

Iran Update



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October 17, 2024, Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm ET

The Iran Update provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities abroad that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests. It also covers events and trends that affect the stability and decision-making of the Iranian regime. The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) provides these updates regularly based on regional events. Click [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

CTP-ISW defines the “Axis of Resistance” as the unconventional alliance that Iran has cultivated in the Middle East since the Islamic Republic came to power in 1979. This transnational coalition is comprised of state, semi-state, and non-state actors that cooperate to secure their collective interests. Tehran considers itself to be both part of the alliance and its leader. Iran furnishes these groups with varying levels of financial, military, and political support in exchange for some degree of influence or control over their actions. Some are traditional proxies that are highly responsive to Iranian direction, while others are partners over which Iran exerts more limited influence. Members of the Axis of Resistance are united by their grand strategic objectives, which include eroding and eventually expelling American influence from the Middle East, destroying the Israeli state, or both. Pursuing these objectives and supporting the Axis of Resistance to those ends have become cornerstones of Iranian regional strategy.

We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We utterly condemn violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

Israel killed Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Yahya Sinwar in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip on October 16. Sinwar's death is unlikely to change Hamas' maximalist negotiating position meaningfully. Israeli officials confirmed on October 17 that the IDF 828th Infantry Brigade killed Sinwar in Tal al Sultan, Rafah Governorate.[1] IDF soldiers located three fighters inside of a building, one of whom was later identified as Sinwar, and fired a tank round at the building. The IDF had previously assessed that Sinwar was likely using Israeli hostages in the Gaza Strip as a “human shield” after Israeli forces found Sinwar's DNA samples in a tunnel where six hostages were killed on August 31.[2] The IDF did not report the presence of Israeli hostages with Sinwar at the time of his death, however.

Sinwar's death is unlikely to meaningfully change Hamas' negotiating position because Hamas aims to exploit the hostages it still holds to compel Netanyahu to agree to a ceasefire that would enable Hamas to rebuild. Hamas executed six hostages who had been traveling with Sinwar in late August 2024 and

publicized propaganda videos of the hostages.[3] These videos were intended to trigger domestic Israeli pressure on Netanyahu in order to compel his government to agree to a ceasefire with Hamas. Khalil al Hayya, Sinwar's deputy and chief negotiator, will probably take over Hamas' political affairs in the interim period.[4] Hayya—who, like Sinwar, is close to Iran—has shown little willingness to moderate his positions.

Mohammad Sinwar is the most likely replacement for Yahya Sinwar in the Gaza Strip, but he will likely split his military duties with other commanders.[5] Hamas is unlikely to immediately publicly appoint a new political chief in the Gaza Strip, given the reality that Hamas' political organization is under extreme pressure in the Strip right now.[6] Mohammad Sinwar's military control of the group would at least in theory give him control over the hostages, though given the severely degraded state of Hamas' command and control, it is far from clear that any single Hamas commander could be aware of the locations of hostages. Other commanders, like Gaza City Brigade Commander Izz al Din al Haddad, will also probably assume some of Yahya's and former Hamas military wing commander Mohammad Deif's responsibilities if they have not done so already.[7] Mohammad Sinwar also has the requisite experience as a military commander that would enable him to rebuild Hamas, however, if allowed to do so. Mohammad Sinwar has served in many capacities for Hamas' military wing, including as logistics and manpower chief and a brigade commander.[8] He was also part of Yahya's inner circle as a war planner and strategist.[9] These skills will be extremely sought-after by Hamas' leadership if it emerges from this war able to rebuild in the Gaza Strip.

The death of Yahya Sinwar and the transition to new commander(s) will have minimal impact on Hamas' command and control structure, however. Israeli ground and air operations in the Gaza Strip have defeated or severely degraded Hamas units across the Gaza Strip.[10] This reality means that Mohammad Sinwar and others, like Izz al Din al Haddad, will be unable to immediately influence dynamics on the ground. Hamas fighters are currently fighting in small cells. The value of Mohammad Sinwar and Izz al Din al Haddad will come if they manage to survive this war and if the end of this war enables Hamas to reinvest in its military wing in the Gaza Strip to rebuild. Their military experience under those conditions would be invaluable to rebuilding Hamas.

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi traveled to Egypt on October 16, marking the first time an Iranian official has visited Egypt since 2014.[11] Araghchi's visit is likely part of ongoing Iranian-backed efforts to reach a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon.[12] Araghchi and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el Sisi discussed the need to “intensify efforts towards ceasefires in Gaza and Lebanon.”[13] Araghchi separately called on regional countries to “redouble” their efforts to stop Israeli “aggression” in the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and Lebanon during a meeting with his Egyptian counterpart, Badr Abdelatty.[14] Egypt—along with Qatar and the United States—has mediated ceasefire and hostage negotiations between Israel and Hamas in recent months. Araghchi's visit to Egypt is noteworthy given that Iran and Egypt do not have formal diplomatic ties. Iran has increased its efforts to restore diplomatic relations with Egypt in recent years, however.[15]

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el Sisi appointed Hassan Rashad as chief of the General Intelligence Service on October 16.[16] Rashad replaced Abbas Kamel, who had served as the Egyptian intelligence chief since 2018.[17] Kamel worked closely with the heads of the CIA and Mossad, as well as the Qatari prime minister, to try to secure a ceasefire and hostage deal between Israel and Hamas throughout the October 7 War.[18] Rashad has a long history of working in Egypt's intelligence services and previously served as Kamel's deputy.[19] Rashad has also overseen Egypt's relationship with Iran and its proxies.”[20]

