

Iran Update, October 17, 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 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.

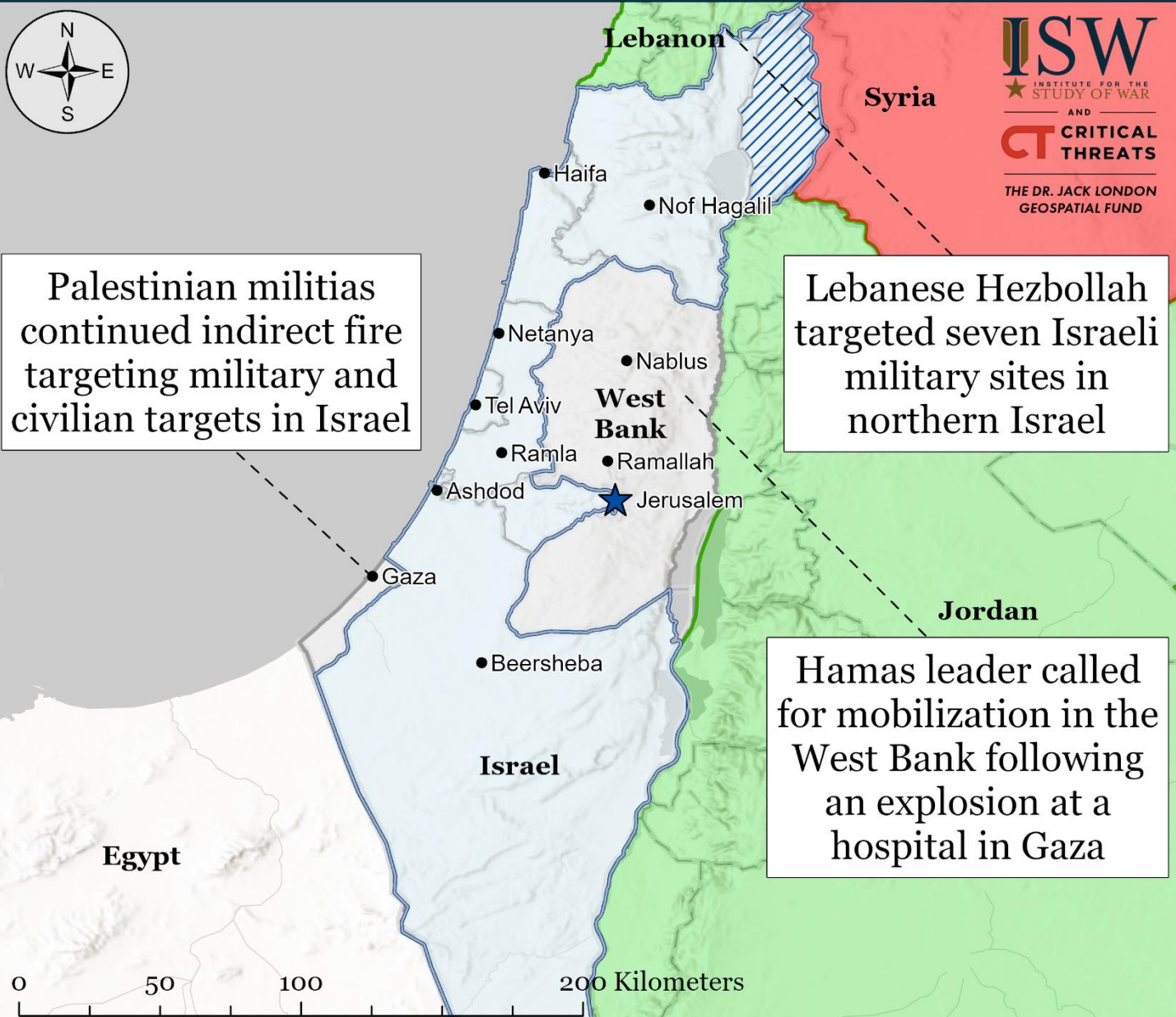
Israel-Hamas War as of October 17, 3:00 PM ET



