

Iran's attack means Israel has an opening: Derailing its nuclearization

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 15.04.2024

Iran concludes this chapter of confrontation with Israel with a mixed cost-benefit balance sheet: On one hand, it crossed the Rubicon, disregarded President Joe Biden's explicit warning, and use its own territory to carry out the largest missile and UAV attack any country has ever launched against another country. In doing so, according to its view, it will cause Israeli decision-makers to think twice before approving strikes on Iranian elements.

On the other hand, it exposed itself to a direct response, led to the formation of a coalition of countries against it, provided an opportunity to showcase an impressive array of air defense capabilities against Iran, opened the door for Israel to extricate itself from the political travails it found itself in due to the situation in Gaza, led the US to intensify measures against it, and caused internal tension and escalation in American political climate.

In addition to preserving deterrence, Israel's main goals vis-à-vis Iran are dismantling its nuclear capabilities and neutralizing the threat posed by the Iranian regime's proxy forces, chief among them Hezbollah. In response to the pressure Washington is exerting on Israel to refrain from retaliation, its willingness to join a practical plan with a binding timeline for achieving these goals should be examined.

In any case, Israel need not rush to respond. It would be wise to keep Iranian nerves in tense anticipation, allowing the Iranian rial to continue plummeting and enabling internal criticism of the regime to intensify.

Iran concluded this chapter of confrontation with Israel in a worse geopolitical position than it began: It invested in building proxy forces to avoid direct confrontation with its adversaries, but ultimately became embroiled in a direct clash with Israel. The attack it carried out against Israel was impressive in scale but encountered an effective air defense array and did not cause significant damage. It prompted a cohesion of regional states and provided them with a

successful experience of regional cooperation against it – which could encourage such a trend, contrary to its desires.

It provided legitimacy for striking it directly, and unlike Israel, it is less protected. It gave Israel leverage to pressure the US, so that even if it does not attack, it can extract concessions that will make things difficult for Iran. Russia and China, its allies, stood on the sidelines. It exacerbated Iran's domestic situation, created a sense of tension and anxiety, and impacted the value of the rial.

What does Iran still have in its arsenal that it has not yet employed against Israel? It mainly boils down to Hezbollah. The terrorist group's set of considerations is broader and not solely focused on Iranian interests.

The Biden administration, which once again impressively stood by Israel's side and assisted in forming a coalition of states that participated in thwarting the Iranian attack, fears a widening of the regional war due to the geostrategic and economic implications and the possibility of being dragged into intervening, especially in an election year.

Therefore, it is trying to amplify the achievement against Iran, settling for that and a few diplomatic steps whose significance regarding neutralizing Iran's capabilities is unclear. From Washington's perspective, the developments reinforce its approach to hasten the establishment of a strategic regional alliance, and it will try to push for that to happen.

Israel, for its part, even if the prospects are unclear, must examine the possibility of seizing the opportunity created to advance its over-arching goal: Thwarting Iran's nuclear capabilities. If that is a concession that can be obtained at this time – restraint on its part would be justified.

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