



The Iron Swords – The war in the south of Israel Updated to 1 p.m., October 15, 2023

Overview¹

- ▶ **The southern sector:** IDF forces continued to operate, primarily carrying out aerial attacks, against terrorist targets throughout the Gaza Strip. Several squads, including anti-tank squads, were captured on the border. A number of operatives of Hamas' military-terrorist wing were killed in the attacks, some of them released from Israeli jails in the Gilad Shalit exchange deal (2011). Rockets attacks continued, most of them targeting the Israeli villages near the Gaza Strip border and Ashkelon. A rocket was also fired at the Haifa area.
- ▶ **The Gaza Strip:** Israel called on the residents of the northern Gaza Strip to evacuate their homes and move to the central and southern Gaza Strip. Hamas tried to prevent the evacuation. Egypt expressed concern about the entrance of Gazan refugees into Egyptian territory. Reports indicate the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is worsening. Aid sent to the Gaza Strip is waiting on the Egyptian side of the Rafah Crossing, which is currently closed. Hamas spokesmen were interviewed about the preparations for the invasion and continued to falsely claim the civilians were harmed "accidentally" and not by operatives of the military wing.
- ▶ **The northern sector:** In northern Israel several anti-tank missile and rocket attacks were reported from Lebanon and Syria. One Israeli was killed and several were injured. The IDF returned fire. As of now, tensions remain high. Hezbollah figures reiterated the equation of "aggression would be met with a response" adding that the organization could not be pressured into refraining from joining the combat.
- ▶ **Judea and Samaria:** Israeli security forces continued counterterrorism activities. The ministry of health in Ramallah reported 55 Palestinian deaths and approximately 1,200 wounded since the beginning of the war in the Gaza Strip. Hamas' call for solidarity demonstrations after the Friday prayer in Judea and Samaria, on Israel's border and in other

¹ Click <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en> to subscribe and receive the ITIC's daily updates as well as its other publications.

countries was answered. Demonstrations were held in Judea, Samaria and Jordan, but were contained and without exceptional events. The senior Palestinian Authority (PA) figures have been working in the international arena to stop the fighting and help the Gaza Strip.

► **Iran:** The Iranian foreign minister held a round of meetings in Syria, Lebanon and other Middle Eastern countries. For now, Iran is apparently not interested in turning the conflict in Gaza into a regional war, but Iran emphasized it had red lines and would be forced to respond if the IDF's operation in Gaza continued.

► **The Arab world:** Shi'ite militias in Syria and Iran expressed support for Hamas and a willingness to join the fighting. Global Jihad organizations also expressed support for Hamas.

The Combat Arena

IDF activity

► **Ground activity:** The IDF continues securing the towns and villages surrounding Gaza against the infiltration of terrorist from the Gaza Strip. IDF forces carried out local raids in the Gaza Strip to clean the area of terrorists, eliminating terrorist infrastructures and squads, including a group of Hamas terrorists who fired anti-tank missiles into Israeli territory. An al-Qaeda instruction booklet was found on the body of a terrorist who infiltrated Israel and was killed (IDF spokesman, October 12, 2023). During the activity, efforts were also made to locate information about the missing persons. The forces collected information which could help find them (IDF spokesman, October 13, 2023).



Al-Qaeda instruction booklet found on the terrorist's body (IDF spokesman's website, October 12, 2023)



Photos from a video documenting the attack on IDF forces east of Khan Yunis (Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades Telegram channel, October 14, 2023)

► **Aerial activity:** Massive air strikes on the Gaza Strip from the air continued, concentrated in and around Gaza City from where Hamas leaders operate. Extensive damage was done to central neighborhoods in the northern Gaza Strip where terrorist operatives congregated. In preparation for an extensive attack the IDF advised residents to evacuate their homes (see below). The Israeli Air Force aircraft also eliminated squads launching anti-tank missiles at the villages near the Gaza Strip. (IDF spokesman, October 14, 2023).

► According to the IDF spokesman, among the hundreds of targets attacked were houses of senior operatives which served as military headquarters and houses used by terrorist operatives, including the homes of nukhba operatives, high-rise buildings which housed military-terrorist infrastructures, the Hamas military-terrorist wing operations room which monitored the activities of IDF forces, tunnels, munitions warehouses; terrorist targets, nukhba operatives deployed throughout the Gaza Strip, rocket and mortar shell launchers immediately after they are fired at Israel to paralyze their activities, UAV launch sites located on rooftops houses and inside civilian houses.



Right: Fatal attack on the commander of the nukhba force in the south Khan Yunis battalion (IDF spokesman's website, October 15, 2023). Left: Attack on a building in the Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman's website, October 13, 2023)



Right: Fatal attack on the commander the aerial system in Gaza City. Left: Attack on nukhba deployment areas and operatives (IDF spokesman's website, October 14, 2023)



Right: Attack on the Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip (QudsN Twitter account, October 14, 2023). Left: Israeli Air Force attack in Rafah (QudsN Twitter account, October 13, 2023)

► **Naval activity:** Israeli Navy forces attacked terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip preventing attempts by terrorists to infiltrate Israeli territory by sea (IDF spokesman, October 14, 2023).

Rocket fire

► Meanwhile, rocket attacks continued at the rate of two hundred per day. Most of the attacks targeted the town and villages near the Gaza Strip and cities of Ashqelon and Sderot. Several rockets were fired towards the center of the country. One rocket was fired, exceptionally, to attack the area near Haifa in the north. Hamas' military-terrorist wing claimed responsibility for firing an Ayash 250 at the IDF's Northern Command (Hamas Telegram channel, October 13, 2023)

► As of October 14, 2023, **6,300 rockets had been launched at over thirty villages, towns and cities throughout Israel.**

► "A source in the resistance" [Palestinian terrorist organizations] stated that the fighters in the field were on high alert and operating according to plans prepared in advance for long-

term fighting. He claimed that so far they had used less than 10% of their rocket arsenal (al-Mayadeen, October 14, 2023).



