

Iran Update, October 26, 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. Palestinian militias continued attacks at their usual rate from the Gaza Strip into Israel. The IDF conducted a raid into the Gaza Strip, which Israeli media framed as preparation for the ground operation.
2. Clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinian militants and anti-Israel protests continued at their usual rate in the West Bank. The Lions' Den released a statement indicating increasing alignment with Hamas.
3. Iranian-backed militant attacks around the Israel-Lebanon border decreased significantly. The IDF is conducting daily airstrikes against LH and Palestinian militia targets along the northern Israeli border, which may have contributed to the reduced rate of attacks.
4. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed three attacks on US military positions in Iraq and Syria.
5. A senior Hamas delegation traveled to Moscow and met with Russian and Iranian officials.
6. Iranian officials and media are dismissing US calls for Iran and the Axis of Resistance to show restraint in the Hamas-Israel war. The narrative that Iran cannot control its proxy and partner

militias in the Axis of Resistance is an Iranian information operation meant to generate plausible deniability for Iranian-led actions in the Middle East and obfuscate Tehran’s responsibility.



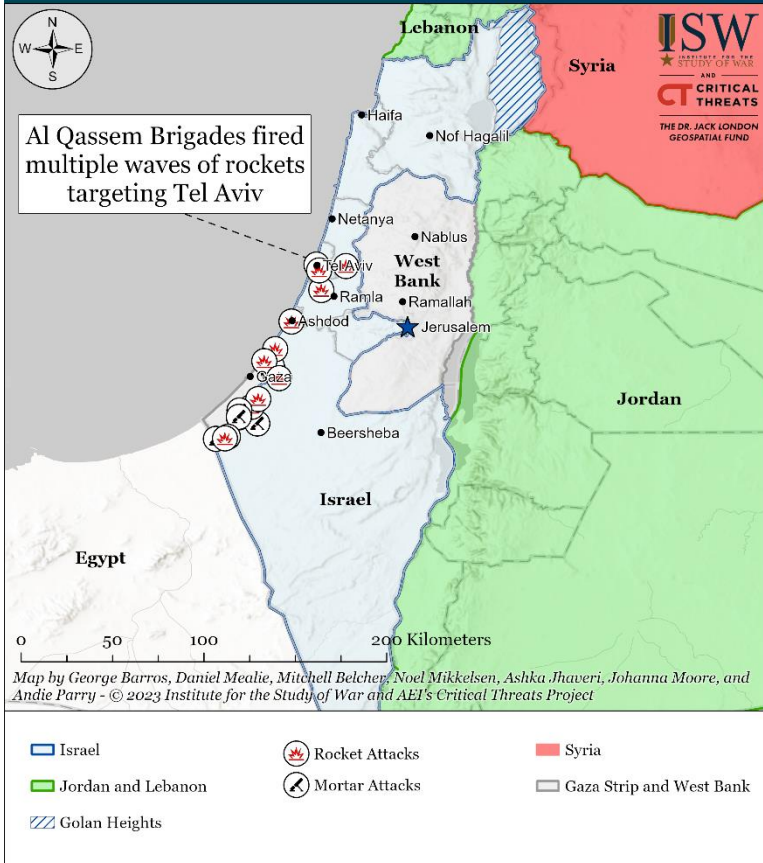
Gaza Strip

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

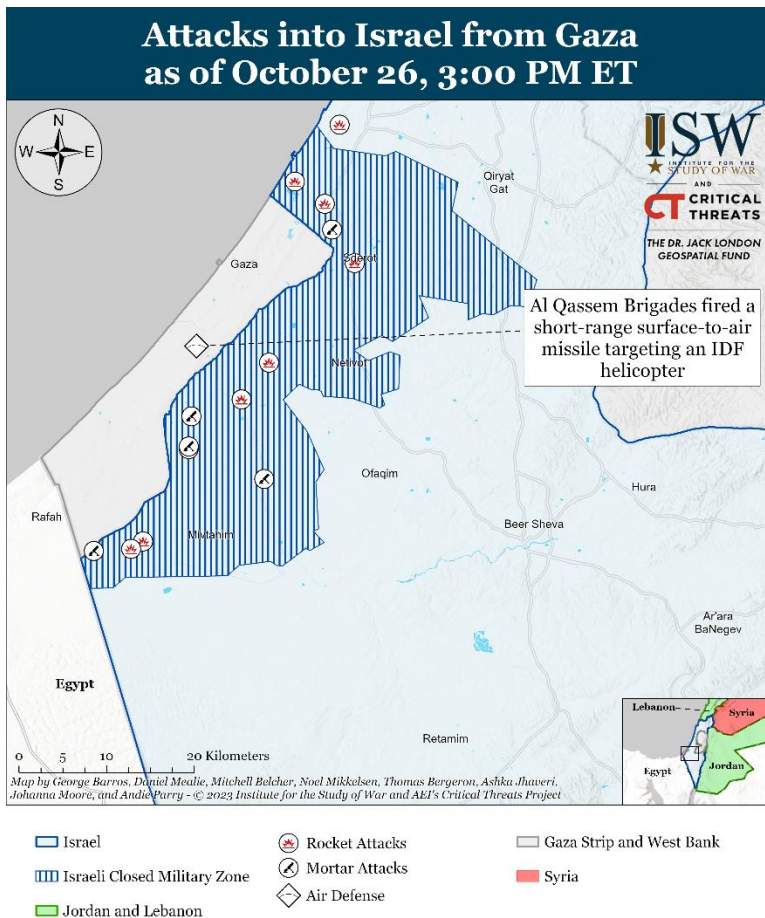
- Erode the will of Israeli political establishment and public to launch and sustain a major ground operation into the Gaza Strip
- Degrade IDF material and morale around the Gaza Strip

Palestinian militias continued attacks at their usual rate from the Gaza Strip into Israel on October 26. The al Qassem Brigades— Hamas’ militant wing—claimed responsibility for 10 indirect fire attacks.¹ Saraya al Quds—the militant wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)—claimed responsibility for five mortar and rocket attacks.² The al Aqsa Matyrs’ Brigade, which claims it is affiliated with Fatah, claimed responsibility for one rocket attack.