

Severely threatening Iran's stability is only way to prevent attack

written by Asher Fredman | 11.08.2024

America's current approach to the threat of a large-scale Iranian attack against Israel is misguided and will not prevent regional war. Rather than focusing on a defensive posture and de-escalation, the best way for the US, Israel and regional allies to deter Iran is to present a credible threat to its strategic assets.

In the ongoing international maneuvering to prevent an Iranian assault, the United States is emphasizing a defensive approach. On August 5, US Defense Secretary Austin posted on X that he had discussed with his Israeli counterpart, "US defensive force posture moves... and stressed the importance of ongoing efforts to de-escalate tensions in the region."

According to reports, US officials have been warning Israel not to respond strongly to any Iranian attack. It seems that Washington's goal is a reprise of the international response to Iran's April 13 aerial attack, during which a US-led coalition downed the vast majority of the 300 plus missiles and drones fired by Tehran at Israel.

This approach by the US will not deter Iran or prevent a regional war. A credible American and Israeli threat to strike critical Iranian assets and sites - including military, nuclear, oil and electricity facilities, as well as air and sea ports - is far more likely to produce the desired outcome.

The Iranian regime is much more vulnerable than it would like to appear. Its air defenses are relatively weak. Its ability to carry out successful long-range aerial attacks is currently limited. Strategic sites, critical to its military strength and economy, as well as to the regime's stability, could be destroyed or severely-damaged in a US-led strike.

Despite its bluster, the Islamic Republic is well aware of its weaknesses. This is precisely the reason that Iran is now making significant efforts to obtain advanced air defense and radar systems from Russia.

IRAN'S WEAKNESS is also the reason that the Ayatollah regime has adopted a proxy strategy in its war against Israel. Tehran, to date, has been enjoying the best of both worlds. On the one hand, the proxies which it arms and trains, such as Hezbollah, the Houthis, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, have launched thousands of attacks against the Jewish state, including the October 7 massacre.

On the other hand, Tehran has largely-avoided direct retribution in response to such attacks, with Israeli and US operations targeting primarily the proxies rather than the government arming and empowering them.

If the Iranian regime were to believe that it faces a severe threat to its stability and even survival if it should launch a massive assault against Israel, it would likely make do with a much more limited attack. Conversely, if Iran believes that following such an assault, international efforts will be focused on preventing a robust Israeli response, it has no reason to avoid launching such an attack.

Indeed, while the July 31 assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran embarrassed the Iranian authorities and deprived them of an important partner, it is highly unlikely that the Iranian Shi'ite regime will risk its stability in order to avenge the death of a Palestinian Sunni terror leader. The regime instead will prefer to continue channeling arms, funds and expertise to Hamas and to whomever is appointed to replace Haniyeh.

If, despite a clear and credible warning, Iran nevertheless launches an intensive strike, the US and Israel should deal a devastating blow to Iran's strategic infrastructure, one that degrades its nuclear and military sites, cripples its economy, and threatens the regime's survival.

Such a blow may lead to a wider regional outbreak of hostilities. However, it is far more advantageous that such an outbreak take place now, before Iran has the opportunity to deploy sophisticated Russian air defenses and break out to a nuclear weapon, than after it has an opportunity to do so.

According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Iran is weeks away from having enough enriched uranium to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran's weaponization program may be much further along than previously imagined. Countering a future attack by Iran and its proxies against US or Israeli interests will be much more dangerous if that attack takes place under an Iranian nuclear umbrella.

A credible US warning will also send a clear message to both regional allies such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan, who view Iran as a central foe, and to Russia and China, who have been deepening their ties with Tehran. Such a strategic approach has the greatest chances of deterring Iran, preventing a wider war, protecting US interests, and advancing regional stability.

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