



# The Iron Swords War Updated to 1 p.m., October 23, 2023

## Overview<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ **The southern sector:** The Israeli Air Force continued to carry out massive air strikes on terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip. Palestinians called them “unprecedented” and heaviest attacks since the beginning of the war. Ground forces operated along the Gazan border to counter terrorism, clear the area of terrorists in preparation for a ground attack, and attempt to collect additional information about the missing and abducted. An anti-tank missile killed one IDF soldier and injured three. The Palestinian terrorist organizations continued launching rockets at Israel, although at a relatively slower pace.
- ▶ **So far, more than 1,400 civilian and soldier deaths have been reported, and 222 civilian and soldiers abductees are being held by terrorists in the Gaza Strip.** Hamas continues to insist that in any negotiation for their release a distinction will be made between civilians and soldiers.
- ▶ **Gaza Strip:** According to reports in Gaza, the humanitarian situation is deteriorating. Egypt proposed that the displaced Palestinians be settled in the Rafah area near the border. Additional aid trucks arrived at the Rafah Crossing. Khaled Mashaal, Hamas leader “abroad,” called on the Arab-Muslim world to mobilize for jihad and for Muslim scholars to issue a fatwa calling on Muslims around the world to fight for the land of “Palestine.”
- ▶ **The northern sector:** Hezbollah squads continue attacking IDF posts and Israeli cities, towns and villages along and near the Lebanese border with anti-tank missiles, rockets and mortar shells. The IDF attacked and eliminated at least eight rocket-launching squads before they could attack; Hezbollah reported seven deaths. Other organizations, including a militia assisting Hezbollah and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), reported three more deaths. Sources in the arena referred to a joint operations room which was in contact with the Gaza Strip and discussed escalation if Israel crossed red lines in the Gaza Strip.

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<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:** Counterterrorism activities and detentions of Palestinians suspected of terrorist activities continued, especially Hamas operatives. A terrorist attack was prevented near al-Aroub, north of Hebron; the Palestinians reported five deaths.

► **Iran:** Government officials warned Israel not to continue the campaign and offered to transfer humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. The Iranian foreign minister spoke with Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, and with Ziyad al-Nakhalah, PIJ secretary general. Pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and Yemen continue threatening to join the campaign. The Iraqi prime minister is trying to deter them on the grounds it would harm Iraq.

## The Combat Arena

### IDF activity

► **Aerial activity:** IDF air strikes on terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip continued and increased, with more than 320 carried out during the past day. The attacks concentrated on Gaza City, which is a focus of Hamas activity. Among the targets were dozens of headquarters, in some of which Hamas and PIJ terrorist organizations were hiding, military compounds and observation posts. Also destroyed were targets which could endanger the Israeli forces preparing for the upcoming ground maneuver, among them dozens of mortar shell launchers, anti-tank missile launching positions and anti-tank and rocket launching squads (IDF spokesman, October 23, 22, 2023).

► The Palestinian media reported that the intensity of the IDF attacks during the night of October 22, 2023 was "unprecedented" and the most massive since the beginning of the war. According to the media assessment, Israel increased the intensity and scope of the attacks in preparation for the ground entry (Ma'an, October 23 2023).



**Attacks on Hamas operational facilities (IDF spokesman's website, October 23, 2023)**



**Attacks in the Gaza Strip during the night of October 22, 2023  
(Shehab Twitter account, October 23, 2023)**



**Right: Attack on a house near the Kamal Adwan hospital in Beit Lahia (Shehab Twitter account, October 23, 2023). Left: Attack on the Riyan Building in the Jabaliya refugee camp (QudsN Twitter account, October 23, 2023)**

► **Ground activity:** IDF forces, accompanied by tanks and engineering vehicles, operated in the Kissufim area on the Gaza Strip border. Their objectives were to carry out counterterrorism activities, clear the area of terrorists in preparation for a ground maneuver and attempt to collect additional information about the missing and abducted. During one activity Palestinian terrorists fired an anti-tank missile at an IDF tank and engineering vehicle, killing an IDF soldier and wounding three (IDF spokesman, October 22, 2023). On the night of October 22, 2023, infantry forces attacked several targets, among them terrorist and anti-tank squads (IDF spokesman, October 23, 2023).

