



The Iron Swords – The war in the south of Israel Updated to 1 p.m., October 16, 2023

Overview¹

- ▶ **The southern sector:** Israeli Air Force attacks on Gaza City continued after at least some of the residents of the northern Gaza Strip had responded to the IDF's calls to evacuate; during the past day there were more than 250 air strikes. The Palestinians reported the night of October 15, 2023, had been the worst since the outbreak of the war. The IDF displayed huge amounts of terrorist weapons and equipment which showed Hamas' intention to take over large sections of southern Israel and remain in the territory for an extended period of time.
- ▶ **The Gaza Strip:** The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is worsening. As of 1 p.m. on October 16, calls for a ceasefire to deliver supplies to the residents and open the Rafah Crossing had not been answered.
- ▶ So far, **more than 1,300 Israeli civilian and soldier deaths have been reported. The number of the wounded stands at 3,526; Hamas is holding 199 abductees, civilians and soldiers, in the Gaza Strip.**
- ▶ **The northern sector:** Tensions continued mounting in northern Israel. During the past day Hezbollah fired anti-tank missiles at IDF forces, killing an IDF soldier. A rocket barrage was launched at the settlements of the Western Galilee, for which Hamas' military-terrorist wing claimed responsibility. The IDF responded with air strikes, artillery fire and tank fire.
- ▶ **Judea and Samaria:** Israeli security forces detained several dozen Palestinians suspected of terrorist activities. Mahmoud Abbas' feeble condemnation of Hamas' barbaric attack on the Israeli villages near the Gaza Strip was deleted shortly after it was issued.
- ▶ **Iran:** Iran continues public support for the Palestinians and diplomatic activity to stop the fighting and does not rule out intervention in the future if conditions change.

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

► **The Arab world:** Arab countries have been holding meetings and contacts with various parties for a ceasefire and the transfer of aid to the residents of the Gaza Strip. Al-Qaeda called on Muslims to support Hamas, participate in the fighting and attack Israelis and United States assets.

► **The United States:** President Joe Biden said Hamas had to be eliminated but that occupying the Gaza Strip would be a mistake. He also sent an unequivocal message to Iran and Hezbollah not to enter the war.

The Combat Arena

IDF activity

► **Ground activity:** Activities continue to secure the Israeli cities, towns and villages surrounding and near the Gaza Strip to prevent terrorist squads from infiltrating.

► **Aerial activity:** During the past day the IDF attacked approximately 250 military-terrorist targets, most of them inside Gaza City, where they are highly concentrated and for the most part underground. The IDF destroyed dozens of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) military-terrorist headquarters, observation posts and rocket launching positions, killing several senior terrorist operatives, including the commander of the southern district of Hamas' "national security."

► According to Palestinian media reports from Gaza, the night of October 15, 2023 was the most difficult since the beginning of the war because of the intensity of the attacks, which continued throughout the night without a break (QudsN Twitter account, October 16, 2023).



Israeli Air Force strikes on October 15 (IDF spokesman's website, October 15, 2023)



The Israeli Air Force attacks Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip (IDF website, October 15, 2023)



Israeli Air Force strikes in Gaza City (QudsN Twitter account, October 15, 2023)

Rocket Launches

▶ Meanwhile, the terrorist organizations continued firing rockets, although during the past day there was a noticeable decrease in the frequency and quantity of the barrages. Most of the rockets were fired at Ashqelon and the villages around Gaza, the rest at central Israel. A house in Ashqelon was damaged by a direct hit. There were no casualties. On the morning of October 16, 2023, rocket fire resumed after a hiatus of several hours. Barrages targeted the villages near the Gaza Strip and the cities of Ashdod and Modi'in.



A direct rocket hit on a house in Sderot (Shehab Twitter account, October 15, 2023)

Israel's wounded and abducted

So far, **more than 1,300 civilian and soldier deaths and 3,526 wounded have been reported, and the IDF told the families of 199 abductees, civilians and soldiers, that they were being held in the Gaza Strip.**

► **Ibrahim al-Amin, known to be close to close to Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah secretary general,** claimed a draft agreement for the release of the captives had been presented to Qatar. According to the agreement, all the civilian captives in the Gaza Strip, including the American citizens, would be released and foreigners would be permitted to leave in return for the delivery of medical aid and food. He also noted that as part of the agreement, Hamas requested a list of the names of people who, according to the United States and European countries, were among the captives in the Gaza Strip, and assurances that they were indeed civilians and not soldiers. Hamas also claimed it was not holding all the captives because they had been distributed among several organizations and military groups (al-Akhbar, October 16, 2023).

