claimed that al Qassem Brigades fought in the Nour Shams camp on October 19.^[20] The PIJ-affiliated Tulkarm Brigade said that several Palestinian groups supported them during the fighting.^[21] This is the first coordinated small arms clash that a Palestinian militia has claimed in the West Bank since October 7.
- Hamas continued to message that the resistance in the West Bank and Gaza must work together. Hamas' Political Bureau leader Ismail Haniyeh delivered a speech on October 9 praising the mass popular movement in support of Gaza over the past few days, noting that Israeli aggression extends to the West Bank.^[22] Coordinated Palestinian resistance in the West Bank supports Hamas' stated objectives to expand the war to the West Bank.

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

Attacks into Israel from Lebanon as of October 20, 3:00 PM ET



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

Attacks from Lebanon into northern Israel risk further escalation between Israel and Lebanese Hezbollah (LH). Two attacks in northern Israel killed at least one IDF soldier and wounded three more.[23] The IDF soldier killed in action on October 20 marks the sixth IDF soldier killed in action on the Israel-Lebanon border since October 7.[24] LH released a statement on October 19 that warned that violation of “Lebanon’s security” will not go unanswered, which suggests that LH will continue to respond to Israeli airstrikes that the IDF conducts in response to LH attacks.[25] LH targeted IDF positions with two Kornet anti-tank guided missiles near Natua and Barnit in retaliation for IDF shelling of southern Lebanon.[26] The attack killed one IDF soldier and wounded another, according to LH.[27] The IDF responded with airstrikes against LH positions.[28] At least one unspecified militant infiltrated Israel on October 20 for the first time since October 13 near Margoliot, seriously injuring one IDF soldier.[29]

LH conducted 18 attacks targeting civilian and military infrastructure in northern Israel on October 20, which is consistent with its rate of attacks since October 15.[30] CTP-ISW recorded between three and five attacks daily between October 12 and October 14.[31] CTP-ISW has recorded between nine and 20 attacks targeting northern Israel daily since October 15.[32]

The IDF intercepted an unspecified drone crossing the Israel-Lebanon border near the Upper Galilee region on October 20.[33]

Iran and Axis of Resistance

Iranian-backed militants targeted US forces stationed at Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) and al Harir Air Base on October 20, marking the third consecutive day of attacks against US forces in the Middle East.[34] The Islamic Resistance in Iraq - an umbrella group of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias - targeted US forces stationed at Al Harir Air Base in Iraqi Kurdistan on October 20 in a drone attack.[35] It claimed to have launched two drones targeting the air base and reported that both drones “hit their target.”[36] This is the fourth attack claimed by the Islamic Resistance of Iraq during the last three days.[37] Militants from the Islamic Resistance in Iraq targeted Al Harir Air Base and Ain al Asad in Iraq and the al Tanf Garrison and Conoco Mission Support Site in Syria on October 18 and 19.[38]

Unidentified militants targeted US forces stationed at BIAP in a rocket attack on October 20.[39] Iraqi Security forces found the rocket launch site in Jihad neighborhood, which is adjacent to the airport.[40] The counter-rocket artillery mortar (C-RAM) system at BIAP engaged two rockets, destroying one.[41] This is the first attack on BIAP since October 7. No group has claimed the attack on BIAP at the time of publication.

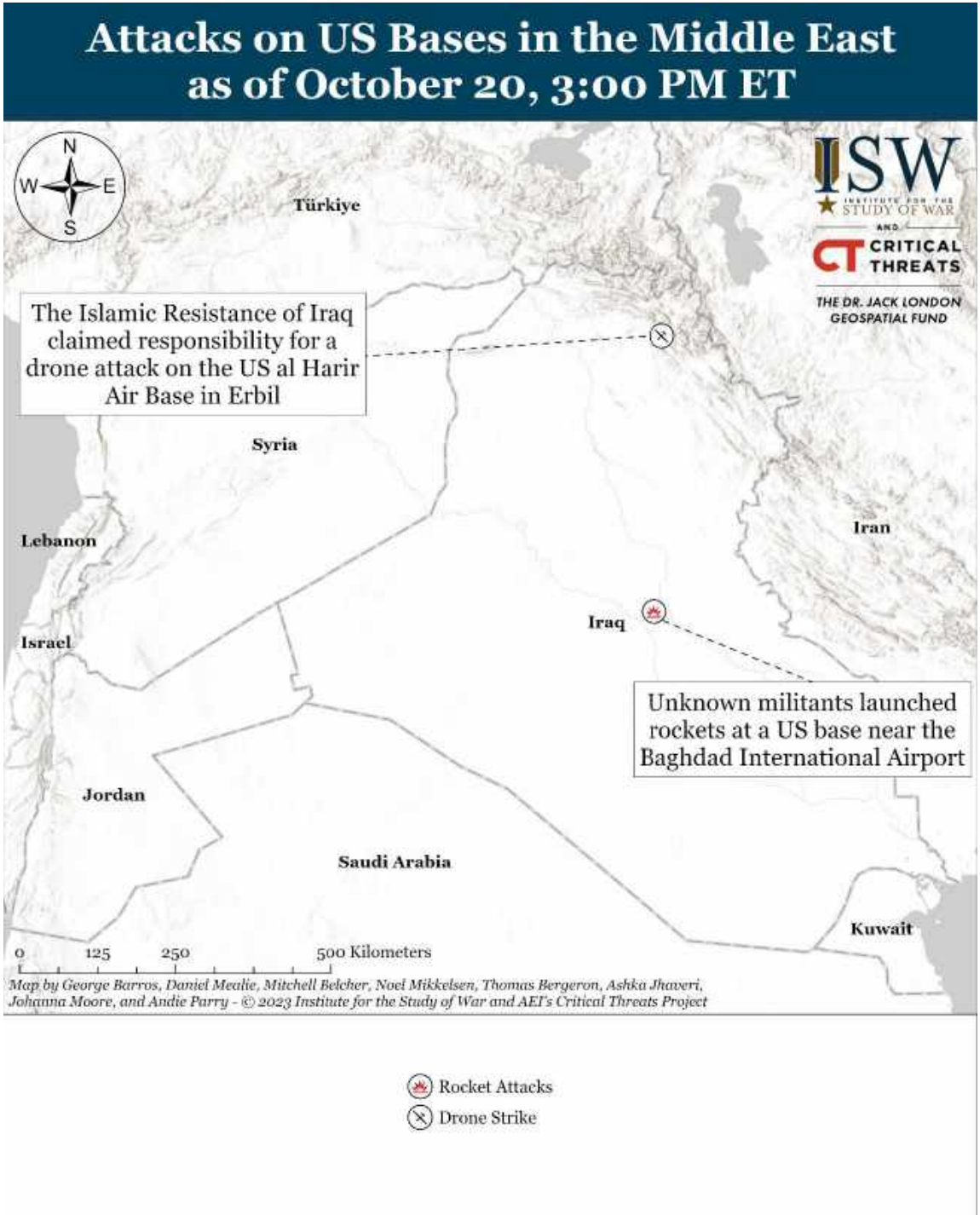
Iranian-backed militias have conducted eight attacks over the past three days across the Middle East in a multi-theater escalation against the United States and Israel.

Iranian-backed Iraqi militias threatened to conduct attacks on US forces in the region if the United States intervened in the Israel-Hamas war, as CTP-ISW previously reported.[42] Iranian-backed Iraqi groups are currently behaving as though the United States has crossed this red line. Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Mohammad Bagheri warned on October 19 that continued Israeli actions in the Gaza Strip could force “other actors,” including “resistance groups,” to engage in the conflict, echoing previous regime rhetoric about the possibility of a conflict expanding.[43]

Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have threatened to continue attacks on US forces in the Middle East. *Tura News*, affiliated with Iranian-backed Kataib Hezbollah, circulated a warning of additional attacks on US forces in Iraq “in the next few days.”[44] Iranian-backed Badr Organization

released a promotional video repeating the group's threat to attack the United States if it intervenes in the Israel-Hamas war.[45]

Ashab al Kahf released a statement on October 20 threatening to conduct improvised explosive device (IED) attacks on US forces.[46] Ashab al Kahf is a member of the Islamic Resistance of Iraq which claimed the one-way drone attack on US forces stationed at Ain al Asad Air Base on October 18.[47] Ashab al Kahf claimed 3 IED attacks targeting US logistics convoys in Iraq between July and August 2023.[48]



IRGC-QF Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani warned Syrian President Bashar al Assad during his visit to Syria on 15 October that Iran intends to use Syria as a second front if the Israel-Hamas war expands geographically.[49] The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) began directing militias to the southwestern Syrian border immediately after the Hamas-led attack into Israel on October 7. Iranian officials have since messaged that a multi-front war against Israel is becoming more likely.

- Najafi reported that Ghaani established a joint operations room in Syria during his visit on October 15.[50] The IRGC will oversee this operations room, according to Iranian state-news journalist Mostafa Najafi.[51] An unspecified Iranian intelligence official said that Iran will start a “limited” ground operation from the Golan Heights and notably not from Lebanon if the situation escalates to protect LH.[52]
- Syrian opposition media reported on October 19 that the Axis of Resistance, in coordination with the Syrian regime, plan to surprise Israel and create a narrative in which the Axis represents the main resistance to Israel.[53] Iranian-backed militias are deployed along the southwestern Syrian border in Rif Dimashq and Daraa province.[54] CTP and ISW have tracked the IRGC and LH from Syria and Iraq deploying to the border of Syrian and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights since October 9.

Iranian-backed militias have relocated ammunition and equipment to residential areas in Deir ez Zor City and Hatla, Deir ez Zor Province on October 19 according to a report from anti-regime news outlet Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR).[55]

According to local sources cited by SOHR, Iranian-backed militias began transferring weapons to residential areas in fear of a possible retaliation from US forces. The Islamic Resistance of Iraq targeted US forces stationed at al Tanf Garrison and Conoco Mission support site in eastern Syria on October 19, as CTP-ISW previously reported.[56] US forces have targeted Iranian-backed militia weapons storage facilities in Syria in retaliation for strikes on US positions in Syria previously, most notably during the last escalation cycle between the United States and militias in March 2023.[57]

LH and Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) arrived in al Mayadin, Deir ez Zor Province, Syria on October 19. LH militants were transferred from Idlib Province, Rif Dimashq Province, and Hatla, Deir ez Zor Province.[58] Popular Mobilization Forces arrived in al Mayadin from Iraq the same day.[59]

PMF supporters traveled to the Iraq-Jordan border near Trebil, Iraq to stage a sit-in in support of the Palestinian people.[60] Sadrist Movement leader Moqtada al Sadr called for Iraqis to hold a sit in on the border with Palestine and remain “until the siege is lifted.”[61] Jordanian authorities did not comment on any convoys traveling to the border; however, Jordanian security forces closed the al Karamah Border Crossing with the West Bank according to Iraqi Kurdistan-based Shafaq news.[62]

Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) spokesperson Nasser Abu Sharif stated that the potential for normalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia motivated Hamas’ October 7 attack during an Iranian conference on the Israel-Hamas war in Qom on October 20.[63] Sharif argued that the normalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia would have dealt a devastating blow to the Palestinian cause. He also mentioned that many

unspecified intra-Palestinian issues also “justified” the Al Aqsa Flood operation. Sharif further claimed that LH Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah is awaiting a simple “phone call” from resistance leaders before attacking Israel, consistent with Iranian and Axis of Resistance rhetoric about the potential expansion of the conflict since October 13.[64] Sharif finally claimed that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has forbidden Palestinian groups from granting any concessions or retreating, consistent with CTP-ISW's previous assessment that the Palestinian resistance is preparing for a prolonged conflict with Israel.[65]

Iranian Friday prayer leaders echoed Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei’s recent claim that the United States is responsible for Israeli actions against the Gaza Strip during their sermons on October 20. Khamenei accused the United States of determining Israel’s “current policy” vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip during a speech on October 17, as CTP-ISW previously reported.[66] Mashhad Friday Prayer Leader Ahmad Alam ol Hoda emphasized that the United States, not Israel, is the “main perpetrator” of killings and bombings in the Gaza Strip.[67] Varamin Friday Prayer Leader Mohsen Mahmoudi similarly claimed that the United States is “the root of all Israeli crimes.”[68] Pardis Friday Prayer Leader Hossein Hosseini asserted that Israel is carrying out attacks against women, children, and hospitals in the Gaza Strip “under the heads of American statesmen.”[69] This coordinated rhetoric from Friday prayer leaders suggests that Khamenei and his inner circle are directing this messaging campaign. Friday prayer leaders receive guidance for the content of their sermons from the Office of the Supreme Leader.

Iranian officials and media are criticizing US President Joe Biden’s October 18 visit to Israel and framing it as part of US-Israeli preparation for an Israeli ground invasion into the Gaza Strip. Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian described Biden’s visit as “provocative” during a meeting with his Lebanese counterpart Abdallah Bou Habib on the sidelines of the emergency Organization of Islamic Cooperation meeting in Jeddah on October 18.[70] Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani similarly stated that Biden’s visit highlighted US plans to “complicate” the situation in the Middle East during a phone call with his Iraqi counterpart Thabet al Abbasi on October 20.[71]

- State-run outlet IRNA claimed on October 20 that the purpose of Biden’s visit to Israel was to “strengthen” Israeli attacks against Hamas.[72] Qods Friday Prayer Leader Hamza Mohammadi claimed on October 20 that Biden gave the Israeli government “the green light” for a ground invasion into the Gaza Strip.[73] Regime outlets recirculated Western reporting on October 19 that Biden told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that Washington is “fully in support” of a ground invasion.[74]

Iranian officials have begun comparing Israel to ISIS and Hitler after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu labeled Hamas as “ISIS” and “the new Nazis” on October 17.[75] Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian compared Israel to ISIS while claiming that Israel attacked a Greek Orthodox church in the Gaza Strip on October 20.[76] Iranian Chief Rabbi Younes Hamami Lalehzar separately stated that Israel cannot represent Judaism “just as ISIS cannot represent Islam” during an interview with English-language *Press TV* on October 20.[77] Passive Defense Organization Head Brigadier General Gholam Reza Jalali described Israel as “a new Hitler in the region” in a speech on October 20.[78] The above rhetoric is consistent with Iranian accusations since October 11 that Israel is committing war crimes and genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Iranian media recirculated Western and Syrian reporting on the October 19 Iranian-backed militant attacks on US military assets. State-controlled *Islamic Republic News Agency*

recirculated the sUS Defense Department’s announcement that it had intercepted several Houthi missiles and drones on October 19.[79] The Iran-backed Houthis launched at least three land-attack cruise missiles and eight drones “potentially” targeting Israel.[80] IRGC-affiliated *Tasnim News Agency* recirculated Western and Syrian media reporting on Iranian-backed Iraqi militias targeting US forces at Ain al Asad Airbase, Anbar province, Iraq as well as the Conoco Mission Support Site in Syria.[81] The Islamic Resistance of Iraq fired three drones targeting the al Tanf Garrison, Syria and three one-way drones targeting Conoco Mission Support Site on October 19.[82] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias also launched an unspecified number of rockets targeting US forces at the Ain al Asad Airbase.[83]

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Iran Update, October 19, 2023

**Ashka Jhaveri, Peter Mills, Andie Parry, Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani,
Brian Carter, and Nicholas Carl**

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. For more on developments and in Iran and the region, see our [interactive map of Iran and the Middle East](#).

Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. 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, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

Key Takeaways:

1. Palestinian militias continued indirect fire from the Gaza Strip into Israel. Palestinian militias targeted 12 IDF military positions with indirect fire and ATGM in southern Israel. An Israeli journalist indicated that Hamas is also trying to attack natural gas rigs in the Mediterranean Sea.
2. Clashes between Palestinian militants and Israeli forces in the West Bank may increase on October 20. Hamas called for protests in support of the Gaza Strip across all cities and towns in the West Bank then, as part of Hamas' effort to expand fighting against Israel to the West Bank.
3. CTP-ISW recorded 13 attacks from Lebanon into Israeli territory, which is creating opportunities for further attacks into Israel. LH is allowing Palestinian militias to continue attacks from southern Lebanon into Israel.
4. Iranian-backed Iraqi militants in Syria conducted three attacks using one-way drones and rockets against US military positions in Iraq and Syria, marking the second consecutive day of such attacks targeting US forces in the Middle East.
5. Iranian Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Mohammad Bagheri held separate phone calls with his Russian and Qatari counterparts to discuss the Israel-Hamas war.

Israel-Hamas War as of October 19, 3:00 PM ET



Iran's Axis of Resistance launched a multi-theater attack against the United States and Israel

The al Qassem Brigades fired 30 rockets into northern Israel

Palestinian militias continued indirect fire into Israel from Gaza

Hamas called for demonstrations on October 20



Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Israel
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Gaza Strip and West Bank
- Golan Heights
- Syria

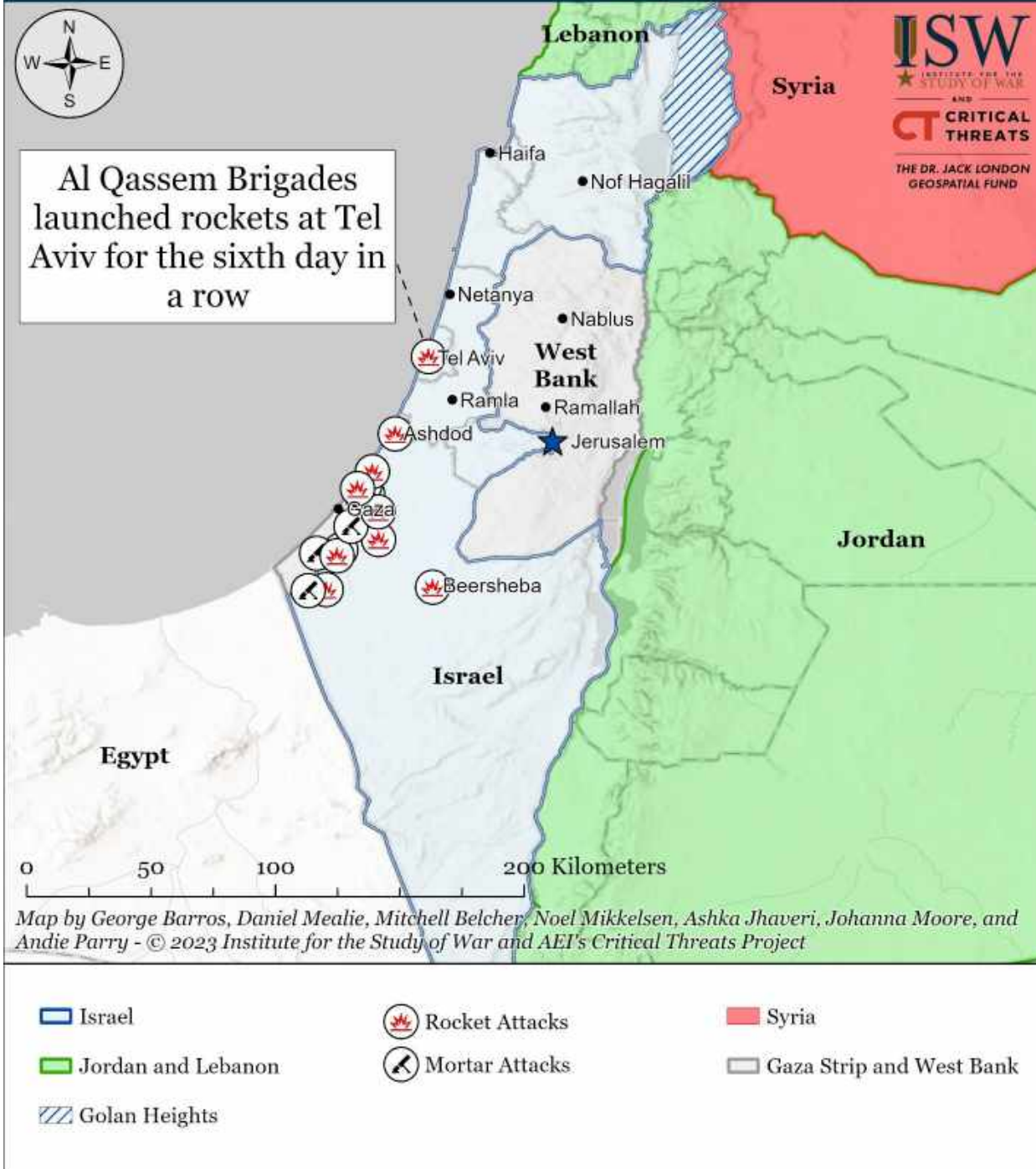
Gaza Strip

Palestinian militias continued indirect fire from the Gaza Strip into Israel on October 19.

The al Qassem Brigades— Hamas’ militant wing—claimed responsibility for 15 mortar and rocket attacks.¹ Saraya al Quds—the militant wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)—claimed responsibility for another eight rocket attacks.² The al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades—the self-claimed militant wing of Fatah—claimed two rocket attacks.³ The National Resistance Brigades—the militant wing of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine—claimed one mortar attack on an IDF military base in southern Israel.⁴ These attack patterns show how Hamas remains the most prominent actor attacking Israel from the Gaza Strip but also how other Palestinian militias have joined the fighting against Israel since the war began on October 7.

PIJ published a message saying “save our shells, you will be blessed with flames,” indicating that PIJ is following Hamas’ approach of reducing indirect fire attacks to conserve its stockpile and prepare for a prolonged war.⁵ Saraya al Quds launched 19 mortar and rocket attacks on October 18 compared to the eight attacks on October 19. CTP-ISW previously reported that Hamas began reducing its rate of attacks from the Gaza Strip on October 12 to conserve munitions.

Indirect Fire Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of October 19, 3:00 PM ET



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

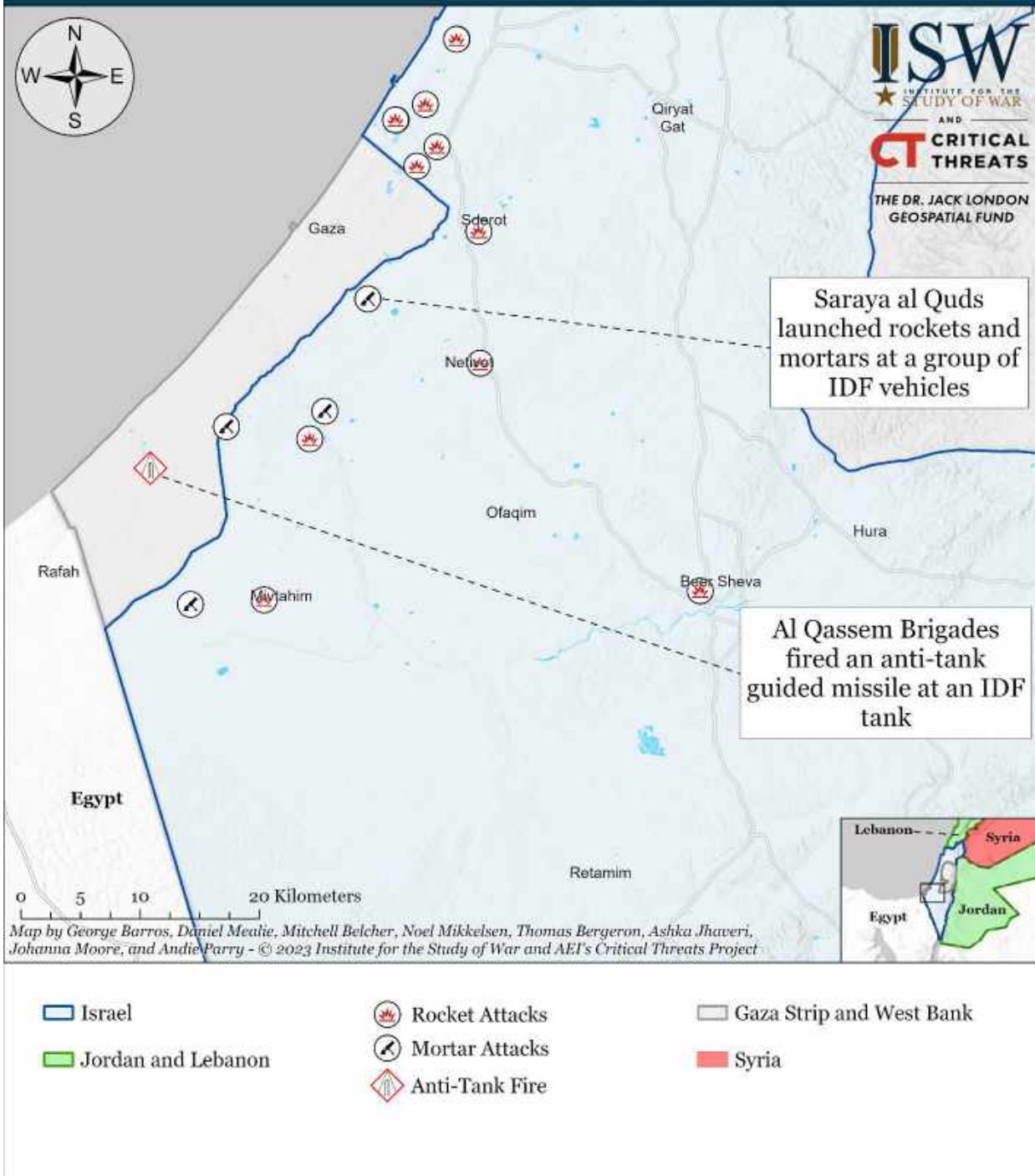
Palestinian militias targeted 12 Israel Defense Forces (IDF) military positions with indirect fire and anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM) in southern Israel on October 19. The militias hit 21 military positions on October 18. The IDF evacuated and designated the periphery of the Gaza Strip as a military zone on October 11.⁶ CTP-ISW previously reported that the IDF deployed units to this area, suggesting that the militias seek to target IDF military targets in addition to civilian areas, such as Tel Aviv.

An Israeli journalist indicated that Hamas is trying to attack natural gas rigs in the Mediterranean Sea.⁷ The journalist claimed that the IDF has intercepted several attempts from unidentified militants to conduct rocket attacks on such rigs. Israel previously shut down the Tamar gas field, which Hamas struck in 2014, on October 9.⁸ About 58 percent of the energy from the gas field served Israel, while 15.5 percent was exported to Jordan.⁹ The Israeli Navy stopped Hamas attempts to send its unmanned mini-submarines into the sea, which Hamas could use to attack energy platforms, according to a report on October 19.¹⁰

The IDF stated that some Hamas infiltrators may still be in Israel after the attack on October 7.¹¹ Hamas sent hundreds of fighters into Israel on October 7 to attack nearby border posts, military sites, and residential areas. The IDF noted that it captured an infiltrator who was trying to return to the Gaza Strip on October 18 and that there have been no new infiltrations into Israel “in recent days.”

