

Iran Update, November 30, 2023

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Information Cutoff: 5:00 pm EST

The Iran Update provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities abroad that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests. It also covers events and trends that affect the stability and decision-making of the Iranian regime. The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) provides these updates regularly based on regional events. For more on developments in Iran and the region, see our [interactive map of Iran and the Middle East](#).

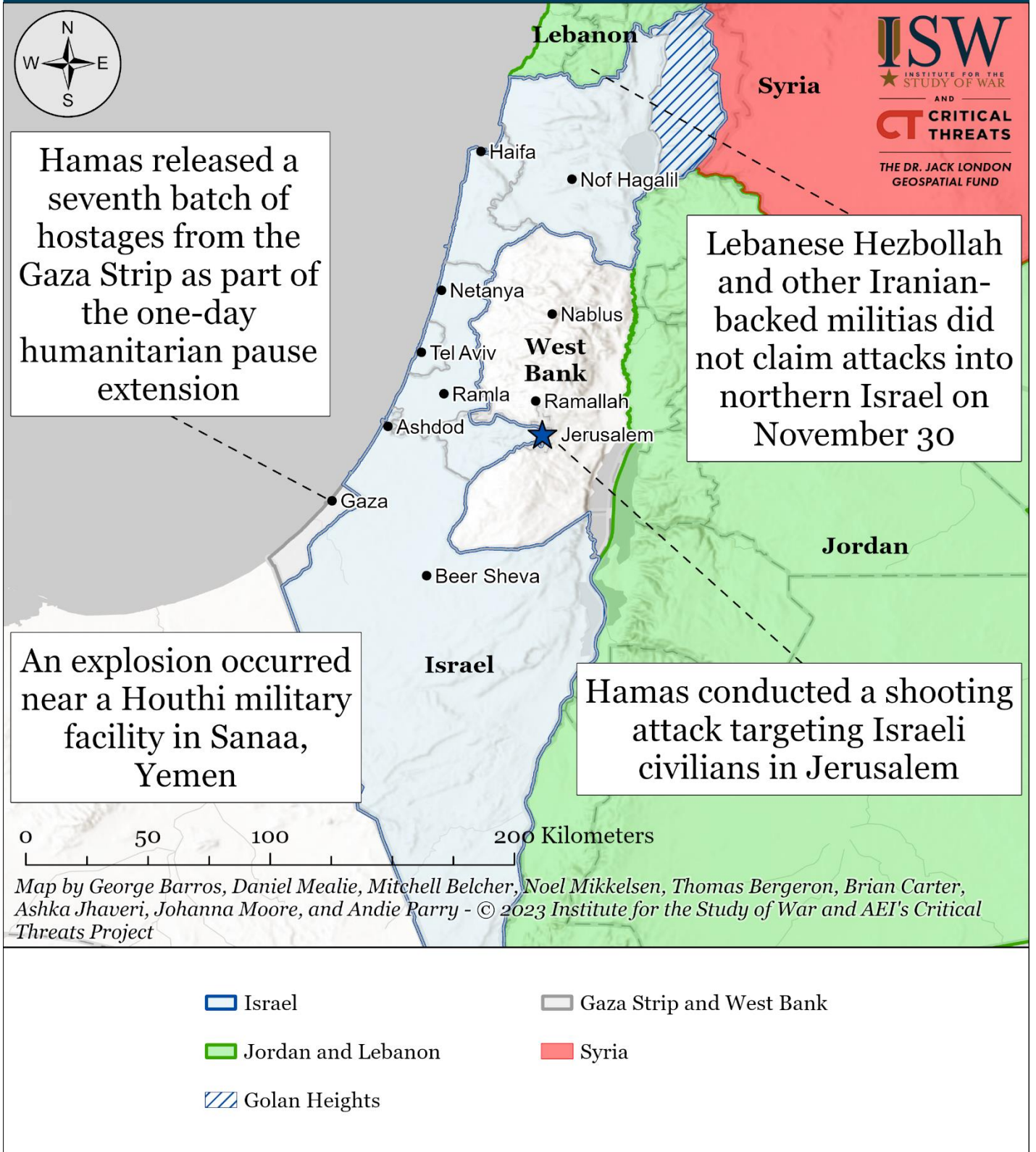
Note: CTP and ISW have refocused the update to cover the Israel-Hamas war. The new sections address developments in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as noteworthy activity from Iran's Axis of Resistance. We do not report in detail on war crimes because these activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We utterly condemn violations of the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions and crimes against humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.

