# Iran Update

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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 in Iran and the region, see our <u>interactive map of Iran and the Middle East</u>.

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* <u>here</u> 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 continued advancing eastwards from the al Shifa Hospital, which is consistent with Israeli efforts to establish evacuation corridors for civilians moving west-to-east in Gaza City. The IDF told the New York Times that it had captured a Hamas fighter at al Shifa Hospital and it had not "fully secured" the hospital as of November 17.
- 2. Hamas highlighted the proximity of one of its tunnels to a mosque, which is notable given Hamas' repeated claims that it does not use civilian infrastructure for military purposes.
- 3. Palestinian militants clashed with and conducted IED attacks against Israeli forces in Jenin. Iranianbacked fighters, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted 17 cross-border attacks into northern Israel.
- 4. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—conducted three attacks targeting US positions in Iraq and Syria.
- 5. The United States Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated Iranian-backed persons and entities as Specially Designated Nationals. OFAC reported that the persons and entities were involved in recent attacks on US forces in Iraq and Syria.
- 6. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's official website refuted Western reports that Iran will not "directly" enter the Israel-Hamas war, likely to reassure Axis of Resistance members of Khamenei's continued support for them.

#### <u>Gaza Strip</u>

# 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 continued advancing eastwards from the al Shifa Hospital, which is consistent with Israeli efforts to establish evacuation corridors for civilians moving west-to-east in Gaza City.** Local Palestinian sources reported that Israeli forces fought Palestinian militia fighters near the al Samer roundabout on November 17, just west of the al Ahli Hospital.<sup>1</sup> The Palestinian Red Crescent Society said that Israeli forces "surrounded" the hospital on November 17.<sup>2</sup> Israeli forces have repeatedly established safe corridors and evacuation routes to facilitate the departure of civilians.<sup>3</sup> The IDF announced an evacuation route east from al Shati Camp to Salah al Din Road on November 14 and declared a unilateral tactical pause between 1000 and 1600 local time to facilitate evacuations.<sup>4</sup> The IDF also declared an evacuation route east from al Shifa Hospital on November 13. Hamas fighters fired upon this evacuation route from al Shifa Hospital, according to Israeli officers.<sup>5</sup>

**The IDF told the** *New York Times* **that it had captured a Hamas fighter at al Shifa Hospital and it had not "fully secured" the hospital as of November 17.**<sup>6</sup> Israeli forces also recovered the body of a second Israeli hostage at al Shifa on November 17.<sup>7</sup> The IDF also said that it found information related to hostages on computers inside al Shifa Hospital.<sup>8</sup> Hamas claimed on November 17 that it had moved hostages to "care centers" to "preserve their lives."<sup>9</sup> Hamas took 242 hostages on October 7 and killed another 1,200 Israelis.<sup>10</sup>

The IDF released footage on November 17 showing an Israeli foot patrol on al Rashid St, western Gaza City, which suggests that the northern and central Israeli advances have linked up.<sup>11</sup>

**Hamas highlighted the proximity of one of its tunnels to a mosque, which is notable given Hamas' repeated claims that it does not use civilian infrastructure for military purposes.**<sup>12</sup> The al Qassem Brigades claimed that it detonated explosives in a tunnel during an Israeli clearing operation near al Nasr Mosque in Beit Hanoun, killing 5 IDF soldiers.<sup>13</sup> This attack targeting Israeli forces behind the Israeli forward line of troops is consistent with the doctrinal definition of a clearing operation.

**The al Qassem Brigades claimed two indirect fire attacks into Israeli territory on November 17.**<sup>14</sup> The al Qassem Brigades claimed one rocket attack targeting Tel Aviv in retaliation for civilian deaths.<sup>15</sup> Official Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) media claimed that five Israelis were injured in the attack.<sup>16</sup> An Israeli news outlet reported that Israel's Red Alert system was activated by a Hamas rocket attack but did not report any injuries or deaths following the attack.<sup>17</sup> The al Qassem Brigades also claimed a mortar attack on Nirim Kibbutz, in southern Israel.<sup>18</sup>