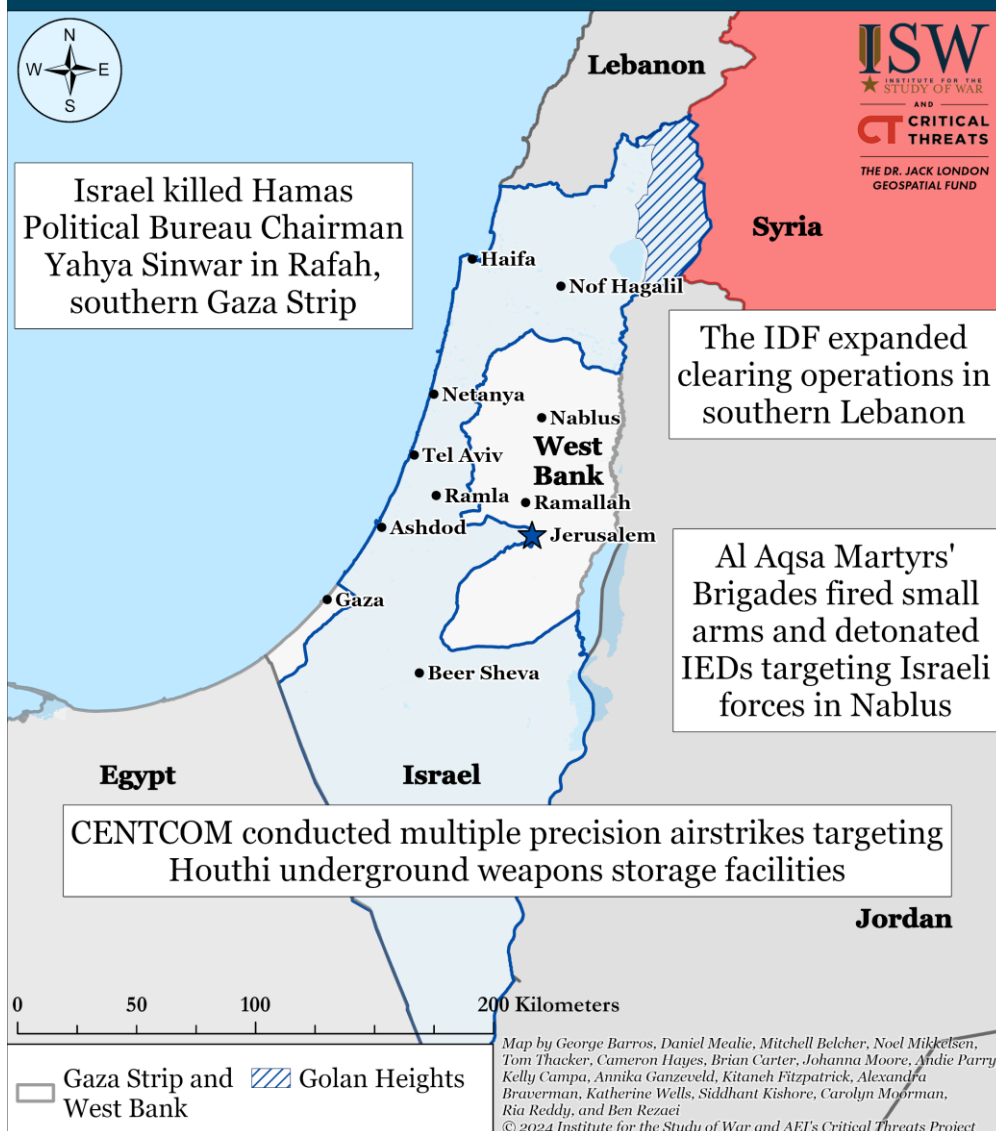
The United States Central Command (CENTCOM) conducted multiple precision airstrikes in unspecified locations in Houthi-controlled Yemen on October 16 targeting Houthi underground weapons storage facilities that contained “various advanced conventional weapons.” [21] CTP-ISW reported on October 15 that Houthi efforts to build an extensive tunnel network in the Houthi-controlled mountainous region between Sanaa and Sa’ada have intensified.[22] This was the first time that the US Air Force used B2 Spirit long-range stealth bombers against Houthi targets. US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin III called the CENTCOM strikes “a unique demonstration of the United States’ ability to target facilities that our adversaries seek to keep out of reach.”[23] Austin added that the US will continue to “degrade Houthis’ capability to continue their destabilizing behavior“ attacking vessels in the Red Sea.[24]

Key Takeaways:

- **Gaza Strip:** Israel killed Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Yahya Sinwar in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip on October 16. Sinwar’s death is unlikely to change Hamas’ maximalist negotiating position meaningfully.
- **Sinwar’s Succession:** Mohammad Sinwar is the most likely replacement for Yahya Sinwar in the Gaza Strip, but he will likely split his military duties with other commanders. Hamas is unlikely to immediately publicly appoint a new political chief in the Gaza Strip, given the reality that Hamas’ political organization is under extreme pressure in the Gaza Strip right now. The death of Yahya Sinwar and the transition to new commander(s) will have minimal impact on Hamas’ command and control structure, however, given the degraded state of Hamas’ military organization.
- **Iranian Diplomatic Efforts:** Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi traveled to Egypt on October 16, marking the first time an Iranian official has visited Egypt since 2014. Araghchi’s visit is likely part of ongoing Iranian-backed efforts to reach a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon.
- **Yemen:** The United States Central Command (CENTCOM) conducted multiple precision airstrikes using B2 Spirit stealth bombers in unspecified locations in Houthi-controlled Yemen on October 16. The strikes targeted Houthi underground weapons storage facilities that contained “various advanced conventional weapons.”
- **Israeli Ground Operations in Lebanon:** Israeli media reported on October 17 that Hezbollah fighters killed five 1st Infantry Brigade soldiers during clearing operations in southeastern Lebanon on October 16.

