

Israel Degrades Iranian Capabilities, Protects International Security

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Multiple attacks over the past weekend against Iranian military targets—including sites reportedly linked to the production of drones possibly destined for use by Russia against Ukraine—likely represent a continuation of Israeli efforts to disrupt Iran’s proliferation of rockets, missiles, and drones across the Middle East and beyond, into Europe. If indeed conducted by Israel, these strikes demonstrate the Jewish state’s unique ability and determination to defend itself, as well as the interests of the United States, other regional partners, and even Europe, through bold and ingenious military action. The United States should adopt Israel’s policy of proactively preventing Iran’s proliferation of weaponry as well as assist Israeli operations to degrade Iranian military and nuclear capabilities.

What Happened?

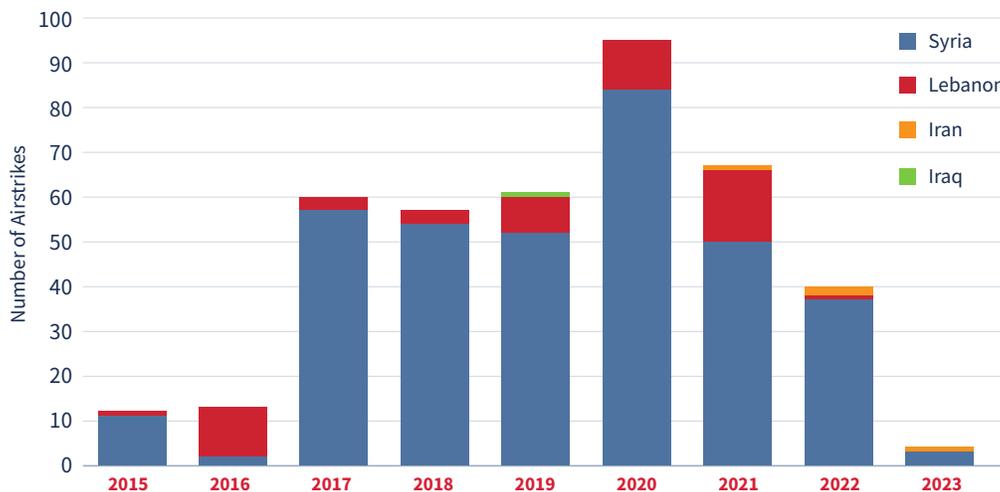
- An Iranian military facility in Isfahan was [hit](#) with drone strikes overnight on January 28.
 - » The purpose of the drone strikes is still unclear, as reports have linked it to Iran’s supplying of drones to Russia, Iran’s ballistic missile program, and other possibilities.
 - » While initial [reports](#) suggested American involvement, U.S. officials immediately told the [Wall Street Journal](#) and [New York Times](#) that the drone strikes were a clandestine Israeli attack carried out by Mossad. The United States was quick to [deny](#) any involvement in the strikes.
 - » Though Iranian officials and media suggested, as they have routinely in past similar incidents, that the attack was “[unsuccessful](#)” and failed to inflict any significant damage, Western intelligence sources told [The Jerusalem Post](#) that the attack was a “tremendous success.”
- On January 29, six Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-linked convoy trucks [reportedly](#) carrying Iranian weapons were struck by drones [along the Syria-Iraq border](#), yielding multiple casualties and destroying the vehicles.
- On January 30, [drone strikes](#) killed an Iranian-backed militia leader and two others with him in Syria.

Why Is It Important?

- In continuing its policy of using military force to prevent Iran’s proliferation of weaponry and demonstrating an incredible ability to operate inside of Iran, Israel appears to have degraded Iran’s ability to threaten Israel, U.S. forces and partners in the Middle East, and Ukraine.
- While Iranian-made projectiles—particularly drones—have for several years posed the most immediate threat to U.S. service members, interests, and Middle East partners, they now threaten Ukraine and the West’s vital interest in the rapid defeat of Russian forces there.
 - » The IRGC’s proliferation of these weapons to proxies in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Gaza has allowed [Iranian-backed groups to bombard](#) U.S. forces in Syria and Iraq as well as U.S. regional partners like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel.
 - » Iran also [abets and enables](#) Russian attacks on Ukrainian critical infrastructure and civilians by supplying Moscow with reconnaissance and armed attack drones.
- Israel has repeatedly and preemptively degraded Iran’s ability to develop, manufacture, and proliferate these weapons, including by attacking both the IRGC’s proxy militias throughout the region and Iranian targets directly.
 - » Since Israel started its [“Campaign Between the Wars”](#) in 2015, it has conducted over 400 airstrikes to degrade Iran’s proliferation and development of weaponry, including 350 in Syria, over 50 in Lebanon, 4 in Iran, and 1 in Iraq, according to data compiled by JINSA.