IDF airstrikes into the Gaza Strip continue to kill senior Hamas officials. The IDF killed Hamas Palestinian Legislative Council member Jamila Abdallah Taha al Shanti and National Security Forces Major General Jihad Muheisen.¹²

Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of October 19, 3:00 PM ET



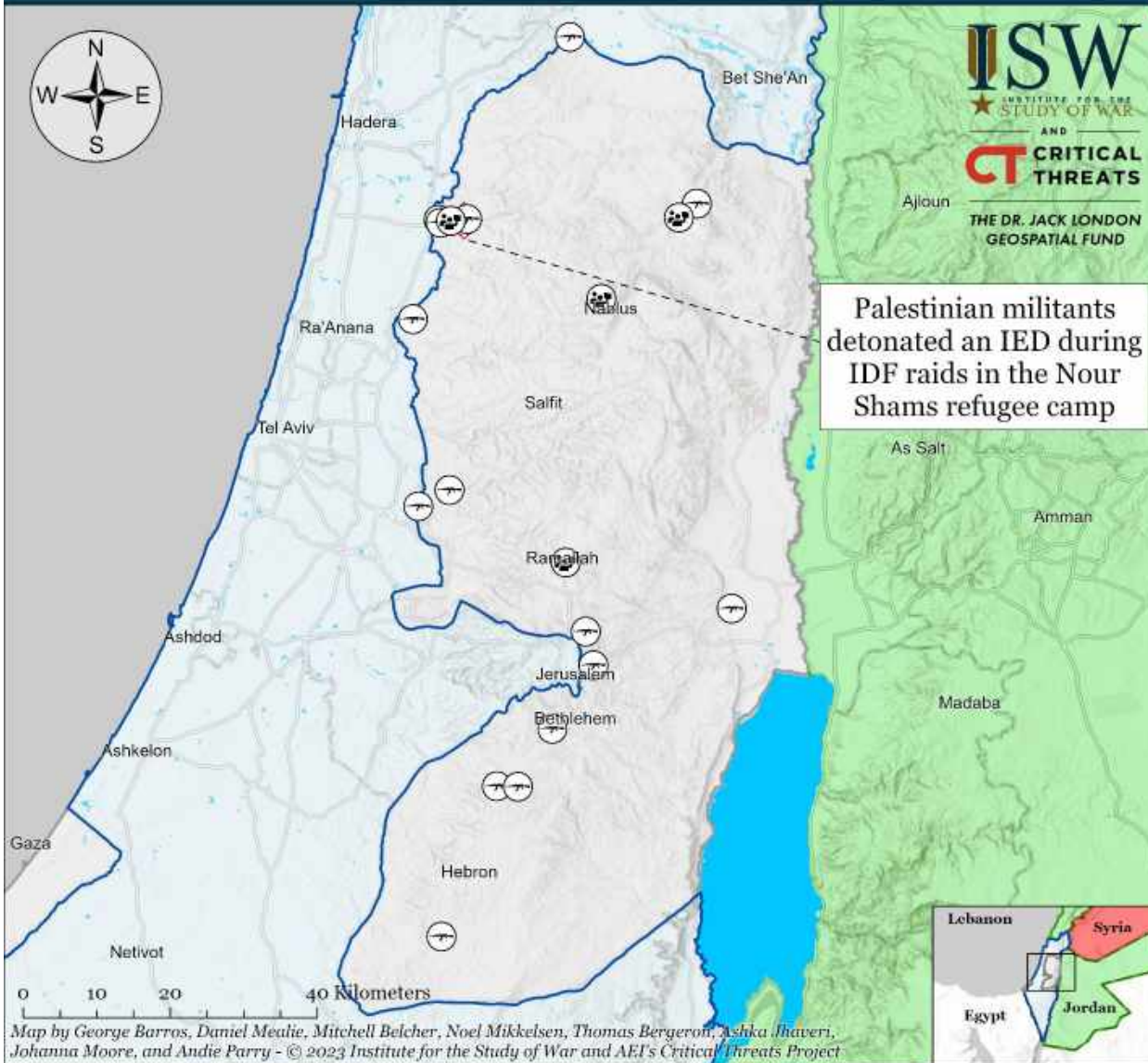
Recorded reports of rocket attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

West Bank

Clashes between Palestinian militants and Israeli forces in the West Bank may increase on October 19. CTP-ISW recorded 20 distinct clashes in the West Bank on October 19—half the number recorded the previous day.¹³ Hamas called for protests in support of the Gaza Strip across all cities and towns in the West Bank on October 20, as part of Hamas’ effort to expand fighting against Israel to the West Bank.¹⁴ Anti-Israel activity in the West Bank has typically surged on days when Hamas calls for demonstrations and greater violence since the war began.

IDF forces and PIJ-affiliated militants clashed in Tulkaram, West Bank on October 19.¹⁵ The PIJ-affiliated Tulkaram battalion claimed an IED attack that killed an Israeli major and wounded 10 Israeli Border Police.¹⁶ CTP-ISW has observed three IED attacks thus far in the West Bank since October 7—all on October 18-19. IDF forces captured a stash of IEDs during raids in the Noor al Shams Refugee camp, which is near Tulkaram.¹⁷ Hamas- and PIJ-affiliated militants previously used IEDs during clashes with IDF forces in Tulkaram on October 5.¹⁸

Clashes in the West Bank as of October 19, 3:00 PM ET



- Israel
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Clash (Small Arms Combat)
- March
- IED Detonated
- Gaza Strip and West Bank
- Syria

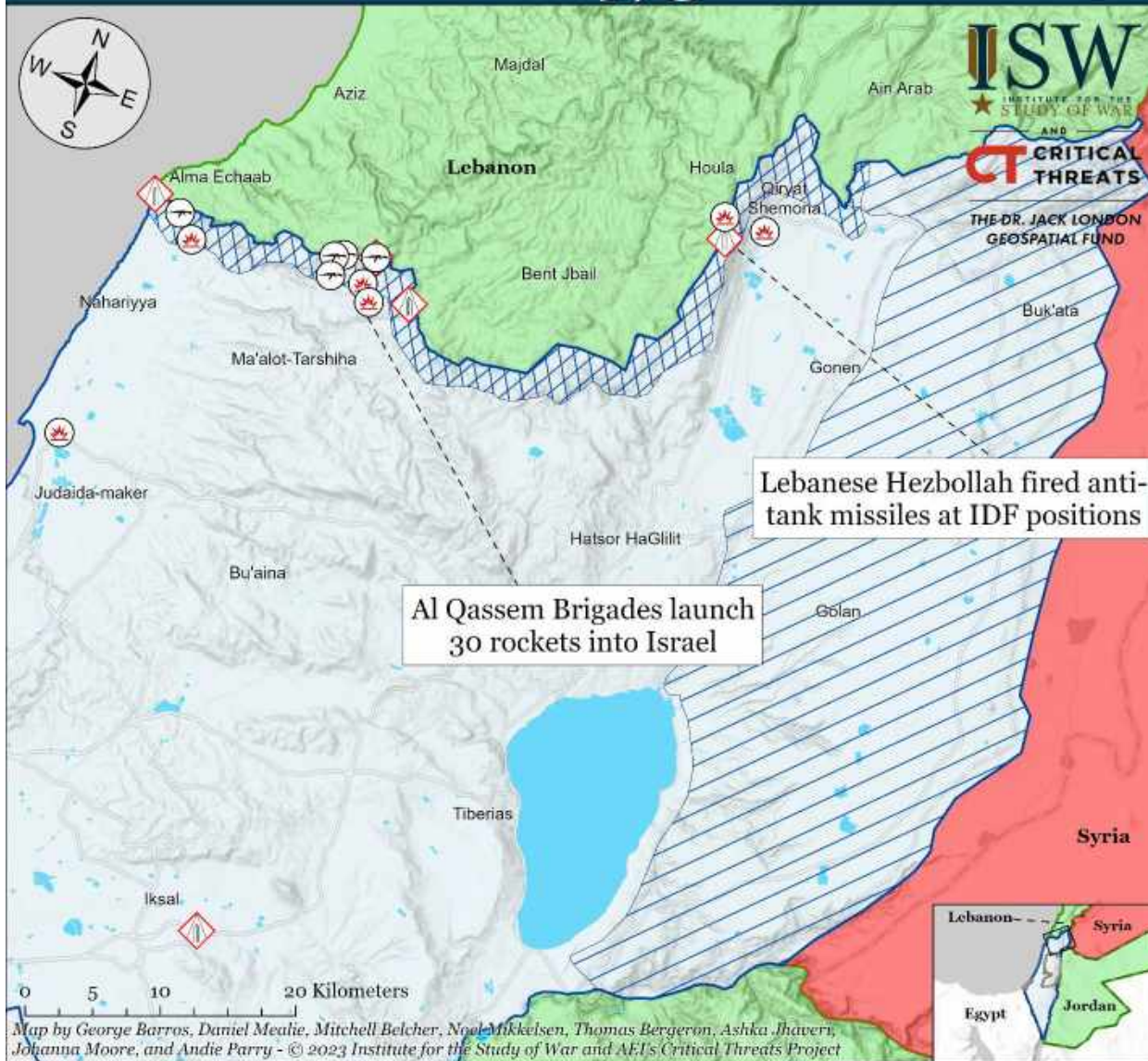
This map is not an exhaustive depiction of clashes and marches in the West Bank.

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

CTP-ISW recorded 13 attacks from Lebanon into Israeli territory on October 19.¹⁹ The attacks targeted locations across the entire length of the Israel-Lebanon border.²⁰ Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) claimed six mortar and small arms fire attacks.²¹ LH launched four ATGM at Israeli military positions along the eastern border and released a video of its recent ATGM attacks on Israeli tanks.²² LH has also continued to target Israeli communications and surveillance equipment over the last week of fighting.²³ CTP-ISW previously noted that these LH attacks create opportunities for further operations against Israel.²⁴

LH is allowing Palestinian militias to continue attacks from southern Lebanon into Israel. The al Qassem Brigades branch in Lebanon said on October 19 that its militants fired 30 rockets at western Israel.²⁵ CTP-ISW recorded rocket barrages fired toward both western and eastern Israel, however.²⁶ The IDF disclosed that LH gave the al Qassem Brigades permission to fire rockets from Lebanon.²⁷ This reporting is consistent with CTP-ISW's previous assessment that LH probably approves attacks from southern Lebanon into Israel given the extent to which LH controls southern Lebanon.²⁸

Attacks into Israel from Lebanon as of October 19, 3:00 PM ET



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

Iran and Axis of Resistance

Iranian-backed Iraqi militants in Syria conducted three attacks using one-way drones and rockets against US military positions in Iraq and Syria, marking the second consecutive day of such attacks targeting US forces in the Middle East.²⁹ The Islamic Resistance of Iraq fired three drones targeting the al Tanf Garrison, Syria and three one-way drones targeting Conoco Mission Support Site.³⁰ Iranian-backed Iraqi militias also launched an unspecified number of rockets targeting US forces at Ain al Asad Airbase, Anbar province, Iraq.³¹

The Houthis launched at least three land-attack cruise missiles and eight drones “potentially” targeting Israel.³² US Navy warship USS *Carney* intercepted the missiles.³³

Axis of Resistance Red Lines

Members of Iran’s Axis of Resistance have articulated their thresholds for intervening in support of Hamas’ war in Israel

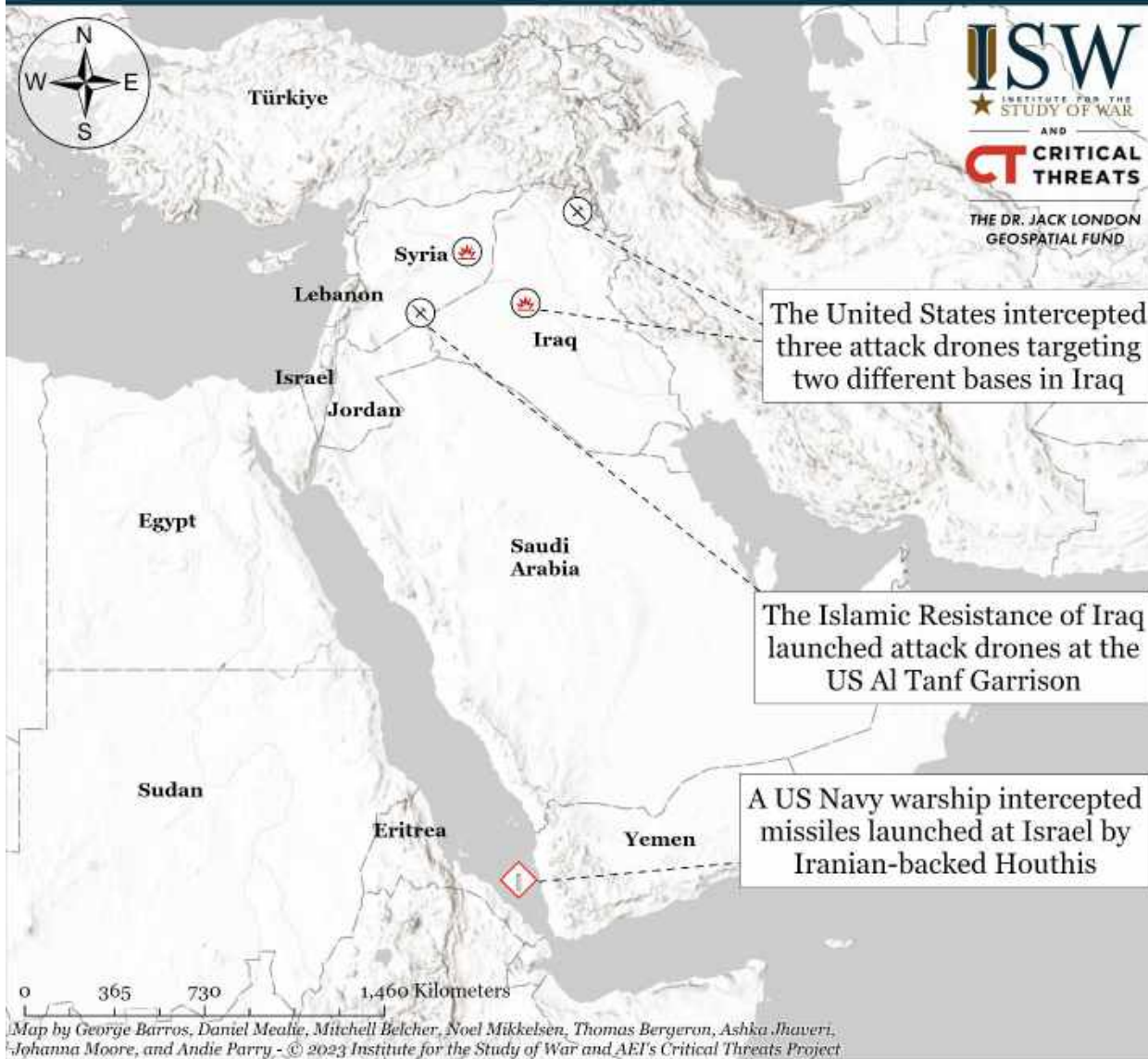





■ Possible tripped red line as of October 19

| Actor | Threat | Stated Red Line |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| Iran | Conduct missile attacks into Israel from Iran, Lebanon, and Yemen and send fighters from Syria into Israel | Israel attacks Iran |
| | Direct its proxies to attack US positions in Iraq and Syria | United States refreezes \$6 billion to Iran |
| Lebanese Hezbollah | Enter the war | Israel conducts a ground operation into Gaza |
| Badr Organization | Attack US military positions | The United States intervenes in the war |
| Kataib Hezbollah | Attack US military positions | The United States intervenes in the war |
| Kataib Seyyed ol Shohada | Intervene in the war | The United States intervenes in the war |
| Houthi Movement | Conduct drone and missile strikes | The United States intervenes in the war |