► Hamas' military-terrorist wing claimed responsibility for a "planned ambush" on an armored force which crossed the fence in eastern Khan Yunis, adding that two bulldozers and a tank had been destroyed, the IDF force had to withdraw and the operatives who carried out the ambush managed to return unharmed (Hamas military-terrorist wing Telegram channel, October 22, 2023).

► An IDF tank unintentionally hit an Egyptian position near the border in the Kerem Shalom area, superficially injuring several Egyptian soldiers. The Egyptian army spokesman said that the IDF had expressed its immediate regrets to the Egyptians for the mishap. According to reports, the incident is being investigated (Egyptian army spokesman's Facebook page Facebook, October 22, 2023).

► In the Kissufim area, IDF fighters found a school bag left by Hamas terrorists. Inspection revealed it was booby-trapped and contained seven kilograms (about 15.4 pounds) of

explosives prepared for remote detonation (IDF spokesman, October 22, 2023). A terrorist who had been in Israeli territory since the attack on October 7, 2023 was captured.



**The booby-trapped school bag (IDF spokesman's Twitter account, October 22, 2023)**

## Rocket fire

► During the IDF activity in the Gaza Strip Palestinian terrorists continued launching rockets at Israel, but to a lesser extent than on previous days. They primarily attacked the Israeli cities, towns and villages near the Gaza Strip. One volley was launched at the Beit Shemesh area and another at Beersheba. According to IDF surveillance, the rockets were launched from kindergartens, schools and mosques, using the Gazan population as human shields.



**Rockets fired from within the civilian population [marked in red]. Right: A launch point near a kindergarten. Left: A launch point near a UN building (IDF spokesman, October 22, 2023)**



**Rocket hit near vehicles in Netivot (Magen David Adom spokesmen, October 22, 2023)**

- **More than 7,500 rockets have been fired at Israeli territory since the beginning of the war.** Several hundred rockets fell in the Gaza Strip.

### **Israeli casualties**

- **So far, more than 1,400 civilian and soldier deaths have been reported; 222 abducted civilians and soldiers are being held by the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip.**

### **The issue of releasing the abductees**

- **Zaher Jabarin, who holds the prisoner file in Hamas,** claimed all the mediators had been informed that Hamas would not use the civilian prisoners as a bargaining chip in dealing with Israel. Hamas informed six mediators that it had no objection to releasing them immediately, but “logistical conditions” on the ground prevented it. However, when conditions on the ground allowed, they would be released “unconditionally,” he claimed. Asked why Hamas did not exchange them for Palestinian prisoners [in Israeli jails], Jabarin replied that Hamas separated them from the "military prisoners." He also claimed Hamas had released the two American citizens “without compensation” because of "its Islamic principles and morals [sic]." Jabarin alleged that Hamas’ military wing was “committed to morality and norms and treated the civilian abductees accordingly” (al-Jazeera, October 22, 2023).
- **Hussam Badran, a member of the Hamas political bureau,** claimed they were holding talks with the relevant parties regarding a "prisoner exchange deal," insisting the soldiers and civilians were two separate issues (al-Jazeera, October 22, 2023).

## **The Gaza Strip**

### **Palestinian casualties**

- The spokesman for the Hamas-controlled ministry of health in Gaza reported that as of 2 p.m., the number of dead in the Strip was 5,087 and the number of wounded was 15,273. He

claimed 12 hospitals and 32 medical centers were not functioning because of [alleged] direct attacks, adding that fuel supplies had run out. Regarding the injuries, he claimed they were seeing skin injuries that they had never seen before, and therefore had appealed to international organizations to check what weapons Israel was using (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page, October 23, 2023).<sup>2</sup> UNRWA reported the deaths of 13 more staff members, bringing the total number since the beginning of the war to 29 staff members killed and 17 wounded. According to UNRWA, half of the dead were teachers (UNRWA Twitter account, October 23, 2023).

