

Israeli strikes on Iran: A dress rehearsal for a wider war

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Early Saturday morning, Israel launched coordinated air strikes on Iran, amid the Zionist regime's genocide in Gaza and its attacks on the West Bank and Lebanon.

The attack—far and away the biggest Israeli military strike ever launched against Iran—represents a major provocation and escalation of Israel's war throughout the Middle East, one that was planned in the closest consultation with Washington and enjoyed US logistical and intelligence support.

Since the beginning of the current Middle East war, the chief target of both Israel and its US imperialist-sponsors has been Iran, which is viewed as the main regional impediment to Washington asserting unbridled hegemony over the world's chief energy-exporting region. US enmity toward Iran has increased as Tehran, in response to Washington's scuttling of the Iran nuclear accord and war threats, has forged closer strategic ties with Beijing and Moscow, including supplying Russia with drones and possibly ballistic missiles for the Ukraine war.

In the weeks prior to Saturday's attack, Israeli government and military spokesmen let it be known that they were contemplating striking key elements of Iran's nuclear program and/or the oil infrastructure upon which its economy depends. Iran warned that either action risked igniting all-out war.

Ultimately, Israel chose to mount a more limited operation. Nevertheless, Saturday's attack was far bigger than that it carried out in April, and was clearly aimed at preparing the terrain for a wider war, both by degrading Iranian military capacities and testing its defences.

US and Iranian press accounts agree that the strike caused five deaths in Iran—four soldiers and one civilian. Otherwise, precise information as to what was hit and the overall effectiveness of the strikes is contested.

While US and Israeli accounts have insisted that the strikes inflicted major damage to Iran's ballistic missile program and anti-missile defenses, Iranian officials have downplayed their impact.

None of the claims and counter-claims should be taken at face value. Not only are the various belligerents seeking to mislead their adversaries as to their military capabilities. They also face restless populations at home, fearful of the horrific cost an all-out war would entail.

The most detailed report of the strike to emerge in the US press was a *Wall Street Journal* article headlined, "How Israel pulled off its largest-ever strike on Iran." It reported that 100 jet fighters, spy planes and refuelling aircraft, including F-35 stealth fighters, were involved in three waves of attacks, hitting targets not only in Iran but also Syria and Iraq.

According to the *Journal*, the first wave struck air-defence batteries in Syria and Iraq, establishing a flight path for the main force that hit air defense installations and missile production facilities inside Iran. These strikes were launched from outside Iranian airspace, some 100 kilometres inside Iraq. The operation lasted some four hours and, according to Israel, all planes returned to their base.

In the run-up to Saturday's long planned and publicly signalled attack, US President Joe Biden and other senior White House officials publicly urged Israel not to attack either Iran's nuclear program or oil installations. No doubt a factor in this was fear of the impact the possible eruption of a full-scale regional war in the Middle East, and the turmoil it would produce on world oil markets, would have on the November 5 US presidential election.

Following the Israeli strikes, Biden and other imperialist leaders like British Prime Minister Keir Starmer rushed to declare them "proportionate" and demand that Tehran not take any action in retaliation for a military attack on Iran of unprecedented scale. One, moreover, that is only the latest in an endless series of provocations, including the killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran in late July.

"It looks like [Israel] didn't hit anything other than military targets," said Biden, adding that he hoped this was the end of the exchange of fire between Israel and Iran. Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh declared: "We believe that this should be the end of this tit-for-tat. We don't think that Iran should or needs to respond."

No credence can be given to such comments.

Unquestionably, many considerations and calculations by both the US and Israel went into determining the parameters of what could have been far greater airstrikes on Iran, including potentially the ability of the US to continue supplying Israel with the missiles it would need to withstand a sustained campaign of Iranian ballistic missile attacks.

But any and all such considerations and calculations were purely of a tactical character. The modus operandi of these criminal regimes, whether in the Middle East or Europe and Asia, is baiting and provocation aimed at producing a reaction that can be exploited as needed to escalate hostilities in pursuance of their strategic goals.

