

Iran Update, November 16, 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](#).

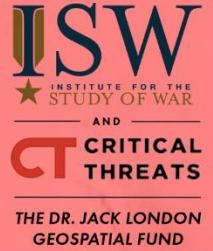
Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are well-covered 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 continued reconnaissance operations in al Shifa Hospital to uncover Hamas military infrastructure, according to the IDF. Israel uncovered a tunnel shaft and weapons during operations there, which is consistent with Israel's repeated assertions that Hamas uses humanitarian infrastructure for military activities. The United States reemphasized that Hamas used al Shifa Hospital as a command node, citing its own intelligence.
2. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said the IDF has completed the capture and clearing of western Gaza City and that the "next phase has begun," which is consistent with Israeli advances toward eastern Gaza City. Israel dropped leaflets on four communities east of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip asking civilians to evacuate.
3. Palestinian fighters attacked Israeli forces 16 times in the West Bank. The Israeli police said that it foiled an attempted Hamas terror attack near Jerusalem.
4. Iranian-backed fighters, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted 11 cross-border attacks into northern Israel.
5. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—did not claim any attacks on US forces in the Middle East on November 16. Unspecified Iranian-backed militants conducted two rocket attacks on a US base in eastern Syria, according to Axis of Resistance-affiliated and local media. Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah (KH) issued a statement threatening the United States.
6. Iranian officials and state media refuted Western reports that Iran will not "directly" enter the Israel-Hamas war, likely to reassure other Axis of Resistance members of Iran's continued support for them. Iran is exploiting the Western media framing that Iran is not already involved in the war, which is unintentionally obfuscating the role Iran is already playing.

Israel-Hamas War as of November 16, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



Israeli forces continued reconnaissance operations in al Shifa Hospital to uncover Hamas military infrastructure

Iranian-backed fighters, including Lebanese Hezbollah, conducted 11 cross-border attacks into northern Israel

Kataib Hezbollah threatened to attack US forces in the Middle East

The Israeli police stated it foiled an attempted Hamas terror attack near Jerusalem

0 50 100 200 Kilometers

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

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 continued reconnaissance operations in al Shifa Hospital on November 16 to uncover Hamas military infrastructure, according to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

US military doctrine defines reconnaissance as “a mission undertaken to obtain, by visual observation or other detection methods, information about the activities and resources of an enemy or adversary or to secure data concerning the. . . geographic characteristics of a particular area.”^[1] Reconnaissance operations can occur before, during, or after an operation. The IDF will probably not release the intelligence that the reconnaissance generates immediately because the intelligence is meant to enable further military operations to clear, destroy, or otherwise degrade the tunnel system that the IDF claims Hamas maintains under al Shifa Hospital.^[2] An IDF spokesperson said that Israeli special forces are conducting unidentified targeted operations against Hamas infrastructure around the complex, which this intelligence could enable.^[3]

An IDF spokesperson told CNN that troops remain active both inside and in the vicinity of the hospital complex.^[4] Doctors from the hospital, including its director, said Israeli forces are operating inside the complex’s various buildings.^[5] A Fox News journalist embedded with Israeli special forces in al Shifa Hospital said that Israeli operations are ongoing and that hundreds of Palestinians are still inside.^[6] The journalist posted images showing Palestinian militia fighters’ weapons stashed inside the radiology building.^[7] The al Quds Brigades—the militant wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)—claimed that its fighters remain engaged in fierce clashes with Israeli forces in the vicinity of al Shifa Hospital.^[8]

Israel uncovered a tunnel shaft and weapons during operations in al Shifa Hospital, which is consistent with Israel’s repeated assertions that Hamas uses humanitarian infrastructure for military activities.^[9]

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said that the IDF found “significant” items inside al Shifa Hospital.^[10] The IDF published evidence of an operational tunnel shaft within the hospital grounds.^[11] The IDF also seized small arms, grenades, tandem rockets, and explosively formed penetrators (EFPs).^[12] Hamas has manufactured and used EFPs in the Gaza Strip since 2007.^[13] EFPs require specially manufactured concave copper disks, suggesting that Hamas militants either imported the disks or received the specific instruction and capacity to produce them. Iran previously manufactured and distributed copper disks for EFPs to Iraqi militants for use against US forces in Iraq.^[14] Hamas and PIJ leaders rejected Israel’s accusations of Hamas’ military use of al Shifa Hospital.^[15]

The United States reemphasized that Hamas used al Shifa Hospital as a command node, citing its own intelligence.

The US National Security Council spokesperson told reporters on November 16 that the United States has its own intelligence that “Hamas was using al Shifa [Hospital] as a command-and-control node—and most likely, as well, as a storage facility.”^[16] The *Wall Street Journal* reported on November 15 that “people familiar with the matter” stated that the US assessment that Hamas used al Shifa Hospital for military activities is based on signals intercepts.^[17] The sources

added that Hamas and PIJ fighters used the hospital to conceal and support military operations. The sources stated that this information is from multiple streams of data and collected without Israeli involvement.[18] The US Department of Defense defines signals intelligence (SIGINT) as a category of intelligence comprising all communications intelligence, electronic intelligence, and foreign instrumentation signals intelligence, however transmitted.[19] The US intelligence community infrequently releases SIGINT to avoid compromising the methods by which it obtained the sensitive information.