#### West Bank

# Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

**Palestinian militants clashed with and conducted IED attacks against Israeli forces in Jenin on November 17.** The Jenin Brigade of the al Quds Brigades claimed that it detonated and fired small arms at IDF forces in Jenin Camp during several ambushes.<sup>19</sup> The Hornets' Nest of the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade, which operates in the Jenin camp, claimed that it detonated an IED targeting an Israeli military bulldozer in Jenin.<sup>20</sup> CTP-ISW recorded five IED detonations in Jenin and the IDF announced that it uncovered more roadside IEDs in the camp that Palestinian fighters were using to target Israeli security forces.<sup>21</sup> Israeli forces killed three fighters in the al Quds Brigades' Jenin Brigade in a raid in Jenin, including the co-found of the al Quds Brigades' Jenin Brigade in the raid along with two other militants from the group.<sup>22</sup> Israeli forces conducted a drone strike in the Jenin camp during the raid.<sup>23</sup> Unspecified Palestinian fighters clashed with Israeli forces three times in West Bank areas outside of Jenin.<sup>24</sup> Israeli forces arrested at least 47 Palestinians in the West Bank according to the Palestinian Prisoners' and Ex-Prisoners' Affairs Authority.<sup>25</sup> The IDF announced it had arrested 21 Palestinians overnight, however.<sup>26</sup> Palestinians demonstrated in support of Gaza in three West Bank cities on November 17, which is fewer than normal for a Friday protest turnout.<sup>27</sup> Hamas had called for global Friday protests on November 16 under the slogan *"Save Gaza's hospitals...Save Gaza's children"* but Palestinians in the West Bank did not mobilize in significant numbers in response to the call.<sup>28</sup>

# 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 fighters, including Lebanese Hezbollah (LH), conducted 17 cross-border attacks into northern Israel on November 17.** LH conducted 12 anti-tank guided missile attacks and one quadcopter drone attack targeting Israeli forces and military infrastructure.<sup>29</sup> Unspecified fighters separately conducted three anti-tank guided missile attacks and one rocket attack targeting Israeli forces and military infrastructure.<sup>30</sup> The IDF shot down an LH quadcopter drone near Metula, Israel.<sup>31</sup> The IDF conducted airstrikes targeting "terrorist infrastructure" in southern Lebanon in response to the attacks into northern Israel.<sup>32</sup>

# 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—conducted three attacks targeting US positions in Iraq and Syria on November 17.** The Islamic Resistance in Iraq and its affiliated groups have claimed 81 attacks targeting US forces in the Middle East since the Israel-Hamas war began.

- The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed a one-way drone attack targeting US forces at the al Harir airbase in Erbil Province in northern Iraq.<sup>33</sup> The group separately claimed two one-way drone attacks on US forces at the Ain al Assad airbase, Anbar Province, western Iraq.<sup>34</sup>
- The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed two one-way drone attacks targeting US forces at Tal Baydar, Hasakah Province, northeastern Syria.<sup>35</sup>

**Syrian state media said that Israel conducted airstrikes on southern Damascus on November 17.** SANA said that Syrian air defense systems shot down most of the munitions but that there were "material losses."<sup>36</sup> The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said that the strikes targeted Lebanese Hezbollah weapons depots and Iranian-backed militia sites near the Damascus International Airport, al Bahdalia, and Sayyida Zeinab.<sup>37</sup> SOHR said the strikes killed two militia members. The IDF has not confirmed the strikes. Israel previously conducted airstrikes on Damascus on October 22.<sup>38</sup>

**Senior Houthi official Mohammad Ali al Houthi denied that the United States has intercepted Houthi drones and missiles targeting Israel.**<sup>39</sup> Mohammad Ali al Houthi serves as the head of the Houthi supreme revolutionary committee and is close to the Houthi supreme leader.<sup>40</sup> Mohammad Ali al Houthi said that Houthi drone and missile strikes are in support of Palestinians in Gaza and that the United States must release videos to prove it shot down the attacks. The Houthis have launched multiple attacks using drones and

missiles targeting Israel since October 7 and the US has shot down some of these attacks.<sup>41</sup> The group also threatened attacks on Israeli ships operating in the Red Sea and Bab al Mandeb Strain on November 14.<sup>42</sup>