### **Evacuation of the northern Gaza Strip**

- ▶ According to Hamas administration media information bureau in Gaza, tens of thousands of displaced persons have returned to their houses in Gaza City and the northern Gaza Strip after having moved to the southern area. The bureau alleged Israel attacked residents in areas it had claimed were safe (al-Aqsa, October 22, 2023).
- ▶ "An Egyptian source" stated that Egypt rejected the idea of moving Gazan civilians to the northern Sinai Peninsula. Senior Egyptian officials instead proposed to establish camps in Rafah, about three kilometers inside the territory of the Gaza Strip, which Egypt would supervise and provide with urgent aid. One of its services would be diagnosing the condition of the sick and wounded and if necessary, transferring them to Egypt for treatment. "An additional source" stated Egypt, Qatar and the United States were cooperating on delivering the aid accumulating in Rafah and El-Arish. According to the source, delivering the aid was connected to the Qatar-mediated negotiations between Hamas and Israel regarding the release of the civilian abductees (al-Araby al-Jadeed, October 23, 2023).

### **The situation in the Gaza Strip**

- ▶ Philippe Lazzarini, UNRWA commissioner general of UNRWA, criticized Israel for not allowing fuel to be delivered to Gaza. He claimed UNRWA had fuel for three days and without it there would be no water and hospitals and bakeries would not operate. He emphasized the need for continuous aid (UN website, October 22, 2023).

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<sup>2</sup> As of 1 p.m., October 23, 2023, neither the ministry of health in Ramallah nor the ministry of health in Gaza has provided a list of the names of the fatalities, therefore it is impossible to know how many deaths were civilians and how many were terrorist operatives.

- ▶ According to reports, there are concerns about an outbreak of disease due to the difficult living conditions and the lack of drinking water and basic hygiene products (al-Quds al-Arabi, October 23, 2023).
- ▶ A correspondent from al-Ghad TV, reporting from Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis, said the IDF's massive attacks in the Khan Yunis area had caused a large number of casualties. He claimed the Khan Yunis municipality was unable to supply water to the residents because the fuel supply had run out (al-Ghad TV, October 23, 2023).



**The al-Ghad TV correspondent reports from Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis (al-Ghad TV, October 23, 2023)**

## The Rafah Crossing

- ▶ The Palestinian media reported that the Rafah crossing opened for the second time on October 22, 2023, for the transfer of 14 trucks carrying medicine, food and drinking water to Gaza (al-Quds, October 23, 2023). At around noon on October 23, 2023, the Arab media channels reported the arrival of a third aid convoy whose trucks were waiting for a security examination (al-Ghad TV, October 23, 2023).



**Right: Delivering humanitarian aid to Gaza through the Rafah Crossing (Twitter account of photojournalist Hassan Aslih, October 22, 2023). Left: A UN representative oversees the delivery of humanitarian aid (Rafah Crossing News Facebook page, October 22, 2023)**



## Hamas

► **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, spoke by phone with **Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein-Amir Abdollahian** about the latest developments in the "Zionist aggression against the Strip" and ways to stop the "brutal crimes" committed by Israel (Hamas Telegram channel, October 23, 2023). Abdollahian had a similar conversation with **Ziyad al-Nakhalah, PIJ secretary general** (Telegram channel of the Iranian ministry of foreign affairs, October 23, 2023).

► A recorded speech by Isma'il Haniyeh was played at a support rally in Irbid, Jordan. He thanked the demonstrators for their support and called on them to "continue the mass flood." He claimed the "massacres" [allegedly carried out by Israel] were meant to hide its "great failure" in the face of the "resistance" [the Palestinian terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip] claiming they were moving towards the "great victory." He claimed the Hamas attacks on October 7, 2023 constituted a "turning point in the history of the conflict" and had toppled Israel's theory of security. He called on the Jordanian people and the entire Arab-Muslim world to continue their activities in support of "Palestine" and the "resistance," support the "resistance" and the Palestinian people, and urgently provide humanitarian aid to the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. He noted that when Israel wanted to break the "resistance" in the Gaza Strip, the "resistance" began in Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Syria and all the capital cities (Hamas Telegram channel, October 22, 2023).

