

# Iran Update, October 21, 2023

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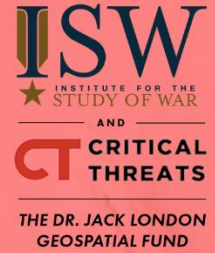
*The Iran Update provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities abroad that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests. It also covers events and trends that affect the stability and decision-making of the Iranian regime. The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the 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 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

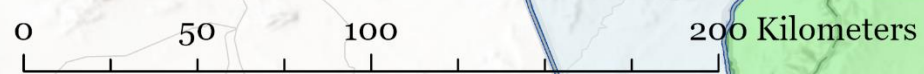


Palestinian militias continued indirect fire into Israel from Gaza

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

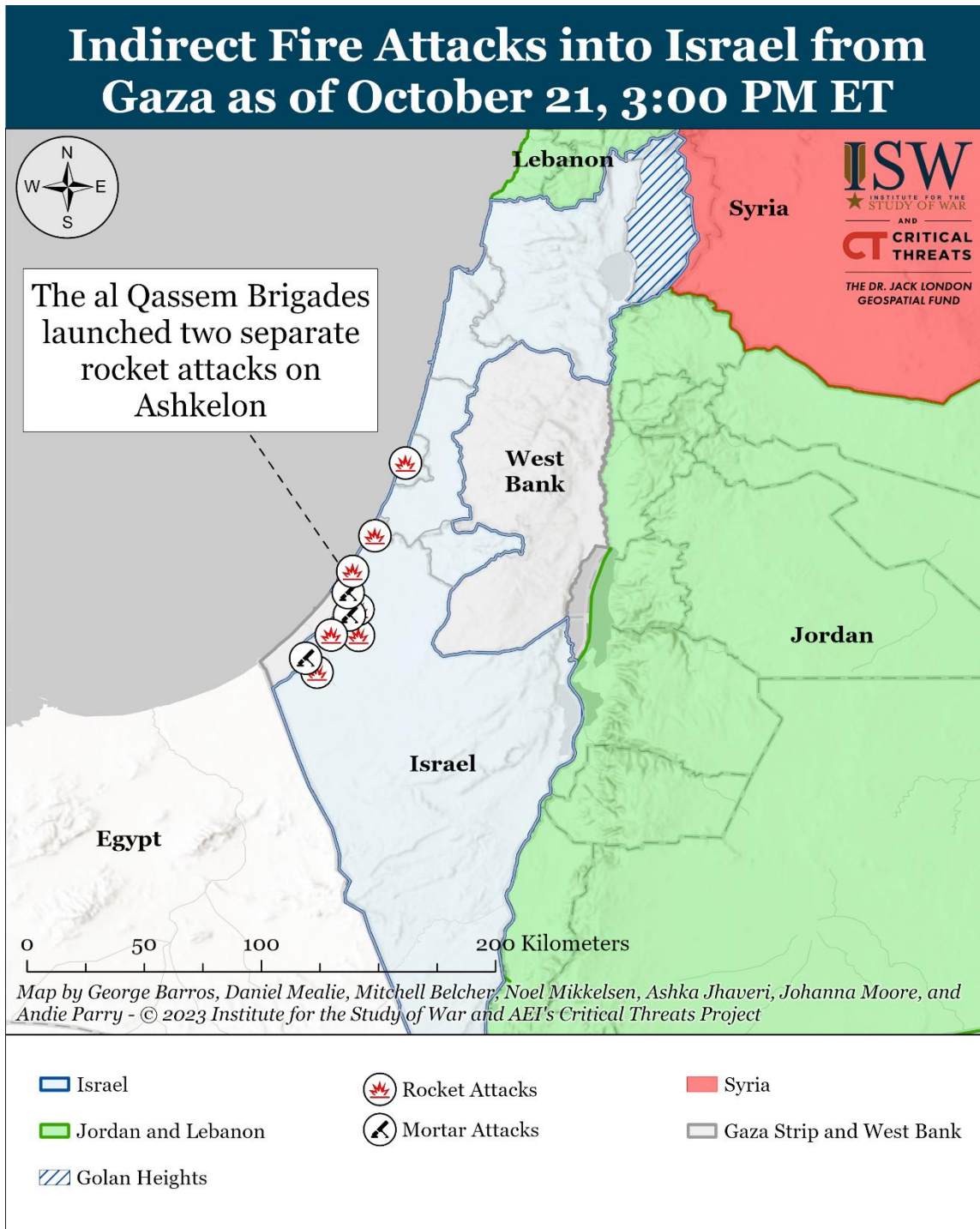


Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

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

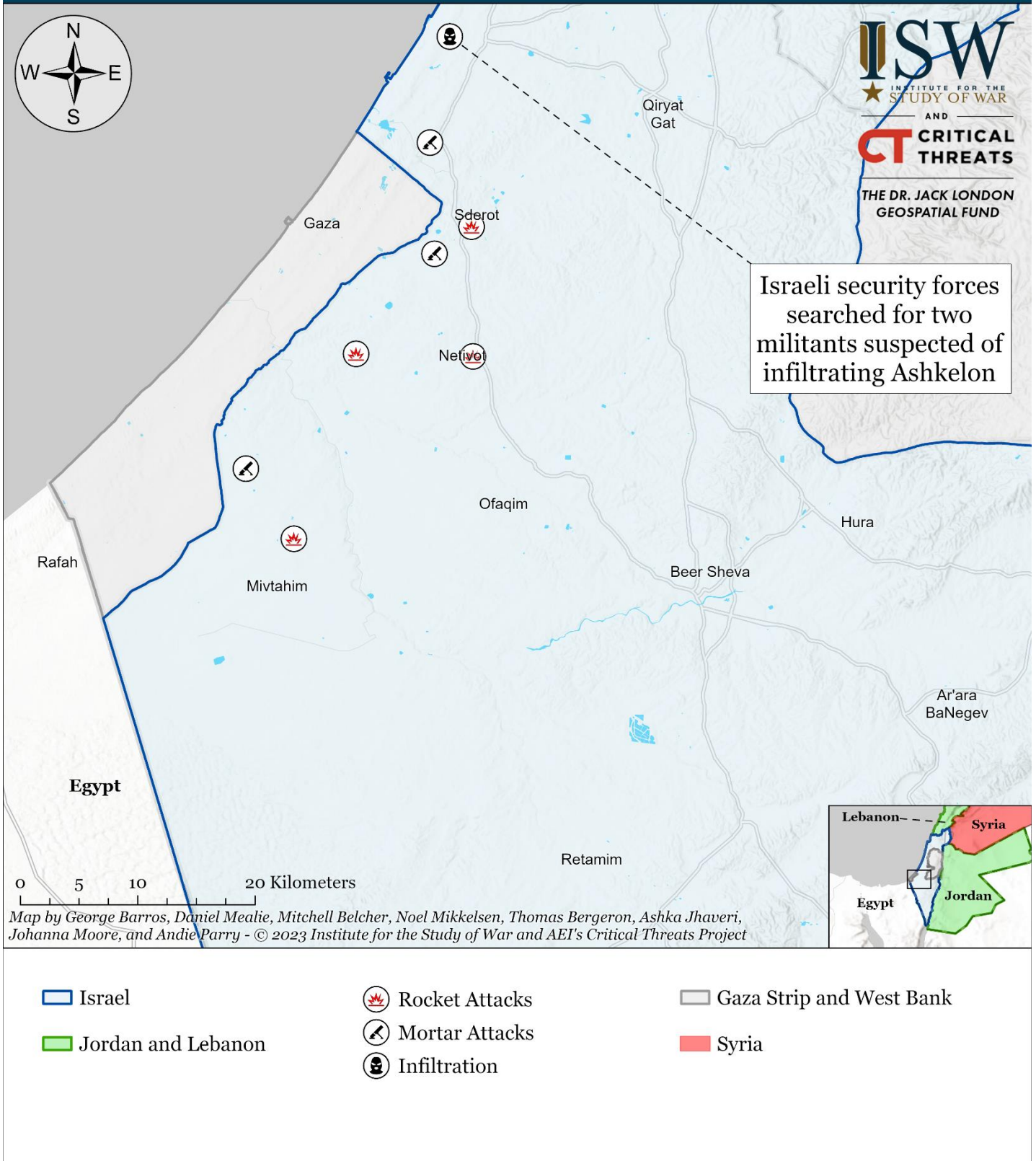
## Gaza Strip

**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



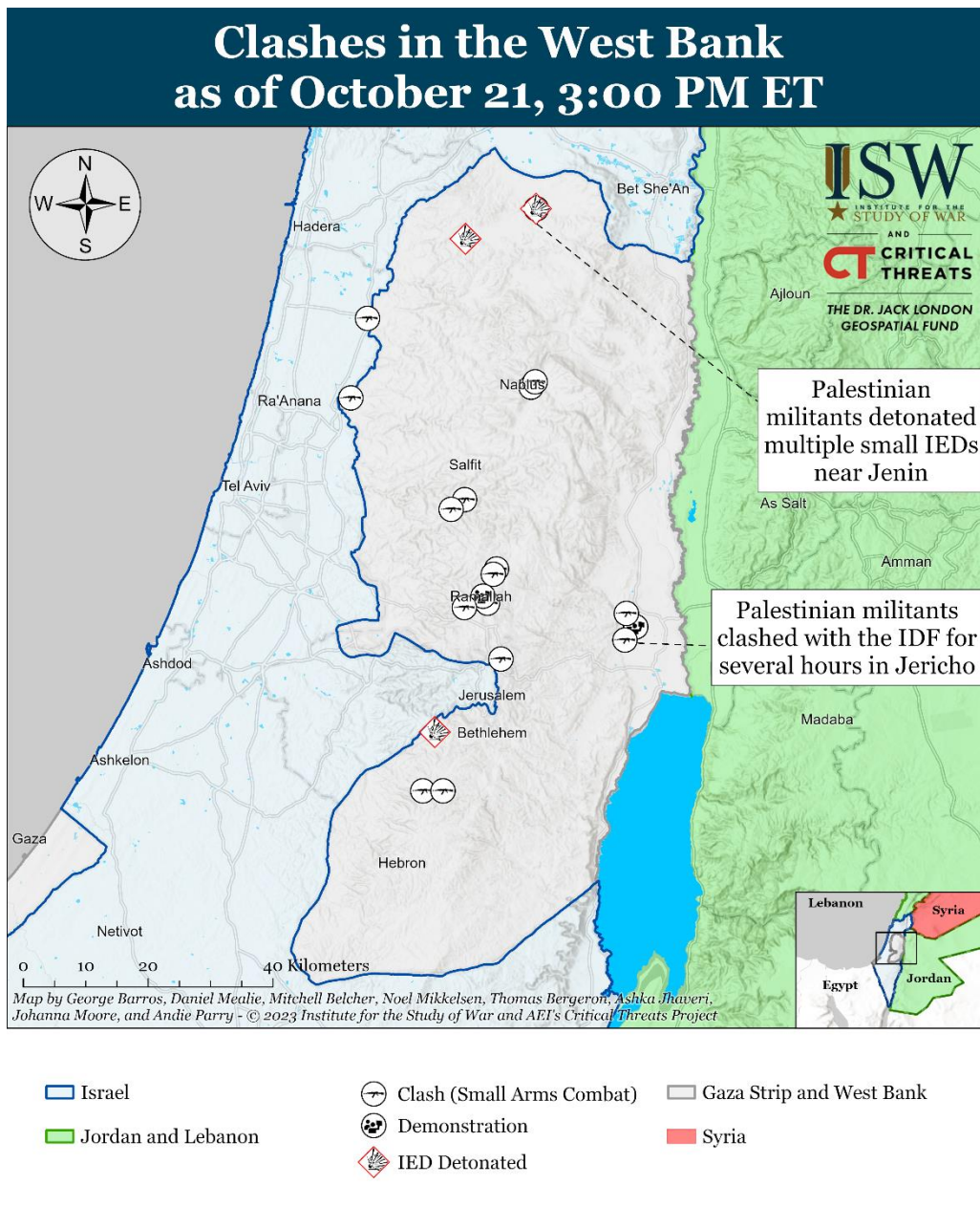
Recorded reports of rocket attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.

