



## The Iron Swords – The war in the south of Israel Updated to 1 p.m., October 17, 2023

### Overview<sup>1</sup>

► **The southern sector:** The IDF continued its activity in the Gaza Strip, mainly by conducting airstrikes against terrorist targets of Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Several thousand terrorist targets have been attacked since the beginning of the war. Using precision-guided munitions, Israeli Navy ships attacked Hamas military-terrorist targets from the sea, including operational headquarters in the center Gaza City and munitions depots. Meanwhile, terrorist operatives continued firing rockets and mortar shells at Israel. Two barrages were fired at the Jerusalem area during the opening of the Knesset's winter session. About 6,930 rockets have been fired at Israel since the beginning of the war.

► So far, **more than 1,400 civilian and soldier deaths have been reported, and 199 civilian and soldier abductees are currently held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Since the beginning of the war, 4,229 wounded have been evacuated to hospitals; 344 are still hospitalized.** Hamas claimed between 200 and 250 hostages were being held in Gaza, some by Hamas and others by other organizations, and stated that negotiations would not take place under fire. Hamas also said IDF soldiers with foreign citizenships would be considered "direct enemies."

► **The Gaza Strip:** The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is worsening. Egypt erected a field hospital on the Egyptian side of the Rafah Crossing. Many aid trucks are waiting to enter the strip through the Crossing, which is closed. Hamas operatives stole fuel and medical equipment from UNRWA warehouses.

► **The northern sector:** Tensions continued mounting in northern Israel. During the past day there were several artillery and other attacks for which Hezbollah claimed responsibility. A squad of four terrorists was eliminated before it could penetrate Israeli territory. Lebanese government officials expressed concern over the opening of a northern war arena and were working, mainly on the diplomatic level, to prevent it.

---

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

- ▶ **Judea and Samaria:** The Israeli security forces continued extensive counterterrorism activities, detaining Palestinians suspected of terrorist activities. The Palestinian Authority (PA) continues its efforts to provide the Gaza Strip with humanitarian aid.
- ▶ **Iran:** Iran has ramped up its threatening messages, apparently concerned that an Israeli ground attack could challenge Hamas' survival. Iran does not necessarily regard Hezbollah as its only option for an attack on Israel and might prefer other options, such as activating the pro-Iranian Shi'ite militias in Syria or Iraq.
- ▶ **The United Nations:** The UN Security Council deliberation ended without a practical decision after the resolution proposed by Russia failed to achieve a majority vote.
- ▶ **The United States:** The commander of the Central Command of the American Army has arrived in Israel. The President of the United States is planning to visit on October 18, 2023.

## The Combat Arena

### IDF activity

- ▶ **Aerial activity:** The IDF continued air strikes on terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip. During the past day more than two hundred terrorist targets belonging to Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) were attacked. The targets included underground tunnels, rocket and mortar shell-launching squads and positions, dozens of operational headquarters, terrorist operatives and a bank that financed terrorist activities. The military-terrorist headquarters of Ali Qadhi, a nukhba commander who was killed a few days ago, was also destroyed. On the morning of October 17, 2023, the attacks continued, focusing on the Zeitoun neighborhood in Gaza City, northern Rafah, Jabaliya and Khan Yunis (IDF spokesman, October 16, 17, 2023).
- ▶ Usama al-Mazini, the head of Hamas' Shura Council in the Gaza Strip, who was responsible for the prisoner file, was killed in the airstrikes. The head of Hamas general intelligence in Khan Yunis was also killed (IDF spokesman, October 16, 2023).



Israeli Air Force strikes in the Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman's website, October 17, 2023)



Right: Attack on the shaft of a terrorist attack tunnel. Left: Attack on the shaft of a mortar shell-launching pit (IDF spokesman's website, October 16, 2023)



The aftermath of attacks in Gaza City (QudsN Twitter account, October 17, 2023)



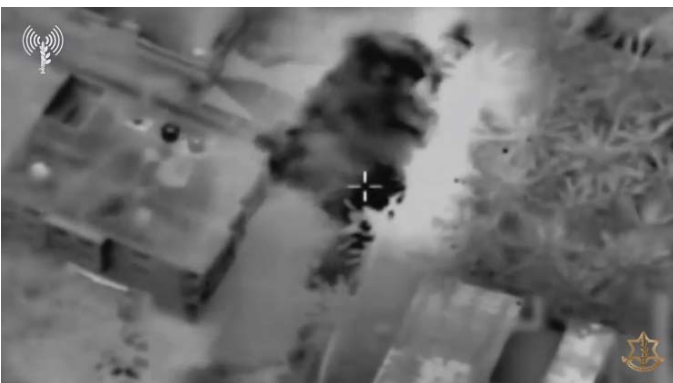


**Right: Attack in west Gaza City (QudsN Twitter account, October 16, 2023). Left: A satellite image showing the destruction in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip (al-Ghad TV, October 16, 2023)**

