

The Missiles of April. “Iranian Missiles Rained Down on Israel”. Scott Ritter

The “Missiles of April” represent a sea-change moment in Middle Eastern geopolitics—the establishment of Iranian deterrence that impacts both Israel and the United States.

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Iran’s retaliatory attack on Israel will go down in history as one of the greatest victories of this century.

I’ve been writing about Iran for more than two decades. In 2005, I made a trip to Iran to ascertain the “ground truth” about that nation, a truth which I then incorporated into a book, *Target Iran*, laying out the US-Israeli collaboration to craft a justification for a military attack on Iran designed to bring down its theocratic government. I followed this book up with another, *Dealbreaker*, in 2018, which brought this US-Israeli effort up to date.

Back in November 2006, in an address to Columbia University’s School of International Relations, I underscored that the United States would never abandon my “good friend” Israel until, of course, we did. What could precipitate such an action, I asked? I noted that Israel was a nation drunk of hubris and power, and unless the United States could find a way to remove the keys from the ignition of the bus Israel was navigating toward the abyss, we would not join Israel in its lemming-like suicidal journey.

The next year, in 2007, during an address to the American Jewish Committee, I pointed out that my criticism of Israel (which many in the audience took strong umbrage against) came from a place of concern for Israel’s future. I underscored the reality that I had spent the better part of a decade trying to protect Israel from Iraqi missiles, both during my service in Desert Storm, where I played a role in the counter-SCUD missile campaign, and as a United Nations weapons inspector, where I worked with Israeli intelligence to make sure Iraq’s SCUD missiles were eliminated.

“The last thing I want to see,” I told the crowd, “is a scenario where Iranian missiles were impacting on the soil of Israel. But unless Israel changes course, this is the inevitable outcome of a policy driven more by arrogance than common sense.”

On the night of 13-14 April 2024, my concerns were played out live before an international audience—Iranian missiles rained down on Israel, and there was nothing Israel could do to stop them. As had been the case a little more than 33 years prior, when Iraqi SCUD missiles overcame US and Israeli Patriot missile defenses to strike Israel dozens of times over the course of a month and a half, Iranian missiles, integrated into a plan of attack which was designed to overwhelm Israeli missile defense systems, struck designated targets inside Israel with impunity.

Despite having employed an extensive integrated anti-missile defense system comprised of the so-called “Iron Dome” system, US-made Patriot missile batteries, and the Arrow and David’s Sling missile interceptors, along with US, British, and Israeli aircraft, and US and French shipborne anti-missile defenses, well over a dozen Iranian missiles struck heavily-protected Israeli airfields and air defense installations.

Image is from [The Unz Review](#)



The Iranian missile attack on Israel did not come out of the blue, so to speak, but rather was retaliation for an April 1 Israeli attack on the Iranian consulate building, in Damascus, Syria, that killed several senior Iranian military commanders. While Israel has carried out attacks against Iranian personnel inside Syria in the past, the April 1 strike differed by not only killing very senior Iranian personnel, but by striking what was legally speaking sovereign Iranian territory—the Iranian consulate.

From an Iranian perspective, the attack on the consulate was a redline which, if not retaliated against, would erase any notion of deterrence, opening the door for even more brazen Israeli military action, up to and including direct attacks on Iran. Weighing against retaliation, however, were a complex web of interwoven policy objectives which would probably be mooted by the kind of large-scale conflict between Israel and Iran that could be precipitated by any meaningful Iranian retaliatory strike on Israel.

First and foremost, Iran has been engaged in a strategic policy premised on a pivot away from Europe and the United States, and toward Russia, China, and the Eurasian landmass. This shift has been driven by Iran’s frustration over the US-driven policy of economic sanctions, and the inability and/or unwillingness on the part of the collective West to find a path forward that would see these sanctions lifted. The failure of the Iranian nuclear deal (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA) to produce the kind of economic opportunities that had been promised at its signing has been a major driver behind this

Iranian eastward pivot. In its stead, Iran has joined both the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the BRICS forum and has directed its diplomatic energies into seeing Iran thoroughly and productively integrated into both groups.

A general war with Israel would play havoc on these efforts.