Key Takeaways in the Israel-Hamas War

As of October 17, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Gaza Strip

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Erode the will of the Israeli political establishment and public to sustain clearing operations in the Gaza Strip
- Reestablish Hamas as the governing authority in the Gaza Strip

See topline for coverage of the IDF engagement that killed Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar.

The 162nd IDF Division continued clearing operations in Jabalia, northern Gaza Strip, on October 17. The IDF killed several Palestinian fighters in Jabalia and confiscated weapons including grenades, Kalashnikov-type rifles, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and mortar rounds.[25] The IDF Air Force conducted an airstrike that struck a command-and-control site in the

northern Gaza Strip that hosted both Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) personnel.[26] The IDF killed 12 fighters in the strike.[27] The IDF reported that the militias established the command-and-control site in what was the Abu Hussein School before the war. The IDF said that Palestinian fighters used this command-and-control site to plan attacks targeting Israeli forces and civilians.[28] The IDF reported that it used precision munitions and intelligence to minimize civilian casualties.[29]

The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades mortared Israeli forces west of Jabalia refugee camp on October 17.[30]

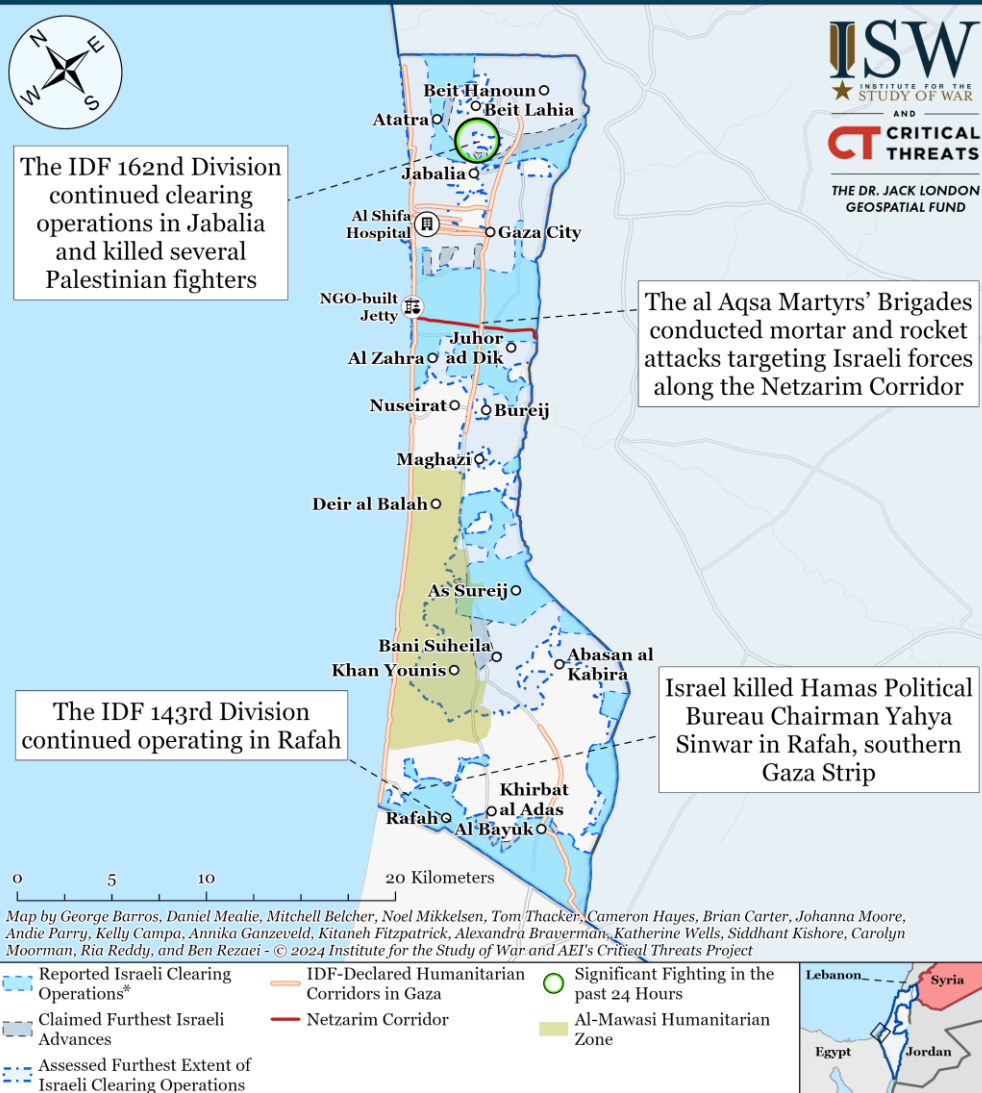
The IDF 252nd Division resumed clearing operations in Nuseirat and Bureij refugee camps in the central Gaza Strip on October 17.[31] The IDF 252nd Division last operated in the central Gaza Strip on October 8.[32]