The Iranian-backed Iraqi groups and Houthis are behaving as if the United States has crossed their stated red lines of intervening in the war to support Israel. Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah (KH)’s military spokesperson said that the United States is an “essential partner in killing [Gazans]” and must “bear the consequences” on October 18.³⁴ KH’s military spokesperson also said that the United States is “aware of the capabilities of the Iraqi Resistance” and that the Iraqi resistance can target anywhere in Iraq.³⁵ Other Axis of Resistance factions have also expressed this risk since October 7. The Houthi Movement’s supreme leader said on October 10 that his forces would respond with missiles and drones if the United States intervened in the conflict.³⁶

Iranian-sponsored attacks in the Middle East as of October 19, 3:00 PM ET



-  Rocket Attacks
-  Drone Strike
-  Surface-to-Surface Missile

Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Mohammad Bagheri held separate telephone conversations with his Russian and Qatari counterparts to discuss the ongoing Israel-Hamas war on October 19.³⁷ Bagheri warned that continued Israeli actions in the Gaza Strip

could force “other actors,” including “resistance groups,” to engage in the conflict, echoing previous regime rhetoric about the possibility of conflict expansion since October 13.³⁸ Bagheri also called on the international community to take action to halt Israeli attacks into the Gaza Strip and on regional countries to disallow the transmission of American military equipment through their countries to Israel. Bagheri finally highlighted the American role in Israel’s “criminal operations,” consistent with regime rhetoric since October 13.³⁹

Iranian officials and media continued to highlight the American role in Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip on October 19. President Ebrahim Raisi decried the US veto of a UN Security Council resolution calling for a humanitarian pause in Israeli attacks into the Gaza Strip on October 19, emphasizing the world’s “hatred” toward the United States and Israel.⁴⁰ Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian criticized the US call for restraint while it supports Israeli offensive operations into the Gaza Strip during his meeting with Saudi Foreign Affairs Minister Faisal bin Farhan on the sidelines of the Organization of Islamic Countries meeting in Jeddah.⁴¹ Abdollahian was echoing his own earlier remarks during a press conference in Beirut on October 13.⁴² Bagheri claimed that the United States is “commanding” Israel’s “criminal operations” during separate phone calls with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Qatari Defense Minister Khalid bin Mohamed Al Attiyah.⁴³ Other Iranian officials claimed that the Gaza strip has been turned into a “laboratory” for American weapons.⁴⁴ Iranian media similarly claimed that the United States plays a role in Israel committing infanticide in the Gaza Strip, that it now “fully supports” an Israeli ground incursion into the strip, and has begun to supply armored vehicles for the Israeli war effort.⁴⁵ Some Iranian outlets also called for the closure of US military bases used to re-supply Israel.⁴⁶

The Iranian regime is trying to rally public support for the Palestinian cause, possibly to prepare Iranians for the prospect of a regional war. Senior Iranian officials, including Raisi and IRGC Deputy Commander Brigadier General Ali Fadavi, attended anti-Israel protests in Tehran on October 18.⁴⁷ The regime has called on Tehran residents to protest on October 20 against Israel’s killing of women and children in the Gaza Strip.⁴⁸ State-run outlet IRNA published an interview on October 18 of young Iranian boys expressing their support for Palestinians and desire to go to Gaza.⁴⁹ Fars News Agency separately claimed on October 18 that 3.7 million Iranians have volunteered to fight Israel.⁵⁰ Numerous outlets have circulated images of severely wounded or killed Gazan civilians to stoke anger and hatred among the Iranian public toward Israel and the United States.⁵¹

The Iranian regime has historically framed itself as the champion of the Palestinian cause. Iranian media has repeatedly recirculated statements from Palestinian leaders that Iran is the “biggest supporter” of Palestine.⁵² Senior Iranian officials, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, have described the liberation of Palestine as one of the most important issues facing the Islamic world.⁵³

¹ Sources available upon request.

² Sources available upon request.

³ Sources available upon request.

⁴ Sources available upon request.

⁵ <https://t.me/sarayaps/16397>

⁶ <https://twitter.com/IDFSpokesperson/status/1712031420065919123>

⁷ https://twitter.com/Doron_Kadosh/status/1714925804302340292

⁸ <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/4259531-israel-hamas-war-threatens-regional-gas-volatility/>

⁹ <https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/news/news-140523/he/ng-2022.pdf>

¹⁰ https://twitter.com/Doron_Kadosh/status/1714925804302340292

¹¹ https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/idf-says-its-possible-hamas-infiltrators-still-in-israel-one-arrested-last-night/

¹² <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-769124>; <https://apnews.com/live/israel-hamas-war-news-10-19-2023#0000018b-47da-d1d9-a3cb-e7dfcee80000>

¹³ Data available upon request.

¹⁴ <https://t.me/almanarnews/131691>

¹⁵ <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-769177>

¹⁶ <https://t.me/sarayaps/16400> ; <https://t.me/almanarnews/131642> ; <https://twitter.com/GLZRadio/status/1715051107938922955> ; <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-769177> ; https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/police-say-10-officers-wounded-in-explosion-during-idf-raid-in-tulkarem/

¹⁷ <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1715000894834540769>

¹⁸ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-clashes-with-palestinian-gunmen-during-raid-in-west-bank-refugee-camp/>

¹⁹ Sources available on request ; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-october-18-2023>

²⁰ Sources available on request.

²¹ <https://central-media.org/36373/600/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%85-%D9%85%D9%88%D9%82%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86%D9%8A> ; <https://www.almanar.com.lb/11086682>

²² <https://central-media.org/36367/633/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%88-%7C-%D8%AF%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%83%D9%85-%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%85> ; <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1714997682035380530> ; <https://central-media.org/36373/600/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%85-%D9%85%D9%88%D9%82%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86%D9%8A>

²³ <https://english.almayadeen.net/news/politics/al-qassam-fire-rockets-from-south-lebanon-amid-hezbollah-ope>

²⁴ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-17-2023>

²⁵ <https://t.me/qassambrigades/28651>

²⁶ <https://twitter.com/manniefabian/status/1715001245495095485> ;

<https://twitter.com/manniefabian/status/1715014426099675443>

²⁷ <https://twitter.com/GLZRadio/status/1715059907697762792>

²⁸ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-15-2023>

²⁹ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-18-2023>

³⁰ https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/iran-backed-groups-said-to-target-us-bases-with-drones-in-syria/

³¹ https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1715074391833219171;

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³² <https://abcnews.go.com/International/security-incident-involving-us-navy-destroyer-red-sea/story?id=104147141>

³³ <https://abcnews.go.com/International/security-incident-involving-us-navy-destroyer-red-sea/story?id=104147141>

³⁴ <https://t.me/maymun5/53630>; <https://t.me/maymun5/53635>

³⁵ <https://t.me/maymun5/53630>; <https://t.me/maymun5/53635>

³⁶ <https://saba.ye/ar/news3270850.htm>

³⁷ <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1402/07/27/2974442> ; <https://defapress.ir/fa/news/624279> ;

<https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2023/10/19/2974480>

³⁸ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-october-13-2023> ;

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<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-october-15-2023> ;

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<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/iran-update-october-17-2023> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-18-2023>

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<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/iran-update-october-14-2023> ;

<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/iran-update-october-15-2023> ;

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⁴⁰ <https://president dot ir/fa/147315>

⁴¹ <https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14020727000372> ; <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/en/news/2023/10/19/2974411>

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⁴³ <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1402/07/27/2974442> ; <https://defapress dot ir/fa/news/624279> ;

<https://www.tasnimnews dot com/en/news/2023/10/19/2974480>

⁴⁴ <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85264149>

⁴⁵ <https://www.presstv dot ir/Detail/2023/10/19/713007> ; <https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14020727000661> ;

<https://www.farsnews dot ir/media/14020727000500>

⁴⁶ <https://www.presstv dot ir/Detail/2023/10/19/713029>

⁴⁷ <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85263073> ;

<https://twitter.com/JasonMBrodsky/status/1714454943472492694>

⁴⁸ <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1402/07/27/2974636>

⁴⁹ <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85263155>

⁵⁰ <https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14020726000114>

⁵¹ <https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14020726000304> ;

<https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1402/07/27/2974636>

⁵² <https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/13930230000641> ;

<https://www.irna dot ir/news/84320123>

⁵³ <https://farsi.khamenei dot ir/speech-content?id=27165>

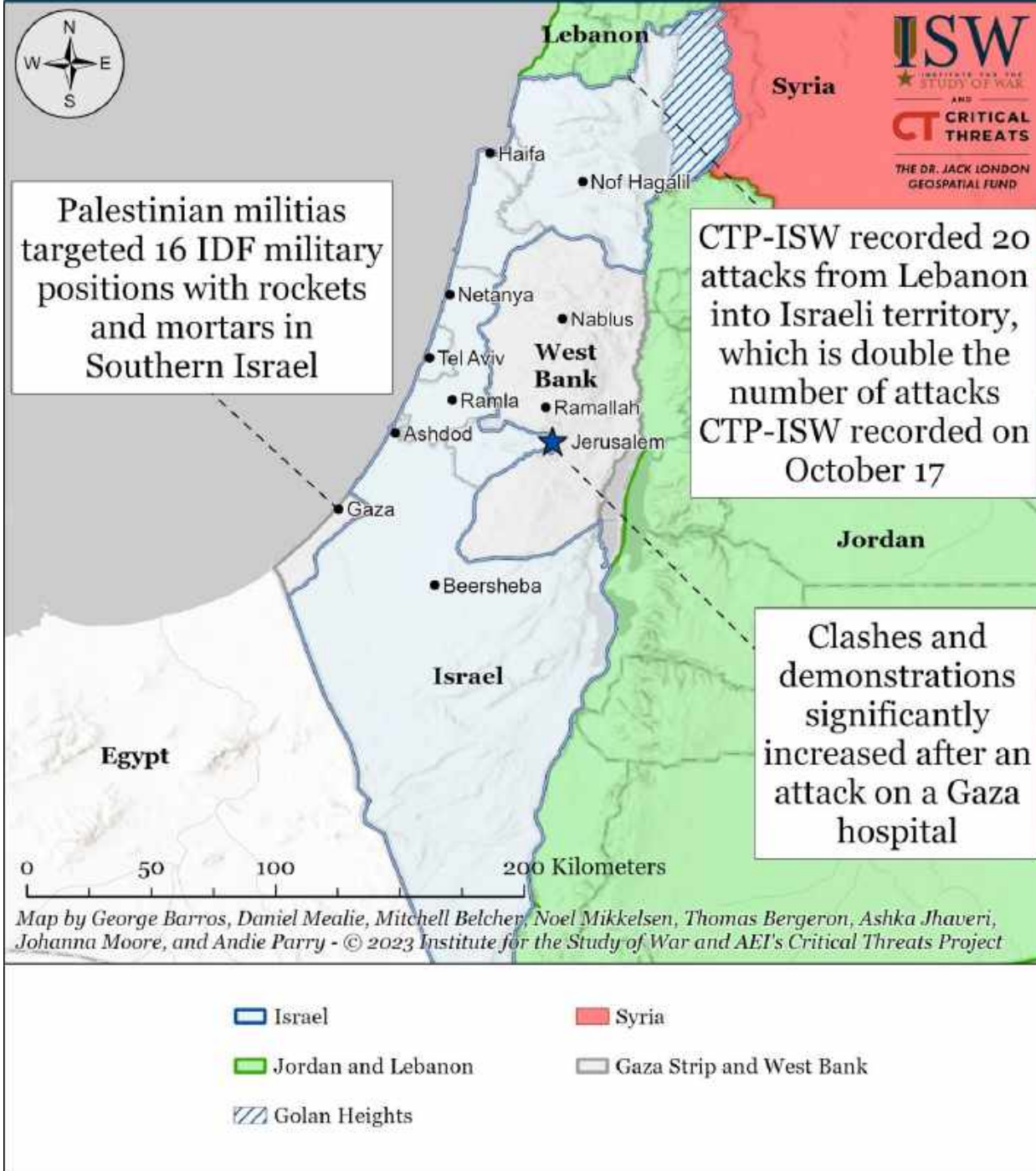
Iran Update, October 18, 2023

Ashka Jhaveri, Andie Parry, Johanna Moore, Brian Carter, and Amin Soltani

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. For more on developments and in Iran and the region, see our [interactive map of Iran and the Middle East](#).

Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. 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, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

Israel-Hamas War as of October 18, 3:00 PM ET

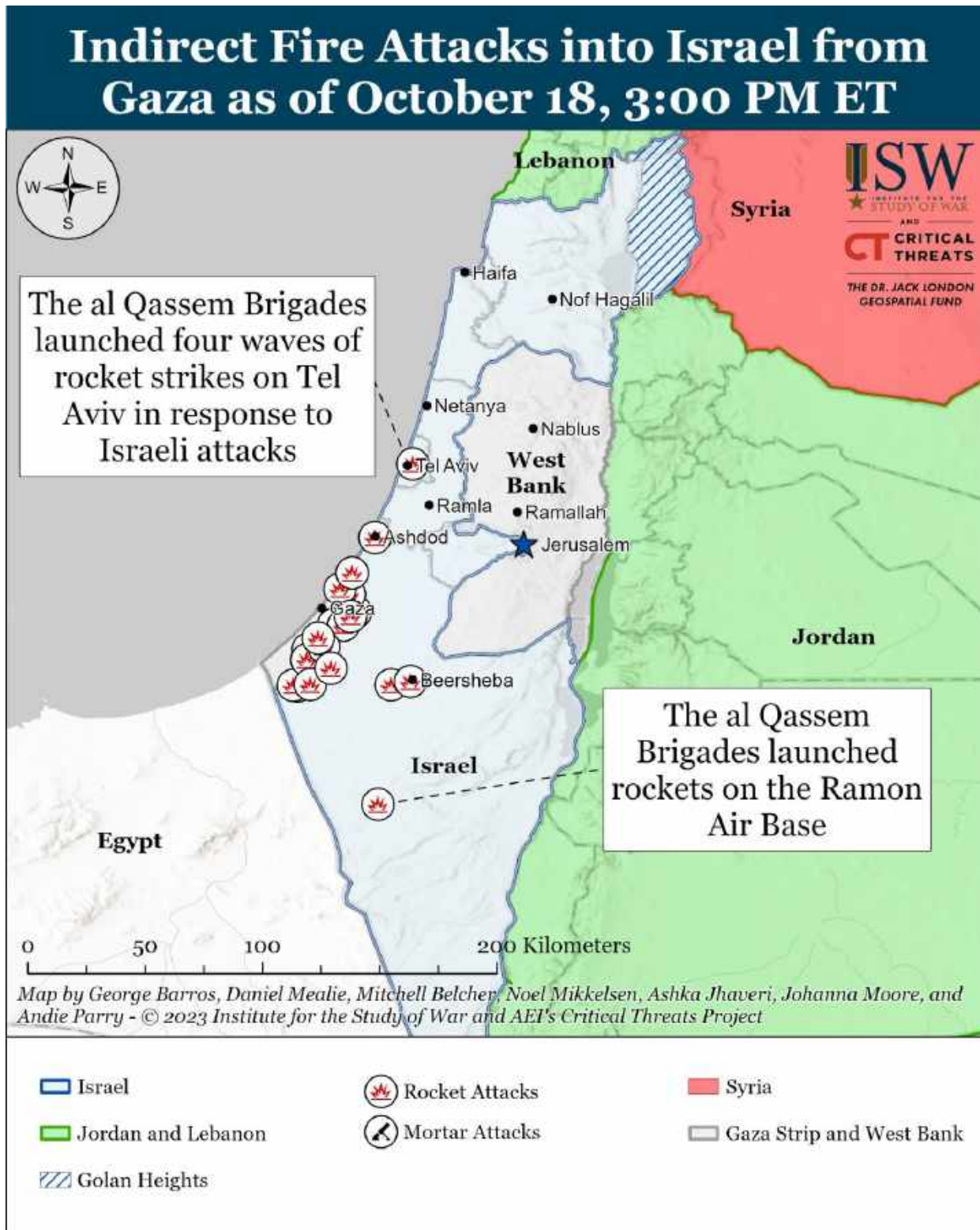


Key Takeaways:

1. Palestinian militias continued indirect fire into Israel from the Gaza Strip. Palestinian militias targeted 21 IDF military positions with mortars and rockets in Southern Israel.