The IDF found the body of an Israeli civilian near al Shifa Hospital, whom Hamas kidnapped from Beerli in southern Israel during its attack on October 7.[20] Israel did not comment on how the hostage died. Hamas kidnapped hundreds of Israelis during its attack on October 7.[21]

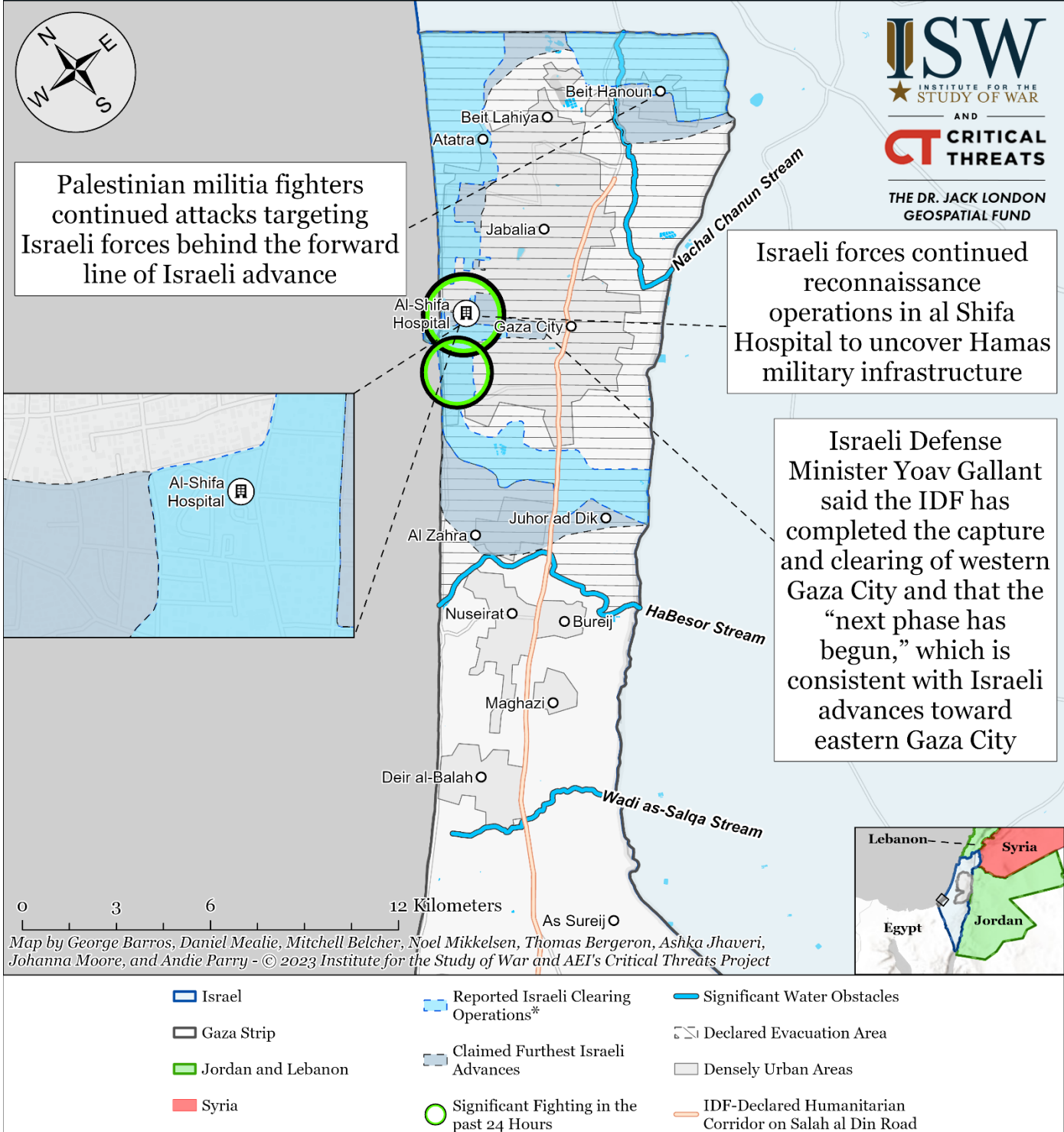
Israeli forces continued to uncover Palestinian militia equipment during clearing operations in al Shati refugee camp. Israeli forces located and destroyed a cache of weapons in al Shati camp that belonged to Hamas' naval force.[22] A *Times of Israel* military correspondent posted photos of cleared areas within al Shati camp on November 16.[23]

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said the IDF has completed the capture and clearing of western Gaza City and that the “next phase has begun,” which is consistent with Israeli advances toward eastern Gaza City on November 16.[24] Gallant said that the IDF has taken “operational control” of the western part of the city.[25] Local Palestinian media reported clashes between Palestinian fighters and Israeli forces on Omar al Mukhtar Road.[26] The Palestinian Red Crescent reported on November 16 that Israeli military tanks have besieged the al Ahli Baptist Hospital in the Zaitoun neighborhood of Gaza City.[27]