► A recorded speech by **Khaled Mashaal, Hamas leader "abroad,"** was played at a gathering in support of Gaza held in Istanbul with the participation of about sixty Arab organizations and institutions in Turkey. He described what was happening today as "a world war which started in al-Aqsa Mosque, which Gaza came to rescue." After the Gazan rescue of al-Aqsa mosque, he falsely claimed, Israel took revenge on the residents of Gaza, and then the United States joined: it not only supported Israel but today was leading the campaign for complete hegemony over the Middle East. He claimed that the Islamic nation's most important obligation was mobilizing for jihad. He called on the Muslim scholars of Sharia law to issue a fatwa compelling Muslims to fight in the land of "Palestine," adding that the rights of the Palestinians would not be restored by the Security Council but by mobilization bureaus, "and a thousand words do not equal one bullet." He appealed for money and weapons to help the Gaza Strip, called on "everyone" to demonstrate and protest and refute the Israeli narrative

in the media through "a media flood which would present the 'real' Palestinian-Arab narrative" (al-Jazeera Mubasher, October 22, 2023; al-Andalou News, October 22, 2023).

►  **Hamas spokesman Abd al-Latif al-Qanua** boasted that the "resistance" was firm, strong, capable of conducting the campaign and dealing with any land "aggression." He added that if the IDF conducted a land incursion "it will be a good opportunity to inflict casualties and capture prisoners" ( Hamas Telegram channel, October 23, 2023).

## The PIJ

► **Ismail al-Sindawi, aka Abu Mujahed, the PIJ representative in Damascus**, said the Cairo summit was a disappointment and the Egyptian president's statements spoke about both sides of the conflict "as if he were speaking of the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea." He said they put their trust in the Arab and Islamic nations and not in the regimes subordinate to the United States, which had normalized relations with Israel. He said Hezbollah sacrificed 19 lives in the campaign, the resistance in Iraq was helping by attacking the American bases in Iraq and Syria, and the Houthis had also launched missiles at Israel. Regarding the situation in Israel, he claimed that for the first time during the war demonstrations were held, heralding the failure of the war against Gaza had demonstrated, foreshadowing the failure of the war against Gaza (Fars Agency, October 23, 2023).

► **Ahmed Baraka, the PIJ representative in Yemen**, said that the Arab and Islamic attitudes towards what was happening in Gaza were very embarrassing, and the Arab-Muslim world should have imposed sanctions on Israel. He pointed positively to the Arab nations taking to the streets in recent days. Asked why the "axis of resistance" [Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, the Palestinian terrorist organizations and the Houthis in Yemen] did not intervene, he claimed the "axis of resistance" stood by them but did not have an obligation to fight on the battlefield. Everyone knew about the aid the Palestinians received from the "axis of resistance," or more precisely, from Iran, which gave them money, weapons and technical knowledge. He claimed **the "axis" had a joint operations room which was managing the campaign and had drawn red lines**, and if Israel crossed them there would be "axis" military intervention. He claimed that had already been manifested in Iraq, South Lebanon, Syria and Yemen (almasirahnews website, October 22, 2023).

## The Northern Arena

### Lebanon

#### The situation on the ground

► Hezbollah operatives continued launching anti-tank missiles, mortar shells and rockets at IDF forces and the northern cities, towns and villages. Hezbollah claimed responsibility for all the attacks (Hezbollah's combat information Telegram channel, October 22 and 23, 2023).