Ceasefire declaration

► On the morning of October 16, 2023, Reuters reported from "Egyptian security sources" that the United States, Israel and Egypt had agreed on a ceasefire in the southern Gaza Strip from 9:00 a.m., during which the Rafah Crossing would be open for the delivery of humanitarian aid (Reuters, October 16, 2023). In addition, Egypt will allow foreign citizens to leave the Gaza Strip, including local residents who hold foreign passports (Ma'ariv, October 16, 2023). Following the announcement, crowds of people reportedly arrived at the Rafah Crossing (al-Arabiya, October 16, 2023) So far Israel has not announced a ceasefire, the Crossings remain closed and IDF forces continue fighting (update from the IDF spokesman, October 16, 2023).

► **Salama Maaruf, head of the Hamas "government" media information office in the Gaza Strip,** reported that no message had yet been received from the Egyptians about opening the Rafah Crossing and that everything reported about the issue "is aimed at the Israeli media" (al-Ghad, October 16, 2023). **Sameh Shukri, the Egyptian foreign minister,** reported that as of 1:00 p.m. no agreement had been reached for opening the Rafah Crossing. He added they were working with all parties to open it as soon as possible (al-Ghad TV, October 16, 2023).

► **Izzat al-Rishq, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, said rumors about a ceasefire of a few hours or opening the Rafah Crossing were not true. He asked the media to rely only on the official Hamas sources (Hamas Telegram channel, October 16, 2023).



Right: Trucks carrying humanitarian assistance wait in El Arish for the Rafah Crossing to open. Left: Palestinians wait on the Egyptian side of the Rafah Crossing (al-Ghad TV, October 16, 2023)

Captured equipment and weapons

► The IDF displayed Hamas materiel taken from Hamas terrorists on Israeli territory, including thousands of weapons of various types, mobile devices, communication devices and cameras, as well as documents and certificates. Among the documents were detailed attack orders for the villages surrounding Gaza, testifying that the attack specifically and unequivocally targeted both civilians and soldiers. The material contained details of the forces that took part in the terrorist attack, coordination operations, the stages of the attack and the code words. It also included instructions for dealing with and holding hostages. A detailed plan of the terrorist attack on Kibbutz Alumim was found on the body of a Hamas terrorist (IDF spokesman, October 15, 2023).

► The quantity of weapons found in the area was enormous. There were thousands of assault rifles and ammunition magazines, bombs and anti-tank missile launchers, RPG launchers, thermobaric weapons² designed to ignite fires, various types of IEDs, including anti-personnel IEDs, anti-tank IEDs, mines, limpet mines, detonators and hand grenades. Communications equipment and night vision equipment were also captured. A considerable part of the combat equipment was produced locally in workshops throughout the Gaza Strip;

² A thermobaric weapon, also called an aerosol bomb, or a vacuum bomb, is a type of explosive munitions that work by dispersing an aerosol cloud of gas, liquid or powdered explosive. Thermobaric weapons are almost 100% fuel and as a result are significantly more energetic than conventional explosives of equal weight (Wikipedia).

some of it was smuggled into the Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, October 15, 2023). The quantities of weapons show Hamas' plans to fight in Israeli territory for several weeks.



Some of the weapons seized (IDF spokesman, October 15, 2023)

The Gaza Strip

Evacuating residents from the northern Gaza Strip

▶ Israel continued to encourage the residents of the northern Gaza Strip to evacuate to the central and southern Gaza Strip. Hamas continued preventing them from leaving and its operatives erected roadblocks and confiscated vehicles. In the afternoon, after Israel restored the water supply to the southern Gaza Strip, Israel announced that the window of opportunity to leave the northern Gaza Strip had closed.

▶ The Egyptian foreign ministry protested the IDF's call to the residents of the northern Gaza Strip to move south, claiming it was a serious violation of international and humanitarian law and would expose millions of civilians to danger. Egypt asked the UN Security Council to take responsibility and stop the measure (Egyptian foreign ministry website, October 14, 2023).

▶ The foreign ministry of Qatar also announced the country's strong opposition to attempts to forcefully expel the Palestinians from the Gaza Strip and warned of the danger of collective punishment, which included calls for the evacuation of the northern Gaza Strip residents. Qatar urged the international community to intervene to open humanitarian corridors which would allow international organizations to bring in food and medical aid and evacuate wounded civilians (Qatari foreign ministry Twitter account, October 14, 2023).

Palestinian casualties

▶ The ministry of health in Ramallah reported that as of 9:00 a.m., since the beginning of the war 2,750 Palestinians had been killed and 9,700 wounded (ministry of health in

Ramallah Facebook page, October 16, 2023). **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem** claimed that more than 1,000 children had been killed in Israeli attacks (Hamas Telegram channel, October 15, 2023).

► The IDF spokesman reported that Mu'ataz Eid, the commander of Hamas "national security" for the southern district of the Gaza Strip, had been killed in an airstrike.