The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades conducted mortar and rocket attacks targeting Israeli forces along the Netzarim Corridor on October 17.[33]

IDF continued operating in Rafah on October 17. The IDF 143rd Division killed an unspecified number of Palestinian fighters and destroyed militia infrastructure in Rafah.[34]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip

As of October 17, 2024, 2:00 PM ET

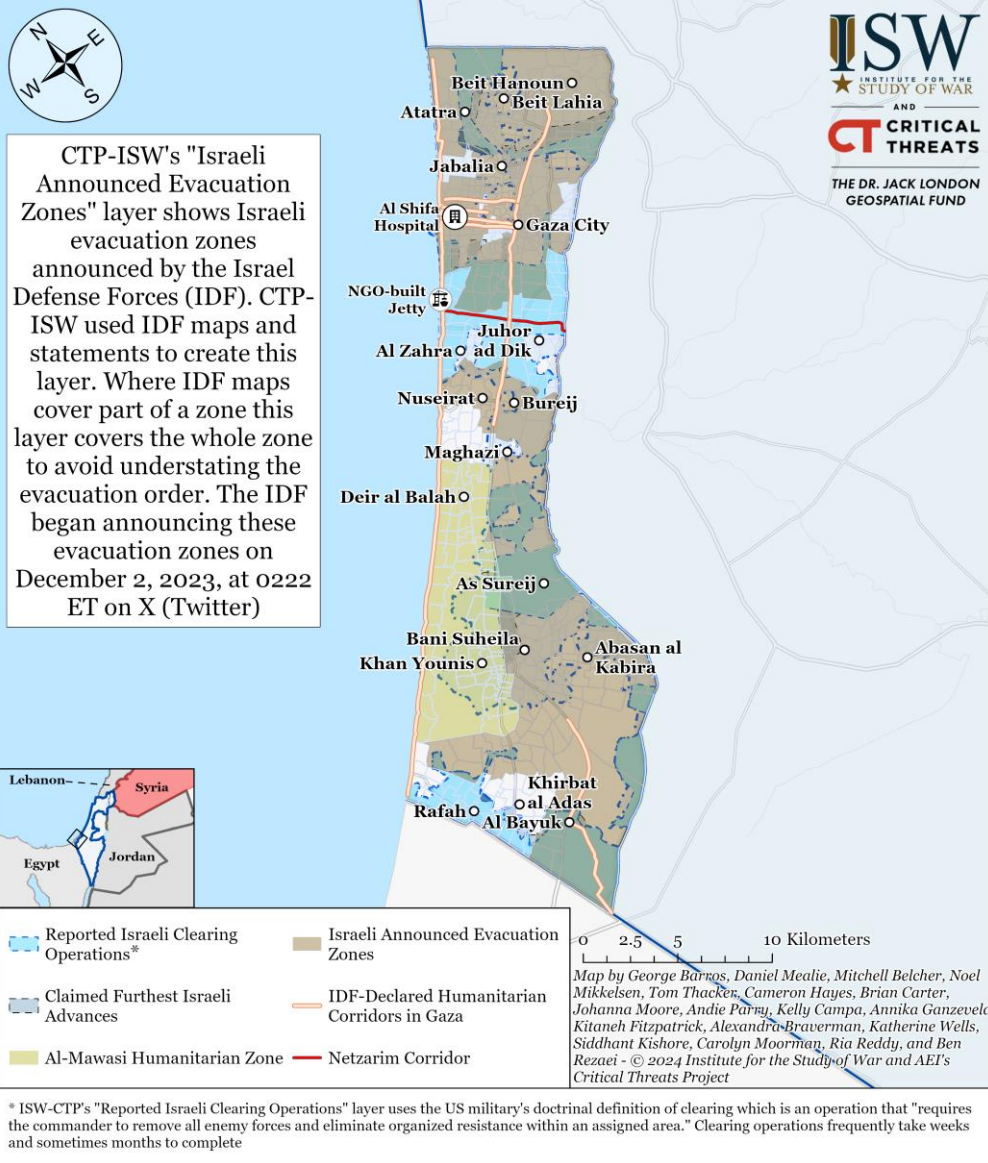


Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Tom Thacker, Cameron Hayes, Brian Carter, Johanna Moore, Andie Parry, Kelly Campa, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Alexandra Brauerman, Katherine Wells, Siddhant Kishore, Carolyn Moorman, Ria Reddy, and Ben Rezaei - © 2024 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

* ISW-CTP's "Reported Israeli Clearing Operations" layer uses the US military's doctrinal definition of clearing which is an operation that "requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance within an assigned area." Clearing operations frequently take weeks and sometimes months to complete

