

Decoding the Iran-Israel War:

Politics of Regional Security Complex in the Middle East

By

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An inherently fragile Middle East is on the verge of full-scale conflict after Iran launched an unprecedented drone and missile strike on Israel on 14th April in retribution for the bombardment of its embassy complex in Damascus two weeks earlier. Iran was anticipated to respond after losing two of its generals, notably Mohammed Reza Zahed, who was in charge of the Quds Force's operations in Syria and Lebanon, as well as five top Revolutionary Guard commanders.

In previous instances, Iran has retaliated against Israel's attacks on its leaders by using its allies or attacking Israeli interests abroad. However, Tehran's assault of weaponry from its territory this time was directed against Israel itself, raising prospects for interstate conflict to heights not seen in the Middle East in decades. Israel intercepted "99%" of the Iranian missiles with assistance from the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Jordan. Iran claims that the issue is now resolved and that its action was taken in "self-defense" in reaction to the attack on the embassy. The United States and other Israeli allies praised Israel's missile defense system and pleaded with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to use caution in order to prevent a crisis in the region.³

The Middle East is still a geopolitical minefield in many respects. Regional and international parties disregarded Israel's unlawful and cruel siege of Palestinian areas for a considerable amount of time. Israel has been attacking Gaza with a murderous sense of revenge. Israel's most powerful associate, the United States, was unable to stop Tel Aviv when it went on the rampage

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³ "Step back: On Iran-Israel tensions : Israel should stand down to avoid a regional war in West Asia", The Hindu Opinion, April 17, 2024.

<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/step-back-on-iran-israel-tensions/article68072172.ece>

in Gaza and carried out other strikes around the area, including the exceedingly perilous assault of Iran's embassy compound. Since the area has grown critically close to the edge, even a slight shove might bring about disaster. Although the Israeli war on Gaza has resulted in the enclave being transformed into a cemetery, it has not succeeded in overthrowing Hamas or freeing the captives. Furthermore, Israel and Iran have been linked to the region's careless bombing attacks. Both Israel and Iran have the ability to wreak devastation on one another in the event of an open conflict, transforming the region—which is the world's primary supply of energy—into a battlefield.⁴

Iran's 'Operation Honest Promise' against Israel

With this tremendous aerial bombardment, Iran has officially launched its first direct attack on Israeli land from Iranian soil. The strike was designated as "Operation True Promise" by Iran. Tel Aviv was among the Israeli cities that heard explosions during the strike. As Israeli soldiers attempted to fire down the rockets, air raid sirens sounded in over 720 places and explosions were also audible in Jerusalem. According to an Associated Press news agency report, Iran's onslaught featured over 120 ballistic missiles, 170 drones, and over 30 cruise missiles, according to Israel's top military spokesperson, Daniel Hagari. The Israeli military said that with assistance from the US, the UK, and France, the great majority of the rockets were intercepted outside of Israel's borders. A few of the missiles fired against Israel as they were passing through Jordanian airspace were also intercepted by Jordan.⁵

Iranian military leader Major General Mohammad Reza Zahedi was assassinated in Damascus on April 1st, and Iran launched the assaults in reprisal for what was believed to be an Israeli strike. Six other Iranian nationals, one of whom was a general, were also slain with him. Also slain

⁴ Maziar Motamedi, "How well could Iran defend itself against a potential Israeli attack?", Al-jazeera, 17 Apr 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/17/how-well-could-iran-defend-itself-against-a-potential-israeli-air-strike>

⁵ "Israel army chief pledges Iran response as Western countries urge restraint", Al-jazeera, 15 Apr 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/15/western-allies-urge-restraint-as-israeli-war-cabinet-weighs-iran-response>

were at least six Syrian nationals. There is an impression that Iranian officials are not only willing to act, but also want to be seen acting. This suggests, that pride and prestige are taken into account separately from strategy and tactical usefulness, which might spell disaster ahead of anyone's expectations. According to Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi, the Zionist regime in Israel was brought to its knees by "Operation Honest Promise." Raisi reaffirmed warnings of "a fierce and severe response" in response to "the slightest act of aggression" by Israel. Days after the attack, Iran held a military parade where a variety of weapons, including long-range ballistic missiles and drones, were on display. Iran has insisted that, in the wake of the attack on the Syrian consulate, the attack on Israel was an act of "self-defense."⁶ Following a Hamas attack on Israel in October 2023, US President Joe Biden backed Benjamin Netanyahu's Israel with the "self-defense" rhetoric. Despite Israel's heinous onslaught, over 33,000 Palestinians have died in Gaza since then. With assistance from the US and other partners, the Israeli army said that the strike only resulted in "minimal damage" and that the great majority of Iran's missiles were shot down. However, Israel was cautioned by Iran not to react. Major General Mohammad Bagheri, the head of Iran's armed forces, stated on state television that Iran will launch a "much larger" counterattack in the event that Israel retaliates, in contrast to the previous bombing. Iran also forewarned Washington that if it supported Israeli reprisal, US bases would be targeted. Prior to this, Iran's UN envoy stated that it considered "the matter... concluded" and referenced Article 51 of the UN Charter, which allows for self-defense. However, Iran will respond far more harshly if the Israeli leadership makes another error.⁷

Regional Security Complex in the Middle East

The Arab world as a whole is terrified of what may occur if there is another regional war in the conflict-ravaged area due to the direct confrontation between Israel and Iran. If it happens, its consequences will not just be regional but also global. A regional clash between Iran and Israel has the potential to spark not just tensions with the Gulf nations but also with the US, Russia, and

⁶ Sayantani Biswas, "Israel-Iran war news: Tehran celebrates 'success of operation Honest Promise' ", Livemint, 17 Apr 2024