Secondly, but no less important in the overall geopolitical equation for Iran, is the ongoing conflict in Gaza. This is a game-changing event, where Israel is facing strategic defeat at the hands of Hamas and its regional allies, including the Iranian-led axis of resistance. For the first time ever, the issue of Palestinian statehood has been taken up by a global audience. This cause is further facilitated by the fact that the Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu, formed from a political coalition which is vehemently opposed to any notion of Palestinian statehood, finds itself in danger of collapse as a direct result of the consequences accrued from the Hamas attack of October 7, 2023, and the subsequent failure of Israel to defeat Hamas militarily or politically. Israel is likewise hampered by the actions of Hezbollah, which has held Israel in check along its northern border with Lebanon, and non-state actors such as the pro-Iranian Iraqi militias and the Houthi of Yemen which have attacked Israel directly and, in the case of the Houthi, indirectly, shutting down critical sea lines of communication which have the result of strangling the Israeli economy.

But it is Israel that has done the most damage to itself, carrying out a genocidal policy of retribution against the civilian population of Gaza. The Israeli actions in Gaza are the living manifestation of the very hubris and power-driven policies I warned about back in 2006-2007. Then, I said that the US would not be willing to be a passenger in a policy bus driven by Israel that would take us off the cliff of an unwinnable war with Iran.

Through its criminal behavior toward the Palestinian civilians in Gaza, Israel has lost the support of much of the world, putting the United States in a position where it will see its already-tarnished reputation irreparably damaged, at a time when the world is transitioning from a period of American-dominated singularity to a BRICS-driven multipolarity, and the US needs to retain as much clout in the so-called “global south” as possible.

The US has tried—unsuccessfully—to take the keys out of the ignition of Netanyahu’s suicide bus ride. Faced with extreme reticence on the part of the Israeli government when it comes to altering its policy on Hamas and Gaza, the administration of President Joe Biden has begun to distance itself from the policies of Netanyahu and has put Israel on notice that there would be consequences for its refusal to alter its actions in Gaza to take US concerns into account.

Any Iranian retaliation against Israel would need to navigate these extremely complicated policy waters, enabling Iran to impose a viable deterrence posture designed to prevent future Israeli attacks while making sure that neither its policy objectives regarding a geopolitical pivot to the east, nor the elevation of the cause of Palestinian statehood on the global stage, were sidetracked.

The Iranian attack on Israel appears to have successfully maneuvered through these rocky policy shoals. It did so first and foremost by keeping the United States out of the fight. Yes, the United States participated in the defense of Israel, helping shoot down scores of Iranian drones and missiles. This engagement was to the benefit of Iran, since it only reinforced the fact that there was no combination of missile defense capability that could, in the end, prevent Iranian missiles from hitting their designated targets.

The targets Iran struck—two air bases in the Negev desert from which aircraft used in the April 1 attack on the Iranian consulate had been launched, along with several Israeli air defense sites—were directly related to the points Iran was trying to make in establishing the scope and scale of its deterrence policy. First, that the Iranian actions were justified under Article 51 of the UN Charter—Iran retaliated against those targets in Israel directly related to the Israeli attack on Iran, and second, that Israeli air defense sites were vulnerable to Iranian attack. The combined impact of these two factors is that all of Israel was vulnerable to being struck by Iran at any time, and that there was nothing Israel or its allies could do to stop such an attack.

This message resonated not only in the halls of power in Tel Aviv, but also in Washington, DC, where US policy makers were confronted with the uncomfortable truth that if the US were to act in concert with Israel to either participate in or facilitate an Israeli retaliation, then US military facilities throughout the Middle East would be subjected to Iranian attacks that the US would be powerless to stop.

This is why the Iranians placed so much emphasis on keeping the US out of the conflict, and why the Biden administration was so anxious to make sure that both Iran and Israel understood that the US would not participate in any Israeli retaliatory strike against Iran.

The “Missiles of April” represent a sea-change moment in Middle Eastern geopolitics—the establishment of Iranian deterrence that impacts both Israel and the United States. While emotions in Tel Aviv, especially among the more radical conservatives of the Israeli government, run high, and the threat of an Israeli retaliation against Iran cannot be completely discounted, the fact is the underlying policy objective of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over the course of the past 30-plus years, namely to drag the US into a war with Iran, has been put into checkmate by Iran.

Moreover, Iran has been able to accomplish this without either disrupting its strategic pivot to the east or undermining the cause of Palestinian statehood. “Operation True Promise,” as Iran named its retaliatory attack on Israel, will go down in history as one of the most important military victories in the history of modern Iran, keeping in mind that war is but an extension of politics by other means. The fact that Iran has established a credible deterrence posture without disrupting major policy goals and objectives is the very definition of victory.

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Featured image: An Iranian missile is launched. Scores of these missiles were used to attack Israel. (Source: Scott Ritter Extra)

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