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

Lebanese Hezbollah targeted seven Israeli military sites in northern Israel

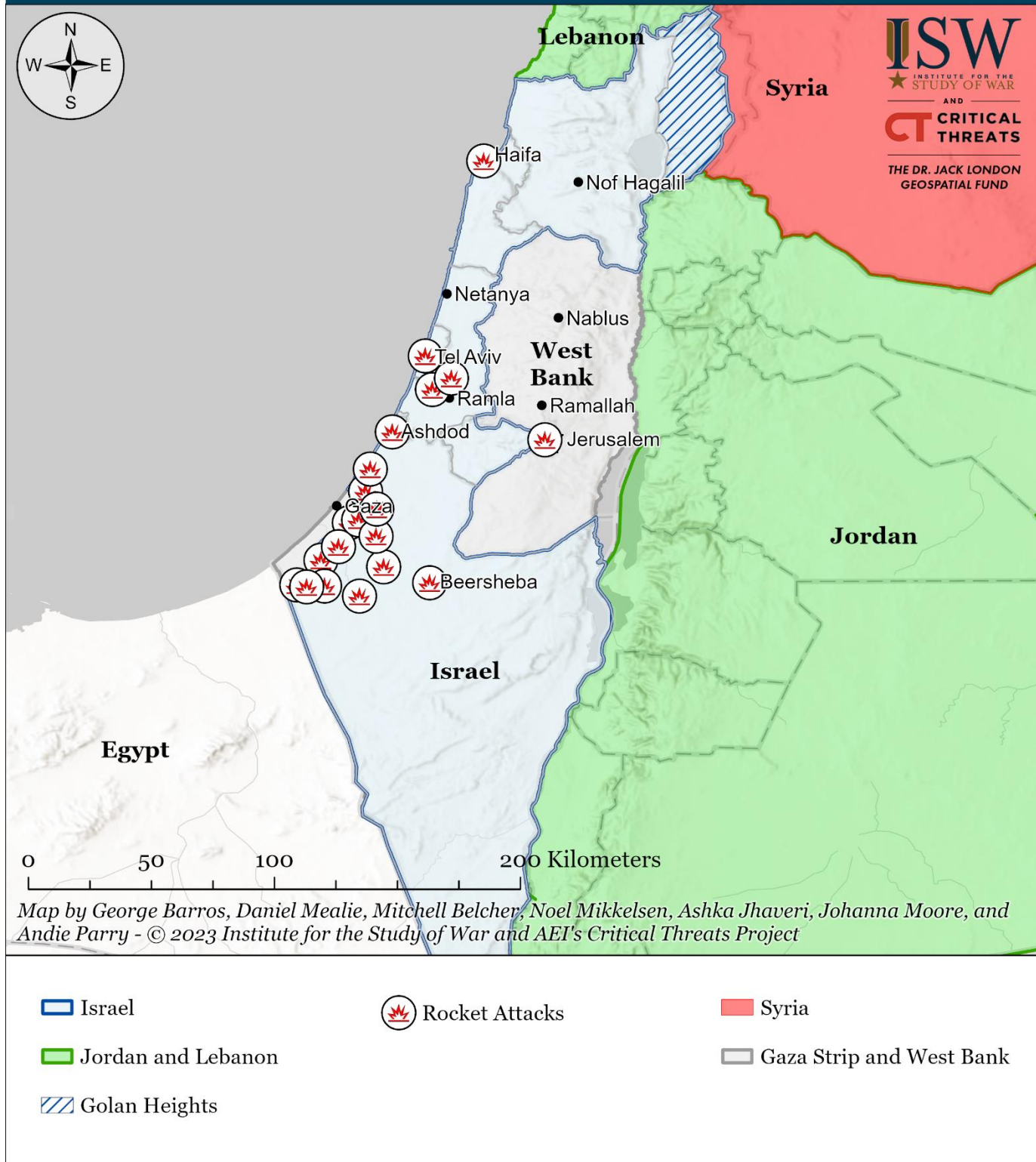
Hamas leader called for mobilization in the West Bank following an explosion at a hospital in Gaza