- ▶ **Israeli Navy activity:** Using precision-guided munitions, Israeli Navy ships attacked several Hamas military-terrorist targets from the sea, including operational headquarters in the center of Gaza City and munitions depots (IDF spokesman, October 17, 2023).
- ▶ The IDF spokesman stated that since the beginning of the war, thousands of targets had been attacked and the attacks continued (IDF spokesman update, October 17, 2023).

### Rocket fire

- ▶ Meanwhile, terrorists in the Gaza Strip continued firing rockets at Israel's south and at the cities and towns in the center of the country. The number of attacks has decreased slightly, and most of them targeted the south. Several barrages were launched at Tel Aviv and the central cities, mainly in the evening. Two barrages were fired at the Jerusalem area during the opening of the Knesset's winter session. A rocket hit an empty house in Sderot. Several people were injured over the course of the day.
- ▶ As of October 16, 2023, since the beginning of the war 6,930 rockets had been fired at Israel, most of them by the operatives of the Hamas and PIJ military-terrorist wings.



**Right: Knesset members leave the Knesset hall to take shelter during the rocket attack (QudsN Twitter account, October 17, 2023). Left: Israeli Air Force attack on a launch squad (IDF website, October 16, 2023)**

## Casualties and abductees

► So far, **more than 1,400 civilian and soldier deaths have been reported. The IDF has contacted the families of 199 civilian and soldier abductees who are being held captive in the Gaza Strip. Since the beginning of the war, 4,229 wounded have been evacuated to hospitals; 344 are still hospitalized.**

►  **Hamas said the following about the abductees:**

◆ **Khaled Mashal, Hamas leader "abroad,"** said Hamas had a number of captives sufficient to trade for the Hamas prisoners in Israeli jails, adding there was a difference between Israeli soldiers and civilians and captives with dual citizenship. He also claimed that because of the intensity of the Israeli bombings they could not count how many prisoners they were holding and claimed "Hamas will take care of the prisoners in accordance with international humanitarian law" (al-Arabi, October 16, 2023).

◆ **Musa Abu Marzouq, a member of the Hamas political bureau,** claimed they had no desire to continue holding prisoners with foreign citizenship, and would release them under the appropriate conditions. However, he claimed, they could not be released now because of the ongoing Israeli attacks. He also claimed, mediation efforts were being undertaken by Qatar, Turkey, Egypt, Iran, Russia and China (al-Jazeera Mubashar, October 17, 2023).

◆ **Abu Obeida, the spokesman for Hamas's military-terrorist wing,** said so far they could not fully and accurately determine the number of abductees due to security considerations and the situation on the ground, but their initial estimate was 200-250, possibly more. He added that the military wing had about 200 hostages and the rest were being held by the other organizations or in places they could not reach because of the security situation. He added they were holding "detainees" of different nationalities whose identities they were unable to verify. He said those "detainees" were their protected "guests," who would be released as soon as conditions on the ground permitted. He called on all the countries of the world to warn their citizens against serving and fighting in the ranks of the IDF, adding they were treating every IDF soldier, even if he held another citizenship, as a "direct enemy" (Hamas Telegram channel, October 16, 2023; Palinfo, October 16, 2023).

◆ **PIJ spokesman Musab al-Bari** claimed the Israeli abductees would only be returned in exchange for Palestinian prisoners (al-Mayadeen TV website, October 16, 2023).

## The Gaza Strip

### Palestinian casualties

► On the evening of October 16, 2023, the Hamas-controlled ministry of health in Gaza reported that since the beginning of the war, 2,778 Gazans had been killed and 9,938 wounded (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page, October 16, 2023). According to Wafa on October 17, 2023, the number of dead had passed 2,800 (Wafa, October 17, 2023).

### The situation in the Gaza Strip

► Due to the high number of casualties, the ministry of health in Gaza issued an urgent call to all the Gazans to go to the hospitals and blood bank branches and donate blood (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page, October 17, 2023).