Click [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

Key Takeaways:

1. Members of the Israeli policy community have expressed concerns in recent days that Iran's so-called "Axis of Resistance" has built the capability to attack Israel from the West Bank and Lebanon in addition to the Gaza Strip. These concerns are consistent with Iranian leaders' intent to threaten Israel and its population from multiple different directions simultaneously and thereby drive citizens away from living in Israel.
2. Israel and Hamas extended the humanitarian pause agreement for an additional day, meaning that the pause is set to expire on December 1 at 0000 EST. Israel and Hamas completed the seventh swap of hostages in the Gaza Strip for Israeli-held Palestinian and Arab-Israeli prisoners on November 30 in accordance with the humanitarian pause agreement.
3. Israeli officials are emphasizing their continued commitment to destroying Hamas and their immediate military readiness. Hamas is signaling its preparedness for further fighting as well.
4. Palestinian fighters conducted nine attacks targeting Israeli forces in the West Bank. Hamas conducted a shooting attack targeting Israeli civilians in Jerusalem as well.
5. Members of the Axis of Resistance threatened to resume their regional attacks on US and Israeli targets if Israel resumes military operations in the Gaza Strip after the humanitarian pause ends.
6. An explosion occurred at a Houthi military facility in Sanaa, Yemen. The Houthis have claimed responsibility for several attacks on Israel and Israeli-owned tankers in the Red Sea throughout the Israel-Hamas war.

Israel-Hamas War as of November 30, 2023, 5:00 PM ET



Members of the Israeli policy community have expressed concerns in recent days that Iran’s so-called “Axis of Resistance” has built the capability to attack Israel from the West Bank and Lebanon in addition to the Gaza Strip. An Israeli think tank published an article on November 29 describing the risk of a Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) ground attack into northern Israel in a way similar to Hamas’ October 7 attack.[1] The article stated that LH “poses a significant challenge for the IDF and still poses a clear and present danger.” Mark Regev—a senior adviser to the Israeli prime minister—similarly warned on November 30 that Hamas seeks to attack Israeli targets inside and from the West Bank.[2] Regev expressed concern that Hamas could conduct an escalation from the West Bank into Israel similar to Hamas’ October 7 attack. CTP-ISW has reported extensively on how Iran has invested in building military capabilities and infrastructure in the West Bank in recent months.[3]

These concerns are consistent with Iranian leaders’ intent to threaten Israel and its population from multiple different directions simultaneously and thereby drive citizens away from living in Israel. Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Commander Major General Hossein Salami advocated for LH and Palestinian militia ground attacks into Israel during an interview with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei’s website in August 2022.[4] Salami argued that such attacks would stoke internal chaos and facilitate migration away from Israel. Iran’s defense minister, Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Gharaei Ashtiani, more recently boasted on November 18 that Hamas’ October 7 attack has reduced migration to Israel by creating economic, political, and security crises for the country.[5]

Gaza Strip

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Erode the will of the Israeli political establishment and public to launch and sustain a major ground operation into the Gaza Strip
- Degrade IDF material and morale around the Gaza Strip.

Israel and Hamas extended the humanitarian pause agreement for an additional day, meaning that the pause is set to expire on December 1 at 0000 EST. Israel, Hamas, and Qatar confirmed the extension late on November 29.[6] The Qatari Foreign Affairs Ministry stated the extension includes the same conditions as the previous pause agreement, which involve a cessation of all military activities and the entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip.[7] No further extension was announced at the time of this writing.