While Israel has conducted its genocidal campaign against the Gazan Palestinians over the past 13 months, Tel Aviv and Washington have pursued a strategy of intensifying pressure, provocation and terror against Iran and all its allies across the Middle East, with the aim of systematically degrading their military capacities so as to place the US and Israel in the best position to wage an all-out war against Iran, and preferably at a time of their own choosing.

In pursuing this strategy, they are exploiting the contradictions of Iran's bourgeois clerical regime, which is deeply divided over how to respond. Even now, important sections are clinging to the hope that they can reach an accommodation with the US and its European imperialist allies. Above all, Iran's bourgeois ruling elite, including elements in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps who favor a more belligerent military posture, are organically incapable of mobilising the masses of the Middle East across all ethnic and sectarian lines against imperialism.

The US claims that the Israeli strikes pave the way for de-escalation are contradicted by the reports in the media, themselves based on information leaked by military-intelligence operatives in Washington and Tel Aviv. They clearly indicate that the strikes were designed to prepare the way for more extensive attacks in the future.

A *Wall Street Journal* article Tuesday claimed the Israeli strikes had destroyed three of Iran's sophisticated Russian S-300 air defence systems; the fourth had been hit earlier in the year.

The other Israeli targets, it said, were principally missile production facilities, including military sites at Parchin, Khojir and Shahroud. These complexes house key aspects of Iran's missile industry, including specialty mixers used to produce solid-propellant motors for Iran's advanced missiles. The *Times of Israel* claimed the strikes dealt a "crippling" blow to Iran's missile production, destroying at least 12 and as many as 20 planetary mixers that cannot be easily or quickly replaced.

While both Israel and the US have insisted that Saturday's strikes were against military sites, not Iran's oil industry or nuclear facilities, one of the four buildings reportedly destroyed at the huge Parchin military complex was alleged to have been involved in Iran's nuclear program. Moreover, the *Times of Israel* claimed "hidden damage" not revealed by Israel may have included production facilities for the centrifuges needed to enrich uranium in the city of Karaj, where Israeli war planes reportedly hit nearby air defence batteries.

Iranian authorities, for their part, have insisted that the strikes caused only limited damage and once again signalled that they

are not looking for escalation of the conflict with Israel or the United States. Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said the strike should not be "exaggerated or downplayed," but pointedly refrained from threatening further strikes on Israel in retaliation. He added, "It is up to the authorities to determine how to convey the power and will of the Iranian people to the Israeli regime and to take actions that serve the interests of this nation and country."

US imperialism has never accepted the outcome of the 1979 Iranian Revolution which ended the dictatorship of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, a critical US ally in the Middle East. Washington backed Iraq in its devastating war with Iran in the 1980s. Even as it subsequently waged war against Iraq in 1990-91 and invaded it in 2003, the installation of a US-aligned regime in Tehran remained a top priority. Now Iran is included with Russia, China and North Korea as obstacles to American global hegemony that must be removed at any cost.

Like the US, for whom Israel functions as an attack dog, the Zionist ruling elite views Iran as an obstacle to its predatory ambitions. Israel, the only state in the Middle East with a nuclear arsenal, has repeatedly taken drastic, illegal action to delay Iran's nuclear program. This includes the assassination of top Iranian nuclear scientists and, in concert with the US, the sabotage of Iran's nuclear facilities.

Israeli chief of the general staff Herzi Halevi declared Tuesday: "If Iran makes the mistake of launching another missile barrage at Israel, we will once again know how to reach Iran, with capabilities that we did not even use this time." These comments are not just a warning to Iran, but foreshadow what Israel, with US backing, is actively preparing.

Whatever the immediate outcome of Israel's airstrikes on Iran, it is certainly not the end of the confrontation and conflict, but rather the preparation for new Israeli and US provocations and a dress rehearsal for a wider war that could rapidly draw in other powers in the region and beyond.



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