

Iran's attack gives Biden a chance to shore up his credibility

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 12.04.2024

The security tensions following the assassination in Damascus of Gen. Mohamed Reza Zahedi have again turned the spotlight toward Tehran. This comes after a period in which Iran enjoyed the benefit of having the world preoccupied with its proxies and various hotspots that are not directly related to it.

Until Zahedi's death, Israel has allegedly struck a series of Iranian officers and "advisors" in attacks it has carried out in Syria over recent months. However, the figures killed in those attacks allowed Tehran to swallow its pride and make do with measured responses that didn't embroil it in a wider campaign.

In contrast, the assassination of Zahedi, for which Israel hasn't officially claimed responsibility, took out a senior command in the Revolutionary Guard. It's perceived as an escalation by Israel - exacerbating the regime leadership's dilemma: How to respond without getting sucked into a mess it can't get out of.

From Iran's perspective, too weak a response would project weakness. A harsh response could lead to an expansion of the war, endanger strategic assets on its soil and across the Middle East, and also risk dragging it into direct confrontation with the US.

In the days leading up to its attack on Israel during the weekend, there was no need to belabor the potential response scenarios. They are described extensively in the media, and the very discussion allows spokespeople for the Islamic regime to portray Israel as deterred and fearful, seeing it as a down payment on the price it's yet to pay.

In fact, the current development places the Islamic Republic in a situation it sought to avoid when creating the model of deploying proxy forces. This allowed Iran to reap the successes of the front-line groups without paying the price or suffering failures.

Iran has managed to have the world let the orchestrator off the hook despite sending proxies to do its bidding. This has had it invest in building such forces in

the Mideast and other regions - training, equipping, financing them - turning them into key players in their countries and attack dogs against common enemies nearby. It did this without a nuclear umbrella, and it knows full well what having one would have meant in terms of its security.

Iran has long ceased being just a local or regional problem; it is now a global matter. The US needs to spearhead the effort to counter it, regarding not only the nuclear aspect but also its weapons proliferation, subversion, proxy deployment, funding terrorism, and fueling it. The Biden administration can view this as an opportunity to set new boundaries for Tehran's conduct, now in the final stretch before presidential elections.

Against the backdrop of Iran's Ukraine war involvement and partnership in the anti-US, anti-West axis, there lies an opportunity for the US to restore its stature in the Middle East, strengthen the pro-Western front, and impact the global order.

Those who might be concerned in Washington that such a policy would embroil the US in an undesired war should think about the prospect that could occur without such action: An expansion of the war in the Middle East that could drag the US into it. In the eyes of the ayatollahs, Israel is the "little satan." It stands at the tip of the spear of Western civilization in this region. There is no need to guess who the "great satan" is.

Published in Israel Hayom, April 14, 2024.