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FIRST ARROW 3 OPERATIONAL USE

The Israel-Hamas war is not just reshaping the Middle East, it is also a moment for some of Israel's latest defence systems to be deployed for the first time. As Yehoshua Kalisky [writes](#) for the Israeli Institute for National Security Studies, in early November Israel used its Arrow 3 system to intercept a ballistic missile in space. The missile had been fired by the Houthis in Yemen, but the Arrow 3 interceptor destroyed it long before it could reach its likely intended target, Eilat. Kalisky provides a useful overview of Israel's multi-layered integrated air defence framework that comprises Patriot missiles, the Iron Dome [pictured above], the David's Sling system and the Arrow 2 and Arrow 3 [pictured right] systems.



U.S. Missile Defense Agency/ CC BY 2.0

IS ISRAEL TOO RELIANT ON HIGH-TECH?

Debates about how Hamas was able to conduct the devastating attack of 7th October are continuing. In a very useful [piece](#) for *Foreign Policy*, Franz-Sefan Gady argues that Israel's fixation with technology may have contributed to its vulnerability, and could also negatively affect its performance in the ongoing war and thinking about post-war security arrangements in Gaza. While noting that hubris and a failed political strategy by Israel's leadership clearly must be taken into account, Gady suggests that the high-tech surveillance systems put in place along the Gaza-Israel border may have contributed to a false sense of security, while missing signs that only human intelligence can effectively pick up on. He also warns that an ongoing doctrinal shift within the Israel Defence Forces – towards more reliance on technology and smaller boots-on-ground footprints – could create yet further, and potentially costly, single points of failure.

THE RISE OF ISRAEL'S VOLUNTEER ARMY

Israel's population has been highly mobilised since the 7th October attack, filling in roles largely vacated by the state as it shifts responsibilities to focus almost entirely on the conflict in Gaza. This [article](#) explains in detail the extent to which Israeli civil society has stepped in to create parallel institutions to allow the country to continue functioning; civic centres, relocation and rehousing offices, ad-hoc security organisations, and agricultural centres have all sprung up in order to replace the state, which has struggled to allocate resources adequately to respond to the level of displacement and societal dislocation placed upon Israel's southern populations. As the war continues, Israeli societal resilience appears to be the glue holding life together.



SAUDI ARABIA AND THE ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

Hamas' attack on Israel on 7th October has dramatically interrupted what could have been one of the most seismic shifts in the Middle East's regional politics in decades: the normalisation of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Although obstacles to a deal between Israel and the most powerful Arab country were substantial – and likely more substantial than some observers, and perhaps even the US government keen to secure a major foreign policy victory, wanted to admit – momentum was clearly building. Now, Saudi Arabia, along with other regional powers, has to focus on containing the war in Gaza, fearing that a wider regional conflagration could upend its ambitious domestic economic transformation agenda. However, as Gregory Gause [writes](#) in *Foreign Affairs*, normalisation remains on the table. He argues that, ultimately, both countries share too many key interests as to let their bilateral relations be forever dictated by regional conflicts.

WHAT THE ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR MEANS FOR CHINA IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Before the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, China's influence in the international relations of the Middle East appeared to be on the rise. Already the most important economic partner for many states in the region, China seemed to be increasingly interested in inserting itself into regional diplomacy, most notably the Iran-Saudi Arabia rapprochement announced in Beijing in March. However, it took Beijing two weeks to meaningfully respond to the 7th October attack on Israel by Hamas and the war that has since followed; its statement, relatively bland and not explicitly condemning the attack, caused consternation in Israel. In an [article](#) for the European Council on Foreign Relations, Camille Lons analyses China's response to the Israel-Hamas war. She notes that the crisis shows China's still very limited strategic influence in the region, and explains that China finds itself in a bind: on the one hand, it is conscious that it is disappointing Israel, with which it has built an increasingly important relationship; on the other hand, it wants to exploit a shift in global opinion as much of the Global South sees the West as too uncritically behind Israel's onslaught on Gaza.

UKRAINE'S FOREIGN MINISTER TALKS ABOUT THE COUNTER-OFFENSIVE

Ukraine's much anticipated counter-offensive did not lead to the hoped-for breakthrough; this has raised some concerns that Western support for Ukraine could diminish as a result, with governments pushing for eventual peace negotiations, rather than providing more and more resources to Kyiv. At the recent World Policy Conference in Abu Dhabi, Thierry de Montbrial, founder of the French Institute of International Relations, [interviewed](#) Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba to discuss how the war – and Ukraine's attempts to push back against Russian occupation – might develop over the winter. Kuleba argues that Ukraine's successes in 2022 might have led some to believe that defeating Russia would be an easy task; he calls for patience and continued support as Ukraine vows to fight on.



