

# Iran Update, November 18, 2023

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**Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm EST**

*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](#).*

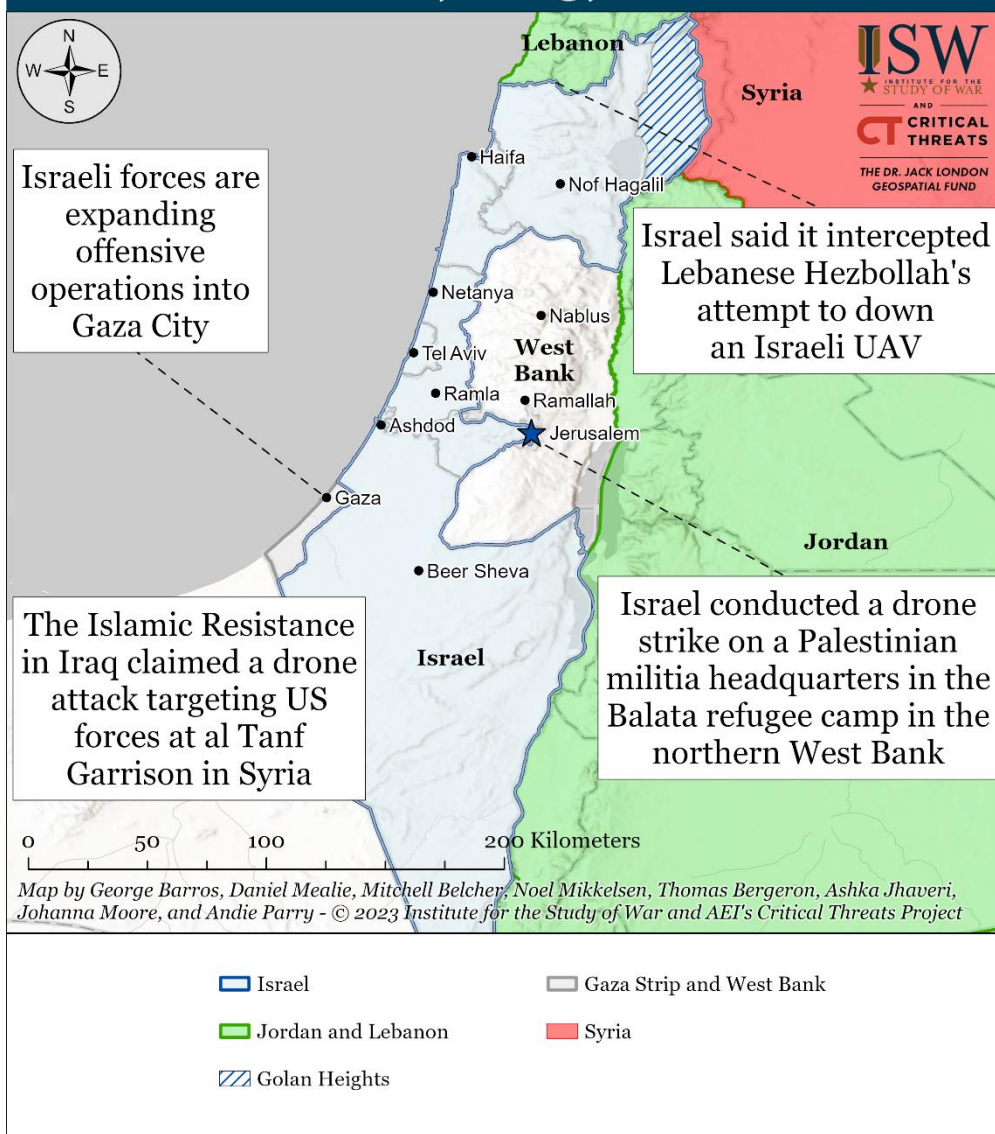
*Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are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

*Click [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.*

## **Key Takeaways:**

1. Israeli forces are expanding offensive operations into Gaza City. Israel forces provided humanitarian aid to al Shifa Hospital as civilians evacuated the medical complex.
2. Al Qassem Brigades military spokesperson said Hamas is preparing for a flexible and protracted defense in the Gaza Strip, which is consistent with the delaying operation that CTP-ISW assessed that Hamas is conducting against advancing Israeli forces.
3. Israel conducted a drone strike on a Palestinian militia headquarters in the Balata refugee camp in the northern West Bank.
4. Iranian-backed militants, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted 13 cross-border attacks into northern Israel.
5. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—conducted one attack targeting US positions in Syria.
6. Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Gharaei Ashtiani argued that the Axis of Resistance has successfully destabilized and isolated Israel since Hamas' October 7 attack.

