

Iran Update, November 29, 2023

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Information Cutoff: 2:00pm 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. Israeli officials and international mediators expect that the humanitarian pause with Hamas will be extended. The current pause in fighting between Israel and Hamas lasts until November 30.
2. The New York Times reported on November 29 that international mediators are hoping that short-term pauses will pave the way for a longer-term cease-fire to end the war.
3. Israel is insisting that it will continue operations in the Gaza Strip to eliminate Hamas, which is consistent with Israel's stated objectives.
4. Hamas and Israel completed the sixth swap of hostages in the Gaza Strip for Israeli-held Palestinian prisoners on November 29 in accordance with their humanitarian pause agreement.
5. The US destroyer USS Carney shot down a Houthi drone launched from Yemen on November 29.
6. An Iranian drone conducted "unsafe and unprofessional actions" near US aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower in the Persian Gulf on November 28.
7. Saudi Arabia offered to increase investments in the Iranian economy if Iran reins in its proxies and prevents the Israel-Hamas war from turning into a regional conflict, according to Arab and Western officials.
8. The al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, al Quds Brigades, and unspecified Palestinian fighters conducted small arms clashes and IED attacks against Israeli forces during Israeli raids in Jenin.
9. Lebanese Hezbollah and other Iranian-backed militias did not conduct any attacks into northern Israel on November 29.

Israel-Hamas War as of November 29, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



Israel and negotiators expect an extension to the humanitarian pause with Hamas

Lebanese Hezbollah and other Iranian-backed militias did not conduct any attacks into northern Israel

Palestinian fighters conducted 22 attacks against Israeli forces in the West Bank

A US destroyer shot down a Houthi drone in the Red Sea

0 50 100 200 Kilometers

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Israel
- Gaza Strip and West Bank
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Golan Heights

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.

Israeli officials and international mediators expect that the humanitarian pause with Hamas will be extended. The current pause in fighting between Israel and Hamas lasts until November 30. An anonymous senior Israeli official told the *Washington Post* that Israel expects the pause to continue for another two to three days after November 30.[1] The Qatari Foreign Ministry spokesperson told CNN on November 29 that they are “very optimistic” that an extension will be announced in the coming hours.[2] The *New York Times* reported that top officials from Qatar, Egypt, Israel, and the United States are discussing extending the pause to allow for further hostages/prisoner exchanges. Anonymous senior Egyptian officials told the *Wall Street Journal* that Hamas leaders said that Hamas would agree to an additional four-day extension of the truce, according to Egyptian and Qatari mediators.[3] An unnamed Israeli official said that Israel is willing to discuss the release of Israeli soldiers held hostage in the Gaza Strip when Hamas has released the remaining 27 women and children hostages.[4] Hamas said that it is open to releasing young male hostages in exchange for senior Palestinian prisoners as part of a longer-term ceasefire.[5] Participants at the negotiations said that Mossad Director David Barnea listened to a host of proposals—including a permanent cease-fire—without giving a firm no.[6] An anonymous “official familiar with the matter” told Israeli media that Israel is not willing to extend the current ceasefire beyond December 3, however.[7]

The *New York Times* reported on November 29 that international mediators are hoping that short-term pauses will pave the way for a longer-term cease-fire to end the war.[8] One of the mediators said the longer the pause lasts, the harder it will be for Israel to restart its offensive and extend it to the southern Gaza Strip.[9] A permanent ceasefire would prevent Israel from completing its stated objectives in the Israel-Hamas war, which are the destruction of Hamas’ military and governance capabilities.[10] The United States and European Union have also expressed support for these objectives, which a permanent ceasefire would block.[11]

Israel is insisting that it will continue operations in the Gaza Strip to eliminate Hamas, which is consistent with Israel’s stated objectives. The IDF Chief of Staff approved plans on November 29 for IDF combat operations in the Gaza Strip after the end of the truce agreement.[12] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said there is no scenario in which Israel does not resume fighting in the Gaza Strip.[13] Netanyahu reiterated Israel’s objectives in the Gaza Strip. He said that Israel aims to “eliminate Hamas, return all hostages to Israel, and ensure that Gaza will never again go back to being a threat to the state of Israel.”[14] Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said that Israeli forces will continue ground operations “very soon.”[15] Senior Israeli army officials stressed that for Israel to complete its objective of defeating Hamas, Israeli forces must eliminate Hamas leadership and destroy Hamas infrastructure in Khan Younis and Rafah.[16] Israeli media reported that the IDF expects to use aggressive tactics in its assault on Khan Younis.[17]

