



Iran War Update: October 20–21, 2026

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President Donald Trump and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian signed a now-expired Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on June 17, outlining terms to end the war and reopen the Strait of Hormuz over a 60-day period of further negotiations. However, on July 8, President Trump [declared](#) the MOU to be “over,” and both sides have resumed exchanging fire. JINSA continues to release regular updates about the conflict. The update below includes information since [JINSA's last update](#) as of October 21 at 10:15 am ET.

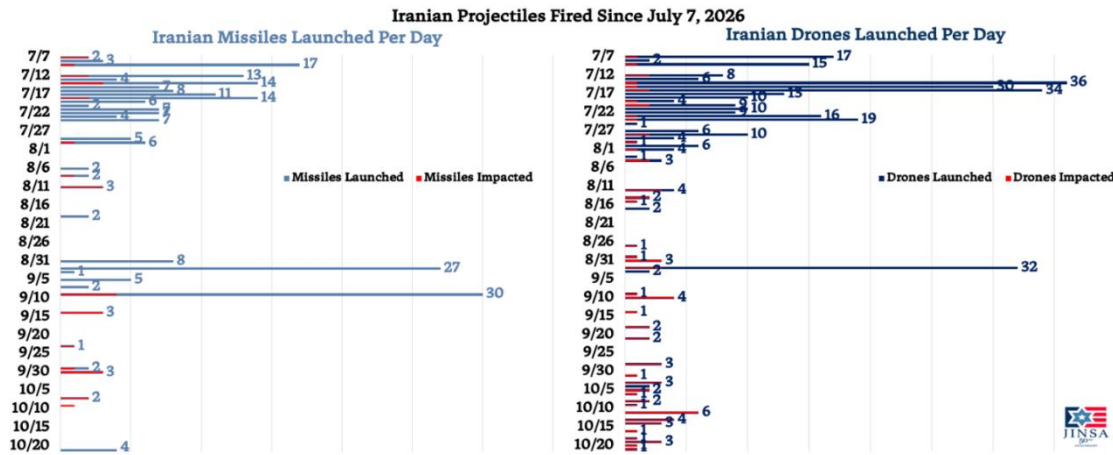
Iranian missiles and drones launched since July 7: **At least 601** (9 on October 19–21)

Brent Crude Oil Price: **[\\$107.89 a barrel](#)** as of **9:00 am ET** ([day range](#): \$108.88–111.32)

1. Overview

- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly [planned](#) to conduct strikes against Iran earlier in October, but President Donald Trump opposed resuming the conflict prior to the U.S. midterm elections, according to reporting from *The Financial Times* on October 21.
 - » Sources who spoke to *The Jerusalem Post* later [denied](#) that any Israeli government official directed the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to plan an attack against Iran.
- On October 20, President Trump [told](#) reporters that “we’re doing very well with Iran,” adding that, “We just have to make a final decision of which way do we want to win? Do we want to win the nice way or the not nice way?”
- On October 20, two senior U.S. officials told Fox News that the United States is [deploying](#) the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* aircraft carrier to the Middle East, along with its broader carrier strike group, the Makin Island Amphibious Ready Group (ARG), and the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU).
 - » The deployment would add a third aircraft carrier and around 10,000 U.S. troops to America’s current Middle East force posture.
 - » According to Fox News, the assets are expected to arrive in the region by the end of November.
- On October 20, Reuters reported, citing three Iranian officials, that Iran is deliberately [dragging out](#) the U.S.-Iran talks in order to delay American or Israeli military action, as well as weaken President Trump’s standing ahead of the U.S. midterm elections.
- On October 19, after receiving an endorsement from President Trump for the upcoming Israeli election, Prime Minister Netanyahu [posted](#) a video on X of a call with the U.S. president, with the caption, “Together we are going to remove the Iranian threat forever!”

- On October 19, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth [traveled](#) to Israel to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The meeting centered around [Iran](#), according to senior officials who spoke with Reuters.
 - » The meeting took place at Israel's Ovda Air Base, where U.S. personnel and platforms are stationed. Ovda, as JINSA has [detailed](#), was a major component of American military operations against Iran earlier this year.
 - » *The Jerusalem Post* [reported](#) that IDF Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir was not included in the meeting between Hegseth and Netanyahu.