# Israel-Hamas War as of November 18, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



## Gaza Strip

### Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Erode the will of the 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

**Israeli forces are expanding offensive operations into Gaza City.** Israel Defense Forces (IDF) spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said on November 18 Israeli forces have expanded clearing operations to additional neighborhoods in Gaza City.<sup>[1]</sup> The IDF 36th Division clashed with Hamas forces around the Zaitoun neighborhood in southern Gaza City, and the IDF 162nd Division began operating on the outskirts of Jabalia in northern Gaza City.<sup>[2]</sup> An IDF spokesperson said

Hamas' northern brigade maintains a command-and-control center and critical strongholds in Jabalia.[3] The Israeli Army Radio reported that two of the four Hamas battalions operating in Jabalia are combat capable, implying that the other two are currently combat ineffective.[4] Additionally, Hagari said Israeli forces are working to clear Hamas personnel and infrastructure from the Sheikh Ijleen and Rimal neighborhoods.[5]

Palestinian militias conducted attacks on Israeli forces in the areas of advance into Gaza City. The al Quds Brigades—the militant wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)—targeted Israeli forces and military vehicles in four neighborhoods in Gaza City.[6] The al Quds Brigades used rockets, including tandem charge anti-tank rockets and rocket propelled grenades (RPG). The IDF said infantry, armored, and engineering forces supported by the Israeli Air Force are engaged in heavy fighting.[7]

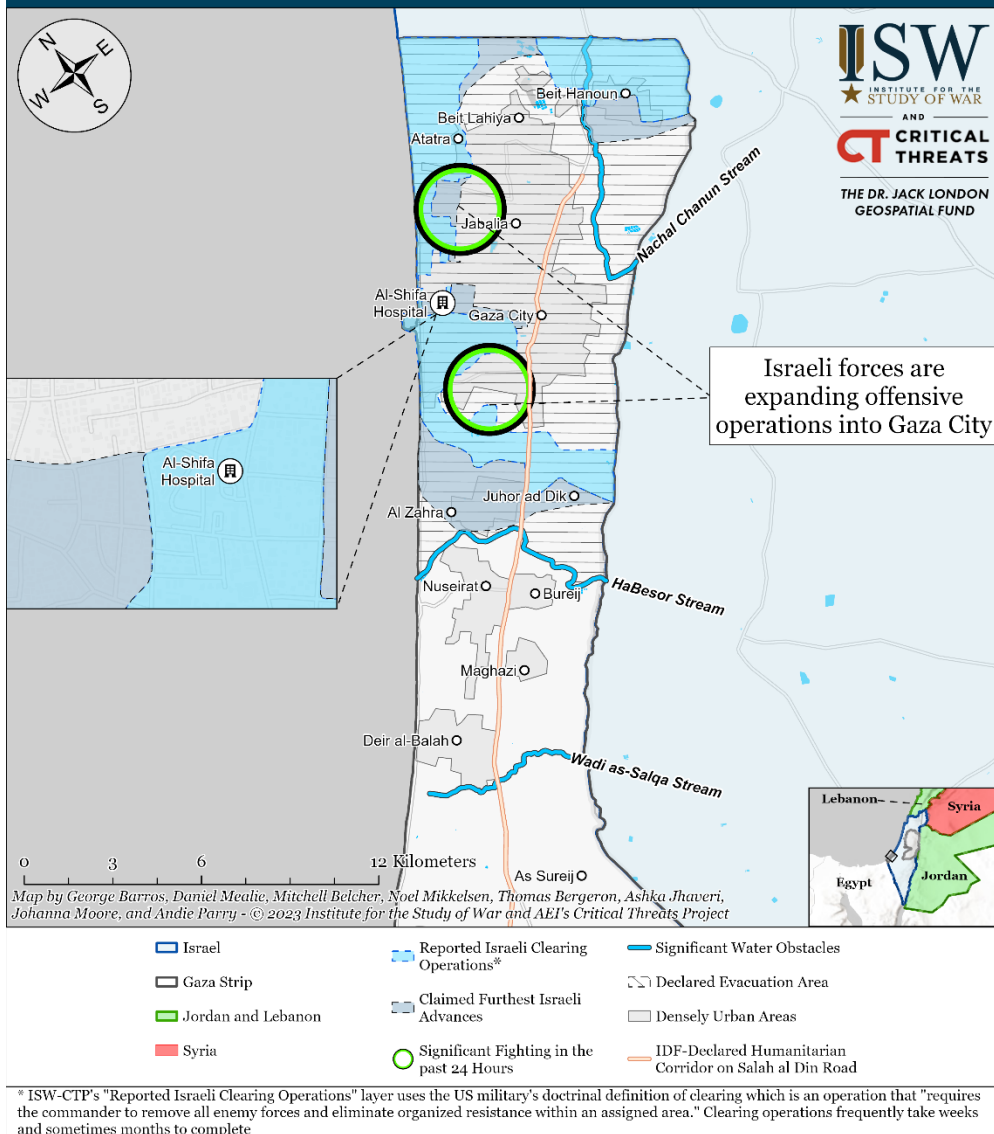
**Israel informed residents in neighborhoods of Gaza City to evacuate, which is consistent with Israeli efforts to establish evacuation corridors for civilians moving to the southern Gaza Strip.** The IDF told residents to evacuate from Jabalia, al Daraj, al Tuffah, and Shujaia neighborhoods on November 18.[8] Israel also dropped pamphlets over the Indonesian Hospital.[9]

**Hamas and Israeli forces clashed near al Shifa Hospital.** A local media outlet reported that there are “significant” battles in the vicinity of the medical complex between al Qassem Brigades—the militant wing of Hamas—militia fighters and Israeli forces.[10] CTP-ISW previously reported that Hamas and PIJ have attacked Israeli forces east of the hospital, where Israel is attempting to establish an evacuation corridor, several times since November 10.

