

Israeli airstrike destroys Iranian consulate in Syria

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An Israeli airstrike on Monday in the Syrian capital of Damascus destroyed the consular section of Iran's embassy killing two senior generals of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC) and at least five other people. The attack is a flagrant act of war, undoubtedly discussed with Washington, aimed at provoking a wider conflict throughout the Middle East with Iran and its allies.

Israel has long conducted naked acts of aggression in Lebanon, Syria and the region more broadly in obvious breach of international law. Over the past six months, it has stepped up its airstrikes in both Lebanon and Syria, killing Hamas and Hezbollah leaders and also top IRGC generals. However, the strike yesterday was the first time that Israel has directly attacked Iranian territory—as consulates and embassies in a foreign country are designated by international convention.

Those killed in the strike included General Mohammad Reza Zahedi, a military adviser who led the IRGC's international arm, the Quds Force, in Lebanon and Syria until 2016. The attack, which levelled the consulate, also reportedly killed Zahedi's deputy, General Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi and General Hossein Amirollah, the chief of general staff for the Quds force in Syria and Lebanon.

The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said 11 people were killed in the airstrike. The dead included diplomats as well as military advisers. Others were injured, including two Syrian police guarding the embassy. Tehran's ambassador to Syria, Hossein Akbari, whose residence is in the consular section of the Iranian embassy, survived.

The attack has been denounced by Syria and Iran. Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad “strongly condemned” the strike, adding that “the Israeli occupation entity will not be able to impact ties

between Iran and Syria.” Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian declared: that “We consider this aggression to have violated all diplomatic norms and international treaties.”

Iran's ambassador Akbari branded the strike as a “heinous act” carried out by Israeli F-35 fighter jets that launched six missiles. “For the first time, the Zionist regime dared to target an official building of the Islamic Republic's embassy carrying Iran's flag,” he said, adding that Iran's response would be delivered “at the appropriate time and place” and “at the same magnitude and harshness.”

Israel, which rarely comments on such attacks, has issued no statement, but there is no doubt that it carried out the strike—it being the only country with both the motive and the means for doing so, other than its backer, the United States. Asked whether Washington had been informed of Israel's plan to attack the consulate, Pentagon press secretary Sabrina Singh declined to comment.

For Israel not to discuss a strike with the US that threatens to dramatically escalate war throughout the Middle East is hard to believe. Indeed, there are strong indications that a wider conflict was closely discussed when Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant met with US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin last week in the US. Prior to the talks, Gallant indicated that he would be discussing Israel's “ability to obtain platforms and munitions” as well as the opening of a new war front in southern Lebanon against Iranian-backed Hezbollah.

In the aftermath of those talk, the US authorised a new arms shipment, effectively giving Israel the green light not only for a barbaric assault on the city of Rafah in Gaza housing some 1.5 million Palestinians, but also for a wider regional conflict. The arms include 1,800 massive 2,000-pound bombs capable of levelling entire

city blocks and inflicting huge casualties.

Asked about the delivery of the devastating ordnance to Israel, a US State Department spokesperson justified the decision by declaring that the Israelis needed “to have the ability to defend themselves against a very well-armed adversary... like Iran, Hezbollah...” Having justified the genocidal war in Gaza on the absurd pretext of Israel’s right to defend itself, the US is handing Israel the weaponry needed to wage war on Iran on the same basis.

Yesterday’s attack on the Iranian consulate and the killing of senior Iranian generals are calculated to force Tehran to respond. Any response by Iran will be branded as “Iranian aggression” and seized on by Israel, the US and its allies as the pretext for further aggression against Tehran and its allies. Along with Israel, the US is already engaged in a conflict with Iranian-linked Houthi militia in Yemen and conducted air strikes in Iraq and Syria in February following the killing of three American troops in a US outpost in Jordan.

Israel has already killed Iranian military advisers in Syria in a series of attacks, including top IRGC general Seyed Razi Mousavi in an airstrike in a Damascus neighborhood in December. At least three Israeli strikes this year have been aimed against Iran, including one in January in Damascus that killed at least five advisers and another last week in Deir el-Zour near the Iraqi border that killed one adviser.

Over the past week, Israel has intensified its attacks inside Syria, including airstrikes against targets in and around the city of Aleppo. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said the Aleppo attack had led to the highest number of dead, 36, among Syrian forces in a single such Israeli attack. It also said six Hezbollah fighters were killed.

The Israeli military last month reported that it had struck more than 4,500 Hezbollah targets in Syria and Lebanon since the beginning of the Israeli war on Gaza. It claimed to have killed over 300 Hezbollah members. While many of the strikes have been in southern Lebanon in the escalating conflict between Hezbollah and Israel that is transforming the border area into a war zone, Israeli warplanes have also hit sites deep inside northern Lebanon.

The latest airstrike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus is, however, far more consequential. An

article on the attack in the *Financial Times* (FT) pointed out that Iran has sought to avoid a conflict with the US and Israel and to rein in allied militia. Far from backing off, Israel has sought to take advantage of the situation to escalate the wider conflict.

“Israel believes that Iran is effectively deterred, and is willing to risk a war in order to degrade significantly Iran and Hizbollah,” said Emile Hokayem, senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, told the FT. “This calculation will work until it will not, and then it will be catastrophic,” he warned.

In reality, it is not just Israel, but US imperialism, which has backed Israel politically, financially and militarily to the hilt, that is seeking to provoke a catastrophic conflict against Iran. Already engaged in an expanding war with nuclear-armed Russia in Ukraine and advanced preparations for war with China, the US regards control of the Middle East as a critical element of the developing global conflict and Iran as the key obstacle that must be removed.



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