**Launching rockets during the Israeli Air Force attack
(IDF Spokesman's website, October 13, 2023)**



Right: A house in Sderot set on fire by a rocket attack from the Gaza Strip (Shehab Twitter account, October 14, 2023). Left: A rocket hits a building in Ashqelon (QudsN Twitter account, October 13, 2023)

► The military-terrorist wings of Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) claimed responsibility for most of the rocket launches.



Photos from a Hamas military-terrorist wing video of a rocket launch. The Arabic on the right reads, "In response to the attack on the civilians [sic]; The next one will be bigger; do we have more?? Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades. Operation al-Aqsa Storm 13/10/2023" (Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades Telegram channel, October 13, 2023)

Israeli casualties

- So far, **more than 1,300 civilian and soldier deaths have been reported; 3,360 have been wounded, and there are approximately 120 civilians and soldiers being held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip.**
- **Musa Abu Marzouq, a member of Hamas' political bureau,** claimed in an interview that Hamas would be prepared to release women, children or elderly prisoners and citizens of foreign countries, if Israel stopped the military campaign. He claimed that they would not hold innocent people who had been captured. He also said Hamas might try to exchange Israeli soldiers for Palestinians held in Israeli prisons, but added that it was too early to talk about exchanging prisoners (The New Yorker, October 13, 2023).

The Gaza Strip

The evacuation of residents from the north of the Gaza Strip

- In preparation for expanding its operations in the Gaza Strip and in an attempt to minimize harm to non-combatants, the IDF called on the residents of the northern Gaza Strip to evacuate their homes and move to the central and southern Gaza Strip by the evening of October 14, 2023. The IDF spokesman said that after the evacuation, Hamas would bear responsibility for the welfare of anyone who remained in the northern Gaza Strip; about 600,00 residents have evacuated. The Hamas leadership tried to prevent them from going. The Hamas media information bureau in Gaza claimed the purpose of Israel's call was to confuse the Gazan population and damage internal cohesion, and asked the residents not to obey, claiming it was Israeli psychological warfare (al-Aqsa, October 13, 2023) The Hamas

ministry of the interior in the Gaza Strip called on the residents to stay in their homes, claiming Israel wanted to uproot the residents from their homes, as had happened in 1948 (ministry of the interior in Gaza Facebook page, October 13, 2023). UNRWA said it was moving its headquarters and operatives to the southern Gaza Strip (UNRWA Twitter account, October 13, 2023).

► Hamas erected roadblocks in the path of the evacuees. According to the IDF spokesman, the Hamas leadership is worried about the evacuation of the residents because **their departure will expose the organization's operatives and infrastructure to IDF attacks, as it will no longer be able to use them as human shields** (IDF spokesman, October 14, 2023).



Right: Blocking of the evacuation of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip (IDF Spokesman's website, October 14, 2023). Left: Residents evacuating towards the southern the Gaza Strip (Wafa, October 14, 2023)

► **Abu Obeida, spokesman for Hamas' military-terrorist wing**, said emigration was unthinkable with the exception of "return emigration" to Ashqelon, Jerusalem, Haifa, Jaffa and all of "Palestine." He claimed the purpose of Israel's psychological warfare was to create a false image of victory to show to the Israeli public (Abu Obeida's Telegram channel, October 13, 2023).

► After the director of al-Awda Hospital in the northern Gaza Strip announced they refused to evacuate (al-Jazeera, October 14, 2023), Hamas said that Israel's request to evacuate the hospitals, and the last of them, al-Awda Hospital in the northern Gaza Strip, "constituted a crime." Hamas also praised the refusal of the medical staffs to leave the hospitals, claiming Israel was determined to commit "war crimes and genocide" against the Palestinian people. Hamas called on the UN and international institutions to urgently intervene and stop "Israel's crimes" in the Gaza Strip (Hamas Telegram channel, October 14, 2023).

► The evacuation of the residents provoked anger in Egypt, which made it clear it did not want refugees from the Gaza Strip in its territory. "A senior figure in Egyptian security " said Egypt

had taken unprecedented measures to prevent a breach of the border, where and thousands of its security force operatives had been stationed. **Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi** said there was a significant threat that the Palestinian issue would no longer have top priority (AP, October 14, 2023). The Egyptian foreign ministry issued a statement warning of the IDF's "demand" and noted it was a serious violation of international humanitarian law which would expose millions of citizens to danger (Egyptian foreign ministry website, October 13, 2023)

► **Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan** supported Egypt's position. In a joint press conference with the Egyptian foreign minister, he said Turkey stood with Egypt in refusing to move the Palestinians out of the Gaza Strip (Reuters, October 14, 2023).

► Other countries, including Syria and Qatar, have expressed opposition to the transfer of Gazans. UN Secretary General António Guterres, and EU Foreign Minister Josep Burrell also addressed the issue and noted (separately) that the transfer of more than a million people to an area without food, water and proper housing, when the entire Gaza Strip was under siege was an impossible task and very dangerous (the Twitter accounts of the UN secretary general and the EU foreign minister, October 14, 2023).

The Rafah Crossing

► The Wall Street Journal reported that negotiations mediated by the United States were underway between Israel and Egypt to allow civilians, including those with American citizenship, to cross the Rafah crossing from Gaza to Egypt. Egypt informed the United States it had too many requests to evacuate American citizens, could give priority to a particular country and had security concerns because they could not screen those entering (The Wall Street Journal, October 15, 2023). "Informed sources" stated that the Egyptian authorities refused to allow the Rafah crossing to be used only for the exit of foreigners, adding that Egypt's position was that the crossing would be opened to foreigners on the condition that it would be possible to transfer humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip through it (al-Qahara, October 14, 2023).

Palestinian casualties

► According to a ministry of health in Gaza update at 8:00 a.m. on October 15, 2023, the number of casualties in the Gaza Strip since the beginning of the war was 2,329, dead and 9,042 wounded (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page, October 15, 2023). The ministry of health reported that medical teams in the Gaza Strip continued to work despite the load and

the difficult situation. It called on every resident with professional medical knowledge to come forward and volunteer. The ministry called on international organizations to bring medical equipment into the Strip because of the large number of casualties (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page, October 13, 2023).

