



THAAD Deployment No Substitute for Action Against Iran

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The U.S. deployment of a THAAD battery to Israel will help augment Israel's air defenses and is a timely symbol of the U.S. commitment to Israel's defense. Once the system is in place and operational, which Israeli sources tell JINSA could happen imminently, Israel can more confidently launch retaliatory strikes against Iran for launching 181 ballistic missiles against Israel in its October 1 attack. However, it remains unclear whether Washington only agreed to send the missile defense system in exchange for Israeli agreement to limit the targets or restrain the scope of their retaliation against Iran. But rather than de-escalating the conflict, as the Biden administration might hope, any such U.S. "bear hug" strategy will only prolong and exacerbate the fighting and undermine Israeli and U.S. credibility, emboldening Iran.

Instead, the United States should join Israel in militarily retaliating against Iran for its brazen October 1 attack. Further, the U.S. should provide Israel with missile defense interceptors, precision-guided munitions, and any other vital munitions that Israel needs for its war against the Iranian axis after its heavy use of interceptors against Iran-backed attacks over the past year. Meanwhile, U.S. officials should stop counterproductively speaking to the media about what Israel should or should not do in its retaliation against Iran.

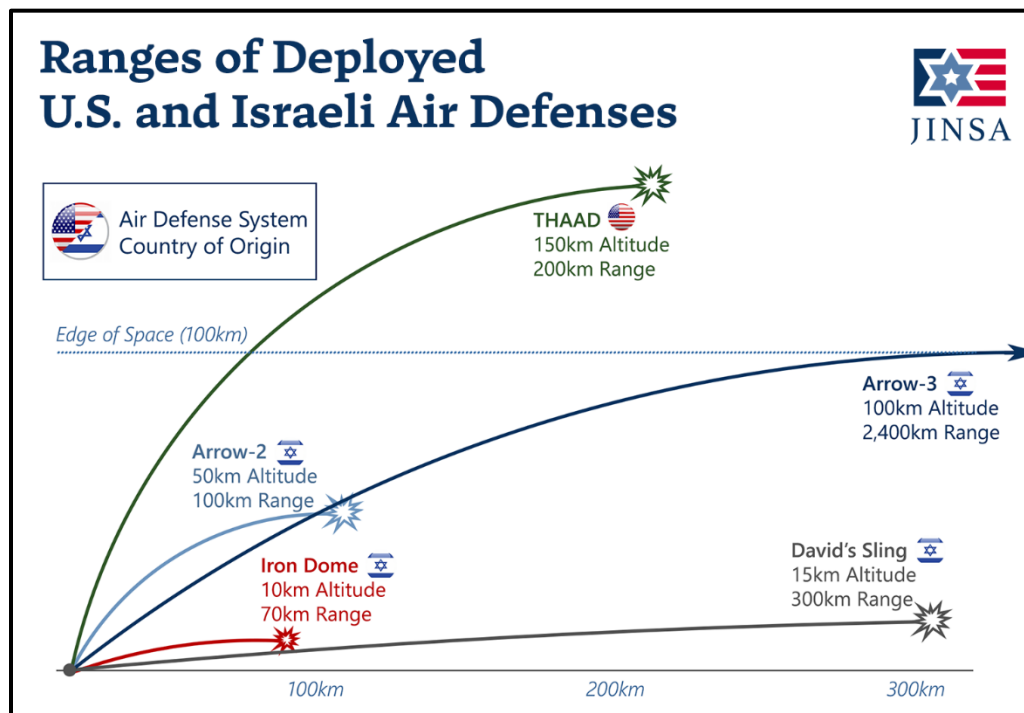
What Happened?

- On October 13, the Department of Defense [announced](#) that, at the request of President Biden, the United States would be deploying a Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battery to Israel.
 - » Roughly [100 U.S. troops](#) will deploy to Israel to help operate the system.
- On October 14, the Department of Defense [announced](#) that THAAD battery components and U.S. military personnel had begun arriving in Israel, and that the battery would be operational "in the near future."
 - » Israeli sources tell JINSA the THAAD system could be operational "within hours" of its arrival.

Why Is It Important?

- The THAAD deployment—a testament to years of bilateral strategic planning—conveys a signal of shrinking bilateral daylight and will provide a vital tactical backstop for Israel's air defenses. By helping secure the Israeli homeland, the deployment will also expand Israel's freedom of action regarding Iran, provided that the battery deployment not come at the expense of Israeli retaliatory action as part of a quid-pro-quo U.S. bear hug aimed at constraining how Israel responds to Iran's October 1 missile attack.

