

Threat of war between Israel and Iran grows as new offensives launched in Gaza

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Tensions between Israel and Iran reached new heights Thursday after the United States warned of an “imminent” attack being planned by Tehran. The Iranian regime has said since Israel’s bombing of its Syrian embassy at the start of this month, killing senior members of Iran’s military, that it would retaliate.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz threatened Thursday, “If Iran attacks from its territory, Israel will respond and attack in Iran.”

Speaking at the Tel Nof Air Base, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told air force personnel: “We are in challenging times. We are in the midst of a war in Gaza that is continuing with full force. In addition, we are continuing with ceaseless efforts to return our hostages, but we are also preparing for challenges from other fronts.

“We set a simple principle: Anyone who hits us, we hit them. We are ready to fulfil our responsibilities to Israel’s security, in defence and attack.”

According to Israeli news stations, the country’s air force recently conducted joint exercises with Cyprus to “simulate an attack in Iran.” The Israel Defense Forces are on high alert, with weekend leave cancelled and the army calling up extra reservists to the Aerial Defence Array.

A top US general, Erik Kurilla, head of the US Central Command, landed in Israel for talks with Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, who was assured by US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken in a call Wednesday evening that Washington would back Israel fully in any conflict with Iran. President Joe Biden had said in a press conference earlier that day, “As I told Prime Minister Netanyahu, our commitment to Israel’s security against these threats from Iran and its proxies is ironclad, ironclad.”

Republican Senator Marco Rubio, a member of the

Intelligence Committee, described the situation as “the most dangerous Middle East moment since 1973,” warning, “Iran wants to launch a large-scale attack from their own territory against Israel. Israel will respond instantly with an even more severe counterattack inside of Iran.”

Even as they push Iran to respond to such provocations, the US and European powers have demanded Tehran show a “restraint” never expected of their ally Israel. American Middle East envoy Brett McGurk directed the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar and Iraq to speak with Tehran and urge its government to back down.

German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock urged “maximum restraint” in the name of “avoiding further regional escalation.”

But it is the imperialist powers who have constantly and deliberately driven the escalation, providing Israel with weapons and diplomatic and military support to carry out a genocide in Gaza and brazenly attack its opponents in Lebanon and Syria. Last December, Gallant described Israel as being engaged in a “multi-front war” across “seven theatres.”

At the very start of Israel’s war, the United States dispatched two aircraft carrier strike groups to the eastern Mediterranean to insure the country against retaliation. These forces intercepted 11 drones launched by the Iran and Palestine-aligned Houthis in Yemen on Wednesday.

The most unashamedly hawkish voices in Israel and the imperialist centres have been urging Israel to attack Iran directly.

Danny Ayalon, former Israeli ambassador to the US, commented, “With this heightened tension, there is a novelty here. Iran, for the first time, is threatening to strike, itself, directly at Israel, and not through

proxies,” adding, “I think that by striking at the head of the snake in Iran and in Tehran, this is probably the most effective way to bring Iran back, to keep it at bay.”

The UK *Daily Telegraph*’s Richard Kemp, a former colonel, argued that “the UK should be ready to take direct military action against Iran” or “whatever is needed to help them [Israel] fight back.”

In the same paper, John Bolton, a former national security advisor under President Donald Trump, gnashed that “Israel has for too long delayed the Rafah offensive...”

“Mopping up residual Hamas guerrilla/terrorist activities will be time-consuming, but dismantling it means Israel is freer and less at risk if it must confront Hezbollah full on. Or confronting Iran and its nuclear weapons programme now, before Iran has a reliable deliverable capacity.”

Israeli forces are already redoubling the campaign in Gaza, carrying out attacks in the central Strip focussed on the Nuseirat refugee camp. Raouf Abed, a resident of nearby Deir el-Balah, told *Al Jazeera*, “It was as if the occupation army is launching a new war.”

Referring to strikes launched from air and sea, he explained, “The explosions were non-stop, the sounds came from different directions. Every time we hope there will be a ceasefire, Israel escalates the aggression as if they are trying to pressure Hamas by hitting on us, the civilians.”

Al Jazeera journalist Tareq Abu Azzoum reported, “The situation on the ground is terrible and chaotic as the Israeli military has been scaling up its attacks... Battles have been raging in villages and towns that are adjacent to the Nuseirat refugee camp.

“We can see the Israeli military destroying entire neighbourhoods using heavy firepower from artillery units on the ground with cover from fighter jets and surveillance drones.”

Azzoum’s colleague Hani Mahmoud explained, “People find themselves trapped under heavy bombardment. This has caused a great deal of panic and people are starting to move out of Nuseirat camp and other parts of the central area. The situation is getting more difficult by the hour.”

Attacks were also carried out at the Jabalia refugee camp and Gaza City in the north of the Strip, and in the southern city of Rafah, to which the majority of Gaza’s

population has fled.

In Rafah, a group of six on their way to visit family for Eid were killed by Israeli warplanes. In Gaza City, another six were killed when the Firas market was bombed.

A UNICEF aid convoy attempting to enter the north was hit by Israeli fire aimed at Palestinians. Spokeswoman Tess Ingram explained shots were fired “towards civilians who then ran in the other direction” and several hit the car. “It was shocking that this was happening to us on a coordinated mission in a designated holding area. We had colleagues outside the vehicle who very easily could have been injured or killed.”

On the front with Lebanon, Israeli aircraft launched raids against a Hezbollah military compound near the border town of al-Dahira, and against the southern town Tayr Harfa.



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