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

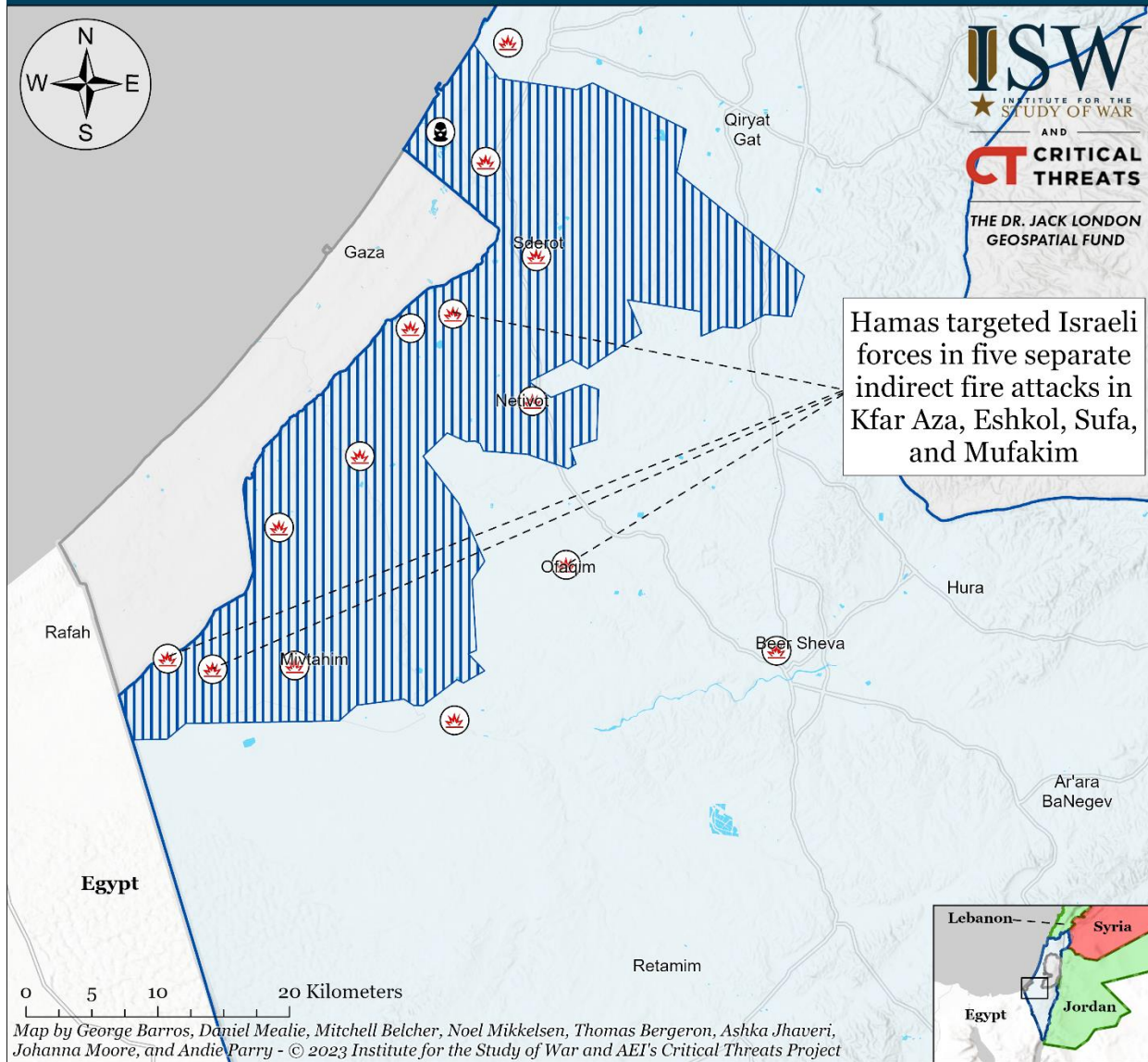
Indirect Fire Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of October 17, 3:00 PM ET



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.