³ Fatah denies that it has any connection to the al Aqsa Matyrs’ Brigade, however. The Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades—the militant wing of Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—claimed responsibility for two rocket attacks.⁴ Axis of Resistance-affiliated media reported five other unclaimed mortar and rocket attacks.⁵

Indirect Fire Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of October 26, 3:00 PM ET



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



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Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reaffirmed that the IDF will conduct a major ground operation into the Gaza Strip and described its objectives in a televised speech on October 25.⁶ Netanyahu stated that the operation is meant to “eliminate Hamas by destroying its military and governance capabilities and to do everything possible to get our hostages back.” Netanyahu did not specify when the operation would begin.

The IDF conducted a raid into the Gaza Strip on October 26, which Israeli media framed as preparation for the ground operation.⁷ The IDF Givati Brigade deployed an armored company equipped with bulldozers for the raid.⁸ An IDF spokesperson stated that the unit “eliminated terrorists, neutralized threats, dismantled explosives, [and] neutralized ambushes” during the raid.⁹ Palestinian anti-tank elements attempted to fire on the IDF unit, and the IDF tanks returned fire and destroyed the anti-tank elements, according to local Israeli sources.¹⁰

Iranian state media responded to the raid by pushing the false narrative that Palestinian militants forced the IDF to withdraw from the Gaza Strip.¹¹ US military doctrine defines a raid as “an operation to temporarily seize an area in order to secure information, confuse an enemy, capture personnel or equipment, or to destroy a capability culminating with a planned withdrawal.”¹² The IDF withdrawal after the operation is consistent with the US military doctrinal definition of a raid, which includes a planned retrograde at the end of the mission.

