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Can the US and Iran sustain a 'frozen war'?

CHENNAI – 19 Nov, 2026 For months, Iran and the United States have been weighing a return to outright war over persevering towards a negotiated peace. But they appear to have settled on something in between.

While largely stopping short of full-blown military confrontation since July, when a June Memorandum of Understanding between the two sides fell apart, the two countries have instead intermittently traded attacks while using what economic levers they have to inflict as much pain as possible on the other side. Both have maintained blockades in and around the Strait of Hormuz, once the conduit for one-fifth of the world's oil and natural gas supplies.

In recent days, Iran says it has targeted US military sites in Bahrain and Kuwait, while the US has carried out an air strike on Iran's Qeshm island on Tuesday.

Iran has, meanwhile, continued to target ships it says have not followed its rules for passing through the critical Hormuz strait, as the US stands firm on its economic sanctions and naval blockade of Iran's ports.

The result, if not precisely a frozen conflict, is certainly



demonstrating a pattern of limited confrontation that could carry on for months without escalating into all-out war, analysts say.