► Hamas, through its media channels, continues to inflate the number of casualties in the Gaza Strip (Shehab Twitter account, October 14, 2023). At the same time, Hamas is apparently hiding the names and identities of senior terrorist operatives who were killed, such as:

- ◆ Murad Abu Murad, head of the aerial unit in Gaza City (IDF Telegram channel, October 14, 2023).
- ◆ Ali al-Qadhi, commander of the nukhba force. In 2005 he was detained following the abduction and murder of Israelis and freed as part of the Gilad Shalit exchange deal (IDF Telegram channel, October 14, 2023). According to a Hamas source who asked to remain anonymous, al-Qadhi comes from Ramallah and was deported to the Gaza Strip as part of the deal. He added that al-Qadhi was a field commander in the nukhba force (Ilaf website, October 14, 2023). According to the social media, al-Qadhi's wife and five children were killed, but his name was not mentioned (Facebook page of his relative Halima al-Qadhi, October 13, 2023; the Facebook page of his relative Edrees Hasan, October 13, 2023).
- ◆ Hamed al-Sinwar, brother of Yahya al-Sinwar. He was killed in the attack on his apartment in the Hamad Tower building in Khan Yunis (Twitter account of Ahmed Jamal, a QudsN correspondent in Gaza, October 12, 2023).
- ◆ Yusuf Abu Marzouq, brother of Musa Abu Marzouq, and several family members were killed in an attack in Rafah (Paldf Twitter account, October 12, 2023).
- ◆ Two brothers, Abd al-Masser al-Halisi and Tareq al-Halisi, and their families, were killed in an attack in Gaza City (PALDF Twitter account, October 12, 2023; @Freethemall6 Twitter account, October 12, 2023). The two, residents of east Jerusalem and operatives in the PIJ's military-terrorist wing, threw hand grenades at Givati Brigade recruits at their swearing-in ceremony at the Western Wall on October 15, 1986, and were sentenced to life imprisonment. They were released as part of the Gilad Shalit deal and deported to Gaza (The Palestinian Archive Twitter account, October 13, 2023).

◆ Abdallah Abu Sayf (QudsN, October 13, 2023). He was an Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades terrorist operative from Hebron who was detained in 2003 and sentenced to life imprisonment. He was released and deported to Gaza as part of the Gilad Shalit (masarnews website, October 9, 2023).

◆ Salem Dawid (Fahmi Canaan's Twitter account, October 10, 2023). He was a Hamas terrorist operative from Bethlehem and an operative in a squad that carried out the attack on the Kapit cafe on March 7, 2002 (Pesek Din website, February 13, 2008; Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs website, September 20, 2018).

The situation in the Gaza Strip

► **According to Mai al-Kayla, PA minister of health**, 15 hospitals were damaged, 28 staff members who worked in the medical sector were killed and Israel was threatening to evacuate hospitals. She called on the international community, the UN, legal, humanitarian and international organizations to provide urgent protection for the hospitals, medical treatment centers, ambulances, medical teams, patients and the wounded subjected to daily Israeli attacks (the ministry of health in Ramallah Telegram channel, October 14, 2023).

► The World Health Organization (WHO) strongly condemned Israel's order to evacuate 22 hospitals in the northern Gaza Strip, describing it as a "death sentence" for the sick and wounded. According to the organization, the evacuation would further worsen the humanitarian disaster. According to reports the health facilities in northern Gaza Strip continued to receive an influx of sick and wounded and were struggling to operate beyond their maximum capacity. Some patients were being treated in the corridors and streets adjacent to the hospitals due to the lack of hospital beds (UN website, October 14, 2023).

► The Hamas administration media information bureau reported that more than 1,695 buildings, high-rise and residential buildings had been completely destroyed, over 7,000 housing units had been completely destroyed, and over 69,000 housing units were partially or severely destroyed, of which 4,679 were no longer fit for habitation (Hamas media information bureau Facebook page, October 14, 2023).

► Hamas' al-Aqsa TV channel reported that the French satellite company, Eutelsat, responsible for the channel's broadcasts, had stopped its broadcasts. According to the announcement, the channel's broadcasts could still be watched on the network's Telegram channel and other platforms. The network emphasized that stopping the broadcasts was a

surrender to Israel, a blatant violation of international law and the right of the Palestinian people to make their voice heard (al-Aqsa, October 14, 2023).

Aid for Gaza

► According to reports, several organizations and countries have begun sending aid to Gaza, and more than a hundred humanitarian aid trucks were waiting in Egypt to enter the Gaza Strip through the Rafah Crossing (Twitter account of photojournalist Hassan Aslih, October 14, 2023). In the meantime, Egyptian security officials reported that the Rafah Crossing was closed and they had appealed to Israel to open it for the entry of humanitarian aid; they were waiting for an Israeli response (Ma'an, October 15, 2023).

◆ The director of the Palestinian Red Crescent in the northern Sinai Peninsula reported that a Jordanian military plane had landed in el-Arish carrying 12 tons of medical equipment for Gaza. The cargo was unloaded and stored in the Red Crescent warehouses in el-Arish (al-Ghad TV, al-Araby al-Jadeed, October 12 and 13, 2023).

◆ The head of the WHO announced a plane carrying medical equipment had landed at the el-Arish Airport and its cargo was ready to be deployed as soon as the humanitarian crossing opened (Reuters, October 14, 2023).

◆ **Mohammed Shi'a' al-Sudani, the prime minister of Iraq**, ordered humanitarian aid to be sent to the Gaza Strip in coordination with Egypt, including urgent medical and humanitarian equipment (Iraqi prime minister's office Twitter account, October 12, 2023).

◆ A senior figure in the Turkish defense ministry said Turkey was prepared to send humanitarian aid to the Palestinians. He said under the current circumstances delivery was very difficult, but the Turkish armed forces were ready to carry out the mission assigned to them (Reuters, October 13, 2023).