2. The rate of clashes between Palestinian militants and Israeli forces in the West Bank expanded by 470 percent.
3. CTP-ISW recorded 20 Attacks from Lebanon into Israeli territory, which is double the number of attacks recorded on October 17.
4. Two Iranian-backed Iraqi militias conducted separate attacks on US forces stationed at the al Harir airbase and Ain al Asad airbase in Iraq.
5. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq established the al Aqsa Joint Operations Room in support of Hamas' al Aqsa Flood operation.
6. Iranian officials and media are blaming the United States and Israel for the explosion at the al Ahli hospital in the Gaza Strip and warning about the potential expansion of the conflict as a result.

Gaza Strip

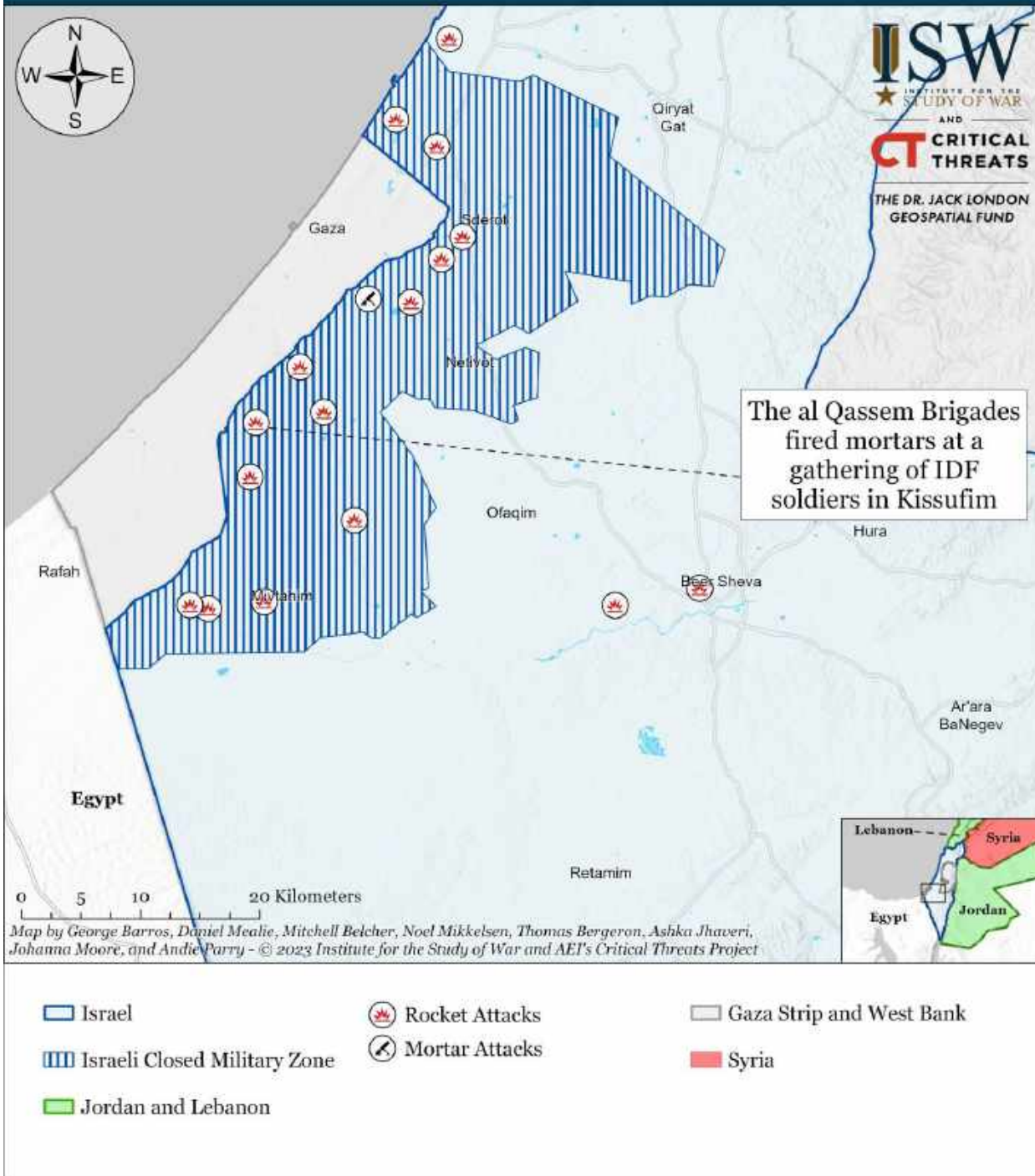


Recorded reports of rocket attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

Palestinian militias continued indirect fire into Israel from the Gaza Strip on October 18.

The al Qassem Brigades— Hamas’ militant wing—claimed responsibility for nine mortar and rocket attacks.¹ The al Qassem Brigades also launched four waves of rockets at Tel Aviv in response to Israeli “massacres against civilians.”² Saraya al Quds—the militant wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)—claimed responsibility for another 16 rocket attacks.³ The al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades—the militant wing of Fatah—claimed two rocket attacks into Israel from the Gaza Strip.⁴ This rate of attacks is consistent with the rate that CTP-ISW observed in recent days.

Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of October 18, 3:00 PM ET



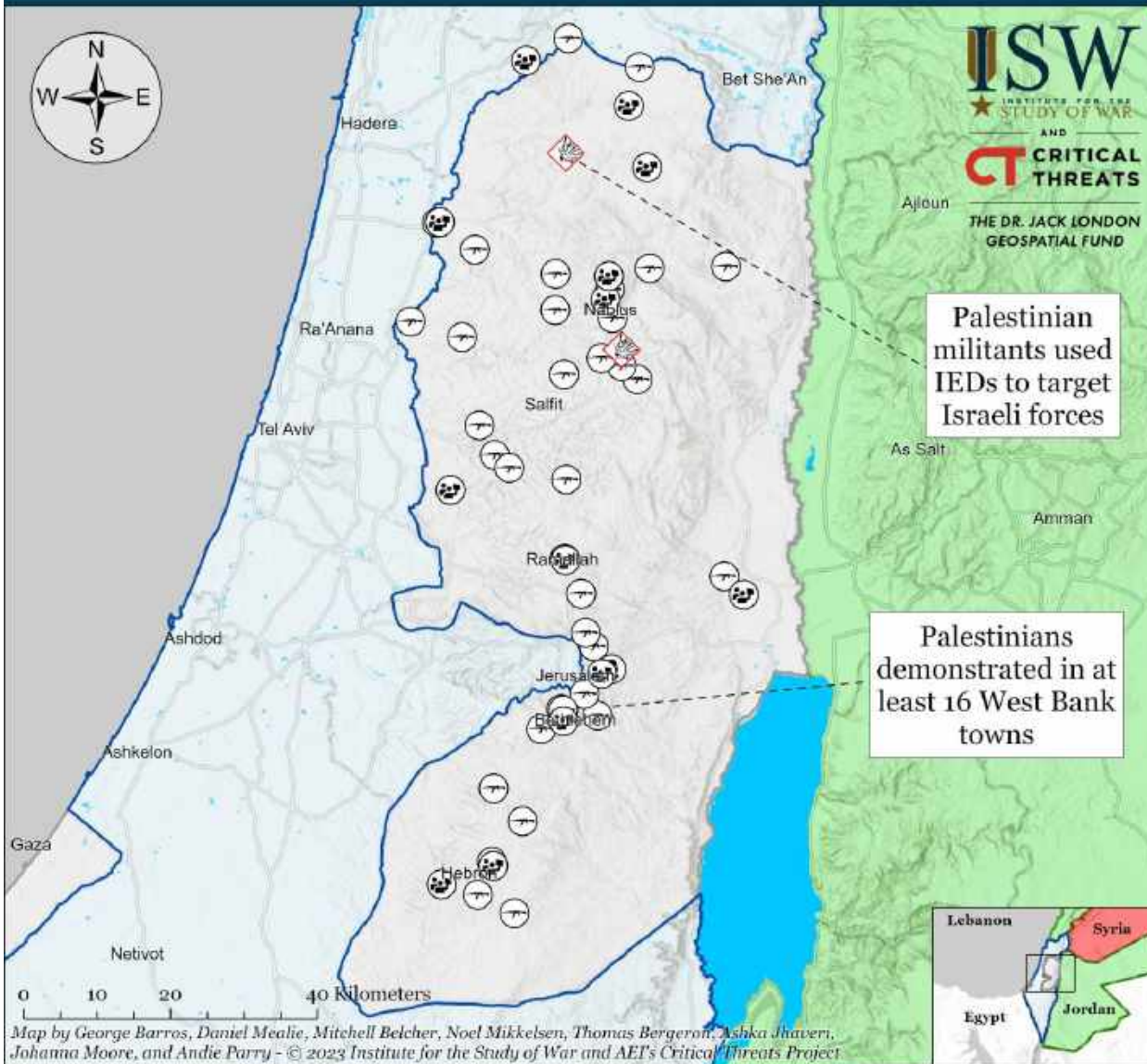
Recorded reports of rocket attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

Palestinian militias targeted 21 IDF military positions with mortars and rockets in southern Israel. The IDF evacuated and designated the periphery of the Gaza Strip as a military zone on October 11.⁵ ISW previously reported that the IDF deployed units to this area in recent days, which suggests that the militias seek to target IDF military assets in addition to civilian areas, such as Tel Aviv.

IDF airstrikes into the Gaza Strip continued to kill senior Hamas officials. The IDF reported that it killed the commander of Hamas' anti-tank unit in the Gaza City Brigade, who was a prominent weapons dealer and coordinator for attacks.⁶ The IDF also killed Hamas' naval forces commander.⁷

West Bank

Clashes in the West Bank as of October 18, 3:00 PM ET



- | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| | | |
| Israel | Clash (Small Arms Combat) | Gaza Strip and West Bank |
| | | |
| Jordan and Lebanon | Infiltration | Syria |
| | | |
| | Demonstration | |
| | | |
| | IED Detonated | |

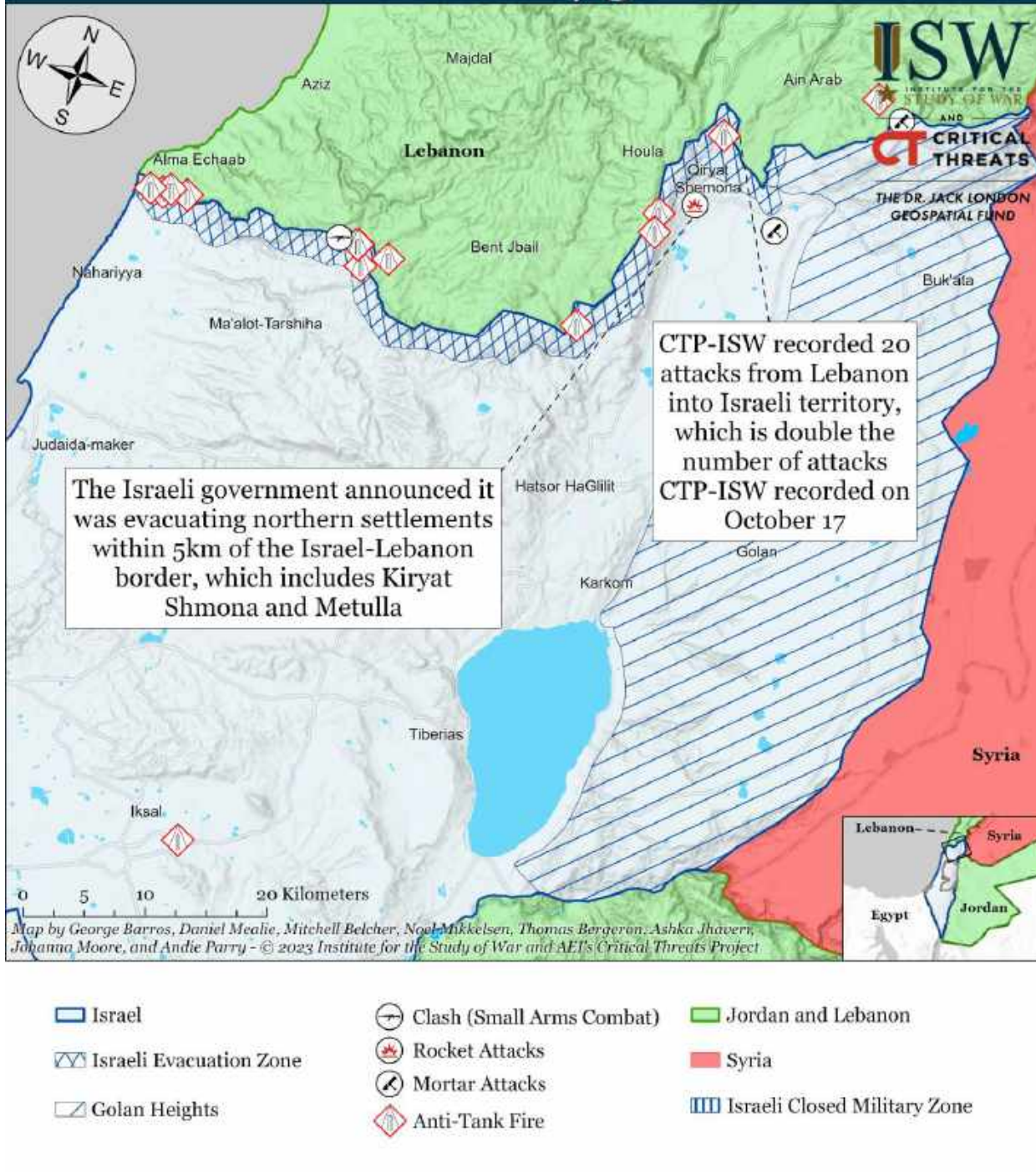
This map is not an exhaustive depiction of clashes and marches in the West Bank.