Location of Israeli “Campaign Between the Wars” Airstrikes

 JINSA



- » Beginning under former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, Israel [adopted](#) what it calls an “Octopus Doctrine” to impose direct costs on Iran—the head of the octopus—for its aggression, and not just the regime’s proxy militias—the tentacles.

Likely Israeli Strikes Inside Iran

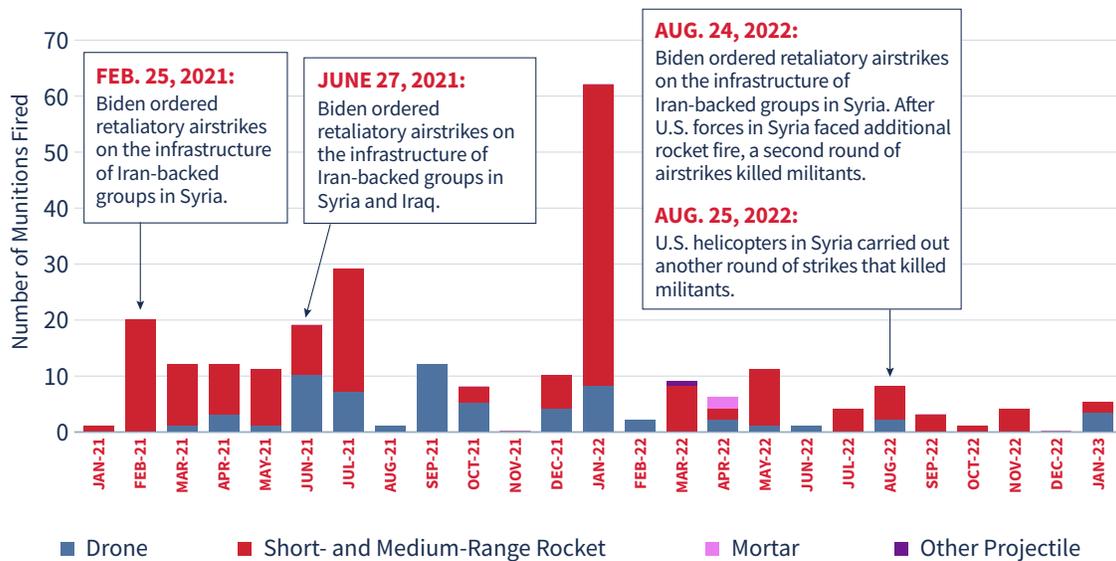
(not including sabotage operations and targeted killings)



- JUNE 2021** ● Quadcopter drones struck an Iranian centrifuge manufacturing facility in Karaj.
- MID-FEB. 2022** ● Six drones devastated an Iranian drone facility near the western city of Kermanshah.
- MAY 2022** ● A quadcopter drone hit a military development site near Tehran that was believed to house projects related to nuclear, drone, and missile operations.
- JAN. 28 2023** ● Reported Mossad drones struck an Iranian drone facility in Isfahan.

- Although Iranian officials have already made [multiple](#) threats against Israel, they have largely refrained from retaliation for past Israeli strikes. However, the United States has not established the same level of deterrence against Iran that Israel has, making it more likely that Tehran will act on its [warning](#) that not only Israel but also its allies (read: the United States) “need to learn that punishment comes with failure too.”
 - » In the last two years, Israel has also launched over 90 strikes on Iranian-backed targets in Syria but only faced three attacks emanating from Syria.
 - » During the same period, Iranian-backed groups have launched at least 80 attacks on U.S. troops or contractors in Iraq and Syria, involving over 230 projectiles, including 170 rockets and 60 drones, according to JINSA’s [Iran projectile tracker](#). Yet, the United States has only launched three rounds of retaliatory airstrikes in response.
 - » Israel’s campaign has strengthened its own deterrence against Iranian retaliation. Meanwhile, the Biden administration’s [consistent](#) avoidance of either any U.S. association with Israel’s campaign or similar operations in retaliation for Iranian aggression has had the perverse effect of eroding U.S. deterrence and encouraging further Iranian strikes against U.S. targets.
 - U.S. timidity to use military force against Iran in fear of being drawn into another war in the Middle East has in fact encouraged Iran to retaliate after Israeli strikes by targeting U.S. forces.
 - Seeking to avoid a war with the Israel, Iran's Syrian partners have not wanted attacks against Israel launched from their territory. Instead, members of Iran's elite Quds Force, Lebanese Hezbollah, and Iran's other proxies in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen agreed in 2021 to retaliate after Israeli strikes by targeting U.S. forces in Syria, according to [The New York Times](#). The Iranian-linked groups calculated that the U.S. response would be less forceful than Israel’s.