2. Diplomatic Engagement

Iran

- Pakistan and Qatar have reportedly [presented](#) U.S. and Iranian officials with a draft proposal to set the foundation for resumed talks. The proposal was received positively by both sides, according to Qatari's *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed* outlet.
 - » The agreement reportedly would provide Iran with funds, totaling the interest of the \$6 billion in frozen Iranian assets held in Qatari banks.
 - » In return, Iran would commit to letting International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors examine its nuclear sites. It was not clear how much access the inspectors would be given or if the inspections would be regular or a one-off.
- On October 21, during a meeting with U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff, Russian President Vladimir Putin [offered](#) to help mediate between the United States and Iran.
- On October 21, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi [wrote](#) in a *Financial Times* op-ed that, "While Iran is firmly committed to seeking a dignified peaceful resolution to the conflict, we are also fully prepared to defend ourselves."
- On October 20, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov [traveled](#) to Iran, his first visit to the country since the Iran war began in February. Lavrov met with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi during the trip.
 - » After the meeting concluded, Araghchi posted on X, "We covered everything from Europe to West Asia, including Lebanon, Palestine, Ukraine and Yemen. Also focused on expansion of economic and nuclear cooperation. Never in our history have Iran and Russia worked as closely as now."

- » The visit comes two days after President Trump [posted](#) on Truth Social, “Russia is doing very little, if anything, to help the Islamic Republic of Iran, compared to what they could be doing, and I want to keep it that way.”
- Iranian security chief Mohsen Rezaei [said](#) on October 20 that Iran will not give up any enriched uranium under any deal with the United States. Rezaei also stated, “There will be no negotiations until America takes steps to build trust - a process that must begin with the fulfillment of Iran's conditions.”
- The main intermediary in U.S.-Iran talks, Pakistani military leader Asim Munir, traveled to Iran on October 20 in an effort to revive negotiations. However, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian [told](#) him that Iran refuses to re-enter talks until its demands are met, according to Iran's state-run media.
 - » According to the official X account of the Iranian government, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian [told](#) Pakistani Field Marshal Asim Munir that “Washington must lift its pressures, threats and sanctions before any negotiations.”
 - President Pezeshkian also remarked that American “warmongering lies behind regional tensions, including disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz.”
 - » On October 19, Pakistan [halted all trade](#) through multiple border crossings with Iran. The crossings, located on the border between Pakistan and Iran's Balochistan province, were temporarily closed due to efforts “to support counterterrorism measures,” according to Pakistani officials. However, Iranian officials cited “technical issues” for the closure.
 - » Recently, violence has escalated on both sides of the border, and 20 Pakistani security personnel were kidnapped near the border earlier this month.

Lebanon

- On October 20-21, working-level discussions between Israeli and Lebanese officials on implementing the June Trilateral Framework Agreement are [taking place](#) in Tampa, Florida, with the United States mediating, according to an American official speaking to *The Times of Israel*.

Yemen

- In an interview with Iraq's Al Ekhbariya TV released on October 21, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi [stated](#) that Saudi Arabia and the Houthis have not yet responded to Iran's offer to mediate between them.

3. U.S., Israeli, and Arab Partner Operations

- On October 21, Israel's *Walla News* [reported](#) that overnight, Israeli fighter jets flew east over Syria and Iraq in the direction of Iran as part of a military exercise. No further details were included in the article.
- On October 20, the State Department's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Press Edgar Vasquez [told](#) CBS News, “We are actively warning U.S. citizens about the very real threat the Houthis pose and urging them to heed official guidance,” after U.S. embassies across the Middle East issued security alerts over the weekend warning of the risk that hostilities quickly spread.
- On October 20, the British Ministry of Defense [announced](#) that its Royal Air Force Typhoon fighter jets will carry out defensive missions in support of Saudi Arabia against ongoing Houthi attacks.
 - » The British military will also send an Atlas A400M transport aircraft, as well as military advisers, as part of its support to the kingdom.

- On October 19, Prime Minister Netanyahu [shared](#) a new Israeli national security doctrine that would [prioritize](#) “prevention and offence over containment and defence, including launching preemptive strikes to thwart evolving threats.”
 - » Under the new security concept, Israel’s defense budget would [increase](#) by almost 450 billion shekels (approximately \$145.6 billion) to build underground weapons factories, among other uses.
 - » Presenting an assessment of threats facing Israel, Prime Minister Netanyahu outlined four key threats: Iran’s nuclear program; drones; precision and ballistic missiles; and cyber and artificial intelligence.

Iran

- According to reporting from *The Financial Times* on October 21, the IDF had [prepared](#) to launch a multi-day campaign of renewed strikes against Iran on the weekend of October 10, with targets that would have included civilian infrastructure, regime targets, and nuclear sites.
 - » The bombing campaign was planned to be more intense than the U.S.-Israeli offensive launched in February.
 - » However, *The Jerusalem Post* later [reported](#) that sources told it that the IDF has remained on high alert, especially in the days around October 7, but no Israeli officials had given the IDF orders to plan for an imminent attack against Iran.
- In comments to reporters on October 20, President Trump [discussed](#) Europe’s lack of support during the Iran war, stating, “We don’t need any help. But I was testing them.”
 - » President Trump remarked, “I just called individual presidents and prime ministers to ask, would they like to help us? And they said, ‘No.’” President Trump added, “I said, ‘Well, that’s not nice.’ You know, we spend hundreds of billions a year on NATO.”
- Speaking to reporters on October 19, Prime Minister Netanyahu [stated](#) that if necessary to ensure Israel’s security against Iran, “we will also act independently” of the United States.
 - » He also [stated](#) that Tehran has already attempted to resume its nuclear program, adding that regime change in Iran remains the primary remaining goal for Israel.