Trucks carrying humanitarian aid waiting to enter the Gaza Strip (Twitter account of photojournalist Hassan Aslih, October 14, 2023)

Hamas

► **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, sent a letter **UN Secretary General António Guterres**, calling on him to make Israel stop its "crimes" and respect international law (Hamas Telegram channel. October 14, 2023). Haniyeh spoke on the phone with **Hadi al-Amari, chairman of the Iraqi al-Fatah Alliance** and representative of the coordinating committee of Iraq's the pro-Iranian political parties. Al-Amari emphasized the Iraqi people's support for the Palestinian people and their "resistance," [anti-Israel terrorism] and praised the "achievements [sic] of the seventh of October." Haniyeh praised Iraq for its position (Hamas Telegram channel, October 12, 2023).

► Isma'il Haniyeh said in speech that the "resistance" [Palestinian terrorist organizations] were writing history with Operation al-Aqsa Storm, which marked the beginning of the end of the "occupation." He claimed that since Israel and its army were unable to confront them, they resorted to carrying out "massacres to erase the defeat experienced after Hamas' strategic attack." He claimed the Gazans were deeply rooted in their country and would never leave their homeland, not even to Egypt. Addressing Egypt, he said they had decided to stay in their country. He also falsely claimed Hamas had always emphasized that it did not attack civilians, and the narrative of the Israeli media was "misleading" (Shehab, October 14, 2023).

► **Abu Obeida, spokesman for Hamas' military-terrorist wing**, claimed Israel was committing extremely heinous crimes against "our innocent civilians." He emphasized that if Israel dared to enter the Gaza Strip by land they would "crush its army." He called for "resistance," for the Palestinian youth in Judea, Samaria and Israel to "set the earth on fire," and told the Palestinian prisoners that the "cards" [i.e., captives] they held would buy their freedom. According to Abu Obeida, they achieved much more in the operation than they thought they would and were aware that when the war ended, Israel's leadership would pay

a high price regarding its military and political future (Hamas Telegram channel, October 12, 2023).

► **Bassem Na'im, a senior Hamas figure**, said they condemned the West for providing Israel with military support so it could continue to kill the Palestinians, adding and that the American President's "hate speech" had been based on Israeli lies. He called for international measures to stop Israeli aggression and to open humanitarian crossings to provide aid to the residents of Gaza (Filastin al-A'an, October 13, 2023).

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)

► The PIJ said in a statement that the "brutal Zionist aggression" against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip continued, in addition to the "crimes and massacres committed against children and women." According to the PIJ, the purpose of the "crime" of attacking the Rafah Crossing was to increase the pressure on the Strip and turn it into a large prison and even a large cemetery (PIJ Telegram channel, October 14, 2023).

► **Ziyad al-Nakhalah, PIJ secretary general**, spoke on the phone with Ali Akbar Velayati, senior advisor the Iranian leader for international affairs. Velayati emphasized the support of Iran and the Iranian people for the Palestinian people, the Palestinian issue and the right of the Palestinian people to defend themselves and their rights. Al-Nakhalah informed Velayati about "the Zionist aggression of the Zionist government headed by neo-Nazis thirsty for the blood of children who are committing genocidal crimes" (PIJ Telegram channel, October 12, 2023).

Hamas combat measures

► Interviewed by The New Yorker, Musa Abu Marzouq, a member of Hamas' political bureau, said the Hamas military commanders had hidden the details and the timing of the attack even from the movement's "political leaders," who only received the news in the early morning hours of October 7, 2023. He claimed he was amazed by the "success" of the attack, after Hamas fighters had breached the border fence in twenty locations and invaded more than twenty villages. He claimed that while he was not aware of the final details, he and other Hamas political leaders approved the overall strategy of the attack. He was more vague regarding the question of timing when he claimed at one point that the military wing of Hamas decided on the attack a few hours before the breach of the security barrier. However, he also contradicted himself by stating it had not been spontaneous, but rather prepared a long a long time in advance by the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades (The New Yorker, October 13, 2023).

► Asked if the attack had achieved anything other than a devastating Israeli retaliation, Abu Marzouq claimed it was the first time the Palestinians had crossed the borders and fight in their "historic land." He said Israel used to wage war outside its borders, kill and imprison Palestinians. Now, he gloated, it was the other way around, and future generations of Israelis would know they could not continue to "occupy" the Palestinians or continue their wars forever. That, he boasted, was the greatest achievement. He admitted that the war would barely prevent the Arab countries from continuing to cultivate relations with Israel. At best, he admitted, it would only delay Saudi Arabia's latest moves in that direction (The New Yorker, October 13, 2023).

► Abu Obeida, referring to the planning of the attack in an interview, said they had been determined to hide their intentions and preparations. They developed a plan to deal with machine guns, anti-tank missiles and electronic jamming to make it difficult for Israel to observe the forces beyond the border fence. He said 3,000 fighters had been recruited to carry out the "maneuver" [invasion] and 1,500 more for "support and aid" operations (Hamas Telegram channel, October 12, 2023).

The battle for hearts and minds

► **Khaled Mashaal, the Hamas leader "abroad,"** claimed in an interview that the events had begun long before October 7, 2023, since the "occupation of their country." He claimed, falsely, that the Hamas military wing's "rules of engagement" dictated that children, women and the elderly were not to be killed. There might have been a number of "mistakes" in the fighting, he claimed falsely, but there was no intention to kill civilians. He also falsely claimed that if the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades had had accurate, advanced weapons, "mistakes" would not have occurred. On the other hand, Israel, with the support of the United States and the West, deliberately killed civilians and committed "genocide." He further stated that the military branch was the one that decided to conduct the operation and planned it alone (Hamas Telegram channel, October 14, 2023).