The rate of clashes between Palestinian militants and Israeli forces in the West Bank expanded by 470 percent on October 18.⁸ CTP-ISW recorded 40 distinct clashes in the West

Bank.⁹ Clashes also expanded geographically to 37 cities and towns. Anti-Israel demonstrations within the West Bank tripled on October 18, compared to the previous two days.¹⁰ Demonstrators mobilized rapidly after the Gaza hospital explosion on October 17. This is consistent with CTP-ISW's assessment that the rate of clashes would increase after the bombing.¹¹ Immediately after the explosion, Hamas called for clashes across Israel and the Palestinian territories.¹² Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) similarly called for a "day of unprecedented anger" in response to the hospital explosion and Biden's visit to Israel.¹³ Demonstrators in the West Bank likely responded to LH's call as well as Hamas'.

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

Attacks into Israel from Lebanon as of October 18, 3:00 PM ET



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

CTP-ISW recorded 20 Attacks from Lebanon into Israeli territory on October 18, which is double the number of attacks recorded on October 17.¹⁴ The attacks targeted locations across the entire length of the Israel-Lebanon border. Fifteen of the attacks targeted military positions.¹⁵ LH claimed responsibility for 15 attacks on military and civilian targets along the Israel-Lebanon border.¹⁶ LH militants targeted Kiryat Shmona with nine rockets.¹⁷ LH also launched an anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) at Metulla for the fourth consecutive day.¹⁸ The Israeli government announced it was evacuating northern settlements within five kilometers of the Israel-Lebanon border on October 18, which includes Kiryat Shmona and Metulla.¹⁹

LH sources told a Lebanon-focused analyst on October 16 that Hezbollah recalled its cadres from abroad.²⁰ This is consistent with Syrian opposition media reporting since at least October 10, which claimed that LH redeployed forces from Syria to Lebanon.²¹

Palestinian militias remain active in southern Lebanon, likely with the approval of LH. The al Qassem Brigades said on October 18 that three of its militants died during an operation near Margoliot on October 14.²² CTP-ISW previously assessed that LH probably approves attacks from southern Lebanon into Israel given the extent to which LH controls southern Lebanon.²³

Syrian President Bashar al Assad blamed the United State and Israel for the Gaza hospital bombing on October 17 and called for three days of mourning.²⁴ CTP-ISW did not record any attacks related to the Israel-Hamas war into or from Syria on October 18, however. Over 1,000 Iraqi Popular Mobilization forces deployed to Homs Province from Iraq in the past several days, according to local opposition media.²⁵ The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) also transferred Iranian-backed militias from eastern Syria to southern Syria, the Golan Heights, and Lebanon from eastern Syria on October 16 and 17.²⁶

Iran and Axis of Resistance

Two Iranian-backed Iraqi militias conducted separate attacks on US forces stationed at the al Harir airbase and Ain al Asad airbase in Iraq on October 18.²⁷ CTP-ISW previously reported that elements of Iran's Axis of Resistance, including Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, have threatened to attack US forces if the United States intervenes in the Israel-Hamas war.²⁸ It is unclear if the two attacks were coordinated or if the IRGC Quds Force ordered the attacks.

- The Islamic Resistance of Iraq – an umbrella group of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias – claimed responsibility for targeting US forces stationed at the Ain al Assad airbase.²⁹ US Central Command (CENTCOM) reported that US forces engaged two drones, destroying one and damaging the other.³⁰ Two unidentified US officials reported that the two drones were one-way attack drones targeting the base.³¹ Iranian-backed Iraqi militias last targeted the base in May 2022.³²
- Tashkil al Waritheen—an Iranian-backed militia—claimed responsibility for conducting a drone attack targeting US forces stationed at the al Harir airbase in Iraqi Kurdistan.³³ Waritheen

claimed responsibility on behalf of the al Aqsa Joint Operations Room. Iraqi Kurdistan-based *Shafaq News* cited an unidentified Iraqi source, who claimed that it was unclear what damage, if any, the drone had done on the base.³⁴ Tashkil al Waritheen reports directly to Iran's IRGC Quds Force.³⁵ CENTCOM reported that US forces stationed at Harir Airbase destroyed the drone targeting the airbase.³⁶

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq established the al Aqsa Joint Operations Room on October 18 in support of Hamas' al Aqsa Flood operation.³⁷ The Islamic Resistance in Iraq released its statement following accusations that Israel and the United States were responsible for the explosion at the al Ahli Hospital in the Gaza Strip on October 17. The Islamic Resistance of Iraq is comprised of Iranian-backed militias, such as Asaib Ahl al Haq, Kataib Hezbollah, Badr Organization, Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba, Kataib Seyyed al Shohada, Ashab al Kahf, and Kataib Imam Ali.³⁸ Two unidentified members of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias cited by *Associated Press* reported that Iran has not given orders to "join the wider battle on Israel."³⁹ Prominent Iranian-backed militias issued statements condemning Israel for allegedly striking the al Ahli Hospital but did not call for attacks as they had previously threatened to do.⁴⁰

Iranian officials and media are blaming the United States and Israel for the October 17 explosion at the al Ahli hospital in the Gaza Strip and warning about the potential expansion of the conflict as a result. President Ebrahim Raisi claimed that "US-Israeli bombs" were dropped on the hospital on social media on October 18, echoing claims from Iranian officials and media since October 13 that the United States is playing a direct role in the Hamas-Israel war.⁴¹ Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian claimed that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was present in the Israeli operations room during a meeting with his Qatari counterpart Sultan bin Saad al Muraikhi in Jeddah on October 18.⁴² IRGC-affiliated *Tasnim News Agency* claimed that the United States had devised the Israeli attack to disincentivize an Israeli ground operation into Gaza.⁴³ Several Iranian regime outlets claimed either that American munitions were used in or that the United States had authorized the strike on the hospital.⁴⁴ These same outlets claimed that Iranian protesters were holding the United States responsible for the specific attack and greater Israeli "crimes" in Gaza on October 18.⁴⁵

- President Ebrahim Raisi stated that Israel's "criminal, crazy, and illegal actions" will expand the war to the region during a meeting with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on October 17.⁴⁶ The Raisi administration similarly issued a statement on October 18 warning that the hospital bombing "will not go unanswered."⁴⁷ The Artesh—Iran's conventional military—also published a statement on October 18 condemning Israel for allegedly attacking the al Ahli hospital and warning that the Artesh is looking to respond "forcefully" to the attack and bring the "criminals" to trial.⁴⁸
- Expediency Discernment Council member and former IRGC Commander Major General Mohsen Rezaei warned on October 18 that a "big storm" is coming and pointed to the potential for the formation of new Islamic militant groups seeking to enter the conflict with Israel.⁴⁹ Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf similarly warned that Israel is "opening up the

gates of hell with their own hands and are filling all Muslims with wrath,” further arguing that Muslims are ready to make sacrifices to confront Israel.⁵⁰

- Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Mohammad Bagheri echoed Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei’s October 17 remarks that “the resistance” will lose its patience were Israel to continue its “war crimes” within a statement condemning the alleged attack on the al Ahli hospital on October 18.⁵¹ IRGC-affiliated *Fars News Agency* published an article warning that “the resistance” will deliver an “even harder slap” against the Israeli regime while pointing to the “activation” of LH on the northern front.⁵² “The resistance” is the term that Iranian officials and media use to describe the proxy and partner militias that Iran sponsors throughout the Middle East.

Iran and elements of its Axis of Resistance have been messaging that the Hamas-Israel war could expand geographically into a multi-front conflict since October 13.⁵³ CTP-ISW is closely monitoring the situation to forecast whether such a scenario is becoming more or less likely. CTP-ISW previously assessed that Iran seeks to avoid entering a direct conflict with Israel, however.⁵⁴ Iranian officials, for instance, combined their warnings about the risk of conflict expansion on October 18 with calls for the international community to help bring about a ceasefire and impose punitive measures on Israel for its “war crimes,” including severing diplomatic ties and imposing an oil embargo and broader economic sanctions.⁵⁵ CTP-ISW previously assessed that Iran would likely provide material and financial support to its proxies to fight Israel rather than get directly involved in the Israel-Hamas war were this war to expand into a regional conflict.⁵⁶

Palestinian militias are using the October 17 explosion on the al Ahli hospital in the Gaza Strip to frame the United States as a belligerent in the Israel-Hamas war. The IDF said that PIJ conducted a rocket attack that failed and hit the active hospital. The IDF spokesman noted that 450 rockets from the Gaza Strip have failed and fallen short since October 7.⁵⁷ The Hamas-run Health Ministry contrastingly and falsely claimed that an Israeli airstrike hit the hospital and that hundreds of people died. A senior adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Hamas of inflating civilian casualty numbers.⁵⁸

- The IDF released an audio recording of two Hamas militants discussing how PIJ fired the rocket and noted that the rocket at the impact site was locally made. Independent analysts on Twitter and *Bellingcat* noted that images of the aftermath of the attack are inconsistent with reports of missiles or joint direct attack munitions (JDAMs).⁵⁹
- A Twitter user posted on October 17 that ““The Wall Street Journal: 'The bomb that was dropped on the hospital was an American MK-84” and that “this bomb is precision-guided, largest in MK family, and has about 950 kg weight.”⁶⁰ *Newsweek* confirmed that the claim is false.⁶¹ US President Joe Biden said the data that the Department of Defense showed him says Israel was not to blame for the attack.⁶²

- The PIJ spokesman echoed Iranian rhetoric that the bombs used to strike the Gaza hospital were American bombs.⁶³ Hamas released a statement that the US adoption of the Israeli narrative that PIJ misfired a rocket is considered participation in the attack.⁶⁴ Hamas also stated its appreciation to cancel the US-Jordan-Palestinian Authority-Egypt summit scheduled for October 18.⁶⁵

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas cancelled his attendance at the joint US-Egypt-Jordan summit following the explosion on the Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza.⁶⁶

Abbas, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi, Jordanian King Abdullah II, and US President Joe Biden were scheduled to discuss the ongoing Israel-Hamas war. Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi also stated that Jordan would only host the summit in the future if Israel agreed to stop all attacks and deliver aid to the Gaza Strip.⁶⁷

Kataib Hezbollah-affiliated *Tura News* circulated calls to protests in solidarity with Palestinians at the US Embassy in Baghdad on October 18.⁶⁸ Ashab al Kahf called for Iraqis, “youth of the popular mobilization,” and other supporters to demonstrate in Tahrir Square, Baghdad on October 17 following the explosion the al Ahli Hospital. Protesters gathered in Tahrir Square and attempted to approach the US embassy but were blocked by Iraqi security forces.⁶⁹

Iranian regime outlets and officials are attempting to generate further momentum for the current Israel-Hamas war. Iranian media circulated disturbing images of severely wounded or killed Palestinian children on October 18.⁷⁰ IRGC-affiliated media published a series of responses to Israel’s “infanticide” in Gaza and recirculated calls for the expansion of “anti-Zionist” demonstrations in the West Bank.⁷¹ Several Iranian officials and outlets claimed that millions of ordinary Iranians are prepared to volunteer in the fight against the Israeli regime.⁷²

Violent protests occurred at US positions in the Middle East following LH calls for a “day of rage” in solidarity with the Gaza Strip. Hundreds of protesters demonstrated outside of the US Embassy in Beirut and attempted to remove barbed wire and barricades.⁷³ Some people burned a building near the embassy.⁷⁴ The embassy issued a travel advisory not to travel to Lebanon and recommended that US citizens leave the country.⁷⁵ Protesters attempted to storm a US base in Turkey, according to a pro-Axis of Resistance telegram.⁷⁶

¹ Sources available upon request.

² <https://t.me/qassambrigades/28634>; <https://t.me/qassambrigades/28635>; <https://t.me/qassambrigades/28636>; <https://t.me/qassambrigades/28637>

³ Sources available upon request.

⁴ Sources available upon request.

⁵ <https://twitter.com/IDFSpokesperson/status/1712031420065919123>

⁶ <https://twitter.com/AuroraIntel/status/1714512057817825364>

⁷ <https://x.com/manniefabian/status/1714510806962835679?s=20>; <https://twitter.com/AuroraIntel/status/1714512057817825364>

⁸ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/iran-update-october-17-2023> ; Sources available upon request.

⁹ Sources available on request.