### Aid for Gaza

► **Khaled Abd al-Ghafar, the Egyptian minister of health**, visited El-Arish and the Egyptian Rafah region where aid for the Gaza Strip is currently concentrated. He reported on Egypt's preparations for erecting a field hospital on the Egyptian side of the Rafah Crossing, and noted that more than 300 tons of humanitarian aid was in Egyptian territory, awaiting the opening of the Rafah Crossing and delivery to the Gaza Strip (al-Ghad TV, October 16, 2023).



**Right: The Egyptian minister of health visits the Egyptian side of the Rafah Crossing. Left: Preparations for erecting a field hospital on the Egyptian side of the Rafah Crossing (Twitter account of photojournalist Hassan Aslih, October 16, 2023)**

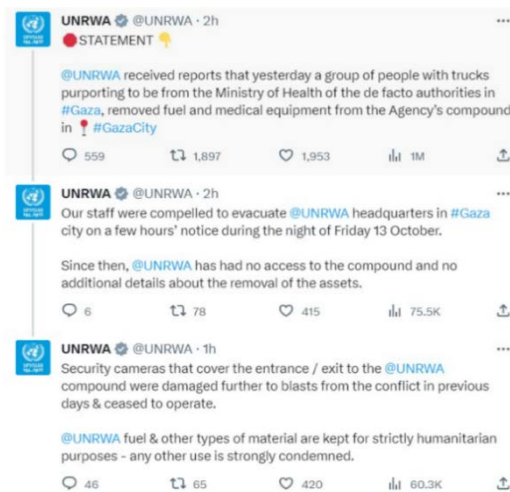
► Al-Ghad TV reported that before dawn the trucks bringing humanitarian aid trucks began to move from the El-Arish region towards the Egyptian side of the Rafah Crossing. In the afternoon, the channel reported the trucks were waiting at the Rafah Crossing (al-Ghad TV, October 17, 2023). The spokesman for the crossings authority in the Gaza Strip stated they had not yet received notification of the opening of the Rafah Crossing (al-Ghad TV, October 17, 2023).



**The convoy of trucks bringing humanitarian aid waits on the Egyptian side of the Rafah Crossing (Rafah Crossing News Facebook page, October 17, 2023; al-Ghad TV, October 17, 2023)**

### Theft from UNRWA warehouses

► According to UNRWA, reports were received that "people" claiming to have come from the ministry of health in Gaza [which is controlled by Hamas] arrived with trucks at the agency's center in Gaza City and removed fuel and medical equipment intended for civilian purposes. Since Friday, October 13, 2023, there had been no access to the facility, and the security cameras covering its entrance and exit had been damaged or destroyed (UNRWA Twitter account, October 16, 2023). A short time later, the link to the article on the UNRWA website was deleted.



**The deleted report of the theft of fuel and equipment (UNRWA Twitter account, October 16, 2023)**

### Senior Hamas terrorist operatives killed

► **Dr. Usama Atiya Ahmed al-Mazini:** Killed in an Israeli attack along with his son Ahmed and his mother. He was born in 1966, held a doctorate in psychological counseling and mental health, and was the son-in-law of Hamas founder Ahmed Yassin. He was the minister of



education and higher education in the Haniyeh administration between 2011 and 2014. In the most recent Hamas elections, held in 2021, he was elected chairman of the Shura Council in the Gaza Strip. After Gilad Shalit was abducted, he was one of the most prominent speakers on the issue (Ultra Palestine website, October 17, 2023; al-Jazeera TV website, March 15, 2021).



**Usama al-Mazini (Adham Abu Salmiya's Twitter account, March 17, 2023)**

► Hamas issued a mourning notice for the death in airstrikes of leader and preacher Dr. Wa'el al-Zarad, who was the head of the movement's court, and of the jihad fighter and leader Dr. Taysir Ibrahim (Hamas Telegram channel, October 17, 2023).

◆ **Wa'el Mahi al-Din al-Zarad:** Born on December 24, 1972, married and father of eight. He received a master's degree in hadith [the Islamic oral tradition] studies from the Islamic University of Gaza in 2001, and a doctorate from Ayn Shams University in Cairo. He held several positions in the university's college of applied sciences, and had served as a lecturer at the al-Quds Open University and the Islamic University in Gaza. He was a preacher in mosques in the Gaza Strip, served as an imam of the Great Amri Mosque in Gaza City and became famous for preaching jihad. His son Bara' was killed when an IED accidentally exploded during the riots near the border fence in eastern Gaza City on September 13, 2023 (Wa'el al-Zarad's Facebook page; Quds Press, October 16, 2023).