Iranian-linked Munitions Targeting U.S. Service Members and Defense Contractors in Syria and Iraq During the Biden Administration



- These latest strikes on Iran’s weapons proliferation apparatus come at time of significant U.S.-Israel diplomatic and military engagement on countering shared military threats from Iran.
 - » One week ago, the United States and Israel [carried](#) out the Juniper Oak exercise, their largest-ever joint military training, which included strike and refueling operations clearly meant to send a deterrent message to Tehran through demonstrating the two countries’ combined military capabilities.
 - » U.S. Secretary of State [Antony Blinken](#) and National Security Advisor [Jake Sullivan](#) discussed Iran during separate meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in January. CIA Director [William Burns](#) also visited Israel in between the Sullivan and Blinken trips and likely discussed Iran as well.
- While pressure has mounted for Israel to provide military support for Ukraine, it has been willing to use direct force to degrade the supply of Iranian-made drones that Russia could have potentially used. This is in direct contrast to the United States and its NATO allies who have added sanctions on Iranian drone manufacturers and proliferators but apparently not even considered taking kinetic action to interrupt the Iran-Russia arms nexus—despite the fact that Iran’s supply of drones poses the most brazen and direct challenge by an outside power to America’s most urgent national security priority of ensuring Russia’s defeat in Ukraine.
 - » During testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on January 26, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland [noted](#) that “Iranian drones are fueling this war and that is why we have taken many increased sanctions measures against Iran over the last couple of months” but “we have not stopped the drones.”

- » The United States and Ukraine have [pushed Israel](#) to provide Kyiv with air defense platforms. Jerusalem has resisted this pressure because it has a limited supply and does not want to complicate its relations with Russia in Syria, where Israeli and Russian forces have developed a deconfliction hotline to warn Moscow before Israel strikes Iranian-backed forces.
- » As Wall Street Journal reporter Yaroslav Trifonov [noted](#), “If it was Israel, as everyone seems to believe, and if Iran’s drone and ballistic missile facilities have been seriously damaged, as appears to be the case, that’s worth a hell of a lot more than 14 tanks.”
- Iran has also [reportedly](#) threatened to retaliate against Israeli ships for the recent strikes. In 2021, Iran [targeted at least five ships](#) with Israeli ties after a series of alleged Israeli attacks in the Red Sea and Mediterranean Sea damaged Iranian ships smuggling fuel to Syria.

What Should the United States Do Next?

- Building on its positive recent strategic and military coordination with Israel, including large-scale exercises to improve and broadcast joint readiness, the Biden administration urgently must strengthen frayed U.S. deterrence against Iran by publicly adopting a policy, modeled on Israel’s Octopus Doctrine, to proactively target Iranian weapons proliferation and preemptively disrupt its proxies’ aggression against U.S. assets throughout the Middle East.
 - » U.S. Central Command should launch consistent preemptive and retaliatory strikes against Iranian weapons storage facilities and launch sites that are used in attacks on American troops.
- In light of the fact that America’s highest current national security priority is ensuring the defeat of Russian forces in Ukraine, the administration should make clear to Iran that it is prepared to use tools beyond sanctions and diplomacy, including military force and covert action, to disrupt and impose major costs on Iran’s lethal support to Russia and brazen challenge to U.S. vital interests.
- This should be part of, and would be complementary to, a larger shift in America’s Iran policy toward a “Plan B”—including closer strategic and operational coordination with Israel—in light of the clear failure of the Biden administration’s good-faith, but ultimately counterproductive, policy of open-ended diplomacy that only further undermines U.S. deterrence in the eyes of the Iranian regime.
- U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) should push for as much Israeli integration as possible into the existing multilateral maritime partnerships it leads to protect the region’s waterways, including Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), a 34-nation partnership that focuses on freedom of navigation, counterpiracy, counter narcotics, and other illicit activities, as well as CMF’s associated task forces.