- ¹⁰ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-october-17-2023> ; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-october-16-2023> ; Sources available upon request.
- ¹¹ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-october-17-2023>
- ¹² <https://hamas dot ps/ar/p/18346>
- ¹³ <https://www.almanar dot com/lb/11076738>
- ¹⁴ Sources available on request.
- ¹⁵ Sources available on request.
- ¹⁶ Sources available on request.
- ¹⁷ <https://t.me/maymun5/53565>; <https://t.me/maymun5/53572>; <https://twitter.com/manniefabian/status/1714669656705839164>;
- ¹⁸ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-17-2023>;
https://x.com/ignis_fatum/status/1714645810913169605?s=20; <https://twitter.com/manniefabian/status/1714650436395827505>;
https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/anti-tank-missile-fire-from-lebanon-continues-at-northern-israel-idf/
- ¹⁹ <https://www.israelhayom.co.il/news/defense/article/14724888>
- ²⁰ <https://actafabula.net/in-a-special-call-hezbollah-asks-its-members-abroad-to-come-to-lebanon/>;
<https://twitter.com/Mucagcebe/status/1714025911861862719>
- ²¹ <https://eyeofeufrates dot com/index.php/ar/news/2023/10/12/9893>; <https://www.syriahr dot com/%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AB-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%8A/682857/>; <https://deirezzor24 dot net/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B5-%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%B124-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84/>
- ²² <https://t.me/qassambrigades/28626>; <https://t.me/qassambrigades/28625>; <https://t.me/qassambrigades/28624>
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Iran Update, October 17, 2023

Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, Annika Ganzeveld, Brian Carter, and Nicholas Carl

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. For more on developments and in Iran and the region, see our [interactive map of Iran and the Middle East](#).

Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. 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, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

Key Takeaways:

1. Palestinian militias continued indirect fire into Israel on October 17, attacking civilian and military targets.
2. The rate of small arms clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinian militants in the West Bank remained low after peaking on October 13.
3. Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh called for mobilization in the West Bank following an explosion at a hospital in Gaza.
4. CTP-ISW recorded 10 attacks from Lebanon into Israeli territory on October 17, including seven against military targets. LH activity on Israel's northern border creates opportunities for further operations against Israel.
5. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei reiterated what other senior Iranian officials are saying about the Hamas-Israel war during a speech.
6. Senior IRGC commanders are framing Hamas' al Aqsa Flood operation as a prelude to future attacks on Israel.

Israel-Hamas War as of October 17, 3:00 PM ET

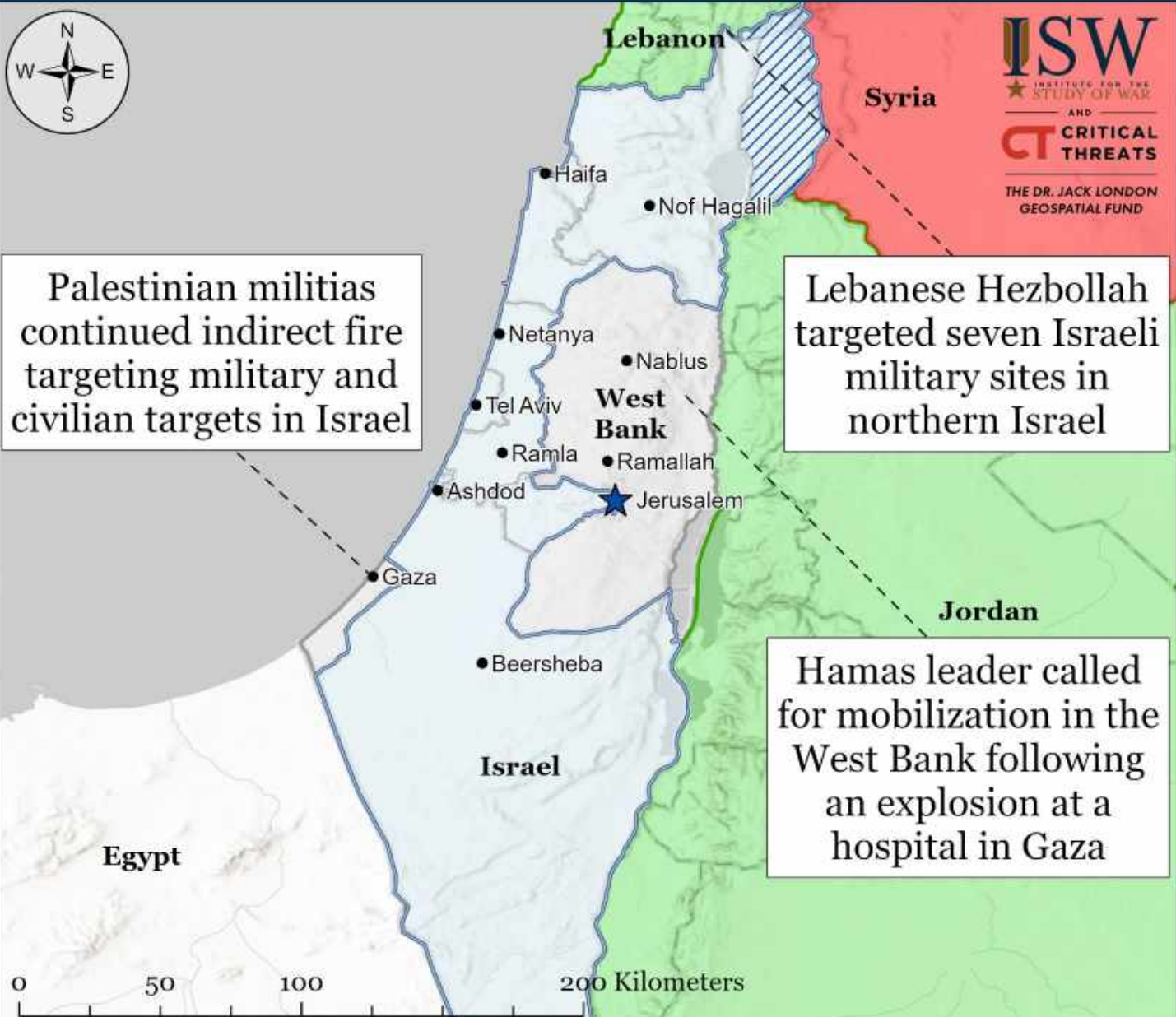


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Palestinian militias continued indirect fire targeting military and civilian targets in Israel

Lebanese Hezbollah targeted seven Israeli military sites in northern Israel

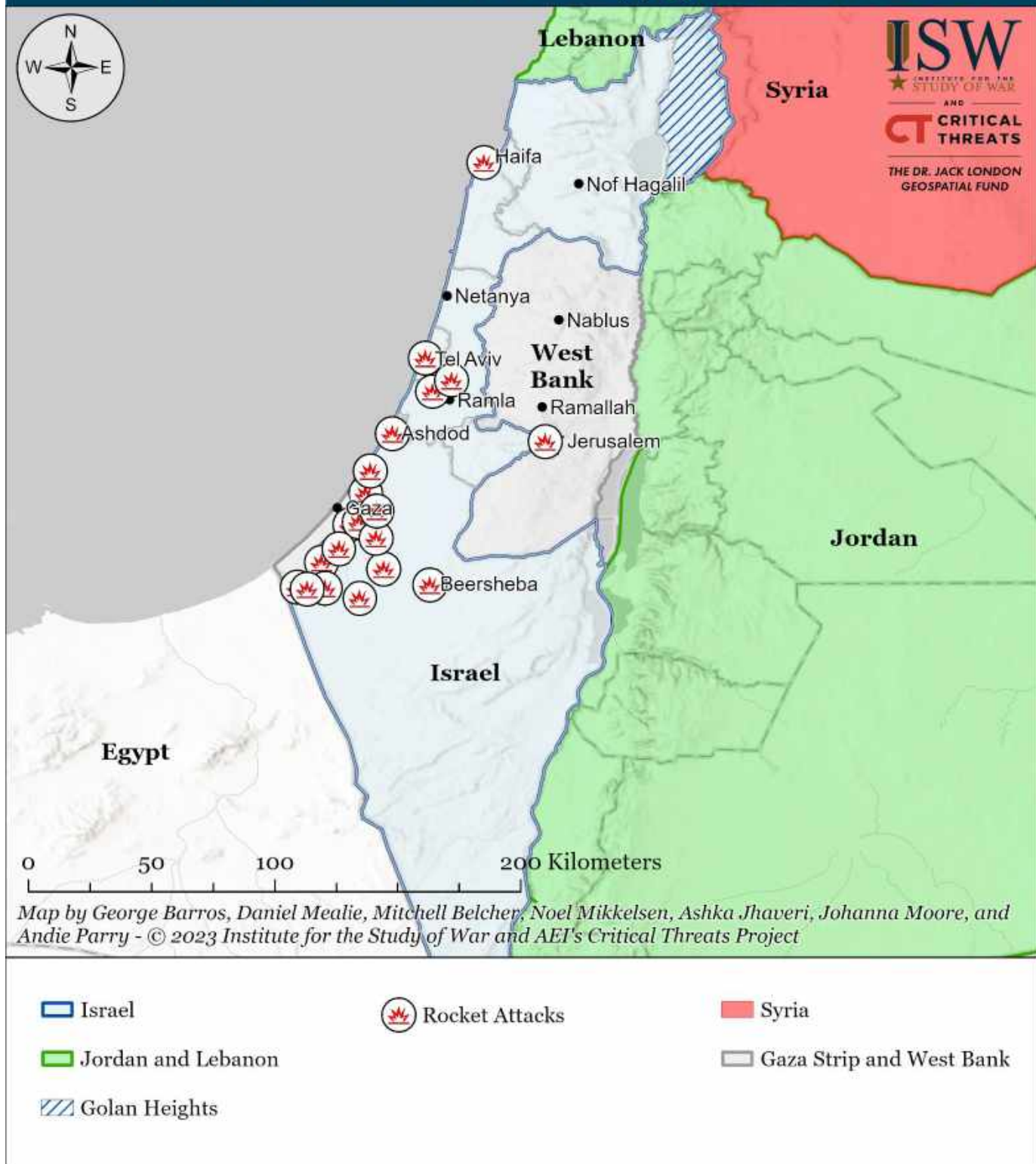
Hamas leader called for mobilization in the West Bank following an explosion at a hospital in Gaza



Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

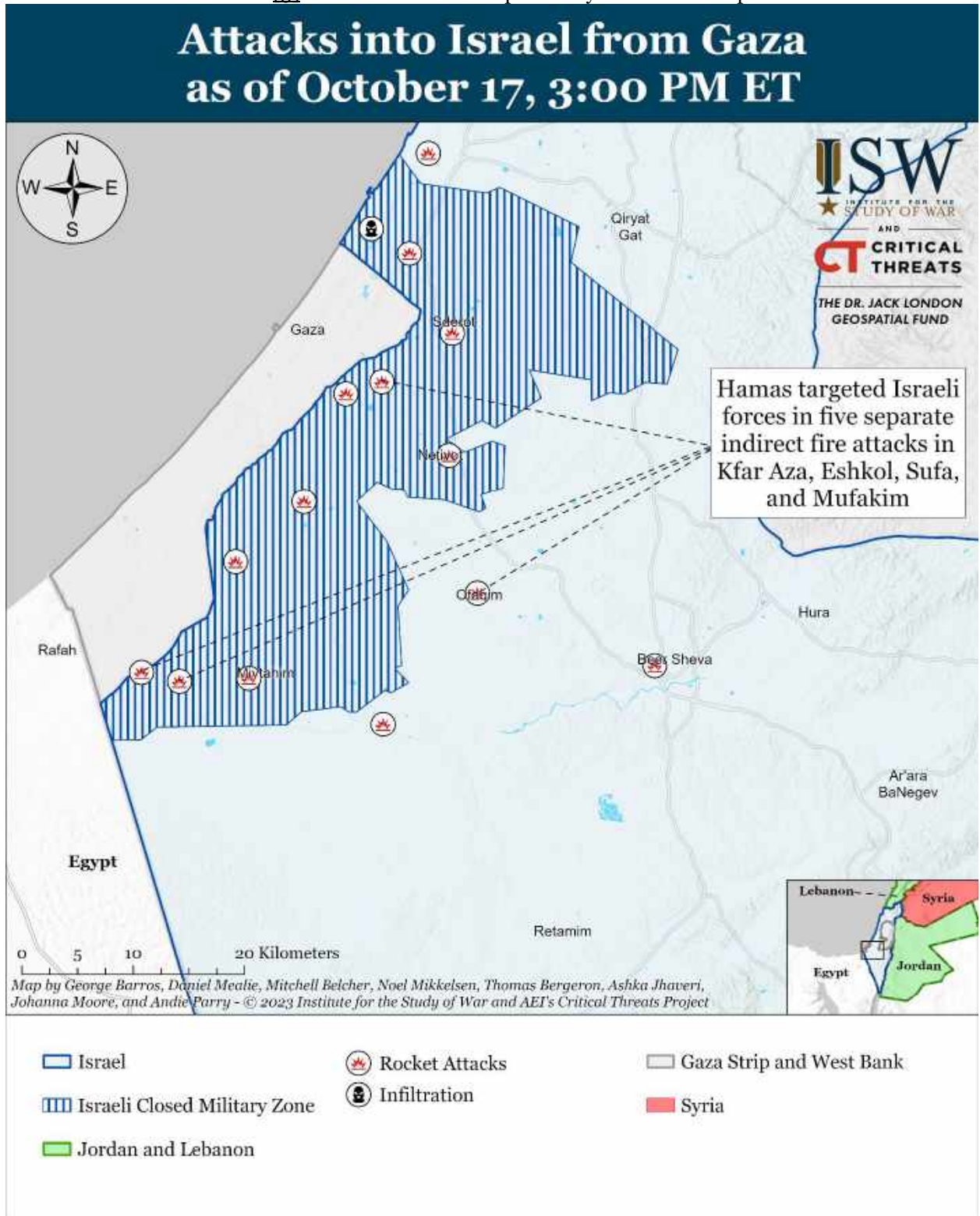
- Israel
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Golan Heights
- Syria
- Gaza Strip and West Bank

Indirect Fire Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of October 17, 3:00 PM ET



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

Palestinian militias continued indirect fire into Israel on October 17. The al Qassem Brigades— Hamas’ militant wing—claimed responsibility for 26 mortar and rocket attacks.[1] Saraya al Quds—the militant wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)—claimed responsibility for another five rocket attacks.[2] The al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades—the militant wing of Fatah—claimed two mortar attacks into Israel from the Gaza Strip.[3] CTP-ISW recorded reports of five unclaimed mortar and rocket strikes as well. This rate of attacks is consistent with the rate that CTP-ISW observed on October 16. CTP-ISW recorded one report of an infiltration from the Gaza Strip near Zikim on October 17.[4] An IDF helicopter killed two individuals on the beach.[5] CTP-ISW cannot independently confirm this report.