IDF airstrikes continue to attrit Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip. The IDF reported on October 26 that it killed the deputy head of Hamas’ intelligence department.¹³ The IDF stated that the deputy head helped plan the October 7 attack with other senior Hamas officials. The IDF reported that it killed the commander and deputy commander of the al Qassem Brigades’ Darj Tafah battalion in Gaza city.¹⁴ The IDF announced that it killed a battalion commander in the al Qassem Brigades in Khan Younis on October 25.¹⁵

West Bank

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Draw IDF assets and resources toward the West Bank and fix them there

Clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinian militants and anti-Israel protests continued at their usual rate in the West Bank on October 26.¹⁶ CTP-ISW recorded five small arms clashes and eight protests.¹⁷ This rate of activity follows a brief uptick in anti-Israel activity in the West Bank on October 25.¹⁸ The Lions’ Den—a West Bank-based Palestinian militia—appeared to trigger this brief uptick as it released a statement calling for mobilization on October 24.¹⁹

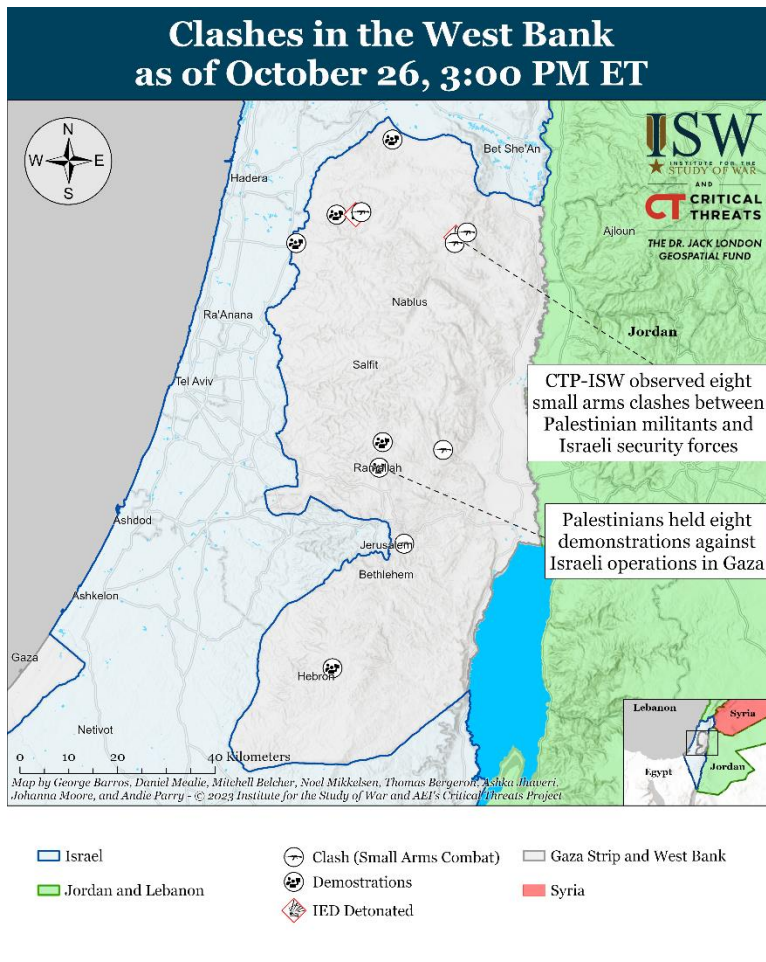
The Lions’ Den released a statement indicating increasing alignment with Hamas on October 26. The group called for a general business strike throughout the West Bank and described itself as “a sword in the hand of Commander Mohammad Deif,” who is the head of Hamas’ al Qassem Brigades.²⁰ This framing marks a departure from previous Lions’ Den claims that the group is not affiliated with any specific Palestinian faction.²¹ The statement also marks a departure from previous Lions’ Den calls for mobilization because it refers to the entire West Bank rather than specific locations.²²

The timing of this statement is noteworthy for several reasons:

- The statement coincides with additional Hamas calls for further escalation against Israel in the West Bank.²³ This apparent alignment comes after CTP-ISW observed indications that Hamas and the Lions’ Den were struggling to coordinate their efforts in the West Bank during the early days of the war.²⁴
- The statement comes after Lebanese Hezbollah, Hamas, and PIJ held a coordination and planning meeting in Beirut on October 24.²⁵ CTP-ISW is considering the hypothesis that this meeting has prompted a change in Palestinian militant behavior in the West Bank.

- The statement comes after Netanyahu reaffirmed on October 25 that the IDF will imminently conduct a major ground operation into the Gaza Strip to destroy Hamas’ “military and governance capabilities.”²⁶

The fact that Palestinian militias, especially Hamas, rely on public calls for escalation in the West Bank indicates that these groups lack the necessary chain of command and organization to do so covertly. Hamas has demonstrated that it can organize coordinated efforts in the Gaza Strip because it has organizational infrastructure there through which Hamas leaders can communicate instructions and orders.



