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## Israeli Strikes Demonstrates Limits of Western Military Might

Israel's most recent missile strikes on Iran reveal the limits to conventional Western military power in the Middle East, reflecting wider limits globally.



While Israel's air force conducted a sophisticated, large-scale operation requiring well-trained, well-coordinated personnel as well as capable air-launched long-range precision guided missiles, a combination of Iranian defensive capabilities and constraints on

Western (including Israeli) military industrial production limited results.

While Israel and its US sponsors are capable of larger-scale military operations, this would be within the context of open warfare – warfare US-Israeli forces and their combined industrial power would struggle to sustain.

Large-scale war and even the use of nuclear weapons may seem unthinkable, but US desperation is unprecedented

Doubts may exist regarding Iranian resolve and resilience and whether it and its allies could outlast and outfight US-Israeli forces short of either or both the US and Israel resorting to nuclear weapons. Even if the US and its proxies, including Israel, were to prevail over Iran in the Middle East, it may come at the cost of forfeiting Washington's pursuit of primacy elsewhere around the globe, including in Ukraine versus Russia and the Asia-Pacific region versus China.

### **Escalation Toward War**

Long-standing US policy seeks to use Israel to provoke war with Iran, absolving Washington of responsibility while creating a pretext for Washington itself to wade into the conflict once it begins. Despite Israel lacking the conventional military power required to fight and win a war against Iran, Israel has conducted a long list of provocations to draw Iran into conflict, nonetheless, specifically to fulfill this US foreign policy objective.

Exchanges of missile strikes between Israel and Iran began in April ۲۰۲۴ when Israel attacked the Iranian consulate in Damascus, killing military personnel and civilians. It triggered a chain-reaction of strikes, assassinations, and retaliations, documented in a timeline laid out by the New York Times.

Iran's first retaliatory strike in April ۲۰۲۴ consisted of a barrage of drones, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles two weeks after its consulate was attacked and after notifying the United States days prior, giving the US and its regional partners ample time to coordinate efforts to intercept most of the incoming weapons.

Iran's second retaliatory strike in early October ۲۰۲۴ consisted of between ۱۸۰-۲۰۰ ballistic missiles, launched with little warning, overwhelming Israeli air defenses and inflicting significant damage to at least one Israeli air base, according to the Western media.

The two Iranian retaliatory strikes represented incremental escalation, each designed to serve as a demonstration and warning regarding Iranian capabilities including Iran's ability to target Israel with an array of weapons, overwhelm Israeli air defenses and inflict damage at will on Israeli military targets – all of it falling short of a full-scale attack.

Israel has responded to each Iranian retaliation with additional attacks consisting of air-launched long-range precision-guided missiles. Such missiles are launched far beyond Iranian airspace, likely in Iraq after transiting Jordanian airspace, with attacks on Syrian air defenses and claims of having transited Syrian airspace used to spare Jordan diplomatic complications.

While Israeli missiles managed to strike targets in Iran, the air operations required were complex, involved dozens of aircraft and highly trained pilots, and for the second, larger strike, involved scores of missiles (over ۵۰) according to leaked US intelligence assessments.

Despite the large, complex operation Israel launched, alleged damage dealt to Iranian targets, even according to Israeli sources, was minimal. Israel itself claimed to have hit three S-۳۰۰ air defense systems. However, the term “systems” likely means individual pieces of equipment from among entire S-۳۰۰ batteries which consist of several launchers, radar stations, a command center, and power generators. As was the case with Israel’s April missile strikes, these “systems” were likely radar sets.

NBC News and the New York Times both published satellite images of buildings at Iranian military and alleged missile production sites damaged by Israeli strikes. Out of over a dozen visible buildings at an alleged missile production site, one appears severely damaged. A military base allegedly struck by Israel appears to show perhaps ۳ out of over ۲۰ visible structures damaged.

Because of the complex operations required by Israeli warplanes to launch these missiles at targets in Iran well over ۱۰۰۰ km from Israeli territory and the fact that Israeli warplanes must enter into foreign airspace to launch these missiles, missile strikes on Iran are risky and less sustainable than Iran’s use of ground-launched ballistic missiles from Iranian territory capable of reaching targets anywhere in Israel.