**Israeli forces provided humanitarian aid to al Shifa Hospital as civilians evacuated the medical complex.** Most patients, doctors, and displaced people evacuated the hospital.[11] The IDF emphasized on November 18 that at no stage has it asked patients or medical teams to evacuate the hospital and said it has suggested allowing the transfer of patients to other hospitals.[12] The IDF via the Gaza Liaison Administration delivered more than 6,000 liters of water and more than 2,300 kg of food to the hospital.[13]

**Hamas and other Palestinian militia fighters conducted attacks against the IDF behind the Israeli forward line of advance, which is consistent with the nature of clearing operations.** The al Qassem Brigades published footage of militia fighters operating in Beit Hanoun, where Israeli forces have been operating since the start of the ground operation into the Gaza Strip.[14] The militia fighters used anti-tank munitions and small arms to target Israeli forces stationed in buildings. The al Quds Brigades claimed to destroy two Israeli tanks with tandem charge anti-tank rockets and RPGs in Beit Hanoun and west of Beit Lahiya.[15]

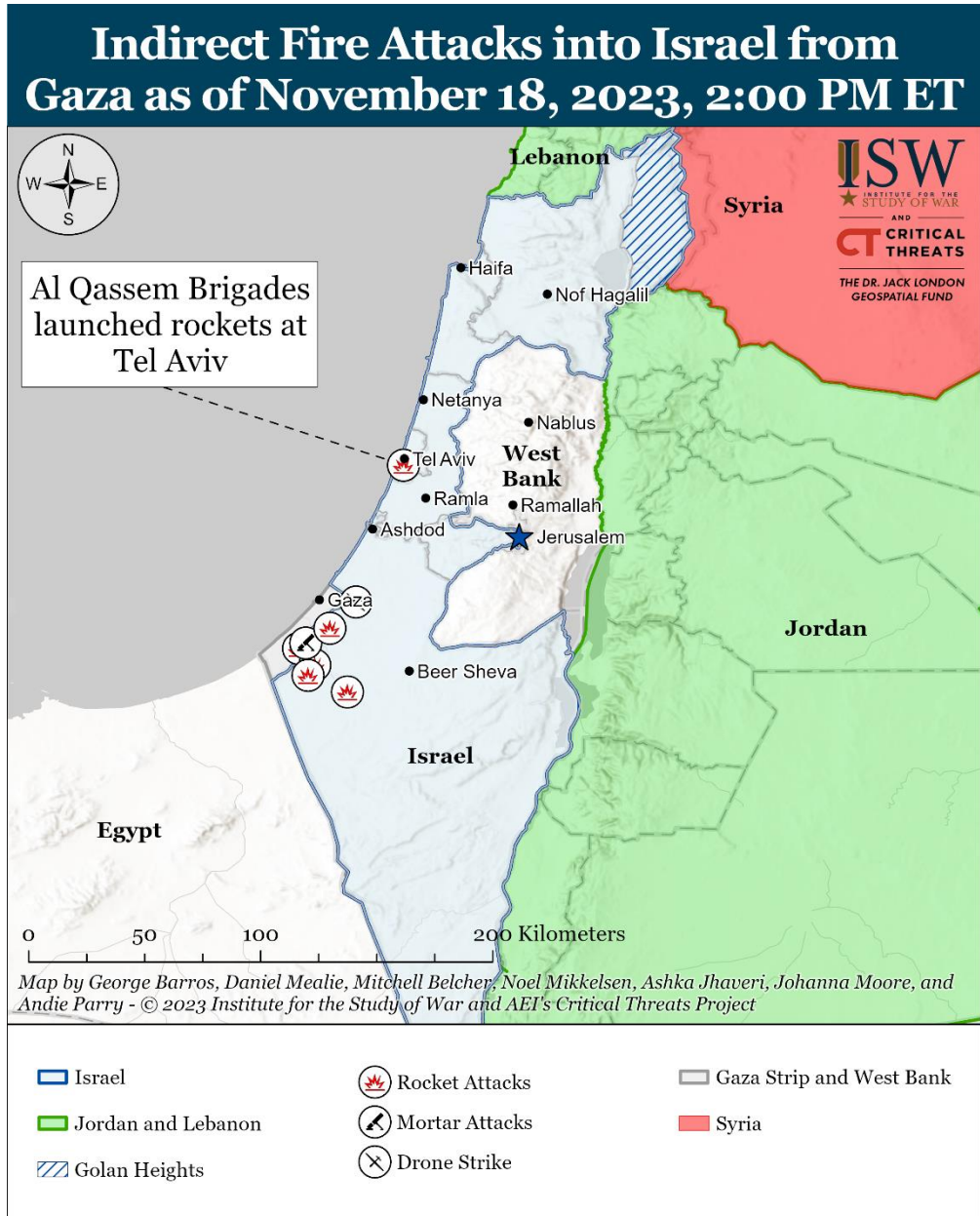
# Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of November 18, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