► **Saleh al-'Arouri, deputy head of Hamas' political bureau,** said 1,200 operatives of Hamas' military wing had entered the villages and "taken control" of the Gaza Division in a short time. He said the operation of the military branch was organized and its instructions were to attack the Gaza Division responsible for "crimes against our people," and they were surprised that the army had collapsed in less than three hours. He claimed Hamas was aware of [Israel's] [alleged] preparations to launch an attack against it after the holiday period, and therefore

preempted the Israeli attack. He also noted that when the Gaza Division collapsed, the residents of Gaza entered [Israeli territory] and "clashed" with the settlers, and therefore civilians were "injured." He falsely claimed the leadership's instructions to the military wing operatives had been clear, "Do not kill children and women," and claimed, again falsely, that the movement's military wing had not planned to harm or kill civilians. He sneered at the IDF, saying, again falsely, that the Israeli army had not even intervened to protect the civilians in the villages. He claimed Hamas could not harm civilians or prisoners, and it acted in accordance with the international laws of war [sic]. He pointed out that "residents of the Gaza Strip" had managed to enter and take civilians captive, but it had not been their intention and went against their principles.² He warned Israel against a ground attack in Gaza and said Israel knew it would be a disaster for its army because Hamas' defense plan was even stronger than its attack plan, and they had a plan for any action Israel might take. As to Israeli attacks in Gaza, he claimed that Israel had not damaged Hamas' military infrastructure, only civilian areas and residential neighborhoods. He emphasized once again that the discussion about prisoners would be held only after the fighting ended (al-Jazeera, October 12, 2023).

► Musa Abu Marzouq falsely claimed in an interview that Hamas fighters did not execute civilians or commit atrocities. He claimed such violence might have been carried out by "Palestinian militants and civilians" who entered after Hamas fighters entered through the breaches in the fence (The New Yorker, October 13, 2023).

Iran's involvement

► Contrary to the statements made by senior Hamas figures regarding Iran's non-involvement in the operation, Newsweek published an interview with **Ahmed Abd al-Hadi, the representative of Hamas in Lebanon**, who stated Iran had been involved in the attack against Israel "before, during and after." He admitted that Hamas worked in full cooperation with Iran and Hezbollah. Hamas issued a denial, claiming al-Hadi had been "surprised" by the statements attributed to him, "which were baseless" (Hamas Telegram channel, October 13, 2023).

² The opposite has been proved by numerous documents found in the possession of terrorists who were killed.

The Northern Arena

Lebanon

October 15, 2023

► In the morning, anti-tank missiles were fired at the village of Shtula, near the Lebanese border. A man was killed and three people were wounded. In response, the IDF attacked the sources of fire with artillery, after which more anti-tank missiles fired at an IDF post on the Lebanese border.

► Hezbollah announced that as part of its response to the killing of journalist Issam Abdallah and the wounding of other journalists, and the attack on a house in the Shebaa Farm, which killed two civilians, a Hezbollah squad had fired anti-tank missiles at an IDF center in the Shtula area (Hezbollah's combat information Telegram channel, October 15, 2023). In another announcement, Hezbollah announced its fighters had fired anti-tank missiles at an IDF Merkava tank at the al-Raheb post (Nurit post). According to Hezbollah, a precise hit on the tank was identified and the tank's crew members were killed or wounded (Hezbollah's combat information Telegram channel, October 15, 2023).

October 14, 2023

► According to reports, on the night of October 13, 2023, an infiltration of unidentified UAVs was detected near the northern Israeli city of Shfaram. In addition, an IDF drone was shot at and hit. In response, the IDF attacked Hezbollah targets in south Lebanon (IDF spokesman, October 14, 2023).

► In the morning, IDF surveillance identified a terrorist squad attempting to infiltrate Israeli territory from Lebanon. An aircraft attacked the squad and killed several terrorists (IDF spokesman, October 14, 2023). Hamas' military-terrorist wing said it was a squad of nukhba forces whose operatives blew up a section of Lebanon-Israel border fence, damaged surveillance devices and penetrated Israeli territory near the village of Margalioth. Hamas claimed the IDF force had suffered fatalities. During the exchange of fire, IDF aircraft carried out an airstrike and killed the squad's three operatives (Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades' Telegram channel, October 15, 2023).

► At 4:50 p.m., about 30 mortar shells were fired at Israeli territory in the Mount Dov area, some of which landed in Israeli territory. In response, the IDF attacked the sources of the fire (IDF

spokesman, October 14, 2023). Hezbollah claimed responsibility for the attack. According to the announcement, the organization's operatives attacked several Israeli posts in the Shebaa Farms area with missiles and mortar shells (Hezbollah's combat information Telegram channel). Al-Jazeera reported that two Lebanese civilians were killed in the Israeli attack that hit a house in Shebaa (al-Jazeera, October 14, 2023).

► At the time of the attacks, a terrorist squad suspected of planning to fire an anti-tank missile at Israel was identified. An aircraft attacked the squad (IDF spokesman, October 14, 2023).

October 13, 2023

► At around 5:00 p.m., there was an explosion in the border fence in Hanita. The wall sustained minor damage. After infiltration into the village had been ruled out, IDF forces fired artillery at Lebanon. Hezbollah issued an announcement stating that in response to the Israeli aggression against several towns in south Lebanon, Hezbollah operatives attacked several Israeli posts (Hezbollah's combat information Telegram channel, October 13, 2023).

► In response, an IDF aircraft attacked Hezbollah targets in Lebanon. The Lebanese army announced IDF forces had attacked a Lebanese army guard post, putting it out of commission, and there had been no casualties (Lebanese News Agency, October 13, 2023).

► In another statement, the Lebanese army said a missile had been fired from Israel which hit a civilian car belonging to a team of journalists, killing photojournalist Issam Abdallah and wounding five others. It was also noted that Israel had attacked a number of communities in south Lebanon (al-Nashra, October 14, 2023). **UNIFIL said that at this stage it could not say with certainty how the group of journalists was hit. It added that if the situation continued to escalate more tragedies were likely to occur. The organization called on all parties to practice restraint and refrain from firing (UNIFIL Twitter account, October 14, 2023).** The killing of the journalist and the wounding of other journalists led to angry reactions:

- ◆ **Najib Mikati, prime minister of the Lebanese interim government**, said it was a new mark of shame for the "Israeli enemy," which continued its aggression against Lebanese territory (NAA, October 14, 2023).