**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]



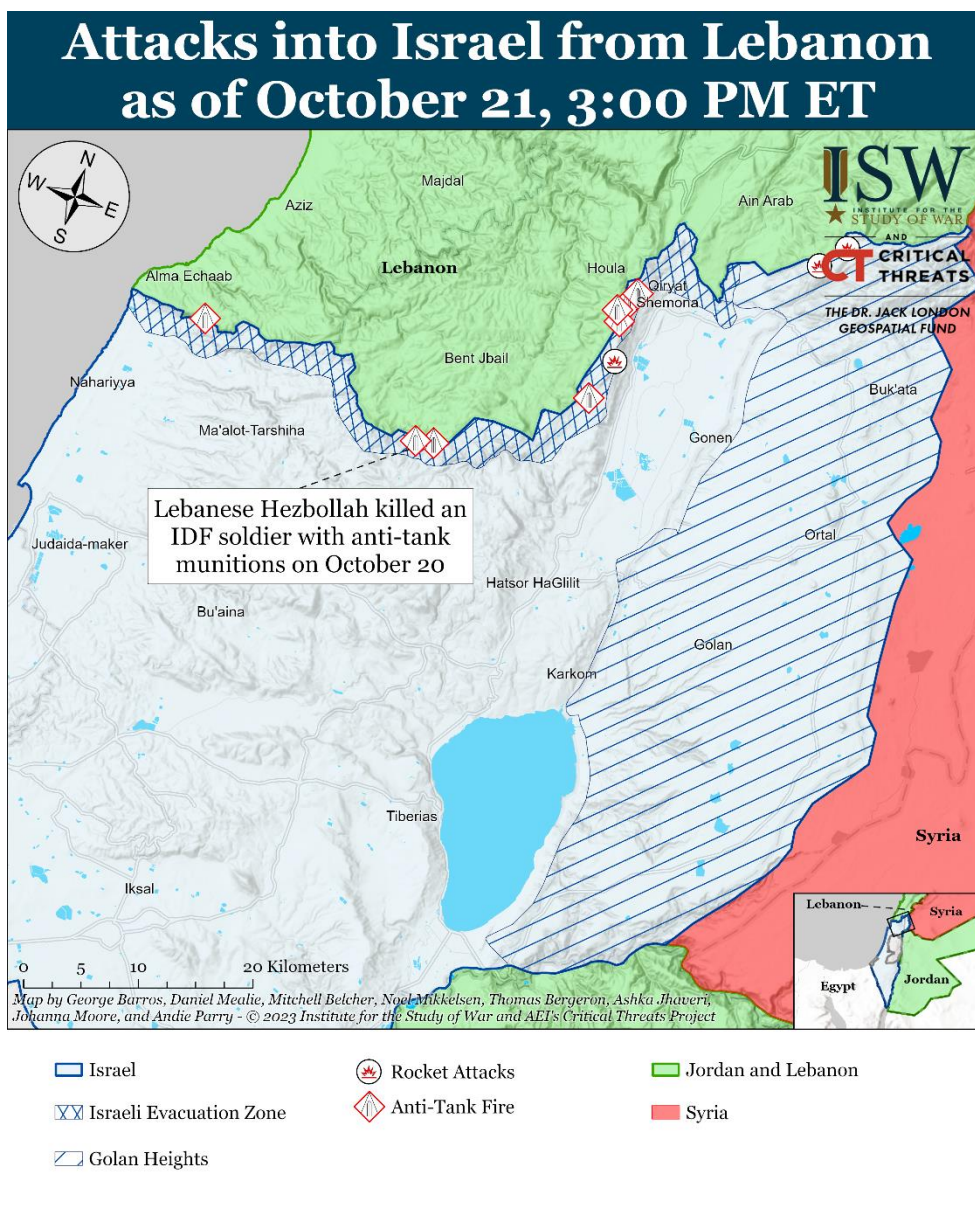
*This map is not an exhaustive depiction of clashes and marches in the West Bank.*

