



# Iranian Regime Continues Escalation, Despite Limited U.S. Strikes

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On November 8, the United States conducted its second round of airstrikes against Iran-linked targets in Syria since the Israel-Hamas war began on October 7. As part of that broader conflict, beginning on October 17, Iran-backed groups have launched a rapid, sustained escalation of attacks against U.S. personnel in Iraq and Syria that has become increasingly dangerous. In the twenty-three days since, there have been forty-six attacks on U.S. forces, fifty-six American injuries, and one related casualty. Iran's Yemeni proxy, the Houthis, have also entered the conflict, firing missiles at Israel and downing a U.S. drone on November 8.

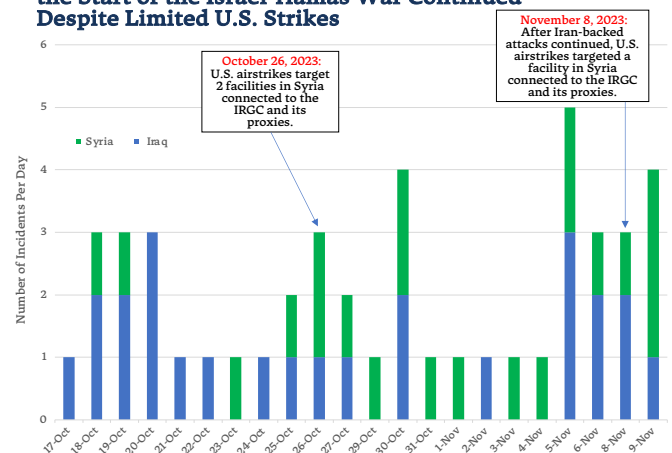
Faced with this escalation, the Biden administration has relied on the same approach it used when dealing with similar attacks before October 7: infrequent and limited U.S. strikes coupled with rhetoric that is more conciliatory than bellicose. That approach failed to deter the Iranian regime or its proxies before, and it is failing to deter them now. They already launched further attacks shortly after the U.S. strike on November 8.

To deter the Iranian regime and its affiliated groups the United States will instead need to use consistent and strong military force that holds the Iranian regime directly accountable for the aggression it enables, alongside a surge of air defense assets to the Middle East that can better protect U.S. personnel and regional partners.

## What Happened?

- After Iranian-backed attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria continued despite an October 26 U.S. airstrike on Iranian military infrastructure in Syria, on November 8, the U.S. military used two F-15s to conduct a “self-defense strike” on a weapons storage facility in Deir Ezzor Province, Syria that Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and proxies used, according to a [statement](#) from U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin.
  - » Austin later [told](#) press that “if the attacks against our forces don't decrease or stop, we will take additional measures.”
  - » Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Dana Stroul went further, [indicating](#) that “the United States has taken — and as necessary, will continue to take — military action against the IRGC and its affiliates ... This includes the use of force against IRGC and IRGC-affiliated personnel and facilities ... with the intention to convince the Iranians to de-escalate threats against the United States, our interests and our people.”

**Iran-backed Attacks Against U.S. Personnel Since the Start of the Israel-Hamas War Continued Despite Limited U.S. Strikes** JINSA

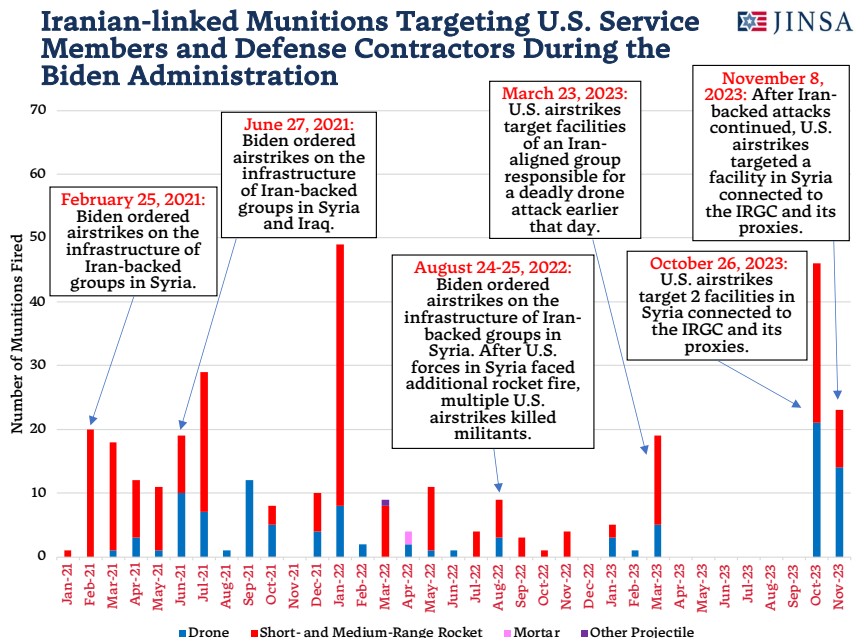


- Earlier on November 8, the Iran-backed Houthis [shot down](#) a U.S. MQ-9 Reaper drone while it was in international airspace.
- Iran-backed groups reportedly [launched](#) four [attacks](#) after the U.S. airstrikes on November 8.
  - » During an attack on November 9 against Mission Support Green Village in Syria, three Americans suffered minor injuries and have since returned to duty.

