

How Significant Is the US' THAAD Deployment to Israel?

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Something big is coming, and whatever it is, there's now a heightened chance that the US will become directly involved.

The Pentagon [confirmed](#) that it'll dispatch nearly 100 troops to Israel to operate one of its premier air defense systems, the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), of which it only has [seven in total](#). This comes ahead of Israel's expected retaliation to Iran's latest missile strike on the first of the month that it [carried out to restore deterrence](#) after the assassination of Hamas chief **Ismail Haniyeh** in Tehran and Hezbollah chief **Sayed Hassan Nasrallah** in Beirut. Here's what this latest US move signifies:

1. Israel Is Probably Planning Something Big

Rumors have abounded about what exactly Israel is planning, but it's probably something big and will provoke at least proportional retaliation from Iran, hence why the self-professed Jewish State requested that the US deploy one of its few THAADs to help defend it afterwards. THAAD specializes in intercepting ballistic missiles so it can be intuited that Israel and the US expect Iran to respond through these means. THAAD only carries [48 interceptors](#), however, so it could be overwhelmed if there's a saturation strike.

2. The Iron Dome Needs All The Help It Can Get

Many observers assessed that Iran's latest missile strike exposed the limits of Israel's famous Iron Dome. The footage that they saw and Israel's panicked reaction afterwards in trying to cover up the damage, including by [detaining Grayzone journalist Jeremy Loffredo](#) and then investigating him for "aiding the enemy in a time of war" by reporting on it, leave little doubt that this is the case. Accordingly, the Iron Dome needs all the help it can get, hence why Israel requested that the US deploy THAAD to assist.

3. The US Risks Getting Caught In Mission Creep

Biden previously promised that "[No US boots will be on the ground](#)" in the West Asian conflict zone, yet he just went back on his word after his administration approved this latest deployment. The US thus risks getting caught in mission creep since hawkish policymakers might now argue that it's worth scaling this deployment in pursuit of perceived national interests after this psychological line was just crossed. They might not succeed, and this could be all that's sent, but more deployments also can't be ruled out either.

4. The THAAD Team Is An Escalation Tripwire

Building upon the above, the THAAD team is an escalation tripwire since any harm that might befall them while attempting to intercept Iran's expected retaliation to Israel's presumably forthcoming attack could serve as the pretext for the US to strike Iran and/or deploy more troops to the conflict zone. While this move is being sold to the public as "defending Israel" and "deterring Iran", policymakers nonetheless keenly understand what's really at stake, yet they're downplaying the dangers to avoid public outcry.

5. Israel-US Ties Remain Strong Despite Problems

And finally, the US' THAAD deployment shows that inter-state ties remain strong despite the well-known Bibi-Biden rivalry, which saw Biden [endorse Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's](#) call for regime change against Bibi last spring. Whether one attributes this to the US' permanent military, intelligence, and diplomatic bureaucracies ("deep state") still appreciating their perceived mutual geostrategic interests or to the power of the Israel lobby, the point is that it testifies to the resilience of their ties.

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The US' THAAD deployment to Israel is a worrying step because it suggests that that something big is coming, and whatever it is, there's now a heightened chance that the US will become directly involved. Whether its role remains defensive or evolves into an offensive one remains to be seen, but this team of nearly 100 operators essentially serves as an escalation tripwire. Hawkish policymakers want a larger war, and it'll take self-restraint on Iran's side and a little bit of luck to avoid that worst-case scenario.

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