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

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

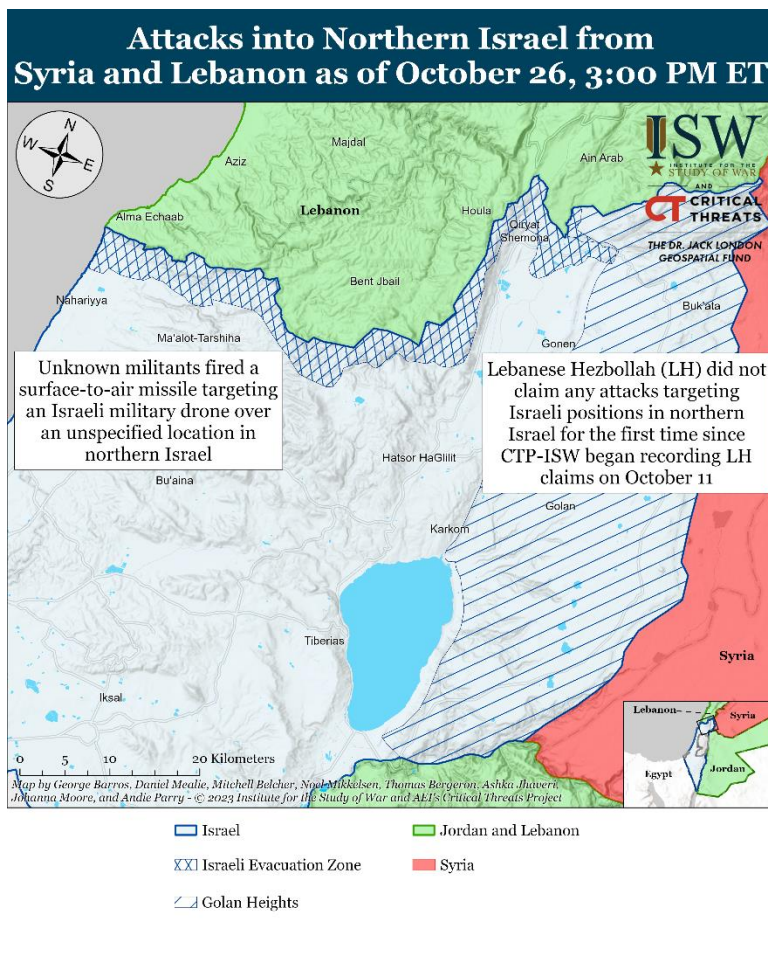
Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Draw IDF assets and resources toward northern Israel and fix them there
- Set conditions for successive campaigns into northern Israel

Iranian-backed militant attacks around the Israel-Lebanon border decreased significantly on October 26. Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) did not claim any attacks on Israeli targets for the first time since CTP-ISW began recording LH claims on October 11.²⁷ Unspecified militants fired a surface-to-air missile targeting an IDF drone.²⁸ This single attack marks a noteworthy decrease from the six Iranian-backed attacks that CTP-ISW recorded on October 25.²⁹

The IDF is conducting daily airstrikes against LH and Palestinian militia targets along the northern Israeli border, which may have contributed to the reduced rate of attacks.³⁰ LH acknowledged that IDF airstrikes have killed at least 44 of its fighters since October 9, including 30 fighters since October 21.³¹ Israeli airstrikes specifically targeting LH anti-tank guided missile cells on October 25 killed eight LH fighters before they could fire their missiles and hit Israeli targets.³²

It is noteworthy that the decreased rate of attacks occurred immediately after LH Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah held a coordination and planning meeting with Hamas Deputy Political Bureau Chairman Saleh al Arouri and PIJ Secretary General Ziyad al Nakhalah in Beirut on October 24.³³