◆ **Dr. Taysir Kamal Isma'il Ibrahim:** Killed on October 13, 2023 (Muhammad Marwan al-Qutarawi's Facebook page, October 13, 2023). He was appointed dean of the Sharia and Law Faculty at the Islamic University of Gaza after holding several administrative positions at the university. He held a bachelor's and master's degree from the Islamic University of Gaza, and a doctorate in religious law from the World Islamic University in Malaysia. He previously served as inspector of religious law for the National Production Bank in Gaza. He was a preacher in mosques in the Gaza Strip and a member of the



Palestinian association of religious authorities (Arab International Academy website; Taysir Ibrahim's Facebook page).



**Taysir Ibrahim (Facebook page of Taysir Ibrahim, September 9, 2023)**

## Hamas reactions

- ▶ **Khaled Mashaal, Hamas leader "abroad,"** related to the threats of senior Israeli officials to eliminate Hamas. He claimed it was not the first time Israel used the slogan of eliminating Hamas. He claimed Operation al-Aqsa Storm was their opportunity, as Palestinians and Arabs, to "eliminate the Zionist entity." He thanked Hezbollah for the steps it had taken so far but the battle required them to do more and it was in their common interest to fight together (al-Arabi, October 16, 2023).
- ▶ **Hamas spokesman Abd al-Latif al-Qanua** claimed they were ready, willing and able to confront Israel and its "hopeless attempts to enter the Gaza Strip." He also claimed that "the killing of the Palestinian children and civilians" was proof Israel was afraid to confront Hamas' military wing. He called for the continuation of "support demonstrations" around the world and more solidarity with the Palestinian people (Hamas Telegram channel, October 16, 2023).
- ▶ **Abu Obeida, spokesman for Hamas' military-terrorist wing,** claimed Israel's threat of a ground maneuver did not frighten them, the Gaza Strip would be a graveyard for the invaders and its sands would swallow them. He added that a ground maneuver would be a new opportunity to punish Israel for the "crimes" it had committed in recent days (Hamas Telegram channel, October 16, 2023; Palinfo, October 16, 2023).



**Abu Obeida gives a speech. The Arabic reads, "Indeed the victory of Allah's people is near and approaching" (Qur'an Sura 2, verse 214) (Palinfo, October 16, 2023)**

## Hamas in the international arena

► Hamas issued a statement of appreciation for the position of the Colombian Foreign Ministry, which asked the Israeli ambassador to leave the country after he had criticized the Colombian president for expressing solidarity with the Palestinians. Hamas called on all the countries of the world to take similar steps (Hamas website, October 16, 2023).

## The PIJ

► **PIJ spokesman Daoud Shehab** said the "Palestinian resistance" [terrorist organizations] had strength, capabilities and fighters on the various fronts where there was a Palestinian presence, including south Lebanon and Syria, adding they were prepared for conflict if the fronts became active. However, he claimed the Palestinians did not want to open other fronts or become an enemy of the world. Regarding the United States, he claimed it had destroyed Iraq and Afghanistan with flimsy excuses and was now using the same excuses in an attempt to destroy the Gaza Strip, but had provoked the ire of the Arab-Muslim nation and would have to bear the consequences. Regarding the readiness of the "resistance forces" [terrorist operatives] in the Gaza Strip, he said the "resistance" had capabilities and means and a stock of weapons that would surprise Israel. He claimed the coordination between the various "resistance forces" was at a very high level (al-Jazeera TV website, October 16, 2023).

► **PIJ spokesman Musab al-Bari** said they were currently giving priority to the "resistance's" response to Israel's aggression. As for Israel's threats of a ground maneuver, he claimed that if Israel dared to enter the Gaza Strip, it would find the "resistance" fighters waiting for it (al-Mayadeen TV website, October 16, 2023).

## The Northern Arena - Lebanon

### Attacks

► After a quiet morning and after Israeli residents had evacuated the towns and villages near the border, **during the past day there were several incidents near the border fence, including shooting and an attempted infiltration.**

► **At around 5 p.m. on October 16, 2023,** shots were fired from small arms at several IDF posts on the Lebanese border and an anti-tank missile was fired at an IDF tank. The shooting lasted about an hour. No casualties were reported.

