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Israel's limited counter to Iran's massive attack

After weeks of grandiose threats, Israel struck a number of military sites in Iran over the weekend. While many details of the attack remain unclear, Iran's leadership suggests that a qualitative response is on the horizon.



Photo Credit: The Cradle

Twenty-five days after Iran's massive 1 October missile attacks on Israel, and following weeks of threats and bluster about its huge preparations, Tel Aviv unleashed its own offensive against military sites of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the early hours of Saturday, 26 October.

The Israeli attack started in the capital, Tehran, where at around 02:15 local time (22:45 GMT), very loud explosions were heard on the western side of the city. Reports which

usually are published immediately on the social media platform X, suggested six explosions had been heard.

A multi-wave attack

Footage surfacing afterward — though scarce in number — showed Iranian anti-aircraft guns firing into the sky over Tehran, but no sign of missiles were recorded in those videos. The lack of visible missile evidence sparked debate among analysts, with some suggesting that the occupation state employed tactics designed to evade traditional detection methods, potentially by using low-altitude or stealth drones. But others have questioned whether Israeli jets even entered Iranian airspace.

The second and third waves of strikes came two to four hours later when aerial defense systems became active in Iran's western province of Ilam and the southwestern province of Khuzestan. This multi-wave strategy indicated a calculated attempt to wear down Iran's defenses, probing their response times and resilience in multiple regions simultaneously.

With news about the initial raids ebbing, western media began to frame the Israeli strikes as enormous as well as successful. These evidence-free portrayals were met with skepticism from Iranian officials, who emphasized the effectiveness of their air defenses in minimizing any damage from Israeli strikes.

The *New York Times* wrote, “Israeli jets first targeted air defense batteries and later struck Iran’s missile arrays and production sites.”

Axios quoted Israeli officials as claiming, “Israel had sent a message to Tehran, ahead of the airstrikes, warning the Iranians not to respond.”

In the morning, the Israeli military issued a statement saying “it had completed its strikes but that if Iran makes the mistake of carrying out another attack, Israel will have to fight back.”

The Khatam al-Anbiya Air Defense Base — the central command in charge of defending the skies of Iran — meanwhile announced that:

“Despite all previous warnings from the Iranian authorities to the criminal, illegal Zionist regime against engaging in any form of adventurism, that fake regime in an escalating move struck military locations in Tehran, Ilam, and Khuzestan. The joint aerial defense of the country successfully intercepted and thwarted the aggressor’s raids. Despite that, limited damage was done to some sites with the extent of the harm being investigated.”

The Iranian army later in the day announced the death of at least four officers, including a colonel, killed during Israeli air raids in Khuzestan. An informed source speaking to *The*

Cradle on condition of anonymity reveals that the number of Iranian casualties is higher than what is officially being reported.

What were Tel Aviv's tactics?

More than 24 hours on, details about the Israeli air raids or the extent of the harm to the Iranian military are unclear and patchy at best. Both sides have a vested interest in controlling the narrative: Tel Aviv to project power and deterrence, and Tehran to maintain an image of resilience and minimize perceived vulnerabilities.

Israel says it deployed over 100 F-35 fighter jets to conduct the offensive. However, an Iranian conservative lawmaker on Saturday morning claimed that the strikes in Tehran were actually carried out by small drones or quadcopters.

Hamid Rasaei wrote on his Telegram channel that “the Zionist regime’s agents in Tehran were involved in those attacks and Iranian anti-aircraft guns fired at those microdrones.”

The narrative in the west of the country was different. Images of an Israeli missile’s booster falling in Iraq’s Salahuddin province suggest Israel used the Golden Horizon Air launched Ballistic Missile to hit Iranian radars in the western belt of the country.

The use of Iraqi airspace by Israel was confirmed by the Khatam Al-Anbiya Air Defense Base. It has blamed the US military for allowing Israel to fire air-launched ballistic missiles into Iranian territory from 100 kilometers deep inside the Iraqi soil. No such permission had been granted from Iraqi authorities.