Senior Israeli army officials told Israeli media that its forces have spent the past week investigating Hamas military capabilities.[18] The IDF has mapped Hamas’ underground infrastructure and collected intelligence from computers and communication systems in preparation for ground maneuvers in the center and south of the Gaza Strip.[19] The officials noted that the bulk of weapons smuggling to the Gaza Strip has occurred through the Rafah and Kerem Shalom crossings.[20]

Hamas and Israel completed the sixth swap of hostages in the Gaza Strip for Israeli-held Palestinian prisoners on November 29 in accordance with their humanitarian pause agreement. The IDF reported that the Red Cross said that 10 Israeli hostages and four Thai hostages are on their way to Israel.[21] CNN reported that Hamas released an Israeli American dual citizen.[22]

The al Qassem Brigades—the militant wing of Hamas—released two Russian citizens as a sign of appreciation for Russian President Vladimir Putin’s support for Palestine.[23] The al Qassem Brigades previously cited Putin’s support for Palestine as its reason for releasing a Russian citizen on November 26.[24] Hamas Political Bureau member Musa Abu Marzouk said that the release is not part of the hostage/prisoner swap agreement with Israel.[25] The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) confirmed that the two hostages were transferred to Israel on November 29.[26]

Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov posted footage on November 29 purportedly showing 50 Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip arriving in Chechnya.[27] (*NOTE: This text also appeared in the Institute for the Study of War’s November 29 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment*) Kadyrov claimed that the Gazan refugees will stay at the “Gorny Klyuch” children’s health camp in Shalinsky Raion, Chechnya and that an additional 100 Gazan refugees will arrive in Chechnya on November 30.[28] Kadyrov’s claims reflect the Kremlin’s shift to

a much more anti-Israel position in the Israel-Hamas war, as well as Kadyrov's desire to show unwavering support for Russian President Vladimir Putin.[29] ISW cannot independently verify the footage or any of Kadyrov's claims, however.

The al Qassem Brigades said three Israeli hostages died due to Israeli airstrikes in the Gaza Strip.[30] The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said Hamas is responsible for the security of all hostages in the Gaza Strip.[31] Israel is examining the reliability of the al Qassem Brigades' claim.[32]

Senior Israeli army officials said Israel controls 45% of the Gaza Strip.[33] CTP-ISW assesses that Israel has cleared 48% of the northern Gaza Strip north of Wadi Gaza. Israel has declared the area north of Wadi Gaza "a war zone." [34] It is not clear that the Israeli officials are using the same doctrinal terms and definitions as does CTP-ISW.

China proposed a peace plan for the Middle East that is tantamount to Israeli defeat. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi presented a four-point plan for Middle East peace to the UN Security Council. The plan aims in part to revitalize the political prospects for the two-state solution.[35] Wang told the council that there needs to be a lasting cease-fire and that those held hostage should be released, although he offered no specifics.[36] Wang said Palestinians' right to statehood and "right to return" has long been ignored.[37] The Chinese proposal does not address the future governance of Gaza, specifically whether Hamas should be allowed to continue ruling the enclave, or the demilitarization of Gaza, nor does it address Israeli concerns about their own security against future attacks such as the October 7 assault.