Lebanon

- On October 20, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz [posted](#) on X that “The IDF will not move out of the security zone as long as Hezbollah has not been disarmed throughout Lebanon — and the threat to the residents of the north has not been removed.”
 - » He added, “We are pursuing a determined policy stipulating that any shooting or launch of drones and UAVs toward Israeli cities, moshavim, or kibbutzim will be met with a powerful response against the Dahiyeh district in Beirut.”
 - » Minister Katz also stated that should Hezbollah join an Iranian attack against Israel, “it will be dealt a severe blow, and the IDF is prepared to carry out a ground maneuver into additional areas around Nabatieh and the Litani River,” adding that the captured territory will be “permanently made part of Israel’s security zone in Lebanon.”
- On October 19, the IDF [announced](#) that over the past several weeks, its forces uncovered over 150 weapons and destroyed 540 sites belonging to Hezbollah in Khiam, Tayr Harfa, Meiss El Jabal, and Majdal Zoun in southern Lebanon.
- In a press briefing on October 18, Prime Minister Netanyahu [shared](#) that Israel had permitted the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to clear Hezbollah infrastructure in two pilot zones, but shared that the LAF had “not demonstrated sufficient capabilities.”
 - » He [remarked](#) that if the LAF cannot clear the pilot zones of Hezbollah fighters and infrastructure, “We’ll take care of it.”

- » Prime Minister Netanyahu added that the dismantling of Hezbollah could facilitate a peace agreement between Israel and Lebanon.

Strait of Hormuz

- Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian [stated](#) on October 21 that “75-80 percent of our trade was through the sea, which they [the United States] have closed.”

Syria

- Israel has reportedly begun establishing a military base in Syria’s Sweida province, according to open-source intelligence [published](#) on October 20. The base, in the Jabal al-Arab area, reportedly contains an early-warning radar system and other infrastructure.

Yemen

- Reuters reported on October 21 that Turkey is [considering](#) sending troops to Saudi Arabia, and is joining a Saudi-led coalition to secure global shipping, amid continued Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia’s energy and civilian sites.
 - » The previous day, *Alhurra* reported that Egyptian lawmakers are beginning to resist Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi’s plan to [send](#) Egypt’s military to Saudi Arabia to help counter Houthi attacks.
 - According to *Alhurra*, the Egyptian parliament announced this week “that it had postponed a vote on the authorization until October 26,” with lawmakers citing concerns over “the risks facing Egyptian troops, and the possibility [of a] ... protracted confrontation with the Houthis.”
 - *Alhurra* reported that Egypt is also attempting to mediate between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia to end the current hostilities, but without any progress thus far.
- On October 20, Yemen’s military [announced](#) that its forces carried out around 744 strikes in the past day, neutralizing 200 Houthi fighters and damaging 90 equipment pieces and vehicles belonging to the rebel group.
- On October 20, Spokesman for the Saudi-led coalition Maj. Gen. Turki Al-Maliki [shared](#) that the coalition had destroyed a Houthi platform that had been used to fire a missile at Saudi Arabia that day.

4. Iranian and Proxy Operations

Iraq

- On October 21, Iran [fired](#) four ballistic missiles at a military base in Iraqi Kurdistan. No injuries were reported.

Israel

- On October 20, *Israel Hayom* [reported](#) that Iran is unlikely to attack Israel directly on the morning of the October 27 election, but that Tehran may indirectly target the country by disrupting the election process.

Maritime

- On October 21, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) Centre reported that an oil tanker was [struck](#) by an unknown projectile off the coast of Oman, near the Strait of Hormuz. No casualties were reported.
- On October 20, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) officials claimed that it [shot down](#) a U.S. MQ-9 drone and three oil tankers caught fire after [hitting](#) IRGC mines and could not continue their voyage.

- On October 20, an unknown projectile [struck](#) a tanker 30 nautical miles southeast of Al Faw, Iraq, without causing damage or injuries, according to UKMTO.

Saudi Arabia

- On October 21, the Saudi-led coalition [announced](#) that its forces shot down five drones targeting Medina and the kingdom's Eastern region.
 - » The Houthis denied responsibility for the attack.
- On October 20, blasts [rocked](#) Riyadh after the country's National Early Warning Platform sent out an alert.
 - » On October 20, Spokesman for the Saudi-led coalition Maj. Gen. Turki Al-Maliki [shared](#) that the Houthis had launched a ballistic missile at Riyadh that day, which was intercepted, and later reported that a drone was intercepted in the Riyadh region.
- On October 20, Reuters [reported](#) that due to rising Houthi attacks against the kingdom, 45 percent of flights leaving Saudi Arabia since October 8 have been canceled.