Iran is rumored to have over ۳۰۰۰ ballistic missiles. Only a percentage of those missiles likely have the ability to reach Israel. The question is, what percentage?

Iran has extensive missile production facilities and was reported by Reuters in July ۲۰۲۰ to be expanding production even further. Israeli sources cited by Euro News claim that Iran has already exhausted a third of its “*high-grade missiles*” leaving about ۰۰ “*top-tier*” missiles in its arsenal. However, this number, if true, likely represents a much larger number than Israel’s “top-tier” missiles capable of reaching Iran.

Even the US, with vastly greater military capabilities than Israel, has found its position in the Middle East increasingly vulnerable with Iran and its allies repeatedly demonstrating an ability to strike at US bases in Iraq and Syria. Both the US and Israel suffer from a critical shortage of air defense missiles required to defend against Iranian drones, cruise and ballistic missiles, further tilting the military balance of power in the region in Iran’s favor.

Considering the shifting balance of military power in the region, the US and its proxies are faced with a decision – acknowledge limits to Western military power and influence over the region or continue escalating toward war. Because the US is able to employ Israel as a proxy and by doing so, avoid the direct consequences of failure, it enables and encourages Israel to continue expanding a multi-front conflict with Iran and its allies including Syria, Hezbollah, and Ansar Allah despite the growing costs and risks to Israel itself.

### **Extreme US-Israeli Desperation, Extreme Danger**

Israel and its US sponsors have the means of inflicting greater damage on Iran, but only within the context of open war – or worse – nuclear war.

Israel could use the summation of its long-range air-launched missiles on targets in Iran in waves of attacks, with US participation utilizing a much larger arsenal of air and sea-launched missiles also capable of striking Iran. These strikes could be expanded beyond military targets to include energy infrastructure and industry, undermining Iran's economy and possibly destabilizing the nation socioeconomically.

However, the US has a finite number of these stand-off weapons and should they be used in large-scale war with Iran either by itself or its Israeli proxies, it will take years to replace depleted stockpiles, forfeiting perceived US leverage over China in the Asia-Pacific region or over Russia in Eastern Europe.

Beyond this, both the US and Israel possess nuclear weapons. Israel is thought to possess its own arsenal of missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including the Jericho III intercontinental ballistic missile.

Because the US has deliberately invested in maintaining plausible deniability regarding Israeli actions despite facilitating every aspect of its actions, there may be a temptation to utilize Israeli nuclear weapons as the window of opportunity closes on the successful use of conventional military power against Iran.

Israel could use nuclear weapons on Iran, setting back both its nuclear program and the production of ballistic missiles as well as civilian infrastructure and thus its economy, setting the entire nation back years if not decades and removing it for the foreseeable future as an otherwise immovable obstacle to US primacy over the Middle East.

For Washington, the best part about this option is that while many would suspect US involvement behind-the-scenes, the US could officially deny any role, and even claim it urged Israel to exercise restraint. While Israel would face unprecedented consequences for its use of nuclear weapons, for Washington, the whole purpose of employing proxies is

precisely to shift the consequences of US foreign policy onto another nation while enjoying that policy's benefits.

As extreme and reprehensible as this sounds, it should be remembered that the United States and Europe have enjoyed generations of primacy over the globe. This primacy is now in terminal decline. This has already driven the US and its partners to adopt extreme measures, including war and proxy war, around the globe.

The ongoing war in Ukraine is a byproduct of this process, as is the escalating violence between Israel and Iran in the Middle East. Growing tensions between the US and China in the Asia-Pacific region are also a result of Washington attempting to reverse its declining primacy there.

Large-scale war and even the use of nuclear weapons may seem unthinkable, but US desperation is unprecedented. Because desperation breeds danger, unprecedented desperation breeds unprecedented danger. While many have criticized Iran's patience and restraint regarding US-Israeli provocations, it is likely because Iran realizes time is on its side unless it provides the US and its proxies an opportunity to justify exercising what few, extreme options are capable of turning the tide back in the West's favor.

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