- ◆ The Lebanese foreign ministry instructed the Lebanese representatives to the UN to submit a complaint to the UN Security Council. He said the attack was a crime against freedom of opinion, the press, human rights and international law because it was an

attack on unarmed journalists who were victims in "their attempt to present the truth" (Lebanese Foreign Ministry website, October 14, 2023).

◆ **Hezbollah issued an announcement condemning the "heinous crime" and saying that any harm to the security of the Lebanese people and its land would not go without an appropriate response and punishment (al-Ahed, October 13, 2023).**

◆ Hamas condemned the Israeli attack in south Lebanon that caused the journalist's death, claiming it was "a despicable war crime, part of a series of crimes that the occupation has already committed against the press" (Hamas Telegram channel, October 14, 2023).



Attack on Hezbollah infrastructure (IDF spokesman's website, October 14, 2023)

Reactions to the events

► **Hassan Fadlallah, a member of the Hezbollah faction in the Lebanese parliament,** said the equation they had established, according to which any aggression would be met with a response, still existed. He also noted that how this equation is applied on the ground "depends on the resistance and its leadership." He stressed that any harm to civilians would not go without a price. Regarding Operation al-Aqsa Storm, he said they had the vision and plans in all areas and would not provide Israel with information about their activities (al-Mayadeen, October 14, 2023).

► In a speech given by **Hezbollah deputy secretary-general Na'im Qassem** at a rally in support of the Palestinian people held in Beirut in al-Dahiya al-Janoubia, he stressed that Hezbollah was fully aware of its obligations and fully prepared. According to him, Hezbollah was constantly monitoring developments, and the behind-the-scenes talks between international elements designed to ensure that Hezbollah did not intervene in the fighting did not affect the organization; they monitored Israel's movements and when the time came to act, they would (al-Mayadeen, October 13, 2023).

► **Ihsan Ataya, a member of the PIJ's political bureau and the organization's representative in Lebanon**, referred to the PIJ's squad that infiltrated from Lebanese territory on October 9, 2023, saying the operation was part of the "unity of the arenas and fronts," and carried two messages: one was that the new Palestinian generation was determined to return to its land even if it paid with its life to liberate it. The second was that the Palestinian weapons were not intended for conflicts, or for threatening the safety of civilians in Lebanon or the stability of the refugee camps, but rather the weapons had a role and the goal of "liberation and return." He stressed that the PIJ's military operations in Lebanon would take place inside Israeli territory and would not drag Lebanon or involve it in a campaign or front by a Palestinian decision, and they would not allow Israel a justification to launch aggression (Kuwaiti al-Rai, October 14, 2023).

► **Ali Baraka, head of Hamas' foreign affairs department**, said Hamas' activities in Lebanon were in response to Muhammad Deif's call to prevent Israel from isolating the Gaza Strip. He said that if Israel tried to carry out a ground operation in the Gaza Strip, the campaign would expand even further because the allies of the "resistance" would not leave it an easy target for Israel and the American government. He also mentioned the existence of a joint operations room for the "resistance" forces, which has been in operation since 2021, but did not specify its location (aljazeera.net, October 12, 2023).

Syria

► Late in the evening of October 14, 2023, two launches were identified from Syrian territory into Israeli territory; they fell in an open area. The IDF attacked the source of the fire with artillery (IDF spokesman, October 14, 2023).

► At 23:35, an airstrike was carried out west of Latakia, targeting Aleppo International Airport. The airport was reportedly damaged and put out of commission (Al-Ekhbariya, October 15, 2023).

► Syria's foreign ministry called on the United States and Western countries to prevent Israel from sending 2.3 million Palestinians from the Gaza Strip to the Sinai Peninsula because if that happened, it would be a repeat of what happened in 1948 [i.e., what Palestinians call the nakba] (SANA, October 14, 2023).

Support of the Fatemiyoun militia

► The Iranian-backed Shi'ite-Afghan Fatemiyoun militia, operating in Syria, issued an announcement praising Operation al-Aqsa Storm, expressing its support for the Palestinians

and noting that its fighters were prepared and ready to join the campaign. It also noted that they had been waiting for years for the beginning of the "final battle to liberate Jerusalem" (Fatemiyoun Telegram channel, October 13, 2023).

Judea, Samaria, and the Palestinian Authority

Events

- ▶ The Israeli security forces continued their counterterrorism activities in Judea and Samaria. Over 50 terrorist operatives were detained. More than 30 of them were Hamas operatives, including **Aziz Dweik, chairman of the Palestinian Legislative Council, and Hatem Qafisha, senior Hamas figure from Hebron** (IDF spokesman, October 15, 2023).
- ▶ The PA ministry of health reported that 55 Palestinians had been killed in Judea and Samaria and about 1,200 wounded since the beginning of the war in the Gaza Strip (ministry of health in Ramallah Facebook page, October 15, 2023).
- ▶ According to the ministry of health in Ramallah, since October 12, 2023, 24 Palestinians had been killed in Judea, Samaria and east Jerusalem. Of them, 16 were killed in riots and attempts to carry out terrorist attacks as part of the "al-Aqsa Storm Friday day of rage."
- ▶ An IDF reserve officer was killed by IDF gunfire near the village of Immatin (east of Qalqilya). Initial investigations indicate that he was accidentally shot by IDF soldiers engaged in operational activity at the site (IDF spokesman's Twitter account, October 14, 2023).
- ▶ On its Telegram page, Hamas posted a call to all residents throughout Judea and Samaria to establish popular defense committees in all regional locations to repel attacks by Israelis who threatened to escalate the situation and attack homes and property. The movement stressed that "it is the duty of all Palestinians to stand up and defend their homes and take an active part in the battle of al-Aqsa Storm" (al-Aqsa TV, October 14, 2023).

Palestinian Authority

- ▶ Meeting in Amman with Jordan's King Abdullah II, Mahmoud Abbas related to the abductees held by Hamas and stressed the need for political action "to end the occupation and achieve peace." He called for the release of civilians, prisoners and detainees on both sides, adding that settler activity against the Palestinians and the "extremist incursions into al-Aqsa mosque," which were causing an escalation in the situation, had to be stopped (Wafa, October 12, 2023).