► Hezbollah claimed responsibility for attacking five Israeli border posts, stating “resistance” fighters had directly hit the Misgav Am, Khirbat al-Manara, Hermon, Risha and Ramya posts, and there were confirmed wounded. Later, Hezbollah issued another claim of responsibility for hitting a Merkava tank in the al-Dhahira area (Tabak post) with guided missiles. According to Hezbollah, the operation was carried out by the Ali Kamel Mohsen squad, named for an operative killed in an attack attributed to Israel in July 2020 in Syria (Hezbollah's combat information Telegram channel, October 16, 2023).



**Photos from Hezbollah's video documenting the anti-tank fire. Right: Merkava tank (yellow) at Tabak post before Hezbollah's anti-tank missile hit (red). Left: The missile hits the tank (Hezbollah's combat information Telegram channel, October 16, 2023)**

► In response, IDF forces fired artillery at the sources of the attack. The IDF later attacked Hezbollah military-terrorist targets in Lebanese territory (IDF spokesman, October 17, 2023).

► The Lebanese army reported that after an inspection and search of the border areas, 20 launching pads were found on the outskirts of the towns of al-Qleileh and al-Shaitiya, four of which had rockets ready to for launching. The army reportedly dismantled them (Lebanese army Twitter account, October 16, 2023).

► **On the morning of October 17, 2023**, the IDF prevented a four-man terrorist squad from infiltrating Israel from Lebanon. IDF surveillance identified the squad approach the border fence and planted an IED. The terrorists were shot and killed (IDF spokesman, October 17, 2023).



**Eliminating the terrorist squad (IDF website, October 17, 2023)**

► **At around 10 a.m. on October 17, 2023**, an anti-tank missile was fired at the northern Israeli city of Metulla, which lies close to the Lebanese border; three people were wounded. IDF forces attacked the area from which the shooting took place.

► A few minutes later, and 10:18 a.m., it was reported that Hezbollah had launched the missile (al-Mayadeen Telegram channel, October 17, 2023).

► **At 1:30 p.m. on October 17**, another anti-tank attack missile was fired at an IDF post near Margaliot, on the Lebanese border. At the same time, small arms were fired at several points along the border fence. The IDF responded with artillery fire (IDF spokesman, October 17, 2023).

► The Hezbollah-affiliated *al-Akhbar* reported Hezbollah would continue "engaging" Israel on the northern front to reduce the military pressure exerted on the Gaza Strip (*al-Akhbar*, October 17, 2023).

## Responses and diplomatic activity

► **Najib Mikati, prime minister of Lebanon's interim government**, said the government was continuing internal and external contacts to maintain a state of calm in Lebanon insofar as was possible and to distance Lebanon from the war. He said that although there was solidarity in Lebanon with the Palestinian people, no one was interested in opening a front in south Lebanon because Lebanon would not be able to withstand it. He noted that they were working to bring peace but the decision was in the hands of Israel, which had to stop its "provocations" (NAA News Agency, October 16, 2023).



► **Mikati** met with **French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna** and stressed that all measures had to be taken to distance Lebanon from regional tensions. He said a ceasefire would contribute to the issue and stressed the need to hold international and Arab meetings to stop the escalation. The foreign minister replied action had to be taken to distance south Lebanon from the tension since clashes were liable to continue for a long time (Twitter account of the Lebanese prime minister, October 16, 2023). Catherine Colonna said she told each of her interlocutors that they had the responsibility and ability to prevent Lebanon from being dragged into "a vortex from which the country will not recover" (Twitter account of French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, October 16, 2023). According to reports she also met with Lebanese army commander Joseph Aoun (official Twitter account of the Lebanese army, October 16, 2023).

► As part of diplomatic activity aimed at preventing escalation, **Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdullah Bou Habib** met with ambassadors from several countries, including American Ambassador to Lebanon Dorothy Shea. Bou Habib said Lebanon had no desire for escalation and warned of the consequences of unlimited support for Israel on regional security and peace (*al-Nashra*, October 16, 2023).

► **Naim Qassem, Hezbollah deputy secretary general**, said they believed Israel's defeat was "inevitable." He said they were being asked not to expand the war, but they were asking to stop its cause, which he falsely claimed was Israeli aggression, which included the destruction of homes and the killing of children, women and civilians. He also claimed the results of Operation al-Aqsa Storm indicated Israel's failure, military weakness and extreme dependence on the support of the United States and Western countries (Naim Qassem's Twitter account, October 17, 2023).

### **Civilian preparedness**

► Several reports indicate that civilians in Lebanon are preparing for the possibility of war. In the south an increase in demand for consumer goods and food has been reported. Mount Lebanon is preparing to absorb refugees from southern Lebanon (al-Diyar and NBN, October 17, 2023).