► **Izzat al-Rishq, a member of Hamas' political bureau and head of Hamas' central media information bureau in Hamas**, claimed the reports of the death of the wife and children of the Abu Obeida, spokesman for Hamas' military-terrorist wing spokesman were not true (Hamas Telegram channel, October 15, 2023).

The situation in the Gaza Strip

► UNRWA reported that approximately 400,000 Gazans were currently staying in the agency's shelters throughout the Gaza Strip (UN website, October 15, 2023). The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)³ in Gaza reported that the fuel reserves in the hospitals would be sufficient for the next 24 hours (QudsN Twitter account, October 16, 2023). An identical statement was issued on October 12, 2023.



Gazans in UNRWA schools in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip (Wafa, October 15, 2023)

► Water and electricity were cut off in most areas of the northern Gaza Strip. Water is available in the central and southern Gaza Strip for two hours a day, in addition to wells and pumps activated by generators or solar electricity. UNRWA reported that Gazans were drinking contaminated water instead of using water supplied by the potable water stations.

³ The agency was established in 1991 by a UN General Assembly resolution, and was designed to strengthen and coordinate UN responses in emergency situations and natural disasters. Its offices are scattered has around the globe. The Palestinian branch was established in 2002, its center is in Jerusalem and it has offices in Gaza, Ramallah, Hebron and Nablus.

▶ **Mazen Ghanim, chairman of the water commission**, said that the remaining water sources in the Gaza Strip could not supply 15 liters per person per day, which is the minimum amount recommended by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in emergency situations. The W.H.O. deals with the quality of water, not its amount. He also warned of the continued disruption of the water supply systems. He called on the international community to take responsibility for protecting the water commission's technical teams so they could operate the facilities and ensure the residents a supply of water supply (Wafa, October 15, 2023).

▶ **UNRWA Commissioner General Phillipe Lazzarini** said the agency was unable to provide humanitarian aid and was "on the verge of collapse." He said at least one million people had been forced to flee their homes and that "a river of people continues to flow south." He said UNRWA had lost 14 staff members who had moved to Gaza. He demanded the immediate transfer of essential supplies such as fuel, water, food and medicine.

Aid for Gaza

▶ The American president appointed David Satterfield, former ambassador to Turkey, as the special envoy for humanitarian issues in the Middle East. According to reports, he will lead the American diplomatic effort in dealing with the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip (United States State Department website, October 15, 2023).

Hamas

▶ **Musa Abu Marzouq, a member of the Hamas political bureau**, related to the following in an interview (Arab Post, October 15, 2023):

◆ **Continuing the campaign:** He claimed Hamas' military wing had taken into account the management of a long campaign and knew how to conduct it. Hamas was prepared for all circumstances and conditions on the ground, whether a ceasefire, the continuation of the campaign or any other option on the table.

◆ **Possibility of ground combat:** He said Hamas could not confront aircraft and artillery fire outside the Gaza Strip, or the artillery fire from battleships, but Hamas was ready for a ground confrontation, and could win as it successfully broke the [IDF's] Gaza Division. However, he was of the opinion that the IDF would not enter the Gaza Strip.

- ◆ **The Israeli abductees:** H claimed the issue was very complex and could not be discussed now. First there had to be a ceasefire to count the exact number of captives because, he claimed, Israel's policy "is to attack both captive and captors."
- ◆ **Opening the Rafah Crossing:** Hamas, he said, was in contact with Egypt regarding the Rafah Crossing, bringing in aid and allowing humanitarian cases or foreign residents to leave. However, he claimed, there were no developments on the ground whatsoever due to "Israel's intransigence."
- ◆ **Jordan:** Asked about Hamas' relationship and contacts with Jordan, he claimed Jordan had no role in the recent events in the Gaza Strip. They were in contact with the lower [diplomatic?/government?] echelons but there was no contact on a specific issue related to the war in the Gaza Strip. He added they also had no contact on the issue with the Palestinian Authority.

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)

- ▶ **Abu Hamza, spokesman for the PIJ's military-terrorist wing,** said in a recorded statement that in view of the blows the "resistance" had inflicted on Israel, it had resorted to impossible, unfortunate attempts to expel the Palestinians. He claimed the reaction of the young men and women, old men and children was to stand firmly their ground. He also claimed that Israel's attacks on "mosques, homes and children," which were in violation of all religious, legal and humanitarian conventions, did not damage their spirit in any way (Abu Hamza's Telegram channel, October 15, 2023).