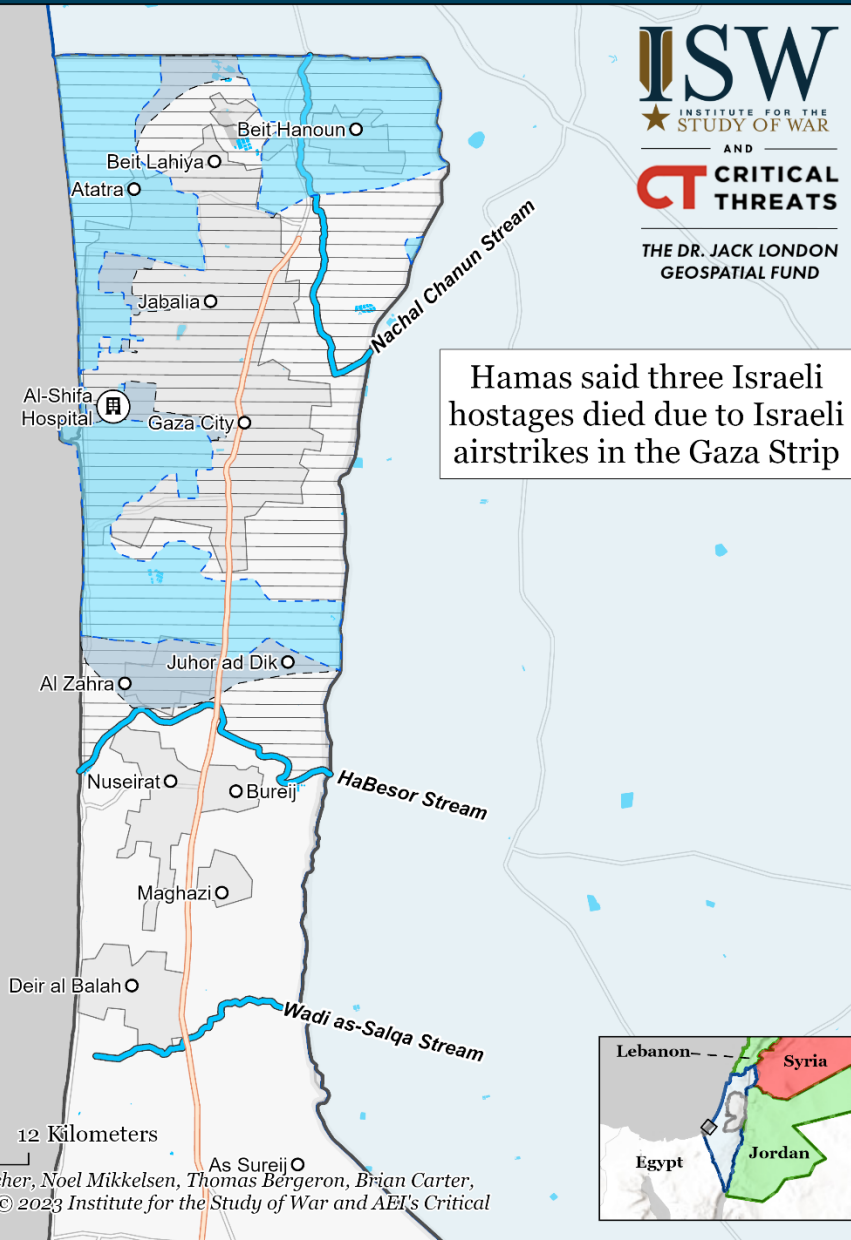
The United States delivered humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip and plans to continue similar shipments after the humanitarian pause ends. US Central Command confirmed on November 28 that it supported USAID efforts to increase the flow of assistance into the Gaza Strip.[38] Two US senior officials told reporters that the United States expects the increased levels of humanitarian aid and fuel entering the Gaza Strip will continue after the pause ends.[39] The United Nations continued to operate in the Gaza Strip, including in the northern Gaza Strip, on November 29.[40]

Reported Israeli Ground Operations in the Gaza Strip as of November 29, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



Israel is insisting that it will continue operations in the Gaza Strip to eliminate Hamas

Hamas said three Israeli hostages died due to Israeli airstrikes in the Gaza Strip



Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

- Israel
- Gaza Strip
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Syria
- Reported Israeli Clearing Operations*
- Claimed Furthest Israeli Advances
- Significant Water Obstacles
- Declared Evacuation Area
- Densely Urban Areas
- IDF-Declared Humanitarian Corridor on Salah al Din Road

* ISW-CTP's "Reported Israeli Clearing Operations" layer uses the US military's doctrinal definition of clearing which is an operation that "requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance within an assigned area." Clearing operations frequently take weeks and sometimes months to complete

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.

CTP-ISW did not record verifiable reports of kinetic activity inside the Gaza Strip or reports of attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel on November 29.