## Why Is It Important?

- Multiple attacks against U.S. forces shortly after the U.S. strike on November 8, combined with the Houthis destruction of a U.S. MQ-9 Reaper, provide further proof that the Iranian regime and its proxies remain not only undeterred by the limited U.S. strikes but also willing to escalate their aggression further.
  - » This is unsurprising given that, by targeting infrastructure, not personnel, the November 8 U.S. strike was similar to previous U.S. limited response, including that on October 26, which also did not deter Iran-backed attacks.
  - » Building deterrence will require consistent military force and stronger, clearer deterrent language from the Biden administration, considering that previous infrequent and limited airstrikes have not deterred the Iranian regime or its proxies.
- Iran-backed groups began attacking U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria on October 17. Since then, there have been 46 total attacks, including:
  - » 25 attacks targeting U.S. personnel in Iraq;
  - » 21 attacks against U.S. personnel in Syria;
  - » 56 U.S. personnel [injured](#).
- On October 26, after 19 Iran-backed attacks on U.S. forces in just 10 days, the United States responded.
  - » U.S. F-16 aircraft struck two [weapons and ammunition storage facilities](#) in Syria in response to the spate of aggression.
- Between that first U.S. response, on October 26, and the second on November 8 — a span of 13 days — there were another 22 attacks against U.S. forces, highlighting the first strike's lack of deterrent effect.
  - » The continuation of daily, increasingly dangerous strikes against U.S. personnel indicates that Iran does not believe the United States has the will to use sufficient military force to deter or prevent its aggression.
  - » Not only did the attacks continued, but according to U.S. officials who spoke with [The New York Times](#), Iran-backed groups have attached larger loads of explosives — as much as 80 lbs. — onto drones they fire at U.S. personnel.
- That limited U.S. strikes against infrastructure are ineffective at deterring Iran-backed attacks against U.S. forces should not be surprising — it is the same approach that the Biden administration tried, and failed — to produce deterrence with, from 2021 to early 2023.

- » Iran-backed groups launched nearly 90 attacks on U.S. forces in Syria and Iraq between January 2021 to March 2023, while the United States has only launched four rounds of airstrikes against those groups.



- » While Biden ordered airstrikes against Iran-backed groups in [Syria in February 2021](#), [Iraq and Syria in June 2021](#), and [Syria in August 2022](#), U.S. force was calibrated to “limit the risks of escalation and minimize casualties” and Iran’s proxies continued to target U.S. and partner forces in between each of these U.S. airstrikes.
- » Unlike in the previous cases, the [U.S. airstrikes on March 23](#) — after a drone attack from an Iran-backed group killed an American contractor and wounded six other Americans — were not initially limited to avoid killing militants, with eight Iranian-aligned individuals reportedly being killed in the operation.
- » While no Iran-backed groups had targeted U.S. service members since March, even the more forceful U.S. airstrikes did not establish long-term deterrence, considering the large, sudden escalation against U.S. personnel over the past week.

## What Should the United States Do Next?

- Since previous rounds of infrequent and limited U.S. strikes against Iran-backed groups has not deterred them or the regime in Tehran that funds, arms, and directs them, establishing deterrence will require the United States to exert consistent and strong military force against Iran-linked targets that endanger U.S. personnel or American partners in the region.
  - » U.S. strikes should target the fighters, not only the facilities, involved in attacks on Americans and hold Iran directly responsible for attacks by its proxies.
- The Pentagon should further buttress the recent deployments of U.S. military assets to the region by deploying additional *Arleigh Burke*-class guided-missile destroyers that can help protect U.S. troops and partners from Iran-backed attacks.
- As JINSA recently documented in a list of [recommendations](#) for the Biden administration and Congress to support Israel, the United States should reinforce deterrence, replenish the

U.S. stockpile of American weaponry in Israel that Israel can draw from in an emergency, and provide Israel with the diplomatic support it will need to defend itself. This support will give Israel access to the large number of weapons it will need for the ongoing fight in Gaza, and to help deter and prepare for the potential war with Iran and Hezbollah.

- » The Biden administration and Congress should work to quickly replenish Israel's stocks of air defense interceptors and other critical weaponry it needs so that Israel can better protect itself and deter further aggression by denying the ability of Iran-backed groups to conduct successful strikes.
- » The U.S. stockpile of U.S.-owned weaponry in Israel, called War Reserve Stockpile Ammunition-Israel (WRSA-I) has become [depleted and obsolete](#), preventing it from serving its strategic purpose of providing Israel with access to weaponry it would need in an emergency. Deterring the Iranian regime and its proxies from escalating to a multifront war requires them to fear that the United States and Israel — both together and independently — have sufficient capacity to conduct a long, high-intensity war.
  - The United States should replenish WRSA-I with much-needed precision-guided munitions (PGMs), chiefly Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) tailkits and GBU-39 and GBU-53/B small diameter bombs, and potentially other much-needed weapons.
- » During each [conflict](#) that Israel fights, international pressure mounts to force it to end it prematurely, along with spurious accusations that Israel violates the law of armed conflict (LOAC). U.S. officials should publicly make clear, especially at the United Nations, that Israel complies with LOAC and strongly support its right to defend itself from threats.