The Northern Arena

Lebanon

- ▶ The past day was the most tense on the Lebanese border since the beginning of the war. On the morning of October 15, 2023, an anti-tank missile was fired at the village of Shtoula, near the Lebanese border, killing a civilian **At 3:25 p.m.** an anti-tank missile was fired at the Kibbutz Hanita area, the fifth missile attack since the morning. According to the Israeli media, three people were injured, one of them seriously (Walla, October 15, 2023). It was later reported that an IDF soldier died in the incident (IDF spokesman, October 16, 2023).
- ▶ Hezbollah claimed responsibility for attacking the "Hanita military base" with anti-tank missiles, "causing several deaths and injuries and damaging two Merkava tanks and an

APC." Hezbollah claimed the attack was an extension of the response to the attack on the journalists in Alma al-Sha'ab and the attack on civilians in Shebaa (Hezbollah's combat propaganda Telegram channel, October 15, 2023).

► In response, IDF forces attacked the area from which the anti-tank missiles had been launched in response to an earlier attack on a Hezbollah military-terrorist facility (IDF spokesman, October 15, 2023).

► At around 4:30 p.m. on October 15, 2023, nine rockets were fired from Lebanon at the Western Galilee. Aerial defense fighters intercepted five of them. In response, the IDF fired artillery at the area from which the rockets were launched (IDF spokesman, October 15, 2023).

► According to reports, a rocket fired from south Lebanon towards Israel hit UNIFIL headquarters in al-Naqoura (al-Akhbar Twitter account, October 15, 2023). UNIFIL later reported its headquarters in al-Naqoura had been hit by a rocket, adding that there were no casualties and they were working to verify where it was fired from. UNIFIL also stated they were continuing contacts with both sides in an attempt to deflate the situation, but the military escalation unfortunately continued. UNIFIL noted that attacks against civilians or UN workers were a violation of international law and could be considered as constituting war crimes (UNIFIL Telegram channel, October 15, 2023).

► Hamas' military-terrorist wing claimed responsibility for launching a barrage of about twenty rockets at the northern border cities of Shlomi, Nahariya and their surroundings in response to "the crimes of the occupation in Gaza" (Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades Telegram channel, October 15, 2023).

► **At around 5 p.m. on October 15, 2023**, more anti-tank fire was reported on the Lebanese border. Hezbollah announced its operatives had attacked five IDF posts on the Lebanese border with direct trajectory fire.⁴ In response, the IDF attacked the sources of the fire with artillery fire. Another anti-tank missile was then fired at an IDF post on the border with Lebanon (Hezbollah's combat propaganda Telegram channel, October 15, 2023).

► **At 5:53 p.m.**, Hezbollah announced its operatives had shot at and deactivated Israel's cameras and technical devices along the border fence near Metulla (Hezbollah's combat propaganda Telegram channel, October 15, 2023). In response, during the night IDF forces

⁴ As opposed to rockets, whose trajectory is a parabola, curving first upwards and then down.

attacked Hezbollah military facilities in Lebanese territory from the air and the ground (IDF spokesman, October 15, 2023).

► In the wake of the events in the north, the Israeli Ministry of Defense and the IDF, on behalf of the National Emergency Authority (NEMA), ordered the evacuation of 28 towns and villages in the north lying within a distance of up to two kilometers from the Lebanese border (IDF spokesman, October 16, 2023).

Reactions

► **Nabil Qaouq, a member of Hezbollah's Central Council**, claimed Israel's "aggression" in the Gaza Strip was "a threat to Lebanon's security." He added that Israeli "aggression" against Lebanon at any time or place would be met with "a harsh and immediate response." He claimed the American aircraft carriers and other ships did not scare them and would not keep them from protecting their people and homeland. He accused the United States of being primarily responsible for the "ongoing massacre" in Gaza because it encouraged and armed Israel. He claimed American naval power had arrived to isolate the Gaza Strip from external aid and prevent the "resistance" [Hezbollah and Palestinian terrorist organizations] in Lebanon from supporting and assisting the Gaza Strip (al-Ahed, October 15, 2023).

► **Hassan Fadlallah, a member of the Hezbollah faction in the Lebanese Parliament**, claimed Israel was facing strong "resistance" in Gaza and the Palestinian people would continue with the "resistance forces" [terrorist operatives] fighting at their side. He claimed they were prepared for any scenario but would not reveal their next steps. He claimed they were protecting Lebanon and when Hezbollah aimed missiles at Israel it openly claimed responsibility. He also noted that the "equation" according to which any Israeli aggression would be met with a response still held true for them (al-Mayadeen, October 15, 2023).

► **Abdullah Bou Habib, the Lebanese foreign minister**, said that Lebanon was being pressured not to open another front. He also said **Najib Mikati, the prime minister of the interim government**, and **Nabih Berri, the speaker of the Lebanese Parliament**, were exerting pressure on Israel to stop the escalation in the Gaza Strip (al-Nashra, October 16, 2023).

► "Political sources" said that the Lebanese government spoke daily with senior American and European officials, who were pressuring Hezbollah not to join the war. It was also reported that Najib Mikati had conveyed the message to the Hezbollah without receiving a response (al-Akhbar, October 16, 2023).