Israel dropped leaflets on four communities east of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip asking civilians to evacuate.[28] The leaflets said Hamas' activity in Khan Younis will force the IDF to target Hamas fighters and facilities in residential areas.[29] Gallant said at a news conference that Israel's ground operation will last for many months “and will include both the north and the south [of the Gaza Strip].”[30] Humanitarian aid organizations have warned that Israeli advances into the south could cause the humanitarian situation to deteriorate.[31]

Palestinian militia fighters continued attacks targeting Israeli forces behind the Israeli forward line of advance, which is consistent with the nature of clearing operations. The al Qassem Brigades—the military wing of Hamas—claimed to fire a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) at Israeli jeeps west of Beit Lahia on November 16.[32] The al Qassem Brigades also claimed to fire 12 tandem-charge warheads at Israeli ground forces in Beit Hanoun.[33]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of November 16, 2023, 2:00 PM ET

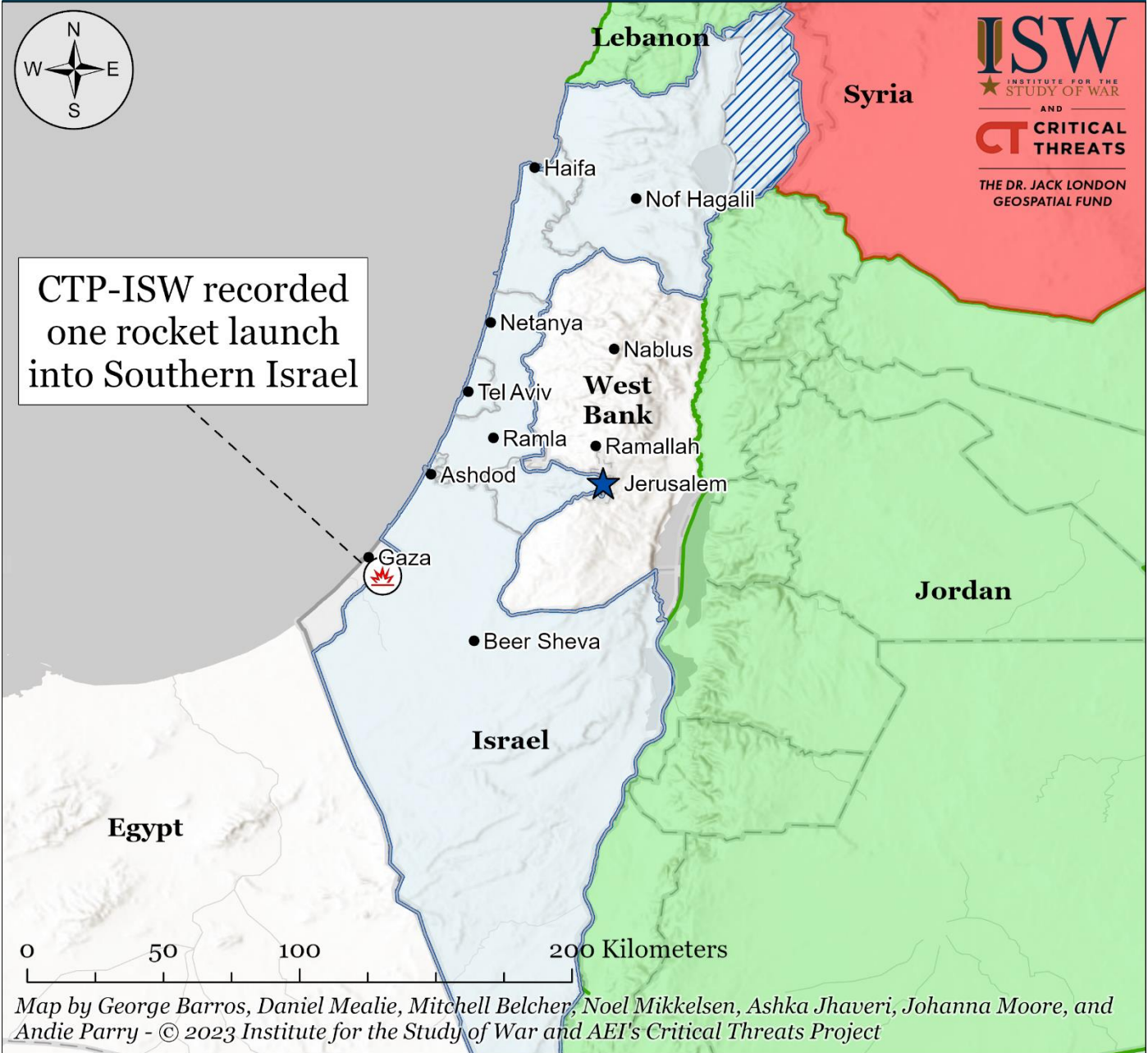


Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

* 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

The al Quds Brigades conducted one indirect fire attack from the Gaza Strip into Israel on November 16. The al Quds Brigades fired rockets at Nir Oz in southern Israel.[34]