West Bank

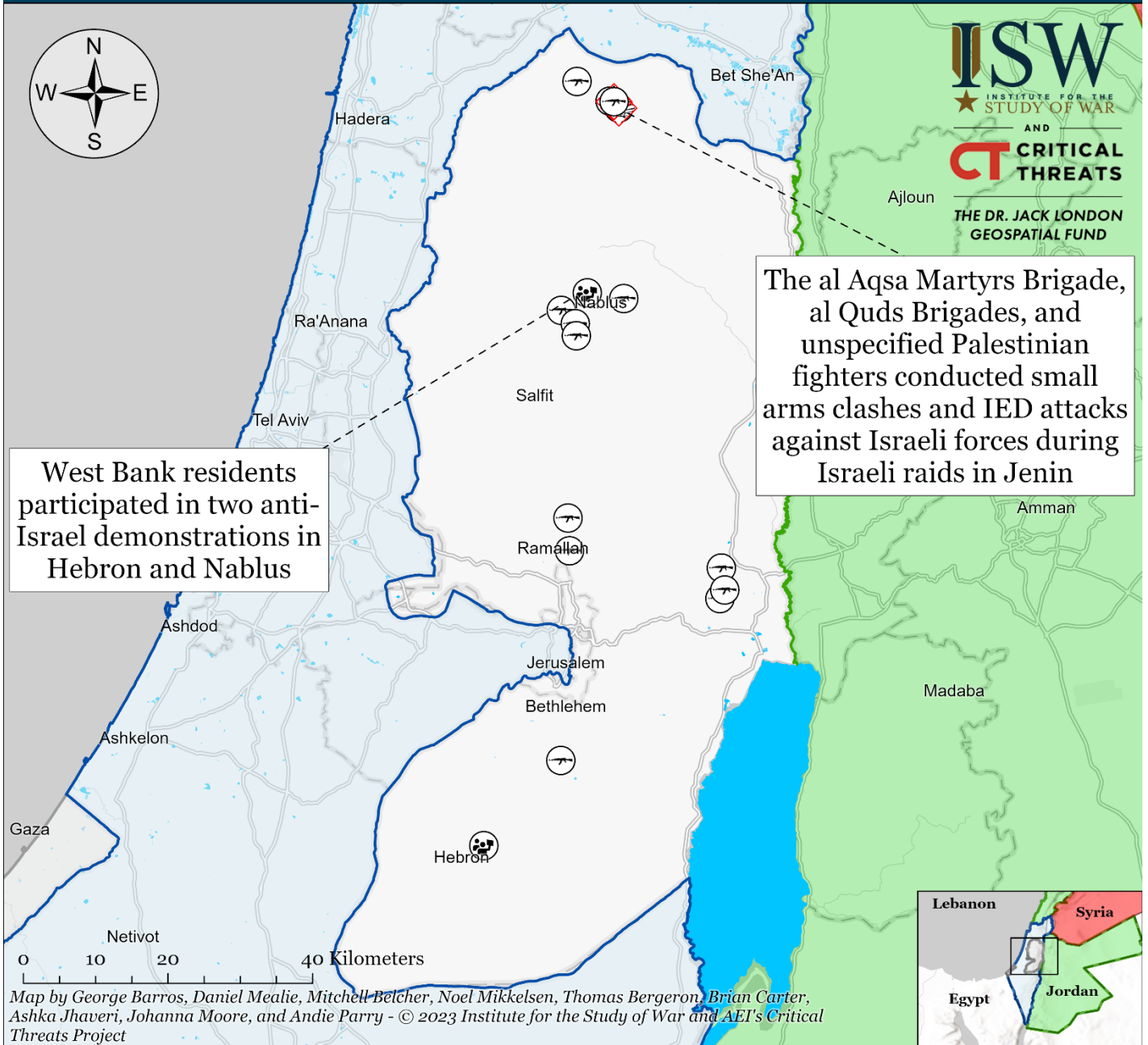
Axis of Resistance campaign objectives:

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

Palestinian fighters conducted 22 attacks against Israeli forces in the West Bank on November 29.^[41] This attack rate is more than double the average daily attack rate since November 21. The al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, al Quds Brigades, and unspecified Palestinian fighters fired small arms at Israeli forces at least 18 times in the West Bank.^[42] Palestinian fighters also detonated four IEDs targeting Israeli forces across the West Bank.^[43] West Bank residents participated in two anti-Israel demonstrations in Hebron and Nablus.^[44]