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



Hamas targeted Israeli forces in five separate indirect fire attacks in Kfar Aza, Eshkol, Sufa, and Mufakim

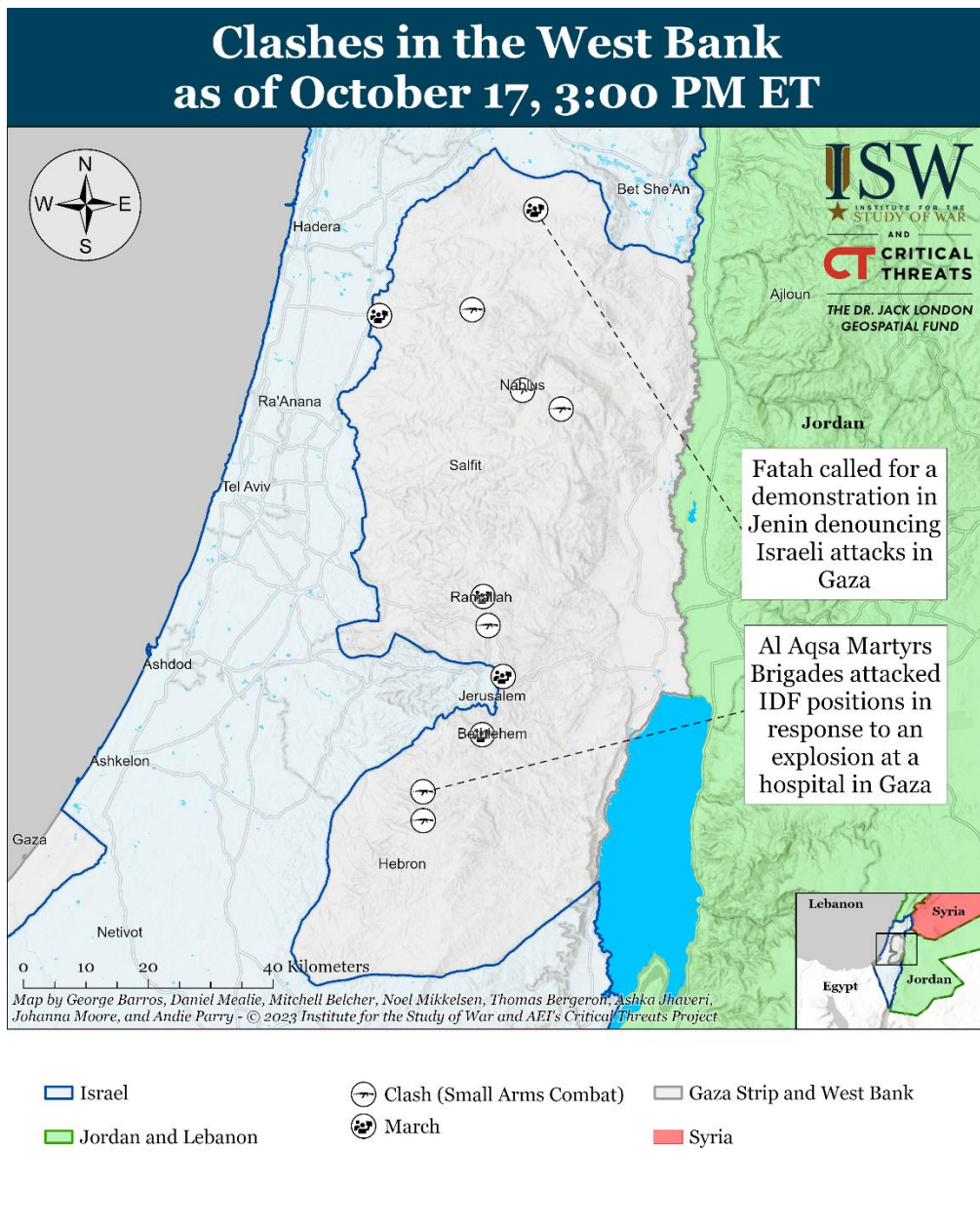
- Israel
- Israeli Closed Military Zone
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Rocket Attacks
- Infiltration
- Gaza Strip and West Bank
- Syria

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]

