



U.S. Prepares for Iran-led Attack on Israel

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Following the killings of Hezbollah's top military commander and Hamas's seniormost leader in Beirut and Tehran, respectively, U.S. enhancements to Middle East force posture send vital signals of commitments to Israel's defense in the face of Iranian escalation. But these signals are directly undermined by repeated public statements conveying America's overarching desire to avoid escalation, and pleading with Tehran to curtail its military retaliation. Instead, the Biden administration's surge of U.S. forces toward the region must be accompanied closely by firm and explicit deterrent warnings to Tehran and its proxies that any such attack is unacceptable, and will incur a prohibitively strong U.S.-Israeli response.

What Happened?

- Following the July 30 [killing](#) of top Hezbollah military commander Fuad Shukur in Beirut and the July 31 [killing](#) of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, Iranian leaders have vowed to attack Israel, potentially on an even larger scale than its April 13-14 aerial assault.
 - » On August 4, Barak Ravid of *Axios* [reported](#) that the United States believes that both Iran and Hezbollah will retaliate against Israel, potentially within “the next 24-48 hours.”
 - » On July 31, *The New York Times* [reported](#), citing three Iranian officials, that Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei issued an order for Iran to strike Israel directly.
- In response, the United States is preparing to help defend against such an attack:
 - » On August 5, Commander of U.S. Central Command Gen. Michael Kurilla [arrived](#) in Israel to meet with his Israeli counterpart IDF Chief of Staff Lt Gen Herzi Halevi and Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant to [coordinate](#) military defenses in advance of a potential Iranian attack. According to *Axios*, Kurilla will also [meet](#) with counterparts from Jordan and several unnamed Gulf countries.
 - » On August 2, the U.S. Department of Defense [announced](#) that it was [positioning](#) the USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group in the Mediterranean Sea, [shifting](#) “additional ballistic missile defense-capable cruisers and destroyers” to the Middle East, and deploying an additional fighter squadron and “additional land-based ballistic missile defense” assets to the region.

Why Is It Important?

- Anticipating another massive Iran-led attack like in April, U.S. assistance would again be pivotal to assist Israel in minimizing the costs on the ground of such an attack, and would further demonstrate to the entire Middle East the growing value of U.S.-led integrated air and missile defenses. But in the absence of any clear willingness to actively deter and respond to such aggression, and instead seeking only to defend against it, the United States counterproductively encourages even more destabilizing attacks by conspicuously conveying its desire to avoid any risk and overtly signaling its desire to distance itself from Israel.
 - » The unprecedented and surprisingly large-scale nature of Iran's April attack was driven in no small part by clear U.S. signals beforehand of its desire to avoid escalation, and its unwillingness to warn Iran sharply against anything like its highly escalatory attack.
 - In turn, Iran's readiness to entertain massive retaliation now is inseparable from this demonstrated pattern of U.S. urgency to "[deescalate](#)" no matter what, as President Biden did in April when he [framed](#) the defense against Iran's attack as a "win."
 - » U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken reportedly [asked](#) foreign ministers from G7 countries in an August 4 conference call to apply diplomatic pressure on not only Iran and Hezbollah but also Israel to, according to *Axios*, "maintain maximum restraint."
 - » Secretary Blinken also reportedly [told](#) his counterparts, per *Axios*, that "the boosting of U.S. forces in the region was for defensive purposes only," an unprompted further signaling of U.S. aversion to use force in the event of a major Iranian or proxy attack.
- Such daylight between the United States and Israel merely incentivizes Iran and its proxies to escalate more aggressively against Israel than it did even with its unprecedentedly direct and massive attack in April, including by coordinating attacks more closely with its proxies:
 - » Hezbollah notably withheld its most dangerous fires in April, but its participation this time around could help overwhelm Israeli defenses through large-scale projectile attacks, including precision munitions, with much less warning than Iran's April strike:
 - As JINSA Iran Policy Project Member and former U.S. Special Representative for Iran Elliott Abrams [stated](#) in a recent JINSA webinar, "Hezbollah has a much greater capacity than Iran to harm Israel" given its much closer proximity. "The ability to defend against Hezbollah rockets that are a minute away [from Israel] is much less than the ability with respect to Iran, where drones are hours and hours away, even missiles are 10, 15, 20 minutes away [from Israel]."
 - Israel's Alma Research and Education Center has [noted](#) that Hezbollah launching drone swarms and unguided rockets could "serve as a diversion and overload Israel's defense systems before or during the launch of precision missiles."
 - » An additional variable in such an attack is the extent of Houthi involvement. The Houthis only [marginally](#) participated in the April 13-14 attack, but recently demonstrated in a deadly [drone strike](#) on downtown Tel Aviv a capability to strike sensitive locations—including potentially high-value targets—across Israel. Such attacks could be even more effective if Israel's defenses are simultaneously tested by Hezbollah, Iran, and others.
- Iran's reticence to court serious escalation in attacking Israel will correspond directly to its fear of a prohibitive and direct U.S.-Israeli military response against Iranian forces and assets. This includes clear U.S. backing for Israel to remove the strategic threat posed by Hezbollah – which also doubles as the Iran regime's insurance policy to prevent Israeli military action against its nuclear weapons program.

- » As JINSA President and CEO Michael Makovsky recently [observed](#) in a JINSA webinar, Iranian leaders are “careful about the risk they take when they are faced with force.”
- » JINSA [analysis](#) shows how “credible U.S. military pledges to respond to Iranian aggression have previously compelled changes in Iranian regime behavior,” including:
 - In 1988, successfully [coercing](#) Iran via force into ceasing its attacks on ships in international waters during the Iran-Iraq war;
 - In 2012, [compelling](#) Iran to reverse its threats to close the Strait of Hormuz, and;
 - In February of this year, [exploiting](#) Iranian risk-aversion by announcing the start of an open-ended, multitiered U.S. campaign against Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Iranian proxies, leading Iran to comprehensively [halt](#) its proxies’ attacks on U.S. troops for months.

What Should the United States Do Next?

- The United States should unequivocally signal its unqualified support for Israel in the event of any Iranian attack, including by conveying unambiguously to Iran that any strike targeting Israel, other U.S. partners, or other U.S. interests in the Middle East will catalyze a U.S.-Israeli response [directly](#) against Iranian forces, personnel, and interests across the region.
 - » This should include explicit messaging that ongoing U.S. force posture enhancements in the region are not strictly intended for defensive purposes, and are prepared to respond swiftly and overwhelmingly to any Iran-led attack.
- As JINSA has previously [advocated](#), the United States should urgently participate in a resupply of Israel’s precision-guided munitions, air and missile defense interceptors, and any other assets Israel needs to defend against, and respond to, the prospective Iranian and proxy attack on its soil.
 - » As part of this effort, as JINSA’s Assistant Director of Foreign Policy Ari Cicurel has [called for](#), the United States “should prepare to deploy Patriot systems to Israel under U.S. control to assist in Israel’s air defense.”
 - » Rather than [announcing](#) politically motivated holds on vital weapons shipments, the United States should expedite munitions Israel needs to prevent Iran and its proxies from being emboldened by signs of daylight in the U.S.-Israel security relationship.