**Al Qassem Brigades military spokesperson said Hamas is preparing for a flexible and protracted defense in the Gaza Strip, which is consistent with the delaying operation that CTP-ISW assessed that Hamas is conducting against advancing Israeli forces.**[16] Hamas' delay mission generates strategic effects by helping it rally support for Hamas among its partners, within the region, and internationally. CTP-ISW has observed instances of Hamas methodically preparing for a drawn-out conflict with Israel. Israeli reports suggesting that Hamas fighters have fled south along with the fact that Hamas has not reportedly used some of the higher-end capabilities it is assessed to have suggest that its leaders seek to preserve combat power rather than become decisively engaged.[17] Hamas' delay effort also supports Hamas' operational objectives within the Gaza Strip, which include preserving essential capabilities and key leaders. A local media outlet assessed that Hamas leaders have relocated to Khan Younis and are likely sheltering beneath

one of the area medical centers or in an underground position.[18] CTP-ISW cannot independently corroborate the assessment, although it is consistent with previous claims that CTP-ISW has reported.

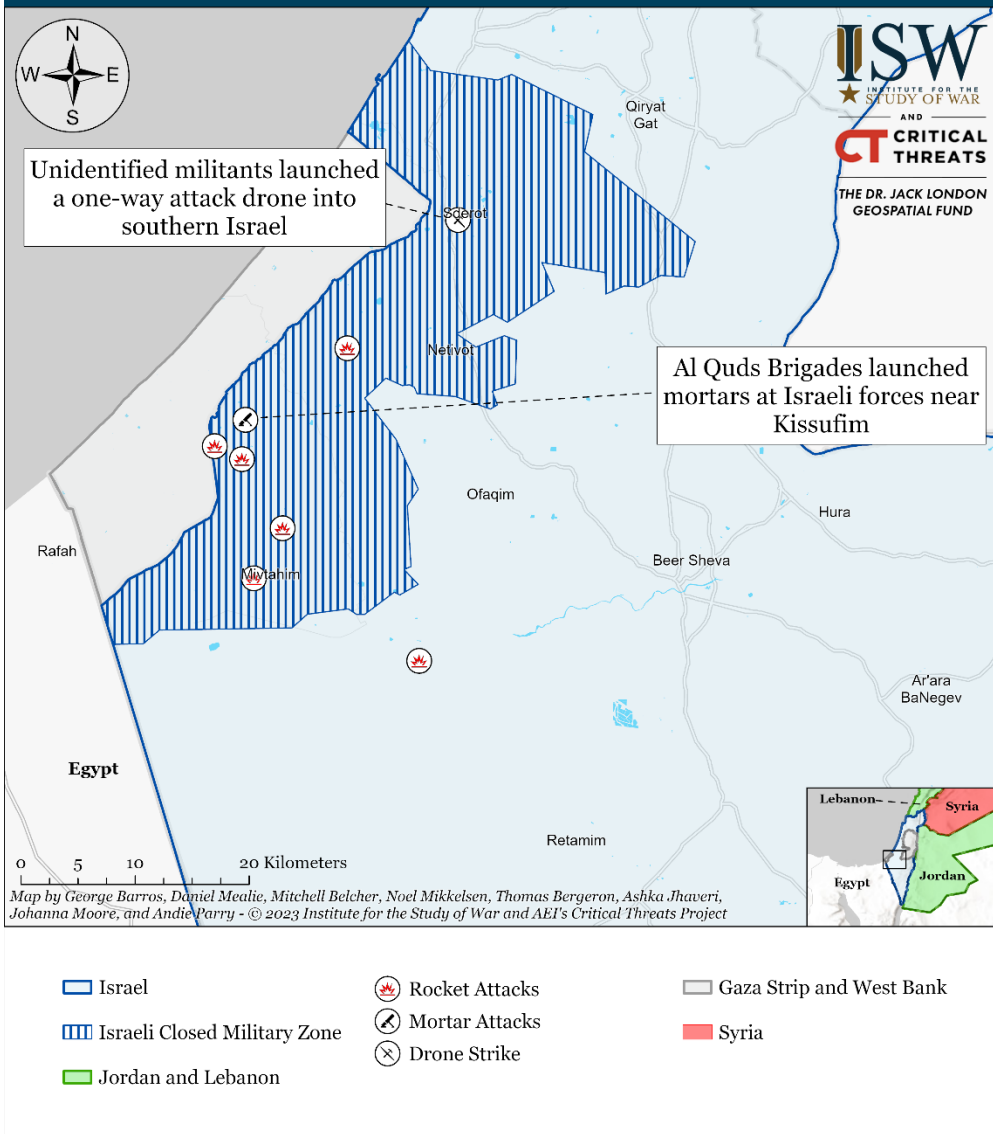
**Palestinian militias conducted 11 attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel on November 16.** The al Qassem Brigades claimed four attacks, one of which involved militia fighters firing RPGs at Israeli forces at a military site along the border with the Gaza Strip.[19] The al Quds Brigades claimed five indirect fire attacks, all of which targeted positions in southern Israel.[20]