The United States Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated Iranian-backed persons and entities as Specially Designated Nationals on November 17. OFAC reported that the persons and entities were involved in recent attacks on US forces in Iraq and Syria.<sup>43</sup> OFAC designated Kataib Sayyeda al Shuhada (KSS) and senior KSS leader Hashim Finyan Rahim al Saraji.<sup>44</sup> OFAC designated six individuals belonging to Iranian-backed Kataib Hezbollah, a US-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO):

- **Imad Naji al Bahadli:** According to OFAC, Imad al Bahadli is currently a member of KH's governing Shura Council. Al Bahadli was previously responsible for militia recruitment and training at the direction of the IRGC. In this role, al Bahadli also identified US military and civilian targets in Iraq for future IRGC-QF directed attacks by KH. He was also behind efforts to intimidate Iraqi politicians to support efforts to remove US forces from Iraq. Al Bahadli is sanctioned under E.O. 13224 for acting for or on behalf of KH.
- **Habib Hasan Mughamis Darraji:** Habib Darraji currently serves as KH's Foreign Affairs Chief and has previously coordinated KH militia training in Iran with the IRGC. Darraji is designated under E.O. 13224 for acting for or on behalf of KH.
- **Ja'afar al Husayni:** Al Husayni is a KH media spokesperson and has supported planning for attacks on US forces in Iraq. Husayni is designated under E.O. 13224 for acting for or on behalf of KH.
- **Khalid Kadhim Jasim al Skeni:** Khalid Al Skeni is a senior KH military commander for KH and has coordinated KH training with the IRGC. Al Skeni is designated under E.O. 13224 for acting for or on behalf of KH.
- **Basim Mohammad Hasab al Majidi:** Basim al Majidi is currently KH's chief of commercial development. He is also the head of KH's TV station al Ittijah and has KH propaganda production with Iranian support. Al Majidi is designated under E.O. 13224 for acting for or on behalf of KH.
- **Mojtaba Jahandust:** Mojtaba Jahandust is an IRGC-QF member responsible for facilitating KH member travel to Iran for training. Jahandust is designated under E.O. 13224 for materially assisting, sponsoring, or providing financial support to KH.

**Iraqi Supreme Judicial Council President Faiq Zaidan met with US Ambassador Alina Romanowski on November 17 to discuss the Iraqi Federal Supreme Court's decision to remove Iraqi Parliamentary Speaker Mohammed Halbousi from office and the necessity of an independent judiciary.**<sup>45</sup> The Iraqi Federal Supreme Court announced on November 14 that it had decided to remove Halbousi from his role as parliamentary speaker and from office. Halbousi had repeated statements that the Federal Supreme Court's ruling was unconstitutional and was motivated by unspecified parties to create political divisions within society.<sup>46</sup>

#### The Iraqi Federal Supreme Court's decision to remove Halbousi appears to be unconstitutional.

The Federal Supreme Court cited Article 94 of the Iraqi Constitution which stipulates that "decisions of the Federal Supreme Court are final and binding for all authorities." The Iraqi constitution does not explicitly give the court the authority to remove the parliamentary speaker from office.<sup>47</sup> Members of Parliament could have called for a vote of no-confidence to remove Halbousi from office; it is unclear why members chose not to. The Shia Coordination Framework - a loosely aligned coalition of pro-Iranian political parties - the al Azm party, and the al Hasm coalition have begun discussions to identify a new Speaker.<sup>48</sup> The Parliamentary Speaker holds a key position in shaping Iraqi relations with the United States.

**Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's official website refuted Western reports that Iran will not "directly" enter the Israel-Hamas war, likely to reassure Axis of Resistance members of Khamenei's continued support for them.** Reuters reported on November 15 that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei told Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh that Iran will not "intervene directly" in the war during their meeting in Tehran on November 5.<sup>49</sup> Khamenei also pressured Haniyeh to silence Hamas members calling for Iran and LH to fully join the war against Israel.