## Judea, Samaria and the Palestinian Authority (PA)

### Events on the ground

- ▶ The ministry of health in Ramallah reported that since the beginning of the war in the Gaza Strip, 61 Palestinians had been killed and more than 1,250 wounded in Judea and Samaria. During the past day three Palestinians were killed in clashes with Israeli security forces near the Salem crossing in Jenin, Nablus and Hebron (ministry of health in Ramallah Telegram channel, October 16 and 17, 2023).
- ▶ Wafa reported that Israeli security forces had detained over 100 Palestinians in Judea and Samaria, 76 of them in the Hebron district (Wafa, October 17, 2023). Five Hamas members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, headed by Aziz Dweik, were reportedly detained in Hebron. Issa al-Ja'abri, a former minister in Haniyeh's government, was also detained (Ultra Palestine website, October 17, 2023).

### Palestinian Authority

- ▶ **Mahmoud Abbas, chairman of the PA**, spoke by phone with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak **and** stressed the need to stop the attacks against Palestinian civilians, open humanitarian corridors and prevent attempts to uproot Palestinians from the Gaza Strip. He also noted the importance of preventing civilian deaths and releasing prisoners on both sides. Sunak expressed Britain's willingness to provide humanitarian aid and act to stop the events (Wafa, October 16, 2023).
- ▶ **Hussein al-Sheikh, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee**, met with Tor Wennesland, the UN envoy to the Middle East, and discussed ways to immediately end the "ongoing aggression on the Gaza Strip," provide humanitarian aid for the residents of the Gaza Strip and restore the supply of water and electricity. Al-Sheikh demanded immediate intervention by the UN and mobilization of the international community rather than resorting to condemnation alone (Hussein al-Sheikh's Twitter account, October 16, 2023).
- ▶ **Abdel Bari Atwan, a senior Palestinian commentator**, published an article titled "We must not remain silent about Abu Mazen's [i.e., Mahmoud Abbas'] shameful statements – enough is enough," criticizing Mahmoud **Abbas** and his conduct during the war. He said the "war crimes of the Israeli occupation state" were a "golden opportunity" for Abbas to stand with the Palestinians and "cleanse himself **and** the PA of all the sins they committed." Referring to Mahmoud Abbas' feeble condemnation of Hamas' activities, he noted that to say that Hamas'

actions did not represent the Palestinian people was "shameful" and that the PLO did not represent the Palestinian people (Ra'i al-Youm, October 16, 2023).

► **Rawhi Fattouh, chairman of the PLO's Palestinian National Council**, met with the Iraqi foreign minister to discuss the situation in the Gaza Strip, the importance of opening humanitarian corridors and the need to take a united Arab position against Israel's actions. He expressed his appreciation for Iraq's popular and official position (Wafa, October 16, 2023).

## Iran

► During the past day Iran ramped up its threats against Israel's continued activity in the Gaza Strip. Iran apparently is concerned that an Israeli ground campaign might undermine Hamas' survival of Hamas, which is its main proxy for consolidating its influence in the Palestinian arena. Therefore, it is increasing the threats against Israel in an attempt to prevent it from continuing the campaign. At the same time, statements by senior Iranian officials indicate Iran does not necessarily see Hezbollah's participation in comprehensive campaign against Israel as its only possible response and might prefer to use the pro-Iranian Shi'ite militias in Syria or Iraq to respond to Israel without endangering Hezbollah, which is considered Iran's strategic and forward means of deterring Israel.

► **Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei** said that if Israel's "crimes" continued no one would be able to stop the Muslims and the "resistance" [anti-Israeli terrorist] forces. He accused the United States of responsibility for Israel's actions over the past week, claiming that according to "Iranian information," Israel's policy over the past week had been dictated **by** the United States. He said the Israeli bombings had to stop immediately and senior Israeli officials had to be prosecuted. Khamenei also said the claims that Hamas killed civilians were incorrect because all those living in "settlements in the occupied territories" were armed and not civilians. He said everyone had the responsibility to respond to what was happening in the Gaza Strip (Tasnim, October 17, 2023).

► **Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanani** said the "resistance" would not sit idly by in the face of "Israel's crimes." He said the "axis of resistance" [Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, the Palestinian terrorist organizations and the Houthis in Yemen] was not limited to a specific front and that the Zionists should not exclude any scenario (al-Mayadeen, October 17, 2023).