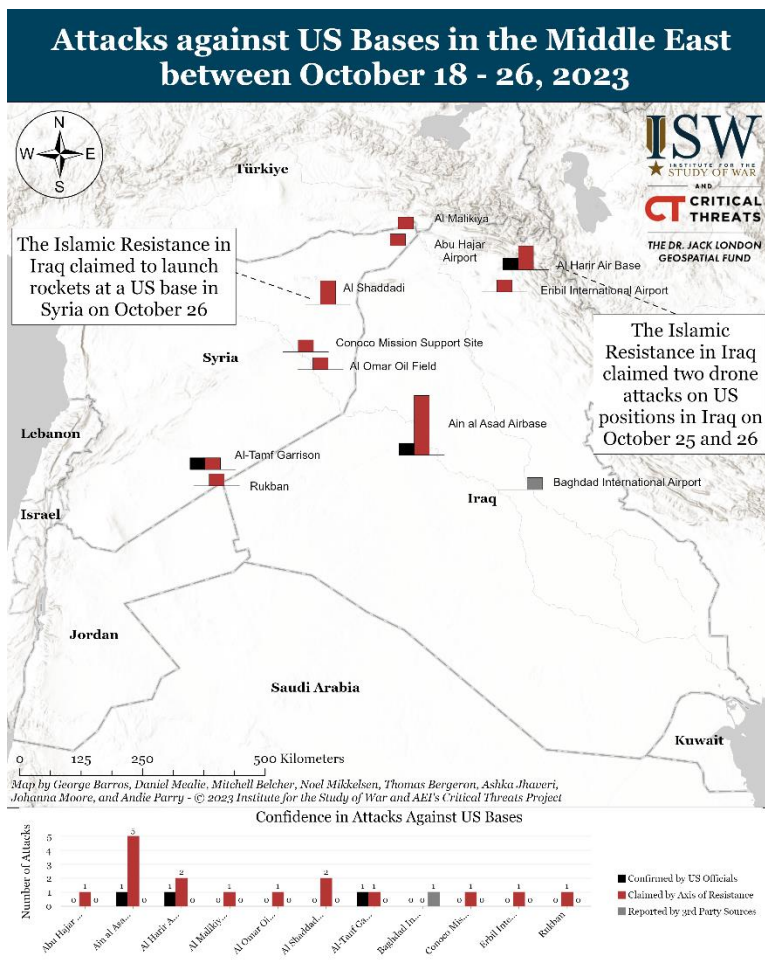
Iran and Axis of Resistance

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Demonstrate the capability and willingness of Iran and the Axis of Resistance to escalate against the United States and Israel on multiple fronts
- Set conditions to fight a regional war on multiple fronts

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed three attacks on US military positions in Iraq and Syria. The group conducted one-way drone attacks on US positions at Ain al Asad airbase and Erbil International Airport on October 25 and 26.³⁴ The group also conducted a rocket attack on a US base near Hasakah in northeastern Syria on October 26.³⁵ The Islamic Resistance in Iraq has claimed 20 of the 22 reported attacks on US forces in the Middle East since October 18. The US force presence in Iraq and Syria is essential to US efforts to counter ISIS.

Iranian-backed Iraqi militia leaders from the Islamic Resistance in Iraq reaffirmed on October 26 their commitment to waging a long-term fight against the United States, indicating that the group will conduct additional attacks in the coming days. Kataib Hezbollah (KH) leader Abdul Ali al Askari stated that the group is prepared to fight the United States "for years."³⁶ Asaib Ahl al Haq leader Qais Khazali stated that Iraqi militias are attacking the United States for its support for Israel.³⁷



A senior Hamas delegation traveled to Moscow and met with Russian and Iranian officials on October 26.³⁸ Hamas' International Relation Office head and political bureau member Musa Abu Marzouk led the delegation, which also included Health Minister of the Gaza Strip Basem Naim.³⁹ The delegation held a joint meeting with Russian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister and Special Representative for the Middle East Mikhail Bogdanov and Iranian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Ali Bagheri Kani. Hamas leaders issued statements around the visit praising Russia's stance toward the Israel-Hamas war. Russia has framed itself as a possible mediator between Israel and Hamas and submitted a UN resolution calling for a humanitarian ceasefire on October 16. The UN resolution failed to mention Hamas by name.⁴⁰ The Israeli Foreign Affairs Ministry condemned Russia's invitation to Hamas on October 26.⁴¹ CTP-ISW previously assessed that the Kremlin is already exploiting and will likely continue to exploit the Israel-Hamas war to advance several information operations intended to reduce US and Western support for and attention to Ukraine.⁴² A senior Hamas delegation most recently visited Moscow in March 2023 amid strained tensions between Russia and Israel over the Russian invasion of Ukraine.⁴³