Yemen

- On October 21, an unnamed Yemeni police official [announced](#) that a Houthi missile attack resulted in an explosion near the airport in Aden.
- On October 20, Yemen's Shabwa provincial media office [announced](#) that the death toll from a Houthi attack on a Yemeni government military training camp on October 19 has now reached 73, while 14 people remain missing.

5. Threats, Condemnations, and Statements from Iranian and Proxy Officials

- On October 21, the head of the Iranian parliament's national security committee, Ebrahim Azizi, [wrote](#) on X in Hebrew that "whatever the results of your [Israel's] election may be, we have no doubt about your hostility. We are ready to eradicate your evil from the region forever in response to the smallest operational misstep."
- On October 21, Iran's new Defense Minister Mehrdad Akhlaghi [announced](#) that he would concentrate on ensuring that the needs of the IRGC Aerospace Force and Iranian military's air defense branch are met.
 - » He stated, "For us, responding to repeated threats is not a contest of rhetoric; it means turning threats into greater readiness and more effective defensive capabilities."
- On October 20, Iranian Armed Forces Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Ali Abdollahi [declared](#) that Tehran "has not waited, nor will it wait, for the results of the U.S. congressional elections" to retaliate against an attack on Iran.
 - » He also reiterated a common stance among Iranian leaders, saying, "Countries hosting the United States in the region should also know that the main cause of insecurity in the region is the presence of the terrorist U.S. military."
- On October 20, Iranian army legal affairs deputy Brig. Gen. Moslem Yaghoubi [insisted](#) that Iran is pursuing legal action against the United States for an American torpedo attack on an Iranian ship in March that resulted in the deaths of over 80 Iranian military personnel.
 - » Yaghoubi claims the ship was unarmed and carrying trainees over 1,000 miles away from the battlefield.
- On October 20, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi stated, in response to a question about Egypt's potential involvement in the Saudi-Houthi war, that "any foreign intervention would [complicate](#) matters."
- On October 19, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi [insisted](#) that "The war imposed by the United States and the Zionist regime (Israel), combined with the economic blockade,

constitutes the principal source of insecurity in our region,” referring directly to the Strait of Hormuz.

6. International Response

- On October 21, the Élysée Palace [announced](#) that French President Emmanuel Macron will visit Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia today in order to “demonstrate France’s solidarity with the Kingdom in the face of the Houthi attacks against its territory, and to continue efforts to secure and diversify fuel supplies.”
- On October 21, Iraq [closed](#) its Sheeb border crossing with Iran to conduct a security review and install equipment to detect smuggling.
- On October 20, Future Investment Initiative (FII) CEO Maha Al Saud [announced](#) that the kingdom’s annual investment conference will now take place in 2027 due to ongoing Houthi attacks.
 - » FII was initially supposed to hold the event between October 26–29.

7. JINSA Resources

- Ari Cicurel, [Iran Escalates Before U.S. Midterm Elections](#), October 19, 2026
- LtGen Michael Groen, USMC (ret.) and Sarah Havdala, [“Iranian Cyber Operations,” RealClearDefense](#), October 17, 2026
- John Hannah and Rena Gabber, [“Iran ‘Blew the Hell Out of Bahrain’ — And Trump’s Gulf Strategy With It,” The Washington Examiner](#), October 12, 2026
- Lt Gen Thomas Bergeson, USAF (ret.), LTG Karen Gibson, USA (ret.), LtGen Sam Mundy, USMC (ret.), and MajGen Robert Sofge, USMC (ret.), [“How to Keep the Houthis Out of the Red Sea,” The National Interest](#), October 5, 2026
- Ari Cicurel, [Resupply Israel to Deter Iran and Protect U.S. Forces](#), September 23, 2026
- VADM Jeff Trussler, USN (ret.) and Sarah Havdala, [The US Needs an Information-Warfare Strategy for Iran — And Beyond](#), September 21, 2026
- Jonah Brody, [The Houthis Close in on the Gulf’s Oil Export Lifeline](#), September 17, 2026
- Sarah Havdala, [Iran in the Wake of Women, Life, Freedom](#), September 16, 2026
- Giran Ozcan, [The United States Cannot Afford to Abandon the Kurdistan Region](#), September 14, 2026
- Ari Cicurel and Jonah Brody, [All Is Not Quiet on the Houthi Front](#), September 11, 2026
- Michael Makovsky, PhD, [Why Iran Fears Israel, But Not America](#), September 9, 2026
- Michael Makovsky, PhD, and Blaise Misztal, [How to Win the Iran War](#), September 3, 2026

Iranian Projectiles Fired During 2026 War