- The Line of Hezbollah—a newsletter published by Khamenei's website—described the Reuters report as "completely false" in its November 17 publication.<sup>50</sup> The newsletter recirculated Khamenei's October 10 statements that Iran defends Palestine and "kisses the foreheads and arms of the resourceful and intelligent designers [of the Al Aqsa Flood Operation]."<sup>51</sup>
- Khamenei's website also published on November 17 an interview with former Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini's daughter Zahra Mostafavi, who praised Khamenei for "seriously and strongly" pursuing the Palestinian cause.<sup>52</sup> Khamenei's website likely published this interview to emphasize Khamenei's commitment to supporting Hamas and the Axis of Resistance. Khamenei's website may additionally have specifically interviewed Mostafavi given that her father, who was the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, institutionalized the regime's staunch pro-Palestine, anti-Israel stance.

**Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian met with his French counterpart Catherine Colonna in Geneva, Switzerland on November 16.**<sup>53</sup> Abdollahian wrote on X (Twitter) that he and Colonna had a "frank and important conversation" during which they discussed the Israel-Hamas war and "consular and bilateral issues."<sup>54</sup> Colonna warned Iran not to further expand the war, especially to Lebanon.<sup>55</sup> Colonna additionally called for the immediate release of four French nationals being held in Iran. Abdollahian and Colonna's meeting notably comes days before the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) Board of Governors meeting on November 23.<sup>56</sup> The Iranian regime has sought to prevent these three European powers from joining calls for a hardline stance on Iran's nuclear program since the 2002 revelation of Iran's undeclared facilities and the formation of the United Kingdom, France, and Germany (E3) diplomatic process in 2003.<sup>57</sup> Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister and chief nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani recently discussed nuclear negotiations, among other issues, with his Russian counterpart Sergei Ryabkov in Tehran on November 16, as CTP-ISW previously reported.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>4</sup> https://twitter.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1724326961336434934

65e8bef8?mod=middle-east\_news\_article\_pos3

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> https://t.me/beitlahiaNews/7224

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://www.bbc.com/news/live/world-middle-east-67446662

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> https://x.com/AvichayAdraee/status/1724326961336434934?s=20; https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/israel-warns-of-wider-war-as-it-presses-on-in-gaza-65e8bef8?mod=middle-east\_news\_article\_pos3

 $<sup>^{5}\</sup> https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/israel-warns-of-wider-war-as-it-presses-on-in-gaza-it-presses-on-it-presses-on-it-presses-on-in-gaza-it-presses-on-it-$ 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/11/17/world/israel-hamas-gaza-war-news

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/11/17/world/israel-hamas-gaza-war-news/israel-says-a-2nd-hostages-body-was-found-near-al-shifa-as-pressure-grows-over-the-captives?smid=url-share

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/israel-searches-for-more-evidence-of-hamas-presence-at-gazas-largest-

hospital-123e50e5?mod=middle-east\_news\_article\_pos3

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> https://t.me/qassam1brigades/479