## 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]



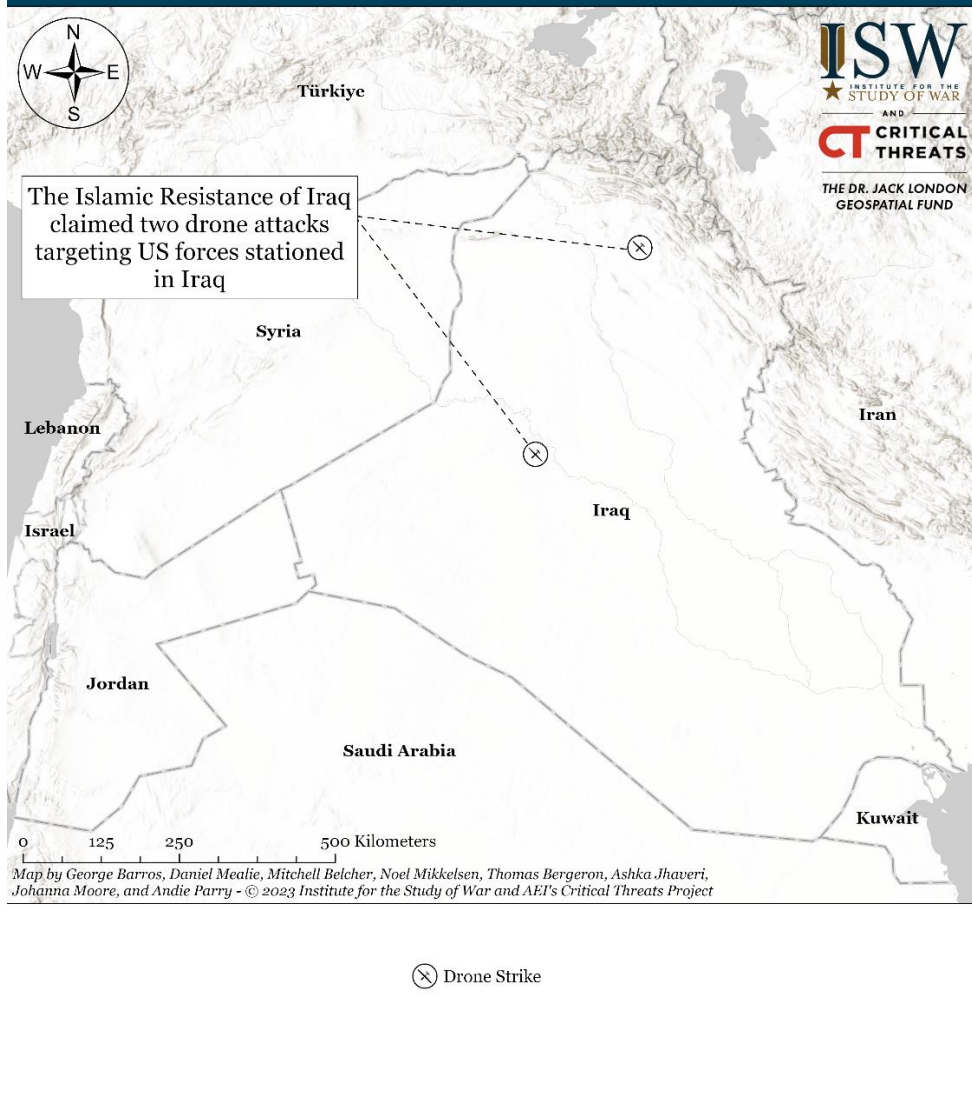
*Recorded reports of rocket attacks; CTP-ISW cannot independently verify impact.*

## 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.

### Attacks on US Bases in the Middle East as of October 21, 3:00 PM ET



**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/36162) ; [https://t.me/mihwar\\_almuqawama/36160](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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[17] Sources available on request.  
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[21] <https://www.maariv.co.il/news/military/Article-1046474>  
[22] [https://t.me/Hanata\\_Republic/3148](https://t.me/Hanata_Republic/3148)  
[23] <https://t.me/TuthiatAlshiyeha/53559> ; <https://t.me/maymun5/54234> ; <https://www.almanar.com.lb/11100234?s=tg>  
[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>  
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[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>