



# Iran Goes Ballistic Defending Degraded Hezbollah

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*Iran's audacious missile attack on Israel, the second such strike in less than six months, seeks to halt Israel's stunning recent successes in eliminating many of the key leaders and capabilities of Hezbollah, which is the cornerstone of Tehran's project to encircle the Middle East in a "ring of fire" and deter Israeli military action against Iran itself. Instead of treating the successful tactical defense against Iran's latest escalation as another "win," the United States must reinforce regional defenses and support Israel's freedom of action to continue degrading Iran's proxy axis, mitigate the risks of a major Middle East conflict driven by Iranian aggression, and prevent Tehran from taking its most logical next step up the escalatory ladder—crossing the nuclear weapons threshold.*

## What Happened?

- On October 1, Iran [launched](#) roughly 180 medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBM) at Israel in three waves. The attack killed one Palestinian near Jericho, lightly injured two people, and set off alarms throughout the majority of Israel.
  - » The IDF said it [intercepted](#) "a large number" of missiles, while videos circulated on social media indicating several missiles and missile fragments struck in central and southern Israel, including Tel Aviv.
  - » Two U.S. Navy destroyers in the Mediterranean Sea reportedly [intercepted](#) multiple missiles, according to American defense officials.
  - » Jordan's Public Security Directorate indicated that its air defenses [responded](#) to several missiles and UAVs that entered its airspace.
- The Biden administration signaled its support for Israel following the attack.
  - » President Joe Biden [stated](#), "make no mistake, the United States is fully, fully, fully supportive of Israel."
  - » National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan [indicated](#), "we have made clear that there will be consequences—severe consequences—for this attack, and we will work with Israel to make that the case."

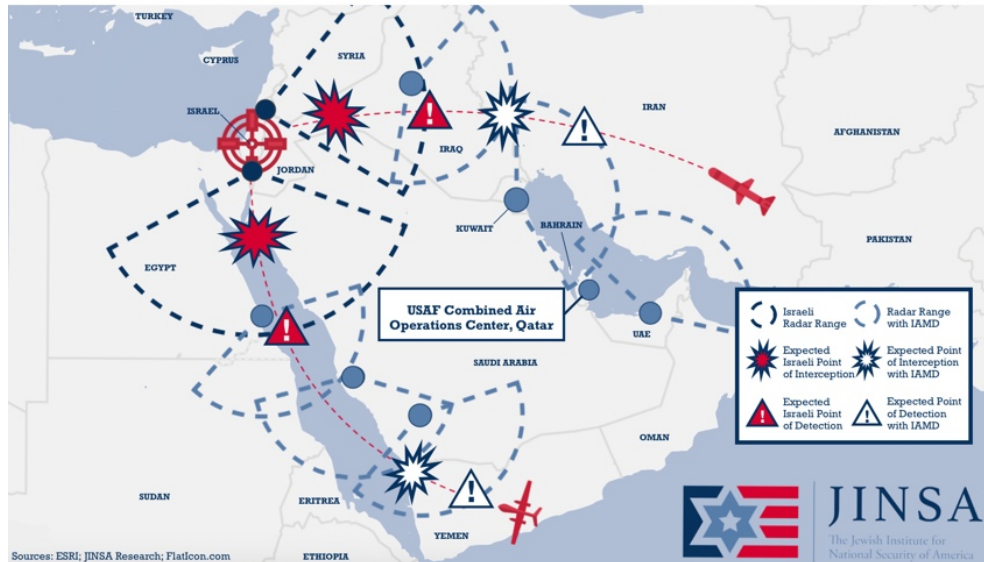
## Why Is It Important?

- Iran's missile attack is a major escalation that seeks to halt Israel's recent stunning achievements in degrading Hezbollah, which is both the linchpin in Tehran's efforts to surround Israel with a "ring of fire" and the second-strike capability deterring Israeli military action directly against Iran's nuclear weapons program and other core regime assets.

- » Israeli [operations](#) since September 19 eliminated much of Hezbollah’s key political and military leadership, most notably Hassan Nasrallah on September 27, and substantially depleted the group’s capacity to conduct large-scale projectile attacks against Israel.
  - Notably, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are achieving these battlefield gains and strategic strikes with only a fraction of readily-available firepower.
- » After launching persistent rocket and drone attacks against Israel for nearly a year, Hezbollah’s retaliation was relatively limited in response to recent stepped-up Israeli operations, falling by more than half in the five days preceding Iran’s October 1 missile attack.
- By broadening the Israel-Hezbollah conflict in audacious fashion and attempting to impose serious costs on Israel, Iran intends to compel an end to Israel’s successful military and covert campaigns that have undermined Tehran’s regional proxy strategy and killed key Iranian personnel charged with implementing this strategy.
  - » Similar to its first-ever direct attack against Israel on April 13-14, which likewise featured mass MRBM salvos, Iran’s October 1 attack followed Israeli airstrikes that killed a Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) general in the same attack that eliminated Nasrallah in Beirut.
  - » In another [parallel](#) to the April incident, Iran could reasonably have hoped this incendiary attack and its threat of a broader conflict might spur the United States to pressure Israel to limit its response, in light of clearly-conveyed fears by the Biden administration of any actions that threaten a broader conflict and unpredictable escalation spiral.
    - After American officials tried to convince Israel to consider April’s successful tactical Israel-U.S.-Arab-European defense as a “win,” Iran seeks to further normalize direct attacks on Israel, undermine Israeli deterrence, aggravate strains in the U.S.-Israeli strategic partnership, and deplete Israel’s air defense interceptor stocks that are crucial for countering further escalation by Hezbollah.
- Having twice taken failed “[kill shots](#)” at Israel with its prized ballistic missile arsenals in the last six months, and with its proxy forces reeling from Israeli military operations, Iran’s most logical remaining option to coerce the United States and dissuade a serious Israeli response is by threatening to cross the nuclear weapons threshold.
  - » As a recent JINSA Iran Policy Project [report](#) explained, there is now a high risk Iran could achieve all the necessary elements of a nuclear weapon, with no certainty the outside world could detect such moves quickly and accurately enough to stop this move.
- Iran’s attack underscores the acute need for more truly integrated regional air and missile defenses throughout the Middle East under the auspices of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), as explained in a [major JINSA report](#) last year.
  - » The Iranian regime’s attacks on April 13-14 and October 1 represent the largest stress-tests of Israel’s multilayered air and missile defenses and CENTCOM-led efforts to strengthen Middle East air defense cooperation, including developing a regional integrated air and missile defense (IAMD) network. While there has been substantial progress for intelligence-sharing in recent years, the coordination remains ad hoc, creating potential gaps in coverage and making it more difficult to respond to rapid attacks.
    - The strenuous efforts of CENTCOM Commander General Michael “Erik” Kurilla to coordinate joint air defense in the days leading up to the April 13-14 attack were critical to partners sharing their intelligence with the United States, enabling the development of a common operating picture (COP).

