

How Will Israel Retaliate Against Iran?

As expected, in retaliation for Israel's killing of a top Iranian general and seven other senior military leaders on April 1, all of whom were suspected of having Israeli blood on their hands, Iran struck back on Saturday night, launching roughly 350 drones, ballistic missiles and cruise missiles on Israel. This marked the first time that the Islamic Republic of Iran directly attacked Israel after years of murderous attacks by their proxies, in particular Hezbollah and Hamas.

What will Israel do in response? And what does this mean for the region and the world?

Remarkably, Israel, with the help of America and other allies (including Britain, France and even some Arab allies, such as Jordan), was able to intercept 99% of the drones and missiles, rendering the Iranian attack virtually harmless, even though Hezbollah joined in the bombing, along with the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

So, despite the trauma of a mass assault from Iran at a time when Israel remains in the thick of the war with Hamas in Gaza, now more than six months old, and with 130 Israelis still held hostage, Israel emerged unscathed physically.

But the attack itself added trauma upon trauma, with schools closed for two days, flights canceled and Israelis across the nation urged to go to their shelters the moment they heard sirens. (If you were not aware, every home in Israel must have a "safe room" for shelter, while every apartment building must have a bomb shelter. This is how all Israelis live. Many Israelis also have an app on their phone that tells them when a rocket has been launched. It often goes off through the day, even on "normal" days.)

When I checked in with one of my close friends in Israel during the night, he emailed back, saying, "Yes, all safe, it was crazy, well over 100 missiles in about five minutes. My phone was exploding [meaning, on his app] and I could see it in the skies, but it was far enough away that our sirens did not go off. Now it is 3:20 AM and I can't fall asleep ... Prayers appreciated."

As for the Iranian attack itself, it had been expected for days since Israel's surprise airstrike on the Iranian consulate annex building in Damascus, Syria, on April 1, killing Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi and seven other Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps officers.

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It also came at a difficult time for Israel, as the IDF had to put a temporary halt on its offensive in Gaza under heavy pressure from President Biden, paralyzing its efforts to neutralize Hamas. As for Biden's warning to Iran—"Don't"—the Iranian leadership paid no heed. As for Israel's next move, the Biden administration has reportedly told Israel it will not join with them in a direct counterstrike on Iran.

What, then, is coming next?

First, it's not clear if Iran simply launched this attack to save face, knowing it would not succeed, but needing to do something major because of the killing of Gen. Zahedi. As it is, despite the operation's abject failure, Iran is claiming success.

If that was the case and Iran knew the operation would be limited in its impact, Israel's response might be more restrained, even though it must do something because of the unprecedented nature of this attack from Iranian soil.

On the other hand, if Iran were legitimately seeking to

inflict many casualties, Israel's response would be more severe. As Prime Minister Netanyahu said, "We have determined a clear principle: Whoever harms us, we will harm them. We will defend ourselves against any threat and will do so level-headedly and with determination."

In that same spirit, it has long been thought that, should Israel find itself in an existential battle with Iran with the survival of the Jewish state on the line, it would resort to nuclear war: We will destroy you before you destroy us.

And while the apocalyptically minded mullahs of Iran might even welcome such an end-of-days scenario, believing that this would lead to the revelation of their expected messianic leader, the "Mahdi" or the "Twelfth Imam," Israel certainly has no desire to force such a costly war.

Pragmatically, with the Islamic leadership in Iran on tenuous ground due to social and economic upheaval, it would not want to risk an escalation either.

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What, then, will Israel do?

My educated guess—and nothing more than that—is that we could see a twofold approach.

First, Israel will do something stinging and immediate, but more of a symbolic nature, simply to say, "You crossed a line, and you will not get away with it."

Second, in keeping with Israeli wartime Cabinet member Benny Gantz's promise on Sunday "that his country will 'exact the price' for Iran's overnight missile attack when the time is right," Israel could wait for the opportune moment to do something major, such as taking out one of Iran's nuclear

plants, as it did spectacularly in Iraq in 1981. Or perhaps there will be another major assassination of a top Iranian leader with blood on his hands.

More conservatively, Israel could work with America to further isolate Iran, potentially forcing a regime change, as could have happened during the presidency of Barack Obama had he the will or desire to support the Iranian grassroots revolution.

My thinking, though, is that Israel wants to make its own statement, and while it will use restraint, especially in light of its successful defensive measures Saturday night, it will make Iran pay.

This is a great time to pray the Lord's Prayer for Israel and the Middle East: "Heavenly Father, may Your name be hallowed in the region! May Your will be done and may Your kingdom come! And we also pray for the peace of Jerusalem! We really need Your help, Lord."

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