Israeli-Announced Evacuation Zones in the Gaza Strip

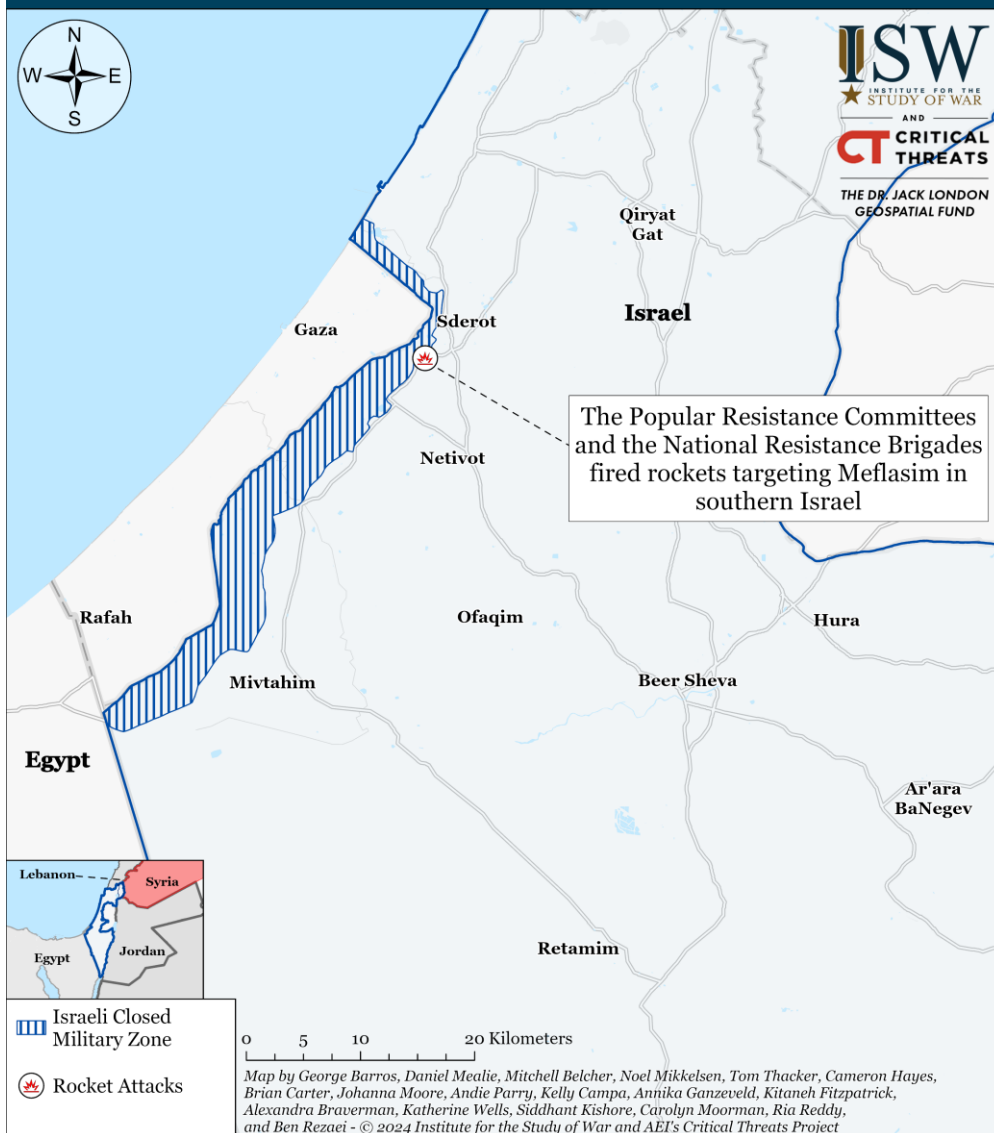
As of October 17, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



The Popular Resistance Committees and the National Resistance Brigades fired rockets targeting Mefalsim in southern Israel on October 17.[35]

Attacks into Israel from the Gaza Strip

As of October 17, 2024, 2:00 PM ET



West Bank

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Establish the West Bank as a viable front against Israel

Israeli forces engaged Palestinian fighters in at least one location in Nablus since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on October 16. [36] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired small arms and detonated IEDs targeting Israeli forces near the al Ain refugee camp in Nablus.[37]

Significant Activity in the West Bank

As of October 17, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



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

Northern Israel and Lebanon

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Prepare for an expanded and protracted conflict with Israel in the near term
- Expel the United States from Syria

The IDF 98th Division expanded clearing operations in southeastern Lebanon.

Commercially available satellite imagery from October 17 shows that the 98th Division has expanded its clearing operations west from Misgav Am, Israel, to the outskirts of Odaisseh, Rab al Thalathine, and Markaba sometime before October 17. Southern Lebanese media reported clashes between Israeli forces and Hezbollah fighters on the outskirts of these towns during the evening of October 16.[\[38\]](#) Hezbollah mortared Israeli forces operating between Kfar Kila and Odaisseh.[\[39\]](#)

Israeli media reported on October 17 that Hezbollah fighters killed five 1st Infantry Brigade soldiers during clearing operations in southeastern Lebanon on October 16.[40]

Israeli forces entered a building during clearing operations and discovered “several” tunnel shafts.[41] Four Hezbollah fighters then appeared and fired at Israeli forces in the building stairwell shortly after the Israeli soldiers entered the building.[42] Israeli forces returned fire, killing all four Hezbollah fighters. The Hezbollah fighters killed five IDF soldiers and wounded five more.[43] The IDF is investigating how the Hezbollah fighters evaded detection and whether initial strikes on the building were sufficient.