- IAMD would strengthen both the capacity and capability to neutralize projectile threats by providing distinct operational advantages in terms of enhanced early warning, tracking, and interception potential.

### Individual vs Integrated Air and Missile Defense in the Middle East



- In terms of building out a regional IAMD architecture, the assets that the United States, Israel, and other regional partners used to thwart the Iranian regime’s April 13-14 attack demonstrated that there are already advanced U.S.-supplied platforms in the region.

### Overview of Major Middle East Air Defense Systems That Could Form U.S.-led IAMD



Country Location	U.S. Deployments	Currently Deployed by Regional Country	Awaiting Delivery to Regional Country	In Acquisition / Development Process
Bahrain	2 Patriot PAC-3		2 Patriot PAC-3	
Egypt		20 I-HAWK 25 Avenger		
Iraq	C-RAM Centurion	8 Avenger		
Israel		Arrow 2 & Arrow 3 Barak-8 David's Sling Iron Dome 4 PAC-2 "Yahalom" SPYDER		Iron Beam Laser-Guided Missile Defense System
Jordan		14 I-HAWK		
Kuwait		8 Patriot PAC-3 5 I-HAWK	NASAMS	
Oman		NASAMS		THAAD
Qatar	2 Patriot PAC-3	10 Patriot PAC-3	NASAMS	THAAD
Saudi Arabia	2 Patriot PAC-3	24 Patriot PAC-3 10 HAWK 6 I-HAWK	7 THAAD	
U.A.E.	2 Patriot PAC-3	9 Patriot PAC-3 2 THAAD 5 I-HAWK Barak-8		

## What Should the United States Do Next?

- Realizing that Iran’s escalatory action reflects its unremitted efforts to broaden the ongoing Middle East conflict, the Biden administration should convey clear and immediate support—in both word and deed—for Israel’s freedom of action to continue degrading Iran and its proxy axis that directly threaten U.S. targets and other interests as well.
  - » Rather than continuing to advertise their [overriding concerns](#) to avoid escalation at all costs, as they did right after the April 13-14 attack, administration officials must make clear that America’s “ironclad” support includes Israel’s right to respond to such attacks and to prevent further regional destabilization by Tehran and its proxies.
  - » Building on today’s comments by President Biden and Jake Sullivan, American officials also must communicate to Tehran that the United States and Israel are united in preventing a potential Iranian dash to nuclear weapons, and that U.S. forces in the region stand ready to support Israel directly through aerial refueling, intelligence cooperation, search and rescue, and potentially other operations.
- Given Iran’s demonstrated tendency to try to deter Israeli action by threatening U.S. targets in the region, the United States must ensure its forces are postured to defend U.S. and partner assets against Iran-led retaliation, particularly assets around the Gulf that are vulnerable to more effective swarms of short-range ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and attack drones.
  - » Iranian proxies in Iraq [attacked](#) U.S. personnel at Baghdad’s international airport on Monday, the latest in nearly 200 strikes on U.S. targets by such groups in the last year.
- The scale of these Iranian attacks, and of the joint efforts to mitigate their effectiveness, underline the increasingly munitions-intensive nature of Iran-related conflicts, and should prompt expedited and expanded U.S.-led efforts to resupply Israel, including:
  - » Transferring interceptors for Israel’s various air and missile defense systems, including Iron Dome, David’s Sling, and Arrow, all of which are co-produced with the United States.
  - » Expediting the transfer to Israel of key aerial platforms and munitions—namely, F-35 and F-15 multirole combat aircraft, KC-46A aerial refueling tankers, and air-to-air missiles—like those which played key roles in helping defend against Iran’s attacks against Israel.
  - » Replenishing and updating the prepositioned U.S. munitions stockpile in Israel (WRSA-I) with appropriate munitions and materiel, from which either country can draw in wartime.
- CENTCOM must [accelerate](#) efforts to establish a common operating picture (COP) with Middle East partners as part of its larger work to develop more coherent regional IAMD, and the Biden administration should send clear messages of the importance it attaches to this project in light of the Iranian regime’s increasingly acute threats to longstanding U.S. partners and regional stability.