Israel and Hamas completed the seventh swap of hostages in the Gaza Strip for Israeli-held Palestinian and Arab-Israeli prisoners on November 30 in accordance with the humanitarian pause agreement. Hamas released eight Israeli hostages to the Red Cross on November 30.[8] The agreement stipulates that Hamas must release ten hostages to extend the pause an additional day, but Israel agreed to count two of the hostages whom Hamas released yesterday as part of the most recent ten.[9] Hamas previously released 12 Israelis on November 29, including two dual Israeli-Russian citizens through a separate negotiation process with Russia.[10] The al Qassem Brigades—the militant wing of Hamas— said that it released the Russian citizens as a sign of appreciation for Russian President Vladimir Putin’s support for Palestine.[11] Israel released 22

Palestinian youth and eight Arab-Israel women from detention on November 30.[12]

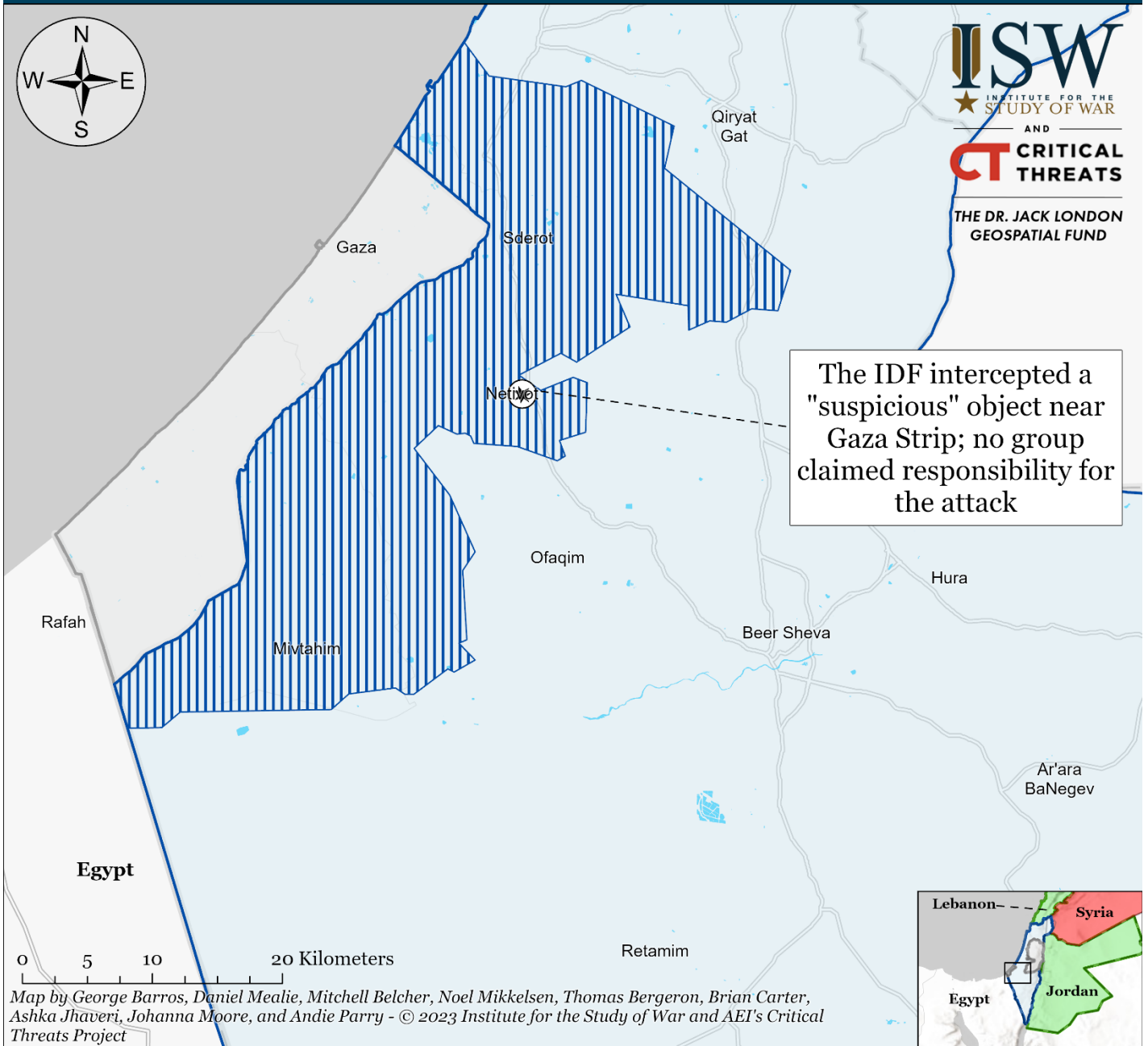
Israeli officials are emphasizing their continued commitment to destroying Hamas and their immediate military readiness. Hamas is signaling its preparedness for further fighting as well. The IDF spokesperson stated on November 30 that the IDF is ready to resume the fighting and is prepared to attack at any hour, including the night of November 30, if the pause is not renewed for another day.[13] Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant stated that Israel will take as long as needed to win the war in the Gaza Strip against Hamas in a meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.[14] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu similarly reiterated his oath to eliminate Hamas, saying that “nothing will stop us” after his meeting with Blinken.[15] Netanyahu also spoke to Blinken about the “next phase” of fighting.[16] The al Qassem Brigades issued on Telegram a warning to its fighters to be on high alert on the evening of November 29 before Israel and Hamas renewed the pause.[17] Hamas does not ordinarily issue orders to its fighters on this public channel, suggesting the statement was intended to message Hamas’ military readiness.