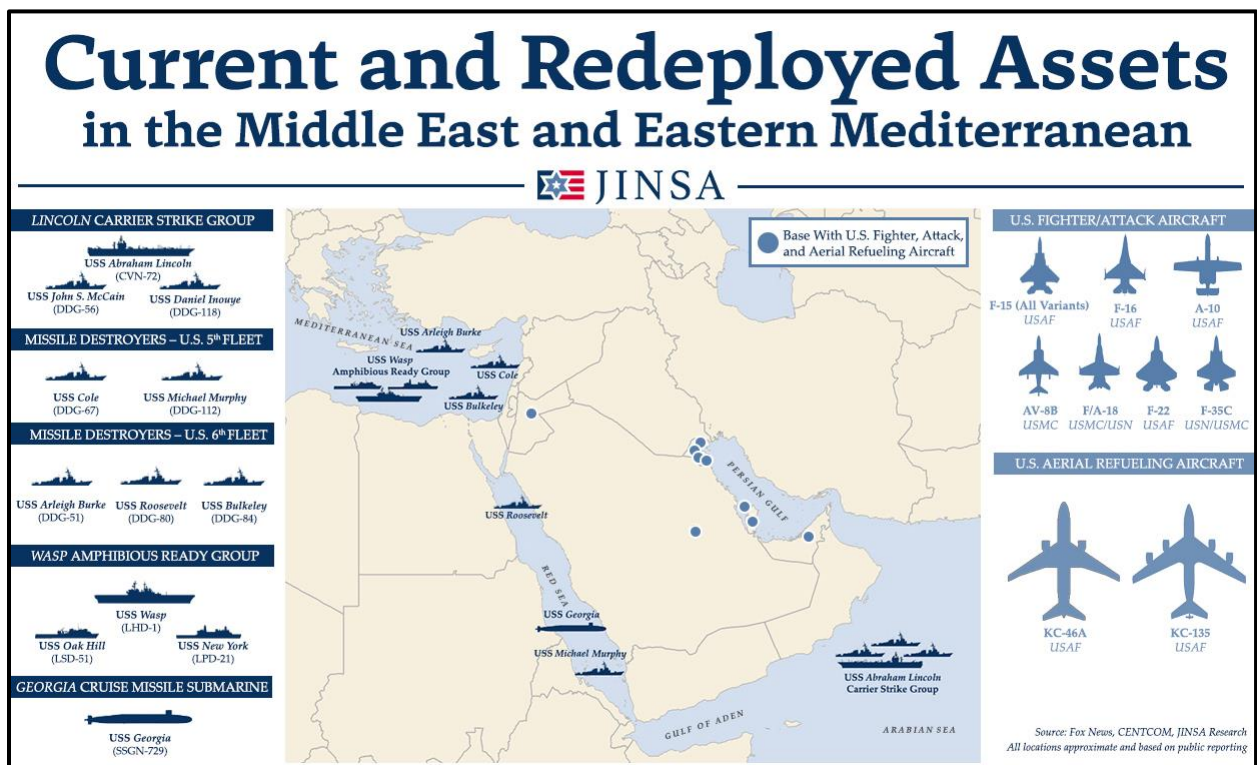
- » The deployment also highlights the U.S. need to replenish Israel's interceptor stocks and backfill Israel's defenses, as well as signal clear support for Israel in its retaliatory action against Iran to ensure that defensive measures are not the sum total of U.S. backing for Israel at this critical juncture.
- The THAAD deployment sends a strong signal to Iran and other adversaries that the United States is willing to shift pivotal and scarce assets to protect its allies and partners. As JINSA has previously [noted](#), deploying air defense "systems to Israel under American control in a timely manner, in order to assist in Israel's air defense ... [would] send to Iran an unmistakable message of U.S. commitment."
- » The United States deploying one of just seven of its operational THAAD batteries—among the U.S. military's scarcest and most advanced air defense assets—is an emphatic signal of its commitment to Israel's defense.
 - Of the nine THAAD batteries operational across the world, two are [owned](#) by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the remaining seven are typically [apportioned](#) between U.S. bases in Guam, South Korea, and the continental United States. One battery is typically [out of commission](#) for maintenance or service upgrades.