Iranian officials and media are dismissing US calls for Iran and the Axis of Resistance to show restraint in the Hamas-Israel war. The Biden administration has sent Iran at least two messages since October 7, expressing its desire to avoid a regional war and calling on Iran to show restraint and to urge its proxy militias to do the same.⁴⁴ US President Joe Biden also issued a direct warning to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on October 25, stating that the United States will respond to continued attacks on US forces in the Middle East.⁴⁵ Iranian Vice President for Political Affairs Mohammad Jamshidi dismissed the Biden administration's messages, describing the warnings against regional escalation as "nothing but requests."⁴⁶ An unidentified source separately told Iranian state media on October 26 that the United States' supply of military equipment to Israel contradicts US calls for restraint.⁴⁷ The source added that Iran cannot "order or forbid regional resistance groups [from acting.]"⁴⁸

The narrative that Iran cannot control its proxy and partner militias in the Axis of Resistance is an Iranian information operation meant to generate plausible deniability for Iranian-led actions in the Middle East and obfuscate Tehran's responsibility.⁴⁹ This narrative has repeatedly proven false.

- CTP-ISW reported in June 2023, for example, that Iraqi proxies stopped threatening to attack US forces following IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani's visit to Baghdad that month.⁵⁰ The cessation of proxy threats suggested that Ghaani had directed the proxies to deescalate.
- Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters Commander Major General Gholam Ali Rashid stated on October 26 that the Axis of Resistance in the "north, east, and south" of Israel would support Hamas in the event of an Israeli ground operation into the Gaza Strip.⁵¹ Rashid is a member of Iran's IRGC command network, a small group of senior leaders who dominate the IRGC and have close connections stemming from the Iran-Iraq War.⁵² Rashid has personal connections to

other senior members of Iran’s military leadership, such as former IRGC Commander Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari.⁵³ The Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters is the highest Iranian operational headquarters and is responsible for wartime operations. The headquarters, along with the Armed Forces General Staff, commands, controls, coordinates, and supports the three branches of Iran’s armed forces.⁵⁴ The commanders of these branches—the Artesh, IRGC, and Law Enforcement Command—relay orders from the Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters to their operational forces.⁵⁵ Statements by Rashid carry more weight than those by IRGC officers in lesser posts.

- Iran has facilitated the expansion of the Hamas-Israel war since October 7. Iran has directed its proxy and partner militias in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen to attack US and Israeli targets.⁵⁶ The militias have used weapons supplied by Iran in some of their attacks on US military positions.⁵⁷ Iran has historically provided extensive material and financial support as well as training to its proxies in the region. The *Washington Post* reported on October 9 that Iran provided Hamas fighters with training and weapons prior to the October 7 attack.⁵⁸ The IRGC Quds Force has separately coordinated the deployment of hundreds of Iranian-backed militants in southern Lebanon and southwestern Syria since the war began.⁵⁹ These militants include military engineers and missile experts, among others.⁶⁰ Israel has furthermore conducted several airstrikes on the Damascus and Aleppo international airports since October 12 and indicated that the airstrikes are meant to prevent Iran from moving weapons into Syria and/or opening a front against Israel from there.⁶¹

Iran’s claims are part of its ongoing information operation to deflect responsibility for any further escalation of the conflict away from Iran. The Iranian regime has repeatedly accused the United States of aggravating the conflict while framing itself as a promoter of peace. Iran has additionally set informational conditions to blame the United States and Israel for any further escalation of the war and deflect any responsibility from itself, as CTP-ISW previously reported.⁶²

¹ <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/51> ; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/52> ; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/54> ; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/56> ; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/57> ; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/58> ; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/59> ; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/60> ; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/62> ; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/64>

² <https://t.me/sarayaps/16465> ; <https://t.me/sarayaps/16470> ; <https://t.me/sarayaps/16471> ; <https://t.me/sarayaps/16472> ;

³ <https://t.me/AymanGouda/5801>

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<https://t.me/almanarnews/132997>