The United Nations confirmed that 10,500 liters of fuel reached two northern Gaza Strip hospitals on November 29.[18] The Palestinian Red Crescent Society and UNRWA delivered medical supplies and fuel to al Ahli hospital and al Sahaba hospital. This fuel will operate the hospitals' generators for about a week. The United Nations noted the lack of fuel in the northern Gaza Strip is disrupting water filtration plants, however. The Gazan Health Ministry director stated on November 30 that that fuel had not reached hospitals in Gaza city and the northern parts of the strip, which is preventing hospitals from resuming their full operations, according to Lebanese Hezbollah-affiliated media.[19]

NOTE: The IDF has said that its forces are stationed along ceasefire lines across the Gaza Strip during the pause in fighting. CTP-ISW's map of Israeli clearing operations shows reported Israeli clearing operations and the claimed furthest Israeli advances. CTP-ISW will not be mapping the shift in Israeli operating areas during the humanitarian pause.

The IDF reported that it intercepted a “suspicious target” outside the Gaza Strip over Netivot on November 30.[20] Israel frequently uses the term “suspicious target” to refer to direct and indirect fire attacks into Israeli territory. Israel has not confirmed from where the target originated and said that the event is under investigation. No group claimed the attack. Palestinian militias had not conducted indirect fire attacks into Israel from the Gaza Strip since the humanitarian pause began on November 24.[21]

Attacks into Israel from Gaza as of November 30, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



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

West Bank

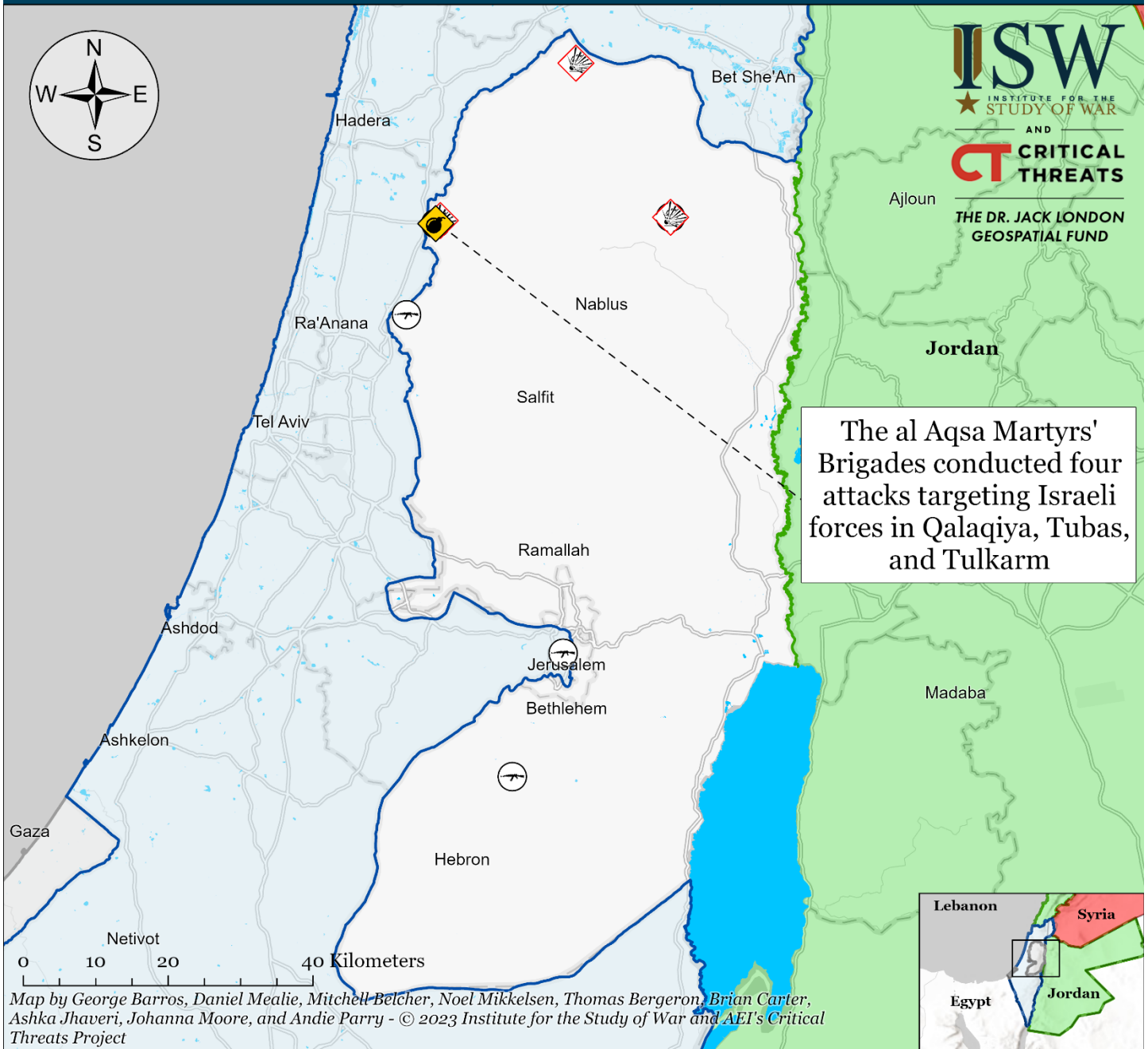
Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