Indirect Fire Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of November 16, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



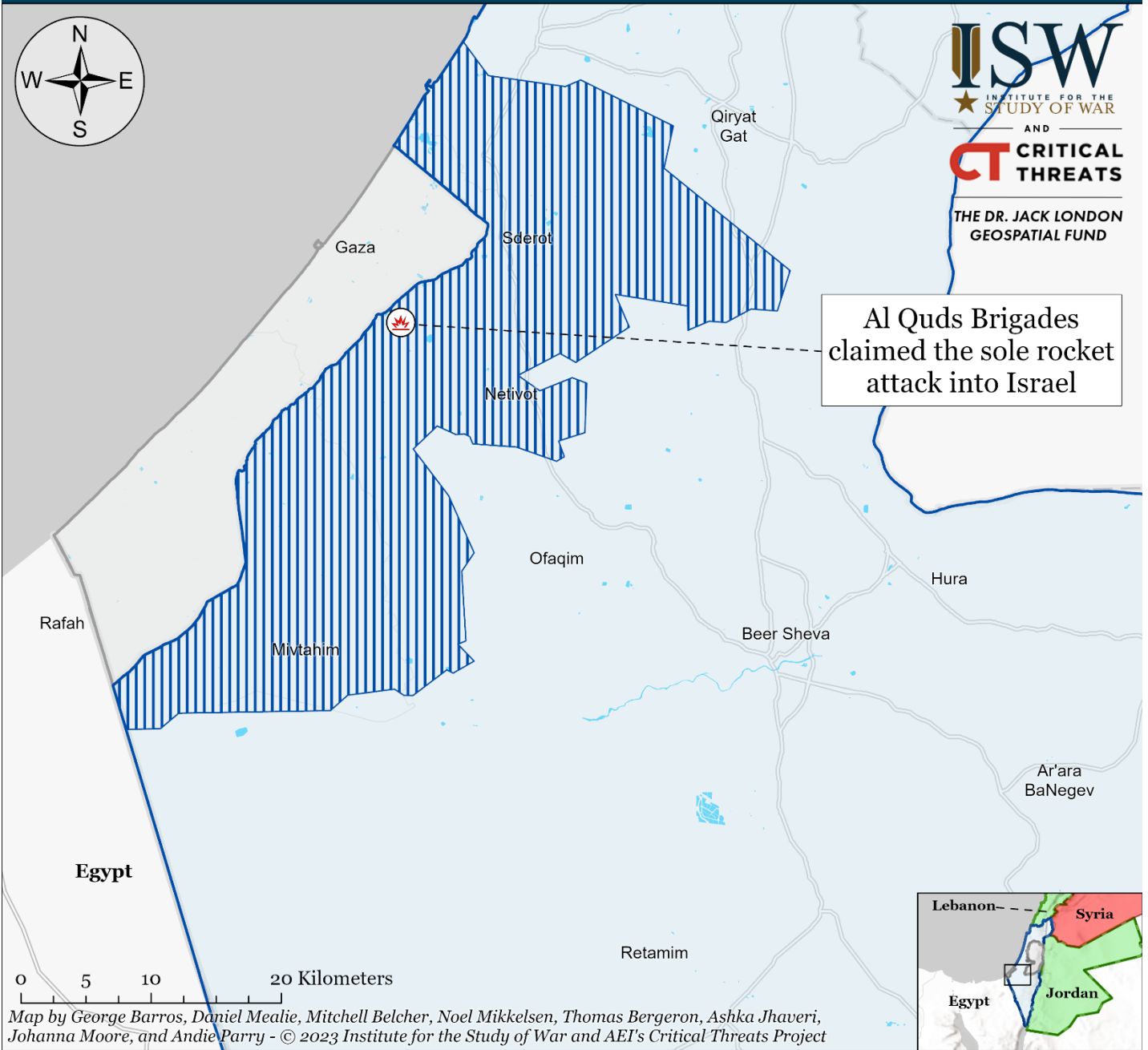
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CTP-ISW recorded one rocket launch into Southern Israel

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

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

Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of November 16, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