► American Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Mahmoud Abbas in Amman. A day later, Mahmoud Abbas spoke by phone with American President Joe Biden. Mahmoud Abbas stressed the need to stop "Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people," open humanitarian corridors and supply water and electricity to the Gaza Strip, and stop settler violence in Judea, Samaria and the holy sites in Jerusalem (Wafa, October 13 and 14, 2023).



Right: Mahmoud Abbas meets with King Abdullah of Jordan (Wafa, October 12, 2023). Left: Mahmoud Abbas meets with Secretary of State Blinken (Wafa, October 13, 2023)

► **PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh** said their first priority was to stop Israel's attacks in the Gaza Strip. He called on the UN to act immediately and for the Red Cross to renew the supply of water and electricity from Israel to the Gaza Strip. Shtayyeh warned that an Israeli ground operation would have catastrophic consequences (Facebook page of Muhammad Shtayyeh, October 13, 2023).

► **Riyadh Mansour, PA representative to the UN**, sent the same communiqué to the UN secretary-general, the president of the General Assembly and the president of the Security Council, saying that the lives of all Palestinians were in danger due to Israel's ongoing aggression against Palestinian civilians, about half of whom were children. Mansour called for immediate action (Wafa, October 13, 2023).

Judea and Samaria

► Following Hamas' calls to encourage Palestinians in Judea and Samaria and Israeli Arabs and Palestinians on Israel's borders and around the world to demonstrate and escalate their activities and turn Friday, October 13, 2023, into a "day of rage," a series of events were recorded throughout Judea and Samaria and the Arab world.

► In Judea and Samaria, thousands of Palestinians participated in mass marches after Friday prayers. Marches were held in Jenin, al-Bireh, Ramallah, Qalqilya, Nablus, Tulkarm and Hebron. They left the city centers for confrontation points and IDF checkpoints. The

participants waved Hamas flags, chanted "Allahu Akbar" and slogans expressing their support for the Gaza Strip, Hamas and the resistance. As part of the "day of rage," shots were fired at the communities of Dotan and Merav, as well as at the Salem checkpoint in the Jenin sector (Palinfo, October 13, 2023; AFP, October 13, 2023; Ultra Palestine website, October 13, 2023). The Jenin Battalion of the Jerusalem Brigades claimed responsibility for the shooting attacks (Jenin Battalion's Telegram channel, October 13, 2023).



Right: A march in Nablus (QudsN Twitter account, October 13, 2023). Left: A march in Ramallah (QudsN Twitter account, October 13, 2023)

Iran

- ▶ On October 12, 2023, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian arrived in Beirut. He said at a press conference that the Islamic nations and governments could not tolerate the continuation of Israeli "war crimes" and that "the continuation of the crimes against the Palestinians" would receive a response from the "axis of resistance" [Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, the Palestinian terrorist organizations and the Houthis in Yemen] (al-Manar, October 12, 2023). While in Lebanon, Abdollahian met with Lebanese interim Prime Minister Najib Mikati; Foreign Minister Abdullah Bou Habib; Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri; and Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah. Abdollahian told Mikati that if "Israel's crimes" continued, the "resistance" would have to use additional means. Abdollahian and Nasrallah discussed "positions to be taken in light of the historical events and dangerous developments" (Tasnim, October 13, 2023).
- ▶ In addition, the Iranian foreign minister met with representatives of the Palestinian organizations, headed by Ziyad al-Nakhalah, PIJ secretary general, and Saleh al-'Arouri, deputy head of Hamas' political bureau . Abdollahian said sources in the West admitted that Operation al-Aqsa Storm proved that Palestine was alive and that, contrary to some assessments, normalization with the "Zionist regime" would not end the Palestinian issue. He

added that Iran was continuing its diplomatic efforts to end Israel's "war crimes" in the Gaza Strip (Fars, October 13, 2023).

► At the end of his visit to Lebanon, Abdollahian continued to Damascus and met with Syrian President Bashar Assad and Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal al-Mekdad to discuss the latest developments in the Palestinian arena. Abdollahian and al-Mekdad held a joint press conference, where Abdollahian claimed Israel was unable to cope with the "resistance" and therefore bombed and killed civilians, women and children, and deprived the Gaza Strip of water and electricity (al-Manar, October 13, 2023). Abdollahian returned to Lebanon from Syria and held a press conference where he said that if the scope of the war expanded, the "resistance" would decide how to act. He said the "resistance" had the means to stop the Israeli aggression and Iran fully supported the Palestinian people's "resistance" to Israel's actions. Abdollahian also said there was a possibility of opening new fronts according to the circumstances, stressing that the leaders of the "resistance" were optimally coordinated and prepared for any scenario and had their fingers on the trigger. He said Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah had always played a prominent role in achieving "security" for Lebanon and the region (al-Mayadeen, October 14, 2023). At the end of his visit, Abdollahian met in Beirut with Tor Wennesland, special UN envoy to the Middle East peace process, and told him that the opportunity for political action existed only today and that tomorrow would be too late. He added that if the UN wanted to do something, it had to stop Israel's attacks immediately (IRNA, October 14, 2023).

► **Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei**, meeting in Tehran with Nigerian Shi'ite leader Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaki, said that what was happening in Palestine was one of the expressions of Islam's power. He praised the "unimaginable power of Islam in Palestine" and declared that, with Allah's help, the trend that began in Palestine would continue and lead to total victory for the Palestinians. Khamenei also said that the duty of the entire Muslim world was to help the Palestinian people (Mehr, October 14, 2023).

► **IRGC Commander Hossein Salami**, speaking at marches held in Tehran in support of the Palestinians, said that Operation al-Aqsa Storm was the product of accumulated hatred on the part of a people uprooted from its land by oppressors. He called the Hamas operation "the greatest defeat in the history of the existence of the fake Zionist regime since 1948 and the greatest victory for the Palestinian movement" (ILNA, October 13, 2023).