- The THAAD system is [capable](#) of intercepting ballistic missiles at a range of up to 200 kilometers and at heights of up to 150 kilometers, enabling interceptions both inside and outside the earth's atmosphere. THAAD is calibrated to intercept missiles in their terminal, or final, phase of their inbound trajectory, and has a 100 percent [success rate](#) in trials.
 - » THAAD has been used in combat once, successfully, to [defend](#) the UAE against a Houthi ballistic missile attack in January 2022.
 - » While the deployment represents a significant operational step, THAAD is equipped to address one specific threat—medium-range ballistic missiles—and does not address other projectile threats Israel currently faces, such as Hezbollah's short-range rockets and Hezbollah and the Houthis' explosive-laden drones.
- Because THAAD—like Israel's Arrow system—can operate both inside and outside the atmosphere, the deployment adds resiliency and a tactical backstop to Israel's existing air and

missile defense architecture, strengthening its defenses against any future missile barrages. The deployment's tactical benefits include:

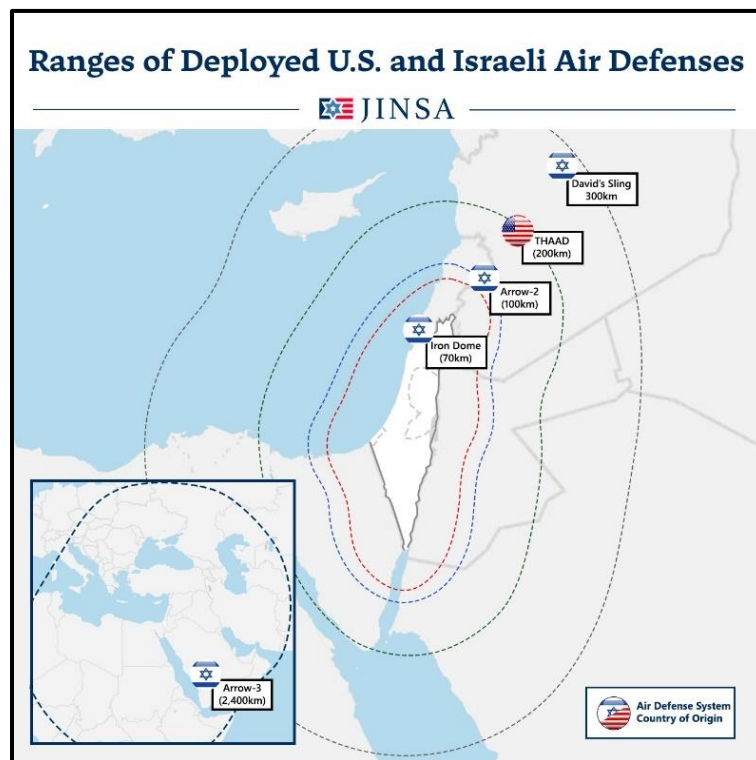
- » Boosting the number of operational launchers in Israel, as each THAAD battery is [comprised](#) of six transporter-erector launchers (TEL);
- » Increasing the number of operational kinetic interceptors in Israel, as each THAAD battery typically is [stocked](#) with at least 48 interceptor missiles, although the United States may deploy more interceptors to Israel;
- » Creating greater redundancy and flexibility in how Israel and the U.S. jointly position air defense assets, given that THAAD launchers and command nodes are mobile and that the launchers can fire in all directions;
- » Augmenting Israel and the United States' shared ability to counter efforts to saturate Israel's air defenses with large quantities of projectiles launched at different times and at different heights and speeds, as occurred in the April 13 attack, or ballistic missiles launched in [staggered volleys](#), as took place in Iran's October 1 attack, and;
- » Helping [aid](#) in intercepting missile shrapnel as a second or third line of defense to complement the Arrow and David's Sling systems, and providing radar redundancy to enhance joint threat detection.



- The deployment could also help lower the U.S. Navy's cost curve and resource drain from extended regional deployments and extensive munition expenditures.
 - » By complementing the sea-based AEGIS destroyers, the THAAD battery will help strengthen the U.S.-led regional defense architecture and potentially lessen the resource burden on the U.S. Navy, which has had to rotate a number of assets to the EastMed and Red Sea in recent months to help defend Israel.
 - » Deploying THAAD could also preserve the U.S. Navy's [limited stockpile](#) of SM-class missiles, well over 100 of which have been [expended](#) to defend against Houthi attacks on

Red Sea shipping. U.S. cruisers and destroyers in the Central Command theater [helped repel](#) Iran's April and October attacks using over a dozen SM-3 missiles.

- That the United States is able to seamlessly transition the THAAD system into Israel's highly complex multilayered air defense system attests to the success, and importance, of long-term bilateral strategic planning and system integration.
 - » The United States and Israel trained for this "plug and play" interoperability previously, including stationing THAAD in Israel as part of a 2019 bilateral [drill](#), and the THAAD deployment—at a critical juncture for Israel's security—underscores the importance of bilateral long-term strategic planning and close collaboration.
 - The U.S. Army permanently [deployed](#) troops to Israel several years ago to [operate](#) an Army Navy/Transportable Radar Surveillance (AN/TPY-2) system, THAAD's primary radar system, helping set the groundwork for the current deployment.
 - According to JINSA distinguished fellow and former Israeli Air Force Commander IDF MG (ret.) Amikam Norkin, the deployment is the [fruition](#) of over twenty years of joint planning, including bilateral THAAD-based exercises "every two years."