<sup>10</sup> https://www.nytimes.com/article/israel-hostages-hamas-explained.html; https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/11/12/israel-revises-october-7-death-toll-after-agonizingforensics/#:~:text=Latest%20Developments%E2%80%8B,the%20figure%20on%20November%209. <sup>11</sup> https://x.com/idfonline/status/1725402918897996264?s=20 <sup>12</sup> https://www.newarab dot com/news/hamas-denies-having-military-positions-civilian-areas <sup>13</sup> https://t.me/qassam1brigades/475 <sup>14</sup> https://t.me/mihwar almuqawama/39803 ; https://t.me/mihwar almuqawama/39805 ; https://twitter.com/ArmedSyrian/status/1725548321375195583; https://t.me/gassam1brigades/481 <sup>15</sup> https://t.me/mihwar\_almuqawama/39805 <sup>16</sup> https://t.me/C Military1/39688 <sup>17</sup> https://www.haaretz dot com/israel-news/2023-11-17/ty-article-live/idf-finds-body-of-65-year-old-israeliwoman-held-by-hamas-near-gazas-al-shifa-hospital/0000018b-db64-df9a-ab8b-dfecf1ca0000#1542709205 <sup>18</sup> https://t.me/qassam1brigades/478 <sup>19</sup> https://t.me/C Military1/39624 ; https://t.me/sarayajneen/1150 ; https://t.me/sarayajneen/1148 <sup>20</sup> https://t.me/beitlahiaNews/7241 ; https://t.me/newpress1/58744 <sup>21</sup> https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1725410916131340434 ; https://t.me/QudsN/330478 ; https://t.me/QudsN/330479; https://t.me/C\_Military1/; https://t.me/newpress1/58793; https://t.me/beitlahiaNews/7241 <sup>22</sup> https://t.me/sarayajneen/1149 <sup>23</sup> https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1725410924918448599 <sup>24</sup> https://t.me/QudsN/330231 ; https://t.me/newpress1/58826 ; https://t.me/QudsN/330418 <sup>25</sup> https://t.me/QudsN/330346 <sup>26</sup> https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1725410905712697473 <sup>27</sup> https://t.me/QudsN/330451 ; https://t.me/QudsN/330433 ; https://t.me/QudsN/330381 <sup>28</sup> https://t.me/hamasps/17777 <sup>29</sup> https://t.me/C Military1/39605 ; https://t.me/QudsN/330480 ; https://t.me/QudsN/330477 ; https://t.me/C Military1/39679; https://t.me/QudsN/330341; https://t.me/C Military1/39678; https://t.me/QudsN/330468; https://t.me/QudsN/330449; https://t.me/C Military1/39636; https://t.me/C\_Military1/39639; https://t.me/QudsN/330361; https://t.me/C\_Military1/39643; https://t.me/C Military1/39656 ; https://t.me/C\_Military1/39689 <sup>30</sup> https://t.me/C Military1/39677 ; https://t.me/newpress1/58815 ; https://twitter.com/alishoeib1970/status/1725517653635105006 <sup>31</sup> https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1725533925613687137; https://twitter.com/JoeTruzman/status/1725533764909257176; https://t.me/C Military1/39669 <sup>32</sup> https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1725533916734357791 <sup>33</sup> https://t.me/elamharbi/103; https://t.me/elamharbi/104 <sup>34</sup> https://t.me/elamharbi/105 <sup>35</sup> https://t.me/elamharbi/106 <sup>36</sup> https://sana dot sy/?p=2002335; https://twitter.com/Charles Lister/status/1725303393676145089 <sup>37</sup> https://www.syriahr.com/en/317360/ <sup>38</sup> https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-air-strikes-kill-two-workers-syrias-damascus-airport-official-2023-10-22/ <sup>39</sup> https://twitter.com/Moh Alhouthi/status/1725266843944845723 <sup>40</sup> https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/2/8/houthi-leader-vows-to-defend-glorious-revolution

<sup>41</sup> https://www.reuters.com/world/us-navy-ship-shoots-down-drone-yemen-officials-2023-11-15/

<sup>42</sup> https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/yemens-houthis-leader-says-group-will-target-israeli-ships-red-sea-2023-11-14/

<sup>43</sup> https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1921

<sup>44</sup> https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1921

<sup>45</sup> https://www.ninanews dot com/Website/News/Details?key=1090336 ; https://almadapaper dot

net/view.php?cat=301492; https://twitter.com/USAmblraq/status/1725237920603222116

<sup>46</sup> <u>https://almadapaper</u> dot net/view.php?cat=301402

<sup>47</sup> https://wwwex.ilo dot org/dyn/natlex2/natlex2/files/download/73414/IRQ73414.pdf

<sup>48</sup> https://www.shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%B1-

%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-

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%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%AB%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%85-

<sup>49</sup> https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/irans-axis-resistance-against-israel-faces-trial-by-fire-2023-11-15/

<sup>50</sup> https://farsi.khamenei dot ir/news-content?id=54398

<sup>51</sup> https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14020826000396 ;

https://farsi.khamenei dot ir/news-content?id=54049

<sup>52</sup> https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1402/08/26/2990012

<sup>53</sup> https://mfa dot ir/portal/newsview/734072

<sup>54</sup> https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1402/08/25/2989723

<sup>55</sup> https://iranwire dot com/en/middle-east/122623-france-firmly-warns-iran-against-escalating-gaza-conflict/

<sup>56</sup> https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/looking-ahead-important-2023-events-at-the-iaea

<sup>57</sup> https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-22-

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58 https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-november-16-

2023#\_edn5b866a8ab58edd052e7f07868014be2f60;

https://mfa dot ir/portal/NewsView/734030