► **Mohammad Mokhber, Iran's first vice president**, wrote in a message to government ministers and his colleagues in Islamic countries that the countries of the world had to invest

their "best efforts" to put an end to the "war crimes against the Gazans" and send humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip (IRNA, October 17, 2023).

► **Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian** said many regional efforts were being made to prevent the war from expanding. He claimed that when people spoke about the "resistance" today they were not referring only to Hezbollah in Lebanon but to the entire region. He said the leaders of the "resistance" would not allow Israel to act as it pleased in Gaza, and therefore "any preventive action in the coming hours is acceptable." Referring to the possibility of Iran entering the war, he replied that every possibility was acceptable and no one could remain indifferent to "Israel's crimes." He said the United States had sent Iran a message calling for restraint and not to expand the war, but Iran replied that self-restraint would not be unilateral and it was impossible to demand restraint from Hezbollah and then allow Netanyahu to commit crimes. Abdollahian also said that during his visit to the region, the leaders of the "resistance" told him that they would release the civilian prisoners "at the appropriate time" (Iranian TV, October 16, 2023).

► On October 17, 2023, **Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon Mojtaba Amani** tweeted about Abdollahian's warnings, writing: "The warnings must be taken seriously. Others may act without prior warning."

► **Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf**, speaker of the Iranian Majlis, speaking at an emergency Zoom meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, said Israel's entry into the Gaza Strip could lead to "opening the gates of **hell** to the entire region and even the world." He warned that if "the crimes of the Zionist entity do not stop, the situation will quickly spiral out of control." Qalibaf also called on the international community to actively condemn Israel (IRNA, October 16, 2023).

► At the same time, diplomatic activity and contacts continued:

◆ **Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi** spoke with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss developments in the Palestinian arena. Speaking with Putin, Raisi warned that "the continuation of the siege, the [alleged] **massacre** of women and children, and a ground attack on Gaza will cause a long and extensive war." Raisi and Erdoğan discussed steps to resolve the crisis (Tasnim, October 16, 2023).

◆ On October 16, 2023, **the Iranian foreign minister spoke with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell** and warned that if Israel did not stop its attacks on the Gaza Strip,



Iran might open new fronts (IRNA, October 16, 2023). He also spoke with the foreign ministers of Malaysia, Tunisia and Pakistan, noting that time for a diplomatic solution was running out and calling for "an immediate halt to the [alleged] massacre and war crimes of the Zionist enemy." The foreign minister also warned against expanding the war to other arenas (Tasnim, October 16, 2023).

## The Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)

► According to reports from "sources close to the Shi'ite pro-Iranian militias in Iraq," three senior IRGC officials visited Iraq and Syria on October 14, 2023 and met with commanders of the pro-Iranian militias, including Akram al-Kaabi of Harakat al-Nujaba, Qais al-Khazali of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, and Hadi al-Ameri, commander of the Badr militia. They coordinated positions on the situation in the Gaza Strip and the possibility of escalation between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon. The source denied that forces of the Iraqi Shi'ite militias had moved to Syria, noting that Iraqi militia fighters were in Iraq and could quickly move to Syria if necessary (al-Araby al-Jadeed, October 16, 2023).

► **Ali Fadavi, deputy IRGC commander**, warned that if Israel continued its "crimes" in Gaza, Muslims in other countries would enter the arena and carry out a major attack against the Zionists, similar to the Palestinian people and the "resistance" groups, which could not bear these crimes. He said the shock of the resistance forces against the Zionists would continue until the "cancerous tumor" [Israel] disappeared from the map of the world (Fars, October 17, 2023).

## The International Arena

### The United Nations

► The UN Security Council convened again to discuss "the gravity of the situation in the Middle East." Russia proposed a resolution calling for a humanitarian ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. The draft resolution condemned violence against civilians and all acts of terrorism but did not explicitly mention Hamas. It did not receive the required number of votes (five votes for, four against, and six abstentions) and was not approved. Russia's representative to the Security Council alleged in response that the vote had proved who was in favor of the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and who was not (Reuters, October 17, 2023).

► **Riyadh Mansour, PA representative to the UN**, said that what was happening in Gaza was not a military operation, but rather "a massacre against innocent civilians," noting that the

public health system in the Gaza Strip had completely collapsed as a result of the Israeli strikes. He said the council should not justify killing and blame the victim (Wafa, October 17, 2023).