► However, voices were also heard in Lebanon opposing Hezbollah's activities. For example, **Fadi Kerem, a Lebanese Forces [Christians] member of the Lebanese Parliament**, said the "unification of the arenas" in fact annulled the sovereignty and independence of Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. He said Hezbollah protected itself, its environment and the place where it existed geographically, but not Lebanon. If Hezbollah entered the war, it would be impossible to know what would happen to Lebanon and if Iran also intervened, what Russia's position would be (MTV, October 16, 2023). Prof. Maroun Khater a Lebanese financial and economic researcher, said Lebanon, which was experiencing an economic collapse, would not be able to bear the consequences of any kind of war (Lebanon Debate, October 16, 2023).

Presence of Hamas military operatives in Lebanon

► After the rocket fire of Hamas' military-terrorist wing, Asharq al-Awsat published an article dealing with the presence of operatives of Hamas' military-terrorist wing in Lebanon. It noted that senior Hamas figures were reluctant to talk about the issue or about the number of operatives or their goals. According to the article, most of the Hamas force was concentrated in the Burj al-Shamali and al-Bas refugee camps in the Tyre area, in the Burj al-Barajneh camp in Beirut, and there was a growing presence in the Ein al-Hilweh refugee camp. According to a "reliable Palestinian source," there were no camps where operatives of the military-terrorist wing had declared their presence, which was kept secret in most of the camps.

◀ **Rafat Mara, who is in charge of Hamas' public activities**, said the Palestinian refugees were exercising their natural right to confront Israel from Lebanon. Regarding the question of whether Hamas operations from Lebanese territory would increase, and whether there would be a large-scale attack by the "resistance axis" from south Lebanon, he said that the future of the operations was related to the situation in the Gaza Strip and the results of the efforts to stop the aggression.

▶ According to Palestinian researcher **Hisham Debsi**, the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades have no bases outside the refugee camps in Lebanese territory and were located where Hamas was present in all the Palestinian refugee camps. He claimed that for reasons of logistics, Hamas could not send a terrorist squad across the border to carry out operations in Israeli territory without Hezbollah's support. He also ruled out the possibility that Hamas could open the south Lebanon front against Israel. According to Debsi, since the south Lebanon area was closed by the Lebanese army and Hezbollah, the Palestinians in Lebanon had not acted independently of their ties with Hezbollah, Syria or the Lebanese army. Therefore, no matter how strong Hamas was inside the camps, its strength could not be translated into the ability to open a military front from south Lebanon independent of Hezbollah's decision. **Lebanese political analyst Qassem Qassir** noted that the developments in the Gaza Strip had caused all the "resistance" [terrorist] forces to provide support on the ground. He said that so far operations were limited, but if the situation in the Gaza Strip worsened, a south Lebanon front might open (al-Sharq al-Awsat, October 15, 2023).

Pro-Iranian militias in Lebanon

▶ There have been reports that operatives of two armed pro-Iranian Iraqi militias, the Sayyid al-Shuhada Brigades and the Imam Ali Brigades, have been deployed in south Lebanon (@nourabohsn Twitter account, October 15, 2023). A photo was also posted of **al-Hajj Abu Ilaa al-Wala'i, secretary general of the Sayyid al-Shuhada Brigades**, standing near the Israeli-Lebanese border (Sayyid al-Shuhada Brigades' Telegram channel, October 15, 2023).



Secretary General of the Sayyid al-Shuhada Brigades near the Israeli-Lebanese border
(Sayyid al-Shuhada Brigades' Telegram channel, October 15, 2023)

Syria

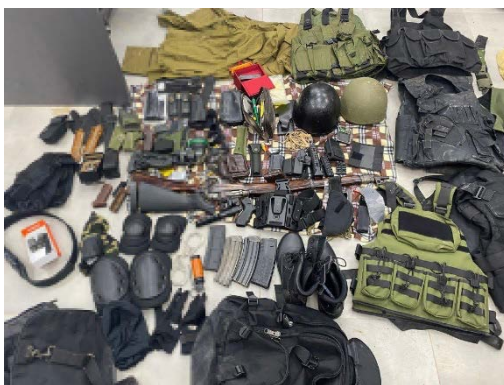
▶ A day after the attack on Aleppo International Airport, Syria announced that as of 08:00 a.m. on, October 16, 2023, the damage had been repaired and all aircraft traffic at the airport had resumed (Twitter account of the Syrian Ministry of Transport, October 15, 2023).

▶ The **Syrian** opposition channel, Suria TV, reported that Ababil-2 drones had been transferred to Hezbollah's Fuj al-Julan in the Quneitra area (Suria TV, October 12, 2023).