The al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, al Quds Brigades, and unspecified Palestinian fighters conducted small arms clashes and IED attacks against Israeli forces during Israeli raids in Jenin. The IDF said that it conducted a drone strike targeting Palestinian fighters who fired at Israeli forces in the Jenin refugee camp.^[45] The IDF killed two Palestinian fighters, including a commander in the Jenin Battalion of the al Quds Brigades, during hours of fighting between the IDF and Palestinian fighters in the camp.^[46] The IDF said the commander carried out shooting attacks, supplied vehicles for attacks, and "promoted" other attacks.^[47] The IDF also said the commander killed two Israeli civilians and four IDF soldiers in attacks in May and June.^[48] Hamas condemned the Israeli operations in Jenin and called on West Bank residents and fighters to escalate "all forms of resistance" in the West Bank.^[49] The IDF separately arrested five Hamas fighters in Hebron.^[50]

Clashes in the West Bank as of November 29, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



- Israel
- Jordan and Lebanon
- Gaza Strip and West Bank
- Syria
- ☒ Clash (Small Arms Combat)
- ☒ Demonstration
- ☒ IED Detonated

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

Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) and other Iranian-backed militias did not conduct any attacks into northern Israel on November 29.

Israeli forces fired warning shots at a “suspicious vehicle” approaching the Israel-Lebanon border near the Israeli town of Malikiyah on November 29, according to the IDF.[51] The Lebanese National News Agency said that Israeli forces fired small arms targeting a combined Lebanese Armed Forces-UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) patrol near Houla, southern Lebanon.[52] UNIFIL told CNN that Israeli forces fired a “burst of machine gun fire” at a UNIFIL vehicle in the same area.[53]

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

The US destroyer USS *Carney* shot down a Houthi drone launched from Yemen on November 29.[54] Houthi President Mahdi al Mashaat warned on November 29 that any US escalation towards the Houthis will not change the group’s position towards the Israel-Hamas war.[55]

Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada (KSS) Secretary General Abu Alaa al Walai praised Iraqi resistance groups’ support for Palestinians in a statement on November 29.[56] Walai published the statement in commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Walai praised Iraqi resistance groups for “confusing” supporters of Israel and “relieving the burden” on Palestinian militants. Walai reiterated KSS’s opposition to US and Israeli “arrogance” and “crimes” against Palestinians.

An Iranian drone conducted “unsafe and unprofessional actions” near US aircraft carrier *USS Dwight D. Eisenhower* in the Persian Gulf on November 28.[57] US Naval Forces Central Command reported that the drone came within 1,500 yards of the *Eisenhower* and that Iran ignored multiple hails and warnings. IRGC Navy Commander Rear Admiral Ali Reza Tangsiri called on the US Navy to “behave rationally” in the Persian Gulf in an interview with Iranian state TV on November 26.[58] CTP-ISW recently assessed that the IRGC may have conducted a one-way drone attack on an Israeli-owned, Malta-flagged freighter in the Persian Gulf on November 24.[59]

Iranian-sponsored Attacks in the Middle East as of November 29, 2023, 2:00 PM ET



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An Iranian drone conducted “unsafe and unprofessional actions” near the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower in the Persian Gulf

A US destroyer shot down a Houthi drone in the Red Sea

0 300 600 1,200 Kilometers

Map by George Barros, Daniel Mealie, Mitchell Belcher, Noel Mikkelsen, Thomas Bergeron, Brian Carter, Ashka Jhaveri, Johanna Moore, and Andie Parry - © 2023 Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei discussed the Israel-Hamas war with Basij members in Tehran on November 29.[60] Khamenei claimed that Hamas' October 7 attack into Israel created a "new political geography" in the Middle East and diminished US power and influence in the region. Khamenei also discussed "American failures" in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria in recent years. Khamenei falsely claimed, for example, that the United States previously tried to destroy LH, but that LH became "more than ten times stronger" after the 2006 Lebanon war with Israel.

Saudi Arabia offered to increase investments in the Iranian economy if Iran reins in its proxies and prevents the Israel-Hamas war from turning into a regional conflict, according to Arab and Western officials.[61] The officials told Bloomberg that Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman discussed "the possibility of deeper engagement" during their meeting on the sidelines of the joint Arab League-Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) conference in Jeddah on November 11. Bloomberg reported that Saudi Arabia is simultaneously working with the United States to prevent Iran from exploiting the Israel-Hamas war to strengthen its Axis of Resistance.

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