



Israel Strikes Back; U.S. Must Show ‘No Daylight’

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On April 19, Israel responded to the Iranian regime’s unprecedented April 13-14 attack against it by launching three missiles from outside of Iranian territory at an air defense radar site guarding a nuclear facility near Isfahan. An initial [assessment](#) by U.S. officials – not yet complete as of this writing – determined that the strike achieved its objective in eliminating the radar site. Explosions were also reported in Syria and Iraq.

The failure of Iran’s attack on Israel and Israel’s clear demonstration of its ability to hit where and when it wants inside Iran likely means that Tehran is unlikely to attempt another massive missile launch at Israel. But this episode is very unlikely to spell the end of Iranian aggression against Israel, or the region. The United States should demonstrate, in both words and actions, that there is no daylight between it and Israel, as JINSA argued in its 2023 report, [No Daylight: U.S. Strategy if Israel Attacks Iran](#).

What Happened?

- [According](#) to U.S. officials, in the early morning local time of April 19, Israel launched three missiles from outside Iranian territory at Iranian air defense systems near Isfahan.

Why Is It Important?

- By signaling Israel’s undiminished ability and willingness to impose costs directly on military targets deep inside Iranian territory, last night’s operation conveyed that Tehran’s all-out overt and direct attack on Israel last weekend did not “create a new equation,” as Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Commander Hossein Salami [claimed](#) after the attack, and did not succeed in deterring further Israeli action. At the same time, the covert and limited nature of Israel’s strike was meant to avoid giving Iran a pretext to retaliate, without blurring or undermining the clear message that Israel retains the upper hand in any potential escalation spiral with Iran going forward.
 - » Iran’s unprecedentedly large and direct April 13-14 attack on Israel was intended to halt Israel’s [successful](#) strategy of targeting the IRGC’s “ring of fire” around the entire region – of which the April 1 airstrike on IRGC leadership in Damascus was only the latest and most successful in a string of such Israeli operations in recent months.
 - » Combined with Israel’s effective countermeasures against Iran’s drones and missiles, this operation’s limited nature also served Israel’s objective of restoring deterrence against Iran. By striking air defense assets near one of Iran’s most heavily guarded nuclear sites, Israel unsubtly hinted at its capability to impose far greater costs on Iran’s

most valuable assets – chiefly its nuclear weapons program and its missile and drone arsenals – without Iran being able to credibly retaliate in kind.

- A senior Israeli official was quoted to have [observed](#) that the attack “was intended to signal to Iran that Israel can attack its territory.”
- Iran has largely tried to downplay the attack – in part to avoid having to retaliate – which suggests that Israeli successfully denied Iran’s intent on establishing a “new equation. It also suggests that Iran probably doesn’t have much in the way of capabilities, as [noted](#) in a previous JINSA analysis, that it could field to follow-through on its claim of having established this “new equation.”
 - » On April 19, a senior Iranian official told [Reuters](#), “the foreign source of the incident has not been confirmed. We have not received any external attack, and the discussion leans more towards infiltration than attack.” The official added that there are no plans for an Iranian retaliation.
 - » On April 19, an Iranian official told the [New York Times](#) that Israel struck “a military air base near Isfahan,” but did not offer further details on the impact or means of the attack.
- Although the United States was not involved in the strikes, it was reportedly given advanced notice by Israel.
 - » The Associated Press reported that Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani [said](#) the United States was given “last-minute” notice by Israel about the attack on Isfahan.
 - » At a press availability on April 19, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken [responded](#) to a question about the strike, saying, “the United States has not been involved in any offensive operations. What we’re focused on, what the G7 is focused on ... is our work to de-escalate tensions, to de-escalate from any potential conflict. You saw Israel on the receiving end of an unprecedented attack, but our focus has been on, of course, making sure that Israel can effectively defend itself, but also de-escalating tensions, avoiding conflict. And that remains our focus.”

What Should the United States Do Next?