Palestinian fighters conducted nine attacks targeting Israeli forces in the West Bank on November 30.[22] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades—the self-proclaimed militant wing of Fatah—engaged Israeli forces in three small arms clashes in Qalaqiya, Tubas, and Tulkarm.[23] The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades also detonated an IED targeting Israeli forces during an Israeli raid in the Tulkarm refugee camp. The al Quds Brigades separately detonated an IED on Israeli forces in Tubas.[24]

Hamas conducted a shooting attack targeting Israeli civilians in Jerusalem on November 30.[25] Two Hamas gunmen fired on Israeli civilians at a bus stop near an entrance to the city before off-duty Israeli soldiers and an armed civilian killed the gunmen.[26] The Hamas attack killed three Israeli civilians and wounded at least eight others. The attack does not represent a technical violation of the humanitarian pause, which appears to apply only to the Gaza Strip based on statements made by Israel, Hamas, and Qatar. Hamas praised the attackers and said that the attack was in response to Israeli violations and "massacres" in the Gaza Strip and West Bank and Israel's treatment of Palestinian prisoners.[27] Hamas also called for an "escalation of resistance" against Israel without specifying further. The al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, al Quds Brigades, and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine celebrated the attack and reiterated the unity of their fighters with one another.[28]

Clashes in the West Bank as of November 30, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