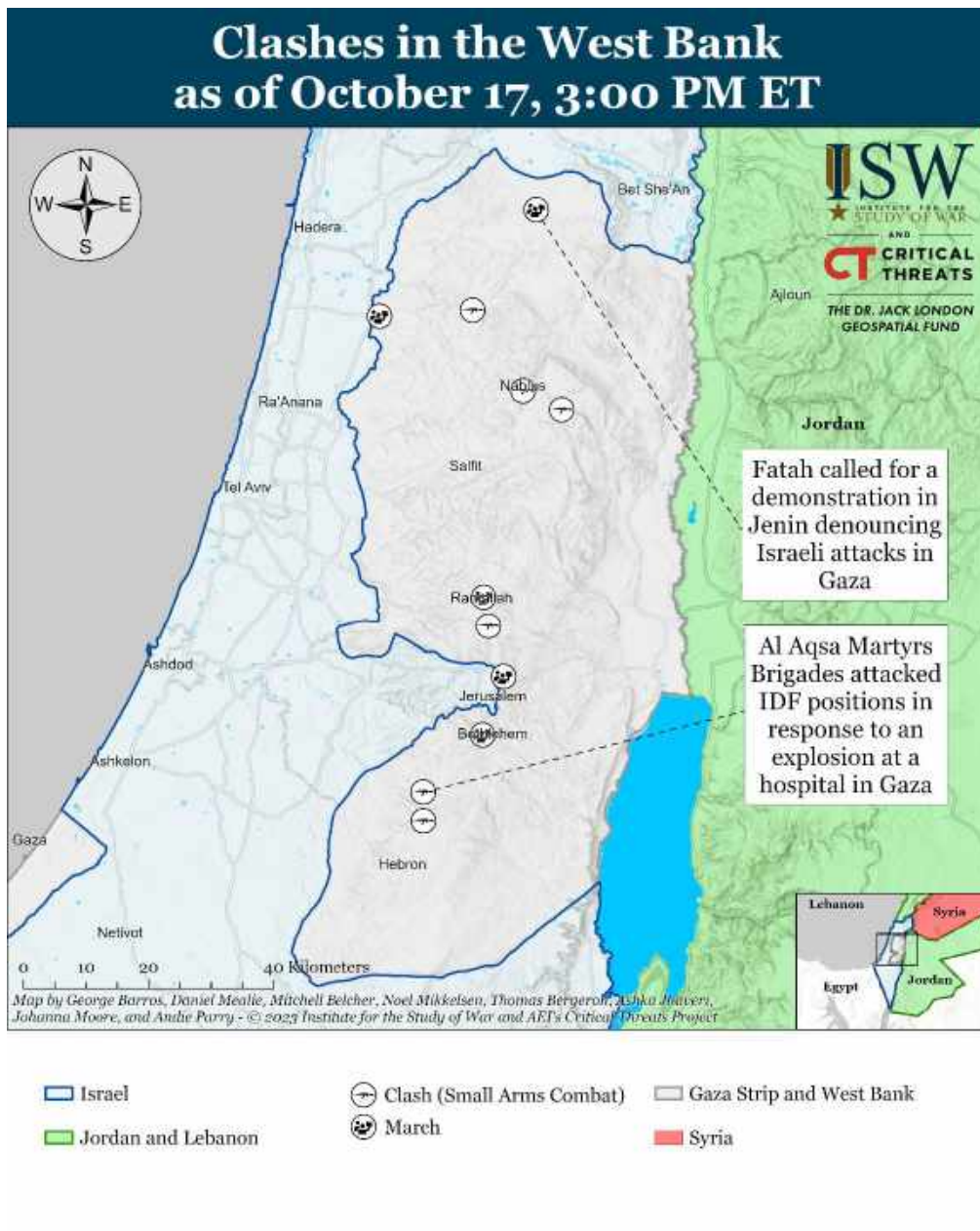


Recorded reports of rocket attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

Palestinian militias are hitting civilian and military targets in their indirect fire attacks. Hamas is continuing to target civilians throughout Israel from the Gaza Strip, including in Tel Aviv, Beersheba, and Haifa.[6] Hamas targeted Israeli forces with mortars and rockets near Sufa, Mufakim, Eshkol, and Kfar Azza in five separate attacks on October 17.[7] Palestinian militias are also continuing to target southern Israeli towns that the IDF has evacuated and designated as military zones. Ninety percent of Sderot’s civilians have departed the city, for instance, which Israel designated a militarized zone on October 16.[8] The IDF deployed units to this area in recent days, suggesting that the militias seek to target IDF military assets in addition to civilians.[9]

IDF airstrikes into the Gaza Strip have killed several senior Hamas officials since the war began on October 7. Three senior IDF officers told the New York Times that the goal of Israeli operations is to “wipe out the top political and military hierarchy of Hamas.”[10] Multiple separate IDF airstrikes into the Gaza Strip killed Hamas’ Shura Council chief, the al Qasem Brigades Central Brigade commander, and at least two relatives of Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh on October 17.[11] Israel has conducted at least 10 airstrikes against senior Hamas, PIJ, and other militia officials since October 8.[12]

West Bank



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

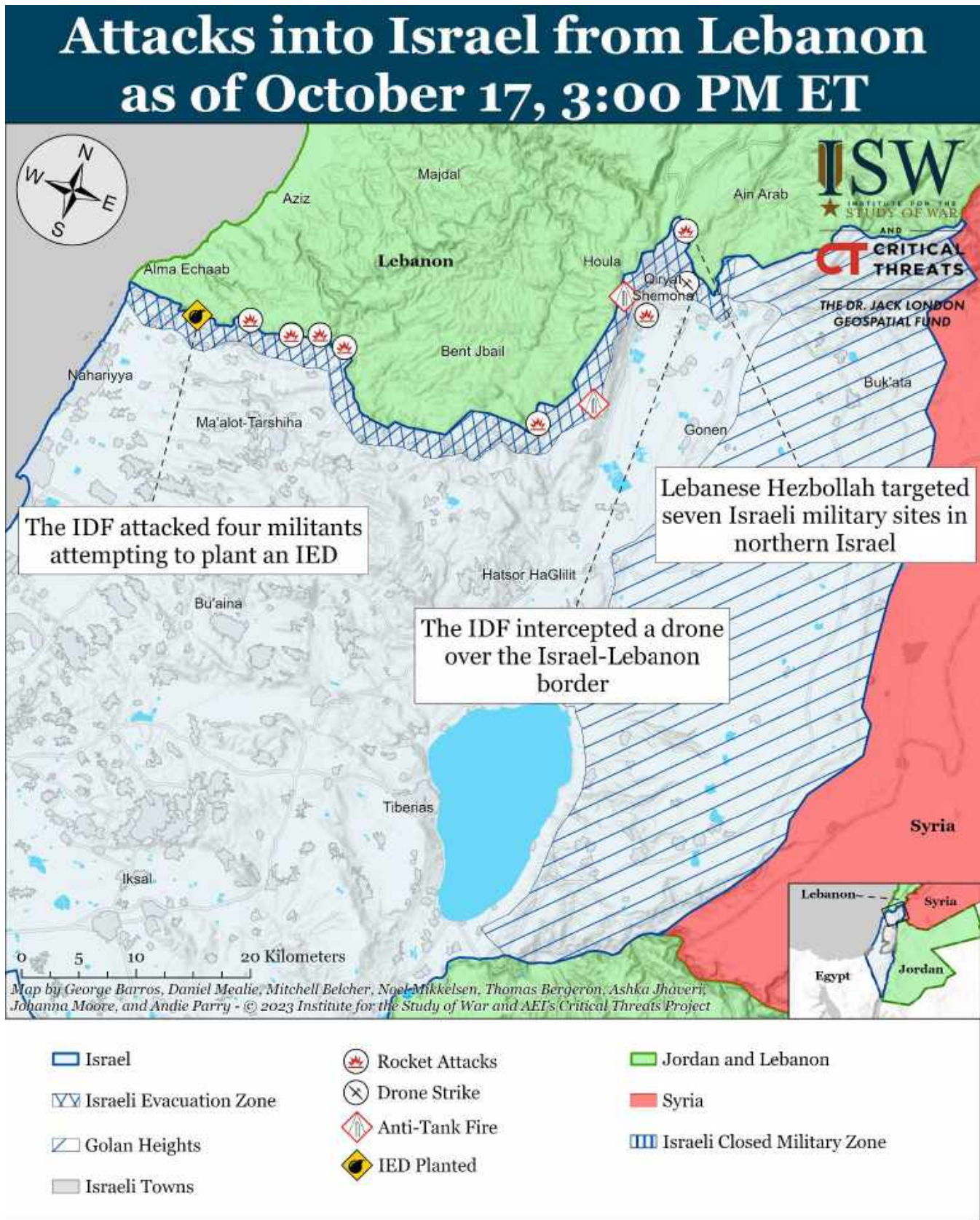
The rate of small arms clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinian militants in the West Bank remained low on October 17 after peaking on October 13. CTP-ISW recorded seven small arms clashes in the West Bank and five demonstrations in support of the Palestinian resistance and denouncing Israeli attacks into the Gaza Strip. Hamas remains committed to expanding the war to the West Bank.^[13]

Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh called for mobilization in the West Bank following an explosion at a hospital in the Gaza Strip on October 17, which may increase the rate of clashes in the coming days.^[14] The IDF said that PIJ conducted a rocket attack that failed and hit the active hospital.^[15] The Hamas-run Health Ministry contrastingly claimed that an Israeli airstrike hit the hospital. The explosion has reportedly killed hundreds.^[16] ISW cannot independently verify the cause of the explosion or the exact death toll.^[17] The Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed to attack IDF positions in the West Bank in response to the explosion.^[18]

LH-affiliated Al Mayadeen claimed on October 16 that the IDF's focus on the West Bank throughout 2023 contributed to its intelligence failure ahead of Hamas' October 7 attack.^[19] The report said that IDF redeployments from southern Israel to the West Bank drew IDF attention away from the Gaza Strip. It also alleged that Hamas deceived Israel by not interfering in conflict between Israel and other Gaza-based Palestinian militias throughout the year.

Senior Iranian regime officials, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, have called for the arming of Palestinian militias in the West Bank since August 2022, as CTP-ISW has reported extensively.^[20] These calls have coincided with an uptick in kinetic activity in the West Bank during the past year.^[21] IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami previously specified during an interview with the Supreme Leader's website in August 2022 that Iran seeks to arm Palestinian groups' "infantry" in the West Bank to conduct more ground operations against Israeli security forces and stoke unrest.^[22] The Iranian focus on the West Bank in addition to several reports noting the flow of weapons into the territory this year via Iran's proxy network in the Levant suggests that the West Bank remains a threat to Israel.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas canceled a meeting scheduled for October 18 with US President Joe Biden and other leaders in the Middle East, according to a senior Palestinian official.^[23] Abbas withdrew from the summit to protest the explosion at the hospital in the Gaza Strip.^[24] The Palestinian Authority was founded in 1994 and is the governing body that oversees the West Bank.^[25]



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

CTP-ISW recorded 10 attacks from Lebanon into Israeli territory on October 17, including seven against military targets. Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) claimed responsibility for all 10 attacks on military and civilian targets along the Israel-Lebanon border, including an anti-tank missile attack on Metulla that wounded two IDF soldiers.[26] This is the third consecutive day that LH has targeted Metulla. The IDF called for civilians to immediately evacuate Metulla and other areas along the Lebanese border.[27] The IDF separately killed at least two LH militants attempting to plant explosive devices near Hanita along the Israel-Lebanon border on October 17.[28]

LH activity on Israel’s northern border creates opportunities for further operations against Israel. LH has targeted dozens of Israeli military targets in northern Israel since October 7, including Israeli border outposts, surveillance, military equipment, and barracks. CTP-ISW previously reported that Iran and elements of its Axis of Resistance, including LH, are preparing for the Hamas-Israel war to expand into a regional conflict.[29] Israeli officials have furthermore reported on LH efforts to transport weapons to Lebanon via the Damascus and Aleppo international airports.[30] The IDF has conducted three airstrikes on those airports in recent days to disrupt possible Iranian military transfers to the Levant.

Iran and Axis of Resistance

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei reiterated what other senior Iranian officials are saying about the Hamas-Israel war during a speech on October 17. Khamenei echoing these talking points demonstrates his support for them and signals to the rest of the Iranian regime that these are the official positions.

- Khamenei warned that the continuation of Israeli “crimes” against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip will make resistance groups “impatient” and that “no one will be able to stop [these groups].”[31] “Resistance groups” is the term that Iranian officials use to describe the proxy and partner militias that Iran sponsors throughout the Middle East. Khamenei’s warning resembles similar warnings from Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian since October 9. Abdollahian posted on X (Twitter) on October 16 that the expansion of the Hamas-Israel war to “other fronts” is becoming “inevitable.”[32] Abdollahian separately warned that resistance groups may take “preemptive” measures against Israel during an interview on Iranian state television on October 16.[33]
- Khamenei also accused the United States of determining Israel’s “current policy” vis-a-vis the Gaza Strip, echoing claims from Iranian officials and media since October 13 that the United States is playing a direct role in the Hamas-Israel war.[34] IRGC-affiliated Tasnim News Agency, for instance, recirculated Lebanese Hezbollah’s assertion that the United States is the “real owner” of the Hamas-Israel war and that Israel is “merely implementing American decisions.”[35] Tasnim similarly alleged on October 16 that American military commanders are overseeing some operations against the Gaza Strip because Israeli officers are suffering from “mental and psychological confusion.”[36] Abdollahian accused the United States of encouraging Israel to conduct more attacks against civilians in the Gaza Strip during a phone call with EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell on October 17.[37] Members of Iran’s Axis of Resistance—including Lebanese Hezbollah and the Bashar al Assad regime—have criticized the US role in the conflict as well.[38]

Senior IRGC commanders are framing Hamas’ al Aqsa Flood operation as a prelude to future attacks on Israel. Former IRGC Commander Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari framed the attack as a “warmup” to prepare and train for future operations against Israel in an interview on October 15.[39] IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami similarly described Hamas’ operation as the “first stage” of Israel’s “hasty collapse.”[40] IRGC Deputy Commander Brigadier General Ali Fadavi added on October 17 that the Axis of Resistance will inflict a new “shockwave” on Israel if it continues its “atrocities” against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.[41]



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