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



# Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of November 18, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



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

## West Bank

### Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

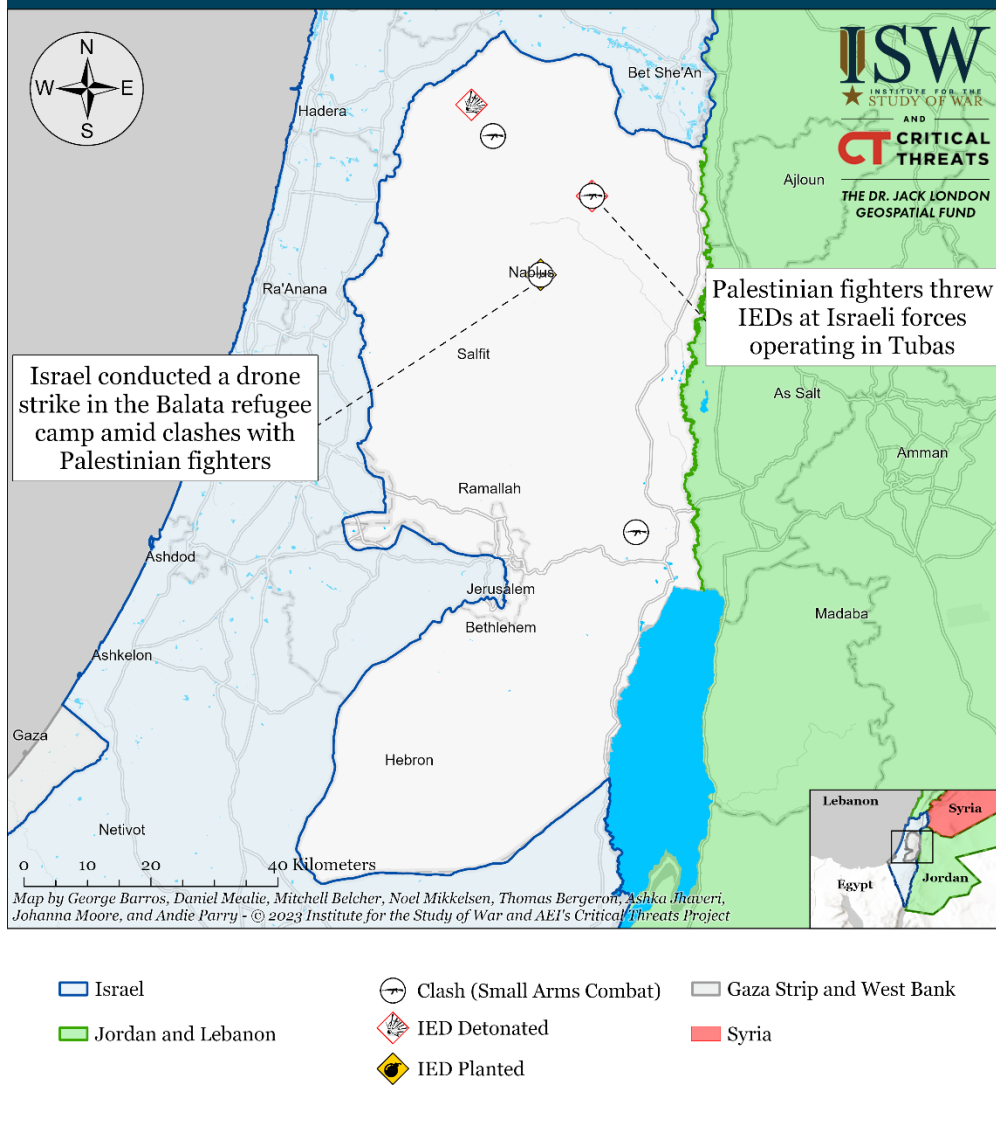
**Israel conducted a drone strike on a Palestinian militia headquarters in the Balata refugee camp in the northern West Bank.** The IDF coordinated with Shin Bet to attack a safe house that Palestinian militia fighters were using to plan attacks against Israeli civilians and military targets.[21] The strike killed a militant involved in recruiting for a militia squad in the Balata refugee camp, shooting attacks against IDF forces, and manufacturing explosive devices.[22] The Al Aqsa

Martyrs' Brigades—the self-proclaimed militant wing of Fatah—posted a martyr communique honoring the five militia fighters, who died in the drone strike.[23] The IDF said its forces were able to locate and destroy a laboratory for IEDs during the operation.[24] Unspecified Palestinian fighters used small arms and IEDs to attack Israeli forces operating in the camp.[25]

**Palestinian fighters engaged Israeli forces in five small arms clashes across the northern West Bank on November 18.** CTP-ISW recorded two instances of Palestinian fighters using IEDs against Israeli forces and an armored vehicle. Palestinian militia groups have not claimed the attacks, which occurred primarily near major cities, including Nablus, Jenin, Tubas, and Jericho.