Baghdad was joined by other Arab capitals in strongly condemning the Israeli attack on Iranian soil without referring to the use of its airspace by Israel. *The Cradle’s* correspondent in Baghdad says, “Iraq did not approve of the use of its skies, but Prime Minister [Mohammed Shia] al-Sudani has no say in this matter because Washington controls the Iraqi airspace, while Iraqi radar systems are old.”

Khatam al-Anbiya has not mentioned Jordan, a country that denies involvement in the Israeli aerial attack despite its track record of defending the occupation state from previous Iranian retaliatory strikes.

Limited success or major damage?

Although the official Iranian media have downplayed the extent and strength of the Israeli strikes, University of Tehran academic and political analyst Mohammad Marandi tells *The Cradle* that “it was a big operation on the side of Israel and actually a considerable one, as Israelis did a harm to Iranian radar and defense systems.”

Iranian academic Foad Izadi believes “the Israeli attack was not something that many had expected, much less than what was thought it would do.” But, he emphasizes, “(In essence)

Israel has no right to strike Iran, whether the strikes are small, medium or large. Iran is an independent country, and attacking another country is a violation of international law.”

Izadi dismisses western claims that Israel's patently illegal strikes on Iran are justified as “self-defense,” pointing out that, in all cases, Tel Aviv launched the original aggressions while Tehran was legally retaliating.

“Iran fired a barrage of missiles on Israel for the first time in April in the wake of an Israeli attack on the Iranian embassy in Damascus, Syria, that had been conducted despite Tehran’s previous warnings. The second encounter happened following Israel’s assassination of Hamas’s leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran. Iran had the right to respond to the killing of its guest, as well as the events that unfolded in Lebanon including Nasrallah’s assassination.”

Izadi points to a stellar performance by Iran's air defense systems, in which “Iran was basically able to minimize the effect of this aggression” by Israel.

Marandi, who served as a consultant for the Iranian negotiating team at the last round of Vienna nuclear talks, agrees with the assessment that Iran’s air defenses performed well:

“Iranians had conducted security and intelligence operations ahead of the strikes and succeeded in limiting the extent of damage by dummies and decoys as well as spreading misinformation about sensitive sites.”

As he tells *The Cradle*, the damage inflicted on Iranian military sites was not grave because “the possibility of a direct confrontation with the United States convinced Iranians many years ago to relocate almost all sensitive sites and strategic production facilities underground. Neither warplanes nor missiles are able to penetrate into those underground facilities.”

“What remains on the ground are small workshops producing missile spare parts and they are scattered across the country, but not near borders, that’s why the strike failed to leave a significant harm,” Marandi adds.

True Promise 3?

Saturday's direct hits on the Iranian capital and Iran's provincial military facilities were the first since 1987, when former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein’s military forces rained missiles on Tehran and other Iranian cities. The psychological impact of targeting Tehran itself cannot be overstated; it represents a symbolic blow that challenges Iranian security and sovereignty and will likely necessitate a meaningful and calibrated response.

That notion was reiterated by Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who has the final word on all national security matters. During a meeting with “Martyrs of Security” family members earlier today, Khamenei pointed out that Israel has yet to learn its lesson:

“They (the Israelis) need to understand the power, determination, and innovation of the Iranian nation and its youth. How to convey this power and resolve of the Iranian nation to the Zionist regime is for our officials to determine, and what is in the best interest of the nation and the country should be done.”

Foad Izadi believes a third Iranian attack against the occupation state is likely because “Iran's leaders are very much in line with the analysis that attacking the country should not become normalized. Mohammad Marandi says Tehran's retaliation isn't a matter of if, but when: “Even if Tehran had not been struck and only Ilam had been targeted by the Israelis, the Iranian leadership would have reacted,” he tells *The Cradle*.

“Iran’s retaliation to the April’s Damascus strike took days. After Haniyeh’s assassination, it took months for Tehran to strike back,” Marandi elaborates. Following the Israeli strikes, Iran's Supreme National Security Council met to get briefed on the targets that were hit and assess the extent of damage. While a possible Iranian military response was reportedly discussed, there is no information yet on whether that decision has been made.

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