- While it is unclear whether this is the end of Israel’s response, the closer the United States stands with Israel, the more likely Iran will be deterred from attacking, as JINSA argued in its June 2023 report, [No Daylight: U.S. Strategy if Israel Attacks Iran](#).
 - » **Strength in messaging:** Make clear in public statements that the U.S. administration views Israel’s decision to act as consistent with longstanding U.S. policy to prevent a nuclear Iran and that, consequently, the United States stands with Israel and fully supports its security and self-defense needs;
 - » **Put Iran on notice:** Deliver a message to Iran that any effort to retaliate against U.S. troops, citizens, or interests in the region, or to strike the core political and economic interests of America’s Gulf partners, will be met by a severe U.S. military response, including against vital interests of the Iranian regime itself; and
 - » **Resupply of Israeli Forces:** Conduct an immediate and comprehensive resupply effort for Israel’s self-defense, prioritizing air and missile defense interceptors, PGMs, ammunition, and spare parts. As an operational backstop and another unmistakable sign of support, the United States should be prepared to deploy Patriot systems to Israel under American control to assist in Israel’s air defense and send to Iran an unmistakable message of U.S. commitment.

- To further underscore what President Biden has called the “ironclad” U.S. commitment to Israel’s security, he should invite Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the White House as soon as possible to publicly discuss a joint U.S.-Israel strategy to counter Iranian aggression.
- The United States should expedite the transfer to Israel of key aircraft, specifically F-35 and F-15 multirole combat aircraft, and KC-46A aerial refueling tankers—as well as air-to-air missiles that would send a strong deterrent signal to Iran.
 - » Israel already agreed to purchase many of these platforms.
- The United States must use this time to build on the momentum of regional air defense cooperation by Israel, the United States, United Kingdom, France, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other regional partners intercepting Iran’s 300 projectiles during “Operation Iron Shield” to further plan and prepare should Iran choose to escalate. Specifically, as Jonathan Ruhe and Ari Cicurel [argued](#) on April 18:
 - » The United States should assist Israel to exploit Iran’s degraded ability to target the region with medium-range-ballistic missiles (MRBM)s, as part of a larger shared effort to reestablish deterrence against Tehran. This should include assisting with intelligence, cyber, and refueling operations for strikes against Iranian weapons-manufacturing sites, air and naval bases, missile launchers, and ports and associated facilities for proliferating such weapons around the region.
 - » The Biden administration should frame these efforts broadly as vital countermeasures against Tehran’s demonstrated intent to inflict maximal damage and intimidate the region, rather than narrowly as a defensive success supposedly justifying an immediate de facto ceasefire, since doing so will signal to Iran that it can comfortably rebuild its MRBM arsenal and resume trying to coerce Israel and the rest of the Middle East with impunity.
 - » U.S. messaging also should emphasize and publicize the extent to which any future Iranian attempt to threaten or use such missiles would be highly vulnerable to timely detection and even “left of launch” interdiction and interruption.
 - » U.S. Cyber Command (CYBERCOM) should work with partners to infiltrate networks at Iranian missile and drone facilities and associated assets, in order to disable or degrade the production or transportation of weapons, as well as to acquire valuable intelligence about Iran’s evolving MRBM capabilities, production infrastructure, and proliferation networks.
- As part of its ongoing diplomacy with the G7, the Biden administration must work with Britain, France, and Germany to “snap back” UN Security Council (UNSC) sanctions on Iran’s development and proliferation of missiles, drones, and conventional weapons.
 - » Reinstating these arms embargoes will be crucial for disrupting Iran’s ability to reconstitute and refine its MRBMs and other arsenals used in last weekend’s attack, as well as its ability to acquire advanced Russian-made systems to defend missile production, storage, proliferation, and launch infrastructure.
- The Biden administration also must concertedly enforce U.S. sanctions on Iran’s oil exports and other primary sources of regime revenue, as these illicit income streams have played major roles in funding the marked growth of Iran’s domestic weapons-manufacturing capabilities in recent years.