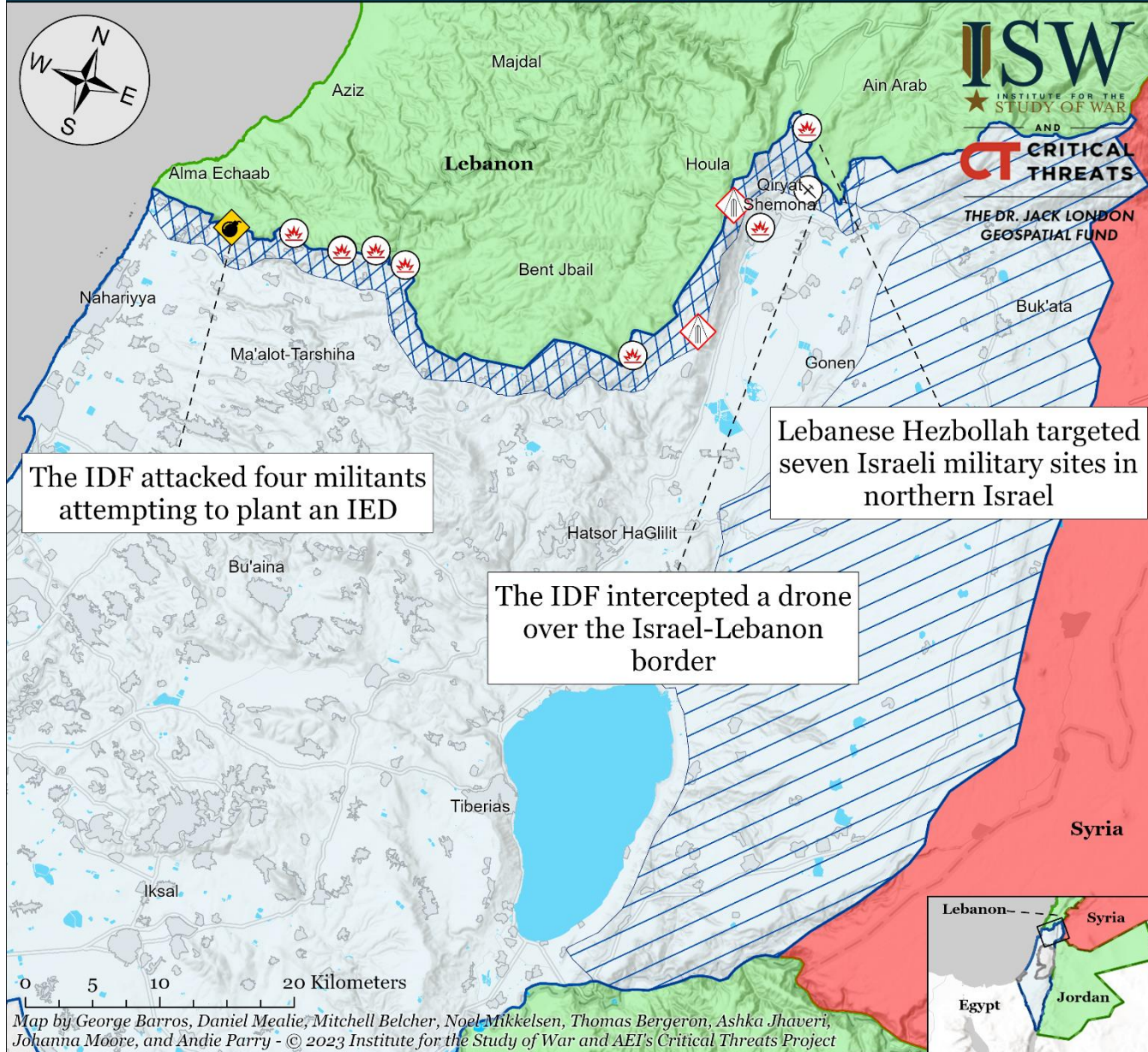
Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh called for mobilization in the West Bank following an explosion at a hospital in the Gaza Strip on October 17, which may increase the rate of clashes in the coming days.^[14] The IDF said that PIJ conducted a rocket attack that failed and hit the active 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]

Attacks into Israel from Lebanon as of October 17, 3:00 PM ET



The IDF attacked four militants attempting to plant an IED

Lebanese Hezbollah targeted seven Israeli military sites in northern Israel

The IDF intercepted a drone over the Israel-Lebanon border

- Israel
- Israeli Evacuation Zone
- Golan Heights
- Israeli Towns
- ☘ Rocket Attacks
- ✕ Drone Strike
- ⚡ Anti-Tank Fire
- ⚡ IED Planted
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Israeli Closed Military Zone

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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BABELSTREET

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