Judea, Samaria, and the Palestinian Authority

Events

▶ The Israeli security forces continued their counterterrorism **activities** in Judea and Samaria, detaining 40 terrorist operatives, 20 of them from Hamas. During their activity, large quantities of weapons were confiscated. Since the beginning of the war, 360 wanted Palestinians have been detained, 210 of them Hamas operatives (IDF spokesman Twitter account, October 16, 2023). The Palestinian Prisoners' Club reported that since the beginning of the war, about 540 Palestinians had been detained in Judea, Samaria and east Jerusalem (al-Araby al-Jadeed, October 16, 2023).



**Weapons confiscated during Israeli security force activity
(IDF Spokesman's Twitter account, October 16, 2023)**

▶ The ministry of health in Ramallah reported that three Palestinians were killed in Judea and Samaria. In clashes during Israeli security force activity in the 'Aqabat Jaber refugee camp (near Jericho), another Palestinian was killed (the PA Health Ministry's Telegram channel, October 15 and 16, 2023). The ministry of health reported that since the beginning of the war in the Gaza Strip, 58 Palestinians had been killed and 1,250 wounded in

Judea and Samaria (ministry of health in Ramallah Telegram channel, October 15 and 16, 2023).

Palestinian Authority

▶ **Mahmoud Abbas, chairman of the Palestinian Authority**, spoke on the phone with **Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro**. Abbas claimed that " Hamas' policies and actions do not represent the Palestinian people, and the PLO is the only body representing the Palestinian people." Shortly after Wafa published the text of the conversation, an amendment was published, according to which Mahmoud Abbas told Maduro that "the policies and decisions of the PLO are the only ones that represent the Palestinian people, since it is the only body that represents the Palestinian people and no other body." That replaced the previous report, according to which Abbas had condemned Hamas (Wafa, October 16, 2023).

▶ **Muhammad Shtayyeh, PA prime minister**, said the weekly cabinet meeting would be devoted to the war in the Gaza Strip. He called for an end to the Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip and stressed that the Palestinians had the right to defend themselves. He warned against uprooting residents and a "new nakba" following the IDF's call for residents to evacuate to the southern Gaza Strip. He said the ministry of health was continuing her efforts with international bodies to bring medical aid into the Gaza Strip (Muhammad Shtayyeh's Facebook page, October 16, 2023).

▶ **Mei al-Kayla, PA minister of health**, met with **Ihab Suleiman, Egypt's representative in the PA**, and briefed him on the situation in the Gaza Strip and her efforts to bring in medical aid (ministry of health in Ramallah Facebook page, October 15, 2023).

Iran

▶ Diplomatic activity continued in Iran:

◆ **Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi** spoke by phone with **French President Emmanuel Macron**. He said that if Israel's "crimes" did not stop, the situation could become complicated and the campaign might expand (IRNA, October 15, 2023).

◆ **Hossein-Amir Abdollahian, the Iranian foreign minister**, met with **the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani**. He thanked Qatar for its support for the Palestinians, saying an end had to be put to Israel's [alleged] "war crimes" and the "siege" of the Gaza Strip (Tasnim, October 15, 2023).

◆ **The Iranian ambassador to Iraq, Mohammad Kazem Al-e Sadeq**, met with the Palestinian ambassador to Baghdad. The Iranian ambassador stressed Iran's support for the Palestinian people (IRNA, October 15, 2023).

◆ **Ali-Akbar Velayati, advisor to the Supreme Leader of Iran, met with Khaled Qaddoumi, Hamas representative in Tehran.** Velayati said "the speed with which Hamas' operation was carried out was highly admirable" [sic] and that Iran stood by the Palestinian people and would continue to support it. He added that Hamas had to continue to advance with all its force, the Muslim world was united in its support for the Palestinians, Israel was dying, and the Palestinian people would win. Qaddoumi thanked Velayati for Iran's support for the Palestinians, saying that the Palestinians had proved victory would be achieved and that Jerusalem would be "liberated" (Tasnim, October 16, 2023).

▶ **IRGC Commander Hossein Salami** said that Operation al-Aqsa Storm was the first stage in the collapse of the "Zionist regime." He stressed that **Hamas alone, without relying on any other force**, had inflicted a great defeat on the Zionists (Tasnim, October 16, 2023).

▶ The Iranian delegation to the UN conveyed a message, via Reuters, that the Iranian armed forces would not intervene in the war against Israel, provided it "does not attack Iran, its interests and its citizens." The message also said that the "resistance front" [Palestinian terrorist organizations and Hezbollah] could defend itself (Reuters, October 15, 2023).

▶ However, in an interview, **Abdollahian** once again warned that if efforts to stop the Israeli attacks in Gaza failed, the possibility of expanding the war fronts was growing by the hour. He claimed Iran had informed Israel that if its "crimes" did not stop, tomorrow would be too late. He also noted that "Iran cannot remain a bystander in such a situation." Abdollahian also noted that Hezbollah had drawn its red lines and would take the necessary steps if necessary. He claimed that the scope of the war expanded, the United States would also suffer heavy losses (al-Jazeera, October 15, 2023).