Al Quds Brigades claimed the sole rocket attack into Israel

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

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

West Bank

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

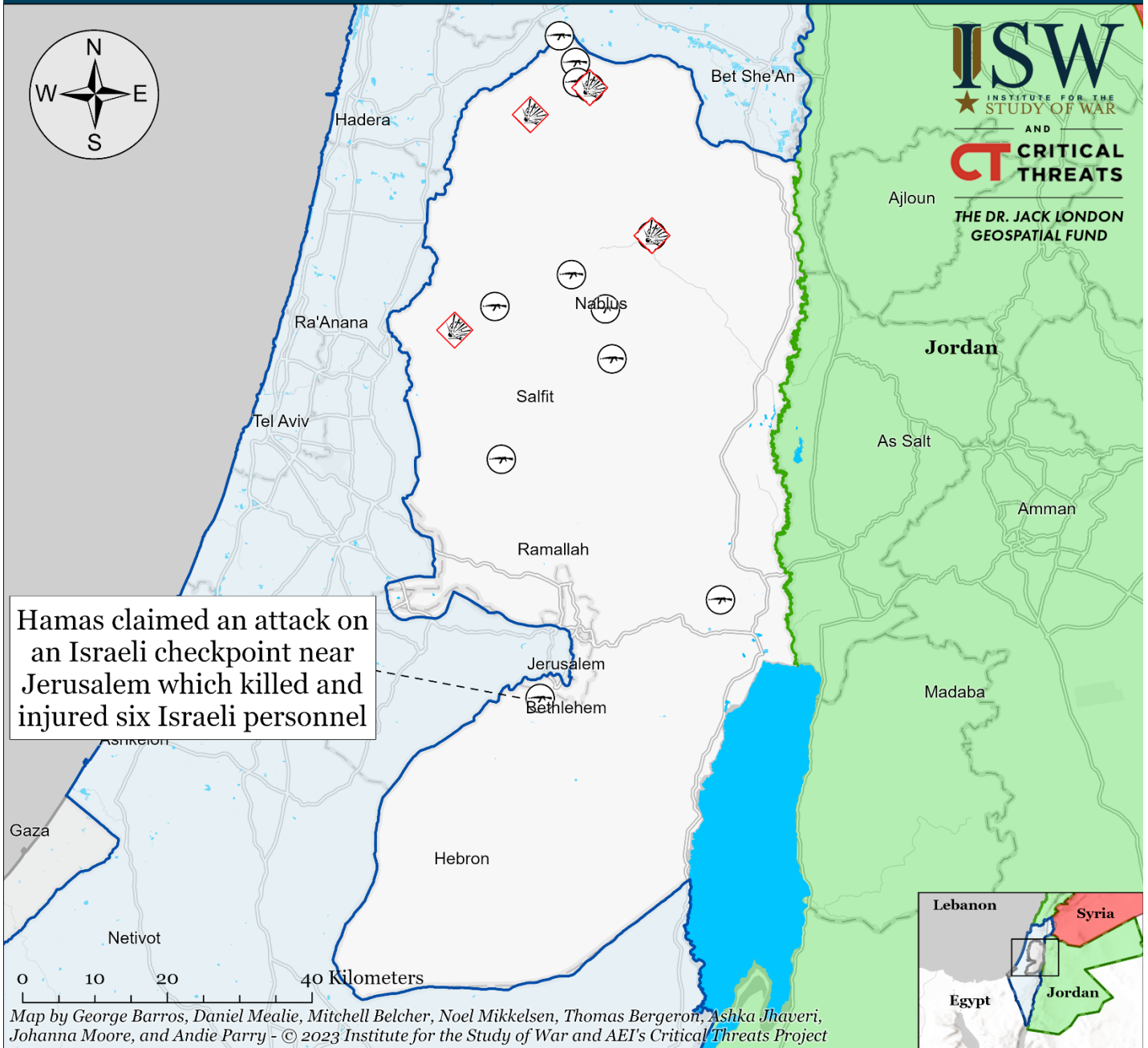
- Draw IDF assets and resources toward the West Bank and fix them there

Palestinian fighters attacked Israeli forces 16 times in the West Bank. Unspecified Palestinian fighters engaged Israeli forces in 12 small arms clashes in the West Bank, primarily near Nablus and Jenin.[35] Unspecified Palestinian fighters also conducted IED attacks on Israeli forces in three incidents across the West Bank.[36] The al Qassem Brigades claimed responsibility for small arms clashes and an IED attack near Jenin on November 16.[37]

CTP-ISW separately recorded two demonstrations in Ramallah and Nablus against Israel.[38] The IDF said on November 16 that it arrested 33 “wanted persons” across the West Bank and that 20 of them were associated with Hamas.[39]

The Israeli police said that it foiled an attempted Hamas terror attack near Jerusalem on November 15. The al Qassem Brigades claimed responsibility for an attack at an Israeli checkpoint south of Jerusalem that injured five and killed one Israeli officer on November 15.[40] The Israeli police commissioner said that the al Qassem Brigades fighters intended to conduct a “terror massacre” inside Jerusalem.[41] The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) praised the Hamas attack and framed it as a response to Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip.[42] Hamas called for an escalation in attacks against Israeli forces in the West Bank by “all available means” on November 15.[43] Hamas and the PFLP have repeatedly called for attacks against Israeli soldiers and civilians in the West Bank as part of an effort to draw IDF assets and resources toward the West Bank and fix them there.[44]

Clashes in the West Bank as of November 16, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



- Israel
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Clash (Small Arms Combat)
- IED Detonated
- Gaza Strip and West Bank
- Syria