Hezbollah claimed one rocket attack targeting Israeli forces operating around Blida, southeastern Lebanon, on October 17.[44]

The IDF 36th Division has continued clearing operations around Aita al Shaab and Ramyeh since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on October 16.

The 7th Armored Brigade (36th Division) located “many” Hezbollah weapons stockpiles.[45] Southern Lebanese media reported clashes between Israeli forces and Hezbollah around Ramyeh.[46]

The 146th Reserve Division expanded clearing operations around Labbouneh and Alma ash Shaab.

Commercially available satellite imagery captured on October 16 showed Israeli forces advance northeast of Labbouneh down the north-facing slope of the ridge that forms that Israel-Lebanon border south of Labbouneh. Hezbollah has repeatedly falsely claimed it has prevented Israeli forces from advancing to Labbouneh.[47] Commercially available satellite imagery showed Israeli forces also advanced along a separate axis northeast from Hanita, northern Israel, towards Alma ash Shaab.

Reported Israeli Operations in Lebanon

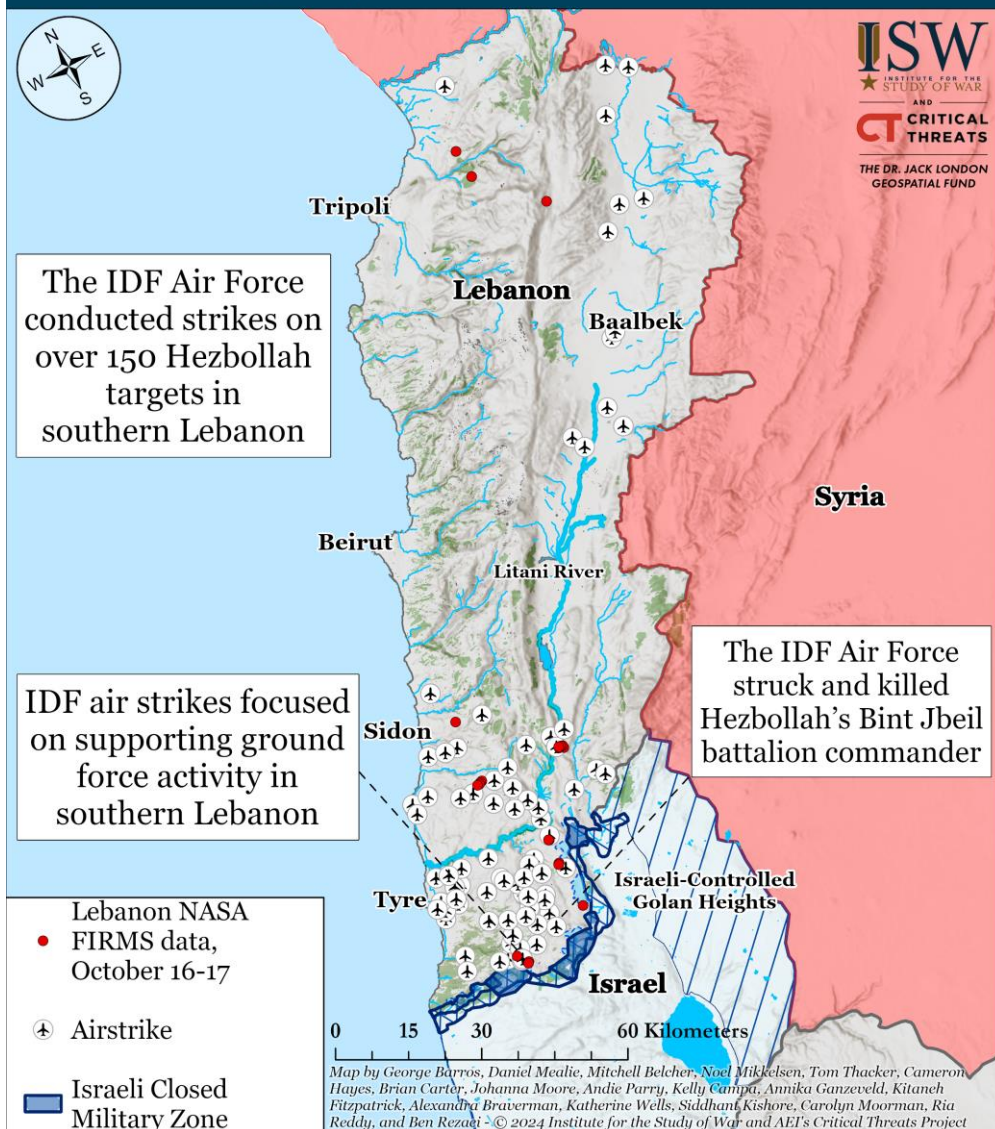
As of October 17, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



The IDF continued its air campaign to degrade Hezbollah’s capabilities and leadership on October 17. The IDF Air Force conducted strikes on over 150 Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon, including weapons depots, rocket launchers, tunnel networks, and military buildings.[48] The IDF Air Force and ground forces conducted numerous strikes targeting Hezbollah personnel, killing more than 45 Hezbollah fighters.[49] The IDF Air Force struck and killed Hezbollah’s Bint Jbeil battalion commander Hussein Muhammad Awada on October 17.[50] Awada was responsible for planning and executing attacks into Israeli territory from the Bint Jbeil sector.[51] Israeli forces are operating south of Bint Jbeil to clear Hezbollah infrastructure and fighters, which could make Awada’s death tactically significant.[52] IDF air and artillery strikes primarily focused on supporting ground force activity in southern Lebanon.[53]