▶ **Hossein Kanani Moghaddam, a conservative Iranian commentator and former senior IRGC official**, said in an interview that Iran was being accused of involvement in the Hamas attack to deter Iran from assisting its Palestinian allies at this crucial time. He noted that Iran had unequivocally declared its support for all sides fighting against Israel and maintained contact and coordination with its allies in the "axis of resistance," but refrained from intervening in the fighting because the Palestinians were capable of achieving victory on

their own. He added that the "resistance" was prepared to respond to the "occupation's crimes against the Palestinians" but would not enter the battle until it had carefully considered all aspects and was confident of its ability to achieve a decisive and final victory. Regarding Iran's direct intervention in the fighting, he said that Iran was not currently directly confronting Israel, but that if Israel crossed Tehran's red lines, including the "genocide" of the Palestinian people, hostile actions against Hezbollah in Lebanon or Syria, or expanding the scope of the conflict in the region, Iran's position might change (al-Jazeera, October 15, 2023).

► **Nasser Kanani, spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry**, said at his weekly press conference that Iran was acting in the political and international arena to defend the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and that the top priority was to end the killing and "siege" of the Palestinians in Gaza. He added that Israel's continued "war crimes" could throw the situation in the region out of control and that if Israel's "inhumane policy" continued, all options were open. Kanani also said that the **claim of Iranian military involvement in the Gaza Strip was baseless**. He said anyone who supported Israel and its "current crimes" bore the same degree of international responsibility and had to be held accountable (Fars, October 16, 2023).

The Arab World

Egypt

► **Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi** convened a meeting of the National Security Council to discuss regional developments, especially the military escalation in the Gaza Strip. Several decisions were reportedly made at the meeting, including continued coordination with international and regional partners to de-escalate the situation and stop harming civilians, increasing communication with aid organizations and increasing efforts to calm the situation. The Council emphasized that Egypt's national security was a red line which could not be compromised. Egypt called for regional and international summit conferences to be held on its territory to discuss developments (Egyptian presidential spokesman's Facebook page, October 15, 2023).

► The Egyptian president met with the **United States Department of State Secretary Antony Blinken**. Sisi said Israel's response to the Hamas attack went a claim of self-defense and had become "collective punishment" (al-Qahara, October 15, 2023).

Jordan

► **Foreign Minister Ayman al-Safadi** said that bringing humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip was necessary to prevent deaths and destruction. He said that during their visit to Europe, he and King Abdullah II of Jordan would try to bring about a ceasefire. He also said that they would not allow Palestinians to be expelled from their land and as far as they were concerned it was a "red line," because the Palestinian was no less human than the Israeli, and the world had to understand that (al-Jazeera, October 15, 2023).

► Meeting with the foreign ministers of the UAE, Oman and Iraq, **Al-Safadi** said the "humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip" had to end and withholding aid was a war crime and a violation of international law. He also stressed that the international community had to condemn the killing of civilians on both sides. He called for an end to the escalation in the Gaza Strip and for work to renew peace negotiations based on the two-state solution (al-Mamlaka, October 14, 2023).

► Al-Safadi said the war was leading to a humanitarian catastrophe and constituted the "collective punishment of over two million Palestinians." He said the failure of the international community to stop the war reflected its failure to implement international law, which is intended to protect common human values and innocent civilians. He noted said the international community had to treat the war in the Gaza Strip according to a single criterion: condemn the killing of Palestinian residents just as it condemned the killing of Israeli civilians, since civilian victims are victims regardless of identity or nationality. He expressed his opposition to uprooting Palestinians from their homes, warning that Israel's attempt to impose it would "lead the region toward an abyss that will deepen and widen the conflict" (Jordanian foreign ministry Twitter account, October 14, 2023).

Saudi Arabia

► The Saudi Arabian foreign ministry issued a statement condemning Israel's attacks on the Gaza Strip, claiming that the "siege" on the Gaza Strip had to be lifted. Saudi Arabia called on the international community to provide for the medical needs for the residents, saying that denying the residents of the Gaza Strip basic needs was a violation of international law and would exacerbate the crisis (Saudi Arabian foreign ministry Twitter account, October 14, 2023).

▶ According to “reliable Saudi sources,” in the wake of the escalation, the Saudis reconsidered their foreign policy priorities. As evidence, the article reported a telephone conversation which took place this week between the Saudi crown prince and Iranian President Raisi, which was the first conversation ever held between the two (Reuters, October 13, 2023).

Qatar

▶ **Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abd al-Rahman** held separate telephone conversations with the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Oman, to discuss the latest developments and ways to end the current escalation. Al-Rahman stressed that Qatar's position was "firm" on condemning harm to civilians and "collective punishment." He stressed the need to open humanitarian corridors and warned against "attempts to forcibly uproot the Palestinian people" (Qatar News Agency, October 16, 2023).