; <https://t.me/almanarnews/133124>

⁵ https://t.me/mihwar_almuqawama/36816 ; <https://t.me/almanarnews/132956> ; <https://t.me/almanarnews/133120> ; <https://t.me/almanarnews/133171>

⁶ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-following-war-everyone-will-have-to-answer-for-failures-including-me/>

⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-ground-forces-raid-hamas-sites-gaza-withdraw-military-statement-2023-10-26/> ; <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1717403162485629277> ; <https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-tanks-troops-briefly-push-into-gaza-strip-ahead-of-ground-offensive/>

⁸ <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1717403162485629277>

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https://twitter.com/IsraelRadar_com/status/1717409857563746326?s=20

¹¹ <https://www.dot-tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1402/08/04/2978274>

¹² <https://www.tradoc.army.mil/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/AD1029823-DOD-Dictionary-of-Military-and-Associated-Terms-2017.pdf>

¹³ <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1717563808703512867>

¹⁴ <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1717582831218504168> ; <https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog-october-26-2023/#:~:text=The%20Israel%20Defense%20Forces%20says,combat%20support%20commander%2C%20Tarek%20Maarouf.>

¹⁵ <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1717075843749487060> ; <https://twitter.com/manniefabian/status/1717075354890694930>

¹⁶ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-25-2023>

¹⁷ [%20">https://twitter.com/no_itsmyturn/status/1717431355343061478">%20](https://twitter.com/no_itsmyturn/status/1717431355343061478) ; [%20">https://t.me/mihwar_almuqawama/36765">%20](https://t.me/mihwar_almuqawama/36765) ;

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¹⁹ <https://t.me/areennabluss/286>

²⁰ <https://t.me/areennabluss/288>

²¹ <https://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/924> ; [https://shehabnews\(dot\)com/post/109274/](https://shehabnews(dot)com/post/109274/) - الغربية تنتفض-تلبية- بمسيرات ومواجهات- الضفة الغربية- تلبيبة- عرين- الأسود

²² <https://t.me/areennabluss/236> , <https://t.me/areennabluss/249> , <https://t.me/areennabluss/269>

²³ https://t.me/mihwar_almuqawama/36744 ; [https://almanar\(dot\)com\(dot\)lb/11127327](https://almanar(dot)com(dot)lb/11127327)

²⁴ <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-october-11-2023>

²⁵ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-25-2023>

²⁶ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-following-war-everyone-will-have-to-answer-for-failures-including-me/>

²⁷ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-11-2023>

²⁸ <https://x.com/manniefabian/status/1717276439161029015?s=20>

²⁹ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-25-2023>

³⁰ <https://x.com/manniefabian/status/1717569789130858899?s=20> ;

<https://x.com/manniefabian/status/1717079923808981504?s=20>

³¹ <https://x.com/QalaatM/status/1717601881457897576?s=20> ;

<https://x.com/QalaatM/status/1715795708249362453?s=20> ; <https://x.com/QalaatM/status/1715720893924622654?s=20>

³² <https://x.com/QalaatM/status/1717238137393385494?s=20> ;

<https://x.com/manniefabian/status/1717079923808981504?s=20>

³³ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-october-25-2023> ; <https://www.dot-farsnews.ir/en/news/14020803000608/Lebanese-Palestinian-Resistance-Leaders-Discuss-Ways-to-Achieve-80%98Real> ;

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³⁵ https://t.me/C_Military1/37874; [https://www dot almayadeen.net/latestnews/2023/10/26/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82--%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-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%81%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84](https://www.almayadeen.net/latestnews/2023/10/26/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82--%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-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%81%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84)

³⁶ https://t.me/mihwar_almuqawama/36820

³⁷ https://t.me/mihwar_almuqawama/36820

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⁴³ <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230316-hamas-sent-high-level-delegation-to-moscow-at-russias-invitation/>

⁴⁴ <https://amwaj.media/article/exclusive-blinken-delivers-us-message-to-iran-amid-surge-in-regional-tensions>

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⁵¹ [https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1402/08/04/2978302](https://www.tasnimnews_dot_com/fa/news/1402/08/04/2978302)

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⁵⁵ <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Pivot-to-Offense-How-Iran-Is-Adapting-for-Modern-Conflict-and-Warfare.pdf?x91208>

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