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

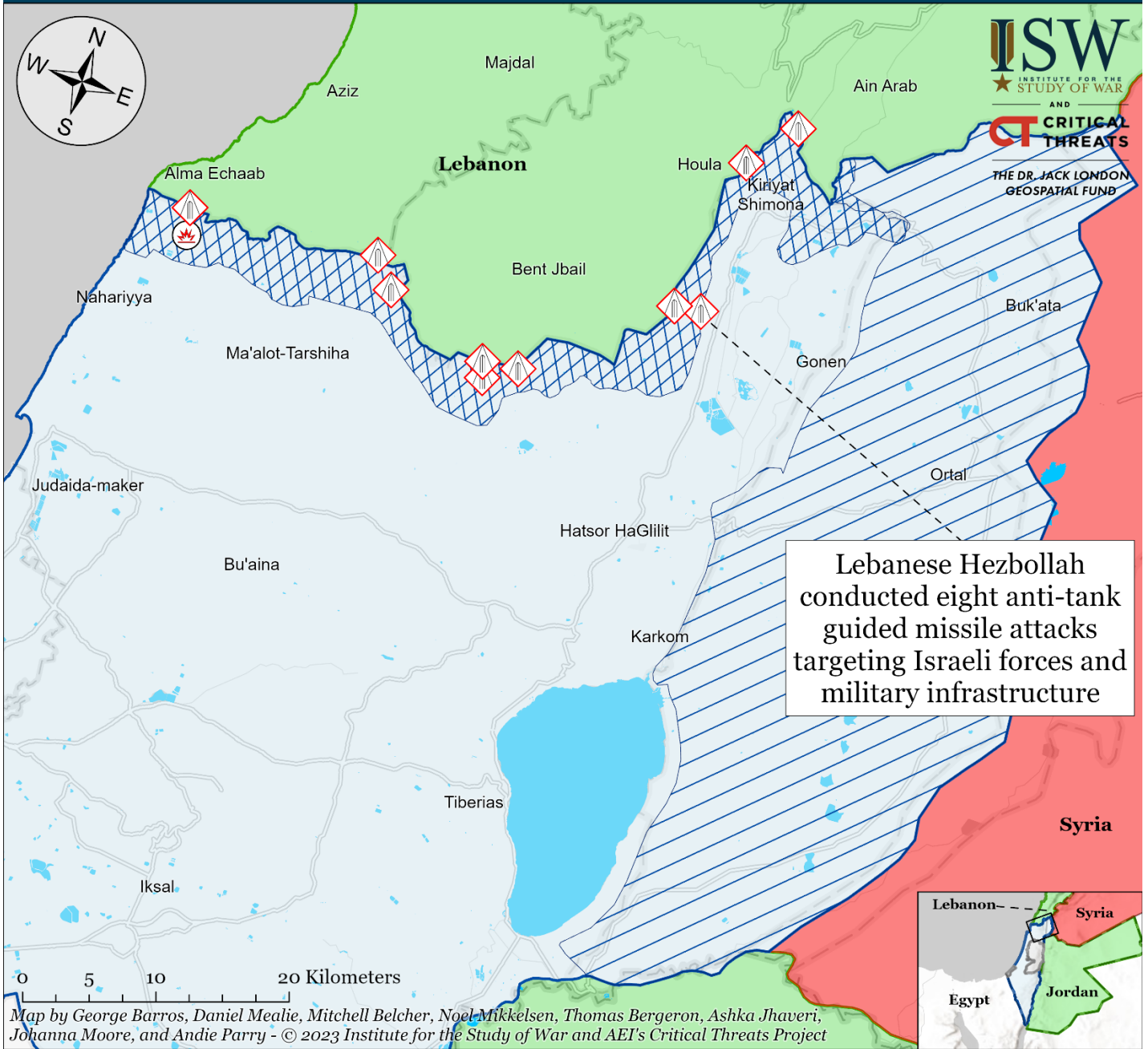
Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

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 fighters, including Lebanese Hezbollah (LH), conducted 11 cross-border attacks into northern Israel on November 16. LH conducted eight anti-tank guided missile attacks targeting Israeli forces and military infrastructure.^[45] Unspecified fighters separately conducted two anti-tank guided missile attacks and one rocket attack targeting Israeli forces and military infrastructure.^[46] The IDF fired artillery targeting LH and “terrorist” infrastructure in southern Lebanon in response to the attacks into northern Israel that day.^[47] LH said on November 16 that two more of its fighters had been killed in action, presumably in Israeli retaliation against LH.^[48]

Attacks into Northern Israel from Lebanon as of November 16, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



- Israel
- Israeli Evacuation Zone
- Golan Heights
- Rocket Attacks
- Anti-Tank Fire
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria

Iran and Axis of Resistance

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

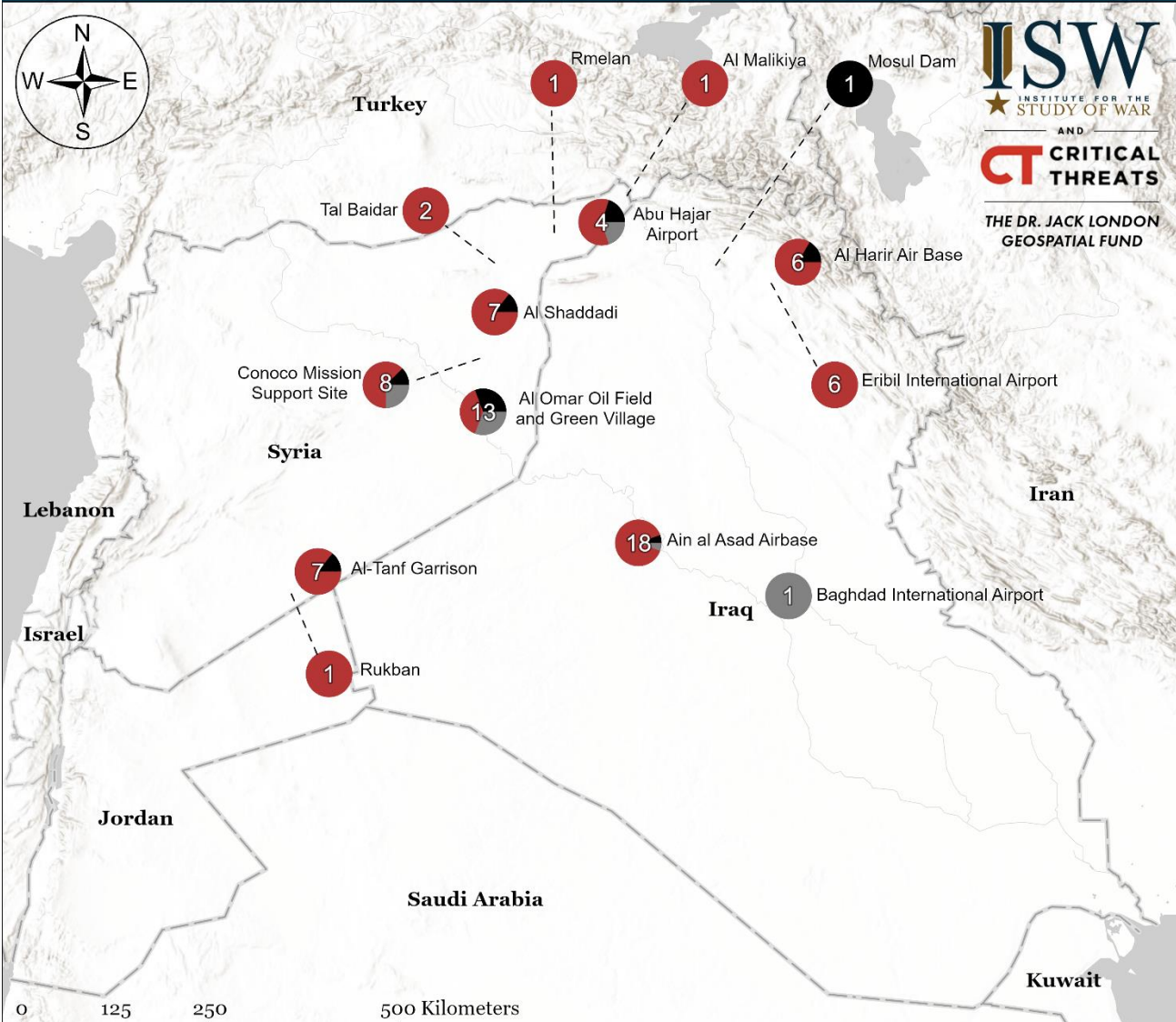
- Demonstrate the capability and willingness of Iran and the Axis of Resistance to escalate against the United States and Israel on multiple fronts
- Set conditions to fight a regional war on multiple fronts

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—did not claim any attacks on US forces in the Middle East on November 16. The group has attacked US forces in Iraq and Syria almost every day since October 18.

Unspecified Iranian-backed militants conducted two rocket attacks on a US base in eastern Syria on November 16, according to Axis of Resistance-affiliated and local media.^[49] Social media sources reported two separate attacks on US forces stationed at al Omar Oil Field. CTP-ISW cannot verify these reports at this time. Iranian-backed militants have claimed attacks targeting al Omar Oil Field five times since October 18.^[50] The United States said Iranian-backed militants attacked US forces at al Omar Oil Field twice on November 8.^[51]

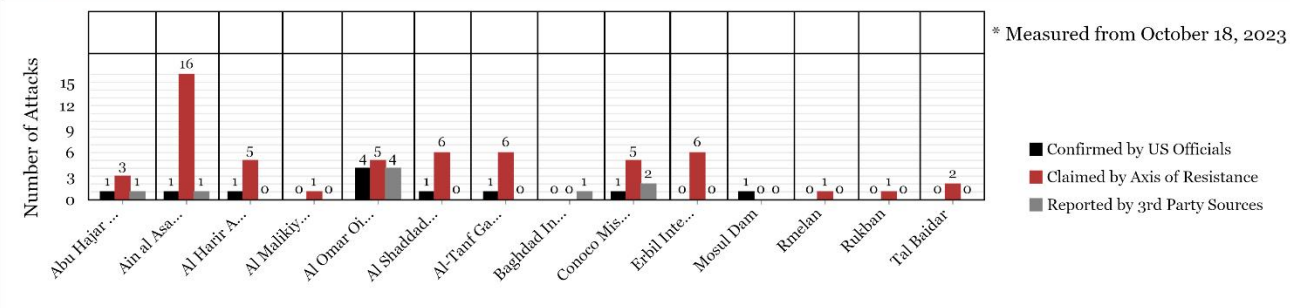
Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah (KH) issued a statement threatening the United States on November 16. KH said the United States' actions require deterrence and punishment and that the United States will receive the “harshest blows and slaps wherever Kataib Hezbollah’s hands reach.”^[52] The statement also praised the “steadfastness” of the Palestinian people and blamed the United States and other Western countries for Israeli military actions in the Gaza Strip. KH spokesperson Jafar al Hussein issued a similar threat to the United States on October 20 saying that attacks on US forces will continue and that the pace of attacks will increase.^[53] KH has consistently threatened attacks on US forces in the Middle East since the Israel-Hamas war began on October 7.^[54] KH is a member of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, which has attacked US forces in Iraq and Syria almost daily since October 18.