Iraq

▶ **Akram Kaabi, secretary general of the pro-Iranian al-Nujaba militia,** spoke with **Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau,** and told him that he, his men and their weapons were at his disposal, and they were willing to volunteer to go to Gaza, including as suicide bombers. Haniyeh thanked him and the millions of Iraqis who demonstrated last Friday in support of Hamas and "sent a message to the enemy that Gaza would not be left alone" (al-Nujaba militia website, October 16, 2023).

Western Countries

United States

▶ **US Department of State Secretary Antony Blinken** continued his tour of the Middle East and met with Qatar's Emir Tamim bin Hamad and other government officials and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to discuss developments in the Gaza Strip, ways to stop the fighting, and humanitarian activity, including the release of the prisoners (Qatar News Agency, October 14; Saudi News Agency, Safa, October 15, 2023). According to reports, Blinken encountered strong opposition from the Egyptian president and the Saudi Arabian crown prince when he appealed to them to adopt the American view of the conflict between Hamas

and Israel. In addition, according to reports, efforts to persuade Saudi Arabia to condemn Hamas have so far failed (The Washington Post, October 16, 2023).

▶ Interviewed by CBS, **President Joe Biden** discussed the current escalation. He reiterated American support for Israel, saying that Hamas had to be eliminated, along with implementing the two-state solution. Asked whether American troops would participate in the war, he said it was unnecessary because he believed in the Israeli forces. However, he said, the United States would provide Israel with everything it needed. Regarding the occupation of Gaza, he said it would be a mistake. As for the northern front, he sent an unequivocal message to Iran and Hezbollah not to enter the war (CBS, October 15, 2023).

United Nations

▶ UN Secretary-General António Guterres called on Hamas to release hostages unconditionally. At the same time, he called on Israel to allow quick access for humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. He noted that the two issues were separate and should not become bargaining chips (Reuters, October 16, 2023).

The Global Jihad

Al-Qaeda called for attacks on Jews and US bases

▶ The al-Qaeda leadership called on Muslims around the world to participate in the fighting in Gaza, provide financial assistance and moral support for the "complete liberation of Palestine." The announcement called it a historic moment after it became clear that "the Israeli enemy is a paper tiger and its intelligence, military, security and economy are collapsing." Al-Qaeda has declared an "open war" against everything that is Crusader [the Christian West], Zionist and Israeli. The announcement also called on Muslims in countries bordering Israel to break through the borders and on the Sinai tribes to break the siege on Gaza. There was also a call to attack Israelis in the UAE, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, and to attack United States military bases, airports and embassies in Muslim countries. They also called for a boycott of Western products in general and those of Jewish-owned companies in particular (Telegram, October 14, 2023).



Text of al-Qaeda's announcement (Telegram, October 14, 2023)

Al-Qaeda's in the Maghreb and Sahel calls for continued "jihad"

► Al-Qaeda's branch in the Maghreb and Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM), al-Qaeda's branch in the Sahel region, issued a joint statement praising the "jihad fighters," headed by Hamas' military-terrorist wing, for the terrorist campaign in the Israeli cities, towns and villages near the Gaza Strip border and calling on them to continue their "jihad." The announcement also noted that al-Qaeda was trying to reach and "liberate" Jerusalem called on Palestinians in Judea and Samaria to act (Telegram, October 13, 2023).



Text of the joint announcement (Telegram, October 13, 2023)

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula joins the calls for "jihad"

► Al-Qaeda's branch in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which operates from Yemen, praised Hamas for its action and called on the Palestinian "jihad fighters" to continue along the path. It was also noted that Muslims in Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, i.e., the countries bordering Israel, had a responsibility to help the Palestinians, whether with fighters, money, food, equipment and moral support (Telegram, October 14, 2023).



The opening part of the announcement by al-Qaeda branch in Yemen (Telegram, October 14, 2023)

Al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Shabaab holds a rally for the Gaza Strip

▶ On October 14, 2023, the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Shabaab held a rally in Somalia in support of Hamas and the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The rally called for the liberation of al-Aqsa and Jerusalem and for "blood for blood, destruction for destruction, forced migration for forced migration," claiming the war against Gaza was a war against Islam. Children participated in the rally wearing headbands reading "Al-Aqsa, we are coming," and posters showing al-Aqsa Mosque with an al-Qaeda flag flying above it (Shahada News Agency, October 14, 2023).



Right: Children with headbands reading "Al-Aqsa, we are coming." Left: Poster of al-Aqsa Mosque with an al-Qaeda flag flying above it (Shahada News Agency, October 14, 2023)



The Arabic reads, "Jerusalem will not be Judaized" (Shahada News Agency, October 14, 2023)