Israeli Air Campaign in Lebanon

As of October 17, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET

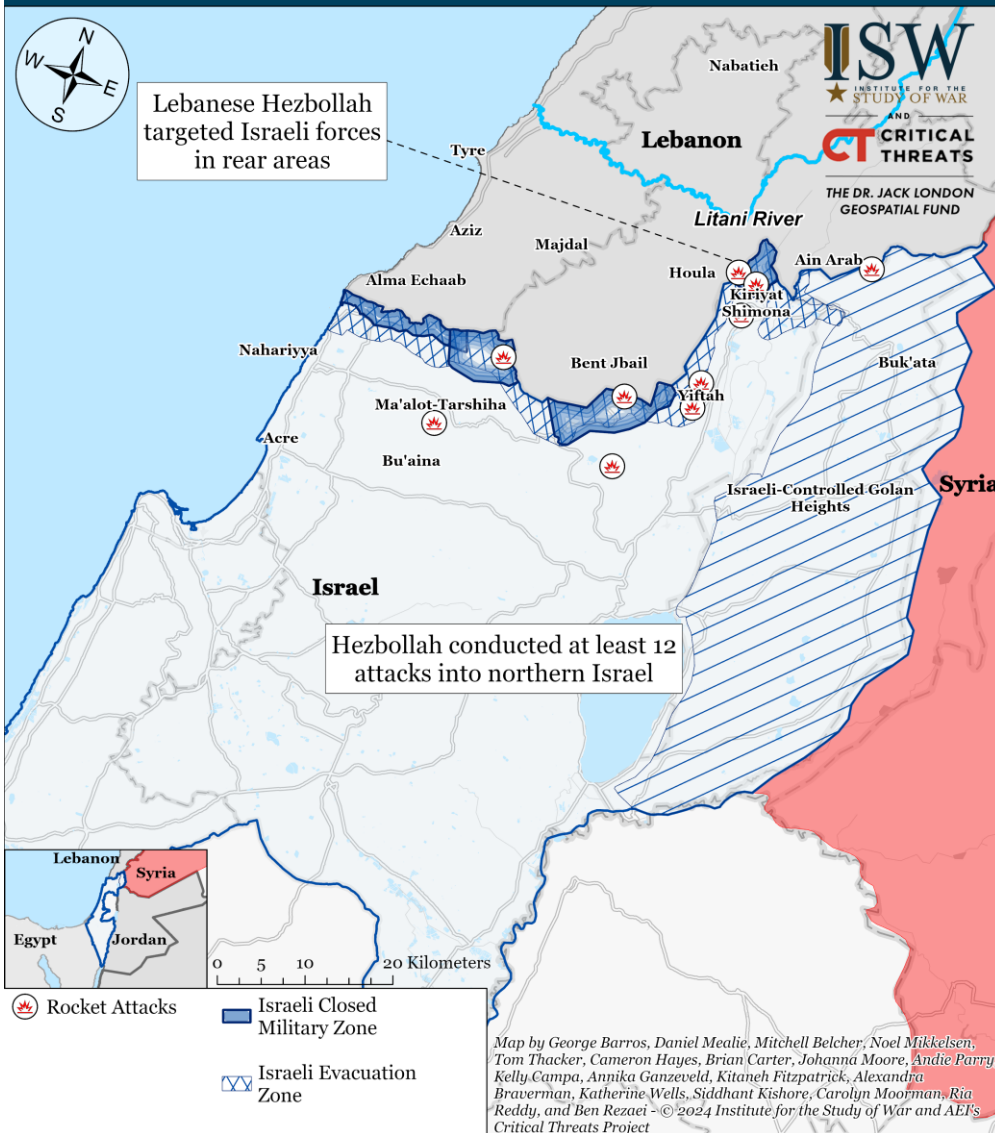


This map illustrates individual Israeli air and artillery strikes based on local Lebanese reporting. This map depicts strikes reported from 2:00pm ET on October 16 to 2:00pm ET on October 17. This map is not exhaustive. CTP-ISW cannot independently verify the locations of Israeli strikes.

Hezbollah has conducted at least 12 attacks into Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on October 16.[54] The majority of Hezbollah attacks targeted IDF positions and towns on the east side of the border in Hezbollah's Nasr Unit area of operations.[55] Hezbollah conducted two rocket attacks targeting the Sheeba Farms area at the easternmost edge of the Israel-Lebanon border.[56]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon

As of October 17, 2024 at 2:00 PM ET



Iran and the Axis of Resistance

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—claimed three attacks targeting Israel since CTP-ISW's last data cutoff on October 16.^[57] The claims include the following:

- A drone attack targeting a “vital target” in Eilat on the evening of October 16.^[58] The IDF detected a drone near Arava in central Israel that entered Israeli territory from the east on the evening of October 16.^[59]
- A drone attack targeting a “vital target” in southern Israel on the morning of October 17.^[60]

- A drone attack targeting an unspecified military target in Israel on the morning of October 17.[61]