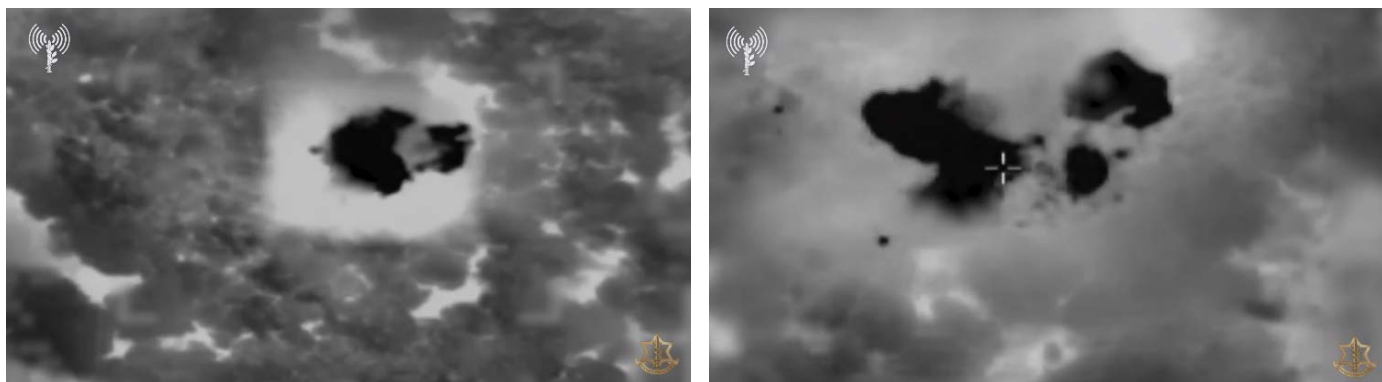


#### Documentation of Hezbollah attacks on the Gladiola post in Mount Dov (Hezbollah's combat information Telegram channel, October 22, 2023)

► IDF forces continued to attack terrorist squads in Lebanese territory planning to launch anti-tank missiles and rockets at Israel, destroying them and their weapons. During the past day, several squads planning to shoot at Matat, Har Dov, Malkia and Shlomi were eliminated. At the same time, airstrikes were carried out against Hezbollah military-terrorist, including compounds and observation posts (IDF spokesman, October 22, 23, 2023).



The IDF attack on a Hezbollah military facility (IDF Spokesman's website, October 23, 2023)



**Right: IDF attack on a terrorist squad near Matat. Left: IDF attack on a terrorist squad near Har Dov (IDF website, October 22, 2023).**

## Hezbollah fatalities

► During the past day Hezbollah reported seven of its operatives had been killed while "fulfilling their jihad duty" and another who died of his wounds.<sup>3</sup> Hezbollah's announcements did not specify the time or location of the incident (Hezbollah's combat information Telegram channel, October 22, 2023):

- ◆ Ali Yusuf Abu Khalil, aka Dhu al-Fiqar, from the town of al-Qlaileh in south Lebanon.
- ◆ Haidar Khader Ayad, aka Mohammed Jawad, from the town of Tayr Felsay in south Lebanon.
- ◆ Ja'far Abbas Ayoub, aka Dhu al-Fiqar, from the town of Younine in the Bekaa Valley.
- ◆ Ali Mahmoud Marmar, aka Abu Turab, from the town of al-Taybeh in south Lebanon.
- ◆ Ahmed Ali al-Hellani, aka Nur Ali, from the town of al-Hellaniyah in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon.
- ◆ Bilal Abdullah Ayoub, aka Ali Haidar, from the town of Yahfoufa in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon.
- ◆ Muhammad Hassan Mansour, aka Shamran, from the town of Mashgharah, in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon.
- ◆ Abbas Ali al-Suqiya, aka Ali al-Hadi, from the town of Ainatha in south Lebanon.

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<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Hassan Mansour, aka Shamran.



**Hezbollah operatives killed on October 22, 2023**  
**(Hezbollah's combat information Telegram channel, October 22, 2023)**



**Hezbollah operatives killed on October 22, 2023**  
**(Hezbollah's combat information Telegram channel, October 22, 2023)**

- ▶ The Lebanese Battalions for Resistance to the Israeli Occupation<sup>4</sup> issued a statement announcing the deaths of two of their fighters, Ali Kamal Abd al-Aal, aka Jihad, and Hassan Abd al-Aal, aka Bilal (Hezbollah combat information Telegram channel, October 23, 2023).
- ▶ The PIJ's military-terrorist wing announced the death of Osama Muhammad Kheir Dhayabat, 23, one of the operatives in the Syrian arena, killed on October 22, 2023, in south Lebanon (Jerusalem Brigades Telegram channel, October 22, 2023). Since the beginning of Operation al-Aqsa Storm, the Jerusalem Brigades have announced the deaths of four operatives in south Lebanon, two of whom came from the Syrian arena and two from the Lebanese arena.

