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Pentagon acknowledges flying unarmed drones over Gaza

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Israel-Gaza war



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By Max Matza

BBC News

The US has confirmed for the first time that it has been flying unarmed surveillance drones over Gaza.

Pentagon spokesman Brig Gen Pat Ryder said the drones were operating in "support of hostage recovery efforts".

"These UAV flights began after the Oct 7 attack by Hamas on Israel," he said in a brief statement.

The acknowledgement comes after reporters spotted unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) on flight-tracking websites.

"The US is conducting unarmed UAV flights over Gaza, as well as providing advice and assistance to support our Israeli partner as they work on their hostage recovery efforts," the Pentagon's statement on Friday said.

The confirmation comes after reporters spotted MQ-9 Reapers, usually operated by American special forces, circling Gaza on Flightradar24, a publicly available flight-tracking website.

Reaper drones have previously been deployed to conduct airstrikes in Afghanistan, but are primarily used as surveillance aircraft because of their ability to "loiter" above an area for more than 20 hours at a time.

Unnamed US military officials told the **New York Times** that the drones were not helping co-ordinate Israeli military action in and around Gaza. Officials told the newspaper that information related to hostage recovery was being passed on to the Israelis.

These are not the only remote-controlled American military vehicles operating in the region.

On Thursday, the US Navy announced that it had fired lethal munitions from an unmanned surface vehicle (USV) - a speed boat - in the international waters of the Arabian Sea.

In a statement, the Navy noted that the test on 23 October was the first time combat munitions had been fired from a USV in the Middle East.

The US Navy said the development brings American military capabilities in the region to the "next level".

Last month, the US Navy said it had shot down multiple drones and rockets fired from Yemen that were appearing to head towards Israel.

- [Hezbollah chief breaks silence on Israel-Gaza war](#)

The US has also sent two battleships to the eastern Mediterranean, saying that they are there to prevent the war between Hamas and Israel from spreading.

In a fiery speech on Friday, the leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah warned the US against using the ships to attack the militant group.

"Your fleets in the Mediterranean do not scare us and will never scare us," said Hassan Nasrallah.

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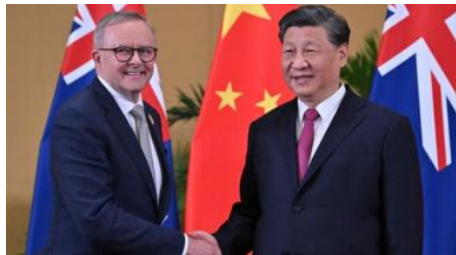
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