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

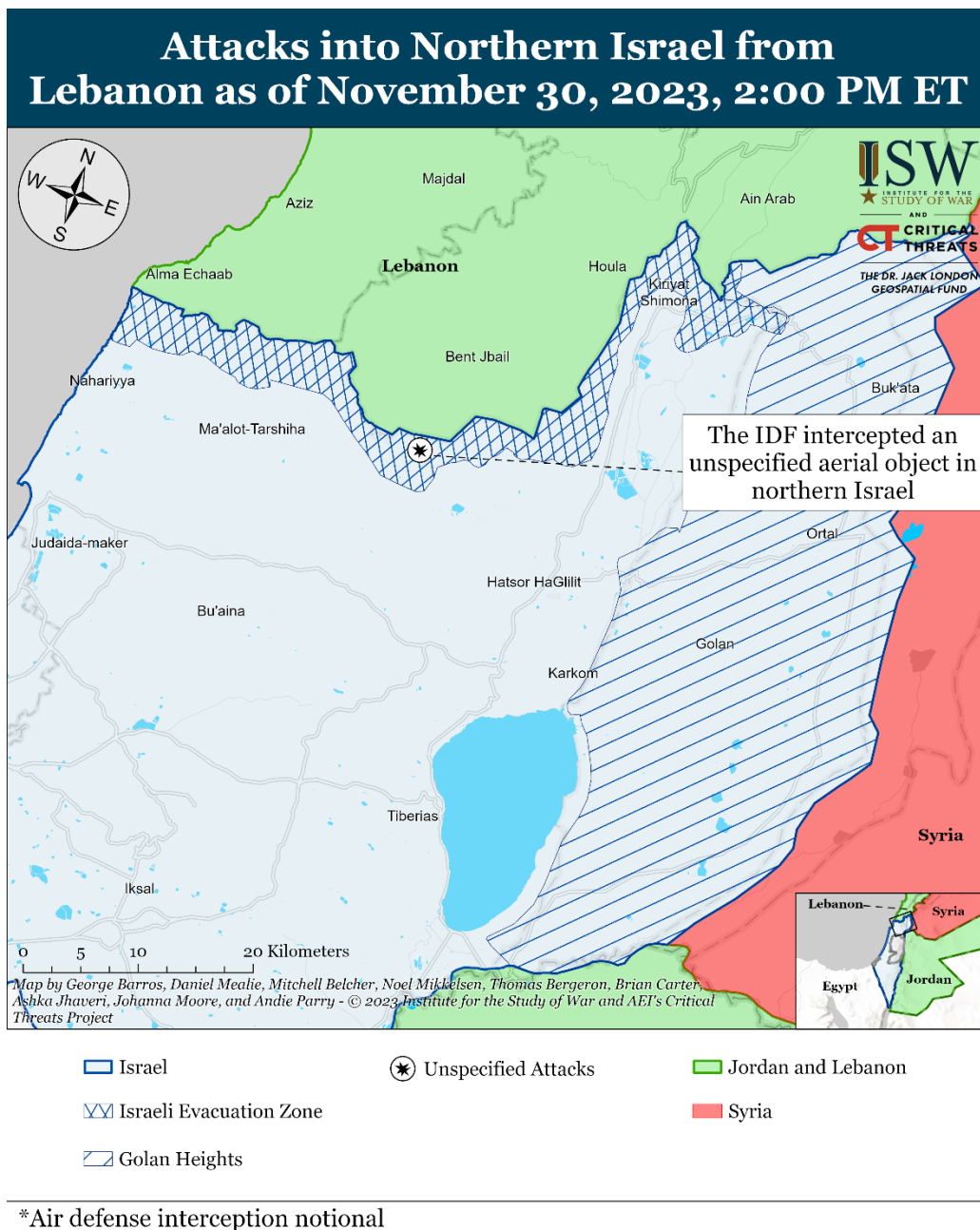
This map is not an exhaustive depiction of clashes and demonstrations in the West Bank.

Southern Lebanon and Golan Heights

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

- Draw IDF assets and resources toward northern Israel and fix them there
- Set conditions for successive campaigns into northern Israel

LH and other Iranian-backed militias did not claim any attacks into northern Israel on November 30. The IDF intercepted an unspecified “aerial target” that crossed from Lebanon into Israeli territory on November 30.[29] No group claimed responsibility for the unspecified “aerial target”.



Iran and Axis of Resistance

Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

Members of the Axis of Resistance threatened on November 30 to resume their regional attacks on US and Israeli targets if Israel resumes military operations in the Gaza Strip after the humanitarian pause ends. The Axis of Resistance—likely under Iranian direction—has conducted dozens of attacks against US and Israeli targets across the Middle East since the war began but largely stopped these attacks since the pause began on November 24. The Axis of Resistance has continued to attack and seize Israeli-operated tankers in this period, however.

- The Islamic Resistance in Iraq—a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias—stated that it will escalate against the United States inside and outside Iraq if Israel resumes operations in the Gaza Strip. This statement is consistent with the threats that its constituent militias have made against the United States in recent days.[30] The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed 74 attacks on US positions in Iraq and Syria between October 18 and November 23. Neither the Islamic Resistance in Iraq nor any of its affiliated militias have claimed any attacks on US forces since the pause took effect in the Gaza Strip on November 24.[31]
- The Houthi movement military spokesperson said on November 30 that the Houthis are ready to resume military operations against Israel if Israel resumes operations in the Gaza Strip.[32] Houthi Ambassador to Iran Ebrahim al Daylami said in a meeting with Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian in Tehran on November 30 that the decision to target Israel and Israeli assets in the Red Sea is meant to defend the people of the Gaza Strip.[33] The Houthis did not officially affirm its commitment to the Israel-Hamas truce.