<sup>4</sup> A Lebanese paramilitary organization founded in 1997, it includes militias of Sunni, Christian, Druze and other non-Shiite Muslims operating with Hezbollah in south Lebanon, particularly in the Sidon region.



**Jerusalem Brigades operative killed in south Lebanon  
(Jerusalem Brigades Telegram channel, October 22, 2023)**

## Reactions

### Hezbollah

► According to an article by **Ibrahim al-Amin, who is close to Hassan Nasrallah**, Western and Arab diplomats in Beirut share French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna's view that the war between Israel and Lebanon is already being waged, and Hezbollah understands it faces a difficult war because its red line is exactly the one the Israeli government intends to cross in its war against Hamas. He also notes that the diplomats agree that Hezbollah is not on maximum alert and its institutions operate routinely, with the alert noticeable only in the border area. In his opinion, some even believe Hezbollah aspires to limit the confrontation to the area of the Shebaa Farms and does not intend to change the rules of engagement. The escalation has been caused by Palestinian organizations carrying out cross-border operations in solidarity with the Gaza Strip. UNIFIL forces are aware that no one can carry out a military operation in south Lebanon without Hezbollah's knowledge, and they understand that the Lebanese army is incapable of stopping the Palestinian networks, proof of which is that the points where the fighters operate are closed because Hezbollah holds them (*al-Akhbar*, October 23, 2023).

► It was also reported that the residents of the Dahiya (Hezbollah's stronghold in Beirut), especially the residents of the neighborhoods of Harat Hreik and Bir al-Abed, who suffered a severe blow from Israeli attacks during the Second Lebanon War and are considered the "circle of direct threat," had begun preparations for the campaign. Thousands of residents had prepared bags with equipment in case they had to leave, and public vigilance was felt in pharmacies, since residents had begun to stock up on several months' worth of medicine (*al-Akhbar*, October 23, 2023).

► **Hashem Safi al-Din, chairman of Hezbollah's Executive Council**, claimed Israel had compared the “resistance” in the Gaza Strip to ISIS to benefit from it. He also accused French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and American President Joe Biden of being worse than ISIS because they backed attacks against hospitals (*al-Nashra*, October 23, 2023).

## Palestinian NGOs

► In an article about the involvement of Hamas and the PIJ in the campaign in south Lebanon and the possibility of opening a broad front from the north, **Ihsan Ataya, PIJ representative in Lebanon and a member of the PIJ's political bureau**, said that coordination with Hezbollah was carried out through a joint operations room which was in constant contact with the Gaza Strip. In his opinion, the opening of the south Lebanese front depends on developments in Gaza. According to the article, there is information that more Palestinian organizations are preparing to enter the front line, as Hamas and the PIJ did (*aljazeera.net*, October 22, 2023).

## Judea, Samaria, and the Palestinian Authority

### Events on the ground

► The Israeli security forces continued their extensive counterterrorism activities. During the past day, 64 wanted Palestinians were detained, including 37 Hamas operatives. Since the beginning of the war in Gaza, 800 wanted Palestinians have been detained in Judea and Samaria, of whom 500 are Hamas operatives (IDF spokesman's Twitter account, October 23, 2023). According to the ministry of health in Ramallah, as of 8:00 a.m., the number of fatalities in Judea and Samaria since the beginning of the war in Gaza was 95. During the past day five Palestinians were killed, two in the Jilazoun refugee camp, two in Nablus and one in al-Arroub (ministry of health in Ramallah Facebook page, October 23, 2023). The following were the main events:

- ◆ On October 23, 2023, Israeli security forces operated in the Jilazoun refugee camp, north of Ramallah. They detained 20 wanted Palestinians (Israeli media, October 23, 2023). The Palestinians reported two fatalities during clashes (Ma'an, October 23, 2023).
- ◆ On October 22, 2023, Israeli security forces operated in the Nablus area to detain Palestinians wanted for involvement in terrorist activities. Palestinians threw IEDs; the

IDF forces returned fire (Judea and Samaria Rescue, October 22, 2023). The Palestinians reported two fatalities (Wafa, October 22, 2023).