**Hamas praised Palestinian resistance in the West Bank and called for further escalation.** The al Qassem Brigades spokesperson celebrated Palestinian fighters in the West Bank and encouraged them to continue attacks and clashes against Israeli forces.[26] Speakers at a Hamas press conference encouraged those in the West bank to continue their attacks in support of the al Aqsa Flood operation.[27] The appeal is consistent with repeated Hamas calls for further resistance in the West Bank. The audio of the spokesperson's speech was broadcast from minarets and speakers in Beita, south of Nablus.[28]

# Clashes in the West Bank as of November 18, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



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

## Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

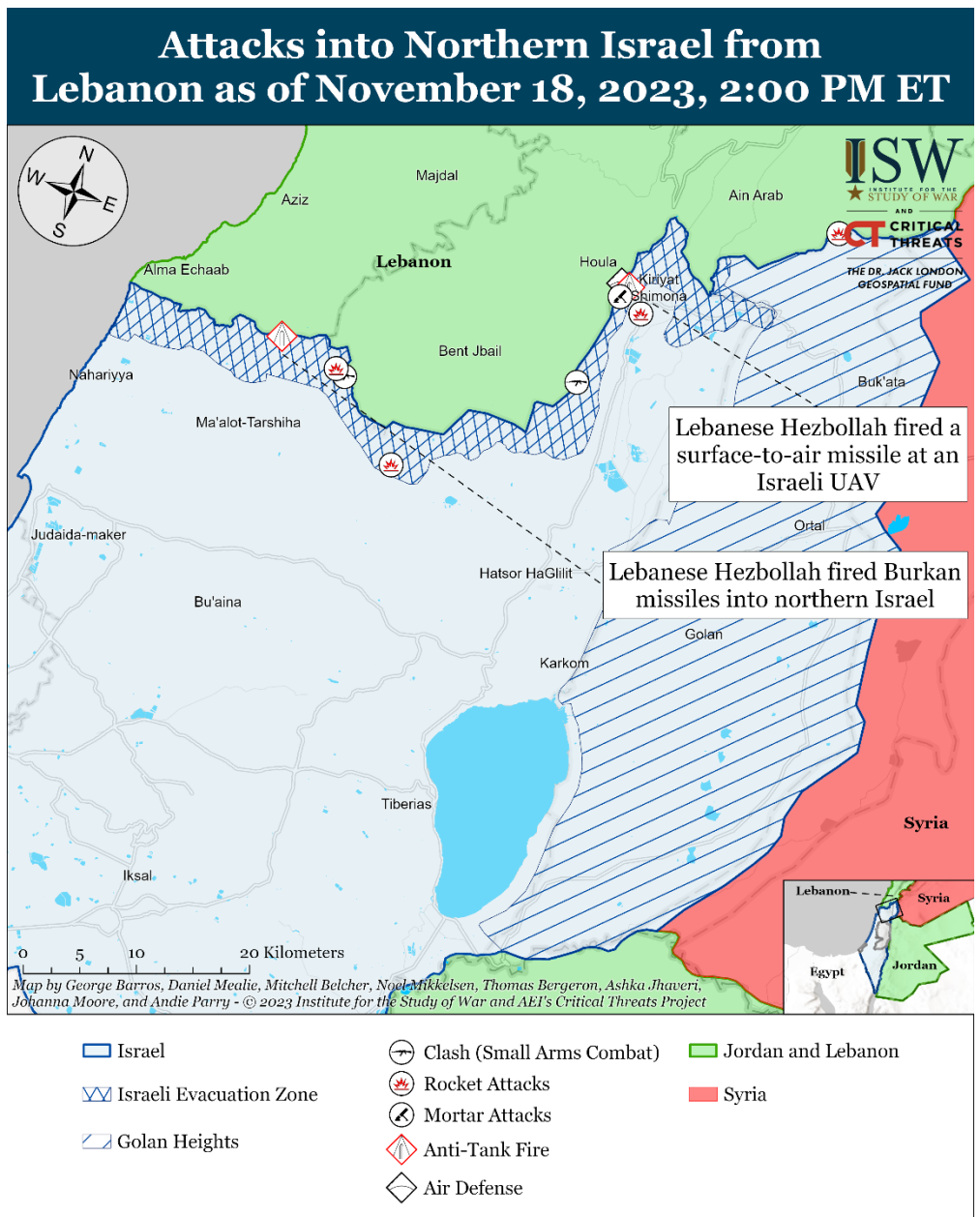
### Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

**Iranian-backed militants, including Lebanese Hezbollah (LH), conducted 13 cross-border attacks into northern Israel as of November 18.** LH claimed seven attacks using anti-tank munitions, rockets, and small arms targeting Israeli forces and military infrastructure.