Attacks against US Bases in the Middle East as of November 16, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



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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 officials and state media refuted Western reports that Iran will not “directly” enter the Israel-Hamas war, likely to reassure other Axis of Resistance members of Iran’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.[55] Khamenei also pressured Haniyeh to silence Hamas members calling for Iran and LH to fully join the war against Israel.

- Iranian state media, including outlets affiliated with the IRGC, denied the Reuters claim. Ebrahim Raisi administration-run outlet IRNA conducted an interview with Hamas senior representative to Lebanon Osama Hamdan, who described Reuters’ claims as “pure lies and slander.”[56] IRGC-affiliated Tasnim News Agency similarly called the Reuters report “fake news.”[57]
- IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani sent a public letter to Hamas military leader Mohammed Deif, emphasizing Iranian support for Hamas and that Iran would do “whatever it must do in this historical battle.”[58] Iranian state media widely circulated the letter.[59] Iran has extensively coordinated with its proxies and partner militias in the Axis of Resistance since the Israel-Hamas war began. Iran has additionally facilitated the expansion of the war to Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria by directing and encouraging its proxy and partner militias in these countries to attack US and Israeli targets throughout the region. Khamenei’s statement that Iran will not “directly” enter the war and Ghaani’s vow to provide continued support to the Axis of Resistance are therefore not contradictory since Iran is *already* directly involved in the war through the Axis of Resistance.

Iran is exploiting the Western media framing that Iran is not already involved in the war, which is unintentionally obfuscating the role Iran is already playing. This framing ignores the fact that Iran has extensively armed, financed, and coordinated with the various members of the Axis of Resistance that are now attacking US and Israeli targets across the Middle East. Iran considers itself to be both part of the Axis of Resistance and its leader. Ghaani committing the continued support of the Axis of Resistance to Hamas implies continued Iranian support. CTP-ISW has furthermore recorded extensively how Iran has led and cooperated with the Axis of Resistance in recent weeks to threaten the United States and Israel and preserve Hamas.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Ali Bagheri Kani met with his Russian and Kazakh counterparts, Sergei Ryabkov and Alibek Bakayev, respectively, in Tehran on November 16.[60] Bagheri Kani discussed “regional and international developments” and nuclear negotiations with Ryabkov and economic, scientific, and cultural cooperation between Iran and Kazakhstan with Bakayev. Bagheri Kani also covered the Israel-Hamas war in his meeting with Bakayev, stating that all Muslim countries must pressure Israel to stop the war. Ryabkov and Bakayev separately met with Iranian Foreign Affairs Ministry Economic Diplomacy Deputy Mehdi Safari.[61] Bagheri Kani recently met with Ryabkov in Moscow on October 26.[62] Bagheri Kani was in Moscow at the same time as a senior Hamas delegation and met with Hamas’ International Relations Office head and Political Bureau member Musa Abu Marzouk on October 27.[63]

[1] https://irp.fas.org/doddir/dod/jp1_02.pdf

[2] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1717902393776484789/video/1>

- [3] https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-11-16-23/h_5183b8f60ecbbd9adba6a0cb77f8c277
- [4] <https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-11-16-23/index.html>
- [5] <https://twitter.com/ytirawi/status/1724921506650632268>;
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[30] <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/other/israel-drops-leaflets-on-parts-of-southern-gaza-suggesting-possible-expansion-of-offensive-against-hamas/ar-AA1k2AeD>

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[33] <https://t.me/qassam1brigades/473>

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[36] <https://t.me/QudsN/329676> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/329690> ; <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1725119614667948428>

[37] https://t.me/C_Military1/39549

[38] <https://t.me/QudsN/329922> ; <https://t.me/QudsN/330031>

[39] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1725119610523987979>

[40] https://t.me/mihwar_almuqawama/39715 ; <https://t.me/QudsN/329890> ; <https://www.dothimesofisrael.com/6-injured-1-critically-in-attack-by-3-gunmen-at-west-bank-checkpoint-near-jerusalem/>

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[46] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1725146706596049305> ; https://t.me/C_Military1/39584 ; https://twitter.com/dw_persian/status/1725046242151907502

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