- ◆ On the afternoon of October 22, 2023, a Palestinian tried to run over IDF fighters with his vehicle at a checkpoint near al-Arroub (north of Hebron). He was shot and killed. A knife was found in his vehicle (Israeli media, October 22, 2023).

## Palestinian Authority (PA)

► **PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh** met in Ramallah with diplomats from 25 countries. He claimed international support for "Israeli aggression" legitimized the continued killing and destruction and a united international front was needed to stop Israel's plans to "uproot residents and invade the Gaza Strip." He said that in addition to the aggression in the Gaza Strip, they were dealing with the IDF's "terrorism" in Judea and Samaria, and that to continue the "murder" of Palestinians the IDF rules for opening fire had been changed and the settlers were being encouraged to arm themselves (Wafa, October 22, 2023).



**Muhammad Shtayyeh meets with foreign representatives in the PA (Wafa, October 22, 2023)**

► **Nasser al-Laham, editor-in-chief of Ma'an News Agency**, published an editorial criticizing the PA. He wrote that two weeks had passed since the outbreak of the war and there was no Palestinian entity addressing the public and providing it with information about the campaign in Gaza or Judea and Samaria. There was no responsible entity with knowledge about what was happening or guiding the residents. They lived in a vacuum without a government, without leaders and without dedicated departments in the PLO. He said it seemed that the government ministries themselves were fed by information from television screens, and did not publish guidelines regarding consumption, equipping oneself, guarding at schools or how to deal with the banks (Ma'an, October 22, 2023).



## Iran

► **Iranian Defense Minister Mohammad-Reza Ashtiani** spoke by phone with **Syrian Defense Minister Ali Mahmoud Abbas** to discuss developments in Gaza. Ashtiani condemned the "crimes of the Zionist regime in Gaza" and Israel's attacks on the Aleppo and Damascus airports. He noted that by attacking the airports, Israel was conveying the message that it was capable of providing a serious response on all fronts at a time when it was more fragile than the image it had created. He added that Israel's attacks in Gaza encouraged world public opinion against Israel and were like "political suicide." The Syrian minister of defense thanked Iran for supporting Syria and the "axis of resistance," saying that the "crimes of the Zionist regime" had given the Palestinians the support of all Arabs, Muslims and freedom seekers and heralded the beginning of a great revolution that would lead to Israel's defeat (Mehr, October 23, 2023).

► **Ali Fadavi, deputy commander of the IRGC**, told a student conference in support of the Palestinians at Tehran University that Iran had repeatedly said it would support anyone who fought against Israel. Asked about practical steps taken by Iran in the war, Fadavi said, "Some of you, young people, see practical action as launching direct missiles at Haifa. Of course, if it is necessary and if we are assigned the task, we will carry it out without hesitation, but I am not the one who determines the mission" (Tasnim, October 22, 2023). Interviewed by Fars News Agency (October 23, 2023), Fadavi said that if Israel entered the Gaza Strip, it would be defeated and dealt a severe blow by the "resistance front." However, he noted that the "resistance front" in the region could act on its own.

► **Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein-Amir Abdollahian** spoke by phone with his Egyptian counterpart, Sameh Shoukry, to discuss developments in Gaza. Abdollahian praised Egypt for organizing the regional summit and for its efforts to stop the conflict and deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza. He reiterated the Iranian Red Crescent's willingness to send humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip through the Rafah Crossing. Abdollahian added that Israel's ultimate goal was the forcible displacement of residents of the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria to the Sinai Peninsula and parts of Jordan (ISNA, October 22, 2023).