The IDF said its air defense fighters successfully intercepted a surface-to-air missile launched from Lebanese territory at an Israeli drone.[29] LH said it downed an Israeli Hermes 450 UAV, a multi-mission combat drone, with a surface-to-air missile on November 18 and published alleged footage of the interception.[30] None of the material that LH published provides actual evidence that it downed the drone. Israel responded to the attempted downing by destroying an advanced surface-to-surface missile system in Lebanon.[31]



## Iran and Axis of Resistance

### Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

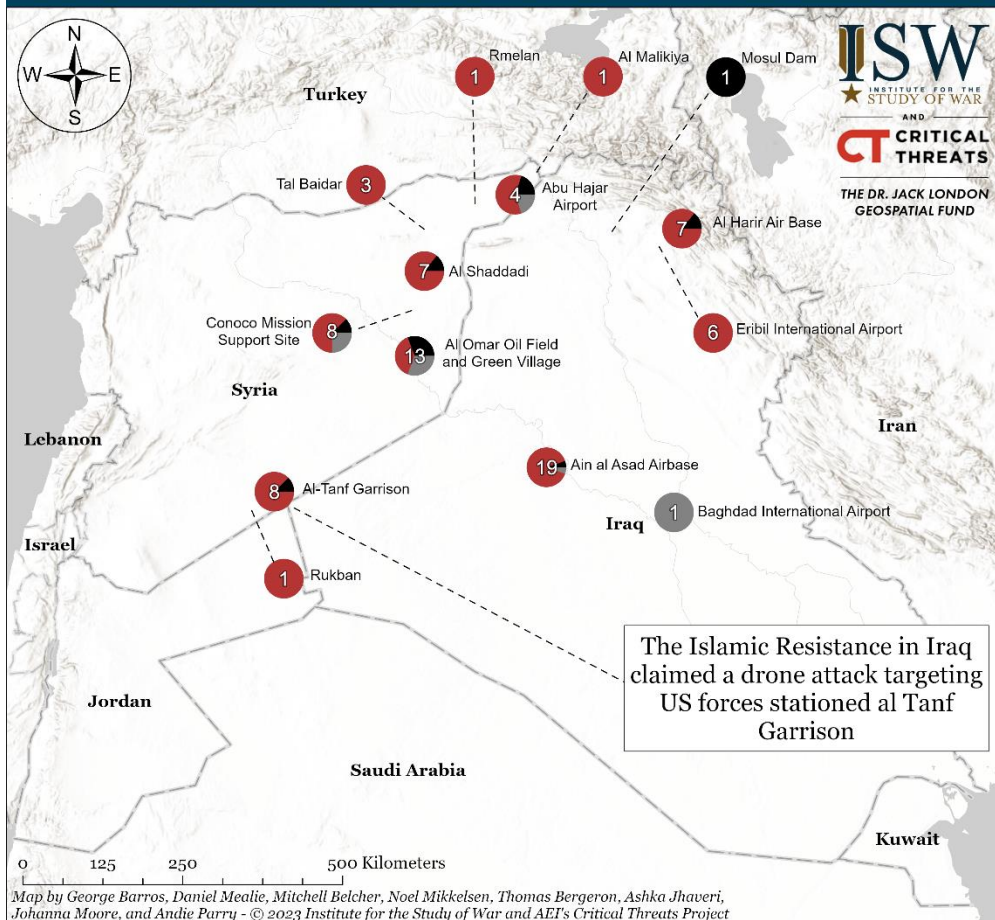
- Demonstrate the capability and willingness of Iran and the Axis of Resistance to escalate against the United States and Israel on multiple fronts
- Set conditions to fight a regional war on multiple fronts

**The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed on November 18 to conduct a one-way drone attack on US forces at al Tanf garrison in southeastern Syria.[32]** This attack marks the eighth Iranian-backed attack on al Tanf garrison that CTP-ISW has recorded since the Israel-Hamas war began.

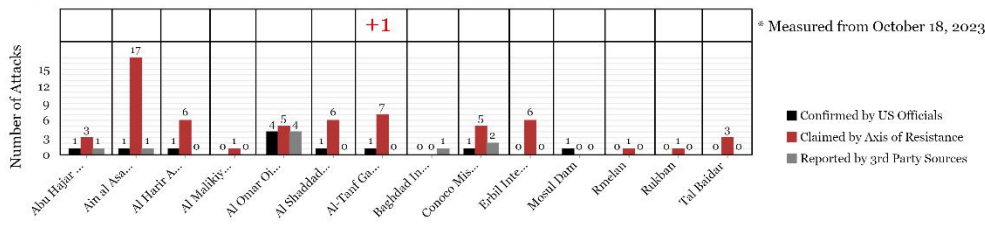
**The Dhaferin Group of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq published a statement on November 17 threatening further attacks on US military positions in the Middle East.[33]** The group has repeatedly threatened the United States in recent weeks and conducted mortar attacks on US bases in Iraq on November 5 and 8.[34]

The Dhaferin Group separately in its statement praised Iranian-backed Iraqi militias Kataib Hezbollah (KH) and Kataib Seyyed al Shohada (KSS) for their attacks on US bases in the Middle East. The Dhaferin Group was responding to the United States sanctioning KSS and individuals affiliated with KH and KSS on November 17 for their involvement in recent Iranian-backed attacks against US bases.[35]

# Attacks against US Bases in the Middle East as of November 18, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



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



Note: The numbers placed inside the pie charts denote the total number of attacks. Locations that include an addition to its total number of attacks have red numbers above the bar graph and pie chart to represent new attacks against that location within the past 24 hours.

**Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Gharaei Ashtiani argued on November 18 that the Axis of Resistance has successfully destabilized and isolated Israel since Hamas' October 7 attack.**[36] Ashtiani asserted that the al Aqsa Flood attack has reduced Jewish migration to and within Israel by creating economic, political, and security crises for Israel. Ashtiani also claimed that the war has driven anti-Israel sentiment throughout the world and undermined the credibility of the Israeli government. Ashtiani lastly noted that Israel's military and intelligence failures since October 7 provide lessons for future action against it. Iranian state media widely circulated Ashtiani's message. This statement is

consistent with CTP-ISW's assessment that Hamas is trying to prolong its war against Israel to create time for Hamas to rally support from its foreign partners and international actors.[37]

Ashtiani's statement is also consistent with the Iranian grand strategic objective of internationally isolating and ultimately destroying the Israeli state. IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami previously advocated for Lebanese Hezbollah and Palestinian militias to conduct activities that would destabilize Israel and generate internal displacement to this end.[38]

Ashtiani's statement is especially noteworthy given his position in the Iranian regime. Ashtiani previously served as deputy chief of the Armed Forces General Staff from 2019 to 2021 before becoming defense minister.[39] The position of defense minister is often a stepping stone into increasingly influential positions in Iran. Numerous Iranian defense ministers have later served as personal advisors to the supreme leader, for instance.



- [1] <https://twitter.com/IDFSpokesperson/status/1725887321046667299>
- [2] <https://twitter.com/IDFSpokesperson/status/1725887408934154628>; <https://twitter.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1725890537520091244>
- [3] <https://twitter.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1725890537520091244>
- [4] [https://twitter.com/Doron\\_Kadosh/status/1725899894806782336](https://twitter.com/Doron_Kadosh/status/1725899894806782336)
- [5] <https://twitter.com/IDFSpokesperson/status/1725887408934154628>
- [6] <https://t.me/sarayaps/16691>; <https://t.me/sarayaps/16689>; <https://t.me/sarayaps/16698>
- [7] <https://twitter.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1725890537520091244>
- [8] <https://twitter.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1725810783425089647>
- [9] <https://twitter.com/ytirawi/status/1725810404280946766>
- [10] [https://twitter.com/gaza\\_report/status/1725950026168320226](https://twitter.com/gaza_report/status/1725950026168320226)
- [11] <https://time.com/6337235/most-shifa-hospital-patients-staff-and-displaced-leave/>
- [12] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1725797019321610611>
- [13] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1725851832340058553>
- [14] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/485>; <https://t.me/QudsN/330578>
- [15] <https://t.me/sarayaps/16692>
- [16] <https://t.me/QudsN/330582>
- [17] <https://www.timesofisrael.com/gallant-hamas-has-lost-control-in-gaza-troops-kill-gunmen-who-fired-from-hospital/amp/>
- [18] [https://twitter.com/gaza\\_report/status/1725949474768355599](https://twitter.com/gaza_report/status/1725949474768355599)
- [19] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/29187>; <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/487>;
- <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/488>;
- <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/489>
- [20] <https://t.me/sarayaps/16688>;

<https://t.me/sarayaps/16690>;

<https://t.me/sarayaps/16697>

[21] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1725765490604154958>

[22] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1725765493212975591>; <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1725765494794334218>; <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1725765496329400401>

[23] <https://t.me/kataipshohdaaalaqsa/829>

[24] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1725810733508641017>

[25] <https://t.me/QudsN/330719>; <https://t.me/QudsN/330730>

[26] [https://t.me/C\\_Military1/39695](https://t.me/C_Military1/39695)

[27] <https://t.me/hamasps/17838>

[28] <https://t.me/QudsN/330598>

[29] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1725675350170939723>

[30] <https://twitter.com/alishoeib1970/status/1725741357166186906>;

[https://t.me/C\\_Military1/39750](https://t.me/C_Military1/39750)

[31] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1725880277212262641>

[32] <https://t.me/elamharbi/107>

[33] <https://t.me/alzafren/18>

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

[35] <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1921>

[36] <https://defapress dot ir/fa/news/631278> ; <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1402/08/27/2991235>

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

[38] <http://farsi.khamenei dot ir/others-dialog?id=50786>

[39] <https://www.hamshahrionline dot ir/news/632370>