An Islamic Resistance in Iraq source told Lebanese outlet al Akhbar that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have collectively decided to continue targeting Israel despite Iraqi government pressure to cease attacks against Israel.[62] The source said that select Iranian-backed Iraqi militia leaders met to discuss the Iraqi government's requests for the militias to cease drone attacks targeting Israel before Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi visited Baghdad on October 13.[63] CTP-ISW assessed that Araghchi may have met with senior Iraqi leaders to warn Iraq against allowing Israel to use Iraqi airspace to attack Iran.[64] The Islamic Resistance in Iraq source also stated that the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) brigades affiliated with Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are taking precautions to harden their forces against Israeli attack, including by removing heavy vehicles and weapons from headquarters and instructing fighters to avoid large gatherings.[65] Saudi media reported on October 9 that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias had begun evacuating their headquarters in Baghdad in anticipation of an Israeli attack in response to recent militia attacks targeting Israel, including a drone attack likely conducted by the Islamic Resistance of Iraq on October 3 that killed 2 IDF soldiers.[66]

Syrian media reported that the IDF conducted an airstrike targeting a weapons depot near the entrance to the city of Latakia, Syria, on October 17.[67] The Syrian government claimed that the attack injured two civilians and caused property damage.[68] Previous suspected Israeli airstrikes targeting weapons depots in Latakia Province have occurred closer to Russia's Hmeimim airbase.[69]

The Taliban said that it is investigating reports that Iranian security forces killed and wounded Afghan nationals near the Iranian border with Afghanistan, on October 13.[70] Local human rights organizations in Sistan and Baluchistan Province claimed that Iranian border guards killed "dozens" of Afghan migrants.[71] The UN Mission in Afghanistan expressed its concern over the allegations over the incident in the Kala Gan border area in Sarbaz district, Sistan and Baluchistan province on October 14 and 15.[72] Iranian officials, including the Iranian Ambassador to Afghanistan Hassan Kazemi Qomi, have denied that the incident occurred.[73]

Iranian hardliners continue to express their support for a revision of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's 2003 fatwa banning nuclear weapons. Senior Iranian parliamentarian and member of the parliament's National Security Commission Vahid Ahmadi stated on October 17 that the 2003 fatwa could be lifted if "conditions change," likely referring to rising tensions with Israel.[74] Ahmadi emphasized that Iran will reevaluate its nuclear doctrine if it faces threats to its "existence, authority, and integrity." Ahmadi expressed his support for the letter previously sent by thirty-nine Iranian parliamentarians to the Supreme National Security Council calling for a revision of Iran's nuclear doctrine.[75] These statements from Iranian politicians signal a growing normalization within

the regime about Iran’s willingness to procure nuclear weapons.[76] Ahmadi also stated that the US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-missile system in Israel would be among the targets for an Iranian response in the event of an Israeli attack on Iran.[77] Ahmadi’s statements reflect the Iranian regime’s ongoing efforts to deter an Israeli attack on Iran following the April 13 and October 1 Iranian attacks on Israel.

The Seyyed al Shohada Corps, which is a division within the IRGC specifically responsible for operations and military activities in Tehran Province, conducted an exercise involving 50,000 soldiers in Tehran on October 17.[78] The exercise focused on enhancing combat readiness and defense capabilities in various districts using military-grade equipment and ammunition. Imam Ali and Imam Hossein Battalions participated in the exercise.[79] The Imam Ali Battalion, which was formed in 2009 to suppress the Green Movement protests, has a close relationship with the Iranian Law Enforcement Command (LEC) and receives specific anti-riot equipment and training.[80] The Imam Hossein Battalion is subordinate to the 22nd Khatam Al-Anbia Operational Division, Seyyed al Shohada Corps of Tehran Province, and it is responsible for defense and security tasks in Varamin city.[81] The commander of the Seyyed al Shohada Corps reassured residents that they should not worry if they hear explosions because the exercise takes place in designated protected areas around Tehran.[82]

Houthi Supreme Leader Abdulmalik al Houthi warned that Israel seeks to “change the reality of the entire Middle East,” in his speech on October 17.[83] Abdulmalik also claimed that the Houthis have targeted 196 ships as part of their campaign in the Red Sea and conducted operations this week using 25 ballistic missiles, a drone, and cruise missiles.[84] The Houthi spokesperson claimed separate attacks on two commercial vessels on October 10.[85] Abdulmalik added that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq has escalated operations against Israel.[86] The Islamic Resistance in Iraq has increased its rate of claimed attacks targeting Israel since mid-September.[87]

The US Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) imposed new sanctions against 18 companies, individuals, and vessels linked to a Houthi financial network on October 17.[88] OFAC stated that these entities are transporting illicit oil to generate revenue for the already sanctioned Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF)-backed Houthi financial official Said al Jamal. This network is responsible for weapons smuggling and arms procurement for the Houthis.

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[1] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1846958203172508008> ; <https://x.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1846958083437674759>

[2] <https://t.me/moriahdoron/15602> ; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-september-1-2024>

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- [4] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-september-12-2024> ;
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<https://t.me/channelnabatieh/92391>
- [55] <https://t.me/mmirleb/8008> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/8007> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/8006> ;
<https://t.me/mmirleb/8002> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/8004> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/8000> ;
<https://t.me/mmirleb/7998>
; <https://t.me/mmirleb/7999> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/7994> ; <https://t.me/mmirleb/7991>
; <https://t.me/mmirleb/7992>
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%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%85-%D8%B7%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-
%D9%84%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A6%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B9-
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