<https://www.livemint.com/news/world/iran-celebrates-success-of-operation-honest-promise-against-israel-10-points-11713343197448.html>

⁷ "Iran attacks Israel with over 300 drones, missiles: What you need to know", Al-jazeera, 15 Apr 2024.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/14/iran-attacks-israel-with-over-300-drones-missiles-what-you-need-to-know>

China. Israel's partners have denounced the aerial attack and issued warnings that it puts the Middle East at risk of future escalation. As per a senior administration official, Biden explicitly stated that the United States will not take part in any aggressive actions against Iran. He did, however, reaffirm his backing for Israel. Israel sent a strong message to its enemies that they could not seriously jeopardize Israel's security by "demonstrating a remarkable capacity to defend against and defeat even unprecedented attacks," according to a White House quotation citing Biden.⁸

At a meeting, the UN Security Council urged Israel and Iran to exercise caution. Speaking to the gathering, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated that "neither the region nor the world can afford more war." "It's time to diffuse and neutralize this situation." Ayman Safadi, the foreign minister of Jordan, issued a warning about the possibility of a conflict escalating into the Middle East and said that doing so would lead to "dangerous paths." The "military escalation" concerned Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which demanded moderation from all sides. China also expressed its serious concerns over the escalation, stating that a ceasefire has to be enacted right once since it constituted a "spillover of the Gaza conflict." An immediate mitigation, exercise of restraint, stepping back from violence, and return to the path of democracy was demanded by India, which also voiced worry.⁹

A potential Israeli strike

The Israeli military has been deliberating on how to respond to Iran's drone and missile strikes. Strategic sites such as nuclear research centers or the bases of the Revolutionary Guards might be the target of an Israeli strike. This would be one of the riskiest and most aggressive options available. It may lead to Iran striking back at Israel, which would start a regional conflict that the US, Europe, and the Arab world are very anxious to avoid. Israel assaulted a Syrian nuclear site in 2007 and an Iraqi reactor in 1981 as part of its preemptive military response to perceived

⁸ Abhimanyu Kulkarni, "How Israel Could Strike Back At Iran: High-Risk Options Explained", NDTV World, April 17, 2024.

<https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/israel-iran-war-live-updates-what-next-strike-on-iran-nuke-sites-cyber-warfare-how-israel-might-respond-5459586>

⁹ "Iran attacks Israel with over 300 drones, missiles: What you need to know", Al-jazeera, 15 Apr 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/14/iran-attacks-israel-with-over-300-drones-missiles-what-you-need-to-know>

dangers to its security. Iran's nuclear program is seen as an existential danger by Israel. Israel thinks Tehran's nuclear facilities are meant for armament, despite Tehran's insistence that they are for peaceful reasons. A significant number of Iran's nuclear installations are well hidden underground, making attacks difficult. As a result, many analysts argue that for Israel to strike these sites, the US would need to aid it. However, US President Joe Biden has stated unequivocally that should Israel choose to take revenge on Iran, he would not dispatch troops to support them.¹⁰

Israel may use direct bombings or cyberattacks to target Iranian defense facilities or vital infrastructure. With as little civilian losses as possible, this policy seeks to strike Iranian land to send a deterrent message. Israel may target Iran's allies like the Houthis in Yemen or Hezbollah in Lebanon in place of launching a direct attack within Iran. Additionally, Iran finances organizations in Syria and Iraq to carry out attacks against Israel on its behalf. Since October, when Israel's battle against Hamas started in Gaza, there has been a daily gun exchange with Hezbollah. Additionally, it has repelled Houthi rockets and drones, which have also attacked ships with ties to Israel in the Red Sea.¹¹

Way Forward

In apparent reprisal for a fatal attack on its consulate in Damascus, Syria, Iran launched over 300 projectiles at varying speeds and altitudes against Israel, including over 170 drones, cruise missiles, and over 120 ballistic missiles. The majority of Iran's first-ever barrage of drones and missiles fired straight into Israel was effectively defused by Israel thanks to a powerful regional alliance and the efficient employment of cutting-edge defense systems designed to resist such assaults.

¹⁰ Belén Fernández, "Sorry, but Iran is not the aggressor here", Al-jazeera, April 17, 2024.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/4/14/sorry-but-iran-is-not-the-aggressor-here>

¹¹ Abhimanyu Kulkarni, "How Israel Could Strike Back At Iran: High-Risk Options Explained", NDTV World, April 17, 2024.

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However, this massive assault is a turning point that goes beyond a covert conflict between the two most formidable adversaries in the Middle East and another flashpoint in the Israeli-Hamas conflict. Iran is about to face more sanctions from the US and its allies in retaliation for the country's extraordinary attack on Israel. The intention is to dissuade Israel from taking the situation to new heights. Undoubtedly, the Middle East has been engaged in a fierce proxy war for a considerable amount of time, waged in cyberspace as well as on land, sea, and air. However, this disastrous development represents a major deterioration of the Middle East's geopolitical environment in general.¹²

A sense of proportion and balance is desperately needed. However, there is an extremely distinct possibility that Israel may launch retaliation and perhaps deterrence strikes in addition to a horizontal escalation. The Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, are trying to stop this war from getting worse and destroying the whole Middle East and North Africa area because of these uncompromising positions. As the situation rapidly shifts, the United States government's stance is expected to play a significant role. This is because a temporary cease-fire is unlikely, moving toward a two-state solution for Israel and the Palestinian territories is growing more difficult, and the likelihood of hostilities ending in Gaza soon is decreasing. At this point, it's hard to predict which course of action would be taken, but there is constant pressure and advice not to go down the escalation path from all sides.

¹²Tol Desk, *"Iran-Israel conflict: Are we on brink of World War III?"*, Times of India, Apr 17, 2024. http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/109373417.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

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