► **Mahmoud al-Hamoud, Jordan's representative to the UN**, claimed Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip were not self-defense and did not respect the minimum limits of international humanitarian law (Wafa, October 17, 2023).

► **Martin Griffiths, the UN deputy secretary-general responsible for coordinating UN emergency relief**, related to the desperate situation of approximately one million Gazans displaced from their homes. He claimed their top priority now was to create access to aid for the Gaza Strip. He said they were holding frequent discussions with the Israelis, Egyptians and elements in the Gaza Strip. Regarding the hostage crisis, Griffiths noted that the war began with a kidnapping which had ignited a fire that could only be extinguished when the hostages were released (UN website, October 16, 2023).

## The United States

► **General Michael Kurilla, commander of the US Army's Central Command (CENTCOM)**, arrived in Israel for an official visit as the guest of the IDF Chief of Staff, Major General Herzi Halevi (IDF Twitter account, October 17, 2023). American President Joe Biden is expected to arrive in Israel on Wednesday, October 18, 2023.

## Russia

► **Russian President Vladimir Putin** held phone conversations with **Mahmoud Abbas and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi**. He said "the killing must stop and humanitarian aid be provided to the Palestinians," and confirmed Russia's support for the Palestinian people's right to freedom and independence (Reuters, October 16, 2023). According to later reports, Putin also spoke with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The Kremlin issued a statement saying Putin offered his condolences to the families of the Israelis who were killed and emphasized his rejection and condemnation of any action that harmed the civilian population, including women and children. Putin announced the steps taken by Russia to help normalize the situation, prevent a further escalation of violence and a humanitarian disaster in the Gaza Strip (RIA Agency, October 16, 2023).

## Turkey

► According to a source at the Turkish ministry of foreign affairs, **Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan** spoke by phone with **Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**. The two discussed the latest developments in the fighting in Gaza and the release of civilian abductees held by Hamas (Reuters, October 16, 2023). No mention was made of the abductees in Hamas' report on the conversation (Hamas website, October 16, 2023).

## Egypt

► On Saturday, October 21, 2023, a summit conference is scheduled to be held in Cairo with the extensive participation of international and regional elements to discuss the situation in the Gaza Strip (al-Youm al-Sabaa, October 17, 2023).

► **Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi** spoke by phone with American President Joe Biden, and the two agreed on the severity of the current situation and the importance of stopping it in a way that would not allow the conflict to expand and threaten regional security and stability. They also agreed to give priority to protecting civilians and transferring humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip (Facebook page of the Egyptian presidential spokesman, October 17, 2023).

► **Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry** and French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna held a press conference where they condemned "Israel's attempts to uproot residents from their homes in the Gaza Strip" (Reuters, October 16, 2023).

## Jordan

► **Jordan's King Abdullah II** met with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni during his visit to Europe. Abdullah called on the international community to condemn the attacks on "innocent" civilians (Petra, October 16, 2023). In Berlin, he met with the German president and warned that thousands of innocent Palestinians would be in danger if the war on the Gaza Strip did not end (official Twitter account of the Jordanian royal family, October 17, 2023).

## Iraq

► On October 16, 2023, **American President Joe Biden** spoke by phone with **Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al-Sudani** to discuss the conflict in Gaza (Reuters, October 16, 2023).

## The Global Jihad

► On October 16, 2023, an armed man opened fire near the stadium in Brussels about half an hour before the soccer game between Belgium and Sweden began. He shouted "Allahu Akbar," declared he belonged to ISIS and fled. Two fans wearing Sweden football shirts were killed. The terrorist was pursued, shot and killed. He was identified as Abd al-Salam Jilani of Fateh al-Asoud, 45 years old of Tunisian origin. The Belgian government declared a state of national emergency (Reuters and La Monde, October 16-17, 2023).



**The terrorist during the attack (Telegram, October 16, 2023)**

► Jaish al-Malhem al-Khatroni, al-Qaeda's media information branch, published a poster with a quote from Seif al-Adel, the leader of al-Qaeda, calling on the members of the organization and its supporters to establish sleeper cells to kill the leaders of the "traitorous" Gulf States and help the "jihad fighters" in "Palestine." He also called for attacks on Jews and their property in Islamic countries as an expression of "support for Palestine." The quote appears on the background of a photo of Muhammad bin Zayed, UAE president, meeting with Yitzhak Herzog, president of Israel (Telegram, October 17, 2023). Al-Adel is apparently in Iran.



**The al-Qaeda poster (Telegram, October 17, 2023)**