- THAAD's operational benefits translate into strategic considerations. The better prepared Israel is to defend against prospective future attacks from Iran and its proxies, the more freedom of action Israel should and could enjoy with respect to any imminent strike on Iran.
- However, the THAAD deployment could be part of a "bear hug" strategy by the United States designed precisely to constrain Israeli freedom of action.
 - » After two weeks of apparent [disagreement](#) between Washington and Jerusalem about what the targets should be for a potential Israeli strike on Iran in response to its October 1 attack, it is unclear whether the United States agreed to send the THAAD system only in return for Israeli concessions regarding its Iran strike plans.
 - » Any U.S. attempt to limit Israel's ability to respond to Iran's ballistic missile barrage would only prolong and escalate regional conflict by signaling to Iran that it will not face

consequences for direct attacks on Israel that could have killed thousands of civilians, inviting continued aggression from Iran and its proxies.

- U.S. support for Israel's security should not be narrowly confined to homeland defense, as U.S. leaders' efforts to distinguish between support for Israeli "defense" and [opposition](#) to proactive Israeli measures risks further Iranian aggression. The false dichotomy overlooks that Israel's self-defense hinges on credible deterrence, including the credible threat of force against Iranian regime targets.
- A credible U.S. threat of force and demonstrated willingness to support Israeli military operations would bolster the deterrent value of deploying THAAD.
 - » U.S. leaders' rhetoric should thus backstop the strategic importance of the THAAD deployment by signaling support for Israeli self-defense measures against Iran and its proxies, thereby limiting adversaries' perceptions of the United States restraining Israel's freedom of action or the existence of daylight in the bilateral relationship.
- The deployment also underscores the need to ensure Israel has sufficient air defense interceptors and batteries.
 - » Recent media reporting suggests that Israel has [depleted](#) large sums of its Arrow and David's Sling interceptors defending against Iranian ballistic missiles. Additionally, Iran's April 13 or October 1 attack—in which, despite Israel's success in minimizing casualties, over a dozen missiles [struck](#) IDF bases—may have revealed tactical vulnerabilities in Israel's existing air defense architecture.
 - » Former Commander of Israel's Air Defense Command IDF BG Ran Kochav [told](#) Israel's *Maariv* outlet that the deployment will aid Israel in its "economy of armaments" considerations, namely the decreasing quantity of its interceptors.
 - Israel's interceptor stocks were likely sizably drawn down in Iran's April 13 and October 1 missile attacks, the latter of which required Israel to [launch](#) well over 100 interceptors, mainly from its Arrow system.

What Should the United States Do Next?

- The United States should join with Israel in imposing on Iran, as National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan promised, "[severe consequences](#)" for its October 1 attack.
- The United States should keep the THAAD battery indefinitely stationed in Israel, given the variety of threats Israel faces on all fronts and the potential for further escalation.
- The United States should urgently prioritize sending interceptors to Israel, particularly interceptors for the Arrow 2, Arrow 3, and David's Sling systems to help defend against Iranian ballistic missile attacks.
- The United States should be prepared to deploy further deterrent assets to Israel, including F-15 and F-35 combat aircraft, KC-46A refueling tankers, and munitions to counter future Iranian aerial assaults and concretize Israel's freedom of action against Iran and its proxies.
- The United States should preposition munitions and weapon systems in the U.S.-operated reserve stockpile based in Israel, WRSA-I, to minimize the tactical costs of Israel waiting [lengthy durations](#) for crucial munitions to arrive, emboldening Iran and its proxies. WRSA-I munitions, which are intended first and foremost for U.S. troops in the Middle East, also boost American readiness in the region.
- Particularly given the fruits of years of bilateral missile defense drills, including the 2019 [drill](#) in which THAAD was deployed to Israel as part of an exercise simulating an attack on Israel,

the United States and Israel should conduct additional bilateral drills in missile defense and other domains as part of long-term strategic contingency planning.

- To build on the important tactical step of adding another layer of defense to further strengthen the regional defense architecture, the United States should expedite efforts to continue formalizing regional integrated air and missile defense, including:
 - » Technical steps aimed at building a common operating picture, including working to further interoperate regional countries' radars and sensors to form a more comprehensive common operating procedure (COP), and;
 - » Public and private U.S. messaging aimed at ensuring continued buy-in by regional partners by reassuring them that their defense, too, is paramount in light of direct Iranian threats against them in recent weeks for participating in regional defense measures.