► Ayatollah Mohammad Mohammadi Golpayegani, Iranian Supreme Leader's bureau chief, attacked Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a speech during a religious ceremony, saying, "The humiliated prime minister of the Zionist regime said that the head of the snake was in Iran; It is not the head of the snake but the rod of Moses, and it will swallow all the snakes and destroy them." He praised Hamas and the "young Palestinians" and said the operation they carried out was unprecedented in the history of the "Zionist regime" (Tasnim, October 12, 2023).

Arab World

Jordan

► **Jordan's King Abdullah II** went on a tour of Europe to mobilize an international position to stop the fighting. The visit will reportedly deal with the deteriorating situation in the Gaza Strip and the need to provide humanitarian aid to the Palestinians. He is expected to meet with the British prime minister, the Italian prime minister, the president and chancellor of Germany, and the president of France (Petra News Agency, October 15, 2023).

► The Jordanian foreign ministry issued a statement warning of a humanitarian disaster in the Gaza Strip. Foreign minister al-Safadi stressed that the international community had to treat the war in the Gaza Strip according to a uniform criterion: condemn the killing of Palestinian residents as it condemned the killing of Israeli civilians since civilian victims are victims regardless of identity or nationality (Jordanian foreign ministry website, October 14, 2023)

► The Jordanian ministry of the interior announced a "ban on gathering and demonstrating in the Jordan Valley and on the border with Israel, out of concern for the safety of civilians." The ministry made it clear that the Jordanian security forces would take all measures to ensure this prohibition (al-Mamlaka Network, October 12, 2023). Thousands of Jordanians participated in marches held in most of Jordan's governorates. They chanted slogans in favor of the "resistance" in Gaza and demanded that the siege on the Gaza Strip be lifted and the "Israeli aggression" be stopped. Many reached the border area, where the Jordanian security forces dispersed them (Amman, October 13, 2023).

Egypt

► Al-Azhar University held demonstrations in solidarity with the residents of the Gaza Strip. The demonstrations included slogans: "In spirit and fire we will redeem you, al-Aqsa," and "Khaybar, Khaybar, Jews, Muhammad's army will return" (al-Arabiya, October 13, 2023). It

should be noted that prior to the events, it was reported that Egypt had taken unprecedented steps to prevent a breach of the border with the Gaza Strip and that thousands of members of the security forces were deployed near the border (AP, October 13, 2023).

► **Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi** called on "all sides to act sensibly on the Palestinian issue and commit to exercise restraint." He stressed that "civilians, babies and women must be removed from the circle of revenge," calling for the return to the path of negotiations. He added that Egypt was prepared to use all its capabilities and efforts to mediate, in coordination with all regional and international parties operating unconditionally (**al-Youm al-Sabaa**, October 12, 2023).



**Demonstration at al-Azhar University in solidarity with Hamas
(al-Arabiya, October 13, 2023)**

Saudi Arabia

► The Saudi Arabian foreign ministry issued a condemnation of the attacks against Palestinian civilians. It argued that the siege had to be lifted, international law had to be upheld, and a peace process had to be promoted. It was also reported that Saudi Arabia called on the international community to provide medical needs for the residents of the Gaza Strip, saying that denying their basic needs was a violation of international law and would exacerbate the crisis (Saudi Arabian foreign ministry Twitter account, October 13, 2023).

Iraq

► A spokesman for the Sayyid al-Shuhada Brigades, an Iraqi pro-Iranian militia, said the militia was ready to enter the war in the Gaza Strip and that it was not just media statements. He said the participation of the militia in the war depended on two factors, the needs of the Palestinian "resistance" and the United States' joining in the fighting (Baghdad al-Youm, October 14, 2023).

► According to "informed Iraqi sources," several commanders of the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq traveled to military sites in Lebanon and Syria several times to tour the border sites and strengthen coordination. According to the report, the Iranians sent messages to the Iraqi organizations about the situation in Gaza, stating that the expansion of the war could lead to their direct intervention. "Iraqi sources" reported that "the decision to wait is still valid, but the Iraqi organizations are waiting for Iranian orders that have not yet arrived, and they will not act without them (al-Sharq al-Awsat , October 15, 2023).

Yemen

► **Mahdi al-Mashat, chairman of the Houthi Supreme Political Council**, spoke with Ziyad al-Nakhalah, PIJ secretary general, and expressed Yemen's support for the Palestinians. Al-Nakhalah thanked him for his support and said they trusted the Yemeni people to support them (Saba News Agency, October 13, 2023).

Turkey

► The Turkish parliament condemned the Israeli attacks against the Gaza Strip and called for them to end. The parliament demanded that the international community, especially the UN Security Council, guide the parties to a just solution based on the two-state solution (al-Andalou News, October 12, 2023).

Western countries

France

► **French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna** announced that at least 15 French citizens had been killed in Hamas' terrorist attack against Israel. She said other French citizens were missing, some of whom may have been abducted (Ynet, October 13, 2023).

UN Institutions

► **Karim Khan, prosecutor general at the International Criminal Court** (ICC) in The Hague, said the court would be able to hear Hamas' war crimes against Israel (Reuters, October 13, 2023). The United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) announced that it would examine cases of war crimes related to the war in Gaza and the Israeli villages near the border, noting that it was collecting information on the subject (ohchr.org, October 13, 2023).

Global Jihad

ISIS calls on Muslims to help the Gaza Strip

► The editorial of ISIS's al-Nabā' weekly, entitled "Assistance to Muslims," called on Muslims to help in the fighting and with money and propaganda for the Gaza Strip, without explicitly mentioning the word Gaza (Telegram, October 12, 2023).



The article "Assistance to Muslims" (Telegram, October 12, 2023)

Al-Shabaab issues a statement in support of Hamas

► The media wing of the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Shabaab, operating mainly in Somalia and the Horn of Africa, issued an announcement praising Hamas' attack on Israel, calling it a war of "jihad." The announcement called on the Palestinians to engage in jihad, be patient and internalize that they were on the "front line" in the struggle for Jerusalem. At the end of the announcement read, "We are fighting in Somalia, but our eyes are on Jerusalem" (Shahada News Agency, October 11, 2023).