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COMPARING UKRAINE AND RUSSIA'S WAYS OF WARFIGHTING

Russia's re-invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has profoundly reshaped the European security landscape – that is the fundamental argument of a new book, *Russia's Imperial Endeavour and its Geopolitical Consequences*, edited by Balint Madlovics and Balint Magyar. The whole book is available for [download](#) on the website of the German Council on Foreign Relations. Of particular note is [a chapter by Andras Racz](#), which compares Ukraine and Russia's opposing approaches to warfighting. Racz explains how Russia is relying on top-down mobilisation and military organisation, effectively trying to showcase the supposed advantages of an autocracy with straightforward decision-making structures. On the other hand, Ukraine's approach is based on horizontal mobilisation and the building and sustaining of networks of trust, inclusiveness and crowdfunding.



CHINA'S TAKEOVER OF HONG KONG – NEAR COMPLETE?

In October last year, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared that Beijing had taken 'full control' over Hong Kong, effectively ending the 'One Country, Two Systems' arrangement established after the British withdrawal from Hong Kong in 1997. A new [episode](#) from *The Red Line* podcast takes stock of where Hong Kong stands in 2023. Three geopolitical experts, John Fowler, John Coyne and Dan Harris, share their views, arguing that Beijing has indeed established effective strategic control over Hong Kong, with deleterious effects for democratic values and civil liberties. However, they also note that China's absorption of Hong Kong appears to have undermined the economic agility and flexibility that has long been one of its hallmarks.



NEWS STORIES TO WATCH OUT FOR

As the wars in Ukraine and Israel/Gaza and their multi-dimensional repercussions continue to dominate headlines, here are some other topics to keep an eye on:

30th November saw the kick off of the [COP28 Conference](#) in Dubai.

North Korea has held elections with [99 per cent voting](#) in favour of ruling party candidates.

After a 400-hour ordeal, workers trapped in a [tunnel in India](#) have been found alive.

A recent [jailbreak in Sierra Leone](#) leading to 19 deaths appears to have been a coup attempt.

Hundreds of flamingos in Argentina have died of [Avian flu](#), raising concerns of an epidemic.

Opposition parties in Bangladesh [stage mass protests](#) ahead of planned January elections.

Armed rebels have launched a [major offensive](#) against Myanmar's military junta.

A sharp increase in [respiratory illness in China](#) has parents worried and hospitals overloaded.

TURKEY IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

Russia's war against Ukraine has put a spotlight on the Black Sea and the region's complex security dynamics. In a new [research paper](#) for the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Daria Isachenko reviews how Turkey, one of the region's pivotal powers, is positioning itself. She finds that while Ankara is not questioning its NATO ties, it continues to see the Black Sea as a domain in which it wants to keep the presence of external powers limited. In fact, in the Black Sea, Turkey and Russia share the basic view that they, rather than anyone else, should be in control of security, while also having the confidence that their bilateral relations are strong enough to resolve any disputes that might emerge between them.

RUSSIA AND NORTH KOREA STRENGTHEN SPACE COOPERATION

On 21st November, North Korea launched its third military satellite. Demonstrating – perhaps deliberately – an increasingly close cooperation with Russia, which has provided technical knowhow and support to bolster Pyongyang's military espionage programme. In this [informative interview](#), CSIS experts explain that DPRK has benefited in its newly found friendship with Moscow, particularly in terms of space and ballistic missile technology. This could fast forward North Korea's military offensive capabilities significantly and begin to upset the balance of power on the peninsula. Unfortunately there does not seem to be a diplomatic way to de-escalate rising military tensions at this time.



DOING A DEAL WITH THE SEPARATISTS: WHAT FUTURE FOR SPAIN?

Spain's new government – led by Socialist Pedro Sanchez – is the product of an unwieldy coalition, cobbled together with nationalist parties in Catalunya, the Basque Country and Galicia. After a thwarted independence referendum in Catalan territories, the difficult relationship between Madrid and the periphery resulted in clashes and senior Catalan politicians fleeing the country. This [article by the Brookings Institute](#) outlines the legal challenges and horse trading involved in proving an amnesty for 300 or so Catalan politicians who participated in the 2014-17 secession process, in exchange for dropping any further unilateral moves for Catalan independence. In forming his government, Sanchez has taken a gamble empowering independence parties while trusting them not to use their newly found power to fragment the country.



EUROPE EMERGES AS THE MAIN MARKET OF THE GLOBAL COCAINE TRADE

The Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington has published a fascinating new [report](#) mapping the global cocaine trade, and focusing especially on increased trafficking across the Atlantic from producers in South America to increasingly lucrative markets in Europe. Supported by useful graphics and charts, the report demonstrates how increased cocaine consumption in Europe over the past decade, and changing drug habits in the US, have significantly altered the flow of cocaine from key producing states like Colombia, via the Caribbean, to European ports – especially in Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain. In Rotterdam, alone, port authorities seized some 50 tonnes of cocaine in 2022, an increase of 164 per cent on seizures in 2018.