► At a joint press conference held in Tehran by the foreign ministers of Iran and South Africa, Abdollahian called the region a powder keg and noted that any mistaken consideration on Israel's part could have severe and bitter consequences. He warned the United States and

Israel that if the "crimes against humanity and genocide in Gaza" were not stopped immediately, all options were open and the region could spiral out of control (ISNA, October 22, 2023).

## Pro-Iranian militias in Iraq, Syria and Yemen

► **American Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin** said there had been a number of recent attacks against American military bases in Iraq and Syria, noting they were concerned about the significant escalation against their personnel in the region. He said the United States would not hesitate to take appropriate actions to ensure the safety of its forces. He also noted that the additional deployment of American forces to the Middle East was a message to those who wished to expand the current conflict (ABC, October 22, 2023).

► Iraqi sources reported that in the three recent attacks on the United States Army base in Ayn al-Assad, three soldiers had been killed and six wounded. One of the fatalities was an American contractor (al-Ma'aluma, October 22, 2023).

► "Iraqi sources" reported that **Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia' al-Sudani** was working to stop the attacks carried out by pro-Iranian militias on military bases where American forces were concentrated in northern and western Iraq. The prime minister reportedly held contacts with the "coordination committee" of the parties affiliated with the pro-Iranian militias and with some of the militia commanders to stop any escalation against the American forces at bases in al-Anbar, Baghdad and Erbil. Al-Sudani explained the severity of the escalation, its impact on the stability of his government and the fear of losing American support (*al-Araby al-Jadeed*, October 22, 2023).

► **Yahya Rasool, spokesman for the Iraqi armed forces**, said they opposed the attacks against the Iraqi bases where the headquarters of the international coalition advisors were located, noting that all security forces had been instructed not to allow security and stability to be harmed in Iraq (Iraqi armed forces Telegram channel, October 23, 2023).

► **Abdel-Aziz bin Habtour, the Houthis' interim prime minister**, said Yemen had helped respond to the "massacres in the Gaza Strip" and would help in the future. He said they had fired missiles in solidarity with the Palestinian people in view of what had been done in the Gaza Strip. He stated that Israel claimed they had fired missiles and drones at "occupied" areas such as Ashqelon, Ashdod and Tel Aviv, and that the United States intercepted some of them and others hit the target. He warned that if the aggression against the Gaza Strip

continued, Israeli ships sailing in the Red Sea would be attacked and they would take part in the fighting according to their capabilities (Tasnim, October 22, 2023).

## The International Arena

### United States

► **United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken** expressed American concern and noted that they anticipated the possibility of escalation by Iranian proxies against American military forces in the region. He noted they were taking the necessary steps to protect their forces and respond decisively, as necessary. He stressed the United States did not want an escalation or opening of another front, but if that happened, the forces were prepared (Fox News, October 22, 2023).

► **Brian Nelson, United States under secretary of the treasury for terrorism and financial intelligence**, intends to travel to Saudi Arabia and Qatar to continue American efforts to prevent Hamas and other terrorist organizations from raising and transferring funds (American Treasury Department, October 23, 2023).

► Following the attack on American bases in Iraq, the American Department of State issued a travel warning prohibiting American citizens from traveling to Iraq. According to the warning, the United States has limited ability to provide support to Americans in Iraq in cases of terrorism and kidnappings. The United States also demanded that the families of embassy employees in Baghdad leave because of heightened security threats against American administration personnel, and forbade its administration personnel based in Baghdad to use the city's international airport (Twitter account of American Department of State, October 22, 2023).

### Solidarity demonstrations

► On October 22, 2023, demonstrations were held in support of the Palestinians in Egypt, Tunisia, Pakistan, the United States (Boston), France (Paris), Belgium (Brussels), the Netherlands, Britain (London) and Germany (al-Jazeera, October 22, 2023).



**Protests in support of the Palestinians in Boston, Pakistan, Tunisia, Egypt, France (Paris), Belgium (Brussels), the Netherlands and Germany (al-Jazeera, October 22, 2023)**