An explosion occurred at a Houthi military facility in Sanaa, Yemen, on November 30. Local footage shows a large cloud of smoke in the Jabal Attan area of Sanaa.[34] An independent analyst on X (Twitter) geolocated the footage to a Houthi missile base.[35] Israeli media, citing unspecified Saudi media, reported that a missile strike cause an explosion at a Houthi missile depot located in a closed military zone.[36] A Houthi Political Bureau member claimed that the explosion was caused by an unexploded piece of ordinance in a mountainous area, without mentioning the military facility.[37] The US Department of Defense press secretary confirmed on November 30 that the US military did not target a Houthi base in Yemen.[38] The Houthis have claimed responsibility for several attacks on Israel and Israeli-owned tankers in the Red Sea throughout the Israel-Hamas war.

Iranian Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Mohammad Bagheri discussed expanding Iranian-Saudi military ties during a phone call with Saudi Defense Minister Khalid bin Salman al Saud on November 30.[39] They also discussed “important issues in the Islamic world,” possibly including the Israel-Hamas war. Bagheri has discussed the war with foreign defense officials on numerous occasions since the war began. Bagheri held separate phone calls with the Russian and Qatari defense ministers on October 19, for example.[40]

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian criticized the Emirati government for hosting Israeli President Isaac Herzog during a phone call with his Emirati counterpart Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan on November 30.^[41]

Abdollahian stated that Herzog's presence at the UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai warrants "serious consideration." IRGC-affiliated media separately reported that Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi did not attend the conference "in protest" against Herzog's presence.^[42] The Iranian regime has consistently pressured Arab and Muslim countries, especially ones that have normalized relations with Israel, since the Israel-Hamas war began to cut diplomatic and economic ties with Israel.

The Artesh and IRGC navies conducted a joint naval exercise with the Royal Navy of Oman in the Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman on November 30.^[43] Iranian media reported that the naval forces monitored maritime traffic as part of the exercise. Iran and Oman have regularly conducted joint exercises in recent years, such as in December 2021.^[44]

Assembly of Experts member Rahim Tavakol revealed that an Assembly of Experts committee is discussing deputy supreme leader candidates during an interview with Iranian reformist-affiliated media on November 28.^[45] The Assembly of Experts is an Iranian regime entity constitutionally responsible for monitoring the supreme leader and selecting his successor. The committee that Tavakol mentioned is the same three-person committee that is reportedly responsible for preparing a short list of potential candidates to succeed Ali Khamenei.^[46] Tavakol confirmed that he is a member of the committee and did not deny when asked about reports that Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Friday Prayer Leader Ahmad Khatami are the other members. Khatami is a staunch hardliner who entered the Assembly of Experts in 1999.^[47] Any individual holding the position of deputy supreme leader would be an obvious candidate to replace current Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei when he dies.

Some Western observers have noted that the Assembly of Experts is discussing deputy supreme leader candidates amid rumors of Khamenei's deteriorating health.^[48] An equally if not more plausible explanation is that the officials are having this discussion in the context of the upcoming Assembly of Experts election in March 2024. Assembly of Experts members are elected every eight years, meaning that the next assembly will probably select the next supreme leader given that Khamenei is 84 years old.^[49]

The Islamic Republic has had only one deputy supreme leader in its history thus far. The Assembly of Experts appointed Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri in 1985 to the position under then-Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini and designated him as Khomeini's successor.^[50] Khomeini dismissed Montazeri in 1989 for questioning regime policies, such as the regime's mass execution of political prisoners in 1988.^[51] The regime placed Montazeri under house arrest until 2003, and he died in 2009.^[52]

Artesh Coordination Deputy Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari claimed on November 30 that Israel has withdrawn its forces from the Caucasus since the start of the Israel-Hamas war on October 7.[53] The Iranian regime has historically accused Baku of allowing Israel to use Azerbaijani territory to launch operations against Iran, as CTP-ISW has reported on numerous occasions.[54]

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